Helena

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ALSO BY SYLVIA THOMPSON

THE HOUNDS OF SPRING
THE BATTLE OF THE HORIZONS
CHARIOT WHEELS
WINTER COMEDY
SUMMER'S NIGHT

HELENA

By SYLVIA THOMPSON

. . . . I have beheld those eyes before,
And their eternal calm, and all that face,
Or I have dreamed. . . .

KEATS

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Dedicated to

ALICE AND FREDDY DE RIEMSDYK

who gave me sanctuary

PART I

Helena

The mistral tormented the island all day, blowing the olive leaves into stiff silver patterns and tearing the blossom off the peach trees.

The sunshine was bright and acrid. The gulls kept low over a speeding sea. The neighbouring islands stuck up like bits of blue-grey scenery.

No one came out of the house. The Siamese cat slept by the stone basin in the courtyard. The dog, a stiff-shouldered Aberdeen terrier, pattered to and fro, going indoors and coming out again. Every now and then he whimpered and shivered.

Lawrence Marvell died in the afternoon.

At five o'clock the doctor came out of the house. The cat, who had climbed on to a window-sill to be in the sun, blinked down at him.

The wind dropped before sunset. The olive leaves folded down dark green. The surface of the sea was luminous, like a beetle's wing, and the sunset spilled slow transparent lights across it. The rocks darkened quickly. The peach blossom and the white house grew bright.

The windows of Lawrence Marvell's room were open. The last glow of the sky made the figures in the tapestries seem alive. The four-poster bed was in the shadow. Lawrence Marvell lay big and taut under the sheet, his head tilted back as if he were floating in the sea.

The girl sat beside the bed watching him. She sat with her arms crossed, and her tawny curls pushed back from her brow. The folds of her scarlet wrapper touched the floor. As the light went her dress grew darker and the dusk carved out the young tormented beauty of her face.

The dog began to give long yelping howls in the courtyard below.

I

Quilter reached the second-floor landing. He lifted his chin and barked, seal-like, to the third-floor landing.

"Miss Hepburn?"

Hepburn looked down.

"What is it?"

"A telegram for her ladyship."

It lay on the salver. Hepburn knew Mr. Quilter wouldn't come up another step. And she was curious, naturally. So she came down, a brassiere dangling over her arm, saying: "Her ladyship's in her bath."

They both looked at the telegram. Then Hepburn darted out her hand and picked it off the salver.

"Glad it isn't for me, anyway," she remarked, and skipping up the flight of stairs gave him a look over her shoulder.

"Wimmin always have melo-dramatic ideas," said Quilter.

"O yeah?" snapped Hepburn from her landing, "and who called the police for burglars last Christmas, and it was only Mrs. Drake looking for 'bi-carb' with a flash-lamp?"

"I'm waiting to know if there's an answer——"

"O.K., Mr. Quilter." Hepburn whisked across the bedroom and knocked at the bathroom door.

"A telegram, your ladyship."

"One minute—bring it in."

Edith Marvell was in a bath-towel and a pink rubber bath-cap. "Open it and give it me. Bring me my glasses." She held her bath-towel with one hand and the opened paper with the other. "Put them on me." Hepburn slipped the horn-rimmed glasses on her mistress's nose. She stood behind her peering, and discerned that the message was not in English. After a silence Edith Marvell sat down heavily on the cork-topped stool. Hepburn waited, prinking in the steamy glass over the basin. (Her hair needed setting —and a trim, too——)

"Tell Quilter there's no reply."

"No reply," mouthed Hepburn over the banisters. "It's foreign, and she almost passed out when she read it."

"Possibly it's from Sir Lawrence——" said Quilter.

"Hepburn—HEPBURN—where are my slippers?—I want to telephone—get my dressing-gown——"

Hepburn took off the cap. The bleached curls changed Edith Marvell's face. Her curls, when tawny, had helped her features to their reputation for prettiness. Now that they were soft and white, they maintained her belief in her own charm.

She was blustering, but tremulous. She would telephone to Marigold—or Piers—to both, of course. After all, he was their father—Piers would still be in bed—all the same, Marigold was always so matter-of-fact—(always referred to Lawrence, anyway, as "Our Dear Departed"——)

She spoke angrily to Hepburn. "Don't fuss round now—I want to telephone——" She felt choky. "Give me a glass of 'Vichy' water and go downstairs." (If Lawrence hadn't been so *extraordinary*) . . . Lawrence, Lawrence?—She began thinking his name. He was dead. *Lawrence?* And he had really been there once. (—and so brilliant and good-looking, people said—but he had held her shoulders, like a madman, exactly like a madman, and said that he hated her, that she destroyed life, that she was "The World and the Devil without the Flesh"——! Shellshock, she liked to think)—She choked, spilling the Vichy on the pink carpet. She put her glass down and unfolded the telegram again, "*est mort*"—To communicate with "*sa fille Mademoiselle Marvell*——"

Helena. The child he'd taken to "create." She had that letter still.

She must ring up Piers. Marigold was so impatient on the telephone. Piers first—"Central 9850." She said: "Yes, *Central* . . ."

Because I am delicate, thought Piers, because my will is a little too pliable, because my manners (which are my defence, and save me in the end from people) are good but nervous, I am made into a sort of target. Events, impressions, emotions rain at me, sometimes grazing an outer ring of my mind, and falling away; sometimes sticking in my inner more vital circle. I am becoming pitted with little marks; so many that I begin to read an odd arbitrary pattern into them, and call it "experience." But very seldom, thank goodness, very seldom, they—(the people or the places or the happenings, which keep on hurling their delicate, positive little arrows)—touch the inner

black circle—which I value. Claire (who is in the bathroom now, in a temper because she didn't mean to stay all night, and woke up to find herself still here)—Claire hasn't touched the black circle. She would like to, and that is why she gets in these tempers. There are only three marks in the black circle. One was made by Elizabeth ten years ago. And one by a minute of an October morning in the Grants' garden. And one, years ago, by father carrying Helena in her brown coat and bonnet across the pavement into that four-wheeler. . . .

The Claire arrow has marked the blue circle (the third outward). She is witty, and her head is a good shape, and her black hair is set round it once a week in little curls by an expensive man. But she has the stereotyped no-manners of what is now an upper-class of young people, and though she makes love beautifully, even her love-making has more artifice than charm—Soon her annoyance with me will dispel her interest. And she will discount me, and by implication discredit me (as she discounts the fashions of-the-moment-before in her articles in *Chic*).

I loved Elizabeth, and thinking about her is still pain ("many waters cannot drown——" neither can the floods—of boredom, of experience, of ebbing and flowing impressions——).

I loved Helena. I was sixteen when Father took her away. I saw, perhaps, what he saw in her—I was even sentimental about her. Her four years had a golden bloom, a vital, incredible innocence in a world that seemed ugly and tortured every day—And now Elizabeth is in Egypt; where the sun is devouring her beauty with dry, hungry light. And she has had another baby—(with William's eyes? With William's stupid well-bred ears?——) And Helena died-and-was-buried in a four-wheeler—in a brown bonnet, and a shining impudent smile. And I go every day to the offices of the *Daily Bulletin*, and am its Literary Editor, and get eight hundred a year, and scoff at the *Bulletin*, and at the public, and at myself, because I pretend that my soul has a double life. (Though, in fact, I am quite proud of my tricks, and should be bored in the office of a highbrow weekly, writing little critical articles—breeding literary maggots out of dead lions.) . . . .

As Claire came out of the bathroom brushing up her eyelashes with his tooth-brush, he said it must be nice to be Gene Tunney. She said: "No, it wouldn't. I had a friend who was a boxer, and he said he had a gnawing ambition to be literary."

He laughed. She put the tooth-brush on the chest of drawers, and said: "What are you laughing at? My temper's better now. Tell me."

He said: “All your friends have that sort of stories about them.”

“You never noticed my new scent. It’s called ‘Très Cricket.’ Nice? Mm?”

“I did notice.”

“You didn’t like it?”

“Not as much as some of yours.”

“You’re so damned amiable. You don’t really like it, and you hate me sitting here on the bed when you want to get up. And you didn’t enjoy last night, and you wish——”

“My dear Claire——”

“I’m going.”

“Please do stay and have some breakfast.”

“No, thanks. You really don’t like your char to know you have bad women here——”

“Darling, bad women never stay for breakfast. And she’ll know you’ve been here, anyway.”

“How?”

“——by ‘Très Cricket’——” which smells like cooked lobster, he thought. (And “Très Cricket” will be like a cheap nostalgic tune for me, for the rest of my life; will Claire’s head be thrown back on the pillow, and the edge of her teeth glinting in the light from the street lamp outside, and the remote braying of taxis outside Covent Garden.) He said:

“You won’t stay for breakfast?”

“No, thanks. Kiss me. I shall go and have a kipper at the Savoy.”

“Very reviving. Good-bye.”

She hesitated in the doorway.

“Piers.”

“Yes?”

“When——” The telephone-bell rang beside the bed. He took up the receiver. She went out and banged the door.

“Hello—Hello, is that you, Piers?—it’s Mother—*Piers*——”

Marigold Grant went to the library and kissed her husband before Miss Blanchard, the secretary, arrived. Miss Blanchard came at ten. Philip Grant was at work by nine.

Marigold kept her hand on his shoulder after she had kissed him. He looked up without seeing her.

She said:

"I shall be back for luncheon."

Miss Blanchard was on the doorstep and said that the weather was better. Mrs. Grant always made her shy, then annoyed. She watched Mrs. Grant walk away, along Eaton Square, noticed her new hat, and went indoors wondering exactly what shade and make of powder she used to get that "petally" effect. She asked the parlourmaid if Harrods' had sent yet about a wholesale order for Easter eggs, and Bishop, who unwillingly liked Miss Blanchard (for her integrity), said they hadn't.

"Has Mr. Grant ordered a taxi yet?"

"No, Miss——"

"He'll want one at twenty minutes to twelve."

"Very well, Miss."

Rosaline Blanchard hung her coat in the "flower"-room beyond the lift and went into the library, where her chief was pacing up and down in front of the fireplace. He said:

"They've been ringing up from Silsbury."

"Again?"

"Yes, they want the Children's Party changed to Easter Monday. They say Saturday would create a lot of 'feeling'; the idea being——"

She said delicately: "That Lent won't be quite over?"

"Exactly."

He smiled, then frowned. The smile and frown played suddenly beneath the gravity of his manner. He stood, balancing a paper-weight in his palm, absently surveying his secretary with his bright tawny eyes.

As a young man Philip Grant had been florid, with a thick nose and chin, and courageous mouth. Now, at forty-two, his face had firmer lines and a

browner colour. The fine forehead and eyes began to predominate, the mouth showed a new sensibility. Piers had described this change by saying that Philip had passed from an Elizabethan youth to a late Victorian maturity. Miss Blanchard, who had been with him five years, conceived, loyally and privately, that Mrs. Grant had ruined his life.

"They're a damned nuisance. I should like to countermand the Easter eggs, and chuck the whole scheme."

"You *can't* do *that*, Mr. Grant."

"Of course."

"If you were to open the tea on Easter Monday, you could still get to Mr. Sichley's Disarmament Meeting by eight o'clock."

"I suppose I could." He sat down at his desk. "This petty round—Sichley's all wrong except on this one thing. Words, words, words——"

Miss Blanchard answered the telephone. So many curves, reflected Philip, and not one of them seductive. . . . Sichley was drunk with half-matured schemes.

"Yes . . ." said Miss Blanchard. "Yes, Mr. Marvell!—I'm afraid she went out only five minutes ago. I suppose Mr. Grant won't do? Very well. It's Mr. Piers," she said, "but he will ring again at luncheon-time."

"Just take this letter," said Philip. "Before we go on with that article . . ."

He stood grasping the back of the arm-chair. He turned his face towards a gleam of sunshine and blinked; and became aware of its touch. It affected him ("*Dear Madam*," he said), like the sudden remembrance of a verse. The letter was to a constituent, who had written pointing out that as Philip represented an agricultural constituency, he should concern himself with the matter of a pure milk supply. He dictated glibly to the familiar readiness of Miss Blanchard's machine. The sunshine touched his neck like a child's finger. He remembered for no reason, as if it were happening now, how Marigold had buttoned up her glove in the picture-gallery in Amsterdam and said: "Why on earth should you think I'm in love with him?" (*would let me have further details of the cases you refer to*——) and looked at him with the half smile and clear eyes that he hated. How long did he hate Marigold? Months? Years? But now, he could go to her, and talk and get a satisfaction from the way she listened, looking smart and intelligent and pressing out the stubs of cigarettes into an ashtray——

"Love that had robbed us of immortal things—
This little moment mercifully gave——"

Miss Blanchard typed "*I remain, yours faithfully*," thinking that Mr. Grant wasn't himself these last months, and feeling sure that what he wanted was a good holiday.

Piers said: "Of course I'll fetch her."

Lady Marvell lay on the sofa. Whenever she was distressed, she put her feet up. She had her hat and gloves on, in case she were obliged to go out suddenly. She had an irritated notion that Piers and Marigold would make her go to the island; but she didn't mean to shirk her last duties, if her duty was proved.

Marigold sat with her hands folded, and her body graciously inclined, as if her chair were on a public platform.

"I can go, too, if you want me to, Mother."

"No, dear, I think perhaps if Piers went alone."

Marigold said: "How characteristic of Father to die of bathing and to leave a fantastic situation."

"Without the need of one melodious tear or Press-cutting," said Piers.

"I have told the Press," said Edith Marvell. "Naturally, I sent a formal notice to *The Times* and *Morning Post* as soon as I was composed enough this morning. And then I rang up dear George Ransome, and he's going to do the obituary notice. He does them so well, and he was so devoted to Lawrence . . ."

Piers lit a cigarette. "I'm sure George Ransome will do the right thing by you, Mother." He went and looked out of the window into Park Crescent. Father had talked to him in this room the week before he left. He must have been trying to make friends. But they had mistrusted each other for too long. That chill, quizzical manner must have been a defence; those tempers were symptoms. . . .

"I wonder how old George Ransome will deal with 'the last period,'" said Marigold.

"He's not going to say anything, except that he 'led a retired life.' *I* suggested that over the telephone. Ring for tea, Piers; Quilter is too stupid, I told him to bring it up at once."

Marigold took off her gloves. "I suppose there'll be some sort of Memorial Service?"

"Of course, naturally," said Lady Marvell.

Piers said: "Father would have objected."

Quilter came in and set out the tea.

She said: "He can't prevent it," beginning to make out a mental list of people who would come. "I don't see why St. Margaret's shouldn't be arranged. (We were married in St. Margaret's.) I thought, of course, you would do something in the *Bulletin*, Piers."

"Yes," said Piers. "Why I do Not Care if My Father is Dead—Son of Famous Dramatist Reveals Secrets of Lawrence Marvell's Life."

His mother flushed. She was afraid of Piers. Only her habit of self-indulgence strengthened her will to oppose him. She said:

"I should have thought, at such a time, Piers——"

"I must say," said Marigold, "that I think you *could* put in something—only not too—garish."

But they saw that he had stopped listening to them. He stood with his back against the mantelpiece, his soft brown eyebrows drawn down, his eyes dark. His square under-lip was pushed up against the gentle upper lip, emphasising his air of habitual and yet inconsequent defiance.

Marigold's bony little white hands moved in a gesture.

"It's no use, he won't," she said, and took a sandwich.

Lady Marvell addressed herself to her daughter.

"I've been thinking, dear, that perhaps I ought to show you the letter that your father wrote me just after he went. I—well, it's a very unbalanced letter. But I kept it (as you know, I keep all letters), and this afternoon I got it out to show you. I feel it may help us all—to understand the girl—I mean, any oddness in her——"

"I didn't know there was one. I hope it's scandalous."

Edith Marvell took it out of her bag.

Marigold read it.

She handed it to Piers, and got up and walked about the room. He noticed her, and thought: Father can still hurt her—Marigold, who is so

beautifully invulnerable, who is glazed and flawless like an image taken from the tomb of a king——

"Of course," said Edith Marvell, "there is no doubt that Lawrence, when he wrote that, was unhinged——"

Piers knew the writing. There had been letters, when he was at prep. school—when he was at Eton. The minute, thickly-penned words woke a forgotten nervousness. The address was a hotel in Marseilles. The date 3/12/18.

Dear Edith,

Helena and I arrived here a week ago. I got her a good nurse in Paris, who will serve for the moment.

I told you, when we had our (last) scene, that I was going away, and that I should take the child with me. It would have been no use trying to explain my reasons in detail, as you wouldn't have listened. But I did say that we were both near middle-age. That although you enjoyed the results of my success, I didn't. That my taking a Knighthood to please you had been on the condition that you no longer questioned the way I disposed of my life. (How can I make you realise what boredom I've endured, for your satisfaction? What hours and days I've wasted among futile people? and finally how I saw it all, my tolerance of what was intolerable, my acceptance of "our" friends, even my dull enjoyment of what I resented and despised, coming out in my work?)

Do you remember Morton's criticism last year of "Benedict"? "In the last fifteen years, Mr. Marvell's work has undergone an interesting metamorphosis; his humour has changed to wit, his irony to cynicism, his tenderness to an exacerbated sentimentalism."

You see, Edith, Morton—the tortoise among critics—gets there. And the changes in my work have been the symptoms of the changes in me. The thing has been like a disease, getting hold of my system for years; but only diagnosed in middle life.

I had a crisis, I suppose, of what Morton calls "exacerbated sentimentalism", in 1914 after I'd enlisted. Do you remember when I came down to Templedean that September? I suppose I'd been away, and the war atmosphere was making us all drunk, and

for once I was alone with you in the country (and you looked so pretty) and I thought I could talk to you. Do you remember how we sat in the garden after dinner, and I began to talk as it got dark? I suppose I must have ranted. (I can see the house now, across the lawn between the trees, with the windows lit.) You had on a white wrap, and you watched me with a dim, steady face; you were quiet for once; and you looked so pretty. And when I'd finished you said: "Any other man in your position would be grateful for his success." And I ended by making love to you. And you settled to sleep afterwards with your usual air of having, at the dictates of your conscience, opened a bazaar—or laid a foundation-stone.

You won't like my reminding you of this. How well I imagine your expression. I remember the little mauve book you brought with you on our honeymoon; telling you that any woman who "gave herself" to her husband more than once in six weeks was cheapening herself. (Curious that, even now, I should want you to know that I loved you.)

This letter is disjointed. Helena has come in from a walk on the "Quai" with her nurse.

But she brings me back to my main theme. Helena is my apology.

Briefly. The dead hand of success has been in everything I've touched. My career as a dramatist has been without reverses. My career as a "husband"—married to a pretty enterprising woman with a fortune of her own, has been envied (as you have often told me) by men, better and worse than myself.

Socially, you've been admirable. For more than ten years, "Everybody Interesting and Amusing" has eaten with us in London and stayed with us in the country. At this moment, our eldest daughter is suitably engaged to a "rising" young man; and our son will be anything that my brains and your ambition can make him.

Marigold and Piers have been brought up, with care and expense, to accept the standards and taste the pleasures of our civilisation. I have watched them, since they were little children, being prepared for that pleasant circle of the Inferno into which we saw fit to call them. Marigold at nineteen is pretty, clever, smart, mildly sensual and without affection. Piers is arrogant and

nervous. He suffers in a world which he hates, but wants to conquer. He is discouraged by your approbation of his looks, his clothes, his work at school; and by my prestige.

I told you that I'd done with my work, and with life as we've known it together, and that I meant to go away and enjoy my last twenty-odd years. But before I went, I decided to take Helena.

You think I'm not sane. And this act confirms your belief—(and comforts you. For your pride is hurt at my going. But you won't miss the child or me).

At four years old, Helena is full of vitality, intelligence, and sensibility. In a year or two, she will go (would go if she stayed with you) to a "little school." Then to a bigger school. Perhaps to one or two different schools, so as to have every possible advantage.

What will be the result?

By such an education her vitality will be dissipated, her intelligence staled and corrupted, her sensibility distorted. She will emerge, if her educators do their work, as approximately as possible the young Englishwoman of her time and class; which implies—what? A constipated intellect, a rickety soul, and a body dedicated to athletics. A Woman (doesn't she abound in the h-pronouncing classes?) consciously highbrow—but without any natural thirst for knowledge (or consciously lowbrow—there's the reaction!—confounding intellectualism with intelligence); vain of body—but bored by her biological functions; smugly unmoral, but ignorant of all moralities. Worldly, but with no understanding of humanity, epicurean without taste, she will accept dull pleasures and false sensations—mistaking speed for vitality, distance for experience, lust for passion, words for ideas. . . .

In short, my excuse for experimenting on her is that I cannot do worse than you would.

*To outline a curriculum at this point isn't possible. But my general idea is to keep her away from Stupid People and False Ideas. Making it clear that stupid people are bad, or rather diseased and therefore bad. Isolated from them, she should grow in innocence of all the major Vices—*i.e., *Hypocrisy, Cruelty, Cowardice, Snobbery, Prudishness—or to put it positively, become*

herself Honest, Charitable, Courageous, Self-assured and Shameless.

If I get snuffed out too soon she will fall into your hands. But if I manage my three score or so, and have made a woman who's essentially sane and potentially happy, I shall expect at least a foot-stool to perch on in Olympus. (And you, my dear, as the Incubator, may yet be on show in a glass case in the mansions of eternity.)

All communications will reach me through Wedge Secker and Hope. And all business communications for you will come through them.

Yours,

Lawrence.

Piers handed the letter back to his mother.

He said: "I'm sorry for Helena. Rather a handicap to be the Last Symphony of a disillusioned egoist."

II

In the distance the island looked like a big tortoise huddled on the Mediterranean, the head peering northwest towards Toulon. A tortoise with a small shining coronet set in his head.

At nearer range, the mottled darkness of the "shell" was explained by pine trees, exposing here and there a paler vegetation, the light edges showed up as bays of sand, and small rocky headlands; and the "coronet" as a square white house.

Close to, the shores showed a peculiar silver sand.

The pines grew close over the shore, covering the sand with patterns of hyacinth-coloured shadow. Between the bays the rocks rose from the water with miniature ferocity. Beyond, on the rising ground, the pines were interspaced by vine terraces and small olive groves and groups of palm trees with plumed headdresses waving.

Nestling into the neck of the tortoise was a small harbour. From the harbour a road zig-zagged upward intersecting a steep terraced garden, and reaching the coronal building which was flanked by cypresses.

The gardens looked like a huge bright carpet, hung from the stone balustrade in front of the house, and fastened to the harbour rock two hundred feet below.

Piers paid the boatman and told him to go back to Toulon. He began to climb the zig-zag road, feeling all the time as if he was in a dream. On the higher terraces he noticed in detail the beauty of the flowers; the streaked tulips, the anemones and freesias. And small, bright, unfamiliar flowers, star-shaped. And varieties of cactus plants, some small with flowers like pink trumpets.

He came near the top sweating. A flight of wide, semi-circular steps rose to the terrace in front of the house. On either side of the steps, the lilacs were in bloom. He tried to distinguish the scent of white from mauve, with his eyes shut.

There was no one on the terrace.

He had expected to find her there. He had expected a terrace, and a balustrade exactly like this; orange trees at each end, and the wind blowing from the sea. But she wasn't there.

He walked slowly toward the house, feeling afraid for no reason. The house, too, was what he had expected. White stone, sunlit, built round three sides of a courtyard, with a loggia supported by pillars. In the centre of the courtyard was a stone basin and a tree with small leaves and pinkish-purple blossoms.

He knocked at the big double door. No one came. He stamped about. The house slept in the sun. The trees moved in the light, steady wind, and the sea moved below. A Siamese cat was asleep by a stone basin.

If there was no one here?

She might have gone. He should have asked at the port below. He lit a cigarette. His hand shook lighting it.

He sat down on the edge of the fountain. He was possessed by a feeling of time melting away round him and leaving him isolated in this fragrant, insistent light. He felt a passivity that was like an emotion, a delicate aching through his whole body. He thought, I'm tired, and so I'm unreal. Or father (a diverting fancy) has cast a spell over this place—Prospero— My head aches. These scents are like an anæsthetic.

He turned to watch the sea. How characteristic of a cynic, seeking salvation, to bring up his daughter here! (An island is a piece of sentimentality entirely surrounded by disillusion? Shakespeare might have bought an island instead of writing *The Tempest*.)

He turned suddenly. She stood in the open doorway.

She was tall. She wore a white dress. She held her head high. Her shoulders and arms and feet were bronzed, her hair swept back in bright curves from her face. (She was strange, but he recognised those green-grey, shining eyes and long eyebrows.) Her face was grave, her lips pressed together at the corners. He didn't know her—but he remembered the wide brow and the sweet, firm line of the jaw. He couldn't speak.

She went on looking at him, without surprise, but with dim, troubled interest. Then she asked in French if he wanted to see Mademoiselle Marvell. Her voice was low, but vital and sweet-toned.

He said "Yes" and stood facing her.

She said: "The servant isn't here at this hour." And added:

"You're English?"

"Yes."

She was silent again, her eyes curiously lightening and darkening under her steady eyebrows. She stepped over the threshold into the loggia. Still watching him she raised her arms slowly above her broad shoulders, stretched herself, and then slowly let her arms fall.

She said: "Your knocking woke me. I've been asleep for two days. Will you come in?"

She turned and Piers followed her into the high shadows of the hall. She stopped; suddenly came close to him. "Who are you?"

She was lovely in a way he hadn't expected. Her voice, her poise, her movements felt into his heart. He said:

"I want to tell you." How could he tell her? How would she take it? (What sort of a girl—woman—had he expected?—Some conscious jewel of unsophistication?)

"Tell me then."

"We—I—had a telegram in London."

She said "Yes" without interest; and added: "We had kinsmen there. Perhaps the Doctor sent it."

"The telegram came to my mother," he said.

"The telegram said that he was dead?"

"Yes."

After a pause she said with a visible effort to be courteous: "Who is your mother?"

"Yours."

She bent her head as if she were confirming her own thoughts. "Piers?"

"Did you know?"

"Know?"

"About me? That you had a brother?"

"Yes. He told me. And I remember a little. I think I do." She stepped close now and slowly took his face between her hands. Her touch was extraordinarily gentle. He remembered that this had been one of her baby gestures; that she would hold his face just so (and chuckle). But now her eyes were profound and brilliant, searching his face, searching into his eyes. "Piers." Her voice had a rough liquid quality—like a wave drawing back

over shingle, he thought—like a dragging sea. "Yes," she said, "I do remember." He didn't dare put his hand on her shoulder, for she was like a new altitude which he breathed hardly.

She withdrew her hands. He noticed that she could stand graciously with her arms to her sides.

"Have you come to fetch me?"

"Yes."

She turned away and walked over to the open door and stood looking out. He could see her look move from the courtyard to the terrace beyond, and over the terrace to the sea. At last she said:

"To-night you must sleep here in our guest-room."

He said: "Thank you." What guests had his father entertained?

"Would you rather," she asked, "rest now or bathe or go to the library?"

"I think I'll rest."

"I'll take you to your room. The library, if you should need it, is through that door there."

He followed her upstairs.

The room she led him into had a bathroom next door and a Gauguin over the stone mantelpiece.

Before she left him, she said:

"Do you remember the cardboard lion you made, with legs put on with paper clips?" Her smile came up like a bubble through the dark, still depths of her unhappiness.

"Yes, I do—It had a blue bead eye."

"And riband pasted on its neck."

"A red one——"

They looked at each other. She went out suddenly. Then she came back to say that they would dine at eight o'clock; and went out again, leaving him thinking that it would be fantastic to cry—For there was no reason for him to cry.

They dined, with candles lit, at the long table in the hall.

She was composed, and welcomed him to table with a lovely formality, which he saw must have been part of her training. She wore a long silver dress, like the white she had worn in the afternoon. She directed the servants and spoke about the wine, saying that the sherry was one they had brought from Spain, after their last voyage.

The dinner was excellent. She ate little. She asked him about his journey. He said he had been uncomfortable as he hadn't been able to get a sleeper. She said that she had once been in a train from Genoa to Venice, but not by night. They had always travelled by sea, on the *Atalanta*. During dinner she described several of the voyages with her father, and an occasion when they had almost been shipwrecked off the coast of Greece.

When she mentioned her father she spoke in an equable tone. After dinner the servant withdrew, leaving the coffee and liqueurs on the table. The door was open on to the courtyard and they could see the stars. She lit a cigarette and handed it to him. The woman, whom she called Fernande, came out of the shadows and put a shawl round her mistress's shoulders. Piers noticed the pattern, chrysanthemums on a dark ground. When Fernande had gone, the girl smiled.

"Courants d'air," she said.

"Has Fernande always been here?"

"She was my only nurse—after the one from the mainland ran away. She belongs to the island. She is married, but has no children. She and her husband have both worked for us. They live in a house close by."

"And when you travelled, she went with you?" He added: "Do you mind my asking you?"

"You mean because I travelled with Lawrence?"

"Yes."

