

**THE INTERCESSOR
AND OTHER STORIES**

MAY SINCLAIR

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THE
INTERCESSOR
AND OTHER STORIES

by
MAY SINCLAIR

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THE MAHATMA'S STORY

THE MAHATMA'S STORY

YOU remember the Grigley's Mahatma, that queer Bengali chap they brought back with them from Bombay? This is one of the tales he told them.

At one time he used to turn up for supper at the Grigleys' every Sunday, dressed in a very long black frock-coat, and a high waistcoat buttoned up to his chin like a clergyman's, and a great white turban wreathed round his head and flopping over one ear. He would arrange himself on Grigley's divan, with his face very meek and his backbone very stiff and his legs very sinuous and curly, like a cross between a blessed Buddha and a boa-constrictor sitting up on its coils. He told his stories in a little quiet, sing-song voice, smiling at the Grigleys all the time, as if they were very young and rather silly children. We would sit before him on the floor, staring at him, the Grigleys with solemn faces full of childlike wonder, and the rest of us rather critical and incredulous—enlightened Westerners, you know.

At first we thought he was pulling all our legs, trying to see what we Westerners would swallow. But no, it was the Grigleys' wonder and our criticism and incredulity that amused him. The things he told us were to him so obvious and of their kind so elementary that he couldn't conceive how any reasonable being could regard them with interest, much less with wonder or suspicion.

I remember at the end of one of his most incredible yarns—about a man, I think, who could be in two places at once—Mrs. Grigley looked up with her little intense face and said,

“Anything—*anything* can happen in the East. The *East is wonderful!*”

She was going on like that, undeterred by the Mahatma's supple shrug, when George Higgins cut in. He would begin to believe, he said, when things like that began to happen in the West.

The Mahatma looked at him as if he had been a baby and smiled.

“When the East comes to the West they do happen,” he said.

It seems that about nine years ago the East came to the West in the person of a certain Rama Dass. He was proclaimed as a Mahatma by the members of a small occult society which lived on the wonder of him for a year or two. Then suddenly and violently it died of Rama Dass. He had caused a sort of scandal that no society, however occult, can be mixed up with and survive. But if the Mahatma's story is as true as he swore it was, Rama Dass must certainly have possessed powers.

To us the remarkable thing about him was, not his powers—the Mahatma had inured us to powers—but the light the whole queer story threw on certain mysterious events involving people whom we all knew. One of them indeed is so well known that I

wouldn't give his name if it wasn't that he was under suspicion at the time, and the Mahatma's story clears him.

I mean Augustin Reeve.

You remember he disappeared? Well, we knew things had happened, very queer things, but none of us had ever understood how or why they happened, or how much queerer the real explanation was (if it *is* the real one). Who would have imagined that Augustin Reeve could ever have been mixed up with Rama Dass? But that, of course, was Varley's doing; his contacts were frequently unclean. Not that he had anything to do with the scandal; that was a story none of us were concerned with; I only mention it as proving the Mahatma's point, that the powers of Rama Dass were by no means spiritual. To him they were just the lowest, cheapest sort of magic.

The person who matters is, of course, Augustin Reeve. That's where the mystery comes in. He had everything to lose and nothing in the world to gain, unless you count Delia. Oh, well, I suppose she counted; talking of scandal, she seems to have been at the bottom of his disappearance. The point is—if it was only Delia—he could have had her without disappearing.

Here are the facts as they appeared to us at the time. Seven years ago Reeve, as I say, vanished. So did Varley's wife, Delia. Muriel Reeve, Reeve's wife, stayed on at the house in Chelsea, which, by the way, was her house. She had the money. When you called there you found Clement Varley in possession. Clement Varley, of all people in the world, who hadn't a decent coat to his back or an address he could own up to, nothing but his beautiful wife Delia, who kept him by sitting for Reeve and, it was said, by complacencies less innocent. Literally we didn't know where they went home at night. They used to receive us at a shabby little club they belonged to. And there he was, as I say, in possession. Oh—of everything: of Reeve's studio, of Muriel's car, of Reeve's servants (till they left), of Reeve's furniture, of Reeve's cellar—and of Muriel. He was quite off his head, suffering from delusions of greatness, imagining that he was a genius, that he had painted Reeve's pictures and that the whole place belonged to him and always had. He was wearing one of Reeve's suits.

And there was Muriel, behaving as if it was all true, humouring him in his madness—actually living with him. But for Muriel, we should simply have supposed that the Reeves had lent him the house while they went abroad somewhere. As it was, it looked like some infamous bargain between Reeve and Varley. That was the incredible thing—that Reeve could lend himself—that Muriel—the angelic Muriel—An inexplicable mystery.

But if you admit Rama Dass and his powers——

Reeve, mind you, had been gone about a year before we heard of him. Then somebody came on him in an opium den down in Limehouse. And it was after that that the stories began to get about. He had taken to drugging, to drink, to every vice you could think of. He did horrible things, things he had to hide for. It looked like it.

Then one day Delia turned up, very shabby, at Grigley's studio and gave him her address as a model. Somewhere in Limehouse. Grigley called there.

Reeve opened the door. He was frightfully shabby too, and very queer. He behaved as if he didn't know Grigley, had never met him and didn't want to meet him. He was very gentle and very polite about it, but firm. He didn't know Grigley. And Grigley had to go away.

Of course, as bluff it was pitiable, and it seemed to confirm all those stories.

And the mystery of it—if it had been Clement Varley you could have understood. He had the sort of corrupt beauty which would have lent itself. But Augustin Reeve, with *his* beauty, with his dignity and iron-grey serenity, you couldn't see him playing any part that wasn't noble. Augustin Reeve skulking in awful places to hide a vice, forgetting his old life and repudiating his old friends—it wasn't conceivable; if you don't believe in Rama Dass.

The next thing was the show of Reeve's Limehouse Scenes (superb masterpieces) at Varley's villainous little club. They sold. Everything he did sold. And we began to hope that he might return to us. Not a bit of it. When he'd made enough money he went over to Paris with Delia, and, as you know, he never came back again.

We heard that Varley and Muriel had run across him there. And when Varley was next seen in Chelsea he had Delia with him and Muriel was living again with Reeve in Paris.

Soon after that Varley went smash and disappeared. He couldn't make money and apparently he had spent most of Muriel's. Anyhow he disappeared.

As for Reeve, he must have made pots and pots before he died.

Those were the facts, as far as we knew them. And I say, if you exclude Rama Dass, they are inexplicable.

We only realised him by an accident. We were dining with the Grigleys and the Mahatma was there. We'd been talking about poor Atkinson's death, and Grigley said,

“He would have been a fine man in finer circumstances. The poor devil hadn't a chance.”

The Mahatma asked us what we called a chance, and I said, “Well, a decent income and a decent wife. A wife he could have lived *with* and an income he could have lived *on*.”

Then the Mahatma said there were no such things as chances. There was nothing but the Karma that each man makes for himself. Then he told his queer story. I shan't attempt to tell it in his words. He had formed his style chiefly on the Bible, and at times he was startling. This is the gist of it.

First of all he said he knew a man who was always saying what we said, that he hadn't a chance. And he asked us if we'd ever heard of Clement Varley?

Of course we'd heard of him, long before things had begun to happen. Muriel Reeve had taken him up and they were more or less looking after him, and Delia Varley was even then notorious. So was Clement in his way. He had once had a studio and he'd spoiled more canvases than he could afford to pay for, painting the abominations he called portraits. We wondered how on earth the Reeves could put up with the beast,

he was so morose and lazy and discontented. I admit he hadn't much to be contented about. But the Reeves were extraordinarily good to him. He wasn't bad at copying and he might have made a decent living that way if he'd stuck to it. Unfortunately he thought he was a great painter, or at least that he would have been if, as he said, he'd had a chance. He didn't consider himself in the least responsible for his laziness and his vile temper and viler pictures. He believed these things were so because he hadn't an income or a decent place to live in, and because he was tied to a woman he had left off caring about, who had left off caring about him.

The Mahatma was only interested in their case so far as Rama Dass came into it. Still he told us things. He says the two spent most of their time tormenting each other. Delia would fly out at Clement because he didn't earn enough and because he didn't paint like Augustin Reeve. She said he'd no business to marry her when he couldn't keep her, and she'd remind him a dozen times a day that she was keeping *him*.

And Clement would shriek and call on God to witness that nobody could paint within half a mile of a woman like Delia; and that it was all very well for Reeve. *He* didn't depend on his painting for a living; *he* hadn't got to prostitute his genius; he'd had the sense to marry a woman with money, a woman of refinement, a woman who was a perfect angel. But he, Clement, hadn't had a chance.

And Delia would shriek back at him that it was all very well for Muriel. Augustin Reeve was a perfect angel too. But if Muriel had had to live cheek by jowl with a brute like Clement, she wondered what sort of angel she'd have been then. And she would keep on nagging at him to give up trying to paint and find work as a clerk in a bank or something.

Varley's case was complicated by his hideous jealousy of Reeve. And, of course, he fell in love with Muriel.

Those two women were as different as they could well be. Muriel was sombre and intense, black-haired and white, the blonde whiteness of honey. Delia's hair was like a heavy gold helmet clapped on to her head, and her skin was exquisite; cyclamen-white and pink. Her mouth and eyes glistened as though water ran over them. Her mouth was very red, redder than fair women's mouths generally are, and it had sulky corners. She was beautiful; but she had the temper of a she-devil. And Muriel really was a heavenly angel. You can't blame Varley for falling in love with her. And you can't blame Delia for falling in love with Reeve. Lots of women were in love with him. But that he should have become infatuated with Delia and Muriel with Varley, that's the uncanny thing; he wasn't that sort of man and she wasn't that sort of woman; besides they hadn't been married a year. This is where the Mahatma's tale comes in.

He said that one evening Varley and his wife brought Rama Dass to Reeve's studio. It would, of course, be Varley that brought him. He'd picked him up in some nasty East End den. And Rama Dass had begun talking, he supposed, about his powers. And then Varley had started grouching as usual, saying he hadn't had a chance, and that if he'd only had what he called Reeve's luck he'd have done something tremendous, and that it was all very well for Reeve, and so on.

If only they could change places——

Delia—it must have been Delia—looked at Rama Dass. And Rama Dass made queer Eastern faces at them—you can see him—and said, “Why not?” He could make them change places in five minutes if they liked. Only they must give him five minutes. And Reeve—it must have been Reeve—said he’d like to see Rama Dass try.

That wasn’t a challenge that Rama Dass was likely to let pass. And you can hear the women joining in: “Oh do try, Mr. Rama Dass, *do* try.” You see, Reeve and Muriel didn’t believe that anything would happen. It was just their idea of a joke.

And Mr. Rama Dass tried. I’ve no doubt that was what he’d been brought there for. Varley and Delia were in deadly earnest.

He must have tried for all he was worth. He put them all four to sleep, laid out on Reeve’s divan. Then he squatted down by each of them in turn and did some sort of incantation business, mumbling in their ears. And when they came up out of that horrible sleep, they *had* changed places.

That’s to say, they had exchanged memories.

Varley found himself completely at home in Reeve’s Chelsea house with Reeve’s servants and Reeve’s furniture and Reeve’s bathroom—that must have been the strangest experience of all—and Reeve’s wife. He remembered having painted Reeve’s pictures. His possession of Reeve’s memory entailed most of Reeve’s habits, so that his reactions to his surroundings were correct.

You might have thought it would be a bit of a shock to Muriel, finding herself Varley’s wife. But the ingenious Mr. Rama Dass had provided for that. His infamous magic poisoned her with Delia’s first passion as well as Delia’s memory.

In the same way he provided for Reeve’s shock when he found himself with Delia. He had done the thing so well—whatever it was he did do—that Reeve drove off peaceably in a taxi-cab with Delia and Rama Dass, and settled down in Varley’s rooms in Limehouse—those inconceivably squalid rooms—with every appearance of content. He couldn’t remember anything else. His mind behaved exactly as if he had lived in Limehouse for years and years, and before that wherever it was that Varley had happened to be living, down to the room over the tobacconist’s shop where he had been born.

Rama Dass had even provided for the case in which these transferred memories should clash. Say, Reeve with Varley’s memory, or Muriel with Delia’s, remembering each other’s original circumstances. At all these points of contradiction Rama Dass had established complete forgetfulness, so that their memories dove-tailed very neatly and nothing destroyed the fourfold illusion. You’ll say he couldn’t have tampered with the memories of everybody concerned, all the people who had known Varley and Reeve; but this very exchange of circumstances lessened the chances of contact. Reeve had quite thoroughly disappeared from his circle and Varley from his; and if any of us did knock up against one of them, why, we were left with our unsolved mystery on our hands. And, naturally, Reeve’s friends avoided Varley and Muriel.

I said it was Reeve who mattered most, but as Varley hadn’t disappeared yet, whatever else he had done, Varley looms more considerably in this tale. We know, that’s to say, the Mahatma seems to have known, more about Varley’s behaviour than

Reeve's. This because Rama Dass fairly haunted Varley, and the Mahatma was keeping an eye on Rama Dass.

What appears most evident is that Varley had got his chance. He had got *all* the things he had declared were necessary to him if he was to show what was in him. Money, leisure, the right surroundings, and the right woman.

But mark what happened.

When he found himself in Reeve's big studio, he remembered the very pattern of the carpet, he was familiar with the "Salamander" stove and the white-painted pipes of the radiators. Long years of comfort stretched behind him. He remembered with emotion the pictures on the walls and easels. As the Mahatma took care to point out, it was only their memories they had exchanged. They had kept their own bodies, and their own temperaments, and wills. After all, the powers of Rama Dass, though considerable, were not sufficient to cause them to exchange personalities completely. The self, as the Mahatma said, can neither be changed nor exchanged. It was beyond Rama Dass. And as Varley's temperament had always cried out for Persian carpets and voluptuous divans and anthracite stoves and woman's sympathy, it had nothing to say against these illusions of his memory. The presence of the pictures confirmed him in his belief that he was a great painter.

And yet, when at last he had every mortal thing he had ever wanted, when the very scene supported him and invited him to work, for months and months he seems to have simply given himself up to sloth; driving in Muriel's car, sprawling on Reeve's divans, making love to Reeve's wife; drinking much too much, and eating frightful quantities of rich food, till he grew so sleek and fat that his own mother wouldn't have known him. Not attempting to work. His bitterest complaint used to be that he couldn't paint because he hadn't enough money to pay for models; but now, when Reeve's best models turned up on his doormat every morning, he sent them away; and swore at them for coming, too. In nine months he hadn't done a stroke. He had always some excuse; he would say the light was bad, or he wasn't in the mood, or Muriel took up all the time he might have worked in. If she put her nose into the studio he would swear at her for always hanging about; if she left him to himself, he complained that he was neglected and that he might as well never have married her, for all the good she was to him. And again when the angel who, thanks to Rama Dass, must, have believed in him as she had believed in Augustin Reeve, when the angel tried encouraging him to paint again he screamed out that he couldn't paint to order and she'd better mind her own business and not come meddling with his. He'd stamp about the studio and call upon God to tell him *how* he could do anything with a woman like that in the house.

And presently they began to hear about Augustin Reeve. First of all, Delia turned up, imploring Varley to let her sit for him. Then Reeve's pictures began to be shown here and there. And when Muriel praised them—she seems to have retained her judgment—he flew into a rage and swore at her. He said it was all very well for Reeve. *He* had the spur of poverty. He must paint or starve. But as for himself the life he lived was enough to kill all inspiration. He might as well be a grocer. Muriel's money was a drag on him; the house was a drag on him; what did he want with money and houses?

Muriel was a drag on him. No artist ought to marry. And then his old cry: He hadn't had a chance.

At last his jealousy of Reeve and that itch of his vanity which he mistook for inspiration, whipped him on to work again.

He must have expected to see, rising up magically under his hand, pictures like those of Augustin Reeve (his old manner) which fairly surrounded him in that house. You see, he thought, poor chap, he had painted them himself. But though he tried his level best to paint in Reeve's old manner he kept on turning out things that were too lamentably in his own. For he had kept his own body, and his body had kept to its own memory which was much deeper than his mind's memory, and it made his hand move in its old way. It couldn't have moved in any other way. And when he compared what it was doing with what he believed it to have done in the days before he married Muriel, he laid the whole blame of his impotence on her.

"See," he would shout, "what I was before I knew you and what I am now."

And he wished to God he had never married her. He said she had destroyed his soul.

When she reminded him that she had at least given him the sympathy and understanding he had wanted, he said he wanted nothing of the kind and that her business wasn't to understand him—he could understand himself—but to give him pleasure. He was beginning to hanker after Delia's unspiritual beauty.

This didn't seem to us to fit in with Rama Dass and his love-magic. But the Mahatma explained it. Rama Dass had only worked his love-magic on Reeve and Muriel who wouldn't have changed without it. And Varley's will and temperament were stronger than his memory. Memory, the Mahatma said, is only a record; it has no power but that which will and temperament put into it. And Rama Dass hadn't interfered with Varley's temperament and will.

He, Varley, seems to have heard that Reeve and Delia were in Paris; and it occurred to him that here was another chance he hadn't had. So he went to Paris to see what it would do for him.

It did nothing but bring him into touch with Delia again. Meanwhile, whatever it was that Rama Dass had done to Reeve, the effect seems to have worn a bit thin under the friction of Delia's tongue. The Mahatma couldn't tell us much, he seems to have lost track of them after Paris; but I imagine things happened something like this: Reeve would be frightfully sorry for Muriel. The angel's sweetness would show up more beautifully than ever under Varley's treatment. And Muriel would be sorry for Augustin Reeve. I daresay the sight of him was more powerful even than Rama Dass's beastly love-magic. And she worshipped his genius. He seemed greater than ever in his poverty. He *was* greater. Because he kept his own temperament and his own will he had been cheerful and contented even down in Limehouse, the Mahatma says. He trailed behind him the dark tissue of Varley's memory, but when he came to join his own piece on he made it shining.

I ought to tell you that when he took over Varley's three rooms he found any amount of canvases stacked against the wall. When he turned them round and looked at

them, though he remembered himself as painting them he couldn't conceive how he had done anything so vile. And because he never kept his failures he destroyed every one of those abominations so that of Varley's life nothing remained that could interfere with Reeve's knowledge of his greatness. After that he began painting in what we know as his second manner.

And because he had no money for models he painted Delia over and over again; he painted himself; he painted the people of the house where he lodged; he went out into the streets and along the river and painted what he saw there. Within his range there was nothing paintable he didn't paint. He was a greater artist in the Limehouse days than he was before or since. He stuck to his work all the tighter because it was his only means of getting away from Delia.

And now in Paris, from being sorry for each other, he and Muriel went on to falling in love.

I believe *they* kept pretty straight. But Varley and Delia had no sort of self-control and they fairly gave themselves up to it. And as Muriel's money enabled him to keep her in considerable comfort she was glad enough to live with him this time; and between them they spent what was left of Muriel's money. He seems to have sunk lower and lower, and to have painted more and more abominable pictures, till Clement Varley became another name for grotesque incompetence. These horrors didn't bring him in a cent, so that he was as poor as ever when he and Delia came back to London.

And then, suddenly, he disappeared, and was never heard of again.

We all know what became of Augustin Reeve. He died three years ago, more famous than he had ever been. As the Mahatma put it, "each was in the end brought back to that estate he had in the beginning. For a man's estate is what his self is."

And whenever he hears it said that somebody "hadn't a chance" he tells this tale of Rama Dass and Clement Varley.

He tells it in his quiet, sing-song voice, smiling almost maliciously at the absurdity of our wonder.

Well, I can understand that smile and that supple shrug of his. What beats me is his attitude to Reeve and Muriel. Nothing more horrible could well have happened to two innocent people. And he could have saved them. He could have stopped Rama Dass's little game if he'd liked, or what's the good of being a Mahatma? But he took it all as a matter of course or as the fitting punishment of their Western levity.

What's more, that smile suggests that the same thing might happen any day to any of us, if we persist in our scepticism. And the moral of it seems to be that if you can't despise Rama Dass like a Mahatma, you'd better fear him. In either case you'll keep out of his way.

JONES'S KARMA

JONES'S KARMA

I

THE Mahatma was sitting on the divan in Grigley's studio, cross-legged, like a Buddha. He meditated.

I was playing Debussy on Grigley's piano. Yes, of course I asked the Mahatma whether he minded my playing the piano while he meditated, and he had replied that it was indifferent to him whether I played the piano or did not play the piano. But when I left off, he came up, pop, out of his meditation. And as he was always particularly bright at these moments of emergence, Grigley tackled him.

"You say the will is free, Guru. How do you reconcile that with your theory of Karma? You can't escape your Karma."

"You cannot escape it, Bikkhu," said the Mahatma; "but you made it for yourself in your last life and you were free to make it different."

"Not if your last life was made by the Karma of your life before."

"That also you made and the Karma before it."

"Oh, if you go back and back to the beginning——"

"If you go back and back to the beginning you start free."

"Still, it comes to this," I said: "if you could live your life again in the same circumstances, I take it you would do the same things. Nothing would be different. And you would not be free."

"You would be free," the Mahatma said, "to do the same things."

"But each thing would be predictable."

"Predictable, yes. But that is not your concern. It is not you who predict."

I persisted. "No; but the possibility of prediction would mean that I was doomed, not free."

"There you are again," said the Mahatma, "with your pairs of opposites. It would mean that you were doomed *and* free. You come to the cross-roads. *I* know which turn you are going to take. You take it. But you were free to take the other."

"Not if you knew, Guru."

"Why not? My knowledge has no hold on you. There is no path from my knowledge to your action, Bikkhu."

"Talk about living your life again," said Grigley, "who *would* live it, if they knew?"

"I would," I said, "if I were free to live it differently; if when the wrong turn came I could take the right one."

“Then,” said Grigley, with an air of saying something important, “it wouldn’t be the same life.”

“No. I stipulated for the power to live it differently.”

I happened just then to think of two or three things I would very gladly have had different if I could.

Grigley’s little wife heaved up a stifled sigh out of the sofa cushions. “If only one *could* live one’s life again, on those terms,” she said.

We all laughed, for Grigley’s wife was a notoriously innocent and happy person.

“Why, what would you have different?” I said.

“Me, probably,” said Grigley.

“Good thing it was impossible.”

