IRON AND SMOKE

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IRON AND SMOKE

By SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

Author of

THE GEORGE AND THE CROWN
JOANNA GODDEN
SPELL LAND
Etc.

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To
Penrose Fry

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PART I
NORTH AND SOUTH

§1

It would rain tomorrow, for the sky was green and watery at the rims. At the zenith a few stars pricked a purple darkness, bloomy as a grape, but where the sky was on the hills and in the distances of Cleveland, were lakes and pools and rivers of delicate tranquil green, rimmed with golden shores of cloud.

Jenny Bastow, standing on the terrace of Slapewath Grange, looked dreamily at the sky, and duly noted the threat of rain, with a faint apprehension in her heart. If it rained tomorrow, then the picnic to Thirkleby could not take place—there would be no driving up into the Moors in the family wagonette, to where the servants' trap would have gone beforehand with salmon and game pie and other delicacies of a Bastow picnic. There would be no wearing of her new dark-green coat and skirt, with the jaunty green hat, in which she had planned yet a deeper entrance of Humphrey Mallard's heart. He had seen her in her brown tweeds, so daringly short—quite six inches off the ground; and he had seen her in her various house-frocks of silk and foulard, with trimming of guipure lace, and braid and coloured silks . . . . but he had not seen her in the green coat and skirt in which she knew her hair looked more golden and her waist more trim than in anything else; and the day after tomorrow he would be gone. Tomorrow was the Last Day.

Her heart began to beat suffocatingly. She found her thoughts leading her into terrifying rapids of emotion. Would he speak before he went? Would he?—Oh, would he? She felt she could not bear the suspense if he did not, the dragging emptiness of the long weeks that must go by before in any decency he could be asked again. And yet had she any right to expect him to speak after so short an acquaintance? Only a fortnight . . . or perhaps you could call it a month if you counted that brief first meeting at the Dilworths' ball in London. Anyhow it was too short a time to expect . . . but his looks, his manner, even sometimes the things he said, had been so very particular, and her family seemed to think—her mother had hinted . . . oh, it must happen—it must. . . .

She bowed her head to her arms that were folded on the balustrade. The first moonlight was upon her, and her long white dress trailed out behind her on the grass. Drooping there she was like a pale symbolic figure of moonlight and romance, suggesting fountains and sculptured nymphs and the moon shining on some white façade . . . she brought all these things into the mind of Humphrey Mallard as he came towards her from the house.

"Jenny!"

She started upright, and the nymphs and fountains vanished to give place to a pretty, innocent, rather too artless girl of nineteen, wearing a while silk evening gown, with timid neck, and bold ballooning sleeves.

"You said I might call you that," he continued, coming close to her.

"Yes, of course."

The words seemed to catch her breath in a queer, awkward way so that she could say none of the things that she felt the occasion demanded, but allowed an unnerving silence to come and grow.

He leaned beside her on the balustrade, his elbow scarcely more than an inch from hers. The nymphs and fountains had come back into his imagination with the silence and the big white moon that had now entirely lifted herself above the arabesque of the hills. The silence seemed to be part of the moonlight . . . it seemed part of his dream of a temple-like house with shimmering white façade—fluted pillars supporting a huge three cornered architrave, and on the lawn before it the freckled pool of a fountain where a naked nymph stood pouring water from a shell. He fearfully broke this silence and the dream of the white house.

"Jenny."

She turned her face towards him in relief. The last few moments had been unendurable to her in their embarrassment. He saw her eyes look out sweetly and wonderingly from under the pale frizz of hair on her forehead, while her bosom heaved the laces of her gown. He trampled on his dreams and kissed her.

"Oh! . . ."

The start, the quiver of her under his lips, told him if he had wanted any telling that he was the first who had ever been so bold. But though startled she was not dismayed. Her recoil was no more than the natural recoil of surprised innocence. He kissed her again, and there was none, only a fresh and sweet delight. He was touched by her yielding. His heart woke—he seemed to clasp his nymph.

"Jenny—darling little Jenny. I love you."

As he spoke the moonlight suddenly changed, going up in a sheet of flame. The night turned crimson, and for a moment Humphrey felt his heart bound with fear, but the next he remembered the blast furnaces at Carlingrove. This was not the first time that he had seen them belch into the night, wiping out moon and stars, transforming the peaceful fields of Eden-in-Cleveland into some landscape of fire and horror, a frontier-stretch of hell.

"Oh!"

They both laughed together at his moment's panic. Then he stooped to kiss her again. But the spell was broken. She had had time to think, to be

afraid of her joy. A great shyness overwhelmed her, and she shrank out of his arms.

"I—I—I'm sorry. I mean I must go in. That is to say—I mean I promised Mother—"

He let her go. He would not alarm her by any violence in his courtship. Besides for him too the spell was broken, and he no longer clasped his nymph.

§2

A few minutes later he followed her indoors. He had not given himself much time to dress for dinner, so he did not try to find her again. He had all the rest of the moonlight and the evening in which to woo. He had drawn the main lines of the picture, and all that was left was the shading and stippling —such detail as he felt inclined to add in the interests of tenderness and security. She was sweet—that child. He looked forward to the moment when he should once more hold her softness in his arm, sniff the sweetness of an unscented skin, feel the frizz and fluff of her delicious hair. Bless her!—She was a darling.

But between him and his next kiss lay the vastness of dinner. He thought of dinner as a mountain range to be crossed—each course a different ridge. To the Bastows dinner was the massive and elaborate function it is to those who have only lately achieved it in their social progress, who still speak of it as Late Dinner, or even, as Mrs Bastow occasionally did in forgetful moments, as supper. Mallard did not despise a good dinner—on the contrary, when he had the opportunity he loved to spend more money than he could afford on some delicate feast for himself and his friends, some carefully chosen combination of fish and flesh and bird, with wines both ripe and dry, and a touch of the exotic in either the first course or the last. But the Bastow conception of dinner was richness and quantity—a procession of courses which included two successive sweets, both very rich and creamy, the whole served most dreadfully without a single drop of wine. Old Tom Bastow was a rigid teetotaler, and he who could have kept the best cellar in the three Ridings, kept instead a loathsome sticky brew of lemonade, all the more revolting because it was served in priceless cut glass to accompany luscious dishes. It debased the whole dinner to a schoolboy's gorge, an affair of pastry, cream and lemonade—one could almost add the final vomit.

The dining room was like a magician's cave, Humphrey told himself, now that the first shock of it was over—flowers and fruit magically out of season, a chandelier like the solar system, gold plate, and even powdered footmen. When had he last seen a powdered footman? For that matter, when had he last seen—or in some cases ever seen—a marble entrance hall hung exclusively with original Landseers? A stable with marble feeding troughs? A private coal-gas supply, complete with gasometer? A private bicycling track? A fifty-foot square library stocked solid with uncut books bound uniformly in gold and calf? Or any of the many other marvels to be found at Slapewath Grange?

The drawbacks of the meal were not much lessened by the company. Humphrey had been inclined to take pride in himself as a dinner-table talker, of restrained yet reliable wit, of tact, of information. But here conversation was not an art, it was just a habit, and subordinate to the eating, which though no more an art than the conversation, was less a habit than a business. Also his fellow diners did not live in his world. To them Leeds and not London was the centre of the universe—vain to ask them if they had read Kipling's latest or seen "The Shopgirl." Sussex seemed to him a land of culture by comparison. Not thus they talked at dinner at the Herringdales, or at Stream House, or Rushlake Manor, or at Old Mogador. . . .

The Bastows' talk was all either business or personal. Mrs Bastow had been to see her mother, and Aunt Gertie had looked in and they had discussed the burning question of Aunt Gertie's Willie's tonsils. Though Mrs Bastow lived literally in marble halls, slept in a Louis Quinze bedstead and ate off gold plate, her mother and unmarried sisters lived quite unenviously in a Middlesbrough street, often invited to Slapewath and lavishly entertained there, to go back to their front parlour and high teas and daily slavery, with nothing in their hearts but honest pride in their Lizzie's splendour. Old Tom Bastow did not talk about his relations, and no one—least of all himself—knew what had happened to most of them. An iron-worker does not often become an iron-master unless he is able to lose sight of detrimental kin. It was understood that a regular remittance went to a brother in Australia, but only on the condition that the brother came no closer than that.

So Tom Bastow did not talk about persons, but about business. He discussed various problems of their craft with two iron-masters from Oselby and from Stockbridge, men who rode like himself on the crest of the iron boom, and with a retired iron-master from Southyat, whom five years had made so rich that he had shut down his works, dismissed his workmen and bought an impoverished Earl's estate for his last years' ease. The iron-masters' wives talked with Mrs Bastow about relations and tonsils. From both conversations Mallard felt himself shut out. Jenny by his side was silent—nothing that he said could find her tongue for more than a word. There remained only an iron-master's daughter, who preferred to join with the matrons, and the Bastows' son, young Timothy.

Mallard liked Timothy, and had experimentally found him interesting. He had not been to a public school, but he was now at Oxford, though the place did not seem to have produced in him quite the effect one would have expected. He still remained uncivilised in many of his ideas, and though ready enough with his tongue when he and Mallard were alone, he held glumly aloof from both streams of table-talk, even maintaining his

uncouthness after one of them had trickled away with the ladies into the drawing-room. Humphrey tried for a time to find out how much he hated the prospect of becoming a member of the firm of Bastow, Routh and Partners, to find out whether he harked back in spirit to his mother's ambitionless kin, or derived some queer independent strain from his father's roving brethren —but he was too preoccupied to try much. His mind was full of his resolution to seek Jenny, draw her back into moonlight and loneliness and finish what was begun. He must get the matter definitely settled before he left. He must go back to the Herringdales knowing that the place was saved —he must hear the hidden voices of the fields lifted to bless him.

Suddenly the thought came to him that he had not yet gone too far to draw back. What was begun could be left unfinished. It could stand as an impulse, an experiment, even a disgrace. He had not yet definitely committed himself. . . . But he had—and he must. He could not retreat. He could not face Jenny's sorrowing eyes any more than he could go back to the reproachful voices of the fields.

§3

After dinner old Tom Bastow went to sit in his study. He usually went into the drawing room, to hear the ladies—that is, the young ladies, for their mammas had not their advantages—play and sing or even recite. "We sometimes have a regular concert after late dinner," he would boast—"my little wee Jenny's champion at her notes—as she ought to be, with a Frenchman out from Middlesbrough to teach her every Thursday." But it was on little wee Jenny's account that he sat in his study tonight, though he excused himself on the score of business.

In a sense it was true, and he sat in his study on a matter of business—no less than the sale of his only daughter Elizabeth Jane to Sir Humphrey Mallard, Bart., of Herringdales Manor, Heathfield, Sussex. Not that old Bastow regarded it as a sale. He could see plainly that the girl was in love—lovesick, it might be said—and the man if not so obviously stricken had for her true love and regard besides other qualities calculated to make a woman happy. The fact that the payment of money in large sums would inevitably accompany the romance merely bore out Tom Bastow's conviction that money was the essential stuff of life and that nothing, not even romance, happened without it.

Mallard had told him that he would like a word with him later, and of course it was high time that this word were spoken. The suitor had not been any too brisk—a fortnight did not seem to her father the short, feverish time it had seemed to Jenny. The man had been his guest a fortnight, he was leaving the day after tomorrow, and had not yet proposed, though when he came to Slapewath Grange it had been understood that he came for that purpose. Jenny's week in London had not been so merely frivolous after all. . . . Old Bastow had nearly committed an error of judgment in forbidding it, in substituting Leeds. His daughter could have found a richer husband in Leeds, but she would not have found a Title—at least an ancient and historic Title such as the Mallards'. Humphrey Mallard offered rank and honour in exchange for wealth—it seemed to Tom Bastow an eminently sound transaction.

He was pleased with his daughter. Jenny had always been what she should be—good and sweet. As a little tot in a Middlesbrough street she had played contentedly with the other iron-workers' children, as a grown girl she had contentedly gone to school with the other iron-masters' daughters. And now she was going to bring glory to the family by marrying a Sussex baronet, and allying the wealthy yet proletarian Bastows for ever with a

Title. She had done all the best that could be expected of her, and her father blessed little wee Jenny in his heart.

He wished he could feel as pleased with his son. But lately Timothy had caused him some anxious thinking. Timothy had of course been destined for the firm of Bastow, Routh and Partners. He would learn the business from the beginning as soon as he had left Oxford, which would be at the end of the following year, and in a very short time he ought to be his father's right hand, and ready to take his place when he was gone. But . . . well the whole trouble was, he could never say exactly what should follow that "but." Timothy had never objected to entering Bastow, Routh and Partners, he had never shown any leanings towards any of the professions, he had never caused his parents the slightest anxiety as to his way of living. Nevertheless, Bastow knew that his son did not really care two pins about the firm, that he accepted his future in it with tacit reluctance, that all his enthusiasm was given to ideas and causes that had no place in the world of the iron boom.

Perhaps it was his own fault, the old man reflected sadly, in having sent him to the Friends' school at Eden-in-Cleveland instead of to a public school. He had thought it all over very carefully at the time, and had come to the conclusion that the moral tone of the great public schools was not all that it should be—and he had been told that the boys were not taught to work, but that more attention was paid to their prowess in the playing-field than in the school-room. Whereas, the Friends gave as good an education as Eton, and laid less stress on games than on character. So he had sent Timothy to the Friends' school, and there unfortunately his son had learnt to be enthusiastic over lost causes, and had picked up all sorts of humanitarian and co-operative stuff that would smash the iron trade in a week if put into practice. Oxford had failed to undo the mischief—in fact Oxford too seemed to favour lost causes and humanitarian principles. Old Bastow told himself reluctantly that he had made a mistake. He should have educated the boy as he had educated the girl—according to the traditions of the world he had bought for them. Then Timothy now might be bringing him the same credit as Jenny.

There was a knock at the door, and with a sigh of relief he put away the thoughts that had begun to trouble him.

§4

Humphrey Mallard came in.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you."

"Not a bit, Sir. Sit ye down."

Mallard sat down and lit a cigarette before Bastow could push the cigars towards him. He seemed a little nervous—he had lost some of the dignity and confidence that the elder man had always grudged him a little. Mallard was a walking exhibition of the graces that cannot be bought, and Bastow resented it. The sight of a shaking hand and a twitching lip, as well as a slight precipitancy in actions generally deliberate, encouraged the iron-master who in the presence of the squire had so often felt himself a clumsy beast. He broke the silence heartily.

"Well, well. I think I can guess why you've come to see me."

Mallard smiled his quick, disarming smile.

"Then I needn't waste your time telling you. I'm a happy man."

"And I'm a proud father."

"I hope I'll turn out a satisfactory son-in-law. I ought to be, with such a wife."

"She's a champion, my Jenny. The man who gets her gets a darling. Ee, but there'll be a crowd of lads envying you—the number that's been after her, you'd never believe, and all of the highest quality too. But you're the first she's ever turned to herself, so to speak, and I'd never force her hand where she hadn't first given her heart. When she told me all about meeting you at the London ball I guessed something had happened, and after, when I met you staying over at Dilworth's I felt proud it had.

"Then you don't despise the poor landowner's suit?"

"Sir, I don't ask for riches. I've got 'em. But you've got what I haven't got, and that's rank. Let's be honest as between man and man. Between my daughter and you it's true love, just as it should be, but between you and me it's business. You're going to give me a title in my family and I'm going to give you forty thousand pounds."

Humphrey started slightly. It had been a relief to find Bastow so direct—so unentrenched behind conventions that might have kept them skirmishing for hours. But he carried directness to the point of crudity, and the younger man's fastidiousness was jarred. Still no shocked sensibilities could lessen the overwhelming relief and gratification of such an announcement. It had always been understood that the father would liberally endow his daughter—of course at his death she would inherit a pretty fortune, but to have forty thousand pounds here and now . . . Mallard felt almost silly with delight. For

one ecstatic moment he saw his debts paid, his mortgages redeemed, Herringdales restored and reconstructed, Yockletts rebuilt and the land reclaimed. Here indeed was ample acceptance of his sacrifice.

He became aware of old Bastow's voice continuing.

"But of course it must remain in the business. I don't expect a man to understand the iron trade who ain't in it, but you must take my word that it would be worse than inconvenient—it would be disastrous for me to take forty thousand pounds out of the firm just now."

"Remain in the business . . . then I'm to understand . . ."

He didn't understand anything really—the sudden reaction was too great.

"Your wife becomes a shareholder in Bastow, Routh and Partners to the extent of forty thousand pounds. I consider that an honourable arrangement. I can't hobble the company by taking out a large sum of money just at the present moment, and if I gave you forty thousand pounds here in notes into your hand you couldn't put it into a better thing than Bastows'—twenty per cent, and as safe as houses. You can't buy these shares in the open market."

Humphrey licked his lips, forcing himself to speak.

"You are most generous. But the whole point with me is—I mean to say—well, I'll go on being frank with you, Sir. I'm desperately in need of ready money."

"Debts, eh?"

"Debts and mortgages."

"How much?"

"Well, a couple of thousand pounds would pay off my debts, but it ud take thirty thousand to redeem my land."

The old man looked grave.

"How's that?"

Humphrey tried to explain, but he did not feel his explanation did him much service. The misfortunes of the Mallards were chiefly due to improvident living. To pay for their improvidence they had mortgaged their land, every rood they possessed.

"How much land have you?"

"About two thousand acres, Sir, all told. There's some twelve hundred round the Herringdales, and eight hundred over at Easternhanger in Kent."

"I didn't know you had land anywhere but in Sussex."

"I bought the Kent estate some ten years ago. It came into the market, and things weren't so tight with me then."

"Can't you sell it?"

"No, Sir."

He could almost have added, “It’s to save myself from selling it that I’m marrying your daughter.”

“Why can’t you sell it?” persisted the old man, “land isn’t so hard to get rid of these days.”

“I’ve only just bought it—that is, I bought it only ten years ago, and it would be a shame to sell it, even if I could get what I paid, which I can’t.”

“What sort of land is it? How much does it bring in?”

“I can’t say that up till now it’s brought in much. It wants some money spent on it before it can do that.”

“Not likely to be coal under it?”

“Coal!”

“Yes, it’s been found in Kent, you know—in the Brady boring for the Channel tunnel. Is your land near Dover?”

“About forty miles away, west of Canterbury.”

“Most like that ud be too far. You’d better sell it.”

Mallard felt his anger rise.

“I prefer not to sell it. I prefer to keep it and improve it in every way I can. It’s not what is or may be under the land that I care about, it’s what grows on it—corn and timber. . . .”

“That you can’t get to pay because of the foreign stuff that’s cheaper and better. Now coal, you can charge what you like for that, and you’ll still hold the market, because the foreign stuff’s no good.”

“But I don’t want to own coal even if it happens to be there, which I don’t believe for a moment. I want to own my land. My people have always been land-owners.”

Old Bastow nearly said, “Which accounts for the mess you’re in now.” But he had the sense to hold his tongue. He was bewildered and shocked by Mallard’s point of view. To acquire land not for the sake of the treasures hidden beneath it, the coal and iron that bring wealth, but for the sake of mere breadth and surface, the acres of its extent, that mean poverty rather than riches . . . the whole conception was to him pernicious, he told himself that even if he could have taken money out of the firm he wouldn’t have let this man have a penny of it. But he did not want to quarrel with him now. He felt uneasily that if the argument went much further, Mallard might say something to show even more definitely that he was marrying Jenny from mixed motives. That business should accompany romance was one thing—that it should take the place of it was another—and Bastow feared that circumstances might arise in which his conscience would not allow him to proceed, and the honour of the alliance as well as the young blush of Jenny’s happiness must be sacrificed. Mallard, too, on his side, was ashamed of bargaining. It seemed a cruelty and a treachery to the innocent Jenny, whose

romantic mind was picturing a very different interview between her father and her lover.

"Remember," said Bastow—"the interest is twenty per cent."

The young man calculated swiftly. Twenty per cent on forty thousand pounds—that was eight thousand a year. He had scarcely taken in the magnitude of the income. He could save half of it easily, and pay off the mortgage bit by bit. Meanwhile he would be spared the worry of finding the interest every year, and could devote a certain amount to improving the land.

"Of course I don't say it's an impossibility that there should be coal on the Easternhanger estate—the seam may run as far . . . always providing there really is useable coal in Kent, which I doubt."

"Well, you can hang on for a bit and see. I expect the value of land to go up in the next few years."

§5

It was nearly twelve o'clock before Humphrey found himself in his room. He went over to the window and pulled aside the rich velvet curtains that shut out the night. The moon was high and the whole sky silvered, so that the fantastic outline of the hills showed clear against it with a white bloom on their slopes. The gleam of a pond among some dark trees reminded him of a night over at Yockletts when he had risen and looked out towards Sole Street, where a pond lies, and the warm hop-scented breath of the Kentish night had been part of the warm sweetness of his own joy and of Isabel's breathing as she lay asleep in the darkness behind him.

Oh, Isabel. . . .

Suddenly she seemed to call him from the room behind as she had called him then, and he turned back, as he had turned then, but this time not to her and to the darkness, but to the glare of gas showered down upon the frills and satins of a huge empty bed. He threw himself on his knees beside it, covering his face. In the darkness that he thus made another vision rose, also in moonlight—Old Mogador as he had pictured it when he came towards Jenny on the terrace, its temple-like façade gleaming in the white radiance, the fountain like a spray of stars. Then the lighting changed, but not the scene—green and red and blue and white was the garden frontage of Old Mogador in the Summer of a year ago, and he and Isabel were standing there in the clear shade behind the pillars. And she was saying—

"My dear, we must end it now. There's nothing else."

He had protested that there was something else—everything else—anything else. But she had continued—

"No, Humphrey, be honest and look at this. Let's end it while it's good."

Again he had protested.

"It will always be good."

"No, it won't. If I saw that"—it was characteristic of Isabel to "see" things instead of "think" or "feel" them—"if I saw that I'd go on—for ever."

"But why shouldn't we go on for ever? We've loved each other four years now—we'd have changed already if it hadn't been meant to last."

"Four years isn't so very long, Humphrey, and we have changed. At first you loved me more than everything—Herringdales and Yockletts simply didn't count. But lately I can see that these things do count, that they're worrying you badly, and the time will come when they will count more than me and it's I who will worry you badly."

"Isabel."

"It's true. Do look at it. If I loved you a little less I could bear it—I could bear to play second string in your life, or I could bear to think that I'd been able to keep you from what you really wanted more than me. Oh, don't start denying it. You've always cared for your land and your family more than for me, or else you'd have cut the knot and run away with me at the beginning."

"You know that I asked you, and that you wouldn't come because of the children."

"I don't know how long the children would have kept me from you if I'd seen that you'd always want me. But, perhaps . . . well, anyhow, we can't marry each other. I can't forsake the children and you can't forsake Herringdales—so let's leave it at that. All I want to say is that I'm not going to stand in your way any longer. While you and I remain lovers you've got to see your land failing and your family dying out. At present you don't hate me for it, but the day's coming when you will, and then I'll hate myself."

"Are you suggesting that I should marry a rich woman, who'll pay off my debts and present me with an heir?"

That had been apparently exactly what Isabel was suggesting, and they had quarrelled over it long and bitterly. But now in the end here he was, about to marry a rich woman who would finally pay off his debts, and speedily, he hoped, present him with an heir.

Isabel had been right, or as she herself would have put it, she had "seen clear." Their affair, which had seemed to soar so high, had swooped earthward, and she had seen the turn of the wings. After all, he had had many other affairs and at first he had thought this was just one of them, part of the everlasting game of life, but remote from its real concerns. When it had taken on a different quality, and asserted itself in the mid stream of things, he had at first been glad and welcomed something new. But before very long he had seen it differently. It was indeed in the mid stream, but running contrary to it, a dangerous tide. He feared that it might sweep all away—all his landmarks—Herringdales and Yockletts and the fields he loved and the ancient house of which he was so proud and of which he was the last heir. And in his heart he knew that it was a tide which would one day ebb and fail—he could not allow it first to sweep him out of his course, so that when he came to himself he would have lost everything save Isabel, who one day might not matter very much. . . . Oh, God! How he hated himself for seeing that, and it was little comfort to know that Isabel saw it too—had seen it before him—and that it was her clearer vision which had saved them from it.

But he bore her no ill will—that sickness was over now. Love and hate had died together into a regretful friendship. Or was that friendship less their death than the shroud in which they lay awaiting their resurrection? The

thought seemed to blow in on him with the sharpness of the northern summer night. Ridiculously he found himself rising to close the window on it.

Then he sat down to write to Isabel. He addressed the envelope first:—

Mrs Halnaker,
Old Mogador,
Rushlake Green,
Nr. Heathfield,
Sussex.

Then he sat for long minutes biting the end of the silver pen that Slapewath Grange provided for its guests. After all, her husband had not come between them, so why should his wife? They neither of them had felt any treachery towards Claude Halnaker, who went his own way. Would Jenny in time go her own way?—not yet, but later? He glanced sharply up towards the window. But the night was gone. The big gold plush curtains hung over it, shutting him into artificial day. He began to write.

> Dear Isabel,
>
> I am writing this to tell you that I have at last done the only thing that can save the Herringdales. I am going to marry Jenny Bastow. Of course you probably knew I would when I told you how I had met her and had fished for an invitation to stay with her people. From the moment I first saw her I knew I could be very fond of her, and it did not want my promise to you to keep me from ever marrying a girl I didn't love. Of course this puts us apart for ever. . . .

He had no thought now of Jenny "going her own way," for he knew that she never would. Sweet, loving little thing, she would give him her utmost loyalty, and he could not give her any less. Besides, Isabel would tolerate no betrayals, and she had once said, "I'm not just setting you free so that you can marry someone else, but so that you can love someone else. You're not hypocrite or fool enough to tell me that's impossible." He had not told her so even though he might have thought it. But now he knew that Jenny had touched his heart—he saw her finding a place in it and warming that empty house . . . he would love her and be a good husband to her, and Isabel would stand outside, a respected, respectful ghost.

"For ever," he wrote again, not knowing that he had already written it once.

> But I agree now that it is best to have this quick, clean ending. Now we can be real friends, our love all in the past. It will always be a joy to me to know that through this I have kept Yockletts, the place where we have been so happy. But for this I should have had to sell it, and I feel that if I had I should have sold something of our love. Now I feel that our love lives on there in the Kentish fields under the old roof . . .

He had not meant to write like that. The silver pen seemed to have run away with him . . . perhaps he was too tired to write tonight—his heart too full. Perhaps he had better put it off, and write more sensibly tomorrow morning. He tore the letter in pieces, and burned it in the empty grate.

§6

Rain fell towards dawn, and then passed, so Jenny's longed-for picnic happened after all, though the true urgent need for it was gone, since her lover had "spoken." It was just a family affair—no one but her mother, her brother, Humphrey and herself, for her father could not be persuaded to miss even one day at the works. They drove up on the Moors above Eden-in-Cleveland, where the heather spread in coloured miles to Whitby, a huge purple pink expanse, over which the cloud-shadows moved solemnly towards the sea. Stark out of the purple miles rose a conical hill known as Freeboro'. Humphrey guessed it to be an ancient burial place, but it was evidently no more than a landmark to the company that camped at its foot, in the midst of a luxurious litter.

The servants spread a meal that in the South would have been considered adequate for a dinner-party, except that it was served with tea. Mrs Bastow sat beaming on the good food and on her daughter's happiness. She had not said much to Humphrey—she was shy with him, even a little afraid, and she was wondering if she still ought to call him Sir Humphrey, even though he was engaged to Jenny—but she plied him with food, sure token of her love, and in the language of a heaped plate told him of her joy.

Timothy, too, had said little, and in his case Mallard was not quite sure of what he thought. He liked the boy, but could not feel at his ease with him—differences in outlook and education seemed to loom more largely between him and this product of the Friends' School and Oxford than between him and the frankly parish-taught father and mother.

Jenny looked radiant. She had recovered from the agitations of the night, and put on new confidence with the green coat and skirt, which clipped her gentle figure most becomingly. A little sailor hat met the tilt of her adorable nose—Humphrey reflected with pleasure that she had the sense of clothes; remote from the fashionable world in all but wealth, she contrived to look the perfect belle of 1896, almost as turned out in Bond Street. Even Isabel was not more rightly gowned. He pictured her at the head of his table at the Herringdales, all creamy and fussy and dainty according to the best modern standards. Darling! He had done well.

When luncheon was over, he coaxed her away, and they wandered along a little brown path till they found themselves on the other side of the Freeboro', out of sight. They sat down in the heather, and he kissed her gently, as was meet. When his face was very close to hers he could see tiny freckles on her nose and cheeks, under the skin. They sat for a while with fingers enlaced, watching the shadows run out to sea. The sea lay framed in

a flat green gulf of land, wide fields, trim and laid out as a chess board, edging the Yorkshire coast. One could see the distance only in patches—every here and there drifted a grey cloud of smoke. The smoke of the Bastow furnaces at Carlingrove hung above their chimneys like a big flat mushroom, shutting out the sea beyond, while further west hung the pall of the Great Smoke itself—Middlesbrough and all the fuming travail of the Tees marshes, a land of everlasting fog.

As he watched it all, this landscape of field and smoke, moor and sea, he wondered what she would think of Heathfield, of the long road that sweeps from Woods Corner to Cross-in-Hand, and all the little shaggy fields and farms.

"It'll be different, you know," he told her, "all much more small and crowded. And our roads are nearly all sunk deep, for they're so very old that they've been trodden down almost into ditches. Our fields are very old too, with old tangled hedges. I do hope you'll like our country."

"Of course I shall love it," she whispered. But in his heart he felt that she would not care much. Why should she? Women seldom care truly for the land. Scenery—views—picturesque buildings, that's all they ask. The earth-in-herself has no meaning for them. They have never known the tragic Mother—Demeter, whose sorrows are under her feet.

§7

At the end of half an hour Timothy suddenly appeared round the swell of Freeboro'. He had evidently not expected to find the lovers seated in the foreground of his favourite view, and was going away when they both called him.

"Mother's fallen asleep," he said as he joined them, "and I came to have a look at the sea."

"You get a fine view of it here—if it wasn't for the smoke."

"Yes, Carlingrove's no ornament—and yet I've somehow got so used to it there in the middle of the view, that I believe I'd miss it if it disappeared, though I'm sure I hope it will."

"That isn't the right state of mind for the future head of Bastow, Routh and Partners. You should be looking forward to your works spoiling the view of the Last Judgment."

"It's like the Last Judgment already inside. Have you ever been over any iron-works?"

"None except the remains of those we have in Sussex. There's a quarry on my land where we still dig clinkers out for the roads."

"I've heard of Sussex iron, but I never knew it meant much."

"Five hundred years ago Sussex was the Black Country. My own folk made their money and got their land through iron. Queen Elizabeth gave Aubrey Mallard the manor of Herringdales in recognition of his skill as an iron-master, and Charles I made his son a baronet because he helped the Royalists with mortars and cannon."

"Is there nothing of the iron trade left?"

"Nothing but the names; you get them all round Heathfield—Cinder Hill and Furnace Field and Iron Latch and lots of others—and there's Pigstone and Clappers where the Mallard forges used to be. A wood near Herringdales is known as Towncreep, and the legend runs that a town is buried there like Pompeii—an iron-workers' town which stood there before the Normans came. The Normans were inferior ironworkers to the Saxons—they couldn't burn their clinkers out so well. But the works went on till the woods were nearly all burned up for the forges, and of course when the big coal industry started in the North it did for the wood-burning South."

"A good thing too—for the South."

"Your father's son thinks that?"

"Oh, I dunno. I suppose not really. But sometimes I feel that agriculture's a better idea than mining—improving the earth's surface rather than digging into her vitals."

"The rape of Demeter?"

"That's it. And it seems to me as if it had brought us our judgment. While man remains a husbandman he is content, but when he digs for iron or coal or gold, then his miseries begin . . . strikes, lock-outs, all the rest of it—and no wonder, when you think of what are bound to be the conditions of such work. You really ought to get Dad to take you over Carlingrove."

"You ought to be coming south, to help me revive the dying arts of husbandry."

Timothy shook his head.

"You'll never revive agriculture except on a huge commercial scale, such as it is in Canada or the States. I'd be willing to bet that in another five hundred years the South will have become a Black Country once more—all chimneys and wheels and smoke."

"And I'd be willing to bet that in another five hundred years the North will have become agricultural, like the South—all fields and stacks and barns. Your mines will be exhausted in time—some of them are already—"

"And what about your fields?"

"The science of agriculture has developed as well as the practice—we can put into them what we take away. . . ."

"Darling," interrupted a rather pathetic voice—"oughtn't we to go and find Mother?"

Humphrey laughed.

"Are you so bored, my sweet? We're only discussing first and last things."

"Well, I really think you ought to stop. I don't like to hear Timothy speaking against the firm. Dad's looking to him to take his place there some day."

"And so I shall, Jen—don't you worry."

"He'll be a fool if he doesn't," said Humphrey. "It's only because I was born with an inherited passion for land that I go my poverty-stricken way. For every penny you pick up off the earth there's a sovereign underground."

"There's also rumblings and explosions. We're pretty steady now, but earthquakes come, you know."

"How?" A sudden dread chilled Mallard's heart.

"Oh, different ways—a war, or just a slump."

"A war would make your fortune, surely."

"It all depends. We should have to make war material."

"Well, of course you'd do that."

"I shouldn't."

Timothy's young, idealistic mouth became suddenly fierce and old.

"You don't approve of war?"

He remembered that young Bastow had been to a Quaker school—bad politics it seemed now on his father's part.

"I don't approve of making myself rich at the expense of other men's lives. It's dreadful to think that firms like ours might give themselves over to making guns and shells and horrors of that kind."

Humphrey smiled.

"It would only be repeating the history of the South. It was a Sussex firm that made the first cannon.

" 'Master Huggett and his man John
They did make the first cannon.'

"And the remains of Huggett's Forge still stand over by Wadhurst. You can see his hammer pond, and you can picture the nights when it was red with the glare of his furnaces, and the neighbourhood couldn't sleep for the racket of Master Huggett and his man banging away at their iron."

§8

The next morning Humphrey went south, back to the fields and stacks and barns of the golden August reapings, leaving the chimneys and wheels and smoke of those sinister harvests underground. Jenny did not feel so sad as she had expected to see him go. For one thing, the parting would not be for long—he was anxious, flatteringly if embarrassingly anxious, that their wedding should happen soon, and she knew that without him both her mind and time would be more free for preparation.

She visited her dressmaker in Darlington, and between them, with the help of the *Queen* and other London papers, they evolved the elaborate garments that fashion decreed. "Dainty" and "fussy" were words often on their lips, and sometimes the dressmaker said "dashing." But Jenny knew that "dashing" styles did not suit her, and that she must avoid them even as a baronet's wife. Billows of tulle and chiffon and muslin, endless ruchings and gatherings and flouncings were more in her line than the latest thing in shirts or golf-capes. She would have liked to have had her wedding dress made in London, but her family did not see London with her eyes, and the wedding dress finally came from Leeds, with all the linen that her mother chose for her.

Humphrey Mallard nearly came north again when his bride wrote, "Father is giving us some new china and silver. Of course we know you have plenty, darling, but it is old, I think you said." However, he restrained himself with the thought that whatever Bastow chose it would certainly be costly, and could probably be disposed of if too abominable for use. He did not expect that Jenny's parents would visit her much in her new home. He would make it his business to deepen the gulf between North and South, to get and keep his wife more and more to himself so that he could make her more and more what he wanted. After all, he was only acquiring the raw material of a wife, to shape it to his needs and the needs of the Herringdales. Jenny's mind was as the waters of creation, without form and void, and he could move on its face and create out of it what world he willed. Better that than a fiery mind in conflict with his own and giving birth to its own stars. He dreamed of Jenny as the ideal wife, submissive, following, comforting, such as Isabel could have never been.

As the days drew nearer the marriage fixed for October, Jenny began to have a multitude of thrilling disquiets, which she could not quite drive out of her head with thoughts of satin and linen. Sometimes for hours after she had gone to bed, she would lie awake with her heart beating fast. Her mind would be full of pictures which she could not darken, though she did not

know if they had any counterpart in waking life—pictures of herself and Humphrey in contacts which she could not feel sure would be blissful or terrifying. He had come to stay for short periods at Slapewath twice since their betrothal, but neither time had they achieved quite that intimacy which she had hoped. She had thought that when their first shynesses were broken down they would open their minds to each other, they would give and receive delicious confidences. But, strangely enough, nothing of that kind had happened. The ardour of his love seemed to have deepened, his kiss was readier, his touch more passionate, but his mind was as much a stranger to hers as at the beginning. She had made one or two tentative approaches, but he had not seemed to notice them, and she had drawn back. Well, perhaps it would come when they were married. Men always were reserved in comparison with women, and she must not alarm him by trying to force his confidence. Perhaps he was a little afraid of her—more than she was of him—and she must be patient and let things go slowly.

§9

In spite of northern prejudice, the wedding took place in London. Mallard pointed out that his friends would find it impossible to come to the ceremony if it took place in Middlesbrough, and as Mallard's friends would be the chief lustre of the day, and Bastow's friends were invited only to be dazzled by Mallard's friends, it was essential to find some middle ground where both could fulfill their appointed functions.

He also insisted that the wedding should take place in a church and not in a chapel. He had been a little disconcerted to find that his bride was a Noncomformist. He did not say much about it, for he did not want to stir up opposition to the changes he was resolved to make, but he pointed out to Bastow as delicately as he could that in the South nobody was a Noncomformist unless he were a labourer or a tradesman, that the Squire was the backbone of the Church, and Rector's warden, and that scandal would follow if he entered a chapel for any purpose whatsoever.

Bastow too was disconcerted, but he did not argue the matter. He feared, as he had feared before, that if he argued, his conscience might be roused, and might force him to raise an opposition that would mean strife and perhaps disruption. Experience told him that his conscience was best left alone, as it invariably held views that were contrary to its owner's true wishes and interests. Like a wise man he listened to the voice of experience, knowing that if he had listened to the voice of conscience he would not now be a wealthy iron-master about to marry his daughter to a baronet.

He brought his family up to London and engaged a suite for them at the Langham Hotel. The wedding was to be at All Souls, Langham Place, so the position was convenient, though it cramped Bastow in the display of carriages he had meant to make in the London streets. The last day or two were spent in and out of shops by the bride and her mother, in and out of banks and lawyers' offices by the bridegroom and her father. There seemed to be nothing to a wedding but clothes and money, and when the last evening had come and the last document was signed and the last trunk was packed, Jenny sat a little forlorn in the drawing-room of the family suite, feeling that the main business of matrimony was over.

It was here that her brother found her, sitting in the twilight, looking a little ghostly, as if she belonged already to the past.

"Hullo, Jen—actually sitting still!"

"Yes, there's nothing more to do now. It's all finished."

"Finished! What a thing to say—I should say it's not begun."

"Oh, you know what I mean."

She spoke with an irritation that was new to her, and she suddenly struck him as pathetic and forlorn. He wondered what of real preparation for marriage she had made in the midst of all this fuss.

He came and sat beside her.

"You're quite happy, Jen?"

"Of course I am—I'm only so very tired."

"Where's mother?"

"Lying down."

"I suppose you've had some talks with her about your marriage."

"Oh, yes, heaps. But there's really no need for her to bother so much. You see all the servants have been there for years, and know much more about the house and housekeeping than I do."

"Yes, I should say you would find all that part of the business very plain sailing. But, of course, it'll be different from Slapewath, you know—less cash but more credit, if you see what I mean. You'll be the lady of the Manor, and expected to behave as such, but on the other hand you won't have half the luxuries we have at home."

She did not seem to have considered this aspect of things.

"Shall I have to entertain a lot?"

"I expect so. You're going to live right in the midst of your husband's friends. It'll be quite a different society from ours up in the North—old families, you know, not self-made."

"Oh, dear—" she seemed troubled, and he felt sorry to have disturbed her with what was, after all, only one of the many non-essentials with which the situation was overlaid. The true heart of the business seemed as remote as ever, and being only her brother he felt he could not draw nearer. They had always been fond of each other, but lately one or two small barriers had risen between them—the different outlook that Oxford had given him, and her distrust of his "ideas," which she had been taught to consider silly and unsuitable.

But suddenly, of her own accord, and to his surprise, she drew closer.

"Tim, you like Humphrey, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"He's very clever, isn't he?"

"He's all that."

"Sometimes I feel you know him better than I do."

"How can I?"

"Well, he talks to you about the things that interest him—the land and industry and war and so on. I don't seem able to make him talk to me."

"I expect he's got something better to do when he's with you. But don't worry. The talk ull come later, if you show him you're waiting for it."

“I must try to learn to talk—cleverly—like you do. Tim, you’ll come and stay with us sometimes, won’t you?”

“Of course I will, when you want me, but I don’t suppose you’ll want me much at first.”

“Oh, yes, I will, I’ll want you to talk to Humphrey—till I’m able to do it myself.”

“Jenny, don’t be so very, very young.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, this. Don’t believe what you’ve probably been told—that a man likes sweet, flower-like, child-like innocence, ad nauseam and ad infinitum. You’re very young and sweet and beautiful, but don’t kid yourself with the idea that men prefer beauty to brains. Some may—though not nearly so many as is supposed—but a man like Humphrey doesn’t.”

“But if I haven’t got any brains . . .”

“You have—if you’d get rid of the idea that you haven’t and that it’s rather creditable of you.”

“I don’t think it’s creditable—I do want—I do try—. Oh, Timothy, I think you’re being very unkind.”

Yes, he knew that he was, and it was unkindness thrown away. Now was not the time to attempt to shatter conventions. Let ’em stand—and do what they can to protect the venturer into the estate which is at once life’s most primitive experience and biggest convention.

§10

The wedding took place according to all Jenny's ideas of what a wedding should be. Choir boys, carriages, bouquets, bridesmaids, white satin, red baize, kisses, cake, tears—all the things that she had expected were there, giving her a pleased impression of complete success. She drove away all smiles and waving fluffy ends of lace and feathers, the happiest creature Humphrey had ever seen.

He was a little surprised, but on the whole relieved to find that she did not seem to have any of the usual bridal qualms—no tears for her mother, who shed them freely, no regrets for the old Grange in the North or the fields of Eden-in-Cleveland. He did not know that the absence of such tears and regrets was due to her conviction that, alone with her bridegroom, she soon would know the mystery of his mind, just as he would search hers and lift it out of the shadows. Timothy's words had given her a new hope and boldness. She would no longer accept the idea that she was silly and ignorant—she would try to please him with her thoughts and conversation, just as she would try to please him with her clothes and appearances. She felt she had been too timid in the past. Marriage would make all the difference, break down those barriers between mind and mind which she had deplored. "A marriage of true minds?" . . . Who had written that? Was it Tennyson or Shakespeare?

Humphrey did not remotely guess such thoughts. They would have appeared to him incredible in the brain of Jenny. A little virginal curiosity and eagerness he half suspected, but this passion for the union of their minds had no place in the estimation he had formed of her. He was glad she was so happy, though, so free of either apprehension or regret. He would do his best to keep her happy, care for her, pet her, give her pretty things, steal little caresses at dangerous moments. . . .

They went to Bordighera for their honeymoon. When given a choice, Jenny had asked for Italy, and Bordighera was in Italy—just in Italy, so that they were not involved in any difficult remoteness. For Humphrey did not want to feel himself too far from home—he wanted to be able to get back when the Herringdales called, which he knew the Manor would do before long. It never let him stay away many weeks.

Jenny was disappointed when at the end of the first week he suggested they should return to Paris. She had thought they would go on to Venice, Rome, and Naples. He had talked vaguely of such progress at Slapewath, when he had not yet realized all that exile would mean.

“It’s the wrong time of year for Venice, and too early for Rome. Paris would be ideal just now—and then we could run home if anything happened.”

“But is anything likely to happen?”

“Not likely—but it might. You don’t run an estate like Herringdales, short of cash and short of labour, without things happening pretty violently every now and then.”

“It’s so beautiful here. Can’t we stay on here, in the sunshine, even if we don’t go any further?”

He knew that he was being cruel. She had never been out of England before, and this sophisticated Italian seaboard was to her the land of glory and romance. But he hardened his heart. After all he had married her for the sake of Herringdales, and if he preferred her to it now, even in a small matter, he would be betraying his own act. So he wired for rooms at the Hôtel St. James et Albany, and took her away from the sunshine and palms and sea to the unceasing downpour of the Paris streets. They stayed in Paris for a week of rain, at the end of which even Jenny was sated with her honeymoon and thought that they might just as well go home.

It had not happened—that wonderful mental discovery she had hoped to make and see him make. But her ideas had changed a little. Her husband’s love seemed to make any more spiritual adventures unnecessary. With her heart full of his ardour, her memory sweet with new, rapturous experience, she could not believe that any woman had ever been loved as she was, and that was enough.

§11

It was in the short grey dusk of a November day that Jenny first saw Herringdales. The apple-red of the old house stood out against a background of purple wood—sallow and chestnut under growth which half ringed the Manor on the south, where the ground sloped to the marshes. In front the ground rose steeply to the road, so that, what with the hill in front and the wood behind, there was no view even from this high spot.

Jenny liked the bright red tiles that weathered the house front. They seemed to hold all the light there was in that grey afternoon. But in her heart the whole place struck her as ramshackle and neglected. The garden, the drive seemed wofully poor and small in comparison with Slapewath Grange. Somehow she had never expected the place to look as old as this. Most of the houses she used to visit were newly-erected monuments to industrial triumph, and such old houses as she knew were of the bluff grey Yorkshire stone that shows its age only in mellowness of tint and outline. But here the tiles, whether of roof or wall, waved and crinkled in an alarming manner over their supporting beams. It seemed to her that the whole place was in imminent danger of falling down.

However, she hid her fears, or rather they were all swallowed up in the dominating fear that she might fail to rise to this great occasion of entering Humphrey's home. She knew that to him it was the climax of their honeymoon. All the way from Battle station, where his carriage—a landau drawn by two huge, bony horses—had met them, he had shown her the pride of her new country. First there had been Ashburnham Woods, which he said had had furnaces at work when Yorkshire was still fighting the Danes, then had come Darwell Hole and the long climb up to Woods Corner. . . . She felt sorry for the poor horses—these hills were even steeper than the Yorkshire banks. Then had come a steep hill down and another steep hill up, and he was making her look back at old Dallington, clustered on the ridge behind them against a fiery sunset. Three Cups Corner . . . Punnett's Town . . . what funny names . . . Cade Street—this is where a yeoman called Iden slew Jack Cade the rebel long ago. . . . When shall we be in Heathfield?—All this is Heathfield, four miles of street, the little houses strewn along it like apples by the wayside . . . roads flowing into it—from Rushlake Green, from Waldron, from Horeham, from Hellingly . . . Humphrey says the road is like a river, widening as it gathers stream . . . the road is wide now with all the lanes that have flowed into it, and Humphrey says it will grow wider and wider till it reaches Cross-in-Hand where it becomes the great road that crosses all Sussex, by Maresfield and Billingshurst, to the west. Humphrey's

eyes are bright and his voice is full of a queer excitement . . . at last they turn down one of the little tributary lanes, which brings them to Herringdales, and then flows on to Rushlake Green.

"Welcome home, Jenny."

Humphrey kissed her as the carriage stopped. The house door was opened by an elderly butler, rather shabbily dressed, she thought. She looked behind him for more servants, but saw only a loutish youth carrying a tea tray across the hall. Then she remembered that her husband had told her that people did not keep men-servants in the South to the same extent as they did in the North. The servants at Herringdales were mostly women. No doubt this would make housekeeping easier for her.

A very old woman, so it seemed, was coming down the stairs, with a housemaid's cap on her grey head.

"Here's Anna come to welcome you," said Humphrey—"Jenny, this is Anna Luck, who used to be my nurse."

At Slapewath there was and could have been no such retainer, the children having passed the nursery age before Bastow's growing fortune made a nursery possible. As she looked at Anna, Jenny did not feel it a loss.

"How do you do," she said politely, shaking hands.

"Anna will look after you and maid you," continued her husband. "I don't think she'll be as stern with you as she was with me. You'll probably not need it. I may as well tell you that it annoys her very much to be called Any Luck. I sometimes couldn't resist the temptation in my youth, but of late my sense of humour has matured."

Jenny giggled. Her sense of humour was still green—"No Luck, I should call her with that face," she thought to herself, and felt in spite of Humphrey that she had thought a witty thing.

"Will you come upstairs, my lady?" said Anna Luck.

Jenny followed her up the wide wooden staircase into a bedroom where a new-lit fire fought with a misty and draughty cold. At Slapewath they had "hot water pipes" in all the rooms, and no room allowed like this dim wraiths of fog to crawl in from the garden, making the far corners ghostly and dim.

"Oh, please shut the window," she cried instinctively.

"It's shut," said Anna Luck.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know. I thought perhaps the fog—"

"It comes in from the garden. It gets all over the house. Not one of the doors and windows fits," said Anna Luck with relish.

The house certainly felt cold. Accustomed as she was to a strong contrast between the temperature indoors and the outer air, Jenny would have some difficulty in getting used to their approximation. She had

expected to feel warmer in the South, but she had never in her life felt so cold as this. Cold and darkness were the two dominant impressions of that first night. After dinner she sat by the drawing-room fire while Humphrey read reports and circulars under the lamp. The lamp! There was another strangeness. She missed the cheerful glare and hissing of the gas as much as she missed the cheerful warmth and gurgle of the hot water pipes.

She was cold and she was bored. She longed for the time to come when she could reasonably go upstairs. Suddenly Humphrey looked at her.

"You're tired, Jen. You'd better get off to bed. I'm sorry to be so unentertaining tonight, but all these things have piled up while I've been away."

She was glad to go, though there was something disappointing in ending her first evening like this. Either there should have been a party to celebrate their return, or else, and much better, they should have spent the hours in making love. This preoccupied, aloof Humphrey was almost a stranger, though she had had glimpses of him before.

Upstairs the mist lay like a film over the room. It seemed as ridiculous to fight it with candles as to fight the cold with the wood-fire that burned in the old-fashioned fireplace, where most of the heat went up the chimney. Jenny undressed quickly and crept for warmth into the four-post bed. But she could not go to sleep. The old house seemed full of noises, crackings, scuttlings, little creeps and whispers. She did not feel that it was haunted, but more as if it, the place itself, was a ghost, a memory of old times, and that it was whispering to her in the night, telling her old things about itself which she could not understand.

In the firelight the bed made a huge shadow on the wall. She had never slept before in an old-fashioned bed, and she found its vastness and darkness a little terrifying. It was hung with looped curtains of Jacobean stuff, and on the top of each post was a knob of plumes—it seemed like a hearse, and its shadow upon the wall was the shadow of a funeral. . . .

Jenny shut her eyes and tried to comfort herself. When Humphrey came she would not feel strange or afraid any more. He would take her in his arms and give her his warmth. Her consciousness of his fellowship would be with her in sleep, and she would not wake till the room was light with morning.

Soothed by her thoughts, she slept, to wake, as it seemed, hours later startled, cold, suffocating with some nightmare she could not remember. She put out her hand and found emptiness. Humphrey had not come to bed. Where was he? It must be long past midnight . . . the small hours . . . she sat up panting, her eyes searching the black pool of the night. But she would not stay any longer up here alone listening, while the old house whispered to her. She must go and find Humphrey. Perhaps he was not there. Perhaps the

house had spirited him away. Forgotten quakings of her childhood, when she had lain in bed upstairs, terrified lest her parents should have gone out and left her, returned now, and without waiting to grope for a wrapper, she ran out of the room on her bare feet, down the corridor to the stairs.