She said: "How could I mind? No, Fernande stayed here. I always travelled alone with him. Except, of course, for the crew. But I had no woman with me. I have known no women except the peasant women on the island. I think Lawrence knew no woman on the Mediterranean coasts. I did once meet one, though I didn't speak to her. She was with a professor at Rome. His wife or concubine. She had a misshapen body and talked loudly without sense."

"The men you met were better?"

"Yes, but we only saw a few of them. They were mostly learned men in middle life. They talked to Lawrence. I liked to listen to them."

"Did you know any of them well?"

"No, they were Lawrence's friends. One, in Constantinople, loved me. But I didn't love him. He was foolish and had fat knees."

"You form definite judgments."

She said: "Not always. But a lover forces himself upon one's notice."

Piers made no comment.

She asked, leaning into the candle-light: "Why did you come?"

"Because you were alone."

She shook her head.

"Why?"

He offered: "Because you're my sister."

"But I've always been your sister."

"True."

"Why, then?"

"Because you were left, my dear."

"But I'm still left."

He said: "You might have had no money."

"I have money."

She got up and went over to the open door. And then came back and sat down again.

"Does our mother live in London?"

"Yes."

"Lawrence never spoke of her. I knew she bore me. But he ceased to love her soon after——"

Piers watched her. She was clearly piecing some facts together.

"Is she a noble woman?"

He met her with an imitation of her own perfect simplicity.

"No."

"Is she base?"

He said "No," thinking that one must have, even for mother, some sort of loyalty. And added: "Did he never talk of her?"

She shook her head.

"Did he talk about me or Marigold?"

"He only said that he had begotten you, and that you lived in England."

"Excellent."

She asked: "Is my sister beautiful?"

"She's attractive."

"What's that?"

"She isn't beautiful—she's pretty."

She accepted this slowly, and put it aside as if he had given her a token which she might examine later.

She was silent now. Piers sipped his cognac and watched her. She stared past him. The candle-light painted her face against the darkness—painted the serene brow, wide-open eyes, quick arch of the nostrils, the sensuous sad mouth and wilful chin. He could see thoughts moving in her eyes. He wondered how much her father's death had changed her. Every now and then there was a flash of gaiety.

She said: "He was buried in the sea. I should want that, too." She asked: "Did you love him?"

"No."

"Strange."

He said: "I think he was different with you."

"Yes." She looked round into the shadows. "We sat here in the evening and he read to me."

"What did he read?"

"All sorts of books. Sometimes he read until the candles were all burned out. Once Fernande came in the morning and found us asleep—I on the sofa and Lawrence in the chair you're in now, and *The Faerie Queene* with a glass of wine spilled over it. He swore at Fernande for waking him, and threatened to beat her, and she went away to the kitchen and made coffee as quickly as possible. . . ."

"Was he ever enraged with you?"

"Very seldom. Once he hit me, because I kissed a sailor we had in the yacht." She added: "Lawrence hit me across the face, and I hit him back and made his nose bleed. And then he laughed, and so I laughed, too. But afterwards he explained the futility of desiring uneducated men, and read me the sonnet by Shakespeare about the expense of spirit. . . ."

(Piers thought: "He always liked that one. The sonnet for all lustful sentimentalists.")

"The other time," she said, "was when I wanted to go to school. Fernande had told me that girls went to school to learn, and I wanted to repair my ignorance. Lawrence locked me in my room and went away all day. . . ." As she spoke of her father she became less able to control her voice. There was a break in her: "When he came back, I had climbed on to the roof—up the chimney." She got up. "Now I must be alone. Good night." She turned so quickly that the candle-flames shook.

He heard her go into her room upstairs.

Fernande came in and put a cup of tisane before him, and blew out three of the candles. She remarked, looking him over with a mixture of hostility and surprise, that the tisane would make him sleep. Then she went up to her mistress's room.

Piers stood in the courtyard. He could see the shapes of the cypresses against the stars. He saw his sister standing at the window; and Fernande's shadow behind her, bobbing and stretching on the walls.

III

While Harold Stemp was waiting in the Grants' drawing-room he conceived a phrase for his notebook. "The real test of a woman is her husband." He looked in the glass while he thought of this, and smoothed his smooth brown hair, which was brushed across his head from a side parting, emphasising the squareness of his youthful contemplative and dyspeptic face. His fine brown eyes and short but well-shaped nose often consoled him for the pugilistic build of his body and a plebeian (he recognised it as such) lack of finish about his mouth—which, though firm and sensual, had sometimes a slit-like air and damp corners.

Marigold, he thought, typified this observation. It was characteristic of Marigold to have a husband like Philip Grant, with such a well-bred and unconscious facility for success. Marigold would no more have married a careerist than she would have worn cheap shoes or read a second-rate novel. Essential in her—that Grant should be neither handsome nor witty, and yet have charm. A test of Marigold, too, that her husband should be, or appear, complaisant. Only a man like Grant could make his wife's infidelities seem trivial and elegant. Indeed, there were moments, Harold reflected, when Grant had made him feel like an expensive umbrella-handle—a thing rich women have, and no one else could want.

Harold decided on another phrase.

"The test of a lover is her husband."

He wrote both these phrases on his cuff. He looked at the portrait of Grant as a little boy, hanging at the end of the room. He wondered if his nervous interest in Grant was a sort of regurgitation of early conscience; or the solicitor blood coming out in him.

The Grants' parlourmaid brought in cocktails and put them on the table between the windows.

"—evening, Bishop."

"Good evening, sir."

She went out. Bishop disliked him. He knew, and angrily recognised Bishop's view of him—as a mistake on Mrs. Grant's part (though Mrs. Grant wasn't really to blame). He was sure that Bishop knew that he had been to a minor public school and couldn't speak French, and borrowed ten shillings at a time from Marigold.

He poured himself out a cocktail. Marigold came in. He said:

"I've begun."

She took a cocktail herself. She smiled with cool eyes and curving lips. He said:

"One always does say the obvious."

She said: "I've got tickets for *Canned Peaches* to-night."

"I hear it's perfectly frightful."

"Not nearly as frightful as the Opera, where we ought to be going."

"There's something in that."

She said: "There's everything. Someone ought to invent a sort of 'Twilight Sleep' for opera-goers."

"Where's Philip?" he asked, and wrote down "Twi. slp. op. goers" on his cuff, while she went to the glass and peered close to her face.

"Looking rather hag-like," she commented.

He looked at her face in the glass.

"Not very," he said, and went over to kiss her neck and shoulders. She was quiet for a second. Then she said: "This is no time for 'love-play.' Piers is bringing back the little sister this evening. They ought to be here any time. Mama's coming, too—Philip's dressing. He's got a dinner at the House."

Lady Marvell was announced. Her mourning made her look slimmer, and nervousness gave a timid look to her features. She looked almost kindly. She sat down at once and fanned herself with a jet-incrusted fan which Marigold had never seen and which Harold associated with dowager parts in private theatricals at Maidstone.

Philip Grant came in after her. He greeted his mother-in-law with a kiss on her unrouged cheeks. He said: "Well, Stemp, how are you?"

"More than usually tiresome," said Harold.

Philip turned again to his mother-in-law.

"Can I get you a cocktail or some sherry?"

Edith Marvell agreed to some sherry. She felt that she could always rely on Philip. He asked if she had received any letter from Piers. She said no, she had only had the telegram. Marigold said:

"Piers only writes telegrams. He can't write letters." She added: "Unlike you, Harold. Your last letter was marvellous. Five epigrams in two pages."

"Enviable young man," said Philip.

Edith Marvell put down her glass.

"They ought to be here soon."

"Her room's ready," said Marigold. "She may be very *émotionnée* and want to go to bed."

"She probably doesn't sleep in a bed at all," said Harold.

Edith Marvell sighed. Mr. Stemp's idea seemed probable.

Philip asked why they should assume the girl would be savage. The Mediterranean was, after all, the cradle of civilisation. He added: "Indeed, she's more likely to find us barbarian." How like Marigold, he thought, to insist, for conventional reasons, on having her sister to stay, and then to create an ungracious atmosphere for her reception. "She's probably delightful," he added, wondering if, indeed, he could tolerate an assertive young sister-in-law in his home.

"Dear me, I do hope she is," said Edith Marvell.

"Harold and I are going to *Canned Peaches* after dinner, darling," said Marigold to her husband.

He looked at her vaguely, and at Harold amiably.

"I'm so glad you were able to get tickets," he said.

Lady Marvell said: "I don't believe you ought to be going to things even if you won't go into mourning."

Marigold said: "My dear Mother, everyone knows now about Father's 'stunt' life (and death). There's absolutely no reason why I should do anything about him. Anyway, mourning's absurd. I shan't even wear black for Philip. You don't mind, darling, do you?"

He shook his head. "You intend to survive me, my dear?"

She said, half-irritated, half-admiring: "At your rate of work, I certainly shall."

Philip smiled. His despair caught him suddenly, he said: "Your pace isn't slow, darling."

She glanced at him, and he saw that she questioned the lightness of his tone.

"I'm only pleasure-seeking," she said.

"There's nothing like good unwholesome fun for keeping women alive," said Harold Stemp. And Edith Marvell, who had been brought up by an evangelical mother and responded to the verb "seek," asked, from the sofa, what people really did seek in this life. She sniffed at her handkerchief, which was scented with her new scent.

"That's a question which Grant might answer," said Harold.

Philip said: "Not very well. One grows less and less 'hot for certainties.'" He no longer even wondered that Marigold should stomach a man like Stemp. The coin of Youth had two faces, Wonder and Certainty, and both got worn away by a thousand imperceptible frictions. . . .

"There's their taxi," said Marigold, and her mother rose to her feet, and then decided to sit down again. Harold Stemp adjusted his tie, and wondered whether cavemen in moments of social stress adjusted the hair on their chests. Philip saw that Marigold, after three cocktails, was no longer out of temper. He poured out some sherry for himself and wondered if he'd manage to speak this evening before eleven o'clock. If he could get a night's sleep before going to Silsbury. . . . He would motor there, simply to get two hours' solitude. He glanced towards the door, and saw Piers come in, followed by a tall girl with a mop of bright hair pushed back from her forehead.

Piers said, looking round: "I gather my telegram arrived."

He said: "Helena—this is Mother . . . Marigold . . . Mr. Stemp, and Philip—Marigold's husband."

Helena looked at each of them in turn and then at the sunset-lit, shimmering room, full of silken folds and surfaces, and little gleaming ornaments; and then again at the two women.

Lady Marvell said:

"My dear child."

The girl went to her.

"Do you want to see me?"

This was her mother, she thought (as the women at home were mothers to their brown-cheeked babies). She stared at this woman with a white

bosom and pale blue eyes and a collar of little diamonds.

"My dear child." Edith Marvell stared up into her face.

"Do you want to see me?" the girl insisted. And Philip thought: "No, she isn't like Marigold—more like Piers."

"My dear child," said Edith Marvell, and embraced her. Helena accepted this. She turned to Marigold, who was saying she must be terribly tired after her journey.

"I'm not, thank you."

The sisters looked at each other.

"Do sit down," said Marigold.

"Thank you." Helena took off her cloak and laid it beside her. Everyone sat down except Philip and Piers. Piers saw Marigold looking at the cheap little dress he had squeezed Helena into at a shop in Toulon. He knew that the dress, now in full view, was disturbing Marigold and her mother, and amusing Stemp.

"What sort of crossing did you have?" asked Edith Marvell.

Helena didn't answer. Piers saw that she didn't understand.

"Quite good," answered Piers.

Harold lit a cigarette and handed one to Marigold.

"I don't suppose you smoke," he said to the girl.

She said: "No, thank you, it spoils the palate."

Philip sat down beside her. She turned from Marigold to look at him. He became aware of a sensation he hadn't known for years; he felt shy. Through his shyness he saw that she had a curious flaring beauty. He found himself saying:

"I suppose you were too tired to have taken in a first impression of London?"

She was interested. But for the moment she would only think of London as a tinted skyline seen obliquely upward from the taxi window; a press of dark-dressed, white-faced people in the copper dust of the sunset, and the sudden quiet of pavements and caged trees and supercilious shutterless house-fronts. . . . She said:

"It isn't my first view." She glanced round at Marigold—at Piers—at her mother. She added: "Places are easier to remember than people."

"They change less," said Harold Stemp.

"I remember Piers best, because he was fond of me." She surveyed Marigold in detail. "I don't remember you or Mother."

"Old age will come," said Marigold lightly.

"Yes," said Helena, "I suppose you are getting old for a woman. Piers says you're thirty-five; but when you're painted like this you look quite young."

"Thank you," said Marigold, and got up to be further away from her sister.

Philip Grant interposed with quick banter:

"And how old do you suppose I am, my dear sister-in-law?"

He felt her deep gaze move over him, and became conscious of his white tie, his glinting shoes, the crow's feet round his eyes and the grey in his brown hair.

"More than forty," she guessed gravely.

"Exactly forty," he said.

She added, half smiling: "You have eyes like a lion. I once saw lions in a circus in Rome. They have yellowish eyes with a melancholy expression."

He said: "And time has blunted my claws. . . ." He smiled. "Time and captivity."

"He adores being compared to a lion," said Marigold.

"What man wouldn't?" Harold remarked, thinking that the sister's figure had possibilities—"The King of Beasts."

"My dear child," said Edith Marvell, taking Marigold's place beside Helena. "I find it so difficult to tell you how happy I am—to see you."

"But are you really?" Helena asked. "You seem more distressed than happy."

Edith Marvell took her daughter's hand.

"My darling child, it's just that I can't express myself."

Helena surveyed the plump claw resting on her wrist. “Perhaps you will be able to express whatever you have to say better when we’re alone.”

“It must all seem very unfamiliar,” said her mother.

“I hope Piers looked after you nicely on the journey,” said Marigold.

“I’ve no doubt everyone thought he was abducting you to South America,” said Harold Stemp.

Piers laughed irritably and looked at his sister. When they were alone in the train after Paris, she’d cried without moving and held his hand. Now she looked up at him. He saw that her courage was dimmed by fatigue. He said:

“We neither of us slept last night. I suggest that Helena gets packed into bed soon.”

“Would you like to go to your room?” asked Marigold.

“Am I staying here?”

“Yes.”

“That’s very hospitable of you.”

“My dear child, there’s nothing hospitable in having one’s own sister to stay . . .”

“And, unfortunately,” her mother explained, “I can’t manage to have you, as my head housemaid is away and the temporary one is quite useless really, and I shouldn’t feel that you were being properly looked after. Besides, you know, servants are so funny now. It’s different for Marigold, who is always having young people about her house.”

Helena followed her mother’s expression while she spoke, as if the words themselves were in a strange language. Then she spoke to Marigold.

“I’ll go to my room then.”

Edith Marvell said: “We shall meet to-morrow,” and offered another embrace. This time the girl accepted with a sudden intensity and then stood looking down into her mother’s face. “It touches me that you should want me,” she said. She added: “You smell so sweet.”

“What about Marigold’s smell?” asked Harold Stemp.

Helena went up to her sister and sniffed slowly. “It’s not so sweet, but more languorous.”

“And what about me?” asked Harold. “Sniff me.”

"I don't care to," said Helena.

Marigold took her arm and led her out, saying that she would have her dinner sent up to her. And when she had gone out, Lady Marvell turned to Philip and Piers.

"She is *very* strange."

Philip said: "I'm sure she feels strange."

"What's interesting," said Piers, "is how strange we are." He added: "She'll have to have some clothes. She's got no idea of dressing except robes like a priestess, or dressing-gowns."

His mother said: "I must take her to Chavelle and get her fitted out."

Piers left with his brother-in-law, and drove with him as far as the House of Commons. He asked Philip what he thought of the "Lady from the Sea" and how he liked the idea of harbouring her. Grant said that she seemed an interesting girl, but he couldn't for the world see what she was going to do with herself. Piers said, as they passed Buckingham Palace: "After all, what do most young women do with themselves?"

Grant said: "I should have thought this was the age of active women. The point about your young sister is that she may not fit in with the usual activities."

Piers nodded: "She's rather out-size."

Philip began to ask Piers about a young man on the *Bulletin* who had rung up to ask him for an interview.

When they parted Piers walked off up Whitehall.

Philip glanced after him, thinking how characteristic was that graceful, unhurrying walk. Charm, but no backbone.

When Piers got back to his flat, he found a letter on the table. A letter from Elizabeth with an Egyptian stamp. She wrote:

Dear Piers.

Thank you for your very sweet letter. Of course we will meet when we come home on leave, which may be in the autumn. We are all very well and the babies are flourishing and so is William. We have had a lot of gaieties lately, and some nice new people have come out here.

I don't know how to answer your letter, so I won't try. We may be moved to Cyprus or to India later. But, anyway, I think we shall be back in England before the autumn.

Thank you for the snapshot. You look awfully fit.

Yours affectionately,
Elizabeth Sinclair.

He read it three times and put it in his pocket and went to the window and looked out into Henrietta Street, which was empty except for the halos of the lamps and the two policemen-shaped silhouettes at the corner. He wondered why Elizabeth (who wrote "awfully fit" out of her goodness of heart—because she would never be "above" the jargon of the people she cherished), why Elizabeth had woken this unrelenting passion in him.

A taxi came down the street and drew up outside. Claire and Lettice Dean got out. He shouted down. They called up that they wanted a drink. He told them to come up. They came. They were both in tweeds.

Claire said they had been pub-crawling in Limehouse. Lettice said:

"How are you, Piers? I haven't seen you since Biarritz, two years ago."

Piers got out the whisky. He didn't like Lettice. She was red-haired, and, anyway, he disliked actresses.

Claire said: "I rang you up three times to-day and got no reply."

"I only got back to England this morning. I've been fetching my youngest sister from an island."

"But how thrilling," said Lettice Dean, sitting on the table.

"Yes," said Piers, thinking of Helena suddenly. "It is."

Claire took off her jacket and looked at him dubiously, thrusting out her little magenta under-lip.

"What's this about a younger sister?"

He said: "You shall meet her, Claire, you might be good for each other."

"An island sounds simply thrilling," said Lettice Dean, lighting a cigarette and patting the little tails of copper hair against her cheeks and spreading her too expressive nostrils.

"Tell us about her," said Claire, sipping. But Piers said: "I dislike telling about things."

IV

Helena woke up and saw the greenshiny walls and yellow curtains. The clock's little face stared twenty-past six from the table beside the bed. And now her room at home was empty, and the shutters closed. And Fernande wouldn't come in saying: "Six heures et demie, Mademoiselle."

She lay feeling the long ache begin again, and thinking of the early morning shadows of the olive trees, and the shadows of the cypresses across the east terrace, and the sea far down.

The aching held her. She imagined Fernande laying out the breakfast on the table in the loggia, and shaking the cushion in Lawrence's chair.

She got out of bed and went to the window. The sky was changing from gold pallor to pale light blue. The air was fragile and smoke-scented but sweet, and the slate roofs and house-backs looked newly washed. She gazed from roof to roof and beyond to faint towers and chimneys, thinking that this was the place that he'd wanted to bring her back to. He said he'd left England because he wanted to be alone. But he wanted, in the end, to bring her back. She remembered, "When you're fledged, darling, you must see everything and try everything." But he would never describe any person or book or place beforehand, saying that every taste should be her own (but rated her for condemning Naples for smelling and *Paradise Lost* for dullness).

She noticed a lilac-bush in the paved yard below and thought how late it bloomed; no buds open. She looked back into the room. The house was still and quiet. How late they got up. She thought of them all as she had seen them when she arrived, detaching them now from her night's dream, yet unable to strip them of a dream-like quality. They remained in her mind this morning as bright, uneasy figures, lacking in some vital dimension.

Only Piers seemed real, when he smiled like Lawrence. That last morning Lawrence had smiled like that, gasping and saying: "If this knocks me out, darling, then live hard, remember to live." And then later: "Most people die alive, my darling. I want you to have the hell of a good life, my sweet. And I detest mourning . . ."

She went into the bathroom and turned on the taps. The green bath and the green towels, the water sluicing round against her skin pleased her. The details of her new surroundings kept giving her distant but actual excitement, reaching her mind as a touch or scent penetrates physical pain.

When she went back into her bedroom she chose a book from a table by the farther window and lay down to read. Perhaps everyone was reading now, and therefore the house was quiet. She and Lawrence had read in the afternoons, but the custom might be different here.

Philip dressed early, meaning to leave for Silsbury by eight o'clock.

When he was dressed he went in to say good-bye to Marigold. She was awake, sipping lemon and hot water. He asked her if she had had an amusing evening. She said no—the play was devastating and Rigolo's was too crowded to dance. She looked liverish, and with her brass-coloured hair in a mop over her forehead she reminded Philip of a poster of dancing girls of the "Moulin Rouge" period. The traces of mascara showed round her eyes, and there was no colour on her lips, so that her chin looked more pointed. He reflected, handing her her bed-jacket, that something essential was revealed by each person's awakening. Even when he and Marigold were first married he had noticed her early-morning expression—the "what am I going to get out of to-day?" air, followed so quickly by an acute consciousness of some small dissatisfaction, that, in time, the dissatisfaction alone became her morning mood. In those days he had wondered if her discontent was his fault—contrasting her (with what now seemed a strange naïveté) with his mother, who had been gay and serene.

She said: "Well, to-day I suppose I shall have to battle with that appalling young woman."

"Whom do you mean?"

"My dear little sister!"

He said: "I don't see why you asked her here if you don't want her."

She took a comb and glass out of the drawer in her bedside table, and said: "What could I do? Mother refuses to have her for no reason at all, and yet managed to believe that she wants to have her and can't manage it. Piers hasn't got room, and, anyway, doesn't want her about, I expect, to interfere with his little 'affaires.' Mother's always managed to run us by sheer selfishness, and she insisted about this, and so I gave in." She combed her hair into its smooth, shining curves. "As a matter of fact, I had a hope that Helena might be slightly more amusing."

Philip filled his cigarette case from the box on the dressing-table. "She isn't at all what one would expect," he said (seeing the girl's eyelids lift suddenly above the green-grey gaze, and the slow enchanting turn of her

head when she said: “Places are easier to remember than people”). He added:

“I think the reality’s rather reassuring.”

Marigold said: “She may be for you, darling. Men always like women without a sense of humour.”

“I can’t see that her predicament, so far, can have given her sense of humour much scope. Her father’s been dead a month and she’s come among complete strangers.”

“She’s not going to *live* here, anyway. She can stay a few weeks and then —*nous verrons*.”

“I doubt if she’ll want to stay if you’re so ungracious.”

“I shan’t be to her face.”

He hesitated: “She’d understand you better if you were.”

Marigold said, looking in the hand-glass and smoothing her eyebrows with a finger-tip: “It’s pretty obvious that she doesn’t really understand anything. Harold was rather amusing about her last night. He said she was a ‘kind of marvellous moron!’”

“Harold’s remarks are memorable for their brilliant ineptitude.”

She demanded nervously:

“Why be unpleasant about my friends?”

“I’m sorry.”

He went out. Why indeed? Stupid of him.

The whole business—Marigold and her young men—was tedious and destroying beyond belief. Tedious because of their mutual pretence of marriage. Destroying because this false relationship which was made of interest on her part, and an unhappy tolerance on his, undermined all hope and all repose, and he was driven to this incessant life, with the moments of irony and its blanks of sleep.

Downstairs his breakfast was ready, his newspapers arranged. He ate rapidly, glancing over the headlines. The *Herald* had a leader praising Sichley’s speech of two nights ago.

Philip took the papers out to the car.

“Morning, Robson.”

The young man touched his cap. Philip took the wheel and Robson sat beside him.

They sped up Chester Place and through Belgrave Square and Grosvenor Crescent to the Park. Philip glanced towards the Row, thinking how jolly the children looked on their ponies under the trees, and what an astounding green everything was. That corner of the Row always reminded him of driving in a barouche with his mother and grandfather and drawing up there, and his grandfather, enormous in a grey top-hat with a black riband, asking him how he'd like a pony of his own. Amazing old man. But possibly anyone could live to ninety-three and write to *The Times* on their deathbed, if they never doubted their own judgment, and had all their money in gilt-edged securities.

As they passed through the traffic of Edgware Road, Robson said:

"I seen your speech reported yesterday, sir."

"Hope you agree, Robson."

The young man hesitated. "Yes and no, sir."

"You're a Socialist, aren't you?"

"Oh no, sir," the snubby face grew red. Philip gave him a glance.

"You needn't say 'no' for my sake. I don't care what you are as long as you don't smash up the car."

"Well, to be accewrit, my last employer dismissed me on that account."

"I know. He told me."

Robson laboured in thought.

"Well, sir, the truth of it is, I am and I'm not. I am a Socialist, but I'm not a believer in change for the sake of change."

Philip accelerated. "I rather agree with you," he said. They passed a Packard driven by a blonde girl and he saw Robson's eyes veer back.

As they left the by-pass Robson remarked:

"Mrs. Grant ordered me for Sunday to go down to the country, sir."

"Yes," said Philip briskly. "Mrs. Grant always has the car, unless I arrange to take it." He saw the working of the man's mind . . . The bitch in the Packard . . . Marigold . . . And the insinuation that he mightn't know what Marigold was doing on Sunday. He didn't. He passed a lorry suddenly. Robson gripped the side of the car.

When she had finished dressing, Marigold went across the landing to her sister's room and found her lying on the bed reading. Marigold went over and kissed her and asked how she slept and whether her breakfast had been all right . . . Helena said, "Fitfully," and that her breakfast was delicious. She went on, "This is an extraordinary book. With what period does it deal?"

Marigold glanced at it and smiled.

"Oh, *that*. It isn't historical, darling. It's modern. Haven't you read any Aldous Huxley?"

Helena shook her head. "I've read the work of Thomas Huxley."

"Just a little previous, darling."

"Is this man a chronicler of these times?"

Marigold thought, "Harold's right, she is a moron." She said: "No, he's a novelist, and writes novels."

Helena put the book down.

"*That's* a novel?—I've never read one—we had none. Lawrence didn't want me to read any until I'd met people and mixed in the world."

"Why on earth not?"

"He said it was like reading travel literature, instead of travelling, and that so often the wrong things were starred—and you missed other things because they weren't mentioned. So far this is obscure to me."

"I imagine it must be!"

Marigold sat down on the edge of the bed.

"You must have had a queer life."

"Queer?" Helena asked.

Marigold lit another cigarette.

"Yes, my dear. So utterly unlike anyone else."

"But do any two people grow alike?"

"Most people are brought up alike."

Helena reflected. "That seems to me 'queer.'" She got off the bed, disturbed by her sister's nearness, and began to walk about. She stopped in

front of the fireplace, absently examined the flower painting hung above it, and said:

"I won't read any more novels yet. I've read a third of that and already I see you all like people in a play before I've begun to see you face to face."

"Certainly if you see us like that"—Marigold indicated the book—"you'd better stick to *Punch* and *Tatler*."

"What are they?"

Marigold smiled. "Weekly newspapers. One funny, one serious. I'll show you sometime."

Helena said, taking off her bath-towel and beginning to dress, "Piers talked to me about newspapers. I understand he works for one."

"The old *Bulletin*—yes. What marvellous underclothes!"

Helena looked surprised.

"Lawrence always had them sent from Paris for me. Don't all humane women have such underclothes?"

"*Humane?*" said Marigold.

"Intelligent . . ." Helena sought the synonyms of her thought. "Leisured?"

Marigold blew out a mouthful of smoke. "Chaps that can afford them do."

Helena looked at her as if she were waiting for some rational simplification of this sentence. Marigold admired the golden-burned creaminess of her skin and the strong curves of her body under those paradoxical underclothes.

"Who are they?" asked Helena.

Marigold said she meant women with money.

"Yes," said Helena, "that's what I meant." She added: "There can be no leisure without money and no Humanism without leisure."

"Are you quoting 'our father'?"

"Yes."

Marigold watched the movements of her sister's shoulders as she combed back her hair, and sprayed it with scent and combed it again. She said:

"Well, darling, I can see there's a missing link somewhere in the argument. Piers would illuminate you, he adores arguments."

"Don't you enjoy them?" Helena asked. She wondered if the things in her sister that baffled her, a certain hardness of gaze and inconsequence of attention, could be accounted for by some limitation of mind.

"No," said Marigold. "And look here, darling, what do you want to do to-day? That's what I really came to ask you. I've got a hair and manicure this morning and a lunch out (which I can't get out of) and we might do something together this afternoon."

Helena thanked her. She answered that she would go out and walk all the morning, and wanted to be alone in the afternoon. She added that she might go and see her mother in the evening. Marigold said quickly that she was out of town for the night. ("I can't face her," Mother had said, "until to-morrow night. I am trying to get myself used to the idea of her.")

Helena took her mother's absence without surprise Marigold reflected that nothing seemed to surprise her sister except the obvious.

She said: "Well, lunch is at half-past one, and dinner's eight."

"I don't want to lunch, thank you, but I will dine," said Helena.

"You seem to feel fairly independent already."

After a moment the girl answered:

"It seems to me I am independent. I have some wealth of my own and I'm bound to no one by affection."

Marigold got up to go.

"You certainly don't pretend anything."

Helena was thinking "bound to no one" ("For we get snuffed out like candles," Lawrence said, "and for no reason!—a gust more or less"). But she answered through some automatic process of her reasoning.

