

DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON

PILGRIMAGE

with an introduction by Gill Hanscombe

March Moonlight



VIRAGO

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# MARCH MOONLIGHT

BY  
DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON



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# **MARCH MOONLIGHT**

## CHAPTER I

My dear, dear Dick,

Behold me in a *chaise-longue* in the shadiest part of the *Lauriers* garden. Not at all a good position for writing, but excellent for enjoyment. There you may picture me now, every morning. I write until Miss Hancock comes in at eleven and reads to me while I needlework.

To whom, so much letter-writing?

At present the book is *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. I know you have many objections to Mrs Ward, but this particular book is very interesting to me personally, because Alan Helbeck is so very like B.V. But now and again it awakens the strain and the sadness I felt during those last days just after you left. You misunderstand when you think this sadness comes from contemplation of his possible death. No, no; it isn't that. Death is all right. Besides, his health is enormously improved. And it seems so sad that now, when he feels himself capable of enjoying life like other men, he can't allow himself to do so because of his religious convictions.

Miriam finds her eyes upon Sally's chestnut tree, whose buds just now seemed so indifferently freed from their fancy dress of April snow to reveal, in this morning's sunlight, their varnished beauty. But they are no longer the buds Sally had looked out upon when she came upstairs holding the little pile

of letters and slapped them down, with a gesture of mingled congratulation and protest, upon the bedside table; swiftly withdrawing her hand as though it had been at once charmed and chilled by contact with the evidence of so many unknown ties; putting so much of herself into the small manoeuvre that nothing was left for speech; and then at once aware, as I said have you seen the chestnut buds, of the morning quality of this usually shrouded spare room, now full of upper garden light, less screened by the trees than the light entering her kitchen. For a moment she stood responsive, on a level with the budding branches that were invisible from her front bedroom, taking in, in the undisturbing company of someone of her own blood, their full loveliness. Aren't they lovely? I asked. Lovely, she said in her warmest voice and still looked out on them, her features relaxed, letting through a radiance. But even while I watched her restored to girlhood, protest reached her face and her eyes grew sightless. There ought to be *two* Aprils, she said bitterly. The month is all house cleaning and the hideous noise of lawnmowers. When it is over, another spring has gone.

But now the chestnut tree has joined company, being a participant of mystery, with those bare larches opposite the *Lauriers* balcony where every afternoon I sat talking with Jean.

What can Jean mean?

She recalls the day of the great tea-party. The sight of Miss Lonsdale, immediately after breakfast, excitedly inquiring through the service hatch how much extra butter would be required. 'Un demi,' Berthe had sung carelessly out from some remote corner of her kitchen. 'Combien?' called Miss Lonsdale, inclining her better ear. 'Trois quarts,' came the sing—song voice quite near, cold and clear and sly, describing the cunning eyes gloating in advance over the spare quarter

tucked away with the other perquisites in the huge covered bucket she carried off under our noses as she made her nightly way out through the lounge. The arrival of the dedicated afternoon and of the guests: the retired Major, pride and president of the local English; Mrs Harcourt, bringing the German professor, rubicund as a farmer, his natural perceptiveness overlaid by a training that made him so classicimustically insist on calling the peaks across the way our Greek gods, and yet, with his booming voice and solemn round eyes, so good to have in the room representing the sound and sight of Germany; the two Poncets, eagerly pleased to be there, the daughter, her prim liveliness outdoing even her mother's, giving, with obvious delight in an exceptional public, a neat little demonstration of the Swiss style of prune-and-prism behaviour, so unsuited to her undulating, mountain-bred voice; the handsome stripling son of Miss Lonsdale's landlord, pirouetting elegantly about with the cakes, eyebrows perpetually up, above a smile intended at once to deride and graciously to approve his occupation amongst these valuable, astonishingly ignorant British who came out year after year without acquiring more than the necessary minimum of simple words and, therefore, kept him almost silent. Only once did he emit more than the obligatory politeness, suddenly exclaiming, in a clear light tone into the midst of the professor's disquisition on Chopin's pianoforte miracles: 'C'est tout simplement parcequ'il s'est consacré au piano. Il faut se consacrer.' And when they had all made their farewells and pulled on their snow-boots and departed to become shadowless black figurines upon the deserted snow, and the deep freshness of the cold, advancing into the house like a solid, and the ruby patches still staining the topmost peaks across the valley, reproached Jean and me for an afternoon spent in a room, we



closed the door and went back to the little *salon*, feeling that we shocked the robust, pockmarked boards of the empty lounge with the frivolous tap-tap of premature evening shoes, and were greeted, on entering the room, by the quiet *here they are of the Bishop*, so that to the glow of rejoining fellow survivors of a tempest that had left the house party sitting weary and relieved amidst the wreckage, was added the pleasing assurance of being essential parts of the reunion. Just at that moment, the exempted Marlboro' boys, back from their ski-ing, plonked, waking its echoes, through the lounge, and the Bishop's meditatively murmured 'Dear me, someone would appear to be arriving,' completed their mother's joy in their safety. Always, when I think of her, I shall see her as she looked when the sound of their boots was heard, the light on her raised face and the way, after the Bishop had spoken, she looked down, without shifting her pose, towards her clasped hands, to control and hide, from the roomful of people, the love and pride the whole cosmos is too small to contain.

And then it was that Miss Lonsdale, standing tired and dishevelled in the middle of the room, made her little speech: 'Friends. You have all behaved with conspicuous nobility. I thank you for the happiest tea-party the *Lauriers* has ever experienced.' And before anyone could respond she had turned and marched, with her brisk, audience-terminating, schoolmarm step, to the nearest window, to stand looking out and murmuring, as if to herself: 'Oh, I am going to *remember* the winter of '08-'09.'

And while most of us were uncomfortably waiting for someone else to speak, the Bishop, silent for a moment to give others the chance of seizing an opportunity he imagined all to have desired, sent his grave deliberate voice, a little raised for Miss Lonsdale's defective hearing, across the room: 'We must

*not*, my dear Miss Lonsdale, allow you to forget your *own* large part; the happiness, to say nothing of the comfort and wellbeing, we owe to your daily presence amongst us. I may, I think, speak for our whole party. For myself, I can say without hesitation, that the winter '08-'09 will stand in my memory as the happiest I have ever spent.'

Then *what* can Jean mean? What veil, if she were here to be questioned, would she gently withdraw to reveal, to an eye she trusts but sometimes finds blind, the truth she is so swift to perceive?

When the others had departed to their rooms, we ensconced ourselves on the little settee, one at each end, compactly filling it with our feet up and our persons dovetailed, at home together at the end of the long afternoon and at peace, feeling our weariness give way to the living joy that always held us the moment we were alone. But this time, facing each other, instead of, as usual, side by side. Each, therefore, a witness of the other's joy, so that for a while we could only smile and drop our eyes before this mutual recognition, face to face, of our joy in each other, and look away into the room as if confiding it to some third presence before returning to smile again. And her only reference to the party was a demand to know what I had been discussing with the professor. And when I told her I had said tame nothings just for the sake of hearing German, she said: 'Dick, I have seen you radiant. You don't *know* what you are like when you are radiant'; as if, for her, this new vision of her friend had been the afternoon's chief gift. That was all.

Until now, she has never voluntarily mentioned the Bishop. When we wept together over the memory of his plaintive inquiry, sent down the table from his vice-presidential seat with the Marlboro' boys to right and left of him, as to *why* a

sudden silence should fall upon the table just as the three of them were discussing the awkward topic of *washing*, it was probably I who recalled it. And when I told her he refused to agree that Hugh Benson's *Light Invisible* was a forecast of his going over to Rome, we were certainly considering the wonderful Benson family. And when she took me on tiptoe into the *salon*, to see the special little feast Miss Lonsdale had prepared for the Bishop, obliged that evening to be late, we were tempering our real sympathy for the old lady with a little wicked amusement.

What, as seen by Jean, is wrong with his religious beliefs?

She fully admits his happiness in telling me why, when he went down to Montreux, it fled. A vivid picture, in her last week's letter: 'Unfortunately the dear soul made the mistake of being as easy and confiding with them as he was with us: letting them darn his poor old socks and generally look after him as we did here. But while we surrounded, we also left him free, and respected what you call the so beautifully unassumed and unassuming dignity of his office. *They* cultivate him on the strength of their officious services.'

I see them, those bishop-lionizing women. Yet don't I come near them in being thrilled, that second afternoon of my stay, by a bishop's invitation to join him in a toboggan ride?

But in what courteously guarded terms he will have conveyed to Jean the difference between the two pensions, trusting her instantly translated, eager, perceptive consciousness to fill out the picture? By letter, these rueful confidences. Then it is to him she is so sedulously writing?

'If you remember in the book, Alan Helbeck in Lent and Easter week, how he felt he *must* not let his thoughts stray at those times, you will understand how it was this last Easter. Dickie, he told me—and I know it to be perfectly true—that I

am much too tolerant and that it lessens my power as also does my too great allowance for the independence of others and my consequent hesitancy to interfere. The truth is, as he knows, too, I think, that I am quite aware of it all, but I don't really want to change. I feel so sure that love is in itself the supreme power and will in the end conquer all things.'

Jean's carefree wisdom. And he cannot see that she is right. Yet even he can find in her only this one generous fault.

'Gissing says: "I used to judge the worth of a person by his intellectual power and attainments. Now, I think that one has to distinguish between two forms of intelligence, that of the brain and that of the heart, and I have come to regard the second as by far the most important." C'est ça, n'est-ce pas? His sadness, before he left, succeeded in making me sad, too, and consequently, we laughed a great deal, hilariously, all day long, because we did not wish our sadness to appear. On his last day here he said we shall never meet again on this side of the grave—but beyond. And then followed a dissertation on his ideas of a meeting there. Of its happiness and naturalness. He may be right; but I wonder.'

Then it was *Jean*, and not someone remembered from his far-off youth, who shone within his mind when he asked me as silently we toiled, trailing our luges, side by side up the long tracks, that astonishing question.

'The loveliness of this scene,' he began suddenly in his elderly and habitually rather devout low tone within which there lingered, bestowing a touch of colour and warmth, the persuasively protesting cadences of youthful academic controversy, shattering not only my newly found joy in being again amongst the snow-cloaked mountains and the snowfields and the million-needled assault of the crystalline air, but also the silence that I had imagined filled with the ease of

immediate good understanding. A good understanding, resulting from our mutual stock-taking during the social gatherings of that first twenty-four hours, ending with his final summing-up, that day, when at lunch I had caught him taking, while Miss Lonsdale dealt with that queer, convulsive young man who was spending his last hours under her roof in trying to persuade her to uproot herself from a Switzerland faced with ruin if Germany should start a war, a snapshot of me, with a flattering lens. I did not then know that already Jean had told him I was more or less of a Quaker, probably just saying, with the restrained twinkle that accompanies her communication of odd facts, she's a *Quakeress*, and that his mind, as he observed me under cover of an assumed air of attention to the impassioned duet, would certainly be at work upon this piece of information.

Still fevered with the sleepless journey, knowing I was once more in Oberland rather than feeling myself there, and still taking in only with my mind the quality of the party into which I had been gathered overnight when they all came, one by one, after tea in the *salon*, to pay a little Vicarage call on me, sitting at my side on the low settee that looked out on to a fierce Gumfluh made gentle by their kindness, I was probably staring, while he imagined me far withdrawn from the unquakerly tumult raging round the equally unquakerly theme, blankly into space. And I remember contemplating, from the depths of my twenty-four hours ensconcement in Alpine winter, in its peculiar quality of seeming to be there, freed from turmoil and from change, for ever, and from my still deeper ensconcement in the immortal moment between taking stock of one's surroundings and becoming involved in them, the autumn beauty of Dimple Hill; the fiery blaze of its northernmost woodlands in afternoon sunlight, their misted

gleam when a strong south wind drives across them the gigantically stalking wraiths of fine rain; the gentle onset there of what, incredibly, was this same winter. Its first dusk, so different from the thin twilights of spring and from the ripe gloamings that come later and yet, because the memory and the promise and the clear vision of these is contained within it, so deeply moving; and how for a mile I raced it as it trailed, increasing its pace, strengthened by the dense, low-hanging grey that since morning had screened the sun's brief journey, upwards towards the house on the hill, to find there the depths of this dusk, warm in the firelight of the front room whose lamp was still to come; and the December morning singled out from the rest by the small warm scent of violets within in the early mist and, later that same day, the voice of Richard as he said I reckon it would puzzle one of those quaint little contraptions to get *me* over the snow at a pace like that; and presently feeling, although in that moment of new birth his image in my mind seemed little more than a ghost, a fresh surge of resentment towards his eternal, self-protecting facetiousness, and probably revealing, to the Bishop, in my expression, a combined wistfulness and vexation not unnatural in a Quaker overhearing the conversation of potential warriors; and there, full upon me as I shifted my gaze, in search of release from the final object of my contemplations, away from the space these had opened before me in the air between myself and my opposite neighbour, was the mild, deeply speculative eye of this oddly planted ecclesiastic.

‘The loveliness of this scene carries one’s thoughts to the world beyond our world. Tell me, do you believe that we shall meet there, free from terrestrial barriers, those for whom on earth we have felt a deep affection?’

Fraudulent I felt. Again, as at Dimple Hill, though the

blessedly generous and generalized culture of those who here were crediting me with the estate of a fully fledged Christian did not demand of each individual that he should be his own priest and prophet, I felt myself a wolf in sheep's clothing. But also so much taken aback, by the priest's appeal, to a layman and a relative stranger, for reassurance in regard to so bright and precious a part of the faith he represented, that in my embarrassment I abruptly said oh yes, keeping my eyes upon the mountains because the answer he sought seemed there so much more fully expressed than in any words I might, upon reflection, have brought forth.

'Thank you. It cannot, I believe, be otherwise.' And in a moment we were at the top of the track and I was envying him, reduced, in the interval, from the height whereon my inexperience had placed him to the level of average humanity, the gaiters saving him the daily tedious labour of unwinding puttees that nevertheless, whether drying unrolled upon the radiator, demanding, before they could be assumed, to be re-rolled to the compactness of a surgical bandage, or waiting, trim dry bundles firmly wound off the day before, side by side upon a shelf, supplied a ritual within the moments of whose laborious accomplishment was enfolded the day's deepest consciousness of a snow-bound world.

It was *Jean*.

Weary, broken by a life methodically devoted to everyone but himself and also, on principle, to no earthly creature in particular, this prematurely aged mission-priest, unaware of what awaited him, had made his way across the world to Jean, to a lover by nature rather than through the reasoned acceptance of a creed. Jean. Not Miss Sclater, the college-trained Eucken-reading, Kierkegaard-reading young missionary-in-the-making, like himself on holiday after a

breakdown, and yet dividing her time between a selfish invalid and the local evangelistic enterprises. Better looking than Jean, an interested, self-effacing talker and listener, yet no effort of hers could have drawn him as Jean had drawn him without an effort or a thought. Instantly, he must have recognized her. Who would not? And presently found himself in a new life, in the midst of revelation, in love, for the first time, with all the banked-up force of an almost perfectly disciplined nature. Joy, shattering and incredible, and presently torment. Keen enough to drive him to open his heart to a stranger.

And Jean? One day, incredulously aware. Plunged, presently, to her own surprise, in emotional response. And when the barrier made itself felt and, at last, with the help of his characteristically guarded generalizations, clearly perceived, unable to grant it the tolerant welcome she so readily extends to individual peculiarities. Able only to deplore the belief that so inexorably built it up.

We never directly discussed religion. But when the English chaplain, losing his head during his furious denunciation of Christian Science, went so far as to boast of his ignorance of the writings of the founder, she blushed her shame for him, and smiled, looking down at her tightly clasped hands, her sympathy for my hysterical giggle. (Will she remember, will she always remember, how, deserting for a while the English church to go the round of the local Bethels, we climbed one day up the hill to the Réformée, arrived late and innocently made our way into the choir?) And though her interest in my Sussex experiences led more than once to a discussion of the technique of Quakerism, I recall her only as questioning and listening; never as giving a verdict. Save perhaps on that one occasion, left for ever perfect by the sudden appearance on the balcony of my first sample of the local English, unmistakable



in a shabby, perfect tailor-made, at once eager and composed, middle-aged and girlish, waving an ear trumpet and to become, as soon as she had departed, one of two sisters sustaining compulsory exile, on small means in a small chalet, with the help of daily excursions undertaken by each sister in solitude with the idea of gathering material for interchange sufficient to last, if economically and exhaustively doled out, until again they should separate on their respective rounds. Advancing down the balcony, she made straight for a Jean hoisted a little in her *chaise-longue*, surrendered to this intruder as to someone eagerly awaited, perched herself on its base, leaned towards her, trumpet to ear, considered for a moment Jean's flushed and eager face and said coquettishly: 'Say something sooving.' And while I fumed and in vain reproached myself for fuming, I felt the moment preceding her arrival strike its deep root.

I had been watching Jean, hitherto known only in weekday guise, ever so little sabbatically withdrawn in the company of her small Oxford Bible and had been speculating, while carefully she turned its delicately crackling leaves, as to the composition of the local Bible study circle and the nature of its appeal to her alert, college-trained mind, and presently had become aware of the beneficent restfulness of our common silence, and in a moment was desiring interchange on the subject of Sunday, on its way of standing outside time, divesting active, planful, out-turned, time-table people of the cutting edge of their power to disturb, providing a deep retreat whence long perspectives, lost during the turmoil of the week, again became visible, even amongst Friends, compelled, by custom, to be sabbatarians against their principles. And I broke the silence to call her attention to the Quaker repudiation of the idea of singling out, as the Lord's Day, any one of the seven,

and went on to confess to a nostalgic longing, when isolated on Sunday with people who completely disregard it, for the company of even the most lugubrious of Old Testament sabbatarians, and saw her glowing face turn my way and felt the working of her instinctive knowledge of the superiority, for the purpose of encouraging discourse, of a delighted, appreciative smile directed across the speaker's path and keeping speaker and listener free and firm in their respective solitudes, over an encounter of the eyes and an ardent rejoinder. And felt, too, in that same moment, again the strong deep sense of Sunday uniting and holding us apart, confirming our growing delight in each other by providing, even while we sat side by side, a distant focus; and at the same time enchantedly recognized, saw that I was intended to recognize, as she bent once more zealously over her Bible, both the suspension of her thoughts and the desire for continuance confessed by her smile, so nearly approaching a schoolgirl's grin as to show her eager to recover and to share, from within the shelter of a genuine preoccupation, schoolgirl joy in illicit exchange screened by an apparent pious engrossment in an imposed task.

Inspired by her response, I discovered sturdily flourishing in my consciousness and at once confided to the framed landscape ahead of me, a preference for living, if ever circumstances should compel the choice, with even the most hypocritically sanctimonious pietists, flopping to their knees on every possible occasion, singing many hymns and having a long grace before each meal, rather than with even the most enchanted and enchanting humanists. And again she turned my way, and unawares I abandoned my role and watched her while cautiously, holding back the laughter that had filled her eyes with tears, she murmured so would *I*, and perceived for

the first time the strength controlling her sweetness, the power that had drawn me when as a stranger I had observed her at table and wondered why, for all her apparent absorption in making inane conversation for her neighbour, this inconspicuous girl seemed somehow to enliven the whole decorous group, and felt in equal measure a desire for close acquaintance and a fear lest the desire be realized. And now again, in this eternal moment, she was a stranger far removed, and I saw her gently making her way through life, upheld by this mature strength, unconsciously inspiring all those she would meet and draw to her side, to seek and find their own. And as once more, aware of my scrutiny and betraying her awareness by a lingering flicker of the schoolgirl grin, she bent above her crackling leaves, I longed, bereft and breathless, for the sound of her voice, conning over in my mind its peculiar cadences, neither trained and mannered like Amabel's, nor making, like the deliberating voices of the Roscorlas, each word a statement with parentheses, yet conveying, in their gentle, unaggressive movement, her whole self, the tolerance and the wealth of her sympathetic imagination, so that after she had spoken there lingered within the air, rather than the meaning of what she said, its sound; protective. But just as she asked in level, meditative tones 'What is a humanist?' Miss Cadogan and her ear trumpet appeared in the doorway.

We had no premeditated discussions. Apart, we could forget each other: but our serenity in absence owed its power to the quality of our meetings.

Separation from Amabel used to bring both regret and relief. Relief from the incessant applause-demanding drama, regret for failure to emerge unwearied. Meeting her again with strength renewed, one would find her already divorced from the past she so readily discards, involved in fresh excitements

that brought the uneasy sense of time rushing ahead and were overshadowed, even while she dramatized them, by the certainty of their imminent doom.

To return to Jean is to find oneself at an unchanging centre. Even when, during some of our silences, we reached, travelling independently, different destinations, and returned then to consultations that left for one or other of us a point of view for ever modified, the ensuing sense of the flowing away of the time at our disposal surprised me by its painlessness. Again and again I recalled my helpless woe when Amabel first hinted her desire for fresh people, her need to pass on, opening a gulf across which I still look back. Still, I can feel the sudden hard indifference of the wall behind us as we sat side by side across my narrow bed and, still, my own surprise at the swift tears flowing, quietly, resignedly, as though for long they had been prepared without my knowledge, for this inevitable moment, and seeming, so swiftly in that instant of silent realization had I moved back into loneliness, the witnessed grief of another. And to this day I do not know whether she desired only to test her power, or whether her response to my tears, her undertaking never to leave me, was native generosity, or just a way of comforting a child.

But the thought of leaving Jean was promise as well as pain, carrying me forward across a future that held no assurance of a fresh meeting and yet promised reunion.

