

DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON

PILGRIMAGE

Oberland



VIRAGO

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OBERLAND

BY
DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON

VIRAGO

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TO
J.H.B.

OBERLAND

CHAPTER I

The sight of a third porter, this time a gentle-looking man carrying a pile of pillows and coming slowly, filled her with hope. But he passed on his way as heedless as the others. It seemed incredible that not one of these men should answer. She wasted a precious moment seeing again the three brutishly preoccupied forms as figures moving in an evil dream. If only she were without the miserable handbags she might run alongside one of these villains, with a tip in an outstretched hand and buy the simple yes or no that was all she needed. But she could not bring herself to abandon her belongings to the mercy of this ill-mannered wilderness where not a soul would care if she wandered helpless until the undiscovered train had moved off into the night. She knew this would not be, and that what she was resenting was not the human selfishness about her, of which she had her own full share, but this turning of her weariness into exhaustion ruining the rest of the journey that already had held suffering enough.

There must be several minutes left of the ten the big clock had marked as she neared the platforms. Recalling its friendly face, she saw also that of the little waiter at the buffet who had tried to persuade her to take wine and murmured too late that there was no extra charge for it, very gently. Rallying the remainder of her strength she dropped her things on the platform with a decisiveness she tried just

in vain to scorn, and stood still and looked about amongst the hurrying passengers and saw, passing by and going ahead to the movement of an English stride, the familiar, blessed outlines of a Burberry. Ignoring the near train, the man was crossing a pool of lamplight and making for the dark unlikely platform over the way. She caught up her bags and followed and in a moment was at peace within the semi-darkness of the further platform amongst people she had seen this morning at Victoria, and the clangorous station was reduced to an enchanting background for confident behaviour.

All these people were serene; had come in groups, unscathed, knowing their way, knowing how to quell the bloused fiends into helpfulness. But then, also, the journey to them was uniform grey, a tiresome business to be got through; not black and sudden gold. Yet even they were relieved to find themselves safely through the tangle. They strode unnecessarily about, shouted needlessly to each other; expressing travellers' joy in the English way.

There seemed to be plenty of time, and for a while she strolled delighting in them, until the sight of an excited weary child, in a weatherproof that trailed at its heels, marching sturdily about adream with pride and joy, perfectly caricaturing the rest of the assembly, made her turn away content to see no more, to hoist up her baggage and clamber after it into cover, into the company of her own joy.

Into a compartment whose blinds were snugly drawn upon soft diffused light falling on the elegance of dove-grey repp and white lace that had been the surprise and refreshment of this morning's crowded train, but that now, evening-lit and enclosed, gave the empty carriage the air of a little salon.

Installed here, with fatigue suddenly banished and the large P.L.M. weaving, within the mesh of the lace, its

thrilling assurance of being launched on long continental distances, it was easy to forgive the coercion that had imposed the longer sea-route for its cheapness and the first-class ticket for the chance of securing solitude on the night journey.

And indeed this steaming off into the night, that just now had seemed to be the inaccessible goal and end of the journey, was only the beginning of its longest stretch; but demanding merely endurance. With hurry and uncertainty at an end, there could be nothing to compare with what lay behind; nothing that could compare with the state of being a helpless projectile that had spoiled Dieppe and made Paris a nightmare.

Yet Dieppe and Paris and the landscape in between, now that they were set, by this sudden haven, far away in the past, were already coming before her eyes transformed, lit by the joy that, hovering all the time in the background, had seen and felt. France, for whose sake at once she had longed to cease being a hurrying traveller robbed right and left of things passing too swiftly, had been seen. Within her now, an irrevocable extension of being, was France.

France that had spoken from its coast the moment she came up from the prison of the battened-down saloon; the moment before the shouting fiends charged up the gangway; spoken from the quay, from the lounging blue-bloused figures, the buildings, the way the frontage of the town met the sky and blended with the air, softly, yet clear in its softness, and with serenity that was vivacious, unlike the stolid English peace.

And later those slender trees along the high bank of a river, the way they had of sailing by, mannered, *coquettish*; awakening affection for the being of France.

And Paris, barely glimpsed and shrouded with the glare of night ... the emanation even of Paris was peace. An emanation as powerful as that of London, more lively and yet more serene. Serene where gracious buildings presided over the large flaring thoroughfares, serene even in the dreadful by-streets.

And that woman at the station. Black-robed figure, coming diagonally across the clear space yellow in gaslight against the background of barriered platforms, seeming with her swift assured gait, bust first, head reared and a little tilted back on the neck, so insolently feminine, and then, as she swept by, suddenly beautiful; from head to foot all gracefully moving rhythm. *Style*, of course, redeeming ugliness and cruelty. She was the secret of France. France concentrated.

Michael, staying in Paris, said that the French are indescribably evil and their children like monkeys. He had fled eagerly to England. But Michael's perceptions are moral. France, within his framework, falls back into shadow.

The train carrying her through beloved France and away from it to a bourne that had now ceased to be an imagined place, and become an idea, useless, to be lost on arrival as her idea of France had been lost, was so quiet amidst its loud rattling that the whole of it might be asleep. No sound came from the corridor. No one passed. There was nothing but the continuous rattling and the clatter of gear. The world deserting her just when she would have welcomed, for wordless communication of the joy of achievement, the sight and sound of human kind.

Twelve hours away, and now only a promise of daylight and of food, lay Berne. Beyond Berne, somewhere in the far future of to-morrow afternoon, the terminus, the business of finding and bargaining for a sleigh—the last effort.

A muffled figure filled the doorway, entered the carriage, deposited bags. A middle-aged Frenchman, dark, with sallow cheeks bulging above a little pointed beard. Thinking her asleep, he moved quietly, arranging his belongings with deft, maturely sociable hands. From one of them a ring gleamed in the gaslight. He showed no sign of relief in escaping into silence, no sign of being alone. Conversation radiated from him. Where, on the train, could he have been so recently talking that at this moment he was almost making remarks into his bag?

She closed her eyes, listening to his sounds that sent to a distance the sounds of the train. He had driven away also the outer spaces. The grey and white interior spoke no longer of the strange wide distances of France. He was France, at home in a railway carriage, preparing to sleep until, at the end of a definite short space of hours, the Swiss dawn appeared at the windows. Before he came the night had stretched ahead, timeless.

A moment's stillness, and then a sound like the pumping of nitrous-oxide into a bag. She opened her eyes upon him seated opposite with cheeks distended and eyes strained wide above indeed a bag, held to his lips and limply flopping. Bracing herself to the presence either of a lunatic or a pitiful invalid believing himself unobserved, she watched while slowly the bag swelled up and took, obedient to an effort that seemed about to make his eyeballs start from his head, the shape of a cushion, circular about a flattened centre. Setting it down in the corner corresponding to that where lay her own head, he took off his boots, pulled on slippers and pattered out into the corridor where he became audible struggling with a near ventilator that presently gave and clattered home. Tiptoeing back into the carriage, where

already it seemed that the air grew close, he stood under the light, peering upwards with raised arm. A gentle click, and two little veils slid down over the globe and met, leaving the light quenched to a soft glimmer: beautiful, shrouding hard outlines, keeping watch through the night, speaking of night and travel, yet promising day and the end of travel.

But he had not done. He was battling now with the sliding door. It was closing, closed, and the carriage converted into a box almost in darkness and suddenly improper. With a groaning sigh he flung himself down and drew his rug to the margin of the pale disk that was his face and that turned sharply as she rose and passed it to reach the door, and still showed, when the corridor light flowed in through the opened door, a perfect astonishment. His inactivity, while she struggled out with her baggage into the inhospitable corridor, checked the words with which she would have explained her inability to remain sealed for the night in a small box. As she pushed the door to, she thought she heard a sound, a sniggering expletive, mirth at the spectacle of British prudery.

She was alone in the corridor of the sleeping train, in a cold air that reeked of rusting metal and resounded with the clangour of machinery. Exploring in both directions, she found no sign of an attendant, nothing but closely shrouded carriages telling of travellers outstretched and slumbering. Into either of these she felt it impossible to break. There was nothing for it but to abandon the hope of a night's rest and drop to a class whose passengers would be numerous and seated. The train had gathered a speed that flung her from side to side as she went. In two journeys she got her belongings across the metal bridge that swayed above the couplings, and arrived with bruised arms and shoulders in

another length of corridor, a duplicate in noise and cold emptiness of the one she had left. Everywhere shrouded carriages. But something had changed, there was something even in the pitiless clangour that seemed to announce a change of class.

The door she pushed open revealed huddled shapes whose dim faces, propped this way and that, were all relaxed in slumber. There was no visible vacant place but, as she hesitated within the emerging reek, a form stirred and sat forward as if to inquire; and when she struggled in with her bags and her apology the carriage came to life in heavily draped movement.

She was seated, shivering in a fog of smells, but at rest, escaped from nightmare voyaging amongst swaying shadows. The familiar world was about her again and she sat blessing the human kindness of these sleeping forms, blessing the man who had first moved, even though his rousing had proved to be anxiety about the open door which, the moment she was inside, he had closed with the gusty blowings of one who takes refuge from a blizzard.

But the sense of home-coming began presently to fade under the pressure of suffering that promised only to increase. She had long ceased to wonder what made it possible for these people to add wraps and rugs to the thick layers of the stifling atmosphere and remain serene. The effort was no longer possible that had carried her through appearances into a sense of the reality beneath. She saw them now as repellent mysteries, pitiless aliens dowered with an unfathomable faculty for dispensing with air. With each breath the smells that had greeted her, no longer separately apparent, advanced in waves whose predominant flavour was the odour of burnt rubber rising from the grating that ran

along the middle of the floor and seemed to sear the soles of her feet. Getting beneath them her rolled rug she abandoned all but the sense of survival and sank into herself, into a coma in which everything but the green-veiled oscillating light was motionless forever. Forever the night would go on and her head turn now this way now that against the harsh upholstery.

The train was slowing, stopping. Its rumbling clatter subsided to a prolonged squeak that ended on a stillness within which sounded, one against the other, the rapid ticking of a watch and a steady rhythmic snore. No one stirred, and for a moment there was nothing but these sounds to witness that life went on. Then faintly, and as if from very far away, she heard the metallic clangours of a large high station and amidst them a thin clarion voice singing out an indistinguishable name. Some large sleeping provincial town signalling its importance; a milestone, marking off hours passed through that need not be braved again. Yet when the train moved on it seemed impossible even to imagine the ending of the night. She had no idea of how long she had sat hemmed and suffering, with nothing in her mind but snatches of song that would not be dismissed, with aching brow and burning eyeballs and a ceaselessly on-coming stupor that would not turn to sleep. And at the next stop, with its echoing clangour and faint clarion voices, she no longer desired somehow to get across the encumbered carriage and taste from a corridor window the sweet fresh air of the railway station so freely breathed by those who were crying in the night.

A numbness had crept into the movement of the train, as though, wearying, it had ceased to clatter and were dropping into a doze. It was moving so quietly that the ticking of the watch again became audible. The wheels under the carriage seemed to be muffled and to labour, pushing heavily forward.... *Snow*. The journey across France ending on the heights along its eastern edge. Her drugged senses awoke bemoaning Paris, gleaming now out of reach far away in the north, challenging with the memory of its glimpsed beauty whatever loveliness might be approaching through the night.

Again outside the stopping train a far-off voice, but this time a jocund sound, ringing echoless in open air. In a moment through a lifted window it became a rousing summons. Blinds went up and, on the huddled forms emerging serene and bright-eyed from their hibernation, a blueish light came in. The opened door admitted crisp sounds close at hand and air, advancing up the carriage.

Upon the platform the air was motionless and yet, walked through, an intensity of movement—movement upon her face of millions of infinitesimal needles, attacking. Mountain air ‘like wine,’ but this effervescence was solid, holding one up, feeding every nerve.

A little way down the platform she came upon the luggage, a few trunks set side by side on a counter, and saw at once that her portmanteau was not there. Anxiety dogging her steps. But this air, that reached, it seemed, to her very spirit, would not let her feel anxious.

The movements of the people leaving the train were leisurely, promising a long wait. Most of the passengers were

the English set free, strolling happily about in fur-coats and creased Burberrys. English voices took possession of the air. Filled it with the sense of the incorrigible English confidence. And upon a table beyond the counter stood rows and rows of steaming cups. Coffee. Café, mon Dieu! Offered casually, the normal beverage of these happy continentals.

The only visible official stood at ease beyond the table answering questions, making no move towards the ranged luggage. He looked very mild, had a little blue-black beard. She thought of long-forgotten Emmerich, the heavy responsible pimpled face of the German official who plunged great hands in amongst her belongings. Perhaps the customs' officers were yet to appear.

Fortified by coffee, she strolled up and made her inquiry in French, but carefully in the slipshod English manner. For a moment her demand seemed to embarrass him. Then, very politely:

'Vous arrivez, madame?'

'De Londres.'

'Et vous allez?'

'À Oberland.'

'Vous n'avez qu'à monter dans le train,' and hospitably he indicated the train that stood now emptied, and breathing through its open doors. Walking on down the platform she caught, through a door ajar in the background, a glimpse of a truckle bed with coverings thrown back. Here, as they laboured forward through the darkness, the douanier had been sleeping, his station ready-staged for their coming, a farcical half-dozen trunks laid out to represent the belongings of the trainful of passengers. Appearances thus kept up, he was enjoying his role of pleasant host. Tant mieux, tant very

much mieux. One could enjoy the fun of being let out into the night.

The solid air began to be intensely cold. But in its cold there was no bitterness and it attained only her face, whose shape it seemed to change. And all about the station were steep walls of starless darkness and overhead in a blue-black sky, stars oddly small and numerous; very sharp and near.

When the train moved on, night settled down once more. Once more there was dim gaslight and jolting shadows. But the air was clearer and only two passengers remained, two women, each in her corner and each in a heavy black cloak. Strangers to each other, with the length of the carriage between them, yet alike, indistinguishable; above each cloak a plump middle-aged face not long emerged from sleep: sheened with the sleep that had left the oily, glinting brown eyes. Presently they began to speak, with the freemasonry of women unobserved, socially off duty. Their voices frugal, dull and flat; the voices of those who have forgotten even the desire to find sympathy, to find anything turned their way with an offering.

They reached details. One of them was on her way home to a place with a tripping gentle name, a fairy keep agleam on a lakeside amidst mountains. To her it was dailiness, life as now she knew it, a hemmed-in loneliness. Visitors came from afar. Found it full of poetry. Saw her perhaps as a part of it, a figure of romance.

When their patient voices ceased they were ghosts. Not even ghosts, for they seemed uncreated, seemed never to have lived and yet to preside over life, fixed in their places, an inexorable commentary. Each sat staring before her into space, patient and isolated, undisguised isolation. To imagine them alert and busied with their families about them made

them no less sad. Immovable at the centre of their lives was loneliness, its plaints silenced, its source forgotten or unknown.

Of what use traveller's joy? Frivolous, unfounded, dependent altogether on oblivions.

One of them was rummaging in a heavy sack made of black twill and corded at the neck. Toys, she said, were there — '*pour mes p'tits enfants.*'

'*Ça porte beaucoup de soins, les enfants,*' said the other, and compressed dry lips. The first agreed and they sat back, each in her corner, fallen into silence. Children, to them, seemed to be not persons but a material, an unvarying substance wearily known to them both and to be handled in that deft adjusting way of the French. Satisfied with this mutual judgment on life, made in camera, they relapsed into contemplation, leaving the air weighted with their shared, secretly scornful, secretly impatient resignation.

Yet they were fortunate. Laden with wealth they did not count. It spoke in their complacency. Aspiration asleep. They looked for joy in the wrong place. In this they were humanity, blindly pursuing its way. Their pallid plump faces, so salient, could smile impersonally. Their heads were well-poised above shapely, subdued bodies.

Now that it was empty and the blinds drawn up, the carriage seemed all window, letting in the Swiss morning that was mist opening here and there upon snow still greyed by dawn. Through the one she had just pushed up came life, smoothing

away the traces of the night. She lay back in her corner and heard with closed eyes the steady voice of the train. The rattle and clatter of its night-long rush through France seemed to be checked by a sense of achievement, as if now it took its ease, delighting in the coming of day, in the presence of this Switzerland for whose features it was watching through the mist.

Incredible that in this same carriage where now she was at peace in morning light she had sat through a flaming darkness, penned and enduring. Lifting weary eyes she boldly surveyed it, saw the soilure and shabbiness the gaslight had screened, saw a friend, grimed with beneficent toil, and turned once more blissfully towards the window and its view of thin mist and dawn-greyled snowfields.

The leap of recognition, unknowing between the mountains and herself which was which, made the first sight of them—smooth snow and crinkled rock in unheard-of unimagined tawny light—seem, even at the moment of seeing, already long ago.

They knew, they smiled joyfully at the glad shock they were, sideways gigantically advancing while she passed as over a bridge across which presently there would be no return, seeing and unseeing, seeing again with the first keen vision.

They closed in upon the train, summitless, their bases gliding by, a ceaseless tawny cliff throwing its light into the carriage, almost within touch; receding, making space at its

side for sudden blue water, a river accompanying, giving them gentleness who were its mighty edge; broadening, broadening, becoming a wide lake, a stretch of smooth peerless blue with mountains reduced and distant upon its hither side. With the sideways climbing of the train the lake dropped away, down and down until presently she stood up to see it below in the distance, a blue pool amidst its encirclement of mountain and of sky: a picture sliding away, soundlessly, hopelessly demanding its perfect word.

'Je suis anglaise,' she murmured as the window came down into place.

'Je le crois, madame. Mais comment-voulez-vous-mon-dieu-vous-autres-anglais-qu'on-chauffe-les-coupés?'

She was left to pictures framed and glazed.

Berne was a snowstorm blotting out everything but small white green-shuttered houses standing at angles about the open space between the station and the little restaurant across the way, their strangeness veiled by falling flakes, flakes falling fast on freshly fallen snow that was pitted with large deep-sunken foot-prints. The electric air of dawn had softened, and as she plunged, following the strides of a row of foot-prints, across to her refuge, it wrapped her about, a pleasant enlivening density, warmed by the snow. Monstrous

snowstorm, adventure, and an excuse for shirking the walk to the Bridge and its view of the Bernese heights. She was not ready for heights. This little secret tour, restricted to getting from train to breakfast and back again to the train, gave her, with its charm of familiar activity in a strange place, a sharp first sense of Switzerland that in obediently following the dictated programme she would have missed. But coming forth, strengthened, once more into the snow she regretted the low walking-shoes that prevented the following up of her glad meeting with the forgotten details of the continental breakfast, its tender-crust rolls, the small oblongs of unglistering sugar that sweetened the life-giving coffee, by an exploration of the nearer streets.

Presently their talk fell away and the journeying cast again its full spell. Almost soundlessly the train was labouring along beside a ridge that seemed to be the silent top of the world gliding by, its narrow strip of grey snow-thick sky pierced by the tops of the crooked stakes that were a fence submerged. From time to time the faint clear sound of a bell, ting-ting, and a neat toy station slid by, half buried in snow.

‘I don’t dislike those kind of breakfasts myself,’ she said and turned her face to the window. Her well-cut lips had closed unpressing, flowerlike. Both the girls had the slender delicate fragility of flowers. And strength. Refined and gentle, above

a strength of which they were unaware. They were immensely strong or they would not appear undisturbed by their long journeying, would not look so exactly as if they were returning home in an omnibus from an afternoon's shopping in their own Croydon.

They had come so far together that it would seem churlish, with the little terminus welcoming the whole party, to turn away from them. And she liked them, was attached to them as fellow adventurers, fellow survivors of the journey. The falling into the trap of travellers' freemasonry was inevitable: a fatal desire to know the whence and the whither and, before you are aware, you have pooled your enterprise and the new reality is at a distance. But so far it had not come to that. There were no adieux. They had melted away, they and their things, lost in the open while she, forgetful of everything but the blessed cessation, had got herself out of the train.

The station was in a wilderness. High surrounding mountains making it seem that their half-day's going up and still up had brought them out upon a modest lowland. There was no sign from where she stood of any upward track. Sheds, dumped upon a waste of snow beyond which mountains filled the sky and barred the way.

Fierce-looking men in blue gaberdines and slouch hats, lounging about. One of these must be attacked and bargained with for a sleigh. But there were no sleighs to be seen, nothing at all resembling a vehicle, unless indeed one braved the heights in one of those rough shallow frameworks on

runners, some piled with hay and some with peeled yellow timbers, neatly lashed. Perhaps a sleigh should be ordered in advance? Perhaps here she met disaster....

The man knew her requirements before she spoke and was all hot-eyed eagerness, yet off-hand. Brutish, yet making her phrases, that a London cabby would have received with deference, sound discourteous. In his queer German he agreed to the smaller sum and turned away to expectorate.

The large barn-like restaurant was empty save for a group of people at the far end, forgotten again and again as she sat too happy to swoop the immense distance between herself and anything but the warm brownness of the interior and its strange quality, its intensity of welcoming shelter—sharp contrast with the bleak surrounding snow. Switzerland was here, already surrounding and protecting with an easy practised hand. And there was a generous savouriness.... She could not recall any lunching on an English journey affording this careless completeness of comfort.

Incompletely sharing these appreciations, her tired and fevered body cowered within the folds of the beneficent fur-coat seeking a somnolence that refused to possess it. Fever kept her mind alert, but circling at a great pace round and round amidst reiterated assertions. Turn and turn about they presented themselves, were flung aside in favour of what waited beyond, and again thrust themselves forward, as if determined, so emphatic they were, not only to share but to steer her adventure. And away behind them, standing still and now forever accessible, were the worlds she had passed through since the sleet drove in her face at Newhaven. And ahead unknown Oberland, summoning her up amongst its peaks.

Hovering vehement above them all, hung the cloud of her pity for those who had never bathed in strangeness—and its dark lining, the selfish congratulation that reminded her how at the beginning of her life, in the face of obstructions, she had so bathed and now under kindly compulsion was again bathing. And again alone. Loneliness, that had long gone from her life, had come back for this sudden voyaging to be her best companion, to shelter strangeness that can be known only in solitude.

In a swift glimpse, caught through the mesh woven by the obstinate circlings of her consciousness, she saw her time in Germany, how perfect in pain and joy, how left complete and bright had been that piece of her life. And in Belgium—in spite of the large party. Yet even the party, though they had taken the edge from many things, had now become a rich part of the whole. But the things that came back most sharply had been seen in solitude: in those times of going out alone on small commissions, the way the long vista of boulevard seemed to sing for joy, the sharp turn, the clean pavé and neat bright little shops; the charcuterie just round the corner, the old pharmacien who had understood and quickly and gravely chloroformed the kitten quite dead; the long walk through the grilling lively Brussels streets to get the circular tickets—little shadow over it of pain at the thought of the frightened man who believed it sinful to go to mass and saw the dull little English Church as light in a pagan darkness; the afternoon alone in the polished old salon while the others were packing for the Ardennes tour, just before the great thunderstorm, bright darkness making everything gleam, the candles melting in the heavy heat, drooping from their sconces, white, and gracious in their oddity, against the dark panelling: rich ancient gloom and gleam and the certainty of

the good of mass, of the way, so welcome and so right as an interval in living, it stayed the talkative brain and made the soul sure of itself. That moment in Bruges—after the wrangling at the station, after not wanting to go deliberately to see the Belfry, after feeling forever blank in just this place that was fulfilling all the so different other places, showing itself to be their centre and secret, while aunt Bella bought the prawns and we all stood fuming in the sweltering heat—of being suddenly struck alive, drawn running away from them all down the little brown street—the Belfry and its shadow, all its might and sweetness and surroundedness, safe, before they all came up with their voices and their books.