"Indeed no, why should I?"

V

Piers kept on making affirmative noises when Sichley paused; and looking round the table at Marigold, at Vernon Haskett opposite, at Helena—between Philip and Sichley—and half-listening to his mother's exclamatory small talk. He thought, "This is Lawrence's circle of the Inferno; and now she's in it. In this picturesque candle-light she sees our faces; sees Mother frosted and plump; and Marigold slick from her hairdresser, and Vernon Haskett's American face with its fine brow and nose and neat thick lips; and Philip like a Rembrandtesque portrait of a disappointed buccaneer. And Roger Sichley, a bilious amorist with eyes like currants. And myself looking a little like herself—like a brown shadow of herself. She doesn't see herself (for there is no egoist in her, and no artist). She doesn't know why Marigold already dislikes her, why Haskett keeps bending forward to look at her across Sichley's slow gesticulating torso, and why Philip and Sichley, talking across her, turn to her every now and then saying, 'Don't you agree?' and 'Isn't that so, Miss Marvell?'"

Haskett was saying:

"I couldn't help being amused, Marvell, by the *Bulletin's* latest campaign to boost British cooking——"

Lady Marvell, who was sitting on Philip's right, caught the word cooking, and said to Philip that her new cook was really marvellous, so interrupting his discussion with Sichley, who now devoted himself to Helena, disparaging Liberalism and tapping on the table with his fork. Philip listened to his mother-in-law's praises of her new cook and her revelations of the dishonesty of the last one.

Edith Marvell was cheerful, for things were going better than she'd expected. The girl seemed to have table manners, though she hadn't much conversation; but then Roger Sichley (who was getting fat) was rather wild in the kind of things he said, and even she herself didn't always quite know what to say to him. But then, old Lady Sichley was very queer, and everyone knew that she had brought Roger and Christabel up in a peculiar way, making them eat carrots raw, and seeing rabbits born and never being punctual, and she could remember them coming in sandals to see the Lord Mayor's Show. But Christabel had made a good marriage and seemed quite settled down, except for her Birth Control work. What a pity that Helena wasn't a little more vivacious really. (But perhaps that would come, for, as Piers said, she might be feeling a little out of everything and had had a

shock.) Young Haskett's people—she had asked Marion Cleeves, who knew all the best-sort-of-Americans—were really delightful apparently; not just rich like so many Americans. And his mother came from Virginia, and his sister, who lived in Washington, was married to an Austrian in the diplomatic. (Austrians were so much like English people in so many ways.) And if Helena were smartened up a little . . . And she said to her son-in-law:

"Of course, before the war, one could get a good French or German cook without any difficulty, but now it seems impossible to get foreigners in, and one really wonders how the hairdressers manage."

"I wonder how they do?" said Philip.

And Marigold was saying to Vernon Haskett:

"How's the work going?"

"Excellently."

She gave him a look, a sudden dropping of her eyelids and half-smiling droop of her mouth. (He was attractive and she'd been silly to let him go so easily.) Versed in the simplicity of masculine reactions, she shifted in her chair, so that her shoulder strap slipped off.

"Difficult dress," she said.

"On the contrary, it seems pretty easy," said Vernon, and including Piers opposite him in his audience, he began to say how much Philip was helping him with the general plan of his book. And glancing up the table at Philip, Vernon thought that *there* was an Englishman he admired; and if only he hadn't fooled around first with Marigold (who'd caught him fresh when he first arrived, putting the London-hostess stuff over him). For she was just like so many other women he'd known, out for a sensation and a heap of admiration and wanting to keep eating her cake and having it. So that now he never felt quite easy with Philip, because of that damned week-end in Dorking; even if everyone did say that Philip didn't care how his wife behaved, and only cared about his work.

Sichley raised one black eyebrow in his yellow face and said to Helena:

"My dear young lady, you should read Farrow's book, *The Five Year Plan and After*."

And Helena said: "I have read it. But I disagree with the principle of Communism."

Philip turned to her, leaving his mother-in-law to draw Piers, on her other side, into a hit-and-miss discussion of Christian Science.

"Why?" Philip asked Helena.

And Roger Sichley said in his squeaky voice: "Tell us why?" and sat pulling his moustache and biting his droopy lower lip and wondering if she were a virgin.

She said: "Because its whole end is toward mediocrity. Even when every peasant has got comfort and learning—what is the sense of that?"

"I would have thought that was considerable sense," said Sichley, admiring her eyelashes.

"Why?" she demanded.

Sichley hunched his high shoulders and leaned towards her, asking: "Don't you believe in equality or opportunity?"

"No," she said. "There should be leisure and comfort for the people who are clever enough to deserve it—and everyone else must be kept in good health to work for them."

Philip listened, amused to hear what must be Lawrence's *obiter dicta* spoken with such gentle, such perfectly unconscious arrogance. The girl turned to him now, saying: "You believe that?"

He compromised: "I believe that's one sort of ideal. And probably nearer the truth than Sichley's Socialism."

"But the point is," said Sichley, "the point is, my dear girl—who *are* clever enough to deserve the leisure and comfort?"

Philip, watching her profile, saw her colour spread and ebb. Her father had clearly left no defined answer to this problem, and she was thinking. Then:

"I don't know yet," she said. "So far I only know the theory and it seems the right one. But I shall answer you sometime," she glanced at Sichley with a smile and a sudden incisiveness of manner. Philip saw that she was accustomed not only to listening, but to being listened to. Her assurance was so innocent of all conceit, that at first it seemed to be aloofness. Now he saw its positive quality. She was ashamed neither of her certainties or uncertainties. Her dignity, that went so strangely with her inexperience, lay in the fact that she took herself for granted.

Sichley started a tirade beginning: "These arbitrary aristocracies are all very well in theory . . ." And Philip saw Marigold at the other end of the table, trying to make an impression on young Haskett. Sixteen years ago he himself had sat beside her at dinner and thought her lovely; wanted her—for her young fragrant fairness, and fallen in love, and read Keats' sonnets at night; haunted the Row before breakfast to see her; gone to Ascot, to Etretat; given her "The Ring and the Book" and found passages in Francis Thompson that seemed to describe her; quoted *Love in the Valley*, Verlaine, Heine, his imagination using a hundred familiar and lovely cadences to make music for his passion.

"What do you think, Philip?" The girl had turned to him again: and again meeting her gaze he had that sensation of shyness. He answered, having vaguely followed Sichley's familiar argument, and went on watching her. She'd startled him this evening, when he came into the drawing-room. He hadn't realised that she was there, standing by the window and looking out. In that long silver dress, she lost that half-wild adolescent beauty, and gained a repose, a classic loveliness, redeemed from perfection by her sudden vehemences of gesture, or by an inconsequent trick of laughter.

Now she answered Sichley again:

"But how would you spend your life, Mr. Sichley, if all such problems were resolved, and there were no Utopias to make?"

Philip watched the movements of her lips as she spoke, the way they closed slowly, meeting in an expression of sensuous impersonal sweetness, or broke apart in that extraordinary brilliant smile, that was like the lighting up of a child, and seemed to reveal in her a child's delicious capacity for delight.

"——in the old days," said Edith Marvell—who thought of the years before the war as the *ancien régime* to which she belonged. "In the old days if you walked up Bond Street in the morning you saw all the people you knew. But now I never meet anyone and the buses make it impossible to cross the street."

Philip was sympathetic.

Philip *was* sympathetic, Edith Marvell thought.

Philip is in one of his gloomy moods, Marigold reflected, seeing him between the candles.

Piers thought, as the women got up to go, Philip is different to-night. There is a kind of nervousness in his manner. He is by turns courtly and

absent-minded. The mood, state of soul, whatever it is, inhabits him like a ghost in a weathered but prosperous house. . . .

In the drawing-room Helena listened to her mother's accounts of strange things she would do for her and with her. Marigold every now and then joined in—endorsing such statements as: "I think not Ascot this year—considering everything—but there is no reason why you shouldn't go to the tennis and to the opera, and to small dances."

Helena said that she liked opera, although she thought it a bastard art. She added that she had no inclination to dance. As the men came in, Marigold asked: "Can you dance?"

"Yes, Lawrence had me taught. I learned the Tango in Madrid. And Ravinsky, the Russian dancer, gave me lessons once in Rome."

Marigold beckoned to Haskett to sit by her.

Helena turned to Piers. He said: "Darling, how does it go so far?"

She hesitated. "It must be like learning a language that resembles your own, but has different meanings for the same words."

"D'you feel a foreigner?"

"I can't tell yet. You see, every now and then, like in the Park this morning, I remember it all, from when I was a baby. That lake called the Serpentine, and I went to see the Guards in Whitehall and they were the same——"

Marigold put a record on the gramophone.

"Every prospect pleases, but only man is vile," said Piers.

She smiled. Then: "I like Philip," she said.

"*Bend down sister.*"

"*Bend down sister.*"

"*If you want to get thin . . .*"

"I like Philip. I don't understand Marigold very well."

"And Mother?"

"I want to stroke and sniff Mother, she's like a fragrant white cat. But I don't understand her."

"*Bend down sister.*"

"*Bend down sister.*"

Helena thought back over her mother's talk. It had a baffling mixture of garrulousness and allusiveness. Fernande could be garrulous; and Lawrence and his friends had been allusive, but their allusiveness had been to matters which she could imagine even if she couldn't understand them. So much about "meeting people," and the "right people" and finding one's "*milieu*."

Piers laughed. "I wish I'd heard you together."

"Don't laugh," said Helena. "She cared enough for me to want me to come back."

Piers made no comment.

"And Marigold asked me to stay under her roof."

He said: "You haven't seen my roof yet. Sometime you must come and meet some of my friends—not the 'best people.'"

"Why aren't they?"

"Because—well, my dear, you can judge for yourself."

She thought that Piers looked unhappy. She put her hand on his.

"Shall I see you before then?"

"My dear, yes."

"When?" she asked.

"Come and fetch me at the *Bulletin* to-morrow—a taxi will take you there—and we'll have lunch together."

"Yes," she said, "I should like to."

Vernon Haskett left Marigold by the gramophone and came over to them, saying he wanted to be allowed to talk with Miss Marvell. Helena smiled at him. She liked his short neat face. He looked determined, and had a considerate manner. He said:

"Piers tells me that we're both strangers to this country."

She asked him where he came from. He said America. He spoke slowly with less drawl and no squawk, like the American Professor she'd met in Rome.

She said: "I'm very ignorant about America."

He smiled, looking at her with a steady interested gaze.

"Most people in Europe are. Only they think because they don't know anything, that there's nothing to know. Where d'you come from?" he continued.

"From the 'Iles d'Argent,' near Toulon."

He threw back his head with an emphatic "Wonderful."

"The smallest one," she said, "but lovely."

"It must be."

"You never went there?" she asked, wondering if by some chance he'd ever seen the island, and the low pale curves of sand, and the pines and steep terraces.

"I've never been to the Mediterranean at all," he said.

But she didn't take in his words. Was it real that Lawrence was dead?—and she was among these inconsequent unresting people, in rooms tinted like shells?

VI

Piers said to Carberry, his sub-editor, "You answer it this time."

Carberry took up the receiver. Then he turned to Piers. "Miss Venetia Boyne suggests an article on, 'Men are *really* the Home Lovers.'"

"No use," said Piers.

"No, I'm afraid not," said Carberry, and listened again. He reported: "Sex-Appeal in Business."

"All right," said Piers.

"Yes," said Carberry into his receiver; "that'll do. Could you let us have that by Monday or Tuesday next week?"

"Where are those photos for the Seaside Health Articles?" Piers asked Miss Fox. Miss Fox telephoned for them. A boy brought them. Piers said: "These girls are all plump. There has got to be one of a trim girl, who's going to put on weight. And I want a group laughing. If you haven't any of them in this year's costumes, get hold of a new Riviera picture. Where are the notes I was doing for those articles, Miss Fox?"

She got them out from a file. Piers looked through them. "*Gaining Health with Happiness at the Sea*," by a *Medical Man*. He crossed out "Medical Man," and put "Our Physical Culture Expert."

Miss Fox said: "A Mr. Stemp is coming at twelve to see you."

Piers said to Carberry: "Four momentous things are happening next week. The Toy Dog Show, the Vevey Conference, Kringel's Exhibition at the Essex Galleries, and Georgia Brane's baby is being christened."

Carberry said in the "peppy" voice which had helped him to his present position:

"O.K. Chief—what are we going to do about it?"

"We want a big centre-page apropos of the Conference. And I'd like to get Georgia Brane herself to give an interview that we can bring out on the day of the christening—I thought Dogs might be brought in rather delightfully in a short article disproving that 'Little Things Please Little Minds.' I shall do that myself. Only see that the photos are bona fide."

Carberry giggled and stroked back his sleek hair. "Yep. We don't want the Cat Show scandal over again."

Piers said to Miss Fox: "Get Lady Georgia Brane for me. If you can't get her right away, then get Mr. Philip Grant—Sloane 5669—first."

"What about the Kringel Exhibition?" said Carberry, correcting the copy spread out on his desk.

Piers said: "I shall do that myself. I want an article saying how important he is, before the usual stuff starts about Ugliness, and 'nothing being more beautiful than the Human Form but'—I shall have to find a title to treacle the brimstone."

A boy came in and handed a slip of paper. Miss Fox said: "Mr. Stemp."

"He can come in now," said Piers.

Harold Stemp was shown in. He was wearing a smart suit and dusty suede shoes. He said:

"Good morning, Piers. I'm afraid I'm being a bore and using private acquaintanceship for commercial ends."

"Pleasure often leads to business," said Piers. "Sit down."

Harold put his black felt hat on Miss Fox's desk and sat down opposite Piers. He belched slightly and lit a cigarette. "I want to do an article for you," he said.

"Lady Georgia Brane on the line," said Miss Fox.

Piers took up his receiver.

"Hello! Georgia, darling. Piers speaking. Strictly business."

"What is it?"

"If I send along a reporter will you give a really nice interview that we can use on the day of your progeny's christening?"

"Mm—will they pay me?"

"Publicity, darling. Why should they?"

"I think they might."

Piers hesitated: "I expect they'll produce a fiver."

"They ought to manage ten. The daughter of England's dullest peer."

"I'll see. Anyway I'll send someone along. When can she come?"

"Any morning before twelve. I'm feeding the brute, so I'm being rather languorous."

"Pity we can't make a story out of that. 'Natural Feeding for the Granddaughter of England's Dullest Peer.'"

"When are you coming to see us?"

"Soon, bless you."

"Good-bye, Piers."

Piers said to Harold: "Now, my man."

"I want to write an article on murderers," said Harold.

Piers nodded. "So far, so good."

"I thought," said Harold, "that one might do an appealing article proving that every murderer has a heart of gold."

"You certainly respond to the Zeitgeist," said Piers.

"Mr. Philip Grant's secretary on the line," said Miss Fox.

Miss Blanchard's voice said: "It's Miss Blanchard speaking, Mr. Piers. Do you want to speak to Mr. Grant?"

"Yes, please," said Piers.

"Hello!"—Philip's voice.

"Will you do an article on the Verey Conference next week?"

"When do you want it?"

"By Tuesday night, at latest."

"Yes—all right."

"Twenty-five guineas," said Piers.

"I won't have it 'edited.'"

"Very well. I think that's safe. It was Strang's own idea that you should do it."

"Mm—*was* it? He must be doing a left turn. All right." He cut off.

"Now," said Piers, "about the golden-hearted criminal."

"What the Great British Public likes to feel," said Harold, "is that every murderer's a kind of glorious extension of himself. All their hate-repressions find relief in reading and thinking about the man who wasn't afraid to kill his wife—I shall call the article, 'What is wrong with Murderers.'"

"That's too strong," said Piers.

Harold belched again. "What about, 'A Murderer's a Man for a' That'?"

"Won't do either," said Piers.

"What about '*He* had a Mother too!'?"

"That's Eighteen-Ninety—mere sob-stuff."

"Very well, you can choose the title. The thing is, what will you pay me?" asked Harold.

"Five, I expect."

"It isn't enough. My goodness. . . ."

"You won't get more than five," said Piers.

"But look here," said Harold. "After all, I did write that damned book."

"I don't like to be brutal," said Piers; "but you see it's two years since your novel came out; and a great many other novels have been censored since."

"Oh, all right," said Harold. "But I should do better selling artificial silk shingle-nets."

"Quite possibly," said Piers.

A boy brought in a slip of paper and Piers read it.

"Show her in at once. It's my sister," he said.

"Not Marigold?" asked Harold.

"No. Helena. Send me along the article then, as soon as you like."

Harold went with an air of faintly bilious resentment. He met Helena in the doorway and shook hands. "How odd to find you here," he said. She stared at him. "Is it?" and came into the room. Miss Fox shut the door after Harold.

Helena said: "I've been seeing the presses down below. I came early and I told a man I was your sister and he took me to another man, who took me to see everything."

"That's the evening paper they're doing now," said Piers.

She sat on the desk. "I know—they told me."

"What's the time?"

"Gone twelve," said Carberry.

"We might go and lunch early," said Piers.

As they went down in the lift he said: "I see you've still got your Toulon dress on."

She looked down at herself with a funny mixture of amusement and distaste. "I must buy some things to fit the fashion of the country."

As they walked along Fleet Street towards the Strand, she asked why people should want news so often. He said:

"They read chiefly that."

"I suppose," she said, "in a democracy where every man has the responsibility of governing he wants to be informed perpetually of what goes on."

Piers glanced at her walking beside him. He noticed that people turned and looked after her.

"That isn't quite the point." He added: "Did you never see any newspapers?"

"Lawrence always had *The Times* and the *Temps*. Sometimes I looked at them. Is that a market?" She stopped.

"No, that's Woolworth's. The ideal expression of an industrial age. Everything for sixpence and nothing made to last."

"Oh, but," she said, looking in the window, "I should like those ear-rings. Sixpence is a few francs, isn't it?"

He let her go in. She bought a pair of big pearl ear-rings and fastened them on in front of a mirror by the doorway. They gave her an entrancing air of sophistication. She looked at herself attentively. He said:

"Pull your hat more on one side." (She was wearing the little black hat he'd got her in Toulon, which she'd refused at first to keep on.) She obeyed, staring at herself.

"Now I'm more like Marigold."

"Not very," he said. Marigold's looks, he thought, wouldn't give that skimpy buttony dress and the cheap hat and ear-rings such an air of involuntary elegance.

They went into the Savoy Grill. As she sat down opposite him he said: "You look absurdly lovely."

She was looking round at the people, and gave him half her attention. "Yes, I know."

One of the waiters came up and Piers ordered. She was exacting about the wine. "With the cold salmon we must have a Chablis."

He ordered it. Helena said: "In the street the English seem less ugly than the French. But the types here are very low, especially the men."

"They're all rather successful," said Piers.

"Mother used the word yesterday about Marigold's marriage. Has it a bad meaning?"

Piers drank half his cocktail. "It means that you are better than most people at the job you are doing."

She looked at a group of business men at the next table.

He saw Claire come in with Roger Sichley. They sat down at a table in the corner.

"Does Mr. Stemp work with you?" Helena asked.

"No, he's doing an article for us."

"Is he clever?"

"Fairly."

"Marigold has asked me to go with her and him to visit his kinsfolk in the country."

"When?"

"On Sunday."

Piers smiled. "I should certainly go."

"Why do you smile?"

"The British Nation has a diversity of backbones. The Stemps are one of them. You'll see."

"I'll look." She liked being with Piers. More and more often his tricks of speech, that way of blinking his eyelids as he made a diverting remark, his silences—brows down and under-lip thrust out—and every now and then a turn of his neck and shoulders reminded her of Lawrence. She liked his quick speech and slow movements; and was puzzled by some of his phrases.

He began to talk about newspapers, beginning by a description of the Stemps as essentially *Daily Bulletin* people. He said that every newspaper existed to flatter its particular public by confirming their prejudices, and titillating their particular news-appetite. He instanced the *Bulletin* as the perfect paper for privileged mediocrity. No new idea was mentioned unless it could be treated as a "stunt." She asked what a stunt was. He said that in the newspaper world it meant turning an event or an idea into an advertisement to sell the paper. Murder, or a scientific discovery, or an economic fallacy could be used for this. The quicker your succession of stunts, the more successful your paper was.

While he was talking Claire came across from her table in the corner. She said:

"Hello, Piers," looking at Helena.

Piers introduced them. Claire said: "Marvellous meeting you. I've heard so much about you."

Helena said: "I haven't heard anything about you."

Claire laughed, showing her little white teeth, and said to Piers:

"I like It!"

"What?"

"The sister." She added: "You see whom I'm with?"

He glanced at Sichley, rising like a fish for his own asparagus. "I do."

She said: ". . . I came to ask you something."

"Mm?"

"I want a chap or fellow to come to Brighton with me on Sunday. I have 'immortal longings in me' to go to Brighton."

"I will," said Piers. "We can shrimp and slot and hold hands and listen to the band."

"Too early to shrimp. Too chilly."

"We'll see. Will you fetch me? You know my car is smashed."

"Yes, but mine's all right." She turned to Helena.

"Let's meet sometime."

Helena said: "I'd like to."

"Thank you."

Piers said: "I've got a plan. You might see about getting Helena clothes, Claire? Mother means to. But she'll dress her in sky blue or pink and frills. She wants to made a débutante of her!"

Claire stared again at Helena and then gave her little husky giggle. "Might as well try and make a débutante out of the Queen of Sheba! I don't see her statuesque bosom with a rosebud pinned on. . . ." She said to Helena: "Lunch with me to-morrow, and I'll see you're fitted out by someone who'll really do you properly."

When she'd gone Piers asked Helena what she thought of her. Helena said:

"Lively but paltry."

Piers chuckled and tapped his feet under the table. "She's considered very pretty."

"A degenerate type," she said. "No man would desire to breed by her."

Piers said: "No, they don't want to do that."

"Where's Brighton?" asked Helena.

"By the sea."

"On Sunday, after Marigold and Mr. Stemp have taken me to his family, they are going to a place called Templedean? Philip's going there for the week-end apparently."

Piers said: "That's our house in the country. We all share it now. But Philip and Marigold have it mostly. Mother doesn't like the country, except for entertaining. Lawrence bought it years ago. Didn't you know? I suppose you can't remember."

She coloured and didn't answer. He thought her behaviour about Lawrence was a strange mixture of matter-of-factness and quick betrayals. She said:

"Perhaps I'll remember when I go. I didn't know it was his house."

"He liked the country. Some of his books are there still. The ones he left. . . . He used to hunt down there."

After a minute she said: "What did he hunt?"

"Foxes," said Piers.

VII

On Sunday morning Edith Marvell rang up her daughter before starting for church. She sat in her dressing-gown telephoning, while Hepburn folded her clothes and listened.

"Good morning, darling."

"*Good morning*."

"How did you sleep?"

"*All right, thank you*."

"I didn't sleep so well. There was a fire somewhere. The engines woke me. What are you doing to-day?"

"*Going down to the Stemps for lunch*."

"Who are they?"

"*Harold's people*."

"Oh yes, what else?"

"*We're going to join Philip and Vernon Haskett afterwards—Philip's at Templedean for the week-end with him*."

"With whom, dear?"

"*Vernon Haskett—the young American*."

"Oh yes, I thought him charming. I hear he's the nephew of Mrs. Curtis Raeburn, who has Cleaveden."

"*Yes. We're all to meet at Cleaveden. I'm taking Helena*."

"Oh . . . that's just what I was going to ask you. How is she?"

"*She looks as if she'd been crying all night. Rather plain, but less difficult. She's talking about taking a flat of her own*."

"Oh dear, I don't think that would do."

"*Why on earth not? It does for other people. She can't go on here indefinitely. She'll upset the servants. She only eats two meals a day and thinks nothing of coming into my room with no clothes on to ask me if I think Meredith's novels are a picture of real life*."

"One was afraid of that sort of thing."

"*She simply doesn't seem to know what behaviour means. Last night we had Teddy Bream and Iris to dinner. Half-way through she got up and said would I forgive her, she must go. I thought, of course, she was ill or something. She didn't reappear. And when I found her in her room reading, she simply said, 'the conversation displeased her and she would rather read.' Iris is a little broad for a 'jeune fille.' But I don't even believe Helena is. . . .*"

"Well, dear, perhaps it might be better if she did move a little later. What is Piers doing? He never tells me."

"*Nor me. I don't know—Mother, we're just going . . .*"

"Hepburn!" called Edith Marvell. "Hepburn, these shoes are too tight. Fetch me another pair."

"Drat the old hag," muttered Hepburn inside the dress-cupboard. She was in a bad temper. It was her Sunday afternoon out, and she had a spot on her chin and it looked like rain. . . .

Claire drove between sixty and seventy whenever she didn't see a policeman. So that they arrived at Brighton before twelve.

They went and sat on the beach in front of the Metropole Hotel and threw stones into the sea. Claire threw well for a woman. She looked round and said: "We're dressed all wrong. I ought to have my new summer straw and a coloured mackintosh and you haven't got co-respondent shoes."

He said: "I have at home. Don't you remember I bought a pair last September at Avignon?"

She said: "How I hated Avignon. My insides went all funny and I never wanted to hear the word Pope again."

He found another flat stone and made it spin over the grey waves. "The smells at Arles were worse."

"The mosquitoes were worse at Nîmes." She took out her powder compact.

"Vive la France," he said.

She took out her lipstick. "Shall we lunch at the Metropole or a fried fish bar?"

He said: “France ought to be denationalised and made into a European pleasure park. The Metropole is more ‘local colour’; the lunch at a fish bar probably better. . . .”

She put her arm through his. “Let’s be low, and go to the Metropole.”

“It isn’t time yet.”

“I’m empty.”

“That comes of breakfasting off Bromo-Seltzer and anchovies.”

She got up. “I’m getting chilly. Let’s do the slot machines before lunch.”

He got up too. They went on to the pier. Claire did the cricket match and tried her grip, and couldn’t return the penny and weighed herself (eight stone four), and got out some milk chocolate. Piers did cigarettes and matches and a packet of butterscotch and scent—he got Jockey Club. Claire did scent too and got Violet. As they stood at the end of the pier trying the butterscotch, she asked:

“Are you still in love with Elizabeth Sinclair?”

He didn’t answer. He had been thinking of Elizabeth all the time they were motoring down and wondering if she would really come back this summer.

She watched his expression and put her arm through his.

“I’m sorry, darling,” she added, “all the same I don’t know what it is about her. William’s a cousin of mine, you know, and I went to their wedding. A June wedding and Surrey garden full of greenhouses and the bridesmaids in beige satin.”

“I know.”

“And she wears strap shoes made for her in Bond Street.”

“I know. It’s utterly irrational.” (“And Claire is much more amusing and has much lovelier legs and sees life a good deal more whole. . . . Elizabeth believes in Our Empire and Decency and What One Doesn’t Do. But what counts, what traps one . . . is the shape of an eyelid, or a sudden evidence of courage; or was it Elizabeth’s childish-slender neck and her grave belief in What One Doesn’t do?”)

They turned and went back to the Metropole.

After luncheon they walked up and down the Promenade, and Claire was light-hearted and the women looked at her clothes and the men at her figure.

Claire was delicious when she was gay. That was what he'd liked in her at the beginning. Her mind tumbled and flickered. They sat down on a bench and he said: "I do rather love you, Claire."

She said: "How nice. And how untrue. But you're the only man I've ever been in love with. You're the thirteenth I've slept with—perhaps that's why."

"Why do you say that?"

She turned her face to him.

"That I'm in love with you?"

"Yes."

"I am."

"Why?"

"Something about your vague lost expression and the way you walk. Mark Ambrose said you were like a Blake Angel strayed into the Café Royal."

"Why do you frequent the Ambroses?"

"They amuse me."

"Christabel's too fearful. Nothing is impure to her, and hardly anything amusing. And Mark is that dreadful product, the born gentleman trying to be natural—'Waterloo Place' won on the playing-fields of Eton."

"They give good parties."

"The one I went to they drank sweetish cup, and indulged in the sort of highbrow necking which consists in discussing sex till dawn, and then going home to do Müller."

As they went to the pier to hear the band, Claire said: "I like your new sister. She can be amusing. When I took her to Oliver Devereux's for her frocks he was in himself and came to advise her. She took his advice—and my goodness she'll look divine when those frocks are done. And when she was going, she shook hands with Oliver and told him that she liked him. You know he's large and good-looking and not at all the dress-designing young man. He was pretty astounded, but he said: 'Will you give me a kiss then?'—and she smiled that hundred per cent smile quite suddenly and let him kiss her. I asked her in the taxi afterwards if she always kissed men when she liked them."

"What did she say?"

"She said: 'Yes, if I really like them.'"

They sat down in two deck-chairs near the bandstand and turned up their collars. Piers said:

"I can't altogether make her out. She doesn't fit into one's oddest ideas of what she might be."

Claire said, sucking butterscotch: "Roger Sichley's got that roving eye on her."

Piers said, annoyed: "I don't think she likes him enough to encourage him."

"She doesn't encourage anyone," said Claire. "She doesn't have to. And I don't believe she knows about encouraging."

Piers agreed. "No, I believe she just accepts what she wants, and rejects what she doesn't want."