The moment we found ourselves together, time stood still. Our relief and our unspoken delight expressed themselves in smiles, observed rather than exchanged. Every memory of rejoining Jean evokes her flushed face lit by the radiance her downcast lids were powerless to veil; her perfect prelude to speech. The sound of irrepressible joyous laughter flowed through her gravest communications. And our intermittent

silences, rather than tension-creating searches for fresh material, were fragments of a shared eternity whence, upon an identical rhythm—since our recovered voices, boxed by the balcony’s sloping roof and enclosing balustrade, its fragrant log-stack and the evocative piled instruments of sport and yet escaping to challenge, with their small individual threads of sound, the snow-bound outer stillness, would simultaneously restore these beloved forgotten surroundings—we contemplated whatever had been summoned to stand before us.

Bless her for her ardent agreement as to the charm of a country winter, apart from the long lingering of autumn-coloured leaves and the sight, when they fall, of spring buds much too small to blur the clean beauty of stripped trees, apart from January’s April-green mosses and the distant view of June’s gold summoned by winter gorse—the way, during the dark months, *all* the doings of the light, half of whose pageant, in the height of summer, must daily be missed, fall well within the waking hours.

And for admitting the townsman’s misreading of the consciousness of the yokel. The inability of the civilized, relatively isolated, uneducated and inexperienced town dweller to imagine himself into the situation producing the slow, roundabout speech and the guarded, in-turned facial expression he mistakes for stupidity. She sat holding the scales, a little dubious over the implied lack of reverence for civilization. But when I asked her, myself considering it for the first time, to imagine herself spending her life in a village, amongst people all known to her and many of them her relatives; to picture the experience accumulated in the consciousness of a village child, even before school pumps in its supply of easily forgotten irrelevancies; to compare a town life’s relatively small *direct* knowledge of the business of birth and death, sudden sickness,

insanity, the relentless slow progress of every kind of incurable disease, of infirmity and senility, with the exhaustive knowledge of all these things acquired in a village lifetime; to remember that in 'a sleepy village where nothing happens,' crime and cruelty, kindness and joy and sorrow go their way under the highest white light of publicity known to mankind. And then to imagine falling into a richly experienced, preoccupied village consciousness whose every day brings a fresh event somewhere in the huge family, even the simplest of questions, even a demand for the way to the next village, to the inquirer only an imaginary destination, the momentary halting-place of his will-o'-the-wisp, but for the local man a storehouse of memories and the scene of current events through whose crowding presences, while with vacuous, expert eye he sums the stranger up, he must thrust his way to the desired information, she turned and swiftly kissed me.

I shall never know what she would have said when presently our voices sounded together and mine prevailed because I desired to hide from her the certainty that had dawned at Dimple Hill and increased there. And now, having put into words something of what I had felt about the wealth and the woefulness of village life, I realized how far beneath her I stood in preferring, to its enclosure and its tests and exposures, the more distributed life of the townsman, its exemptions and protected solitudes, I hurried on, holding forth on the universally belauded quality of local work and the tributes paid to village kindness; making her see that native honesty in craftsmanship, and village sympathy, born of witnessing distress at close quarters rather than merely hearing about it, are not always of sufficient account; making her realize how, in a village, everyone carries about with him his own inalienable record, known to everyone else, and that a bad

piece of work, or a lack of active sympathy when need calls, will brand a villager for life. And again she glowed towards me, missing, in the interest of the subject, my flight from judgment.

But the best and, for me, the most searching moment of the afternoon was the sudden perception of what lies behind the 'simple' person's inability to summarize, behind the obvious deep enjoyment, particularly remarkable in women, of the utmost possible elaboration of a narrative, of what is evoked in the speaker's mind, while in torment one waits for the emergent data: 'Well now, let me think. It couldn't have been a *Thursday* because I've been out working every *Thursday* this month, owing to Mrs Jones being ill and sorry I am though I don't deny the extra bit came in handy with prices going up like they are.' Hopeful question. 'Yes, it *might* have been a *Wednesday*. I'd set my iron to reheat just as I heard the click of the gate. My big iron, it was, to press Joe's trousers for him to go to the sale. What am I *telling* you?' Pause for enjoyable laughter. 'I must be going silly. Oh, deary me. What I mean to say, now I come to think of it, it couldn't have been so late as *Wednesday*. I had a great pile of things on the table here ready to iron. I remember that because I thought to myself shall I ever get all them things done *today*? Easter coming, I'd done me curtains too. *Tuesday*, then, it must have been, because I was telling Joe this morning every *Monday* this month has been a good drying day, like you often get in *March*.'

But when we agreed, recalling, as I thought, tortures, how easily, if one set oneself to realize the deep delight of the dancer of the interminable *pas seul* in honour of the joy of life at first hand, and executed, wordlessly, while it lasted, a similar *pas seul* of one's own, the trial might be supported, and with what refreshment one might emerge to greet the finale, I

knew, watching Jean's luminous face, that what for me seemed an onerous laudable venture, a possibility I might in time learn to realize, for her, already, in relation to nearly everyone she met, was a commonplace of daily life, a labour to which she had given no name.

And always our contemplations discovered a truth that left us united, so much one person that in the talk following the arrival of an outsider it seemed, when either spoke, as if it were the other, and I would hear, in Jean's voice addressing someone else, myself speaking, and see her lessened, moved away from her centre, a little too out-turned in her responsiveness and with all her faults upon her, and when, in fact, I spoke, would be aware of Jean controlling.

And Miss Lonsdale became aware of this close interchange, and, in spite of herself, jealous. Socially, with her deafness, the neediest and, with her cultivated intelligence, the wealthiest member of the household, she had had, before I came, the largest share of Jean. And steadily Jean kept up the pathetic lip-reading lessons without perceptible progress. Wistfully, arriving on the balcony towards tea time, she would demand, standing between the foot-rests of our *chaises-longues*, and looking from face to face, a share of our thoughts, sending Jean upon a search for something that could be communicated in a few shouted remarks.

It is the puritanism of his Anglo-Catholicism that troubles her..?

And I saw nothing. My picture of him was almost himself as he wished, or thought he ought, to be. Serenely immune, I believed him, as well as so gifted with sympathetic imagination as to be living several lives besides his own. Light falls now upon those two small incidents, giving them vivid life: that morning when, coming down to breakfast on the



stroke of the hour we had named, Jean defying me to succeed, I found the Bishop unexpectedly late and in his place at the end of the table, and Jean just round its corner instead of in her usual seat and, when Berthe brought in my coffee and set it also near that far end, I murmured towards Jean, through the clatter, 'You see I have kept our appointment.' It was because he might have heard my words that her lie was justified when she rebuked my crudity and cut me to the heart by saying in her clearest tone, 'Oh, I had forgotten it.' I imagined she would have done something of the kind whoever might have been with us, and sat crushed and furious, yet contemplating a perfection of social awareness perhaps to be acquired under her guidance.

But now I see that it was more than Jean's in-born courtesy. Knowing what had happened to him, and herself more deeply involved than her letter admits, she feared even the suggestion that she would sooner breakfast, at the beginning of yet another heavenly day, with me rather than with anyone else.

And the day we all went suddenly, with one accord, to Gruyères. Did anyone particularly want to undertake that tremendous outing? Who suggested it? Miss Lonsdale, urged by her teacher's desire to introduce her party to the things that ought to be seen?

It was arranged on one of those rare occasions finding us all having breakfast about the same time, everyone there beneath her eye and the day, through each window, showing its perfection. The Bishop, who must have come down late, having finished the meal he usually took in solitude, lingered vice-presidentially, urbanely chatty, glad to be there amongst us all. When I came in he must have been paying his tribute to the morning's splendour. 'In *Switzerland*,' he was gently saying, in the dry, plaintive tone that meant a little tale at

someone's expense, usually his own, a blessed sound enclosing the leisurely good humour of the English, their refusal to rush or be rushed, 'one may quite *safely* employ such a remark in the service of conversational interchange. Whereas in *Madeira*, as a stranger, deeply impressed, *day after day*, by the continuous sunshine and blue sky, I met, when remarking at breakfast upon the fineness of the day, with what seemed to me a singular lack of *response*, and was *puzzled*, if not somewhat *embarrassed*, until I discovered that in *Madeira every day* is a fine day.'

I'd just escaped remarking that in that case the visiting English must be condemned to perpetual silence when I felt, as hastily I swallowed my brick, running round the table amidst the general chirruping, an uneven ripple, and heard the Bishop inquire, voice raised for Miss Lonsdale at the other end: 'And you? You will join us?'

Peering round at us all through her dense glasses, 'I *must*,' she sighed, 'you give me no choice, dear people, I *must* be in it.' And she called confidently to Berthe-in-the-kitchen as if she imagined her a witness of this gratifying scene: 'Alors, Berthe, *dix déjeuners en paquet!*' And Berthe, with a despairing shriek, appeared at the open hatch, all her teeth illuminating the most beatific of her smiles. And when she dispatched us, her sing-song blessings ringing out from the doorway to which at such a far-distant hour we were to return, and the faces of the scattered party all turned obediently towards her, even that of the Bishop wore the uncritical glad expectancy of a child on holiday.

For all of us, even for Rosabel when she is an enlightened old woman, that day will stand out as the peak of our unity at *Les Lauriers*, at all times perceptible and, after Gruyères, present in the very air of an empty room.

It was a Saturday, a day always drawing us more closely together, with Sunday ahead to bring the formal ease of an unvarying ritual, a later breakfast, our more stately clothes, our unanimous church-going; our party collected, within that of all the local English, in the little plaster church, a nucleus of conviction that the chaplain's woolly haverings could not obscure. And it was in the depth of the Swiss winter's best, before the February sun grew strong enough to free, at midday, some small frozen torrent to tinkle in the stillness out of sight, and to summon, to the heads of the village children, those weird little inverted baskets of embroidered, brightly coloured straw.

Rosabel—newly impressive with the strange surroundings heightening her solid beauty that everywhere attracted eyes whose owners presently wondered what had drawn them—restlessly haunting the corridor of the little train in a blind quest for fuller response than any *Les Lauriers* had afforded her, and finding, instead, the uninspiring producer of Jean's little scene: a young man negative almost to vanishing point, of whom even Rosabel's imagination could not create a figure of romance and who yet, by appearing unexpectedly, awoke in her an animation that must have astonished and may have brought him, since he would not perceive its impersonality, both pride and fear in equal measure. And Jean, summoned, flew forth to greet and stay talking with him until at the next toy station he left the train and for a few moments stood visible upon the platform, his wooden bearing and unilluminated face revealing the fruitlessness of Jean's effort to make him serve as a partner in an animated conversation. Audible amongst the voices sounding in the enclosure, her gentle outcries, projected from the open carriage door, made her visible: sweetly absurd as she stood in the doorway rapturously savouring her wealth,

the far-off cherished home his presence brought so vividly before her and that yet subtracted nothing from the riches of her enchanted exile.

And she came back, with the delight that had shone from her as she went forth heightened upon her flushed and eager face, and I watched her coming down the gangway and revelled in my pride in her and in her controlled and gentle movements as she came to resume her seat at my side and give me, in a single swift look, before she settled down to recount her adventure, the measure of her joy. And she went, not even glancing my way, straight to the Bishop, tucking herself compactly down, hands in muff, against his arm, her face all smiling curves, her eyes, while still they looked reminiscently into space, radiating a perfect satisfaction. And it was he who, after a single, indulgent glance at her profile, looked across at me, smiling, so I thought, his fatherly pride in being singled out as the recipient of her surplus, and his half-mischievous sympathy for my plight in being set aside in favour of an older friend.

I know now what will have been for him that moment in the depths of the untethered day.

Blind, I was, to the drama playing itself out under my nose.

Throughout the winter I believed, and silently at every turn she seemed to confirm my belief that she and I together, because we were together, irradiated our surroundings, she for me, I for her.

From the moment I first saw her sitting opposite to me at table and tried to discover why she was impressing me, Vaud, anticipated as a renewal of Oberland, and becoming Oberland as the train wound upward from the cloud-dimmed lake and the first tawny crag looked down from a gap in the mist, began to become Jean. There, for ever, she sits, her slightly prominent blue eyes apparently quite vacant beneath the arches

of her delicate eyebrows that at once attracted me and that help so much to give to her serene brow and to her oval face, whose soft bloom recalls Eve in her teens, surrounded by Eve's brown hair grown silkier and arranged in puffs that would be Japanese save for their irregular massing, something of the look of a conventionalized eighteenth-century portrait.

Landed amongst strangers, their presence the inevitable price of access to joy whose sure approach alone made bearable those last weeks at Dimple Hill, I watched her, from the depth of my weariness, making conversation as though she were giving it the whole of her attention, though now I know that her clear intelligence and her gentle heart were all the time aware of every point within the compass of her surroundings, with the mild, neat-featured young man whose gentle, rather high-pitched voice had the Balliol accent and the apologetically, plaintive cadences so often accompanying it, and who, two days later, turned into Jim Davenport quietly and efficiently building a pine-branch fire for our picnic in the snow at the top of the world and, later, in the swiftly descending after-sunset cold, when the off-horse, on the narrowest part of the high path between precipice and mountain face, got a leg outside the long rein and began to plunge, rising from the last, most wildly swinging luge of the tail and somehow getting himself, serenely watchful, along past the row of slithering luges and the rocking sleigh, to the horse's head.

'No, Sally. No one shrieked.'

No one made a sound. Not even old Miss Lonsdale, hilariously conducting her pension on the grand spree, and having, from her seat in the sleigh, the clearest view of what was happening, nor the small wise mother of the Marlboro' boys ('courtesy in youth may be little more than good spirits; if

it survives the trials of life, it is *genuine*’) sitting beside her amongst the empty picnic baskets, nor Rosabel just behind the sleigh, nor the disdainful girl heading via Cheltenham for Girton, poised elegantly upon her luge with the Marlboro’ boys for van and rearguard, nor the tall, jocular young woman heading, via Woodbrooke, for the West African mission-field, Whose peaked white helmet rose above the head of the young man on furlough from the C.M.S. who was to get so many quiet snubs from the Bishop for his masculine superiority and sat, blissfully unconscious of Jean’s half-amused pity and my impatient scorn, just ahead of us.

Davenport’s exploit had made a good sample story for Sally; really holding her attention. To almost everything else she had listened with indifference. Patiently at first, buoyed up by the expectation of hearing at any moment something that would serve as a basis for hope. But always in the end revealing her disappointment in the smile that plainly said, as she bustled away to labours piled up while she had sat listening: this is all very well, but leads nowhere. Jean’s first letter, bearing the Swiss postmark, had given her a momentary relief whose departure had been avenged by her impatient reference to the difficulty of distinguishing ‘nowadays,’ between masculine and feminine hand-writing. ‘It’s these *modern* women,’ she had said with patient contempt, ‘who write like men.’

Then all our deep happiness, never confessed, never even alluded to, was nothing more than a background. Lit by glowing rays from an unsuspected source. Yet it had seemed so real, so independent. Renewed every morning, it reached perfection during our afternoons in solitary possession of the balcony. Silent, or endlessly talking. One of the prices of this perfection she taught me: to accept incursions without evasion or resentment. (‘Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled.’) Jean

knows that *nothing* can be clutched or held. Were we ever more fully together than during that evening when we were impelled, after the snowstorm, to escape and creep out into the moonlight? At the very door we were caught by Miss Lonsdale emerging from her hall-bedroom. I could have slain her as she stood, schoolgirlishly hopping while she announced her intention of joining us. And, as we wandered about, for her lyrical outcries, Jean, responding, made her happy. ‘A *most* delightful adventure. I thank you, my children.’ And, as once more the house door opened to let us in, triumphantly preceded by Miss Lonsdale, Jean, gently pinching my arm, murmured with her little sigh: ‘That’s *life*, Dickie.’

But once, she rebelled. The day we watched the first avalanches thunder down into the valley, a murky grey cloud of snow and stones and pine branches rolling helplessly over and over. Yet only in face of a needless demand. And with a recklessness, considering our combined poverty, that surprised and enchanted me, Miss Lonsdale, dressed for visiting, confronting us in our *chaises*, looking from one to the other, saying exultantly: ‘Now *which*, I wonder, of you two, in my absence and most *charmingly*, will preside this afternoon in the *salon*? I go, unfortunately, by duty bound, *out* to tea.’ Instantly, Jean’s little cry: ‘So do *we*!’

It was the first of our deliberate extravagances, so well repaid; the first time we sat, silent and apparently damned, drinking in the conversation of the gathered English excitedly keeping things up—and watching our beloved E. F. Benson, sitting sternly alone at a little corner table with his back to everyone, making us wonder how he endured hotel evenings, how he passed his time until another morning should set him on the rink to glide about looking, even in his enchantment, a lost soul.

‘I am very glad you persuaded Miss Hancock to come out here. We are a great deal together. She repeated to me, this morning, very gravely, you know her unfailing quiet sense of humour, the following:

“Go to father, she said, when he asked her to wed.  
Now she knew that he knew her father was dead,  
And she knew that he knew the life he had led,  
So she knew that he knew what she meant when she said:  
Go to father.”

‘So you see, Dick, I can’t possibly tell her my naughtiest stories.’

Does Miss Hancock find her, as I promised Mr Hancock, feeling so glad to have something to offer in return for that first gift of Oberland, a host in herself? Does she recognize, as the daily recipient of Jean’s being, her great good fortune? Do they wander as we wandered, talking and talking, inevitably meeting an acquaintance, or some half-known resident Britisher, either of whom I would desire to strangle, while Jean patiently and amiably conversed, as if the whole of time were hers and the whole of her sweetness at the service of vacuous conversation-makers? Miss Hancock, she will not find it necessary sharply to rebuke: ‘Dicky, one *can*’t out people short and just march away.’

Do they sit talking on the balcony?

One more sheet, closely covered ... ‘*Gentian.*’ She has nothing more to communicate but the changes in the surrounding scene, now, too late, revealed as neglected, pushed aside on behalf of an illusion. But even if I had held aloof, kept myself free for untrammelled unity, I left too early to discover whether the blue of gentian gives the same sense of an ultimate



distinction as do the best of the Dimple Hill delphiniums.

Turning back to read to the end, Miriam welcomed as accompaniment to the undesired excursion, the odour of wood-smoke coming up from some downstairs fire-lighting, sending its fragrance to compete with this painful pothor about people, providing, too, a refuge from the pressure of the personalities within the house, a way through; the local gentian, always somewhere discoverable.

In any case, the Swiss gentian, like the famous edelweiss which may be noble but is no more white than the Swiss snow-drop, the disappointing *perce-neige*, creamy and insipid, may be no more than a spurious blue.

‘Dick, I don’t say much about our friendship. It is a very precious thing. I am silent before the wonder of it. And before your understanding of everything. Unconsciously now I find myself comparing everyone I meet with you. And they always fail. I hunt and hunt to find another you. I never shall. I share your happy optimism, but haven’t learned how to convey it to others as you do by just being *there*.

‘Each time I hear from you I feel armed for the fray. You make me laugh. But when you threaten to go about labelled ginger-ale for ladies only, you use the wrong expression. For me you are like the most refreshing of sea breezes. No, that won’t do. There is nothing to compare with the effect you have on me. And it works however you are feeling. At this moment I am lonely. No, I’m not. Looking at your letter, I hear your voice and am at once under your influence. How I miss you—when I forget to love the fellow creatures about me. I feel starving. You won’t misunderstand. I am enjoying every moment.

‘The crocuses are coming out. I shall send you the first gentian. Perhaps next week.’

The door clicked, calling her attention to her flaming cheeks, moved half open, mercifully came to rest, its handle held by some one not intending to appear; either one of the children with a message, or Sally herself come up with something to say.

‘I’ve lit the fire in the drawing-room, in case you feel like coming down.’

‘Oh, that’ll be lovely, Sally.’ To come down, from the top of the world to the miracle of a fireside, of any fireside.

‘I’ll keep the children out of the way.’

‘You needn’t.’ Jean speaking, herself speaking to Jean, to Sally, to the world flooded by the tide risen within. ‘Unless you fear the remains of my flu.’

Sally was looking at her nails, or away across the landing, while she listened, taking the moral temperature of this sister once again returned empty-handed and therefore justifiably gloomy, and, astonishingly, from what she saw as a field of infinite possibilities, judging from the warmth of her voice, restored to her usual mysterious, half-vexatious, half-enviable confidence in face of a future both empty and menacing.

‘No. Really, I’m all right, Sally.’ Again Jean speaking, addressing herself to that far region of Sally’s being where, unknown to her, or forgotten, overlaid by each day’s thronging multiplicities or obscured by beguiling pictures of a ‘future’ that would compensate for the not much more than endurable ‘present,’ the same certainty dwelt secure. ‘Only a bit wobbly.’

‘Well. We’ll see.’

The door closed. Sally’s patent shoes creaked hurriedly across the landing, down the stairs.

‘To love everyone about me.’ Jean could not speak these, her inmost secrets, if we were to meet again. They can only be written. Or lived. That’s why there *must* be churches, and

dogmas, to formulate and cherish and pass round the things that cannot be mentioned. Jean lives them, gaily. Lives in a world she sees transfigurable. Already, for her, transfigured. What comes to others only at moments is with her always.... Her natural genius. Cultivated.

Somehow she has mastered the art of incessant prayer? Incessant orientation of her spiritual compass toward the love that is the centre and the gaiety of the universe, and the secret, too, of her deep enjoyment of any and every moment. That is why she never flies into rages, and holds me back when I do, laughingly as well as in pleading, because she knows what I am missing. And is the reason, too, for the quality of her outward responses. Even her swiftest pities are always a little shy, as if dependent upon some more powerful feeling untouched by sadness. With the Bishop, pity is entirely sad, and his most radiant goodwill suggests something acquired, not there by nature, acquired, laboriously, through obedience to accepted doctrines and disciplines.