“It is not impossible,” the Mahatma said. “Time is nothing. Or it is everything. You can go forward or you can return on the path of time. You have only to will it so in the moment of dying. For, as the wish formed at the moment before sleeping is powerful in the waking life of the next day, so the wish formed in the moment before dying is all-powerful in the next life. People do not know how important that moment is, so they do not will.”

He had one of his fruitful pauses.

“There was a man who knew; for a Mahatma had told him. He came back to the same time-space, to the same womb. His name,” said the Mahatma, “was Jones. I will tell you the story of Jones’s Karma.”

II

“The family of Jones was exceedingly particular about its caste. If it had lived in India, where the laws of caste are laid down precisely, so that mistakes are not possible, it would have been safe. But it lived in Europe, where there are no rigid laws, where the castes mix among themselves, and caste itself is a flexible thing, a thing of each man’s interpretation, and each man is a law to himself in this thing.

“So that at every turn the family of Jones was liable to contamination.

“We of the faith of Buddha do not, as you know, believe in caste, and for us there is no such things as contamination from mixing. But for those who believe, these things are so; and he who is deceived by the illusion of contamination is contaminated.

“In the house next to Jones’s house in the suburb of Putney there lived a little boy— Jones was about eleven years old at this time—a little boy whose caste was many degrees lower than the caste of the Joneses. Jones was brought up to believe that his caste was higher and holier than the caste of the families round about him and would be contaminated by mixing. It was even, they said, higher and holier than the caste of the other Joneses, for his family was distinguished by the name of Uppingham. Uppingham Jones. The Uppingham was not joined firmly on to the Jones with a stroke, as your custom is, for it was indeed but the second name of Jones’s father: Albert Uppingham Jones; but it seemed to exalt these Joneses above all others. So much so that there was nobody in the suburb of Putney who was judged fit to be the companion of Jones. And thereby Jones suffered from an exceeding loneliness.

“And when he saw the little boy, whose name was Peter Hawkins, playing by himself in the next garden, a great longing came upon Jones either to go into the garden of the Hawkinses and play with him there, or else persuade him to come into his own garden. And Peter Hawkins had the same longing when he looked through the hedge and saw Jones looking in at him. So that nothing would appease him but that he must have Jones for his playmate.

“At the bottom of the gardens there was a gap in the hedge of which the two, by agreement, tearing down the bushes and parting them asunder, made so large an opening that each could creep through to the other. It was generally Jones who went through into Peter’s garden, for Peter’s garden had in it a swing and a summer-house and a pond with a row-boat; and Peter had there also a great store of European toys, steam engines, sailing ships, velocipedes, and the like costly things which Jones’s parents could not be prevailed on to give him. All these things were now at his disposal through the generosity of Peter.

“I should tell you that these gardens of the Joneses and the Hawkinses were long and wide and ended each in a wild grass-place set about with many tall and thick bushes, so that the children playing there were concealed from the rest of the gardens and the houses. The swing, the summer-house, and the pond were likewise hidden. And on the far side of the Hawkinses’ garden there was a high wall and behind it a lane leading to a side-door in the Hawkinses’ house. And there Jones was led, secretly, by Peter into his house and played with him there in his play-room. And Peter’s father and mother had compassion upon Jones because he was kept so close and strict in the solitude of his caste, and they rejoiced in his great friendship with Peter and helped him to keep it secret.

“This hidden communion lasted for three years. Then Jones was sent away to a public school; and three years later Peter followed him there. They had continued to meet, furtively, in the holidays, more by the desire of Peter than of Jones, for Peter loved Jones with a love that was greater than Jones’s love for him.

“At this school—it is your strange English custom—Peter Hawkins was assigned to Jones in some sort as his servant; not because his caste was lower, for I am told that a great lord may be thus servant to a common boy, but because, being two years younger than Jones, he stood many degrees below him in the school.

“And because there were many patricians at this school the low caste of Peter became manifest to Jones, so that secretly in his heart he felt ashamed of his love for Peter and of Peter’s love for him. Nevertheless he did not break with Peter, but used their relation of servant and master as a cloak for his curious friendship.

“Indeed, he had no desire to break with Peter, for Peter had much money and was in many ways of great use to him over and above his appointed service. For example, Jones had much talent for the learning of languages, but he was but a poor mathematician, while Peter, who was backward in Greek and Latin, had much skill in numbers and in geometry. And when he rose rapidly in the school and was no longer the servant of Jones, he proved his great love by helping him with his mathematics, so much so that there was hardly a problem that Jones would have attempted to solve without him. Moreover he had, with great courage, saved Jones’s life when bathing.

“All these things Jones could bring forward as his excuse when he was mocked at by the young patricians for his attachment to a fellow of low caste. I am telling you all this that you may understand how many were the obligations that bound Jones to Peter and what reason he had to love him.

“Now, in Jones’s class in school there was a certain young lord who had his seat not far from the suburb of Putney, and he had attached himself to Jones so firmly that when the time came for Jones to leave that school he invited him most earnestly to visit him at his seat. At the same time he pointed out to him that he would suffer much disadvantage if, at the outset of his career, he continued to be seen with such a one as Peter Hawkins. For Jones and the young lord were to finish their studies together at the university of Oxford, while Peter, in accordance with his caste, went down into the city to serve in the shop of his father Hawkins who was a draper.

“Jones understood that this was the turning of the ways, that the hour had struck when he must choose between Peter and the young lord.

“So it happened that on one of your great national festivals, which you call cricket-matches, at a certain public place the name of which I have forgotten——”

“ ‘Lord’s?’ ”

“Yes, that is so,” said the Mahatma, “the Place of the Lord. And Jones, on his way to the pavilion, with that great one who was his friend and with his friend’s sister, a high lady in her own right, did to his horror observe Peter and his father and mother coming towards him with the palms of their hands extended and a loud salutation, your ‘Hullo!’ in which it was discernible that the initial letter was not sounded. And this, I understand is, in your country, one of the most grievous signs of a dishonourable birth. I speak according to the tradition and not as a Buddhist.

“And Jones, trembling with the shock of the encounter, turned his head somewhat to one side and made as though he had not seen the hands of the Hawkinses nor heard their salutation, and so passed them by.

“And it happened thus on more than one occasion when Jones met Peter while in the company of the lord and his sister. And from that time onward he ceased altogether from his former communication with Peter, as if he had not so much as known his name. And Peter, perceiving that he was repudiated, ceased altogether from communication with Jones.

“Thus did Jones betray the friend to whom he owed so many and so great debts.

“That was the first turning of his roads.

“The next was when he had made, secretly, the acquaintance of a certain young girl who came many times to play ball” (he meant tennis) “in the garden of the Hawkinses.

“Her name was Sarah Bunning.

“And it so happened that many times the ball would fly over the hedge into the garden of Jones, and that Sarah Bunning would be sent to fetch it; for it was not possible for Peter to pass any more into Jones’s place, because of the betrayal and his great and sore pride. And Jones would come out and aid her in her search. I think,” said the Mahatma with a look of subtlety, “that in consequence of these meetings the ball was sent flying abroad more often than there was necessity, and that so dexterously as

to lodge it in the thick places of the jungle which was at the bottom of the Jones's compound, where the search for it would take much time and keep those two long in each other's company.

"And when the season of this ball-play was over, Jones planned to meet the girl, secretly, one night after dark in a certain grove of birch trees on Putney Heath.

"And here appears Jones's freedom. For that evening he received a message from a friend asking him to dine with him at his club in Piccadilly at the very hour which he had appointed to meet Sarah Bunning. So that assuredly a choice of ways was given him. And Jones wavered, perceiving that here was his chance to escape, if he would, that great temptation. He went to the telephone that was set up in his father's house and summoned a hansom to take him into Piccadilly. But at the last moment the thought of Sarah Bunning so overcame him that he drove instead to about a stone's throw of the place of assignation; and having the conveyance there ready, he persuaded her to enter it and so took her to a certain hidden place that he knew of in Soho. And afterwards they met many times in that place.

"For the young girl was of an exceedingly fine and perfect beauty; but she had not the bearing nor yet the speech of Jones's caste; her caste indeed was lower even than that of the Hawkinses. So that, while Jones did excessively love her, he could not stoop from the noble state of Jones so far as to marry her. Nevertheless, he promised her that if she should find herself with child by him he would marry her.

"But presently a time came when he thought to marry a high friend of that young lord for whom he betrayed Peter. And for that lady he betrayed Sarah Bunning.

"She died in childbirth in the hospital of Queen Charlotte which is set apart for women of low caste.

"And in the end the high lady refused, for reasons of caste, to marry Jones.

"Jones was so greatly smitten with grief for the loss of that lady, and with remorse for the death of Sarah Bunning that, though his disposition was by no mean warlike, he volunteered with your army in South Africa, where at that time you were fighting the Boers.

"And it was there that he came to the third turning.

"It was on the open veld. Jones and his comrade, a young captain whose name was George Denby, were flying on horseback from a Boer ambush, when Denby, who rose somewhat in front, had his horse shot under him, he himself being severely wounded in the groin so that he lay like a dead man with his foot held fast in his stirrup. He cried out to Jones with a great cry to help him. And Jones saw that he had but to dismount and cut away the stirrup leather and set him on his own horse in front of him, and with the start they had they might get away safe to the British lines. At that moment, while he yet planned the rescue, a bullet sounded past Jones's head, and another, and yet another; and his courage so forsook him that he put spurs into his horse and galloped away, leaving that young captain to die there on the veld.

"The thought of how he had betrayed his comrade was a punishment almost too great for Jones to bear. And many years after, being in India, he happened to meet one of my friends, the Mahatma who told me this story. They began talking, even as we

were talking just now, about free will and destiny and the turning of the ways and whether a man would or would not live his life again. And Jones confessed to my friend that he had done three things in his life that he would gladly return and undo. He had betrayed the friend who trusted him; he had seduced his sweetheart; and he had deserted his captain on the field of battle.

“And the Mahatma told him, as I have told you, that if he would live his life again he had only to will it so in the moment of dying. And if he would take the other turn, he had only to will it. So when he came to die, Jones uttered the wish that he should come back and live his life again as it had been, and that when he came to those three turnings he should remember and each time take the right one.

“And he was brought back into that same space-time and into the same mother’s womb. And from his birth-hour his life unrolled itself in every particular exactly as it had been before up to the first turning.

“Jones was crossing in front of the pavilion at—at——?”

“Lord’s?”

“Lord’s, with the young lord and his sister, and Peter and his father were coming towards him as before, with outstretched palms and saluting him loudly after their manner. And Jones remembered his former base betrayal, and instead of passing by and looking the other way, he came forward and grasped Peter by the hand and also his father and mother. And he reminded the young lord that he had known Peter beforetime at their school, and he presented him to the young lord’s sister.

“And, except that his communion with Peter remained now unbroken, Jones’s life went on as it had gone before up to the moment when the hansom came to his summons. But when he thought of Sarah Bunning he remembered his second betrayal and her death in shameful childbirth, and, turning his back on the birch grove, he ordered the driver of the hansom to go furiously towards Piccadilly and to the club of his friend there.

“Now, men do not encounter lightly and to no purpose; and it happened that at that club Jones made acquaintance with a certain Colonel Rivers, and this had afterwards, as you shall see, a great working on his Karma.

“And so when the nine months were up which had formerly unrolled the pregnancy and death of Sarah Bunning, and now brought instead her betrothal and marriage to Peter Hawkins, Jones volunteered with your army in Africa as before, yet not as flying from his shame, but in the quest of glory. And the ambush happened as before. But when Jones came upon the dead horse and his wounded comrade, George Denby, lying in that place on the veld, he remembered that third and last betrayal. And he dismounted and cut the stirrup strap that bound Denby to his horse, and lifted him up and set him on his own saddle, while the bullets sounded past him; and so brought him alive and safe into the camp of the British.

“You would have thought that Jones had now worked out his Karma and accomplished his redemption. But no. In taking each time another turning he had started another chain of events, so that his life could not unroll itself altogether in the

same pattern as before. Moreover, when he came back from South Africa, he was still but a young man, not thirty.

“And soon after his return from the war the lord his friend gave a banquet at your Criterion hall in honour of Jones’s General, and Jones also was invited. Now, at this banquet there were many lords of caste, even more exalted than that of his friend. And as he went up the principal staircase between two of these very great ones, he saw Peter Hawkins, who stood above him on the landing looking down at him, having come there to see the General pass. And when he saw him he came forward with his hand outstretched and with the same cry as before.

“Mark that on the last repetition of his Karma Jones’s memory gave him warning and support; but he had made no provision for this third encounter. Occurring at another time and in a place where he least expected it, catching him thus unaware, it overcame him even as at the beginning, so that he turned his head aside and made as though he had not seen Peter. And when the very great ones, laughing, inquired who his friend was, he answered that he did not know the man, thus for the second time betraying him.

“Further, because of the slight change in his record which was set up in that moment when he had acknowledged Peter and renewed their communion, Jones had been compelled, unwillingly, to meet again that girl whose fascination he had run from. For she was now Peter Hawkins’s wife. So that at an hour when, again, he was unprepared, he was caught a third time in the snare of her great beauty. And, taking occasion of Peter’s absence for three months on business in the United States, he again tempted her so that she fell. And she bore a child that by all reckoning was manifestly not her husband’s, and died, as she had died beforetime, at its birth.

“Thus their Karma was repeated.

“You will remember that I told you how, on that evening when he had fled from the second temptation of Sarah Bunning, he had become acquainted with one Colonel Rivers. And so great was the friendship which thereafter sprang up between them that Jones went out to stay with Colonel Rivers at Jabalpur in Central India.

“Now, the regiment of George Denby, who was by this time Major, was stationed at Jabalpur; and it happened that he had three days’ leave from his service. And he asked Jones to come to him to a place about twenty miles up-country near the jungle, where he had a bungalow and there was much sambhar. And when Jones arrived at the bungalow he was told that cholera had broken out in the village and that the Major had gone there to aid the police in isolating the sick people.

“And at this news the joints of Jones became as if they had been water, and he said to himself that truly he had come at an inconvenient season, and that the best thing he could do would be to depart instantly as he had come. But when he looked for the tonga that had brought him thither, it had departed. And at that moment the Major arrived at the bungalow. He pressed Jones to stay, making light of the cholera and saying that there were but two cases in all, and they had them so well in hand that the doctor who had come up from Jabalpur had returned there, and how there was more cholera in Jabalpur than there was in this village.

“And when the Major had stripped and bathed himself and put on clean clothes that had not been near the cholera, they dined together; and in the cool of the evening they went up into the jungle to shoot sambhar, returning about ten at night.

“At midnight they went to bed.

“Towards morning Jones was wakened by a noise of groaning and of retching in the Major’s room. And it seemed to him that between the groaning and the retching he could hear his name called, although but faintly. He got up and went into the Major’s room and found him doubled up, with his knees drawn even to his chest, leaning his head out of bed and sore retching.

“And at that sight and that sound the bones of Jones became again as water, and his stomach sank towards the ground. And when he had given Denby a little brandy he made an excuse that he would go into Jabalpur and bring back a doctor.

“He dressed in great haste, and having summoned the Major’s tonga, he departed to Jabalpur. And there he found that the doctor he knew of had gone to a far place beyond the town. It was the same wherever he called, for the cholera was by this time raging, and all the doctors were scattered abroad. He left a message at the house of one and set his face to return, as he believed, to the bungalow; though at the thought of the cholera his flesh and his bones melted.

“And it may be that he would indeed have returned there but that as they passed the railway station he saw the train standing ready to go to Bombay. It wanted but a minute to its starting. And at the sight of the train, Jones jumped out of the tonga and ran to it. In his haste to catch it—for it was now moving—he climbed into the nearest wagon which was full of natives flying from Jabalpur. There was cholera on that train.

“Jones died on it an hour before it reached Bombay.”

III

“And you expect me to believe, Guru,” said Grigley, “that that man’s will was free.”

“Most certainly, Bikkhu, it was free. No will but his own compelled him to betray Peter, and seduce Sarah, and leave Denby to die. In these three deeds he had made his own Karma. And though his free will refused those deeds the second time, yet at the third time his Karma compelled him to their accomplishment.”

“How do you make that out?”

“Because in dying he had willed only to undo the actual deeds done in one place and one time; not to resist the same temptation at all times and all places. And those final turning-points he neither remembered nor had foreseen, so that his Karma had power to repeat itself.

“You will observe,” said the Mahatma, “the concatenations of Jones’s Karma. If he had not overcome the temptation to desert his comrade, he would have been disgraced, and there would have been no reception in his honour, and he would not have betrayed Peter a second time. If he had not overcome the temptation to betray Peter, he would not have met Sarah again, and seduced her a second time. And if he had not overcome

the temptation to seduce Sarah, he would not have met Colonel Rivers, and gone out to Jabalpur, and found Denby sick with cholera and deserted him a second time.

“Yet when you talk of free will and bondage you talk of the pairs of opposites. You are free and you are bound also. It is according. But so long as you affirm the reality of the pairs of opposites you are subject to illusion.”

He paused.

“Notwithstanding, there is a path of perfect freedom. When it is indifferent to a man whether he is himself or not himself, whether he lives or dies, whether he catches the cholera or does not catch the cholera. Thus he escapes from desiring and undesiring, from the pairs of opposites, and from the chain of happening and the round of births.”

At this point Mrs. Grigley interrupted the Mahatma to tell us that dinner was getting cold. We went into the dining-room.

On the table there was the Grigleys' delicious dinner and there was a bowl of boiled rice for the Mahatma. To these Grigley pointed.

“Which is it to be, Guru? There's no compulsion.”

The Mahatma spread out his brown palms. “Truly, there is no compulsion. For it is indifferent to me, Bikkhu, whether I eat my rice or your dinner.”

He ate Grigley's dinner.

HEAVEN

HEAVEN

I

MR. SESSIONS had made up his mind. He would go. It would be a pity not to while he was in the neighbourhood; he might never have another chance. Nothing but the funeral would have brought him to Sutton now—his first cousin, and a Sessions, the last but one.

Why, he hadn't seen the place for thirty years; not since Rose Milton married; not since his mother died. And he was fifty-seven.

He knew how to get there. Out at the back of the house, through the apple orchard to the fir-wood. Along the bridle-path between the palings and the banked edge of the wood under the black eaves of the firs. At the end of the path the yellow high road would cut through the forest, and a hundred yards down it he would come to the "Old Green Dragon." He knew how it would look, with its red roofs crushed low over its windows, squatting there in the yellow bay of the road under the black-green crescent of the firs. He would see the tall sign, the green dragon on a white ground, standing out by the highway above the stone horse trough. He would see the bow window of the parlour, the small, greenish, bottle-end panes, the thin red curtains.

The bridle-path was the same, dark under the eaves of the fir-wood. It gave him the hallucination of his youth. He was five-and-twenty, going to see Rose Milton. She would be sitting in the bow window between the red curtains, with her crochet work in her hands, waiting for him, looking up the road. The inn garden ran back into the forest; there would be a little lawn there and the arbour of the weeping willow where Rose and Alice Milton had brought him his tea, the first time. The first time. When he stayed talking.

He remembered the second time, and the slight shock he had when he caught sight of Rose behind the bar; the little dreaming face suddenly alert, suddenly attentive. Her mouth had an adorable smile for the rough carters drinking their beer, a small, rounded smile, as if it were saying something. She didn't want to shame and hurt them by her refinement, her difference. He remembered her eyes when she saw him, shining; she hadn't thought he would come again. And Alice's face when she looked at him.

The two sisters were alike, except that Rose was dark and Alice was the taller and slenderer, and her face looked as if it had been made of some firmer and clearer stuff. Too firm; too clear. And she had grey eyes, light and wide, like—like gates thrown open. He could see them now, Alice's eyes.

He remembered, too, the uncanny things that happened on wet days in the red-curtained parlour, when Alice would be at her tricks, willing Rose to do things. She had only to look at her and say, "You're drinking raw whisky," and Rose's little face would

crumple with disgust and she would pour away her tea into the slop bowl. She would make her think that Bunny the cat was a baby, so that she would rock him on her breast, hushing him to sleep. And he had seen Rose come out of the bar carrying a pint pot, guarding it from the draught with her curved hand. She had thought it was a lighted candle. But she only laughed when he asked her what she was doing; it was “that Alice” again, she said.

Sometimes he had wondered whether it was Alice who——. But no; it was himself. Or, rather, it was his mother. She wouldn’t hear of his marrying Rose Milton. She wouldn’t hear of his going to see her. Yet he had gone.

He remembered all the times; the first time and the last. They were the only times he had ever taken his own way against his mother, escaping from the gloomy Highbury house, running down to Rose Milton on a Saturday. The only times he had deceived his mother, pretending he went to see his aunt and cousins. He had only that, his infatuation for Rose Milton, only those Saturday escapades to reproach himself with; and he had made up for them on Sundays, going with his mother to church, morning and evening, sitting with her and her Sunday friend, Mr. Minify, through the long afternoon, listening while she sang hymns to them in her thin, high voice, and accompanied herself on the American organ; taking her to sacred concerts in the Albert Hall. And the evenings of all the other days; it seemed to him, looking back on his young life, that he had spent them all at home. He had been so determined to make up to her for his father’s death; and before that, as long as he could remember, to make up for his father’s life, for all that his father was and wasn’t.

Had he really determined anything? Wasn’t it she who had determined, she who had willed, while he followed, without resistance, her determination and her will?

Who could have resisted her? He could see her now, her beautiful face between the lace lappets of her cap, between the blonde bands of her hair, and that look when his father worried her, that look of resignation, of heavenly patience, sacred martyrdom. Why, he had loved her so much that he had hated Mr. Minify, poor old Minify who had got nothing; for all his Sunday devotion, nothing.

Then, last spring, his mother had gone down with him to Sutton. He couldn’t stop her; how on earth could he have stopped her? Besides, he had wanted her to see Rose Milton.

And when she had seen her he knew that he would have to choose between his mother and Rose. Between Rose and his mother. If he had the courage——

He put off going down to Sutton till he was certain that he had it; and when he went Rose was engaged to be married to George Pargeter.

It was Alice Milton who told him, walking with him in the wood.

“It’s your own fault,” she said. “You should have taken her when you could. . . . Even now, if you tried, you could take her.”

“Oh, no. Oh, no.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. One doesn’t.”

“Ah—You haven’t any will of your own. You never will have as long as your mother lives. Perhaps not even afterwards. She may be stronger afterwards.”

“Don’t say such terrible things.”

“You’re a coward. You can’t bear thinking of terrible things.”