And oh! that first glimpse that had begun it all, of Brussels in the twilight from the landing window; old peaked houses, grouped irregularly and rising out of greenery, gothic, bringing happy nostalgia. Gothic effects bring nostalgia, have a deep recognizable quality of life. A gothic house is a person, a square house is a thing....

In silence and alone; yet most people prefer to see everything in groups, collectively. They never lose themselves in strangeness and wake changed.

That man is cheerfully bearing burdens. Usually in a party there is one who *is* alone. Harassed, yet quietly seeing.

He was smiling, the smile of an old friend. With a sharp effort she pushed her way through, wondering how long she had sat staring at them, to recognition of the Croydon party. Who else indeed could it be? She gathered herself together and instantly saw in the hidden future not the sunlit mountains of her desire but, for the first time, the people already ensconced at the Alpenstock, demanding awareness and at least the semblance of interest. Sports-people, not only

to the manner born—that, though they would not know it, was a tie, a home-tie pulling at her heart—but to the manner dressed, making one feel not merely inadequate but improperly hard-up. But since she was to rest on a balcony? And there was the borrowed fur-coat ... and the blue gown.

The words sung out by the Croydon father were lost amongst their echoes in the rafters. She heard only the English voice come, as she had come, so far and so laboriously. Her gladly answering words were drowned by the sudden jingling of sleigh-bells at the door near by.

Behind the sturdy horse, whose head-tossings caused the silvery clash of bells, was the sleigh of *The Polish Jew*, brought out of the darkness at the back of the stage and brightly coloured: upon a background of pillar-box red, flourishing gilt scrolls surrounded little landscape scenes painted upon its sides in brilliant deep tones that seemed to spread a warmth and call attention to the warmth within the little carriage sitting compact and low on its runners and billowing with a large fur rug.

As unexpected as the luxurious vehicle was the changed aspect of the driver. Still wearing smock and slouch hat he had now an air of gravity, the air of a young student of theology. And on his face, as he put her into the sleigh, a look of patient responsibility. He packed and arranged with the manner of one handling valuables, silently; the Swiss manner, perhaps, of treating the English, acquired and handed down through long experience of the lavish generosity of these travellers from whom it was useless to

expect an intelligible word. But there was contempt too; deep-rooted, patient contempt.

This was luxury. There was warmth under her feet, fur lining upon the back of the seat reinforced by the thickness of the fur-coat, and all about her the immense fur rug. There was nothing to fear from the air that presently would be in movement, driving by and growing colder as the sleigh went up into the unknown heights. Away ahead, the Croydon party made a compact black mass between the two horses of their larger sleigh and the luggage, standing out behind in unwieldy cubes just above the snow. Their driver was preparing to start. On all the upward way they would be visible ahead, stealing its mystery, heralding the hotel at the end.

They were off, gliding swiftly over the snow, gay voices mingling with the sound of bells, silvery crashings going to the rhythm of a soundless trit-trot. Every moment her own horse threw up a spray of tinkles, promising the fairy crashing that would ring upon the air against the one now rapidly receding. The mountains frowning under the grey sky and the snowfields beyond the flattened expanse round the station came to life listening to the confidently receding bells.

The Croydon party disappeared round a bend and again there was silence and a mighty inattention. But her man, come round from lashing on her luggage, was getting into his seat just as he was, coatless and gathering up the reins with bare hands.

‘Euh!’

The small sound, like a word spoken *sotto voce* to a neighbour, barely broke the stillness, but the sleigh leapt to the pull of the horse, and glided smoothly off. Its movement

was pure enchantment. No driving on earth could compare to this skimming along on hard snow to the note of the bells that was higher than that of those gone on ahead and seemed to challenge them with an overtaking eagerness. Gay and silvery sweet, it seemed to make a sunlight within the sunless air and to call up to the crinkled tops of the mountains that were now so magnificently in movement.

‘Euh-euh!’

On they swept through the solidly impinging air. Again the million needles attacking. In a moment they were round the bend and in sight of the large sleigh, a moving patch upon the rising road.

‘Euh-euh-euh,’ urged the driver laconically, and the little sleigh flew rocking up the slight incline. They were overtaking. The heavier note of the bells ahead joined its slower rhythm to their swift light jinglings. The dark mass of the Croydon party showed four white faces turned to watch.

‘You are well off with your fur-coat,’ cried the father as her sleigh skimmed by. They had looked a little crouched and enduring. Not knowing the cold she had endured in the past, cold that lay ahead to be endured again, in winters set in a row.

Ringling in her head as she sped upwards along the road narrowing and flanked by massive slopes whose summits had drawn too near to be seen, were the shouted remarks exchanged by the drivers. They had fallen resonantly upon the air and opened within it a vision of the sunlit heights known to these men with the rich deep voices. But there was the hotel....

After all, no one was to witness her apprenticeship. And to get up within sight of the summits was worth much suffering. Suffering that would be forgotten. And if these were

Oberland men, then there was to be *ski-running* to-morrow. Si-renna, what else could that mean? Patois, rich and soft. Doomed to die. Other words gathered unawares on the way came and placed themselves beside those ringing in her ears. Terminations, turns of sound, upon a new quality of voice. Strong and deep and ringing with a wisdom that brought her a sense of helpless ignorance. The helpless ignorance of town culture.

The thin, penetrating mist promised increasing cold. The driver flung on a cloak, secured at the neck but falling open across his chest and leaving exposed his thinly clad arms and bare hands.

She pulled high the collar of her fur-coat, rimy now at its edges, and her chin ceased to ache and only her eyes and cheek-bones felt the thin icy attacking mist that had appeared so suddenly. The cold of a few moments ago, numbing her face, had brought a hint of how one might freeze quietly to death, numbed and as if warmed by an intensity of cold; and that out amongst the mountains it would not be terrible. But this raw mist bringing pain in every bone it touched would send one aching to one's death, crushed to death by a biting increasing pain.

She felt elaborately warm, not caring even now how long might go on this swift progress along a track that still wound through corridors of mountains and still found mountains rising ahead. But night would come, and the great shapes all

about her would be wrapped away until they were a darkness in the sky.

If this greying light were the fall of day then certainly the cold would increase. She tried to reckon how far she had travelled eastwards, by how much earlier the sun would set. But south, too, she had come....

The mist was breaking, being broken from above. It dawned upon her that they had been passing impossibly through clouds and were now reaching their fringe. Colour was coming from above, was already here in dark brilliance, thundery. Turning to look down the track she saw distance, cloud masses, light-soaked and gleaming.

And now from just ahead, high in the mist, a sunlit peak looked down.

Long after she had sat erect from her warm ensconcement, the sunlit mountain corridors still seemed to be saying watch, see, if you can believe it, what we can do. And all the time it seemed that they must open out and leave her upon the hither side of enchantment, and still they turned and brought fresh vistas. Sungilt masses beetling variously up into pinnacles that truly cut the sky, high up beyond their high-clambering pinewoods, where their snow was broken by patches of tawny crag. She still longed to glide forever onwards through this gladness of light.

But the bright gold was withdrawing. Presently it stood only upon the higher ridges. The colour was going and the angular shadows, leaving a bleakness of white, leaving the mountains higher in their whiteness. The highest sloped more swiftly than the others from its lower mass and ended in a

long cone of purest white with a flattened top sharply aslant against the deepening blue; as if walking up it. It held her eyes, its solid thickness of snow, the way from its blunted tower it came broadening down unbroken by crag, radiant white until, far down, its pinewoods made a gentleness about its base. Up there on the quiet of its topmost angle it seemed there must be someone, minutely rejoicing in its line along the sky.

A turn brought peaks whose gold had turned to rose. She had not eyes enough for seeing. Seeing was not enough. There was sound, if only one could hear it, in this still, signalling light.

The last of it was ruby gathered departing upon the topmost crags, seeming, the moment before it left them, to be deeply wrought into the crinkled rock.

At a sharp bend, the face of the sideways-lounging driver came into sight, expressionless.

‘*Schön, die letzte Glüh,*’ he said quietly.

When she had pronounced her ‘*Wunderschön,*’ she sat back released from intentness, seeing the scene as one who saw it daily; and noticed then that the colour ebbed from the mountains had melted into the sky. It was this marvel of colour, turning the sky to molten rainbow, that the driver had meant as well as the rubied ridges that had kept the sky forgotten.

Just above a collar of snow, that dipped steeply between the peaks it linked, the sky was a soft greenish purple paling upwards from mauve-green to green whose edges melted imperceptibly into the deepening blue. In a moment they were turned towards the opposite sky, bold in smoky russet rising to amber and to saffron-rose expanding upwards; a high radiant background for its mountain, spread like a

banner, not pressed dense and close with deeps strangely moving, like the little sky above the collar.

The mountain lights were happiness possessed, sure of recurrence. But these skies, never to return, begged for remembrance.

The dry cold deepened, bringing sleep. Drunk, she felt now, with sleep; dizzy with gazing, and still there was no sign of the end. They were climbing a narrow track between a smooth high drift, a greying wall of snow, and a precipice sharply falling.

An opening; the floor of a wide valley. Mountains hemming it, exposed from base to summit, moving by as the sleigh sped along the level to where a fenced road led upwards. Up this steep road they went in a slow zigzag that brought the mountains across the way now right now left, and a glimpse ahead, against the sky of a village, angles and peaks of low buildings sharply etched, quenched by snow, crushed between snow and snow, and in their midst the high snow-shrouded cone of a little church; Swiss village, lost in wastes of snow.

At a tremendous pace they jingled along a narrow street of shops and chalets. The street presently opened to a circle about the little church and narrowed again and ended, showing beyond, as the sleigh pulled up at the steps of a portico, rising ground and the beginning of pinewoods.

CHAPTER II

She followed the little servant, who had darted forth to seize her baggage, into a small lounge whose baking warmth recalled the worst of the train journey; seeming—though, since still one breathed, air was there—like an over-heated vacuum.

The brisk little maid, untroubled, was already at the top of a short flight of wide red-carpeted stairs, and making impatient rallying sounds—like one recalling a straying dog. Miriam went gladly to the promise of the upper air. But in going upwards there was no relief.

Glancing, as she passed at the turn of the stairs, at a figure standing in a darkness made by the twilight in the angle of the wall, she found the proprietress receiving her; a thick rigid figure in a clumsy black dress, silent, and with deep-set glinting eyes, hostile and suspicious, stirring a memory of other eyes gazing out like this upon the world, of peasant women at cottage doors in German villages, peering out with evil eyes, but from worn and kindly faces. There was nothing kindly about this woman, and her commonness was almost startling, dreary and meagre and seeming to be of the spirit.

She blamed for the unmitigated impression the fatigue she was silently pleading whilst she searched for the mislaid German phrases in which to explain that she had chosen the cheaper room. She found only the woman's name: Knigge.

This was Frau Knigge, at once seeming more human, and obviously waiting for her to speak.

Suddenly, and still unbending from her rigid pose, she made statements in slow rasping English and a flat voice, that came unwillingly and told of vanished interest in life. Life, as she spoke, looked terrible that could make a being so crafty and so cold, that could show to any one on earth as it showed to this woman.

Admitting her identity, seeing herself as she was being seen, Miriam begged for her room, hurrying through her words to hide the thoughts that still they seemed to reveal, and that were changing, as she heard the sound of her own voice, dreadfully, not to consideration for one whose lot had perhaps been too hard to bear, but to a sudden resentment of parleying, in her character as Roman citizen, with this peasant whose remoteness of being was so embarrassing her.

The woman's face lit up with an answering resentment and a mocking contempt for her fluent German. Too late she realized that Roman citizens do not speak German. But the details were settled, the interview was at an end, and the woman's annoyance due perhaps only to the choice of the cheaper room. When she turned to shout instructions to the maid, she became humanity, in movement, moving in twilight that for her too was going on its way towards the light of to-morrow.

When the door was at last blessedly closed upon the narrow room whose first statements miscarried, lost in the discovery that even up here there was no change in the baked dry air, she made for the cool light of the end window but found in its neighbourhood not only no lessening but an increase of the oppressive warmth.

The window was a door giving on to a little balcony whose wooden paling hid the floor of the valley and the bases of the great mountains across the way. The mountains were now bleak white, patched and streaked with black, and as she stood still, gazing at them set there arrested and motionless and holding before her eyes an unthinkable grey bitterness of cold, she found a new quality in her fast closed windows and the exaggerated warmth. Though still oppressive they were triumphant also, speaking a knowledge and a defiance of the uttermost possibilities of cold.

Cold was banished, by day and by night. For a fortnight, taken from the rawest depths of the London winter, there would be no waste of life in mere endurance.

She discovered the source of the stable warmth in an unsightly row of pipes at the side of the large window, bent over like hairpins and scorching to the touch. The concentrated heat revived her weary nerves. At the end of the coil there was a regulator. Turning it she found the heat of the pipes diminish and hurriedly reversed the movement and glanced out at the frozen world and loved the staunch metallic warmth and the flavour of timber added to it in this room whose walls and furniture were all of naked wood.

Turning to it in greeting she found it seem less small. It was small, but made spacious by light. Light came from a second window that was now calling—a small square beside the bed with the high astonishing smooth billow of covering oddly encased in thin sprigged cotton—offering mountains not yet seen.

The way to it was endless across the short room from whose four quarters there streamed, as she moved, a joy so deep that she brought up opposite the window as if on another day of life, and glanced out carelessly at a distant

group of pinnacles darkening in a twilight that was not grey but lit wanly in its fading, by snow.

The little servant came in with the promised tea and made, as she set it upon the little table with the red and white check cover of remembered German cafés, bent over it in her short-skirted check dress and squab of sleek flaxen hair, a picture altogether German. She answered questions gravely, responsibility speaking even in the smile that shone from her plump toil-sheened young face, telling the story of how she and her like, permanently toiling, were the price of happiness for visitors. But this she did not know. She was happy. Liked being busy and smiling and being smiled at and shutting the door very carefully.

Some movements of hers had set swinging an electric bulb hanging by a cord above the little table. Over the head of the bed there was another. Light and warmth in profusion—in a cheap room in a modest hotel.

Switching on the light that concentrated on the table and its loaded little tray and transformed the room to a sitting-room, 'I'm in Switzerland,' she said aloud to the flowered earthenware and bright nickel, and sat down to revel in freedom and renewal and at once got up again realizing that hurry had gone from her days, and flung off her blouse and found hot water set waiting on the washstand and was presently at the table in *négligé* and again ecstatically telling it her news.

The familiar sound of tea pouring into a cup heightened the surrounding strangeness. In the stillness of the room it was like a voice announcing her installation, and immediately from downstairs there came as if in answer the sound of a piano, crisply and gently touched, seeming not so much to break the stillness as to reveal what lay within it.

She set down her teapot and listened, and for a moment could have believed that the theme was playing itself only in her mind, that it had come back to her because once again she was within the strange happiness of being abroad. Through all the years she had tried in vain to recall it, and now it came, to welcome her, piling joy on joy, setting its seal upon the days ahead and taking her back to her Germany where life had been lived to music that had flowed over its miseries and made its happinesses hardly to be borne.

For an instant she was back in it, passing swiftly from scene to scene of the months in Waldstrasse and coming to rest in a summer's evening: warm light upon the garden, twilight in the saal. Leaving it, she turned to the other scenes, freshly revived, faithfully fulfilling their remembered promise to endure in her for ever, but each one, as she paused in it, changed to the summer's evening she had watched from the darkening saal, the light upon the little high-walled garden, making space and distance with the different ways it fell on trees and grass and clustering shrubs, falling full on the hushed group of girls turned towards it with Fräulein Pfaff in their midst disarmed to equality by the surrounding beauty, making a little darkness in the summer-house where Solomon shone in her white dress. And going back to it now it seemed as though some part of her must have lived continuously there, so that she was everywhere at once, in saal and garden and summer-house and out, beyond the enclosing walls, in the light along the spacious forbidden streets.

She relived the first moment of knowing gladly and without feeling of disloyalty how far a Sommerabend outdoes a summer's evening, how the evening beauty was intensified by the deeps of poetry in the Germans all about

her, and remembered her fear lest one of the English should sound an English voice and break the spell. And how presently Clara Bergmann, unasked, had retreated into the shadowy saal and played this ballade and in just this way, the way of slipping it into the stillness.

‘Man soll sich des Lebens freuen, im Berg und Thal. In so was kann sich ein’ Engländerin nie hineinleben.’

Perhaps not, but in that small group of English there had been two who would in spite of homesickness have given anything just to go on, on any terms, existing in Germany.

It is their joy; the joyful rich depth of life in them.

And this ballade was joy. Eternal Sommerabend; and now, to-morrow’s Swiss sunlight. Someone there was downstairs to whom it was a known and cherished thing, who was perhaps wise about it, wise in music and able to place it in relation to other compositions.

Its charm she now saw, coming to it afresh and with a deepened recognition, lay partly in the way it opened: not beginning, but continuing something gone before. It was a shape of tones caught from a pattern woven continuously and drawn, with its rhythm ready set, gleaming into sight. The way of the best nocturnes. But with nothing of their pensiveness. It danced in the sky and tiptoed back to earth down the group of little chords that filled the pause, again sprang forth and up and came wreathing down to touch deep lower tones who flung it to and fro. Up again until once more upon down-stepping chords it came into the rhythm of its dance.

It was being played from memory, imperfectly, by someone who had the whole clear within him and, in slowing up for the complicated passages, never stumbled or lost the rhythm or ceased to listen. Someone choosing just this

fragment of all the music in the world to express his state: joy in being up here in snow and sunlight.

When the gown was on, the creasing was more evident; all but the enlivening strange harmony of embroidered blues and greens and mauves was a criss-cross of sharp lines and shadows.

For the second time the long loud buzzing of the downstairs bell vibrated its summons through the house.

Standing once more before the little mirror that reflected only her head and shoulders she re-created the gown in its perfection of cut, the soft depths of its material that hung and took the light so beautifully.

‘Your first Switzerland must be good. I want your first Switzerland to be good.’ And then, in place of illuminating hints, that little diagram on the table: of life as a zigzag. Saddening. Perhaps he was right. Then, since the beginning had been so good, all a sharp zig, what now waited downstairs, heralded by the creased dress, was a zag, equally sharp.

The dining-room, low-ceiled and oblong, was large and seemed almost empty. Small tables set away towards a window on the right and only one of them occupied, left clear the large space of floor between the door at which she had come in and a table, filling the length of the far side of the room where beside a gap in the row of diners a servant stood turned towards her with outstretched indicating hand.

No one but the servant had noticed her entry. Voices were sounding, smooth easy tones leaving the air composed, as she slipped into her place in a light that beside the unscreened glare upstairs was mellow, subdued by shades. The voices were a man's across the way—light and kindly, 'varsity, the smiling tone of one who is amiable even in disagreement—and that of the woman on her left, a subdued deep bass. Other voices dropped in, as suave and easy, and clipping and slurring their words in the same way; but rather less poised.

The tone of these people was balm. Sitting with eyes cast down, aware only of the subdued golden light, she recalled her fleeting glimpse of them as she had crossed the room, English in daily evening dress, and was carried back to the little world of Newlands where first she had daily shared the evening festival of diners dressed and suave about a table free of dishes, set with flowers and elegancies beneath a clear and softly shaded light: the world she had sworn never to leave. She remembered a summer morning, the brightness of the light over her breakfast tray and its unopened letters and her vow to remain always surrounded by beauty, always with flowers and fine fabrics, and space and a fresh clean air close about her, playing their part that was so powerful.

And this little wooden Swiss hotel with its baked air and philistine fittings was to provide, thrown in with Switzerland, more than a continuation of Newlands—Newlands seen afresh with experienced eyes.

The clipped, slurred words had no longer the charm of a foreign tongue. Though still they rang upon the air the preoccupations of the man at the wheel: the sound of 'The Services,' adapted. But clustered in this small space they seemed to be bringing with them another account of their

origin, to be showing how they might come about of themselves and vary from group to group, from person to person—with one aim: to avoid disturbing the repose of the features. Expression might be animated or inanimate, but features must remain undisturbed.

Then there is no place for clearly enunciated speech, apart from oratory; platform and pulpit. Anywhere else it is bad form. Bad fawm.

She felt she knew now why perfect speech, delightful in itself, always seemed insincere. Why women with clear musical voices, undulating, and clean enunciation, are always cats; and the corresponding men, ingratiating and charming at first, turn out sooner or later to be charlatans.

The nicest people have bad handwriting and bad delivery.

But all this applied only to English, to Germanics; that was a queer exciting thing, that only these languages had the quality of aggressive disturbance of the speaking face: chin-jerking vowels and aspirates, throat-swelling gutturals ... force and strength and richness, qualities innumerable and more various than in any other language.

Quelling an impulse to gaze at the speakers lit by discovery, she gazed instead at imagined faces, representative Englishmen, with eyes and brows serene above rapid slipshod speech.

Here, too, of course, was the explanation of the other spontaneous forms of garbling, the extraordinary pulpit speech of self-conscious and incompletely believing parsons, and the mincing speech of the genteel. It explained ‘nace.’ Nice, correctly spoken, is a convulsion of the lower face—like a dog snapping at a gnat.

She had a sudden vision of the English aspirate, all over the world, puff-puff-puffing like a steam-engine, and was

wondering whether it were a waste or a source of energy, when she became acutely aware of being for those about her a fresh item in their grouping.

It was a burden too heavy to be borne. The good Swiss soup had turned her bright fever of fatigue to a drowsiness that made every effort to sit decently upright end in a renewed abject drooping that if only she were alone could be the happy drooping of convalescence from the journey.

Their talk had gone on. It was certain that always they would talk. Archipelagos of talk, avoiding anything that could endanger continuous urbanity.

In the midst of a stifled yawn, the call to a fortnight's continuous urbanity fell upon her like a whip. Dodging the blow, she lolled resistant to the sound of bland voices. An onlooker, appreciative but resistant; that, socially, would be the story of her stay. A docile excursion, even if they should offer it, into this select little world, would come between her and her Switzerland. Refusal clamoured within her and it was only as an afterthought that she realized the impossibility of remaining for a fortnight without opinions.

The next moment, hearing again the interwoven voices as a far-off unison of people sailing secure on smooth accustomed waters, she was bleakly lonely; suppliant. Nothing showed ahead but a return with her fatigue to sustain the silence and emptiness of a strange room. She was about to glance at the woman on her left when the deep bass voice asked her casually if she had had a good journey. Casual camaraderie, as if already they had been talking and were now hiding an established relationship under conventionalities.

The moment she had answered she heard the university voice across the way remark, in the tone of one exchanging

notes with a friend after a day's absence, that it was a vile journey, but all right from Berne onwards, and looked up. There he was, almost opposite, Cambridge, and either history or classics, the pleasant radiance of *Lit. Hum.* all about him, and turned her way bent a little, as if bowing, and as if waiting for her acknowledgment—with his smile, apology, introduction and greeting beaming together from sea-blue eyes set only ever so little too closely together in a neatly tanned narrowly oval face—before regaining the upright.