She is wrong about our laughter. Whenever we were together laughter enfolded us, coming from her to me, from somewhere to both of us. Sometimes I deliberately drove it away, desiring, for one of my elucidations, a surrounding gravity. And gravely she would listen. But in her response there was always laughter, in her quietest responsive smile a dancing laughter.

## CHAPTER II

‘Say something funny, Auntie.’

William’s confident grin broadened as she smiled back at him, revealed all his white teeth and brought to his eyes the conspiratorial gleam that was at once his silent salute to their good understanding, a tribute to past performances and an invitation to immediate jollity. But her heart, that so recently had missed a beat in imagining Jean, and Jean’s love that was her own passport to eternity, abolished from the universe, now contracted before the spectacle of William so precariously launched therein. There, unconscious of risk, he sat, squarely and incongruously upon the fragile chair salvaged by Bennett from the Henderson crash and seeming to summarize, even while it brought, together with the little inlaid table and the Italian landscapes, into Sally’s crowded sitting-room a touch of the vanished graciousness of the drawing-room at Barnes, the hazardous circumstances wherein the decisive events of his boyhood were swiftly telling themselves off.

Bennett’s son, steady and sturdy and honest to the core, he was the son also of the Bennett who now, with entertainment her immediate preoccupation, entered her mind coming hotfoot down the gangway of the parish hall to join for a moment herself and Sally sitting in frozen astonishment while the vicar-led audience eagerly and dutifully applauded a bald young man’s impersonation of a suffragist as a shrieker of the incoherent vituperations he delivered, arm-waving, upon the top notes of his shrillest falsetto. Bennett, arriving radiant, with

tears of joy in his eyes, cheeks almost as red as his steward's rosette, had stood for a moment applauding and then had turned to say, between husky chuckles betraying him as having laughed, during the exhibition, to coughing point: 'Wasn't that good! Clever chap, isn't he?' So much in his element in helping a good cause and at the same time reaping first-class entertainment, so confident of sharing the delight that had driven him to desert his post, that he either did not notice the reservations in Sally's response, or had taken the half-surprised, half-judicially meditative tone of the agreement given at the bidding of her sense of the amiability-at-all-costs due to the occasion, for a confession of an imperfect appreciation now become, under the guidance of a superior judge, retrospectively perfect.

But Sally's son, too. Having so full a share of her sensibility that already, in social intercourse, his eyelids had often to serve as shutters for his swift perceptions.

Across the room whose atmosphere still carried the chill of fireless days, he radiated a warmth that left Marian untouched. Alone.

'Nothing there. *Butterfly*.' Alone as she had been when Sally heard these words, clear and meditative, coming from the nursery where for a moment Marian had been left unattended, and had found her squatted in an empty corner, facing the blank wall, intent. But, now, in no dream-world. Already seeing everyone about her, family, neighbours, friends, with ironic clarity. Yet, socially, kinder than Sally, whose judgments were apt to leak through.

Experienced for the first time as sole hostess, this child, Sally's amused, adoring confidante and Bennett's only tyrant, so aloof and so helplessly observant, was giving to the little party the character of a public gathering to whose unknown

elements one must feel one's way. For the moment the bright lens of Marian's spirit was dimmed by her preoccupation with correct behaviour. Seated farthest from the struggling fire, upright upon the sofa, her chilblained hands clasped in her lap, her face raised, exposed and available as should be, she knew, that of a hostess receiving company, she held out against the embarrassment of finding her eyes, the moment William's words were on the way, glancing desperately from point to point about the room. No retreat, for her, behind dropped eyelids. Her struggle for serenity lifted her finely marked eyebrows and compressed her almost tremulous lips, while within the intelligently reflective eyes always, on social occasions prepared, if fully met, disarmingly to smile, the battle was visible between vexation with William and her own embarrassment, leading her to seek some stately piece of drawing-room furniture as sole confidante of her awareness of the unsuitability, for the entertainment of a convalescent aunt, of the attack launched by William the moment Sally, abandoning her presidency of the reunion, had gone back to the kitchen.

'I suppose you don't feel strong enough to give a concert,' pursued William, his voice breaking on a well-controlled chuckle.

'Poor Auntie!'

An echo of Sally, one of Sally's presidential comments punctually thwarting every attempt at direct contact with the children's minds, but free from Sally's meditative tone that was always a plea for reconsideration rather than a reproach, leaping into the arena as lively as the blush risen to Marian's cheek while, to create an opportunity for turning upon William the whole of her gathered resentment, she raised a hand to the knot of ribbon nowadays confining, at the nape of her slender

neck, the barley-gold hair so delicately, in profile, clasping the outline of her head. (Mozart. The profile of the young Mozart seated playing. The resemblance, so eagerly sought a few days ago at first sight of Marian, grown almost beyond recognition, and now discovered, only to remain, lest it add doubtful fuel to the fire of Sally's devout wondering observation, an incommunicable mental note.) Scorn? But not so much for William as for an enormity Marian hoped, though now beneath his dropped eyelids William's cheeks were redder than her own, to see recanted to the accompaniment of a general hilarity under whose cover she might retire, unobserved, to her coign of vantage.

'Well,' Miriam said, hurrying into speech while still Marian was within the party and lending it her warmth, 'what about a trio; or is it too late to hunt for combs and paper?'

Speaking across the room towards William's shuttered isolation, she read in the eyes now raised and turned, after a shy, swift, grateful glance in her own direction, in anxious watchfulness upon Marian, his recent progress from disappointment to disappointment. For even *The Gipsy Rondo*, performed at competing speeds, would be a poor substitute for the improvisations so delighting him in a life that held so few delights and above which hung, for onlookers, already the shadow of a swiftly advancing destiny, saddening at this moment the garden light flowing freely in through the french window behind him, outlining his solid sturdy shape, gilding the obstinate flaxen hair of all the Brodies. Changeless and unremitting for as long as his strength should hold, some stereotyped toil would close down, within a few years, upon his restricted existence. Was he already aware? And craving, therefore, as throughout their confined lives within the world's accumulating machinery do so many men, thus earning part of

their reputation for selfishness, only for effortless diversion, entertainment, forgetfulness?

‘Yes, I think it’s nearly lunch time, Auntie.’

In spite of his pathetic disarray, William’s mere presence in the room, representing manhood, a comforting blind cliff, bringing freshly to mind, in illustrating its truth at the irreducible minimum, Mag’s fervent preference, seemed at first both mysterious and revolting, for the society of men on account of their securely dependable inability to recognize necessary deceptions, made endurable the experience of being bathed, at the hands of this small relative, in a feminine clairvoyance that was trying to hide its own inevitable embarrassments not, in Amabel’s revealing way, by a clenched, almost stuttering recoil from speech, prelude to an abrupt change of topic, during which she would glance about as though seeking an invulnerable receptacle for a cascade of incommunicable emotion, or, in her more uplifted moments, as though desperately endeavouring to escape into forgetfulness, but beneath dropped lids and behind childish lips uneasily moving under pressure of a courteous desire to avoid revealing, by their compression, the holding in leash of an implacable disapproval, or, by their twisted disdain, a challenge to defence.

Yet however welcome was William’s blindness to one’s longing to feel these enclosed, interminable moments end in escape to the shelter of distributed family activities, and his acceptance of a rarely seen relative as an enlivening visitor from a world in regard to which his imagination remained incurious, it made upon the weariness of convalescence a more exacting demand than Marian’s intuitive perception of that world as occupying, even at this moment, more of the aunt’s attention than the one where illness had temporarily stranded



her. A perception so clear and so deep that for an instant at whose end their eyes met and Marian's, obedient to her firm little will, produced their social smile, she could believe the child actually discerning, where it lay sharply engraved upon the aunt's consciousness, the experience of those final moments upstairs, the finding and hurried reading of the letters that Jean's had driven from her mind, and the ending of the sense of being stranded in a vacuum whose sole light was the certainty of Jean's immortal love. She could believe the child aware of the meeting, in one post, of the letter embodying Rachel Mary's incredible suggestion, and the one enclosing the astonishing bestowal of the means of carrying it out.

But it was William, receiving no unspoken communications, making no demands beyond those brought by opportunity beneath his kindly little nose, who struck most deeply at her conscience, reproached her for having failed in the past to see as much of these children as so easily would have been possible at the price of refusing to spend every one of her disengaged week-ends in hanging about within London's magic circle.

'Perhaps,' she said, and saw hope glimmer again in William's watchful eyes, 'there is just time to tune up an orchestra.'

Almost barring the way as she squeezed past it to reach her conductor's post behind the piano, the elaborate upright chiffonier, self-satisfied, unquestioning, dominating its surroundings, taking the full light of the french window and reflecting in its gleaming central mirror and in the smaller ones above its pillared brackets, the room's brief perspectives and those of the little garden beyond it, broken only by the images of its own knickknacks, brought to her mind the Brodie relatives who had selected it as a wedding present for Bennett. Here

they stood, powerfully represented. Unanimous in being for ever alert upon the social front, ready to risk life and limb in the performance of social duties, knowing nothing of singleness and solitude, they were ranged permanently upon the borders of Sally's consciousness, an everlasting challenge. Their warm, rallying voices sounded musically in the room duplicated by that of Sally, their half-convinced recruit, as it was when she used the tone taken over from them as a prop to sustain her in her dealings with grouped humanity; even when the occasion was nothing more formidable than the summoning of her family to a meal.

And this, she reflected, disengaging a floating sleeve from a protruding angle, this application of an alien technique, was amongst the things that had kept one away. And here, safe, in this unused, uninfluenced corner between the slanted piano and the wall, the joy overarching her preoccupations came down and closed with her, clamouring for an instant's tribute.

Remaining crouched, 'I think,' she intoned in a warbling falsetto, an instalment for the audience, and a screen, 'I'd better have a hassock.'

Following William's crow of delight came Marian's quiet voice, judicial, but with judgment for the moment suspended: 'I expect it's in the dining-room,' and the room was empty and she stood upright and watched, in the distances substituting themselves for the sheltering wall, the little figure of Rachel Mary going busily about, using every small journey towards or away from her fellow creatures as an opportunity to return to the centre whence she drew life and strength; Rachel Mary presiding at table, bending her head in the midst of a discussion that threatened to become fruitless dissipation of force and pretending, with downcast and apparently investigating eye, to rearrange her fichu while she turned with

her whole being towards the source of unity and peace, to come back with some little sally that at once distributed the tension. Rachel Mary writing of her mother's death, tenderly and soberly, reminding one of the Quakeress who 'gently closed the eyes of her dead and came down to tea'; and, adding, when all was told: 'Your word-pictures make us all feel we have been in Switzerland.' Rachel Mary, only last week, initiating and presiding over the family discussion that must have been the prelude to this morning's letter, written, on a corner of some crowded table and, as ever, only just in time for post, the little note that serenely hastened to its still incredible conclusion: 'And if you have no other plans, you might like to come to us again. We'd all be glad to see you.'

A few more days of gathering strength within this enclosed circle no effort of mine can open towards the lights that fill my sky, the promised week-end with Michael and Amabel and then—*home*. The place I found and where I belong, amongst those who regard even the loveliness now increasing all about them and calling to me with claims as powerful as their own, as being merely 'pleasant.' Who rob the world of its power.

Yet without Mrs Harcourt, perfectly at home in the world and living according to its values, there could be no going back. What a strange interweaving; Jean, listening to the tangled story, would say, at the end of a moment's meditation: 'I see what you mean, Dick, but somehow for you it is different.' But Mrs Harcourt, admitting no such difference, would regard my proposed use of her determined gift as a base treachery. And perhaps it is, and I cannot care if it is.

Though away in her hotel, ski-ing every day and seeing me so rarely, she felt, just as she had done at the Oberland *Alpenstock*, that she had me under her wing. Witness her abortive efforts to bring about a romance between me and her

German professor and, towards the end, her meditative inquiries as to my circumstances and plans. And when, in response to my ghastly suggestion of qualifying for an orthodox secretarial job complete with shorthand, that out there amongst the mountains whose summits at the moment shone madder-rose, did not seem so ghastly, she said nothing, it was not only because she knew I should take her approval for granted, but also because even then she must have been planning to forward my laudable scheme.

But I *knew*, in advance, when she began questioning me. And because I knew, I improvised a plan that would appeal to her, and half knew, all the time, that nothing on earth would persuade me to carry it out. Jean, what do you think of that?

But still smiling, Jean answered, with one of her rare hand pressures: 'Dick, with you it is different.'

Knowing little of the inside life of the *Lauriers*, Mrs Harcourt imagined herself the nearest friend I had in Vaud, and was no more prepared for the quality of Jean's presence at the station than was Miss Pelham, who came to see me off only to ascertain whether Jean, ill as she was, would yet be there. But Mrs Harcourt, self-controlled and relatively selfless, instantly taking in the situation, abdicated to the role of indulgent onlooker, sitting opposite to me near the door and dividing her attention between the unexpected little drama and the bustle on the platform; while Miss Pelham, bunched in the corner opposite Jean, her secret fury breathing from her very garments, kept repeating her frantic appeal for Jean's retreat to the house, not so much because she feared for her as because only with the help of these outcries could she endure what she saw and remain seated, paying no attention to the departing traveller who still, on the outskirts of a consciousness centred on the inevitable parting, was feeling gratitude for her hints,

given in that disconcertingly English-villa chalet, on the playing of Chopin, and was sorry as well as glad that she should be compelled to witness what she so bitterly resented: Jean, muffled to the eyes and hardly able to speak, herself became an amused spectator, almost flaunting, as she sat defiantly tucked into my side, her gay sadness of farewell; lifted, for these final moments beyond the control of her determination not to hurt feelings, not able to care who saw and suffered in the seeing.

‘Well, dear people?’

Sally’s voice, in perfect reproduction of the Brodie intonation, at the half-open door.

‘Here’s the rest of the dear people.’ Marian’s, half-mocking herself and everyone else, from the door of the dining-room.

The lights and shadows of the passage were full of secret perspectives. And from the kitchen window, as she squeezed herself into her place between it and the table, a glimpse of the ancient rain-barrel bearing upon its battered lid a sun-gilt pool patterned by twig shadows; of the shady angle between the trellised fence shutting off the back garden and the low ivied wall only partly screening the neighbouring back door; of the little gate in the fence, invitingly open towards the hidden back garden, a world apart, its high trees already preparing summer shelter for that refuge from household tensions, giving upon the slope to the river and the towering elms that lined its bank.

And when she was in her place, instead of the dining-room furniture awkwardly crowding the available space, and the huge Henderson portraits looking on from the small walls, looking forth from their old world of unquestioned ease and stability upon the family’s present disarray, the ample doors, flanking the kitchener, of Sally’s store-cupboards, the clear, busy glow of the kitchener, the unhurrying wooden tick-tock of

the clock on the mantelshelf in the middle of Sally's row of canisters, all battered, but each one offering a dimmed picture or decorative design.

This chequered kitchen tablecloth, too, rather than reinforcing, as always and everywhere does the usual cold spread of white napery, the bleakness of the midday light, softens it with a suggestion of morning and evening colour.

'... because the dining-room fire takes so long to warm the room.'

Even at Dimple Hill, she reflected as she roused herself to respond to Sally's remark, bleakness, thrown up from a white tablecloth, hovered above the gathering beneath the summit of the day's light. But only for a moment, only during the settling down of the party separated for the morning and still engrossed, each in his own concerns. After the silence, the dropping of preoccupations and the turning towards the everlasting source within and without, the bleakness was gone. But here, without even the grace whose hurried murmuring by one of the children made, whenever Bennett was present, the unvarying prelude to either of the substantial meals, there was merely the sense of the family gathered together, its natural sympathies and animosities firmly in place, to still the pangs of hunger in a crude light whose dominion could be shattered only by the precarious expedients of human talent; turns, staged to fill the void.

'Yes,' she said weightily, suddenly hopeful of initiating, by transforming Sally's apology into a topic, at least the semblance of a unified contemplation, and paused before adding, in perfect imitation of the Roscorla manner: 'I suppose it *does* that.'

And was translated, while she spoke with her mind truly set upon the image of the small fire slowly struggling towards

mastery of the cold, to her place at the Dimple Hill table, to possession of her prentice share of the medium wherein the Roscorlas met and communicated with each other and that gave to every seated figure an inalienable dignity; and was aware, the moment her words were sped, of the incompatibility of the two atmospheres: the one enabling the speakers to address each other indirectly, impersonally, from a distance, so that even the simplest words became jewels set in a spacious light; and the one wherein each speaker, competitive, represented only himself, the quality of his production dependent upon his single ability.

For here was William grinning delightedly, from across the way, his assumption of some concealed hilarious intention; and Marian, before assuming her air of courteous attention, had darted an inquiring glance.

Yet in Oberland, where there was neither grace nor Quakerly silence, where communication flowed at once, there was at least an approach to the desirable atmosphere. Created by those in whom the Oberland quality went right through. By people like Harry Vereker and Mrs Harcourt. Its source was the same? For whence did England acquire her code of universal urbanity, its social method? No exhibitions, no prize-fighting. Smiling retirement, the moment conflict raised its head, backwards, bowing, as from the presence of royalty. But also, no thought. Only tastes and prejudices.

‘It gen’ly takes ovra-naah to have any effect.’

In spite of the casual word-clipping and Sally’s obvious preoccupation, mental hands set, ever since the dismissal of the burdened and burdensome Emmaline, even in leisure moments upon the intricate machinery of house-running, here was a remark, an impersonal statement that could be handled, provided no one broke in during the necessary brief Quakerly

pause, in the Quaker manner, given, together with the one who had spoken it, its full due of dignity and consequence.

Keeping herself at home in her place at the Dimple Hill table, she imagined the remark falling amidst the leisurely to and fro distribution of necessaries that, there, seemed not so much preparations to feed as means of conveying, from one to another, a quiet delight in this fresh meeting, in sharing a moment, as were the moments of all true Quakers, new and unique in human history, and sought, in the minds of those seated at the long table, a development of the theme.

Almost anyone at the Roscorla table might have produced her response to Sally's first remark. But the one she now had in mind would have come either from Richard securely home from the farm at tea time, haggard and weary, distributing the largesses of his inexhaustible good-nature, or from Alfred who was at least Richard's equal in the family game of caricaturing a tussle with a practical difficulty. And it was in the person of Alfred that she said, 'And it's got to have its hand held to accomplish that much,' and was at once aware of the loss the borrowed words sustained in being divorced from Alfred's way of dropping them sideways, as if into the ear of an invisible neighbour, rather in the manner of a stage 'aside,' but with the difference created by Alfred's experience of being so frequently the self-made butt of friendly family laughter that even when the victim was not himself he would retreat from his sally with a small crow of apprehension and the head-ducking movement of one dodging an expected blow.

William's adoring grin spilled over into a giggle. Putting forth a hand and swiftly withdrawing it, as from a flame, 'Whee,' he squealed, but very gently, and returned busily to his food with downcast, disclaiming eyelids, with the air of one saying it's no affair of mine, almost of one saying *now* you've



done it. Caught speculatively glancing, Marian smiled, the hesitant faint smile expressing at once her all-embracing amusement and her apology for being amused. Sally too produced a smile, a belated recognition of family mirth, with reservations, as if saying yes it's all very well, we may smile but it's neither here nor there and doesn't alter anything.

The situation was hopelessly astray. Intending a gravely respectful continuation, a sympathetic following up of Sally's apology for a kitchen meal, she had launched, in her preoccupation with another environment, a remark Sally would consider mannish and not, perhaps, in the best taste. And if now she were to disown it, explain its origin and elaborate in simple statements the idea now beckoning her with a genuinely smiling radiance, Sally would respectfully attend until, growing weary, she would intimate, tempering the wind of her impatience to the reduced strength of a convalescent, her disapproval of 'going too deeply into things.' Sally knew, had known all her life, Mim's tiresome insistence on thought and now, at this date, if one were to produce what one had in mind, she would think to herself: 'That's the sort of thing that keeps you without a *home*.'

Conversation at a standstill. All three waiting upon her next move, suppressing, to leave the way clear for her, their customary interchange. A turning-point, the perfect opportunity for a test. Here and now she would abandon for good and all the role of entertainer sustained here at every meeting during the years that had made her increasingly a stranger. They must learn, if she were to represent Quakerism, to tolerate her silence. Sally, dreading group silences on account of her large share of Henderson self-consciousness and lack of spontaneous volubility, would not immediately learn to distinguish between a steady Quaker stillness and one's old

sullen silences, alternating with the non-stop verbosity born, at home, of perpetual disagreement and a desire to restate everything that was said: even now not always kept in check by regret for the hostility aroused by perpetual restatement. And during one's withdrawal, since the hardest, the preliminary work of attaining to Quakerly stillness cannot be achieved to the accompaniment of sociable attention to whatever may be going forward, Sally would imagine criticism volubly at work; unless the sheer intensity of concentration required to attain inward serenity in the presence of others, should reveal to her its goodwill, should presently, ah, if it were possible, attain her and reveal to her its power of blossoming, unaided by a tiresome, conscious, watchful determination to be amiable, into friendly and fruitful exchange, or, what sometimes was even better, a recognition of the more than sufficiency of just being together.

The sharp jar, against a plate, of William's knife with power behind it, and a fragment of crust flew over the table edge.

Marian's bird-like 'Wheep!' collided with 'Oh-dear-me' from Sally, conversational, allowing her to draw herself up, to look sprightly, glad of her smile arrived of its own volition, the girlish smile she never herself saw and that, once seen, would forever transform her in her own eyes.

'That's the worst of *pie*.' William's voice, rising from under the table, followed by his scarlet face.

Caught thus, half way to her bourne, she imagined, in response to William's swift investigating glance, revealing him, in the midst of his disarray, uncertain of the aunt's sympathetic approval of the flying leap, Richard remarking, his voice warm with the desire to rescue, and wide with the Mephistophelian smile it only partly belied: 'That bit wanted a run in the open.'

