

REVOLVING LIGHTS

BY
DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON



LONDON
DUCKWORTH & CO.
3 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

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REVOLVING LIGHTS

*THE WORK OF
DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON*

“In the ordinary novel, the novelist stands on the banks of the river of life chronicling how and when people arise, and how it is that things happen to them. But Miriam (the central figure of Dorothy Richardson’s work) pulls us with her into the yielding water.”—*Nation*.

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BACKWATER	DEADLOCK
HONEYCOMB	REVOLVING LIGHTS
THE TUNNEL	

DUCKWORTH & CO.
3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.

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To
F. E. W.

REVOLVING LIGHTS

CHAPTER I

The building of the large hall had been brought about by people who gave no thought to the wonder of moving from one space to another and up and down stairs. Yet this wonder was more to them than all the things on which their thoughts were fixed. If they would take time to realise it. No one takes time. No one knows it... But I know it... These seconds of knowing, of being told, afresh, by things speaking silently, make up for the pain of failing to find out what I ought to be doing....

Away behind, in the flatly echoing hall, was the busy planning world of socialism, intent on the poor. Far away in to-morrow, stood the established, unchanging world of Wimpole Street, linked helpfully to the lives of the prosperous classes. Just ahead, at the end of the walk home, the small isolated Tansley Street world, full of secretive people

drifting about on the edge of catastrophe, that would leave, when it engulfed them, no ripple on the surface of the tide of London life. In the space between these surrounding worlds was the everlasting solitude; ringing as she moved to cross the landing, with voices demanding an explanation of her presence in any one of them.

“Now *that*,” she quoted, to counter the foremost attack, “is a man who can be trusted to say what he thinks.”

That cloaked her before the clamorous silence. She was an observant intelligent woman; approved. *He* would never imagine that the hurriedly borrowed words meant, to her, nothing but a shadow of doubt cast across the earnest little socialist. But they carried her across the landing. And here, at the head of the stairs, was the show case of cold Unitarian literature. Yet another world. Bright, when she had first become aware of it, with freedom from the problem of Christ, offering, until she had met its inhabitants face to face, a congenial home. Sending her away, at a run, from cold humorous intellectuality. She paused in front of the case, avoiding the

sight of the well-known, chilly titles of the books, to read what had gathered in her mind during the evening.

A group of people who had come out just behind her were going down the stairs arguing in high-pitched, public platform voices from the surfaces of their associated minds. Not saying what they thought. Not thinking. Strong and controlled enough to keep within pattern of clever words. Most of them had been born to it. Born on the stage of clever words, which yet meant nothing to them. But to one or two people in the society these words *did* mean something....

Nothing came after they had passed but the refrain that had been the mental accompaniment of her listening throughout the evening, stepping forth now as part of a high-pitched argumentative to and fro. Her part, if she could join in and shout them all down. Sounding irrelevant and yet coming right down to earth, one small part of a picture puzzle set in place ... a clue.

“Any number of barristers,” she vociferated in her mind, going on down the shallow stair, “take up JOURNALISM. Get into

Parliament. On the *strength* of being both educated and *articulate*. Weapons, giving an unfair advantage. The easy touch of prominence. Only a good nervous system wanted. They are psychologists. Up to a point. Enough to convince nice busy people, rushing through life without time to bethink themselves. Enough to alarm and threaten and cajole. They can raise storms; in newspapers. And brandish about by *name*, at their centres, like windmills, kept going by the wind of their psychological cheap-jackery. Yes, sir. Psychological cheap-jackery.... Purple-faced John Bull paterfamilias. Paterfamiliarity. Avenging his state by hitting out.... With an eye for a pretty face....

The little man had no *axe* to grind. That was the only test. An Englishman, and a barrister, and yet awake to foreign art. His opaque English temperament not weakened by it; but worn a little transparent. He would be silent in an instant before a superior testimony.

He did not count on anything. When Socialism came, he would be placed in an

administrative post, and would fill it quietly, working harder than ever.

He brought the future nearer because he already moved within it; by being aware of things most men did not consider; aware of *relationships*: possibly believing in God, certainly in the soul.

Modern man, individually, is in many respects less capable than primitive man. Evolution is related development. Progress towards social efficiency. Benjamin Kidd.

“These large speculations are most-fatiguing.”

“No. When you see truth in them they are refreshing. They are all there is. All I live for now, is the arrival in my mind, of fresh generalisations.”

“That is good. But remember also that these things cost life.”

“What does it matter what they cost? A shape of truth makes you at the moment want to die, full of gratitude and happiness. It fills everything with a music to which you *could* die. The next piece of life comes as a superfluity.”

“Le superflu; chose nécessaire.”

At the foot of the stairs stood the yellow street-light, framed in the oblong of the doorway. She went out into its shelter. The large grey legal buildings that stood by day a solid, dignified pile against the sky, a whole remaining region of the pride of London, showed only their lower façades, near, gentle frontages of mellow golden light and soft rectangular shadow, just above the brightly gilded surface of the deserted roadway. For a moment she stood listening to the reflection of the fostering light and breathing in the dry warm freshness of the London night air.

The illuminated future faded. The street lights of that coming time might throw their rays more liberally, over more beautiful streets. But something would be lost. In a world consciously arranged for the good of everybody there would be something personal ... without foundation ... like a nonconformist preacher's smile. The pavements of these streets that had grown of themselves, flooded by the light of lamps rooted like trees in the soil of London, were more surely pavements of gold than those pavements of the future?

They offered themselves freely; the unfailling magic that would give its life to the swing of her long walk home, letting her leave without regret the earlier hidden magic of the evening, the thoughts that had gathered in her mind whilst she listened, and that had now slipped away unpondered, leaving uppermost the outlines of the lecture to compete with the homeward walk. The surrounding golden glow through which she could always escape into the recovery of certainty, warned her not to return upon the lecture. But she could not let all she had heard disappear unnoted, and postponed her onward rush, apologising for the moments about to be spent in conning over the store of ideas. In an instant the glow had gone, miscarried like her private impressions of the evening. The objects about her grew clear; full of current associations; and she wondered as her mind moved back across the linked statements of the lecture, whether these were her proper concern, or yet another step upon a long pathway of transgression. She was grasping at incompatible things, sacrificing the bliss of her own uninfluenced life to the

temptation of gathering things that had been offered by another mind. Things to which she had no right?

But all the things of the mind that had come her way had come unsought; yet finding her prepared; so that they seemed not only her rightful property, but also in some way, herself. The proof was that they had passed her sisters by, finding no response; but herself they had drawn, often reluctant, perpetually escaping and forgetting; out on to a path that it sometimes seemed she must explore to the exclusion of everything else in life, exhaustively, the long way round, the masculine way. It was clearly not her fault that she had a masculine mind. If she must pay the penalties, why should she not also reap the entertainments?

Still, it was *strange*, she reflected, with a consulting glance at the returning brilliance, that without any effort of her own, so very many different kinds of people and thoughts should have come, one after the other, as if in an ordered sequence, into the little backwater of her life. What for? To what end was her life working by some sort of inner

arrangement? To turn, into a beautiful distance outspread behind her as she moved on? What then?

For instance, the sudden appearance of the revolutionaries just at this moment, seemed so apt. She had always wanted to meet revolutionaries, yet had never gone forth to seek them. Since her contact with socialists, she had been more curious about them than ever. And here they were, on their way to her, just as the meaning and some of the limitations of socialism were growing distinct. Yet it was absurd to suppose that their visit to England, in the midst of their exciting career, should have been timed to meet her need. Nor would they convince her. The light that shone about them was the anticipation of a momentary intense interest that would leave her a step farther on the lonely wandering that so distracted her from the day's work, and kept her family and the old known life at such an immeasurable distance. It was her ruling devil who had just handed her, punctually on the eve of their arrival, material for conversation with revolutionaries.

But it also seemed to be the mysterious friend, her star, the queer strange *luck* that dogged her path always reviving happiness, bringing a sudden joy when there was nothing to account for it, plunging her into some new unexpected thing at the very moment of perfect hopelessness. It was like a game ... something was having a game of hide and seek with her. She winked, smiling, at the returned surrounding glow, and turned back to run up and down the steps of the neglected argument.

It was clear in her mind. Freed from the fascinating distraction of the little man's mannerisms, it spread fresh light, in all directions, tempering the golden light of the street; showing, beyond the outer darkness of the night, the white radiance of the distant future. Within the radiance, troops of people marched ahead, with springing footsteps; the sound of song in their ceaselessly talking voices; the forward march of a unanimous, light-hearted humanity along a pathway of white morning light.... The land of promise that she would never see; not through being born too soon, but by being incapable of

unanimity. All these people had one mind. They approved of each other and were gay in unity.

The spectacle of their escape from the shadows lessened the pain of being left behind. Perhaps even a moment's contemplation of the future helped to bring it about? Every thought vibrates through the universe. Then there was absolution in thought, even from the anger of everlastingly talking people, contemptuous of silence and aloofness. And there was unity with the future.

The surrounding light glowed with a richer intensity. Flooded through her, thrilling her feet to swiftness.

If the revolutionaries could be with her now, they would find in her something of the state towards which they were violently straining? They would pause and hover for a moment, with half envious indulgence. But sooner or later they would say things about robust English health; its unconsciousness of its surroundings.

The *mystery* of being English. Mocked at for stupidity and envied for having something

that concerned the mocking people of the two continents and challenged them to discover its secret.

But by to-morrow night she would have nothing but the little set of remembered facts, dulled by the fatigue of her day's work. These would save her, for the one evening, from appearing as the unintelligent Englishwoman of foreigner's experience. But they would also keep out the possibility of expressing anything.

Even the bare outlines of socialism, presented suddenly to unprepared English people, were unfailing as a contribution to social occasions. They forced everyone to look at the things they had taken for granted in a new light, and to remember, together with the startling picture, the person who first drew it for them. But to appear before these Russians talking English socialism was to be nothing more than a useful person in uniform.

What *was* the immediate truth that shone, independent of speculation, all about her in the English light; the only thing worth telling to enquiring foreigners?

It was there at once when she was alone, or

watching other people as an audience, or as an uncommitted guest, expressing in a great variety of places different sets of opinions. It was there radiant, obliterating her sense of existence, whenever she was in the midst of things kept going by other people. It could be given her by a beggar, purposefully crossing a street ... not 'pitiful,' as he was so carelessly called—but something that shook her with gratitude to the roots of her being. But the instant she was called upon there came the startled realisation of being in the world, and the sense of nothingness, preceding and accompanying every remark she might make.

One opinion self-consciously stated made the light go down. Immediate substitution of the contrary, produced a chill followed by darkness.... *Men* called out these contradictory statements, each one with his way of having only one set of opinions.

How powerful these Russians were, in advance, making her count herself up. If she saw much of them she would fail and fade into nothing under the Russian test. If there were only one short interview she might escape unknown, and knowing all the things

about Russian revolutionaries that Michael Shatov had left incomplete.

Their scornful revolutionary eyes watched her glance about amongst her hoard of contradictory ideas. Statements about different ways of looking at things were irrelevancies that perhaps with Russians might be abandoned altogether. Yet to appear before them empty-handed, hidden in her earlier uninfluenced personality, would be not to meet them at all. Personal life to them was nothing, could be summed up in a few words, the same for everybody. They lived for an idea.

She offered them a comprehensive glimpse of the many pools of thought in which she had plunged, rising from each in turn, to recover the bank and repudiate; unless a channel could be driven, that would make all their waters meet. They laughed when she cried out at the hopelessness of uniting them. "All these things are nothing."

But a revolutionary is a man who throws himself into space. In Russia there is nowhere else to throw himself? That would do as an answer to their criticisms of English

socialism. She could say also that conservatives are the best socialists; being liberal- *minded*. Most socialists were narrow and illiberal, holding on to liberal ideas. The aim of the Lycurgans, alone amongst the world's socialists, was to show the English aristocracy and middle classes that they were, still, socialists.

There *were* things in England. But they struggled at cross purposes, refusing to get into a shape that would draw one, *whole*, along with it. But there were things in England with truth shining behind them. English people did not shine. But something shone behind them. Russians shone. But there was nothing behind them. There were things in England. She offered them the contents of books. They were as real as the pools of experience. Yet they, too, were irreconcilable.

A little blue-lit street; lamps with large round globes, shedding moonlight; shadows, grey and black. She had somehow got into the west-end—a little west-end street, giving out its character. She went softly along the middle of the blue-lit glimmering roadway,

narrow between the narrow pavements skirting the high façades, flat and grey, broken by shadowy pillared porticoes; permanent exits and entrances on the stage of the London scene; solid lines and arches of pure grey shaping the flow of the pageant, and emerging, when it ebbed away, to stand in their own beauty, conjuring back the vivid tumult to flow in silence, a continuous ghostly garland of moving shapes and colours, haunting their self-sufficient calm.

Within the stillness she heard the jingling of hansom, swinging in morning sunlight along the wide thoroughfares of the west-end; saw the wide leisurely shop-fronts displaying in a restrained profusion, comfortably within the experienced eye half turned to glance from a passing vehicle, all the belongings of west-end life; on the pavements, the trooping succession of masked life-moulded forms, their unobservant eyes, aware of the resources all about them, at gaze upon their continuous adventure, yesterday still with them as they came out, in high morning light, into the adventure of to-day. Campaigners, sure of their weapons in the gaily decked

mêlée, and sure every day of the blissful solitude of the interim times.

For as long as she could remember she had known something of their secret. During the years of her London life she had savoured between whiles the quality of their world, divined its tests and passwords, known what kept their eyes unseeing and their speech clipped to a jargon.

Best of all was the illumination that had come with her penetration of the mystery of their attitude towards direct *questions*. There was something here that had offered her again and again a solution of the problem of social life, a safeguard of individuality. Here it was once more, a still small voice urging that every moment of association would be transformed if she would only remember the practice the technique revealed by her contemplation of this one quality. Always to be solid and resistant; unmoved. Having no opinions and only one enthusiasm—to be unmoved. Momentary experiments had proved that the things that were about her in solitude could be there all the time. But forgetfulness always came. Because most

people brought their worlds with them, their opinions, and the set of things they believed in; forcing in the end direct questions and disagreements. And most people were ready to answer questions, showing by their angry defence of their opinions that they were aware, and afraid, of other ways of looking at things. But these society people did not seem to be aware of anything but their one world. Perhaps that was why their social method was not able to hold her for long together.

“Is this the way to Chippenham?” But *everyone* delights in telling the way. It brings the teller out into adventure; with his best self and his best moments all about him. The surroundings are suddenly new with life, and beautiful like things seen in passing, on a journey. English people delight because they are adventurous. They prolong the moment, beaming and expanding, and go on their way refreshed. Foreigners, except perhaps Germans, answer differently. Obsequiously; or with a studied politeness that turns the occasion into an opportunity for the display of manners; or indifferently, with a cynical suggestion that they know what you are like,

and that you will be the same when you reach your destination. They are themselves, without any fulness or wonder. English people are always waiting to be different, to be fully themselves. Strangers, to them, are gods and angels.

But it is another kind of question that is meant, the question that is a direct attack on the unseeing gaze; a speech to the man at the wheel. That is where, without knowing it, these people are philosophers. What Socrates saw, answered all his questions; and his counterings of the young men's questions were invitations to them to look for themselves. The single world these people see is, to them, so unquestionable that there is no room for question. Nothing can be communicated except the latest news; and scandal; information about people who have gone outside the shape. But, to each other, even their statements are put in the form of questions. "Fine day, what?" So that everyone may be not questioned, but questioner. It is also a sort of apology for falling into speech at all.

It was Michael Shatov's amused delight in

her stories of their method that had made her begin to cherish them as a possession. Gradually she had learned that irritation with their apparent insolence was jealousy. Within her early interested unenvious sallies of investigation amongst the social élite of the Wimpole Street patients, or as a fellow guest amongst the Orlys' society friends, there had been moments of longing to sweep away the defences and discountenance the individual. But gradually the conviction had dawned that with the genuine members of the clan this could not be done. Their quality went right through, shedding its central light, a brightness that could not be encircled, over the whole of humanity. They disarmed attack, because in their singleness of nature they were not aware of anything to defend. They had no contempts; not being specially intellectual; and, crediting everyone with their own condition, they reached to the sources of nobility in all with whom they came in contact. It was refreshment and joy merely to be in the room with them. But also it was an arduous exercise. They brought such a wide picture and so long a history.

They were England. The world-wide spread of Christian England was in their minds; and to this they kindled, more than to any personal thing.

The existence of these scattered few, explained those who were only conventional approximations....

To-night, immersed in the vision of a future that threatened their world, she found them one and all bright figures of romance. She sped as her footsteps measured off the length of the little street, into the recesses, the fair and the evil, of aristocratic English life, and affectionately followed the small bright freely moving troupe as it spread in the past and was at this moment spreading, abroad over the world, the unchangeable English quality and its attendant conventions.

The books about these people are not satisfactory.... Those that show them as a moral force, suggest that they are the fair flower of a Christian civilisation. But a Christian civilisation would be abolishing factories.... Lord Shaftesbury ... Arnold's barbarian idea made a convincing picture, but it suggested in the end, behind his back, that

there was something lacking in the Greeks. Most of the modern books seemed to ridicule the English conventions, and choose the worst types of people for their characters.

But in *all* the books about these people, even in novelettes, the chief thing they all left out, was there. They even described it, sometimes so gloriously that it became *more* than the people; making humanity look like ants, crowding and perishing as a vast scene. Generally the surroundings were described separately, the background on which presently the characters began to fuss. But they were never sufficiently shown as they were to the people when there was no fussing; what the floods of sunshine and beauty indoors and out meant to these people as single individuals, whether they were aware of it or not. The 'fine' characters in the books, acting on principle, having thoughts, and sometimes, the less likeable of them, even ideas, were not shown as being made strong partly by endless floods of sunshine and beauty. The feeble characters were too much condemned for clutching, to keep, at any price within the charmed circle....

The antics of imitators, all down the social scale, were wrongly condemned.

But *here*, in this separate existence, was a shape that could draw her, whole, along with it ... and here suddenly, warmly about her in its evening quiet, was the narrow winding lane of Bond Street.... Was this bright shape, that drew her, the secret of her nature ... the clue she had carried in her hand through the maze?

It would explain my love for kingly old Hanover, the stately ancient house in Waldstrasse; the way the charm of the old-fashioned well-born Pernes held me so long in the misery of North London; the relief of getting away to Newlands, my determination to remain from that time forth, at any cost, amidst beautiful surroundings...? Though life has drawn me away these things have stayed with me. They were with me through the awful months.... If *she* had been able to escape into the beauty of outside things, it would not have happened.

It was not the fear of being alone with the echoes of the tragedy that made me ill in suburban lodgings, but the small ugliness and

the empty crude suburban air; the knowledge that if I stayed and forgot its ugliness in happiness it would mould me unawares. My drifting to the large old house in grey wide Bloomsbury was a movement of return.

Then I am attached forever to the spacious gentle surroundings in which I was born? Always watching and listening and feeling for them to emerge? My social happiness dependent upon the presence of some suggestion of its remembered features, my secret social ambition its perfected form in circumstances beyond my reach?...

No. There was something within her that could not tolerate either the people or the thoughts existing within that exclusive world. In the silences that flowed about its manifold unvarying expressions, she would always find herself ranging off into lively consciousness of other ways of living, whose smiling mystery defied its complacent patronage.... It drew only her nature, the ease and beauty loving soul of her physical being, and that only in critical contemplation. She would never desire to bestir herself to achieve stateliness.

So that the faraway moment of being driven forth seemed to bear two meanings. It was life's stupid error, a cruel blind destruction of her helpless youth. At this moment if it were possible she would reverse it and return. During all these years she had been standing motionless, fixed tearfully in the attitude of return. The joy she had found in her invisible life amongst the servants was the joy of remaining girt and ready for the flight of return, her original nature stored up and hidden behind the adopted manner of her bondage.

Or it was life's wisdom, the swift movement of her lucky star, providence pouncing. And providence, having seized her indolent blissful protesting form and flung it forth with a laugh, had continued to pamper her with a sense of happiness that bubbled unexpectedly out in the midst of her utmost attempts to achieve misery by a process of reason.

It is my strange bungling in misery that makes everyone seem far off. A perpetual oblivion not only of my own circumstances, but, at the wrong moments, of those of other

people, makes me disappoint and shock them, suddenly disappearing before their eyes in the midst of a sympathy that they had eagerly seemed to find satisfying and rare.... A light frivolous elastic temperament? A helpless going to and fro between two temperaments. A solid charwomanly commonplace kindness, spread like a doormat at the disposal of everybody, and an intermittent perfect dilettantism that would disgust even the devil?

That was *his* temperament? The quality that had made him gravitate, unaided, towards exclusive things, was also in her. But weaker, because it was less narrow? He had thrown up everything for leisure to wander in the fields of art and science and philosophy; shutting his eyes to the fact of his diminishing resources. She, with no resources at all, had dropped to easy irresponsible labour to avoid being shaped and branded, to keep her untouched strength free for a wider contemplation than he would have approved, a delight in everything in turn, a *plebeian* dilettantism, aware and defensive of the exclusive things, but unable to restrict herself

to them, unconsciously from the beginning resisting the drawing of lines and setting up of oppositions? More and more consciously ranged on all sides simultaneously. More *catholic*. That was the other side of the family. But if with his temperament and his sceptical intuitive mind, she had also the nature of the other side of the family what a hopeless problem.... If she belonged to both, she was the sport of opposing forces that would never allow her to alight and settle. The movement of her life would be like a pendulum. No wonder people found her unaccountable. But being her own solitary companion would not go on forever. It would bring in the end, somewhere about middle age, the state that people called madness.... Perhaps the lunatic asylums were full of people who had refused to join up? There were happy people in them? "Wandering" in their minds. But remembering and knowing happiness all the time? In dropping to nothingness they escaped forever into that state of amazed happiness that goes on all the time underneath the strange forced quotations of deeds and words.

Oxford Street opened ahead, right and left, a wide empty yellow-lit corridor of large shuttered shop-fronts. It stared indifferently at her outlined fate.

Even at night it seemed to echo with the harsh sounds of its oblivious conglomerate traffic. Since the high light-spangled front of the Princess's Theatre had changed, there was nothing to obliterate the permanent sense of the two monstrous streams flowing all day, fierce and shattering, east and west. Oxford Street, unless she were sailing through it perched in sunlight on the top of an omnibus lumbering steadily towards the graven stone of the City, always wrought destruction, pitting its helpless harshness against her alternating states of talkative concentration and silent happy expansion. Going west it *was* destruction; forever approaching the west-end, reaching its gates and passing them by.

Stay here, suggested Bond Street. Walking here you can keep alive, out in the world, until the end, an aged crone, still a citizen of my kingdom, hobbling in the sun, along my sacred pavements. She turned gladly,

encompassing the gift of the whole length of the winding lane with a plan of working round through Soho, to cross Oxford Street painlessly where it blended with St. Giles's, and would let her through northwards into the squares. The strange new thoughts were about her the moment she turned back. They belonged to these old, central finely etched streets where they had begun, a fresh proof of her love for them; a new enrichment of their charm.

Whatever might be the truth about heredity, it was immensely disturbing to be pressed upon by two families, to discover, in their so different qualities, the explanation of herself. The sense of existing merely as a link, without individuality, was not at all compensated by the lifting, and distribution backwards, of responsibility. To be set in a mould, powerless to alter its shape ... to discover, too late for association and enquiry, the people she helplessly belonged to. Yet the very fact that young people fled their relatives, was an argument on the side of individuality. But not all fled their relatives. Perhaps only those of St. Paul's evil

generation, “lacking in natural affection.”

She glanced narrowly, with a curiosity that embarrassment could no longer hold back, at her father’s side of the family, and while she waited for them to fall upon her and wrathfully consume her, she met the shock of a surprise that caught her breath. They did not *object*. Boldly faced, in the light of her new interest, the vividly remembered forms, paintings and photographs almost as vividly real, came forward and grouped themselves about her as if mournfully glad at last of the long-deferred opportunity. They offered, not themselves, but what they saw and knew, holding themselves withdrawn, rigorously in place about the centre of their preoccupation. Yet they *were* personal. The terrible gentleness with which they asked her why for so long she had kept aloof from consultation with them, held a personal appeal that made her glow. Deeply desiring it, she held herself away from the solicited familiarity in a stillness of fascinated observation.

They were *Puritans*.... More wonderful than she had known in thinking of them as nonconformists, a disgrace her father had

escaped together with the trade he had abandoned in youth. They were the Puritans she had read of; but not Cromwellian, certainly not Roundheads. Though they were tall and gaunt with strongly moulded features, their thoughtless, generous English ancestry showed in them, moulded by their sternness to a startling ... *beauty*. They had well-shaped hands, alive and speaking amongst their rich silks and fine old laces. They wore with a dignified austerity, but still they wore, and must therefore have thought about, silk and lace and broadcloth and fine frilled linen, as well as the sin in themselves and in the world. But principally they were aware of sin, gazing with stern meditative eyes, through the pages of their gloomily bound books, into the abyss yawning at their feet. She held herself in her place, growing bolder, longing now for parley with their silent resistance, disguising nothing, offering them pell-mell, the least suitable of her thoughts. But the eyes they turned on her, still dreadfully begging her to remember now, in the days of her youth, were kind, lit by a special smiling indulgence.... Their strong stern lives, full of

the knowledge of experience, that had led down to her, had made them *kind*. However far she might stray, she was still their favourite, their different stubby round-faced darling, never to be condemned to the abyss. Listening as they called to their part in her, she shared the salvation they had wrought ... salvage ... of hard fine lives, reared narrowly, in beauty, above the gulf.

Yet it was also from their incompleteness that they called to her; the *darkness* in them, visible in the air about them as they moved, that she had always feared and run away from. The thought of the stern gaunt chairs in which they sat and died of old age was horrible even at this moment, and now that she no longer feared them, she knew, though she felt a homesick longing for their stern righteousness, that it was incomplete. The pressing darkness kept them firm, fighting the devil every inch of the way....

But the devil was not dark, he was bright. Brightest and best of the sons of the morning. What shocking profanity. Something has made me drunk. I am always drunk in the west-end. Satan was proud. God revenged

himself. Revengeful, omnipotent, jealous, “the first of the autocrats.” ...

There was a glory hidden in that old darkness, but they did not know it; though they followed it. Accepting them, plunging into their darkness she would never be able to keep from finding the bright devil and wandering wrapt in gloom, but forgetful, perpetually in the bright spaces within the darkness. And perhaps it was God.

Impossible to say. Religious people shunned the bright places believing them haunted by the devil. Other religious people believed they were the gift of God and would presently be everywhere, for everybody, the kingdom of God upon Earth. But even if factories were abolished and the unpleasant kinds of work shared out so that they pressed upon nobody, how could the Kingdom of Heaven come upon earth as long as there were childbirth and cancer?

Light makes *shadows*. The devil is God’s shadow? The Persians believed that in the end the light would absorb the darkness. That was credible. But it could never happen on earth. That was where the Puritans were right

with their vale of tears, and why they were more deeply attractive than the other side of the family. Their roots in life were deeper and harder and the light from the Heavenly City fell upon their foreheads *because* they struggled in the gloom. If only they knew what the gloom was, the marvel of its being there. They were solemn and reproachful because they could not get at their own gaiety....

The others were *too* jolly, too much turned out towards life, deliberately cheerful and roystering, not aware of the wonder and beauty of gloom, yet more dreadfully haunted and afraid of it, showing its uncomprehended presence by always deliberately driving it away. They spread gloom about them, by their perpetual impatient cheerfulness, afraid to listen and look. Their wild spirits were tragic, bright tragedy, making their country life sound in the distance like one long maddening unbroken noise, afraid to stop, rushing on, taking everything for granted, and troubling about nothing. People who lived in the country *were* different. Fresh. All converted by their surroundings into

perpetual noise? The large spaces gave them large rich voices ... rounded sturdy west country yeomen, blunt featured and jolly, with big voices. Jestng with women. The women all dark and animated ... arch ... minxes. Any amount of flirting. All the scandals of the family were on that side. Girls, careering, with flying hair, round paddocks, on unbroken bare-backed ponies. Huge families. Hunting. Great Christmas and Harvest parties. Maypoles in the spring. They always saw the spring, every year without fail. Perhaps that was their secret? Wherever they were they saw nothing but dawn and spring, the light coming from the darkness. They shouted against the darkness because they knew the light was hidden in it. If you're waking, call me early, call me early ...

So ear-ly in, the mor-ning,
My Belo-ved
My Beloved.

Those women's voices pealed out into the wakening air of pure silver dawns. The chill pure dawn and dark over the fields where

L'Allegro walked in her picture, the dewy dawn-lit grass under her white feet, her hair blown softly back by the morning breeze flowing over her dawn-lit face, shaping her garments to her happy limbs as she walked dancing, towards the increasing light. Little pools and clumps of wet primroses over the surface of the grey-green grass, flushed with rose, like her glowing dancing face as she skimmed, her whole bright form peeling with song towards the *increasing light*. Was that sort of life still going on somewhere?

Yet Il Penseroso *knew* and L'Allegro did not.

Long-featured Sarah was on the Puritan side, with a strain of the artist, drawn from the other half, tormenting her. Eve, delicately and unscrupulously adventurous, was the west country side altogether.

Within me ... the *third* child, the longed-for son, the two natures, equally matched, mingle and fight? It is their struggle that keeps me adrift, so variously interested and strongly attracted, now here, now there? Which will win?... Feeling so identified with both, she could not imagine either of them set aside.

Then her life *would* be the battle field of her two natures. Which of them had been thrilled through and through, so that she had seemed to enter, lightly waving her hand to all that had gone before, for good, into a firelit glow, the door closing behind her, and leaving her launched, without her belongings, but richly accompanied, on a journey to the heart of an unquenchable joy? It was not socialism that had drawn her, though the moment before, she had been, spontaneously a socialist, for the first time. The glow that had come with his words was still there, drawing her, an unfulfilled promise. She was still waiting to be, consciously, in league and everlasting company with others, a socialist. Yet the earlier lonely moment had been so far her only experience of the state; everything that had followed had been a slow gradual undoing of it.

What was the secret of the immense relief, the sense of being and doing in an unbounded immensity that had come with her dreamy sudden words? One moment sitting on the hearth-rug living in the magic of the woven text, feeling its message rise from the quiet

firelit room, drive through the sound of the winter sea and out and away over the world, to everyone who had ears to hear; giving the power of hearing to those who had not, until they equally possessed it. And then hearing her own voice, like a whisper in the immensity, thrilled with the sense of a presented truth, coming *given*, suddenly, from nowhere, the glad sense of a shape whose denial would be death, and bringing as she dreamily followed its prompting, a willingness to suffer in its service.

“You ought to cut out the pathos in that passage.”

“*Which* passage, Miriametta?” The effort of throwing off the many distractions of the interested, mocking, critical voice.

“You weaken the whole argument by coming forward in those three words to tell your readers what they ought to feel. An *enormous* amount of time is lost, while attention is turned from the spectacle to yourself.”

“Yes. *Which* passage?”

“In the moment that the reader turns away, everything goes, and they come back

distracted and different, having been racing all over their own world, perhaps *indifferent*.”

“Passage, passage——”

“The *real* truth is that you don’t feel that pathos to yourself, or not in that way and in those words ... there are one or two earlier passages that stopped me, the same sort of thing.”

“Right. We’ll have ’em all out.”

“Without them the book will convince everybody.”

“No sane person can read it and keep out of socialism.”

“No.” But how fearful that sounds said by the author. As if he knew something else as well.

“Y’know *you* ought to be a Lycurgan, Miriam.” And then had come the sense of the door closing on all past loneliness, the rich sense of being carried forward to some new accompanied moulding change; but without any desire to go. Even with him, a moment of expression, seeming, while it lasted, enough in itself; the whole of life, when it happened not alone, but in an understanding presence; led to *results*, the destructive demand for the

pinning of it down to some small shape of specialised action. Could he not see that the thing so surprising her and coming to him also as a surprise, was enough in itself ... would disappear if she rushed forward into activities, masquerading, with empty hands, as one who had something to give. Yet *he* was going forward into activities.... She ought, having learned from him a clear theory of the working of the whole of human life, to be willing to follow, only too glad of the opportunity of any sort of share, even as an onlooker in the making of the new world.

But if she responded, she would be supporting his wrong estimate of her, his way of endowing everyone with his own gifts, seeing people only as capability, waiting for opportunities for action. She wanted only further opportunities with him, of forgetfulness, and the strange following moments of expression.

“Everyone will be socialists soon; there’s no need to join societies.”

“There’s mountains, my dear Miriam, *mountains* of work ahead, that only an organised society can compass. And you’d

like the Lycurgans. We'll make you a Lycurgan."

"What could I do?"

"You can talk. You might write. Edit. You've got a deadly critical eye. Yes, you are a Lycurgan. That's settled."

"How *can* you say I can talk?"

"You've got a *tenacity*. I'd back you against anyone in argument, when you're roused."

"Argument is no good to anybody, world without end, amen."

"Don't be frivolous, Miriam. Real argument's a fine clean weapon."

"Cutting both ways; proving *anything*."

"Quarrelsome Miriam."

"And you know what you think about my writing. That I, or *anybody* could *learn* to write, passably."

"If you *have* written anything, I've not seen it. You shall learn to write, passably, in the interests of socialism."

What an awful fate. To sit in a dusty corner, loyally doing odd jobs, considered by him "quite a useful intelligent creature" among other much more clever, and to him,

more attractive creatures, all working submissively in the interests of a theory that he understood so well that he must already be believing in something else. But she was already a useful fiercely loyal creature, that was how he described her, at Wimpole Street —But that was for the sake of freedom. Working with him there would be no freedom at all. Only a series of loyal posings.