The hall was in darkness, and for a moment panic nearly choked her. Then suddenly she saw a thin line of light under a door. She stumbled towards it, and the next moment found herself in the drawing room, with Humphrey sitting as she had left him, poring over documents under the lamp.

"Jenny! My dearest! What on earth's the matter?"

"Oh, I'm so frightened!" she moaned. "I'm so frightened!"

He took her in his arms, and set her on his knee before the fire, which was nearly out.

"You're frozen cold. My darling child, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I couldn't think where you were."

"But it's not late . . . what! Oh, I see . . . it's half past twelve—I'd no idea the hour had struck. Poor little wife! Did she think her husband had forgotten her?"

"I never thought you'd stay up so late—and on our first night too."

"Half past twelve isn't so very late, and I've the hell of a lot to see to, just because it is our first night."

After all, he thought to himself, he had deliberately renounced his study and sat with her in the drawing-room. He'd have been much more comfortable working at his own writing-table.

But she was too pitiful for him to feel impatient with her.

"You poor little chicken. I must take you straight upstairs and put you to bed again."

"You'll come too. . . !"

"Yes, I'll come too, and you shan't be frightened any more."

"I expect it's my not being used to an old house."

"Old houses are better than new."

He cleared his littered papers off the table and turned down the lamp. Then he bent over her, and his arms swooped, gathering her up against the strong wall of his chest.

"You aren't afraid of the dark now?"

He seemed to know his way blind about his house. Old houses are better than new. In the hall was a pale starlight, and it was enough to guide him to the staircase. The stairs cried out as he carried her up them, but she no longer feared their voice. Borne in those strong arms she felt once more a

bride, and the voice of the bride answered the voice of the house, telling it new things about herself, which it could not understand.

§12

By morning the mist had gone, blown over the hills by a sea wind, leaving gardens, fields and hedges globed with moisture, and the air full of a damp, hurrying sweetness. There was hurry, too, and sweetness in the sky, where the clouds flew like doves over high blue windows. For the first time Jenny knew the balmy softness of the South, as the gentle wind stroked her cheeks and hair, and the sunlight fluttered down through the shadows of leaves.

It was Sunday, and Humphrey said he would take her to church. They had not been to church on their honeymoon, but apparently it was a ceremony he never omitted when they were at home. Jenny felt a little apprehensive, for he told her that in church she would see many of the people who were now to be her friends and neighbours, and would have to speak to some of them when service was over.

She put on a dark blue velvet gown, and a velvet hat trimmed with pale blue ribbon and one or two ostrich tips. Then in spite of the warmth she put on the sealskin coat which had been one of her father's wedding presents. She wanted all the courage of clothes for the occasion, which was made doubly formidable by the fact that she had never before been to morning service in a Church. Her father had not begun that dalliance with Anglicanism which some of the iron-masters considered proper to their social advance. Every fine Sunday morning he and his family had driven into Middlesbrough to worship at the big new Baptist chapel, and Jenny had only the vaguest idea as to what took place in Church at the same time. However, among her wedding presents she had been given a silver-bound Prayer Book, and, clutching this, presented at least the outward appearance of orthodoxy as she walked up the aisle of Heathfield parish church.

The Prayer Book did not help her much to understand the service. It had never occurred to Humphrey Mallard that there were human beings in England who could not follow the Order of Morning Prayer as Appointed to be Read in Churches, so he made no attempt to guide Jenny through its complications, though she pushed the book towards him rather forlornly more than once. However, she was able to find her ease in the hymns—though they seemed rather dull and restrained after the chapel's more riotous tunes and voices—and the shortness of the sermon brought the otherwise dreary proceedings to an end with a delightful surprise.

She noticed that the church was very old, and its light was subdued with broken colours. It had an old musty smell, and some of the draughtiness of Herringdales. It seemed very dim and quiet after the lusty brightness of the

new Baptist Chapel at Middlesbrough. She wondered if Humphrey also said "Old churches are better than new."

She was glad to be out again in the sunny, windy noon, even though it meant some shy moments when she stood in the churchyard and was greeted by many strange people. Humphrey introduced his bride to the Culpeppers of Tilement Hall, the Luces of Stream House, the Halnakers of Old Mogador, the Sherwoods of Lions Green, to the Rector and his wife, and many others. Her shy, sweet manner pleased him, as he saw it pleased them, and when all the meetings and greetings were over, he handed her into his carriage and took his place beside her feeling more than ever the Squire of Herringdales.

"Well, my sweet, I think you've done splendidly with all those people. I could see they liked you. I hope you liked them."

"Oh, yes, very much, especially that nice Miss Mollet and that nice Mrs Halnaker."

Humphrey writhed at the coupling.

"They're two very different kinds of women. It's odd that you should like them both."

"I think they're both extremely nice. Of course you can't really know people by just shaking hands."

"Miss Mollet is a silly old maid, who's somehow had her head turned by the Women's Rights idea. Mrs Halnaker is a beautiful and intelligent woman."

"Oh, yes, I could see she was more intelligent than Miss Mollet, even in that short time, and I really liked her the best. And of course she's very beautiful. I hope I'll get to know her soon."

"We must ask her and her husband to dinner with us one night."

While he spoke he wondered why he did not want Isabel and Jenny to know each other.

"Oh, yes, that would be lovely. But I don't like him as much as I like her. He seems sort of—of—inferior, somehow."

"He is inferior. He's given her a rotten time."

"Oh, dear, how very sad!"

Humphrey said nothing, and the conversation languished. Jenny was busy with the questioning, pitying thoughts that lay underneath her words, while Humphrey was impatiently asking himself if all her life she would make inadequate remarks beginning with "oh." He had lost a little of his pride, but before they reached home he had comforted himself with the thought that though she might fall short in private, in public she was supremely satisfying.

§13

Later that week Jenny wrote to her brother Timothy. She wrote to her father and mother dutifully every Sunday, but there was no fixed day for Timothy's letter. She wrote whenever she had plenty to say. Since her marriage she seemed to have more to say to Timothy than in the days before it, when a vague barrier of "ideas" had stood between them in their daily intercourse.

> I do hope you will soon be able to come and stay here, though I must warn you it is very cold and gloomy after Slapewath. We have nothing but candles and lamps and mostly wood fires, and none of the doors or windows fit properly. The house is very old. It was built in Queen Elizabeth's time, so no wonder it is not comfortable to live in. But I am very proud of it, for Queen Elizabeth specially gave it to Humphrey's family, after they had made themselves rich over the iron-working. Just like Father—isn't it funny? There is a place called Pigstone, where their works used to be. It is a farm now.
>
> I have not seen much of the neighbourhood, as I have been sitting at home waiting for people to call. When they have finished Humphrey says I can go hunting. That will be lovely. A great many people have called, and they all seem very nice. But it is a funny thing—the grander they are, the worse their style seems to be. There was a Lady May Birkett came over from Muddles Green, and she and her daughters all say "ripping," which you know we were fined for if ever we said it at school, and I am nearly sure that Lady Alfriston (a Countess) rouges. I really was quite shocked, but Humphrey says that a lot of people in Society do it, and powder too.
>
> There is a very nice Miss Mollet. Humphrey does not approve of her because she is an advocate of Women's Rights, but I think she is clever, and she has an excuse for her views, because she wanted to go to Girton when she was young but her parents would not hear of such a thing. She reads a great deal, and I hope she will help me to improve my mind. You know yourself that would be a good idea. There is also a very nice Mrs Halnaker. I don't think she is clever, but she was so charming when she came to see me, and she has asked us to dinner next Tuesday, even though we have not yet returned her call. She has a lovely, laughing sort of smile. I

can't describe it. She told me one or two very useful things, too, about housekeeping and entertaining, which I really want to know just as much as to improve my mind, and I do hope we will be friends, as she is quite the nicest person I have ever met.

Oh, Timothy, it is so funny being Church. I went to Church last Sunday, but found it very difficult to understand. There is a Chapel, too, and it is very pretty, but Humphrey says I must not go to it, and I expect in time I will know what Church is about. The Rector and his wife called yesterday. They are very poor, and his clothes were so shabby. She wore a thing she called a bosomette, so that she can use the same gown for day or evening wear. I felt very sorry for her, but it appears that the Church clergy are often poor like that. I asked Humphrey if I could give her one of my evening dresses, but he says she would be offended, as, though they are poor, they are not poor in that sort of way, which is a pity.

There is a housemaid here who used to be Humphrey's nurse, and she is a sort of maid to me. Her name is Anna Luck, but I call her No Luck, because she does not look as if she had ever had any. She talks very queerly, as all the common people do round here. You know I used to understand our Yorkshire and sometimes talk it for fun. Ee, lad, but yon's champion, you know. But here they all talk as if they hadn't any teeth. They slide the words together in their throats like this—"der a' o' i' d'ee, ire," which means "there's a hole in the hedge, Squire." I do hope I shall learn to understand them soon. I do want to be a success as lady of the Manor, and I've not forgotten what you told me about my mind.

§14

This business of improving one's mind . . . Jenny had never thought it would be so difficult. At school you improved your mind by filling it with knowledge. A girl who knew the exports of Jamaica, the dates of the Kings of England, the Books of the Bible in their order, and half a dozen stanzas of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" could look down on the world from the vantage of a well-stocked mind. But all this information seemed to go for nothing when one left school. A quite different order of knowledge was required. Here at Heathfield people either talked about country affairs—hunting, farming, and such—or about London doings—plays and scandals.

Jenny did not feel at home with either. She knew little about the life of country houses, all the burning topics of land-owning and land-reclaiming, spring and winter sowings, repairs, hedging, road-making and such matters that often held the dinner-table from the soup to the dessert. She knew more about the topics of Northern dinner-tables, and could have talked quite intelligently, she felt, about iron or coal, if anyone else had wanted to talk about them. But here nobody troubled about such things as iron or coal, except in so far as their prices affected life in the South. They were of far less importance than hops and roots and wheat.

However, Jenny hoped that in time, if she listened attentively and learned more of country ways, she would be able to take her share in this type of conversation. The other kind was much more difficult. Out of her whole life she had spent less than a fortnight in London, and in the North nobody troubled about London very much. But here everybody seemed to know its mysteries. Many of the landed gentry had houses in town, and others continually paid short visits—"I was in Bond Street yesterday, and I met . . ." "We saw the Queen driving in the Park . . ." "Our drawing-room at Clarence Gate . . ." were phrases that at first seemed to bring an exotic atmosphere to her dinner table. Still worse were references to plays she had never seen or heard of, or to a man called Oscar Wilde whom everybody was talking about and quoting. "As Oscar says . . ." or "according to Oscar's latest . . ." was always a prelude to something that seemed to her quite shocking and untrue. She much preferred the agricultural type of conversation which prevailed in most houses, and could not help feeling relieved when the much-quoted Oscar was suddenly arrested on some mysterious charge, and disappeared forthwith from the dinner table, though she suspected his continued existence in the smoking-room.

The best part of that winter was the hunting. Three times a week the East Sussex Foxhounds met in the district, and the country of the Eastbourne

Harriers was close at hand. Jenny had learned to ride at school, and in spite of the counter-attraction of the bicycle, had often followed the hounds at Eden-in-Cleveland. She had a firm and easy seat, a love of hounds and horses, and a complete lack of fear. In the hunting field she could hold her own, however many battles she lost at the dinner table, and awareness of this gave a new confidence to her manner and a brighter glow to her cheek.

Hunting broadened her knowledge of her husband's country. Such places as Lankhurst and Moorcocks and Cowbeech and Horeham and Hazard's Green soon became more than mere confusing names. She rode eastward to meets at Penhurst and Mountfield, and westward to meets at Waldron and Framfield and Blackboys. She galloped cross-country from Bucksteep to Bird-in-Eye, she halted at dusk one evening in the yard of Huggett's Farm, where Huggett's Forge used to stand, and the first cannon was cast. Even in a winter's time she came to love this country of huddled, tilted fields, of narrow lanes trodden deep between high hedges, of red-walled, wavy-roofed farms, and white-capped oast-houses that somehow made her think of pigeons. At first it had seemed strange that the distances should be all fields and woods, blue and grey, instead of the purple horizons of the Moors, but even before the sunset had moved northward from the sea she loved them nearly as much.

She could be happy here, if only she could feel that she was pleasing Humphrey, which she couldn't feel quite confidently at present. There was still the unavailing effort to reach his mind, that hidden journey's end of lovers' meeting in a passion of thought. It seemed to her sometimes as if he held deliberately aloof from her, and yet at others she felt his impatience, his striving against the limitations of their marriage. She had moments of bewilderment and oppression. She had moments even of wild, mysterious fear. She said nothing about these moments, for though she could have talked to Timothy had he been with her, she was shy of the written word, and the neighbourhood of the Herringdales had so far failed to produce a friend.

She had seen much less of Isabel Halnaker than she had hoped. The dinner-party at Old Mogador—that queer, temple-shaped Georgian house on the road to Rushlake Green—had not proved the intimate affair she had expected. They had sat down eight to table, and she had not spoken more than half a dozen words alone to her hostess. They had of course asked the Halnakers to dine at Herringdales, and at first it had been planned to have them alone. But suddenly Humphrey had decided that they must also ask the Birketts and the Culpeppers, so the evening had again been formal and repressive. Mrs Halnaker did not ride to hounds that winter, as it appeared she was expecting a baby in the Spring. For the same reason, no doubt,

Jenny did not meet her much at the houses of their friends. But every meeting sent her away in a deeper enchantment. She resolved to model her deportment on Isabel Halnaker's, and as a first step ordered herself a dress of the rich, deep wine-colour that the older woman wore so effectively. But Humphrey for the first time had not been pleased with her choice. He said that they were such different types that it was ridiculous for them to dress in the same colours. He liked Jenny best in white or in blue.

The other affinity she had picked out of local society had proved disappointing too in a different way. Closer acquaintance had revealed Miss Mollet's mind as by no means in that state of progress and enlightenment she had first imagined it. After all, a thwarted desire to go to Girton in 1875 is not in itself sufficient education. Miss Mollet soon showed that in many important matters her mind might well be improved by Jenny's instead of Jenny by hers. For instance, her opinion of the male sex seemed, to the wife of three months' standing, to thrive on a complete ignorance of their character and habits. She spoke of them publicly as masters of selfishness and treachery, and in private as monsters of grossness and moral turpitude. Once or twice she shocked Jenny by her curiosity about the sexual side of marriage. She evidently had only the most rudimentary ideas on the matter, and yet her little sitting-room at Cade Street was littered with pamphlets on Prostitution and the White Slave Traffic published by Feminist Societies. She lived in two little rooms in rather an unclean cottage, and her poverty of means maintained the friendship long after her poverty of mind had ended it. Jenny felt sorry for the poor thing—who after all had suffered at men's hands, since none would educate her or marry her—and went to see her rather oftener than she would have chosen. Occasionally she invited her to dinner at the Herringdales—not to meet the Squire, but when they had what Humphrey called a charity dinner of Mr Soames the schoolmaster, and the Rector and his wife—the latter without her bosomette, and her neck displayed according to social law.

§15

In the Spring, Timothy Bastow came to stay at Herringdales. Humphrey felt that his coming would please Jenny and at the same time would not sweep her back too dangerously into the old contacts. Also he might make the home atmosphere more exhilarating, ventilate it with a few ideas and abstractions. It was curious, Humphrey thought, that when he had lived alone he had never felt dull but that now he was married he strove continually with successive moods of boredom and mental oppression.

Jenny was delighted to welcome her brother. His arrival made her forget the sorrow of the last meet and the last gallop, when the April menace drove the East Sussex hounds back to kennel. In spite of the changing weather they had a good run to Terrible Down, killing in the little wood that borders the Laughton road, and when she came home, tired and glowing, she found Timothy already waiting for her at the Herringdales.

She kissed him enthusiastically, and he saw how she had changed—grown prettier and more important—with just a touch of the hoyden, it seemed to him, as she came in with the skirts of her habit thrown over her arm, and her tall hat set rakishly by the wind. She on her side was not so pleased with him. He seemed worn and preoccupied; she told herself he must be working too hard.

The first evening was all talk—chiefly Timothy's and Humphrey's. Having made her first enquiries after her parents and those at home, and having received the satisfying answers she expected, Jenny was glad to sit and listen, glad to feel that Humphrey now at last had the comradeship of mind that he desired, even though she was not bestowing it. She listened carefully to their conversation, making notes for her own guidance. It seemed to her that her manner and point of view were not so different from Timothy's, after all, and yet she knew that even if she said the exact things Timothy was saying now Humphrey would not answer her as he answered him. Also she would never dare contradict him as her brother contradicted. Timothy contradicted almost everything he said, and he seemed to like it. She knew that he would not like it from her.

The next day Humphrey went over to Yockletts' Court, his estate in Kent, which he left in charge of a bailiff. He was over there nearly every month, and as the trains were few and the connections bad he generally stayed away for a couple of nights. Jenny did not care very much for being left alone at night, even though Anna Luck was appointed to sleep in Humphrey's dressing-room. The sighing and whispering of the old house, which now she scarcely noticed when her husband was at home, would

become very persistent as she sat alone in the drawing-room after dinner, and worse still when she lay alone in the great hearse-like bed with its columns and plumes. She would conceive the ridiculous fear that one day the house might actually succeed in telling her its secret . . . and then she would be finished, burdened, haunted. . . . She did not know why or how; but sometimes the fear would dominate her, and cowering down in bed, she would stuff her ears, and silence the voice that spoke out of the wall and the beam that answered it.

She had not dared tell Humphrey of these fears, but she had persuaded him to make his April journey into Kent coincide with her brother's visit. It would be good, too, to have Timothy to herself. When Humphrey was there she felt she could not spoil the conversation by dragging it round to her own interests, but alone with her brother she could talk as her heart dictated. She could make him tell her all the trifles of Slapewath and Eden-in-Cleveland and she would confide in him all her social aims and embarrassments, stopping only on the edge of that secret country where she and her husband wandered in search of each other. She could not take him there.

It was a fine morning, so she suggested that they should both ride. The horses were brought, and they rode down into the Cucknere Valley, by Pigstone and Clappers and Thunders Hill, so that she could give him at least the names of the old black country that had been. But she found him poor company that day, and all the good talk she had planned came to nothing. Even a gallop along the wide grassy border of the Dicker road gave him only a passing exhilaration.

"Tim, I believe you're not well," she said to him as they rode home —"You don't seem yourself, somehow. Are you over-working?"

"No, I'm not likely to do that at Oxford."

"Aren't you? I'd have thought . . . But I'm sure you're worried about something. You're not a bit yourself."

"What is myself, Jenny?" he asked with a smile.

"The Tim I'm used to."

"Well, aren't you used to a very odd creature, whose ways you can't always account for?"

"No, I don't think you're at all odd, Tim—even though I don't agree with lots of your ideas. You may be different, but you're not odd."

"What a splitting of hairs, my dear Jen. You make more distinctions than the dictionary. And when you have on your dinner-table a piece of china that's different from the rest, don't you call it an odd piece?"

"Well, anyhow, I wish you'd tell me what's the matter."

"Very well, then, I will."

She had refused to let him take her up an argumentative side-street, and after all he had come to Heathfield with the idea of telling her if not the purpose. He would have preferred to tell her just before he left, so that their days together could be unclouded, but evidently he had already brought into them the shadow of a secret, and it would be better to speak clearly at once. Already she was anxious.

"Tim—it's nothing to do with Mother?"

"No, not directly. Indirectly it affects us all. It's the firm that's causing anxiety."

"Dad's work."

"That's it. Only unfortunately they're not all Dad's. If they were, then we could manage better."

"What exactly has happened?"

"Nothing's happened yet, but I'm afraid it's going to. You see, the iron trade's getting past the boom. Business is much slacker than it used to be, and I feel something really bad in the way of a slump is coming. Our company simply can't face that. It's not organised to stand the smallest loss. All our profits have gone in dividends. It's foolish to pay those huge dividends, but we don't seem able to help it. The people who financed us at the start, and got nothing out of the firm for years, now naturally want their money back. We've not been able to put by a penny, and now if things should slump even moderately we're done for."

"But are you sure they're going to slump?"

"Practically. In some quarters they've slumped already. It's unofficially known that Hendersons' is going into liquidation and I've heard the same about Gibson and Partners. You see, the demand for iron isn't continuous, like the demand for coal, or the demand for eatables, such as the big Quaker firms are wise enough to trade in. If we were selling chocolates we could go on for ever. But the time's bound to come when every house in England that's going to have a bathroom will have got one. You've no idea how much of our trade is purely domestic—baths and pipes and stoves—and no amount of new building is ever likely to give us the boom we had when every British householder woke up to the fact that he ought to have a bathroom, with hot and cold water laid on."

"But what about machinery in factories, and all that?"

"There again you've got a rush that's died down. People have been building factories thick and fast for the last fifty years. Now we've got enough, and the whole thing's going much more slowly. As for a war, which everybody thinks would make the fortune of the iron trade, we're too rocky at present—anyway Bastow's is—for a war to do us the slightest good. The economic upset would bust us up before we could benefit from any orders

we might receive—not that the firm shall ever make war material if I can help it."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Nothing at present—just hold on, and try and prevent the partners losing their heads and forcing us into liquidation. If only we can hang on, we may be able to weather the storm."

"Timothy, what about my dowry?"

"Well, you're in the same hole as the rest of us. I'm afraid you may lose some of it. You won't lose it all, and you may lose none. That's all I can say."

"Humphrey would be awfully worried if he knew. He's counting on my money—my income, you know—to help along the estate, and pay off the mortgage on the land he has in Kent. We don't spend half our income, and the rest all goes to the land."

"Your husband's got some sense—more sense than we have. But don't tell him about this, Jen; it would only worry him, and it might make him furious with Dad. Of course Dad ought to have let him know how things were—he said he didn't know himself then, but he must have. Nothing may come of it all, and then it would have been a pity to have upset him. Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you, but you saw I was worried and it's been a relief to talk about things."

"I'm glad you told me. Is Dad frightfully worried?"

"He is a bit, but he's more hopeful than I am."

"Well, he knows the business better than you, so perhaps it's not so bad after all."

Timothy shook his head.

"He's got to bluff himself. But don't fret, Jenny. You shan't lose everything. Of course if we go bust you get your money out—what's left of it. That might make things up to Humphrey a good deal. I know he wanted ready money for the estate, and the fact that Dad couldn't give him any ought to have warned him. But I suppose he doesn't know much about business."

"No—at least not our sort of business. Though his family used to be in the iron trade hundreds of years ago."

"Well, I for one shan't grumble if the Bastows go the way of the Mallards."

"But, Timothy, you must stand by Dad and the firm, you mustn't let your ideas prevent your helping him now he's in a tight corner."

"I won't, Jen. Even if I don't love the iron-trade I love my people, and I don't want to see them ruined and disappointed and set to struggle once again in their old age. All the same I like the farms down here better than the

factories up there. Oast-houses seem to me a great improvement on chimneys, and it's a relief to see a view that doesn't include at least one Big Smoke."

"Well, as it happens, this farm we're riding by is Pigstone, where the Mallards' furnace used to be. That pond was their hammer pond, and the furnace used to be down just there where the little wood is now."

Timothy gazed in respectful silence at the low red farmhouse, the cowled oasts and many-coloured barns that were mirrored in the long smooth mere, the end of which was lost mysteriously in a low, scrambling wood.

"Well, if Bastow, Routh and Partners ever comes to look like this . . ."

"It was the biggest furnace west of Rye, and you could hear their hammers going right away as far as Chiddingly. That's why that hill we came up from the valley is called Thunders Hill, because you used to hear the hammers thundering away at Pigstone."

"How long has it been a farm?"

"Oh, ever since sixteen hundred and something. The Mallards gave up working iron when they became baronets and landed gentry. But they say that if you walk up Thunders Hill at night you can still hear the forge going —the hammers going—'boom—boom'—like thunder far away."

§16

Timothy did not stay long at Herringdales. After all, it was not a good place to come to with his special trouble—to stay with the man whom his father had deceived if he had not swindled, in the midst of the country which was haunted by the ghosts of dead iron-masters and dead iron-works. Once he had a dream in which he heard all the thunders—the thunders of Pigstone, and Clappers and Towncreep and Hazards rumbling away in the woods; and looking out he saw the darkness all red with fiery eyes, as the furnaces roared up from the woods to the stars of a Tudor night.

So he went home to Yorkshire, and for a few days Jenny felt anxious and troubled. But soon the impression of his visit wore off. He and she had not had another private talk, at least not on business matters, and her mind eagerly turned itself from the shadow. May had come with a delicious heat, and meadows such as she had never imagined for richness and colour. The Herringdales was warm at last, and the garden sent sweet smells into the house instead of fogs.

Towards the end of the month a little girl was born to Isabel Halnaker at Old Mogador. Jenny drove over to leave cards and flowers; she would have liked to see Isabel, but did not dare ask it. The house lay wrapt in a curious spell of sunshine—it was a silent, enchanted house. Great tubs of scarlet geraniums burned like braziers before it, and the spray of the fountain waved before it like a plume. They were queer, Jenny thought to herself, these old houses of the south country. They seemed to hold so much more than their present occupants, as if everyone who had ever lived in them, lived in them still, bound by a special immortality to the house of their mortal lives and loves. But Mogador was different from the Herringdales. It was not so much a haunted as an enchanted place. In spite of the sunshine and the red geraniums one pictured it living in an eternal moonlight, its columned façade a contrast of gleaming radiance and black shadows, its fountain no longer a plume, but a silver flame—and empty—no friendly ghosts to keep the darkness of it alive.

Jenny found herself longing for a house which is nothing but a home, a place to live and eat and sleep in, a place which like a good dog knows only its masters. She would like to go back for a little while to Slapewath, to her bright little room with its high ceiling, flowery wallpaper, and view of the hills. She wondered if Humphrey would agree to her going for a short while in the Summer, even if he did not come too.

Humphrey was moody and queer that evening. He would not talk, though she tried a variety of subjects. He did not seem interested in Mrs

Halnaker's baby when she told him about her visit of the afternoon.

"I wish she and I could know each other better," said Jenny. "I like her so much."

"But I don't suppose you have much in common."

"Oh, haven't we? I should have thought. . . . Well, of course she's much cleverer than I am, but then she's older."

"Isabel was always exactly like what she is now, even when she was your age."

"Did you know her when she was my age?"

"Yes, she came here in '85—she was just nineteen then."

"I do wish I knew her better."

Humphrey picked up a newspaper, and Jenny sank into a disappointed silence. It struck her that he was being rather unkind tonight. He might have entered more into her feelings about Mrs Halnaker.

Then suddenly a terrible thought smote her. Perhaps he was vexed and unhappy because though a child had come to Old Mogador, there was not yet even the expectation of one at Herringdales. She knew he wanted an heir, and they had been married over six months. . . . Perhaps he was worried about that. She felt her heart sink. Should she ever, she wondered, succeed in doing all that was expected of her? For one dreadful moment she saw herself as a failure, if not as a fraud. Suppose she failed ever to produce an heir, and suppose all her money was lost in the collapse of Bastow, Routh and Partners. What would Humphrey think of her then? Would he love her as much? Had he ever loved her truly for herself alone?

The questions seemed to shower on her like blows, and turning almost sick under them, she sprang up and ran out of the room. Humphrey did not seem to notice her going.

§17

A few days later she heard that Mrs Halnaker was very ill. Something had gone wrong, a specialist had been sent for, and there were grave fears that she might not recover. Jenny heard the news from Miss Mollet, and brought it to Humphrey, who had, however, already heard it from some other source.

"Isn't it dreadful," she cried. "Poor Mrs Halnaker! I shall go again and leave our cards."

"Yes, do. That will make an enormous amount of difference."

"But I expect she's got more flowers than she can do with already, so I won't take any this time. Oh, I do hope she'll get well."

"I don't. I hope she'll die."

"Humphrey!"

"I don't suppose she wants to live, poor woman. Her life must be wretched now—bound to that rotter, who's given her hell all these years. She can't have wanted to be burdened with another child of his. She's got three now. Three chains. . . . And all the goodness gone out of life."

"Humphrey, don't talk like that. How can you know?"

His manner frightened her. For a moment she wondered if he could possibly have been drinking.

He laughed rather dreadfully in a way meant to be reassuring.

"I don't know. Of course I don't know. I'm only guessing."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't talk like that. It's all dreadful."

"Dreadful! Dreadful! How fond you are of that word."

She swallowed her rising sobs, and walked out of the room with as much dignity as she could command. For the first time since their marriage he had really shocked and frightened her. The unkind sarcasm which had been growing in the last few days had now culminated in a cynicism and mockery that terrified her far more than any deliberate anger. She had tried to blind herself to his mood at first, but now it was impossible not to see, and the human spirit in her was outraged. He had no right to treat her so, however much he wanted a child. . . . She still believed him to be fretting over this, in spite of what he had said about Isabel's children. That was probably more sarcasm. . . . Some instinctive disappointment in herself made her persist in her conviction of his, and she was doubly hurt by his manner of showing it.

For a whole day she was shy and angry in his presence, and his perverse mood continued, holding them apart long after she had relented. But as her natural humility overcame her sense of outrage, she deliberately sought opportunities for reconciliation. They were rare, for she could see that he

avoided her; he was out continually, riding about his estate. But one evening, coming in from a drive to Old Mogador, where she had learned Mrs Halnaker was a little better, she found him huddled forlornly by the drawing-room fire, which had been lit for the chills of the June evening. In the dim light he looked pathetic and appealingly young. For the first time he stirred in her feelings that were possessive rather than submissive, maternal and compassionate rather than diffident. She went over to him, slipping her arm about him, pressing her cheek to his, to fill the measure of her pity by the discovery that it was wet.

"Humphrey, my dear, what is it? What's hurt you?"

He said—"Nothing. I'm all right."

But for a moment he leaned against her, pressing his head into the hollow of her breast; then he pulled her arm so that her face was drawn down to him and their lips met. For a moment he was just a little boy, then suddenly passionate husband. Her heart throbbed with the response to both demands from him, in a conflict of ecstasy which was almost pain.

§18

Jenny had once hoped that when Spring came her husband would take her to London. But she soon found that he had no such intention. He went to London himself every now and then, and had once taken her up to see Mademoiselle Genée dance at the Empire. But he rejected the idea of a longer visit during the season. By this time she knew that more than half their income was being spent on the estate. The house itself and the house's ways were very much the same as before his marriage. There were no such refurnishings and reconstructions as might have been expected when a man's income had been trebled. The creaking floors and fading furniture of Herringdales Manor continued to creak and fade. There was still no proper water supply, still no gas nor adequate heating. The doors and windows still admitted the weather freely when shut. On the other hand, the Mallard land was as a land reborn. Gates, fences, hedges had all been repaired and renewed, farmhouses glowed with new tiles and shone with new paint; some new machinery filled the tenants with mixed emotions of pride and fear, and outraged those of their labourers who still believed in Providence. And with it all, Humphrey was saving money to pay off the mortgage on Yockletts, to launch new schemes both in Sussex and in Kent, to redeem his dear land east and west for the glory of the Mallards and its own good luck.

Jenny was well pleased to have it so. She was enough in love to ask no more for her money than that it should give her husband what he wanted, and she was young enough not to care about domestic comforts and pretensions. She soon grew used to the lacks of Herringdales, and forgot the superior ways of Slapewath and the North.

Nevertheless she was glad to go there for a time in August. Humphrey himself proposed it, and said he would join her when his wheat was in. She had not seen her parents since her marriage; somehow, she could not picture them at Herringdales, and Humphrey did not suggest it. She also had an uneasy feeling that her father would resent the way her money was spent, and would generally find himself out of patience with the slow goings of the slow South. It was much better that the parting should be knit up at home in Eden-in-Cleveland. . . . She rebuked herself when she found she was thinking of it as home. But the thought deepened and grew as the train ran out of York, and the fresh stiff air of the Moors blew in at the window. Soon the outline of the Cleveland hills was seen biting the sky . . . and then came Darlington, the vanishing length of platform and Stevenson's engine, familiar tokens of return. . . . It was like the days when she came home from school. Countless happy returns seemed to throng her as she climbed out of

the train, to greet her father himself, who had come to take her the last few miles on the branch line.

The first evening was all joy and excitement, meetings and greetings, parents, servants, dogs, familiar corners of the house and grounds. Now she returned to them she could see a certain pretentiousness and lack of taste in the splendours of Slapewath. All the gas and glory failed somehow to give that sense of aristocracy which haunted every room of the shabby Herringdales. But she loved the house as a schoolgirl loves her home, and was careful not to hint at differences; though sometimes she felt inclined to exclaim—as when the lights went up on the dining-room chandelier, or when the long string of servants filed into the drawing-room for family prayers. What would her parents think, she wondered, of a baronet's house in which there was nothing but candles on the dinner table, not more than half a dozen servants in the kitchen—and no prayers.

However, these tokens of prosperity were reassuring. She could not believe that with so many outward signs of wealth the family fortunes were in any real uncertainty. If any crisis was imminent, surely there would have been a little less food, a little less light, a little less superfluity of service. She went to bed that night feeling happy and comforted, her mind at rest with her body.

But the next morning her comfort was dispersed—by her father himself as he joined her on a walk through the grounds. They skirted the cycling track, unused since her marriage, and he waved his hand towards the stucco pile of the Grange and its terraces, saying—

"There's trouble coming to all this, Jenny."

She was startled at his words, but before she could speak her eyes received the same warning as her ears. They had come to where a clearing in the trees showed the chimney of the Southbeck iron-stone mine, and she saw that it stood cold and lifeless as a pillar—there was no banner of smoke unfurled in token of the strivings within.

"What's happened?" she asked.

"Henderson's gone bust."

"But—but does that mean anything to us?"

"It does, my girl. It just about finishes us for the time being."

"Oh, Daddy . . ."

"I don't expect ye to understand the ways of such things, but when a big firm like Henderson's goes smash it spoils confidence all round, and many a business that might have weathered the storm goes under. Henderson's have appointed a receiver, and I hear that Gibson's ull have done the same in a week or two. That'll upset the markets and we can't stand it. Things have been bad with us for some time past, and now I'm afraid it's only a question

of months. . . . Tim says he dropped you a hint when he was staying at your place in May."

"Yes, but I haven't told anyone."

"Not told your husband?"

"No—not a word."

"Well, look ye here, Jenny, he'll have to know soon. And I tell you, my girl, it's important that your brass stays in the business. With care we may get this thing through in such a way as it'll mean no more than a sort of general reconstruction. We can start again—as other folk have done—as Henderson's and Gibson's mean to do. I shall have to sell this place and live quiet for a bit, but I'm not too old yet to climb back to where I've fallen from. We go up and down quickly in these parts. But if he won't let me put your money into our new show . . . Mark ye, my dear, it's your money, according to the law, and he can't touch it, capital or interest. But I know what it is to be husband and wife, and he'll strive might and main to get what's left of your capital into his hands. He never wanted it to be in the business—he wanted it to spend on his estate, to buy land with—just bare land. I'd never have let him have it, even if things hadn't been so tight . . . but he fought hard, and I'll wager, my dear, there'll be trouble when he hears what's happened."

Jenny did not speak. She could not help seeing Humphrey's side of the question, and realising that there were sinister accusations which he could bring against her father. On the other hand, she was as anxious as any director of Bastow, Routh and Partners that her money should be used for purposes of reconstruction, to redeem mines and factories in the North rather than empty meadows in the South.

"I did my best," continued her father, "but I couldn't push him further than he'd go. At first I thought he'd chuck the whole thing up, just because I wouldn't let him have the money to do as he pleased with. And after I'd talked him round on that, he got his lawyers to put a clause into the settlement that ud cover a situation like this—and I didn't fight it, because I thought we were all right then. Honest to God, I did, my dear. He won't believe that. He'll say I was bound to have seen this coming. But I didn't. I knew there'd be a slump one day, but I didn't think it would happen for years yet, and by that time we'd be like a rock. It hasn't really happened now—only we see it coming, and it's that what's done us in."

Still Jenny was silent. Her mind had never moved beyond the beginning of his last words—"At first I thought he'd chuck the whole thing up, just because I couldn't let him have the money to do as he pleased with." Had her marriage really been such an affair of bargaining? Had Humphrey really haggled with her father over her price? She knew that there had been big

settlements involved, and that she had entered the Mallard family bearing its relief, but she had never till then imagined that her entrance had depended on this relief—that if it had not been forthcoming she would not now be Humphrey's wife. The thought struck her with a chill which she could neither reason nor scold away.

"But the whole point is"—her father was still speaking—"that the brass is yours. He can't make you do anything with it against your will. . . . You must stand by your people in this, Jenny. . . . Your own folk have the first claim on you. You mustn't let him talk you over. . . ."

His words seemed to come from a great way off.

§19

So Jenny's visit to Slapewath was not a happy one in spite of her expectations. The shadow lay deep over her days. Now that her father had spoken, others spoke. She had long, sad conversations with Timothy and others shorter and less sad with her mother. Mrs Bastow saw herself back in the Middlesbrough street—six rooms and a backyard, and a little slut in the kitchen. She saw herself running across the road with a shawl over her head, to have a crack with her mother and Sister Alice. In time Jenny became queerly convinced that her mother was not unhappy in these anticipations.

"There's sure to be a house going somewhere near your Granny's. I can keep some furniture out of the servants' rooms when the other things are sold. That ull do us nicely—much better than anything grand. And maybe little wee Tibbie ud come with us, her they've just got in the kitchen. She's a nice little thing, with no airs, like some of the others. I'd be glad to have her with us when we go."

"But, Mother, perhaps we never shall go. Dad and Mr Routh may pull the business round yet. He said so."

"I think not, dearie. I believe they're expecting a lot of trouble at the general meeting next month."

"Anyhow, it won't be so bad as you think. We'll have to give up Slapewath, but it won't mean us being really poor."

"Much better to live homely and save the money, dear."

Jenny would do no more to shatter such an enviable frame of mind. Her own was very different. Her chief preoccupation was the thought of Humphrey's arrival and his probable reception of the bad news. Even when she had silenced the more sinister of her doubts, she still knew how angry he would be and how just a cause he would have for anger. Sometimes she thought of writing a warning letter—it seemed to her inevitable that some sort of preparation should be made. But she lacked the skill and courage. Her letters might have told him that something was amiss by their utter flatness, their complete lack of news, but she could not and dared not put her fears into the definite shape of words.

Perverse harvests delayed Humphrey's coming till the end of the month, and he would not be able to do much more than fetch her home in time for the hop-picking. But before he arrived the whole situation had changed, or rather had been complicated by a new element. At first Jenny had thought that her feeling of being tired and out of sorts was simply due to care, but a talk with her mother shed a new light on the matter. They went together to

see the family doctor, who confirmed Mrs Bastow's opinion. Jenny was going to do what was expected of her, after all.

The joy and relief were almost overwhelming. It seemed to her that here at last was a way out of her troubles as far as Humphrey was concerned. When he heard her good news she could not believe that he would persist in his anger about a mere matter of finance. A child would fulfill all his dearest hopes. Oh, how she prayed that it might be a boy!

She made her mother promise to tell no one till she had told Humphrey.

§20

Humphrey came. A drive in a sumptuous landau behind two fat servants and two fat horses, a reception by a butler and four footmen, a bedroom with a private bath, and a dinner of eight courses eaten off gold plate was his only preparation for the news that his wife's family was on the edge of bankruptcy.

This was duly broken to him in old Bastow's study after dinner, and for long hours into the night Jenny lay cowering in the gilt vastness of the best bed, wondering what was happening between her father and her husband. She never felt afraid at Slapewath as she felt at the Herringdales, so she did not go on any search as the moon climbed down from the midnight heavens to meet the white gleam of day on the edge of the hills. She thought that her father might have done well to let her break the news—she gave herself little airs of an experienced wife and told herself that she could best have dealt with her husband's temperament. But Bastow held that an elaborate knowledge of the iron-trade rather than of Humphrey Mallard's temperament was necessary to the occasion, and he urged Jenny not to drop so much as a hint of what was coming. She had felt all anxious treachery as she welcomed him and responded to his greetings and caresses, but she had sustained herself with the thought that she held his comfort ready waiting. When he came up to her, stricken by what he had heard, she would be able to whisper words that would heal him.

But he did not come. The white dawn woke upon the hills, and still he did not come. Then, towards five o'clock she heard a muffled step. His dressing-room door shut, and she waited, holding her breath. But still he did not come. She heard him moving, rustling, opening and shutting drawers. Then she remembered that there was a bed in the dressing-room, and he would very likely sleep there rather than disturb her. She slipped out of bed, and ran across to the door.

"Darling—I'm awake."

She pushed the door open, and saw him standing there fully dressed. His pumps were muddy, as if he had been out of doors, his hair was rumpled, and the dawn exposed the darkness of his unshaven chin. On the floor lay his bag, half packed.

"Humphrey! What are you doing?"

"Packing to go home. Go back to bed. There'll be time for the maid to pack your things when she comes."

"But—"

"We're going home today, by the first train. I won't stay any longer in this bucket-shop."

"Humphrey!—Oh, don't speak like that! Don't look like that! Dad couldn't help it."

"Then you know all about this incredible business?"

"No-o—no. They've only just told me. Oh, Humphrey, don't be angry. Can't you see how dreadful it is for them?"

"And for me. We may lose every penny—forty thousand pounds and only one year's income to show for it. Everything gone up in smoke. It was all a damn swindle. Your father knew this must come, and yet he told me the iron-trade was booming. I'd never have taken the offer if I hadn't believed him—hadn't thought the thing would pay till the end of our lives. If I'd had any sense. . . . But there's no good saying more. I've been had. That's all there is to it. And I'm done with your people and their low, bucket-shop ways."

Her own anger rose.

"How can you speak like that? Dad has always treated you splendidly. It's not his fault if. . . . And anyway, it's not your money—it's mine."

"It's part of your marriage settlement—part of your contract with me. I've been cheated. If I'd known how things were going, as he must have known. . . ."

"You wouldn't have married me."

The doubt that for days she had been driving from her heart, now rose to her lips.

"I couldn't have married you. God, child! D'you think a man like me can afford to marry as he chooses? I had to marry for my family's sake. Don't be afraid—I love you all right, but I'd never have let myself love you if I'd known your family was on the verge of becoming as broke as my own."

Angry, bitter tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Then it's I who've been swindled."

"You!—How?"

"I thought you loved me."

"I've told you that I do love you. But, God! I'm not a boy. I look where I'm going. I looked where I was going then, and what did I see? Why, people who were obviously wallowing in riches—the utmost welter of tasteless luxury and extravagance. How was I to know it was all bluff?"

"It wasn't bluff. We were perfectly safe and settled then. And as for now, we're different up here from you down south. We don't get shabby and seedy at the first hint of things going wrong. We keep things up till the end."

"Of course you do. It's all part of the swindle."

Jenny burst into a storm of weeping. She could not go on with the argument, which was tearing her in two between her parents and her husband, Slapewath and Herringdales. She ran back into her room and slammed the door. It was not till then she remembered the secret that she still held from Humphrey, and must now continue to hold.

§21

Her breakfast was brought up to her, and a silent, curious maid packed her clothes. For a mad moment she asked herself if she would go with her husband. She could refuse. She could insist on taking her parents' part and on staying behind with them. But the impulse did not last. She was too miserable to fight, and she saw that a heavy battle would be involved by such a decision. Also she saw that her parents themselves would not support her in it. They did not want an open breach with their son-in-law, which, if the cause of it were known, might damage the Bastow credit and precipitate catastrophe.

Both her father and her mother visited her while she was breakfasting.

Her mother came first.

"It's sad, dearie, your leaving us like this. I'd hoped Humphrey could have stopped a day or two at least. But he's in a mortal hurry to be back home. Have you told him, pet?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, you tell him soon. It'll make him feel happier. I'm afraid he's a bit downcast over our troubles. But when he hears your news . . ."

Jenny began to cry again.

Her father said, when he came—

"There's a lot that you can do for us, my dear. You can get that man of yours to feel a little less sore. At present he thinks he's been swindled."

"And so he has."

"For shame, Jenny."

"Well, if you had to sell me, you might have sold me honest."

"For shame, girl. That's a wicked way to speak. We talked about settlements, as was only right and proper. But I treated him fair. I treated him fine. He's no right to say what he's saying now. And remember, it's your own brass, my dear. You can do what you want with it, and if the smash comes—I'm not sure even yet if it will—the best thing you can do is to put it all back into the new business. It'll be a voluntary liquidation, just so as we can make a fresh start. You'll be a fool if you take your money out, and let your husband buy land with it, as he wants to—a lot of dead farms . . ."

Jenny did not speak.

"Your mother tells me you've got good news for him," the old man continued. "When he hears that I reckon he'll let you do whatever you please. The baby's father mustn't quarrel with the baby's grandad—eh, dear?"

Jenny turned away.

Her parents had evidently pooled their efforts to make her going appear as natural as possible. The hall was full of servants when they left, to hear her father say—"Ee, but I'm sorry you've got to go so soon. Still, harvests must be minded, same as everything else that comes out of the ground."

Her mother strained her to her heart and whispered something in her ear which she could not understand. Timothy kissed her sadly. It was the first time they had met since the storm. She had half hoped that he would come to see her in her room before she went away. But he did not. She saw that he too suffered from a divided allegiance. He felt the justice of her husband's anger, and his heart was not in his father's business, but honour compelled him to take his father's side and stand by him in the crash that was coming. On the other hand, honour—or perhaps less honour than the urge of life and circumstance—compelled Jenny to follow her husband, to suppress what she felt of the justice of her parents' case, to give her loyalty to the man she had chosen. As she drove off beside him, it seemed to her as if now for the first time she was "going away." The tears and embraces of the earlier occasion had meant nothing to her excitement, but now in all the tearless platitudes just over, she saw, a real parting of the ways.

§22

Humphrey had regained his calm. He felt that he had acted with dignity as well as decision. His departure had been no vulgar flight, but an effective thing, a situation through which he had moved as befitted an English squire, while his wife's family had betrayed their plebian origin and guilty consciences in a dozen petty embarrassments.

Also, though still morally indignant, and determined to preserve his wrath, he was beginning to see certain points of light. At last he might have ready money, even if not an enormous sum. It was quite likely that Bastow, Routh and Partners would pay their shareholders a few shillings in the pound. It might even be more. In which case he would have ten or twelve thousand pounds to do as he liked with. He was not afraid of his wife's giving him the slightest trouble in regard to her money. He would not find the Married Woman's Property Act standing between him and the redemption of Yockletts. After all he was not sure if ten thousand pounds in the hand wasn't worth forty thousand in the bush of Bastow, Routh and Partners, even at twenty per cent.

Jenny's manner on the journey home did not hold out much promise of future compliance. She was silent, almost sulky. He had never seen her in such a mood before. But he was not afraid. Her will, he knew, had no chance against his, even if the pleadings of Slapewath were not so far away. Besides, this mood could not last—it would melt and yield, giving place to a reaction of submission and love. After all, poor little thing, she must feel terribly sore at having to leave her home in this way—and probably she had had a bad time with her parents before he came. Also, he acknowledged, he had spoken unguardedly in his moment of wrath. He had revolted at the sentimentality of her outlook on their marriage—the romanticism which made her ignore its need for a firm foundation in finance. He had tried to show her that no marriage between sensible people can be built on air, forgetting that she was only a girl, with her head probably still full of nonsense about "love in a cottage" and "loving me for myself alone." Perhaps he had been cruel to her unsophistication.

He tried to atone by his tenderness during the journey. He looked after her and waited on her, he petted her when they were alone. But she would not yield. He sometimes thought she must have something on her mind, some secret she was holding back from him, so obstinate and yet so anxious was her silence, so stiff and yet so trembling the little body he held in his arms as the train ran through the Shires.

As they drew near London he saw that her misery was not entirely spiritual. She was evidently feeling ill; but she spurned almost angrily his suggestion of a night in town. She would be all right, she said, as soon as they were at home; she was only tired after the long journey. He redoubled his care and tenderness and as her bodily discomfort grew, she allowed her head to droop upon his shoulder and received in hers his cherishing hand.

As he held her huddled against him in those last miles of journey from Tunbridge Wells to Battle, it suddenly struck him that perhaps her sickness and bad health had a happy interpretation. After all, it was time. . . . Poor little thing, poor little wretch. . . . Well, if this was true, everything else was settled beautifully. She would be all his. The North would have no more chance against the South.

§23

In the end it was Humphrey who told Jenny her own secret. The next morning she said that she felt much better—quite well, and would get up. But he insisted on her staying in bed till the doctor came.

"I shouldn't wonder, darling, if he didn't tell you something you'd be very pleased to hear."

Her eyes and mouth opened upon him in three round O's.

"Hadn't you even thought of it?" he asked, smiling.

"Why . . . but how did you know?"

"I don't know. I'm only guessing—putting two and two together. That's why I've asked Dr Wood to call."

"But it's true. Our doctor at home told me three days ago."

He stared at her.

"Your doctor told you! Then why in God's name didn't you tell me?"

She hid her face in the pillow.

"How could I?"

"Jenny . . ."

He slid his arm under her and tried to lift her out of her sudden attitude of grief. But she stayed with her face obstinately hidden.

"Darling, darling—aren't you glad?"

"I was glad."

"Then why aren't you now? Surely you're not so angry with me as all that."

She could not speak. She could not tell him why her glorious, thrilling secret had remained unspoken—why it had become a mere hidden thing in her heart.

"My little Jenny, don't treat me like this—when you've made me so happy. Don't you know that I've wanted this more than anything?"

"You only—only want it because it's—it's one of the things that you married me for."

"But of course it is, my sweet. Why on earth shouldn't it be? Isn't it natural that when a man loves a woman he should want to be the father of her child?"

"It's not a child—it's an heir."

Humphrey almost laughed. Then he almost smacked her—silly little thing with her idiotic backfisch ideal of a marriage that never touched earth. Then as he looked down at her huddled there on his arm, and felt the dampness of her tears, both amusement and anger suddenly turned to pity.

"You poor little thing. You poor little heart."

He caught her to him, holding her and kissing her with a passion that for months he had thought dead.

“You poor little bird.”

PART II
BEGGARS AND QUEENS

§1

The hop harvest was gathered on the slopes of Heathfield and Cross-in-hand. For the first time since her coming, Jenny saw the Sussex country-side faintly smoked. Dim blue clouds drifted from under the cowls of the oasts, bringing a pungent, malty sweetness into the lanes. Blue pillars rose from the cottage chimneys, as wood-fires were kindled in the September dusk. While in the corners of fields and gardens bonfires of burning leaves seemed to send the very breath and ghost of Autumn into the thickness of the air.

Jenny liked to walk in the fields, to sniff the smoke-scents, so different from those that used sometimes to blow in at her window at Slapewath when the wind was from the sea—to watch the workers, so different, in their coloured, dawdling groups, from those grimy squads that garnered the more sinister harvests of underground. The Autumn seemed to play to her heart, to give her an echo of wistful, sweet loss, to give with its mood of regretful futility an answer to her own thoughts about her child. She thought a great deal about her child in those days, but spoke little.