But Richard was not quite the model here to be represented: not quite the authentic Quaker brand (disliking entirely silent Meetings because ‘you’ve nothing to do but sit and *think*,’ explaining that ‘it wouldn’t be much good for Elphick to pit himself against *me*,’ and, when asked why not, fingering his moustache and saying with a laugh: ‘You see I’m the bigger man’; bracing himself against those boys racing round the refreshment tent at the flower show so that they cannoned into him and fell); an illustration, standing somewhere between the world, even the *beau monde* eternally jesting, and the gentle tradition that was his birthright, justifying those Quakers who just now are making a pother about birthright membership of the society.

‘That bit,’ nevertheless she began, for Richard refused to budge from the forefront of her consciousness, but Sally’s voice, colliding with her own, won the day. ‘It’s a *lovely* beefsteak pie,’ she said. Not a defence, but a proclamation sung out across the room for all whom it might concern. One for me and my mannish oblivion of all that goes to the production of savoury food. And Sally leaned towards William, murmuring, as if under cover of a lively conversation: ‘You should put the fork into the crust and press it *gently* down till it comes in two.’ And remained thus leaning, watching him as with downcast lids, isolated, he squirmed his loathing and resentment of this public instruction, until, realizing that her pressure was useless, she turned again towards the centre with the air of one apologizing for absence and eager to take part in whatever was going on. And met only a wave of disapproval, resentment of a technique that had shattered all links. Always Sally had isolated the criminal and driven the crime home and waited, oblivious of all else, for acknowledgment.

What would a Quaker, other than Richard, be doing in this

spiky atmosphere, with Sally now across the room dishing up the second course with brisk energy, part of whose source was resentment of one's resentment, and Marian, with thoughts no one could fathom, secretly contemplating a familiar scene, and William, still crestfallen, glancing across, when one was not looking, awaiting a diversion.

But to come to his aid, after having failed him at a crisis, would be to add, to the crime of one's own departure into wrath, the offence of making common cause with him against Sally; a meanness wherein he, too, would be involved.

Rachel Mary?

With a mighty effort, against which her very limbs seemed in league, she joined her hands, rubbing them round each other in Rachel Mary's way, looking down at them the while, to escape, be lifted away from conflict, and return, perhaps, with a healing contribution.

Widespread, blocking the way, the garden grounds of Dimple Hill shone clear amidst their vast surroundings, coming so near that she could almost hear, rising from the gardens, the daily chorus of sounds blended by the wide distances and lost in the heights of the summer sky. Another effort, a closing of her inward eye, and she found herself thrown back, farther than ever from that far region of the spirit whence she might truly have joined those about her, alone in a void, dizzy with the weakness of convalescence, and turned to cling again to the loveliness that was to be hers without price. April, whose face in Sussex she had not yet seen, was even now making beauty for the familiar figures scattered in the beloved enclosure. Somewhere within each consciousness, lightly or deeply engraved, together with the sense of on-coming summer, was the expectation of her arrival.

If now, from the depths of her profanity, she were to speak,

her very voice would betray her to Sally as merely putting in time, handing out easy animation while waiting to be elsewhere.

‘Wish we had some *cream*.’

William, recovered, taking a small revenge.

‘*Do-you*.’ Mock-angry emphasis, carrying off Sally’s satisfaction in having a witness of this restoration. ‘*Nothing* goes better with prunes than rice—if it’s properly cooked.’

‘*Just* caught on the top.’

Instructed by Sally, William will never be indifferent to the finer shades. Never will his wife hear Bennett’s anything’ll do for me, my dear, that yet so often must be a blessed lightener of Sally’s ceaseless labour.

The neighbouring back door burst open for the resounding crackle of a shaken tablecloth.

‘*La-deedahdy, la-deedahdy ...*’

‘Dear me,’ murmured Marian, glancing round to collect reactions, ‘lunch early today for a change.’

‘Tom’s feeling cheerful,’ said William, also *sotto voce*, but warily, eyelids down.

Like her own, William’s heart had responded to the sound of gaiety. Her smile waited to greet him. Was observed by Sally who, having in a lightning-swift glance fathomed its meaning, dropped her eyes to seem not to have noticed and said briskly, again as if dropping an irrelevant remark into an engrossing conversation: ‘*Noisy* people.’

Muted by the slammed door, the cadences of the waltz-song were still audible, and the startling, living glow, spontaneous, needing for its production no complex preparatory controls, that had gone forth to meet them, now rose heavenwards from the depths of her being. Within the tones of the lad’s voice sounded the common qualities of British philistia, of the

thoughtless, musical-comedy-loving English worldlings: profanity, pluck, confidence; incredible density, kindly humanity. And while, yielding to self-revelation, and to the joy of inspiration, a warm and comfortable blush, she remarked upon the day's increasing mildness and welcomed the summer, their riverside summer, now on its way, 'garden teas, picnic lunches on the river, summer clothes, summer evenings ... all those things that spread all over the year, really ...' and saw them all awake and glow and begin chirruping one against the other, she saw within her mind, evoked in all its first clarity and revealed as immortal, the hitherto unpondered vision of that last, late afternoon on the Vaud rink whence Jean had been driven by the rising mist. Leaving one, forlorn yet glad, to wait, empty, blind and deaf, for solitude again to yield, as on that one lonely afternoon on the balcony, clearer depths of perception than the united contemplations that left, even while bringing reassurance, so many vistas to vanish unexplored.

The little group of players at the corner of the rink, festally illuminated on behalf of the lingering skaters who on that day ignored the message of the growing twilight, had become, the moment Jean's little figure, plodding along the hard-beaten snow to the roadway, vanished behind the brushed-up rinkside drift, the very moment of crossing the chill barrier between companionship and solitude, magicians, cunningly, tootling out, into the thin, bitter Alpine mist, for the English already fused into fellowship by the sense of the season accomplished behind them and now at its end, and by the common risk of missing, for the harvesting of these last, precious moments, time to dress for dinner, the English waltz of the moment, the *Merry Widow* waltz to whose familiar swinging rhythm, supporting and enlivening their movements, they skimmed, within eternity, enchantedly about, a few couples even, after a

fashion, waltzing on the ice; a triumph setting them apart from the rest, unenvious in this pre-separation unity, unity of harvesters that on that afternoon seemed to include even E. F. Benson still, to the last possible moment lost-souling about, depositing within himself layers of indestructible experience.

## CHAPTER III

A moment's silence, the first. Amabel meditative, perhaps holding in leash some freshly arrived irrelevant emotion.

Michael, still alight and expansive, gazing now across the common centre to where the open window gave access to a world showing always a single face: his summary.

The small room reasserts itself, stating Amabel's quality. But to look about now, to be caught investigating detail, will be to break the spell of this first reunion, emerge into the oppressive sense, hanging so heavily over this sprawl of outer suburbia, of the shallows of life hurrying heedlessly along. Yet already, in this brief pause, lies nothing but the assertive presence of the little room, rapidly telling its own story as the successor, for Amabel, of the acceptably elegant, sophisticated club, her dingy room at Tansley Street, mitigated by books and the Empire coffee-set, and the battered Flaxman attic brought to life by geraniums.

Imagined empty as the builders left it, it becomes a small characterless square akin to millions of its fellows destined to grow smaller with the introduction of cheap, pretentious suites, and anecdotal pictures drawing the walls together with their teasing lack of distances. Rooms wherein the eye finds neither food nor rest. Keeping the centre clear and the walls a pale, soft shade, Amabel has created space and perspectives by her treatment of the corners. Deep, rich tones, rose, and gold, and, somewhere, for it had greeted one on entering, an angle bearing vertical strips of that rare, indefinitely retreating



eastern blue, making a far distance there, enhanced by the bulge beneath it of a gently assertive pouffe, silky-crimson, gold-patterned. No graven images.

Here, in this little room, with its riot of rich colour held in check by severe economy of line, she has created for her own beauty and for Michael's, hitherto each seen in surroundings throwing it up by sheer contrast, a perfect setting. Here, where most people would look incongruous, they glow like jewels.

Yet though this successful room already, during their brief residence, by the two of them so richly magnetized, offers itself as a worthy topic and one might well inquire, by way of expressing willingness to prolong this knitting together of past and present, whether they are not glad to have escaped the bob-fringed art-serge lodgings sheltering their first six months, one finds oneself, as soon as the little room has said its say, once more out in the unfinished roadway, gazing into the brilliant, live varnish of the stray celandine encountered on the way to the house; again feeling, as just now, while Amabel waited, controlling her always so readily provoked impatience lest its outbreak mar the triumphal entry, the unconfessable relief of escape from suburbia, from the raw, unfinished road and the crudity of the small, uniform houses, into the Roscorlas' life-fashioned, richly girt homestead so soon to pour into one's being, where dwell already the scenes of the rest of its year, the unknown loveliness of its spring time. Spoken from that far distance, the question would lack even the semblance of sincerity.

'The light is going, Babutschka. Will you not immediately show Miriam her room?'

Rescue. Suddenly weary, as of old, Michael desires cessation. For the best part of an hour, fresh from the ceremonial tubbing (whose final cascade, reverberating

through the house as proudly she opened its door, had yielded Amabel the joy of a witnessed rejoicing in her achievement for Michael of a life wherein at last he could conform to the pattern of his beloved ritual), in sabbath frock-coat topped by a deep crimson tie visible, when he raised his head, beneath the beard no longer trimmed to a worldly point and already on the way to becoming an oblong bush, rabbinical, the massed fine strands of his grandfather's pale gold watch-chain garlanding his breast, and the antique ring in place whose pimple of seed pearls rising from its bed of blue enamel set in graven gold, together with his air of leisure and availability, so vividly recalls those first, far-off evenings at Tansley Street, he had glowed responsive while she and Amabel revived their common past, moving, with each of his gusts of incredulous laughter, to and fro between their hazardous makeshift world and his still incredible little home re-created by the presence, not realized as unenvious, of one in whom all his English years and the whole of Amabel's London life are stored up.

The remembered Russian in him, wandering into irrelevancies sounding like fragments of a conversation going on elsewhere, and the middle-European intellectual, Emil Reich's aggressive continental luminary, coldly convinced and, for an unhappy while, convincing, and always in the end turning out to be *lucus a non lucendo*, are either in abeyance or, with his new growth towards his own roots, being gradually shed. At last, child and man, he is at home.

And Amabel?

Recalled from what might have been one of her sudden, determined retreats into realization, dependent for its depth upon the presence of others whose evocative speech should make no demand upon her direct attention, Amabel has leaped up, whirled, raised an arm to a switch. Light floods the room,

the brilliant light whose instantaneous appearance Miriam has never failed secretly to applaud ever since in London and in the newer country houses she visited, it had begun to drive into a benighted past all other forms of illumination. Now, for the first time, it seems too abrupt, too easily, unceremoniously attained. Triumphant, indeed, as is also Amabel's face on which it shines. But while she contemplates the miracle, the sudden banishing of the shallow suburban twilight, whose relative it nevertheless seems to be, just as it is the relative of the dense, sacred twilight of central London, and the way it gives to the now brilliantly gleaming interior the semblance of a richly surrounded centre of town life, her truant inward eye turns gladly to the dim, dumpy little figure of Rachel Mary, her short arms outstretched, her serene, pleased anticipation revealed by the small glimmer of a flickering match as carefully she creates the evening's friendly glow in a room whose shadowy distances will recall, after the lamp is alight, the rich depths of the country twilight.

But even the present violent, unmitigated translation to evening demands some form of recognition. The clear, diffuse brilliance, like the sudden arrival of a host, enlivens the waiting guests who indeed should now drop the fragment of interchange languishing on their hands when he appeared, yet, rather than disperse, leaving him to himself without even a moment's tribute to his presence, should properly, under his benign influence, make some fresh departure. But Amabel, beckoning, and still silent, is leading the way, compelling abandonment and swift enterprise, into the windowless little passage dimmed almost to darkness as the door closes behind them.

Opening another door, she turns and, for a moment, prelude to standing aside to allow one to enter, stands framed in the

doorway, in the soft light of the room's west window, finger to lower lip; her call either for solicitude or for a speechlessly shared contemplation.

A small strip of a room. New. Intimately familiar. Familiar sideway-falling radiance of a fading sky upon the pathway from door to window of polished green linoleum, pools of its light upon moss-green crockery, clear reflections in the oblong lake of a black-framed mirror fixed to a wall the colour of sack-cloth.

How to respond? How cross the chasm standing between today, already itself flooded by the rapidly approaching morrow, and the far past Amabel had here so charmingly recreated and that for her, still living within the framework of the London that was its background, seems only yesterday?

'It's adorable, Babinka,' she breathes, hoping against hope that Amabel, whose head is now pressed against her arm, will fail to be aware of the incompleteness of one's presence within the little shrine.

'It's your room,' whispers Amabel, releasing her and tiptoeing to the window, 'your Flaxman room. I made it for you.'

She is disappointed? Has gone off, alone, to seek in the open sky the rewarding response anticipated while she assembled the furnishings of her little spare room? But the lingering sound of their two voices, hushed as in the past they had been hushed whenever, reaching, by their so widely different routes, awareness of a shared inward life, they are aware also of challenging perspectives opening ahead to put that life to the test, and feel, in that same moment, the stirring of its growth as it feeds upon the strength of a united recognition, together with the sight of her, so much more richly attractive than that of Jean, standing, as of old, absorbed, contemplative, gracefully

outlined against the frame of an open window, has worked the miracle the room alone had been unable to achieve. Their old world, unrivalled, incorruptible, is all about them and for a moment it seems as though the little room must open and let them through into the past. Easy now to move, to drift, thoughtless, along the gleaming linoleum pathway to her side. To let her see, arrived there, making no polite guest's comment on what doubtless will be a little garden plot not quite robbed by surroundedness of its power to send fragrance into the air streaming down the room, how fully one perceives the return of their common life.

Emerged from an instant's unconsciousness of all but the breath-taking loveliness of the blossom whose little cups outshine the newly opened leaves against which they cluster, that yet, pure new green, not only state their own perfection but serve as foils for the densely white, rose-striped petals, Miriam cries out in protest to an Amabel become a thief whose plunder grieves the world.

'I know,' she murmured out into her garden, solicitously, 'but wasn't it worth it?'

The final, perfect touch of her welcome. Had anyone, ever before, gathered apple-blossom to decorate a room? Amabel's perfect gift, yet leaving one bereft. For the rapturous first sight of it, in its place against blue sky amidst the spread of a spring-green countryside, could bring no fuller pang of the joy of return than did the unexpected presence here of this little snapped branch paying with its life for a delight one would gladly have foregone. During that instant of breathing in the inexhaustible joy of its just perceptible colour, perceiving the miracle of its form, revealed more powerfully here in the darkling light than in the sunlit open, one has been transported, unprepared, unequipped, into the heart of the world that still

stands two days away.

‘You’re going *back*, Mira.’ Speaking dreamily out into the barely visible little garden, deliberately averted while laying gentle, privileged hands upon the immaculate future, seeing it as something to be dealt with; still believing one prepared, as behind her air of easy spontaneous improvisation she herself is always prepared to deal with situations, to calculate and plan. Asking, therefore, for confidences. Leaning on arms propped upon the window-sill, so far out that one must lean, too, to hear.

‘I love your Miss Roscorla.’ Rachel Mary, the first, save only Michael, of one’s human belongings she had unreservedly approved. ‘And Richard,’ she breathed, almost inaudibly, ‘an *utter* darling.’ Here it is, her interpretation, inviting confirmation, of the two communicated items; the removal of the old lady and Rachel Mary’s little *ballon d’essai*.

‘Indeed he is. Everybody’s darling.’

This swift hand-pressure upon one’s arm might mean either sympathy or a reproof for sacrilege. Let her speak again since she is set, or she would have swung gaily round to carry one off to the rest of the house, upon continuation. Let her make a fresh departure or ask, unmistakably, her unanswerable question.

‘You’re going *back*,’ she repeated, with a catch in her voice.

‘Yes, but I don’t know what *to*.’ To the old house, beloved to its every musty cranny; to its spreading gardens, huge, yet lost in their vast surroundings; to the silent eloquent company of light, present even during the hours of what townsfolk call darkness. Enough, at almost any price that will enable one just to survive. And, thrown in with all this, the strange intimations of unpredictable growth. ‘I believe I’d go more gladly if he were not to be there.’

‘I *know*.’ Passion, this time, in her voice. Nostalgia, awaiting opportunity to confess, for the perspectives she has sacrificed to matrimony? Or a restatement of her oft-expressed doctrine in regard to things eagerly grasped: that they invariably reach one’s hands *broken*.

Drawing abruptly back into the room, ‘Come and see the kitchen,’ she says without enthusiasm, automatically, her mind elsewhere.

As if greeting their entrance, a clock begins to strike.

‘Holy Moses! I must get supper!’

Sweeping impatiently from point to point she fills the room with movement that leaves no pathway free, aimless movement expressing, as well as resentment of momentarily forgotten, inexorable demands, a longing to be left alone to deal with them that keeps one rooted in the doorway reduced to the status of a man, a useless alien. Everything in the brightly lit little interior, save only its inevitable kitchener, is pleasant to contemplate, each object exactly in place and bearing itself with an air of coquettish elegance; all unsightly detail contained, like the windows, with crisply starched cotton patterned with a small blue and white chequer.

Small, compact and brightly burnished, the little kitchener, the heart and meaning of the room, prevailing over its decorative surroundings, draws one’s eyes with its mystery, acquaintance wherewith places Amabel amongst the household women, shows her caught, for life, in a continuously revolving machinery, unable to give, to anything else, more than a permanently preoccupied attention. Impatiently, now, she is poking, rootling about behind the bars, defiant of her material, uncertain of its behaviour, destroying, in treating it as an enemy to be outwitted, its air of sturdy benevolence, driving one yet again into truancy. At this moment in the roomy

Dimple Hill kitchen, quiet, and dark save where at its far end the practical harsh light of the unshaded oil lamp falls upon the serene figure of Rachel Mary bent over the shabby ancient range, the fire's rosy glow stands out against the blackness of the great flue starting on its journey up through the house into the Open whose fading twilight is the promise of dawn.

How express to Amabel, remembering her meditatively murmuring, when faced with the loveliest of the Dimple Hill vistas: 'How does anyone endure country life without servants and a motor?' (If she *had* meant to be crushing, I ought promptly to have told her that motors are now called *cars*), what it is to look out, in solitude, from some remote doorway, upon that dawn-promising evening twilight? How make her see the inexhaustible wealth of life down there apart from, and successfully competing with, any form of human association?

'You know, Amabel, it's queer. Quakers are full of plant lore and natural history. They're what Michael calls "factative." Never, even in their own quiet way, are they beside themselves out of doors. "Pleasant" is their extremist tribute even to the loveliest scene. The Puritan tradition, perhaps, from which most of their forbears came forth to join Fox. From which Fox himself came forth. They place the more negative ethics of Puritan living side by side with their own fundamental beliefs and never see their incompatibility. Yet their alphabet, their way of handling life, I mean the business of minute to minute living in the spirit which gives them their perspective and their poise and serenity, is the best I've met. But the thought of the missing letters makes the idea of a Quakerized world intolerable. And the thought of a world without Quakers is equally intolerable.'

'Mira.'

Something is coming. The low-pitched tone, meditative,



revealing her unarmed and wholly present, means an appeal in the name of the fullest of their past inter-change. Some question that will strike to the centre of one's being. Not in regard to Richard. Considering that episode closed, Amabel would experience, if told how the thought of his share in Rachel Mary's invitation reinforced the other inducements to return, the pull of Quakerism, the equal pull of the earth and the light only a contemptuous amazement.

'Will you become a missionary?'

In advance, as ever, of one's own thoughts, she has put the obvious question waiting ahead of a full acceptance of Quaker doctrine.

'Your friends will miss you.'

Unanswered, she is taking silence for consent, and has moved forward into a future seen by her as in some measure bereft. Believing that I hold, in my consciousness, so much of the drama of her life, an investment that no longer, once I am removed, will yield any return? If now she knew that Jean, unquestioning, trustful of all I may do, stood central in my being, she would rejoice with me? Rejoice that the day of her full power, recalled by the present retrospective radiance, is over.

This is no acting. With her head bowed on my knees, for the first time neither in irrepressible mirth over my stupidity nor in half-amused adoration, Amabel is not being audience for her own performance. Her whispered words held despair touched by real fear, leaving one isolated with the misery she has so quietly described. Michael, across the way, still hunched forward in his comfortless kitchen chair, his clasped hands

between his knees, though a silently consenting witness of Amabel's recital will be by this time far away within the cage of his own fixed ideas. Absent from the bitter climax. To and fro his mind will be swinging, suspended between phrases, recalled from his restricted 'novelistic readings,' phrases embodying 'the disillusionments of marriage, depicted, for example in most-wonderful small touches by Tolstoi, who is always a most masterly speechologue.' Amabel has doubtless heard all of these, has given her deeply dredged reasons for finding them inadequate.

Having believed and stated himself to be forewarned, having always been ready to admit masculine shortcomings, never weary of repeating his repulsive little tag about the difference between a fiancé and a man taking his ease at home, *en pantoufles*, he is now fatalistically accepting the proof of the findings of his European luminaries. In a moment he will be cracking his finger-joints and following up the detonations with his depressing 'ach-ma.'

Echoing forlornly in the bright spaces of the discredited little kitchen, Amabel's 'What are we to *do*?' brings back her first warning note, sounded just before she and Michael left their furnished lodgings: 'Marriage is awful. I mean just what I say. It may be, I'm free to confess, helped to be awful by these lodgings and the weird people who run the house. When Mike is out, life is far from gay. But when we're shut up here together: my God! And it's not Mike's fault, nor mine. Believe me, Mira, it is just *marriage* that is so impossible.' And then, later: 'We're moving, thank the Lord. Next week. To a maisonette. Do you see me? In an own house I'll be all right.'