Her soft reply, lost in other sounds, made a long moment during which, undisturbed by not hearing, he held his attitude of listening that told her he was glad of her presence.

The close-set eyes meant neither weakness nor deceit. Sectarian eyes, emancipated. But his strength was borrowed. His mental strength was not original. An uninteresting mind; also he was a little selfish, with the selfishness of the bachelor of thirty—but charming.

The party was smaller than she had thought. The odd way they were all drawn up at one end of the table made them look numerous. Spread out in the English way they would have made a solemn dinner-party, with large cold gaps.

Someone asked whether she had come right through, and in a moment they were all amiably wrangling over the pros and cons of breaking the journey.

Staring from across the table was a man alone, big oblong foreigner dwarfing his neighbours, and piteous, not to be looked at as the others could who fitted the scene; not so much sitting at table with the rest as set there filling a space. His eyes had turned towards a nasal voice suddenly prevailing; sombre brown, wistfully sulking below eyebrows lifted in a wide forehead that stopped unexpectedly soon at a

straight fence of hair. Oblong beard reaching the top of stiff brown coat. Russian, probably the Chopin player.

‘Any one’s a fool who passes Parrus without stopping off at least a few hours.’

A small man at the end of the row, opaque blue eyes in a peaky face, little peaked beard, neat close-fitting dress clothes. Incongruous far-travelled guest of little Switzerland.

He was next the window, with the nice man on his right. Then came the big Russian exactly opposite, and again naïvely staring across, and beyond him a tall lady in a home-made silk blouse united by a fichu to the beginning of a dark skirt; coronet of soft, coiled white hair above a firmly padded face with polished skin, pink-flushed, glimmering into the talk, that was now a debate about to-morrow’s chances, into which sounded women’s voices from the table behind, smooth and clear, but clipped, freemasonish like the others. To the right of the coronetted lady an iron-grey man, her husband, gaunt and worn, with peevishly suffering eyes set towards the door on the far side of the room. Fastidious eyes, full of knowledge, turned away. He was the last in the row and beyond him the table stretched away to the end wall through whose door the servants came and went. His opponents were out of sight beyond the bass-voiced woman on the left, whose effect was so strangely large and small: a face horse-like and delicate and, below her length of face increased by the pyramid of hair above her pointed fringe, a meeting of old lace and good jewellery.

To her own right, the firm insensitive hand, that wore a signet ring and made pellets of its bread, belonged to just the man she had imagined, dark and liverish, but with an unexpectedly flattened profile whose moustache, dropping to sharp points, gave it an expression faintly Chinese; a man

domestic but accustomed to expand in unrestricted statement, impatiently in leash to the surrounding equality of exchange. Beyond him his wife, sitting rather eagerly forward, fair and plump, with features grown expressionless in their long service of holding back her thoughts, but, betraying their secret in a brow, creased faintly by straining upwards as if in perpetual incredulity of an ever-present spectacle, and become now the open page of the story the mouth and eyes were not allowed to tell.

At her side a further figure and beyond it the head of the table, unoccupied, leaving the party to be its own host.

The atmosphere incommoding the husband, who at a second glance seemed to call even pathetically for articulate opposition, was that of a successful house-party, its tone set by the only two in sight who were through and through of the authentic brand: the deep-voiced woman and the nice man. The invalid and his wife belonged to that inner circle. But they were a little shadowed by his malady.

It was an atmosphere in which the American and the Russian were ill at ease, one an impatient watchfulness for simpler, more lively behaviour and the other a bored detachment, heavily anchored, not so much by thoughts as by hard clear images left by things seen according to the current formula of whatever group of the European intelligentsia he belonged to.

He was speaking softly through the general conversation to the nice man, with slight deprecating gestures of eyebrows and shoulders, in his eyes a qualified gratitude. The nice man spoke carefully with head turned and bent, seeking his words. French, with English intonation. All these people, however fluently, would talk like that. All of them came

from a world that counted mastery of a foreign tongue both wonderful and admirable—but ever so little *infra dig*.

‘Won’t you come in heah for a bit?’

Drugged as she felt with weariness, she turned joyfully into a room opening in the background of the hall whence the deep bass voice had sounded as she passed. A tiny salon, ugly; maroon and buff in a thick light. Plush sofa, plush cover on the round table in the centre, stiff buff-seated ‘drawing-room’ chairs; a piano. It was from this dismal little room the Chopin had sounded out into the twilight.

There she was, alone, standing very thin and tall in a good, rather drearily elderly black dress beside a cheerless radiator, one elbow resting on its rim and a slender foot held towards it from beneath the hem of a slightly hitched skirt: an Englishwoman at a fireside.

‘My name’s Harcourt, M’zz Harcourt,’ she said at once.

Books were set star-wise in small graded piles about the centre of the table, the uppermost carrying upon their covers scrolls and garlands of untarnished gilt. The one she opened revealed short-lined poems set within yet more garlands, appealing; leaves and buds and birds lively and sweet about the jingling verse. Swiss joy in deep quiet valleys guarded by sunlit mountains. Joy of people living in beauty all their lives; enclosed. Yet making rooms like this.

But it held the woman at the radiator, knowing England and her sea, and whose smile looking up she met, watching, indulgent of her *détour* and, as too eagerly she moved

forward, indulgent also of that. Here, if she would, was a friend, and, although middle-aged, a contemporary self-confessed by a note in her voice of impatience over waste of time in preliminaries.

But Mrs Harcourt did not know how nimbly she could move, might think it strange when presently her voice must betray that she was already rejoicing—defying the note of warning that sounded far away within her—in a well-known presence, singing recklessly to it the song of new joy and life begun anew that all the way from England had been gathering within her.

The announcement of her own name made the woman again a stranger, so much was she a stranger to the life belonging to the name, and brought into sudden prominence the state of her gown, exposed now in its full length. She recounted the tragedy and saw Mrs Harcourt's smile change to real concern.

Here they were, alone together, seeming to have leapt rather than passed through the early stages.

Like love, but unobstructed. A balance of side-by-side, not of opposition. More open than love, yet as hidden and wonderful; rising from the same depth.

'Hold it in front of the waydiator. Vat'll take 'em out a bit. Such a poo'hy gown.' She moved a little back from the row of pipes.

Going close to the radiator, Miriam moved into a fathomless gentleness.

But it was also a demand, so powerful that it was drawing all her being to a point. All that she had brought with her into the room would be absorbed and scattered, leaving her robbed of things not yet fully her own.

The warning voice within was crying aloud now, urging her not only to escape before the treasures of arrival and of strangeness were lost beyond recovery, but to save also the past, disappeared round the corner, yet not out of sight but drawn closely together in the distance, a swiftly moving adventure, lit from point to point by the light in which to-day she had bathed forgetful.

Even a little talk, a little answering of questions, would falsify the past. Set in her own and in this woman's mind in a mould of verbal summarizings, it would hamper and stain the brightness of to-morrow.

She found herself hardening, seeking generalizations that would cool and alienate, and was besieged by memories of women whom she had thus escaped. And of their swift revenge. But this woman was not of those who avenge themselves.

Hesitating before the sound of her own voice, or the other which would sound if this second's silence were prolonged, she was seized by revolt: the determination at all costs to avoid hearing in advance, in idle words above the ceaseless intercourse of their spirits, about Oberland; even from one whose seeing might leave her own untouched.

To open the way for flight she remarked that it must be late.

'About nine. You're dead beat, I can see. Ought to go to bed.'

'Not for worlds,' said Miriam involuntarily.

Mrs Harcourt's face, immediately alight for speech, expressed as she once more took possession of the radiator and looked down at it as into a fire, willingness to stand indefinitely by.

‘Every one’s gone to bed. Bein’ out all day in vis air makes you sleepy at night.’

Remembering that of course she would speak without gaps, Miriam glanced at the possibility of pulling herself together for conversation.

‘I been pottering. My ski are at Zurbuchen’s bein’ repaired.’

‘But what a *perfect* Swiss name. Like oak, like well-baked bread.’

To get away now. Sufficient impression of the Alpenstock people perpetually strenuous, living for sport, and, redeeming its angularity, the rich Swiss background: Zurbuchen. But Mrs Harcourt’s glance of surprised delight—there was amusement too, she didn’t think Swiss names worth considering—meant that she was entertained, anticipating further entertainment; to which she would not contribute.

‘No. I’m supposed to sit about and rest. Overwork.’

‘You won’t. Lots of people come out like vat. You’ll soon find resting a baw out heah.’

‘Should like a little sleep. I’ve had none for two nights.’

‘Stop in bed to-morrow. Have your meals up.’

‘M’m....’

For a moment Mrs Harcourt waited, silent, not making the movement of departure that would presently bring down the shadow of returning loneliness her words had drawn so near; keeping her leaning pose, her air of being indefinitely available.

The deep bell of her voice dropped from its soft single note to a murmur rising and falling, a low narrative tone, hurrying.

Through the sound, still coming and going in her mind, of the name Mrs Harcourt had so casually spoken, bringing with it the sunlit mountains and the outer air waiting in tomorrow, Miriam heard that the people at the Alpenstock were all right—with the exception of the two sitting at dinner on Mrs Harcourt's left, 'outsiders' of a kind now appearing in Oberland for the first time. Saddened by their exclusion, embarrassed by unconscious flattery, Miriam impulsively asked their name and glowed with a sudden vision of Mrs Corrie, of how she would have embraced this opportunity for wicked mondaine wit. Mrs Harcourt, for a moment obediently reflecting, said she had forgotten it but that it was something rather frightful. Every one else, introduced by name, received a few words of commendation—excepting the Russian and the American. The Russian would be just a foreigner, an unfortunate, but the American surely must be an outsider? Insincerely, as if in agreement with this division of humanity by exclusion, she put in a question, and while Mrs Harcourt pulled up her discourse to say, as if sufficiently, that he was staying only a couple of days and passed on to summon other hotels to the tribunal, she was glad that the Russian had been left untouched. Harry Vereker, fine, a first-class sportsman and altogether nice chap, was already lessened, domesticated, general property in his niceness; but the Russian remained, wistfully alone: attractive.

'... hidjus big hotel only just built; all glass and glare. It'll be the ruin of Oberland. No one'll come here next year.'

Though still immersed in her theme Mrs Harcourt was aware, when next she glanced to punctuate a statement, if not exactly that instead of the object she offered it was herself and her glance that was being seen—the curious steeliness of its indignation—at least of divided attention, a sudden breach

in their collaboration; and immediately she came to the surface, passing without pause to her full bell note, with an inquiry. Hoping to please. But why hoping to please?

This abrupt stowing away of her chosen material might be a simple following of the rules of her world; it suggested also the humouring of a patient by a watchful nurse, and since she had the advantage of not being in the depths of fatigue this perhaps was its explanation; but much more clearly it spoke her years of marriage, of dealing with masculine selfishness. And she was so swift, so repentant of her long, enjoyable excursion, that it was clear she had suffered masculine selfishness gladly. Neither understanding nor condemning. It had not damaged her love and she had suffered bitterly when it was removed.

Suffering was pleading now in her eyes off their guard in this to-and-fro of remarks that was a little shocking: the reverberation of a disaster.

Now that it was clear that her charming behaviour from the first might be explained by the attraction there was for her in a mannish mental hardness, that she sought in its callousness both something it could never give, as well as entertainment, and rest from perpetual feeling, she ceased to be interesting. She herself made it so clear that she had nothing to give. Offering her best help, what in the way of her world would be most useful to one newly arrived, she was yet suppliant; and afraid of failure, haunted by the fear of a failure she did not understand and that was perhaps uniform in her experience.

Miriam found her own voice growing heavy with the embarrassment of her discoveries and her longing to break this so eagerly woven entanglement. Trying again for cooling generalities, she had the sense of pouring words into a void.

The gentle presence hovered there, played its part, followed, answered, but without sharing the effort to swim into the refreshing tide of impersonality; without seeing the independent light on the scraps of reality she was being offered. No wonder perhaps: they were a little breathless. She was scenting apology and retreat. And did not know that it was retreat not at all from herself, but from her terrible alacrity and transparence: the way the whole of her was at once visible. All her thoughts, her way of thinking in words, in set phrases gathered from too enclosed an experience. Enclosed. To be with her was enclosure. The earlier feeling of being encompassed that was so welcome because it was so womanly, so exactly what a man needs in its character of kindly confessor and giver of absolution in advance, had lost value before the discovery of this absence of vistas, this frightful sense of being shut in with assumptions about life that admit of no question and no modification.

Again the dead husband intruded; his years of life at this woman's side, his first adoration of her, and then his weariness, fury of weariness whose beginnings she felt herself already tasting, so that for sheer pity she was kept in her place, effusive, unable to go.

But at the moment of parting Mrs Harcourt became again that one who had waited, impatient of wasting time in formalities. Her smile glanced out from the past, revealing the light upon her earlier days. It was a greeting for tomorrow rather than a good night.

Going up to the little bedroom that was now merely a refuge off-stage, she found it brightly lit in readiness for her coming, summery bright all over, the light curtains drawn and joining with the unvarnished wood to make an enclosure that seemed to emulate the brightness of the Swiss daylight.

The extravagant illumination, the absence of glooms and shadows, recalled the outdoor scene and something of this afternoon's bliss of arrival and the joy that had followed it, when music sounded up through the house, of home-coming from long exile. Switzerland waited outside—enriched by her successful début—with its promise that could not fail. Meanwhile there was the unfamiliar enchantment of moving comfortably in a warm bedroom, not having the wealth one brought upstairs instantly dispersed by the attack of cold and gloom. The temperature was lower than before, pleasant, no longer oppressive; and more hospitable than a fire whose glow was saddened by the certainty that in the morning it would be an ashy desolation.

The moment the basket chair received her the downstairs world was about her again; circling, clamorous with the incidents of her passage from lonely exposure to the shelter of Mrs Harcourt's so swiftly offered wing, from beneath which, with its owner assured of the hardness of what it sheltered, she could move freely forth in any direction.

The two Le Mesras—that was her pronunciation of Le Mesurier? Three Chators. Mrs Sneyde and Maud Something at the little table behind ... Hollebone. Maud Hollebone. The American, leaving. Interest hesitated between Harry Vereker, already a little diminished, and the Russian: the reincarnated, attractive, ultimately unsatisfactory Tansley Street foreigner?

Someone was tapping at the door. She opened it upon Mrs Harcourt offering a small tray, transformed to motherliness by a voluminous dressing-gown.

When she had gone she vanished utterly. There she was, actually in the next room, yet utterly forgettable. And yet she threw across the days ahead a strange deep light.

The steaming chocolate and the little English biscuits disappeared too quickly, leaving hunger.

The french window was made fast by a right-angle hand-piece, very stiff, that gave suddenly with a dreadfully audible clang. The door creaked open. Racing the advancing air she was beneath the downy billow before it reached her. It took her fevered face with its battalions of needles, stole up her nostrils to her brain, bore her down into the uttermost depths of sleep.

CHAPTER III

From which she awoke in light that seemed for a moment to be beyond the confines of earth. It was as if all her life she had travelled towards this radiance, and was now within it, clear of the past, at an ultimate destination.

How long had it been there, quizzically patient, waiting for her to be aware of it?

It was sound, that had wakened her and ceased now that she was looking and listening; become the inaudible edge of a sound infinitely far away. Brilliant light, urgently describing the outdoor scene. But she was unwilling to stir and break the radiant stillness.

Close at hand a bell buzzed sharply. Another, and then a third far away down the corridor. People ringing their day into existence, free to ring their day into existence when they pleased. She was one of them; and for to-day she would wait awhile, give the bell-ringers time to be up and gone down to breakfast while she kept intact, within this miracle of light, the days ahead that with the sounding of her own bell would be already in process of spending.

But perhaps there was a time-limit for breakfasts?

Screwing round to locate the bell with the minimum of movement, she paused in sheer surprise of well-being. Of the shattering journey there was not a trace. Nor of the morning weariness following social excitements.

Sitting up to search more effectually, she saw the source of her wakening, bright gold upon the mountain tops: a smiling challenge, as if, having put on their morning gold, the mountains watched its effect upon the onlookers.

She was glad to be alone on the scene of last night's dinner-party; to be in the company of the other breakfasters represented only by depleted butter-dishes and gaps in the piles of rolls, and free from the risk of hearing the opening day fretted by voices set going like incantations to exorcize the present as if it had no value, as if the speakers were not living in it but only in yesterday or to-morrow.

And when there came a warning swift clumping of hob-nailed boots across the hall, across the room, she demanded Vereker, oddly certain that even at this late hour still somehow it would contrive to be he.

And there he was, lightly clumping round the table-end to his place, into which he slipped smiling his greeting, boyishly. Not at all in the self-conscious Englishman's manner of getting himself seated when others are already in their places: bent, just before sitting down, forward from the waist and, in that pose—hitching his trousers the while—distributing his greetings, and so letting himself down into his chair either with immediate speech or a simulated air of preoccupation. Vereker flopped and beamed at the same moment, unfeignedly pleased to arrive. Knickerbockers; but that was not the whole difference. He was always unfeignedly pleased to arrive?

He began at once collecting food and spoke with gentle suddenness into a butter-dish:

‘I hope you had a good night?’

His talk made a little symphony with his movements which also were conversational, and he looked across each time he spoke, but only on the last word; a swift blue beam. In the morning light he seemed younger—perhaps a champion ski-er at the end of his day is as tired as a hard-worked navy?—and a certain air of happy gravity and the very fair curly hair shining round its edges from recent splashings, gave him, in his very white, very woolly sweater, something of the look of a newly bathed babe in its matinée jacket—in spite of the stern presence, above the rolled top of his sweater, of an inch of stiff linen collar highly glazed.

He was of a type and of a class, and also, in a way not quite clear, a tempered, thoroughly live human being; something more in him than fine sportsman and nice fellow, giving him weight. Presently she found its marks: a pleat between the brows and, far away within his eyes even when they smiled, a sadness; that sounded too in his cheerful voice, a puzzled, perpetual compassion.

For the world? For himself?

But these back premises were touched with sunlight. Some sense of things he had within him that made him utterly *kind*.

‘Isn’t it extraordinary,’ she said, hoping to hide the fact that she had missed his last remark, ‘the way these people leave the lights switched on all the time, everywhere?’

‘Cheap electricity,’ he said as if in parenthesis, and as if apologetically reminding her of what she already knew—‘Water power. They pay a rate and use as much as they like.’

In all his answers there was this manner of apologizing for giving information. And his talk, even the perfect little story of the local barber and the newspapers, which he told at top pace as if grudging the moment it wasted, was like a shorthand annotation to essential unspoken things, shared interests and opinions taken for granted. Talking with him, she no longer felt as she had done last night either that she was at a private view of an exclusive exhibition, or gathering fresh light on social problems. There was in him something unbounded, that enhanced the light reflected into the room from the sunlit snow. His affectionate allusion to his Cambridge brought to her mind complete in all its parts—together with gratitude for the peace he gave in which things could expand unhindered—her own so sparse possession: her week-ends there with the cousins, their blinkered, comfort-loving academic friends, the strange sense of at once creeping back into security and realizing how far she had come away from it; their kindnesses, their secret hope of settling her for life in their enclosed world, and their vain efforts to mould her to its ways; and then the end, the growing engrossments in London breaking the link that held her to them and to the past they embodied—and Cambridge left, lit by their sweet hospitality, by the light streaming on Sunday afternoons through King's Chapel windows; the Backs in sunlight, and a memory of the halting little chime.

When she told him of the things that Cambridge had left with her, she paused just in time to escape adding to them the gait of the undergraduates: the slovenly stride whose each footfall sent the chin forward with a henlike jerk.

He agreed at once with her choice, but hesitated over the little chime.

‘It might have been a new church. I never saw it. But if you had once heard it you *couldn't* forget it.’

It was absurd to be holding to her solitary chime in face of his four years' residence. But it seemed now desperately important to state exactly the quality she had felt and never put into words. She sat listening—aware of him waiting in a sympathetic stillness—to each note as it sounded out into the sky above the town, making it no longer Cambridge but a dream city, subduing the graceless modern bricks and mortar to harmony with the ancient beauty of the colleges—until the whole was a loveliness beneath the evening sky—and presently found herself speaking with reckless enthusiasm.

‘*Don't* you remember the four little gentle tuneless phrases, of six and seven notes alternately, one for each quarter, and at the hour sounding one after the other with a little pause between each, seeming to ask you to look at what it saw, at the various life of the town made suddenly wonderful and strange; and the last phrase, beginning with a small high note that tapped the sky, and wandering down to the level and stopping without emphasis, leaving everything at peace and very beautiful?’

‘I think I *can't* have heard it,’ he said wistfully, and sat contemplative in a little pause during which it occurred to her, becoming aware of the two of them talking on and on into the morning, that it rested with her to wind up the sitting; that he might perhaps, if not quite immediately, yet in intention be waiting for her to rise and spare him the apparent discourtesy of pleading an engagement. Even failing the engagement, they could not sit here for ever, and the convention of his world demanded that she should be the first to go.

She had just time to note, coming from far away within herself, a defiance that would sooner inflict upon him the discomfort of breaking the rule than upon herself the annoyance of moving at its bidding, when he looked across and said with the bowing attitude he had held last night as he spoke and waited for her to become aware of him: ‘May I put you up for the ski-club?’

It was, of course, his business to cultivate new people, and, if they seemed suitable, to collect them....

She smiled acknowledgment and insincerely pleaded the shortness of her stay. All she could do, short of blurting out her poverty which he seemed not to have perceived.

But a fortnight was, he declared, the ideal time: time to learn and to get on well enough to want to come out again next year; and hurried on to promise a fellow sufferer, a friend coming up, for only a few days, from the south, who would be set immediately to work and on whose account he was committed to-day to trek down to the station.

‘We were,’ he said, for the first time looking across almost before he spoke, and with the manner now of making a direct important communication, ‘at Cambridge together.’

A valued friend, being introduced, recommended, put before himself. Warmth crept into his voice, and lively emphasis—compressed into a small note of distress. That note was his social utmost, for gravity and for joy; recalling Selina Holland—when she was deeply moved: a wailing tone, deprecating, but in his tone was more wistfulness, a suggestion too of anxiety. It had begun when he spoke of Pater’s *Renaissance Studies*, but had then merely sounded into the golden light, intensifying it. Now it seemed to flout the light, flout everything but his desire to express the absent friend.

‘That was some years ago. Since then he has been a very busy man, saying to this one go and he goeth ...’ He smiled across as if asking her to share the strangeness of his friend’s metamorphosis.

‘You’ve not seen him since?’

‘Not since he bought his land.’

‘He’s a landowner,’ she said, and fell into sadness.

‘He is indeed, on quite a big scale, and a very hardworking one.’

‘A farmer,’ murmured Miriam, ‘that’s not so bad.’

‘It’s very arduous. He is always at his post. Never takes a holiday. For three winters I’ve tried to get him up here for a week.’

‘Absolute property in land,’ she said to the sunlit snow, ‘is a crime.’