Her husband would have spoken much, if she had not discouraged him with her silence. His attitude towards her had changed—it was more fond, more proud. She had evidently made him happy—so happy that the fall of Bastow's scarcely seemed to trouble him for the moment. After all, an heir was even more vital to the Mallards than a fortune. What profit to buy land and till fields, to build barns and houses, if in a few short years the family is dead and the land gone to strangers? Better a wife poor and fertile than rich and barren. She knew that was how he thought, and for that reason his changed mood did not bring her the happiness it might. She could not feel that it was herself he loved—had ever loved. Rather it was what she stood for, what she gave him. She now felt sure of this.

She was young enough to experience a certain luxury in sorrow, and her wanderings in the fading lanes of Autumn fed a mood that was often sweet. As she roamed down the sides of the hopfields, and watched the workers stooping over the binns, their children playing round their feet, the scent of the hops rising from their labour like a sweet smoke, she would picture herself as a bird in a golden cage, a prisoner of the South. In the North men went to work in darkness and danger, their children could never play where they stood over their toil, and the smoke of their labour choked and stank. But in the North was her home, her memory. She was an exile here, even though the land was fairer than the land she had lost. She told herself she would willingly exchange these scenes of peaceful, contented labour for one glimpse of the red, naked men who stoke the furnaces where iron is melted,

dancing like demons in the red light, with their arms held up before their scorching faces . . . or of the black, sooty men who come pouring away from the pithead at the end of the day shift, marching home in boots full of coal-dust to houses that are black with the eternal smoke. . . .

§2

In November the firm of Bastow, Routh and Partners went voluntarily into liquidation, as did one or two smaller firms whose crises had been precipitated by the crash of Henderson's and Gibson's in the Spring. The examination in all cases revealed the same causes of failure—bad company management, the paying away of profits in exaggerated dividends, unsound finance leading to collapse at the beginning of a trade depression which better founded undertakings would have survived. It was shown however that at the winding up of the company, the shareholders would be paid eight shillings in the pound. This meant that in exchange for the loss of an income of eight thousand a year, Jenny would receive about fifteen thousand pounds in ready money.

Her father wrote urgently to persuade her to reinvest it in a new undertaking that he and his partners had planned. A new Bastow's would rise on the ruins of the old, and in time, he hoped, recover all the lost glory. They had already received gratifying promises of new money but it was important that the old capital should be reinvested, and he trusted his girl to set an example to the other shareholders and stand by the firm.

> I am selling Slapewath—or trying to. But folks are so upset with all that's happening round here, that money is tight, and no one will spend it on big houses. I could sell the land without the house tomorrow. We shall move into Middlesbrough and live quiet for a bit. Now Tim has left Oxford he will stand by me and help me through these bad times, as I'm sure you will, my dear. Your old father was generous when you married. If I hadn't given you so much things would be easier now, and I shouldn't have to bother you to re-invest your capital with us, though, after all, it is to your own advantage to do so.

Jenny showed this letter to Humphrey, who, however, read it unmoved.

"You'd be a fool to let him have the money, Jen. After all, if he can't manage without it, he must be in a bad way, and the new business will come to nothing, like the old. Anyhow, he could never pay you anything like twenty per cent.—they'd never dare do that again after what was said at the examination. Besides, it isn't income we want down here—it's ready money. Give me a good lump of hard cash to spend on the land, and I warrant the returns will be better than any five per cents."

"But father wants it very badly. It seems wrong to stand out against him now, when he's been hit so hard."

"Of course he'd rather have it than lose it. But he can manage without it. And you're much better out of all his concerns. If he's been hit, it's only because he's asked for it. And I may say it's no more than he deserves. You don't seem to realise how badly *I*'ve been let down."

"Oh, Humphrey, I do."

"Then give me my chance. Your father's got his, whether you let him have the money or not. But if you reinvest it at five per cent, I'm simply done for. We'd get only about seven or eight hundred a year—not enough to pay the interest on the mortgages."

"What do you want to do with the money, Humphrey?"

"First and foremost to pay off the mortgage on Yocklett's Court. I can't redeem all the Kent land—I'd want more than twenty thousand for that—but I could save Yocklett's and about five hundred acres. Then I'd put it in proper order—I could spare a few thousand out of capital—and what with that and the seven or eight hundred saved every year in interests, I'll make it pay, so as even your father will see there's money in land."

"But you've so much land here in Sussex. Why must you keep up another estate in Kent?"

"Because it's the best land I have—much better than the Herringdales. If I can save Yocklett's Court I shall be able to make a fine thing of it—an estate worth having—an estate worth passing on to our children, Jenny dear. You've got to think of the baby that's coming as well as of your husband. If I don't redeem the Yocklett's land within the next four years I'll lose it for ever. Monkbridge and Seymour have said that they won't renew—anyhow, not on the old terms, and I couldn't afford others. Jenny, you can't put your father before your husband and your child."

He had carefully omitted any appeal to her own interests. He had carefully made it a matter of altruism—the love of her father ranged against the love of her husband and baby. The latter, of course, must win. But he did not guess that in her heart a battle was raging on personal grounds. To Jenny, the Kent land stood for parting and estrangement. Yocklett's was a place for which periodically he left her. If it was the best of his possessions, it was a best that he had never shown her.

"Why do you never take me to Yocklett's?" she asked abruptly—"If my money's going to save the place, I may as well see it."

"Oh, of course I'll take you—whenever you wish. But I never thought you'd care to come. It's a very old house, you know—tumbledown. I'm sure you wouldn't like to stay there. It's not the sort of place you'd care for at all.

You wait till I've put it in order, and then I'll take you. I'm sure you wouldn't like it now."

§3

It was natural that Jenny's decision should lead to a breach with her father. Not without reason, perhaps, Bastow was convinced that her husband had forced her hand.

"Mark my words, but he's made the girl ask for her money so as he can spend it on his damned rubbish-heap of a farm. She's not the sort to turn against her kin—she'd have given us the brass and welcome if she'd had her own way, and done well out of it too, as I'll show the world. But he's always wanted cash—asked for it when he asked for her—to spend on his pigs and mangold-wurzels. She'll not see a penny of it again. There's nothing ever comes out of the ground except what you dig from the bottom."

Many angry letters travelled from Yorkshire to Sussex, and so distressed Jenny, that Humphrey refused to let her see any more, and took upon him their answering in his own way. This did not make the situation easier. Timothy wrote in a vain search after peace, but his letters only complicated the strife. He had the misfortune to see both sides.

He saw that Humphrey was quite right in declaring that he had been deceived, that Bastow must have known at the time the contract was made that the future was uncertain and the money unsafe. He had at least compromised with honesty in his effort to bring about a fine marriage for his daughter. On the other hand Mallard's conduct struck him as cynical and mercenary. On the face of it he had done well to secure himself by conditional clauses in the marriage settlement, and now that nearly half Jenny's dowry was about to come into her hands, to refuse to risk it in a second venture. But the cold fury with which he waged war, his entire lack of generosity towards the smitten Bastows, and his railing accusations against them, disgusted the son of their house. Also he made no attempt to hide the fact that he wanted the money for his own purposes—that he had always wanted it for these same purposes, really more, it seemed, than he had wanted Jenny. His greed of land seemed to Timothy no whit superior to Bastow's greed of money. Both of them were forcing the earth for their own ends—the rape of Demeter.

As winter passed into the cold, early spring, gloom settled upon Jenny. It was partly due to the stress of these family affairs, partly to her health—for her youth did not readily adapt itself to the burden of child-bearing—but mostly to a growing sense of failure and estrangement in her married life. In these last few months she seemed to have been walking away from Humphrey, down a long, lonely path whose end was in the wilderness. And now, when she was within three months of the birth of his child, he already

seemed far off—a dim voice calling, a distant shadow seen. They still ate together at the big oaken table, still drove together to call on their neighbours in the Manors and Granges and Halls, still slept together in the huge, plumed bed with its Jacobean draperies; but he seemed to her always further and further off.

Perhaps it was because her dream of him was dying. It was the husband she had imagined whom she was losing. The husband she had married was still there, as he had always been—the husband who had married her to give his fields new hedges and his barns new roofs and his family new sons. Before very long, perhaps before her child was born, the dream Humphrey would have gone right away, out of sound of hail, and in his place would be a stranger, who would always be kind, always considerate, and firm, and practical, and rather strict, and sometimes passionate, but would not be the husband she had lost, or rather had never had, save in dreams that were dead.

§4

A great unrest teased her in those days, and she wandered to and fro about the house like one of its ghosts. Humphrey, continually about on his land, or waging words with Slapewath in his study, did not notice how constantly she moved from the drawing room to the morning room, from the morning room to the bedroom, from the bedroom into the spare rooms, and sometimes from these into the sequence of unused chambers that filled the rest of the house. Anna Luck was terrified into a scream by seeing her mistress suddenly emerge from the blinded shadows of an empty room she had come to dust.

"Lord, my lady, but I thought you was one of them tokens that they say is in the house. You just about scared my soul."

"I came to see about the covers," said Jenny lamely.

"Isn't anything to your liking?" bullied Anna.

"Oh, yes, everything. . . . In fact, I'm thinking of sleeping here. I'd much rather be on the sunny side of the house."

The idea had suddenly rushed into her mind with a sense of deliverance. If only she could change her room . . . begin again. And this room looked normal and comfortable, with modern furniture. A few chintz covers, and it would be bright and reassuring as any room at Slapewath.

But Anna Luck shook her head, with its morsel of cap sitting on her grey locks like a wintry butterfly.

"You'd never do that, my lady. Not now—when Sir Humphrey himself was born in that very bed you think of leaving. There's six Mallard ladies died in that bed, as I know of, and two as I've seen—and children born. . . . Sir Aubrey's lady had nine and Sir Peter's seven. It's only of late our ladies have been grudging. I tell you that bed's alive with birth and death."

Jenny shuddered.

"That's just why I'd prefer to sleep in another. I'll speak to Sir Humphrey."

But she knew he would not tolerate her scheme. He was all for tradition, and he did not understand how much she was afraid. . . . He would think it an honour for her to lie under that carved tester with its century-soiled hangings, or to have the shadow of its plumes fall across her with the last darkness. . . .

Stifling sobs that would rise, she ran downstairs to her husband's study. She wanted his company, even if he were abstracted by business and resentful of her intrusion. But he was out, as usual. The butler told her he had gone over to an outlying farm at Foxhurst Green, and would not be back

till the evening. But she remained in the study. His traces gave her a sort of comfort, a dim companionship—the huge map of his estate, his files of bills and letters, his reference books, his pipes, his pens, all the litter of his landlordship, even though it was a side of his life from which she was shut out, or rather served blindly, as a slave without privilege or understanding.

Too restless to sit still, she wandered round looking at the shelves that were crammed with books, some new, but most of them old—drearily old, Jenny thought. She had always considered herself "fond of reading," but she had never read any of Humphrey's books. They had revealed themselves to her inspection as either coarse and shocking or dry as dust—very different from the novels of Edna Lyall and Rhoda Broughton. But today she found herself pulling one or two volumes out of the shelves. They were poetry—she had always liked poetry, though she had never, for some reason, read very much of it. Here were Rossetti's poems. She did not think she had seen them before—in fact she had always thought of him as a man who painted pictures.

The book fell open at a place marked by a small card, and, idly at first, she read:—

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
Unto thine ear I hold the dead sea-shell
Cast up thy life's foam-fretted feet between;
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.
Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs—
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

She read—baffled but absorbed, and as the last lines were reached a curious pang went through her. She only partly understood them, but they hurt her with beauty and pain half seen. "I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell" . . . "A shaken shadow intolerable" . . . "Mine ambush at thy heart." The words smote. A tear fell on the page.

She shut the book, then noticed that the marker was lying on the floor. Picking it up, she saw that it was a picture taken by one of the new Kodak cameras—an out-of-door snap-shot. It was a picture of Mrs Halnaker

standing on the terrace at Old Mogador, a gay smile on her face, her sunshade over her shoulder. It had evidently been taken two or three years ago, for it was beginning to fade. She wore one of the high-peaked hats that had been fashionable in 1893. But it was unquestionably a good likeness. Isabel was smiling at her out of the photograph with an invitation that seemed almost alive. It was as if she said, "Come here—I want to talk to you."

Jenny gazed at it fascinated. Then she suddenly made up her mind. She would order the carriage now and go to see Mrs Halnaker. It would cheer her up. She felt sure that in this other woman's company she would find comfort and courage. She must get to know her better. Anyhow her society was just what she wanted to lift the shaken shadows of this day.

§5

While the carriage was being brought round, she ran up stairs and put on her prettiest hat, trimmed with coque's plumes, and her sealskin coat, for the February dusk would be cold. A pleasant thrill of anticipation ran through her. Why had she never thought of doing this before? When she first came to Heathfield she had hoped great things from her friendship with Isabel Halnaker. But it had all ended in nothing. A merely formal acquaintanceship had expressed itself in an "At Home" and a couple of dinner parties. On the whole, it seemed as if Humphrey had discouraged anything more. She wondered if he disliked Mrs Halnaker—or perhaps it was Mr Halnaker. . . . But now she would take the matter into her own hands—after all there was no need for Humphrey to be drawn into an intimacy he disliked.

She was ready, and ran downstairs—to find her husband standing in the hall.

"Hullo!" she cried, surprised—"I thought you'd gone over to Great Tanners."

"I'm on my way there now. I've been at Pigstone all the afternoon, and just called in for some papers. Where are *you* off to?"

Her brightness was a good surprise after the dejection of the last few weeks.

"I'm going out to tea."

"Where?"

"With Mrs Halnaker."

She saw his face change. His disapproval was not all her imagination.

"Has she asked you?"

"No, but—"

"Then, is it worth while going all that way on chance? She's very probably out."

"I don't mind. I'll risk it. The drive will do me good."

"But now I come to think of it she's certainly out. She's hunting with the harriers—it's a bye-day of theirs, you know."

"But she'll be in for tea."

"That depends on where they've run to. And anyhow she'll be tired. You'd much better not go."

The brightness faded from her eyes and cheeks. She almost pouted.

"That's all very well, but I'm tired of being alone. And you'll be out—"

"I must. There's some trouble about their lease at Tanners. I've got to go over. But look here, Jenny, Mrs Halnaker isn't the only person you can have tea with. Why can't you go somewhere else? What about the Parsonage?"

“I hate going there—it depresses me.”

“Then why not try Miss Mollet? You like her, and she’s sure to be in for tea.”

“I don’t know that I do like her.”

“Oh, yes, you do. You’ve stood up for her many a time. You go there now, and have a good gossip.”

He was leading her towards the door, his hand under her elbow. “Mount Cottage, Elphick”—to the coachman as he handed her in.

Jenny felt really angry, but at the same time unable to protest. She could not argue with Humphrey before the servants, neither could she in loyalty to him give a contradictory order as soon as she had driven away. But she felt sore and injured, nevertheless, and took no notice of her husband’s farewell smile. Why should he interfere with her friendship in this way? Surely she had a right to be friends with whomsoever she pleased . . . and a woman to whom he himself had introduced her. . . . Well, never mind—she would achieve it yet—in spite of him.

§6

It was only half a mile to the cottage in Cade Street, and Jenny's anger, short-lived though it usually was, had not had time to evaporate during the drive. She hoped Miss Mollet would be out, and then, she decided, she would boldly say, "Mogador Hall," and let happen what might. But after an introductory vision of Miss Mollet's nose scouting through the window-curtains, the lady herself appeared at the open door, surprised, delighted, overjoyed, and only regretting that there was no more seed-cake.

"The Rector ate the last of it when he called this morning. I always like to offer a little Something to my guests, and he is especially fond of seed-cake. He apologised when he found he had eaten it all. But I said, 'Don't apologise, Mr Nixon, for you have given me an Intellectual Repast.' He was talking all about the Rosetta Stone, you know, in the British Museum—so very interesting. It's written in five languages, I believe, and they'd never have discovered what it meant if it hadn't been for the Bible. Not that I believe in Verbal Inspiration. And I can easily make some buttered toast."

By this time they were in her hot little sitting-room, warmed by the double fires of sunset and red coal. Miss Mollet pulled forward an armchair into which Jenny sank, more weary of mind than of body. It seemed strange now to think that this room had once appeared to her as a refuge from the faded aristocracies of the Herringdales. The wallpaper, the chair covers, the table cloths, with their gay patterns, the pictures that crowded the walls, the "ornaments" that congested the mantelpiece and innumerable brackets, had somehow reminded her of Slapewath's ornate homeliness. But during the last eighteen months her taste must have changed—pattern and shine were no longer what she regretted of Slapewath, dimness and austerity no longer what she deplored at Herringdales. Miss Mollet's parlour seemed to her abominable, and a fresh wave of anger surged against Humphrey when she remembered Isabel Halnaker's long low drawing-room, full of cool shadows and soft gleams, with creamy walls reddened by firelight and outside the window a pale view of lawns fading into dusk. . . .

She suddenly realised that Miss Mollet was talking about Mrs Halnaker while she prepared the tea.

"I've just seen her riding home. She's been out nearly every day this Winter. Such a change after last! Poor thing, it must have been awful. . . . Really, if I believed in Hell—which I don't, having read Dean Farrar's book—not Eric, you know, but the one about Hope—I'd picture it as a place where men were made to have babies, one for each time they'd made a

woman have one who didn't want it. Poetic justice, I'd call that. It's a pity . . . how are you feeling, my dear?"

Jenny was too deeply absorbed in her hostess's vision of an underworld to notice the question, but Miss Mollet answered it herself.

"You're not at all well. You look as if you'd been fretting. You should go about more. There's nothing to prevent you driving to meets, you know. It would bring you among people, and take your mind off things. . . . Mrs Halnaker used to do that now and then. It's rather queer and sad that she shouldn't have been hunting last Winter for the very same reason that you're not hunting this."

"I don't call it queer or sad at all," said Jenny irritably—"I've been wanting a baby ever since I married, and I expect she wanted one too. You seem to think that a woman never has a child except against her will."

She felt angry with Miss Mollet, and angrier still with Humphrey, who had condemned her to such talk. "Have a good gossip," he had said, with a man's contemptuous ignorance. Well, perhaps she had given him some foundation for his ideas by her earlier preference. The Jenny of those early times seemed very young and stupid to the Jenny of today.

"Oh, I don't exactly mean that"—Miss Mollet was defending herself—"I know some women would rather be mothers than wives, and I feel our man-made laws should provide for such. But on the other hand, one hears such dreadful things . . . personally I've always been thankful for my single state."

Jenny with difficulty refrained from the obvious retort, and her hostess pulled forward a bamboo table, spreading over it a Japanese tea-cloth. She was still talking about Mrs Halnaker.

"I'm glad she's beginning to recover her looks. She looked dreadful all the Autumn, poor woman. Of course it's partly her age and I suppose can't be helped. She must be well over five and thirty."

"As it happens, I know that she's twenty-eight."

She did not really know it, but at all costs Mrs Halnaker must be defended from this old maid's tongue.

"Oh! . . . then she must have married very early. She's been here over twelve years you know. I remember her when she first came—I was one of the first to call. She looked unhappy, even then. I believe the marriage was a failure from the start."

Red gossip, red fire . . . Jenny strove to drag the conversation off Mrs Halnaker.

"What a quaint place Old Mogador Hall is—quite different from most of the houses round here. Humphrey says it was built by an eccentric Halnaker who had a passion for Greek art."

"It always strikes me as such an unhappy place. I hate that Claude Halnaker—a thorough beast of a man, I should say. I don't blame her for any of the things she's done."

"What things?"—the question slipped out of Jenny before she had time to think.

"Oh, my dear Lady Mallard . . . well, of course I thought you knew. But I suppose . . ."

"I don't know anything—and I don't want to."

Miss Mollet looked at her curiously.

"Why, everyone knows that Isabel Halnaker is—er—well—exceedingly *fin-de-siècle*. Her husband goes his way and she goes hers. And I don't blame her. I'm no believer in different moral standards for the two sexes."

"Oh, please. . . ." Jenny made another effort to stop what she had started, but Miss Mollet seemed to hold Mrs Halnaker like a rat between her teeth.

"She'd have left him if it hadn't been for the children. . . . Of course it's lucky they're all exactly like him, or people would think . . . but as a matter of fact I believe each child means an affair of his and an affair of hers ending together. Then they go on with their married life for a bit and make the best of each other. But it always fails."

Red gossip, red fire. . . . Jenny felt uncontrollably angry—with Miss Mollet, with Humphrey who had condemned her to Miss Mollet, with herself for having ever in her ignorance liked this evil-tongued old maid. She suddenly stood up.

"I'm not going to sit here while you say things like that about Mrs Halnaker. She's a good and charming woman. I know her very well, and I like her better than anyone else in Heathfield."

Miss Mollet's first look was one of surprise. Then it changed to something more malevolent. The lines of her face seemed to loosen into a kind of stupid resentment.

"You're very generous to your friend," she sneered, "it's very generous and noble for you to stand up for her like that—very generous and noble."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, most women don't speak so well of their husbands' mistresses."

Jenny stared at her.

"Of course he didn't tell you about her," continued Miss Mollet—"a man wouldn't. You might have a different opinion of her if he had."

"How dare you speak like that! It's not true. Humphrey . . . Mrs Halnaker . . . they'd never. . . . It's only your beastly gossip. I wish I'd never come here."

"Very well—if you don't believe me, ask anyone else you like. Ask the servants at Mogador and Herringdales, ask Mrs Green at the post-office, and

ask—ask above all the bailiff and his wife at Yockletts. They'd tell you your husband didn't often stay there alone."

But Jenny had walked to the door.

"I don't believe a word of it, and I don't want to hear any more. I'm going."

Miss Mollet deflated a little.

"Won't you finish your tea?"

"No, it would choke me."

"But you're not angry with me for telling you the truth. Most women would have told it before this—thought it their duty. But I—"

"You didn't dare tell me such a lie—till I made you angry—then you invented it. Good evening."

She flung open the door. Outside the carriage waited in the green dusk. Coachman and horses all seemed asleep, but started awake as the lamplight from the open cottage door shone suddenly across the road and their mistress came walking angrily down the beam.

§7

She was too angry to think clearly. Her mind was a jangle of words —"generous and noble" . . . "their husbands' mistresses" . . . "ask the servants" . . . "the bailiff at Yockletts" . . . "your husband didn't stay there alone." How dared that dreadful woman?—How dared she? It was all revolting—she felt smirched by the mere listening. Lies! lies! lies—Dreadful, abominable lies! Humphrey had never loved Isabel Halnaker. Why, he scarcely knew her. He didn't even like her. It was just because he didn't want to encourage their friendship that he. . . .

Her mind suddenly seemed to fall blank. The jangle was still, and into its place came one cold question.

She gripped her hands together under the rug as the carriage lurched out of Cade Street into the Herringdales lane. Her anger had been at the sheer monstrosity of the accusation, of the lie at the expense of the two beings who held, one all her love, the other all her admiration. But now for the first time a doubt was in her soul . . . lighting up memory like a corpse candle . . . and by that baleful light a dozen half forgotten fragments of the past seemed to rise and fly together, to make one dreadful suspicion.

Humphrey! . . . After all, men did these things. . . . Oh, no, no, no! Not Humphrey!—But why not? . . . He had known Isabel ten years before he had met Jenny. . . . But Isabel was not like that—not that sort. She would never have done anything ignoble. . . . Wouldn't she? After all, what did Jenny really know about her? She had never met her except in public. She knew only what she looked, not what she was. She had only guessed and dreamed . . . Why shouldn't Humphrey and Isabel have loved each other years ago? And it would have been just like him to renounce her for the sake of his land —make a wealthy marriage for the sake of his land. . . . "Look in my face; my name is Might-Have-Been" . . . where had she heard that? . . . Why—that poem—today . . . Isabel's photograph.

She felt shaken and sick as the carriage pulled up at the Manor door. But she made a last effort with herself as she climbed down. She was a disloyal fool to be upset like this by an old maid's ill-natured gossip. Miss Mollet had spoken only out of resentment and spite. If there had been any truth in her words she would have said them earlier. And the rumour would have reached Jenny from some other quarter. . . . Humphrey and Isabel Halnaker! —It was preposterous. . . . But was it? Hadn't all the misery of the last few months been due to a growing conviction that her husband did not really love her?—had never really loved her? . . . Perhaps he still loved Isabel. . . . "Ask the servants"—"Ask the bailiff at Yockletts." . . . Perhaps they still met

at Yockletts. Oh, no, no,—that was nonsense. It was all nonsense. If he had loved anybody like that it would not have been Isabel. . . . Then why had he kept her photograph? . . . That was nothing—only a snapshot, a bookmarker. . . . But that poem. . . . "Mine ambush at thy heart." . . . What was it that it said?—She must read it again—make sure that it did not fit into the hideous pattern she had made.

She went straight to the library, and took down Rossetti's Collected Poems from the shelf. After all, what more natural than to mark a place with an old snapshot and then forget all about it? He couldn't value the picture much or he wouldn't have forgotten it. . . . But had he forgotten? Hadn't he deliberately put it there because it was in some secret way connected with the poem? And if he had always been as aloof and remote from Isabel Halnaker as he now seemed, how was it that he had a photograph of her at all?

Meanwhile her fingers, clumsy with anxiety, had found the place. Isabel Halnaker looked up at her from under that preposterous hat of four years ago, and her smile now seemed a little mocking, a little secret.

> Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart
> One moment through thy soul the soft surprise
> Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs—
> Then shalt thou see me smile. . . .

A sword seemed to go through Jenny. In one definite moment she seemed to experience the whole of pain. For the first time in her life her heart was pierced with jealousy. Her worship of Isabel Halnaker turned suddenly to black hate, her love for Humphrey seemed to flare into a flame so fierce and devastating that every feeling and thought was consumed in agony. They had betrayed her, these two. She saw it all now—the dreadful picture was complete, made up of hundreds of small strokes, words, events, behaviours which till then had gone without significance. The mercenary foundation of her marriage, which the last few months had revealed—the way in which Humphrey had always steadily thwarted the intimacy she longed for—and yet had seemed to know so much about Isabel, her plans and ways—his failing love, which seemed now never to have been true. . . . It was possible—it was probable—that he still loved Isabel—that she was still his mistress. . . . Yockletts . . . that was why he would never take his wife to Yockletts—lest she should know. . . .

A kind of frenzy possessed her. The face that smiled up at her from the photograph she still held in her hand seemed to mock her to madness—

> Mark me, how still I am!

She suddenly tore it across, ripped up the smiling mouth, then flung the fragments on the ground and stamped on them, grinding them with her shoe. She did not feel like Jenny Mallard, but some totally different being, dispossessed both of human restraints and human rights. It was with a sense of return that a moment later she swung round in reply to the calling of her name, and saw Humphrey standing just inside the door.

§8

"Jenny, my dear, what is it?"

He came forward into the room, laying his hand upon her arm. At his touch the madness revived, and she flung him off, crying—

"How dare you touch me?—How dare you come near me?"

Then he understood. The torn photograph at her feet was enough to show him what had happened. Ever since his marriage he had been living in the half expectation of this—of her hearing some rumour about himself and Isabel. He had more than once thought of telling her himself, but he had distrusted the immaturity of her mind, and had, moreover, felt himself totally unable to face her inevitable question: "Do you care for her still?" After all, the chances of her hearing were very small. The affair had been discreetly conducted, mostly at a long distance from Heathfield. If she were ever to go to Yockletts that would be a different thing. . . . But now some gossip must have reached her. She must have heard some tale. . . .

"Jenny, who's been upsetting you? What's happened? Come and speak to me here."

He tried to lead her to the couch, but she remained stiffly and obstinately standing, her heel on Isabel's photograph, as if the pose of triumph might help her to its reality.

"Jenny," he pleaded, trying again to take her hand.

"Don't—I can't bear you to touch me. Not after what I've heard about you."

"But what you've heard about me mayn't be true. Anyhow, you haven't told me what it is."

"That you and Isabel Halnaker were lovers."

She forced out the words in a rush, then suddenly bent over and sobbed. He made a movement to take her in his arms, but realised that it would only drive her wilder.

"Who told you that?" he cried. "Whoever told you that?"

"Miss Mollet."

Miss Mollet! That old woman! How could she have known? He had never for a moment thought that rumour had spread to the cottages.

"She said, 'Ask the servants' . . . 'Ask the bailiff at Yockletts.' "

He stood before her silent. He had always imagined that if anything ever happened to rouse his wife's suspicions he would easily be able to reason and persuade them away. He knew that Miss Mollet's accusation could rest only on the wildest hearsay, and that with a little address he could show it up as mere evil-minded gossip. But he did not speak.

"Oh, deny it!" cried Jenny—"deny it if you can."

How could he deny it? Why should he, merely for peace, deny all memory? He had always taken for granted that, if she accused him, he would deny what she could never prove. But now to his own surprise he found the lie impossible—not because it was a lie to Jenny, but because it was a lie about Isabel. Isabel stood to him for all in life that was most fine, intelligent and true. To lie about her would be mean, stupid and false. He could not do it, even though it cost him and Jenny their peace.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly, "I can't deny it."

She gazed at him with wide eyes swimming in tears. Then her hands flew up before her face with a cry. He felt suddenly angry with her.

"My dear, why make such a fuss about what's over and done with?"

"You ought to have told me."

"Why? You never asked me about any earlier love affairs of mine. I'm a man of thirty-eight. Did you take for granted that I'd never had any?"

Jenny did not know what she had taken for granted. Now she came to think of it, she had troubled very little about Humphrey's life before he met her. She had thought doubtless that he had had some love affairs—but only small ones, before the Big Thing came. . . .

"I didn't think you'd ever really cared for anyone before you cared for me."

"Then you were a fool. I'm really not responsible for all the romantic nonsense you're stuffed with. Any woman of the world would have known that a man of my age was bound to have had his affairs—big affairs—before he met her. Any woman of the world—"

"But I'm not a woman of the world."

That was true, poor little soul. After all, he was expecting too much—expecting Isabel's experience, toleration and understanding from this child. Her education was still to begin. He had better begin it now.

"Let me try to explain things to you," he said gently.

He did not touch her again, but sat down on one of the chairs beside the hearth, and after a short hesitation, she sank wearily upon the other.

"Let me try to explain."

"You can't explain. If, as you say, it's true about you and Isabel Halnaker, then there's nothing to explain."

"Oh, isn't there!"

"How can there be? You just fell in love with her—she was beautiful, she attracted you—you didn't care that she was married to another man—you just had a low, vulgar intrigue. . . . I never thought . . ."

"No!" he cried bitterly—"you can't think. You haven't got it in your power to think what the love of Isabel Halnaker would be. To you it's just a

‘low, vulgar intrigue’ because she happened to be married to somebody else. It’s never struck your ignorance that a man may love—love with all the best of him—a woman who can never be given to him wrapped up in white satin with a bunch of lilies.”

Jenny winced and swallowed her tears.

“But if you loved her so much, why didn’t you marry her? She could have got a divorce . . .”

“She wouldn’t, for her children’s sake. She couldn’t have left them with Claude Halnaker, and he’d never have let her divorce him.”

“If she’d got a divorce would you have married her?”

“Of course I should.”

Jenny could swallow no more tears. The torrent was too great. She hid her face in the arm of the chair and sobbed.

“Don’t,” said Humphrey. “Don’t, my dear.”

He saw that he was handling the situation in the wrong way. He ought to have belittled his love for Isabel, spoken of it as a mere infatuation. But the same urge which had driven him to confess it would not suffer him to decry it now. It was Isabel, not Jenny, who was his life’s best love. He could not, would not plead otherwise—to comfort her or to save himself.

“Jenny,” he persuaded, “don’t take it so much to heart. It’s all over, it’s all finished now. I’ve never even spoken alone to Isabel since I became engaged to you.”

“I—I don’t believe it. I believe you still meet her at Yockletts.”

“I don’t. How can you suggest such a thing of me—of her?”

“If you neither of you minded her husband why should either of you mind your wife?”

“Don’t expose your hardness and ignorance by making such a comparison. Claude Halnaker’s a rake—he’s been a brute—he has no claims whatever either on my friendship or her loyalty.”

“Then you’ve only kept apart because of me—you still care for her.”

“A man doesn’t stop caring all of a sudden for a woman like that. But he can live as if he didn’t care. I tell you she’s a stranger to me.”

His voice faltered as he spoke.

“Then you ought never to have married me—feeling like that. Why did you marry me? Simply in order to have my money, to spend it on your land. You married me—to get my money. You pretended to love me—you made me think you loved me—you made love to me but you never loved me.”

“Jenny, I do love you.”

“And Isabel Halnaker?”

“Don’t be so silly. It’s quite different.”

"Oh, is it? Is that one of the things I'm too hard and ignorant to understand?"

The bitterness in her voice was something new.

"My dear, don't speak like that. Can't you forgive me? Can't you forgive me for what I did before I ever knew you?"

"No, I can't forgive you for having deceived me—for having told such lies."

"I never told you any lies. You never asked me—"

"Asked you! . . . Everything you did was a lie—the way you pretended you didn't care for Isabel—didn't want me to know her."

"I never pretended I didn't care for her. The question simply didn't arise."

"It did. It did—a hundred times. You deceived me in a hundred ways. Oh, why did you marry me, when you loved her?"

"You're simply maddening!" he cried—"all this talk about 'loving her' and 'loving me,' as if it was just a choice between this and that. My God! Can't you understand? Can't you understand how a man can be driven?—forced? Is there nothing in the world but you women and your love?"

"Yes—there's your land, for that you'd sell us both. You gave her up for the same reason as you married me—to get money for your land. You've been as untrue to her as you have to me."

He was stung.

"By God, I've never been untrue to her."

"You have. You've been untrue to both of us. You haven't really loved either of us."

Her voice rose shrilly. She was getting hysterical and his self-control was nearly gone. He took her by the shoulders.

"Keep quiet, you hysterical little schoolgirl. Keep quiet. What do you know about truth and love? You don't begin to know. You're just an ignorant, conventional, romantic little fool."

She was terrified, but fear made her fight him rather than yield.

"I know enough to tell that when a man gives up one woman to marry another with money he doesn't really love either of them."

"Then, why worry?" he mocked. "Why worry?"

"I don't worry. I'm merely finished with you."

"You've never begun. When I first married you I loved you so that if only you'd had any depth or wisdom in you, you could have got me away from Isabel. But you hadn't. If I go back to Isabel now it's your own fault."

"Go to her—if she'll have you. Go to her and welcome. I can't love you any more—can't feel I'm your wife any more . . . after this. And you haven't got my money to think about, for I shall give it to Father to put into his new

company. I'll do that whatever happens, so you needn't let my money keep you from Isabel a second time. I won't quarrel with my people for the sake of . . ."

A storm of crying broke up her words, and realising that the dreadful scene must at all costs be ended, as everything else was ended, he turned and walked out of the room.

§9

Jenny sobbed on for some minutes, then feeling as if she had been beaten with a stick, she rose and crept upstairs. Her bedroom was dark, for the evening fire had not yet been lighted, and throwing herself upon the bed she passed an hour in which thought was choked by pain. Her heart was in such anguish that her mind was unable to review the tragedy, dwell on it or plan for its respite. She could only lie stricken, as if a spear transfixed her to this bed of the Mallards, where their ladies and their Squires had died and their children had been born.

At seven o'clock, Anna Luck came in to bring hot water and light the fire. Jenny realised that her misery must be adjusted to the world of outside events, to dressing for dinner and playing her part as a Mallard lady.

"Anna, I'm not feeling well. I shan't come down to dinner—tell Parker I'll have just a little soup and toast sent up on a tray."

"You don't look well, my lady. Would you like me to send for Dr Street?"

Jenny was touched by such solicitude, on the part of her stern handmaiden, but the next minute she remembered—Anna wasn't thinking of her. She was thinking of the child, the child whom its mother had almost forgotten. She was wondering lest the heir stood in any danger. If she knew, as she probably did, that her master and mistress had just had a terrible scene in the library, all she troubled about was its possible effect on the Mallard unborn.

"No, thank you, Anna, there's nothing at all the matter with me—only a slight headache."

Her voice sounded incredibly dignified, so much so that she nearly laughed. She felt an overwhelming desire to laugh, but strangled it, knowing that if she gave way, her laughter would be as shattering and agonised as her tears. She wished she had not cried so terribly—she wished that she had stood before Humphrey calm and tragic and dry-eyed. . . . But she was such a baby, she never could stop herself crying if she was unhappy. If only she had not cried—if only she had faced the situation in the proper spirit of accusing calm. That was how Isabel Halnaker . . .

The thought of Isabel Halnaker plunged her back into all her grief. It was the bitterest thought in her heart. Isabel? Whom she had so much admired, so much wanted to know, so hopefully tried to imitate—Isabel to have done this? There was no good telling herself that it did not matter to her, that it belonged to a past in which she had had no share. She felt dishonoured and outraged . . . and more by Isabel's guilt than by her husband's. After all, it

was not the dream Humphrey who had sinned—not the Humphrey she had loved so romantically and youthfully—it was only the stranger, the love of whom was already half pain. But Isabel was still a dream, no stranger in fallible human flesh had taken her place. It was the dream Isabel who had failed, who had fallen, who had sunk all her panoply of ideal and romance in the mire of a hectic intrigue.

As a hectic intrigue Jenny still saw it—she could not picture more than a shadow of true love in the affair. But sometimes that shadow frightened her, because she realised that even a shadow of love was more than she had ever seen. At different moments different aspects of the matter seemed to hold her; there were times when Humphrey's deepest guilt seemed to lie in his failing Isabel, sacrificing her to his land as he had sacrificed Jenny . . . in those moments Jenny and Isabel seemed almost to stand together over against Humphrey, despised for the land. But her worst moments were those in which she felt the torment of his words: "Of course I should have married her." Then she saw Isabel standing beside Humphrey over against her. His love for Isabel had not been that inferior sort which can never make husband and wife. Hectic and sordid the intrigue may have been, but it had meant more to Humphrey than his year and a half of marriage. This false Isabel was more proud, more fortunate than poor good Jenny on whom had never fallen so much as the shadow of love passing by.

§10

Her misery was checked in a measure by the arrival of the dinner tray. She compelled herself to eat, and the forced meal brought on an attack of sickness, which was merciful in the end—for it reduced her to such a pitch of exhaustion that she was able to sleep.

Utterly worn out, she did not wake till Anna Luck was pulling back her curtains and letting in the day. The memory of her grief rushed at once upon her, but with it came a sense of thanksgiving at having escaped the terrors of a wakeful night. She felt rested and altogether more hopeful. The sun was streaming into the room, and the boughs that threw delicate shadows on the window-pane were already rough with spring buds.

"A fine morning, Anna."

"Yes, m'lady. How are you feeling this morning, m'lady?"

"Oh, better—much better. I made you anxious, last night, didn't I? But you mustn't worry about me. I'm very strong, you know."

"It's them that's strong that has to be careful. Sir Humphrey's mother was a poor little dentical thing, and yet he couldn't have been born more proper, while Sir Aubrey's mother, I'm told, was a big sound woman, but had nothing but trouble in childbed. Her last little one never saw the light of life, for she heard as Sir Aubrey had gone holidaying with a gay lady to Brighton, and her pains came on her at six months—"

"That's enough, Anna. I don't like gossip."

The housemaid's words beat her back into despair. She felt that they must be more than chance. "Ask the servants . . . ask the servants" mocked a voice from Cade Street.

"It ain't gossip, my lady. Everyone knows as the Mallard gentlemen have never been so true as the Mallard ladies—all except Sir Humphrey, that's to say. He always was different. Where he loves he fixes."

She went out of the room, leaving her mistress to ponder her words. Did they mean that after all Anna Luck and her kind knew nothing of Isabel Halnaker? Or did they merely confirm what she already dreaded: that no gay lady held his heart but one whose face was dark with the shadow of love's wing?

Jenny wondered when her questions would in some measure be answered by a visit from her husband. The childish hopefulness that had been born with the new day persuaded her to think that he would come for fresh arguments. The fact that he had slept in his dressing-room that night meant nothing—he had done so more than once when he was late or she was tired and ill. She felt sure that he would come to see her before he went out,

and though she pictured no immediate results from the interview, she was restless and eager for it to take place. Perhaps at the end of some long vista of resumed and continued explanations she saw herself at last finding comfort in the thought that it had all happened long ago, and when the child was born would be as if it had never been. So much had a sound sleep done for her youth.

A step sounded in the passage, but it was only Anna Luck with her breakfast. There were letters on the tray, and Jenny saw that one was from Humphrey. She could hardly wait for the maid to leave the room before she tore it open. It was only a few lines.

> I have gone to Yockletts, and do not know when I shall be back. You had better go to your parents. They will be glad to have you, since now you are willing to do what they want.
>
> H. M.

Jenny gasped. She had never imagined that Humphrey would be so cruel as that. To go away and leave her—now—when she was so unspeakably wretched. The too-ready tears gathered under her drooped eyelids and rolled down her cheeks. She had never thought he would go away . . . to Yockletts . . . perhaps he had gone with Isabel! She nearly screamed. Most likely that was what he had done—now that there was no longer her money to keep them apart. That was what his last sentence meant. She had forgotten all about her threat to give her money to her father. But he had remembered. What a fool she had been! She had deliberately set him free to go, by breaking the only chain that bound him to her—her money! her hateful money!

Dropping back on the pillow she sobbed heart-brokenly for a few minutes. Her life seemed over and finished. Humphrey was gone for ever. He was gone with Isabel. She had driven him away. She had reproached him and taunted him and threatened him, all in her jealousy and anger, when if only she had had any sense she might have bound him to her, snatched the very last of him from Isabel. It was her own fault. Yet how was she to know he would act with such cruel speed?—refuse to give her another chance? He was behaving barbarously. He did not deserve her contrition.

For one desperate moment she thought of going over to Yockletts and forcing him to come to grips with her again . . . or begging him to come back . . . the next she decided to pack at once and go to Yorkshire, to return to her parents, the prodigal daughter, confessing herself in the wrong, and offering the remains of her dowry in reparation. But she knew in her heart that she would not do any of these things. There would be no use

confronting her husband . . . the scene would be as humiliating as yesterday's, when she had wept and threatened, and achieved nothing but her own misery. As for confronting Isabel Halnaker, if she were at Yockletts . . . she was afraid. She could not bear to see Isabel . . . that would be the most dreadful thing of all. Humphrey had told her to go home—but she did not want to go home. Such a step, she felt, would end things irrevocably, and her heart told her secretly that she did not want an end.

No, she was helpless, bound by her fears and by those obstinate hopes which still refused to die. She read his note again. Oh, Humphrey, how cruel! Not one soft word to suggest a thought of relenting. . . . "I have gone to Yockletts, and do not know when I shall be back." . . . At least he did not mind her knowing where he was. But perhaps that was only to taunt her . . . and anyhow she would be far away: "You had better go home to your parents." No, she would not go. It would humiliate her too dreadfully—to have them all know that her marriage had failed, that her husband had married her only for her money—their money—loving all the time another woman, whom he loved still.

§11

The next days were to Jenny as a long evil dream. She moved remotely through the little business of her household, anxious only to hide her shame from those whom she sometimes felt already knew its first and last. She tried to behave as if Humphrey had gone on one of his ordinary visits to Yockletts, only a little more prolonged than usual. He, it appears, had accounted quite normally for his sudden departure . . . that sounded as if he didn't mean to end things, as if he wanted to leave the way open for his return. . . . Oh, of course he could not really mean to forsake her, with the birth of their baby so near—May, and this was February. But why, then, had he told her to go home to her parents, knowing that when once they had heard of the tragedy it would be irrevocable. He must be expecting, working for, a separation—he had merely arranged his departure so that no scandal should fall on him and Isabel . . . he would give her no chance of divorcing him, he would keep his name unblemished for the sake of Herringdales.

A day settled the question as to whether Isabel had gone with him to Yockletts. The very next afternoon, Jenny met her riding home with her husband after a day's hunting. Their horses had to pass the Mallard victoria in a narrow lane. It was impossible to avoid an encounter. Jenny felt her throat tighten with fear. What should she do? Pretend not to see? That was impossible. Talk and smile? That was still more impossible. Cut Isabel dead? That was the only thing. After all it was the right, the inevitable thing. Whatever peace she made with Humphrey, she could never speak to Isabel Halnaker again. Of course she would guess what had happened, but that again was right. . . . Isabel must know that a man's wife and a man's mistress can never meet. Isabel who had loved him without right should be made to realise the gulf between herself and the woman who had a right to love him. These fiery thoughts stared at Isabel Halnaker out of the white, mask-like little face that met her gracious smile. For a moment the two women held each other's eyes, then Isabel's smile faded and her face became as white as Jenny's. Claude Halnaker who rode behind her saw nothing, and passed with a "Good day, Lady Mallard—fine afternoon."

Jenny felt badly shaken. That one look exchanged with Isabel Halnaker had been worse than all yesterday's long quarrel. She could hardly bear to think of it—the smile that had faded, the graciousness that had stiffened. Isabel knew everything now. Their acquaintanceship was at an end. Henceforward they would avoid each other, shun each other, cut each other dead. And it was right—right—right. She was ashamed to think that once she had admired this woman, sought after her, longed for her friendship. . . .

Strange to say the realisation that Mrs Halnaker had not gone with Humphrey to Yockletts brought very little comfort. After all, she did not know that she had really expected her to go, or really cared whether she went or not. The torment of her jealousy lay in the past—the past that was so dreadfully alive; and the torment of her jealousy was not physical—her vision was not of Isabel in Humphrey's arms—but mental, feeding itself on the thought of Isabel in Humphrey's heart, in Humphrey's soul. This woman had known the Humphrey she had never known, but always longed to know. She had known his mind and soul, withheld in contempt from his wife. Kisses, caresses, pictures of rapturous nights and wakings in each other's arms—what were all those? She knew them all, and knew that they were nothing. She could not feel jealous of Isabel's share in these. But the rest, the comradeship, the communion, it was the thought of these she could not bear, that drove her raging into a jealous fury that would have liked to kill the woman who had known them.

During the next few days the love of Humphrey and Isabel seemed to come more and more alive—in its pain as well as in its pleasure, indeed most consumingly and unbearably in its pain. It was like a landscape in moonlight, unearthly, haunted by a melancholy sweetness—it was like some dark wood holding a secret. . . . Here was beauty she could never know, pain she could never give. It was because she was herself that she had had none of these things, because she was herself that Humphrey had been unable to fill his empty heart with her love. Her love was a just a little garden, bright with a few flowers, and he had wanted a landscape in moonlight, unearthly, and visited by ghosts.

To such abasement the days of his absence brought her. They passed by, and not a word came from him, not a sign. Isabel was still at Mogador, but Humphrey lived at Yockletts with her ghost.

It was a week of rain, steady and streaming, washing away the moist spring earth from the roots of the hedges, making the ditches tinkle and babble like brooks, turning the furrows of the newly-ploughed fields into canals of muddy water. Jenny could not go out. She sat at home, utterly wretched. Sometimes she would make up her mind to write to her parents—she had even sat down with paper and ink before her, but at the last moment she had not the resolution to shut the only open door. Of course she was a fool. Humphrey would never come through that door out of his moonlight fields. It was folly to expect him to come back. Even if his body came his soul would stay out in the moonlight with Isabel—that was where he had always been, that was why she had married a stranger.

As the days went by she still fidgeted with pen and paper, but it was to Humphrey that she tried to write. She was desperate, she must somehow try

to touch his heart. But no words would come to her, only tears, splashing and cockling the empty page. At last she wrote—

> Darling Humphrey, please come back. I am too miserable without you. Please forgive me for the things I said. I did not mean them and you shall have the money as I promised. I have not written to Mother, and nobody knows we have quarrelled, so please come back.
>
> Your miserable Jenny.

She knew it was abject, that it put her in the wrong, but she could not help that. It was written, and she must post it at once before she changed her mind.

Two days passed, and no reply came. She told herself that cross-country posts were slow. On the third morning a letter came with the Easternhanger postmark, but written in a hand she did not know.

> Dear Madam,
>
> Sir Humphrey has asked me to thank you for your letter and to tell you that he is not well enough to write himself, but will send you a line as soon as he is able. He caught a bad chill out in the dirty weather we have been having lately. It has gone to his lungs, and I would respectfully ask you, my lady, to come over and see him as early as possible. He said not to tell you he was bad, but I have taken upon myself, my lady, to ask you to come, as the doctor thinks badly of him. Mrs Crouch and I do our best, but the nursing is rough here, but the doctor says he is too bad to move at present.
>
> Yours obediently,
> Walter Crouch.

§12

Life suddenly became for Jenny an exceedingly simple thing. Gone were those dreams of haunted landscapes, those glimpses of dark faery shown her by the love of her husband for another woman. All she thought of was the railway time-table. A mixture of love and fear made her practical, and Humphrey's earlier journeys had given her some knowledge. He had usually left about ten, catching a train at Battle at 11.35, which brought him to Hastings twenty minutes later. She found a train leaving Hastings soon after one, and arriving at Ashford at 2.14. Then came a long wait, as a slow train to Canterbury was wanted, and there was none before half past three. But she could reach Humphrey that evening if she started at once.

She rang the bell and sent for Anna Luck, who heard of her master's illness without emotion, but not so the news that her mistress proposed to start off then and there for East Kent.

" 'Tis a lamentable journey, my lady, and not for you to undertake in your present happy condition. You don't want to be confined at Yockletts, where there's rats under all the floors, and mice in the thatch, and rabbits popping in and out of the lean-to windows, if you'll believe me."

"Don't talk nonsense, Anna, and pack my things at once. I'm perfectly well, and a few hours in the train won't kill me. I can't leave Sir Humphrey with no one but the Crouches to nurse him."

"You could have a hospital nurse telegraphed for from Canterbury."

"I'll do that too, but I'm going myself. Be quick. The carriage will be round in half an hour."

"Sir Humphrey won't welcome you, my lady."

Jenny flushed angrily, but remembered that the words had probably quite a different meaning on Anna's lips than in her own heart.

"He'll be glad to see me, even if he wouldn't like actually to ask me to come. Don't make any more fuss, Anna. I'm going."

"Then I'm coming with you."

"There's no need whatever to do that."

"What would happen if you were took bad on the platform at Ashford?"

"I shan't be taken bad on the platform at Ashford. But you can come with me if you like."

She was suddenly struck by the advantages of a companion on what promised to be an involved and toilsome journey. Anna might not be agreeable, but she was capable, and after all she had been Humphrey's nurse, and could be expected to know how to tend him now.

So Anna, dressed severely in black, with a small bead-trimmed bonnet tied under her chin, drove off beside her mistress to Battle station, and shared with her the miseries and frustrations of a cross-country journey through Sussex and Kent. To Jenny the least she had to endure were the hardships of the railway system that linked Battle and Easternhanger as two flies are linked in a spider's web. She welcomed the discomforts and confusions of country junctions and conflicting time-tables; even Ashford Station which Anna seemed to think bound to bring about a miscarriage, only served to give her the solace of battle. The bad times were those spent in the crawling train, when outside the Kentish marshes jogged past the window in long misty slats, and inside her fears were black as a flight of crows wheeling and settling on her mind. Suppose Humphrey was dangerously ill . . . suppose he was dying . . . suppose he was dead. She read Crouch's letter over again, but it told her nothing. The summons might merely be the anxiety of a servant trying to control an obstinate master, or it might be the late response to signals that would have driven another man to action long ago. Nothing could answer her doubts but the sight of Humphrey himself.

