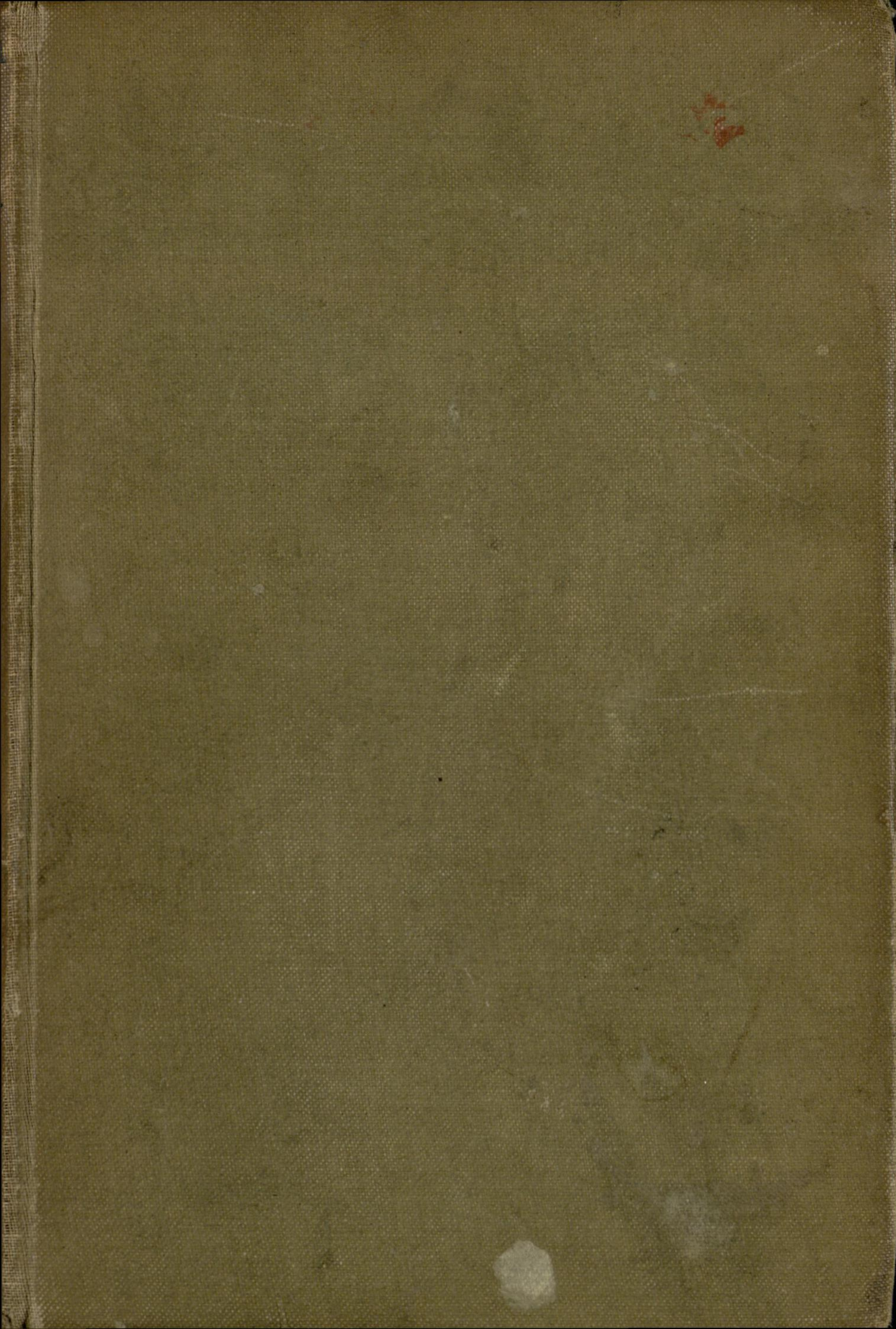

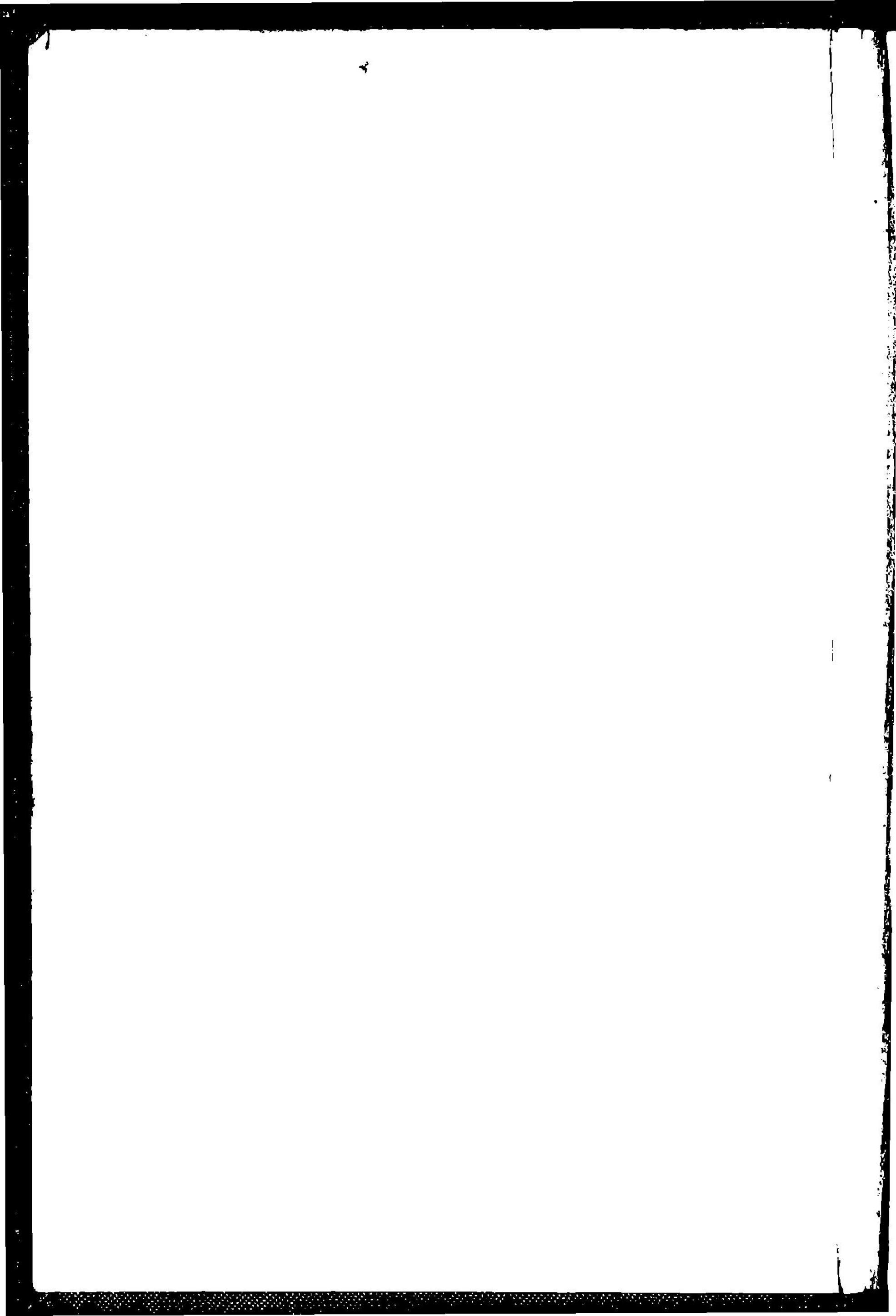

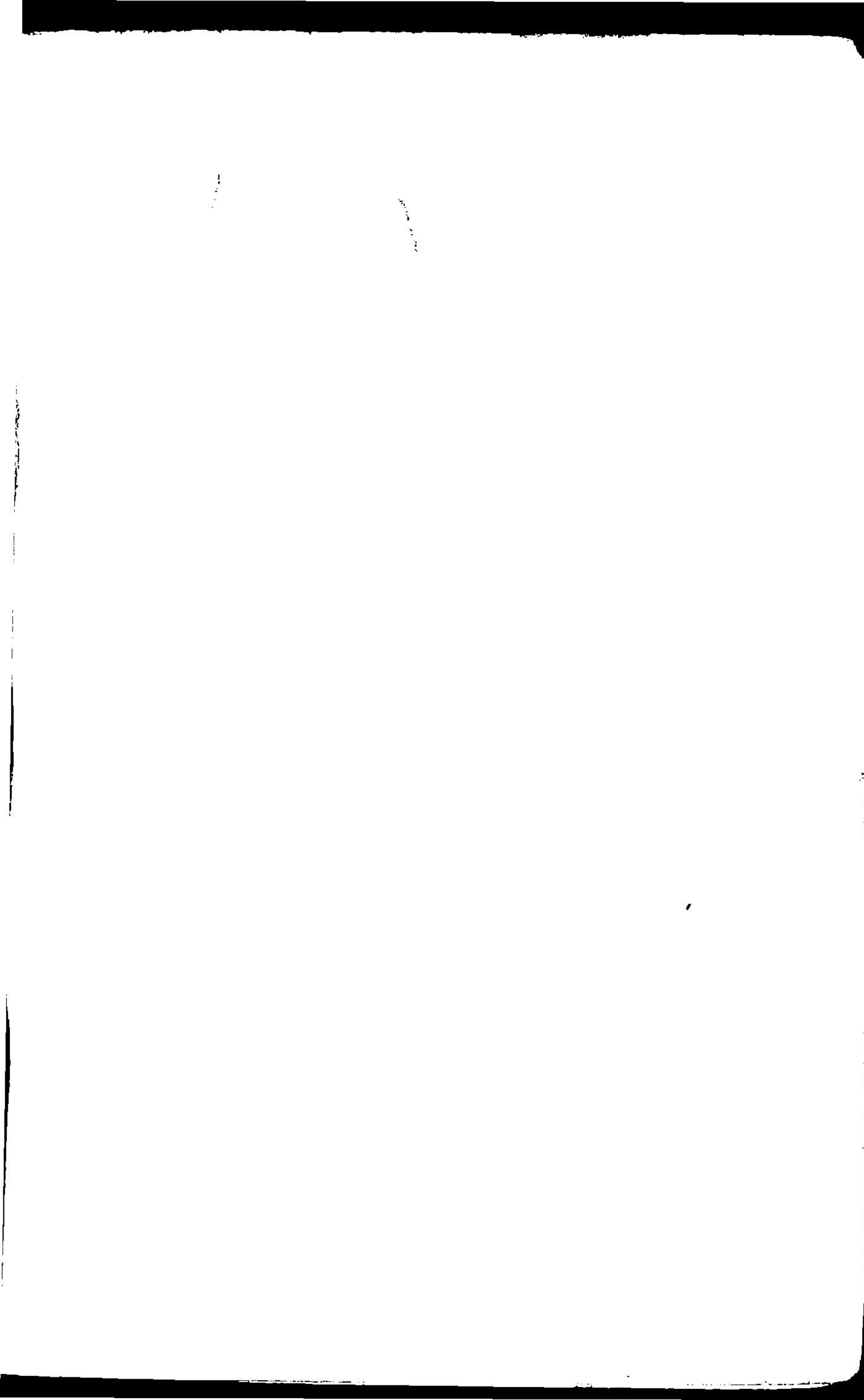

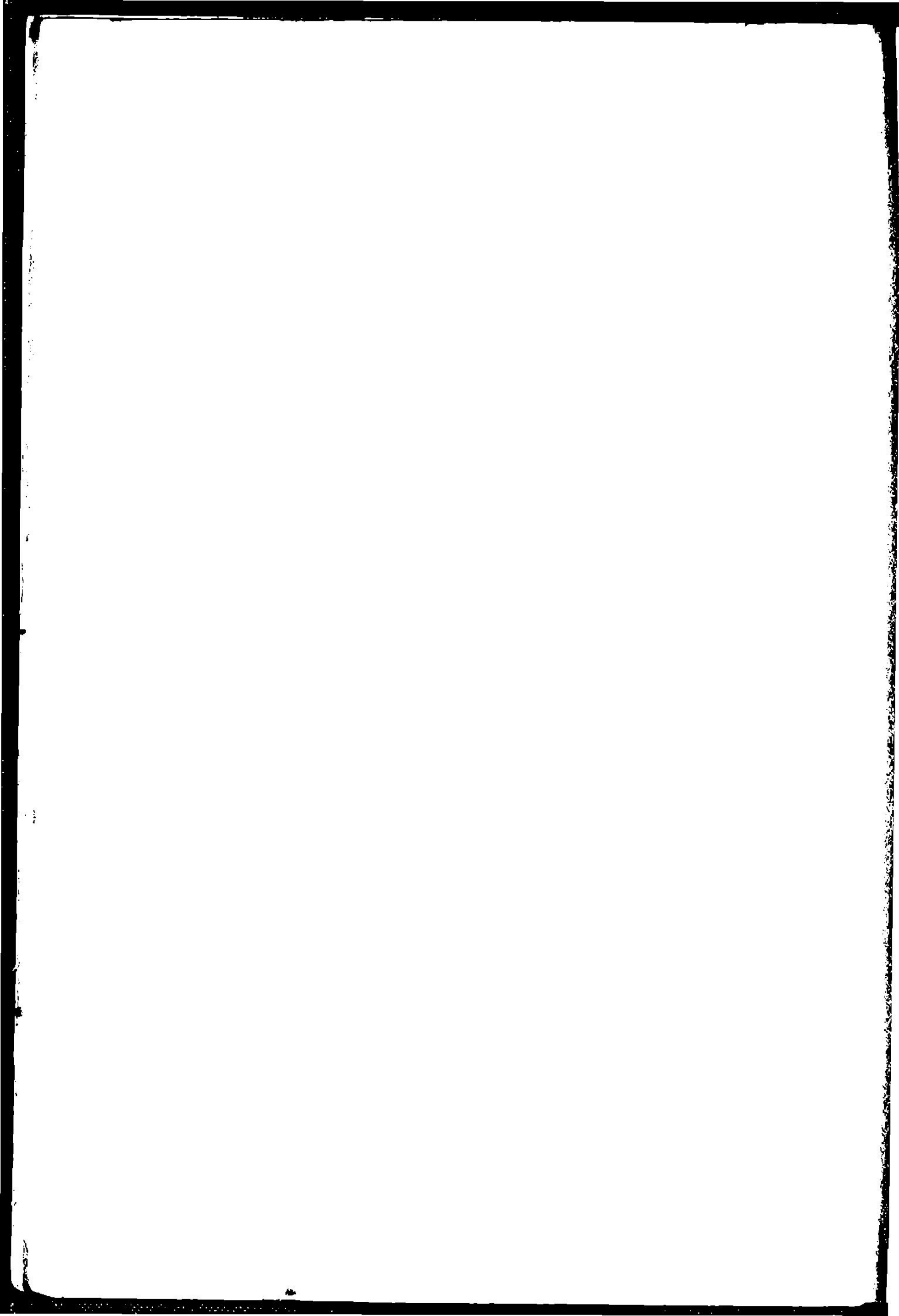

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TURN AGAIN

A Novel

by

L. E. MARTIN

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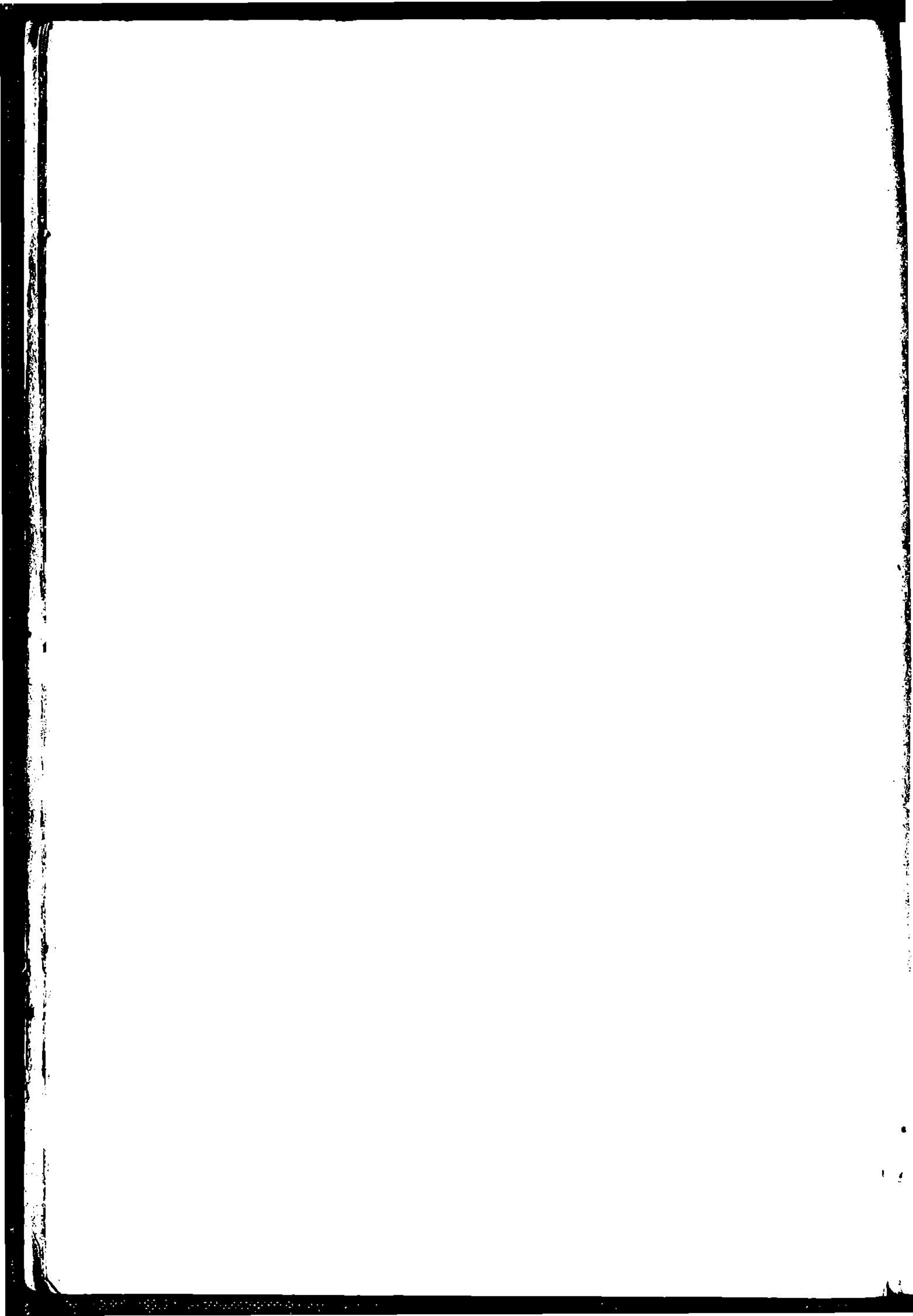

CHAPTER I

HAWTHORN

IMMEDIATELY after the war, Stanley Fielding, who had been foreman in an unenterprising building firm in the provinces, set up on his own. The moment was propitious, and after a very brief incubation his bungalows came up like a rash at the outskirts of the town. He kept careful but uninformative accounts, and never knew on what part of the business he had made his money. All the same, he did get a lot of money, and began to make rather a show of his success. He built himself a two-storey villa on a high-priced bit of land only ten minutes' walk from the High Street, and moved into it in the spring of 1920, a fortnight before his fifth child was born. His wife Violet was obliged to leave the drawing-room windows without curtains during her confinement and came downstairs after it in a mood of conscientious flurry from which she was never afterwards free.

In a year or two the period of prosperity passed, unexpectedly, as it had come. 'Poor Stan' had a nervous breakdown, went bankrupt, and did not afterwards recover either financially or psychologically.

"Since my trouble," he said, "it got hard to keep the business up together. A sick man can't be expected to keep things going like I used to. There was nothing wrong with things so long as my health lasted out, we had money and to spare when you children were small. But that wasn't done without hard work, either; and I shouldn't be surprised if it wasn't that worry and responsibility which sent me ill in the first place. A business doesn't stay right of itself, you have to watch it pretty carefully, but of course, when a man's ill he hasn't the strength for it. . . ."

He explained this situation on countless occasions to anyone who would either listen or appear to listen, and did not get better. He gave up the business, after he had hundreds of times shown himself incapable of managing it, and hung about the house (now falling out of repair) alternately complaining and tyrannising. Violet reverted somewhat to her country ways, and had meals in the kitchen; but it was a constant worry to her that their position was not being kept up as it had been.

She often had long talks with her eldest daughter about what they would do when Dad got rich again.

"I would have a house with a large hall," said Edna, "not just a passage."

"I would like some good clothes for you girls, and some suits for Dad, and perhaps some little things for myself, some time."

"Could we have a servant?"

"Yes, of course, dear, as many servants as we wanted. If only Dad was as rich as he ought to be."

"Perhaps I will meet a millionaire," said Edna, "and he will adopt me, because I remind him of his dead child, and leave me all his money, so that we can go to the seaside every summer in silk dresses, and in the winter go every Saturday to the cinema in velvet ones."

"Perhaps he'll want to marry you."

"I shan't forget you, mother, even when I am married. Even if I married a duke, and lived in a palace by a lake with swans."

Jess, who had been doing homework at a table in the window, looked up, pushing the hair out of her eyes.

"And who's going to want to marry you?" she asked disagreeably, for these conversations always made her angry. "There might be some hope for you if the duke had never seen anyone but geese. . . ."

"Don't be rude, Jess," said Violet abruptly. Edna began to whine.

"I was only joking," said Jess, "but she'd better wait and see if she looks any nicer when she's grown up before she decides who's going to propose to her."

"No one will ever want to marry an awful beast like you!" shouted Edna.

Jess shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't mind. I'm not counting on it. I shall dress up as a boy and go to sea."

"They'll send you home."

"Who will?"

"The people on the ship."

"Well, I shall choose a ship that isn't coming back for several years, and then they'll have to keep me. Then I shall be so useful to them that they let me stay as long as I want."

"Well, I hope they want you a long time, so that I don't see your nasty face again."

"Why on earth do you hang about this room, then? I want to work, anyhow."

"Come along, Edna," said Violet, making a belated effort at authority, "there's no use in us making ourselves disagreeable because she is."

With this, Violet swept out, without much dignity; and Edna followed. She turned round once, and hissed out, 'you're a beast,' but Jess stared out of the window as if she had not heard.

Jess hated being poor too, and imagined in secret how grand it would be to be free of these small spaces and recurrent duties and penny-saving anxieties. But these talks between Edna and her mother made it seem just as wretched to be rich. She did not really want particularly to be rich, but only to be somewhere else. She thought that Edna and her mother would be just the same, only perhaps a little worse, if they were rich. It would be a particular disadvantage if they had more time to talk in. Jess hoped that Edna would be too sulky to talk this evening and determined to be as horrid as possible.

"Why are you such a beast to me?" said

Edna, "and just when I wanted to tell you something."

"I don't suppose it would interest me."

"Oh, it would. I swear it would. It's about somebody . . . well, somebody."

"Do you mean your adored Miss Hayweed? Why d'you think I want to hear about her?"

"Don't be a liar, Jess. You told me yourself you thought Miss Haywood was the most beautiful woman you had ever seen."

"I must have been mad for a minute."

"But, Jess, you waited about to talk to her, and took her flowers out of the garden; I saw you choosing them, and then afterwards they were on the desk in her form-room. . . ."

"You notice a good deal too much. And if you want to know I shan't give her flowers again."

"Was she horrid to you? or have you got a passion for one of the others?"

"That's what you think, is it? No, she was very nice to me, and I shan't be giving flowers to any of the others either. But I think her nose is too little, and her hair is too wispy, and her legs are stuck on crooked."

"Jess, how can you say that. She has the most beautiful retroussé nose, and her legs are a lovely shape, even if they are a little short."

"When have you done all this measurement of her wonderful legs?"

"We were all talking about it. All our form think she's marvellous. And we decided that

her legs were perhaps a bit short, but otherwise she's perfect. And then to-day . . ."

"Did she kiss you?"

"No; did she kiss you?"

"No, but only because I wouldn't let her. I think she's really quite boring, though I did like her a bit at first."

"Jess, you are so exasperating. I had such a marvellous adventure, and then you make it seem quite boring. . . ."

"All right, tell me about it, only don't mind if I yawn."

"Well, if you're only going to fall asleep in the middle I won't be bothered. . . ."

"All right then." Jess closed her eyes, and there was a longish pause. Then Edna, in a shattering whisper:

"Jess, are you asleep?"

"Yes."

"Well, listen. When I was coming out of the North Road gate after my music lesson I saw a silver pencil in the road, and of course I recognised it at once, because it was Miss Haywood's, so I thought I'd take it round to her. And when I got there she was just having tea, and she said would I come in and have some. And she has such a lovely room, full of books and pictures and very comfortable stools, and she was having tea with lemon in it and little chocolate biscuits, which were gorgeous though horribly small. And she was awfully sweet to me, and thanked me for bringing the pencil, and asked me what

could be done to make our form a bit nicer in English lessons. There!"

"She asked *you* what could be done? . . ."

"Well, I said I liked English so awfully much, and then I said I couldn't think why everyone didn't like English. And she smiled a little sadly, and so I said that perhaps it was because they didn't listen so as to know how nice it was. So she said no, they didn't listen, and I said I would make them listen a bit more. . . ."

"How would you do that?" said Jess sarcastically.

"Well, they all adore her, only they won't listen to what she says, they're all so stupid. So I thought if they knew how miserable it made her . . ."

"Did you tell her that?"

"No, not exactly, because she hadn't exactly told me that she was miserable. But I can see she is miserable, and think I ought to do something to help her. She is *so* nice, Jess, especially in her own house."

"That's why I don't know about it, I suppose," said Jess, still rather sulky, though nearly asleep.

"You're jealous," said Edna loudly, with triumph.

"Madly," murmured Jess, her voice coming muffled out of the pillow. The whole thing bored her intolerably and she preferred sleeping.

A syrupy stillness (being half-asleep) came over her. The stuff in her mind, without being moved, was loosening, as if by penetrative mois-

ture, not wind or tide. The shapes which had been stamped on her mind during the day became alive. The shapes of young girls, unformed and energetic, darted here and there, the separate impulses forming a pattern and the ball linking up hand and hand in parabolic arches. With this, in the suave inconsequence of half-sleeping, marched out a procession of dogs, perambulators and shoppers. With them, a clump of very early crocuses. With that, the abrupt shape of a hill-edge, and the pitiless, indecipherable gesture of a tree-skeleton, making no explanation, on a freezing, shining sky. These images came and went of their own energy, growing brighter as she folded herself from the external world, her limbs lying more softly, until, sinking deeper, she withdrew herself from them also, and slept.

Asleep, she lost her daytime too-habitual expression of sullenness and exasperation. She slept with lips opened a grass-blade's-breadth, gold hair spread loose as seaweed, all of her together as undefended and vivid as a leaf-bud, and strong as, in February, the inexplicit spring.

February becomes March and March April; the sun-patches grow warmth as well as light; the intricate though simple pattern of branches confuses itself, growing complex, with buds and catkins; the sky pants, breathing rain; colour flashes between sky and earth as between two looking-glasses. Waking and sleeping, eating and walking are pleasures. Hair is fire, fingers are darts

of light, body is a stalk through which the flame-sap rushes upwards.

Jess ran from school, feet quick and lively as flames, hat snatched off (like clouds stripped from the hill-edges), hair as unruly as grass. She put down her satchel in the hall and went to tea. How dark the room is; Alfred's nervous and high-pitched voice stumbles forward, he gesticulates brusquely as a puppet, shaking the sandy hair back from his forehead with a habitual movement, and stretching out his thin adolescent fingers on wrists like long stalks. To him Fred opposes a heavy, easy, and immovable good-humour. Daff looks from one to the other, giggling and encouraging. Edna purses up her lips and drinks tea. Stanley, the father, huddles at the head of the table, clutching his neurosis. Violet, disappointed but still effortful, pours tea and passes cake, in a manner at once weary and unsparing. Occasionally she rebukes the children for shouting; or tries to interest them in bits of gossip.

"Mrs. Hunter up the road has got her eldest son home for a few days. He looks a nice boy too, though his mother's not at all the sort of woman I care for. No money, and the place kept like a pigstye and full of children; there's no harm in being poor, I always say, but the poorest can be clean. . . ."

"Is he grown up, mother?" asked Edna.

"Grown out of all his clothes, but looks a boy still. Though I see he's got a motor-bicycle; and where the money comes from I can't imagine."

"We're the only people in this town without any money, it seems to me," said Stanley lugubriously.

Jess sat down without speaking, and ate and drank ravenously; school makes you hungry. From its points of concentration her energy dissolved hazily, spreading through her a mute, permeating tranquillity, cool as water and intangible as air. When she had finished she got up and went out without a word.

"Why don't you put your hat on, Jess?"

"I'm only going as far as the corner."

Jess felt herself like the spring air through which sounds come so clearly, exact as equilateral triangles, the air being empty, shining, piercable. Her mother's voice cut through her, leaving no trace. She went like a wind, unhurt and unrecognisant.

In the road Adam stood beside his new motorbicycle. A scaley, fire-breathing beast, submissive and dangerous like a domestic dragon. A crowd of children stood round.

"How fast will it go?" said a little boy, solemn as a baby.

"She'll get up seventy," said Adam, pleased and kind.

"Will you give me a ride?" said Nesta Mathews, immediately twisting her head, with bashfulness, to hide her face, since perhaps she oughtn't.

"Me as well, if she does?" said Alice, on tiptoe, as ready as anyone.

"You're sure you can hold on all right?" said Adam, they seemed so small.

"I'm sure I can," said Alice, holding out her thin arms to show.

"I should hold on very tightly to your belt," said Nesta.

Jess felt the colour of her sky changing as she came up to them. It glowed, and the air, not so translucent, flickered with warm golden motes. The voices, which from a distance had dropped through her like pebbles, grew up now in blurred flowery shapes.

"Who's first?" said Adam.

The children crushed towards him, like the circle of a wave receding, leaving Jess distinct.

"I am too old," reflected her distinctness, "to come playing motor-bicycle with the children."

She lingered uncertainly; her mood soft and warm as the air, in which shook and swam the yellow dust of voices, and yet self-conscious because she was also a girl in a green coat, half a head taller than the others.

Adam took the children in turn, from the youngest upwards. He thought Jess would go away (since the wave-circle of his game with the children did not touch her), but coming each time into sight he looked for her, and saw her with joy, as you do a particular flower, when, thinking it will have been picked and taken away, you look unconsciously for a space, and instead find, with astonishment and joy, the flower itself.

The great grunting beast so powerfully and

adroitly skimming the corners was strange to her and disagreeable. But his intimacy with it astonished and fascinated her; and his sunlight, his pleasure, his vitality glowed through her air.

"Will you have a go now?" he asked her.

She was not afraid of anything, but she said:

"Is it dangerous?"

"No, look how these kids stuck on. You just try."

She got up behind him, and the great lumbering-looking creature shot off under them like a fish. She held his belt and crouched gripping on the little shuddering seat. Then her muscles grew easier. She balanced, throwing her head back so that the wind drove over her forehead from the peak of her nose to her hair-tips. She saw his short crisp hair shaking like leaves, and his neck straight and firm as a beech tree trunk.

They turned out of the town on to the road which lies flat at the edge of the plain, with the hills on one side of it. As Jess perched herself more easily the shaking zigzag of the hill-edge flowed out into sweet curves, and the hedges, hitherto shot past like arrows of green horizontal rain, became also vertical and composed of bushes. They turned to the hills, where the road charges them and then swerves sharply crosswise. Jess looked down, through trees, at the roman road lying straight as a flail across the plain, decisive as their course. The motor, forcible and labouring, heaved them over the peak. Then they turned along the ridge and came out on a hill-

balcony, beneath which the plain spread flat as a pond, with a far vague bank of other hills. They stopped, on a grass edge; Adam balanced them with his toes, and turned his head only to her.

"Nice?"

"Yes."

"I must look her over."

They got off, and Jess walked to the extreme edge, which fell perpendicular like a small pebbly cliff, to a steep slope on which grew a pine-wood. Between her and this wood, below and to the left, a thorn tree grew out of the earth and pebbles. Its leaf-buds were just showing, like drops of sap, forced out to the smallest and farthest twigs of the tree, taut with sap. In the afternoon sun they shone gold.

Adam came up, and sat on the grass. She settled beside him, and watched his broad skilful and kindly hands as he took out and lit a cigarette. He smoked in silence, looking over to a distance where roofs and smoke blurred the green fields.

"That's where my girl lives," he said abruptly.

"Oh," said Jess, looking at him with her blue eyes almost black. "Is she nice?"

"Yes, she is nice," he said reflectively, "but I don't think she very much likes me. . . ."

"Then why do you go on with her?"

Adam laughed ruefully, and was silent. Then: "Have you been in love, as they call it?"

"I'm too young," said Jess sharply.

She looked down at the thorn tree. The pres-

sure of life inside it, so barely, so agonisingly crushed out in these small drops, as small as sweat, was intolerable. The trunk seemed almost cracking open, the branches splitting off, the sap leaping up like a fountain, or a fire triumphing in a house. Her finger-tips hurt, as if the blood were pressing out in them, like sap; her bones trembled, as if a fire were loosening the beams.

"I love you better than anyone," she said.

He looked at her uncertainly, as if into a secret room whose window had blown open and swung loose. Her voice was like a window swinging; her look like a lamp beside which someone sits unconscious. He was astonished and yet satisfied, as if he had woken in a strange place, remembering that he had himself come there, but not remembering how or why, and not knowing where it was. Uncertain, he put his arm round her, and so, feeling her thin waist, her trembling childish body, recognising her extravagant and untried strength, must say, smiling gently:

"You are so young."

She drew in her breath with difficulty. There was a queer buzzing inside her head. Adam crossed his arms on his knees, and sat looking at her.

Putting chains across rivers so that they do not flow, screwing down crocuses, dragging the clouds up and down the sky in nets, would have been easier. Jess clenched her teeth. Suddenly the tension vanished, and they were comfortably together again.

"That's all I know," said Jess, smiling at him suddenly.

"I expect what you know is generally the right amount."

"Yes, knowing is easy, but doing is sometimes rather difficult. Sometimes I feel all right about everything I do and sometimes about nothing."

"Do you feel all right or not all right now?" said Adam curiously.

"Oh, I feel all right, of course. Don't you?"

"Yes," said Adam, but with a little shamefaced masculine exasperation.

" I am at this moment more happy than ever in my life. So we *must* be all right. And it was a lovely ride."

She was really a child, he thought, and left the town again the next morning with no particular regret. Nor did she miss him, but she remembered him, among thwarting and rebuking conversation, as someone to whom she could say what she liked, and felt free with. She could not remember his face at all distinctly.

The children grew up, Edna had her hair cut and waved, and got a young man, Harold Webbing, a commercial traveller, who worked round the district from the town as centre, and always came to see her two or three times a week. Violet liked him, because he teased, and opened doors for her; so she took trouble with her cooking and showed off a little when he was there. Daff, the

baby, fourteen now, but remaining helpless and protectable, was nice to him and got sweets. The others disliked him. Stanley hated to imagine any rivals to his influence and authority (since he had none); Alfred (doing brilliantly at the grammar school) could hardly tolerate his sluggish self-satisfaction. Fred (now errand-boy to a butcher) shrugged his shoulders and winked obscenely over the whole business; and Jess as far as possible avoided noticing him.

Edna had been educated to a high idea of her own value, and though she admired Harold for his astuteness, his easiness, his affability, she could not but think that he had made a fine bargain. She was very well-behaved; and at first, though she held his hand in the cinema, made a lot of trouble over being kissed on the way home. Harold 'got her over that' all right, but she persisted in an air of condescension, so that he would have thrown her over, if he could have brought himself to cut his connection with what seemed to him a substantial family (his father was a dock labourer, and had caused him some embarrassment in various ways; till he had succeeded in breaking off all relations).

It was part of Edna's idea of propriety to keep him waiting. He must have spent hours altogether in the parlour, his elbows on the green tablecloth, his white and slightly swollen face slung above his fists, impatient, resentful, resigned, or perhaps merely negative.

Jess came in one day when he was there, with-

out knowing, to fetch something. He looked at her mournfully.

"Will your sister be long?"

"I don't expect so," said Jess, with a bright, kind and uninterpretable look. To see these two together made her almost sick, but Harold by himself was merely pitiable, and she was angry with Edna.

"She's changing," she added.

Harold looked pleased and at once vulgar and repellent.

He felt powerful, and immediately, bullying, said:

"She ought to have done that before."

Jess shrugged her shoulders. If she had been in love she would have done it before, or not had time to do it at all. But of course not for Harold. She smiled oddly to herself.

"What's the joke?" said Harold.

"Nothing much," she said, blushing a little.

"Don't agree with nice clothes?"

"Sometimes."

"I thought you were perhaps, well, rather highbrow about them. There's something a bit artistic about you, I always thought. . . ."

He looked up at her bright red-gold hair, her intent blue eyes, wide-open, her still, serious mouth. He stretched his hand out and fingered the coarse stuff of her skirt.

"Now that's not grand," he said, "and yet it's nice, and suits you. The truth is that girls like you—" he leaned forward confidentially, and his

hand, still gripping the stuff, rested against her leg—"the truth is that girls like you, who are really beautiful, if you know what I mean, they don't *need* clothes. Well, perhaps I ought to say they don't need *grand* clothes, if you take my meaning."

Jess stood quite still and looked at him with amazement.

"Now Edna," he went on, "she needs dressing. And I like her to take care of herself, and go to a bit of trouble. But you, you know, there's something kind of wild about you, something almost poetic"—he giggled apologetically. "I look at you, and think, now there's someone who's quite different from anyone else in the world; I wonder what's going on inside that funny little head. . . ."

His commercial training had made it almost impossible for him to stop talking, once started, and had deadened him to all responses. He did not notice Jess's expression of contempt, anger and amusement, which gradually merged in one horror. Suddenly he decided to produce a crisis ('take it or leave it') and got up, pushing his chair out of the way with one foot, and tried to put his arms round her. He expected her to resist, to run away, to scream, and felt powerful enough to subdue her; but she stood there, and suddenly burst out into harsh contemptuous laughter. He dropped his arms, feeling very small, and his face wrinkled up as if something had collapsed inside. He pulled himself together, and attempted tenderness.

"Did I frighten you? Poor child, I oughtn't to have spoken so suddenly. But look here, I'm on the square, and you've only got to say a word, and I'd marry you to-morrow. It's the spirit in you I like. . . ."

Jess looked at him more solemnly. A creeping horror had followed her hysterical laughter.

"I'd sooner sleep with slugs in my bed," she said. Harold was shocked.

"Well, I didn't think to hear *you* talk like that," he rebuked her.

"What about the way you talk?" she retaliated, a schoolgirl, uncertain of herself, using the only weapons.

"I'm a man, and you're a young girl, with no experience, or didn't ought to have."

"Well, I'm engaged, if you want to know," said Jess (a schoolgirl, boasting of the parties she has been to in the holidays). Then, "But it's private."

"If I'd known that," said Harold resentfully; "what's it kept so dark for? I don't see it."

"It's no one's business but mine," said Jess, going to the door.

They heard Edna come out of her room.

"Look here," whispered Harold, "don't say anything about—you know what to—you know who."

"No, of course I won't," said Jess, and, looking at his collapsed, alarmed expression, was too proud to ask anything of him.

Edna came in smiling primly.

"Sorry to keep you," she said, offering Harold her cheek. "I hope you've entertained each other nicely."

Jess went out without a word, and Harold took Edna on his knee.

"I never knew you were engaged, Jess," said Edna, aggrieved, as soon as they got into bed that evening.

"How d'you know now?"

"Harold told me you told him."

"Tell you anything else?"

"No, what else might he have told me? Who is it, Jess? He said you didn't say."

"It's none of it true, anyhow."

"Oh, Jess, don't be a beast. Tell me who it is. Is it that man you were keen on about two years ago—Adam Hunter, wasn't it—who's been away to work? You haven't been seeing him since, have you, Jess?"

"No, of course I haven't seen him, and I'm not engaged to him, and if you want to know I'm not engaged to anyone."

"But Harold says you said . . ."

"Oh, I told him I was, but that was only to see if he believed it. . . ."

"Jess, you wicked liar. Harold will be horrified. . . ."

"I expect he will be," said Jess, with teeth clenched. "Now shut up, and go to sleep."

In spring again, two years later, Adam came back. Jess was just crossing the strip of hall to

go in to supper, when she heard a knock, and ran to the door. As they stood opposite each other, a flash of perception made blind their actual eyes; they could not see form or gesture or expression, and waited, dazed, uncertain how to interpret and substantiate this subtle, intuitive and featureless recognition.

"Will you come to the circus with me?" said Adam.

"Yes. Now at once?"

"At once. Yes. At once."

Jess ran upstairs for her coat. Edna was in their room putting powder over her face. (It was one of Harold's evenings to supper.)

"What's the excitement?" she said.

"Adam has come, and we are going to a circus," said Jess, pushing her arms into her coat-sleeves.

"Adam? and you're going out with him? You'd better ask him to supper, hadn't you?"

"He says we must start at once. . . ." Edna heard the last words from the stair-head, and then hurrying feet, and a jump, and a door banged.

"What's happened to you in all this time?" said Adam, still hardly able to see her.

"I've left school. What are you doing?"

"Till last week, I expect you know, I worked in Birmingham, in a garage. Now I'm going to drive one of the buses here."

"Just drive and drive about in all kinds of places all day?"

"Yes, that's about it, but they'll be pretty often

the same places. What do you do all day, now you've left school?"

"I . . . oh, I . . . I don't know." Jess looked troubled and vague.

She did not know, and felt awkward, not knowing what to say; not even being able to keep up this distant, stilted conversation.

Almost from the house, a few people had been going in their direction, and as they went on farther, it became clear that a stream of people was being drawn in the direction of the circus-field. It swelled swiftly and steadily by imperceptible increases, drawing with it, and increasing imperceptibly their sense of expectation. Then all suddenly, through a gate between two villas, turned into a field. In a wide circle round the gate the grass had been trampled away, and the girls screamed and clutched, slithering on the soft mud. Jess walked on hardly noticing, looking between their heads at the tent, squatting like a huge dim elephant. At the door-flap, behind a shifting silhouette of heads and shoulders, a chrysanthemum light flared like trumpets. People were laughing and shouting and pushing.

They got in, and found among the jostle, seats about three rows from the ring. The place smelt of sawdust and horses. The lights shone violently downwards, and the top of the tent was invisible, in a misty obscurity. It might have stretched upwards for ever. The people shouted from distances, and nudged and shuffled, and wriggled their haunches on the hard seats.

"Have you had supper?" said Adam suddenly.

Jess looked at him dazed, not hearing.

"Yes," she said mechanically, and then, "No, they were just going to have supper when I came away."

"I must get you something," said Adam abruptly, and jumped up. Jess alone, looked as out of a dark black cave at the light falling violent as hail on the sand-coloured sawdust, and heard the talking-noise rocking like waves.

Adam came back with fish and chips in a newspaper. Jess felt suddenly ravenously hungry. Adam would not eat, but held the greasy package open while she picked out of it yellow slivers of potato and lumps of yellow fish. The potato was at first crisp and delicious, but soon went a little damp and floppy, the grease spread out in dark wider circles on the white paper, and Jess felt not at all hungry. So she put the rest (most of it) under the seat.