The band struck up a selection from *Madame Butterfly*. Several women put up umbrellas.

"If this rain goes on, we'll go to a movie," said Claire.

Helena sat by Marigold, who drove, and Harold sat behind them, but leaned forward to talk and give Marigold directions. He said:

"When you get to Henley you turn left at the cross-roads. My parents' home is about three miles out. If you knew my parents already you'd probably recognise the house for its characteristic lack of distinction. My family are hardly like human beings. They're like types."

He made several remarks of this sort about his family. He explained that they had been banal enough to make money in the war. He said: "My only reputable relative is a Bishop. But he was defrocked, and became a shop-walker; and now I have no one I can boast about—except of course Cousin Jessie at Market Harborough. She's a great woman, very queer, but interesting. Some people think she was the original of the English girl in *A Passage to India*. She was in India when her father was a colonel out there. But after he died she inherited this place at Market Harborough and breeds rats and mice there."

"Why does she?" asked Helena.

"Because she can't stop them."

"I don't think she's worth boasting about," said Marigold, slowing down at a petrol station.

"I haven't told you everything."

"Tell us then. That half-wit, Robson, hasn't put enough petrol in, damn him."

"I stayed with her last Christmas," he began.

"You told me you went to St. Moritz last Christmas."

"No, darling, that was the Christmas before. Last Christmas I stayed with Cousin Jessie at Market Harborough. The most admirable thing about Cousin Jessie is that she hates all festivals and all relatives. She told me she'd invited me as she considered Christmas a loathsome observance anyway. On Christmas morning, dressed as usual in her brown smock and dirty leggings, she made me come out with her. We did a kind of 'passover.' While everyone was at church, she pinned on every door (I carried the drawing pins) a little card she'd had specially printed with 'HATE AND BADWILL' printed on it. And after that we had no lunch."

As they left the filling station Harold slipped his hand over Marigold's shoulder and said: "After this utterly fearful visit let's go somewhere and be moderately gay. I don't feel like going on to Templedean and sitting round with Philip and Haskett and discussing the fate of the world and how to cure it."

Marigold said: "We might leave Helena at Templedean and go on to Birmingham and dance."

"Not my idea of utter gaiety," said Harold, "but better than nothing."

Harold's family had an oak gate with twisted iron electric lanterns set each side. The drive was bordered with rhododendrons. It opened out into an oval sweep of gravel in front of a yellow and brown neo-Tudor mansion with an iron-studded front door inside a porch. Here and there among the roofs there grew turrets with little lattice windows in them. A butler opened the door and they were met in the hall by Harold's mother. She had the proportions of a cotton-reel, and cinder-grey crimped hair, and a brownish fattish unpowdered face. She was dressed smartly in brown. She shook hands with Helena and Marigold, saying, "So glad you were able to come," and led them into a panelled smoking-room full of catchy music and hung

with antlers and sporting prints. It was furnished with leather arm-chairs and Indian brass tables on distorted stands.

Harold's father got up stiffly, holding a newspaper, and said: "How d'you do?" He had the build, jowl, ears and small forehead of a pugilist. His tweeds were smart, his voice the growl of a ruler not born to rule. He had the troubled frown and touching eyelash curve of a small boy at a big party. He and his wife made their guests sit down and rang for cocktails, and handed cigarettes, and asked them questions about their drive down, and the music in the room went on all the time. Through the window there was a view of a red hard tennis-court, and laurels, and glasshouse whose white paint gleamed below the greying sky. Mrs. Stemp said to Helena:

"My youngest daughter will be in soon, she's bringing a boy-friend to luncheon." And Harold said: "Has Adèle got a new young man?" And his mother said: "Nothing serious as usual, but for goodness' sake don't go on at her about it."

The butler handed cocktails and several kinds of cheese biscuits and Mr. Stemp asked Harold questions of a gibing sort and went to a corner and fidgeted with the side of a table. The music stopped and there was a long thin screech, and then organ sounds filled the room. Adèle came in, a tall girl with a curly head and thigh-tight green check skirt, followed by an undergraduatish young man with his hands in his pockets. She said "How d'you do?" to Marigold and Helena, and dug Harold in the stomach with "How's everything?" and introduced the young man. "This is Bobby Park."

Through the swelling sacramental air, Mrs. Stemp snapped little questions at Helena. Helena found she was talking about the same things that seemed to interest her own mother. She began about the opera, then about the tennis, the season and the weather, and "things nowadays." She said: "I hope it won't be wet again for Ascot this year." Helena had heard this fear before. She asked if Ascot were a harvest. Mrs. Stemp looked uncomfortable and changed the subject. She said: "I'm so sorry my elder daughter isn't here to meet you."

Helena wondered if the elder daughter was interesting. Mrs. Stemp continued:

"She did so want to meet your sister," looking at Marigold's elegant back.

"Why didn't she come then?"

Mrs. Stemp lowered her voice. "Oh well—she couldn't very well—she's—er—expecting next month."

"Expecting what?" asked Helena.

"A baby," muttered Mrs. Stemp.

Helena stared. Then she laughed. Marigold turned. Harold relaxed. Helena's chuckle broke up her words: "Surely," she said, "you must know or not, if you have a baby inside you."

Harold's nasal perfectly enunciated words filled in his mother's silence.

"The fact is," he said, "that my elder sister is married to a man who has been rejuvenated, so she isn't quite sure what to expect."

"Stow it, Harold," said his father.

"I think luncheon must be ready," said Mrs. Stemp.

They lunched in an oak dining-hall with stained-glass windows and more antlers. The lunch was long, richly cooked and badly ordered. Helena sat between Harold's sister Adèle and the young man with greased hair.

"Are you fond of ice-skating?"

Helena said: "I've never skated."

Adèle shoved some salted almonds into her wide, red mouth.

"What d'you do?"

"I have no profession."

"Oh Lord, I didn't mean that. That 'professional girl' stuff's getting out of date, *I* think. Now people know women can do things, we haven't got to keep on showing them. I mean what d'you do with your young life?"

"When I'm at home—that is, where I used to live—I swim, cook, travel, read."

"Highbrow, are you? Like old Harold. As a matter of fact, I read quite a lot myself, only I like thrillers. I'm coming to the conclusion that the real difference between highbrows and other people is that highbrows only read smut, and other people like ordinary books as well. I'm awfully keen on good authors, not just 'tec stuff, when I get time."

Mr. Stemp was saying: "When we got to Newlands Corner, we were doing pretty nearly sixty and the other car was coming absolutely straight at

us, *on the wrong side of the road*, and I said to myself, 'either the fellow's tight or it's a woman'. . . ."

Harold said to his sister across the table:

"You look as if you'd got a bit of a hang-over."

"Hang-over nothing," said Adèle, "just these damned theatricals."

"All the same what about the night before?" said Bobby Park. "I don't believe she's recovered from that."

"Oh *yes*," said Adèle, "we had an absolutely marvellous time on Friday night. *You* needn't talk, Bobby, you were pretty tight before we even started."

"What did you do?" asked Harold. "Play poker again?"

"Oh, *shut* up, Harold. No. A whole lot of us had dinner at Toby Edwardes' flat up in town and then we went to the Piccadilly and danced a bit, and then we went back to his flat and had drinks, and then we all got into cars and had a race down to the new petrol station—you know, on the Kingston by-pass, where they've got a room upstairs they let out for parties and you can have bacon and eggs and things. Bobby and I got there first—very nearly crashing three times at least, I believe, and Baba Klein brought three bottles of gin she'd lifted from home and Bobby and I had some vermouth and Peg and Jim brought beer and whisky—so you can imagine we had a pretty gay time, and Baba behaved too frightfully."

"And Adèle sang a song or two," said Bobby.

"Oh, shut up, Bobby!"

"And came in at four a.m.," said Mr. Stemp.

"Five a.m. if you please, Papa!" said Adèle.

Mrs. Stemp showed Marigold the new central-heating—from the ceiling—and next door in the library Mr. Stemp had got Buda-Pesth in a series of aerial shivers and whines, and Adèle went out, and came back with a photograph which she showed to Helena of her greyhound, which she explained was being educated to pursue an electric hare and never catch it.

"Like the Grecian Urn," said Helena.

"Do the dogs run for that in Greece?" asked Mr. Stemp, who had got Madrid now, and came in to talk. "I hear you've been educated abroad. Yer sister's been telling me. Mrs. S. always wanted to send Rosie and Adèle

abroad to 'finish,' but I wasn't going to. They put ideas into their heads at these foreign schools and make you pay through the nose. And they cost me enough in schooling as it was."

"I wasn't at school," said Helena, "I lived abroad with my father."

"Wise man, wise fellow," said Mr. Stemp. "Wish I could dodge my income tax that way." He turned to Harold, who came up to join them. "Well, young fellow, that suit doesn't look exactly off the peg, does it?"

"It isn't," said Harold.

"I bet it cost a good bit."

"It might," said Harold, "if it were paid for."

"That's right," said Mr. Stemp, waggling his torso and keeping his legs braced, "run into debt a bit more, and then come and ask me to settle 'em for you."

"I shan't do that," said Harold, "I'm much more likely to forge your signature."

"Yes," said his father, "and land all of us in the courts. That's what comes of wasting your time and being cleverer than other people."

Harold said: "I always think J.C. was so lucky not to have had the kind of father who accused him of wasting his time. There seems everything to be said for immaculate conception."

"Harold," said his mother, "this is not the smoking-room."

Helena saw that Mrs. Stemp herself was smoking. She thought now that she understood why Philip had urged her to come to Templedean instead of coming here. These people seemed diseased or mad. She supposed that Marigold had come out of consideration for her lover.

The butler came in and said that a Mr. Haskett wished to speak to Mrs. Grant on the telephone.

Afterwards, when they had left and Harold was lounging asleep in the back of the car, Marigold said:

"Pretty dreary, weren't they?"

Helena said: "Once I had to visit one of our women, from the island, in a hospital. She was in the cancer ward, and all the other people there with her were stricken with it too. When I came out again, I felt as I do now."

Marigold gave her a quick look and laughed.

"They seem to have given you the 'orrors."

"They were—horrible."

"My dear child, they're quite ordinary," Marigold said.

Helena said, after a minute: "Are they?" and then, "Are they?"

As Philip and Vernon drove away from Templedean, Vernon said: "This has been one of the best two days I've ever had." He looked back at the loganberry-coloured Jacobean house standing among the wet lawns and beeches. He said that that was his idea of a perfect house, and that if ever he wanted to settle down he would choose a replica of Templedean. He added that his father's family had had a colonial house of the same date in North Carolina.

Philip watched the young man's tough boyish profile. He thought what a tangible quality youth was when one no longer had it. The yellow-brown head had such a young shape, the serious expression of the eyes was so direct. Philip said: "But last night, you were prophesying a hopeful future, with skyscrapers in blocks, and uninhabited landscapes between."

Vernon grinned. "Then I was trying to house the millions of over-educated morons. Now I'm housing myself."

They discussed English and American architecture until they reached Cleaveden.

"For sheer dignity, without anything cold or formal about it, you can't beat that," said Philip, indicating the house.

Vernon agreed. He said that it was exactly like the 1763 print of it which hung in his aunt's house in New York, except that the stone had gone a more goldy-grey and there was only one cedar tree now, instead of one each side of the house.

Marigold didn't wait at Cleaveden. She and Harold left Helena outside the high door, with the fanlight.

She felt the house was like silence after noise.

And as she passed through the rooms she felt a beauty of space and shadows, of surfaces and textures which reminded her of her own home; the long library lined with books and fragrant with them; the smaller room with

doors open, where a dark mirror held the images of flowers and high sofas; the narrow room with a Chinese paper and long window filled with a green view.

She waited in a room facing on lawns, with a lake beyond. The enriched quietness, the fine grace of detail, the ordered ease reassured her spirit. For the first time since her coming to England she felt freed from all sorts of alien tyrannies—of times and appointments, noises and obligations, inconsequent efforts, and extraordinary concessions. She wondered why she was here. There had been telephoning, and, as usual, one arrangement had been substituted for another. At the time it seemed only another minor dislocation in the lives about her (which seemed to be sequence of speedings and jarrings). She remembered that Marigold said "Vernon's aunt lives here." But Marigold and Mother talked incessantly about people—saying where they lived and what they clothed themselves in; leaving the listener to imagine their other qualities——. Often she didn't listen to avoid being bored. Vernon, she remembered, was the American young man who'd dined at Eaton Square the week before.

She heard voices now outside the door. Then Mrs. Raeburn came in. Philip and her nephew followed her.

As Mrs. Raeburn greeted Helena she smiled suddenly. She was a woman of about sixty. She must have once been handsome and was now beautiful. She had black brows, white teeth, a pointed fighting chin, hazel eyes, and white hair. The smile was like a flash from her spirit. In its moment it revealed the spirit itself, gracious and humorous, and poignant. She took Helena's hand.

"I'm glad you've come."

For a moment Helena didn't answer. Philip and Vernon were both watching her. Neither ever forgot her expression when she said:

"I—believe you are."

To Philip her tone and look were a revelation of what the girl must be up against in her new life. Mrs. Raeburn kept the girl's hand and made her sit down beside her.

"I think we understand one another." She spoke without sentimentality, stating what she felt with accustomed simplicity. "I wish you'd come earlier. We've just been for a walk. If you want dry shoes, Vernon—and you, Mr. Grant, you'll find a selection in the cupboard in the cloakroom. You know where, Vernon."

"My feet are quite dry," said Philip.

"My dear Mr. Grant, they're soaked through. Take him, Vernon, and change them."

Philip obeyed, amused by her tyranny. He saw Helena watching her.

When he and Vernon came back, the women had moved over to the big fender stool. Mrs. Raeburn broke off their talk for a moment to say that she hoped they wouldn't be too warm, but fires in English summer-time was one of her Americanisms. Helena said:

"What lovely logs—we used to burn pine logs on the island. They have a heavenly smell burning."

"I know it," said Mrs. Raeburn. "Applewood smells good too. But go on telling me about that boat of yours. I know a little about boats myself."

Vernon said: "Aunt Alys gave me a boat when I was ten. To sail on the small lake near our summerhouse. I never had more fun out of anything in my life."

Helena said: "My first was a flat-bottomed canoe, to use in a sheltered bay on the other side of the island from our house. They call them '*périssoirs*' there. Once I packed it with provisions and set out to go to Barcelona in it because I'd been hearing about bull-fights down at the port. By good luck there was such a strong west wind I couldn't even put out to sea, and my father discovered me battling with the elements and my boat full of wet chocolate and bread and broken eggs."

"What did he do to you?" asked Mrs. Raeburn.

"He got me a bigger boat, and asked me never to leave the bay without him."

"Wise man." Mrs. Raeburn moved to the sofa behind the tea-table. Philip took her place beside Helena on the fender-stool. He held his hands out to the flames. She noticed their shape. The thick palms and short slender fingers. He said:

"I wish you'd come to Templedean with us."

"I wish I had. Have you had a peaceful time there?"

"Perfectly. Brilliantly peaceful. Haven't we, Vernon?"

"Grand," said Vernon. "We destroyed the world and made it over again in half a dozen conversations. You ought to have been there to help us, Miss

Marvell."

She said: "I would have listened admirably, I've so often heard men, in talk, destroy civilization, and remake it; and wondered why they should want to."

"Do you still wonder?" asked Philip. "Now that you begin to see more civilization?"

Her gesture answered him. "What have I seen in a fortnight?"

"True," he added, "I'll ask you that question again in six months' time."

"Present-day civilization's like plague," said Vernon, leaning behind the high back of the sofa and taking a cup from his aunt. "Either men have got to destroy it or it destroys them. It rots their souls and keeps their bodies central-heated in winter and nicely refrigerated in summer."

"Vernon believes he can help to destroy it," said Philip, half affectionate, half bitter.

Mrs. Raeburn turned a quick look at her nephew. "I like him for believing so," she said. "Though I'm not so certain as he is that all this destruction is necessary."

Philip got up and poured himself out a whisky and soda. "Vernon holds a common belief, that if a thing looks bad the right way up it may be better inverted."

Vernon smiled. "You've got me wrong there, Philip. I believe that the world's psychologically upside down now. You've got the stupid people ruling and the clever ones without any power. I want to see things the other way up. That's what I'm trying to get at in the first half of my wretched book —that luckily Democracy's only a theory and doesn't work. (No democracy actually works.) But if it did work the men in power would have to be even stupider."

Philip turned to Mrs. Raeburn. "I doubt if any political theory is workable. After twelve years of politics one tends to become opportunist. Getting the vital practical things done somehow gets to matter more and more."

As he finished speaking he became aware of Helena's look fixed on his face. He went and sat beside her again, but didn't look at her. Mrs. Raeburn told him she'd read and agreed with his speech on educational expenditure the week before. They began to discuss education.

As they talked Philip's first impression of Mrs. Raeburn was confirmed. He found her mind quick, her opinions sound, if excessively individualist in tendency—her high-tempered charm undeniable. But he was aware of resenting a quality which he could only define, with a sense that the definition lacked subtlety, as a "terseness of outlook." She had a way of firing the ideal, the abstract, even the mystical, in the crucible of her common-sense—a habit which seemed to him singularly un-American and irritating. They'd gone from education to the matter of general influences on youth. He said:

"For nearly everyone, youth is the great opportunity wasted, a divine talent buried." She said, one black eyebrow lifted and a twist at the corner of her lips:

"I should say that a human being worth anything at all has got to spend his or her youth on experience. You don't get experience more than any other necessity without paying for it."

"The price is high," said Philip. "All one's irrecoverable twenties . . . all those devastating mistakes."

She said: "They needn't be devastating. They can be creative just as well"—and took him in for a long moment.

Vernon watching her, and knowing that deep faintly quizzical expression, wondered what she'd decided about Philip Grant. She spoke to Helena.

"You must come here to stay this summer, when you feel you want to be quiet."

"Yes," said Helena, "I will."

Philip said: "My wife and mother-in-law come down to Templedean for most of the summer from June onwards. I expect Helena will be there too."

"Excellent," said Mrs. Raeburn. "Then we must all meet."

"May I park myself here for a week or two when the Oxford term's over?" asked Vernon.

"My dear boy, you know you can live here. I don't ask you because I feel I don't have to."

He bent over the back of the sofa and kissed her.

"You're a darling, Aunt Alys."

She smiled. “If you come you can teach the grandchildren to swim in the lake. Anne and John and a nurse are arriving at the end of May.”

Helena had gone to the window and Philip was beside her saying something about the oak tree on the far side of the lawn. Vernon heard, “The one at Templedean was planted at the same time. It’s rather a curious bit of local history.” The girl’s profile was turned to Philip as he talked. He heard her say:

“When I go to Templedean for the first time, will you take me?” and Philip’s answer, “My dear child, of course I will. I wish I could take you back there to-night. But Vernon has to get back to Oxford and I shall be there alone.”

Helena accepted this. “You want to be alone?”

“No. Only——”

“Then I’ll come.”

Mrs. Raeburn had joined them. She saw Philip’s discomfiture.

“There are conventions, some bad, some useful, which have to be accepted.” Alys Raeburn hesitated, looking into the girl’s face. “One is,” she said, “that men and women, unless they’re married, can’t stay alone together in the same house or hotel.”

“Why not?”

“Because the world—meaning any other people—immediately assumes that a relationship exists, that in fact doesn’t.”

Helena said: “But either—either——” she made out with lucid impatience, “a man and woman are lovers—married or not, or they don’t love each other, or desire each other. But in any of these cases, whom does it concern? Except ourselves?” She paused, “Whom should it concern, to think Philip is my lover, if I went with him to Templedean? Or, if it does concern any idle fool, why should I care, or Philip?”

Philip said quickly: “Public opinion has its force. One has to respect convention.” He lit a cigarette and went and stood by the fire. Mrs. Raeburn said, amused by the girl’s air of displeasure: “There are all sorts of concessions we have to make to the society we live in. Simplicity of conduct is only possible in the very simple—or the very great. Most of us are between those poles.”

Helena said, after a silence:

"I feel very simple."

Philip wrenched himself from a mood induced by the girl's words, and her matter-of-fact coupling his name with what he thought of as her "reputation." In any other woman those words would imply an easy virtue, or coquetry, or be at any rate the intellectualist's jargon of hypothetical lusts. He looked at her. Mrs. Raeburn's next words said something of his own feelings.

"My dear child, you're just about as simple and good as one can get. And just now I should stop worrying your head about this thing. Think about it later, when you've seen more of us all."

The girl accepted this slowly. "I will."

"But I can take you home to London," said Vernon. "There's no 'tabu' about that. No one'll conclude anything from seeing you and me in a cheap sports-model together."

She hesitated: "Are you joking?"

"I'm going to take you back all right. I'm being funny about the car."

Mrs. Raeburn looked from one to the other and saw a momentary gaiety spring up between them. They had an elusive likeness (due perhaps to their common tallness and untroubled brows), and in spite of their grace she was reminded of two big puppies inconsequently moved to play.

"He shall certainly take you back," said Mrs. Raeburn. "But not yet. I'm going to get those maps and you're going to show me exactly where that island is, and your own house on it. . . ."

Vernon said: "We'll make Oxford before seven, we'll dine there, and I'll deliver you in London at midnight." And then they were speeding southward through the jade-green rolling Warwickshire and Oxfordshire country, with the sun falling low and apricot-gold on their right, and the girl's profile set in the corner of his eye, so that he felt a sudden crazy exhilaration as if steam were pounding inside his whole body. She didn't speak for nearly twenty miles, and he kept on thinking that to fall in love with a girl like that would be a crashing affair, neck or nothing, and hell to pay if she couldn't love you back. It wasn't just that she was lovely and with a body that made other girls look like a lot of slinky mannequins. But she just wasn't like the ordinary sort you picked on anywhere and everywhere. And she wasn't, either, that god-awful thing the "nice English girl" who walks like a duck, turning her

feet out and shouting. And she wasn't "highbrow" either. But her mind looked straight at things just the way her eyes did. Not that he wanted to compare her with Fan Stuyvesant. (Fan's last letter was in his pocket saying, "Why don't we get married this fall?") But all the same, for another man, he could imagine some sort of terrific happiness with her. A Grand Love Affair; wild and ecstatic; and yet somehow peaceful and tremendous and complete. . . . They got to Blenheim and she said she was thirsty, so they got out and drank beer. She said it was "unpleasing" and laughed; but he told her it was an acquired taste, like English life. Once you got used to it and to blowing the froth off, you settled to the habit. She asked him if he meant to settle in England. But he said no, when he'd done his book he was going home to help save America from herself. She took this seriously, which reminded him she wasn't English and that he was becoming so. (He'd spoken his real thoughts because in England the safest way to hide your real beliefs was to say them out loud.) But he didn't want her to think him a smug idealist, so he said: "I'm not serious," and she banged down her tankard and said: "Then you ought to be," and they got back into the car in silence and started off south again towards Oxford, with the fields flat and water-green under a slow-flaming sky, and her profile set straight at the wind-screen looking so startling and lovely that he could think of nothing but he wanted to kiss her. But he said: "Are you angry with me?" and she didn't even turn her head and said, No; she just added him to the collection of people who seemed afraid to "mean anything"; but that she thought his aunt, Mrs. Raeburn, wasn't like that. He accelerated to nearly seventy, passing two other cars and saying, "I'm sorry, I know I'm a poor substitute for my aunt." But she either didn't understand his irony or wasn't interested enough to try to, and kept looking ahead, thinking about goodness knows what; until they saw the skyline of Oxford far off over the dusk fields between all the dark silhouettes of elms. Then she began to ask him questions about Oxford as if he were a guidebook.

Soon they got to the speed limit on Woodstock Road, and had to join a petrol-smelling queue running between red villas, shut behind swing-gates. She seemed to have a liking for facts, he'd noticed that before, and he wasn't able to answer all her questions about the buildings when they got into the town. She got all lit up with excitement about the place, especially looking up the High towards Magdalen before they went into his rooms in Number Six, Oriel Street. She seemed to know quite a bit about classical and Renaissance architecture, but nothing about Gothic, as she'd never seen any. He took her up to his rooms, and she admired the panelled walls and comfortable window seats. She said she'd like to be working here. She

thought of studying and coming to spend three years at Oxford. He asked her what she'd study. She said: "I'd do Greats, because my father did and I like classical history and literature—and then I think I'd want to study how the modern world works." He smiled:

"You ought to do Economics, as I did at Harvard, and learn how it doesn't work!" She seemed surprised he'd been at another University. Then he said they must think about eating. So he rang for Mrs. Day and said what could they have right away, as they had to make London after dinner. She said, as it was Sunday, they could have cold lamb, or she would do some eggs if they liked, and looked the girl over with a practised eye, and then spoke respectfully, asking if the young lady liked coffee after, and insisted on lighting the fire.

While she was gone he got sherry out of the cupboard and said: "I remember you like sherry." He showed her Fan Stuyvesant's picture, and she said: "What a beautiful woman." And he said, Yes, she was awfully nice and clever too! (And he seemed to hear Fan being clever in that modern apartment of hers, and saw her look at him with that little bright smug air over one of those lovely shoulders that were always being photographed.) He showed her his sister's photograph and one of her two children, and she stared at the children and said she'd never known any except the peasant children on the island. He said: "I wish you'd tell me something of your life there." And she said: "I will sometime."

When Mrs. Day brought up dinner the girl's mood changed, and she seemed to come out of a sort of mist into focus. She began to tell him about the Stemps, and described Mr. Stemp as "thick and choleric, with a face like a Red Mullet." She said it was like waking from a nightmare to get to his aunt's house. He said he was so glad she and Aunt Alys had liked one another.

They sat opposite each other in the little panelled room, with the dusty sofa and chair. She threw off her hat suddenly and laughed when it fell into the fire and got burned. "A damned ugly cap," she said, and "a handsome youth in London was making her new hats." She told him about Claire, who'd taken her to a designer of dresses called Oliver. He supposed Claire was the girl Piers went around with. He kept watching the time and realizing he'd soon have to take her back to London. When coffee came she began to talk about Philip Grant. (They'd been talking about politics and he'd been trying to explain about American politics in answer to her questions.) She said Philip was going to take her to the House of Commons this week. She

said that she liked Philip, and felt she could grow to love him. She said: "He's real, and definite and safe."

He wondered what she meant by using those words. He got an idea she felt lost. He agreed about Philip. He was glad she didn't speak about Marigold. He wondered if she knew about all Marigold's little affairs.

It was dark when they went out and down the street to fetch the car. It was parked by Christ Church gate. They drove out by Magdalen and over the bridge. When they got out into the country again, a watery moon was rising. She said: "I'm very grateful to you for taking me back to London." Then she said she was going to sleep and fell asleep beside him, her arms folded, her head turned towards him, so that he could look down at her face, queerly lit by the dim glare from the dashboard.

He didn't enjoy the run. She slept almost all the way. Once he slowed down and bent down and kissed her lips, but she didn't wake, and he felt crazy to go on kissing her, and lit a cigarette, nearly running into a ditch and put on speed until they got to Edgware, when she woke with tears running down her face, saying she'd had a dream. He didn't look at her for a time, and when he did, they were in the bright dreary light of a big London thoroughfare on Sunday evening. She managed a smile that fairly jabbed at his heart. The only pretence he'd got at so far in her.

When they got to Eaton Square it was ten minutes to twelve. He said:

"D'you want to see me again?"

She was getting out her latchkey, but she said yes, she did. He said: "I'll write to you then," and left her and got back to Oxford at nearly three, and wrote a letter to Fan, telling her he loved her, and went to bed in a rotten temper.

VIII

Philip Grant waited in the outer lobby of the House of Commons. She was to come at eight. Yesterday morning she'd borrowed Stubbs and two other volumes on Constitutional History, and had been reading them ever since, up in her bedroom. Marigold complained that she hadn't come to meals, but rang for more biscuits for her biscuit-box, and came in this morning, while Marigold was having breakfast, to ask her opinion on the value of Second Chambers. Marigold had told the story at lunch to-day at the de Frenes'. She was beginning to dine out on her anecdotes of Helena, giving an amusing twist to their simplicity. It came as an unconscious rejoinder, on the girl's part, when she simplified some act or opinion of her sister's; as in her mild statement to Lady Marvell, calling to take them to Ranelagh—that Marigold was "still upstairs painting her face."

The loitering and pushing crowd about him got on his nerves. She'd certainly be late. She had to dress; Marigold was taking her to some party afterwards. He looked at the clock. Eight. He'd waited under this clock for Marigold when they were first married, and she dined with him here twice a week. (At the time she'd had a political phase) . . . Now Helena was coming up the steps. She saw him and came towards him, slipping off her cloak. She asked: "Do you like my new dress?"—direct, like a child.

"Yes." There was nothing child-like in her aspect. He was aware of people turning to stare at her. The dress was white. She said:

"The young man Oliver made it."

He took her cloak from her. "He's done very well."

She looked round: "Where's the Parliament?"

He nodded towards the inner lobby.

"Through there. You'll see later."

He took her down to the dining-room and they sat at a table in the corner. While he was ordering the division bell rang, and he explained that he had to leave her. She seemed to think this funny. When he came back, she said:

"Do you like my new necklace? Piers gave it to me."