That still seemed remote, even after they had reached Easternhanger station at the end of a dark and rainy afternoon. She had sent a telegram to Crouch announcing her arrival, but no conveyance from Yockletts was waiting in the station yard. Enquiries resulted in the dispiriting information that the farm was six miles away, and no transport was available unless the "George fly" could be persuaded to set out on another expedition when it returned from Lyminge in half an hour's time.

That half hour was spent in the dingy, cactus-planted parlour of the George, drinking stewed tea and eating stale seed cake. Jenny felt utterly cowed by the journey which seemed to have landed her at the world's end—with Yockletts beyond in some dim nebular space—but struggled to bear herself boldly under Anna Luck's examining eye. As a matter of fact, the old nurse need not have been uneasy, for all her mistress's pain was in her mind, which absorbed the body's share, so that even the journey's weariness was less a physical than a mental affliction.

At the end of half an hour the fly returned from Lyminge, and by the offer of liberal payment was persuaded to set out again, on condition that the horse should be stabled for a few hours at Yockletts. So Jenny and Anna Luck, just as night was falling, ventured over the world's edge into the nebular darkness. At first they saw a few houses and trees go by against a dim sky, but hardly were they out of the village when complete blackness fell, with no light but the red lamps of the fly moving in the hedges. The rain came spattering in at the window, and continued to do so after Anna had

pulled it up, for the glass pane had been broken and removed long ago, leaving only the empty frame still manoeuvring grotesquely at the end of the window-strap.

§13

The journey from Herringdales to Easternhanger seemed only the beginning of the journey to Yockletts—by far the greater part seemed to lie between the station and the farm. All sense of space was lost with time in an eternity made up of mud, darkness and rain—of the clop of hoofs in mud, of the suck of wheels in mud, of the spatter of rain in mud and the swish of it in the hedges, of the smell of old leather damp with rain, of the moving of red lights over drenched banks and the trunks of swaying trees. At the end of it, they did not seem to reach Yockletts so much as the farm to swim to them suddenly out of the rain, with shining wet roof, and gleaming yard-stones, and every gutter a-wash and a-tinkle.

Crouch answered the driver's knock at the fast-closed door.

"Lord, but it's never you, my lady!"

"Didn't you get my wire?"

"Yes, but I never thought it meant you was starting today. It didn't come till this afternoon—we're outside the free delivery, you know—and I thought it meant you was coming tomorrow. I didn't reckon for my letter to reach you—"

"Stop explaining, and let us in," interrupted Anna, "her ladyship's likely to pay for your silly, slow wits."

Crouch withdrew muttering into the small passage way. The house seemed very small and old; even in that moment Jenny wondered how her husband should love so desperately a place so small and mean and remote as Yockletts.

"How is Sir Humphrey?"

"About the same, my lady. He don't change much. Catched in the breath, and sometimes has some unaccountable queer fancies. The doctor's sending over a sick-nurse tomorrow."

"What doctor have you got?"

"Dr Barnes from Canterbury. He's a fine good doctor when he's time to call. I'd better run up and tell Sir Humphrey as you're here, my lady."

"Does he know you sent for me?"

"No, my lady. That's why I'd better tell him fust."

He ran up a flight of stairs that twisted suddenly out of the passage into upper darkness. Jenny and Anna were left standing in the passage, which was lit only by the lamplight coming from an open door. Out of this Mrs Crouch appeared, flustered and apologising. The place seemed untidy and ill cared for, and Jenny shuddered to think of her husband being left alone in these incompetent hands.

"I'm sure I'd have seen to things a bit if I'd known you was coming, my lady, but I never thought you could arrive before tomorrow, and now there's next to nothing in the house."

"What does Sir Humphrey have?"

"Oh, he takes nothing but milk, poor soul. He's an easy man to feed. Maybe if you and this lady don't mind a slice of cold bacon—"

"Don't worry about us. We can easily manage on what you have. I'm going up to Sir Humphrey now."

She moved towards the stairs.

"I can't give you much of a bed, either, my lady, though I'll do my best. Sir Humphrey never cared about anything but the one room, and the rest is sore old stuff. But . . ."

Her voice died away with the throbbing roar of the kitchen fire and the singing kettle as Jenny went upstairs.

"I've left his door ajar, my lady," Crouch said, and she went trembling towards the slant of light.

As she entered the room she experienced a violent surprise. From the gloom and shabbiness of the rest of the house she passed into a large, well-ordered chamber, dimly lit, it is true, but furnished with comfort and charm. The furniture was mostly old oak but the wide low bedstead was uncanopied and covered with a piece of richly woven damask. Curtains of the same material were drawn across the window, and a large sheepskin rug was roseate in the light of a wood fire.

Humphrey lay in the midst of the bed, and his eyes seemed to glow in the firelight as she came towards him, and sinking on the floor, laid her head beside his on the pillow.

"Darling—I've come—do you mind?"

"Mind, my sweet?—I'm grateful."

The reassurance of his words was spoiled by the difficulty with which he uttered them. His breath came between them in heavy gasps.

"My dear, your voice sounds dreadful. How are you?"

"Pretty bad"—he smiled wanly—"beastly pneumonia. I got wet. . . ."

"You poor, poor thing."

Her lips stole over his burning forehead, and pity seemed to break her heart.

"It—it was good of you to write, Jenny."

"Oh . . ."

"And, say that about the money. You meant it, didn't you?"

"Of course I meant it. I never really meant Dad to have it. It was only because I . . ."

She hid her face.

"You see, darling, I couldn't bear this place to be sold . . . as it would have to be. . . . Jenny, promise me, if I don't get well . . . you won't sell Yockletts."

"Of course I promise, but you will get well."

"I'll do my best. But it worries me dreadfully to think of the place being sold. . . . You won't sell it."

"I've promised."

"It's not doing much now . . . but in a few years' time, when the brat's growing up . . ."

Again she had forgotten all about the brat.

"Don't talk any more, dear. Lie still, and I'll sit by you."

She pulled a chair up to the bed, and held his hand. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light of the room, and details till then unnoticed began to decorate the general impression. There were photographs upon the walls, and she recognised several of them as photographs of Isabel Halnaker. Over the fireplace was a portrait of her in water-colour, younger and more girlish than Jenny had ever seen her, holding a white wrapper across her breast, while her hair fell on her shoulders in a black sweeping cloud. As Jenny looked at the portrait, she suddenly realised that the whole room must have been furnished for Isabel, that Isabel was the reason for its surprising contrast with the rest of the house. She had probably chosen the furniture and hangings—the taste for antiquity was hers, in spite of her *fin-de-siècle* reputation. . . . It was on her account, too, that Humphrey dreaded so inexpressibly the sale of Yockletts, of seeing this place where memory lived pass into the hands of strangers. . . . Jenny's heart ached once more with the old sickness—jealousy, disillusion—hatred of this proud thief who had spoilt her marriage before it had begun. She would have liked to get up and turn the portrait with its face to the wall, but the weak hand in her own detained her. After all she could take comfort in the thought that here she was and Isabel was not, that if this was the end, Isabel had no part nor lot in it. It was Jenny, Jenny the despised wife, who watched by her husband in his pain and weakness, who held his hand and shook his pillow, and wiped his poor damp face. Isabel was only a picture on the wall.

§14

This sense of triumph and final possession grew as Humphrey's illness grew. The fatigue of the journey was forgotten, the protests of Anna Luck were ignored, and she spent the night at his bedside, sleeping only a little towards dawn in a big armchair pulled forward to the fire. When morning came and it was plain to see that he was worse her triumph still was able to withstand the sickening anxiety that chilled her heart. The doctor came about ten o'clock, bringing a nurse with him. He did not hide his relief that the patient's wife had come.

"I don't want to alarm you, Lady Mallard, but it's a very serious case. The heart is erratic . . . still, now we shall have trained nursing, and of course your presence will do an immense amount of good."

"Do you think he will die?"

Her triumph flickered in a sudden wind of fear.

"I don't think he will die, but—" he paused, realising how close in her life death would stand to birth—"No, I don't think he will die," he finished lamely.

But Jenny knew what he thought, and that it was only because he shared Anna Luck's superstitious reverence for the unborn that he would not tell her. The nurse, too, evidently had thoughts that she hid; she was a middle-aged woman, pleasant and quiet, and she did not try to drive Jenny out of the sick-room, though she was fortunately inclined to challenge the visits of Anna Luck. The doctor called again in the evening, bringing oxygen. Jenny bit her lip upon the worst dread.

But there had been a happiness in that day that she could never forget, for throughout the whole of it, Humphrey had been all hers. She had never left him except for two hours in the afternoon, when she had lain down to rest in one of the shabby half-furnished bedrooms of the farm. A short sleep marvellously refreshed her, and she went back to her vigil with love still triumphing over fear.

For the rest of the day she had sat beside him, holding his hand, turning and smoothing his pillow. It was she and not the nurse who fed him. She knew that the nurse pitied her, but she felt she would not really deserve pity till this delicious sense of restoration and possession was gone. Now at last she seemed to have recaptured the lover she had lost—or sometimes it almost seemed as if for the first time she held him to her heart. His weak pressure, and the following of his eyes told her that his own heart was with hers, that he too knew of this rebirth, this springtime at the end of the world. . . .

At night she went back to the little cold bedroom, and allowed Anna Luck to scold and fuss her into bed. She had left him in an uneasy, drug-brought sleep, and the nurse had persuaded her to sleep during hours when she could not possibly be wanted. She fell asleep almost at once, but woke suddenly, with vague memories of an evil dream. It was about five o'clock, and she felt that Humphrey might be awake. She slipped out into the heavy cold of the morning, and began hurriedly to dress. The sky was still quite dark, but she could see a gleam upon some distant water—it might be the reflection of an unseen dawn or of an unseen moon. She suddenly found herself thinking of Isabel Halnaker, and before she could banish the thought it took to itself a new and surprising quality of pity. Isabel who was far away, who was shut out . . . she must know, as all Heathfield now must know, that Sir Humphrey Mallard lay mortally ill at Yockletts and his lady had gone to him. Perhaps now she was lying awake, wondering, longing . . . Oh, but she deserved no pity, she must pay her reckoning. She had ruled the beginning and must leave another to be queen of the end . . . the End . . . oh, no, not death, not parting, not the birth of a fatherless child in May . . . Jenny felt herself turning sick and faint—her fingers fumbled with the hooks of her skirt. . . . Suddenly death seemed to be bigger than anything else in life, than love or hate or jealousy. She did not wait to finish dressing, but ran to Humphrey with unbelted waist and collarless throat.

He was waking up, and seemed much distressed. His fingers plucked at the sheet, but eagerly caught at Jenny's hand when she took them.

"My sweetheart, my poor, poor love, my boy, my own darling," she murmured with her lips close to his ear.

His face with its five days' beard looked ghastly and unnatural.

"Is he worse?" she whispered to the nurse.

"I think it's only the waking. But I'm afraid he's in a very bad way."

"Jenny," said Humphrey faintly, "come close."

She huddled herself beside him on the bed, her arm at the back of the heap of pillows that supported him.

"Jenny," he repeated imploringly.

"My poor sweet, I'm here. I won't leave you—ever—ever."

"Jenny . . . I want Isabel."

The shock went through her like a little death.

"Isabel . . . will you send for her? . . . I want Isabel."

The words jostled against her lips, and only pity prevented her uttering them. Had he been thinking of Isabel all the time when he held her hand and lay against her shoulder? Was Isabel to have the end as well as the beginning? No, she could not bear it. She had enough. She could bear no more.

“Isabel’s away.”

The words came quite perfunctorily to her need. It seemed as if some primitive instinct of self-defence had taken charge of her.

“Isabel’s away. She’s gone to stay in Wales—I don’t know where.”

Whether he accepted her words or was too weak to argue she did not know. He said nothing, and she threw her arms about him, crying—

“But I’m with you, darling, Jenny, your own wife. I’ll never leave you. I’ll stay with you. I’ll take care of you. I’ll never leave you—never—never.”

But the triumph was gone, or rather it had become a different thing. It was something harsh and bitter. She knew that she held the field only by a stratagem. Humphrey had not really turned to her at the end—he still wanted Isabel, and it was only because of his helplessness that he did not have her. Isabel was already here by right—Jenny was merely the interloper, the usurper. Isabel was by divine right Queen of the End.

She did not find the same happiness in being with Humphrey, in doing for him the little homely things that had seemed to bring them so closely and tenderly together. She could not banish the feeling that all the time he wished that it was Isabel who held his hand, that it was Isabel who wiped his forehead, or gave him a drink. So she left the room, and fussed about the nurse's breakfast and the patient's brandy and milk. Out in the yard the men were going to milk the cows. It had stopped raining, and the stars were fading in a pale green sky. For the first time she saw the house from out of doors, as she stood in the fold, drinking in the clear, damp morning air, that seemed to soothe the heat of her distress. It was of later date than Herringdales, a Stuart house, with remains of ornamentation in the gables, but all very old and weather-worn. It was both smaller and clumsier than the Sussex Manor, and spoilt by cheap patchings and matchings . . . if she had seen it a month ago she might have wondered why Humphrey loved it so much.

He had made her promise to keep it—to spend her money on its salvation—to preserve it for their child . . . as a memorial of his father's sin. No—she could not do it—it was horrible. Why should she be made to swallow such an insult? Neither truth nor tenderness could compel her to bear any more. Perhaps there were women who would have sent for Isabel Halnaker and for pity's sake allowed a husband to die in the arms of his mistress, while his wife stood by unwanted, save for her promise to spend her fortune in preserving the scene of their intrigue. Jenny could do much for pity's sake, but she could not do this.

"Oh, curse her, curse her!" she cried into her hands. She felt old, insulted and forsaken—suddenly and terribly old.

She went indoors, and spent the morning moving to and fro between the sick-room and the kitchen, with one long ramble to the end of the drive to see if the doctor's trap were in sight. He arrived early, on horseback, and looked immediately grave.

"My dear Lady Mallard, I'm very sorry. . . ."

"What is it?—Oh, please tell me."

"He's sinking, I'm afraid."

"Do you mean he'll die?"

"I'm afraid so."

She managed to ask—

"How soon?"

"I can't tell you for certain. He's a healthy man, and with restoratives we may keep him alive till tomorrow, but I doubt it . . . the pulse is very weak."

He looked at her compassionately as she stood before him so worn.

"You must take care of yourself, Lady Mallard. Don't make yourself ill too, for a great comfort is coming to you, remember."

She turned away weeping.

In her heart she thought—"There's no use sending for Isabel now. It takes all day to get here if you start at ten, and he won't be alive tomorrow."

She went back to the sick-room, and took her old place beside the bed. She could not leave him any more. Even if he wished her kiss and touch were Isabel's she still must give them, for this was the last day. The end—as beggar if not as queen, she still must have the end.

He was fully conscious, moving his head to and fro upon the pillows that had to be changed so constantly. She smiled at him, and he smiled back at her, but his breathing was too difficult for speech. So the hours passed. The dirge of the rain had ceased, and a struggling spring sun came round to the window. The nurse drew the blind and shut it out. And all the time she knew that Humphrey was thinking of Isabel, longing for her, dreaming of her, trying perhaps to make believe that the arm that held him and the lips that kissed him were hers. While she, miserable beggar . . . she had robbed him of the only comfort he had left in his last few hours of life. In a few short hours Humphrey's love for Isabel Halnaker would have ceased to beat in that labouring heart or to breathe in that struggling breath—and yet she set her heel upon it, standing upon it as she had stood on Isabel's torn photograph in a victory that was no victory. What sort of woman robs the dead?

She could bear no more. Her own suffering had become as dreadful as her husband's, and she must end it for pity's sake.

She slipped her arm from beneath his head.

"Darling," she said slowly to his failing ears, "I'm going to send for Isabel."

In his weakness he took her words quite simply.

"Can—she get here—in time?"

"Yes, if you hold on."

She went quickly out of the room, knowing that it would be a miracle if Isabel got there in time. It was too late for her to catch a morning train from

Hastings, and Jenny did not know of anything in the evening that would find a connection at Ashford. But she did not wait to make sure. She scribbled a summons on a piece of paper, and running out into the yard she ordered Crouch to send a boy at once on horseback to the nearest telegraph office. Then she studied the local time-table, and discovered that it was as she had feared. There was no train stopping at Easternhanger after half-past six, and it was practically impossible for Isabel to catch that. The only chance was that if the wire travelled exceedingly fast, that if Isabel were in on its arrival and all circumstances kind, she could arrive in Canterbury soon after ten, and drive from there. In that case she might reach Yockletts about midnight. Otherwise she could not be there till late in the next day.

Jenny went back to her husband's room, and gave him as much cheer as she could. If only he held his own . . . she was now desperately anxious that he should live to see Isabel, and in that way wipe out her cruelty. But she was afraid . . . mortally afraid. His face had changed in the last few hours, and his breathing. There was a faint rattle in his throat. The nurse moved anxiously about the room, and hoped the doctor's afternoon visit would be early.

"Can't we do anything?—Can't we help him—just to keep him alive till tomorrow?"

The nurse had given him oxygen and an injection, and could do no more.

Humphrey was still conscious. His spirit fought obstinately the clouds that invaded it. His eyes were like living coals in the smoky whiteness of his face, and they were fixed continually upon the door . . . waiting for it to open, and Isabel to come in, proud and gracious and lovely. . . . Jenny could scarcely bear it.

For some hours she hoped that she might receive an answer to her wire, but none came. Had Isabel started hotfoot, without waiting to announce her arrival? Or had the telegram reached her too late for an answer to be sent that day? If the lad had been slow in despatching it—he seemed to have taken a long time over his double journey—or the delivery on her side had been delayed—Mogador was probably outside the "free delivery radius"—or she had been out when it came . . . any of these things would have spoilt that slick fitting of favourable circumstances which alone could bring her to Yockletts in time.

The doctor when he came in the evening said that the patient might conceivably last out the night. There seemed to him something both pathetic and foolish in the young wife's wild desire to keep her husband for a few hours longer. After all it was no kindness to preserve him only half alive . . . with nothing left of life but its pains; and as for her, it would be better for her when he was dead, and she could rest. He tried to persuade her to go to

bed that night, promising her that she should be sent for if any change came, but she obstinately refused to leave Humphrey's side.

The household knew, of course, that she had sent for Isabel, but nobody spoke. Anna Luck's mouth was a hard straight line. No doubt she condemned the love which could bring no glorious confinements to Herringdales, but she said no more than the Crouches who had sheltered that love and seen it flower in the wilderness. At eight the trap was sent off to Canterbury, driven by Crouch himself, so that there should be no fear of his missing Mrs Halnaker, but he returned alone in the small hours. Isabel, then, had not come, and Humphrey must die without her as he had mostly lived.

He lay with his eyes on the door. He was too weak to turn his head, but his eyes were open. The room was growing dark. He saw nothing but the door, through which she might come. In his mind the thoughts were dying like coals that dropped from a brazier, only one little flame lived on.

"Oh, wait for her, my dear, wait for her," cried Jenny. She knew that now Isabel could not be at Yockletts till the afternoon, but she could not bear him to die like that with his eyes on the door.

"Bring a light," he said.

The nurse set the lamp on a table close beside him. "But he can't see," she whispered to Jenny.

He lay for a while in silence save for the rattle in his throat. The nurse put her arms round Jenny.

"Don't grieve, my dear—he doesn't feel it. He's unconscious now."

The minutes dragged on, and still he never turned his eyes from the darkness which was the door. Then his lips moved—

"Isabel."

He had not spoken her name since the morning, and, as in the morning, Jenny's reaction was quite instinctive and automatic.

"I'm here," she heard herself saying, "I've come."

She felt a shiver go through him as she stooped over the pillow, and set her lips on his. That was the only response he made. But the look of anxiety and waiting passed from his face, and his eyelids drooped.

"Good-night, my dear," said Jenny steadily, "sleep well."

§16

She was old now—quite old, and able to take things calmly, it seemed. She no longer had to struggle with the indignity of tears. She allowed the nurse to put her out of the room, and Anna Luck to help her to bed. There she surprisingly fell asleep. She was exhausted, and did not wake till daylight was on the fields and fighting through the blind. Her heart seemed washed of feeling. The memories of yesterday were cold. She turned them over, bewildered, as if she were fingering coals in a furnace and finding they did not burn her. Humphrey was dead, and though he had died far away from Isabel, he had died happy in a dream. Thank God she had been able to make that dream! The worst consequence of her treachery was spared her, since at the end he had escaped out of its shadow. She must suffer for it, she knew, when her heart was awake—suffer in the memory of those blind eyes watching the door. . . . Oh, pity, pity!—when that should wake . . . but not yet.

Anna Luck came to her with a cup of tea.

"We must see about things today, Anna," said her mistress abruptly, "when the doctor's called, there'll be the Squire's funeral to arrange for, and of course we must take him home—"

"Not us, I hope, my lady. I hope you'll send for someone to help you over all those things."

"Yes, I've thought of that. I shall wire to my brother to come to me here, and Mr Creed from Hastings. He managed Sir Humphrey's affairs, you know."

"And I trust you'll stop in bed yourself, my lady, for today."

But Jenny shook her head. That would never do. A heart sleeps best in the midst of the body's exertion.

"Bring me some paper and a pencil, and I'll write out the telegrams at once."

She must send a telegram to Isabel Halnaker—prevent her starting at all costs. She simply must not come now.

She wrote a telegram for Mogador, for the lawyers, and for her brother. She would be glad to have Timothy come to her here and take her back to Herringdales. It might lead to the establishment of peace with her family, which she wanted more than ever now. Of course there would be outcries when they discovered her ultimate pledge to the land. She could never take back those words she had given Humphrey when she first came to Yockletts. But she had hopes that her misery would soften her father's heart, and that he would take a different view of her decision when he saw her no longer as

the wife and tool of a mercenary man, but as a poor widow honouring her promises to the dead.

When she had written the telegrams, she sent them off at once by one of the men; then, in spite of Anna Luck's entreaties, she rose and dressed. She dared not take any more of the risks of idleness. As she came downstairs, Crouch met her in the passage.

"There's a telegram just come for you, my lady."

She opened it without daring to think. It ran—

"Arriving by the 10.30. Easternhanger. Halnaker."

Jenny could scarcely breathe. Isabel here—all but here—nearly on the doorstep. How had she come? She must have travelled all night—or she had spent the night at Ashford. That was what she must have done. Fool! not to have thought of it. Now here she was with Isabel upon her—and she could not face Isabel . . . over Humphrey's dead body . . . Isabel, who through her had come too late.

"Excuse me, but might that be from Mrs Halnaker, my lady?"

Crouch's words recalled her to action.

"Yes. She's spent the night at Ashford, and will come on here by the 10.30."

"Then I'd better send the trap for her."

"It would never get there in time, and I want it myself to go to the station."

"You're never starting this morning, my lady?"

"Yes, I am. I must get back to Heathfield today. When is the next train?"

"There's one at 11.12 that'll take you as far as Ashford, but . . ."

"Will you order the trap round at once?"

"It'll mean a terrible long wait at Ashford. You'd better wait till the 1.50."

"No, that would be too late. I want to go at once. Will you order the trap while I get ready."

She ran upstairs, calling for Anna Luck. She was desperate—at all costs, at all risks, she must be out of this house when Isabel entered it.

"You'd never do such a thing, my lady. What you need today is rest—complete rest. And there's the gentlemen coming and all, and Sir Humphrey scarce cold—"

"Hold your tongue. You needn't come with me, but I'm going."

Needless to say, Anna would not let her go alone. Grumbling, lamenting and foreboding she packed her mistress's bag and her own, and at about ten o'clock they set out in the Yockletts' trap on their way to the station. Jenny knew what construction must be put by everyone on her sudden departure.

But she could not help it—she felt indifferent to everything but the thought of meeting Isabel.

She had left instructions with Crouch, and a note for Timothy. He would do all that was terrible and necessary and bring Humphrey's body back to Heathfield for its Sussex burial. As for her, she was glad to be away from that sad place whose past she was shut out of, yet to whose future she was pledged. The trap lurched threateningly in the ruts of the steep lane that led up from Yockletts to the main road or Stone Street. The day was overcast, and as they reached the ridge, rain began to fall again.

"It'll be comfortable waiting at the station," said Anna Luck.

Jenny did not reply.

They drove through the village of Maydensole and past the lonely inn on the edge of the heights. The Easternhanger valley lay before them, with the low clouds drifting over it, so low that their grey whorls seemed to mingle with the smoke of the train that had just left Easternhanger station. It was half-past ten, and that train would have left Isabel Halnaker on the platform. Perhaps she was there now, wondering why no trap had met her, waiting on the chance of it coming in a few minutes . . . or perhaps she had gone desperately to the George, as Jenny had gone, and would set out like Jenny for an ageless drive through the rain in the George fly.

The driver stopped and put the shoe on the wheel for the descent of the long hill. Jenny now wished she had thought of going from Canterbury—it would have been a much longer drive, but probably she would have found a swifter train at the end of it, and anyhow she would have been spared the risk of meeting Isabel Halnaker either on the platform or on her way to Yockletts. Then she realised that though they could see the station lying there like a toy in the valley below them, it would take them quite another half hour to get there, and Isabel would certainly have left the platform long before them. But they were still bound to pass her at some point of the journey. There was no other road to Easternhanger from the top of the hill. Jenny looked anxiously ahead as the trap began its slow descent. The valley appeared and disappeared behind the hedges as the road wound . . . the hateful fill-dyke hissed rain into the wind. It sometimes seemed as if they would all be blind with rain.

Then at the last bend a carriage appeared, a black shabby carriage, evidently the George fly, crawling up over the wet road. Here most likely was Isabel, starting on the same timeless journey that had been Jenny's three days ago, but with an even greater misery awaiting her at the end.

For the first time she pictured Isabel during the last twelve hours. She saw the hopeless summons, breaking the long anxiety, she saw the desperate

response—the difficult and lonely journey, the night at Ashford, wakeful and forlorn, and now this arrival—alone, exhausted, too late.

Jenny would not think, would not look. She cowered down in the trap, holding her umbrella before her face. Isabel must not see her.

"It's the George fly," said Anna Luck.

There was a creaking rattle of wheels and springs, a suck of hoofs and a spatter of mud as the fly passed them. Jenny could not help looking for a moment, just to make sure, and through the rattling glassless window she caught a glimpse of, as it were, a white shadow of Isabel's face. Then the cab splashed away up the hill, carrying Isabel Halnaker on to her journey's bitter end.

PART III
THINGS THAT ARE KIND

§1

The following months showed Jenny how much smaller a thing is birth than death. The birth of her son in May came almost as an anti-climax to the death of her husband in February. The soft bright sun shining through the blind, the scent of lilac on the air that moved the muslin curtains were only pretty silly things compared with the drenching days of the fill-dyke, when all the world was rain. They seemed to stand in the same contrast as herself and Isabel Halnaker; once more she saw the two signs—the pretty garden and the haunted field.

She mused on these thoughts without either much joy or sorrow as she lay in the veiled sunshine, clasping her son. Nothing could go very deep with her, she reflected, or she would not in such health and calm have lasted out her full time, defeating all Anna Luck's prophecies of miscarriage and premature birth. Sir Aubrey Mallard had been born just a few days later than he had been expected, and was a fine, healthy infant, whose contented mind gave no hint of dark, pre-natal influences, of sorrows endured in the womb.

And yet could anyone, thought Jenny, have suffered more? That conflict of love and hate, of pride and pity, and that deep stain of remorse . . . surely they had not touched her lightly. She could not remember feeling them much in the weeks that followed her return to the Herringdales, the weeks that had lain flat and stagnant between her husband's funeral and her child's birth. All she knew was that they had changed her. They had made of her a silent creature, a tearless creature—she who hitherto had both talked and wept too much. She had not talked, even to Timothy, who had spent a fortnight with her and was shocked at her tormented eyes and silent mouth; and she had not wept, even when the coffin that held all she had ever known of her husband, slid down into the refuge of the earth he had loved too well.

On the eve of the child's birth there had been a sudden revival of feeling, an unexplained crisis of sorrow, as it were a messenger. But when her labour began her mind laid down its burden, and when the baby was in her arms, everything seemed to have passed, pain of mind with pain of body, leaving her in a drowsy lull of content.

Yes, she was content. The calm of those days had nothing to do with the flatness of the past weeks. With the child her husband seemed to have come back into her life, which had lost its aimlessness. She was glad it was a boy—not that a girl would have been mere catastrophe, since the land was not entailed, but of course the title would have been lost, and the name could only have been preserved by legal artifices and matrimonial bargaining. Now the thin line of the Mallard Baronets would be continued and perhaps

gain thickness and strength with new generations. Humphrey Mallard's sacrifice had not been made in vain. It was queer, thought Jenny, that she should now find comfort in this—in the thought that the two purposes for which he had renounced Isabel Halnaker and married Jenny Bastow had been fulfilled, that Yockletts still remained Mallard land and that the Mallard name still lived at Herringdales.

The boy seemed to give her back into her married allegiance. She felt as if she belonged to Humphrey as much as when he was alive or rather less to him than to his desires, his pleasures, his ambitions, all the unfulfilment in which he had died. Some such emotion must have been unconsciously in her heart even before the birth, for she had deliberately chosen it to take place according to tradition in the great bed of the Squires, when by virtue of her new freedom she could have had a modern bed in a sunny room and lived through her hour without shadows or ghosts.

Now her choice seemed to have reconciled her to the old house and the old bed. As she lay there during the long, comfortable days of convalescence she found that her terrors were gone. Even the shadow of plumes on the wall in candlelight could not disturb her. She felt herself a true Mallard, with her splendid rights, scorning the fears and hesitations of the first months of her marriage. She had gone through some process of initiation while she lay between death and life—a long line of Mallard ladies now called her sister, and all the pride of the Mallard squires seemed to lie in the baby that slept on her arm.

Her convalescence was a long one, because she found it too comfortable to hurry over it. She lay dreaming away the hours in a relief of mind and body that was nearly perfect rest. Her room was full of flowers. Touched no doubt by the plight of the girl whose bridehood, widowhood and motherhood had been all so close—and the last two in such sinister order—the neighbourhood had spent itself in kindness. The gardens of Rushlake Manor, of Stream House, of Lion's Green Hall, and many another—as well as the lowlier gardens of cottages and farms—had been stripped of handfuls and armfuls of Spring flowers—irises, tulips, hyacinths, syringa, lilac, lupin, rhododendron, every flower of the May borders from the last daffodil to the first rose, crammed the room with light and colour and perfume. Lying there, she dreamed and gazed at their heaped masses, at their empurpled blues, their flame-stroked yellows, their burning mauves, their misted reds and flushed whites—at their delicate shapes, their cornets, trumpets, spurs, wings, rings, fans, and crowns. They were a beauty that could not hurt her because it could not torment her with thought. They came, they went, their masses and colours shifted, names were murmured in her ear—names of

gardens, friends and flowers. She smiled and murmured other names. It was all restful and good.

One evening she woke to find her room all sunshine, and the flames of the flowers burning in it with a smoke of perfume. By her bed stood a pyramid of fire, a golden azalea that must have been put there while she slept. Its scent came to her delicately, creeping over her pillow as she turned her pleased face towards it. In its lower branches was stuck a visiting card, and after some luxurious moments in which languor and curiosity strove pleasantly together, she put out her hand, and took and read it.

§2

Later on when she was up and well, and tackling the heavy business of returning thanks for all the cards, notes and flowers that had been sent her, she wondered what she should do about Isabel Halnaker's azalea. She had not kept it in the room while she was ill—she could not bear to look at it when she knew whom it was from. She had made some excuse about its wanting more sun than it could get in her rather dim bedchamber, and had had it taken downstairs. Then on her first day of recovery she had found it, blazing away like the burning bush in the sunshine of the drawing-room window. She had realised that she could not ignore it any longer, but must find some way of dealing with its amazement.

She told herself angrily that Isabel ought not to have sent it, and that her straightest course was to ignore it. It was impossible that there should be even recognition between them after those days in Kent. . . . Isabel herself should not feel it possible—after all, she had suffered as much from Humphrey's wife as ever Humphrey's wife had suffered from her. Why was she making this approach? Or was it no approach, but mere convention, done to avoid attracting gossip to herself by doing differently from her neighbours?

Somehow she could not quite believe that of Isabel, even now when she believed so much that was bad. She could not deny her secret conviction that the gesture had been deliberate—a token of friendship? pity? repentance? what? She did not know, and her curiosity was troubled. She finally decided to send just an ordinary card, one of the number she had had printed to distribute among those who had sent no more than cards—to the flower-senders she was writing little notes, but she could not write to Mrs Halnaker. All she could do, she reflected, as she slipped the card into its envelope was to add "and flowers" to the printed return of her thanks for kind enquiries. She took up her pen to do so, and as she moved, saw the azalea burning in the window, each delicate horn of flame sending as it were the very secret perfume of the sun itself into the air. She felt the beauty touch her, and her hands trembled. A mist of tears suddenly veiled her eyes—and for one moment it was a mist of rain, and through it she saw a carriage driving up a hill, and a woman's white face at the glassless window. . . .

Was she the one to be cruel? Had she the right to be hard? To turn herself in hardness and contempt from this woman whom she had made to suffer so? After all, it was she who had brought their sorrow upon them both—but for her bitter and senseless words to Humphrey he would not have gone away to Yockletts, and it was Yockletts and his uncared for loneliness there

in the great rain that had given him his death. She had served Isabel more cruelly than Isabel had served her, for she had struck deliberately, at a woman whom she knew—not merely followed a course which without her foreseeing had ended in another woman's grief.

She coloured with uneasiness and shame, and all the time she fumbled her pen, not knowing whether to write a note after all, hesitating, but not daring, feeling herself quite unable. Finally she wrote on the card "and lovely flowers" hoping that Mrs Halnaker would read all there was in the extra word.

§3

Two days later a letter came from Isabel. Jenny knew whom it was from when she saw the postmark of Rushlake Green, and her hands trembled as she began to open it. Then she suddenly saw the sweet revenge of returning it unopened. How dared this woman write to her? She must deal with the situation at once—show her that there could never be peace between them. Then she remembered that she herself had prepared the way to peace by meeting Mrs Halnaker's first advance. This letter only meant that Isabel had read the message there was in one adjective . . . and after all, she had already tasted revenge, and it had not been sweet, but salt with tears and bitter with regret. She opened the letter.

It was only a few lines, asking if the writer might be allowed to come and see Lady Mallard one day. "I know that from the usual point of view I have no right to ask this, but I'm hoping you will allow me, as there are one or two important things I want to say to you, and I think that on the whole you will be glad to hear them."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Jenny, out loud in her panic—"I can't see you—I won't hear them."

But half an hour's reflection changed her mind. She began to see her attitude to Isabel as part of the silly childishness she had hoped was passing away. After all, a meeting of some sort between them was inevitable—she could not live on at Herringdales and never meet Mrs Halnaker, and it was far better that their first encounter should be in private. She could then deliberately plan their future relations—she saw now that the cut direct was out of the question, it would be merely to expose her husband's memory and her own humiliation. She would have to maintain at least a public intercourse with Old Mogador, and that intercourse would be full of fears and uncertainties if she did not lay its foundations in a private understanding.

Her reply was rather stiff. She would be pleased to see Mrs Halnaker next Thursday at eleven-thirty. That was a strictly non-social hour. She felt that she was committing herself to no definite policy beyond that already involved in her compassion. She told herself that she was only being fair to Isabel—giving her a chance to explain—since she wanted to . . . which was odd. She would not acknowledge even to herself that her curiosity was involved, that she longed to know what were the "one or two important things" that Isabel meant to say and that she would be "glad to hear."

On Thursday morning she was pale with agitation, and at first uncertain as to whether she should prepare the servants for Mrs Halnaker's visit, or let

it take them, and presumably herself, by surprise. She wondered how much they knew . . . "ask the servants"—that echo was growing dim . . . but now that Humphrey was dead and there was no master of the house it might be a good excuse for pensioning off old Harris the butler and engaging a really efficient parlourmaid in his stead. Of course there would still be Anna Luck—Jenny felt a raging desire to get rid of Anna Luck, to get rid of Miss Mollet up at Cade Street, of all those who remembered. . . .

Finally she compromised by saying to Harris as casually as she could—"Mrs Halnaker may be coming to see me this morning—if she comes, I'm in the morning-room."

Then she wondered how Isabel would arrive—would she come furtively as one on a secret errand, or would she drive up splendidly and openly in the Mogador carriage? In her heart Jenny felt it would be the latter.

But Isabel came neither way. She arrived neither secretly nor splendidly, but sensationally. Shortly after half-past eleven sounds as of distant explosions were heard, drawing gradually nearer, and ultimately linked by a rattling roar which seemed to be in Herringdales drive itself. Full of alarm and curiosity, Jenny ran to the window, and had her first sight of a motor-car. It came jerking up to the front door, with a cloud of evil-smelling smoke tailing from under it, and Claude Halnaker high above the steering wheel, while his wife sat beside him her head and hat entirely covered by a large veil. Halnaker pulled violently at several levers, the car gave a deafening report and stopped still.

Isabel could not have made her visit more public. Jenny could hear the excited squeaking of maids at the upper windows, and old Harris was so perturbed that on his way to answer the bell he thrust his head into the morning-room with the cry "It's an ortymobble, my lady," as if uncertain whether anyone arriving so unusually ought to be admitted.

"Please show Mr and Mrs Halnaker in here."

She would make that much use of good-for-nothing Claude Halnaker—he should help cover an awkward situation. But it was Isabel who marched in alone, her veil discarded, to show hat and hair unruffled by recent adventures.

"Please forgive me for coming this noisy and startling way, but our old coachman's laid up, so I couldn't have the carriage, and Claude offered to drive me over in his new toy. He's going on to Mayfield, and will call for me on his way back."

"I think it's very brave of you. Weren't you frightened?"

"No, not frightened, but nearly shaken and rattled to bits. It's lucky I've been out once before, or I'd have arrived here with a totally black face—but that earlier experience taught me to wear a veil."

Thus the motor-car helped them to cover the first awkward moments of meeting.

§4

The moment came when they could talk of it no longer, and for a few seconds they faced each other uneasily, aware of inevitable conflict. Isabel was the first to break the silence.

"I came to see you because one or two things made me think you wouldn't refuse to hear what I've got to say."

She hesitated again, as if expecting some remark from Jenny, but as none was forthcoming, she went on—

"I shouldn't for a moment have thought of intruding if I didn't feel that I could tell you things that will make you happier than you probably are."

"What things?"

Jenny's voice sounded gruffer than she meant it.

"Things about Humphrey and me. Of course I know now that you've heard about us, and you've probably thought two quite different things at two different times. . . ."

Jenny was struck by Isabel's insight. She had thought two different things, and they had both hurt her in two terrible, different ways. Something of the old pain awoke in her eyes, and Isabel turned hers from her.

"I'm sorry—I know you must hate the sight of me. But one of the things I have to tell you is that Humphrey and I haven't given one thought, one single thought to each other, since you came—since before you came."

"But that isn't true—he thought of you continually, he thought of you at the last . . . and you must have thought of him."

"Not as lovers—that's what I mean. You may have imagined that he's been untrue to you in his heart, but he hasn't—even at the last. He was unconscious then—his mind was back in the past, when only I was there, before you came."

Jenny could not speak. Was Isabel actually trying to comfort her, trying to explain away the moment when her dying husband had turned from her to his forbidden memory?

"When you first heard about us," continued Isabel in her clear, level voice—"you probably thought it was just a common affair between a bachelor and a married woman. I'm talking from my own experience—there was a day when I first heard of an affair of my husband's before we married—of more than one affair. . . . I heard of it, and it seemed to degrade my love and my marriage. I saw it as something altogether common and contemptible—and I was right. But you were wrong. I can tell you that with all the truth of my heart, now when I've had three years to think it over."

Jenny nodded her head.

"I know it's true. It—it wasn't like that."

"But later on you thought something that hurt you even more—when Humphrey asked for me at Yockletts, you thought that I was the one great love of his life, and that you counted for nothing."

"How—how can you know?"

"They told me at Yockletts that he'd asked for me, and you'd been noble enough to send—"

"Oh, don't!" cried Jenny.

"I only want to say again what I've said before—that his mind was in the past, where I belonged. He was in the place where I'd often been, and you never had, so it was only natural that his wandering mind should find me . . ." She drew her breath in sharply, as if for the first time she suffered in this strange talk . . . "it wasn't because he loved me so very much—then. He didn't. For the matter of that, he never loved me as I loved him. There was always something he loved better."

"The land," said Jenny.

Isabel nodded.

"You've seen it."

"Yes—he loved it more than either of us."

"It's always like that with the best men—there's always something in their lives more than love. Generally, it doesn't matter, because generally there's no conflict. But with Humphrey his love and his life's work were always at odds. I'd hoped that when he married they wouldn't be—that then he'd be able to find peace. But the conflict went deeper than I saw. . . ."

"It may have been my fault," said Jenny.

Isabel shook her head.

"Don't think it. You're wrong. It was in him—he couldn't give his heart. I thought he could—if the way was clear—but I made a mistake, I didn't know him as well as I thought. I want you to see exactly what happened—Humphrey's affair with me was not broken up by his marriage, by his meeting a rich girl and deciding to marry her to save his family and estate. I expect you've been thinking that, and one of the reasons I've come today is to tell you that it isn't true. We broke off our friendship a year before he even met you. It is true that I broke it off, but I did so only because I saw that his love for me was failing, that he was beginning to feel the pull of his land against me. From the beginning I'd seen that time would come. That's why I wouldn't let Claude set me free to marry—I put it on the children, but it wasn't the children; I've never been the sort of woman whose child means more to her than her man—it was simply because I saw he didn't really want it, and that if it happened he'd come in time to hate me for it. . . . And if he'd

been different, if he'd put me first and counted everything else well lost for me, I couldn't have loved him."

She smiled wryly, and her words were followed by an awkward moment of silence. Jenny had listened attentively, but now she suddenly felt that the whole situation was beyond her; that this was not how she had expected Isabel to behave and speak. Why was she giving this elaborate explanation of the past—trying, as it seemed, to minimize her share in it? She forced her lips to frame the question.

"Why are you telling me all this?"

Isabel gave her a swift glance from those curiously direct eyes. For a moment Jenny thought inexplicably of a bird flying over dark waters.

"I'm telling you because I like you—I've always liked you, though I could see that, naturally I suppose, Humphrey didn't want us to be friends. And now I don't want you to think of me as a rival. Because I've never been your rival. I was gone before you came, and afterwards . . . whatever you thought, or he gave you reason to think, I was only a memory."

"But why do you mind what I think of you?"

"Because, as I've just told you, I like you, and I want your good opinion. Or perhaps I ought to say, I don't want your bad opinion. I don't want you to think of me as an adventuress who took your husband from you, but a woman who had the same misfortune as you to love him unsuccessfully."

"But I—I can't help—I mean I don't understand—I mean, even if you didn't take him from me, it wasn't right—it was wrong—nothing can make me say it was right to love him when you were married . . . and you might have guessed there'd be a time when he'd marry somebody, who . . ."

Her words faltered, but the thought behind them was unhesitating. Jenny had been brought up in a tough school of morals.

Isabel sighed.

"I don't say it was right, and I shan't ask you not to think badly of me on that account. But you might have thought worse—you might have thought I'd come between you—stood between you."

Jenny did not speak. A crowd of words were at her lips, but she remembered that earlier discussion she had had, with Humphrey, when he had called her "hard" and "ignorant," when her protesting sense of right had seemed only to confirm him in hostility and self-vindication.

"I don't want to excuse myself," continued Isabel quietly—"but I suppose that circumstances sometimes make a difference in these things. If I'd had any religion, for instance, there might have been something in my life bigger than my love for Humphrey. But there was nothing."

"I don't know about religion. . . . I mean, a thing's right or wrong, isn't it?"

"Is it? I don't feel so sure. Anyhow, when one's in love one doesn't care a damn about right or wrong. Did you?"

Jenny went pale even to her lips. Isabel's words struck suddenly, unexpectedly home. Did she mean them? Had her first "you'd been noble enough to send" been mere irony? Even if she didn't mean them they were an exposure and a rebuke. There she, Jenny, sat preaching of right and wrong when she . . .

"Are you ill, Lady Mallard? Can I do anything for you—send for anybody?"

She half rose, but Jenny motioned her desperately to sit down again.

"No—I'm all right . . . only I—"

She burst into tears.

Never had she cursed more heartily her fatal ease in weeping. For weeks she had thought it superseded by a sterner habit, but now here it was upon her again, betraying her just when she most needed defence. She had never expected such humiliation—that this interview between her and the guilty Isabel should end in her own frantic, penitential tears.

"My dear . . ."

She heard Isabel gasp, then move suddenly. There was a rustle of skirts on the floor, and the next minute the other woman's arms were round her, drawing her close in comfort and compassion.

"Don't!" cried Jenny, but she made no struggle to enforce her cry. Instead her whole body seemed to relax. Her head sank on Isabel's shoulder, and for a few moments she sobbed helplessly in her arms. But it was not long that her conscience allowed her this relief.

"Don't!" she cried again—"let me go—I haven't told you. . . . You'll hate me when I do—but I must. . . . I never sent for you when Humphrey asked for you—not when he asked first. If I'd sent then, you'd have got there in time. But I didn't . . . till I could bear it no longer—and then it was too late."

Isabel's arms still clasped her.

"Never mind," she said soothingly—"you sent as soon as you were able."

"Oh, no, I didn't—I could have sent hours before I did."

"I mean as soon as your heart was able, and naturally that wasn't at once. Don't worry because you didn't rush to the telegraph office directly Humphrey asked for me. No woman would have. I shouldn't myself."

"Oh, yes," cried Jenny, "you would."

"I don't think I should have at all, anyhow not till I'd thought it over. So don't worry any more about that—if you have been worrying."

“Of course I’ve been worrying. Oh, it’s dreadful to think . . . how he lay there watching the door. But at the end he thought you were there. His mind was wandering—he couldn’t see—and I pretended . . .”

“Then that’s all that matters.”

“But you—you suffered . . .”

“I can stand a few knocks—and what about you? You suffered too. And I tell you I’d have done just the same in your place. So don’t think about that any more. We’ve both of us got our sorrows on his account, so don’t let’s add to them by brooding on the wrongs we’ve done each other.”

She rose from her knees beside Jenny, and went back to her chair.

§5

It was not till long afterwards—after Isabel had gone as she had come in a cloud of stench and racket—that Jenny could think at all coherently of that astounding interview. It was plain to her that, incredible as it might seem, Mrs Halnaker wanted her friendship, and had risked every possible humiliation and rebuff in order to secure it.

She wondered why she wanted it so much. "I like you—I've always liked you." That was flattering, but it did not seem to account entirely for such a resolute approach. Jenny felt that an equally strong motive must be Isabel's love for Humphrey, bringing the desire to love what he had loved. It was a strange motive, and she certainly would not have thought of it a year ago; but now she thought of it because an emotion very like it was in her own heart.

She wanted to be friends with Isabel again. She hated her no longer, and she knew that one of the reasons why she no longer hated her was the very reason why she had hated her in the beginning—because Humphrey had loved her. From the day of his death she had hated her less, and now she hated her no more, for in the love that Humphrey had given her she seemed to meet a little of himself, as if he lived on in what he had loved. Death had given him the franchise of the angels, and that franchise had been extended to herself and Isabel, setting them beyond the conflict of marrying and giving in marriage.

Besides, in a still greater measure, her child's birth had destroyed any possible lingering of her jealousy. How could she be jealous when she held in her arms this child who was strangely Humphrey himself. . . . Isabel had never held that joy. No mental comradeship and equality could have given it to her. For Jenny alone Humphrey lived on in the body's great gift. She could afford to be generous, to forget, to let Isabel keep what had been hers.

During the next few days she wondered what the next development would be. Would Mrs Halnaker make any sign—hold out her hand again? Or was she waiting for Jenny to make the next approach? Or perhaps she had done all that she had ever intended to do—cleared the issues between them. Perhaps she did not wish for friendship with the woman who had taken her place in Humphrey's life if not in Humphrey's heart. Perhaps, in spite of her generosity, she could not forget even if she could forgive the final cruelty that had kept her from the deathbed of the man she loved. . . . As Jenny pondered these thoughts she realised that she would be exceedingly disappointed if the affair was left where it stood. She wanted to know at least how Isabel intended things to be, and if she did not write soon,

then Jenny must write—perhaps she ought to write at once, since Isabel had already ventured much in her approaches.

But just as she was trying to summon the resolution to do so, another letter arrived from Old Mogador, asking Lady Mallard to lunch there the following week.

"There will only be my sister and myself—quite informal—so please come."

At first Jenny was surprised. Isabel seemed so matter-of-fact—not a single allusion to their interview; just an ordinary invitation that she might have sent anybody. But when she thought it over, she was pleased. After all, what more could they say to each other? And was there any profit in saying again what had been so painfully said once? The plan seemed admirably constructed—an informal luncheon at which she and Isabel would not be in any danger of being left alone. It was comforting to know that their next meeting would take place in the presence of a stranger.

§6

Mrs Halnaker's sister, Mrs Woodruffe, turned out to be a quiet, good-looking woman, some years older than Isabel, whose talk and personality seemed to make very little difference to the situation beyond guaranteeing its safety. Not, as Jenny soon guessed, that there was any real need for a guarantee. Isabel's whole manner seemed designed to emphasise the normal. There was something about her which said "if you like we will never talk of these distressing things again." Jenny was beginning to realise that her own love of explanation and re-explanation was not shared by the more strong-minded of her contemporaries, and began to suspect that it belonged to the order of childish things which it was time to put away. In a sense she would have liked the discussion that she dreaded, but she made up her mind that if Isabel did not want it, it should never happen. The grave of the past should close over the ill they had done and the ill they had endured.

It was a warm, sunny day, and after luncheon they sat out in the pillared shade of the verandah and Mrs Halnaker's little daughter was brought to them. The two elder children were both boys, and more Claude's, it seemed, than Isabel's. They both had his broad face and blue eyes, and his sun-bleached brownish hair. But the daughter, at a year old, already had her mother's delicate darkness.

"What's her name?" asked Jenny.

"She has a ridiculous name. An uncle of Claude's, from whom he has 'expectations,' suddenly decided to resent the fact that neither Wilfred nor Lance was named after him. So we promised that if the baby was a boy we'd call it Wingfield—and then when it wasn't a boy we thought that we might as well call it Wingfield all the same. It would be an even greater compliment to the uncle, and as for poor baby, we can shorten it to Wing, which I rather like."

"So do I," said Jenny.

"What are you calling your boy?"

"Humphrey Thomas Aubrey. It's a long string, but Humphrey wanted him to be called Aubrey, which is a 'family' name, and I wanted him to be called Humphrey, and then naturally my father would like his name to go to his first grandson."

"Have any of your people seen him?"

"No, but I'm taking him North next week. It's rather a business at his age, but my parents don't care for travelling, so it's the only way of bringing them together."

“You won’t be staying long, I suppose? I mean you’ve no intention of leaving Herringdales, and settling near your people?”

“I!—No!—How could I?”

Isabel’s eyes lit up.

“I’m glad you feel like that. I’m glad you feel you belong here.”

