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a novel by

L. E. MARTIN



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SUBLUNARY

A Novel

by

L. E. MARTIN

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CONTENTS

PART I

CHAP.		PAGE
I	PRELIMINARY	3
II	ELLEN	20
III	ARRIVAL	39

PART II

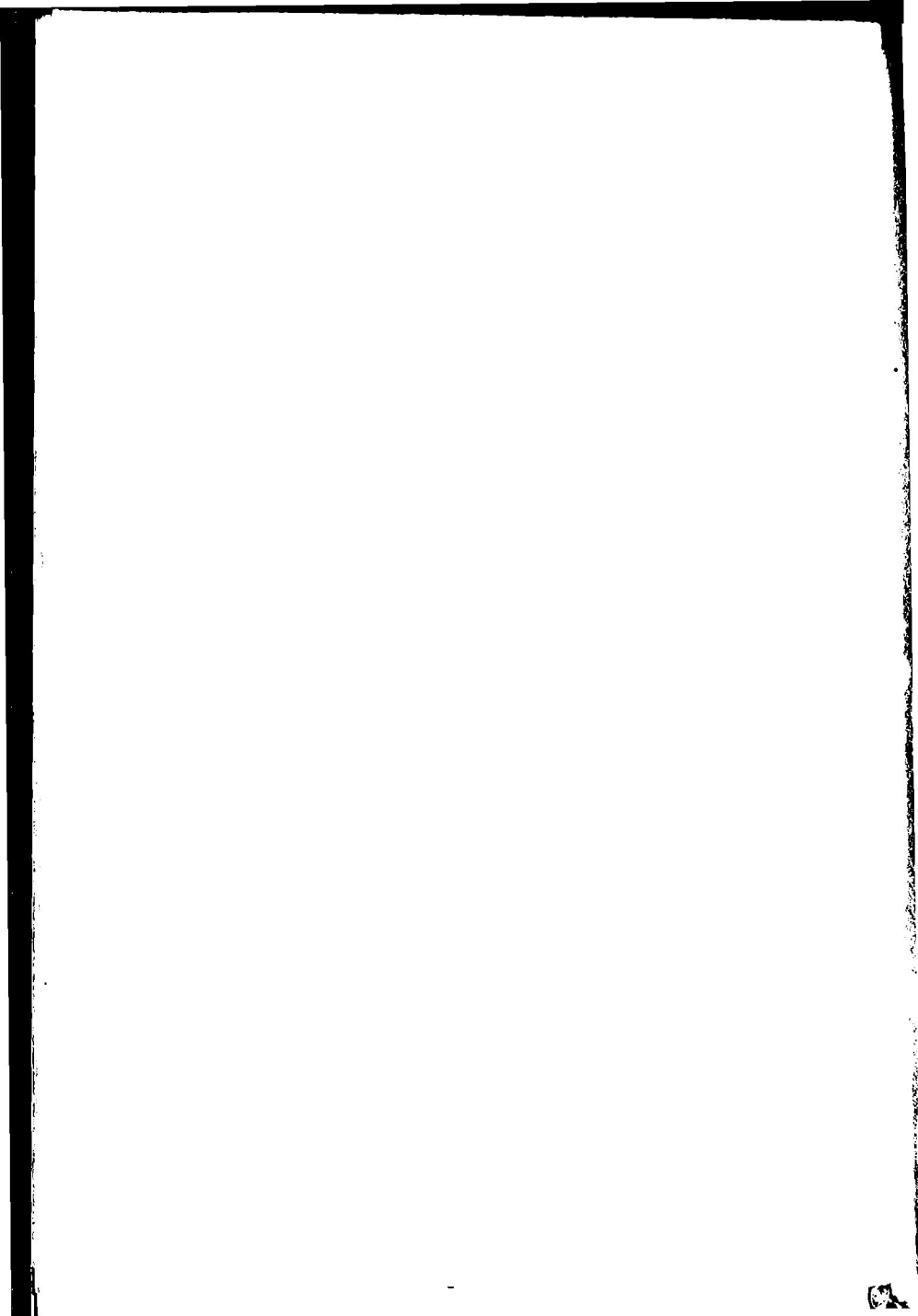
IV	THE NEW DIRECTION	53
V	COLOURED GLASS	73
VI	HALL OF MIRRORS	93
VII	CATASTROPHE	108
VIII	DISEASE	117
IX	ELIMINATION OF GUY	133

PART III

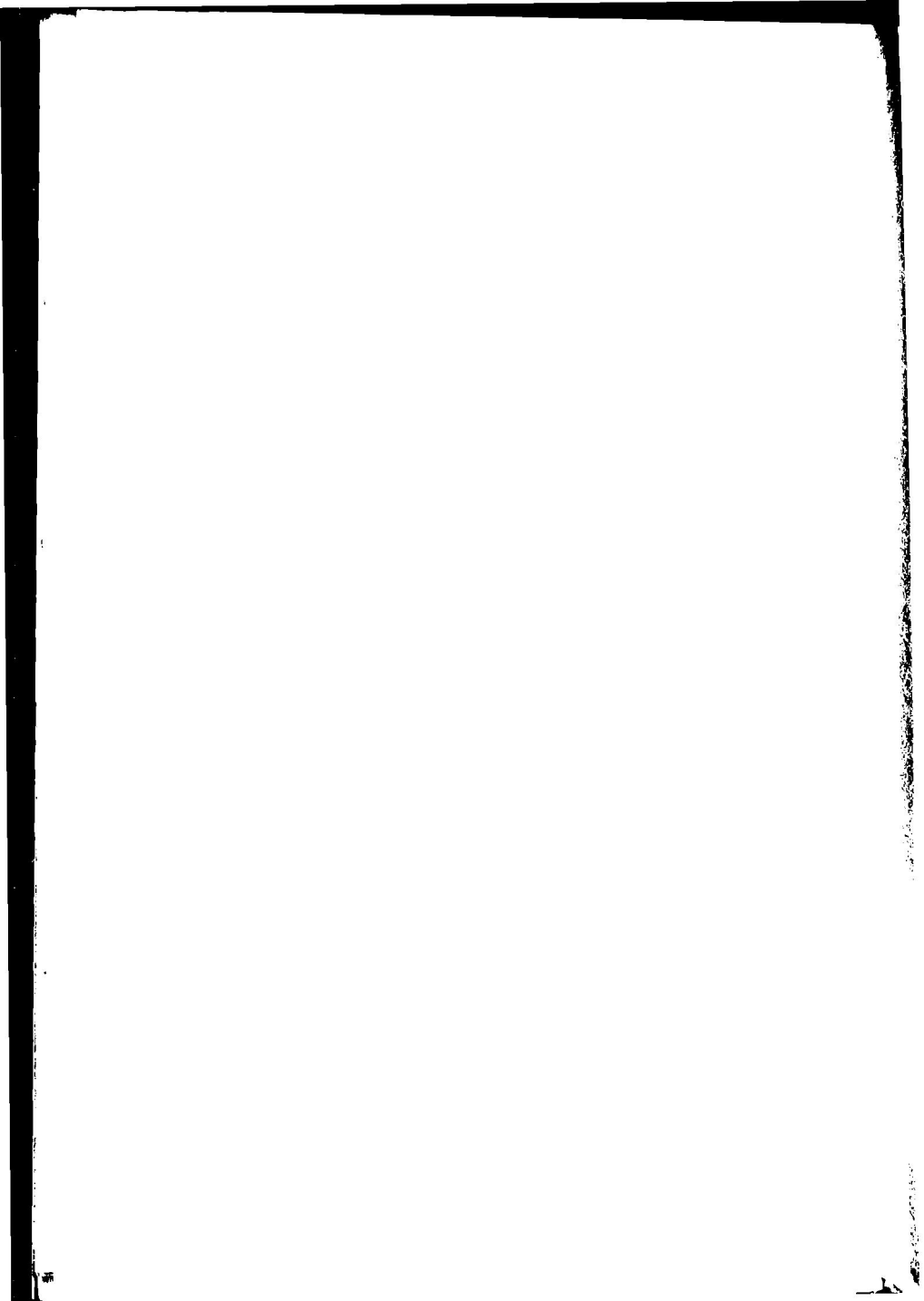
X	NOT A PARTY	143
XI	THE PORTRAIT	156
XII	THE SEARCH	167

PART IV

XIII	ANOTHER BEGINNING	187
XIV	INFANT LOVE	207
XV	RIPE APPLES	227
XVI	THE CANDLE	245
XVII	FINAL DESTRUCTION	252
XVIII	THE SWAN	266
XIX	PAUSE	277



PART I



CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

GUY TYNDALE thought of himself as a man eaten out inside. He was self-absorbed, and his self-absorption did not give him self-knowledge, for the more he examined his mind, the more certain he became that there was nothing to be known in it. He had no practical feeling of belief in his own existence. He loved trees, because, touching them, he was able sometimes to catch a sensation of rooted reality. His manner was at once formal and insolent, as if he were demanding more attention than an ordinary man, and were too proud to procure it by the usual social expedients. Certainly he desired it; but his efforts were barren in that however remarkably they succeeded, he had only a momentary feeling of success. He was surprised when people who had seen him only once recognised him at a second meeting; and whenever it came out that even in the most trivial connections, his friends had talked of him, quoting an opinion, or passing on his address, he felt bewildered, as if he had met someone he knew to be dead.

Often he imagined himself walking across a

landscape, or standing in the middle of a group of people. He imagined his gestures and his words. But this fantasy never worked out very well in life. He had to be a little ostentatious, so that people turned their faces to him, momentarily convincing him that he was *there*. And then, extravagantly elated, he often talked brilliantly and subtly; so that they said to each other afterwards, 'He is really a very remarkable man.' But they always forgot about him easily; and he, whether he knew of this or not, always reacted from such orgies in blank discouragement.

He hated being bad at things; but as he thought less about what he was doing than about his relationship with what he was doing, he was never concentrated enough to get particularly good results. At school he played most games for his house; and he was considered by his masters to be able, but unsatisfactory. At sixteen (towards the end of the nineteenth century) he became an atheist. But he soon discarded the label, and spoke of religion with tolerant smiles. During his last term in the Sixth Form he developed a talent for epigrammatic blasphemy, and despised equally the boys who admired him and the boys who were in any way disquieted.

At Oxford he experimented in all opinions and tastes. He decided to despise intellect, and glorify emotion. He railed at his own subject, Mathematics, for which he had some talent; and, finding that his own emotions needed considerable stimulation, he read with fervour any erotic

literature he could get hold of, especially in French and Latin, which have cachet, and can be obscene and vulgar, without being common. He was extremely nervous, but not sensitive; and acted generally from whim, rather than desire or judgment. That is, in more scientific and accurate language, not from long-distance but from short-distance motives, from momentary and unconnected impulses.

He fiddled about a good deal, examining his own motives, and, not understanding this effect of his extreme unco-ordinated susceptibility to trivial influences, he interpreted them in forms of gigantic wickedness. But even his wickedness was shadowy. Generally he felt only emptiness, a vast emptiness he groped through, while his behaviour was a kind of surface-mechanism working without control.

This view of himself was not exactly false, but grotesquely distorted. The materials of it were in a few scattered and painfully remembered moments that he took for the whole of his life. But, though it was only a part of the truth about himself, it became gradually more nearly the whole truth, since this idea of his nature acted as a kind of sterilising agent in it. Whenever he thought of himself (which he did often) he saw himself in this form; and the phantasm was very near the surface of his mind, imminent and potent.

After he had left Oxford, and travelled, and rejected his earlier design of reading for the Bar,

he decided to be ordained. Not because he thought the Christian Church right or true, but because he felt he had tried most other things. This piece of policy, whose only vitality, to use his own grandiose phrase, was the equivocal force of despair, was curiously successful. Belief could never be a passion to him, hardly even an emotion. His belief in himself as an empty-minded and pretentious humbug was simply (he told himself) that he thought in the forms that such a belief would necessitate. The theology and ritual of the Church of England became in the same way a part of his mental manner. And because the intimacies of religion satisfied his need for concentrated self-interest, and because the practice of it gave a direction to whatever accessible energy he had, he began, without knowing how, to be happier.

In church he read the Bible very beautifully, like poetry, as if it were meant to be felt, and people were astonished and moved. He prayed fervently, so that even rebellious adolescents (who always try to be fair-minded) asked themselves if there mightn't be something in it after all. His sermons were never reasoned justifications, in the self-conscious and apologetic manner of most modern clergy, but rhapsodies, opening up strange vistas of the imagination. All this, he thought, applying the usual abusive words to his own character, was simply theatrical parade. So it may have been to start with. But it was as effective over himself as over his audience, and

sooner than he realised it became the one stability of his life, the nearest thing to bed-rock among his quicksands. Sometimes he prayed raptly, losing himself, feeling himself simply as a channel of enormous power; and he forgot how arid he knew himself to be, in the experience, and the remembrance also, of this ecstasy. He began, too, to take an exaggerated and almost passionate interest in the trivial details of ritual and dogma; and though, in moments of emergence, he mocked himself for it, he generally forgot in activity to be unabsorbed, and aloof, and sardonic.

This satisfaction was of course no more a certainty of his life than the former desolation and despair. It wore thin just the same. He often made up his mind to give up his work, to emigrate, to become a miner (for he always had a belief, which he never acted on, in the saving grace of manual labour) or a tramp. But he never did any of these things. He only cursed, or quarrelled with his friends, or knocked dandelion heads off with his walking-stick.

In this mood he had travelled from London, on a very hot June day, to have lunch with some friends who had just moved into the country. He had expected to be met at the station, and was annoyed not to have been, as he did not know the house. The village, moreover, seemed deserted, and he felt a sudden inordinate dislike for the inconvenience of finding his way through it.

The road was dusty, and the grit got into his shoes.

He looked about, and, as he saw no house that could possibly be the right one, he decided to ask at one of the cottages. They seemed to him forbidding, but at the same time horribly insignificant. They were blank and unwelcoming. He walked on aimlessly, unwilling to push open the barrier of garden gate, thunder on the open indifferent door, and rouse the inhabitants from dark, blank inner caves. Besides, they might be ill, or asleep, or gone out for the day; and there he would be, knocking and knocking, ridiculously alone and unknowing, exposed to anyone who might be passing. So he went on in the middle of the road, not committing himself.

In the White Horse there were signs of activity. But he passed it, not wanting to go with an inquiry only to a place where they would expect him as a customer. There was always such a difficulty in explaining yourself from one class to the other.

At last he came to a little brick house that opened on to the road, without a garden. There were a few jars of sweets, and packets of tobacco, and a cardboard box of liquorice sticks and toffee apples displayed in the small square window. He thought the place looked friendly, and approached it, forgetting the reason he had given himself for not going to the pub. A little tinny bell rang uncertainly as he pushed the door. He heard a chair being scraped back in the parlour,

a corner of which he could see through the doorway behind the counter, and a girl came quickly up the two steps leading from it. She smiled, almost as if he were someone she had been expecting, and then waited, with serious attention, to know what he wanted.

"Good morning," he said. "Can you tell me the way to Dr. Wall's house?"

"Oh yes, I'll show you."

She took him outside, and pointed to a side road.

"You go up there, and past the church, and turn again this side of a hayfield they've just begun to cut, and then it's on your right."

"Past the church, and turn this side of a hayfield, and it's on the right. It's not far, is it?"

"Five or ten minutes. You'll find it all right."

She smiled, full of goodwill and a sense of the hospitality due to a stranger in the village. Because of this, and without personal interest, she watched him as far as the first corner. He walked self-consciously, but did not look back. When he got out of sight he had practically forgotten her. Passively he followed her directions. Past the church, and past the hayfield, and there was the house.

Dr. Wall had been a don at Oxford in Guy's time, and Guy had known him as well as was possible. For he had an appearance of leading a very secret life, and nobody had ever discovered the nature or the intensity of it. Probably his

evasive manner was only a defence against the well-meant and entirely justifiable demands of his wife and Sylvia, his only daughter. Sylvia had been at Oxford rather a friend of Guy's, and they still kept up a sober and intermittent correspondence.

At half-past twelve Mrs. Wall had gone into the study.

"What about meeting Guy?" she said.

Dr. Wall got half out of his chair. "He'll find his way all right . . . or perhaps Sylvia?"

Mrs. Wall went to Sylvia's room.

"Would you like to run down to the station, darling? Guy's train will be in in a quarter of an hour."

"Surely he can come up by himself?" said Sylvia with impatience, stitching at her flimsy bit of sewing as if it were of great importance. "I just can't be bothered."

Mrs. Wall bent over her, and slipped a kiss on to her forehead which she jerked to evade. Really, she thought, it's indecent.

When Guy was shown into the drawing-room, Mrs. Wall was there alone, placidly, in a green light.

"I'm sorry nobody met you," she said; "we were all busy. How are you? and how is your work going? You are looking a little tired; I hope you aren't doing too much."

"It's hard work, of course," answered Guy; "but I suppose all work that's interesting is so, and I don't want to grumble about it. How do you find your new house?"

"We like it very much, very much indeed. James was sorry to leave Oxford, and so was I; but I think we will all be very happy here. . . ."

Lunch was ready, and distress began to tremble through her equability, because James and Sylvia had not yet come down.

"But they're always late," she said, excusing them, ashamed of herself for being bothered. And she thought, it bothers me because I'm getting old. I mustn't be bothered, I mustn't be old, she thought, fretting with impatience.

Sylvia came first, looking fresh and elegant. She is perfect, thought Guy, hating her perfection.

"Well, Guy . . ." she said, perfectly welcoming, perfectly smiling, just 'great friends.'

Somebody might have cut her out of paper, thought Guy. The fashion editor, or the one who gives you tips in etiquette, might have made her up. . . .

"I think we had better go in," said Mrs. Wall.

Dr. Wall was in the dining-room already, thoughtfully sharpening a carving-knife. He would never accede to the routine of meals, and was almost certain to 'gather' in the wrong place. Nobody ever knew if this was from real absent-mindedness, or from a peculiar sort of malice.

Guy wondered how he could get through their guard; touch their nerves, their feelings, their soft hermit-crablike human flesh. He began to talk about a girl he had had to go and see in hospital.

"She'd had concussion, and was still pretty

bad. She'd been going with her young man for a day at the seaside, and there was a railway accident. She kept asking for him, knowing he must have been hurt even worse than she was, and saying he'd be better if they'd only let her go to him. She wouldn't listen to anything I said. 'Why don't they let me see him?' she whispered all the time, moaning and whimpering, the way people do when they are only half-conscious. Have you heard it ever? Like that she said all the time, 'They don't understand, I'd make him better. It's me he wants. Why don't they let me see him? They don't understand.' When they brought her in, they told me, she just lay and groaned his name. . . . 'Eric . . . Eric . . . I'll be all right in a minute . . . Oh . . . Eric . . . it doesn't really hurt so very much . . . Oh . . .'

"But Eric was dead really," Guy finished brusquely.

"How awful," said Sylvia. Her expression was horror-stricken.

"That's a very sad story indeed," said Mrs. Wall, almost unconcernedly, as if she were laying her soft, comfortable fingers very lightly and gently on the sore place, somehow smoothing and obliterating the pain, without minding it much, or feeling for you, and forgetting immediately. Guy thought, I expect she's right. You can't notice all pain so that it pierces you, and by the time you're that age, you've learnt to keep it in its place. She just calls it by its name, recog-

nising it, and gently puts it away. And it stops being . . . poignant. But Sylvia responds from her knowledge, on principle. She waits for opportunities to look as if she felt something. If you dissected her, there wouldn't be anything inside her head. . . .

He imagined a sharp line across Sylvia's white forehead, a sharp line round her head, with a fringe of blood-stained yellow hair. She would look like an egg-cup, with a grotesque face painted on it. And inside there wouldn't be anything. He thought of doing the operation. Cutting off the top of her head. She would look frightened, really frightened, her eyes starting. He would grip her neck, and push his fingers through her yellow, yellow hair, lifting it up, so that his knife, his axe, could cut clearly through her skin, and the thin layer of flesh, and hard bone. He was glad she was so beautiful. She should be punished for all the ways that the world had gone wrong in. She should be terrified, stupidly and dumbly terrified, and then she should be made ridiculous. *There wouldn't be anything inside.* He would tell everybody, shouting out to them, 'This is what you're like.' But they wouldn't take much notice. They wouldn't understand, and they would go on thinking themselves real.

But he was brave and clear-sighted, and knew what it was to know yourself pretence. Empty and empty his mind was, with long, long corridors and no rooms. **THERE ISN'T ANYTHING INSIDE.**

“. . . have you read it?" said Sylvia.

Guy said no, because yes is sometimes difficult to substantiate.

"The preface is the best part really. But it's all full of ideas, as well as being amusing. It's very . . . stimulating. You ought to read it—I think you would like it. Shall I lend it you?"

Guy realised by this time that he had read it, so it was only for suitability that he said he would like to borrow it very much. She's got culture too, he thought; I wonder how she did that. She doesn't even wear it like a dress, she carries it like a hand-bag. I suppose she got it by some sort of intellectual shop-lifting. This display of culture is vulgarer by now than any display of wealth. We haven't any of the proper mental clothes, and we flaunt this with the indecency of a nude in a picture with a velvet ribbon round her neck, or kid boots. I've got it too, of course. I'm as bad as any of them, perhaps worse. Oh God, perhaps worse, what shall I do? Worse, *worse*. Is there anyone who's stayed real? Anyone who's not just painted on top?

He thought of the girl in the sweet-shop, of her wary and alert passivity. He thought of laying his head on her cherishing and uncomprehending bosom. He remembered how she had said to him, 'You'll find it all right,' and what a curious feeling of assurance that had given him. She *was* something. She didn't just do and feel, and watch it all happening.

After lunch, Sylvia took him for a walk. They had two dogs with them on leashes, so it was a spasmodic affair, with a great many pauses. They talked mostly of people they had both known.

"It was fun," said Sylvia.

Cautious girl, thought Guy, she wants me to tell her I love her, so she says it was fun in the days when we saw such a lot of each other. I do love her, in some ways, but I'm damned if I'd tell her so. She'd use it. She'd hold it over me. And she's not any use to me. She isn't real. That girl in the sweet-shop's real. She's what I want. She's fixed. She is something. I might be something if she held me to her. . . .

They let the dogs off, and leaned over a gate, looking at the hills.

Guy stared quizzically at Sylvia, and watched her beginning to blush without moving her head. He said:

"I expect I do love you Sylvia, a little. . . ."

She couldn't understand the matter-of-fact voice he said it in, and turned to look at him, startled.

". . . but it's not any good," he said.

She made gestures of protesting. What could he be thinking of? Was it modesty? or because he hadn't enough money? or what?

He was going to kiss her, but she drew back in alarm. She thought he would be gentle with her, want her so much, and be so uncertain of his own merits, that at some unimaginable

moment she would find herself in his arms in a soft contentment of pity and tenderness. Now he seemed fierce to her.

"Silly," he mocked, "it doesn't mean anything."

She was puzzled, and waited, all astray. He kissed her violently, and she went slack in his arms, ecstatically acquiescent. Immediately he said:

"Now we must go home—they'll wonder what's happened to us."

He behaved as if nothing had happened. She couldn't make it out. She was silent, and walked suspiciously down the far side of the lane, repeating to herself, it doesn't mean anything, it doesn't mean anything. Yes, but what does it mean? pushed up against her conviction. . . .

When they got home, Guy said he must start for the station.

"Well, Guy," said Mrs. Wall, "it's been very nice to see you. You must come again quite soon. We're out of things now, and our friends must come often to see us. And it may be dull for Sylvia, I sometimes think."

"I don't mind that," said Sylvia, pushing her hair off her forehead. "I've got a bit of a headache," she added abruptly.

What a simpleton, thought Guy, what a silly, silly girl. He smiled at her with impudent friendliness. She turned away, and looked out of the window, blushing very slowly.

Dr. Wall had adroitly disappeared, and Guy

went off by himself. His contemptuous mood had changed to bleak dejection.

There is nothing inside, he thought, getting so slight a pleasure from the exquisite, he knew it was exquisite, smell of the cut hay. He looked sardonically at the church. There is nothing inside that but a few wizened old women and ill-behaved choir-boys. That's where people try to compensate for having no minds by trying to pretend that they haven't any bodies. And in the end they haven't. Only shells.

He went into the sweet-shop. It was cool and quiet, like a pool of brown water in the middle of the thick glare of afternoon sunlight. The girl was meticulously weighing out an ounce of brown bull's-eyes for a ragged and dirty little boy.

"May I see your mother?" said Guy.

"Why yes," she said, surprised, but not at all inquisitive. She went through the doorway, and called, "There's a gentleman wants to see you in the shop," and soon a small, bright-eyed, sandy-haired woman came out.

"Yes?" she said.

"I wanted to ask you," said Guy, trying to make up for a lack of ceremony in the matter by a certain solemnity in the style, "... I wanted to ask you, if I might marry your daughter."

She looked at him with suspicion, and went out into the other room. The girl had gone through to the kitchen, and she found her there.

"Do you know what he said? I didn't know you knew him. What's happened?"

"I don't know what you mean. I've never seen him but once, when he came in this afternoon asking the way to Mrs. Wall's. What's he want?"

"Says he wants to marry you. That's what."

The girl looked amazed, and horrified, and angry.

"But that's not . . . sense."

"Sense! It's impudence, if you ask me. I'll tell him what I think of him."

She rushed out, boiling over with abuse; but when she got into the shop, Guy looked so serious, and so like a gentleman, that she was frightened.

"I don't know what you mean," she said; "I think you had better go away."

Guy frowned. "I mean just exactly what I say. I want to marry your daughter . . . I don't know her name."

"Ellen," said the woman, taken by surprise, and then added defensively, ". . . but that's none of your business."

"Why won't you believe I'm in earnest?" he said persuasively, leaning over the counter. "I tell you what. This is my card. The Walls know me. They'll tell you I'm all right" (that's the phrase, all right). "You just go and ask them. I'd be able to make a comfortable home for her, and I hope I'd make her happy. I've got money enough, and I'm in a respectable pro-

fession. In fact, I'm a clergyman, though I don't always wear the clothes . . . but the Walls will tell you all that; and soon I'll be coming to see you again myself."

He went out, and after glancing at the name above the shop, walked off whistling. He had left everyone in great consternation.

CHAPTER II

ELLEN

“WELL!” said Mrs. Brooks, going back to the kitchen.

“Don’t bother about him, Mother,” said Ellen, in a gruff voice, “he’s mad, I expect.”

“What did he say to you the first time? He didn’t . . . you didn’t . . .?”

“No, Mother, what do you think? We hardly had two words. I thought him a nice ordinary gentleman, and just the kind of friend for Dr. Wall. I showed him the way. But I shan’t think any more about him, and don’t you either.”

“I don’t know what to do, I’m sure.”

“Oh, Mother, there’s nothing to be done,” said Ellen in exasperation; “put him out of your mind.”

“No, but . . . I can’t make it out. . . . I knew your father three years before he said a word. . . . Things have got quicker nowadays, that’s what it is.”

“I don’t believe it happened.”

“He stood there as plain as you or me. ‘I want to marry your daughter,’ he said. ‘The Walls,’ he said, ‘will tell you I’m all right.’ And

he looked all right, too, I will say, though he said some queer things. 'Ask the Walls about me,' he said. I've half a mind . . ."

"Oh, Mother, you mustn't. It didn't happen. We'd look idiots."

"I shouldn't wonder if we weren't being more idiots, going on this way. Clergyman, he said he was."

Ellen got up, and went out slamming the door.

In the road the sunlight was mellower, almost imperceptibly bluer, less clamant. She didn't notice it. Its gentle cherishing touch on her skin she accepted, profited by, secretly and unconsciously, as she did the natural necessities of food, and drink, and companionship. It wasn't important—she rebuked herself. The forces of her mind and spirit had scattered in disorder, like a cloud of startled pigeons. Now she was reclaiming them, in the mood of quiescent but not idle placidity that was natural to her. In the slow unconscious holding up, damming up of power. Power that might not ever be used. Spiritual anabolism. She did not think at all, and hardly felt. It wasn't important, she said gently to herself, not needing any longer to be fierce or directive. And it wasn't important. She walked in contentment towards the Rectory, to see Elsie, her girl-friend, who was parlour-maid there.

The Rectory kitchen was large and low and cool. The cook was out, so there was an unusual air of gaiety about it. Elsie had just returned

from taking tea out on to the lawn, and now she was caricaturing the visitors, mostly for her own amusement. She had no audience but the housemaid, who sat laxly and clumsily in a chair, as if she had been thrown there, and laughed in huge gulps. . . .

"Oh, you *are* . . ." said the housemaid. "Oh, Elsie, you *are* . . ."

Elsie was pleased that Ellen had come. The housemaid was a stupid, gawky girl.

"Well rahhly, this is a surpreyse," she said, "and how are the de-ah gayerls, and your de-ah mothah?"

Ellen laughed. "That's just like," she said. Elsie's imitations were grotesques, done largely from the comic papers, but they had vivacity enough to appear individual.

"The Professor's there too. . . ." She did Dr. Wall's walk from the dresser to the fireplace. She did the conventional gestures of nervousness, and made them somehow like his intensely individual movements, the quick hidden equivocal glances that were more *farouche* than shy.

"I was expected, wasn't I?" said Elsie, affecting his low, smooth, gentle voice. "And the old woman said," she went on in her own high-pitched treble, "'Yes, of course you were expected.' But he knew and she knew and I knew that it wasn't true; only of course I hid the extra cup and saucer behind the tea-pot when I brought it out, all the same."

Ellen was very much at home here, and had

begun to cut bread and butter in thin even slices. The housemaid began to make tea, but Elsie brushed her aside. She talked in a loud amusing excited way while they ate and drank, so that the housemaid was in fits of laughter. Ellen, though she did not explicitly wonder what was the matter, was slowly drawn into the mood of expecting something. After tea the housemaid went off to her room to write home, a weekly ceremony that was always done in secret, though the letters themselves were quite commonplace and almost impersonally unexpressive, as if they had been copied from a Complete Letter-Writer.

'... Well, Mother, that is all this week. I hope you and the boys are well. I am very well. Elsie is very funny, and she makes us all laugh. There is a Cattle-Show here next Saturday, but I won't be able to go, it not being my day out, and also Mrs. Saunders doesn't like us gadding about she says. No more now as I have finished the paper.

Your loving daughter,
SALLY.'

And yet these letters took a long time to write, and Sally was always careful to post them herself.

Elsie brought the tea-things in from the garden, and she and Ellen went into the pantry to wash up. They did not talk much. Ellen took great pleasure in the spacious neatness of this room. At home, their pantry was nothing but the kitchen dresser. She liked putting cups

and plates back in their own rows and piles, and arranging the silver on a green baize tray. There was so much of it, and it was all so tidy. At home they had very little, but there never seemed to be room for it. Naturally she made no contrasts. Just her fingers touched with secret rare pleasure the brittle china and the brightly shining silver. Elsie, with ostentatious gaiety, hummed broken phrases of dance-music. Suddenly she burst into tears.

"Oh, Elsie, what is it?"

"Nothing," said Elsie, her face all crumpled india-rubber, zealously rinsing the tea-pot: looking ridiculous. But it seemed to them, shameful to abandon oneself to weeping. Going on rinsing the tea-pot, drying the cups, made them feel that some wreckage of self-respect was still preserved.

"Tell me," said Ellen, "if that would make it any better."

"Oh, Ellen, she's such a beast to me."

"Mrs. Saunders?"

"Always nagging. Nothing right, ever. I can't stand it much longer. She'll never get another girl to stick it as long as I have."

"I'm sorry. I'd be sorry if you went away from here. . . ."

They went back to the kitchen, and sat on the little hard chairs. They said nothing for some time. Elsie wiped her eyes.

"You make me feel better, Ellen," she said; "perhaps I'll stay a bit, anyway. I like the place,

and the Rector's all right, and I've got a good many friends."

They talked on about indifferent things, and not themselves. At last Ellen got up.

"I'd better be going. You're sure you're all right?"

"Quite," said Elsie, smiling, not out of bravery, but conviction. "I'd better start thinking of supper. That girl's no good at all, you'd be surprised. I do it all when cook's out; I just haven't the patience to watch her at it, the clumsy thing."

Ellen went home. Her mother tried once or twice to get her to talk of Guy, but it wasn't any use. She gave it up in the end, deciding that Ellen was still alarmed and angry. Which was not true. She was just on the way to forgetting him.

But the next morning there were two letters. Mrs. Brooks was in the shop, after breakfast, dusting the counter, when the postman came; and so got hers first.

'DEAR MRS. BROOKS,

Thinking over our interview yesterday afternoon, I am afraid you are hostile to me. Perhaps I was clumsy. Certainly, by some stupidity or other, I made you suspicious; and am now confronted with the difficulty of convincing you of my sincerity.

I do really wish to marry your daughter, and that as soon as possible. Dr. or Mrs. Wall could

give you any information about my character or position, and I should like you to ask for it. Your daughter quite naturally will think me either a lunatic or a villain, and her mind must be freed from this prejudice, before she can judge rightly, either for me or against me, of her own inclination.

I shall think it a great honour if, as I so deeply hope, she accepts my proposal.

Yours very sincerely,
GUY TYNDALE.'

Guy had liked writing 'proposal.' It was so formal, so stylised. He thought it a pity that young people were beginning to dispense with ceremony. It made things so slipshod, and without recognisable outline. This was decisive, and clean-cut, and right, and real. It would change everything.

He wrote also to Ellen.

'DEAR MISS BROOKS,

Yesterday I am afraid I was a little abrupt; but when you know me better you will realise that that is my only way of doing things. Another sort of man, having come to my decision to marry you, would have cautiously sidled into your notice, and then, when he was certain of you (or at least as certain as a man can be of a woman), would have told you he loved you. But I am not capable of working on secret plans. I want you to marry me.

I hardly hope to make you happy. My own misery is too pervasive. I want you selfishly, for my own sake. You suddenly came into my life as the one human being who could in any degree reclaim its waste; and I cannot let you go out of it without fighting for my salvation through you.

I will come and see you, if I may, on Thursday.

I write in a hurry, and some excitement. I am afraid it all sounds extravagant and cold. I hope to explain things better to you when we meet.

Yours,
GUY TYNDALE.'

Mrs. Brooks read quickly through her letter. She hardly took in the sense of it in any detail, but the general manner made a strong impression on her. She had never seen anything like it before, and thought it very frank and very gentlemanly. She called Ellen, and handed her the other letter addressed in the same handwriting. She was too much in awe of her to look over her shoulder as she read, which she would have liked to do, so she re-read her own letter over and over again, almost learning it by heart, but not any more understanding it.

Ellen read slowly. She was at first repelled by his apparent confidence in her acquiescence; but, in his favour, she received, like her mother, an exaggerated impression of openness and sincerity from the unimpassioned self-confessional style, which was new to her, and not suspect.

She began to remember that she had liked the look of him.

They exchanged letters, and their feelings were not altered, except that Ellen stopped thinking him presumptuous or patronising.

"Well, and now what's to be done?" said Mrs. Brooks cheerfully.

"Nothing, I suppose wait till to-morrow."

"What about the Walls?"

"I think I'd rather we didn't bother them."

"I'd feel happier if I knew about him."

"So should I. But they'll think it queer."

"Better than making a mistake about him."

"Perhaps it would be right, but I'd rather you didn't."

"Well, if you think it right the same as I do, I'll go off and do it here and now. There'll be no harm. You'd better come too."

"I couldn't do that. It would be . . . shame to me. Do you think you'd really better, Mother?"

"Well, it's what he said. You come along with me now at once."

"I'll stay. I'd rather. But what'll you say?"

"Tell them what's happened. And ask them if it's all the way he says. Mrs. Wall I'll ask to see. . . ."

"He'd be better. . . ."

"I don't feel I could. I'd rather talk about it to a woman. She's very kind and seems to understand more. . . ."

Ellen had not thought this. But perhaps it was more decent to go to a woman.

"Perhaps that would be best. But what'll you say to her?"

"Just everything. What I remember. . . ."

"I'd better come too. Wait while I get my hat."

They walked out solemnly. It was a very serious occasion. And they made no frivolous pretences of its being anything but that.

Sylvia had been restless all night. She kept being woken up by a sensation of thin excitement. She thought there would be perhaps a letter for her; and desired, and dreaded it, in turns. There was not; and she sat through breakfast haggard and unhappy. To herself she pretended that she hadn't expected any. Her mother commiserated with her headache, and she went on appearing as if she had one.

Just as they were finishing breakfast, the maid came to say that Mrs. Brooks and daughter had come to see Mrs. Wall.

"What can it be, at this time of the morning?" she complained; "you'd better go and see about it, Sylvia."

"She said particularly it was you she wanted," said the maid.

"How tiresome," said Mrs. Wall, going out to them in exasperation. Ellen and her mother were standing in the hall, looking uncomfortable, and dressed up, and out of place. She took them into her own sitting-room, and, after a good deal of encouragement, they sat down on the edge of chairs.

"Well, is there anything I can do for you?" said Mrs. Wall, helping them out.

"It's like this," said Mrs. Brooks: "a gentleman who came here yesterday, a Mr. Tyndale he was, he said to us that he wanted to marry Ellen here, and we thought he was joking, or something we couldn't understand, so we didn't take much stock of him, and he went away. But this morning we got letters—I'll show them to you if you'd like—and they said the same. Ask Mrs. Wall about me, he said, in case you think I'm a lunatic or a villain, and that's why we took the liberty, Mrs. Wall, and I hope you'll excuse us, because I can't have my daughter getting engaged to a man no one knows anything about; you'll see that as a mother, Mrs. Wall. So I came straight off to you."

Ellen had come to control her mother's exuberance. But when she got into this elegant room, and the aura of Mrs. Wall's intelligent and insensitive normality, she was quite abashed, and was silent, leaving everything to the others. But she was made uncomfortable by her mother's telling of the story, and by Mrs. Wall's expression, showing clearly her amazement, and what was, to Ellen, an inexplicable anger.

Mrs. Wall put her hand up to her forehead. "I don't understand," she said.

Ellen felt she didn't really understand either. Her mother hastened to explain.

"It's just what I say, Mrs. Wall. He says he wants to marry her, and we don't know what to do."

