The Candle's Glory

Sylvia Thompson

Title: The Candle's Glory
Date of first publication: 1953
Author: Sylvia Thompson (1902-1968)
Date first posted: June 12, 2026
Date last updated: June 12, 2026
Faded Page eBook #20260625

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

BY SYLVIA THOMPSON

THE HOUNDS OF SPRING
THE BATTLE OF THE HORIZONS
CHARIOT WHEELS
PORTRAIT BY CAROLINE
SUMMERS NIGHT
UNFINISHED SYMPHONY
BREAKFAST IN BED
A SILVER RATTLE
THIRD ACT IN VENICE
RECAPTURE THE MOON
THE ADVENTURE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMIN
THE GULLS FLY INLAND
THE PEOPLE OPPOSITE
THE CANDLE'S GLORY

SYLVIA THOMPSON

THE Candle's Glory

AN ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS BOOK
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY · BOSTON

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO. 53-7305

FIRST EDITION

ATLANTIC-LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS
ARE PUBLISHED BY
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS

Published simultaneously
in Canada by McClelland and Stewart Limited

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my “Dear Reader,” Jack Eldon

Well, 'twas a weed; remove the eye-sore quick!
But should you not remember it has lain
Steeped in the candle's glory, palely shrined,
Nearer God's Mother than most earthly things?

ROBERT BROWNING

Va, laisse la Justice où elle est. Ce n'est pas à nous de l'appeler et de la faire venir.

CLAUDEL

PROLOGUE

It was May, 1903. The well-known French finishing school of Mademoiselle Lemaître, that used to be at Versailles, was already established at Southfields, in the big, red brick, gabled mansion called Fairways. The school was known as "Fairways."

The reputation of Mademoiselle Lemaître, a distant cousin of Jules Lemaître the critic, caused parents to send their girls there from all over Europe, from America, and even from China. On this particular afternoon in May at the far end of the gardens a group of girls, dressed in high-collared white shirts, and white "drill" or piqué skirts with boned petersham belts, were taking it in turns, four at a time, to play tennis on the one grass court. Mademoiselle Lemaître would not have more tennis courts made. She didn't really approve of "games" that made the girls dishevelled and red in the face.

A long lawn and flower beds lay between the tennis court and the house. On either side of this lawn were serpentining gravel paths. Typical of any big English suburban garden in early summer were the shrubs, lilac and rhododendron, azaleas and the sort of trees that the English woods have left behind in the prosperous suburbs, beech and lime, oak and hornbeam. There was also a cedar tree halfway down the lawn to the left; and a seat under it, on which Mademoiselle Lemaître sat during fine sunny afternoons to read the plays of Racine and Molière and occasionally Rostand, or passages from Voltaire and Renan, to the girls of the "top form."

On one particular afternoon Mademoiselle Lemaître entertained Mr. Edmund Gosse in her sitting room whose bay window overlooked the garden. He was going to give a lecture to the girls at six o'clock that evening, on Wordsworth and Coleridge.

There was a corresponding bay window in the same façade of the house. The two windows were separated by a garden door that led out to the gravel terrace. The other window belonged to the sitting room of *les grandes*, girls over sixteen who would soon be ready to "come out" into whatever society their family had destined for them.

Three of these had not gone to play tennis and were sitting by the windows, whose sashes were pushed up, wide open, letting in a warm air

deliciously scented with lilac, and the distant sounds of voices and thudding tennis balls, and the sweet velvet growling of the pigeons that inhabited the trees and orchards of the high-walled gardens.

One of the girls sat on the window ledge. The other two were in ladder-backed straw-seated armchairs, the only sort of armchairs permitted by Mademoiselle Lemaître. All three girls had put their hair up. The girls at Fairways were encouraged to do this when they were over seventeen. They were all wearing white blouses and dark blue skirts.

Camilla was sitting on the window ledge, clasping her knee and arguing vehemently against Mademoiselle Lemaître's ban on Swinburne. Her blouse had tiny net frills topping its high neck, and edging the narrow cuffs of its bishop sleeves. Her brown hair was lifted and coiled above her clear, vivid face. Her green eyes looked dark because her skin had a shell-pale colouring. The strong fine bones of her face and her effect of being so intensely alive and, as she talked, impassioned and amused by turns, made her beautiful rather than pretty. She was very long-limbed, but no longer coltish. She was excited partly about Swinburne, but also by the feel of the heavenly afternoon, and by simply being young. (She didn't know that it was this latter state that dizzied her now and then as if she were waltzing.)

The other two were also under the strong influence of their youth, and the exquisite weather. Lucy Robbins, the American girl, was affected by it as she was by music; by Schubert especially. Her rather constrained New England nature had given way to it, and her innate mistrust of sensuous happiness had been overborne by its beauty. Her hazel eyes glimmered, her charming heart-shaped face was eager in expression. Sitting upright in her straight-backed chair, she carried her head with its wavy gold-brown pile of hair high from a habit of pride which, at that moment, wasn't visible at all in her face, for her rather obstinate mouth was smiling, and her firmly cut nostrils inhaled lilac instead of expressing, as they often did, small disapprovals, or swift unalterable resolutions.

"I think I *will* come with you!" she said to Camilla, who had asserted that Miss Shaw, who kept the news-agent's shop up on Wimbledon Common, knew Swinburne well, and could describe just how he used to come in after having walked all the way from Putney Hill.

"Lucy will go it doesn't matter *where*, to get a 'sense of the past.'"

Sophie Tissot looked up from the small embroidery frame firmly held in her left hand, while the strong blunt fingers of her right hand initialled yet another of the big fine cambric handkerchiefs, an A intertwined with a T, for

her father, Auguste Tissot. Sophie had a solid body that would be stout later, a square face with a pale beige skin, naturally *matte* like a mushroom, and black eyes under straight thick black eyebrows. From her build and colouring she might be Spanish. But there was nothing Southern about the quick timing of her speech, her succinct manner of expression, her kindly but autocratic and already authoritative ways of judging and advising. She had been brought up by her widowed father to inherit, worthily, the wealth accumulating from the family shipping business at Bordeaux. A Huguenot tradition had endowed Sophie Tissot with the same assured attitude towards Right and Wrong that Lucy Robbins had inherited from Puritan generations of forebears. This had enabled them to understand each other in a basic, comforting way though neither of them could understand Camilla. But they both liked Camilla, attracted by her vitality and warmth of heart, as well as, unconsciously, by her appearance. Sophie had as much vitality, and, when she was a child, as much warmth. But this warmth had been regulated by seventeen years of education, organised by a stern devoted father and a pious, unhappy aunt, so that her early eagerness had been stunted by a heavy, kindly discouragement of any kind of excess.

Lucy, who was naturally quiet, equable and womanly when she was not self-willed—it was her pride that identified her own opinions with Right and whatever she didn't like as Wrong—was attracted to Camilla by an almost chemical need of Camilla's qualities of ease and expressiveness and her gay unreasoning loving confidence in life, which, though it often irritated Lucy, fascinated her.

Camilla pointed out to Sophie that far from being ready "to go anywhere," Lucy's sense-of-the-past hadn't persuaded her to go into the chapel during the school's expedition to Arundel. This was said with the affectionate amusement that the tall impulsive Camilla often showed towards the reticent, exquisite Lucy. Lucy answered that she "just couldn't bring herself to go in"; as she spoke she crossed her capable little hands, with their small, rosy tapered fingers, on her lap, and perceptibly squared her shoulders.

The effect on Camilla of this repressed disapproval, this invisible raising of eyebrows—all Lucy's affection for herself, yet all her serious deploring of Camilla's religion implicit in that folding of hands on lap and squaring of shoulders—was to make Camilla's fantasy bound wildly round Lucy like a large puppy round a well-trained Pekinese.

"Then how are you going to behave, Lucy, when you come and see me through my *grille*? And I come hobbling along absolutely bent with prayer

and rattle an enormous rosary at you? Shall you push one of your neat sweet little parcels through the bars? Or spit at me, having rinsed out your mouth first?"

"Really, Camilla!" Lucy Robbins's considerable reserves of intelligence and taste contained no small change of fun or silliness. Sophie, her black stare concentrated on the intertwining white A and T, shared Lucy's lack of humour in all matters relating to religion. But this lack in her was compensated by her undeniable pleasure in any sort of wit or fantasy of expression. But now her capacity for benevolently managing people, developed in the last year by administering her father's house in Bordeaux, made her tranquillise Lucy by suggesting with her reflective little smile, that "all the same, Camilla may be married before she is twenty-one."

A little gust of wind made the far voices at the end of the garden distinct. Camilla was preoccupied by the colour of the shadow under the cedar, which was like spilled blue-black ink, and the honeyed light on the lawn, and great Japanese-looking mauve-pink blooms of the rhododendrons. She felt as if she had breathed deep into her heart some immortal golden air. She was filled with it. She said, absently, that it would be Lucy "who'll be married before then." Sophie, in order to lead the talk from the subject of religion, said perhaps it would be that handsome young Althorpe, whom Mademoiselle Lemaître permitted to visit Lucy last week in the *salon vert*.

Lucy was too well-bred to toss her head, but her reaction was evident.

Camilla asked, "D'you want to marry young, Sophie?"

Sophie drew the fine thread through the stretched cambric. Her intent gaze smiled a little. "When I was a little girl my *nounou* asked me what I wished to do when I was grown up, and I said I wanted to be a widow!" Her deft needle pricked the top of the T's stem. She asked, "Where are you going at the end of this term, Lucy?"

"To stay with my sister Louisa at Vallombrosa."

Camilla asked, "And you, Sophie?"

"Home to Chouzy. Come with me, Camilla? Like last year?" But Camilla said that she must go home, because in August her brother was going to be twenty-one. There would be a dance. If only they both would come and stay for it?

But their plans were made. Lucy must go to Italy (where young Althorpe had already gone, ahead of her, to get himself liked, approved, and finally encouraged by her sister, Louisa di Sarfatti). Sophie's father was expecting

her, to entertain for him at the Château near Arcachon; to sit at the head of the long table in a dining room shaded by lace-encrusted linen blinds from the sea-coast brilliant middays; to make herself agreeable during luncheons of six rich courses, and still lengthier and richer dinners in the light of the massive silver candelabra; to turn her young, soberly handsome face to this and that visitor, to offer her attention and affection to the numberless aunts and uncles and cousins, almost always in mourning, who would drive out all the way from Bordeaux in their carriages; to make, also, her father hoped, an excellent impression on his friend, de Langer, recently bereaved of his wife, childless, and still only thirty-five.

Camilla's mother had invited Francis Graham, among the young people coming to stay for her son's "twenty-first" party. Camilla knew vaguely that Francis Graham—his name was mentioned by her mother in the last letter—was "considered brilliant." If she had known she would anyway have felt no special interest; because, though she was often interested or attracted by young men, and then felt a delicious excitement sometimes when a man looked at her, to look again, she was absolutely certain of her vocation. She was too young, and too much alive, for half-certainties.

The tennis players were coming from the far end of the garden. They came in twos and threes, swinging their rackets, trim-waisted in their white bell-shaped skirts that were short enough to show their brown-stockinged ankles and white plimsolls. Two of them still had plaits tied on the nape with big black bows; the ones whose hair was "up" were dishevelled, one or two had pinned on straw boaters, and the light gleamed on the disc-like crowns, and dropped little veils of violet shadow over each schoolgirl face under the stiff brim.

They were coming in to "change" for the lecture. They were to wear their best dresses, or evening blouses.

The three girls moved from the bay window. Of the three it was Lucy who felt real pleasure at the prospect of hearing a lecture on Wordsworth by Mr. Gosse. Sophie considered it would be an integral part of the admirable education she had been getting during these two years at Fairways. Camilla was bored by Wordsworth's poetry, and quite certain that Mr. Gosse was a prig.

They went across the parquet of the hall, and up the uncarpeted high polished stairs to their rooms. Lucy would wear her pink dress with spotted net frills and deep frilled yoke, and deep-rose satin belt.

Sophie's, made for her in Paris when she was staying there during the Easter holidays, was of white and turquoise blue striped faille with an écru lace yoke, and black velvet sash, and tiny black velvet bows down the front of the bodice from neck to her firmly corseted waist. Camilla had to wear her blue best-dress of last summer; a schoolgirl's dress of Liberty red-flowered tussore with net ruffles at throat and wrist, a regrettably lasting proof of her mother's subjection to the influence of William Morris. As Camilla put it on she found herself coveting such a Paris dress as Sophie's, or even possibly one more chic and more romantic. . . . A dress from Paris, white satin with white tulle . . . a ball dress.

Francis Graham was eclectic. Camilla could not perceive how conventionally so. And amusing. How could she foresee how repetitive and mannered his wit would come to seem?

He danced with her. He danced beautifully. He danced with her all the second part of the evening. He didn't talk about cricket. He talked beautifully; about Italian pictures, and Wagner, and French and German poetry. He said, "You aren't just a pretty girl, you're a Beauty. Someone who knows about clothes ought to dress you."

He was in the Foreign Office. But he was amusing and casual about his work; and funny when he described the people he worked with. Already, at twenty-seven, he had curious and interesting things to say on so many subjects. (He had an exact memory.) He was interesting that night; and diffident that night, and for the next three years (as he would never be after), because he was in love with Camilla. Because it would take her three years to make up her mind. To give up her vocation.

Those three years would be his only risk of failure in the successful almost forty years ahead of him; his only bad shake-up whose effect would be to lend him a certain sensitiveness that would eventually, after her three years of indecision, persuade Camilla to love him.

But once married to her, his pride recovered, he would give her beauty the important niche he had prepared for it in his life, just as he would use his daughter Mary for the adorning of his family life, as if she were a little stained glass window.

His, and Camilla's, daughter Mary.

The high air of Vallombrosa answered a demand in Lucy Robbins for purity in scents, and freshness with a chill edge. (These September nights were cold and pricked with stars.) She shared with her sister Louisa a dislike of "the heat"; although Louisa's attitude in this, as in many things, seemed now and then disconcertingly modified by her years of marriage in Italy.

The cool, high-ceilinged house at Vallombrosa, where the Sarfattis spent their summers, caught up its visitors from the heat-vibrant valleys, baked vine terraces, and blanched, dust-clouded roads, into the blue of that Italian sky that Lucy admired with the rarified tremulous passion she felt for the same blue in the Della Robbia plaques, and for the music of Schubert. She didn't mistrust such passion in herself, although it was sometimes near ecstasy, because its cause was "art." Her sense of fitness, which was part of her idea of Rightness, allowed intensity in the appreciation of Art but demanded moderation in all human passions. Beauty was one thing, she felt; love another. Beauty of music, of scenery, of painting, of poetry, these may be, as she would have phrased it, "perfectly delightful." She would talk to Louisa when, free of the many visitors, they were together in the garden, or walking in the beech woods, of her excitement at the prospect of going to Dresden; but would admit only the mildest pleasure in the society of Chester Althorpe, who was staying up there with the Sarfattis on his way back from Greece. She admitted that he was very cultivated, and might even be a very upright person. She considered her sister's statement of Chester's great "devotion" to her, and accepted it as pleasing, but not to be encouraged beyond its present stage. She pointed out to Louisa, who seemed to her to have acquired an exaggerated interest in love, as well as curiously Latinised views as to marriage, that she, Lucy, intended to go to Dresden next spring, to study music there for a time, after which she and Lilian Osgood were planning a most interesting journey to China.

Louisa wondered that any girl in her senses didn't fall in love with a dear boy like Chester; that it was hard on him; that he had clearly been "perfectly devoted" ever since two summers ago at Newport, when Lucy was only sixteen.

Lucy pointed out that Time was surely a test of love? Using Time, as she used her parasol, to shield herself from unwished-for intensity.

She generally considered that Time existed for profitable use, as Space was for travel. She presupposed Time to be tame, and had no idea, yet, of its unreliable and mordant nature. It would take her even longer to learn this than to decide to "accept" Chester Althorpe.

No quality worthy of respect was lacking in Maurice de Langer. Serious, kindly, high-principled, he combined the acute intelligence of a successful *avocat* with the simplicity of his personal tastes, and modesty about his own ideas and achievements. As Sophie came to know him she perceived that his legal experience of human beings had not hardened him but made him sympathetic towards individuals, and confirmed his naturally liberal tendencies in political and social reform. His excellence of heart, not his imagination, made him charitable. He had replaced religious faith, of which the philosophical rationalism of his youth and milieu had deprived him, by faith in his fellow men, which he expressed now in the second half of his life by philanthropic activity.

Sophie naturally bestowed affection with respect. During the summer and autumn spent at Chouzy she found Maurice de Langer both admirable and interesting. He often went with her father to shoot in the Landes, and came back to dine and stay overnight at the Château. He drove over, also, from Arcachon, where he had been living with his mother since the death of his wife. Sophie's deep affection for her father also made her wish to like this friend of his. That de Langer was a little bald, and lined, and thickened in body didn't count with her. He treated her with gentle consideration, and showed increasing interest in her ideas. Their characters had so much in common. He saw the excellence of her judgment; her balance of impulse by good sense; her solid youthful dignity. He was old enough to be conscious of her youth and to feel a tenderness for its manifestations in her, such as her too quick, crisp, moral judgments, and unqualified enthusiasms. During the time they were engaged she told him exactly how she would bring up their children.

It was still 1903.

Sophie had a proper confidence in the future. Lucy Robbins relied on it to take her where she wished, as she relied on the train to take her to Dresden, the First Class Cabin Steamer to convey her, and the Osgoods, to China; as she relied, justifiably, on Chester Althorpe to wait for her, for twelve years.

Camilla still believed passionately in her vocation. It would take her almost four years to be converted by Francis Graham to what she considered, just then, a mere life-in-Time. Once she had fully accepted Time, she would, like the other two, use it, profit by it, order it, buy yearly charts of it at Christmas and cite its hocus-pocus numbers—1907—1911—

1940, and the usual pet names of each month. The year 1913 would mark the birth of her daughter, Mary.

She would go on, as she supposed, using Time until she began to see that it was she who was being used, with unremitting force and exquisite precision, by Time.

As Lucy Robbins Althorpe would be used too.

And Sophie de Langer.

PART I

1

It was April, 1949. The long drive through the pine forests, from Arcachon, was familiar to Claire; their darkness and their tarry fragrance, and the converging perspectives of the road and the ribbon of bright sky, for when she was a child she and her sister used to visit their great-aunt, Madame de Langer, here, every September.

The grey stone gateposts were the same, but the iron gates had been taken away during the war, and the drive, once smooth gravel between the rhododendrons and laurels, was rutted on one side and encroached on by patches of moss. At the far end of the drive the Château itself, which used to seem big and romantic with its round turrets and steep slate roof, looked smaller, though still imposing in a melancholy self-controlled way.

Christophe, the old manservant, wearing it seemed the same faded lead-blue linen coat, patched at the elbows, was waiting at the top of the four stone steps. His face, with its pointed chin and sharp long nose and big eyelids, had got rosier in eleven years, and his back more bent. He received her emotionally with the little jerkily articulated gestures of a marionette, and paid the taxi for her, extracting notes from a shabby wallet with shaky precision.

He escorted her into the hall where the mixed fragrance of polish and camphor and mildew and *pot-pourri* waited still, and that special saltiness that had always been in the air of Chouzy like the far sound of the surf.

"Madame is in the garden with Madame Fanshawe, Mademoiselle Claire!"

"Thank you, Christophe."

She lifted the portiére and went through the Gothic doorway across the salon and out by the French window to the gardens and orchard that separated the Château from the reedy marshland that, in its turn, divided the gardens from the dunes and the sea. She went through the orchard where daffodils and narcissus shook in the wind, under the budded grey fruit trees, and reached the gravelled terrace with its stone balustrade. From here Claire looked across the marshland and saw two figures silhouetted against the sky above the dunes. One was Tante Sophie, stocky and dignified in black, leaning on a stick as she walked; the other a tall woman in a pale coat that she held close across her while she moved slowly, bending her head to the stocky elderly figure at her side.

Claire watched them turn and take the path back from the shore across the *digue*, a grass embankment. When they had come halfway Aunt Sophie stopped and raised her stick, beckoning Claire to come and meet them. So she began to run towards them, the wind drumming past her ears, through the air's salt pearly radiance. As she got near she saw that the tall lady, who must be the Mrs. Fanshawe Claire had come to see, was curiously beautiful. This was her immediate impression of her. Her next was that her actual features, her dark green eyes and pale skin, although really lovely, were secondary to the "effect of beauty" made by her expression.

She held out her hand to Claire. Tante Sophie stood to receive a kiss on each cheek, and said, "This is my great-niece, Claire Bardet—whom I have proposed to come to England to occupy herself with your little Teresa." She added, brisk and energetic, "Now we will go indoors. You two can then talk better. Turn round now, Claire, and walk in front of us. There is no room for three." She added as they went, "It is a pity our view of you from the back is so inelegant."

Claire called back over her shoulder with deference and embarrassment, "I excuse myself, *ma tante*, but for a journey trousers are so very practical."

"I don't understand that." Tante Sophie's words, brought by the wind, seemed to box her ears. "When I was young I crossed Persia in several petticoats!"

As they got back to the garden they saw Christophe hurrying to them through the orchard. Claire said, "Poor Christophe, he's getting old!"

"He walks like a man carrying a coffin," said Madame de Langer. "What is it, Christophe?"

"It is the telephone, Madame, from Paris. It is European Air Routes who demand Madame Fanshawe."

Begging Tante Sophie to forgive her, the English lady ran towards the house, her coat bellying and flapping behind her. While she was gone Tante Sophie rapidly asked Claire about each member of her family. Then she said that she was glad her father and mother agreed to this possibility of her going to England, under the conditions Mrs. Fanshawe had proposed. As they crossed the grass Madame de Langer explained that, in fact, the first proposal that she should find "a young girl, of good education" for Mrs. Fanshawe's little girl had not come from Mrs. Fanshawe herself, but from a friend of Tante Sophie's, a Mrs. Althorpe, with whom Mrs. Fanshawe and the child were at present living. Tante Sophie stopped short, ten yards from the door that led indoors. "I don't know if your mother has already

explained to you the child's circumstances?" She turned her lively, square, dough-coloured face with its jet-black eyes, to Claire. "In any case it isn't worth my doing so, until Mary Fanshawe is sure that you please her." She stopped. Then questioned with that abrupt tenderness that Claire remembered, "What makes you want to go, my child?"

"Two things."

"What are they?"

"To visit England. And the idea that perhaps this child—" Claire hesitated to say to her rational and critical great-aunt that she had "felt" she "must" go. "Maman did tell me that the child's father had left her."

"Now I see." The old woman's gently sardonic stare examined the girl's flushed features. "So you, who adore your Papa, couldn't imagine anyone more to be pitied than this little Teresa Fanshawe?"

She broke off as Mrs. Fanshawe came out of the house and explained that she had now got her booking changed to the midday plane on Wednesday, and that would give her more time to see her friends in Paris. But that she must still leave on tonight's train, and not permit herself the pleasure of staying on, as darling Tante Sophie proposed. She said this in a tone of sweet regret, taking hold of Tante Sophie's hands still in their grey cotton gloves that she wore out of doors in summer, being replaced by darker grey woollen gloves in winter. Tante Sophie drew down her eyebrows, black and thick in comparison with her crest of foam-white hair, and indulged in her old-gentleman's type of simple fun, saying, "I hope you are *not* too eager to go?"

While Mrs. Fanshawe was protesting, Claire had an impression that she was, in some way, moved, or excited, or upset. And when they were both indoors and she sat down and began to talk about her little girl, Teresa, Claire thought she seemed to be speaking inattentively phrases she knew by heart. She only once seemed to be fully aware of Claire, and of what she herself was saying, when she stated that she and Teresa were "at present living with a distant relation of her husband's, this Mrs. Althorpe, whom Claire would find a dear person, and not frightening, only prim."

Mrs. Fanshawe dined with them before she left.

Claire perceived that dinner was still the same simple practical ritual; the dining room—lit by two oil lamps stood on the massive sideboard—had its same red-brocade-covered walls, the same shadows filled the vaulted pinewood ceiling, the big damask tablecloth was more darned, the silver

epergne in the centre brimmed with daffodils. There were the same aromas of oil and meat and wine; and Christophe wore a stiff white jacket, glossed and brindled here and there from ironing, and white cotton gloves darned and thickened by his years of service, both here at Chouzy and in Tante Sophie's *appartement* in Paris; which had the same old, dank, dignified Second Empire feel. At the end of dinner Christophe carried round the *rinse-bouche*. In Paris he did this just before any gentlemen, present at dinner, were exiled to a smoking room.

When Tante Sophie rose, at the end of dinner, her evening black clothes rustled. But for rustling, these resembled her day clothes, seeming also to be upholstered on her stout body. The high neck was topped by a fold of white muslin just under her double chin, that Claire had always found impressive, rather than ugly, like imperial double chins on antique coins. They went into the salon where Christophe had set the lamp with the silver stand and pleated yellow shade on the round table, and built up the log fire. Mrs. Fanshawe sat with them at the table, while Tante Sophie took up one of the unending series of woollen things she knitted for "her" children at her sanatorium on the coast nearby. She gave Claire an old pink sweater someone had sent her, to unravel and wind into balls.

Mrs. Fanshawe talked to Tante Sophie in her soft foreign French. The emphases fell prettily and unexpectedly, and the sentences were alternately hesitant and hurried, as if she were bubbling them from a narrow-necked bottle. Claire thought how moving Mrs. Fanshawe's face looked in the light of the lamp, the shadows behind her. She couldn't imagine that her husband could have left her; or that any man who had once loved her could cease to love her; or want any other woman.

Claire said this to her aunt after Mrs. Fanshawe had gone. Tante Sophie looked up and over her metal-rimmed spectacles. "My dear child, often a man does not like the sensation that his wife has a better character than his own." She began knitting again, then stopped and glanced at her great-niece. "When does Mary Fanshawe want you to go to her in England?"

"In May, *ma tante*."

2

How many million young men in London were waking, as Charles Behrens did this morning, unwillingly, defensively, with a deep restive unwillingness to open their eyes and look up into the face of the day already bending over them? Some with a bitter or heavy-hearted unwillingness,

because they were young enough to remember how almost any day's morning face, in their recent boyhood, had been splendid with challenge, and beautiful with certainty. Still in their middle twenties, hardly a decade cut them off from those years when the future was a dream certain to be realised; and the present brimmed with a fullness of Doing and Happening and Finding Out, and Thinking, and Idling and Violence, that, now and again, slaked their thirst for Life with mysterious and irrecoverable bliss.

Soon they would forget those years. But remember them again when the memory of middle age would evoke, incredulous, the boy moving through light-brindled woods; or breasting the sea's surf, not merely for enjoying, but a very part of its salt glitter; a boy not merely "reading a story," but drugged by the print's magic power, his fancy plunged so deep that he himself was Drake or Holmes or d'Artagnan, or exalted and fearless in some aerial touch-and-go with glorious griefless Death.

Charles, his eyes shut, must give away, any second now, to the present reality of being Charles Behrens, in a divan bed, in his furnished room on the sixth floor in a "converted" house in Thurloe Square, S.W.7. The reality of this spring day, in his twenty-eighth year.

Opening his long dark green eyes, there was no splendid phantom face above him, no enchanted dig in the ribs—only a dim memory survived of the quality of bliss. And being the sort of young man he was (a civilised, sensitive "sort," zest and tenderness and imagination bred into him) he believed that this same bliss, that can fall on boyhood from any sky, might be found again in love.

But he was in love, and loved. And the day that waited for him, like all his days now, had her face.

Lately Charles had forced himself to get up when he woke. So that sometimes there were two or three hours before it was time for him to leave for his office. Ever since her last letter he had woken suddenly, and very early, oppressed by an intense emotion that he believed was happiness.

Her last letter had contained the sentence, "Once I'm with you, this illness of excitement and longing and uncertainty will go."

This morning he leaned out of his high window and watched an iridescent mist lift from the gardens, in the square, and clear off the tall stucco façades of the houses opposite. He saw buds on the chestnut trees, and a glimmer on the shrubs below. The sky looked as if it were this melted

exquisite blue for the first time, and just before seven the sunlight touched the terraced houses and made them look clean and freshly gold.

Whatever he looked at became related to her in his mind. It was as if she were a language in which all his thoughts expressed themselves.

But the actual fact of her coming, this very evening, remained obstinately unreal. When he tried to imagine it, exactly, it was like hitting a dead note on a piano.

By half-past eight he was too restless to stay in, and went down, past the other flats in the tall house, and out through the high dingy hall, into the square. He walked up the square into Brompton Road and crossed over to the bus stop, where he always took his 74 to go to his work, at Woodley and Ames. But it was too early to go. Perhaps he might walk part of the way, across Hyde Park. Then, from habit, he went along the pavement, and, preoccupied, into the Oratory, and sat down on one of the benches at the back near the doors. The half-past-eight Mass was going on. He sat with his arms folded, his head lowered, his tawny hawk-stare fixed through the pew, his mind tormented.

When Mass was over and people were going out past him, he sat on, his thought bated by fears that he refused. After a quarter of an hour, suddenly, as though escaping, he got up and hurried out into the morning light and the traffic in the street.

3

Written (in French) by Madame de Langer to Mrs. Chester Althorpe, Elmwood, Wimbledon Common.

CHÂTEAU DE CHOUZY,
MONDAY NIGHT

MY DEAR LUCY,

After what you told me in your letter of March 2nd about the circumstances of Mary Fanshawe's present life, I am pleased to write to you that it was possible for me to arrange for my niece, Claire Bardet, to come here to meet her. It is now arranged that Claire will go to you, in England, at the beginning of May. It seems that Mary was satisfied by their interview, which took place this evening before her departure for Paris. Now I must only hope that my little niece will be conscientious in her work and do her best for the little Teresa. Like all children in such a situation as

you describe she will be especially in need of affection balanced by discipline. I have known Claire (she is my husband's great-niece) since she was a baby. She had always a good heart and lively sympathies, if perhaps a tendency to be overemotional. Now, at twenty, I find her steadier perhaps than most of her generation who grew up during the war under the Occupation.

As to Mary, I find her looking less well than when she came here in '46, but how young she still looks—at thirty-seven, is she? How much she resembles her mother in features! But one feels, as you say, that she is better balanced than Camilla. Let us hope so! How difficult to realise, my dear Lucy, that it is already nearly fifty years since poor Camilla and you and I were at Fairways together!

I am delighted to hear, from Mary, that you and Chester are well. By the time you get this letter, no doubt, Mary will be back with you, in your dear house on the Common that I remember so well. It seemed to me always to combine everything that is best of your cultivated America with such "English" charms as the herbaceous border and gardener in his "bowler hat," I remember, too, visits from nice timid English people who only wished to converse about their dogs!

Your very affectionate old friend,
SOPHIE

4

Lucy Althorpe had always been humble about her accomplishments, for she had a high standard of excellence. But she believed her opinions, on big or small matters, to be unquestionably right.

But though she held her views with assurance and even arrogance she expressed them with a forbearing, if sometimes tense, gentleness.

"What a pity," she said to her husband, when the child, Teresa, had gone out of the room, "that Mary should have decided to come back by Paris. Surely she could have taken her plane at Bordeaux, as she first planned, and then she would have been here already yesterday evening."

Chester Althorpe put down *The Times*, looked at his wife with placid affection, and amused himself by making one of his *enfant terrible* remarks: "How do you know Mary hasn't got an admirer in Paris?"

He sat upright, handsome and solidly distinguished, his white moustache hiding his half-smile, watching his shot go like a croquet ball through a hoop. When she had answered, "Don't be so absurd, dear," with the little air of martyrdom she had for whatever was out of place, he took up his *Times* again.

She said, "I have a very dear letter from Sophie saying that her young great-niece she spoke of, Claire Bardet, came from Paris expressly for Mary to see her. . . . That seems foolish too. If Mary had intended to go to Paris in any case . . ."

"Maybe Mary's lover telephoned her from Paris."

"That isn't amusing, Chester." The Bostonian inflection made her English velvety and prim.

He lowered his *Times* and looked at her again with a pleasure that, after thirty years of marriage, still easily melted into amused, or sentimental, adoration. He shook his head.

"What a moralist you are, Lucy."

She said, after hesitation, "I daresay that . . ."

The damask and silver of the breakfast table made no visible concessions to laundry prices or domestic shortages, and the white-panelled room in which they sat, although smaller than the rooms they had been used to in the early years of their marriage, when they had lived sometimes in New Hampshire, sometimes in Florence, gave an effect of habitual moderated luxury which characterised the whole house. Even the acre of garden, with its western barrier of flowering shrubs, and laburnum and holly, visible from the dining room window, and dividing it from the Common, had its own air of being specially tended and privileged on a minor scale.

". . . what dear?"

"I daresay she stopped to see that old priest in Paris! I don't recollect his name."

"I shouldn't worry, Lucy dear."

But she cut him short, holding up her head and speaking like an indignant dove:

"I could never help feeling it was *he*—that Abbé whatever-it-is, who had such an influence over Camilla. I've just never really got over her going into that convent! And after everything that one couldn't help knowing . . ."

Chester Althorpe was, by long habit, attentive to her mood, but inattentive to her words. He was now reading the speech made by the American ambassador the previous evening at a public dinner he'd attended.

"What did one know, dear?" he asked with the mild truculence that was his nearest approach to irritability. "Anyway," he added, "you always seem good enough friends with those nuns at Teresa's school."

Lucy, realising that Chester's characteristic tolerance, which often perplexed and angered her, would make him merely find excuses for Camilla, decided to ignore his query; and gathering up her pile of letters, her grey velvet bag with the steel frame, her paper knife and maroon spectacle case, she stated firmly that the nuns at Teresa's school were "different" and perfect dears every one of them, and calling Brecky, her cairn terrier, she hurried off to see Gloria in the kitchen.

5

"Monsieur le Comte rang?"

"Yes." Bertrand d'Anville put the letter he had been reading into the pocket of his white dressing gown, and said that his chauffeur, Vannier, had had orders to go and meet a certain Bertoldi who was to arrive this morning from Naples, and that they must be on their way back by now. D'Anville glanced at his wrist watch. "When this Bertoldi arrives," he said, "I don't want to see him. Give him this envelope, and tell Vannier to drive him to some modest hotel, where I shall get in touch with him. Also telephone home to inform Madame la Comtesse that I am kept in Paris for another two days, but that I shall return home for the week end."