He looked at her throat, encircled by the crystal leaves and flowers. "It's perfect for you."

She said: “I wanted you to be pleased.”

He was conscious of his brusque: “Thank you”. . . . Her lack of reticence was mysterious. He added, deliberately, to test her:

“You look lovely, my dear.”

She said: “I seem more so by contrast.” She was looking now at the wife and daughter of a member for Eastport—the wife suety-faced in a corslet of black sequins, the daughter blooming and sexless in green chiffon. He said:

“This isn’t the place to come for beauty.”

“Why?”

He suggested: “Because the female relatives of politicians are seldom beautiful.”

“How curious.”

“Then for what reason do they choose their women?”

He countered: “Politicians are like other men. Beauty isn’t everything.”

He saw that she failed to take this in.

“I mean,” he said, “that other qualities are important.”

She smiled. “Of course. *Ça va sans dire*.”

She clearly gave up the subject, or reserved it for later thinking, and began to question him. For how many years were Parliaments elected? How were elections conducted? She explained that her reading had got her only so far as the first Reform Bill. She’d read the small text-book and found it “too cursory.” He found her, in matters of knowledge, the oddest mixture of the feminine and professorial: feminine because she refused to be interested in anything unrelated to some visible or personal fact (he’d heard her dismiss “the universe” as a subject outside her life and beyond her interest); professorial in the accuracy and thoroughness with which she studied the subjects she accepted. She covered a large ground during dinner—going on from the constitution to the question of franchise, from franchise to education (he saw that she’d taken in Mrs. Raeburn’s notion that education should be more a toughening and development of the spirit than a drilling of the mind)—and from education to questions of living and character. Here he found her curiously believing that humanity was divided into two sections, civilised beings and “mere” human beings. The philosophy had an eclecticism and lack of pity which he attributed to her father. And she had its defence ready. When he said that everyone had possibilities of being what

she called "civilised," she answered with the most bigoted matter-of-factness that that was no excuse for cherishing "possibilities" that weren't developed. When he explained his reasons for practical humanitarianism, she listened to him courteously, her enchanting face lit by her interest. He concluded, "Your notion, my child, that the 'pick' should be served by the rest is a virtual slavery."

She sipped her claret. (Looking down like that, her eyelids showed pale gold from the sun.)

"But does your system work?"

"In a general way. For some people."

"For whom?"

"More perhaps for the general than the particular."

"You mean, the ordinary person, in England for instance, is happy?"

"That's putting it a little strongly."

"Contented, then?"

"No."

"What, then?"

He offered, half amused: "They're all given—opportunities, shall we say?—and no one need starve." He added: "A good deal of life and energy and bitterness have been spent to achieve that much. . . . If you want to see the show, we'd better be going."

As they got up, she said: "I want to see you governing."

He laughed. "I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

They met Sichley in the corridor. He said in his squawky voice: "Ah, the daughter of the gods—divinely tall and most divinely fair. I heard you were coming, and came down in the hope of seeing you."

Philip said: "I'm just taking her up to the Gallery."

Sichley's short-sighted but perceptive stare turned from Helena to Philip. He put his hand on his shoulder.

"Well, if you must snatch her away now I shall ascend to see something of her later."

Helena shook her head. "Please don't. I shall want to listen to what's going on."

Sichley flushed. “Divinely rude,” he said, and turned and went.

Philip said to her as they paced the corridors to the Ladies’ Gallery: “You were rather unmerciful to Sichley.”

She frowned. “He talks too much.”

Philip protested. “He’s quite important, you know.”

“He’s not important to me.”

There were three chairs still empty in the front row of the Gallery. He installed her in one of them. He sat behind her, explaining in an undertone the arrangement of parties on the floor below. She murmured:

“To think I could catch so many powerful men with a fishing rod. . . . And there’s Mr. Sichley walking up the path in the centre and looking like a *langouste*.”

Philip pointed out the Prime Minister. She asked if he were heroic or corrupt.

When he’d gone, she leaned with her elbows on the rail.

Down below the little men—*vis-à-vis* rows of little heads and legs—heads lolled back, feet propped up, little nodding men, gossiping men, little men moving up the gangway, running in and out of a far swing door—startled her expectations. Here and there a little female; but nearly all were these little drab-backed males. It was like looking into a box packed with performing fleas.

Immediately below her the Prime Minister was simulating sleep; two others on the same bench were actually asleep; another on the ministerial bench was scratching his ears. All of them had their feet up on the big table covered with books and documents. Opposite them in the second row, she tracked down the voice. A man with grey hair was growling out numerical information, which he read from the piece of blue paper. When he finished speaking there was a scattering and buzzing as if someone had sprayed an insecticide. Some flitted out down the gangway and out through the doors. Others settled again in their benches. A few new ones came in. She recognised Philip among them and thought that he looked different from the others, even at this distance: his way of moving, composed but vital, his odd trick of standing with one hand in his pocket and the other clenched on an invisible sword hilt; his heavy forehead that caught the downward lighting. He looked up at her. She smiled with a quick-beating sense of admiration. In the last three weeks she’d grown to feel the contrast between him and

Marigold. She trusted him and felt at ease with him. He came and sat below, behind the ministerial bench. A tubby man was talking. She tried to understand what he said. Whenever he paused there was laughter.

This was Parliament.

She had expected some sort of grandeur and gravity; not so much of an outward kind (Piers had warned her not to expect "pageantry"), but, at any rate, a general sense, such as she got from Philip personally, of depending humanity and impending responsibilities. The debate, Philip had explained, dealt with taxation. Some speakers were grave; but their gravity was angry or rhetorical: several were jocose, and many seemed to jump up and speak simply from high spirits. This same animal vivacity seemed to prompt the applause and growls of dissent, and sudden shouts and boos. An impartial speech or lucid exposition of fact produced a fidgety boredom. A woman member spoke in a fit of sustained ill-temper.

When she was driving home with Philip she asked him where most of the women members had been. He said they'd all been present, and began to explain the comparatively recent entry of women into politics.

"All that struggle—to get in *there*!"

He said, annoyed: "You saw it on a bad evening."

She stopped laughing and put her hand on his arm.

"I wanted you to speak."

"I didn't get a chance."

"Let me come when you do."

He was disconcerted by her change from laughter to this poignant, untroubled intimacy.

She said: "It would have seemed different if you'd spoken."

He lifted her hand for a moment and looked at it as they passed a street lamp.

The taxi stopped.

Marigold was in. She came out of the library shrilling: "We can't go to the party. My pearls have been stolen." She seemed hysterical. She said:

"I was dressing. . . . I haven't worn them this week . . . they aren't anywhere—we've looked absolutely everywhere."

Philip followed her back into the library.

"They're probably there all the same."

"I tell you they aren't. I always put them *in* my case *under* the top tray."

"When did you last have them?"

"Last Sunday."

"I don't remember what you did last Sunday."

Helena said: "You motored me to Henley and afterwards you went to Birmingham, didn't you?"

"I—we dined in Birmingham," said Marigold, beginning to cry.

Philip said: "You probably left them—wherever you stayed."

"I didn't—I know that. I know either I wore them or packed them . . . And I'm pretty sure I know what happened."

Philip lit a cigar.

She went on: "I'm pretty certain Robson took them out of my case. He brought it in from the car to the house when I got back."

Philip frowned. "Control yourself, Marigold."

She sobbed, "*Control!*—I'm certain he did it. Probably the case wasn't locked. . . ."

"They're insured," said Philip.

"Of *course* they're insured, but. . . ."

"We needn't discuss this now . . . I'll notify the police when you've searched again. But there's to be no question of implicating Robson."

Helena watched her sister's face. She wondered if being barren had made her distraught. The necklace hadn't even been beautiful. Philip turned to Helena and asked her to go up to her room. She obeyed. As she went upstairs she heard Marigold's shrill repetitions and Philip answering her with a reasoning weary distaste.

IX

"But London," said Lady Marvell, "is not what it used to be . . ." The car passed across Hanover Square down George Street. "It isn't only the working classes who lead quite a different life (any kitchen-maid goes out in silk stockings and has silk underclothes—artificial, of course—with lace on) but the bourgeoisie too——" The car turned down six o'clock Bond Street, with girls streaming out of the shops and hurrying to their buses; slim girls with newly-powdered faces and bright lips and tired smudges under their eyes. "The bourgeoisie, too, who used to be content to live in the suburbs and perhaps come up to the theatre once a week. Everyone has motors . . . the restaurants are full of people one doesn't know. Piers said he would be at the Berkeley at quarter past, he's been seeing some American author, I forget what about . . . *What* a crowd! Really, they should do something about the traffic. Christabel Ambrose has a delightful house, 'arty' of course; but her husband is in the Foreign Office and lives in Chelsea. When I was a girl only artists lived in Chelsea and those kind of people, but now—and they are converting all the slum quarters . . . *There's* Piers. Come in, darling—don't tread on those parcels! Be careful of the rug! Helena and I have been to *The Times*, and whom d'you think we saw?"

"Queen Mary," said Piers.

"No; try again. Someone who asked after you. Pam Benham! She said her sister Elizabeth was coming home next month . . . Elizabeth," she said to Helena, "used to be an old flame of Piers."

"Next month?" said Piers.

"Yes—and we went to Charles Bitterne's private view—what a pretty girl his wife is—there was some scandal, I forget what, about them—but I thought she seemed devoted to him to-day, and some of the pictures were delightful, I thought. Marigold was to have come with us, but she had a fitting. . . ."

"What's happening about Marigold's necklace?" asked Piers.

"Absolutely no news, I'm afraid. You know, I can't help thinking, whatever Philip says, that it must have been Robson who took it. After all, if she had it on that Sunday and only missed it after she was back in London . . ."

"She might have left it in Birmingham," said Helena.

"In *Birmingham*?" said her mother.

"She and Mr. Stemp went to Birmingham for the night."

"Nonsense, dear, they must just have dined there."

Helena saw an expression on Piers's face which she couldn't interpret. "I know they stayed there," she said.

"No, dear, you must be mistaken, and, anyway, she only missed them *in London*."

"Why should Robson take them?" Helena asked.

Piers said: "Suspicion falls on Robson because he's a Socialist and has never been to a Public School."

"Yes, exactly," said Edith Marvell, relieved at having her reasons formulated.

They got to Christabel Ambrose's house, which was on the Embankment. Helena followed her mother into a long room full of people talking a high emphatic English with long "o" sounds. Piers stayed beside her and persuaded her to try a cocktail. Mrs. Ambrose came up to her in flowing yellow clothes and said: "We must find a moment to talk. I've been so wanting to meet you." And went away again. Harold Stemp came up to her and said:

"Will you come to my party? I'm having a party on the ninth—an exception to prove the rule that I accept hospitality from everyone and never return it."

She thanked him, and he stayed talking and making remarks about the people in the room. Then he said: "Don't forget the ninth," and went away in a hurry. Sichley came in and said:

"Are you still going to be rude to me? Everyone was asking who the Blessed Damozel leaning out of the Gallery was that night."

She said: "I don't think that can be true."

He said: "I see you have an unprepossessing aptitude for truth."

She said to Piers: "Will Philip come here?"

He said: "No, he never wastes time." He was thinking: "If Elizabeth is coming home I shall go abroad." But he knew that he would stay.

A woman with features like a hawk and eyes like a cow came to Helena and held her hand, and said that she had known her father and been devoted

to him, and that her name was Edith Sichley.

Helena said: "Are you the mother or wife of Roger Sichley?"

Her cow eyes looked melting, and she said: "The mother—the mother of Roger and Christabel. The mother of the Gracchi." Then she lit a cigarette and reverted to the subject of Lawrence Marvell. She said:

"He was so wonderfully *real*. I hear you had such an interesting, wonderful life out there. I think it's such a pity he never wrote anything after he left. One feels he might have given the world something very charming—written in retreat, you know."

"He did write," said Helena, "but he tore it up. He wrote poetry. He read me some. It was beautiful but melancholy."

"Oh dear! What a waste! You know, I always think there are beautiful passages in the plays—especially the last ones."

Helena wished the woman wouldn't keep taking her hand in her cushiony one. "I've not read his plays. He brought none with him to the island. He said they were vitiated work and not worth reading."

"Oh, but *Benedict* was *brilliant*! *Imagine* your not having read it!"

Helena moved away from the woman. She felt tired of hearing people talk.

Harold's party consisted of Marigold, Helena, Claire Rackham, Vernon Haskett, a friend of Harold's with red hair called Jimmy Cloud, a sculptress with a big face and hips called Matilda Brigmann, and svelte young men and noisy young women with nicknames. They met at Harold's flat in Knightsbridge and went on to Boulestin's, where Piers joined them. He had brought a friend, an artist called Bernard, a tall Frenchman with an air of quizzical detachment.

Harold announced that he had taken seats for two different plays, so that they must dine hurriedly, and after the theatre they could sup at leisure.

Piers, who was sitting between Helena and Claire, said: "Very lavish."

Harold explained that he had taken half the seats for a "highbrow" and half for a "lowbrow" show so that they could quarrel about who should go to what during dinner. He said:

"First of all, Highbrows put up their hands."

Miss Brigmann raised a massive paw. Monsieur Bernard said:

"Tell us first what are the plays?"

"*The Cherry Orchard* and *Why Baby?*"

Piers put his hand up, and told Helena to put up hers. He said: "You ought to see *The Cherry Orchard*."

There was a lot of disputing and laughter.

Bernard, who was next to Helena, said that only the Anglo-Saxon race was capable of making this distinction between highbrow and lowbrow. He said that the English had a wholesome fear of intellectualism and theory and logic, but that, like all fears, it produced a state of exaggerated defence, so that the English bourgeoisie had come to believe that sanity and stupidity were identical.

Jimmy Cloud, the red-haired young man who was next to Marigold and opposite Helena, kept slapping the table and holding Marigold's arm and saying: "Isn't this a swell party?" with an assumed American accent. And Vernon Hasket leaned across to Piers and asked him who the devil Jimmy something was. Harold overheard him and said: "He's my best friend, because he's even more of a cad than I am."

Harold's mouth-corners looked damp, and his touching brown eyes glistened. Piers thought: "Harold is like a very horrid little boy. . . . And Marigold will drop him soon. For already she thinks that Jimmy Cloud, who looks like a lecherous grocer's assistant, interests her. And probably Harold is tired of Marigold, for she tires them all, and will end up an old woman on a régime eating furtive *pâtisseries* at Monte Carlo. And Vernon looks at her guiltily and angrily, for he is morally fastidious and hates to have traces of his mistakes left about. But when he watches Helena he is grave and his rather too keen-and-noble young face gets character from the shadow of doubt that she throws across it; for she tallies with none of his experiences of women and fits into no category of 'womanhood' . . . Even Bernard, who has a flair for people, is curious about her. Now that she's 'dressed' she makes Claire look a little vulgar; for she has a kind of spiritual elegance which informs even her clothes. And now Matilda Brigmann is staring carefully at her and will probably want to sculp her in mustard-yellow-stone with her hair in strings and no toes and breasts like torpedoes. But Bernard is finding her amusing and she looks gay, either because she likes the language or because she's used to hearing good talk in French (for they have a way—the better French—of catching and throwing ideas until even the dimmest throw off a spark in transit)."

Harold was casting lots for the theatres. (There had been too much squabbling to decide by vote.) Piers found himself and Helena condemned to *Why Baby?* together with Bernard, Marigold and Harold and four others. Harold explained that they were to meet afterwards at the Savoy, where he had ordered supper. As they were getting their coats, Bernard said that Helena was the most intelligent Englishwoman he'd met.

Helena had been to the theatre in Rome as well as to several operas, but *Why Baby?* had no relevance to the kind of plays she'd seen with Lawrence. She was diverted by the tunes. But it seemed to lack interest as a spectacle; the dancing was bad, and the dialogue dull. During the second *entr'acte*, Piers asked her if she was enjoying it. She shook her head.

"No. It's like watching the antics of scullions. I wonder we came here."

He said: "It's just dope, really, for the tired business man who's supposed to want to see pretty girls and hear light music after earning his daily bread."

After a minute she asked: "Were Lawrence's plays good?"

He had been thinking of *Benedict* at that moment.

"Two of them are. The last one he wrote was revived last autumn. It wears well. It was about precisely 'the tired business man.'"

She said: "I shall read it."

"If he didn't want you to?" he asked. He thought: "Her expression is strange; it has a hesitant sadness, a betrayal of conflict which is new in her. So far her looks and words have always expressed an absolute unhappiness, or pleasure, or opinion, and one's only doubt of her was whether she had the sort of sensitiveness that makes for growth."

Afterwards in the taxi Harold said:

"Well, I expect Chekhov was better." And when they met the others they groaned and said that it had been lovely, but, of course, too full of "samovar" and procrastination. Harold said:

"Procrastination is the thief of Time, but the staff of Russian fiction," and everybody laughed.

They had supper in a private room, at a long table decorated with orchids. Claire said: "How fearfully gilded. What's happened to Harold? And, my God, look at the champagne; is somebody going to have a bath in it?"

Harold sat at the top of the table with Marigold on his right, and a girl on his left sang "This is my Lucky Day." Everybody talked louder and higher. One of the young women stuck an orchid behind her ear and laid her head on Piers's shoulder. But he said:

"Never till after supper. I'm sorry to be brutal."

Vernon Haskett forced his way to a place beside Helena, sat down and didn't speak. Bernard, on her other side, asked her if she found London life agreeable. He had a manner of sheltering her from the screamed conversation on his other side.

Vernon realised that his other neighbour was Matilda Brigmann, and that she had been speaking to him. He said: "I'm sorry, I didn't hear."

"——quite a Byzantine type!" she repeated.

"I'm so sorry, but who——"

"Miss Marvell."

"Oh, d'you think so?"

"——and yet something almost Scandinavian."

"Oh yes," said Vernon.

"Or perhaps it's something essentially English. . . . Are *you* an artist?" asked Miss Brigmann.

"No," said Vernon, "I'm just a plain American."

"I shouldn't have thought you were American!" exclaimed Miss Brigmann. "I have so many dear friends in America."

Helena tried to hear what Mr. Bernard was saying about a new French film; but people's voices were getting louder.

Harold said that they must drink some toasts. Anyone who liked was to propose a toast. Jimmy Cloud, who was leaning back in his chair with his arm round Marigold's shoulders, kept shouting: "The British Constitution." Somebody proposed "Elizabeth Arden." There was a lot of shouting and giggling, and a girl got on the table and sang half a song and was picked up and carried round the room. Vernon Haskett became lugubrious, and sat with his arms folded staring at his plate. Jimmy Cloud was whispering to Marigold, and she kept giving little shrieks of laughter.

Then Harold got up on his chair and began shouting down the noise, and saying he was going to propose the toast of the evening, and someone

shrilled: "Harold Gobblesshim." There was a gasping and clinking abeyance of noise, and Harold thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat and cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I just wanto propose alittle-toast—I have no doubt that manyofyou are—er—wondering at my pulling a party atall. I have, I believe with perfectjustification, a reputation for being one of those geniuses who manage never to return hospitality." (Cries of "Hear, hear!") "But—er—even the worms will turnand shake hands if you're friendly enough. And it struck me that I should like to show you all—that I can give a party when I want to." (Cries of "So you can. Bravo, Harold!") "BUT—ladiesangentlemen—bad as I am, it is not in my nature to claim the credit—for what I haven't done. And I should like you to know that we should not all be gathered together here thisevening if——In short, I claim the idea for myself, but want to render to Cæsar's wife the things that are Cæsar's." He felt in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a small card. "Here is the—er—*ticket* for some valuable pearls lent for the occasion by the Hon. Mrs. Philip Grant." He bowed, and leaning unsteadily down towards Marigold: "Tomorrow she will, of course, reclaim—I think it's called 'redeem'—the pearls for, I'm sorry to say, a much smaller sum than they're worth. But meanwhile we have all been enjoying—er—the fruits of her—er—generosity, and soIshould like to propose the toast: 'Marigold's pearls—and many of them.'"

There was silence. Then Marigold began to laugh hysterically, and seized her glass, and there was a general burst of laughing and shouts of: "Good old Harold—My God, what a notion!" and Marigold herself repeating: "Darling, you're *quite* crazy!"

Helena saw the library door ajar and a light on inside. She went in. Philip was writing. He sprang up when he saw her.

She came and stood opposite him. "It was horrible."

"What was?"

"All of them. Horrible, despicable. Besotted maniacs." Her violence filled the room. "One of them brought me back. I forget which." She added, with a calmer look: "His nose is bleeding."

He said: "Sit down, my dear." He went over to the tray of decanters and glasses and poured her out a glass of water.

She threw herself down on the sofa. He said:

"I gather they were all drunk."

She said: "Yes. It was as if they all stripped themselves naked and were deformed." She took the glass of water. Her hand shook. She drank it down and leaned back. He watched her, still conscious of the shock of her coming in. She held her hands over her eyes. Her mouth and chin looked very young with her eyes hidden. She had square, strong hands like a boy and slender wrists. He noticed the ring she wore on her middle finger, an emerald in a heavy gold setting. The tears came slowly from under her fingers and dropped in little grey marks on the white satin of her dress. He heard the clock out in the hall strike two. A dim fragrance, like jasmin? like narcissus? came from her least movement.

He said: "Don't cry." She obeyed. She took her hands away from her eyes. After a time she said:

"I'm better now I'm with you."

The words were an echo of his own mood. They asserted, with her peculiar lack of subtlety in words, the sense of comfort, of spiritual rest and physical smoothing out, that he got from her being in the room. He felt that he could remain, through an unending ticking of the hall clock, watching the great quiet grace of her body, and accepting the troubled vehemence of her expression.

"—bad wines," she said. "A champagne only fit to cook with."

"You needn't have gone," said Philip, moving about the room. He stopped by the sofa, looking down at her. "Why did you go?"

"Because they asked me to. Why are you angry?"

"I'm not."

She shook her head. "You're angry with me."

"No, with myself." He sat down on the edge of the sofa. She accepted his nearness with a movement that he remembered afterwards as evidence of an unconscious egotism in her simplicity. She took his hand and kissed it, looking at him as she did so with a preoccupied air.

"I *like* being with you," she said.

He said: "I don't understand you," possessed by her strength and fragrance and the thick beating of his own heart.

She let his hand go. He decided not to move. Then he quoted lightly, taking her hand lightly:

"——*this grave charm*
Whose eyes becked forth my wars and called them home.

"——You'd better go up to bed."

He got up.

"You order me—as Lawrence did." She took up her cloak.

"Is that why you like me?"

"Yes."

He took a drink. "I should like to have a daughter," he said.

"Why don't you?"

"Marigold doesn't want any children."

"But there are other women, more fertile."

"This is a monogamous society."

"It doesn't seem so."

"In theory, shall we say?"

"But Marigold has a lover."

After a minute he said: "You mustn't say that."

"Why?"

His secret exasperation broke out. "You must accept certain rulings." He added: "And do you imagine that I—should pick out a woman to get a child?"

"If you loved her and she was healthy."

He saw that she said too simply what she thought. That she had no hidden meanings and no motives—to shock, to interest, to attract. No theories even to counter the theories of a society which seemed to her inconsistent. His anger went and he felt tired.

"Go up," he said. "You must sleep."

She went out. He watched her go up the staircase. He wondered if her going was due to his advice or to any reticence of her own.

PART II

I

Elizabeth Sinclair could make the ugliest room look neat and fresh by living in it. As a soldier's wife, she had imparted a vernal quality to many bungalows and lodgings, and as a mother she gave it to her children. Her babies were fresh and rosy in circumstances where others looked peaky and soiled.

She and her husband arrived back on leave in London at the beginning of June. They had the children with them, so they decided not to stay with their relations, who were inquisitive and had left off being rich. They took a little furnished house in Kensington, where they could see their friends and be near the gardens. They bought a second-hand small car so that William could get his golf. It was the eighth furnished house they'd had since they married, and it was dingy. But Elizabeth wasn't discouraged. She was delighted to be back in England and William was so glad to see all his old friends. And the gardens were so near for the children.

Piers heard she was back, from her brother-in-law, whom he met at a concert at the Wigmore Hall. He gave Piers her address, which was off Victoria Road. Piers wrote to her that night.

But he met her by chance the next afternoon. He had been to his tailor's and was going to see some pictures. She was standing at the corner of Grafton Street and Bond Street looking into a shop window. He went up to her, feeling a pulse in his head beating.

"Elizabeth!"

"Piers!" She took his hand. "*Piers*, how nice to see you."

She wasn't like his idea of her. She was less grave and less fragile. When he thought of her, she was like Beatrice d'Este, with her light gold colouring and childish lips and small eyes with a sweet expression. But now her face was more decisive and her nose freckled—though she had something in her look which must have suggested the likeness. Partly the sweetness. Partly the serenity. For she was serene rather than grave.

She began asking him questions. She said she'd had his letter and had meant to ring him up this evening. She suggested he should help her buy some shoes, and then come back and have tea.

She had to buy some white satin shoes. She and William were going to a dance. They went to a shop in Regent Street. As they walked there she told

him about their voyage home. He listened to her voice and watched her face.

She bought some shoes for twenty-one and sixpence. Piers took the parcel. She said they could get a bus all the way home. When he hailed a taxi she told him he was extravagant, but seemed pleased.

The house was in a row of mouse-grey houses. It had a black front door, three floors, and a basement. The hall smelled of roses, and so did the drawing-room where tea was laid. Elizabeth left him in the drawing-room. He sat down in an arm-chair and lit a cigarette. His heart was still beating quickly. He felt happy; but uncertain of his happiness. It was like an anæsthetic whose effects might wear off at any moment.

When Elizabeth came back she'd taken off her hat, and her gold hair and her face were more like his thoughts of them. She said:

"William's out, playing tennis; but you'll see him when he comes in. . . . And I want you to see the children. They're just at tea, upstairs."

She sat on the sofa behind the little table with its crisp cloth and shining silver.

"Now tell me all the things you've been doing," she said.

Looking at her gave him an aching peace.

"I still go on with the *Bulletin*."

"How's Marigold?"

"Very well."

"And your mother?"

"She's very well."

She hesitated. "I only heard—about your father when I got back.—I somehow missed it. I'm so sorry."

"I hadn't seen him for years. Since he died, my youngest sister has come back—to be with us. I think I once told you about her. She's living with Marigold now."

She said: "I remember. Poor child! Is she dreadfully unhappy?"

Piers wondered. Is she? He said: "She's rather out of her element still." He always found that he simplified things to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth handed him his tea. "I expect Marigold is difficult to live with."

Elizabeth was gentle, but accurate. She disapproved of Marigold.

Piers said: "You never answered my letters."

She handed him the sandwiches. "Yes, I did."

"Not—really!"

Her face lost its brightness and became sad.

"I couldn't," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't have been right."

"Why not?" He saw that he was hurting her, and this satisfied him, but increased his own pain.

"You know it wouldn't." She said: "You mustn't write like that again."

"Did you show William my letters?"

She coloured. "No, it would have hurt him."

Piers got up and walked to the fireplace. She watched him.

"Don't, Piers," she said. "Please be sensible, as it spoils everything."

He could feel her pity and her determination.

"Is there anything to spoil?" he said.

She pressed her little competent hands together on her lap.

"I want our friendship to last," she said.

"That's so easy for you to say, because you're secure and happy."

There was a pause. His mind photographed her head and slender neck rising from the circle of small white frills.

"I wish I could feel you were," she said. And then she added: "It's partly a matter of trying to be happy. I'm sure it is."

He had never heard her make a generalisation of this sort before. She wouldn't generalise except from her own experience. (And that would be the nearest she'd get to a personal revelation.)

She said, relieved: "There are the children."

They came in, four of them. Three little girls in blue cotton smocks, and a baby boy, like William, modelled in pale pink wax. One of the girls was

like Elizabeth. She had the same virginal and trusting expression and the same dignified carriage of her head.

The children shook hands and then went behind the grand piano. The baby sat on Elizabeth's knee and banged a teaspoon and chuckled at her. He was a lovely baby; but Piers thought him revolting. The biggest little girl looked over the piano and said:

"Can we go now? We've put the tent up in the yard and the soup's boiling."

"Very well."

They came back again and shook hands to say good-bye. The smallest girl paused, looking up into Piers's face. She said:

"Do *you* have prickles if you don't shave?"

"Yes," said Piers.

She turned triumphantly to her sisters. "He has prickles, *too*!" She beamed and gave a little jump.

"Marjorie is *silly*!" said the one like Elizabeth, and they hurried out.

Elizabeth began to talk about the difficulties of travelling round with the children. Soon William came in. He shook hands with Piers, and said: "Hullo, old man," to the baby, whom Elizabeth had put on the sofa.

"Is there any tea left?"

He was strong and clipped and admirable as a box-hedge. He said: "Excuse me, while I wash my hands, I've just been playing tennis."

When he had gone out Piers looked at Elizabeth relighting the kettle. She was preoccupied. She was "on duty" once more. He said:

"Do you remember that Commem? Do you remember the Magdalen ball?"

She put down the matches. She gave the faintest sigh.

"What a long time ago that seems."