The circus was beginning. Two clowns, very short, with broad-at-the-hip pantaloons, and sad, red, enormous mouths, shouted jokes at each other in hoarse voices across the ring, turning to the audience for applause and confirmation. Tiers of hands clapped, smiles were splashed on to faces like sudden sunlight, laughter and applause bubbled up enough to lift off the tent's kettle-lid. "What did he say?" voice after voice whispered (flushed face turning in the misted blackness), but not having heard did not matter. They laughed

and shouted. Then horses, groomed flat as paint, black paint, with one horse swan-white, gold bells jingling, castanet-music clapping and slapping, puffs of sawdust flying up. On the white horse a lady, empress-like, large black eyes, large nose, firm hands with heavy bright rings, red trousers, black jacket heavily and brightly beaded and embroidered. Light violent as beads of hail. Pleasure from the black tiers like waves of light streaming. Then seals balancing huge balls like the world spinning in bright sunlight in space. Then, air like water, fish-men darting from trapeze, then balancing, bowing, shoulder muscles gross as tree-roots. Then elephants, huge grey tents in illimitable grey tent, sitting obediently on their vast behinds, balancing obediently on barrels, winding out their mississippi trunks for lumps of sugar. Then a pink-bosomed in pink tights lady with a pink parasol walking a tightrope. Then small arch ponies dancing. Then a contortionist. Then poodles at a tea-party. Air thicker and heavier with smoke; crowd compacter; noise deeper, louder.

Suddenly the end came; sudden and astonishing as morning after a sleepless night. The light blazed down ineffectively on the ring, dungy and trodden. People crushed to the door, drawing themselves like a veil off the scaffolding-skeleton of seats, raven-scoured and joints loosening. This is the end, this is death; but still Jess saw in front of her eyes horses, seals, orange-and-red balls, a girl tightrope walking in pink, elephants, sand-

sawdust, chrysanthemum light, hands clapping like castanets.

So she did not talk, but walked home in silence beside Adam, and parted from him with a bare good night.

It was not strange that they did not recognise each other when they next met. They were walking down the same road, but on opposite sides, not noticing. Adam first saw Jess, and stared at her covertly, waiting for her to turn her head, so as to be sure. He thought she must have grander clothes than usual, she looked so serious and responsible, and older on the whole than he had imagined. He started to cross the road, hesitated, and then called to her—hopefully, dubiously, as you might try a foreigner with French or German. She turned, startled, looked blankly at him for a minute, and then smiled, but with difficulty. Three images of him were cutting in and out in her mind. The one, which she-then had seen of him-then; the second, which she-now saw of him-then; and the third, which she-now saw of him-now. Up till this minute only the first had existed; and the second, consequently, only existed as identical with it. At this minute the third came into being, a new difficult creation, modifying both first and second. She saw that he was older than she remembered, yet still so young, as she-now (growing-up) saw it, that she could not explain to herself how he-then had seemed to her-then (two years ago) so heroic, so complete. She saw him

now, awkward and a little clumsy, a creature growing on a different stalk, so alien now (for she was accustomed to him-then) that the friendship, the actual though indistinct love between her-then and him-then, seemed to have no connection with her-now, and no meaning.

They walked along side by side. Neither could think of anything to say, and yet felt uncomfortable in the silence, as if there was something special they ought to be talking about. Jess thought of one or two remarks, but her lips froze on them.

"I've got to go and see someone here," she said, turning suddenly in at a gate, and holding out her hand.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Adam, disappointed, but not suggesting he might wait, and partly relieved, "but shall I see you again soon?"

"I expect so; I don't see why not," said Jess, anxious and uncertain. He went off, and she crept into a damp, leaf-mouldy hole between the stone gate-post and a laurel bush. She did not want anyone to see her, and stood there, holding her breath, smiling a little giggling smile of hide-and-seek excitement and mystery. He had got round the corner a long time before she dared come out into the open again. Looking back through the laurels and the white italianate house, she saw that it was empty. In the pit of her stomach she felt sick (she could bear not seeing him again, but that he shouldn't perhaps want to see her again she could not bear), so she laughed,

and ran home, and decided she did not care. This disappearance of her friendship with Adam was a mere absence, not a pain.

"Well, how's your young man?" said Edna.

"My young man?"

"Don't be an idiot. Everybody knows about it. And one naturally supposes, when you slink off by yourself, that you've gone off to see him."

"I didn't go out to see him. I went out by myself."

"Well, I met somebody who said they'd seen you with him. Weren't you with him?"

"Yes, I did walk a little way with him. But it was by accident."

"Well, don't get mad about it, there's a good child. No one would mind if you had done it on purpose. Mother thinks he's a very nice boy, though a little rough. We can't think much of his family; and of course we none of us like it all being so mysterious and odd; and I *know* it's a mistake your throwing yourself at his head the way you do. . . ."

"But I don't throw myself at his head, Edna," said Jess, for a moment aghast. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you let him go away from you for two years, and then the first instant he comes back, you dash into his arms . . . you haven't any pride, that's what it is."

"My kind of pride is a different kind from your kind, if that's what you mean," cried Jess, throwing up her chin defiantly. "When I want to

do something with people, I do it, and I don't cringe round. . . ."

"That's what I do, is it?" said Edna, with a malicious rat-like look.

Jess felt her anger sink exhausted like a fire burnt out.

"I won't bother about you, if you don't bother about me. . . ."

"I'm not *bothering* about you. But I'm older than you, and where I can give you any advice about the things I know about and you don't, well then I'd like to help you. . . ."

Face to face with one of Edna's sudden changes from poisonous ill-temper to ingratiating (though perhaps as poisonous) agreeableness, Jess always felt that she had been unjust. Edna looked now so child-like and harmless, standing before the glass in her lumpy nightdress, turning on Jess her large nut-brown eyes, lamps of sympathy now switched on.

Jess did not want her sympathy or her advice; but because she had offered them she seemed to deserve something. Certainly she wanted something. Jess wanted to make her certain position quite certain with herself.

"There isn't anything to want advice about. I don't think we shall see each other much more. I liked Adam very much when we met before, but now we don't seem to get on quite. I expect it was a little nice thing that happened then, and now it's quite over, and no good any more. That's what I think, anyhow."

"Jess, you are queer. Don't you mind?"

"Well. I expect I mind a bit; but not very much really. And don't want to do anything more with him if it's not going to be nice."

"It isn't even as if you had anyone else. You haven't anyone else, have you?"

"Oh, no. I haven't anyone *else*."

While they were both telling themselves that the other meant nothing to them, each glimpse, each abrupt sentence, each unfinished gesture, took on a huge significance. Being only so briefly together they began to know each other. Each meeting was swift substantiation, from which they went further.

Adam felt this very precisely. Jess was not aware of it. Since she had 'put him out of her mind' she had been in a strange, vague, empty mood, in which she was neither unhappy nor happy, but melancholy and idle and indifferent. Adam could not break in on her and for the moment did not want to, because he saw something behind the blankness of her eyes like a light coming towards him, beginning to show, by reflection, down a winding passage. So he could wait without being unhappy, though impatient. She waited in ignorance, not expecting anything, while inside her the light moved out towards him. Inside, he was sure of this, but on the surface he felt impatient and defeated. He tried to arrange accidents for meeting her, but they never seemed to work, and he did not want to go to her house.

In the end one Sunday afternoon he saw her setting out of the town for a walk and followed her. She walked faster and faster; he thought scornfully of the possibility of giving up because of this, and walked faster after her.

"It's no good," he said abruptly over her shoulder, startling her excessively, since the shock was expected.

"What's no good?" she said sharply, turning and standing, as if ready to dash back the way she had come.

"Dodging about."

"Dodging about what?"

"Well, I want to talk to you about what."

Jess hesitated. Then said: "Yes, we'll talk, and settle everything up, and then that'll be a proper end that you can see."

"We'll see if it is the end or not. We oughtn't to decide what our talking will do before we've done the talking. But come, anyhow, and we'll talk."

"It is the end," said Jess, looking at him tragically; but with relief turning out of the town again, with him walking beside her. The feeling of dreariness she had had vanished like mist in hot sun, she was full of exact pleasure like the shape of leaves in bright sun, or of pebbles at the bottom of a quite transparent stream. The decision that they must talk had appeared to make talking unnecessary. They walked on without bothering, and very happy, one or other occasionally putting up a sentence like a grass-tuft, not impressing or

inquiring, but simply the inevitable shout of this spring.

They rested for a little in a cowslip field. All round the little fists of young cowslips swung from their sturdy stalks.

"It's settled without talking, isn't it?" said Adam, looking at the pleased sure poise of her back and head.

"Yes, I think it's settled."

"That there won't be any more dodging?"

"Oh, no, I know there won't be any more dodging."

"And we'll go for a walk to-morrow, some time in the evening?"

"Yes." Jess nodded rather than spoke, her eyes fixed on him, half-smiling. The sun was setting and the green field looked almost wintry grey. You could see only the nearest cowslips. So they hurried homewards, happy and expectant.

The next evening they walked in the town. Throwing words at each other across the current of their forward-motion, doing a nimble juggling trick which excited them and made them talk and walk faster. At important moments they leant against a wall or railing, sideways, facing each other, to force their meaning on to the other, dead straight. Jess told him about her family; she spoke of them in a definite and considered manner which amazed her, since she had never talked of them before, and did not know that she had created, even for herself, so clear an idea of them.

"It is horrible for you, having to live with them," said Adam.

"I? Oh, yes, it is a bit horrible. But I don't suppose I notice them really, so much as I say."

"My mother is always so busy, there are so many of us," said Adam, "so that she never has time for anyone particular. And so, because of that perhaps she doesn't get in your way, or bother about you; though you know she thinks about you (when she has time) and wants you to be happy."

"She sounds nice. I see her about sometimes, and she looks rather comfortable, though a bit keeping to herself."

"Yes, she keeps to herself all right, and lets you too. That's what I like."

"I would like that too. I didn't know there were people like that. I don't think there can be many, do you?"

"That's the only one I've met. But there are very likely a lot of others, waiting to be like it."

"I thought perhaps all my family were so mean and miserable because they hadn't any money. But it can't be that."

"No, that's not it. Mother married when Dad got eighteen shillings a week, and I was born the next year, when they didn't have much more. We were never given halfpennies like the other children at school, but we always seemed to have good food, or nearly always, except in very bad times. And Mother had to save up a week or two if there were any shoes wanting mending. Then I got five shillings a week as an errand boy

after I was fourteen, and afterwards a bit more. And then after Father died I got into the garage in Birmingham, and got pretty good money, considering that I was so young. So I saved up and got my first motor-bicycle, which was almost the first thing I'd bought with my own money."

"Was that your first motor-bicycle? the one you took me for a ride on? Was that its first day?"

"Yes, brand-new it was that day. Didn't you know? I was as pleased as punch, I can tell you. Proud of myself I was."

"Were you? and I thought you were the kind of person who was quite used to owning motor-bicycles. . . ."

"I exchanged it for a better one before I left Birmingham. But I've not used it much here. May have to sell it."

He considered regretfully, going on with longer strides.

"That would be a shame," said Jess.

"Might be worth it," said Adam, balancing the pros and cons impartially; "I'll have to think."

"I should do what you like," said Jess.

"That's what I mean to do."

They got into a habit of walking almost every day. Sometimes, when he was driving one of the last buses, they could not meet till late in the evening. If it was raining, they put on mackintoshes from ankle to chin, and went out just the same. Violet was furious.

"Of course I can trust you to behave," she said, "but it looks bad. Now why can't Adam come

here the same as Harold? Harold and Edna enjoy themselves like anyone else; and I don't see why you two can't act the same. It looks so queer, all this running away from people."

"I don't run away, Mum," said Jess; "don't bother about me. . . ."

"It's my business to bother about you. I'm responsible for what you make of your life, and I've got to look after you. I know we've not got much money, and you may be ashamed of bringing your friends to this little house, and perhaps they're too proud to talk to your poor Dad (not to speak of me), but still, it's what you ought to do, and what others *do* do. After all, there's good food here, and the place is clean, which is more than could be said of his house, if there's anything in what I hear. . . ."

"It's not like what you say, Mum; Adam isn't proud a bit."

"That I will be able to believe of him when he acts accordingly. . . ."

Jess slunk away miserable and ashamed, not of herself but of the situation. She knew she would go her own way. She had always been at heart independent, and they had always hated her indifference and inaccessibility. Her friendship with Adam only gave excuses for emptying out spite. Jess had really done nothing new, and could retract nothing, without retracting the whole course of her life.

So they stayed up very late each night walking and talking; and were almost always tired, partly

with the exciting newness of the unexpected coming-together, and partly with not having time to sleep enough between leaving each other and morning.

Suddenly Adam's mother fell ill. In the morning when she gave Adam his breakfast he noticed that she was flushed, and seemed to move her heavy body with difficulty. But she would not allow that she felt any different from usual; and sent him off fairly satisfied. When he got home to supper, he found the younger children waiting in the kitchen, by a dead fire, just whispering together and not playing.

"What's up?" said Adam.

"Mother's in bed," said one of them uncomfortably.

Adam ran upstairs, and found his mother lying with the clothes pushed off down to her waist. The loose strands of her hair looked damp and she breathed stiffly. Near the window stood the eldest of his young sisters, in the dark, so that he could only see the outline of her, and the shine of her eyes. Both women gave a movement of relief towards him; the mother tried to lift her head, but quickly lay back, clenching her teeth.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," said Pat, "I didn't know what it was, or what I ought to do." She was almost hysterical, and the mother shifted her body with impatience.

"You go downstairs and light the fire; I'll talk to mother. Have you had the doctor?"

"No. I didn't know if we ought to, and

mother said not, when I asked her this afternoon. . . ."

"Well, you'd better run and fetch him. Or send one of the others, and get us some supper. . . ."

The mother looked at him gratefully but did not speak. He sat down on the yellow chair beside her bed and took her hand.

"Where does it hurt?"

She touched her forehead and her breast; and whispered:

"Only a little headache, and rather bad in my chest; but I expect it will be all right in the morning, if I stay in bed and look after myself a bit. I feel pretty well in myself." She smiled painfully.

"Shall I lift you up a bit higher?" said Adam.

The woman nodded, and began struggling to prop herself on her elbows. Adam put his arm behind her shoulders and tried to lift her. He had never felt before the unwieldiness of a helpless human body. It shocked him (this discovery of the inert stuff, made buoyant only by a mysterious synthesis of action, physical and psychic, which makes up the appearance of the human race) so that he had to force himself to go on helping her, a look of determination on his face. At last he succeeded in raising her a little higher, and she lay back on the pillows, exhausted and sweating. She still breathed with difficulty. He gave her a troubled look, feeling that she was only half herself, less, and that he must also diminish himself

to be able to tend her. A deep and hardly conscious struggle went on in him, and at last he said gently:

"That's not right, is it?"

"Good enough. Better leave it so. I'm too tired." But she turned her head restlessly from side to side.

"We'd better get it all over at once," said Adam; "I'll get another pillow."

He fetched one from his own room, and leaning over her from the front put his left arm right round her behind her shoulders and held her up, while he put the pillows in a pile behind her and pounded them into a soft shape. She contributed nothing, but he felt stronger and held her easier. He settled her almost sitting up, and noticed that her breathing did not sound so scraping.

She shut her eyes.

"I'll get a bit of sleep now. You'd better go down to your supper."

Adam went down and found the children still standing about in the kitchen while Pat dished up the supper. She looked harassed as ever, and some of the potatoes, which she was turning out on to the dish, had blackish discs on their sides where they had caught on the bottom of the saucepan.

"I've made an awful muddle of it," she said despairingly. "I don't think the carrots are cooked properly, but it was so late, I thought we'd better have supper, in any case."

Adam carved the cold mutton, and gave some

to himself and Pat and the two elder boys, Leslie and Cecil. The younger children only had vegetables. Adam hardly noticed the scorched potatoes, or the crisp sweet taste of the half-raw carrots; one of the little children began to cry.

"What's the matter with you?" said Pat, leaning forward towards him, her sharp face bleak in the lamplight. "What's this fuss about?"

The child pushed away his plate, and covered his eyes with his arm. Pat went over to him, took up a spoonful of vegetables and pushed them against his mouth.

"Now then, eat up your supper," she said.

The little boy pushed away the spoon, and cried harder.

Pat slapped his hand.

"Can't you eat it, Tom?" said Adam.

"No."

"You'd better give him some bread and butter. You could eat bread and butter all right?"

Tom nodded, and wiped his eyes with his sleeve. Pat spread some bread and butter. Adam watched her movements mechanically, and noticed in a moment (for his senses were responding slowly) that she too was crying.

"What's up?"

"Everything goes wrong when I try to do anything. I did try to do it, and it all goes wrong. That's what always happens."

"Don't be silly," said Adam wearily.

"She never does anything when Mother's up," shouted Cecil, "that's why she doesn't know now."

Nobody said anything.

Before they finished the doctor came. Adam took him upstairs, and stood holding the candle while his mother was examined. She submitted, but appeared to take very little interest. Yet when he came back from seeing out the doctor she was waiting for him alertly, with bright eager eyes.

"What does he say?"

"He says it's pneumonia," said Adam simply; he was not used to lying to her. They looked at each other seriously.

She remembered about people who had pneumonia. He was thinking how the doctor had warned him of delirium. That night she was delirious, and afterwards delirium and exhaustion alternated. She seemed to feel no responsibilities and no fears. Adam saw in her only a struggle of tissues to keep themselves together. A woman came to look after her during the day, and at night he slept on a mattress in her room, and did anything she needed. She was restless and exacting, they seemed to live in a little circle in which only the other one existed. Yet it was not a personal relationship. Adam could not, as he looked at her, mad with delirium, or dead with weariness, see how she could be a person, and his mother. But it was, deeper than he could explain to himself, this relationship which held him so that he could think of nothing else. (He did not go to see Jess, and did not remember to tell her why he had not gone.) Nothing except his mother,

now without character, a shape without movement or affections, existed for him. She did not recognise him; but used him, in the last struggle to resume herself.

After four or five days she died. Adam felt as if he had been fighting in a battle which lasted for a month or two. He felt quite separated from his life before, as if he knew that all his friends had been killed. It was rainy weather, and the wind, the rain, the clouds across the sky, all moved in a monotonous rhythm of misery. Yet he was not exactly unhappy, more empty and numb, and bare as a graveyard where there are no headstones.

A fine day came, but he did not notice; although mechanically, in driving his bus, he stopped taking precautions against skidding. He left work early; and walked home with his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Adam," a voice said.

He stopped; and shifted his head, but did not lift his eyes.

"Adam," she said again, more questioningly. Her stout snub-faced shoes, with a knot on one of the laces, stood firmly in front of him on the spot of pavement he had been looking at. Her stockings were wet at the ankle (probably she had splashed carelessly through puddles). He looked up at her face.

In the last few days he had heard so much glibly-worded sympathy that he recoiled with embarrassment from starting a conversation with anyone he knew. He looked up at Jess with a

surly expression, and stepped sideways as if to pass her. But at that moment he noticed that she was not going to tell him she was sorry. (He did not understand that day about being sorry, he felt nothing himself.) She stood looking at him proudly and simply as if saying 'I exist' without any confusions of detail. He was amazed, and stood still. She moved out of his way, and went on as she had been going away from him. He looked after her for a few seconds, and then went home.

The next day they met for a walk at their usual time, and turned without speaking towards the hills. He felt as if he had died, and as if he were (perhaps) coming alive again in her.

"Are you very tired?" she said.

"I don't feel tired, but I can't have slept much for a good many nights."

"After a walk I expect you'll sleep better."

In the grey emptiness of his landscape she took a bright, exact, but also mobile shape. She was wearing a vividly patterned cotton dress, and had taken her coat off. His eyes began to see and the clenched impassivity of his expression broke. They sat on the hill-edge, and looked across the plain, lit with pink slanting sunlight.

"I'm glad it's stopped raining," said Adam.

He put his hand over hers, without moving otherwise. They sat as still as carved figures, yet shook inwardly like pine trees lashed backwards and forwards by a gale. Their arms were then round each other. The pine trees trembled in

every bough and a red sun shone through them. Their mouths were together, and they lay once more immobile, existing only in an excitement fine as the hovering-vibration of wings.

Adam sighed, and drew himself back so that she fell into the crook of his arm. They smiled at each other. She put up her hand to push aside his hair, which had fallen over his forehead almost into his eyes. Their movements were slow and almost tranced. Adam felt as if something had burst inside him. He was happy, but so tired that it seemed dangerous to move. His eyelids dropped contentedly over his eyes. Jess sat up, and looked down at him out of the sky.

"Go to sleep."

He put his head on her knee and pushed it against her stomach, and closed his eyes, feeling nothing but tiredness and contentment.

Suddenly he looked up at her, wide-awake, because of some very important matter, which was almost forgotten, now remembered.

"We must get married."

"Yes," said Jess, smiling with delight. He felt her delicate fingers shutting his eyelids (as if blessing them) and he slept immediately. Jess looked at him and thought how very much she loved him. The time passed, and he went on sleeping. The sun got lower, and she felt tired too and wanted to go home. She thought, that now she was to marry him, and suddenly a change of mood came over her and she did not want to. She wanted to go back and be a young girl and live freely in her

own thoughts and not have anybody round her giving and asking.

She rolled up her coat, and moved his head on to it. He sighed but did not seem conscious of her, or wake. She jumped up and began racing down the hill. She came on to a sunk lane, over which the hazels and brambles join so as to make a tunnel. A stream runs down the path too from side to side. It was dark here, so that she slipped about as she ran; but ran on desperately, ran on as if back to the obscurity of her own single unknown self. She did not want to have to be anything more difficult than this. She did not want to know about someone else, or respond to them. She must be alone, and able to do what she liked.

But while her brain still raced to escape, her feet moved slower. She stood still, almost at the bottom of the hill. She stood very still as if listening, as if waiting for the result of some complicated process.

Suddenly she said out loud: "I am lazy and a coward."

Then she stood silent again for a few minutes, as if to finish finally whatever she had to say to herself.

Then she turned and began slowly to go up the hill again. The track (being so deep) was now almost entirely in darkness, and she missed her foothold over and again. The hill seemed steeper than she had ever known. But her need to be back on the hill-edge with Adam grew stronger at

each step, and she pushed herself at each moment faster.

When she got back he was just waking, he lifted his eyes as she stood over him:

"I dreamt you had gone."

"I am still here," said Jess, "it's all right."

At the side of the path was a hawthorn tree. Jess frowned as she looked at it, trying to remember. It seemed to mean something violent to her, and yet strange, so that there was no way of remembering. Then she smiled, seeing its green leaves like water-drops and imagining how this tree was in spring like a fountain, splashing into the green pool-coloured foliage of summer. It was an easy, natural and beautiful rhythm.

"What are you thinking of so solemnly?" said Adam.

Jess reflected a second.

"I think I shall like being married to you," she said.

CHAPTER II

SUNDAZZLE

THEIR engagement was made public and everybody thought it was 'very nice indeed.' But they were baffled afterwards by Jess and Adam's unwillingness to discuss 'plans.' (When were they going to be married? Was it true the younger children were going to an Aunt in Canada?) And affronted by their look of going their own way. So that the hostility in Jess's own home was not diminished, though she noticed and minded it less. She became to her family almost blind and deaf. Alfred envied her in secret, for she was getting out of all this, but he had no level of communication with her and his energy turned as always to play round the opposition between himself and Fred. To him now growing up it seemed that the whole purpose of his life would lie in justifying his own fluid and impressionable character as against the solid and predictable character of Fred. He dreamed of what he should become; an orator, a poet, a painter, a political or religious leader; between these he wavered, one or other being most prominent at different periods. And he took refuge in work, where he could be certain of showing an

immediate superiority, hoping in vain to satisfy in this way his vague and wider ambitions.

He did not have many friends at school—now that he was at the top he worked by himself largely and there was no reason for talking to the other boys. He thought them very stupid too. Fred's stupidity did not matter, because, being connected with earliest impressions, it seemed to Alfred a necessary part of life, almost part of himself. But those other boys at school had nothing to do with him.

Fred and he used to go to the cinema together. He imagined himself at that time a film director (acting, expressing the ideas of other people, he did not like) and criticised everything in a highly technical manner. Fred only responded with yes or no or trite irrelevant observations of his own, so that Alfred became often wild with exasperation, imagining that Fred was indifferent. In fact, Fred did admire him a great deal, and often, from habit, understood things as they affected Alfred without having any knowledge of the things themselves; but was inarticulate from a sense of inferiority and also because he did not attach much importance to the sympathy which did or did not exist between himself and his brother. He simply chewed his toffee, or sucked at his surreptitious cigarette, and smiled meaninglessly.

At the film, he stared at the screen resolutely without moving his eyes, and yet when Alfred, who kept re-arranging his great-coat on the back

of his seat, looking round at the audience, or even closing his eyes for several minutes at a time, talked to him about some particular point he would almost always answer: "I didn't happen to notice it." Alfred seemed always to retain an incredible number of distinct impressions, as well as, very definitely, a pattern of the whole.

One evening they went to a more than ordinarily dull film—a long-drawn-out 'Comic.' Alfred looking round happened to notice that Adam and Jess were there too, a few rows in front of them. They sat straight and could be seen individually, among the indeterminate hillocky shapes of couples huddling together, lips almost or quite touching. Alfred wondered if their hands or their knees were touching. Not touching seemed to him at once noble and ridiculous, in this darkness, watching these flat black and white kisses which only became interesting when you felt them on your own lips. Jess and Adam are a funny pair; so distinct and yet in some way clearly satisfied; as if not-touching were another method of touching on a different key; like when you hold your watch a few inches from your ear and then on the bone behind it. I wonder if they sleep together, if they are holding hands, if their legs from knee to hip lie side by side, like a man and a woman. No; there they sit side by side as straight and ridiculous as bamboo-sticks. If I had a girl beside me (where Fred now sits lumpishly) my arm would be . . . Her head would . . . my hand . . . my hand moving from . . .

No; the essay I must write to-night after the film is about the Industrial Revolution. Mines in which children worked, and women, naked to the waist, dragged trucks of coal. No; first I must go home; elbow my way out of the dense crowd, in which girls . . . No; go alone along the cold streets, at the end of them figures, perhaps men (which?) or perhaps wrapped in fur against the cold, body inside as distinct and uncoverable as a kernel, soft, peach-coloured, warm as a kitten. (Kittens come to you to be caressed.) . . .

Fred nudged Alfred suddenly, pointed at Jess and Adam and sniggered. Alfred looked at him disdainfully, thinking him a vulgar fellow. What was there to snigger about, anyway? The film was as boring as possible, and afterwards he'd got to write an essay on the Industrial Revolution.

"Let's go," he whispered.

Fred looked at him surprised. "We haven't got to where we came in yet," he said.

"All right." Alfred tried to settle down to the film again, but he could not keep his eyes on it. He looked up at the strings of light spreading fan-shaped from the projector, weaving continuously like maypole ribbons. This meaningless pattern (which nobody looked at) seemed to Alfred far more beautiful and exciting than its cross-section on the screen, and yet it was the cross-section that he knew about and that fascinated him. Of Jess and Adam, of himself, of the Industrial Revolution, of Fred, of the girl beside him (or not beside him). Yet his curiosity about this flat aspect of

the universe did not prevent him hating it (he would not be a film director), it was too approximate, too inadequate (what was the good of writing his essay?), any interpretation was in its nature untrue. A mere Fact (like Fred was) could be true. . . .

Fred got up, and Alfred realised that the film began to overlap what they had seen already. He followed Fred down to the front of the auditorium and along the gangway, turning right at the foot of the screen. A black head-and-shoulders, blurred but actual, moved across the distinct non-existent scene. Alfred watched it, without thinking particularly that it was Fred's. Suddenly he looked down at his right sleeve and saw on it a moving, shaking, light-and-shadow pattern, to which the shape of his arm and the wrinkles of the cloth gave grotesque, unintended, incomprehensible forms. The glare of the projector drew his eyes towards it. In the dazzle he could distinguish shadows like sunspots, and realised that the picture was on his face too, distorted and meaningless; and that he could not see it. He almost paused; then, ashamed because everyone might have seen him pausing, hurried out. He must have stood out very clearly, he thought unhappily, against the screen, with this pattern like leaf-shadows on his face. What can it have looked like, really?

This winter he was working for an examination. A small gas-fire had been put into the room he

shared with Fred, and he had moved an old table out of the boxroom. This just fitted in between the wall and the chest of drawers, and he was able to put a row of books along the back of it (History books, *Tess of the Durbervilles*, *Poems of To-day*, Shelley's poems, the complete works of Longfellow which someone had given him, and so on). There was room for notebooks and loose-leaf books holding his essays and papers in front, and there was still a little cramped space to write on. Fred treated all the paraphernalia of his work rather scornfully (feeling at the same time inferior), and Stanley gave it to be understood that learning from books was merely a kind of newfangled affectation. But Violet (bitterly recognising herself a goose) decided that this one of her brood must be the inevitable swan; and enjoyed arranging for his peace and comfort, and above all saying to visitors:

"He always has to slip away after tea like that. He's working for an examination, and we've rigged him up quite a little study upstairs, where he can peg away at his books with nothing to disturb him."

In this dark corner, with his back to the two iron bedsteads, he wrote verses, or dreamed, often till he heard Fred coming up to bed, when he snatched in front of him a book, or a half-written page of notes. Fred undressed usually without talking, and waited by the light-switch till Alfred had lit the two candles on his table. Then he turned the light out and rooted his way between

the bedclothes, and slept at once. In the candle circle, limiting and intense as enchantment, Alfred always felt more isolated and more precisely awake. He worked violently for an hour or two, and then dreamed again, till, feeling himself almost asleep, he dragged himself stiffly to bed.

He could not forbear talking about his work (as he talked about everything), but never very factually; and his mother, when she boasted of it, did not know at all clearly what she was talking about.

One day he came down late to supper, his hair fallen over his forehead, his eyes dazed. Cloudy images swelled obscurely in his imagination, powerful and significant. Each shape, as the white light of his concentration beat down on it singly, dwindled, the sentences which he made to catch its meaning were like boxes holding air. Yet he believed in the meaning without words, the shape without outline, and felt it imminent, like a storm below the horizon. He felt himself a poet, and the words themselves, the authentic words, had been almost on his lips; but the actual poem (which was like a plant grown in another country and not under these clouds) he tore up. But the unrealised emotion still hovered, coming like an atmospheric screen between him and the chairs, tables, faces he sat down among.

He muttered the usual excuse: "Been working."

"I wish you could try to be more punctual," said Violet complainingly. "You always let your food get cold, and it's bad for you."

"Can't he think of anything but himself?" said Stanley, looking at her crossly, accusing her implicitly of favouritism. "If any of my children had ever been taught to consider others, I would prefer him have thought 'it's bad for *us*, it upsets *our* arrangements.' But that would be no use, I suppose. We must say it's bad for *him*." He turned to the boy vindictively, and shouted: "Have you no consideration for your mother?"

Alfred did not know how to answer, for he had not altogether heard. He merely looked guiltily at his father and then away. Jess brought him the sausages she had unobtrusively left on the corner of the fire.

"He doesn't even need to have it cold," said Edna, darting a shrewd inquisitive glance at Stanley, and then fixing her eyes on her plate. Jess, standing up behind Alfred, was looking at her across the table. Stanley brought down his small fist with a heroic bang. Everybody, startled, looked round at him. He himself, startled, immediately gathered his forces to substantiate his sudden gesture. He compressed his lips tightly, drew his eyebrows together till they almost touched in the frown over his nose, held his shoulders erect and square as his eyebrows. To Alfred, still looking at him reluctantly, he seemed ridiculous and helpless. His bushy eyebrows twitched. The exaggerated compression of lips only reminded you that they generally hung loose and open. And his fist, which had made the plates and saucers bound

from the table, now stayed as if jammed against it, but trembling, so that his spoon made a feeble rattle against his teacup. His lean cheeks blew out with irregular gusts of anger, and at last the words came out in little rushes.

"Are you all set on indulging him? What's he done, to have everything made easy for him?" He turned his small furious eyes more directly on Alfred. "Anyway, what work are you doing? What good is it? What is your work?"

"I'm working for my examination," said Alfred.

"Examination?" shouted Stanley scornfully. "What's that for? Have you ever known anyone who did themselves any good with examinations? Showing off before your parents who never did any examinations (and all the better for it), that's all about it. What else is an examination when you're just on leaving school? What's the good of it, anyway?"

"It's a scholarship examination for Oxford," said Alfred, and added hurriedly, "but I don't expect I'll get it."

Stanley did not hear the last timid words. He was staring at Alfred in amazement, no less genuine because he could only express it theatrically. There was an intense, astonished silence.

"But I very likely won't get it," said Alfred again, his voice sounding sharp.

Stanley threw his head back and burst out laughing. He spoke as if he were choking: "And what if you do get it? What'll you do if you do?"

Alfred resolutely forbade himself to be frightened.

"I could go to Oxford."

Stanley stopped laughing and shot out his head like a snake.

"How do you propose to do that?"

Fred, who had till now sat unmoving, turned to Jess and whispered with twinkling eyes: "By train." Jess shook her shoulders impatiently, got up, collected a pile of plates, and went out to the kitchen.

"I don't see what there is against it," said Alfred obstinately.

"No, I wouldn't expect you to see an inch beyond your own interests. I'll explain." Stanley was now leaning across the table, and gesticulating with his finger, the very picture of a man explaining reason to an unreasonable opponent. "First, there's the money. I can't put up cash for a hare-brained scheme like that, and where'll you get it from otherwise?"

"I'll probably be able to get a County grant as well, and that will cover it," he said calmly, but he was twisting his fingers together under the table.

Stanley sighed. "The money part of it's a bit more complicated than that," he said. "As you know, we've given you a good education."

"It was with my money," said Alfred, "I won the scholarship."

"Don't be ungrateful, Alfred," said Violet, sharply and yet pleading.

"Don't interfere," said Stanley, rounding on

her angrily, and then turning with a sarcastically conciliating gesture to Alfred.

". . . or perhaps I ought to have said we enabled you to have a good education. We gave you a good home, a roof over your head, good food, a quiet place to work; and now when the time has come for you to earn a living and we are getting older, I cannot see that it is unreasonable of us to expect something back from you. Why even Fred, who is younger than you are, gives his mother something every week. . . ."

"How much?" said Alfred.

"Since his rise, it's been seven shillings," said Violet.

"How much does it cost to keep him?"

"I don't know."

"What would you say?"

"Don't bother your mother with questions that haven't any bearing on the case," said Stanley, "just listen to me."

"But I want to know," said Alfred impatiently. "What would you say, Mother?"

"Well, it would be thirteen or fourteen shillings for food, not counting laundry. . . ."

Alfred laughed dryly. "Then how much do you think it would cost to keep me if I were out working?"

"I could do it altogether for about a pound a week," said Violet. Alfred turned to his father.

"You see, if I'm away from home, it'll be the same value to you as a pound a week. It'll be just as if I were paying you a pound a week, that's

thirteen shillings more than Fred does. Now what?"

"You're treating me very unfairly," said Stanley; "this is a situation in which not money only, but affection also, plays its part."

Alfred laughed again. He felt humiliated and furious and miserable; but as determined in his course as a river is not to flow backwards. In a pause of silence, they heard Violet sniffing back tears. This made them both more angry. Stanley felt that he must shout to save himself.

"Anyway, what's the good of this education? You talk as if I wanted something for myself, but it's you I'm thinking of. I never had any education, and look at the business I had built up by the time I was thirty-five. Look at the things I was able to give you children and your mother . . ."

"But that's all over now," sobbed Violet.

"All over? Yes, it is all over, and through no fault of mine. Do you suppose education would have prevented my trouble? Do you think misfortune doesn't come to educated people? Do you think educated people have stronger insides?"

Alfred had turned his head away, and his profile was expressionless. Stanley leaned further over the table and shouted louder, so that his meagre face got red and swollen.

"What do you say to that? That's what I'm asking you."

Alfred gave him a cruel, steely look.

"Of course I shall go to Oxford if I get the

chance," he said, then got up and went out. Stanley fell back in his chair.

Violet in the sudden unexpected lull sobbed louder. But no one noticed her. She looked up, and saw, blurred by her tears, Fred standing at the window with his hands in his pockets, Edna staring as if struck dead at the shut door which Alfred had banged after him, and Stanley lying back, quite still. She went over to him, stumbling because of the tears, looked at him, and then screamed.

"It's all right," said Stanley, with obvious exaggerated difficulty opening his eyes; "I can't stand much of that sort of thing though."

"Shall I get Jess, Mother?" said Edna, now more frightened than curious, and wanting to get out of the room.

"Yes, do," said Violet, "and tell her to hurry."

"I don't want to be a bother . . ." said Stanley, and closed his eyes.

"You'd better go and lie down for a bit, hadn't you?"

He did not answer. Nor did he move when Jess came in.

"He oughtn't to have got so excited," she said stolidly. But it was she who helped him upstairs to bed. He was well the next day, only very bad-tempered, and thenceforward jeered at Alfred continually for his Oxford project. He had accepted it as a thing that was quite settled, and Alfred was glad to think that he had won the fight, though he felt pretty miserable about it

otherwise. He had a lurking fear that he would fail, and the whole affair would then become retrospectively ridiculous and worthless. But luckily he won the best scholarship offered, and his triumph was entire.

He became very silent. He felt himself growing out into the future, where there was space and brilliance; and so the need (it had never been a pleasure) for making himself a space in these surroundings disappeared. He began to keep his feelings and opinions entirely to himself. He avoided Fred, unconsciously comparing him with the unknown friends, whose subtle and generous sympathy he would so soon experience. It was this life, about to burst bright as a peony, of which he was the centre, and he gave up all interest and effort in his near circumstantial life, all his energy flowing out, bursting up in his imagination, like petals of splendour.

His dreams were abstract, shapes of splendour and freedom, not plans or ambitions. Sometimes he tried to remember how things had looked and felt when he went up for the examination. He remembered a pink house on the way up from the station, and large empty quadrangles, and colleges, empty for the vacation, like old men sitting, becoming more exactly themselves in vacancy. He tried to imagine how they would look, when all these men who were to be his friends (and among them, his one friend) were living among them. But the scene and the persons did not go

together. These figures, although imagined obscurely, immediately put this background out of focus till it became a dim clematis purple, like distant mountains. He tried to remember the rooms he had lived in for the three days of the examination. He had noticed the leathery comfort of the sitting-room, and the raw squalor of the bedroom, whose iron bedstead and thick china water-jug reminded him of his room at home. The sitting-room was like clothes, urbane and accountable, but the bedroom was stiff and bare as a naked thin body exhausted with torture. He had put off going to bed, distressed in this place by things he had not noticed at home, although they existed there; and one night he had slept in the sitting-room by the fire.

But he did not remember anything against them. For two things they were perfect. They were private, and gave him more space for himself than he had ever imagined. He thought he would like to have curtains of royal blue, and walls of orange, almost reflecting the black wood furniture. There he could sit alone into the night, working or dreaming; or else people would come together there like streams joining, and flow through evening like a full river.

In the Easter holidays he was asked to pay a visit to some distant cousins of his father, who lived in London, and whose son had been at Oxford for a year. Violet wheedled some money out of his father to get him a new suit, and bought him some shirts out of her own savings. These

things came from the best shop in the town, but he felt stiff and strange in them and not at all sure they were right. Violet found in the boxroom an old cow-hide suitcase which had to be tied up with a strap. He thought he would have to get his ticket out of his own savings, but his father, after forcing this arrangement, met him at the booking office and gave him a ticket in an ungracious manner. Alfred counted his money in the train, and felt very rich.

His cousin had sent him instructions about how to get from Paddington to Clapham, where he was a teacher in a secondary school. These directions he had read through so often that he knew them by heart; but when he found himself at Paddington he got into a taxi and asked to be driven to Trafalgar Square. He jumped out and was forgetting to pay, so that the taximan called after him angrily. He blushed and gave him almost double his fare. The man said 'thank you' in the end, but looked at him suspiciously; and then went off slowly, turning round once or twice, only to see him standing with the bag in his hand, looking at something or other.

This trip to London (he saw suddenly) had made a rift in his time of secret waiting for the realisation of being and doing which was symbolised in Oxford. Perhaps London, he thought, was really the time and the place, here under his nose. Here he stood on a space occupied otherwise by tame lions, children, pigeons tipping backwards and forwards for crumbs, men and

women waiting for somebody, or for nothing; and all round roads sticking out. The near scene was distinct yet feeble; as if giving an impression which could be recalled in detail later, but did not have any immediate force inside him. Vivid and violent only were the streets leading away, where people with vivid, mysterious faces went about in shops and gorgeous restaurants. Buses, taxis and motors passing through the square had a dust of this glory, because joining that place up with this in a network of movement.

His bag was a nuisance, reminding him of ultimately arriving in Clapham, and having to see it near to, when it would perhaps be disagreeable. It was time to go.

The directions he had been given did not now apply, so he took a bus marked Clapham Junction. He sat on the very front seat on top, with nothing but glass between him and the air into which the bus was plunging. There are the Horse Guards, he thought, Downing Street is round here, and the Cenotaph (oh, that's why people took their hats off; quick, I must), and there are the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey. What a lot of things there were to recognise; and yet recognising was not (as he had expected) like walking forward, but more like going down step after step on to your heels. Now he could see on his left the placid grimy water of the Thames and on his right huge buildings like preposterously white and decorated barns. They turned over a bridge, where electric lights, encased like lan-

thorns, were already lit. He began to feel harassed, seeing everything ridiculously immobile, or ridiculously jerking; but the river, real because flowing, gave him comfort. They went between shops, butchers bright as a red and white painting, cigarette-shops like dusty mosaic, modistes with bright polished vulcanite and chromium framing to dazzling dresses whose seams were already splitting on the stands, oil-shops with baths and buckets and brooms and kettles in bundles and bunches, boot-shops with sandshoes and slippers strung up like Breton onions. The bus slid out on to a wide long road, in the twilight like the serpent of eternity with tram-lines for backbone. The houses which had once been residences, now occupied by builders or laundries or teachers of banjo, were set back in gardens now more like yards. Here and there grass straggled up among bits of an old perambulator or bedstead frame. Broken window-panes had been mended with boards, and even under the coating of dirt you could see that the mortar was crumbling between the bricks. Some of the houses were in a Greekish style, and there the plaster had generally broken off like a scab, and the fluted pilasters were smooth with dirt. London is an immense grey serpent, thought Alfred, coiling round you; there is no freedom here, it is somewhere else that you find freedom. . . .

He got off the bus at Clapham Junction, and after some difficulty found the house. It had been built as a villa, but the usual slum grime

had settled on its red roof, and white walls, and green privet; so that its look was even more desperate and miserable than that of the older houses who had managed to come to terms with their decay in a manner not altogether undignified. A smiling woman with hair done over her forehead opened the door.

"I'm your cousin Nancy," she said; "Gordon will be back in a minute, and I expect you'd like to have a wash after your journey."

The bathroom was small and very tidy. There was a rack in which each person kept his toothbrush in an allotted place. Nancy went into her bedroom, leaving the door open, so that she would hear when Alfred had finished. As he came out of the bathroom he found her coming out of her room and across the minute landing as if by accident.

"Come along down," she said, "and be introduced to your cousin. Because it's Luke who is really your cousin, and I'm just an in-law."

Luke was standing in the drawing-room with his back to the fire. He had a narrow, square-cut beard which gave him a deceptive look of Lytton Strachey. He was reading the *Evening Standard*, but *The Times Literary Supplement* lay on the table as if about to be opened.

"Well, so you're the clever one of the family? I expect you and Gordon will find a lot to talk about." He began jovially, but after he had finished speaking remained staring at Alfred as if he had been told he was either blind or deaf and could not remember which.

"How is your mother?" said Nancy. It was one of her superstitions that nice young men were always thinking of their mothers.

"She's all right."

"And I hear your sister's engaged?"

"Yes, that's right."

"So that's both of them fixed now. That is nice. I expect your mother is very pleased."