"Very good, Monsieur." Morel presented the face that was his service-mask; his dark eyes, inexpressive except of a wary subservience, his lips and nostrils set in the gravely simpering amiability of a wax model in a tailor's window.

"And tell Hortense to make some fresh coffee."

"Yes, Monsieur."

The *valet de chambre* went out, closing the double-doors.

Bertrand lit a cigarette. His fingers had the deft movements of a watchmaker. He inhaled a first puff of smoke before taking the letter out of his pocket again.

It was evident that she didn't want to see him! His first painful feeling was tempered by the wilful excitement of imagining how he might, all the same, succeed in finding her. She would doubtless go to her usual hotel in the Rue de Rivoli. . . . He got up and walked to the window, preoccupied.

His small high-ceilinged bedroom, like the big salon next to it, faced the rose-red brick-and-stone arcade on the far side of the square. He had taken great trouble to get this *appartement* for he considered that the Place des Vosges had a special charm, not of Paris, but of an old Hanseatic town, its seventeenth-century simplicity echoing the, to him, romantic, Nordic elegance of Copenhagen.

He reread her letter, and came back from the window to lean on the marble chimneypiece. The big mirror above it reflected the lilac-grey panelling behind him, and the four-poster bed with its yellow brocade curtains. The room looked north, and was filled with a clear shadow in which only things light in themselves had any brilliance, such as the two *lumières* in the wall, the gold design on the lacquer cabinet that stood opposite the mirror, and Bertrand's own head and shoulders; for the ivory-sheened cloth of his dressing gown was from the same palette as the colours used to depict the cinnamon of his skin, burnished here and there to the same plumaged gold as his hair and moustache, which themselves were varied by tawny and russet and silvery hairs. Both moustache and hair had a soft, child-texture, in curious contrast to his eyes which, partly from the intensity of his intelligence, partly from sexual excitability, had a jewelled look, and were like sapphires. His nose was arched and solid with curved-up fleshy nostrils, his mouth half hidden under the moustache, its visible underlip mobile and thick; while his chin had an almost Hapsburg bony heaviness in contrast to the delicate modelling of the wide brow and big eyelids, and the soft curve-up of the gold-brown lashes, and the fine shaping of ears and nape of the neck.

Morel came back with the coffee.

"Hortense desires to know if Monsieur le Comte is dining here tonight?"

"I'll let her know—Get me the concierge of the Hotel d'Albany on the telephone . . . I'll speak myself."

Morel went out. In a few minutes he came back, took up the receiver from the table beside the bed, and said that the concierge waited. Then he went out again.

The concierge's answer to Bertrand's questions was that Madame Fanshawe had arrived, very early this morning, and was, at present, resting

in her room. He left his name, and a message that he "had telephoned." Then he took up the little dark blue English diary he always used, and looked for a Fontainebleau number. When he had, finally, got it, he spoke to the proprietor of the hotel and gave his name as "Monsieur Villon," and ordered "the same rooms as last October." Did the proprietor remember? He remembered perfectly.

He rang for Morel to run his bath, and told him he wanted the car when Vannier had disposed of the Italian. He added that Morel was to telephone "old Miss Osgood" and remind her about some tickets for the concert of sixteenth-century music, that she'd promised to send him.

This morning Morel, in his black alpaca jacket, looked like a small plaster puppet. Whenever his master's personal interest was withdrawn from him he got this wire and plaster look. His slanted eyes became painted on his beige face; his coat and his striped trousers looked streaked on, and only his gold chain bracelet that, now and then, slipped from under his sleeve, seemed detachable.

An hour later d'Anville drove to Bernstein's. As he drove through the streets he examined the face of the morning and found it perfectly delicious. He reflected that no amount of repetition could spoil the enchantment of such an April day, with its premature brilliance and softness; and that no other town in the world had this special sort of expansive, intelligently planned elegance. The perspectives were always *à la mesure de l'homme*, and therefore charming. And this charm extremely moving. The fountains, like chandeliers of perfect design, were glittering and lovely, their gaiety in proportion to the gardens and spaces they jewelled, and even certain modern façades and plate-glass windows seemed to have learned enough good manners to be received among the ancient, or traditional, architecture of their quarter.

D'Anville was welcomed by "young Bernstein." He said that his father was in New York at present. What could they do for Monsieur d'Anville? Bertrand explained that he had seen a little carved ivory Virgin and Child, almost certainly Florentine of the sixteenth century in that exposition of ivory figures last January. He remembered that he had come in the last day and had noticed then that this especially charming thing hadn't been sold.

Young Bernstein said they still had it, and spoke of its beauty with an expression of pleasure on his thrush-like face. He added that it was in his father's office at present, and led d'Anville in to see it.

6

Mother Mary Dominic stood at the top of the stairs that led up from the basement cloakroom.

"Teresa? Come along, Teresa! Hurry up!"

Mother Dominic's brown eyes glimmered. Her round face, with its round cheeks, bow mouth, and cherub nose, seemed set within its white bands and black veil above all for the expressing of gaiety.

Mother Veronica called from where she stood in the front hall, near the door, "Is Teresa Fanshawe coming?"

"Yes, Mother."

Mother Dominic watched the little girl's slow characteristic ascent, her green beret on the back of her fair head that was bent over the open book in her hand. Her feet, in highly polished brown shoes and wrinkled socks, felt their way up the steps, her plaits falling forward, her satchel dangling from one shoulder against her hip. Arrived at the top of the stone stairs she seemed to become aware of an influence or presence, so that she lifted her face from her book, and her green eyes, dark under their black lashes, gradually smiled.

"You're last again, Teresa!" Mother Veronica called from the front hall.

Teresa usually accepted correction with a sort of anxious sweetness of acknowledgment as if she thought she had been given a present, and hoped she had received it with proper politeness. Only in unpredictable instances, she would be sullen and ironical.

"I'm so sorry, Mother."

"Well, hurry dear, now!"

"Oh *dear*." Teresa dropped her book, picked it up, and ran towards Mother Veronica, who waited, rising black out of the white and black marble floor. Her glance was observant and clear behind her glasses.

"Come along, Teresa! I'm afraid you're keeping Mrs. Althorpe waiting. I can see her car at the end of the mews."

"*Oh . . . dear.*"

"Is it today your mother comes back?"

"Yes, Mother." Teresa coloured.

"Is Jane Allen not going with you today? Put your gloves on, dear."

"No, Mother. She's gone to the dentist."

"Run along then. And do try to be quicker."

"Yes, Mother."

Teresa ran out of the door, up the mews, to the square, where Cousin Lucy had drawn up her car. Cousin Lucy said that she had been waiting for five minutes. She looked Teresa over critically, although with affection, while she got in beside her.

"Did you have a nice day, darling?"

"Yes, Cousin Lucy."

They drove round the square and back into Wigmore Street.

Lucy Althorpe drove with impassive majesty, sitting upright at the wheel, the brim of one of her velvet ribbon-trimmed hats shading her glance, which frowned her displeased patience at traffic blocks. She wore a special pair of "shammy leather" gloves for driving, and heel-protectors for the shoes on her small feet. Compared to Cousin Lucy's way of driving, other people's seemed lounging or unceremonious.

When Teresa's father came, occasionally, to take her out, she noticed that he drove very fast without seeming to attend to what he was doing, smoking, and occasionally talking to her with an affection that had beguiled her more when she was very small, but less as she grew aware that he could change from niceness to queer ill-temper. Since the divorce, she had an increasingly uncertain feeling towards him.

She had avoided asking the cause of "the divorce," and tensely and deliberately accepted her mother's formula about "the importance of Daddy's being happy." Otherwise she had put away the whole matter for a remote future consideration, as she would set aside a book she didn't yet understand. She had, by now, almost forgotten the first stages of her father's absence. She remembered that he was said to be "in Aldershot" while Teresa and her mother were alone at Little Fairings. She could remember when her mother told her that they would be going away from Little Fairings; and had wished that "all this," whatever it was, wasn't happening. This wish had been intense, and sometimes painful. But when she "thought back" to her

"life before the divorce" it was chiefly to remember her room with the rosebud wallpaper and certain special corners of the garden at Little Fairings. But she mostly avoided remembering; and her naturally dreamy enjoyment of life helped her to forget.

As they drove through Hyde Park Teresa saw a cairn like Brecky, and in the Row she saw a piebald pony and exclaimed, "Charles says you should wish if you meet a piebald pony."

"Charles who, dear?"

"Charles Behrens."

"Why, of course." Lucy approved the serious-mannered young man and his evident chivalrous devotion to Mary. "And what do you wish for, darling?"

Teresa answered that she wanted a kitten most. She was thinking of a kitten that her father's new wife, Pamela, had. She didn't say so to Cousin Lucy, for she could feel that Cousin Lucy and Cousin Chester minded, in an angry way, about Pamela.

"I'm afraid Brecky mightn't like a kitten."

"If it was young enough?"

"Maybe . . . What a very beautiful afternoon," Cousin Lucy said firmly. But this sentence failed to exorcise the smoke-grey head and translucent eyes and snowy paws. In any case "beauty," of day or sky or place, didn't yet reach Teresa except in those magic sensual ways as it would have reached the imagined kitten, or the real Brecky. Absenting her mind from Cousin Lucy, Teresa settled down to the number plate game. She got up to one hundred and nine at Putney Hill; then stopped to ask if airplanes had number plates? Cousin Lucy didn't know. Teresa reflected that her mother wouldn't either, for her attitude towards anything mechanical was indifferent or irritated. She wondered, would her mother bring the medal from *Nôtre Dame des Victoires*? She never knew what her mother would remember, or forget.

Teresa had no critical awareness of her mother yet. Her love for her was, still, part of the general glow in which she existed, and her mother so much part of her happiness that any fault in her unrealised and unremembered like an adult interruption of some afternoon of treasured solitude, such as she loved to spend with a book, on the broken-springed sofa in the sewing room.

When Lucy and Teresa got back, Chester Althorpe came out of the library where he dozed in the afternoons, and said that there was a telegram from Mary saying that she wouldn't be here until lunch time Thursday.

Lucy put down the parcels she had brought out from London and exclaimed, in a controlled manner, at this "unexpected postponement." Mary had been "so definite" that she was coming today!

Lucy's dislike of all changes of plan was caused by her obscure certainty that they were due to weakness of will in the planner. But, since another trait in her character was loyalty to whomever she loved (a loyalty capable of being fanatical, or blind, or heroic), she at once attributed Mary's change of plan to someone else. She searched her mind for one of those types she readily distrusted—these including most people unknown to her, or to anyone she knew; or those in categories that her upbringing had conditioned her to disapprove, such as Excessively Religious People, Very Rich People, Germans, except German governesses and German composers, and Bohemian Sorts of People, these latter cross-referenced in her mind to People One Would Rather Not Know.

She added, to Chester, "I daresay one of those people Mary knows in Paris has managed to delay her." She turned to Teresa who was standing halfway up the staircase, leaning on the banisters, and said kindly:

"Don't be anxious, dear! Mummie will be here the day after tomorrow. And that'll give you just that extra time to finish your little present!" Her look, lifted to the child on the staircase, had a beautifully sudden and clear tenderness.

As they went into the library Chester said, sentimentally, that the child was going to be as lovely as her mother. Lucy rang the bell, and sat down at the tea table.

"Let's hope she'll be as good."

Teresa came down bringing her sewing folded in a piece of tissue paper. At twelve she had a kind of leggy elegance as if she might just as well grow into a tree as into a woman. But though her features still had the flower texture of a small child, they were also alive and observant. Her moss-agate eyes, wide-set beneath eyebrows like brown wings, were evidently used by her intelligence to look out from the watch-tower of her body.

When Chester Althorpe said she was going to be like her mother what he really perceived was that the child already made an effect that her features and colouring didn't explain.

Just as he began talking to Lucy, the placid air of the room with its tidy ranks of books, and strip of sunshine bisecting the rug, and silver and china tea things in accustomed order on the tray, was splintered by Teresa's laughter as she saw Brecky, with guilty tact, withdrawing a sandwich from the cake-stand.

"Now, dear, *what* is it?" Lucy asked, amused herself, but, as ever, a little critical and perplexed in the presence of immoderate laughter.

7

Charles had bought the flowers during his lunch hour. Pink and red roses, and white lilac, and lilies of the valley. He kept them in the washroom, on the half-landing, above Woodley's room.

Woodley was, mysteriously, a good publisher. When he came in and saw Charles putting them in the basin, he smiled diffidently, his eyes kind and inquisitive behind his thick glasses, and said, "Expansive, Behrens? Expensive *and* expansive!" with the soft school-masterish jocosity that made postulant authors unduly hopeful. His facetious air, fidgeting nicotined fingers, and narrow small body obscured the fact that he was both dynamic and shrewd.

Charles was leaving just before five, carrying this sheaf of flowers, when he met Ames, the other partner. George Ames overacted his own easy manner and dressed well. He had no literary knowledge but a practical experience of, and enthusiasm for, the Book Trade. He offered to lend Charles his car and chauffeur; but Charles refused with the eager politeness that so often involved him, socially, with people he found boring or trivial.

He crossed Tottenham Court Road, went along a dingy side street where he bought some grapes, and French bread, and a tin of tunny-fish (that she loved), her favourite black cherry jam, and foie gras in a small terrine. Then he walked back to Tottenham Court Road to take his usual 74 bus; but took a taxi instead and drove back to Thurloe Square. He felt empty and, now and then, giddy; unreal streets, bustling with unreal people, steeped in a gilded light, slipped past the taxi window, the streets themselves constantly changing focus as in a dream. He paid the taxi-driver as if to reward him. The man's face reflected Charles's excitement; but remotely, stolidly, like a face in a crowd observing some passing splendour.

When he got up to his room he went to the windows and opened them wider. The old pigskin clock, once his mother's travelling clock, marked quarter to six. He began to arrange the flowers. He put the white lilac on the

bookshelves on either side of the fireplace, and some roses, red and pink mixed, on the sofa-table in the middle of the room (the only bit of furniture belonging to him). The lilies of the valley he put in a wine glass on the oak revolving hexagonal bookshelf next to the divan.

This evening the room, which normally asserted its own mediocre character, changed its familiar ugliness—as if it were a picture in one of those children's books supplied with pink mica spectacles which can cause a cow to vanish and be replaced by a rosebush, or an ogre to be supplanted by a ringletted fairy—and took an attentive look, waiting for the sound of a taxi drawing up in the square below.

He went through into the kitchenette and put the things he had bought on the table; the bread, the grapes, the foie gras. He wanted to prepare something strange and delicious. But he felt clumsy from excitement; and his least movements were too slow, or unsteady, as if he were drunk. He got one of the two bottles of claret his mother had brought him last week out of the cupboard; then a tray and two glasses. He did this with an absurd feeling of acting, and remembered how he'd laughed with her once at a description, in some French novel of the nineties, of a man preparing a room for his mistress with remarkable properties, such as white bearskins and oysters and "perfumes" for the fire. She'd said, "All the same I'm sure he forgot to have the oysters opened," and that they'd had to prise them open with "one of her huge hatpins." Charles remembered, astonished, that at that period of their friendship it would have been unimaginable to either of them that they could fall in love.

He found the tin-opener. It was still in the glass pen tray where she'd put it after they'd opened the chestnuts in syrup she'd brought. He remembered with odd visual distinctness that she'd had it in her hand while she walked about the room. That was the day before she went abroad.

He went again to the window and looked down into the square. He looked at his watch. In her letter of this morning she had asked him not to meet her. But he rather wished he'd arranged to anyway.

He fetched the white and red check tablecloth that she'd given him at Christmas. He spread the cloth on the table, and laid plates and knives and forks and the wine glasses. As he did so he could see, almost touch, his image of her last Christmas Eve, standing here, in the doorway, saying that she'd missed him in the crowd at Midnight Mass, and "here was his present." She had on a fur hat and muff. She looked very tall, and was breathing quickly, he'd thought from coming up all the stairs. She came in

and said, "Wasn't it lovely?" meaning the Mass. He'd been so astonished at seeing her, and by the abrupt indescribable effect she made on him, that he didn't answer. Then she'd said she must go, and he went down the stairs with her, and she remarked that "stairs always felt sad and exiled" in these converted houses.

Then, out on the pavement, he found himself telling her that he couldn't let her go.

She'd slipped her arm in his and said, "Walk to where I've left the car." When they got to the end of the square she said, "But darling, aren't we lunching next week?" As she said this the light of a street lamp showed him her face, white and gleamy with tears.

People kept passing them, still coming away from the Oratory and he asked her if she loved him at all, and she said, "Very, very much," in her delicious vague voice, that seemed to drift towards one, down long vistas in her mind. Then she'd said, "I'm going now." And had turned and gone across the street.

That was Christmas morning.

They had known each other so long before this. When she was first married to Fanshawe and lived near his parents in Norfolk, he'd still been a schoolboy, and gone to see them. Then there'd been the war. Then there had been two years in the army, in Germany, when he'd lost sight of both of them, until he'd finished his two years at Oxford, and come to London and met her, with Edward, by chance, at a show of pictures at Agnew's. He'd thought, then, that she looked dispirited and older; but more beautiful; or else he just hadn't felt her beauty before. She asked him to come and see them, as Edward had a "city job now" and they had a house near Sunningdale. Charles had said, "What a funny district for *you*," and she'd answered, "It's got everything one wants. Bridge and Golf and Amusing People . . ." reciting this in her vague voice.

He went down to see them, for a Sunday, soon after this. The house was called "Little Fairings." It was Tudor, and stood at the end of a drive that was S-shaped, between lawns. There was a rose garden the further side of the house, and beyond that a kitchen garden, the whole acreage being sentinelled by birch trees. Charles felt that Edward Fanshawe had imposed his character and tastes on the place. The house, with its gabled roofs and diamond-paned windows with old, or fake-old, glass, had luxury but no charm. The thick carpets reached the skirting boards, the intensely oak

furniture, varied by a walnut tallboy or lacquer chest, gleamed dark; ships' lanterns contained electric bulbs, and the open fireplace had iron backs and firedogs. The people he found there having drinks before lunch when Charles arrived, all seemed to be Edward's kind of friends. The men mostly wore check suits or flannels with silk scarves tucked between the lapels and had the bronzed skins, shrewd eyes and slightly thickened jowls of men successful enough to afford country life at week ends, and holidays at ski resorts and on Mediterranean beaches. Although some of them were young, they all had, in some degree, the look that Charles disliked in Edward Fanshawe; the lively complacency of manner, the assertive voice, the naïve or lecherous short bursts of laughter. They all looked, at the same time, astute and stupid, and had the same shiny glances that observed from inquisitiveness, or in nuzzling quest of pleasure, and made the effect of easy-going good humour that, like Edward Fanshawe's, would be switched off, automatically, by the least annoyance or disappointment. Their women were, mostly, their complements; conditioned in health, looks, and clothes by the same proportion of good cooking, sport, sunbathing, sexual pleasure and gin. And, just as the men might lose ground, in maintaining a "good time," to attacks of business worries, or liverishness, or by the depressing treachery of baldness, or failure of desire, their women contended with increase of weight, debts, frustrations of vanity, or defeat in sentimental or sensual passion.

In the group that Charles found that Sunday at Little Fairings the women seemed more tiresome than the men; partly because of their shrill emphases of tone; partly because their preoccupation with being attractive kept them in a chronic state of display, while the men had, at least, the secondary dignity of purchasing-power.

But there were two or three women there who seemed likeable, either from being naturally kind-hearted, and therefore immune from a too shameless self-interest, or from being so nearly animal that their existence of well-fed physical security made them agreeably contented.

Pamela Dunn (who was to become Edward's second wife) was in the first category. She was sitting beside Mary on a wide stool near the fire when the latter introduced Charles to her. She looked more than twenty-five and less than forty. Her yellow silk hair was parted on one side and hung straight but curled up just below her triple pearl choker. Her eyes were hazel, and cheerful between sensual creamy white upper and lower lids with curling bronze lashes. Her teeth were a little prominent, her upper lip slightly lifted, the lower lip glossy dark red, setting off the warm pale colouring of her skin.

She made Charles sit down by her, behaving as if she were herself a little feast prepared specially for him.

He didn't see Mary to speak to alone that day. But the unhappy impression that he'd had when he met her at Agnew's was confirmed. As it rained in the afternoon there was no tennis, and some of the party played bridge, and Edward Fanshawe went off with Pamela Dunn to her house, at Virginia Water, to fetch some films she and a former husband had taken in Corsica. For the first time Charles consciously wondered why Mary had married Edward, who was merely a better-looking, more gentle-voiced version of the other men in this milieu. At this time Charles was still too young in experience, and too romantically biased in temperament to imagine that physical attraction could have its violent alchemic effect on a girl of Mary's sort, or that it was precisely her "sort" that was most easily in girlhood seduced in soul through the excitement of her senses, and incapable from sensitiveness and idealism of supposing any conceivable disparity between the love of body and of soul. He simply supposed she had been blinded to Fanshawe's obvious faults by his obvious charm.

Charles himself, at this time, had experienced the alternating excitement and dreary emptiness of chance *affaires*, and begun to realise that it was possible to go through life without the love that his reading (of Shakespeare, and of Ronsard especially at this time) had made him expect, and part of his mind had adjusted his expectations of love to marrying and being happy in those practical terms of Christian marriage, by which intense emotion only had a temporary place.

When he'd said good-bye to Mary she suggested that Katrina Althorpe, a tall American girl in a grey suit, who had arrived at tea time, should drive him back to London. Mary said that Katrina was staying with her Althorpe relations, who were also relatives of Edward. She added that Teresa was also staying with them, as she was in quarantine for mumps, and Edward was afraid to have her in the house. Mary gave Katrina Althorpe a small parcel for Teresa.

While this Miss Althorpe was driving Charles back to London he thought her rather boring. But he realised when he saw her again later that that had been because of his state of mind that evening. (Later he was to realise that she had understood what he was feeling much better than he did.) So as to make conversation he asked her if it was the uncle or aunt she was staying with who was the relation of Edward Fanshawe. She said it was the uncle. She said, "But it's Mary they love. They don't approve of

Edward." She added, "Anyone would love Mary." She said this as they drove through Sloane Square.

Later that week Mary telephoned to him at Woodley and Ames and suggested he should take her out to lunch. Her voice sounded gay. He went to meet her at the Escargot. When he saw her he thought some mood of his own must have made him imagine that she was unhappy. Also that he had been getting into a state of foolish, nervy unrest from no real cause. During lunch she was exactly as she used to be when he used to bicycle over to see her in Norfolk when he was a schoolboy. There was the old feeling of ease and amusement. She told him that Teresa was out of quarantine and coming home next week from the Althorpes. It was at this lunch she said she had a "passion for tunny-fish." It was as part of the *hors d'oeuvres*. She told him she was going to see her mother after lunch, at her convent, and Charles said he remembered seeing Lady Graham only once, in 1939, when he was living with a French family in Paris and she and Mary had come to lunch with them. Mary said she and her mother and the baby, Teresa, had been on their way back from a visit to an old friend of her mother's, Madame de Langer. She added that this was the last time her mother had been in Paris, and that she had stopped there to see a certain Abbé Meudon whom her mother had described as a saint. Charles suggested that Mary's mother was, surely, the sort of woman who saw and described everything in an exaggerated way. Mary said if he could see her as she was now he wouldn't get that impression. She said too that it was as if you saw a tree, a great beech for instance, and thought how lovely it was in summer, but when you saw it in winter you felt all that summer beauty had just been covering up. She added, "But that's a *silly*, wrong description. It's much more that everything that doesn't matter has been chipped away." They walked up to New Oxford Street and Mary took a bus from there, and Charles had gone back to his office at Woodley and Ames.

He lost sight of Mary again until the following spring, when he was in Hatchard's, choosing a book for his father's birthday, and suddenly realised that there was a little girl standing beside him, looking up at him with excited interest. After hesitation he saw that it was Teresa; the same fair head, only much higher, and the round baby-cheeks deflated. She said, "Excuse me, aren't you Charles?" She was with an elderly small woman in a grey squirrel coat. She replaced a preliminary manner of fastidious doubt first by a cautious amiability and then, when he spoke of Mary, by a tempered sweetness. She said "Dear Mary and this child are staying with us, just at present—"

When he lunched with Mary again, soon after this, she told him she was divorcing Edward because he had asked her to, as he wanted to marry a woman called Pamela Dunn. Charles said he remembered Pamela Dunn that Sunday. Mary said, "She'll make him much cosier than I can." She looked very tired; but Charles had the impression that she was relaxed after a long exhausting tension. She said she felt guilty at so enjoying being with Teresa at the Althorpes where "no one ever came in for drinks" and that she believed Teresa loved it and hadn't made any comment about leaving Little Fairings. Charles asked her what she was going to do. She said, "Bring up Teresa in peace," and the way she said "peace" seemed to confirm his impression that she was very tired. And unhappy. But not about Edward, he thought.

He knelt to light the fire laid by his "daily," Miss Townshend. As he got his lighter out of his pocket, the telephone bell rang. The usual insistent female voice asked him his number and said she had a telegram for him. She said, "We have tried to ring you beefore, but there was no replay; here is the message. Handed in at Paris 11:35 A.M. The telegram is to '*Charles Behrens. Kensington 4197: darling: staying Paris until tomorrow. Will come to you then six o'clock*.' Have you got that co-rrectly or do you wish me to repeat it?"

"No, thank you."

He put down the receiver.

Looking about him now it seemed to him that the flowers only emphasized the room's ugliness; its "modern" (in 1930) wallpaper, that seemed to be printed by the heel of a rubber golosh dipped in crab paste and stamped in transverse lines up a pocked beige ground; the pickled oak of the bedside table, in contrast with the rickety satinwood writing desk escaped from some drawing room suite and originally designed to proclaim gentility (with full support of brass fender and ferns and photographs).

Mary always said she forgave the room, because of all the "nice dear things" in it that were his; the books, the sofa-table from his home, the engraving of Nymphenburg, the two Renoir reproductions (his post-war thirst for what Renoir expressed to him overriding his inherited scruples about "reproductions"); the little Guys, hung above the divan, that had cost him his army gratuity, enchanting evocation of horse and carriage and crinoline that symbolised compensation for those two years of army life. Mary had said, *à propos* of his room that one's life was exactly like it; you

put your own "bits" into a *décor* that just happens to you. This being characteristically one of her notions that, giving her mind a shake, she tumbled down like apples. She'd added that, anyway, people who insisted on perfection of taste and comfort always had something phony about them; that, at best, they were Horace Walpole, but more often just men designed by nature to be old ladies; or women who arranged "settings" for their "individuality," or, like her mother-in-law, dream-lived an existence of "marvellous taste" by hysterically collecting blue glass and Staffordshire dogs.

But Charles had felt that the inchoate room, and the fact that he so often meant to change it, was too like his whole existence. During the years immediately following his demobilisation he'd had a vague sense that if he were to find himself suddenly vital, or very good, or even just very rich, he would then know how to change his whole way of living. This vague notion had suddenly been displaced by a reality of finding himself neither rich nor good, but happy.

If he hadn't been bored, in those years he hadn't certainly been happy. His general remembered sense of them was of going to and fro, and seeing this and that, of having "rather hated" the army, "rather loved" those two years at Oxford, after which he'd liked less but enjoyed on particular occasions the years in London. That time had been interrupted now and then by saved-up-for winter-sports, or brief holidays at home in Norfolk where he enjoyed his mother's high spirits, and motored about with his father, an antiquary by bent, who considered the churches of East Anglia more curious than the Baroque he had been brought up to admire and had sworn an archaeological loyalty to Kings Lynn, which, he asserted, had more real flavour than Venice, and during its Festival as good music as "*zum Beispiel, Salzburg!*"

By upbringing a cosmopolitan, Charles's father had the Israelite tendency to pitch as luxurious a tent as he could afford in a given place, rather than solidly settle; the "pitching" being elaborated by two distinct determinations. One, to appreciate every aspect of local life, devoting a thoughtful and eclectic interest to fox hunting, rural politics, dairy farming, turkey breeding or cocktail parties. The other to impose the maximum of luxury compatible with the simplicity of the "pitch" chosen, the present standard of his Norfolk farmhouse, demanding, for instance, that fruit should be in season, coffee perfectly made, wood fires kept up and the views exposed to the best advantage by the cutting of trees or shifting of a wall or barn.

Sometimes Charles brought back some of his mother's inconsequent happiness to London, together with whatever his father chose to present him with affectionately on the platform at Kings Lynn station—either a brass-rubbing, or one of his latest photographs of a Norman church, or a flight of wild duck, or the gates at Sandringham. (These latter he considered "of curious sociological interest".) But no talisman from home "worked" after a few days "back." Not that his parents ever imagined, as he knew, that his London life could need any extra magic. Indeed he was conscious that nothing demonstrated so clearly their ignorance of the life of his whole generation as their matter-of-course assumption that his London existence must brim with carefree amusement. His mother's hope that he didn't have "too many late nights" credited him with the opportunities and tastes of her contemporaries (whose youth had been tonicked with jazz and suckled on the bitter milk of Aldous Huxley) while his father's idea (inevitably expressed in phrases from three languages) of Charles's opportunities to frequent "*des jolies femmes*," to revel in "*Tischunterhaltung*," to meet celebrities, to go constantly to the Opera, prevented him from guessing that Charles's actual London was conditioned partly by money shortage, but most of all by there simply not existing the kind of elegant women, civilised by homage, whom his father had known in France, nor any wit (since Wilde), nor "Conversation" of the regularised sort, because of the English ban on overt traffic in ideas.

8

On school days Teresa always began her breakfast before Cousin Lucy and Cousin Chester came down. She sat alone on the left of Cousin Chester's place, in the white-panelled dining room with its polished Chippendale sideboard and chairs, and the Sargent drawings of Cousin Lucy and her sister on the wall. The table always looked pretty, with its white cloth and the crystal bowl of flowers in the middle. Brecky sat beside her chair hoping for forbidden bits of bacon or toast and butter. Sometimes her mother came down in her dressing gown and told her something interesting from a book she was reading, or, if she was in a gay mood, some incident in the endless exploits of "the Wags," three worn-out toy rabbits that Teresa had had long since when she was very small, but whose Legend had continued and become more complicated as Teresa got older.

Teresa liked this breakfasting alone. She loved the feel of the room, warm in winter, cool in summer. A conservatory led off it, and through its glass door the plants, cinerarias and azaleas and hydrangeas and begonias and small roses, according to the season, sat watching her from their

stepped-up shelves, like gaily dressed ladies at a theatre. The letters and newspapers were always laid ready beside each place; Cousin Chester's *Times*, and few business-looking envelopes; and for Cousin Lucy the *Daily Telegraph* and usually several what she called "nice letters," which meant they came from her friends, often with American or Italian or Swiss or French stamps, that Teresa would save for the girls at school who collected them.

This morning there was a letter for Teresa from her mother, with a French stamp. Even though Mummie would be here by lunch time. She opened it, and put the envelope in the pocket of her tunic for Sally Callaghan's brother. She sat forward on the edge of her chair to read it, twitching her nose and scratching at the calf of her left leg.

> This will be the *last* letter, darling, before I see you again. I am staying with Madame de Langer in that *very* French sort of house that you stayed in, with me, just after the war five years ago. Do you remember at all? The "poster" beds with cotton curtains? And the bathroom like a chapel where the *femme-de-chambre* brought us water in a huge can and the long corridors upstairs with wooden arches like aisles in a church? The old manservant here, Christophe, remembers you. He asked me how "*la petite demoiselle aux boucles d'or*" was—I didn't disillusion him by saying the "*boucles d'or*" had turned into plaits! It *is* funny how everything in France has a French look. Even their pigeons and their rain. I saw lovely things in my hop-up to the Savoy mountains. Did you get my postcard of a village church? I do love Baroque churches, *thick* as possible with gold. I like *richly glorious* churches, and *poor, unglorious* people in them. I posted you a little present from Annecy. A sticky one, as you are such a nougat addict. The Wags have all three gone to Nîmes with their ears tied down under scarves. This may have been disguise; after their attempts to lynch the President things have been tricky for them in France, and they have resorted to such Desperate Disguises as wearing top-hats down to their ankles. While they were here at the Château they rehearsed their anti-police incantation, "*Mort aux Vaches!*" every morning under the windows, and Madame de Langer believed one of the shutters was creaking and told Christophe to oil it.
>
> It will be *lovely* to see you, and hear about all the dark doings at school (if any?) and if you enjoy Nicholas Nickleby as much as

David?

Love, hugs,
MUMMIE

I am going to stop in Paris on my way where I hope to find last *Mitbringsel* for you all, and a pink Parisian *chop* for Brecky which I shall smuggle, stuck in my hat!

Gloria came in bringing Teresa's bacon and eggs under a plated cover.

At this hour Gloria's appearance showed her own inbred easy-goingness at odds with the spick and span standard imposed on her, not only by Cousin Lucy but by Gloria's own early memories of Elmwood "before the war," when there had been "four inside and two out"—and Gloria, recruited at fifteen from a big family in a mining area in Yorkshire, had been the kitchenmaid. Gloria wore cotton overalls in the mornings and a white collar, fumbled to fasten by drowsy fingers. Her glasses were "on straight" but her hair, permed and uncombed, looked like the yellow spun sugar that Teresa had once eaten at a wedding. Gloria would slip in with Teresa's breakfast still wearing her trodden-down carpet slippers, which Cousin Lucy always pretended not to notice on the grounds of Gloria's devotedness.

"I've got a letter from Mummie, Gloria!"

"But she'll be *back* today!"

"Yes, but it was posted—perhaps the day before yesterday?—no, *Monday* I should say."

"Excited?"

"You *bet-I-am*!"

"Now, you've not begun yer cereal even. So you'd better miss it out today if you want to be ready for Captain Allen." (Teresa was driven to school with Jane Allen, who lived on Parkside.)

Gloria said, "Mrs. Queen brought up some lilies of the valley from her own garden yesterday to put in your mum's room." Mrs. Queen was the daily-woman.

"I didn't know Mrs. Queen had a garden."

"It's about the size of a pocket handkerchief. Now hurry with your breakfast, Teresa. It's wicked to let one of those eggs get cold and then leave

half, like you did yesterday." She added as she went out, "Those eggs is sixpence each! You don't think of that!"