“I can’t bear thinking of mother’s dying. You don’t understand. I *love* her. I’ve been happy with her all my life.”

“If you’d been unhappy you’d have had more chance. But you aren’t happy with her. You’re only happy when you get away from her into a world of your own.”

“Oh, I’ve a world of my own, have I, though I haven’t a will of my own?”

“It isn’t any good to you. You can’t do anything in it. You can’t get what you want. You want Rose and you can’t have her because your mother doesn’t mean you to, and you can’t lift up your hand to take her.”

He couldn’t. He couldn’t. Lifting up his hand to take anything was an effort beyond him.

He was not angry with Alice. He knew she was saying these things to him because she loved him. And there was something beautiful about her. But he didn’t love her. He would never want to take her in his arms. He wondered whether anybody would, ever. Perhaps it was because he was afraid of her, because of those tricks she played with her sister.

“Alice, is it true you can make people do things?”

“Sometimes.”

“No. But against their will. Could you make me?”

“Oh—your *will!*”

“Could you? Could you? Could you make me get up and come to you?” He meant, Could you make me care for you against my will?

“Of course I could.”

“I hope you won’t. I should loathe it.”

“You needn’t be afraid. I shan’t *make* you do anything. I’d never do it. It’s wicked. It’s the wickedest thing you can do, to tamper with another person’s will. . . . Unless I had to save you.”

“Oh, don’t,” he said. “Don’t save me.”

He hadn’t hated Alice at the time. Only afterwards, when he remembered the things she had said about his mother, he hated her.

He had come to the end of the path, to the high road. He wondered where Rose Milton—Rose Pargeter—and Alice were now.

The road was different. It had lost its bright yellow freshness. It was bleached and powdered by the March wind, broken into great pits and ruts by the hauling trollies, and at intervals up and down it the fir-wood had been cut back for a depth of twenty yards or so and marked out into building lots. Ahead of him he could still see the stone water

trough; but the standard with the swinging sign was not there. When he came to the bay of the road, the old white-washed, red-tiled inn was gone, and in its place stood a gaudy three-storied hotel, its upper half yellow brick, its lower half chocolate paint. The vast saloon doors at one corner were flanked by pillars of sham yellow marble, and above them an enormous gas globe hung out its triangular facets shining with cut stars. Above that the corner bore like a breastplate a carved placard advertising Truman and Hanbury's ales in gold letters on a green ground.

As he stared at this structure Mr. Sessions had a sense of desolation, of violent unreality. Over the door he read the name of George Pargeter, Rose's husband.

In the hotel they told him the old inn had been pulled down fifteen years ago, and that Mrs. Pargeter and her sister Alice were dead.

Mr. Sessions drew himself closer into the corner of the third-class railway compartment. A shiver went over his skin like a trickle of ice-water. The March wind had got at him. He had taken a chill at the funeral.

From time to time he fixed a sudden, nervous, inimical stare at his fellow-passenger. Huddled in the opposite corner, the young man showed an inflamed face and watery eyes above a dirty woollen muffler. A rattling, strangling sound in his throat broke into a gusty cough. He apologised to Mr. Sessions. He said he was suffering from a bad attack of influenza. But Mr. Sessions hadn't any pity for him. He thought: "He's no business to be travelling, infecting other people. It should be made a punishable offence."

He had always been afraid of infection; he had always been afraid of change; always afraid of death, because he conceived of it as entailing some prodigious effort to meet it. He wanted to go on living, to go on being cashier of the firm he had worked for since he was a boy. He felt safe in his round of duties that were habits, where he had no responsibility and was never called on to make a decision. And influenza this year was of a peculiarly virulent type.

Supposing he caught it?

Supposing it turned to pneumonia?

Supposing he——?

II

Glass. Glass. He was sure it must be glass. *Not* ice. It felt warm—well, distinctly warmish under your feet. He didn't know how long he had been gliding and sliding over the glass. There was no way of judging space by the time you took getting through it; no way of judging time by the space you got through. No measurements.

He had tried counting the crystal slabs of the pavement. But that wasn't any good. You couldn't count them. Mr. Sessions gathered that this must be a special sort of space; and the queer thing was that you got from point to point of it without passing through intermediate space.

He supposed it was because there was no friction. No friction. That would account for it. He supposed that time, the time you measured by, would be going on all the same

over your head, and it would be very awkward, when you got to the place you were bound for, not knowing what time it was really.

It was this very singular behaviour of space and time that made Mr. Sessions think he must be dreaming. And the fact that the air all around him was buoyant like water.

Then something seemed to take hold of him under his armpits and lift him off his feet, so that he came, half floating, half treading water, into the great open Square of the City.

It was paved like the roadway with slabs of crystal; the wide houses round it were built of crystal, block upon block, with gold veins running through them, and cemented—no, welded together with gold. And in the middle of the Square, raised on crystal steps and facing Mr. Sessions, was a great crystal cross with a sun blazing away at the heart of it.

This was queerly familiar to him; and the sight of the cross gave him his first faint sense of uneasiness. He had a feeling that something, something unpleasant was going to happen. Then he saw his mother coming towards him slantways across the Square; he had the impression that she came out of one of the houses.

Young—young. And he remembered her as an old woman; but he knew it was his mother, mysteriously, irrefutably, as you know things in dreams. She was rather like her portrait in the wedding photograph they had at home in the drawing-room over the piano, dressed in her white wedding gown with a long white veil floating behind her; her face had the sharp, thin-lipped, dominant beauty that he knew; it had the look he knew of holy but complacent resignation, the self-satisfied—yes, he could see now it was a self-satisfied smile.

He was aware, disagreeably aware, that he was not glad to see his mother. The feeling he had was not pleasure, not pleasure at all; it was more like fear. He consoled himself by the reflection that he was only dreaming, and that you were not responsible for anything you felt in dreams. Not responsible. That was the best of dreaming; you were not responsible.

His mother's face with the sharp smile on it was tilted up to him to be kissed.

"I was afraid," she said, "you wouldn't know me in my crown."

He saw then that instead of a wedding wreath she wore a crown, a gold one, with stars standing up and twinkling all round it. It struck him that it was just like her to draw his attention to it first thing. He could see her coming into the dining-room at Highbury with her Prayer-book in her hand and a new hat on. He dropped at once into his old cajoling manner.

"I say—I say—it's what they call a martyr's crown" (just as he used to say it's what they call a boot-shaped hat), "isn't it?"

"Yes. A martyr's."

"Well, you couldn't wear anything more becoming."

"Oh—becoming! It's *suitable*, my dear; that's all I think about. . . . And so you've come to me, Albert?"

She pressed his hand, and a thrill, stringent and not quite pleasant, shot up his arm.

“I knew you would.”

“Yes. I seem to have come, somehow, from somewhere.”

“You came,” she said, “from the dark place, across the bridge over the great gulf.”

“I don’t remember any dark place or any gulf. I don’t remember coming over any bridge. I just *came*.”

“My dear Albert, you *couldn’t* come any other way. Not in your unregenerate state. Didn’t they explain?”

“Didn’t who explain what?”

“The guides—the spiritual guides who brought you over?”

“I don’t remember any guides. I don’t know what you’re talking about. What was there to explain?”

“The scheme of redemption. Don’t imagine that you could have got over by yourself, in your own strength, on your own merits, that you had the *entrée*——”

“But I did, I tell you. I came sliding over the glass, for ages, by myself; there wasn’t anybody with me. I came bang into the middle of all this.”

“That was the cross,” she said, “the cross. It drew you. It’s a magnet. The sun in it’s a magnet. The Magnet of the Universe.”

He stood there, in the great open Square, blinking uncomfortably under the furious light that beat from the heart of the cross.

“It’s too much for you,” his mother said. “We’ll go into the house.”

He could see it was the principal house in the Square, distinguished from the others by its height and breadth and by a flight of crystal steps leading to a colonnade, all crystal and gold-veined, and yet curiously like the façade of St. Pancras Church. As he followed her through the massive gold doors he had a sense of misgiving, of foreknowledge—or was it reminiscence? His mother had got him; she would hold him there behind the gold doors as she had held him in the shabby house at Highbury. He told himself that this wouldn’t really happen. His mother was dead, and he would wake up presently and be free.

Meanwhile he took in the wonderful interior where every object shared the transparent hardness of the crystal walls. The couch they sat on might have been hewn from one block of clear emerald; the cross-legged chairs and tables had the fragile clearness of yellow topaz; the cabinet opposite glowed, a pigeon’s-blood ruby; the flowers in the crystal bowl on the sapphire stand shook with the tremulous glitter of cut jewels.

At first he thought he was in a hall of looking-glass blazing with electric light and reflected at each end in a long sequence of blaring halls. Then he saw that these vistas were not reflections; they were other rooms with other furniture, seen through and through as the light penetrated the transparent crystal. This would have surprised him if he hadn’t known he was dreaming.

And from every surface there came a rapid, shimmering vibration, a dancing of innumerable points of light, so that the whole scene flashed and quivered like a cinema show.

And calmly, as if nothing in his surroundings called for remark, his mother was continuing their conversation. He heard himself saying with his old obedience, "If you think so, Mother, of course, it *is* so."

"Of course. Why, if I hadn't prayed and prayed and prayed for you, Albert, you wouldn't be here now."

"Quite so, but I can't think what *you're* doing here."

"I, Albert?"

"Yes, you." He thought of her dull, sober drawing-room at Highbury. "I can't make it out. It isn't like you somehow."

"What isn't like me?"

"All this splendiferousness—that ruby thing over there. What I mean is, it isn't your taste."

"No," said his mother, "it's God's taste."

"Well," Mr. Sessions said, "that beats me. It does, really."

He put his hand up to his head to screen off the vibrating light. His mother sat still and closed her eyes, and presently he was aware of a clouding and thickening in the transparency, like milk spreading through water, till the crystal turned to white chalcedony, the emerald to jade, the topaz to dull amber, the sapphire to lapis lazuli.

"Ah," said Mr. Sessions, "that's better. I couldn't have stood it much longer, that infernal glitter."

"Albert, will you please remember where you are?"

"That's just it," said Mr. Sessions. "*Where am I?*"

She looked at him with the old shocked, surprised expression he remembered.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "don't you know? You're in Heaven."

"Then," said Mr. Sessions, "I'm not dreaming. I'm dead." He said it out loud, to himself. His mother had left him.

Somebody answered him. "You are what they *call* dead in the place you came from. Really, you are now in your eternal life." The voice was measured, slightly lyrical, and suave.

Somebody had come behind him into the room. He could see the figure of a man reflected in the crystal floor. It came forward and stood before him in an attitude that reminded him of something, the bent left arm stretched stiffly across his breast, the hand grasping a scroll. Somewhere, he had seen before the stiff, sharp folds of its white draperies, the sparse, tidy auburn beard, the sleek parted fall of the hair to the shoulders, the pale, meek face. Somewhere——

"I don't think," said Mr. Sessions, "I have had the pleasure——"

"You have. I met you on the bridge. I brought you over."

"Ah, so my mother says."

"My dear young man——"

“Not young. Not young,” said Mr. Sessions.

“Very young in eternity. You’d better realise that anything your mother says is pretty certain to be true.”

“I don’t need to be told that, sir.”

“You need to realise it.”

“If I knew to whom I have the pleasure of speaking——”

“My name in time is Stanford Jones. It may be familiar to you.”

It was, very familiar, but for the life of him he couldn’t put an idea to it.

“Well, Mr. Jones——”

The stranger corrected him. “My eternal name is Aspirel.”

“Mr. Aspirel, then.” (He thought: What beastly affectation! Got up to look like Jesus Christ, too. Shocking bad taste, I call it.)

“Can I do anything for you?”

The stranger smiled with a sort of saccharine contempt. “You can call me Aspirel, quite simply. Beyond that you can do nothing. On the contrary, it is I who must do everything for you.”

“You have me, sir, at a disadvantage. I’m still no nearer knowing——”

“Who and what I am and my business?”

“Precisely, if you would be so good.”

“I am,” said Aspirel, “Instructor-in-Chief for this district of Heaven. I am the Principal of the College of Spiritual Guides. And because of the very high position your mother holds here I have consented to undertake your education.”

He sat down beside him on the emerald couch, and there was a pause in which Mr. Sessions observed the drooping eyelids of the Principal, and the pinched mouth, furtive under its screen of auburn beard.

“You are interested in natural science,” said Aspirel, making the statement without any note of interrogation.

Mr. Sessions replied that at one time when he was young he had gone in for it, but, if he had ever known anything about it, he had forgotten all he knew.

“Just as well. You will have the less to unlearn. Our great difficulty with our students is that they are apt to remember too much. They have to be trained to forget. To let go all the theories, all the laws of natural science, all the great discoveries. What have your great discoveries revealed? Nothing. Ours have laid bare the secret of the universe.”

When he had heard that Mr. Sessions felt a tingling revival of the intellectual curiosity which had once made him attend a course of lectures on geology at the London Polytechnic. He had even bought a second-hand copy of Haeckel’s *History of Creation*, keeping it where his mother couldn’t find it, in his office desk, and reading it in A.B.C. shops at his luncheon hour. He was pleased at the idea of enrolling himself as a by-student at the College of Spiritual Guides.

The operator had let go the handle of the Cosmological Machine. Aspirel's voice went on and on, solitary and immense, like the booming of a church organ, in the vast lecture hall of the College.

"You have now," he said, "seen how, by the use of a mechanism as simple as your office dictaphone, you have had unrolled before you the drama of the cosmos, from the beginning of atomic motion, through the stupendous events of sidereal and geologic space, the blazing and cooling of the earth, the formation of igneous rocks, glacial rocks, through upheavals and subsidences, through the wonders of the carboniferous age, up and on to the evolution of the organic beings that we know. You have seemed to travel backwards through time; but in reality you have not done so; for in our science the past is not past. You have simply been brought into touch with those vibrations through which the events of pre-organic time would have been made visible to a spectator, if spectator there had been. It is all," said Aspirel, becoming excited and waving his hands, "a question of vibrations, continuing through the air, through the ether, from universe to universe, through all space and all time, for ever and ever. You can catch those vibrations, as a tuning-fork catches sounds. Owing to their permanence the past is never really past.

"This," he ended up, "is part of the Great Secret that has been revealed to us——"

Great Secret——? Mr. Sessions thought. It all sounded vaguely reminiscent. At some time or other he had read something very like this in some book. All that about plant life, for example, he had read that in a book. A book with diagrams.

"But we have not yet," Aspirel went on, "so much as skirted the fringe of our revelation. That revelation which will lead us upwards and onwards to the knowledge and the vision of God. It is not till we come to the evolution of human forms that we approach its heart. This will be the subject of our next lecture."

If he could only remember the title of that book——

Everywhere he went in Heaven he was haunted by this sense of things already seen, already heard: the cloistered square of his mother's garden, set about with little shining trees; his mother's dining-room, austere bare, with the long, narrow, cross-legged table at the top; her bedroom with its square bed; the windows and the roof of the great Conference Hall at the College, with the stalls of the Spiritual Guides each in a fretted niche. He remembered the fan work and the lace work, the traceries, the beaded points of the canopies. Gothic. Gothic style, that was; or was it Early English Perpendicular?

He would have liked to explore the City, to penetrate into the country beyond it, to play by himself with the Cosmological Machine. But no sooner had he started to do something by himself than his mother or Aspirel would pop out on him from behind some door or some pillar. And they would take him to a lecture by one of the Spiritual Guides, or to a Sacred Concert, or to the Bridge of the Passing, to watch the redeemed penitents as they came over from the Darkness to the Light. This was his mother's favourite diversion, and it reminded Mr. Sessions of their autumn holidays at Dover when they went to the pier on rough days to see the seasick Channel passengers land. The penitents were very like the passengers, haggard and exhausted; frightened eyes in drawn, white faces, and a tendency to sink at the knees when the Guides grabbed them.

Mr. Sessions wondered whether he had looked like that when he landed, and was told that he had, only much worse; it had been a job, Aspirel said, to get him along. The penitents, it seemed, were blinded by the light of Heaven just at first and didn't know what they were doing; they would fight like mad things, resisting the guides. And as he watched their struggles Mr. Sessions wondered why his mother had been so anxious that he should come into Heaven in that painful and ignominious way.

Every day he was beginning to find out some little thing about her he hadn't known before; for it seemed that this after-death state was one of singular clear-sightedness. And every day his uneasiness increased. The gorgeous gold and crystal architecture of Heaven could not disguise from him the fact, the disgusting fact, that he was being drawn again to something like his old life at Highbury, when his mother's will had frustrated him at every turn. All his life he had yearned, in his ineffectual way, for the society of people who had intellects, who could, as he put it, "talk about things." Here they never got away from their own quarter of the City. They never met anybody but the Spiritual Guides or the favoured students of the College.

His mother and Aspirel were trying to force him into intimacy with one of those whom Mr. Sessions recognised as old Dancy, the greengrocer and the verger of St. Jude's Church, Highbury. He remembered Dancy as a stupid and illiterate person to whom his mother paid a small pension that saved him from the disasters of his incompetence. In Heaven, as on earth, Dancy had a face of the purest imbecility, a cock eye, and a sloping smile that gashed his left cheek when he didn't understand what you said to him (he seldom did), and two exasperating phrases by which he safeguarded his idiocy: "Eggs is eggs," and "That's as it may be, Mr. Sessions."

And here he was in Heaven, an Operator in the College of the Guides. He turned the handle of the Cosmological Machine; he took most of the elementary classes, and Mr. Sessions found that he was expected to look up to Dancy as his spiritual superior. This was very irritating to Mr. Sessions.

He was beginning to wonder whether, at this rate, Heaven had anything new, anything wonderful to give him. The Sacred Concerts, for example. He had understood that Heaven was famous all the world over for its music, and there was something in *Revelation* about a New Song. Yet he could swear that this evening they were simply listening to the *Messiah*. There it went: "All we like sheep—All we like sheep——" bleating away; you couldn't possibly mistake it.

Yet his mother and Aspirel had been annoyed when he said it was the *Messiah*, and Aspirel had told him that it only seemed so to him because he was listening to heavenly music with earthly ears. And when he stuck to it, drawing their attention to the Handel full close, little Dancy had smiled his gash of a smile and spluttered, "That's as it may be. 'Eavenly music is 'eavenly music, 'andle or no 'andle, Mr. Sessions." The idiot was thinking of his blessed machine.

And that last lecture that wound up his course of Physical Science—the one on embryology. To be sure, Aspirel had told him to be prepared for a revelation which would transcend all that was known of embryology on earth; yet Mr. Sessions had his first decided shock of mistrust when Dancy (whose eternal name was Regius) turned the handle of the Cosmological Machine and Aspirel invited you to examine "the

human germ-plasm in its earliest stage.” You then saw, curled up in the form of a comma, microscopically small, a perfect human body with all its organs fully developed, the nervous system visible in the transparent flesh.

As Dancy-Regius went on turning the handle this form increased in size without altering its structure, remaining perfect through all the stages of its growth.

And suddenly Mr. Sessions remembered his Haeckel’s *History of Creation*—those diagrams.

“But,” he cried, “this isn’t embryology. This is clean contrary to the laws of evolution.”

“How—contrary?” said Aspirel. He looked more annoyed than ever. Dancy-Regius had disappeared; he had a class to take.

“Well, what I mean is, the embryo—in those early stages—doesn’t look like that. We know perfectly well what it looks like. First it’s a uni-unicellular organism, then it’s like a tadpole, then it’s like a lizard, then it’s like a fish, then it’s like a series of gargoyles. Why, even when it’s born it’s like a monkey.”

“To spiritual eyes,” said Aspirel, “it’s like none of these things. It is as we have shown you. Perfect from the very first.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Mr. Sessions. “We’re talking about Physical Science, aren’t we?”

“Albert,” said his mother, “do you set up your judgment against Aspirel’s?”

“No. I set up the judgment of Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer.”

The two looked at each other and a smile passed. A smile of heavenly, yet slightly malicious, understanding.

“We will,” said Aspirel, “refer you to their judgment.”

They passed out of the lecture hall into one of the great class-rooms, and down at the far end, in a form by themselves, the lowest form, which Dancy-Regius was teaching, they found them: Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer. Mr. Sessions had seen their portraits, and he recognised them, Darwin by his bald head and snub nose and white beard, Huxley by his wide, truculent mouth and black side-whiskers, Herbert Spencer by the points of his collar and the great British Museum dome of his head, his long upper lip, and his resemblance to that nice old butler that the Taunton-Smiths had.

It was inconceivable, but there they were, sitting in a row before Dancy, the verger and the greengrocer, intoning the catechism. Dancy would shout at them: “Now, after me, Mr. Darwin. . . . After me, Mr. ’Uxley. . . . After me, Mr. Spencer——. And now, all together.” And they would chant back at him:—

“In six days——

“In six days——

“In six days the Lord made heaven and earth,

“The sea and all that in them is.”

And when they saw Aspirel they rose and stood at attention.

It was Huxley who replied to his question whether Mr. Sessions was correct in his account of human evolution.

“Certainly not.” He snapped his great, square jaws and glared at Mr. Sessions under his shaggy eyebrows. “Certainly not. If one of my demonstrators had made such a statement—so damnable and so ridiculous—he’d have been sent down from the University. In disgrace, sir.”

“I like that,” said Mr. Sessions, “when you said yourself——” But he couldn’t remember exactly what Huxley *had* said. “I appeal to Mr. Darwin.”

Darwin was dignified and cold, and, it struck Mr. Sessions, a little dazed.

“I agree with Mr. Huxley,” he said.

“Well, then—to you, Mr. Spencer.”

“I agree with Mr. Huxley and Mr. Darwin. *In toto.*”

As they stood up there Mr. Sessions noticed something about them unusual—uncanny.

“I can’t think,” he said, “what’s happened to you. Or what you’re doing here. In Dancy’s class.”

Huxley spoke. “What has happened to us, young man, is that our spiritual eyes have been opened by your mother and by our great master, Aspirel. We are here in the lowest form of his College owing to that sin of intellectual pride which made us so offensive to all right-thinking people when we were on earth. We are humble now, and it would become you, Mr. Sessions, to be humble too.”

But he didn’t look humble, not half so humble as Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

Then it seemed to Mr. Sessions a queer thing happened. He had turned to go out of the classroom, following his mother, when he looked back for a last view of the three. They were not there. No Darwin. No Huxley. No Herbert Spencer. Nothing but the empty form and the row of desks and Dancy wiping the chalk off the blackboard with a duster. How the dickens had they got away? The classroom had only one door.