Standing upon the footstool to get out, back, away from the wrong turning into the sense of essential expression. The return into the room of the sound of the sea, empty and harsh, in a void.

“That’s admirable. You could carry off any number of inches, Miriam. You only want the helmet and the trident. You’re Britannia, you know. The British Constitution. You’re infinitely more British than I am.”

“Foreigners always tell me I am the only English person who understands them.”

“*Flattery*. You’ve no *idea* how British you are. A mass of British prejudice and intelligent obstinacy. I shall put you in a book.”

“Then how can you want me to be a

socialist. I am a Tory and an anarchist by turns.”

“You’re certainly an anarchist. You’re an individualist you know, that’s what’s wrong with you.”

“And what’s wrong with *you*?”

“And now you shall experiment in being a socialist.”

“Tories are the best socialists.”

“You shall be a Tory socialist. My dear Miriam, there will be socialists in the House of *Lords*.”

The same group of days had contained the relief of the beginning of generalisations; the end, on her part, of stories about people, told with an eye upon his own way of observing and stating. These stories had, during the earlier time, kept him so amused and, with his profane comments and paraphrases, so perpetually entertaining, that a large part of her private councils during the visits were spent in reviewing the long procession of Tansley Street boarders, the patients at Wimpole Street, and people ranged far away in her earlier lives, as material for anecdote. But throughout the delight of his interest and

his surprising reiterated envy of the variety of her contacts, there had been a haunting sense of misrepresentation, and even of treachery to him, in contributing to his puzzling almost unvarying vision of people as pitifully absurd, from the small store of experiences she had dropped and forgotten, until he drew them forth and called them wealth.

His refusal to believe in a Russian's individuality because no one had heard of him had set a term to these communications, leaving an abrupt pain. It was so strange that he should fail to recognise the distinction of the Russian *being*, the quality of the Russian attitude towards life. He had followed with interest, gentle and patient at first before her overwhelming conviction, allowing her to add stroke after stroke to her picture, seeming for a moment to see what she saw and then —What has he *done*? Either it was that his pre-arranged picture of European life had no place for these so different, inactive Russians, or her attempts to represent people in themselves, without borrowed methods of portrayal, were useless because they fell between the caricature which was so

uncongenial to her and the methods of description current in everyday life, which equally refused to serve by reason of their tacit reference to ideas she could not accept.

But the beginnings of abstract discussion had brought a most joyful relief, and a confirming intensification of the beauty of the interiors and of the surrounding landscape, in which their talks were set. Discussing people, save when he elaborated legend and profanity until privately she called upon the hosts of heaven to share this brightest terrestrial mirth, cast a spell of sadness all about her. With every finished vignette there came a sense of ending. Sacrificed to its sharp expressiveness were the real moments of these people's lives; and the moments of the present, counting themselves off, ignored and irrecoverable, offering, as their extension, time that was unendurably narrow and confined, a narrow featureless darkness, its walls grinning with the transfixed features of consciousness that had always been, and must, if the pictures were accepted as true, forever be, a motionless absurdity.

Launched into wide opposition, no longer

trying to see with his eyes, while still hoarding, as a contrasting amplification of her own visions, much that he had given her, she found people still there; rallying round her in might, ranging forward through time, each one standing clear of everything that offered material for ironic commentary, in a radiant individuality.

Wide generalisation was, she had immediately vowed, the way to illuminating contemplation of humanity. Its exercise made the present moment a life in itself, going on forever; the thought of the speakers and the surroundings blended in an unforgettable whole; her past life gleaming about her in a chain of moments; leaping glad acceptances or ardent refusals, of large general views.

The joy of making statements not drawn from things heard or read but plumbed directly from the unconscious accumulations of her own experience was fermented by the surprise of his interested attention, and the pride of getting him occasionally to accept an idea or to modify a point of view. It beamed compensation for what she was losing in sacrificing, whenever expression was urgent

in her, his unmatched monologue to her own shapeless outpourings. But she laboured, now and then successfully, to hold this emotion in subjection to the urgency of the things she longed to express.

“*Women*, everybody knows nowadays, have made civilisation, the thing civilisation is so proud of—social life. It’s one of the things I dislike in them. There you are, by the way, women were the first socialists.” Havelock Ellis; and Emerson quoting Firdusi’s description of his Persian Lilla ... but the impression, remaining more sharp and deep than the event, became one’s own by revealing an inborn sharing of the view expressed. And waiting behind it now, was the proof, in life, as she had seen it.

“I don’t mean that idea of public opinion ‘the great moulding and civilising force steered by women’ that even the most pessimistic men admit, in horror.”

“What *do* you mean, Miriam?” Patient scepticism.

“Something quite different. It’s amazing, the blindness in men, even in you, about women. There must be a reason for it.

Because it's universal. It's no good looking, with no matter *what* eyes, if you look in the wrong place. All that men have done, since the beginning of the world, is to find out and give names to and do, the things that were in women from the beginning, and that the best of them have been doing all the time. Not me."

"*You*, Miriam, are an incorrigible *loafer*. I've a sneaking sympathy with *that*."

"Well, the thing is, that whereas a few men here and there are creators, originators ... *artists*, women are this all the time."

"My dear Miriam, I don't know *what* women are. I'm enormously interested in sex; but I don't know *anything* about it. Nobody does. That's just where we are."

"Because you're a man and have no personality."

"Don't talk nonsense, Miriam."

"How can a man have personality?"

"All right. *Men*—have no personality."

"You see women simply as a sex. That's one of the proofs."

"Right. Women have no sex."

"You are doubtful about 'emancipating'

women, because you think it will upset their sex-life.”

“I don’t know *anything*, Miriam. No personality. No knowledge. But there’s Miss Waugh, with a thoroughly able career behind her; been *everywhere*, done *everything*, my dear Miriam; come out of it all, shouting you back into the nursery.”

“I don’t know her. Perhaps she’s jealous, like a man, of her freedom. But the point is, there’s no emancipation to be done. Women are emancipated.”

“Prove it, Miriam.”

“I can. Through their pre-eminence in an art. The art of making atmospheres. It’s as big an art as any other. Most women can exercise it, for reasons, by fits and starts. The best women work at it the whole of the time. Not one man in a million is aware of it. It’s like air within the air. It may be deadly. Cramping and awful, or simply destructive, so that no life is possible within it. So is the bad art of men. At its best it is absolutely life-giving. And not soft. Very hard and stern and austere in its beauty. And like mountain air. And you can’t get behind it, or in any way divide it up.

Just as with ‘Art.’ Men live in it and from it all their lives without knowing. Even recluses.”

“Don’t drive it too far, Miriam.”

“Well; I’m so staggered by it. All women, of course, know about it, and *there’s* the explanation of why women clash. Over what men call ‘trifles.’ Because the thing I mean goes through everything. A woman’s way of ‘being’ can be discovered in the way she pours out tea. *Men* can’t get on together. If they’re boxed up. Do you know there’s hardly a partnership in Wimpole Street that’s not a permanent feud. Yes. Would you believe it. And for scandal and gossip and jealousy there’s *nothing* to beat the professors in a University Town. Several of them don’t speak. They communicate by letter.... But it’s the women who are not grouped who can see all this most clearly. By moving, amongst the grouped women, from atmosphere to atmosphere. It’s one of my principal social entertainments. I feel the atmosphere created by the lady of the house as soon as I get on to the door step.”

“Perceptive Miriam.... You *have* a flair,

Miriam. I grant you that. I believe in your flair.”

“Well, it’s *true*, what I’m trying to tell you. It’s one of the answers to the question about women and art. It’s all there. It doesn’t show, like men’s art. There’s no drama or publicity. *There*; d’you see? It’s hard and exacting; needing ‘the maximum of detachment and control.’ And people have to learn, or be taught, to see it.”

“Y...es. Is it conscious?”

“Absolutely. And there you are again. Artists, well, and *literary* people, say they have to get away from everything at intervals. They associate with queer people, and some of them are dissipated. They can only rest, stop being artists, by getting *away*. That is why so many women get nervy and break down. The only way they can rest, is by being nothing to nobody, leaving off for a while giving out any atmosphere.”

“Stop breathing.”

“Yes. But if you laugh at that, you must laugh at artists, *and* literary people.”

“I will. I *do*.”

“Yes; but in general. You must see the

identity of the two things for good or for bad. If people reverence men's art and feel their sacrifices are worth while, to *themselves*, as well as to other people, they must not just *pity* the art of women. It doesn't matter to women. But it's so jolly bad for men, to go about feeling lonely and superior. Men, and the women who imitate them, bleat about women 'finding their truest fulfilment in *self-sacrifice*.' In speaking of male art it is called *self-realisation*. That's men all over. They get an illuminating theory—man must die, to live—and apply it only to themselves. If a theory is true, you may be sure it applies in a most thorough-going way to women. They don't stop dead at self-sacrifice. They reap ... freedom. Self-realisation. Emancipation. Lots of women hold back. Just as men do—from exacting careers. *I do. I don't want to exercise the feminine art.*"

"It's true you don't compete or exploit yourself, Miriam."

"Some women want to be men. And the contrary, men wanting to be women, is almost unknown. This is supposed to be evidence of the superiority of the masculine

state. It isn't. Women only want to be men before they begin their careers. It's a longing for exemptions. Young women envy men, as young men, faced with the hard work of life, envy dogs."

"Harsh Miriam."

"It's true. At any rate it's deserved, after all men have said. And I believe it's *true*."

"Pugilistic Miriam.... Your atmospheric idea is quite illuminating. I think there's some truth in it; and I'd be with you altogether but for one ... damning ... yes, I think absolutely damning, *fact*."

"Well?"

"The men women will marry. The men quite fine, intelligent women marry; and *idolise*, my dear Miriam."

"Many artists have to use any material that comes to hand. The treatment is the thing."

"Treatment that mistakes putty for marble, my dear Miriam——"

"And you don't see that you are proving my point. Women *see* things when they are not there. That's creativeness. What is meant by women 'making' men."

"They don't. They'll make idols of nothing

at all; and go on burning incense—all their lives.”

“I don’t believe women are *ever* deceived about their husbands. But they don’t give up hope. And there’s something in everybody. That’s what women see.”

“Nonsense, Miriam. Girls, with quite good brains and abilities will marry anything; accept its views and quote them.”

“Yes; just as they will show off a child’s tricks. Views and opinions are masculine things. Women are indifferent to them, really. Any set will do. I know the way a woman’s opinions and interests change with her different husbands, if she marries more than once, is supposed to prove the vacuity of her mind. Half the satirists of women have made their reputation on that idea. It isn’t so. It is that women can hold all opinions at once, or any, or none. It’s because they see the relations of things which don’t change, more than things which are always changing, and mostly the importance to men of the things men believe. But behind it all their own lives are untouched.”

“Behind... What *is* there behind, Miriam?”

“Life.”

“What do they do with it?”

“Live.”

“Mysterious, Miriam.... The business of women; the career; that makes you all rivals, is to find fathers. Your material is children.”

“Then look here, if you think *that*, there’s a perfect instance. If women’s material is people, their famous ‘curiosity’ is the curiosity of the artist. Men call it ‘incurable’ in women. Men’s curiosity, about things, science and so forth, is called divine. There you are. My *word*.”

“*I don’t*, Miriam.”

“Shaw knows how wildly interested women are in psychology. That’s funny.... But about children. If only you could realise how incidental all that is.”

“Incidental to what?”

“To the *life* of the individual.”

“Try it, Miriam. Marry your Jew. You know Jew and English makes a good mix.”

“You see I never knew he was a Jew. It did not come up until a possible future came in view. I *couldn’t* have Jewish children.”

“Incidents. Mere incidents.”

“No; the wrong material. I, being myself, couldn’t do anything with it; couldn’t be anything in relationship to it.”

“You’d *be*, through seeing its possibilities and making an atmosphere.”

“I’ve told you I’m *not* one of those stupendous women.”

“What *are* you?”

“Well, now here’s something you will like. If I were to marry a Jew, I should feel that all my male relatives would have the right to *beat* me.”

“That’s strange.... And, I think, great nonsense, Miriam.”

“And I’m not anti-semite. I think Jews are better Christians than we are. We have things to learn from them. But not by marrying them, until they’ve learnt things from us. Women, particularly, can’t marry Jews. Men can marry Jewesses, if they like.”

“Marriage is a more important affair for women than for men. Just so.”

“I didn’t say so.”

“You *did*, Miriam, and it’s quite true.”

“It appears to be so because, as I’ve been trying to show you, men don’t know where

they are.”

“Your man’ll know, Miriam. You ought to marry and have children. You’d have good children. Good shapes and good brains.”

“The mere sight of a child, moving unconsciously, its little shoulders and busy intentions, makes me catch my breath.”

“Marry your Jew, Miriam. Well—perhaps no; don’t marry your Jew.”

“The other day we were walking somewhere. I was dead-tired. He knew it and kept on suggesting a hansom. Suddenly there was a woman, lugging a heavy perambulator up some steps. He stood still, shouting to *me* to help her.”

“What did you do?”

“I blazed his own words back at him. I daresay I stamped my foot. Meanwhile the woman, who was very burly, had got the perambulator up. We walked on and presently he said in a quiet intensely interested voice ‘*Why* did you not help this woman?’”

“What did you say?”

“I began to talk about something else.”

“Diplomatic Miriam.”

“Not at all. It’s *useless* to talk to *instincts*. I know; because I have tried. Poor little man. I am afraid, now that I am not going to marry him, of hurting and tiring him. I talked one night. We had been agreeing about things, and I went on and on, it was in the drawing-room in the dark, after a theatre, talking almost to myself, very interested, forgetting that he was there. Presently a voice said, trembling with fatigue, ‘Believe me, Miriam, I am profoundly interested. Will you perhaps put all this down for me on paper?’ Yes. Wasn’t it funny and *appalling*. It was three o’clock. Since then I have been afraid. Besides, he will marry a Jewess. If I were not sure of that I could not contemplate his loneliness. It’s heartbreaking. When I go to see friends in the evening, he waits outside.”

“I say. Poor *chap*. That’s quite touching. You’ll marry him yet, Miriam.”

“There are ways in which I like him and am in touch with him as I never could be with an Englishman. Things he understands. And his absolute sweetness. Absence of malice and enmity. It’s so strange too, with all his ideas about women, the things he will do.

Little things like cleaning my shoes. But look here; an important thing. Having children is just shelving the problem, leaving it for the next generation to solve.”

That stood out as the end of the conversation; bringing a sudden bright light. The idea that there was something essential, for everybody, that could not be shelved. Something had interrupted. It could never be repeated. But surely he must have agreed, if there had been time to bring it home to him. Then it might have been possible to get him to admit uniqueness ... individuality. He would. But would say it was negligible. Then the big world he thinks of, since it consists of individuals, is also negligible....

Something had been at work in the conversation, making it all so easy to recover. Vanity? The relief of tackling the big man? Not altogether. Because there had been moments of thinking of death. Glad death if the truth could *once* be stated. Disinterested rejoicing in the fact that a man who talked to so many people was hearing *something* about the world of women. And if anyone had been there to express it better, the relief would

have been there, just the same, without jealousy. But what an unconscious compliment to men, to feel that it mattered whether or no they understood anything about the world of women....

The remaining days of the visit had glowed with the sense of the beginning of a new relationship with the Wilsons. The enchantment that surrounded her each time she went to see them and always as the last hours went by, grew oppressive with the reminder of its impermanence, shone, at last, wide over the future. The end of a visit would never again bring the certainty of being finally committed to an overwhelming combination of poverties, cut off, by an all-round ineligibility, from the sun-bathed seaward garden, the joyful brilliant seaside light pouring through the various bright interiors of the perfect little house; the inexpressible *charm*, always renewed, and remaining, however deeply she felt at variance with the Wilson reading of life, the topmost radiance of her social year; ignored and forgotten nearly all the time, but shining out whenever she chanced to look round at

the resources of her outside life, a bright enduring pinnacle, whose removal would level the landscape to a rolling plain, its modest hillocks, easy to climb, robbed of their light, the bright reflection that came, she half-angrily admitted, from this central height.

But there had been a difference in the return to London after that visit, that had filled her with misgiving. Usually upon the afterpain of the wrench of departure, the touch of her own returning life had come like a balm. That time, she had seemed, as the train steamed off, to be going for the first time, not away from, but towards all she had left behind. There had been a strange exciting sense of travelling, as everyone seemed to travel, preoccupied, missing the adventure of the journey, merely suffering it as an unavoidable time-consuming movement from one place to another. She, like all these others, had a place and a meaning in the outside world. She could have talked, if opportunity had offered, effortlessly, from the surface of her mind, borrowing emphasis and an appearance of availability and interest,

from a secure unshared possession. She had suddenly known that it was from this basis of preoccupation with secure unshared possessions that the easy shapely conversations of the world were made. But also that those who made them were committed, by their preoccupations, to a surrounding deadness. Liveliness of mind checked the expressiveness of surroundings. The gritty interior of the carriage had remained intolerable throughout the journey. The passing landscape had never come to life.

But the menace of a future invested in unpredictable activities in a cause that seemed, now that she understood it, to have been won invisibly since the beginning of the world, was lost almost at once in the currents of her London life. Things had happened that had sharply restored her normal feeling of irreconcilableness; of being altogether differently fated, and to return, if ever they should wish it, only at the bidding of the inexpressible charm. There had been things moving all about her with an utterly reassuring independent reality. Mr. Leyton's engagement ... bringing to light as she lived it

through chapter by chapter, sitting at work in the busy highway of the Wimpole Street house, a world she had forgotten, and that rose now before her in serene difficult perfection; a full denial of Mr. Wilson's belief in the death of family life. In the midst of her effort to launch herself into a definite point of view, it had made her swerve away again towards the beliefs of the old world. Meeting them afresh after years of oblivion, she had found them unassailably new. The new lives inheriting them brought in the fresh tones, the thoughts and movement of modern life, and left the old symphony recreated and unchanged.

The Tansley Street world had been full and bright all that summer with the return of whole parties of Canadians as old friends. With their untiring sociability, their easy inclusion of the abruptly appearing unIntroduced foreigners and provincials, they had made the world look like one great family party.

They had influenced even Michael ... steeping him in sunlit gaiety. By breaking up the strain of unrelieved association they had

made him seem charming again. Their immense respect for him turned him, in their presence, once more into a proud uncriticised possession.

Rambles round the squares with him, snatched late at night, had been easy to fill with hilarious discussions of the many incidents; serious exhausting talk held in check by the near presence of unquestioning people, and the promise of the lively morrow. Yet every evening, when they had her set down and surrounded at the piano, there came the sense of division. They cared only for music that interpreted their point of view.

Captain Gradoff ... large flat lonely face, pock-marked, eyes looking at nothing, with an expression of fear. Improper, naked old grizzly head, suggesting other displayed helpless heads, above his stout neat sociable Russian skipper's jacket ... praying in his room at the top of his voice, with howls and groans. Suddenly teaching us all to make a long loud syren-shriek with half a Spanish nutshell. He had an invention for the Admiralty ... lonely and frightened, in a ghostly world; with an invention to save the

lives of ships.

Engström and Sigerson!

Engström's huge frame and bulky hard red face, shining with simplicity below his great serene intellectual brow and up-shooting hair. His first evening at Mrs. Bailey's right hand, saying gravely out into the silence of the crowded dinner table, "there is in Pareece very much automobiles, and good wash. In London not. I send much manchettes, and all the bords are cassed." Devout reproachfulness in his voice; and his brow pure, motherly serenity. Sweden in the room amongst all the others. Teased, like everyone else, with petty annoyances. But with immense strength to throw everything off. Everyone waiting in the peaceful silence that surrounded the immense gently booming voice; electing him president as he sat burying his jests with downcast eyes that left the mask of his bluntly carven face yielded up to friendship. Waves of strength and kindness coming from him, bringing exhilaration. Making even the Canadians seem pale and small and powerless. At the mercy of life. And then the harsh kind blaze

of his brown eyes again. More unhesitating phrases. He had brought strength and happiness into the house. A rough, clump-worded Swedish song, rawly affronting the English air, words of his separate country, the only words for his deepest meanings, making barriers ... till he leapt, he was so *light* in his strength, on to a chair to bring out the top note, and the barriers fell.... He pealed his notes in farcical agony towards the ceiling. In that moment he was kneeling, bowed before the coldest, looking through to the hidden sunlight in everybody.... Conducting an imaginary orchestra from behind the piano. Sind the Trommels in Ordna? Everybody had understood, and loved each word he spoke.

“Wo ist the Veoleena Sigerson? I shall bring.” Springing from his place near the door, lightly in and out amongst the seated forms, leaping obstacles all over the room on his way back to the open door, struggling noiselessly with all his strength, strong legs sliding under him as he pulled at the handle to open the open door. He and Sigerson had stayed on after the spring visitors. Evenings, voyaging alone with the two of them into

strange new music. He had forgotten that he had said, I play nor sing not payshionate musics in bystanding of Miss—little—Hendershon. And the German theatre ... a shamed moving forward into suspicion, even of Irving, in the way they all played, working equally, together ... all taking care of the play ... play and acting, rich with life.

Sigerson was jealous. He wanted all the bright sunlight to himself and tried to hold it with his cold scornful brains. Waspy Schopenhauerism. They went to *Peckham*. The little weepy dabby assistant of the Peckham landlady, her speech ready-made quotations in the worst London English. Impure vowels, slobbery consonants. She reflected his sunlight like a dead moon. There was a large old garden. His first English garden in summer. He had loved it with all the power of the Swedish landscape in him turned on to its romantic strangeness, and identified the dabby girl with it. She fainted when he went away. A despair like death. He had come faithfully back and married her. *What* could she, forever Peckham, seeing nothing, distorting everything by her speech,

make of Stockholm?

And all the time the Wimpole Street days had glowed more and more with the forgotten story. Thanks to the scraps of detail in Mr. Leyton's confidences she had lived in the family of girls, centred round their widowed mother in the large old suburban house, garden girt, and bordering on countrified open spaces. She imagined it always sunlit, and knew that it rang all the morning with the echoes of work and laughter, and the sharp-tongued ironic commentary of a family of Harrietts freed from the shadows that had surrounded Harriett's young gaiety, by the presence of an income, small but secure. The bustle of shared work, all exquisitely done in the exacting, rewarding old-fashioned way, nothing bought that could be home-made, filled each morning with an engrossing life of its own, lit, by a surrounding endless glory, and left the house a prepared gleaming orderliness, and the girls free to retreat to a little room where a sewing machine was enthroned amidst a licensed disorder of fashion papers, with coloured plates, and things in process of making according to the

newest mode, from oddments carefully selected at the west-end sales. When they were there, during the times of busy work following on consultations and decisions, gossip broke forth; and thrilling the tones of their gossiping voices, and shining all about them, obliterating the walls of the room and the sense of the day and the hour, was a bright eternity of recurring occasions, when the sum of their household labours blossomed unto fulfilment ... at-home days; calls; winter dances; huge picnic parties in the summer, to which they went, riding capably, in their clever home-made cycling costumes on brilliantly gleaming bicycles. And all the year round, shed over each revolving week, the glamour of Sunday ... the perpetual rising up, amongst the varying seasons and days, of a single unvarying shape, standing, in the morning quiet, chill and accusing between them and the warm, far-off everyday life. The relief of the descent into the distractions of dressing for church and bustling off in good time; the momentary return of the challenging shape with the sight of the old grey ivy-grown church; escape from it again into the

refuge of the porch amongst the instreaming neighbours, and the final fading of its outlines into the colour and sound of the morning service, church shapes in stone and wood and metal, secure round about their weakness, holding them safe. The sermon, though they suffered it uncritically, could not, preached by an intelligent or stupid man, but secure, soft-living and married, revive the morning strength of the challenging shape, and as it sounded on towards its end, the grey of another Sunday morning had brought in sight the rest of the day, when, at the worst, if nobody came, there was the evening service, the escape in its midst into a state of bliss that stilled everything, and went on forever, making the coming week, even if the most glorious things were going to happen, wonderful only because it was so amazing to be alive at all ... That was too much ... these girls did not consciously feel like that; perhaps partly because they had a brother, were the kind of girls who would have at least one brother, choking things back by obliviousness, but breezy and useful in many ways. It's good to have brothers; but there is

something they kill, if they are in the majority, absolutely, so that one girl with many brothers rarely becomes a woman, but can sometimes be a nice understanding jolly sort of man. Brothers without sisters are worse off than sisters without brothers; unless they are very gifted ... in which case they are really, as people say of the poets, more than three parts women. But Sundays, for all girls, were in a way the same. And though these girls did not reason and were densely unconscious of the challenge embodied in their religion, and enjoyed being snobbish without knowing it, or knowing the meaning and good of snobbishness, their unconsciousness was harmless, and the huge Sunday things they lived in, held and steered their lives, making, in England, in them and in all of their kind, a world that the clever people who laughed at them had never been inside.... *They* did not laugh, except the busy enviable blissful laughter permitted by God, from the midst of their lives, about nothing at all. They thought liberals vulgar—mostly chapel people; and socialists mad. But in the midst of their conservatism was something

that could never die, and that these other people did not seem to possess....

And the best, most Charlotte Yonge part of the story, was the arrival of Mr. Leyton and his cousin, whilst these girls were still at home amongst their Sundays; and the opening out, for two of them at once, of a future; with the past behind it undivided.

And they had suddenly asked her to their picnic. And she had been back, for the whole of that summer's afternoon, in the world of women; and the forgotten things, that had first driven her away from it, had emerged again, no longer mysterious, and with more of meaning in them, so that she had been able to achieve an appearance of conformity, and had felt that they regarded her not with the adoration or half-pitying dislike she had had from women in the past, but as a woman, though only as a weird sort of female who needed teaching. They had no kind of fear of her; not because they were massed there in strength. Any one of them, singly, would, she had felt, have been equal to her in any sort of circumstances; her superior; a rather impatient but absolutely loyal and chivalrous

guide in the lonely exclusive feminine life.

Surprised by the unanticipated joy of a summer holiday in miniature, their gift, wrested by their energies from the midst of the sweltering London July, and with their world and its ways pulling at her memory, and the door of their good fellowship wide open before her, for an hour she had let go and gone in and joined them, holding herself teachable, keeping in check, while she contemplated the transformation of Mr. Leyton under the fire of their chaff, her impulse to break into the ceaseless jesting with some shape of conversation. And she had felt that they regarded her as a postulant, a soul to be snatched from outer darkness, a candidate as ready to graduate as they were, to grant a degree. And the breaking of the group had left her free to watch the way, without any gap of silence or difficulty of transition, they had set the men to work on the clearing up and stowing away of the paraphernalia of the feast; training them all the while according to the Englishwoman's pattern, an excellent pattern, she could not fail to see, imagining these young males as

they would be, undisciplined by this influence, and comparing them with the many unshaped young men she had observed on their passage through the Tansley Street house.

But all the time she had been half aware that she was only watching a picture, a charmed familiar scene, as significant and as unreal as the set figure of a dance. Giving herself to its discipline she would reap experience and knowledge, confirming truths; but only truths with which she was already familiar, leading down to a lonely silence, where everything still remained unanswered, and the dancers their unchanged unexpressed selves. Individual converse with these young men on the terms these women had trained them to accept, was impossible to contemplate. Every word would be spoken in a dark void.

Breaking in, as the little feast ended in a storm of flying buns and eggshells, a little scene that she had forgotten completely at the moment of its occurrence had risen sharply clear in her mind.... A family party of quiet soberly dressed Scotch Canadian people from

the far-west, seated together at the end of the Tansley Street dinner-table, coming out, on the eve of their departure, from the enclosure of their small, subduedly conversing group, to respond, in level friendly tones, to some bold person's enquiries as to the success of their visit. The sudden belated intimacy, ripened in silence, had seemed very good, compressed into a single occasion that would leave the impression of these homely people single and strong, so well worth losing that their loss would be a permanent acquisition. Suddenly from their midst, the voice of the youngest daughter, a pale, bitter-faced girl with a long thin pigtail of sandy hair, had rung out down the table.

“London's *fine*. But the folks don't all match it. The girls don't. They're just queer. I reckon there's two things they don't know. How to wear their waists, and how to go around with the boys. When I hear an English girl talking to boys, I just have to think she's funny in the head. If Canadian girls were stiff like that, they'd have the dullest time on earth.” Her expressionless pale blue eyes had fixed no one, and she had concluded her

speech with a little fling that had settled her back in her chair, unconcerned.

And in the interval before the ride home, when the men had been driven off, and she was alone with the sisters and saw them relax and yawn, speak in easy casual tones and apostrophise small things, with great gusto, in well-chosen forcible terms, while the men were no doubt also enjoying the same blessed relief, she had felt that the Canadian girl was more right than she knew. Between men and girls, throughout English life there was no exchange, save in the ways of love. Except for those moments when they stood, to each other, for all the world, they never met. And the sense of these sacred moments embarrassed, even while it shaped and beautified, every occasion. Women were its guardians and hostesses. Their guardianship made them hostesses for life. Upon the faces of these girls as they sat about unmasked and pathetically individual, it shed its radiance and, already, its heavy shadows.

Yet American girls with their easy regardlessness seemed lacking in depth of feminine consciousness, too much turned

towards the surfaces of life, and the men with their awakened understanding and quick serviceableness, by so much the less men. In any case there was not the recognisable difference in personality that was so striking in England, and that seemed in some way, even at one's moments of greatest irritation with the women, to bring all the men under a reproach. Many young American men had faces moulded on the lines of responsible middle-aged German housewives; while some of the quite young girls looked out at life with the sharp shrewd repudiation of cynical elderly bachelors. If it were the building up of a civilisation that had brought the sexes together, for generations, in relations that came in English society only momentarily, at a house-warming or a picnic, would the results remain? Or would there be, in America, later on, a beginning of the English differences, the women moving, more and more heavily veiled and burdened, towards the heart of life and the men getting further and further away from the living centre. Ought men and women to modify each other, each standing as it were, halfway

between the centre and the surface, each with a view across the other's territory? Or should they accentuate their natural differences? *Were* the differences natural?

As they rode home through the twilight lanes, the insoluble problem, sounding for her in every shouted remark, had been continually soothed away by the dewy, sweet-scented, softly streaming air. The slurring of their tyres in unison along the smooth roadway, the little chorus of bells as they approached a turning, made them all one entered for good into the heritage of the accomplished day. Nothing could touch the vision that rose and the confessions that were made within its silence. Within each one of the indistinguishable forms the sense of the day was clearing with each moment; its incidents blending and shaping, an irrevocable piece of decisive life; but behind and around and through it all was summer, smiling. Before each pair of eyes, cleared of heat and dust by the balm of the evening air, the picture of the English summer, in blue and gold and green, stood clear within the outspread invisible distances. *That* was the harvest, the thing that

drew people to the labour of organising picnics, that remained afterwards forever; that would remain for the lovers after their love was forgotten; that linked all the members of the party in a fellowship stronger than their differences.

But when they reached the suburbs, the problem was there again in might, incessant as the houses looming by on either side, driven tyrannously home by the easy flight ahead, as Highgate sloped to London, of the two whose machines were fitted with “free” wheels.... Only a mind turned altogether towards outside things could invent....

And then *London* came, opening suddenly before me as I rode out alone from under a dark archway into the noise and glare of a gaslit Saturday night.

Trouble fell away like a cast garment as I swung forward, steering with thoughtless ease, into the southernmost of the four converging streets.

This was the true harvest of the summer’s day; the transfiguration of these northern streets. They were not London proper; but tonight the spirit of London came to meet her

on the verge. Nothing in life could be sweeter than this welcoming—a cup held brimming to her lips, and inexhaustible. What lover did she want? No one in the world could oust this mighty lover, always receiving her back without words, engulfing and leaving her untouched, liberated and expanding to the whole range of her being. In the mile or so ahead, there was endless time. She would travel further than the longest journey, swifter than the most rapid flight, down and down into an oblivion deeper than sleep; and drop off at the centre, on to the deserted grey pavements, with the high quiet houses standing all about her in air sweetened by the evening breath of the trees, stealing down the street from either end; the sound of her footsteps awakening her again to the single fact of her incredible presence within the vast surrounding presence. Then, for another unforgettable night of return, she would break into the shuttered house and gain her room and lie, till she suddenly slept, tingling to the spread of London all about her, herself one with it, feeling her life flow outwards, north, south, east and west, to all its margins.

And it had been so. Nothing had intervened, but, for a moment, the question, coming as the wild flowers fell from her unclasped belt, bringing back the long-forgotten day—what of those others, lost, for life, in perpetual association?

The long lane of Bond Street had come to an end, bringing her out into the grey-brown spaciousness of Piccadilly, lit sparsely by infrequent globes of gold. The darkness cast by the massive brown buildings thrilled heavily about the shrouded oblivion of west-end life. She passed elderly men, black coated and muffled over their evening dress, wrapped in their world, stamped with its stamp, still circulating, like the well preserved coins of a past reign—thinking their sets of thoughts, going home to the small encirclement of clubs and chambers, a little aware of the wide night and the time of year told on the air as they had passed along where the Green Park slept on the far side of the road. This was their moment, between today and tomorrow, of freedom to move amongst the crowding presences gathered through so many years within themselves;

slowly, mannishly; old-mannishly, perpetually pulled up, daunted, taking refuge in their sets of thoughts; not going far, never returning to renew a sally, for the way home was short, and their gait showed them going, almost marching, to the summons of their various destinations. Some of their faces betrayed as they went by, unconscious of observation, the preoccupation that closed in on all their solitude; a look of counting, but with liberal evening hand, the days that remained for them to go their rounds. One came prowling with slow, gentlemanly stroll, half-halting to stare at her, dim-eyed, from his mufflings. Here and there a woman, strayed away from the searching light and the rivalry of the Circus, hovered in the shadows. Presently, across the way, the Park moved by, brimming through its railings a midnight freshness into the dry sophisticated air. Through this strange mingling, hansoms from the theatres beyond the Circus, swinging, gold-lamped, one by one, along the centre of the deserted roadway, drew bright threads of younger west-end life, meshed and tangled, men and women from social throngs, for

whom no solitude waited.