"Yes, I expect she is," said Alfred.

"Didn't I send you my map showing how to get here?" said Luke suddenly. "I always send it to people."

"Yes, you sent it," said Alfred, and dropped his eyes, "but I got lost."

"Got lost, did you? But the map was clear enough, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was awfully clear; but I think I must have been stupid," said Alfred blushing; "I found myself in quite the wrong place."

Luke turned to his paper, with a look of pity for these people who couldn't profit by the trouble he took on their behalf. It was the expression most often on his face when teaching. Nancy proceeded patiently and kindly with her method of entertaining Alfred by asking him questions, to which he gave inadequate and often surly answers. Luke went on reading about a crime of passion, and looked repeatedly at the clock. Nancy did not appear to notice him but at last said:

"Don't worry about him, Luke dear. He'll be back soon."

Luke would not answer, but burst out a few

minutes later, his sarcastic tones quite failing to conceal his simple fury.

"That's what it's always like with these brilliant people. They think they're better than anyone, and can do what they like regardless of anyone."

"He doesn't mean to hurt you," said Nancy timidly, "it's his temperament."

"Yes, yes, I think I know something about temperament," said Luke, "but it's not all of us can afford to have a temperament. I don't hold against him, but I do think he might think a little . . ."

He broke off and continued as if in confidence to Alfred, the dictatorial abruptness of his voice denied by the pale eyes rapidly blinking in uncontrollable self-distrust.

"I don't deny that he's a boy of exceptional promise. And I understand him, because he is like in so many ways what I was at his—or at least what I would have been if only I . . . if only the circumstances of my life had been happier."

He looked into the fire, brooding.

"Shan't we have supper?" said Nancy.

"Give him a minute or two."

"How long has Gordon been at Oxford?" inquired Alfred politely, although he knew.

"Just a year this summer," said Nancy. "He seems to have made such a lot of nice friends, and so I expect he'll be able to help you a bit at first and show you round."

These tales of Gordon's cleverness, and success, and the impression of his ruthlessness, made

Alfred think that it was by him of all people that he would like to be shown round Oxford. But he did not show any enthusiasm for Nancy's suggestion because it was always difficult for him to decide against doing things by himself, and also because he had an unallowed suspicion that Gordon was perhaps not so nice, not quite so nice as he expected, apart from the indisputable glory of having made a crowd of friends in his first two terms and of having brought his parents to a state of such complete submission.

The maid, her cap crooked, just put on outside the door, came in to say that supper simply could not wait any longer.

"Very well," said Nancy, sighing, "but you'd better keep Mister Gordon's in the kitchen."

They went in and sat round the reddish mahogany table in silence.

"Do your parents allow you to behave like this?" said Luke, pretending it as a joke; then, afraid that Alfred would take it too seriously (as seriously for instance as he actually meant it), he dashed off to another subject.

"And what is there you particularly want to do in London? Of course we hope to go about with you a certain amount, though Gordon as you see is"—he waved his hand vaguely—"busy."

"But of course he won't be busy all the time while Alfred's here," said Nancy, "he's particularly kept himself free. . . ."

"I can always do things by myself," said Alfred, "when Gordon has other engagements."

"You will perhaps even *want* to do things by yourself," said Luke, "and I expect we will be able to arrange a bit of everything. But I was going to suggest for a first arrangement that we could all go to a play together on Saturday evening, and that perhaps if Nancy would like to go to the morning service in Westminster Abbey you would perhaps like to go with her. Gordon and I do not generally go to church, and it would be nice for you to see the Abbey. That is my contribution for the present. I have no doubt Gordon has thought out a lot of other . . ."

The front door banged and he stopped suddenly with his mouth still half-open.

"That's Gordon," thought Alfred.

"That's Gordon," said Nancy.

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Luke, closing his mouth in a firm-looking line.

Gordon seemed to push open the door in one movement with taking his coat off. He pushed in with his head, his elbows pinned behind him by coat-arm-holes. Alfred, who was inclined to be weedy, noticed first the almost brutal strength of hips and shoulders. Then he saw the full, slightly twisted lips and flabby cheeks. And the backs of his hands, full and white like his cheeks, and flabby. He spoke with a little lisp.

"Well, any supper left for me? Hullo" (he raised his hand and lowered it), "you're Alfred are you? The one I've got to look after at Oxford."

"Don't be silly, Gordon," said Nancy; "does Alice know you've got in?"

"Alice!" shouted Gordon, not turning his body and barely turning his head.

"Where've you been, Gordon?" said Nancy.

"Wouldn't you like to know."

Alfred looked at him with disgust and envy. His thickness, mental and physical, became obscenity at the hands of his showmanship. Yet there was something noble in being able to flout inquisitive and tyrannical parenthood without a fight. This seemed to Alfred, who had had to fight, a sign of superior talent. But he did not trust him, and so felt himself standing firmly on his own ground, looking out, only reminded of the precariousness of his position by the shamed remembrance of his earlier subservient expectancy.

They did think of some things to occupy themselves with together. Gordon showed off to Alfred, but anything he actually did was such a flat affair, that Alfred became very certain that he must cut as poor a figure in Oxford as he did in cinemas and pubs and suburban parties. For all his joviality and boastfulness Alfred knew that he was plain, ignorant and stupid; and it was hardly credible that where he saw through him, Oxford, home of discernment, should be taken in. At the same time, Alfred remembered a lot of the things he told him to repeat to Fred, and unconsciously adopted his manner, with modifications. He learnt carefully exactly what names are right for Oxford colleges; and bought a pair of flannel bags, very pale and wide. He looked well in them, and wondered afterwards how on earth Gordon's

shambling legs and lumpish draped buttocks can have given him the inspiration. The day before he left he discovered also (when they forgot the key, and were late, and climbed in at the pantry window) that he was not even strong. Alfred remembered a story he had told about climbing into his college over an immense wall topped by terrific iron spikes. Alfred laughed, thinking how funny he must have looked; and it only occurred to him several years after that he had probably gone in by the usual way at five to twelve.

Edna's engagement was in a very uncertain state. Harold came to see her as often as ever, but he spoke very little of marriage and a good deal about how difficult he found it living on his salary and commission, although he was 'a single man' and didn't therefore have nearly such a tough time as the others. Edna mentioned that she thought of going to London to work in a shop, and was so disgusted by his indifference (though she had never meant it seriously) that in the end she did take a position in a town in the next county. She was in the haberdashery department of a large store, and did not earn much. But she lived very cheaply and managed to save. She and Harold corresponded. She had a principle about not answering letters at once, and sometimes succeeded in waiting for three or four days. Sometimes she wrote twice to his one, but that was always with a good excuse. She had for-

gotten to ask him something, or something extremely important had happened since she wrote her last.

Adam's younger brothers had gone out to Canada and his sister was in service in London. He and Jess got married in the summer and so she disappeared as far as Alfred was concerned. She came to the house sometimes, but not often even at the beginning. Alfred still had to insist that he didn't belong to the family, by argument, or silence; but Jess just drifted away, and so there was nothing to prevent her having detailed and interesting conversations with Violet about household management, or asking Stanley about mending a door which stuck in damp weather. She was glad Alfred was going to Oxford, because she liked people to do what they wanted, but she couldn't see what was the point of it. When he noticed this, he was inclined to take it as a criticism.

He went up in the autumn. Leaving home was like going into the world from the far side of Lethe. Violet, though circumstantial to the last glove-button, Jess, though solid as a green field, Stanley, though an enemy, Fred, though a brother, a part, all stood on the platform like a line of ghosts, like cardboard puppets with the edge turned, their eyes like the flash of water at the bottom of a well-shaft, their voices like the jingling of teaspoons on saucers. When living people had visited Hades, thought Alfred, the small thin ghosts had fallen round them like

leaves, not hurting, but thick as autumnal leaves. . . .

He pushed the hair out of his eyes with a quick, impatient movement, and leaned out of the window, waving. One strand of hair fell again over his forehead, and he had to keep jerking his head back as he leaned out of the carriage window, waving, the way they did. He was almost sure that not only was he moving away from them but that they also faded. Violet was crying a tear or two into a pink handkerchief. Jess hurried away because she had to get Adam's supper ready.

When Alfred arrived it was raining a thin steady drizzle. The town looked like blotting-paper absorbing the rain. On this background the undergraduates swarming out of the station had an unreal exactness of line like insets in photographs. A young man in a canary yellow pullover jumped nimbly into the taxi to which Alfred had signalled. Alfred knew he had not meant to push in front of anyone, but had simply not noticed him, which was even more humiliating. Yet at the same time he was pleased to know for sure that there did exist thrusting, beautiful and regardless people, and that some of them were indeed in Oxford. He waved to the second taxi with more assurance, and got it. That evening he saw his tutor, and unpacked. He had told Violet that he wanted some blue curtains, and she had made him some with a piece of stuff got in a sale. He had known all along that the colour was too thick and the material too fluffy, but they didn't

seem in fact to look so entirely awful. Even the pink cushions, which she had called orange, had something to be said for them. Anyhow, they made him feel that he was beginning to inhabit the little room with the enormous fireplace and massive table. The next day he bought himself an ash-tray and a waste-paper basket, and hung about in Blackwell's wondering what books were the important ones, and thinking that there must be some poets younger than Yeats, but not knowing how to find them.

In the afternoon he went for a walk with two other freshers. They seemed to have got very friendly in a short time, so that he felt out of it, and talked a lot to them one after the other (not together because they seemed such friends), till it suddenly occurred to him that each of them thought he was extremely intimate with the other, and felt in fact as out of it as he did. Their talk was confidential and secretive at the same time, so that they had to avoid each other for days afterwards, not knowing quite what they had said.

They got back to Oxford in the early frosty darkness, and Alfred escaped (refusing an invitation to tea) to look round the shops for some crockery. Violet had given him some odd cups and plates and things but they were not enough. Besides, his scout had asked him when the rest of his stuff was coming. He could not find anything that exactly pleased him, and extricated himself with embarrassment from the profuse, inept suggestions of the various shop-people. He

had a plate and a cup for himself and that would have to be enough for the present.

He went back to college and began rearranging all the furniture in his room so as to find the ideally perfect place for his wastepaper-basket. He could not decide whether the ash-tray was better on the table or on the mantelpiece. After dinner he moved it on to the table and, thinking it silly to have the wastepaper-basket at the side of the fire (because in that direction you would throw things into the fire, naturally), he moved it over to the window (as you couldn't throw them out into the quad). Then he settled in an armchair and read through his lecture list, wondering if he would go to the ones his tutor had recommended after all, and whether he could find out about any on Art or Psychology. Then he finished that and had nothing to do. He sat looking steadily at the fire, turning a little melancholy inside himself, waiting for something to happen or for somebody to come in.

At ten he wandered out to the lodge and found a note there from Gordon asking him to tea on Sunday. He went back to bed, hurrying, and turning out the light quickly, because his bedroom was cold and unattractive and gave him no satisfaction whatsoever.

He spent his first term in digging himself in geographically; trying to orientate himself with his work; and making superficial contacts with anybody who was accessible, and tolerably promis-

ing. After a few weeks he dismissed the problem of work by agreeing with the majority opinion that 'no one can possibly take these ridiculous prelims seriously.' So that he worked only a few hours every day, or some days, and spent the rest doing what he liked in an extremely busy manner. He joined various societies, although every meeting he went to appeared to be less good than usual, and went about with various gangs of young men, only noticing occasionally that he did not really like them much. At these times he became a little ashamed, and dissatisfied in general; but mostly he took it for what it was, a kind of companionable herding, like a lot of calves nosing together in a corner of a field, and enjoyed it as a physical pleasure like eating or lying in bed. He had been rather aloof from the boys at school, and the companionship of people of his own age, whoever they were individually, was a discovery in itself. It was like suddenly finding you had walked ten miles towards your destination without noticing. He went to the cinema with them, and for walks, and they even had discussions about Art, and Religion, and Sex. Nothing ever seemed to have happened in these talks, nothing very startling was said, and nobody's opinions seemed to change in the slightest; but they were all the same a necessity for all of them, making vantage points (like shooters' look-out towers in a reed-bed) from which they could see the secret, winding channels of individual exploration. So that Alfred was disappointed unreasonably by

knowing that nothing was of any importance except what had not been said. That was true, but did not matter.

Going for walks and to cinemas and things like that they were all right. They had a cheerful, easy way of fitting themselves into a simple pattern of activity or enjoyment, and did not misstate themselves in the way that they always did verbally.

His deepest experience was in the discovery of the new place, the town, and the surrounding country. He got to know the town quickly, and soon, as he walked through it, going to places, it became an unobtrusive background, easily ignored, or easily noticed when it accorded with his mood, or when some particular effect of light made it seem new. The country he learned more slowly. You were inclined to think of it only in reference to Oxford, a walk out, and a walk back; so that it took a little time to think of the places as themselves and enjoy them properly. But by the end of the term he had found out how he felt about most of them; and knew in what mood and in what kind of weather he could best go there.

He went home for the Christmas holidays.

"Have you got any prizes?" said Daff, who had just got the form scripture prize at her school.

"No, we don't have prizes," said Alfred, laughing very kindly on his first day home, "we don't have anything so nice."

"Father gave me sixpence because I got

the scripture prize," said Daff, wriggling her shoulders.

"What have you bought with it?"

"Well, I want to buy a pencil-case, but they're ninepence. And I really need threepence for more pencils."

Alfred didn't know what to say to her; but he noticed Violet looking at her in an affectionate, smiling way, and thought that he was being stupidly censorious. All children are probably like that. He took out sixpence and gave it to her rather glumly.

"Oh, thank you," she said, "I never thought . . ."

"Never mind about that," said Alfred hastily, seeing her sly, timorous look at Violet, to whom perhaps she had said that she hoped Alfred would help her with the pencil-box. It was really rather squalid coming home. His room had been kept, said Violet, "just as it was," and yet he found it difficult to work in, and it was a nuisance to find himself still sleeping with Fred. Fred was really impossible; one could not talk about anything to him; he was an immovable lump of brainless matter. Fred tried once or twice to ask him about Oxford, or even to tell him about things he had done himself, but after a little effort he gave up, and did not seem to mind. Alfred thought he had perhaps been rather a beast, and made some advances from his side, which Fred did not appear to notice. So Alfred thought it was all right. Stanley and Violet were both in their way wildly

curious about his way of life, and pestered him about it endlessly. He found them very slow at taking in what he told them, and that, he partly knew, was because he was so very much disinclined to tell them in anything but a rough dramatic outline what his life was like; and because he hated explaining what subfusc or progs or rollers really were. So that he didn't want them to have the chance of understanding what he was talking about, or even the words he was using, and yet despised them in a distant way for not understanding.

"It's all very queer," said Violet, pursing up her anæmic lips. "I suppose I'm very stupid. . . ."

"It's what he likes, I suppose," said Stanley, "and it's one way of spending money. . . ."

Alfred went to see Jess, who lived now in one of a row of red houses sticking out into the country like an index finger. It was so absurd and disintegrated, in a quite conventional way, that it seemed it must be there by accident, like a piece of pantomime scenery that people had suddenly decided to live in. This was, however, the style dominant at the time, and Jess, therefore, had not troubled what it was like. Adam had satisfied himself that it was fairly solid and would keep the rain out, and hadn't thought anything else particularly important. Alfred, seeing for the first time, noticed with disgust that it was the same kind of thing as his parent's house, only brighter and newer. Inside, he remembered that of course it would make a lot of difference to Jess having it for

herself and Adam; it was really not the house so much as the difficulty of avoiding people which had made it so insupportable at home—especially considering the people. This house was almost nice, in a funny kind of way, because of Jess and Adam living in it. Jess had no feeling that could be called taste; but she had a good idea of use, and had never wanted to buy anything showy or ramshackle. Nor would she have things about that she didn't like, even if they were wedding presents, but put them into a cupboard under the stairs where, she said to Alfred, "they can collect as much dust as they like, without bothering me." She gave a funny broad grin, and he knew she didn't really take dust so very seriously. The house looked clean but wasn't particularly tidy, and she told him she only did housework when she wanted to.

"But it's a lucky thing that I generally do want to," she said.

She seemed very happy.

"It's fun having a place by yourself, isn't it?" said Alfred. "I suppose that's what I'm doing for the first time at Oxford."

"Yes," said Jess absently. Living with Adam was such an important part of the fun, that this was an odd way of expressing it. She had felt very near to Alfred, and friendly and communicative, at first, because he had seemed not part of the family; but now that he seemed to be connecting himself and her in a not-family group she withdrew into vagueness. She remembered she

had never got on with him particularly well, and was surprised at herself for having talked to him with such enthusiasm.

"You getting on all right?" she said, suddenly looking at him.

"Yes, I have a grand time" (in retrospect it was entirely grand, since the imagination could easily obliterate times of boredom and disappointment). "Are you happy, too?"

There was a sentimental sound in his voice, and he was ashamed of having asked. He thought she would perhaps shield herself with mockery.

"Yes, I'm happy," she said. The words sounded unconsidered, as if they had an unconscious, non-intellectual meaning like the expression on the face of a person who imagines himself alone or an involuntary gesture. Alfred supposed it was the first time that anyone (herself or anyone) had asked this question; and he felt ashamed of having boasted so much about how he loved Oxford.

They heard Adam coming up the path. Then there was a pause while he went round the house and then the back door opened and shut.

"Hullo," called Jess, but Adam did not answer. He had turned on the tap in the scullery, which splashed so that he couldn't hear much else.

"Washing his ears, I expect," said Jess, and ran out to him.

"Adam, Alfred's here."

Adam came in and said hullo to Alfred in a

reserved way. He had never taken much notice of him, and had no special reason to suppose that he would be any nicer than Edna, or any livelier than Fred. And he hadn't much hopes of anyone who was called 'the clever one of the family.' He had quite forgotten that he had been called that at one time. He saw so much more of the results of the cleverness in his fingers that he didn't suppose there was any in his head, and didn't mind. He thought perhaps Alfred would be difficult to talk to.

Jess went away to get supper. She always got a bit impatient when people had to walk round and round each other sniffing like dogs in the street, before anything could happen; and anyhow, she had to make supper, so that was that. When she came back with a tray of supper-things she found that they had finished all that and were talking properly, smoking cigarettes and leaning forward towards each other with their elbows on their knees.

She set the table very quietly, not wanting to interrupt. They were speaking about the surrounding country, comparing notes, and telling each other about new places. Alfred knew everything within walking distance in great detail; Adam (who had had a motor-bicycle) had explored farther, and knew the map of the country for a great distance, its hill-peaks, the courses of its rivers, and all the dangerous corners on its roads. He would have known where he was anywhere by the lie of the land and the position of the sun;

but not (as Alfred could) by individual hedges, or the shapes of trees. Jess, intermittently listening to them as she went in and out, observed (as if cocking her eye sideways) the absolute importance that this earth had for them. To Alfred, it was an organic entity like himself, to be discovered by slow and subtle approaches, in which observed and observer changed, drawing nearer to each other. To Adam the moment of discovery was the goal, a new shape of land and sky as he came over a hill, or a new complex of roads linking up two known areas. Jess had another way, of seeing the shapes and colours of her own mood, so that she remembered distances by weariness, and sunny fields by the sensation of tickling grasses on her cheek, and the spring aspect of hawthorn trees by impatience and pleasure and coming together with Adam. So, coming in with bread and plates and butter, she gave them an apprising, satisfied glance with her head a little on one side, and did not say anything. She was very pleased that they got on with each other so well. She went out to the kitchen again and came back with stew and potatoes which she set down on the table. Then she shut the door and stood looking at them with her hand still on the door-knob.

"Dinner's ready," she said. They both turned to her. The tension, which had been as straight as a clothes-line, now became triangular, but unsymmetrically so, because each of them connected only with her, and no longer with the other. During dinner, they exchanged hardly a word

more. Jess and Alfred talked mostly; he was feeling very well, and sure of himself; and did not mind when Jess burst out laughing at his new Oxford mannerisms, and expressions she did not understand. She thought he was really a bit funny, but nice. She laughed, and answered him back, and mocked him a little. It was not till they had nearly finished that she noticed how they had quite stopped taking any notice of each other. Adam said very little (her conversation with Alfred hardly admitted a third person), but watched her with his bright confident eyes, a look as direct and simple as one movement of stretching out a hand. As they sat round the table after dinner with their chairs pushed back Jess got bored and restless and wanted Alfred to go. And yet she could not go away herself because she felt that they had perhaps said to each other all that they would ever have to say, and that if she went there would be nothing but a hole between them as big as a crater. Alfred, feeling a disappearance of something, got up awkwardly. Jess began clearing the table before Adam had even properly closed the door after him. He had not turned round as she took the closely packed tray out to the kitchen.

When she came back, dangling the empty tray by the rim, he was standing in the passage.

"What's the hurry?" he said.

"Can't waste all my time hanging about."

"Still, there's no harm in wasting a bit of it," said Adam, not moving.

Jess leaned against the door-frame, and in a careless manner tapped the tray against her knee as if it were a tambourine.

"Funny sort of brother I've got, haven't I?" she said, looking at him sharply.

"I think he's a nice chap," said Adam; "don't you like him?"

"Yes, I do like him. I'm glad you like him too. Really, I think I like him awfully."

Alfred went back to his house, where Violet had been waiting up for him.

"How's Jess?" she said.

"They seem very well, both of them," said Alfred, "don't you think so?"

"Yes, I think they are," said Violet, "but I always think it's a bit of a mistake for the youngest to marry first. There's Edna now, working herself to the bone, and I don't know who'll have her I'm sure."

"What's happened to Harold?"

"Well, he writes to her," said Violet, "but he hasn't treated her well. In a manner of speaking, Jess has got what she ought to have had. And she feels it, too."

"I think Jess deserves what she's got though," said Alfred.

"I couldn't expect you to understand, of course," said Violet sadly. "You've had everything you've ever wanted. You don't know what it's like to go without."

Alfred felt ashamed, but without knowing what he was ashamed of, though it was not of himself.

There was a mournful silence. The noises they made breathing or slightly moving were feeble and half-animate, like those of a machine which is almost run down.

"Well, anyhow, it's time we were all in bed," said Alfred, sighing. He took her arm, and managed also to smile at her.

"I will see you to your door," he said gallantly.

The vacation passed slowly. He felt as if he were straining on innumerable small tangled ties like root-fibres. He was as if bound unfairly, through himself-as-child. When he went (with relief) back to Oxford for the spring term, he remembered only Jess and Adam as people towards whom he had made a movement of his present self. They were going with him, in sunlight. The other things, Violet and his father, and home, and his old work-table, were shadows stretching off his feet behind. He could not look at them any longer, if he was to go forward towards the blurring, dazzling and actual sun.

CHAPTER III

CHAIN OF WHIRLPOOLS

BUT he did not arrive in Oxford, on the first day of his second term, in any mood of exaggerated expectancy. He read a newspaper in the train, as if to show himself undeniably that he was now freed from the excitement and secret panic which had occupied him on the earlier journey; and got himself a taxi without difficulty. It was a grey characterless day, not particularly warm or cold, and the streets had an ordinary, natural look, like a dining-room, not particularly festive or promising, but familiar and suitable. He felt at ease, ready to settle with indolent satisfaction into last term's groove. His friends seemed really nicer than he had remembered (even when he had been boasting of them) and he was surprised to find how many people he knew. How many people greeted him even in the street, and asked him about the vacation.

One of these was Marcus Goldner, a young Jew with a plump melancholy face and a matronly way of walking. Alfred had recognised his walk from a distance even at the far end of the Broad; and began wondering, even then, if he knew him

well enough to say anything. But Marcus himself came up to him.

"I won't ask you what you've been doing," he said, breaking off from two companions (who stood talking at a little distance) to cross over to Alfred, "you look glad to be back."

"I suppose I am," said Alfred, "but I seem to forget at once what anything else is like."

"It is a drug which works very quickly," observed Marcus; "I find it so also. Some people, notably dons, don't even believe that anything else exists." He threw a look at the turrety façade of Balliol and the youthful rosy faces of two undergraduates who happened to be passing. "It is really an idyllic landscape," he went on, "charming, preposterous and really boring."

"Not always charming," said Alfred obstinately.

"And so not boring?" asked Marcus, adding a subtlety which Alfred had to agree with, as if it had been in his mind. "We agree then, only about preposterous. You do agree about preposterous, don't you?" Marcus took out a little book, like a diary. "I have an unpleasant piece of business to do next Wednesday at six," he said, "and shall certainly want some relaxation afterwards. Would you care to dine with me?"

"I should like to awfully."

"Well, then. If you would come to my rooms at a quarter to eight?—and in the meantime, I must not keep my friends waiting."

Alfred felt very baffled. Why had Marcus asked him to dinner? What unpleasant piece of

business had he got on Wednesday at six, which would take exactly one hour and three-quarters? and what did his life elsewhere consist of, that it made him judge Oxford so harshly? What was his room like? and what sort of people did he know?

He was early on Wednesday evening, and went for a walk to fill up time, and so in the end was late. Marcus had already poured out sherry for himself.

"I'm sorry I'm late."

"That's of no consequence. I should have given you an hour and a half."

Alfred looked at him, on the point of saying 'why' or 'what do you mean'; but Marcus was pouring out the second glass of sherry with such an air of concentration that it was impossible to interrupt him. He took the full glass.

"Did the business go off all right?"

"As well as I expected," said Marcus, and nodded sagaciously, then slightly inclined his head and lowered his eyelids, as he held his glass against his lips, before tilting it for the last delicious mouthful.

"Shall we go now?"

Alfred did not know where they were going; and for some reason did not care to ask. He walked very docile beside Marcus, sometimes being pushed away, into the gutter sometimes, by the crowd, and sometimes overshooting unexpected corners which Marcus took narrowly and without warning.

They got to the George, and went upstairs. Alfred, who had not been there before, could not distinguish the shape of the room because the air was so thick with smoke, like fog. He saw at the tables a number of ungainly red-faced creatures, dressed in anything from evening dress to plus fours. He noticed with relief that Marcus was making for a little table against the wall. They sat down opposite each other.

"I will order dinner," said Marcus. The waiter leant towards him solicitously. That will never happen to me, thought Alfred. Marcus laid down the menu and looked round, his eye resting on each person for about the same length of time, without apparent recognition, or expression of any kind. He appeared reserved and disinterested, like a person on a channel steamer reviewing his travelling companions, knowing that they will probably separate in three and a half hours without ever having spoken.

"The usual lot," said Marcus.

"Do you know them?" said Alfred.

Marcus again looked round the room, more quickly, glancing only an instant at each person.

"There are forty-seven people here," he said. "Of these, I know the names of forty-six. Twenty, to my knowledge, know me, but of these only three would be worth speaking to for more than five minutes. . . ."

"You know everybody," said Alfred admiringly.

"Not everybody. Forty-six only. And there are forty-seven."

Alfred looked across at Marcus with sudden relieved admiration (he hadn't known how to tell about Jews but this chap was all right), and then round at a confused herd of unrecognised faces.

"Which one don't you——?"

"The girl in the corner. . . ."

Alfred had not noticed any women at all, and had not imagined there would be any.

"Which?"

"Not the one against the window. That's Paula Tenniers, without whom no party is a success, and with whom it can never be anything except a party. I know her all right. The one I don't know is the one farther away, facing us, with a broad forehead and untidy hair, leaning over the table as if someone were just going to give her something, but with an expression on her face which makes the man she's with quite certain that it isn't him she wants—even if she thinks it is. I've seen her before somewhere, but I forget where, for the moment. The man is an American, with a past so fantastic that everyone thinks he's a liar, which he can't be, because he hasn't a vestige of imagination."

At a larger table in the middle four brawny young men were putting bits of newspaper down each other's necks. One leant back in his chair admonishing them, with a piece of twisted paper, like a long ear, sticking out of his collar. Paula Tenniers and her companion went out. The four young men looked gapingly after her, and waved a torn copy of the *Daily Telegraph*. She

did know them, but had given them only the faintest of mechanised smiles. She drew nearer to the man she was with, as if for protection. To Alfred, whose head was swimming, this slight unconscious movement appeared a deliberate gesture, extreme, magnificent.

"She is very pretty," he said, "but she looks as if she might be rather stupid."

"On the contrary," said Marcus, "you will notice sooner or later that her looks are painfully mediocre; and that she achieves everything by her superlative intelligence."

Alfred shook his head. She had reminded him of a tobacconist's girl in his own town—a girl who had always been pleasant to him, and made him feel grown-up. Marcus went on:

"Temperamentally, she is a kind of glorified barmaid. With a routine benevolence for anyone, and a flair for giving it on each occasion a personal and exclusive twist. This model, in fact, can be imitated in any colour or material. But she does happen to be intelligent as well. She works with the utmost concentration from half-past one till five, without wasting a minute, and is expected to get a first."

"I wouldn't have thought that," said Alfred.

"No, of course not. Did you ever know a woman who wanted to be thought clever?"

Alfred smiled slowly, thinking of his mother and sisters. What would they think if they could see him here? So drunk that even smiling at all suddenly would have made him feel sick.

"To tell the truth," he said solemnly, "I don't know much about women."

"Do you know much about men?" said Marcus, smiling.

Alfred closed his eyes, as if reflecting, for what seemed an age.

"No," he said slowly. "No. I don't know much about men either." He was about to drink, and saw suddenly over the rim of his glass a man standing in the doorway, looking round. Alfred held his glass in mid-air, and stared.

"Who's that?"

Marcus shifted in his chair (it did not seem easy for him to turn his head over his shoulder) and looked also.

"William Hawes. Didn't you know him?"

"I didn't know his name," said Alfred, and then after a long pause, "but I have seen him about."

"Yes, he is one of the more noticeable people in this University. Besides, he is reading history also; and he has a great friend who lives on your staircase."

"Yes, I know who you mean. Small, Irish, like a firework, but I don't like him much. What I mean is, I never liked him much. He reminds me of Siegfried."

"William?"

"Yes, he reminds me very much of Siegfried. I must look and see if he is really like, next time. I am sure to meet him again."

He looked at the doorway, from which William

had now disappeared, as if through a trap-door, suddenly as he had come, it seemed to Alfred.

"Let's go now," he said, standing up, but keeping the tips of his fingers on the table. Marcus paid the bill without hurrying, and took his arm on the way downstairs.

"I'd better see you into bed," said Marcus, and kept his arm there even when they were on the flat again. It felt very kind and strong.

"I am sure to see him again, aren't I?" said Alfred.

"Quite sure," said Marcus, smiling and pressing his arm consolingly.

"I always have," said Alfred, to reassure himself, but in a despondent voice.

From this time, Marcus treated him as a confidential ally, as if they were associated in some slightly illicit enterprise. Alfred still felt, deeply, that he was sinister because unexplained (although on the surface justified and explained because of the people who knew him) and sometimes expected to find after they had met for an instant and parted that a string of priceless pearls had been stuffed into his pocket, or imperative instructions (written on an envelope flap or a torn edge of newspaper) that he was to go and shoot the Prime Minister. He was not used to friendliness, having known nothing between loneliness and going about in gangs, and was nervously on the look out for something to be asked of him. It would have been an unjust simplification to

imagine that Marcus gave only because he intended to receive, but this was the effect, because he had recognised in Alfred an alien and unestablished being, requiring protection and encouragement (which Marcus, sympathising with something known and forgotten in himself, gave) and at the same time offering possibilities of exploitation which he was not likely to neglect.

The business of getting Alfred known just suited him. Nobody (particularly not Alfred) knew what he was up to; and he delighted privately over the practice of his secret powers, like a sorcerer who kills not by incantations and the evil eye, but by slippery banana skins, and railway accidents, and guns which aimed at a dictator are jerked aside so that the bullet picks out (as if by chance) some person in the crowd. Marcus used any method, so long as it looked natural; and very few people so much as realised that he had known Alfred any longer than they had.

"I met such an odd person at Tony's party," said Paula Tenniers, "he looks a little like an out-of-work clerk become crossing-sweeper, and is said to be one of the coming young men. His name was Fielding, I think. Do you know him?"

"I see him sometimes," said Marcus, "and I agree that he has possibilities. For one thing, there have been so many poets with beards about lately that it is a relief to find one who looks, as you say, like a crossing-sweeper."

"What kind of a poet?" asked Paula, immedi-

ately a little scornful and reserved, and taking refuge in polite questions. Marcus spread his hands as if apologetically.

"He is very inchoate. And so for the moment he is a poet, of an indeterminate kind. But he might in the end be a politician, or a managing director. I don't know him well enough to say."

"And I only saw him for a moment . . ."

"From the little I know of him, I doubt if you would like him particularly. He is so very unfinished." Marcus let a discreet glance move unemphatically over her arranged hair and her arranged face and her polished finger-nails shining so that you could hardly see them. She is really marvellous. He smiled at her with baffling admiration.

"You have an unfair idea of me," she said, making a pettish expression; "I don't, it is true, like little boys who are always going to remain little boys, but it would be different with ones who . . ."

"Have possibilities."

"Oh, yes, we were talking about Alfred. Yes, I think he has possibilities."

Meantime Marcus was very satisfied to find that his belief in Alfred's 'possibilities' was justified not only by the general reaction, but also by the behaviour of Alfred himself. He had got himself a scarlet jersey, and looked far less of a clerk and far more of a crossing-sweeper, with his untidy sandy hair falling over his forehead. Also

his look of contempt and exasperation, which had before had in it too much that was timid, protective and retaliating, now began to appear genuinely careless and intolerant; and his smile had become generous instead of unwillingly pleading. Marcus began to feel that he should soon have to find something else to amuse himself with.

"I think it is time we started a society," he said.

"What for?" said Alfred. He was lying so deep and comfortable in an arm-chair that he could barely be bothered to move his head. He looked teasingly at Marcus, because it was so absurdly like him to put forward the idea as a matter of carrying out principles.

"A discussion society. Membership to be by nomination."

"To discuss what?"

"Literature, Art, Morals, perhaps politics, if from a civilised angle."

"Aren't there societies of that sort already?"

"There are these intolerably formalised and old-world debating societies. And a few small clubs in various colleges. But this would be on a much bigger scale; and there would be more people to choose members from, so that the effect would be more concentrated. It must have a really good president."

"Why not you?" said Alfred, though he saw at once that Marcus was not the kind of person to be president of anything, and would probably have the sense not to try.

"Me?" Marcus thought it worth replying only

by one word and an expressive gesture. But then he went on:

"I don't expect I shall join. I shall know just as much about it and probably more, if I don't attend a single meeting. I merely think it is time that some such society were started."

He set to work at once to organise a party (at which he would not be present) to launch the new society. It looked promising. Most of the people to whom it was mentioned appeared very sceptical but seemed likely to turn up. "It may be amusing," they said to each other, "and after all we needn't join." Alfred was rather ashamed of feeling really a bit enthusiastic about it; so that he almost had to show his disdain by keeping away. "You'd better go," said Marcus, not showing his exasperation; "it's sure to be frightfully funny and nothing whatever will happen. So you'd better seize your only opportunity." Alfred repeated this remark to several people. The party was to take place in some rooms in the High belonging to an insignificant but wealthy young man who promised to provide tea. One or two people had agreed to say a few introductory words, and others had been approached as possible officers.

"I think on the whole that William should be president, don't you?" said Marcus.

"I don't know him personally," said Alfred; "is that the kind of thing he does?"

Marcus shrugged his shoulders and started another subject. But the next day he remarked:

"I imagine there is every possibility that William would stand as president if someone proposed him."

On a Tuesday, round about the middle of the spring term, the party assembled. Alfred arrived very early, and found Eckersley, the host, distractedly counting cups and lamenting the impossibility of procuring passion fruit in this God-forsaken town.

"I compromised on prawns," he said, "with brown bread and butter. Try some; I don't suppose anyone will eat anything when the whole lot arrive." He walked about the room with an air of great anxiety and business; he always had a suspicion that no one would notice him if once he stopped moving. Several men drifted in; they did not say anything, but glanced round the room, in which Alfred and Eckersley happened to be standing, and seemed satisfied that they had come to the right place. They then went on with the conversation they had been having on the stairs. Eckersley turned his back on them, and talked more volubly than ever to Alfred. The room gradually filled. No one appeared to wish to start anything in common, but stared about for the first moment and then went on talking to the people with whom they had come.

"I am afraid it will be a frost," whispered Eckersley. "Give them some bread and butter, will you? and I'll push round the prawns."

Alfred carelessly took up a plate and began

holding it out to people. He noticed that they mostly looked at it as if it smelled bad, and then took a piece to avoid saying anything about it. He heard Eckersley going from place to place and saying in his high complaining voice:

"Alas, there were no passion fruit, so I thought I had better get prawns." People smiled faintly, as if to acknowledge that a joke had been made, although it meant nothing to them personally. Alfred began to find his half-empty plate embarrassing, so he put it under a chair. People he knew were beginning to come in, and he wanted to talk to them. He noticed a man with a low forehead and black oily hair, John Morton, the son of a schoolmaster, who had a whim for picking out names at random of first-year students in the women's colleges and inviting them to dinner. These invitations were always sent from an accommodation address in someone else's college, couched in illiterate though flowery French, and signed Jean Morand. He had written out an exact time-table of the procedure on these occasions from eight o'clock till midnight, but as no one had ever accepted it was not known how it would work out in practice. He was inventive rather than resourceful, and each time that he showed anyone the manuscript he would think of something to add, in red, green, or purple ink. Alfred had not yet seen through him and could still study his dissipated peasant's face with curiosity. With him was a boy like an angel, yellow-haired, and simple as the taste of barley-sugar. Alfred

despised him, because among all these complications of appearance and manner, this sweetness seemed feigned. In front of the window, the wide square shoulders of Bruno (whose mother was Italian) loomed like a mountain. His broad moon-white face was so still and the eyelids drooped so low, that he looked asleep or unconscious. Until his eyes moved, and then you could see them flash like water under his eyelashes. So that you knew he was watching.

Alfred looked from one to the other, and for the first time compared now with then. How different this was from the gang of schoolboys he had known earlier. How far he had come. How busy life was now, how full. What variety there was spread out before him, Bruno, John, Marcus. What a poor creature he had been last term, going about in body with a lot of adolescents like a drove of calves, and lurking in spirit in the dingy secret caves of himself, dragging his guts out in poetry (bad poetry) and realising himself only in dreams. Now, in his red jersey, it seemed almost unlikely that he had any guts. He was violent and æthereal as the sun. He tossed his head in triumph, jerking the hay-coloured lock out of his right eye.

"What's going to happen?" said Bruno quietly.

Alfred turned his face into the shadow, for he did not want anyone to know how excited he was. He shrugged his shoulders with a lethargic, indifferent movement.

"I don't know. Nothing very likely. I shall probably give it fifteen minutes, and then if it hasn't I shall go."

Bruno nodded, and again shielded his eyes.

The two girls Marcus and Alfred had observed in the George came in together. Paula (always certain of a welcome) slightly raised her head and smiled, as if answering a greeting no one had given. Lyca (the other) looked round suspiciously, her eyes, because of a secret fear, focussing beyond the actual people, and not seeing them, knowing they were strangers. The men barely moved, except to glance quickly and without expression, and then return more compactly to their own groups, allowing them space on the floor only by drawing themselves closer.

"It was a mistake to ask any women," said Bruno.

"Perhaps, I don't know," said Alfred, seeing with satisfaction how Paula adapted herself with glacial efficiency to this unlikely situation. She appeared at once to be occupied with something of absorbing interest, but whether imagined or observed her expression did not in the smallest degree reveal.

Lyca, on the other hand, appeared to Alfred both pitiable and exasperating; as if, not finding herself recognised, she had stopped existing. Someone gave her a cup of tea, and she began to stir it with exaggerated interest.

It was time something happened. People

began to look a little querulous; although no one seemed to think that he was the right person to begin.

"Are they getting frightfully bored?" said Eckersley, still holding out a plate of prawns.

"I think they'll last out a few minutes longer," said Bruno.

"I'm supposed to be talking," said Lionel Spencer, with a high abrupt giggle, "but I don't know that I ought to start before William gets here, do you think? Though on the other hand everyone else is here and I am so afraid they may start going away. I've got something ready." He took from his pocket some minute pieces of stiff paper, covered, without margins, by neat tiny writing. He shuffled them like cards. "Just a few ideas I jotted down at random." His flabby face took on an uncongenial expression of noble carelessness, which soon weakened into one of awkward uncertainty. "What do you think I ought to do really?" he asked Alfred.

"I should wait a few minutes," said Alfred, and went over to the window to look out. It was shut, so he pushed up the bottom sash and leaned over the sill. The blue, dense, smoky air from inside the room was sucked out each side of him in long streaks like hair in water. The air outside was like water, fresh with sunlight. He looked along the road and saw nobody, then, looking down, he caught a glimpse of fair hair, crisp at the ends and shining in the chill March sunlight. Then the door banged.

"He's just coming," he said to Lionel, his voice sounding inconveniently important.

"Oh, then I'd better get ready to begin," said Lionel (Alfred saw at once that he was safe to take no notice of any but his own concerns). He started reshuffling his cards.

William came in. The room was long and narrow with the windows at one end and the door at the other; so that Alfred, turned from the outside sunlight, and looking through air dense with smoke, could hardly see him. But he saw how everyone had moved as if something (for the first time) had happened. All the same, it was at this moment that he noticed that they all were really like dead prawns. Only one, the Irishman who lived on Alfred's staircase, Larry Munro, showed signs of vitality. He was now talking in a forceful, excited way to Morton, but glanced continuously over his shoulder. He was looking of course at William, who for his part took no notice whatever.

"Not such a bad chap really," thought Alfred, pitying and despising him. For he was the kind of man you wouldn't take any notice of. William's indifference, moreover, appeared supremely noble, like the indifference of planets, or the sun. Alfred gazed at him without concealment, as one looks at the countryside over a gate.

Lionel, by the mantelpiece, attempting to force a silence, gave a few noisy coughs, and at last clapped his hands. A good many other people

began clapping and talking suddenly more loudly. No one seemed to understand what he meant.

"Silence!" he cried. "Please be quiet," he implored, and tapped thinly on the mantelpiece with his silver pencil. At last there was a rippling and uncertain quietness, through which the voices of people making comments on the speaker came clearly.

He did not appear to hear them, but fumbled again with the cards, explaining elaborately that they had somehow got out of order. Suddenly he began formally.

"Gentlemen—ladies and gentlemen—it is a difficult task to describe (as I have been asked to do) the character of a Society as yet unnamed and non-existent. I must therefore confine myself to giving you my personal views, which will afterwards, I hope, be amplified, or perhaps modified, by yours. It is to be a discussion society. You may say, to discuss what?" (ironic laughter) "and to this the answer, I imagine, is 'everything.' We will discuss all the problems of moment in our time, and possibly we will sometimes invite authorities on the various subjects in which we are interested, to speak to us. We will deal with literature, and very likely have meetings at which the work of members may be read. We will consider Art, and if there are found to be enough practising Artists in this University, we might attempt an exhibition. We will not overlook morals (an eminent supporter of birth-control has

practically promised to be present at an early meeting) . . ."

Alfred had heard all this before, and more concisely, from Marcus. He was afraid William would be horribly bored, and very likely throw up the whole thing. He stared hard at William, trying to decide if this was so; but William's face seemed to tell everything or nothing, it was impossible to know which. The oration appeared to be ending.

" . . . not so much to discuss actual subjects, for instance, politics or poetry, but to acquaint ourselves with the emotional background, or aura, of this present time, of which a factual situation, or a collection of words, is but the crassest symbol."

Lionel packed his cards together as if he had finished. Then opened his mouth as if to begin speaking again. Then he sat down. A burst of relieved clapping broke out.

"It only remains—" said Bernard Holden, speaking with an air of authority quite incompatible with his sulky child's face and cross-stitch blouse (he was clearly acting on instructions)—"it only remains to choose officers and decide on a name. I call for nominations for President."