"Well, really. I don't know what to do either. I must allow it is a great surprise to me. I didn't know Mr. Tyndale knew anyone here except ourselves."

Ellen blushed. Her mother looked for a moment, taken aback.

"He didn't. Not till yesterday," said Ellen slowly. "I only met him yesterday."

"Isn't that rather extraordinary?" said Mrs. Wall. She was trying to discount her personal anger and resentment, but she was not very good at it. There were so many reasons for disapproving of this affair.

"You may be sure we think it extraordinary, too. But you look at his letters."

The sight of Guy's handwriting convinced Mrs. Wall that there had not been some muddle of identification, as she had before suspected and hoped for. She was angrier than ever on Sylvia's account, but, as she read, her anger was transferred from Ellen to Guy. She felt she would like to do well by this girl; and she began to resent, for her sake, his treatment of her.

"I should be sorry," she said, "to have a daughter of mine marry Mr. Tyndale, but in justice to him I must say that in all ordinary senses of the word he is a respectable man. My husband knew his father. Indeed, they were great friends. This Mr. Tyndale is a little eccentric. He is very clever. But he likes to do things in a curious and unusual way. I think you should above all reflect"—she felt as if she

had found a hard pebble in this slimy tangle—"on whether it is wise for a girl to marry out of her . . . her position" (in her evasion of the harsher word 'class' she lost the pebble again). . . . I'm sure you're a very good girl, Ellen, and won't do anything rash or silly. I don't know what to say to you; it's too sudden, and I must confess very surprising. . . ." She found her mind going quite vague, and made a recovery into a well-drilled convention. "I hope you'll be happy in whatever you decide to do."

They got up to go, and Mrs. Wall went back to the dining-room. She was too astonished to break the news gently; and she was too human to make her own catastrophes, or those of her children, sound trivial.

"My darling, Guy's wanting to marry that girl. . . ."

She was ready with sympathy, but too shy to offer it. And it was not asked for.

"Then she's a fool," said Sylvia. "I wouldn't marry him to be Queen of Heaven."

"Is she going to marry him?" said her father.

"I don't know. I told her that was for her to decide. He has behaved very oddly indeed. But they showed me his letters, and he seems to be in earnest. He does do very extraordinary things sometimes."

"He must be mad," said Sylvia, who had, besides her disgust, a feeling of contempt for a person whose motives were so completely beyond rational explanation, as his were to her.

"But I couldn't say it was an impossible marriage, could I? It isn't as if either of them were mad, or epileptic, or drunk. Though heaven knows there are reasons enough without that. But what could I say?"

"It might be the best thing for him, to marry a girl like that. She'd be a sort of block that he can't put off its balance, with all his cleverness and affectation. He'd drive crazy anyone with a mind or a heart."

Mrs. Wall's dubious reception of her startling news had drawn off some of Mrs. Brooks' confidence in Guy. But it had made Ellen feel protective and defensive, as if she were "on his side." They didn't understand him, she thought. Dr. Wall came in in the evening for tobacco, and gave her as he went a mysterious nod and smile. Neither of them knew what it meant, but it gave her a feeling that perhaps everything would be all right. The next day Guy came. He persuaded her that he wanted her; and, after one or two meetings, she realised that, in his own way, he loved her. So she loved him, too, and said she would marry him, and knew she would love him and be faithful to him for ever and ever and ever. It was not the expected way for her to love, which would have been rather through a slow deepening of affection. But this way it happened.

Mrs. Brooks was proud of her daughter's engagement. She talked of it a lot, and did not notice the reserved way in which people listened.

To the villagers it seemed odd and rather pitiable. They liked Ellen, and knew this would take her away from them. And, being simple-hearted, they wondered how she would do without them. Already she kept more aloof than she had done; and she never talked about Guy to any of her friends.

When they were together, he talked on and on in a way she could not often understand. Sometimes she asked him to explain. . . .

"Explain, Ellen? to you, Ellen? but that would spoil it. Sweetheart, you're so perfect, I don't want to have you any different. . . ."

So she gave up asking questions, and just listened, understanding what she could, and growing very sensitive to the inflexions of his voice, and thought about him a great deal, trying to understand him, and gained in the end a good working knowledge of his nature, without having the slightest idea of any of the principles which controlled it.

She discovered that he liked her to talk about the running of the shop, and crops, and rural seasons, and the histories of the village people. So she talked of these, letting her natural interest run free, gradually forgetting her surprise that he should pay attention to such things.

"Tell me about spring in the country, Ellen," he said. And she went through all the things she could remember about spring. She was not minutely observant, so her descriptions were much in outline, and mixed general with detail,

and learned with noticed, in the muddled way of a children's nature class. But all she said was so like herself, that Guy was enraptured. She never knew why.

"Ellen, tell me about Johnny Walters' grandfather. . . . Tell me how Tom climbed the tower on St. John's eve . . ." (the date he had put into the story himself) . . . "tell me about the first moment of your life that you remember. . . ."

She knew she could please him by telling him all these things. But she was still disquieted by their difference, his ungetatable 'cleverness.' She thought she must improve herself, and so for a time she went up to London every Thursday, to attend Evening Lectures on English Literature. In a sober way she enjoyed them. The words flowed through her mind, and some of them meant something to her. She felt, certainly, as if everyone were making far too much fuss about things, but she had always taken it for granted that pain or misery were naturally more pitiable in other people than she could allow them to be in herself, and she was often touched. The lectures were given in an Elementary School, where the rooms were bare in character, and crowded superficially with railway posters, and diagrams, and children's drawings, which gave them an atmosphere of particularly oppressive vacancy. This she did not notice, nor the mannerisms of the lecturer. Nor did she speculate about the characters of the members of the audience. She listened, and every word fell on

her attentive ears, and sometimes reached, and stirred, the massive simplicities of her emotions. She did not tell Guy of this, and did not mean him to know, ever at all. She did not do it to gain praise, or to give her things to talk about, or even to please him, but because she thought it would inwardly change her nature, and so bring her nearer to him.

But Guy found out. His talk with Mrs. Brooks was generally of Ellen, and they both vied in praising her excellence. Mrs. Brooks liked to feel that she was showing him what he hadn't noticed himself, and he enjoyed the *naïveté* of her little proud discoveries.

“. . . but you don't know," she said, "what she does Thursday evenings. That'd please you; but she won't tell you, she says, and I'd better be quiet about it myself. . . ."

"What is it?"

"I'd not dare to tell you. Ask her."

So Guy, when they were next alone in the little parlour, said:

"Ellen, my darling, what is the secret activity of Thursday evenings, that your mother was making tantalising hints about? Is it a secret? or could you tell me?"

"It was meant to be a secret, but not such a special one. If you know the beginning, you might as well know the rest."

She went to the cupboard where she kept her work-basket, and took out of it a notebook. It was a penny one, with a name, and a good deal

of black pattern on the green cover. It occurred to Guy that he liked to be particular about his stationery.

He opened it, and read, in Ellen's tidy childish writing:

"Shakespeare

The Swan of Avon

Not of an age, but for all Time

Born 1554, Died 1616.

England justly proud . . ."

He swore, and in a passion threw the book across the room. It twisted wildly in the air, and fell in a corner. There it lay stupidly, in a ridge, its pages propping it on a series of curves. He cried out as he threw it, "Oh, Ellen, you mustn't do that. . . ."

As he spoke, his eyes suddenly ached with tears. Ellen's cheeks reddened. He threw himself on the floor beside the sofa, and put his face between his hands. The hideousness of the situation was clear and sudden in his mind, like a landscape by lightning.

Ellen forgot that situation. This was more pressing. She sat on the sofa, and pulled his head against her knee.

"It's all right. It's all right, Guy dear."

She had made a stupid mistake; so she dismissed the thought of it, not wasting herself. Guy was in a torment of disgust. Waste, rejection, frustration, were frightful to him, and made him ashamed. He did not realise how little Ellen was affected; he never realised how easily

and certainly, even in greater things, she could right herself, like an underground shoot that deviates round a pebble, and then grows accurately upwards, in its first direction. Over-pitying, he tormented himself to explain and excuse his brutality. He must dispel her humiliation.

"Ellen, forgive me . . . I didn't mean . . . Darling, it was sweet of you to think of it, but it's not any good. I want you to stay the way you are for ever and ever and ever. Culture's not any good. It just turns sour on you, I know that. Ellen, you aren't angry, are you?"

"No, of course not angry."

"And not sad any more?"

"I don't like you not to be happy."

"Oh, Ellen, you're so perfect, I can't believe in you. Are you truly a human being? Is there real letoutable blood under your lovely smooth skin?"

"Of course, Guy. What can you mean?"

"And you do love me?"

"Yes, of course I do, Guy. You know that . . ."

They were both quite happy again. But Guy that night lay awake, and cried, thinking of the Thursday evenings. His pillow got warm and wet with tears, as it had a long, long time ago, when he was wretched at his Preparatory School.

CHAPTER III

ARRIVAL

MRS. BROOKS had expected a long dilatory engagement, like her own, of several years; but Guy wanted to be married at once, and she didn't take long to come round. Ellen, on the other hand, had made up her mind that she would be married in a year and no sooner, and she was not so easily persuaded. So it was arranged her way. Guy came often to see her, and the rest of the time she spent in her usual occupations, and in sewing linen pillow-cases and fine lawn underclothes.

The wedding was in June. Mrs. Brooks had wanted to make it as grand as she could afford, but Guy, in spite of his efforts to slough sophistication, had a disgust of the crude, ingenuous, orange-blossom ostentation; and Ellen, not minding much, fell in with his wishes. She made herself a simple white dress, rather the kind girls wear for confirmation; and Guy felt it was 'in keeping' and was pleased with it. They had no honeymoon, for they were not so foolhardy as to strain their basic incompatibility of taste in London or abroad; and if they were going to some quiet piece of English country, there was

hardly any better than the rural parish to which Guy had been appointed. They did not even discuss the matter, but found themselves in agreement that they should go straight there.

Mrs. Brooks and a crowd of Ellen's friends saw them off at the station. Everyone was rather uncomfortable. They had most of them not seen much of Ellen lately, and they seemed to be assigning the strangeness they felt in her, not to their own shyness, or to her year of growing intimacy with Guy, but to some immediate change that had taken place in her during the reading of the marriage service. There was a certain amount of shrill laughter. Ellen cried a little, but secretly, behind her bunch of roses, because she would have hated it to be seen by Guy, or by these other friends that she had chosen to leave. Mrs. Brooks soaked her handkerchief, and then, forgetting her tears, left them to dry on her cheeks. Elsie, who was still at the Rectory, still ill-used and impertinent, had not got away in time for the service, but came running to the station as the train went, and threw rice into their carriage. Guy smiled a little half-heartedly, and smoothed his hair to make sure that none had stuck in it. Ellen leaned out of the window, and waved as the train went out, and drew back almost reluctantly as it rounded the bend. But then she knew immediately that she had been right in leaving them and coming with Guy. Guy was right for her, she thought.

He was just glad to be rid of the impertinence of their friendliness. Ellen was so sweet she shouldn't have lived on such a background. At the edge of his mind was the thought that he wouldn't have noticed her on any other, because he was so bored by simple situations. But this didn't protrude, and soon faded altogether. Ellen was so sweet.

The company fell into groups on the way up to the village, and Mrs. Brooks unexpectedly found herself alone. Elsie, who had not felt in the humour to join one of the clusters of chattering girls, or any of the shining and self-conscious young men, was waiting for her as she came off the platform. They went along together without speaking. Mrs. Brooks was mechanically dabbing her useless handkerchief on the ridge of her cheek-bones.

"He isn't half good enough for her," said Elsie at last, speaking as though she were letting out a thought that had been in her mind for a long time.

"No, that he isn't. Perhaps I didn't ought to have let her take him. But he was so persistent. . . ."

"Ellen's got a mind of her own, too."

"Yes, I will say, ever since she was so high. She would have him. But it's no joke being married; only it wasn't any use my saying anything. She made up her mind."

"Ellen generally does what's right."

"Right it may be. But there's happiness to be

thought of too. And I don't doubt he'll be as tiresome and selfish as most men."

"But he's quite a nice man, isn't he?"

"Oh yes, I'm not saying anything against him. He's a good man. But a man always needs managing, and Ellen's not as if brought up with them. I had four brothers, and knew all about their ways and fancies before I married her father. And even then it had its disappointments. But that's only natural, and I'm not complaining. And I don't want to say anything against Guy either. Don't you think it. We get on together. He's a gentleman, but he's not a bit stuck-up. Our house has been just like a home to him this last year. He calls me mother; comes in and out, just as if it was his home like. Always polite he is; treats Ellen like a princess; never put out. . . ."

"He knew the Walls, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Brooks, abruptly discomposed. But she revived again quickly. "Taking it all in all, Ellen's done well for herself," she said.

Guy had settled his old nurse in the Rectory to make everything ready. It was a large house, and now so dilapidated as to be hardly worth repairing, and a new Rectory was being built on a higher and healthier site. Mrs. James was appalled at the amount of work that she saw for her to do. But she was determined to give Mr. Guy's wife a proper welcome; and, as it had rained all day, and the house was so wide and

cold, she lit a fire in the sitting-room, where tea was laid. Then she went upstairs, and sat chillily, wrapped up in a railway rug, at her bedroom window, from where she would be able to see the smoke of the train as it came in at the station.

Guy and Ellen drove up in the new trap that Guy had bought them. The gardener, who brought it to the station, had with him a large umbrella sent by Mrs. James, and this they held over their heads, leaning together. The rain was not violent, but soaking. The sky was almost white. There was a smell of green. The trap jolted over loose flints. The large yellow wheels sent up neat curved sprays of shining water-drops, before and behind. The horse's hair, so meticulously groomed smooth that morning, clung in black thorn-shapes. His flanks smoked.

On a hill to the left a new house was being built in ornamental brick. Guy pointed it out to Ellen as the new Rectory, which would be ready fairly soon. But he was glad, he said, that they were now going to live in the old one.

On their right was a long high wall, with its mortar crumbled out, and its stones pushed apart by moss, and little tenacious ferns, and toadflax. There was a small door in it, whose dirty blue paint had almost all peeled off. Soon they turned in at broad iron gates, up a drive, with rhododendrons one side, and a lawn with great

yew-trees the other, and drove smartly, in a fine curve, to the door. Mrs. James was there opening it. Guy relished her substantial, lavish conventionality (she was an 'Old Servant'), and was momentarily entertained by its setting in the meagre and dilapidated pseudo-classicism of the porch. Ellen was just frightened of her. They were alike in some ways; and for this reason, perhaps, it was impossible for Ellen to make herself look like the quaint hybrid of god and child that Mrs. James needed as the object of her curious, intense, and only half-human love. Guy, of course, did it instinctively.

He jumped down, and turned to lift Ellen. He stood with her in the porch with his arm round her shoulder.

"This is my wife, Mrs. James. Isn't she the loveliest wife you ever saw?"

"I'm very pleased I'm sure, ma'am," said Mrs. James quickly, in formal welcome. This whimsicality she always expected of Mr. Guy, but she could not very well deal with it.

"I'd 'ave always known you'd make a good choice, Mr. Guy," she added.

All this made Ellen faintly miserable. She wanted to go back to the trap to lift out her suitcase, but Guy prevented her. "The man'll bring them," he said.

Mrs. James took her to her room. Guy was suddenly afraid of going with her, afraid of marriage, so symbolised in the room where they would sleep together. He stayed downstairs and

talked to the man, in a professionally clerical manner, of his wife and family.

Ellen went into the large room, secretly trembling. She saw it as an enormous room; Guy would seem very far away from her, she thought, in that enormous bed.

The man brought up her box, and she began to unpack it. Mrs. James helped her, although they would both have preferred to be doing it alone. Guy lonelinessly drifted into the dining-room, and leaned against the French window, pressing his forehead on the glass, as if he were trying to flatten himself on the smooth, grey picture of out-of-doors. He muttered half-aloud the childlike simplicities that he had used, since his reaction to religion, as an appropriate expression of candour.

"Oh, please, dear God, please let Ellen be happy. Please let her be happy with me. She's so made to be happy, it doesn't matter so much about me. But, oh, God, don't give me the misery of seeing myself spoiling her life. Let me feel that I did right, and give me strength to continue. Oh God, give me strength. . . ."

He did not think very clearly what he was saying, or choose the words for any exactness of meaning. His prayer was more in the tenseness of his muscles, and the hard pressure of his forehead on the window-pane, and the strangled half-articulation of the words. Then he relaxed. His breath had made a cloud on the glass. He drew his fist across it, and the garden seemed

suddenly brighter and solider. He went upstairs. For a minute he hesitated in the doorway, and then came quickly across the enormous space of floor. Mrs. James 'slipped away.'

Guy took Ellen to the bay-window, and they stood there looking out, holding down their rapturous consciousness of each other by little pegs of talk.

"The church is behind those trees; and the village beyond it, down the slope. You'd see the end house if you leaned out. That's quite a big wood over there; we must go for walks in it. And our garden goes as far as that field, and the field's ours too; and there's an orchard along there down the side."

"Is there a vegetable garden?"

"Yes, there's everything. The vegetable garden's beside the orchard, over by the stable yard. It has peas and beans, and carrots, and parsley, and potatoes, and cauliflowers. Oh, and gooseberries, and raspberries, and currants, red, white and black. And the beds have little box hedges round them, just about as high as your ankle. Shall you like being here, Ellen?"

"Yes, I'll like it. I'm very happy, Guy."

"I'm so happy, Ellen."

Mrs. James knocked on the door, and told them that tea was ready.

"Why, there's a fire," said Ellen, taken aback. Even through her rapture, she was chilled a

little by the elegance. The fire, and the large room, and the silver tea-pot, and the tiny sandwiches.

After tea they went hand in hand to explore the house. It had been built in a very wasteful way, with almost more space in passages than in rooms; so it seemed larger than it was, and there were a lot of odd corners and turns, that made it full of sudden excitements, like a varied landscape. A good many of the rooms had not been furnished, as they would never want to use them. They wandered here and there, and kissed each other, in dim, cobwebby, echoing silences. Soon it was supper-time.

After supper Guy said they should go for a walk. Ellen put on a man's old overcoat that she had worn in bad weather at home. They went across a strip of sodden lawn, and through a rather dank shrubbery, where there were yew-trees, and rhododendrons, and many small bedraggled bushes, set far apart on a spongy carpet of loose pale moss and lanky grass. On the little winding path the trodden-in gravel was overgrown by bright green moss, close, and flat, and hard, like wool-work. There was a small stream at the end, with a plank bridge over it to the field path. The plank was green and slimy, and a dip had been worn in the middle, where grass and pebbles had collected and little plants grew. The whole garden was smoky with rain. Rain so fine that it just settled in little bright dew-drops on the escaping curls of

Ellen's brown hair. Her cheeks were faintly flushed by it.

The mud clung heavily to their shoes, but they walked on till they had nearly reached the beechwood at the top of the hill. Then they turned round to look at the house. The dun brown of the wet plaster had a grey dado round it, under the eaves, of dry plaster. The windows were black and blank.

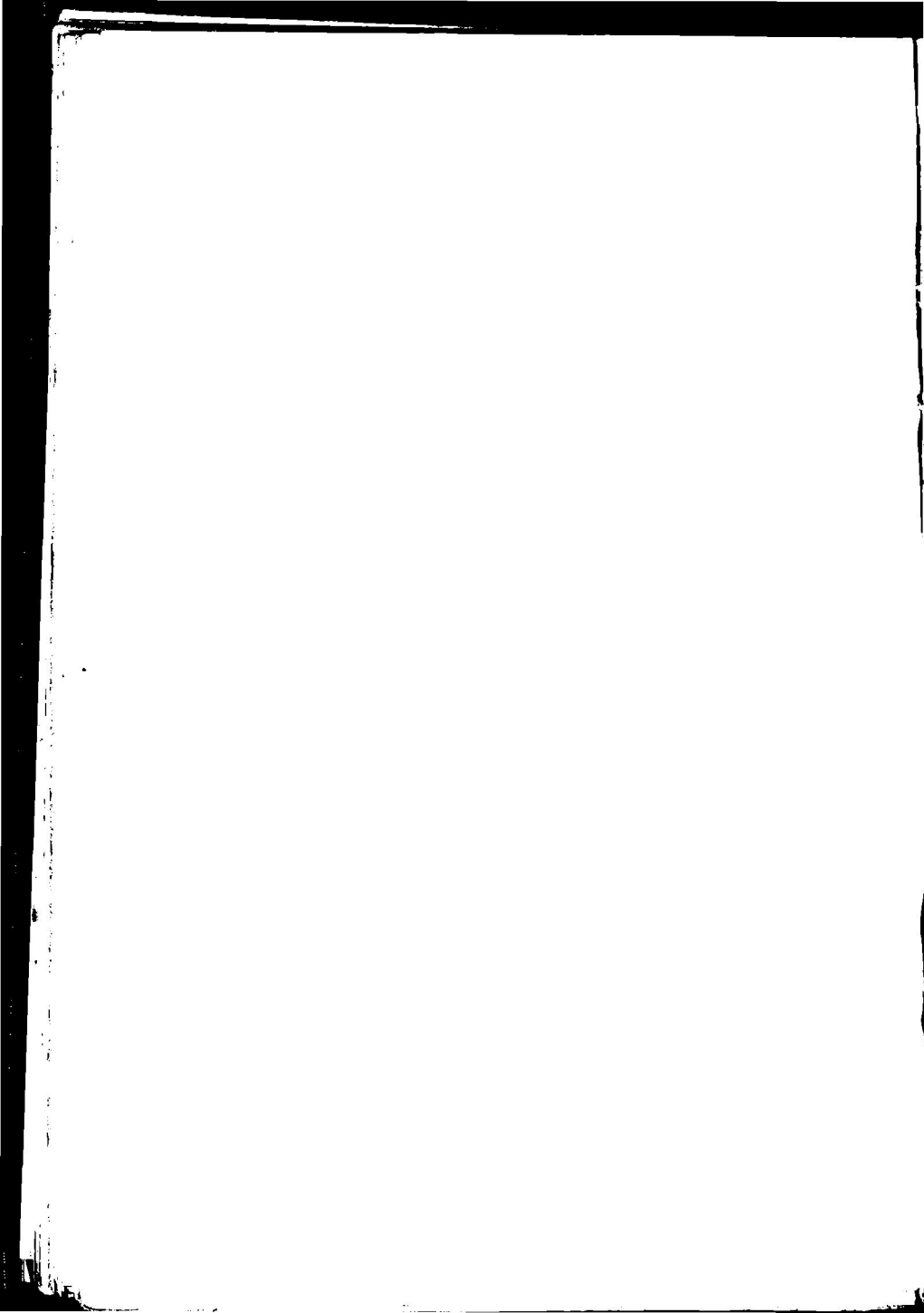
"I don't feel as if I belonged to it," said Ellen.

"It belongs to you," said Guy, "to us. We are going to be very happy in it."

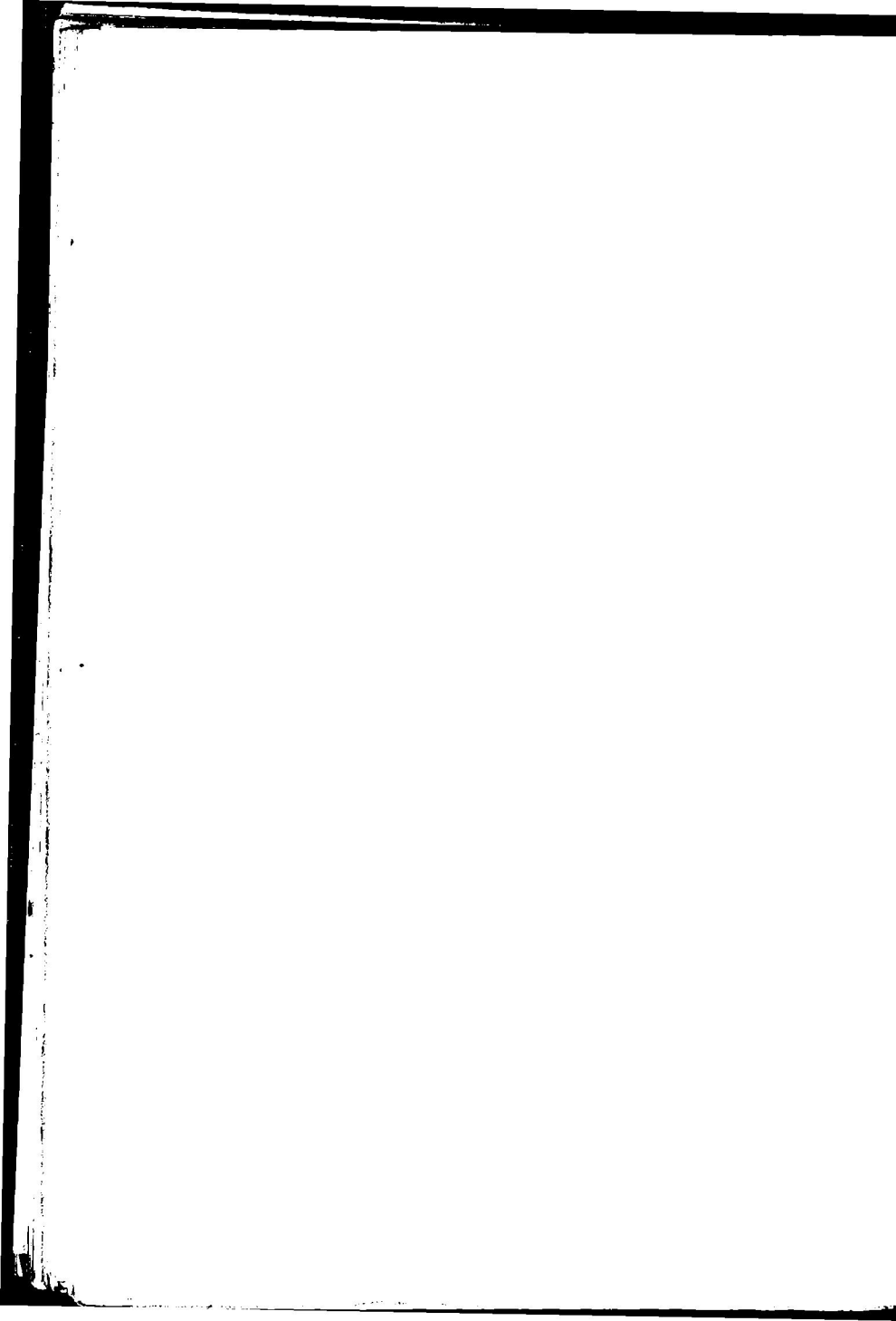
They ran down the slippery path. Ellen was sure-footed, and faster here than Guy. He suddenly went slower, suddenly thinking of the plank bridge, and imagining how you might slip on it and fall ridiculously into the little stream. He was terrified of coming to it. His head went dizzy with thinking how thin and slippery and wobbly it was. He almost called out to Ellen to say they were going back the other way. But she was ahead, so unnoticed, that he could not; and he went on trembling. When he came to it he was quite engrossed in fright. He went very slowly over, with his fists clenched, shuffling, and not lifting his feet. He could feel his heart in his body, and still, for a minute or two after he was safely over, he trembled. But Ellen was ahead, and noticed nothing.

They went through the shrubbery, between trees swelled with dusk. The house took them in, engulfed them. "Good night, sir; good

night, ma'am," said Mrs. James. The fire settled and blackened in the drawing-room. The lamp was put out in the kitchen. Mrs. James read her Bible, blew out her candle, and turned her face against the pillow.



PART II



CHAPTER IV
THE NEW DIRECTION

ELLEN had never felt sure of him before. He was her lover; and she felt sure of her lover. But she was afraid and suspicious of all the other unpossessable and untouchable men. She felt now that he was hers altogether. She was in an undisturbed trance of satisfaction, so deep and powerful that it nullified all his little spurts of impatience and mistrust. Once or twice he felt caught, engulfed, and rushed away from her, in a panic, on to the hills. He came back dreading her like suffocation; but she was so regardless of his moodiness, that it seemed ridiculous and pretence; and he came to her again, silently imploring her to dispel these stinging menaces of his divided mind. And she, pursuing her own way, did so.

After a week he started his work in the parish. On Saturday evening he prepared his sermon, and Ellen conscientiously 'took care not to disturb him.' She stayed up till he had finished, sewing, and not thinking much. He came into the drawing-room late, pushing the hair off his forehead. The effort of thinking and

writing had made him feel strong and quiet. But he was glad that it was over, and that here was Ellen.

"Did it go all right?" she said, trying to ignore that aura of grandeur that his pastoral duties gave him, in her eyes.

"Quite well." He had made up his mind to speak to her about something, and did not really attend to what she said. He thought for a moment about how he could say what he wanted in a way that would leave her free to her own choice. Then he plunged:

"But, Ellen . . . don't come to church any more than you want to . . . ever."

He saw immediately that she could not be freed from her regard for his position; that she thought a parson's wife *should* be in church for almost every service. Besides, she confidently imagined, without even enough misgiving to notice and reject an alternative, that he would be really distressed if she were absent, and that he was only making this eccentric suggestion out of extravagant and unnecessary broad-mindedness.

"But of course I'll go to church. Besides, I'd like to."

He observed sardonically her implied consideration for appearances; and made another attempt.

"There's early communion to-morrow. You won't want to get up so early, will you?"

"I'm used to it. And I'd like very much . . . I'd much rather . . ."

"Of course, I'm awfully pleased if you really feel anxious to. But I think it's so bad, the way people go to church out of all the wrong reasons, to do their duty by the poorer classes, or to please their parents. My mother made me an atheist that way. But that was all rather stupid," he said, remembering his adolescence.

Ellen, he suddenly noticed, was horrified that such extraordinary wickedness as atheism should be called just stupid. He did not know how to reassure her.

"But you're all right now?" she said.

"Of course, of course" (but he did not know how to explain to her). "Religion means a great deal to me now."

"I'm glad you . . . got over that."

"I'm much happier than I was then."

"Besides, it's so wrong."

"Yes," he answered, a little too hastily.

They got up early and walked together to the church. Ellen's shoes got quite wet, because the path through the churchyard was narrow, and in places long grass and buttercups straggled across it. She knew that she had some time to wait, and knelt quietly, with her head in her hands, repeating to herself the hymn and little prayer that she had learnt for her first communion. A few people came in, and settled themselves sparsely over the church. Then the priest went up to the altar, and began, in a rich expressive voice, to read the service. Ellen might have thought, this is Guy; but she did not connect

him with her own husband. The church, and the silence, and the familiarity of the words, made her feel that he might just as easily be Mr. Saunders, who had christened her, and prepared her for confirmation, and whom she had once thought was God. Even now, God was not very much more abstract. She always felt him very near to her in church. And when she went up to the altar, she received his body and blood, in an ecstasy that was not interrupted but intensified by the emotional excitement of the week before. But Guy was horribly aware of her, like a patch of sunlight, in the wan line of crouched figures. As he came near to her, putting the bread of life into her raised suppliant hands, he began to tremble, and he murmured very faintly over her bent head . . . "the body of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."

She waited for him after church, but she met him as if he were a stranger. Allowing for the existence of an unknown man in him, she felt that he was withdrawing to his separate life; and so she also began to emerge, to wake up to her natural self-reliance.

They spent the afternoon in the garden. Ellen was sitting in a deck-chair, and, with wandering attention, writing to her mother. Guy lay on a rug, and read *Howards End*, which had lately been published. He had bought it in the spring, and forgotten to read it. But now he found that it engrossed him. Only sometimes he interrupted himself, to look how Ellen's hair

went golden in the sunlight, or how she got tired of the letter, and just stared across the fields. But she was deeply held by it, when suddenly she said:

"Guy, I wanted to ask you something."

He looked up at her quickly, and smiled. "What is it?"

"Would you mind very if you sent Mrs. James away, and I did the work instead?"

"Are you bored already?" said Guy.

Ellen did not respond with protestations. "Not bored," she said, "but that's what I'm used to."

Guy turned on his back, and looked up thoughtfully at the pale shining sky. "Perhaps it was a mistake," he said, feeling it a fearful mistake.

"Oh, don't say that," said Ellen; "it was very nice having her here at first. But now you've got your work, and I should be happier if I had mine. I'm very strong, and it wouldn't be too much for me."

"Very well, I expect that would be best," said Guy. He turned over, and re-lit his pipe, and tried to return to his book. But his enthusiasm was broken; Ellen had effaced for him these vigorous people. He had lost his impetus in following their story; though still, as he turned vaguely over the pages, he caught a kind of echoed delight in them.

"This *is* a good book," he said.

"What's it about?"

"It's about, oh, intelligent people, and active people, and there's a timid man in it, and a woman who . . . well, just a woman, an old woman, who dies. And there's a house with a wych-elm in the garden. . . ."

"Yes, but what's the story?"

Guy began plaiting up the fringes of his rug. Talking, as usual, had concentrated his enthusiasm. How was it possible to give his impression of this wonderful book? How particularly impossible it was to give it to Ellen.

"Would you like to hear a bit?" he asked dubiously.

"Yes, I don't mind. But I never was much of a one for books."

It'll be too sophisticated for her, Guy thought, but it's so human, too. Perhaps she'll see. Perhaps she'll know better than we do. He turned over the pages, looking for what he should read. His expression changed as he was reminded of Aunt Juley's ill-timed and unhappy visit to the Wilcoxes; of Mr. Bast's distrust and admiration of the brilliant Schlegels, his wretched, gimcrack subterranean flat, his tawdry mistress, his walk by starlight; of the luncheon-party conversation over Stettin, and whether there was such a thing as Stettinity. But he could not decide what he should read to Ellen. So he began at the beginning.

"One may as well begin with Helen's letter to her sister . . ."

He read on, forgetting partly that Ellen was

listening, till he got to the sudden ending of the first chapter.

“‘. . . Dearest, dearest Meg—I do not know what you will say: Paul and I are in love—the younger son who only came here Wednesday.’”

He looked up. “Well?”

“I never guessed, did you?” said Ellen.

Guy laughed. “Like some more?” he said.

“Just read on a bit till tea-time.”

So Guy read on, about Meg’s reception of the news, and her talk with Aunt Juley, and Aunt Juley’s visit to Helen at Howards End, and the fearful discovery that the affair has petered out, and the panic and emptiness, that Mrs. Wilcox so gently alleviated.

“‘It is all right, dear. They have broken off the engagement.’”

“‘Engagement——’”

“‘They do not love any longer, if you prefer to put it that way,’ said Mrs. Wilcox, stooping down to smell a rose.”

“There’s trouble,” said Ellen.

“Yes, what do you think of it?”

Ellen, as if she had been holding it in all through the even flow of Guy’s reading, said:

“‘They haven’t much sense, have they?’”

Guy got up from the rug.

“I just want to walk down to the village, or somewhere, before tea,” he said quietly.

“Why not wait till after?—then you could take my letters to the post.”

Guy looked at her fiercely, and without say-

ing anything, went quickly away across the lawn. He thought; she's a fool, that's all; and what's more, I've known it from the very beginning. It was a crime almost for me to marry her. A crime against both of us. And now I'm tied for life to a woman who can't understand a word I say. Some day, perhaps, I'll murder her.

Generally he thought of her firmness and contentment with relief and delight. Now they seemed more like stolidity and complacency. He hated the fixity of her image in his mind, her face, that he remembered most clearly in repose, and her passive body. He struggled with his hatred, and at last reached a mood of bleak determination. He hated her, but he must treat her well. That night he felt that he must sleep as far as he could be from her. But, in his sleep, he took her again in his arms, and when he woke he realised that he was still unescapably in love with her.

Then there was no development in their relationship; only in Ellen, almost because of her satisfaction and delight in him, the same inevitable acceptance of her independence, and in Guy the same alternation of desire and rebellion. Then Ellen told him that she was to have a child.

"Oh, Ellen, my darling, when?"

She was surprised that his interest should be so practical. She herself was too receptive of the moment to understand such a sudden grasp out at the future. She simply felt herself preg-

nant; and it was astonishing to her that Guy should immediately see her as a mother. But she answered him without apparent surprise.

"Somewhere about the end of February."

Guy wanted to talk about it. He held her face between his hands, and looked for some change in it. But to her there was a horrible publicity in such words and glances. This forming baby was as secret to her as her prayers. She did not pull away from his hands, but over her face came an expression of indifference and self-dependent power, that was like a film against the touch of his fingers. He was baffled, and drew back. She did not want a man now, but a child. And so, because of this, very tenderly she drew him back to her, and very tenderly laid his head on her breast. And to this, because loneliness and isolation were to him the most fearful things in the world, he submitted.

And this intensification of her natural feminine character did not alarm him, as it had before. He had resented its fixed strength. Now he felt that here was a justification of it. Intellectually she is nothing, she is not born, he thought; but she is all woman, the counterpart of man, my complement. And he was awfully proud of having produced in her what was to be a human being. It made him almost convinced of his reality in the universe.

But he was never satisfied with situations, feelings, states of mind, the way they were. He felt a necessity to probe them, and twist them

about in inept and inquisitive fingers. He had accepted more simply his original relationship with Ellen, because he had arranged with himself that her lack of self-consciousness was the important and interesting part of it. She was the pole of his orientation, and for her there could be no orientation, no relationship—she existed only, in the middle. Now he must recognise her as a distinct individual, and this roused in him the old itch for useless verbal explicitness. He wanted to discover what she felt like, and her aloofness was a goad to him.

He began: "You do love me still, don't you, Ellen?"

"Yes, Guy. Oh yes."

"The same way, or different?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought about it."

"Think now, and then tell me."

Ellen thought, drawing her eyebrows together. She could make herself realise in part her feelings of that moment, but the feelings she had had on other days had slipped out of her mind as quickly as the shape and colour of the summer clouds.

"I can't much remember," she said.

"Well, try this way. Think of any day—the day we were married, for instance. Then what do you remember about it?"

"I remember waking in the morning and thinking, it's to-day I'm going to marry Guy. . . ."

"And didn't that make the morning seem quite different from any other? When I woke

and said to myself, it's to-day I'm going to marry Ellen, the morning was immediately quite different from any morning that there ever had been. Wasn't it that way with you?"

"Well, yes, it was a bit." (Guy's so clever, she thought. I'll never be able to know that kind of thing without being told it. But of course, for having a baby, it didn't seem to matter much whether you were clever or not.)