He said: "Like something in another life." He thought "one should die young"—but the idea was too romantic to mention. He remembered leaving Magdalen after the ball and going up the river alone in a canoe, possessed by his happiness.

William came back smelling of verbena soap.

"Well, Marvell," he said. "And how's life going with you?"

Alys Raeburn put down her book on the *chaise-longue* and went to the window.

Half an hour ago she had watched the sunrise.

Now early morning flooded the gardens, washing the lawns, the colour-patches of flowers, the high trees, in its cool radiance. Beyond the lawns the river cut silver-blue across, dividing the velvet green from the parkland beyond. Away off, beyond the park itself, hazy between the oaks and chestnut trees, lay the morning countryside, the bloom of night still bluish under elms and hedges.

She knelt on the window-seat and looked out. Two swans moved across the river and caught the light and moved away into the black shade of the boat-house. The aching, silvery silence held minute sounds, a faint humming and tapping, momentary trills and cooing. She thought, only in England the summer mornings can be like this, remembering summers in England when she was a little girl. And later, in France, in Switzerland, in Italy—driving behind sweat-streaming horses, through the dry, unlovely summers of the south.

She tasted it all, the freshness, the innocent gold fragrance of the air. . . . (At sixty—nearing sixty, one's soul developed a palate.) This infinitely tranquil, infinitely satisfying green. These big quiet trees, and tame copses twinkling with birds. At home, the woods were wild, beautiful, and hostile, waiting to devour one's hardly planted garden. . . . Her fancy played with a metaphor—forces menacing the patches of real civilisation in America. . . . The absence of these forces in England. (But absence of other forces, vital growing powers) . . . The train of thought led on to her nephew Vernon's remark last night:

"People have got an idea that democracy and modern civilisation are the same thing. In fact, there are just bits of democracy here and patches of civilisation there. But they don't connect . . ."

A rabbit ventured out from the rhododendrons and scuttled back again. She thought of her two grandchildren. John and Anne would like the rabbits and the swans here. She thought of their approaching visit. She would have that puppy ready for them in a basket in the nursery. And Mrs. Grainger must make a chocolate soufflé for their luncheon.

The stable clock chimed six. She decided to dress and go out. She went back into her room and lit the flame under her little silver kettle to make tea.

She found her nephew already in the garden. She said:

"I didn't know you were an early riser!"

"I couldn't sleep."

He looked tired. She slipped her arm through his. "Come and say good morning to the swans."

He drew a deep breath. "It's good to be out, anyway."

They crossed the lawn and went along the path mown through the high grass to the river.

She wondered if he was worried about his examination which was just over. It wasn't like him to worry about his work. He was apt to trust his own memory and judgment too completely.

They sat on the bench near the boat-house. The swans came gliding up and stretched their necks at them.

"You know Fan Stuyvesant?" he said, looking at the reflections of the swans.

"Yes."

"Look here, Aunt Alys, I *have* to speak to somebody. . . ."

She waited.

"You know we're engaged," he said.

"Yes."

He plucked at some grasses. "Oh, Lord, I feel I'm acting badly." He stopped.

"You don't feel you care for her enough?"

He nodded, biting the grasses.

"I've been thinking about it for the last month—I never exactly—I never exactly cared enough." (Fan had always played on his senses. And she'd wanted to be engaged and was used to having her own way.)

His aunt said: "If you don't care enough, you certainly oughtn't to marry her." She added: "You shouldn't have let her think you wanted to."

"It was difficult."

“That’s no reason, my child.” But she knew it must have been difficult. She knew Fan, and Fan’s sort.

“What had I best do?” he asked.

She saw that he’d been suffering. He was proud and hated to act stupidly. And he was tenderhearted.

“I think you should write and make it clear that you were mistaken. . . . I don’t think Fan’ll be broken-up.”

“She’ll be fearfully disappointed.”

She knew that he wasn’t ironical. She wondered how many American men had spoiled their lives through a fear of disobliging a woman. She said:

“That won’t really matter.”

“You really think so?” he urged.

“I’m quite certain.”

They didn’t mention Fan again. But when they’d gone half-way back to the house, he decided to have a swim, and she took this as evidence of his relief.

Later, he joined her at breakfast on the terrace. He was lithe and fresh and smiling.

During breakfast a telephone message came from Templedean saying that Miss Marvell would be delighted to come over on Tuesday afternoon.

“I’ve got several people coming for tennis,” Alys Raeburn explained.

“Splendid,” Vernon said. “That’ll be grand,” and decided to have another helping of scrambled egg.

II

On June the twelfth Lady Marvell and Helena moved down to Templedean. Marigold remained in London, but went down there for week-ends, bringing parties of her friends. Since the episode of the pearls Marigold seldom saw Harold. She went into partnership with a friend who had a furnishing business in Mount Street. Marigold went off to work at nine o'clock every morning and came back after six. She was better-tempered than Philip had known her since the first year of their marriage.

Philip stayed in London working all June. He only left twice to go down to his constituency. He didn't see Helena after Harold's party and before she went to the country. Marigold told him the evening after she'd gone. He wondered if she'd avoided saying good-bye on purpose.

He had a letter from her the week after she'd left.

Except for you, I was glad to leave London. I should never get used to such a life. It is peaceful here. The countryside is lovely. I thought I could never care for any place but the Island. But I feel why Lawrence liked to live here. He wrote some verses about the trees here. I remember the dark red house and the rooms with window-seats from my childhood.

I ride every day. Marigold says you bought Empress for me. She is lovely to ride, and I thank you. I've been over twice to swim in Mrs. Raeburn's river. It is curious, swimming in a river, after the sea. First I found myself sinking. Then I began to like it.

I am much alone, which is a relief. Mother no longer asks me to go "calling" or "lunching out" with her. I had to explain that the people she likes are uncongenial to me. I'm afraid she was angry.

The peasants I like and visit them. But they live badly. They cannot cook and are extravagant. I am giving some of them cooking lessons. I taught the carrier's wife to make stuffed potatoes as they do them in the Midi and a soupe à l'oignon which her family liked. Would it not be better to teach the women of the poor to cook than to give them votes?

I can think of Lawrence better here. When are you coming?

Helena.

Philip found the letter one evening when he got in. He read it and took it up with him to his room. He was tired after a crowded day. Marigold wasn't in yet. He shut the door between their rooms and lay down without undressing.

He read the letter again. She wrote a small, limpid hand, more or less like Greek characters and uninflected by use. He wondered if she could have written half a dozen letters in her life—in her simple, mysterious life that he began to decipher, but could never piece together in a whole. . . . He'd thought of her several times since she went, with tenderness and curiosity. He remembered her looks and movements and wondered why she had kissed his hand that night.

The letter touched and disturbed him. It made her distinct. He saw her alone at Templedean with her ridiculous mother. He saw her stretched out on a sofa absorbed in a book; or in the garden, moving with her rapid, graceful walk, stopping still to think, and then move on; or listening to her mother in the evenings with melancholy inattention.

He heard Marigold come in, downstairs. He put out his light and undressed quickly in the dark. When he was in bed he wondered why he'd done this. (He could hear the chinking and padding of her undressing next door.)

He fell asleep with a sense of dim, worrying excitement. He dreamed that Sichley was sitting opposite him in the train. They were disputing some question, and Sichley kept saying: "What we want is more islands. People are getting denationalised." Helena was sitting next to Sichley, in the little dress she had arrived in her first evening, and he gradually realised that she was Sichley's wife. Her head was turned away so that he could only see her profile. He wondered if she enjoyed Sichley making love to her, and in a rage he shouted at Sichley, but somehow couldn't make him hear, and he just went on talking. But just as Philip was going out of the carriage and got up, Helena looked up at him, and he saw her lips move, "Please stay," and her look drew him down and down until he could see down into the darkness of her eyes, and he was saying: "That grave charm whose eyes becked forth my wars and called them home." He woke. . . . He heard Marigold put out the light beside her bed next door.

The next day he decided not to answer Helena's letter. But he wrote to his mother-in-law, saying he would come down the last week-end of the month, and sent Helena his love.

At first Helena found her days broken up by her mother's inconsequent demands for her company. But gradually she established her own routine. She got up at six and stayed out of doors riding or walking far over the country until midday. Then she came in and changed her clothes and joined her mother at luncheon. After luncheon she withdrew to her room and read for three or four hours. Sometimes, towards evening, she went down the mile of shady lane to the village. Sometimes she rode over to Cleaveden to see Mrs. Raeburn, and bathe. Her mother always urged her to order the car, but, in fact, it was seldom available, as her mother took it out in the afternoons. In the evenings she dined with her mother and sat with her afterwards. If there were no guests they listened to the wireless. . . . Helena could never take these aerial voices and concatenations seriously. It made her think of Hamlet's "I eat the air, promise crammed." But she realised that it was the way in which her mother chose to learn and to be diverted; and preferred it to her conversation which was either gossip or lament for the past, or accounts of the cures she had done in different watering-places.

The people who came to lunch or dine with her mother were older than the friends Marigold brought at week-ends, and seemed to come out of the various houses in the neighbourhood which Helena had visited with her mother the first week. Lady Marvell curiously described them as "County"—an attribute which Helena made out to mean kinship with others classified as County in another neighbourhood. At first they seemed to differ less from each other than did their houses, and to have less character. They were healthy and good-natured, satisfied with their own life and unconscious of any significant thought or action outside it. They talked mostly about their sports and gardens and animals. The women when left together discussed their servants and children. At first Helena was inclined to accept Piers's dictum that "being 'County' is a sort of foot-and-mouth disease: it limits you to a rural area and never attacks human beings." Then she began to see differences. The people who visited her mother went seldom to Mrs. Raeburn, and vice versa. In her mind she dubbed them "Rococo" and "Classical." The former had the same elaborated and restless quality as the people she'd met in London; and were often the same people in different clothes and houses. But she made out that they were, in fact, trying to imitate the latter, whose lives were simple and certain, and whose outlook had a beauty created by its own limitations. Among these she liked several of the women, who seemed to feel and act in ways that she understood, devoting themselves to their men and children, taking pleasure in their gardens. When she said to her mother that she liked a Mrs. Danesfort and

was going to lunch there, her mother said: "Oh yes, she's related to the Danesforts who have Newbold Park."

Her visit to Mrs. Danesfort confirmed her notion that the men, though fine physical specimens, were less intelligent and more selfish than the women. They were like big spoiled dogs with good house manners. Captain Danesfort seemed typical of the half-dozen she met at Cleaveden. He was courteous to his guest, friendly with his wife, jocular with his children and gravely affectionate to his horses and dogs. But she left the Danesforts with the impression of contentment and got back to find her mother entertaining two elderly women in white felt hats. They were asking about Marigold's shop, and Edith Marvell was saying:

". . . She so enjoys having something to do."

And one of the visitors said: "I really think women are wonderful nowadays."

As Helena went up to her room she wondered why.

There had been a thunderstorm the afternoon Philip arrived. But by six o'clock the sky was clear and the air fragrant and quiet. Helena walked up and down the drive under the slow-dripping beeches waiting for him.

When she heard the car coming up the hill she ran to the gates. She meant to run down the lane to meet him, but stayed leaning against the gatepost. When he drew up beside her she stayed still without speaking.

He said: "Well, Helena," and leaned across to open the door of the car. "Well, how are you?"

She waited. He tried to see her matter-of-factly: the gold pallor of her face and her white dress against the stone of the gatepost.

"Jump in," he said.

She obeyed. He drove slowly towards the house.

"And how's life been going here?" he asked.

She turned her head, and the look she gave him seemed to hold all her enchanting youth, all the tenderness of her fierce and innocent spirit. She said: "I'm glad you've come."

Philip drew the car up in front of the house. "I hope you've been behaving well." He heard his own words. They sounded empty and vulgar.

Helena didn't hear them. She got out of the car after him, and followed him indoors and stood beside him while he hung up his coat.

Then they went into the drawing-room. While he was talking to her mother Helena watched him. She felt as if Lawrence had come back.

On Saturday Marigold arrived with two other women and Jimmy Cloud. They played tennis all the morning. It rained in the afternoon and they played poker. Helena could find nothing to say to any of them. But she noticed that Philip seemed to find them amusing, and joked with the women. She went about all day possessed by her strange content. Even when she was alone she could feel his presence in the house.

Philip was afraid of being alone with her. He believed that she felt some emotion for him of a profound and disinterested kind. He wanted this emotion from her, and the idea of a certain sweetness and intimacy in their relationship tempted his judgment. He was by nature sensual, sensitive and romantic. His marriage and his personal fastidiousness had given him a double character of cynicism and romantic puritanism. When he thought of Helena his desire for her seemed a defamation of her beauty. During the last weeks in London he'd imagined a relationship based on her trust in him and her renewal of his illusions.

Seeing her again shocked his nerves and senses.

In her company he was aware of her and dissatisfied. When he avoided her he wanted to be near her again. When he spoke to her her animation hurt him. When he turned from her and talked to the rest of the party he was relieved, but exasperated by her indifference. Once, on Saturday evening, he found her looking at him. He couldn't analyse the look; but afterwards, when he was alone, he found in it the absurd quality of admiration; the heart-felt, hero-worshipping admiration of a small boy for an elder athlete. The simile emphasised something unfeminine in her whole attitude. At first he hadn't believed in her lack of coquetry. Lately it had puzzled and charmed him. Now it made him afraid. Her integrity troubled his emotions as her body enchanted his senses.

When he was going back to London on Sunday evening she came out to the car. Marigold came with her. Marigold kissed him. Helena said:

"Are you coming back next week-end?"

He said: "I don't know. I think not."

She accepted this. “When will you come?”

Marigold said: “You’ll see more than enough of him after the fifteenth, when we move down here.”

Philip looked back as he drove through the gates. Helena was still standing at the door.

Helena went over to Cleaveden the Tuesday after Philip left. She found Vernon Haskett staying there. She was pleased to see him because he was one of Philip’s friends.

When he was escorting her through the shrubbery to the tennis-courts, he asked her if she played. He said:

“You ought to play well.”

She said she had never learned. Lawrence thought that games disturbed women’s mental balance.

Vernon said: “I think it’s a good training. If I had a daughter I should make her practise plenty of sport.”

Helena said: “I shouldn’t like to be your daughter.”

Vernon saw that she was angry. He smiled.

“I didn’t ask you to be.”

She didn’t speak the rest of the way to the courts. He thought: “If she’s going to be snooty, I’m off,” and left her beside the ugliest man he could see, who said: “How d’ye do, Miss Marvell? I believe we met at yer mother’s last week”—and Vernon went off to play, with his spirits dropped to zero.

But when he saw her after tea she smiled at him. He sat down beside her. He said:

“I haven’t asked you yet how you enjoyed Harold Stemp’s party.”

“I didn’t.”

“I certainly didn’t. . . . You liked Mr. Bernard though, didn’t you?”

“Yes.” She was watching the players. Most English women moved like porpoises and their hands didn’t seem to belong to them.

“I don’t believe I like Frenchmen,” said Vernon.

"Why?"

"Because they're French, probably."

"How strange!" she said. "He's going to do a drawing of me sometime."

"I hope he does you justice," he said. "You look lovely in that pale green." (She'd look lovely in anything. She got more lovely every time you saw her. She was different from that evening at the party, but he couldn't make out how.)

She asked him if he'd finished his work at Oxford now. He said yes, he was sailing in August sometime. His aunt wanted him to wait and sail with her, but he'd promised to stay with his family in the country in September. And, anyway, he wouldn't sail with his aunt if he did go, as she went first and he went third. Helena asked him why. He said:

"Because I'm poor and she's rich."

She said: "I thought you were rich."

He said: "I've got two thousand dollars a year—that's about four hundred pounds, and I don't mean to work for any more."

"But you could buy everything you want for that!" said Helena.

"Depends what I want. I can't afford a wife with that—unless I marry a rich one."

"But you don't pay for wives."

"You keep them or they keep you."

"Is that what marriage means?"

"Pretty well. And breeding children and keeping them, too."

"How could you get more money if you wanted to?"

"By going into business. Selling something. Going out early and coming back too tired to do anything but amuse yourself. Coming back so stale with doing work you hate that you have to get drunk to believe you're getting anything out of life at all. And going on like that until you're rich enough to stop, and too old to go on."

"Horrible."

"It's how most men live—and think they're having a pretty good time."

She said: "If I married it would only be to a man I meant to have children by. Yet even so, I wouldn't let him work like that for money. I

would as soon have him changed into a brute."

"You'd have to have some money yourself, then."

She hesitated. "If I hadn't, I would rather live like the peasants, and possess my days."

"You probably wouldn't like it."

She shook her head. "I shouldn't like to lack money because it buys peace and leisure—and books and lovely things and strange places. But if I hadn't I could choose one place, and a few books. I could endure the 'roughness' better than living in a town and growing stupefied."

"You'd get that way in the country—with a lot of children to bring up."

"No," she said. "I wouldn't have children unless I had money."

He said: "You seem to know what you want and think. I wish I did. The minute I make up my mind about any problem I see the other side——" He dropped a cigarette-end and stamped it slowly out under the sole of his tennis-shoe. "Philip says I'm crazy to publish a book on anything just yet, because in two years I'll have altered my opinions."

She looked at him.

"You believe in Philip's judgment, don't you?"

"Yes, he's got a remarkable mind."

"Who has?" asked Alys Raeburn, coming up behind them and leaning over them.

"Philip Grant," said Vernon.

She made no comment. She said:

"Come, Helena, and meet my grandson and granddaughter. I told them there was a lady here who had really lived on an island, and they're just clamouring to see you."

Helena went with her towards the house. Two children were standing by the deserted tea-tables on the terrace.

John was a slender boy of six with gleaming grey eyes and a brown face and smooth, yellow hair. His sister, Anne, was a beautifully grown three-year-old, with a quick magnanimous gaze, and cheeks like two peaches, a tender, obstinate mouth and brown curls.

She came at once at her grandmother's bidding and said "How d'you do?" The boy was uncertain and then swift and certain, holding out his thin hand and searching Helena's face with his lovely gaze.

Helena saw that these were no more like the peasant children than like dogs or fishes. She felt they were people like herself. After a few minutes she began to feel that they were more like herself than the people playing tennis.

Anne asked her:

"*Did* you live on a niland?"

"Yes."

They both came near.

"Won't you sit down?" said Anne.

"Thank you."

They pulled forward a chair for her.

The boy asked: "How big was it?" He coloured faintly.

"Ten kilometres long and four across."

"What's that in miles?"

"About six miles long and two miles across."

"Were there fairies on it?" asked Anne.

Helena said: "I don't think there were. I looked when I first went, but I never found any."

"Were there nurses?"

"There was one, but she ran away."

Anne looked with delight at her brother: "There *was*, an' she *ranned away*!"

Mrs. Raeburn left them together, looking back over her shoulder.

"Were there pirates?" John asked.

"There were long before I lived there."

"Were there Indians?" He leaned against the wooden arm of the chair.

"No," said Helena. "It wasn't hot enough for Indians."

"I didn't know Indians had to be hot. What did you eat?"

She told them and described Fernande and the house and the garden and the village in the port, and the boats and the different nets the fishermen fished with.

"I wish we could grow grapes and make wine," said John. "We've been to France, but it's always to Paris to see our cousins where you can't grow grapes. We live in Washington, because Daddy's in the Embassy there. He's English and Mummie's American, but that really makes us English. What are you?"

"I'm English," said Helena.

"Even if you lived on a French island?"

"Yes."

"When I grow up I'm going to be American," said John, leaning his face close to Helena's and speaking in his uncertain little voice. "You see, it isn't fair to Mummie if we're both English, so Kedgeree," he indicated his sister, "is going to stay English and *I* shall change!"

Anne looked at the sky with a sanctimonious expression.

"I shall be a pidermonkey!" She gave a loud giggle.

John looked at her sidelong. "She's just being monkey-silly. I wish she'd never gone to the Zoo with me and Granny."

Anne turned and thumped him up and down his arm. His gaze grew fiercer, but he just looked down at her, and when she'd done he said:

"You'll never really be a monkey," with a little sigh of contempt.

"I had a monkey once," said Helena. "My father gave it me." She told them about it. Anne climbed on to her knee.

"What a nice father you must have had," said John.

Helena looked at him and didn't answer.

"Is he dead?" John asked.

"Yes."

"I *wish* somebody would tell me what dead is," said Anne dreamily, but with hidden impatience.

"It means not having a person with you any more," said Helena.

Anne put her hand up and stroked Helena's face. "I wish wasps were dead. One bitted Nurse an' she said damn! But she put nammonia on it, so it got quite all right."

Mrs. Raeburn came back.

"Now I must take Miss Marvell away," she said. "Her car's come for her."

Anne frowned. "No!"

John put his hand on Helena's wrist.

"Why can't we keep her if she's so pretty?" said Anne.

Mrs. Raeburn was looking at her grandson's face and at Helena's next to it. "She'll come again," she said to him.

"Will you?" he asked Helena.

"I should like to see you again very much." She got up and shook hands with both of them before she went.

Philip and Miss Blanchard came down on the fifteenth. Marigold had decided to go to Le Touquet.

Edith Marvell welcomed her son-in-law partly because she was bored by Helena's companionship: partly because the electrician seemed unable to make the light engine really reliable: partly because she had come across Philip's name several times lately in the Press and began to think of him as a future Prime Minister and herself as one of his old-and-valued women friends.

Her welcome to Miss Blanchard was:

"Ah, this looks like work, Philip."

Miss Blanchard was trim, but too warm in a travelling costume of beige tweed. She said:

"Which is my room, Lady Marvell?"

Helena said: "I'll show you. I put flowers in it because you always put such lovely flowers in mine at Eaton Square. Come and see if you like them."

Miss Blanchard was touched, and surprised by the girl's animation. She thought Miss Marvell a dear girl, and you wouldn't imagine she and Mrs.

Grant could be sisters.

When Helena had taken Miss Blanchard to her room she ran downstairs to find Philip.

He heard her calling: "Philip! Philip!"

"She seems quite excited," said Edith Marvell, annoyed.

Helena came in flushed and out of breath.

"Philip," she said, "come to your room and see if you like your flowers." She slipped her arm through his. How was he to take this mood of hers? How could he pursue a policy of amiable detachment when she pulled him upstairs laughing and saying: "I'm *glad* you've come to stay."

"Doesn't your room smell lovely?" she said. The vases were filled with roses.

"You are an extraordinary girl!" he said.

"You're pleased?" she asked, half grave, half laughing.

He said: "Of course I'm pleased." He added lightly: "I feel like a prima donna on a first night."

"Oh no, you aren't so fat and ugly."

He glanced sideways at the mirror in the wardrobe and saw himself next to her, solid and immaculate in a grey suit. He looked away. "I'm ugly and I'm getting fat."

"Oh no, no!" she cried, as if he'd hurt her. "You mustn't say that." Her glance as she looked him over had a curious animal gentleness. "You're strong and your face is too clever to be ugly."

"Thanks very much." He threw his dispatch-case down on the bed. "Now run along. I want to put on something cool."

She stood in the middle of the room, the sunlight flaring in her swept-back curls. "You do like the flowers?"

He saw her a little giddily.

"Yes, it was—sweet of you. Now run."

"When you're cooler—will you come out in the garden?"

"I'll see . . . I've got a lot of work."

"Oh, Philip!"

"I'll see."

He didn't go down until the gong sounded for luncheon.

After luncheon Helena said she was going to Cleaveden to bathe with Vernon Haskett. Philip refused to come. "You and Vernon can amuse yourselves."

Helena came to Miss Blanchard before she went. "Is Philip worried or tired? He seems so."

Miss Blanchard sighed quickly and compressed her lips. "You know the way he works, he never spares himself. I daresay he is tired. And now he'll hurry up and down to town from here. It's really more restful for him in London. But Mrs. Grant has arranged for the decorators to come in."

Helena left feeling troubled.

When she came back Philip was in his study and her mother had gone out to tea.

She drank down the jug of lemonade that she found in the hall and went into the library.

The sun-blinds were drawn down outside and everything in the room was lacquered with shadow. She picked up a newspaper and put it down again.

Her mother had told her that Lawrence used to write in here. She often came and sat at his desk. She tried to imagine what his life was like when he lived in England and wrote plays. But she couldn't think of him as Lawrence who had made her life. Her want of him had become part of her, so that she woke to it naturally every day. But when her mother or Piers spoke of him she felt they were talking of someone she hadn't known. Only his desk seemed to belong to Lawrence as she knew and felt him. He had one like it on the island with the acrid-smelling drawer in it where he kept his pipes.

Several times in the last weeks she had examined the backs of his plays, arranged in a lower shelf near the window. She knew the titles in their silver lettering. *East Wind*, *The Cedar Tree*, *No Deception*, *Benedict*, *The Amorist*. She wanted to read them. But she was afraid to. She had a fear that they might be like the photographs of him which Mother had in her room. The photographs had shocked her because she had never seen him look cruel or elegant. They identified him with influences which she felt continually under

the surface of the life about her. She could only have described them as "meanness" and "pride."

This afternoon she felt a perverse impulse to take down one of the plays. She believed that she ought out of loyalty to Lawrence to read one. She found a reason because she was aware of being compelled by a mood. She took down *Benedict*, remembering Piers's reference to it, and began to read.

Philip went into the library toward seven o'clock. He had been working in the full west light of his study, and for a minute the library seemed dark. Then he saw Helena stretched on the big sofa.

She hadn't heard him come in. He saw that she was lying on her back, her arm clasped behind her head. A book lay open on the floor beside her. She didn't hear him even when he came nearer. She was staring at the ceiling. Something startled and tragic in her aspect made him rap out her name.

She turned her head. She said:

"Philip," as if she weren't sure, and didn't care if he were there. Her face stayed turned towards him.

"What's the matter?"

She raised herself on one elbow with a visible effort of her will. Then she stretched out her other arm towards him, the boyish hand turned palm upwards in a gesture of unspeakable need.

He took her hand. It was cold.

"What is it? What's the matter? Darling, what's happened?" He sat down beside her. She kept his hand gripped in hers. He could feel her draw in a long breath.

"Was he really like that? Did he really think and feel like that? Did he say those kind of things? Cheap things. . . ."

"Who?"

She glanced down at the book on the carpet.

"Lawrence. . . ." She said the name with a brooding, infuriated tenderness that made him realise how completely her worship of her father was identified with her own pride. ". . . What made him write like that? How

could he make those . . . those hideous men and women? . . .” She stopped speaking as if her language hadn’t the strength to bear her feelings.

He picked up the book. Her glance followed it. He said: “He was very disillusioned when he wrote *Benedict*.”

She whispered “Yes—yes——” She waited. He felt her hoping for evidence against her own judgment.

He said: “When I knew him, and I only knew him for a year, he was the most bitter man I’ve ever come across; and the most unhappy, I think. . . . He was, of course, immensely run after. He was witty, when he cared to talk. But most people were afraid of him!”

“Afraid?”

“I was a fairly confident young man at the time, but I remember my fear of being left alone with him.”

She said: “Even if he was angry with me, he was gentle. If he lost his temper it hurt him afterwards. The people on the island respected him, but they weren’t afraid. And when he died they mourned for him.”

“I’m quite sure that he was—misunderstood.”

She accepted the word blankly. She said: “He told me he’d been unhappy.”

He urged: “Much more desperately unhappy than anyone suspected. . . . I was too young then to understand the possible corruption of unhappiness. All one’s hopes and beliefs eaten away. Everything that matters coming to seem trivial—and trivialities gaining a desperate importance. . . .”

“Was he cruel?” she asked.

“Cruel?”

“Yes.”

He wondered why she used the word. “No,” he said.

His denial didn’t seem to satisfy her. She went on tormenting herself. “He says cruel things in the play. . . . And Piers hated him.”

“Desperation can make people cruel.”

“And then he went?” she said.

“Yes.” He took her other hand. He was so close to her beauty that he forgot even her nearness.

"He ran away," she said.

"He turned his back on it all. . . . Doubtless," Philip added, "he saved himself." He got up and went over to the writing-desk and took a cigarette out of the box and lit it. When he looked back at her she was sitting up, her arms clasping her knees. When she spoke again she said:

"Then he was afraid," and her sentence had an enigmatic and profound sadness, as if she were contemplating human fear, and the tragedies of fear, from the beginning of time.

"If he hadn't gone," Philip said, "you would have had a different life. You would have been brought up like Piers and Marigold."

She didn't seem to hear. He meant to comfort a grief he couldn't completely understand. He could remember nothing worse in *Benedict* than an elegant cynicism, and a certain contempt for women which marked all Marvell's later plays. He took in the meaning of his own words after he'd said them. He wondered how much she'd been made by her life. It seemed to him that Marvell had struck good material for his experiment. (Would Marigold have been different if her father'd taken her away?) Anyway, if Lawrence Marvell had made her, he was being condemned by his own creation. . . .

"He did wrong—to his own dignity. And there was no sense in taking me out of the world I'm bound to live in."

He couldn't make out from her voice if she was angry or in pain. She was still clasping her knees, and her profile looked blank against the window. She didn't move when he picked up the book and put it back in the shelf. After moving about the room he came back to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"I don't understand you," he urged. "What does it matter what he did, since you loved him? You had a life with him that you couldn't have had otherwise."