There was a long pause. Then Eckersley whispered something into Bernard's ear.

"Mr. William Hawes is nominated," he announced, and looked round. " Mr. William Hawes is therefore elected unanimously. Vice-president." There were no suggestions and it

was decided that the office should be left vacant for the present. " Secretary?"

"Lionel Spencer," said somebody. Lionel raised his eyebrows, as if very much surprised, and looked quickly round the room.

"I would like to suggest Fielding," he said, smiling self-consciously.

"Why not make Spencer treasurer and Fielding secretary?" said Bruno languidly. He was anxious to get away, and the crowd was too thick at present to thrust himself through.

"I'll put it to the vote," said Bernard, and everybody at once raised their hands. "That's carried then. Now we must elect a few people for the committee." Alfred, affected by Bruno's impatience, felt almost bored to death. He was glad he was going to be in the thick of it, but this inert mass of possible members were insupportable. He would like to discuss about it with the others, William and so on. Two or three other men, and Paula, were elected to the Committee; it was decided (probably by a minority) to call it the Tuesday Club; and the first meeting was announced for the following week. Everyone dispersed quickly, agreeing that "it would probably be worth coming to once. It really seemed ludicrous enough to be quite possibly amusing." Alfred had half expected that the elect would at once settle down to a Committee meeting, and he lingered about for a few minutes. William and Bruno went out together and nodded to him. Lionel put his little cards for the last

time into his pocket, and said: "Well, that's all then." Alfred went quickly out and walked down to the towpath by the gas-works. It was his favourite walk at that time.

He supposed the party had been a success. But it seemed a nuisance to have to do all that organisation so as to get people together. The important people (William, for instance) always go away quickly at the end without having said a word. Surely, if a few people, himself, William, any others, really wanted to settle down and talk something out, they would. The organisation only seemed necessary because that wasn't what people really wanted to do. More than anything, they seemed to do things because they didn't want to do anything else. He remembered the comments he had heard at the party. He wondered if that was the sort of thing William had been thinking. On the whole not, at any rate, not exactly. But it was extremely difficult to imagine what on earth William did think. He seemed more to exist doing, and yet the things he did were so like what other people, any other people, were doing, that they told you nothing. Was he happy? It was impossible to imagine. No one could say which among the things to which he attached himself were of importance to him. Probably, he did not inquire. He stands at the door of the restaurant, looking for his friend, not unaware that all eyes are on him, but unperturbed. He can walk with serenity on mown grass, because no one has ever turned him off it. Any-

thing, thought Alfred, which demands time, or diligence, or even inspiration, I shall achieve; but I shall never have the confidence, the contentment of a man who can walk on mown grass with an ease which has never been disturbed. I shall never feel people's eyes on me without exulting, and wishing to escape. I shall never accept my position, I shall not accept my happiness, or my occupations.

In the darkness the river flowed like black oil. Across it was a factory, a square black mass, with windows marked only by deeper blackness, like the space between the jaws of a skeleton. In one only there was a flame, red and intense, more heat than light. This flame was only visible for a second, it was so far behind the window, in a wedged entanglement of still machinery. Alfred was walking alongside a dilapidated paling. In one place two slates had rotted off, and he could see through to a wood-yard. Near at hand, where it had been necessary to put a pile of long planks on a pile of short ones, there was a small nook or cave. One could sleep there, thought Alfred. He stood still to look at it more minutely, and immediately the wind (as if catching him up) blew shivers over him, up his spine and across his thighs. He walked on.

He was tired when he got in. It must be bed-time. He felt hungry (for he had not had supper) and took out of his cupboard some bread and cheese and pickles. The fire was mostly ash, which seemed odd, because he remembered he had

not lit it that day. He stirred out a feeble flame, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, slowly dipping bread-fingers in the pickle and eating it in small mouthfuls. Looking down at the large hearth he saw that it was covered with small collapsed pellets of cigarette-ash. Who can have been here? His first thought (exquisite and terrible, because it had only to occur to show itself ridiculous and impossible) is, perhaps William? He smiles, with his lips stiff and angular, cruelly. He despises us, people say. Who, you? No, he has found something in his situation, his character, which he despises, and will change. He smiles again, easily. His ambition is roused; he sees himself famous, admired, famous, above all, worthy of his own approval. It might have been William. . . .

He looked round the room, for surely some momentous change would have come over it if William had been there. The constellations of his room, chair-table-group, book-group, paper-group, should have rearranged themselves, as if for the birth of an emperor. But everything is the same, except for the extra shining which comes from all close-lit objects after nightfall.

Alfred is nearly asleep, images ramble through his mind. He pulls back the curtains (who drew the curtains?) and exerts his will to draw out one of the little stars from its socket. It trembles, almost coming, but withdraws, on its guard and firmer, like a limpet. He walks back to the fire, and looks at the things on the mantelpiece, one

by one. That letter should be answered. The cigarette-box is nice (a soft green, like fields in an Italian picture); it was clever of Jess. The matchbox I meant to use for something, but it didn't do. I emptied the matches on my hand and some spilt on the floor. And then it didn't do. So I collected the matches to put back, but they were all head to tail, and they wouldn't all get in.

He opened the matchbox, and there lay the matches side by side, heads together, as if they had only just left the factory. This then was the sign. He imagined himself here with a man who had spread out the matches on the palm of his hand, and was diligently arranging them. Who was it, who could it be? Why, Marcus.

The idea of Marcus splashed over him like a bucket of cold water; he made a face, as if in a hopeless attempt to ward it off. He spread himself another piece of butter, opened a book, and decided he would certainly go to bed in less than five minutes.

But the room now seemed full of Marcus. It was disagreeable of him not to have left a note and have done with it. As it was, the place simply reeked of him. Sitting in the chair, waiting for Alfred to come, he had spun his will out like chains all round the room. Alfred went into his bedroom to undress, but it was almost difficult to move, the air was so dense. Alfred took off his shirt, and then put it on again. It was no good, he would never be able to sleep properly.

He walked unwillingly across his sitting-room, opened the door on to the staircase, and went out.

He had noticed from the first almost the curious and subtle contrast between the building, the shell of cool grey stone, and the life which filled it, this brilliant and effervescent distillation—youth. Generally, he could walk here with free movements, lounging and running as it suited him, glancing here and there with the careless, expert eye of ownership, as if he were going about in his own room where he could lay hands on anything without first looking for it.

To-night coming out of his room was like crossing the channel. The staircase which he must pass down (was it with boredom or terror?) was alien. Only staircases in slums are so dark and narrow. Above, an echoed footstep mocked, and suddenly escaped behind a door-slam. The quadrangle spread like the sea. His feet dragged. A staircase again.

He opened the door without knocking, and saw Marcus sitting unperturbed in his chair, reading, as if that were the only thing on earth. Without looking up, he said:

"Shut the door, won't you?"

Alfred remembered being sent for by the headmaster. He wondered what he had had to come for. But he shut the door.

"What did you want?" he said pugnaciously.

Marcus at last looked up, smiled, and shut his book with a deliberate movement.

"What do *you* want?"

"I? Just thought I'd come round." Alfred had wanted to accuse Marcus, but was afraid of convicting his own imagination.

"Sit down, and have some sherry," said Marcus hospitably.

Alfred took the sherry, but stayed standing up. He took up Marcus's matchbox and began disarranging the matches, and laying them head to tail. This he did very seriously, as if performing some religious act—perhaps exorcism. Marcus was always impatient with fiddling habits, but controlled himself, and produced some excellent conversation about a play that was on that week.

"Well, I might as well get to bed," said Alfred, but Marcus had refilled his glass, and it seemed a pity to waste it.

He drank quickly, put down his glass, held his hand over it, and said: "Now I'm going to bed."

"My clock's a good deal fast," said Marcus (it was), "and I have been wanting to play you a delightful new French record—incredibly lewd but undeniably charming. In the kind of French which a discreet sprinkling of words you do not understand makes unbearably provocative."

"The whole thing'll be like that to me," said Alfred.

"I'll explain it. Hush." He had started the record.

Alfred stared at the oil-black disc revolving, but heard nothing. It was clearly hopeless to expect Marcus to ask what he wanted and allow him to

go. That had been a childish and silly idea, the best was to get it over. . . .

"I went to the meeting . . ." he began.

"Yes?" said Marcus, in his indifferent, unhurried voice, at the same time, or just before, switching off the gramophone with an incongruous grab.

"Yes?"

Alfred told him what had happened in as few words as possible. Marcus nodded impatiently.

"Yes, but what did it feel like, what was the atmosphere?"

"Damn stuffy," said Alfred, inclined to be silly and annoying.

"That I can believe," said Marcus equably, "and the people?"

"Like a collection of rabbits with their noses twitching," said Alfred.

Marcus smiled indulgently.

"It is possibly one of the amiable weaknesses of age," he observed, complacent and mocking, "but I find I take a very great interest in nose-twitching."

"You mean, that anything I say will be taken down against me as a sign of—adolescence?" Alfred wrinkled his mouth over this word as if it were a sour-fleshed plum-stone.

"Since you suggest it . . ." said Marcus. Alfred felt himself blushing, and had to laugh.

"Oh, all right." He waved his hand dismissingly. One didn't have to take Marcus too seriously, he reminded himself. He stretched his arms out,

yawning, exaggerating his sleepiness with the effort of not-caring.

"Good night," he smiled (thinking of cold steely air; of sheets chilly as the stems of water-lilies; and of how, beneath these two layers of cold, like a snow-house, he would lie curled up and spin out of himself a cocoon of warmth).

"Good night," said Marcus, making no effort now to detain him, and reaching out his hand as he spoke for the book he had put down on the mantelpiece. Released, Alfred made a dash for his own room and the warmth of his own thoughts. Marcus intruded on his private atmosphere like extreme weather, like a prolonged drought, a monsoon, or a hard frost, affecting continually all daily occupations, becoming of necessity a factor to be considered in all projects.

"I didn't bargain for this," said Alfred, pulling his bedroom curtains, shutting out the cold distant stars, tugging off his red jersey (which Marcus admired), and the trousers bought under the inspiration of Gordon, and the vest and pants provided by Violet, bought cheap, and not wearing well. As he glanced at the untidy heap (a trouser-leg brushed the floor, and braces dangled over the chair-back) it occurred to him it made a ridiculous but just picture of the stratification of his life. The shoes, stained and misshapen, took him back to his schooldays, and his socks, bought three weeks ago, and now revealing themselves as 'not what he really wanted,' represented (almost) the present. "But I am rid of all that," he

thought, looking at them, half-rolled, one in the middle of the floor and the other nearly under the bed. He was standing in his pyjamas; it was his custom to put on the trousers before he had taken off his shirt, and so he had put them on unconsciously as a part of undressing, but when he came to look at them they displeased him. They were like clothes which might be allotted to you in a hospital or a workhouse, impersonal and yet tyrannising. He took them off again and flung them with the other things on the chair, switched off the light, shutting out, as the night with curtains, the room and these things of his, with darkness. The cold air tickled his skin and crept freezingly from the floor up his ankles. He leapt into bed. The cold of the sheets gripped him like paralysis. He did not move. His mind even halted; admitting to it would have made it more difficult to bear; would have taken away his defences, would have shown him himself, naked in this narrow bed, struggling with an enemy. As it was, with a brief hibernation, he would edge him out, vanquish him without so much as choosing weapons, or pacing out the ground. He could feel his feet again, they were cold, but not numb. He stretched his toe out and drew it back, reassuring himself that a habitable area, his exact shape and only one size larger, was indeed being created. He waited now comfortably, allowing his mind to flicker over the events and feelings of the day.

The afternoon's meeting appeared now not

only distant but out of focus; the conversation with Marcus distant also, but sharp and unemotional. He tried to rationalise it, to understand why Marcus had treated him with this inexplicit severity, what this interest in things in which he took no part was exactly, what he was up to in general, and so on. He had to confess himself defeated; Marcus was a real puzzle; impossible to like or dislike entirely, to approve or disapprove. Alfred's habit of admiring him broke down with difficulty; his appearance of being able to predict and even organise William's actions in spite of its disagreeable air of patronage, had made William himself suspect. Was he also involved in this slightly bogus affair because he had nothing to do with his time? or because he liked to be seen about? and have references made to him in University papers? Was it not nobler to remain, like Marcus, in the background, watching? He decided that this behaviour was safer, but certainly not nobler. For one thing, any course of action which threw suspicion on William discredited itself.

It is clear that Alfred, a creature with a jerry-built background, provided in youth with a set of assumptions which had one by one broken under him, or else strangled him as he grew like a necklace slipped over his head at birth, is over-anxious to get hold of some invariable recipe for the 'right thing.' Two things which are incompatible, or even widely different, immediately set him thinking that there is something wrong with one or

other of them, particularly if he is himself involved with them and there is any suspicion of there being anything wrong with him. He is in fact entirely inexperienced, and without the camouflage of tradition which enables people to acquire experience without making fools of themselves in public.

All this he is vaguely aware of, and is ashamed of it. He tells himself that the right thing is to love life, to act instinctively, to demand no justification; and yet he finds himself constantly taking thought, and comparing, and deciding what he ought to do or think or feel. He tries to like Epstein; and is delighted that he really does like van Gogh. He wonders if it is unreasonable to be annoyed by Marcus, and whether William (on whom he was ready to lavish all that his imagination has stored up in eighteen starved years) is indeed without flaws. It is a humiliation to him that he never knows what tips to give taxi-drivers; and that literature is to him a class-room subject rather than a heritage.

He is cold and naked. He has shut out the stars, which remind him of that enormous Outside with which contact is still so uncertain, and he has shut out the room, which reminds him bleakly of himself, and yet the pleasure of being alone with his own thoughts is slow in coming. He turns over, and rubs the soles of his feet briskly on the sheet. I would like to ask Marcus what he thinks, what he means by it, what makes him do the things he does do, and so on; and I would like to ask him about William, and William about

William, and I'd like to know what they thought of me too. Not that I take any morbid interest in that, I just wonder, that's all, and knowing what they thought of me would tell me about them. He imagines conversations.

William; could I come in?

Why, yes; I am afraid the fire's not very good. I was . . . doing some work.

Work?

My own work. . . .

Oh, yes, Marcus told me that you wrote things. He said they were very good. I don't like him, but his judgment is sound. I expect they are good.

He was very kind to me, at a time which was otherwise difficult.

It's not difficult now, is it?

Not now.

I'm glad. I should hate to feel . . .

The words flowed sweet and coloured through Alfred's imagination; but he was hard put to it to summon up any image of William real enough to satisfy him. He saw only himself, pacing a room, or standing meditatively on a bridge, regarding the brown flooded river.

You see, I know I could be happy, if only . . .

What do you want?

Nothing that can be described. A sensation. Perhaps a perfect blend of all sensations, as white contains all colours. Do you see that?

I think I do. But I'm not sure that I agree with it. All sensations? surely one must learn to choose?

No. To dictate sensations is to kill all spontaneity. I must lie open to all weathers.

It will be difficult.

The image of Marcus appeared exact as an engraving, sleek hair, plump fingers, slightly pointed shoes. Alfred, towering over him in his blurred, half-dreaming state, forced him to speak out of character.

What's happened to you lately? I never see you.

I'm doing things. My own work. Friends.

A pity.

Why that? You hadn't any claim on me.

No.

What's wrong with getting tired of a thing, and doing something else?

There's nothing wrong, morally. It is a defect of character. An unstable temperament.

I didn't want to get fed up with it. That is my misfortune. I am a poet. William believes I am a poet.

Through his eyeglass, Marcus looked out at Alfred with the torpid, incredulous stare of a fish in an aquarium. His body shrank, and took on a bluish tint, his white face glistened as if marinated in sea-water. He was a fish, and hung behind the glass with sea-weed gently tickling his belly. He did not lose his sarcastic expression.

Now Alfred found himself holding a glass bowl half full of water. The surface of the water was still and flat as glass. With a feeling of extreme daring he began to rock it gently from side to side. It took on a circular motion, and a little

cone-shaped dimple appeared in the centre. To this he was drawn, in the same way as he had been pushed away from the convex rebuking bulge of Marcus's eyeglass eye. Stealthily, he rocked more subtly in this curve, and the hole grew deeper, stretching out to the edge, which stretched out also. He himself was rocking in a little boat on a placid stretch of water, from which the whirlpool seemed to be at a distance of several miles.

"They are very frequent in these waters," said Fred, crossing his arms on his chest. The muscles of his arms bulged under the sleeves of his seaman's jersey.

"It is too late to draw back," said Alfred dramatically, hardly noticing that Fred had walked off, whistling, over the water in the direction of land.

"You must make shorter strokes," said Gordon, moving his oars so quickly and violently that he heaved himself out of his seat and straight into a following wave, into which he sank, smiling, and calling out, "that's how."

The waves were now so high that Alfred could only see a few yards and that intermittently. He could not see the whirlpool, and only guessed that it must be in the direction in which he was being violently driven. His oars were swept away, and he grasped the edge of the boat, swaying from side to side to balance it, when the waves came. They broke over him repeatedly.

At last the sea seemed smoother. At the same time the boat tipped slightly sideways and was

swept forward even faster. He realised that it was now going in a spiral, and, looking down on his left side, he again saw the hole, in which the shining green of the water melted gradually into an abysmal black. Across it, at a great distance, he saw a green wall of water, with thin lines of white spray along the horizontal line of its motion. It closed in on him, and at first he thought that the cone was shrinking; then, looking up, and seeing how it spread out above him in a convolvulus-shape, green paling to opal, he realised that he was nearing the centre of the vortex. His speed increased, so that, when he looked at the opposite side, he could say to himself that there was the place he had been in less than a second before. He was filled with exhilaration and dread. The spray hissed as it was torn off the surface of the water. Small drops dashed against his face like a shower of pebbles. It was in some way his own force that drove him on; he gave himself up to it; filled with longing for the final moment, the centre, where, in the intensest green-black darkness . . .

He reached it, and swooned; the darkness closed over him its great black wings; he struggled for a moment, or an eternity, with its still and muffling terror, and woke.

His heart was beating in his throat and he breathed sobbingly. He made a great effort for quietness, and slowly collected himself, opening his eyes against the freezing actual night, and running his fingers over the rough blanket. "If

I had only had the strength," he said, "I should have seen it." He was consumed with regret; there, the sensations of his dream convinced him, was the key to the whole mystery of life. He groaned with disappointment, and flung himself on his side, with his face pressed into the pillow. His fists were clenched.

He slept quickly and was immediately in the same dream. The boat rocked gently, and he imagined he must be again at the edge of the sea, with Fred or Gordon. Then, as it gathered speed and shot upwards, he saw that he must have been *there*. But his sensations were not of regret; he felt rather relieved and exhilarated. He was approaching something new. Now the sea was flat and sunny. Fred was not there, nor Gordon, nor Marcus. He is alone, but he is going to find something. The boat gathers speed.

CHAPTER IV

OH, TO WHOM?

"I WAS sorry when Harold Acton went down," said Marcus, "now there is nobody to focus the æsthetic life of this University."

"Perhaps he is better employed," said Alfred with prim malice.

"That is very possible," said Marcus urbanely, taking the wind out of his sails.

The discussion club went on. Sidney Allan went on draping his tenuous figure against mantelpieces, Lionel Spencer went on writing down impromptu speeches on little cards, and generally managed to get himself a hearing when only about a quarter of the audience had gone, Eckersley went on drawing corks out of bottles that he would be paying for, Paula went on displaying her self-possession, Bruno loomed always at beginning and went early, there was a good deal of talk about poetry and a lot of people read out their own, an Editor came to talk about Literature and contemporary Life, and asked one or two of them to lunch with him in London in the vacation, and there was also a black man and a woman novelist who talked about something. And it was known that the treasurer used the funds to meet private

expenses but nobody minded. And William dealt very ably with everything there was and left the rest, quite interested in it all, but not spending an unreasonable amount of time on it. Alfred got very bored with having to write letters and keep minutes.

"I'm sick of it," he said.

"One can't resign absolutely at once," said William, without regret. It did not occur to him to resign until it was practicable to do so. His eggs are always in a good many baskets. Alfred, however, who attaches himself heart and soul to anything, at the slightest diminution of passion swings loose. Outside difficulties do not frighten him, but the snake in his heart of boredom and distrust undermines everything. A minute spent falsely seems like his lifetime. He is ruined; he will be no more good.

"They are a hopeless collection," he said, "they don't even talk well. It's obvious they don't think or feel; so they might at least talk."

"Never mind; don't think about them," said William.

They were going along the tow-path to Godstow, and just then passed two men in shorts, with sweaters tied round their necks. They had very hairy legs, and gave great shouts of laughter which scraped the cold smooth river-banks like twig brooms.

"I wonder if one could," said Alfred.

"Could what?"

"Be like that."

"Yes, I think so," said William; "I have a young cousin who rowed for his school and so on, and he is quite like that, though in rather a different style. He is nice."

"I was fairly friendly with some terribly tough people in my first term," said Alfred, "I don't think they were nice though. They were like clockwork steam-rollers, a great deal of noise and effort, and then running down all at once."

"Yes, they are a bit like that." William appeared to have lost interest, and Alfred felt uncomfortably rebuffed. Nobody could possibly imagine, he thought, considering how banal the things we say are, how much they mean. These people passing, this austere and almost reproving landscape, these words passing between us like cups of tea of the usual strength, these are all nothing but a conventional arabesque against the existence of William. And I am also scrawling my trivial piece of decoration to celebrate his existence; and seeing us together, knowing my delight because I am walking along beside him, and now and then exchanging remarks (though without any objective importance), even the March fields seem to be unfreezing, and the sky leaning over us not unbenignly; even the hearties, perhaps, who will no doubt have had him pointed out to them by an officious friend, wonder who I am. . . .

They came into Wytham, and William, without discussion, led the way to the right, and up the hill through some muddy fields.

"I got turned back once at the lodge," said Alfred.

"Yes, that's why I always come this way. We are very unlikely to meet anyone."

They crept through a hedge into the wood and then through a belt of thorny undergrowth. A path crossed their way obliquely and they turned along it, uphill. The ground was swampy with moss and mud and rotted leaves.

"I hadn't remembered," said Alfred, "that dead leaves stayed on the ground till the end of winter. I suppose they are not absorbed into the ground till the spring spreads over them and pushes them under."

"Yes, that's it."

"Here's a bud, look." Alfred tore it open with his nail and held out the tiny green heart on his palm.

"Soon we'll be having breakfast out of doors," said William, smiling.

"I am impatient," cried Alfred, flinging down the little ineffective twig.

"You are generally."

"Aren't you?"

"Not particularly. I like this too." He threw up his head and breathed in deeply. Then strode on. The track had now become very uncertain. On either side were deep ruts filled up with yellow water like velvet ribbons, and in the middle shallow puddles alternated with treacherous patches of grass and moss. William was ahead, picking his way adroitly without looking; when Alfred's shoe

was sucked half-off by the mud, so that he had to stop and stoop down and pull it on with his finger, William waited. "Bad luck," he said.

Alfred walked on behind him proudly. His shape, his movements, his way of walking, of waiting, of speaking, were wonderful. He seemed to notice this (seeing him walking in front) as well as feel it; so that his feelings, justified, stretched themselves upwards with delight, growing and exulting.

It is difficult to describe a love of the imagination, particularly a love such as this, where a powerful and inexperienced egosim is first conscious of an object, and turns to it as a revelation and a symbol. A love primarily sexual and factual can be described in sensations, and words like things, kisses, embraces, copulation, which create a landscape, or earth, over which the movements of the spirit, acceptances, refusal, growth, can be felt like weather. But a love which is above all imaginative, even where it is sexual and factual to the same degree, must not be shown from this angle. Not because the sexual constituent is to be denied as disgraceful or for any reason whatever; but because it must not even inadvertently be admitted as anything greater than a part; and because it is so easy to assume that it is more, to imagine, at best, that it is a symbol, and at worst that it is a picture of the whole experience, thus preventing from the outset the discovery of its essential character.

In his early surroundings Alfred had found

nothing more interesting than his own sensations and conflicts, and nothing where he could find satisfaction except in his own dreams. Now he saw for the first time a person for whom he need make no excuses; one he could look at, or think about, with delight; and one he could feasibly endow, moreover, with all the qualities he had dreamt of; convincing himself of the beauty and nobility he hitherto sought without success. In him also, after his own exhausting and pertinacious struggle against that environment, driving him from one rejection to another, he first saw the possibility of a life of acceptance, in which one's energies, freed from these harassing defensive duties, could *act*; and perhaps even construct some common ground for action, emerge from this cave, where we cannot stretch out our arms without grazing our knuckles, and walk about freely, doing things we want to do. . . .

It was almost dark. They had been walking easily across an open space over the high ground where it was fairly dry; then, suddenly going under the trees into what seemed complete darkness, missed the path.

"If we go straight on," said Alfred, "we will come out on the Eynsham Road. It can't be far off."

"We shan't like walking along that horrible road much," said William, and swung a little to the left, "and there aren't many buses. Let's aim at the Cumnor turn. There'll be more there, and we shan't have so far to walk if there isn't one."

Alfred had turned after him. He kept catching his feet in loose brushwood and brambles; but thrust his way through, not stopping to disentangle it. William seemed to be striding ahead easily, and had to wait from time to time.

"You all right?" he said.

"Yes, rather. I only got caught in a bush or two."

"It's better out here. I think this must be the park that goes almost down to the road."

Alfred came out from under the trees and looked up. He could see nothing, and stood still, winking his eyes, and trying to pick out something.

"I thought it was because we were under the trees. I didn't know it was *really* as dark as this."

Something touched his fingers and a shock like electricity went up his arm. It was William's hand, stretched out comfortingly in the darkness. Alfred felt himself grip it as if with extreme terror (or what?) and then as suddenly and surprisingly with a brusque, embarrassed movement drew back and set off wildly in any direction.

"A little more to the left I should think," said William; "it will be more in the open, and we can go quicker."

Alfred swerved and ran on. The darkness was no longer formidable. It seemed that his love was not entirely rejected.

Alfred had never been so happy. William

lent him books, taught him to drive his car, read his poetry with sympathy, though not always with understanding, argued with him, and finally invited him to stay during the vacation.

"My mother says it would be best really if you came back with me at the end of term. But any time would do."

The idea of William's mother filled Alfred with terror. He had seen her once from a distance, and knew that she was a very beautiful and elegant lady to whom he would have nothing to say.

"I don't think I *could* come at once," he said, "I haven't any idea what arrangements at home are. But I would love to come later, and I could write to you as soon as I know, if that would be all right?"

"Yes, of course, it was only that there'll probably be some rather boring people there afterwards, and at the beginning we should have been by ourselves, except for my sister. . . ."

Alfred went home, and was immediately involved in interminable discussions about Edna, who, it appeared, was very unhappy, and had even rushed home, one Sunday morning, with *all her things*. Violet related the story in great detail:

"She said it was one of the shopwalkers; and I said, 'there isn't anything *wrong* is there?' and she said, no, there wasn't anything wrong, but the whole shop was talking and she couldn't bear it any longer, and wanted to come home. I didn't know what to tell her, because of course we can't afford to lose the money, but it was no good her

making herself ill and so I told her. What would you have said?"

"She wouldn't ever have asked *my* advice," said Alfred, dazed and temporising.

"Yes, but what ought I to have done? I didn't want her to be miserable, but I didn't want her to lose the money, that was how it was."

"What did you say?"

"Well, I said we all had a lot to put up with, and of course these were hard times and there wasn't much money in this house; but that of course if it came to doctor's bills, that would run off with any there was, and of course if she couldn't stand it, she must do what she thought best. . . ."

"I'd have thought she'd do better to stay."

"That's what I said to her. Be a brave girl, I said, and face the music. After all it's not as if there was anything *wrong*. And then she started crying all over again, and I don't know if I ought to tell you, but she said, 'No, but there very soon will be . . . and I've never really forgotten Harold, but a girl can't get on without a chap.' And then she just went on crying most of the day. So I said, now you be a sensible girl, and go back and do your work properly and don't lose your head or do anything you'd be sorry for; and perhaps it'll turn out that he wants to marry you, you never know. And she said she was sure he wouldn't ever marry her, but she cheered up a bit, and went home in the evening. But I'm worried about her, all the same."

"Yes, it's a horrid situation."

"I wish Harold hadn't behaved so funny. He still writes to her, you know, but he just doesn't say anything about getting married. I can't help thinking that perhaps he's worried about money, with thinking he hasn't really enough to start up on, and that kind of thing. I was wondering if we couldn't get some money somehow, and tell him we'd guarantee him so much at the beginning, and perhaps that would be all right. What do you think of that?"

"I think it would be rather awful."

"Well, it'll be pretty awful for Edna if she hasn't anyone but a shopwalker and him not wanting to marry her. I don't see why you should grudge her the only thing she wants, when you've had everything, going to college and all and now being invited to the best houses. But of course if *you* with all your education think I'm wrong, well then of course I *am* wrong."

"Don't be silly, Mother, we were just discussing it, and each saying what we thought."

"Oh, I see, I may not be wrong, I'm only silly. Thanks, I'm sure."

"I didn't mean it like that. You do what you think right, and I don't see why it shouldn't work."

"Yes, but I want to know what *you* think."

"I've told you already."

"Yes, but you seemed so despising . . . as if it was sure to be wrong if I'd done it. . . ."

"Don't let's talk about it any more. . . ."

The next morning she came to Alfred in

great excitement, and showed him a letter from Harold.

'. . . I wouldn't have liked to ask a girl like Edna when I couldn't offer her a real home. But if I'm able to settle her in with some nice things it will make all the difference. I've written to tell her that everything is now O.K. and I think we might as well be married as soon as poss. I've got to go off on a pretty long tour next month, and I might get a few days off before, for my honeymoon (!) What about getting the old man to stump up for a special licence (!) . . . .'

"So you *had written* to him?" said Alfred.

"Yes, of course I had. Isn't it lucky I did? I was so afraid; but now its right. I thought I'd sell some jewellery I was given for my wedding, and perhaps one or two old-fashioned bits of silver. But we mustn't tell Dad, he'd be furious, and especially as I did it without asking. And perhaps it would be nicer if we didn't tell Edna."

"But won't Harold tell her?"

"I don't see why he should, if we don't. It'll just be a lovely surprise."

Edna came home a few days later, and a great bustle of preparation started. She had not yet seen Harold, but he had written urging her to get ready to be married in a fortnight, and she was quite willing. She had saved up a little while she had been at work, and this, with some money enveigled out of her father, was enough to buy

quite a lot of cheap stuff and a good many second-rate paper patterns. The house was filled with sewing and trifling conversation, and Alfred found himself taking refuge more and more with Jess and Adam.

"What do you think of it?" he said at last.

Adam shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"Adam says it isn't his business," said Jess, "but I know he hates it as much as I do. Still, I'd have minded more if I'd been fond of Edna."

"It all seems rather squalid."

"Looks like a put-up job to me, if that's what you mean. I shouldn't think either of them cared a halfpenny for the other. Harold thinks the family's got a bit of money up its sleeve, and Edna thinks any man will do; and they're both wrong."

"But there isn't anything we ought to do, is there?"

"No, of course there isn't, that's what Adam says; and of course he's right; but I don't like it. They'll end up just as cross and miserable as Mum and Dad, and their children will hate them."

"Edna likes your mother all right, I should have said."

"Oh, well, if they have horrid children, perhaps it will be all right; but it would be nicer for the rest of the world if their children were a bit nicer than they are. But it's no good bothering. It's worse for you, Alfred, hearing all about it."

The day before the wedding Violet was in great distress and Alfred was the only person in whom

she could confide. She whispered to him at dinner that she wanted to talk to him quietly and he found her lurking in his room when he went upstairs.

"I don't know what I am to do," she said; "I told Harold I would give him fifty pounds, and I haven't been able to get more than forty-five, and now I don't know what to do."

"Well, it isn't so serious. Harold will just have to do without it. He'll have to get a little less furniture or something; and, anyhow, he ought to consider himself lucky to get any. After all . . ."

"It's worse than that. I've told Harold, and he's not at all pleased. . . ."

"Good God! Not pleased. But it's a present, anyhow. . . ."

"Yes, of course it's a present, but he says he's not sure that he really wants to marry Edna. And I don't dare to say anything to anyone but you, and I don't know what to do."

"I should think Edna ought to think herself well rid of him."

"Yes, but I know she won't. Besides, think of the scandal if it's broken off now. Oh, Alfred, I had to borrow some of the money from my Aunt, and I know she won't lend me any more; couldn't you borrow something from one of your grand friends?"

"No."

"Oh, Alfred, I'm sure they wouldn't mind, if they knew how things were. . . ."

"They mightn't mind, but I would."

"Oh, Alfred, your own sister's happiness. . . ."

"How do I know it's her happiness? I don't see what happiness there can be, after this."

Edna had noticed their absence and now poked her head in inquisitively.

"What's all this solemn conversation about, on the eve of the festive day?"

"What would you think if there wasn't any festive day, as you call it, after all?" said Violet lugubriously.

Edna turned white, then laughed awkwardly, and then looked cross and spiteful.

"It's unkind to make jokes like that," she said, and slammed the door. They could hear her stumping downstairs.

"You see . . . ?"

Alfred was thinking of his maintenance grant which was to last him with careful management over the next term.

"I might do something," he said.

He went to the bank and drew out five pounds; which he handed over at once to Violet.

"Oh, I *am* so grateful," she cried, "you've saved everything. I'll pay it back to you at once; out of the housekeeping; I won't let you go short next term."

Alfred had just had a letter from William urging him again to come and stay. He felt he would do anything to get out of the house, but that this one thing was impossible. He thought of the elegant lady he had seen across the quadrangle,

and of William himself, and wondered if either of them could possibly imagine . . . and what on earth they would think if they did imagine. Besides, he hadn't any clothes, and now hardly enough money to pay his fare. He was bound and hopeless. He wrote to say he was prevented by rather painful circumstances and that he was very much disappointed. He hoped William would understand that he meant more than that, and only felt incapable of saying anything.

The wedding was depressing and awkwardly hilarious. Daff was very much pleased with herself as a bridesmaid, and Edna was self-satisfied, though not altogether at ease, as a bride. Harold was at first extremely silent and heavy, but afterwards got a little drunk and was much more companionable. Stanley had an opportunity of speechifying, and liked that; but Violet had too much on her conscience to enter into the spirit of the day, such as it was; and Alfred, although present, took no part at all. But, anyhow, Harold and Edna were married, and went off for their honeymoon amid showers of rice and confetti. They were afterwards going to settle down in a town about sixty miles off, which Harold had said was really more convenient for his work. Violet had not expected this, and cried a bit about losing her daughter.

"Although," she said, smiling through her tears, "I have gained a son."

The relief when all the fuss was over was so great that Alfred almost enjoyed, in a limp way, the last week or so of the vacation. He managed

to work a little and went for long walks, but he did not write anything or think much; he felt as if he lost ground and was dispirited. He could hardly bear to think of going back to Oxford; he thought of his life there as an invention which he would never have the energy or resource to build up again.

However, it didn't occur to him to stay away, and he found himself back there with all the others on the right day. There were two notes for him in his room; one from Marcus—"What have you been doing, thinking, writing? Are you free for dinner? with love"—and one from William, simply saying that he had arrived. Alfred tore up the first, and screwing the other in his fist went over to William's rooms.

"I was sorry you couldn't come," he said, "we might have had fun. The weather was heavenly and I was out of doors almost all the time, except for a few ridiculous parties."

"I think I've been dead since last I saw you," said Alfred. "Everything was simply awful at home; and I'm just in despair about everything, myself in particular."

"You look a bit dazed. Sit down and get warm, that makes a great deal of difference."

Alfred crouched over the fire, while William went on unpacking and arranging books. He wondered what kind of a home it was really that had made Alfred look so defiant and exhausted; but he supposed the effect would wear off in a day or two.

"It feels almost like last term," said Alfred.

"Why shouldn't it?"

"Only because of being dead in between. . . ."

William laughed. "That sounds so serious and fatal; I expect it was something more like a slight coma."

Alfred stretched his fingers towards the fire and slid into an easier position on the rug.

"It thaws gradually, anyhow, whatever it was. Are you glad to be back?"

"For some things."

"I'm glad. I didn't know how glad I would be, but I am, for every reason it is possible to think of. Why, when I'm at home, I forget that people exist, real people I mean, like you or . . . anyone."

"I suppose the others are real."

"I try not to think so."

"Is it as bad as that? I'm sorry. Don't think about it, there are a great many other things. . . ."

In a few days Alfred had caught up with himself; he was satisfied that he did not need to start *all* over again, and that there were a certain number of people, and one particularly, who accepted him for some reason which he didn't understand, and of whom he did not need to be afraid. This conclusion made him quite cheerful; and he wrote two poems, one about a sailing-boat he had seen on a blowy day, and another mathematical one about the two triangles into which the quadrangle was cut when William walked across it (this he had seen from above,

accidentally from a staircase window) making a line as straight as a scissors-cut, or the imaginary bisection of an angle. Only his shadow was unsymmetrical, leaning backwards away from Alfred as if to look up at him; but Alfred left out that part in the poem, and just said that it *was* unsymmetrical, like the place where you knot off a pattern.

Paula Tenniers suddenly invited them both to a breakfast party on May morning.

"I don't really know what she's like," said Alfred; "will it be fun?"

"It will be a success," said William, a little sarcastically; "anyhow, she told me about it before, and I accepted."

Paula and two other girls were to bring the punts down to Magdalen bridge, and there William and Alfred were to meet them. At the last minute, however, they decided not to bother about listening to the singing from Magdalen tower (it was really the party and the early morning that were fun) but meet in the Parks and go upstream as far as they could.

They got up very early and after a shivering hurry of dressing went out. Alfred had expected, as one always does, to find something strange and dramatic in this unknown district of the day. Instead, he was met by a negative and baffling eclipse-light, precise, thin and unexciting. There was a faint mist over the parks.

The punts were there waiting, with Paula and Isabel Dyson, an untalkative and intelligent

fair girl, and an indefinite young man called Michael.

"Are we late?" said William.

"No. We're terribly early. I got called long before I meant to be," said Paula, "and Hugh isn't here yet."

Everyone was a little dim, and did not want to talk. The indefiniteness of the morning had invaded them. William stood on the bank very still and silent, and Paula and Isabel sat in the boats without stirring, as if they were watching something, trying to remember it for ever. Or more probably, thought Alfred, indulging in a complete mental vacuum. Michael had lit his pipe, and was sitting on the little platform at the end with his elbows on his knees, looking from one person to another in a slow and rather sullen manner.

"I haven't any idea how to punt, you know," said Alfred.

Paula looked up suddenly.

"We'll do it until we're tired and then teach you; it's time you knew."

"I've been canoeing mostly; it's more fun, at least, I thought it would be more fun."

"Yes, it is, but it's not so restful."

"But just lying about is so boring. . . ."

Here Hugh arrived, his swarthy and insolent face set in a particularly sarcastic expression.

"Paula, I adore you and always have and so far as I can see always will, but isn't this rather fantastic. Why, I don't even know the rest of the party."

"I can't possibly introduce you, not at this time of day. You'll get to know them gradually."

"We did meet once, I think," said William, "at a luncheon-party in Balliol. I'm William Hawes." Hugh turned from him to Alfred.

"Then you're Alfred Fielding. I've heard about you from various people, and have wanted to meet you. . . ."

Alfred bowed ungraciously. It all seemed very silly, on the bank of a river at 6 a.m. It was difficult to see where Paula's reputation for success came in. Isabel, who was saying nothing and doing nothing, seemed the only member of the party with any dignity whatsoever. He was sorry not to be with her, but found himself instead with Paula and Michael.

He thought they must be in love with each other, or perhaps just falling in love, and the situation embarrassed and fascinated him. He could not see Michael, who was standing behind him and poling expertly; but Paula's witty and vivid conversation (though of all things she was talking about the political situation somewhere) and the quick, fascinating variations of her expression appeared to be called up for some special occasion; so that he felt as if he might be in the way. The whole situation, however, was so unreal (the sun was not up, and their conversation bounced over the unshadowed water like flat pebbles) that he was almost satisfied with looking on. Hugh was punting in the other boat, and, by cutting a corner too fine, had got them entangled in a tree. Now,

with exaggerated movements indicating stupendous effort, he drew level and passed them.

"It looks like a picture," said Alfred, without meaning to interrupt.

"The composition is exquisite," said Michael.

Alfred saw Paula look at him, quickly and expectantly.

"But I mean," he said, "really on canvas, really on a wall."

Hugh shouted something which they could not hear. Isabel did not turn her head, and William only lifted his hand languidly in an imitated and unmeant gesture of waving. He was talking to her, but their faces were completely carved wooden, so that their conversation, it appeared, must certainly be ghostly and indifferent. Alfred felt as if he could care about nothing; but then suddenly at the emptiest moment, he remembered again about William (this thought sudden as a blow) and everything, turning inside out, became alive. If only it had been he-and-I, thought Alfred, walking along the bank or in this boat even, we should have been happy. Our talk would not have been display and polite duty but discovery, confirmation, delight. We would have breathed in with joy this chill and warning air, before which we now shudder (I cross my arms, and push my fingers up my sleeves), our legs would have stretched like scissors, cleanly snipping the crisp minutes, which now entangle us like grey wool, making us observant only and unmoved while the grass-stalks turn gold on the east side,

and begin to pull their long shadows up under them, while the surface of the river tinkles, and the sky ripples into blue and white.

William is here, thought Alfred; I could swim, I could leap, I could stretch my hand out. His face, at this moment calm, unexpressive, mysterious, is a proof to me of reality, his kindness is my talisman. I greet this May morning.

The air, with sunlight shot through it, now seemed deliciously warm and they tied up between two leaning willow trees at the edge of a large meadow. The grass, with dew, and sunlight, and fresh green, was almost dazzling.

"I must run," cried Alfred.

William had got out of the other boat, and gone over to sniff at a may tree, from whose opening flowers a net of syrupy fragrance unfurled.

"Run," cried Alfred, and began tugging off his shoes and stockings. William threw his head up and laughed, and then, with a kind of swoop, dashed across the field diagonally towards the farthest corner. Alfred was only about ten yards behind him. He might have been going on air, the cold was so numbing; then it cut through this brittle protection, and the grass-blades, like burning swords, slashed at his ankles with a violent, uninterpretable pain. He ran fleetly; one would succumb to such a pain if for a moment admitting it or hesitating. William was still ahead but not much; suddenly he doubled back. Alfred overshot him by a few steps, turning required an effort, a deeper plunge, whips of freezing heat on

new and undefended places. He had lost ground and ran faster, diminishing the distance it seemed at every step. At last, very near to the bank again, he stretched out his hand and touched his shoulder.

William stopped instinctively, and Alfred also for a second, skipping from one foot to the other.

"I can't stand still," he said.

William bent down and lifted him into the air; he closed his eyes with relief; one second more would have been more than bearable. William was carrying him to the boat.

The others were in a close group unpacking food, and hardly noticed them. One boat was empty and William put him down in it. His senses were taut and delighted with readiness like dancers at the fine point of balance between one movement and another. The smell of green and may-blossom, the sun-flashes on river and grass, the sound of birds, and voices, and water hollowing the banks, made one pattern, vivid and delightful. Alfred snatched up the roughest cushion he could see, and rubbed his feet with it. He looked up at William, still standing above him, with an expression of eagerness and pleasure.

"I didn't know one could feel so *much*," he said.

Paula became interesting. If William was like everything in the morning, fresh, bright and definite, she was like the rhythmic sway of the flat boats, and the black shadows under the banks. Her face, he had to admit, was commonplace, but her confident charm of manner impressed you not-

withstanding; you felt she would never make any great mistakes, or be awkwardly unexpected, or cry, or find she had forgotten her handkerchief. Self-interested obviously, but also enlightened, so that you knew where you were.