"What else?"

"I liked dressing. It made me feel like a real bride. Then there was the church, but things got a little queer and dim. . . ."

"Did you feel as serious as you looked?"

"Did I look serious? Well, you see, it's an important thing being married."

"But a good idea, don't you think?"

His tone of banter was stupid to her. She said calmly, "Oh yes."

"No more?"

Ellen smiled at last. "Yes, more, of course," and the conversation broke up. But Guy could not leave it at that. A night or so later he said:

"What did you feel like when we were getting into the train, and we were just going to be alone together, quite each other's?"

She was puzzled by these recondite anticipatory emotions.

"I can't remember about that in particular," she said, "but afterwards it was . . . all right."

"Did you love me a lot?"

"Yes, a lot."

"And still a lot?"

"Yes, still . . . but, Guy, you're quite right—it is different, but I don't know how."

"What about this?"

"Oh . . . don't touch me like that." She did not move, but as she lay by him was suddenly remote and cold.

It's mine too, thought Guy, triumphing in it, and feeling strong enough to allow her her graspingness. She would have also the trouble. He left her to sleep.

But he was no better satisfied by the distance they kept because he had acquiesced in it. He tried to punish her by an exaggeration of it. But she seemed impervious to this cruelty, so that he only tortured himself with new proofs of their mutual isolation. But his thrusts, to which she was apparently oblivious, had an ultimate cumulative effect. And she in her turn resisted him in her dumb negative way; and the distance widened.

But he was not wholly thwarted. He had still a glad feeling about the child, and could turn his mind to that when he was lost from her. And they were not actually hostile, only reserved to the very verge of hostility. Even, in an agonised mutilating way, he loved her unresponsive fecundity. The idea of creation, of reproduction, was powerful over him. It brewed in his head, changing continually in form and substance. Only Ellen always represented it in the

end. His twisting fancy, whatever form it took, always ended and began with her.

One day, on a walk, they were caught in a hail-shower, and took shelter in a small farmhouse. There were only three fields to it, two cows, and a fluctuating population of pigs; and the farmer did all the work himself without hired labour. The daughter, a pale pretty girl of nineteen or so, too tall for her strength, looked after the poultry and the house. She was very excitable, and varied quickly between utter languor and a fierce strained vivacity, expressed chiefly in hurried clumsy gestures of her narrow hands. The mother was dead.

Ruth was in alone when Guy and Ellen came to the door and asked for shelter. She was enormously pleased to see visitors, and eagerly asked them inside. Out of politeness she first opened the door of the parlour, where there was an upright piano, and photographs, and clammy-looking ferns on little tables. The fireplace was hidden by a painted screen.

"If you wouldn't mind coming into the kitchen," she said doubtfully; "it's warmer in there."

"We'd like awfully to go into the kitchen," said Guy, "of course."

The kitchen was comfortable with itself. There was old wood, and unpretentious china, not interesting or valuable, but harmonious. Ruth's darning and a pile of farming papers were not out of place.

They settled themselves in large arm-chairs beside the fire, and Ruth brought Ellen a pair of dry slippers to wear while her own shoes were drying.

"They're almost new," she said, as if nothing must be offered but the best. Guy did not like altogether her anxious subservience to Ellen, but, pastorally, he knew she was a nice good girl, and looked after her father well.

"Dad'll be in in a minute," she said. "I know he'd be very pleased if you'd stay and have a cup of tea with us."

Guy looked out at the weather. It was still raining hard.

"I think we'd like to very much," said Guy, looking across at Ellen.

"Thank you," said Ellen, in such things indifferent and dependent; "it is very kind of you. We would like to."

Ruth put on the kettle, and got everything ready, thin bread-and-butter, and jam, and curranty cake. She took from the dresser a blue-patterned tea-pot and blue-rimmed cups and plates. Ellen sat by the fire, unobservant, keeping herself warm.

The farmer came in, and they all pulled their chairs up to the table. He was tired after a hard day in the fields, and gulped his food and drink in huge mouthfuls, and did not talk. So the conversation was mostly between Guy and Ruth. Soon he saw that she was for some reason anxious and expectant, and when, under

the flow of talk, he listened with her, he heard, from some distance away, a dog's shrill yelpings. Once he had noticed them they seemed unbearably persistent, and long pauses came, where he could do nothing but listen for them. In such pauses Ruth grew more troubled. . . .

"It's not anything to bother about," said her father; "it'll be all right."

"I know it'll be all right, but it's so awful, now."

"The little dog's whelping," said the farmer, explaining, "and she's old now, and it's being a little troublesome for her. By rights, of course, she ought to be in the stable, but Ruth will have her in the house, and now she won't be happy if we put her out."

"She doesn't seem awfully happy the way she is," said Guy, tense with excitement.

"Father doesn't think they'll come till to-night," said Ruth, tormented to think of the hours of pain, and pitiful shrill cries, that she must, in herself almost, endure.

They had finished tea, and Guy, Ellen, and the man Williams again drew round the fire. Then suddenly there came a long deep bark. Ruth pushed back the table without clearing it.

"Father, I must go and see," she said.

Guy rose also, torn with curiosity and an extraordinary fear. They went quickly to the back-kitchen where the dog was shut up. Outside they paused, as if hoping that the other would put a hand to the door. Guy would

perhaps have gone back, but Ruth stepped forward, and opened, and then they went in together. An undistinguished little black and tan terrier lay in a basket by the window. When she saw them, she dragged herself out of it, and came awkwardly towards them, delightedly wagging her tail.

"She hates being here," said Ruth, "and perhaps it would be good for her to have a bit of a walk. I couldn't get her to move this morning, but I think she would like to now."

Guy opened the door into the yard, but it was still raining, and the little dog wouldn't go out, but stayed shivering on the step, bleakly looking at it. So they tried to coax her back into the basket, but that didn't please her either. So in the end they went back to the kitchen, leaving all the doors open, so that she could do what she liked. Cumbrously she followed them. She was quiet now, but a little dazed, and she paused half-way across the room.

"Eh, spoilt dog," said Williams. But he held out his hand to encourage her, because she was his daughter's pet, and always about the house.

She crept under his chair, and came very close to the fire.

"Poor thing, she was cold," said Ruth, "and I haven't been able to get her to eat anything all day. Do you think she would now perhaps?"

"Try her."

Ruth brought a slice of bread-and-butter, and

broke it up into very small pieces. The dog accepted it, and wagged her stumpy tail, full of gratitude. Then she lay down on her side, with her legs stretched out. Suddenly she raised herself, and uttered again a high short agonising yelp.

"And to know there's nothing we can do," said Ruth.

"That's right, you leave her alone," said Williams.

"Isn't there anything?" said Guy, now more excited than anxious.

"They have to be left alone," said Ellen.

"But surely there is something?" said Guy, looking at the farmer.

Ellen was roused to sudden extraordinary fury.

"There's nothing," she said, "nothing at all. You must leave her alone."

There was a terrific tension of hostility. The dog was again lying on her side, her flanks spasmodically heaving and contracting, her tail lifting.

"She'd better go out again," said Williams.

"Oh, Father, she's so cold and wretched out there."

"Then I'll fetch her basket," he said.

He fetched it, and put it down in front of the fire, in the corner beside his chair. The dog climbed slowly into it. Before, she had recognised their existence, and been grateful for their help, now Guy saw from her absorbed and entirely abstracted look that nothing existed for

her at this moment but the physical crisis. Her eyes were glazed, and seemed not to be seeing them. Then she bent her head, and began to snort and lick, rummaging in the straw at the bottom of the basket. Guy saw something black and shiny there, but he thought it was perhaps her leg, covered with slaver.

Williams looked down.

"Here's the first," he said, pleased and laughing. "I'll take her out now, Ruth; she'll not notice anything for a bit."

He lifted the basket. Under it were two small spots of blood. The dog did not lift her head, but went on licking, licking, licking the slimy shapeless new creature between her legs. She seemed not to know even that she was being moved.

Guy and Ellen went home arm in arm along a dark and muddy road.

"I had never seen anything born before," said Guy; "it was extraordinary. . . ."

"They shouldn't have had her in there. Animals are better left to themselves, if they can be," said Ellen. But she was no longer angry, only, Guy knew, immeasurably distant. And her arm in his was only a horrible reminder of the distance. Yet he could not let go of her, because the road was so dark and rutty. And he was very tender with her. For himself, he hated and feared the mother in her, which obliterated him; but sometimes he felt himself exalted with a cosmic understanding of it, a

huge acceptant understanding of it that was almost worship.

In his sermon on Christmas Day, he spoke of the huge absorbed joy of Mary, as she leant over the manger where the child lay, or gave him milk from her breast. Ellen, in her back seat, for she was shy now of appearing in public, blushed as if at an impertinence; and Mariella Dalby, the artist-woman, looking across at her from a seat in the choir, was fierce with sympathetic feminine anger against the man. Guy's voice and his whole dramatic presentation of himself had attracted her for a time; but, she decided now, there was nothing in him really, but rather elaborate tricks of self-interest. . . .

Yet he was speaking simply, happily, and positively, because he had an alive primitive response to what he was talking about as 'the mystery of birth'; and, in this Bible story, where there was no man, where there was nothing to contradict or resist the extreme abandonment of personality and responsibility in motherhood, his emotion ran free and single, without self-destructiveness.

He had a wan hope that Ellen would perhaps like what he said, and though they had no habit of discussing his sermons, he waited for some word. But she said nothing of it, and still withdrew, illimitably.

At the beginning of February the baby was born. It was a boy, and they christened him John, which was the name of Ellen's father. Mrs. Brooks stayed with them for a week, to

the discomfort of everybody. Guy thought there was an alliance of the two women against him, and felt belittled, as if they were meaning to degrade him; and above all, meaning to keep the baby away from, meaning to make him look like an intruder. So he swung between assertiveness and insulted withdrawal, and explained to himself how they would not let him love the baby; how Ellen would not let him love her; and how everything might have been well, if only he were not weakened by this cruelty. And then sometimes he repented, and asked Ellen to forgive him, and she forgave him, not knowing exactly for what.

The two women were not together. They had no way of approaching each other. And Mrs. Brooks soon went away. Ellen did not want any other satisfaction. The baby was enough.

CHAPTER V
COLOURED GLASS

MARIELLA had passed the morning in a white heat. In the mood that, mockingly, she called inspiration. She had painted with urgent passion the shuddering landscape, where spring was not yet tentative in young uncurling green, but still somehow imminent, in the black fists of winter. This she had painted, passionately subjecting herself, and she was still all tender—tender with perceptiveness, vulnerable and tender, new-born almost, like chestnut leaves just unfolded. She had not yet begun to fear the flat wash of dissatisfaction, in which her huge waves of energy were usually dissipated. She did not understand them, but endured them in obstinate calmness, for the sake of this occasional ecstasy of submission to the pure external. Sometimes she suspected that she left something fierce in her quite unexpressed, something very deep, that she did not know an idiom for, in words or colour; and that the shallower creative activity of her impressionist painting, so complicatedly sensitive, and strong also, only roused these unaccountables to secret and frustrated movement. Sometimes she was

almost ill with desolation. But always after hopeless waiting, sleeplessness and nightmare, vacant white haunted days, she was driven again to this extremity of joy, and painted, submitting herself, abject, and ardent with proud glory, like a saint. People said that she excited herself too much over her painting, and that was about it, from one point of view.

Generally she lived by herself in a little and adequately comfortable cottage; but for a week or so she had had with her a middle-aged lady, whom she had met by chance abroad and somehow liked, she didn't know why, and whom she had invited impulsively to stay with her. She had sent the invitation in a mood of loneliness and despondency. For a week Miss Willis had very capably relieved it, engrossing her attention; but now, at work again, she had forgotten her.

But Miss Willis, who had a curious rare taste for being friendly without ever wanting to be intimate, had unostentatiously prepared the lunch, and came upon Mariella, very startlingly, with the news that it was ready. Mariella's bright blue eyes were at first quite wild and hostile, but she smiled suddenly, realising that she was for the moment exhausted and hungry, and that on the whole she had come to a good stop. But she could not help remaining a little abstracted, and gulped down the good food thoughtlessly, and forgot to talk. But Miss Willis did not mind, and enjoyed herself on her own, eating and chattering.

"I suppose you wouldn't like," she said, "to come out for a walk?"

Mariella immediately felt wild with strength in her legs and whole body as well as in her fingers and eyes. She felt it would be wrong to go, because she *had* been in the mood for painting that morning; but, on the other hand, she had come to a *very* good stop, and the intense work had certainly exhausted her. Perhaps if she went for a walk, something 'would come in.'

Miss Willis was in a pecking humour, and Mariella was able to give her the little crumbs she wanted without much disturbance to her own mood. Their friendship mostly consisted in the giving of such little things, and they never seemed to want or to try to affect each other. For the moment they were talking easily and casually about people, gossiping.

"I was very much interested in your Rector, who preached on Sunday," said Miss Willis.

"What was it you said his name was?"

"Tyndale, Guy Tyndale."

"He seemed to me quite an extraordinary man."

"Yes, he is. No, not really, though. I thought so at first. He comes and talks to me when he finds me at work in the village, or about the fields. And I even went to church once or twice, on his account, to hear what he said about it. He manages to be impressive in some way or the other, almost always. And he's clearly intelligent, and in lots of ways sensitive. But

I thought not ultimately extraordinary. All of it seems just a little spurious, and he has, you know, that horrible ill-treated look. I can't quite get at it to explain to you, but perhaps you've noticed?"

"No, I didn't notice anything like that, I must say. Is he married?"

Mariella burst out laughing. "Oh, I didn't mean ill-treated quite so precisely. More likely by himself. Though that's too definite, besides. But you see a lot of people like that, especially walking about London streets. It seems to be a good deal in the shoulders. Have you noticed how expressive shoulders are? . . ." She drifted off into a kind of visual reverie, watching long lines of people, with that horrible set of their shoulders, looking so purposeful, but really aimless, with invisible wires drawing them along in queer eddies, and twitching their arms and legs, apparently irrelevantly, on little pivots. . . .

She came awake again suddenly. "But he has got a wife," she said.

"And do you know her at all?"

"Not much. I talk to her sometimes. I would have liked to have been friends with her. But she doesn't seem to have much attention for one; and lately she's been so occupied with having her baby."

"Oh, really, a baby. Just lately, was it? And did all go well?"

"Yes. Altogether ordinarily—but that's what one would have known, of course."

"Yes, generally it seems to be all right. But what is Mrs. Tyndale like in particular?"

"Well, like that partly. The admiration for the Noble Savage is ludicrous of course, and that isn't what I mean when I say she's more natural than anyone I know. I mean, you really feel she's a human being, which doesn't happen as often as one might expect. Such lots of people are such lots of other things, and very interesting and valuable they are sometimes, but not that ever, quite. Mr. Tyndale is in one of those classes, though it's stupid of course to think people into classes, but he gives me an impression of doing everything from secondary motives. As if he were inventing his life as he came to it, which doesn't happen. Mrs. Tyndale seems more to grow in it, which is truer . . . but, oh, rather horribly sedentary. I wouldn't really like to be that way. . . ."

Miss Willis began rather acidly: "Mr. Tyndale is in fact an intelligent and thoughtful man, and Mrs. Tyndale is . . ."

Mariella felt herself rebuked for her indulged vagueness, and somewhat abashed. She liked to talk that way, feeling a special vitality in the immediate, disordered flux of thought and feeling, which would be lost in stark exactitude. But it was all false very likely.

She began disgustedly to use the words to which she could never, for herself, allow a meaning. She remembered that they always acquired a meaning, an exact one, in other people's minds.

"She's not a lady, as people like us put it. I should think she was the daughter of the gardener, or somebody like that. But that doesn't matter. Only she has a way of making one's outward and social life seem a little futile. Though she's very respectful, and seems to admire one for having a recognised status in the county, but really inside she just isn't paying any attention to you. A husband and a child now seem quite enough for her. She doesn't talk much and seems shy when you meet her, but it's an awfully proud shyness. . . ."

The metallic winter daylight was softening and dimming. The earth did not feel so clenched, as if it were resisting the urgent pulse of sap, but weaker and blanker, without resistance, negative to life, apart. Mariella walked faster, home-wards. This enervated outside world had lost its grip on her. She was drawn in on herself, puzzling over the relationship between these two, and hers with them. For she felt that she had a relationship with them, though so far it was untried and unacknowledged. She thought how Guy always talked to her in the way of friendship whenever they met. But there was a kind of cloud over her memory of how Ellen had rejected her when she had suddenly and ostentatiously wanted to be friends. The interaction had been so delicate between them that the situation had adjusted itself without ever coming thoroughly into her consciousness. There had been calls, and a stream of aimless talk, she had

poured herself out, vague and undirected, hoping unconsciously that Ellen would find in this torrent some secret hard bright beautiful jewel of her nature, and stretch out her hand for it. And there essentially, stark in beauty, she would lie in Ellen's hands, vivid in her own nature, unpossessed, but glorified, and lifted up. Ellen had never repulsed her, but she had taken no notice, and Mariella, not consciously daunted by any outward chill of manner, had found this fervour of communication die within her. And no more happened.

They came home silent and were received into the mild lamplight. There by the fire was a nook of light and warmth. Miss Willis sat happily and unconcerned, Mariella crouched in a kind of thin desperation, nestling against this rich breast of comfort. She winced and drew closer when the wind, tearing over the unwilling earth, bore down upon her soul.

After tea, Miss Willis went out, and returned immediately, holding out to Mariella in a curious detached and puzzled way some little woollen garments, astonishingly little and shapeless, white and pink.

"When I was in Devon there was a bazaar, and I had to buy something, and these seemed the least useless. Do you think, dear, we might give them to your Mrs. Tyndale?"

Mariella was doubtful at first, remembering that Mrs. Tyndale 'was not a lady,' and afraid it might appear like giving to the poor. Also,

she was afraid, more generally, of encroaching on her. But she remembered that her mother had given such funny little things to her friends' babies, and was reassured. Besides, she had, herself, quite a passion for young babies, a fierce passion, that sometimes twisted into hatred or disgust, but was always alive, extreme, violent. So she wanted to go to Mrs. Tyndale with these for the baby. She would go that very evening, she said, and Miss Willis, who loved these isolated connections with people, not expecting any return, or continuation, but satisfied with an exterior quick touch upon their lives, decided that she would go also, in spite of the rising storm and one walk already that afternoon.

They went quickly and silently, individually intent. Ellen opened the door to them, and took them straight into the study, where a ripe fire glowed. So that they seemed to pass unexposed from one deep glade to another of yellow heat, ignorant of the journey. Yet they found a difference. For here there was a new alertness in the company, like a response to some exaction between them. Guy had been all spread out, and vaguely wretched, before they came. Now instantly he gathered himself for presentation to the outside world, for the projection which he at once craved and hated—his only way of satisfaction, yet always, finally, a failure. For the moment, however, he seemed active and effective; he was often at his best when taken by surprise.

Ellen was pleased with the little things, but it seemed to her altogether natural that these women should bring her baby gifts. And she thanked for them quite formally. Guy, however, was grateful enough for two. Mariella had to say at last . . . "but it's from Miss Willis really . . ." and that embarrassed him. For he could not bear the smallest flaw or waste in personal contacts. It was horrible to him that Mariella should give his words back to him, and say, these are really from Miss Willis.

He hated Miss Willis. In some other mood he might have decided to like her, but now he hated her, because she seemed to have released herself unreluctantly from the inner life, and yet to be truly alive in the outer. He hated the complacency of this quiet relinquishing. It was better that men should tremble between existence and annihilation in agony, like himself.

He had responded to Mariella's rich though hesitant vitality. Weeks ago he had put her down as 'interesting.' This evening he was too burdened with self-consciousness to study her, but he was kindled with pleasure in having her there. When they got up to go he was filled with dismay. They must not go. No, they must not go. He went to the window, and pulled aside the blind. The noise of the rain had been drowned by the noise of the wind, and none of them had noticed that the storm had really broken. But there it was. Outside the window-pane was streaming with water, and gave

back a broken turgid varying reflection of the lights inside. Little round drops sometimes stayed for a second, holding a little round yellow reflection of the lamp, but immediately they were swallowed up in the merging flood. Mariella shivered, and went nearer to the fire.

"Look," said Guy, in triumph, "you can't possibly talk of going home through all this storm. You'll have to stay with us for the evening, perhaps for the night. But stay to supper anyhow. Please do."

Mariella and Miss Willis looked at each other. Mariella might have ventured, but she wanted to stay. Miss Willis knew she would have to stay, but she was troubled by the awkwardness of an unexpected visit. Perhaps there was not enough food. So they looked at each other, indecisive.

Then Ellen, whose instincts were hospitable, joined with her husband in asking them to stay, and they felt that it was all right to accept, and sat down again, very much relieved.

"It'll be quite easy," said Guy. "Ellen can make wonderful omelettes, and there's cold beef and pickled walnuts, and some bottled plums, that Ellen's godmother gave us for a Christmas present. So, you see, it won't be a bit of a bother."

To Mariella, this man's knowledge of the kitchen and larder was wonderful. One wouldn't have expected it, she thought, but it's awfully right. It was marvellous, this practical corollary to a personal relationship. But Ellen was a little

bit ashamed of Guy's versatile domesticity. She had been brought up to think that meals should appear by magic in front of visitors, that they should be surprised by everything that came. This way of being in the know from the beginning was almost indecent. She tried to go away quite quietly to get things ready, but Mariella noticed, and offered to help, because, she said, it was a sudden invasion, and they ought to be sharing the trouble.

"It's no trouble, I assure you," said Ellen, a little too brusquely, and Mariella felt rebuked for an impertinence, as if she had been found knowing a secret. There was a complete disintegration of the close group round the fire. Ellen went off into domestic reserve. Guy trailed in and out, sometimes in the kitchen or the dining-room, more often in the study, when some sudden flicker of thought insistently crystallised in words, and he came to Mariella, burdened with it, to lay it before her. He never came right in, but stood in the doorway, or wandered on a few steps till he could lean against the table. Once he was carrying a pile of forks, once tumblers. Then he was particularly conscious of an easy and intimate gaiety.

Between whiles, Miss Willis and Mariella talked desultorily, but Mariella would not give herself to these moments in the least degree. Unconsciously, her interest in Guy reviving, she was holding herself in reserve, lest she should not be ready the next time he came in.

He came at last with a bunch of heavy iron keys.

"I'm going to the cellar for sherry," he said. "Who'd like to come?"

Mariella jumped up straight away. Miss Willis was warm and idle and did not want to stir. She found something unrecognisable in these people, and this made her even more detached than usual. Guy and Mariella passed through the kitchen, where Ellen, under a hard bright light, was preoccupied in cooking the omelette. She seemed in a different world, like someone on the stage, or the other side of a closed window. Guy took down a candle from the chimneypiece without saying a word. They passed together to the gentle refracted light of the passage. He unlocked the top door, and stood for a minute over the deep well of darkness to light the candle. The cellars were enormous, and he kept his small store of wine in the farthest shelves there were. So it was always an adventure to him, going to fetch up a bottle. They passed down a staircase of stout planks. The coal-cellars came first, on the left, and a layer of black dust was over everything, fine and spattered on the plane surfaces, deep in the crannies. Over the steps, where the ceiling was low, the men who carried the sacks down on their shoulders had rubbed off long black streaks against it. You saw them without lifting your eyes, sweeping, dragging, plunging into the black darkness, the well at the bottom of the stairs.

It was a little surprise to Mariella that the darkness did not lap up in soft waves, from her knees, to her breast, to her eyes. A surprise that it recoiled from their fragile chrysalis, fine yellow silk, of candleshine.

In the second cellar the roof was higher, vaulted with great recesses unknown. A heap of potatoes lay in one angle of the wall. There was a cold and earthy smell. Mariella's huge shadow followed her, gaunt and vague and shapeless, shuddering across wall and ceiling, vague and tremulous, like an undefined desire. Once she looked round at it, but it did not seem like anything to do with her. And she turned away, antagonistic, and moved on, in poised tranquillity, within the safe enclosing glow. But deep down she was astir with excitement. When they came to the shelves, and stood in the narrow alley between them, and Guy gave her the candle to hold, she felt herself glorious and supreme, as if she were master of the world. And so she was, this world. With a puff, or a touch, she could destroy it. Annihilate this thin protective reality of light, and then the obscure subterranean darkness would come up in flood, destroying her, and Guy, and this world altogether. Her whole will was set on its preservation, as they bent their heads together, in the middle of this universe, Guy holding out the bottle to the light, Mariella putting forward the flame, preserving it, making a world for them.

"That's the one I wanted," said Guy.

They went back in silence, conscious of a fragile and exquisite intimacy, yet holding themselves in reserve, not wanting to touch or to alter it. It was a strange mood for both of them, and without endurance. They walked delicately, extricating themselves from the moment.

When they came to the top of the stairs Mariella blew out the light. Guy remembered that Ellen ruthlessly snuffed it with her thumb and finger, and in this he compared the two women. He felt in Ellen a regardless destructiveness; in Mariella a profound sensibility, because she would not crush out a tender flame with blunt fingers, but rather, aware of its kinship with the human soul, subdue it in more equal fight with the breath of her lips. So Guy thought to himself, standing for a minute at the top of the stairs.

Supper was ready, and everyone went into the dining-room.

"What lovely glasses," cried Mariella in a rapture.

They all looked at them. They were the colour of bog-water, a narrow cone lifted ethereally on a smooth and slender stem. To Miss Willis it seemed that their simplicity was a kind of paltriness. She liked better a mass of detail that could be enjoyed little by little, and gradually taken to the heart. Something with more cosiness, companionable art, not expecting your whole attention all at once, or reminding you of being yourself. But rather receiving you, com-

fortably, and only so far as you wished. Besides, work of this kind was not yet fashionable, and she tended to resent anything to which she was not accustomed.

Ellen, who had no bias towards any tradition, liked them—almost more physically than intellectually, for touching as much as for seeing.

Guy began explaining them.

"A man I know is making experiments in glass like this. He gave it us when we were married. He designs them himself, and I imagine does most of the mechanical work as well. I saw some green glass of his too. Like light in summer under trees, and a little less austere than these in form. But they all have something of this nakedness. It's a lovely design, don't you think? So pure and single, do you see, like one gesture. . . ."

He was talking to Mariella, trying to communicate his enthusiasm, but her eyes were abstracted, and a twist came on to her lips.

"They are incredibly beautiful," she said; "they are so perfect. But you know, I couldn't live with them. I would smash them sooner or later."

Guy understood her feeling at once. And it touched him also.

"Yes," he said (but a little too solemnly), "they are a kind of reproach to us. It's odd, isn't it? because it's mostly the dead lumpish things that weigh on your spirit till you go at them with a

hammer. But these are quite warmly alive, quite human, only horribly perfect."

"That's what it is," said Mariella, with an intense anguish in her eyes.

Miss Willis interrupted them. She felt that the conversation was getting beyond her. She did not like the glasses, but she realised that they were valuable; and even the loss of a kitchen cup went hard with her.

"Really, Mariella, you are being a little exaggerated. In fact, all you are saying seems to me like very great nonsense. And if I am not mistaken, Mrs. Tyndale is agreeing with me."

Ellen had been attentive, but not roused. Now she seemed almost alarmed by having to take part in the conversation.

"I do like them," she said. "I wouldn't like it at all if they were broken."

"Yes, that's true," said Guy, looking at her in contemplation. "You do like them; and you don't want to smash them the way we do."

"Well," said Miss Willis, "and what else do you expect? We can't all share Mariella's fantastic ideas."

She was mostly exasperated on Ellen's account, who was restless under this scrutiny like an observed animal, restless and wild, like an animal behind bars.

The baby, who had been put to bed by the time they had arrived, now suddenly woke, and a high impersonal wail came thinly from an upstairs room.

"He oughtn't to have woken yet, surely?" said Guy.

Ellen may not have heard. She did not answer. But after a moment of tense listening went quickly out. They heard her running upstairs.

Guy was always uncomfortable when a remark got left on his hands. With an effort he went on with the old conversation, as if there had been no interruption. He wanted to talk about Ellen, expositively, and this made him secretly ashamed, but his sudden friendship with Mariella justified it, he told himself.

"You see, I suppose Ellen has enough real inner life not to be afraid of them. She has such strength, and such unity, almost as complete as they are. Not all in criss-cross currents like the rest of us. And it's the jarring elements that make us want to destroy such lovely things."

Miss Willis had stopped being angry, and was only bored.

"It's a pity Mrs. Tyndale should have had to go upstairs. Couldn't she bring the baby down? Besides, we should so much like to see him?"

Guy went out into the hall and called to Ellen. He was in a state of worked-up depression that was fast becoming solid and real. As Ellen came in, holding the baby, intent on it, he gave Mariella a look of gloomy triumph, as if he said, "You see, it's as I told you."

Ellen realised that they must have been talking of her, and was shaken into a moment of

fright. In particular, she had a feeling that Mariella was really 'Guy's sort,' and this made her feel momentarily defeated and ashamed. Then she withdrew beyond their reach, looking down in great happiness at her young baby's face and soft, uncertain, groping hands.

Mariella was too absorbed to notice Miss Willis's interruption, or Ellen's return.

She said suddenly and crudely, "You see, if I didn't break them, I should know that one day, when I put a glass to my lips, it would crack me in two."

Guy withered in consternation, but no one else paid much attention. Mariella herself relaxed, and became newly and delightedly aware of Ellen and the baby; and the conversation slid off down easy channels. She had cared deeply for the moment, but suddenly she was at ease, in possession of herself, not terrified. It gave her a moment of surprise when she saw that Guy did not drink again, but restlessly twisted his glass between his fingers, looking at it as if it possessed him.

But she did not mind at all, and talked idly to Ellen and Miss Willis. After supper she was given the baby to hold, and full of fierce delight she caught it, pressing it against her breast. When Ellen noticed her expression, she asked for him again. And Mariella was left empty. Soon they got up to go.

Ellen went upstairs with the child. Guy began taking the supper things into the pantry

to be washed up. She was a long time settling the child to sleep, and before she returned, Guy was on his last journey, carrying the glasses, which, for some reason, he had left till the end. He felt a special reverence for them, and need for care. He went very slowly, carrying them with a kind of intent solemnity. He remembered that he had to turn sideways to get the tray through the kitchen door. Yet, when he came to it (though it is hardly possible that he was startled by Ellen's footsteps in the hall), he caught one edge on the frame, and the whole thing went crashing. There was a fearful rattle of tin, and a tinkle of broken glass. Not one was saved. Ellen in alarm came running. Guy had a moment of glory. He looked at her, hardly troubling to cover his exaltation with a proper distress.

"They're smashed to pieces," he said, "every one of them."

Ellen was sorry and angry. They washed and dried in silence. At ten Ellen went upstairs to feed the child, and Guy was left alone. He still had a feeling of triumph. Nothing in the world could frighten him. He could win over all of it. He suddenly realised that he wanted Ellen again; with an unafraid candid passion, such as he had not felt for some months. He thought she would be finished with the child, and went upstairs. He found her laying him in his cot, and he came up behind her, and put his hand on the curve of her waist, and leant his cheek

towards hers. She was aware of his coming, and, almost before he touched her, gave a twist of her shoulders that, like an electric shock, or stab of sudden heat, made his hands drop, numb and thwarted.

"Not now," she murmured.

He went out into the garden. Everything had crumbled, his triumph had gone into nothing. He was at everything's mercy.

But resolutely he came back. Ellen was in bed and almost asleep, forgetful and indifferent; but he was not to be repulsed by her indifference a second time, and woke her quite brutally. That night he took her deliberately and arduously, and she accepted it, suffering him, and there was a strained ashy passion between them.

CHAPTER VI

HALL OF MIRRORS

THE situation presented itself to Guy in intricate and evasive forms, as if he were watching the outer currents of a vortex whose nucleus was beyond vision. He thought that familiarity with the twisting streams driven before his eyes was knowledge; but it was chance knowledge, no true discovery; he made no search for the hidden, nor even the half-seen, on the fringe, pale and unformed; and so, its issue into full consciousness was devious, unexplained, uncontrollable.

He went downstairs, with the purpose of going for a walk to think about it. Words lapped, half-formed, against the edges of his mind.

The face in the glass, which might be mine, or yours, or anyone's, scowls, hating me. Give hate for hate then, scowl back; let hatred be proud between us, whole like God's, starrily distant.

Impossibility and defeat. This hatred yours is of power, and mine fear. Snarling lips which might meet in withered kisses. . . .

Guy sometimes looked at his reflection in the glass for quite a long time, trying to see him-

self, staring himself dizzy, or arranging with the hand-mirror a profile view, which gave him a feeling of having caught himself unawares. But at this moment he was obsessed by the project of Thinking Things Out. As he passed the hall-mirror, on his way to the spacious hills, he did not pause, but gave himself only one quick glance, hostile, and fascinated, and sardonic.

Guy thought: you see, Ellen, it has been in some ways hard for me, though I don't deny that it has been hard for you as well. Perhaps I have been unkind to you because there is one part of me that has no counterpart in you; and because my mind was unsatisfied; and I struggled, because I was horrified to feel that you held me from one necessary part of life, because there, you could not understand me. But we should have been content to build up our own lives. . . .

There lapped up, almost unseen, unheard, in Ellen's voice, very faintly, *'And I did so, but you? You had no life. You took a part in my life, such being your momentary existence, and now . . .'*

Then violently, consciously, Guy shouted to the image of her, now I am destroyed, by you, who might have saved me. . . .

Guy thought: I must not be cruel, in spite of injuries . . . *she has injured me beyond retribution, exposed my spirit to destroy it, tormented my intricate fine shuddering soul. . . .*

It has been my fault, too; I must take my share of the blame, appeal to her, not as an avenging victim, but as one blind, mistaken,

struggling creature to another. And this is a kind of nobility in me . . . *because she has mutilated me beyond recovery . . . and yet it was I gave her the power, the desire, the compulsion. In the last issues I failed, failed myself, failed irrevocably. . . .*

Perhaps even I shall have strength and insight to create a new life from this chaos. We can still meet somewhere. Last night . . .

. . . last night . . .

That shows how there is still something, something positive between us . . .

. . . but it was horrible, appalling, too ghastly to remember. . . .

She does not understand me, but that's no matter. Why should I be understood? I am the same as other people; why must I be more gently treated?

. . . alas . . . that the fine soul should be tortured so, almost beyond endurance . . . the fine agonised senses . . . alas . . . pain, pain. . . .

But I must be greater in courage than they. Know all, understand all, and strive in loneliness. . . .

. . . but is there nobody to understand?

It is glorious to be lonely, the last virtue. Christ was lonely. I shall be lonely like Christ. Oh, Jesus, give me courage, the courage to know, and understand, and triumph. . . .

. . . but there is no recovery from this defeat. Worn down you will be to the last crumb of white bone. Only flight will save you. . . .

At this point of his reverie Guy found him-

self on the road to Mariella's cottage. It occurred to him that it would be polite to go in and ask for them, after last night's dark and muddy walk, and, with a feeling of relief, he turned in at the gate. Mariella was alone; Miss Willis, she explained, was in bed, trying to stave off a cold with Eucalyptus and gargles.

"You don't look particularly well yourself," said Guy.

"I'm all right," said Mariella brusquely. "I just sometimes get rather . . . tired."

"Work of your kind has to be exhausting, so much of oneself has to go into it. It is the same with mine."

"Yes, I expect so." She spoke vaguely, but as he looked at her, crouching over the fire, gnomishly, lit up by flames, he saw her expression become concentrated and bitter.

"It must be almost the cruellest work there is. I am never happy when I'm not painting, and still not happy when I am, except for a minute or two. To-day I feel left by the tide, because yesterday was good. Being alive is such torture; the crises spaced out differently for different people, that's all."

"Yes," said Guy, but he had never finally exposed himself to the full torture of being alive. "I know what you mean. But" (he saw himself as the confidant, the consoler) "there are always compensations. Religion is one. . . ."

"Have you the effrontery to talk of religion as a compensation? Is it no more to you than

that? Not even a medicine, but a soothing drug. . . .”

Anger always made her weak. She stopped, and stared moodily into the fire, remote in anger, but inactive, weary.

“I don’t mean that,” said Guy quickly. “Certainly it is more to me. I have given my life to it,” . . . *one must never allow oneself to think that one’s life has been insignificantly given . . .* “but there is no harm, surely, in seeing the distinction between the satisfaction of the spiritual life and the dissatisfaction of the outer life. . . .”

He did not know exactly what this meant, nor exactly how it came in the conversation. But he spoke persuasively. He thought he had convinced himself that afternoon that his life had taken a favourable direction, and he remembered asking God’s blessing on it. He wanted to believe in things: in God, in himself, in the compensations of life, and the consolations of religion. He wanted to believe for himself and for Mariella. He wanted Mariella to believe. And he spoke simply, believingly, waiting for the moment when her choking anger and reserve should break. . . .

“I’m sorry,” she said gently, looking up at him, her face dim and penitent. “That was impertinent. But it just made me wild for a moment, I don’t know why. But it wasn’t reasonable, and I take it back. I expect it was, you know how, because I was wretched myself; and that makes one violent to other people. So

horrible, at the times when the whole world seems most hopeless, one is most obstinate in keeping it as horrible as one can manage . . . to the limits of one's really trivial influence."

"I suppose we all suffer. And there is so little we can do, positively, for each other. We are very lonely, each one of us, and lonely we must be for the greatest exercise of our strength. You know that, don't you?"

"But we must try and meet, mustn't we? We must have alliances with people: a friend, a husband, a lover. It is a kind of starvation to be without. Our existence is finally separate; but we don't become ourselves without these things. That's true, isn't it?"

"But they are not a solution in themselves."

Mariella did not notice his look of personal insistence. Her thought, suddenly loosed, was too violent to be turned aside. Impersonally she took up what he gave her.

"Perhaps I know that too well. Perhaps because of that . . .

"While I was a student I could have had a lover if I had wanted. No one in my own circle would have been surprised or horrified. But somehow I never quite wanted. Or I might have married, and made a family; with a lot of little children. I wanted children, I still want them, but there was never anyone I quite wanted to marry. . . .