Left alone, Teresa ate and ruminated over the different things different people thought were "wicked." To Gloria "waste" was wicked; and burglars; and "men" on the Common. To Cousin Lucy lying was wicked, but missing church on Sunday wasn't. If Mother Veronica did ever talk about wickedness it was as if it was something sad, but not shocking. But Teresa felt, subconsciously, that there was something tidy and restful about Cousin Lucy's absence of moral compromise; just as, at school, she preferred the Doctrine that explained exactly, to the toleration implicit for instance in Mother Veronica's affirmation that "only God could know how bad each person's sin was."

When Cousin Chester came in Teresa asked him, partly as a tease, if he had ever been "wicked"?

"*Never!*" He raised one eyebrow, then sat down slowly into his chair and took up his *Times*, opened it, refolded it inside out, and set it on his special little reading stand that Gloria had to put ready precisely in front of the space between his knife and fork.

"Not even when you gambled in the West? And shot at those Indians?"

"Of course not." The smile was just visible under the corner of his trim white moustache. As he took his reading glasses out of his breast pocket a smell of lavender water came from his clean handkerchief.

Cousin Lucy came in. Teresa got up and kissed her and sat down again. Cousin Lucy always sat quickly down, as if the music had stopped in Musical Chairs. She looked through her letters but already stretching out one hand to take the "cosy" of Italian linenwork off the coffee pot.

"Excuse me, Cousin Lucy, but do *you* think it was wicked of Cousin Chester to shoot that Indian?"

Lucy Althorpe didn't deal irresponsibly even with such a recognised and accustomed joke as Chester's murderous past. She squared her slender shoulders and said, "Of course not, dear," while her ingrained devotion to her husband made her add with that tartness that sometimes frightened people, "In any case it wouldn't have been wrong if Cousin Chester did it."

Sophie de Langer was in the tradition of women who are authoritative, either by inheritance or from full knowledge of their superior intelligence, and usually express their views as facts, and their orders as commands. In her quiet tones and clipped sentences she was accustomed to arrange benefits, and often happiness, for all sorts of people, who were either her inferiors in age, or social position, or cleverness, or good fortune. Constantly generous in action, she was restrained in manner, and severe, almost ascetic in her own way of living and dressing. Unimaginative in speech she applied her imagination to diverse cases of human welfare. She would send books, subsidize a holiday, or medical treatment, or some course of study; or bestow a chance to travel; or arrange, always secretly benign, outwardly brisk and directive, that someone, living alone, should be visited, or some overworked mother of a family should have domestic help. Students who "must have" certain opportunities, a niece or nephew who "must read" certain books, or hear such and such a concert, a secretary or old friend needing rest, a cultured young couple who deserved "a little visit to Italy," an old servant who "should have at once" a better coat, or a radio, or a visit from distant relations; these passed before her, as on an assembly belt, and were summarily benefited. These were also indexed by her excellent memory, together with every tubercular child who had been to her sanatorium, and most of the babies who, in the last twenty-two years, had been brought to her Crèche in Paris. Sophie administered her fortune with the vision and ability and capacity for detail that had enabled her father, Auguste Tissot, to make it. She was as little concerned with "being charitable" as he, Tissot, had been with "being" a powerful "*industriel*." Deliberately extrovert, she mistrusted most religion or philosophy, except her own. In any closely personal dealings with people she used an unsaid, wise love instinctively as a healer uses certain herbs. She could not have told that it was love she used, habitually supposing that she acted on common sense and experience. She would say "in my experience," her brown eyes wary, her kindly lower lip pressed obstinately up against the long obstinate upper one; meaning that in her sixty-odd years, she had learned, logically, how to proceed from observation. Holding upright her square head with its white silk hair and little bun, her hands crossed over her massive compact body as if they emerged from invisible monastic sleeves, she severely gave orders dictated by her heart, or summarised tersely a wonderfully profound and tender sympathy.

Claire hadn't meant to stay on at the Château with Tante Sophie, for Philippe had begged her to come back to Paris quickly, and her parents felt

that if she were going to England she should be with them before she went. But the familiar rooms and garden, and the wild, clean beauty of the Atlantic, so different from the sea in the Midi where she'd been the last two summers, renewed the love she'd felt for this coast as a child. When she stood on the sands beyond the dunes watching the long foam-edged breakers seethe towards her exactly as they used to, she saw her childhood summers here, set deep in the crystal of Time.

When she talked of this remembering to Tante Sophie at dinner a night or so after Mrs. Fanshawe had gone, Madame de Langer said: "That mine was worked with profit, and, I must admit, with much talent, by Marcel Proust."

Claire said that she had found great *longueurs* in his writing, though, as she was saying this, she reflected how well he would have described old Christophe, handing Tante Sophie the dish of *filets de soles* like a sacristan proffering the plate; and that, in fact, Christophe exactly resembled a sacristan who has been working and fussing round the same Church all his life, and become tenderly devoted to every detail of its familiar architecture and routine and added his own special ritual, such as the exact laying out of spoons on the sideboard, to the traditional ritual; while gradually his devotion to the "priest" Aunt Sophie though not less tender has become critical. For just now he had interrupted her to say that "Madame forgets to drink her wine," Aunt Sophie having begun to catalogue the qualities and defects in Proust's *chef d'oeuvre* in a manner which, Christophe knew, presaged a discourse.

Madame de Langer concluded her remarks on the "triple sensibility of a man who was an asthmatic, an Israelite, and man of genius" by saying, "And you, Claire? Your mother tells me you are interested in a young man who writes?"

Claire said that she was "good friends" with a young man who wrote, who was also *professeur* in a *lycée*. Aunt Sophie said that this latter piece of information pleased her; for one must beware of young men who believed they could gain their livelihood by writing. Then she asked: "What is he like?" and waited for her great-niece to speak. Claire did so unwillingly, from sensitiveness in the matter, but respecting Tante Sophie's frequent dictum that "an opportunity to speak was an opportunity to please." She said, "He is tall, like I am, and looks *sportif*. He has a *thinking* expression. He is the contrary of worldly; he dances badly; he is of a simple family. He isn't at all like my sister's friends, the boys who come to the house . . . He

has passed through Existentialism, like so many. At present he is trying to resign himself to believe nothing."

"He is in love with you?"

". . . yes."

"And you, Claire?"

"No. Certainly not, *ma tante*. But I admire him."

"That's evident, my child."

The next evening Claire came out of her room and saw by the gilt clock that stood, under its glass dome, on a table at the top of the staircase, that there was still a quarter of an hour before Christophe, having pulled on a pair of white cotton gloves, would announce dinner. So she went down and out through the open front door into the drive, and round the house to the lawn. The wind had dropped. The sky was low and grey, separated from the horizon by a narrow band of pale red light. Moth-like ships seemed to cling on the sombre iridescence of the sea. The strong west wind that had blown all day had spent itself suddenly, like the violence of a sensitive character, leaving emptiness.

Claire walked slowly to and fro, partly thinking about a letter from Philippe that had arrived by the afternoon post, partly watching the ships and the sea.

Suddenly she heard Tante Sophie's voice calling to her. She turned and saw her standing in the garden door window of the salon. She was holding a small piece of paper. As soon as Claire got to her she said that she had just had a telegram from Lucy Althorpe; that Mary Fanshawe's plane from Paris had crashed and she had been killed. Madame de Langer added that she had read this morning of yesterday's air disaster but hadn't read any details. Claire went in with her. She sat down and put the telegram on a small table. She repeated "What a terrible thing" several times. Then she said, "To think of dear Lucy, who loved her so much . . . And of that little girl." And, after a pause, she added, "Also her poor mother—"

Claire felt as if she were watching a scene in a play. Although she was shaken, and touched by Madame de Langer's grief, she also knew she was a spectator. She thought of the romantically lovely Mrs. Fanshawe, who had been in this room so few nights ago, with the same intense, momentarily excited emotion she'd felt, as a schoolgirl, at the theatre about Phèdre or

Roxane. At the same time she felt ashamed at being merely a spectator of this real woman's death.

Tante Sophie said, "You will excuse me if I go to my room." She rang for Christophe and told him to "serve Mademoiselle Claire."

Tante Sophie had evidently told him the news already, for he was crying, dabbing at his wrinkled pink-lidded eyes with a twist of white-spotted dark handkerchief.

PART II

1

Letter from Lucy Robbins Althorpe to Sophie de Langer.

ELMWOOD,
WIMBLEDON COMMON
MAY 16th

MY DEAREST SOPHIE,

I am ashamed to have been a whole month answering the very dear letter you wrote us after the terrible news. I am afraid I took you at your word and set your letter aside while I answered many others. It has all been harder still to bear, because of the little girl. At her age (she is twelve, not ten as you thought) it seems even more sorrowful than for a younger child, and these last weeks our own grief has been made so much worse by the sight of hers. She has been very good, I think. Quite controlled, most of the time, though the nights have been worst, and the doctor gave her some (mild) tablets for a time. We felt it best she should go back to her daily convent school as soon as the term started again. I had a talk with the principal nun there, who is a very sensible, understanding person, not at all *exaltée*. She said one thing that helped me. When I said I just couldn't resign myself to the cruelty and injustice of this dreadful thing happening, she said she thought that at such times resignation was the very greatest kind of courage, and this brought back my father's training about courage. (Of course he was not a Believer, except in an Ethical Code.) He told us, as children, that courage was like the magic sword Excalibur.

Of course one cannot help dwelling on poor Mary altering her plans, and staying over in Paris until Wednesday, instead of coming on *Tuesday*, as she had arranged, and wondering why she did it. At the time her whole trip seemed to me a little unnecessary, though Chester believes our Doctor Renfrew was right in saying that her nervous condition needed a complete change.

The funeral was at the Brompton Oratory. That was inevitable. Edward Fanshawe came, but I was relieved that the woman he has married did *not*. He looked all to pieces, and one could not help feeling sorry for him. Chester says his weakness of character is due to his dreadful mother. But just the same, one can't forgive it as the root of all Mary's unhappiness. Many friends came. The

priest spoke in a very moving way. He is from this district here and knew Mary well. Quite an elderly man, simple and not one's usual idea of a Catholic priest. A very dear young man called Charles Behrens came also. He has been a comfort to the little girl. He was a friend of poor Mary's and quite devoted to her. Chester persuaded me *not* to take Teresa, though I felt it would be right for her to be there. However, she stayed with Gloria, our devoted little servant, in the garden at Elmwood. Gloria said Teresa never cried all the morning and sat on the rockery steps with my little cairn, Brecky, beside her.

As you know, I have been corresponding with your husband's great-niece, Claire Bardet, and she is to come next week. I feel Mary would have wanted this. And it will make a change for the child to have her in the house.

You ask me in your letter if Camilla had written. No, I had no word from her. Mary used to visit her regularly, and now and again took Teresa. Poor Camilla, one feels this last grief is terribly hard for her too, whatever punishment her former life has deserved.

Dear Sophie, your letter was so full of sympathy and understanding. Yes, Mary was indeed like a daughter to us. Chester keeps up for Teresa's sake and one must go on as one can.

Always your loving and affectionate,
LUCY

P.S. I wonder if you would know who a Count Bertrand d'Anville is? He sent such beautiful flowers.

It was impossible for Lucy Althorpe, who had been and was still Lucy Robbins, not to think of Camilla's life in terms of moral and immoral, ethical and unethical; and so implicitly in terms of reward and punishment.

Not only Lucy's American tendency to simplify moral issues but her personal feeling that characters, like houses, should be tidy made her intolerant.

She not only disliked the disorder, but her New England heritage of unrelenting judgment (although tempered by her natural sweetness which often caused a troubled conflict between affection and condemnation)

eliminated, as it were, certain colours from her view of character and behaviour. Scarlet and crimson seeming black and flames the grey of its own cinders.

For instance the scarlet in Camilla. The fire in Camilla that Lucy never understood; because she had never really seen it. Camilla's leap and glow, her need to shine and dance and crackle, to consume and be consumed, and see the sky burn in the rose-red light of her own consuming—When they were young, Lucy had felt Camilla's warmth; and loved, and needed it. But later she forgot the warmth, and only remembered the fire, grey as its own ashes. And though grieved and sad, considered its "punishment" as a violence from Heaven. Or, rather, as Lucy's idiom would put it, as the Course-of-Things.

The Course-of-Things; because Camilla had had, to Lucy's knowledge, a lover, who was a Russian-Composer. The long-after effects of a Russian-Composer being Mary's death.

To Lucy Camilla's suffering was "punishment." She was incapable of perceiving that it wasn't the *affaire* with a Russian-Composer (not, as Lucy rightly supposed, the only one) nor even the Russian himself—whose brown, amusing, sardonic face had, long since, become for Camilla merely another symbol of that always so excitingly broken promise which is any love affair—neither the man nor the affair which had started a rift between Camilla and her own soul.

A rift irreparable by punishment.

But reparable, conceivably, by suffering.

But not by suffering as Lucy saw it.

2

Woodley and Ames occupied a narrow eighteenth-century brick house in Bloomsbury Street. The doors and window frames were painted cream; a sign, hung on a wrought-iron bracket between the two windows of the first floor, displayed a black beaver on a scarlet background.

Mr. Horace Woodley's room was on the first floor, facing the street. Mr. Ames's was the one above it. Charles had the small room on the first floor at the back of Mr. Woodley's. It looked onto the garden, a dank, paved, brick-walled rectangle, the sooted trunk of a lime tree rising from one corner, and a neat flower bed at the far end where the two typists had begun to grow herbs, inspired by *Your Own Herb Garden* which Woodley and Ames

published in their "Your Own" series. Charles's room was small, half filled by his roll-top desk. It was sombre in winter, except when the late afternoon sun poked in a chilly finger and withdrew it again into a muff of clouds; but now, in early summer, when the lime tree was in leaf, the scent of its blossoms came in through the open window, and by three o'clock a long rectangle of sunlight marked the brown Wilton carpet, its furthest edge touching the claw feet of Charles's chair, and his left foot in its shabby brown shoe, polished so painstakingly by his "daily," Miss Townshend.

He was slowly answering a letter in Swedish, on the recurrent subject of paper. Horace Woodley had sent him in the letter and data for reply, with a facetious footnote in his quavering little script: "Tell the Swedes it's our Turn-ip." While he was typing George Ames came in, on his way downstairs, to ask Charles to a cocktail party at his flat in Weymouth Street, on June third. Charles said, untruly, that he would love to come. Ames said:

"You haven't been looking at all fit these last weeks, Charles. Why don't you knock off a bit earlier and get a swim or a game of squash? You work too hard. If you're not careful you'll knock yourself up."

"I'm all right, really."

"You don't look it. But I daresay it's the heat these last few days. Why don't you come down to us next week end? We've got a pool now, and you might like some tennis."

"—thank you, awfully, only . . ."

George Ames stood in the middle of the little room, cheerily resilient, as if his profession were to demonstrate that the slings and arrows of fortune could be bounced off. His teeth glinted in his square ruddy face, and his blue eyes twinkled between their upper and lower lids, as he repeated that a week end at Wotanhangar would "set him up."

"Never been down, have you? It's rather a jolly situation. I believe the name used to be *Wotanhangar*—Anglo-Saxon for 'Wotan's shed' which shows how old the property itself must be." He added, "Incidentally, we're next door to old Violet Fanshawe's place. You know the Fanshawes, don't you? I saw in *The Times* you were at the Requiem for her daughter-in-law, that poor girl who was killed in the plane accident. She was Eddie Fanshawe's first wife, of course, but he's been married to Number Two ever since we've been settled down there."

Charles said he was afraid he had to spend his week ends with his parents just now, as his mother hadn't been very well.

Ames at once began to sympathise about Charles's mother and added, taking a reflective pull at his cigar, that there was something really awfully sad about getting older. Then he said he must be going, as he had got to go to the Dorchester to have tea with Marlene Sachs, the American literary agent. Did Charles know her? She was rather good value. Charles would see her at the cocktail party on the third anyway—in fact there were quite a lot of interesting people coming.

The fragrance of his cigar remained. A certain junior partner in another publishing house, whom Charles had got to know in Occupied Germany, had said that "one couldn't help suspecting that George Ames had a heart of chromium."

Charles took up his dictionary to find the Swedish word for "licensee." His telephone bell rang.

"Charles, dear?"

It was Mrs. Althorpe. She wondered if, as he was coming out to Elmwood this evening anyway, he would call for Teresa at school. That would mean, of course, his leaving a little early? Charles said he could do that, but that as he hadn't a car, they'd have to come by underground and bus. Anyway he'd like to bring her.

It would be only too easy to borrow Ames's car. Charles ran downstairs after him. He said he would go straight to the Dorchester and send the car back to fetch Charles, and that he wouldn't want the car himself until after dinner. Where did Charles want to go to? Wimbledon Common! Some nice houses out there. He'd considered buying a house there himself, but Maureen, his wife, had wanted real country.

Charles waited, his back to the Notice Board. A tide of little girls, and a flotsam and jetsam of very small boys, seethed about two black rock-firm nuns. In a shadowy recess of the hall, opposite Charles, were dim waiting figures of mothers, or occasional grey nannies, who hooked some child from the green shoal, and bore it off through the open door into the mews outside.

Mother Veronica glanced across the green berets at the tall young man with a bony face and untidy brown hair and told Mother Dominic to go and ask him whom he was waiting for.

Mother Dominic dimpled. "Mother Veronica wanted to know if you were waiting for one of the children."

"Teresa Fanshawe."

"I'll fetch her."

She went down a vista of polished parquet, vanished, and reappeared escorting Teresa.

Charles watched her coming. She looked leggy because she'd got so thin. Her small face was "peaky," and made paler by the green cotton frock. He was startled. She didn't look like Mary for she had Edward's fairness. Yet she had a look, an effect, most strangely like; and her expression, when it lighted at the sight of him, held that festal quality, that was joy as much as beauty.

When she ran to him, her words said what her expression said: "I'm glad it's you." Then she beckoned to a little girl with red hair who joined them. She explained it was Jane Allen who was always "fetched" with her. The two little girls walked to the car beside him, and Charles told Teresa it had been lent to him. She said: "It's the same make as Daddy's. Only his is a coupé, not a saloon. What a pity it isn't your own. Shall we sit each side of you?"

"Please, a *little* seat." Jane sat her plump compact body on one of the folding seats. She glanced at Charles shyly and stubbornly from a mask of freckles. Teresa sat beside him; out of politeness, he felt, for he was sure she was tempted by the other "little seat." As they drove through the park Jane took her handkerchief very carefully out of the breast pocket of her blazer. It was wrapped round something. Teresa said: "Please excuse Jane's mouse."

It was a black mouse. Jane didn't speak at all, but kept trying to make its minute evasive eyes look out through the side window at the view. She held it firmly, looking down at it with stolid tenderness. Teresa said its name was Philip Neri.

When they got to Wimbledon Common, near the War Memorial, Teresa said they always "dropped Jane first." Jane re-wrapped the mouse and put it back in her pocket, and they left her in the gravel drive of a beige rough-cast house with ivy-bearded bay windows. Charles glimpsed the dining room through one of these windows and could see that it would smell like old biscuits.

As they were driving across the common, Teresa exclaimed with distress that the mouse had had a "slight misfortune," using Lucy Althorpe's phrase. Charles said they could clean up before they sent the car back. But they both

forgot to, because Chester Althorpe, in a Panama hat and carrying a Malacca stick, met them just outside Elmwood gate.

As Charles watched the handsome old man bend downward stiffly for Teresa's kiss, he thought of one of Teresa's past summaries: that "Cousin Lucy was the most good, and Cousin Chester the most kind, person she knew"; with a characteristic addition that "she didn't mean that the former wasn't kind or the latter not good" and a further corollary that "of course, Mummie didn't count, because one didn't think of one's mother as good or bad—one just loved her!"

Since Mary's death everything that normally seemed real to Charles felt unreal. His routine, his work, his friends, his visits to his parents borrowed his own sensation of being hollow and senseless. His unhappiness was worse from being necessarily secret and tormented by remorse. And it all seemed hopeless to him.

Only the simplicity of the child's grief had stayed real; and the Althorpes —who had seemed to Charles formerly to have been just another two of Mary's "darling people" that sprang up under her footsteps, rosy with dearness and suspect with "niceness"—had become actual through their kindness to him.

Now, strolling back towards the house with Mr. Althorpe, Teresa between them, Charles felt grateful for a kindliness that could be so comforting.

The old gentleman, courteous and mildly conversational, had simply assumed Charles's devotedness (an Althorpe word) to Mary, and during these last weeks he had tacitly shared with Charles his own unhappiness, "backed-up" by his wife's strong feeling that, since Charles was "doing so much for the little girl" the least thing they could do was to offer him the sternly gentle sort of love for which Lucy Althorpe's name was "approval."

3

Pamela Fanshawe sat in the loggia of Little Fairings knitting lime-yellow wool and reading the *Daily Mirror*. She paused now and then to laugh at her retriever puppy when it gnawed at the bottom of her grey velveteen slacks. The new Austrian girl came out and asked her if Captain Fanshawe would be back for lunch? Pamela nodded, and then smiled at the girl to make her

feel less homesick. For some inexplicable reason she assumed that all foreign girls were homesick.

Edward had stayed away last night with his mother. He always came back "nervy" and needing to be cheered up. And he had been worse lately because his mother had this notion now that he ought to get the little girl, Teresa, back to live with him.

Pamela decided to try and make up a foursome with the Bensons at St. George's Hill this afternoon. That might take Edward out of himself.

Pamela tried to like Edward's mother although the latter treated her, as she had Mary, sometimes with false sweetness, sometimes acidly. Pamela supposed all mothers disliked their son's wives, especially if, like Violet Fanshawe—whose husband had left her—they had too much time to dote on their only son. Lady Fanshawe was more amiable to Pamela when she was disparaging Mary.

Edward came through the drawing room door, behind Pamela. He put down a basket of apples beside her, and then flung himself back into one of the deck chairs.

She asked: "What are those, darling?"

"Mother sent them to you."

"How *very* nice of her. Let me get you a drink, sweetie-pie?"

"Thanks."

He lay back, morosely, and took the whiskey and soda, glancing up at her without interest. Pamela could feel that he was still under his mother's influence. She knew that it always took several hours before he became himself again. She sat down and took up her knitting. The puppy brought a stick and she threw it out onto the lawn for him. She reflected that there was a lunch Edward liked. Then, if just *after* lunch she were to telephone to the Bensons . . .

"How's your mother, sweet?"

"Not too good."

"Oh dear . . ."

He became morose again, sipping his whiskey. Watching him, Pamela thought, as she often did, and always with the same proprietary pleasure, what an attractive man he was! That wonderful tan, and such blue eyes, and wonderful physique.

After a long pause he said:

"Mummie started this business about the child again. She says I must get her. She says I ought to be bringing her up. Not that I *don't* want to, as you *know*, darling, but of course, as I was decent enough to let Mary divorce me, Teresa just was given to Mary by the Court, and I can't see why things can't be left like that."

"I must say, honey, you couldn't have divorced her if you'd wanted to!"

"*Well* . . . you know what Mother says! That I jolly well could have!"

Pamela put down her knitting.

"Sweetie, I *just* don't believe that, and no one else would, whatever your mother says! No one in their senses could imagine Mary having an affair. After all, I *did* know her pretty well while she lived here! And when you think how she never even flirted—and—well . . ." Pamela hesitated.

"Well, what?" His glance was perturbed. Under his moustache his mouth expressed the disconsolate annoyance of a little boy; perhaps from having been treated as a little boy for the last twenty-four hours.

"Well, you know what you told me about her being 'cold'!"

He said shortly: "She wasn't at first."

"And, anyway, I don't *really* see why your mother bothers about all this. She's always so fussed about money anyway; and it means you'd have to pay everything for Teresa."

"Actually no. There's a trust fund for Teresa that her other grandmother made (Mary's mother—Camilla Graham) before she popped into that convent. And at twenty-one Teresa gets the capital of that. And at eighteen she gets Mary's own money as well. Not that that amounts to much; still . . ."

Pamela didn't say that she understood, now, why Violet Fanshawe had begun this particular campaign of tears, and sarcasm, and self-pity and obstinacy.

"Just the same, Eddie darling, I don't see how you *can* do anything! The divorce fixed it all. And poor Mary's death doesn't alter what the Court arranged, I'm sure!"

Edward got up, and went indoors, and fetched himself another whiskey. Already his manner was less tense and absent. He put his hand on Pamela's shoulder and then on the nape of her neck under her curled up floss hair.

"You see, Pam, what Mother thinks is that what she calls 'moral pressure' would do the trick! With my worthy Althorpe cousins, I mean."

"Just what *is* moral pressure?" She glanced up at him, her upper lip showing the edge of her very white teeth, her gaze affectionate and puzzled. Her little stupidities were as sensually attractive to him as her voice.

He said: "I suppose it means threatening people with facts, instead of using actual force."

"But that sounds like *blackmail*, Edward!"

"Nonsense. If you knew any law you'd know it's completely different. Come here and let me kiss you."

"—but I *still* don't see—"

"Well, anyway, don't you bother yourself about all that, Pam. Generally speaking the Althorpes, and all the people who doted on poor Mary, believed she was an absolute saint! Mummie's certain she wasn't! And so am I, after several odd facts Mummie's been telling me! And she says the *one* thing a woman like Lucy Althorpe wouldn't stand for would be Teresa's being told anything against her mother. Of course at present the Althorpes suppose there's nothing to be told! But once one had convinced them there was, she'd let us have Teresa, on condition we were to keep up the deception."

"What *deception*?"

"Why, that Mary was as pure as driven snow!"

"I see—" Pamela returned his kiss absently. "But how could the Althorpes be sure that you and your mother would keep this promise?"

The whiskey was now making Edward kindly in mood and imprecise in thought. His attempt now to focus this possible moral obligation to the Althorpes was like the squinting and fumbling of a puppy with a piece of thistledown. He suggested that anyway people like the Althorpes always did believe in other people's promises.

"Perhaps . . ."

Pamela's natural warmth of heart made her think generously, although laziness, or sensuality, sometimes made her behaviour selfish. Also a certain candour (which preserved her from the small-minded malice and acquisitiveness of most of the women in her world) made her, quite simply, shocked by behaviour that she recognised as "mean." On the other hand her thematic success with men was just as much due to her tact as to her full-

bodied prettiness and husky voice; and it was this tact that prevented her saying now what she felt about another of her mother-in-law's "goings-on." Instead she produced exactly the smile of complaisance that Edward needed to soothe his conscience.

"Anyway, sweetie, I believe your Teresa might be *happier* with you! I know I'd jolly well do my best not to be a wicked step-mother. We could do up her old nursery with one of those pretty rosebud wallpapers!"

As she spoke she thought affectionately of Teresa, remembering her as a dear little girl in pink, or blue, cotton frocks at the time when Mary and Eddie first came to live at Little Fairings, and she herself had just left Winkie Corrigan to marry Harold Dunn.

4

At the Gare St. Lazare Philippe continued to protest. Even when he had put her valise in the rack above her seat, and she came down, once more, onto the platform, he reasoned with her.

"—if it were only for two months, to learn English, or get experience, I would say 'go'! But you put some completely idiotic exalted note of 'duty' into this affair. You've managed to create a sort of 'grail' for yourself out of this child, and I don't know *what*, out of this dead woman! Even if she was beautiful! Even though your aunt's old butler wept for her, and that your aunt herself shares your idea that you are *obliged* to go, what is life dictated by old aunts, and lachrymose butlers, and *mirages* that take the form of little English orphans? You talk about being *needed*, Claire! If you want to be needed you know very *well*—But give me your hand, Claire. Take off those gloves—"

"Philippe . . . please."

"You don't love anyone else . . . I believe that! And it's that that's wrong with you! That you *don't* love. You don't feel! You don't care!"

"But Philippe, you know that I'm fond of you . . ."

"Yes. I know this *friendship* you go on offering. All cold-blooded women offer that. It's their little 'grimace' at the sight of desire. But you haven't the least real comprehension. You don't imagine what I feel, you can't imagine what it's like when I can't sleep, or work, or think . . ."

"Philippe . . ."

She felt the grossness of her equanimity. Looking into his unhappy face (they were the same height, both tall, both broad-shouldered) she felt only too conscious of the vulgar, stupid safety of her feelings in comparison with his despair. She felt herself niggard in the face of his extravagance.

He looked sick, fierce and haggard. He repeated one of his eternal little questions:

"Do I displease you physically?"

"No."

"You always say that. Then, perhaps, all the same, there *is* another man! . . . That man you worked for last winter?"

"You know very *well* . . ."

People hurried up the platform, porters shouted, climbed up into the train. Some other travellers came down from the train to buy newspapers, books, sandwiches.

He asked one of his other constant questions:

"I bore you?"

"But *no* . . . *That*, at least . . ."

". . . I'll make you love me. I shall come to London. I shall come the moment the holidays begin . . . I don't like you in this *tailleur* . . ."

"It doesn't suit me?"

"On the contrary, you look ravishing. *Much* too much so. But you are already half English in it and altogether smug, and conventional. Your hair is tidy. Your gloves are new. Your shoes have high heels. Even your complexion is too made up, like English girls. I prefer your trousers, and big shoes, and your hair as if a lover had disordered it . . . and no lipstick as if . . ."

"D'you imagine I want to arrive at Madame Althorpe's straight from the Boulevard St. Germain! But listen, Philippe, I'll write to you."

"I don't want your letters, once you've gone. Which'll be in two minutes. I prefer to forget you. I don't want the routine scribblings about how 'nice' English people really are and how little they have to eat. And that you have already met an English boy whose freckles, and silences, have 'something about them all the same . . .'"

Claire climbed onto the train. She stood looking down at him from the corridor window. As the train moved, her imagination took a distinct and complete impression of him: his old grey suit, his blue shirt open at the neck, his shabby sandals, his shoulders hunched, his hands in his pockets. His thin, high cheekboned face, with the stubby nose, black eyes, brown hair *en brosse*, stamped itself finally on her imagination, while his look followed her, its pain tempered with irony. She saw the drab darkening perspectives of the *quai*, the bulky women waving small hands, the blue blouses of the porters as she was carried from the station's turbulence and clamour. And even when the crowd blurred, she could still see him, with a curious distinctiveness, hunched and immobile, and his still visibly angry deprecation.

When they were out of sight she pulled her *briquet* out of her bag and lit a cigarette.

5

It was part of Madame d'Anville's arrangements for that morning to leave her husband at the corner of the Rue de la Boëtie, after which she would go on to visit a cousin in the Avenue Foch, then drive out to St. Germain to lunch with the Brissacs, then return in time for her afternoon appointments which included a visit to her old governess at Passy, an appointment with her hairdresser, and a meeting, at half-past five, of the committee of one of her *Oeuvres de Charité*.

Bertrand got out of the car and stood on the pavement, but still holding its door open and leaning into the car to confirm, exactly, their arrangements for the evening.

"You will call for me this evening at the Bourgogne?" Madame d'Anville spent five days of every second week at this hotel, considering that the *appartement* in the Place des Vosges was "impossible" from the point of view of convenience, neither central, nor an agreeable quarter for the two little girls when she occasionally brought them to Paris.

". . . We must go to the Célignys' punctually. Annie tells me it is well worth arriving in time for this new play we're going to."

Everything about Bérénice d'Anville was seasoned with self-confidence. Her voice was ripe and hard, her words rapid. Her handsome round face seemed to be set on the prow of her broad-bottomed little body with its effect of being fitted out in every detail for sober festivity. She made an

impression of being compact, trim, and unsinkable; and had the secondary beauty of anything perfectly adapted to its own needs.

Bertrand bent and kissed her hand. Its honey-brown suede glove matched her hair. She smiled. Her dark red lips made her teeth seem so white as to echo her small hat. If her eyes didn't match her black dress it was simply that they were like satin and her dress was crêpe.

"Until tonight, then, my dear—"

An Englishwoman passing on the pavement noticed the little flourish of devotion and the quick glance with its automatic tribute of admiration, with which he stepped back, shut the door of the car and stood while she drove off, and compared it in her mind with an English husband's manner of parting with his wife as if he were, quite kindly, shaking off an undesirable acquaintance.

When her car had gone he turned and began to walk along the Rue La Boëtie . . . He had no plan beyond using up the rest of the morning. He regretted that Bérénice hadn't brought the little girls to Paris this week. He would have liked to take them to the *Chapeau de Paille d'Italie* which was being given at the *Français*. He stopped to examine a Boudin in a dealer's window, then went on, anxious to evade an imminent mood of depression.

He went into Bernstein's to see if they had anything remarkable to show him. Old Bernstein was in the small gallery at the back, talking to an American woman. In this front room they were still exhibiting the Fuselis. The son came out of the office, evidently on his way out, but stopped when he saw Bertrand.

"Ah, Monsieur d'Anville!"

They conversed. Young Bernstein's beaky, black-eyed bird head cocked on one side when he listened; while d'Anville's crest of bright hair, raised fair eyebrows, sapphire eyes under deeply convex lids, and the hunch of his shoulders as he leaned both hands, gloves and hat in hand, on his Malacca stick, gave him the air of a courtly, arrogant, heraldic bird, of a type recognisable since the Middle Ages in the history of pattern, and constantly reappearing, saturnine and fantastic, in stone, in lead, in wood, in embroideries.

Young Bernstein said that he had, incidentally, a rather curious thing to tell him. Then he stopped and coloured. Perhaps, he said, he was indiscreet, but, in fact, they *had* feared, that possibly . . . However, as there had been no enquiries . . . He lowered his voice as a murmuring, thickly perfumed trio of

women came in, and began standing about, looking at the Fuselis, and exclaiming in a tone of voice they shared as the legendary Graeae shared an eye. In fact, young Bernstein now said in a lowered voice, what had happened was that "a woman" ("a woman-of-the-people," he said, his tone depriving her of any outline except that of her regrettable income-group) had come in, bringing that little ivory Madonna that they had sold to Monsieur d'Anville only three months before! In April to be exact . . . Of course they had questioned her as to where she got it before buying it, and so on; and she said it had been given her by an Abbé Meudon. They had then felt it advisable to refer to him, this Abbé. So they had written to him, and he had replied confirming the woman's statement.

"Then you bought it back from her?"

"Yes."

"But how did she think of bringing it here?"

"It seems the people she works for suggested it. She's evidently a sort of dairy servant."