“Well,” said Aspirel, when they were on the other side of it, “you’ve got your answer. Are you satisfied?”

“No,” said Mr. Sessions, “I am not. There’s something queer about it. Something queer about the whole business.”

Aspirel put his hand on his arm and held him so that they dropped behind his mother as she went on down the glassy corridor, her long white veil streaming behind her.

“You are not to say that,” he said. “You are not to say it to your mother.”

“It’s true, then?”

“True? Yes. But the queerness is in your own eyes.”

That was what he had found out about Aspirel. He would always wriggle out of it somehow. He always had his answer.

“Well, but—look here, Aspirel, on your own showing—take those first lectures: each turn of the machine represented thousands and thousands of years, didn’t it?”

“It did.”

“Then why, I ask you, do you allow that egregious Regius to make them say the world was created in six days?”

“Discipline. A necessary discipline to take down their intellectual pride. Full of it, they were, when they first came over.”

“But the truth, Aspirel, the *truth*?”

“The truth, my dear friend, is there all right. In the symbol. When they’re moved to the next form they will attend my lectures on Symbol and Reality. The day of the Mosaic cosmology stands for æons, for many æons of the true. That,” said Aspirel, “is one of our great revelations.”

“Revelation? I seem to have heard something uncommonly like it before. On earth. I think *that* requires some explanation.”

“It can be very easily explained,” said Aspirel, “as false memory.”

That was how he had you every time.

Mr. Sessions was getting sick of it. It was quite clear to him that Aspirel was hedging; that he wasn’t honest; that under his tortuous and pretentious system of revelations there was something he was trying to conceal. Something—Mr. Sessions had a curious feeling that if only he could lay hands on it he might escape.

That was what he wanted: to get away; to be safe from his mother and her power; to get away from the Sacred Concerts, from Aspirel and his eternal lectures. Aspirel bored him. All the Spiritual Guides bored him. His mother bored him. Heaven bored him, he wished he could say to extinction, but it was quite clear that he was inextinguishable; he was in for an immortality of boredom. If he didn’t get away——. And how *was* he to get away? Some law of lateral gravitation kept him there. He could no more have got up and walked out of Heaven than he could have walked off the face of the earth.

He had set off one morning, half an hour before lecture time, for a stroll in the City. There was one thing he liked about it, those clear, shining, crystal streets; not a germ could lodge there. No danger of infection in Heaven.

Well—wasn’t there? Wasn’t there a spiritual infection? Wasn’t his mind under the influence of the preposterous Aspirel, wasn’t his mind becoming every day more and more contaminated with falsehood?

That morning he discovered that the Heavenly City was quite a small place, not larger than Sutton, if as large. He had come strolling to the ramparts, which in the form of a cloistered terrace enclosed it on every side. It seemed to be built up on a high platform, and through the arches of the cloisters you could see, framed, a country of green fields and tall pointed trees and blue streams and blue sky, a little formal and flat, flat and narrow like the landscape in a stained-glass window. He wondered how you could get to it; but when you leaned over the parapet you saw nothing, positively nothing, so immense was the height of the platform. Looking through the arches was like looking through a telescope, then. The landscapes must be hanging high up and isolated in space, an immense stretch, a bottomless pit of space between them and the City.

He was meditating on the impossible perspective, when he saw, coming towards him round the corner of the terrace, Aspirel.

“Oh, Lord, here he is again.”

And in another minute the lecture had begun. Aspirel gave it then and there in the cloister.

“It is,” he said, “a question of vibrations” (he was always repeating himself like that). “In our earthly state, vibrations, starting outside us and striking on our nerve-endings, gave rise to our consciousness of the world. In this, our heavenly state, vibrations, originating within us, give rise to the world of our consciousness. Our former bodies were transmitters, drawing the world of space in to us. Our present bodies are projectors, throwing our world out into space. As we were once spectators of a universe imposed on us from the outside by a superior power, we are now co-creators with God, imposing our universe from within upon inferior spirits.

“You have noticed that we can moderate the radiance and transparency of objects round us, external, that is to say, to our bodies. We do this by slowing down the rate of our own vibrations. . . .”

Where, oh where had he heard that before? He must have read it somewhere. His mind anticipated the next sentence.

“These psychic vibrations . . .”

Psychic vibrations. Ah, now he had it. He remembered. The round of the tapestry tablecloth; the lamplight glowing through the opaline shade—the dining-room at Highbury. He was sitting there reading. The book had a maroon cloth cover. He could see the capitals of the chapter headings, black on the white page: PSYCHIC VIBRATIONS. He could see the title of the book; gilt letters on the maroon ground: *The Science of Survival*, by Stanford Jones. That chap his mother was always talking about. “Read Stanford Jones’s *Science of Survival*, Albert.” He had read it. Stanford Jones was Aspirel’s “name in time.”

He heard himself saying, “Look here, Mr. Stanford Jones, this isn’t any revelation. The whole time, the whole blessed time you’ve been at it you haven’t told me one single blessed thing I didn’t know. I’ve read *The Science of Survival*. Precious poor stuff it was, too.”

He was alone. Aspirel had gone away in a fit of temper. He had tried his favourite trick of mystification: “False memory.” But he hadn’t a word to say for himself when you confronted him with his own chapter headings. How a fellow like that—a conceited charlatan—should have contrived to get into Heaven, should be allowed to bamboozle people there as he had bamboozled them on earth—

“Good Heavens”—Mr. Sessions was aware that he was no longer alone. A little gentleman was coming towards him with the step, with the gesture, he remembered. “I’m blessed if that isn’t old Minify.”

Old Minify, looking incredibly younger and sprucer than he used to, yet like himself, with his head on one side, wistful and shrewd, as he used to come, every

Sunday afternoon, into the drawing-room at Highbury, looking at you to see if you wanted him; never quite sure whether you did or didn't. Mr. Sessions had never been quite sure. Mr. Minify had been such a nuisance, with his futile, obstinate devotion to Mr. Sessions' mother.

He thought: "Just like him. Of course, after dangling round her there for twenty years he follows her up here."

Mr. Minify greeted him with his sidling, hesitating smile. "Well, Albert, this is very delightful surprise."

"Surprise?"

"I don't mean I'm surprised at your getting here. I mean I didn't know you'd come."

"I came three weeks ago."

"Bless me! Your mother didn't say a word."

"Now why," Mr. Sessions wondered, "why didn't she?" But she had always been mysterious and secretive with Minify, her poor frustrated lover, by way of showing her power. No doubt, even here she was keeping him on tenter-hooks.

He stood there, as he used to, blinking and twinkling, his kind, eager mouth twitching nervously, not knowing how you were going to take him. And Mr. Sessions thought: "I wonder if he remembers what a little beast I was to him."

They sat down on the parapet under one of the arches.

"How do you like it up here?" said Mr. Minify. He might be wistful, but he was shrewd. Mr. Sessions caught the thrust of his small lizard's eye glinting upwards.

"How do you?" he parried.

"Oh, I'm all right. I'm through with all the lectures; they let me potter about now as I please. But I suppose they've fairly roped you in?"

"They have. This is the first minute I've had to myself in three weeks, and I wouldn't have it now if I hadn't told that damned Aspirel what I thought of him."

"Oh, you told him, did you?"

"I did. . . . You say you've been to all the lectures—well, I put it to you, are you any the wiser? Did they tell you a single confounded thing you hadn't heard before?"

"Not a thing. But I didn't expect 'em to. I only went to please your dear mother."

"Well, to my mind the whole thing's a regular imposition."

"Did you get as far," said Mr. Minify, "as the vision of God?"

"No. He's always dangling it in front of you. He says the whole course is leading up to that. But you never get there."

"I did."

"Well——"

Mr. Minify lowered his voice. "Strictly between ourselves, there's nothing in it."

"Did you *see* anything?"

“Oh, yes, I *saw* it all right.”

“What was it like?”

“Well, I don’t know. It sparked about a lot, and the organ was playing ‘Abide with me,’ with variations all the time, but when it settled down it looked something like that picture that used to hang in the spare bedroom in your mother’s house. God lolling about in the sky, and Jesus and the Virgin Mary and the dove coming down out of Heaven, all sort of hung up on a screen. It hurts your eyes a bit, but it doesn’t last long.”

“Yes. Just something you remembered. That’s how they put you off. Put you off. I call it an infernal swindle.”

“All right, only don’t let your mother hear you.”

“Mother—I suppose *she* ’s all right? I mean she isn’t in it?”

“Oh, Lord, no. She’s been got at—got at, I tell you, by that humbug Aspirel. Between you and me, Albert, I should like to wring the fellow’s neck.”

“Why don’t you then?”

“Because she wouldn’t *like* it. She wouldn’t like *me* if I did it. You can’t do these things.”

“Perhaps not. Anyhow, if I’d known Heaven was like this I’d have been damned if _____”

Mr. Minify looked shrewder than ever, and not at all wistful.

“Oh—so you think you’re in Heaven, do you?”

“Well—aren’t I?”

“No. You’re in your mother’s heaven.”

He seemed to be chuckling over it, as if it were a good joke. “And it’s no use your saying you’d have been damned as long as she didn’t mean you to be damned. . . . You know, of course, how you got here?”

“I *don*’t. The whole thing beats me.”

“She willed you over.”

“She *said* she prayed.”

“Praying or willing, it’s the same thing. You came because you hadn’t any will to set against hers. You were always a bit weak, Albert.”

“I like that. How did *you* get here if she didn’t will you?”

“She willed me right enough. She likes to have me hanging round her here just as she liked to have me on earth. It flatters her innocent vanity, gratifies her lust of power, and it makes her feel virtuous, resisting me. Just as it did on earth, dear woman. Heaven wouldn’t *be* heaven for your mother, Albert, if she didn’t have me to torment.”

There had come to Mr. Minify, in his after-death state, the same formidable lucidity that had come to Mr. Sessions.

“You know all this, yet——”

“I know all this, yet—it makes no difference.”

He went on.

“But you mustn’t suppose I came *because* she willed me. I came because I wanted to; I’m staying because I want to. Heaven wouldn’t be heaven for me without her to hanker after. It’s *my* heaven, Albert. But it isn’t yours.”

“But Darwin, and Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, did she will *them* over?”

“Well—perhaps the less said about that the better.”

“*Did* she?”

“Not as you think. The fact is, you know, when you see them they’re not really there. They’re fakes—hallucinations of your dear mother’s mind. Projected. You may have noticed how they disappeared when she went away.”

An idea came to Mr. Sessions.

“I say—do you think by any chance that *we’re* hallucinations?”

“Alas—no. *We* don’t disappear.”

Mr. Sessions meditated.

“Do you imagine,” he said presently, “that she’s got my father here too?”

“He was here a little while ago. She thought she ought to have him. And he was useful—she always liked to have him to play off against me. But he couldn’t stand it, and he got away.”

“How?”

“By his intense aversion——”

“Oh, if intense aversion does it——”

“*And* the free exercise of his will. As he used to.”

“Minify—do you think if we tried we could get away?”

“You forget. I don’t want to.”

“No, but me—me? Could I?”

“It would be your will against hers. Or, as they say here, your vibrations against hers. Hers and Aspirel’s. You’d have to break through their universe. Break through all this. They’ve made it up between them out of their ideas. So there isn’t very much of it. Nothing beyond these ramparts—nothing but mirage—her memories of the stained-glass windows in St. Jude’s Church.”

That was it—those landscapes. He remembered.

“It’s limited. But it’s jolly hard.”

Mr. Minify pricked up his ears, cocking his little head.

“I must leave you, Albert—I think I hear your dear mother coming. She won’t like to see us together.”

“Why not?”

“Because—I know too much.”

He disappeared down the steps that led to the centre of the City.

With her measured tread, her self-conscious dignity, her everlasting complacent smile, his mother came to him. Above the white veil the stars twinkled, twinkled in her martyr's crown. She put her hand on his arm.

"My dear Albert," she said, "I want you to make it up with Aspirel. You mustn't allow a trifling misunderstanding to interfere with your eternal welfare. I don't know what's come over you. You didn't use to be like this, so full of pride and contradiction."

"It's because I see things clearer. I can't help seeing them."

"I can tell you, in your present state of mind, you've precious little chance of seeing anything. As for seeing God——"

"God? I shall never see Him. I shall never see reality. Never see truth." He let her have it. "Not here."

With that cry he broke loose from her.

He hadn't meant to say it. He didn't want to shatter her illusions, to put her out of conceit with herself and her heaven. If only she had let him alone.

But, of course, he hadn't shattered it. As for putting her out of conceit, he told himself you couldn't do it. All round him her heaven stood firm, compact crystal, held together by her will, the heaven of her mind and Aspirel's. He could see now what it was made of, bits out of the Bible, the glassy, jewelled New Jerusalem, the stained-glass windows of St. Jude's, the sacred pictures she had loved. Why, he had it now—that dining-room, it was the room of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper," and his mother's bedroom, of course, it was St. Ursula's. And the shining cross and the Bridge of the Passing and the penitents, all the redemptive ideas of her creed.

And Dancy-Regius—he remembered her old distrust of intellectual people, her hatred of freethinkers, of men like Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer; you could see that her chief joy in heaven was their humiliation, their subjection to the verger-greengrocer.

The rest was Aspirel with his silly fancy science, his system of vibrations. Well, there had been something in it, since the two of them had managed to impose their universe. They would go on imposing it for ever and ever. He could see the whole length and depth of his damnation, to be shut up, to be shut out from truth, from reality, in the tight prison of their ideas, hallucinated, for ever and ever, with no power to escape, nothing, nothing but this discarnate lucidity of his that made him see through the illusion. Impossible to break through. As Minify had said, it was jolly hard. It would take a lot of breaking.

If only by some supreme effort of his will—but there, he had never had any will.

It was then that he saw Aspirel coming towards him down the steps of his mother's house. He had forgotten. There was another lecture at eleven.

And at the sight of Aspirel with his meek, conceited face, his gesture of obstinate, implacable pursuit, and at the thought of the lecture, of the sickening, enervating boredom of the lecture, something inside Mr. Sessions got up and said, "I will not stand it. I will not be bored."

And he was aware of something that was he and yet not he, greater than he, above and beyond him, invading his being from the outside, rising up in him in a clear jet, a soaring, thrusting column of pure will. Of resistance. Of rebellion.

It landed him clean outside Heaven.

III

He was going along the bridle-path, dark under the eaves of the fir-wood. He came to the high road, the bright, yellow track through the forest; the firs were set thick there; faint grey daylight stood like deep water between their red stems. Down the road he could see the sign swinging on the tall standard.

He came to the low, white-washed, red-roofed inn, set back humbly in the yellow bay of the road under the black crescent of the firs. He went through the passage between the parlour and the bar and out into the garden.

And there on the little lawn by the arbour of the weeping willow he found Alice Milton. She was waiting for him. He knew her by her clear, firm face and her grey eyes, wide like gates thrown open.

“It’s Alice,” she said.

“Alice——”

He had a sense of reality, of sheer invulnerable, indestructible reality, rising up out of some queer foregoing state of hallucination.

“Where am I, then?”

“In the garden of the ‘Green Dragon.’ Don’t you remember?”

“But the ‘Green Dragon’ was pulled down fifteen years ago.”

She smiled. “It wasn’t. It can’t be pulled down unless you pull it.”

“But I was at Sutton the other day, before I—— It wasn’t there, and they told me ——”

“This isn’t Sutton. It’s Heaven. *Your* heaven.”

“Then why are you in it?”

“Because it’s my heaven too.”

“Alice—did you make me come?”

“No; you came by your own will. And you were free to go where you wanted. You might have gone to Rose’s heaven.”

“Where is it, Rose’s heaven?”

“In another sky. It looks like Brighton.”

It would, Rose’s heaven.

“But,” she went on, “I made you get up and go away out of your mother’s heaven. You couldn’t have done *that* yourself.”

That was it. That was it. He had felt the tug of her.

“You said—you said you never would——”

“Yes, never. Unless—unless—— You see I *had* to save you. I had to get you out. . . . But you did the rest yourself. You came here by yourself. You came because you always used to come here when you made an effort—got away from your mother—did what you wanted.”

“Yes. But I always wanted Rose. And Rose isn’t here.”

She smiled at him. Her odd smile, clear and firm and unspeakably tender.

“Ah,” she said, “can’t you see?”

And suddenly he saw. He saw that if he hadn’t gone to Rose’s heaven it was because he no longer wanted Rose and Rose’s beauty. He wanted Alice’s beauty. He wanted Alice. Alice was truth. Alice was reality.

Her voice wrapped him like the peace of God.

“Can’t you see,” it said, “that my heaven’s your heaven now?”

“I see. The place of my desire.”

“No,” she said, “the place of your will.”

THE INTERCESSOR

THE INTERCESSOR

I

THEY had told him he couldn't miss it. There wasn't another house near it for a good mile. He knew where the bridle-path from the hill road struck the lane in the Bottom. It was down there, with a clump of ash trees close up against the back of it, trying to hide it.

Garvin followed the path. It went straight over the slope of the fields, hemmed in by stone walls, low and loose piled, part of the enormous network of stone flung across the north country to the foot of the fells.

At the end of the last field, a wild plum tree stood half naked on a hillock and pointed at the house. All that Garvin could see was a bald gable end pitched among the ash trees. It was black grey, like ash bark drenched with rain.

It stood, he now saw, in a little orchard of dead trees, shut in from the fields by walls, low and loose piled. Coming to this place he had the distinct thrill of fascination, a sense of the presence of old things.

Garvin was by nature and profession a hunter of old things, of old houses, old churches, old ways and superstitions. He had had his nose in a hundred parish registers, sifting the dust of oblivion for a clue to some forgotten family. He was gifted with an implacable persistence in following up a trail, a terrible and untiring industry in minute research. His almost legal precision had served him well when he left an estate agent's office in Pall Mall to work for the Blackadders on their County History.

The Blackadder enterprise was so vast that Garvin in his operations was but a minute part of the machinery. But it fired him; it gave him scope. As an estate agent, selling land for building lots, Garvin had done violence to his genius. The dream of Garvin and his passion was for wild open stretches, everlastingly unbuilt on, for moors and fells, for all places that have kept the secret and the memory of the ancient earth. It was this queer, half-savage streak in the respectable Garvin that marked him as *the* man for the Craven country.

He had travelled through the district all summer, working up his notes at night in small humble hotels and wayside inns. But when it came to the actual writing of his section, Garvin had taken rooms in a village in Craven. He had insisted on two things only when he took them, that the house must be old and that there must be no children in it. That was in July. And before August other lodgers had come and had brought many children. Garvin was driven out. He said he *must* have a place to himself, and was told, fairly and squarely, in broad Yorkshire, that he couldn't have it; leastways, not in August. If he wasn't satisfied where he was, he could go to Falshaw's in the Bottom. Likely enough he'd have it to himself there as much as he wanted.

Garvin ignored the hint of perdition. He inquired placably if Falshaw's was an old place, and was told that it was "old enough." He asked also whether at Falshaw's there would be any children. No (this time it was palpable, the sidelong, sinister intention), there wouldn't be; leastways not in August nor yet September—if all went well with Falshaw's wife. Garvin judged that the state of Falshaw's wife had acted somehow as a deterrent to tourists. It had kept Falshaw's empty. That was good. Anyhow he thought he'd risk it.

It was early evening in the first week of August that he set out for the house in the Bottom.

It didn't strike him (for the approach was sideways through a little gate in the low wall), it didn't strike him all at once that the house was not "old enough." But it struck him very sharply as he entered and took in, slantways, its bare rectangular front. So far from being old enough (for Garvin) it was not old at all, if you went by years. He had given it about a hundred at sight, when he came upon its date graved above the lintel of its door: 1800, and the initials of its founder: E. F.

If you went by years—but this gaunt and naked thing had grown old before its years. It wore the look of calamity, of terrible and unforgetting and unforgotten age. What it did was to throw back its century into some tract of dark and savage time.

He stepped back a few paces to get a better look at it. The front door stood open; its flagged passage showed like a continuation of the orchard path. At one end its wall was broken halfway by the roof of a pent-house. A clump of elder bushes here were the only green and living things about the place. It stood before Garvin, dark and repellent in its nakedness, built from floor to roof of that bleak stone that abhors the sun, that blackens under rain. The light of the August evening was grey round it; the heat of the August day lived only in the rank smell of the elder bushes by the pent-house wall. It seemed to Garvin that the soul of eighteen hundred hung about him in the smell of the elder bushes. He found it in the blurred gleam of the five windows, deep set and narrow, that looked out on the orchard of dead trees. Garvin's delicate sense of time was shaken under their poignant, impenetrable stare, so that the figures 1800 troubled him, stirred in him the innermost thrill of his passion for the past.

He knocked with his stick on the open door. The sounds struck short and hard. Nobody answered. Garvin took another look at the house. The wall-space to the left of the threshold was narrow and had but one window which he had passed as he entered. The long, two-windowed wall on the right bounded the house place. Garvin saw through the open door that this interior was diminished by two wooden partitions, one of which formed the passage, the other shut off the staircase at the back. The door at the end of the passage was closed. So was the door on his left, leading into the small room he had passed. The door in the partition on his right stood ajar, so that when he knocked again he heard the loud scraping of a chair on the stone floor. Somebody had got up and was probably listening there, but nobody came. He knocked again on the inner door imperiously.

This time he heard footsteps. They advanced heavily to the door and paused there. The door swung to with a click of the latch and the footsteps retreated. They trailed off

somewhere into the depths of the house to the back. Somebody called out there to somebody else, "Onny! Onny!" and Garvin waited.

Some moments passed before the door at the end of the passage (the door into the backyard) opened, and a girl, whom he took to be Onny, came to him. She was a young girl, sturdy and full-blown in the body, florid and fair in the face; in all commonplace and a little coarse. She came heavily, with no sign of interest or of haste, but staring at Garvin with her thick grey eyes.

He asked if he could have rooms. Onny didn't know, she was sure.

Would she be good enough to find out?

She didn't know. He could find out himself. Ooncle was in the tool shed.

With more good will than her speech indicated she led the way to the shed under the elder bushes.

There was no one there. Onny now reckoned that Ooncle would be in the mist-house.