“Of course I do—and not only on my own account There’s Baby—I couldn’t bring him up away from his own place. And there’s the place itself, and all I promised . . . I shan’t be away more than a fortnight. I don’t really want to be away as long as that. There’s a terrible lot to see to at Herringdales.”

“There must be,” Isabel hesitated, as if afraid of pushing enquiry beyond good manners—“I suppose you still have Walton as agent.”

“Yes, but of course he’s not used to running things on his own. Humphrey always used to see to everything. My solicitors advise me to engage a bailiff.”

“I think that would be wise. And what about the Kent Land—shall you sell that?”

For the first time the conversation had touched the edges of that world they had decided in mutual respect to ignore. Jenny answered steadily—

“No, I shan’t sell it. Humphrey particularly didn’t want it to be sold. He made me promise to keep it . . . for the child when he grows up.”

She had done her honour to Isabel—she had shown her that the land was hers. But as she spoke the last word she saw that Yockletts was not for Isabel’s honour alone. If the land was hers, and kept only because it was hers, it was kept for the child, which was Jenny’s. Thus Jenny’s and Isabel’s honour, which the dead had given them, was united in one promise, given to the dead.

§7

A few days later Jenny travelled North, with her baby and her nurse and all their paraphernalia. It was a visit she felt bound to pay, though she dreaded the thought of the questions it might reopen and the difficulties it might revive. She went chiefly for her mother's sake. Mrs Bastow had been tormented by the struggle between her desire to be with her daughter at her baby's birth and her fear of the long journey to the South coupled with her reluctance to leave her husband during the first difficult months of transplantation. Jenny had persuaded her not to come—her experiences had made her feel strangely remote from the home she had left, and she had dreaded the possible reopening of the family squabble at such a time—her mother's pathos might work more strongly on her soul than her father's bullying, and revive the old conflict that she had silenced with a vow.

She had promised to take the child North at the first opportunity, and here she was, brought from the warm, pollen-scented May of the southern fields, to the thin cold May of Cleveland, where the buttercups had scarcely begun to bloom. This time she did not feel the gay sense of home-coming that had brightened her first return. The long vault of Darlington station was cold and howling with winds, and as the train ran out towards Thorneby and Middlesbrough the grey sky was smeeched over with scuds of evil-scented smoke. She noticed the stunted trees that could not grow in the sulphur-laden atmosphere, the cottage windows that were grimy with smoke, the cottage gardens that were starved for the smoke-hidden sun.

"Lor!" shrieked her Brighton-born nurse in fear, as an emptying truck sent a stream of molten flame down the side of the great slag heap outside Dinsdale.

The falling night seemed full of evil eyes, as flames winked from the mouths of ovens and kilns or flew from the tops of chimneys. The works of Dorman, Long and Co. just outside Middlesbrough were going full blast, with every chimney belching and every window alight. It seemed to Jenny as if the distress of iron could not be so great after all. She wondered if the furnaces of Carlingrove were once more alight.

Timothy met them at the station. It seemed strange to take a cab and drive to a number in a street, instead of prancing out to Slapewath behind two fine horses. But on her arrival Jenny was relieved to find that the street was not quite so mean as she had anticipated. Number eight was a pleasant, semi-detached house, with a strip of lawn, and in the open doorway a parlourmaid with long streamers to her cap proclaimed that Mrs Bastow had not been able to sink quite so low as she had hoped.

Indeed the whole of her first evening was a relief and a surprise. Both her father and mother seemed touchingly glad to see her and to welcome their grandchild. The house was comfortably furnished with salvage from Slapewath, the comfort without the glory, and late dinner had given place to a high tea which was only a little less abundant. Evidently her parents had saved more from the wreck than they had expected, and possibly the reconstruction scheme was equally a denial of their forebodings; but she would hear more of that, no doubt, tomorrow.

"Slapewath's still standing empty," said her father, when at last little Aubrey was safely asleep upstairs, and they all sat round the tea-table before plates of pie—"I can't get anyone to take it. There it stands—a house with thirty bedrooms, seven reception rooms, billiard room, tennis lawns, bicycle track, stables, gas, hot water pipes, and no one will live in it. I don't know what's happened to the iron-masters these days. Twenty years ago we were all building against each other, and when I built Slapewath there wasn't one of them that wouldn't have given his head to put me out of it. And now I'm out—and they won't even make an offer. I'm letting off some of the Park as grazing, but the house . . . it breaks my heart to see it standing empty."

"Perhaps it's waiting for you to come back again, Dad. You may some day, you know."

"Ee, but wouldn't that be fine!" the old man rubbed his hands, "and wouldn't it be fine for your little chap if one day he inherited Slapewath Grange as well as Herringdales Manor! But it can't happen. I must sell the place. Maybe one of these American Millionaires ud buy. I'd like to see the poor old house lived in splendidly. I don't hold with all this plain living—unless you're bust and saving. You tell me you haven't even got gas at your place."

"No, nor a bath-room."

The tea-table marvelled.

"Why, we've got one here, in this little house," said Mrs Bastow.

"The country's different—anyhow in the south. For one thing it's difficult to get water. But I shall have to think of putting in a bath-room now Baby's come."

It suddenly struck her that now her choice was free there were many small changes she would make at Herringdales.

§8

The question of her capital in Bastow, Routh and Partners did not provoke the crisis she had feared. She soon found out why her family seemed so much more comfortable and cheerful than had seemed possible. Messrs Easby and Wright, a comparatively new firm, had made an offer to buy Bastow's. The old business would be incorporated in the new, which would be known as Easby, Wright and Bastow, and her father would keep his place of Managing Director. Prospects were good, as apparently the iron trade was steadying itself again after the quakes of last year. The works at Carlingrove would be kept on, with more up-to-date methods and sounder company-management. Old Bastow was full of the new scheme.

"Not that I expect it'll do much in my day, but by the time Timothy's children are growing up . . ."

He made an effort to persuade Jenny to re-invest her money, but when she told him what she promised Humphrey, he put up only a mild opposition. As she had supposed, the claims of the dead impressed him more than all the energies and ambitions of the living.

"We can do without the money now—there's plenty new capital coming in, even though we shan't pay more than seven per cent this time. Not that you'd ever find a better investment—a safe 'un, that's to say—still, as you've promised him that's dead . . . I only hope your farms ull serve you as well as our mines."

"I don't expect ever to be very rich," said Jenny, "but if I can only keep things going till Aubrey comes of age, then I'll have kept my promise to Humphrey, and feel I've done something in life."

She did not see much of her brother while she was at home. He seemed to be more involved in the new effort even than her father, though she knew he did not like it and had no very high hopes.

"We'll just rub along, I expect," he said, "unless we get an opportunity for some exceptional piece of villainy—either ramping over some weaker business, or supplying some foreign power with war material."

"Then why do you encourage Dad?"

"I don't encourage him, I merely stand by him. I've got to do that. It would break his heart if I stood out."

"You mean that I have, so you mustn't."

"I think you were quite right to stand out, but I've got to take your place all the same. I'm different from you—there are no ties holding me to anything else. You can't turn down your husband and son, and I can't turn down my father and mother. We're both sacrificing ourselves."

"I don't think I am."

He smiled.

"Perhaps I'm not either, so very much. Only one likes to feel a martyr. After all, I can't think of anything else I want to do. I'd hate doing nothing, and I'd hate the ordinary professions. I sometimes thought I'd like to be a Minister—"

"A Baptist Minister!"

"Of course—Oh, but I forgot, you little snob, you're Church now. You've nothing to do with Ministers any longer."

"But anyhow I can't imagine you as a Minister."

"No, nor, to be frank, can I. It's simply a general feeling that I want to do something instead of merely to get something. Our business here is simply a means to an end—the getting of money. My ideal job is to do something which seems really worth while in itself, and brings in just enough money to keep you while you're doing it. If I could write verses, I expect I'd want to be a poet—or a musician, or painter . . . but I've got no talents, so all I can think of is a Minister, though I'm sure I'd make a bad one."

"I'm glad you don't think of it seriously. I'd hate you to be a Minister."

"I'm not likely ever to be anything of the kind, so you needn't worry. I'll just be a dull and fairly prosperous business man—not half as interesting as Dad—no ups and downs, just a jog-trot level of hard work and comfortable living."

"Well, that won't be nearly so bad as you make it sound."

"Won't it? Haven't you heard—'and the iron entered into his soul'? That's what it'll do to me—some day."

Jenny felt sorry for him, though it was a sop to her conscience to find him thus determined. Her brother's bondage would set her free—she would have fewer thoughts to bind her where she knew now that she belonged no more.

As the days of her visit went by, she realised that she was counting them till her return. She was longing to go back—not only to the sunshine and the fields and the old Manor house which lacked half the comforts of this house in a Middlesbrough street—but to the duties of her new estate, to her cares and toils as the mother of a Squire. Since Humphrey's death she had made only general plans for the future of Herringdales, but now she felt anxious to move from the general to the particular, to begin her undertaking for the land, her task of preserving it for her son, till he should be old enough to step into her shoes.

It was strange that her husband's death should only have confirmed her in her adoption. Instead of feeling set free to deal how she chose with life, to make her own plans and decisions, she felt definitely committed to the way

Humphrey had chosen for her, and to which, had he lived, she would have been inevitably bound. The only difference was that while in his lifetime her obedience had been unwilling, a jealous obedience, conscious of a perpetual rivalry between her claims and the claims she served, her service now was willing, even eager, without any sense of jealousy or conflict. In serving Herringdales, in serving Mallard, she was no longer serving a hard, impersonal force of land and family, which claimed in sacrifice all the sweeter things of life, but she was serving those sweet things themselves—the love of husband and son, of house and household. The dreary forces had become personal, alive and glowing, and love no longer strove with stone.

§9

In the swale of a June day she was back at Heathfield, driving along the ridge, watching the sunset gather slowly behind the downs and set its fiery signature upon the Marsh. The air smelt of hay—it was nearly as thick as the air of a Middlesbrough twilight, but thick with the fumes of life. Along the road workers were going home, plodding slowly one by one, as the fields and the farmyards released them—not pouring out in sudden noisy squads at the clanging of a bell. Oh, it was good to be back in this peace, to which she belonged by blessed adoption.

Clop, clop . . . the horses turned out of the road now wide with the converging streams of the road from Horeham and the road from Mayfield. Shadows fell across the dipping lane—shadows of hazel and sallow and birch, swaying gently in the sunset breeze, while almost like a ghost came the scent of the dusty wild rose.

"Baby, we'll soon be home."

She bent over the mass of shawls and veiling that was Sir Aubrey Mallard, Bart. He was asleep, and all unknowing passed through his own gates, and up the drive to the door of Herringdales. The old red tiles were bloomy with passion vine, and the heads of roses nodded against the windows, and blazed in the column of fire that Carmine Pillar set against the wall.

For a moment her heart lifted sharply—in a sudden, stabbing pain for Humphrey, who had loved this place, but could see it no longer. But there was comfort in the thought that he could see it through her eyes, that her love for it would keep his awake, and the love of their son would come after them.

Old Harris was at the door in welcome, with Anna Luck hovering behind him among the shadows of the hall. Jenny wondered how she could ever have found the place unfriendly. There were shadows indeed, but the broken sunset lights shifted among them, making spots and shafts and flickers of ruddy brightness; and on every shelf and table flowers were set—glorious patches of blue larkspur and crimson peony, of freckled lily and snow-white and blood-red rose, that seemed to hold light in themselves so vital was their blooming.

"Well, here we are, Anna, and none the worse for our journey."

"I'm glad to hear it, my lady."

Anna peered at the veiled countenance of the heir, as if hoping to read there symptoms discreditable to the nurse, whom she despised.

“Don’t touch him—he’s asleep,” said the nurse, who had her own views of Anna Luck.

Jenny quickly moved for peace.

“Anna, would you get me a cup of tea—I’m simply dying for one—I’ve had nothing since we left London.”

“Very good, my lady. Where shall I bring it?”

“In the drawing-room, please. I’m going to read my letters.”

There was a little pile of them there awaiting her, and seeing that one was in Mrs Halnaker’s writing, she opened it first.

> Dear Lady Mallard,
>
> This is just a note to welcome you home to Herringdales. I do hope you are not too tired after your journey, and that the sun will shine upon your return.
>
> All greetings from
> Isabel Halnaker.

Jenny was touched. She read the thought behind the words—Isabel’s thought of how she might compare her homecoming with two earlier ones: the day when she had first come to Herringdales as a bride, and the dreadful day of her return from Kent. It was kind of Isabel to have sent those two lines of welcome—a friendly, sisterly act. Jenny’s heart warmed towards her.

The note contained no suggestion of meeting, but she told herself that Isabel had no doubt deliberately confined her message to welcome only. Besides, it was surely for Jenny to make the next move. . . . She decided then and there that she would ask Mrs Halnaker to dinner—next week, as soon as her routine was established and her house in order.

§10

When the invitation was actually sent, it proved to be even bolder than she had planned, for she invited Isabel to come alone. Mrs Woodruffe had been gone some time, so there was no question of including her, and as for Claude Halnaker, his presence would involve another man, and Jenny felt sure that Isabel would understand her reluctance to make a formal occasion of the event. She was right. An acceptance came almost immediately, and the happy, busy days of her return were made happier and busier by this new expectation.

Though there would be only herself and Mrs Halnaker, she made her preparations just as carefully as for a formal dinner-party. She found herself instinctively rejecting the idea that because they were two women dining together no particular excellence was required either of food or wine. She would have acted according to this idea with anyone else, but somehow Isabel was different—Jenny felt that she would appreciate, and that it would be humiliating to fall short of her appreciation.

Two years' remoteness from the standards of Slapewath Grange had faded her delight in sugar and cream and weakened her trust in them as the foundation of a successful meal. She turned rather to her farmyard and her garden, which gave her a plump spring chicken, new peas, tender, young potatoes, and early strawberries. It was the food of Springtime, and there was Springtime on her table, where blue and purple lupins rose from tall vases into the twilight of the ceiling. The meal was set for daylight; only the lighted candles shone for the dusk in which it would end.

Isabel came, this time in her carriage, and Jenny rose to greet her as her golden gown caught the sunset in the drawing-room door. She saw with pleasure that her guest too had thought the occasion worth adornment. She wore a gown of gold brocade, stiff in the skirt, which stood out round her like the skirt of a mediaeval queen, cloudy at the breast, where floating billows of tulle veiled neck and arms and the sweetness of a single golden rose. She looked like a queen, with her high head and her swimming gait—Jenny's heart bowed to her beauty and her pride, and glowed with the hope of privilege.

Their conversation was rather difficult at first. Both were a little shy, and it was a relief when Harris announced that dinner was served, and they moved into the dining-room. Here food and wine soon put them at their ease. Jenny was no judge of wine, but she had renounced the heresy of Slapewath, and was pleased to find that her craving for lemonade was growing less. For tonight she had chosen a wine that Humphrey had liked

and praised—a light Barsac, both delicate and dry. She felt rewarded for her renunciation of Grave lusciousness when she saw Isabel's eyes laugh at her over the top of the golden glass and heard her say—

"My dear, this wine's been to heaven and come back again."

"Humphrey chose it—I mean . . ." she blushed and faltered.

"He had a good taste in wines. You must be proud of your cellar."

"I'm afraid I don't understand much about it—we never drank wine at home, and when I married I found Humphrey liked to manage these things. But I must learn now—I hate women who say they don't mind what they eat and drink."

She had not hated them half an hour ago, but she found that she hated them extremely, now that Isabel said:

"So do I."

"I mean people who have boiled eggs brought in on trays," continued Jenny, her wrath waxing against a private custom which from henceforward she renounced entirely.

"Yes, it seems to me so foolish to pretend to be indifferent about these things which we really can control, when there are so many things which we've got to leave alone and do without. We can't make the sun and moon stand still, but we can make the cook stay, so why despise comfort which is often the only thing life allows us to achieve?"

Jenny was not very sure of this. The Isabels of this world may be able to make the cook stay, but for the Jennies the sun is not more determinedly set on his course. . . . However, she was too diffident to challenge the statement, and the next moment Mrs Halnaker continued:

"Of course I'm talking about women like us—with enough money and intelligence to order these things as we like. And by comfort I don't only mean physical comfort; I mean mental comfort—music, books, philosophy."

"Philosophy . . ." Jenny respectfully pondered the word.

"Not cut and dried system—I don't pretend to be a learned woman—but one's own ideas about life, one's thoughts. There are two departments of life that I can be happy in—my household and my thoughts—because I have control in both."

Jenny did not feel that she had control in either.

"Outside them," continued Mrs Halnaker, "I meet all sorts of miseries and disappointments, but I'm able to bear them because I have my refuge—in a book or a glass of wine. . . . You think me very trivial, I expect, or cynical, but life has taught me to look for comfort in little things."

Jenny hoped that life would teach her something gayer than that. She looked rather sadly at Isabel, whose face was beginning to bloom with candle-light as the dusk fell.

"Perhaps," she ventured—"bigger things are coming . . . with comfort, I mean. There are your children growing up . . ."

"Yes, of course. There's all that and much more. It's only that I've learned to distrust the big things of life that have always failed me, and turn to the little things, that have always been kind. I own it's a confession of failure on my part."

"But you're still young. You can't be more than thirty. You talk as if your life was over."

Isabel smiled before she spoke.

"Do you know, I think you're going to be a very good friend for me? You're going to prevent my distrust of life getting the better of me. After all, you've suffered too, and yet you still look forward to things . . . you're going to show me at least that mine isn't the only possible attitude."

"But I think it an extremely good attitude all the same!"—Jenny was feeling that she had been too bold in criticism—"your ideas about comfort and eating and drinking . . . I think you're going to be a very good friend for me too. There are lots of things I ought to do better in my house."

"I wonder what. This dinner could scarcely be improved upon."

"Oh, do you like it? I'm so glad. I took such trouble—I mean . . . I didn't want you to think me the sort of woman who doesn't understand these things. . . . I must have known, somehow. But there are lots of other things I want to get right. When Humphrey was alive, you've no idea how much everything went on of its own accord—what with the old servants, and him knowing and doing such a lot himself . . . But now, I've been wondering if I'd make any changes. I thought I'd like to have women servants only. Do you think that would be wise?"

"I much prefer women if one can get good ones, and haven't got a man in the house. But old Harris has been with you so many years."

"I'd have to pension him off, of course, but he's really getting too old for work. So is Anna Luck. I do feel I'd like to make a fresh start. . . ."

She stopped abruptly, for her sentence would naturally have ended "with servants who don't know." She would like to think that her friendship with Isabel was not the gossip of the servants' hall, that there would be no old butler and housemaid to tell curious girls of its strange foundation. But she could not say this to Isabel—it would break their covenant—so she stopped in confusion, and the next moment the entrance of Harris with the coffee made a change of subject essential.

They did not return to those difficult topics with which they had started. Isabel began to give her a recipe for dandelion wine, and for the rest of the meal they talked mainly on that level. But somehow it was just as inspiring. Whether she talked philosophy or cookery, Isabel talked in a way that

seemed to make the subject vital. Jenny found clothes quite as interesting to talk about as life and death.

"I've heard that sleeves are getting small again. . . ."

"They say that fringes are going out. . . ."

The room was quite dark now, except for the orange glow of the candles, gleaming on the silver sweet-dishes and wine-coolers, lighting up Isabel's golden beauty and its reflection in the brown pool of the table. The window was a square of blue, and into the corner of it crept the yellow crescent of the moon, moving upward from the ring of sallows at the bottom of the garden. It was one of those moments that remain, because in them mysteriously the commonest life seems to touch wonder, to hang as it were between earth and heaven . . . memory would always hold this picture of darkness and candle-light, of a woman's beauty mirrored golden brown in the pool of a polished table, of a crescent moon climbing the sky.

The rest of the evening passed quickly. They sat in the drawing-room and talked of servants, children, gardening, parties, and visits to town. Then Isabel's carriage was announced, and she took her leave. They both told themselves and each other that they had spent a delightful evening and must dine again together soon; but they did not know that they were to dine together practically every week till the end of their lives.

§11

The custom was begun by Isabel inviting Jenny to dinner the following Saturday. Her husband was away and they had dinner alone in the dining-room at Mogador Hall, where the walls were ivory tinted and fluted pillars guarded the door. Outside the window more pillars were supporting the verandah, and dividing the twilight sky. Each division seemed in itself a picture to Jenny as she sat facing it—one held a single cypress tree, rising clear black out of a low scramble of bushes, another held the fountain spraying silver in the dusk, and another held a carven nymph listening to a shell. All had for background the soft, lightless blue of the northern sky, into which the stars came pricking one by one, till at last the Great Wain hung in a darkness where cypress, nymph, and fountain were blotted out.

They drank a light hock, and ate the usual summertime peas and strawberries, though for young chicken Isabel had substituted young lamb, and after the sweet came a more wintry dish of grilled almonds, tasting of salt and fire. Their conversation was much as it had been at Herringdales, touching the light yet honest things of life, as suited a light and honest meal. But towards the end of dinner they had at least one glance at darkness. It came of Isabel's referring, in the natural course of some other topic, to her husband's absence from home, and Jenny's asking when she expected him back.

"I don't know."

There was something in the way she said the words that gave import to her ignorance. Then seeing from the other's face that she had let a corner of the veil drop, she shook her head and smiled.

"I never do know much about my husband. He often goes and stays away, and sometimes I don't even know where he is."

"That must be rather awful for you."

"Yes, it often is—not always now. I've learned acquiescence."

Jenny's indignation suddenly burned.

"I think that's the saddest part of all."

"Do you?—No, I don't agree. If I'd learned it earlier I might have spared myself—and others—a lot. My marriage doesn't go so badly now. My husband and I are good friends when we are together, which, after all, is most of the time. As the years go by I think we shall get closer instead of further apart. When I was first married I had high expectations and no tolerance whatever. When I found my expectations would never be realised, I lost all hope and all patience, and very nearly wrecked the whole show."

"But surely it's natural to have high expectations when one marries."

"Yes, but they should be reasonable—and they should be tempered with a little wholesome fear. It's a remarkable thing that marriage which is the most human and natural state one could imagine requires practically superhuman and supernatural qualities to make it a success."

"Oh, dear! What can we do then?"

"Find happiness in other things, as I was telling you last week."

"But it seems so—so hopeless, somehow. I mean a glass of wine . . . you said 'a glass of wine.' "

She spoke tragically in the voice of dying romance.

"My dear, don't take me so seriously. And I don't think I said only 'a glass of wine,' I said 'a book' as well. Surely books aren't an ignoble refuge. . . . And we spoke of our children. That's a happiness we women have specially prepared for us—you'll find that out some day."

"Have you found it out?"

"Yes, in a measure, though not to the extent that you will. To me 'man' always means more than 'child,' even when the man has failed me. But I shall adore the little creature Wing."

"More than the boys?"

"Yes, certainly more than the boys, which shows I'm not the true mother-type of woman. They always like boys best. I prefer little girls."

"I don't. And I'm not the mother-type either—I feel sure of it."

"I don't. And anyway you're in a quite different position from me. You're a widow, I'm a mis-married woman. You love your boy because he reminds you of your husband—I prefer not to be reminded of my husband. But it's just as well we are as we are. You have a boy, so it's lucky you don't prefer girls. My boys will be brought up according to my husband's ideas and I shan't be allowed much voice where they are concerned, but the girl will be left to me to bring up as I choose, so it's a good thing that I love her the best."

"It will be interesting to see them growing up together—your girl and my boy, I mean."

"Yes, won't it! Perhaps they'll marry each other some day."

Jenny was thrilled by the new idea.

"Should you like that?"

Isabel smiled.

"It's early to say. The parties are a little young."

"But in theory, I mean."

"In theory I should be delighted for my daughter to marry your son."

Into Jenny's mind came a sudden picture of a wedding—she saw her grown-up son, looking exactly like his father, standing at the altar of Heathfield church beside a grown-up Wing who looked exactly like her

mother. The marriage of Humphrey and Isabel . . . She suddenly found that she could not bear the thought. It had pleased her when Isabel had first airily framed it, but now she saw it in a changed light, and hastily put it from her.

§12

The next week-end Claude Halnaker was still away, and Isabel sent a message asking Jenny to take pity on her loneliness and dine with her again.

"He'll be back next week—poor old Claude! At least, I don't know why I should say that. Paris in June . . . it sounds good enough for anybody. Someday I'll make him take me."

She did not refer more seriously to her husband, but followed her usual course in the trivial and in the abstract rather than in the personal. Jenny saw that she was not to be taken any further into her confidence, and yet there was no sense of repulse or estrangement in this exclusion. Those outpourings which she had always regarded as the normal conditions of friendship, especially friendship between women, were evidently to have no place in her friendship with Isabel Halnaker. Their unity was to be based in common interest and fellow feeling rather than in any mutual exchange of souls. It was a new idea, but she received it gladly, as she received every idea of Isabel's.

There was no fear of Halnaker's return checking the growth of their intimacy. Isabel was determined to put Jenny on a definite footing with her husband—Claude should fulfil the normal uses of a friend's husband, that is he should be ready with advice and active help on the material and commercial side of life. Jenny was a young and inexperienced widow, with a great undertaking before her. Claude should help her in her plans for Yockletts and Herringdales, giving her the benefit of his experience and masculine power.

"Claude says that of course you must have a bailiff," said Isabel, "and he thinks he can find you a good man, if you can manage with Walton a bit longer. Has Creed found anyone yet?"

"No—they're appallingly slow, like all lawyers, I suppose. And of course it's a difficult place to fill."

"Well, Claude knows of a splendid man who's leaving an estate in Lincolnshire at the end of the Summer. He's been working for friends of ours, and Claude says he's the very man for you—you could trust him absolutely. But you must let my husband come and talk things over. He has practical experience of these matters, and I think you'll find him quite useful."

Claude Halnaker came—he and Isabel had tea with Jenny one afternoon, and he was there when next she dined at Mogador. He certainly seemed likely to be able to help her, though in her dealings she had to conquer her instinctive dislike of him for his share in Isabel's tragedy. Except for his

stock of the usual masculine experience, he struck her as being very like a child—an unruly, untrustworthy, affectionate, selfish, not unattractive child. She saw too that this was much how Isabel viewed him—she seemed to have for him a sort of maternal toleration, sometimes lit up by tenderness. His behaviour towards her in public was always charming, and did much towards reconciling Jenny to his company and advice.

Also she began in time to suspect that many of Halnaker's suggestions for the future of Herringdales were inspired by his wife. She found out for instance that it was Isabel and not Claude who had first thought of the Lincolnshire bailiff. Isabel was very careful, however, to keep in the background—she evidently did not wish to appear officious in helping her friend or to assume any superior knowledge of the affairs that puzzled the younger woman. But Jenny felt instinctively that she had a personal and passionate interest in the Herringdales—it was part of her love for Humphrey, surviving in a desire to help his wife to achieve what had been his great ambition.

Sometimes when she thought this she felt the dark clouds of earlier jealousies blowing back as it were on an evil wind, but she resolutely drove them out of her mind. Surely Isabel had only one motive in helping her, and that was good will—and if her good will was based on her love for the man who had finally belonged to her friend, that did not make it any less an honourable inspiration. In one or two matters she felt especially grateful for the sympathetic imagination that had smoothed her way.

There was one particular instance. For a long time she had been troubled by the idea that it was her duty to visit Yockletts. She ought to interview Crouch, to inspect the house and land, to make arrangements for their future. She was failing in loyalty to Humphrey if she did not do this—and yet she could not bring herself to face it, to set out on that dreadful, tangled journey across Sussex and Kent, to drive along those haunted miles of road to see the house, perhaps the room, where Humphrey had died . . . to be asked, perhaps, about the disposal of his furniture, of Isabel's portrait. . . . No, she could not bear the thought, and from day to day put it out of her mind, knowing all the while that a time would come when she must face it.

Then suddenly Claude Halnaker suggested that she should let Yockletts. The bailiff had now been interviewed and engaged. He seemed a thoroughly experienced and reliable man, and it was apparently he and Halnaker between them who had conceived the idea of a let.

"It was what they did at Thrussleford," said Claude—"they had a whole outlying property over by Quartering Fen, and Cummins says he advised them to let it off, as it was a constant worry and expense for them to run it with the Manor estate, being so far away. He found them a first class tenant,

who paid two hundred a year and kept the place in splendid order—I believe he reclaimed fifty acres of fen."

"It would be nice if I could find someone like that for Yockletts."

Jenny spoke wistfully, sitting by the open window in her drawing-room. Halnaker sat close to her, his dog at his feet, Isabel was dim among the shadows of the room.

"Well, we ought to be able to find someone just as good. I'd trust Cummins to do that. I gather the people you've got there now aren't up to much."

"Oh, they aren't real tenants—just caretakers. You see, Humphrey liked to run the place himself—he was always going there . . . I've no idea how they manage without him. . . ."

Her voice trailed off self-accusingly.

"You haven't been there since your husband's death?"

Thus Claude blundered on to the debatable ground.

"No . . . I've written, of course, but I'm afraid I've never been . . . I must go sometime. . . ."

"I shouldn't"—Isabel's voice came out of the shadows—"it's an awful journey, and it isn't as if you were a farmer, my dear. Let Cummins go over—have a look at the place, and arrange for a let. He'll be able to size it up immediately and see the state it's in—you want an expert for these things."

Jenny sighed gratefully, but her mind was not quite at rest. Was she really being loyal to Humphrey if she left this matter to others, even to experts? Wouldn't Humphrey be hurt by her refusal to go again to his beloved farm?—just because her memory hurt her so—memory and remorse?

So great was her disquiet, that when Halnaker rose to take leave, she made an excuse for detaining Isabel.

"Can you come upstairs for a minute? I want to show you that hat."

Isabel, being herself, did not say "what hat?" but "thank you, I should like to see it," and came upstairs with Jenny, though guessing doubtless that one of the rules that guarded their friendship was to be broken.

"I want to ask you," said Jenny, facing her in the bedroom—"I must know what you think—would Humphrey approve of my letting Yockletts?"

"My dear child, why not?"

"He—he loved it. And I've not been near it. I can't."

"There's no reason at all for you to go near it. It's not your job. And I'm sure he'd approve of your letting it—really, what else can you do? You would find it a terrible strain and expense if you tried to run the two properties, even with a man like Cummins, and Yockletts would almost certainly come off much worse in the end. Now if you get a good tenant,

he'll keep the place in order and improve the land, so that when little Aubrey comes of age he'll find a flourishing estate ready for him. Then he can do what he likes with it—it won't be your responsibility any longer then."

"Did you know I'd paid off the mortgage?"

"I knew you were thinking of it."

"Well, I've done it. It would be a shame to let the place go to pieces. . . . I'll have to be fearfully careful about whom I let it to."

"Trust Claude and trust Cummins for that. They'll find you a good tenant. And you can start with only a short lease, so that you'll be able to get rid of him if he doesn't seem to be doing as well as you expect."

"And you really think Humphrey wouldn't mind?"

"From what I knew of him, I'm quite sure he wouldn't mind."

Thus Jenny let Isabel settle the matter for her, and three months later Yockletts was let, to a Lincolnshire man known personally to Cummins, who came from a very good mixed farm of five hundred acres near Quartering Fen. The house was to be put into repair for him, but this Claude Halnaker and Cummins undertook to arrange—whether Isabel ever went over with her husband, Jenny never knew.

With the letting of Yockletts she seemed to put definitely behind her that part of her life which had been darkened by the shadows of strange wings. As long as the farm had been in any sense her responsibility, she was conscious of those shadows upon the road—she was conscious of them sometimes when happiest in her friendship with Isabel, calling her back to the days when Isabel herself had worn strange wings, and had stood in the midst of a dark dream—a dream of faery, of dark love full of pain and bliss.

But now Isabel was just her friend, without any secrets in her eyes, and Herringdales was beginning to be just a tumbledown well-loved Elizabethan Manor, and Mogador a cool, shadowed, classical Georgian house. Her friendship with Isabel and her returning intercourse with the neighbourhood, the routine of her household, the bringing up of her baby, and the gentle overseeing of her estate were going to fill her life with comfortable, well-ordered interests, pleasures and loves. The sun, which those strange wings once had occulted would now shine in all his strength. Her life was like a road coming out of a wood into fields and sunshine, running on past cottage gardens and peaceful farmyards, homely and frequented, far away from the dark and beautiful shadows of the wood.

PART IV
HUGGETT'S CURSE

§1

The neighbourhood for a long time cherished the idea that Lady Mallard would marry again. Her youth, her lonely effort with her big estate, her good looks and her reputed fortune, all pointed to a quick re-mating. But when the years passed and its expectations were not fulfilled, the neighbourhood, like most neighbourhoods, forgot all about them. It was satisfied in the contemplation of the widow's constancy. It spoke favourably of her devotion to her son's future and her own past.

As it happened, Jenny had never seriously thought of marrying again. Her manner of life gave her few opportunities of making new acquaintances, and her experience urged her to withdraw herself from any approach. Though she had loved her husband, she had found no especial blessedness in the married state. She had never known the sweetness of the mystic rose. On the contrary her short married life had been but a wandering in a strange land, a land of darkness and surprises, a land of disillusion and the shadow of love.

Her present life was full and varied—she had no need ever to experience more than transiently those reactions of loneliness, helplessness, uselessness or frustration that might have pulled her back into the married state. There was her son growing up, with all the engrossments of his love and need of her, his health and his education. There was her household, with its constant developments and re-adjustments, its happy preoccupations of food and flowers and furniture. There was her social life—her goings and comings in the neighbourhood, her entertainments, her good works, her simple patronisings of the poor. There was, too, her estate, the wide lands of the Herringdales—though here, just where she might have found life too much for her single effort, she had the efficient, impersonal direction of her bailiff Cummins. Every morning he called at the Manor, and she interviewed him in Humphrey's old study, where the shelves were still full of books she never read, and the writing table was laden with maps and charts and farming almanacks. They talked of farms and fields, of leasehold and copyhold, of gates and barns and roofs, of timber and hedgerows, and all the while Jenny was lady of the manor and of all these things. But she knew that directly her vice-regent was gone she could put them out of her mind, and turn comfortably to her own affairs, confident that a good estate was being nursed for her son's manhood.

Yockletts too, was doing well. It had been let to a sound tenant, who renewed his lease at the end of seven years, and seemed inclined to stay on till it was time for the farm to be handed over to the young Squire. Here

again Cummins supervised, and made reports which he laid before Jenny with all proper deference; she knew that in Kent as well as in Sussex everything went all the better without her. She had never been required to go near the place—memory was able to sink year by year into a deeper grave.

Life had lost its stinging qualities. It had become a quiet and gay affair, a sunny enclosure. As time went on no woman could have been more contented with her lot. She was not rich, but she was comfortable—only comparatively a few lay bound with mortgages, and though her resources would not allow her to make the experiments and developments that Humphrey would have wished, she had no inheritance in her husband's ambition. She was a widow—but she did not regret her lost estate; on the contrary, she kept hidden in her heart a secret relish of her freedom, though she used it modestly, and if she went her own way, that way was mostly in her husband's tracks. She was the mother of an only son, but he gave her very little trouble. He grew up a healthy, country child, and his progress from his nursery to his preparatory school and from his preparatory school to Winchester went forward with little to disturb or excite her.

Sometimes she realised that she paid for this peace with a certain loss. There had been something in the old dark days that had called to a part of her that now slept. There had been voices in the storm and in the fire that now spoke no longer. But only fanatical lovers of life will regret a past that owes its vividness to pain, and Jenny was no fanatic. All she asked of the life that had used her so hardly was reconciliation—that life should smile once more upon her, and forgive her, as she herself forgave.

§2

For Isabel Halnaker, too, the years meant reconciliation. With her the process had begun earlier, for she had turned to it almost immediately after her break with Humphrey, and at the time of his death had struggled at least into a philosophy. But her friendship with Jenny Mallard had ripened the difficult fruit of experience, and brought back sweetness into life. For the first time she had the comfort she had missed in marriage, of a friend with whom to discuss the petty concerns and interests of every day. At first their fellowship could go no deeper, for Jenny's taste in reading and her ideas on things and people were in an infancy which made impossible any true exchange with Isabel's; but as time went on this difficulty passed. Jenny, with self-improvement always at her heart, and friendship as a powerful urge, was susceptible as few women of her age to education. She exchanged Mrs Hungerford for Sarah Grand and Rhoda Broughton for May Sinclair; she read and discussed W. H. Mallock and the first socialistic hints of H. G. Wells, and in general purged her ideas of the obvious and sentimental, with the model of Isabel's before her eyes.

On Isabel's side there was also a change, though it was less striking, more of an adaptation. If Jenny learned to think more straightly, Isabel learned to think more freshly—to pull up her mind at the common point of view, without always feeling the necessity to drive past it and overthrow it. She found the restfulness of an occasional unsophistication.

But the necessity to which she chiefly owed her peace, was, she knew well, apart from their friendship, though it sprang from its demands. Her association with Jenny Mallard required that a certain side of her life should be closed altogether. Though her love affairs had never deserved Miss Mollet's hint of promiscuity, for some time she had been accustomed to seek in them relief from the disillusion of her marriage. Both before and after Humphrey there had been adventures—sentimental contacts, emotional surprises. But now the relief from disillusion could be found in this new friendship, and the rest must go.

She saw that Jenny's affection must always have its mixture of respect, and her sense of right would not allow respect to survive knowledge of this side of her friend's life. On the other hand, any thought of secrecy was out of the question. She might not be addicted to confidences, but neither was she tolerant of lies, and she knew that once she attempted to mix the old wine with the new, she was committed to a system of lies, subterfuges and evasions that would not only destroy the friendship but her own soul.

Nothing would make her destroy the friendship—or even risk it. For the first time in her life she was finding complete satisfaction in her relations with another human being. She had never before had a friend—lovers, admirers, adorers, but never a friend—passion and rapture and ecstasy, but never this comfortable peace. It was worth all the efforts she had made to secure it—this restful contact with a mind more simple than her own, less tossed by experience, less cynical and sophisticated, responding to urges of prejudice and convention that with her had ceased to drive. She deliberately chose the key of the friendship, and maintained it through all Jenny's preliminary hesitations. It was to be an honest friendship in C Major—no sharps or flats, no minor undertones. Their meetings were to be regular rather than frequent, and their confidences were to be restrained by the dignities of human reticence.

Sometimes Isabel too had moments like Jenny's, in which she felt she had deliberately silenced a voice and put out a star. In exchanging love for friendship she had turned her back on youth. But after all youth was going from her—she was merely turning away from its retreating music and facing the middle age that inevitably advanced. She thought that the braver course than to cling to youth till the last rag of his fleeing garment was torn out of her hand.

"Jenny," she had said once to her friend—"you stand to me for middle-age instead of youth. Don't be angry. I hated my youth but I'm loving my middle age, and I don't believe I could have given up my youth if it hadn't been for you. I couldn't have come in from the storm if I hadn't been sure of a good fire to sit by, and it doesn't suit us women to stay out in bad weather. Our souls get weather-beaten. Have you read 'Jude the Obscure'?"

"I tried—but I couldn't get on with it."

"In other words, you found it shocking. Dear Jenny, you're the only woman I know for whom to be shocked is also to be bored. Never mind. But if you'd struggled on you'd have found that Hardy has got hold of a vital truth about women when he makes the experiences that develop and broaden Jude merely narrow and embitter Sue. All she suffers simply serves to make her narrow-minded and one-idea'd and horribly, cruelly stupid. . . . That's true, that's life—women can't stand the racket, so let's get out of the racket, I say, even though middle-age is our only refuge."

§3

If society round Heathfield had felt any surprise at a friendship springing up between Humphrey Mallard's widow and his mistress it discreetly held its peace. But it is quite possible that no surprise was felt. The terms of the friendship were not of a kind to bring it into any sensational prominence; and the affair between the dead Squire and Mrs Halnaker had been but vaguely rumoured and merely guessed. It had existed as a certainty only in those circles where Miss Mollet moved, among servants and in the cottages, where mysteriously the affairs of the Manor were better known than in other Manors and Halls.

At the beginning Miss Mollet had been unable to mortify a certain curiosity. Also she had been anxious to regain something of her old footing with Lady Mallard. For a long time she had not dared come near her. On the Squire's death she had sent formal condolences which had been formally acknowledged. At the baby's birth she had ventured on a short note of congratulation, accompanied by a mysterious knitted garment whose exact purpose Jenny had been unable to guess. However, she had been too tranquilly content in those days to nurse any resentment even against Miss Mollet, and had sent some evasive words of thanks. Months had gone by without any further signal from the Herringdales, which had no intention of ever making any. Finally Cade Street had moved, urged by the rumours that Lady Mallard and Mrs Halnaker were dining together twice a week.

Miss Mollet appeared—ostensibly to try to interest Lady Mallard in the Women's Freedom League.

"Doesn't it ever strike you as a dreadful thing that you, with such a big stake in the country, have no voice in its government? While your gardener . . ."

They were in the garden, where Jenny had been sitting when Miss Mollet was announced. Before them on the lawn tumbled a small round figure, the Squire of Herringdales in his first knicker suit. Jenny was pulling absent-mindedly at a clump of pinks, and stuffing the flowers into the back of her son's knickers as he crawled about her feet. Miss Mollet's words flowed round her unheeded till they ended unexpectedly in—

"Isn't he rather young to wear knickers?"

"Perhaps he is—but I hate little boys in petticoats."

"What do you think of Mrs Halnaker's little girl?"

"I think she's a sweet little thing, and she'll be very pretty some day."

"Does she often play with your little boy?"

"Sometimes. But babies don't care much for other babies, you know."

Miss Mollet sniggered.

"I expect they'll like each other better when they're older. I say—er—it would be rather funny if they married each other when they grow up."

"How? Funny?"

Jenny's voice had become suddenly rasping.

"Oh, I don't really mean funny. Of course it would be a delightful thing. You're great friends, aren't you, with Mrs Halnaker?"

"Please don't talk to me about Mrs Halnaker."

Miss Mollet flushed.

"You're not still angry with me for what I said when . . ."

"Please don't say any more now. Go on with what you were telling me about Mrs Despard."

Miss Mollet swallowed violently and went on, but she did not stay much longer. She told herself that Lady Mallard was unforgiving and revengeful—and it was really disgusting that she should be friends with Mrs Halnaker . . . she could have no proper pride.

Jenny too was angry. She vowed that she would never speak to Miss Mollet again. Never again would she come within range of that tongue. . . . She saw herself sitting in a red sunset beside a red fire while an old woman laid the powder-train that was to blow up her marriage. Miss Mollet's tongue was a fire that had burnt up her marriage. In her own heart the fire kindled, and she resolved on a piece of violence that normally she would not have contemplated. She would give notice to the tenants of the cottage in Cade Street at the end of the year, and she would put in people who would undertake not to let lodgings. She owned the place, so she could do what she liked. For once she would taste the sweets as well as the responsibilities of landlordship. . . . But she could not have that old wretch living on so near and talking about her and Isabel. That was what she would do now—talk about her and Isabel, and how queer it was that they should be friends; and how their children would probably marry. . . .

§4

She did not have to test her own ruthlessness for Miss Mollet herself suddenly decided to leave Heathfield. Whether she was driven away by her resentment of Lady Mallard's treatment, or whether she had been further snubbed—as was rumoured—at the Rectory, could not be known. Anyway she removed herself from Cade Street, with her books and bamboo tables, and went to live at Hastings, where, she said, the neighbourhood would be more in sympathy with a cultured woman, and she could attend University Extension Lectures.

Jenny felt released—not only on account of her fear of Miss Mollet's tongue, but because her going meant the shutting of another door. One more closed gate lay between her and the past wherein she and Isabel were rivals and enemies. There was hardly anyone left now who knew—apart from mere guessing—how things had been. She had succeeded in exchanging old Harris the butler for a more attractive and efficient parlourmaid. Successive bouts of rheumatism had given her an excuse for retiring him on a pension of ten shillings a week, and he had gone to live with a brother who was coachman to a family in Wimbledon. Her own coachman, Elphick, she did not suspect of any special knowledge, as in spite of Miss Mollet's "ask the servants," she had reason to think that only the old pair, Harris and Anna Luck, knew anything of their master's secret.

Anna Luck still remained. Jenny had made one or two unsuccessful efforts to unseat her, and indeed had her excuses, since Anna quarrelled destructively with every nurse she engaged for young Aubrey. But the child himself adored her—he would "mind" her when the rest of the household were mere females, to be kicked and defied, and her wintry smiles had a charm for him which no shining laughter of youth could emulate.

"I want my Lucky," he would wail if long deprived of her society, and in the end Jenny lost heart and gave him his Lucky. If the nurses would not stay, they must go, and Anna must be nurse. She would tend the son as she had tended the father, and Jenny would endure the thought of her memory. It was never a question of more than memory. She soon saw that Anna had far too exalted an idea of her dead master's honour to gossip about his indiscretions, and by no word or look did she ever convey to her mistress any hint that she remembered those dark days of the fill dyke, when the rain poured unceasingly on the wet, shining roofs of Yockletts, and the roads were a-shine and the ditches a-tinkle, and a cab with glassless windows passed a trap on the Easternhanger road.

As years went by it seemed to Jenny almost as if Isabel had forgotten too—as if only she herself remembered, with a memory that grew more and more unreal till it took the qualities of a dream. Isabel scarcely ever spoke of Humphrey, and then only in a natural and casual way. She seemed to fear that without restraint their bond of union might become a cause of schism.

Every week Jenny dined at Mogador or Isabel at Herringdales. As a rule Jenny came to Isabel when her husband was away, so that they could be alone and talk as they pleased, but every now and then in both houses there would be larger parties, wider occasions that proclaimed their friendship to be no mere personal association, but a social and family affair based on mutual interests and their position as neighbours.

However, both enjoyed the private evenings best, and both took a pride in preparing for these as carefully as for the grander occasions. They were less elaborate, but the food and wine were even more thoughtfully chosen; each sought to do the other honour in her entertainment. Sometimes Jenny would wear a new gown for the first time when she dined alone with Isabel, so that she might be the richer for her observation, and Isabel would come to Herringdales dressed as for her next party, knowing that in the matter of clothes Jenny's knowledge and judgment were well worth having.

At these dinners they talked of many things—of life and people, books, pictures, music, current prices and modern farming, clothes, food, wine, household management and the upbringing of their children. Their talk kept mostly on a matter-of-fact level—only sometimes it glanced at mysteries. They had come both of them to prefer the daylight, and the dear common things they knew.

Their favourite topic was their children—the comparison of their growth, development, and promise. They were both fond and proud of young Aubrey, Jenny's son, growing up to be a Squire by way of Summerfields and Winchester, with Oxford ahead of him. They both hoped that he would grow more and more like his father, and both felt a certain anxiety because so far no special love of the land had shown itself in him. He loved living an outdoor life when he was home for the holidays—he loved horses and hunting, and he passionately played all games; but for the land itself he so far lacked that romantic devotion that had been his father's self.

"Perhaps it's just as well," said Jenny—"anyhow he will be happier."

"Yes," said Isabel—"he won't be like his father and have to choose . . . but it's a pity, especially after all you've done. Think how you've slaved so that when he comes of age he can claim two thriving estates."

"My dear Isabel, I haven't slaved in the least. I've left everything to Cummins, and Cummins is your idea. If Aubrey has a fine inheritance he

owes it largely to you."

"What nonsense! Claude and I thought of Cummins between us, and if we hadn't your lawyers would have discovered somebody just as good. If you leave things to him, which I know you don't entirely, it's only because you have the sense to recognise the value of experience. No, you're a good mother, Jenny. Don't refuse to wear your laurels."

Jenny was pleased at the thought of being a good mother, but still more pleased at the thought of Isabel calling her one.

Isabel's own boys were some years older than Jenny's. They were both fine young fellows, and passed on with credit from Marlborough to Oxford and Sandhurst. Wilfred would take a degree in law and then read for the bar, Lance would in the natural course of events be given a commission in the Rifle Brigade. There was no denying that they were creditable young men. Jenny, for her part, thought them uninteresting, and had a private conviction that Isabel thought the same.

The Halnakers were the opposite of the usual family convention according to which the father favours the girls and the mother the boys. Claude Halnaker loved his boys, who were himself at their age and would probably grow up like him—he was pleased with their manliness and ordinariness, their healthy, animal youth. Whereas of the small Wing he stood a little in awe—she had all the qualities that baffled him in her mother. Isabel adored her, though, unlike her husband, she saw in her a great deal that was not herself. As for Jenny, she could not say Wing was uninteresting, but on the whole she did not like her.

In her heart she called her "precocious," because she liked none of the things that Jenny had liked doing at her age. She had never wanted to play with dolls, but had a large and embarrassing family of "pets," varying from caterpillars to guinea-pigs. She never wanted to be told stories, but read them herself out of books—stories that Jenny at her age would not have understood, and certainly would have been forbidden. She was inclined to despise the society of other little girls, and ill-treated them when they were forced upon her, but loved climbing and fooling about with the boys, who ill-treated her in their turn, but could not shake her off.

"She's not a bad sport, that Wing," said Aubrey once—"I twisted her arm right round this afternoon—absolutely got her elbow into her backbone—and she never squeaked."

Jenny inevitably rebuked such behaviour, but she could not help feeling satisfied that it contained no hints of romance. The thought of Aubrey marrying Wing was the only thought that had power to take her back into the dark country, where she and Isabel walked in jealousy. She told herself that she had other reasons—that Wing would not be a good lady of the Manor,

that she was too independent and peculiar, too dominant and unfeminine—but in her heart she knew secretly that her fear was less simple, more akin to the shadows she had left behind.

§5

Her brother Timothy came generally twice a year into the South. He was now the only Bastow left. Old Tom had died at the end of the century, and his wife had followed him and Queen Victoria in the new nineteen-hundreds. Timothy had continued faithfully with the firm of Easby, Wright and Bastow. He had not treated his parents' death as an emancipation.

"I'm too old to change now," he said.

"Too old at twenty-seven?"

"Yes, that's a lot too old to learn a new job. Besides, I've had my struggles, and they're over. To change would be to challenge fate, and I'm certainly too old for that."

The second firm did not have the swift and exciting progress of the first. It was more respectful of caution, more ambitious of security. The South African war which had broken out early in its opening years had had but little effect upon it, as it was not then in a position to make war material. It had developed ever since on slow and orderly lines, showing no tendency to make the fortunes of its directors, nor on the other hand to keep them awake o' nights.

Timothy lived on in his parents' house in the Middlesbrough street. He did not marry, and sometimes Jenny fretted a little as she imagined his loneliness. She invited him down to Heathfield, and asked the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood to meet him. There were lights and laughter at the Herringdales, and good food and wine, and the tinkle of a piano in the drawing-room, and in the drive the crunch of cars and more conservative carriages. Tilement and Moorcocks and Rushlake and Lions Green brought their daughters sheathed in satin gowns to dine with Lady Mallard's rich brother from the North. "Enormously wealthy"—"one of the richest iron-masters in Yorkshire"—"owns half the county" (it was difficult for Tilement and the rest to think in terms other than those of land)—thus they romanced about Timothy, and there was no little heart-burning when he refused to make his choice. That is to say, the mothers' hearts burned, but the daughters' hearts were left cold. Timothy was too clumsy and too queer for these country girls—he did not shoot, he did not hunt, he did not dance; he did not even talk to them very much, and when he did it was generally to say something that people did not say in East Sussex.