"She must have needed money badly to sell a statue of Our Lady given her by a priest!"

"No doubt. She was, of course, astounded by the sum we paid her. She was going straight from here to some bazaar of '*bondieuserie*' in the Saint Sulpice quarter, to buy herself another! Which she'll consider, of course, much prettier!"

"It's here then?"

Young Bernstein asked if he wanted to buy it *again*?

He looked curiously at his client, for whom he always felt an uneasy admiration.

"No—in any case, I'm not sure . . . I'll let you know . . ."

Out in the street, taking a direction without choosing it, Bertrand remembered Mary saying that she was going to see an Abbé Meudon that evening.

She had made that visit her excuse for not being able to dine with him, and he had made a casual pretence of believing it. She had made it during the afternoon while he was walking with her in the Bois. And it was after that, when he was sitting beside her, looking across the lake, that he'd felt

that emotion whose pain and beauty he remembered now, so that, for a moment, he slowed his pace up the street, caught by the pain.

It had been this emotion that had gradually invaded their whole relationship.

At its beginning there had been a gaiety and simplicity that he'd never known in any *affaire*. For Mary Fanshawe had brought a dowry of truth to what he'd supposed simply another of those adventures to which women usually bring coquetry and pretence. (Even those women honest and unpretentious in marriage tend to furnish illicit love with a whole vanload of trumpery vanities and gimcrack allurements.) And though he was, as part of his epicene character, abnormally sensitive to understand, he had at first misjudged this "realness," simply as he might have doubted the too wonderful authenticity of a drawing or *bibelot* got cheap.

He'd met her at a small luncheon party given by some French friends of his in London in 1947. He'd been immediately interested by her beauty; the full face, so delicately oval, the obstinate profile with its short upper lip and humorous eyelids. Her husband, called by everyone "Eddie," had been there too. Bertrand had judged him to be a polo-playing "regular army" Englishman, whose long-limbed blue-eyed good looks had made him, comprehensibly, a little spoiled, and had been surprised, by her telling him that her husband was "in the City." She'd told him, too, that they were living in Norfolk but were buying a house nearer London. D'Anville had asked her if she hunted or gardened or played golf, and she'd asked him if he imagined that Englishwomen had to choose one of those three things? And how did his wife spend her time in the country? He'd replied that, like most Latin women, she enjoyed domestic administration, and the sense of power that went with it. At the end of that luncheon he asked her if she ever came to France, and she answered "whenever she could," and he'd begged her to let him know when she next came, giving elaborate instructions as to how she might reach him.

But he didn't expect her to. He was astonished—and didn't remember at first who she was—when, more than a year later, she'd telephoned to say she was in Paris. She'd stayed in Paris three days, and dined twice with him. He liked her lightness of mind, and something a little desperately irresponsible and excitable about her, that he perceived to be a state of imagination, caused perhaps by a need of escape. What he'd also deduced, gradually, was that she didn't so much want escape, as did so many women, from her husband, but from her own ashamed and yet angry inability to love him.

(Later his comprehension assembled a context round her chance remark that "you could go on loving a *bad* person but not a cold one.")

As for his own side of the *affaire*, he'd realised that she knew nothing about him, except what he told her. He asked her once if she knew his "reputation," and she'd answered that she "thought reputations were made by the devil" anyway.

She went away after three days but she came back again that autumn, and seemed unastonished when he proposed they should stay together at Fontainebleau. Her eyes, so exactly like Renan's "*vertes fontaines*," had glimmered with happy pleasure, as if he'd suggested a picnic. This made him suppose she often had love affairs. On the other hand her insistence that the whole plan was "deliciously unreal" and certain undertones in her gaiety made him hazard another explanation for her being "facile." Also, in the measure that his sense of the exquisite and curious transferred itself to his understanding of her (for he'd begun to love her, though without knowing it), he perceived that one of the things she "couldn't be" was facile; and that she did, or thought, everything vehemently and with passion. On the surface she was sweet and often vague, but he came, in the end, to realise that the sweetness overlay that same profound despair of perfection that had caused him, in his own disappointment of splendour, and defeat in happiness, to seize every and any kind of brutally sensual and exciting compensation.

Last October he'd asked her if she realised that, for him, their relation had become "real happiness"?

She was lying beside him. It was early morning in their hotel room at Fontainebleau. The shutters and windows were open to the chill misty brilliance of the morning. Sounds came up from below the window, doors below were creaked and banged open, shutters rattled and fastened back; heavy footsteps went to and fro on the stone *terrasse*; a man's brisk voice gave orders, a woman servant shrilled an answer; steps crunched the gravel, and there was the swishing of a broom sweeping leaves. He'd seen that Mary was disquieted by what he'd said. How well he knew her by then! He saw her suddenly veil her thoughts by a sort of wary gentleness. Her glance suddenly became too short-sighted to see him, her voice lost its pigeon notes, and had the clipped high tones of a little boy. She turned away the gaze that couldn't focus on him, to look straight out through the window, opposite the end of the bed, at the red-gold beech trees. She said, in French, that he mustn't "count on her," with an air of indifferent amiability suitable to excusing an absence from a cocktail party. He'd answered with corresponding frivolity that "One didn't, naturally, count on anyone for

happiness—" and was grateful to the *valet de chambre* for coming in, just then, with their coffee. For he'd too nearly committed the solecism of taking her in his arms to tell her precisely those things of which there was no question between them; simple, banal, unpermissible things, such as his longing to protect her, his desire to be with her always.

Those moments of unsaid violent tenderness had remained, and with them, preserved within his memory, that hotel room, embalmed by the fragrance of dead leaves in the garden below the windows.

He'd become aware of those moments renewed while he watched her, as they sat by the lake that afternoon in the Bois. This time the pain had been like a lens through which he saw her state of heart. So that when she began to explain that she "couldn't dine with him this evening," he knew perfectly well that it wasn't, really, because she was going to see this Abbé, but because, ever since last autumn, her half-real feeling for him had been changed by a more real feeling for someone else. Her very profile was a statement of this. Her thoughts were too visibly fixed on the horizons of a passion. She said, "Will you *forgive* me? About this evening?" A swan had passed them as she said, "You've been so kind . . . And that lovely little Our Lady . . . Dear Bertrand," she'd said, as if he were an old friend.

Nothing had been as bitter to him as her contrition for being indifferent; or more painful than her blindness to all the little things they usually shared; her new love had emptied her even of their common memories. Even the tears in her eyes seeped from the unshed tears, dedicated to her new passion.

As they left the lake he talked to her—about some alterations he was making in his house in the country. That had done as well as anything else to be, hardly, listened to. He drove her back to her hotel; and, as their taxi drove down the Champs Elysées, she'd "come round," like someone from an anaesthetic, and asked him not to think her "ungrateful." "For what?" he asked. And she said, "For only staying in Paris such a short time," and he answered that he understood very well how difficult "arrangements" always were! They crossed the Place de la Concorde, in whose spaces, it seemed to him, the unforgettable sentences of his life always had to be spoken. For it was here his English nurse had told him that there were "no mermaids" in the fountains; here his mother, outside the Orangerie, had confided to him, when he was seventeen, that her life, that he'd always supposed so lovely and interesting as herself, was unhappy; over there, by the bridge, a Sicilian with too much charm had explained her preference for an American actor.

As they drove past the gate of the Tuileries Mary had said:

"How comforting, darling, that we've never pretended it was anything but delicious fun!"

He knew now, stopping at the Rond-Point, sitting down at a table to order an *apéritif*, sitting here alone in the sunshine, how real it had been.

6

Two days after Charles's evening with Teresa and the Althorpes, George Ames came in to see Charles in his room at Woodley and Ames, and repeat his invitation for the next week end, or "the one after?"

Charles could have resisted Ames's good nature, even to not feeling committed by having borrowed Ames's car. But from an absurd fear that the car had returned to Ames smelling of mouse he found himself saying, "Yes, I should simply love to come," as though this acceptance were the penance stipulated for this particular offence. George said "Splendid" and that his wife would send Charles a card with directions for "driving down." Georges Ames never supposed that any man whom he assumed from signs known to him to be his social equal didn't own a car. The English Revolution was one of the many things Ames didn't believe because he hadn't seen.

A few days later Charles got a large beige postcard showing a prettyfied map, with tiny facetious drawings on it, directing motorists to "Wotanhangar." He telephoned to Mrs. Ames and explained that he would be coming, by train, after lunch on Saturday.

"Wonderful!" Maureen Ames answered, in her tremulous, amiable voice.

He was met at Ascot station by George Ames in the very "mouse" car. George was driving. He told Charles to get in beside him. While Charles was putting his suitcase in the back he bent and sniffed the floor and wondered if he had let himself in for this, certainly awful, visit for no reason.

Ames looked florid in a yellow turtle-necked sweater. He was in his usual high spirits. His success as a publisher was supposed to be partly due to his imposing his own standard of cheerfulness on the Woodley and Ames "list." ("*That* novel," he would object, "isn't going to leave anyone feeling happier.") While he drove he told Charles that his "fellow-guests" consisted of old Harry Binding, the M.P. and his wife, who was "an extremely good sort" and an American girl, who had just had a book published in America. Although he (Ames) hadn't read it he doubted if it were "their" (that is,

Woodley and Ames's) sort of book. Charles asked what her name was. Ames said it was Katrina Althorpe, but he couldn't remember the title of her book.

Charles got out to open a wrought-iron gate for him. Then they drove up, between neatly mowed lawns encrusted with fancifully shaped rose beds, to a house that looked like several zebras huddled together under successive waves of thatch. The oak front door was studded with nails and led up to by a semi-circular brick step. The door lintel had "Manners Makyth Man" carved in it in Gothic lettering. When Ames saw Charles reading this he said, "The Winchester motto, you know! It'll appeal to *you*, being a Wykehamist."

They went through the house. It was afforested inside with dark beams and a tortuous oak staircase, and was redolent of the *pot-pourri* Mrs. Ames got from Fortnum and Mason. Out on the further side they emerged into a complete outfit of crazy-paving, herbaceous borders, sunk garden with goldfish pond, rose garden with sundial, and a pergola of pink and red rambler roses. Beyond the pergola was the white bench inscribed with "The kiss of the sun for pardon," and set beside the green hard tennis courts. Mrs. Ames came forward, smiling and said, nervously and kindly: "Wonderful you've come."

She introduced Charles to the Bindings, who were in deck chairs. She again said to Charles: "Wonderful you've come. Don't you think it is *rather* heavenly?" She had an acquired habit of underlining insignificant words. Humble herself, and not often in good spirits, she was anxious that her manner, a faltering echo of her husband's blaring good nature, should conceal her lack of cleverness, and counted on the good food and wine she worked hard to provide, to beguile the "interesting people" assembled by her husband. She spent time and energy and great anxiety, as well as Ames's largely supplied money, on these week ends at Wotanhangar which tired and subconsciously bored her as much as the cocktail parties and lunches and dinners George liked to have at the London flat in Weymouth Street. Her own occasions for enjoyment were her small son's holidays, her visits to him at school, and an occasional day's shopping with one or other of the girl-friends she had worked with at the War Office.

"Katrina Althorpe's *just* gone in to change for tennis," she said to Charles. "Would you like to play?"

Harry Binding was getting out of his deck chair with muscular deliberation. Once standing he announced with unction that he was thinking of having a set, or "perhaps even two," before tea. And "How good, by the

way, was Miss Althorpe?" Confident, vigorous, dapper, and with gifts of rhetoric and self-deception, Harry Binding represented his own Conservative interests.

Mrs. Ames answered that she was sure that Katrina Althorpe was certainly "awfully good." Althea Binding, limber in a conventional tennis dress that, fifty years before, would have announced her to be doing a comic impersonation of a baby boy, said that if "Mr. Behrens" would buck up and change they could have a four! "Unless," she added, "that wrist of yours is all right again, George, and *you* can play?"

"Corkscrew wrist, eh, George?" chaffed Harry Binding, and waited for the laugh. His wife got up. She stood, now, lean and gawkily self-satisfied beside him, swinging her racquet, her saxon-blue eyes investigating Charles from under her eye-shade with an appraising doltish slyness.

"How good are you?" she barked.

"Not very, I'm afraid."

He followed Mrs. Ames back to the house and up to his room. On their way upstairs they met Katrina Althorpe and Charles remembered that it was she who had driven him back from Mary and Edward's house nearly two years ago.

During the first set Charles had Althea Binding as his partner. She seemed so mummified within her type, with her fresh predatory features and quite unconsciously bad manners, that he found it difficult not to dislike her. Her boyish, uncouth gestures, and such idioms as "I say, that was a rotten shot" didn't obscure her female smugness. When she and Charles had been beaten by her husband and Katrina Althorpe, she said she was afraid she was in "jolly poor form," and sprawled down on the bench and fumbled a powder compact out of a pocket of her red corduroy jacket that she'd flung down.

Katrina Althorpe asked Charles if he remembered their drive. He said he did, of course. He asked her if she was still living in London, and she said that she was staying in comfortable, ugly rooms just behind Harrods.

Charles at once felt natural with her, because of her "naturalness," which was her most apparent characteristic. It gave her grace, and made her elegance of dress appear simple. Her face with its soft black brows, hazel eyes and wide mouth was pleasing. He thought she must be about twenty-seven. He thought that the others, the Ameses and the Bindings, seemed

especially blatant in comparison. Their voices were too loud, and their faces boring because of their stereotyped thoughts.

Katrina didn't mention Mary Fanshawe. After tea George Ames announced that Lady Fanshawe was coming to dinner, and at that moment Katrina quite evidently refrained from referring to Mary and Edward in this connection. Charles felt intensely grateful to her for this.

He came down early for dinner and found her alone. He asked her about her book. She told him it was a collection she'd made of all sorts of episodes and happenings remembered by the old people of her large American family of which one side was from South Carolina and the other ("Uncle Chester's side") New England. She said it had been a fascinating book to "make," because her aunts and uncles and grandparents on both sides were long-lived and long-memoried, and many of them had kept old diaries and letters. She told him that her great-grandmother, whom she could just remember, had been a Southerner married to a New Yorker, and during the Civil War, when her brother had been killed fighting with the South, had had a visit of sympathy from Abraham Lincoln. She added she was soon going to stay in the country in France, to work on a second volume.

They talked about France. She said she thought "the individual" there still tended to cultivate his own garden instead of accepting phony ideals of mass-happiness. And that "*mon verre n'est pas grand, mais je bois dans mon verre*" explained the best sort of French common sense. She added that there was this type of good life going on being lived in pockets of America, that some of her relations in Massachusetts still had the highly civilised, leisured ways of a hundred years ago.

Charles felt that Katrina's voice was agreeable to listen to. It rather reminded him of Lucy Althorpe's; prettily lilting but very distinct and precise in pronunciation.

George Ames came in and began mixing cocktails. Then the others came down. Then Lady Fanshawe arrived.

Katrina asked Charles if that was, in fact, Edward Fanshawe's mother.

"Does that surprise you?"

She said: "No, not at all. I've often heard about her." She added that she'd met Edward's father who was a "perfect dear." She said his eldest sister had blonde thick hair like Edward's, and Edward's long legs, and easy-going smile, and the same patent charm.

They both watched Lady Fanshawe talking with over-animation to Harry Binding, who was preening himself and ruffling his mind. She was small but conveyed an effect of vigour. Her tortoiseshell-coloured hair was waved about a face whose aesthetic fault was its heaviness of jaw. By its structure, and by a certain glib vulgarity of expression, her face seemed designed to be florid. But her mannered blinking, and the steely effusiveness of her glances, had the unexpected setting of a fine-grained white skin. Her black dress was fitted, with a seal-like effect, to her high bosom and svelte hips and stomach. She had sharp movements and self-conscious, almost simpering turns of her russet head and solid shoulders, and a quantity of small gestures that made a quantity of big jewellery gleam and twinkle. Charles murmured to Katrina Althorpe that he supposed "one told her age by her jewellery."

An Italian, introduced as the Marchese Zelotti had come with her. He was grey-haired and plump, and kept looking about him genially. Mrs. Ames whispered to Katrina Althorpe that he was "one of the richest men in Italy" and that "people said" he was going to marry Lady Fanshawe.

But when the men were in the dining room, after dinner, Harry Binding, confidential because drunk, told Charles that "poor old Vi Fanshawe had tried to hook Zelotti" but was now losing him to "a certain movie star." He added, "Seems that old Vi cooked her goose by letting Zelotti pay her bills, and offering him no *quid pro quo* unless he married her. And, of course, a chap like that isn't going to stand for the old chastity racket."

After dinner another couple called van Deren came in to play bridge. The Bindings played with these two, and Katrina, George Ames, Violet Fanshawe and Zelotti, made up the other four. Charles didn't play. The tables were in the "oak-room." Charles sat on the red brocade Knole sofa that stood at right angles to the stone hooded open fireplace. George Ames pointed out this fireplace to visitors as "big enough to roast an ox." He had had it put in himself.

The latticed doors were open to the garden. Charles went out once. But the beauty of the night made his unhappiness intolerable. He came in again, to the Knole sofa and back numbers of *Country Life*, and occasionally watching the players. When Lady Fanshawe was dummy she came and sat down beside him and began talking. Her eyebrows, plucked thin like antennae in a fashion of her youth, maintained their own effect of doll-like surprise in her massive pastel-tinted face. Charles could feel a bulldozer selfishness in her; and that somehow her silliness wasn't harmless, but an actual mechanism in her destructive progress. While she talked he

remembered that Mary once said her mother-in-law "brought out one's powers of hating!"

She said to Charles: "I've been trying to remember *where* I've seen you! *Now* I remember! It was at my poor little ex-daughter-in-law's funeral! Or was it called—*Requiem?* Last *April*, wasn't it? I knew I'd seen you somewhere before! It's too absurd, isn't it—when one can't remember? Did you *know* poor darling Mary?"

"Not well."

"Oh! I had a sort of idea you did. . . . I was so fond of her, poor darling. Even though I *never* thought she was the right wife for Eddie! . . . And what a tragedy! That plane accident! Those crashes always put one off flying—anyway for a *time*, don't they! And you know, Mr. Behrens, I couldn't help feeling too that if it *was* meant to happen, if *only* it could have been the year before! And spared them both the divorce! All that sordidness and unhappiness—I know because I went through it myself.—Don't bother to look for an ashtray for me . . . I've got one . . . What? What?"

George Ames was calling to her to come back to her table. She went. But her phrase "meant to happen" had been caught up into those convolutions of Charles's thought that ceaselessly, tormentingly questioned his own responsibility.

He remembered, again, her last letter, from Chouzy, that repeated her still troubled "illness of indifference to everything except himself."

7

Tante Sophie's remark that Mrs. Althorpe lived in "a worthy fashion" hadn't prepared Claire for Elmwood, any more than her summary that "the little girl was blonde and well brought-up" had given an appropriate picture of the twelve-year-old Teresa Fanshawe.

Claire hadn't supposed that any truly modern household could be so starched, so frilled, so punctual, so scrupulously administered. Mrs. Althorpe's housekeeping, or character, Claire soon perceived the latter caused the former, seemed to order problems of dust and Time and tidiness with the same—at first alarming—sweet effectiveness that she applied to moral arrangements. The house, with its white rooms and chintzes, and highly polished furniture, its muslin curtains, and striped awnings, where necessary, to temper the light, its moss-green stair carpets ascending the white stair treads, seemed to Claire, arrived from her family's large, untidy,

book-littered *appartement*, to express an extraordinary assurance that dust, disorder, glare, noise, wear and tear, were—she was soon to learn Mrs. Althorpe's word—"unthinkable!" And that what was "thinkable," so the house stated, standing *soignée* as its own white-painted window frames, between its gravel drive and flowering shrubs and the lawn, with its cedar tree, was a special kind of life based on special kind of exemptions, of which the two that struck Claire were from the Makeshift and the Uncertain.

What counted in her own home, in a general way, was a great deal of activity of mind, books, papers, discussions, food, the best possible food within the narrow limits of the family budget; and as groundwork certain affections and traditional loyalties deeply implicit in the whole organisations of the "family." The way the home was kept and polished and decorated was relatively unimportant. Everything was clean as could be managed (on Saturdays the *appartement* smelled of *eau de savon*), certain specified things such as china and bedroom curtains were pretty, though worn. Actual beauty wasn't realised concretely at all, but symbolized by the bronze bust of Hypnos, a photograph of the Parthenon, a colour print of El Greco and the discoloured small plaster busts of Beethoven and Mozart on the chimneypiece in the dining room. While the general fact of the family life going on there at all was recognisably dependant on contingencies—of money, of jobs, of health.

As for the little girl, Claire had expected a flaxen child, like the pictures in the English children's books belonging to Claire's mother, with plump cheeks, ringlets and black-lashed round eyes like Alice in Wonderland, and in mourning.

But in fact Teresa's hair was long and straight and a brown-gold; her face was small, her eyebrows dark and straight, and her eyes, as Claire remembered her mother's, dark clear green with black lashes. She was tall, with long legs and long hands. The morning that Claire arrived she was wearing a scarlet cotton dressing gown. This first sight of her, coming down the staircase, meeting Claire's own glance with a steady eager gaze at once replaced the tragic image of a little girl in black by the reality of this tall, nervous child in scarlet.

8

Philippe had once accused Claire of using, at any decisive moment or in any matter of importance, "not her brains but her simplicity." His love, vitrified by anger, revealed her clearly. Like a "healer" she knew how to abdicate intellect. At any point at which her excellent, and highly educated,

brain comprehended a problem of behaviour or relationship, it "turned itself off," leaving her simplicity to work. It was a perceptive simplicity, that teamed up now and then with a certain extravagance of fancy. Easily touched, so that a small opportunity seemed rich in demands, she had the same sympathy available for large or extraordinary commitments; a certain heavenly absence in her of "a sense of proportion" making her one of those people ready to fetch a lighted candle from Jerusalem to Rome, adopt a lion-cub, or baptize penguins, without incurring the least charge of eccentricity or exaltation, and remaining, what her great-aunt Sophie had perceived her to be, a pretty, well brought-up girl.

It was this young girl who was received by Lucy Althorpe at the front door of Elmwood. Her being so well mannered and not made-up at once pleased Lucy, while her kind of prettiness, that depended on softness and brightness, on neatness of nose and firm curve of lips and chin, charmed Chester as being, to his mind, "unmodern."

But Teresa, poised on the stairs, shy and curious, filled with anxious desire to see "the French girl," whose deepest significance was that her mother had seen her and asked her to come; so that Teresa had lent her in advance the kind of beauty, enhanced by tenderness, that so often death, or merely distance within time and space, "brings out" in retrospect.

Once Teresa had glimpsed Claire, she came down with confidence, feeling immediately secure—not with the nice-girl visible to the Althorpes, but with the potential foster-mother of lion-cubs—the Claire that Teresa escorted shyly to her room, being, not simply the French girl, but quite clearly a probable bearer of a holy flame from one end of the Mediterranean to another; the sweetly firm face that Teresa kept looking up to being, without question, the face reliable not only for inconsequent heroism, but for the deepest sort of confederacy that was expressed in Teresa's thought as the quality of being "awfully nice."

About ten days after Claire had arrived, she was with Teresa in the garden, reading *La Petite Fadette* to her.

It was Saturday. Mr. and Mrs. Althorpe had gone into London for a concert. Claire was sitting on the rug on the grass, while Teresa sprawled on it. When Claire stopped at the end of a chapter, Teresa said, "I suppose this is a grownup book." She added, picking a blade of grass, "There's nearly always a love story in them. Why?"

"I suppose because love is important to most people."

Teresa said: “I can’t imagine being in love, like Fadette is.” After a long pause, during which she lay with her forehead pressed down on her arm, she said, “Of course I love Cousin Chester *and* Charles. But not at all like that.”

She added: “Actually I do love Charles quite a lot.”

“Here is Gloria—”

Gloria came hurrying across the lawn, one of the muslin aprons she wore in the afternoon put on awry, from haste. “Miss Teresa . . . Teresa?”

She bent over Teresa with the awkward tenderness she’d shown toward her since her mother’s death, this new attitude to the little girl, normally jocular or curt, stressing her sense that, however grieved they all visibly were, actual mourning had been somehow shockingly minimised, for in Gloria’s view mourning had precedence of grief.

“Dear!” she said, “there’s your Grannie-from-Ascot in the drawing room waiting for you,” and when Teresa raised her head to stare up at her, Gloria said, taking her hand, “Your Grannie Fanshawe, dear!”

“*Oh . . .*”

Claire had been inattentive to this dialogue because she didn’t understand Gloria’s accent. Now she saw Teresa’s troubled face.

Teresa said quickly: “Excuse me please, Claire, but it’s my grandmother —I must go in and see her.”

Teresa ran up the steps from the lawn to the terrace, slowed for a moment, then walked quickly over the threshold of the French window into the drawing room. She hadn’t seen “Grandmama Fanshawe” since “the divorce.” Although this happening was now two years ago it seemed still an octopus-like, doubtful Thing, that had inexplicably, frighteningly, clawed at herself and her mother and father, and hunted her mother from Little Fairings. Once they’d left her childish quick acceptance, and rapid assimilation of change had soon made her fatherless state simply part of existence now, and therefore “normal.” She hadn’t forgotten her life at Little Fairings. Certain hidden away corners of the garden, the reassurance of the nursery, the smoky wet air of certain winter-afternoon walks, the sweet-cabbage scent of the stock under the night nursery window in summer had an intense, unforgettable distinctness but were quite severed from the present.

Only her affection had been disturbed for a time after the divorce by anxiety about her mother’s and father’s “happiness.” But in this matter she

had come to accept what her mother told her: that Daddy was a "special person who found happiness very difficult"—that as he wasn't a Catholic he could marry another lady who would be able to make him happier than she could. That she (Mummie) wasn't sad; and that Teresa mustn't imagine she was. That God's arrangements *were* often incredibly difficult to explain to oneself; but if they seemed stupid it was because one could only see a minute section of a big pattern. Her mother also said, once, that Teresa mustn't listen, as she grew up, to other people's ideas of what did or didn't make one happy and that people were always giving one another recipes for Happiness that turned out as "dry as rock-buns." And that only God and the Saints had the *real* recipes, and sometimes when you least expected, you got a "lovely warm new-bread snuff of Happiness" that was like "God baking!"

At first her father came often, after the divorce, to fetch her from Elmwood, and take her out in his car. When he came her mother stayed in another room, or went out.

But after a time he came very rarely. This last year Teresa had realised he didn't probably love her as much as her mother did. But she accepted this too, supposing that fathers often didn't feel much interest in their children, unlike the fathers in books like Sarah Crewe's father, or Mr. March, or Bob Cratchit.

When she was still-at-Little-Fairings (this phrase her mind used), Grannie Fanshawe used to come occasionally, and now and then her father drove her over to Ascot, to her house, which was called "Clarence Cottage" but wasn't at all the sort of cottage that Teresa longed for. Teresa's memories of going there were distinct, but inexplicably depressing.

Today, when she came into the drawing room she had the impression that her grandmother was smaller than she remembered, but her big face was the same, and her shiny auburn hair. She was wearing a little hat entirely made of white marguerites. There were no lines in her face, as in Cousin Lucy's. She didn't look any age; not old; but not young either, just as she hadn't any distinct, real expression. Her prettyish, but not nice, face always seeming to be excitedly rehearsing kindness or pleasure or intense interest instead of just showing them.

When she saw Teresa she held out her hands, and did her expression-of-love.

"My da-arling! And *how* you've grown! Come and give me a kiss! Come on, darling. *That's* better! *Well*—let me have a look at you! You *have* grown. . . ."

Teresa stood, stranded close to her by the scented kissing, while her grandmother explained that "your father" had tried to phone at lunch time, but got no answer. He wanted Teresa to come out for the afternoon as it was so "terribly long" since he'd seen her; and as he couldn't fetch her himself, she had offered to come instead.

When they were in the car Teresa sat as far apart from her as possible. As they drove she answered her questions politely. She realised that she felt shy with her; though it didn't occur to her to dislike her. But she felt an instinctive recoil from a sort of subtle ugliness typified by the contrast between the smooth pearl of Grandmother's earrings and the wrinkled lobes of her ears.

As they arrived her father came out of the house.

Seeing him again was apt to be like that "top extra step of the stairs," thinking it was there, and it wasn't. Her heart always expected he would be solid in a way that he always failed to be. But just as she didn't dislike her grandmother, from an innocence that supposed "dislike" impossible within families, she assumed that all her father's characteristics must be good, or part of a goodness that she was too young to understand.

Conditioned by her mother to think of him as an especially sensitive person, specially in need of understanding, Teresa had learned, long before the divorce, to interpret his sulky moods as sadness, and accept affectionately his habitual indifference, caused by a hardening of his heart due to years of unconscious egotism. Only very rarely, as this afternoon, when he came out to welcome her, a gleam of affection, almost of love, showed in his look. He wrenched the door of the car open and held out his arms while his features (that Teresa supposed the handsomest in the world) had such a fleeting, touching expression of eagerness that Teresa jumped from the car, speechless, to throw herself against him for the great loving hug her heart ached for.

But in the very moment he held her his hold slackened, and she felt, with a sickening little jolt, the physical hesitation that expressed the stammer in the very language of his being. He turned from her; to answer some comment of his mother's, and in the same moment gave a quick embarrassed glance at Teresa who stood with bent down head.

She followed them into the house. Pam was there. She always felt that Pam was kind. Her mother had said Pam was kind. She could feel it now, when she came straight to her and suggested she should come and talk to her labrador puppy, and "see if he remembered her." Putting her hand on

Teresa's elbow, she took her into the next room, and then left her there with the puppy.

That evening Cousin Lucy sat on the edge of Teresa's bed.

"Claire tells me Lady Fanshawe came soon after Cousin Chester and I had left this afternoon?"

"Yes, Cousin Lucy."

"She took you to *her* house?"

"Yes, to Clarence Cottage."

"Couldn't you eat a little more of that bread and butter, darling?"

"No thank you."

"And your—father was there?"

"Yes."

"And then—you had tea, I suppose?" Cousin Lucy looked anxious and strange all the time she was asking these questions. She sat even more upright than usual, and kept her hands crossed in her lap.

"Yes. But they all talked before tea in another room, while I played with Pam's dog." She didn't say that she'd sat on the floor of that hostile little room, full of little china dogs and china cottages on shelves, not able to stop crying, and hearing Pam's voice speaking louder than the others in the next room. And not knowing why she was crying.

"Was . . . Did Lady Fanshawe talk, dear? Or rather . . . what did she speak *about*?"

"She said I might enjoy going to a boarding school. I shouldn't."

Cousin Lucy got up. She had on her brown satin dress with long sleeves, tight at the wrists, that she often wore in the evenings. She smiled uncertainly, and said that that "silly little Claire" had quite "worked herself into a state" during the afternoon. She added, "And Gloria too."

Teresa realised that Cousin Lucy too had been frightened, but wouldn't like anyone to know this. Also that she was having her supper in bed because Cousin Lucy had, somehow, understood that the whole afternoon had been unhappy in a rather frightening way.

"I never asked you dear, when you came rushing in like that this evening, who brought you back?"

"Pam did. She stopped just outside the front gate." Teresa added, thoughtfully, "She was nice."

But she saw that Cousin Lucy didn't believe this.

9

Claire had a clear, charming voice. She often sang with Teresa. Old French songs, and student songs. She accompanied herself. One evening when Charles came to dinner, Claire sang afterwards; the songs of Schubert, Brahms and Schumann that Cousin Chester loved.

She also sang "*Le ciel est pardessus le toit*" with Reynaldo Hahn's setting, which Charles remembered his mother singing in the salon of their villa in Hyères; when he was about six years old and the words had seemed to describe exactly the view from the window, and "*si bleu, si calme*" was precisely that piece of sky above the roofs and the palm tree that one saw behind the sun-riven plaster of the garden wall.

While Claire was singing he thought that only here at the Althorpes could there still be evenings like this; a girl in a pink dress singing, and everyone sitting round in tall-backed armchairs, and Teresa, attentive in her tartan silk dress, on a stool, her hair loosed and shining. Cousin Lucy had switched on the Italianate lamps that lit the room, but the perspective of the garden was still visible in a rainy twilight that was the blue-mauve of artichokes, and the songs, literally enchanting, seemed to give a magic glimmer to the whole small occasion like the gold dust in Venetian glass; and the occasion itself had the exquisiteness of something that, once traditional, had become rare.

He looked at Claire and saw her as part of this magic that her singing had diffused. But he knew that when she stopped, and Lucy Althorpe had said "Thank you, dear Claire," and Teresa tossed back her hair and got up, and Chester Althorpe dabbed right and left at tears, and put his handkerchief back in the pocket of his brown velvet smoking jacket, the girl-in-pink would cease to be a figure in this sort of *tableau survivant* and return to being, what he'd so oddly suddenly noticed her to be during dinner, pretty, desirable—and conceivably distracting.

That evening when he got up to his flat he found a small parcel outside his door. It was a book, and a note from Katrina Althorpe saying that these were the Robert Frost poems she'd talked about at Wotanhangar.

He remembered that conversation. And her theory that Americans with literary talent should be kept out of Europe. He remembered her saying it was a pity, "for Literature" that Henry James hadn't been raised on a cattle ranch, and had a buxom wife and ten children.

He thought that Katrina's handwriting looked like herself; clear and sensible and yet charming. He crumpled her note and dropped it beside the book on the table, and lit a cigarette. He moved about the room, wondering whether to go for a walk, or try and read, or even get down to reading some of the typescripts he'd brought back. He was sure his doctor was wrong about these last sleeping tablets. Taking them had made him feel physically ill. Anyway, no tablets could do anything for those bouts of wrenching misery that came on at night; and the remorse that went round and round in his thoughts like a terrifying face on a merry-go-round . . .

He picked up Katrina's note and smoothed it. She'd given her telephone number. He looked at his watch. It was still only twenty to twelve. He went and sat on the edge of his bed, took up the receiver. He dialled the number.

Her calm voice answered him (like a doctor summoned, he thought after) that she would "come at once."

10

Claire and Philippe sat at a marble-topped table. Whenever he could drag his look from her face he stared round, his attention assimilating extraordinary details. He asked her: "Why did you give me a rendezvous here, in such a place?"

"Because it's cheap and convenient."