Piccadilly Circus was almost upon her, the need for thoughtless hurrying across its open spaces; the awakening on the far side with the west-end dropping away behind; and the tide of her own neighbourhood setting towards her down Shaftesbury Avenue; bringing with it the present movement of her London life.... Why hadn't she a club down here; a neutral territory where she could finish her thoughts undisturbed?

Defying the surrounding influences, she glanced back at the months following the picnic ... the shifting of the love-story into the midst of the Wimpole Street household, making her room like a little theatre where at any moment the curtain might go up on a fresh scene ... knowing them all so well, being behind the scenes as well as before them, she had watched with a really cruel indifference, and let the light of the new theories play on all she saw. For unconscious unquestioning people were certainly ruled by *something*. The acting of the play had been all carefully according to the love-stories of the sentimental books, would always be, for

good kind people brought up on the old traditions. And a predictable future was there, another home life carrying the traditions forward. All the old family sayings applied. Many of them were quoted with a rueful recognition. But they were all proud of playing these recognisable parts. All of their faces had confessed, as they had come, one by one, betweenwhiles, to talk freely to her alone, their belief in the story that had lain, hidden and forgotten, in the depths of her heart; making her affection for them blaze up afresh from the roots of her being. She had *seen* the new theories disproved. Not that there was not some faint large outline of truth in them, but that it was so large and loose that it did not fit individuals. It did not correspond to any individual experience because it was obliged to ignore the underlying things of individuality.... Blair Leighton ... Marcus Stone ... Watts; Mendelssohn, corresponded to an actual individual truth.... The new people did not know it because they were odd, isolated people without up-bringing and circumstances? They did not know because they were without backgrounds? Quick and

clever, like Jews without a country? They would fasten in this story on the critical dismay of the parents, make comedy or tragedy out of the lack of sympathy between the two families, the persistence of unchanged character in each one, that would tell later on. But comedy and tragedy equally left everything unstated. No blind victimising force could account for the part of the story they left untold, something that justified the sentimental books they all jeered at; a light, that had come suddenly holding them all gentle and hushed behind even their busiest talk; bringing wide thoughts and sympathies; centring in the girl; breaking down barriers so completely that for a while they all seemed to exchange personalities. Blind force could not soften and illuminate.... There was something more than an allurements of "nature," a veil of beauty disguising the "brutal physical facts." Why brutal? Brutal is deliberate, a thing of the will. They meant brutish. But what was wrong with the brutes, except an absence of freewill? Their famous "brutal frankness" was brutish frankness, showing them pitifully proud of their knowledge of facts that looked

so large, and ignorant of the tiny enormous undying fact of freewill. Perhaps women have more freewill than men?

It is because these men *write* so well that it is a relief, from looking and enduring the clamour of the way things state themselves from several points of view simultaneously, to read their large superficial statements. Light seems to come, a large comfortable stretching of the mind, things falling into an orderly scheme, the flattering fascination of grasping and elaborating the scheme. But the after reflection is gloom ... a poisoning gloom over everything.... “Good writing” leaves gloom. Dickens doesn’t... But people say he’s not a good writer.... *Youth* ... and *Typhoon*.... Oh “*Stalked about gigantically in the darkness.*” ... Fancy forgetting that. And he is modern and a good writer. New. They all raved quietly about him. But it was not like reading a book at all.... Expecting good difficult “writing” some mannish way of looking at things, and then ... complete forgetfulness of the worst time of the day on the most grilling day of the year in a crowded Lyons’ at lunch-time and afterwards joyful

strength to face the disgrace of being an hour or more late for afternoon work.... They leave life so small that it seems worthless. He leaves everything big; and all he tells added to experience forever. It's dreadful to think of people missing him; the forgetfulness and the new birth into life. Even God would enjoy reading Typhoon.... Then *that* is "great fiction?" "Creation?" Why these falsifying words, making writers look cut-off and mysterious? *Imagination*. What is imagination? It always seems insulting, belittling, both to the writer and to life.... He looked and listened with his whole self—perhaps he is a small pale invalid—and then came 'stalked about gigantically' ... not made, nor created, nor begotten, but *proceeding* ... and working his salvation. That is what matters to him.... In the day of Judgment, though he is a writer, he will be absolved. Those he has redeemed will be there to shout for him. But he will still have to go to Purgatory; or be born again as a woman. *Why* come forward suddenly, in the midst of a story to say they live far from reality? A sudden smooth complacent male

voice, making your attention rock between the live text and the picture of a supercilious lounging form, slippers, a pipe, other men sitting round, and then the phrase so smooth and good that it almost compels belief. Why cannot men exist without thinking themselves all there is?

She was in the open roadway, passing into the deeps of the central freedom of Piccadilly Circus, the crowded corner unknowingly left behind. Just ahead was the island, the dark outline of the fountain, the small surmounting figure almost invisible against the shadowy upper mass of a bright-porched building over the way. The grey trottoir, empty of the shawled flowerwomen and their great baskets, was a quiet haven. The surrounding high brilliancies beneath which people moved along the pavements from space to space of alternating harsh gold and shadowy grey, met softly upon its emptiness, drawing a circle of light round the shadow cast by the wide basin of the fountain. There was a solitary man's figure standing near the curb, midway on her route across the island to take to the roadway opposite Shaftesbury Avenue; standing

arrested; there was no traffic to prevent his crossing; a watchful habitu ; she would pass him in a moment, the last fragment of the west-end ... good-bye, and her thoughts towards gaining the wide homeward-going lane. A little stoutish dapper grey-suited ... *Tommy Babington!* Standing at ease, turned quite away from the direction that would take him home; still and expressionless, unrecognisable save for the tilt of his profile and the set of his pince-nez. She had never before seen him in unconscious repose, never with this look of a motionless unvoyaged soul encased in flesh; yet had always known even when she had been most attracted, that thus he was. He had glanced. Had he recognised her? It was too late to wheel round and save his solitude. Going on, she must sweep right across his path. Fellow-feeling was struggling against her longing to touch, through the medium of his voice, the old home-life so suddenly embodied. He had seen her, and his unawakened face told her that she would neither pause nor speak. Years ago they would have greeted each other vociferously.... She was now so shrouded that

he was not sure she had recognised him. Through his stupefaction smouldered a suspicion that she wished to avoid recognition. He was obviously encumbered with the sense of having placed her amidst the images of his preoccupation. She rushed on, passing him with a swift salute, saw him raise his hat with mechanical promptitude as she stepped from the curb and forward, pausing an instant for a passing hansom, in the direction of home. It was done. It had always been done from the very beginning. They had met equally at last. This was the reality of their early association. Her spirits rose, clamorous. It was epical she felt. One of those things arranged above one's head and perfectly staged. Tommy of all people wakened thus out of his absorption in the separated man's life that so decorated him with mystery in the feminine suburbs; shocked into helpless inactivity; glum with an irrevocable recognising hostility. It had been arranged. Silent acceptance had been forced upon him, by a woman of his own class. She almost danced to the opposite pavement in this keenest, witnessed moment of her

yearslong revel of escape. He would presently be returning to that other enclosed life to which, being a man, and dependent on comforts, he was fettered. Already in his mind was one of those formulas that echoed about in the enclosed life ... “Oui, ma chère, little Mirry *Henderson*, strolling, at midnight, across Piccadilly Circus.”

Suddenly it struck her that the life of men was pitiful. They hovered about the doors of freedom, returning sooner or later to the hearth, where even if they were autocrats they were not free; but passing guests, never fully initiated into the house-life, where the real active freedom of the women resided behind the noise and tumult of meetings. Man's life was banded to and fro ... from *word to word*. Hemmed in by women, fearing their silence, unable to enter its freedom—being himself made of words—cursing the torrents of careless speech with which its portals were defended.

And all the time unselfconscious thoughtless little men, with neat or shabby sets of unconsidered words for everything, busily bleating through cornets, blaring

through trombones and euphoniums, thrumming undertones on double-basses. She summoned Harriett and shrieked with laughter at the cheerful din. It was cheerful, even in a funeral march. There would certainly be music in heaven; but not books.

The shock of meeting Tommy had brought the grey of tomorrow morning into the gold-lit streets. There was a fresh breeze setting down Shaftesbury Avenue. Here, still on the Circus, was that little coffee-place. Tommy was going home. *She* was rescuing the last scrap of a London evening here at the very centre and then going home, on foot, still well within the charmed circle.

The spell of the meeting with Tommy broke as she went down the little flight of steps. Here was eternity, the backward vista indivisible, attended by throngs of irreconcilable interpretations. Years ago, a crisis of loneliness, this little doorway, a glimpse, from the top of the steps, of a counter and a Lockhart urn, a swift descent, unseen people about her, companions; misery left behind, another little sanctuary added to her list. The next time, coming coldly with

Michael Shatov, in a unison of escape from everlasting conflict; people clearly visible, indifferent and hard; the moment of catching, as they sat down, the flicker of his mobile eyelid, the lively unveiled recognising glance he had flung at the opposite table, describing its occupants before she saw them; the rush of angry sympathy; a longing to *blind* him; in some way to screen them from the intelligent unseeing glance of all the men in the world.

“You don’t *see* them; they are not *there* in what you see.”

“These types are generally quite rudimentary; there is no question of a soul there.”

“If you could only have seen your look; the most horrible look I have ever seen; *alive* with interest.”

“There is always a certain interest.”

The strange agony of knowing that in that moment he had been alone and utterly spontaneous; simple and whole; that it had been, for him, a moment of release from the evening’s misery; a sudden plunge into his own eternity, his unthreatened and indivisible backward vista. The horrible return, again

and again, in her own counsels, to the fact that she had seen, that night, for herself, more than he had ever told her; that the pity he had appealed to was unneeded; his appeal a bold bid on the strength of his borrowed conviction that women do not, in the end, really care. How absolutely men are deceived by a little cheerfulness....

And now she herself was interested; had attained unawares a sort of connoisseurship, taking in, at a glance, nationality, type, status, the difference between inclination and misfortune. Was it he who had aroused her interest? Was this contamination or illumination?

And Michael's past was a matter of indifference.... Only because it no longer concerned her? Then it *had* been jealousy? Her new calm interest in these women was jealousy. Jealousy of the appeal to men of their divine simplicity?

“... which women don't understand.

And them as sez they does is not the marryin' brand.”

Oh, the hopeless eternal inventions and ignorance of men; their utter cleverness and

ignorance. *Why* had they been made so clever and yet so fundamentally stupid?

She ordered her coffee at the counter and stood facing upstairs towards the oblong of street. The skirts of women, men's trousered legs, framed for an instant in the doorway, passed by, moving slowly, with a lifeless intentness.... Is the absence of personality original in men? Or only the result of their occupations? Original. Otherwise environment is more than the human soul. It is original. Belonging to maleness; to Adam with his spade; lonely in a universe of *things*. It causes them to be moulded by their occupations, taking shape, and status, from what they do. A barrister, a waiter, recognisable. Men have no natural rank. A woman can become a waitress and remain herself. Yet men pity women, and think them hard because they do not pity each other.

It is man, puzzled, astray, always playing with breakable toys, lonely and terrified in his universe of chaotic forces who is pitiful. The chaos that torments him is his own rootless self. The key, unsuspected, at his side.

In women like Eleanor Dear? Calm and

unquestioning. Perfectly at home in life. With a charm beyond the passing charm of a man. She was central. All heaven and earth about her as she spoke. Illiterate, hampered, feeling her way all the time. And yet with a perfect knowledge. *Perfect* comprehension in her smile. All the maddening moments spent with her, the endless detail and fussing, all afterwards showing upon a background of gold.

Men weave golden things; thought, science, art, religion upon a black background. They never *are*. They only make or do; unconscious of the quality of life as it passes. So are many women. But there is a moment in meeting a woman, any woman, the first moment, before speech, when everything becomes new; the utter astonishment of life is there, speech seems superfluous, even with women who have not consciously realised that life is astonishing. It persists through all the quotations and conformities, and is there again, the one underlying thing that women have to express to each other, at parting. So that between women, all the practical facts, the tragedies

and comedies and events, are but ripples on a stream. It is not possible to share this sense of life with a man; least of all with those who are most alive to “the wonders of the universe.” Men have no present; except sensuously.... That would explain their *ambition* ... and their doubting speculations about the future.

Yet it would be easier to make all this clear to a man than to a woman. The very words expressing it have been made by men.

It was just after coming back from the Wilsons, in the midst of the time round about Leyton’s wedding, that Eleanor had suddenly appeared on the Tansley Street doorstep.... I was just getting to know the houseful of Orly relations ... Mrs. Sloan-Paget, whisking me encouragingly into everything.... “my dear you’ve got style, and taste; stunning hair and a good complexion. Look at my girls. Darlings, I know. But what’s the good of putting clothes on figures like that?” ... Daughterless Mrs. Orly looked pleased like a mother when Mrs. Paget said “S’Henderson’s got to come down to Chumleigh.” ... I almost gave in to her reading of me; feeling whilst I

was with her, back in the conservative, church point of view. I could have kept it up, with good coats and skirts and pretty evening gowns. Playing games. Living hilariously in roomy country houses, snubbing “outsiders,” circling in a perpetual round of family events, visits to town, everything fixed by family happenings, hosts of relations always about, everything, even sorrow, shared and distributed by large rejoicing groups; the warm wide middle circle of English life ... secure. And just as the sense of belonging was at its height, punctually, Eleanor had come, sweeping everything away. As if she had been watching. Coming out of the past with her claim.... Skimpier and more beset than ever. Yet steely with determination. Deepening her wild-rose flush and her smile. It was all over in a moment. Wreckage. Committal to her and her new set of circumstances.... She would not understand that a sudden greeting is always wonderful; even if the person greeted is not welcome. But Andrew Lang did not know what he was admitting. Men greet only themselves, their own being, past, present or future.... I am a

man. The more people put you at your ease, the more eagerly you greet them.... That is why we men like “ordinary women.” And always disappoint them. They mistake the comfort of relaxation for delight in their society.

Eleanor swept everything away. By seeming to know in advance everything I had to tell, and ignore it as not worth consideration. But she also left her own circumstances unexplained; sitting about with peaceful face, talking in hints, telling long stories about undescribed people, creating a vast leisurely present, pitting it against the whole world, with graceful condescending gestures.

It was part of her mystery that she should have come back just that very afternoon. Then she was in the right. If you are in the right everything works for you. The original thing in her nature that made her so beautiful, such a perpetually beautiful spectacle, was *right*. The moment that had come whilst she must have been walking, brow modestly bent, with her refined, conversational little swagger of the shoulders, aware of all the balconies,

down the street, had worked for her....

The impulses of expansive moments always make things happen. Or the moments come when something is about to happen? How can people talk about coincidence? How not be struck by the inside pattern of life? It is so obvious that everything is arranged. Whether by God or some deep wisdom in oneself does not matter. There is something that does not alter. Coming up again and again, at long intervals, with the same face, generally arresting you in midway, offering the same choice, ease or difficulty. Sometimes even a lure, to draw you back into difficulty. Determinists say that you choose according to your temperament, even if you go against your inclinations. But what is temperament?... Uniqueness ... something that has not existed before. A free edge.... Contemplation is freedom. The way you contemplate is your temperament. Then action is slavery?

There is something always plucking you back into your own life. After the first pain there is relief, a sense of being once more in a truth. Then why is it so difficult to remember

that things deliberately done, with a direct movement of the will, always have a falseness? Never meet the desire that prompted the action. The will is really meant to prevent deliberate action? That is the hard work of life? The Catholics know that desire can never be satisfied. You must not *desire* God. You must love. I can't do that. I can't get clear enough about what he wants. Yet even without God I am not lonely; or ever completely miserable. Always in being thrown back from outside happiness, there seem to be two. A waiting self to welcome me.

It can't be wrong to exist. In those moments before disaster existence is perfect. Being quite still. Sounds come presently from the outside world. Your mind moving about in it without envy or desire, realises the whole world. The future and the past are all one same stuff, changing and unreal. The sense of your own unchanging reality comes with an amazement and sweetness too great to be borne alone; bringing you to your feet. There *must* be someone there, because there is a shyness. You rush forward, to share the

wonder. And find somebody engrossed with a cold in the head. And are so emphatic and sympathetic that they think you are a new friend and begin to expand. And it is wonderful until you discover that they do not think life at all wonderful.... That afternoon it had been a stray knock at the front door and a sudden impulse to save Mrs. Bailey coming upstairs. And Mrs. Bailey, after all she had said, also surprised into a welcome, greeting Eleanor as an old friend, taking her in at once. And then the old story of detained luggage, and plans prevented from taking shape. The dreadful slide back, everything disappearing but her and her difficulties, and presently everything forgotten but the fact of her back in the house. Afterwards when the truth came out, it made no difference but the relief of ceasing to be responsible for her. But this time there had been no responsibility. She had made no confidences, asked for no help. Was it blindness, or flattered vanity, not to have found out what she was going through?

Yet if the facts had been stated, Eleanor would not have been able to forget them. In

those evenings and week-ends she had forgotten, and been happy. The time had been full of reality; memorable. It stood out now, all the going about together, drawn into a series of moments when they had both seen with the same eyes. Experiencing identity as they laughed together. Her recalling of their readings in the little Marylebone room, before the curate came, had not been a pretence. Mr. Taunton was the pretence. There had been no space even for curiosity as to the end of his part of the story. Eleanor, too, had not wished to break the charm by letting things in. She had been taking a holiday, between the desperate past and the uncertain future. In the midst of overwhelming things she had stood firm, her power of creating an endless present at its height. A great artist.

To Michael, a poor pitiful thing; Rodkin's victim. *She*, of course, had given Michael that version. Little Michael, stealing to her room night by night, towards the end, to sleep at her side and say consoling things; never guessing that her threat of madness was an appeal to his Jewish kindness, a way of

securing him. What a story for proper English people ... the best revelation in the whole of her adventure. And Mrs. Bailey too; true as steel. Serenely warding off the women boarders ... gastric distension.

Rodkin ... poor little Rodkin with his weak dreadful little life. Weekdays; the unceasing charm of Anglo-Russian speculation, Sundays; boredom and newspapers. Then the week again, business and a City man's cheap adventures. He *had* behaved well, in spite of Michael's scoldings. It was wonderful, the way the original Jewish spirit came out in him, at every step. His loose life was not Jewish. And it was *really* comic that he should have been trapped by a girl pretending to be an adventuress. Poor Eleanor, with all her English dreams; just *Rodkin*. But he was a Jew when he hesitated to marry a consumptive, and perfectly a Jew when he decided not to see the child lest he should love it; and also when he hurried down into Sussex the moment it came, to see it, with a huge armful of flowers, for her.... What a scene for the Bible-woman's Hostel. All Eleanor. Her triumph. What other woman

would have dared to engage a cubicle and go calmly down without telling them? And a week later she was in the Superintendent's room and all those prim women sewing for her and hiding her and telling everybody she had rheumatic fever. And crying when she came away....

She was right. She justified her actions and came through. And now she's a young married woman in a pretty villa, *near* the church, and the vicar calls and she won't walk on Southend pier because "one meets one's butcher and baker and candlestick maker." But only because Rodkin is a child-worshipper. And she tolerates him and the child and he is a brow-beaten cowed little slave.... It is tempting to tell the story. A perfect recognisable story of a scheming unscrupulous woman; making one feel virtuous and superior; but only if one simply outlined the facts, leaving out all the inside things. Knowing a story like that from the inside, knowing Eleanor, changed all "scandalous" stories.... They were scandalous only when told? Never when thought of by individuals alone? Speech is technical. Every

word. In telling things, technical terms must be used; which never quite apply.... To call Eleanor an adventuress does not describe her. You can only describe her by the original contents of her mind. Her own images; what she sees and thinks. She was an adventuress by the force of her ideals. Like Louise going on the street without telling her young man so that he would not have to pay for her trousseau....

Exeter was another. Keeping the shapes of civilisation. Charming at tea parties.... Knowing all the worldly things, made of good style from her perfect brow and nose to the tip of her slender foot ... made to shine at Ascot. It was only because she knew so much about Mrs. Drake's secret drinking, that Mrs. Drake said suddenly in that midnight moment when Exeter had swept off to bed after a tiff, "I don't go to hotels, with strange men." I was reading that book of Dan Leno's and thinking that if they would let me read it aloud their voices would be different; that behind their angry voices were real selves waiting for the unreal sounds to stop. Up and down the tones of their voices were

individual inflexions, feminine, innocent of harm, incapable of harm, horrified since their girlhood by what the world had turned out to be.... It was an awful shock. But Exeter paid her young man's betting debts and kept him on his feet. And *he* was divorced. And so *nice*. But weak. Still he had the courage to shoot himself. And then *she* took to backing horses. And now married, in a cathedral, to a vicar; looking angelic in the newspaper photograph. He has only one regret ... their childlessness. "Er? Have *children*?" Yet Mrs. Drake would be staunch and kind to her if she were in need. Women are Jesuits....

From the first, in Eleanor's mind, had shone, unquestioned, the shape of English life. Church and State and Family. God above. Her belief was perfect; impressive. In all her dealings she saw the working of a higher power, leading her to her goal. When her health failed and her vision receded, she clutched at the nearest material for making her picture. In all she had waded through, her courage had never failed. Nor her charm; the charm of her strength and her singleness of vision. Her God, an English-speaking

gentleman, with English traditions, tactfully ignored all her contrivances and waited elsewhere, giving her time, ready to preside with full approval, over her accomplished aim.... Women are Jesuits.... The counterpart of all those Tansley Street women was little Mrs. Orly, innocently unscrupulous to save people from difficulty and pain....

It was when Eleanor went away that autumn that I found I had been made a Lycurgan; and began going to the meetings ... in that small room in Anselm's Inn.... Ashamed of pride in belonging to a small exclusive group containing so many brilliant men. Making a new world. Concentrated intelligence and goodwill. Unanimous even in their differences. Able to joke together. Seeking, selflessly, only one thing. And because they selflessly sought it, all the things of fellowship added to them.... From the first I knew I was not a real Lycurgan. Not wanting their kind of selfless seeking, yet liking to be within the stronghold of people who were

keeping watch, understanding how social injustice came about, explaining the working of things, revealing the rest of the world as naturally unconsciously blind, urgently requiring the enlightenment that only the Lycurgans could bring, that could only be found by endless dry work on facts and figures.... At first it was like going to school. Eagerly drinking in facts; a new history. The history of the world as a social group. Realising the immensity of the problems crying aloud all over the world, not insoluble, but unsolved because people did not realise themselves as members of one group. The convincing little Lycurgan tracts, blossoming out of all their intense labour, were the foundation of a new social order; gradually spreading social consciousness. But the hope they brought, the power of answering all the criticisms and objections of ordinary people, always seemed ill-gained. Always unless one took an active share, like listening at a door.... She was always catching herself dropping away from the first eager gleaning of material to speculations about the known circumstances of the lecturer, from them into

a trance of oblivion, hearing nothing, remembering afterwards nothing of what had been said, only the quality of the atmosphere—the interest or boredom of the audience, the secret preoccupations of unknown people sitting near....

Everyone was going. The restaurant was beginning to close. The west-end was driving her off. She rose to go through the business of paying her bill, the moment of being told that money, someone's need of profits, was her only passport into these central caverns of oblivion. Forever driven out. Passing on. To keep herself in countenance she paid briskly, with the air of one going purposefully. The sound of her footsteps on the little stairway brought her vividly before her own eyes, playing truant. She hurried to get out and away, to be walking along, by right, in the open, freed, for the remaining time, by the necessity of getting home, to lose herself once more....

The treelike golden glow of Shaftesbury

Avenue flowed through her; the smile of an old friend. The *wealth* of swinging along up the bright ebb-way of the west-end, conscious of being, of the absence of desire to be elsewhere or other than herself. A future without prospects, the many doors she had tried, closed willingly by her own hand, the growing suspicion that nowhere in the world was a door that would open wide to receive her, the menace of an increasing fatigue, crises of withering mental pain, and then suddenly this incomparable sense of being plumb at the centre of rejoicing. Something always left within her that contradicted all the evidence. It compensated the failure of her efforts at conformity.... Yet to live outside the world of happenings, always to forget and escape, to be impatient, even scornful, of the calamities that moved in and out of it like a well-worn jest, was certainly wrong. But it could not be helped. It was forgetfulness, suddenly overtaking her in the midst of her busiest efforts ... memory ... a perpetual sudden blank ... and upon it broke forth this inexhaustible joy. The tapplings of her feet on the beloved pavement were blows struck

hilariously on the shoulder of a friend. To keep her voice from breaking forth she sang aloud in her mind, a soaring song unlimited by sound.

The visit to the revolutionaries seemed already in the past, added to the long procession of events that broke up and scattered the moment she was awake at this lonely centre.

Speech came towards her from within the echoes of the night; statements in unfamiliar shape. Years falling into words, dropping like fruit. She was full of strength for the end of the long walk; armed against the rush of associations waiting in her room; going swift and straight to dreamless sleep and the joy of another day.

The long wide street was now all even light, a fused misty gold, broken close at hand by the opening of a dark byway. Within it was the figure of an old woman bent over the gutter. Lamplight fell upon the sheeny slopes of her shawl and tattered skirt. Familiar. Forgotten. The last, hidden truth of London, spoiling the night. She quickened her steps, gazing. Underneath the forward-falling

crushed old bonnet shone the lower half of a bare scalp ... reddish ... studded with dull, wartlike knobs.... Unimaginable horror quietly there. Revealed. Welcome. The head turned stealthily as she passed and she met the expected side-long glance; naked recognition, leering from the awful face above the outstretched bare arm. It was herself, set in her path and waiting through all the years. Her beloved hated secret self, known to this old woman. The street was opening out to a circus. Across its broken lights moved the forms of people, confidently, in the approved open pattern of life, and she must go on, uselessly, unrevealed; bearing a semblance that was nothing but a screen set up, hiding what she was in the depths of her being.

CHAPTER II

At the beginning of the journey to the east-end the Lintoffs were as far away as people in another town. When the east-end was reached they were too near. Their brilliance lit up the dingy neighbourhood and sent out a pathway of light across London. Their eyes were set on the far distance. It seemed an impertinence to rise suddenly in their path and claim attention.

But Michael lost his way and the Lintoffs were hidden, erupting just out of sight. The excitement of going to meet them filtered away in the din and swelter of the east-end streets.

They came upon the hotel at last, suddenly. A stately building with a wide pillared porch. As they went up its steps and into the carpeted hall, cool and clean and pillared, giving on to arched doorways and the

distances of large rooms, she wished the Russians could be spirited away, that there were nothing but the strange escape from the midst of squalor into this cool hushed interior.

But they appeared at once, dim figures blocking the path, closing up all the distances but the one towards which they were immediately obliged to move and that quickly ended in a bleak harshly lit room. And now here they were, set down, meekly herded at the table with other hotel people.

No strange new force radiated from them across the chilly expanse of coarse white tablecloth. They were able to be obliterated by their surroundings; lost in the onward-driving tide of hotel-life; responding murmuringly to Michael's Russian phrases, like people trying to throw off sleep.

Her private converse with them the day before, made it impossible even to observe them now that they were exposed before her. And a faint hope, refusing to be quenched, prevented her casting even one glance across at them. If the hope remained unwitnessed there might yet be, before they separated,

something that would satisfy her anticipations. If she could just see what he was like. There was, even now, an unfamiliar force keeping her eyes averted from all but the vague sense of the two figures. Perhaps it came from him. Or it was the harvest growing from the moment in the hotel entrance.

A dispiriting conviction was gathering behind her blind attention. If she looked across, she would see a man self-conscious, drearily living out the occasion, with an assumed manner. After all, he was now just a married man, sitting there with his wife, a man tamed and small and the prey of known circumstances, meeting an old college friend. This drop on to London was the end of their wonderful adventure. A few weeks ago she had still been his fellow student, his remembered companion, in a Russian prison for her daring work, ill with the beginnings of her pregnancy. Now, he was with her for good, inseparably married, no longer able to be himself in relation to anyone else.... She felt herself lapsing further and further into isolation. Something outside herself was

drowning her in isolation.

Something in Michael.... That, at least, she could escape now that she was aware of it. She leaned upon his voice. At present there was no sign of his swift weariness. He was radiant, sitting host-like at the head of the table between her and his friends, untroubled by his surroundings, his glowing Hebrew beauty, his kind, reverberating voice expressing him, untrammelled, in the poetry of his native speech. But he was aware of her through his eager talk. All the time he was tacitly referring to her as a proud English possession.... It was something more than his way of forgetting, in the presence of fresh people, and falling again into his determined hope. Her heart ached for him as she saw that away in himself, behind the brave play he made, in his glance of the deliberately naughty child relying on its charm to obtain forgiveness, he held the hope of her changing under the influence of seeing him thus, at his fullest expansion amongst his friends. He was purposely excluding her, so that she might watch undisturbed; so that he might use the spaces of her silence to persuade her that she

shared his belief. She was helplessly supporting his illusion. It would be too cruel to freeze him in mid-career, with a definite message. She sat conforming; expanding, in spite of herself, in the rôle he had planned. He must make his way back through his pain, later on, as best he could. No one was to blame; neither he for being Jew, nor she for her inexorable Englishness....

Across the table, supporting him, were living examples of his belief in the possibility of marriage between Christians and Jews. Lintoff was probably as much and as little Greek Orthodox as she was Anglican, and as pure Russian as she was English, and he had married his little Jewess.

Michael would eagerly have brought any of his friends to see her. But she understood now why he had been so cautiously, carelessly determined to bring about this meeting.... They would accept his reading, and had noted her, superficially, in the intervals of their talk, in the light of her relationship to him. She was wasting her evening in a hopeless masquerade. She felt her face setting in lines of weariness as she

retreated to the blank truth at the centre of her being. Narrowly there confined, cold and separate, she could glance easily across at their irrelevant forms. They could be made to understand her remote singleness; in one glance. Whatever they thought. They were nothing to her, with their alien lives and memories. She was English; an English spectacle for them, quite willing, an interested far-off spectator of foreign ways and antics. No, she would not look, until she was forced; and then some play of truth, springing in unexpectedly, would come to her aid. Reduced by him to a mere symbol she would not even risk encountering their unfounded conclusions.

She heard their voices, animated now in an eager to and fro, hers contralto, softly modulated, level and indifferent in an easy swiftness of speech; his higher, dry and chippy and staccato; the two together a broken tide of musical Russian words, rich under the cheerless hotel gas-light. It would flow on for a while and presently break and die down. Michael's social concentration would not be equal to a public drawing-room,

a prolonged sitting on sofas. Coffee would come. They would linger a little over it, eagerness would drop from their voices, the business of reflecting over their first headlong communications would be setting in for each one of them, separating them into individualities, and suddenly Michael would make a break. For she could hear they were not talking of abstract things. Revolutionary ideas would be, between him and Lintoff, an old battlefield they had learned to ignore. They were just listening, in excited entrancement, to the sounds of each other's voices, their eyes on old scenes, explaining, repeating themselves, in the turmoil of their attentiveness ... each ready to stop halfway through a sentence to catch at an outbreaking voice. Michael's voice was still rich and eager. His years had fallen away from him; only now and again the memory of his settled surrounding and relentless daily work caught at his tone, levelling it out.

Coffee had come. Someone asked an abrupt question and waited in a silence. She glanced across. A tall narrow man, narrow slender height, in black, bearded, a narrow

straw-gold beard below bright red lips. Unsympathetic; vaguely familiar. Him she must have observed in the dim group in the hall during Michael's phrases of introduction.

"Nu; da;" Michael was saying cordially, "Lintoff suggests we go upstairs," he continued, to her, politely. He looked pleased and easy; unfatigued.

She rose murmuring her agreement, and they were all on their feet, gathering up their coffee-cups. Michael made some further remark in English. She responded in the vague way he knew and he watched her eyes, standing near, taking her coffee-cup with a sturdy quiet pretence of answering speech, leaving her free to absorb the vision of Madame Lintoff, a small dark form risen sturdily against the cheap dingy background, all black and pure dense whiteness; a curve of gleaming black hair shaped against her meal-white cheek; a small pure profile, firmly beautiful, emerging from the high close-fitting neck-shaped collar of her black dress; the sweep of a falling fringed black shawl across the short closely sleeved arm, the fingers of the hand stretched out to carry off

her coffee, half covered by the cap-like extension of the long black sleeve. She might be a revolutionary, but her sense of effect was perfect. Every line flowed, from the curve of her skull, left free by the beautiful shaping of her thick close hair, to the tips of her fingers. There was no division into parts, no English destruction of lines at the neck and shoulders, no ugly break where the dull stuff sleeve joined the wrist. In the grace of her small sturdy beauty there seemed only scornful womanish triumph, weary; a suggestion of unspeakable ennui. She was utterly different from English Jewesses....

Without breaking the rhythm of her smooth graceful movement, she turned her head and glanced across at Miriam; a faint slight radiance, answering Miriam's too-ready irrecoverable beaming smile, and fading again at once as she moved towards the door. Too late—already they were moving, separated, in single file up the long staircase, Madame Lintoff now a little squarish dumpy Jewish body, stumping up the stairs ahead of her—Miriam responded to the gleam she had caught in the deep *wehmütig* Hebrew eyes, of

something in her that had escaped from the confines of her tribe and sex. She was not one of those Jewesses, delighting in instant smiling familiarity with women, immediate understanding, banding them together. She had not a trace of the half affectionate, half obsequious envy, that survived the discovery of their being more intelligent or better-informed than Englishwomen. She had looked impersonally, and finding a blankness would not again enquire. She had gone back into the European world of ideas into which somehow since her childhood she had emerged. But she was weary of it; of her idea-haunted life; of everything that had so far come into her mind and her experience. Did the man leading the way upstairs know this? Perhaps Russian men could read these signs? In any case a Russian would not have Michael's physiological explanations of everything; even if they proved to be true....