And yet afterwards he was not sure that he did know. He kept meeting her about, and found himself with curious impulses to show off, and to impose himself in some way or other; and saw that in her own manner she was ready to accept this. He discovered that her attitude was, most deeply, reserved and distrustful, and this urged him on to a sarcasm even more final than hers. He had learnt this to a certain extent from Marcus, but he had gradually come to believe that Marcus concealed in himself somewhere a creature so innocent and confiding that it could not be allowed to appear on earth unprotected; whereas Paula, who was so ready to undertake anything and to give any person at least five minutes' opportunity of proving themselves 'interesting,' had at heart the most obdurate pessimism. Alfred was afraid sometimes that she might suddenly want to destroy everything within her reach. Yet their precarious and largely hostile relationship persisted.

"Why do you like me?" he said suddenly.

"I suppose I find you attractive."

Alfred was dumbfounded. His intelligence, his imagination, these might be thought admirable; but this answer was so simple and queer. . . . She seemed mocking, but not entirely.

"Don't you think I am attractive?" she went on.

"Yes, I do, in a way."

"You have the distinction of being one of the least polite people I know."

Alfred laughed. "Is it necessary for everyone you meet to fall in love with you?"

Paula shrugged her shoulders. "I don't in the least insist on it, but it seems to happen quite often."

"I should think it would be hell."

"What would be?"

"Being in love with you."

"It's not as bad as all that," said Paula coldly; "I'm rather reasonable; I'm not exacting, and less than average temperamental. I don't cheat about it. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I know you're marvellous," said Alfred brutally, "a good housekeeper and sexed to perfection. The only trouble would be that you'd kill the man."

"Yes? yes?" Paula swayed her head from side to side, then leant over the little table. "Do you know the kind of woman it is who kills her lover? It's the one who spends her whole life adoring him, and thinks about him when he's there and when he isn't there; one who horrifies him so by her eternal presence that he withdraws behind newspapers and games of bridge and glasses of beer. And then she kills him."

"You wouldn't do anything bloody or scandalous. But the chap would just pass quietly away in his sleep without telling you."

"That couldn't happen. If it didn't work, I should go away, or he would,"

"It all sounds great fun."

"It would only go on as long as it was fun."

"But who decides?"

"Circumstances."

There was a pause. They finished their coffee and got up to go.

"You know it was quite true," said Alfred, "I do like you, in a way."

"Every word you say brings this home to me," said Paula with a delightful smile.

She was walking straight past the turning which led to his rooms, so he took her elbow and twisted her round. She made no comment.

"Have you got new curtains yet?"

"No, still the awful blue ones. I've no money. Can't you bear them?"

"Not very well."

"You'll just have to try not to notice them."

Outside the sun was very bright and lovely, but his room, which faced west, was still in shadow, and had a bleak and forgotten appearance.

"They are very depressing," said Paula, looking at the curtains. "Why did we come here?"

"I can't think," said Alfred sarcastically, rather hoping she would go; but afraid of finding himself in the humiliating position of having to stop her.

"Still," she said, "I suppose one can hardly go away again at once. Have you got a cigarette?"

"Am I the first man who hasn't been in love with you?" said Alfred.

"No."

"Would it be fun if I were, do you think?"

Paula shrugged her shoulders: "When this cigarette is finished I must go."

Alfred snatched it out of her fingers, and threw it into the empty fireplace.

"Now you may go, if you want to."

"How can I? you're holding me."

"No. Look, I'm only touching you. . . ."

"I would go, if I thought you didn't want me to stay. . . ."

"And what if I told you I didn't want you . . .?"

"Then you would find yourself having to keep me by force. . . ."

"Like this. . . ."

"So long as you don't break my ribs. . . ."

"This is a funny brooch. . . ."

"Have you scratched yourself?"

"Damnably. Why do you wear such things? Victorian bric-à-brac."

"But quite useful in their own way. . . ."

"Why are you laughing?"

"You are so savage and clumsy. But it's rather sweet. . . . Only isn't it usual to lock the door?"

The next day Alfred met William by chance. He felt sick and ashamed and had avoided him, so that they were now very ill at ease together, and only walked side by side, because they had so obviously been going in the same direction. And yet William, to Alfred's annoyance, appeared quite unconscious of this horrible situation. He walked along as if it was quite natural to have nothing to say, and as if it was quite usual not

to have been together till six in the evening. Alfred looked at him from time to time, and seemed about to speak, but it was difficult, because the silence between them was so strong. Nothing he could say was violent enough to break it.

"What do you think of Paula?" he asked at last.

"She's nice, I suppose."

"Why I suppose?"

"Well, because you like her, and so on."

"How do you know I like her?"

"What else? You spend a lot of time with her."

"Time I might be spending with you?"

They had sat down on a park-bench, and Alfred was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and looking up sideways. William leant backwards and his gaze rested idly on sky and leaf-patterns.

"I haven't any claim on you," he said.

"I wish you had," cried Alfred hysterically, and stretched his hand out, the palm outward. William did not notice this appealing gesture. Alfred drew his hand back.

"Everything is dead and wasted that is not somehow to do with you," he said. "With you I learn, and grow, and create. Anything else is to die in one's tracks."

"You have to do what you feel is all right," said William a little coldly and awkwardly. Alfred suddenly jumped up and went off. He realised that under the pretext of fearing William's anger he had really wanted him to be angry, and

denounce him, and claim his fidelity. He had not, and a second shame was added to the first.

He spent more and more of his time with Paula; it became only limited by the amount which she still methodically insisted on working, and the social engagements which she still considered herself bound to fulfil. Alfred did some work occasionally but very irregularly, and he was extremely interruptable. He would suddenly feel that he simply had to go and see if William was there, or even out of mere idleness go and talk to people he hardly knew and did not much like. Even that, though, was something to do with William, either when he could not be found, or when it was necessary to show him that he wasn't the only person in Alfred's world. They were not outwardly less intimate, but the substance of their friendship seemed thinner. Alfred's disappointment for not having been saved in some dramatic manner from himself showed itself in queer forms. Despising himself, he imagined that William also despised and avoided him; then in a violent reaction he detested his corrupt imagination which had seen in William the possibility of any such ignoble feeling; and at the same time rebuked himself for daring to assume they were ignoble, and not fully justified. Sometimes, in the end, he went to him with garbled and complicated apologies, which William could never understand.

With Paula he delighted in a preposterous realism. He admitted and delighted in the

mechanical adroitness of her wit, her inevitable proficiency within narrow limits, and the pretty ordinary niceness of her face and shape.

"You know, I didn't recognise you the first two or three times," he said, "I was never sure if it was you or not."

"I always recognised you," she retaliated, "you looked so extremely furious and suspicious always."

"Do you wonder?"

The summer was hot and delicious. You could lie for hours in the long grass, hidden, seeing only sky and treetops, and hearing only distantly the voices and music of river-parties. In a moment of triumph, Alfred asked:

"Do you love me?"

Her drowsy body had not lost its obstinacy. She opened her eyes, dark, shining and wicked.

"No more, no less than you love me," she said in an affected Garbo-whisper, and laughed. He laughed also, more bitterly, and his head sank down on her soft, comfortable shoulder.

At the end of the term he had a very serious interview with his tutor, who was extremely distressed that he had not yet passed his preliminary examination.

"A certain number of people don't take it till their fourth term, but with scholars it's a different matter altogether. You simply must do it, Fielding, otherwise . . ."

Alfred sighed. "I can't attach any great importance to examinations," he said.

"Good God, nor do I. But don't be silly. For a man of your abilities there is no difficulty about it whatsoever, you could do it with your eyes shut, and yet for some idiotic reason you plough." His voice rose shrilly. He liked Alfred, and admired indiscriminately all kinds of independence, yet he felt it a duty to justify the System to himself and others. This acutely difficult situation made him nervous. He shook himself, and tried to speak less excitably and in a lower key:

"Now why not look at it like this. It's silly, we all know it's silly, but there it is: until you've done this, you can't go on to your real work, you've just got to mark time and get bored as Hell. So why go on? Why not look at it reasonably and get it over. It would only need a very little effort, and anyhow it's got to be done."

"I expect I'll do it all right next term."

"I can't understand you, I must say. You are one of the most promising people who have come up for several years, and as far as I can see you do nothing. What's at the back of it? Have you been ill?"

"No, not particularly."

"You've not been feeling your best though?"

"No, I suppose not. But I doubt if I ever do."

"Well, I don't want you to lose your scholarships, I shall probably say you haven't been up to the mark. You know, I feel responsible for you in a way. I was very much impressed by some of your papers; and although it was said

that the background of your work was thin, I held to it that you would turn out one of our best scholars. So I shall be very much disappointed if you don't live up to the highest expectations."

"I will really make a determined effort to get through the exam., if that's what you mean," said Alfred.

The don smilingly laid his hand on his shoulder. "I understand just how you feel," he said, "I've often felt like it myself. But you'll just have to learn the knack of toeing the line with one foot and doing what you like with the other. Good-bye. I won't tell you not to work too hard in the vacation, because I'm afraid there's no danger of it."

In the quad Alfred burst into shouts of laughter over the last exquisite image. It was just true that all the younger dons were sedulously dancing on one leg; waving the other in vain in the direction of Russia, or art, or games, or week-ends in London.

William had again asked him to stay, but he had imagined some reserves in his manner, and had again refused. He had not arranged anything with Paula. He went home.

The conversation with his tutor had on the whole encouraged him. He had got used to being far the cleverest boy at school, and then when he got to Oxford he had rather given up hope of being pre-eminent in this way. Now it appeared that he was really an important person intellectually—that he might be really 'one of our

best scholars.' The phrase made him laugh, but had an effect on him. He found it easier to start working, and once he got into it he found it much more interesting than he expected, so that he did certain bits of work in great detail, and became very sure of them. He remembered that William had always seemed to think him a bit lazy.

Stanley still resented his way of life very much, and was inclined to wait until he saw him comfortably engrossed before he suggested something should be fetched from the town, or that he needed some help in mending the gate. Alfred soon found however that this was very easy to deal with, by doing instantly whatever was tolerable, and refusing firmly and finally what wasn't. Violet, whose particular affection for him led her to confide in him endlessly all her squalid and awkward difficulties, was far more of a nuisance. He could not bring himself to turn her out of the room, or even to go himself. And yet nothing he could say seemed any good.

One morning he heard her knocking.

"Come in," he said, after a pause.

She came timidly round the door.

"Am I disturbing you?"

"Yes. No, it doesn't matter."

"Because I'll go away if . . ."

"No, stay." He pulled a chair out.

"I wanted to talk to you sometime, and I expect this is just as good as any other. I've had a letter from Edna, and she says it isn't suiting them so well there now, and they'd like to move back

here; and so would we look round for a place, and when we'd found something she'd run down and take a look at it."

"What sort of a place do they want?"

"She says small, and not at all expensive. Not above fifteen shillings a week, she says; but Harold wants it to be very convenient, and not more than a few minutes from the middle of the town."

"Well, we'll have to set about looking for something. I might do a bit this afternoon. And if you'd got time, we could go together."

Alfred opened his book again, but she still lingered.

"Was there anything else?" he said.

"No, nothing much, but I was just thinking . . . I suppose they're all right?"

"I don't see why not," said Alfred, but with a sinking heart, "she hasn't said anything which makes you think they aren't, has she?"

"No, she hasn't, but I just thought she was a bit depressed, and it seems queer wanting to move so soon, especially when they've got a nice big place, and convenient, and now she says they want somewhere *really* small. I don't see what it means."

"Harold hasn't lost his job, has he?"

"No, but she did say something a week or two ago about that he was thinking of changing it, though I don't know why he should change out of a good job, and it worries me."

"Well, all we can do is to look out what they

want, and we'll probably hear all about it from Edna when she comes."

"We may," said Violet lugubriously.

That afternoon they went over unfurnished flats of all kinds. None were particularly nice, and none quite impossible, so they found themselves saying repeatedly 'something might be done with it,' and it was very difficult to make a selection. They decided to try a few more before writing to Edna.

The next morning, however, they had a letter from her enclosing a cutting from a local newspaper which advertised two furnished rooms to let at twelve shillings and sixpence. "You might look at this and let me know about it," she wrote curtly.

"I can't think why they want furnished rooms," said Violet, "they must have got some nice furniture."

"I expect they don't want the expense of moving it," said Alfred. "After all, we don't know much. Perhaps they're thinking of going back again soon."

Violet was busy that day, so he went by himself. The rooms seemed to him very small and inconvenient, and there was no water on that landing he noticed. He wrote and told Edna that it was not worth her coming for that.

All the same, she turned up within a day or two. She was wearing her 'going-away' dress, which still looked smart although a little spotted on the skirt, and her hat had been put on at a very deliberate tilt.

"Harold likes me to take a little trouble," she said, "but I only remembered to wash my gloves just before breakfast, and they weren't quite dry, so they got a bit grubby in the train. Still, it's nice to see you all again, I must say. How's Jess and Adam?"

"Same as ever," said Violet, "getting along very nicely, but not much of a word for the rest of us."

Edna nodded. "Jess always was a bit stuck up," she said, "and as for Adam, he always was a dark horse, not that it was probably anything except stupidity. Are we going to see the flat first, or is tea ready?"

"I don't think you could call it a flat," said Violet; "it's just two rooms, and not at all the kind of thing you'd want."

"Well, it's worth seeing anyhow, it's very cheap, and fairly handy."

"I can't see I'm sure why you're getting a furnished place. Wouldn't it be more cheerful to have your own things?"

"We didn't think it was worth moving them. It's so expensive, and we don't know how long we'll be able to stay here."

"That's what Alfred said. But there's always the expense of storing."

"Well, as a matter of fact, there's a friend of ours has put them in their attic. We can leave them there as long as we like without paying a halfpenny."

"That's very nice of them. Have you made a lot of friends? What's their name?"

Edna hesitated. Alfred began to feel very uncomfortable.

"Shall I make the tea, mum," he said, "while you're talking to Edna?"

Her innocent curiosity was quite remorseless. She took no notice of Alfred, and remained with her inquiring gaze fixed on Edna's face, still expecting an answer. Edna laughed nervously.

"Well, it will seem very silly," she said, "but as a matter of fact they're business friends of Harold's, and I can't remember their name for the moment."

"And has Harold really changed his job?"

"Oh, I told you that, did I? Yes, it wasn't any good going on with those people. They didn't know how to treat their employees properly; so now he's got in with another firm."

"And he likes that, does he?"

"It's all right. But as a matter of fact, he doesn't get as much money. That's why we're trying to do things a bit cheaper. He thinks this job is going to be a better one in the end, but we may have to wait. He'll have to build up a connection, of course, and it doesn't come easy at first."

Alfred had been going in and out with tea-things and heard most of this.

"Well I never," said Violet, "here's tea all ready and me not having had to stir a finger. Call Daff and Father, Alfred, and we'll have a nice tea together just like old times."

Daphne had been paying a good deal of atten-

tion to Alfred since he came home, and had followed him about persistently, and insisted on moving her place so as to sit next him at meals. But she had never found him quite the ideal of what a big brother ought to be, and now Edna's arrival completely distracted her interest. She sat staring at her most of the time, and almost forgot to eat.

"Well, what's wrong with me?" said Edna, wriggling her shoulders. "Have I got a smut on my nose, or something?"

"You look so modern and fashionable," said Daff, sighing.

"Do you think so? Well, I don't believe in not taking a bit of trouble. You can have this dress if you like when Harold and me get tired of it."

"Oh, could I really? that would be lovely. Jess has such awful clothes, they're none of them any good when she's done with them, just like old rags. But if I could have some of yours . . . I do need some more clothes, don't I, Mum?"

"Steady," said Edna, "you mustn't be in too much of a hurry. I want to keep something to wear myself. And now I must just slip down and look at these rooms."

Stanley, who had been preserving an outraged silence for no particular reason, got up.

"Although I don't suppose I shall be of any *use*," he said, "perhaps I might come with you for company."

They were back in a very short time, and Edna had definitely taken the rooms.

"Don't you feel nervous in case Harold doesn't like them?" said Violet.

"He'll be quite satisfied, they're so cheap," said Edna. "I've arranged to go in next week, so good-bye all, and I'll be back soon, as they say."

CHAPTER V

MY GRIEF LIES ONWARD

BY the afternoon post Alfred had had a letter from Paula, asking him to go and stay. It was curiously chilling and unexpressive, like a formal invitation, and came from an address in London which he did not recognise. He thought she might be asking him to her parents' house, and wondered why. Still, the opportunity of getting away seemed too good to miss, so he telegraphed that he was coming, and went the next day.

The place turned out to be a flat in one of the less dilapidated, but extremely gloomy parts of Bloomsbury. There was a card with Miss Tenniers printed on it stuck beside the door with a drawing-pin, and Paula herself came down to let him in.

"I'm glad you came," she said.

They went up several flights of stairs, then through a door, and then up more stairs. Alfred plodded up behind her, and followed her into a small comfortable room, done mostly in whitish colours, with curtains and cushions in rather complicated reds and greens, and one Paul Nash picture on the wall. Alfred walked over to the

window, he had accustomed himself to the aspect of his own home, and this plunge was not to be taken too suddenly.

"I didn't know you had a flat of your own," he said.

"It's not mine. It belongs to my sister really, but when she's away in the summer, she generally lets me take it over for a month or so. It's very convenient for working in the museum."

"Are you doing a great deal of work?"

"A certain amount. Have you reformed at all?"

"Yes, I did a lot at the beginning; but not so much lately. I get so sick of this academic attitude, and the theory that you can understand anything if only you read enough books. Sometimes I'd like to chuck it all up, and work my passage round the world, or become a farm-labourer or something. There seems so much talk and opinions about everything, and nobody has their five senses in good enough order to feel what things *are like* at all."

"I suppose the objection is," said Paula, "that the range of five senses is so narrow. Think of it. No way of knowing what people are thinking, except by talking to them. No way of knowing what they used to think, except by meeting someone who was butler in a house where they stayed every summer."

"Still, you can know all that theoretically, and it doesn't help you. The creative and energising principle, which is all that makes it worth any-

thing, may be there, but in point of fact often isn't."

"Poetry?"

"No. I don't think poetry *is* it, although poetry sees things from that sort of direction. It's more some kind of good will, which acts strongly and definitely and in accordance with real situations."

"But a great many thieves, murderers and swindlers act like that, and one doesn't call it good will."

"No. But all the criminals one finds out about carefully seem to be dealing with some imaginary situation and in a perverse and unsuccessful way. Of course, some crime is justified, and I don't know if this holds true of all the rest. But what I mean is this. That there seems to be some very deep and certain arrangement (which is fate I suppose) that one gets out what one puts in. That greed and self-interest generally lead you to cut off your nose to spite your face. That you can't do things well unless you *are* well. That no disasters are fatal unless you wish them to be. And so on."

"The Tragic Hero, or, I am the master of my fate," said Paula. Alfred began walking backwards and forwards across the room. He stopped suddenly and turned to her.

"You think that's all very half-baked and first year?"

"Yes, I've heard some of it before. But I think you are a bit better at it than some of the

others. Why don't you become the prophet of the new order?"

She seemed partly serious and partly mocking.

"You can't bring yourself to believe in new orders?"

"I would like to, but . . ." She shrugged her shoulders and spread out her hands.

"Well?"

"One can imagine a new order, but there are so many difficulties in the way. Not to mention the lethargy of human nature."

Alfred began walking again, and talking at the same time in jerks, stopping from time to time to emphasise something special.

"If you had seen my home, you would know that there *must* be something new. People can't go on being like that. My father is a failure. He had at one time, by chance, a bit of a success, so he thinks he is a successful man, with whom fate has dealt unkindly. He wants continual sympathy for his misfortunes, and where sympathy fails, attention of absolutely any kind, like a child. One of my sisters doesn't talk to him much, so he pesters her with suggestions that her husband neglects her (this is quite untrue) and asks why they don't have any children; till at last she gets angry and tells him it isn't his business; and even that gives him a kind of frightful satisfaction, because it is a further illustration of how unjust and cruel the world is, when he was only trying to be nice. He is so jealous, that if he sees you are happy, or occupied with anything,

he forces his unhappiness on you, or just interrupts you for something of no importance. My mother, at any rate, doesn't try to put spokes in your wheel, but she is very weak, and goes to other people for advice and support. But she never tells them the truth. One bit of the story, probably a very important bit, she is ashamed of, and keeps quiet about. And it turns out when she asks if she ought to do something, that she has already done it, and wants to be assured she was right. Why should there go on being people like that?"

"I suppose there always have been."

"Then I don't wonder we have wars, and unemployment, and expensive law-suits without results, and epidemics of preventable disease. And I don't see what good it is attacking these problems from a mechanical end. What good will it be organising industry if the chief consideration is the imaginary one of money, instead of the real one of goods people need on the one hand and occupation that they want on the other? What good is it forbidding armaments if people want to fight, or insist, at any rate, in being in a position to fight if they suddenly felt frightened. . . ."

"Being frightened is at the bottom of it all," said Paula.

"Yes, we must kill the other chap before he kills us; and snatch a loaf of bread from a hungry family because we may be hungry by Christmas. Being frightened does a lot of good."

"But saying that isn't a way of stopping it."

"I know," Alfred sank down rather wearily on the divan beside her, "but I can't see why it shouldn't stop. There must be a lot of people about somewhere who want to deal with things openly and don't want things at the expense of other people; who don't even want any personal honour for it, and don't have any particular myth about the Nation, or the Gold Standard, or the Upper Classes, or the party they happen to favour. But just want people to be able to live in decent houses and have clean milk and enough to eat and wear and some occupation that's suited to them, and the opportunity of enough amusement, travel or football or cinemas or French classes or what they want. I know there are a lot of technical difficulties, but they mostly seem to come from the fact that we are really in our hearts accepting the situation of smoke and war and unemployment and dirty milk, and regard it as our highest duty to find alleviations, and lay down limits beyond which these regrettable impulses of the universe will not be allowed to operate. But this is what I consider an imaginary situation. The real situation is that there is enough stuff for everyone to have some, and that there is no reason why everybody should have to work the whole time to get a living. It just isn't possible to think of jobs for them all; and because we are organised practically and spiritually for a situation where everyone had to be either a worker or an exploiter so as to earn enough to eat; our imagina-

tion, our administration, our machinery just stops working when that isn't so. And though we are prepared to make innumerable painful efforts on the old lines, we are not prepared to make a single constructive effort on new lines."

"I didn't know you were a politician."

"No, I'm not. It's not my job. My job's something quite different really. But I don't think any of the people in 'practical affairs' know their own business; and so it's time somebody else turned a fresh brain on to it. I think it must be common sense, and, yes, good will, more than anything; and I am sure there must be a lot of people who want it to come right, and have the intelligence perhaps to help make it come right, and I don't see why these people shouldn't become the important ones."

"I wish I could see any reason why they should. Who are they? How could they get together and make one force? What influence would they have? Would they write poetry, or pamphlets, or proceed by silent prayer?"

"It would be something like that."

"It is all very visionary."

They had forgotten to have supper, and it was now getting dark. Outside, the trees in the square rustled their leaves, and the street lamps popped on like flowers bursting open. Alfred looked at Paula. The easy curves of her body and the soft childish contours of her face appeared at this moment intolerably complacent and feline. He saw that she would never understand how

this alien practical problem had become his concern. And that he could never explain to her how he had set himself the difficult task of assimilating this undigested cruel muddle till all there was in life, even the farthest and coldest rim, would become part of his poetry, and so that his poetry would flow into it, giving and receiving strength. He hated her now, he saw clearly, looking at her lowered and secretive eyes, her small resolute fingers. She had the intention, he thought, to put out the flickering light which struggled in him against all the massed forces of darkness.

"I'm going," he said.

She threw out her hand to stop him, and caught his. He wondered what was coming, fearing reproaches, or tears, or appeals.

"Do you hate me?" she said levelly.

He nodded and tried to pull away his hand.

"I would like to believe in you," she said, her grey eyes melancholy but not imploring, "I can't. It's my weakness. If you have to go, you must, but I don't want you to."

"I feel, suddenly, that you are set against something—something in me that is important."

She took no notice of this.

"But do you want to go?" she persisted.

"I must go."

"But do you want to? now, at this minute?"

"No."

Alfred stayed a week or two and they had

great fun. He decided not to talk seriously about anything, and more or less kept his resolution. If Paula was disappointed, she was too invariably decent in her behaviour to show it. At the end of the time she said that she must now start working again, as she had got very much behind, and although she said it would be all right for Alfred to stay on, there didn't seem so much point in it, and he went home again. As usual, everything there was becoming more awkward and complicated. Edna and Harold had quarrelled with their landlady and moved into some unfurnished rooms, for which they had bought a few shoddy bits of furniture and tried to borrow some from Violet.

"But why not get all your furniture down? Even if you aren't here very long, it wouldn't be so expensive as buying it."

"Oh, I thought I told you," said Edna, "we didn't exactly buy the furniture we had there; we didn't want to tie up all that money, so we paid a deposit on it (fairly stiff it was too) and did the rest by instalments."

"But what's happened to the furniture?" cried Violet aghast.

"Safe back in the shop of course, and not much worse for wear. Though they charged us for that, all right."

"But what's happened to my money?"

"Your money?" Edna spoke crossly and scoffingly. She was obviously afraid.

"Yes, the money I gave Harold for furniture."

"You didn't give *him* money without telling me?" screamed Edna, leaning forward.

"I thought it would be a nice surprise," said Violet, beginning to sob.

"A surprise it is," said Edna, "but I wouldn't have said nice."

Alfred heard the substance of this from Jess, who had had it all from Violet at an early stage. The later version which Violet told Alfred was practically unrecognisable. Edna stayed away for a day or two, and it was Alfred she first saw when she next appeared.

"I suppose you've heard all about this?" she said. "About Harold getting thirty pounds out of Mum for furniture when we were married, and then not spending a penny of it on furniture, but paying off some old debts that he didn't ever ought to have got into. It was Mum told me about it, so I went back and asked Harold what it was all about, and what he'd been up to, and he was as furious as I've ever seen him, so that I wished I'd never spoken. I wish I'd never said anything about it, I said; if I'd known you'd take it like that I wouldn't have done. Well, I can't think what your ma is thinking of, he said; I could have understood it if she'd told you at the beginning, but to bring it up by accident like this, and just now, that I can't understand, he said. And of course I was in the right, and he quite terrified me with his behaviour, so I said, Oh, all right, let's say no more about it. And he said, except to tell your ma that I think her an

old fool. But I shan't tell her that, and I shan't tell her what he took the money for. So don't you either, mind."

"No, I shan't say anything."

"You don't say much, do you? Jess is the only one you deign to talk to now."

"Yes, I like Jess."

"I suppose she's got round you in some way. But, you know, Harold doesn't like her. He's told me that once or twice. He thinks she's a bit of a minx, and not at all clever like people say. And he can't see anything in Adam either. He can't understand what people see in him. He calls him a dumb-bell, and says he probably only opens his mouth to snore. But I tell him, Jess would never allow that, she always wakes people up if they snore, and stops them. I tell Harold I'll do it one day too." She went off into peals of laughter. Then, as soon as she could collect herself, went on:

"And what do you think of Fred? He's got some funny friends, hasn't he? Great tough fellows they are, and do you know, he stays out with them till very late at night, drinking and betting I shouldn't wonder. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he came to a bad end one way or another. What do you think about him, why don't you say anything?"

"I haven't seen him very much lately. He seems quite happy."

"Happy. He'll find himself in jail, if what I hear's true. He's mixed up with something to do with betting slips, by what I hear."

"But who tells you all these things, Edna?"

"Oh, they're some friends of mine in the town. Young married women like myself. And their husbands are pretty well in the know of what goes on, and pass it on to them, and then of course it naturally comes in in conversation."

"Well, you might leave out Fred."

"Well, I'm naturally more interested in what I hear if it's about my brother. I suppose you think we just do nothing but gossip, but you're quite wrong. One of my friends is going to have a baby and so we all make clothes for it. Not that there seems to be much *in* having a baby, judging from all she tells us; but it gives us something to do with our fingers."

Alfred had some consolation in the thought that he would not be at home long. He had arranged with William to go for a walking tour sometime in the middle of the summer, and every day expected to hear from him an exact date. He longed to see him, as one can long for something essential and without substitute, water or sunshine. At last a letter came to say that he had got to go abroad, but would drive over to spend one day with him during the next week. Alfred was miserably disappointed, and told himself that one day was worse than nothing. For one thing, he could hardly bear William to come near his home. It was not that he thought he would despise it; but because he was not yet strong enough to see all that he loved and idealised and all that he was discarding set against

each other. He had not achieved one personality, but one personality for each circumstance.

For this reason he did not want William to come. He thought desperately that it would spoil everything, that something terrible would happen before their eyes. He wrote to put him off, then, thinking better of it, tore up that letter, and sent another, suggesting a meeting at a village a few miles off, which he could walk over to. Crossing this letter was a postcard from William at Dover, saying that everything had got moved a week earlier, and he was terribly sorry. Alfred hoped for a letter following, from France, Italy, Spain, he did not know where, except that it was probably somewhere towards the South. But none came. He felt cut off altogether. Marcus in Berlin wrote to him once, a sardonic anæmic intellectual letter, whose pages came out of the envelope with a rustle like dead leaves. He was cut off altogether. Paula remained also silent.

He felt himself a lost forgotten soul, and yet in his home he knew he was the strongest. He was constantly called on for advice and encouragement and help, in the monotonous, agitating routine of self-interest and self-concern. Fred only stood solidly outside the pale, immersed in secret (and certainly disreputable, said Edna) activities, which he had never been known to speak about.

Alfred helped his father to nail up the rotted trellis of the pergola. Stanley was very per-

nickety and interfering, but Alfred was thinking of other things and did not much mind.

"Hold it a little higher up," said Stanley excitedly, "and wait till I get the hammer." Alfred held it obediently a little higher up, his arm aching.

"That's right, that's right. Now don't move your fingers. I didn't hit you, did I? It'll look very nice indeed by the time we've finished. If only it hadn't been for the neuritis in my shoulder I'd have got it done a long time ago."

"You wouldn't like me to finish it off?"

"No, I like to see it's being done properly. I can stand a twinge or two in a good cause. You young people, you know, just as soon as you've got an ache or pain, you think it's time to lay off. Now I'm not saying the older generation hasn't got its faults mind, but we do know how to stick to things, regardless . . ."

"But I don't see the point of sticking to things just so as to give yourself neuritis. Unless you really like the neuritis, which is possible."

"What an idea. No, no, no. We like getting the work done, that's the thing."

"But you can do the work a great deal quicker if you just take a little trouble to get rid of the neuritis." Alfred was beginning to get a little bored with holding bits of wood together and having his finger-nails hammered on.

"That's the trouble, always thinking about what *you* feel like, and how *you* do the work. About yourselves, in fact. Now just try thinking

about *me* for a change. I slaved through the best years of my life to get you all a good start, and if I'd taken notice of every little thing that was wrong with me, I shouldn't have gone far. But here we've still got our little house, and the pretty garden, in spite of all our difficulties; and even although I have had a bit of trouble in my time. And now both the girls are married, nicely, and Fred doing well, and you having the education you always wanted. I don't see that I haven't got *something* to be proud of after all," he laughed timidly; and then stood looking fixedly at Alfred. He was suddenly touching. He stood with his stomach stuck out a little and his coat sagging over his shoulders. The hammer was still in his hand, and he was swinging it gently at his side with an easy and satisfied movement; but his faded blue eyes were frightened and inquiring. He wanted something from Alfred.

Alfred said awkwardly, "I think I'm going on all right, you know. I'm glad it was all possible, and that you feel all right about it."

He felt friendly and almost confidential. For a moment he was tempted to try and tell him about how marvellous and queer and complicated it all was. Stanley drew himself up.

"I feel I have done my duty," he said.

"I'm glad you're pleased about it, anyhow."

"That is not so important, in my opinion."

The job was finished. They had been putting the tools away, and even started on a little turn round the garden. But now there seemed no

point in it. Alfred, with one of his abrupt, yet extremely exact and delicate movements, turned out of the gate and walked off into the town.

He did not feel he could bear the hills, or the valley fields. On this rich summer day they would seem too withdrawn in an easy drowsy beauty. He wanted to see houses and faces and shops and factories and motors. One never asks, he said, one never expects to find people making spiritual effort. But it is intolerable that all their efforts should be concerned with inventing botched fantasies of things they can only see squint-eyed. In lying, and showing off, and consoling themselves. Yet here through an open window I can see a woman dropping a peeled potato into an enamel bowl; I can see a group of boys, crouched at the edge of the path, rolling their streaked marbles into a scoop of dust. The others tell you that they've won, or that they lost (circumstances being too hard), but if you look you can see they haven't got any marbles at all, really. Perhaps they've made some dirt-pellets, which don't roll straight.

Here in the town every action seemed simple and decisive. The boys on roller skates contorted their faces to an exact replica of the screeching, tearing, stone-on-metal noises. Workmen on bicycles bent with certainty in their own direction. A few belated housewives went like bees from shop to shop, filling their plump bags to bursting.

If I could just go on doing things, said Alfred, it would be all right. The potatoes drop into the

enamel basin with a clear splash, and though I may have lost my marble, to-morrow I will have the opportunity of winning it back. On my bicycle I can go to places, and come back from places, and from these shops I can buy food and clothing and put it into a bag for taking home. And yet I must have my finger also on the pulse of this life, so as to be able to say, now it goes well, now ill. Now it is tremulous, now rigid, now cold, now hot. And if anyone should answer, "yes, now, now it is . . . I know." Then my wings would stretch out more confidently, and with great beats mount up the steps of solid air.

Now they say, "Alfred, I haven't any money till Dad gives me the housekeeping, Monday. Can you lend me half a crown?" "Harold said your tie was like a piece of blanket, Alfred, why not wear a muffler while you're about it?" "Oh, Alfred, all the other girls have got chalks to colour in their maps with. They only cost ninepence, the best kind." "I'm not disturbing you, am I? I just wanted . . ." "I was only saying, if you only thought a little more about other people . . ."

Alfred was filled with a profound desolation. He was tired of admiring, noticing, imitating, listening, thinking, making efforts in all directions. He wanted somebody to be kind to him.

William was kind to him sometimes, but alas, so separate, so absent, so distant (perhaps he was now in Naples). In Alfred's knowledge of his difference there was even a hint of patronage (this there is sometimes in religion) since he knew him-

self to be supremely powerful in some place which William did not touch. In some unimaginable place where he was insignificant Alfred would ultimately triumph. Yet here and now he was the nonpareil; there was no question of kindness. What he gave was something finer and more difficult than kindness. It was blasphemy to imagine things different.

Jess and Adam were kind to him, but inexplicitly and practically, without indulgence. Almost crying, he admitted to himself that he wanted indulgence.

He telegraphed to Paula; telling himself that she was the cruelest, wickedest, most dangerous creature on earth; remembering her comfortable shoulder, moments of forgetfulness, rare gentleness and submissions. He caught the next train.

She had an evening dress on and a cloak. He could not tell if she had just come in, or was going out.

"Why have you come?" she said; "what do you want?"

"You."

She laughed, "You have come so suddenly. What have you just thought of? I was supposed to be going to a party, but I didn't know what time you would get here, so I waited."

"I am glad you waited."

She looked at him sweetly and held her hand out. He took it and laid his cheek down on it.

"I wanted someone to be nice to me," he said childishly.

She laughed again, not scornfully, and sitting on the divan pulled him down beside her with his head on her knee.

"Is that nicer?" she said.

"Much nicer." He rubbed his cheek against the water-smooth satin.

She had not taken off her cloak. With his eyes indolently closed he stretched his hand up and tried to pull it off her shoulders.

"I must go to my party," she said.

He could not manage to take off the cloak without getting up. His head sank back on her knee, heavy and obstinate.

"Mustn't I go?" she said.

He made a very slight movement with his head, and pleated up a fold of her dress in his fingers. He did not know if she could see this, but anyhow . . .

She stroked his forehead.

"Why are you being so nice to me?"

"Why shouldn't I be nice to you?"

"Are you going to be really nice to me?"

She nodded.

"And not go to your party?"

The cloak was now slipping off her shoulders, and she made no movement to stop it.

"I don't really mind about the party," she said.

He was quite quiet and did not move; she stroked his hair rhythmically.

"It's funny," she said, "when we were little we hated our mother going out in the evening. We used to implore her, and hang round clinging on

to her, and hold on to her skirt, so that once it got torn."

"I'm holding your skirt," said Alfred sleepily.

The situation became a kind of game. Alfred stayed in bed for breakfast and Paula made it for him. He abandoned himself to indolence and dependence; and she put no limits to her indulgence of him, appearing to find satisfaction in it. You could not discover, thought Alfred in a moment of wakefulness, her final reserves.

The morning sun threw a chequer-pattern across his bed. If he sat up (if he could be bothered to sit up) he could see out of the window a complicated view of chimney-pots, small gardens, and some trees. Paula, in a black-and-red oily silk dressing-gown, came in and sat on the edge of his bed and took his hand between both of hers.

"I was thinking of going to Paris," she said.

"Paris?"

"It's time we did something different."

"Yes," he said unwillingly.

"That's all right then?" She spoke a little too eagerly as if she were getting him to sign something he had not read.

"I don't know." He stretched his arms up and yawned, and then smiled in a way that was generally successful. She got up impatiently.

"Don't be silly. I don't want to do something which won't fit in with you, with your plans."

"I don't know what my plans are. What are yours?"

"I've been enjoying myself; but if it goes on it's rather demoralising. We don't see anyone except each other, and we can't go on hanging about and talking to each other for ever, and not doing anything."

"Poor girl. Bored?"

"Not yet, but going to be."

"So you must go to Paris?"

She nodded, smiling, and then said after a short pause:

"It wouldn't embarrass you to be given money, would it? I mean, if you would like to come to Paris as well, that wouldn't have to be a reason against."

"I come to Paris?"

"Yes," she said without expression.

His first thought was that William was somewhere the other side of the channel, and that it was the kind of thing William would do, dash off to Paris at a moment's notice.

"I have always wanted to," he said.

"Well, why not?" she said reasonably.

He looked at her suddenly, as if he had for the moment forgotten she was there. Then he looked round the room (grey walls and yellow curtains). He agreed, it was time something different happened. Going to Paris would be good, it would change everything. That would be good (everything has got to be changed), but he still wanted it the same (grey walls and yellow curtains). He

still wanted someone to be kind; to give him cups of hot coffee, and deep satisfied sleep. He was furious with her for wanting to go away; and yet did not trust himself to go with her. Here he had exultingly and without shame exploited his dependence on her; but he had only excused his conscience by assuming that it was only for this short time, only in this one place. He knew he would lose all faith in himself if he did not make this the end of it; and at the same time did not want to go with her, and make it a beginning. He was afraid and mistrustful. He shook his head decidedly, then said a little anxiously:

"When are you thinking of going?"

"I was rather inclined to go at once, this afternoon for instance."

They were not looking at each other; her voice seemed to Alfred a little strained and solemn. Hoping to conceal the pang which her words caused him, in spite of himself, he answered lightly:

"This afternoon seems just as good a time as any other."

She kissed him amiably and dispassionately and went off to telephone. It was all right.

"I am going by air," she said, "Croydon and five o'clock."

"How impatient you are."

"Yes." She went from room to room, pulling open drawers and beginning to sort out her things for packing.

"Can I get up and help you?" called Alfred.

"No, stay there, out of the way."

"Shall I come and see you off?"

"If it would amuse you. But it's a fairly squalid place."

"What shall I do when you've gone. Go home?"

"If you have to. Otherwise you can stay here. There won't be anyone else and Mrs. Minty will go on coming in every day."

"Could I really?"

"Yes, of course, if you want to, of course you could."

He went out to Croydon with her. It was a scorched misty day, warm but not vital. He tried to talk as if he didn't mind anything, but really he was miserably depressed. Again he was being shoved out into a cold world. He looked askance at her elegant travelling clothes, her face neatly rouged and powdered, and its becoming air of discreet excitement.

"I hate trains," she said, "and I hate ships. They don't either of them make me quite sick, but so bored and miserable that I would almost welcome even that distraction. And I suppose sooner or later we shall all feel the same about aeroplanes, but just at the moment I still find it fascinating. You don't feel you're wasting so much time, and everything you see is so much more interesting. Even over the sea."

"It must be queer."

The bus got them out as usual a lot too early,

and after she had been weighed and had her passport checked up, they wandered off. At the side of the aerodrome hotel they came to a gate with a notice up saying 3*d*. each person, so Alfred gave the man sixpence and they went through.

"Where are we going?" he said as an afterthought.

"I imagine this leads to the roof," said Paula, who had already started to climb up a metal staircase like a fire-escape. Alfred followed her. He was sorry he had come. The whole thing was obviously at an end anyway, and this idle attempt to give it a finishing touch was painful. They got on to the roof and side by side leaned rather glumly against the parapet. She put her hand, looking smaller than ever in a glove, over his.

"Sorry I'm going?"

"Yes," he said vacantly: it was true and not-true.

She took her hand away, and cried, pointing:

"Look at that enormous creature."

The immense field of sun-scorched grass seemed to stretch illimitably, at its edges could be only indistinctly seen a fringe of regular mean houses. Half-way across it a small flare of smoke trailed along the wind. Paula pointed to a plane which had taxied across with the wind, and was now turning into it to take off.

"It's so difficult to see at exactly what minute it leaves the ground," she said.

He admired unwillingly. The place was so

desolate he could have cried; and yet it was exciting when the plane lifted itself so strongly on the wind, and passing with a roar over them turned into the sky. Some small boys beside him were commenting with expert knowledge on its construction; he wanted to ask them what were the points one should look for, but was afraid they might think he was laughing at them. Near the sheds a small red beetle-like machine was having its propeller swung round again and again with no result.

"She's no good," said one of the boys solemnly, "but she belongs to a millionaire. I can't think what he was up to, wasting his money like that."

Paula looked at her watch.

"It's time I went."

"I'm going to see you off from here. I'll wave to you when you go over."

"All right. You haven't changed your mind? You wouldn't like to come?"

William might have done it, for William he might have done it; but here and now, no. He shook his head.

"Anyhow, we'll meet again next term."

"Yes."

She went. He stared down into the garden of the hotel, where a mown lawn and a shallow pond with stone figures round it attempted an air of civilisation. On the roof of the veranda were quantities of fourpenny-ice-cream-cartons which had been thrown there during the summer, and now rotted in the gutters like dead leaves.

The Paris plane had been out of sight. Now it went out across the field and turned. He tried to notice when it left the ground, but could only see suddenly that it had left it, he could not tell when. He wished he were in it, but not with Paula. He wished he were going somewhere very far away, Venice, Budapest, Athens, wherever William was.

He had to go back by bus and train, a tiresome and complicated journey. But he was buoyed up by a sensation of relief. Now being clear of everything, he could make anything happen.

When he got back to the flat, he found that a whole batch of letters had arrived for Paula. What a nuisance that she didn't give me any address, I never thought of it. He looked through them, wondering if any were particularly urgent, and suddenly came on one in William's writing. He wished it were for him, his fingers tingled to open it, just to know what he was doing, and where he was. Looking at it more closely, he saw that it had a French stamp, and was from Paris. How funny, he thought, I wonder how long he has been there. I wonder if he and Paula will run up against each other. He imagined them meeting under the Arc de Triomphe or at the top of the Eiffel Tower. I wish I had gone with her, he thought. But no, that would have been just like Oxford, he and she and me. I wish I had gone, and she had stayed here, or gone somewhere else. I wish I had met him suddenly in a wide street with little trees along

each pavement, he and I the only people who speak English, he glad to see me. Laying the letter down regretfully, he went into the sitting-room. He could not resist this day-dream and imagined to himself more and more circumstantially how this meeting would be.