A gate in the wall behind the elder bushes opened into the mist-house yard. Falshaw was alone there, pitching dung from the cow-shed. At the girl's call he came forward, leaning on his pitchfork. He was a big man, thick in the girth, and fair like his niece, and florid. Garvin reckoned his age at fifty or thereabouts. For in this body, built for power, the muscles had begun to slacken; it was sunken in its secret foundations. Garvin supposed that this was because of Falshaw's age. What baffled him was the contradiction between Falshaw's face and its expression. It was natural that Falshaw should grow old; but what had Falshaw done that his face, formed by nature in an hour of genial grossness, should have all its contours tortured to that look of irremediable gloom?

The gloom did not lift as the big man slouched nearer, and (contemptuous of the stranger's greeting) inquired what Garvin wanted. His manner intimated that whatever it was Garvin would probably have to want it.

As to whether Garvin could put up at Falshaw's, Falshaw, like his niece, didn't know, he was sure. It depended upon whether the missus could "put oop" with Garvin.

Garvin, suddenly remembering what he had heard about Falshaw's wife, protested that his requirements would be slight. Falshaw did not know about that either, he was sure; but he reckoned that Garvin would have to ask the missus. The missus was "oop there," in the house.

He was about to leave Garvin to deal with the situation when he seemed to think better of it, and to have decided that, after all, he would see him through. All this time he had clung to his pitchfork. He now planted it firmly in the earth to await his return. He seemed to leave it with reluctance and regret.

The girl Onny smiled as if she was pleased at the turn affairs were taking. Garvin thought he saw hope for himself in Onny's smile.

As they reached the door that had been shut against Garvin, Falshaw drew himself up and squared his shoulders with a tightening of all his muscles. He seemed to take the

young man under his protection with an air of dogged courage in seeing him through. It struck Garvin then that Falshaw was afraid of his wife.

She sat in twilight and slant-wise from the doorway, so that she had her back both to them and to the light. The sound of the lifted latch had been answered by a loud and sudden scraping of her chair; it was like a shriek of fright. She rose as Garvin entered, and turned, as if she suffered the impulse of the pregnant woman to hide herself.

He approached her, uttering some such soft and inarticulate sound as he would have used to soothe a shy animal. As she swung heavily round and faced him he saw that he was likely to be mistaken as to Mrs. Falshaw's impulses. Otherwise he would have said that it was she who was afraid. But whatever her instinct was, fear or hostility, it already was submerged in the profound apathy of her gloom.

For the expression on Falshaw's face was a mere shadow fallen on it from his wife's face, where gloom and heaviness had entered into the substance of the flesh and the structure of the bone. Gloom was in the very fibre of her hair, a dull black, rusted.

It was Falshaw, with his air of protection, who put it to her whether it would be possible for them to take Garvin in.

"Ya know how *thot*'ll end," said she significantly.

Things had happened, then, at Falshaw's. The gloom on Falshaw's face renewed Garvin's impression that Falshaw, perhaps on account of these things, was afraid of his wife. He looked from her to his niece Onny, who stood leaning awkwardly against the dresser and twisting and untwisting a corner of her apron. There was a queer, half frightened, half sullen look on her face. And Garvin received a further impression, that the things that had happened at Falshaw's were connected unpleasantly with Falshaw's niece. It might well be. The girl was coarse.

By way of establishing his own incorruptibly moral character, Garvin drew a portrait of himself as a respectable, intellectual, dry-as-dust alien to human interests and emotions, intolerant of the society of his kind. So much so that he was obliged to stipulate that wherever he lodged there must be no other lodgers, and no children.

"There'll be no other lodgers. You can depend on *thot*," said Falshaw.

"And—no children?"

The girl Onny stirred uneasily. Her face, florid a second ago, was white as Garvin looked at it. She hid her hands in her apron, turned on her heel abruptly, and left the room.

Then Garvin was sure that he knew. *That* was the trouble in the house. Falshaw's eyes followed his niece as she went out. There was some tenderness in the gross man, and plainly he was sorry for the girl. But his wife's face had tightened; it had grown even more forbidding than it had been. The woman, Garvin judged, had been hard on Onny. He could see Onny being ground under that nether millstone.

Of course they would resent his touching on the sore point, but it happened to be the point on which Garvin himself was uneasy, and he really had to settle it. He approached it gently and with some confusion.

"I was told," he began, and hesitated.

“What were ya told?” said Falshaw.

“Why—that there weren’t any.”

“Speak oop. Ah doan’ understand ya.”

Garvin plunged. “I mean—any children. I say, you know, there aren’t any, really, are there?” He plunged deeper. “I mean, of course, in the house.” And deeper still. “I mean—at present.”

“There’s noa fear o’ thot—here.”

It was Falshaw’s wife who spoke.

II

It was as if the heart of her gloom had suddenly found utterance. Silence followed it.

They had seated themselves round the deep open hearth place, Garvin on the settle facing Mrs. Falshaw, and Falshaw in the middle facing his hearth. His attitude indicated that he was seeing Garvin through, not because he liked him or approved of him, but as a simple matter of justice between man and man.

He did not look at Garvin when he spoke to him. He had not looked straight at him since he had brought him into the house. He seemed unable to face another man fairly and squarely in the presence of his wife. That might be, Garvin supposed, either because he was afraid of her or because his consciousness of approaching fatherhood had made him shy. Now, as his wife spoke, he turned on Garvin a dumb and poignant look that besought his pity and his comprehension. It was as if he had said, “You see what’s wrong with her”; as if he was letting him into the secret of her malady, of the gloom that hung about them both. And Garvin understood that the unfortunate woman had fallen into some melancholy incidental to her state. She had got it into her head that the unborn thing had died within her or would die. A curse was on her. She would never be the mother of a living child.

She sat there, leaning forward, propping her weight with hands planted on her thighs, and staring at the hearth, a creature bowed and stupefied with her burden. Her husband leaned forward too, staring as she stared, moved to a like attitude by sympathy. He pushed out his loose lips from time to time, as if he said, “That’s how it takes her. That’s how it takes her.”

Garvin’s delicacy prompted him to inquire whether it would be inconvenient for Mrs. Falshaw to take him in.

At this innocent query Falshaw actually smiled. It was the most extraordinary smile. Without altering the expression of his face it went quivering through his whole vast bulk, as if his body were invaded by a malign mirth. It became articulate.

“We woan’t,” said Falshaw, “put ourselves out for anybody.”

Garvin took this as an intimation in the northern manner that he was to consider himself at home.

Falshaw now approached his wife so near as to reckon that they could let the young man have the parlour and the back bedroom, and Mrs. Falshaw replied from the depths of her apathy that he, Falshaw, could do as he liked.

A brief inspection showed Garvin that his quarters, though small, were incomparably clean. He moved into them in the afternoon of the next day.

He was pleased with the cool stone-flagged parlour. Its narrow walls concentrated the light in a clear equable stream on his table under the window. He ranged his books on the top of the low cupboard that flanked the fire-place; and, if the room was still cold and strange to him, he had only to look at them to feel instantly at home. Nobody interfered with him.

It was his bedroom that made him realise that Falshaw had meant what he said. They weren't going to put themselves out for anybody, not they. Garvin's expert eye had measured the resources of the house, and he knew that he had got the worst bedroom in it. It was such a room as is only given to a servant even in houses like the Falshaws'. And nobody had turned out of it for him. With all its cleanness, it had the musty smell of long disuse. Garvin, however, preferred this smell to any kindred sign that might suggest recent habitation. Apart from its appearance and the smell, the room inspired him with a profound discomfort and distrust. He prowled about in it for half an hour, searching in vain for possible sources of this feeling.

So little did the Falshaws put themselves out that nobody came upstairs to tell the lodger that his tea was waiting for him in the parlour. He drank it lukewarm and stewed to an abominable blackness. A delicious scent of home-baked bread and hot girdle cakes came from the Falshaws' kitchen, while Garvin sniffed suspicion at a sour loaf and a slab of salt butter from the village shop. Bacon from the shop appeared at his supper, its rankness intensified by a savour of hot stew wafted through the doorway. He ventured to ask Onny if he couldn't have some of the new bread he had smelt baking, and was told that they only baked once a week for themselves. The idea seemed to be that any food cooked by the Falshaws was sacred to the tribe. He wouldn't be allowed to eat it.

But Garvin was ready to endure any privation of mere appetite in the satisfaction of his passion for peace, and peace (he could feel it) was what he had found at Falshaw's.

Before going to bed he had assured himself that he had his side of the house entirely to himself. He found out that the girl Onny slept with Mrs. Falshaw in the large front room over the kitchen. He supposed that this arrangement was unavoidable if they wanted to keep the young minx out of harm's way. As for Falshaw, he was lodged in a commodious chamber next his wife's, covering both the parlour and the passage. Garvin's room was certainly not commodious. The roof of the house, low and short on the front of it, long and steep-pitched on the back, dwarfed Garvin's room to the proportions of a garret. The space on this side of the house was further taken up by a landing, lighted through a small pane in the slope of the roof.

The doors of the three rooms opened on to the landing. There was also, at the top of a short stair, a fourth door, opposite Garvin's. This door was locked (Garvin in his fastidious curiosity had tried it). But the wall, flanking the well of the staircase, reassured him. There could be no width behind it for anything bigger than a box-room. Garvin was certain of his peace.

Oh, certain. At evening an almost unnatural stillness had fallen on the place. It was in the house, in the orchard, and in the yard down there under the ash trees. It deepened

with each hour of the night. He was almost oppressed with his sense of it as he lay in bed, waiting for the sleep which he knew would be shy of visiting him in his strange quarters.

He would have had a better chance—as far as sleeping went—if there *had* been some noise about; some noise, that was to say, outside his own body. For in the silence Garvin's body, with all its pulses, had become a centre of intolerable clamour.

Garvin's body grew quiet. He was deliciously, delicately aware of the approach of sleep, of sleep entering his veins, of sleep and silence and oblivion flooding his brain, his heart, submerging him, or just submerging, when, with a terrible vain resistance and resentment, he found himself being drawn out of it.

What amazed him as he came up was the slenderness of the thread that drew him, a sound so fragile, so thin that he was almost unaware of it as sound. His resentment flamed to indignation as the thing became audible and recognisable, distinctly recognisable, as the crying of a child.

It came from one of the upper rooms: it was hardly a crying, a sobbing, a whimpering rather, muffled by closed doors. The wonder was how it could have waked him; the sound was so distant, so smothered, so inarticulate.

It went on for a long time, and Garvin could not say whether it ceased or whether he slept through it. He knew he did sleep.

III

In the morning he was aware that, as the victim of their deception, he was more interesting to the Falshaws than he had been overnight. Returning from a stroll before breakfast, he found Mrs. Falshaw standing in the door of the house and watching him. She slunk away at his approach and shut the kitchen door between them. Falshaw, encountered in the passage, eyed him steadily with suspicion that turned at close quarters to defiance; as much as to say that, if Garvin was up to anything, he, Falshaw, was ready for him.

Garvin would have dealt with Falshaw then and there but for the presence of the girl Onny, who was stationed in the doorway of the parlour, watching also. She lingered in her waiting on him, and he discerned in her queer eyes a vague animal terror, half spiritualised by an unspoken, an unspeakable appeal. It was borne in on him that her change of attitude was somehow connected with the disturbance of the night. He gathered from it that if her fear could have spoken it would have besought him to spare her, to say nothing.

His annoyance was accompanied by an inward shrug of cynical comprehension. Nothing more likely, said Garvin in his shrewdness, than that Onny should have borne a child, and that her child should be a shame and a burden to the Falshaws. They couldn't have resented it more than he did; but he meant to wait and see the extent of the nuisance before he made his protest.

All day the inviolate stillness of his solitude was a reproach to the resentment that he felt. The child was kept quiet, smuggled away somewhere out of sight.

But that night and the next night he heard it. And no wonder. He had found that its crying came from the small garret facing his, where apparently it was locked in and left

to sleep alone.

It had its trick of waking at the same hour. The crying would begin about eleven and go on till past midnight. There was no petulance in it and no anger; it had all the qualities of a young child's cry, except the carnal dissonances and violences. The grief it uttered was too profound and too persistent, and, as it were, too pure; it knew none of the hot-blooded throes, the strangulated pauses, the lacerating resurgences of passion. At times it was shrill, unbroken, irremediable; at times it was no more than a sad sobbing and whimpering, stifled, Garvin gathered, under the bedclothes. He lay and listened to it till he knew all its changes and inflections, its languors and wearinesses, its piteous crescendos and amazements, as of a creature malignly re-created, born again to its mysterious, immitigable suffering.

As he never slept until it had ceased, Garvin was qualified to witness to the Falshaws' abominable neglect. Nobody came near the poor little wretch to comfort it. It was probably frightened there, all by itself. The mere sound of the crying wouldn't have kept him awake but for his pity for the helpless thing that made it. In the daytime he found himself thinking about it. He couldn't get away from the thought of it. He worried over it. He had the horrible idea that the child suffered on his account; that the Falshaws kept it locked up in the garret in the daytime that it might be out of the lodger's way. As this theory was inconsistent with their allowing it to keep the lodger awake at night, he could only suppose that the Falshaws were as indifferent to its suffering as to his. They had more than one devil in their blood. Likely enough, it was the devil of Puritanism that made the man and woman cruel to the child of Onny's sin.

But the girl herself?

He had the very worst opinion of the girl Onny. He was convinced that Onny, and not Mrs. Falshaw, was the mother of the child. Not that he was inclined to think hardly of the girl for having it. What he couldn't stand was her behaviour to it now that she had had it. There was nothing very intimately revealing in Onny's heavy, full-blown face; but Garvin had judged her gross. He saw her now sinning grossly, for the sin's sake, without any grace of tenderness. She was the kind predestined to go wrong. She lacked the intelligence that might have kept her straight. He could see her going to meet her sin half way, slowly, without any beating of the heart, finding the way by some dull instinct older than her soul.

He was obliged to admit that the poor thing had at any rate let *him* alone. Probably her instinct sufficed to tell her that he was not her prey. But he had gathered that she was responsible for the Falshaws' unwillingness to take him in; and it was plain enough that they kept a sharp look-out on her. He knew their habits now. He knew, for instance, that Falshaw accompanied his niece on any errand undertaken after dark. Indoors they wouldn't trust her out of their sight a minute on his side of the house. Now he came to think of it, he had never once seen her there in the hours of dusk and dark; he had never found her alone in his room at any hour. Mrs. Falshaw was always hovering somewhere near; her forbidding eye was for ever on the poor girl as she swept and scoured.

This austerity of the Falshaws had its inconveniences for Garvin. He didn't expect a tidy room at bed time, or hot water, or sheets invitingly turned down. But nobody

seemed to think of closing the window when the evening mists came on and settled on his bed, or when the rain beat in and made it damp.

He determined to deal with Onny.

He dealt with her on the morning after his third bad night.

“Look here,” he said; “why don’t you keep that child quiet?”

Her gross colour fled. And yet she faced him.

“You’ve heard her, sir?”

“Of course I’ve heard her.”

Her thick eyes stared at him. They were curiously without shame.

“You don’t look as if you had,” she said.

That and her stare staggered him. Before he could answer her she had given utterance to a still more amazing thing.

“You needn’t go,” she said. “She won’t hurt you.”

With that she left him.

IV

That night, his fourth, Garvin found that his nerves were growing so increasingly, so frightfully sensitive to sound that the crying seemed to come from the threshold of his door, from his bedside, from his pillow. It got from his nerves into his dreams, and he woke with the sense of a child’s body pressed to his body, the palms of its hands upon his breast, its face hidden against his side, and the vibration of its sobbing above his heart. The thing passed, with a fainter, shivering, vanishing vibration which he felt as somehow external to himself.

He sat up, wide awake, and listened. The crying had ceased. His nerves were all right again.

He supposed he’d have (as Falshaw would have said) to put up with it. He could, after all, reckon on six or seven hours’ good sleep, and in the daytime the poor little thing was quiet enough in all conscience. He couldn’t very well resent it.

And yet he did resent it. He resented the cruelty of it. So much so that he spoke about it to Mackinnon, the doctor, whose acquaintance he had made when he was lodging up in the village. Mackinnon had called at the house in the Bottom to see how Mrs. Falshaw was getting on. Garvin lay in wait for him and asked him if he couldn’t do something. He, Garvin, couldn’t stand it.

The doctor was a little Highlander, red haired, fiery, and shrewd. He looked shrewdly at Garvin and told him that if he couldn’t stand *that* his nerves must be in an awful state. And he took him off with him in his motor on a long round that swept the district.

That evening, Garvin, drowsed with the wind of speed, refused the solicitations of the County History and went to bed before ten.

He was in the act of undressing when he heard the child cry.

The sobbing whimper was no longer stifled under bedclothes; it sounded distinctly from the open landing. Garvin unlatched his door and looked out.

At this hour of the newly risen moon there was light on the landing like a grey day. He saw a girl child standing on the garret stair. It had on a short nightgown that showed its naked feet. It was clinging to the rail with one hand.

Its face was so small, so shrunken and so bleached, that at first its actual features were indistinct to him. What *was* distinct, appallingly distinct, was the look it had; a look not to be imagined or defined, and thinkable only as a cry, an agony, made visible.

The child stood there long enough to fix on him its look. At the same time it seemed so withdrawn in the secret of its suffering as to be unaware of him.

It descended the stair, went close past him, and crossed the landing to the women's room.

Now on these hot August nights the door was left half open, leaving a wide passage way into the room. Garvin could see it. He looked for the child to go in where its mother lay. Instead of going in it stood there motionless as if it kept watch.

Then all at once it began crying, crying and beating on the open door with its tenuous hands, beating and pushing as against a door closed and locked.

It was then that Garvin knew.

The creature gave up its efforts at last and turned from the door sobbing. Garvin could not see its face now, for it had raised its arms and held them across its forehead with the backs of the hands pressed against its weeping eyes. Thus blinded, it made its way across the landing towards Garvin's door, and passed by him, still unaware, into his room.

He went in and shut to the door. The child was standing by the foot of the bed as if it watched somebody who slept there. It stayed, watching, while Garvin undressed and got into bed. Then—Garvin was not frightened nor even surprised at what happened then; he seemed to have expected it—the little creature climbed up the bedside and crept in beside him. He felt, flesh to flesh, its body pressed to his body, the palms of its hands upon his breast, and its face hidden against his side.

V

He knew now what he was in for; he knew what was the matter with the house; he knew its secret, the source of what, so far as *he* went, he could only call its fascination. For he could swear to his own state of mind—he was *not* afraid.

On one point only he was uncertain. He did not yet know whether he were alone or not in his experience, whether the Falshaws knew what he knew, and whether it was the things that they knew, that they had heard and seen, their experiences, which accounted for their abiding gloom. Neither they nor anybody else had told him precisely what he would be in for if he insisted on staying at Falshaw's; but there had been (he remembered now) a rather sinister inflection laid on certain words that had been said to him.

They came back to him now. He could have very little doubt that the place had a sinister reputation, and that the Falshaws knew it. He had not understood it at the time,

because his mind had been so misled by Falshaw's bodily grossness that it could only form a gross conception of the trouble of the house, of the things that, as they had intimated to him, had happened there. Poor Garvin profoundly repented the infamy of some of his suspicions, those relating to the girl Onny.

He found on the morning of his experience that Falshaw's attitude, like his own, had changed somewhat overnight. The gross man was still suspicious (like Garvin), but there was more solicitude than hostility in his suspicion. He watched Garvin as if he thought he were going to be ill, as if he knew and were on the look-out for the symptoms of his malady.

Ill or not (he certainly felt all right), Garvin was an object of even greater interest to his friend Mackinnon. The doctor called that evening with the evident intention of cheering him up. Garvin felt that Mackinnon was on the look-out for something, too. They talked about the County History and Garvin's part in it, which Mackinnon plainly regarded as conferring lustre upon Garvin. Incidentally he put him in the way of much valuable information, for the doctor knew something (sometimes he knew a great deal) about each house and its family within thirty miles round.

In the pauses of the conversation they could hear Falshaw talking to his wife. The two were sitting up late, and he seemed to be arguing with her.

It was eleven o'clock before Mackinnon went. The clank of the gate behind him was instantly followed by the sound of Mrs. Falshaw's chair scraping on the stone flags of the kitchen and by Falshaw's fist knocking upon Garvin's door.

He was almost respectful as he stood looming before Garvin's writing-table.

"Mr. Garvin," he began, "ah've soommat to saay to you. If you doan't loike what you've found you'd better goa. There's noa call for you to give th' ouse a bod naame. There's too mooch been saaid. Ah'm dommed if ah'll put oop with it."

"I know the worst," said Garvin quietly, "and *I* can put up with it. How do you know what your next lodger'll do—or say?"

Falshaw's huge bulk seemed to sway there as he placed his balled fists on the table for support. He was silent.

"Mr. Falshaw, I don't know how much you know, or what—but if it happens to be what I know——"

"Ah doan't saay as 'tish't. What ah saay is that there's noa call for you to stomach it. You can goa."

"I don't want to go. Why should I?"

"You doan't?" He peered at him.

"Of course not."

"Then, sir" (it was the first time that Falshaw had called him "sir"), "you bean't afeard?"

"No more, Mr. Falshaw, than you are yourself."

"Ah've noa cause to be afeard. Ah know nothing."

A tremor passed through him as from some centre stirred by utterance. His face quivered. Its brute heaviness was redeemed for a moment by some inscrutable pathos. It was impossible to say whether Falshaw deplored his ignorance or repudiated knowledge.

On the whole, Garvin inclined to think that he *was* alone in his experience.

VI

Three days passed. Night after night Garvin witnessed the same supernatural event.

His senses were now so perfectly adjusted to his experience that he no longer thought of it as supernatural. What struck him as marvellous was the change it worked in the Falshaws now that they knew he had it. He was evidently set apart, consecrated by his experience. He had become for them an object of extraordinary respect—he would almost have said of affection. Whereas they had once disregarded his wishes and treated his little likings and dislikings with an almost insolent contempt, now, everything that he had ever asked for, that he had ever wanted without asking for, was remembered and provided. The fresh home-made bread that he had coveted appeared daily at his table; his meals had a savour and variety which he would have judged beyond the scope of Mrs. Falshaw's art. He could hardly suppose that they did it for the sake of gain; for, poor as they were, they had taken him in under protest and had made no effort to keep him until now.

This change from hostility to the extreme of friendliness dated from the evening when he had declared to Falshaw that he felt no fear.