"It's no good, Jenny," he would mock her from time to time—"you can't get me off. I'm not attractive enough."

"You can be most attractive when you want."

“It must be because I don’t want, then. If I marry I’d much better marry a girl up North—just a jumped-up thing with red cheeks and pots of money. I don’t like these old families—they’re all worn out.”

“Oh, Timothy! How can you say that about Aubrey?”

“I don’t say it about Aubrey.”

“There’s no family in Sussex older than the Mallards.”

“But Aubrey is your son, Jen. Humphrey was wise—he married new blood. If Aubrey is a fine and sane and healthy youngster—and I boast it of my nephew with pride—it’s because his father had the wisdom to marry a jumped-up thing.”

Jenny, however, did not despair. She continued to give parties for him—partly still in hope, and partly for her own pleasure. She had almost forgotten the days when parties baffled and terrified her. She no longer sat silent at the head of her table. Her guests’ ways were her ways and their talk was her talk. She was as interested as any woman and as most men in hedge-clipping and sheep-dipping. She no longer wanted people to talk about iron and coal. Her friendship with Isabel had broadened her mind and quickened her conversation. Not only did she read the new books, but she saw the new plays. Every now and then she and Isabel would steal a day in town together and go to a matinée, so that she could talk as an eye-witness of the new Barrie or the new Sutro or the new Pinero or those very modern comedies and tragedies produced by Granville Barker at the Court.

§6

Timothy had one friend in the neighbourhood who watched eagerly for his coming, though she was never asked to the parties, and that was Wing Halnaker. She had proclaimed him her uncle. He was always Uncle Timothy to her, though Jenny was never anything but Lady Mallard. She had been fond of him from the beginning—much fonder than of her own capricious father, and in time Jenny noticed that, ridiculous as it seemed, there was a bond of real friendship between the two. It was not merely a case of fatherly interest and entertainment on her brother's side—he really liked talking to Wing, making her listen to his theories and prophecies, which Jenny found so boring, but to which she would willingly have listened if Timothy had ever shown the slightest tendency to inflict them on her, which he did not. It was queer, she sometimes thought, that men had never seemed to want to meet her mind, to talk to her about those ideals and abstractions which meant so much to them. It was not till her friendship with Isabel that she had ever been required to talk about such things, to feel her way on the cloudy ground of abstractions.

Wing did not go to school. Her mother belonged to a tradition which favoured the governess at home, so Wing was always there when Timothy came. They would go out for long walks together, and whenever Isabel or Jenny asked what they had done on these walks, Wing always gave one answer: "We talked."

"And what did you talk about?" her mother occasionally followed up, and the answer varied. Sometimes it was: "Iron"—which seemed to Isabel a totally unimaginative topic of conversation.

"How can you talk about iron?"

"We do. Uncle Timothy was telling me about pig-iron—how it's made."

"You'll find that very useful, no doubt."

"Oh, Mother, don't despise it. It's really thrilling. And Uncle Timothy was telling me about all the places round here where they used to make iron—Pigstone, you know—that was pig iron—and Cinder Hill, where they threw out all the burning cinders; and then there are all the hammer ponds that used to work the hammers—just like mills. And did you know that the first cannon in the world was made at Huggett's Farm?—Huggett's Forge it was called then, and—

> Master Huggett and his man John,
> They did make the first cannon,

that's the poem about it. Uncle Timothy took me into the yard, and we shut our eyes and pretended we could hear them working—boom, boom, clink, clink, and then all the roaring flames, just like the smithy."

"Why is it, adorable, that you like going out with Uncle Timothy so much? He's old enough to be your father, and yet you seem to enjoy being with him much more than with Aubrey. Why last holidays you went over to Herringdales only once."

"Aubrey's such a mutt."

"Wing, dearest, where ever did you learn to talk like that! And he isn't. I think he's a most delightful person."

"He cares for nothing but games. I hate games. I like walking and riding, but I hate messing about with a ball. And he can talk about nothing but his silly school and the silly boys there. He takes no interest in the country, which I really think he might, considering that it all belongs to him."

"That will change soon. It's natural for him at his age to be more interested in his school than in his home. I should be pleased if you liked Aubrey, Wing."

"Dearest, I'd do anything to please you, but I think one day you'll ask me more than I can manage. I know you want me to marry Aubrey, but I simply couldn't—ever."

"Don't talk nonsense. How can you tell? You're only fourteen and young for your age. Besides, I've never said that I want you to marry Aubrey."

"Mother, you've never said it, but you've shown it in a hundred dozen ways. I know you do—but I don't. If I marry anyone I'd like to marry Uncle Timothy."

"Now you really are talking nonsense. Why, Timothy Bastow's more than twice your age. He'd laugh if he knew you were thinking anything so silly. And you wouldn't like it at all if he did marry you. He'd take you away up North, among all the mines and the factories—"

"There'd be iron," said Wing with relish.

"Oh, I'd forgotten that you're fascinated by iron. When you grow up, I don't think you'll find it so attractive. You'll be wanting things then that Timothy won't be able to give you."

"What things?" said Wing, but Isabel was silent. She felt a little disturbed at this infatuation for Timothy Bastow, though her regard for Jenny would not allow her to do more than discourage it.

Deep in her heart for years she had nursed the longing that her daughter should marry Jenny's son. She felt as if that wedding would give her back something that she had lost. She saw Wing looking exactly like herself, walking as a bride up the aisle of Heathfield church, to where at the altar stood Aubrey Mallard looking exactly like his father. Then, she felt, as if her

love for Humphrey would live once more outside the cold house of memory. . . . For so long those years had been dead, but in the years to come they would live again, and the parents would meet again in their children's embrace, and inherit the Eden that had withered in their own hearts.

§7

As the years passed there was little sign of any alteration in the relations of those three—Aubrey, Wing and Timothy. All that could be said was that as he grew older and Wing lovelier, Aubrey was inclined to notice her more; she was no longer a mere half-willing partner in his games, but a girl—a being of the same type as others he had secretly admired in his friends' houses, with the same mysterious provocations.

"Mother, is Wing pretty?" he once asked.

"What makes you ask that?"

"Oh, I dunno. Only I was looking at her this afternoon while we played tennis, and wondering if she was pretty. Is she?"

"Not nearly so pretty as her mother. She's better looking than she was, but beside Mrs Halnaker she's nothing."

Jenny exaggerated. By many Wing would be considered handsomer than Isabel. It is true she lacked Isabel's tragical beauty of gaze, the flame that smouldered behind her eyes, and burned out in her smile. But she had all the magic of youth, a gipsy youth, warm-skinned and dark-eyed and glowing. She would grow up merrier than her mother, merrier and harder. Beside her Isabel sometimes looked a ghost—all light and spirit, with a gliding grace that made her daughter seem clumsy, but without her daughter's gay colours of flesh and blood.

Aubrey said no more, but Jenny's heart was pricked by danger. In vain she told herself that it was a mere passing glance, that at best it was only calf-love, which, even if spoken, Wing would receive indifferently. Fear made her deaf to reason. She saw Humphrey deserting her once more for Isabel, and her spirit cowered, for she knew that if that happened again she would lose not only him but Isabel for ever.

Goaded by her fears, she made a sudden plan. The summer holidays were the most dangerous, as they were the longest. In future she would not spend them at the Herringdales. She would go away and take Aubrey with her. Hitherto she had scarcely ever left her home, and then only for trifling visits—week-ends and jaunts to town. She had never been out of England since her honeymoon. But now she suddenly decided to go abroad again. She would take Aubrey on a foreign tour—after all, he was sixteen, and it was time that he saw something of other countries than his own.

Where should she take him? She must not venture on anything too remote and strenuous, with only a boy of sixteen for her esquire. After some consultation with a tourist agency she chose the country of the Ardennes, as likely to give them beauty and change without too many difficulties. They

would start almost directly he came home, and go to Dinant, and thence visit Luxemburg and the Black Forest. . . . Her spirits rose at the prospect. She saw herself and Humphrey once more on holiday together.

§8

But the plan never materialised. Before the summer term was over the shadows of war had gathered in Eastern Europe, and by the time Aubrey was home the cloud had spread till it hung heavy over his own land. On the day that Jenny had planned for them both to arrive at Dinant the Germans entered it instead.

At first she was utterly bewildered. Only two emotions stood out clearly from her surprise that so savage and sudden a catastrophe should invade her peaceful life—those were fear for her land, for Yockletts and Herringdales, and wild relief that Aubrey was too young to serve. For sixteen years now she had kept and nursed the land for him—she had lived simply and frugally so that it should in no wise lack spending, and at the same time had withheld herself from adventure on its behalf. Aubrey should have his estate come to him as his father had left it, only more solidly founded and more gaily flourishing, as befitted his father's sacrifices in marrying for its sake. She had weathered the troubles of Lloyd George's land act, which had caused her some anxious times and now she should have had nothing but hope for the five years that lay between her and her son's majority. But war would mean unsettlement and dearth, scarcity of labour, deficiency of material, uncertainty of markets. It did not occur to her that it would also mean restriction of imports, with increased demand for home-grown stuff, and soaring prices in grain and meat. Her industrial upbringing had taught her to dread war as the shaker of all foundations.

Her relief on Aubrey's account she felt most acutely when a brief note from Isabel told her that both her sons had joined up.

"They were off this morning, and of course I'm proud, though dreadfully anxious. I don't know what they'll get. I'm told that there have been more commissions applied for than there are to dispose of. Lance is sure of his in the Rifle Brigade, but Wilfred may have to wait a bit. He's terribly afraid it may all be over before he has his chance."

Jenny did not feel more than a little sorry for Isabel. She knew that it was her daughter and not her sons who held her heart. Only if Wing could be taken from her and rushed into danger would she feel what would be Jenny's pain if she had to give up Aubrey.

"Thank God! he's too young," she thought in her heart, but she did not say it aloud, for Aubrey himself held very different views.

"It's sickening. If I was only two years older I'd be taken, and if I was one year I could wangle it. I wish I was taller. Lots of chaps have got in who aren't any older than me, but manage to look it. It's rotten to think that in

September I'll be back at school, and Kitson and Graves out in Flanders. I wonder if there's a single mortal chance of the war's lasting a year."

"I don't suppose so," said Jenny tranquilly. Then, as she spoke, a sudden riving pang of terror went through her heart. What if there were—that single mortal chance? After all, people had said that the Boer War would all be over by Christmas, and it had lasted years. She would not think of it. She looked forward to dining with Isabel the following night and talking to Claude Halnaker. As a rule she did not much like him to be there but this time she was actually glad of it. Claude Halnaker, she knew, did not expect the war to last three months.

The evening came, and according to a new custom which had arisen, she was fetched in the Halnakers' car, the comfortable Austin landaulette which had finally succeeded that first explosive Panhard of 1898. Jenny kept no car of her own—she was still proud of her carriage and pair, and still faithful to old Elphick who at his age would never learn to drive a car—but she appreciated Isabel's hospitality of swiftness and gladly accepted it with her invitations to Mogador. When she arrived she found Mrs Halnaker standing in the hall.

"Well, my dear, I'm glad to see you, for I'm all alone. Wing has rushed off to a First Aid lecture in the village, and Claude—now what on earth do you think he's done, that man of mine?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Nothing dreadful, I hope."

"Oh, no—not this time. He's joined up."

"Claude!—why, he must be years over age."

"He's forty-eight. But a man he knows at the War Office said he thought he could manage something. D'you know the poor old thing's been simply frantic to go off and fight? And now, this very afternoon a wire came, and he just threw some clothes into a bag and rushed off. I don't exactly know what he'll be doing, but I'm glad he's got what he wanted."

"And what about the boys?"

"Oh, Lance has got his commission, and will probably be in Flanders quite soon. Wilfred's still waiting. I expect you're glad your boy's too young."

"Yes, I am."

"And it will all be over before he's old enough. Claude's positive of that. And Cummins is years too old. You won't lose him either."

"He was thirty-five when he came to me nearly sixteen years ago, so there's not the slightest chance. But I'm afraid Herringdales will be hard hit all the same."

"Nonsense—when the first unsettlement's over you'll find everything go quite smoothly. You must remember that war is good for farming in this

country—it restricts foreign markets and sends up prices. If only it went on long enough you'd probably make your fortune."

She took her friend's arm and they went into the dining-room together.

It was as she had seen it on so many occasions, the shadows of the room pricked by candle-light and the gleams of reflecting glass and silver, while outside was a pillared dusk, the twilight broken by the fluted columns of the verandah, between which the stars hung, as the heavenly patterns of the lights within. They sat down to table, smiling at each other, and Isabel's graceful black and white parlourmaid served the soup.

They sent her out of the room during the courses, so that they could talk freely. They always did this when they were alone, though tonight their conversation was not intimate. It was like many conversations of that time, a digest of the day's newspaper reading. Isabel took in the Times and Jenny the Morning Post, and the columns of these two pages were exchanged and debated over the dinner table. Both women sat very upright—they belonged to a generation which had been taught above all things to keep a straight back, and as the years passed and the comfortable sloth of middle-age came into conflict with early training, their erectness stiffened almost into exaggeration. Jenny was thirty-six, and Isabel forty-seven, but they looked far more of an age than they had looked at the beginning of their friendship. Both consciously and unconsciously they had modelled their respective styles on each other so that in certain lights, and without seeing their faces too closely they might almost have been taken for sisters. They were both well-dressed in the fashion of the day, but like so many women whose prime and triumph are of yesterday, they kept something of yesterday about them still. Jenny and Isabel had been belles of the nineties, and the nineties still showed faintly here and there amidst the elegance of nineteen-fourteen—a sharper waist-line, a more decided bust, a lingering curl in the smoothly swathed hair.

Jenny was feeling encouraged. They had proved to each other that the war would be over by Christmas, and Isabel had proved to Jenny that it would have no disastrous effect on Herringdales.

"There's another member of your family, too," said Isabel, "whom it won't harm. And that's your brother. War ought to be good for the iron-masters."

"I'm not sure that Timothy would allow his firm to make war material."

"My dear, he won't be able to prevent it."

"I wonder."

She had neither seen nor heard of Timothy since the beginning of the war, though if his plans were not drastically altered by it, he was due for his Autumn visit in September.

“I hope he won’t do anything silly about that,” she continued, “but I’m afraid he will.”

“Well, my dear, you know your own brother best.”

“I’m not sure that I do. But he always used to say that he’d never allow himself to make a penny out of war material. . . . Still, it’s quite possible he’ll feel different about this war, for he’s absolutely sensible and patriotic.”

She had changed the tone of her sentence violently, as she had suddenly remembered the only subject on which she and Isabel were divided. For the last year or two she had sometimes wondered if Timothy was in love with Wing Halnaker. She knew that Isabel discountenanced the idea, but then Isabel wanted Wing to marry Aubrey . . . she must not let her brother appear in a mean light.

“Timothy was brought up at a Quaker school, and that gave him some queer ideas on war; but of course everybody says this war is different, and lots of Quakers have joined up, I believe. I expect, after all, that he’s sure to accept war contracts if he’s lucky enough to get any—and I hope to goodness he will, for anything of that kind would make his fortune. Then he could go and live in Slapewath again, and of course he’d marry . . . he’d be a great catch for any girl, and I’d like to see him happily married, for he’s one of the best.”

§9

Timothy duly arrived in September, announced only by a telegram.

"Well," he said as Jenny greeted him, "Huggett's curse has fallen upon us."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Only that—

Master Huggett and his man John,
They did make the first cannon.

"Think, Jenny,—in that peaceful farmyard on the slope of the hill below Waldron was forged the horror that has shaken and blasted the world for nearly five hundred years."

"You do talk nonsense, Tim."

"No, I don't. I tell you, Huggett's Farm is the parent of every iron-works now roaring away over-time to turn out weapons of destruction. Carlingrove, Dinsdale, Dorman Long and Co.—they're all the children of Huggett's Farm and the workers of Huggett's curse."

"I suppose all this means that your firm isn't going to accept contracts for war material."

"Not while I can stop it."

"And can you stop it?"

Timothy made a face.

"I don't suppose so."

"Then what will you do?"

"I don't know."

"You won't be such a fool as to sell out?"

"I'll probably be just such a fool."

"Oh, Timothy—" Jenny's voice quivered with concern—"I do hope, I do pray, you won't do that—just when there's a chance of your getting rich."

"My dear Jen, I refuse to grow rich on the price of blood. Even Judas Iscariot refused to do that."

Jenny coloured uneasily.

"Do let's talk of something different. Aubrey will be in to tea in a minute, and I don't want him to hear you talking so oddly about the war. He'd be terribly upset. And Wing, too—she might be coming . . ."

"Wing won't mind what I say about the war."

"Won't she! She's most patriotic—perfectly splendid. She's taking the V. A. D. course and will probably go to a hospital in London. I tell you that she thinks very differently from you."

"And I tell you that she thinks exactly the same—she only acts differently."

"How do you know?"

"By her letters."

"Then you've been writing to her?"

"On and off—we've exchanged some pretty similar ideas on the subject of the war, for all her red, white and blue."

Jenny was surprised to hear of the correspondence, but she was still more pleased. She had never really liked Wing, but she felt that she would like her if she married Timothy. After all, he wasn't more than thirty-eight—when Wing was of a marriageable age, say twenty-one or twenty-two, he would only be just over forty. The disparity was not grotesque. If Wing married Timothy, she might make him more practical, more usual, being herself an eminently practical, if violent, young person; and if Wing married Timothy she could not marry Aubrey. . . .

Restored to calm and good humour, she poured out tea for her brother and her son who just then came in. The conversation flowed in safe channels—chiefly round Slapewath, which Timothy was offering the authorities as a hospital. But when Bastow had gone up to his room, Aubrey asked abruptly—

"When's Uncle Timothy going to join up?"

"Darling, he's over age."

"Only a year or two—and he doesn't look it. He could join up perfectly well if he wanted to—lots of men do who are older than he is."

"He has his business—it's very important to the country just now."

"Does it make war material?"

Jenny blenched before the persistence of her offspring.

"No-o—but iron's most important in all sorts of other ways. And besides we've all got to carry on—'business as usual' you know."

"Oh, rot—a mere shopkeeper's motto. If Uncle Timothy doesn't do better than that I'll jolly well tell him what I think of him."

"Aubrey, please don't. I can't have you quarrelling—besides it would be very wrong of you to speak like that to your uncle."

Aubrey muttered something inaudible and went out.

§10

The whole of Timothy's visit was a trial to Jenny, even after Aubrey had gone back to school and found relief for his indignation in the Officers' Training Corps.

"All I only hope to God is that the war lasts till I get out to it," was his farewell cry.

Jenny did not echo his prayer, but she understood her son's sentiments better than her brother's. She did not actually quarrel with Timothy—she loved him too well, as all she had left of the old life, of her childhood and Slapewath and the North—but in her heart she was ashamed of him. All round her men were thronging to the colours—their stockman at Pigstone was now a Sergeant in the Sussex, and under the same roussillon banner marched a battalion of carters, ploughmen, stockmen, grooms, chauffeurs, and gardeners that she knew. From every farm and manor someone had gone, and not only the labourer and the servant, but the farmer and the squire. Ted Fuller had gone from Tanners Farm, though he was over forty and a married man—Sir Herbert Luce had gone at forty-five from Stream House; men who were positively too old to go, such as Cummins and Elphick, made up for their disability by the violence and bloodthirstiness of their language. And there sat Timothy, neither forty nor married nor bloodthirsty . . . Jenny was ashamed.

This time she gave no dinners for him. Apart from the social disintegration of the district and the need for economy, she shrank from proclaiming his inactivity to her friends, or even hearing him proclaim it himself. For Timothy was not ashamed; he had his reasons for not fighting, and was more than willing to give them to anybody who cared to hear. Jenny became conscious of a vague buzz of disapproval in the neighbourhood, and a slightly louder one in the servants' hall. Anna Luck, now immensely old and privileged, openly declared her opinion.

"We've been wondering when Mr Bastow is going to put on his uniform, my lady."

"Not just yet, I think, Anna. You see, he has very important work to do."

"Will it keep the Kayser off?"

"I'm sure I hope so."

"Well, I doubt it. There's nothing like a good uniform for skeering away bad folk. I'd be sorry if Mr Bastow didn't put his on, and the Kayser came and murdered and ravished us all."

"Don't talk nonsense, Anna. Mr Bastow won't make all that difference. Besides, I've told you he's got his own work to carry on."

"Carry on . . . carry on," mumbled Anna—"it's more like to be carry out —carry out; carry out the corpses for the carrion crows."

"Hold your tongue," cried Jenny; she told herself that Anna was growing senile, and must not be taken seriously.

The person whose attitude surprised her most was Isabel. She had expected Isabel to be as ashamed of Timothy as herself, and more indignant. Instead she found her viewing his behaviour with a certain amount of toleration, not unmixed with sympathy.

"After all, Jenny, he is over-age, and he *was* educated at a Quaker school. It's scarcely reasonable to expect him to rush off to enlist like a young, public school man. Besides, if the war's only going to last a few months, he'd be foolish to throw over a good business and join up only to be kept drilling at some camp at Brighton or Bournemouth."

"The war isn't going to last only a few months," said Jenny sadly. Those were the days after the retreat from Mons, and the Battle of the Marne was in progress.

"Well, if it drags on, he probably will join up—later. But at present I really don't think you can expect it of him. I think everyone's making rather an absurd fuss."

Jenny was surprised at Isabel, for Isabel herself was so splendidly active and patriotic. She was going to Red Cross lectures, and organising work parties at Mogador for the troops. She was helping the Rector with a Club for soldiers' wives in the village, she was paying full wages to her gardener and chauffeur who were with the colours, and had herself learned to drive the Austin, which Jenny thought the very heart and crown of courage. Her husband and both her sons had joined up in the very first week of the war, and her daughter—having suddenly decided that nursing was not in her line —was going daily to work at Clappers Farm, so that she might be able to take a man's place on the land. It was astonishing that Isabel should defend Timothy, when so many less zealous condemned him. But Isabel had motives Jenny did not suspect.

"Well, Wing," she said one evening, as she stood over the hungry girl, devouring a late meal after her long day at Clappers—"what do you think of Uncle Timothy now?"

"Just the same as I always did," said Wing with her mouth full.

Isabel rebuked herself for not having realised that her daughter would stand loyally by an old friend whatever his misdeeds. But she was quite satisfied in her heart that she could not feel the same as she used. Timothy must be appearing before her daily as inferior to the rest of his generation— Wing must feel secretly what secretly her mother felt, that his opinions were dictated by want of courage. If the war only lasted long enough—and Isabel

too expected now that it would last longer—then Wing would see Aubrey Mallard looking brave and splendid in the uniform Timothy Bastow had refused. She could not help thinking that Wing would feel the contrast as much as her mother wanted.

§11

But when the time came and the phenomenon appeared, Wing bore the sight of it with remarkable equanimity. It was in the early Spring of 1916—Aubrey was still a month or two under age, but with the help of friends and his record in the O. T. C. had compounded the difference. To Jenny he looked pitifully a little boy, standing before her in his Second Lieutenant's uniform—he was a smaller man than his father had been, and the rudiments of a much-coaxed moustache seemed only to increase his air of forlorn youth. As she looked at him a sword of pity went through her heart . . . after which she felt no more of the tearing pain that had tormented her all through the months when she had known definitely that the war would not end and that he would have to go. She became like the hundreds of other women she had marvelled at, whom some special compassionate dispensation of fate or nature seemed to keep from too much grief. Once for the father and once for the son—twice now her heart was dead.

Seeing him as she did, she was not so surprised as Isabel at Wing's want of enthusiasm. Isabel was frankly annoyed with her daughter.

"Really, Wing, I'm astonished at you. I should have thought that Aubrey having joined up—months before he need—would have made you feel what most people feel about Timothy Bastow."

The occasion was her discovery of Wing sitting alone upstairs in what used to be the schoolroom, writing a letter to Timothy, when she ought to have been in the drawing-room, enjoying an evening's rest after her hard day.

She sat hunched up over the table, sucking her pen, while her eyes searched the growing darkness of the room. There was scarcely enough light to show up the contrast between herself and Isabel. The latter was scarcely more than a drift of shadows, above which her white face gleamed reproachfully. Wing, sitting nearer to the window, revealed the clumsy lines of her land-girl's uniform—the linen overall and corduroy breeches, the heavy boots with their additional burden of clay.

"If you must sit up here," said Isabel, "you might have the lamp. You'll spoil your eyes writing in this gloom."

"If I have the lamp I'll have to pull down the blind, and I want to see out."

"My dear, you've been out all day. I'd have thought a cosy, lamplit room would be a pleasant change. Do come downstairs and sit comfortably by the fire with me."

"I will, dear, when I've finished this. But I particularly want it to go tonight."

Isabel's face hardened.

"Really, Wing, you're quite incomprehensible. Apart from his behaviour, I can't think what you see in Timothy Bastow. When I was your age I liked a Man."

"Uncle Timothy's a man—don't you make any mistake about it, Mother."

"Then he might behave like a man, and do what other men are doing."

"That's just what I'm telling him in this letter."

"You are!"

Isabel was surprised.

"Well—read it and see."

Consistently surprising, Wing pushed the scrawled sheet toward her. Isabel hesitated. In her own youth she had written letters to censured friends, but she had written in fear and secret—she sickened even now at the thought of her mother finding or reading what she had written.

"Read it," said Wing—"I want you to."

Isabel could just read in the dim light—

> "Don't you see that believing that war is wrong makes no difference? Every sensible and decent person who thinks at all believes that. But most sensible and decent people see that you can't stand apart wringing your hands just to keep them clean. There's not a thing that you say about war that I don't agree with, but if I was a man I'd fight, and as I'm not a man I'm sweating like six men on your sister's damn farm. . . .

"Really, Wing—" Isabel dropped the letter. Not thus had she written to censured friends. "But I thought you liked your work, dear," she continued uncertainly.

"I don't like it—I hate it. But it's got to be done, and there are fewer girls to do it than there are to nurse nice sick soldiers. It makes me feel I'm taking a man's place, especially now that ass Aubrey is going."

"I think you're being extraordinarily silly about both Aubrey and Timothy."

"I'm not really. As a matter of fact they're not so different. Aubrey's joining up and Timothy isn't, just because every other man is. They're both doing different things for the same reason, and they're both wrong."

"You're extremely sure of yourself."

Wing looked crestfallen.

"You needn't snub me, Mother. Why is it a crime to be sure of oneself? I don't see how one's to get on if one isn't. I know you're annoyed with me because I like Uncle Timothy and don't like Aubrey, but I can't help it."

"You've never tried to like Aubrey."

"Indeed I have, but I can't get on with it. He's so flat and empty-headed. He thinks only about games and dancing. He doesn't even care—not truly—about his land, which his mother has simply sweated—and so have I, for that matter—to keep going for him till he comes of age. It's just nothing to him, except something to live upon. I believe he'll sell it when he can do what he likes with it. He can't be a bit like his father."

"What do you know about his father?"

"Nothing, except what I've heard from Lady Mallard. But every one says he was extraordinarily keen on the land, and specially wanted none of it to be sold. Aubrey can't be a bit like him."

"He's very young now—really only a schoolboy. He'll change, and I believe he will grow up like his father. His father was a splendid man, Wing."

"Yes, that's what Lady Mallard says."

Isabel's voice faltered a moment.

"If he grows up like his father, he'll be a man you'll like . . . a man I'll like for you. Don't be silly and set yourself against him now when he's too young for you really to know what kind of man he'll be."

"I'm not setting myself against him, Mother. Don't be so tense about it."

"You're seeing nothing of him now he's at home."

"Well, how can I? I'm toiling and moiling like a nigger all day to keep his property going till he's old enough to get rid of it. He could come out and lend me a hand, or at least look at me, but he doesn't."

"You probably don't encourage him."

"Of course I don't. Why should I?"

"Really, you modern girls are remarkably unsubtle. But you might see something of him in the evenings, instead of sitting up here writing to Timothy."

"His mother wants him in the evenings. We were going to a dance at Hastings on Thursday, but when she found out she asked him not to go, as he's got such a little time at home."

"Oh . . ."

"Well, I think it very natural of her, poor thing. She adores him, and naturally wants to keep him to herself. Anyway, my heart isn't broken."

§12

Ever since she had finished her training at Clappers, Wing had been working at Herringdales. The two friends had been pleased with the idea that she should serve the land for which the man they had loved had betrayed them both. Such an arrangement would mean that Wing could live at home with her mother instead of adventuring to some distant farm or market garden; and Jenny was greatly in need of help—her men had gone, either willingly or as the new-cast net of conscription caught them. She was glad even of help that a year ago she would have despised.

Wing was still slight and small, with her mother's darkness—though in her case it was more the darkness of the gipsy than of the storm. But she was strong—her little muscles were like iron, and her eye was as keen as her will. She worked indefatigably, as no man had worked yet for Jenny. Not only was she proud and zealous, anxious to take her part in the great toil and the great woe, but she seemed truly to love the land itself—to feel for it what its rightful Squire and owner never felt.

Jenny sometimes reflected sorrowfully that though so like his father in manner and looks, Aubrey was at heart a Bastow. He had none of those troublous indications of "mind" that had baffled her short years with Humphrey, and he had none of that passionate love and sorrow for the land that was Mallard's true inheritance. He enjoyed an outdoor life—games, dogs and hunting—but she knew that he did not feel as his father had felt for the acres of Yockletts and Herringdales, and unlike Isabel she did not expect that he ever would. On the other hand, he had a very shrewd idea of the value of money. Already he had questioned her more than once as to what the estate "brought in," and he had even demurred at money being spent on the land to the sacrifice of the house and garden.

"Why can't we have electric light? It's so gloomy here with nothing but lamps and candles; and there's an engine on the market now that's self-generating—no storage batteries and fuss. Couldn't we have it, Mother?"

"My dear, we couldn't possibly afford it. You've no idea what this place costs to run."

"That's just it. There's so much goes out on the estate that there's nothing left for the house. I think we've got too much land. When I'm of age I shall sell Yockletts."

"Aubrey!"

"Well, why not? Why do you look so upset, Mother darling? It brings in hardly anything; and you don't care for the place itself—you never, never go there."

"No, never."

"Then why shouldn't we get rid of it? After all, it's seventy miles away."

"I promised your father to keep it."

"For me—till I came of age. Then I can do what I like—he meant that. Really, dear, you can't object to my selling it."

"You'll get very little for it."

"That's true. Whatever made Father buy all that land over there, I wonder! Do you think he thought there was coal under it?"

"I'm sure he didn't."

"Then whatever did he buy it for? I really must sell it, Mother."

"Well, don't let's talk any more about it now. You're still three years off twenty-one. You may have changed your mind by then."

Her heart was heavy. For some unexplainable reason, that distant, changed, unvisited farm, where she had lost and suffered all, was dear to her imagination, a sort of secret shrine. She would not think of its being cast off . . . she would not think of it at all. . . . As she looked at Aubrey, she realised that That might happen which would make the loss even of secret Yockletts a small thing.

But she felt a certain comfort in Wing's enthusiasm, in her ardour for the fields of which her son thought chiefly in terms of cash, as his mother's father had thought before him. This new sympathy did much to modify her first dislike of the girl, and in her loneliness she welcomed her occasional company. She would ask her in to tea, and talk to her of everything in the world except Aubrey.

She was pleased to know that the friendship with Timothy prospered. It had now reached a definitely adult stage—it no longer suggested the patronages of uncle and niece, though neither did it suggest to Jenny's romantic mind the communings of lovers. It sometimes amused her to think that she got most of her news of her brother not from himself but from his queer, determined little friend who seemed in some mysterious way to have learned the secrets of his heart. She did not pay for them in sympathy—at least so Jenny judged from the samples she was given of letters and conversation. She sometimes deplored to herself that Wing was too rough, that she wrote and spoke too bluntly, and would end by wounding and driving away that hope which Jenny welcomed because it killed a fear. Timothy always said that Wing understood his point of view though she did not sympathise with it. There, thought Jenny, lay the great difference between Wing and her mother. Isabel would never have given understanding without sympathy, though she would always have been ready to give sympathy without understanding. The younger generation, thought Jenny, were so hard—they saw life in terms of electric light, whereas sunlight and

moonlight had been good enough for their mothers, and candle-light an accepted substitute. For Wing and for Aubrey and their generation there were no substitutes—only the things they wanted.

It was from Wing that Jenny first heard of Timothy's difficulties with the firm of Easby, Wright and Bastow, though he soon wrote to her himself about them. As the war had dragged on the firm had more and more reluctantly stood aloof from the pool of wealth that had been created in the midst of the land. They were good, old-fashioned, North Country people, of sound Noncomformist stock, but they were not so ready as their junior partner to see that pool as a pool of blood. They saw many shaky firms that bathed in its waters coming out perfectly strong and whole, and firms that were not shaky coming out in a state of almost miraculous health and wealth. They grew to resent the counsels that they had welcomed at the beginning, when they had thought the war would not last and while it lasted could achieve only ruin. For some time Bastow had known that a storm was rising against him, and he was prepared for it when at last it broke.

"I shall sell out," he wrote to Jenny—"there's nothing else for me to do. The whole firm is for the blood and iron trade now. I've stood out against them as long as I could, but I can't do it any longer. Besides, the Tribunals will be after me now—unmarried forty. I may just as well get clear."

Jenny was sorry and anxious. She had dreamed a pretty future for her brother, in which he should become an enormously rich iron-master, dwelling once more in Slapewath. There was no chance of that now. He would have, no doubt, a decent competence, but no wealth that could ever bring Slapewath to him. As for the threat of conscription, she was alternately pleased and terrified. Now at last he would have to go, she told herself at times—but at other times she knew that where he had not acted willingly, he would not act perforce. She saw Timothy a Conscientious Objector, in prison, a proclaimed traitor, openly despised. Already people in the neighbourhood were beginning to say—"I suppose your brother will be going to fight now, Lady Mallard." . . . She wished that she had not displayed him quite so proudly and openly—made sour grapes of his wealth to so many mothers of daughters.

But Timothy did not bring her and Aubrey the final disgrace of kinship to a Conscientious Objector. His conscience, though it drove him hard, did not drive him to the ultimate logic of refusing to help the war by mending its broken pieces. The Tribunal which decided his case dealt gently, and he was enrolled in the R. A. M. C.

"Thank God!" cried Jenny, when she heard—"I was so afraid he'd refuse to do anything—lots of them won't even help the wounded, you know."

"Timothy isn't insane enough to be logical," said Wing. "It's a pity."

“Really, my dear,” said Isabel, “you needn’t try so hard to be clever. And since when have you been calling him ‘Timothy’? If you’ve dropped the ‘uncle’ it ought to be ‘Mr Bastow.’ ”

She noticed and deplored the sharp note in her own voice. But lately she had been feeling annoyed with Wing, and—more dishearteningly—annoyed with Jenny. When Aubrey had come home from the front on his first glorious leave, his mother had taken him up to London to spend it there instead of Herringdales. She said that he found the country dull in winter, and that she wanted him to have a really good time; but Isabel suspected that all she wanted was to keep him and Wing apart. On this vital and growing matter of their children’s marriage, the two friends were divided. Isabel could not be quite sure of the root of Jenny’s desire that Wing should marry her brother and not her son, but she sometimes felt as if once more Humphrey stood between them.

§13

In the Autumn Timothy came to Herringdales. The uniform of a private in the R. A. M. C. scarcely improved his appearance.

"Well," he said to Wing and Jenny, who were at tea together when he arrived, "are you pleased now you've got me into khaki?"

"No," said Wing.

"Yes," said Jenny.

She noticed that he looked disappointed.

"Why aren't you pleased?" he asked after a moment's silence. Evidently he thought only of Wing's reply.

"Because you're still being superior. You haven't joined the R. A. M. C. because you're too old or too crocky for anything else, but because you think you're too good for anything else. You don't think it right to do what everybody else is doing."

"Why must what everybody else does be right?"

"I never said that—it isn't. But it's right to do what everybody does, even if it's wrong."

"How can you talk such nonsense! You don't mean what you say," he seemed agitated and annoyed, he stood up and began to pace about unlike the usual half-laughing manner of his earnestness. "My God! where would humanity be if no one ever dared march ahead of it?"

"You're not marching ahead of it, you're standing apart and judging it."

"I'm not judging it. No one seriously believes that war is good."

"That's just it. No one seriously believes that war is good, but all the same there happens to be a war on. It's no use—you can't escape the day of judgment by just walking about by yourself. You've got to come in with the crowd and share the common doom. When every decent man's hands are dirty I don't want to keep mine clean."

"You're damned unreasonable," he grumbled—"and you've no right to talk as you do. At least I'm risking my life over this job—the Red Cross gets shelled quite a lot. I may be killed."

"But you'll die with your hands clean."

"Oh, damn you!" he cried.

"Timothy!" Jenny rose and went over to him, she stroked his sleeve, and tried to make him sit down again at their despised teatable, where Wing sat scowling and smoking.

"I thought she'd be pleased," he said, childishly wounded—

"I've joined up, even though it is as a non-combatant. I'm wearing khaki —I'm going to be sent abroad. Isn't that enough for you?"

“No, it isn’t. I’d really have respected you more if you’d stood right out and refused even to help the wounded. Then at least you’d pay the proper price for your opinions. But now you don’t have to pay any price. You’re wearing khaki, and old ladies won’t run after you in the street and say ‘why aren’t you fighting for *me*?’ Nobody will send you white feathers, though you jolly well deserve them, having funked two things instead of one—”

“Wing!” cried Jenny—“I won’t have my brother spoken to like that. Do please remember that this is my house, and consider my feelings a little.”

Wing looked sheepish.

“I’m sorry, Lady Mallard, but I’ve been rather boiling up against Timothy these last few weeks.”

Jenny watched her anxiously, as she put out her cigarette and stood up to go.

“I don’t think I’d better stay any longer. I might break out again. I’ll get back to the Sunk Pasture. That’s my job.”

She walked out of the room without looking at Timothy.

§14

Jenny had her brother more or less to herself for the rest of his leave. Wing chose her work deliberately in fields far from the house. She was busy with the breaking up of a hundred acres of pasture, as the Ministry of Agriculture had decreed. Hitherto there had been very little grain grown on the Herringdales, but now, just as the kitchen garden had spread and eaten up Jenny's flowers, so the wheat was to devour her grass. The pastures chosen were on the south-eastern flap of Herringdales, not far from Punnetts Town. Out of sight even of the chimneys, Wing toiled with the old men, and Timothy never went in search of her.

Jenny was perturbed. She feared that they were estranged definitely, and her heart was loath to give up the growing thought of their marriage.

"Timothy," she said on the morning of the day he was to go—"I hope you're not taking Wing seriously."

"Of course I am."

"But, my dear. She doesn't mean half what she says—she's only a girl of twenty."

"If you think that Wing hasn't meant every word she's said since she was ten, it only shows how little you know her."

"Have you seen her again since you've been here?"

"No—I don't want to see her while she's feeling like this about me."

"Then you think she'll change?"

"No, I don't."

"Timothy, I wish you wouldn't speak in that exasperating way. I know I'm stupid, but I really don't think it's entirely my fault I can't understand you."

"Indeed, it isn't. I'm sorry, Jen, if I'm churlish—but I've been hurt . . . damnably."

She squeezed his hand.

"My dear, you know how I want you and Wing to be friends."

"Do you, Jen? I'm so glad. You see how splendid she is."

"Ye-es. But she's rather cruel."

"Because she's honest—she can't compromise. You and I, Jenny, learned to compromise—it was part of our education. I don't think they teach it so much today."

"Well, I feel sure that Wing will come round. Don't give up hope of her."

"I haven't."

She squeezed his hand again.

That afternoon he went away, and that evening Isabel dined at Herringdales. It was now a curtailed and constricted dinner that they had together selected according to the rules of scarcity and ration cards, though Jenny still could offer her friend the hospitality of golden wine. Isabel seemed in good spirits. She was expecting both her boys home on leave within the next few weeks, and seemed even more elated at the prospect than Jenny would have expected.

"It would be nice if they could both be home together, and they ought to be, if they get the dates they hope for—but you never know. . . . When are you expecting Aubrey?"

"Some time in October—before he goes to France."

"So I thought; and that gave me the idea that if they were all home together, we might arrange a little dance—just get a couple of girls with Wing to celebrate the occasion."

"Aubrey and I might be going to London . . . as we did last time."

"My dear, surely you wouldn't do that again."

"Why not?—he likes it. He says he finds the country dull."

"That's because he never goes about or sees anyone. But if he met plenty of young people . . . We should like to see something of him this time, you know."

Isabel spoke lightly, but Jenny knew what she was thinking; and she wondered in her heart—"what would happen if she and I spoke out our feelings to each other the same way as Wing and Timothy do?" She knew that their friendship could never exist on such lines, not because it wasn't true enough, but because it was too fastidious—it had begun under old, dignified conditions that were passing away, and had been governed all through by reticences and restraints that would appear insincerities to Wing and her generation. She knew now that Isabel was hurt at the way she kept Aubrey to herself, that she felt that if he and Wing saw more of each other they would fall in love and fulfil her dearest wishes. Jenny on her side was determined not to give them the chance, but she was equally determined never on any grounds to quarrel with Isabel. So she thought of something to say that would please her, though it was not particularly pleasing to herself.

"I'm afraid that Wing and my brother aren't such good friends as they used to be."

"No, I'm afraid not. Wing was telling me about it."

"Oh! . . ."

"She didn't tell me much—" Isabel soothed and smiled, and would not glory in her advantage—"only that she thought less of him now he'd joined the R. A. M. C., than she would if he'd gone in for being an out and out Conscientious Objector."

"Do you agree with her?"

"Of course I don't. I can't see why the wounded should be left to suffer, even if war is wrong. And of course I'm ever so relieved on your account."

"Yes, it's a great relief to me. But I'm sorry for Wing."

"My dear, don't be sorry. Wing's tough. She's quite different from what you and I were at her age. We'd have wept bitter tears of disillusion, but you can't do that unless there's been some sort of illusion first."

"And Wing's had none?"

"None whatever. She's got her ideas of what a man should be; they're not mine, but she knows what they are and that your brother doesn't fit in with them. Now you and I, either we'd have created our ideas to suit some particular man or else we'd have created the man to suit our ideas—I mean if he hadn't fitted in with them as he probably wouldn't, we'd have dressed him up in an imaginary character that would have fulfilled all requirements."

"I don't believe we would."

"The answer to that is we did. Now tell me truthfully, Jenny. Was the man you thought you married the man you really did marry?"

Jenny was silent. Her mind unwillingly returned over the comfortable years to that sad, thwarting time when she had pursued a dream Humphrey sorrowfully into daylight, there to see him change, lose his coat of many colours, and stand before her as a stranger. She would not linger among these old shadows, and mercifully Isabel saved her the effort of speaking.

"All I know is that I didn't. I had my ideals, like Wing; but unlike Wing, when the man I loved didn't square with them, I wouldn't see it. I simply told myself that he did till I couldn't tell even myself such a lie any longer. Now Wing and her kind will lie to anybody rather than themselves."

Still Jenny did not speak, though she had come out of the past into the equally difficult if less disturbing present. She knew that Isabel was talking like this because she thought all was finished between Wing and Timothy. She continued in the same gay, confident voice.

"The one thing this generation knows is what it wants. Wing knows what she wants, which means she also knows when she hasn't got it. The trouble about you and me when we were young was that we didn't know what we wanted, so we couldn't know that we hadn't got it."

"Hadn't we got it?"

"I ask you—*had* we?"

"I had."

"You wanted to marry a man whose heart was lost to his land, who cared for no woman apart from it, and would sacrifice any woman to it? You know you didn't want that any more than I did. We merely took what came,

hoping and pretending it was the thing that we wanted, because we didn't know what the thing that we wanted really was."

"What did *you* want, Isabel?"

"My dear, I didn't know then, so how can I know now? That's one of the things that's lost."

§15

Aubrey's farewell leave was spent at Herringdales, but the dance Isabel had planned did not take place because Wilfred could not get his leave when he expected, and Lance had only one day when he and Aubrey were in Sussex together. There was a luncheon at Mogador for them all, and a dinner at the Herringdales, but on the whole the two families met little. Jenny felt that she had done all she could for Isabel by having her son at home instead of taking him to London. She would not do more, and she would not have done that much if she had not feared, intangibly, some crisis, some open encounter. After all Wing was about the place all day—if the young people did not meet, it was their own fault.

One evening Aubrey said to her—

"Old Wing looks rather dashed. Can't we do anything to cheer her up?"

"She's all right, dear—only a bit over-worked and worried."

"What if I took her up to town for the day tomorrow—just lunch and a matinée. The trains would let us do it."

"And leave me—when we've so few days together?"

Her voice faltered, and Aubrey was stricken.

"Darling—I wasn't thinking. I'm a beast. I'd hate to leave you—only I thought old Wing wanted bucking up. . . . Still that's not my job. I don't care what happens to her really. . . ."

He kissed Jenny with all a son's love, and the cloud passed.

When he was gone, she scarcely thought of him and Wing—or of their shadows, Humphrey and Isabel. Her mind was taken up with the new thought of her son in daily danger of death. It is true that the quick ferocity or former pain was lost, burnt up by pity when she first saw her little boy as soldier, dressed up to die. But there was that ceaseless orientation of her mind on him, the inability to trouble much with other ideas, the feeling that nothing else really mattered except his safety. So long as he was safe, let him marry whom he would.

Her outward manner and life were quite unchanged, though she was perhaps a little quieter, a little readier to be often alone. Sometimes she would walk alone in the lanes round Herringdales. She had never been fond of walking much, but now she often went down the hill, as far as Pigstone or Clappers, and watched the fiery sunset raking the marsh, or she walked up to the river of the road, where it flowed narrowly at Three Cups Corner, following it as it broadened, through Punnetts Town and Cade Street, and then back down her tributary lane to where Herringdales lay red on the slope among its sallows.

Lately a change had come to Sussex in war time. A pulse had crept into the air. As the gunfire in France and Flanders grew heavier so its echoes reached the fields for which men out there were dying. Those who loved them could listen to the flicker of sound which in their ears was a rocking roar. As Jenny listened it sometimes seemed to her like the beating of a heart —a heart whose throbbing meant not life but death. When that heart ceased to beat then the world would come alive again and rise from the dead, and her own heart with it. But generally she felt that it would never cease to beat, and that the world and her heart would lie dead for ever.

But on the face of things she was not sad, and everybody said how bravely Lady Mallard bore her son's being at the Front.

She grew to live for letters with the field postmark, though when they came they told her very little, not only of what Aubrey was doing but of Aubrey himself. The mind that touched her through them did not seem to be quite his. It seemed to have become strangely adult and contemporary. He wrote continually of "My men"—his men, the child! Who nine months ago had been a boy at school. She was impressed by his efforts for their safety and comfort, his air of fatherly responsibility.

But sometimes he still wrote as a child, and that was to Anna Luck. When he wrote to Anna he became a boy again, chaffing and coaxing. "What about another cake, Lucky? The last one you sent still lives as a heavenly dream. And mightn't I have some of those nursery biscuits? Don't you remember how you used to give me one every night after I was in bed? You used to creep in like a thief after the light was out because Mother didn't like my eating anything after I'd cleaned my teeth."

Jenny sometimes wondered if she ought to be hurt because he wrote so differently to them both. But she never could make up her mind which kind of letter was really the most natural and intimate. Often she thought that it was to Anna that he strained and to her that he relaxed, that the real Aubrey was no longer the chaffing, coaxing boy, but this grown-up, responsible creature whose chief preoccupation was "my men."

§16

Early in the following Spring a letter came from Timothy. Jenny took it with the feeling of disappointment she always had when Timothy's letters arrived. First she would catch sight of the familiar khaki envelope and the field postmark, and her heart would leap with thoughts of her son, then she would see that the address was not in Aubrey's firm, round hand but in Timothy's scratchy and eccentric script, which was even more difficult to read than it looked.

This time she was so annoyed that she put the letter in her pocket, and went on with her job of laying down waterglass eggs. When she had finished her work and washed her hands, she remembered the letter. Timothy's letters were superior to Aubrey's from every point of view but the only one that mattered. From him she had really vivid accounts of life in a field dressing station. Like most "conchies," he had been sent to a hot place, and his letters conveyed a more imminent sense of danger than anything Aubrey wrote—except just once when he had added as a postscript: "I forgot to say in my will that I want Lucky to have my watch, so will you please see about it if anything happens to me?"

This time Timothy did not seem to have much to say, but the preliminary survey which brought the main drift of the letter out of the haze of the writing, made her think that it might be more significant than usual. She always had to read his letters twice, first for clues, and then for the actual meaning. This letter she read over three or four times.

Timothy was coming home. He was leaving the Red Cross for a line regiment. He was going to fight, and had been granted Blighty leave to set his affairs in order. He would travel straight to Middlesbrough, and then come for a night to Herringdales on his way back.

The letter, deciphered, ran:—

> This is only just to tell you that Wing is right, and I can't stand apart any longer keeping my hands clean. This is humanity's doom and I must share it. I've no right to my own private integrity. I've seen two things that have changed me. The first was a broken crucifix lying on the floor of a ruined church in Blank. The second was a dead tommy lying in the street. I had gone out with a stretcher party when the shelling was over, and he lay there like the crucifix, his arms flung out, and his tin hat fallen in such a way that it was like a halo behind his head. You may think I'm mad, but those two things entirely changed me. There was my God

being “made sin” for mankind, and there was mankind being made in the likeness of God. I felt that if I stood apart any longer keeping myself righteous, instead of being the martyr I’ve imagined myself all this time, I’d be only one of those who, “sitting down, they watched him there,” when he was crucified. It was God and mankind who were the martyrs and I was only a gazer, a looker-on. I don’t suppose you’ll understand, but I felt I must tell you. I ought to be with you on the 17th, but I’ll send you a wire from Middlesbrough.

Much love from
Timothy.

First Jenny was astonished, then slightly shocked—as if the letter were ever so little indecent—then suddenly and wildly joyful. She crushed up the paper in her hand and laughed excitedly.

Thank goodness! Now at last I’ve got a brother who’s like other men. And Wing and he—they’ll be friends again now. She’ll see that he’s done all this for her, and they’ll marry. Yes, that trouble’s at an end. He “doesn’t suppose I understand.” Ha! Ha! That’s good. I understand better than he does. I don’t have to tell myself these tales of dead tommies and broken crucifixes. It’s love that’s changed him—his conscience can’t keep him from Wing. He’ll have her at all costs. And my boy will be safe from her. Humphrey will always be my own.

§17

It was a curious thing that Wing had not heard from Timothy. He had not written to her once while he was in France, but Jenny had felt sure that he would write now that he was coming back to her, delivered from those difficulties and misunderstandings that had kept them apart. But when Jenny saw Wing that evening, she found that she had heard nothing. Timothy had not broken the silence that had existed ever since his going to France. Wing received the news calmly—at least as far as her outward manner showed. Jenny raged in her heart against this impassivity of modern youth. Not thus would she have heard of the breaking down of the barriers between herself and her true love. But Wing, perversely, did not seem to consider it so. "Of course he wouldn't write to me—it's no concern of mine," she repeated more than once.

"But now that he's done what you wanted . . ."

Wing's eyes blazed.

"What *I* wanted! You think he's done this—gone against all his ideas and convictions because *I* wanted it? I'll have nothing more to do with him if it's true."