Before her, side by side with a vision of Rent as a clutching monster astride upon civilization, was a picture of herself, suddenly hitting out at these pleasant people, all, no doubt, landowners. It was only because the friend had been presented to her in the distance and with, as it were, all his land on his back, that this one article of the Lycurgan faith of which she had no doubt, had at all reared itself in her mind. And as it came, dictating her words while she stood by counting the probable cost and wondering too over the great gulf between one’s most cherished opinions about life and one’s sense of life as it presents itself piecemeal embodied in people, she heard with relief his unchanged voice:

‘Oh, please tell me why.’

And turned to see him flushed, smiling, pardoning her lapse, apologizing for pardoning it, and altogether interested.

‘It’s a whole immense subject and I’m not a specialist. But the theory of Rent has been worked out by those who are, by

people sincerely trying to discover where it is that temporarily useful parts of the machinery of civilization have got out of gear and become harmful. *No* one ought to have to pay for the right to sit down on the earth. *No* one ought to be so helplessly expropriated that another can *buy* him and use him up as he would never dream of using up more costly material—horses for instance.’

‘You are a socialist?’

Into her answer came the sound of a child’s voice in plaintive recitative, approaching from the hall.

‘Daphne in trouble,’ he said, ‘you’ll tell me more, I *hope*’—and turned his pleading smile to meet people coming in at the door. They clumped to the small table nearer the further window and she caught a sideways glimpse before they sat down: a slender woman with red-gold hair carrying a bunchy little girl whose long legs dangled against her skirt—Mrs Sneyde, the grass-widow, and, making for the far side of the table a big buoyant girlish young woman—uninteresting—the sister-in-law, Maud Hollebone.

The child’s ‘so bitter, *bitter* cold,’ sounded clear through the morning greetings in which she took no part. Her voice was strange, low and clear, and full of a meditative sincerity. Amidst the interchange of talk between Vereker and the two women it prevailed again: a plaintive monologue addressed to the universe.

The grating of a chair and there she was, confronting the talking Vereker, who was on his feet and just about to go. She stood gazing up, with her hands behind her back. A rounded face and head, cleanly revealed by the way the fine silky brown hair was strained back across the skull; bunchy serge dress and stiff white pinafore. Pausing, Vereker looked down at her.

‘You going out, Vereker?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Your friend coming? Not telegraphed or anything?’

‘He’s coming all right, Daphne. He’ll be here to-night. You’ll see him in the morning.’

‘You’ll be writing your letters till you start?’

‘I may.’

‘Then I’ll come and sit in your room till my beecely walk.’

She rapped out her statements—immediately upon his replies, making him sound gentle and slow—from the childish, rounded face that was serenely thinking, full of quick, calm thought. Regardless talk was going forward at the other table to which, her business settled, she briskly returned.

The little wooden hall was like a summer-house that was also a sports pavilion. Against the wall that backed the dining-room stood bamboo chairs uncertain, as if, belonging elsewhere and having been told not to block the gangway by moving into the open, they did not know what they were for. The table to which they belonged stood boldly in the centre and held an ash-tray. Between it and the front door, from above which the antlered head of a chamois gazed down upon the small scene, the way was clear, but the rest of the floor space was invaded on all sides by toboggans propped against the wall or standing clear with boots lying upon them, slender boots gleaming with polish and fitted with skates that appeared to be nothing but a single brilliant blade.

Against one wall was a pair of things like oars. Ski? But thought of as attached to a human foot they seemed impossibly long.

From a hidden region, away beyond the angle of the staircase, came servants' voices, staccato, and abrupt sounds: the sounds of their morning campaign, giving an air of callous oblivion to the waiting implements of sport, and quenching, with the way they had of seeming to urge the residents forth upon their proper business outdoors, the hesitant invitation of the chairs.

Beyond the dining-room and this little hall, whose stillness murmured incessantly of activities, there was no refuge but the dejected little salon.

Filled with morning light it seemed larger, a little important and quite self-sufficient, giving out its secret strangeness of a Swiss room, old; pre-existing English visitors, proof, with its way of being, set long ago and unaltered, against their travelled hilarity. The little parlour piano, precious in chosen wood highly polished, with faded yellow keys and faded silk behind its trellis, was full of old music, seemed to brood over the carollings of an ancient simplicity unknown to the modern piano whose brilliant black-and-white makes it sound in a room all the time, a ringing accompaniment to the life of to-day.

But into this averted solitude there came to her again the sense of time pouring from an inexhaustible source: gentle, marvellous, unutterably *kind*. It came in through the window whose screened light, filling the small room and halting meditatively there, seemed to wait for song.

Drawing back the flimsy curtain from the window, she found it a door giving on a covered balcony through whose panes she saw wan sunless snowfields and, beyond them,

slopes, patched with black pine woods and rising in the distance to a high ridge, a smooth bulging thickness of snow against deep blue sky. The dense pine woods thinned as they climbed into small straggling groups, with here and there a single file of trees, small and sharp-pointed, marching towards the top of the ridge.

Beautiful this sharp etching far-off of keen black pines upon the sunless snow, and strange the clear deep blue of the sky. But mournful; remote and self-sufficient. Switzerland, averted and a little discouraging.

The balcony extended right and left, and a glimpse away to the left of mats hanging out into the open, and a maid pouncing forth upon them with a beater, sent her to the right, where the distance was obscured by a building standing at right angles to the house, a battered barn-like place, unbalconied, but pierced symmetrically by little windows; chalet, warm rich brown, darkened above by its sheltering, steeply jutting roof ... beautiful. Its kindness extended all about it, lending a warmth even to the far-off desolate slopes.

A door at her side revealed the dining-room lengthwise and deserted, and then she was round the angle of the house and free of its secret: its face towards the valley that was now a vast splendour of sunlight.

Every day, through these windows that framed the view in strips, this light would be visible in all its changings. Standing at the one that glazed the great mountain whose gold had wakened her, she discovered that the balcony was a veranda, had in front of it a railed-in space set with chairs and tables. In a moment she was out in the open light, upon a shelf, within the landscape that seemed now to be the whole delight of Switzerland outspread before her eyes.

Far away below, cleft along its centre by the irregular black line of its frozen river, was the wide white floor of the valley, measuring the mountains that rose upon its hither side.

Those high, high summits, beetling variously up into the top of the sky, where patches of tawny rock broke through their smooth whiteness against its darkest blue, knew nothing of the world below where their bases went downward in a great whiteness of broadening irregular slopes that presently bore pines in single file upwards advancing from the dense clumps upon the lower ridges, and met in an extended mass along the edge of the valley floor.

Here and there, clear of the pine woods, and looking perilously high and desolate, a single chalet made a triangular warm brown blot upon the dazzling snow.

In this crystal stillness the smallest sound went easily up to the high peaks; to the high pure blue.

Turning to bless the well-placed little hotel, she met a frontage of blank windows, each with its sharply jutting balcony, jaws, dropped beneath the blind stare of the windows set for ever upon a single scene. Hotel; queer uncherished thing. No one to share its life and make it live.

On a near table was a folded newspaper, thin, heavily printed, continental. Switzerland radiant all about her and the Swiss world within her hands—a reprieve from further seeing and a tour, into the daily life of this country whose living went on within a setting that made even advertisements look lyrical.

The simple text was enthralling. For years she had not so delighted in any reading. In the mere fact of the written word, in the building of the sentences, the movement of phrases linking part with part. It was all quite

undistinguished, a little crude and hard; demanding, seeming to assume a sunny hardness in mankind. And there was something missing whose absence was a relief, like the absence of heaviness in the air. Everything she had read stood clear in her mind that yet, insufficiently occupied with the narrative and its strange emanations, caught up single words and phrases and went off independently touring, climbing to fresh arrangements and interpretations of familiar thought.

And this miracle of renewal was the work of a single night.

The need for expression grew burdensome in the presence of the empty sun-blistered tables. Perhaps these lively clarities would survive a return journey through the hotel?

Voices sounded up from below, from the invisible roadway. English laughter, of people actively diverting themselves in the winter landscape. Far away within each one was the uncommunicating English spirit, heedless, but not always unaware, filling its day with habitual, lively-seeming activities. The laughter sounded insincere; as if defying a gloom it refused to face.

They passed out of hearing and the vast stillness, restored, made her look forth: at a scene grown familiar, driving her off to fresh seeking while it went its way towards the day when she would see it for the last time, giving her even now, as she surveyed its irrevocably known beauty, a foretaste of the nostalgia that must rend her when once more she was down upon the plains.

But that time was infinitely far away beyond the days during which she was to live perpetually with this scene that clamoured now to be communicated in its first freshness.

The writing at top speed of half a dozen letters left arrival and beginning in the past, the great doorway of the enchantments she had tried to describe safely closed behind her, and herself going forward within them. With letters to post she must now go forth, secretly, as it were behind her own back, into Oberland; into the scene that had seemed full experience and was but its overture.

The letters were disappointing. Only in one of them had she escaped expressing yesterday's excited achievements and set down instead the living joy of to-day. And this for the one to whom such joy was incredible. But all were warm with affection newly felt. The long distance not only made people very dear—in a surprising way it rearranged them. Foremost amongst the men was Densley of the warm heart and wooden head, wildly hailed. His letter, the last and shortest, wrote itself in one sentence, descriptive, laughing, affectionate. How it would surprise him....

Life, she told herself as she crossed the hall trying to drown the kitchen sounds by recalling what had flashed across her mind as she wrote to Densley, is eternal because joy is. 'Future life' is a contradiction in terms. The deadly trap of the adjective. *Pourquoi dater?* Even science insists on indestructibility—yet marks for destruction the very thing that enables it to recognize indestructibility. But it had come nearer and clearer than that.

Fawn-coloured woolly puppies, romping in the thick snow at the side of the steps as though it were grass, huge, as big as lion cubs, with large snub faces, and dense short bushy coats trying to curl, evenly all over their tubby tumbling bodies ... St Bernards, at home in their snow. They flung

themselves at her hands, mumbling her gloves, rolling over with the smallest shove, weak and big and beautiful, and with absurd miniature barkings.

The Alpenstock was at the higher end of the village and from its steps she could see down the narrow street to where the little church and its white-cloaked sugar-loaf spire obscured the view, and away to the right, set clear of the village and each on the crest of a gentle slope, the hotels, four, five, big buildings, not unbeautiful with their peaked roofs and balconies and the brilliance of green shutters on their white faces. And even the largest, Mrs Harcourt's 'hidjus big place' recognizable by its difference, a huge square plaster box, patterned with rows and rows of uniform windows, above whose flat roof a high pole flaunted a flag limp in the motionless air, looked small and harmless, a doll's house dumped casually, lost in the waste of snow.

If these hotels were full, there were in the village more visitors than natives. But where were they? The vast landscape was empty. From its thickly mantled fields came the smell of snow.

Going down the street, she was lost in a maze of fugitive scents within one pervading, and that seemed to compose the very air: the sweet deep smell of burning pine wood. Moving within it, as the crowded little shop windows went by on either hand, were the smells of dried apples and straw and a curious blending of faint odours that revealed themselves—when presently summoning an excuse for the excitement of shopping, at the cost of but a few of the multitude of small coins representing an English sovereign, she gained the

inside of the third general store between the hotel and the church—as the familiar smell of mixed groceries; with a difference: clean smells, baked dry. No prevailing odour of moist bacon and mouldering cheese; of spilt paraffin and musty sacking, and things left undisturbed in corners. No dinginess. And though shelves and counter were crowded, every single thing gleamed and displayed itself with an air.

But there were no Swiss biscuits. Only a double row of the familiar square tins from Reading, triumphantly displayed by the gaunt sallow-faced woman, whose ringing voice was as disconcertingly at variance with her appearance as was her charmed manner with the eager cunning that sat in her eyes. She asked for soap and the woman set wide the door of an upright glass case in which were invitingly set forth little packets bearing names that in England were household words.

She glanced back at the biscuits. Petit Beurre were after all foreign and brought with them, always, the sight of Dinant and its rock coming into view, ending the squabble about the pronunciation of *grenouille*, as the Meuse steamer rounded the last bend. But catching sight, above the biscuits, of a box of English night-lights, she chose a piece of soap at random and fought, while she responded to the voluble chantings accompanying the packing of her parcel, with the nightmare vision of bedrooms *never* bathed in darkness, of people *never* getting away into the night, people insisting, even in rooms where brilliance can be switched on at will, on the perpetual presence of the teasing little glimmer; people who travel in groups and bring with them so much of their home surroundings that they destroy daily, piecemeal, the sense of being abroad.

Regaining the street in possession of a replica of the tablet she had unpacked last night, she found that the busy midst of the village lay just ahead where the way widened to encircle the little church. Many shops, some of them new-built, with roomy windows, and the lifeless impersonal appearance of successful provincial stores. There were more people here, more women in those heavy black dresses and head-shawls, more bloused and bearded men, crossing the snowy road with swift slouching stride. A post office, offering universal hospitality.

Post office: offering universal hospitality more vitally than the little church. A beggar could perhaps find help in a church more easily than in a post office. Yet the mere atmosphere of a post office offered something a church could never give. Even to enter it and come away without transactions was to have been in the midst of life. And to handle stamps, and especially foreign stamps, was to be aware of just those very distances the post had abolished.

As if from the bright intense sunlight all about her, a ray of thought had fallen upon the mystery of her passion for soap, making it so clear in her mind that the little ray, and the lit images waiting for words, could be put aside in favour of a strange dingy building breaking the line of shops. Looking like a warehouse, it had a small battered door, high up, approached by a flight of steps leading from either side whose meeting made a little platform before the door. Rough sleds were drawn up round about the entrance, making it central in the little open space about the church, the perpetual head-tossings of the horses filling the bright air with showers of tinkles. It could hardly be a café; yet two men had just clattered down the steps flushed and garrulous. Strange dark-

looking hostelry, within which shone the midday sun of these rough men living in far-away chalets among the snow.

It was not only the appeal of varying shape and colour, or even of the many perfumes each with its power of evoking images: the heavy voluptuous scents suggesting brunette adventuresses, Turkish cigarettes, and luxurious idleness; the elusive and delicate, that could bring spring-time into a winter bedroom darkened by snow-clouds. The secret of its power was in the way it pervaded one's best realizations of everyday life. No wonder Beethoven worked at his themes washing and re-washing his hands. And even in merely washing with an empty mind there is a *charm*; though it is an empty charm, the illusion of beginning, as soon as you have finished, all over again as a different person. But all great days had soap, impressing its qualities upon you, during your most intense moments of anticipation, as a prelude. And the realization of a good day past, coming with the early morning hour, is accompanied by soap. Soap is with you when you are in that state of feeling life at first hand that makes even the best things that can happen important not so much in themselves as in the way they make you conscious of life, and of yourself living. Every day, even those that are called ordinary days, with its miracle of return from sleep, is heralded by soap, summoning its retinue of companion days.

To buy a new cake of soap is to buy a fresh stretch of days. Its little weight, treasure, minutely heavy in the hand, is life, past, present, and future, compactly welded.

The priced goods in the shop-windows were discouragingly high. One window behind whose thick plate glass were set forth just a few things very tastefully arranged, showed no prices at all and had the ominous note of a West End shop. Next door was a windowful that might have been

transplanted from Holborn, so much steel was there, such an array of rectangular labels and announcements. Skates and skates and skates. Then a chemist's and an inspiration, though the window showed nothing but a perforated screen and the usual coloured bottles bulging on a shelf above.

The counter was stacked with wares from Wigmore Street. Even the tooth-brushes were those of the new shape devised in Cavendish Square. The chemist was a bald preoccupied man speaking English abruptly. She came away with a jar of Smith's cream, her shopping done and the face of the clock sticking out above the watchmaker's telling her it was nearly noon. The little clock on the church said a quarter past eleven and glancing back at the watchmaker's, now in the rear, she saw the reverse dial of the outstanding clock marking half past eleven. And Switzerland was the land of watchmakers.... Her own watch said one o'clock, English time. Then it was noon. But this far world was not three minutes' distance from the Alpenstock. There was still half an hour.

The post office was a sumptuous hall. Little tables stood about invitingly, set with pens and ink. No railed counter; a wooden partition extending to the ceiling; a row of arched pigeon-holes, all closed. Like a railway booking-office on Sunday, between trains—blankly indifferent to the announcement of the presence of a customer made by the clumping of her boots upon the wooden floor. And when presently—having gone the round of the posters, brilliant against the white-washed walls, all so much brighter and so much less bright than reality, all resounding with a single deep charm, bringing assurance of possessing, in one journey and one locality, the being of the whole—she tapped at a little shutter, it flew up impatiently, revealing an affronted young man in a blue cotton overall, glaring reproachfully

through spectacles. The stamps handed over, the little door shot back into place with a bang, as if cursing an intruder.

The open spaces called for a first view before the sense of its being no longer morning should have robbed them of intensity. But where the street joined the roadway there was a little shop, full sunlight falling on its window, whose contents were a clustered delight and each separate thing more charming than its neighbour.

Two women approaching along the road preceded by English voices distracted her, for a moment, with the strangeness of their headdress—a sort of cowl. In a moment they passed with dangling clinking skates, and her intention of getting a good view from behind was diverted back to the shop window, by ‘tourist-trap’ interpolated in a tone meant to be inaudible, in the dissertation of the one holding forth in a voice not unlike Mrs Harcourt’s, about a hotel ‘packed like a bee-hive and swarming with influenza.’

It was true. The shop was full of Swiss brummagem. She fastened on it the more eagerly. Little expensive cheap things whose charm was beyond price. Small clumsy earthenware, appealingly dumpy, flower-patterned upon a warm creamy background; painted wooden spoons. Little brooches and trinkets innumerable. Cow-bells. Some small thing for everybody and a problem solved at the cost of a few marks.

Turning away, she caught sight of an old woman amazingly wrapped up, peering at her from inside a little booth set down in the snow on the other side of the way. A shelf laden with small things in carved wood protruded in front. She crossed to look at them. Silently, with slow fumbling movements, the old woman displayed her wares. Bears. Bears on ski, on toboggans, bears in every kind of unbearable attitude. Intricate model chalets, useless and

suggesting, imagined in England, nothing but the accumulation of dust. But there was an owl, with owlish dignity, very simply and beautifully carved. Her eyes returned to it, and the old woman put forth an aged freckled hand and grasped its head, which went easily back upon a hinge and left revealed a clean white china inkwell.

‘Kipsake,’ said the old woman huskily.

‘*Danke schön. Ich komme wieder,*’ smiled Miriam escaping, followed by hoarse cacklings of praise.

Out upon the roadway fenced between dazzling snowfields, the end of the valley came into sight, new, but faintly reproachful, having waited too long, and complaining now about the lateness of the hour. Certainly it was worthy of a whole self, undistracted. But there was to-morrow, many to-morrows. She had done with the street and the shops, save as a corridor, growing each day more dear, to daily fulfilment of the promise of this prospect whose beauty she was clearly recognizing. And more than its beauty. Its great, great power of assertion, veiled for the moment by distractions, but there. Wonderfully beautiful was the speech and movement of the far-off smooth pure ridge of snow, rising high against the deepest blue of the sky, linking twin peaks.

Some of the near slopes were dotted with people, tiny figurines mitigating the snowfields and the towering mountains: the sounds of English voices ringing out infinitesimal in the wide space, yet filling it. Shutting out the scene, yet intensifying it; bringing gratitude for their presence.

That remained even after the quaint peaked hoods of brilliant white or mauve, the effective skirts and jerseys of a group of women passing in the roadway had rebuked with their colours, clean and sharp against the snow, her tweed

that in London had seemed a good choice, and her London felt hat.

But though the clever clothes of these people brought a sense of exile, they were powerless to rouse envy or any desire. Envy was impossible in this air that seemed, so sharp was every outline, to be no longer earth's atmosphere but open space, electric.

Perhaps even this morning there was time to get clear, to be, if only for a few moments, along some side track alone with the landscape, walking lightly clad in midsummer sun through this intensity of winter.

The road was dropping and growing harder. No longer crunching under her feet, the snow, beaten flat, showed here and there dark streaks of ice, and her puttee-bandaged legs, flexible only at the knees, felt like sticks above her feet, lost and helpless in the thick boots that seemed to walk of themselves.

The dropping road took a sharp turn towards the valley, showing ahead a short empty stretch and another sharp turn, revealing it as the winding trail up which she had come last night. On the right it was joined by a long track running steeply down into a wilderness of snow in the midst of whose far distances appeared, high up, a little bridge half hidden amongst pines. The track was dotted with pigmy forms.

'*Ash-tongue!*' A fierce hoarse voice just behind and, joining it, another, clear and ringing: '*Ach-toooooong.*'

Plunging into the roadside drift, she turned in time to see a toboggan bearing upon it a boy prone, face foremost eagerly out-thrust, shoot down the slanting road, take the bend at an angle that just cleared the fence and dart at a terrific pace down the slope towards the wilderness; followed by the girl with the ringing voice, lightly seated, her toboggan throwing

her up as it bumped skimming from ridge to ridge down the uneven road. She took the bend smoothly with space to spare and flew on down the slope with lifted chin and streaming hair. Both mad. Children of the reckless English who had discovered the Swiss winter.

This terrific scooting was not the tobogganing of which she had heard in London. Two more figures were coming, giving her excuse to wait, lest they were coming her way, and watch their passing from the drift that was like warm wool, knee-deep. They were women, coming slowly, paddling themselves along with little sticks. They took the bend with ironic caution and went on down the slope, still furiously stabbing the snow with their little sticks, their high, peaked cowls making them look like seated gnomes.

Aware of intense cold invading her feet, she plunged out into the road and was beating her snow-caked puttees when an intermittent grinding sound, approaching, brought her upright: an aged couple side by side, white-haired and immensely muffled, sitting very grave and stern behind the legs protruding stiffly on either side the heads of their toboggans, and set, from moment to moment, heels downwards upon the road to check a possible increase of their slow, triumphant pace. Triumph. Behind the sternness that defied the onlooker to find their pose lacking in dignity, was triumph. Young joy; for these who might well be patrolling, in bath-chairs, the streets of a cathedral town.

And they left the joyous message: that this sport, since pace could so easily be controlled, might be tested at once, alone, without instruction, this very afternoon. A subtle change came over the landscape, making it less and more; retiring a little, as who should say: then I am to be henceforth

a background, already a mere accessory, it yet challenged her vow, an intimidating witness.

Along the empty stretch towards the valley, the blazing sun blotted out the distance so that it was pleasant to turn the next corner and be going again towards the expanse that ended at the white high-hung collar. The fresh stretch of gently sloping road was longer than the one above it, and, walking freely here, she found that her gait had changed, that she was planking along in a lounging stride which brought ease to her bandaged legs and made more manageable her inflexible feet. With a little practice, walking could be a joy. Walking in this scene, through this air, was an occupation in itself. And she was being assailed by the pangs of a piercing hunger. Obtrusive; insistent as the hunger of childhood.

It would take a little longer to go back. It would be wise to turn now. At the corner ending this stretch. Suddenly it seemed immensely important to discover what there was round the next corner. From the angle of the turning, she could see the little bridge far away to the right, in profile, with pines stretching along the bank of what it spanned, that showed a little further on as a thin straight line of frozen stream steeply descending to join the serpentine that cut the white floor of the valley. Away to the right of the bridge, straggling leafless trees stood in a curve. Behind them something moved; coming and going across the gaps between their trunks. Skaters.

Then for the girl and boy that reckless rush was just a transit; a means of getting to the rink, as one might go on a bicycle to a tennis court.