The statement (he had to own it) required qualification. It was true enough that he felt no fear of the primal, the complete manifestation. That, having all the colours and appearances of flesh and blood, had the value, the assurance, almost the inevitability of a natural thing. It had parted with its horror from the moment when he perceived that it was responsive to his pity and accessible to his succour.

But Garvin, reviewing his experiences, distinguished between the perfect and the imperfect. Beyond the primal haunting, round and about the central figure, the completed vision, he was conscious of a borderland of fear into which he had not yet entered.

It was chiefly present to him as a disagreeable feeling that he had about his bedroom—a feeling which little Garvin, as he valued his own manliness, sternly refused to attend to. Still it was there. But for that sense he had, he would have preferred his garret to the long eastern chambers looking on the orchard of dead trees. The branches that hung before his window were alive. At sunset the light ran through their leaves, kindling them to a divine translucent green. And yet he loathed it.

The room had, clearly, some profound significance for the child, since it was always compelled to come there. But the significance was something that Garvin didn't care to explore; he felt it to be part of the peculiar, foggy unpleasantness of the borderland.

It was strange that, while he knew no terror of the perfect apparition, the bedfellow, his fear of the borderland was growing on him. His feeling was that if the things that were *there* became visible they would be more than he could endure.

There were degrees in the clearness of the primal manifestation; degrees which, as he made it out, corresponded to the intensity of the emotion, the suffering behind it. The child's form gathered and lost substance. At times it was of an extreme tenuity, suggesting nothing tangible. At times it had, not only the colour, but the pressure of flesh and blood. At times its face, its hands, and little naked feet had the peculiar livid whiteness of white skin seen under water. Its feet along the floor were like feet moving through water.

He saw it now by day as well as night. It would pass him in the passage, on the stairs. It lay in wait for him at his door or at its own. He had an idea that it spent hours playing in the backyard under the ash trees. Once when he looked out of his window he could have sworn that he saw it hanging over the great stone water tank that stood there at the corner of the wall. He had never once seen it in his sitting-room, and what went on in the Falshaw's kitchen he could not say.

Thrice he saw it in the garden, coming towards him from the backyard to a corner under the orchard wall. As it passed under the trees he could see the grass growing through its feet. It carried in its hand a little cup of water which it emptied there in the corner. It was busy and absorbed, very earnestly and seriously bent upon this act. He noticed that always, out of doors, the appearance was imperfect, but he discerned dimly that, out of doors, it had a happy look.

He examined the corner that it visited. A long flat-faced stone stood upright in the wall there; below it, hidden by the grass, he found a small plot marked out with stones.

A child's garden ruined beyond remembrance. There were gaps in its borders where the stones had been upheaved or buried. In the middle, trampled and beaten into the earth, he came upon the fragments of a broken cup.

It was thus that he began to construct the child's history. He had found that its more complete manifestations occurred indoors, on the landing and after dark, and that they culminated in bodily contact, the pressure of its form—the bedfellow's—against his own. And so he argued that outside, in the open air, it had been happy. It was within the house that the suffering which was its life had come to pass; the suffering was somehow connected with the closing of Mrs. Falshaw's door; it was habitually intenser at night time, and it had its unspeakable climax, its agony, in Garvin's room.

On all these points he was certain with an absolute and immutable certainty. What baffled him was their date. Things had happened. He had more than a sense, an intolerable sense, of their happening. But *when* had they happened? To which one of the four generations that the house had known?

He thought he could tell if he could only get into the room where, as far as he could make it out, the whole thing started, the garret opposite his own with the stair before its door. It was the child's room and was bound to contain some sign or trace of the child. He must contrive to get in somehow.

He found a pretext. The parlour was still lumbered with the packing-cases his books had travelled in (Garvin had bruised his shins over them more than once). He approached Falshaw and asked him if he might not store the packing-cases in that box-room that they had upstairs. He supposed it was a box-room.

Falshaw hesitated. His gloom deepened. Presently, with some visible perturbation, he replied. Mr. Garvin might do as he liked. He would give him the key of the room. Mr. Garvin would be so good as to put the packing-cases in the space behind the door, without—Falshaw's trouble grew on him—disarranging anything.

He carried the cases upstairs and left them on the landing after giving Garvin the key of the room. It was evident that nothing would induce him to go in there himself.

Garvin's heart beat thickly as he entered. The room—he could see at a glance—was not used as a box-room. It was not used now for anything at all. It was a long garret, narrowed excessively by the sloping roof, and bare of all furniture but a chest of drawers and a washstand near the window, and, drawn to the far end of the room against the wall, two objects, each covered with a white sheet.

Garvin drew back the sheets. Thrust away, hidden out of sight, shrouded like the dead, were a child's little chair and a child's cot. He could see the slender hollow in the mattress where its body had lain.

He raised the edge of the coarse blue and white counterpane. The pillow beneath was not soiled, neither was it freshly clean. There was a small round patch, slightly discoloured, slightly dented, by the pressure of a child's head.

For a moment that brought the thing horribly near to him.

He felt the hollows with his hand and found that they were hard. His reason told him that it must have taken more than one generation to make them so. He was, therefore, no sorer of his date. The room had given him an uncomfortable sensation, and that was all.

That evening, setting out for his walk, he met Falshaw in the path coming over the brow of the hill. They exchanged a greeting and some remarks about the weather. There was a wind on the hill, and Falshaw advised Garvin not to go far. It was beating up, he said, for rain.

Garvin turned and walked back with him towards the lane. A sudden impulse seized him to make Falshaw talk. They stopped at the rise where the naked plum tree pointed to the house in the Bottom.

“That's not an old house for these parts, Falshaw. How long have you had it?”

“Ever since ah can remember. Ma faather had it before me, and 'is faather before 'im agen.”

“Four generations, then?”

“Three, sir.” He added, “There'll be four soon enough if all goas well.”

It was his first open reference to his wife's state.

“Why shouldn't all go well?”

“Thot's what I tell the missus. But ah can't move 'er. She's got it into 'er 'ead thot thick,” said Falshaw gloomily.

Garvin murmured something vaguely consoling; and all the time his mind was running on his date. He must make Falshaw give it to him.

“You see, Mr. Garvin, she's bin, you may say, in a dark state ever since——”

He stopped. Speech was painful and difficult to him.

“Ever since?” For a moment Garvin felt that Falshaw might be giving him the date.

But if Falshaw had hovered on the verge of a confidence he now drew back. All he said was, “It’s more soomtimes than ah can put oop with.”

He meditated.

“And t’ doctor, e cooms to cheer ’er oop, but ’e can’t *do* nowt.”

“What does he think?” asked Garvin, recalled to sympathy by the man’s misery.

“Think? ’E doan’t think. ’E saays it’s natch’ral to ’er condition. But—ah doan’t remember——”

He stopped again, and fell into the gloom that Garvin recognised as the shadow of his wife’s dark state.

“It’s a bod job, Mr. Garvin, it’s a bod job.”

“I wonder,” said Garvin, “if I ought to stay much longer. She may be doing too much. Honestly, hadn’t I better go?”

Falshaw shook his head.

“Doan’t you think thot, sir; doan’t you think thot.”

“I can’t bear,” Garvin went on, “to be giving trouble at a time like this.”

“Trooble? You call *thot* trooble?”

“Well——”

“You’ll bring trooble, Mr. Garvin, if you goa.”

“I don’t understand.”

“And ah doan’t understand it neither. But—if you *con* stop, Mr. Garvin, doan’t you goa. Doan’t you goa.”

He paused.

“If she sees you con stond it, maybe she’ll mak’ out thot things can’t be so bod.”

Things? It was vague; but when it came to the point, to Garvin’s point, Falshaw *was* vague. Garvin felt that they were on the verge again. He was determined to find out how much Falshaw knew, or how much he didn’t know. He would tackle him there and then. He would tackle him suddenly and straight.

“Things can’t be so bad if I can stand them?” he questioned. “And how bad do you think they are yourself, Falshaw?”

“Ah doan’t think. And ah—*knew* nobbut what ah I’ve heard. What you’ve heard.” (He glossed it further.) “What folks saay.”

“And these things—that they say, how long have they been said?”

Falshaw winced. “Ah doan’t know.”

There was no doubt that Falshaw repudiated any personal knowledge of the things; but then, Garvin reflected, he might be lying. He pressed it home.

“Before your time?”

“Noa. Not afore *ma* time. Thot couldn’t be.”

He said it simply and uncontrollably, as if it had been wrung from him, not by Garvin but by the pressure of some suffering of his own. He was profoundly unaware of having given Garvin what he wanted.

“You know *that!*” said Garvin, who was for the moment insensible to pity in the excitement of following his trail.

Falshaw rallied. “Ah know nothing, ah tell you, but what ah’ve heard. Nothing but what *you* ’ve heard, Mr. Garvin.”

They had come to the stone stile that led into the lane. They stood there facing each other.

“It’s not what I’ve heard,” said Garvin. “It’s what I’ve seen.”

At that Falshaw turned from him and bowed himself upon the stone wall.

VII

Up till that moment Garvin had barely hinted at the nature of his experiences. He was aware that his previous intimations had given Falshaw some uncomfortable emotions; but he was not prepared for the violence of the passion with which his final revelation was received.

He couldn’t leave the man there in his agony; neither could he touch him nor speak to him. A certain awe restrained him in the presence of a feeling so tremendous and inscrutable.

It was Falshaw who recovered first, pulling his huge bulk together and steadying himself to speak. It was as if under it all he had not forgotten the consideration due to Garvin, who had become so inexplicably the witness and partaker of his tragedy.

“Mr. Garvin,” he said. “Ah think ah know what you may have seen. And ah tell you you’ve noa call to be afeard. It woan’t harm you.”

It was what Onny had told him.

“I know,” he said, “it won’t harm me.”

“It wouldn’t,” Falshaw went on. “There’s a soort o’ pity in they things.”

He paused, feeling for his words.

“They know; and they doan’t coom to those that are afeard of ’em. They doan’t coom so as to be seen.”

He paused again, meditating, and fell back upon his phrase. “It’s the pity in them.”

He climbed the stone stile and went slowly towards his house.

Garvin turned and walked again to the brow of the hill. There he stopped and looked back. Above the stone wall of the orchard, in the corner of the child’s garden, he saw Falshaw standing, with his head bowed to his breast.

He said to himself then that he might have known. The child’s garden under the orchard grass—that belonged clearly to the Falshaws’ time. Why—as grass grows—within fifteen, within ten years it would have been buried, grassed over, without a stone to show that it had ever been. It belonged, not to Falshaw’s father’s generation, nor yet to Falshaw’s but to the generation that his wife bore in her womb.

The wild plum tree on the hill rocked in the south-west wind, and pointed, gesticulated at the house.

Garvin's gaze followed the network of stone walls flung over the country. He had a sense of the foregone-ness of the things he saw. He saw that network as a system of lines that, wherever you picked it up and followed it, led in some predestined way to the house as its secret and its centre. You couldn't get away from the house.

It was in an effort to get away from it that he walked on towards the fells.

The wind, as Falshaw had warned him, was beating up for rain. The south-west was black with rain. He could see it scudding up over the shoulder of the fell.

Halfway he turned and was blown home before the storm, leaning backwards, supporting himself on the wind. A mile from the Bottom the rain caught him and soaked him through.

Falshaw and Onny stood at the door of the house, watching for him. They were troubled at his drenching. He changed, and threw his dripping clothes down over the stairhead to be dried in the kitchen. He knew that neither Falshaw nor Onny had the nerve to go to his room to fetch them. He was glad to get out of it himself.

Mrs. Falshaw had kept his supper hot for him by the kitchen hearth. She proposed that he should sit and eat it there while the fire was being lit in the parlour. He had owned to a chilliness.

She had set the lamp on the supper table, and sat in the ring of twilight with darkness behind her. Portions of her face and body thus appeared superficially illuminated, while the bulk of her became part of the darkness. Garvin was deeply aware of her face and of her eyes, which were fixed on him with an intolerable hunger. The face was sombre and sallow; it was hewn with a hard, unrounded heaviness, unlike her husband's. It would have been deadly hard but for the fugitive, hunted look that gave it a sort of painful life in deadness. Whether she sat or stood she was a creature overtaken, fixed in her fear, with no possibility of escape.

There were moments when he thought that she was about to speak, to ask him what he had seen. He felt somehow that she knew. She knew he had seen something. Whatever Mackinnon thought, he, Garvin, knew, and her husband knew, that she suffered no bodily ailment. What weighed on her was her sense of the supernatural, and her fear of it and of its inscrutable work on her, penetrating her flesh and striking the child that was to be born. It had been already brought home to him that his value, his fascination for her lay in his shared sense of it. That was the secret that they kept between them.

It was terrible to have to sit in that tongue-tied communion, and eat, bearing his own knowledge and her sense of it. He was glad when it was over and he was safe in the parlour, a place which he felt to be immune from these influences.

Onny was in there, on her knees by the hearth, trying to coax the fire to draw up the damp chimney. His impulse urged him to talk to Onny as he had talked to Falshaw. He was at that stage when he had to talk to somebody; and he wanted to know how much Onny knew.

“Onny,” he said, “my bed’s damp; why didn’t you go up and shut the window?” He knew why.

She rose and stood before him, awkwardly wiping her hands on her rough apron.

“Because I’m afeard, sir.”

He looked at Onny. She was coarsely made as to the body, but to his purified perception there seemed to flow from her an almost radiant innocence and probity.

“What are you afraid of?”

She glanced aside miserably.

“You knaw what.”

“Yes, I know. But you told me yourself it wouldn’t hurt me.”

“Hurt you? Little Affy——”

It had a name then, but he hadn’t caught it.

“Little——?”

“Little Affy.”

“Effy,” he murmured.

“Yes, sir. Little Affy never ’urt any one in her life.”

He said it over to himself. It touched him even more than Falshaw’s “There’s a sort of pity in they things.” It brought the child nearer to him, poignantly near, in tender flesh and blood. He felt the sting of an intolerable evocation.

It was not yet complete.

“Who *was* little Effy?”

The girl’s eyelids flickered and reddened and filled with tears.

“I mustn’t talk about her, sir.”

“Why not?”

“I promised Ooncle.”

“It doesn’t matter, does it, as long as I’m not afraid?”

“You’re *not* afraid, sir” (she whispered it), “to sleep with her?”

“No, Onny, I’m not afraid.”

The girl said “Good night” as if she had said “God bless you,” and left him to his thought.

Whatever Onny had or hadn’t seen, she *knew*.

He could not doubt that he was alone in his complete experience, yet he would have said that if ever there was a man and a woman and a girl that were haunted, it was Falshaw and his wife and the girl Onny. He could only suppose that their haunting was vague and imperfect. They lived on the edge of the borderland of fear, discovering nothing clearly, yet knowing all. Onny, at any rate, knew the worst.

For he always put it to himself that it *was* the worst, even while he felt in his flesh the horror of the borderland, his own borderland, beyond.

It was on him that night, though he tried to fortify himself by reiterating that he knew the worst, and that if his nerves could stand that they could stand anything. He was not afraid (as Onny had suggested) to sleep as he had slept; he was not afraid of his bedfellow. He was afraid of his bedroom and of his bed, of the white sheets and the coarse quilt, of the whole twilight bulk of it, waiting for him in the corner by the window wall.

His sense of terror had defined itself as a sense of evil surpassing the fear of the supernatural. It was borne in on him that some iniquitous thing had had its place in this house and in this room.

He lay awake there, listening to the sounds of the night; to the wind sweeping the ash boughs along the roof above his window; to the drip of the rain in the stone trough beneath. The sounds of the night comforted him; and before long his brain became fogged with a grey stupor. But the stupor was like a veil spread over some backward, bottomless pit of fear. Tenuous itself, intangible, it yet held him, perilously it held him, breaking, delaying, lengthening out, moment by moment, his imminent descent.

The air in the close garret oppressed him to suffocation. He got up and opened the window. The wind and the rain had passed, the ash trees were still; a clear light, grey as water, filled the room. Things showed in it solid and distinct. Something seemed to shift in Garvin's brain with the sudden shifting of his body, and, as he stood there he was aware of something happening before him.

He couldn't say what it was that happened. He only knew that it was bound to happen; it had been foreshadowed by his fear. He knew what that sudden shifting in his brain meant. He had simply gone over the borderland of fear and was in the gripping centre.

There were two there, a man and a woman. He did not discern them as ordinary supernatural presences; the terror they evoked surpassed all fear of the intangible. Of one thing he was certain. The man was Falshaw. He could swear to that. The woman he had with him was a woman whom Garvin had never seen. He couldn't say what it was he saw, but he knew that it was evil. He couldn't say whether he really saw it, or whether he apprehended it by some supreme sense more living and more horrible than sight. It was monstrous, unintelligible; it lay outside the order of his experience. He seemed, in this shifting of his brain, to have parted with his experience, to have become a creature of vague memory and appalling possibilities of fear. He had told the truth when he had said that he was not afraid. Until this moment he had never known what fear was. The feeling was unspeakable. Its force, its vividness was such as could be possible only to a mind that came virgin to horror.

The whole thing lasted for a second or so. When it passed and the two with it, Garvin turned and saw the child, in its nightgown and with its naked feet, standing in the middle of the room and staring at the bed as he had stared. The fear on its face was more terrible to Garvin than his own fear. If it *was* his own.

He turned sick and knew nothing. He supposed he must have fainted.

The next day Garvin said to himself that he would see Mackinnon. His nerves had gone to pieces for the time being, and he would have to get Mackinnon to patch them up. He found himself clinging to the thought of Mackinnon.

He spent the morning and afternoon out of doors, as far from Falshaw's as his legs would carry him; and in the evening he went to see Mackinnon.

The doctor was out, and Garvin waited. He hadn't the pluck to go back to Falshaw's without seeing Mackinnon.

By the time Mackinnon appeared (late for dinner) Garvin knew that he hadn't really come there to consult him. He had come to talk to him, and to make him tell what he knew about the Falshaws. He couldn't think why on earth he hadn't done it before; but he supposed Mackinnon must have put him off by the stupid things he had said about his nerves. He didn't mean to be put off to night, and he wasn't going to talk about his nerves.

Neither was Mackinnon. He only looked at Garvin and said it was odd, his being there; for he had just gone round to Falshaw's to see Garvin and bring him back to dine.

They dined alone together (Mackinnon was a bachelor); but it was afterwards in his den, over the cigarettes and whisky, that they talked.

"I say," said Garvin, who began it, "do you know anything about those Falshaws?"

"Oh, as much as I know about most people," said Mackinnon.

"Do you know what's the matter with them!"

"Would you expect me to own it if I didn't?"

"You know as well as I do that there's something wrong with them."

"There's something wrong with Mrs. Falshaw. Melancholy. They get it. She's had it ever since."

"Ever since what? That's what I want to know."

Mackinnon shrugged. "Ever since she began to be——"

"You think *that* accounts for it?"

"Presumably."

"Well—but how about Falshaw? And how about the girl Onny? And if it comes to that—how about *me*?"

"You? I suppose you've been hearing some queer stories. There *are* queer stories."

"I haven't heard one of them," said Garvin.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Positive."

"What *have* you heard, then?"

"I told you the other day."

"Yes," said Mackinnon; "that's one of the stories."

"How do you account for them?"

"The stories?"

“Yes.”

“The facts account for the stories right enough.”

“You mean they’ve been fabricated after the fact?”

“That’s what happens.”

“You forget,” said Garvin, “that I haven’t heard the stories and that I don’t yet know the facts.”

“I can give you them if you want them. They’re quite as queer as the stories, and more interesting, because more human.”

“I think,” said Garvin, “you’d better hear *my* story first.”

“Haven’t I heard it?”

“Not my latest. Do you want it?”

“Well, I’d like to see if it’s different from other people’s. You know they all say they’ve *heard* things.”

“Do they say they’ve seen them?”

“No. None of them seems to have gone as far as that.”

“Well, I’ve gone as far as that—farther.”

He told Mackinnon as casually as he could what he had seen.

Mackinnon was inclined to be impatient. “Yes, yes—a child that cries—in a nightgown—of course. But can you describe her? Can you give me any details?”

“She was very small; she had short hair—bleached—and pale eyes. The flesh under her eyes was sunken. Two little pits—just here. Her face was sallow white and drawn a little, by her nostrils——”

“Queer,” murmured Mackinnon, “very queer.”

Garvin went on till Mackinnon interrupted him again.

“Beating on the door? Which door?”

“The door of Mrs. Falshaw’s room.”

“All right. Go on.”

Garvin went on, to the scene in the orchard. “And I’ve seen it hanging over that stone tank at the back.”

“Good God!” said Mackinnon softly.

Garvin came to his last experience.

“There,” he said, “I own I’m a bit vague.”

“You’re certain you saw a man and a woman?”

“Yes. And I’m certain that the man was Falshaw. But the woman I know nothing about. It wasn’t Mrs. Falshaw.”

“No,” said Mackinnon thoughtfully. “Can you describe her?”

“I couldn’t see her very well. I think she was big and young and——” He stopped. “I don’t know. That part of it’s beastly.” He recovered and went on.

“And the beastliest thing about it is that I didn’t understand it, Mackinnon, I didn’t understand it—and, frankly, I was in an awful funk.”

Mackinnon stared. “You didn’t understand it?”

“I’m only talking about what I felt at the time. I’m explaining what made it so horrible. I seemed to have parted with my power of understanding—a whole tract of knowledge—clean gone——”

Mackinnon was silent.

“What room were you in?” he asked presently.

“The small room at the back.”

“I know.” The doctor shifted his position as if he were trying to shake off something.

“Well,” he said, “that yarn of yours would be queer enough if you knew the facts. As it is, I don’t mind telling you that it’s the queerest yarn I’ve heard yet.”

“Can you account for it?”

“My dear Garvin, you can’t live up here, in this country and with these people, and still go about accounting for things. If you’re a wise man you accept them.”

“You accept my statements, then?”

“I have to. They square with the facts. Did you say anything to the Falshaws?”

“A little—to him—and Onny. I can’t tell how much they know. They wouldn’t say.”

“Onny wouldn’t?”

“She let out that the child’s name was Effy; and then she told me she’d promised Falshaw not to talk about her.”

“She isn’t allowed to talk about her—because she—*knows*. She didn’t tell you that Effy was the Falshaws’ child?”

“No.”

“She was. Their only child. She died three years ago.”

“How?”

“Drowned. In the stone tank under your window.”

“She fell in,” said Garvin dreamily.