"Is it? What a horror! And look at what that man is eating! I can smell it from here. It smells of old shoes. And that woman—what's that she's eating?"

Claire explained that it was called "jelly" and that many people ate it.

"*Not possible?*"

Claire explained that there were hundreds of places, exactly like this, where people came in and out all day long, and had "snacks" with tea or coffee, as well as large meals. Philippe said, "That must be why they look

like that. Now I comprehend the appearance of the English. What are those little *saletés*, in cardboard, on the glass shelves?"

"They're called 'trifles.'"

"Trifles! And that pink *ordure*, stuffed into drinking glasses with straws sticking out?"

"They're called 'Sundaes.'"

"The English Sunday?" He gazed slowly from face to face about him. "*Dieu*, but they're ugly."

She said, "But French people are just as ugly. Only they look lively and ugly, while these people look generally in a sort of apathy."

"All *bourgeois* are apathetic," said Philippe, "except in their appetites . . ." He continued on a favourite theme, the greed-motif in civilisation.

Claire waited until he terminated a diatribe against economists. "Now tell me why you came!"

"It's obvious, isn't it?"

"For how long are you here?"

"One day. I go back tonight. Who was the man who answered when I telephoned this morning?"

"Mr. Althorpe."

"Who's he?"

"He is sixty-seven years old. And devoted to his wife."

"Who else is in the house where you are?"

She told him. The waitress put down their two coffees. "Any buns?" she asked.

"What's 'buns'?" Philippe demanded.

Claire pointed out some, ranged on a glass shelf in the window. "They're very good."

"I see you already have English tastes. Who do you go with to such places as this when I'm not here?"

"I don't."

"You go somewhere else then? It's not imaginable that you see no one but this little girl and the old people! You speak in your letter of an 'English

boy' who is devoted to this little Teresa!"

She said, "He only comes to see the child . . . I have an impression that he adored her mother."

"It was she who was killed?"

"Yes."

"—then he must be all the more in need of consolation!"

"You talk without sense, Philippe."

"On the contrary, Claire, it's you who always have sentimental, romantic ideas. Do I ask you to suppose that, just because I love you, I don't frequent any other women when you're away? Exactly the contrary!" He took his spoon from his saucer and rapped the marble surface of the table. "*Exactly the contrary!*"

The clink of his spoon and suddenly excited tone, and the excited expression in his thin brown face, made the people at tables near stare at him with stolid amusement. Claire suspected that he was lying out of pride; and that he knew she suspected this.

She had been shocked when she met him first this morning to see how tense and ill he looked. He drank his coffee in gulps. "What's his name, this man?"

"Charles Behrens."

"What does he do in life?"

"He's in a publishing firm."

He paused. He ran his hand through his hair, smiled suddenly, then his eyes filled with tears and he seized her hand.

"I'm idiotic, Claire. I spend the price of precious books to come and see you for a few hours, and then I exasperate you! Tell me, Claire darling, do I exasperate you? Are you bored . . . angry that I came? Claire . . .?"

"But *no*—Philippe, you *know* I'm not. I'm pleased. . . . Touched."

He leaned forward on his elbows. "All the *same* . . . this Englishman . . . this Charles . . . he *does* interest you?"

"No, *no*, Philippe, I promise you."

So close to her, his voice was suddenly husky. "In any case . . . what does it matter! What a strange blue your eyes are, Claire. And that one

corner of your mouth a little different from the other. When I think about you you're like this, with just this expression, that you have at this moment . . ."

11

It seemed to Lucy that Edward Fanshawe went on and on talking, like someone speaking in a nightmare . . . "It's pretty certain that she was with a Frenchman called d'Anville when she was in Paris last October. My mother saw them together there in a night club. She happened to be over there. This Frenchman's apparently notorious for the life he lives!"

Lucy Althorpe refolded her hands on her lap. "How strange your mother should have been in a night club, Edward!"

"She went there to entertain some American friends of hers."

"Naturally." Lucy used the word like a little hatchet.

"Anyway," Edward said, "Mary did change her plans this last time, so as to stay on in Paris. And perhaps you remember she was there quite a bit longer than she'd planned in October?"

Chester stood, his shoulders squared back to the chimneypiece, smoking his pipe, but now and then taking it out from between his moustache and lower lip with a suddenness of gesture that was a betrayal of temper. He did this now.

"I'd like to put it to you, Edward, that we, or rather Lucy, had a letter from Madame de Langer just when Mary had left her, saying Mary was stopping off in Paris to visit an old Abbé there, who's a friend of her mother's."

"Who's *he*, anyway?" Edward glanced uncomfortably at Chester, conscious of his contempt, and abruptly hating him for it.

"An Abbé Medan, or Meudon," Lucy said.

"That wouldn't prohibit the other thing!" Edward added. "Catholics always have it both ways."

Lucy cut him short. "I forbid you to talk that way, Edward. After all, it's your child's religion."

Edward coloured. All his life he had felt uneasy with Lucy Althorpe. When she and Chester were newly married and just settled in England, they used to drive down to Windsor on Sundays at his father's invitation to visit

his parents. He remembered how then Aunt Lucy used to look at him with an expression that he'd been conscious of as the exact opposite of the one usually evident on the faces of grownup women who generally smiled at him, and admired him, aloud, to his mother! Today he felt the same sensations of dislike and guilt when she looked at him, and nervous anger at being forced into this interview at all; deflecting against both Lucy and Chester his resentment against his mother. For she had involved him in this; the thing he most dreaded, and most often and elaborately avoided, "unpleasantness."

He answered Lucy by saying vaguely and pompously that "anyway, this whole business was for Teresa's good." Lucy snatched the last word "good," seemed to try it between her teeth, and spit it back with:

"I'm surprised *you* should use that word."

"At least, you must both admit that it *wouldn't* be for her good if she was to get disillusioned later on about her mother."

Chester put his hands in his pockets. "You can't prove a thing. Not one single thing!"

"I suggest you wait until I've been to Paris." He added, "I might even look up this old Abbé."

There was a silence. Summer brilliance came in under the awning from the terrace outside. A small wind came over the threshold, stirred the folds of Lucy's flowered dress.

Chester relit his pipe with an unsteady hand. He threw the match down. Lucy's attitude expressed a meetinghouse rigidity. She was looking at Edward with chilling incredulity. She asked him:

"And what else do you suspect?"

"Would you like to know?" Cornered in the situation he'd dreaded, Edward's alarm was changing to a savage defensiveness. As he answered Lucy a piteously vicious nervousness distorted his handsome face.

"Charles Behrens! They were seen about together, all this last winter."

Chester demanded: "Who saw them?"

"My wife, Pam, among others!"

"Naturally!" Lucy said. "And so did we. He was devoted to Mary. He came here several times."

Chester said: “At any rate, it’s quite obvious what you’re after!”

“To get back my own child?”

“You lost her by the divorce!”

“I happened to be chivalrous enough to let Mary divorce me.”

Lucy started. “How you *dare* . . .”

“Lucy dear . . .” Chester protested, then turned his glance on his nephew. He spoke slowly as ever: “There’s nothing new about your ‘racket,’ Edward. You’re going to load your gun with the lies you collect in Paris, and then, if we don’t hand over the child, you’ll shoot her up, so to speak? Wreck her faith in her mother?”

Edward got up. “You make the whole thing sound perfectly *monstrous*! Incidentally what right have you and Aunt Lucy got over the child?”

“Ask the lawyers.”

“I’ve damn well got my own lawyers. Anyway, we’ll jolly well see . . .”

When they were alone Chester said, “Stop crying, Lucy dear.”

She said, “How *dare* he say such things? How could he imagine we’d believe one single word?”

“That’s not the point, dear.” Chester had sunk down into a chair. He sat staring past her, and past Brecky out on the sunny grass, rolling on the daisies. Then, after a long silence, he said in a steady, but troubled tone, that it was only too clearly a hold-up by Edward and his mother to get hold of the child, and her money. Even though this didn’t amount to much, a woman like Violet Fanshawe grabbed at every hundred pounds.

Lucy pushed her handkerchief into her grey velvet bag, and snapped the steel top.

“It’s as if they were gangsters!”

“They are.”

“Do you suppose they’d really consider getting Teresa to believe such wickedness? And when one *thinks* of Mary! And how unfaithful he was to her; and how unhappy he made her . . . And how blessed and loving she was . . .”

Chester was silent. He got up and went, slowly, preoccupied, out of the door onto the terrace, then turned and came in again, but pausing as he came in, to bend and take her hand and kiss it, a tribute that he'd always given her easily, but that she'd always, as at this moment, accepted with a very slight recoil from such demonstration. Then took up his stand with his back to the chimneypiece. He remarked, troubled, that there was no question but that Edward meant to go to Paris. And probably at once.

PART III

1

". . . As I was saying, Mademoiselle Katrina, before Christophe interrupted me just now, it was only in April that she was here. The days were just about as long as they are now, in the beginning of September, that is to say Christophe had already to bring the lamp soon after dinner. I remember that because my niece Claire said to me afterwards that it was precisely in that lamplight that the face of Mary Fanshawe reminded her of the Virgin in that excellent picture by Raphael, of which we have a copy, over there, near the chimneypiece because my dear husband used to admire it so much. By the way, dear Mademoiselle Katrina, will you permit me the observation—now that you have been my guest long enough for us to become friends?—that you who work with your brain should do some work with your hands, as when we sit here and talk . . . I remember that my niece Claire thought her unusually beautiful. In fact she was very agreeable to look at, with an extremely sweet expression. All the same I would say that she hadn't a strong character, and permitted herself to rely too much on the influence of other people. I have often found that is the result of a Catholic upbringing. It does not provide clear definite *principles*! A list of sins is not at all the same thing! One is, I think, more ashamed to relax a principle than to commit a sin . . . I remember very well that when Mary was staying here with me the summer war began, her little girl was only about two years old then, she said to me she felt that this house had an 'atmosphere' that made her 'feel good.' Naturally, that was a charming thing to say! But, at the same time, it was the proof of a too subjective character—But no, Christophe, do not shut the curtains. You deprive us of the sunset. Come back in twenty minutes—Her mother, Camilla, was, as a girl and young woman, a great friend of mine; as of your aunt, Lucy Althorpe. We were at the same finishing school—Mademoiselle Lemaître's school at Wimbledon, as Lucy may have told you. Later, Mary made the acquaintance of her husband, Edward Fanshawe, through the Althorpes. Edward is a nephew of Chester, by Chester's half-brother. (And you through his younger brother, I think, isn't that so?) Chester and Lucy were always kind to the girl Mary, although, like me, Lucy found it difficult to keep up her friendship with Camilla—for various reasons." Sophie de Langer looked up from her knitting. Behind her metal-rimmed spectacles her black eyes were glossy like the buttons covered with black satin whose single file proceeded from just below the high white muslin band of her neck, outward across the bosomed plateau of black velvet, to descend an escarpment and disappear under a massive silver belt

buckle. Sophie gazed through the window at the sunset, without allowing her reflexions to be distracted by such a display of crimson and gold.

"Camilla also must have lacked force of character. Although in the years that I remember her best, at school, and when we were both young married women in Paris (her husband Francis Graham was then at the British Embassy) this was not evident, because she was a creature of such great vitality . . . That was part of her attraction."

Sophie took up her knitting again.

"The daughter Mary seemed to me to have more sweetness, less—how shall I say it?—of certain wild, frivolous qualities that ruined Camilla, in spite of her excellent heart! When Mary came here last April she made an impression of having suffered by the divorce, and no doubt at the prospect of the life before her, solitary except for her child. I don't say she didn't also make an impression of being perhaps too easily excited, and therefore capable of being foolish. But Mary hadn't, at all, as her mother had, for a certain time anyway, that *culte* of pleasure that one finds among worldly people, though as my husband used to remark Camilla never was hard, or shallow, as were many of the people around her. I recollect a party Camilla gave in the little house she had in the Rue de Ranelagh. It was, I think, in 1923, just before they were moved from Paris to Washington. Lucy and Chester were in Paris and they came also. Indeed it was partly for them that Camilla had arranged the party. Camilla knew how to receive, and I must admit we all enjoyed ourselves. I remember she had arranged the flowers herself with an exquisite taste. At that time women of the world of her sort didn't arrange their own flowers, anyway for a party. I recollect how Lucy amused us all by making a conquest of the painter Jacques Emile Blanche. He wanted to paint her portrait. I must say, too, that Camilla herself looked extremely beautiful that evening. My husband, Maurice, was a man who noticed everything (he remembered the details of every case he had handled, and every person who had ever worked for him) and he observed, already, that evening, that Camilla was too often in the company of a certain composer, a Russian."

"Was Mary already born?"

"Yes indeed. She was a little creature of nine or ten—of exquisite beauty. She was rather blonde in those days. Camilla adored her, and dressed her in all the laces and ribbons in Paris, which cost her dear, as you can imagine!"

". . . And the Russian composer—did she marry him?"

"But no, my dear. For one thing she had the good fortune to have a husband who didn't see whatever he didn't want to see. Francis Graham was a very clever man. My husband had a great respect for his abilities. He believed that if Camilla had not, all the same, made herself a reputation that scandalised certain people, Graham would have gone further. He was one of those handsome Englishmen who look and sometimes speak as if they are dull, but are, at bottom, extremely shrewd. He, Graham, died only a year after my husband—that is to say comparatively young. He was one of those apparently calm people whom one doesn't easily suppose to have high blood pressure, and who then die of it, or rather some complication of it, quite suddenly. No doubt he was much more a nervous type than one thought. Yes, Christophe, you can draw the curtains now!"

"And Lady Graham?"

Christophe went out again, his felt slippers silent but his starched coat making a faint crackling sound as he passed across the room and out past the green plush portiére that hid the recessed arched door.

"She is in a Benedictine convent, in London."

"In London!"

"She has been there since '41."

"And she was there when she had the news that her daughter had been killed? But how terrible! How heartbreaking for her!"

"No doubt she must have accepted it as a dispensation of Providence."

A certain dryness in Madame de Langer's manner of saying this derived from her dislike of acceptance or quietism. Her own attitude to Providence was combative, challenging its blindness, its stupidity, its cruelty, and had prompted her to start her crèche in Paris, to build her children's sanatorium on the coast nearby, and to give her money, her energy, her understanding in an effort of constant compensation of individual "hard cases." She added: "Even dear Lucy, after Mary was killed, quoted to me some good Sister's words to her about 'acceptance'—but for my own part I have observed that it is either a synonym for weakness or an excuse for indifference."

Katrina said she thought you had to accept things for yourself, but not for other people.

Sophie glanced up at her. She'd often observed not only her capacity to imagine other people's lives, but an impatience to better them. The girl was certainly full of opinions. But she was also, Sophie guessed, full of unused

practical capacity. For, in these last weeks when Katrina had worked at her book all morning, she eagerly came with her in the afternoons to visit the children over at the sanatorium, or to a farm or a cottage on the estate, or to consultations on some local problem with the *notaire* at Chouzy, or, as this last week, to renew talks with the Curé over the case of little Colette Thibon. During all these expeditions, as well as during their evenings together, Katrina's quiet manners and mild wit and her sensitiveness, constantly tempered by common sense, had pleased Sophie, and she had come to wonder if Katrina weren't wasted on her present sort of life. For it seemed to Sophie that whether Katrina were to marry or not, her imaginative energy, and her interest in human problems, shouldn't be resolved by a merely domestic life, nor by her lively, but not deeply thoughtful, literary talent.

"—she must be so terribly miserable."

"Camilla?" Sophie did not think of her in the present.

"Why, yes; it's the sort of suffering that's worst, don't you think so too, Madame, if you keep on seeing how something you did in your own life has reacted badly on a person you love. Maybe seeing just how, if you hadn't acted that way, a whole train of circumstances would have been different? For instance, in this case! Mary Fanshawe made that trip, didn't you tell me, to get a change after all the unpleasantness of the divorce? It seems to me her mother would think that Mary's marriage needn't ever have happened! It seems to me she would feel that, *if* Mary had had quite a different home, she'd have had a choice of a good sort of man which Edward certainly is not!"

"I had the impression that Mary was on the trip for some other reason than just unhappiness about her divorce. After all, that had been concluded since some time! She had some altogether personal problem to solve! That I am sure of. Like her mother she had no power of regulating her life by her intelligence, and so relied easily on advice. When she was here, she didn't ask my advice on any private matter, but she did consult me, when we were walking out there on the shore, as to whether she should bring up her daughter in Paris, or Switzerland, because she considered quitting London! But also she mentioned she was going to see an Abbé Meudon on her way home in Paris. . . . Ring for Christophe, Mademoiselle, that reminds me that I want that note about little Colette taken to the Curé. What time is it they arrive tomorrow?"

"When Charles called up last evening he thought about four. What the English call 'tea time.'"

Madame de Langer put down first her knitting, then her spectacles, and blinked: "Why does this young man bring the child? Why doesn't Lucy send Claire with her? She simply says in her letter that this seems a convenient plan! Firstly, it is unsuitable for a little girl—how old is she?—nearly thirteen, to travel alone with a young man, however well she knows him. It is an idea only possible to the exceedingly candid Anglo-Saxon minds! Secondly that Claire is to stay in Paris is idiotic also. Who is this young man she must see? When she was here in April there was some young man in Paris who wrote to her every day, but whom she did not love—but, it seemed to me, encouraged all the same. Like so many young girls little Claire has her head in the clouds. She permits herself to be carried away by sentimentality! It is not that she has no reason. It is that she prefers not to follow it!" She paused to give Christophe the note for the Curé.

Katrina said: "Claire's very attractive," remembering the night when Charles had telephoned, and she'd gone up to see him in that melancholy room of his in Thurloe Square. And how he'd talked of Claire's singing. And how he'd said that all one's experience of music had the same quality as one's experience of suffering; and that one felt both with the same kind of intensity. It was during that midnight visit to Charles that she'd become certain that his state of intense unhappiness, that she'd been so aware of during that week end at the Ameses', was caused by his having been in love with Mary Fanshawe. And, at the same time she'd felt that Claire had made an impression on him during the earlier part of that evening. She'd felt this instinctively.

Teresa saw that the Château had four turrets, three stories, the brickwork of the walls yellow grey, the slates dark like *aubergines*. The windows had shutters, painted dark grey, but faded in patches to a mushroom pallor. The perspective of the drive went straight from the gateposts to the steps of the front door, which was of thick pinewood and shaped in a pointed arch.

The architect who had built the Château for Madame de Langer's father, Auguste Tissot, a Bordeaux merchant of great wealth and almost as great integrity, had adapted his own admiration for Gothic to his client's demand for a modern country house that must be set back from, yet in full view of, the sea. During the eighty-odd years since its building the gardens, laid out to copy an English garden, had been extended, and trees and shrubs and climbing plants had grown up so that jasmin covered the south side of the house up to the third floor, and a pretty obstinate yellow rose clambered all about the western windows that faced the sea. Generations of pigeons had

accustomed themselves to come out of the forests and perch on the roof and turrets, and fill the summer days with their sweet velvety growling, presenting a front of indigenous respectability to visiting gulls that planed across the *digue* and marsh, to circle and dive and scream in the wind.

The Château itself, merely a stronghold by the fancy of its design, had none of the mellowed fierceness of an old warrior, nor of a great farmhouse seeming to be timeless and toughened as the land it grows from. No one had ever shot from the turret windows; their shuttered slits dimmed servants' bedrooms, and only a successive traffic of carriage-horses, hunters, a venerable de Dion Bouton, and feather-footed black spaniels had used the cobbled yard between the stables and the back door. Orderliness had reigned in the house from its beginning; unrest, uncertainty and disorder had been unknown as greater visitations of fear, or violence, or tragic loss. Consciences had been kept clear, passions controlled, inevitable sorrows accepted. Daily life had been ordered by duties and clocks, dying had been done in bed. Masters and servants had eaten and drunk well but in moderation; lust, legitimized, had never been, openly, recognised as pleasure; and pleasure itself, together with taste and wit, considered of secondary, and even doubtful, importance. From attics to cellars, there had always been order, and the decency of order, and the tyranny of pursed lips. No ghosts walked the long pine-panelled, Gothic-arched, beeswaxed corridors; no dreams haunted the curtained beds in the airless alcove of each bedroom. In the stainless, unemphatic records of the household of nearly a century, no one had been known to smash glasses, fall downstairs, chase a wild boar through the house (as at a neighbouring manor), hunt a woman to bed, eat in the kitchen, or make love in the drawing room. No one had eloped, or broken their hearts, or written poetry, or watched the stars, or died young.

Because of all this negation the house appeared stiff-necked; and was known to be unbending; except to children.

Only when children came the Château seemed to stir. As they came in at the gates, the pigeons high on the roof *roucouled* louder, the turrets stood to attention, the salt wind rushed in by left-open doors, whisked up the stairs, rattled the flowered china door-knobs along the corridors, stirred tapestry, swung blind-cords to click against windows; while the windows themselves, opened here and there, up and down the house, by some conspiratorial hand, let in a prying neck of ivy, an inquisitive and charming yellow rose, a reeling butterfly, a bumblebee bent on a droning flight of inspection. Up in the bedrooms, the alcoves that contained the four-post high-mattressed beds,

became caves, and their curtains the tents or witches, or the sails of galleons at sea. The bathroom, chill from seldom use, with its dim ogive window, vaulted roof and wooden bath-surround, became a sombre chapel, served by small priests in hooded *peignoirs de bain*; and the cellars changed sometimes to dungeons, sometimes to catacombs.

As for the great staid kitchen, hung around with immense copper saucepans. As for Jeanne who presided there, white-clothed as a gull, stout as a pigeon, old as the pine forests, her massive feet encased in white canvas *espadrilles*. How her gnarled hands conjured, rather than cooked, the oyster soups, the roasts garnished with *cèpes*, the chocolate soufflés, the rich *pâtés* and *rillettes de porc* so delicious to eat in attics, or out on the *digue*! How the kitchen devoted itself, over and again, to the snatched feeding of pirates, the restoring of the shipwrecked, the supplying of pemmican for explorers, the filling of knapsacks for shore-dwellers, or grotto-builders, or fishers of shrimps.

None of the children, who had come and gone, knew if Tante Sophie knew of this, the enchanted double life lived by her house. In the forty years she and her husband had lived there childless, children from different generations of cousins and nieces and nephews had come; and Tante Sophie, in her benign-stern way, had given them the outward and visible signs, the house, the garden, the woods and shore, that were to cause such magical operation of happiness in their souls.

But she had never made any admission beyond always hoping, when they went, that their holiday "would make them try to be good at home."

Teresa and Charles having crossed the Channel together, motored together from Le Touquet to Bourges and stayed there together at an hotel that summoned up all its most un-English attributes—its best omelettes, its most vivacious concierge, its most gleaming *bidets*, to claim its place as the first French-hotel of Teresa's life.

They drove on next day; to Bordeaux, to Arcachon, finally to Chouzy where the Curé, crossing the road from the *épicerie* to the *tabac*, arranged to have the blackest *soutane*, the most solid stomach, the most matter-of-fact stare, of all the Curés she was ever to see crossing the tarmac street or a white, shabby, shuttered strip of French village.

They drove, together, between the stone gateposts and up the straight drive. It was only as Christophe came down the steps, his knees bent, his hands moving with twitching restrained eagerness, that they separated.

Charles let himself be escorted into a house of the Second Empire containing Madame de Langer and Katrina Althorpe. Teresa followed him. The old servant addressed her as "*Ma petite mademoiselle*"; and this phrase of his clinked into her mind exactly like a coin dropped into one of those mechanised peep-shows which click to delicious activity within a glass proscenium; tiny figures gyrating dressed in dusty silk, minute glass waterfalls cascading, faded little feather birds chirruping among wired crystal foliage, to the tinkling of a tune plucked, it seems, on an infinitely tiny, rusty harp.

Charles entered into a conversation with the stout black Madame de Langer while Teresa climbed the staircase, went along vaulted corridors, past doors so mysteriously hidden behind curtains, to reach her bedroom, whose magic difference from Charles's next door was disguised under a certain perfunctory likeness of bedcurtains, and mahogany chests, and green plush overmantels. Leaning out of her window she saw him walk out with Miss Althorpe into a garden that he didn't see, in full view of an ocean of whose darkest blue he was, inevitably, dispossessed.

Whereas for Teresa, the very words "Atlantic Ocean" quickened her heart beats.

Next day, when Christophe, bidden by "Tante Sophie," conjured up his "little granddaughter," Charles could only see, brought into the salon, a dark little girl of thirteen, small for her age, whereas Teresa moved forward, shy but quite certain, to meet exactly the little girl, fitted by her so strange and excitingly likeable appearance, to belong magically to the place.

She was called Martine. She had a long upper lip, and a pale brown, round, face. Her black eyes looked "put in" like raisins, and she had a little black silk curtain of hair each side of her wisely observant calm face. Her eyes smiled slowly; her manner welcomed placidly. Her checked cotton dress was short, her socks very white. Her manner was mature from her unquestioning acceptance of life-as-it-is; kitchen and school to work in; fields and forest to play in; religion to comfort; feasts, and seasons, and the weather for variations. A mother, to Martine, was a person to be helped; a baby something to be mothered. Her expression had a country child's slow curiosity about people; the quick part of her judgment being reserved for practical occasions.

Teresa found her like coolness on a hot day; like quiet after noise. They were together constantly. When Teresa was with her she felt relief from the unhappiness that had never left her since her mother's death. Claire had

helped; by affection and quick constant understanding. But Martine didn't understand people with her thoughts. She didn't use thought for that; she used her good heart, that the disciplines of poverty had made unselfish. She knew Teresa's story from her grandfather, old Christophe. She remembered his coming to their cottage the day after the news of the English lady's "plane accident." Martine conceived the loss of a mother as the first of those primal disasters, to be regarded with the awe due to all visitations of Nature, such as storms, floods, and the sicknesses of creatures and trees and crops. She felt towards Teresa the traditional grave and fearful emotions due to motherless children, wrecked boats, diseased vineyards, and trees felled by tempest.

What Martine gave Teresa, as they went about the farm together or played on the shore, were slices of her solid home-made tranquillity. Small slices. Martine had no curiosity about the world in general. Her notion of England was a signpost pointing to Bordeaux, whence Teresa had arrived. The great forests, that stretched north towards Bordeaux, and south towards those mountains Teresa thought of, with a gasp of imagination, as "the Pyrenees," existed for Martine simply as certain recognisable and immediate trees. Sands, forests, farm, the white road to the village church, the *Mairie*, the fields and vineyards, visible from "*nôtre maison*," all these were "hers" in the sense that she thought and often spoke of them as "ours." So she also relegated distances of Time. Outside the rigidly respected work-time of each day, and the feasts, customs and seasons of her collective experience, she had no interest in Time. The present in Chouzy was real. So was this September morning in the farm of Madame de Langer, and this splendid midday when one sat oneself in the shade . . . And this afternoon was good for bathing; under the far-off surveillance of the American Mademoiselle and the English Monsieur; and for eating afterwards there was the *goûter* that old Jeanne packed in the little basket; the milk, the *brioches* and *pain d'épices*.

Martine smiled often, and laughed seldom. When she did laugh her round cheeks became tightly embossed and gleamed pink, her chin pointed, her eyes glittered and screwed up, and the neat curtains of her black hair shook a little. She talked in a thick, gently sing-song French; about what she was doing, or looking at. When she and Teresa collected eggs she concentrated on counting the eggs, and scolding broody hens. When they made elaborate gardens on the shore, with shells and seaweed, she knelt intent, her upper lip drawn down in the same grave way as when she sat knitting beside Teresa during afternoons spent under the trees in the orchard. She brought patience and controlled enthusiasm to the business of

shrimping, for which she wore her red bathing dress and a big straw hat, or, if it was cold and if the wind blew, "*mon petit chandail bleu*" over it. She treated those metres of the Atlantic she shrimped in with the same possessive gravity she gave to those particular skeins of wool which, out of all the wool in the world, had been chosen for her to make a vest for a small sister.

Teresa lived those long sunlit days as if becalmed by Martine.

"The little Martine can do her nothing but good," Sophie said to Charles.

Sitting beside Charles on the beach, Katrina continued her tirade against Newman.

"He was an hysterical old lady. A perfect old mock-turtle of a cardinal. Wasn't he turned down for canonization because he didn't have joy? Doesn't your church consider that, primarily, important?"

Charles said it did. He added that one of his mother's pet prejudices was against "seriousness." He added, "That's where all the sorts of Puritanism run off the Christian rails."

He picked up a handful of sand and let it run between his fingers. Katrina asked:

"Your mother's a Catholic?"

He smiled. "In her special way—that's to say, the way she's anything! She says her rosary in the car while my father's driving, and the house is full of pretty little stoups for holy water. She involves the saints in getting her absolutely anything she wants! Like more success with her clematis, or more Mozart on the wireless programmes. On the other hand theology exasperates her. She said once it was like artificial silk because it had no warmth or wear in it . . . She's got her own theories about God! She writes them on slips of paper, in the form of epigrams or paradoxes, and keeps them about the house in *pot-pourri* bowls, mixed up with quotations from Francis de Sales and Fénelon and Anatole France. She's canonized Anatole France—because of his love of the poor and humble, she says!"

"She must be charming, but disconcerting, to live with."

"She is. Her natural gaiety has never *quite* overcome her depression at finding herself married—although she adores my father."

She asked: "It's there—your home, I mean—that you're going to when you leave here? Madame de Langer tells me you're going tomorrow?"

"Possibly." He gazed at the two little girls far off; a dab of red and another of pink as they moved, to and fro, on the distant margin of the sands. It was low tide. The wet sands gleamed pale blue, the sea quiet, seeming to hiss in its sleep.

Katrina said: "I'd have thought you'd do better to stay here another day or two, while this weather lasts."

He turned to glance at her. This was the first time she'd shown a desire to influence him. He'd respected this tactful withholding of directive power that he felt in her, and to which, in his present state, he would have so easily and even happily submitted. He'd felt this withholding as part of her scrupulousness; part, too, of her inbred ideas of honour. Less of it would make her more accessible, he felt, in the same way that less assurance in her gestures, and less steadiness of observation in her beautifully clear grey eyes, could make him count on her emotions, as he already counted on her understanding.

"Surely you'd be better here." As she said this her profile coloured, up the clearly modelled space from her light-boned obstinate jaw to the indentations of the hair line, from which her brown curls swerved back. Two seconds after she regained her transparent, lightly freckled, tan.

"Why do you have to go?" she asked.

He had to invent a reason. The original reason had been to stop in Paris and find Claire. Now, on these sands and in this vast blue, gold, salt, afternoon he knew that the transitory obsession with the "idea of" Claire that he'd had in London, and consequent plan to see her in Paris, was illusory as his father's notions, that would abruptly convince him that a certain *Ville d'eaux*, a certain spa, was the place for him to do a "cure"; his imagination linking up some long-since glimpse of Aix, such as its delightful tree-shadowed pavements, or of the snow on the Pyrenees from Pau, or the fact that Turgenev used to go to Baden, with his imagined certainty of being cured, not of illness, but of some deviation from perfect health.

This belief of "cure" was always as vivid to him as the travel-brochures, the hotel-plans, the schedules, air-and-rail routes that littered his desk; the resorts themselves visiting his mind with the phosphorescent brilliance of a view seen in a camera obscura, until he had actually to decide on dates and bookings. Then a reverse process would begin: the peaks of the Pyrenees glimmered out, the jingling *fiacres* of Aix vanished under phantom trees,

Turgenev returned to his shelf in the library, travel-brochures and timetables were stuffed into the paper-basket, and the cure itself faded out into his beloved view of sodden lawn and swaying cedar branches, and flat ploughland, and the familiar sensation of rheumatic shoulders, and hissing of logs on the fire, and gales rattling the windows.

Katrina's companionship had faded-out his image of Claire, as he'd seen her that evening when her singing had excited a kind of emotional *wanderlust* in him. He said to Katrina:

"Actually I'd arranged to stop and see my father's man of business in Paris."

"How like you, Charles, to have a father who has a 'man of business.'"

"Why?"

She smiled. Her smiles had a sort of crisp sweetness. "I suppose I mean that you're so awfully, obviously, the child of people used to 'being,' and not of people who 'do' . . . I mean 'do' in the sense of 'getting'! Going to offices every day, or running factories, or galvanizing something."

"But I go to an office every day!"

"I know. But you go as if it was a very slightly comical thing to do! As if the *natural* thing would be *not* to go!"

"Am I so lackadaisical?" He relaxed at the suggestion of his own word, lying prone now, and resting his head, turned sideways, on his crossed arms. From this position he could look at her profile.

"Why *no*! That's to say I know you don't work any less, even though you seem more casual than a New Yorker who gets to his office an hour earlier! Not that he works *less* well," she added, with the wary staunchness she always had for her countrymen.

Charles said: "All the same, I'd love to feel the very opposite of casual about W. and A., and books and authors, and the insides and outsides of books, and drug myself into a terrestrial paradise of believing that W. and A. was a cornerstone of Great Literature." He stared at the sand, narrowing his eyelids. He said: "I'm certain one needs to be either deeply drugged or passionately excited . . ."

Katrina sat still, her hands linked about her knees. "And you aren't either?"

"No."

"There's nothing in the whole world you just *terribly* want to *do*? Or *have*? Or *be*?"

". . . No."

"You don't look that way. When I saw you the first time you didn't impress me as a lukewarm person! I expect you wouldn't remember, but it was two years back at the Fanshawes at Little Fairings."

"I do remember." He saw Mary standing among talkative people without faces, saying, "Katrina Althorpe will drive you back . . ."

Did Katrina go on now from ignorance, or its opposite? Why did she say: "Mary had talked to me about you. She said you were such a fine person."

" 'Fine' is your American word, Katrina."

"Maybe she said 'good.' "

The air's cruel brightness poured down. He shut his eyes. He was with Mary in a chance little restaurant in Fitzroy Street; neither of them able to eat; Mary explaining that "she knew she must go away . . ." Coming out, very late, into the rain and looking for a taxi; making her promise that she'd come back . . . Her face in the rain . . .

Katrina said: "Mary impressed me as a person who was so good . . . I don't mean the virtuous . . ." She added: "People like Madame de Langer, for instance, tend to admire people for their virtues, just the way they trace their misfortunes to their *lack* of them . . ."

Misfortunes, he thought, like fatal accidents. He pressed his forehead on his arms. He shut his eyes.