A voice greeted her from behind, surprising, in its level familiarity, until the finished phrase revealed the American, to whom, turning to find him standing before her, his

toboggan drawn to heel by its rope, she gave the smile, not for him, the lover's smile reviewing, as they passed her in inverse rotation while she made the long unwelcome journey into his world of an American in Europe, her morning's gatherings.

But he had received it, was telling her that already she looked splendid, adding that when folks first came up they looked, seen beside those already there, just gass'ly. And for a moment the miscarriage was painful: to have appeared to drop even below his own level of indiscriminating hail-fellow-well-met. And for a fraction of a second as he stood before her in his correct garb she transformed him into an Englishman condemning her foolish grin—but there was his queer little American smile, that came to her from a whole continent and seemed to demand a large face and form, a little smile dryly sweet, as misdirected as her own and during which they seemed to pour out in unison their independent appreciations, and to recognize and greet in each other, in relation to the English world out here, fellow voyagers in a strange element.

It healed her self-given stripes that were, she reflected as they went on together up the hill, needless, since to him, as an American, her greeting would seem neither naïve nor bourgeois. For all Americans are either undisturbedly naïve and bourgeois or in a state of merely having learned, via Europe, to be neither. And this man, now launched in speech, revealed himself by the way he had of handling his statements, as so far very much what he had always been.

Strange that it was always queer people, floating mysterious and intangible in an alien element, who gathered up, not wanting them, testimonies that came from her of themselves.

All the way back to the Alpenstock he pursued his monologue, information, and in an unbroken flow that by reason of its temperature, its innocence of either personal interest or benevolent intention, left her free to wander. There was in his narrow, unresonant voice only one shape of tone: a discouraged, argumentative rise and fall, very slight, almost on two adjacent notes, colourless; as of one speaking almost unawares at the bidding of an endless uniform perception. She heard it now as statement, now merely as sound, and for a moment as the voice of a friend, while, after informing her that he had done the valley run and climb each morning and taken to-day a last turn to add yet one more layer to his week's sunburn, he remarked that the long zigzag was commonly deserted in the forenoon, folks mostly taking the other track, either to the rink, or further to the made run, or way beyond that to the ski-ing slopes.

When she was clear of the shop and crossing the road with the toboggan slithering meekly behind, the invisible distant slopes seemed lonely, and her plan for getting immediately away to them postponed itself in favour of enjoying for a while the thrilled equilibrium with everything about her that was the gift of the slight pull on the cord she was trying to hold with an air of preoccupied negligence. Turning leisurely back from the short length of street ahead that too soon would show the open country, she came once more into the heart of the village and paid an unnecessary visit to the post office, heard the toboggan pull up against the kerb and knew,

as she turned to abandon its cord, that she had tasted the utmost of this new joy, and that when once more the cord was in her hands she must go forth and venture.

Out on the road beyond the village, the pleasant, even slithering alternated with little silent weightless runs, that at first made her glance back to see if the toboggan were still there. These little runs, increasing as the road began to slope, came as reminders of its character, assertions of its small willingness for its task, enhancing its charm, calling her to turn and survey, as she went, its entrancing behaviour of a little toboggan.

But presently, and as if grown weary of gentle hints, and feeling the necessity of stating more forcibly the meaning of its presence out here in the glittering stillness, it took a sudden run at her heels. Moving sideways ahead, she reduced it to its proper place in the procession until the distance between them set it once more in motion. Overtaking her, it made a half turn, slid a little way broadside and pulled up, facing her, in a small hollow, indignant. In the mercifully empty yet not altogether unobservant landscape it assumed the proportions of a living thing and seemed to say as she approached: 'You *can't* bring me out here and make a fool of me.' And indeed, even with no one in sight, she could not permit herself to walk down the slope with the toboggan ahead and pulling like a dog.

She might go back, make a *détour* on the level round about the village, turn the afternoon into a walk, and postpone until to-morrow the adventure for which now she had neither courage nor desire. In choosing the time when there would be fewest people abroad she had forgotten that it was also the lowest point of the day. Even this first day had a lowest point. And belated prudence, reminding her that she had

come away to rest, cast a chill over the empty landscape, changing it from reality to a picture of a reality seen long ago. At the sight of it she turned and went a few paces up the gradient and perched and gathered up the length of cord, and life came back into the wastes of snow, the mountains were real again, quiet in the motionless afternoon light, and the absurd little toboggan a foe about to be vanquished.

It slid off at once, took a small hummock askew, righted itself, to a movement made too instinctively to be instructive, and slid onwards gathering pace.

But ecstasy passed too swiftly into awareness of the bend in the road now rushing up to meet her ignorance. Ramming her heels into the snow she recovered too late, with a jolting pang in both ankles and a headlong dive into this morning's drift, a memory of what she should have done and stood up tingling with joy in the midst of the joyous landscape, stilled again, that had flown with her and swooped up as she plunged, and was now receiving her exciting news.

The backward slope invited her to return and go solemnly, braking all the way and testing the half-found secret of steering. But the bend tempted her forward. A single dig on the left when she reached it and she would be round in face of the long run down to the level.

But the dig was too heavy and too soon, and landed her with her feet in the drift and the toboggan swung broadside and all but careering with her backwards along the steepness that lay, when once more she faced it, a headlong peril before the levels leading on and up to the little bridge could come to bring rescue and peace.

Pushing carefully off, sliding with bated breath and uncomfortably rasping heels, down and down, making no experiments and thankful only to feel the track slowly

ascending behind her, she remained clenched until only a few yards were left down which with feet up she slithered deliriously and came to rest.

It was done. She had tobogganed herself away from Oberland into the wilderness, the unknown valley waiting now to be explored, with the conquered steed trailing once more meek and unprotesting in the background. The afternoon was hers for happiness until hunger, already beginning its apparently almost continuous onslaught, should make welcome the triumphant climb back to Oberland and tea upon the promontory.

The high bridge that in the distance looked so small and seemed to span smallness was still small, a single sturdy arch; but beneath it dropped a gorge whose spines led down to a torrent, frozen; strange shapes of leaping water arrested, strangely coloured: grey in shadow, black in deep shadow, and here and there, caught by the light, a half-transparent green.

There was a great fellowship of pines clustered on either bank and spreading, beyond the bridge, to a wood that sent out a rising arm blocking the view of the valley and the pass. They made a solitude down here above the silenced waters. The backward view was closed by the perilous slope whose top was now the sky-line, leaving Oberland far away out of sight in another world.

The track through the wood, wide and level for a while, with spired pines marching symmetrically by, narrowed to a winding path that took her in amongst them, into their strange close fellowship that left each one a perfect thing apart. Not lonely, nor, for all the high-bulging smoothness of snow in which it stood, cold. It was their secret, pine-breath, that brought a sense of warm life; and their close-clustered

needles. Out on the mountain-sides they looked black and bleak, striving towards the sun until they were stayed by the upper cold. Seen close, they were a happy company bearing light upon the green burnish of their needles and the dull live tints of their rough stems. And very secret; here thought was sheltered as in a quiet room.

Out in the immense landscape, in the down-pouring brilliance of pure light, thought was visible. Transparent to the mountains who took its measure and judged, yet without wounding, and even while they made it seem of no account, a small intricate buzzing in the presence of mighty, simple statement sounding just out of reach within the air, and invited thoughtless submission to their influence as to a final infinite good that would remain when they were no more seen, there was pathos in their magnificence; as if they were glad even of one small observing speck, and displayed gently the death they could deal, and smiled in their terrifying power as over an open secret.

And to walk and walk on and on amongst them, along their sunlit corridors with thought shut off and being changed, coming back refreshed and changed and indifferent, was what most deeply she now wanted of them.

The track climbed a ridge and there, below, were the American's wide snowfields.

Before she was assured by the doffed cap upheld while he made his salutation—the sweeping foreign *coup de chapeau* that was so decisive a politesse compared with the Englishman's meagre small lift; and yet also insolent—she was rejoicing in the certainty that the bearded figure, in spite of the English Norfolk suit and tweed cap, was the big Russian. He alone, at this moment, of all the people in the hotel, would be welcome. Remote, near and friendly as the

deepest of her thoughts, and so far away from social conventions and the assumptions behind conventions, as to leave all the loveliness about her unchanged—and yet trailing an absurd little toboggan, smaller, and, in contrast with his height, more ridiculous an appendage than her own. He plunged down the ridge in the English style, by weight and rather clumsily, and in a moment was by her side at the head of the run that went, pure white and evenly flattened, switch-backing away across the field out of sight.

In a slow mournful voice that gave his excellent French a melancholy music, he asked her if she had already tested the run and became, when he had heard the short tale of her adventure, impatiently active. Her toboggan, he said, and raised its fore-part and bent scanning, was too large, too heavy and with runners not quite true. It would be better for the moment to exchange. ‘Try, try,’ he chanted with the true Russian nonchalance and, abandoning his own, went off down the gentle slope on the discredited mount that now she might blame for her mysterious swerve at the bend.

After the gentle drop, carrying him over the first small rise as if it were not there, he flew ahead gathering swiftness with each drop, away and away until at last he appeared a small upright figure far away on the waste of snow.

The run, compared with what she had already attempted, seemed nothing at all. The drops so slight that once or twice she was stranded on a ridge and obliged to push off afresh. And the light little toboggan, responding to the slightest heel-tap upon the hard-pressed snow, taught her at once the secret of steering. And when at last, full of the joy of fresh conquest, she was pulled up by the loose snow at the end of the run, she was eager only to tramp back and begin again. But, tramping at her side, he tore her triumph to shreds.

Silently she tried to imagine the toboggan having its own way uncontrolled for the whole of that sweeping trek, for the two quite steep drops towards the end.

The second time he started her in advance and remained behind shouting, his voice rising to a crescendo at the first steepness: '*Il n'y a pas de danger!*' With an immense effort she restrained her feet and entered paradise.

'*Ça ira, ça ira,*' he admitted smiling when once more they were side by side. They tramped back in silence, under the eyes, as they approached the ridge, of a group newly appeared upon its crest and from which, when they drew near, a voice came down in greeting. She looked up to see the Croydon family, all very trim in sporting garb and carrying skates, gathered in a bunch, at once collectively domestic and singly restive. They smiled eagerly down at her and she read in the father's twinkling gaze that she was providing material for Croydon humour, so distinctly and approvingly was it saying in the Croydon way: 'You've not lost much time,' and so swiftly, having told her in response to her own greeting, that the rink was within five minutes' easy walking, did he turn and disappear with his family in tow down the far side of the ridge.

The third run left her weary and satisfied. Again they were tramping back side by side, and although her experience of Russians had taught her that gratitude was out of place and enthusiasm over simple joys a matter for half-envious contempt, her thankfulness and felicity, involuntarily eloquent, treated him, marching tall and sombre at her side upon feet that in spite of the enormous boots showed themselves slender and shapely terminations of a well-hung frame, as if he had been of her own English stock; let him see the value, to herself, of his kindly gift. All she lived for

now, she told him, was to rush, safe-guarded by a properly mastered technique, at the utmost possible speed through this indescribable air, down slopes from which the landscape flew back and up. He smiled down, of course, the half-incredulous smile. Of course bored, giving only part of a dreamy attention to all this raving.

'C'est bon pour la santé,' he murmured as she paused.

What did he know of *santé*, unless, perhaps, he had been in a Russian prison? He might be a refugee; an anarchist living in Switzerland.

When he, too, turned out to be now returning in search of tea and they were climbing the slope towards Oberland, their toboggans colliding and bumping along as best they might at the ends of cords twisted together round the wrist of his gloveless hand, she remarked by way of relieving a silence he did not seem to think it necessary to break, that the Swiss winter must be less surprisingly beautiful to Russians than to the people of the misty north. He agreed that doubtless this was so and gloomily asked her if she had been in Russia. He agreed with everything she said about his country as seen from a distance, but without interest and, presently, as if to change the subject, declared that he knew nothing of Russia and Russians.

His voice sounded again too soon to give her time to select a nationality that should soften the disappointment of losing him as a Russian, and in a moment he was talking of Italy, and the Italy she knew by so many proxies dead and living was stricken out of her mind, to give place to the unknown Italy who had produced this man, simple and sincere, gloomy and harsh-minded, playing Chopin with all his heart. But when presently she learned that he was a business man on holiday from Milan, her Italy returned to her. He was from a

world that everywhere was the same, a world that existed even within Italy.

And at dinner again he sat apart wrapped in his gloom, until again Vereker was rescuing him with speech and he was responding in the withheld, disclaiming Russian way.

A Latin consciousness was, in this group, something far more remote than a Russian would have been, and she wondered what it was that behind Vereker's unchanging manner was making his half of the bridge upon which they met. Music perhaps, if Vereker, with eyes candid and not profound and not deep-set, were musical. She caught a few words. It was the weather. Do Italians discuss the weather? Was Guerini, behind his gratitude in being rescued from isolation, wondering at the Englishman's naïveté? Vereker was not showing off his French. He was being courteous, being himself. No one, except, when he could seize a chance, the American, made any sort of parade. Nor was it that they made a parade of not making a parade. Talk with them was easy because it was quite naturally serene. No emphasis. No controversy. The emergence of even a small difference of opinion produced at once, on both sides, a smiling retreat. Deep in his soul the American must certainly be deploring this baffling urbanity. English correctness and hypocrisy. Here was the original stuff from which the world-wide caricatures were made.

And talk with these people always ended in a light and lively farewell, a manner of dropping things that handed a note of credit for future meetings. A retreat, as from royalty, backwards. A retreat from the royal game of continuous courtesy.

And together with the surprise of discovering—when having departed upstairs she was drawn down to the little

salon by the sound of the Chopin ballade—not the Italian but Vereker at the piano in the empty room, was the boon of his composure. Of his being, and continuing to be after she had slipped into the room and reached a chair from which she could just see him in profile, so quietly engrossed. A little strung, as though still the phrases that yesterday he had so carefully recaptured might again elude him; but listening. Led on, and listening, and in the hands of Chopin altogether.

Seated thus exposed he was slender, delicate, musicianly; only the line of his jaw gave him an appearance of strength; and perhaps the close cropping of his hair, so that of what would have been a flamboyant mass only crisp ridges were left, close against a small skull, like Caesar's. His spruceness and neatness made stranger than ever the strange variance between the stiff, magpie black and white of dress clothes, and the depth and colour of music.

He played the whole ballade; sketchily where the technical difficulties came thick and fast, but keeping the shape, never losing the swinging rhythm.

Its concluding phrases were dimmed by the need of finding something to say that should convey her right to say anything at all; but when the last chord stood upon the air, the performance seemed to have been a collaboration before which they now sat equally committed. And when his face came round, its smile was an acknowledgment of this.

For an instant she felt that nothing could fit but a gratefully affectionate salute and then a 'How's old So-and-so in these days?' after the manner of men of his type drifting happily about upon the surfaces of life. And when she said: 'You got the whole of it this time,' it was as if the unexpressed remainder had indeed passed across to him, as if she were the newly arrived friend whose presence

somewhere upstairs had made him so radiant during dinner and afterwards sent him to pour out his happiness in the deserted little salon.

‘After a fashion,’ he said with the little flicker of the eyelids that was his way, from sixth-form or from undergraduate days, of sustaining for further speech the pose of his turned head and smiling face. ‘There’s no one like him, is there?’

‘You were playing last evening, just after I came. For a moment I couldn’t believe that ballade was actually here. I heard it long ago, and never since, and I’ve never been able to recall the theme.’

‘I’m *so* glad,’ he said with his little note of distress. ‘I’ve been trying for *days* to get it all back.’

For him, too, it came out of a past, and brought that past into this little Swiss room, spread it across whatever was current in his life, showed him himself unchanged. And in that past they had lived in the same world, seen and felt in the same terms the things that are there for ever before life has moved. So far they were kindred. But since then she had been flung out into another world; belonged to the one in which he had gone forward only through an appreciative understanding of its code, of what it was that created its self-operating exclusiveness. He did not yet know that she stood outside the charmed circle, had been only an occasional visitor, and that now, visiting again after years of absence, she was hovering between the desire to mask, and remain within it, and her proper business as a Lycurgan: to make him aware of the worlds outside his own, let him see that his innocent happiness was kept going by his innocent mental oblivion.

And whilst they called up cherished names and collided in agreement, she wondered what these people who lived in exile from reality could find in their music beyond escape into the self for whom in their state of continuous urbane association there was so little space; and presently became aware of lively peace filling the intervals between their to and fro of words, distracting attention from them, abolishing everything but itself and its sure meaning: so that into this Swiss stillness, of frost without and electricity within, nothing had been present of the Switzerland that had brought them both here, and now suddenly came back, enhanced, a single unbounded impression that came and was gone, that was the face of its life now begun in her as memory.

She read her blissful trancy in his eyes, his recognition of their having fallen apart, but not of its cause, which he thought was perhaps the monotony of their continuous agreement, and was now swiftly seeking a fresh bridge that in an instant, since clearly he intended to prolong the sitting, he would, deferentially flickering his eyelids, take courage to fling.

But into the little pause came the sound of footsteps approaching through the hall, and an intensity of listening that was their common confession of well-being and was filling them with a wealth of eager communication that must now be postponed until to-morrow. But, to-morrow, the college friend would be in possession; there was only this evening, a solitary incident. Perhaps the door would open upon someone who would straightway withdraw, leaving the way open for the waiting conversation. And the college friend had come only for a few days....

But this falling from grace was rebuked by the reminder of Vereker's all-round niceness. He would, of course, retain the

intruder. If it were a man there would be three-cornered talk, enlivened by what was being sacrificed to it. But with the opening of the door, as she raised her eyes towards it and caught in passing a glimpse of him upon his music stool, out of action and alone, she saw that dear and nice as he was, had always been, he could not fully engage her, was real to her on a level just short of reaching down to the forces of her nature; was pathetically, or culpably, a stranded man; subsisting.

Guerini: huge, filling the doorway, hesitating for a moment and retreating, quietly closing the door, but not before Vereker, wheeling round on his music-stool, had seen his departing form.

It was his unexpectedness, the having forgotten him so that he came like an apparition, that had sent him away. Even so, a woman of the world would have promptly become a smiling blank and suitably vocal; or withdrawn and expressionless in the manner of a hotel guest only partly in possession of a room now to be partly taken over by another. But she had left her thoughts standing in her face, leaving Vereker, who had turned just too late, to be hostess.

Wheeling back to face her, he was again the gentle companion from the past. In his elegant sunny voice he was recalling their morning's talk, begging at once, with his despairing little frown, for more light on the subject of property in land. It was clear that these things had never come his way. It was after all not his fault that his education had held his eyes closed, that they had since been kept closed by wealth and ease taken for granted. And, in his way, he had kept fine. His adoration for his gods of art and literature was alive and genuine—and he was a sportsman. It was difficult, face to face with his gentle elegance, to remember that he

was distinguishing himself in an exacting sport. Repentant of her condemnation, she set forth the steps of the reasoning and the groups of facts, saw him eagerly intent—not upon herself but upon this new picture of life, wrestling step by step with what he saw far off—and presently had the joy of seeing him see how economic problems stood rooted in the holding of land at rent. But he was only one; there were thousands of men, nice men, needing only hints, as blinkered as he.

CHAPTER IV

Hurrying through her dressing to keep the appointment that had not been made and whose certainty in her own mind was challenged in vain by all the probabilities, she opened her door upon the silent corridor; stillness and silence as if every one else in the hotel had been spirited away, leaving clear, within the strange surroundings in which for a while she was set down, the familiar pathway of her life. And, when she reached the dining-room, the sight of them there, side by side at breakfast in the brilliant morning light with no one else in the room save herself approaching, had for a moment the hard unreality of things deliberately arranged. She saw them very clearly, and it was as if neither of them were there; as if they were elsewhere each on his own path from which this tacit meeting was a digression.

But before she was half-way to the table they were rising. Their breakfast over, they were going off into their day. She was too late; her haste was justified of its wisdom. Reaching her place, she murmuring a casual greeting, turned away towards the spaces of her own day opening, beyond this already vanishing small disappointment, as brightly as the light shining in from the sunlit snow.

They halted a moment while Vereker introduced his friend to whose height, as she sat down to the table, she glanced up to meet the intent dark gaze of a man on guard. She was already far away and, in the instant of her hurried astonished

return to face for the first and perhaps the last time this man who was challenging her, the eyes were averted and the two men sat down: to freshly broken rolls and steaming cups.

The little self-arranged party was secure in the morning stillness that was the divine invisible host equally dear to all three. Happy in this fulfilment of premonition, she sat silent, delighting in the challenge left, miscarried and superfluous upon the empty air, wickedly delighting in the friend's discomfort in following the dictates of the code forbidding him again to look across until she should have spoken, and confining his large gaze within the range of his small immediate surroundings. Refusing rescue, she busied herself with breakfast, enjoying his large absurdity, free, while he paid the well-deserved penalty of his innocently thwarted attack, to observe to her heart's content.

He sat taking sanctuary with Vereker—who at his sunny best was making conversation, enlarging upon the trials in store—slightly turned towards him and away from the barred vista across which no doubt, before she came in, his large gaze had comfortably extended; responding to Vereker now and again, with thoughtful groans.

Beside Vereker's sunburned fairness he was an oiled bronze; heavy good features, heavy well-knit frame. Lethargic, or just a very tired man on a holiday, bemused by his sudden translation. Superficially he was formidable, 'strong and silent.' His few remarks, thrown into the talk that Vereker kept up while he waited for his two friends to fraternize and admire each other, came forth upon a voice deliberately cultivated since his undergraduate days, a ponderous monotone, the voice of a man infallible, scorning argument, permanently in the right. Its sound was accompanied by a swaying movement from side to side of

his body bent forward from the hips: suggesting some big bovine creature making up its mind to charge.

She recalled other meetings with his kind, instant mutual dislike and avoidance. This time there was no escape. She was linked to him by Vereker, obliged by Vereker to tolerate his presence, sit out his portentousness, and be aware, since Vereker found him so very fine, of the qualities hidden within. Courage of course, tenacity, strength to adventure in strange places. Were such things enough to justify this pose of omniscience? With that pose it was for ever impossible to make terms; and if this were not a single occasion, if there were further meetings, there would sooner or later be a crossing of swords. She considered his armoury.

Mentally it was a flimsy array; a set of generalizations, born of the experience that had matured him and become now his whole philosophy, simple and tested, immovable; never suspected of holding good only for the way of living upon which it was based.

The fact of the existence of life had either never entered his head or been left behind in the days before he crystallized. He had now become one of those who say 'our first parents,' and see a happy protégé of an entirely masculine Jehovah duped into age-long misery by the first of the charmers. Homage and contempt for women came equally forth from him, the manifest faces of his fundamental ignorance. The feminine world existed for him as something apart from life as he knew it, and to be kept apart. Within that world 'charm' and 'wit' drew him like magnets and he never guessed their source; knew nothing of the hinterlands in the minds of women who assumed masks, put him at his ease, appeared not to criticize. And such women were the sum of his social knowledge. One day he would be a wise

old man 'with an eye for a pretty face,' wise with the wisdom that already was cheating him of life.

There was no hope for him. His youth had left him Vereker, his chum whose sunny simplicity had always disarmed him, who did not resent his portentous manner. From women he would have, till old age, flattery for his strength. From his workers nothing but work, and respect for his English justice and honesty. It was inconceivable that any one should ever pierce his armour; the ultimate male density backed by 'means' and 'position.'