"When we were children we lived in Scotland, in desolate and enormous country. And we were

very happy there, loving the hills, unafraid and confident, as if we were inheritors of the earth. People so often feel a mixture of terror with their love of the earth, and that's wrong; but I feel it myself, now. When we were children we were wild and free. I remember particularly a shepherd there, who was my greatest friend; probably he is the greatest friend I have had ever. He was the only person I have ever met who was at ease about sex; he was so used to the processes of breeding, coupling, and birth, and the care of the ewes and lambs. He was very gentle. But he hadn't any reverence for sex (have you met the people who describe to their children the wonderful arrangements of nature, with charming botanical illustrations?), he was just at ease with it. And when I was grown up I felt that it was only a man like that that I could finally trust myself to; and, of course, there are none. . . .

"Yet I feel now, often, that I would have been happier if I had married. At least, perhaps not happier, but certainly more the way I should have been."

Guy's mind fixed on this last sentence.

"But you can't think of marriage as a solution in itself. There are as many difficulties with marriage as without."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Mariella, realising him. Guy was gratified by her confidences, although he knew that they were not really personal between her and him. He was afraid

now that he had broken in too suddenly and he wanted to ease over the gap between accidental, eavesdropping intimacy and the real friendship. He knew himself afraid that she would be ashamed of having said so much.

"It is generous of you," he said, "to have told me this"; but he had a very indistinct recollection of what she had told him—he only remembered in himself the *attitude* of receptiveness. "To share experience, that is the way, the only way that we can help each other. And so I don't want to hold back from you my experience. I want to be candid and open with you, and then, perhaps, something will come of it."

Mariella did not recognise his furtive pleading, his insistent destroying desire to be taken, to be made into something by the other person, to exist on their responsibility. She only heard his casual voice, not presenting himself, but revealing himself, in case there was anything. . . .

There might be something. She desired knowledge, she desired experience, vicarious if it could not be immediate. She wanted what he could tell her, she was acquisitive of his knowledge. And he could not give knowledge, he could only bring out the old presentations, the time-worn images, and alternating between misery and complacence, attract her attention like a showman, saying, "This is myself . . . this is myself . . . this is myself." On one level of his mind, he knew this; but he believed also

that what he told her was in itself true and valuable.

He stared at the fire, and began talking.

"The significance of anything that happens can be truly shown only in strict relation, either implied or explicit, to the person it happens to. And so where is one to start? Scientifically, it is impossible to explain the man without the child, or the child without the parents. Impossible to explain the race without the individual, or the individual without the race."

"Tell me all you can," said Mariella, staring at him with ardent blue eyes, wanting to discover. She wanted to travel about in his mind, as you do in a foreign country, looking perhaps for things that will apply to you, for things that, by likeness or difference, may remind you of undiscovered native curiosities; but at the same time, on the unwilling receptive plane, ready to see everything unselectively, for the pure pleasure of seeing. So Mariella turned to him from the firelight, and he was eager to respond to her eagerness, not quite knowing how she was distant, and almost impertinent, like a traveller.

"I was always very lonely and miserable when I was a boy. I suppose I thought more than other children, but it wasn't much good to me. I didn't really have much confidence in my ideas, a good deal because the others, who seemed so thoughtless, so external, were clearly, in every respect I could think of, better and finer than I was. And yet I believe they thought well of

me at school. I was unreliable, of course—they never knew what I would do well or badly, and neither did I—but the things I did do well showed, I believe, a sort of undefined promise. And I was always good at debating and essay-writing, besides mathematics, which I can't deny I found remarkably easy. Later, at the University stage, I fell behind. All the other men reading it were really stupid, with that one specialised cleverness; and otherwise, clumsy and dull. My friends were entirely on the arts side; and I think sometimes that I would have done better to stick to that from the beginning, but you know how schoolmasters pick out one's most obvious facility, and make you spend all your life on that; and partly through laziness, and partly one is pleased at the thought of having a distinct vocation, but anyhow, the result is that you do what they tell you. And they're satisfied, and you're settled, for a bit, at any rate. . . .

“But I never found my place at school. As soon as I had stopped being frightened, I had begun to grow out of it. I was very impatient of the routine, and the conventions, and wanted to be allowed to think for myself. And I did think. All the obvious problems of marriage, politics, religion, I remember settling in a determined theoretical way. And I was pleased with myself for having taken so much trouble over them. I cut chapel out of conviction; but afterwards, though I would explain it like that to

my friends, I sullenly let the masters go on thinking that it was accident, or general indolence. But I had a feeling of being beyond the scope of school organisation; and I think that was felt by the others, too; I was hated by some of the boys for it, and had a kind of success among others. I suppose both were demoralising. . . .

"Then I had a usual kind of University career. Long before, I had come to the adolescent view that the universe was a failure, and the only noticeable thing in it was the passage of time. This I expressed in verse, in an eminently adolescent manner. At Oxford, without having altered my conviction, I found myself more at ease with it. Heartlessly, I did not mind any more the injustices of providence, since I was well enough dealt with. But I was never satisfied. Before, I had wanted some kind of intellectual satisfaction, and failed; now, what I wanted was perhaps an emotional satisfaction, and I did not realise at first that I was being cheated of that, too. There was so much always to read and to talk about. Yet I never seemed quite able to grasp what I wanted; under my activity and enjoyment there was a settled kind of despair preparing. . . .

"But it is really ridiculous to talk of despair at that childish stage, when I think of what I have since . . . suffered."

He had distantly realised that a pause there would be theatrical rather than dramatic, and had meant to avoid it. Yet it came, and not

too meretriciously, he immediately persuaded himself.

"For a long time I was quite in abeyance. I couldn't get started. It was a kind of spiritual catalepsy. And then I saw that the Church was my only hope and refuge. It was no use, of course, playing at it half-heartedly, so I had to become a priest. I believed, rightly or wrongly, that I had been given a certain power over people, which I had never had opportunity to exercise, and that here I could use it. My friends were, of course, amazed, but I am not afraid of being thought eccentric, and I took no notice of them, though I suspected all the time that when they did not mock me to my face, they were mocking me behind my back. They were mostly realists, rationalists, stock-still in sterile enlightenment. And the use of reason alone is like ploughing where there is no seed to sow, or like an impotent man planning the life of a child he hopes to have. I think that what we need now is not Truth but Power, not enlightenment but energy, spontaneous and instinctive energy. . . .

"That, of course, was why I married Ellen."

"It was a brave and thorough thing to do," said Mariella. "I suppose she almost exactly represents to you what you see biggest in the outside world."

"To me? But don't you see her so too?"

"Ye . . . es, I know exactly what you mean. I might almost have used the same words myself. It's one of the immediately obvious things

about her. But I can't help thinking that the way you practically identify her with the spontaneous physical Principle, makes everything altogether too complicated. I'm afraid it's . . . just silly."

Guy was astonished. The receptive eager listener was changed to an adviser. But he was quick to adapt himself. He was afraid, if he appeared astonished, that that would somehow give him away. And perhaps even here would be help. Mariella knew now that he had nothing of importance to give her. In spite of the way he referred himself always to the extreme action, the extreme temperament, he was indecisive, like a picture with too many finishing touches. But, with a little pity, and the little contempt that she felt for all men because she never quite wanted them, she wished to help him. She would try to help him, even though she almost knew him unhelpable.

Guy was more interested in manœuvring her to withdraw her censure, than in understanding what she meant.

"Of course, I don't identify them," he said; "but surely there is a connection? Don't you think there is a quite real connection?"

"Yes, but I still think you perhaps feel it too extremely. . . ."

"But her power over me," said Guy, his eyes widening, "is not the power of an individual, of one person. She is destroying me, because she represents more than I am able to stand

against. She can't regard or consider me, because she lives in a world without knowledge of my world. She sweeps me down like a flood. I know her world, but I am not able to live in it for ever. And in my world she sweeps me away, and obliterates me, and destroys me. I think sometimes that I shall soon go mad."

Mariella was defeated. To this there was nothing to be said. She felt hopeless and blank, as if she had been awake all night.

Guy pushed his fingers through his hair, and stared enormous-eyed at the fire. He was full of pity and horror for his fate, and yet elated, like an actor who has done well in a long emotional part. He thought how dramatic it would be to go suddenly, at once, snapping this string at full tension. He wanted to do this. And yet he wanted also to end calmly, as great poets do.

He said: "Do you know that old scholastic belief that it is only under the moon that stuff suffers flux and decay? And that above the moon there is something absolute and final, a certainty and stability? Rest."

"But there is no air," said Mariella, her lips twisting in a smile.

Guy looked at her doubtfully. He did not think what she meant, but suspected from her look that she mocked him. He rose brusquely.

"I am sorry," she said, afraid that he was feeling so.

"Don't be troubled by my affairs," said Guy.

"Let a worthless life fritter itself out on its own. I haven't told you this for help, or sympathy, but it is good sometimes for people to see each other exposed. And sometimes," he went on in a lower voice, "we are taken by surprise with the necessity to speak."

"It's all right," said Mariella. "It's good when people have enough confidence in you to do that."

Guy saw that her goodwill towards him was unshattered; and, after such purgation, he felt himself strong and pure, and glorious, like a clean wind. It was astonishing to him that, in the dim-lit mirror of the hall, his image looked meagre and wretched.

CHAPTER VII
CATASTROPHE

OF course, Ellen was not so unresponsive to Guy as he imagined. Her resistance was in itself the instinctive answer to his obscure demands, and this in turn forced from him the retaliation of positive cruelty. It was an intellectual cruelty that she did not always understand, but she knew from his voice and gesture that he was belittling her, trying to hurt her, loading her with the responsibilities for his failings and miseries. At first she had been only sorry that he should be unhappy; and had given him what she could, warmth and gentleness towards him, and a sure peace. But he had not been able to enjoy her; and by this time her necessary resistance had become conscious in fear of him. So that she avoided him, and he approached her only to torment her; and they were both much alone.

Guy felt he was fighting for his life. Sometimes he drifted with the stream, and then he was nothing, nothing, nothing; he was vanishing to nothing. And at such times, thought, or the explanation to Mariella (afterwards like nothing), was only touching and slipping, con-

vincing oneself of annulment. Only when he snarled and struck and hated was there any complication in existence to feel or know.

As he walked across the open hill he was suddenly taken with a whim to play an old childish game of his own invention. He stood still, and shut his eyes. He imagined the sky cracking apart, and falling with icy shivers down and out into interminable space. He thought how the farthest hills were rent away, and crashed after; how a huge fissure widened nearer, this side of the wood; how the wood hung, and toppled, and fell. In and in came the disaster, till at last he could see, behind his eyelids, only the little tuft he stood on, of moss and grass. He waited then a moment, savouring in anticipation the amazement of finding how solid the landscape was all round him, when he opened his eyes. . . .

And yet, when he did, for some reason, this climax of the game fell flat. Perhaps he had not quite enough believed, not quite enough filled himself with horror. He must do it again.

So again he shut his eyes. This time his fantasy changed. The sky was softly blown apart, and vanished like a broken thread of cobweb. Soundlessly the hills fell, and lapsed swiftly. The cracks of ground opened like a cloud-rift. As the dissolution came nearer, he heard, as the stuff crumbled and fell, a very faint hiss of speed. Then he stood on the last little clod. He thought

how the earth had shaken from its grass-roots, and how they hung white and naked over nothing. He began to sway from side to side violently. He hardly dared to open his eyes again, but his hand was instinctively flung out for support, and there was nothing to touch but air.

He looked at last, and then it seemed to him that indeed the world was not solid any longer. It was evening, and everything was hazy and uncertain. He wondered who had made it up. Himself perhaps. And in that case it was very, of course, very important that he should be careful to preserve his invention, because he was afraid he perhaps hadn't any more, and if that went, then indeed there would be nothing.

He had a long way to walk home. As he went, with all his strength he tried to grip and keep the landscape that darkness was obliterating. But he was defeated at last by the pitch-black country night.

"Of course, it is because of the darkness," he said aloud. "But then again, the darkness may be just a ruse, so that it won't show how everything has gone."

He had a feeling that the stony surface of the path did not exist till he came to it.

"It's lucky they have allowed me enough for my feet," he said, "but it's only just enough." He was convinced that only at the last instant the path was ready for his foot, at the very last

instant. He tried walking very slowly, thinking that then perhaps it would be readier, but still it moved like his feet, draggingly, and met them instantaneously, in the horizontal line. For a long time he had not courage enough to go quickly, but at last he stood for a moment, swaying, and then jumped. He thought he would perhaps fall out into space for ever, but the ground met him suddenly, as if he had tried to go on downwards at the bottom of a staircase. In this way he proceeded, with curious eccentric movements.

The moon rose, and he looked proudly at the rediscovered world, as if he had himself brought it back. On the Rectory lawn he stood and surveyed it, as if it were something he had made. Then he forgot about it. There was a curious numbness on him, all through his body and his mind, the kind of suspension there is in a room when much is being felt and nothing said. And yet he felt nothing. He was numb and waiting, exposed to an unexpressed compulsion.

Suddenly he was full and positive and violent with hatred. The universe was concrete with hatred. He laughed very loudly, and looked up at the stars, twinkling with intense distant hatred. And the air between, and the ether, vibrating with hatred.

Ellen had long ago had her supper, and had left Guy's ready on the table. Upstairs she found John with all his blankets thrown off,

for it was now very warm, and she spent a short happy minute in covering him up. Then she went over to the window to see if Guy were coming up the drive.

He had approached by the field-path, and she now saw him uncertainly in the moonlight, detaching himself from the shrubbery. He stood still for a minute, and looked complacently from side to side. Then for a long time he was indifferent and dead, quite still. There was something appalling in his stillness. He threw up his head and laughed horribly, and immediately came towards the house. She saw how he was tense with cruelty, and she did not know where to hide herself. So she stayed where she was; only, for misery and terror and helplessness and incomprehension, she fell suddenly into a violent fit of weeping, and so, for weakness, she dropped on to the bed, and her sobs were muffled in the pillow.

He came upstairs. He had thought he would perhaps kill her, but he knew that if he killed her, then his hatred would be settled, and then there would be again nothing, there would be nothing to fill up the immeasurable distance between earth and stars.

When he came near she subdued herself, and lay quite still and quiet, as if she were trying to hide from him. He took her roughly by the shoulder and wrenched her round. Then he put his hands upon her throat and pressed a little with his thumbs. He wondered what it

would be like to kill her, knowing that he must not, because she was so much to him.

She was hardly afraid of his fingers on her neck. They seemed there weak and fumbling. But his face terrified her, and she nearly screamed. Yet, because she was unalterably conscious of John, asleep in his cot a yard or so away, she would not, and lay dumb, violently trembling. He began feeling as if for her heart, to stab it, and at that she gave a little cry.

"Don't, don't. Think that the baby's there."

Guy took her fiercely by the shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"And what's the baby to me? Everything to you and nothing to me. You've forgotten me, and you wish I wasn't there, because people you've forgotten are just lumber. . . . But you mustn't forget me. You must know me. I must have you. . . ."

"But you don't, you won't, you aren't able to," she whispered. "And now you don't love me; you don't love me now."

"How can I only love you when you are everything there is? You are everything in the world that is not me, and I must hate you for not being me. But I must have you, I must have power over you, and *shall* not hold back. . . ."

The child began to move and whimper. Ellen tried to struggle from his arms, but he held her tight. His words meant little to her, but his

unnatural insensitive strength told her everything.

He said: "I thought perhaps I would kill you, but I don't know, I don't know yet." He let go of her, and went over to the cot. He took out the child in its blankets, and held it thoughtfully, wondering over it.

"No, no, no . . ." she said, and sprang up towards him.

His brief meditative pause was eclipsed in anger. He said, "I will drop it if you touch me," and she saw that he meant it, and did not move. The baby woke and began to cry with terror. Guy took him across the landing to a spare room, and laid him on the cold unmade bed. He came back, smiling as if he were well satisfied with what he had done, locked the door, and kept the key in his hand.

"Now let's go to bed," he said quietly.

Ellen did not stir. She was still standing by the cot.

"Get off your clothes," he said, undressing.

Ellen made a movement towards the door. Guy intercepted her, and stood in front of it, giving a jerk of laughter.

"Do as I tell you," he said, like a fierce and harried schoolmaster. He paused, and then added, "Or it'll be the worse for all of us."

Ellen looked at him in quite dumb misery. What could she do? It was better perhaps that she should suffer, so long as the baby was out

of this danger. Slowly she undressed, and submitted, dazed with terror, to his appalling love-and-hatred, this appallingly too great connection that he thrust on her. Afterwards he held her by the wrist as they lay together, and looked at her with very bright eyes. Now she was his, he thought. Her terror was right. She ought to be terrified. He forgot the little boy, growing colder on an unmade bed across the landing, and he thought the issue was only between himself and her. And he felt himself triumphant.

Ellen looked at him, and thought to herself that as his eyes were closed he was perhaps asleep. She tried to move her hand, but at that his fingers tightened, and she lay still again, listening in anguish for the baby's cry. She heard nothing; and then terrified herself with thoughts of how he might have fallen on to the floor, and now lie stunned or dead.

Guy tossed and muttered as if he were dreaming. At last his fingers relaxed, and Ellen was free. Immediately she reached over for the key on the table behind him. He was unaware of her, absorbed in his mutterings and restless movements. Very softly she walked to the door, very quietly turned the key, and at last came to the room where the baby was.

He was sleeping placidly; but when she passed her hand tenderly over his little arms and legs, she felt that they were quite cold. She unfolded a blanket from the other bed, and lay down under

it, with the baby in her arms. And warmth passed from her body to his body; and, in the touch of his body on her body, she found alleviation of her tense and inarticulate fear; and both slept.

CHAPTER VIII

DISEASE

TOWARDS morning Guy slept quietly, and woke early, with the calm and purified feeling that you get after a sudden sweetness of companionship, or very sweet solitude. In the first moment of waking he felt very new and tender, as if he and Ellen would greet each other gently and gladly, like a gentle wind and a gentle rain of earliest spring.

She was not there.

He lay still, thinking she would come. But she did not come. He began to be uneasy, his eyes puzzled and anxious, pitiable like a child's. And still she did not come.

The baby, too, was gone. No sound, no sign of them. . . .

For, across the landing, they were still sleeping deeply. A dust-glittering bar of sunshine moved over them, while they lay oblivious.

The baby was the first to wake. But he did not move. It was as if sleeping and waking were much the same to him—as if his open, misty, dark eyes were sightless. And yet, by and by, his fingers began to push about in the sunlight as if it were something to be touched. Then

Ellen, too, began to wake, but for her waking was cruel and strenuous—it was forcing herself against an acrid pain, which became, each moment of awakening, more sharp and concrete. She could hardly bear it, and tried with all her force to rest numb, but there was too much here for her to resist: the baby, the wonted summons of morning, and her own vitality not yet wholly crushed, all forced her out against the pain. And at last she also lay awake, unmoving also, suffering the first pang in solitude.

She heard Guy go out of his room and downstairs. She heard him calling for her, at first only seekingly, and then in rising desperation.

“Ellen! Ellen!” his voice trailed from room to room. But she would not answer. At last he came wearily upstairs again. And then by chance he opened the door, and looked in on them.

Ellen, when she heard the handle turn, looked up, and saw him standing, haggard and terrible, in the doorway. But when she looked at him, when her eyes, her bodily eyes, had seen him, she knew he was not terrible any longer.

“Why are you in here?” he asked gently, in wonder and astonishment.

“You should know that,” said Ellen obstinately.

“I know?” said Guy, holding up his hand in the sunlight and watching how the yellow dust slid between his fingers. But he did not persist in questions, and in a minute or so wandered vaguely

out to dress. Ellen knew now that it was not her injury only that she suffered, but an injury to both of them. She had to consider not self-protection only, but humanity. She thought first, that of course he must be sent away, put somewhere where kind, unconcerned people would take care of him. But she had a natural horror of institutions, and soon persuaded herself that it was not necessary. And so, for the time, humanity supplanted self-protection. Yet self-protection was ready to dominate in the last dangerous issues.

All day she watched him closely. He was listless and melancholy, no longer menacing, but vague and distant. She pitied him, as you might pity a dog who has bitten you and whom you may perhaps have to shoot. In the evening she went upstairs and moved all her things, and the child's out of his room, and she found that she could arrange them easily and pleasantly in the new one across the landing, as if it had been thought of and settled beforehand. As she put the baby in his cot, she felt very fresh and clear—they were together in a new clean isolation. She was afraid of leaving it, and hesitated about going downstairs, lingering unduly over folding the towels and emptying the bath. But she had to go in the end.

As she turned the corner of the stairs, a sudden wind blew out her candle. She had never been afraid of the dark, but to-night it could let loose a thousand terrors. She had no matches with

her, and must go on. She knew if she stopped for a minute she would be overcome with panic, paralysed or crazy. So she went on at an even pace, not letting herself hurry, fearing above all things the slightest failure of her resistance. She was going to the dining-room, where she knew there would be matches on the mantel-piece.

When she was in the middle of the room, on the right the table, on the left the sideboard (but both out of reach), there was a sudden extraordinary increase in her feeling of terror and oppression, as if Guy were there, quiet, and horrible again with cruelty, aware of her. She thought there was a movement of the curtain against the window. He was, she thought, in the chair by the window, waiting for her. Yet, at an even pace, she went on across the room, holding her fear at bay. As she reached for the matches (when the arm is lifted, the side is so unprotected) the breath came out with a little hiss between her teeth. She struck a match and held the flame to the candle, shielding it with her hands, and anxiously waited to let the flame on the wick burn clear. And then she held it up. And there was no one in the room.

From that time, present or absent, Guy haunted her. He was an oppression, a hostile force, because of what he had done and might do; and yet, in fact, she saw that he was gentler and easier than ever he had been before. His querulous unhappiness had softened and weakened to

melancholy. He accepted unresistantly whatever she did, he never asked why she no longer slept with him. But sometimes he looked at her with a vague puzzled expression, like a child who does not understand the conversation.

And she, on her side, was kind and distant and unscrupulous, as you are to a sick person. She knew that they were now quite separate, quite inimical, she felt almost that they lived in different worlds; and so she could easily afford her kindness, because there was no connection or obligation, nothing that he could hold over her, no way for him to have power. And she did not realise how he was exhausting her and weighing her down.

Soon she knew she was again pregnant, and this was frightening. She had no happiness now in bearing a child. The child, too, was an oppression. She felt always weak and tired, and became subject to fits of weeping and ill-temper, which astonished and humiliated her. She spent much of her time in her own room, where sometimes she was able to imagine herself untroubled and unviolated, as if she were a young girl again. But this was not often. She had to go so much about the house, preyed on by the opposing forces.

She told no one what had happened. They noticed, of course, a change in Guy, but it made him appear to them, if anything, more normal than before. They had never understood the forms his energy had taken, and now, weakened,

he was so much simpler, the kind of person they imagined they could know about. His work went on, divided by long empty hours of musing about books, or people, or the shapes and colours of the country. He seldom thought explicitly of himself, but his mind was dominated by a feeling of inexpressible sadness, rather beautiful and tender.

In the outer world war broke out. But they hardly noticed. In a country district of small farms, where every man was obviously indispensable, there was little to show for it, and for themselves the people took little interest in the affairs of the world. Mariella was the only person they knew whose imagination it occupied. She tried at times to convey her enthusiasm to Guy, but he quenched her with gentle indifference. So that she thought, in passing, judging from the fact of his inaccessibility, not inquiring what it represented in him, 'He is beginning to get like Ellen, a little.' But she did not pause over him, for her mind was taken up, thinking about what she could do.

Yet she could do nothing, for almost immediately she caught scarlet fever from one of the cottage children who had lately been her model, and for some weeks she was very ill. But still, during the first interminable nights and days of delirium, the thought of the war recurred continually in manifold terrifying dream-shapes, so that she hardly noticed the discomfort and pain her body suffered.

As soon as she was better, Guy was allowed to see her. Her life was very empty now, in bed, between four walls, with only doctors, and food, and letters, descending on her from nothing, and placid nurses filling the background with attentions; and for this reason she was terribly excited at the thought of his coming, so that the nurses threatened to refuse him, and Mariella had to lie very still and quiet, controlling herself, so as to persuade them that it wouldn't do her the least harm, really. But when he was there she was miserable. His face looked blurred and negative, and she could not make out if this was some change in him, or an uncertainty in her own sight and understanding. And she raged against her weakness, and immediately relapsed again in the indefinite, thoughtless indifference of extreme sickness.

Then she developed pneumonia, and was very ill again. She was aware of nothing but the nights flapping by like sails of a windmill, and a fearful drag of life from minute to minute, each minute eternity. She wished to die. It seemed as if it would be so easy to slip away. Each breath was pain and determination. If once, on the turn, she should not take thought, if she should once neglect to struggle with this pain of filling her lungs, then there would be nothing, so simply and easily. Even her heart had no rhythm. It was as if between each beat it must wait for strength to be gathered, and then beat late or soon, as the strength came. And if once

the strength were too long in coming, then there would be no more power in the heart to move. She was not afraid of this cessation. There was nothing at all in her conscious mind to hold her from it. And yet there was some will in her somewhere that would not give in, and this held her there, suffering.

This is the least calculable factor in sickness. From all the symptoms of the disease they thought she would die. But she did not. Only it was a long time before she was alive again.

Ellen did not care to risk infection, and so at this time they never met. Ellen still lived resistantly, inaccessible, trying to preserve herself, and yet not preserving herself, because something was choked at the source, as if a shadowing poisonous plant drew all the nourishment from her soil. And the fear was always with her that Guy would again perhaps fail, again come against her. She carried the child in her like a burden.

In the end relief came. The idea of the war permeated. People began to notice certain privations. The younger men joined up. Guy, quite dissociated from his earlier life, not thinking about, or wanting, the same things, filling his time easily with little momentary interests, was suddenly caught in this huge movement. He felt nothing now keeping him in England, so he resigned his living, which was only quite distantly and vaguely interesting to him, and, with something of his old caprice, joined up as a private soldier. He was sent immediately to a

training camp some distance away, and was afterwards drafted abroad at thirty-six hours' notice. He spent this little leave in London with old College friends, to whom he was very enthusiastic about his new vocation.

When he first went to the camp, Ellen saw him off at the station, but it was a parting without much feeling—they kissed as a brother and a sister might out of habit. Ellen was sorry and pitiful to think of him going alone into the world, but she was glad that it was so.

Since the first morning in the new room, she had always woken into dim troubled anxiety, fighting her way back with difficulty. But this first day after Guy went, she woke freshly and suddenly in a cold intense-bright winter morning. The sun was still little, and yellow, and contained. Near to the ground there was a thickness in the air, and in it the frosty trees were starrily silver. Against the frosty grass their outline was a little vague and blurred, but their character, the direction of the stem, the thrust or droop of the outer twigs, was emphasised. They all shone together, bright and silver; and higher up the sky was clearing to a frosty shining blue. She washed and dressed quickly; and the cold water, and the cold air on her skin, was like this new world to sight, bright and clear.

She left the baby in his cot and went downstairs to light the fire. The flame jumped vividly on the little sticks. Then she went all round the house and opened the windows. It was

time the house had a proper airing, she thought. She slid up the drawing-room sashes with a rush. She flung open the French window of the dining-room, she opened the back door and the front door, and the cold air came quietly and keenly through the house, and she breathed very deeply, and stood erect, shivering a little, pleasantly.

Upstairs she pushed open all the casements, and leaned out for a minute as she fastened each rod. The whole world shone so silver, it was quite new to her, and vivid, and yet she recognised the brightness like something in herself. But she did not look for long. She saw how it was there, out in the world, and she went quickly round the house to let it in. Even she propped up the broken sky-light in the attic with an old chair-leg.

She tired quickly, and was happy to sit down to breakfast. And yet the child in her was not so heavy. To-day she was valiant and hopeful. She was strong again.

Breakfast was slow and happy. John, who had grown up a little wan and fretful in the shadow of his parents' unhappiness, was to-day eager and smiling. Ellen talked to him and played with him, and they both laughed out of real joy and merriment, Ellen deeply and softly, and John in high wild chuckles. Ellen was so strong again, she wanted to work, she wanted to turn out the rooms, to shake the rugs in the garden, making a cloud of dust against the sun. She wanted to polish the boards and scrub the

kitchen tiles, she wanted all the house to be new and fresh, filled to every corner with this new fresh winter air.

But for some weeks now they had had a woman in to do the housework, and Ellen did not want to work with her. She knew that she would be slow and clumsy, not able to do things as she wanted, and then the delight would be gone. But she was restless with wanting to do it; it was misery to her that she could not.

And so the beginning of the morning was aimless. She sewed for a little, and played with John, and cut a new overall out for him. Then she decided that they would go for a walk. She knew that Mariella was now past the infectious stage, and she thought it would make a good object for their walk if they went to see her. So she dressed herself and the baby, settled him in his push-chair, and set out.

Mariella was still ill. Her legs were weak and tottery, and the slightest thing exhausted her so much that she was quite helpless for a time in mind and body. She had still one nurse, not because a nurse was needed, but because she could not be quite alone. She had breakfast in bed, got up rather late, dressed rather slowly, and began to wish, as soon as she got downstairs, that it was time for lunch.

When Ellen came, she was staring, moodily, at the shining landscape, where the sun was dissolving the sharp glitter of frost into soft shiny moisture. The nurse met Ellen at the door.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said. "She really needs a little cheering up now, and this place is so quiet, there aren't many visitors, and she doesn't much take to the idea of going away."

She lifted John out of his chair. "I may take him, mayn't I?"

She went into the sitting-room, and Ellen followed.

"Here's Mrs. Tyndale to see you, Miss Dalby," she said cheerfully, "and just look what she's brought with her." She made little gurgling noises at the baby and tickled his neck; he looked at her appraisingly. Mariella shook hands with Ellen.

"It's nice to see you," she said. "I was just wondering what I could possibly do all day. Why, how big your baby is now—he looks quite different and grown-up. And his hair's a different colour. Wasn't it quite black when he was little?"

"It was quite black and long when he was born," said Ellen, "but that fell out, and it all came in again like this."

"It's nicer so," said Mariella, stroking the delicate wispy curls of soft fine yellow hair. But she could not really be interested in anything, she could not go out to anything, she was shut and coiled and weak inside herself.

"May I have him for a little?" said the nurse, wanting to leave them together for a little talk.

"I think he'll be all right," said Ellen, "but he may want to sleep. . . ."

The nurse laughed. "I'm quite good with babies," she said, taking this as an acceptance.

"I hope you are better now," said Ellen to Mariella.

"I'm not ill any more," said Mariella tragically.

There was a pause.

"But being ill is almost easier," said Mariella.

"Of course, it takes a long time to get strong again."

"Sometimes I feel I never will be again the way I was before. But perhaps I don't really mind very much. I'm awfully resigned."

"It has to take a long time."

"Yes, but you can't believe how long it is. . . . But that's a little silly. When I talk tragically, it is only about what I got in the habit of feeling a little while ago, and don't really feel any longer. I am really resigned now, somehow unnaturally, but resigned anyhow, and that is something . . ." She broke off, and began again. ". . . when I was ill, I discovered afterwards, I was really happy. I lay there, like a piece of furniture, and people could do what they liked with me, and the pain was not exactly in me, just something that happened. And I didn't mind if I died or not. And getting from one minute to another did happen somehow—it wasn't so difficult, so appalling, as it has been since. Afterwards, it was as if I was being struck at all the time. All day I longed for the evening, when I would be a little sheltered, when voices and colours wouldn't be there any longer; and I always woke crying.

Even before I knew or thought that this was day again, and that I was waking to it, to live through it, I was crying. Once or twice, later, I tried to paint, but it wasn't any good—I was hardly strong enough to hold a brush. And so now I've given up, I'm quite indifferent. I'm quite indifferent. If anything is going to recover inside me, then it will recover, and I'm not going to struggle any more, and torment myself. . . ."

"I am sorry you are not happy," said Ellen.

"Now, I am not unhappy," said Mariella, suddenly smiling superbly; "I know that it's the only thing to do. Wait, and be nothing, and see what happens. After all, there is so much time."

Ellen said she must go. Mariella rang for the baby; and the two went back to the Rectory. Ellen walked hurriedly, as if there were something she were running away from.

"You've been too far," said the charwoman lugubriously as she came in. She said nothing, and went into the passage to hang up her hat. As she lifted her arm she was suddenly taken with giddiness. Everything went faint and blurred, and her breath seemed choking. At the same time she was very purposeful, and knew that what she must do was to walk into the kitchen and sit down in a chair. She stood for a minute in the kitchen door.

"I'm afraid I'm going to faint," she said.

She went over to a chair, and everything became quite black and distant. The woman held

out a glass of water for her to drink, but she knew that that effort would be too much, that she would lose herself altogether, and she turned her head aside with a little semi-conscious moan. The woman was dashing water over her face; again and again it came, sharply on her face, and dribbling coldly down inside her clothes. But she could not tell how often—each time was like the last. And still she was struggling between two worlds, the easy final world of unconsciousness, and the hard clutchable world of reality, and she was struggling between them in interminable uncertainty. In the end, weakly and miserably, she came out into this world.

“What did I tell you?” said the woman. “You walked too far, that was what it was. You shouldn’t have done, in your condition.”

Ellen did not listen to her. The morning’s energy and brightness had quite gone. There was so little time, she thought. In five weeks her baby would be born, and for its sake she must struggle to this positive life of reality; there was not enough time to drift, and let things be, and wait. And yet, whatever she did, whatever effort she might make, there would still be not enough time. She had lived too long in the shadow, in the half-world; and she was filled with great despair.

Yet it was something that the oppression had left her. Sometimes her weakness was made vivid by a delicate young nursling hope, and she would almost be glad of the child; and when at

last a girl-baby was born to her, she loved her very deeply and passionately, with more of a conscious passion than anything she had felt for the boy. She loved her almost against her nature. There was in her love something wild, and anxious, and compensatory, from the very beginning.

CHAPTER IX
ELIMINATION OF GUY

GUY did not come home for his leaves. The strain of the relationship with Ellen had quite relaxed, and he did not want to come back to her. It was not that he positively would not; if nothing else had offered he might have come, but there was nothing in himself to bring him; his life with her seemed now quite unimportant, and there were other things. By exact comparison they were insignificant in intensity, the new friendships and all the impressions of his day-to-day irresponsible life. But he made no comparison; they completely occupied him, and he wanted nothing else. He did not know how diminished he was, and happily filled his life with little things.

He sent occasional letters to Ellen, to which she paid little attention; she had to read them by a great effort of will, as you have to read a technical book, or a catalogue, dealing with things you know little about. And this effort she was unwilling to make. Her days were so full with two young children to look after. Sometimes she read half, and had to leave it, being called away to something more urgent; and then when

she came back, she could not remember if that was one that she had finished or not. So sometimes she painfully went at it again, and sometimes she put it in the box.

To Mariella he wrote one or two odd little pensive letters. They exasperated her and touched her. She tried very hard to answer in the same vein, but she could not—there always was now something imperative and uncalled-for in everything she said or did. She was working in a hospital that had been established near, and she could not help writing a good deal about the stupidities she encountered there, which sometimes drove her almost to frenzy, she said. She was doing executive work and had shown herself to be of great value. She had a reputation for being unreasonable and uncertain, but she did get things done. The people under her felt that she bullied them and gave them energy; so they resented her, knowing all the time that anybody else would be worse, talked about her continually, and secretly admired her enormously. And she was quite used up. She hardly thought about anything but the work of the hospital. And she never painted.

Her letters made Guy puzzled and unhappy. He could not understand them. He simply could not understand this swirl of violent feeling over such obvious trivialities. He thought how she was wasting herself on such things, but he was not really bewildered logically. It was only that he could not understand such feelings—it

seemed like nothing, it was outside his spectrum. So he did not know exactly what to think. But, as he read her letters, he felt a hardening in her that made him unhappy. And again, when he thought of it, it seemed like nothing, and he wanted very much to tell her that everything was quite simple and easy really. But he could never exactly pin down what it was that he wanted to tell her. So he chased round and round in a little misty circle.

In the end, he wrote to her.

"... It seems a pity that you should be so occupied. I suppose, as you say, one must do something, but why more? I mean, do something, and let it be something, not everything. . . . Though I don't know what right or reason I have to give you advice, or anybody. But persistence is so cruel. Being able to let things be is noble, like dying. And things are only patterns on a paper. In dreams, the pattern sometimes rises like a wave and drowns you. But here it is all on paper. At the edge of your sight it may be intricate and alarming, but where you look at it it is as simple as anything; you can see right through to space, or God, or eternity.

"Did you ever read Wordsworth? People laugh so much at him, and indeed he is ridiculous, like anything that happens. But he makes other people seem as if they were only decorating what isn't there. I don't know exactly what it is I want to say about him, but I wish you would try him. If you haven't the book, there is a good

edition of Lyrical Ballads in my study. Ellen will give it to you, and don't bother to return it. I should like it to be in good hands. There is something about Ruth, and the Mad Mother, and the Thorn—I don't know—you must read them——”

Mariella was in no mood for reading, and Wordsworth in particular seemed impossibly far away. But she happened to be free from the hospital that afternoon, and she found herself going to the Rectory.

As she turned in at the gate, she saw John and the little girl playing mysteriously in the drive. John looked up immediately, and when he saw her, seized his sister by the hand and began to run. Her legs were very short and fat and uncontrolled. He just dragged her. And of course they both fell headlong.

Mariella ran to catch them up. The girl sat on the ground howling, and John looked at her in bewilderment. Mariella picked her up.

“How could you do anything so silly?” she said to the boy, for at this time she very easily took up an indignant attitude. She looked at the child's knees, and saw that they were only very dirty and not grazed at all. Yet she still carried her towards the house, unthinkingly, and John trotted beside her, wondering what she was doing.

“What's your name?” said Mariella to the child in her arms, wanting to establish something between them. The child had stopped crying,

and was pulling absorbedly at Mariella's brooch. She did not answer. Mariella pushed away her fingers, and turned her chin up, making her look and attend. But her eyes were deep and unvariable, like a very little baby's, unfocusing, looking beyond.

"Can't you tell me your name?" said Mariella, with a mixture of mockery, cajolery, and command.

The child would not speak. John began pulling at Mariella's skirt. She looked down at him.

"That's Jenny," he said; "she's my sister."