Jenny was bewildered. There seemed to be no pleasing Wing—no living up to her peculiar code of integrity. Surely nothing could be sweeter to a woman's mind than to know she had completely changed a man's. . . . But Wing did not mean what she said—she was merely annoyed because Timothy had not written to her when he wrote to Jenny. It was queer of him not to have done so—he ought to have had the sense to see that his mad-minded letter should have been sent to his sweetheart, who understood mad minds, and not to his sister, who didn't. Perhaps he trusted to the better emotion of personal explanations . . . or he didn't want his change of opinion to seem too obviously inspired by self-interest. . . . But he ought not to have been so silly—he could not play for ever with Wing's indignation.

These feelings made Jenny a little abrupt with her brother when he appeared at Herringdales—this time as a private in the Durham Light Infantry, looking, in spite of his change from peace to war, very much the same as he had looked as a private in the R. A. M. C.

"Really, Timothy," she said rather spitefully,—"you change your coat so often."

"And I'll have changed it once again, I expect, next time you see me. They're pressed for officers—I'm sure to get a commission in two or three months."

"I think I'm prepared for anything now."

"But you're pleased?"

"Of course I'm pleased."

"And you understand?"

"Of course I do."

"It was very difficult to put it all into a letter. But I wanted you to see the two things which changed me when I saw them—the broken crucifix and the broken soldier, both the same, both telling me that if I kept myself unbroken, I . . ."

"My dear Timothy, I don't require nearly such a high falutin' explanation of your motives as you do yourself."

"Whatever's that?"

"Well, I see every day one of the things that changed you."

He flushed.

"You mean Wing Halnaker? I was afraid you'd think that. And I'll be perfectly frank with you, I felt it was possibly a motive, as well as—or rather, underlying—the other two. So I took steps to put it out of court altogether."

"How do you mean?"

"I have simply made myself impossible to Wing as a husband."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"I've got rid of every penny I possess. I'm not worth a cent. I've nothing but my pay."

"Timothy!"

"No woman in her senses would marry me now."

"But how could you—how could you have got rid of all the money you had from Bastow's?"

"Simply by obeying literally the evangelical precept of 'Sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor.' I felt that as I was deliberately breaking one of the Gospel laws I must keep the rest as well as I could."

"You must be mad."

"Not at all. I was merely guaranteeing myself against changing my coat to please Wing."

Jenny burst into tears.

He really was hopeless—so mad and silly. He did not seem to belong to her generation, which viewed soberly both good and evil, but to Wing's with its hard gallantry. Now all her hopes were ended for these two, whose latest follies merely showed how fundamentally they were suited to each other. Isabel, who had never approved of the match, would now definitely and rightly forbid it, and even if she did not, it was impossible. How was Timothy to keep Wing, without a penny piece—and no prospect of making any when the war was over?

"How are you going to live?" she sobbed, "how are you going to keep yourself after the war?"

"I shall manage—I shall get a job like other men."

"But you've no training—you can't make a start at your age."

"Don't worry—I shall manage quite well. After all, I may not come through."

"And Slapewath?—What about Slapewath? Have you sold that?"

"Slapewath is a hospital, and I'm keeping it as such till the end of the war. Then I shall probably give it to the nation."

"And what in heaven's name will the nation do with Slapewath?"

"I don't know. It might become a museum—or a sanatorium. But I'm not going to bother about that now."

She noticed a sudden change in his manner, and looking up she saw that Wing had come into the room. She stood immediately behind her, by the door, bringing a faint atmosphere of sweat and soil into the aridities of their quarrel.

"What's all this about?" she asked.

Jenny laughed shrilly.

"Only that Timothy's beggared himself, so that there's no chance of his ever being able to marry you."

Wing swung towards him, her question in her eyes. He answered it firmly.

"Yes, it's true. I'm a soldier now, and I was so afraid I was doing it for your sake that I deliberately made it impossible for us to marry even if you'd have me."

"He's sold his share in Bastow's and given the money away," continued Jenny on the edge of hysteria. "His conscience had to make a fool of him somehow, even after he'd got the better of it. What have you given the money to, Timothy?"

"There's plenty of things one can give money to these days."

"But is it all too late?—all given?—can't you get it back?"

"Of course I can't get it back."

"Oh, you fool! you fool!"

She hid her face in her hands, crying again with her disappointment and rage at him.

"This—this was why he didn't write to you, Wing."

The girl did not speak. She stood behind Jenny's chair, and Jenny felt that she trembled. Then why in God's name didn't she try to make him change this thing that he had done? Why didn't she go down on her knees before him, and tell him she hadn't meant all she'd said before—that she only wanted him to be happy, and would marry him at once if only he could

somehow contrive to get back some of his scattered livelihood. Why couldn't she behave like a human girl—like her own mother, generous, womanly, sweet and concrete—instead of a dreadful hard-headed, hard-hearted sexless prig?

"Wing," cried Timothy—"you understand, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I understand."

She came forward, took his hand, and dropped it suddenly. Jenny hated her, but there was a new fount to her hatred. She saw her no longer as a hard, sexless prig, but as Isabel—Isabel not as she was now, but as she had been when she and Jenny were rivals for Humphrey Mallard. That old, dark Isabel, long forgotten, stood before her now, and all her old, dark hatred for Isabel revived and fixed itself upon this girl. Wing would have Aubrey—Isabel would have Humphrey. Once again she would make Jenny a beggar, and herself a queen, and Jenny hated not Isabel herself, but the old, dark Isabel who lived again in her daughter.

§18

Timothy left the next morning after some stilted, uncomfortable hours. Jenny could not dissemble her anger, so avoided him as much as possible. When he was gone she would not talk about him, to Isabel or to Wing. “He’s impossible—just impossible,” was her reply to Aubrey when he wrote in excited comment. He must not think that his uncle was behaving like a man at last. As for her, she would have preferred him to remain a Conscientious Objector rather than manifest this new and unscheduled righteousness. For the first time for many years, she began to experience vague longings, vague regrets for the North from which she had for so long contentedly been exiled. Even after Timothy had severed his connection with Easby, Wright and Bastow she must have felt some vague subconscious kinship with the land of mines and works, or she would not now have experienced such a wrench when she knew that his last stake in it was removed. She thought of her childhood in the Middlesbrough street, where it was seldom before midday that the sun could pierce the layers of cloud that the chimneys sent to swag over the Tess. She thought of her girlhood at Slapewath, with the cool outlines of the hills and the Big Smokes. It seemed all gone now, since even the money that had made it and that it had made was gone—dispersed with the multitudinous graspings of the war. It seemed as if her childhood had been cut off, amputated from the rest of her life like a maimed limb. At scarcely more than forty she had lost her past, as her brother had lost his future. Thus her father’s two children stood together at the end of the world.

During the days that followed, she avoided Isabel. She felt she could not bear to hear her comments on Timothy’s behaviour, or see her dissembled joy in his definite removal from Wing’s path. Also she feared lest some of that hatred she felt for Wing might swing back on Isabel herself, whose own it was. She was now almost superstitiously convinced that Wing would marry Aubrey, and then she doubted if any longer she could use the daughter as the mother’s scapegoat . . . some day she might hate Isabel again. Her heart knew its own bitterness.

Isabel guessed what Jenny must feel, and carefully avoided both Timothy and Wing as subjects of conversation. She also avoided meetings, for they emphasised the restraint that was growing between them. Isabel felt that if she left things alone it would pass. In time Jenny would forget her schemes for that impossible brother—so different from Isabel’s own men, that her heart turned gratefully towards them for their simple soldiery—and then her clutch might loosen on her son, and what Isabel longed for might come to pass and yet all be well.

Then suddenly a thing happened that turned all other things to dust. It was a clear March morning, and Isabel had driven up to Heathfield Street in the little pony cart that now took the place of the Austin car which the petrol shortage had laid aside. She was on her way back, and had just turned into the lane to Rushlake Green, when she noticed a telegraph boy on his bicycle ahead of her. Immediately the question shot into her heart—was he going to Herringdales or to Mogador? for the road led to them both.

Hitherto the woe of war had fallen mostly on the cottages—husbands and sons had gone from Cade Street, from Three Cups Corner and from Punnetts Town, the stockman at Clappers had lost his boy, and the young ploughman at Stream Farm had been killed a year ago. There had also been catastrophe at distant Halls—at Moorcocks and at Foxhunt Green—but the two Manors of Herringdales and Mogador had stayed untouched. Isabel suddenly realised how strangely fortunate she had been in having a husband and two sons nearly three years at war and all unscathed. She also realised how much rather she would have any bad news for herself than for Jenny. She loved neither Claude nor Wilfred nor Lance as Jenny loved Aubrey. Aubrey was Jenny's all—Jenny's Humphrey . . . Isabel's Humphrey. . . . He must not be sacrificed to the muddled hate of nations—he who was the hope of two women's hearts, their dead alive again. . . .

She whipped up the pony so that she should not lose sight of the boy as he pedalled and whistled down the lane. After all, she told herself, he might be for neither house. There were cottages between Herringdales and Mogador, and a hamlet beyond. She was being silly—the telegram was not bound to contain bad news. "Unexpected leave. Arrive tomorrow"—it might be that. Or some cottage woman might hear of the birth of a grandson, or some farmer get a good, prompt offer for a bull he had advertised for sale in the Sussex News . . . why did her mind run on telegrams and catastrophe like a Victorian schoolgirl's? Even the war . . .

The telegraph boy's bicycle wobbled at the gate, and then turned suddenly into the drive at Herringdales.

"Unexpected Leave. Arrive tomorrow," said Isabel aloud to herself, but she followed him in at the drive gate all the same.

§19

Jenny was sitting in the morning room when the telegram was brought to her—at her writing-table, busy with her household accounts. She opened it quickly, knowing that she must not have time to think.

"No answer, Merritt."

The parlourmaid crackled out, and Jenny read the telegram again quite calmly—"Regret to inform you that Second Lieutenant Sir Aubrey Mallard is seriously wounded."

What did that mean? Was it dangerous? Didn't they say "dangerously" in that case? She didn't know. Could she see him? Where was he? She didn't know.

With that realisation her calm suddenly left her. He was ill—hurt—perhaps terribly hurt—she must go to him; and yet she could not, for she did not know where he was, and a battlement of regulations stood between them. He was ill—hurt—and he wanted her; he must want her, as he had always wanted her when he was hurt or ill. Perhaps he was asking for her—crying for her—Oh, poor baby! poor little boy dressed up to die! Perhaps he was dead—dead by the time the telegram had reached her . . . the end of hope, the end of all. Oh, my poor little boy, I must save you, I must go to you—but I can't! I can't!

She fell back in her chair, suddenly weeping. She wept as she had never wept since Aubrey's father lay stiff and still in her arms at Yockletts Farm . . . yet Aubrey was no longer Humphrey to her now, but just himself, her little boy, her darling, whom she had borne and suckled and watched and taught and tended. . . .

"Aubrey!" she cried aloud, "Oh, my boy, my darling, my baby . . ."

Then suddenly she felt two arms come round her, and her head was drawn to a strong shoulder, and a strong voice said—

"My dear, my very dear, lean on me—let me comfort you."

Trembling and sobbing, she turned towards her friend, hiding her face in the sun-scented linen of her gown. Isabel's arms were almost like a man's about her, so strongly they held her, so swiftly they seemed to put courage into her, and hope. In a few minutes she was revived, able to look up and speak.

"Oh, dearest Isabel, how did you come?"

"I saw the telegraph boy turn in at your gate, so I followed him."

"How good! How good!"

"Why good? Surely this is one of the things we're friends for."

Gone were the jealousies and restraints between them; their friendship was once more clear in the darkness, as it had been clear in the shadow of Humphrey's death. Isabel had read the telegram as it lay on the floor, so she knew exactly what she had to meet.

"I'll telephone at once to the War Office—I can get hold of Colonel Shotter—he'll help me. Then we'll decide what to do next."

"Shall I be able to go to Aubrey?"

"If it's really serious you'll be given a permit—anyhow we can go to Folkestone, and be ready to start at once. But I'll ring up first."

Isabel acted swiftly and decidedly. She rang up a friend of her husband's at the War Office, and at the end of much telephoning, some telegraphing, and a certain amount of frenzy, they both stood on the steps of Mogador waiting for the Austin, which was being energetically prepared by Wing for action. They had obtained enough petrol for the drive to Folkestone, and they were going alone. Anna Luck had begged piteously to be allowed to come with them, but Jenny had recoiled almost superstitiously from the suggestion. She remembered that other journey on which Anna had accompanied her, and her terrified heart told her that if Anna came with her on this one it would be the same, a journey of rain and tears.

When at last she drove off beside Isabel through the clear sunshine of the afternoon she had instead a feeling almost of elation. Aubrey would not die as his father had died. This journey was altogether different from the first—swift and direct where the other had been slow and involved, sunny where the other had been rainy, in company with the friend instead of the servant—surely that which was so different in circumstance must be different in essence, a matter of life and not of death. Thus Jenny's heart went back ten thousand years, and became the heart of a savage mother, casting spells for her son.

§20

Her spells worked. Aubrey did not die. He did not even become very seriously ill. Jenny never crossed to Boulogne to see him. His wound was reported less severe than had been thought at first, and after a few days at the Metropole, Jenny and Isabel went home again. During those days Isabel had been her strength—almost a man beside her, and yet a woman for sympathy and tenderness. Jenny thanked God for her nearly as much as she thanked Him for Aubrey's safety.

About a fortnight later the boy himself was brought over to England, and spent a couple of months in hospital in London. When Jenny first saw him, she was shocked at his drawn, white face and the strained look in his eyes. She felt a little indignant at the authorities that had made so light of his injuries. His right arm had been broken in two places when a big crump brought down the shell of a house in which he was stationed, and buried him in the ruins. It was really a slight consequence of so big a catastrophe, but the mental effects of the burial were actually worse than the physical effects of the explosion, though here again the doctors infuriated Jenny by speaking of them as "slight." They said that Aubrey was "slightly" shell-shocked—hence his drawn face and hunted eyes, and the stutter that had broken up his clear young voice. He would get over it soon—rest and nursing would soon put him right—and he would be able to go out to the shambles again.

That summer came the first daylight air-raid on London. Jenny was on her way to the Hospital in Bruton Street when she heard a soft humming in the sky, and looked up expecting to see the usual friendly aeroplane. Instead she saw what seemed like the shadow of a cloud—scarcely more than a smudge on the dancing blue of the hot day—with little white puffs and bubbles breaking round it. . . . Then suddenly there was a terrific detonation, followed by others shorter and sharper; the earth and the air seemed to shake together. A policeman at the corner of Brook Street cried—"Take cover. It's an air raid." Nobody did so. Some people stood still looking up at the sky, the others walked on just as if nothing was happening. Jenny felt that she wanted to run, but with everybody round her so unmoved, she was afraid to show herself afraid.

She merely quickened her pace, for she was desperately anxious to get to the hospital. The noise increased, and in spite of her inhibitions she ran the last few steps to the door. A young V.A.D. nurse let her in.

"Oh, yes, do come in, Lady Mallard. But I don't think you can see Sir Aubrey."

“Why not? He told me to come at this time. I’m not just taking shelter from the raid.”

“But I don’t think . . . I’ll ask Matron.”

The young nurse led her towards the waiting room, and Jenny suddenly heard screams.

“What’s that?”

“It’s only the raid. . . the shell-shock patients . . .”

The screams grew louder. They were terrible—far worse than the guns.

“It’s Aubrey!” cried Jenny frantically—“I’m sure it’s Aubrey. Oh, let me go to him.”

“You can’t—you’d really better not.”

The nurse herself was disturbed and trembling, and suddenly the Matron appeared.

“You can’t come up, Lady Mallard,” she said decidedly—“please wait downstairs till the raid’s over.”

“But I must go to him—to my son.”

“You couldn’t do him any good now, and it isn’t only your son—the other two men in his room are just as bad. We must get ’em changed, Peters, when this is over. If we’re going to have raids the shell-shocks oughtn’t to be together.”

To Jenny her words sounded hideous. She seemed as unmoved by the screams as the rest of London by the raid. Jenny, her limbs trembling and her heart rent, allowed herself to be taken by Peters to the waiting-room, where at least she might have the relief of tears.

§21

But good came out of the evil, for that air-raid proved London to be no fit place for shell-shocked men. In the quiet country of the Sussex weald air-raids were unknown, and the sounds of war came only as a distant pulse upon the wind. Aubrey was given three months' sick leave. His arm was practically mended, and his mind would be better healed by the peace of the country and his old home than by all the skill of hospitals in a city which was now a part of war.

Jenny's heart was full as she received him back at Herringdales. She prayed that the war might be over before he was able to go out again. Every year people talked of "the war being over by Christmas." But whether he went back or not she had these long months of the summer clear—July, August and September. The two great months of summer fullness, of heavy, crowned trees, thick hedgerows, and parching shades of green, and the month of the year's fall, when the trees' crowns turned to gold, and the parched greens of the hedgerow kindled into scarlet.

Aubrey too was glad to be back, and in time his eyes lost their stricken look, and his speech, though slower than it used to be, no longer fumbled and hesitated. Once or twice, though, he shocked her with sudden panics. If an aeroplane flew overhead he would be terrified until it was definitely shown to be British, and occasionally he would mistake the distant rumble of a train for hostile aircraft—his hands would shake, his eyes would dilate, he would laugh nervously, and escape to his room, enough master of himself to know that he must spare his mother the sight of his fear.

It was always a grief to Jenny that he would not allow her to come near him on these occasions. The only company he would tolerate was Anna Luck's. She would soothe him as she had used to do when he was a little boy in the nursery and afraid to go to sleep without a nightlight. "There now, Master Aubrey, there's nothing to hurt you, and only good fairies about." Sometimes, too, in the night, when he dreamed over again the horror of the blasted house at Bailleul, Anna, as well as Jenny, would hear his screams and go to him. "There now, it's only a dream, Master Aubrey. See, I'll fix the blind so that the moon shines in and makes Jackies on the wall. Now you go to sleep and dream of me—it'll be much better." He would fall asleep comforted, while Jenny would go back to lie awake, her heart in torment with his dreams.

During those months Wing Halnaker worked as usual at Herringdales, and generally came in to have tea with Jenny and Aubrey. Jenny forced herself to press her for her company, which otherwise she seemed disposed

to withhold. She was urged by a sense of fundamental loyalty and gratitude to Isabel. Isabel had been so good to her in her trouble, had stood by her with a man's strength and a woman's tenderness—she could not deliberately fight her dearest hope, even though it meant her own defeat. She would not in any way help or encourage a friendship between Wing and Aubrey—her whole nature recoiled from that and made it impossible—but neither would she deliberately stand between them. For Isabel's sake, and in gratitude for her help, she would deny herself the activity of small frustrations, separations and disparagements. If she could not speak warmly, she at least would hold her tongue.

But it was a comfort to find that neither of the young couple seemed inclined to take advantage of her neutrality. Aubrey's brief interest in Wing had passed—possibly choked off just in time, before gratitude and honour forbade any more use of such tactics. He found her in those days gruff and unsympathetic, and she on her side found him tiresome. She would not put down all his petty irritations to shell-shock. She thought that Jenny and Anna Luck were spoiling him, and occasionally told them so.

Jenny would have liked to know if there was any communication between Wing and her brother. They never spoke of him now. If the conversation turned his way, as it sometimes did when Aubrey was there, Wing retired from it into silence. Jenny felt both curious and anxious, but the girl's manner forbade any direct question. She had sometimes in her letters questioned Timothy, but had never been given an answer.

§22

The long months of the summer passed. The trees wore their crowns and the hedges their scarlet. The widow's son went up before his medical board, and to his mother's soaring relief and thanksgiving, was considered still unfit for active service. After a short delay he was sent as instructor to a Cadet School at Hastings. Here he spent easy days teaching and drilling pitifully small boys, with the respite of frequent leaves to spend at Herringdales.

Jenny's life was beginning to flow smoothly once again. For a brief time shadows had lain over it and echoes had troubled it, but now it was once more an afternoon lane, and the echoes had faded back into a pulse. As long as her own beloved was safe, the war could not deeply trouble Jenny. The privations and restrictions of domestic life, the cares and shortages of labour, she could endure all of them gladly because she felt that they would bring a speedier peace. For other women's sorrows she had only a perfunctory sympathy, ending in her own thankfulness; and the bigger matters of national anxiety, which accompanied the preparations for the great German offensive in the Spring, did not afflict her as they afflicted Isabel. Her only fear was that Aubrey might have to go out again, and as that fear diminished with recurring medical boards, she could bear to watch in her newspaper that sagging line before Amiens, and to agree with the rest of the neighbourhood that the guns sounded louder now.

Isabel, on the other hand, whose fears were not centred in one man's safety, felt and suffered all these things, though she did not talk about them much. She had reduced her housekeeping to its severest limit, working herself in the house and garden, and serving in the canteen at Maresfield camp, to which she drove unafraid in her little pony-trap through the dark spring nights. She would probably have given up Mogador altogether and gone to work in London, if it had not been for the needs of her husband and sons. Wilfred and Lance were not likely to get leave till the Summer was over, but Claude Halnaker, who was in charge of a depot on the East Coast, came home pretty regularly every two months or so. Then Isabel would light up the dark rooms, where usually she economised in fire and candles, and help her single-handed cook to prepare a good dinner, and invite the neighbours to dine. Normally she entertained nobody but Jenny. Those weekly dinners were still held either at Herringdales or at Mogador, though now they were but shorn affairs, and water was drunk at them like tears.

Jenny sometimes wondered if the blow that had once fallen on her would ever fall on her friend. She knew that it could not fall so heavily, for Isabel

did not love her sons and husband as Jenny loved her only son. She was fortunate in loving her girl better than them all. But when she thought of all the woe that was in the district it seemed strange that none should come to Mogador.

The fury of the Spring passed, and still it did not come. Instead it came once more to Herringdales. Early in June another telegram arrived for Jenny. It brought the news that Lieutenant Bastow, as he was now, had been wounded—this time without the terrifying adverb.

Jenny cried as she read it, but even in her first anxiety her tears were partly tears of relief—at the thought that her chief treasure was safe, and that the only blow that really had power to crush her could not fall. Isabel came over from Mogador, as she had come before, with sympathy and offers of help, and Jenny tried hard to pretend it was not a minor occasion. But this time she did not want to besiege the War Office or dash off to Boulogne. She was content to stay at home and wait for further news.

As for Wing, she was working hard over the haymaking, and had no time at all to come up to the house.

§23

Timothy was brought over to England even more quickly than Aubrey had been. Two days after the telegram, Jenny had a letter from him in a hospital near Sloane Square, and once again she set off to London to visit the wounded, though this time she did not go for more than an afternoon.

She found her brother even better than she had hoped, sitting up in bed, though much bandaged about the arms and body.

"I'm riddled with bullets, Jenny—like any old practice target, but with even fewer near the bull's eye. My first doctor said he'd never seen a man with so much old iron bestowed about the non-vital parts of his person. They've taken a lot of it out, but I believe I still weigh about a stone more than I ought."

Jenny kissed him.

"My dear, I was so relieved to get your letter. The telegram only said 'wounded,' but they might have left out the 'seriously' or 'dangerously' by accident."

"Well, anyhow I'm bad enough not to have to go out again. They'll take longer to pick this shrapnel out of me than they will to persuade Fritz that it's time he went home."

"Oh, Timothy, do you really think the war will end by Christmas?"

"Well, not quite by then, perhaps—but it won't be much longer. The great strafe has failed—that's pretty sure—and I don't think the Hun has anything else to go on with."

Jenny smiled—as far as she was concerned, the war was over. It was almost with difficulty that she brought herself back to Timothy.

"I expect you're glad to be out of it all."

He nodded.

"Damn glad, my dear. I don't regret that I took my part, but I'm glad they're not likely to have any further occasion for my services."

She suddenly remembered how he stood.

"But what will you do when it's all finished?—when you're discharged? You've got no job—no money. How will you manage?"

"Somehow. Don't be afraid. After all, I know a great many fellows in the way of business up North. No doubt I'll get some sort of clerkship out of one of them. I shouldn't be bad at that."

"A clerkship—oh, Timothy!"

"Well, why not? I can bang a typewriter. It would be a comforting change to find myself a wage-slave after all the uncertainties and responsibilities of being a capitalist."

“But you won’t get enough—” she was going to say, “to marry on,” but suddenly held her peace. However, he understood.

“Thousands of men get smaller money than a clerk, yet they have wives and children.”

“Yes, I know. . . . But—oh, Timothy, can’t you get back into Easby, Wright’s? When the war’s over . . . you needn’t be a partner, but at least they could give you some sort of a decent position—with your experience . . .”

“No,” he said firmly—“I’m finished with that sort of thing. I’m through with iron, Jenny. I’ve had enough. I’ve worked with it and for it and under it all my life, and now my wretched body’s full of it. But thank God, I’ve just stopped in time to prevent its entering my soul. If I have any more dealings with it, it will enter into my soul. You don’t want my epitaph to be ‘and the iron entered into his soul.’ ”

“Oh, dear, you haven’t changed a bit.”

“Oh, dear, I never will. But cheer up, Jenny, I promise to lead a quiet and useful life from this day forward.”

“I don’t see how you can, if you won’t have anything more to do with iron.”

“But there are other trades than the iron trade, even in the North. I might have a try at coal, for instance. At the present moment coal seems to me a friendlier substance than iron, and not so likely to get inside one’s skin.”

“I can’t see much difference myself. Why don’t you give it all up, Timothy, and come south? If you’d like a job on the land, I might find you something with Cummins. He’s getting old now, he’ll be wanting to retire—you might step into his shoes.”

“I’d ruin you if I did. No, no, Jen, I haven’t got a head for agriculture. I belong to the new, bad ways of industry, and I must walk in ’em and die in ’em, however much I disapprove. I wonder if you remember a conversation I once had years and years ago with your husband. I believe it was before you were married—one day when we were all up on the moors together.”

Jenny shook her head.

“Well, I think we agreed then that industrialism is the rape of Demeter and man’s crowning impiety, for which he will be everlastingly accursed. When he first discovered that he could dig into the earth’s heart for treasure instead of merely planting and sowing on her surface for his daily bread, then all his sorrows began. The first piece of iron he tore from her he used as a weapon of war to slay his brother, and so it will be with the last. I know that iron makes saucepans occasionally, but it makes many more bullets than saucepans, and fewer ploughshares than cannon. And what’s coal, but fodder for iron? When we’d torn up all the woods round Herringdales that were sacrificed to the Forges and Furnaces and the Hammers in those days

—then we started digging down to the woods of a million years ago that are hidden underground. It's no good, Jenny. We can't stop. We can't go back to agriculture—stroking and patting the earth with our little ploughs and spades, now that we've dug into her with our shafts and bores. Demeter is growing old and haggard with it all—she has lost her bloom, and what was once a natural growth will in time only be maintained by chemical manures, nature's cosmetics. So there! You're not listening, anyhow."

Jenny laughed.

"Of course I'm listening, but you don't convince me. If industry's so wicked and mistaken, why don't you give it up—go back to the land?"

"Because, as I've been saying for the last ten minutes, there's no land to go back to. However, never mind. I only hope you won't find it out too suddenly when the war's over."

"Both Herringdales and Yockletts have done well during the war."

"Because a war puts civilisation back ten thousand years, and ten thousand years ago was better times for agriculture than today. But alas! we'll soon wake up in the year of God and find we have only been dreaming of green fields. . . ."

"All I want is that you shan't be poor."

"And all I want is that I shall."

"You're talking nonsense—and I must go."

His arguments did not vex her as much as they might have done, for she could see that, in spite of all that he said, in his heart he was happy and confident, and she told herself that he would not be happy and confident if he didn't still hope to marry Wing some day.

§24

The great German offensive of the Spring had spent its force, and the line of battle swayed behind Amiens, falling back here and there to positions that for long had been out of the maps and newspapers. Once again people began to say that the war would be over by Christmas, and this time they did not say it less and less confidently as the weeks passed, but with a growing assurance. “I believe that there’s going to be peace—but I daren’t think of it,” said Isabel. As for Jenny, she thought of nothing else.

Aubrey was still at Hastings, instructing the pitifully small boys how to read maps and wag flags. Timothy, now, as he said, exhausted as an iron mine, had been sealed up and sent to a convalescent home at Bournemouth. Wing worked doggedly at Herringdales, looking, Jenny thought, a little worn at last. Isabel still drove in her little pony-carriage through the nights, dark with Autumn now; and stood till her legs ached behind the urn at the Maresfield canteen, and helped Tommies to spell their letters home, and gave them change out of a pound note when they bought a stamp. She would not give up an evening at the canteen, nor burn an extra candle or piece of coal, nor take a pinch of sugar in her tea, for fear that if she slackened her bearing in the face of war, peace would not come after all. “I daren’t think of it—I won’t think of it,” she said in her heart, while Jenny chattered of nothing else, and the Tommies at the camp sang—

> “The bells of peace are ringing
> For me and my girl.”

More weeks passed, and the sagging line of battle shrivelled. Whole redeemed territories came out of the map, and all that the pessimists could say was, “We mustn’t expect anything before Christmas.” Then the heads of nations began to fall, small countries asked for peace, big countries blew up into revolution, and finally Anna Luck’s personal enemy, Kayser Bill, joined the crowd of flying monarchs, and the big, bad game was over.

It was on a Friday that Isabel said, “I never thought it could happen soon—but I think it must happen soon now.”

It happened on the Monday. Jenny read in her morning paper that at eleven o’clock that day an armistice would be declared. That, she supposed, would eventually lead to peace. The newspaper did not seem to consider there was any other possibility. Her thankfulness was not so overwhelming as it would have been if Aubrey were still in the fighting line, nor even as if she did not know practically for certain that he would not have to go out again; but it was heartfelt nevertheless. Now at last she could definitely plan

for the future—think proudly and hopefully of his coming of age next year, and look round with satisfaction at the fields of Herringdales, which all these years she had tended and kept for him, and which would now so soon be his.

It was a still, grey day, with scarcely any wind to move the heavy sky, and no sunshine save a rare reflection among the clouds, an occasional kindling of their edges. The fields were grey and brown—grey for pasture, brown for ploughs—and the woods lay like shadows upon them. Jenny had an errand to Pigstone, and went on foot, for the first cold of winter was whipping her blood, and driving her to unaccustomed exercise.

As she walked she found herself watching the fields with a new emotion, or rather with an emotion that had once been keen but for long had lain asleep. She had not dared think of Herringdales land when there was always a chance that Aubrey would not inherit it, that Humphrey would not live on in his son's possession. . . . But now she beamed on fields and livestock, on the well-kept cottages, and prosperous looking little farms. The war had not smitten it all as she had feared—on the contrary, her estate had thriven on wide demands and high prices. How peaceful it all looked now—saved from the curse . . . Huggett's curse. . . . That was Huggett's farm down there on the slope, a sprinkle of red and black roofs and walls beside the pond that had once been a hammer pond, driving the hammer of Huggett's Forge where, for ever accursed, Master Huggett and his man John cast the first cannon . . . why, she was thinking like Timothy! How silly! But as she stood at the gate of Pigstone there seemed to be a faint thudding on the air, as if at Huggett's Forge a spectral hammer still worked . . . idiot! that was only the guns—the last of them she would ever hear.

When she came out from her business at the farmhouse, it was past eleven o'clock, and the war was over. She felt as if the event ought to have been signalled by some terrific outcry, a wild burst of cheering and ringing of bells. But the fields lay in windless silence—she could hear the cattle munching beside the hedge; not even a cock crowed. The stillness positively ached . . . she heard a bicycle bell ring far away on the Heathfield road. "I expect they're not so quiet as this in London," she thought to herself, as she went homewards up the hill.

Nearing the crest of the ridge, she turned round and looked back towards the marsh, over the slope of the dead iron country. As she did so a thin sound smote the air—tink, tink, tink, tink—the bell of Heathfield church, ringing its one monotonous note, since there were not enough ringers nowadays for a peal. Tink, tink, tink, tink—that was all the village of Heathfield could do to signify its joy at the world's deliverance. Tink, tink, tink, tink—a thin sound, almost spectral, like the voices of the guns. She

stood by a field gate, listening to the silence that lay wrapped about the thin sound. So all this terror was over, and she had escaped. She felt almost as if some great thing had passed her by. But thank God that it had passed—this sharpness of life. She felt the tears gathering in her eyes, and thoughts that had never troubled her before troubled her now. How old was she?—only forty? She felt much older—quite old somehow. Tink, tink, tink, tink. The thin sound suddenly ceased—its human agent must rest his arm. In a minute or two it would start again, and go on, with intervals, all the afternoon.

Meanwhile the empty silence came almost as a shock. She realised that it must be because this silence, unlike any that had been before it for the last three years, held no ghostly mutter of war. The guns were silent. The great heart was still—she remembered how the distant guns had seemed to her like the beating of a heart. Now she saw that they might have been the ghostly echo of Huggett's Forge, working on and on through the centuries—Master Huggett and his man John eternally at work, as Vickers and Krupp and all their kind weld the roaring molten metal into forms of death. . . . She was beginning to think like Timothy again. Well, after all, they were brother and sister—it was good for them occasionally to think alike. How different her life would have been if she had always thought as the North instead of as the South. But Timothy did not think as the North—he thought in a strange way all his own, and had his hand against life and life's hand against him, while she had yielded to life and been happy and rewarded. Tink, tink, tink, tink—the thin sound had started again, and Jenny turned homewards up the hill, with a lighter step. She had just thought—Now we shan't have any more ration cards.

§25

For the next few weeks Jenny lived hoping for Aubrey's demobilisation. However, it delayed, and for her the war was not truly over till his return, in spite of the disappearance of ration cards, and the unwonted dazzle of her drawing-room lamplight upon the lawn. Apparently he was still indispensable to His Majesty's forces, busy demobilising the small boys, now no longer pitiful—busier, it seemed, than he used to be in war time, for he no longer had those frequent leaves to spend at home. Indeed she saw him only once after the armistice, when he came to her for Christmas.

Timothy was still in his convalescent hospital, and when Christmas had set her free, Jenny decided to go down to Bournemouth for a few weeks. She felt as if since the armistice she had neglected her brother, holding herself and her house in readiness for her son. She certainly ought to go and see him, now that Aubrey said there was no chance of his being demobbed till February. She must talk to him about his future—where was he going? had he any hopes of a job? And Wing . . . she must talk to him about Wing, find out how matters stood, and do her best to prosper them.

Wing had given up her work on the Herringdales since Christmas. Most of Jenny's men were now back, and anyhow there was never so much to do in the winter months. Both her employer and her mother agreed that the girl was tired out. She had worked beyond her strength and needed a rest.

"Besides," said Wing—"there's no good going on with it. The men who come back to the land won't be pleased to find girls doing their jobs, and there won't be enough jobs for both. Agriculture boomed during the war, but it'll slump with peace. There's no real future for it in this country."

Jenny was pleased to hear her talk, for her sentiments were obviously inspired by Timothy. They must still be writing to each other.

She was still further pleased when shortly before her departure for Bournemouth, Wing came and asked if she might accompany her.

"I've been feeling rather run down since the armistice, and the sea air might make me fit again. Besides"—scorning even an innocent evasion—"I want to see Timothy."

"But, my dear, what will your mother say?"

"She'll let me come all right. As a matter of fact she can't stop me, but she won't really mind my running down to Bournemouth with you for a fortnight."

Isabel, however, minded.

"If you'll wait just a week or two, till I know definitely about your father, I'll take you away myself—to Falmouth or Torquay."

"I'd much rather go now," said Wing, "and Father won't want you to dash off the minute he comes home."

"Besides," put in Jenny, "I'd be grateful for her company. I'm not over keen on staying in a hotel by myself, and I don't suppose I'll be allowed to see very much of Timothy, so it'll be rather dreary for me if I go alone."

She felt treacherous as she pleaded, especially when she saw that she had persuaded Isabel—

"Of course, my dear, if *you* want her . . ."

So, leaving a reluctant and dissatisfied, though not actively protestant mother behind her, Wing went down to Bournemouth with Jenny. They stayed at the Branksome Tower Hotel, and found Timothy much more at large than they had expected. He was practically well again now, and was only waiting for the usual delays to be over before he was discharged and demobilised. He generally came to lunch at the hotel, and all three together they would walk by the sea or on the cliffs towards Boscombe. Sometimes Jenny would feel tired, or disinclined to go out, and then she would send them for a walk together refusing to let herself think of Isabel.

Timothy was still a little lame, and receiving electrical treatment at the hospital, but on the whole he seemed better than she would have dared to hope—indeed, she sometimes thought he looked younger than she had seen him look for years. Neither did his prospects appear quite so black as at first. He had had the offer of a job—which was more than happened to most officers in those days. A young Easby, son of one of his former partners, had just returned to his pre-war position at Ruthern, a big colliery near Newcastle, owned by Messrs Clegg and Co. Here he had obtained for Timothy an under managership at the pit—it was nothing much in itself, but would lead to something better. Bastow had experience of business on a big scale and a fair knowledge of the coal trade—though no longer young, he might still find himself in a comfortable position. Meanwhile, he would have to live at Ruthern, a bleak and desolate village on the north-east coast; but, as he never tired of saying, he belonged to the north, and the dingy tides of Ruthern, black with the darkness of the mines under the sea, meant more to him than the blue horizons of Hampshire and Sussex.

Jenny was pleased to find him so cheerful. It struck her that his years in the army had improved him, made him more like other men. He still talked as of old, but she found him inclined to be more rational on small points. He had not yet succeeded in selling Slapewath, and when she pleaded with him not to sell their old home, he listened to her sympathetically.

"After all, Jenny, it's as much yours as mine—morally, I mean. I expect you loved it more than I ever did."

"I can't bear to think of its being sold."

“But it’s been empty—barring hospital service—for twenty years.”

“You might want to go and live there some day.”

“On seven pounds a week?”

“My dear, I hope you won’t always be so poor as that.”

“If I sold Slapewath I shouldn’t.”

“You mean you’d keep the money?”

“Of course I should—”

“But I thought . . . I mean you wouldn’t keep the money you got from Easby, Wright’s.”

“Ah, I had a special reason for getting rid of that,” said Timothy with a grin.

§26

They were all to leave Bournemouth together when Timothy went up for his last medical board. Then he would probably be demobilised at once, and return honourably to the civilian's coat that he had worn so long in contempt. On the last afternoon, Wing and Timothy went for a walk on the cliffs. It was a fine, fresh winter's day, but Jenny did not feel inclined to go with them. She said she must start her packing—she was too old for Wing's method of hurriedly cramming all her things into a suit case at the last minute.

On this occasion she really thought the girl had carried unconcern too far. The next morning she disappeared immediately after breakfast "to do a job in the town," and by eleven o'clock she had not returned, though none of her things was packed, and their train went at twelve-eighteen.

Jenny, her trunk locked, her rugs and umbrellas strapped together, looked anxiously into the corridor more than once. She was waiting for Wing's return before going down into the lounge, but finally decided not to trouble about her any longer. If she chose to run things so fine . . . it was her own fault, and she must manage without help. Then she saw Timothy and Wing coming out of the lift together.

"Where have you been?" she cried—"Be quick, my dear, you haven't a thing packed."

"Oh, there's heaps of time," said Wing airily—"and we want to talk to you first."

"May we come in here?" asked Timothy, opening the door of Jenny's dismantled bedroom.

She suddenly felt her heart beat fast. She looked from one face to another, but was unable to read the signs. Then suddenly Wing's manner changed, losing its cool hardness. She threw her arms round Jenny's neck.

"Darling! Congratulate us! We're married."

Jenny gasped. For one suffocating moment she had hoped they were going to announce their engagement; but this—she was totally unprepared for this.

"When?" she managed to say.

"This morning," said Timothy. "Forgive us for not telling you beforehand, Jenny dear, but we thought it would make things easier for you not to know."

"Easier . . ."

"Yes, of course. You can't expect Mrs Halnaker to regard me as an eligible husband."

Jenny suddenly found breath and sense.

"You aren't," she retorted. "Oh, my dears, I'm glad you're married—I've always wanted it. But how are you going to live?"

"Quite easily," said Wing—"Timothy has seven pounds a week, and will get more. And I shall start off with three pounds."

"Doing what?"

"My own job. I've got a post on a big market-garden outside Newcastle. I shouldn't have got married if I hadn't been able to pay my share."

"But my dear . . ."

Jenny's Victorian mind visualised a baby at the end of the first year. Not so Wing.

"I shall go up to Newcastle every day," she continued. "We'll have just a workman's cottage in Ruthern to begin with, so the housework won't take up much of my time, and on ten pounds a week—that's over five hundred a year, you know—we ought to be able to manage splendidly."

"And I've let off the paddock and lawns at Slapewath for grazing," said Timothy—"that will bring in nearly another hundred."

Jenny could not speak. Now that for the first time the desire that had blinded her was over and satisfied, she was able to see what an utter catastrophe this marriage was from every point of view. Timothy Bastow, past forty, and penniless except for a vast house and grounds that he would never be able either to sell or to live in—starting life afresh at an unaccustomed job—Timothy the madman of the family, who might do anything next . . . and Wing, only just twenty-one, bred to ease and culture, a girl who might and ought to have married well, who now was going to live in a workman's cottage and work for her daily bread . . . Jenny felt aghast. Isabel would fiercely and rightly blame her—apart from those shadows that had led them both—for having encouraged the match. And she had encouraged it—of course she had—just to end the possibility of Wing ever marrying her son—for absolutely no other motive whatever . . . she did not really like the girl, and she certainly did not want in any way to thwart or distress Isabel. She felt very much as she had felt as a child when she had come to herself after having unpicked the sewn limbs of her best doll to see what was inside them, and the world had dissolved in sawdust and tears.

She heard Timothy's voice afar off saying—

"We owe our happiness to you, Jenny dearest; you've always stood by us—always helped us on."

He put his arm round her and kissed her, as he had not done for years.

"But I can't tell Isabel—" her principal fear rushed to her lips.

"Oh no, of course not, we'll tell her—we're going straight there now, on our way to London."

“I’m dining with her tonight,” said Jenny dully.

“Yes, but I think she’d better hear it from us,” said Wing—“I’m afraid she’ll be dreadfully upset.”

“I’m afraid she will,” said Timothy—“she never liked me.”

“Oh, it wasn’t that she didn’t like you, but that she’d other ideas for me—she wanted me to marry Aubrey, and no other man would do. But nobody else seemed to share her wish—least of all Aubrey himself, did he, Lady Mallard?”

“You must call her Jenny now—she’s your sister-in-law.”

“So she is. Bless you, Jenny. But you didn’t want Aubrey to marry me, did you?”

“No, I didn’t.”

She could say no more, for her only hope of calm lay in her return to that land of shadows, where the ghosts of a dead passion moved, and where a ghost of herself triumphed in final possession of a ghost.

§27

Evening found Jenny alone at Herringdales, dressed and setting out for Mogador. Old Elphick and the carriage and horses had vanished into the last war years, and she drove over in a small trap like Isabel's, though, unlike Isabel, she would not drive alone through the dark lanes, but was driven by the stable boy.

Her mind was still a guarded blank. She dared not think of what she and Isabel would say to each other when they met, and her refuge among the ghosts, though still sought, had lost much of its comfort. The pillared doorway of Mogador swam up to her in a dim dazzle of light, and she was in the hall, taking off her cloak. Isabel had once more a parlourmaid—a luxury she had foregone early in the war—and her house was returning to its pre-war ease. Once more butter was on her table and coal was in her grate. Her country no longer required more than a modified asceticism. . . . Here she was, coming towards Jenny out of the shadows in her new Christmas gown, gleaming with a hundred flashing points of light, against which the white of her arms and neck seemed flat, extinguished.

"Well, my dear, so here you are back again."

Her voice sounded just the same, and they kissed, as they always did, in greeting. But Jenny was uneasily conscious of restraint . . . certainly of her own embarrassment. Oh, why had she come? She should have let the storm blow over before she saw Isabel—and here she was arriving in the midst of its first shock. This was what came of not letting oneself think—if she had thought at all she would not be here.

"How are you, Isabel?" she heard her own voice ask nervously.

"Oh, bearing up, as the boys say. Or getting on as well as can be expected."

"I'm afraid it must have been a dreadful shock to you. You've seen them, of course?"

"Of course I have."

Jenny did not dare ask what the result of the interview had been.

"It was a dreadful shock for me too," she babbled—"I never in my life thought it would happen—"

She was about to have added "so soon," but checked herself automatically.

"Dinner's just ready," said Isabel—"I've got my sister staying with me. Come in and see her."

The shock of Jenny's relief was almost physical. She followed Isabel into the drawing-room and shook hands with Mrs Woodruffe, feeling like a

criminal reprieved. As she did so, she remembered an earlier occasion when Isabel's sister had saved the situation between them—when she had first lunched at Mogador, more than twenty years ago. . . . How shy she had felt then, how awkward and embarrassed, just as she felt now, but with an added quality of hope and excitement which now was lacking.

Mrs Woodruffe was, of course, full of talk about the wedding. But Isabel must have borne herself bravely in her home, for her sister seemed to have no suspicion of what Jenny knew she must really feel. That there would be surprise, shock, vexation at furtive ways, went without saying, but Bessie Woodruffe had evidently had no glimpse of the darker forces of desire and jealousy that shadowed the occasion. She talked of Wing's foolishness and secrecy—

"Of course at her age a secret wedding would be much more attractive than the most expensive and spectacular one. Isabel had told her she thought there was too great a difference in their ages, and that was quite enough for the young woman, to make her think an elopement necessary. I hope you're not too angry with her, Lady Mallard."

"I?—Oh, no. I've always been very fond of her, thought her a most sweet girl. But I was surprised—I never expected—"

"Wing is far too young to be married," said Isabel.

"I'm not sure," continued Mrs Woodruffe, "that if a girl marries young it isn't better for her to marry a man a good deal older than herself. Then at least there's a settled character on one side. But you oughtn't to disapprove of early marriages, Isabel dear. When you married you were younger than Wing."

"That's why I disapprove of them."

"But modern girls are so different from what we were at their age. I feel pretty sure that Wing has made up her mind on every single question in the world."

"I've no doubt that she has—but it doesn't prevent her being a very silly girl, all the same. If only she'd talked things over with me, of course I'd have allowed the engagement—in reasonable time, when Timothy was able to provide for her. I must say I thoroughly disapprove of their both working like this."

"Of course you do. Mr Bastow has been so quixotic, hasn't he? It will take him some time to recover. Besides, there's poor Lady Mallard to think of. It was a most unfair advantage to take of her kind holiday."

"It was a most terrible shock to me," said Jenny, "when—"

She noticed that whenever she tried to explain how totally unprepared she had been for the event, Isabel either said nothing or changed the conversation. As dinner progressed, she began to feel vaguely resentful, and

to wish Mrs Woodruffe out of the way so that she might explain things more clearly. It was positively a relief to find at the end of the meal that Mrs Woodruffe was going to Rushlake Manor for bridge, a game that Isabel did not play.

"I generally go there two or three evenings a week when I'm here—they very kindly send their car for me. I know you won't mind, Lady Mallard; you and Isabel will be glad of a comfortable talk together without me."

Jenny doubted if the talk would be comfortable, but she was glad of it all the same. She must at all costs remove this idea of Isabel's, that she had engineered the wedding. Her heart did not absolve her of all guilt, but it acquitted her of this monstrous charge of having deliberately deceived and betrayed her friend.

"My dear," she began, directly they were alone in the drawing room, "I don't want you to think that when I invited Wing to Bournemouth I had the faintest idea that she and Timothy would do this insane thing."

"I'm quite sure you hadn't," said Isabel.

Jenny felt reassured, but still doubtful. She did not believe that Isabel was speaking anything but the plain truth, nevertheless there was a ring of displeasure under her words.

"I was terribly—dreadfully surprised—shocked," she continued in a hurry. "Wing hadn't been out more than an hour—she said she just had to run out to do some job in the town, and of course I didn't ask her what it was, because I don't believe in . . . but she and Timothy hadn't really seen so very much of each other, and hardly ever alone . . . of course sometimes I didn't feel inclined for the long walks they enjoyed, and then I'd let them go together. The doctor said Timothy ought to take plenty of exercise."

"But you've always wanted this marriage."

"I—I know I have—but—"

"Don't think for a moment that I imagine you definitely planned it. Wing herself was most emphatic about that. She said you knew nothing till it was all over, and that she felt very guilty about deceiving you."

Jenny gave a sigh of relief.

"All the same," continued Isabel, "I'm quite convinced that but for you it would never have happened."

"What do you mean?"

"You wanted it—you encouraged it—you gave them plenty of opportunities for meeting—you took Wing to Bournemouth with the definite idea of encouraging their friendship, even though you did not think they'd get so far as an engagement. Also you prevented Wing marrying Aubrey—"

"My dear Isabel, there was never a question of that."

"I beg your pardon, Jenny, there was decidedly a question. Years and years ago when they were children we spoke of it . . . and then later you seemed to lose your enthusiasm for the idea, but I always wanted it."

Jenny did not answer immediately. Her mind travelled back to the evening when she had first dined at Mogador—a summer evening, when the window had been full of solemn twilight, and when, as they talked of the marriage of their boy and girl, she had seen for the first time that the conflict between them was not dead, but lived on in their children.

"But they never cared for each other," she said.

"They never had a chance. You deliberately kept Aubrey away from Wing—just when she was beginning to interest him. Don't say that she never did. There was a time . . . and you kept them apart, took him to spend his leaves in London, said you were lonely when he wanted to take Wing to dances. You didn't want them to marry, you did all that you could to prevent it."

Jenny began to tremble. It almost seemed as if she and Isabel were going to quarrel.

"If they'd shown the slightest token of beginning to care for each other, I'd have—"

"No, you wouldn't. You didn't want Wing to have Aubrey—you did all you could to prevent it. Oh, don't think I haven't seen what you've been doing all these years, though I've endured in silence."

"Isabel!"

"But it's true. You've worked against me. This marriage is only a part of your work. You didn't really want it—not for its own sake—but you knew that if it happened Wing would never be able to marry Aubrey, so you did everything that you could to bring it about."

"If you saw all this, why didn't you stop it? If I prevented Wing marrying Aubrey, you could have prevented her marrying Timothy."

"No, for there I had Wing against me too, as well as you. If you had been on my side we could have stopped her, but you were against me. You were working for your best friend's only daughter to marry disastrously, so that you could keep your son—Humphrey's son."

The name had been spoken, and for a moment both women faced each other in white uneasiness.

"Why should you have had him?" cried Jenny suddenly—"why should you have had him *too*?"

"And why should you have had him *too*?"

"I never had him—not really—all that was worth having in him belonged to you."

"It did not—I gave it back to him, so that he might give it to you. It wasn't my fault that you failed to hold it."

Jenny stood up, trembling and clutching at the bosom of her gown. She suddenly felt old—and frightened—dreadfully frightened. Her friendship with Isabel seemed a concrete thing that was about to be broken. She seemed to see it as a mirror, reflecting the whole of her life—Slapewath, Humphrey, Herringdales, Yockletts, Aubrey, Timothy, everything. If it was broken, everything would be broken too, for now it was as if her life existed only as in a mirror, as if she herself were unreal, living only in her reflection

in Isabel. If the mirror were destroyed, she would be destroyed, and the world would be only slivers of broken glass.