“She fell in. There was nobody about. She must have had some sort of fit, or she could have got out all right.”

“Who found her?”

“The woman you saw.”

Garvin winced.

“The Falshaws were severely censured at the inquest. You see, the child oughtn’t to have been left alone. She’d had one fit about a month before and they knew it.”

“And before that?”

“Can’t say. Nobody knew. They weren’t likely to know. The child was left by herself night and day.”

“I see. That’s what’s the matter with them.”

“No doubt it’s what’s given Sarah Falshaw this idea of hers that the baby will be born dead. Shouldn’t wonder if it was. Good thing, too, when you think how she made the other one suffer.”

Mackinnon’s fire broke out. “Women like that oughtn’t to bear children. But they do. They always will do.”

“She wants it to live?”

“I can’t tell you what she wants—now.”

“She didn’t want—the other one?”

“Oh, she wanted her well enough. But she wanted something else more. And she had to want. She’d been all right to the child until she found that out; and then she couldn’t bear the sight of it.”

“She wanted another man, I suppose?”

“Not a bit of it. She wanted her own husband. It isn’t a pretty story to tell, Garvin.”

X

All the same he told it.

“I’d say she was like an animal, only animals don’t carry the thing to the point of insanity. And animals—most of them, at any rate—aren’t cruel to their young.”

“What did she do to it?”

“She did nothing. That was it. She used to say it was Falshaw’s fault that she didn’t care for it. Everything, you see, was Falshaw’s fault. But she behaved as if it was the child’s fault that Falshaw didn’t want her. You’d have said she had a grudge against it. Things certainly got worse after it came. But she’d led him a life before that. Lord, what a life a woman *can* lead a man when she wants him more than he wants her and he lets her know it.

“They’d been all right at first. You wouldn’t think it, but Sarah was a fine-looking woman when he married her—one of those hard, black and white women who turn yellow when they worry. And Sarah was the sort that worried. She worried the life out of Falshaw. He was a big, strong, full-blooded fellow with a lot of exuberant young animality about him, and look at him now; what aged man do you suppose he is? Fifty, wouldn’t you? Well, if you’ll believe it, he’s only thirty-eight. That’s Sarah.

“He was twenty-three when he married her, and Sarah may have been a bit older. And they’d been married five years before the child came. He wasn’t a bad sort, Falshaw, and he rubbed along with Sarah and her tongue and her temper for three years or so. He used to say she didn’t mean it, and she couldn’t help it, and she’d be all right when there was a youngster or two about. I suppose he thought all women were like that when they hadn’t any children. The worst of it was she knew he thought it, and it riled her.

“Many a man would have tried to knock it out of her with a stout ash stick, but Falshaw wasn’t that sort. He chuckled and grinned at her and reckoned secretly on the baby. And there’s something exquisitely irritating, to a woman of Sarah’s temperament, in a man who chuckles and grins and reckons on a baby that doesn’t come. And long before it came she’d tired him out and he took up with another woman, a bad lot.

“That was a temporary lapse. Falshaw’s heart wasn’t in it. And, though I don’t suppose Sarah forgave him, she got over it. But she never got over Rhoda Webster.

“Rhoda was a servant girl at the White Hart Inn. I don’t blame Falshaw, mind you. When I think what his life was, I’m glad he had that one bright spot of immorality to look back upon. He’d got into the way of going off to the White Hart—a good two miles—to get out of the range of his wife’s tongue, and Rhoda wasn’t by any means a bad girl—then. She was neither good nor bad; she was just natural, without a bit of art to help her one way or the other. Anyhow, there was so little harm in the girl—then—or in Falshaw for that matter, that nothing happened till he had her in his house after Sarah’s child was born. Sarah was laid up for months—that’s how it took her—and the man was at his wits’ end. Rhoda got restless and left her place and was always in and out of Falshaw’s house, looking after Falshaw. She’d walk the two miles from the village and back, just to cook his dinner and see him eat it. And when Sarah got about again she wasn’t fit for much and she had to mind the baby. So Falshaw kept on having the girl about the house. He said he had to have some one.

“That went on for months and months. It looked innocent enough; but Sarah began to suspect things. They had a row about it. Sarah said the girl was to go, and Falshaw said she was to stay, and if Sarah didn’t like it she could lump it.

“It ended in the girl staying altogether. She slept in the house. Then Sarah found them out. And this time it broke her nerve. If she’d been a woman of any spirit she’d have left him. But she wasn’t that sort. The feeling she had for Falshaw wouldn’t let her leave him. She had to stay. She wasn’t going to leave him to the other woman, and the other woman wasn’t going to leave him to her. So there they were all three, shut up in that house, Falshaw carrying on with Rhoda behind his wife’s back, and his wife stalking them, and seeing everything and pretending half the time she didn’t see. And Rhoda, if you please, amiable, imperturbable, scouring and scrubbing, and behaving as if it didn’t matter to her whether Falshaw carried on with her or not. She always had that air of not knowing what Sarah saw to worry about.

“At first I believe Falshaw made a great point of not leaving Sarah. But one night he never came near her. And then Sarah turned. The next night was a wet one, and she waited till Rhoda was in the backyard or somewhere, and she locked her out. Up till then Falshaw had chuckled and grinned and gone his own way, reckoning on the child that had come to keep things straight. He excused himself for everything by saying Sarah’d got the child.

“But when he came home that night, and found Rhoda standing on the front doorstep in the rain, he went for Sarah there and then and told her that if she did anything more to the girl he’d go out of the house—he and Rhoda—and leave her, as he put it, for good and all. He was sick of her. It was her own doing. She’d driven him to it. It had got to be, and she’d have to ‘put oop with it.’ Can’t you hear him saying it?

He hammered it in. She'd got the child. He'd given her the child; and it ought to be enough for her.

"Up till then she might have had some hope of getting him back, but when he began to talk about the child she knew it was the end. And she blamed the child for it. If the child hadn't been born Falshaw's girl would never have got her foot into the house. If the child hadn't been born she'd have had her strength, she could have turned the girl out and made her stay out. If the child hadn't been born she'd have kept her good looks and had a hold on Falshaw.

"Which," said Mackinnon, "was all perfectly true."

"How old was the child then?" Garvin asked.

"Let me think. It must have been about three."

"It was older than that when *I* saw it," said Garvin.

"Up till then it hadn't suffered," said Mackinnon. "Sarah had been quite decent to it. But when she realised that she'd got it instead of her husband she couldn't bear it near her.

"The first thing she did was to turn it out of the bed where it used to sleep with her. They say she couldn't stand the touch of its body against hers. You see that was how she took it. You may think I'm unjust to the woman—Heaven knows she suffered—but if you'd seen her with that child and how *it* suffered—I've seen passion, animal passion, of unpleasanter kinds than you can imagine, and I've seen some very ugly results of its frustration; but that woman showed me the ugliest thing on God's earth—the hard, savage kind that avenges its frustration on its own offspring. If she couldn't have Falshaw with her she wouldn't have the child. That was her attitude.

"When it was older she turned it out of her room—that long room in the front. It had to sleep by itself in some place at the back——"

"I know," said Garvin.

"Not that Sarah was actively or deliberately cruel. It was well fed and all that. But it loved its mother—and it knew. My God—how she *could!* I've seen the child making love to that woman—making love, Garvin, with its little face and its funny voice and its fingers—stroking her; and if she didn't push it away, she'd sit and take no notice of it. But it went on.

"I've seen that; and I've seen Rhoda kiss it and give it things when its mother wasn't looking. Rhoda was always good to it. But it would go from Rhoda to its mother any day.

"That was when it was little. She'd suckled it, you see, before she took a grudge against it.

"At last she took to locking her door against it. Once Rhoda found it beating on the door and crying the house down, and she took it into her own bed.

"Rhoda slept in the servant's room, the room you have now.

"All this came out at the inquest, mind you, when Rhoda gave evidence. Lots of things came out. It seems that when Falshaw was annoyed with his wife or she with Falshaw, she vented her annoyance on the child. She found out that was the way to hurt

him. For instance, Falshaw had dug a little garden for it at the bottom of the orchard. And it made the child happy. She used to go running backwards and forwards from the stone tank to the garden, watering it from the little cup that Rhoda gave her. Rhoda and Falshaw used to play with her there. One day Mrs. Falshaw found them at it. And she took the cup from the child and broke it to pieces in a fury, and stamped on the garden till she'd destroyed it. Just because Falshaw made it. Rhoda took the child into the house so that it mightn't see what its mother was doing. She got that in at the inquest too. But she shielded Falshaw so well, and made the case so black against his wife, that it was considered to damage her evidence.

"And here's where you come in. When the child couldn't get into its mother's room it used to go across to Rhoda's, and creep into her bed and cuddle up to her for warmth. It was always cold. It fretted, you see, and though it was well fed its food didn't do it any good. I was always being called in. Once I spoke my mind to Sarah Falshaw, and she told me I didn't know what I was talking about.

"Then, one night, it went into Rhoda's room and found Falshaw there.

"And I'm inclined to think, Garvin, that you saw what it saw. For Falshaw turned round and cursed it. Heaven knows how much it understood. Falshaw may have frightened it. Anyhow it had some kind of fit—the first, I believe, it ever did have.

"After that it was afraid of Falshaw and of Rhoda, though it had been very fond of both of them. Oddly enough, it never was afraid of its mother. Account for *that* if you can."

"What happened," said Garvin, who didn't attempt to account for it, "when Effy died?"

"Falshaw sent Rhoda away, wouldn't have anything more to do with her. His wife blamed them both for the child's death, and Falshaw blamed himself. It sobered him. He's been a good husband to that woman ever since.

"It's queer, Garvin—but in one way it hasn't changed him. He still reckons on the child, the child that Mrs. Falshaw insists will be born dead. It may be. But it's far more probable——"

"What is?"

"That Sarah Falshaw will go off her head. That," said Mackinnon, "is what *I'm* waiting for."

They were silent a long time till Garvin spoke.

"But, Mackinnon, what do you make of it? Of my seeing these things? It's a series of hallucinations, if you like. But a series, and it all tallies. On your own showing it all tallies."

"It does."

"What I can't get at is *why* it tallies—what makes me see?"

Mackinnon brooded, while Garvin excitedly went on.

"Is it, do you suppose, suggestion? Or some influence given off by these people—by their evil consciences?"

"Or," said Mackinnon gravely—"their evil."

It was morning. Garvin was sitting in the field under the plum tree, staring at the house in the Bottom, the house that seemed to stand always in the twilight, to gather upon its walls a perpetual dusk.

It knew no sun, only degrees of twilight, dark and clear. Yesterday under a grey sky it had been drenched in gloom. To-day, when the south was golden white with the sun, when the hot air quivered like water over the grass tops in the field, the house stood as if withdrawn into its own grey, sub-lucid evening, intolerably secret, intolerably remote.

And now he knew its secret. "Their evil" saturating the very walls, leaking through and penetrating those other walls, the bounds of Garvin's personality, starting in him a whole train of experience not his own.

Their evil. It had been for Mackinnon an immense admission. It went beyond all accepted theories of suggestion; and considering what Mackinnon's information was compared with his, Garvin couldn't see that he could very well have gone further. The doctor had watched the outside of events, whereas he, Garvin, had been taken into the invisible places, into the mystic heart of suffering. He knew the unnamed, unnameable secret of pity and fear.

These things had become the substance of his innermost self.

His knowledge, overlaid by his own adult experience, had been a little tangled and obscure; Mackinnon's revelations had served to make it orderly, clear, complete. From that tale, half savage, half sordid, from that tragedy of the Falshaws, from that confusion of sombre lusts, and unclean, carnal miseries, there emerged the figure of the child Effy, tender, luminous, spiritual, unspeakably lovable and pure.

He knew now what had happened to him. He had been made the vehicle of that spirit; he had been possessed, divinely coerced by Effy. What he had seen he had seen with Effy's eyes, with Effy's awful innocence and terror. He had slipped the intangible bonds, to become one (Heaven knew how) with that slender, fragile being, broken by the invasion of a knowledge out of all proportion to its understanding. For Effy's vision of evil had been thus immense and horrible because it had been so obscure, so unintelligible. He could not doubt that he had shared to some extent the child's malady.

But all that had been only for a moment. What really possessed him and remained with him was Effy's passion. Effy's passion (for the mother who had not loved her) was *the* supernatural thing, the possessing, pursuing, unappeasably crying thing that haunted the Falshaws' house. Effy's passion was indestructible. It was set free of time and of mortality. He could not detach Effy from her passion and think of her as in a place apart. Where it was there she was also.

As far as Garvin could make out from his experience, the place of the blessed or of the unblessed was not by any means a place apart. There were no bounds and partitions between flesh and spirit, the visible and invisible. He had seen Effy's spirit as flesh.

He asked himself why he had seen it? Why he and not any of the Falshaws of whose flesh she was? Falshaw and Onny had given him a hint. He saw Effy because he was not afraid to see her. Fear was the great blinder and divider. Falshaw could see that.

But hadn't Falshaw, in his moment of inspiration, seen further? Wasn't it Effy's pity that had spared them? She hadn't hurt them—she had never hurt any one in her life. She hadn't pressed them hard.

Under Effy's pressure, her continual pursuing of him, Garvin's "Why?" had come to mean "For what reason? To what end?"

Mackinnon's story had enlightened him. He was the intercessor between Effy's passion and the Falshaws' fear.

Effy's suffering had endured with her indestructible, unappeasable passion. It was through him, Garvin, that her passion clamoured for satisfaction and her suffering for rest.

She had come back (so he made it out) to recover the love that had been withheld from her. She pursued them all; but if her father and Onny were afraid of her, her mother was mortally afraid. And it was her mother that she wanted to get at. She could only get at her mother through Garvin who had no fear.

It was clear to Garvin that Mrs. Falshaw divined what purpose he had been put to. Her fear divined it. And how, he now asked himself, was he, the intercessor, going to break down her fear? Plainly she, like her husband, was relying on Effy's pity to protect her from the vision of Effy. It was a sort of moral support to her; and morally the woman was already so shattered and undermined that to break any prop might bring down the whole structure. Mackinnon had warned him of that. And there was her state to be considered. He had been at Falshaw's now for nearly a month. It wanted but seven weeks of her time. But it was borne in upon Garvin that if he waited till *afterwards* it would be too late—for Effy.

If he was responsible for Mrs. Falshaw, how about his responsibility to Effy? That—seeing the incredible relation in which he stood to her—was unmistakable; it was supreme. And couldn't he, who knew her, rely upon Effy too?

He watched his opportunity for three days. Then, on the evening of the third day, the last of August, the thing was taken out of his hands. Mrs. Falshaw sent for him of her own accord.

She was sitting in her chair in the kitchen and excused herself from rising as he entered. There was nothing unusual in her appearance—nothing, as far as he could see, premonitory. What he did notice was the unabated fear in her eyes as she fixed them on him. She was holding something hidden in her lap.

A chair had been placed for Garvin close beside her.

"Mr. Garvin," she said, "d'ye know it'll be a month to-morrow you've been here? I didn't look for ya to stop soa long."

"Why shouldn't I? You've been very good to me."

"Good to ya? Who wouldn' be good to ya? You're a good man, Mr. Garvin, else you'd a been afeard to stop. You'd 'ave tuk and roon like the rest of 'em."

She brooded. Garvin sought for words to break the intolerable silence, and found none.

"Ah can't blaame 'em. Ah'm afeard myself."

“There’s no need. It’s not a thing to be afraid of. It’s a thing to pity, Mrs. Falshaw—and to love. Such a little thing.”

She looked at him. Her obscure soul was at his feet. Up till now she had not known the extent and substance of his knowledge; but now she knew. It was not only that she respected him as one who had seen the thing she feared and had not feared it. She yearned to him; she longed for touch with him, as if through him she reached, unterrified, the divine, disastrous vision.

“It’s true what they saay?” she said. “You’ve heard it?”

“I’ve seen it.”

“Tell me what you’ve seen?” she whispered.

He told her in a few words. He saw her body stiffen as she braced herself to hear him. She heard him in silence until he began witnessing to Effy’s form, her face, her features; then she gave a low moan of assent. “That’s her. That’s Affy.”

She now uncovered the thing she had held hidden in her lap. “Was it like that?” she said. “Would you know ’er from that picture?” She gave it him. It was a photograph of a much younger child than Effy as he had seen her.

He hesitated. “Yes. Just. She’s a little older than this and thinner—ever so much thinner.”

“That’s Affy at three year old. She was seven when she died. She’d be ten year old to-day. To-day’s ’er birthday.”

Garvin got on with his tale as far as the child’s coming to his bed. He told how he had received the little thing and had warmed it at his side. Hitherto Mrs. Falshaw had sat rigid and constrained, as if she held herself back from realisation of the thing she feared; but at that touch she trembled and broke down.

“You let ’er stay?” she cried. “You didn’t send ’er away? You let little Affy stay with you?”

She drew back again and paused.

“She comes to you in ’er little night-shift?”

“Yes.”

He wondered why she should ask him that and in that accent of fear made vehement.

“That’s how ah’m *afeard* of seeing ’er.”

She leaned forward to him.

“There’s times, Mr. Garvin, when ah’m scairt for ma life o’ seeing ’er, anyway. And when the fear taks hold o’ me, it strikes through, as if it wud kill the child. And so ’twill, so ’t wull. ’Tisn’ likely as ah should bear a living child. Ah’m not fit to ’ave un.”

“Don’t think of it,” said Garvin.

“Thinking doan’t mak’ no difference. I doan’t care,” she cried savagely, “if ’tis killed.”

“Don’t say that, Mrs. Falshaw. Think of your husband.”

That was not judicious of Garvin, as he saw. It stirred Mrs. Falshaw's devil from its sleep.

"Falshaw!" She spat his name out. "'E thinks child-bearing's the only cure for all a woman's suffering."

"He has suffered, too," said Garvin.

She softened. "'E's sot on it," she said. "'E saays if there's a child about the place, there'll be an end of the trooble. But I tall 'im if Affy's here, and she knaws, and she sees me takken oop with another child, 'twill be worse trooble for 'er then than 'tis now."

"You know what her trouble was and is."

She said nothing.

"And you know that at this moment, in this room, there's nothing between you and Effy but your fear."

"My little Affy! 'Tis more than that. If ah weren't afeard ah should see 'er, ah know. But if ah were a good woman ah shouldn't be afeard."

As she said it Garvin felt a light breath on the back of his neck. He turned and saw the child standing behind his chair. It slid past his shoulder and he saw it now in the open space between him and the hearth-stone, facing Mrs. Falshaw. It advanced, solicitous, adventurous. It put out its hand and, with a touch that must have fallen light as thistle-down, it stroked its mother's face.

Mrs. Falshaw shrank slightly and put up her hands to ward it off, and the child slid back again. Garvin cried out. "Don't send her away—don't, for God's sake, send her away."

Mrs. Falshaw and Effy seemed both unconscious of this cry.

He saw the child approach again fearlessly. It smiled, as with an unearthly pity and comprehension (he could not tell whether Effy had learnt this sad wisdom on earth, or in the place of the blessed). The look was superhuman. Urged by the persistence of its passion, the child hovered for a moment, divinely coercing, divinely caressing; its touch fell now on its mother's hair, now on her cheek, now on her lips, and lingered there.

And then the woman writhed and flung herself backwards in her chair away from it. Her face was convulsed with a hideous agony of fear. Then, even to Garvin's sight, Effy vanished.

That night Mrs. Falshaw was delivered of a dead child.

XII

That was at midnight.

An hour before, Garvin had been roused out of his bed by Falshaw knocking at his door. He flung on his clothes and went to fetch Mackinnon.

The doctor was up till dawn with Mrs. Falshaw. When he looked in again at noon of the next day he found the woman doing well. Her body, he said, was as strong as any horse.

He took Garvin away with him and put him up at his own house. It was better both for him and the Falshaws that he should be out of the way. Garvin was worrying. He held himself responsible for the event. Having been assured four times that Mrs. Falshaw's body was out of danger, he insisted on his fear as to her mind. Mackinnon had said himself that she would go off her head. Did Mackinnon think now that that was at all likely?

The doctor was cautious. He wouldn't swear to Mrs. Falshaw's mind. It might be better, or it might be worse. So far there had been no disturbing symptoms. She had behaved just like any other woman. She had asked for the dead baby, and Falshaw had fetched it and put it in her arms. Mackinnon had left her looking at it. There was no distress. On the contrary, she was placid and curiously appeased. The mere act of child-bearing, Mackinnon declared, was sometimes enough to set a woman straight who had been queer before it. And Mrs. Falshaw had been decidedly queer.

Mackinnon was now steeped in the physical aspects of the case; and when Garvin dwelt morbidly on his own possible share in it, he became almost grossly derisive and refused to listen to any other view. He was fantastically fertile in suggesting things that Garvin might just as well suppose. But when Garvin began to tell him about the latest appearance of the child, he was angry and got up and left him. There was a real child in the village, he said, whom he had to attend to.

That was about nine o'clock in the evening. Garvin had settled himself comfortably in Mackinnon's study with a book, when he was told that Mr. Falshaw was outside and wanted to see him. It wasn't the doctor, it was Mr. Garvin, the maid was sure of it, that he had said he must see.

Garvin went to Falshaw. He was standing in the door of the doctor's house. The lamplight on his face showed it fallen and undone. He held, half-hidden under his arm, an oblong thing covered with a black cloth.

His wife, he said, wanted to see Garvin. She was in an awful way. They could do nothing with her. She kept on calling for Mr. Garvin. They couldn't get the child away from her to bury it (he glanced at the thing he held under his arm).

Garvin left a message for Mackinnon and went out with Falshaw.

The short cut from the village was a mile and a half by the lane through the Bottom. As they trudged through the dark, Falshaw, between fits of silence, took up his tale. He'd been up to the village to fetch the coffin. The child was to be buried in the morning soon after daybreak. And the trouble was that its mother wouldn't hear of the burying. She'd got the child in the bed with her and she wouldn't let it go. They'd taken it from her when she was asleep, and laid it on the cot in the back room, and the nurse, she'd dressed it pretty. They were at their supper, and the nurse was out of the wife's room but five minutes when Sarah she'd up and she'd got, somehow stealthy, into the back room and taken the child. And she turned mad-like when they tried to take it from her.

"An' what she saays is, Mr. Garvin, that you know all about it."