The charwoman had been in in the afternoon, and so everything had been tidied up after the sudden whirlwind of packing. The crumpled tissue paper had been picked up off the floor, and the dress Paula had been wearing was hung up in the cupboard, and the door shut. Yet her presence was still in the house, perhaps a scent, thought Alfred, sniffing like a terrier, or perhaps simply in the cool immaculate combinations of colour which she had chosen, and which it seemed were almost rigidly a part of her, so that it was impossible to imagine them with anyone else. He threw up the window and leaned out. It was a blue and yellow evening, reminding him of autumn, even on the grimy walls there were flakes of brick-yellow, shining where the sun fell on them. He was melancholy, regretful. I have spent so much time here, he thought, so much dead time, so much fruitless energy. He was ashamed. The benign sky, demanding no expiation, the exquisite room, indifferent and civil, goaded him. He flung himself impatiently across the room, and leaning against the mantelpiece rested his forehead on his crossed arms. But it will be all right again, he thought, when I see him again next term. I have wasted my time with

him too, I have wasted him, I have imagined he was bored with me, or disliking me, when in reality I was kept away from him by trivial occupations or my own sense of inferiority. Next term I will be cleverer, I will stretch out my hand and respect no imaginary limits and precautions. He began to pace the room with more confidence, forgetting Paula, and finding now in the room itself a beauty not connected with her.

He wished William had written to him, and suddenly remembered that of course he had left no address at home, and that if he had written it would not have been forwarded. For an instant he contemplated going there at once to see, by the night train. Then, finding it intolerable to contemplate another plunge into this rejected environment, and wishing moreover to be alone for a time with his imagination, he wrote to his mother to give his address, and ask for any letters to be sent on. Having done this, he found he could settle down to some work, but when, after a day or two, there were no letters, except one from Violet, asking in a reproachful manner if he couldn't come home for the rest of the holidays, he got restless again, and spent a lot of the time wandering about London, reading desultorily, and writing fragmentary poems which he never had quite enough impetus to finish.

Then, as the beginning of term drew nearer, his energy returned, and he began to write with new power. Paula had vanished. The only moment of importance which emerged from his

two visits was the first conversation in this white and off-white room. He had managed, then, to collect and express for the first time, some of the curious and unfamiliar thoughts which had lately been stirring at the edge of his mind. She had rejected them. I wish I could believe, she said, out of politeness, but in reality she was mocking him. Now she was gone, and the conversation remained unattached; it was she herself that her mocking had subdued. His thoughts remained and grew stronger. His mind was occupied by the spectacle of the human soul shrinking before its own inventions and institutions, its eyes at every turn falling upon some unrealised and terrifying object, bracing itself to conquer this self-created antagonist before its powers should be finally lost. In this world also he saw William, moving serenely, a symbol of permanence and beauty.

He found it difficult to decide by what train he should go up to Oxford. He wanted to see William as soon as he could, but he hated being there before anyone else had arrived. He thought it would be pretty safe if he got there just before dinner, and meant to catch that one; but, finding himself with an impetus of writing on him, missed it, and several others, and in the end did not get there until nearly midnight.

He raced up to leave his luggage in his room, and then across to William's. It seemed certain he would be there; but he was not. He must have gone out, said Alfred; but then, nosing

round the room and finding no trace of him, no books, no luggage, no burberry hung on the door, he realised unwillingly that he had not arrived. But he will come to-morrow, said Alfred.

The next day was spent in aimless waiting. He did all the things he had to do; unpacked, and bought some books, and arranged about his work, but the atmosphere of his day was a waiting one. In the evening, exasperated with hanging about, and frequent visits to William's rooms, and being heartlessly confronted by his own notes left on the mantelpiece, he decided he might as well go and look up Paula.

"Miss Tenniers has not yet come up," said the lodge maid.

"When will she be here?"

"Not for a few days, I don't think."

Alfred sighed. Nobody seemed to have got back. He supposed Paula was still in Paris, and wondered if William was too, and whether they had after all met each other. He hoped William wouldn't be a few days too. He wanted to see him, he wanted to see him at once.

Everything was interrupted by this business of expecting William. He had to forbid himself to go and look for him more than twice each day; and while he was working, had to stuff his fingers in his ears, so as not to be waiting to pick out the sound of his footstep. He got so used to waiting, that when, after a day or two, the porter called out to him as he went out through the lodge: "Mr. Hawes is back, sir," he did not turn round.

Now that he could see an end to it, he could endure waiting a little longer. He might even be able to listen to his lecture. After it, he even walked back slowly, enjoying the sunshine, and looking with interest at faces, and movements, and the things in shops. He even walked slowly up the stairs; he even, instead of bursting in at the door, knocked gently, anticipating with delight the sound of a voice answering and the movement of welcome when he should enter.

"Come in," called William.

Alfred opened the door. William was sitting one side of the fireplace and Paula the other. They both smiled at him.

"Hullo, William. Hullo, Paula."

"Hullo, Alfred."

He knew at once that they had been together. And yet, while at the moment when he realised this with horrifying suddenness, he realised also that he had known it for a long time—he did not know how long a time.

"When did you get back?"

"Just now," said Paula, answering for both of them, "we had the most awful crossing."

"Poor things," said Alfred heavily, "did you have fun in Paris?"

"I always enjoy Paris," began William, "but it was particularly . . ."

"Oh, it was terribly nice," said Paula.

Alfred could not tear himself away. Every word they said was agony, but he could not go He looked at Paula with hatred, her vivid con-

fident glances seemed deadly; and William's contentment, his acceptance, was a kind of death. She has betrayed us, he thought. And yet he stayed talking to them, and they, after the first difficulties, were very nice to him. They told him about Paris, not emphasising, and perhaps not knowing how vividly he imagined this emphasis, the particular pleasure of having been together. He told Paula that he had enjoyed being in the flat, and that he had left the keys with the charwoman as they had arranged. They did not seem particularly to wish him gone, and yet all that held him there was the misery of knowing that he had not more to do with either of them.

"It's time we had lunch," said William suddenly; "will you come too, Alfred?"

He could not bear any more, and went back to his rooms. His mind was almost in a swoon of pain. It was a situation so fantastic, so odd, so desperate, that he could hardly see it clearly, and much less interpret it. He tried first to look at the facts, asking himself, did Paula know he was in Paris? Did she go to him? This he was inclined to believe, but then remembered that she had asked him if he would not go too. Surely, if she had been going to the other, she would not have done that? Perhaps, then, she had not known she would meet William, or perhaps she had expected to meet him as a friend only, or perhaps she had not at that time quite decided, perhaps she wanted to keep Alfred until she was quite certain of William. But what, then, was the meaning of the

letter which had arrived too late? Was it the impatient outburst of a lover whose mistress delays, or (since it is William we are thinking of) the confident statement, I am here, I wait, I am expecting? "I will meet the 15.18 at the Gare St. Lazare." Had she, when she telephoned for her seat, sent him a telegram? Otherwise, why should she have shut the door? He remembered now that she had shut the door. And yet she was not very long out of the room, she came back and asked me if I would go too. Surely she could not have imagined that we three . . . unless it had happened before, unless in the summer, on the river, in flat grassy meadows, she had also, he had also . . .

No. That is impossible. She was working, she always said she was working, so that I was ashamed of my laziness. And he had his work too, and his engagements, and the long letter he wrote every week to his mother. Besides, at that time they did not like each other. They both told me so, or almost, and I could feel it when they were together. So that they must only have become friends later, perhaps only when they met in Paris, by accident. Unless they had met in July, unless, when William disappointed me by not spending with me the last day before he went abroad, he was with her. But that is unlikely, that I must not think. She would lie, but he would not. And now he is fallen, he is no better than I am. His nobility, which I only loved, she has stolen. Perhaps even he *would* lie, for her sake. She has stolen him from me, and she has

also destroyed what I loved in him, his unapproachable pride, his freedom. Now, in that room where I first understood friendship, where I first recognised, distinct from the close, inflexible affections of a family an emotion as fresh as young grass, as powerful and mobile as mountain torrents, she holds him in her arms as she did me, invites him hard to nuzzle his face against her neck, laughs with delight when he now kisses the little vein in the crook of her elbow. So he is lost to me now, his lips pouncing on hers, opened to laugh mockingly, his face grows brutish with desire.

This is the one fact that concerns me. How long, how often, is nothing in comparison. This one thing is all, it is too much, one cannot feel more than this.

He buried his face in his hands, and sat motionless; these thoughts swinging persistently through his head.

There followed a period of emptiness. He did nothing, and saw nobody. A few people tried to see him, among them William and Paula, severally, but he appeared so detached and indifferent that it seemed useless to persist, and he was left very much alone. He felt himself inaccessible to all impressions, even the misery of his own thoughts hardly existed, as when you lie quite still in a scalding bath and feel no pain. He seemed paralysed, and had no wish to rouse himself, for fear of this pain. He did not know how long this state of things lasted.

The first demand made of him was a summons from his tutor. He went to see him. He sat down in an arm-chair, and stared in front of him and listened with about a quarter of his attention.

"This is getting rather serious. Not only are you not doing any work, but you never have done any work, and as far as I can make out, you don't intend to do any work. Can you give any better account of yourself than that?" he paused for answer, and getting none, felt it necessary to go on. "It is perhaps one of the virtues of this University that we don't judge exclusively by results. However, where there are positively no results, our position is made rather difficult. At the end of last term, you told me definitely that you would make every effort to pass your Preliminary this term (as indeed you must to avoid being sent down) and yet a fortnight has gone and you have done absolutely nothing. You have been to no classes, and when I have arranged to discuss your work with you, you have simply not come, and sent no explanation. . . ."

"Oh, didn't I? I'm sorry. I forgot."

"Naturally. But am I to suppose from that that you are taking a keen interest in work? I am perhaps being unjust to you, I hope I am, it was for that reason that I got you here this morning, but seriously, I would like to know, have you in fact done one hour's work this term?"

"No," said Alfred mulishly.

"Well, I ask you, what is to be done about it? You don't know? Well, then, who is to know?

The one certain thing about it is that it can't go on. Either pull yourself together, or else get sent down."

Alfred moved his hands in gesture which meant that if he must get sent down he must, but that he himself was quite indifferent. It appeared a matter for someone else to decide. The don felt he was not doing much good, and got up.

"Well, think over what I've said, and see what you can do about it," he said rather heartily.

"Yes," said Alfred in a very non-committal voice, and went out. He had not taken much interest, and went back with relief to the seclusion of his room. Again for a few days there was no particular interruption, and then very unexpectedly Gordon came to see him. Alfred hardly recognised him, it was so long since they had met. He stared at him.

"Are you tight?" said Gordon.

"You don't suppose I can get myself tight so soon after lunch," said Alfred. Gordon shrugged his lumpish shoulders.

"There's no knowing what your habits are," he said. Alfred did not say anything. Gordon waited a minute, as if to emphasise the fact that he was uninvited, and then sat down.

"Well, how's life?"

"Just like life, you know, more bad than good."

"Sounds pretty morbid. What's up?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Oh, come on. . . ."

"Why should there be anything the matter?"

"Well, you look like death, and I keep hearing things. . . ."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, of course I didn't believe them."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't know. I just didn't think it was likely, about someone I knew, someone who was a relation. So I came round to make sure it was all right. But you look awful, Alfred, I don't know what you *have* been up to."

"Why shouldn't it be what they say, whatever that is?"

"I just can't quite believe it. You know what they are. But I did want to say to you, Alfred, you ought to be a bit more careful. Why, even people who don't know you at all, they say, oh, *him*; you know the way they say it; and they always talk about you in connection with people with very funny reputations, John Morton, and Larry Munro and a lot of others."

"Oh, they've got as far as that, have they?"

"Well, you don't seem to mind much. Perhaps there wasn't much point in my telling you, but I thought you might as well know, and then perhaps you'd be a bit more careful. Of course, they never know you're any connection of mine, because we're in such different circles, but I can't help not liking the things they say. . . ."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"You don't seem to be taking it very seriously."

"Not taking it seriously. Why, I haven't yet thrown you downstairs, and I've listened to quite

three-quarters of what you've been saying. What more do you want?"

Gordon got clumsily to his feet.

"I rather wish I hadn't come," he said, "I may as well go now. If you'd only think about what I've said a bit, Alfred."

"If I thought about it as much as you have, I wouldn't have any attention for anything else."

"Don't take it badly, old boy," said Gordon.

"Of course not. Why should I. I'm only too glad to feel people are taking an interest in me."

"That's right," said Gordon, then, catching sight of Alfred's expression, added in a surprised voice, "Oh!" and went out hurriedly.

"What a fool," said Alfred to himself, but just before Gordon shut the door. Alfred remained for a moment standing in the middle of the room, and then went over to the window. It was almost dark, and he thought it must be very late; but when he looked back into the room at the blue three-legged clock which stood on the mantel-piece, he saw that it was not long past five. And yet, he thought, remembering the evenings when he waited for William, I am sure it stays light till nearly dinner-time. He thought the clock was perhaps wrong, and decided to go out and walk about till he saw a really reliable one. The air was chilling, so he wound his old thick yellow scarf round his neck, and as he got out into the cold dark staircase, thrust his hands deeply into his pockets.

He walked across the town, through the deserted cattle-market, and on to the tow-path by the canal. A train went down the line, the flare of its fire throwing an unnatural illumination on the engine-driver and stoker, who appeared in uncouth and devilish attitudes. As he went on under the black dripping railway bridge it was still clumping overhead. Then, when it had passed, there came an almost unnatural quiet. From the sky, beyond the fields and low wooded hills, there still trailed a dim and fibrous light. He went on towards it.

In half an hour it was quite dark, but he went on. After a while he turned back into the town. He still did not know what the time was, but felt hungry and remembered that he had not had anything to eat since breakfast; so in the slums at the edge of the town, he went into a fish and chip shop, and ordered a great plateful of skate and potatoes. The place was empty, and the proprietor, having nothing to do, came and talked to him; although he did not do more than answer, the man seemed to find him in some way sympathetic enough, and talked of his life, his opinions, and above all, of the difficulties of his trade. He had a cheerful air on the whole, and seemed quite free from self-pity, and yet there was something melancholy about his eyes, and an occasional inflection of his voice.

"It happens wherever I go," he said, "I can change my clothes as often as I like, I can wash myself from head to foot, but it always sticks. If

I go into a theatre people begin nudging each other. 'What can it be,' they say, 'it smells just like fried fish.' Sometimes I have to come out, it's so awkward."

Alfred offered no comment, but his expression of interest appeared enough. The man went on talking for some time, and Alfred found something good and relieving in his coarse realistic observations, and his confident assumption of friendliness. He seemed to have been there a long time when he got up, paid his eightpence, and made off. There was a feeling of excitement about the town. At a little distance a rocket shot up, and burst in a fountain of stars, blue, gold and green. Down side-streets, children had gathered round little bonfires, one lot had stuck catherine wheels on to a gate with hatpins, and twirled them with their fingers to start them up. A good many had put on false noses, or their mothers' clothes, and nearly all had blackened their faces. Why, of course, it's Guy Fawkes night, thought Alfred.

In the Corn, there was a huge packed elbowing crowd, mostly undergraduates, broad, red, youthful faces, arms linked, so that it was impossible to thrust your way through. Now and then there was laughter, cries, an eddy of shoving, where a squib had been let off. There were a few townspeople, a few women, but mostly it was undergraduates, and they were mostly pretty drunk. A party of them began to shove Alfred in a way that terrified and infuriated him. He began to shout at them, all the helpless stored misery and anger

of the last few weeks pouring out against them. They took it all as a very good joke.

"Speech, speech," they shouted, and began to shove him towards the steps of the Clarendon, the nearest thing like a platform in sight.

"All right then," he shouted, "all right then, I *will* make a speech." He ran up the steps and turned round at them, all his newly released energy giving force to voice and gesture, his sunken greenish eyes becoming almost black, and shining like water in moonshine.

He wondered if they knew how he hated them, and asked them if they did. Then he began to tell them, shouting out at the top of his voice, the simple abusive words used by navvies and bargemen. By this they were so staggered that they did not at once make a rush for him, and by the time they came to themselves, he was attacking in the same style, but rather more picturesquely, the dons, and the whole atmosphere of the University. Some people who had pushed up from the back, and had not heard his bad beginning, called out enthusiastic agreement, and supplied ribald emendations; so that feeling swayed towards him, and he was allowed to go on. He did not notice an uncomfortable torpor which had appeared at one corner of the crowd; and only paused when the people nearest him began drawing away, and someone apparently in authority stood in front of him.

"Who is this old man?" said Alfred.

"Drunk, sir," said one of the bulldogs offici-

ously, "I wonder the police haven't had him before now."

"I'm no more drunk than you are," said Alfred pugnaciously. But the force of this authority was too strong for him; they took his name and college and instructed him to appear at the Proctorial Office the next morning. He felt rather pleased with himself, he had been wanting to get that off his chest for a long time, and he slept better than he had for some nights.

The next morning he packed his suitcase, and gave his scout almost all his spare cash to send on the rest of his stuff. He was going down. He had loved this place because of William, and now he despised it, and felt nothing more. He gave no final look at his room before shutting his door for the last time.

Walking across the quad, he met, inconveniently enough, Marcus. They had avoided each other lately, and Alfred hardly expected him to speak, and was almost walking past him.

"This is a strange sight," said Marcus, looking at his hat, "and a little case as well. Is it an elopement?"

"I'm going down," said Alfred indifferently.

"Why? if I may ask."

"I want to."

"And I suppose I can make a shrewd guess at why you want to," said Marcus nodding.

"I've no doubt you can."

"And I'm sorry," went on Marcus calmly, "because I don't think they're worth it. I think

you're very likely right to go, but I think you're going for a bad reason."

Alfred stared at him. This was the first time he had heard him give advice, even the first time he had heard him give an opinion on a matter of right and wrong. Really for the first time, he thought that Marcus was, after all perhaps, a human being. He was going on:

"The one's a brat, of no particular importance in any circumstance, and the other's just entirely out of date, as you ought to know very well."

"I know what you mean, but I don't see it makes any difference."

Marcus shrugged his shoulders.

"Like whoever you please. I'll willingly admit they're any kind of marvel you say; but to let yourself turn into a walking corpse because you've lost a friend, is nonsense."

Marcus seemed to be getting in a towering passion. Alfred had never seen him like it, and did not know how to take it.

"It doesn't really matter about me," he said.

"Affected ass," said Marcus harshly, "of course it matters, and of course that's the one thing you believe in, that it does matter. Oh, go to hell, go anywhere you like, if you really don't mind, it doesn't matter to me. But if you'd like a drink first, come up to my rooms."

"No, thanks, Marcus. I just feel I want to get away at once."

"I expect you're right," said Marcus calmly again, "you've been looking pretty lousy, and it

quite gets on my nerves, seeing you about the place."

It was difficult to go. Alfred stayed some minutes more talking to Marcus at the corner, by an old stone buttress. Perhaps he was hoping that he would still see William, for the last time.

"What are you going to do?" said Marcus.

"I don't know, I feel I've made a wrong start. So I'm going home, to look about, and start off in some other direction."

"That's a very abstract way of putting it," said Marcus wryly. "What *are* you going to do, or don't you know?"

Alfred looked at him dumbly, a wave of desolation going over him. That was just a house of cards, was it? He did not know really what he was going to do, what he could do. Still watching the corner round which, at any moment, William might come, he said:

"I must think a bit, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Marcus, more in his old manner, "but I cannot approve of too protracted solitary thinking."

Alfred raised his eyebrows in surprise, because Marcus himself . . .

"In your case, not," said Marcus. He was no longer roused or angry. His eyes twinkled provokingly. Alfred imagined (do not our thoughts make eddies in the atmosphere?) that he knew he was still waiting for William, and watching out of the corner of his eye. He wheeled round, and stared at the wall (over which a fly was crawling,

passing out of the sunlight into Marcus's head-shadow) and a corner of untrodden grass.

"I am quite capable of managing my own life," he said obstinately.

"Yes. But I have always enjoyed having a finger in it."

"Well, it's something to be escaping your interference."

Marcus made a conciliatory movement, then immediately began talking somewhat at random:

"There were so many things I wanted to show you, some pictures in my uncle's house in London, and the very private book my father wrote about his life at the age of twenty-one, and . . ."

He had been staring vaguely at the corner, but now his glance slid sideways. Alfred looked over his shoulder, and saw William; with Paula. His first movement towards him was checked as soon as it was made. They both waved to him gaily, and then again turned to each other. He did not reply, but stood staring after them, his arms stiff at his sides, his brow furrowed, his lips full and sullen, like an angry peasant.

"I won't go after them," he said, to himself more than anyone.

"No, don't go," said Marcus. Alfred gave him a violent hating and wounded look, then turned his head uneasily aside. The empty misery at his heart swelled like a bubble just going to burst, and yet did not burst, but hung inside his ribs huge and empty and straining.

"Look at your shadow," said Marcus, "how

funny it is." Alfred turned slowly, the shapeless black patch on the wall was the same (but how could it be the same) as before William went by.

"No, it's no good, when you turn it spoils it. Wait." Marcus took a pencil out of his pocket, and began scrawling on the wall. "Now look."

Alfred turned again. On the wall was a snoutish tilted profile, uncouth and ridiculous. Marcus wanted to distract his attention, Marcus wanted to be kind. . . .

It was not his, this face. He threw his hat back and shouted with laughter, hysterically. Marcus thought he was never going to stop. But it was better than crying.

CHAPTER VI

BAD ALTERNATIVES

"YOU see, Adam, it does seem rather a bother *not* having children."

"It would be a lot more bother having them. Just think what it would be like if they were twins."

"Yes, it would be rather difficult if they were twins," said Jess, and lay silent for a minute. She was afraid Adam might not like this conversation, or perhaps was sleepy, but she went on:

"Don't you ever want to have any, Adam?"

"They're much more bother than they're worth, you know."

"But perhaps they *would* be worth the bother. Wouldn't you like them?"

"It might be worth it to us, but I'm not so sure it would be worth it to them."

"Don't you think we'd be good parents?"

"Oh, all right, I suppose. But it's such a damned poor sort of world."

"Yes," she said, agreeing; and then, thinking out her own thought more slowly, "but is it really so bad?"

"Not for me, at the moment; but when you see all the chaps hanging around doing nothing, and

not having enough to give their wives to buy food, you have to think twice before bringing another chap into it. I've been lucky, but I mayn't always be, and I don't know that I can pass on my luck to anyone else."

"But it isn't all luck. It's because you're good at your job."

"I used to think that; but there are a lot of chaps good at jobs, and haven't got them. I have got one, and so that's luck, and I hope it holds. I can't do anything else about it."

Jess sighed. "I suppose that's all true," she said.

Alfred had been home a day or two before anyone asked him what he was doing.

"Is it a holiday?" said Daff; "we don't begin our holidays till two days before Christmas."

"Well, it's a holiday I've given myself."

"Have you run away?"

"You can't run away from a place where no one minds if you're there or not. I just didn't want to be there any longer and nobody else wanted me to be there either, so I came away."

"I wish I could do that."

"It's not so nice as you might think. You have to think out whether you want to stay or not, and you have to be sure you won't want to go back."

"Of course I wouldn't want to go back. I hate school. Everyone knows I hate school. But Mum's so silly, she signed for me to stay till sixteen. . . ."

"I expect you'll last out."

"Yes, but did you like being at school?"

"I don't know. It was all right."

"And are you glad you went?"

"Oh, it's all rather a silly business."

"That's what I say, but Mum won't listen."

She went out calling for Violet, who afterwards came in alone.

"Why can't I come in and talk to Alfred too?" called Daff from a distance. Violet shut the door carefully.

"What is this Daff's been telling me, Alfred? What's happened? You haven't been doing something you oughtn't?"

"Oh no, I've only left Oxford for good."

"Alfred," but in her exaggerated disappointment there was a hint of some perverse pleasure, "but why? I thought . . . we all thought. . . ."

"So did I. But it wasn't my kind of place, after all."

Alfred felt so tired he could hardly speak, much less give any explanation of himself.

"Whatever will your father say?" said Violet (things so seldom happen, thought Alfred, she has to clutch at all the pleasures and horrors of anticipation).

"I don't know," he said, closing his eyes, "and I'm not sure that I mind. It's not his business."

"Oh, Alfred."

She was already moving towards the door, eager to tell someone, to be first with the news, although she only faintly understood what it was. But Daff

had got in before her; and Stanley was already scraping the mud off his shoes in the porch. Alfred could hear the fumbling jagged noise of it, and saw distinctly in imagination the shape of the scraper, bleak and complicated. They collided in the passage and he could hear Violet's excited whispers, and Stanley's loud indefinite "Yes, yes, I know." They both came in; Stanley walked half across the room, and Violet stood at the doorway like a school-girl, holding the door-handle. Alfred waited, slightly wincing.

"Well, so you've seen reason at last," said Stanley.

Edna took the kettle off the gas-ring, and poured the tepid water over the supper-things in the tin basin.

"I can't understand it at all," she said.

"What?" said Harold. He had a newspaper in his hands but was not reading it, perhaps he had been asleep.

"I say I can't understand it, I mean Dad and Alfred."

"If you didn't stand with your back to me," said Harold portentously, "and didn't make all that row with the plates and the water, I might possibly, I say possibly, be able to hear what you said. . . ."

"Oh, all right, I won't talk if you don't want me to," said Edna crossly. Harold held his paper, he might have been sniggering behind it, or sleeping.

"How I hate greasy water," cried Edna.

"You ought to have had it hotter."

"Oh, all right, do it yourself. And besides, it's ridiculous to expect me to go on boiling kettles all the time, there ought to be hot water in the house, running hot water, not just a cold tap on the stairs, and a measly gas-ring, not even a stove, and in the sitting-room too. If I'd known it would be like this. . . ."

"Oh, all right," said Harold, "and neither would I. That's one thing we're agreed about anyhow." His plump face took on an obstinate and spiteful look, and this was more than Edna wanted. She did want to quarrel; but more than anything she wanted to talk.

"But don't you think it's queer, Harold," she said plaintively, "about Dad and Alfred?"

Harold was all for a quiet life. He laid down his paper and began to consider the subject.

"Alfred's a bit of a dark horse to me," he said sagaciously.

"Oh, I'm not surprised at anything *he* does," said Edna, "but it is a bit funny about Dad. Why, Mum was quite certain he'd go off the deep end about Alfred coming home like that, and I expect that was what Alfred thought too, though he keeps things to himself; and all that happens is that Dad's as pleased as anything, and goes round asking all his friends to give Alfred a job. I should have thought he'd turn him out of the house."

"Well, after all, he never did want Alfred to

go there, and now it's obvious he was right all along, I suppose he's just making a good thing out of that. It all seems pretty natural."

"I suppose it must be, but he seemed to have got so accustomed to Alfred's being there; and he's a lot more likely to take a thing badly when you think it'll be all right than the other way round. Look here, you might at least dry up a cup or two, instead of just sitting there watching." She flung him a cloth.

"I don't see how I'm expected to dry anything with a piece of rag like a damp bathing-costume."

"Well, where is there here to dry anything? Now if I had a nice house like Jess. . . ."

"Oh, shut up. You know we couldn't afford it. Perhaps you've heard there's a depression on? And besides, if you were the person looking after it it would soon be in just the same mess as this is."

"And who makes the mess I should like to know? And who couldn't get a decent job depression or no depression?"

"You think I couldn't get a decent job, do you? Let me tell you, I have had decent jobs before now, and I'll have them again. I've just struck a bad patch, like a lot of other chaps. I'm getting a lot less than I should, I'll grant you that, but I do do some work for it. And there you sit letting the crumbs stay on the table and the dust in the corners and your hair like a cow's tail. . . ."

"I don't have any time or money to look after myself like I used to. . . ."

"What about Jess then? She keeps herself nice, even though she has got a husband."

"She's happy. It's easy to look nice if you're happy."

Jess was happy. Her happiness, and Adam's, had increased steadily and imperceptibly, like morning, or grass growing. There are no dramatic climaxes, now there are fewer stars, now the leaves against the window are green, now birds sing, now I see that the lumpish object on my mantelpiece is a net of walnuts, which I had forgotten, given me by my grandmother. Less eventful even had been their history, not in waves even like a tide; but smoothly as a lake in rainy weather filling from innumerable mountain streams. They had reached a basic acceptance of each other, a practical and unspoken sympathy (too immediate to be called understanding) in which their diverse natures found new pleasures, new satisfactions and new freedom.

Compared with them, Alfred seems to have got nothing out of his year of arduous tumult. He would like to cancel it out, to erase from his nature the effects of Marcus, of William, of Paula, as before he repudiated his home. Struck from all sides he withdraws into himself so entirely that nothing can be told about him. He walks and talks mechanically, his thoughts, stagnating, make gluey eddies round the same stone, his senses stiff as wires, trace shapes and colours on his brain with sick precision, and he can take no delight

in them. He is numb, paralysed, non-existent, only to be seen as an object, a piece of furniture, filling up the scene, and perhaps occupying at one moment or another the minds of other people.

"The only thing that bothers me," said Jess, "is Alfred."

"I don't see what you can do about him, anyway," said Adam.

"Nor do I, but that doesn't stop it bothering me. Ought it to?"

"Well, it doesn't make it much good."

"I hate seeing something all gone wrong that I can't do anything about."

"I expect he'll be all right in the end; just at the moment I should say he just wanted leaving alone, and I don't suppose he gets much of that."

Violet was insisting on having a family Christmas dinner.

"But we can't afford much in the way of jollification," said Stanley, who had lately become extremely apprehensive about his dwindling income.

"Well," said Violet, "we've been paring and scraping all the year, and I should think we deserved a little change by now; and I don't see you've any cause to grudge it. It wouldn't cost much either, we'd make everything at home, and only have to buy a few sweets and crackers. It's time we all had something to cheer us up."

An orgy of preparations followed; old recipe books were diligently looked through; clippings

were made from Women's Pages; and an urgent letter written to Aunt Cissie to ask how she made her famous plum pudding. It was going to be the biggest party they had ever had, "to a meal, that is; it was a different matter when the children were small and you could just have sandwiches and jelly. But now that they're married you do have to give men something solid. . . ."

At one moment Violet had a feeling that it was perhaps a pity to prepare all this magnificence 'just for the family,' and made some efforts to get in a few other people, disregarding the fact that there could not possibly be room for them. Almost everybody however had fixed up something already, and in the end the only guest was Louie, a friend of Daphne's, whose mother was ill, and glad to get her out of the way. Violet felt it rather a come-down to have all her invitations refused, but contented herself with the thought that it 'made the numbers right.'

She sat at the foot of the table with Harold on one side and Adam on the other. Stanley at the other end was between Edna and Louie, beyond her Fred, then Jess, then Harold again. On the other side, Daff tried to make the best of Adam, who she 'always found a bit boring,' and Alfred, with a gloomy expression and in complete silence, sat between her and Edna. It was midday, but they had drawn the curtains and lit candles, to make it more 'Christmassy.'

The turkey was a great success. Nobody wanted to talk much, and this massive lump of

food made talking seem frivolous. Daff screwed up her eyes, she was praying that God might let her have the drumstick. The others lifted off lids, and passed spoons for the potatoes and the brussels sprouts, and handed the salt backwards and forwards across the table. Violet all by herself kept up some conversation.

"It's a very good turkey, isn't it, Fred? that Mr. Burcham's given us; I hope it's cooked long enough. Oh, Stanley, you've forgotten to give Edna her slice of bacon; and mind, that sausage is just slipping off and it'll splash the gravy on the cloth. Shall I give you some sprouts, Adam? or would you rather . . .? Oh, come on now, that's not enough. Look, there's plenty here, and a lot more in the kitchen. Is the stuffing all right, Jess? I followed the directions exactly. Yes, Stan, that'll be just nice for me; but don't forget to keep some white meat for yourself, Daff doesn't like it anyhow, you'd better give her part of a wing. Oh, just look, I've got the merry-thought; put it by the fire, would you, Harold, and I'll pull it with you after dinner. You all right, Alfred; that's not enough potatoes for you, is it? . . ."

Everyone was now in the thick of it. At every instant large succulent mouthfuls were shoved between ready lips. Even Alfred had taken more potatoes, and with a white face concentrated his efforts on filling himself as full as possible, hoping for somnolence. Edna with delicate gestures pushed her fork through whole sprouts

and quarters of potato and stout gobbets of meat, then smeared it all with gravy, and popped it into her mouth with a refined expression, which quickly became one of embarrassment when she found her mouth so full that she could hardly work her jaws. Stanley's eyes had watered slightly, he ate quickly and carelessly, now a dry lump of potato, now a sprout, now a white, now a brown piece of turkey, now a piece of bread pushed round in gravy. Louie noticed that the turkey was much better than last year's one at home, but the sprouts had a sourish taste and the gravy was a little greasy; nobody was talking, she wondered if she ought to say anything, or if they would all laugh; Fred, now gobbling with evident gusto, looked as if he might laugh, rather coarsely, and make you feel ashamed. Jess thought it was good food, as good as fried herrings in oatmeal, or stewed lamb with peas, but she would rather have had it on the kitchen table with daylight coming in.

"I'm a bit of a connoisseur about food," said Harold, "and I must say I think this is pretty good; and I'm looking forward to a bit of that trifle I see on the sideboard; and there's something about those crackers . . ." He sniggered, and apologetically put up his serviette in front of his mouth; the crackers were adorned with pictures of girls in very short ballet skirts and with extremely pink legs. Up to now Violet had been too anxious about the success of the food with the others to enjoy it much herself, but this awkward compliment reassured her.

"Yes, it is good," said Adam. Daff was still a bit sulky because she had not got the drumstick.

The brandy round the pudding burnt only feebly, but the pudding tasted all right, and Daff got the threepenny bit.

"Oh, Alfred, look, you've got something. What is it?"

"It's the donkey," cried Alfred, and was the first to burst out laughing, "I knew I'd get the donkey. This is a really discriminating pudding."

After mince-pies, they went on to tangerines and nuts. There were only two nut-crackers, so you had to wait your turn. Conversation started. Fred asked Louie how many of the girls at her school had got a young man, and Louie said that he'd better ask Daff, in as sly a manner as she could manage. Stanley gave a description of the first Christmas he could remember. Harold began telling Jess some infallible method of making money; and Violet asked Adam several times if he was really sure that he had had enough.

In a pause, Adam leaned across to Alfred, and told him that he was just going to change his job. Everyone at the table exclaimed in surprise.

"Whatever for? Have you been sacked? When?"

"At the New Year," said Adam.

"You have given us a surprise," said Violet. "Did Jess know?"

Jess nodded.

"What is the new job?" said Fred.

"Oh, it's a man I know who's got a garage; he wants someone responsible who can do any kind of repairs and look after the whole place when he's not there."

"It doesn't seem a particularly good time for leaving a safe job," said Stanley, "who is he?"

"A man called Thomas, who was in the army. I wasn't sure about it myself at first, but it's been going two or three years now, and seems to be doing all right."

"What are they going to give you?" said Harold.

"More than I'm getting now," said Adam cautiously, "but of course if the show gets on well, I'll get on with it. It's on the main road, but there's not too much competition; and I don't see why we shouldn't make something of it."

Harold had begun to look rather glum. "I envy these people," he said, sighing, "with a chance to choose between one good job and another; there's most of us have only a bad job, or nothing."

"Oh, but you're getting on all right, Harold," said Violet, "I don't see what cause you have to grumble."

"I do," said Edna, "I wouldn't work for a firm like his. They don't pay him any wages, and expect him to live on what he makes in commissions."

"Don't talk about what you don't understand," said Harold. "Haven't you heard there's a depression on? I shall be as right as rain when things look up a bit. And if things are a bit tight just

at the moment, there's no need for you to go giving away trade secrets."

Edna tossed her head, but before she could speak Stanley began a series of remarks about how difficult everything was now, even for people who had managed to put a bit by. He mentioned that he had talked to all his friends about a job for Alfred, and that there really seemed very little hope; though at the same time Alfred *might* have shown more enthusiasm, as it wasn't everyone who had opportunities of getting jobs off his father's friends; and when you looked round at all the people who are out of work and haven't anything extra even at Christmas-time. . . .

But their stomachs were stuffed full. They knew they would have some money next week, and the week after. They would never starve. What was the point of worrying about unemployment, or high rents; you had enough to think about on other days of the year, and this was a holiday. Edna took some nougat. Harold lighted a small cigar, and handed another over to Stanley. "Only got two unfortunately," he said.

"It is intolerable," said Alfred, but he seemed half-asleep.

Jess looked across at Adam. "He will never think the world nice enough for his children," she said to herself sadly.

"I don't know what sort of a job Alfred wants," said Jess afterwards, "but he told me a very funny thing. Said he'd been going round to all the farmers asking if they'd take him on. And of

course they didn't, because of course they don't want anyone extra just now, and anyhow he's not used to it, and wouldn't be strong enough. But I can't think why he wanted to, can you? I should have thought he'd have wanted teaching, or something in an office."

Adam shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't be bothered to think about anything after that dinner.

From the first Adam was pleased with the new job. There was a boy to do cleaning and sell petrol, and Captain Thomas was pretty well occupied with book-keeping and writing letters and talking to customers. So that Adam was almost wholly responsible for repairs.

"It's just what I wanted," said Captain Thomas, "to have someone who could do things on his own. That man I had before may have had a little practice with meccano, but he didn't know a darned thing about this business. I had to do it all myself in the long run, besides all the work in the office, and I must say I found it a bit too much of a good thing. Mind you, I like tinkering about, but a man can't do everything. . . ."

So he left Adam alone, and Adam got on with it; keeping the half-dozen or so cars which were left with them in good condition; and seeing to anything else that came in by chance. He was quite ready to believe that Captain Thomas was a good mechanic, and as he never did enough work to make any gross mistakes, this belief lasted

for some time; but was shaken by the confidence with which, showing off to an owner, he would diagnose the fault in an engine he had not so much as looked at or heard running. Especially as he was often wrong. Still, he didn't bother him often with his bad advice, or waste much of his time. Only when there was someone there, and perhaps it did make a good impression.

"We're doing quite well," said Captain Thomas, "I shall soon be able to get hold of a bigger place."

"It wouldn't be worth extending," said Adam, "till we get our plant a bit more up-to-date."

"Aren't you satisfied with it now?"

"It's all right. It's a lot better than a good many places. But if we want to get more customers, we want to be able to deal with them faster, and space isn't the only thing. I could give you a list if you like. . . ."

"Oh, well, I expect it's a long way ahead yet. It takes a bit of time to get properly started. But when the summer comes and there's more on the road we ought to do quite well."

Adam was determined they should do well. He would listen with satisfaction as the sound of a car he had mended and set off on the road again vanished in the distance. He loved hearing an engine running well; he liked coaxing anything that was smashed or badly treated to do its work again; he liked the bone-setting operations which needed strength and the delicate adjustments which needed skill; and he varied his methods as you might with a child or an animal.

He began reading a great deal, getting all the books he could out of the library, on mechanics and engineering, both particular and general; and he seized every opportunity for examining in detail any make of car with which he was not absolutely familiar.

Everything in the world divided itself into things which worked and things which didn't. The right-hand entrance to the garage, which was on a corner, was definitely one which didn't. He kept urging Captain Thomas to buy up the little piece of garden with the privet hedge, but was always told it was not worth it. He began to suspect that Captain Thomas was not one of the things that worked, either; but the fact that he was paying him good wages seemed as if there was something behind it all.

Fred was now very seldom at home, except to sleep; but since Alfred had come back he had made a point of taking him for bicycle rides on Sunday afternoons, and even tried to introduce him to some of his friends. Alfred was very unresponsive, but Fred stuck to it with amiable stupidity; his earlier admiration for him having changed, now that it was clear how much tougher and stronger he himself was in all the obvious ways, to a feeling of protectiveness. He made a point of creating some clumsy diversion when Stanley held forth to him; and took him out of the way of Violet's whining insistence 'that he would be all right if only he tried to think a bit

more of other people.' Fred was trying too to 'take him out of himself,' but in a slightly less teasing manner. It was however no more successful.

At last he went and asked Jess if she didn't think it would be better if Alfred went and lived with her.

"They're always going on at him," he said, "and he has to share a room with me; and he's got out of the habit. If I snore or anything it bothers him, and keeps him awake."

"We've got a spare room," said Jess, "but I'd have to ask Adam."

"It'd be a good thing if you could. It's a bit awkward at home."

He had pulled the kitten up on to his knee, and with his great red fingers rubbing it so that it trembled with delight. When he paused for a minute it looked up at him as if all its happiness depended on that touch, so that he rubbed again, laughing. He did not have anything more to say. He dropped it suddenly, almost brutally, on the floor, and made off.

Adam considered for a minute or two before answering. He didn't think Alfred was up to much good at the moment, but that didn't make it any better for him living in a place where he didn't fit.

"We could ask him, anyway," he said.

And Alfred came up by chance to see them that evening (Fred had not told him anything). He didn't have much to say for himself.

"What have you been doing to-day?" said Jess, so as to say something.

"Went to see someone Dad knows, who might give me a job. He was an undertaker. Said he didn't want anyone at once, but business might get better in the Spring, and he would let me know."

Jess burst out laughing, and then Alfred laughed too, but bitterly. So they asked him if he would like to come and live with them.

"Could I really?" he said.

"We've got an extra room," said Jess.

"I could pay you something. I've had one or two stories in a magazine I used to write for when I was at Oxford, and if I'm here I expect I should be able to write a bit more. Would it really be all right?" He was looking at Adam.

"Yes, it's all right. It'll be a help if you pay when you can, but . . ."

"One extra person doesn't make *much* difference," said Jess.

"I could do something to help, as well. Make my own bed, or carry back the sacks of potatoes you buy in the market. I'm quite good at that sort of thing."

Jess laughed. "I don't expect I shall be overworked," she said.

By the beginning of March Captain Thomas was beginning to take a more melancholy view of his affairs.

"I've been going into the costs of this place," he said, showing a piece of paper very much

scribbled, "and I'm sorry to say I've come to the conclusion that we're paying you more than you're worth. Not more than you're worth from your point of view mind; but unless we have a bigger volume of business it's not worth it from our point of view, and besides, we can't afford it; at the moment, of course. . . ."

"I couldn't very well get through more work as it is, but if we had the things I spoke to you about . . ."

"Can't afford them, can't possibly afford them. You're just too expensive for us."

"You won't get anyone for less."

"No, that's my trouble," said Captain Thomas, suddenly becoming personal and a little pathetic, "so I was wondering—we get on very well together—if, as a *purely temporary measure*, you'd stay on at a bit less,—a drop of ten shillings a week say,—for the time being, till things pick up. Of course I wouldn't have suggested it if there'd been any other possibility at all, but I don't want to lose you just because of a temporary squeeze, and I'd promise you to raise it again as soon as it was humanly possible."

"Perhaps I'd better go back to my old job," said Adam, though as he said it, he knew it would not be possible.

"I wouldn't stand in your way for a moment," said Captain Thomas. His manner had a trace of eagerness which roused Adam's obstinacy. After all, he was making a good job of it, he knew that, and he didn't want to give up in the middle.

"You must do what you think best," said Captain Thomas, sighing. "It's a hard time for all of us."

Adam went to see his former employers, *in case*, and a few other people. But it was no good. He had to tell Jess that evening that his wages had been cut, and that he couldn't do anything about it.

"But that's damnable," said Alfred, "why do you go on working for him?"

Adam shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. Alfred was always a bit up in the air.

"Wouldn't you really get something else?" said Jess.

"I've tried already."