She whispered: "I do love him."

"You've got this all out of proportion. You can never have had the chance of coming across the—the qualities in him that the life here brought out . . . just because you and he were so completely happy."

She bent her head, pressing her forehead against her knees. He heard her mutter "No—no—no!" and felt her shiver. She stayed like this, huddled up, either accepting his hand on her shoulder or unconscious that it was there at

all. He noticed how white her neck was where the gold-bronze curls had protected it from the sun. He heard her say:

"I thought you were like him."

He was startled. "He was a much greater man than I am."

She went on: "I began to feel I wanted to live, because you were like him."

He let go her shoulder.

She said: "Now he's got smaller . . . I can't explain. I must try to understand him."

She unclasped her knees and threw herself back among the cushions and closed her eyes. He had a fantastic impression that she'd uncurled and fallen asleep in one lithe violent movement. Then she said, in her infinitely moving voice, and with a characteristic half-simple, half-romantic phrase:

"I'm glad you remain. . . ."

Edith Marvell came in, saying:

"Here you are, both of you. I'm so sorry I didn't make you both come with me this afternoon; it was simply delightful, such a beautiful old house they have; I'd no idea or I'd have called before. . . ."

III

"Isn't it a lovely band?" said Elizabeth.

Piers drew a gilt chair next to hers.

"Yes, lovely," he said. "You're sure you won't have anything to drink?"

"No, thank you." She opened her fan of white ostrich feathers. "It is hot, for England." She turned her head to look out of the window behind their chairs. "How lovely the river looks at night. I should like to live on the Embankment. When William retires and settles down that's what I should like."

He said: "I could imagine you happier in the country."

She hesitated.

"I've had enough country. I like the gaiety of London, the shops and theatres and being where I can see my friends easily. And London has a lot of advantages for the children."

Piers thought: If there is a nice normal woman, she is Elizabeth. She is pretty but not beautiful, charming but not attractive. Her judgment is limited to perceiving the secondary and never the primary qualities of things. Thus she thinks that London is gay, that Cairo is romantic, that children are child-like, that William is admirable, and that I am "Bohemian." She has no idea that William is stupid and that I am isolated and wretched, and find a sort of comfort in the material fastidiousness and intellectual bluntness of the Philistines. Her quality of sympathy is nothing more than the natural play of her charming instincts; for like many women lacking in sensual impulse she has exquisitely developed instincts of the heart. Her fairness, that touches, that moves me like a lovely Primitif, her freshness that the sun has faintly gilded and dusted with a few freckles, are merely the evidences of her sound health and her unredeemed Saxon ancestry (just as Claire's flair for seduction is some sort of trick of her cheek-bones and her impudent mouth and her fitful vitality). . . .

He lit her cigarette, saying:

"When will William retire?"

"Not just yet, I'm afraid."

William crossed the supper-room at this moment, escorting his sister, a stalwart, fussily-dressed girl, for whom the dance was being given.

"I'm sorry your sister couldn't come up for the dance," said Elizabeth. "But I think she's quite right not to go about yet. . . . Of course, it's different for the rest of you, because everybody knows your father was hardly a relative any more."

"Exactly," said Piers. "But if you and William come down in September you'll meet her."

Elizabeth said yes, and they were delighted to be coming. She said: "When do you get your holiday, Piers? You look as if you needed one."

"In September. Do you think I look tired?"

"You look run down."

He thought: Next to William, anyone looks run down. But he was touched because she noticed how he looked.

"How are the children?" he asked. (William's odious children and the little girl who looked like Elizabeth . . . If Elizabeth hadn't been sane and saved them from marriage they might have had children. They might have had that same little girl.) She said:

"They're very well. Next week they're going to an aunt at the sea."

Their children—what a small turn veered the pointer of one's life—might have gone to aunts-at-the-sea. . . Would he have grown indifferent to her? If the pointer had had just that shove (a little more money, a little more force on his side, a less level-headed altruistic affection on hers) he might have come to feel nothing for her now but the stale sympathy of a common bondage. That turn of her neck would have grown less delicious; her chastity, that gave her such a bright silver outline, might have become tiresome, her optimism an intolerable stupidity.

Or would she have changed him?

"We always had the *Bulletin* sent out to us," she said.

"A frightful paper," he said mechanically.

She smiled at his joke. "I always think of you when I read the centre page. I think you choose such good articles."

"I'm glad you like them." He added: "Shall we dance?"

"Yes."

They went back into the ballroom. When he danced with her he could see minute lines by the outer corners of her eyes. When she smiled they

deepened. Curious that he'd never kissed her. Her effortless self-possession isolated her, as if she were in a frame. In the ten years he'd loved her and wanted her he'd never thought of her as sensually desirable.

"I like the long dresses," she said. "Don't you?"

Claire was waiting for him when he got back. She was reading. She looked at his face.

"Tired, darling?"

He nodded.

She got up and went to the cupboard.

"There's nothing but gin left. D'you mind?"

He shook his head.

She put him out a gin and water. She said: "I lunched with Marigold today. She's doing a 'decoration' article for me for *Chic*."

"She doesn't know anything."

"Mm. But her shop has good things. And she's an 'honourable.' D'you like my dress?"

He hadn't noticed.

"You're always like the cover of *Chic*," he said miserably.

She sat beside him with her arms crossed, looking at her shoes. After a silence she asked:

"Would you like me to go?" without looking at him.

He said: "No, if you don't mind." He'd been glad to find her. After the gin he began to feel that Elizabeth was a little less real. But his sense of acute and positive deprivation went on, and he felt that it would never stop.

Claire said: "She's everything that I'm not."

He put his hand on her knee.

"Don't let's talk about her."

He put his glass on the table and went to the window and leaned out. He said:

"It's such a lovely night."

“I know. I walked here from the theatre.” She looked at the back of his brown head and his slender familiar shoulders. “Heaps and heaps of stars,” she said, and grabbed at her little mirror, because her tears made the black run. She dried them and lit a cigarette. “I don’t see how anyone remembers all their frightful names. But I suppose they haven’t all got names . . .”

He came back into the room. He held out his hand without looking at her. He said:

“Let’s get into bed.”

When they were undressing he stopped with one sock off and said:

“Don’t stay if you’re bored.”

She shook her head. He saw that she was crying, but he couldn’t mind. When they were in bed he said:

“I don’t want to make love to you. But it’s sweet of you to stay.”

She put her arms round him so that his head was on her shoulder. She said: “Try and go to sleep, my darling.”

IV

Philip had to go over to Silsbury for two days. Miss Blanchard was to go too, and Lady Marvell suggested that Helena should go with them, as it would interest Helena to hear Philip make a speech. Lady Marvell was having her portrait painted by Bernard, and she was pleased by an element of naughtiness in the idea of being left alone with him.

Philip asked Helena at dinner if she would like to come. He said: "Marigold was to have come down for the meeting, but Mrs. Thealby is going to speak instead."

Helena remembered meeting Mrs. Thealby; a big woman with fine eyes and long chains round her neck. She said she would like to go, and Miss Blanchard (whom Lady Marvell allowed to come to dinner when there were no guests) said:

"I'm sure it'll give the women the greatest pleasure to see Miss Marvell. I do think people like to feel the Member's family take an interest."

Philip said: "Miss Blanchard would like me to hire some children for the Election to drive round shouting 'Vote for Daddy!'"

"Oh, Mr. *Grant*!" said Miss Blanchard, delighted to be teased.

"I am sure," said Paul Bernard, "that Mrs. Grant's beauty wins more votes than many children would."

"How gallant Frenchmen are!" said Edith Marvell.

He replied: "That is the effect of the charms of Englishwomen."

Edith Marvell smiled and, still pleasantly aglow, turned to her daughter.

"I'm sure you'll enjoy going."

They left next morning and got to Silsbury in time for luncheon. A small market town, with new shops built in a main street of seventeenth-century brick houses, a cobbled market place, a Palladian church of yellow-grey stone, an ugly new town hall and an outer district on the north side consisting of rows of mean pink villas, a glove factory, and a railway station. The narrow main street was choked with cars and bicycles and carts, chivvied by an untiring but philosophic policeman.

The "Bear Inn," where Philip and Miss Blanchard and Helena were to stay, stood in this street, its timbered upper front jutting out and almost touching the windows above the ironmonger's on the opposite pavement. A

group of men, mostly farmers with red faces, portly bodies and rheumatic movements, stood outside "The Bear." They shook hands with Philip. He seemed to Helena to know all their names and family interests.

Though the exterior of the inn was Tudor, the interior was furnished with horsehair sofas, mahogany tables, fusty carpets, and palms.

They had luncheon in an oak-panelled room with ferns in wire baskets suspended in each window. They had ox-tail soup, fish with a pink sauce, roast mutton with caper sauce, and apple-tart with custard sauce, and coffee that tasted like liquid cascara. During lunch Philip got up several times to speak to people who came in, and once to telephone. While he was telephoning Miss Blanchard told Helena that Mr. Grant always came here. All the people here were very loyal. There was another hotel, "not at all the same class of place," she said, where the Labour Candidate stayed. She explained that there was also a Liberal Candidate, who lived only two miles out of Silsbury, and owned the glove factory. "Not a very nice sort of man from what one knows of him," said Miss Blanchard.

"Why not?"

She said: "Oh well, there's been talk. He has a housekeeper there, and he isn't married. Of course there may be nothing in it."

"I don't see how his housekeeper matters in his political work," said Helena. But Miss Blanchard said that one wanted to keep public life clean, "and after all if our public men didn't live clean lives others could not be expected to."

Helena knew by now that Miss Blanchard meant that the housekeeper was the Liberal's mistress. But she wondered why she used the word "clean."

Philip came back, saying he had been telephoning to Mrs. Thealby, who wanted them to come back and have supper after the meeting. Miss Blanchard got up and pushed in her chair and asked to be excused, as she had to go round to the town hall at 2.30. Philip sat and smoked a cigar and talked to Helena about his agent, a young man called Pepper, whom he had picked up on the boat coming back from Paris last year. He said Pepper was one of his best discoveries and had a genius for his job. He said: "He has all young Stemp's *finesse* and the loyalty of a spaniel."

Helena thought Philip had changed the moment he arrived in Silsbury. At Templedean he had been silent and thoughtful. Now he was direct and talkative and seemed to be enjoying himself.

When he had finished his cigar he looked at his watch and said he must talk to Pepper, and could she amuse herself for the afternoon? She smiled at this and he felt a sudden delight at having her with him. She went up to her room. It had a grey wallpaper with a muddled pattern of stripes and red roses, and enormous furniture and red-plush curtains and lattice windows, overlooking a cobbled courtyard. There was a fireplace with green crinkled paper in it, and a faded picture over the mantelpiece of ladies in crinolines getting out of a stage coach.

She put on her hat and decided to go out and look at the town. She passed Philip's room. The door was open. His dark blue overcoat was flung over the end of the bed. She went on downstairs more slowly. She crossed the narrow hall hung with antlers and smelling of metal polish and beer. She was thinking of the first evening when she arrived in London and Philip was a stranger. Now she felt that he had never been strange, and that she must always have felt this passion that slept and waked with her.

The hall was packed for the meeting. There were flags hung all round the walls and two rows of people on the platform. Major Thealby was in the chair, and Mrs. Thealby sat in front of Helena.

Major Thealby, a lanky man with a game leg and a face like a grizzled stoat in pince-nez, spoke first, and more people kept coming in at the back of the hall. While Helena watched the back of Mrs. Thealby's regal black hat and listened to Major Thealby's speech, she compared Miss Blanchard's remark that "these meetings kept people's interests alive and educated the electorate," with Vernon Haskett's dictum that "only a fraction of any electorate votes intelligently—and that fraction can never find a party worth voting for." She saw Miss Blanchard, in front, with a notebook on her knee, and behind her rows of faces like smeared lamps.

Major Thealby stopped speaking and sat down. Little Pepper, the agent, wriggled in his chair and leaned across to say something to Philip. Mrs. Thealby got up and began to speak, referring every now and then to a paper which she held in her white-gloved hand, her other hand resting on the table beside her. She had a plump voice and seemed satisfied with what she was saying. Helena watched Philip. She could see his profile. He was sitting with his arms crossed, staring straight in front of him. He was like an animal listening, curiously still, with an inexpressive mouth and bright intent eyes.

He got up to speak. While he spoke Helena watched his slight definite gestures and felt the tones of his voice. When he stopped there were

clapping and murmuring, and a man in the audience got up and asked him a question. He answered it at length. Helena tried to remember what he had spoken about, but she could only remember phrases and the way he had spoken them.

When he sat down he turned to glance at her, then looked in front of him with that intent brilliant expression.

An elegant stout man spoke next. He swayed to and fro on his feet as if they were rockers and urged the audience to remember that Socialism was a destructive force, and "just to look and see what had happened in Russia." Philip looked uncomfortable while he was speaking, and there were several interruptions from the back of the hall.

When the meeting was over Mrs. Thealby turned to Helena and said: "*Well*, I think it was a most successful affair, don't you?" and Helena said:

"I suppose it was," wondering how its success was estimated.

Helena and Philip went in the Thealbys' car. Major Thealby talked in a sharp narrow voice and Helena sat beside Mrs. Thealby, looking out at the dark trees and fields and the moon rising above a bank of clouds. Philip answered Thealby in monosyllables. The warm afterglow of speaking had ebbed from his senses. He wished he hadn't promised to sup at the Thealbys'. He felt a chill melancholy which closed round him like a mist. The Thealbys seemed remote, but exasperating, and Helena opposite him in the shadows of the car was unreal.

When they got to Datcham Manor they found the two Thealby girls and some young men in the drawing-room playing poker. Helena had met the girls on several occasions. They went to every local party and function. They were both pretty and smart and noisy, with good-natured smiles and a mildly swaggering gait. Helena admired them as physical specimens, but found them verbally obscure, as they talked in phrases and exclamations. Vernon had said they were typical females of the new "hunting aristocracy," "bred by commerce out of an athletic bourgeoisie." He had had a flirtation with the younger one, but he'd told Helena that "howtoomarv'llous" had chilled his ardour after two days.

Both the girls stood round Philip, asking him about the meeting and chaffing him with the elliptical phrases and glowing smiles, and each took his arm when supper was announced.

Supper was in the placid, richly-furnished dining-room. A portrait of Major Thealby, in a pink coat, hung above the mantelpiece, and there was a

white tablecloth and an array of silver vases and candlesticks and sweet dishes on the table.

Helena sat on Major Thealby's right. He asked her if she thought it had been a good meeting, whether she was coming down to hunt in the winter and if she was interested in gardening. She answered him briefly. He seemed dry and stupid and she was listening to Philip. He was talking to Mrs. Thealby about the Conservative fête that was to be given at Datcham Manor in September. He talked rapidly and ate kidneys and scrambled eggs. Occasionally he turned to one of the Miss Thealbys and talked to her in the half-bantering manner which she seemed to enjoy. He didn't look at Helena during the whole of supper, and she felt he had grown strange and somehow allied himself with these stupid assertive people who lived in such comfortable rooms and had pictures of dogs on their walls.

After supper Philip stayed drinking port and talking to Major Thealby in the dining-room. In the drawing-room Mrs. Thealby asked Helena about the Riviera climate in December and the hotels at Cannes, while the girls and their young men went on playing poker. Helena said she had never been to Cannes or Nice or Monte Carlo, and Mrs. Thealby said she understood the other end of the Riviera was getting quite fashionable now.

Philip came in still talking, and he and his host stood with their backs to the empty fireplace arguing and glancing at each other with bright unobservant eyes. They were flushed and amiable and emphatic, and Major Thealby began each sentence with "My dear Grant."

Suddenly Philip's gaze focused on Helena. Then he said they must go. They said good-bye and got into the Thealbys' car in a gust of talk and exclamations.

When they got out of the drive Philip stopped talking. "Now we can have peace," he said, and threw himself back in his corner and lit a cigarette. Helena saw his face in the flare of the match. He smiled at her and threw the match out of the window.

"Did you enjoy it?" he asked.

She said: "I liked hearing you speak."

"You didn't like the Thealbys?"

"They didn't interest me."

He was half aware of her words. He stared at the moonlit countryside. He felt that at any moment he might break the windows of the car. He sat

back, intently watching the hedges and grass springing green gold into the headlights.

After a long time he heard her say his name.

"Yes?"

"Are you tired?" she asked.

"Yes."

She didn't speak again and he didn't look round until they got into Silsbury High Street. Then she said:

"I didn't speak because I didn't want to disturb you."

"Thank you." He muttered as they got out: "You do that without speaking."

They went into the hotel. As they went up the staircase he said:

"I expect you are sleepy."

"No."

He looked down from the landing into the hall, with its Turkey carpet and aspidistras and the stuffed ferret in a glass case.

"Curious place to be with you," he said.

She was staring down into the hall too. Her laughter shook the genteel silence.

"Why do you laugh?"

She shook her head. Her laughter flickered out, and left her smiling and uncertain.

"Perhaps it was the ferret," she said.

He took her hand.

"I—I like you when you laugh, darling." He kissed her hand and let it go abruptly. "Now you must go to sleep. Run along—good night." He went to his door and looked back for a second to say good night again. She hadn't moved. She was watching him. But the light was behind her and he couldn't see her expression. He repeated, "Good night, Helena," but she didn't answer or move.

Philip turned sleeplessly. The room was filled with a dim glare from the lamps in the High Street below. The mirror in the big wardrobe reflected the two lattice windows with their shrouds of lace.

He kept thinking of her, of her gravity, her profound sweetness, her magnificent laughter . . . of her voice and her hands and the strong lovely movements of her body. Her expression and her movements made other women seem like marionettes, squeaking and jerking.

The door opened; creaked; opened further.

She came in; then stopped by the door.

He raised himself on his elbow.

She must have been able to see him, for when he moved she whispered his name.

He said: "What's the matter?" and got up, repeating, in a whisper, "What's the matter?"

He thought she shook her head, and her hands moved in a just perceptible gesture, denying the sense of his question. She came and sat beside him on the bed. He could see her now quite clearly, her face pale and her hair etched in gleams and shadows and the folds of her dressing-gown carved out in ivory. . . .

She said: "I can't sleep." There was an unresolved chord in her voice and her word "sleep" hung in the air.

He said: "Nor can I."

She was looking at him. And for what seemed an unending thudding succession of minutes he stared at her, at her near white face and unmoving shoulders, wondering if he was dreaming, and knowing, by his sick sense of wonder, that he wasn't. During these minutes his conscious preoccupation was keeping still, as if an absolute stillness and unbreathing silence could somehow master the situation.

She stirred, and made a rift in the silence.

"Were you thinking of me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I was of you." She waited. Then she added in a tone that would have seemed inconsequent if it hadn't been so gentle:

"Do you love me?"

He leaned slowly to see her face, and as he moved she said with a beautiful measured certainty:

"You do love me."

He drew away from her muttering: "Do you care for me?" speaking with a notion of gaining time.

"Yes."

He got up and walked to the window and came back to her. She waited, watching him. He said:

"Why did you come? Why have you come?"

She seemed to hesitate, finding words for the simplicity, the very obviousness of the explanation he demanded.

"To sleep with you." Her way of saying it made him out a little stupid. She waited with a curious serenity for his reply.

He said: "What d'you mean by that?"

"I mean that since you desire me, since you love me . . . and I. . . ."

"Desire you? . . . Of course I want you—desire you——" He sat down by her, putting his arm round her and looking with a sense of nightmare into her dim and lovely and untroubled face. She turned and took his face between her hands and looked into his eyes.

"Why are you unhappy?"

"Because I love you . . . Because I want you and can't have you."

She put one of her hands against his forehead. "I don't understand you," she said.

"It would be wrong."

She echoed "wrong," giving the word a grotesque quality, as if she were holding it up and exposing its queerness in a clear light.

He said: "Are you so—fantastic that you can't see that? I'm married . . . You're Marigold's sister . . . The thing's unthinkable."

"You've thought about it—so it isn't unthinkable . . . And how can it be wrong? . . . It's only wrong that you're married."

"That's wrong, too," he said.

"But these things are insignificant if you love me."

She was quiet and definite, but he could feel her shiver.

"You mean you wouldn't mind?"

She asked: "What should I mind?"

"Just the things you call insignificant. My being married. Marigold. The whole situation."

He heard her whisper: "Strange you are. Such *little* things . . ."

He held her, bending closer to the enchanting profile that he'd watched and brooded on so often, so that his spirit had taken its imprint and knew the delicate hardness of each line and the sweetness of each curve. He laid his cheek against hers, and felt her cling to him. He repeated, only half aware of what he was saying—"Such little things. . . . And you've changed my life—brought light back . . ."

Her whisper broke in, hushed the room, and died out, "Don't speak."

He was conscious of the silence that followed as curiously hers; its pulsation, its darkness, its chill fragrance seemed to flow from her as she waited in his arms. He felt that he couldn't move if he'd wanted to. He waited, afraid to break a charm which seemed to grow more real as the minutes passed, and more irreparable.

She moved at last, laying her head back on his shoulder and shutting her eyes.

Philip asked, bending over her: "How long have you loved me?"

He could just hear her "I don't know."

Her lips closed. He felt the beat of her heart under his hand. The faintest movement, that might have been a sigh or a glimmer of delight, or the evidence of some hidden amusement, passed across her features. He leaned nearer and touched her brow with his lips.

Now she seemed asleep, and he lay watching her while the milky light between dark and dawn filtered into the room.

He felt utterly peaceful, and empty of all life except an immense clear-burning tenderness . . . It seemed to him that he lived forty years with a meaningless intensity, pursuing, racketing, planning: and now he held the meaning of life quietly in his arms.

He felt as if Time itself had come to an end, relieving all pressure of past and future, and leaving him in infinite possession of an infinitely satisfying happiness.

V

Occasionally Marigold came down to Templedean during the next few weeks. She brought Jimmy Cloud with her, and they played tennis and played the gramophone and stayed out late in the garden after dinner.

Philip and Helena noticed her incursions, just as they knew that Bernard and Lady Marvell were in the house. She was part of a play that went on round them.

During these weeks they lived so in each other's consciousness that the house was a place they haunted rather than inhabited. They moved mechanically through the familiar rooms, speaking and acting with the habits of another life.

Lady Marvell was preoccupied with Bernard and her portrait, but she complained to Marigold that Philip was "dreadfully distrait." Marigold said she thought he looked well and seemed less sardonic than usual. Paul Bernard observed them both, and continued to paint Lady Marvell and play piquet with her in the evenings. Once he said to Helena that she had changed since he first met her. She smiled and said: "My life has changed," and then left him because Philip had come into the room.

Helena had never had a sense of time, as "meal-times" and "bed-times." But in these long sunlit days even her rudimentary time-table—of alternate eating and sleeping and moving and reading—gave way to her continuous sense of being perfectly alive. She knew that she must have waited for her life to be as it was now. She slept when she was tired and woke again to find herself possessed by a happiness that made her sensitive to the least echo of beauty, to the finest grain of humour, to every movement of the air about her.

The practical aspects of her life with Philip, above all, the secrecy of their relations, she accepted as temporary and incidental. She couldn't have spoken of them to her mother or Marigold. Half their days she and Philip spent away from the house, riding or walking. The high green horizons, the trees and brown-gold cornfields, the drowsy copses and grey-brown stone houses, gave them solitude and haunted their emotions, so that Helena, half asleep, remembered Philip's face dappled with the midday shadows of leaves; and he could see her in a hundred moods and moments in the summer fields, lit by the changing sky.

For Philip her nearness was an emotion so fine and poignant that she became part of his own being. The idea of "self" was unreal. . . . During

these days he felt as if life had been given him to make again, and this bright intrinsic sense of her became the perpetual source of its renewal. His doubts and hurts and angers left him. He felt her youth in his veins, her radiance in his sight, her serenity in his heart. He came to believe that he loved her with her own exquisite and magnificent passion. He saw his adoration in her looks, and heard its inflection in her voice whose tones were so rich and sweet and distinct, and yet left a minor echo.

As the weeks passed he gained a peace of spirit that he hadn't known all his life. Her courage, her ignorance of moral laws, her fine emotions and fierce senses gave him a new simplicity. Neither fear nor shame existed for her. She knew the qualities by name, but couldn't understand them. Once she said: "People here"—(her way of referring to English people)—"people here pretend so much of life that they scarcely seem to live. They even pretend to love and not to love . . ."

He said: "Most people would be worse without pretence."

She said—they were in the garden at Templedean: "Never pretend if you should cease to love me."

"Nor you," he said lightly. "You must tell me when you begin to see that I'm a middle-aged bore with an uncertain temper."

"I shall always love you," she said.

Anne said: "There's the niland-lady walking along."

"Where?" said John, leaving his drawing and going to the window-seat beside his sister.

"With Granny an' Uncle Vernon."

John saw them. "She said next time she came she'd have tea in the nursery with us."

"Then she's going to," said Anne, who had no doubts in her system. "Let's shout."

They pushed their faces against the white bars and shouted. The island-lady saw them and ran across the lawn until she was below the window. Anne said:

"Come an' have tea in the nursery."

The lady turned and said something to Granny and Uncle Vernon, who came up behind her. Then she said:

"Yes, thank you." And Uncle Vernon said: "Can I come too?"

"*All* come," said John, and scrambled off the window-seat, calling, "Nana, Nana, that'll be three more for tea, Nana."

"That's all right," she said, divining his anxiety. "There's plenty of cake left."

"Quick," he said, "quick, I must wash my hands!"

Anne had fetched a pair of Nana's white shoes and put them on over her own. "Now I'm a lady waiting for the people!" She stalked precariously across the linoleum and sat down on a small stool, and opened an imaginary bag. "Now I'm powdering my nose an' making my lips lovely an' red."

John looked at her and giggled. "I think her cheeks get more blown-out every day," he said to Nana, who was brushing his hair.

"I'm a lady with lipstick on," Anne announced to the visitors. She accepted Helena's hand—she hit Vernon when he tried to pick her up, saying stormily: "I'm a *lady*."

Helena shook hands with John. He tugged her forward and began to arrange the chairs.

"When are you going, Vernon?" said Helena. She had been examining the frieze of ducks and pigs above the yellow walls.

Mrs. Raeburn said: "He's deserting us this very next week."

Helena said: "Then I shall have no one to swim with."

"No. I'm afraid not." Alys Raeburn saw his expression.

"*I'll* swim with you," said John quickly. "I'll swim and dive in, and swim across the river and back"—thinking that perhaps he really would, that he would find himself swimming (and not a bit afraid) with the Island Lady, who was so very, very beautiful (like Atalanta on the cover of his book), watching him and saying to Granny: "How well John swims!"

"I should like that," said Helena.

John will do just as well, thought Vernon. A week to-day I shall be going.

Helena thought: How disagreeable Vernon is to-day! Mrs. Raeburn had told her that he'd broken off his engagement with the girl whose photo she'd

seen at Oxford. Perhaps he was sorry. But she'd said he never loved the girl. If that was true it seemed strange that he should then have meant to marry her. But Philip had said: "There are all sorts of minor passions that you want to believe in, until you really love someone." That seemed incredible. But she accepted Philip's judgment.

Alys Raeburn was asking her to stay to dinner. She said she was sorry, but Philip was fetching her about six.

After tea they played hide-and-seek with the children. But Vernon soon went off by himself. Helena saw him going towards the woods with a book under his arm. She called out:

"Good-bye, Vernon."

He turned. She was smiling at him, the wind fluttering her dress.

"Good-bye."

He heard a car, Philip's car, coming up the drive. She heard it too, and turned and ran across the lawn, John running after her. He saw her reach the car as it stopped in front of the house, and Philip getting out.

Philip shook hands with Mrs. Raeburn. "So these are the grandchildren," he said; "what lovely children!" He shook hands with them and pinched Anne's cheek. John knew he couldn't be the lady's father because he was dead. Anne was being silly at him, making dimples and scrooging her eyes. John got closer to Helena and gripped her wrist, but she didn't notice him. Granny was asking the man to come in, and he said he would. They all went into the library that John liked the smell of.

Alys Raeburn glanced at her grandson's little blunt heart-shaped face under its cap of gold hair. He was gazing at Philip Grant and leaning close to Helena. Then she looked at Helena, and then at Philip. He was saying:

"The Thealbys have promised to give a garden fête—for party purposes —in September."

"If I can help in any way——" said Alys Raeburn.

He thanked her.

"We'll go into that thoroughly, then," she said. The girl's expression seemed to focus the radiant gravity that had informed her looks and tones and movements in the last weeks. Philip Grant was more than usually courteous in his manner and restless in his movements.

When he got up to go he turned to Helena, who was sitting with her arm round John's shoulders. Alys Raeburn saw Philip's expression. She accepted and disliked what she saw. But she wasn't surprised. Only her manner to Philip had a quality which made him say to Helena, as they drove out of the gates:

"Mrs. Raeburn dislikes me."

The girl didn't answer. If she heard she wasn't interested.

"Well," said Vernon. "I suppose this is our last bathe."

Helena was lying prone in the grass leaning on her elbows, her chin resting on her hands.

"I'm sorry you're going," she said.