The high village road dropped to the lane. A mile off a solitary light shone in the Bottom. Coming from the village, they approached the house from the back, and

Garvin saw that the light came from the long garret, Effy's garret, where the dead child had been laid.

Falshaw put the coffin in there and took Garvin to his wife's room.

Mrs. Falshaw lay in a big bed facing the door. A candle burned on the table beside her. A nurse sat at the head of the bed and Onny at the foot. Mrs. Falshaw lay slantwise on her left side with her back turned to them. The candle-light fell full on her and left the watchers in shadow.

Falshaw took Garvin by the arm and led him to the bedside. They stood there without speaking, made dumb by what they saw.

The bedclothes were turned back a little on this side, and in the uncovered space the dead child, wrapped in a flannel, lay cradled in its mother's left arm. With her left hand she held it tight against her side, with her right she supported her own sagging breast and pressed the nipple to its shut mouth.

Her face, thinned and smoothed, refined beyond Garvin's recognition, brooded over the dead face, in the stillness, the stupefaction, of desire accomplished.

"It's Affy. It's little Affy," she said. "She's afeard to suck."

"Thot's how she keeps on," said Falshaw.

"She's afeard o' me. She's afeard of her mother. You speak to 'er, Mr. Garvin, and tell her not to be afeard."

Garvin bent over the body, and she whispered fiercely, "You tell 'em it's little Affy, sir."

"Let me look," said Garvin.

Mrs. Falshaw closed her eyes. As Garvin laid his hand on the dead child she drew back a little. Her breast dropped from its dead lips.

"Now," he heard Falshaw muttering at his elbow. And some innermost voice in him replied, "Not yet."

"There's Affy now. Standing by the doorway."

Garvin saw her.

It was Onny who had spoken.

She rose, fascinated; and Falshaw turned. They stood motionless, gazing at Effy as she came. Their lips were parted slightly. It was evident that they felt no fear. They were charmed, rather, as at the approach of some wonderful, shining thing. (The nurse sat on, stolidly unconscious.)

"She's gone," said Onny.

She had passed out of their momentary vision. Her business was not with them.

She came—Garvin saw her—no longer solicitous, adventurous, but with a soft and terrible swiftness, an irresistible urgency.

As Garvin stooped suddenly and lifted the dead child from the bed, he saw Effy slide through his hands into its place. In Mrs. Falshaw's eyes there was neither fear nor any discernment of the substitution; yet she saw as he saw. She saw with sanity. Her

arms pressed the impalpable creature, as it were flesh to flesh; and Garvin knew that Effy's passion was appeased.

EPILOGUE

A year later Garvin was on Dartmoor, working up Stone Circles for the County History. A letter from Mackinnon reached him there. It came as an answer to his wonder.

"There's a man in your trade living at Falshaw's. He doesn't see or hear things; and he's there for nerves too. They tell me nothing *has* been seen or heard since you left.

"Mrs. Falshaw often talks about you. I saw her the other day, and she desired, almost with tears, to be remembered to you. The point she insists on is that you are a good man. I'm inclined to think, Garvin, that you knew more about that woman than I ever did. She is, I ought to tell you, absolutely sane—has been ever since that night.

"There's a little thing that may interest you. In Mrs. Falshaw's room—you remember it?—they've got a picture, an enlarged photograph of the child Effy, framed and hung on the wall. Under it there's a shelf with her things—a cup she used to drink out of—some tin animals—a doll. They suggest votive offerings on an altar of the dead. What does it mean? Just remembrance? Or—some idea of propitiation?

"You ought to know."

He did.

THE VILLA DÉSIRÉE

THE VILLA DÉsirÉE

I

HE had arranged it all for her. She was to stay a week in Cannes with her aunt, and then to go on to Roquebrune by herself, and he was to follow her there. She, Mildred Eve, supposed he could follow her anywhere, since they were engaged now.

There had been difficulties, but Louis Carson had got over all of them by lending her the Villa Désirée. She would be all right there, he said. The caretakers, Narcisse and Armandine, would look after her; Armandine was an excellent cook; and she wouldn't be five hundred yards from her friends, the Derings. It was so like him to think of it, to plan it all out for her. And when he came down? Oh, when he came down he would go to the Cap Martin Hotel, of course.

He understood everything without any tiresome explaining. She couldn't afford the hotels at Cap Martin and Monte Carlo; and though the Derings had asked her to stay with them, she really couldn't dump herself down on them like that, almost in the middle of their honeymoon.

Their honeymoon—She could have bitten her tongue out for saying it, for not remembering. It was awful of her to go talking to Louis Carson about honeymoons, after the appalling tragedy of *his*.

There were things she hadn't been told, that she hadn't liked to ask: Where it had happened. And how. And how long ago. She only knew it was on his wedding night, that he had gone in to the poor little girl of a bride and found her dead there, in the bed.

They said she had died in a sort of a fit.

You had only to look at him to see that something terrible had happened to him some time. You saw it when his face was doing nothing: a dark, agonised look that made it strange to her while it lasted. It was more than suffering; it was almost as if he could be cruel, only he never was, he never could be. *People* were cruel, if you liked; they said it put them off. Mildred could see what they meant. It might have put *her* off, perhaps, if she hadn't known what he had gone through. But the first time she had met him he had been pointed out to her as the man to whom just that appalling thing had happened. So far from putting her off that was what had drawn her to him from the beginning, made her pity him first, then love him. Their engagement had come quick, in the third week of their acquaintance.

When she asked herself, "After all, what do I know about him," she had her answer, "I know that." She felt that already she had entered into a mystical union with him through compassion. She *liked* the strangeness that kept other people away and left him to her altogether. He was more her own that way.

There was (Mildred Eve didn't deny it) his personal magic, the fascination of his almost abnormal beauty. His black, white and blue. The intensely blue eyes under the straight black bars of the eyebrows, the perfect, pure, white face suddenly masked by the black moustache and small, black, pointed beard. And the rich, vivid smile he had for her, the lighting up of the blue, the flash of white teeth in the black mask.

He had smiled then at her embarrassment as the awful words leaped out at him. He had taken it from her and turned the sharp edge of it.

"It would never do," he had said, "to spoil the *honeymoon*. You'd much better have my villa. Some day, quite soon, it'll be yours, too. You know I like anticipating things."

That was always the excuse he made for his generosity. He had said it again when he engaged her seat in the *train de luxe* from Paris and wouldn't let her pay for it. (She had wanted to travel third class.) He was only anticipating, he said.

He was seeing her off now at the big Gare d'Lyons, standing on the platform with a great sheaf of blush roses in his arms. She, on the high step of the railway carriage, stood above him, swaying in the open doorway. His face was on a level with her feet; they gleamed white through the fine black stockings. Suddenly he thrust his face forwards and kissed her feet. As the train moved he ran beside it and tossed the roses into her lap.

And she sat in the hurrying train, holding the great sheaf of blush roses in her lap, and smiling at them as she dreamed. She was in the Riviera Express; the Riviera Express. Next week she would be in Roquebrune, at the Villa Désirée. She read the three letters woven into the edges of the grey cloth cushions: P. L. M.: Paris-Lyons-Mediterranée—Paris-Lyons-Mediterranée, over and over again. They sang themselves to the rhythm of the wheels; they wove their pattern into her dream. Every now and then, when the other passengers weren't looking, she lifted the roses to her face and kissed them.

She hardly knew how she dragged herself through the long dull week with her aunt at Cannes.

And now it was over and she was by herself at Roquebrune.

The steep narrow lane went past the Derings' house and up the face of the hill. It led up into a little olive wood, and above the wood she saw the garden terraces. The sunlight beat in and out of their golden yellow walls. Tier above tier, the blazing terraces rose, holding up their rows of spindle-stemmed lemon and orange trees. On the topmost terrace the Villa Désirée stood white and hushed between two palms, two tall poles each topped by a head of dark green curving, sharp-pointed blades. A grey scrub of olive-trees straggled up the hill behind it and on each side.

Rolf and Martha Dering waited for her with Narcisse and Armandine on the steps of the verandah.

"Why on earth didn't you come to us?" they said.

"I didn't want to spoil your honeymoon."

"Honeymoon, what rot! We've got over that silliness. Anyhow, it's our third week of it." They were detached and cool in their happiness.

She went in with them, led by Narcisse and Armandine. The caretakers, subservient to Mildred Eve and visibly inimical to the Derings, left them together in the *salon*. It was very bright and French and fragile and worn; all faded grey and old, greenish gilt; the gilt chairs and settees carved like picture frames round the gilded cane. The hot light beat in through the long windows open to the terrace, drawing up a faint powdery smell from the old floor.

Rolf Dering stared at the room, sniffing, with fine nostrils in a sort of bleak disgust.

“You’d much better have come to us,” he said.

“Oh, but, it’s charming.”

“Do you *think* so?” Martha said. She was looking at her intently.

Mildred saw that they expected her to feel something, she wasn’t sure what, something that they felt. They were subtle and fastidious.

“It does look a little queer and—unlived in,” she said, straining for the precise impression.

“I should say,” said Martha, “it had been too much lived in, if you ask me.”

“Oh, no. That’s only dust you smell. I think, perhaps, the windows haven’t been open very long.”

She resented this criticism of Louis’ villa.

Armandine appeared at the doorway. Her little slant, Chinesy eyes were screwed up and smiling. She wanted to know if Madame wouldn’t like to go up and look at her room.

“We’ll all go up and look at it,” said Rolf.

They followed Armandine up the steep, slender, curling staircase. A closed door faced them on the landing. Armandine opened it and the hot golden light streamed out to them again.

The room was all golden white; it was like a great white tank filled with water where things shimmered, submerged in the stream; the white-painted chairs and dressing-table, the high white-painted bed, the pink and white striped ottoman at its foot; all vivid and still, yet quivering in the stillness, with the hot throb, throb, of the light.

“*Voilà*, Madame,” said Armandine.

They didn’t answer. They stood, fixed in the room, held by the stillness, staring, all three of them, at the high white bed that rose up, enormous, with its piled mattresses and pillows, the long white counterpane hanging straight and steep, like a curtain, to the floor.

Rolf turned to Armandine.

“Why have you given Madame this room?”

Armandine shrugged her fat shoulders. Her small, Chinesy eyes blinked at him, slanting, inimical.

“Monsieur’s orders, Monsieur. It is the best room in the house. It was Madame’s room.”

"I know. That's *why*——"

"But no, Monsieur. Nobody would dislike to sleep in Madame's room. The poor little thing, she was so pretty, so sweet, so young, Monsieur. Surely Madame will not dislike the room."

"Who *was*—Madame?"

"But, Monsieur's wife, Madame, Madame Carson. Poor Monsieur, it was so sad——"

"Rolf," said Mildred, "did he bring her here—on their honeymoon?"

"Yes."

"Yes, Madame. She died here. It was so sad——. Is there anything I can do for Madame?"

"No, thank you, Armandine."

"Then I will get ready the tea."

She turned again in the doorway, crooning in her thick, Provençal voice. "*Madame* does not dislike her room?"

"No, Armandine. No. It's a beautiful room."

The door closed on Armandine. Martha opened it again to see whether she were listening on the landing. Then she broke out.

"Mildred—you know you loathe it. It's beastly. The whole place is beastly."

"You can't stay in it," said Rolf.

"Why not? Do you mean, because of Madame?"

Martha and Rolf were looking at each other, as if they were both asking what they should say. They said nothing.

"Oh, her poor little ghost won't hurt me, if that's what you mean."

"Nonsense," Martha said. "Of course it isn't."

"What is it, then?"

"It's so beastly lonely, Mildred," said Rolf.

"Not with Narcisse and Armandine."

"Well, I wouldn't sleep a night in the place," Martha said, "if there wasn't any other on the Riviera. I don't like the look of it."

Mildred went to the open lattice, turning her back on the high, rather frightening bed. Down there, below the terraces, she saw the grey flicker of the olive woods and, beyond them, the sea. Martha was wrong. The place was beautiful; it was adorable. She wasn't going to be afraid of poor little Madame. Louis had loved her. He loved the place. That was why he had lent it her.

She turned. Rolf had gone down again. She was alone with Martha. Martha was saying something.

"Mildred—where's Mr. Carson?"

"In Paris. Why?"

“I thought he was coming here.”

“So he is, later on.”

“To the villa?”

“No. Of course not. To Cap Martin.” She laughed. “So *that’s* what you’ve been thinking of, is it?”

She could understand her friend’s fear of haunted houses, but not these previsions of impropriety.

Martha looked shy and ashamed.

“Yes,” she said. “I suppose so.”

“How horrid of you. You might have trusted me.

“I do trust you.” Martha held her a moment with her clear, loving eyes. “Are you sure you can trust *him*?”

“Trust him? Do *you* trust Rolf?”

“Ah—if it was like that, Mildred——”

“It *is* like that.”

“You’re really not afraid?”

“What is there to be afraid of? Poor little Madame?”

“I didn’t mean Madame. I meant Monsieur.”

“Oh—wait till you’ve seen him.”

“Is he *very* beautiful?”

“Yes. But it isn’t *that*, Martha. I can’t tell you what it is.”

They went downstairs, hand in hand, in the streaming light. Rolf waited for them on the verandah. They were taking Mildred back to dine with them.

“Won’t you let me tell Armandine you’re stopping the night?” he said.

“No, I won’t. I don’t want Armandine to think I’m frightened.”

She meant she didn’t want Louis to think she was frightened. Besides, she was not frightened.

“Well, if you find you don’t like it, you must come to us,” he said.

And they showed her the little spare room next to theirs, with its camp-bed made up, the bedclothes turned back, all ready for her, any time of the night, in case she changed her mind. The front door was on the latch.

“You’ve only to open it and creep in here and be safe,” Rolf said.

II

Armandine—subservient and no longer inimical, now that the Derings were not there—Armandine had put the candle and matches on the night-table and the bell which, she said, would summon her if Madame wanted anything in the night. And she had left her.

As the door closed softly behind Armandine, Mildred drew in her breath with a light gasp. Her face in the looking-glass, between the tall light candles, showed its mouth half open, and she was aware that her heart shook slightly in its beating. She was angry with the face in the glass with its foolish mouth gaping. She said to herself, Is it possible I'm frightened? It was not possible. Rolf and Martha had made her walk too fast up the hill, that was all. Her heart always did that when she walked too fast up hill, and she supposed that her mouth always gaped when it did it.

She clenched her teeth and let her heart choke her till it stopped shaking.

She was quiet now. But the test would come when she had blown out the candles and had to cross the room in the dark to the bed.

The flame bent backwards before the light puff she gave, and righted itself. She blew harder, twice, with a sense of spinning out the time. The flame writhed and went out. She extinguished the other candle at one breath. The red point of the wick pricked the darkness for a second and died. At the far end of the room the high bed glimmered.

She could feel her mouth set in a hard grin of defiance as she went to it, slowly, too proud to be frightened. And then suddenly, half way, she thought about Madame.

The awful thing was climbing into that high funereal bed that Madame had died in. Your back felt so undefended. But once she was safe between the bedclothes it would be all right. It would be all right so long as she didn't think about Madame. Very well, then, she wouldn't think about her. You could frighten yourself into anything by thinking.

Deliberately, by an intense effort of her will, she turned the sad image of Madame out of her mind and found herself thinking about Louis Carson.

This was Louis' house, the place he used to come to when he wanted to be happy. She made out that he had sent her there because he wanted to be happy in it again. She was there to drive away the unhappiness, the memory of poor little Madame. Or, perhaps, because the place was sacred to him; because they were both so sacred, she and the young dead bride who hadn't been his wife. Perhaps he didn't think about her as dead at all; he didn't want her to be driven away. He had the faithfulness for which death doesn't exist. She wouldn't have loved him if he hadn't been faithful. You could be faithful and yet marry again.

She was convinced that whatever she was there for, it was for some beautiful reason. Anything that Louis did, anything he thought or felt or wanted, would be beautiful. She thought of Louis standing on the platform in the Paris station, his beautiful face looking up at her; its sudden darting forward to kiss her feet. She drifted again into her happy, hypnotising dream and was fast asleep before midnight.

She woke with a sense of intolerable compulsion, as if she were being dragged violently up out of her sleep. The room was grey in the twilight of the unrisen moon.

And she was not alone.

She knew that there was something there. Something frightful and obscene. The greyness was frightful and obscene. It shut her in, it was the enclosing shell of the horror.

The thing that had waked her was there with her in the room.

For she knew she was awake. Apart from her supernatural certainty, one physical sense, detached from the horror, was alert. It heard the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece, the hard, sharp shirring of the palm-leaves outside, as the wind rubbed their knife-blades together. These sounds were witnesses to the dreadful fact that she was awake, and that whatever was going to happen now was real. At the first sight of the greyness she had shut her eyes again, afraid to look into the room, because she was certain that what she would see there was real. But she had no more power over her eyelids than she had had over her sleep. They opened under the same intolerable compulsion. And the supernatural thing forced itself now on her sight.

It stood a little in front of her by the bedside. From the breasts downwards its body was unfinished, rudimentary, not quite born. The grey shell was still pregnant with its loathsome shapelessness. But the face—the face was perfect in absolute horror. And it was Louis Carson's face.

Between the black bars of the eyebrows and the black pointed beard she saw it, drawn back, distorted in an obscene agony, corrupt and malignant. The face and the body, flesh and yet not flesh, they were the essence made manifest of untold, unearthly abominations.

It came on to her, bending over her, peering at her, so close that the piled mattresses now hid the lower half of its body. And the frightful thing about it was that it was blind, parted from all controlling and absolving clarity, flesh and yet not flesh. It looked for her without seeing her; and she knew that unless she could save herself that instant it would find what it looked for. Even now, behind the barrier of the piled-up mattresses, the unfinished form defined and completed itself; it shook with the agitation of its birth.

Her heart staggered and stopped in her breast. Her breast was clamped down on to her backbone. She struggled to keep alive and conscious. If she were to die or faint that appalling presence there would have its way with her. All her will surged up against it. She dragged herself straight up in the bed suddenly and spoke to it.

“Louis! What are you doing there?”

At her cry it went, without moving; sucked, back into the greyness that had borne it. She thought: “It'll come back. Even if I don't see it I shall know it's in the room.”

She knew what she would do. She would get up and go to the Derings. She longed for the open air, for Rolf and Martha, for the strong earth under her feet.

She lit the candle on the night-table and got up. She still felt that It was there and that standing up on the floor she was more vulnerable, more exposed to it. Her terror was too extreme for her to stay and dress herself. She thrust her bare feet into her shoes; slipped her travelling coat over her nightgown and went downstairs and out through the house door, sliding back the bolts without a sound. She remembered that Rolf had left a lantern for her in the verandah, in case she should want it—as if they had known.

She lit the lantern and made her way down the villa garden, stumbling from terrace to terrace, through the olive wood and the steep lane to the Derings' house. Far down the hill she could see a light in the window of the spare room. The house door was on the latch. She went through and on into the lamp-lit room that waited for her.

She knew again what she would do. She would go away before Louis Carson could come to her. She would go away to-morrow. Rolf and Martha would bring her things down from the villa, he would take her away into Italy in his car. She would get away from Louis Carson for ever. She would get away up through Italy.

III

Rolf had come back from the villa with her things. He had brought her a letter. It had been sent up that morning from Cap Martin.

It was from Louis Carson.

“MY DARLING MILDRED:

You see I couldn't wait a fortnight without seeing you. I *had* to come. I'm here at the Cap Martin Hotel.

“I'll be with you some time between half-past ten and eleven——”

Below, at the bottom of the lane, Rolf's car waited. It was half-past ten. If they went now they would meet Carson coming up the lane. They must wait till he had passed the house and gone up through the olive wood.

Martha had brought hot coffee and rolls. They sat down at the other side of the table and looked at her with kind, anxious eyes as she turned sideways, watching the lane.

“Rolf,” she said suddenly, “do you know anything about Louis Carson?”

She could see them looking at each other.

“Nothing. Only the things the people here say.”

“What sort of things?”

“Don't tell her, Rolf.”

“Yes. He *must* tell me. I've got to know.”

She had no feeling left but horror, horror that nothing could intensify.

“There's not much. Except that he was always having women with him up there. Not particularly nice women. He seems,” Rolf said, “to have been rather an appalling beast.”

“Must have been,” said Martha, “to have brought his poor little wife there, after _____”

“Rolf, what did Mrs. Carson die of?”

“Don't ask *me*,” he said.

But Martha answered. “She died of fright. She saw something. I told you the place was beastly.”

Rolf shrugged his shoulders.

“Why, you said you felt it yourself. We both felt it.”

“Because we knew about the beastly things he did there.”

“She didn't know. I tell you, she saw something.”

Mildred turned her white face to them.

“I saw it too.”

“You?”

“What? What did you see?”

“Him. Louis Carson.”

“He must be dead, then, if you saw his ghost.”

“The ghosts of poor dead people don’t kill you. It was what he *is*. All that beastliness in a face. A face.”

She could hear them draw in their breath short and sharp. “Where?”

“There. In that room. Close by the bed. Looking for me. I saw what *she* saw.”

She could see them frown now, incredulous, forcing themselves to disbelieve. She could hear them talking, their voices beating off the horror.

“Oh, but she couldn’t. He wasn’t there.”

“He heard her scream first.”

“Yes. He was in the other room, you know.”

“*It* wasn’t. He can’t keep it back.”

“Keep it back?”

“No. He was waiting to go to her.”

Her voice was dull and heavy with realisation. She felt herself struggling, helpless, against their stolidity, their unbelief.

“Look at that,” she said. She pushed Carson’s letter across to them.

“He was waiting to go to her,” she repeated. “And—last night—he was waiting to come to me.”

They stared at her, stupefied.

“Oh, can’t you *see*?” she cried. “It didn’t wait. It got there before him.”

By the same Author

THE ALLINGHAMS
ANNE SEVERN AND THE FIELDINGS
ARNOLD WATERLOW: A LIFE
THE COMBINED MAZE
A CURE OF SOULS
THE DARK NIGHT
A DEFENSE OF IDEALISM
FAR END
HISTORY OF ANTHONY WARING
JOURNAL OF IMPRESSIONS IN BELGIUM
MARY OLIVIER
MR. WADDINGTON OF WYCK
THE NEW IDEALISM
THE RECTOR OF WYCK
THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL
THE ROMANTIC
TALES TOLD BY SIMPSON
THE THREE SISTERS
THE TREE OF HEAVEN
UNCANNY STORIES

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Intercessor and other stories* by May Sinclair]