To either, alone, one could plead that people, and especially those who expect each other to be the sole source of rapture, cannot *go on* feeling consciously rapturous. Admitted. What

then? What of the worst loss of all: the loss of unthreatened solitude? Useless, cruel, to mention that. Like saying: I told you so. And the state of these two is the worst of all. Far worse than the normal incompatibility of man and woman is the absence in their daily life of a common heritage, stating itself at every turn. Amabel, freer than most, more genuinely catholic, could not foresee this and now pays the price. In misery.

‘I don’t know.’

‘Well, I *must* say, you are a *goode* friend.’

Michael’s deepest bass. More than reproachful. For the first time, to me sarcastic; the measure of his hurt. Not cynically aloof, he has been listening, following, countenancing. Perhaps, counting on my help, had even suggested this outpouring.

Unanswered, unanswerable, his words stand upon the fevered air. Not the rejoicings, the happy reconstructions of yesterday, seeming then so sure a foundation for whatever of the future the three of us are to share, but this piteous scene will accompany us tomorrow, stand between me and the threefold joy of Dimple Hill.

No remedy. Nothing to be said or done. Cajolery, or even reason, with Michael silently supporting, would drive Amabel to excess.

Risen to her feet, she strolls about the room as if seeking, hopeless of human aid, refuge amongst things inanimate.

‘Be glad, Mira,’ her gravest tone from the farthest distance allowed by the small room, ‘that you can go *away*.’

## CHAPTER IV

The train moved off, carrying her forward within the deep peace welling up the moment she had uttered, at the pigeon-hole, the name of the little station. Unintentionally she had adopted the Roscorla pronunciation, the gently shortened vowel and slightly lingual 'l' transforming Hayleham to Heyl'm, seeming courteously to salute the place, and suggesting unlimited courtesies in reserve. Last year this station had meant just the end of the journey towards an unknown refuge. Today it is the gateway to Paradise.

Meadows, forlorn, London-dimmed, their green silvered by the night's rain. But any moment now skied orchard-bloom will suddenly appear, sail by, vanish, leaving no regret. Then the little woods of Surrey, their too many conifers ousting the sense of spring. Then Sussex.

On last year's journey, though the coming six months' freedom seemed an eternity, the Sussex woods, heavy with summer leafage, demanded breathless watching. Today, for the first time, even when the woods bring close alongside the doings of light and shade within their depths, there will be no longing for the train to go more slowly, but only gratitude for these instalments of wealth waiting ahead to be enjoyed for a period extending unenclosed. Perhaps for life. Perhaps, this time, there need be no return? Upon Mrs Harcourt's gift of six months' living, I can hold out at Dimple Hill for at least a year. Writing. Becoming increasingly what Hypo calls turnip-minded. No more argumentative articles. No more short-

circuiting humanistic socialism. ('I've thrown science and socialism overboard.' 'Right, reckless Miriam. But don't get drowned when you plunge to retrieve them.' 'If I ever do, submergence will have changed them.' 'Everything's changing all the time. That's one of the things humanity has to learn.' 'Und ob alles in ewigen Wirbel kreist, es ruhet im Wirbel ein stiller Geist.' '*Geist*, my dear Miriam, is a very questionable term.' Spirit, at the centre. His obsession with evolution makes him see theosophy as alone sane and reasonable amongst the creeds. An endless spiral. Nightmare. Wrong metaphor. Spirit is central.)

I must remember to tell Jean about thought. About the way its nature depends upon the source of one's metaphors. We all live under a Metaphorocracy. Tell her I'm giving up thinking in words. She will understand. Will agree that thought is cessation, cutting one off from the central essence, bearing an element of calculation. 'Ye must become as little children.' Meaning, as those who do not *calculate*. But children are heedless. When elders say 'you did not think,' they really mean 'did not reflect.' Did not reflect any actuality but your own. Most people don't. I don't. I've been reflective only in my own interest, and heedless. Laying up a past that one day will smite unendurably.

Will begin at once to smite if I pursue the pathway so suddenly opened last night. Towards the past. Inexhaustible wealth. Inexhaustible remorse. Why do they say distance *lends* enchantment? Distance in time or space does not *lend*. It reveals. Takes one into heaven, or into hell. From hell, heaven is inaccessible until one has forgiven oneself. So much, much more difficult than accepting forgiveness. Not God, but we ourselves, facing the perspective of reality, judge and condemn. Unforgiven, we scuttle away into illusions. But, all

the time, we know. We are perambulating Judgment Days. That will make Jean, the permanent forgiver, laugh till she weeps. But it is the truth. If one could fully forgive oneself, the energy it takes to screen off the memory of the past would be set free.

Perhaps the sudden return of past reality is the result of temporarily losing freedom to move, of being compelled to concentrate, for a whole evening, upon affairs other than my own; to endure, in that workaday kitchen, the background deliberately chosen by Amabel to emphasize her translation of a Christian Sunday into a Jewish weekday, the revelation of suffering I could not hope to relieve.

For when at last I escaped to my little green room it enclosed no longer the past I had shared with Amabel. Inhabited only by the April night and the apple-blossom, it let my being expand, touch the borders of a destination that she, entangled, could not reach. As soon as I was at peace within the darkness where still the young green leaves and crimson-striped buds of the apple-blossom seemed visible, and on-coming sleep just a swift passage towards today's journey, I suddenly saw, substituting itself for the boundless mind-view of Dimple Hill towards which I was drowsily drifting, the gabled porch at Barnes, the shallow, wide steps leading down from it, the tubbed yuccas. Unchanged. Yet subtly changed. No longer quite the secret, sacred portal, the sight of which always hurried my footsteps as I came up the drive, and always brought me as I passed through it, no matter what my mood, or the circumstances awaiting me inside the house, a moment in eternity, but just the well-known porch seen for the first time impersonally. And I knew at once that it was bringing a message. And while sleepily I wondered what revelation was about to come, I discovered a figure seated there in the dim

light. Harriett. Sitting there alone, in possession, gracefully ensconced where the stone balustrade meets the upright of the porch. And for the first time I realized that my porch was Harriett's also.

Only now does it occur to me to wonder where, on that evening, I could have been. For during the summer of the dress Harriett was wearing I was at home, and we were always together. But to reach the depth of contemplation in which now I found her she must have sat, not for a few chance moments of my absence, but for a long time, alone. There she was, gazing, in solitude, into her own life, realizing it as it slipped, with the approach of marriage, away into the past, realizing that soon it would be inaccessible.

Within the depths of that moment I seemed to gaze into her being. Aware of it as if it were my own. For the first time I realized the unique, solitary person behind the series of appearances that so far had represented in my mind the sister called Harriett. And as the scene vanished, its curious darkling light spread, fading, across the world, showing me, as it moved, dim unknown figures as real as she.

Returned to the heart of the darkness, I begged myself to remember, every day, this sudden glimpse of reality. But shall I? Amidst the daily call of things that come between me and the sense of any human presence?

A year secure. Given by a kindly philistine for a purpose I mean to ignore. Three hundred and sixty-five days. Each with a morning, an afternoon, an evening. Three eternities. Yet they are not three eternities but one eternity. The ever-changing light, one light. Unbroken. Every day a choice of experiences, any one of them presently returning of itself with power to move me to put it into words, to spread hours in oblivion from which I awake to find a piece of life gone by unheeded.

To write is to forsake life. Every time I know this, in advance. Yet whenever something comes that sets the tips of my fingers tingling to record it, I forget the price; eagerly face the strange journey down and down to the centre of being. And the scene of labour, when again I am back in it, alone, has become a sacred place. Just one evening's oblivion gave me everlasting possession of the little white table standing under the brilliant light of my Vaud bedroom.

If Jean had not gone out to squander her evening upon the unhappy Cattermoles, it would not have occurred to the Bishop to lend me, by way of compensation, *The Friday Review*. If I had not been curious as to the nature of his chosen periodical, I should have spent my evening writing letters instead of venturing back into the world of conflicting ideas. Dreary it seemed, irrelevant. Each party drawing different conclusions from the same data, unaware of any common ground. Soon weary, I looked up. Found my little room stripped of its magic. Played with the idea of going downstairs to spend, unsupported by Jean, the rest of the evening in Lhasa, where, if it should occur to the Bishop to ask how I liked his review, I might expiate my backsliding by a small sparring-match ending in a smiling draw. Glancing again through the paper, I came upon that shapely single column I had somehow overlooked: *The Threshold of Spring*. One of those things Hypo calls 'middles' and urges me to try my hand at: 'Anyone can do 'em. Any old theme. Worth two guineas.' Though annoyed by the superfluous words cluttering up the title, I read and presently was watching a seedy little man walking along a lane; *observing*. Carefully, right and left. Could hear his voice, a little raised as though addressing students, and having the colourlessly clear enunciation common to so many London universitarians, giving to each syllable a uniform emphasis and



making, between each, a just perceptible pause ('see, this, pop, lar') so that his phrases were a series of hammer-blows neatly striking dead everything to which he called attention. Yet here he was, full of specialized nature-lore, welcomed by the editor to supply the weekly oasis, read by countless people who heard no voice, found refreshment, instruction, interest?

In vain this knowledge-burdened naturalist deplored my ignorance. There I stuck, outcast by all standards of intelligence and kindness, with no comfort but the certainty of Jean's forgiving laughter for my foamings.

Putting down the paper, I craned round to ask the face of my clock how long I must wait for Jean's return. But my eyes never reached it.

One after another the scenes passed before me, each with its unique claim. Impossible to choose. Impossible without special knowledge to convey. Flesh without bones, as Hewart's sketch was bones without flesh; a tour through a museum, he the curator, cataloguing its specimens.

With the return of scorn, the Dimple Hill scenes disappeared.

It was while I was recalling what Susan told me about that man who wrote, every week, about something he had seen: 'Any old fang. Someone buying a bunch of flowers, or boarding a bus,' that the auction in the thirty-acre shot into my mind and got me to my feet. But on the way to the table, freshly aware of the presence, outside my shuttered room, of the Swiss night and its promise for tomorrow, there came that moment of warning, of regret for having involved myself, unwillingness to spend of my diminishing store of evenings in oblivion.

And when near midnight the sheaf of filled pages lay before me, and confidently I saw it arriving, unsolicited, under the eye

of the editor, saw him held forgetful of all else, as I, while writing had been held, heard him tell himself how much better it was than Hewart's, I still could have wished it away and my evening restored. There it lay, part of me, yet now independent. And then came that knock at the door, gathering me back to listen into the house I had deserted; and to speculate. And then the door ajar, and Jean's tired voice murmuring that she was not coming in, murmuring good night. Did she notice how startled and over-emphatic was my response, how it proclaimed my forgetfulness of her very existence? Her light footsteps died away down the corridor, leaving me alone with the realization of a bond, closer than any other, between myself and what I had written.

Which room will they have given me to forget them in?

For a while, whenever Rachel Mary, disappointed of a sister-in-law, and Richard, at once regretful and relieved, are alone with me, any silence will bring them embarrassment. But this evening will be filled with speech, and during the next few days while still the sight of me recalls their vicarious experience of Vaud, Rachel Mary will be able, at need, to grasp at something described in one of my letters. I must be prepared if, sensing a clamorous void, she should reproduce her written comment upon my 'word-pictures,' not to squirm. If I should squirm, they will imagine me scuttling about to avoid encirclement by the circumstances leading to my retreat to Vaud. I must devise a generalization that will at once leave Vaud intact and provide a point of departure.

Vaud will disappear. The past, all our pasts, falling back into their places, will vanish from our midst, and our life together will be as it was in the beginning, a moment to moment building up of shared experience. Current existence, the ultimate astonisher. Whose testimony will be the ease and

depth of our silences. But Richard still fears, at table, any silences beyond those prescribed by Quakerly technique. The leisurely Sunday dinner-hour will still give him opportunities to relate, upon the remotest pretext, his dreadful anecdotes, never failing to delight all the others and to bring home to me the difference in our sense of humour.

Henceforth, whenever some local happening serves him to recall, with kindly malice, a kindred incident in the far past, withholding his own laughter until, prompted by the turning upon me of his patient mephistophelian smile, my slow intelligence shall have grasped, unwillingly, the pictured situation, I shall remain upon my own ground; refuse to pretend to find food for mirth in the described spectacle of acute embarrassments and yield him, from beneath lowered eyelids, only Amabel's meditative half-smile that so clearly indicates 'we are not amused.' *That* may learn him. In any case it is high time for a gap in his career of immunity from feminine criticism.

Vaud and Jean, have vanished. Not a word, even to Rachel Mary, about Jean.

If I were less than I am, I should talk about her until my friends would grow to dread her name. If I were more than I am, I should follow her path, the path to freedom. But I forget. Again and again, until something pulls me out into remorse. If only I could remain always in possession of my whole self, something of Jean-in-me would operate.

Good that she is gone. How right are the Catholics in separating within their orders those who grow too happy in each other. To give oneself, fully, to God-in-others, one must belong to no one. Careful though she was, and in the end taught me to be, to avoid, in public, any revelation of partiality, we yet aroused jealousies. As those last weeks slid away, the

glow we created in each other could not be concealed.

Jean. Jean. Jean. My clue to the nature of reality. To know that you exist, is enough. Those final days fulfilled the whole of our winter. Whenever, with the date of my departure drawing near, I was on the point of making moan, something held me back. Every day in that last week brought a richer depth of happiness. Did Jean know, all the time, that in the depths of reality there is no room for lamentation? Was she waiting for me to discover this? Or was our experience, to her too, a revelation? Leading, as for me it led, to the sudden discovery coming when on that last grey afternoon while side by side we sat gazing in silence at the thawing remains of winter: that in separation we should not be parted? Perhaps she felt me realizing this when simultaneously we turned to each other, laughing, and returned, without a word, to the landscape.

With Jean, for me, friendship reaches its centre. All future friendships will group themselves round that occupied place, drawing thence their sustenance.

What room will they have given me? Today, being washing-day, Eliza will not have begun on it until this afternoon. At this moment, within a dense cloud of dust, she is busily sweeping. Rachel Mary, at the last moment, will put finishing touches. Will scatter petal-dust in every drawer. Hearing the carrier's bus climb the hill, she will trot briskly downstairs, removing her apron as she goes. Will be in the porch. The others, their day's work finished, may be about. Greetings and handclasps, and I shall be at home. In no time, the first tea-party. Lively interchange, but no spilling over. After supper, when Richard lifts the great brown Bible on to the table, we shall all feel ourselves quietly together again, free of space and time. It will be as though I had never left.

But before I can feel fully at home, Mrs Harcourt must know

I'm not carrying out her plan. Then I need think no more; for ever. My letter to her will be what Hypo calls 'a version.' But she will know. Will understand that I never meant to qualify for a job in an office. I don't, can't care. I'll tell her I've come to stay where I can live on almost nothing, and am going to write. What does Mr Godge mean? Would he agree with Michael that in England writing is becoming a base trade? He asks for more sketches, tells me to write only when strongly moved to do so, and then warns me that there is not a living to be made from sketches like *Auction* 'because they take too much thought.' What does he mean by thought? Imagination? Not in the sense of *making up*. Imagination means holding an image in your mind. When it comes up of itself, or is summoned by something. Then it is not outside, but within you. And if you hold it, steadily, for long enough, you could write about it for ever.

'If you can describe people as well as you describe scenes, you should be able to write a novel.' But it is just that stopping, by the author, to describe people, that spoils so many novels?

A copse sails by, bringing escape, absence within its glimmering depths.

Now open country. Sweet air, elastic; perceptible even within the London-impregnated carriage. Lowering the half-opened window, she sits down to attend to a hovering statement now come into the open to answer this man's evident belief in the importance of novels.

Novels are irrelevant.

Irrelevant to what?

To follow his advice would mean spending enormous pieces of life away from life. Perhaps novels are important. Whenever anyone sneers at them, I am moved to defend. Anyway to

smack long-nosed people who sit in the seat of the scornful.

Green meadows, low-lying. Red-brown Herefords, with ghost-white masks, all seated, serenely chewing. Every line of their confident great shapes rebuking contempt for anything or anybody.

It's true. Scorners nearly always have long noses, with clean-cut nostrils that can curl and twitch. Cogitative, reflective people are mostly snub-nosed. Dr Stenhouse is betwixt and between. A kindly, investigating, doctoral eye, blinkered. 'Odd, the way we synchronize.' Or a shape of some kind? Whether I reached Lyons' early or late, he had always just arrived for his lunch, or came in almost at once. If he had merely expressed speculative wonder over the general love of novels and neglect of history, we might have put our heads together. But his bitter contempt for those who read novels and know next to nothing about history, put my back up and spoiled my prunes and cream. And while I was deciding to suggest that he should read, as Anglo-American history, first *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and then *The Ambassadors*, he trotted out, to bring me back and secure my attention, his stock remark upon the excellence of Lyons' coffee, his call, whenever I became incommunicative, for a unifying duet. And it was only after he discovered that I had done three middles for the *Friday* and was waiting for a third to suggest itself, that the underlying strange *shape* came out into the open; as it *always* does if you leave things alone. I'd spent the morning reading Erdmann's *History of Philosophy* at the Museum, and was feeling very remote while he told me of his years at Cambridge and presently reintroduced his theme of History versus the Novel and suddenly slapped down at the side of my plate, with an air of triumphant finality, a folded manuscript. 'Perhaps,' he said, hiding his very slight embarrassment behind

an assumed indifference, 'your editor might be interested in that.' Important, I felt, a writer to whom this Harley Street doctor was humbly appealing. Yet sorry, too. For I knew he would have described what he disliked by its defects and what he approved of by its qualities, and both very tamely, so that inevitably the editor would 'regret.' And at the same time I merely relished his certain discomfiture. Never dreaming by what a strange route this was to arrive.

In the afternoon, my seat in the library under the shelf holding the Erdmanns was empty, and that young man who for weeks had been my engrossed, congenial neighbour, still in his place, but not, as usual, sitting bent in an attitude of studious concentration over a single volume. There he sat, with all my Erdmanns piled on his section, looking through one of the volumes with a dreamily interested smile on his good-looking face. For how long did I stand indignantly staring before I sat down to think out the wording of a disdainfully courteous request to be allowed the use of any volumes he might have finished with? But while I sat thinking, appearing to be tranquilly engaged with my note-books, I observed out of the corner of an eye that he was not only scanning the summaries at the heads of the chapters, the menus of my incomparable feast, but also taking notes. With that realization he became myself, eagerly tracing the development of Greek thought. Not for anything would I have interrupted him. And then into my emptied mind came suddenly, standing out among the room's subdued rustlings, that sound like the popping of a cork, calling the odd forgotten name of that man who had 'written so illuminatingly about the Arian controversy; that decisive turning-point in the history of Christianity,' and I wanted only to leave Greek thought to itself and get hold of his book while I remembered the author's odd name.

And when it came, the slender little volume brought me the two gifts which I might have missed but for the stealing of my Erdmanns. First the discovery of this 'Gwatkin' as a professor in Stenhouse's time at Cambridge at Stenhouse's own College; then, incredibly, that passage about the novelist's advantage over the historian on account of his freedom to isolate and illuminate the interplay of human passions; and then, after I had triumphantly copied the passage for Stenhouse the journey to the end of Gwatkin's little book, happiness in Athanasius' salvation of truth, together with realization of the need for dogma and the tragic limitations of verbal statement.

Irrelevant to what?

There is something to find out. Something fundamental that applies to the whole mass of what Michael calls novelistic writing.



## CHAPTER V

The shape of the spade-flattened hard-frozen face of the snowdrift outside the woodcutter's chalet, and the outlines of one or two of the figures chiselled thereon with such reckless prodigality of craftsmanship, grown at last clear in her mind's eye, demand now, if words are to be summoned that will express anything of their quality, a further immeasurable withdrawal from the beatitude so richly overflowing, on this first morning, from everything within sight.

The first effort had aroused the almost vocal protests of the beloved shabby furnishings of this little room, as if they knew that her return to them from even a momentary absence will find her, and themselves, and the relationship between them, already a little changed.

As yet, not much damage done. The things in the room have retired a little: not sure whether they have been affronted or merely momentarily forgotten. If one rejects the demand for a second departure they will at once fully return, bringing their treasures; evocative.

Daily, however varying, this light, subdued on one side by the dense branches of the evergreen oak, pours through the window upon everything in the room. Light-absorbing, light-reflecting individuals, pathetic and proud. Claiming acknowledgment and interest. Wilting under neglect. But beneath the high morning sky, the just visible distant marshes, the near green meadows and the piled downlands away to the right, though ignored and forgotten during the moments of

withdrawal, hold now a livelier glow than when, sitting down at the table, she had first greeted them. Seem to promise, if she should face the second journey, a further increase of their inexhaustible response. The garden, partly tamed, domesticated, turned in on itself, expresses only a tolerant neutrality.

And now, exactly at this moment of wavering, interruption. The door coming cautiously open. Rachel Mary, still radiating welcome, sparing a moment of her busy morning to inquire as to one's welfare. Passing through the doorway from bustling kitchen to silent dining-room, scene of the triumphant fulfilment of kitchen labour, along which she will have trotted on holiday, on a pleasant journey, taking in as she passed, without looking towards it, the loveliness beyond the window, the little high-walled enclosure now all fruit bloom and early flowers; aware, as she approached the farther door, of the glass-misted green light of the peach-house; aware, the next moment, as she turned into the passage, of the larch-darkened light coming through the open door of the gun-room, and then of the full light of the front hall across which she trotted to this door; cautiously grasping its loose handle to avoid rattling, gently pushing the door open, prepared, if all is well, immediately to retire.