Mariella, looking down at Jenny, felt suddenly repulsed. It was horrible, this quiet and intense remoteness. She put her down, and again John took her hand.

"Is your mother at home?" said Mariella.

"Yes, I think so," said John.

Mariella waited at the front door, while the two children went through the house. She heard John shouting for his mother, and soon Ellen came out to her.

"Good morning," said Mariella, "I've just had a letter from Mr. Tyndale, and he offers to lend me a book, and said you would give it to me. . . ."

"I had a telegram this morning," said Ellen; "he's been killed."

Mariella had written two or three very competent letters to women whose husbands had died in hospital, but for this news she had nothing.

"Oh, how awful . . . I'm so sorry . . . what can I say, though . . ." She only wanted to go. This was not a demand for sympathy, but something for herself. She wanted to think about it. She said, ". . . of course I won't trouble you about the book. . . ."

"You had better have it," said Ellen, hating her, remembering all of a sudden and hating all that she represented in Guy—the educated life, the inaccessible life of books and talk. Because of this she was the more insistent.

"Yes, you must have it," she said; "he wanted you to have it." She took Mariella to the library. Mariella felt she was being forced, she had to go, and she could not bear to be forced; she had formed a habit of imposing herself, unquestioned, and it was terrible and alarming to find what a child she was in Ellen's hands. And since at this time she was working with people's energies, and began to know about them, she thought disapprovingly how wasted this was in Ellen. Where did it all go to? she wondered. She was ashamed for herself, being so easily conquered, and yet admiring, recognising ability.

They looked for the book in hostile silence. But Ellen was not really moved. She was so settled now in the long uneventful life of washing and scrubbing and cooking, all for the children; so settled she was that it was difficult to move her. From the future loomed a fear, but that was in the distances of her mind, hardly yet in sight; and the hurting memory of Guy had only

an extreme momentary force, and died quickly. And she felt proudly towards Mariella.

She found and gave her the book with a pleasure like real kindness. They went to the door. The children were playing on the lawn; John was coaxing an ear-wig from path to path, and Jenny was sitting with her legs stuck out in front of her, picking grass and daisies indiscriminately and pushing them into her mouth.

Ellen went over to her and slapped her hands, but almost caressingly. The child made inarticulate noises of remonstrance.

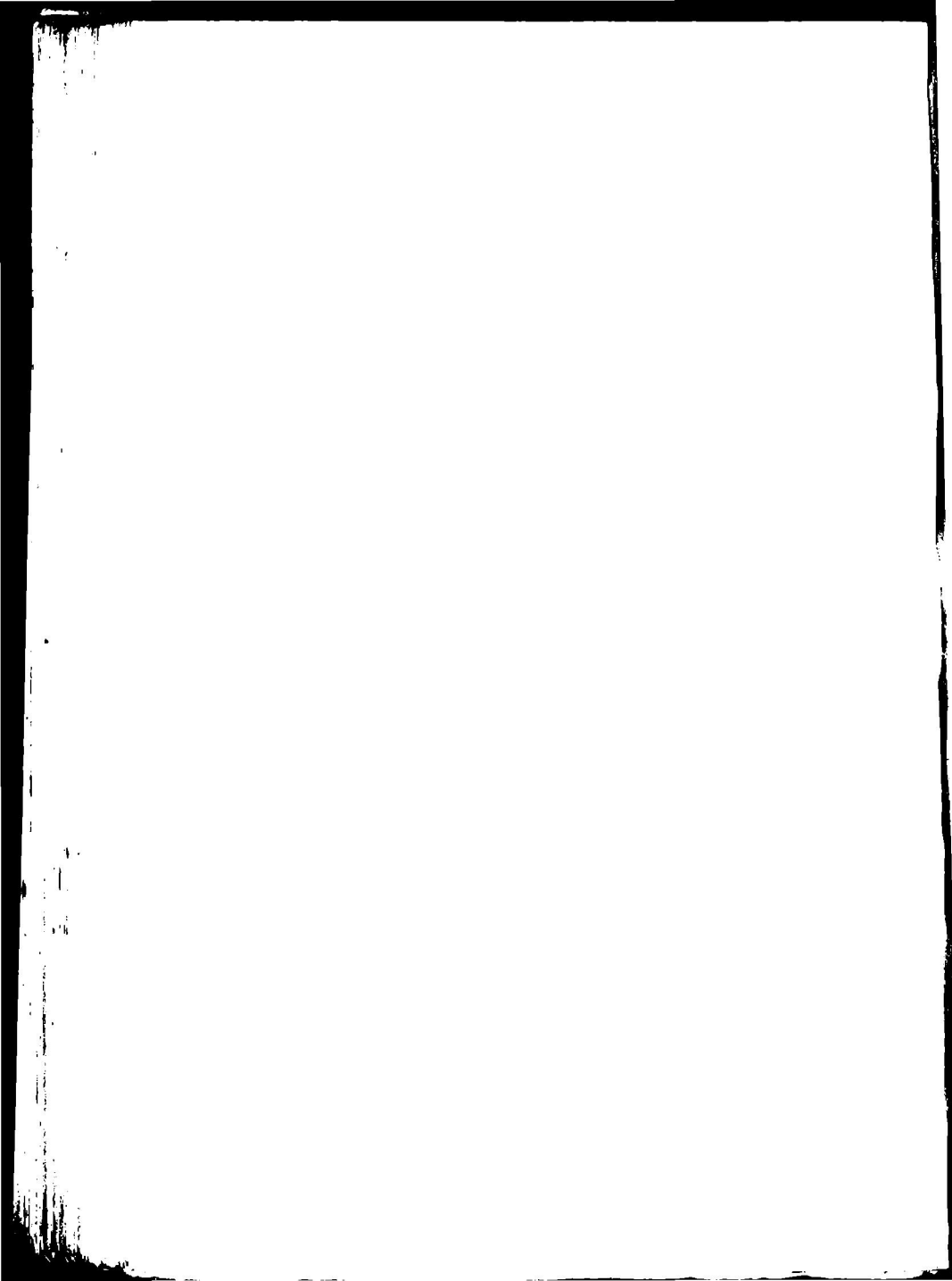
"She's a little backward for her age," said Ellen defensively; "the war's been hard on the children. . . ."

Mariella was still sore.

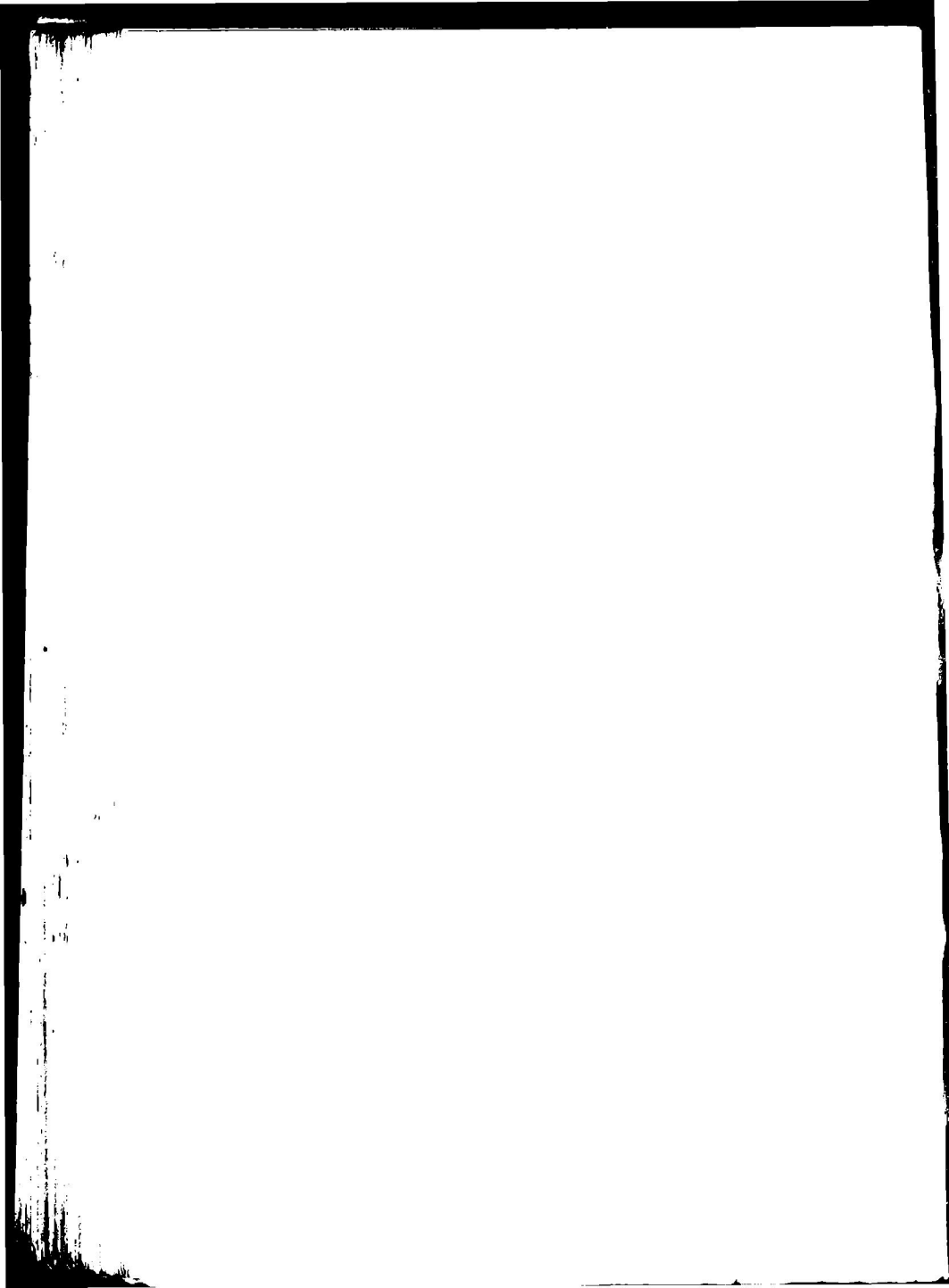
"Do they know?" she said officiously.

"I told them this morning," replied Ellen, indifferent, forgetful, "but they're used to being without him, and it doesn't seem to make any real difference, so far as I can see. . . ."

Mariella said good-bye and went away. John was tired of the ear-wig and began turning awkward unpractised somersaults. Ellen sat down on the grass beside Jenny, and talked to her in a special mysterious language they had invented together.



PART III



CHAPTER X
NOT A PARTY

THE neighbours had never known how to place the Tyndales. When they first came to the place, the gentry had paid formal calls, but none of them had done much more. Some liked Guy and some didn't; but they all said it was awkward that Mrs. Tyndale was not quite their sort. And Ellen herself made no advances. Mariella was the only person who had ever been on anything but the most distant terms, and that was against considerable odds. The farmers' wives were unwilling to accept Ellen as quite one of themselves, and she had not the ingenuity or the inclination to pretend she was anything else. Indeed, she did not want them. There was always enough to occupy her elsewhere.

Then Guy went away, and the elderly parson who took his place, and his elderly wife, came to the new Rectory on the hill-top. The old Rectory was condemned, but Guy had bought the property, and Ellen and the children were left in it undisturbed. Rumours went about that it was not now kept as a gentleman's house should be. They took their meals in the kitchen, and there was no servant even for the rough work.

How Mrs. Tyndale could manage with two young children, and that large house to keep, nobody could imagine.

After Guy's death Ellen began to be a little friendlier with the village people, and sometimes had quite long conversations with Miss Thomas at the post office, who was stupid, and kindly, and not very interfering. But she was obviously one for keeping herself to herself, and nobody ever forgot that she was the widow of a clergyman, and had money without working for it. Her preoccupation with her own affairs seemed a little supercilious, and it was funny that she didn't seem to encourage her children to come down to the village and play about with the others. Moreover, she seemed to be a friend of Miss Dalby's; and Miss Dalby was a real lady, to everyone's certain knowledge, though she was a little queer, and painted pictures, till the war came and gave her something to do.

But the village people were quite easy in their minds. If Mrs. Tyndale didn't care to ask them to her house, well, she shouldn't come to theirs, though there was nothing in that to prevent them stopping in the road and talking, in the way of friendship, about the weather, or the children. It was the doctor's and parson's wives who, when they thought of her, wondered what they could do about it, and sometimes went so far as to consult their husbands.

"I think it's all right if we don't ask Mrs. Tyndale," said Mrs. Forbes, the lady of the new

Rectory. "I believe she would really rather we didn't; but I do think we ought to do something for the children. Only I can't think who to have with them. She'd sure to be offended if we asked them with the Sunday-school children, and yet the boy's with them all the week in the day school, and it seems the sensible thing to do. Because, of course, it would be useless and unkind to ask them with the little Carruthers and Wingfields. It's not exactly that one feels them of a different class. I know, of course, that their father was a gentleman, but they wouldn't know any of the same games or anything; and children like that seem always a little stupid and backward. I know they're often nice, and all that, but you can't say they're as quick as our sort of child. . . ."

"The little boy seemed intelligent enough."

"Perhaps. But I don't at all like the look of the girl. However . . ."

Ellen was baking that afternoon, and the children were hanging round her, attracted by the sticky dough, wanting to play with it and make things. John, besides amusing himself, could also help her considerably; for he was intelligent and deft, and already knew by heart, practically, all the movements of bread-making. But for some reason she did not like him to help, and so pushed him impatiently out of her way; or sometimes, giving in, said in a grudging voice, "Very well, go on with this for a minute while I'm seeing to the rest."

When she had almost finished kneading, she gave them each a lump of dough. John set to work immediately to make a man. It was very plump and sturdy and breadlike, with eyes and waistcoat buttons of very black currants. Jenny at first only played with hers, pushing it about, rolling it on the window-sill, till it looked grey and miserable. Then she caught sight of what John was doing, and at once tried to copy. But her man was not so good; he was scraggy and disjointed, one leg was goutily swollen, and the other went so thin at the knee that it almost came apart. And her fingers simply could not put the currants straight. And then some would not stick, and some went in too far and got lost in the dough. So her interest failed, and she wandered out into the garden. In a few minutes she came back suddenly excited, talking very quickly in a gabbled inarticulate way.

"What is it?" said Ellen. "Oh, a lady. At the door, is she?"

She put the last loaf in the oven, washed her hands unhurriedly under the tap, and went out into the hall. Mrs. Forbes was standing on the doorstep, looking idly at the garden, with a very elaborate air of having fallen there by chance.

"Come in, won't you?" said Ellen.

"Oh no, I can't come in; I only just happened to be down in the village, and it came into my head to come and ask you if you would lend us the children for tea this afternoon. Of course it's not a party—I only just thought of it on the

spur of the moment, as I was coming along. But we've a good many quite amusing games, and I'm sure they would enjoy themselves."

"Thank you very much," said Ellen, who was always pleased when notice was taken of her children. "What time shall I bring them?"

"Well, I thought it would be easiest if I took them back with me. I've just got to run into the church for a minute to look for a key I forgot last Sunday" (she was being so tactful, she thought, over giving Ellen time to make them presentable), "and then I'll pick them up on the way home, in about five or ten minutes, shall I?"

"Thank you very much," said Ellen; "and then what time shall I fetch them?" (She was always afraid they would get together with the village children, if she let them go about by themselves too much.)

"Oh, don't bother," said Mrs. Forbes, having, at the back of her mind, the feeling that if she did everything possible now, she would have all the longer before she need do it again. "I'll see them home."

"It's very kind of you," said Ellen. "I'm afraid it's a great trouble. . . ."

"Oh, not a bit. But now, good-bye for a few minutes; I must do my little errand. . . ."

Jenny had been hanging at Ellen's skirts during the conversation. John had to be called out of the kitchen. Ellen bundled them both upstairs to be changed.

John stood obstinately on the landing and would not move.

"What's the matter with you?" said Ellen.

"You didn't put our men in the oven."

"It won't hurt; I'll do it when I've got you out of the way."

"Bread has to be put in the oven when it's ready," said John.

"Come on now, come and get dressed. Mrs. Forbes'll be back in a minute."

John stood still and rigid, holding on to the banisters, as if he feared force. His mouth was tight closed, as if he would resist it to the last.

"You always say it has to go into the oven when it's risen, and our men are risen."

"I can't have this nonsense now; that's for real bread, not play—men with buttons, and I don't know what."

"My man will go all soft inside. I don't want him to go soft inside."

Jenny began to wail, and threw herself on her mother, clasping her legs. Indistinctly she echoed John's complaining.

"There'll be no peace till it's done, I can see," said Ellen. "Can I trust you now to get undressed, and wash yourselves, properly mind, if I go down to the kitchen and see about it?"

"Yes," said John, going at once into his bedroom.

Ellen followed him, and took out clean clothes from a drawer.

"These for you, and those for Jenny. You'll help your little sister if she wants it?"

"Yes."

Ellen went downstairs. Of course she was in a hurry; but she found herself, all the same, working on Jenny's scarecrow of a man, improving him, putting him to rights. She arranged the eyes more symmetrically and straightened the buttons, and she even tried to bring the legs into some kind of harmony. But the dough was now tough and stringy and unworkable. And so she couldn't make it look like much, though it was certainly better than it had been before.

She put them into a baking-tin, and slid the tin into the oven. And she thought, looking anxiously at Jenny's, forgetting her own contribution, 'It's not so bad for such a little girl.'

She went upstairs again. John was washing in a slap-dash fashion, and Jenny was sitting on the floor with her dress only half off. It was John that Ellen stormed at, but not for long. There was no time for talk. She washed them and put their clothes on, quickly and urgently.

They were ready just exactly when Mrs. Forbes came back. Ellen felt relieved, thinking that was the end of it, they were really going. But at the door John suddenly darted away.

"I'm going to see my man," he said.

Ellen caught him by the shoulder.

"It's time for you to be going," she said.

"Mrs. Forbes isn't interested in your man."

But Mrs. Forbes, wanting to be nice to the

children, was at the same time saying, "And what man is that, John? Would you like to show him to me?"

John took no notice of her.

"I want to see my man," he said.

Ellen had a picture in her mind of the two men, side by side in the tin.

"It'll spoil them if I open the oven now," she said, lying; and with that John had to be content. But as the three walked off together, because he still felt angry and defeated, he would not talk, or help Mrs. Forbes and Jenny in their efforts to understand each other.

The tea was good, with sponge-cake, and short-bread, and sugar-buns, and chocolate biscuits. John began to be more friendly.

"Do you always have a tea like this?" he asked, out of pure friendly interest.

"We just have to see what kind Cook makes for us," replied Mrs. Forbes evasively, remembering how she had asked them 'on the spur of the moment.' She began to feel a mistrust of John, and turned again to Jenny.

Jenny couldn't say much that was coherent, but John, now a little happier, answered for her himself, very quickly, as he had heard his mother do. So there was a certain amount of conversation.

John ate a good deal, enjoying it, and then wiped his mouth on his handkerchief in a final and determined way.

"I think we must go now," he said.

"Oh, but there are a lot of games for you to play first," said Mrs. Forbes, not much surprised. In her time she had given a good many children's parties.

She lifted Jenny from her chair and took her hand. John followed submissively.

She took a bundle of rails, curved and straight, out of a box and set John to put them together. In the meantime, she amused Jenny with a balloon.

John discovered pretty soon that the rails were of two gauges. You could make one railway straight, with a hook at the end, and the other was nothing but a rather small circle. The straight line which he had laid excitingly across the room, with a curve under the table, had only a luggage van. He tried pushing the luggage van backwards and forwards, but that didn't seem very interesting. So he wound up the engine and put it on the circular track. He found after one or two trials that when you wound it to the full it would go over one whole circle, three rails and one sleeper, if you started it in the best place. He tested this discovery once or twice, to see if it was so, then pulled the rails apart and put them back in the box.

Mrs. Forbes was still playing with the balloon. Jenny paid little attention, but seemed happy enough.

John went over to them.

"Please," he said, "I've finished playing with the trains. I think it must be time to go home now."

"Don't you want to play with the skittles?" said Mrs. Forbes persuasively. She did not like to fail with children.

"No, thank you," said John, and waited, looking at her.

"Well, if you want to go, I can't keep you," said Mrs. Forbes, at last allowing to herself that she was exasperated. "I'll get my hat at once."

When they got away from the house, John became possessed of the wildest spirits. With ill-timed enthusiasm he explored and loitered everywhere, so that Mrs. Forbes was hard put to it to keep him in sight.

He rushed ahead, and waited behind, indifferent to them, pursuing his own purposes, lingering over what interested him, getting prickles in his legs and mud on his shoes. Through the wood he disappeared completely for a time, so that Mrs. Forbes had a most uncomfortable feeling of being tracked and watched by unseen eyes. This made her walk along the path in a queer stalking manner, and John, catching sight of her by chance, laughed loudly. She was a little indignant at this, and he was surprised and ashamed to hear her scolding. It seemed to him that such a way of walking was essentially and indisputably funny, even if you were doing it yourself. So he sidled uncomfortably off, because he hated the sound of her voice, being indignant; and quickly he forgot about her.

When Mrs. Forbes and Jenny got to the

stream where the field-path crosses it, some way from the old Rectory, at the edge of wood and field, they found him playing in it, moving huge stones from the bank to make a dam. Mrs. Forbes was not really at all interested, of course, but she always made a point of appearing to pay great attention to children's pursuits.

"What's that you're making?" she said.

"It's a dam," he replied, rather as if he were saying, 'The sun,' to a person who had asked him what it was in the sky.

"Aren't you coming home with us?" said Mrs. Forbes, pretending to move away.

"I must stay a little longer," he said; "you go if you want to."

Mrs. Forbes came back, and stood watching him.

"What'll your mother say if I come home without you?"

"I'll be back soon."

"You're a naughty boy," said Mrs. Forbes, very judicial, not wanting to be angry. "If I was your mother, I'd smack you."

John did not answer. Mrs. Forbes continued to watch him. He did not look at her, but her scrutiny made him uneasy; he felt he could not move so well, or carry so easily the heavy stones. He began walking up and down on the bank, turning his head from side to side, growling like a caged lion. And then suddenly he began wading towards them through the stream, uttering long fearful howls.

"I'm a man-eating tiger escaped from the circus," he shouted, "and I'm going to eat you."

Jenny turned clingingly to Mrs. Forbes, who, quite out of patience, started off with her towards home, making no effort to talk. She handed her over to Ellen rather brusquely.

"John's up in the wood," she said; "he wouldn't come when I told him. . . ."

"He's been troublesome all day," said Ellen. "I'm sorry if he's behaving badly with you. . . . Thank you very much for having them."

"I hope he's all right."

"Oh, I'm not anxious about him. He never comes to any harm. Only I'm sorry if he's been a trouble to you. . . ."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Forbes obligingly.

She went away, full of disgust; and, meeting Captain Warren in the village, she warned him that he had better not have the Tyndales to their children's party, as the girl was not quite right, and the boy was the naughtiest she had ever set eyes on.

Ellen and Jenny went into the kitchen. On the table were the two men—Jenny's grey and meagre, with one leg broken short at the knee, John's lively and jovial, the brown crust burst open down the front.

"John's very naughty," said Ellen; "we'll eat his man if he isn't in by supper-time."

Jenny burst out laughing, meaninglessly.

John did not come, and so they each had half of a good man and half of a bad man. When

it was quite dark he marched in with a rather ostentatious and defensive swagger.

"Man eaten, man eaten," sang Jenny.

"You didn't come, John, so we had your man for supper. You can get something for yourself from the pantry, if you want it."

John did not seem to be listening.

"I made such a good dam in the stream," he said; "I left just a very small hole, and the water simply rushes. . . ."

CHAPTER XI
THE PORTRAIT

JOHN grew up to a status of curious unconcern. Ellen was jealous of him, for Jenny. She resented his natural sure touch, both intellectual and practical; and she seemed to like finding out its failures and goading him with them. But she did not pursue or persecute him. She lived now in her anxious care of Jenny, and it was only when he came inside this circle that he was in sight. Beyond, he could do what he pleased.

She sent him to a good Grammar School in the nearest town, and gave him, as he grew older, a suitable allowance, for they were not pinched for money. He came and went as he pleased. He had lodgings in the town during the week, and was generally at home for Saturday and Sunday. But it did not seem to matter if he stayed away; it did not seem to matter if he walked home on Wednesday evening, climbed into his window at midnight, and started at four again for school. It did not matter if he slept in a haystack, or a ditch.

This freedom had been found gradually, of course. Ellen had remonstrated at first with his

irregularity. But she was helpless before his explanations; I just wanted to, he always said; and, though she jeered at him for eccentricity, she knew in her heart that she had no right or reason to insist against him. They both knew, without saying so, that explanations are always consciously or unconsciously faked up. And so, really, though she jeered, it was enough for her that he said, I just wanted to, and she didn't interfere or demand anything else of him. Indeed, hidden in her, apart from their obvious relationship, she had a complete confidence in him, because she recognised how truly he was of her blood; there was, in both of them, something unquestionable.

At school he was rather a hero, but he hardly noticed. If he did, it made him giggle. He didn't give much for being a hero. He was good at games, and he loved the feeling of his body being tense and workable; but he was quite without the competitive and showing-off feelings that make people think a lot of games. So he would play every day for some weeks, and then suddenly give up, so that the captains were all sooner or later enraged with him, and he was not so much admired. This did not affect him.

His school-work was not like a schoolboy's. He had unusual powers of concentration and no shame about using them. He would do nothing for six weeks, then work for fourteen hours at a stretch, and know in the end rather more than anyone else. But he took no interest in the *idea*

of work, the *idea* of scholarship; he just read when he found things he wanted to know about. And if it were something to be seen or heard that he wanted to know about, he would spend the time on that, so that he did a good deal of apparently aimless wandering about the countryside.

Sometimes he was so distant and tiresome that there was nothing to be done but to throw books at his head, or heavy boots. This sent him into furious rages that were somehow delightful. He was good to fight with, strong and quick and supple, and you could hate him in an exact, violent way. Often he was positively silly; everything in the world—people, rooms, the shape of a chimney against the sky—would send him off into giggling laughter. "But what's funny in that?" said the other boys. His blue eyes would waver, he would say, "I suppose nothing," and then the obstinate ridiculous smile would come to his lips again.

He was a difficult friend, because he could never get the idea of how people must come to terms, so as to live together in a sedentary manner. He did not want to be sedentary. Living together was like trying to fit a jig-saw puzzle out of all possible geometric figures. People only endured it by shielding themselves under a strenuous affectation of being hexagons. He preferred to keep himself incalculable, seven-sided. After all, you can never finally calculate yourself for yourself, so what is the sense of

producing an obviously spurious answer for the public? He hated being labelled, and even had a slight feeling of distrust about his Christian name.

He always thought that he would very soon go away from England. He could only know how free he was by going the full length of his freedom. And his passion was for freedom. Not for the *idea* of freedom, but for the practice of it individually. He wanted enormous spaces, geographically and intellectually, to move about in.

He knew himself to be very alone and separate. He was quite without the need to huddle, the pervasive desire that makes most human relationships, even the least intimate, a little close and sweaty. People who were not in possession of themselves often found him uncomfortable; he was too inaccessible and without sympathy. Inaccessible he was, in the sense that, though he could be hurt, and hurt deeply, he could not be harmed. Nothing ever got at him, to harm him, and would not, except by cutting at the root. And he knew this and trusted it, and when he suffered, was not himself subdued or diminished, but bold still, and unpitiful; and this made a distance between him and others. And he was not sympathetic in the usual slightly maudlin sense. He did not want to be poured out on other people, or mixed up with them. And yet he was very sensitive to people's feelings, and, in a curious way, realised people, seeing them a

little transparent, as some very great painters do. But he thought very little about people (they were humiliated very often by his obvious lack of attention); he did not have patterns of them in his mind, or draw conclusions from his immediate knowledge of them. But the immediate knowledge was in him, so that he was kind, not bruising you. Sometimes, when he was angry, he cut cruelly, but he never bruised. And it is from the bruising that we have so much suffered.

Mariella, in intermittent glimpses, watched him grow up. After the war she went back to painting and her dilatory, uneven, dissatisfied life alone. She was not so happy as she had been in the hospital, but she felt that that was a misfire, that she was now more human, more what she really wanted to be. And yet she realised that she would never paint anything worth while now. She was beginning to be dominated by a weakening sense of loss, which had been in her mind, embryonically, she thought, from the earliest time she could remember.

Still, in knowing about John, she was vigorous and alive. She saw him with her eyes emerging from his childhood, like a fine model from clay. She knew about his sensitive mouth, the variable expressiveness of his face, his wild, fair hair, and his straight forehead, with its look of being bent against the wind. She thought he had been born into that freedom which all her struggles had not won for her, and, because she

was in some sense great, she loved it in him, unenvying.

He left school at seventeen. He was still, of course, a statue that the sculptor had not yet finished with. In his movement there was still something coltish and sudden, an uncertainty and violence. Then for a bit Mariella lost sight of him. He was in London, looking at things, and working, and collecting himself, he did not know for what.

A year or so after she met him suddenly in one of the smaller lanes outside the village. He was walking slowly, and she, at her own pace, caught him up. It was a negligible grey day, and he looked somehow blurred and obliterated under the heavy sky.

"Hullo, John!" she said, "you've been away a long time."

He looked round, startled, suddenly smiling, roused suddenly from preoccupation.

"Yes, London, and places."

She saw he was in no mood now for talking, and they walked on together in silence.

Across two fields, a grey rain-dimmed farmhouse was in sight.

Mariella said suddenly:

"Shall we go and see Williams? I like him so much. Perhaps he'd make us forget about the weather . . ."

John did not quite want to. He was so weak under this heavy sky. But he had no volition, and he acquiesced. Mariella went on talking.

“When I first came here, he was quite a young man, very active and strong. Perhaps really about thirty-five; but in his prime, always looking as if this were the best moment of life for him. His wife had died, but he had a daughter he was very fond of. I liked her too. But she wasn't quite full of positive vitality like him. She did, of course, when I think of it, have a tremendous vitality, of a sort. You felt a great force in her mind and character, but it was somehow uneasy, a little agonised. We knew afterwards that she was really ill all the time; and she died in the end of consumption. The people here say that it broke her father's heart. That's not true exactly, because I suppose only flimsy hearts crack up altogether like that, but he does begin to look as old as he is, which he didn't before, and I feel sometimes that he notices her absence continually. But he hasn't lost the good vigour of a hard life in the fields, against the earth. It is as if there was still some mud on his boots, and he hasn't done the irremediable change into bedroom slippers.”

They turned in at the gate. A servant opened the door, and took them straight into the kitchen where the old man sat smoking by the fire. He was quite a particular friend of Mariella's, and happy that she came. She was very glad to be indoors; outside, the world was so ungraspable to-day; and here, in this little room, she could watch John coming back into himself. He did not really notice her interest; but there was some-

thing about her, her nervousness, her bewilderment, her sidelong energy, that had always made him a little withdrawn and unhappy. And so he resisted at first. He wanted to stay in his blotted-out indifference. But he could not do it, the man's easy friendliness conquered him, and he came to life. Over their unimportant conversation his face became ardent and adventurous, even the shape of his body seemed exacter. Mariella noticed for the first time the subtle beauty of his nostril, how finely it curved.

She had a plan to ask if she might paint him. Instead, she asked him to supper with her the following night. They became friendlier. He liked her. A good deal because, though she almost knew the issue was against her, she was still so courageously keeping up the struggle to be alive. At the same time, it was this that made him uncomfortable to be with her. Sometimes, when she said sad things, a look of such extreme sympathetic anguish came into his face, that she wanted to take it all back, tell him it was nothing that mattered really, nothing to be bothered about.

There was a pause, and she said quite suddenly: "Would you let me make a picture of you?"

He looked up, laughing. "I wonder what I should feel like on canvas."

He did not want a picture to be made of him. It made him feel silly, sitting still and being observed. And she saw that he became quite undistinguished, like anybody. So she let him

off sitting for her, and instead, asked him often to come and see her, and afterwards, did curious vivid sketches of the mood in him, which, for the moment, had caught her imagination. She loved these sketches, and lived in them herself.

She meant to complete at least one as a picture. But it was very difficult to decide which. There was one of a look of pain which she could hardly bear, it transported her so with misery. There was another of an intent fiery look, which made her feel her immediate existence quite spilt and futile; and yet, looking at it, in imagination she felt glorious.

He did not like these pictures. They were too intellectual, too prophetic, too precise a reading of him. They made him feel what-he-was-to-be like a burden. She knew herself they were not really good. She thought they were a little too abstract. She had given him too naked a spirit; not caught the complex of brain and nerve and body that makes personality. She had not managed to show him growing; and in that failure there was a kind of death.

Yet when she showed him the pictures (he had not known she was doing them) his expression of baffled childishness made her furious.

She thought she must have been blind or crazy to make him appear so mature. She saw quite clearly now how unformed and unfinished he was, and always would be. She began, satirically, a new drawing. In it he was sitting quite idle,

as he had been at first in the farm-house. He was all idle, his face and body looked, in every detail, uninhabited. He was not there.

Then she tired of wanting to show him up, and began again in oils, on a fairly large canvas. He was walking, taking a stride across it. He looked strong and supple, but a little disjointed and ungainly. His head was turned aside, for she despaired now over painting his face. You could only see the line of his cheek (still fairer and softer than a girl's), and there was a suggestion also, of the flamy way his hair grew off his forehead. He walked in the cold dispersed light of early morning, before the sun is up. There were no distracting decorative colours, no easy symbolism of spring or sunrise, to relieve the bare fact of youth. He was just so young, that she cried once, putting it down on canvas.

She showed it to him, and he laughed out loud. Generally, his lack of interest in projecting himself, had prevented him really seeing himself in the drawings she had done already. But this he certainly recognised, and he laughed out loud. And yet he was secretly unhappy to find himself so held and fixed. And this she knew.

It was the best picture she had ever painted, but she took up her palette knife, and cut it in two with a long jagged slit.

They stood looking at it. The paint a little furrowed up at the edge of the wound, and a white frayed thread or two.

"You needn't have done that," he said; "it

was an awfully good picture." But he was unspeakably relieved.

She knew this, and it made her happy. She was glad also, that he knew how good it had been.

CHAPTER XII
THE SEARCH

SOON after, he had an impulse to hatch out in another country, and went abroad. Very little was heard of him for almost a year. Jenny was now eighteen, and seemed, in her isolated and easy relationship with Ellen, almost normal. Ellen always talked to her very simply, and never gave her anything to do that was difficult or complicated. And they lived quite to themselves. Jenny was easily alarmed by the inexplicable outside world of quick talk, and inquisitive quick glances, and Ellen could not bear her to be subjected to it. Her manner to all outsiders became surly and hostile, but this was not anything in her nature or feeling, only a mode of protection. For she was not hardened, her life with Jenny was sweet and full. She made a place for the girl where she did not seem altogether extraordinary, or wrong. And Jenny had all confidence in this world, and moved in it trustingly. Nobody was harsh to her if she did not understand, or forgot the things she had been asked to do. So she did not know she had forgotten, or that there was anything she should have understood. Her vague blond prettiness

ripened unbruised, at once helpless and intrepid, like a very frail flower, which has only experienced soft weather.

About ten o'clock one evening in the early summer, John came home. He was surprised to find that all the doors of the house were open, as if everybody had run off in a hurry. He walked through the house from front to back, astonished at this strange look in the familiar rooms. Standing at the back door, he saw from the yard the flicker of a swinging lantern, and he walked towards it. His mother, holding the lantern, was opening the upper half-door of the disused stables. She leant over the lower door, stretching out her arm with the lantern, to light the stable within, and she looked anxiously from side to side. This did not satisfy her. She put her hand over and felt for the latch, lifted it with difficulty, for it was wedged with dirt and cobwebs, and opened the door. When John came up, she was peering into one of the loose-boxes. There was in one corner a heap of dry hay. The air was warm and dusty, and still held a very faint old smell of horses.

She heard John coming, and turned eagerly. But there was a disappointment in seeing him.

"What is the matter?" he said anxiously, not trifling over greetings or explanations.

"It's Jenny," said Ellen, "I've lost her. She went out such a long time ago, this morning, and she's not come back. I was hoping she'd perhaps be about the place, asleep, or forgetting to

come in to supper; so I've looked all over. But she isn't there. And I don't like to call for her, except quietly, for fear people should hear, and wonder. But now I don't know what to do."

"We must look further off," said John, "she may have gone quite far since morning."

They looked at each other hopelessly; feeling the hopelessness of looking for her, two of them alone, through the dark and limitless country. They were held by the old unwillingness to admit anyone else. Even John felt it, though he was himself only admitted secondarily, because Ellen needed him for the search. He had no part, for himself, in the situation. In that, for Ellen, there was only Ellen and Jenny. Ellen having lost Jenny.

"We must tell somebody," said John. "I am afraid we must tell somebody."

"Perhaps she's lost her memory, and doesn't know where to come home to. I wonder if we could find out anything from the police."

"Shall we look once more? She's very likely somewhere about, and we don't want to make an alarm unless it's hopelessly necessary."

"We will do that," said Ellen, in momentary relief. She gave John the lantern, and went into the house. She looked again into every room, calling very softly and tenderly.

John looked through all the barns and stables and lofts. But he came upon nothing but old harness, and empty bottles, and sacking, and

garden tools. Then he searched the garden, and the shrubbery, but in them there was nothing to find but the heavy damp night-green, and sudden surprises of twigs cracking under his feet, and the sudden touch of leaves, and swinging branches, on the hands and face. He looked in anxiety across the fields, straining his eyes, searching with baffled sight the darkness, and the almost indistinguishable pallid ridges of night-mist.

When he got back, Ellen was at the door, shielding a candle with her hand, and calling. He could not look at her. In this, he was so much less than she was. She laid her hand on his arm, taking him impersonally; he was her instrument, for use. And yet she spoke to him with entreaty as well as command.

“What shall we do?”

He could not take her command. He said: “What had we better do? What do you think is best?”

“I must stay here,” said Ellen decidedly, “she may come back, and then I must be here. And we had better—I think we had better now—telephone to the police; perhaps it would be best to telephone straight to the town, then we’d be sure of getting somebody. And then, perhaps there’d be some men in the village who’d help you to look. . . .”

“I’ll telephone first from the post office . . .”