His pose had found its bourne in his present position of authority, his state of being bound to present a god-like serenity; and it had become so habitual that even when it was put out of action he could not disencumber himself of it. At this moment, for lack of proper feminine response from across the table, it was actually embarrassing him. To proper feminine response, charming chatter or charming adoring silence, he would pay tribute, the half respectful, half condescending interest of the giant in his hours of ease.

Unable any longer to endure silently, she rode across him with speech; pictures, for Vereker, of her yesterday's adventure. Lively and shapely, inspired by the passage of wrath. Her voice had a bright hard tone, recognizable as the tone of the lively talker.

She was aware of the friend accepting her as the bright hard mondaine; at once attentive, his pose relaxed so far as to be represented only by the eyebrows left a little lifted and still knitting his deliberately contemplative brow. He was looking, poor dear, at the pictures, enjoying them, their mechanism, their allusions. And she, for a weary empty interval, was being a social success. It was a victory for the friend, a bid for his approval.

Vereker was puzzled, meeting a stranger; a little taken aback. But when, grown weary of the game of brightly arranged exaggerations, she relapsed into simplicity, he recovered at once and again brought forth his ski-club. The friend sat by while one after another the persuasive arguments came forth, smiling with the slightly lifted brow that was now his apology for smiling at all.

And suddenly he was grave, intent as he had been at the first moment; this time towards the door, outside which sounded Daphne's eager breathless voice and ceased in the doorway. Her swift slight footsteps crossed the room and brought her to a standstill just in sight, gazing at the stranger.

He remained grave, darkly gazing. Vereker, half-risen, eager to be off, was looking at him in the manner of a hostess arrested in giving the signal for departure. For a moment the man and the child stared at each other, and then she moved stealthily, rounding the table-end. A light came into his unsmiling face. With a rush she was upon him, mouth set, eyes blazing, clenched fists beating upon his breast.

'*Eaden,*' she panted, 'evil, *evil* Eaden.'

There was no defence, no display of comic fear, no wrist-catching dominance. And when she desisted, and stood back still searching him with grave face a little thrust forward in her eagerly thinking way, he turned more sideways from the table, to attend, while hurriedly, with the air of one having other business on hand and no time to waste, she catechized him. He answered simply, with just her manner of one cumbered with affairs and eager nevertheless to contrive meetings; devouring all the time with his eyes the strange hurried little face, the round wide eyes set upon something seen afar.

They had recognized each other. To the rest of the party she was a quaint, precocious child. This man saw the strange power and beauty of the spirit shining in those eyes almost round, almost protruding, and, if there had been in the blue of them, that toned so gently into the pearly blue surrounding, a shade more intensity of colour, merely brilliant.

‘You *must*,’ she said, her lips closing firmly on her ultimatum, head a little out-thrust, hands behind back. ‘You’d better go now,’ with a glance at the group that had gathered round. She pattered swiftly away to her table in the background.

‘Daphnee’ll always get what she wants with her nagging,’ said the Skerry youth standing by.

‘She will get what she wants with her beaux yeux,’ said Miriam warmly, and saw the little form panting along its ardent way up through life, seeking and testing and never finding, in any living soul.

‘Yes,’ groaned Eaden and impatiently sighed away the wrath in his eyes set upon the departing figure of the youth. Again they were lit and gentle and as if still gazing upon Daphne. He sat for a moment, paying tribute to a suddenly found agreement, before joining Vereker held up at the door in the little crowd of newly arriving breakfasters.

It was something like cycling in traffic, only that this scattered procession making for the rink seemed all one party. The achtungs, of those starting on their journey from the top of the slope rising behind her, rang out like greetings, and the agonized shrieks coming up from below, as one and another neared the gap visible now in the distance as an all-too-swiftly approaching confusion of narrowly avoided disasters, were full of friendly laughter: the fearless laughter

of those experienced in collisions. For a moment she was tempted to steer into the snow and wait until the road should be clear. But the sudden sideways swerve of a toboggan just ahead called forth unawares her first *achtung*. It rang, through the moment which somehow manoeuvred her clear of the obstacle, most joyously upon the air and hailed her—seeming to be her very life sounding out into the far distances of this paradise, claiming them as long ago it had claimed the far distances surrounding outdoor games—and sent her forward, one of the glad fellowship of reckless tobogganners whom now unashamed she could leave, to go along her chosen way.

Ignoring yells from behind she slowed to pass the gap and its glimpse of the descending track dotted with swiftly gliding humanity, took the sharp bend beyond it, and was out of sight careering down the first slope of the valley run with sky and landscape sweeping upwards, mountains gigantically sweeping upwards to the movement of her downward rush.

The dreaded bends arrived, each too swiftly, with its threat of revealing, upon the smooth length of the next slope, an upward-coming sleigh, or village children steering down at large. Slope after slope showed clear and empty, each steeper than the last, and here and there a patch of ice sent her headlong, sent the landscape racing upwards until her heels could find purchase for a steadying dig and bring back the joy of streaming forward for ever through this moving radiance.

The fencing was growing lower, almost buried in deep snow. A sweeping turn and ahead, at the end of a long smooth slope, the floor of the valley, the end. From a drive of both heels she leaned back and shot forward and flew, feet up, down and down through the crystal air become a rushing

wind, until the runners slurred into the soft snow, drove it in wreaths about her, and slowed and stopped dead leaving her thrown forward with the cord slack in her hands, feet down, elbows on knees come up to meet them, a motionless triumphantly throbbing atom of humanity in a stillness that at once kept her as motionless as itself, to listen to its unexpected voice: the clear silvery tinkle, very far away, of water upon rock; some little mountain stream freed to movement by the sun, making its way down into the valley. She listened for a while to the perfect little sound, the way it filled the vast scene, and presently turned to search the snowy levels, longing to locate it and catch a glimpse, defying distance, of the sunlit runnel. The mountains were cliffs upon the hither side, their shoulders and summits invisible until one looked up to find them remote in the ascended sky.

Down here at their feet was *terra firma*, broad levels on either side the windings of the frozen river that was trimmed here and there with bare trees sparse and straggling, their gnarled roots protruding through the snow that bulged its rim. A bird-cry sounded from a tree at the roadside; on silent wings a magpie, brilliant in sunlit black and white, sailed forth and away across the wastes. Birds and the tinkling runnel, the sole inhabitants of this morning solitude.

Whose magic survived the long backward climb and the run down to the rink amidst the sociable echoes of the morning's tumult, survived the knowledge that in the minds of these busy skaters it was merely the bottom of the hill; nothing to do down there, unless you were going on down to the station to meet and sleigh up with someone newly arrived.

Here on their tree-encircled rink they were together all day as in a room. Passing and re-passing each other all day long. Held together by the enchantment of this continuous gliding. Every one seemed to be gliding easily about. Only here and there a beginner shuffled along with outstretched jerking arms and anxious face. It was skating escaped from the niggardly opportunities of England and grown perfect. Long sweeping curves; dreaming eyes seraphic, even the sternest betrayed by the enchantment in their eyes. There were many of these in this English crowd. Many who knew there was absurdity in the picture of grown persons sweeping gravely about for hours on end. Only a great enchantment could keep them in countenance and keep them going on. Envy approached and stared her in the face. But only for a moment. She could skate, rather better than the beginners. In a day or two she could be sweeping enchantedly about. It was a temptation, answered before it presented itself, only presenting itself because it could move more quickly than thought: to be racing about on a sled was a reckless flouting of the prescribed programme, but innocent, begun in forgetfulness. To have come and seen, to sit and stroll about each day just seeing, would have been joy enough.

But when she looked across, from the grey crowded rink with its belt of ragged bare trees, to the mountains standing in full sunlight and filling half the opposite sky, and saw, away above the pine woods ascending beyond the little bridge, the distant high white saddle of the pass with its twin peaks rising on either side—they startled her with their heightened beauty. These enchanted skaters, cooped upon their sunk enclosure, had enlivened the surrounding scene not only by bringing forgetfulness of it, but because she

knew the secret of their bliss, had shared long ago the experience that kept them confined here all day.

Gliding, as if for ever; the feeling, coming even with the first uncertain balance, of breaking through into an eternal way of being. In all games it was there, changing the aspect of life, making friends dearer, making even those actually disliked, dear, as long as they were within the rhythm of the game. In dancing it was there. But most strongly that sense of being in an eternal way of living had come with skating in the foggy English frost. And this it must be that kept all these English eagerly and shamelessly fooling about on bladed feet; eternal life.

It might be wrong. Wells might be right. Golf. There must be a secret too in golf. The mighty swipe, the swirl of the landscape about the curving swing of the body, the onward march? All these must count, even if the players think only of the science of the game, only of excelling an opponent. Even in safe and easy games there is an element of eternity, something of the quality there must be in sports that include the thrill of the life-risk. Savage sports. Fitness, the sense of well-being of the healthy animal? But what *is* health? What *is* the sense of well-being?

‘We know *nothing*. That at least you must admit: that we walk in darkness.’

‘And proclaim ourselves enlightened by awareness of the fact.’

A figure swinging swiftly up the rink, a different movement cutting across the maze of familiar movements, drawing her eyes to follow it until it was lost and watch until again it came by: clothed in uniform purplish brown, close fitting, a belted jerkin, trousers, slenderly baggy, tapering down into flexibly fitting boots. A strong lissome body that

beautifully shaped its clothing and moved in long easy rushes, untroubled by shackled feet.

He was not perhaps doing anything very wonderful, just rushing easily about, in the manner of a native of some land of ice and snow. But he transformed the English skaters to jerking marionettes, clumsily clothed, stiff-jointed. Visibly jointed at neck and waist, at knees and ankles and elbows. Their skating seemed now to be nicely calculated mechanical balancing of jointed limbs, each limb trying to be autonomous, their unity, such as it was, achieved only by methods thought out and carefully acquired. They seemed to be giving exhibitions of style, with minds and bodies precariously in tune. He was style spontaneously alive. His whole soul was in his movements.

She made her way to a near bench under the trees to watch for him. Sitting there with her feet upon the ice, she became one with the skaters, felt their efforts and controls, the demand of the thin hard blade for the perpetual movements of loss and recovery. Not all were English, skating with reservations. Here a little Frenchman, with arms folded on his breast, came by as if dancing, so elegantly pointed were the swinging feet above which gracefully he leaned now forward now back. Effortlessly. In his stroke there was no jerk of a heavy-muscular drive, yet he covered as much ground as the English, and more quickly. Behind him an Englishwoman, with a bird's-wing pointing back along the side of her little seal cap, going perfectly gracefully in smooth slight sweeps; serene.

Near at hand two men practised trick skating, keeping clear the space about them with their whirling limbs. They swept about with eyes intent, and suddenly one or other would twirl, describe a circle with an outflung leg, and

recover, with an absurd hop. Clever and difficult no doubt, but so very ugly that it seemed not worth doing. The stout man's hop seemed as though it must smash the ice. Between their dervish whirls they talked. They were arguing. Amiably quarrelling; the occasional hysterical squeal in the voice of the stout man revealing 'politics.' They were at loggerheads over the housekeeping, the lime-lit, well-paid, public housekeeping, 'affairs,' the difficult responsible important business that was 'beyond the powers of women,' that was also 'dirty work for which women were too good'; wrangling. The stout man executed a terrific twirl and brought up facing his opponent who had just spoken. He advanced upon him, bent and sliding, arms dangling low: 'Just *so*,' he chanted amiably and, recovering the upright, presented a face really foolish, a full-moon foolishness, kindly perfection of inability to see further than his good British nose: 'We're back at what I told Hammond this morning: we *can't afford* to ignore the *Trades Union Secretaries*.' With a swift turn he was off before the other man could respond, skating away beyond their enclosure, smiling his delight, staring ahead, with wise eyes, at nothing at all but the spectacle of his opponent caught out and squashed.

The spectacle of his complacency was profoundly disquieting. He was the typical kindly good-natured John Bull. Gently nurtured, well-educated, 'intelligent,' ready to take any amount of time and trouble in 'getting at facts' and 'thinking things out.' And he was a towering bully. Somewhere within his naïve pugnacity was the guilty consciousness of being more pleased in downing an opponent than concerned for human welfare. There was no peace of certainty in him. He had scored and was flushed

with victory. And all over English politics was this perpetual prize-fighting. The power of life and death was in the hands of men playing for victory; for their own side.

Morning and evening, in some hotel, that big man's voice boomed incessantly. Behind it a kindly disposition and a set of fixed ideas. No mind.

‘Don't you skeete?’

Making for the bench, bent forward to reach it hands first, was the younger Croydon girl; behind her the other, *rallentando*, balancing to a standstill.

She had greeted them, ere she was aware, with the utmost enthusiasm. Smiling in their way, a gentle relaxation of the features that left them composed, they stood about her, pleased to see and greet a stranger who was also an old friend, renewing their great adventure. At the same time they were innocently rebuking her outbreak.

In her suburban past she had instinctively avoided their kind, scented a snare in their refined gentility, liked them only for the way, in the distance, going decorously in pretty clothes along tree-lined roadways, they contributed to the brightness of spring. Meeting them out here, representative of England, the middle-class counterparts, in their ardent composure, of the hotel people who so strangely had received her as a relative, she wanted in some way to put forth her claim as one who knew of old their world of villa and garden, their gentle enclosed world.

‘It's glorious; we're having a lovely tame,’ said the younger, looking away down the rink: an English rose, thoroughly pretty in the characterless English way, shapely sullen little face, frowning under the compulsion of direct statements. Her hair, that in the train had been a neat bun, hung now in a broad golden plait to her waist, where its ends

disappeared behind a large black bow like a bird with wings outspread.

And now, with one seated close on each side of her, it was with difficulty that she attended to their talk, so clearly did it exhibit their world as a replica of the one just above it: as a state of perpetual urbane association; conformity to a code in circumstances more restricted, upon a background more uniform, and searched by the light of a public opinion that was sterner than the one prevailing above. All the bourgeois philistine in her came forth to sun itself in their presence, zestfully living their lives, loving their friends and relatives, ignoring every one who lived outside the charmed circle.

One against the other, they joyously relived the short time whose sunburn had so becomingly accentuated their Blair Leighton fairness. Their stories centred round the success or breakdown of the practical jokes that seemed to be the fabric of life at their hotel ... all the old practical jokes; even apple-pie beds. In and out of these stories went Mr Parry, who was presently pointed out upon the ice; a stout little dark man skating about at random, his movements visibly hampered by the burden of his sociability, his eyes turning, to the detriment of his steering, towards every one he passed in his search for prey.

‘He makes us all *roar*; every evening.’

There were others, some whose names and their roles, as assistants or willing victims of the schemes of Mr Parry, seemed sufficiently to describe them, and, as central decoration in the picture, these two girls newly arrived and certainly Mr Parry’s most adored recruits, ready trained by a brother in the science of practical joking, yet not hoydenish; demure and sweet and, to his loneliness, the loneliness of an

undignified little man, not quite grotesque, and incapable of inspiring romantic affection, figures of romance.

Growing weary of their inexhaustible theme—of waiting for the emergence of some sign of consciousness of the passing moment, a dropping of references backwards or forwards, that would leave them in league together, there as individuals—she pressed them for personal impressions of the adventure in its own right, the movement into strangeness, the being off the chain of accustomed things. They grew vague, lost interest, and fell presently into a silence from which she pulled them by an inquiry about the plait.

In the midst of the story of the plait and just as some people were being pointed out who still thought them three sisters, two with their hair up, and one with a plait who did not appear at dinner, came a longing to escape, the sense of a rendezvous being missed, with the scene and the time of day. But her preparations for flight were stayed by their payment for her interest in the plait. They plied her with questions; presently they were offering to lend her skating-boots, and choosing, from amongst the guests at their hotel, people she would like. They were pitying her, thinking that she must be having a poor time and determined at once that she should do more than just stand upon the edge, sunning herself in the glow of the life they were finding so entrancing.

But her contemplation of the desert that must be, from their point of view, the life of a woman obviously poor and apparently isolated, took her for a moment far away, and when she returned the link between them was snapped. Her silence had embarrassed their habit of rapid give and take. Making vague promises, she took leave, rescued by their immediate reversion to the forms of speech set for such

occasions, from holding forth upon the subject of the dead level of happiness existing all over the world independent of circumstances. They would have thought her both pious and insane.

All the afternoon they had been in harmony, strolling and standing about together in the snow until there seemed nothing more to say; and after each run there had been something more to say. Till Italy lost all strangeness but its beauty, and he had seemed a simpler Michael, free from Michael's certainty that every one in the world is marching to annihilation.

And suddenly there was a wall, dividing. No more communication possible; the mountains grown small and bleak and sad and even now, in being alone upon the promontory there was no peace, in all the wide prospect no beauty.

Why was it so much a matter of life and death, for men as for women? Why did each always gather all its forces for the conflict?

If all he said were a part of the light by which he lived, he should have been able to remain calm. But he had not remained calm. He had been first uneasy, then angry, and then sorry for the destruction of their friendship.

'The thing most needed is for men to *recognize* their illusion, to drop, while there is yet time, their newest illusion of life as only process. Leave off trying to fit into their mechanical scheme a being who lives all the time in a world

they have never entered. They seem incapable of unthinking the suggestions coming to them from centuries of masculine attempts to represent women only in relation to the world as known to men.’

It was then he was angry.

‘How else shall they be represented?’

‘They *can*’t be represented by men. Because by every word they use men and women mean different things.’

Probably Italian women led men by the nose in the old way, the way of letting them imagine themselves the whole creation. And indeed the problem presently will be: how to save men from collapsing under their loss of prestige. Their awakening, when it comes, will make them pitiful. At present they are surrounded, out in the world, by women who are trying to be as much like them as possible. That will cease when commerce and politics are socialized.

‘Art,’ ‘literature,’ systems of thought, religions, all the fine products of masculine leisure that are so lightly called ‘immortal.’ Who makes them immortal? A few men in each generation who are in the same attitude of spirit as the creators, and loudly claim them as humanity’s highest spiritual achievement, condoning, in those who produce them, any failure, any sacrifice of the lives about them to the production of these crumbling monuments. Who has decreed that ‘works of art’ are humanity’s highest achievement?

Daphne, preceded by her hurried voice; followed by her maid carrying a tray. She came swiftly in her manner of a small panting tug, eyes surveying ahead with gaze too wide for detail.

‘Put it there; near the lady.’

Hitching herself into a chair, she sighed deeply, but not to attract attention, nor in the manner of a conversational

opening. She had, without self-consciousness, the preoccupied air of one who snatches a tiresome necessary meal, grudging the expense of time. Her compact stillness was the stillness of energy momentarily marking time. Her face, distorted by efforts, mouth firmly closed, with a goodly bite of the stout little roll, was busily thinking and talking. Continuous. There was no cessation in her way of being, no dependence, none of the tricks of appeal and demand that make most children so quickly wearisome. Yet she was almost a baby sitting there; a lonely infant, rotund.

Her face came round, so perfectly impersonal in its gravity that Miriam knew the irrepressible smile with which she met it for an affront, felt herself given up to the child's judgment, ready to be snubbed.

For a moment the round eyes surveyed her, deep and clear, a summer sea in shadow, and then, with her head a little butted forward in the way she had of holding it during her breathless sentences, she hurriedly swallowed her mouthful and cried:

'You're *nice*! I didn't know!' Condemnation and approval together. Scarcely daring to breathe, she waited while the child drew near, shouting for her maid, who came grumbling and departed smiling when the tables were drawn side by side.

'That's-my-beecely-German-nurse-I-hate-her.'

'She talks German with you?'

'She talks. I don't listen. She has a beecely voice. Vicky Vereker says she can't help her voice, can't help being a silly stupid, and evil Eaden didn't say anything and Vicky said show him how she speaks.'

'And did you?'

‘I should have been *sick*. Evil Eaden’s gone ski-ing again. Evil Eaden likes Napoleon and Vicky doesn’t; he wouldn’t.’

‘Why do you like Napoleon so much?’

‘Because I like him, because he’s the good dear little big one. Everybody is a big silly small one almost.’

Meditating on Napoleon as a pattern for womanhood, Miriam heard the returned ski-ers arrive upon the platform and watched the eager calm little face that was still busily talking, for a sign.

‘When I’ve done my beecely edjagation, when I go back to Indja,’ it was saying, looking out with blind eyes across the bright intolerable valley.

Vereker’s voice, gently vibrant and sunny, sounded near by, and a deep groan from Eaden just visible, collapsed in one of the small green chairs.

‘I’ve got to go now,’ said Daphne, relinquishing her second roll and sliding to the floor. Covering the small space with her little quick-march, she pulled up in front of Eaden and stood surveying, hands behind back, feet a little apart, head thrust forward. Napoleon in a pinafore.

‘You’re dead beat, that’s what you are.’

‘Daphne, I am. I’m a broken man. Don’t pound me. But you may stroke me if you like.’

On a table at his side stood a large brown bear on ski, his gift to her, bought on his way home from the old woman at the corner and that now they were surveying together. She had approached it with two little eager steps and pulled up just short with her arms at her sides, volubly talking just out of hearing, but to his delight who heard and watched her. Between her sallies she sought his face, to bring him to contemplate and agree. Did it please her? She had not yet handled it. Could anything please her? The giver and the

giving were calling forth her best, that moved him and Vereker as men are moved at the sight of life in eager operation, spontaneous as they never seem to be, commanding and leading them. Vereker was amused. Eaden disarmed and delighted, protective of a splendour. Suddenly she seized the bear in her arms and held it while she talked and put it carefully down and looked back at it as she turned with her little quick march to someone calling from the house.

‘It’s all right, Daphne.’ Eaden’s voice eager, free of its drawl, crying out in pity and wrath. He had leapt from his chair and was gathering and fixing together the detached parts, bear and ski and pole, found by Daphne returned, lying as if broken upon the table at his side. She stood speechless, a little forlorn child, red-cheeked and tearful in dismay. A little way off stood the Skerry youth with his grin.

CHAPTER V

What had brought this wakening so near to the edge of night? The mountains were still wan against a cold sky, whitening the morning twilight with their snow.

How long to wait, with sleep gone that left no borderland of drowsiness, until the coming of their gold?

And in a moment she had seen for ever the ruby gleaming impossibly from the topmost peak: stillness of joy held still for breathless watching of the dark ruby, set suddenly like a signal upon the desolate high crag.

It could not last, would soon be plain sunlight.

Already it was swelling, growing brighter, clearing to crimson. In a moment it became a star with piercing rays that spread and slowly tilted over the upper snow a flood of rose.

Each morning this miracle of light had happened before her sleeping eyes. It might not again find her awake. But it had found her awake, carried her away in a moment of pure delight that surely was absolution? And when presently the rose had turned to the familiar gold creeping down to the valley it was more than the gold of yesterday. In watching its birth, she had regained the first day's sense of endless time. To-day was set in advance to the rhythm of endless light.

To-day was an unfathomable loop within the time that remained before the end of Eaden's visit, his short allowance that added, by being set within it, to her own longer portion. His coming had brought the earlier time to an end; made it a

past, expanding in the distance. And beyond his far-off departure was a group of days with features yet unseen. Looking back upon that distant past, it seemed impossible that the crest of her first week was not yet reached.