Incredibly, Richard.

And not by mistake. Not only not withdrawing at sight of her in possession, but actually acknowledging his awareness by closing the door as slowly, as quietly, as he had opened it. And while thus silently he tells her of his intention not to disturb, even of his willingness to be regarded as not present, he announces at the same time, in stentorian tones ringing out amongst the spheres, a planned, deliberate intrusion.

Blessedly her pen has remained, during her meditations,

poised ready for writing. No need for any movement that might suggest a settling down after an acknowledged disturbance.

Now to retain concentration and its accompanying capacity to see, without looking, everything within her range of vision, and thus present to Richard a meditative mask behind which, while apparently engrossed in an exacting task, she can plumb at leisure the depths of this amazing departure.

Meanwhile to be writing something, anything; to empty the room of any sense of her presence as hitherto known to him.

Meaningless words would serve better? For, already, in setting down '*A thing of beauty,*' decoyed by its never-failing charm, she has fallen behind, failed to remain on the alert, missed the immediate impact of his refusal to notice the far chair set so conveniently near the window's direct light. Yet at all costs the writing must go on. '*Is a joy for ever*'—the carefully decorative script demanded by the words, so often traced out at crises as to flow from her pen almost of themselves, make easier the preservation of the meditative mask. Richard has come deliberately to meet her in her own world? Curious enough, interested enough to risk a misreading of his motive?

'*Its loveliness increases, it will never*'—now to discover what lies at the heart of the radiation enclosing her while he sets himself hugely, gently down into the chair at right angles to her own, noiselessly, save for the light scraping, as he settles himself, of clumsy boots against the bare boards beneath the table.

Papers. A neat sheaf of loose leaves, almost as incongruous as his presence.

Has he come in, on the pretext of business to attend to, counting on my believing he does not know that this room has

been set apart for me? Driven by sheer curiosity, the naïve desire to see a writer writing.

*‘Pass into nothingness, but always keep’*—evade thought. Travel, while I write, down to that centre where everything is seen in perspective; serenely.

Rugged, weather-stained hands, quiet now, resting one on each side of the arranged papers. The right hand taking up a freshly-sharpened pencil. Where, now, with the scene set and a gap of less than two inches between the nearest paper and the top of my manuscript, is his mind? Mine retires and retires. I am as calm, as steady, as if I were alone. I am myself, my own. Can go on writing, or stop writing, concentrate my attention upon discovery and still appear to be far away. As indeed I am. Spared the need for speech, I can think at leisure. While slowly his huge fingers push the pencil across the page.

In allotting this room instead of the large upstairs sitting-room I had last year and that now and again has to serve for social gatherings, Rachel Mary said: ‘You’ll be able to work there undisturbed.’ The whole household has certainly been told. Richard, with a letter to write, goes always to the little gun-room, sits at the clear table there, the peach-packing and grape-packing table, the open door leaving him visible and visibly available, sociable; only too pleased to explain to a passer-by the exact nature of his exceptional employment, if the passer should linger, to talk and talk.

No. He has come, upon an invented errand, with some perfectly clear purpose.

Not called upon to furnish a social façade, I have all my world about me. Closer than his huge form is the rival who came to my rescue while we talked across his bicycle in the lane. Who kept me at ease and inaccessible while silently, with his eyes never leaving mine that saw only the local scenes

assembled in my mind, Richard asked me to believe he regretted, even while abiding by it, his mother's decision, reminded me that she had gone, that now there was no barrier, only to meet, while wistfully breathing as though instead of coasting down the steep hill he had been hurriedly climbing it, he produced his lame remarks, merely a politely listening stranger. The rival who in London, during the midnight talk with Amabel before her wedding, kept offering a suggestion: apart from his surroundings, Richard is, for me, almost nothing.

Nearer to him than I am, than I could ever be, is his inseparable companion: the ceaseless challenge of his labour. Beset, in all his solitary comings and goings, by secret joys. Joy in hill and valley, in meadow and wood, in air and sea and sky. It is of these alone that he never speaks lightly, never with a jest, never at all save in the company of a fellow worshipper. When, together with his coming and going, these joys are removed, his end will be swift.

Silent, devoid of words that in their mere sounding bring all humanity into the room, we share a piteous smallness, seem alone in the universe, threatened, vulnerable. Yet drawing strength from each other. Strength that remains; making a link that perhaps, between two people who have ever met in silence, is never broken. Words are separators, acknowledgment of separateness. The strength drawn when several people talk together in a room comes from one person, is paid out by him from some definite level of advantage, and disappears at the moment of separation. Spirits meet and converse and understand each other only in silence. Hence the strength available in a vitally silent Friends' Meeting. In Meeting, people live together, grow aware of each other's uniqueness. And consequence. Each silent figure is

miraculous. Self-sufficiency dies and the meaning grows clear between perfection, which nobody really wants, and completeness; which can be reached only with the help of others. Certainties state themselves, with or without words, within the mind of everyone in the gathering.

Is it something of this kind that Richard wishes silently to demonstrate? Is this incredible situation intended to be a Quaker Meeting in miniature? Has he come, voluntarily abandoning his social armour, to disclose, in silence, the true nature of our relationship? To welcome personally, lose no time in assuring me that I am again one of themselves and everything is once more as it was at the beginning? That we are Friends together, sharing a common vision, rather than man and woman?

But if this is the explanation and justification of his extraordinary enterprise, what of the rest of the household? Not even to Rachel Mary can he have explained what he was about to do. This morning, for some reason, he is at home instead of at his Windmill Farm. Whenever he is at home, things centre round him. Everyone knows, at any given time, where he is or, not happening to know, asks. Rachel Mary knows, at every moment, exactly where her darling is to be found and what he is doing. His time is punctuated by visits to the kitchen for chats with her about this and that; easy, sociable, Irish hanging around, whence, usually belatedly, and usually under the stimulus of a veiled hint, he departs with his 'Well, I'll be doing' this or that. Anyone wanting him in a hurry and not at the moment able to locate him, goes to Rachel Mary.

He is capable, of course, sly Richard, Dimple Hill's champion diplomat, of watching his opportunity to get in here without being seen. What then? For he has also to escape. The chance of his visit remaining unknown is nil. And, according

to the traditions of his class and the manner of his upbringing, to say nothing of the ideas of all his associates, such a visit is decisive. In breaking into a young lady's sitting-room and remaining shut up alone with her there, he commits himself beyond recall. He waits, therefore, for some encouraging acknowledgment of his manoeuvre? When he crept in, carefully preventing the door handle from making its usual din, he expected me to look up and *smile*, hand out the invitation without which, according to Hypo, the doughtiest male is paralysed.

But you *know*. Philanderer though you be, always on the alert, in regard to any young woman newly met, for one or other of the signals meaning philandering welcomed, deep down in your being you know as well as I. Within your consciousness, vivid in your memory, as in mine, is the eternal vast interior of last summer's revealing moments. A destination never to be lost. Neither of these moments was contrived. Without prelude, they opened before us. Surprising. New. For me, their quality was your certificate. You passed the test, Richard, more fully than I would have believed.

Then came cunning interference, calculation, and a wise retreat. Then my long absence. Now, immediately on my return, you come, crashing through all the conventions of your circle. Sitting incredibly there, at my elbow, you believe that you give me the opportunity of giving you an opportunity? If that is the truth, even now, with the whole of our past electric about us, enclosing and separating us from all the world, nothing on earth shall persuade me to step forth and help you in the way you expect; and also dread and despise.

You contrived this situation. It is for you to use it. Time is suspended, but moments are ticking themselves away. Here I am, more fully here, than you have ever known me to be, and

so much at peace that I could smile. Not the smile you expect, but the one that contemplates, weighs and approves. As you see, I can barely repress a smile in taking, unexpectedly to myself, this long deep breath. The deep inspiration automatically arriving when one relaxes from the effort of getting something into words. How will you take it, you who so astonishingly know everything?

Laughter rings within her as this tremendous silent intaking is duplicated, at her side, by a gusty sigh. This, then, is a conversation. Having inadvertently opened it, and received response, she is now responsible for its continuance? No, Richard, that won't do. You cannot, or is it indeed possible that you can, to such a degree, be the yokel-swain? Must I, even at this moment, reconsider you, decide whether or no shall be precipitated a future that for ever would contain this lamentable prelude?

Almost before she realizes the opening of the door, Rachel Mary stands in the doorway. It is upon Richard, and Richard alone, that her eyes are turned as she says:

‘Ah, there you are, Richard. They’ve been looking for you. Mr Swanson’s been here some time; down in Jubilee.’

‘Ah. I guess I’ll go right down and talk to him.’

Addressing, as he rises to his feet and gathers up his papers, not Rachel Mary but the opposite wall, he swings hugely, gracefully away down the room and through the door left clear by her departure, closing it as soundlessly as when he entered so long, long ago.

Gone in disgrace. Disgrace for keeping the great Mr Swanson waiting? For being, without her knowledge, where Rachel Mary has at last found him?

Presently I’ll go along to the kitchen and ask Rachel Mary if she realizes how many expressions today considered as



originating in America, went there from Ireland.

## CHAPTER VI

If I launch that remark, she will turn her head, halting for an instant her sturdy little march, and say: ‘Y’know, you’re a *Friend.*’

Did she, did they all, after taking counsel, decide to suggest my coming down here again on the chance of my finally deciding to join the Society? Was that, after all, Richard’s imaginary justification for his amazing intrusion?

She is waiting for me to begin. Remembers how, whenever we are alone together, I always talk. Yet half suspects that most of my talk is improvisation. Does she realize while I wind it out, relate anecdotes, describe people, air points of view, that I am holding off the sense of being together that presently, if I remained silent, would bear, in speech, unpredictable fruit; bring me nearer to life as she sees and lives it, nearer to being involved in ceaseless *doings*.

She is waiting.

But, today, with a difference. Hidden within her anticipation of an excursion into my world, stands a preoccupation, waiting to be expressed. Something she intends, ‘when the way opens,’ to communicate.

I don’t want it. Want nothing that will affect even what is lying all about us: the little show we are passing without a word, yet aware, both of us, of the way the April sunlight sharpens the grain of the tree-trunks and makes transparent the pure green of new leaves misting the upper branches. No. I won’t draw out what is on her mind. Must say something to

keep us where we are. The election.

‘Don’t you think it a pity that women should go into Parliament as members of *parties*?’

‘Well, perhaps.’

‘Oughtn’t they all to be independents, holding the balance between different points of view? Belonging, in a sense, to all parties. Imaginatively. Just as they ought to belong, imaginatively, to all creeds. Enter all the churches, at the very least all the churches in Christendom. Look at the churches as they are! Look at the endless damage done to their own cause by these enclosed academies of males—in the case of Rome, by enclosed academies of celibate males—by their definitions of God. True, Basil Wilberforce used to call God the father-mother spirit of the universe, but for most of them the statement that God is Love is coupled with descriptions of a being whose love will operate only at the price of endless abject petitions and non-stop serenadings. Not even a gentleman.’

Defying her little chuckle, a bright blush proclaims shock.

‘Now it’s odd you should mention *Rome*.’ Here it comes, the topic awaiting the opening of the way, introduced in the slightly raised tone she employs in the family circle when attention needs rallying. Tingling into the air, flouting the peaceful landscape, comes the something I am to be told.

‘I’ve been exercised in my mind the last few days by a letter from Friends in Birmingham Meeting. They have just now on their hands a Catholic, a Frenchman, until a few months ago a monk in a monastery abroad. Somehow he has been led to Friends. He is very unhappy and suffering from a nervous breakdown. They think he needs country air, and ask us to take him in. In September, if we can see our way.’

Incredible. Uncertain. Perhaps to vanish, driven off by some

small practical difficulty. Standing alone once more in the corner of the little musty white-washed room opening out of that little side chapel of the Hoddenheim cathedral, feeling, while the priest displayed to Fräulein and the English and German girls the jewelled treasures from the oaken cupboard and French-Protestant mademoiselle stood aside scared and disapproving, Miriam felt again that longing, stronger than any she had ever experienced, to remain for ever within this small, dim extension of the sanctified premises. And now, at last, she was to meet one who had come forth from the very midst of the life it represented. He must come. *Must* come.

Controlling her rapid breath, she casually inquired: 'Do you think you could manage it?'

'Well—yes. We've *room* for him. But that's not quite the whole matter. I've a stop in my mind about it. I can't think why.'

Quietly she had spoken, looking away into the distance as if to find approaching thence the reason for the strange arrest, communicating itself from the depths of her spirit and reaching one like a blow upon one's whole being.

No genuine Friend can ignore a stop in the mind. Some, perhaps, may reason it away. But to Rachel Mary its warning is absolute, above and beyond reason.

The silent moments pass. Gradually the enclosing scene expands. The months ahead, no longer a mere bridge towards a strange felicity, lie outstretched at their full length, a vast expanse of days, each day to offer, as did all the days down here, its sudden moment in eternity. Yet still September, though returned to its distant place, reflects the glow that for a moment had so deeply enhanced the month's natural gold.

And why, with the matter so surely settled for her, does she take me into her confidence? To talk it over, hoping perhaps to

discover the cause of the warning, to devise some means of averting a possible danger? Unlike her brothers, she does not regard Catholics with a blend of fear and contempt. Does not, when the subject crops up, enquire why nuns wear such horrible-queer clothes. Also she will be feeling it her duty to give the unhappy young man, already living with Friends, the chance of recovering his health in the shelter of her quiet home. This must have been her first impulse, so strangely checked by the stop; my enemy. Yet I do not dare challenge it. It must take its chance against her warm impulse, her selfless consideration for others that may, by its own strength, presently move the barrier.

‘There’s something else I must tell thee.’

Left alone, while Rachel Mary hurried to the side entrance to reach her quarters by the swiftest route, Miriam went slowly up the sweep, aware of herself for the first time since newly arrived she had rung its echoing bell, as an outsider. In place of the interior, whose well-known rooms, sanctuaries she had taken for granted as everlastingly available, had been swept away while Rachel Mary outlined her own plan for the coming summer, she saw only the blank face of the house, shutting her out, seemed to gaze, with studied indifference, away across the distant marshes waiting, in April sunlight, for their summer. For the summer whose months, only just now, she had transformed into a brief enchanted bridge towards the strange promise of September. Meanwhile, the time still in hand, the few weeks before Rachel Mary left for her long visit to the distant brother, stood bereft, empty and hurried, each day shorter than the last.

Gathered at the dinner-table, the Roscorlas present themselves for the first time as isolated individuals, each one at the mercy of circumstance. Rooted as they seem in their

inviolable home, life prepares for them as for everyone unpredictable change. From moment to moment, beneath the to and fro of pleasant voices, life is stealthily at work bringing not only the familiar circling of the seasons to which they gladly move, engrossed as in the figures of a dance, but also *change*.

The coming disruption will bring self-consciousness. Even though at first they may relish the sense of freedom brought by the removal of the gentle overseer, before they have been long in the hands of this hired housekeeper, this Mrs Somebody from Somewhere, not even a Friend, they will be losing the savour of each day and each moment in looking impatiently forward to the return of the preserver of their unity.

Where to go, until her return allows me too to come back?

Where to go, where, until September, to hide? Where to find both the solitude provided by this family of workers and the enlivening background of shared convictions?

Where, where in the world to go? The words echoed monotonously in her mind as she went upstairs towards the solitude of her own room. In a moment she would be within it, a passing occupant, confronted, if the window should be pushed up, by the clear view of the Downs-flanked, sunlit meadows and the distant marshes, sea-rimmed, the whole scene averted, disowning her, as had, this morning, the many-windowed house-front.

The door, ajar. Coming open with a prolonged squeak whose exact tone, for the first time and as if from far away, she was now attentively noting. It passed into her being, claiming immortality, joining company with the never-to-be-forgotten voices of doors from the past: those of every kind of interior door, from the metallic rattling of glazed doors with loose handles, to the smooth soft slurring of stately portals pushed open across thick carpets, and standing out above them all, the

sharply echoing paint crackle, breaking the wide, high Sunday morning stillness, of Tansley Street front doors opened to the strident cries of the paper-boy.

Driven into her lonely self she moved, an alien presence, into the centre of the disowning room that only an hour ago had been the inviolable reservoir of the securely inflowing future. Where to *go*?

Arrested, she gazed incredulously at the spectacle arisen within her mind and projected thence so clearly that the surrounding room vanished. From the narrow, mean street, hitherto unknown, just off the centre of the West End, its dingy, high confronting buildings shutting out the summer, she went forward into the dark house; into that gloomy back room to interview, on Eve's behalf, the stern-faced woman who answered questions with an unwavering air of dictatorial benevolence. Was escorted by her into that extraordinary sleeping-room, divided into cubicles by thin, faded curtains washed nearly colourless. Its midday was a twilight. Its two globeless gas-burners stood high, enclosed in circular wire cages.

There it stands, this central London branch of the Young Women's Bible Association, transformed. No longer part of an institution the mere idea of whose existence used to make me squirm. Not even a temporary refuge, but a place where I can belong. Whose atmosphere of shared convictions, redeeming the lifeless surroundings, will sustain me while I get on with my sketches for the Friday Review.

Absurd to have imagined the door would be ready to open as soon as I wished. Unattractive, chill, this vacancy they offer,

far away in a suburban branch. St John's Wood. That vague cricket-ground region on the way to Mr Hancock's place in Hampstead. Far from the sheltering depths of London proper.



## CHAPTER VII

‘And lights out at ten o’clock. Well, I think that is all you need to know *tonight*. The rising-bell sounds at half past seven. Breakfast at eight-fifteen. Prayers in the large room at eight o’clock.’

With a final friendly smile, little Miss Bigg closed the door of the incredible bedroom and departed on the long journey down through the house, leaving Miriam exultantly aglow with speculations as to the rules and regulations presently to be found securely enhedging her four months of life as an unqualified guest of a kind of lay convent. Again she came upon it standing substantial in its high-walled garden, again was welcomed by the friendly, controlledly bustling little woman, was given a glimpse of a large-windowed room running the whole length of the house and furnished with a stately high-backed harmonium and rows of cane-seated chairs. ‘Our concert-room,’ smiled Miss Bigg. Then up the wide staircase whose half-landing window gave upon a garden, a large square, mostly lawn, trees at the far end and high walls all round; then up the next staircase on to that wide landing with its few dignified doors through the nearest of which came the strains of a popular waltz played by four hands on a resonant well-tuned piano. ‘Our common-room,’ smiled Miss Bigg. Up again on to a similar landing, one of whose open doors displayed gaily curtained cubicles, and at last this vast free landing, generously sky-lit, broken by no staircase and showing, right and left, a number of small closed doors, all

doubtless leading into little bedrooms similar to this. The elegant little suite of furniture, well polished and so arranged as to give an air of spaciousness to the small interior, together with the pure, fresh air entering the open window, make the room seem like a small guest-room in a country house. But one is not a guest. A boarder, free, within whatever may turn out to be the rules and regulations, to come and go without palaver. High above the street with the sky for company and a large house available to wander in, but not encroaching. Again the good fortune, as in Wimpole Street and Tansley Street, of large characterful surroundings. All as if planned, down to the absence, exactly until September, of the student to whom this room belongs.

Until September. Golden month now glowing, while I experience this new world, infinitely far away.

All the gardens, every side road I passed, held trees. Large. Old. *St John's Wood*. Reminders, they must be, distinguishing it from other suburbs. Making it perhaps unique. As indeed must be this branch of The Young Women's Bible Association to which I have made my way. Several Bedford College girls, said Miss Bigg impressively, various Council School teachers, an Indian medical student, a Russian girl and, strangest of all, one of Pelissier's Follies.

Here they all are, nearly filling the rows of chairs. Here am I, after that deeply peaceful sleeping, launched, in the morning light, in the life of the house. Five minutes past eight. Yet Miss Bigg, at her little table with the opened Bible in front of her, seems to be waiting. In a stillness broken only by the light tapping of a tree-branch against one of the huge windows.

‘Make a noise! Make a noise!’

Following the breathless voice, from perhaps half way up the staircase, comes the sound of hurriedly stamping feet upon the lower flight. Miss Bigg waits. In come a few girls, soon followed by two tall breathless young women, clearly from the top floor, who make their way, still panting, to two empty seats in the front row. The taller generously built, radiating amused friendliness, reveals, as she sits down, the back of a dress many of whose fastenings gape unattached. Glancing at the head of her companion she suffers, at the sight of a small turret of hair tilted perilously sideways from its base, a convulsion ending in an irrepressible squeak that joins company with the gentle voice of Miss Bigg: ‘Let not your heart be troubled.’

Just a short passage, read simply, with no trace of unctuous devotion. Joy, rather, over-fresh, within the meditative tone. Then movement of the whole roomful round on to knees, elbows on chairs, faces cupped in hands. And again little Miss Bigg’s quietly confident voice: ‘Our father.’ What a pity! All the voices will now mutter the strangely combined phrases.... No. On goes the quiet voice, alone: ‘always with us, with each one of us, ready to guide us through the difficulties of this new day.’

‘So I come to your country to find what is the secret of your many-many religions and to find why so many-many peoples from my country come *heere* instead of to elsewhere for a refuge.’

Here, once more, is Russia. But not quite the Russia brought by the Lintoffs. This girl in the beautifully moulded black dress, its sleeves perfectly modelling her slender arms and

coming down in points nearly to the knuckles, her black hair flatly framing the pale indoor face, reporting Russian winter, is here as an interested investigator.

‘Have you discovered?’

‘Some things already I see.’ The sad, meditative voice chimes perfectly with the sadness of the face. Young well-to-do, free to move about, she yet has the hopeless look emphasized by the droop of the full lips, of one ceaselessly watching tragedy. ‘I see first that the English are *healthy*. I see that they question *nothing*. Also I see, and this I find most-strandge, that they never think of *death*.’