“I forgot to tell you, Miriam, that of course Lintoffs both speak French. Lintoff has also a little English.”

It was his bright *beginning* voice. They were to spend the *evening* ... shut in a small

cold bedroom ... resourceless, shut in with this slain romance ... and the way already closed for communication between herself and the Russians before she had known that they could exchange words that would at least cast their own brief spell. Between herself and Madame Lintoff nothing could pass that would throw even the thinnest veil over their first revealing encounter. To the unknown man anything she might say would be an announcement of her knowledge of his reduced state....

The coming upstairs had stayed the tide of reminiscences. There was nothing ahead but obstructive conversation, perhaps in French; but steered all the time by Michael's immovable European generalisations; his clear, swiftly manoeuvring, encyclopædic Jewish mind....

With her eyes on the fatiguing vista she agreed that of course Monsieur and Madame Lintoff would know French; letting her English voice sound at last. The instant before she spoke she heard her words sound in the dim street-lit room, an open acknowledgment of the death of her

anticipations. And when the lame words came forth, with the tone of the helplessly insulting, polite, superfluous English smile, she knew that it was patent to everyone that the evening was dimmed, now, for them all. It was not her fault that she had been brought in amongst these clever foreigners. Let them think what they liked, and go. If even anarchists had their world linked to them by strands of clever easy speech, had she not also her world, away from speech and behaviour?

Lintoff was lighting a candle on the chest of drawers. The soft reflected glare coming in at the small square windows, was quenched by its gleam. He was standing quite near, in profile, his white face and bright beard lit red from below. The bent head full of expression, yet innocent, was curious, neither English nor foreign. He was a Doctor of Philosophy. But not in the way any other European man would have been. His figure had no bearing of any kind. Yet he did not look foolish. A secret. There was some secret power in him ... Russia. She was seeing Russia; far-away Michael blessedly there in the room; keeping

her there. He had sat down in his way, in a small bedroom chair, his head thrust forward on his chest, his hands in his pockets, his legs stretched out across the thread-bare carpet, his coffee on the floor at his side. He was at home in Russia after his English years. Madame Lintoff in the small corner beside the bed was ferreting leisurely in a cupboard with her back to the room. Lintoff was holding a match to the waxy wick of the second candle. No one was speaking. But the cold dingy room, with its mean black draperies and bare furniture, was glowing with life.

There was no pressure in the room; no need to buy peace by excluding all but certain points of view. She felt a joyful expansion. But there was a void all about her. She was expanded in an unknown element; a void, filled by these people in some way peculiar to themselves. It was not filled by themselves or their opinions or ideas. All these things they seemed to have possessed and moved away from. For they were certainly animals; perhaps intensely animal, and cultured. But principally they seemed to be movement, free

movement. The animalism and culture, so repellent in most people, showed, in them, rich jewels of which they were not aware. They were moving all the time in an intense joyous dreamy repose. It centred in him and was reflected, for all her weariness, upon Madame Lintoff. It was into this moving state, that she had escaped from a Jewish family life.

If the right question could be found and addressed to him, the secret might be plumbed. It might rest on some single unacceptable thing that would drop her back again into singleness; just the old familiar inexorable sceptical opposition....

His second candle was alight. Michael spoke, in Russian, and arrested him standing in the middle of the floor with his back to her. She heard his voice, no longer chippy and staccato as it had been in the midst of their intimate talk downstairs, but again dim, expressionless, the voice of a man in a dream. Madame Lintoff had hoisted herself on to the bed. She had put on a little black ulster and a black close-fitting astrakhan cap. Between them her face shone out suddenly rounded,

very pretty and babyish. From the deep Hebrew eyes gleamed a brilliant vital serenity. An emancipated Jewish girl, solid, compact, a rounded gleaming beauty that made one long to place one's hands upon it; but completely herself, beyond the power of admiration or solicitude; a torch gleaming in the strange void.... But so *solidly* small and pretty. It was absurd how pretty she was, how startling the rounded smooth firm blossom of her face between the close dead black of her ulster and little cap. Miriam smiled at her behind the to and fro of dreamy Russian sentences. But she was not looking.

It was glorious that there had been no fussing. No one had even asked her to sit down. She could have sung for relief. She wanted to sing the quivering alien song that was singing itself in the spaces of the room. There was a chair just at hand against the wall, beside a dilapidated wicker laundry basket. But her coffee was where Michael had deposited it, on the chest of drawers at his side. She must recover it, go round in front of Lintoff to get it before she sat down. She did not want the coffee, but she would go

round for the joy of moving in the room. She passed him and stood arrested by the talk flowing to and fro between her and her goal. Michael rose and stood with her, still talking. She waited a moment, weaving into his deep emphatic tones the dreamy absent voice of Lintoff.

Michael moved away with a question to Madame Lintoff sitting alone behind them on her bed. She was left standing, turned towards Lintoff, suddenly aware of the tide that flowed from him as he stood, still motionless, in the middle of the room. He stood poised, without stiffness, his narrow height neither drooping nor upright; as if held in place by the surrounding atmosphere. Nothing came to trouble the space between them as she moved towards him, drawn by the powerful tide. She felt she could have walked through him. She was quite near him now, her face lifted towards the strange radiance of the thin white face, the glow of the flaming beard; a man's face, yielded up to her, and free from the least flicker of reminder.

“What do you think? What do you see?”

she heard herself ask. Words made no break in the tide holding her there at rest.

His words followed hers like a continuation of her phrase:

“Mademoiselle, I see the *People*.” His eyes were on hers, an intense blue light; not concentrated on her; going through her and beyond in a widening radiance. She was caught up through the unresisting eyes; the dreamy voice away behind her. She saw the wide white spaces of Russia; motionless dark forms in troops, waiting....

She was back again, looking into the eyes that were now upon her personally; but not in the Englishman’s way. It was a look of remote intense companionship. She sustained it, helpless to protest her unworthiness. He did not know that she had just flown forward from herself out and away; that her faint vision of what he saw as he spoke was the outpost of all her experience. He was waiting to speak with an equal, to share.... He had no social behaviour. No screen of adopted voice or manner. There was evil in him; all the evils that were in herself, but unscreened. He was careless of them. She smiled and met his

swift answering smile; it was as if he said, “I know; isn’t everything wonderful.” ... They moved with one accord and stood side by side before the gleaming candles. Across the room the two Russian voices were sounding one against the other; Michael’s grudging sceptical bass and the soft weary moaning contralto.

“Do you like Maeterlinck?” she asked, staring anxiously into the flame of the nearest candle. He turned towards her with eager words of assent. She felt his delighted smile shining through the sudden enthusiastic disarray of his features and gazed into the candle summoning up the vision of the old man sitting alone by his lamp. The glow uniting them came from the old man’s lamp ... this young man was a revolutionary and a doctor of philosophy; yet the truth of the inside life was in him, nearer to him than all his strong activities. They could have nothing more to say to each other. It would be destruction to say anything more. She dropped her eyes and he was at once at an immense distance. Behind her closed door she stood alone grappling her certainties,

trying to answer the voice that cried out within her against the barriers between them of language and relationships. Lintoff began to walk about the room. Every time his movements brought him near he stood before her in eager discourse. She caught the drift of the statements he flung out in a more solid, more flexible French, mixed with struggling, stiff, face-stiffening scraps of English. The people, alive and one and the same all over the world, crushed by the half-people, the educated specialists, and by the upper classes dead and dying of their luxury. She agreed and agreed, delighting in the gentleness of his unhampered movements, in his unself-conscious, uncompeting speech. If what he said were true, the people to pity were the specialists and the upper classes; clean sepulchres.... How would he take opposition?

“Isn’t it weird, étrange,” she cried suddenly into a pause in his struggling discourse, “that Christians are just the very people who make the most fuss about death?”

He had not understood the idiom. Sunned in his waiting smile she glanced aside to frame a translation.

“N’y a rien de plus drôle,” she began. How cynical it sounded; a cynical French voice striking jests out of the surface of things; neighing them against closed nostrils, with muzzles tight-crinkled in Mephistophelian mirth. She glanced back at him, distracted by the reflection that the contraction of the nostrils for French made *everything* taut....

“Isn’t it funny that speaking French banishes the inside of everything; makes you see only *things*?” she said hurriedly, not meaning him to understand; hoping he would not come down to grasp and struggle with the small thought; yet longing to ask him suddenly whether he found it difficult to trim the nails of his right hand with his left.

He was still waiting unchanged. Yet not waiting. There was no waiting in him. There would be, for him, no more dropping down out of life into the humble besogne de la pensée. That was why she felt so near to him, yet alive, keeping the whole of herself, able to say anything, or nothing. She smiled her delight. There was no sheepishness in his answering radiance, no grimace of the lips, not the least trace of any of the ways men had

of smiling at women. Yet he was conscious, and enlivened in the consciousness of their being man and woman together. His eyes, without narrowing from that distant vision of his, yet looked at her with the whole range of his being. He had known obliterating partialities, had gone further than she along the pathway they forge away from life, and returned with nothing more than the revelation they grant at the outset; his further travelling had brought him nothing more. They were equals. But the new thing he brought so unobstructively, so humbly identifying and cancelling himself that it might be seen, was his, or was Russian....

Looking at him she was again carried forth, out into the world. Again about the whole of humanity was flung some comprehensive feeling she could not define.... It filled her with longing to have begun life in Russia. To have been made and moulded there. Russians seemed to begin, by nature, where the other Europeans left off....

“The educated *specialists*,” she quoted to throw off the spell and assert English justice, “are the ones who have found out about the

people; not the people themselves.” His face dimmed to a mask ... dead white Russian face, crisp, savage red beard, opaque china blue eyes, behind which his remembered troops of thoughts were hurrying to range themselves before her. Michael broke in on them, standing near, glowing with satisfaction, making a melancholy outcry about the last ’bus. She moved away leaving him with Lintoff and turned to the bedside unprepared with anything to say.

Where could she get a little close-fitting black cap, and an enveloping coat of that deep velvety black, soft, not heavy and tailor—made like an English coat, yet so good in outline, expressive; a dark moulding for face and form that could be worn for years and would retain, no matter what the fashions were, its untroublesome individuality? Not in London. They were Russian things. The Russian woman’s way of abolishing the mess and bother of clothes; keeping them close and flat and untrimmed. Shining out from them full of dark energy and indifference. More oppressively than before, was the barrier between them of Madame Lintoff’s

indifference. It was not hostility. Not personal at all; nor founded on any test, or any opinion.

In the colourless moaning voice with which she agreed that there was much for her to see in London and that she had many things she wished particularly not to miss, in the way she put her foreigner's questions, there was an over-whelming indifference. It went right through. She sat there, behind her softly moulded beauty, dreadfully full of clear hard energy; yet immobile in perfect indifference. Not expecting speech; yet filching away the power to be silent. No breath from Lintoff's wide vistas had ever reached her. She had driven along, talking, teaching, agitating; had gone through her romance without once moving away from the dark centre of indifference where she lay coiled and beautiful.... *Her* sympathy with the proletarians was a fastidious horror of all they suffered. Her cold clear mind summoned it easily, her logical brain could find sharp terse phrases to describe it. She cared no more for them than for the bourgeois people from whom she had fled with equal horror, and

terse phrases, into more desperate activities than he. He loved and *wanted* the people. He felt separation from them more as his loss than as theirs. He wanted the whole vast multitude of humanity. The men came strolling. Lintoff asked a question. They all flung sentences in turn, abruptly, in Russian, from unmoved faces. They were making arrangements for tomorrow.

Lintoff stood flaring in the lamplit porch, speeding them on their way with abrupt caressing words.

“Well?” said Michael before they were out of hearing—“Did you like them?”

“Yes or no as the case may be.” Michael’s recovered London manner was a support against the prospect of sustaining a second meeting tomorrow, with everything already passed that could ever pass between herself and them.

“You have made an *immense* impression on Bruno Feodorovitch.”

“How do you know?”

“He finds you the type of the Englishwoman. Harmonious. He said that with such a woman a man could all his life be

perfectly happy. Ah, Miriam, let us at once be married.” His voice creaked pathetically; waiting for the lash. The urgent certainty behind it was not his own certainty. Nothing but a too dim, too intermittent sense of something he gathered in England. She stood still to laugh aloud. His persistent childish naughtiness assured her of the future and left her free to speak.

“You *know* we can’t; you *know* how separate we are. You have seen it again and again and agreed. You see it now; only you are carried away by this man’s first impression. Quite a wrong one. I know the sort of woman he means. Who accepts a man’s idea and leaves him to go about his work undisturbed; sure that her attention is distracted from his full life by practical preoccupations. It’s *perfectly* easy to create that impression, on any man. Of bright complacency. All the busy married women are creating it all the time, helplessly. Men see them looking out into the world, practical, responsible, quite certain about everything, going from thing to thing, too active amongst things to notice men’s wavering self-

indulgence, their slips and shams. Men lean and feed and are kept going, and in their moments of gratitude they laud women to the skies. At other moments, amongst themselves, they call them materialists, animals, half-human, imperfectly civilised creatures of instinct, sacrificed to sex. And all the time they have no suspicion of the individual life going on behind the surface.” ... To marry would be actually to become, as far as the outside world could see, exactly the creature men described. To go into complete solitude, marked for life as a segregated female whose whole range of activities was known; in the only way men have of knowing things.

“Linton of course is not quite like that. But then in these revolutionary circles men and women live the same lives.... It’s like America in the beginning, where women were as valuable as men in the outside life. If the revolution were accomplished they would separate again.” ...

She backed to the railings behind her, and leant, with a heel on the low moulding, to steady herself against the tide of thought,

leaving Michael planted in the middle of the pavement. A policeman strolled up, narrowly observing them, and passed on.

“No one on earth knows whether these Russian revolutionaries are right or wrong. But they have a thing that none of their sort of people over here have—an effortless sense of humanity as one group. The *men* have it and are careless about everything else. I believe they think it worth realising if everybody in the world died at the moment of realisation. The women know that humanity is two groups. And they go into revolutions for the freedom from the pressure of this knowledge.”

“Revolution is by no means the sole way of having a complete sense of humanity. But what has all this to do with *us*?”

“It is not that the women are heartless; that is an appearance. It is that they know that there are no *tragedies*....”

“Listen, Mira. You have taught me much. I am also perhaps not so indiscriminating as are some men.”

“In family life, all your Jewish feelings would overtake you. You would slip into

dressing-gown and slippers. You have said so yourself. But I am now quite convinced that I shall never marry.” She walked on.

He ran round in front of her, bringing her to a standstill.

“You think you will never marry ... with *this*”—his ungloved hands moved gently over the outlines of her shoulders. “Ah—it is most—musical; you do not know.” She thrilled to the impersonal acclamation; yet another of his many defiant tributes to her forgotten material self; always lapsing from her mind, never coming to her aid when she was lost in envious admiration of women she could not like. Yet they contained an impossible idea; the idea of a man being consciously attracted and won by universal physiological facts, rather than by individuals themselves....

If Michael only knew, it was this perpetual continental science of his that had helped to kill their relationship. With him there could never be any shared discovery.... She grudged the formal enlightenment he had brought her; filching it from the future. There could never now be a single harmonious development in relation to one person. Unless in relation to

him.... For an instant marriage, with him, suggested itself as an accomplished fact. She saw herself married and free of him; set definitely in the bright resounding daylight of marriage ... free of desires ... free to rest and give away to the tides of cheerfulness ringing in confinement within her. She saw the world transformed to its old likeness; and walked alone with it, in her old London, as if awakened from a dream. But her vision was disturbed by the sense and sound of his presence and she knew that her response was not to him....

The necessity of breaking with him invaded her from without, a conviction, coming from the radiance on which her eyes were set, and expanding painlessly within her mind. She recognised with a flush of shame at the continued association of these two separated people, that there was less reality between them now than there had been when they first met. There was none.... She was no longer passionately attached to him, but treacherously since she was hiding it, to someone hidden in the past, or waiting in the future ... or *anyone*; any chance man might be

made to apprehend ... so that when his man's limitations appeared, that past would be there to retreat to....

He had never for a moment shared her sense of endlessness.... More sociably minded than she ... but not more sociable ... more quickly impatient of the cessations made by social occasions, *he* had no visions of waiting people.... His personal life was centred on her completely. But the things she threw out to screen her incommunicable blissfulnesses, or to shelter her vacuous intervals from the unendurable sound of his perpetual circling round his set of ideas, no longer reached him. She could silence and awaken him only in those rare moments when she was lifted out of her growing fatigues to where she could grasp and state in all its parts any view of life that was different from his own. Since she could not hold him to these shifting visions, nor drop them and accept his world, they had no longer anything to exchange....

At the best they were like long-married people, living, alone, side by side; meeting only in relation to outside things. Any breaking of the silence into which she

retreated while keeping him talking, every pause in her outbursts of irrepressible cheerfulness, immediately brought her beating up against the bars of his vision of life as uniform experience, and gave her a fresh access of longing to cut out of her consciousness the years she had spent in conflict with it.

Always until tonight her longing to escape the unmanageable burden of his Jewishness had been quenched by the pain of the thought of his going off alone into banishment. But tonight the long street they were in shone brightly towards the movement of her thought. Some hidden barrier to their separation had been removed. She waited curbed, incredulous of her freedom to breathe the wide air; unable to close her ears to the morning sounds of the world opening before her as the burden slipped away. Drawing back, she paused to try upon herself the effect of his keenly imagined absence. She was dismantled, chill and empty handed, returning unchanged to loneliness. But no thrill of pain followed this final test; the unbelievable severance was already made. Even whilst

looking for words that would break the shock, she felt she had spoken.

His voice breaking his silence, came like an echo. She went like a ghost along the anticipated phrases, keenly aware only of those early moments when she had first gathered the shapes and rhythms of his talk.

Freedom; and with it that terrible darkness in his voice. Words must be said; but it was cruel to speak from far away; from the midst of joy. The unburdened years were speeding towards her; she felt their breath; the lifting of the light with the presence, just beyond the passing moments, of the old companionship that for so long had been hers only when she could forget her surrounded state.... His resonant cough brought her again the sound of his voice ... how could the warm kind voice disappear from her days ... she felt herself quailing in loneliness before the sharp edges of her daily life.

Glancing at him as they passed under a lamp she saw a pale, set face. His will was at work; he was facing his future and making terms with it. He would have a phrase for his loss, as a refuge from pain. That was

comforting; but it was a base, social comfort; far away from the truth that was loading her with responsibility. He did not know what he was leaving.... There was no conscious thought in him that could grasp and state the reality of his loss; nor what it was in him that even now she could not sever from herself. If he knew, there would be no separation. He had actually moved into his future; taken of his own freewill the first step away from the shelter she gave. Perhaps a better, kinder shelter awaited him. Perhaps he was glad in his freedom and his manner was made from his foreigner's sense of what was due to the occasion. He did not know that there would be no more stillness for him.

Yet he *did* dimly know that part of his certainty about her was this mysterious *youth*; the strange everlasting sense of being, even with servants and young children, with *any* child, in the presence of adult cynical social ability, comfortably at home in the world.... Perhaps he would be better off without such an isolated, helpless personality in the life he must lead. But letting him go was giving him up to cynicism, or to the fixed blind

sentiments of all who were not cynics. No one would live with him in his early childhood, and keep it alive in him. He would leave it with her, without knowing that he left it.

All the things she had made him contemplate would be forgotten.... He would plunge into the life he used to call normal.... That was jealousy; flaming through her being; pressing on her mind. For a moment she faced the certainty that she would rather annihilate his mind than give up overlooking and modifying his thoughts. Here alone was the root of her long delay ... it held no selfless desire for his welfare ... then he would be better off with *anyone*. He and the cynics and the sentimentalists were human and kindly, however blind.... They were not cruel; ready to wreck and destroy in order to impose their own certainties.... Even as she gazed into it, she felt herself drawn powerfully away from the abyss of her nature by the pain of anticipating his separated future; the experiences that would obliterate and vanquish her; justifying as far as he would ever again see, his original outlook.... She

battled desperately, imploring the power of detachment, and immediately found words for them both.

“It is weak to go on; it will only become more difficult.”

“You are right, it is a weakness;” his voice broke on a gusty breath; “tomorrow we will spend as we have promised, the afternoon with Lintoffs. On Monday I will go.”

The street swayed about her. She held on, forcing her limbs; passing into emptiness. The sounds of the world were very far away; but within their muffled faintness she heard her own free voice, and his, cheerful and impersonal, sounding on through life. With the breath of this release she touched the realization that some day, he would meet, along a pathway unknown to her and in a vision different from her own, the same truth.... What truth? God? The old male prison, whether men were atheists or believers?... The whole of the truth of which her joy and her few certainties were a part, innocently conveyed to him by someone with a character that would win him to attend. Then he would remember the things they had

lost in speech. The enlightener would not argue. Conviction would come to him by things taken for granted.

Clear demonstration is at once fooled....
All *men* in explanatory speech about *life*,
have at once either in the face, or in the
unconscious rest of them, a look of shame.
Because they are not living, but calculating....
Women who are not living ought to spend all
their time cracking jokes. In a rotten society
women grow witty; making a heaven while
they wait....

But if from this far cool place where she
now was, she breathed deep and let mirth
flow out, he would *never* go.

At the very beginning of the afternoon
Miriam was isolated with Madame Lintoff.
Forced to walk ahead with her, as if
companionably, between the closed shop-
fronts and the dismal gutter of Oxford Street,
while her real place, at Michael's side, with
Lintoff beyond, or side by side with Lintoff,
and Michael beyond, was empty, and the two

men walked alone, exchanging, without interference, one-sided, masculine views.

She listened to Madame's silence. For all her indifference, she must have had some sort of bright anticipation of her first outing in London. And this was the outing. A walk, along a grey pavement, in raw grey air, under a heavy sky, with an Englishwoman who had no conversation.

Most people began with questions. But there was no question she wanted to ask Madame Lintoff.... She knew her too well. During the short night she had become a familiar part of the picture of life; one of the explanations of the way things went.... Yet it was inhospitable to leave her with no companion but the damp motionless air.

Relaxing her attention, to make an attempt at bold friendliness, she swung gaily along, looking independently ahead into the soft grey murk. But hopelessness seized her as a useless topic sprang eagerly into her mind and she felt herself submerged, unable to withstand its private charm. Helplessly she explained, in her mind, to the far-off woman at her side that this bleak day coming

suddenly in the midst of July was one of the glorious things in the English weather.... Only a few people find English weather glorious.... Clever people think it contemptible to mention weather except in jest or with a passing curse. Madame Lintoff would have just that same expression of veiled scorn that means people are being kept from their topics.... For a few seconds, as she skirted a passing group, she looked back to an unforgettable thing, that would press for expression, now that she had thought of it, through anything she might try to say ... a wandering in twilight along a wide empty pavement at the corner of a square of high buildings, shutting out all but the space of sky above the trees.... That lovely line about Beatrice, bringing bright, draped, deep-toned figures, with the grave eyes of intensest eternal happiness, and heads bent in an attitude of song, about her in the upper air; the way they had come down, as she had lowered her eyes to the gleaming, wet pavement to listen again and again into the words of the wonderful line; how they had closed about her; a tapestry of intensifying

colour, making a little chamber filled with deep light, gathering her into such a forgetfulness that she had found herself going along at a run, and when she had wakened to recall the sense of the day and the season, had looked up and seen November in the thick Bloomsbury mist, the beloved London lamplight glistening on the puddles of the empty street, and spreading a sheen of gold over the wet pavements; the jewelled darkness of the London winter coming about her once more; and then the glorious shock of remembering that August and September were still in hand, waiting hidden beyond the dark weather....

She came back renewed and felt for a moment the strange familiar uneasy sense of being outside and indifferent to the occasion, the feeling that brought again and again, in spite of experience, the illusion that everyone was merely playing a part, distracting attention from the realities that persisted within. That all the distortions of speech and action were the whisperings and postures of beings immured in a bright reality they would not or could not reveal. But acting upon this

belief always brought the same result. Astonishment, contempt, even affronted dignity were the results of these sudden outbreaks....

But a Russian idealist ... would not be shocked, but would be appallingly clever and difficult. All the topics which now came tumbling into her mind shrank back in silence before Madame Lintoff's intellectual oblivion. It was more oppressive than the oblivion of the intellectual English. Theirs was a small, hard, bright circle. Within it they were self-conscious. Hers was an impersonal spreading darkness....

They were nearing Oxford Circus. There were more people strolling along the pavement. For quite a little time they were separated by the passing of two scattered groups, straggling along, with hoarse cockney shouting, the women yodelling and yelling at everything they saw. The reprieve brought them together again, Miriam felt, with something rescued; a feeling of accomplishment. Madame Lintoff's voice came hurriedly—Was she noticing the Salvation Army Band, thumping across the

Circus; or this young man getting into a hansom as if the whole world were watching him being importantly headlong?—mournfully came a rounded little sentence deploring the Sunday closing of the theatres.... She would have neatly deplored September.... Je trouve cela *triste*, l'automne.

But thrilled by the sudden sounding of the little voice, Miriam tried eagerly to see London through her eyes; to find it a pity that the theatres were not open. She agreed, and turned her mind to the plays that were on at the moment. She could not imagine Madame Lintoff at any one of them. But their bright week-day names lost meaning in the Sunday atmosphere; drew back to their own place, and insisted that she should find a defence for its quiet emptiness. They themselves defended it, these English theatre names, gathering much of their colour and brightness from the weekly lull. But the meaning of the lull lay much deeper than the need for contrast; deeper than the reasons given by sabbatarians, whom it was a joy to defy, though they were right. It was something that was as difficult to defend as the qualities of

the English weather.

This Russian woman was also a continental, sharing the awful continental demand that the week-day things should never cease; dependent all the time on revolving sets of outside things ... and the modern English were getting more and more into the same state. In a few years Sunday would be “bright”; full of everyday noise. Unless someone could find words to explain the thing all these people called *dullness*; what it was they were so briskly smothering. Without the undiscoverable words, it could not be spoken of. An imagined attempt brought mocking laughter and the sound of a Bloomsbury voice: “Vous n’avez pas quand vous vous rasez, hein?” Madame Lintoff would not be vulgar; but she would share the sentiment....

Miriam turned to her in wrath, feeling an opportunity. Here, for all her revolutionary opinions, was a representative of the talkative oblivious world. She would confess to her that she dared not associate closely with people because of the universal capacity for being bored, and the *hurry* everyone was in.

Her anger began to change into interest as words framed themselves in her mind.... But as she turned to speak she was shocked by the pathos of the little cloaked figure; the beautifully moulded, lovely disc of face, shining out clasped by the cap, above the close black draperies, and withdrew her eyes to contemplate in silence the individual life of this being; her moments of solitary dealing with the detail of the day when she would be forced to think *things*; not thoughts; and did not know how marvellous things were. That lonely one was the person to approach, ignoring everything else. She would protest, make some kind of defence; but if the ground could be held, they would presently be together in a bright world. But there was not enough *time*, between here and Hyde Park. Then later.

Behind, near or far, the two dry men were keeping their heads, exchanging men's ready-made remarks....

“Est-ce qu'il y a en Angleterre le grand drame psychologique?”

What on earth did she mean?

“Oh yes; here and there,” said Miriam

firmly.

She sang over in her mind the duet of the contrasting voices as she turned in panic to the region within her, that was entrenched against England. Some light on the phrase would be there, if anywhere.... Shaw? Were his things great psychological dramas?

“*Galumphing* about like an *elephant*.” ... The sudden bright English voice reverberated through her search.... Sudermann? She saw eager, unconscious faces, well-off English people, seeing only their English world, translating everything they saw into its language; strayed into Oxford Street to remind her. She wanted to follow them, and go on hearing, within the restricted jargon of their English voices, the answer to questions they never dreamed of putting. The continentals put questions and answered them by theories. These people answered everything in person; and did not know it.

The open spaces of the Park allowed them to line up in a row, and for some time they hovered on the outskirts of the crowd gathered nearest to the gates. Michael, in Russian, was delightedly showing off his

Hyde Park crowds, obviously renewing his own first impression of these numbers of people casually gathered together—looking for his friends to show that they were impressed in the same way. They were impressed. They stood side by side, looking small and wan; making little sounds of appreciation, their two pairs of so different eyes wide upon the massed people. He could not wait; interrupted their contemplation in his ironic challenging way.

Lintoff answered with an affectionate sideways movement of the head; two short Russian words pouching his red lips in a gesture of denial. But he did not move, as an Englishman would have done after he thought he had settled a debateable point; remaining there gently, accessible and exposed to a further onslaught. He held his truths carelessly, not as a personal possession, to be fought over with every other male.

It was Michael who made the first movement away from his summed-up crowd.... They drifted in a row towards the broad pathway lined with seated forms looking small and misty under the high trees,

but presently to show clearly, scrappy and inharmonious, shreds of millinery and tailoring, no matter how perfect, reduced to confusion, spoiling the effect of the flower beds brightly flaring under the grey sky and the wide stretch of grass, brilliant emerald until it stopped without horizon where the saffron distances of the mist shut thickly down. She asked Michael what Lintoff had said.

“He says quite simply that these people are not free.”

“Nor are they,” she said, suddenly reminded of a line of thought. “They are,” she recited, clipping her sentences in advance as they formed, to fit the Russian intonation, with carelessly turned head and Lintoff’s pout of denial on her lips, “docile material; an inexhaustible *supply*. An employer must husband; his horses and machinery; his people he uses up; as-cheaply-as-possible-always-quite-sure-of-*more*.”

“That has been so. But employers begin to understand that it is a sound economic to care for their workers.”

“A few. And that leads only to blue

canvas.”

“*What* is this?”

“Wells’s hordes of uniformed slaves, living in security, with all sorts of material enjoyments.”

“It surprises me that still you quote this man.”

“He makes phrases and pictures.”

“Of what service are such things from one who is incapable of unprejudiced thought?”

“Everybody is.”

“Pardon me; you are *wrong*.”

“Thought *is* prejudice.”

“That is most-monstrous.”

“Thought is a secondary human faculty, and can’t *lead, anyone, anywhere*.”

He turned away to the Lintoffs with a question. His voice was like a cracked bell. Lintoff’s gentle, indifferent tones made a docile response.

“I suggest we have *tea*,” bellowed Michael softly, facing her with a cheerful countenance. “They agree. Is it not a good idea?”

“Perfectly splendid,” she murmured, smiling her relief. He could be trusted not to

endure ... to be tired of an adventure before it had begun....

“Certainly it is splendid if it bring dimples. Where shall we go?” He turned eagerly, to draw them back at once to the park gates, shouting gaily as he broke the group, “Na, na; *where*. What do you think, Miriam?”

“There isn’t anything near here,” she objected. She pressed forward with difficulty, her strength ebbing away behind her. His impatience was drawing them away from something towards which they had all been moving. It was as if her real being were still facing the other way.

“No—where really can we go?” In an instant he would remember the dark little Italian-Swiss café near the Marble Arch, and its seal would be set on the whole of the afternoon. The Lintoffs would not be aware of this. They were indifferent to surroundings in a world that had only one meaning for them. But the sense of them and their world, already, in the boundless immensity of Sunday, scattered into the past, would be an added misery amongst the clerks and shop-girls crowded in that stuffy little interior

where so many of her Sunday afternoons had died. The place cancelled all her worlds, put an end to her efforts to fit Michael into them, led her always impatiently into the next week for forgetfulness of their recurring, strife-tormented leisure....

Verandahs and sunlit sea; small drawing-rooms, made large by their wandering shapes; spaces of shadow and sunlight beautifying all their English Sunday contents; windowed alcoves reflecting the sky; spacious, silken, upstairs tea-rooms in Bond Street.... But these things were hers now, only through friends. Here, by herself, as the Lintoffs knew her, she belonged to the resourceless crowd of London workers....

Michael ordered much tea and a lemonade, in a reproachful aside to the pallid grubby little waiter squeezing his way between the close-set tables with a crowded tray held high.

“Ow many?” he murmured over his shoulder, turning a low-browed anxious face. His tray tilted dangerously, sliding its contents.

“You can count?” said Michael without

looking at him.

“Four tea, four limonade,” murmured the poor little man huskily.

“I have ordered *tea*,” thundered Michael. “You can bring also one bottle limonade.”

The waiter pushed on, righting his noisy trayful. Michael subsided with elbows on the smeary marble table-top, his face propped on his hands, about to speak. The Lintoffs also; their gleaming pale faces set towards the common centre, while their eyes brooded outwards on the crowded little scene. Miriam surveyed them, glad of their engrossment, dizzy with the sense of having left herself outside in the Park.

“Shall I tell the Lintoffs that you have dimples?” Michael asked serenely, shifting his bunched face round to smile at her.

She checked him as he leaned across to call their attention.... It was in this very room that she had first told him he must choose between her company and violent scenes with waiters. He was utterly unconscious; aware only of his compatriots sitting opposite, himself before them in the pride of an international friendship. Yesterday’s compact

set aside, quite likely, later on, to be questioned.

The Lintoffs' voices broke out together, chalkily smooth and toneless against the cockney sounds vibrating in the crowded space, *all* harsh and strident, *all* either facetious or wrangling. Their eyes had come back. But they themselves were absent, set far away, amongst their generalisations. Of the actual life of the passing moment they felt no more than Michael. Itself, its uniqueness, the deep loop it made, did not exist for them. They looked only towards the future. He only at a uniform pattern of humanity.