“That would be best, there’s a new girl keeping it now, quite young she is. I think she’d

be quicker at it than Miss Thomas" (Ellen had a moment of satisfaction in thinking that her instruments were good). "That's all. You'd better be going at once."

It was past midnight, and the village had been asleep for more than two hours. As John walked down into it, it seemed quite unwakable. He felt powerless against sleep, and darkness. And the lost girl, so small and blurred in the darkness, seemed lost indeed. It was strange to have come home to this. He felt unreal, as if it might all have been made up, like a paper-chase. Yet he was taking part in it. He was surprised to find himself taking part in it. He was himself so without hope, he moved only like the instrument of Ellen's will. He was negative and empty (so taken by surprise), and only occupied and moved by Ellen's will in him, to find her daughter.

He remembered that, in old Miss Thomas's time, he had seen lights in the side upstairs window. So he walked round into the garden, and threw up at it handful after handful of earth and pebbles.

The moon had not yet risen, but there began to be in the air a faint dispersed moon-glow that made the project of finding the girl seem not so hopeless. He threw harder, again and again, very straight at the window. The pebbles and loose earth made a little clatter against the glass, and fell echoingly. Suddenly, he heard a movement in the downstairs room by which he stood,

and he saw the face of a girl lifted whitely behind water-dark glass. She immediately opened the window, and leaned out.

"What is it?" she said, "what do you want?"

"May I come and use the telephone?" he said. "I've got to telephone to the police, because somebody is lost . . ."

"Wait a minute," she said, shutting the window, and moving away. In a minute he heard her unbolting the door of the post office, and he walked round to it. She was standing by the telephone, and had already taken off the receiver.

"I'll get through for you," she said.

They had to wait a long time before there was any answer from the next exchange. John began to explain.

"I've been away, but I expect you know my sister, and my mother, who live at the Old Rectory. It's my sister now, who's suddenly disappeared, and we don't know where or how, only my mother says she's been away since morning."

The girl remembered what she had seen of Ellen and Jenny going about together, and could say nothing.

"We have looked for her near at hand," said John, in the long gaps of waiting, "but now I must get some other people and look further. In that time, she may have gone so far."

A sleepy and exasperated voice at last answered Cathie's impatient ringing, and she asked for the

Overfield exchange. After this interruption came another long pause.

She said at last, "Hadn't you better go and wake some of the men, and leave me to the telephoning? I can explain it to them all right."

So John went out again. But now he felt the sleep of the village less spellbound and invincible. When he knocked violently on the first door, at once almost a neighbour looked out to see what was the matter, and after the quick explanation, volunteered his help. Then a woman called down from an upper window, and immediately went back to waken her husband and her eldest son. And then the news spread, and the village was roused suddenly and quickly like paper catching fire. Soon there were lights burning in many of the windows, and a little group began to muster in the road. Some of the women were there, but they kept apart, to themselves, knowing there was no activity in this for them, it was a man's job.

(Ellen, the centre, the impulse, sat at home. There was nothing for her to do, but wait. And yet the men, struggling sleepily into their clothes, and drawing together, shadowy, with anxious questions, were only expressing her activity. Her thought sent them out.)

A car came sweeping towards the village. They could see its headlights intermittently on the curves of the road. A young man and woman, very lately married, were driving home

from a dance. They drew up suddenly at this bewildering sight of a whole village astir.

"What's up?" said the man.

James Todd, the carter, came over and talked to them quietly, so that John should not hear too much.

"There's a girl lost," he said, "the daughter of Mr. Tyndale, who was Rector here before he was killed in the war. She's not quite right, poor thing, but nobody says much about it. She lives quite quietly with her mother; and he's her brother over there. This morning, no, yesterday morning, was the last time she was seen, and now we're going out to look for her. We're thinking that maybe she's lost her memory, or been taken bad somewhere . . ."

The girl looked up at her husband. Their own existence seemed snapped off quite suddenly and finally.

"Of course we'll stay, Richard, and see if we can do anything," she said.

"We must, of course. Perhaps the car will come in useful."

Everybody was silent all at once, listening to a quick light footstep, in the darkness, along the road.

"What's that?" said the women to each other. It was a woman's footstep, and some of them had a hope that perhaps it was Jenny herself.

"It's Cathie Johnson, from the post office," said the publican's daughter, peering out at her.

Cathie went immediately to the group of men.

In this she was active and important and of their party.

"I got through to the police," she said, "and a man's coming along at once on a motor-cycle. But they haven't heard anything of her, I'm afraid. I rang up the Manor too; and the gardener and the chauffeur will be down here soon."

Richard Inglesant got out of the car, and the group of men began to prepare a plan. But there was over them an air of uncertainty and hesitation; and they were much relieved when the party from the Manor came, and included not only the chauffeur and the gardener, but Captain Warren himself. Captain Warren had brought a large-scale map of the estate, and with this, and the Inglesants' road-map, he divided and allotted the work.

"Miss Johnson must stay at the post office. That's all right. I don't quite know if it's worth getting out my car, because we ought first to do a detailed search of the immediate district, don't you think? along the river, and over the common, and so on. And yet it would be useful to have the car for transport, and keeping us in touch with each other."

"I could take this car," Priscilla Inglesant interrupted.

"You'll have to have somebody with you," said Richard.

"I'm not the least frightened, and it seems a bit of a waste of one of the men to be just driving

about in a car, when he could be so much more useful otherwise."

"That's true," said Captain Warren thoughtfully.

"I'd go," said Cathie Johnson.

"No use I'm afraid; you'll have to be by the telephone."

"What about Miss Dalby? She'd go, I know."

This seemed a good idea, and Cathie was immediately sent off to waken Mariella. The policeman arrived, approved the plans, and the search-party began to disperse.

"I'm taking your husband back to the Manor with me, for some less elegant clothes," said Captain Warren to Priscilla. "I'll look out something for him, and then we'll start out in the Austin, and leave it in a ditch at the corner of our beat. . . ."

In the village, everything was movement and hurry and excitement. Ellen, at the Rectory, was quite quiet and alone. And yet she was powerfully present in their minds at every moment. It was all for her. Even Priscilla, who did not know her, was wholly occupied with the thought of her, making an image of her from the wispy sentences she had heard that night. She sat alone in the car, and the men scattered, in twos and fours. Soon Mariella came, and they started off, driving very slowly, looking from side to side. The whole village was deserted. Only Cathie sat beside her fire, and from time

to time put on a log; and Ellen still moved from room to room, keeping a candle burning in every window. And she was miserable with anxiety, but glad to think how her anxiety was going out into the furthest lanes and obscurest country nooks. It was almost as if it were her eyes which were searching so widely and so minutely through the thin moony darkness.

Two women went up from the village to tell her what had been done, and to wait with her. But, without exactly telling them to go, she had sent them away, and all night she was alone. All night little lamps and torches twinkled erratically over the countryside, sending their little beams down long paths and wide slopes, and against thick tangled hedges. And the glaring eyes of the cars moved slowly and smoothly along the highways.

In the early morning, Mariella and Priscilla Inglesant picked up many members of the search-party from various points and took them back to the village. Everybody had an air of paleness and dejection. Nothing had been found. Their inquiries in the outlying villages did not so much as produce news of her from the day before.

Mariella went immediately to Ellen. Ellen knew from her face that there was nothing, and for a moment neither spoke.

"There is no news," said Mariella gently.

"No."

"Will you come back with me and have some breakfast?"

"No."

"But you must eat something, there is no sense in starving yourself."

"There is no need yet," said Ellen. "I must stay here. And I will do for myself."

The two women went back to the cottage. Priscilla looked uncomfortable and bedraggled in her evening clothes. Mariella lent her a jersey. They had no feeling for each other. They were considerate and distant, like polite people who have happened to travel from London to Penzance in the same railway carriage. They had no curiosity about each other; participation in the same enterprise was everything there was between them; and they talked of this, or not at all.

The coffee was still hot when Richard Ingle-sant and Captain Warren came back. Between them was the same distance, the same useful companionableness. Richard had a curious elegant grace and beauty, which fatigue, and the loose heavy clothes he wore, emphasised. It was this mostly, that Priscilla had loved him and married him for, and for a flash of time, she was so moved by it, that she had to pull him down beside her, and kiss him, and smooth his ruffled hair a little. But she was too tired to care really, and she was almost indifferent when she said:

"Are you terribly exhausted, darling? You'll feel better after breakfast. Miss Dalby and I have made some really marvellous coffee."

"I suppose, nothing?" said Mariella to Captain Warren.

"Hardly anything. I heard at the post office, though, that a message had come through from the police. There's a man up Overfield way, who says he saw her late last night, crossing the corner of the heath, where the pond is. He shouted to her, thinking she'd lost her way perhaps, but she took no notice. It must have been her, we think; though where she's got to now, heaven knows."

It was an innocent and transparent morning. John, walking homewards from his stretch of well-searched country, wondered over it, and their multiple anxious activity. And yet the force of this anxiety was so strong in him, that it was difficult to relax, and come home. He thought that perhaps she might be at home, discovered, like the world, in daylight. He walked quickly and expectantly in the fresh tense delicate morning.

The sun rose brightly. To the east the country was all golden; to the west the hills were vague blue and purple, and mist lay heavy in the valleys. The dew hung lightly under long shadows, and long vivid flails of light. A bank of clouds slid along the eastern horizon, and swelled blackly, under the sun. And then suddenly, as if with a rush and a fall, the yellow sun sank in it, and hung there, round and white and deathly. John shivered, and rubbed his cold hands together. They looked white also, and unliving.

They came to the village, and were told that nothing had been heard. As they crossed the bridge, they saw that the pool below it was being dragged, and they stayed to look, while the nets were pulled up.

"I don't feel as if we could find so much as her dead body," said John, mostly to himself.

"Don't lose heart," said the other, "we'll find her yet." But he did not believe it.

They separated, and John went back to Ellen. She was sitting now quietly by the fire, but her will was not exhausted or defeated. She seemed indomitable, as if she must find what she sought. John stood a minute watching her, his mouth drawn sideways in distress. All night, while he had been working for her, his spirit had yet been strange and separate and distant; now suddenly he felt her child. He came over to her, and, as if to attract her attention, touched softly her folded hands.

"We will find her," he said. "We must find her. That is the way things must be."

"Yes," she answered, absorbed. Then her eyes turned to him, and she said, gently pressing his hand,

"You have been a good boy, John."

They were both happy for this moment. Afterwards at once, she was dragged back again to her anxiety. She sat muted; and John, forgotten again, left her.

At two o'clock Cathie came running from the post office to say that Jenny was found, and that

Captain Warren was bringing her back in his car. Ellen, for the first time, broke down, and cried, with slow, quiet heart-breaking sobs. Cathie held her very close, as you do children, and stroked her hair. But Ellen hardly noticed she was being comforted. She cried as she must, and then it was over, and she began immediately to make everything ready for Jenny. Cathie stayed for a few minutes, in case she should be wanted to help, and by and by Ellen asked her, suddenly, but in a voice that showed the question had been some time in her mind:

"How was she?"

"They said she was quite happy. She walked into Brussels as if nothing had happened, but her shoes are worn through, and her feet are sore, as if she had gone very far. That was what they told me. And they asked her what she had done, and where she had been, but she wouldn't say anything . . ."

"Poor little Jenny," said Ellen. "I wish she were home."

Cathie went back to the post office. It was so awful that she cried herself a little, as she went. Her breath came caught and strangled by this sorrow from outside.

About half an hour after, the car went past. Jenny got home so exhausted that she could hardly speak. Captain Warren carried her at once upstairs, and Ellen put her to bed. It was such joy to Ellen to have her again, to be able again to wash her, and brush her hair, that she

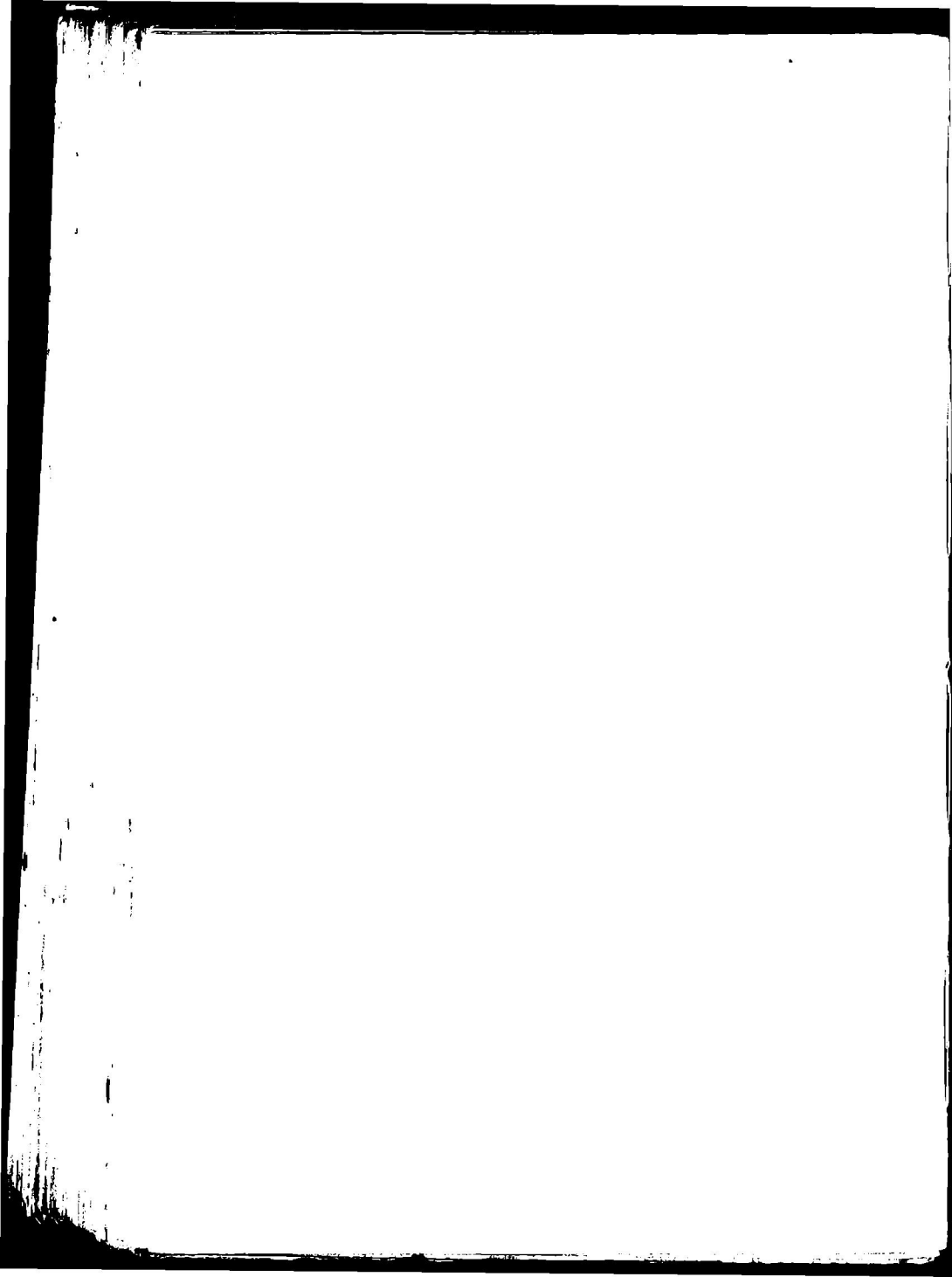
even felt a kind of jealousy of Captain Warren for having carried her, and she was almost unhappy that her poor sore feet had been dressed before she came. She did everything slowly and piously, like ritual; and Jenny only laughed and moaned, and could tell her nothing.

In the evening, the doctor came. He took little notice of her scratches and bruises, but spent a long time in general examination, and in conversation with her. Ellen had not thought of the possibility of Jenny's being still taken from her. So it was the horror of a new thought, and not relief from an old one, when he told her that the girl would very likely never be so bad again, and could safely be left in her charge.

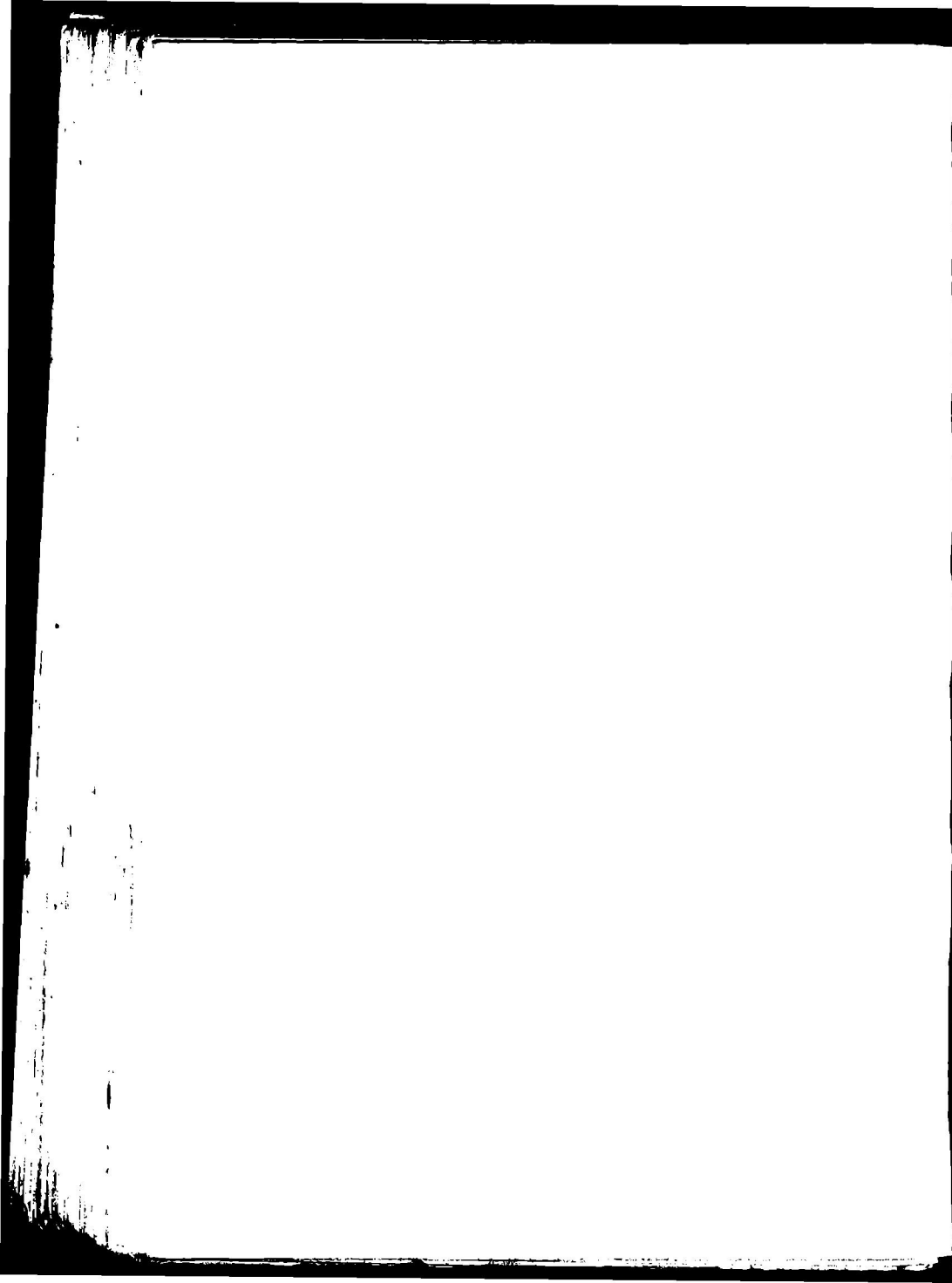
From that time her attitude to the world, the village, was even more hostile and defensive. The people who had been most kind and active in the search were now the ones she most distrusted. They knew too much. Her life with Jenny was closer than ever, each moment was a responsibility. She must make again this safe closed world for her. And in the first few days she looked often at Jenny, wondering, wanting to regain her, entirely, in the old way. She wanted to control, and make altogether, this other life, and there was at first an uneasiness in her, because there was now one terrifying and incalculable break in it. She was uneasy, as if her own hand, through weakness or disease, had acted against her consciousness.

Yet she did not know what she was afraid of,

and Jenny herself was tranquil and satisfied. So that Ellen began to feel that she perhaps succeeded in making a safe and happy life for her; that the crack was momentary and negligible, and would soon be forgotten.



PART IV



CHAPTER XIII
ANOTHER BEGINNING

CATHIE JOHNSON had been at the post office just under a year; at first with Miss Thomas, and then, after her death, alone. It was not at all the kind of life she had expected or prepared herself for; but she had come to it gladly, and found herself happy in it.

She had been educated at a good secondary school. She was on the whole more practical than intellectual, and yet, with intervals of crass stupidity, she appeared intelligent above the average. At school, however, she felt a persistent irrelevancy in all she was given to do. Much of it seemed really beyond her. She could generally do it so as to escape reproof; but no better; she hardly knew what she was doing. Much was easy and at once uninteresting. Rarely she came to something that, with a sudden awakening of pleasure, she felt was to do with her. But then it was always snatched away too soon. And yet she was quite absorbed in this school. Her home was faint. All the time she talked about what the other girls had done and what the mistresses had said, or turned it

slowly round inside her mind. She made school into a kind of cocoon, which kept her inaccessible to her parents, and the children, and all their friends, and the menacing armies of people who pass one in the street.

Yet even within this limitation she could not make herself one life. Her adolescence was inconsequent and uneven. There were times when she went as if in a pale mist, where the horror of *not touching anything* numbed her in suspended anguish; where she trembled with a chill paralytic pain, conscious of nothing but the secret withdrawal of her spirit.

More often she was all outward, she moved in bright sunlight, where everybody had a metallic exactitude of look and character. And she became so herself. She was insensitive, regardless, brutal. In her form she was a force and a leader, always followed and generally admired. She thrust herself into continual action, talking, or playing, or working, or constructing things, or tormenting people. A new mistress was almost driven from the school by her ingenious malice. She did not realise how fragile it all was, how haphazard its connection with Cathie's own nature or character. But, luckily for herself, she found out in time, and with very little trouble cracked all the troublesomeness to pieces. Cathie went to nothing in her hands, a froth of remorse and submission. And so again lost herself. But the outward life went on, in the effort of games, and conversation, and competitive work.

She knew no experience between these two extremes; and she felt them both as contradictions of herself. She did not think of this, rationalising it, but this was the dissatisfaction that was always near the core of her feeling. And at the same time she forced herself further and further in these two modes of living, experiencing in these extremely, because she knew no other modes. For there was nothing else. Either the life seeped out of her, as if there were some inward drain, or else it fixed itself so on the outside things that it seemed all given away. And this last was by far the most frequent; she was then happy, and generally companionable, and full of activity, but she did not belong to herself. And then this fair weather would be broken by swift storm-floods of hysteria, which always took her by surprise, because she did not think about the submarine earthquake forces of mental and physical development. They had no direct issue into her consciousness. They tore the seabottom into huge fissures, and piled it in fantastic tottering sea-mountains. But miles above, the surface was smooth and idle in the sun, and there was nothing to show for it but these incalculable tidal waves, swelling with terror and disturbance up immeasurably distant rivers.

After she left school she did a short training in a secretarial college, and went into an office. There the work was not interesting, but again engrossing. She felt a personal pride in the batch of letters that went off at the end of the

day. But this was not herself. She was acting galvanically, as if the source of her life were cut off, as if she were separated from her unconscious life, of breathing, and the flow of blood. In the evening, when she came away, there was always a struggle to get back to it, as if she had been almost suffocated, almost drowned, and could only resume herself with pain and difficulty. And she began to have inklings of what self it was that she wanted to resume. Her centre and resource was now in an intense responsive and perceptive life which was beginning to develop in her. She exposed herself to the weather, and the turn of the seasons began to be like something in her blood. Her work had started in the summer, and her bus to town raced through London under a raving morning sky, extreme and ardent white and blue. It was intensely hot, but the earlier summer had been mild and variable, and the parks were still thick green. Autumn came suddenly, the time when, with long gentle strokes, men sweep the leaves together. All over London, in the parks, and the gardens, and along the pavements, they were sweeping, sweeping up the leaves. And when she looked down into the little squares and oblongs of London gardens, she saw the little mounds of leafy bonfires, with smoke streaming sidelong, or whirled round in a spiral on the turn of the wind.

From such things she drew virtue. Her senses were all greedy, on her morning's ride, fearing that she might not have enough to last

her through the day. But she did not keep this treasure in her memory as images, to be taken out and looked at; it was as unthought of as food gone down into her stomach. And she was surprised at herself when one day she noticed from her high-up office room how shinily yards below the sun was reflected from a gold-lettered shop-window on to the pavement. Gaudy yellow it came from the letters, white from the glass.

Generally, during working hours, she thought of nothing but the mechanism of filing, and copying, and infinite useless correspondence. At first she hated the dirt and the squalor. Especially the Ladies' cloak-room, with a cracked basin, and only the cold tap working, and the lavatory behind such a thin wooden partition, was horrible. And she resented the friendliness of the girls from other offices that you met in there. But even that she got used to. And she got quite facile with the other girls. ('Have you had your holiday? you didn't have much weather. Pity it wasn't now.') But she was swamped by the babble of girls in her own office. They were so suave and competent, and knowing, and elegantly dressed. She was never quite one of them. Sometimes they seemed to receive her, recognising in her a human companionableness which was lacking in each other. And she responded, turned to them in spirit, warm and pliant and open. But they always drew back again together, giggling and trifling. Yet this intimacy, so formidable against her, was easily

put off; as soon as the telephone went, or one of the men came in, there they were again, like elegant machines, tidy and shining. Cathie was never able to make quite such an immediate recovery, but if she kept to the one level of routine work, she could be as good at it as they were. And this she did. She reserved herself, not for her home (that was just a small house in a long road where she slept, and helped to get the breakfast, and looked after the other children), but for the morning and evening's ride.

She watched people also, as well as the sky and the colour of the leaves. But more distantly. She observed them merely, and there was no relationship. She was just passing in a bus. Once, for instance, she saw two workmen fighting at a street corner. They sprang, hitting out at each other's faces. She felt a smile of curious satisfaction curve her lips, and she turned to see what the other people looked like. For a moment this same inhuman smile was on all of them, as if for a moment it took them by surprise. Then off with a flick. That was all.

For lunch she went to various cheap little shops, where she had eggs, or welsh rarebit, and a roll without butter. These places were dark and sometimes smelt, but the food of its kind was good. And so were the people who came in. At least, they were of some kind or another, definitely; not like the people in Lyons' or A.B.C.'s, who seem to be of no kind, like the huge orange fruits that the flower-sellers put on

barberry stems in winter, when there is a scarcity of real flowers. Cathie was no kind yet, more nothing than most of the people she didn't like to sit opposite to at lunch, but she was drawn to the men and women in the little shops. They were poorer than she was, and she thought that it was perhaps for this reason that they seemed to have a nearer contact with real things. She never spoke to them, but this reality, she decided, you could easily see in their faces.

One day she went to a sweet and tobacco shop, where Luncheons and Teas were served in a room behind. She ordered for herself a boiled egg, and bread and butter, and tea. While she was waiting, there was a sudden confusion of talk and laughter, and a group of some ten or twelve young soldiers came in, and distributed themselves round the tables. The room was immediately full of them, thick with a kind of coarse vitality. Cathie was alarmed, and looked quickly and furtively round from one to the other. They seemed to be taking no notice of her, and talked scrappily to each other, leaning together, and shaking with immense communal laughter, like a herd under one impulse. She dared not look again. She did not know if she was afraid of their herd-force, regardless trampling hooves that would thunder over her if she happened to lie in their path; or shrank from the menace of their virility. For she did not know if they were aware of her; she sat trembling with inexplicable dread. There was nowhere to look. There

seemed no spaces between them where her eyes might rest. Once or twice she saw momentarily a red stupid face clutched in stupid laughter. Nothing but laughter. And she was afraid. Afraid of their regardless laughter, of a sightless force nullifying her, regardlessly sweeping her away. And yet afraid that on some unvisited plane, beyond sight and words, they were wholly conscious of her, and menacing. The shop girl, moving easily between the tables, quickly and easily responding to their easy familiarity, brought in her food. It was a relief to have something to do. With deliberate, artificial exactitude she cut off the top of her egg, and put a lump of sugar in her tea. But she was clumsy with self-consciousness, and felt that she betrayed herself by a too intent look of concentration. And she could not till the end hold back her panic. Her resistance gave, and shamelessly she gulped the last few mouthfuls. The room was wide and fearful to cross, like a universe of cruel flames, exposing and scorching her. She was laid bare to it. But somehow she plunged over to the door. Her reserve had been forced, but there were shreds of it still left to muffle and protect her. Gathering it to her, like a nymph surprised by satyrs, she ran into the street. There as she walked indifferently down main roads of shops and offices, and side-alleys, among all the sordid muddle of the back-doors of commerce, her panic left her. She lapsed from the simple intense emotion to a mood of questioning and restless

shame. She hoped so much they had none of them noticed the power they had had against her. She would almost die if she thought they had known it, or so much as suspected. Endlessly she tormented herself, that evening and the next. But soon the memory was overlaid by the engrossing business of work from day to day.

But she had been more deeply affected by these men than by any others that she had ever met or seen. Sexually, she was indifferent to the office men. Like her, they were in the machine; and in this connection, no more like human beings than she was. The gossip of the other girls about them passed over her. She did not care in the least whether they were faithful to their wives or not. Secretly, she felt it an absurdity that they should have wives at all. And when the other girls boasted, in a falsely-joking, falsely-censuring way, of the advances they made to them, it all seemed quite ethereal, as if nothing had ever really happened, beyond this giggle in the telling. She could not really feel they were male, but some hybrid sex of worker. And for this reason she was able to treat them simply, and do work for them without strain or confusion.

Then one day she was sent for by one of them to take down a letter. This was all part of the usual routine, and she went in quite capable and decisive and unalive. She sat down quickly in the chair beside his desk, and, as he began to dictate, concentrated altogether on his sentences,

and the short-hand presentation. In a minute or two, as his custom was, he got up, and began to pace about the room. He went on dictating evenly, without a break, and she hardly noticed that he had moved. She was quite still. Only her right hand drove the pencil with incredible speed across the paper, and her left from time to time flicked over the pages. She was used to receiving this bodiless voice from the desk, the door, the window; from opposite her forehead, from behind the back of her neck. It was like a thin electric stream from the unsubstantial air, flowing into her, and down her fingers, materialising in the queer pencil-signals on her block.

The voice was coming from behind her, from the air above her head. Then suddenly, she felt a pressure of hands on her shoulder. They seemed huge grasping hands, and as if her shoulders were narrow and brittle between them. They made small soft furtive movements, negligible caresses, and yet they were powerful over her, and grasping. A shudder went darkly over her. But she could not move. She was all suspended. She did not even put to herself the connection of the hands with the voice. They existed for her in a different reality. Even now, not wholly incompatible because it was hardly concerned, the voice went evenly and strangely on. And still with horrible galvanic precision she wrote in these fantastic symbols the words it said. Slowly, meanwhile, with negligible soft

movements, the broad possessive hands, the prying fingers, pushed nearer to her small virgin breasts. Across the collar of her blouse they leapt crouching on her tremulous skin. Then she could not support any longer this unseen, unrealised danger. She sprang to her feet, and turned to it. But she was not freed that way. Like a darkness, he took her in his arms. But she struggled, and ducked her head, and fought silently, her cheek against his waistcoat. And so suddenly, he let her go. She was again taken by surprise, and leaned against the desk, trying to prevent her tears. She looked at him, and found that he was quite an ordinary person, and wondered what had made him seem so terrific, like all the world at once.

"Well, it's certainly not worth all *that* fuss," he said.

Then to her surprise, he smiled quite pleasantly. He seemed neither piqued nor embarrassed.

"I'm sorry," he said easily, "but you needn't be nervous. It won't ever happen again. Look here, sit down a minute if you like, and I'll get you some water."

He brought her a glass, and watched her rather solemnly, as with difficulty she drank. She was quite amazed at what an ordinary young man he was. There was something simple and childish in the way he sat there, watching her drink. Then he began to be anxious.

"Do you feel better?" he said.

"Yes." But she did not move.

"You're sure you're all right?"

"Yes, thank you, it's made me feel a lot better."

"Because, you see, perhaps if you feel up to finishing that letter, it would be better to get it done as soon as we can. People may get wondering what's happened to us."

So he turned into a voice again, a thin pure stream of sound. Now from the window, now from the door. And she forgot altogether how he had been a fear and a darkness to her, and almost forgot what a nice consoling creature he had turned to afterwards. But she never saw much of him again. One of the other typists repeated how she had heard him say, "Oh, not Miss Johnson; I can't stand a girl who's scared of me. Send me one who looks as if she could find her way home in the dark . . ."

"But of course," the girl added reflectively, "it's not always home you want to get to."

Cathie was used to this kind of joke, and laughed quite happily. They meant very little to her, but she could make them herself, and knew the formulæ. It was a fashion to talk as if one was not virtuous, and she was herself verbally not very much less convincing than the others. They were all such young things, hard and smooth outside before they had grown. Frozen buds. She was less developed, but not yet so finished. She was not done for the way they were.

By Christmas she had established herself

among them. They talked about clothes and cosmetics, in the intervals of work, and got on quite easily, accepting each other, whether working or gossiping. There was no particular friendship, but they produced together an atmosphere of easy friendliness, which made the office a bearable place to work in.

Cathie was happy. In most ways she was leading an adult self-responsible life. She was untroubled. Anything that came to her she took simply, and generally with enjoyment. The conflicts and puzzles of her earlier life disappeared. She did not even remember them as possible experiences. Now everything seemed simple. She forgot how the expectation of love had previously tormented her. How it had twisted in her mind, during the last year or so of school, and she had been ashamed to acknowledge it. For at school there was a convention that sex must be thought, not horrible or shocking, as some of their parents had suggested, but simply boring; and Cathie had not the courage to bring up a subject to which everyone was so strenuously paying no attention.

Now, in this company, her conversation was of very little else. But the conversation was apart from her, simply a means of passing spare moments, or of consolidating her relationship with the girls themselves. To all other things she was awake and ardent for living. And her life seemed full of these other things, altogether satisfying. But sometimes, when she was off

her guard and leaving herself alone, the look of a lost orphan child came over her face. This she was unaware of.

And it seldom happened. Generally, she was giving out, or taking too eagerly to feel the slightest wistful consciousness of how she stood. She had many new friends, and there never seemed time to see them as often as she wanted. She made clothes for herself, and her little sisters, and constructed furniture out of packing-cases for her room. Whenever she had money she went to the theatre, in the pit or gallery; and she developed a taste also for the British Museum and the London picture-galleries. It was an indiscriminate collection, but for the moment what she wanted.

One Saturday she went by herself to the Tate Gallery. It was her favourite gallery, because of the modern pictures, which she could feel immediately, without the elaboration of herself into a recondite 'artistic' mood, such as was necessary for the Old Masters.

She knew by now exactly what she wanted to see, and went quickly through the first rooms. She was not looking at the pictures, but casually at the people. At the corner, in the Blake room, to which she had as yet paid little attention, her interest was caught by a curious movement among the spectators. A man who had been looking at the pictures, was now looking downwards at the floor, and the people who stood on it were uncomfortably edging away. They

had not noticed, before, the mosaic of Blake's design, and beside their original impulse to get out of his light, they had also a feeling of shame at having so blindly overlooked it, and were all drawing back to see what it was they had missed. But Cathie looked at the man from whom this wave of movement started. Behind his apparent concentration she thought he was amusedly alive to their observation, and noticed their quick furtive efforts to look as if they had of course known of it all the time, and had only just remembered. He looked up, and saw she was laughing, and at that moment she recognised him as a client of the firm she worked for.

"Had you noticed it before?" he said.

"No, I've not looked at this room very carefully."

"It's worth it, but"—he looked down at her candid untroubled eager face—"of course there isn't any hurry. Do you come here often?"

"Yes, fairly often."

"What do you come to see then?"

She had a twinge of fear for her taste, but hardly hesitated.

"There's some in the end room" (she did not like pronouncing French names), "and one about the Resurrection over there, and some of the statues . . ."

They passed unseeing through the Turner room, withdrawn in talk. (A man was examining the pigments through a microscope.)

He said, "Do any of the other girls in your office come to a place like this?"

"Oh, I shouldn't think so."

"Then you don't know them so very well?"

"Oh, I know them quite well, but they do other sorts of things. . . ."

They stopped in front of a Gauguin. At one time he had had a reproduction of it in his rooms, and had come to hate in the end its nerve-racking luxuriance, a morbid, tropical profusion which gave no peace to your eyes, or your nerves, or your heart. But Cathie stood enraptured.

"You like it?"

"Yes. There's such strength. Simply pushing out."

"But don't you think it's . . . unconsidered. I mean, for that reason, not the very greatest kind of strength?"

"I think it is better to be strong than to be considered," said Cathie, surprised at herself for finding such neat words, as she had never talked on such subjects before. "Don't you think," she went on, "that most people seem a little tired?"

"And do you feel a need for this raw kind of nourishment?"

"Well, I'm not tired, of course, but I like things that are awfully alive, and the ones that aren't raw get cooked too much sometimes, and there aren't any vitamins left."

She immediately felt this all a silly extravagance, and ended gauchely:

"Oh, well, I like it, anyway."

But she was not afraid of disagreements, and felt they got on well in spite of them. Really, she hardly noticed him. She thought about the pictures, and did not mind, except for separate moments, what he thought, of them or her.

She told him she had a reproduction of Van Gogh's Sunflowers in her room at home. This also he was a little tired of seeing about, but now it began to seem fresh and new again.

"Do you know any others besides the ones they've got here?"

"One or two I've seen."

"There's a book of reproductions, black and white, but you get the movement. Would you like to see it sometime? I've got it at home."

"Thank you very much. I should like that awfully."

He happened to be lonely that afternoon, and did not want to leave her. He was pleased with her alertness, and her stripling independence. She seemed as brave and as individual as a young birch tree. He wanted to explore what she was like, and what direction she was going in.

They walked along the Embankment and up to the Strand for tea. He led her on to talk, and found in all she said, a quick observation, and a half-educated native wit that delighted him. He could not bear to let her go. And so they arranged to meet the next Saturday, and then the next again; and soon it turned into a regular custom.