Isabel stood up, also white and trembling, and Jenny felt that her next words would be the hammer that would break the mirror. Oh, why had she done this—sacrificed her living friendship to a ghost? For she saw it all now—Humphrey, whom she had loved so much, was only a ghost, and her passion only a smoke upon the glass. And it was for this ghost that her living friendship must die . . . substance for shadow, light for darkness. What was passion compared to friendship but a shadow compared to substance, smoke to iron, night to day. And having at last learned this, she must see it die.

Then Isabel spoke.

"My dear, we are too old to quarrel."

The mirror vanished, or rather Jenny seemed to pass within it, and be part of her own life again, no longer seeing it as a glass waiting to be broken. She bent her head, and the tears came.

"Don't," said Isabel.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry."

"What for? Don't be sorry."

Jenny could not speak. She saw that once again she had wounded and thwarted Isabel, from the old motive, but under new obligations. Could she never learn the lesson of her own baseness?

"My dear, my dear, I've been a brute to you. I was jealous—yes, I own it. I was jealous of Wing marrying Aubrey—I felt as if it was you marrying Humphrey—and I feared it, and worked hard for her to marry Timothy instead—though I knew in my heart what I know now, that it's a disastrous marriage—unsuitable in every way. . . ."

She felt Isabel come towards her, and put her arms round her, and sobbing brokenly, she bowed her head upon her friend's shoulder. It was like that first time when she had wept in Isabel's presence, and she—the enemy then—had comforted her.

"Don't cry, Jenny. There's nothing to cry about, really. What's done is done, and we must make the best of it. Anything is better than that you and I should quarrel. Besides, the marriage isn't disastrous. Wing and Timothy can pull it through, I know. His prospects will improve, and I can let her have a little money. And as for his being eccentric and so much older—isn't he your brother, and therefore a man I'm proud to be allied with?"

"But I worked against you."

"And I against you—I fought you for Aubrey, though I would not fight you for Humphrey. Oh, my dear, it isn't worth it. Why should you and I work against each other, and strive and envy, and all for the sake of a love

that's dead and done with, and even while it was alive, wasn't so well worth having as our friendship?"

"Oh, Isabel, do you really think that?"

"Of course I do. These last twenty years have proved it. During them you have been my sister, my friend, my comfort, in a way no man has ever been."

"And you've been all that to me. Oh, when Aubrey was wounded you were like a staff to lean upon."

"No lover has given to me the help and joy and interest that you have, so why should I have risked losing you?"

"We were fools."

"But that's over now."

They were sitting again on opposite sides of the fire, as they had started, and the atmosphere was once more still between them.

"After all," said Jenny, wiping away the last of her tears, "I don't suppose all that we planned and plotted against each other really made much difference. Don't you remember how once you said that the great difference between the younger generation and ours is that they know their own minds, as we never did?"

"Yes, you're right. They know their own minds, and Wing had always made up her mind to marry Timothy. She'd have done it without us."

"Oh, I do hope she'll be happy."

"She's made up her mind to be that, so I feel she will."

Jenny put away her handkerchief and Isabel rang the bell.

"Bring a bottle of the 1811 brandy and two glasses," she said to the new parlor maid. Then when she was gone—

"I got that brandy at the sale at Moorcocks, as a surprise for Claude, to welcome him when he comes back. But I think you and I must drink some together tonight, to toast our friendship, which now we know to be the best thing life has given us."

PART V
IN ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

§1

Early in February Aubrey came home, no longer a soldier but a private gentleman, about to enter shortly into all the glory of his majority and estate. Jenny found him disappointingly unmoved at the prospect. One of the first things she said when, the excitement of his arrival over, he was having tea with her in the big, faded drawing room, was—

"We must arrange something big to celebrate your coming of age."

To which he made indifferent reply—

"Oh, why bother about that?"

"But your birthday's in May."

"Well, what of it? It's nothing to make a song about."

"You'll come into your inheritance—you'll be squire, in your father's place."

"Squire of a thousand dud acres, bringing in nothing a year but worry and debt."

Ever since he was wounded she had seen growing up in him a gruff, perverse temper, totally unlike his earlier boyish warm-heartedness. The tears rose in her eyes, as she tried to answer him steadily.

"You know it's not like that. The estate has been doing splendidly."

"During the war; but now the war's over, and we're in for the glorious peace that'll probably mean starvation for half the country. What'll you do when the Government guarantees come off?"

"Perhaps they won't."

"Of course they will. No government will do anything for agriculture. It's ceased to mean anything politically. They'll tax us like hell to keep industry going, but they'll do nothing for the land. My only hope is Yockletts."

"Why Yockletts?"

"Because there may be coal under it."

"Aubrey!"

"Well, you know there's coal in Kent—devilish deep down, but there it is, part of the seam that's under Belgium and Northern France."

"It's nowhere near Yockletts."

"How do you know? They were boring at Heltham in 1915 . . . A chap I was billeted with at Hastings, who's a son of the people that own the Ideford pit, about ten miles from Betteshanger, he told me that there's probably a seam running up from Dover right across England. He seemed to think that Kent coal-mining is going to develop no end during the next fifty years, and when I told him about Yockletts he said it was probably right. He's

demobbed now, and he's wanting to form a syndicate to bore at likely spots. Of course it may all come to nothing, but if it doesn't I may get some money out of the land after all."

"I hope that whatever happens you won't sell any of Herringdales or Yockletts. It would have broken your father's heart if he'd thought there was any chance of that."

Aubrey looked sulky.

"But really, Mother—I mean, I can't go arranging my life according to what my father would have wanted in 1896. I must consider the living, not the dead."

"If by the living you mean your mother, I'd much rather live on here, even if it is difficult and we can't spend much on our comforts, than sell, and start some other way of life, now that I've got so—so used to it all."

Some of his lost spirit seemed to return. He put out his hand and touched her—

"Of course I shall consider you in every way, Mother darling. But when I spoke of the living I didn't mean only you."

Something in the way he said the words gave her a sudden sharp foreboding.

"Whom do you mean then?"

"The girl I'm going to marry. I've been wanting to tell you—but we've talked of so many other things. I'm engaged."

She felt herself turn pale, almost faint. His words smote her painfully, with their sudden revelation of a life led apart from her. Why, he had given her no hint, not the lightest confidence. . . .

"My dear, you startle me—I'd no notion."

"Oh, it hasn't been on for more than a fortnight. She's the daughter of an adjutant at Hastings—quite good family and money and all that. You'll be frightfully pleased when you've got used to the idea."

"But what is she like herself? How long have you known her?"

"Ever since I've been there, more or less. She's just a year or two older than me, awfully pretty and a frightful good sport, dances and wears her clothes well. She'll be a credit to the county all right."

Jenny could only find to say—

"You're very young to be married, dear."

"I don't see why I shouldn't be married as soon as I'm twenty-one. Lots of men married younger than that during the war. There's no sense in waiting for things—they may never happen."

"But in peace time——"

"We neither of us want to wait. What should we do, hanging about for each other? It's much more sensible to get married. Henry's just as keen as I

am."

"Henry!"

"Her real name's Henrietta, but of course you couldn't expect anyone to call her that."

"Henrietta what? I might just as well know."

"Henrietta Lee-Johnson. Her father has an awfully decent little place near St. Albans. I went there one leave. You're not upset about it, are you, Mother darling?"

For a moment Jenny could not speak. Then she forced herself into command.

"It's only that you've taken me so by surprise—I—I never thought you'd get engaged suddenly like this, without a hint or a word to me. And I must see her, Aubrey, before—I mean, you can't expect me to acknowledge your engagement to a girl I've never seen—never heard of till this afternoon."

"Of course you shall see her, darling. She's dying to meet you. And I said perhaps you'd have her for a week-end soon. She's free next week-end, if you can manage to let her come then. Oh, do let her come, Mother."

He was her little boy again, coaxing and pleading, with a sleek head close to hers. She could not resist him, or nurse any longer her wounded feelings. After all he had gone the way of his generation—he had merely joined with Wing in showing her and Isabel how futile had been her schemes and jealousies.

§2

Jenny carried her head high. She would not let a soul think she was in any way surprised by or opposed to her son's engagement to this unknown girl. When she remembered how loyally and proudly Isabel had borne herself under the far worse shock of her daughter's marriage to the utterly ineligible Timothy Bastow, she felt that she could not fail in the face of this comparatively minor disappointment.

Besides, it was not for long that Henry remained unknown. The following week-end she arrived in the very lovely flesh, a typical product of her time, with her soft hair bobbed and waved, and her soft skin delicately powdered, and the trimmest of ankles showing beneath her servicable, brief, smart skirt. Jenny welcomed her kindly, but her warmest welcome came from Anna Luck, who saw in her a fresh link in that long chain of glorious motherhood which had ennobled Herringdales.

"There'll be another great day in the great bed—another Squire born for our place."

"Hush, Anna," said Jenny mechanically. The old woman was sometimes inclined to be embarrassingly outspoken in her talk of the succession.

"She's quite right," said Henry—"I intend to have two babies at least, and I hope the Squire comes first."

Jenny looked nervously at Aubrey, but he seemed to find nothing surprising in the remark. Indeed, when she knew Henry better all that surprised Jenny herself was that she had merely expressed her hope and not her intention that the Squire should come first.

Apart from this ruthless direction of purpose, which Jenny now felt convinced by experience was typical of all the new generation, there was nothing in common between Henrietta Lee-Johnson and Wing Bastow. Henry's most remarkable characteristic was her greed for pleasure. Each day was a definitely schemed sixteen hours of enjoyment. Golf, tennis and riding filled up her daylight, and every evening Aubrey had to take her in quest of dancing either to Hastings, Eastbourne or Tunbridge Wells. Jenny did not see very much of her when she came to stay—if it rained, she and Aubrey would go over to Rushdale Manor, where there was a billiard table, and play snooker all day. She made him buy a small, swift and exceedingly fierce car, in which they dashed amazingly about the country, never returning with any very clear idea of where they had been.

Nevertheless, on the rare occasions when they were together, Jenny found her prospective daughter-in-law most demonstratively affectionate, quite unlike the gruff and guarded Wing. She never spoke to her without

calling her “angel” or “lamb.” She hugged her and kissed her, and told her that she was beautiful, and tried to make her use powder and do her hair a different way—and then tore off with Aubrey, leaving her to spend the day picturing them slaughtered by the fierce car.

They were to be married in the Autumn. Jenny had suggested a postponement, but they were adamant in their purpose.

“What’s the good of waiting?” was their invariable question, to which she felt unable to give an answer, even if they had shown any signs of wanting one.

“Of course they’re too young,” she would protest to Isabel—“It sounds silly to say that when they seem to know everything, and to be so much older than we were at their age, but they do definitely strike me as too young to be married for years yet.”

“We were incredibly romantic,” said Isabel.

“I was, certainly.”

She remembered those protesting outcries from Humphrey which had begun “if you weren’t so incurably romantic” . . . perhaps it was better for Henry and Aubrey that neither of them appeared to be in the least romantic. They would not have quarrels beginning like that. But they were hard—Henry was terribly, uncompromisingly hard. . . . Though now she came to think of it, she had been hard herself—in a different way. Humphrey had once said—or she seemed to think he had said—“Don’t expose your hardness and ignorance by saying that.” After all, had she been so very different from Henry, except that she had been ignorant as well as hard? And romantic . . . perhaps that avid chasing after pleasure was Henry’s substitute for romance—the romance of her generation—all that the war had left it.

§3

"Mother darling," said Aubrey rather awkwardly,—"have you made up your mind what you're going to do when we're married?"

For a moment Jenny could not answer. Then she said—

"No, I haven't."

"There's Tanners' going to be empty—the house, you know. I was speaking to Cummins about it, and he thinks we could easily find a tenant for the farm only, and the house could be made fit for you to live in with very little alteration."

"I—I don't think I should care for Tanners."

"Then what about Eastbourne?—or Hastings? Or would you like to live in London?—It might be jollier for you on the whole."

"I haven't really thought."

Aubrey moistened his lips and continued—

"Of course you wouldn't want to stay on here after we're married. It would be wretched for you, with another mistress of the house . . . and probably we should alter things more than you'd like. According to my father's will, there'll be enough for you to have quite a comfy little place of your own, and Anna Luck can look after you and maid you."

"Anna Luck!"—Jenny could not help rather a bitter laugh at this part of the scheme—"my dear boy, whatever use can she be now?"

"She'll be a bit of the old home, anyway—I'm sure you could make some use of her . . . and I don't see where she's to go if she doesn't come to you."

"Oh, Aubrey, let her stay!"

She would plead for Anna what she would not plead for herself.

He flushed uncomfortably.

"Darling, I'm ever so sorry, but we simply couldn't. We've been talking it over, Henry and I, and we've agreed that she's really too terrible. Her one thought is the next baby, and you can't expect Henry to endure being watched for that, and reminded of her duty. Anna's so very Rabelaisian, too, at times."

Jenny felt inclined to say that Henry had so far shown no signs of minding that, but substituted—

"It'll break her old heart."

"Oh, no it won't"—he spoke impatiently, and she put down his irritation to a lurking remorse—"she's so old and silly that at the end of a week she won't know where she is. But we really can't have her here. She'd be like a death's head at the feast."

"Very well then. If you won't let her stay, she must come with me. When do you want me to go?"

"Oh, Mother, dear, don't talk like that. Of course we don't want you to go. Only we never thought you'd care to stay—that you'd feel happy. . . . I mean . . . Of course you must come and stay with us—often—and there's no need for you to make up your mind just yet where you're going; only with the chance of Tanners—if you want to go there, you'll have to decide within the next week or two. . . ."

"I don't want to go to Tanners, so you needn't worry about that. I think I'll go to London—it'll be much better if I go right out of the neighbourhood."

"You could have a jolly little place in London—a little flat or something—and come down to us for nice long visits."

"Thank you very much, dear."

When he was gone, she shed some tears of misery and anger. So she was to leave Herringdales—the place where now all her life seemed to belong, where she felt as if her heart must live after her body was gone. It was here she had come as a bride, fearful and hopeful, when the old house had terrified her by its voice in the night. It seemed difficult to realise now that she had ever felt frightened or chilled by this dear place. She loved every corner of it, every stick of its old furniture, every rag of its faded chintzes and cretonnes. Here she had lived with Humphrey, through the brief, sweet stormy passage of her married life. And here she had lived for twenty-one happy years with Aubrey, watching over him, watching over the place, caring for the woods and fields and farms, so that when the time came she might be able to hand over to him a goodly estate. And now that time had come, and he seemed to want neither her nor his inheritance.

Wing would not have turned her out like this. If Humphrey had married Wing, Jenny and Anna Luck could both have stayed at Herringdales till the end of their lives. This was what she had got for working against Isabel . . . what would Isabel say when she heard of this? Jenny's heart felt comforted a little when she thought of her friend, and of her friend's house, that would always be open to her.

"I'd rather stay at Mogador than at Herringdales," she thought to herself—"and I can have her to stay with me. If I live in London, I can have her to stay with me as often as I like."

She found herself thinking more favourably of this prospect of living in London. After all, as she grew older, the long damp winters were beginning to try her a little. She could have a dear little home . . . her jointure was not large—Humphrey had died more in love with his land than with his wife—

but it would allow her to live as she wanted, very quietly, very simply, with an occasional theatre or two, and a house always open to Isabel.

After all, it would really be rather dreadful to live on at Herringdales under Henry's rule. She would change the place past recognition—remove all its dear discomforts, its faded sweetness. She would not be able to bear these changes . . . and as for living in the country—she suddenly realised that that already had changed. The war had changed it, cheapened it, roused it up out of its established ways. It was not the country she had come to twenty-three years ago—Humphrey's country, which he had loved and lived for. Former things were passing away, and perhaps it was just as well, after all, that she was to pass away with them, and not stay to welcome this doubtful new heaven and earth.

§4

Having once discovered that the country had changed, Jenny now saw daily fresh evidence of the fact. It was queer that she had never really noticed it before, but now at every corner there was a sign—something to tell her that her time as a countrywoman had passed, because the country itself was passing.

A great activity had succeeded the stagnation of the last four years, and the backwash of pseudo prosperity that had followed the war had not yet ebbed from the land. New houses were springing up in the village, where building for so long had ceased. Some of them were only transplanted army huts, and most of them were the most miserable type of shack—they were giving Heathfield the air of a huge allotment, surrounded as they were by all the muddled apparatus of a chicken farm . . . innumerable discharged soldiers seemed to be spending their gratuities on chicken-farms. They knew nothing about fowls and little about country life, but they knew arithmetic, and arithmetic told them that if you buy a dozen hens and each hen hatches half a dozen eggs . . . and so on and so on. It was not for a year or two yet that they would lose their faith in the soothsaying or arithmetic.

Many other things were changing too. The old-fashioned village shops, that Jenny had used to love in High Street and Cade Street, put up plate glass windows and laid in sophisticated stores. Garages opened, as once more petrol became obtainable, and cars were brought out of the seclusion where they had been kept during the last years of the war. New cars, too, were being built—it was said that a great future lay before the motor trade, and soon it appeared as if every ex-service man who had not spent his gratuity on a chicken-farm had spent it on a garage.

Things had not changed only in the lanes and in the streets—they had changed in the Manors and Halls. The Culpeppers were leaving Tilement, for old Sir William had been carried off by the influenza last Autumn, and they could not pay the death duties without selling the place. Sons had been killed at Moorcocks and Stream House and Foxhunt Green, and in the case of Moorcocks, the parents were leaving too, as it was not worth struggling any longer with the property when there was no boy to inherit it. Building plots were advertised for sale along the frontages of their estate. Jenny felt as if half her old friends were leaving or changing. She had better leave before she saw Herringdales change.

Isabel encouraged her in the idea.

“You’d hate to stay on in the district after you’d left the house—and you certainly wouldn’t be happy in the house if another woman was mistress. I

advise you to go to London."

"Oh, Isabel, it will be hateful not having you near—not dining together every week. I can scarcely imagine life without it."

Isabel's eyes changed, as a pond changes when a cloud passes over it.

"My dear—it will be sad, dreadfully sad, for both of us—at first. But in time we'll find that really everything's just the same—indeed much better, for you shall come and spend long weeks with me, and I hope you'll have me to stay with you. That will be better than just meeting once a week . . . besides, I'll be up in town continually, shopping and seeing people—and you'll be able to run down occasionally for the day. . . . Our friendship will go on just the same."

"It couldn't change—now," said Jenny.

It was Isabel who helped her in practical matters here, as she had helped her so many times before. She actually found Jenny a house in all that scramble of under-housed England at the end of the war. A friend of hers, an American, who had a house in Victoria Road, was giving it up and returning to her own country. Through Isabel, Jenny was able to secure a compact small house in a pleasant district, at a cheapness that she would never have imagined possible in those days of premiums and high prices.

§5

It was on her return from a day in town with Isabel, in the course of which she had definitely settled the matter and taken over the lease of number ninety Victoria Road, that she found Aubrey waiting for her in the drive of Herringdales.

She was in the hired car that had met her at Battle station, but when she saw her son standing there under the chasing shadows of the lime trees, she ordered the driver to stop, and dismissed him. It was the end of an August day, dusty and golden, such as she had used to love most, with the gleam that it put on Herringdales. But already now she felt half uprooted, and could gaze dispassionately at the old apple-tinted house, which formerly she could never see without a quickening of memory that was half-joy, half pain.

"Mother," said Aubrey.

"Well, dear. I've had a successful day. I've taken the house—actually signed the contract."

"Oh, I'm glad. But, Mother, listen to me—listen to my news. I've heard from the Kent Collieries Trust today. They want to bore at Yockletts."

"To bore . . ."

At first she did not take in quite what he meant.

"Sink a shaft—dig for coal. They're practically certain that there's a useful seam about three thousand feet down. The site's on the Maydensole Road, about half a mile from where the farm drive turns in. They put down a boring at Heltham, you know, in 1915, but couldn't go on with it, owing to the war. But already they'd struck coal measures at a thousand feet, and now the war's over they've gone on and found a six foot seam at three thousand, four hundred. . . . Heltham's only ten miles from Yockletts, and they've evidence of the seam thickening—read what they say."

He thrust a typewritten letter into her hands, and she read it, standing there in the golden rake of the sunset, while a blackbird away among the sallows sent out notes like falling drops of water. The letter was mere jargon to her—"coal measures" "secondary rocks"—"carboniferous limestone."

"Of course it mayn't be any use," said Aubrey—"quite a lot of borings have failed—but there's always the chance. And if it comes to anything . . ."

"Aubrey, you won't sell Yockletts!"

"No bloody fear. I beg your pardon, Mother, but I've simply gone up in the air about this thing. Of course I could sell the place to the company, but I shan't. I'll hang on to it and take the royalties. Twopence a ton is what they pay. And of course they'll want all the land for building—houses for the pitmen and such. Oh, Hurray! Hurray! A thousand times hurray!"

She had not seen him so boyishly delighted and excited for years. He had treated his engagement soberly enough—he had not "gone up in the air" about Henry. But now that there was a chance of making something out of his land—riches—wealth . . . Yes, he certainly was a Bastow.

"Of course we mustn't count on it too much," he continued hurriedly —"It may all come to nothing—I daresay it will come to nothing. But there's always a chance that it may not, and then I'll be rich—rich—rich. D'you hear, Mother? And you shall be rich too. There shall be something for you, darling, I promise."

He kissed her tenderly, as love had never moved him.

"Has your friend from Hastings anything to do with this?" she asked.

"Oh, I expect he's in it. When we were billeted together he told me about Heltham, and the course things would probably take. But I never expected things to happen so soon. Good old Yockletts! I'm glad you hung on to it, Mother, and kept it all these years."

"Have you told Cummins about this?"

"No, it's nothing to do with him. But I think I'll dash over there tomorrow, and have a look at the place. Would you like to come with me?"

She shook her head.

"You've never been there, have you?"

"Yes, dear, once."

"Oh, of course—my father died there. I'd forgotten."

§6

The wedding of Sir Aubrey Mallard and Henrietta Lee-Johnson took place towards the end of September in London. A fashionable west-end church and hotel combined to give it every spiritual and material decoration. Jenny's own wedding lost its glittering place in her memory, as she saw Henry come up the aisle in a gown mediaevally fashioned of silver, with clouds of tulle blowing round her and pouring after her in the cascade of a great silver train, at which little silver pages tugged and staggered. The virgins of her company followed in more silver and more tulle, under a weight of spring flowers, doped and stayed like courtesans of the Second Empire, that they might bloom waxily for a few frail moments in September.

Thus came one minister of the sacrament, and the other came dull and heavy-eyed after a doubtful night of nerves and waking which had followed his last bachelor party. The Church blessed their union, dressed as their servant in black and white, offering them solemn examples of polygamous patriarchs and hymns of Perfect Love. Afterwards innumerable wedding guests in innumerable varieties of the same wedding garment jostled round tables of caviar and champagne, and tables which they might only gaze on, where precious stuffs and precious stones proved how dearly they had loved the bridegroom and the bride.

As she stood by one of these, her eye caught by the heaped lights and colours, Jenny remembered that other wedding in January, at which there had been no crowd, no music and no gifts. Timothy and Wing seemed to have passed out of her life for a time. She had pressed them to come to Aubrey's wedding, but they were both too busily at work in their northern banishment. Now it struck her that they would have been out of place. This was a real Bastow wedding, though the bride-groom's name was Mallard, and Timothy was no Bastow in spite of his name.

The time came for the young couple to start on their continental honeymoon. Then suddenly she felt the real prick of parting. Her son was going from her, never to return. The war had given him back to her only that a woman might take him away. "My son's my son till he marries a wife. . . ." Aubrey would never be her son again. The shadow of Humphrey's shadow mocked her with a farewell kiss.

"Goodbye, Mother darling. You'll be all right, won't you? You'll be able to stay on at Herringdales quite another three weeks. That'll give you plenty of time for the move, and allow them to get the place ready. . . ."

"Goodbye, my precious lamb. You've been simply divine to us. You must come and stay with us for a long visit soon. Angel, it's horrid leaving

you—as we mayn't meet for quite a bit after we come back. You'll be so busy settling in, and so will we."

Jenny wished they had not so publicly proclaimed their anxiety that she should be out of the house by the time they returned. But perhaps no one had noticed. . . . Isabel said nothing about it as they drove to their hotel together. She merely suggested that they should dine early and go to a show.

§7

Anna Luck had not come to her young master's wedding. It had never been really considered as a possible plan, though Anna had talked of it a great deal among the servants, and had actually persuaded a good-natured kitchenmaid to re-trim her best bonnet. However, when the day had come she had suddenly found herself unable to get out of bed, and just as suddenly and still more mercifully had forgotten all about the wedding. When Jenny returned to Herringdales the day after, she found that, most sudden and most merciful of all, Anna Luck was dead.

She had had a cerebral hæmorrhage, long expected by the doctor, and passed away peacefully and undisappointed. If she had lived she would have lived to see herself in exile, unwanted at the bedside of Mallard's lady. It was far better that she should die, now that she was so old and so useless, and still ignorant of the sentence passed on her—for Jenny had not dared to tell her of her coming banishment. Anna would have wished to die at Herringdales, and death, stealing upon her as a swift winter twilight, had given her her heart's desire.

Jenny shed a few tears, but her heart was high with relief. Not only was she spared the old creature's disappointment, but she was spared her useless company. She would have been a terrible nuisance in the new house, where there was very little room for her. She would probably have frightened away the young maids that were so difficult to get and keep in these post-war years. Now Jenny could give herself whole-heartedly to her change, preparing for it both in town and country, knowing that she would take no dregs of the old life with her into the new.

She worked busily, seeing to the packing of her pictures and furniture. Henry was bringing a great deal of new furniture to Herringdales, so Aubrey had told his mother she could take away anything she wanted. Most of the stuff was too large, but a gate-legged table, which had always stood in the drawing-room window, would do for her dining-table in the new little house, and there were chests and bits of chippendale that would look well against her cream-washed walls and misty cretonnes.

The railway strike that troubled the close of September delayed her departure, but not dangerously. Aubrey and Henry were not due back till the sixteenth of October, and by the end of the first week, she was ready to go. She had made her farewells both to people and to places—she had left cards at Stream House and Rushlake Manor and Tilement and Foxhunt Green. She had chatted valedictorily in manor drawing-rooms and farmhouse kitchens . . . "Of course I'm not really going away" . . . "I shall be continually

running down" . . . "I shall always feel I belong here" . . . the pretty reassuring phrases had run continually off her tongue, but she knew that they were lies. She was really going away—she would hardly ever run down—she would never feel she belonged there any more. It was all over and finished. One did not change one's whole life and surroundings at forty-two for nothing. It was not her choice—she had been driven away—but she was not really sorry for it.

Yet sometimes the country hurt her—generally when she walked in the sunset, and saw the fields and the marsh and the little shaggy tuffets of the woods swim together in the golden, dusty light. In the haze of early Autumn all that offended was blotted out—the new roofs lost their staring redness, and all the allotment-like chicken farms, and shack-like garages and petrol stations were swamped in the rising tide of night. She was back in the country she had first known, the country of the nineties, where cottages were strewn as sparsely as manors and farms, where roads were lonely, and thoughts were different from the thoughts of town. . . . This was the country she had wakened out of suddenly, as out of a dream.

On the last evening, she went over the house—visiting even the rooms that had been kept shut up, but now probably would be opened and used. She went into Humphrey's old study—now called the library—and wondered how much Aubrey would use it. She had left the old maps on the wall—just as they had guided Humphrey—though they were no longer correct and up to date. She had left the books too—there were none that she wanted to take away, none, now she came to think of it, that she had opened in the last twenty years. . . . As she stood there, looking her farewell, she remembered the Rossetti that nearly twenty-two years ago she had opened in this room, to the change and shattering of her life. . . .

Was it still there? It must be. She looked at the shelf and saw it. There it stood in its blue-green binding, and as she looked, she felt a sudden desire to hold it again, to open it and see . . . was Isabel's picture still marking its old place? The picture that had filled her with such sorrow and madness, the picture she had torn in two . . . she remembered how she had stamped on it with her heel . . . she wondered if Humphrey had retrieved it and put it back—after she had run out of the room. . . .

She would look and see. Her fingers shook a little as she handled the volume and turned the pages . . . though what did it matter now? . . . She was dining with Isabel tonight, her last night. Claude would drive over and fetch her in his new Rover. But after dinner he would leave them alone together, because it was the last night. . . . Ah, here it was—it opened at the place, because the photo was still there—in two pieces . . . so dingy and faded that she could scarcely see it. How odd it looked!—Not a bit like

Isabel, quite different somehow. It must be the clothes . . . and of course she was so much younger . . . but the clothes were ridiculous—such sleeves . . . and such a hat. Was it possible that she and Isabel had ever worn such hats? It really made one laugh. The crown came up to a high, thin peak—it looked quite silly. And yet, she supposed, both she and Isabel had once thought it a pretty hat. Would the hat she was wearing now look quite so foolish and unbecoming in twenty-five years' time? Oh, no. The fashions were much prettier now than they had ever been.

She tore up the photograph and threw the pieces in the grate. It was only the photograph of a dead hat.

§8

The next day began with an old red manor, sitting like an old red hen in its nest of sallows, and ended with a slight, new cream-coloured house whose walls were dappled with the shadow of a single tree. The echoes of Kensington High Street dimly troubled Jenny's first sleep in her new home, but they were little more than the howling of the wind round Herringdales. She woke, looking up for the canopy of the great bed of the Squires, and saw instead with a faint ruffle of pleasure the high white ceiling and shadowless counterpane.

After that, time passed, and soon the new became the usual, and the old that had seemed so strong and dear, became no more than a reflection, a part of that mirror which was her life and which once she had nearly broken . . . her memories were like that, a broad glass held up behind her, in which she sometimes looked, and saw houses and towns and fields, and men as trees walking. But mostly she looked forward—sometimes no further than the next day, with its shopping and its tea-party, sometimes down all the pleasant lane of the year, to her Christmas invitation to Mogador Hall at the end.

Isabel had asked some friends of hers to call on her, and soon Jenny had quite a little circle—pleasant, quiet people, most of them with country roots, who invited her often to tea, and sometimes to dinner, paying a friendly court to the dowager Lady Mallard, whose looks and ways and manner of life appealed to their quiet tastes with rural echoes.

But her friendship with Isabel remained unchanged. Neither separation nor new interests seemed to affect it. The former really did not amount to much. Instead of meeting for dinner every week, with stray encounters from day to day, they met for two or three weeks at a time, when Isabel stayed in Victoria Road, or Jenny stayed at Mogador. In the intervals they corresponded with a regularity that surprised them both. Those letters gave their friendship a new quality, for Isabel found that she could say with her pen what she never could say with her tongue; and now that they lived apart Jenny learned more of her friend's ideas, philosophy, hopes and attitude towards life, than she had learned in all the twenty years and more in which they had lived within a few miles of each other.

She seldom went to stay at Herringdales. Mogador Hall was always open to her, and she preferred its mellow atmosphere to that of her old home, where the life struck her as strangely hectic compared with her memories. Though in reality much of the old furniture remained, the place had a new-furnished air, as Henrietta's colour-schemes shrieked from rooms where of

old days the chintz had whispered. She had transformed the drawing-room, taking away the carpet, and putting down only a few rugs in its place, so that at a moment's notice the room could be ready for a dance. There was also electric light, made by an engine which thudded laboriously of an evening, reminding Jenny of the distant noise of a factory, and making Herringdales more than ever the home of a Bastow. Aubrey nearly broke old Cummins' heart, because he would not spend money on the land, but spent it instead on the house, on every sort of improvement and modernisation, on cars and tennis courts, on dances and dinners, on London servants, bribed to country residence.

His heart was at Yockletts rather than Herringdales, and he went over as often as Humphrey had done, though with very different wishes. He went to see the great bore—the Maydensole bore as it was called—driving deeper and deeper into the ravished earth, and his talk was not of grass or corn or livestock, but of chalk and gault and colites and carboniferous limestone.

After some sickening hesitations, wild hopes, uncertainties, and moments of despair, the bore reached a coal seam ten feet thick at a little over three thousand feet from the surface. That was exactly two weeks after Henrietta had triumphantly brought forth a son in the great bed of the Squires. But her husband's joy in his heir was nothing to the joy with which he greeted the finding of coal on his estate. The letter which he wrote in reply to Jenny's congratulations on the boy's birth was all about "smokeless navigation steam," which appeared to be the special variety of treasure that had lain hidden under Yockletts for some ten thousands of years.

> The Kent Collieries trust have made me an offer of four-pence a ton royalty, as well as the lease of the Maydensole part of the land. But I don't think I shall accept it, as I believe Hunnett and Bradley would give me more. They've got a pit at Old Soar, you know, and another at Bobbing. Maydensole would come just in between, and it would be convenient for them to run the three. Of course there may be trouble with the railway people, but Reeve tells me there ought to be no difficulty about getting a siding at Stellenfield. I'll let you know how things turn out; at present it's all rather confused, and a lot of people are shouting. But the coal's there. That's the main and only point that matters—the coal's there. Yes, it's splendid about the boy, isn't it? He ought to be a rich man when he grows up.

Jenny folded the letter with a sigh. What would Humphrey have said, she wondered. Yockletts was now doomed, in some not far distant future, to

become a mining town—a pit village, such as blackened in their hundreds the green fields of the North. The old farmhouse itself would disappear and its fields be built over and forgotten. What would Humphrey have said? . . . And yet all this would never have happened if Humphrey had not loved Isabel Halnaker so dearly that he could not bear their trysting place ever to be sold. But for her promise to him, Jenny would have sold Yockletts, and it would have had no Bastow to contend with—dissatisfied with its cattle and its corn, seeking only buried treasures. No doubt it was Aubrey, with his Bastow craving for wealth and his Bastow distrust of the earth and mere acres, who had brought this thing to pass. In other hands the land would have gone on peacefully year by year from seed-time to harvest, all unaware of the baleful treasure under the corn. . . . If in some purgatorial place Humphrey saw with pain this last impiety perpetrated on his own soil, he had only himself to blame and his too-faithful heart.

§9

During the years that followed her removal, Jenny saw but little of Timothy and Wing. They were both working hard, and had little time either for letters or for holidays. One Summer they came to stay with her for a day or two, and it struck her that they both had changed, though in different directions. He seemed to have grown younger, to be harder, happier, and more irresponsible, whereas Wing seemed to have grown older and gentler. They were evidently completely happy in each other, two odd natures fitting and working together, as only odd natures can fit when their oddities are sympathetic. Materially, too, their conditions were not so difficult as they had seemed at first. Jenny was definitely told what she had always suspected, that Isabel had made some sort of financial settlement on her daughter. It had been difficult to make Timothy agree, but already his new lightheartedness had begun, and it had been possible to persuade him that his wife's comfort and independence were really no affront to his conscience.

"And I've sold Slapewath," he declared to Jenny.

"My dear—to whom?"

"To Cletherby and Partners; they want it as a sort of club for their people—tennis courts, football ground and all that."

"But isn't anybody going to live there?"

"No—unless perhaps a caretaker in a corner. I doubt if anyone will ever live there again. Slapewath has Cracked."

"Cracked!"

Jenny had not yet lived so long away from the North as to have lost the significance of that word.

"Yes—the house is cracking in all directions now, and quite unsafe to live in."

"But there aren't any workings under it."

"Indeed there are—Cletherbys had started one before the war, and now the place is honeycombed. Don't look so solemn, Jenny. I don't think the house would ever have been lived in again even if it hadn't cracked. I'm glad to have sold it at last—not that I've got much for it, but I've got a little; and I've also got rid of it, which is still more to the purpose after twenty-five years."

For a moment Jenny was solemn. Slapewath had always been to her such a real house—more real in its way than Herringdales. Though she had not visited it for so long—for a quarter of a century—yet its existence, empty and embarrassing, had seemed to give her life stability and continuity.

A fate had come upon it which she had often seen and heard of . . . her youth had been full of tales of the great houses that had Cracked—that had had to be abandoned, stripped of all their costly furniture, because the earth, riddled under them, could no longer support their foundations . . . she wondered if some day Yockletts would crack as the Maydensole pit ate its way under its walls.

But she was glad for Timothy's sake that he was rid of his burden. With luck, she felt, he might come with Wing to a comfortable old age. The following summer she accepted a repeated invitation, and actually went to stay with them in their queer little smoke-blackened house. It was perched on a cliff, looking down on the dark sea, coal-stained to a queer greenish indigo, beyond which the lights broke in wan splashes of white under the clouds that hung over the horizon. The wind had a rasp in its cold, biting into the dull June day like a hungry, hurrying bird. Had she grown too accustomed to the South?—to the mild airs and the blue sea? Anyhow, she felt she could not stand much of this cold, cruel dark place. A seaside pit, somehow, seemed bleaker and fouler than an inland pit; and as she gazed at the little black wind-bitten houses, tilted in rows about the undulations of the cliff, like the tents of an army camped in siege, with the smoke of the great pit-chimney flying like a pennon over them—as she gazed at them, she thought again of Yockletts, and wondered if it would ever look like this.

Once she asked Timothy.

"Oh, no," he said—"Yockletts won't look nearly so bad as this. For one thing, it will be modern. No one would ever dare build foul hovels like these again. For another thing, the coal will be thousands of feet down instead of hundreds. That will mean less spoiling of the earth's surface—less slag and cinders, no beastly outcrop workings. Your fields can go on growing their corn."

"Oh, I'm glad it won't be so bad."

"It won't be so bad, but that doesn't mean it won't be utterly damnable."

"Poor Timothy! Isn't coal any better than iron?"

"Of course it's not. They're both part of the same thing. But I'm not grousing—you mustn't think that. I've come into all this from another angle, from the point of view of the worker, even though a black-coated one. I belonged to the masters before, and you've no idea the difference it made."

"For better or for worse?"

"Neither for better nor for worse. The master has certainly a far more comfortable time, but the worker is far less caught up in the machine. He can call his soul his own in a way the master can't—I've been one so I know."

"Then why are the workers so dissatisfied?"

"They're not more dissatisfied than the masters. They only show it differently, because they have practically only one weapon—the strike. Also they're exploited—shamefully exploited. They always have been. First it was by their masters, now it's by their politicians, but it's exploitation just the same—just the same as when the trucks were dragged along by half naked girls and the traps opened by six-year-old children. It's through them that the earth is getting her revenge on civilisation. Think what fun it would be for Mother Earth if one day the workers of the world rose up and smashed this civilisation of iron and smoke."

"But surely conditions will improve—peacefully, I mean. You said yourself that nobody would ever build those bad old houses again."

"That's nothing. It's not all that pretty welfare work that will save us. The trouble's deeper—in the earth itself. My dear girl, I tell you she will have her revenge. She has set her curse upon us for digging into her heart for our wealth, when she gladly gave us her surface for our necessity. It's the work itself that's impossible, apart from any housing or wages. If we paid our miners sixty pounds a week and gave them palaces to live in, they would still be a rebellious race, because they live and work at enmity with nature. I know that the farmer and the labourer have to struggle, to face bad weather and bad harvests, and in the end perhaps they gently die of rheumatism, and are buried a few feet under the daisies in the village churchyard. But they're not outlaws—they don't carry their lives in their hands when they go day by day to get their living out of the ground. Think of the men here. Every day a man goes down into the mine he knows subconsciously if not consciously that there's a chance he will never come up. And a dozen times during the day he will be reminded that the earth is trying to kill him, and that only the skill and science of his fellow men is holding her off. Do you know what a squeeze is? It's when a new working has been made, and the props put in to hold the roof, and a short time afterwards every prop begins to creak and screech and groan. When you hear it for the first time you think that everything's over and the whole thing's coming down on you. But after a while you get used to it and you realise that it's only the earth settling, adjusting herself to the new wound. If the props are sound, they can bear the weight of the hundreds of feet of settling earth above them, but of course you can't be sure that every one of them is sound, and if one should break —"

"Oh, don't!" cried Jenny.

"I won't. But I want you to realise that if a revolution does come—and by a revolution I don't mean what the Communists mean—it'll only be the sick earth turning over to find an easier position."

Timothy had not often talked to her like this. It was the kind of talk that he usually kept for people whom he trusted to understand him. But his sad and bitter words did not seem to come from any fundamental sadness and bitterness as sometimes of old even his merry words had seemed to come. His personal happiness had given him power over life. He could say to life, "Where is thy sting?—where is thy victory?" Now at last, at nearly fifty years old, he had found happiness, not in the peace and comfort where most men look for it, but in the comradeship of another adventurer.

Wing had given up her market garden work, which Isabel's settlement made no longer necessary, and worked instead at the welfare centre which the Company had established in Ruthern. She worked there even harder than she had worked on the land, and was attending courses in nursing and midwifery at a Newcastle hospital. Wing's politics were very red, and rather frightened Jenny, but Timothy seemed only amused by them.

"Let her be. One's only red once. She'll grow out of it, and come, like me, to a green old age."

Jenny was surprised that Wing did not seem to resent this treatment. She certainly had grown softer, and could laugh more easily. She certainly was admirable, in her efficiency, her zeal, and her devotion. Yet Jenny thought in her heart that she was nothing to her mother. Was it her own age that made Wing seem so crude a thing compared with Isabel? The older generation might not have known its own mind, it might have made mistakes that the younger generation had avoided, but its atmosphere seemed to her altogether sweeter and more gracious than the gale of these vocational energies. . . . Would Wing have borne with Timothy if he had shown the frailties that Isabel had borne with in her husband for over thirty years?—On the other hand, would Wing have sought Isabel's solace in secret adventure? Would she have met the man she loved secretly month after month in a secret place? No; granting the unimaginable supposition that Timothy should trespass, Jenny knew that there would be no forgiveness, no keeping a smooth surface to hide the storms beneath, no noble toleration or ignoble accommodation—just the marriage ripped and done for, a page torn out of life.

Whereas Isabel's had gone on again—the storms under the smooth surface had died down, the secrets had been forgotten, the need for toleration and the desire for accommodation, both had ceased. For the last twenty years Isabel's marriage had been peaceable, and for the last seven years it had been happy. Claude Halnaker, the Squire of fifty, had returned to

his Hall after four years of war, had forgotten his desires just as his wife had forgotten her secrets, and they had settled down together to a happy and friendly eventide. Had it been worth waiting for?—worth all the struggle and the lies and the forgiveness and the accommodation? Jenny knew how indignantly Wing would condemn what in her own heart she blessed.

§11

Soon after her return to London this latest happy marriage she had heard of ceased. Claude Halnaker died suddenly after two days' influenza. If he had died at any other time Isabel would have regretted him less, and yet have mourned him more bitterly.

"At least my marriage has left a good taste in my mouth," she said to Jenny, "which is more than at one time I'd have thought possible."

When she had buried him in Heathfield churchyard, she began to think of leaving Mogador. She would not care to stay on without him—"I should be meeting his poor old ghost"—and there was no need for her to think of keeping the place going for her sons. They were both settled in London now. The war had cured Lance of wanting to be a soldier, and he was working for a big firm of engineers. Wilfred was married, and at the Foreign Office. They both invited their mother to come and live with them, but she said that was one of the mistakes of her generation that she would never make. Neither did she go and live with Jenny, as some of her friends had expected—indeed for a while Jenny had expected it herself.

"My dear," said Isabel, "because we're friends it by no means follows that we should be happy living together. Why should it? Friendship comes out of a community of interests, not an identity of habits. You and I have both lived separately for about three quarters of our lives—we probably have quite different habits; we don't know for certain, because mercifully we've never had to put ourselves to the test in this way. But why should we, at our time of life, bring our hard-set habits to knock against each other? It's a condition that has wrecked many middle-aged marriages, so why do it without the romance and excuse of marriage? All that we've ever wanted of each other we can go on having, more and better than we've ever had in our lives."

At first Jenny was disappointed, but in little more than a few hours after Isabel's pronouncement, she saw its wisdom. They were too old to begin to be intimate. And, after all, there was not really enough room for Isabel in the house in Victoria Road, and Jenny could not bear the thought of leaving it. She had grown fond of the little place, and fitted it. It would be far better if Isabel went to live at Thorney Court, or one of the other big blocks of flats at Palace Gate. Then she would be near enough for friendship, but too far away for intimacy. They would dine with each other, telephone to each other, go out together. It would all be ideal—far better than at Herringdales and Mogador.

Jenny felt in her heart that London had given her an advantage over Isabel. She had now been living there seven years, and she knew that she had lost in it much of her country greenness. She was more sophisticated—could talk more interestingly—she dressed much better. In the old days, Isabel used to be the better dressed of the two, but now Jenny, with the shops of Knightsbridge and Bond Street at her daily disposal, had caught her up and passed her. She had actually shingled her hair, and the grey waves suited her, bringing out the delicate colouring of her skin, which now at last she dared to powder. Isabel's thick coils still crowned her head, no longer black as a starless night in December, but rather the colour of a rainy dawn, heavy clouds lit up with grey as with light.

§12

Mrs Halnaker finally settled in a flat near Rutland Gate, and for some weeks Jenny tasted of the most satisfying and stable happiness that she had known, as she and Isabel made their new life together. They were to see each other more often than of old, not only because less space divided them, but because they were no longer held apart by two separate family circles. Herringdales and Mogador had been two fairy rings in which these two women had stood enchanted. The spells of marriage and birth, of housekeeping and home-keeping, of village necessities, had been upon them, holding them apart. But now all spells were broken; here they were both without husband or child that needed them, in the midst of the city that takes no interest and makes no claims. They were free to come and go as they liked—they had no one to consult but each other and the little unenchanted circle of pleasant friends.

Into this life, both so ordered and so free, so friendly and so detached, broke the muddled uproar of the general strike of 1926. May day was red instead of white, and from May day streamed a red pennon of ten days, when the streets were either strangely quiet or furious with noise. Jenny was not totally unprepared for these events, for Timothy had written more than once to forecast them.

> We're growing hot with our long labours underground, and we're coming up for a bit to cool ourselves. We're going to try to get bread out of a stone, and smite the rock for a drink of champagne. I'm not being political about this. It's not the stone's fault it can't provide bread, and it's not unreasonable to want a drink of something good after a long day underground. But I don't think we shall stay up long or make much trouble this time. Poor Mother Earth's groaning, but she's not going to turn over. We'll go back to where we came from, without what we came for. That's generally the way, and it won't change yet.

In spite of his reassurances Jenny felt afraid. She hated the faint, stinking whiff of hatred in the air, the violence of the class war—the defensive calumnies of the comfortable, the insane envyings of the uncomfortable. Volunteers were called for, and Isabel at once came forward, as she had done in the war, but Jenny held back. She felt that the authorities did not want a crowd of inexperienced women on their books, that Isabel was forgetting she was no longer young, and that this wasn't the war.

Isabel was disappointed to find that her services were not required. "We've got enough women on our waiting list to go three times round Hyde Park," one of the clerks informed her, with a ring of contempt rather, than pride in his voice. Meanwhile innumerable young men brought unwonted gaiety into omnibus rides. It was a pleasure to climb on a bus and drive off westward from Piccadilly, as long as one got off before Hammersmith, where the fighting was.

Both Wilfred and Lance Halnaker were driving omnibuses. Lance's methods with a "17" were responsible for a rumour in Shepherds Bush that big guns had been in action on Hammersmith Broadway. They were special constables, and found that they could hold up the traffic, a privilege of which they availed themselves somewhat arbitrarily.

It was at Wilfred's house in Albion Street that Jenny heard the formal announcement that the strike was ended. Isabel was there too, and Lance, and Wilfred's wife, and one or two friends who had come to listen on the wireless. They all knew that the strike was to be called off, but had not heard yet the official confirmation. Wilfred had a magnificent wireless set, and a loud speaker of the newest make, that looked like an archery target. Through it came the suave voice of the announcer, as it had come comfortingly to Jenny on her crystal set every night of the strike, giving her a sense of human companionship and masculine omnipotence when she was feeling specially alone and scared and feminine.

Now she listened reverently to the story of the Prime Minister's great interview with the strike leaders. It was not so much the story that impressed her as the announcer's voice, which was at once so bright and so silky that it made her think of coloured crêpe-de-chine—a great curtain of flame-coloured crêpe-de-chine let down at the end of the strike.

"It mustn't be expected that conditions will be quite normal at once. It will take a day or two before we find everything as usual. But meanwhile . . ."

The voice flowed on like cream.

Suddenly she noticed that it had abandoned prose. Mere prose could not do justice to the corporate sense of deliverance that the voice expressed. It was the voice of sixty million British subjects, who, whatever their politics or wherever their sympathies had suffered untold alarm and inconvenience through this threat of the world's to turn upside down. It was like the end of the war, when out of sheer reaction and relief they thought the millenium had come. Here was the millenium again—hurrah! Civilisation had won the great battle against the forces of disorder and aggression, in England now as before in Flanders. Industry would emerge strengthened and purified from

the struggle as Europe had emerged in 1918. A new era was beginning—the millenium, the reign of the saints, the new heavens and the new earth.

" 'And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountain green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?' "

"Oh, Lord! They're not going to give us that stuff, are they?" cried Wilfred, who was sophisticated—"can't they let the Kingdom of Heaven come without Blake's Jerusalem?"

"Shut up," said one of his friends—"the Kingdom of Heaven cometh not without quotation."

Jenny listened, uplifted and entranced. The words were new to her, and their primal freshness smote her heart, even though she had only the vaguest idea of what they meant—How had the holy Lamb of God been seen in England's pastures?

" 'And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?' "

That was right—that was true—"dark Satanic mills"—she had seen them, with the half-naked men leaping up and down like demons in the glare of the furnaces. . . . But what was that about the Countenance Divine?

The announcer's voice had failed to rise to his subject, as prose had failed, and it was to an accompaniment of violins that he continued—

" 'Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!' "

"Oh, wow!" shrieked Wilfred.

The announcer was silent as a choir took up the last verse—

" 'I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.' "

"There are basins upstairs," said Wilfred, "if anybody wants to be sick."

But everyone else looked rather solemn, even Wilfred's friends. Isabel was wearing her church face. Jenny sat still, holding her hands together

because they trembled. Once again she had that queer sensation that had come to her before on Armistice day, that some great thing had passed by her without touching her. How was it? Why had life treated her like this? How many things had passed her by? She had seen love coming, but he had swooped by her on dark wings. She had married, but her husband had been a stranger in a far country. She had borne a son, but another woman had taken him. Was it her own fault that her life had been like this—a Levite passing by on the other side? She knew that when the dark wings had been spread over her she had been afraid—she had fluttered like a small bird under the shadow of a hawk. She had escaped. She had hated the wood, and had sought the cottage gardens. There she had sung—she had been happy, yes. It was her own choice. She would rather be happy than search this mystery of life and death. She would rather sing in a cage or in a cottage garden than fly over the barren and lonely mountains.

And after all, Isabel had chosen the same. Isabel, whose philosophy and life were so much bigger and finer than Jenny's had chosen to be happy rather than adventurous. Indeed it was Isabel who had first taught her the philosophy of comfort in little things—the refuge in a book and a glass of wine. . . . She seemed to see an orange glow of candles, and Isabel's neck and arms gleaming golden in the brown pool of a polished table . . . a book and a glass of wine. . . .

"Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

That was for other people—that was for Wing and Timothy, away among the dark Satanic mills. For her and Isabel it was only a beautiful song, sung far off by unknown voices.

The End

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.
[The end of *Iron and Smoke* by Sheila Kaye-Smith]