Sophie de Langer had far less of Sophie Tissot than Lucy Althorpe of Lucy Robbins. Having less pride, Sophie had been more accessible to experience. Her controlled but violent personal sorrows (the death of her one baby, her husband's illness and slow death) and her naturally deep sympathies had eroded certain smug massive certainties as to Good and Bad that she had in girlhood.

But her combative spirit, that her conscience and logic made practical, was the same. And it was her long sustained habit of combat against suffering that made her identify all Acceptance with folly; and she had

become increasingly intolerant of those faults she had to fight hardest with in her work; stupidity, unreliability, self-interest, sentimentalism, inertia.

When Camilla was a young woman, with a busy, rising husband, and a little daughter, her unfaithfulness had seemed to Sophie a culpably, intolerably, foolish form of unreliability. Above all, as it seemed to Sophie at the time, in a young woman made by character for "big opportunities." And Camilla's once confessed defence that she "needed a little happiness" had seemed a vulgar sentimentalism in a creature so full of wits and courage as Camilla Graham.

And thirty years later, it had seemed to Sophie that Camilla's going into a convent was only another sort of betrayal of a potentially admirable self. At a time—the second year of the World War—when a woman of Camilla's ability might have enrolled herself to so many alternative forms of usefulness, Camilla had preferred to become a nun; her girlhood's "vocation" had seemed to canalise her always too seething emotions that could have been dammed for an immediate, public good. It had seemed to Sophie that by this recoil into religion Camilla had made for negation in exactly the same way as, when young, she had rejected a useful important role as Graham's wife, to become merely what she had seemed for years to the friends and observers, in Paris, in Washington, in London—a woman amused by men, devoted, to excess, to her one child, Mary, but quite without conscience as to her position and obligations as Graham's wife. "A woman," as a too witty observer had said of Camilla to Sophie (who never again invited him), "a woman of picnics and alcoves."

Naturally Sophie, an intelligent and informed woman, didn't consider there was anything negative about being a nun. Or that lives, even in Contemplation Orders, are passed in a state of insipid and uncomfortable beatitude. Her disapproving regret for Camilla's step was based on the public-spirited woman's special regret at the "loss" of Camilla to a world that could have used her greater qualities; as well as her notion that it was Camilla's lack of "equilibrium" that accounted for her abandoning herself to the whole dangerous mystique of acceptance.

It wasn't possible for Sophie to conceive of acceptance as something quite as matter of fact and tenderly ruthless as any surgical operation in her children's clinic, with an analogous intensifying of light, heightening of purpose, demand on will.

A small, light-footed manservant—a "dago-type" Edward reflected—with a glance of veiled impertinence, bowed him into a high, pale grey panelled room. The marble chimneypiece and the red velvet pelmets and festooned curtains struck Edward as being altogether too elaborate. There were a great many flowers in the room; pale pink roses and peonies and pots of jasmin, and fuchsia plants in porcelain Chinese-looking tubs. The "dago" asked him his name and went, and reappeared through another set of double-doors to say that "Monsieur le Comte" would be coming "*tout de suite*."

Edward glanced at the cushions, of soft pale-coloured silk, and the variety of knick-knacks; little jade or crystal bottles, tortoiseshell and ivory boxes, fans, the two Sevres groups on the chimneypiece. Possibly Madame d'Anville did live here too? But the telephone directory had only given his name. On the other hand Edward rather guessed from one of the rumours his mother had got hold of, that this d'Anville was possibly what Pam called a "bit of both." Anything was possible, it seemed to Edward Fanshawe, pacing about, nervous from being in this quarter of Paris he didn't recognise, while the notion of d'Anville's "abnormal" tastes induced in him (who, if he'd given himself a sexual category would have called it "straight") a condition of mistrustful rage. It was rage excited by the most naïve sort of group-pride. Brought up, as Edward was, to suppose his own class, education, character and social group "normal," and his sort of sexual life (that involved commercial or casual affairs until marriage, but as seldom as possible after) normal too, it was impossible for his conditioned intelligence to consider that perhaps "abnormality" consisted rather in any satisfaction of instinct without the giving of love; or that it might be no more "moral" to hire a female than a male prostitute. Dulled since childhood by stereotyped self-indulgence and materialism Edward wasn't sensitive enough to feel—as d'Anville did feel, but couldn't escape—the menace to heart and spirit, latent in every sort of loveless *affaire*. Essentially unsophisticated, completely assured of his own worldliness, Edward suspected this Frenchman of being "rotten" and assumed that he, himself, was "sound." Moreover his own weakness of character felt agreeably strengthened by this opportunity for intolerance.

Edward looked at his watch. Four minutes to eleven. The fellow wasn't up yet! But now the door opened, and d'Anville came in, fully dressed, except for a white silk scarf whose ends were tucked between the lapels of his pale grey coat.

The casual pallors and shadow colours of his clothes contrasted with the crested gold of his hair, and his lidded, jewelled eyes set wide apart on either

side of the high bridge of his nose. He came, eagerly, towards his visitor.

"Mr. Fanshawe? You're too kind to have come! You do me honour."

Edward noticed the sapphire ring, the perfume, the recondite last phrase spoken almost without accent.

"I was so delighted when you telephoned. Please be seated. Forgive my tardy coming! A cigarette? What do you smoke? Players? Or a French one?"

Having seated Edward in a chair facing the windows, he bent towards him, holding out his lighter. Although Edward was a little dazed by the brilliance of manners focussed on him, he was subconsciously flattered.

"I think it so very kind that, on this brief visit to Paris, you should have thought of me," d'Anville continued. He sat down opposite Edward, but leaning a little forward from courtesy and interest in his visitor. "Especially in the connection you mentioned . . ."

"You mean as Mary's friend?"

"Yes." He added, with modesty: "I see from your note that you have forgotten we met once, in London. I am only grieved my wife is not in Paris also! . . . You didn't know I was married? *Comment* . . . But it was precisely as the dear friend of Bérénice, my wife, that I had the opportunity to meet Mary whenever she was in Paris. She must have spoken to you of her?"

"Well . . . yes. As a matter of fact I do remember hearing . . ."

"But naturally! In any case what touches me is that you should have remembered our name at all. In any case, allow me to speak now of my . . . our . . . sympathy."

He stopped. Edward felt the amiability switch off, and saw the strange blonde phoenix-face alter in a way he couldn't decipher.

"You sent flowers." He saw his words ripple the surface of the strange face.

"The simplest kind of elegy!"

"I don't quite get you?"

The charm switched on, and glowed again. "I mean simply that . . . remembrance best uses flowers." He made a timed pause, only to display another sort of agreeableness, with grace and dexterity. "Of course you are in Paris for the wonderful *nature morte* exhibition at the Petit Palais? Have you ever seen a more curious and beautiful assembling? And to have got out

those different traditions and styles of painting in such an order that one goes from one room to the next, constantly eager! And never cloyed! At one time the Chinese seem perfection! At another one can't leave the enchantment of the Italian cinquecento. Those *trophées* of fruits and lutes and ribands so rightly included, don't you think so? And then of course the Dutch stuff! Didn't it seem to you impossible to tire of those tearful peonies? Luscious jade-green muscats about to be raped by an enviable little fly! As to your English contribution! Those tidy, sombre little canvases must come surely from some Brontë-esque vicarage, or from one of your little cold country inns that stink of cabbage and beer and W.C.? (How amusing they are, by the way!) The fat roses, too! The bleeding hares, the extenuated pheasants, and lustre tankards! In fact, for me, the world of John Mytton! But you, Mr. Fanshawe, perhaps you enjoy, oppositely, our French stuff? All the same those Chardins! Eh? And even some of the familiar Impressionists."

"I'm afraid I didn't go." Edward had sat watching d'Anville across this sounding, meaningless cascade of sentences that he wanted to check and couldn't. He'd come to talk to d'Anville; not to be put off, perhaps deliberately, by unending boring stuff about pictures. He remembered his mother's warning that d'Anville might be "terribly smooth."

D'Anville was now expressing his complete comprehension of Edward's wisdom of "sometimes fasting from *les belles choses*."

"I like *belles choses* all right in their place," Edward cut him short.

"Another cigarette?"

"No thanks. Incidentally, I know Mary was always grateful for the way you showed her about when she was over here! Last October when she was in Paris I remember her saying you were awfully kind to her."

D'Anville's manicured thumb shut his small gold lighter. He set it on the table next to him, exactly parallel to a very small green book of tooled and gilded leather.

"*Hélas!* I wish that I deserved your thanks. And far more, that we should have had the chance of seeing Mary. But we were both in New York."

"How odd! Perhaps it was November then she saw you?"

"No. We were in New York all the 'fall' as they call it. No doubt it was some other more fortunate of her Paris friends she was with."

"I suppose so. What a silly mistake! Of course, one foreign name is apt to sound like another."

"Naturally—"

". . . Only actually my mother seemed so certain it was you that Mary mentioned to her, when she was telling her about a good time she'd had last autumn!"

As he said this Edward realised that d'Anville was saying quite gently, but with an indescribable effect of suppressed violence: "Your mother must have loved your wife very much . . . I wish you were not going, but since you insist . . . Let me open that door for you. The handle is always exasperating—And don't forget, if you have time, don't miss the charming little exhibition of Tiepolo drawings at a small gallery—the Galleries Sachs—just off the Rue Truman. . . . Ah yes, Morel, Mr. Fanshawe has to go! If you want a taxi, I advise you to walk just to the Rue St. Antoine. But before that I do advise you to walk just once round the Place des Vosges, with the light as it is now! And—for your coming—a thousand thanks! I only wish I were not, at once, leaving Paris . . ."

Edward found a taxi and told the driver to drive to Fouquet's, where he could have an *apéritif*.

3

Claire stayed alone in her family *appartement*. Her sisters were in the Midi, her father and mother in the Vosges, as always, in September.

Whenever she telephoned to Philippe there was no answer. She had tried last night, when she arrived, and from time to time today. She had made herself her *petit-déjeuner*, and gone out in the familiar streets of the quarter and walked in the Parc Monceau nearby, and come in again, hot and still restless, and eaten some bread, and the grapes she had bought.

Outside was heat; indoors the stale airless quiet of shuttered rooms, the dusty drowsiness of the shelves and piles of books, the sleeping-beauty trance of the clocks. Her father's coat lay abandoned across the chair in the hall, and two glasses, a bottle of wine filmed with dust on the kitchen table. She fell asleep on the divan, and woke feeling sticky and oppressed by a headache.

She got up, and looked down into the street. Philippe called this street the Avenue des Bien-Pensants, joined at the corner where the *pharmacie* was, by the Rue des Petits-Pharisiens. Philippe said the whole quarter was a

polished granite sarcophagus, in which the few living—like her family—were buried with the dead.

She went again to the telephone in the darkened hall, by the front door, and dialled his number again. Perhaps he had gone away? But he'd told her he was going to stay in Paris and finish his novel. It seemed that his mother wasn't at home either as, Claire knew, she usually was at this season when she had a lot of lingerie orders to complete for October when her "*clientes*" came back to Paris. But this year she had been taken on a motor trip by her friend Mathis, *son ami Mathis*, whom Philippe described as having "the face of a seal and the heart of a devoted mouse."

Claire decided to go to him. The telephone must be out of order. She took a bus to the Place des Ternes. Philippe's mother lived in a small side street near there. Claire had been there once on a very cold evening, two years ago. There had been two other friends of Philippe. His mother had made them all "grogs," and then sat down again, beside the lamp on her work table, and gone on sewing. She was plump, with hair dyed copper-gold and coiled high in a chignon on top of her head. She wore a black dress that had no character of its own, but seemed part of her good-natured efficiency, just as her pink pearl earrings accorded with her gaiety of temperament that was expressed by the sometimes bawdy twinkle in her glance, and her loud chuckling laugh that brought tears to her eyes, so that she would have to stop sewing to dab at her mascara.

As Claire went up the narrow street, looking for "No. 5" she wondered why Philippe hadn't answered the two letters she'd written him since that day in London when he'd suddenly turned and left her, among the wrought-iron, in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

She rang but no one came.

She stood outside the grained yellow doors, her feeling of purpose suddenly giving way to the intense miserable depression that had threatened her all day. She rang again.

There was no sound inside the doors. Nor on the flights of stone steps above or below her. She rang once more and felt the sound drill the silence, and her own nerves. She wondered if she should go down to the concierge whom she'd glimpsed in the stifling dimness of her room, slouched asleep beside a tin basin of pea-shucks.

Then she heard a movement: a hesitant stir. Then the creaking of a door. Then quiet again. Then, after a minute, footsteps, heavy but sounding

lightly, like someone barefoot, or in rope soles. The doors were rattled from inside; then one opened.

Philippe stared into her face.

"It's *you*?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I'm in Paris."

"I see that." He held the door, and didn't open it wider. He looked ill. She said:

"Have you been ill?"

"No."

"What are you doing, Philippe?"

"I'm working. And you?"

"I told you. I'm in Paris."

"At this season? Like a tourist! Or a pauper!—And the famous little girl?"

"She's gone to Chouzy, to Tante Sophie."

"Ah! Come in if you like. It's in insane disorder. Maman is away, with her Mathis at Etretat."

The long room, as Claire remembered it, was divided across by a blue check curtain, the larger end overlooking the street, and the small kitchen and bath hidden. Philippe slept in the workroom. Claire saw that he had made his bed, by throwing a red tartan rug across it. His mother's big work table was littered with his papers, some blank and some written on, ashtrays, a bottle of ink, a plate with a knife and a rind of Brie on it, a glass with some white wine left in it.

"You live like this?"

"How else? I'm busy—I don't have time to write during the term, as you know."

"But you could write in the country."

He took up the smoking fag end of a cigarette from a saucer on a chair. "The country costs money. I had my holiday—in London!"

"Philippe!"

"What?"

Since the first minute at the door, he hadn't looked into her face. He didn't now.

"I wrote to you, and you didn't answer."

"There wasn't any answer." He walked to the window, his thin big shoulders hunched, his hands in his pockets, his stare on the other side of the street. "You keep on trying to sell me something I've no use for, Claire. I prefer nothing."

"You don't want to see me at all?"

"Precisely . . . But as you're a 'good' young girl, you haven't the least imagination of the senses, and no shame at the—*stupidity* that makes it possible for you to pursue me!"

"But Philippe, it's that I've been . . . anxious."

He continued "—not the least idea that coming here like this is only another proof that you're cruel and stupid as only a chaste, sentimental woman can be! What do you bring your prettiness here for? For me to kneel and stare at, like a pious old woman at a tabernacle? Yesterday the little young girl, who often comes to help Maman, arrived and found me here. She's pretty, and at least, simple! . . . She admired the 'beautiful Scotch coverlet' over there on my bed . . ."

"She stayed?"

He switched his stare from the street to Claire. "She didn't stay!—But only because I didn't want her. She accepted that, too, with simplicity."

"She'll come back . . ."

"Naturally. She helps Maman."

"But perhaps before that?"

"It's possible."

Claire sat down on the wooden chair by the littered table. When she came in she'd felt hot. Now she was shivering. She said: "You're unjust, Philippe."

"How—'unjust'?"

She tried to think; tried to stop herself shivering. Her eyes swam and burned and her breath stifled. She needed to weep, and had no tears. She said, in a choked tone, that he demanded a sort of simplicity from her that she hadn't got. She said:

"D'you imagine that if I could be like her—like your mother's girl—I wouldn't be, and . . ."

"What!" He stood the other side of the table.

"If I had the chance to felicitate you on your 'Scotch' bed cover . . ." She tried to laugh, and found herself sobbing.

"Claire . . ."

He jolted round the table, the saucer rolled off, the ash spilled.

"Claire?"

He knelt down beside her, "*Claire . . . Claire, chérie . . .*"

4

A square of thick yellow light fitted into the top of the courtyard like honey into a honeycomb. But the five lower floors were filled with clear, dark shadow, in which the shutters looked pallid and the bits of washing, suspended on string across some of the opened windows, looked as if their whites and pinks and checked colours showed through blue glass. The sounds, too, in the lower half of this courtyard had well-like dank echoes.

But up in the sun—among the mansard cracked windows and bleached orange or green awnings that shaded a window box, or series of red velvet geranium plants, or steeped a child's head in warm translucence or a woman's shoulders and bosom bared to the heat—the voices were hot too, sounding out raucous-like intermittent sawing of wood, or drowsily bleating, or clacking to and fro from window to basking windowsill among the baked lead-blue tiles. Down below the voices chased their own echoes, and a cry, or laugh, came out of the black, as if toothless, gaps of windows only to ricochet, and fall blank through the sombre, airless shade onto the paving below.

Edward Fanshawe, deciding uneasily to traverse the courtyard, felt the chill of its flagstone, under the constant damp distillation of an atmosphere freaked with smells of cooking, of hot oil, of garlic, of paraffin. The concierge's matter-of-fact impersonal contempt, when he informed Edward that "Monsieur l'Abbé was the first door to the left" across the yard, seemed

to summarise the manner of the whole *cour*. Nursed back by waiters and headwaiter, during his solitary luncheon, to a normal sense of being-at-home in Paris, he felt once again alienated, and threatened by this extraordinary place, and the gloomy *porte-cochère* that had led into it, admitting him through its small door like a hen into a hen house. He'd expected that, having once identified the Abbé Meudon's "church," there would be a recognisable comfortable sort of presbytery next to it, and an eager housekeeper to open its door, as happened when he went to see a priest he knew in London.

He walked quickly away from the concierge. A woman at a first floor window looked down at him with curiosity, succeeded by admiration. A child of three, kneeling to push a small tin motor car to and fro, rolled out of his way. A blowsy girl with her tawny hair tied back in a "horse's tail" came out of a gap-like door on the ground floor and stared at him, her big basket on her arm, and turned her head and stared after him as she saw him go to the door of Monsieur l'Abbé.

She often saw people-of-the-world go to that door, as well as many of the poor people such as her own mother. But her observant stare saw certain differences in this gentleman, in his clothes, his expression, his way of holding his head very stiff on easy shoulders, and something arrogant yet uncertain in his walk that informed her that he couldn't be French, or Austrian, was obviously not American, and that his glance, as he passed her, was once again that glance she was coming to recognise as English-gentleman, though she couldn't have defined its mixture of furtive hostile excitement and a prudish absence of gaiety. They knew, as her friend Lili said, how to give money—but as to pleasure!

Edward rang the bell. He could feel that the red-haired girl was behind him, still in the middle of the court, staring at him; and had a sudden irritated access of self-pity that he should be here in Paris on his own, simply in order to get mixed up in what he secretly thought of as an "infuriating business" about Teresa. This morning with d'Anville had been a complete blank. When his mother had telephoned him last night from Venice he'd told her it would be. As for getting "evidence" from this old priest, his mother's point was possibly a good one, that any priest always backed up the idea of a child being with its parent. (She'd told him to stress his intention of sending Teresa to a convent rather than let her be brought up in the definitely Protestant atmosphere of the Althorpes.) While he thought this Edward's annoyance changed to a calmer sense of being, all the same, creditably involved in righting a wholly wrong situation. So that when the

door was opened, he proffered his good manners, like a modest present, to the scrawny little woman in a blue overall.

"Monsieur?"

She looked as if a casual collection of slight bones had been arranged inside a sallow and no longer young skin, shod in felt boots with tartan tops, and tied into the blue overall simply in order to support, and perambulate, her marvellous eyes. They were hazel in colour and so full of liveliness that it didn't matter that, when she smiled, her teeth between the anaemic lips exhibited the same flea-market quality as the rest of her.

"Can I see the Abbé Meudon?" Edward spoke his "school" French.

"Come in, M'sieu."

She led him across a dark narrow hall into what seemed a tall section of room, lit by a too-big window and containing a table pushed against the dingy blue wall, and a bench and several cane-seated stained oak chairs. Edward saw that there was the usual type of plaster Madonna on the chimneypiece. As there seemed to be no one waiting except an old woman, perched at the end of the bench, who looked and, he noticed, smelled unpleasant, he asked to see the Abbé at once. He wanted to get the whole business over as quickly as possible. The housekeeper answered that M'sieu l'Abbé would surely not delay to see M'sieu, that there was only this lady waiting still. She indicated the perched, bunched figure on the bench with straggly grey hair knotted into a bun, who seemed either so blank in thought, or so halted inwardly that her face suggested a stopped clock.

Edward said, annoyed, that he was "*pressé*." He felt embarrassment and distaste at the idea of being left in this narrow space with her. But the housekeeper only smiled, and said she would tell M'sieu l'Abbé that M'sieu was here, and went through a further door into what must be the Abbé's own room.

Edward laid his hat and stick and gloves on the table, and lit a cigarette. His embarrassment about the woman on the bench was soon dispersed by her complete unconsciousness of him. She had a basket set on the floor beside her. What made this particular acrid sickening "poor" smell, he wondered? He remembered it once when he was a small boy and his father had taken him into what must have been some tenement building, during an election.

The housekeeper came back, leading out a young man. She bent over the woman on the bench and asked her to come in, and helped her up, and told

her she would "look after her basket." The woman went in; Edward heard a voice greet her. Then the door was shut and he was left alone.

He felt restive and annoyed. Suspense brought back all his general feelings of resentment. It was all very well for his mother to engineer all this for *him*, and, as she said, the child. In point of fact the child was perfectly happy where she was. And where was the certainty, anyway, that Teresa would feel in the least inclined to share her money with him when she came of age? And as for the odd two hundred and fifty pounds a year that could be paid out for her, by the Court, during her minority, she'd cost a good part of that to keep. Typical, he thought, of his mother, to land him in all this, and go off to Venice herself. He remembered that the Ameses were going to Venice too, and suddenly it seemed that everyone *else* could go to Venice except himself, and "Venice" became symbolic, in his angered consciousness, of a kind of selfish-good-luck enjoyed by an immense collection of egoists which, somehow, managed to include even that pallid hunched creature who with unquestioned priority had preceded him through that door.

And she was staying in there a good half hour! He glanced at his watch. When she came out she went straight through the other door to the hall, where he saw the housekeeper give her her basket, and they both murmured and quacked and smiled. He had been too incurious to notice the woman's face as she passed him. It had looked as if someone had managed to mend the clock, and get it ticking again.

"M'sieu," the housekeeper said. "Now it is your turn."

5

The Piazza San Marco, that had been, rightly, counted on for six hundred years for beauty and splendour, continued to make its wide particular statement of loveliness, adding the exquisite parenthesis of the Piazzetta, while its stone and marble invoked the still greater, still more shining and coloured, beauty of the sky, by the lifting of golden cupolas, and white columns, and rose-red tower.

Violet Fanshawe was among the number of persons sitting at Florian's who reckoned, each in his way, on this grand alliance of loveliness to enhance a love affair, or top off a holiday, or make merely a background for the sipping of an *apéritif*.

Sipping her dry Martini, fidgeting her garnet-painted toes in her white sandals, she listened to the fair young man saying "No one would imagine

you were a grandmother," a phrase she accepted with complacency, in no way disconcerted by the *bêtise* implicit in such a failure of imagination, nor conscious that it might be one of those "tokens" of admiration used to replace admiration itself.

Among the women round her equally incapable of being grandmothers, Violet Fanshawe seemed least raddled. As a caricature evokes its subject, she was recognisable as the young woman she had once been; auburn hair indicated brown hair with ruddy gleam, and small creeks eroded each cheek where the provocative smile had come and gone for years, its repetition mechanised as the creak of her voice pronouncing her opinions on a "terribly interesting" book or a "*quite wonderful*" idea.

"—quite, *quite* wonderful," she said now to a dark solid man, not young, whose white teeth gleamed in a smile that proclaimed his calm satisfaction with his own virility, while his unsmiling look roamed scavenging titbits of admiration, and scrounging little desirous glances from the women in the crowd.

"—the *best* of his plays, *I* think," Violet said. "Don't you think so, Betty darling?—*To-night*, Antonio?" Bertoldi interrupted then to ask her a question. "But *no*, darling, you *can't* lunch tomorrow with Lili von Lamm, because we're going to Asolo, and on the way to that village—what *is* it called, Castel-something?—where that picture is that everyone says is *so* marvellous. George?" she called out to George Ames who was one of the people sitting round her table. George was dressed in maize coloured linen slacks and a saxe-blue singlet. His neck and arms and face were browned and his blunt shrewd features glowed with amiability.

"—George?" she called, across to the fair young man.

"*Yes*, Vi darling?"

"Are you and Maureen coming to Asolo with us tomorrow?"

"But of *course* they were," George said. "They were most awfully looking forward to it! Only could they go *after* lunch? So as to get in the morning on the Lido—Why didn't Violet lunch with them? And Edward and Pam too, if they'd arrived?"

Violet said that Edward was arriving from Paris this evening but that Pam was staying at Juan les Pins with her mother until next Saturday. The fair young man said how wonderful that Pam was coming, and Maureen Ames, who was sitting beside her husband sipping a gin and vermouth, said, "How marvellous" that Pam was coming, with a small real emphasis

tinkling at the bottom of the empty words, which she took about from one conversation to another, from one party to another, in the hope they would get by, emptiness and gin looking so alike. "I didn't know Eddie and Pam were coming," she said. She smiled at Violet Fanshawe, and kept the smile on for a group of people who now moved past their table, and might be—she was short-sighted—some of George's friends? This smile stiffened her fair, fixed face with its conscientious tan make-up. Her white backless frock, her immense straw hat, her wedge-heeled sandals, her coral and gold jewellery, as well as her effusive assent to whatever was suggested to her as "fun" to do, or "beautiful" to look at, were all part of her battledress for this Venice life that every September upset her nerves. The alien, streetless, treeless place itself, canals wherever you went, depressed her. She knew, of course, that Venice wasn't supposed to be just "the seaside"; and that she went there, with George and all his friends, to partake of their sacrament referred to as a Wonderful Time. But the self in her, kept secret from George, dreamed back to English sands and shingle, and cliffs with Gardens and a Bandstand; or wished itself back in the paddock, beyond the garden, at Wotanhangar, comfy in an old-cotton-frock, watching her boy and one of his little blazered, serious friends lighting a fire, or, with rosy, contorted faces, fastening worms on the lines of their fishing rods.

Among all George's friends, the only one Maureen felt was kind was Pam Fanshawe. Only Pam had come over that winter when Maureen had "flu," to bring carnations and a new novel, to sit on the bed, her leopard-skin coat slipped off, indifferent to infection, talking in her drawling smiling voice, offering to bring her own only medicaments, Benzedrine or champagne; asking about the boy's school, and lessons, and "hobbies," fumbling to find the two South American stamps she'd "kept for him" in one of her immense expensive leather bags that her boy-friends always seemed to give her, she said. George, who'd overheard this had referred, afterwards, to Pam's life, before she married Eddie Fanshawe: "Two divorces, and one guessed the others." But Maureen, incapable of imagining people other than as she saw and felt them, thought Pam was "a good wife to Eddie" in just the same way that she herself tried to be a good wife to George. She was sure, she'd once said to George, that Pam did her very best to make Eddie happy, "though one never felt he was a happy *sort* of man." She'd gone on to say that she often felt poor Mary's life would have been "ever so different" if Eddie had had a more "happy nature"! And she sometimes wondered if Lady Fanshawe hadn't spoilt him; it was easy to understand spoiling an "only boy."

George was saying to Violet that he expected Pam was having "a wonderful time at Juan, and didn't want to leave!"

Violet Fanshawe answered that "Pam never left Edward for long." The careful amiability of her tone was a measure of the hostile respect she felt for her daughter-in-law, intensified since that afternoon when Pam, by force of will, had made her send Teresa back to the Althorpes. That half hour with Pam had changed her rather acrid contempt to mistrust. Pam had shown a watchdog wakefulness; once roused she had been impossible to shake off. Her defence of Teresa as "a child" had been sentimental in tone, but aggressive in effect.

"Where's Eddie been meanwhile, eh?" George asked.

"He had to stay in Paris for a day or two."

"Not much on in Paris just now! I should think most of the lovelies have donned their Bikinis and hied themselves to some sunny beach!"

"As a matter of fact Edward went because he had some business there."

"Wish *my* business took me to Paris!" Ames's expression then changed from the mindless geniality that he habitually used in conversation with women, and was replaced by the shrewdness of his business air; and his words gathered speed as he said that, in fact, his business was quite likely to take him to "Paris in the near future," as Woodley and Ames were going to go-in-for a series of translations of French books.

"French books" made Violet exclaim that she did hope they were going to bring out Mauriac—or was it Maurois?—he was such a *wonderful* writer! Didn't the fair young man think so? she turned to ask. The latter said that both of them had been translated. Violet Fanshawe said not *all*, she was sure. On the other hand, she said to George, she hoped they weren't going to publish the type of French novel that really set *out* to be gloomy and sadistic? There were too many of those sort of novels anyway, especially American ones. Of course it was true one wanted novels to be *real*, but . . . as she spoke she blinked her eyelids, raised her eyebrows, and paused to purse her crimson lips into the *moue* of a connoisseur . . . "But, George, what one *feels* is that there is such a thing as realism being just too much of a good thing! . . . Oh . . . why, there's *Edward*! . . . *Edward*?"

He was standing on the fringe of the packed tables.

". . . he's looking for me! . . . Ed . . . ward!"

He caught sight of his mother now, and came towards her wearing that look of deprecating self-assurance that had become his public manner during his twenty years and more of being an obviously handsome man. Ever since his first youth his delight at being acclaimed by women wherever he went had produced in him a manner of acknowledgment, regal in its effect of wishing both to disclaim and welcome, this effect of sometimes inane radiant diffidence being as little symptomatic of his real character as some mannerism acquired by a pretty woman, who has for years chosen to seem "sophisticated," or "serious" or "sensitive," but behind this public mask is perfectly matter of fact.

"*Darling*," Violet caught his hand, partly from the real satisfaction of having him with her again; partly from her habit of seeming "absurdly young" to be his mother.

"What'll you drink, Eddie?" George had got up to clap him on the shoulder.

"Did you have a good journey, darling? Have you come straight from the plane? Or did you go to the Palazzo first? *Guido?*" She called across the table to Bertoldi, who was listening to Lili von Lamm with the wide-eyed expression of a bull. ". . . When Edward's had a drink I shall go back with him, in the gondola. But don't forget we're dining at eight, punctually! Because of going on to the *Fenice* afterwards . . ."

Once alone with him in the gondola she said: "Well? I can't *wait* to hear!"

They moved above inversions of satin sky, velvet-dark bridges, palazzos, wax-coloured like begonias, whose uppermost shuttered windows lay deep below. The gondolier propelled them, unseeing of beauty, over this mirrored rose and gold and pallors and shadows. Violet's sentences flittered blindly into the heavenly light of the evening.

"You found d'Anville?"

"Yes."

"And what did you find out? You did what I said? You made it clear you just wanted to be friendly? He wasn't difficult? By the way, I can't *tell* you what I *haven't* heard about him since I got *here*. Anyway—what did you get out of him?"

"Nothing."

"*Nothing?* But darling, you can't have played your hand terribly well!"

"Possibly."

". . . You mean he denied he saw Mary last October?"

"He said he and his wife had been in New York, and so obviously he hadn't seen Mary for ages."

"The fact that he did *ever* see her will be quite enough to tell the Althorpes! If you make it clear what the man's like—I mean that he's a rotter and all that. And what about this last visit of hers, in April—now that we haven't got Pam here to be sentimental!—Did you manage to find out if d'Anville saw her then?"

"Yes."

"Well then, *that's* all right! After all, Eddie darling, *no* woman meets a man when she goes abroad, unless she's having an *affaire* with him!"

The gondola slid alongside the steps of the palazzo. Edward followed his mother indoors and up the stone staircase. Once indoors Violet Fanshawe dropped her bag, and scarf and sunglasses on a chair and exclaimed:

"*Anyway*, what you've got to do now is to go to the Althorpes! And if they should take the line they don't believe you, you can just tell them to go to a certain little hotel near Fontainebleau and ask if a *Monsieur Villon* and a girl-friend didn't stay there."

"How d'you know—?"

"As a matter of fact, Bertoldi has his sleuths! Once I'd told him it was d'Anville we were after he thought it rather good fun to find out! He happens to hate d'Anville's guts because he once called Bertoldi's bluff about a picture he was getting Bernstein to sell for him, or suggested to Bernstein that it was a fake. Anyway . . ."

Edward interrupted. "Actually, Mummie, I've decided not to follow this up at all." He threw himself down on a sofa, wedged his back against the cushions, and threw his cigarette onto the hearthstone.

"*Not going to?*"

"No!" He didn't meet her look, but stared at his own knees. "*No*. I'd rather drop it."

"My dear Edward, don't tell me you took all the trouble to go to Paris . . ."

"You *made* me go . . ."

". . . in order to check up on this *affaire* of Mary's, and then decide to drop the whole thing?"

"I didn't exactly . . . But, anyway, I've decided."

"I imagine that at least you can tell me why? Considering it happens to have been my poor little plan to try and help you! Especially as you've saddled yourself with another wife, who hasn't *even* got any money of her own!"

He repeated, "I'm sorry, Mummie. But I've quite decided."

Assuming that she was up against one of the fits of obstinacy that humped in the shallows of his character like rocks in a brook, she said:

"I shouldn't be *silly* about this, darling! After all, it *is* a matter of several thousands of pounds!" She added, "And your self-respect!"—divining his secret thirst for self-respect.

"I'd rather drop the whole thing."

". . . And leave your child to be brought up by these Althorpes that your father was always inflicting on me!"

"Teresa's used to them. She likes them."

"Naturally! It suited Mary very well to play on their feelings, and leave the child there when she went off abroad!"

"They're very fond of Teresa."

"I suppose that means you aren't? Although you're her father!"

He wouldn't meet her sharp stare.

She knew his defences that he'd built up, time and again; the barrier compact of stubbornness and egotism, fortified by a brittle hardness of heart that she knew how to force by a sudden drive of hysterical sentimentality. Her possessive tentacles had a "cleverness" of their own and knew just where a breach could be made, a nervous lie exposed, an evasion countered, a fear exploited, or an unwary movement of affection pressed to advantage.

He repeated, "They're fond of Teresa. And she's used to them. And fond of them. She wouldn't want to come back to the house where she'd been with Mary! Pam made that point to you."

"I remember very well. And I suppose that it's *Pam* who's been getting at you in some extraordinary way?"