Yet the few days that seemed so many had already fallen into a shape. Morning blessedness of leisure, smiled down upon by the mountains again tawny in their sunlight, witnessed to by every part of the house wandered through; rich sense of strength unspent; joy of mere going out again into the wide scene, into the embrace of the crystal air; the first breath of its piny scent, of the scent of snow, and presently the dry various scents confined within the little street, messengers of strange life being lived close at hand; the morning dive into the baking warmth of the post office, to find, amongst the English vehement at their pigeon-holes, the sharpest sense of being out in the world of the free; then the great event, the wild flight down to the valley's sudden stillness.

The afternoon with Guerini; but, after yesterday, there might be no afternoon with Guerini: freedom instead, for fresh discovery until tea-time, on the promontory, in the midst of unpredictable groupings. Sunset and afterglow, high day moving away without torment or regret; the mountains, turning to a darkness in the sky; telling only of the sure approach of the deep bright world of evening.

The gold-lit evening feast was still momentous, still under the spell of the setting, the silent host who kept the party always new.

And it was in part the setting, the feeling of being out of the world and irresponsible, that last night had kept Eaden a docile listener. He had heard a little of the truth, at least something to balance the misrepresentations of socialism in

the Tory press. But he had heard in a dream, outside life. Sitting on the stairs, huge in his meek correctness of evening dress. There was, to be sure, in face of Vereker's determination, nothing else for him to do. But it was with one consent that they had all three subsided on the wide stairs, secure from the intrusions that menaced the little salon.

And it was only for a moment she had sunned herself in the triumph of being claimed, forcibly enthroned, in the sustaining blue gown, upon the red-carpeted stairs with the best of the hotel's male guests a little below on each side of her. After that moment there was only effort, the effort to make things clear, to find convincing answers to Vereker's questions.

And there were no witnesses, only Guerini, coming from the salon and apologetically past them up the stairs; and the maids, passing to and fro.

There is no evening social centre in this hotel, no large room. That is why these sports-people like it. The day is concentrated within the daylight. The falling away after dinner is a turning towards the next day's work.

That Grindelsteig hotel must be rather fascinating. She thought I shared her disapproval of people 'running up and down balconies and in and out of each other's rooms all night long.' I did. Yet they are only carrying out my principles....

She despises even those who come out for sport, unless all day they are risking life and limb. So fragile and brittle-looking, so Victorian and lacy, yet living for her ski-parties with picked people from the other hotels; going off at dawn, swallowed up until dinner-time and then, straight to bed.

The social promise of the first evening has miscarried. The social centre is the Oberland Ski Club; the rest, a mere putting in of time. I am living on the outskirts, looking for developments in the wrong place; have seen all there will be to see until the end of my stay.

Into the golden sunlight fell the clashing of morning sleigh-bells, describing the outdoor world. Listening to them she felt the vast surroundings, that lately had become a setting owing part of its entrancement to the delightful sense of success in a charming social atmosphere, reasserting themselves in their own right, accusing her of neglect, showing the days winding themselves off to an end that would leave her in possession only of the valley road and the fields beyond the bridge.

The dawn had wakened to remind her. Watching the coming of the light, she had been restored to her first communion with it, back in the time when the people downstairs had seemed superfluity, thrown in with the rest. When all was over they would appear in the distance: bright figures of a momentary widening of her social horizon, unforgotten, but withdrawn into their own element; not going forward into her life as this winter paradise would go forward, brightening her days with the possibility of reunion.

This morning she would break the snare, be a claimant for a lunch packet, an absentee for the whole day. With the coming of the far-off afternoon, Guerini, looking down from his window on to the promontory either to escape or to claim her company, would find no one there.

Even in terror there was gladness of swift movement that left her pressed like a niched effigy into the wall of the drift as the beast pranced by, revealing in its wake a slouching peasant; clear brilliant eyes brooding amidst unkempt shagginess, pipe at an angle of jaunty defiance to the steep his heedless tramping brought so near.

She was honourably plastered with snow, and the precious package that had leapt and might have hurled itself into the void was still safely on its string about her neck, but the narrow rising path, bereft of its secrecy by evidence of homely levels above of field and farm, was perhaps only a highway for humiliating perils. More cows might be coming round the bend; a whole herd. There might be—it would harmonize with the way life always seemed to respond to deliberate activity with a personal challenge—on this very day the dawn had drawn her away from beaten tracks, a general turning out of cattle for an airing; mountain cattle, prancing like colts.

Man and cow were now upon the widening path, approaching the sloping field with the barn at the end, the cow trotting swiftly ahead, through the half-buried posts beside the sunken open gate, and now careering hither and thither about the meadow with flying tail, the powdery snow flung in wreaths about its course. It was half mad of course, poor thing, with the joy of release from one of those noisome steamy sheds whose reek polluted the air surrounding them and saddened the landscape with reminder of the price of happiness: oblivion of hidden, helpless suffering.

But in summer-time this air-intoxicated captive would stand knee-deep in rich pasture; mild. Its colouring was mild, soft tan and creamy white, in ill-arranged large blotches; and with its short legs, huge bony mass of head and shoulders

from which the spine curved down as if sagging beneath the weight of the clumsy body, it missed the look of breeding, the even shape and colouring of lowland cattle. Its horns, too, had no style, rose small and sharp from the disproportionate mass of skull.

Almost without warning, so slight in the dense pine wood was the sound of its muffled gliding, the sled was upon her, heavy with piled logs and a ruffian perched upon them: slithering headlong, fitting and filling the banked path from side to side. Somehow she flung herself upon the root-encumbered bank, somehow hitched her feet clear of the sled as it rushed by. The villain, unmoved and placidly smiling, had not even shouted.

‘No time to shout, no use *shouting*,’ she murmured breathless, smiling at the absurd scene, a treasure now that danger was past, a glimpse into local reality. But danger was past only for the moment. This pleasant wide path she had mistaken for a woodland walk winding and mounting safely amidst the peace of the pine woods was a stern highway, almost a railway; formed like a railway to the exact dimensions of its traffic.

Intently listening, going swiftly where the sides of the track were too high for an escaping sprawl, she toiled on and up and came presently to a gap and a view of the small hut, seated clear of the pines, high against the pure blue upon the curve of unblemished snow, come down now nearly to her level and revealed as a chalet with burnished face, inhabited:

above its chimney the air quivered in the heat of a clear-burning fire.

The hotel lunch, opened upon the trestle table, looked pert, a stray intruder from the cheap sophisticated world of to-day into these rich and ancient shadows. The old woman, but for her bell-like, mountainy voice, was a gnarled witch moving amongst them, unattained by the cold light from the small low windows, that struck so short a way into the warmly varnished interior.

And it seemed by magic that she produced the marvellous coffee in whose subtle brewing was a sadness, the sadness of her lonely permanence above the waste of snow and woods—old grandmother, a living past, her world disappeared, leaving only the circling of the seasons about her emptied being.

In this haunting presence, the triumph of distance accomplished, the delicious sense of known worlds waiting far below, world behind world in a chain whose end was the far-off London she represented here in this high remoteness, could not perfectly flourish, came in full only when the silence had had time to fill itself with joy that was too strong to be oppressed by the departed ancient voice, that was like the echo of a sound fallen elsewhere.

Again, recalling the far-off morning, a dark barn-like room. But the woman opened a door at the end of it, led the way through a passage still darker: another door and she was out upon the edge of the world, upon a dilapidated little grey balcony jutting over an abyss. As far as sight could reach were sunlit mountain-tops range beyond range, till they grew far and faint.

Faced alone, the scene, after the first moment's blissfully ranging perception, was saddened in its grandeur through the absence there of someone else perceiving. Thousands, of course, had seen it from this perch in the centre of the row of slummy little balconies. But so splendid was the triumph of the unexpected mountains ranged and lit that no company, even exclamatory, could break their onslaught. Alone, there was too heavy a burden of feeling in the speechless company of this suddenly revealed magnificence.

The woman coming out with the tea that one day she must take here accompanied, was brisk about the view: an adjunct, thrown in gratis with her refreshments which were good and which presently caused the mountains, turned away from, to be felt preparing a friendliness; becoming the last, best reward of her day's accomplishment.

The way home, down and down and across the levels to the rink and up the little homely slope into Oberland, would be a jog-trot taken half asleep to the haven of things small and known amidst which she would sit renewed, to-day's long lifetime stilled to a happy throbbing of the nerves, a bemused beaming in the midst of friends. Its incidents blurred that would come back one day clearer, more shining than all the rest?

Warned by a growing chill, she turned to face the mountains in farewell and found them lit by the first of the

afterglow. Far away in the haze beyond the visible distance a group of slender peaks showed faintly, rose-misted pinnacles of a dream-city from whose spires would presently gleam the rubies of farewell.

CHAPTER VI

The solitary excursion had made a gap in the sequence of days. Those standing behind it were now far away, and yesterday had failed to bridge the gap and join itself to their serenity. To-day looked shallow and hurried, with short hours beyond it rushing ahead to pause in the sunlight of the ski-fest and then to fly, helter-skelter towards the end.

Eaden's departure was helping time to hurry. In the distance, it had promised to leave things as they were before he came. But now that it was at hand it seemed a sliding away of everything.

There was no depth in the morning light.

She turned to survey the scene on which it fell and saw the early gold stealing faithfully towards the valley. Once Eaden had gone, this thinned-out urgency of time would cease. For every one but Vereker his going was only a removal of something grown familiar; a reminder, soon forgotten, of the movement of time. Slight reminder. He reflected only surfaces and was going away, unchanged, to reflect the surfaces of another shape of life.

Yet last night he had talked. Had been less a passenger unable to take root. It was he who had been the first to subside on the stairs—with a groan for his hard day's work. Perhaps the approach of his known life had given him a moment of clairvoyance, showing its strangeness, the strange fact of its existence.

Last night had been good, was showing now how very good it had been: three friends glad to sit down together and presently talking, each voice transformed, by the approach of the separation that would make it cease to sound, to the strange marvel of a human voice. Everything said had seemed important in its kindness, and, though there had been no socialism he had talked at last of his peasants and his ceaseless fighting with their ancient ways as though he wished to excuse himself from accepting socialism, to point out its irrelevance to the life of peasant and soil.

Industrial socialism had bored him. He thought its problems irrelevant, raised by clever doctrinaires who had nothing to lose. She had failed him by standing too much in one camp. The proper message for him came from the people who saw land as the fundamental unit.

Tell him to look away from capital and wages. And read George. And the Jewish land-laws, never surpassed.

‘Good-bye. Please remember that work is an unlimited quantity.’

Then she remembered that this morning there would be a meeting at breakfast. He and Vereker would be there together as on the first morning; with time to spare.

But going into the dining-room she found his departure already in full swing. He was talking, smiling across at Mrs Sneyde and Miss Hollebhone with the eagerness of one who finds at the last moment the ice broken and communication flowing the more easily for having been dammed up and accumulating.

Sitting down unnoticed except by Vereker, she presently heard Maud Hollebhone, to whom he had scarcely spoken, arranging, across the width of the room, to hasten her departure.

They were going down to Italy together; as casually as guests, leaving a party and finding that their way home lies in the same direction, will share a hansom across London. To travelled people, a journey to Italy was as simple as crossing London. Was even a bore, a tiresome experience to be got through as pleasantly as possible. Behind her manner of sony, quietly boisterous schoolgirl indifference Maud was pleased, but still kept her poise, her oblivious independence—of what? On what, all the time going about with Mrs Sneyde, neglecting all opportunities for recognizing the existence of the house-party, aloof without being stand-offish, was she feeding her so strongly rooted life?

She was pleased, of course, to be carrying off as her escort the imposing oiled bronze, now almost animated as he crossed to the little table to discuss details and stood, a pillar of strength, at the disposal of the two ladies now looking so small and Mrs Sneyde, as she fired remarks at him, so scintillating. She, no doubt, had her ideas and thought it an excellent plan. But the sister already knew too late that it was not. Had felt the project change during his approach with his week's happiness all about him, and realized now that she represented a reprieve, was to be, by keeping Oberland before his eyes during part of his long journeying, an extension of his holiday.

Standing at close quarters, already accustomed to her companionship, he was aware, behind his animation, of sacrificing for the sake of it the precious silent interval between his strenuous idling and the arduous work ahead; was paying the price always paid for tumult half-consciously insincere. The finding of Maud also immersed in the business of departure, and therefore seen in a flash of time as a comrade, had enlivened him as one is enlivened by a

greeting without regard to the giver of it. That enlivening glow had already departed and he was left reduced, with its results upon his hands.

It was settled. The elopement arranged and he, with his instructions, moving off to clear her path. Perhaps secretly he was pleased after all. Perhaps his life in the south was not a flight from society and he was glad to be ever so slightly back again in its conspiracy to avoid solitude. Glad to be walking again on those sunny levels where there is never a complete break-off and departure. Never a void. Where even sorrow and suffering are softened by beautiful surroundings.

Their windows, she reflected as Eaden, meeting the Le Mesuriers at the door, was halted for farewells, even their hotel windows, give on to beauty. And they can always move on. And soul-sickness, the suffering of mind so often a result of fatigue and poor food and ugly surroundings, was rare amongst them. They were cheerful and amused. If bored, they shift on and begin again. If bored by the life of society itself, they remain within it and cut figures as cynics.

‘It’s only fair to warn you,’ Maud was crying from her table, ‘that I’m a vile fellow-traveller. Hate travelling.’

She rose and wandered to the window behind her table.

‘You’re going to take away our property?’

Here she was, the unknown Miss Hollebone, close at hand, flopped in a chair, schoolgirlish.

‘Rather!’

Here in this warm circle was the old freemasonry of schoolfellows, two profiles slightly turned, abrupt remarks, punctuated by jabbings at ink-stained desks, the sense of power and complete difference in relation to a stuffy old world; sudden glances, perfect happiness. Happiness that kept both quite still; hearing, feeling, seeing, in a circle of

light suddenly created, making possible only slight swift words in whose echo one forgot which had spoken, which was which.

‘What are we to do?’ They faced each other to laugh delight.

‘Don’t know. What we really want is *your* socialism in *our* world. The socialist ways you have in your world without knowing it, because you know no other ways.’

‘You don’t object to us?’

‘Good Lord, no! But just to cultivate you would be to go to sleep as you are all asleep.’

‘You a Londoner?’

‘Till death us do part.’

‘Lucky dog!’

Eaden was at her elbow, to whom she turned with a guarded brightness, slipped back into her own world, into the half-conscious conspiracy of avoidance. Orderly world. A pattern world, life flowing in bright set patterns under a slowly gathering cloud.

Its echoes followed Miriam into the deserted little salon. Through the open door she heard a coming and going in the hall that at this hour should be empty and eloquent of people spread far and wide in the landscape. The bright pattern was flowing into a fresh shape, flowing forward in its way, heedless of clouds, heedless of the rising tide. On the little table was Daphne’s bear on ski, immortal.

And now in the hall the sound of her, demanding. Drawn to the door, Miriam saw Vereker taking the stairs two at a time, immersed in friendship. And Eaden arrested in the middle of the hall by Daphne up-gazing with white determined face.

‘Look at me,’ she was saying, and his down-bent face lost its smile.

‘You’re not to go,’ she said swiftly, in a casual tone, and then breathlessly, still searching his unmoved face, ‘You’re not to go.’

‘That’s right, Daphne,’ cried Vereker pausing on the stairs. ‘Make him stay for the Fest, he wants to.’

Eaden watched her while she waited for Vereker’s footsteps to die away, watched her in frowning concentration while her voice came again, the voice of one who tells another’s woe: ‘Not for the Fest, but because, if you go away, I shall die.’

Miriam turned swiftly back into the room, but she had seen the pain in his face, seen him wince. Daphne on her last words had taken a little impatient step and stood averted with clenched fists, and now their voices were going together up the stairs, hers eagerly talking.

She made ready to go out amongst the mountains standing there in their places as for countless ages they had stood, desolate, looking down upon nothing.

A door opened at the far end of the corridor, and Vereker’s footsteps came swiftly trotting, went by and paused at a door further down: Maud Hollebone’s, at which now he was urgently tapping. A few words at the opened door and he had returned. A moment later came Maud, swishing along at a run: for more discussion.

Her thoughts turned to the promontory within easy reach. But it would be absurd to sit about, visibly hung up by the bustle of events that were not even remotely her events. It was too late to do the valley run and walk back before lunch.

‘I shall *die*.’ Who was comforting Daphne? No one. No one could. Somewhere outside she was disposed of, walking with her nurse, un comforted.

She peered into Daphne’s future, into the years waiting ahead, unworthy of her.

Vereker’s door opened again, letting out the returning Maud; coming back to go on with her packing, to talk to Mrs Sneyde. The two of them, surrounded by the opulence of wealthy packing, talking, skipping about in talk: family affairs, and in both their minds Maud’s journey to Milan with the mild and foolish bronze.

When the footsteps had passed, she went out into the corridor and across the space of sunlight streaming through Mrs Harcourt’s door open upon its empty room. Far away in the landscape, with those people from the Kursaal, Mrs Harcourt was forgetfully ski-ing, knowing nothing of all this bustle.

But Maud’s door, too, was set wide. Her room deserted, neat and calm as Mrs Harcourt’s.... Where was Maud?

From the room beyond came Mrs Sneyde, dressed for outdoors, brilliant in green and gold, turning, coming forward with laughter and an outstretched restraining hand, suppressing her laughter to speak in the manner of one continuing a confidential talk; laughter remaining in her eyes that looked, not at the stranger she addressed for the first time, but away down the passage.

‘I’ve just,’ she whispered, ‘been in their room tyin’ up Daphne’s finger. Cut it on one of their razors. The poor

things were terrified. Had her sittin' on the table with her finger in a glass of water!'

'No. It's nothing; but those two great fellows were gibberin' with fright. She's a little demon. Two towels on the floor. One all over chocolate and the other bright with gore. They wanted to fetch old Stick-in-the-mud.'

'What a tragedy for Mr Eaden's last hours.'

'He's not goin'; stayin' for the Fest. Nobody's goin' but the dear Skerrys.'

'Didn't know they were going.'

'Nor nobody else. Till Ma suddenly began about her luggage. Wants to save the sleigh fare. Vereker's arranged it; the luggage is goin' by the Post and they're toboggannin'; can't you see them? "Whee don't ye see goodbee to Daphnee?" says she to Tammas.'

Cruel, a little cruel.

'They found out a good deal about the peasants.'

'The *peasants*? The village desperadoes? *Is* there anything to find out about them?'

'The lives they lead.'

'Tammas been tryin' to convert them? With his weak eyes? Through his smoked glasses?'

'You know he smashed his glasses?'

'He would.'

'Yes. I heard his mother scolding him on the balcony and he slowly trying to explain; all in that low tone, as if they were conspiring.'

'In an enemy camp. They were like that if you spoke to them. We all tried; but by the time they'd thought and begun to answer, you'd forgotten what you said.'

'I suddenly remembered some glasses I'd been advised to bring. They seemed astonished and suspicious and yet eager.

“Try them on, Thomas,” she said.’

‘Tree them on, Tammás. I hear her.’

‘And yesterday he handed them back jammy round the edges. I thought he was tired of them. They said nothing about going. But he told me about the peasants.’

‘They had jam teas, on their own, upstairs.’

‘Anyhow, they got in touch with the natives.’

‘I ain’t surprised. Natives themselves.’

‘With the people in the chalet behind.’

‘Old Methuselah? Not difficult if you smash things. The old boy mended Daphne’s watch. Of course she went in to see him do it. Went in jabberin’ German which she *won’t* talk with Frederika. Was there an hour till I went to fish her out. Couldn’t see her, my dear—couldn’t see *anything*; smoke, like a fog, couldn’t *breathe*. Made her out at last squatting close up to the filthy old villain on his bench. Lost, in the insides of watches. She’s goin’ to be a watchmaker now.’

‘It must be his son.’

‘Who must?’

‘The one Thomas told me of. A woodcutter. Terrible. In the snow. It’s only on snow they can bring the wood down from the higher places. Someone bought a high copse, cheaply, because the higher——’

‘Higher you go, the fewer—now I know what that means.’

‘The cheaper. Over two hours’ climb from here; somewhere across the valley. And the men and sleds must be there by daylight.’

‘Poor devils!’

‘Yes. And the horses for the climbing must be fed two hours before the start. Sometimes they have to feed them before three in the morning. One lot of men was caught up

there by an avalanche, and were there four days before they could be got down.’

‘Ai-eee; don’t tell us.’

‘At the best it’s dangerous work. They get maimed; lose their lives. All the winter this is going on. We don’t read their papers, don’t know the people and don’t hear of it.’

‘Isn’t it just as well? *We* can’t help it.’

‘It ought to be done some other way. Men’s lives ought not to be so cheap.’

‘How did Tammas get all this learning?’

‘Speaks German.’

‘Jee-roozlum!’

‘And French.’

‘And Scotch. And having no one to talk Scotch to, talks to the peasants, about their trees. Daphne *hates* the trees.’

‘*Hates* them?’

‘Would like to make a big bonfire and burn ’m all up.’

Miriam was silent, searching the green eyes for Daphne.

‘Yes, that’s Daphne. She’s mad about Napoleon. Reads all the books. Has ’m in her room. I have to expound when she gets stuck. Won’t say her prayers till we’ve read a bit of Bony. Won’t say “Make me a good girl.” Says “Make me a man and a sojer.” She and Eaden are as thick as thieves. He’s an angel to her. I’ve got to be *hoff*. Goin’ to the Curseall for lunch. Maud’s there. She’s goin’ south to-morrow with the Chisholmes.’

‘Before the Fest?’

‘Chisholmes have got to pick up their kid somewhere. Maud’s had enough of Switzerland for this year.’

CHAPTER VII

The clouds were a rebuke; for being spell-bound into imagining this bright paradise inaccessible. The world's weather cannot be arranged as a conversation with one small person. Then how did the rebuke manage to arrive punctually at the serenest moment of self-congratulation? As if someone were watching....

She looked levelly across the sunny landscape and the clouds were out of sight. But there was a movement in the air, a breeze softly at work ousting the motionless Oberland air.

She walked ahead, further and further into the disconcerting change. Everything was changed, the whole scene, reduced to homeliness. She caught herself drooping, took counsel and stiffened into acquiescence—'I might have known. I'm accustomed to this. It removes only what I thought I couldn't give up. Something is left behind that can't be taken away'—and heard at once within the high stillness the familiar sound of life, felt the sense of it flowing warmly in along the old channels, and heard from the past in various tones, amused, impatient, contemptuous: 'You *are* philosophical.' Always a surprise. What did they mean with their 'philosophical'? The alternative was their way of going on cursing, missing everything but the unfavourable surface.

Someone has said that there is nothing meaner than making the best of things.

The clouds made soft patches of shadow upon the higher snow. Beside the angular sharp shadows growing upon the northern slopes they were blemishes, smudgy and vague. But free, able to move and flow while the mountains stood crumbling in their places.

The clouds were beautiful, slowly drifting, leaving torn shreds upon the higher peaks.

Upon the ridge beyond the cloaked silence of the little wood the breeze blew steadily from across the levels—that were strangely empty; no sign of moving specks making for the further ridge. Hurrying along the track, she recalled too late the slightness of the information upon which she had built her idea of the golden scene; the gay throng, herself happily in the midst.