One of the girls saw her out with him, and then it went round the office that she had a boy. It was not as they thought, but she did not mind any of the things they said. She did not feel that she wanted a lover. He was her friend, and a friend was what she needed. She felt as if she had never talked before, as if all her conversations with other people had been games, or exercise, or display, nothing to do with her. And now, through some freedom that this man gave her, she was discovering the whole universe, and herself besides.

He was puzzled to know why he went to so much trouble over her. He would not have believed two such people to be mutually accessible. They were separated by fifteen years in age and by several centuries in education. Intellectually, she was a parvenue, having to acquire what he had absorbed in infancy. Socially she was not even that. His friends would never argue and quarrel about her as they did about the new rich, hating them, and accepting, and still trying to excuse their acceptance, of what was obviously an established fact. Cathie they would gently and invincibly neglect.

Yet, at this time, she was more valuable to him than his easier and more appropriate friends. He thought she made them all seem glib and trite. But more probably it was not at first any special charm in her that kept his interest alive, but his own pleased sense of importance, in her awakening and liberation. But this gradually

gave way to a less directive interest. It was a delight also to approach and discover her personality, the essence of her nature; and this she let him do, giving him all the openness of friendship, unfolding petal after petal. She accepted him without difficulty or hesitation. But there was no movement outward, he had no personal interest, only the immense value of his qualities, his knowledge, his experience; she did not realise him as a person, or feel a curiosity to approach him, but only the easy welcoming happiness of freedom, welcoming what comes to it through the dazzling morning sunlight.

He was only on the edge of this knowledge, and never thought of it in connection with his sudden little rages against her, when he rebuked or mocked at her for trivial things, like going about without a hat. He was also disproportionately ill-tempered when she was in the least late in meeting him.

She received his reproofs in a humble spirit, for she admired him, and believed that he was always, in the nature of things, right; but she did not remember to act by them for very long. She was wretched if she thought she had annoyed or hurt him, but in a vague humanitarian way. And she was not sensitive to his moods, as he was to hers; she seemed always surprised when they thrust up at her, as if she had hardly suspected him of human feelings. So it was no wonder if he sometimes felt cheated, and took miserably his trivial revenges.

It is surprising, however, how seldom these unrecognised climaxes came. Perhaps the planation was that his temperament had always been rather reflective than active, and he did not often feel uneasy in a withdrawn and secondary position. He was willing almost always, like someone who is teaching a child to walk, to have no interests or concerns or directions of his own. You do not even have children's reciprocal attention, because they must think only of what they are doing.

So Cathie ranged through some interesting corners of the universe.

CHAPTER XIV
INFANT LOVE

THEY sat together after tea in the kind amber firelight. Cathie felt mellow and complete, gathered, as if she had just finished some huge work. (Yet all she had done was to toast the bread; she had suffered nothing beyond burning her cheeks.) They talked vaguely, gently unravelling the shreds and wisps of thought that the summer daylight puts out like stars.

Suddenly he was harsh and rebellious. He got up and went over to the window, and leant there in black outline.

"Some day, dear child," he said sardonically, "you will have to put away the playthings."

She turned wanly to him, and the pale outside light. She could not see his face, and nothing suggested to her that he spoke from his own feelings; for the moment he represented only the threat against her from the outside world, coming to her in his voice. This he saw in the alarmed eyes, and soft quivering mouth that she turned towards him.

"Do you have to lose," she said, "a lot?"

He could not bear the unformed touching

beauty of her face; and turned away in harsh profile against the window.

"Some things. You just have to begin choosing for yourself. That's all."

Anger and tenderness brewed together. Young things are so touching sometimes that they almost break your heart. But it was infamous, he raged, that she should exercise this infantile power to these extremes, accepting him so fully in everything, and still, in the spiritual sense, not know him by sight.

He went over to her, and knelt on the floor. He leant against her, body to body, waiting, glorious in the consciousness of manifest power, as if he were the true God revealed miraculously to those who had denied him. But, even holding her in his arms, he could feel in her no response. She neither came to him nor fled, but waited, in vague and pliant indifference.

She looked down at him, not in alarm but wonder. So near, he was strange to her, and seemed like some man that she had never seen. But she was not alarmed; she knew he was her friend, and trusted him without any limit. She had no power to question what he did.

He looked up at her, quite lost; and so, she bent over him, and very gently kissed his forehead.

"That was like a butterfly," he said, frowning. She laughed a little. "Then how?"

He took her closer in his arms, and pressed her lips in long exhausting kisses. Not this, not

this, she thought; and when he drew away she was trembling and lifeless. It was time for her to go home, and they said a commonplace good-bye; but he could not leave it at that, and held her wrist, keeping her for one minute.

"You mustn't think of me as an enemy," he said.

"But of course, we are friends."

Her will held her immovably to their friendship. Submissive to that, she turned up to him her infantile lips; and he, being quite spent, kissed them softly, the way she wanted.

In her imagination, she turned to him more positively. In her imagination, her hidden and forgotten dreams of love were all unrealised; and at the slightest hope of realisation they were roused again. He was not himself to her, but the embodiment of these ghosts. She was not aware of this, and, because she was conscious of enormous forces, represented in him, she thought that he must be the force itself. She did not say, 'he is my lover,' because she did not naturally project herself in words; but she felt that she had reached sublimity because of his kisses, and her body was responsive now to his imagined touch.

In the meantime, he observed, and lived down, his shade of disappointment. He remembered her horrible submissive look, and was ashamed of having imposed himself upon her. But he did not fear that he would be tempted to it again; they were really so far apart. It was just an

isolated inexplicable incident, unimportant to both of them.

A few days later he went to the office on business. He did not want particularly to see her; but it happened that she was working in the outer office when he came, and by herself.

They were reserved, and concentrated on business. She went immediately to announce his arrival; and he sat down in the one comfortable client's chair, and looked about him in a vague waiting-room mood of idle observation.

She came back, and told him that the senior partner was engaged, but would be glad to see him in a moment, if he cared to wait. She handed him *The Times* in the customary distant office manner; but she did not go back to her typewriting. She stood at his side, not knowing what she expected, only mutely waiting, looking down at him. There was no positive expression in her face; but he felt with amazement and resentment how she put a compulsion on him. It was as if some little flower in a hedge had suddenly screamed out, 'Pick me.' He felt helpless, as if he would hardly have the physical strength to move away from her. He knew she was not aware of what she did to him; she had not recognised his recaptured indifference, and, almost because of her ignorance, she had broken it to pieces.

He took her hand, and examined it like some new treasure, and as if it were of great importance that its shape should be fixed in his mind

for ever. He was without energy for this forced change, and desired nothing else, only the whole knowledge of a fine slender hand. It was marvellously white and soft, and because it was thin, the knuckles showed decisively under the skin like elegant carving. Her hand was quite unresisting in his hand; but still, looking down at him, she waited. He laughed shakily and looked up.

"We shall see each other again next Saturday."

"Yes, next Saturday," she said, without positive expression.

"Is that a long time?"

She would not answer.

"Come, tell me."

She teased back. "Three days by the calendar," she said.

"And you think that's too long for us to wait?"

She would not answer.

"Then why not have supper together this very evening?"

Enormous happiness came to her. She smiled with sudden radiance, and said, with a vehemence that astonished him:

"I would like that better than anything in the world."

They were lovers really; but they did not think yet of consummating their love. He liked her too much to take her casually (make a fortnight's affair or so of it) and leave her. And he could not quite let go of his convictions against her.

Besides, there was so much time for certainty. There was no hurry. This was a rich peace to wait in.

But sometimes he was enraged against her because she was *so* happy as she was.

For the first time in her life she existed in a state of full, positive, and realised happiness. For the first time she was inwardly concentrated, not spilt about anyhow. She was full of concentrated life like a plant at the instant moment of bursting into flower. He was in her mind all the time; but not too narrowly engrossing and compelling, for she was as responsive as she ever had been to all other things; and indeed much more responsive. She enjoyed things more and did things better. People loved to be with her. But she treated all these circumstances with a new detachment, recognising that they were not now of supreme importance.

In the spring she took her holiday, and went with her young sister Eileen to stay with an aunt and uncle who kept a little inn in the country. The arrangement had been made for Eileen's sake, because she had been ill, and needed, the doctor said, a rest and country air.

The two girls had very little to do (their uncle did not like them to help in the bar) and they spent their time in exploring the woods and lanes, cherishing between them a new intimacy. Cathie was surprised to find Eileen so companionable. She had always thought of her as just one of the younger ones, for whom she was partly

responsible, but not personally, only in the family relationship. Now for themselves, afresh, they built up a strong personal connection. They talked of everything in the world, Cathie with the fervour of new knowledge, Eileen with an unexpected natural sagacity. Among everything, Cathie talked much of her lover; and Eileen listened with vehement attention and sympathy because this was an experience that she had not touched, wonderfully exciting and mysterious. Cathie made no stint of her confidence, because she felt a kind of safety in Eileen's youth and ignorance; and yet Eileen became, for some reason, very gentle and protective towards her, as if she were herself the elder.

One morning they set off for a walk immediately breakfast was finished. There were heavy clouds in the sky, and it might rain at any time, but the sun shone now for uncertain vivid moments. As they walked along the road, Cathie took out a cardboard box from under her mackintosh.

"I am going to pick some flowers," she said, "it is such a lovely day."

"Why didn't you bring a basket?"

"Some reason. I think I wanted to arrange them immediately the way they would arrive."

They passed through a stretch of sparse woodland, where among lank grasses were a few solitary wind-blown primroses. Eileen picked one or two, but Cathie refused them.

"There are much better ones later," she said.

"And beside, it's no use getting the flowers before I have prepared the box. But I remember some lovely moss at the top of this hill."

Here there was only the coarse dark kind that grows tight on hard earth and stones. Higher up there was a boggy patch, and they found, as she expected, cushions of the loose soft springy antler moss. With this she lined the box.

They went on through the corner of a beech wood, where the huge trees were still sombre, their stark trunks thrust greyly upwards, moulded like arm-muscle. But here and there a young fragile stick of a tree flecked the shadows with a pale dazzling green.

Cathie was impatient and walked quickly. They came soon to a larch wood. Yellower, paler than the uncrumpling beech-leaves, were the soft spikes of larch, tenderly thrusting out from the hard, dark, dusty foliage of the spring before. There, among trails of ivy and loose clumps of grass, were violets. The two girls agreed together that they were certainly scented, but more likely they drew in as they held the violets up to their noses, the entrancing smell of earth, damp and heavy with young green. Eileen picked steadily, but Cathie would never believe that this flower under her fingers could be the loveliest there was. And nothing but the loveliest would do, the very loveliest of all. So she wandered, and picked whimsically, and her bunch was little when Eileen's was large. And all the

same, as she noticed with amusement when she laid them together in the box, Eileen's were really quite as nice as hers.

They went on to an open glade between hazel-trees, where among thick brambles, up and down the paths, were bright clumps of large open primroses. Eileen picked these, while Cathie wandered here and there to find curious and special gifts. She picked a twig of beech and a twig of larch. (So green, so yellow, both so bright and dazzling.) She put in also a soft palm catkin and a dangly hazel. Then, as the box was full, she said they must go home at once. On the way she found in the hedge at the side of the lane a celandine and three strawberry flowers; and she pulled from a high branch a cluster of almost-open cherry blossom.

With great care she tied and addressed the parcel and gave it to the postman. Then it was gone, and she felt finished. There was no more to it than this, preparing the parcel with all care and ceremony and throwing it into space. She imagined its arrival, but that was really without importance. Really, she needed no other satisfaction but the curious distant delight of picking the lovely flowers in a soft and heavy dream.

Next morning she asked Eileen with apparent anxiety, "Do you think he will have got them yet?" but it was a revived and spurious interest.

That evening on the wave of her dream-interest, she wrote him a letter.

'Darling, did you know it was I sent you the flowers? I thought you would perhaps know, because of the little funny ones in the corner that came under the stamp. Do you know, I love you so much (my dear) every second of the day, that it seems as if everything I do is just some other way of loving you. . . .

And it is a very rousing spring. . . .'

When the flowers came, he felt so near to her that he was almost frightened, because in one way he still wanted to be free of her. As he arranged them tenderly in a bowl for his table, he seemed to be thinking of nothing, just feeling her as if she were near to him; but he knew that underneath his mind was working itself to a decision.

He put his face down among the flowers and leaves. There was a ravishing spring smell about them. Suddenly he was quite certain that he and Cathie wouldn't wait any longer. He would marry her, because that was the easiest way, and there would be an end of this fruitless dallying.

And then her letter, when it came, was almost uninteresting. Nothing she could say would ever give him such certainty as he felt then. He laughed a little to think of her simplicity in imagining he could have a moment's doubt about who had sent him flowers.

In two days she was back at work. He met her for supper the first Monday evening. Afterwards they went back to his flat.

He said uncomfortably (this was so silly to *talk* about), "We can't go on like this."

"It's awful the way that I always have to be going home."

"Shall we be married?"

She looked suddenly vague, as if he were speaking in a foreign language.

"Is it that you don't want to marry me?"

"No," she said quickly and fiercely (though perhaps it was). She would not recognise any particular reluctances, and dragged in all the general excuses. "Only I've met so many people who are quite miserably married. I can't bear it. There are some friends of mother's who spend their whole lives in humiliating each other. . . ."

"But we'd never be like that."

"We might be," she said mournfully.

There was a long pause. They did not speak or move. At last she said, hiding her face against his shoulder:

"But I would so love to be with you every moment of the day and night."

"Well then, why not?"

She was at once alert, and wanted to decide that moment how it could be arranged, how a proper secrecy could be preserved. "People will be shocked," she said, not thinking of it very seriously.

He had just taken a cottage in the country which he suggested they might go to; but it was horrible that now she was again at work she could only get away for one night.

"That seems so stingy," she said. "I would like to find you beside me when I woke, for mornings and mornings and mornings."

They were a little discouraged, and settled nothing for a little while and still waited. At last, suddenly, an opportunity came for her to move to a better job, and they arranged that she should resign a little early from her present one so as to have a week or so in between.

"But this work is all very silly," he said; "it would be much better if you married me."

He still wanted her as much as that, and had entirely put aside his mistrusts. And he was exhausted and disgusted by the complexity of these arrangements.

"This'll be all right," she said.

One night she had a curious vivid dream. She was walking with a farmer down one of the lanes she had discovered with Eileen, and they were leading with them three young heifers and a young bull. She had no image of the bull, but she noticed that the heifers had timid gentle faces like calves, and soft, fluffy, puppyish hairs. They all played about like puppies, jumping, and twisting, and nosing up to each other. But the farmer kept them tightly leashed in, and they were not able to be particularly violent. Yet Cathie felt a rising and concentrating excitement.

The farmer took a benevolent pleasure in the childish sport. By and by he remarked, "They

won't be wanting to stop there," and let out the ropes.

At that point the visual dream failed. She knew only that the bull mounted one of the little fluffy heifers. A quick, strained agony came on her, and she found the words . . . "Oh, she is so young, so young. . . ."

Then she saw again and looked round. The bull was walking at ease along the lane, cropping the grass. So also, unconcernedly, the heifer. But the two others stood shouldering each in an ashamed mistrustful way. Cathie looked at them with contempt and pity.

When she woke she thought how interesting and curious that dream had been; but she forgot it before she was dressed.

At last the time came, and they went to the cottage. Cathie was in delight over the green country and the funnily luxurious rooms of the little house. She loved this diminutive expression of his cultured and comfortable character. It was so different from the crabbed littleness to which she was accustomed. They had decided to do their own cooking and sweeping and dusting, because they thought it would be fun. And so it was, but sometimes to him, her intense absorption in the traditional domestic business of mending a fire, or frying a simple egg, seemed a cruel excess of her so sweet immaturity. He thought how she sometimes still stretched out her arms for him with the blind vague yearning of a very little baby; of how sleepily and contentedly

she had lain in his arms, as if he were a comfort and a solace to her, that only, a kind of a cradle. . . .

But her kisses were soft flames, fierce and subtle and astonishing.

He woke in the first whiteness of dawn, and drew himself up on his elbow to look at her. At his movement she opened her eyes, but she did not stir herself, only her eyelids lifted and dropped; she lay tranquil and unconscious, deep, so it seemed to him, in quick and vulnerable beauty. He did not want to touch her, and began to work out in his mind how with what delicate slow movements he could slide his body out of bed without disturbing her. He lifted himself higher, on the whole curve of his arm, and then at that moment, with a little sidling moan of sleepiness, she stretched her hand, which had slid from his shoulder as he moved, in blind flickering search for him. But he felt this, not as her gesture, for herself, for this minute, but as the habit of her generosity. Not that she wanted to preserve her feeling, falsely embalming it beyond its natural life; there was no lack of courage in her, no fears of the eternal travail of the spirit from minute into minute. It was not that she grasped out at the past, the known, experience, and tried to retain it. But she had a compelling necessity to ratify for you each minute. She would say, "That was lovely," and this fervent banality was her acknowledgment of the riches you had somehow poured into the full current of her life.

So, even in sleep, she felt against the air for his shoulder, smooth like polished wood, and he could almost hear her saying . . . "Darling, it has been lovely to love you."

So he drew himself back from her, and swung his legs out of bed, in a tense contraction of slowness. The air was swift and biting round his ankles, like the dark eddies of a mountain stream. His body was no longer informed by a fierce and steady flame of life, but, in sensation, he was alive, wakened from the outside, there was a shiver over his skin, a light surface shiver that came from the cold air, not the deep tremor of pulsing blood; and his bare feet had a subtle sensual knowledge of the floor he crossed. There was a delicate intimacy between them, the soles of his feet and the grained wooden boards. He walked very gently and softly downstairs, exposed, quickened by this fine touch in things, intensely alive in them, enthralled by this perceptiveness over his skin, and in his fingers, and along the tender soles of his feet. He went out on to the lawn, but the stars there, even the eclipsed stars of morning, came with a wound-thrust on his eyes, and he plunged under the trees.

Cathie came slowly awake, through clearing strata of consciousness, as if she had been wrapped in layer after layer of rich scent or colour. She seemed to have known from her sleep that he had gone, for there was no breaking moment of surprise. She was completely aware of her body, but not in movement, for she lay quite still, and

not in sensation, for the air was her own warmth, under the bedclothes. But she knew herself statically, completely, as a shape. She lay on her back with one arm thrown up behind her head, and one knee slightly crooked, lax, supine, abandoned. Yet, without sensation, without movement, without thought or purpose, there was a hard concentration of her consciousness in the one feeling of bodily existence. As if it were a smooth ball she held in her hand, perceived by a single sensation of roundness, she knew the rhythm of her body, the fine flowing curve of her thighs, the little buds of breasts, one round like a water-drop on a nasturtium leaf, the other flattened by the pull of her arm stretched up. She felt her soft palm turned upwards on the pillow. She knew even the carved notches of her spine. She did not move, she lay basking in suave and finished beauty, hardened from the tentative and quivering loveliness of earlier nights. In the white, palely hostile morning, she was hidden, inaccessible, in a soft red glow of fire, as if she were laid on a great ripe blossom of flame, a lifted, spread sunflower. Not Aphrodite, rising in clear reality from the salt and hissing foam, but some earlier goddess, hidden down long avenues of blinding sunlight. Not fugitive Artemis, goading with reluctant beauty, but a beauty unwithheld and yet uncapturable, like the beauty of dandelions and marigolds. And this was blown huge in consciousness, ruthless like flames, untouchable.

The man came in with long quiet strides and stood looking down at her. But she was drowned, distant, inaccessible, muffled in the thick sunlight, the soft blown petals. He came like a gnat on the finest edge of her perception. And she was ashamed, realising that he was so, not only for this minute, but, in their relationship, for always. He was negligible, and a warm flood of hatred for his insignificance came over her. His face was strange, and behind her unrecognisant passivity her spirit fled from this alien in wild panic. But he cracked her indifference, touched her, lay down beside her; and of some necessity she put her little arms round him, slowly, with the sensuous delight of a swimmer pushing apart the heavy water-lilies. Yet, somewhere else, she was racing down long roads of freedom, losing her heavy glory along swift and rousing winds.

The sun had been a long time up when these two rose. The man raced through the high bright grass to the farm for milk, and she meanwhile, drained, withered, pale, against the intrinsic brightness of the morning, was stretched on the rack of her own divergent forces, not in pain, but in thin swooning unreality. Under this conflict, her body even had no essential being, no unity. She was without energy, but restless in superfluous movement, clumsy in putting her clothes on, diffident and precipitous in walking. But she would do nothing yet. There was breakfast to be made, eggs to be adroitly cracked

and slipped into the bright frying-pan, a table to be laid, with a green linen cloth, and knives, and silver forks, and a glass dish for the yellow butter, and a short round pot for the marmalade.

Breakfast was still fun, almost the same as ever, the radiance of her companionship was hardly dimmed. But this was only now what she had taken on herself; deeply, and beyond consciousness, she was pale and withered and withdrawn, because she had fled and not fled, and taken disguises.

They went out into the garden, and there she seemed all spangled with prettinesses, like the flowers. With a little white finger, she turned their faces up to hers, and there they were face to face, smiling at each other, without heart. By and by he went off to finish some minute piece of engineering on the car, and she picked, with careful precision, a mixed bunch of the lovely heartless flowers. She took them indoors, and began to arrange them in a squat earthenware jar she had been thinking of. But she was really unconcerned, and their careless look was somewhat too meticulous, too intellectual, a horrible affectation of nature. Meanwhile, accurately remembering her panic of hatred, she decided what she should do. She was arid, and without spontaneous energy for action, but she had left a bleak mental conscientiousness that saved something of the realities of emotion. Earlier, she would have gone without explanation, but now, at this stage, she knew she must say something,

or write perhaps, although she knew also that now she could think of no words that were humanly applicable. She found a pencil and a stray half-sheet of note-paper, and stood pondering what she should say. In the end she wrote merely 'Good-bye. C.' (there was nothing else) and put on the outer fold his name. Then she stuck it among the flowers, for he would look there; and, as she did it, the thought came to her, to pull out for herself some sweet-peas, and little roses, and pin them on the lapel of her jacket. Then she went quickly out, and down the field-path to the station.

The country was blank, as if all its beauty had been swept from it, perhaps by her own eager spirit, when she fled this way in the unfolding tenderness of morning. She wondered if that alive beauty were lost to her for ever; she felt now only inorganically perceptive, like a camera; and functional, only like a typewriter, or adding machine. By and by she noticed in this hard outline way that the roses and sweet-peas, insecurely pinned, had fallen—she thought, at the last gate, the stile, the turning under the oak . . . but she did not care about that, or want the flowers again. And it came into her mind that perhaps her fingers, more perceptive than the ruthless engine of her will, which forced them out to grasp the dead symbol of a finished piece of life, that her fingers perhaps, pinning them, had meant them to be lost, they were not her affair any longer, and they had fallen in a ditch.

In this weariness of annihilation, she had nothing to seek or to find, there was nothing but this to be done, no necessity, but to cut loose, and wait.

For she was still dead. There was no power in her but this. Yet deep in her mind a certainty was forming that at some time, not to-day, and not to-morrow, not perhaps for long tormenting empty weeks, some wind from heaven, or roused inward fervour, would kindle the grey ashy spirit into twisting flame.

CHAPTER XV

RIPE APPLES

CATHIE was quite unscrupulous. She never considered the man. Not because there was a lack of kindness in her (for indeed in the way of kindness she did think of him fruitlessly), but because she had no knowledge of him in her imagination to give her consideration reality.

She went back to London; invented some lies to account for her return, which fitted in well enough with the lies which had accounted for her absence; stayed at home for a week or two, in a mood of dim and half-hearted disappointment, and then started work again.

The work was more interesting and responsible than the last, and she was rather happy. The universe was not dazzling or exciting any longer, but it was uniformly rather interesting. For the time being it had focused pale and exact, and she was quite able to deal with it. She was enough occupied by it and often amused.

But she was not positively happy. It was unnatural to her to live without enthusiasm; still, she got on well enough with the meagre satisfaction of being rather competent at all the things

she had to do, and people never thought of her as dissatisfied or incomplete. She was lively enough when you talked to her, and she took a proper interest in the things that were going on. You couldn't say she was morbid, or nervous, or silly—the way young girls so often are. And she was getting on well, too, with her work, and earning good money.

Cathie knew this, and didn't bother to feel sorry for herself. But she knew besides that essentially she was barren and windswept, level sands where the tide has receded for miles and miles. And there is nothing to be done, you must only wait till the moon draws up the sea again. So she waited for some time in patience.

Eileen was unhappy about her at this time, but she was much occupied with her own affairs and could do nothing for her. She was just becoming engaged to a handsome and lively young man, who was working in a large garage at the corner of the High Street. They were very sweet and touching lovers, and clearly adored each other. Cathie was full of tenderness for them, and yet there woke in her, too, at the same time, a little wretchedness for herself, which made her not so happy to be with them. The engagement proceeded without interruption or excitement, and progressed very sweetly and placidly to a happy marriage. They were very proud of each other, and rather liked talking about 'my wife' and 'my husband.'

Cathie missed her quite horribly. Her absence

seemed to change the household altogether. Her parents and the younger children became much less avoidable; sometimes she felt so worn away by them that she could hardly endure it. All their occupations were hateful to her; their gestures, and their voices, made her indignant. She could not look at the way her father filled his pipe. When Peggy played patience, the flap of each card on the table went through her like the near sudden hoot of a siren. Then for some weeks she would not care. She would be happy with them, trivially, and almost forget the possibilities of hatred there were between them. She knew, of course, that she was wildly unreasonable, but she could do nothing against it. The mood would take her again, and she was helpless. Yet they never knew of it; she lived through it in stiff agonised resistance, and it never affected her work.

All the time she longed for the country. She felt closed in by miserable streets; and sometimes, as she walked down them, she felt she had enough strength of hatred to send the rows of houses all toppling sideways with one push of her hand. Then she would laugh, seeing herself eminently ridiculous; for she could never feel tragic.

She was being miserably unhappy when a cousin of her mother's, Miss Thomas, wrote to ask if one of the girls could come and help her in the post office, as she was afraid she was getting too old, and too rheumatic, to manage by herself. The parents had an idea that Peggy

might leave school earlier than they had intended and go at Christmas, if Cousin Esther could manage by herself till then. But Peggy herself was not very eager. She managed very easily and indolently at school, and she did not want to be pushed into anything else before it was necessary. So the arrangements came to a standstill.

Then Cathie astonished them all by suggesting that she should be the one.

"You'd not leave Mr. Pemberley's, would you?" said her mother.

"I don't know why not. One oughtn't to stay too long in one place, I think. And besides, I would love to be out of London for a bit . . ."

"I never did think that it suited you any too well," said Mrs. Johnson, who had a wistful distant knowledge of Cathie's moods, and a devious unexpressed tenderness, because she knew that she had quite lost her, somehow.

"Perhaps it would be a good plan," she said to her husband.

"Seems to me like nonsense, giving up good work for nothing. She'll never get another job like this again. But perhaps your cousin will do something for her, and then she wouldn't be in such a bad way. However, there's no trusting people's kindness, and if my advice was asked, I'd tell Cathie to go on with her own work, and not go fidgeting about in other people's. But it's no use our saying anything;

she'll do what she wants in the end, however much she talks about it."

So Cathie was left to decide for herself, and she made up her mind to go, gave her resignation to Mr. Pemberley, and within a fortnight she had come to Ellen's village.

To be in the country was like coming out of the horrible shifting vacancy between unconsciousness and delirium. She felt herself waking. Cousin Esther was stiff and weak and old, and Cathie soon did almost everything. She loved to feel that she had a place and a life of her own in this work, this house, this country. She loved to do the housework, and feed the chickens, and sell stamps, and manage the telephone. And between her and Cousin Esther there came into being the fragile, undemanding tenderness and intimacy that there is sometimes between the very young and the very old, and which is quite different and separate from any other kind of love.

So, when Miss Thomas fell ill, she looked after her with passionate care, terribly afraid she would not get better, miserable. And yet she was never so hopelessly miserable as she had been in London after Eileen's marriage. Even Cousin Esther's death, that seemed to her so awful and final and tragic, was not wholly loss, for there was left for always in her life an unforgettable fragrance, because they had been loving friends together.

She could not bear to go back to London,

which seemed full of her mistakes and miseries. So, when she was asked if she would take on the post office, she consented and stayed. Her life there was even and uneventful, but she made it very full and lovely. She had friends enough, and she was marvellously happy to be out in the open, between the slow rhythm of the earth and the quick rhythm of the sky.

She had gone there in the autumn. In the winter Cousin Esther died; and in the summer Jenny was lost and found again. These were the only events of that period of Cathie's life; and really, when you thought strictly, you could hardly count the search for Jenny as an event. It was huge and terrible while it lasted, but it lost importance very quickly, even as a subject for conversation; and Cathie's lovely, immediate, unthinking life went on. It was as if she had lived in a pot all her life long, and had at last been planted in a garden. She felt she had been too much tended, and that all she needed now was space. She wanted nothing more than necessary companionship, and was glad to be much alone. But she was not consciously and positively lonely, like Mariella, who always felt the space round her; she was happy and growing because there was nothing crushing up against her.

She expected very little of people. She did not look forward now, to wonder who would be friends with her, and whether she would ever love anyone again. During the search she had

done things quite impersonally with Ellen and John and Mariella, not thinking about them, or assessing them, or giving them places in her mind.

Yet when she met John one day, suddenly, walking in the fields, she felt as if she had known him for a long time, and they easily and naturally went on together. It was lovely autumn weather, with a smell of mist, and earth, and wood-smoke. The hedges were dazzling with red and brown and orange. When they looked at them, examining, they could see that they were bedraggled and melancholy. Yet, at the edge of vision, they made for them a glow and a splendour, dazzlingly.

They talked a lot, not with intimacy, and its usual complex accompaniment of meant or unmeant artifice, but with simplicity and candour, almost as if they were talking to themselves and allowing the other to overhear. What they said, therefore, was generally quite unformed and stupid, and yet it made all more deliberate efforts towards communication seem slightly false. And in this way they felt something of the rhythm of the other's mind, and were at ease, moving in their own. Cathie was amazed to find that anyone existed so open and yet so untouchable; and she felt immediately most safe with him, as if she could be the same, and not be hurt.

They walked long the path by the river, and stopped for a minute or two to look at the swans.

"It's so clever, isn't it," said Cathie, "the way they go so poised, with exactly the right amount

above the water and exactly the right amount below?"

"They do it better than we can," said John, "so I suppose it's clever."

"I feel like that," said Cathie, her face turned up towards the sky.

"Yes," said John, "but it isn't so simple for us as it is for them, between air and water. We live so atmospherically, going from tone to tone of a whole spectrum flung out over a universe of rippling density. And so it's difficult to find the place where one balances."

"I think I balance," said Cathie.

"Yes. But then the atmosphere shifts; or you stretch out a finger to discover something, and you tip yourself up and fall headlong. And yet perhaps there is a place where we can live, and go on living; but I think, for myself, I shall always be soaring and sinking and looking about."

"I don't want to have to do that, always," said Cathie in sudden dismay.

John laughed. "It is exciting," he said, "like a bottle-imp. Exciting, and what I like."

Cathie stood still and laughed like anything.

"Like a bottle-imp, exactly like a bottle-imp," she said, sobbing with laughter.

She simply could not stay solemn, and thinking about her adjustment in the universe. She was so happy in this new discovery of him, and the autumn, and the swans, that she could hardly contain herself. She was overjoyed, as if the

heavens had opened. And her happiness was so lavish, that he could not stay outside, he had to be as happy as she was. They walked along the river-bank like children of God, glad and confident.

They came into the village by Mariella's cottage. At the end of the garden, gawkily propped up, was a very old, unpruned apple-tree, whose fruit was a very bright red, sweet and hard and small. This year it had borne well, and as it was almost impossible to pick, the crop was still hanging, although nearly all the leaves had fallen, and were now lying curled and brown and sodden in the yellowish tangled grass.

John and Cathie looked up at it.

"That's a very special apple for children," said John.

"Do you think there are any children in the village more deserving than us?" said Cathie.

"They look very good," said John, beginning to consider where he should climb the fence. He had no special feeling for his own property, and hardly minded whether he was with it or without it. He knew Mariella liked him and would give him her apples. Cathie had been more roughly forced on the necessity for orthodox circumspection, and she at first hung back. But she couldn't think why they shouldn't have the apples, and every minute they were wanting them more and more. So they were soon both over in the garden, John was shaking the tree, and

Cathie was looking up, ready to catch what fell. Cathie watched, quite concentrated, with all intensity, and John pulled and shook with all his strength.

But the apples had been late ripening, and only three had fallen, when they heard an angry rapping on one of the cottage windows and a muffled angry shout. They stopped, frozen, looking towards the noise. Mariella threw open the window and came out on to the path. Her shoes were thin, and she would not come on to the grass, so she stood on the path and called to them:

“Who are you? Come out at once.”

The two, a little abashed, came up together through the long orchard grass. John knew he could explain all right, Mariella had always been so nice to him and let him be what he liked, with intelligent, unusual kindness. He knew he could explain. She would quite understand how he wanted the apples so much and how natural it had been to take them, then and there.

But when she saw who it was she was angrier than ever. She looked at them in hostile amazement. She looked at John and Cathie and the three little red apples in Cathie's hand. Her face was brutal and extraordinary, not quite human. They were frightened of her and could not speak.

She said:

“I thought it was the village children. That I could have understood. But you two, I sup-

pose thinking yourselves grown-up . . . there's nothing I can say to you, only please go at once, and shut the gate after you. I can't have anybody and everybody coming into my garden by whatever way they choose, and taking away with them whatever they fancy. . . ."

"I'm most awfully sorry," said John, with the old look of puzzled childishness that made her beside herself with rage.

"It's no use pretending you aren't responsible," she said, furious, turning on him. "You know what's right and what's wrong as well as anyone, only you think you can have the best of all worlds at once. Eat your cake, and have it, and get paid for it besides, by some poor wretch who's left with nothing. You don't suppose I didn't see through you when I painted you? I know how you can own the world, and despise it. And if you have everything else, you won't have my support and admiration, to despise that, too. Do you think I don't know the ridiculous extremes to which you indulge your eccentricities and affectations? I think your complicated and super-normal feelings are all humbug. Why can't you treat them as a disease, the way other people do, and get rid of them? Or at least conceal them decently. . . ."

John could not stop her, and knew that he must go before she had said too much that would be cruel to remember.

"Let's get away," he whispered to Cathie.

Cathie was frightened and sorry and repentant.

The apples were horrible to hold. Awkwardly she stretched out her hand to Mariella.

"Here are the apples," she said.

Mariella dropped them on the path like hot chestnuts.

"What good are the apples to me?" she said, turning suddenly away and going back into the house. Cathie and John walked miserably through the village.

"How awful to feel like that," said Cathie. "What did it all mean?"

"I don't know exactly. Perhaps nothing important, at least not important for us."

They separated dimly. Mariella had thrown an uneasiness between them, and given them, also, an uncertainty for the future. They did not seek each other out.

But John, although he had expected to go abroad again at once, stayed in the village, and occasionally they met, and smiled at each other, and exchanged a word or two. They were shy of going further than this, because of a very slight surface tension, a very slight feeling of guilt, that was surprising and baffling to both of them. And because they did not think about each other, because they were without plans or expectations, there was nothing to break it down. Cathie's life went on the same as ever, only a little lovelier, a little intenser, because he had reminded her of something immense and vague and wild in herself, which she had never recognised, and John stayed on with Ellen and Jenny,

excluded from them, alone. And yet he had a feeling of re-established humanity, because Cathie seemed like someone who lived bravely in a dangerous world. But what the danger was, or where the bravery, he did not know, or want to know.

In the end he found he wanted to see her, and so he went to see her, and that was all right. The tension had gone quite simply, and they found that they were friends.

Cathie was restless indoors that day, so they went out and across the fields towards the river. Violent arrowy rain whacked down against their faces, till their skin was numb. Across the black sky the clouds were shredded out in long dark quivering streams. The trees bowed dangerously, and the last leaves were dragged agonisingly, with frantic convolutions, from the rocking branches. Even the grass strained sideways from the earth, under the wind. On the bridge they stopped, as people do always, and looked down at the water. The wind drove across it in straight hissing furrows like darting snakes. With shining eyes they walked on through the clatter and fury.

"I wonder what it is that keeps us on the earth?" shouted John.

"I just want to stay on the earth," shouted Cathie, laughing for joy and pleasure. "I don't know why particularly, but there it is."

They came to a haystack, protected by a tall shelter of corrugated iron raised on gaunt mast-

like posts. They crept round to the side away from the wind, and found that there the hay had been cut, leaving a wide recess. From this safety they watched the hurricane. And yet from here it seemed more threatening than it had before. They looked at each other in a kind of dismay. They began also to be very cold.

Partly, they drew together for warmth. But they were very happy to be in each other's arms, to be still, so near together, and the hurricane outside, distant.

It was not enough. But, for the time, it was enough, exactly. Soon they went home, a little blurred and quiet, in dim happiness. They parted quickly, not as if they were lovers, and were happy to be alone.

Cathie felt she had perhaps been waiting for this. With the other man, she felt now, there had always been a brutality, a forcing and exactingness from one side or the other, which had struck at her confidence. It had been so exhausting a wanting and taking, a ferment of mind and spirit and instinct that wracked the whole structure to pieces. Now, they just came together with a simplicity and candour that was like clear cold water from rock-springs.

For some days there was a lapse, a distance between them. Their thirst was momentarily quenched. Cathie moved radiantly about the house and the garden, with a quite new confidence and pleasure in all the world. A little bit of a poem was running in her head,

'The wild deer, wandering here and there,
Keeps the human heart from care.'

and she knew that it was so. That you don't need to have things under your eyes and under your fingers. . . .

At that end of her thought she always stumbled. And the sentence was never finished in her mind. The words came softly back, the wild deer wandering, the wild deer wandering here and there. She almost caught in her ears the rusty light movement of the herd, and she saw very clearly a young wild roe emerging from the distant unknown forest, lifting her narrow head, and walking so delicately with minute and elegant feet. Wandering here and there, keeps the human heart from care.