"No, it isn't! I just happened to think things over, and change my mind."

"But why? In God's name, *why*? What's the *sense* in one's caring so much, and always, always putting you before everything? And then you throw up the sponge! D'you think my life's been so easy, Edward? D'you think it was so damned easy for me, when I was left alone by your father, to face life? And always to be cheerful, and smiling, for you? You don't realise —why should you?—that when your father left me I was a young, pretty woman, who could have made herself a new life! But I chose not to! Naturally you don't realise! Why should you? Naturally you took it for granted when I paid up, over and over again! It hasn't meant anything to you that I've chosen not to marry again, for your sake. Yes, Edward! I let my heart rule my head. And now that I'm not so young any more, I'm suffering for it! *You* don't care. You've never really cared! When you lost your head about Mary, did you stop to think of me? When Pam started running after you, did you ask yourself if I was lonely?"

He knew most of those sentences; and the self-pitying sounds—rising now and again to a wail—to which they were chanted; and how, when the wail had risen to a certain pitch, a special high, thin, note of reproach always cracked the brittle surface of his composure, and he "gave in." She sat dabbing carefully at the outer corners of her eyes. But this time he said:

"I'm sorry, Mummie. I've made up my mind," and looked at her; and kept his look on her, sitting, svelte and stiff on the edge of her chair, in her pale beach dress, her feet in their high-heeled sandals close together. She was dabbing still at her eyes. Watching her he had a sensation altogether strange to him. He knew the feeling of obstinacy, and the taut unhappy anger it produced in his whole body. But this sensation was calm.

But she didn't recognise it as the calm of decision any more than she was aware of his vague pity.

"Look here, Mummie . . ."

She got up, pressing her handkerchief hard to her mouth. She was drawing in long, uneven breaths. She began:

"I can't think why I was such a fool as to imagine that you . . ." A sob caught her words. He got up too. He knew the signs. He knew he couldn't stand what was coming. He had a strangely moved second when he saw, what he had never before realised, that she looked, pathetically, too old for her beach frock, and her bare legs and the whole existence they signified. But he knew that if he stayed he wouldn't have the will, or nerve, or tolerance, to resist what Mary had once described as Violet's "full-dress hysteria"; its hideous, terrifying abandonment, the choking fury and

screamed words, the tear-glittering unseeing glare of her eyes, that had made him afraid ever since he was a schoolboy caught up for the first time in just such a scene between his parents.

He turned and went out.

As he went the tall heavy door banged after him, and the long, pale muslin curtains at the high windows lifted and wavered out into the room. She screamed after him: "Edward—*Edward*—come back!"

But he didn't hear. Or didn't want to.

She knew he didn't want to.

The muslin curtains, like the aerial trains of sylphs, drifted down again; the light rippled on the painted ceiling; outside evening burnished the air, and altered the sounds and echoes up and down the canal.

The banged door had conjured up a strange quiet. The high cool room was filled up with shadows shovelled in by the strong golden light outside.

Violet felt chill and afraid. The ornately stuccoed walls enclosed her, and that last resounding of the door seemed to have sealed them against her last hope. It was as if everything she most valued had been deposited here with her, valueless in this sudden silent solitude; her most precious ideas, her most carefully hoarded sensations, her most cunning elixirs of youth and pleasure, sealed up with her, here, in this alien room of a hired palazzo.

6

Teresa's term had begun. She did her homework after tea, at the gate-legged table that stood in the bow window of the library. Brecky sat, pleased, by the yellow wood fire. Pots of chrysanthemums had been brought in from the conservatory and stood about on Cousin Lucy's little desk, and on the ledge halfway up the bookshelves. Cousin Chester read, or reread, long biographies of American statesmen that made him drowsy.

Teresa was doing a drawing of "Autumn." It was of a woman, rather like Martine's mother, in sabots and a brown dress and a yellow apron sitting with her hands folded. There was an open door at the back of her kitchen's steep perspective. Through it one saw red and yellow vine leaves, of accurate shape, suspended in a strong pencil-rayed wind, blown from the mouth of a Botticellian cherub on the cloud in the centre of the sky.

Lucy Althorpe had had a letter by the two o'clock post. She sat in her high-backed armchair reading it. She handed it on to Chester. He read it

slowly, and then once again, and then handed it back to her. "Rather decent," he said.

"Well—yes—" She looked at the letter again, and added, "Yes, I suppose it is."

"Edward needn't have written at all. He could have just let the whole thing lapse; the way we concluded he had."

"Yes."

They both glanced towards Teresa at the table in the window. She was intent, painting the sabots chrome yellow.

Lucy said: "Of course one knew there never could have been anything for him to find out. But the wicked, horrible thing was that he could well even imagine the whole . . ." she hesitated.

"The whole *plot*, dear?"

"Exactly."

He said: "I always thought he was being primed! As you know."

"Yes." And after a pause she added, "I notice in *The Times* that Lady Fanshawe's selling her house."

"In any case, that's a decent letter."

She folded it and put it in her grey velvet bag, with such letters or accounts as went into it to be considered, and acquire the scent of heliotrope from her handkerchief. She said: "I wonder what he *meant* by his trip to Paris making him change his mind?"

"Found another woman there to distract him."

". . . What nonsense!"

"Or maybe the Frenchman 'got tough'?"

"Cousin Lucy, what's mystic-red?"

"I don't know, dear. Perhaps one of the Sisters would tell you.—It's queer he waited to write."

"You see what he says. He's been in Venice, and then in Scotland."

"That's no excuse. He's always found excuses for being inconsiderate, in large or small matters. He . . ." She checked herself; then, threatened quite suddenly by her own tears, said: "Of course, one should really be very much relieved." She stiffened her head and shoulders, and interlocked her small

fingers, and shut her eyes against the wave of her own momentarily overwhelming relief, then turned her head for a glimpse of the intent profile against the dark green curtains.

"It may have been his wife who influenced him," Chester said. " 'Pam' isn't she called? She seems to be quite a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

"What are you saying, Cousin Chester? Don't you mean an iron hand in a velvet glove?" Teresa demanded.

"I don't mean anything! You go on with your masterpiece!"

"Or maybe she's a lamb in wolf's clothing?" he continued.

"My dear Chester! I know a 'lamb' when I see one! A woman of her type is never reliable."

"What about the woman-at-the-well? The one in the Bible?"

"I don't want to hear about her! Go on with your book, Chester. Teresa can't work if you talk nonsense, and I'm going to the silver cupboard to see what I can pick out as a present for Claire. Don't you think that's a good idea? As well as the little cheque we sent?"

Charles knew about "mystic-red."

Every Sunday now, so that, Teresa pointed out, he was a sort of Mr. Do-As-You-Would-Be-Done-By, he took her for walks on the Common.

This Sunday he recited to her a French poem about "*Les sanglots longs, Des violons d'automne*."

He said, too, that he thought autumn was the "explanation" of spring and summer.

She said: "Then what's winter?"

"Perhaps it's just sleep. Like that woman in your picture. She was obviously going to hibernate in her snug kitchen."

"You've rather mixed up ideas again!"

Further on, as they walked, in and out of the thickets of tattered silver birches, she said abruptly: "You know, I hoped you would marry Claire."

"Did you?"

"Yes. Now it'll have to be Katrina. Not that she isn't very, extremely nice too."

"She is, *very* nice . . ."

"Of course she's older than you!"

"Only a year."

"Dr. Johnson's wife was *much* older, I believe."

"Katrina's going back to America next week."

"You could *stop* her! Or she could go and see her family, and come back again."

"Do you think I ought to marry, Teresa?"

He glanced down. Her face was just below the level of his shoulders. She had tied a bright blue scarf under her chin against the strong wind. It hid her hair. Her oval small face was chilled to the pink of a sugared almond, her eyes were a bright moss-green.

"Of course you ought. So that I can be godmother to one of your children."

"I might be a priest."

"A priest? . . . *You!*"

He smiled. "You mean I'm not your idea of a priest?"

"*No!* Not that they're all like each other. Father Bumbletoes here isn't a bit like the Curé at Chouzy. But I just think you wouldn't have a vocation. And . . . besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

"Well . . ."

"Well what?" He saw her desire to speak the truth (which was as imperative in its gentler way as Lucy Althorpe's) visibly frustrated by a fear of ungraciousness.

"Well—Excuse me, but I noticed you didn't go to Mass at Chouzy."

"I've been since."

"Oh—*Good!*" After a moment she added, with tentative politeness: "Actually I prayed that you would."

"Thank you. Perhaps that did it!"

They walked on, in silence.

"It must be like the bit about 'Pioneers, O Pioneers' that Mummie read me . . . being a priest, I mean . . ."

"It *ought* to be."

"It's a nice bit, isn't it?"

"It is . . . very."

"Mummie said the difficulty is that the part of you that wants to be pioneerish gets kept on a special shelf, like Cousin Lucy's best hat," she said.

She stopped. He saw her evocation of Mary come at her, in sudden squall.

He drew her arm through his, and said, "We must go home, my darling. It's getting late."

7

Katrina dined with the Althorpes the night before she sailed. Charles was there.

At dinner in the white-panelled dining room, with the lace-and-linen napery, the Paul Revere silver, the fine glass, she could believe herself already at home. Lucy in her brown satin with lace ruffle at neck and wrist, her hair blued like snow shadows and waved above her still-pretty, wilful features. Chester in his velvet jacket, moustache and hands groomed, seemed positively to represent his breed of American gentleman, the keen lift of nostril, the placidity of well-modelled lips and fine forehead. He might have lived his life in England but still look, and be, part of that re-immigration into Europe that stretched way back (and included grand, great, distant old cousin Henry James) of American gentlefolk!

Katrina had come across several of them, these re-emigrants with their tradition of quiet living, and a characteristic respect for culture. She had found them resettled in England, or assimilated like Lucy's sister in Italy; but not, Katrina had seen, in Paris. Paris had, evidently, been "settled" since the sixties and seventies by all sorts of Americans, but seldom by its gentlefolk, these latter only coming there to study, or appreciate, or possibly visit some relative so changed by Gallic alchemy as to be scarcely recognisable as the "Mildred" or "Betty" of "years ago."

It had been fascinating to Katrina to find the "Elmwood Althorpes" living in their English house exactly as another lot of Althorpe cousins lived

in Providence. Even such English things as *The Times* and the rain fitted into a traditional New England pattern as oddly and easily as Gloria seemed to have, with all her devotedness, and caps and aprons, and implicitly egalitarian liberty of mind.

Katrina noticed that Charles was approved by Gloria, who interrupted the conversation to say that "Mr. Charles hadn't had any of the white" and should be given some "with his second helping." Teresa, between him and Chester, exclaimed he should have some of hers! But this was prevented by Lucy, who turned the conversation to Katrina's voyage home. She hoped Katrina's stateroom was on the top deck and that she wouldn't be obliged to "share"? To Katrina's admission that her cabin couldn't be "lower," and in the "Tourist" class, Aunt Lucy sighed with a "Dear me, of course!" which was one of her formulae for a bare recognition of "changed times"; "times" which, among other "disagreeable necessities" imposed economical travel. But, at any rate, Katrina would be met in New York by "one of the family?" Lucy suggested. Yes, indeed, Sandy Ellicott was meeting her and driving her up to Boston, Katrina said.

"And you'll be in Boston for the winter? With your parents?"

Katrina said "not all of the winter." She was going to spend part of it in her own small house up in the country, at South Egremont.

"That sounds nice and peaceful!"

Chester broke off a conversation he'd been having with Charles, to throw an affectionately teasing query, "You going to marry that prig, Sandy Ellicott?"

Katrina felt herself colour, and was aware of Charles watching her.

"I hope you won't—all the Ellicotts are prigs," Chester continued. "Sam Ellicott was at Harvard with me and he's the priggiest of the lot!"

Lucy intervened, "Now Chester, you *know* Sandy's very nice. And he's doing some wonderful research work at the Johns Hopkins. Only just last week his cousin, Fanny Delane, wrote me he was making quite a reputation for himself."

"Prig just the same," said Chester. "And I hope you don't marry him, Katrina! When he came two years ago, he stayed all afternoon and—" he glanced at his wife—"bored the pants off me."

"Now really, Chester! Actually—" Lucy turned to Charles—"he was *most* interesting. He told us all about some extraordinary experiments with

all those, what are they? *mycin* drugs he's working on."

"Prig just the same," repeated Chester, mildly and loudly. He challenged Charles. "Define a prig, Charles? You're literary!"

"I should say someone obviously secure in his own cleverness."

"It sounds like pride and pig mixed!" said Teresa.

Chester said, "Whatever it is, Sandy Ellicott is one . . . You haven't answered me yet, Katrina? His awful mother, Maisie, wrote Lucy that she believed you were coming back to marry him."

Katrina said lightly: "Not him. Or anyone! . . . Not right now, anyway."

She felt Charles shift his attention to Lucy; and met an enigmatic look of Teresa's. It was a look she had met before that expressed some quite unchildlike, deep and concentrated attentiveness; it seemed also to question, politely, thoughtfully, but with that distinct reserve of manner she always had towards Katrina when Charles was there. This effect the child made of ranging herself with him had seemed to Katrina to come, not from hostility or jealousy, but from a sort of protectiveness, so that Katrina had felt, once or twice, as though Teresa's rather touching anxiety for Charles might easily adopt the tactics of Olympian legend, wrapping Charles in a little cloud, or transforming Katrina herself into a shrub.

Lucy had led the talk away from the Ellicotts. She mentioned Claire's marriage, which was to be in November. Claire had written begging that Teresa should come to Paris for it. Lucy and Chester had decided to go too, and all three of them were to stay with "dear Sophie" at her Paris *appartement* in the Rue d'Anjou. "We shall both die of taking hip-baths," Chester interpolated. He refused to change his first impressions of certain extraordinarily outdated features of de Langer hospitality at the Château at Chouzy, years ago. This remark inspired Teresa with the hope that there might really be "baths with brown ears" such as she and Martine had once seen, stored in the attics.

Sophie had written, Lucy went on, that she had met Claire's fiancé, and approved of him. The wedding was to be at her *appartement*.

Teresa said, "I expect because Claire's parents' flat is too small and too full of her father's books."

Claire had written to Teresa that she and Philippe were going to live in "a room and a half" at the top of the building where Philippe's mother lived. Lucy said she got the impression from Sophie that the young man's mother

was “quite a humble” person. Charles said that the young man was very lucky to marry Claire; Katrina saw Teresa glance at him her eyes very bright and dark, her head tilted to one side, as often when she was attentive, like a puppy listening.

Katrina drove Charles back into London. After a few generalisations as to “pleasantness” of their evening, she became silent.

He couldn’t tell what her feelings were. He found himself hoping they weren’t unhappy. He dreaded the idea of being responsible for any more unhappiness. At the same time he wanted, he knew that his own unhappiness wanted, the sort of love that Katrina Althorpe could give. These last weeks he’d been tempted by the idea of what she would be capable of giving in depth of love, in complete loyalty, in delicious sympathy. He’d found himself wanting simply her presence in his life, and even counting on it to astonish him, eventually, into tenderness and passion. But at the same time he knew he was too empty. Empty of any magic astonishment of heart.

Without it no love was worth giving. Anyway no young love.

It would be only too easy to want Katrina to come back from America; and let her feel this. He glanced at her profile, dim-lit by the dashboard: her short arrogant nose, the soft sensitive way her determined lips closed, her wedge-shaped chin and the long line of throat.

He asked her if she was driving down to Southampton, next day?

“No.”

“You go from Waterloo, then?”

“Yes.”

“Can I come to see you off?”

“I’d simply love you to.”

She saw Charles coming. Her porter had already put her small case and coat in her corner seat, and she stood outside on the platform. Already the English voices around her, the thin vowels, the lackadaisical fall of sentences, the men’s short rattle of dry words, were interspersed with the macaw cries of the Middle West, a slow Texan bleat, the incisive lilt of New York. An English couple were tipping one another with small change of talk, fumbled up, with embarrassment, from an emotional pocket. An American

couple, seeing off two grownup daughters, kept up a ping-pong of last messages and admonitions.

She watched him coming, hatless, a little stooping, and broad-shouldered in his old khaki coat. He came, slowly staring and peering into each compartment, his drawn-down eyebrows giving him a chance effect of ill temper.

He saw her now, and came hurriedly.

She'd made up her mind to be easy. She smiled and said she was afraid he'd "rushed."

She'd got a more or less accurate notion of his state of feelings last evening. During the night she'd set her will and intelligence to deal with it; and by dawn—smoking one cigarette after another and gazing blankly at her trunks and cases—worked out an interim conclusion.

"You're a perfect dear to come, Charles."

"I'm afraid these flowers are awfully inadequate."

"They're quite *lovely*!"

Looking into his face she imagined Sandy Ellicott's square, firm rosy face, with its deepset eyes behind his glasses. Compared with it, Charles's face was paradox as surely as Sandy's was plain statement; Sandy's teaming up youth and health and brains, while Charles's features admitted youth, made health irrelevant, and relied on intelligence for their significance, his brain-process glowing fitfully like a lantern, manipulated to disclose as much, or rather to obscure as little, as possible.

"How often have you done this?" he asked.

"Done what?"

"Gone back to America?"

"This is the third time."

"Why don't you fly?"

"I like the sea trip. I like the between-two-worlds feeling."

"Are you sorry to go?"

She hesitated.

She was conscious how her "uniform-for-going," her small smart hat, her suit, her French shoes and gloves, a more or less perfectly drilled

elegance, positively held her together, compact and smart and "sensible," while she said "No."

The "no" exorcised the dowdy, weak-minded self, giddy from the pain of going, who ached to say "yes," and stand here hatless, gloveless and in tears among all this noise and shouting. She could feel how "yes" would have got his arms round her, partly from pity, partly from his present need of her.

"It's been a lovely year," she said. "But I'm not sorry to go. There's so much at home . . ."

"Is there?"

She had a second's impression that he was tenderly glad for her that there should be.

He said, "I often long to go. My father does a recitative about the exquisite excitements of America, and a special 'bit' about your New England! White wooden houses and 'blue mountains' and Indian place-names 'like the sound of gongs,' and 'mad old spinsters in rocking chairs on wooden porches.' *Is* it like that? Of course, Father's imagination is like a divining rod! It twitches over bits of territory that seem absolutely dry to the rest of us! Shouldn't you get in?"

The noise and shouting and whistling round them increased.

She got in, to lean in the opened window of the door. She said, "My little house is white and has a porch."

"What made you get it?" he shouted.

"I wanted it." Because she was going any minute now he was moved by the characteristic quality of this high-handed tone. "Maybe I'll live there when I'm a mad old spinster in a rocking chair. There's quite a tradition of crazy old Miss Althorpes already! One of them"—she had to shout now —"made a baby's layette and hid it in a closet where it was found when she died . . . the most *beautiful baby clothes you ever saw*—"

These last, loudly enunciated words stood out against a din of blowing whistles and banging doors.

"You're off . . ."

"It seems so!"

"Katrina?"

He took her two gloved hands.

"Listen," she said, clear and distinct, "listen to me, Charles dear! What you have to do is to go on keeping an eye on that little girl . . ."

The train was moving. He let her hands go.

". . . Teresa," she called up, and then compressed her lips to a determined half-smile behind her veil. She nodded, and lifted her hand and waved.

He called after her, "I'll write to you, Katrina."

But she couldn't hear.

Out to sea, leaning on the deck rail in the salty blowing splendour of light, the dark hissing sea far below, Katrina thought: maybe I am destined to be still another "Miss Althorpe." One of those young-Miss-Althorpes, not old or mad yet (not old for years yet), but free, perfectly independent, spending my own money, thinking out my own ideas, deciding exactly whom I shall see and where I shall travel to. Making up my own mind just what I do, and don't, like to do; knowing exactly the difference between false and true, and right and wrong. Maybe I shall become less and less ready to throw my freedom, and youth, and money into the arms even of the most interesting, most charming man (or even a man who is suffering, and needs to be consoled for his love of a dead woman). In a few years I shall, as Miss Althorpes do, administer my own liberty like a little kingdom. I shall begin to enjoy respect, and discount emotion. Beautiful Places, Good Music, or Just Causes, or Interesting People, will become my rightful territory; wherever these are I shall be found, very well dressed, and well read, and so perfectly self-assured that, whether I have decided (as Helen Althorpe did) that chastity, or (as Romaine Althorpe did) that promiscuity, suits me best, I shall in any case be sure that my view is the right one.

And let me comfort myself (under this heavenly sky and feeling the great power of the ship even in the vibration of the deck rail under my elbows) that I shall be let off a good deal of what marriage must let one in for. Great-aunt Louise Althorpe with her fringe and bustle and the respectful friendship of Lord Tennyson (described as "respectful" by himself in her autograph book) didn't have to face the same man for fifty years at the other end of a dining table. Helen Althorpe could invite d'Annunzio to her villa at Fiesole and go to Bayreuth summer after summer, without a child's measles, or the family budget, preventing her. And who dared to censure Romaine Althorpe in Montmartre (or Sally Althorpe in Chelsea, for that matter) if she elected to pursue Art, or Love, or sit all night in the Café de Flore, or have a chance baby and bring it up on raw vegetables.

Supposing she had stayed?

During that last night in London before sailing, her "no" to the situation had been one of those decisions that, accumulating, gradually built up one's life. That was a sort of pocket-existentialism she supposed. The "no" was her "self" and therefore her "life."

This view helped. She was going back home because her "self" wanted to. But Charles, who, when you probed deep, was riddled with the Catholic mystique, would say her "no" had been the will of God!

But neither view perfectly satisfied her, because both more or less predestined one's life.

She reflected incidentally (during a second of ironical self-awareness) that no "Miss Althorpe" had ever considered herself predestined! Even though two of them were known to have appointed a place for God in their own scheme of the universe: Great-aunt Louise having conceded His Real Presence, and Aunt Romaine become a Theosophist—Helen had decided against Him.

Katrina remembered a talk she'd had with Madame de Langer during that month at Chouzy, when the latter had said that Ideas always seemed more foolishly intoxicating to American women "because they have more vitality to waste," whereas they were "above all admirable" when doing practical good. Following on that subject Katrina had told her that, thanks to the peaceful condition of her visit to the Château, she had finished her book, and Madame de Langer said: "Good! Now you can spend your winter in a useful manner." In contrast Aunt Lucy's prevision of her winter mentioned during her words of farewell was that Katrina's parents would be "relieved to have her home." To Lucy dutifully loving was a "good" enough life. (Presumably the life all those traditional Miss Althorpes had rejected!) Certainly Katrina wanted it, the family home on Beacon Street, the dignified comfort, the atmosphere of well-bred kindness.

But only for a time.

8

When Charles got back to his room, one evening soon after Katrina had gone, he found a short letter from his father, partly about the "fascinating diversity in grass-seed" (he had an expert on this matter staying) and partly to say that he was coming to London for the first night of the "*Entführung*," "your mother refuses to leave her autumn preparation for a 'field of

asphodel.' There is also a new puppy, lineage enigmatic, and a rook whom she tames with *hors d'oeuvres variés* on her bedroom window sill . . ."

The other letter was long, the envelope postmarked "Finchley." It was addressed in a neat thick sloped handwriting. He pulled out a single sheet of blue lined notepaper and a folded envelope.

DEAR SIR,

Enclosed was found in my husband's pocket two days ago. This was owing to him being in hospital until this last week ever since the air accident he was in last April, him and the other that survived being taken straight to hospital. They took away their clothes at the Hospital and only give them back again when they came home which he did last week. I myself found the letter so we thought best to forward. My husband don't remember how it is he comes to have it. That might be on account of his having concussion on the top of his other troubles.

Yours faithfully,
MAY CLIMPTON

He opened out the envelope. It was addressed to him by Mary. It had no stamp.

He sat down, sick and stupid. He saw it shaking in his own hand.

He got it open, tearing the envelope. It was written on the pale yellow hotel notepaper of the hotel she went to in Paris. He began to read. She'd put "Wednesday morning" at the top of the page.

DARLING,

Yesterday evening I went to see my mother's old friend here, the Abbé Meudon. I don't know why I went. I don't know if I wanted to. Perhaps I wanted a miracle. But then I don't like miracles. That's to say, miracles being marked pink and everything else considered normal marked blue. Although I told Tante Sophie I was going to see him in Paris I didn't mean to really. When I got to Paris I half meant to. Then I met an old friend, and we went to the Bois, and I still wasn't sure I'd go, although I told her I had an appointment to go there.

He lives in an awfully grim shabby *appartement* on the ground floor, very badly lit because it gives onto *la cour*. There were

people waiting to see him. I waited with them. While I waited his little housekeeper (she looked like a Cruikshank drawing) came in and put some narcissus in a vase in front of Our Lady on the chimneypiece. Nobody of the people waiting spoke. One woman looked like an ex-music-hall star, all peroxide and defiance, and another very black and respectable in the French way. There was a shabby, ragged old man who coughed and smoked. I had to wait a long time. While I was waiting I saw that each of them came out of the door with a different, I mean changed, look. I can't describe it, but it made me know I must stay and go in too! All the same when my turn came I didn't really want to go. I went in not wanting to, exactly like the stiff cross feeling one has when one kneels down but doesn't want to pray. But then I saw him, and this feeling went.

You know how, when one was a child, there were certain people that seemed *safe*, and *sure*, and *dear* at once, all mixed up. It was like that. He talked about my mother first of all. He said she wrote to him sometimes. (I didn't know that.) He was much older looking than I expected, or perhaps just much more ill looking. He is quite crippled with arthritis. He lies on a sofa while he talks to you. Whenever he moves you can't help seeing he's in pain. Only he's so alive, and has such beautiful manners, when he "receives" you, that you don't connect what you actually see of him with what you feel *from* him. I mean he's old and emaciated and bald, with horribly knotted-up hands, and only his eyes and voice belonging to the man you become aware of. His room is big, and dingy and everything in it is worn, and it's chockful of books. He has a table covered with papers pushed up close beside his sofa, with a telephone on it.

I sat on a cane-backed wooden armchair with a very clean *toile-de-Jouy* cushion on it. I thought perhaps the little housekeeper-woman puts a fresh cover on for each penitent!

I hadn't meant to tell him anything. But I did. I told him about you and me. I simply found myself telling him. I told him that you were so much more afraid of the situation than I, and hated it in a way I didn't, and that I'd come away on this journey to try and think things out, in *theory*, but not really meaning to. Also that, although you loved me you were afraid of making me unhappy, but that I felt it was the only real happiness we could ever have. I

told him I felt nothing else mattered at all, and that nothing else was real. He said that it was inevitable I should feel that. I said that I'd thought it out that it couldn't hurt Teresa, or anyone. I said that I knew that ours was "good love," also that I knew the difference between good and bad love. He understood that too. I told him other things that I never told you, because they had nothing to do with you and me. All the time he listened I felt that he was understanding more than I did myself. But this gave me such a feeling of comfort that I became afraid we were getting into a sort of mist of cosiness and he might imagine that I was *confessing*, instead of just talking to him. So I said he must realise that I meant to go back and become your mistress, and that I didn't "repent," and didn't want to. But he said, of course he knew that, with a sort of charming, dear politeness, exactly as if I had overexplained a social fault, like lateness in keeping someone waiting. Then I said he must forgive me for coming and that it must seem rather tiresome and crazy, because I knew that he had heaps of "real penitents." But he said it didn't seem so at all, and that all he saw was that I was unhappy, and he was touched that I had come. I said I hoped he wouldn't judge me too severely, and that perhaps if I had explained more about those miserable years with Edward I wouldn't seem quite so bad, because those years had made me thirsty for love and happiness. He said how could he "judge" me? And that anyway people can only see one another *contre-jour*, against the light. I said perhaps it was illogical to ask him to pray for me, and he smiled at this and said he should do that anyway. I had brought him a very lovely little ivory statue of Our Lady that one of my friends here had given me. I gave it him before I went. I explained that I didn't feel I was a person to have such a lovely holy thing, which was part of the real reason I didn't want it. He said it was too exquisite for his surroundings, "*ma pauvre chambre*," he said, but that he would certainly find someone worthy of it. But I saw he was deeply moved by its beauty. I could see that. He is so sensitive, you can feel him being moved or saddened or overjoyed by each very smallest impression. I suppose the holier you are the more beautifully sensitive you are. I must have been more and more influenced by his sensitiveness and goodness the longer I stayed with him. Because when I was going, quite suddenly, I had such a longing, it was like pain, only lovely instead of ugly . . . I can't explain easily, but it was a longing to love you *all*, you and Teresa, and Cousin

Lucy and Cousin Chester, and even Edward, all in the same way (how stupid this looks, explained!). But it was a love for you all, not in a separate complicated way, but quite simply, with the indescribable sort of sweetness and completeness one felt in *him*, and coming *from* him. I asked him if he could bless someone who wasn't penitent, and making head-on for sin? But he said, rather ironical but affectionate too, "You will find sin difficult!" He added that venial sins are easy enough to settle down to, but mortal sin had its bad surprises, *mauvaises surprises*. Then I knelt down. After he'd blessed me, and just when I was going, he asked me why I didn't give up my religion and marry you? I said I would if it weren't for Teresa. Because if I did it would be like saying to her that everything I'd brought her up to believe, and the nuns had taught her, counted for nothing. So it would be like murdering her deepest feeling of security. Then he said, as if he *knew*! that you hadn't given up your religion. I said that was true.

After I'd left him I came back here to my hotel, up to my room. I've got the room I always have. One of the little rooms very high up. Its windows lead out onto leads and balustrade, and overlook the Tuileries, and the Seine beyond, and the owl-eyed clocks of Quai d'Orsay opposite, and to the right the Place de la Concorde, and far to the left Nôtre Dame. It's the view I love most in the world. I don't know why. Perhaps because I lived with this view when I was a very little girl with my mother and father. I kept sleeping and waking all night. The last time I woke it was altogether morning, and an early mist was lifting, and the sun coming through. I climbed out of my window onto the leads and sat there in my dressing gown. I thought such a lot of things, mixed up, that I wanted to tell you, because I always want to tell you whatever I think, however banal it is. I looked down and thought how small a space it was to be so loaded with history, and so alive *now*, as well. Beetle-small men began to go across the gardens below and I wondered what kind of wife or cosy rumpled little mistress they'd left behind, at this hour, to come out into this heavenly, wonderful morning! I thought how queer that so much thinking and suffering and making deliciously pretty things, and cooking deliciously good food, had happened all in this one "view" that I sat gazing at in my dressing gown, and so filled with thinking of you every second too.

The beauty kept coming up at me. How disturbing and beautifully saddening a sense-of-the-past is, isn't it? It's like watching a column marching past, and you know when the end of the column comes you'll have to join it! Anyway, because I was so moved already perhaps, and hadn't slept, I found myself thinking of the Abbé yesterday evening, and he became more and more part of my thoughts. I don't know what the "stages" were, or how long it was before I came back into my room from the leads and dressed and went out. It was only just after six when I was dressed. I'd decided to go to his church, and say good-bye to him when he came out from Mass. I'd noticed when I passed his church yesterday evening that the first Mass was at seven. When I got there it was before seven. I walked there. I think its early streets make any town lovable, because then its real people are about. I went to the porch. It's a big hideous granite church. The Abbé came across the street while I was waiting, hobbling and helped to walk by his housekeeper, who doesn't look strong enough herself to lift a canary off its perch. He walks slowly with one shoulder hunched up. He saw me, and came to me in the porch. He said what could he do for me? I said I'd come to go to confession. He seemed to expect this, and told me to come with him. The housekeeper only went as far as the door of the sacristy with him, I waited by the confessional. It was cold inside the church. He came back. After my confession he went to begin Mass. I knelt down in one of the front pews. I think there were several other people. I thought about you, and I found I could pray for you. This prayer was like love, and my love for you like prayer, so that there was no difference. The Abbé said very little to me after my confession, except that he believed that four words that he quoted from Claudel, would help us both, "*Communion sur la Croix*." He gave me communion. I didn't wait to see him afterwards. I came back. Since I got back I've had some coffee and sat at the window writing this to you. It's a few minutes past eleven on the Quai d'Orsay clocks, and I seem to have been over two hours writing this letter. It's meant to explain itself.

I shall give it to a steward on a plane to post, in case I shouldn't have the will to post it myself, once I'm back. I shall go straight to Teresa, and Elmwood. Perhaps I shall be able to take Teresa away with me, for a time. Perhaps here, to France. Madame de Langer has asked me to go with her to the Château any time. Or

perhaps there's the possibility you talked of, of you being sent over to the New York office of W. and A. Now I must pack, and pay my bill.

Dearest love, I feel I've got so many arrears of love to make up. To you most of all.

9

Letter from Charles Behrens to Teresa Fanshawe:

RUE JACOB,
PARIS VI.
28TH MARCH

MY DEAR TERESA,

To answer your three questions—

(a) I *am* coming back to London next week and shall expect you to sup with me in my "eyrie," if Cousin Lucy agrees, on the first possible occasion.

(b) It *has* seemed a long time since I came over here. I am glad, and sorry, if you feel it so.

(c) Enjoying myself? *No*. Liking Paris? *Yes*.

You say my last letter was too short. I was probably busy, or dull, or *grippé*, the latter a spring fashion everywhere. Old W. and A. keep me busy here. I have to see French authors, and French publishers and read their French books. I lunch out, dine out, go to plays, films, and exhibitions of practically everything except smells. Well, almost that too, as Claire took me yesterday to a scent shop, where in fact she merely bought one piece of, it seemed to me, scentless soap! But we sniffed one little bottle after another until we were quite overpowered and had to go out and have literally the vapours in the Rue St. Honoré. As a result of this Claire thinks (I'm to tell you) that her baby, that is to arrive in May, may be a butterfly, as these are such fanciers of perfume!

I visit Claire and Philippe often. They have a beautiful clean attic, and all their happiness fits into it a treat. Philippe goes out every day to teach in his *lycée*, and Claire does her marketing with a big basket, and sometimes takes me with her. I expect you saw her nice mother-in-law, roundish and red-haired at the wedding?

She lives two floors below Claire and Philippe. She makes lingerie and a fuss of me. Last week I took her to one of the chic *Cinés* in the Champs Elysées close by the un-chic little street she lives in, and afterwards she cooked me such a supper as I should like to (but never will know how to) cook for *you* in my "cichinett" at Thurloe Square.