"Never mind," said Jess, "it's only for a bit. I'll wash the sheets at home, and not take a bus into the town. That would save a bit."

"I'd better go," said Alfred.

"But where? what would you do?"

Adam was looking at him, and saying nothing. He liked having him in the house. He understood what you were talking about, even when you weren't very sure yourself, but were trying to grope out to something a bit wider than the question of higher wages, and a bit nearer home than the old slogan that the Government ought to do something. Alfred understood quite often what you were trying to get at, even though he was an annoying chap, and you couldn't agree with him. Even though he sometimes wouldn't talk for days, and made himself ill (and excited as if he was drunk, or had a fever) with writing late at night;

and hung round the place like a sick cat when he wasn't writing, or excited about anything.

He looked up at Adam.

"You'd better stay," said Adam, "for a bit anyway, till we see how things go. This oughtn't to last long."

"I ought to write quite a lot here," said Alfred, "and I have got through a certain amount. I'm only so horribly lazy; but I ought to get something published soon, and then I'd be able to help."

He had begun a novel and a play at different times; but it had been very difficult to get on with them. It seemed so necessary to say, or at any rate, to know, 'life is this, or that,' and then what you wrote would be a unity, so that the most diverse characters, the most irreconcilable opinions, would be real and of one world. But at this time, although realisations of the nature of life came upon him with power that made him tremble, the truth seemed to slip his grasp too quickly, he had to remind himself of it, so as to think what his characters would say or do. His instinct, his confidence, his beliefs were unsure; he began everything with passion; and then, realising himself left without guidance, put it away. And afterwards tore it up.

He did manage to earn two guineas for a short story. He gave Jess the money with great pride, and showed her the magazine in which the story had come out. She was pleased to have the

money (not that she minded being careful; but she didn't want Adam to go without anything, or feel he was going without), but the story, she thought, was dreadfully gloomy, and she didn't see exactly what was meant to have happened. She showed it to Adam:

'Gerard turned over in his bed. It must have been, he thought, the first time he had moved for seven hours. When his landlady brought breakfast in he had drunk the tea and then turned over with his face to the wall, shutting his eyes so as not to see the wall-paper's mechanical trellis-pattern of yellow-blue leaves and grey-pink roses; dirtied and grey all over, and quite obliterated above the gas-bracket by a brown smoke-stain. When she brought up his lunch (it smelt like a chop with a great deal of fat) and took away the breakfast tray, he had pretended to be asleep, and had not moved. Now, turning over towards the window, he could see through looped lace curtains that it was getting dark. His body ached; the lumpy mattress, and the thin pillow, gave him no comfort. He turned over again, and even lifted himself on his elbow to shake up the sparse pillow-stuffing. The sheets felt cold and damp, as if, he thought suddenly, they were wrapping a corpse. The tomb-dark air crept chillingly against his flesh.

The matches were on the dressing-table by the window, under the mirror which always tilted backwards on its loose-jointed frame; the gas-bracket was above his bed. He worked out what movements would be necessary to make a light; he went over them

in his head, trying to reduce them even beyond a minimum.

But the darkness and the dank, clinging touch of the bedclothes pressed on him. He got up, fumbled for the matches, and lit the gas, awkwardly enough.

The room looked strange. He had not seen it for three or four days, and had forbidden the landlady to dust or tidy it. There was a dirty handkerchief on the mantelpiece, with some books, papers, and stubs of cigarettes, and at the edge of the bed, where the blankets, having slipped sideways, dragged on the floor, was a spatter of crumbs. And the clothes he had worn last time he was up were still bundled on a chair.

There was no warmth in the room, and he was standing on oilcloth; the gas hissed like water out of a pointed tap. He began dressing. This shirt was dirty, but it would do all right. He hadn't another coat or trousers. At the last minute he rejected the dull green tie, and chose instead a red one, which had been hanging by the mirror on the knob at the side (with the screw on it that did not tighten if you turned it round and round for ever).

He went downstairs quietly, he did not want to be asked what he was doing, or to be told that he ought to be in bed. He did not know where he was going, but felt himself led by a purpose which was not to be thwarted. His legs were not weak and trembling any longer, and he hurried as if he had to catch a train.

It was foggy; and he did not know where he was; although he knew still very distinctly which direction

he was to go in, almost as if he were following a trail. He came to the canal. The mist lay so low and thick along it, that he could see only the margin of a stretch of waste land on this side; and nothing of what he knew was on the other; little gardens, and rickety summer-houses, and rotting wooden steps with leaking boats tied up at them. These had all disappeared (they might not now exist) behind the mist. There was only the mist, and on this side the waste land, strewn with bits of wood and metal, broken and fragmentary, yet still with a ghostly suggestion of shape and purpose; the bottom of a bedstead, rimless cart-wheels, and innumerable stoved-in cans.

By one of the locks, right in his path, he came upon a group of people, gathered close together, and quite silent. He approached them with apprehension, but without surprise. Some of them were bent over the water, their hands stretched out, and their bodies taut, as if they were dragging something out. They raised it gradually and with effort, till at last, with a noise of movement no louder than a sigh, they drew back a little, to allow it to be laid on the bank.

"Who is it?" said Gerard, the first to speak, pushing his way through the crowd, which gave way to him like water.

He came to the canal-edge, and looked down. It was a body (he had known it was a body), thin, pale and exhausted, as if after years of suffering and illness, and a frantic struggle against the smooth wall of the lock among the slimy water-weed. The silent men did not touch him; he was dead; there was nothing to be done; their severe, unexpressive eyes were fixed upon

Gerard; who, flinching away from them, looked again intently at the dead stranger.

They moved forward and took him up, and, still in a close crowd, started off almost noiselessly along the bank. Gerard was left unnoticed; and followed, but at a distance; hoping, in this way, to find out.

They must have been walking faster than they seemed to be, and might escape him, so he began to run, and catching up with the last one of them, stretched out his hand to take him by the arm. The man turned, and again looked at him attentively.

"Who is it?" whispered Gerard.

"You don't know?" Gerard turned his head away ashamed.

"Was it a green tie?" he said; "it might have been the slime under the water, or the foggy light."

"Yes, it might have been," the man answered seriously. His lips hardly moved when he spoke. The rest had gone on, and were now disappeared in the thickening mist. He was the only one left; Gerard knew it was only from him that he could find out.

"I might have thought," said Gerard, and broke off, "but obviously it is impossible."

"You must know."

They were now going along together; Gerard from time to time falling, as if missing his foothold. His companion went at an even pace, staring straight in front of him. They came to Gerard's lodging; the stranger followed him to his room, where the gas was still burning.

"What do you want?" he said.

"Who was he?" said Gerard hoarsely. The other

only looked at him sternly, and again he could not meet his eyes.

"I must have been wrong, of course," said Gerard, with bravado, "obviously it's all impossible. It was something about the position, and then I thought I recognised the green tie, and the position, because I hardly saw the face. I suppose you knew the ridiculous thought that went through my mind?"—his voice hardly faltered—"I thought it was myself."

The stranger nodded. "It was myself?" whispered Gerard in horror, "and yet I *am still here, I am the same as ever. I don't feel anything, I am not at all sorry. . . ."*

He spoke quickly, confusedly, and then broke off suddenly. He was empty of all emotion; his senses were numb; he did not feel the grain of the floorboards, or the foggy cold of the air. The man looked at him, his glance moving slowly from head to foot. Gerard went over to the mirror. He reached out to tilt it vertical but seemed not able to touch it; so he raised himself, and peered down into it. There was no one in the room. He saw neither the stranger, nor himself. Daylight, now creeping through the window, had smothered even the leaping shadows in the corners, and the strident gas-flame.

On the knob at the side of the mirror hung his red tie.

Jess passed the story on to Adam, but he put it down in the middle and said he couldn't be bothered.

"It's very exciting in a way," said Jess, "but in rather a funny way."

"I don't like stories much, anyhow," said Adam, but I suppose the people who pay for it know what they want."

"Two guineas seems a great deal. It can't have taken him more than a morning to write."

"Did you like it?" said Alfred, coming in.

"Yes, I did," said Jess, "but I wish it wasn't so gloomy."

"So do I," said Alfred, and shrugged his shoulders, and went out again. Then he came back, and began telling Jess about a place he knew of where there ought to be lilies of the valley in a week or two. Adam was reading the paper, but from time to time laid it down on the table as if too much exasperated.

"What's the matter with it?" said Jess.

"If I had a chap under me," said Adam, "who knew as little about machinery as these politicians know about what people think, and will do, and can put up with, I'd pay him a week's wages to be rid of him."

"I thought you didn't hold with criticising the Government?" said Alfred.

"No, I don't. And the way I look at it is this. Running a country's a job like anything else. Like carpentry, for instance. If a chap's making a table I don't stand about and tell him what length of screw to use, or how he ought to hold his hammer. It's not my job, and he probably knows better than I do. But when his table turns out the wrong height, and you get splinters in your hand, and the legs break off short, then

you just can't call him a carpenter. And it seems to me this Government isn't much of a one, either."

"Well, let's send it away and have another," said Alfred rather sarcastically. Adam shook his head.

"By the time they get to be a Government," he said, "they've told so many lies, and made shift with old ways for doing new things, that they don't know which way up things are standing any more than the others. We want something a lot more different than that."

"Yes, we do. But I wish I knew what."

Captain Thomas was now away a good deal. He had decided that there was a lot of money to be made out of second-hand cars. Adam wasn't so sure, but still thought that perhaps he would have the right knack for it; and the work of the garage got on just as well without him. He started off with some quite clever bits of bargaining, which he was very cock-a-hoop about; the cars which stayed standing about in the yard he didn't refer to. Adam got the impression that if he succeeded in beating a man twenty pounds down, he would take the thing, even if he was still paying twenty pounds too much. Also when he was selling he was inclined to set his figure too high, in the expectation of having to bargain, and so discouraged people from the beginning. Adam did a certain amount of overhauling, but didn't give any opinion unless

directly asked; and Captain Thomas was not the man to ask things directly.

"Pretty good for ten quid," he said, as he drove in with some new acquisition. Adam looked it over.

"What's more, I know some people who are wanting just this kind of thing. I shouldn't be at all surprised if I had it all settled by to-morrow."

Now that he was away a good deal, Adam had to keep the books for short periods. The situation didn't seem so bad as he had feared; but he wished he could have had all the money that was being thrown about to bring the place a bit more up to date.

At the beginning of the summer, just as there began to be a lot more traffic on the roads, another garage was opened within a mile of them.

"That'll halve our turnover," said Captain Thomas disgustedly.

"If it doesn't do more," said Adam, thinking of the awkward run-in, and the shed which needed painting.

"What do you mean?"

"I think we ought to do something to the place. And of course if we could do a bit of widening by the privet hedge, and perhaps have some painting done."

"Oh, all right, I wish you wouldn't bring that up so often. I've told you I'll see to it as soon as I can. Not that I think it makes much difference; so long as we keep up our standard of service, which I will say is pretty good, nothing very

bad can happen to us. And next time Tom's got a couple of hours without anything to do, just send him round with a can of paint and that ought to satisfy you."

Edna did not often go to see Jess, but lately she had dropped in several times, mostly at meals, when Harold was out, and she "couldn't be bothered to cook anything just for herself." To-day she turned up about three o'clock, when Jess was in the middle of cutting out a dress.

"But if you don't mind sitting in the corner and keeping out of the way, it's all right," said Jess.

She did not want to be disturbed in the middle, as the stuff had to be pieced, and that needed careful thinking out, and exact remembering. So she went on pinning and cutting and did not notice Edna much till she started off talking.

"Alfred still with you?"

"Yes."

"I should think you must get a bit fed up with him hanging around all the time; why doesn't he get a job?"

"Can't, I suppose. It's not a particularly good time for getting jobs."

"I don't believe he wants one. I expect he thinks it more comfortable to sponge on his relations. I wouldn't put up with it. It gets on my nerves seeing him always about the place and laying down the law to everyone. Thank goodness he isn't here to-day; I'd 'ave gone straight off."

"I suppose he'll get a job when he can," said Jess, but a little doubtfully.

"When he can get the job that suits his highness, which'll take a long time, I shouldn't wonder. . . ."

"Well, he's not doing you any harm." Jess concentrated again on the cutting out (she mustn't cut two sleeves for the same arm) and Edna was silent. Then she began again.

"Would you mind if we had tea early, Jess. Harold was out, and I hadn't got the energy to make myself any dinner, and now I just feel like a cup of tea."

"Well, if you go and start making it," said Jess (she had finished the cutting), "I'll tidy up these things."

She began folding up the pieces with the thin, rustling pattern-paper still pinned to them. But she couldn't resist just putting the back and front together, and holding the sleeve against the arm-hole. It was a plain bluish green cotton, and ought to look grand with her yellow hair; she shook her hair forward, to remind herself what colour it was, yellow, but with red in it. Adam would like her in this dress, she was quite sure.

She bundled it up, and went out to the kitchen. Edna was standing by the stove, looking if the kettle was boiling, and munching a great hunk of bread and cheese.

"Queer how hungry you can get without noticing it. I'd just fancy an egg to my tea." She

had put on a saucepan and the water was boiling in it. Jess fetched an egg from the larder.

"Sure it's all right?" said Edna.

"Yes, of course."

"Harold's having a bit of a bad time again," said Edna, as they sat at tea; "we've had to go pretty short, I can tell you, some of these days. The rent's so expensive at our place. And when you see other people sponging and whining and getting along fine, it does seem a shame to think that people who do try to pay their way don't seem to get any advantage from it."

"What's Harold doing now?"

"A bit here and there. He doesn't tell me exactly; but judging from the money he gives me it can't be very much. I tried to get a bit of work in the mornings myself; but I didn't like the people. I've been ill, too, my nerves are bad, and that place is so noisy; a regular bear-garden, especially at night. I envy you living out here in the country almost."

"It's nice, but I expect it's more work than your flat."

"Oh, I wouldn't mind the work, if only I had the money to keep the place the way I'd like it. And I worry over it, and then I don't manage to get through so much; and of course Harold doesn't understand how it gets on your nerves being by yourself all day; and you can't spend the whole time dusting and sweeping; and he grudges me the money to make new curtains with; not but what he isn't quite right. And the

worst of it is, I seem to have got behind with the rent the last few weeks."

"Well, if he doesn't give you the money . . ."

"Look here, Jess, I'll tell you straight, and perhaps you'll be able to help me. I wouldn't want much and of course I'd pay it, week by week, or any way you liked. I had to get one or two little things for the house, you know, and something or other for myself; and I knew it wasn't any good asking Harold for it, so I had to borrow it out of the rent money, and thought I'd be able to pay it back the next week. But of course the next week he gave me short money, and I'd told him I'd paid the rent, so I couldn't ask for anything extra; and ever since then it's been worrying me all the time, and I don't seem able to pull it up, and I don't know which way to turn. And I spoke to Mum, but she hadn't got any, and said Dad hadn't either. And there didn't seem anything to be done but come round and ask you. Mind you, I don't like doing it, but I'm sick and tired of pinching and scraping and going short with my food, and all the time it doesn't make it any better. And everyone knows Adam's doing better than anyone else in the family, and that Alfred's doing pretty well out of it; so I thought perhaps you'd help *me*."

"How much d'you want?"

"Ten shillings would help a lot. It's a bit more than that really, but that'd help me to get hold of the rest myself. Could you really let me have it?"

"I don't think I've got it, but I could ask Adam."

"Oh, you'd better not do that. A man wouldn't understand. They stick together, and he might tell Harold or something. You couldn't give me something, without telling him?"

Jess looked in a jar on the mantelpiece.

"I've got about four and sixpence. You could have that."

"Well, that's something, anyhow. I've been worrying about it so, I haven't been able to sleep, and I feel just as if I'd been awake for nights on end. You won't tell Adam?"

"Not if you don't want me to."

"I expect you understand about it really."

Adam was in a very miserable humour when he came in that evening. He was very dissatisfied with his work, and disgusted with himself for having moved to it out of a job which now turned out to have been a better one. Jess said:

"Edna was in to-day. She had such a big tea I was quite frightened, and then it turned out that she hadn't had any lunch. She says she's ill or something, but I suppose she's just a bit lazy and doesn't manage things properly. It's a bit of luck there's any food left in the house."

"Don't go giving away too much. You may want it yourself some time."

"Yes, I suppose we might. But when a person's hungry . . ."

"You didn't lend her any money, did you?"

Jess did not answer, and Adam almost shouted at her:

"Did you lend her any money?"

"She didn't want you to know. What made you think of it?"

"Had a letter from my sister in London who's left her place to get married. This borrowing business seems to be in the fashion."

"Did you send her some?"

"Yes." Adam laughed uncomfortably, and they stood looking at each other.

"Well," said Jess crisply, "when we haven't got anything left we'll have only ourselves to blame. I'm afraid all the people we know are a bit poorer than we are, or they use the money up faster or something."

Alfred had been for a walk and was late for supper; Adam wanted to do something to the wireless, and Jess wanted to get on with her sewing. So they were both rather annoyed that they couldn't get the table cleared.

"I could take it all out, and let him have it in the kitchen," said Jess.

"Oh, I expect he'll be in in a minute. Give him till half-past."

He came in with two minutes to spare.

"Sorry I'm late," he said.

"Oh, it's all right," said Jess, but a little grudgingly. Alfred did not seem to notice, his mind was full of something else.

"What d'you think's going to happen, Adam?" he said.

"Happen to what?"

"Oh, the world."

"I suppose it'll go on, one way or the other."

"That's just what I'm not so sure of. Why should it go on? To how many people is life worth living, do you think? Why shouldn't we all suddenly drop dead in our tracks? Not from famine, not from pestilence, but because we've none of us got a square deal, and we're sick of it."

"People *don't* drop dead," said Jess.

"That's their great mistake," said Alfred, "that's what makes them exploitable. Everyone knows they won't drop dead, or at any rate, not in large enough numbers to affect the efficiency of production, and not in a definite enough manner to rouse much public indignation. So that nobody notices that they are putting all the others in an intolerable situation. It makes me furious that it should be done, but to see people putting up with it makes me simply sick."

"Sometimes you have to take the best of some pretty bad alternatives," said Adam.

"I know that's what you think. What else could you think? Considering the work you're doing for that incompetent buffoon, without even being properly paid for it. It's people like you who make it possible for people like him to exist. It's your fault if you're not being fairly treated; you're asking not to be. . . ."

It seemed that Alfred might have gone on for ever. Jess sat stiffly in her chair, staring at him, her eyebrows drawn together. He did not even

notice that Adam had got up, and was coming over towards him, his lips drawn in, so that they looked thin and close.

"You shouldn't have said that," said Adam, "*you* shouldn't."

Alfred looked up at him, surprised. His egotism, hanging before his eyes like a curtain, was rudely torn down by this angry and lowering figure. Adam seemed bigger than usual and his hands more powerful.

"Isn't it true?" cried Alfred boldly, but his voice sounded a little thin.

"That's for me to decide. But now what about you? What about you getting a job, and doing some work for yourself, and seeing what it feels like? What about you getting out of here?"

"All right," said Alfred, very frigidly, and got up and walked to the door. There he turned, and said:

"I didn't mean it to be taken badly, you know."

Adam had his back to him and did not turn round. Neither spoke. Only Jess gave him a mournful look, which he interpreted as a dismissal even more final than Adam's. He went out.

They sat without speaking for some time; then Jess said:

"I don't know what he'll do. It all coming so suddenly."

"He'll find something. And there's no reason why he shouldn't stay on here for a few days if he has to."

"You didn't mean him to, did you?"

"No, I didn't; but I wouldn't mind."

"If he *can* go at once, it would be a lot better."

"Yes; but you'd better go and tell him, that if he can't, he can stay a bit; only I don't want him for ever."

Jess went upstairs to Alfred's room; it was rather disordered, and she could see that his rucksack was missing from the peg at the back of the door. He was probably two or three miles away, in any direction, by this time.

Next day they had a postcard:

'Sorry about everything; do what you like with my things.'

CHAPTER VII

TRAP IN SLOW MOTION

ADAM was cleaning shoes.

"Didn't I tell you days ago," he called out to Jess, "that your shoes needed mending?"

"Yes, but I forgot."

"Didn't you notice though, when you were out in the rain on Monday?"

"Yes, I did notice a bit."

"Then why haven't you had them mended?"

"It's so expensive; and I've got such a lot of better things to do with the money."

"I'll take them on my way in to work this morning," said Adam firmly.

"Oh, no, please don't bother. They'll last a week or two quite well." Her voice was anxious; so he did not ask her for the money, but decided he could do without cigarettes for a bit and make it up that way.

He also decided to ask Captain Thomas for a rise.

"I've been expecting this," said Captain Thomas grimly. Adam felt he must excuse himself.

"I don't mind taking less over a bad time; but

I don't see why it should get permanent. Those aren't the wages I was engaged for, and I'm not doing any less work."

"Of course you aren't," said Captain Thomas, patting him on the shoulder. "I've nothing whatever to complain of about the work you do; but you mustn't think you're the only person that's getting stung. All my money's in this business; and I can't afford to pay out anything that I'm not earning. I'm sorry if this isn't the right job for you, but there it is. I'm not getting as much as I hoped out of it either, but I'm hanging on, and hope to get it back in the end. Of course it was an awkward position for me, but I gave you the opportunity of choosing, and I hoped we'd manage to rub along till things got better. But of course if you don't want to do that, there's nothing to be said. . . ."

"I'm married," said Adam, "and I've had my brother-in-law dependent on me. . . ."

"Yes. Oh, I quite understand. I've been thinking a good deal myself about how we could economise. And I'd even come to the conclusion that I might have to make shift with the boy for a bit, and save something on wages. I only hesitated about that because I didn't want to see you at a loose end. But of course, now you've suggested it yourself, it's quite a different thing; and I don't deny that this would be a convenient time. . . ."

Adam stood silent, a hopeless fury creeping over him. Captain Thomas smiled and nodded,

and agreed (no one having spoken) that it was all very regrettable, but what was one to do?

What am I to do? thought Adam, as he left the garage for the last time; as he came away from an interview with his former employers; as he gave a number of particulars to a not particularly encouraging clerk at the labour exchange; as he looked through advertisements at the public library among a number of other men, all obviously a lot more accustomed to it than he was. But he never really thought he would be a long time out of work. He thought, it will be a bit awkward for a few weeks, but if I just keep my eyes open, and go round to all the possible places, I won't be long without a job of some sort. He was mostly exercised because Jess wouldn't be able to have the summer dresses she had been planning; and he wouldn't be able to start the new and better wireless set which had seemed almost a necessity. For some weeks he did job-hunting in quite a cheerful frame of mind, every morning when he went out he thought he would be certain to get something; and Jess wished him luck in a way that showed she was certain of it too. Every evening she rushed up to him with an expectant "Well?", and when he shook his head, said confidently that he would be sure to have better luck to-morrow. But then she suddenly stopped asking him; and he found it impossible to repeat again and again the same words, "no luck." They would hardly speak to each other, because of not wanting to say this one most important

thing; until at last Jess, thinking that perhaps after all there may have been something, some indirect news, or some promise for the future, would ask in a thin voice, "Heard of anything?" or Adam, wanting to share his disappointment, would describe how he had walked five miles and found out that the position had been filled six weeks ago, or how the Employment Exchange had sent fifty men after one place.

One morning he said: "I'm going to have a good day at the garden; it needs a lot doing to it." And this was the first time since he lost his job that he had not gone out looking for work. It was a good day, fresh and sunny, and he got a lot more satisfaction out of digging and planting and tieing, than he would have from walking round all day, appealing for work to people who always turned him away. He still kept his eye on the papers, and didn't let them forget him at the Exchange, and took trouble to keep in touch with all the men he knew anywhere there might some time be a vacancy for him. But he had accepted the fact that he was 'having a holiday,' and seized the opportunity for doing a lot of odd jobs he hadn't had time for before. When he had pulled the garden together a bit, he decided to do up the bedroom—the only room that hadn't been done when they came in—and after getting some advice from a chap he knew in the trade, started off on it with enthusiasm. The walls he distempered a light green, and pasted a dado of fruit round it. Jess said it was very pretty, but couldn't

he manage to paint the ceiling some colour like yellow? He was a bit doubtful, not only about the effect, but also about the difficulty of painting a ceiling.

"I wish you'd told me before I did the walls," he said.

"That'll be all right," said Jess, and began to cover up everything that had been left in the room with newspaper, "but you'd better wear your overalls."

It was very difficult doing the ceiling, it gave him a bad crick in the neck, and there were a few marks on the dado where the distemper had dripped down, and he had not noticed it soon enough to wipe it off properly. But when the furniture was uncovered again, it looked quite a good job, and Jess loved the colour.

"It's something worth opening your eyes for," she said the next morning.

He was full of ideas for things he wanted to do, and in particular he had got that very good idea for the wireless set that he wanted to try out. But when he made a list of the materials he would need he found that it would cost a lot too much.

"We must have spent a good lot on seeds," he said, "and I suppose the distemper wasn't cheap either. . . ."

He brooded for a moment, then called to Jess that he would not be in till evening, took Alfred's old bicycle from the shed, and set out to see if things were any better outside the town. But he found nothing. The next few days he went out

again, methodically calling at all the garages and engineering works within a distance of about fifteen miles.

"But you couldn't go all that far?" said Jess, "not every morning and evening?"

"I might have to."

But this exploration, and the disappointment, tired him. When Jess said that she wanted another table for the kitchen, he was pleased to have a reason for staying at home, and started on it at once. It turned out a good solid-looking table, though a little clumsy, and Jess was delighted with it, and said, why shouldn't he make a great deal of furniture for the whole house? Adam looked at the little table in a less friendly way, and said:

"There's no difficulty about making things; but it comes too expensive."

So things were difficult; but at the same time, they knew they could think themselves lucky. Harold was now getting very irregular and meagre payments; Stanley, whose income came partly from the money he got when he sold his business, and part from a legacy of Violet's, which had both been invested in depreciating stock, had quite a good excuse for his suspicious curiosity about how every penny in the house was spent; and Adam's sister now wrote almost regularly for help; relating each time some extremely special circumstance which it was very difficult to resist; a baby having pneumonia; a threatened ejection; her husband's

panel money delayed. When the cold weather started, it was worse.

"It wouldn't be so bad," said Jess, "if we were in a smaller place; but you have to use such a lot of coal; and even if I go out and collect wood, when I've spent a whole afternoon on it, it burns through in no time."

"It's cold to-night," said Adam, and pulled his chair closer to the fire. He was frowning. He liked this place, but if they were going to freeze the whole winter . . . But he put this thought away from him, and opened the paper.

"I was thinking," said Jess, "that perhaps we ought to move. This house is rather expensive, and it's bigger than we need."

Adam moved in his chair restlessly. How could he tell if he was going to get work or not? After all, he might get some to-morrow.

"But it's good value for the money; and look what we've done to it. And the amount of stuff we've got in the garden."

"I wouldn't like to go either," said Jess, "but if we have to go short on other things . . ."

"I may get work to-morrow," said Adam; "there isn't any special *reason* why I shouldn't get work to-morrow just as well as any other day." This was the prelude to another bout of feverish job-hunting, without any result.

Soon after Christmas, his insurance finished up, and he went on the Means Test. He was told that the house was a lot too big for man and wife, and that he could easily let off a room. Possibly

some furniture could also be dispensed with. His application was deferred.

"Edna was asking me if they couldn't come in with us," said Jess, "but I think I'd rather get some smaller place."

"So would I," said Adam, "we'd better see about it." He looked round gloomily. "It wouldn't fetch much," he said, "if we sold the lot. I suppose it would keep us for three weeks, but we'd have to sell it at a loss."

"I don't see why we *should* sell it," said Jess.

"I expect they thought I'd bought the wireless," said Adam, with momentary pride.

"If we move to somewhere smaller, we'll have to sell something, or there won't be room."

"We'd better start looking at once."

So while Adam made the last efforts to get some work which might save them in the nick of time, Jess, already secretly despairing, went round looking for a flat or a cottage. She tried the house-agents, who were fairly civil to her, but made it clear that they had very little to do with any property at a price she would be able to pay. She went to the Municipal Housing Office where a very nice young lady told her that people who had had their names down three years were just about beginning to get houses on the Corporation Estates; and she read through the advertisements in the Public Library.

These last seemed the most hopeful. Flats were going at ten shillings even if they weren't self-contained, and in the basement or the attic.

But when she went to look at them the situation seemed less encouraging. The basement ones had stone floors mostly, and were often damp; and the others were in very bad repair, and always seemed to have something which made them quite impossible. Harold came round and again asked if they couldn't get down their expenses by sharing.

"You could let us one of your rooms," he said, "and we'd share the kitchen. We're used to managing with that kind of thing, and you'd still have your bedroom and sitting-room to yourselves, and it'd help you with the rent. And it ought to work out cheaper for us than anything else we've got hold of. Now do be sporting; I don't see what you've got to be afraid of."

"We're going to move as soon as we can get a place," said Jess coldly.

"Why's that? You know you won't do any cheaper than by sharing this with us."

"Very likely not, but we like being on our own. Besides, this is too expensive for us, anyway, and if you wanted to go away some time, we'd be landed again."

"Oh, all right." Harold went off in a bit of a huff, but turned at the gate, and shouted: "Let me know if you change your mind."

"If you don't mind waiting," cried Jess, and laughed more sarcastically than usual.

Adam came in very weary. "Found anything?" he said to Jess.

"Well, I've seen two which are just possible," she said, "though they aren't either of them very

nice. One's in a basement; at least, it's a basement in front, and then at the back opens out on to a kind of yard; that's got three rooms, and quite a big scullery, and of course it's bigger than we need; the people who are in it now have got six children. And that's ten shillings. The other one's two rooms at the very top of a house in the middle of the town; and there's a gas-stove on the landing. The worst part of that is that you have to go downstairs for water, and it's a good way. But I think you'd get more sun there than in the other, and it looks brighter somehow. Besides, it's only seven and ninepence."

Adam sighed heavily. "I suppose we've got to do it," he said.

Jess nodded.

"Shall I come and look at them," he said, "or do you know which you want?"

"I know which I *don't* want," said Jess, "and that's the cellar. Let's take the other."

"To think that the first thing which made us think of moving was the cold," said Jess miserably, as they sat by a fire where all the heat seemed to be sucked up the chimney, and all the smoke driven into their faces.

"We'll get to know how to manage it in time," said Adam.

Jess spoke about it to the landlord's agent.

"Yes," he said, "the last people complained about it, and we had a cowl put on; but they said that made it worse, so in the end we had it taken

off again for them. I hadn't been hearing so much about it lately. I think Mrs. Sylvester must have done something to it. I should try the sweep."

So Jess got the sweep, and he admitted the chimney was dirty. But he also said it was too short and the wrong shape.

"But you'll only get the smoke when the wind's in one direction," he said.

"Would you think a cowl would do any good?"

The sweep shook his head.

"Sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't; but I'm not much of a believer in them myself. Once a chimney's made bad, it just goes on being bad whatever you do to it; just the same as with children."

He shook his head again, evidently ready to start on some philosophical talk, but Jess brought him up short.

"But isn't there anything to be done?"

"There might be something that might do it," said the sweep, "but you can't tell till you try. And so far as I can see, there's been a good deal tried on this chimney."

He looked towards the fireplace in a commiserating manner, as if it were the victim. Then he collected his brushes and went off.

The wind appeared to be in the same quarter for two or three days more, and the sour smoke continued to puff out smotheringly; then it was suddenly all right again. The agent said, "I'm glad it's all right," as if that settled the matter

once for all. Jess began to feel more at home; she had been afraid they might have to move again at once. But the place was not really comfortable; it was draughty all over, and the bedroom was a little damp, and the gas-stove on the landing, even after she had scrubbed off unbelievable quantities of ingrained dirt, still sent out queer smells into every corner. She could hardly bear to think of the other house, where everything had been so tidy and clean, and smelt of country air; or of the garden, where things would be just beginning to grow. Adam had told her last spring that he was going to try and get some snowdrops up by the end of January.

But she could not talk about it to him; and kept herself as busy as possible cleaning the place and settling in. There was a lot to be done, and although, after the expense of the move, they couldn't afford anything new, she contrived to make new curtains by piecing together the old ones. Then she noticed that Adam was happier. It was partly because his money had come through so that now, after a period of panic and ineffective anger, he knew he had something regular although insufficient. But mostly because he had at last got something to do. What was more, it wasn't just occupations to keep yourself from thinking, it was things that had to be done, and really were useful. Things like a shelf by the gas-stove for the saucepans, and nails for the wooden spoon, and the whisk, and the dish-mop. And a wide shelf for boxes, and odd things they didn't use

much (Jess wouldn't have them under the bed); an electric bell; and, after going a bit short on food so as to buy the wood, a window-seat for the sitting-room, so that they could see something besides sky out of the small atticy window.

"I wish we hadn't wasted all that money on the other house," he said, "I'd like to do a lot of painting here. That wood looks awful; I can't feel I've finished it. Could we spare sixpence for a pot of paint?"

Jess counted their money—only three and ninepence left and four days to go. She spread it out on the table.

"We've hardly any food in the house, and we shan't get any more money till Friday. Why don't you leave it till next week, then it'll be easier."

"All right," said Adam regretfully, and went round looking where, if there was any paint over, it would be needed most.

"It would pay in the long run," he said, "to get a bit more paint, and do the thing properly."

"You've got to keep alive every day," said Jess, "as well as fixing things for the year after next."

After four days of necessary idleness he felt rather different. He gave the whole of his money to Jess, without comment.

"Aren't you going to keep sixpence for the paint?"

Adam shook his head.

"Sixpen'oth of paint's a lot of use in a place

like this. I'm fed up with trying to patch over it. It's getting me down."

Jess laughed angrily, they could afford despair less than anything, but she did not want him to know she was afraid.

"Aren't you even going to paint the window-seat? It just looks silly like that, just like something a child's put together. Why can't you do that, anyhow?"

"I'm not going to," said Adam.

Jess laughed again mockingly.

"Who'd 'ave thought you'd turn idle?"

"A lot of encouragement I get not to be idle."

He was so still he seemed like a carved man or a mummy. Even his lips hardly moved, and seemed to move unwillingly as if controlled by some force outside this body. Jess felt the world crumbling. She rushed up to him, took him by the shoulders, and shook him roughly backwards and forwards. But it was worse to feel his numbness even, than to see it. She broke away crying.

"That's supposed to do some good, is it?" he said, and went out of the room. She heard him going downstairs.

She was so angry with him, she felt she could hardly bear his coming back; and yet she listened all the time for his step. By the evening, she longed for him to come. "It was beastly of him," she thought, "but so was I; and I suppose it's worse for him than for me, because it seems a bit more like his fault."

But when he did come, he was adopting what

was so evidently a deliberate 'natural' manner that she was furious again. She tried to recapture the docile and kindly feelings she had had before he arrived, and at last, unable to bear the alternation of silence and conversation, said:

"You know I'm sorry, Adam."

"Good."

"Oh, all right then, I'm not sorry, if that's all the difference it makes to you."

He looked at her for the first time that day, then came over to her, and put his arm round her shoulder, and said dully:

"It doesn't seem to make much difference what we are. We're caught."

"But *I* didn't do it. Don't blame me."

"Who said I blamed you? You just can't expect a man to be particularly cheerful."

"I don't expect you to be cheerful. But I don't see why I should be hated because there's something wrong with the world." She was leaning now against his shoulder, though there wasn't much comfort in it.

"I don't hate you."

She wriggled round and threw her arms round his neck.

"Really?" she said, now laughing again.

His arms tightened round her.

"Anyhow, not all the time?" she said, comically raising her eyebrows.

"No, not all the time."

But it couldn't go on. Jess sometimes felt that

if there was another week of it, even another day, her life and Adam's would just die out. But it went on, for days and weeks and months. But we can't have more than a year of it, thought Jess. A year, nobody could stand. We should die or something. But she was so occupied in thinking out how to get through the next day, and then the day after, that she didn't have much temptation to look into the future, and tried not to.

Soon after the move, she had got some odd jobs of work, cleaning, and some mending to do at home; but when the Committee heard of this, they cut Adam's money, so that they were no better off in the end. During that time, Adam had set himself to do housework, and with his usual energy had devised sensible and labour-saving methods. But when it turned out that her work wasn't worth the time and shoe-leather, and she was home again all day, he entirely lost interest in it, and didn't even bring up the coal, which he had always done hitherto, unless he was asked. He seemed to have sunk into a misery blacker and deeper than ever; and Jess thought almost that she would never see him again. He had noticed lately that the other men who read the advertisements outside the library, those men whom he was accustomed to thinking of as 'chaps who never did any work,' were no worse than he was. He himself wore the same kind of clothes, a rubbed and misshapen suit, with a muffler, or at best a frayed collar; he himself had their expression of resentful and dispirited patience; he also, as they

did, read doggedly down the columns, expecting nothing. He also was a chap who never did any work.

Then at last unexpectedly he got a job. A stupid job, not what he was used to or did specially well, not very well paid, and only lasting ten days. But it was something. One of the ladies Jess had worked for was ill, and she wanted her garden, which she generally did entirely herself, dug over, and tidied up in general.

"I've been away," she said, "and it's got into an awful state; I can't bear it. And now I'm not allowed to lift a trowel for fear my heart stops; so I'm absolutely in despair; and the gardener we used to have, before I took it over, has been snapped up by someone else, the brute."

"If you tell me what you want done . . ." said Adam.

So she told him, sitting in chaise-longue in the vivid early summer sunshine, and reading or knitting at the same time. She seemed to have the faculty of knowing what he was doing even when her eyes were on her work or her book, and would cry, as she raised her head:

"No, no, not like that. Oh, dear, if only I could *show* you."

Still, he was earning some money, and that was good for his self-respect. It wasn't much use otherwise, because she only kept him for ten days, and then he had to sign on again at the Labour Exchange, and wait for some days before he got his money.

"Whatever you do, you lose on it," he said, as he watched Jess mending his trousers which had gone through at the knees. She went on sewing without looking up, for she had the feeling that if once she were to admit this she would be entirely lost, powerless to keep life going, to cook or sweep, to think out how to spend this shilling, and the twopence farthing left over from yesterday; powerless even to walk or breathe. Her attitude rebuked him for forcing it on her.

"I could only get three-and-six for the wireless set," he went on, "and there's quite fifteen bob's worth of stuff in it, not counting the work. I wonder what good they make out it is, keeping us short of money, and making us sell our stuff at a quarter its value."

"We couldn't have afforded to keep it," said Jess.

"Oh, I know it's all for the best really," he scoffed.

"I didn't mean that. You know I didn't. But we *can't* be too miserable."

"Doesn't do much good being happy either. Only makes you look silly."

"I wish I were happy."

"If you were, you'd be ready to lock up in a lunatic asylum."

This was one of the days when they could not speak without hurting, without meaning to hurt; but at night, silent and dimmed, they lay close, and had some comfort. They shrank from passion, which now, corrupted by a morbid desire to

attain momentary forgetfulness at any cost, could not be satisfied; and drove them to further cruelties and unhappiness. Day by day they became a little weaker in spirit and body, a little more bitter; and in their weakness and disappointment their creative forces froze up, leaving them incapable of any outward movement beyond this thin and hardly human physical sympathy; which was their only comfort. Adam had become as secret and indifferent as a cat. Jess, feeling herself at all points powerless, was tormented by inexplicable longings, like a mother whose son will soon leave her.

Jess had never encouraged visits from her family; and since the move they had given up making any effort to see her. This did not come as a definite break, because even before the move their house was not quite so much of a refuge as it had been.

"It's no fun going to see Jess now," Edna had complained to Harold, "she's got so stingy about giving you food, and often she has nothing in the house but bread and margarine. Besides, they're so wrapped up in their own troubles, not a thought to give to anyone else's—you'd think Adam was the first man who'd ever lost his job from the way he goes on, just sitting about and looking gloomy and not saying a word."

But now she was feeling a bit low, and thought it might take her out of herself if she went to take a look at their new place. So she dragged herself up the long staircase (she knew it was a top flat)

and knocked at the first door. Nobody answered, so she knocked again very impatiently, and at that Jess came out of another door . . .

"Why, Edna . . ."

"Oh, there you are. I thought I'd just pop round."

"I'm sorry I didn't hear you before, that's the cistern-room. Come in."

They went and sat down; and then Jess jumped up and said she'd make a cup of tea though it was a bit early. They couldn't find much to say to each other, so Jess bustled about, and Edna sat in a chair by the window, trying to feel what breeze there was.

"You are up in the sky here," she said.

"Yes, it's nice in a way, but it gets stifling on summer nights. And cold in the winter too."

Edna looked round critically.

"You must have been sorry to leave the other place."

"Oh, I was," but as she said it, Jess could hardly remember what it had been like there. She thought she must have dreamed it, and really have lived all her life in these hot cramped rooms. She was silent. It was easier now they had the tea, they didn't feel so much that they ought to talk.

"Well, how's life?" said Edna, passing her cup.

"No work still. How's Harold?"

"Off and on same as ever. Keeps having schemes, and with one or two occasionally that

he doesn't lose on we get along all right. But it's this idea of having a baby that gets my goat."

"You aren't going to have a baby, are you?"

"You must be the only person who doesn't see it the minute they set eyes on me. But you always were an innocent; you must have been pretty lucky not to have had one yourself. I only hope it turns out as well as the rest of us. Here's Dad worrying himself and Mum into the grave, and Fred got a girl into trouble, and Alfred disappeared, and Daff the only one who's got any money, and spends it all on her back. Still, I suppose there's always hopes. Perhaps it'll be a boy, and be Prime Minister, you never know." This idea appealed to her. She laughed, and rubbed her eyes, and said: "That'd give Harold the surprise of his life.

"There's only one thing bothering me," she said, "but it's very awkward. I've let out all my dresses as far as they'll go, and I haven't anything extra to buy anything really suitable. It just popped into my head, as you're bigger than me, that you might have something I could fix up to last me out."

"I haven't got many dresses," said Jess.

Edna sighed. "I don't know what I am to do. I can't go about with the seams all splitting open."

"I've only got two," said Jess, and went into the next room to fetch them. One was of pink linen, the other cotton with a green and blue pattern on it.

"Oh, that's sweet," cried Edna, "but I don't see how the pink one goes with your hair."

"It's quite nice. My hair is more yellow than red, you know."

"You can't be too careful, with red hair," said Edna primly. She went on examining the dresses. The pink one was the newest.

"I'd be ever so grateful if you could lend it to me, just for the time."

"I think I'd have to sell it to you," said Jess slowly; "you see I'd almost *have* to make myself another."

"Oh, well, if you'd have to do that, of course I wouldn't dream of taking it. I wouldn't have asked for it if I'd thought you couldn't spare it." Jess took the dresses away, in case Edna should change her mind; in most ways she was clearly just the same as ever.

"I wonder what's happened to Alfred," she said, coming back; "have you heard anything of him since he went away?"

"No I haven't. We all thought you'd be the ones to know. Mother did get a letter from him, but you know the way he writes, and she couldn't manage to read the address. Besides, that was a long time ago. It was somewhere in London."

Jess suddenly thought it would be nice to hear something about Alfred, and know how he was getting on. She wondered how you could set about finding a person who was somewhere in London. But she did not have long to wait, for in a few days she got a letter from him, unreason-

ably delayed by having been addressed to the other house. It didn't say much; only that he was well, and seemed to be getting on all right; and that he hoped Adam wasn't having too much trouble with Captain Thomas. Jess answered it at once.

. . . We are not getting on very well, because Captain Thomas gave Adam the sack soon after you went away; and since then he has not had any work except one fortnight. We had to move house, and this is our address now. It is not very comfortable but better than a cellar which is what quite a lot of people have to live in here. All the others are well, but I think everyone is worried; it is a difficult time. And the worst of it is having the men about the house all day, which makes them miserable and it gets in the way. I do not know what will happen when the winter comes and we have to buy coal. . . .