Yet within the air itself was all the time the something that belonged to everybody; that could be universally recognised; disappearing at once with every outbreak of speech that sought only for distraction, from embarrassment or from tedium.... She sat lifeless, holding for comfort as she gathered once more, even with these free Russians, the proof of her perfect social incompatibility, to the thought that this endurance was the last. These were the last hours of wandering out of the course of her being.... She felt herself

grow pale and paler, sink each moment more utterly out of life. The pain in her brow pressed upon her eyelids like a kind of sleep. She must be looking quite horrible. Was there anyone, anywhere, who suffered quite in this way, felt always and everywhere so utterly different?

Tea came bringing the end of the trio of Russian phrases. Michael began to dispense it, telling the Lintoffs that they had discovered that the English did not know how to drink tea. Ardent replies surged at the back of her mind; but speech was a faraway mystery. She clung to Michael's presence, the sight of his friendly arm handing the cup she could not drink; to the remembered perfection of his acceptance of failures and exhaustions ... mechanically she was speaking French ... appearing interested and sincere; caring only for the way the foreign words gave a quality to the barest statement by placing it in far-off surroundings, giving it a life apart from its meaning, bearing her into a tide of worldly indifference....

But real impressions living within her own voice came crowding upon her,

overwhelming the forced words, opening abysses, threatening complete flouting of her surroundings. She snatched at them as they passed before her, smiled her vanishing thread of speech into inanity, and sat silent, half turned towards the leaping reproachful shapes of thought, inexpressible to these people waiting with faces set only towards swift replies. Madame Lintoff made a fresh departure in her moaning sweetly querulous voice ... a host of replies belonged to it, all contradicting each other. But there was a smooth neat way of replying to a thing like that, leading quickly on to something that would presently cancel it ... quite simple people.... Mrs. Bailey, saying wonderful things without knowing it.

Answers given knowingly, admitted what they professed to demolish.... She had forfeited her right to speak; disappeared before their eyes, and must yet stay, vulnerable, held by the sounds she had woven, false threads between herself and them. Her head throbbed with pain, a molten globe that seemed to be expanding to the confines of the room. Michael was

inaccessible, carefully explaining to Madame Lintoff, in his way, why she had said what she had said; set with boyish intentness towards the business of opening his dreadful green bottle.

Lintoff sat upright with a listening face; the lit brooding face of one listening to distant music. He was all lit, all the time, curiously giving out light that his thinly coloured eyes and flaming beard helped to flow forth. She could imagine him speaking to crowds; but he had not the unmistakable speaker's look, that lifted look and the sense of the audience; always there, even in converse with intimate friends.... But of course in Russia there were no crowds, none of that machinery of speaker and audience, except for things that were not going to end in action.... When Michael lifted his glass with a German toast, Lintoff's smile came without contracting his face, the light that was in him becoming a person. He was so far away from the thoughts provoked by speech that he could be met afresh in each thing that was said; coming down into it whole and serious from his impersonal distances; but only to go back. There was no

permanent marvel for him in the present....
The room was growing dim. Only Michael's profile was clear, tilted as he tossed off his dreadful drink at one draught. His face came round at last, fresh and glowing with the effervescence. He exclaimed, in gulps, at her pallor and ordered hot milk for her, quietly and courteously from the hovering waiter. The Lintoffs uttered little condolences most tenderly, with direct homely simplicity.

Sitting exempted, sipping her milk while the others talked, lounging, in smooth gentle tones, three forces ... curbed to gentleness ... she felt the room about her change from gloom to a strange blurred brightness, as if she were seeing it through frosted glass.... A party of young men were getting up to go, stamping their feet and jostling each other as they shook themselves to rights, letting their jeering, jesting voices reach street level before they got to the door. They filed past. Their faces, browless under evilly flattened cloth caps, or too large under horrible shallow bowlers set too far back, were all the same, set towards the street with the look, even while they jested, of empty finality;

choiceless dead faces. They were not really gay. They had not been gay as they sat. Only defiantly noisy, collected together to banish, with their awful ritual of jeers and jests, the closed-in view that was always before their eyes; giving them, even when they were at their rowdiest, that look of lonely awareness of something that would never change. That was *why* they jeered? Why their voices were always defensive and defiant? What else could they do when they could alter nothing and never get away? The last of the file was different; a dark young man with a club-footed gait. His face was pursed a little with the habit of facetiousness, but not aggressively; the forehead that had just disappeared under his dreadful cap was touched with a radiance, a reflection of some individual state of being, permanently independent of his circumstances; very familiar, reminding her of something glad ... she found it as she brought her eyes back to the table; the figure of a boy, swinging in clumsy boots along the ill-lit tunnel of that new tube at Finsbury Park on a Saturday night, playing a concertina; a frightful

wheezing and jangling of blurred tones, filling the passage, bearing down upon her, increasing in volume, detestable. But she had taken in the leaping unconscious rhythmic swinging of his body and the joy it was to him to march down the long clear passage, and forgiven him before he passed; and then his eyes as he came, rapt and blissfully grave above the hideous clamour.

“Listen, Miriam. Here is something for you.” She awoke to scan the three busy faces. It had not been her fault that she had failed and dropped away from them. Had it been her fault? The time was drawing to an end. Presently they would separate for good. The occasion would have slipped away. With this overwhelming sense of the uniqueness of occasions, she yet forgot every time, that every occasion was unique, and limited in time, and would not recur.... She sat up briskly to listen. There was still time in hand. They had been ages together. She was at home. She yawned and caught Lintoff’s smiling eye. There was a brightness in this little place; all sorts of things that reflected the light ... metal and varnished wood,

upright; flat surfaces; the face of the place; its features certainly *sometimes* cleansed, perhaps by whistling waiters in the jocund morning, for her. She did not dust ... she could talk and listen, in prepared places, knowing nothing of their preparations.... She belonged to the leisure she had been born in, to the beauty of things. The margins of her time would always be glorious.

“Lintoff says that he understands not at all the speech of these young men who were only now here. I have not listened; but it was of course simply cockney. He declares that one man used repeatedly to the waiter making the bill, one expression, sounding to him like a mixture of Latin and Chinese—*Ava-tse*. I confess that after all these years it means to me absolutely nothing. Can you recognise it?”

She turned the words over in her mind, but could not translate them until she recalled the group of men and the probable voice. Then she recoiled. Lintoff and Michael did not know the horror they were handling with such light amusement.

“I know,” she said, “it’s appalling;

fearful”—even to think the words degraded the whole spectacle of life, set all its objects within reach of the transforming power of unconscious distortion....

“Why fearful? It is just the speech of London. Certainly this tame boor was not swearing?” railed Michael. Lintoff’s smile was now all personal curiosity.

“It’s not Cockney. It’s the worst there is. London Essex. He meant *I’ve; had; two; buns* or something. Isn’t it *perfectly* awful?” Again the man appeared horribly before her, his world summarised in speech that must, *did* bring everything within it to the level of its baseness.

“Is it possible?” said Michael with an amused chuckle. Lintoff was murmuring the phrase that meant for him an excursion into the language of the people. He could not see its terrible menace. The uselessness of opposing it.... Revolutionaries would let all these people out to spread over everything.... But the people themselves would change? But it would be too late to save the language....

“English is being destroyed,” she

proclaimed. “There *is* a relationship between sound and things.... If you heard a Canadian reading Tennyson.... ‘Come into the goiden, Mahd.’ But that’s different. And in parts of America a very beautiful rich free English is going on; more vivid than ours, and taking things in all the time. It is only in England that deformed speech is increasing—is being *taught* in schools. It shapes these people’s mouths and contracts their throats and makes them hard-eyed.”

“You have no ground *whatever* for these wild statements.”

“They are not wild; they are tame, when you really think of it.” Lintoff was watching tensely; deploring wasted emotion ... probably.

“Do you think Lintoff....” They moved on in their talk, unapprehensive foreigners, leaving the heart of the problem untouched. It was difficult to keep attached to a conversation that was half Michael’s, with the Lintoffs holding back, acquiescing indulgently in his topics. An encyclopædia making statements to people who were moving in a dream; halting and smiling and

producing gestures and kindly echoes...
Michael like a rock for most things as they were and had been in the past, yet knowing them only in one way; clear as crystal about ordered knowledge, but never questioning its value.

She wanted, now, to talk again alone with Lintoff ... anything would do. The opposition that was working within her, not to his vision, but to his theory of it, and of the way it should be realised, would express itself to him through any sort of interchange. Something he brought with him would be challenged by the very sound on the air of the things that would be given her to say, if she could be with him before the mood of forgetful interest should be worn away. She sat waiting for the homeward walk, surrounded by images of the things that had made her; not hers, England's, but which she represented and lived in, through something that had been born with her. If there was anyone she had ever met to whom these things could be conveyed without clear speech or definite ideas, it was he. But when they left the restaurant they walked out into

heavy rain and went to the place of parting, separated and silent in a crowded 'bus.

Michael was going to keep his word.

Michael alone. With more than the usual man's helplessness.... Getting involved. At the mercy of his inability to read people.

The torment of missing his near warm presence would grow less, but the torment of not knowing what was happening to him would increase.

This stillness creeping out from the corners of the room was the opening of a lifetime of loneliness. It would grow to be far more dreadful than it was tonight. Tonight it was alive, between the jolly afternoon with the Lintoffs—*jolly*; the last bit of shared life—and the agony of tomorrow's break with Michael. But a day would come when the silence would be untormented, absolute, for life; echoing to all her movements in the room; waiting to settle as soon as she was still.

She resisted, pitting against it the sound of

London. But in the distant voice there was a new note; careless dismissal. The busy sound seemed very far away; like an echo of itself.

She moved quickly at the first sinking of her heart, and drew in her eyes from watching her room, the way its features stood aloof, separate and individual; independent of her presence. In a moment panic would have seized her, leaving no refuge. She asserted herself, involuntarily whistling under her breath, a cheerful sound that called across the night to the mistaken voice of London and blended at once with its song.... She would tell Michael he must communicate with her in any dire necessity.... Moving about unseeing she broke up the shape of her room and blurred its features and waited, holding on. Attention to these wise outside threats would drive away something coming confidently towards her, just round the corner of this vast, breathless moment.... She paused to wait for it as for a person about to speak aloud in the room, and drew a deep breath sending through her a glow from head to foot ... it was there; independent, laughing, bubbling up incorrigibly, golden and bright with a

radiance that spread all round her; her *profanity* ... but if incurable profanity was incurable happiness, how could she help believing and trusting it against all other voices ... if the last deepest level of her being was joy ... a hilarity against which *nothing* seemed to be able to prevail ... able, in spite of herself, in spite of her many solemn eager expeditions in opposition to it, to be always there, not gone; always waiting behind the last door. It was simply *rum*. Her limbs stirred to a dance ... how *slowly* he had played that wild Norwegian tune; making it like an old woman singing to a fretful child to cheat it into comfort; a gay quavering.

Its expanded gestures carried her slowly and gently up and down the room, dipping, swaying, with wooden clogs on her feet, her arms swinging to balance the slow movements of her body, the surrounding mountain landscape gleaming in the joy of the festival, defying the passing of the years. She could not keep within the slow rhythm. Her feet flung off the clogs and flew about the room until she was arrested by the flying dust and escaped to the window while it

settled behind her on the subdued furniture. A cab whistle was sounding in the street and the voices, coming up through the rain-moist air, of people grouped waiting on a doorstep ... come out into the deep night, out again into endless space, from a room, and still keeping up the sound of carefully modulated speech and laughter. The jingling of a hansom sounded far away in the square. It would be years before it would get to them. They would have to go on fitting things into the shape of their carefully made tones. She was tempted to call down to them to stop; tell them they were not taking anyone in....

A puff of wind brought the rain against her face, inviting her to stay with the night and find again, as she had done in the old days of solitude, the strange wide spaces within the darkness. But she was drawn back by a colloquy set in, behind her, in the room. Warmly the little shabby enclosure welcomed her, given back, eager for her to go on keeping her life in it; showing her the time ahead, the circling scenes; all the undeserved, unsought, extraordinary wealth of going on being alive. She stood with the rain-drops on

her face, tingling from head to foot to know why; why; *why* life should exist....

Going back into the room she found that her movement about it had all its old quality; she was once more in that zone of her being where all the past was with her unobstructed; not recalled, but present, so that she could move into any part and be there as before. She felt her way to sit on the edge of her bed, but gently as she let herself down, the bedstead creaked and gave beneath her, jolting her back into today, spreading before her the nothingness of the days she must now pass through, bringing back into her mind the threats and wise sayings. She faced them with arguments, flinching as she recognised this acknowledgment of their power.

Lifelong loneliness is a *phrase*. With no evidence for its meaning, but the things set down in books.... People who *record* loneliness, bare their wounds, and ask for pity, are not wholly wounded. For others, no one has any right to speak.... What is “a lonely figure”? If it knows it is lonely it is not altogether lonely. If it does not know, it is not lonely. Books about people are lies from

beginning to end. However sincere, they cannot offer any evidence about *life*. Even lifelong loneliness is life; too marvellous to express. Absolutely, of course. But relatively? Relative things are forgotten when you are alone....

The thought, at this moment, of the alternative of any sort of social life with its trampling hurry, made her turn to the simple single sense of her solitude with thankfulness that it was preserved. Social incompatibility thought of alone, brought a curious boundless promise, a sense of something ahead that she must be alone to meet, or would miss. The condemnation of social incompatibility coming from the voices of the world roused an impatience which could not feel ashamed; an angry demand for time, and behind it a sense of companionship for which there was no name....

Single, detached figures came vividly before her, all women. Each of them had spoken to her with sudden intimacy, on the outskirts of groups from which she had moved away to breathe and rest. They had all confessed their incompatibility; a chosen or

accepted loneliness. But it was certain they never felt that human forms about them crushed, with the sets of unconsidered assumptions behind their talk, the very sense of existence. They were either cynical, not only seeing through people, but not caring at all to be alive, never assuming characters in order to share the fun ... or they were “misjudged” or “resigned.” The cynical ones were really alone. They never had any sense of being accompanied by themselves. They had a strange hard strength; unexpected hobbies and interests. Those who were resigned were usually religious.... They lived in the company of their idea of Christ ... but regretfully ... as if it were a second best.... “And I who hoped for only God, found *thee*.” ... Mrs. Browning could never have realised how fearfully funny that was ... from a churchwoman.... And Protestant churchwomen believe that only men are eligible to associate with God. Thinking of Protestant husbands the idea was suffocating. It made God intolerable; and even Heaven simply *abscheulich*.... Buddhism.... “Buddhism is the only faith that offers itself

to men and women alike on equal terms ...” and then, “women are not encouraged to become priests” ... *Thibet*.... The whole world would be Thibet if the people were evenly distributed. Only the historic centuries had given men their monstrous illusions; only the crowding of the women in towns. But the Church will go on being a Royal Academy of Males....

She called back her thoughts from a contemplation that would lead only to anger, and was again aware of herself waiting, on the edge of her bed, just in time. In spite of her truancy the gay tumult was still seething in her mind; the whole of her past happinesses close about her, drawing her in and out of the years. Fragments of forgotten experience detached themselves, making a bright moving patchwork as she watched, waiting, while she passed from one to another and fresh patches were added drawing her on. Joy piled up within her; but while she savoured again the quality all these past things had held as she lived them through, she suddenly knew that they were there only because she was on her way to a goal.

Somewhere at the end of this ramble into the past, was a release from wrath. She rallied to the coolness far away within her tingling blood. How astoundingly good life was; generous to the smallest effort.... The scenes gathered about her, called her back, acquired backgrounds that spread and spread. She watched single figures going on into lives in which she had no part; into increasing incidents, leaving them, as they had found them, unaware. They never stopped, never dropped their preoccupation with people and the things that happened, to notice the extraordinariness of the world being there and they on it ... and so it was, everywhere....

She seemed to be looking with a hundred eyes, multitudinously, seeing each thing from several points at once, while through her mind flitted one after another all the descriptions of humanity she had ever culled. There was no goal here. Only the old familiar business of suspended opinions, the endless battling of thoughts. She turned away. She had gone too far. Now there would be lassitude and the precipice that waited.... Her room was clear and hard about her as she

moved to take refuge near the friendly gas, the sheeny patch of wall underneath it.

As she stood within the radiance, conscious only of the consoling light, the little strip of mantelshelf and the small cavernous presence of the empty grate, a single scene opened for a moment in the far distance, closing in the empty vista, standing alone, indistinct, at the bottom of her ransacked mind. It was gone. But its disappearance was a gentle touch that lingered, holding her at peace and utterly surprised.

This forgotten thing was the most deeply engraved of all her memories? The most powerful? More than any of the bright remembered things that had seemed so good as they came, suddenly, catching her up and away, each one seeming to be the last her lot would afford?

It was. The strange faint radiance in which it had shone cast a soft grey light within the darkness concealing the future....

Oldfield. It had come about through Dr. Salem Oldfield. She could not remember his arrival. Only suddenly realising him, one

evening at dinner when he had been long enough in the house to chaff Mrs. Bailey about some imaginary man. Sex-chaff; that was his form of humour; giving him away as a nonconformist. But so handsome, sitting large and square, a fine massive head, well shaped hair, thick, and dinted with close cropped waves; talking about himself in the eloquent American way. It was that night he had told the table how he met his fiancée. He was a charlatan, stagey; but there must have been something behind his clever anecdotal American piety. Something remained even after the other doctors' stories about his sharing their sitting-room and books, without sharing expenses; about his laziness and self-indulgence.

Mr. Chadband. But why shouldn't people on the way to Heaven enjoy buttered toast? A hypocrite is all the time trying to be something, or he wouldn't be a hypocrite.... And the story he told was *true*.... Dr. Winchester knew. It was with his friends at Balham that the girl had been staying. Wonderful. His lonely despair in Uganda; the way he had forced himself in the midst of his

darkness to visit the sick convert ... and found the answer to his trouble in a leaflet hymn at the bedside; and come to London for his furlough and met the authoress in the very first house he visited. Things like that don't happen unless people are real in some way. And the way he had admired Michael; and liked him.

It had been Michael he had taken to the Quaker meeting. But there must have been some talk with him about religion, to lead up to that sudden little interview on the stairs, he holding a book in one large hand and thumping it with the other.... "You'll find the basic realities of religious belief set forth *here*; in this small volume. Your George Fox was a marvellous man." There was an appealing truth in him at that moment, and humility.... But before his footsteps had died away she knew she could not read the book. Even the sight of it suggested his sledge-hammer sentimental piety. Also she had felt that the religious opinions of a politician could not clear up the problems that had baffled Emerson. It was only after she had given back the book that she remembered the

other George Fox and the Quaker in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But she had said she had read it and that it was wonderful, to silence his evangelistic attacks, and also for the comfort of sharing, with anybody, the admission that there was absolute wonderfulness.

After that there was no memory of him until the Sunday morning when Michael had come panting upstairs to ask her to go to this meeting. He was incoherent, and she had dressed and gone out with them, into the high bright Sunday morning stillness; without knowing whither. Finding out, somewhere on the way, that they were going to see Quakers waiting to be moved by the spirit.... A whitewashed room, with people in Quaker dress sitting in a circle? Shocking to break in on them.... Startling not to have remembered them in all these years of hoping to meet someone who understood silence; and now to be going to them as a show; because Dr. Oldfield admired Michael, and being American, found out the unique things in London....

In amongst the small old shops in St. Martin's Lane, gloomy, iron-barred gates, a

long bleak corridor, folding doors; and suddenly inside a large room with sloping galleries and a platform, like a concert room, a row of dingy modern people sitting on the platform facing a scattered “chapel” congregation; men and women sitting on different sides of the room ... being left standing under the dark gallery, while Dr. Oldfield and Michael were escorted to seats amongst the men; slipping into a chair at the back of the women’s side; stranded in an atrocious emphasis of sex. But the men were on the *left* ... and numbers of them; not the few of a church congregation; and young; modern young men in overcoats; really religious, and *not* thinking the women secondary.... But there were men also on the women’s side; here and there. Married men? Then those across the way were bachelors.... That young man’s profile; very ordinary and with a *walrus* moustache; but stilled from its maleness, deliberately divested and submitted to silence, redeeming him from his type....

To have been born amongst these people; to know at home and in the church a *shared* religious life.... They were in Heaven already.

Through acting on their belief. Where two or three are gathered together. Nearer than thoughts; nearer than breathing; nearer than hands and feet. The church knew it; but put the cart before the horse; the surface before the reality. The beautiful surroundings, the bridge of music and then, the moment the organ stopped a booming or nasal voice at top speed, “T’ th’ *Lordour* God b’long *mahcies* ’n f’giveness.” ... Anger and excited discovery and still more time wasted, in glancing across to find Michael, small and exposed at the gangway end, his head decorously bent, the Jew in him paying respect, but looking up and keenly about him from under his bent brows, observing on the only terms he knew, through eye and brain....

Michael was a determinist.... But to assume the presence of the holy spirit was also determinism?... Beyond him Dr. Oldfield, huge and eagerly bowed, conforming to Quaker usages, describing the occasion in his mind as he went. It was just then, turning to get away from his version, that the quality of the silence had made the impression that had come back to her now.

Dr. McHibbert said pure being was nothing. But there is no such thing as nothing ... being in the silence was being in something alive and positive; at the centre of existence; being there with others made the sense of it stronger than when it was experienced alone. Like lonely silence it drove away the sense of enclosure. There had been no stuffiness of congregated humanity; the air, breathed in, had held within it a freshness, spreading coolness and strength through the secret passages of the nerves.

It had felt like the beginning of a life that was checked and postponed into the future by the desire to formulate it; and by the nudging of a homesickness for daily life with these people who lived from the centre, admitted, in public, that life brims full all the time, away below thoughts and the loud shapes of things that happen.... And just as she had longed for the continuance of the admission, the spell had been broken. Suddenly, not in continuance, not coming out of the stillness, but interrupting it, an urbane, ingratiating voice. Standing up in the corner of the platform, turned towards the congregation, as

if he were a lecturer facing an audience, a dapper little man in a new spring suit, with pink cheeks and a pink rose in his buttonhole.... Afterwards it had seemed certain that he had broken the silence because the time was running out. Strangers were present and the spirit must move....

It had been a little address, a thought-out lecture on natural history, addressed by a specialist to people less well informed. He had talked his subject not with, but at them.... While his voice went on, the gathering seemed to lose all its religious significance. His informing air; his encouraging demonstrator's smiles; his obvious relish of the array of facts. They fell on the air like lies, losing even their own proper value, astray and intruding in the wrong context. When he sat down the silence was there again, but within it were the echoes of the urbane, expounding, professorial voice. Then, just afterwards, the breaking forth of that old man's muffled tones; praying; quietly, as if he were alone. No one to be seen; a humbled life-worn old voice, coming out of the heart of the gathering, carrying with it, gently, all

the soreness and groaning that might be there. No whining or obsequiousness; no putting on of a special voice; patient endurance and longing; affection and confidence. And far away within the indistinct aged tones, a clarion note; the warm glow of sunlight; his own strong certainty beating up unchanged beneath the heavy weight of his years. A gentle, clean, clear-eyed old man, with certainly a Whitman beard. Beautiful. For a moment it had been perfectly beautiful.

If he had stopped abruptly.... But the voice cleared and swelled. Life dropped away from it; leaving a tiresome old gentleman in full blast; thoughts coming in to shape carefully the biblical phrases describing God; to God. In the end he too was lecturing the congregation, praying at them, expressing his judgment.... Bleakness spread through the air. It was worse than the little pink man, who partly knew what he was doing and was ashamed. But this old chap was describing, at awful length, without knowing it, the secret of his own surface misery, the fact that he had never got beyond the angry, jealous, selfish, male God of the patriarchate.

Almost at once after that, the stirring and breaking up; and those glimpses, as people moved and turned towards each other, shaking hands, of the faces of some of the women, bringing back the lost impression. The inner life of the meeting was more fully with the women? It was they who spread the pure, live atmosphere? But they were obviously related. They had a household look, but not narrowly; none of the air of isolation that spread from churchwomen; the look of being used up by men and propping up a man's world with unacknowledged, or simply unpondered, private reservations. Nor any of the jesting air of those women who 'make the best of things.' They looked enviably, deeply, richly alive, on the very edge of the present, representing their faith in their own persons, entirely self-centred and self-controlled; poised and serene and withdrawn, yet not withholding. They had no protesting competing eagerness, and none of the secret arrogance of churchwomen. Their dignity was not dignified. Seen from behind they had none of the absurdity of churchwomen, devoutly uppish about the

status of an institution which was a standing insult to their very existence.... It was they, the shock of the relief, after the revealed weakness of the men, of their perfect poise, their personality, so strong and intense that it seemed to hold the power of reaching forth, impersonally, in any thinkable direction, that had finally confirmed the impression that had been so deep and that yet had not once come up into her thoughts since the day it was made....

The poorest, least sincere type of Anglican priest had a something that was lacking in Dr. Oldfield and the pink man. The absence of it had been the most impressive part of seeing them talking together. He had introduced Michael first. And the feeling of being affronted had quickly changed to thankfulness at representing nothing in the eyes of the suave little man. He had given only half his attention, not taking up the fact that Michael was a Zionist; his eyes wandering about; the proprietary eyes of a churchwarden....

St. Pancras clock struck two. But there was no sense of night in the soft wide air; pouring

in now more strongly at the open casement, rattling its fastening gently, rhythmically, to and fro, sounding its two little notes. It was the *west* wind. Of *course* she was not tired and there was no sense of night. She hurried to be in bed in the darkness, breathing it in, listening to the little voice at the window. Here was part of the explanation of her evening. Again and again it had happened; the escape into the tireless unchanging centre; when the wind was in the west. Michael had been hurt when she had told him that the west wind brought her perfect happiness and always, like a sort of message, the certainty that she must remain alone. But it was through him that she had discovered that it transformed her. It was an augury for tomorrow. For the way of the wind tonight, its breath passing through her, recalled, seeming exactly to repeat, that wonderful night of restoration when, for the only time, he had been away from London. It was useless to deplore the seeming cruelty. The truth was forced upon her, wafted through her by this air that washed away all the circumstances of her life.

CHAPTER III

She was inside the dark little hall, her luggage being set down in the shadows by the brisk silent maid. At the sight of the wide green staircase ascending to the upper world, the incidents of the journey, translated as she drove to the house into material for conversation, fell away and vanished.

The thud of the swing door, the flurry of summer skirts threshed by flying footsteps; Alma hurrying to meet her.... It was folly; *madness*; to flout the year's fatigue by coming here to stay, instead of going away with friends also tired and seeking holiday....

With the first step on the yielding pile of the stair-carpet she forgot everything but the escape from noise and gloom and grime. She was going up for four endless weeks into the clean light streaming down from above. This time there should be no brisk beginning. She

would act out Alma's promise to accept her as an invalid deaf mute. There was so much time that fatigue was an asset, the shadow against which all this brightness shone out.

But Alma was not welcoming an invalid. There she stood, at the end of her rush, daintily jiggling from foot to foot, in a delicate frilly little dress; heading the perspective of pure white and green, surfaces and angles sharp in the east light coming through the long casement. She checked the bright perspective with the thought in her dress, the careful arrangement of her softly woven pile of bright hair, the afternoon's excitement, from which she had rushed forth, shining through her always newly charming little pointed square face.

"Shall I labour up the rest of the stairs, or sit down here and burst into tears?"

"Oh, come up, dear ole fing," she cried with tender irony; but *irony*. "Paw fing. Is it *very* tired?" But her gentle arms and hands were perfectly, wonderfully understanding; though her face withdrawn from her gentle kiss still mocked; always within the limpid brown eyes that belabouring, rallying,

mocking spirit. She held her smile radiantly, against a long troubled stare, and then it broke into her abrupt gurgle of laughter.

“*Come* along,” she cried and carried a guest at a run along the passage and through the swing door.

It was the downstairs spare room.... Miriam had expected the winding stair, the room upstairs, where all her shorter visits were stored up. She was to be down here at the centre of the house, just behind low casements, right on the garden, touched by the sound of the sea. And within the curtain-shaded sound-bathed green-lit space there was a deeper remoteness than even in the far high room, so weirdly shaped by the burning roof; its orange light always full of a strange listening silence....

“*Alma*. How *perfectly* glorious.” She stood still, turned away, as Alma closed the door, contemplating the screened light falling everywhere on spaces of pure fresh colour, against which the deep tones of single objects shone brightly.

Alma neighed gently and with little gurgles of laughter put her hands about her and gently

shook her. "It is rather a duck of a room. It is rather a duck of a room." Another little affectionate, clutching shake. Her face was crinkled, her eyes twinkling with mirth; as if she gave the room a little sportive push that left it bashed amusingly sideways. In just this way had she jested when they walked, wearing long pigtails, down the Upper Richmond Road. If she could have echoed the words and joined in Alma's laughter, she would have been, in Alma's eyes, suitably launched on her visit. But she couldn't. *Amused* approval was an outrage on something. Yet the kind of woman who would be gravely pleased and presently depart to her own quarters proud and possessive, would also leave everything unexpressed. But that kind of person would not have achieved this kind of room ... and to Alma the wonder of it was of course inseparable from the adventure of getting it together. It was something in the independent effect of things that was violated by regarding them merely as successful larks.... Yet Alma's sense of beauty, her recognition of its unfamiliar forms was keener, more

experienced, more highly-wrought than her own.

“I shall spend the whole of my time in here, doing absolutely nothing.”

“You shall! You shall! *Dear* old Mira.” She was laughing again. “But you’ll come out and have tea. Sometimes. Won’t you, for instance, come out and have tea *now*? In a few minutes? There’ll be tea; in *ever* such a few minutes. Wouldn’t that be a bright idea?” How dainty she was; how pretty. A Dresden china shepherdess, without the simper; a sturdiness behind her sparkling mirth. If only she would stop trying to liven her up. It seemed always when they were alone, as if she were still brightly in the midst of people keeping things going....

“Tea! Bright idea! Tea!” A little parting shake and a brisk whirling turn and she was sitting away on the side of the bed, meditatively, with both hands, using a small filmy handkerchief, having given up hope of galvanising; saying gravely, “Take off your things and tell me really how you are.”

“I’m at my last gasp,” said Miriam sinking into a chair. It was clear now that she would

not be alone with the first expressiveness of the room. Returning later on she would find it changed. The first, already fading, wonderful moment would return, painfully, only when she was packing up to go. After all it was Alma's home. But it was no use trying to fight this monstrous conviction that the things she liked of other people, were more hers than their own. The door opened again upon a servant with her pilgrim baskets.

"I nearly always *am* at my last gasp nowadays." Clean, strong neatly cuffed hands setting the dusty London baskets down to rest in the quiet freshness.

Alma spoke formally; her voice a comment on expressiveness in the presence of the maid; and an obliteration of the expressiveness of the room; making it just a square enclosure set about with independent things, each telling, one against the other, a separate history.... When the maid was gone the air was parched with silence. Miriam felt suspended; impatient; eager to be out in whatever grouping Alma had come from, to recover there in the open the sense of life that had departed from the sheltering room.

“How is Sarah?” Alma felt the strain. But for her it was the difficulty of finding common ground for interchange with anyone whose life was lacking in brilliant features. She was behaving, kindly trying for topics; but also, partly, underlining the featurelessness, as a punishment for bad behaviour.

“Oh—flourishing—I think.” She rose, unpinning her stifling veil. She would have to brace herself to reach out to something with which to break into the questions Alma’s kind patience would one by one produce. A catechism leading her thoughts down into a wilderness of unexamined detail that would unfit her for the coming emergence.

“And Harriett?”

“Harriett’s simply *splendid*. You know, if she only had a little capital she could take another house. She’s sending people away all the time.”

“Oh yes?” Alma did not want to spend time over Harriett’s apartment house, unless it was brightly described. It was too soon for bright descriptions. The item had been dragged in and wasted, out of place. A single

distasteful fact. The servants, hidden away beyond the velvet staircase, seemed to be hearing the unsuitable disclosure. She sought about in her mind for something that would hold its own; one of the points of conflict that had cleared, since she was last here, to single unanswerable statements. But Alma forestalled her, attacking the silence with her gayest voice. "Oh Miriam, what *do* you think. I saw a Speck; yesterday; on the Grand Esplanade. *Do* you remember the Specks?"

Miriam beamed and agreed, breathing in reminiscences. But they would be endless; and would not satisfy them, or bring them together. She could not, with Alma alone, pretend that those memories were merely amusing. It was a treachery. The mere mention of a name sent her back to the unbearable happiness of that last school summer, a sunlit flower-filled world opening before her, the feeling of being herself a flower, expanding in the sunlight. She could not regard it as a past. All that had happened since was a momentary straying aside, to be forgotten. To that other world she was still going forward. One day she would suddenly

come upon it, as she did in her dreams. The flower-scented air of it was in her nostrils as she sat reluctantly rousing herself to take Alma's cue. "There were millions of them." It had never occurred to her that they were funny. Alma, even then, outside her set of grave romantic friendships, had seen almost everything as a comic spectacle and had no desire to go back. "Yes, *weren't* they innumerable! And so *large*! It was a large one I saw. The very biggest Speck of all I think it must have been."

"I expect it was Belinda."

"Oh, my *dear*! *Could* you tell them apart?"

"Belinda was one of the middle ones.

Absolutely *square*. I liked her for that and her deep bass voice and her silence."

"Oh, but Miriam, such a *heavy* silence."

"That was *why*. Perhaps because she made me feel sylph like and elegant. Me, Susan.... Or it might have been *Mehetabel*; the eldest of the younger ones. I once heard her answer in class...."

"My *dear*! Could a Speck really speak?"

"Hetta did. In a boo; like the voice of the wind."