Madame de Langer has been in Paris this month and I went to see her. You were quite right to say her apartment looks as if there was "a party for furniture going on." When I threaded my way among it to Tante Sophie she was *very* nice, and gave me a choice of tea and port. She said you behaved beautifully when you stayed there for Claire's wedding. I hope sometime she'll tell you that I "behaved beautifully," because once she's made any pronouncement one feels there can be no other opinion. I suspect she feels this too.

You asked me if I had a "nice French room." Yes, "French." No, "nice." It is rather dingy and "giving," as they say, "on the court." But it is *chauffée* sometimes and (since you ask) my *salle de bain* is furnished in the usual French manner. Every morning my breakfast is brought by a muscular woman in white espadrilles who looks as if she had just been shot from a cannon. If I have been to early Mass at St. Germain des Prés (where Anatole France was christened!) this *femme canonne* shows her approval by giving me *pain brioche* instead of her usual jaw-testing toasts (pronounced TOST) and on Lady Day she added strawberry jam.

Last week I went to see an old priest whom your mother knew. He also knows your grandmother (Graham). He gave me a small present for you. I wanted to see him because your mother saw him almost a year ago. It was comforting to see him. I shall try and tell you about it one day.

Tell Cousin Lucy I could fetch you at school and bring you back to Hi-tee with me. Or if you are now so aged as to take a taxi by yourself, I shall be ready for you, stirring my cauldron and making suitable incantations.

Finally, but importantly, I am delighted that Cousin Lucy will let you come for Easter to Norfolk with me. You will find my mother a hostess after your own heart. She is set about with birds and animals, and is a gay, legend-telling, reading aloud, most

easily picnicking kind of person, and my father is an aged courteous mildly eccentric Israelite, always doting on some new sort of beauty. Last time I was at home he made me come into the kitchen to dote on the appearance of a loaf of new bread. Next time it will be you! He will say: "But Charles! the splendour of so simple a thing!" Just as he did about the loaf!

Your very loving
CHARLES B.

10

The red and white checked tablecloth had been put away for nearly a year in the drawer of the writing table that always pulled out crooked, and contained a small key that fitted nothing.

Charles's "Miss Townshend" had folded it up and put it away nearly a year ago, on the morning she had found him, as she'd reported to a friend, "not gone to work, and his bed not slept in," and not seeming to hear a word she said, only he'd said: "Yes, clear the table." It was set for two, but not a thing had been touched. And a whole lot of stuff in the kitchen as well.

Charles had happened to open the drawer once and seen it. But he hadn't used it until today. It was thick and crisp and clean. Now it covered the table for Teresa exactly as it had prepared for Mary. Its white and red lay beneath the red tulips, the white plates of chocolate éclairs, and croissants Charles had brought in, the cherry jam, the yellow butter sent to Charles by Maureen Ames, whose timid forcefulness could tap mysterious supplies for anyone she considered needed "feeding-up."

Charles went to the window and looked down into the square. Teresa had telephoned to say she would take a taxi. He could imagine the grave and pleased manner in which she would stand on the pavement to hail one, and once in it to sit back, and how the bright strange ribbon of London would pass across the taxi window, recording itself in a Morse code of gleams and flickers in her eyes.

He saw a taxi now, slowing to the pavement. Its door opened to emit the green beret and brown satchel. He saw the shine of her loosed hair as she ran over to jump up the wide step.

As he waited he could gradually hear her through his opened door, coming up the tall house. Her steps became distinct on the final, narrow, once "servants' stairs," that led up to his room.

"Cha . . . arles?" He could hear her breathless, stumbling the last steps. Then she was in the doorway.

"*Gosh!* I have *run*!" She stopped, flushed, breathless, glancing at him, and then round the room, and then at him again, to realise him and rush to him and hug him. Then having jumped and hugged from excitement became quiet suddenly and let him go.

He said: "You've grown again!"

"Have I—again?"

"I . . . think so."

"P'raps. I know Gloria's aunt is letting down all my summer frocks."

"How lucky I don't have to let down my summer trousers . . ."

"I *say*, chocolate éclairs!" She slipped off her satchel, threw it down on the divan.

He asked "What's happened to the plaits?"

She threw her coat over a chair and took off her beret and dropped it on the writing desk.

"As a matter of fact I undid them in the taxi, and did my hair like this." She touched a maladroit brown bow that lifted her hair to the crown of her head. She glanced down: "I *wish* I hadn't had to come in my gym tunic . . . still . . . Can I make the toast? Where's the toaster Cousin Chester gave you at Christmas that pops the toast out?"

"There it is. And I'll scramble the eggs."

"What a *pretty* cloth."

"Your mother gave it me."

She had a second's pause before she said, in the clear, grave manner she had when she was moved, "I'm so glad she did."

He handed her the slices of bread, and took the eggs from a bowl. He said they had been sent by his mother and were laid by her singular hens with names.

As he broke them into his saucepan she asked if his father "admired eggs as well as bread?" and Charles answered that he probably considered eggs a "lesson" in pure prettiness.

"How's the toast getting on? Tea or milk?"

"Tea."

"China?"

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind. It's too like those tisanes that Christophe brings Tante Sophie after dinner."

"Did you enjoy our visit there?"

"Yes . . . I liked Martine . . . Is a wooden spoon the right thing?"

"So my mother says."

"What's happening to Miss Katrina?"

"She's still in America. You always called her Miss Katrina."

"She feels Miss-ish, I think. I do hope I shall see Claire's baby."

"I'm sure you will. Is the toast ready? Put it in that rack. These eggs are done."

They sat down, facing each other. Teresa said:

"*Oh*."

"What?"

"Just it's nice . . . Being here." She ate. "Lovely eggs!"

"How's Jane's black mouse?"

"He flourishes."

"And Brecky?"

"He's well. He was asked in marriage but Cousin Lucy refused. When I'm grown up I shall have heaps of dogs."

"How long d'you reckon that'll be?"

"Five years. I should say eighteen was grownup, wouldn't you?"

"Officially, yes."

"What a nice cosy fire. I expect you didn't have a fire in that room of yours in Paris, did you? When we were at Tante Sophie's *appartement* the bedrooms had velvet mantelpieces but no fires, and screens stood in the fireplace."

"No, I didn't have a fire, and when it was very cold I sat huddled up in an old fur-lined coat of my father's, with astrakhan 'frogs,' like a sort of

exiled Svengali, and sometimes if I sat reading late, my *femme canonne* brought me hot wine."

"Is that nice?"

"It makes one sleep."

"Does it make you dream? Gloria says hot cheese makes you dream—What funny things dreams are!—They're never really satisfactory, are they? I mean—if they're nice they're not real. And if they're horrible you wake up remembering them, and you go on remembering them. I think it's funny the fussation they made about dreams in the Old Testament. Always thinking they meant something. D'you dream?"

"Sometimes."

She said, "I had a silly dream last night, about you in Paris. I think it must have been after your last letter. You know that *big* place . . . huge . . ."

"The Place de la Concorde?"

"Yes. Well, you were coming across it walking; there was hardly any traffic. It was quite light but for some reason, I couldn't see your face properly. I was waiting for you on the side you come to from Tante Sophie's, down that narrow street called Boissy something. You took simply ages to come, and I was afraid you might get run over, because I could see a funny black little taxi coming to you from the side and I called out but you didn't seem to hear, and when the taxi got to you it was a priest! A very old priest, and I know it was the Abbé you wrote about, and I know he was nice, in my dream, but I was afraid he would stop you. I saw him drop something into your pocket, but you didn't thank him, or stop. And the usual kind of silly-dream-thing was that he was suddenly the old gardener that used to come every week to Elmwood, that Cousin Chester calls 'Mr. Hedgehog' and I saw him touch his hat to you, but you just came on, looking hawkish like you do, without noticing him . . ."

"Do I look hawkish?"

"Nice hawkish. Can I have another éclair?"

"Finish them up. In fact I have got something from the Abbé, as I wrote to you." He took a minute parcel out of his pocket and handed it to her.

"He sent you a message that he had heard you wanted it."

Teresa's fingertips undid the bright blue paper that wrapped a medal of *Nôtre Dame des Victoires*.

"How did he know?"

"Your mother must have told him."

"Then she *did* remember!"

"I think that's what he wanted you to know . . ."

She went quickly to the fire and crouched down by it. "Mummie didn't much *like* holy medals. I remember she said once, when she was annoyed, that she was sure the Devil simply *clanked* with holy medals. But she was nice after, and she said really it was just that medals were only as holy as the people who wore them—" Her lucid voice quivered. He saw her shiny drifts of hair slip forward. It was the first time she'd spoken to him of Mary since her death. But now she seemed to want, or need, to go on speaking. She spoke slowly, choosing out her words and putting them together with a kind of delicate force.

"It doesn't seem like in books, when people die. It seems more as if it was they who are always real, but oneself called away from them, to other things—lots of them nice and interesting. Even when one's sad," she added, "only all the time they *are* there, very kind and tidy."

"Tidy?"

She lifted her head and tossed her hair back.

"Perhaps I mean un-muddled?" Her lashes glittered.

He said, "I like 'tidy.'" He went to the window. "Come and look out," he said. She came, getting to her feet limber and awkward, and leaned beside him. He said: "Look down . . . When it gets dusk down there in the square, all those left-over old ladies and dogs, and prams, and old gentlemen begin to go to the gates . . . D'you see them? Down there, through the branches!" He couldn't bear her to cry, and offered her old gentlemen and dogs as he'd once beguiled her tears with riddles and chocolates.

But after a few minutes her oddly grown common sense made her say:

"We'd better shut the window. It's getting cold." She added: "Let's go back by the fire."

"What about a game of chess?"

"Oh yes, *please*."

Lucy came around at seven, and found them by the fire, the chess board between them. Something about their profiles, their hunched shoulders, their long legs under the card table, amused and touched her. There was a quality of youth common in the completeness of their concentration, and the sprawled easy abandon of their limbs.

"Well . . . children!" She had come up all the stairs but wasn't out of breath. Climbing of high flights of stairs was a thing to be done, if necessary, and without comment. "It's seven o'clock." She had assigned this time for Teresa to come home. Charles got up; Teresa dragged her attention from the chess board.

Lucy said: "What a nice room! And airy up here, I expect, and no noise. Put your things on, Teresa dear!"

Charles escorted them downstairs to the car, that waited outside, grey, neat, and dignified like Lucy herself. As she got into the driving seat she said how glad she was, for Teresa, that she was going on this "delightful visit" with him to his parents. Her desire for Teresa's happiness had deleted her prejudices against Charles's parents, or rather what she knew of them. For although she was too cultivated, and in her special tradition of expatriate, too cosmopolitan to "dislike Jews," she disapproved of "certain rich Jews" and had decided in her mind that Charles's father must be the cousin of "those Behrenses" whom she recollected as "odiously worldly." Her prejudice had been also against his mother's suspected "eccentricity." Accustomed to respect eccentricity in genius, she disliked it in normal people. That Tolstoy should have had cucumber and eight cups of tea for supper, that Balzac was erratic, that Shelley kept apples in a drawer, was part ornament of their special shrines. Nevertheless Lucy set against all this the country air, and Teresa's eagerness to go.

Charles watched them drive off and then went up, very slowly, to his room. As he began putting the chessmen into their box, he thought about Teresa, and of the strange chance of their relation.

Or was one move no more strange than another in the whole game? He thought of all the preceding moves that had finally set him so close to Mary's little girl. And the move that got Claire near, and then away. And Katrina . . .

He folded the board and put it away with the box of chessmen.

Claire who had momentarily tempted his fancy and excited his thoughts as specifically as a bottle of gin, or a pipe of opium.

What he hadn't got from Claire, who had never been more than an expression of his troubled imagining, he'd got, in fact—and really enough, from Lisette, this winter in Paris, before she left for Marseilles.

For Lisette had been the exact equivalent of consolation by the litre, forgetting by the glass. Her five foot of body had offered him oblivion; her bed, with its pink taffeta curtains festooned from the presiding chipped gilt plaster cupid, had provided its humble *décor* for the specific panting, barbaric ritual, whose end was sleep . . . Only perhaps in the long run, all ritual demanded a sustained significance? The pink curtains framed their own tragedy, and the five foot of female body had Lisette's head, whose round face framed in permed butter-yellow curls, was, too often, the strained truculent face of an ill-nurtured little girl.

His thoughts moved to and fro over this last year with the hesitant vividness of a searchlight. The first weeks after Mary's death. Stupor, and then dazed misery. The terrifying query of his own responsibility for her death.

He tried to get back, in imagination, those first weeks when their love had caught them both on its sudden tide of unbelievably beautiful excitement.

Last summer, after her death, all happenings and people had been like flickering, feverish dreams, except when he was with Teresa, and found she needed him. There'd been Chouzy, in September. And finding Katrina there; and being with her from day to day; discovering her freshness of mind, and liking her qualities of decision and the feminine intelligence of her heart and sympathies.

Then Katrina going. His simply letting her go. Then the monotony of the autumn; his same room, his same routine at Woodley and Ames, the same unavoidable cocktail parties. The blank Christmas, his own refusal of it, that felt all the time like a refusal of life itself. Then the move to Paris.

All this too like moves on a chessboard.

In Paris the same loneliness; worse because without routine. Frustration by beauty. The sense of not being young enough, or old enough, or foolish enough; or just merely "satiable enough," like the horrible sort of middle-aged people one saw wherever there was expensive food or amusement, enjoying their little fat pleasures, and bleating or grunting their repetitive appreciation.

Paris rain; whole grey districts; morose boulevards, side streets whose poverty seemed to have extinguished everything except an indestructible genius for giving a glint of wit to a truculent opinion, or glamour to a vegetable stall in an east wind.

Paris and Lisette. And worse loneliness after.

Then that afternoon with the Abbé. The piled books, the inadequate fire, the old man's indescribably civilised simplicity. And his mildly ironical:

"*Advice?* To you I suggest merely that one's own life is advice—Its events have their own eloquence . . . Like all eloquence it is intended to disturb the soul . . ."

EPILOGUE

The second empire continues to inhabit Sophie de Langer's Paris *appartement* in the Rue d'Anjou. The four tall windows of the salon on the third floor, that face on the narrow street, are shut against the sombre frosty transparence of the January afternoon. What light there is reaches the room inside through cross-looped net curtains. Each window has stiffly yellow braided and fringed pelmets and hangings of dark moss-green velvet. This the dimmed ochred glow from out of doors has infused into the paler clear radiance shed by an electric lamp that stands on the table beside the sofa, a massive mahogany scroll-ended piece of furniture with its apoplectic upholstery, and illumines the detail immediately round it like a lantern set down within this elaborately furnished tomb of another age. Within the circumference of its light are the oval table-top of galleried marble on which stand a few miniature tooled and gilded little books, a turquoise-blue porcelain, gilt-banded small cornucopia its glaze marked by the hair-fine cracks, a stout red-tasselled end-cushion of the sofa, an area of the Turkey carpet, the ebony and serpentine legs of a cabinet whose *vitrines*, lined with emerald silk, display a set of white and scarlet chessmen, and the heavily yellow-fringed *causeuse* that hides the feet of a dumpy yellow chair set close by the big sofa. But the main part of the room, once accustomed to the radiance of gaslight, is at this moment dimmed and gilded and sepia-brushed with shadows, and lies, with an effect of sadness, recoiled from the black figure on the sofa reading, and has the musty, ghostless gloom of a period-room in a museum.

But when Christophe comes in, he switches on the standard lamp, inevitably graceless, which reveals the double-doors which interrupt an unending sequence of cabinets and chairs and bookcases whose books are hidden by a brass lattice backed by pleated green silk, all this close-ranked furniture standing at attention against walls. These walls have been long dedicated to past travels and forgotten relatives; and the handsome grey watered-silk panels are beset with a whole gamut of prosperous ancestors in neckcloths or satin neckties, in ringlets or *bandeaux*, the males pig-eyed or truculent, the females simpering or morosely anaemic, and with views in oil or water colours of Turkey, of Greece or Italy, and photographed groups, paled in leprous patches, jaundiced daguerrotypes in black frames, and oval miniatures in brass frames. All having migrated from the Gothic-pinewood

corridors of Chouzy to settle as if in petrified flights across these walls, within the so strange music of the jingle of fiacres and rolling by of carriages and the hollow haunting street-cries of the *marchand de guimauve* and *Des baisers, M'sieu et dames . . . des baisers . . .*

Sophie, rotund in black, the stare of her black eyes moving intently across the page, is reading *Le Monde*. She is unaware of the edgy bleat of taxis passing below, or of the mimosa that a grateful ex-secretary sends her every year at this time from the Midi and that embalms the well-headed room with its feathery sweetness. She goes on reading while the double-doors are opened, from outside, then left wide open, while Christophe retreats along the sombre, parquet-floored glade of *boule* lit by convoluted gleams of ormolu, to fetch the tea tray. She continues to read. For, just today, there happens to be a review of Philippe's novel that has just been published by Plon. And ever since Philippe has become one of her nephews, everything that he does or writes is her serious concern.

Also the novel itself has unexpectedly pleased her. In it, to her agreeable surprise, she found less of his paradoxical cleverness that she mistrusts and much of his real "seriousness" that she has frequently noticed and valued.

Only when Christophe is quite near her, setting the big tray on the low table before the sofa, she puts down her paper, and pitches her gruff voice higher and louder so that he can hear her.

"—the novel of Monsieur Philippe is well spoken of in here, Christophe!"

He hears a second or two before he comprehends any but routine, accustomed sentences. Then he nods, an old man's nod, thoughtful, sober, shaky. A gleam of benevolence crosses the blue-glass depths of his eyes.

"Good! . . . that is *good*, Madame! . . ."

As he speaks the bell rings; immediately he turns to hurry off, his feet slappering, his knees bent, his elbows lifted as if they were being used like fins to propel his stiff body over the parquet. Sophie hears his respectfully excited greeting of Claire and "Monsieur Philippe!" then sudden cooing tremolo of welcome to the baby.

Claire and Philippe come in—both hatless, both seeming immensely tall and broad-shouldered, both in big heavy shabby overcoats, and with a resembling eagerness, their faces whipped to vividness by the cold out in the streets. Claire has never looked so pretty, for she is filled with gay and tender assurance. Philippe's happiness has modified his defensiveness. He is

losing sight of Man and has begun to see men and women. Claire carries on her arm a baby as impeccable as a fresh gardenia, as pink as a sugared almond, cloaked and hooded in white fur, and, when divested of this, exquisitely confectioned in tucked lawn and lace and insertion threaded with pink ribands. For Philippe's mother "dresses" her granddaughter; the big table in her workroom beyond the curtain is littered in the evenings with scraps of muslin and wisps of Valenciennes, the lenses of her latest spectacles reveal the lines reticulated on the pads of her fingers, and the dry edges of her crimson nails.

The baby's face resembles a peach and its hair the silk of a corn cob. Claire's eyes, full of merriment, have been adroitly inserted into the peach, but in Claire's opinion, its hands are an exquisite imitation of Philippe's big palms and long fingers.

The baby, "Sophie Teresa," is set down on the Turkey carpet. Sophie has put down *Le Monde*, taken off her spectacles, laid aside her seriousness.

For this is a baby with whom it is impossible to be serious. Her delicious, unpractical clothes, now spread out in frothing and beribboned layers, are the outward and visible sign of an inward yet undeniable frivolity. Her tiny, pink kid, lace-up boots (Philippe's mother is an old friend of the famous baby's *bottier* near the Etoile), her smile, that contains six carefully matched pearls, her nails copied from Sevres rose petals, and her global figure designed both to display the finest stitchery and contain the most nourishing meals, all confirm her general message of confident hedonism.

High above her yellow floss head Christophe brings in a weighty silver teapot, while her great-great-aunt (by marriage) disregards her, but only for a moment, to congratulate her father on his book and the review of his book.

But meanwhile the gleamy teapot pleases her, and the gruff sounds of Sophie's voice, and when she looks up she can see the two faces she most delights in.

Lucy slows her car and draws up against the pavement outside the convent whose name she will never use, but speaks of to Teresa as "Your grandmother's convent." Chester is beside her. For he is accompanying her to an exhibition of water colours in Bond Street. Teresa gets out of the back of the car, and listens attentively to the demand that she shall be "down here, outside the front door, at a quarter past four." Teresa answers "yes, Cousin Lucy," preoccupied by the appearance of the park on the other side of the road, a phantom park, seen through the high railings, which are gloved, like

the misted trees beyond them, in rime that sparked like the sugar on the black currant pastilles. The general effect that fascinates her as she stands—letting Cousin Lucy drive off—is that the park has come up through an immense trap door in the universe into a freezing pink glow bronzed by layers of smoky gauze. The shimmering skeleton arms of the trees, the shadows of horses are projected across the layers of gauze; figures and perambulators, and flittering small dogs, solidify for a second and disperse again into the cold ochre atmosphere.

Teresa turns and goes up the steps and walks in.

Lucy, with Chester beside her, has got into a traffic block in Park Lane. She sits in her grey squirrel coat, prettily hatted and veiled as for the driving-out of her girlhood, accepting, with delicate impatience, this particular red, yellow, green regulation of traffic that demands her unquestioning yet thoroughly annoyed conformity. Tapping her toe beside the brake, she uses these enforced moments of delay to comment to Chester on "what has happened to" what her exacerbated nostalgia describes as these "dear old houses." The bow-fronted stucco of one, the tall Georgian windows of another; an iron-hooded balcony where she can remember years ago "sitting out," the crowded ballroom behind her, and looking at trees and stars, these houses, placarded by builders, or war-gutted, or already too visibly "converted" from their old London individuality to the domiciliary life-in-death of "luxurious flats," all this fills Lucy Althorpe with a sad, perplexed, indignation against—? She would not be able to say against what.

She isn't sure, that is part of her sadness, and part cause of her perplexity (since she is accustomed to be sure), exactly why things have changed so very much, nor how, precisely, they have changed. All that she certainly knows is that people are different, that places have altered; that much that was spacious has become narrow; that the lesser matters of ease have become problems of major difficulty; that distinct lines have blurred and a once reliable sort of brightness tarnished. As to how much of "all this change" is due to the two wars, and how much to time, she doesn't know. Or, really, care. For Lucy's attitude towards events has always been moral, not curious. As to Time, she has never got on any terms with it, but like a dog with a buzzing fly on a window pane, been merely roused now and then to uncomprehending annoyance, or vague momentary surprise.

The lights change:—yellow—green. Lucy's gloved hand moves her clutch handle. ". . . at *last* . . ." she says to Chester.

But he hasn't been aware of undue suspense, or exasperation endured; or of houses desecrated by change, nor indeed, of one's whole life so strangely, inexplicably, buzzed at.

Pleased by his view of the park he has always had a great affection for London; he thinks, with affection too, of Teresa whom they have just left on the pavement; outside her "grandmother's convent." For a regretful, kindly moment, he thinks of her grandmother; remembering how handsome Camilla used to be, and her way of smiling suddenly.

Chester is so softly bewitched by memory, and undisturbed by imagination, that he doesn't envisage Camilla as she is at this moment.

Chester lets himself be driven across Grosvenor Square, indifferent, as Lucy isn't, to whatever it is one regrets about "Mr. Roosevelt's statue," as well as being perfectly unaware of that mysterious buzzing on the window pane.

It is a thinly tinkling jarring metal bell; such as may be jerked outside a door set in a high garden wall.

But this is a wooden door, up two short flights of uncarpeted wooden stairs. A cord drawn through a hole above the lintel is attached to this bell. It hangs, polished as far as its tin surface responds to fervid rubbing by a lay-sister, within view of the portress whenever she raises her glance, from her endless fine mending of coarse linen, to observe its agitation, already signalled by the metallic gibberish of its little clapper.

Teresa has tugged the knotted cord. She stands at the top of the now familiar wooden stairs, listening for the sounds of the portress getting up, unwieldy and prompt, from her chair; the chair legs on the parquet, the clink of scissors set down on the trestle table over by the big back window that overlooks the walled yard with its nut trees, and sparrows, and gravel path delineating a square of bleak London grass. As the portress approaches with her quick heavy tread, to turn the handle and slip back the bright brass bolt, she calls out quietly to the nun sitting, with her back to her, at one of the two tall front windows of the L-shaped room. The black solidity of her veil and habit is immobile against the chill, vaporous distances of the park. The portress, supposing her to be praying, repeats briskly, in her good-natured tones, "I expect it's your little granddaughter, Mother!"

Teresa, on the top step outside the door, is aware of the feel of the convent; of its air, of the quality of its quiet that is like a chord resolved. For

the place is filled with something; perhaps prayer; and empty of something; perhaps uncertainty. Now the door is opened by the portress, beaming, and Teresa steps into what she always thinks of as the "upper room."

Camilla has got up and turned away from an unseeing contemplation of the sky. Her faculty for objective seeing comes back to her as she turns to Teresa. She is taller, it seems, at each visit; and strangely like Mary, in a certain sweet and eager mobility of spirit that informs the changeable pink transparencies of her face, and gleams darkly in her gaze.

She leaps and flings an embrace like a puppy, her exclamations breathless and warm, her cheeks cold. She has Mary's swift giving of delighted affection. Now they settle-in in their accustomed corner, on their cane-seated chairs beside the high elaborately carved marble chimneypiece whose grate is empty, concealed by an embossed brass screen. Teresa says, rubbing one gloved hand against the other (although it is comparatively warm in there) that she is glad her grandmother has on her "big shawl," and adds that "the pond on the Common" is freezing, and by tomorrow there may be skating.

Camilla remembers skating on that pond. The whole school, including Mademoiselle Lemaître herself—she can see her now in her veiled toque and sealskin jacket and small muff, circling against the *grisaille* of phantom frozen landscape, with vigorous decorum.

"Cousin Lucy and I once skated there."

"Did you?"

Camilla sees the child's polite attempt to imagine them, two such old women, on skates at all. She adds "when we were young," and sees that their being young is even less imaginable than their skating. Though amusing as legend: "When I was a little girl"—or "when Mummie was little in Paris, in Washington"—having the lively, stilted fascination of marionettes manipulated to express "life," not resemble it.

Teresa continues to tell, to talk, easily and, now and again, eagerly, clasping her knees, her heels hooked into the slat of her chair. She is facing the two high uncurtained windows. The light holds her face between its hands and now and then touches her hair. She went, she tells, to a party; a concert with Cousin Lucy; to *Twelfth Night* with Charles Behrens. She and two friends (Sally and Bernadine) are starting a magazine; Claire—Grandmama remembers about Claire?—has sent a photograph of her baby: it is eight months old now and Claire says has four teeth; and Claire's husband's novel has been published; "Tante Sophie wrote to Cousin Lucy

yesterday that it was a very good novel and has sent it." This reminds Teresa that she has been reading *Wuthering Heights* that she bought with the Book Token that her father sent her for Christmas. Cousin Lucy wondered at her choosing it, actually she had begun it when she stayed with Charles's parents in their house in Norfolk which is "bursting with books." The last lines had made her want to cry—She goes on to say that she has been riding on the Common and in Richmond Park. Pamela—Daddy's wife, does her grandmama remember?—sent her riding-lessons-money for a Christmas present again. One of the ponies is called Johnnie—

She talks on.

Camilla listens.

As she listens the little sentences seem like soft cries of excitement borne out over the fearful and endearing tide of experience that flows about them, as if their two wooden chairs and the polished floor of a convent parlour were a raft on a great river.

Camilla asks—

"—and the mice?"

"—the mice are over. I suppose," Teresa adds, with a mixture of compunction and irony, "that one grows out of mice," then, with a visible tremor of regret?—nostalgia?—sentimentality? "as I grew out of my dolls."

This last statement is put before her grandmother, a tentative hope of comfort concealed beneath an air of clever experience. And Camilla has the comfort to offer, succinct and certain (as if it were one of the consolations she transmits, every day, here in the quiet of the parlour); "It isn't, I think, growing out of *them*, it's growing out of a bit of yourself. All growing-changes have a hurting side. You see," Camilla added, her ravaged coifed features in shadow bent forward to the child's face in light, "what hurts *you*, surely, is that the dolls aren't real any more? But they aren't real to be hurt, too!"

"Yes—I see . . . Funny," Teresa adds.

"Funny" is her sad comment on something she has just seen, but half understood. Only a corner of the curtain has been lifted. She has had a glimpse but only a glimpse of a brilliant scene, in which, among other goings-on (shooting stars, turtle doves, showers of rose-leaves, devils coming up through trap doors) dolls become unreal; and the bright tentacles of imagination through which they drew their life, detach themselves and

grope, predatory in the pulsating coloured airs, to catch and hold and transfuse vitality to some new shape, new face.

"—funny." Teresa feels wrenched by sharp melancholy. For the dolls are dead and their cherished life, that seemed as if it would go on for ever must be given to new shapes, new faces.

But her grandmother has seen the curtain up, and understood the scene. Camilla, Camilla Graham and the old woman in her black habit have, more or less, understood it between them: Camilla who dressed her little girl extravagantly or deliciously and took her for walks in the Tuileries, and the old woman whose daughter Mary was killed (tragically the letters of condolence said) have possibly worked out between them what the scene is getting at. Camilla who has been in love, and loved, waltzed off her feet so that the world spun round her, and the Religious, who can only pray by will, and love stubbornly, humbly, and without Consolation—have their (provisional) explanation of the scene glimpsed by Teresa that is at one moment a Fair, the next a Carnage; of the Roundabout-music, blurred by shrieks, Radiant and Lurid linked, Love and Hate partnered, Youth spangled and Age masked, all for the Completeness of the Illusion.

Their explanation they think is Hope; it seems, at any rate, the least impossible clue to what the scene is all about. For Reason is only a Key that unlocks a door on the Void. Aesthetic-Approach folly; optimism and pessimism two faces of the same Despair; Philosophy a kitten's tail-chasing, and Science (poor-old-Science that used to *compère* the show) has lost its human semblance and gibbers and mows off-stage in strange and empty tones, over a fissure in something it mouths "atom."

For Hope at least offers no panaceas except courage; of a painful dull sort. And such evidences of the miraculous as are discernible through the inimitable lenses of humility or grief.

Teresa feels in her pocket for a photograph she has of Claire's baby. She says, "It's supposed to look like Philippe, but really it looks like a thoughtful apple . . ."

Camilla hands back the photograph, which shows a usual, charming paradox of gravity and absurdity. "It's turned your Tante Sophie into a grandmother. She wrote me such a long letter at Christmas, mostly about the baby."

"She's called 'Sophie.'"

"I know."

". . . Why wasn't I called Camilla?"

"It was I who wanted you called Teresa."

"And now you're Mother Teresa! I should imagine that the first time a grandmother has been called after her granddaughter! . . . Or seems to have been," she adds, then reverts to the information that Tante Sophie has asked her to come again to Chouzy in the summer.

Camilla asks, curiously, what Sophie is now "like."

"Stout and imposing." Camilla sees the glint of affectionate amusement.

"She was imposing even as a girl."

But Teresa isn't really interested to imagine any younger form of the figure so satisfactorily solid, and old, and kind, standing in the garden at Chouzy outside the French window and remarking, always with something a little sternly pedagogic in her manner, on the seas' aspect, or the morning's weather, as if the weather conditions were a matter of the sea or sky's good or bad "behaviour." "I'm afraid the weather is spoiling itself!"—the plump forefinger all but lifted and shaken. "I am glad to see the waves of yesterday are calmer"—so that one wouldn't be surprised to see a small "good" wave ripple up for a reward, given "to encourage"! Teresa's thoughts and talk move from the garden at Chouzy to her friend Martine, who will be glad she's coming. She doesn't know, she says to her grandmother, *why* she likes Martine so much! For she doesn't talk a lot, and isn't exactly clever. "But she is gay, and sensible, and does so many things beautifully. She can crochet lace, and make a blueberry-tart, and make their dog, Miron, obey her in all sorts of ways."

Teresa's talk flows on. Her interest brightens to sudden pleasures in what she tells; or slows, so as to describe exactly; or quickens in eagerness to share an enthusiasm "if only you'd *seen*, Grandmama!" she says. Or—in rare but merciless condemnations "nobody could imagine anyone *could* be so boring." This, of a lantern-lecture on "Great Poets of the Past" singled out by Cousin Lucy, from which both she and Teresa had come home yawning.

The minutes tick past on the sky-blue alarm clock that stands on the trestle table at the portress's far end of the room. The portress stretches; her glasses gleam as she lifts her head for a moment, and catches a gleam of the winter light outside, reflect one second a black twig, the next the flittered streak of a sparrow exchanging skeleton branch for the top of a wall.

Teresa's talk skims on its wide zig-zag course, winged by its own zest, freighted by a sort of sobriety that Camilla recognises as the one treasure

Mary had amassed for her; Mary who had no sobriety herself, who'd said, in tears, in this very room that "the *Bon Dieu* had given her too much sail."

The portress's alarm clock, staring and rickety, has ticked so many minutes that it is time for Mother Teresa's little granddaughter to go—"you asked me to tell you, Mother—"

Camilla thanks her.

"—Cousin Lucy will be downstairs?"

"Yes—Downstairs, outside."

Camilla bends to kiss the child on both cheeks.

She says, "I'll come again in two weeks."

That is Lucy's allowance. Camilla knows it is a liberal one. For it is Lucy's concession to something she doesn't like, or understand. Two weeks is the measure of her trust, and mistrust.

"—thank Lucy for letting you come."

"I did . . . I do, you know, because you tell me to—" There is a certain concise candour in Teresa. "But she doesn't want thanks. She always says so. She says it's—"

"Her duty?"

"—Yes—Why did you smile, Grandmama?"

"Did I? I didn't mean to. Darling, now you must go—"

The portress closes the door after her, as quietly as possible. But even so it jars a phantom tinkle from the little bell above it.

"Your little granddaughter's growing up, Mother—"

Camilla agrees.

She goes towards the windows that overlook the street and the park beyond.

The traffic streams east and west below the window. Her hands that once had a filled warm satin firmness browned and reticulated, drying and hardening under age (like tunny-fish, she thinks, under a Mediterranean sun) rest on the sill. Directly below she can see Teresa's blue beret, and the tip of her nose pointed towards Marble Arch.

Any moment now she will be fetched away, by Lucy, and become part of the stream of traffic below the convent windows.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover which is placed in the public domain was created for this ebook.

[The end of *The Candle's Glory* by Sylvia Thompson]