‘Yes, I suppose in general that is true. It never occurred to me.’

‘No? Yet you are not-English as well as English. That at once I see.’

‘You’ve been about amongst people over here?’

‘So wonderfully heere in St John’s Wood. A little. Enough to see quite much. And Kropotkin, who allows that I visit him for talking, tells me much, living now in your High-gate.’

‘Then you’re a revolutionary?’

‘To this I cannot answer you no or yes. Each way of belief brings to me much thoughts. And I read now your H. G. Vells. The best I like is this writer’s *Sea Lady* ... (perhaps there are better dreams). Ah. That for me is most-wonderful. For this I take to him to leave on his door-step an Easter egg.’

‘Charming of you! You know where he lives?’

‘Kropotkin have say me it is Hampstead, and I find his house in the directoire.’

‘Did you leave a message?’

‘Just I write with gratefulness from Olga Feodorova. Ah, this man is most-wonderful. Also he is most-English. Ah, I think I will remain heere in England and marry an Englishman

and have many-many happy children.'

Healthy? Neither questioning life nor thinking of death? Is that as good as saying we never grow up? A result of the freedom, unknown in Russia, that Michael when first he came, was perpetually remarking? Yet also he used to agree with Spinoza that he who has never known illness knows nothing of health. Yet revolutionary Lintoff, watching the masses in Hyde Park, sternly declared: 'These people are not free.' Lintoff, with eyes intuned upon a far distance, sees everywhere 'the people': exploited, forgotten.

'Yet perhaps even in this house there are girls not quite so wildly unconscious ...'

'Yet think? It is perhaps so. One thing I clearly see: that all are jealous against each other in respect of you. They make competition. You did not know this? Strange.'

Basis Olga has, as outsider, for observation. But sees only in terms of her own values: mental, aesthetic. Accepts with unenvious indulgence the merely good. Does not realize them as far above me. Sets them aside as very simple. Very English. The few who appear to be drawn to me have full lives outside this house. Find me, in their leisure hours, a tonic for their weariness. Someone new in their experience. Mysterious therefore. Unoccupied, apparently, the whole day long. As also is Olga. Yet to her they are not drawn. Are jocularly critical, objecting to her continual prolonged occupations of the bathroom, whence invariably she emerges with wet hair; to her evening monopoly, when they come home tired out, of the most comfortable chair in the common-room. For them she is just a 'foreigner,' queer, as are all foreigners.

To me they are drawn, unconsciously, by my deep delight in all the common doings of our life here? In which I am onlooker as well as participant; the common possession of the

large house, wherein we are all guests, the shared night, the fresh blossoming each day, friendly prayers in the morning light pouring east and west through the large windows; the shared breakfast usually consumed in a preoccupied silence broken only by an occasional jocular outburst from huge Tiny; tinklings of pennies into the fine-box by those arriving late; hailings and farewells for another day; certainty of meeting again for the evening meal; leisure in the common-room for display of superficial fluctuating preferences; for the gathering, by the few close friendships, of wealth from surroundedness, that each rare time of being alone together is the renewal of an everlasting moment; renewal kindred to that bestowed upon our enclosed Association by our monthly tea-party for the old almshouse women, by our Sunday afternoon at-homes for all and sundry, our jubilant part-singing of cheery hymns and 'Crossing the Bar'; and those secret suddenly arranged small prayer meetings in one or other of the little top rooms: a moment's silence, then a young voice, usually Tiny's, opening a wide sky above our enclosure with a plea, murmured through face-covering fingers, for guidance in all our doings; a few husky amens and all of us on our feet again in a dancing gaiety.

Tiny. The largest, fleetest, most light-footed of all the Young Women. At work upon herself. Keeping herself perpetually available to the inflowing spirit. Truthful. Yet able unscrupulously to misrepresent, as seem so many good women, in defence of others. Sometimes even in self-defence against permanently suspicious Authority.

The formal basis of our joy, like the social joy of schooldays, is togetherness on neutral territory, keeping us independent in unity. Something of this there must be in lives monastic and conventual? With the difference that these girls

are neither cowed nor mindless as appear to be the rank and file of monks showing in ceremonial photographs.

Are they aware of all they have here? Does its strong appeal for me rest upon my freedom to leave? Yet were it not for the strange magnet pulling at me from September, I believe I could stay on indefinitely. As suddenly I realized when that coldly serene, detachedly critical female visitor privately on her last day protested to me against 'the come-day go-day way most of the girls here seem to be living, planless, never think of the future.' Bewildered I was, standing for a moment within her point of view, wondering whether my sin, if indeed it were a sin, might not be worse than theirs. Only after her aloof departure did I realize that I should have told her that even the simplest of these young women live, even if unknown to themselves, in the Now, the eternal moment, fully; that their sense of Being, whatever their discontents and longings, outdoes for most of them, the desire to Become. Will triumph, throughout their lives.

Is this conviction of the wonder of mere existence, the amazingness of there being anything anywhere, the secret of my feeling, wherever I go, upon my native heath and wishing to stay there? Belgium; Holland, though seen only in passing through; Oberland; Dimple Hill; and now this half-nunnery? Only from Flaxman's did I fly, from enclosure in squalor I was powerless to mitigate; ready to agree with.

## CHAPTER VIII

**R**ichly enclosed we feel when, at our large parties in house or in garden, we are distributed, dressed in our festive best, among our visitors; onlookers, enhancing our awareness of each other, heightening our sense, more or less dormant in daily life, of individual capacities brought attractively to light in the interest of making the occasion a success.

Olga alone stands aside, a silently preoccupied witness of all we have devised for the entertainment of our guests. Sternly she over-rates my contributions to what others have initiated. When at the end of the festival I come upon her isolated in some corner, conforming only by sitting unoccupied, deprived of her usual resource of slowly inscribing, in almost microscopic handwriting, letters, on postcards, to people in Russia, she murmurs: 'You waste yourself. Pairs before Swine.'

What does she find in me? Why, among all my sketches for the *Friday*, did she single out the one about the wind heard murmuring far off along the shore, gradually approaching, with varying voice, across the marshes, reaching the near meadows to hum within their dense hedgerows on its way to thunder at last upon the walls of the house, squeal through every crevice, roar down the chimney, reach the unsleeping listener, who greets it with laughter as 'the best lover.'

'Ah, *that* I like. Pure decadence.'

Then her appeal, when for a few days I was with Michael



and Amabel, 'Come soon back. This house has lost for me all life. No one is here with whom to speak,' on a postcard bearing that haunting Russian picture of a girl whose features, their expression remotely hopeless, recalled her own. Disturbing it was to be challenged by this outcry in the midst of the new happiness of Michael and Amabel. 'All of bliss to Mike and me' she had written in sending her invitation from the two of them 'and from our son now beginning his journey into the world.' Hopeful, at first, seemed her meeting with them, giving her the opportunity of speaking Russian, but nearly ruined for me by Amabel's wild enthusiasm, a concentrated version of her invariable treatment of a newcomer, lasting until she has taken the measure of their possibilities, but redeemed by the sound of an endless Russian dialogue, whereof so little could be learned by questioning Michael. 'Yes, yes, interesting she is,' he granted, with sceptically pursed lips, and then, being pressed: 'She belongs quite clearly to the upper-class Russian intelligentsia. But revolutionary, no. Lost, rather, in abstractive insolubilities.'

Dark in the background of all I have gathered here lies this strange Russian *sadness*. Seeming, in Olga as in Lintoff, though in her it includes a personal wistfulness, sorrow equally for oppressor and oppressed, sorrow for all humanity. Sounding in the tone of her voice, even in her rare laughter. Leaving one, if silence follows, arrested. The only other sound heard during these months that casts a shadow over the house is the gravely indignant voice of that woman complaining to me at the end of her visit: 'All these girls live come-day, go-day; without *plans*.' Not being a plan-maker, I had no answer. But am still arrested by her thought.

Are we English, on the whole, static? Living in the Now because we have a relatively good Now to live in? A Lhasa,

exclusive? Lintoff, like Olga's friends Kropotkin and Stepniak are aware of the whole world; spokesmen, without distinction of class or race, for everyone for whom they desire a more generous share of the Now. But Olga's sole comfort resides in individuals. Her enemy is life itself rather than social injustice. Finding no ease of mind in her luxurious Russian home, she came to England in the hope of discovering the secret of English optimism.

Is the English consciousness static? While carrying our sporting sense of justice and fair play to the ends of the earth, we regard all un-English humanity, all 'foreigners,' as in some way inferior. At the same time, all the other races, however differing from each other, are united in perception of our oddity.

Are we motionless? Is that what Michael's friend, that German-born Russian ethnologist, meant when he told me in 1900, 'the Russians are the strongest kinetic force in Europe. Watch Russia.'

From the moment I realized, hearing the distant rumblings come nearer, that my arrival at the Brooms for my promised week-end visit could pardonably be evening instead of afternoon, the occasion became immortal. Though none of the girls happening to be at home and caught like myself by the storm would be leaving London on Monday after spending with old friends a week-end lit by the glow of all that lay ahead, yet I felt they were sharing my recognition of the quality of those hours handed to us by the elements.

Competing with the growing darkness we improvised a concert. Someone defiantly raised the lid of the piano for my fling at the thunderous last movement of the Pathétique. Then all who could sing, no matter how, were called upon to contribute. Playing accompaniments, I felt all about me an

awareness, conscious in the few, shared, like an infection, to some extent by all, of the strangeness of the adventure of *being*, of the fact of the existence, anywhere, of anything at all. No need, I felt, in this foreign country created by the storm, to inquire of these girls, as so often I had been tempted to do in strange surroundings shared with people who seem to take life for granted: 'Do you *realize*.'

When the occasion came to an end with the departure of the storm that had given to my time in St John's Wood an end so richly confirming my sense of having always available there a congenial shelter, I wondered, setting off for Dimple Hill via my two days with the Brooms, whether, had Olga been with us, our sense of unity-in-difference would have survived the challenge of her unswerving aloofness. Wondered, thinking of her as I set out, what she would have told me returning from her first meeting, at Kropotkin's, with those Russians newly arrived from Moscow. Wondered whether, if indeed, as she declared, life in the hostel was now to become for her 'a livink death,' she would follow my suggestion of coming down for a while to Dimple Hill. Wondered what she would make of the serene friendliness of Quakerdom.

## CHAPTER IX

Arriving late last night, I learned only that he was in the house. Since when? How, and when, did Rachel Mary get over the stop in her mind sufficiently to allow him to come? Here he sits, at my side. On Rachel Mary's left hand, opposite to Richard, kept always on her right no matter who may come to stay. My place, first on her left, is now given up to this stranger, making me secondary. For him, I am a lodger, having the use of an upstairs sitting-room, joining the Roscorlas for meals. For me, he is Rome in flight from Rome.

'This is Mr Charles Dekorry, Miss Henderson.' 'Ducorroy?' Charles Ducorroy. Frère Charles, reduced to secularity. Tall. Dark, black-haired. Neatly round-headed. Dressed in a close-fitting black alpaca jacket above knickers of some woollen material. No trace in the well-cut features of the cowed, mindless expression of monks shown grouped in ceremonial photographs. French, urban, courteously playing his part in the meal-time business of handing things about; speaking, when necessary, a few words of broken English. At any moment my opportunity may come. Temptation to show off? To surprise and please this wandering fragment of that world so powerfully drawing me as I stood aside from the others in the hush of that little cell-like room just off the side chapel of that ancient church in Hodderheim. 'Plizz?'

Someone spoke to him. I missed it, being elsewhere.

'Pass them here, Ernest.' Rachel Mary, holding out her hand for a vegetable dish, Ducorroy still turned towards Ernest. Are

those eyes really *grey*? So rare. Here is my chance. ‘Encore de légumes, monsieur?’ Only just in time, with Rachel Mary already lifting the lid.

‘Vous parlez français, mademoiselle?’

Grey they were, transparent, but a shock, utterly belying his manner in turning to me; swift, eager. Relieved, I thought he was. But meeting those eyes was a plunge, as if one were falling from the side of a cliff, into an abyss of sorrow. There he dwells, aware of nothing else. Nothing comes to him from the sight of the garden glowing just beyond the open window in ripe September sunlight. Nothing from the Roscorlas, so far, for him, no more than kindly strangers granting him wayside rest on his hopeless journey to nowhere.

No more of this, isolating us within a cloud of reactions. Even while answering his few inquiries, put to discover the circumstances of my presence in the house rather than to express interest in that presence, I could feel, coming across the table from Richard—once my patient tutor in what had seemed to me, until I realized it to be the armoury of one still defying the ravages of a humiliation inflicted long ago, the unquakerly art of perpetual jocularly—resentment, fruit of the enforced silence of one accustomed to be the household referee, the perpetual guide and centre of meal-time talk, now, in the presence of a stranger, dethroned. Even Rachel Mary, something more than a hostess, a woman interested, albeit unaware of the nature of her interest, in this strange, attractive-looking young man, was feeling, side by side with satisfaction in supplying him with an unexpected rescue, something akin to jealousy of the rescuer. Vying with these two streams, came, from both Ernest and the pupil, a warm tide of admiration, for each of whom the displacement of Richard was not, as it was for Rachel Mary, a source of uneasiness.

No more, then. But when, apart from meal times and occasional general gatherings, shall we be able to meet and talk?

Cunning I felt when, the next morning, on my way to the garden for a few flowers for my room, I left *Modern Thought* in a prominent place on the hall table.

But the discomfort, that had come between me and the outdoor loveliness vanished when, on my return, I found him hanging about in the hall and knew that he must have seen me, through the open door of the little back room and, having heard from the Roscorlas that I spend my morning at work in my upstairs sitting-room, had come through, with a cunning equal to my own, to catch me on my way back.

‘C’est à vous, ce livre, mademoiselle?’

Long ago now seems yesterday’s morning’s meeting in the hall. There he stands in my life, there he stood, throughout my afternoon walk, courteously marvelling over my possession of such a book; begging to be allowed to borrow it; still surveying me, while he spoke his gratitude for my permission, with the puzzled air of one facing a phenomenon; going away down the hall with a lit face and the light easy tread of a slender Frenchman, the precious volume clasped to his breast.

Leaving me wondering whether, in handing him this guide to the enchanting intricacies of metaphysic, I may be distracting his attention from the clear pathway he has so painfully reached.

And now, for good or ill, he is in my hands. Amazement still transfigures the moment of finding him, that same evening, waiting for me in my sitting-room. Uninvited. Making no

apology. Making, before we sat lost in talk, the surrounding room aloof and strange, as when I had first seen it.

Not yet has it occurred to him to wonder what the Roscorlas, with whom his small command of spoken English keeps him nearly silent, will make of this spending of evenings with me. So far in their minds is knowledge only of his breakdown, his need for rest, for sleep; and the hope that presently he will begin life anew as a member of their Society, a prisoner rescued from an institution that for them is a revolting mystery. They are not experiencing the warm gaiety of his home in east France, do not see two of his sisters joyously departing, at the end of their schooldays, into convents, his own departure, from College, to the Paris Séminaire des Missions Étrangères. Do not share his meeting there with rumours of Loisy and the Modernists, who may yet turn out to be neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring, but who, when he was settled as he thought, for life, at work on the printing-press of that monastery in China, began to appear, to him, like lights in a coal-mine.

‘Imaginez, mademoiselle, mes sentiments, moi, béni depuis mon enfance, de l’amour d’une mère adorable, ayant aussi deux sœurs consacrées à la service de Dieu, en étant obligé d’imprimer ceci: “La femme, c’est un tas d’ordures”.’

They do not see him lying sleepless in his cell night after night besieged by thoughts his confessor condemned as devil-sent temptations. Do not see him grope his way along the dark corridor to this confessor’s cell, there to fling himself face downwards across the end of his narrow bed, imploring permission to read and to think. In vain.

And now, after reading my Maeterlinck, he glories in the belief that a man who has never rested his head upon a woman’s breast can become truly illuminated. And I am aware,

within the depths of his uncontrollable weeping, of a manly strength waiting to emerge. As also is he: 'Un de ces jours vous sentirez *un homme* près de vous.' A man already stating himself in French and in Catholic fashion, the fashion that exalts to Heaven the Mother of God because with their reverence for motherhood they *must* have her there. So that his concept of womanhood is a combination of deep respect with amusement over what he believes to be its untraversable limitations. Revealing his outcry when he found me trimming that hat: 'Ah! Voilà! Ce qu'elles ont pas dans la tête, elles ont dans les mains.' Stranger, too, it was, when with my hurt foot I was limping home from Meeting side by side with Rachel Mary, just in front of him and Richard, to hear him exclaim in broken tones: 'Poor littul thingue!' And when in our talk I state ideas that for long have stood central in my consciousness, he looks at me as if I were incredible: 'Non, vraiment c'est *étonnant!*'

Yet my oddity has not altered his view of marriage as dependent, for success, upon the husband's unquestioned leadership, illustrated by the conclusion of his account of his married sister's unhappiness during the year while her young mind was being 'rudement balayé' by her husband: 'Maintenant ils sont *une âme.*' Immediately he proceeded to recount, and punctuate with delighted laughter, the incident of that winter's morning when the husband, to prevent her going, with a heavy cold, to early Mass, locked the wardrobe containing all her hats, only to see her, a little later, sailing down the road with her small head supporting his large bowler, draped elegantly with a white veil.



Here, then, is the explanation of the investigating glances Rachel Mary sent my way during breakfast. Speculative, I thought them, in regard to Charles and myself, until she turned, the moment the others had left the room, to the corner cupboard, bent down, produced the card in an extended hand and announced, without looking at me: 'This came for you by the post.' And it was with her eyes that I saw, and with her consciousness that I swiftly hid from the rest of the household, the picture of Rodin's *Le Baiser*, a disturbing revelation, for her, of an unsuspected angle of my being.

And even now that she knows the outline of Olga's tragedy she still feels differently towards me.

'My friend in Paris has now made full investigations. It appears that Miss Feodorova went there with a Russian she had met, for the first time, only the evening before, at Prince Kropotkin's, and had been there with him for only a few weeks when she took her life. The date upon the card sent to you indicates that it was posted during her last day. She came to her lodgings in the evening with a beautiful bunch of hothouse flowers for her landlady, will then have gone upstairs, locked her door, dragged the settee out on to the balcony, undressed, drunk the whole of the bottle of veronal and lain down in her nightgown on the settee, very soon, the doctors say, to become unconscious. She was not found until towards ten o'clock the next morning. The measures taken at the hospital might have saved her life but for the night's exposure which produced pneumonia, of which she died, without regaining consciousness, at the end of a few days, during which the young man remained at her bedside. It is a tragic affair, both

for her friends and the young man she had hoped to marry her.'

'This picture by Rodin shall show you where I have been. In a world so beautiful that I can no more return to the world-life as before. To you alone I say goodebye, with the words of your so wonderfoll Mr Wells: "Perhaps there are better dreams".'

*The Sea Lady.*

Impossible to make Rachel Mary understand, to remove the barrier that has changed me in her eyes. Yet she has moved a little since we first met. Reading Wells's *Anticipations*, though here and there it puzzled her, enlarged her consciousness, already prepared, by her residence in Quakerdom, calmly to face, whatever might be its findings, the results of scientific investigation. But the personal findings and conclusions of *First and Last Things* made her weep as she watched him make, again and again, a close-shave past the point of departure towards the reality no science can enclose.

When I told him of her grief it moved him to suggest coming down to 'have a look' at my Quakers. Furiously he called me a fool to declare that he, with his spy-glass focused in advance would be unable to see them. Would he, bringing his wealthy poverty to confront their poverty-stricken wealth, have grasped anything beyond their aesthetic and cultural deficiencies?

Suppose Olga had come, as lately she had thought of doing? She sought life. Believed for a while that in England she had found it, found a vigorous sanity untroubled by speculative questionings. But soon began, perhaps with Kropotkin's help, to doubt, as did Lintoff, the freedom of our people, to see the amazing blindness of our prosperous classes. Love carried her into a temporary eldorado. But sex-love dies unless it grows, for both partners, towards universal love. Meanwhile, it is comedy for onlookers, who yet share and rejoice in its

beginnings, whether or no they have themselves experienced them. So various in their similarities.

Still upon my left cheek burns the scar made by that first kiss, horribly dropped there, between dances, by that empty-headed little philanderer on the very evening of my first rapturous certainty that one day Ted would kiss me, shyly, out into life with him until the end of time. *Was* it our sudden descent in poverty that drew him away? I shall never know. But knew, soon after Sally and Harriett were married, that the routine life of enclosed suburban housewives is not for me.

Just as I must dimly have recognized, in that decisive moment with Densley, my unsuitability to manage the background of a Harley Street practice. Yet that surprising moment brought revelation. Down from behind me as I sat idly at home and at ease in his consulting-room—scene of our endless discussions—came his arms surrounding me while they held before my eyes that picture of the Grand Canal. Then his deepest tone, a little shaken: ‘Isn’t that where people go for their honeymoon?’ For what may have been a whole minute I was alone in the universe, all my garnered experience swept away as I moved forward in a mist of light. No temple this, but bringing later to my mind the meaning, for him, of one of his quiet generalizations: in marriage, women enter a temple where no man can follow. Certain it is that in that long moment I was aware only of myself as traveller. Sorry I was, disappointed, when I returned to my surroundings, big book vanished and his arms withdrawn, to find that my silent unresponsiveness had driven him to stand, an offended stranger, elbow on mantelpiece in the neighbourhood of one of those dreadful framed photographs of soul’s awakening young women displaying long hair draped carefully waistwards down the fronts of their shoulders. Even then I could have recalled

him. Was it because I knew myself not only beloved but, henceforth, free from the inconveniences of living, as Hypo had remarked long ago, only just above the poverty line, that I had stepped out alone, in blissful silence? Or because I suddenly realized that speech and emotional display in face of a lifelong contract were out of place. Sacred that moment had been, undisturbed by my knowledge of our incompatibilities. For I knew that in one way or another all men and women are incompatible, their first eager enthusiasms comparable to those of revivalist meetings and inevitably as transient. Only in silence, in complete self-possession, possession of the inwardness of being, can lovers fully meet. An enthusiastic vocal engagement is a farewell. Marriage usually a separation, life-long?