She contemplated her thoughtless simile. It was exactly true. First a sound, breathy and resonant, and then words *blown* on it.... Alma's amused laughter was tailing off into little snickers; repeated while she looked for something else. But the revived Specks marshalled themselves more and more clearly, playing their parts in the crowded scene.

"And you know the eldest, Alatheia, was quite willowy. Darker than the others. They were all mid-brown."

"Oh Miriam; doesn't that express them?"

"I wonder what they are all doing?"

"Nothing, my dear. Oh *nothing*. Now *can* you imagine a Speck doing anything whatever?"

"All sitting about in the big house; going mad; on their father's money."

"Yes," said Alma simply, gathering her face into gravity. "It's rather terrible, you know." A black shadow bearing slowly down upon the golden picture.... But they were so determined to see women's lives in that way ... yet there was Miss Lane, and Mildred Gaunt and Eunice Bradley ... three of their

own small group; all gone mad.

“Well,” said Alma rising, her hands moving up to her bright hair, adjusting it, with delicate wreathing movements, “I’m so glad you’ve come, old fing.” She hummed herself to the door with a little tune to which Miriam listened standing in the middle of the room in a numb suspension. The door was opened. Alma would be gliding gracefully out. Her song ceased, and she cleared her throat with that little sound that was the sound of her voice in quiet comment.

“Wow. Old brown-study.” She turned to look. Alma’s pretty head was thrust back into the room. To shake things off, to make one shake things off.... She smiled, groaning in spirit at her accentuated fatigue. One more little amused gurgle, and Alma was gone.

She went into her own room. Next door. Opposite to it was Hypo’s room. Opposite to her own door, the door of the bathroom, and just beyond, the swing door leading to the landing and the rooms grouped about it. Outside the low curtained windows was the midst of the garden. She was set down at the heart of the house. Sounds circled about her

instead of coming faintly up.... She drew back the endmost curtain an inch or two. Bright light fell on her reflection in the long mirror. She was transformed already. It would be impossible to convince anyone that she was a tired Londoner. Here was already the self that no one in London knew. The removal of pressure had relaxed the nerves of her face, restoring its contours. Her mushroom hat had crushed the mass of her hair into a good shape. The sharp light called out its bright golds, deepened the colour of her eyes and the clear tints of her skin. The little old washed out muslin blouse flatly defining her shoulders and arms, pouched softly above the pale grey skirt.... I *do* understand colour ... that tinge of lavender in such a pale, pale grey; just warming it ... and belonging perfectly to Grannie's spidery old Honiton collar.... The whole little toilet was quite good; could be forgotten, and would keep fresh, bleached by the dry bright air to paler grey and whiter white, while the notes of bright living colour in her face and hair intensified from day to day. She hunted out her handglass and consulted her unknown

eyes. It was true. They were brown; not grey. In the bright light there was a web, thorny golden brown, round the iris. She gazed into its tangled depths. So strange. So warm and bright; her unknown self. The self she was meant to be, living in that bright, goldy brown filbert tint, irradiating the grey into which it merged. It was a discovery. She was a goldy brown person, not cold grey. With half a chance, goldy brown and rose. And the whites of her eyes were pearly grey-blue. What a number of strange live colours, warmly asserting themselves; independently. But only at close quarters.

She followed Alma back through the swing door. Alma hummed a little song; an overture; its low tones filled the enclosed space, opened all the doors, showed her the whole of the interior in one moment and the coming month in an endless bright panorama passing unbroken from room to room, each scene enriched by those accumulated behind it, and those waiting ahead; the whole, for

her, perpetually returning upon its own perfection. Alma paused before a scatter of letters on the table below the long lattice. Links with their other world; with things she would hear of, stated and shaped in their way, revealing a world to which they alone seemed to have an interpreting key; making it hold together; but unacceptable ... but the *statement* was forever fascinating.... Through the leaded panes she caught a glimpse of the upper slope of the little town. A row of grey seaside boarding-houses slanting up-hill. A ramshackle little omnibus rumbling down the steep road.

“Edna Prout’s with us for the week-end.” Alma’s social tone, deliberately clear and level. It made a little scene, the beginning of a novel, the opening of a play, warning the players to stand off and make a good shape, smoothly moving without pause or hitch, playing and saying their parts, always with an eye to the good shape, conscious of a critical audience. There would be no expansive bright beginning, alone with Alma and Hypo, the centre of their attention.

“Who is Edna Prout?” she demanded

jealously.

Alma turned with a little bundle of the letters in her hand, speaking thoughtfully away through the window. “She writes; rather wonderful stuff.”

Away outside the window stood the wonderful stuff, being written, rolled off; the vague figure of a woman, cleverly dressed, rising pen in hand from her work to be socially brilliant. Popular. Divided between mysteriously clever work and successful femineity. Alma glanced, pausing, and looked away again.

“She has a most amazing sense of the past,” she murmured reflectively. As if it had just occurred to her. But it must be the current description. His description.

“The Stone Age?”

“Oh *no*, my dear!” She shrieked gently; wheeling round to share her mirth. “The Past. *Istry*. The Mediterranean past.”

“Her stones are precious stones.” From this beginning, to go on looking only at things, ignoring surroundings....

“That’s it! Come along!” Alma went blithely forward, again humming her tune.

But there was a faint change in her confident manner. She too, was conscious of going to meet an ordeal.

Through the still, open-windowed brightness of the brown-green room, out into the naked blaze. Rocky dryness and sea freshness mingled in the huge air. The little baked pathway ribboning the level grass, disappearing round the angle of the enclosing edge, the perfect sharp edge, irises feathering along it, sharp green spikes and deep blue hoods of filmy blossom patterned against the paler misty blueness of the sea. Perfect. Hidden beyond the sharp edge, the pathway winding down the terraced slope of the cliff to the little gate opening from the tangled bottom on to the tamarisk-trimmed sea road. Seats set at the angles of the winding path. The sea glinting at your side between the leaf patterns of the creeper covered pergola. The little roughstone shelter, trapping the sunblaze. The plain bench along the centre of a piece of pathway, looking straight out to the midmost sea; sun-baked gravel under your feet, clumps of flowers in sight. Somewhere the rockery, its face catching the full blaze of

the light, green bosses clumped upon it, with small pure-toned flowers, mauvy pink and tender eastern blue. On the level just below it, a sudden little flat of grass, small flowered shrubs at its edge towards the sea.

All waiting for tomorrow, endless tomorrows, in the morning, when the sunlight poured from the other side of the sky and the face of the cliff was cool and coloured. For tonight when the blaze had deepened into sunset and afterglow, making a little Naples of the glimpse of white town, winding street and curve of blue bay visible in the distance beyond the shoulder of the sidemost clump of shrubs along the end of the sunk lawn.

Alma had halted, just behind, letting her gaze her fill. There was no one to be seen. No sound. Nothing to break the perfect expressiveness.

“We’ve taken refuge at the back,” suggested Alma into her arm-stretching groan of contentment. Down across the lawn into the little pathway between the shrubs. There they were, in the cool shadows under the small trees. Large bamboo chairs, a cushioned hammock, tea going on, Hypo

rising in the middle of a sentence. Miss Prout sitting opposite, upright, posed, knee over knee, feet shod in peacock blue, one pointing downwards in the air, exactly above the other pointing on to the gravel. A wide silky gown, loose; held flat above the chest by brilliant bold embroidery; a broad dark head; short wide tanned face.

The eyes were not brown but wide starry blue; unseeing; contradicting her matronly shape. Now that the arrival was over and Hypo had begun again, she still had the look of waiting, apart. As if she were sitting alone. Yet her clever clothes and all her outlines diffused companionship.

The lizards must have looked perfect, darting and basking on the rockery. But why have his heart won only by the one that quickly wriggled out of the box?... Paying attention only to the people who were strong enough to fuss all the time. Not seeing that half their animation was assumed.... “Do you still,” the bells of the blue flowers in the deepest shadow were like lanterns hung on little trees crowded upon the brown earth. The sound of grass and flowers in blissful

shade poured into the voices, making agreement, giving them all the quality of blossoming in the surrounding coolness, aware of it, aware of the outer huge splintering sunlight that made it perfect, fled away from, left to itself to prepare another perfection ... “divide people into those who like ‘The Reading Girl’ and those who prefer the Dresden teapot?”

“*Sudden* Miriam. Miriam, Edna, is ... is *terrifying*...” He turned full round to hand the buns, both firm neatly moulded hands holding the dish ironically-carefully. The wide blue eyes looked across. Where was she all the time; so calm and starry... “She comes down from London, into our rustic solitude, primed...”

“She’s a fighter,” said Miss Prout roundly, as if she had not spoken.

“Fighting is too mild for Miriam. She crushes. She demolishes. When words fail her,” the lifting, descriptive, outlining laughter coming into the husky voice, filling out its insistence, “she uses her fists. Then she departs; back to London; fires off not so much letters as reinforcements of the

prostrating blow.” *Kind* Hypo. Doing his best for her. Launching her on her holiday with approval; knowing how little was to be expected of her.... Ages already she had been here blissful. Getting every moment more blissful. And this was only the first tea. The four weeks of long days, each day in four long bright separate pieces, spread out ahead, enclosed; a long unbroken magic. Poor Miss Prout with her short week-end.... But she went from country-house to country-house. Certainly. Her garments, even on this languid afternoon, were electric with social life. Then hostesses were a necessary part of her equipment.... She must fear them, like a man. She herself could not be imagined as a hostess. There was no look of strain about her. Only that look of insulated waiting. Boredom if her eyes had been the thing-filled eyes of a man, bored in the intervals between meals and talk and events.

“Yes, but *do* you?” Lame. But Hypo turned, accepting, not departing afresh to tone up the talk. The ringed, lightning-quick grey eyes glanced again, as when she had arrived, taking in the detail and the whole of her

effect, but this time directly messaging approval. The luminous clouded grey, clear ringed, the voice husky and clear, the strange repellent mouth below the scraggly moustache, kept from weakness only by the perpetually hovering disclaiming ironic smile ... fascination that could not be defined; that drove its way through all the evidence against it.... Married, yet always seeming nearer and more sympathetic than other men.... Her cup brimmed over. She saw herself as she had been this morning, in dingy black, pallid, tired to death, hurriedly finishing off at Wimpole Street. And now an accepted harmonious part of this so different scene. But this power of blossoming in response to surroundings was misleading. Beneath it she was utterly weary. Tomorrow she would feel wrecked, longing for silence.

“Any more tea, anybody? More *tea*, Miriam.” Alma waved the teapot. The little scene gleamed to the sound of her voice, a bright, intense grouping in the green shade, with the earth thrilling beneath and the sky arching down over its completeness.

“Yes,” said Hypo, on his feet. “She’ll have,

just one more cup. Let me see,” he went on, from the tea-table, “you liked; the Girl. Yes.... No. The teapot. I accuse you of the teapot.”

“I liked both.” Not true. But the answer to the wrongness of the division.

“Catholic Miriam. That’s quite a feat. Even for you, Miriam, that is, I think ...”

“But she didn’t! She called my teapot messy!”

“It’s true. I *do* think Dresden china messy. But I mean that it’s possible——” She spoke her argument through his answer, volleyed over his shoulder as he brought back her cup, to a remark from Miss Prout. The next moment he was away in the hammock near Miss Prout’s low chair, throwing cushions out on to the grass, gathering up a sheaf of printed leaves; leaving her classed with the teapot people....

“Buoyed up by *tea*, Edna,” he chuckled, flinging away the end of a cigarette; propping the pages against his knee. “By the way who is Olga?”

“The eldest Featherstonhaugh.” She spoke carelessly; sat half turned away from him

serenely smoking; a small buff cigarette in a long amber tube; but her voice vibrated.

He was *reading*, in her presence, a book she had written.... Those pages were *proofs*.... My arrival was an interruption in a companionship that made conversation superfluous.... What need for her to talk when she could put into his hands, alive and finished, something that she had made; that could bring into his face that look of attention and curiosity. How not sit suspended, and dreaming, through the small break in her tremendous afternoon? Yet he was getting the characters mixed up....

“And Cyril. Do I know Cyril?”

She had put *people* in.... People he knew of. They joked about it. Horrible.... She gazed, revolted and fascinated, at the bundle of pages. Someone ought to prevent, destroy.... This peaceful beauty.... Life going so wonderfully on. And people being helplessly picked out and put into books.

“This is the episode of the *greenhouse*!” His voice broke on the word into its utmost wail of amusement.

That was ‘writing’; from behind the

scenes. People and things from life, a little altered, and described from the author's point of view. Easy; if your life was amongst a great many people and things and you were hard enough to be sceptical and superior. But an impossibly mean advantage ... a cheap easy way. Cold clever way of making people look seen-through and foolish; to be laughed at, while the authors remained admired, special people, independent, leading easy airy sunlit lives, supposed, by readers who did not know where they got their material, to be *creators*. He was reading on steadily now, the look of amused curiosity gone.

Alma came over with a box of cigarettes and a remark; kindly thinking she might be feeling left; offering distraction. Or wishing to make her behave, launch out, with pretended interest upon a separate conversation, instead of hanging upon theirs. Of course she was sitting staring, without knowing it.... And already she had taken a cigarette and murmured an answer obliviously, and Alma had gone, accepting her engrossment, humming herself about amongst the trees, missing his remarks.

Deliberately asserting a separate existence? Really loving her garden and enjoying the chance of being alone? Or because she knew all he had to say about *everything*. She came back and subsided in a low chair near Miss Prout just as he dropped his pages and looked out on to the air with a grave unconscious face. Lost in contemplation. This woman, so feminine and crafty, was a great writer. Extraordinary. Impossible. In a second he had turned to her.

“How do you do it, Edna? You do it. It’s *shattering*, that chapter-end.”

Miss Prout was speechless, not smiling. Crushed with joy.... Alma, at her side, smiled in delight, genuine sympathetic appreciation.

“I’m done in, Edna,” he wailed, taking up the leaves to go on, “shan’t write another line. And the worst of it is I know you’ll keep it up. That I’ve got to make; before dinner; my —my *via dolorosa*; through your abominably good penultimate and final chapters.”

“Am I allowed to read?” Miriam said rising and going with hands outstretched for the magic leaves.

“Yes,” he chuckled, gathering up and

handing. “Let’s try it on Miriam. I warn you she’s deadly. And of a voracity. She reads at a gulp; spots everything; *more* than everything; turns on you and lays you out.”

Miriam stood considering him. Happy. He had really noticed and remembered the things she had said from time to time. But they were expecting a response.

“I shan’t understand. I know I shan’t. May I really take them away?”

“Now don’t, Miriam ...” taking his time, keeping her arrested before them, with his held-up minatory finger and mocking friendly smile, “don’t under-rate your intelligence.”

“May I really take them,” she flounced, ignoring him; holding herself apart with Miss Prout. The air danced between them sunlit from between branches. A fresh perspective opened. She was to meet her. See her unfold before her eyes in the pages of the book.

“Yes, *do*,” she smiled, a swift nice look, not scrutinising.

“How *alive* they look; much more alive than a book in its suit of neat binding.”

“Are we *all* literary?”

“We’re all literary,” joined his quick voice.

She blushed with pleasure. Included; with only those ghastly little reviews. Not mocking. Quite gravely. She beamed her gratitude and turned away blissful.

“Is Miriam going?”

“I’ve got to unpack.” He wanted an audience, an outsider, for the scene of the reading. Alma had disappeared.

“Won’t *they* do all that for you?”

“Still I think I’ll go.... Addio.” She backed along the little pathway watching him seek and find his words, crying each one forth in a thoughtful falsetto, while he turned conversationally towards Miss Prout. The scene was cut off by the bushes, but she could still hear his voice, after the break-down of his Italian into an ironic squeal, going on in charge of it. She sped across the lawn and up on to the open above the unexplored terraces. They could wait. For the moment, unpeopled, they were nothing. They would be the background of further scenes, all threaded by the sound of Hypo’s voice, lit by the innumerable things she would hear him say, obliterating the surroundings, making far-off things seem more real.... Mental liveliness *did*

obliterate surroundings, stop their expressiveness. Already the first expressiveness had gone from the garden. She did not want to create it afresh. There was hurry and pressure now in the glances she threw. A wrongness. Something left out. There was something left out, left behind, in his scheme of things. She wandered as far as the horizon row of irises to look out over the sea, chased and pulled back as she went. Until the distant prospect opened and part of the slope of the garden lay at her feet. The light had ripened. The sun no longer towered, but blazed across at her from above the rightmost edge of the picture. Short shadows jutted from the feet of every standing thing. The light was deepening in perfect stillness. Wind and rain had left the world for good. *This* was her holiday. Everything behind her broke down into irrelevance.... How go back to it... How not stay and live through the changing of the light in this perfect stillness....

There was no feeling of Sunday in the house. But when Miriam wandered into her room during the after breakfast lull, she found it waiting for her; pouring into the room from afar, from all over the world, breaking her march, breaking up the lines of the past and of the future, isolating her with itself. The openings of the long lattice framed wide strips of morning brilliance between short close-drawn folds of flowered chintz. Everything outside was sharp and near, but changed since yesterday. The flowers stood vivid in the sunlight; very still. The humming of the bees sounded careful and secret; not wishing to disturb. The sea sparkled to itself, refusing to call the eye. Yet outside there, as in the room, something called. She leaned out. Into the enlarged picture the sky poured down. The pure blue moved within itself as you looked, letting you through and up. An unbroken fabric of light, yet opening all over, taking you up into endless light....

Sunday is in the sky....

Hypo, coming round the corner from the terrace, his arms threshing the air to the beat of his swift walk; knitting up the moment,

casting kind radiance as he came. Married, but casting radiance. He was making for the house. Then Miss Prout was somewhere down there alone.... She hurried to be out, seeking her. On the landing she ran into Hypo.

“Hullo, Miriametta. Going out?”

“I think so. Where’s everybody?”

“Everybody, and chairs, is down on the terrace. But you’ll want a *hat*.”

“I shan’t.” He had often admired her ability to go without. He had been talking to Miss Prout for the last half hour and was now abstractedly making a shapely thing of a chance meeting with a stranger.... His words had carried him to the study door. He began inventing his retort, the unfelt shape of words that would carry him on undisturbed, facing the door with his back to her, hand on the doorknob. The end of it would find him within. She cried out at random into the making of his phrase and escaped into the dining-room to the sound of his voice. In the empty dining-room she found again the listening presence of Sunday and hurried to be through it and away at whatever centre had

formed down there in the open. Going down the steps and along the paths she entered the movement of the day, the beginning of the sense of tomorrow, that would strengthen with the slow shifting of the sabbath light. Miss Prout came into view round the first bend, a sunlit figure in a tub chair on the grassy level at the end of the terrace. *She* had no hat. Her dark head was bent over the peak made in her flowing draperies by her crossed knees. She was *sewing*. Here. In public, serenely, the first thing in the morning.

Strolling to join her Miriam saw her as she had been last night, set like a flower, unaccented and harmonious, in her pleated gown of old rose silk, towards the oval of dinner-table, an island of softly bright silk-shaded radiance in the midst of the twilit room; under the brightest of the central light, filmy flowers massed low in a wide shallow bowl ... a gentleness about her, touching the easy beginnings of talk, each phrase pearly, catching the light, expanding; expressing a secret joy. Then the gathering and settling of the flow of talk between him and her, lifting, shaking itself out, flashing into sharp clear

light; the fabric of words pierced by his wails of amusement as he looked, still talking, at the pictures they drew.... People they knew passing to and fro; *all* laughable, all brought to their strange shared judgment. The charm of the scene destroyed by the surrounding vision of a wit-wrecked world.

After dinner that moment when she had drawn herself up before him, suddenly young, with radiant eyes; looking like a flower in her petaled gown. He had responded standing very upright, smiling back at her, admiring her deliberate effect....

The break away across the landing, white and green night brightness under the switched-on lights, into the dusk of the study, ready peopled with its own stillness; the last of the twilight glimmering outside the open windows. Each figure changed by the gloom into an invisible, memorable presence. Hypo moving in and out of the cone of soft light amongst the shadows at the far end.

“We’ll try the contralto laugh on the lady in the window-seat.”

The fear of missing the music in looking for his discovery. And then into the waiting

stillness *Bach*. Of all people. He found a contralto laugh in *Bach*. There were no people, no women, in *Bach*. Looking for the phrase. Forgetting to look for it. The feeling of the twilight expanding within itself, too small. The on-coming vast of night held back, swirling, swept away by broad bright morning light running through forest tracery. Shining into a house. The clean cool poise of everyday morning. The sounds of work and voices, separate, united by surroundings greeted by everyone from within. The secret joy in everyone pouring through the close pattern of life, going on forever, the end in the first small phrase, every phrase a fresh end and a beginning. Going on when the last chord stood still on the air.... And if he liked *Bach*, how not believe in people? How not be certain of God?... And then remarks, breaking thinly against the vast nearness.

“What does the lady in the window think?”

“She’s asleep.” Miss Prout had really thought that....

“Oh no she *isn’t*.”

Miss Prout looked up as she approached but kept on with her sewing and held her easy

silence as she dropped into one of the low chairs. She was working a pattern of bright threads on a small strip of saffron-coloured silk ... looking much older in the blaze of hard light. But far-off, not minding, sitting there as if enthroned, for the morning, placid and matronly and indifferent. The heavenly morning freshness was still here. But the remarks about the day had all been made on the lawn after breakfast.... She admired the close bright work. Miss Prout's voice came at once, a little eagerly, explaining. She was really keen about her lovely work.

She was saying something about Paris. Miriam attended swiftly, not having grasped the beginning, only the fact that she was talking and the curious dry level of her voice. Beginning on something as everyone did, ignoring the present, leaving herself sitting there outside life.... She made a vague response, hoping to hear about Paris. Only to be startled by the tone and colour of her own voice. Miss Prout would imagine that her life had been full. In any case could not imagine....

“How long are you staying?” The question

shot across at her. She did not know as she answered whether she had seen the swift hot glance of the blue eyes, or heard it in the voice. But she had found the woman who wrote the searing scenes, the strange abrupt phrases that lashed out from the page.

“Tomorrow I shall be grilling in my flat,” went on Miss Prout. Alma’s laughter tinkled from above. She was coming this way. Miss Prout’s voice hurried on incisive, splitting the air, ending with a rush of low words as Alma appeared round the corner. Miriam watched their little scene, smooth, unbroken by a single pause or hesitation, saw them go away together, still talking.

“My hat,” she murmured to the thrilled surroundings, and again “My *hat*.” She clutched at the fading reverberations, marvelling at her own imperviousness, at the way the drama had turned, even while it touched her, to a painted scene, leaving her unmoved. Miss Prout’s little London eyrie. A distasteful refuge between visits.... Had it been a flattering appeal, or an insult?

She is like the characters in her book, direct, swift, ruthless, using any means.... She

saw me as a fool, offered me the rôle of one of the negligible minor characters, there to be used by the successful ones. She is one with her work, with her picture of life.... But it is not a true picture. The glinting sea, all the influences pouring in from the garden denied its existence. It was just a fuss, the biggest drama in the world was a fuss in which people competed, gambling, everyone losing in the end. Dead, empty loss, on the whole, because there was always the commission to be paid. Life in the world is a vice; to which those who take it up gradually became accustomed.... Her eyes clung to the splinters of gold on the rippling blue sea. Dropped them, and she was confined in the hot little rooms of a London flat. If Miss Prout was not enviable, so *feared* her lonely independence, then no one was enviable.

“Hullo, Miriametta! All alone?”

“They’ve gone to look at an enormous book; too big to lift.”

“Yes. And what’s Miriam doing?”

“Isn’t it a perfect morning?”

“It’s a good day. It’ll be a *corker* later on. Very pleasant here till about lunch time. You

camping here for the morning?” She looked up.

He was standing in profile, listening, with his head inclined; like a person suffering from deafness; and pointing towards her his upheld questioning finger; a German classmaster.

“I don’t know.”

“Then you will. That’s settled?” She murmured a speculative promise, lazily, a comment on his taut, strung-up bearing. What, to him, if she did or didn’t?

“That’s agreed then. You camp here,” he dropped neatly into the chair between hers and Miss Prout’s, his face hidden behind the frill of its canopy, “for the morning.” He looked out and round at her, flushed and grinning. “I want you to,” he murmured, “now don’t you go and forget.”

“All right,” she beamed ... the *hours* he was wasting spinning out his mysterious drama ... “wild horses shan’t move me.” He did not want her society. But it was miles more than wildly interesting enough that he wished to avoid being alone with Miss Prout. But then why not dump her as he always did

guests he had run through, on to Alma? He left her a moment for reflections, wound them up with a husky chuckle and began on one of his improvisations; paying her in advance ... putting in time.... She listened withheld, drawing the weft of his words through the surrounding picture, watching it enlivened, with fresher colours and stronger outlines ... a pause, the familiar lifting tone and the drop, into a single italic phrase; one of his destructive conclusions. His voice went on, but she had seized the hard glittering thread, rending it, and watched the developing bright pattern coldly, her opposition ready phrased for the next break. She could stay forever like this, watching his thought; thrusting in remarks, making him reconsider. But Miss Prout was coming. There would be a morning of improvisations with no chance of arresting him. It was only when they were alone that he would take opposition seriously, not turning it into materials for spirals of wit, where nobody could stand against him. The whole morning, hearing him and Miss Prout chant their duet about people ... helped out no doubt by the presence of an apparently uncritical

audience.... I'm hanged if I will....

"I must have a book or something. I'll get a book," she said, rising. He peeped out, as if weighing her suggestion.

"All right.... Get a book.... But come back?"

"Eurasians *are* different," she said. "Have you ever *known* any; really *well*."

"Never known *anybody*, Miriam. Take back everything I ever said. Get your book and come out with it."

On her way back she heard his voice, high; words broken and carried along by a squeal of laughter. They were at it already, reducing everything to absurdity. Turning the corner she found them engrossed, sitting close at right angles, Miss Prout leaning forward, her embroidery neglected on her knee. It was monstrous to break in.... She wandered up and down the terrace, staring at the various views, catching his eye upon her as she went to and fro; almost deciding to depart and leave him to his fate. If he was engrossed he was engrossed. If not, he shouldn't pretend to be. When she was at a distance their voices fell, low short sentences, sounding set and

colourless; but *intimate*.

“Found your book, Miriam?” he cried, as she came near.

“No. I couldn’t see anything. So I shut my eyes and whirled round and pointed.”

“Your shameless superstitions, Miriam.”

“I *am*. I’ve got a lovely one I hadn’t seen.”

“A lovely one. A——”

“I’m not going to tell you what it is.”

“You’re just going to sit down and munch it up. Miriam’s a paradox. She’s the omnivorous *gourmet*.”

“Can I have a cigarette?”

“Her authors—we’ll *get* you a cigarette, Miriam, no, alright, here they are—her authors, the only authors she allows, can be counted rather more than twice, on the fingers of one hand.”

She took two cigarettes, lighting one from his neatly struck match and retired to a distant chair.

“You’ll have the sun in your eyes there.”

“I like it.” Their voices began again, his social and expansive, hers clipped and solitary ... the bank of blazing snapdragon grew prominent, told of nothing but the

passing of time. What was the time? How much of the morning had gone? There was a moment of clear silence....

“Is Miriam there?”

“She is indeed; very *much* there.” Again silence, filled with the echo of his comprehensive little chuckle. Miss Prout knew now that it was not the stupidity of a fool that had spoiled her morning. But, if she could go so far, why not carry him off to talk unembarrassed, or talk, here, freely, as she wanted to, like those women in her book?

A servant, coming briskly through the sunlight, stopping half way along the terrace.

“Mr. Simpson.”

“Yes. What have you done with him?”

“He’s in the study.”

“Fetch him out of the study. Bring him here. And bring, lemonade and things.” But he rose as the maid wheeled round and departed. “I’d better get him, I think. He’s Nemesis.”

Miriam rose to escape. “Now don’t you go, Miriam. You stay and see it out. You haven’t met Simpson, Edna. I haven’t. *No* one has.”

“What is he?”

“He’s—he’s a postscript. The letter came this morning. Now don’t either of you desert.” He disappeared, leaving the terrace stricken. The rest of the morning, lunch, perhaps the whole day ... Simpson. His voice returned a moment later, encouraging, as if shepherding an invalid, across the garden and round the angle. A very tall young man, in a blue serge suit, a *pink* collar and a face sunburnt all over, an even red.

He was sitting upright in a headlong silence, holding on to the thoughts with which he had come. But they were being scattered. He had held them through the introductions and Hypo’s witty distribution of drinks. But now the bright air rang with the rapid questions, volleyed swiftly upon the beginnings of the young man’s meditative answers, and he was sitting alone in the circle in a puzzled embarrassment, listening, but not won by Hypo’s picture of Norwich, not joining in the expansion and the laughter, aware only of the scattering of his precious handful of thoughts. Towards lunch-time Hypo carried him off to the study.

“Exit the postscript,” said Miss Prout.

Charmingly ... dropping back into her pose, but talkatively, a kindness in the blue eyes gazing out to sea. Again she bemoaned her return to London, but added at once a little picture of her old servant; the woman's gladness at getting her back again.

"Only until the end of the week," said Miriam seeing the old servant, perpetually left alone, getting older. Sad. Left out. But what an awful way of living in London; alone with one old servant. A brilliant light came into Miss Prout's eyes. She was looking fixedly along the terrace.

"He wouldn't stay to lunch." Hypo, alone and gay "He's *done* with me. Given me up. Gone away a wise young man."

"He was *appalling*."

"You didn't hear him, Miriam."

"I saw him."

"You didn't hear him on the subject of his guild."

"He's founded a *guild*?"

"It's much worse than that. He's gone about, poor dear, in sublime, in the most *sublime* faith, collecting all the young men in Norfolk, under my banner. I have heard this

morning all I might become if I could contrive to be ... as wooden as he is. Come along. Let's have lunch. You know, Edna, there's a great work to be done on you. *You've* got to be turned into a socialist." He turned as they walked, to watch her face. She was looking down, smiling, withdrawn, revealing nothing. Seething with anticipation. She would be willing. For the sake of the long conversations. They would sit apart talking, for the rest of her time. There would be long argumentative letters. No. She would not argue. She would be another of those women in the Lycurgan, posing and dressing and consciously shining at soirées. Making havoc and complications. Worse than they. How could he imagine her a socialist with her view of humanity and human motives.

"No. We *won't* make you a socialist, Edna. You're too good as you are." Beautiful, different; too good for socialism? Then he really thought her wonderful. In some way beyond himself....

Turning just in time to be caught by the sun dipping behind the cliff. Perfect sudden moment. No sunset effects. No radiance. Clean dull colours. Mealy grey-blue sky, dull gold ball, half hidden, tilted by the slope of the green cliff. Feeling him arrested, compelled to receptive watching; watching a sunset, like anyone else.... The last third of the disc, going, bent intently, asserting the moment, asserting uniqueness; unanswerable mystery of beauty.

“God, reading a newspaper.”

“The way to see a sunset is to be *indoors*. Oblivious. Then ... just a ruddy glow, reflected from a bright surface.... The indirect method’s the method. Old Conrad.”

“Madeleine has no use for this storm-rent sky. She wants untroubled blue, one small pink cloud, and presently, a single star.” Then he must have wanted these things himself once. Why did he try to jest young people into his disillusionment?

Yet tonight the sun had set without comment. With his approval. He was openly sharing the unspoken response to the scene of its magnificent departure.

The reproachful, watching eye of Sunday disappeared, drawn down over the horizon with the setting sun. Leaving a blissful refreshment, the strange unearned sense falling always somewhere in the space between Sunday and Monday, of a test survived, leaving one free to go forward to the cheerful cluster of oncoming days.

The afterglow faded to a bright twilight, deepening in the garden to a violet dusk. The sea glimmered in the remaining light that glared along its further rim like a yawn, holding up the lid of the sky. The figures in the chairs had grown dim, each face a pale disc set towards the falling light. The talk died down to small shreds, simple and slow, steeped in the beauty of the evening, deferring to it, as to a host.

They were still the guests of the evening while they sat grouped round the lamplit verandah supper-table that turned the dusk into night. But the end was coming. The voices in the lamplight were growing excited and forgetful. Indoors and separation were close at hand.

He was oblivious. Given up to his jesting

... she watched his jesting face, shiny now and a little loose, the pouching of his lips as he spoke, the animal glimmer of teeth below the scraggy moustache, repellent, yet part of the fascination of his smile, and perpetually redeemed by the charm of his talk, the intense charm of the glancing eyes, seeing and understanding, comforting even when they mistook, and yet all the time withheld, preoccupied behind their clean rings and filmy sightless grey—fixed always on the shifting changing mass of obstructive mannish knowledge, always on *science*, the only thing in the world that could get his full attention.... She felt her voice pour out suddenly, violently quenching a flicker of speech. He glanced, attentive, healing her despair with his quick interest. The women awoke from their conspiring trance, alert towards her, watching.

“Yes.” His voice followed hers without a break, cool, a comment on her violence. He turned, looking into the night. His shaggy intelligent gaze, the reflective slight lift of his eyebrows gave him the look of an old man lost. The rosy scene was chilled. Cold light

and harsh black shadow, his averted form in profile, helpless, making empty the deeps of the thing that was called a summer night. Her desire beat no longer towards the open scene. She hated it. For its sake she had pulled him up, brought down this desolation.

“It’s a good night. It’s about the human optime in nights. We ought to sleep out.” He turned back to the table, gathering up expressions, radiating his amusement at the disarray caused by his absence.

“Let’s sleep out. Miriam will. Unless we lock her in.” He was on his feet, eagerly halted, gathering opinions. His eyes came to rest on Alma. “Let’s be dogs. Be driven, by Miriam, into fresh fields of experience.”