Without a single clear idea of the direction, she had trusted to the bright magic to draw her to itself.

The subtly changed air and the melancholy clouds restated themselves, became the prelude to disaster. The increasing wind and the cloud-bank hiding the distant mountains were proclaiming the certainty of punishment well deserved: to wander at a loss and miss the Fest.

She glanced at her afternoon in retrospect: aimless walking in a world fallen into greyness and gloom, into familiarity that was already opening the door to the old friend, at whose heart lived a radiance outdoing the beams shed by anticipation over unknown things.

But all the time the ski-ing which now she was not to see would be going forward, mocking her until she could forget it; until the hours it filled should have passed into others bright enough to melt regret.

Climbing the rise beyond the levels, she was at once climbing up to find the Fest, would plod the landscape until

she found it, late, but still in time to share and remember. She reached the crest beyond the rise—there it was: a small shape, like an elongated horseshoe, upon a distant slope. Black dots close-clustered in a strange little shape upon the wastes of snow, defying the wastes of snow.

There was plenty of space. Gaps on each side of the track and even towards the top of the rise, where people were grouped more closely about the comforting, the only festal sign, looking like an altar with its gold-embroidered, red velvet frontal. Nothing could be seen behind its shelf but a small hut upon the levels that extended backwards until the pine woods began with the rising mountain-side.

Where to stand? Up amongst the connoisseurs to see the start, half-way down with a view of the ski-ers coming, or at the bottom of the row amongst the black-clothed natives standing about in scattered groups in the loose snow.

Choosing a place half-way down, she became one of the gathered crowd of Oberland visitors lining the smoothed and steeply sloping course. They were all there. The black and distant dots had become people in every fashion of sports clothes, standing on skis, sitting on toboggans, stamping about in the snow, walking up and down; and all waiting, all looking betweenwhiles expectantly up the track towards the deserted altar. There was a good deal of talking. Here and there the incessant voices of men who make a hobby of talking. But most of them talked intermittently, in the way of these leisured English who veil their eagerness as they wait, half apologetically and wholly self-consciously, for a show. There, patiently they would wait, good-humoured, not deigning to be disturbed, not suffering anything to disturb their pose of amused independence that looked so like indifference and masked a warmth.

Just across the way was a stout lady in a sealskin coat and curiously different snow-boots. She sat sturdily bunched on her toboggan and they stuck out in front of her, close-fitting, the rubber soles curving sharply to the instep and neatly down again into the shape of a heel. She clasped a camera and her sallow heavy face was drawn into a frown that remained there while she turned towards a voice sounding from over the way:

‘... and we’ll just be *here* till judgment *day*.’

‘I was told,’ she answered at large, with face upraised, deep furrows from nose to chin giving strength to her hanging cheeks, ‘I was to see sky-jumping, but I see no men on their skies to jump.’

American continuousness held up in Europe, brought to despair by the spectacle of tolerance.

Sunlight had gone, and on the slope of the breeze small snowflakes drifted down to the snow. For a while it seemed as though the gathering in the white wilderness were there in vain.

From the group of black figures at the top of the rise a deep Swiss voice sang out an English name. Heads were craned forward, but the altar remained empty. The confronted figures were transformed. Each life, risen to gazing eyes, waited in a stillness upon the edge of time.

The knickerbockered, tweed-clad form arrived upon the shelf from nowhere, leaped, knees bent and arms outspread, forward through the air upon the long blades that looked so like thin oars flattened out, came down, arms in upward-straining arches, with a resounding whack upon the slope and slid half-crouching, gaining the upright, fully upright with hooked arms swinging, at full speed to the bottom of the hill,

went off in a wide curve and was stopped, swaying, just not falling, in wreaths of whirling snow.

Achievement. Thrilling and chastening. Long ago, someone had done this difficult thing for the first time, alone, perhaps driven by necessity. Now it was a sport, a deliberate movement into eternity, shared by all who looked on. She felt she could watch for ever. Cold had withdrawn from the snow and from the drifting flakes. One after another the figures appeared at the top of the rise and leapt, making the gliding race to the sound of cheers that now broke forth each time the forward rush followed the desperate dive. For those who crashed and rolled, slanting ski and sloping helpless body rolling over and over down the slope, there was comment of laughter silly and cruel. Yet one man sliced his face with a ski-point, and one had lain stunned at the bottom of the slope....

Vereker came at last, looking very young and lightly built, leaping neatly and far, and gliding, easily upright, to the accompaniment of frantic cheering, at a splendid pace down the slope and far on into the loose snow and round in a sweeping curve that encircled a distant sapling and left him facing up the track half-hidden in a cloud of churned-up snow.

He was the best. Length of jump, pace, style. The best of the English. And kind life had led her to him for speech, for the recovery of shared things; and was making now more memories that fitted with the rest.

Ski'd onlookers were planking sideways up and down the course, flattening it. Snow still fell thinly. The distant mountains were lost in mist. The forgotten scene was utterly desolate. Warmth flowing forth from within made a summer in its midst.

‘Tsoor-boo-chn!’ The strong spell-binding peasant name filled out the ringing cry. Switzerland was coming, bringing its so different life of mountain and pine wood, its hardy strength, perhaps to outdo the English in this brave game.

Here he came, in black against his snow, deep velvety black against the snow, gliding past the little hut with a powerful different gait. It was partly his clothes, the way they seemed all of one piece, closely fitting, without angles. And his size, huge. From the edge of the shelf he leapt high into the air and seemed to stand there against the sky, in a dream. Down he swooped, sailing, dreaming, to the track, rose smoothly from the terrific impact and smoothly went his way.

What could be more beautiful? He was heavy and solid, thickly built. But with his shapely clothing and smooth rhythmic movement he made the English graceless and their clothes deliberately absurd.

All the Swiss, though some were rough and ungainly, moved with that strong and steady grace. But Zurbuchen was the best. It was he who would live in her memory, poised against the sky like a great bird.

‘You took photographs?’

‘For him,’ smiled Vereker with his quizzical affectionate glance. ‘To remind him of what he has to do next year. But we’ll share them. Yours will remind you that next year you won’t be let off.’ Eaden remained silent and expressionless.

‘They will look strange amongst your cypress groves.’

‘They will look passing strange.’

‘You will come out again?’ She wanted neither to know nor to seem to want to know, but Vereker had left him there for a moment on her hands. She was caught in the social trap. Expected, being a woman, not to walk off alone, but to wait and provide, while she waited, suitable entertainment, some kind of parlour trick. For a moment it seemed as though he would not answer. He was silent and used to stillness, yet embarrassed now by stillness in the presence of a perceiving witness. Another woman would not seem to perceive. Would have given her question the semblance of sincerity.

‘No,’ he said suddenly. ‘If I go away at all next year I shall go east.’

‘When you’ve ’eard the East a-callin’....’ She turned to look towards the returning Vereker. Eaden gazed away towards the snowy distances. He was taking his farewell. Tomorrow, he would be gone back to his chosen isolation, uninfluenced. Tender-hearted lover of brave souls, of Daphne, and who yet would bring so little to his love-making. He stood in his heavy silence, heavy man’s silence of waiting for recognizable things.

‘Yes, that man knew what he was talking about.’ Suddenly his friendly beam and a forward approaching step, a turning away, at the first hint of something he had heard before, from his formal preoccupation, preoccupation with a glimpse of the next break in his unknown southern life. She had nothing more to say. Vereker was at hand who had held them at truce together. But now, without Vereker, they were at truce, the only kind of truce he could understand.

For a moment she was aware, far away in the future, of one of whom he was the forerunner, coming into her life for mortal combat.

CHAPTER VIII

In spite of her contempt for tobogganing she was going warily, slowing up a little at the bends, a gnome in an extinguishing cowl, Mrs Harcourt, carelessly carrying her long past and the short future that so strangely she regarded as indefinite, looking forward, making plans for next winter with eager schoolgirl eyes; carelessly bringing the life she carried about with her down to the valley this afternoon with brusque camaraderie, her day-time manner.

Her company added something to the joy of flying through the backward-flowing landscape. But it was shortening the run and fitting it within reduced surroundings—making it show as it showed to her within her larger scale of movement.

Here already was the steepest bend of the run, with the patch of black ice across its middle. Mrs Harcourt had passed it safely and disappeared. It was past and a group of people came into sight midway down the next slope: two figures, pushing off, and Mrs Harcourt at the side of the track, dismounted, beating her skirt. She had collided, managed to run into them; a collision and a humiliating smash....

‘Fools! Fooling all over v’ place. Had to slam into v’ side.’

‘A blessing the fence is broken just here.’

‘Not their fault I’m not smashed up. I was yellin’ for all I was worth.’

‘It’s *really* dangerous when you can’t see what’s ahead. Someone said tobogganing accounts for more accidents than any other sport.’

‘Don’t wonder, with so many idjuts about. Where’s Daphne?’

‘Held up, poor little soul. A broken cord, just as they were starting; the maid went in for another.’

‘Paw kid. She’ll be too late. No good waiting.’

They mounted and sped off, one behind the other, through a scene that was now the child’s vast desolation. In place of joyous flight, selfish, in which Daphne had been forgotten, came now this absurd urgency to arrive. Mrs Harcourt felt it. She was sorry, in her kindness, for Daphne’s disappointment, but saw nothing of the uselessness of arriving without her. Thought of nothing but herself, her determination, her hatred of being beaten. This made a shelter. Under the shelter of Mrs Harcourt’s determination to be there because she had said she would be there it was possible to be seen rushing uselessly to the last farewell.

Another bend. Beyond it a sleigh coming up and Mrs Harcourt carefully passing it and the other tobogganers drawn up in the snow. It was safely past. Mrs Harcourt was getting ahead. Going recklessly. Even for her, there was something more in this desperate urgency than the mere determination to arrive.

If she, too, were to arrive it was now or never. Now, at once, in the midst of this winding ice-patched roadway, she must give herself up to what she had learned on the safe snowfields and never yet dared to try here, until the last clear slope was reached. Lifting her feet to the bar, leaning back to swing free and steer by weight, she let herself go. The joy of flight returned, singing joy of the inaccessible world to

which in flight one was translated, bringing forgetfulness of everything but itself. Bend after bend appeared and of itself her body swayed now right now left in unconscious rhythm. The landscape flew by, sideways-upwards, its features indistinguishable. She was movement, increasing, cleaving the backward rushing air.

At the last slope she was level with Mrs Harcourt, safely, triumphantly returned to the known world, passing her, flying down so blissfully that arrival would now be nothing but an end to joy. Flying down towards two small figures standing on the level, turned this way, watching up the incline down which speeded, superfluously, absurdly, just these two women.

‘Where’s Daphne?’ said Eaden in his rich, indolent voice; looking over their heads, staring up the slope.

While Mrs Harcourt’s deep bass, still staccato with her anger, told the brief tale, she watched the pain and wrath in his face, strong man’s sympathy of pain with this child to whose spirit he gave homage, anger with those who had deserted her. Her useless explanation flickered about him unspoken, silenced by the pain she shared.

‘It’s no good, old man,’ said Vereker gently, watch in hand: ‘we must be off.’

Formal hand-shaking. To Mrs Harcourt’s padding of sociable remarks he paid no heed, keeping his eyes still above her on the bend at the head of the slope until he turned to tramp off with Vereker, to the sound of Vereker’s kindly, sunny voice.

‘Paw kid. Eaden was frightfully wroth. Thought we ought to have brought her.’

‘I couldn’t have dared, down those slopes, on a small single,’ said Miriam wearily. But the judge within stood firm.

She had not thought of trying.

The now distant men were marching swiftly, reaching the point where the road sloped downwards; had reached it and were settling on their toboggans. A face came round. Miriam looked back up the slope still cruelly empty, and round again to see the men seated, gliding off, lessening. Their caps vanished below the level of the ridge. And now the upward slope held a single small toboggan coming headlong. Daphne had made the run alone.

‘How *dare* you let him go?’

Miriam moved forward surprised by her own approach. Her mind was filled with the simple selfish truth. The wrath-blazing eyes saw it, recognized her for what she was, and turned away to the wastes of snow:

‘Eaden, my Eaden ... I shall *never* see him again.’ Tears flowed from the wide eyes and swiftly down the face so little convulsed by grief that bent her, standing there with arms sideways out as if to save her from falling, to keep her upright, facing her loss, fists clenched to fight her woe. Of themselves Miriam’s arms reached forth to stay the torment.

Incredibly Daphne was clinging, sobbing with hidden face: ‘Do you love me—do you love me?’ She held her without speaking, silenced while still the broken voice went on, by the sense of being carried forward into a world known only by hearsay and that now was giving forth all about them in the stillness its ethereal sounds—sounds she had sometimes felt within a gentle wind.

Daphne’s head was raised and her flushed face busy in eager speech as they went forward together over the snow. When presently she assured her that one day Eaden would come back, the child pulled upon her arm and spoke in a new way of her new love. She spoke no more of Eaden, walking

sturdily uphill, eagerly talking, sunned for a while in humble helpless love that soon must be removed.

With Eaden's departure holding Vereker away until tomorrow, and Mrs Harcourt disappeared upstairs with all those who sought sleep and early rising, the hotel was empty, strange again and going its independent way as on the day of her arrival. The presence of Guerini, hidden away in the little salon where daily he had spent his unimaginable evening of a Milan business man on holiday, increased its emptiness, made it as desolate as the world of his thoughts.

He must have learned something in seeing her evening after evening—not in the least goloshy in her blue gown of many colours—seated on the crimson stairs between the two Englishmen, in seeing discussion prevail over personalities; new world for him of men seeking, without sentimental emotion, without polite contempt, conversation with a woman. Had any light dawned in him? Would he show any grace of dawning light?

She went into the little salon and there he was, rising to greet her, with the look of a man penned within an office, the look upon his low Italian brow of worry left over from his daily life. He looked common too, common and ordinary—she wondered now that she could ever have mistaken him for a musician wandered from Russia. But beside the pathetic appeal of his commonness, supporting it, was the appeal of his disarray, his obvious gladness and relief, like Michael coming back after a last, final explanation and dismissal,

saying impenitently: 'You whipped me yesterday, to-day you must not whip.' He was extraordinarily like Michael in his belief in the essential irrelevance of anything a woman may say.

It was his last evening in Oberland, and the first time they had found themselves alone together since the afternoons in the snowfields that were now so clearly in his mind as he stood still turning over those hopeless little old Swiss books, but turned towards her as she ensconced herself in the chair from which so long ago she had watched Vereker at the piano. Yet their life together had gone on. The grim little room was full of it.

Again she had that haunting sense of being a collection of persons living in a world of people always single and the same. Mrs Harcourt, she reflected, as she said the books were like faded flowers, was fastidiously selective and always one person, one unfaltering aspect. Vereker, Eaden, all the others. Yet the lives she lived with each one were sharply separated lives, separable parts of herself, incompatible. The life she lived with Guerini, beginning unconsciously that first evening when he had turned upon her throughout dinner his brown stare, hurrying forward during their afternoons in the snow, ending with their quarrel, begun again with the reproachful gaze he had sent across the table on the evening of her truancy, had persisted during the intervening time and was now marching off afresh on its separate way.

It was clear that these close questionings held not only the remains of his surprise over the nature of the things that had separated them, but also his determination to try to see these things as she saw them. They revealed much pondering, not over the things in themselves but over their power with her, and presently it was clear that he meant to see her again. She

sat ensconced, considering him, measuring the slow movement of his thoughts, the swiftness of the impressions he was drawing from his attention to every inflection of her voice.

She knew she ought to go, that she was building up, with every moment she stayed in the room, a false relationship. The cordiality of her voice, its dreamy animation, was not for him nor made by him. It told its tale to her alone. His talk of London had taken her thoughts there and she saw it afar, vivid with charmed and charming people. For the first time, she was seeing London as people whose secret had revealed itself during this last two weeks, and was at this moment beginning consistently to live her life there as in future it would be lived, as she had lived it, but unconsciously and only intermittently, during the past year.

This man appealed, she realized it now, from the first to a person who no longer existed, to a loneliness that during the past years had been moving away from her life. It was only in its moving that she had realized its existence. This man saw her still as lonely and resourceless; and also as interesting, something new in his narrow experience. He too was lonely, had an empty life, in the busy business man's way of having an empty life: no centre and a lonely leisure. And he was more than half bent on offering her the chance that so often in the past had been at her elbow, of pretending herself into a single settled existence, a single world, safe. Even now it was a temptation. But it was the Italian background that was the real temptation. As soon as he talked of settling himself in London, he was lessened, and the temptation disappeared. Life as a single conversation in a single place, with the rest of the world going by, might seem

possible when thought of in all the newness of Italy. In London it at once fell into proportion and became absurd.

In London was Hypo, held up, at any rate saying he was held up, and not now so much awaiting her decision as taking it for granted. A big shadow, that might turn into sunshine. A gleaming shadow that lost its brightness as she faced it. And, behind it, a world that perhaps took most of its glamour from this uncertain shadow.

CHAPTER IX

It was an urgent tapping on the wall from Mrs Harcourt's side, and she was speaking as she tapped. With half-opened eyes, Miriam grew aware of darkness, half-darkness of early morning, and listened through the companion darkness within her of the knowledge that this was her last whole day, to this strange clamour from the lady whose nightly presence at her side had been for so long forgotten.

'Look out of ve window!'

Sitting up in bed, she saw hanging in mid-air just outside the window a huge crimson lamp, circular in a blue darkness. Sleepily she cried her thanks and leaped awake to dwell with the strange spectacle, the gently startling picture, in its sudden huge nearness, of the loveliness of space. The little distant moon, enormous and rosy in blue mist, seemed to float in the blue as in blue water, seemed to have floated close in sheer unearthly kindness, to comfort her thoughts, on this last day, with something new and strange.

The day passed with heartless swiftness, savourless. Full of charms whose spell failed under the coming loss.

CHAPTER X

And, for the last morning again, a strange surprise. Mountains and valley hidden behind impenetrable mist, and even the nearest objects screened by the thickly falling snow. Alpine winter tremendously at work, holding her fascinated at windows downstairs, upstairs; mighty preparation for the beauty of days she would not see, robbing her of farewell, putting farewell back into yesterday's superficial seeing which had not known it was the last.

But when she was forced to turn away to her packing, she found, within the light of this veiled world that cast within doors a strange dark brilliance, something of the London gloom, and the enjoyment of a concentrated activity that had always been one of the gifts of a London fog. It was as if already she were translated, good-byes said and the journey begun. The hours ahead became a superfluous time, to be spent in a Switzerland whose charm, since London had reached forth and touched her, had fallen into its future place as part of life: an embellishment, a golden joy to which she would return.

And when she saw the guests assembled at lunch in full strength, it was as though, having left them for good, she returned for a moment to find them immersed in a life to which she was a stranger. Confined by the weather, they had produced the pile of letters waiting in the lounge and were now rejoicing in unison over the snowfall. In speech and

silence each one revealed himself, but as a dream-revival of someone known long ago; and in the dream it was again as on that first evening when she had sat a listening outsider, fearing and hoping to be drawn in, and again it was Mrs Harcourt who, when her association with these people was seeming to be a vain thing cancelled, drew her in with a question.

The short hour expanded. Once more she was caught into the medium of their social vision, into the radiance that would shine unchanged when she was gone and was the secret of English social life and could, if it were revealed to every human soul, be the steering light of human life throughout the world. These people were the forerunners, free to be almost as nice as they desired.

And then, with the suddenness of a rapid river, her coming freedom flowed in upon her, carrying her outside this pleasant enclosure towards all that could be felt to the full only in solitude amongst things whose being was complete, towards that reality of life that withdrew at the sounding of a human voice.

It was already from a far distance that, alone with her upon the landing, she promised Mrs Harcourt remembrance and letters, said good-bye and saw once more her first diffident eagerness; felt that it was she, withdrawn since the first days, who had yet lived her life with her, transferred something of her being into the gathered memories and would keep them alive, keep the mountain scene in sight near at hand.

Alone in her room, still thinking of Mrs Harcourt, she remembered from *Ships that Pass in the Night* how on the last day all but one person had forgotten the departing guest.

Then in getting up from lunch she had seen them all, unknowing, for the last time—as yesterday the mountains.

For all these people hidden away in their rooms, immersed in their own affairs, she was already a figure slid away and forgotten. With the paying of Frau Knigge's bill, her last link with the Alpenstock had been snapped.

But when the coach-horn sounded and she went down into the hall, there they all were, gathering round, seeing her off. Hurriedly, with the door open upon the falling snow and the clashing of sleigh-bells, she clasped for the first time strange and friendly hands, saw, in eyes met full and near, welcome from worlds she had not entered. Beside the door she met Daphne forgotten, who clutched and drew her back into the window-space for desperate clinging, and entreaties sounding lest for this new, slow-witted lover the searching gaze should not be enough.

It was not until she was inside the dark coach and its occupants had thanked heaven she was English and let down a window, that she remembered Vereker. He alone had made no farewell.

The coach pulled up outside the post office and there he stood, in the driving snow, and all the way down the valley she saw them one by one, and saw him standing in greatcoat and woollen helmet, heard his elegant light distressful voice begging her to come out next year.

And brighter now than the setting they had charmed was the glow these people had left in her heart. They had changed the aspect of life, given it the promise of their gentle humanity, given her a frail link with themselves and their kind.

She climbed into a carriage whose four corners were occupied and sat down to the great journeying.

'History repeats itself.'

Looking up, she found all about her the family from Croydon, met the father's quizzical brown eyes.

'Had a farewell kick-up at our place last night. We're feeling the effects. *You* look very fit. Enjoyed yourself?'

'I've had a splendid time.'

'You collared the handsomest man in Oberland anyhow—that young giant of a Russian.'

'Italian.'

'Bless my soul! Hear that, Doris?'

'We were up till *fave* this morning,' said Doris.

The train moved off, but only Doris, once more grown-up, with her hair in a staid bun under her English winter hat, turned to watch the station disappear.

'Want to go back, Doris?'

'Ah love,' she breathed devoutly, 'could thou and aye with feete conspire——'

Miriam joined the sister in intoning the rest of the lines.

'Ah Moon——' began Doris, and the brother leaned forward, holding towards her a gloved hand whose thumb protruded through a fraying gap:

'A little job for you in Paris.'

She regarded it undisturbed and turned away the scornful sweetness of her face towards the window and the snowflakes falling thickly upon the shroud of snow.

Transcriber's Notes

This text is taken from: Dorothy M. Richardson, *Pilgrimage IV: Oberland*. Virago Press, London, 2002, p. 11-127.

The original spelling was mostly preserved. A few obvious typographical errors were silently corrected. Further careful corrections, some after consulting other editions, are listed here (before/after):

- ... Switzerland for whose features its was watching through the
...
... Switzerland for whose features it was watching through the
...
- ... Vereker says she can't helper voice, can't help being a silly ...
... Vereker says she can't help her voice, can't help being a silly
...
- ... sweeping curve that encircled a distant sapling and left him
...
... sweeping curve that encircled a distant sapling and left him
facing ...
- ... up the track half-hidden in a cloud of churned-up facing ...
... up the track half-hidden in a cloud of churned-up ...

[The end of *Oberland: Pilgrimage, Volume 9* by Dorothy M. Richardson]