The washing was hanging up in both rooms. Jess hoped to get it down before Adam came in, but she was so busy writing that she forgot; and only remembered when she heard him swearing when he caught his head in the damp clothes hung up in the passage. But he was not angry, and helped her to take them down.

"I had a letter from Alfred to-day."

"From Alfred? What does he say? Let's see."

He read the letter slowly. Jess could not imagine what he found in it. It had seemed so

short and almost dull to her. She was more surprised than ever when he raised his head and she saw in his eyes a look of excitement and readiness which had not been there for months.

"I oughtn't ever to have stayed on here," he cried, "that was where I was wrong."

"Are you going to London?" she said alarmed.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know where's the place to go to, but I'm going to clear out of here."

"By yourself?"

He said slowly, "Yes, it'll have to be by myself. I don't know where I'm going. I've got to find somewhere where I can live, and a way of living, and till I can do that, I wouldn't be any good to you or anyone."

"Oh, Adam, you *are* some good to me."

He pushed her gently and cruelly away.

"Not really. I've got to go and find something different, we can't go on like this for ever."

Jess could not imagine being without Adam.

"Couldn't I come with you?"

"No, that would be silly. You'll get on all right here by yourself. There's a lot of people who'll give you work, and there'll be no one to take the money back again through me. And then as soon as I find anything I'll come back to you, or write and tell you where I am, and then you can come. . . ."

He spoke very simple and reasonably.

"But what happens if you never find anything?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't you bear being with me any longer, Adam?"

"I can't bear seeing things like this, and not doing anything."

"But doesn't it make it better, the two of us being together?"

"Sometimes it makes it better, but in a lot of ways it makes it worse," he said obstinately. Then, looking down at her sad alarmed face, was sorry.

"Oh, it does make it better. You've been good. But I *must do something*."

"But why is there more likely to be work somewhere else? Why shouldn't there be some work here, that you've just missed by accident?"

"I've looked pretty thoroughly."

"But not lately."

"No, I haven't," said Adam, still very reasonably, "perhaps I might try once more. I tell you what, I'll look round here for a week, and then if I've not found anything . . . That be all right?"

"Yes," she said woodenly. This was no victory. Still, chance might still put things right; she told herself that they had had enough bad luck. He would get something this time. He was kept at home, but not in the way she hoped. He caught influenza and was in bed for ten days. When he got up he was so weak that he could hardly walk from one room to the other; and his recovery was very slow. There was not much money, but she could not resist buying him delicacies, and specially nourishing food; so she had to sell some

of their things; the wardrobe, which now had so few clothes in it that they could easily be hung on a few pegs behind a curtain; and the table the wireless set had stood on; and the chair in the bedroom that they never used. She didn't get much for them; and most of it had to go in half-crowns to the doctor who told her rather shamefacedly (since it was true, but he knew it was very little use saying it) that Adam should have milk and eggs.

Jess remembered what Adam had looked like when she first knew him, and he was now in comparison so thin and small and pale lying in bed, that she could have cried. But she hoped secretly that he had given up the idea of going away; he said nothing about it. He did not say much to her at all. She felt also crushed by his illness, so that she moved less lightly. As soon as he could drag himself out he started going for walks from which he came back white and trembling, but saying proudly "I'm getting on." She was so anxious when he was out that she waited with agony for his return; but when he was there his silence oppressed her, and the thought of his purpose, now gathering strength with the recovery of his body, horrified her.

He was finished with this kind of half-life; he was filled with a violent and disruptive disgust. She with a dumb sorrow, cramped and pertinacious. When a piece of furniture was sold, she at once altered the arrangement of the rest, so that its absence would be less noticeable. Adam made

no remark about these shifts, but on each occasion looked quickly round the room, scornfully assessing this present reach of his own failure, discounting her (as it seemed to him) useless and inadequate evasions. But she persisted, setting her powerful and ingenious will against this necessity of his, to confront fate naked. She did not see possibilities except out of present material; and his imagination was fixed on possibilities for which these present materials did not serve him. Their destinies diverged, for she worked to hold everything together, and protect him from the unknown. He, to set out for the unknown, cracking his way out of the present shell, which was crumbling anyhow. She was not part of himself, but part of his outside, detaining him. He could not settle with himself how that had happened.

"Because you used to be so brave."

"When I was a girl," said Jess, thinking.

And then, as if suddenly, "Will you never find what you want?"

"It isn't what I want existing like this," he said angrily, sweeping his arm round. "I can't make myself happy in that way."

"If you must you can."

"No."

"Then what else?"

"How can I tell? Anything. I don't mind. Anything not this."

They knew he would go anyhow; but he wanted her to agree, to send him. Since he had seen the possibility of action, he came alive again; and saw

her no longer as a too-familiar figure in a darkening landscape, but as a person—a person in whom his spirit lived in some way, although she could perversely obstruct him. He remembered how it had been sleeping with her, and wondered how he could waken on this different plane her eager and positive acquiescence. The space of the room was between them.

"You see, I have to *try*."

Jess mournfully shook her head. "I want to see, but I don't. Things are not desperate. And we can live more cheaply together."

She would not look at him because she did not want to give in to his emaciated body (rousing her pity) or to the new eager look which reminded her of everything she had before loved in him.

"I don't understand," she said obstinately.

"But, you see, things will get worse and worse this way. It's no good. We shall get sick and wretched, and make ourselves angry, and each other."

"But what are you going to do to make it better?"

Adam laughed suddenly.

"I don't know, yet. Will you only believe it when you see it?"

Jess moved her hand over her eyes.

"I don't understand how you can believe in things you can't see," she said, "can you?"

"Oh well, you can believe in them till you do see them."

"But it's all so imaginary. We've so little, and

you throw away what we have got. Why can't we make the best of it? We haven't ever been too miserable, have we?"

"No, we haven't been too miserable," said Adam more gently, "but if we let it go on too long, we shall be."

"Well, then, you must go, I suppose . . ." said Jess unwillingly.

"Yes, of course I must go," said Adam, his eyes growing brighter, pleased that perhaps her mood was turning. "That's all right really, isn't it?"

"No, no, no," said Jess obstinately, "I can't want it. I have to think it silly, and fanciful."

"Oh well . . ." Adam went out into the streets, his shoulders hunched.

Jess looked after him rather sullenly, because she had half hoped he would force her to agree with him; and yet relieved, because it was important that this battle should have a solution precisely its own.

There was only bread and dripping for supper, and Jess was almost glad Adam wasn't back for it. She had her supper and then went to bed, it was so cold in the kitchen without a fire. It was cold too under one blanket in bed, but she curled herself closely together, and soon stopped shivering.

Adam came in quietly; but he was numb from the wind and opened the door very clumsily so that she was roused. But she needed so much to be alone, that she kept her eyes closed, and lay as still and stiff as death. Adam undressed in the

dark, and crept in between the soft cold threadbare sheets, clenching his teeth to prevent them chattering. Generally they slept close together, and it was not quite so cold. Jess tried to keep herself drowsy, and not to feel how Adam, prepared and eager for the morning, forced himself to sleep by determination, so as to be strong for it.

He stretched himself out into a relaxed and restful position, and then Jess heard his breathing go soft and even. She felt barricaded out by his complacence and self-sufficiency, and lay beside him clenched up like a fist. She knew that he must go and she knew also that she must let him go, but she did not know how. She tried to persuade herself (her passionate and violent instincts) in his favour. People must act for themselves, they must do what they think right themselves, nobody can claim (I can't claim) anything from anybody. People must be allowed to do what they want, and then see.

Yes, she would let him go (seeming to like it) and then he will be punished and come back. It will be a good thing if he is *very* unhappy. I hate him anyhow, and it will be a good thing to get rid of him.

But if only there was some way of making him stay happily. We could be happy, if he was only not so obstinate, and so grounded in his miseries. Even his sleep (so easy, so inaccessible) was defiance. Jess, half minded to wake him, stretched out her hand and touched his side. He moved towards her in his sleep, and put his hand on hers,

gently and easily, as if at once grateful and unsurprised. She almost laughed out loud. He thinks, does he? that he can thrust me away and yet have me near. But that is not possible. It is not possible. I don't hate him, I want to be kind to him, but that is not possible. She took her hand away, decisively, though not suddenly, and cowered at the extreme edge of the bed, like a fox in a cage, retreating to the farthest corner. Very well, she decided, if he is acting for himself, I will act for myself; I see that I can hope for nothing more from him. He sighed, and half-turned away from her. Away, that's right, she thought, and went angrily to sleep.

In the morning they had breakfast at the usual time, and then he set about his preparations. He had decided only to take a few things in his pocket.

"Weren't there some thick socks that Alfred left?" he called. "Where are they?" Jess would not answer. Why can't he look after his own socks, if he's so clever at looking after his own life? She went on washing dishes, imagining that she just couldn't be bothered to answer him, and that she was just having a little sarcastic joke. But she frowned heavily, and her lips were pressed together as if against no ordinary force; and even so, she could not prevent herself hearing him routing about, and this exasperated her.

"Try the box on the corner shelf," she called derisively.

He came out ready, his pockets bulging.

"I must go in a minute," he said.

"Well, there's one person will be glad to have you out of the house," said Jess.

"We must do something about money," he said, and took out of his pocket all the money they had—twenty-six shillings in silver and four pennies. He counted it slowly. Jess thought that he was trying to avoid looking at her. He didn't want the bother of knowing that she was unhappy.

"I'm glad you're pleased," he said sarcastically, in the middle of counting. He can see that I'm nearly crying, thought Jess, and wants to taunt me.

"That's thirteen and twopence for each of us," he said. He put one pile into his pocket, and pushed the other towards her along the table.

"I don't want your horrible money," said Jess. He was so nearly gone that he seemed almost transparent, as if the picture of the empty room had been put on top of this one. It was the very last minute, Jess told herself, and she could do nothing but twist up her face, and shoot out spiteful words at him. I am lost, she thought, there is no good in me, and no good I can do, and I shall be abandoned for ever. He stood looking at her pile of money on the table.

"You'll be late," said Jess harshly.

"For what?"

"How should I know?"

He began moving to the door. She leant against the dresser with her head turned away from him, so as not to see. She thought he had gone, and cried out:

"Adam, I don't mean to be wicked." She turned to look quickly, and saw that he had only moved half a step. On his face was a look of sorrow and bewilderment.

"Oh!" she cried, as if surprised by a stranger, yet running forward to him, as if welcoming after long absence; realising that his will towards her was good; that it was this new hope which had made it good; that she could let him do what he wanted. She saw that he looked at her kindly, and hid her face, ashamed and happy. She felt weak and happy, as if after great pain.

"Adam, I don't mean to cry." She thought tears would perhaps disgust and frighten him, but he held her closer, and she cried, relievingly, as if to wash away the final traces of her misery. As she cried, she could feel his strength nourishing and renewing her like sunlight. Her anger against him, the humiliation of helplessness with herself, flowed out of her. She looked up smiling, and saw Adam, looking down, at peace with her and himself, smiling.

"Adam, your cheeks are quite wet with my tears. Did I really have as many tears to cry out as that?"

Jess wiped his cheeks and chin, and afterwards her own eyes. He stroked her hair, and said only:

"Is it all right?"

"Yes, it's all right. I don't know quite what you did, but you made it all right." She kissed his palm, and folded the fingers across it.

"That's a testimonial that you can keep for ever to remind you how clever you are," she said, mocking, "and now you must go."

"Yes, I must go now," said Adam, and did not move.

"I could give you some bread," said Jess, "but there isn't anything else."

"I'll take some bread."

"Good-bye then."

"Good-bye."

Adam went down the stairs, and Jess suddenly, standing alone on the landing, laughed. She'd been properly stuck-up, thinking it was her business to arrange everything that happened between her and Adam. Now he had arranged it; and though on top it looked like the worst things that ever could happen, it seemed all right inside. She laughed again; and then turned mournfully back to her abandoned housework.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW YEAR'S DAY

ALFRED was seeing a Features Editor. His broad face, mobile without being expressive, seemed to fill the room; his broad hands more ruthless than powerful, pressed on the table, seemed to be holding down everything on it; holding it down day and night, to be released, item by item, in a series of jerks.

"What I have in mind is this," he said, "I'll just sketch it out roughly. I don't want anything like a scientific study of the conditions under which people live; but the story of how they do live in fact, what these conditions mean to them. I don't particularly want any open criticism, which always limits the appeal, but of course I expect inherent criticism, so far as it is justified by the story. I imagine this is the kind of series you would be ready to do?"

"Of course," said Alfred, "but I have already done it."

"To a certain extent, yes. But it takes a long time to exhaust so wide a subject. You had the last batch of letters? I think that makes it quite clear that there is still a demand. And I don't

see any reason why a second series shouldn't go over as well as the first."

Alfred shrugged his shoulders.

"I feel I've said all I've got to say."

"I should be sorry if that were so. Because there were several letters which I thought did represent a new type, and which I think we should deal with."

"Yes, they were very interesting," said Alfred a little wearily. "But just printing the letters would give people a much better idea of it than if I wrote it up. And if anyone wants to know any more about what I think, the best thing for them to do would be to read any of my articles that they missed when they came out."

"We couldn't very well suggest that. We'll have to have another series, and you are the obvious person to write it."

"I'm sorry," said Alfred, getting up, "but I don't quite see how I could. If you like, I'll see if I can think of some related subject that I'd feel a bit fresher about, and let you know."

He felt curiously vague and irresponsible. He had been working very hard for the last year and a half, and it was very likely that he needed a holiday. The two days which he had spent alone at Christmas (Marcus and everybody he knew had been out of London) had made a very definite break, so that he could hardly bring himself to start working again at the same pace as before. And anyhow, he wasn't going to write up all his stuff again in different words, for the sake of

people who hadn't bothered to understand it the first time, and would have to be made to think it was something new.

It was the last day of December, but warm and blowy, more like some transitional season, Spring or Autumn. It was a disquieting, dissolving day, on which a man might, thought Alfred, change his religion, or kill himself, or set out on a sea-voyage. He got off his bus at Charing Cross and walked down to the Embankment, not yet decided whether he would take a bus again at Westminster, or go on along the great curve of river to the place where he now lived in Pimlico. It was good walking, with the wind blowing in his face, and yet there was a heaviness in it which made him drowsy and reminded him how delicious it would be to lie on his bed with his eyes closed, not thinking or doing anything. It was from inertia even that he went on walking (when one is tired one opens gates instead of climbing them) because a change of direction and of mode would have made too instantaneous a demand on his energy.

He went on walking, rhythmically and unthinkingly, letting the wind dissolve him.

Beyond Vauxhall Bridge he turned up to the right, and began feeling for his latchkey (he could never remember which pocket he had decided to keep it in) and found it just in time to let himself in at the third door. His room was at the top of the house, a big low room with the ceiling sloping almost to the floor between the windows,

outside which was a narrow parapet which you could climb out on and sit in sunlight in the evening and watch the river. But now the sun had set, and in the thundery blue evening light, the windows seemed to give out direct on space, and the furniture inside looked lumpy and colourless. He lit the gas in the middle of the room; its flame popped up lewdly, and then swelled to fill gently its white spherical shade. The window-panes took a shine which shut out the air and the sky and the river more effectually than glass; in the room, an orchestra of colours struck up; reds and browns, with two or three patches of raw and earthy yellow. A big table was covered with papers, and a typewriter was pushed in among them; and there were shelves, with books, and newspapers, and folders. He was so tired, he went straight to the bed (covered with rough blistered reddish stuff) and lay down on it face downwards. He liked this room, but he was tired of all the papers, of the priggish-looking black typewriter, of the things he had written, of the things he had had printed. They had not even left him with enough energy to burn them.

He had not lit the fire, and began to shiver, so he had to get up. Bending down, he saw that it had not quite enough air through it, so he arranged the sticks more cleverly to prop it up better. Then he lit it, using two matches, so that all the paper and shavings should flare up at once. Crouching, he watched it for a few minutes, seeing how the bright thin paper-flames

leaped on to the sticks and hung there blue and starving, dwindling to beads and vanishing, or else growing softer and rounder, reaching up even to the coal and reddening it.

The flames became ripe and powerful. The burnt-through sticks cracked and the coal fell nearer to the flame, opening new centres of heat, in which the glow pulsed like a heart. He stood up and began lazily looking through the letters and cards which lay in two or three piles on the mantelpiece. Among them was a returned postal packet and for a moment he held it in his fingers not remembering what it was. Then it came to him; it was a letter he had written to Jess a few weeks ago and it had come back with a pencilled note on the back that no one of that name was now at that address. Her letter (but it must have come a long time ago now) had worried him; he might have thought he was used to the spectacle of poverty and insecurity, but her brief and uncomplaining account had horrified him, like his first sight of the face of a starving man. He had been going to write to her at once; she had not asked for money, and although he was fairly certain she must need it, he had not known if it would be good to send it. He decided that he must simply write her such a letter that she could then ask if she did want some. But he had been very busy at that time; he had to finish some articles that had been commissioned for a weekly paper, and wanted to snatch any spare time he had for writing a short story that he had already sketched

out in his head. So she must have been waiting for his answer for some weeks; and then when he sent it, she had moved, without leaving an address. That seemed to him very queer. He could not imagine a situation in which she and Adam, even if they were poor, would become like the destitute, half-homeless townsmen, who go from place to place without leaving any traces. He was sure she would have told the postman, or the landlady. So it occurred to him that he might have addressed it wrongly, and he looked again through all the letters to find hers. It was not there, and he remembered that just before Christmas he had stuffed away a lot of old papers in some box or other; so he started on a thorough search and at last found it; the address was right.

He read the letter through again, and wondered how he could have delayed answering it. It showed a situation that he knew so well and yet he could hardly bear to think of it in connection with Jess and Adam. He had grown accustomed to thinking of them as a centre, a source almost, of liveness and goodwill. And now, things were not going very well; Adam was about the house, gradually become sullen and bitter and in-the-way. And Jess was accepting this. Times were hard. Her spontaneous and creative feeling for Adam was waning. She was learning to put up with him.

Alfred wished he had been able to do something. He did not know what he could have done, but he ought to have written sooner, and

then he would have had a chance. I was too much taken up with other things, he thought, ashamed, for this was one of the things that ought not to have been left out. He tried to comfort himself with the assurance that they, if anyone, were able to look after themselves.

But he did not know if there was anyone who could, for certain, look after himself. All the time he had been in London, he had been seeing, knowing, writing about people who were unquestionably victims; might not they (although he loved them) be victims also? He must do something. He must go and look for them. He could not let them be poor and unhappy and quenched.

He determined to go and look for them; realising that it was not merely for altruistic reasons. He was very lonely, and his present life left much unsatisfied. He had friends, and a great many acquaintances, but no one who had ever seemed to live so naturally and fully as these two. Even in the thought of their self-confidence, their vigour, their directness, there had been some sustaining force; and now it was necessary to rescue them from extinction for their sakes, for his, for the world's.

He had forgotten about supper, but it was now very late, and he was drowsy. He opened the window, and the wind drove in rainy and narcotic, as if it might have smelt of jasmine. He leaned out, but this wind, instead of invigorating, seduced. His head dropped languidly; he had

hardly energy to strip the cover off the bed, and creep into it.

But he did not sleep. The picture of Jess and Adam as he had known them and as they must now be (not perhaps outwardly much changed, perhaps not even thinner, but secretly defeated) haunted him; the ardours of his own life (now perhaps dissolving and to be more arduously re-created on some new and untried pattern) over-whelmed him. He tried to fix his mind to things; the pattern of lights which he could see if he leaned out of his window; the taste of the mushroom soup he had had last time Marcus gave him lunch; the hill at the back of the house where he had lived with Jess and Adam. But this touched him too near; he imagined the delights of living again with them in some green and flowery country (things are changing, things are getting better, people won't have to be poor much longer), writing a story or an article from time to time, or selling the vegetables he had grown for pleasure in the old spacious garden with apple trees growing next door to the asparagus. The colours of his imagination grew brighter, in the warm elbows of the mossy apple trees chaffinches had constructed their neat nests decorated with lichen, and the eggs, of a colour a little browner or a littler greener than stone, rock and tremble as the young bird struggles inside and chips the cap of the egg in an exact circle. The apple-blossom is pink and white, but it does not glow in the evening as the pear tree did, before its flowers

fell. Alfred flung his arm up above his head in the cool air. His heart was thumping; this touched him too near. He too was waiting for some spring; he too was testing the shell of his habit; he too longed for space.

But life had closed round him; he was established; he was earning money; he had sold his soul. With a gesture of nobility, it is true, hoping to save with it, not the souls of his fellowmen, but their life, their comfort and their self-respect. It was not such a bad bargain; because the value of any soul was rather doubtful, and he didn't have anything special to say for his own.

The hours passed nightmarish; the gale blowing the curtains almost to the ceiling; his thoughts shaking like spangles. But at last at dawn when the wind fell he did sleep; deeply though not peacefully; for his thoughts, in strange lowering shapes, pursued him. He dreamed he was to catch one of two trains, but just as he ran on to the platform they were both of them drawing out, one from either side. He turned to the ticket collector who was watching him with a severe expression, and when he asked how soon there was another train replied in a firm indifferent manner which filled him with despair, "There is only the eleven-thirty to Leeds."

He woke and saw that it was morning, and then at last fell into a deep sleep, from which nothing could rouse him.

So from this sleep he woke naturally, having finished sleeping, ready instantly for living. The

air was now still but cold; the sky a thin blue with small clouds floating high. The heavy pressure of dreaming had slipped off him like a cloak; he was no longer filled with enervating remorses or the sickly fantasies of desire. He felt ready and confident, unhaunted, sure of his intuition.

There was a knock at his door; and Sadie poked round it her small, cheerful, pointed face.

"Oh, I didn't know you weren't up," she said, in her peaky voice, "here's a friend of yours come who didn't know which your room was."

She disappeared suddenly, for she was always busy and couldn't spend much of her time in talking; and the visitor came in.

"Adam!"

Adam stood in the middle of the room, taking it in, and meantime Alfred watched him. He was much thinner than before, but there was a fleshiness about his jaw-line which Alfred could not remember. His clothes were old and a little ragged, and begrimed; his eyes moved slowly, and his hands hung stiffly at his sides.

"You've got it nice here," he said.

"Yes. I was just going to get up and get breakfast. Will you have some?"

"Sure."

The fire was quite dead; Alfred raked a good deal of the ash out, twisted some paper and then laid the sticks and coal on top. Adam stood by watching him. Alfred lit it, and then picked up the kettle.

"I've got to go down two flights for the water," he said. "Look after the fire, would you?"

When he came back, Adam had drawn a chair very near to it, and was sitting bent with his hands spread out, though there was very little warmth from it yet. Alfred put on some more sticks, and propped the kettle on them.

"The water's fairly hot already, so it won't take long."

He took from a shelf a frying-pan and a jar of dripping and a bowl of eggs; and, having lit the gas-ring, put a great lump of dripping in the pan to melt.

"Do you like fried bread?" he said, taking a large brown loaf out of a tin.

"I'm pretty hungry," said Adam, smiling greedily.

Alfred was puzzled by his inert silences, by his sullen, unexplained passivity. Being puzzled, he threw out remarks at random, awaiting some response.

But he appeared to have nothing to say; only when breakfast was ready he fell on it greedily; and did not speak till he had finished the plateful. Then he said:

"That was the best breakfast I've had for a long time."

"Have another egg? or some bread and honey?"

Adam nodded, and took the bread and honey; and afterwards cut himself another great round and ate that. Then he leaned back in his chair, apparently ready for a contented doze.

The change that had come over his face was now more apparent; it had coarsened and disintegrated; and this, combined with its pitiable emaciation, made him a troubling and almost horrifying sight.

"How's Jess?" said Alfred.

Adam's contentment collapsed immediately.

"I don't know. I expect she's all right," he said bitterly; "I gave her a chance, anyhow, when I came away."

"What have you been doing?"

Adam looked at him a little suspiciously.

"What haven't I been doing? You've only to look at me to tell the kind of thing I've been doing. Now you seem to have got on pretty nicely." He again looked round the room. He seemed furtively anxious to talk about himself, and yet afraid of breaking down the first barriers, suspicious of any sympathy and interest which threatened them.

"It's funny," he went on, "to think that last time I was chucking you out of my house, and now you might as well be chucking me out of yours," he laughed awkwardly.

"It was quite a good thing you did," said Alfred seriously, "it woke me up."

"Well, it's nice to think I once did somebody some good, though I didn't mean it that way. But how did you get on to all this?"

"I hadn't any money, at least not much, so I did some lorry-jumping to get here; and then I just hung about during the day, and slept in a Good

Bed for Eightpence, or on the Embankment or some place if it was a warm night. And I met some nice chaps, and one time there were four of us got talking, and some queer things came out. One of them was a builder, a skilled man, but he hadn't had any work for four years; he was still hoping that some day, if he was lucky, he might get a job stirring the cement and washing the brushes. Another had done a lot of electrical experiments since he was at school, and started off with a lot of great ideas; but his father died just when he was sixteen, and he couldn't get a job, and no one wanted to pay him to discover things, so there he was. And the other had been a teacher of some sort, but he drank, I think. And it made me angry to see all these people who could do something, who could do some special thing, and there they were down and out. So I wrote it all up for a newspaper and they liked it and wanted more."

"You might have put me in," said Adam, shamefaced; and then added brazenly, "except that I'm no good now. I can't do a thing now. And I don't care."

"I didn't know about you," said Alfred.

"No one would have expected it, would they? I looked pretty safe, didn't I? And now look at me. And you, the one that seemed set on making a mess of things, are the only one that gets on. What did you do after that?"

"I got a room near Paddington at first; it was very cheap, and though I had a little money, I

didn't know when I'd get any more. And then I got a room in Poplar, near the river; and I liked that better. I didn't feel like having anything more to do with people who organised things, and sold things, and who'd made such a mess of it. I just wanted to know about the people who did the work. And when I got to know about them, I wanted everyone else to know too; so I made it my business to tell them; gave them stories about children who have to go three miles to the nearest bit of grass; and told what it's like to be overcrowded from the actual, as well as the statistical, point of view; and about the little shops that start up and never pay and then close down; and about the meals people have when they haven't any money."

"And what good did all that do, except for getting you a living?"

"I've wondered. But I think it did some good. People are beginning to think more seriously about how to remedy this state of things; and you have to keep them reminded that things are a lot worse than they imagine. . . ."

"I wish there'd been someone to do something about me," said Adam grimly. He leaned forward in his chair with his chin thrust forward, his whole attitude expressing a combination of self-pity and indignation, as if saying, 'I'll just wait and see if they do anything about me, just to show them, though I know they won't.' But it turned out that his conscience had not been altogether put to sleep. He looked uncom-

fortably at Alfred and then stared into the fire again.

"I've thought about it a lot," he said, "and I can't see where I made any mistake; unless it was that I ought to have gone on with the bus-company in the first place. But a man likes a job where he can make something; and when I went to Captain Thomas I did make a job of it. If I hadn't I wouldn't have minded, at least not the way I did mind. But I just felt properly stung over it, even before I knew that I wouldn't get another job; and then when I didn't get another job it made me a bit sore with everyone; and I just hated the way Jess put up with it, when I only wanted to smash the whole bloody place to pieces; and sometimes I imagined she thought it *was* my fault really and didn't like to say so. So I was just spoiling to get out of it all; and then we got your letter, and it said you were getting on all right; I thought that that was my mistake, that I ought to have gone about more, and looked for work in a lot of different places, and not cling on in the same place dropping to pieces for the rest of my life. I felt as if I'd had an inspiration"—he gave a shout of scornful laughter, and his lips again twisted bitterly as he went on—"and I set out like that just as if God was leading me; and of course he led me into a nice mess. I'm just the same as those people you were telling me about, I'm down and out, and no more good for anything."

He looked at Alfred challenging, but with a

secret weakness in his glance that demanded contradiction. Alfred could say nothing. Adam lowered his eyes.

"You'll stay here for a bit?" said Alfred.

"May as well."

"I've been horribly busy lately. Writing partly, and partly doing something a bit more scientific, a survey of the same sort of conditions for some people who have some good ideas about improving them and want the facts. But I've finished that; and if you'd like to keep me company while I have a bit of a holiday . . ."

"I've had a lot of practice at holidays," said Adam coarsely.

They went out to a little shop for lunch; with brown benches and marbled tables.

"You don't know where Jess has moved to?" said Alfred.

"Has she moved?" said Adam indifferently.

They spent the afternoon walking. In Adam there were still the same difficult alternations of indignation, brazen acceptance, and subdued despair. But he seemed to be thawing a little, to become gradually a little more alive, a little more integrated.

"You're a queer chap, Alfred," he said, "I never saw what you were up to. But your things seem to come out right."

"And of course as soon as that happens, one starts off on something else."

"Yes, that's what makes you seem queer. But I don't see how you get on with doing such a lot

that doesn't seem to be doing you any good. You weren't up to much good so far as I could see when you were living with us; and before that, when you were at Oxford, it all seemed a bit funny. Though I always thought you'd a chance of turning out all right."

"I've been thinking about Oxford lately," said Alfred, "and I think I did get something out of it; I hadn't known before that it was possible to feel anything disinterestedly about people, or about a person, and that was the first thing outside myself that I'd ever noticed in my life; and at the end of it all I made another important discovery, that I was entirely responsible for everything that happened to me."

"Even for spending a year just loafing round?"

"Yes," Alfred laughed. "I needed some time, somehow. I don't suppose I did any good in it, but I shouldn't ever have done any good without it, if you see."

"And I suppose you think I'm responsible for what's been done on me?"

"Oh, that I don't know."

"I don't see what I could have done any different."

He was unhappy, entangled, perverse; but he was coming alive.

"I wonder if I could still drive a car," he said.

"I suppose you could."

Adam went on reflectively: "I sometimes thought I might have pinched a car, when I was tired, and saw one at the side of the road. But I

wouldn't have known how to get rid of it. I took food when I needed it, and once I got jailed for it; but I didn't see why I should starve."

Alfred had been turning in the direction of the house to the North of Hyde Park where Marcus lived. At this point they arrived and were shown straight in to the study where he was working.

"I told you about Adam, didn't I?" said Alfred, "he's just come to stay with me, and he wants to see if he can still drive a car."

Marcus looked from one to the other; his look had grown in the last two years less quizzical and more penetrating.

"But I haven't a licence," said Adam.

"So long as your methods are not such that the police want to look at it," said Marcus, "I see no objection."

They walked round to the mews where his car was kept. Alfred got in at the back and Marcus in front. The driving seat was vacant, so Adam got into it, and looked carefully at the controls; then he glanced round at them, in a nervous pretence of thinking it was they who were not quite ready.

"All right," said Marcus.

They slid out over the cobbles on to the road. The first gear-change scraped, and Adam frowned with self-disgust. The second was smooth as oil.

"Let's go round the Park," said Alfred, and Marcus gave Adam the directions.

"The acceleration's been rather poor lately," said Marcus.

"Yes."

Adam drew up at the side of the road which leads down to the Serpentine bridge, and got out to examine the engine.

"That ought to be better," he said. Under his hands, the machine seemed to put out its powers more willingly.

"This seems all right," said Alfred, leaning forward.

Adam did not say anything. This rediscovery of movements which had long been habitual, the claim on a disused faculty of judgment, needed all his attention. But the feeling of the machine willing under his control, the delicate manipulation of traffic patterns, woke in him a forgotten pleasure. His face had lost its look of lethargy and petulance, and Alfred could see his profile clear-cut and formidable against the clear blue January day.

"Will you have tea here?" said Marcus, when they got back to his house.

"No, I don't think so," said Alfred; "if you remember, you were coming to supper with me; and I think the New Year's a good time for a party; so we'll have one for the three of us, and I must go and lay in some food."

Adam was excited and happy.

"I'm glad I got that chance," he said; "who is he?"

"A man I knew at Oxford. The only person that I knew at Oxford that I still see. He used to do a great many things that when you thought

of them seemed a bit silly; now he does a lot of things still, but most of them are rather sensible. He doesn't like to make a splash, or be a figure of any sort, but he likes to be very powerful at the back of everything, and so he does a lot of work. I've been doing some work for him, too."

They took a bus along to Soho, which Alfred said was far the best place for shopping in. There he bought some truffled liver sausage and some brie cheese and a transparent bag of green split peas and a cheap bottle of red chianti. Then they took a bus home, and on the way in got also some milk and eggs and a twopenny carton of cream.

"I've got some tomatoes, and a good deal of fruit and some nuts," he said. "The only thing to do now, is to put the peas to soak."

Marcus arrived very punctually at half-past seven. His correct clothes and his precise careful movements seemed a little out of place, but he was quite prepared to sit on the floor, and knew where the plates were kept and how to take the cork out of the chianti bottle.

Alfred took the thick pea soup off the gas, and poured it into three yellow bowls.

"I like to stir in the cream separately," he said, "because it makes such lovely patterns." So he put a spoonful into each bowl, and gave it one whisk round with a wooden spoon so that each person had a white spiral.

"Do you live in London?" said Marcus to Adam.

"No," he replied confidently; "but I am hoping to get some work."

Marcus said nothing more at the time. After a pause he turned to Alfred and said:

"You do have the most delicious meals. I would never have thought of mixing brie and walnuts."

"I only thought of it to-day."

After they had finished eating Marcus began talking about work. First he explained to Adam: "As you know, there isn't any intelligent person who doesn't at present see the need for reorganisation of our present system in whole and in part. I have made it my business to be in touch with anybody and everybody who is doing anything productive on these lines—groups or individuals. People who are trying out new ways of running a farm, people who are working out methods for co-ordinating industries or groups of industries, people who are prepared to make social services a creditable part of our national life, people who have realistic ideas about abolishing slums. In short, people who are prepared to give up all the old myths, and, working from the functional point of view, combine to produce a contemporary shape of civilisation."

"Do they get anything done?" said Adam doubtfully.

"Yes. So far it is still piecemeal, and because the part cannot progress beyond the whole, a great deal less has been put into practice than what is actually practicable. But things are certainly

moving. A technique is developing which will enable us to adjust our institutions to our needs far more exactly than has ever before been possible. Our resources have been great, but up till now we have been incapable of profiting by them; with the discovery of a form in which they can be used we shall reach an age of prosperity such as never was known."

"It's true there's a lot of things about," said Adam, "which nobody can use." Marcus turned to Alfred.

"I am beginning to feel," he said, "that the lack of informed public opinion is being seriously felt. It's now possible for the experts, the technicians that is, to get hold of the best information going, but the people who are doing the jobs would feel a lot more driving force, if popular opinion went a bit more decisively with expert opinion. I'm even thinking that it may be necessary to start a paper; probably a weekly; one that can be relied on to give facts; and starts with enough capital not to have to fade out just when people are beginning to notice it. A paper that would give a good reflection of what things are like, and throw a particular emphasis on the more important things that are being done. I've met somebody who'd be a possible editor; and I take it that you'd be prepared to put in some stuff. . . ."

"I'm afraid not," said Alfred.

"Oh, I know you're very busy already; but I'm sure this is an important job."

"I'm not taking on any more jobs whatever;

and I'm getting out of all the jobs I have taken on."

"Oh?" Marcus would not ask why. Alfred seemed to have said all he wanted.

"What'll you do?" said Adam.

Alfred started.

"I? Oh, I'm not sure. Probably something rather different." He was silent again. Marcus began a conversation with Adam, about the ridiculous number of garages and petrol stations there were along main roads.

"That's quite right," said Adam, "there's a lot of places where none of them can make enough to live on; and yet if you happen to go through at night or on a Sunday, quite often there isn't one of them open. I used to think it might be a good thing if they made some arrangement to open at different times; but I couldn't ever quite see how it could be arranged; everyone would think they were being cheated."

"Yes," said Marcus, "but they might get used to it; it's surprising what people do get used to. There's another scheme I've been working out, but I just can't be certain if it would be popular. It's this. You know how expensive it is owning your own car, and in London what a problem there is about garaging; and you'd just as soon hire one, except that that's a lot more expensive than it need be. So I've been thinking up a scheme whereby you'd have a lot of people getting together to form a sort of Car Club; and own together a number of cars, of three or four stand-

ard sizes; and can take one out the central garage whenever they want. The Combine would get the cars cheap, they'd be properly looked after the whole time. The Members would buy shares in the concern, and then probably pay a subscription to cover depreciation and maintenance. Do you think that would work?"

"I don't know much about how things are in London," said Adam; "it wouldn't work in the country; but it looks to me all right, if it's as you say. I should say there'd have to be special arrangements about the insurance."

"As a matter of fact I've gone into it pretty thoroughly in theory; but I hadn't seen anyone to manage it. I want someone with a good deal of mechanical experience, and a good deal of sense. Would you take it on?"

"I'd like to." Adam was suddenly shy and awkward.

"Good. Three or four of my friends have been wanting to come in on this; I'll find out if there are any more people it would appeal to; and then I shall want your help almost at once in choosing a garage (I've got one or two in mind) and the cars."

"I expect I'm rather out of date," said Adam.

"Well, I'll trust you to catch up before we start."

Adam sat by the fire, relaxed; his whole attitude (although the same formally) so different in what it expressed that Alfred could hardly believe him the same person. Suddenly he got to his feet, and looked down at Marcus piercingly.

"It's a real job, is it?" he said, "not just something like the others that won't happen after all?"

"It's a real job," said Marcus. Adam turned to Alfred.

"I can't stay the night," he said.

"You can't go anywhere at this time," said Alfred; "what do you want to do?"

Adam looked at him helplessly. "I thought I'd go and tell Jess I'd got a job at last."

"You'll have to wait for the morning."

Adam looked so helpless and exhausted that he went on:

"Why don't you lie down on the bed, and get some sleep. Then you'll be able to go all right in the morning."

So Adam lay down and shut his eyes, and seemed even quite undisturbed when Marcus got up to go.

"Good night, don't come downstairs with me," he said to Alfred. He would never ask for any explanation, but Alfred felt beneath his cool manner an imploring question, and saw that he must sooner or later make the effort necessary to answer it.

"It's a fine night," he said; "shall I walk part of the way home with you?"

"I should be glad," said Marcus courteously, but he seemed a little stiff and discouraged.

"I'm sorry I can't do any more work for you."

"I wish I could see why you can't. It is work which you have been yourself so much concerned in. I had counted on you."

"It'll go on just as well without me. The ball's been set rolling, and things are tilted that way, so there's no danger of its stopping."

"But what are you going to do?"

"I've been asking myself that question, and I haven't had a very clear or satisfactory answer. I'll tell you what I've been thinking, and you can make what you like of it. I'm glad, in the first place, that the face of the world's being changed. I'm glad we've accepted pylons and reinforced concrete, and don't think that the last thing that ever was beautiful was a thatched cottage. And I'm glad things are going to go on being changed. I think it's time everything was reorganised from the top to the bottom." He paused.

"Well?" said Marcus.

"Have you ever thought," Alfred began again, "that all this reorganisation, and the administration afterwards, has to be conducted by men and women?"

"I admit," said Marcus, "that a good instrument can be used for a bad purpose; and that it's no use making it for a good purpose when people want to use it for a bad. But it seems to me that this happens chiefly when circumstances are intolerable; I think, in fact, that people's actions (I am not sure if I would say their characters) improve with their circumstances."

"If we could only think of a technique for saving people's souls," said Alfred, with a mocking sigh, "we could have them all passed round on a conveyor and have it done like vaccination."

Marcus as usual refused to be touched.

"I am disinclined to meddle with souls," he remarked with genuine dignity.

"There's only one," said Alfred more seriously, "that I feel myself entitled to meddle with. And that's my own."

"But surely," said Marcus impatiently, "it is better to do something practical, to do something which is of public benefit, than to spend all one's energies, with very uncertain results, on the cult of inner life. I could have understood this in you two years ago; but since then you have done so much. . . ."

"If you see a man lifting a knife to his throat," said Alfred slowly, "you fling out your arm and snatch it out of his hand. But you can't go on doing that; hoping to control his actions at every point so that he does himself no harm. In the same way, you will never reorganise society by changing its form. . . ."

"I know, of course, that a great many of our opinions have got to be given up; that our attitude to a great many problems must change; that a new approach is needed."

"You haven't got to the bottom yet. At the bottom of everything is the attitude to ourselves. The blood which runs through any social organisation is the character of the men and women in it; their strength makes it strong; their weakness and evasions mark the points of its collapse; their cruelties and crassness freeze it into intolerable conventions. The form must be changed, but

with it, moulding it more delicately than any reasoned and mechanical process, the spirit must change too. And to this change I know I can contribute best by beginning at the beginning. I must do some work with myself."

"Writing?"

"Possibly. But even that is secondary."

Marcus shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry; and I think you are taking a much too extreme point of view. But I've no doubt you'll turn out to be right, because that does tend to happen, even when you do the most preposterous things."

"It isn't really anything particularly solemn or grand. I suppose it's something like a psycho-analytical fact-facing process, but more exciting. It's just what I've got to do."

"I can see that," said Marcus. His face in the starlight looked a little white and disappointed.

"We are like men tunnelling from two sides of a mountain," said Alfred, "we may meet; and that might mean there was not quite so far for either of us to tunnel."

"Do you remember," said Marcus, "how my scout used to say 'it takes all sorts to make a world'? He said it one time after you'd been in."

"The most important things," said Alfred, "is that they should want to make an alive world, and face doing something as you do in one place, and I suppose I may hope to do in another. Adam's a good person, too, to have in a world, and I'm

glad you're getting him something to do of the right sort."

"I'm glad too. He's a kind of person I like."

They said good-bye, and Alfred walked back across the park. When he came to the bridge he leaned on the rail and watched the oily shimmering water. On one side of him, Marcus, the observer, the organiser, the believer in facts and effects, walked for the second time (but it was not the last) out of his life. On the other side Adam, who was for ever his brother, lay asleep, his apt and eager fingers now curled up like leaves. Here between them Alfred drew into himself, his thoughts rustling like the feathers of a bird as it smoothes them for sleep. But the realisation of this new and more difficult adventure on which he was now to set out broke over him like morning. In the darkness, his mind soared.

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a novel

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[continued overleaf

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(cont)

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[over

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HUGH WALPOLE in *The Book Society's News*: "Mr. Hamilton is certainly the most striking young man of letters in England who is quite definitely and positively a novelist born. *The Midnight Bell*, like *Craven House* and *Monday Morning*, is a novel by someone who was intended by the Almighty to write novels. The book is full of creative power, and it has the beauty of a young, humorous, tender but never sentimental view of human beings."

THE SIEGE OF PLEASURE

GERALD BULLETT in the *New Statesman*: "Readers of the first part of that brilliant piece of naturalistic fiction, *The Midnight Bell*, will hardly need reminding of Jenny, the young prostitute by whom, to his ultimate undoing, Bob the waiter becomes enchanted. Here, then, is Jenny's story, the story of her dramatic slide, over a period of sixty hours, into professional wantonry . . . In action, in dialogue, she is faultlessly presented. You cannot disbelieve a word of it."

CRAVEN HOUSE

The late W. PETT RIDGE in *The Dickensian*: "Mr. Patrick Hamilton shares with Charles Dickens the achievement of writing about ordinary people, and making them extraordinarily interesting. If you love the works of Dickens—and I am sure you do—you will like *Craven House*."

MONDAY MORNING

RICHARD KING in the *Tatler*: "As good a picture of youth, as seen through youthful eyes, as any I have come across for some time."

Times Literary Supplement: "Mr. Hamilton holds his reader by his accomplished writing, his gift for realistic portraiture, his pitiless refusal to cast any befogging glamour over what can only falsely be romanticized, and, not least, by his ability to make even his minor characters real personalities, and to make their personalities the motive forces of his story."