Would it happen? Would she agree? He was impatient, but deferring. Alma sat considering, in the attitude Mr. Stoner had called a pretty snap, her elbows meeting on the table, her chin on her slender hands; just its point, resting on the bridge they made laid flatly one upon the other. It was natural in her. But by now she knew that men admired natural poses. *He* was admiring, even through his impatience.

“I didn’t suggest it. I’ve never slept out in my life.”

“You suggested it, Miriam. My death, all our little deaths from exposure, will lie at your door.” The swift personal glance he dealt her from the midst of his watching swept round to Miss Prout and flashed into admiration as he turned, still sideways surveying her, to bend his voice on Alma.

“It’s quite manageable, eh, Susan?”
Miriam followed his eyes. Miss Prout had risen and was standing away from the table posed like a Gainsborough; challenging head, skirts that draped and spread of themselves, gracefully, from the slenderness of her body. She was waiting, indifferent, interpreting the scene in her way, interpreting the other women for him, united with him in interpreting them....

Alma relaxed and looked up, holding the matter poised, deliberately locating the casting vote before breaking into enthusiasm. He paid tribute, coming round the table companionably to her side, but still looking from face to face, claiming audience.

“We’ll break out. Each bring its little

mattress and things. After they've retired. Yes, I think, *after* they've retired." Why the conspirator's smile? The look of daring? What of the servants? They were bound, anyhow, to know in the morning.

It was glorious to rush about in the lit house, shouting unnecessary remarks. People shouting back. Nobody attending. Shouting and laughing for the sake of the jolly noise. Saying more than could be said in talk. Admitting.

And then just to lie extinguished in the darkness wondering what point there was in sleeping out if you went to sleep at once. All that jolly tumult. And he had been so intent on the adventure that he had let Miss Prout change her mind without protest, *only* crying out from the midst of busily arranging his bed on the lawn.... "Have you seen Miriam's pigtails?"

And suddenly everything was prim; the joy of being out in the night surging in the air, waiting for some form of expression. They didn't *know* how to be joyful; only how to be clever.... She hummed a little song and stopped. It wreathed about her, telling off the

beauties of the night, a song sung by someone else, heard, understood, a perfect agreement.

“What is she doing?”

“She’s sitting up, waving her banana in the air; conducting an orchestra, I think.”

“Tell her to *eat* the banana and lie down.”

Alma, Rose Gauntlett, Mrs. Perry and me, starting off just after I came, to paddle in the moonlight.... “Don’t, *don’t* do anything that would make a cabman laugh.” Why not? Why should he always imagine someone waiting to be shocked? Damn the silly cabman if he *did* laugh. Who need care? As soon as her head was on the pillow, nothing visible but the huge night and the stars, she spoke quietly to herself, flouting them. He should see, hear, that it was wicked to simmer stuffily down as if they were in the house. He didn’t want to. She was making his sounds for him.

“Tell Miriam this is not a *conversazione*.”

His voice was actually sleepy. Kindly, long-suffering, but simply wanting to go to sleep. There was to be no time of being out in the night with him. He was too far off. She imagined herself at his side, a little space of

grass between. Silent communication, understanding and peace. All the things that were lost, obliterated by his swift speech, communicated to him at leisure, clear in the night. Here under the verandah, with its roof cutting off a part of the sky, they were still attached to the house. Alma had been quietly posed for sleep from the first moment. They were all more separated than in their separate rooms indoors.

The lingering faint light reflected the day, the large open space of misunderstandings, held off the cloak of darkness in which things grew clear. She lay watching for the night to turn to night.

But the light seemed to grow clearer as the stillness went on. The surrounding objects lost their night-time mystery. Teased her mind with their names as she looked from point to point. Drove up her eyes to search for night in the sky. But there was no night there. Only a wide high thinness bringing an expansion of sight that could not be recalled; drawing her out, beyond return, into a wakefulness that was more than day-time wakefulness; a breathless feeling of being

poised untethered in the thin blue-lit air,
without weight of body; going forward, more
and more thinly expanded, into the pale wide
space....

There is no night.... Compared to this
expanse of thin, shadowless, boundless light
the sunlit sky is a sort of darkness.... Even in
a motionless high midday the sky is small,
part of it invisible, obliterated by light. After
sunset it is hidden by changing colours....

This is the real sky, in full power, stripping
away sleep. Time, visible, pouring itself out.
Day, not night, is forgetfulness of time. Its
movement is a dream. Only in its noise is real
silence and peace. This awful stillness is
made of sound; the sound of time, *pouring*
itself out; ceaselessly winding off short strips
of life, each life a strip of sleepless light, so
much, no more, lessening all the time.

What rubbish to talk about the stars. Vast
suns, at immense distances, and beyond them,
more. What then? If you imagine yourself at
any point in space or wafting freely about
from star to star you are not changed. Like
enlarging the circle of your acquaintance.
And finding it, in the end, the same circle,

yourself. A difference in degree is also a difference in kind. Yes. But the *same* difference. Relations remain the same however much things are changed. Interest in the stars is like interest in your neighbours before you get to know them. A way of running away from yourself.

What is there to do? How know what is anyone's best welfare?

To be alive, and to know it, makes a selfless life impossible. Any kind of life accompanied by that stupendous knowledge, is selfish.

Christ? But all the time he was alone with a certainty. Today thou shalt be with me.... He was booked for Paradise from the beginning ... like the man in No. 5 John Street going to live in a slum, imagining he was experiencing a slum, with the latchkey of his west-end house in his pocket.... Now if he had sacrificed Paradise. But he couldn't. Then where was selflessness?

Yet if Christ had never been, the sky would look different. A Grecian or a Jewish sky. Awful. If the personal delight that the sky showed to be nothing were put away?

Nothing held on to but the endless pouring down of time? Till an answer came.... Get up tomorrow showing indifference to everything, refusing to be bewitched. There is an answer or there would be no question. Night is torment. That is why people go to sleep. To avoid clear sight and torment.

Tomorrow, certainly, gloriously, the daytime scenes, undeserved, uncontributed to, would go forward again in the sunlight. Forgetfulness would come of itself. Even the thought of the bright scenes, the scenes that did not matter and were nothing, spread over the sky the sense of the dawn it would be obliged to bring; ... the permitted postponement of the problems set by night. Dawn stole into the heart. With a sudden answer. That had no words. An answer that lost itself again in the day. But there would be no dawn; only the pitiless beginning of a day spoiled by the fever of a sleepless night. Torment, for nothing. The sky gazed down mocking at fruitless folly. She turned away. She must, would, sleep. But her eyes were full of the down-bent stars. Condemnation, and the communication that would not speak;

stopping short, poised, probing for a memory that was there....

A harsh hissing sigh, far away; gone. The unconscious sea. Coming back. Bringing the morning tide. The sound would increase. The sky would thicken and come near, fill up with increasing blind light, ignoring unanswered pain.

“You can put tea in the bedrooms.”

Alma, folded in her dressing-gown, disappearing into the house. The tumbled empty bed on the lawn, white in the open stare of the morning....

“Edna wants to know how we’re getting on.” Duplication in light and darkness, of memories of the night.... Their two figures, side by side, silhouetted against dark starry blue. Dismantled voices. His *simplicity*. His sharp turn and toga’d march towards the house. A memory of dawn; a deep of sleep ending in faint light tinting the garden? “Edna wants to know how we’re getting on.” *Then* starlit darkness? Angry sleep leading direct to this open of morning.

Everyone in the house had plunged already into new beginnings. Panoplied in

advantages; able to feel in strong refreshed bodies the crystal brightness of the morning; not worn out as if by long illness.

It was Miss Prout, coming from her quiet night indoors, who was reaping the adventure. She had some strange conscious power. She knew that it was she who was the symbol of morning. Her look of age was gone. She had dared to come out in a wrapper of mealy white, folded softly; and with bare feet that gleamed against the green of the flat grass. Consciously using the glow of adventure left over from the night to engrave her triumphant effect upon the adventurers; of marvellous youth that was not hers but belonged to some secret living in her stillness.... It was not an illusion. He saw it too; let her stand for the morning; was crowning her all the time, preoccupied in everything he said with the business of rendering half-amused approval of her miracle. The talk was hampered, as if, by common consent, prevented from getting far enough to interfere with the set shape of spectacle and spectators; yet easy, its quality heightened by the common recognition of an

indelible impression. For a moment it made her power seem almost innocent of its strange horror.

When she had left the day was stricken. Evil had gone from the air, leaving it empty. Everything that happened seemed to be a conspiracy to display emptiness. The daily life of the house came into view, visible as it was, when no guests were there, going bleakly on its way. Hypo appeared and disappeared. Rapt and absent, though still swiftly observant and between whiles his unchanged talking self; falling back, with his chuckling unspoken commentary, for lack of kindred brilliance; escaping to his study as if to a waiting guest.

Miriam came to dinner silently raging; invisible, yet compelled to be seen. Reduced to nonentity by his wrongly directed awareness, his everlasting demand for bright fussy intelligence. It was her own fault. The result of having been beguiled by joy into a pretence of conformity. For the rest of the visit she would be roughly herself. To shreds she would tear his twofold vision of women as bright intelligent response or complacently

smiling audience. Force him to see the evil in women who made terms with men, the poison there was in the trivial gaiety of those who accepted male definitions of life and the world. Somehow make him aware of the reality that fell, all the time, in the surrounding silence, outside his shapes and classifications.

Sunk away into separation, she found herself gliding into communion with surrounding things, shapes gleaming in the twilight, the intense thrilling beauty of the deep, lessening colours.... She passed into association with them, feeling him fade, annihilated, while her eased breathing released the strain of battle. He was spending the seconds of silence that to him were a void, in observation, misinterpretations. The air was full of his momentary patience. She turned smiling and caught his smile halting between amused contemplation of vacuity and despairing sympathy with boredom. He had not heard the shouts of repudiation with which she had plunged down into her silence. He dropped her and let his testing eye, which he knew she followed, rest on Alma. Two

vacuities ... watched by empty primitive eyes, savage eyes, under shaggy brows, staring speculatively out through a forest of eyelash. Having thus made his statement and caught Alma's attention he made a little drama of childish appeal, with plaintive brows, pleading for rescue.

"Let's have some light. We're almost in darkness," said Alma.

"We are, we are," he wailed, and Miriam caught his eyes flashed upon her to collect her acceptance of his judgment. The central light Alma had risen to switch on, flashed up over the silk-clad firm little column of her body winged on either side by the falling drapery of her extended arms, and revealed as she sat down the triangle of pendant-weighted necklace on her white throat, the soft squareness of her face, peaked below by the delicate sharp chin and above by her piled gold hair. The day had gone; quenched in the decoration of the night set there by Alma, like the first scene of a play into whose speech and movement she was, with untroubled impersonal bearing, already steadily launched, conscious of the audience,

untroubled by their anticipation.

“It’s *awful*. The evenings are already getting short,” cried Miriam, her voice thrilling in conversation with the outer living spaces beyond the shut-in play. His swiftly flashed glance lingered a moment; incredulous of her mental wandering? In stupefaction that was almost interest, over her persistence, after diagnosis, in anachronism, in utter banality?

Alma’s voice, strangely free, softly lifted a little above its usual note, but happy and full, as it was with outsiders with whom she was at her best, took possession of the set scene. His voice came in answer, deferring, like that of a delighted guest. Presently they were all in an enchantment. From some small point of departure she had carried them off abroad, into an Italian holiday. He urged her on with his voice, his eyes returning perpetually from the business of his meal to rest in admiring delight upon her face. It was lovely, radiant, full of the joy of the theme she had set in the midst and was holding there with bright reflective voice, unattained by the little bursts of laughter, piling up her monologue,

laughing her own laughter in its place, leading on little bridges of gay laughter that did not break her speech, to the points of her stories. All absurd. All making the places she described pathetically absurd, and mysterious strangers, square German housewives and hotel people, whom Miriam knew she would forever remember as they looked in Alma's tales, and love, absurd. But vivid; each place, the look and the sound and the very savour of it, each person....

By the end of dinner, in the midst of eating a peach, Alma was impersonating a fat shiny Italian opera star, flinging out without losing her dainty charm, a scrap of a rolling cadence, its swift final run up and up in curling trills to leap clear at the end to a single note, terrifically high, just touched and left on the air, the fat singer silent below it, unmoved and more mountainous than before.

Hypo was wholly won by the enchantment she had felt and cast. His face was smooth with the pleasure that wreathed it whenever he passed, listening, from laughter that was not of his own making, to more laughter. He carried Alma off to the study with the bright

eagerness he gave to an entertaining guest, but intimately, with his arm through hers.

They sat side by side on the wide settee. There was to be no music. He did not want to go away by himself to the other end of the room and make music. Sitting forward with his hands clasped, towards Alma enthroned, he suddenly improvised a holiday abroad.... "We'll go mad, stark staring mad. Switzerland. Your ironmongery in my rucksack and off we'll go."

To go away, not the wonderful eventful holiday life here; to go away, with Alma, was reward and holiday for him.... This life, with its pattern of guests was the hard work of everyday? These times abroad were the bright points of their long march together? Then if this life and its guests were so little, she was once more near to them. She had shared their times abroad, by first unconsciously kindling them to go. And presently they were deferring to her. It was strange that having preceded them, created, even with them, the sense of advantage persisting so long after they had outdone in such wide sweeps the scope of her small experience.

She had never deliberately “gone abroad.” Following necessity she had found herself in Germany and in Belgium. Pain and joy in equal balance all the time and in memory only joy. So that all going abroad by other people seemed, even while envy rose at the ease and quantity of their expeditions, their rich collection of notorious beauty, somehow slight. Envy was incomplete. She could not by stern reasoning and close effort of imagination persuade herself that they had been so deeply abroad as she. That they had ever utterly lost themselves in foreign things. She forgot perpetually, in this glad moment she again found that she had forgotten, having been abroad. She forgot it when she read and thought by herself of other parts of the world. Yet when, as now, anyone reminded her, she was at once alight, weighed down by the sense of accomplishment, of rich deeps of experience that would never leave her. Others were bright and gay about their wanderings. But even while pining for their free movement she was beside herself with longing to convey to them the clear deep sense they seemed to

lack of what they were doing. The wonder of it. She talked to them about Switzerland, where they had already been. It was for her the unattainable ideal of a holiday. She resented it when he belittled the scenery, gathered it up in a few phrases and offered any good gorge in the Ardennes as an alternative. It was not true. He *was* entranced with Switzerland. It was the protuberance of the back of his head that made him oppose. And his repudiation of any form of expression that did not jest. She sought and found a weapon. To go to Switzerland in the summer was not to go. She had suddenly remembered all she had heard about Swiss winters. Switzerland in the summer was an oleograph. In winter an engraving. That impressed him. And when she had described all she remembered, she had forgotten she had not been. They had forgotten. They had come into her experience as it looked to herself. Their questions went on, turned to her life in London. She was besieged by things to communicate, going on and on, wondering all the time where the interest lay, in remote people, most of them perceived

only once and remembered once as speech, yet feeling it, and knowing that they felt it. There was a clue, some clue to some essential thing, in her mood. Suddenly she awoke to see them sitting propped close against each other, his cheek cushioned on her crown of hair, both of them blinking beseechingly towards her.

“*How long,*” she raged, “have you been sitting there cursing me?”

“Not been cursing, Miriam. You’ve been interesting, no end. But there’s a thing, Miriam, an awful thing called tomorrow morning.”

“Is it late?” The appalling, the utter and everywhere appalling scrappiness of social life....

“Not for you, Miriam. We’re poor things. We envy. We can’t compete with your appetite, your disgraceful young appetite for late hours.”

“Things always end just as they’re beginning.”

“Things end, Miriam, so that other things may begin.”

She roused herself to give battle. But Alma

drifted between, crying gaily that there was tomorrow. A good strong tomorrow.

Warranted to stand hard wear.

“And turn; and take a dye when you’re tired of the colour.”

He laughed, really amused? Or crediting her with an attempt to talk in a code?

“A tomorrow that will wear forever and make a petticoat afterwards.”

He laughed again. Quite simply. He had not heard that old jest. Seemed never to have heard the old family jests. Seemed to have grown up without jests.... Tomorrow, unless no one came, would not be like today.

The morning offered a blissful eternity before lunch. She had wakened drowsy with strength and the apprehension of good, and gone through breakfast like a sleepwalker, playing her part without cost, independent of sight and hearing and thought. Successful.

Dreamily watching a play, taking a part inaudibly dictated, without effort, seeing it turn into the chief part, more and more turned

over to her as she lay still in the hands of the invisible prompter; withdrawn in an exploration of the features of this state of being that nothing could reach or disturb. If, this time, she could discover its secret, she would be launched in it forever.

Back in her room she prepared swiftly to go out and meet the day in the open; all the world, waiting in the happy garden.... Through the house-stillness sounded three single downward-stepping notes ... the first phrase of the seventh symphony.... Perfect. Eternity stating itself in the stillness. He knew it, choosing just this thing to play to himself, alone; living in space alone, at one with everybody, as everyone was, the moment life allowed. Beethoven's perfect expression of the perfection of life, first thing in the morning. Morning stillness; single dreaming notes that blossomed in it and left it undisturbed; moved on into a pattern and then stood linked together in a single perfect chord. Another pattern in the same simple notes and another chord. Dainty little chords bowing to each other; gentle gestures that gradually became an angelic little dance

through which presently a song leapt forth, the single opening notes brought back, caught up and swept into song pealing rapturously out.

He was revealing himself as he was when alone, admitting Beethoven's vision of life as well as seeing the marvellous things Beethoven did with his themes? But he liked best the slamming, hee-hawing rollick of the last movement.... Because it did so much with a theme that was almost nothing.... *Bang*, toodle-oodle-oodle, *Bang*, toodle-oodle-oodle, *Bang* toodle-oodle-oodle-oo. A lumpish phrase; a Clementi finger exercise played suddenly in startling fortissimo by an impatient schoolboy; smashed out with the full force of the orchestra, taken up, slammed here and there, up and down, by a leaping, plunging, heavy hoofed pantaloon, approving each variation with loud guffaws.... The sly swift dig-in-the-ribs of the sudden pianissimos....

To watch a shape adds interest to listening. But something disappears in listening with the form put first. Hearing only form is a kind of perfect happiness. But in coming back

there is a reproach; as if it had been a kind of truancy.... People who care only for form think themselves superior. Then there is something wrong with them.

On the landing table a letter lay waiting for the post. She passed by, gladly not caring to glance. But a tingling in her shoulders drew her back. She had reached the garden door. The music now pouring busily through from the next room urged her forward. But once outside she would have become a party to bright reasonableness, a foolish frontage, caricatured from behind. She fled back along her path to music that was once more the promise of joy ... to read the address of one of Alma's tradespeople, a distasteful reminder of the wheels of dull work perpetually running under the surface of beauty. But this morning it would not attain her.... It was not Alma's hand, but the small running shape like a scroll, each part a tiny perfection. She bent over it. *Miss Edna Prout*.... This, then, was what she had come back to find; poison for the day. The house was silent as a desert; empty, swept clear of life. The roomful of music was in another world. Alone in it, he

had written to her and then sat down, thinking of her, to his music.

Complications are enlivening.... Within the sunlight, in the great spread of glistening sea, in the touch of the free air and the look of the things set down on the bench there was a lively intensity. A demand for search; for a thought that would obliterate the smear on the blue and gold of the day. The thought had been there even at the moment of shock. The following tumult was the effort to find it. To get round behind the shock and slay it before it could slay. To agree. That was the answer. Not to care. To show how much you care by deliberately not caring? People show disapproval of their own actions by defending them. By deliberately not hiding or defending them, they show off a version of their actions. That they don't themselves accept.

Meantime everything passes. There are always the powerful intervals. Meetings, and then intervals in which other things come up and life speaks directly, to the individual....

Except for married people. Who are all a little absurd, to themselves and to all other married people. That is why they always talk so hard when two couples are together? To cover the din of their thoughts.... Their marriage was a success without being an exception to the rule that all marriages are failures, as he said.

Why are they failures? Science, the way of thinking and writing that makes everybody seem small, in all these new books. Biology, *Darwin*. The way men, who have no inner convictions, no self, fasten upon an idea and let it describe life for them. Always a new idea. Always describing and destroying, filtering down, as time goes on to quite simple people, poisoning their lives, because men must have a formula. Men are gossips. Science is ... cosmic scandalmongering.

Science is Cosmic Scandalmongering. Perhaps that might do for the House of Lords. But those old fogies are not particularly scientific. They quote the Classics. The same thing. Club gossip. Centuries of unopposed masculine gossip about the universe.

Years ago he said there will be no more him and her, the novels of the future will be

clear of all that.... Poetry nothing. Religion nothing. Women a biological contrivance. And now. Women still a sort of attachment to life, useful, or delightful ... the “civilised women of the future” to be either bright obedient assistants or providers of illusion for times of leisure. Two kinds, neatly arranged, each having only one type of experience, while men have both, *and* their work, into which women can only come as Hindus, obediently carrying out tasks set by men, dressed in uniform, deliberately sexless and deferential. How can anyone feel romantic about him? Alma. But that is the real old-fashioned romance of everyday, from her girlhood. Hidden through loyalty to his shifting man’s ideas? Half convinced by them? How can people be romantic impermanently, just now and again?

Romance is solitary and permanent. Always there. In everybody. That is why the things one hears about people are like stories, not referring to life. Why I always forget them when the people themselves are there. Or believe, when they talk of their experiences, that they misread them. I can’t

believe even now in the reality of any of his experiences. But then I don't believe in the experiences of anyone, except a few people who have left sayings I know are true.... Everything else, all the expressions, history and legend and novels and science and everybody's talk, seems irrelevant. That's why I don't want experience, not to be caught into the ways of doing and being that drive away solitude, the marvellous quiet sense of life at first hand... But he knows that too. "Life drags one along by the hair shrieking protests at every yard."

"Hullo! What is she doing all alone?"

The surrounding scene that had gradually faded, leaving her eyes searching in the past for the prospect she could never quite recall, shone forth again.

"I've got to do a review."

"What's the book?"

"When you are in France, does a French river look different to you; *French*?"

"No, Miriam. It—doesn't look different."

He glanced for a moment shaggily from point to point of the sunlit scene and sat companionably down, turned towards her

with a smile at her discomfiture. “What’s the book, Miriam? It’s jolly down here. We’ll have some chairs. Yes? You can’t write on a bench.”

He was gone. Meaning to come back. In the midst of the morning; in the midst of his preoccupations sociably at leisure. She felt herself sink into indifference. The unique opportunity was offering itself in vain. He came back just as she had begun to imagine him caught, up at the house, by a change of impulse. Or perhaps an unexpected guest.

“What’s the review?”

“The House of Lords.”

“Read it?”

“I can’t. It’s all post hoc.”

“Then you’ve read it.”

“I haven’t read it. I’ve only sniffed the first page.”

“That’s enough. Glance at the conclusion. Get your statement, three points; that’ll run you through a thousand words. Look here—shall I write it for you?”

“I’ve got *fifty* ideas,” she said beginning to write.

“That’s too many, Miriam. That’s the

trouble with you. You've got too many ideas. You're messing up your mind, quite a good mind, with too swift a succession of ideas." She wrote busily on, drinking in his elaboration of his view of the state of her mind. "H'm," he concluded, stopping suddenly; but she read in the sound no intention of breaking away because she had nothing to say to him. He was watching, in some way interested. He sat back in his chair; sympathetically withheld. Actually deferring to her work....

She tore off the finished page and transixed it on the grass with a hatpin. Her pencil flew. The statement was finished and leading to another. Perhaps he was right about three ideas. A good shape. The last must come from the book. She would have to consult it. No. It should be left till later. Her second page joined the first. It was incredible that he should be sitting there inactive, obliterated by her work.

She tore off the third sheet and dropped her pencil on the grass.

"Finished? Three sheets in less than twenty minutes. How do you do it, Miriam?"

“It’ll do. But I shall have to copy it. I’ve resisted the temptation to say what *I* think about the House of Curmudgeons. Trace it back to the First Curmudgeon. Yet it seems somehow wrong to write in the air, so *currently*. The first time I did a review, of a bad little book on Whitman, I spent a fortnight of evenings reading.”

“You began at the Creation. Said everything you had to say about the history of mankind.”

“I went nearly mad with responsibility and the awfulness of discovering the way words express almost nothing at all.”

“It’s not quite so bad as that. You’ve come on no end though, you know. The last two or three have been astonishingly good. You’re not creative. You’ve got a good sound mind, a good style and a curious intense critical perception. You’ll be a critic. But writing, Miriam, should be done with a pen. Can’t call yourself a writer till you do it *direct*.”

“How can I write with a pen, in bed, on my knee, at midnight or dawn?”

“A fountain pen?”

“No one can write with a fountain pen.”

“Quite a number of us do. Quite a number of not altogether unsuccessful little writers, Miriam.”

“Well, it’s wrong. How can thought or anything, well thought perhaps can, which doesn’t matter and nobody really cares about, wait a minute, nothing *else* can come through a hand whose fingers are held stiffly apart by a fat slippery barrel. A writing machine. A quill would be the thing, with a fine flourishing tail. But it is too important. It squeaks out an important sense of *writing*, makes people too objective, so that it’s as much a man’s pen, a mechanical, see life steadily and see it whole (when nobody knows what life *is*) man’s view sort of implement as a fountain pen. A pen should be thin, not disturbing the hand, and the nib flexible and silent, with up and down strokes. Fountain pen writing is like ... democracy.”

“Why not go back to clay tablets?”

“Machine-made things are dead things.”

“You came down here by *train*, Miriam.”

“I ought to have flown.”

“You’ll fly yet. No. Perhaps you won’t. When your dead people have solved the

problem, you'll be found weeping over the rusty skeleton of a locomotive."

"I don't mean Lilienfeld and Maxim. I can be fearfully interested in all that when I think of it. But to the people who do not see the beginning of flying it won't seem wonderful. It won't change anything."

"It'll change, Miriam, pretty well everything. And if you don't mean Lilienfeld and Maxim what *do* you mean?"

"Well, by inventing the telephone we've damaged the chances of telepathy."

"Nonsense, Miriam. You're suffering from too much Taylor."

"The most striking thing about Taylor is that he does not want to develop his powers."

"What powers?"

"The things in him that have made him discover things that you admit are true; that make you interested in his little paper."

"They're not right you know about their phosphoric bank; energy is not a simple calculable affair."

"Now here's a strange thing. That time you met them, the first thing you said when they'd gone, was what's *wrong* with them?"

And the next time I met them they said there's something *wrong* with him. The truth is you are polar opposites and have everything to learn from each other."

"Elizabeth Snowden Poole."

"Yes. And without him no one would have heard of her. No one understood. And now psychology is going absolutely her way. In fifty years' time her books will be as clear as daylight."

"Damned obstructive classics. That's what all our books will be. But I'll give you Mrs. Poole. Mrs. Poole is a very wonderful lady. She's the unprecedented."

"There you are. Then you must admit the Taylors."

"I'm not so sure about your little Taylors. There's nothing to be said, you know, for just going about not doing things."

"They *are* wonderful. Their atmosphere is the freest I know."

"I envy you your enthusiasms, Miriam. Even your misplaced enthusiasms."

"You go there, worn out, at the end of the day, and have to walk, after a long tram-ride through the wrong part of London, along raw

new roads, dark little houses on either side, solid, without a single break, darkness, a street-lamp, more darkness, another lamp; and something in the air that lets you down and down. Partly the thought of these streets increasing, all the time, all over London. Yet when someone said walking home after a good evening at the Taylors' that the thought of having to settle down in one of those houses made him feel suicidal, I felt he was wrong; and saw them, from inside, bright and big; people's homes."

"They're not big, Miriam. You wanted to marry him."

"Good Heavens. An Adam's apple, sloping shoulders and a Cockney accent."

"I have a Cockney accent, Miriam."

"..."

"Don't go about classifying with your ears. People, you know, are very much alike."

"They're utterly different."

"Your vanity. Go on with your Taylors."

"They are very much like other people."

"With *my* Taylors. I'm interested; really."

"Well, suddenly you are in their kitchen. White walls and aluminium and a smell of

fruit. Do you know the smell of root vegetables cooking slowly in a casserole?"

"I'll imagine it. Right. Where are the Taylors?"

"You are all standing about. Happy and undisturbed. None of that feeling of darkness and strangeness and the need for a fresh beginning. Tranquillity. As if someone had gone away."

"The devil; exorcised, poor dear."

"No but glorious. Making everyone move like a song. And talk. You are all, at once, bursting with talk. All over the flat, in and out of the rooms. George washing up all the time, wandering about with a dish and a cloth and Dora probably doing her hair in a dressing-gown, and cooking. It's the only place where I can talk exhausted and starving."

"What do you talk about?"

"Everything. We find ourselves sitting in the bathroom, engrossed—long speeches—they talk to each other, like strangers talking intimately on a 'bus. Then something boils over and we all drift back to the kitchen. Left to herself Dora would go on forever and sit down to a few walnuts at midnight."

“Mary.”

“But she is an absolutely perfect cook. An artist. She invents and experiments. But he has a feminine consciousness, though he’s a most manly little man with a head like Beethoven. So he’s practical. Meaning he feels with his nerves and has a perfect sympathetic imagination. So presently we are all sitting down to a meal and the evening begins to look short. And yet endless. With them everything feels endless; the present I mean. They are so immediately alive. Everything and everybody is abolished. We *do* abolish them I assure you. And a new world is there. You feel language changing, every word moving, changed, into the new world. *But*, when their friends come in the evening, weird people, real cranks, it disappears. They all seem to be attacking things they don’t understand. I gradually become an old-fashioned Conservative. But the evening is wonderful. None of these people mind how far or how late they walk. And it goes on till the small hours.”

“You’re getting your college time with these little people.”

“No. I’m easily the most stupidly cultured person there.”

“Then you’re feeding your vanity.”

“I’m not. Even the charlatans make me feel ashamed of my sham advantage. No; the thing that is most wonderful about those Tuesdays is waking up utterly worn out, having a breakfast of cold fruit in the cold grey morning, a rush for the train, a last sight of the Taylors as they go off into the London Bridge crowd and then suddenly feeling utterly refreshed. They do too. It’s an effect we have on each other.”

“How did you come across them?”

“Michael. Reads *Reynolds’s*. A notice of a meeting of London Tolstoyans. We rushed out in the pouring rain to the Edgware Road and found nothing at the address but a barred up corner shop-front. Michael wanted to go home. I told him to go and stood staring at the shop waiting for it to turn into the Tolstoyans. I knew it would. It did. Just as Michael was almost screaming in the middle of the road, I turned down a side street and found a doorway, a bead of gas shining inside just showing a stone staircase. We crept up

and found a bare room, almost in darkness, a small gas jet, and a few rows of kitchen chairs and a few people sitting scattered about. A young man at a piano picked out a few bars of Grieg and played them over and over again. Then the meeting began. Dora, reading a paper on Tolstoy's ideas. Well, I felt I was hearing the whole truth spoken aloud for the first time.... But oh the discussion.... A gaunt man got up and began to rail at everything, going on till George gently asked him to keep to the subject. He raved then about some self-help book he had read. Quite incoherent; and convincing. Then the young man at the piano made a long speech about hitching your waggon to a star and at the end of it a tall woman, so old that she could hardly stand, stood up and chanted, in a deep laughing voice, Waggon and Stars. Waggon and stars. Today I am a waggon. Tomorrow a star. I'm reminded of the societies who look after young women. Meet them with a cup of tea, call a cab, put the young woman and the cup of tea into the cab. Am I to watch my brother's blunderings? No. I am his lover. Then he becomes a star. And I

am a star. Then an awful man, very broad-shouldered and narrow-hipped, with a low forehead and a sweeping moustache bounded up and shouted; I am a God! You, madam, are a goddess! Tolstoy is over-civilised! That's why he loves the godlike peasant. All metaphysicians, artists and pious people are sensualists. All living in unnatural excesses. The Zulu is a god. How many women in filthy London can nurse their children? What is a woman? *Children*. What is the glory of man? Unimaginable to town slaves. They go through life ignorant of manhood, and the metaphysicians wallow in pleasures. Men and women are divine. There is no other divinity. Let them not sell their godhead for filthy food and rotting houses and moloch factories. What stands in the way? The pious people, the artists and the metaphysicians.... Then a gentleman, in spectacles at the back, quietly said that Tolstoy's ideas were eclectic and could never apply generally.... Of course he was right, but it doesn't make Tolstoy any the less true. And you know when I hear all these convincing socialists planning things that really would make the world more

comfortable, they always in the end seem ignorant of *humanity*; always behind them I see little Taylor, unanswerable, standing for more difficult deep-rooted individual things. It's *individuals* who must change, one by one."

"Socialism will give the individual his chance."

"Yes, I know. I agree in a way. You've shown me all that. I know environment and ways of thinking *do* partly make people. But Taylor makes socialism, even when its arguments floor him, look such a feathery, passing thing."

"You stand firm, Miriam. Socialism isn't feathery. *You're* feathery. One thinks you're there and suddenly finds you playing on the other side of the field."

"It's the fact that socialism is a *side* that makes it look so shaky. And then there's Reich; an absolute blaze of light ... on the outside side of things."

"Not a blaze of anything, my dear Miriam ... a poor, hard-working, popular lecturer."

"Everybody in London is listening. Hearing the most illuminating things."

“What do they illuminate?”

“Ourselves. The English. Continuing Buckle. He’s got a clear cool hard unprejudiced foreign mind.”

“Your foreigners, Miriam. They haven’t the monopoly of intelligence.”

“I know. You think the English are *the* people. But so does Reich. Really he would interest you. You *must* let me tell you his idea. Just the shape of it. Badly. He puts it so well that you know he has something up his sleeve. He has. He’s a Hungarian patriot. That is his inspiration. That England shall save Europe, and therefore Hungary, from the Germans. You must let me just tell you without interrupting. Two minutes.”