Life-long unless resting upon the foundation of shared belief. For me, hitherto, all along the line, transfiguration had always been of the universe rather than of its inhabitants as I knew when telling Amabel in London that I believed Richard, apart from his surroundings, would be nothing to me. But now, for the first time Charles and I were separated, I found myself in the London train actually living the life described to me by that unhappy woman sharing my compartment.

Back here, sailing blindly after breakfast on my first morning into my bedroom, astonishing myself by tripping over the large water-jug prominent on my pathway to the window, sending its contents awash across the carpet, I met further surprise in the amused chucklings of Rachel Mary and the maid obliged to lift, roll and carry it down into the garden. But when the next morning I repeated my exploit, Rachel Mary's laughter, the heartiest I had ever heard from her, told me my secret was hers, was probably known to the whole household.

‘But I feel, Rachel Mary, that he ought, when he goes out into the world, to be quite *free*.’

‘I’m not so sure about that. It might be best for him to be engaged when he goes out amongst people.’

She approves, heartily. Sees Charles and me as acquisitions to the Society. For her, our future stands clear: the social concerns and activities of whatever Meeting we join. Into that life, divorced from the past, I should disappear. Into what for the most part, though every Meeting has its leaven of genuine mystics, is a Protestant, biblicist, ethical society. Aesthetic and cultural starvation. Charles, too, is fully awake to one aspect of this limitation.

‘I have deserted my mother. Each time I enter the Friends’ Meeting, the loveliness of her churches is before my eyes, their music in my ears, reproaching me. Still, I can live in the memory.’

Did he not see, in proposing to spend his life under the perpetual shadow of regretful memories, the impossibility of becoming a whole-hearted Quaker?

Intently he listened while I told him of the local flower show’s competition for table decoration, of how, when I borrowed, for my table, Rachel Mary’s long-stemmed, wide-topped fruit-dish, Alfred, who never spends a penny upon anything but necessities, horrified me by bringing home a huge bunch of maidenhair fern plus a few speckled tiger-lilies, to brighten up my already arranged mass of, love-in-a-mist, its gentle blue shining clear through its cloud of green, with trailers of smilax spreading thence to each corner of the table, the whole, in Roscorla eyes, inconspicuous beside the greenhouse opulencies of the tables to right and left. And when

I told him of their astonishment over the winning, by my table, minus these expensive offerings, of the first prize, he cried, after a moment's meditative silence, 'Ah! Je comprends,' and then, returning at once to his lamentations over the beauty of his deserted mother, left me uncertain as to whether he approved the Roscorla offerings or my refusal to use them.

Looking ahead, I see him built into Quakerdom, into one or other of its generous enterprises at home or abroad, into an outlook as truly Catholic as that of his beloved Church, yet walled up within the irreverent puritanisms brought to if by the sects whence most of the early followers of Fox came forth.

Can I face such a life, become in its background, a kind of Rachel Mary, ceaselessly busy, my share in his life that of recipient of the record of his daily doings? Can I even promise myself to him without confessing the past? This I must soon decide. Think it out at Brighton, if indeed I join Pauline in her little escapade. Write to him from there.

Hurrying almost the length of the long platform in search of corner seats, finding in every carriage just four men screened by opened newspapers, we meekly took windowless middle places and sat, unnoticed, in hilarious silence; interlopers in this six o'clock preserve of middle-aged City men sufficiently well-to-do to be living in Brighton and evidently enjoying this hour on neutral territory, remote from office and from home.

The deprecating smile of the head of the stately Y.W.B.A. branch at once revealed its every room occupied. Despair. Until, perceiving our dismay, she hesitantly revealed another branch, small, never crowded, but run chiefly for women of the servant class temporarily out of work. Brighton was ours,

reborn; the long gay sunlit, high-skyed front, the sea-girt piers, the distant way over the downs of Rottingdean on the edge of nowhere.

While still the gold of slanting sunlight lay upon the town's seaward face, we were out again, adream amongst holiday-making visitors, none, we felt, experiencing the extremity of bliss wherein we wondered silent, planless, our known lives curtained by oblivion, the coming night securely strange in the shelter of those small cubicles in the bedroom of the dingy house in the remote back-street.

Enrichment, this sharing of the night with strangers. Perhaps only for so long as they remain unknown? Yet even then darkness might bring a kind of unity. As does even a deep twilight as it enters, late on a summer's evening, a roomful of contestants. Host and guest in one, it can be felt at work reconciling differences, transforming each sitter into an almost invisible fellow-traveller within the mystery of space and producing, as it deepens, first a lowering of voices and presently a silence so nearly complete as to impel the arrival of the blindingly brilliant indoor light. Restoring at once the sense of enclosure in a walled room and reducing the gathered company to sharply separated exponents of different points of view. Yet, even then, the healing touch of the vanished twilight may be felt. Argument will not recur, or, if it does, will be softened by cordiality.

Shared night-darkness abolishes, even indoors, the division between night and day, though not there so fully as in never-quite-complete-darkness of the open. But to be aware of this absence of division, whether indoors or out, one must remain for a while awake. Will Pauline confirm this, or just agree, as always, with anything I suggest? Is she awake there behind her cubicle curtains? Or at once asleep as she was on those nights

beneath the high trees giving us shelter from the slight breeze swaying their distant tops to and fro against the visible night sky; a gentle movement extending incredibly to their very roots perceptibly stirring in the earth beneath me. Dawn roused her, roused us both to bird-song, to the thunder of hoofs scampering in a distant field, presently to multitudinous small thuddings coming up through the earth, discovered, when we were on our feet, to be the patterings of chickens cooped along the floor of the deep valley on whose edge we had lain.



## CHAPTER X

‘Dearest Miretta:

By all means tell your man about me, if you feel you ought to. Tell him also that if I were compelled to settle, for life, with just one woman, it would have to be you. My confident blessings on you both.

Hypo.’

Can this be true? It confirms things he said from time to time all along the way. Ah no. He says these things to every woman in turn. No. It is a kind, cleverly thought-out message, for Charles, a first-class ‘reference.’ But even if I could bring myself to show it to him, it would not mitigate the shock I must give him in answering his appeal for my return, his question as to why, with my London friend departed, I linger on in Brighton.

Distance, and the daily companionship of that remarkable old woman, bitter judge of all the earth, had mitigated the week’s suspense. But during the short homeward journey its place was taken by certainty increasing with every mile through the callously averted landscape. Reaching at last the familiar lane, her own territory, she felt hope return, become, as she passed the little shaw where she and Charles, silenced by the

transfiguration of everything about them, had walked hand in hand, hope became certainty. Here was the house. Confidently she unlatched the evocative gate. In a moment the open porch would receive her, then the hall, then the room where Charles awaited her.

But the porch was not open. Strangely, at this early hour of a fine, warm evening, its outer door stood closed. Consulting its face, she read there a challenge to her right of entry so clear as to seem spoken aloud. Pushing wide the door, feeling as she did so the vanity of the movement that left her still alone in the open, she heard, sounding from behind the half-open inner door, the voice of Charles, an unknown voice, confidently raised:

‘Alfrède! Ara you reddie?’

*Alfrède.* No longer Monsieur Alfrède. Thursday. *Lodge* evening. To which, inconceivably, Charles was going.

Here was the answer to her letter. Here too, the history of the past week. Charles was now fully at home with the Roscorlas. One of the family.

The door came open. There he stood. Unrecognizable. Unrecognizing.

‘Ah, bonsoir, mademoiselle.’ The words reached her from far away within the deeps of his sorrow.

Murmuring response as he moved aside to let her pass, she went forward into the hall. To be met almost at once by Rachel Mary come out to greet her with the smiling cordiality due to a paying guest. A moment later came Richard, overdoing the same manner.

At supper, no Charles, no Alfred. Throughout the meal Rachel Mary and Richard kept up their excessive attentiveness. Kept going, with endless questions, the topic of her time in Brighton, avoiding any kind of behaviour that would restore

the sense of shared life that hitherto on her return from temporary absence had immediately made her feel she had not been away. Noticing the cold she had developed during the last few days, Rachel Mary suggested the wisdom of breakfast in bed.

Upstairs, she found that life had left her familiar room. Left all that its window looked out upon. Beckoned no longer from behind the curtain of the unknown future.

‘You had much talk with him during this past week?’ ‘We had.’ Can this hard-faced woman be Rachel Mary? ‘He confided in us. Of course we could only tell him we knew *nothing* about you. Only that you came here from London with a nervous breakdown.’

‘I see.’

‘Now that we’ve come to know him, we all like him. He seems like one of my own brothers.’ That break in her voice upon the last word tells a tale of which she is unaware. Consciously, she only knows that somewhere within the present tangle is the origin of the stop in her mind that should have prevented him coming here. Blaming herself, she now does her best to protect him: keeping me away from the breakfast table, sending him to Richard’s farm for the day.

‘I must tell you we cannot keep you here beyond the end of this week. We’re having things done in the house, painting and decorating.’

The end of these planned speeches leaves her scanning my face, across which, if Amabel is right, will have passed the expression of all I feel, she will have seen my incredulous despair. Her face changes. Softens. We are back in our old

relationship.

‘You might, if you like, find quarters somewhere near at hand. Charles loves you. He has told me so. He said: “I love this woman. I cannot not love her.”’

Dear, puzzled Rachel Mary. Once more, a compromise. If he wishes, we are to go on meeting. But not under her roof.

Sudden gay laughter, her irrepressible contribution to the Sunday dinner-time exchange, sweeps her into complete despair, though now more faintly than ever before. Again, as ever, the curtained future called to her to push forward through unbearable pain for what felt like the end of life.

Reaching her sitting-room, she heard his footsteps on the stairs. In a moment he was with her, weeping, with clasped hands.

‘Miriam, Miriam, j’ai péché. J’ai péché contre l’amour.’

In silence she gazed at him. Everything now was in his hands; and he in the hands of the Roscorlas. Impossible to respond, to attempt in any way to influence the movement of his thought.

Sitting at his side on the alien settee she heard his voice, already, now that it had steadied, the voice of a stranger, quietly remark that the confession in her letter had given him pain; then saw his hands move as if to brush away a merely incidental obstruction. This pain then, he had accepted and disposed of. What more could there be? A pause. Then his voice, deep and trembling: ‘Is your health goode? You have had, like myself, a nervous breakdown?’

Here then was the single, simple explanation: Gallic practicality? Aroused in him by the talk of the Roscorlas,

combined to display all they could find in her disfavour: unsuitability for Quakerdom plus poor health the latter, for him, the more important? In either case, with his mind made up, impossible either to remind him of their mutual reservations in regard to certain aspects of Quakerism, or to explain, by way of self-recommendation, her carelessness, on first coming to D. H. to recover from the natural results of overwork plus recklessly late hours, of the technical term 'nervous breakdown' so applicable to his own condition of depression, persistent sleeplessness, inability to consume any but small quantities of carefully selected plain food, or to walk more than short distances. Impossible even to speak. Even through the very sound of her voice, wherein he had found whatever had made him say 'j'ai eu ton âme. Dans la voix je l'ai entendu' might cause him, even now to return to her from the journey taken during the last few days.

About to murmur a goodbye, she became aware of footsteps in the passage, of the door opening, of Richard, importantly genial, speaking from the doorway:

'Ah, there you are, Charles. M'sister has just asked me to remind you adult school meeting'll be a half-hour earlier this afternoon for the convenience of the friends due back at Groombridge by tea time.'

Entering her bedroom on that last evening, she stood for an instant arrested, lost, while behind her the door shut gently to, in the unexpected. Joy flashed through her with the realization that for a moment everything had been forgotten, nothing had existed but the glad shock of the spectacle that had held her eyes; the sight, along the lower edge of the window the servant

had carelessly left uncurtained, of the ivy leaves, outlined by moonlight that drew their dark pattern more clearly than ever she had seen it in colour-revealing daylight.

With incredulous gratitude she recognized as again and again in the past she had done the power of light, seen signalling from untold distance, to obliterate all but itself. Banish all sense of current misery and call her forward into the unknown lying ahead.

Only when she was nearly ready for bed, her preparations made slowly by the light of the moon, her spirit cut away across the meadows, across the moonlit pools of the marshes, did she remember her door, still unlatched. Reaching it she barely resisted the impulse to hold it wide and sing out through the passion-fevered darkness: 'Isn't this moonlight heavenly?'

'Mirry!' The voice a smack; of friendly anger. 'That Bedford College girl'll be back in this room next week. You've got to find another somewhere. Where do you think of going?'

'*Anywhere*. Don't care.'

'Shall I find you one? Somewhere near by?'

'If you like. So long as it's an attic at not more than seven-and-six the week, and no other lodgers in the house.'

The next day she was telling me I must at least see, before moving in, the room she had taken.

'Why?'

'Because you *must*. Come along, I'll show you where it is.'

Off the main road. Sequestered short terrace of narrow little four-storeyed stone houses, Regency; entered by a dividing passage where hollyhocks look up above grey stone walls.

Somewhere the sound, through an open window, of a piano: firm hands skilfully pounding out the final complete crescendo of the Chopin ballade that welcomed me in Oberland.

Knocking on the blistered front door produced no result. Yet voices sounded from the open basement window. Laughter, led by the voice of a young man, curiously *smoothed* voice, neither weak nor strong, urbanely mirthful—satirical. A second hammering brings to the door a man, hurried being who gives one glance and vanishes. The next moment the owner of the voice stands there, the host of the basement party, tall skeleton in tattered garments compelled to elegance by his bearing, regretting in courteously thoughtful voice, while dark hazel-brown eyes look through me into space, the absence of the landlady, and offering to give a message. Clearly a lodger, unconfessed by Mrs Gay.

Yet at the very moment of reproaching Mrs Gay for concealing the presence of another lodger in the house, there stole over me, as I stood by the wide window of this sunlit top-back room and saw for the first time, just beyond the leafage of the house-high lime tree, easeful carelessness in regard to the rest of the house. Far away, invisible, inaudible, on first floor and basement are the Gays and their family. In the very room where she allowed that weird artist to entertain his guests, I am blessedly to have a solitary breakfast for only half a crown added to my rent.

Affection there was, within the sound of her hearty laughter as she disposed of him: ‘*’Im?* You needn’t count *’im*. Couldn’t have a nicer man in the house. A gentleman, Mr Noble is, if ever there was one. And quiet, well you’d never know he was

in the house. Out, he is, too, most of the time. Comes in late; or early you might call it. Shuts the front door without a sound, turns out the gas in the passage and goes upstairs as light as a feather.’ To that second-floor front room, the prize room of Regency houses, with long windows lace-curtained right across.

No one in the other room of this top floor. The garden, its washing lines, ash-heap and dustbins invisible from where I sit alone with the sky, the lime tree and the tops of those poplars pointing up in the next garden.

Solitude. Secure. Filled each morning with treasure undamaged by compulsory interchange. Every distance a clear perspective. Why say distance *lends* enchantment? Each vista demands, for portrayal, absence from current life, contemplation, a long journey. Slower this morning, more difficult, because of that meeting with Mrs Gay. Only for a minute or two, but conserving much more than time. Yet I had to hand over that crumpled pawn ticket.

‘Oh, my goodness! *Isn’t* it a pity? That was a lovely pair of boots they sent him from home. He’s been flapping about in an old pair of evening slippers with one sole loose.’

She likes that weird young man. Is genuinely sorry for him. Pawn ticket just inside the front door. Dropped there last night, or in the small hours of this morning. Breakfast tray, everything quite cold, on the table outside his door. An undisturbing presence. Easy to avoid. Existing for me only as the sound of that strange voice, not strong, not weak, unassertive, yet confidently vibrant with a kind of awareness unknown to me, yet already associating itself with this corner of St John’s Wood that inexplicably begins to offer itself as my native heath. Yet every place I have stayed in, at home and abroad, has sooner or later so offered itself, but none with just



this indefinable quality. Here, the very sunlight, compared with the sunlight along the main roads, seems more mellow and leisurely. In the brief local roadways and odd passages people go about as if at home, at ease. Like that man farther down the terrace coming out unconcernedly in a plaster-smirched overall from the little door in that tumble-down bit of fencing backed by untrimmed shrubberies hiding all but the battered roofing of what must be a studio. Above the passageway alongside the sculptor's studio, some large room whence daily the tremendous last movement of Chopin's last sonata encompasses me. Joining forces with my silent lime tree it sets aside all personal problems. Abolishes, so long as one is alone, as completely did the sudden spectacle of those moonlit ivy leaves when I entered my bedroom on that last night at D. H. two years ago, even tragedy.

Only when I am with others does my sense of isolation return. To last, if they are right who declare that the state of being deeply in love endures for exactly five years, for exactly another three. Until this autumn of 1915, I shall still be alone with Charles. Still feel sure when I am writing, a loneliness that now may encircle the rest of my life.

While I write, everything vanishes but what I contemplate. The whole of what is called 'the past' is with me, seen anew, vividly. No, Schiller, the past does not stand 'being still.' It moves, growing with one's growth. Contemplation is adventure into discovery; reality. What is called 'creation' imaginative transformation, fantasy, invention, is only based upon reality. Poetic description a half-truth? Can anything produced by man be called 'creation'? The incense-burners do not seem to know that in acclaiming what they call 'a work of genius' they are recognizing what is potentially within themselves. If it were not, they would not recognize it. Fully to

recognize, one must be alone. Away in the farthest reaches of one's being. As one can richly be, even with others, provided they have no claims. Provided one is neither guest nor host. With others on neutral territory, where one can forget one is there, and be everywhere. Hence, for me, the charm of that Eustace Miles place. Unique amongst cheap restaurants, most of whose customers don't seem to be fully present, seem, even in the evening, just food consumers. All day the place awaits me. Gives me the long ramble from suburb to centre, sure of the welcome of a spacious interior well filled but never crowded. Sure of a seat in some corner where, after the queer, well-balanced meal comfortably independent of slaughter-houses, I can sit within the differently nourishing variations of the assembled company, reading as receptively as if I were alone, yet feeling one even with that woman who sat at my table last night eye downcast in meditation, breathing out now and again her Buddhistic O—m. Then, at closing time wandering home by a different route, circuitous, to sleep my way into the dawn of tomorrow.

Available, not too weary, not too far off, Jan, glad to be helped with her translation of Strindberg. Still wanting me to meet that journalist who only wants to meet me because he admires Hypo more than any present-day writer. Further off, but still accessible, Amabel.

Haunting each thought of her as Mrs Michael Shatov, a variety of moments, some of them adding up to what seems to be alienation, one, bringing to me an immortal desolation together with insight into her current development. Foremost between the two of us is that talk on the first morning of my visit after the arrival of Paul whose promised birth had brought 'all of bliss to Mike and me.' Talk that soon showed itself to be, for Amabel, a more than welcome opportunity for throwing

out, casually, with eyes turned away to glance inquiringly through the window as if attracted thither by something of immediate interest, statements intended to show me myself as Michael now saw me, or as she would like me to believe he saw me: a deluded female who admired Emerson and supported the suffrage movement. Her 'Mike has done with Emerson. We both find him trite' soon led, perhaps because my face will have betrayed a blend of incredulity and consternation, to 'Marriage, and Paul, have swept away all my interest in votes for women,' and, before I could frame my reminder of the large proportion of wives and mothers amongst the active suffrage workers, she was on her feet bringing the sitting to an end in the manner of a busy, responsible housewife disposing of an amiably cherished young visitor saying: 'Well, my poppet,' and going on to suggest the disposal of my morning.

Yet all such moments, since she knew how thankfully I had given Michael into her hands, surprise me with their continuous suggestion of successful rivalry; while still the essence of our relationship remains untouched. Still we remain what we were to each other when first we met. Something of the inexpressible quality of our relationship revealed itself in that moment she did not share, the moment of finding the baby Paul lying asleep in his long robe in the sitting-room, gathering him up, and being astonished to feel, as soon as he lay folded, still asleep, against my body, the complete stilling of every one of my competing urgencies. Freedom. Often I had held babes in my arms: Harriett's, Sally's, and many others. But never with that sense of perfect serenity. If Jean's marriage with Joe Davenport brought her a child, should I feel, in holding it, that same sense of fulfilment?

### Transcriber's Notes

This text is taken from: Dorothy M. Richardson, *Pilgrimage IV: March Moonlight*. Virago Press, London, 2002, p. 553-658.

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):

- ... pianoforte miracles: 'C'est tout simplement parcequ'il c'est ...  
... pianoforte miracles: 'C'est tout simplement parcequ'il s'est ...
- ... Lauriers, at all time perceptible and, after Gruyères, present in ...  
... Lauriers, at all times perceptible and, after Gruyères, present in ...
- ... swiftly advancing destiny, saddening at this moment to garden ...  
... swiftly advancing destiny, saddening at this moment the garden ...
- ... approval of the flying leap, Richard remarking, her voice warm ...  
... approval of the flying leap, Richard remarking, his voice warm ...
- ... crudity of the small, uniform houses, into the Roscorla's life-fashioned, ...  
... crudity of the small, uniform houses, into the Roscorlas' life-fashioned, ...
- ... her first meeting, at Kropotkins, with those Russians newly ...  
... her first meeting, at Kropotkin's, with those Russians newly ...

[The end of *March Moonlight: Pilgrimage, Volume 13* by Dorothy M. Richardson]