The image was never fixed. With infinite variations the roe came softly out of the forest, looking out with large unshadowed eyes. Infinite with light and shadow was the forest. Infinite with movement of soft heavy branches.

Every moment she was amazed and astonished at infinite lovelinesses. When she washed a cabbage, and tipped the muddy water in the sink, she saw with astonishment and rapture how the earth still lay in the basin in curved ripples.

After a week or so, John came to see her. She had shopping to do in the town, and they walked there through a thin frosty afternoon. It was dark when they had finished their commissions. The shops were bright, and their

light flooded out across the road in strange wonderful shapes, changing and quivering as doors swung and people jostled. John and Cathie were wildly excited by this air of business and interest. People who are truly absorbed in their own affairs are the best to go among. They felt almost as if it would be good to stay here for ever; but they knew that they must go away and discover the last issues between themselves.

They went home by bus, still among a crowd of eager and talkative country people. Everything was close and known and comfortable. They got out, and the bus went on, and there were no more yellow lights. The stars were distant and intense and frosty, very white and little. A shooting star spattered white dust for a moment, and then vanished negligibly. If they had thought of such a night they might have been frightened, because there is a danger, when the shell of known recedes so far, that nothing will be left in you to live by. But it was not so. Everything had withdrawn freezingly, and they moved through the vacant centre in inviolate starry freedom.

They came in silence to the post office, and ate a little supper of bread and apples. The fire was low, and they took it in turns to blow with a large fierce bellows. The logs kindled in rosy incandescent ripples like the inside of a shell. At first they talked now and then, and sometimes their hands touched as they

moved, doing things. By and by they fell silent, but not away from each other, or away from this that was between them. They were rapt, like saints who have given themselves up to the fire, and still untouched, see how the little flames swarm round their feet. They were quite committed, their faces set one way.

Cathie got up and went into her bedroom next door. She undressed without a candle. Slowly he raked out the fire and turned out the lamp.

Slowly he came into her room. He did not imitate the daylight sense by seeming to look for her. His hands felt for her, delicately. She was so vivid under his hands, so nakedly plucked out from the comfortable daylight smother, so starrily intense, that it was almost too much, too much, she almost could not bear it. She almost broke and cried out, and would not have it. But it was all right. And she let herself be shed like a naked star on the dark sky.

And then afterwards she did not want to come back into herself. She wanted ultimate things, this extremity and annihilation. But the night grew thick again, the room was full of chairs and tables, and darkness clotting in the angles. In the square of window the stars shone a little impudently.

She had come back again, and because of the encroaching darkness, and the shifting lonelinesses of the terrestrial life, she wanted to keep him by

her. Yet, because of the extremity and the certain starry ultimate loneliness, she let him go. And she slept very sweetly till daylight.

When she woke she cried a little, brokenly, for joy, to remember it could be like that. Remembering, she cried very softly, to ease her heart of joy.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CANDLE

SOME weeks passed. There began to be gossip about Jenny; people whispered to each other that they wouldn't be surprised if she'd got herself into trouble, poor feeble thing. Ellen became more distant and glowering. She gave them no sign of her attitude or feelings, and so they could not sympathise with her, and disapproved, as a measure of safety against the unknown. Cathie and John lived for themselves, and each other, exaltedly.

Moments were so perfect that they thought sometimes nothing better could exist. And yet they had no feeling of finality, no responsibilities, no direction for the future. They could imagine a future without each other. Sometimes John talked of the time when he would go abroad again, and then Cathie knew that she was not there, that she could not have a part in these immense and lonely journeys. Indeed, essentially, she did not want to. She was happy in their freedom from each other, in her own freedom to go on her own journeys; she did not want a relationship of obligations suffered and exacted.

But, since Eileen's marriage, the idea had come

to her, that she would never be satisfied, never fulfilled, till she married in the old and usual way. She was a lost and errant spirit till she married and had children; and then perhaps had grandchildren, and turned easily mellow, like ripe fruit which hangs lightly, the channel of sap narrowed in the stem. And then she would perhaps die easily. And in her body would be first the white worms, and then the huge bloated red worms; and at last the brown earth-worms, going through her in their journeys. She thought that was the only way to go through life and out of life. She felt that a solid happy marriage was her only hope. But she was not yet fretful for it, and so she was not unhappy to know that this was not the end. She was adventurous and ardent, like one who passes through a high wind, on the way to a quiet house.

She did not argue this out with herself. She did not really know it, till one day, in a vague and puzzled manner, he asked if she thought they had better be married. She looked at him for a minute, as he stared unaware at the sky and distant hills, and then she laughed and said, no, it was not at all a sensible idea. And he said he hadn't thought so really. Marriage was so right for other people, but perhaps not for oneself; and anyhow, they were all right the way they were.

And yet it was not long after that the break came.

For a moment, when she first suspected that she was pregnant, she felt sick with anxiety. The

next instant the thought flashed through her mind that perhaps it would be possible for them to marry after all. But she could not imagine them married, bringing up a baby, and it did not seem so very unlikely that she would do it by herself. To be married, she thought, would be for him a ridiculous and impossible position. And she did not want to be bullying and grasping over him, forcing him to it. Partly, she would not do it, because it was hateful, and partly, because this distance, this only momentary and undeveloping happiness between them, began to be not quite satisfying for her, and she did not want him so much.

Suddenly she remembered the conventional grouping in one class of girls like her, and she began to laugh because it was so silly. Then she thought of Jenny, and in her laughter was an undertone of shame, to think how the village would consider them the same, exactly the same kind of person. And still she laughed and laughed, till she couldn't stand up, and fell on the bed, shaking, and giggling against the pillow.

Then she grew soberer, and sat up, and began thinking about things. First she thought practically, about how she must go away from this village, where she did not want to be notorious, and about what she should do then. And then for a moment, unusually, she thought about herself. Remembering her first lover, she thought that this finickiness in her, this failure of insistence, this refusal to take bluntly, and come to some, any,

conclusion, was a kind of stupidity. Other people who did so came, she knew, to better effect than she did. And yet she did not want to be like them. She could not pretend to be satisfied with tapping her potentiality in driblets. She dreaded unfitting herself for complete existence, by resting in anything that was not complete existence. And for this reason she was still, still fugitive and childish; uncrystallised, incalculable.

She sat there only for a minute, and then got up and wrote a letter, resigning her position as postmistress. She did not think at all about what she should say to John. This separation seemed not like a problem, but just like something that was going to happen. She did not arrange any scene or opportunity for telling him, but waited, knowing it would happen. They met that very evening in the village shop, and he walked home with her. But they felt each other very distant and did not talk. At her gate he paused, uncertain. Not thinking, he felt upwards in the darkness for the branch of acacia-tree that he knew hung over him. At the first contact of the leaves he drew back suddenly in astonishment. They were dry, withered, rustly, about to fall. He was astonished, as if he had expected soft cherishing foliage, as if he had woken in summer and found snow on the ground.

He said: "I am glad we know really when things are finished."

"Yes," said Cathie, "that's all right."

"And what then, I wonder," said John, looking into the future.

"Oh, different things. Some coming to something, and some to nothing, in the natural way."

But they could not talk, they were too distant, and she saw him going away, lapsing into the darkness.

In a few days he left England. Ellen did not mind, she was so absorbed and unhappy that she hardly noticed. Cathie went resolutely on with her preparations for departure. Her successor wanted to take over at once, and so in three weeks she was free, and went by herself to the seclusion and concealment of London. For the time being she got work in a shop. She had hoped that Eileen and her husband might have had her to live with them. But Eileen, when she went to see her, was so puzzled and surprised and miserable that she could not ask it. Instead, she took a cheap semi-basement room with a gas-ring, and there made for herself as much comfort as she could.

The room was high and little, with a too-large iron bedstead and a brown-spotted looking-glass on the dressing-table. The wall-paper had a trellis pattern of brownish roses. The light seemed always grey. But she was not altogether unhappy. She had a few books, and got others from a free circulating library; and she was distantly friendly, in a superficially satisfying way, with the people she worked with. And so she waited for her baby, not really conscious of it yet

as a new element in her life, but gradually focusing her strength on it, and waiting till it should be so.

She was not always contented. Especially when the time drew near when she must give up her work, there were moments of appalling tiredness and appalling despondency. One evening, exhausted and lonely almost beyond bearing, she lay in bed, longing miserably and hopelessly for the time when her stretched, blank waking should change to thin, conscious sleep. At last she despaired and lit her candle, and then took up a book. The candle was still in its first stage, flickering, not strong enough to read by. But her eyes were on the print, expecting the moment when she could see the letters more distinctly. But, because the wick had been crushed a little in the wax, she saw the light on her book grow greyer instead of yellower, and in the room the darkness flooded in towards her. She looked at the flame. It was big but uncertain, clinging to the side of the wick, flickering. She took up a used match, to push away the wax, but then she put it down again. Immediate light for reading did not seem the important thing. She wanted now to know about the fate of this flame. She watched it intently, anxiously.

It was yellow and wavering, the blue transparent core little against the wick. Her eyes dazed watching it. And yet in the room the grey fringing darkness was encroaching. The yellow petal of the flame grew smaller. Suddenly dark-

ness came in with a rush. The flame was all blue now, hard and chilly, except for a narrow edge of yellow, delicate as a bud, pushing out from its hard winter sheath. But for this bud there was little hope. The wax hissed in white foggy foam, ready to drown it. Again came a sweeping tide of darkness, and she thought for a minute it was dead. But it still clung to the wick, very small now, a glazed blue bead. It seemed to give no light, no light at all. It was quite gathered to itself and determined, clinging pertinaciously to the substance which gave it life and which was almost destroying it. Cathie stared at it without moving in unthinking sympathy.

At last, suddenly, the issue was decided. The flame shot up all yellow, easy and free and triumphant.

Cathie's book slithered on to the floor, and she slept happy.

CHAPTER XVII
FINAL DESTRUCTION

ELLEN knew that John had gone, and that Cathie had gone. But it was all one to her. Cathie was nothing to her, not being of her root; and John was severed. He had grown by himself, fine and arrowy in keen air, because she had so early turned away from him. She had given him all the necessaries of life, not gifts, but capacities; and then she had let him be, turning to Jenny, to whom she had been able to give so little.

And now she saw nothing but Jenny. She had created a world for her, and bound herself in it, for she wanted no vision or movement beyond. She was always looking for little easy things to fill it with: cakes made in curious and pretty shapes; a bowl of goldfish, which, in their strange country, you could watch for hours; little toys and easy puzzles; and simple games with dice and counters. These games, halma, ludo, snakes and ladders, were a great interest and excitement to Jenny, but she never quite knew which colour was hers.

One day, on a walk, Ellen noticed the rose-hips in the hedges, how bright and red they were.

"Look, they're pretty," she said, pulling a spray down so that Jenny should know what she meant. But Jenny did not seem to be looking, she only laughed and walked on; and from that moment Ellen did not see the berries any more. She was sacrificed and limited. And yet her self-inflicted limitation was more of a payment than a sacrifice. She got what she wanted. That is, she got the feeling of complete and godlike control, which made her think that she could also be the saviour. Proudly, she thought, that by her knowledge, by her vitality, by her care, the girl could be saved.

The night's loss was the first blow to this satisfaction of impregnability. But the effect of it was not discouragement. She only redoubled her efforts to build up and perfect a security. Her casual and distant relations with the villagers snapped altogether. She passed them without recognition.

It was difficult for her to believe that Jenny was to have a child. Not because she did not think it possible, but because she would not have it. She pretended it was only a morbid realisation of dangerous possibility, like the temptation some people feel to throw themselves down from high places; and she put it aside, as they do.

She could not bear it that a child should be born of this stock; and so she would not believe it. She forgot that the thought had come to her. Its only trace was in the agonising persistent recollections which began to occupy her, of the time before Jenny's birth. She remembered its

feelings of crushed misery, as if they were a knowledge and a prophecy of Jenny; and she began to brood over them; and to wonder at what moment in Jenny's infancy she had known that the lovely wide blue eyes were not the same as other children's. Looking backwards, she thought she had known, the first moment the nurse had brought her in. But it had not been an astonishment, because she had known for so long before. Almost from the moment of conception. She found herself then thinking with horror of what man, and how, had come to Jenny. But that was an unallowed thought, and she roused herself, pale and startled, and fled from it, in work, and the ceaseless drain of care and kindness.

So, because she naturally lived more in action than in thought, she was not obsessed by it. And yet the first moment when she was forced to acknowledge it was true, when she first allowed herself to think how soon the child would be born, the idea seemed established and unastonishing, like a slowly ripened conviction.

It was then some time that she began thinking about Rosalie Anderson.

Rosalie was the daughter of the miller in Ellen's own village. She was smart and fine and saucy and worked in a restaurant in London. She had few holidays, and these she seldom spent at home. When she did, she gave herself great airs with the country people, because she thought herself stylishly dressed. But the mothers of

marriageable sons looked down on her, saying she was no better than she should be.

One summer she was out of work, and, as a last resource, came home. She went regularly to church, because there were no other amusements, and had a considerable following among the younger men. With one or two of the older ones, too, she was on very friendly terms. They were attracted by her conscious and flagrant ostentation of sex, especially as it contrasted with the indifferent, used-up, sallow-spiritedness of their wives. She carried on indiscriminately with all of them.

It was supposed, however, that her favourite was the handsome young fellow on the Home Farm. A few months went by, and she disappeared, rather quietly and mysteriously. The rumour went round that her father had wanted them to be married, and that the young man had been willing enough, but that the girl herself had laughed at the two of them, and said, if she wouldn't have him by himself, how the hell did he think she'd take him with a brat besides. Nobody knew where this story came from, but it was suspected that it had the original authority of the father himself, who was a heavy drinker, and whose conversation tended to become obscenely sanctimonious the further he was from being sober. Or perhaps it came from the barmaid at the White Horse, who had been a kind of temporary ally of Rosalie's and who was a great talker when things weren't too busy. Anyhow,

they joined in abusing Rosalie, and made no remonstrance when the young man said loudly to the other occupants of the bar, that no man with any regard for his health or reason would marry that ——.

In a few weeks she had the impudence to come back, a little pale and exhausted-looking, but as slim and pert and pleased with herself as ever. She had had an operation, she said, for her tonsils. Her father locked her out on the first night, but her mother let her in through the window, and he seemed quite unsurprised to find her there next day. During her absence one of the older farmers had lost his wife, and, after what was considered an indecently short interval of three months, he married Rosalie. The young labourer wouldn't speak to her any more, till one day, wanting to rouse him, she told him that it wasn't him, anyhow, who'd got her into trouble, but the man who was now her husband, and if she'd only known she'd have let it be. The boy was furious, because she had made him give her money. He abused her, and tried to hurt her with his hands, beating her. But then he was suddenly disgusted, and left her comparatively unharmed. This story, in several distorted forms, got added to the tradition.

Ellen had always disliked her, and seldom had occasion to meet her. And she paid little attention to the gossip that went round about her. Now, after twenty years, she found herself remembering her, thinking especially of the operation,

what it was, how it had been done, and who had done it. She wondered if you had to have an operation, or if there were things you could take.

And yet she did not exactly connect this with Jenny. It was just recalled, in her mind, she did not know why or how. So far she had done and said nothing. She felt she could not take any step, or even take up any attitude, till she knew what Jenny felt. And Jenny was for the time mysterious to her—she did not know even if she was aware of what was happening to her. And she would not force knowledge on her; she could only wait in anxiety.

Some weeks later she found her very engrossed over a picture of little children in one of her books. She looked round once or twice at Ellen, in a suspicious, and secret, and satisfied manner, and then broke out into a little tinkly laugh. Ellen came over to her, and looked at the picture with sympathetic interest, laying her hand on Jenny's shoulder. Jenny laughed again, archly, shrugging her shoulders, as people do when they are at once embarrassed and delighted.

Ellen was immensely glad she was so happy. And she felt, also, relieved of responsibility. If Jenny wanted the child she must have it. There was nothing to do but to let things happen the way they were going to.

So Ellen for the moment was satisfied. She had an enormous repugnance for the unusual and unnatural, and was glad to be freed from the necessity for so extreme a remedy. Jenny would have

the child, and it would make her happier, and perhaps, even, it would make her better.

And yet she still found herself thinking of Jenny's own birth and of Rosalie's operation; and she had awful pictures in her mind of what this child might be like, and terrible fears about the operation.

And she was dominated by the old horror and indignation, because this had come through her. She was horrified and indignant for the past, because, against her will, and against her nature, it had made her bear such fruit. So that she felt as if she went on into the future, with her face set against darkness and icy cutting storms.

And still between her and Jenny was the gentlest quivering intimacy. And they talked sometimes about the baby, and Jenny laughed very happily, and Ellen responded with difficult smiles and the habitual easier tenderness.

Meanwhile, Ellen began thinking if there was no one who could help her. Here she had no friends. Her mother, who had died some years before, had had no near relations; but she remembered, as a possibility, a married sister of her father's, who lived in London, and who had stayed with them sometimes when Ellen was a girl, and been nice to her. She thought that people who lived in towns always knew so much; and she decided she would go and see her, and find out, at any rate, if there was any promise in her of help or advice.

When she had come to this conclusion, she did

not write, because she was uneasy with letters, and did not know how to explain so sudden and astonishing a visit, except by the truth, which she might not want to tell. She arranged for a reliable woman to come in from the village to 'look after the house, and also,' she added in rather painful parenthesis, 'to give my daughter her meals, and see to her.' To Jenny herself she gave many cautions and instructions, and then, in anxiety for what she was going to, and in anxiety for what she was leaving, she set off for a day in London.

In the strange, quiet, squalid street of high decaying houses, she had some difficulty in finding the one she wanted; for she had not been to it since her marriage, more than twenty years ago. But she got to it at last, and, in some trepidation, rang the bell. She had heard nothing of these cousins for some time; and she now thought it very possible, and almost began to hope, that in all these years the house would have changed hands. But the gawky, sharp-looking girl who answered the door had an unmistakable look of her family, and so she began:

"Is your mother in? or . . . or . . . your grandmother? I'm your mother's cousin, and as I was doing some shopping in London, I thought I'd look in on her."

"Yes, she's in," said the girl, looking at Ellen inquisitively as she showed her into the parlour. Ellen heard her shouting up the stairs. There was a rustle of excitement in the house for such

an unexpected and unknown visitor. Then it quieted, and in a minute or two a plump middle-aged woman in an unbelievably clean blouse came in.

"I'm Ellen Tyndale, Ellen Brooks that was, and I thought I'd come and see you, as I was up in London for shopping. You're Lettie, aren't you?"

Lettie looked curiously at her cousin. Ellen was practically unknown in the connection, and had a reputation for being proud and undeservedly wealthy. Lettie wondered what she had come about, and hoped that perhaps she would give the children some nice presents.

"Well, I declare, it must be about twenty years since I saw you last; and you were quite grown-up and fine, and I was nothing but a girl still, and nowhere near married. Mother'll be ever so surprised and pleased."

As one of the family, Ellen was taken into the living-room. There Aunt Sarah, surprisingly older than she had expected, sat blinking in an arm-chair by the fire. They greeted each other affectionately, and began by talking of Ellen's mother, and of what her father had been like as a boy. At dinner-time the children came home from school, and they sat down to a noisy and difficult meal. The children were ill-mannered in a stupid and raucous way from which even they themselves got little satisfaction. Ellen was uncomfortable and unhappy. Her own home, her own situation, seemed perfect in this atmosphere

of bickering, and insolence, and reproof. She could not talk much more with Aunt Sarah, or Lettie. And she did not want to. She saw what a futile idea it had been to think she would get help from such people. And yet she had remembered Aunt Sarah as a happy and sensible middle-aged woman. Now she seemed crushed under the crowd and noise, incapable.

So Ellen left them, and went home, and took up again her special happiness with Jenny, sorry to remember how they had missed it. And she cut herself off from her thought and anxiety, and clung only to this known happiness.

She began to make some little clothes, but without interest, and she did not do very much. She still had a kind of feeling that it would not happen, that it was all impossible. At last, when the day came, she had nothing properly ready, not even anyone in the house to send for the doctor, or the midwife. When the pain began, Jenny was quite dumb and helpless, suffering like an animal. Ellen gave her her hand, and she clung to it, out of mere pain and necessity to grasp, not recognising it as human. Ellen sat there some minutes, suffering, and a thought came to her that perhaps if she did not fetch the doctor, if she did not fetch the doctor in time, that perhaps the child could be dead. And so she waited, holding Jenny's hand. She knew quite well that the crisis would not be for some hours.

As it grew worse, Jenny's pain grew harder for Ellen to bear. She had thought she could man-

age by herself, but she did not know what would happen if anything went wrong, and she began to think about how things might go wrong. After all, it was Jenny she cared about. She began to be horrified at the way she was submitting Jenny to a greater risk than need be.

Suddenly, in a pause, and empty tired calm, she got up, and ran quickly out on to the road.

The farm labourer, who met her first, said afterwards, that he thought she was raving. After all, he said, she's had two children herself, and she might know by now that there's never so much of a hurry as people think. But he went very quickly for her, to fetch the nurse and the doctor.

They came before they were needed. The nurse went upstairs, while the doctor stayed talking to Ellen. He looked at her strained and anxious face and said:

"You'd better stay down here, we'll call you for anything we want."

She protested, but he made her stay. Some time passed, as she listened in anguish to every sound and movement. By and by he came down to her.

"It's all right," he said, "a girl."

"And how's Jenny?"

"Both all right. Come up and see now, if you like."

They went up. Jenny lay very blanched and still.

But she smiled when Ellen came to her, and

Ellen stayed by her, lightly stroking her hair and forehead, and whispering little loving nonsense words.

"Don't you want to see the baby?" said the nurse.

Fortunately, Ellen's look of alarm and uneasiness, almost of disgust, passed unnoticed. The nurse brought in the baby from the next room. It was wrapped in a blanket, only its little soft head showing. Its hair was very faint, its eyes deep-set and dusky.

The doctor scrutinised it, thinking of the family history. Suddenly he noticed that Ellen was looking at him, watching his eyes.

"We can't tell yet," he said, "but it may be all right."

Ellen, remembering how Jenny, when first brought to her, had looked like that, had not even this scientific, statistical half-confidence. There was a pain and weakness in her body as if it were she who had been delivered. And she was appalled, as if she had given birth to a monster.

The doctor left soon afterwards. The nurse stayed for a day or two and then Ellen and Jenny and the infant were left alone. Jenny seemed to be getting better very quickly. She was strong and happy, and loved to hold the child, and suckle it. But she was clumsy and careless. Ellen, watching her, thought how easily she might let it drop, how easily it would break. She thought how easily Jenny might lean over it, and smother it among the pillows with her heavy

breasts. These thoughts were not horrible. Horrible only was the contemplation of this creature. For Ellen thought it was a monster. All the sorrows and terrors that she had suffered unperceivingly came back to her. And she thought, how could Jenny give it even that particle of life that she had given Jenny. It could only live, bodily, eating and drinking and excreting, and perhaps even, producing another like itself. She hated it. Even the things that had always touched her in young children, the smallness and softness, seemed only like a deception, a promise of existence that would not be fulfilled.

One day, Jenny, moving suddenly, knocked its head against the rail of the bed. It cried weakly for a moment, and then stopped, holding its breath. Jenny was terribly alarmed, and shouted wildly for Ellen. Ellen took it from her to another room. She watched it, not helping it. At last she saw that it was beginning to breathe again, so she put her strong broad hand over its mouth and nose, and it did not breathe any more.

She left it, covered a little carelessly with a sheet, and went back to Jenny. Jenny was sobbing violently, and crying out :

“I have killed her, I have killed her.”

Ellen tried to calm her, but she would not cease sobbing. She became feverish, and Ellen saw that she was perhaps going to be very ill. So she sent at once for the doctor.

She said to him, "The baby has died, and my daughter has got worse. . . ."

He went straight to Jenny, leaving talk till afterwards. The fever had increased, and she was a little delirious. She cried to him:

"I killed her. There was a little blue mark on her head, and that killed her. Oh, Oh, I killed her . . ."

He and Ellen did quickly what they could. Then, leaving her quieter, they went out of the room together.

"Is it true what she says?" he asked.

"No," answered Ellen. "You know, she is not clever, and not good at doing things, and she moved quickly, and hit its head on the bed-rail, and it died afterwards."

The doctor examined the baby. Ellen did not know what he thought. He gave no opinion, but went away, saying he would send in a nurse, and be back himself in the afternoon.

Being a scientist, he was perhaps glad that the baby was not to grow up. Being a humane person, he felt that this house had had trouble enough. In the evening Jenny died, and he wrote out death certificates in the usual form.

Ellen forgot the baby. She sat up all night with Jenny, talking to her sometimes, and touching her, because it was difficult and grievous to let her go. When she was buried, there was nothing left. The world was hard and empty and sterile, and Ellen was to go on living in it, alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SWAN

FOR some years Ellen lived impervious. She looked much older than her age, and the younger village children thought she was a witch, and ran to their mothers whenever they saw her coming. She spent her time looking after the house, in gloomy and monotonous regularity. This was her only activity, her only interest. And yet in it there were long vacant spaces, when she could only sit idle, her broad hands on her knees, still and empty, loneliness pressed palm to palm. But in these times she was not treasuring or mourning over the past, as old people do. It seemed, she had been so exhausted by it, that her mind could make no movement, even of recollection. She had been fitted for creative living, for giving out spiritual energy and warmth, and this had been choked in her. She had been smothered by the unalive and the unreceptive, by all that was incapable of taking what she had been so able to give. And so she had spent herself in destruction. And now she could not start again. She was old and finished, she would make no movement into life, but drew in, withering.

The seasons as they went by were mere changes from hot to cold, mere necessities for different clothes. And even this weakly; for her hands grew often quite blue and numb before she remembered about lighting the fire. She had no sympathy with the earth—it was not so much as painted scenery, for she did not see colours or shapes. She lived indifferently under the night sky and under the day sky, in rain or sunlight or moonlight. In this wide lonely house she could be quite untouched by it; and when she went out she drew her clothes closely about her, as if for protection.

One spring morning (she had opened the windows wider that morning, but whether it was spring or not, she did not care) there was a ring at the door-bell. She did not move for a moment, and then, hearing it repeated, she got up slowly and went to the door. Some people, blurred and dark, stood there. She wondered what they could have come about.

“Good morning,” said the taller creature, uncertainly. She seemed like a dark shadow wavering against the light. Ellen saw that there were two, a woman and young child perhaps.

“What do you want?” she said.

“Don’t you know me? . . . but perhaps we’ve both changed. I’m Cathie Johnson. I used to be here at the post office. . . .”

Ellen passed her hand across her eyes. This was another life and difficult to think about.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Want?" said Cathie vaguely. "I had a holiday, and came here to see."

"To see what?"

"The place, and you. And to see how Jenny was."

"Jenny's dead. Five years ago."

Cathie drew her breath in sharply. Before, there had always been in Ellen, even at her proudest, a secret richness and kindness, which Cathie, though she knew her only slightly, had trusted. She had been lost and bewildered to find it gone. Now, remembering the night when Jenny was lost, she knew why it was gone, and felt not so shipwrecked, standing there unwelcomed. The child holding her hand began to feel that they had not perhaps come among certain enemies. But she was cautious, and did not speak, or move from her mother's side.

For many years the world had held for Ellen no one but enemies and strangers. She had turned her eyes away, hardly seeing them. Strangely and painfully now these people came to her from an earlier existence. She looked at them sullenly, feeling it was too much that she should have to recognise them, too much that she must go out to them, be something for them. She did not want them, she wanted them to go away.

But it was a kind of waking in her that she so much as looked at them. She saw how they stood holding hands, a little pathetically, on her

doorstep. She saw the child's assessing, withdrawn scrutiny and Cathie's old childish look of eagerness and confidence, now clouded a little. She did not want to see so much, but she did so; and at last she accepted it. With a gesture almost of helplessness, she opened wider the door.

"You had better come in," she said. She walked slowly, thinking. Suddenly she looked round at Cathie, and said diffidently:

"Would your little girl like to go out into the garden?"

Cathie and Elisabeth were quite filled and changed with pleasure to see how she had remembered from somewhere that little children like better than anything exploring a garden by themselves. The child ran off without a word. She had already arranged in her mind which direction she should set out in.

"I am so sorry about Jenny," said Cathie.

Ellen made a gesture of her hands that seemed to say how passed it was, how beyond all sorrow.

"Do you hear anything of John?"

"Nothing for over a year now," said Ellen.

"Then he was on a ship, a cargo boat, between England and America. But I didn't see him, because they were only in Liverpool for one day, and then away again."

She paused. John was as far as Cathie in the other life. And for Cathie, he was gone too. She had so many other things, she never thought of him. Not wanting him, she thought

of him as if in a picture, as if he were the wild and courageous hero of an old poem, journeying inaccessibly, somewhere between here and America.

Ellen, awaking with difficulty, said slowly, as if even the words were unused and difficult:

"And what have you been doing?"

"I went away from here because I was going to have my baby, and I worked in a shop. Then, after she was born, I was in a home, where the babies were left all day, and we went out to work. And that was rather awful, but it had to be so, because, though I had a little money, it wasn't enough. And then I got a place, where they let me have her to live with me, and I've been there for about four years now. This fortnight I am having a holiday, and so I thought I would come here, because I was happy here, and because I love this country, and I wanted Elisabeth to see it. . . ."

She stopped, wondering how Ellen would have been affected by her story. Ellen looked puzzled. She had almost forgotten that things could happen. She said, in an echoey ghost-voice:

"I'm afraid it has been difficult."

"It has been all right," said Cathie, her face taking suddenly a complex expression of happiness and unhappiness, of recollection and possibility. Ellen felt very old and apart.

"Did you know," said Cathie, "that it was John's child?"

Ellen was struck with consternation. This

was too much. How could it be? How could the world still hold so much to concern her? Defeatedly she thought she had not strength enough to be concerned. She must refuse it.

Cathie saw her expression, and, not wholly understanding it, she got up to go. She was sorry, because she had thought that perhaps they would have been happy together. But as it was, she must go.

She went out, and called to the child, who came running, full of discoveries. Ellen saw her look of John, and was glad that they were going. She thought there was no power in her to suffer the movement of life. She wanted to be dry and withered. It was as if her veins had frozen, and as if the blood could not flow in them again, without too great pain. And yet, as she saw them walk disappointed down the drive, it was as if her last hope had gone.

Cathie, looking round for one moment, saw her desolate and hopeless attitude. Immediately she ran back.

"I am sorry," she whispered very quietly, "about everything that hasn't been right for you. I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Ellen's face set in hard lines.

"I need no pity," she said.

They stood opposite each other in the porch. Ellen began pushing a finger up a crack of plaster, till a huge piece loosened, and fell, and shivered on the step. She stared down at the fragments as if she had never seen anything break

before. She began to tremble, as people do from exhaustion, or sudden terror.

The child decided that she was free to go again into the lovely and exciting garden. Ellen and Cathie went into the house, and sat together, watching over a frail and tremulous happiness, new-born. Ellen feared and resisted it, and yet thrust herself into it.

"Can you stay here for your holiday?" she said.

"We would like that," said Cathie.

The holiday passed in joy and misery. Sometimes Ellen was so indignant with them that she could not speak. She went austere and silently about the house, disregarding and quelling them. She would not have them exist for her, and she would not have it that they should force her to exist for them. And at such times they let her retreat into the old way, not tormenting her. But always, in the end, their mere presence forced her to a recognition, and by and by she let them in again, and they had some other days of new sweetness. For so many years she had touched nothing, she had fallen like a plummet through space; and now, when her wings stretched out to beat the air, they were clumsy and soon failed, and she dropped again into her fearful isolation. But these two, existing for her, seeing her to exist for them, forced her to launch herself on this element of their life again, and she stayed herself in dizzying unusual flight, keeping herself by

them. Till, by and by, the drag and impulse to fall, to be separate, to be lost, was not so strong, and she began to move easily, like an albatross, who, with invisible fine vibrations of his mighty wings, making no stir or flutter, cuts through the stormy air and hangs poised and motionless over the dangerous seas.

At the end of the holiday they did not want to part. Ellen asked them to come and live with her. Cathie accepted, and went back for the last month in London, leaving Elisabeth in the country.

Elisabeth was in rapture over walking about, and exploring, and thinking her own thoughts, and pursuing her own activities in peace. At first she had been afraid of Ellen, and avoided her, and grudged her claim on her mother's easier companionableness. Now they were alone together, they began to be friends. Elisabeth thought that Ellen was perhaps not very used to little girls, but she liked her, and found her funny and nice. She took up a rather protective and instructive attitude towards her, and taught her in a short time a great many interesting games. She was not so clever at winning as Cathie, and yet more regular and dependable in interest. These were both good qualities.

The day that Cathie came back they made her a little festivity. Elisabeth decorated the table with primroses, and Ellen roasted a chicken, and all the good things to go with it. After dinner Cathie said, should they take apples in

their pockets, and go out into the fields, and come back as late as they wanted. So they started out through the white bright sunshine.

"It's a very nice house we've got here," said Elisabeth, looking back at it.

"It's a good place for an old woman," said Ellen, smiling.

"Oh, Grannie, it's an awfully good place for a little girl."

"And rather a good place for a person who doesn't quite know what she is," said Cathie, comically frowning and laughing. A little later she added, "... yet." But by that time the others had forgotten the conversation and paid no attention.

With these two, Ellen felt the spring again, as if after a long silence and darkness. She was quickest of all of them at finding the early cowslips in the long meadow-grass; for Elisabeth was too active to notice and take things, and Cathie had always been a little inattentive to anything that was under her nose.

They came to the river.

"There used to be swans here," said Ellen and Cathie to each other.

They walked on along the tow-path, and by and by, sure enough, they saw a swan floating towards them, down-stream. He looked at them distantly out of bright beady eyes, and then paddled on, neglecting them. Suddenly, with clatter and flurry, he launched himself on the air, in a harsh struggling line of flight, his

black feet furrowing the water and sending up wild splashes. Then, the air not supporting him, he gathered himself again on the water, in involved lucid curves, and sailed on, balanced and beautiful.

Elisabeth stayed watching him behind the others. She cried, and threw her arms out, and then crouched, folding herself, her hands against her side.

"What are you doing?" said Ellen, looking back.

"I'm being a swan," said Elisabeth.

"You don't do it as well as they do," said Cathie, critically.

Elisabeth looked puzzled and put out.

"Why can't I do it as well? Do you think, if I practise every single day, till next Christmas, I shall do it as well? Or will I have to practise it on the water?"

Ellen grew alarmed.

"Why not be a little dog?" she said. "They live on land the same as you do, and perhaps it wouldn't take as long. . . ."

Elisabeth knew she was being cajoled. She turned proud and said:

"I shan't be any of those stupid animals. I shall find a way, a very special way of my own. And I shall be the only person who knows when I do it right, because it's my invention."

Cathie laughed, shrugging her shoulders, and walked on with Ellen. Elisabeth stood where she was, contorting herself into various positions.

At last she lay on her back, and looked at the sky, and waved her short legs in the air. In this position she began singing a little tuneless song, about walking on the clouds. They looked very interesting and walkableonable to-day, she thought; and it would be very dangerous and lovely to jump from one cloud to the other as they whizzed about. Her own legs, also, looked interesting, waving in the air like flags. She began to sing about a battle that some people had fought once, throwing doughnuts at each other.

Cathie came running back. She laughed, and smacked her little round behind, and picked her up.

"We can't have you lying on the grass at this time of year," said Ellen, in benevolent disapproval.

CHAPTER XIX

PAUSE

THEY were tired when they got back, and even Elisabeth was still. It was evening, and the room was almost dark. She sat on Ellen's knee, and from time to time they spoke quietly, exchanging their little confidences. Nobody wanted to bring in the lamp. Cathie had gone to the window, and stood there, with the cave of mellow darkness behind her, and outside the blue translucent evening. She felt a security in this house, and a peace and strength that seemed to come easily now from this old woman. And she was happy.

Away to the side, she could see the profuse whiteness of a blossoming pear-tree. The evening darkened, till at last the moment came that she was waiting for, the turn of the earth under the sky that she thought the most beautiful and wonderful of all. The sky was a dark and glowing blue. It seemed to thrust quiveringly into the spirit, like music. The garden trees were black. But the pear-tree blossom was like white moony fire, shining, suddenly transfigured, not white merely, but glowing.

The earth span, and the minute passed, and

the light in everything went out. It all stopped shining. Yet still, when she turned back into the room, she could just make out how Ellen and Elisabeth sat together, their white faces near. Ellen was beginning to sing whisperingly some little song.

Cathie stayed in uncertainty at the window, looking, as it were, in at them. She was a little separate from them and left out; and it was this perhaps that drove her to reflection. She thought of Ellen's strange sad life, and wondered how it was that its course had curved so well to this comely and fulfilled old age; as if she were full of ripe experience, like a hazel kernel or a wrinkled apple. She thought about Elisabeth's young enterprising vitality, and wondered where it would take her. She liked to see these two together. They seemed to share, and nourish in each other, some fine deep satisfaction in their own existences which Cathie could not understand. She knew she had experienced extremely; she knew she was still capable of experiencing extremely; still ready, still alive. And yet all her happinesses, in people, and in things, and in activity; all her miseries, and all her complicated excitements, seemed only endlessly following one another more and more, adding up in number, in quantity, in quality even, to such riches, and yet . . . making nothing. She did not wonder that they left her out. She did not know what she could be for them. And yet she loved them so, that she could

hardly bear this moment. She wanted to go over to them, and kneel on the floor beside them, and feel Ellen's arm round her, and lay her head, as Elisabeth did, on Ellen's shoulder. And yet she wanted also Elisabeth to hold in her own arms, as her own child. And even then, still, still there was a part of her unsatisfied. For this part, she wanted no share, no responsibility, no existence in their lives. She wanted only to escape, and run out under the sky, where the stars hung like blossom. . . .

She stayed at the window. The night grew black outside, and Ellen sang so softly, that the sound of it on the air was lost and faltering. To Elisabeth it came clear and sweet:

'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
One at my head, and one at my feet,
And two at my heart, my soul to keep.'

Ellen's song grew softer and softer. She bent her head to Elisabeth's, holding her closely, almost thinking she was indeed her child:

'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.'

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