“*I’m* intelligent, Miriam. *You’re* intelligent. You have distinction of mind. But a really surprising lack of expression you know. You misrepresent yourself most tremendously.”

“You mean I haven’t a voice, that way of talking about things that makes one know people don’t believe what they say and are thinking most about the way they are talking. Bah.”

“Clear thought makes clear speech.”

“Well. Reich says that history so far is always one thing. The Hellenisation of Europe.... The Greeks were the first to evolve universal ideals. Which were passed on. Through two channels. Law-giving Rome. And the Roman church; Paul, who had made Christianity a universal working scheme. So Europe has been Hellenised. And the Hellenisation of the *rest* of the world will be through its Europeanisation. The enemy to this is the rude materialistic modern Germany. The only hope, England. Which he calls a nation of ignorant specialists, ignorant of history; believing only in race, which doesn't exist—a blindfold humanitarian giant, utterly unaware that other people are growing up in Europe and have the use of their eyes. The French don't want to do anything outside their large pleasant home. They are the sedentary Greeks; townspeople. The English are Romans, official, just, inartistic. Good colonists, not intrinsically, but because they send so much of their best away from their little home. A child can see that the English and Americans care less for money than any people in the western world,

are adventurous and wandering and improvident; the only people with ideals and a sense of the future. Inartistic....”

“Geography he calls the ground symphony of history, but nothing more, or Ireland would play first fiddle in Great Britain. The rest is having to fight for your life and being visited by your neighbours. England has attracted thousands of brilliant foreigners, who have made her, including the Scotch, who until they became foreigners in England were nothing. And the foreigner of foreigners is the permanently alien Jew. And the genius of all geniuses Loyola, because he made all his followers permanent aliens. Countries without foreigners are doomed. Like Hungary. Doomed to extinction if England does not beat Germany. That’s all.”

“There won’t, if we can help it, be any need for England to beat Germany. There are, you know, possibly unobserved by your rather wildly rocketing Reich, a few eyes in England. That war can be written away; by journalists and others, written into absurdity.”

“Oh, I’m so glad. Listening to Reich makes one certain that the things that seem to be

happening in the world are illusions and the real result of the unseen present movement of history is war with Germany. I don't like Reich. His idea of making everything begin with Greece. His awful idea that art follows only on pressure and war. Yet it is true that the harassed little seaboard peoples who lived insecurely *did* have their art periods after they had fought for their lives. Then no more wars no more Art.... *Well*; perhaps Art like war is just male ferocity!"

"Nonsense, Miriam."

"Do you really think the war can be written away? There are so many opinions, and reading keeps one always balanced between different sets of ideas."

"You're too omnivorous, Miriam. You get the hang of too many things. You're scattered."

"The better you hear a thing put, the more certain you are there's another view. And then there are *motives*."

"Ah, now you're talking.... Motives; can be used. Almost any sort of motive can be roped in; and directed. You ought to write up that little meeting by the way. You're lucky you

know, Miriam, in your opportunities for odd experience. Write it up. Don't forget."

"You weren't there. It wasn't a joke. I don't want to be facetious about it."

"You're too near. But you will. Save it up. You'll see all these little excursions in perspective when you're round the next corner."

"Oh I *hate* all these written up things; 'Jones always wore a battered cricket cap, a little askew.' They simply drive me *mad*. You know the whole thing is going to be lies from beginning to end."

"You're a romantic, Miriam."

"I'm not. It's the 'always wore.' Trying to get at you, just as much as 'Iseult the Fair.' Just as unreal, just as much in an assumed voice. The amazing thing is the way men go prosing on for ever and ever, admiring each other, never suspecting."

"You've got to create an illusion you know."

"Why illusion? Life isn't an illusion."

"We don't know what life is. You don't know what life is. You think too much. Life's got to be lived. The difference between you

and me is that you think to live and I live to think. You've made a jolly good start. Done things. Come out and got your economic independence. But you're stuck."

"Now *there's* somebody who's writing about life. Who's shown what has been going on from the beginning. Mrs. Stetson. It was the happiest day of my life when I read *Women and Economics*."

"It's no good, you know, that idea of hers. Women have got to specialise. They are specialists from the beginning. They can't run families, and successful careers at the same time."

"They could if life were differently arranged. They will. It's not that so much. Though it's a relief to know that homes won't be always a tangle of nerve-racking heavy industries which ought to be done by men. But the blaze of light she brings is by showing that women were social from the first and that *all* history has been the gradual socialisation of the male. It is partly complete. But the male world is still savage."

"The squaw, Miriam, was—"

"Absolutely social and therefore civilised,

compared to the hunting male. She went out of herself. Mother and son was society. *He* had no chance. Everyone, even his own son, was an enemy and a rival.”

“That’s old Ellis’s idea. There’s *been* a matriarchate all right, Miriam, for your comfort.”

“I don’t want comfort, I want truth.”

“Oh you *don’t*, Miriam. One gives you facts and you slide away from them.”

Household life breaks everything up. Comes crashing down on moments that cannot recur.... Thought runs on, below the surface to conclusions, arriving distractingly at the wrong moment.

It always seems a deliberate conspiracy to suppress conclusions. Lunch, grinning like a Jack-in-the-box, in a bleak emptiness. People ought not to meet at lunch time. If the bleakness is overcome it is only by borrowing from the later hours. And the loan is wasted by the absence of after-time, the business of filling up the afternoon with activities;

leaving everything to be begun all over again later on.

How can guests *allow* themselves to arrive to lunch? The smooth young man had come primed for his visit. Carefully talking in the Wilson way; carefully finding everything in the world amusing. And he was not amused. He was a cold selfish baffled young man, lost in a set. Welcomed here as a favoured emissary from a distant potentate....

And now with just the same air of reflected brilliance he was blithely playing tennis. Later on he would have to begin again with his talk; able parroting, screening hard coldness, the hard coldness of the pale yellow-haired Englishman with good features.... A blindfold humanitarian giant? Where are Reich's English giants? Blind. Amongst the old-fashioned, conservatives? Gentlepeople with fixed ideas who don't want to change anything? The Lycurgans are not humanitarians. Because they are humanitarians deliberately. Liberals and socialists are humanitarian intellectually, through anger. Humanitarian idealists. The giants are humanitarian unconsciously,

through breeding. Reich said the strongest motives, the motives that made history, were *unconscious*.... Consciousness is increasing. The battle of unconscious fixed ideas and conscious chosen fixed ideas. Then the conservatives must always win! They make socialists and then absorb them. The socialists give them ideas. Neither of them are quite true. Why doesn't God state truth once and for all and have done with it?

And all the time, all over the western world, life growing more monstrous. The human head growing bigger and bigger. A single scientific fact, threatening humanity. Hypo's *amused* answer to the claims of the feminists. The idea of having infants scooped out early on, and artificially reared. Insane. Science rushing on, more and more clear and mechanical.... "Life becomes more and more a series of surgical operations." How *can* men contemplate the increasing awfulness of life for women and yet wish it to go on? The awfulness they have created by swaddling women up; regarding them as instruments of pleasure. Liking their cooking. *Stereotyping* in their fixed mechanical men's way a

standard of deadly cooking that is destroying everybody, teeth first. And they call themselves creators.... Knickers or gym skirts. A free stride from the hips, weight forward on toes pointing straight, like Orientals. Squatting, like a savage, keeping the pelvis ventilated and elastic instead of sitting, knees politely together, stuffy and compressed and unventilated. All the rules of ladylike deportment ruin the pelvis.... Ladies are awful. Deportment and a rigid overheated pelvis. In the kitchen they have to skin rabbits and disembowel fowls. Otherwise no keep. Polite small mouthfuls of squashy food and pyorrhoea. Good middleaged church people always suggest stuffy bodies and pyorrhoea. Somewhere in the east people can be divorced for flatulence.

But the cranks are so uncultured; cut off from books and the past. Martyrs braving ridicule? The salt of the earth, making here and there a new world, unseen? Their children will not be cranks....

A rose fell at her feet flung in through the window.

“Come out and play!”

This is joy. To stand back from the court, fall slack, losing sight of the scatter of watching people round the lawn. Nothing but the clasp of the cool air and the firm little weight of the rough-coated ball in a slack hand. The loose-limbed plunge forward to toe the line. One measuring glance and the whole body a taut projectile driving the ball barely clear of the net, to swish furrowing along the ground.

“The lady serves from the cliff and Hartopp volleys from the sky. They’re invincible.” The yellow young man was charming the other side of the net. Not yellow. His hair a red gold blaze when the sun was setting, loose about his pale eager sculptured face; and now dull gold. He had welcomed her wrangling rush to the net after the first set, rushing forward at once, wrangling, without hearing, Hypo coming too, squealing incoherent contributions. And then the young man had done it again, for her, to make a little scene for the onlookers. But the third time it had been a failure and Hypo had filled the gap with witty shoutings.

And all the time the tall man with dense features had said not a word, only swung sympathetically about. Yet he was a friend. From the moment he came up through the garden from France with his bag, uninvited, and sat down and murmured gently in response to vociferous greetings. Ill, after a bad crossing. So huge and so gentle that it had been easy to go up to his chair as everyone else had done, and say lame things, instead of their bright ones, and get away with a sense of having had an immense conversation. He played the game, thinking of nothing else. Understood the style and rhythm of all the incidental movements. The others were different. They had learned their tennis; could remember a time when they did not play. Playing did not take them back to the beginning of life. Was not pure joy to them.

He was wonderful. He altered the tone. The style and peace of his slow sentences. Half German. The best kind of German. Now *he* could prevent war with Germany, if he could be persuaded to waft to and fro, for Reich's ten years, between the two countries,

talking.

He talked through the evening; keeping his hold of the simplest thread of speech with his still voice and bearing. Leaving a large, peaceful space when he paused, into which it was easy to drop any sort of reflection that might have arisen in one's mind. Hypo scarcely spoke except to question him and the smooth young man dramatically posed, smoked, in silence. The huge form was a central spectacle, until the light faded and the talk began to die down. Then Alma asked him to play. He rose gigantic in the half light and went to the piano murmuring that he would be pleased to improvise a little.

Amazing. With all his foreign experience and his serene mind, his musical reflections would be wonderful. But they were not. His gentle playing was colourless. Vague and woolly. And it brought a silence in which his own silence stood out. He seemed to have retired, politely and gently, but definitely, into himself. The darkness surrounding the one small shaded light began to state the joy of the day. Everyone was beaming quietly with the sense of a glorious day. The tall man

was at ease in stillness. In his large quiet atmosphere communication flowed, following serenely on the cessation of sound. Nun danket alle Gott.... How far was he a believer in the old things? His consciousness was the widest in the room; seemed to hold the balance between the old and the new, sympathetically, broad shouldered and rather weary with his burden. Speaking always in a frayed tired voice that would not give in to any single brisk idea. There was room and space and kind shelter in his mind for a woman to state herself, completely, unopposed. But he would not accept conclusions.... His mild smooth shape of words would survive anything; persisting. It was his *style*. With it he carried himself through everything, making his way of talking a thing in itself.... No ideas, no convictions; but something in him that made a perfect manner. A blow between the eyes, flattening him out, would not break it. There was nothing there to break, nothing hard in him. A made mould, chosen, during his growing, filling itself up from life, but not living ... a gentleman, of course, that was it.

Then there was an abyss beneath. Unstated things that lived in darkness.

But the silence lasted only an instant. Before its test could reveal anything further than the sudden sharp division of the sitters into men and women, Alma made movements to break up the party. Hypo's voice came, enchanting, familiar and new, its qualities renewed by the fresh contacts. The thing to do he said rising, coming forward into the central light, not in farewell, into a self-made arena, with needless challenging sturdiness from one of the distances of his crowded mind. It would be one of his unanswerable fascinating misapprehensions. The thing to *do* was to go out into the world; leave everything behind, wife, and child and things; go all over the world and come back; *experienced*.

“And what about the wives?”

“The wives, Miriam, will go to heaven when they die.” He turned on his laugh to the men in the background; and gathered their amused agreement in a swift glance. They had both risen and were standing, exposed by the frankness of their spokesman, silent in polite embarrassment. They *really* thought,

these two nice men, that something had been said. The spell of the evening was broken up. The show had been given. Dream picture of moving life. Entertainment and warm forgetfulness. Everyone enchanted and alive. Now was the time for talk, exchange; beginning with the shattering of Hypo's silly idea. How could men have experience? Nothing would make them discover themselves. Either of them. Perhaps the tall man....

“Men as they are,” she began, trusting to the travelling power of her mental picture of him as an exception, “might go——”

But her words were lost. Alma had come forward and was saying her good nights, hurriedly. They were to go, just as everything was beginning. All chance of truth was caught, in a social trap. The men were to be left, with their illusions, to talk their monstrous lies, unchecked. Imagining they were really talking, because there was no one to contradict. Unfair.

She rose perforce and got through her part. It was idiotic, a shameful farce. Evening dress and the set scene, so beautifully

arranged, were suddenly shameful and useless. Taken to bits; silly. She seemed to be taking leave of herself, three separate selves, united in the blessed relief of getting rid of the women. In the person of the tall man she strode gracefully across the room to open the door for Alma and herself, breaking out, with the two other men, at once, before the door was closed, with immeasurable relief, into the abrupt chummy phrases of old friends newly met.

CHAPTER IV

The tiger stepping down his blue plaque. The one thing in the room that nothing could influence. All the other single beautiful things change. They are beautiful, for a moment, again and again; giving out their expression, and presently frozen stiff, having no expression. The blue plaque, intense fathomless eastern blue, the thick spiky grey-green sharply shaped leaves, going up forever, the heavy striped beast forever curving through, his great paw always newly set on the base of the plaque; inexhaustible, never looked at enough; always bringing the same joy.... If ever the memory of this room fades away, the blue plaque will remain.

Mr. Hancock was coming upstairs. In a moment she would know whether any price had been paid; any invisible appointment irrevocably missed.

“Good morning.” The everyday tone. Not the tone of welcome after a holiday.

“Good morning. I’m so sorry I could not get back yesterday.”

“Yes ... I suppose it could not be helped.” He was annoyed. Perhaps even a little suspicious....

“You see, my brother-in-law thought I was still on holiday and free to take my sister home.”

“I trust it is not anything serious.”

“It was just one of her attacks.” Suppose Sarah should have one, at this moment? Suppose it was Sarah who was paying for her escapade? She summoned her despairingly, explaining ... saw her instant approval and her private astonishment at the reason for the deceit.

Supported by Sarah she rounded off her story.

“I see,” said Mr. Hancock pleasantly; weighing, accepting. She stood before him seeing the incident as he would imagine it. It was growing true in her mind. Presently she would be looking back on it. This was how criminals got themselves mixed up....

“I’m glad it was not anything serious,” said Mr. Hancock gravely, turning to the scatter of letters on his table. He *was* glad. And his kind sympathy was not being fooled. Sarah was always being ill. It was worth a lie to drag her out into the light of his sympathy. A breath of true life, born from a lie.

The incident was at an end, safely through. He was satisfied and believing, gone on into his day. She gathered up his appointment book from under his nose. He was using it, making entries. But he knew this small tyranny was her real apology, a curse for the trouble she had been obliged to give him. While he sat bereft as she took in the items of his day, their silent everyday conversation was knitted up once more. She was there, not failing him. He knew she would always be there as long as he should really need her. She restored the book to its place and stood at his side affectionately watching him tackle his task, detached, aware of her affection, secure in its independence.

They were so utterly far apart, foreigners in each other’s worlds. Irreconcilable.... But for all these years she had had daily before her

eyes the spectacle of his life work; the way and the cost of his undeviating, unsparing work. It must surely be a small comfort to him that there had been an understanding witness to the shapely building of his life....

Understanding speech she could never have, with anyone ... except the Taylors, and she was as incompletely in their world as in his. The joy of being with him was the absence of the need for speech. She whisked herself to the door and went out shutting it behind her with a little slam, a last fling of holiday freedom, her communication to him of the store of joy she had brought back, the ease with which she was shouldering her more and more methodical, irrelevant work....

There was nothing to pay. Then the moment over the telegram *had* been a revelation....

“You ought to see the Grahams. Stay another day and see the Grahams.”

I might have wired asking for another day. Impossible. The day would have been spoilt

by the discomfort of knowing him thinking me ungrateful and insatiable.... Only being able to say when I came back that I waited to see a man dying of cancer. He would have thought that morbid. The minute the telegram was sent the feeling of guilt passed away. Whilst Hypo was chuckling over it at the top of the stairs there was nothing and no one. Only the feeling of having broken through and stepped forward into space. Strong happiness. All the next day was in space; a day taken out of life; standing by itself.

Mr. Graham was old-fashioned ... and modern too. He seemed to have come from so far back, to see backwards, understanding, and to see ahead the things he had always known. Serene and interested, in absolutely everything. As much in the tiny story of the threepenny-bit as in anything else, making it seem worth telling, making me able to tell it. Seeing everything as *real*. Really finding life marvellous in the way no one else seemed to do.... Ill as he was he looked up my trains, carefully and thoughtfully.... The horror and fear of death was taken away from me while I watched him.... Perhaps he had always felt

that the marvellousness of there being such a thing as life was the answer to everything.... And now that he was dying knew it more completely?

They were both so serene. Everybody was lifted by being with them into that part of life that goes on behind the life that seems to be being lived....

All the time it was as if they had witnessed that past fortnight and made it immaterial ... a part of the immaterial *story* of life....

That fortnight had the shape of an arranged story, something playing itself out, with scenes set and timed to come in in the right place. Upset by that one little scene that had come in of itself....

The clear days after the two men had gone back to town. The long talks kept undisturbed.... All the long history of Gissing....

Gissing's ideal women over-cultivated, self-important creatures, with low-pressure vitality and too little animal.... "You're rather

like that you know.” ...

“Men would always rather be made love to than talked at.”

“Your life is a complex system of evasions. You are a mass of *health*, unused. You’re not doing any thing with yourself....” “... Two kinds of women, the kind that come it over one, tremendously, and nurses.”

“Most good men are something like chimpanzees. The best man in those relationships is the accomplished rake ... that’s the secret of old Grooge.... Yes; you’d hate him. He’s one of the old school; expert knowledge about women. That’s nonsense of course. There *is* no expert knowledge about women. Men and women are very much alike. But there’s the honest clean red-blooded people and the posers and rotters and anæmic people. And there are for your comfort a few genuine monogamists. Very few.”

“You’re stuck, you know. Stuffed with romantic ignorance. You’re a great chap. A gentleman. That’s an insult, isn’t it. You don’t exploit yourself....”

“I’m not sure about you. You’ve got an

awfully good life up in town, jolly groups; various and interesting. One hesitates to disturb it.... But we're old friends. And there's this silly barrier between us. There always is between people who evade what is after all only the development of the friendly handshake."

"She's a very fine artist. Well, she, my dear Miriam, has lovers. They keep her going. Keep her creative. She's a woman one can talk to.... There's no tiresome barrier...."

"Your women are a sort of omnibus load."

"There's always the box seat."

"They all grin. Your one idea of women is a grin."

"There's a great deal to be said for the cheerful grin. You know, a woman who has the grit to take things into her own hands, take the initiative, is no end of a relief. Women want to. They ought to. They're inhibited by false ideas. They want, nearly all women want all their corners taken for them."

"This book'll be our brat. You've pulled it together no end. You ought to chuck your work, have a flat in town. Be general adviser to authors...."

Queer old professor Bolly, pink and white and loud checks, standing outside the summer house in the brilliant sun.

“Is this the factory?”

“This is the factory.”

“Does he dictate to you?”

“My *dear* Bolly.... Have five minutes; have *half* a minute’s conversation with Miss Henderson and then, if you dare, try to imagine *anyone* dictating to her.”

Pink and white. Two old flamingoes. Pulling the other way. Bringing all the old conservative world into the study ... sending it forward with their way of looking at the new things. Such a deep life in them that old age and artificial teeth and veined hands did not obscure their youth. Worldly happy religious musical Englishpeople.

“The Barrie question turns solely upon the question of romance. You cannot, dear young lady, *hesitate* over Barrie. You must either adore, or detest. With equal virulence. I am one of the adorers. *Romance*, for me, is the ultimate *reality*.... Seen through a glass darkly....”

On the other side of the room Mrs. Bolly

was telling her tales of Bayreuth. They were both untouched by the Wilson atmosphere. Not clever. They brought a glow like fire-light; as if the cold summer hearth were alight, as the scenes from their stories came into the room and stood clear.

The second afternoon Hypo stretched out on the study lounge, asleep, compact and calm in the sunlight like a crusader on a tomb, till just before they went.

“There’s something unconquerable in them.”

“Yes, Miriam. Silliness *is* unconquerable. Poor old Gourlay; went to Greenland to get away from it. *Died* to get away from it.”

“Don’t go away. Camp in here. I’m all to bits. You know you’re no end of a comfort to me.”

“I can’t be. You’re hampered all the time I’m here by the silly things I say; the way I spoil your talk.”

“You’ve no idea how much I like having you about. Like the sound of your voice; the way your colour takes the sun, your laughter. I envy you your sudden laughter, Miriam; the way you lift your chin, and laugh. You’re

wasted on yourself, Miriam. You don't know the fine individual things in yourself. You've got all sorts of illusions, but you've no idea where you really score."

"Can't get on with anybody."

"You get on with me all right. But you never tell *me* nice things about myself. You only laugh at my jokes."

"I've never told you a hundredth part. There's never any time. But I'll tell you one nice thing. There's a way in which ever since I've known you, you obliterate other men. Yes. For me. It's most tiresome."

"Oh, my dear! Is that true, Miriam?"

"Oh yes. From the first time I saw you. There you were. I can't bear your ideas. But I always find myself testing other men, better men, by the way, by you."

"I haven't any ideas, Miriam, and I'm a reformed character. There's heaps of time. You're here another ten days yet. You shall camp in here. We'll talk, devastatingly."

"If I once began——"

"Begin. We're going to explore each other's minds."

"I should bore you to death."

“You never bore me. Really. It does me good to quarrel with Miriam. But we’re not going to quarrel. We’re going to explore each other and stop nowhere. Agreed?”

“I’ve seen you *ill* with boredom. You hate silence and you hate opposition. You always think people’s minds are blank when they are silent. It’s just the other way round. Only of course there are so many kinds of silence. But the test of absolutely everything in life is the quality of the in-between silences. It’s only in silence that you can judge of your relationship to a person.”

“You shall be silent. You shall deploy a whole regiment of silences ... but you’ll fire off an occasional volley of speech?”

“Real speech can only come from complete silence. Incomplete silence is as fussy as deliberate conversation.”

“One has to begin somewhere. Deliberate conversation leads to real conversation. You *can* talk, you know, Miriam. You’re not a woman of the world. You don’t come off all the time. But when you do, you come off no end.”

If *his* mind could be tackled even though there were no words to answer him with, then anyone's mind could be tackled....

Finding him simple and sad, able to be uncertain, took away the spell from the surroundings; leaving only him.... Seeing life as he saw it, being forced to admit some of his truths, hard and cruel even if rearranged or differently stated, made the world a nightmare, a hard solid daylight nightmare, the only refuge to be, and stay, with him. Yet the giving up of perpetual opposition brought a falseness.... Smiling agreement, with unstated differences and reservations piling up all the time.... Drifting on into a false relationship.

The joy of being with him, the thing that made it worth while to flatter by seeming to agree was more than half the sense of triumphing over other women. Of being able to believe myself as interesting and charming and mysteriously wonderful as all these women we talked about, who lost their wonder as he stated their formula.

By the time the Grimshaws came everything was sad.... That is why I was so successful with them. Gay with sadness, easy to talk to, practised in conversation. Without that they would not have sought me out and carried me off by themselves and shown me their world....

“I’ve been through a terrific catechism.”

“You’ve impressed them, Miriam. I’m jealous. They come here; to see me; and go off with Miriam.”

“Bosh. They thought I was intelligent. They don’t think so *now*. Besides they really were trying to interview you through me.”

“That’s subtle of you, Miriam. Old James. You’ve no idea how you’re coming on. Or coming out. Yes. I think there’s always *been* a subtle leap in Miriam. Without words. A song without words. Good formula for Miriam. What did they interview me about?”

“I refused to be drawn. Suddenly, in the middle of lunch she asked me in her Cheltenham voice ‘What do you do with your leishah?’ I think she really wanted statistics; gutter-snipe statistics.”

“She’s an enchantress. No end of a lark,

really. She runs old Grimshaw. Runs everybody. You're rather like her you know. You've got the elements, with your wrist-watch. What did you say?"

"Nothing. I haven't the faintest idea what I do with my leisure. Besides I can't talk about real things to a bayonet. She *is* fascinating, though."

"She's a gypsy. When she looks at one ... with that *brown* smile ... one could do anything for her."

"There you are. Your *smiles*.... But he's the most perfect darling. Absolutely sincere. A Breton peasant. I talked to him about some of your definitions. Not as yours. As mine."

"Never mind. He knew where they came from."

"Not at all. Only those I thought I agreed with. And he's given me quite a fresh view of the Lycurgans."

"Now don't you go and desert."

"Well he must be either right or wrong."

"What a damned silly thing to say. Oh what a damned silly thing to say."

Chill windy afternoon, grey tamarisks waving in a bleak wind, tea indoors and a fire

bringing into the summery daylight the sudden message that summer was at an end. The changed scene chiming together with the plain outspoken anger. Again the enlivening power of anger, the relief of the clean cut, of everything brought to an end, of being once more single and clear, free of everyone, homesick for London....

Mr. Hancock's showing-out bell sounded in the hall. The long sitting had turned into a short one. No need to go up yet. He'll come downstairs, pad-pad, flexible hand-made shoes on the thick stair carpet, the sharp turn at the stair-end, the quick little walk along the passage and soft neat clatter of leather heels down the stone stairs to the workshop. Always the same. The same occasion. Which occasion? That used to be so clear and so tremendous. Confused now, but living on in every sound of his footsteps.

Homesick for London. For those people whose lives are set in a pattern with mine, leaving its inner edge free to range.

Perhaps the set pattern is enough. The daily association. The mass of work. Its results unseen. At the end it might show as a

complete whole, crowded with life. Life comes in; strikes through. Everything comes in if you are set in a pattern and always in one place. Changed circumstances bring quickly, but imperfectly, without a background, the things that would be discovered slowly and perfectly, on a background, in calm daily air. All lives are the same life. Only one discovery, coming to everybody.

The little bell on the wall burred gently. Room free. No hurry.

I'll wait till he's gone downstairs.

“Nice Miriam. You really are a dear, you know. You've a ruddy, blazing temper. You can sulk too, abominably. Then one discovers an unsuspected streak of sweetness. You forget. You have a rare talent for forgetfulness and recovery. You're suddenly pillowy. You've no *idea*, Miriam, what a blessing that is to the creature called man. It's womanly you are. Now don't resent that. It's a fine thing to be. It makes one want you, quite desperately. The essential deeps of you. Like an absolution. I'm admitting your deeps, Miriam.”

“It's most inconvenient suddenly to be

forgetting you are having a row with a person. It's really a weakness. Suddenly getting interested."

"Your real weakness is your lack of direction, the instability of your controls. If I had you on my hands for six months you'd be no end of a fine chap. Now don't resent that. It's a little crude, I admit. Perhaps I ought to beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, Miriam."

"I never think about myself. I remember once being told that I was too excitable. It made me stare, for a few minutes. And now you. I believe it. But I shall forget again. And you are all wrong about 'controls.' I don't mean mine. I mean your silly idea of women having feebler controls than men."

"Not my idea. Tested fact."

"Damn facts. Those arranged tests and their facts are utterly nothing at all. Women's controls appear to be feebler because they have so much more to control. I don't mean physically. Mentally. By seeing everything simultaneously. Unless they are the kind of woman who has been warped into seeing only one thing at a time. Scientifically. They are freaks. Women see in terms of life. Men

in terms of things, because their lives are passed amongst scraps.”

“*Nice Miriam.*”

“... Now we can begin to talk. It’s easier, you know, to talk hand in hand.”

The touch of his hand bringing a perfect separation. Everything suddenly darkened. Two little people side by side in a darkness. Exactly alike. Hypo gone. His charm, quite gone.

Alma crossing the end of the lawn. There was not any feeling of guilt. Only the sense of her isolation. Companionship with her isolation. Then the shock of his gay voice ringing out to her across the lawn.

“Susan, if you have that day in town, awful things will happen.” Her little pink-clad figure turning for a moment to wave a hand.

“Of course they will! Rather!”

“We’re licensed!”

“Susan doesn’t like me.”

“She does. She likes you no end. Likes you currently. The way your hair goes back over your ears.”

... He misses nothing. That is his charm, his supremacy in charm over all other men.

And misinterprets everything. That is his tragedy. The secret of his perpetual disappointments. He spoiled everything by the perpetual shock of his *deliberate* guilt and *deliberate* daring. That was driving me off all the time. The extraordinariness of his idea of frankness! His ‘stark talk’ is nothing compared to the untroubled outspokenness of the Taylors....

The *burden* of his simplicity. No one in the world could be more simple....

He thought my silence meant attention and agreement, when I wanted only to watch the transformation going on all round me. That would have gone on; if he had given me time; not destroyed everything by his sudden trick of masterfulness; the silly application of a silly idea.... It’s not only that coercion is wrong; that it’s far better to die than to be coerced. It’s the destructiveness of coercion. How long before men discover that violence drives women utterly away into cold isolation. Never, since the beginning of the world has a woman been mastered. I’m glad I know why. Why violence defeats itself....

“You don’t desert me completely? We’re

still friends? You'll go on being interested in my work?"

He knew nothing of the life that went on of itself, afterwards. I had driven him away. I felt guilty then. Because I took my decision. And absolved myself. The huge sounding darkness, expanding, turned to a forest of moving green and gold. The feeling of immense deliberate strength going forward, breaking out through life.

If it came again I should absolve myself. But it won't. It is something in him, and in his being an Englishman and not, like Michael, an alien mind.

"*Alma*. I want a slice of life!"

"Of course, my very dear! Take one, Miriam. Take a *large* one. An oat. Not a vote. One woman, one oat...."

"I want an oat *and* a vote.... No. I don't want a vote. I want to have one and not use it. Taking sides simply annihilates me."

"Don't be annihilated, old fmg. Take an oat."

"Give me one."

"I will. I *do*!"

Alma's revealed splendour ... lighting and

warming the surrounding bleakness. In that moment her amazing gift that would move her so far from me seemed nothing. Herself, everything to me. Alma is a star. Her name should be Stella.... But I had already decided that it would not be him. And that marvellous beginning cannot come again.

“Particularly jolly schoolgirls! You’ll like them. They’re free. They mean to be free. Now they, Miriam, *are* the new woman.” Posing, exploiting, deliberately uncatlike cats. *How* could he be taken in? *Why* were all her poses revealed to me? What brought me on the scene just at those moments? *Why* that strange little series of events placing me, alone, of the whole large party, innocently there just at that moment, to see the origin of his idea of a jolly smile and how he answers it?

“You looked like a Silenus.”

“That sort of thing always looks foolish from the outside. It was nothing. I beg of you, I entreat you to think no more of it.”

Again the little bell. Clean. A steady little summons. He had not gone downstairs.

He was washing his hands; with an air of communicativeness.

“I’ve a piece of news for you.... I have decided to leave Mr. Orly and set up, elsewhere, on my own account.”

“Really?” The beating of her heart shook the things she was holding in her hands.

“Yes. It’s a decision I’ve been approaching for some time. As you know, Mr. Leyton is about to be taken into partnership. I have come to the conclusion that it is best on the whole to move and develop my practice along my own lines.”

So calmly handing out desolation. Here was the counterpart of the glorious weeks. Her carelessly-made living was gone; or horribly reduced. The Orlys alone would not be able to give her a hundred a year.

“When is it to be?”

“Of course, whenever I go, I shall want help.”

“*Oh ...*”

He went very busily on with his handwashing. She knew exactly how he was

smiling, and hidden in her corner smiled back, invisibly, and made unnecessary clatterings to hide the glorious embarrassment. Dismay struck across her joy, revealing the future as a grey, laborious working out of this moment's blind satisfaction. But joy had spoken first and left her no choice. Startling her with the revelation of the way the roots of her being still centred in him. Joy deeper and more powerfully stirring than the joy of the past weeks. They showed now a spread embroidery of sunlit scenes, powerless, fundamentally irrelevant, excursions off the main road of her life. Committed beyond recall, she faced the prospect of unvarying, grinding experience. The truth hidden below the surfaces of life was to yield itself to her slowly, imperceptibly, unpleasurably.

She got through the necessary things at top speed, anyhow, to avoid underlining his need of her, and ran downstairs.

A letter on the hall table, from *Hypo*....
Dear Miriam—I've headed off that affair.
You've pulled me out of it. You really have.
When can I see you? Just to talk.

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... gleam she had caught in the deep wehmütig ...
- ... of life into the humble bésogne de la pensée. ...
... of life into the humble besogne de la pensée. ...
- ... reflectively. As if it had just occurred to her. ...
... she murmured reflectively. As if it had just occurred to her. ...

- ... blue; unseeing; contradictng her
matronly ...
... blue; unseeing; contradicting her
matronly ...
- ... ironmongery in my rucksack and off
we'll ...
... ironmongery in my rucksack and off
we'll ...
- ... they become foreigners in England were
nothing. ...
... they became foreigners in England were
nothing. ...
- ... tryanny was her real apology, a curse for
the ...
... tyranny was her real apology, a curse for
the ...

[The end of *Revolving Lights: Pilgrimage*,
Volume 7 by Dorothy M. Richardson]