"I'm glad you're sorry," he muttered, pulling up a handful of grasses. Her indifferent voice and her sphinx-like attitude made him feel isolated, and somehow foredoomed. But he meant to fight, he meant to speak to her, if it was only to get a few more of her clear measured sentences to keep and torment himself with. So he went straight at it, looking at her hair and her shoulders, and not at her face (because he couldn't stand seeing her face at this moment).

"Would you ever marry me?—if you married at all?"

The shoulders stayed still. His stare followed the curves of her body with a slow desireless passion. The silence of the warm grass pressed round his senses, choking and dizzying him . . . At last he looked at her profile, and she was saying: "No—Vernon," without moving her lips.

He said after a time: "I didn't expect any other answer . . . I knew you couldn't possibly care for me. I——" he went on, he heard his own voice going on, exasperated by her quiet, which said, better than words would, that she was just utterly, absolutely indifferent, but, of course, just a little sorry for him. "I never really imagined you would."

There was the faintest movement of her profile. Her parted lips closed. Her eyelids lifted as if she were trying to see a longer distance. He said: "I've been in love with you since that afternoon here—when I motored you home afterwards. . . . You aren't like anyone I've ever seen . . ." He heard his own voice sharp and stupid and going on. He stopped. He went on: "I didn't mean to speak to you at all. Then I wanted to tell you before I went. I'm not good enough for you anyway——"

She said: “That isn’t true. But I can’t love you.”

“I told you. . . . I didn’t expect it. Shall I say that—the offer’s left open—indefinitely?”

She turned her head and looked at him.

“I don’t understand.”

He said: “I mean I’ll always be there.”

She understood. She said:

“Didn’t Philip tell you? Since you’re his friend?”

“Philip?”

“Philip is my lover.” She gave him simply the explanation of her indifference.

He managed to say at last:

“I’m glad you told me.”

“So you see,” she said, still with that measured, torturing serenity, “my life is decided—already.”

“I see.” He got up. “Yes. I see.” So that was why she’d changed in the last month. And somehow her happiness and ecstasy—whatever it was she felt, had infected her manner to himself, so that he’d even begun to hope, against his own reason, that she’d get to care for him in the end.

She looked up at him. She understood that he was in pain. Some inexplicable sense of kinship with his youth made her say:

“I wish that you didn’t love me.”

He muttered: “I expect it’s a kind of punishment.”

“Why?” She got up and put on her wrap.

“I had an—affair with your sister.”

“Marigold?” She said the name without even an emphasis of contempt. She added vaguely: “I believe she once told me so.”

He could think nothing but Philip—Philip—Philip: never getting beyond the name and his picture of Philip, with his restless tawny glance and courteous manner, and fastidious English clothes.

“What’ll happen?” he asked.

“Happen?”

“Will—he marry you?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “Sometime, I suppose—if we want to have children,” she added, as if she’d surprised a new emotion in herself. “But now . . .”

He saw that the present satisfied her.

VI

Piers came out on to the lawn. His mother and Philip and Helena were having tea under the copper beech and his mother said: "Here he is at last. Did you have a breakdown?" (He'd said he would arrive for luncheon.)

He said: "No," and kissed her and kissed Helena and sat down with them. Philip gave him a cigarette. He said: "Where's Marigold?"

Philip lit a cigarette for himself. "She left on Wednesday. She's gone to Scotland for ten days."

Piers refused a cup of tea. His mother said: "Now that you've got a little holiday you must try and eat regular meals."

He agreed.

He thought: Helena is quiet. She hasn't noticed me and is thinking of Philip. Philip knows this and he is trying to make me think, by telling me whom Marigold is staying with ("—the Gavin Richardsons," said Philip, "until the fifth and then she's going to the Densburghs'——")—is trying to forestall any perception I may have of what has happened. But as he talks he wonders if I know—if I see—for he is acute, though without instinctive understanding. And I see . . . that the staleness and sadness have gone out of him; that the elegant mansion which is Philip has lights in the windows . . . I see that Helena has grown nervously alive. Her beauty is warmer and deeper; and her serenity, which was lovely as the blank eyelids of a statue, is stained by a new wisdom. Her certainties have shifted from her mind to her spirit. Her mind is in shadow and her spirit and body are alight . . . She watches Philip . . . But Mother doesn't see her expression: and Philip is afraid to. She listens to Philip; and her very stillness has the rhythm of the music that it is in her . . .

His mother was telling him about her portrait which Paul Bernard had finished. She said: "He's coming down again to do a drawing of Helena. He wants to do one as a present for me."

Piers said: "He did rather a good drawing of Elizabeth Sinclair last week. Just a slight thing, but very like her."

His mother said: "How terribly Elizabeth has gone off since she was last home. I met her at lunch at the Sichleys' in July, and thought she looked so —worn. She was such a pretty girl."

He said: "I've asked them down while I'm here. Will the twenty-first week-end be all right?"

Edith Marvell turned her dazed parrot-like stare on her son.

"Yes. Perfectly all right," she said with a warmth caused by curiosity.

Helena watched a thin moon rise above the cedar tree; and her happiness soaked through and through her until she could feel it beating quietly with the beat of her pulses.

Philip, in his room, smoking a last cigarette, taking up a book and putting it down again, glancing out at the night and drawing the blind down, thought: "In ten minutes I shall be with her again. I shall be with her alone. And the bothers of the last three days—Miss Blanchard ill, Sichley's cables from Canada—will be absurd and unreal . . ."

When he went in she was by the window. He went over to her and took her in his arms, she held close to him, laughing a sweet drowsy laughter that seemed to bubble up from a hidden crystalline gaiety of soul.

He said: "The three days seemed interminable."

"They seemed long, to me."

He said: "By yesterday evening I began to wonder if I was really even coming back to you . . . if the whole thing hadn't been hallucination."

She said, her cheek against his:

"I knew you would come back. Last night I woke three times to count the hours."

He said: "When I saw you again this morning, I felt—absurd thing to say—I felt shy. You were so lovely."

She didn't speak and he kissed her grave mouth and felt her shiver. When she spoke again it was in a whisper and with an air of uncertainty and detachment, as if she didn't feel altogether responsible for the words:

"I should like to stop the clock now."

He smiled, moved by the emotion that could prompt her fear of time. He said:

"Time is the thing we're all afraid of."

As he spoke the meaning of his light words impressed him. He said: "I wonder if I'd been away three hundred days instead of three, if you'd have forgotten me?"

She shook her head. “How could I forget you?” She looked over his shoulder. The moon was high and carved out of thin gold.

“People do forget each other. The flame dies down; goes out altogether. Love turns to—hate, to boredom, to ‘kindliness.’” He went on, moved by an impulse to torment himself and hurt her.

“One of these days, sooner or later, you’ll marry. You’ll want to marry some deserving young man.”

She didn’t, for a moment, take in his meaning. Then she stepped backwards, staring at his expression, which was half angry and half ironical.

“Why do you say that? I don’t understand. How should I—how could I—want to marry any man?”

“You’re young. I’m middle-aged. You’ve got all life before you, and I’ve got a small futile half of mine. You throw yourself away on me. I’m not worth it. If you had any sense you’d break away now.”

She sat down in the chair by the dressing-table, whispering: “*Philip! What’s the matter?*” And suddenly the mood left him and he saw that he’d hurt her.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it.”

But she sat staring at him, repeating, “*Philip*,” in a whisper.

He said: “Darling, I’m being foolish.” He knelt down by her and took her hand. “But don’t you see that it’s natural for me to torment myself with these ideas, sometimes?”

“But you know that I love you.”

“Yes, I know. I don’t know why you should. But by some fantastic miracle you do. Please forget what I said.”

She said: “A fortnight ago Vernon Haskett asked me to marry him. And I like him. And we’re friends, and he’s young and beautiful, isn’t he? But I don’t love him?”

“Vernon asked you?”

“Yes.”

His momentary jealousy changed to an enchanted contemplation of her beauty that any man would want.

“You told him you didn’t love him?”

"Yes."

"Was he very—cut up?"

"I explained to him that I loved you and that you were my lover, and so I couldn't marry him."

"You explained—that?"

"Yes."

He got up. "You said to Vernon Haskett that you and I were lovers?"

"Yes."

He didn't answer. He began walking about the room. "How *could* you say that? How could you betray to Vernon—something that—is only between you and me?"

She went on sitting in the chair by the dressing-table, watching him pace to and fro. He demanded:

"Why should you *want* to—speak of it?"

She said, startled: "I told Vernon because it was the reason I couldn't love him."

"You needn't have told him."

She said: "I don't think you understand . . . You told me once that we must keep it secret for a time, from people in general; and from Marigold and Mother, who would 'cheapen' our love for each other. But Vernon's different. He loves me and I trust him. Just as Piers too——"

"You haven't told Piers?"

"No. But Piers would understand."

He snapped out: "Please don't tell him."

He paused, trying to reason out the panic that had seized him. She'd told Vernon. He knew Vernon. Vernon would hate him now, but never tell. So that didn't matter.

"Have you told anyone else?"

"No." She got up, facing him. And he was calm enough to take in the movement of her hands, scarcely lifted from her sides and dropped again, as he said: "I don't understand what I've done."

He began pacing about again.

"I feel such a brute. The whole thing's so infinitely more complex than you can imagine. Until now we haven't had to bother about these—externals. Now the racket begins."

"What's complex?" she asked.

He said: "Life. The world. Human relationships."

"But is our—'relationship' complex?"

He came close to her and seized her hand and kissed it. She didn't move. He said:

"Nothing is simpler—than our love for each other. You've done that. You've given a—sort of magnificence to the whole thing. You've made it unquestionably right and lovely and complete. I realise that, as you can't. The complications, thank God, aren't between us. They're external. They're matters of public opinion and society and so forth: conventional tyrannies—which one can despise and hate and laugh at and yet not escape them." He let go her hand. She saw that he was trembling. She said: "Have a cigarette."

He looked at her oddly. "Not here. You don't smoke in your bedroom." He added: "Do you think I don't hate subterfuge—for us of all people? D'you think that I don't hate myself for skulking along to your room like this, for playing a double part—for asking you, who are the very soul of truth and dignity—to play the part of the woman in any hole-and-corner 'liaison'? And all this, because I'm married to a woman who——" he stopped himself. "All this because you and I aren't married."

She waited, thinking. Then she said: "Shall we have to marry, then?" She added: "I'm not so strange as I was. And it seems to me that one convention is as worthy as another. It would be better to marry and have done with secrecy—if that's the alternative."

"And Marigold?"

"Don't you just 'divorce' each other?"

He said: "Listen, Helena—darling—listen and try and understand. I can't divorce Marigold because, although I have grounds for doing so, I can never prove them. She's clever and careful. (You remember that time she and Stemp went to Birmingham. I put a man on to that. She stayed in a different hotel, under her proper name—as my wife.) If our—relation were to become known Marigold could divorce me. (If she had enough money she wouldn't mind doing that at all.) But if she divorced me, my public position and certainly my future in politics would be worth very little. Public opinion

isn't as strict as it was—we've passed the days of Parnell and Dilke—anyway, in theory. But the fact remains that if I were divorced and married you—my wife's sister—a kind of atmosphere of—goodness knows what unpleasantness would hang about my name—and yours. It wouldn't matter in private life. Goodness knows I don't care from any ordinary motive. Nor would I even indulge in a romantic talk about 'smirching' your name. Anyone who sees you can see what you are. The thing's on a different plane. Try and understand me, darling . . ."

She said: "I am trying."

He said: "I'm not ambitious. Try to believe that. I think you know me well enough to believe it isn't that—that weighs with me now. Nor would I weigh ambition, if I had it, against you.—You, who've made me live again. It isn't that. But here's the problem. My work, as far as it goes, is political. Call it a job. And say that it's a job I'm good at—and may do good with. At this time, with the past blown to bits, the future blank, and the present cracking—there are very few men who are capable of any constructive action. So far, through fourteen uphill years I've been serving the apprenticeship (simply an elaborate obstruction of activity) which our present political system enforces on our younger and more energetic politicians. They've got to sit still (as I've sat still) and watch the old drivelling guard take an unconsciously long and misspent time a-dying . . . Now, in the next few years, I may begin to get something done. One can't reckon chances exactly, but it's possible that after the next election . . ."

She made out carefully: "If you married me, as things are, you might not be elected?"

He was relieved that she saw. There had been nothing in her way of listening to assure him that she saw anything but baffling unreason.

He said: "Exactly. As things are."

She said: "To—get your work done you must—conform to your electorate—first?"

"You put it very well."

"And if they knew that you left a woman you didn't love to marry a woman you loved, they wouldn't elect you? . . ."

"They mightn't. My opponents would make it difficult. Your being Marigold's sister adds to the 'scandalous' aspect."

He took in the unresentful and puzzled thought that lay behind her: "Does that make it—scandalous?" And then the break of her thought and the quick child-like despair of her, "Philip, how can all this be real? How can I spoil your work? How can your future depend on a conspiracy—between us?"

He spoke in a quick low voice, making his persuasiveness and his passion for her inform his haphazard sentences. "D'you think I want a conspiracy, Helena? D'you think I want to play a part? To hide everything that I feel for you and live in open lying respectability with Marigold? D'you think I like being separated from you by every chance engagement, by every convention, by any trivial circumstance that may make it necessary for us to seem separate and indifferent? D'you think I don't want you beside me for every minute of time, for the rest of my life? Do you think that this predicament is easy for me? I've lain awake before this knowing that this moment would come, when this question of 'secrecy' and its fantastic importance might come between us. I knew, well enough, that the idea of going on as we are now, might shake your belief in me—." She made a movement towards him. "—That when this question arose you might, easily enough, as you do now, ask yourself if I really loved you, if it was worth this muddle—above all, if the truth of our love for each other could be reconciled with the untruth demanded by appearances."

She said: "I do believe you love me," as if she were speaking to herself.

He spoke more slowly. "How can you, of all people, understand the half-truths that prompt our actions, and the emblazoned lies that justify them? How can you see that the best of us, above all in my job, must deal with a debased currency, if we're to deal at all? A conventional character and false promises are the politician's cap and bells: they give him licence to deal, sometimes, with realities."

She said: "Shall we go on then? As we are now?"

He took the hand she held out to him. He said:

"Have you been unhappy?"

She seemed to look back through a vista of time before she answered. "To-night, before you came in, I knew that I was perfectly happy."

He whispered: "You'll forget this, won't you? What does anything matter except that we love each other? . . . You'll forget, won't you, Helena?"

She held close to him and took his kisses with a new slow intensity, and didn’t answer his question.

VII

Vernon stepped straight out of the scarlet-panelled elevator into Fan's familiar hall, with its frescoes of exotic birds and yellow-skinned women.

Fan was in her studio.

She was in black chiffon pyjamas and she wore sandals showing her scarlet toe-nails. The little curtain of smooth gilt hair fell one side of her face, while you saw her ear the other side. She smelled perfumy and delicious; and she smiled, waking up her perfect features and flickering her marvellous lashes that didn't need any Rimmel. She said with her "English accent" that sounded so funny to come back to:

"Well, darling, I thought you'd forgotten me. When I heard your voice just now on the 'phone I thought I must be crazy."

"No," he said. "I'm quite real." He was nervous and she wasn't, or else she hid it well. She hadn't answered his letter when he wrote breaking off, and he hadn't a notion of how she'd taken it. And racketing round those last weeks he'd suddenly thought about her. . . .

She said: "You're not looking awfully fit, darling."

(It didn't mean anything that she called him darling, because she did that to everybody.)

"—been drinking?" she asked. "Sit down there, darling."

"Not excessively."

She sat down opposite him, wriggling her brilliant toe-nails and pushing back the curtain of hair with the gesture that had been noted in every gossip column.

She threw him a cigarette and lit one for herself.

"When did you get back?"

"About six weeks ago."

"Who's the girl you fell for over there?"

"There wasn't one."

She gave her musical, depressing little laugh.

"Don't tell *me*. . . ."

He said: “Women always think that.”

“My dear Vernon, women are nearly always right.” Her smile struck him as getting as near being slow and seductive as Fan allowed herself. (For she believed in spiritual affinities and bodily urges, but disapproved of flirtation, which was “experimenting with fires beyond our control.” She talked a special kind of rot of her own when she got going. . . .) “What have you come to see me for?” she asked.

He pushed a corner of the rug with his heel.

“Just to be friendly. I hoped you’d see me.”

She was silent. Then she leaned forward and cupped her pointed chin in her hands and looked into his eyes so that he felt irritated and dimly troubled, remembering the feel of those lashes against his cheek and the way her hands had of sliding slowly round the back of his neck.

She said: “I couldn’t answer your letter. . . .” She added: “I just felt, Vernon, that something had come between you and me.”

He muttered: “There wasn’t anything.”

“But there may be,” she went on, “some day.” She broke off carefully, gave a sad little smile, threw away her cigarette and lit another, saying briskly: “Anyway, tell me what you’ve been doing.”

(Fan must be pretty uncertain of him to ask him to talk about himself. Those pyjamas of hers were attractive. She was always more successful with her body than her mind.) He said:

“I’ve done what I meant to do. I’ve learned what I meant to—only rather more and rather less. Platitude—the more you learn the less you know, you know!”

“Didn’t you just *feel* you belonged in England? Didn’t you feel at *home* there?” she asked, getting up and standing about.

He said “No,” irritated, as he always was, by Anglophile affectation. “I don’t feel I *belong* anywhere except where my work is—and my work’s here.”

But he went on to discuss “the English.” He said: “The thing that gives the English their queer kind of dignity is that they’re content to be themselves. And that’s the one thing the ‘Anglosnob’ American doesn’t learn.”

She murmured: “Are you being ironical at *me*, Vernon Haskett?”

"No, I didn't mean to be personal."

"I believe you *did*," she said, and he got one of her flickering glances and arch-sentimental smiles, and she came and perched on the arm of his chair, saying: "You were always rather brutal, Vernon, weren't you?"

He couldn't remember he'd ever been brutal with her, only just waited until the damned stupid things she said grew sort of hazy because her body was so lovely. . . . And in her cheap soul she knew that, and that was what she was getting at now, sitting near him so he only had to move his arm. . . .

"You always bullied me," she said—and: "Is that an English tie?" fingering his tie, bending to judge its design so that her face was close to his and he only had to move his face close to hers. . . .

"No," he said. "No, it isn't." He took her hand, lifted it carefully off his collar-bones, and laid it on her own knee; and left it there. Her expression came off like a mask: and if he'd wanted anything to steady him, it was this change in her from the lovely woman stooping to folly—to the coquette in an ugly temper. For in a second she was in the middle of the room cursing him and pushing back her bit of gilt hair from her contorted little face and stamping and sobbing and calling him names.

And he got up, saying:

"I'm sorry, Fan. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." But she just went on saying a lot of filthy things; and he wondered, in justice to her, if he'd come this afternoon expecting her to seduce him. Very likely he had.

But he was glad to breathe the air down the street, to hurry along Park Avenue without looking round until he'd got the Grand Central between them. . . .

Then he stopped and stood wondering if he'd go off to Washington to his sister's and see the children and sit talking to her and Johann until midnight about etchings and the child-mind and the future of Europe. (Wondering this and remembering Fan's "You needn't be 'heroic,' Vernon, for if you don't take something, then you just don't want it." Which was pretty near the truth. For he didn't want her. He didn't want anything. . . .)

He found himself looking at flowers in a glass window, and went nearer. Flowers always fascinated him, though he didn't know half their names. He liked their beauty and anonymity, and didn't want to know them any more than he wanted to know the women he'd admired at the Opera in Paris, where his sense of their "foreignness" made them seem more exquisite than they were.

He went close to the window. Then he had an idea and went in. He said to the man:

"Can you cable flowers?" remembering that Walter Stuyvesant, Fan's brother, had done that when some girl of his was in a show in London.

Lady Marvell went into the hall and looked at the box a second time. When Marigold came in from tennis, she said to her:

"Someone has sent Helena flowers—by special delivery. A messenger came down with them."

Marigold went into the hall and looked at the box and came back.

"How thrilling. A hidden young man, after all."

Jimmy Cloud came in looking red and shiny with exercise. Marigold said to him:

"The latest thrill. Helena's got a young man who sends her flowers."

Jimmy Cloud said: "What? Hard-hearted Helena with a beau?" He glanced through the open door at the large box. "Does her well, too."

Marigold said: "She's out with Philip. As usual."

"Dangerous sign when they begin to like 'em young," said Jimmy.

Marigold laughed.

"It isn't that with Philip. He's a sort of—who was the saint who had arrows stuck all over him like cloves?"

"St. Antony," said Jimmy. "Tight-laced Tony."

"All the same," said Lady Marvell, "I don't think he ought to take Helena about quite so much. One or two people have said something to me lately. You see, ever since we've been down here they've ridden together every day, and they went to Silsbury even, and if people begin to talk in the constituency. . . ."

Marigold cut her short. "My dear Mother, nobody's more careful and cautious about his reputation than Philip. He always knows exactly what he's doing—even if he pretends to himself that he doesn't."

Helena came in, carrying the box.

"Well," said Marigold, "who's the young man?"

Helena began undoing the string, saying: "Who's sent me flowers, d'you think?" She took out a card from among the red and white carnations. "It's *Vernon*! Aren't they lovely?" and she turned to Philip, who had just come in. "Aren't they lovely, Philip?" she said, her colour quickened with pleasure.

"Young Haskett!" said Lady Marvell.

"Vernon?" said Marigold. "*Vernon* sent them?"

"I suppose he ordered them by cable," said Philip, examining the flowers.

Marigold took up a red one, snapped a length of stalk off and pinned it to her white dress. "Very attentive of Vernon."

Helena remembered what Vernon had said about himself and Marigold, and understood her sister's temper.

"How very charming of him," said Edith Marvell, remembering the flowers that had been sent her when she was a girl, and looking at Helena with a new gentleness and hope.

Jimmy Cloud bent and sniffed Marigold's carnation, saying: "I think I must start sending flowers. Rather jolly idea—if it didn't cost so much."

Philip watched Helena put the card in the pocket of her riding-breeches and take up the flowers. She seemed pleased by Vernon's flowers; but not surprised. She said that she was going to put them in water, and went out of the room.

When she'd gone Lady Marvell said to Marigold: "You know, it never struck me that young Haskett was at all attracted by Helena."

"He wasn't."

"My dear child, he wouldn't send her flowers from New York if he wasn't interested."

Marigold turned her smart enamelled-looking head towards her mother and said, without taking her cigarette out of her mouth:

"It's just an American way of repaying hospitality. You send a chivalrous offering to the daughter of the house."

But her mother wasn't discouraged.

"No. I'm sure there's something in it. And she seemed really quite excited to have them. She's such an unemotional girl that that meant quite a lot with her. . . . I must say he's a very nice young man. . . ." She took up her

paper again. But when Jimmy Cloud had gone she looked from Philip to Marigold, saying: "It would really be delightful if there was anything in it. . . . One feels it would make all the difference to Helena—if she were to get married. She's so repressed, isn't she? You know, I was thinking the other day—how curious it is—that she seems to be one of those girls with plenty of looks and no *instinct* to be attractive . . . (what the papers call 'sex appeal'). I was talking to Paul Bernard about her the other day, and he was saying that there's nothing of the ordinary *Femme à hommes* about her."

Marigold glanced at her husband.

"Is there, Philip?"

But he didn't hear her; and Lady Marvell was saying to him: "Of course you know young Haskett so well, don't you, Philip? You always liked him so much."

"Yes," he said, "very much indeed. He's very able."

VIII

Paul Bernard was drawing Helena in the library. Philip, sitting out on the lawn reading the morning papers, could see Bernard's back framed in the open window. His wide, thin shoulders and small head were bent towards the easel. Occasionally he talked, though Philip couldn't hear what he said. Helena wasn't visible, but twice he heard her laugh. The sound left him disturbed; and resentful of Bernard.

Bernard had taken three days over the drawing: though he'd meant to take two: said that "with such a subject" the temptation was to try for something more than—as he'd put it to Philip—one of the "resemblances, ironical but flattering by which he gained his living." It was to be finished to-day. And Bernard was going this evening.

Philip put down *The Times* and took up the *Manchester Guardian*. . . . He reflected that Marigold amused herself by assuming a flirtation between Helena and himself. Last night she'd asked him whether he thought Helena more attractive than his own wife. (More "attractive"! . . .) And stayed in his room to sit on the edge of the bed and tell him that she was getting bored with Jimmy Cloud: and that if he, Philip, were a little less "distrait" she would give up her "young men" and be the perfect wife. That was Marigold's policy—an elaborate frankness that just left out the truth.

Again he heard Helena laugh. She hadn't laughed, with him, since that scene in her room a fortnight ago. When he went away to Silsbury, last week, she'd been sad and quiet at his going. And when he came back, the next day, she was strange when they were first alone, at first letting him kiss her; then holding on to him and repeating his name. When he asked her if she were still troubled, she said, "No—no—no," growing quiet again; but looking at him as if she were trying to decipher something hidden in his expression.

Staring at the leader page, he heard Bernard's voice:

"Mr. Grant?"

And hers:

"Philip, come and see."

He got up and went in. She was standing beside Bernard by the easel. For a second Philip wondered if the change in her mightn't just as well

(what more likely?) be due to a change in her feelings. . . . Bernard was attractive to women. He said:

"It's done, is it?" and went and stood beside them.

Bernard asked: "Do you like it?"

The drawing was in red chalk. A profile turned away, the brow and eyelid and cheek outlined against an empty white background. Perhaps the coralline clearness of the medium, perhaps the fortuitous grace of the pose, as much as the fine assurance of Bernard's drawing, gave the sketch its quality of touching vitality. To Philip the shape of the head, closely bound and winged by its own curls, the young softness of the nape of the neck, the strength of the jaw, the hidden expression of the temple and eyelid, recreated Helena, making her again what she'd been to him at the beginning—the symbol of a world more real than the reality. In this recaptured strangeness she seemed more alive than the girl beside him. An obscure instinct in him compared the portrait, pure-lined in space, with the woman (she'd seemed a girl then—a woman now) who held his heart and senses. He said, stepping nearer the easel:

"I'd like to have that!"

Bernard looked from his sketch to Helena.

"I am glad you like it. But it's very discouraging. I cannot do justice to the original." His look stayed for a second on Helena's face. He said: "Ghirlandajo might have painted her face; but Rembrandt would have understood her soul."

Philip turned to look at her in the light of Bernard's attention.

And as Piers came in, he heard Philip say:

"—Rembrandt's too dark and heavy altogether. Sargent would have done her well."

Piers examined the sketch. He said:

"It's brilliant. You've got that classical repose; and yet it's so alive." He asked his sister: "D'you like it?"

She looked at it indifferently; then at Philip.

"You like it, Philip, don't you?"

He had been looking at it again, and said lightly:

"I envy Bernard the understanding that made him able to do it."

Piers saw Helena's move to Philip's side; and Philip's nervous turn away from her. And Philip's expression of attentiveness and latent misery as Bernard began to argue that a good portrait-painter need not be a judge of character at all. . . .

Vernon's carnations died the morning of the fête; and as Helena threw them away she thought of Vernon; remembering their friendship; wishing she hadn't hurt him. Several times during the last weeks she'd gone back to their times together, as she went back to episodes in her life on the island—turning from the present to breathe a firmness and clearness out of the past. Vernon was definite, as the direction of a wind, or the coming of a season. She felt at rest with him.

Since the flowers came Philip had asked her if she cared for Vernon—in the same tone that he'd asked her, last night, if she found Paul Bernard attractive. And when, at last, she couldn't stop herself crying, he'd taken her in his arms, saying he was unforgivably brutal, and asked her to forgive him for all the things in him she didn't understand.

She'd lain thinking of these things after he'd gone. She had accepted his reasons for the secrecy that she hated, going on. She reflected that she had grown used, already, to a common and elaborately conventionalised disregard for truth. In a country where people fed deliberately on distorted news and elected their rulers by prejudices founded on a steady assimilation of these distortions, it didn't seem strange that they should like their rulers to be as hypocritical as themselves. She had got beyond wondering that "the Public" should immolate itself to "public opinion." A people bred without love and educated to fear knowledge weren't likely—Philip had said that often—to gain judgment at the polling booths. She saw that Philip must accept the machinery and conventions of his career. She'd made herself see this. If their relation must be secret, she could accept that. . . . But seeing this and accepting all this, she couldn't interpret Philip's behaviour.—His contradictory moods, his small jealousies, and, more than anything, his nervous fear that their relationship might be found out, bewildered her. Since their relationship was right: and its secrecy was right, she couldn't understand how he could feel himself, as he somehow did, so dreadfully wrong and uncertain. When he said, as he'd said yesterday, "How much longer can this go on?" he seemed to tear down the very condition he'd made to protect them. . . . When he said: "Sooner or later I shall have to throw it all up," she was wrenched by a despair in him that she couldn't explain. . . .

And this morning he'd said: "Be careful at this wretched fête. Everyone'll be there," and then said abruptly: "If we could only get away from all these sickening pretences. . . ."

The Silsbury Town Band played selections from *The Mikado* and *Rose Marie* on the terrace above the rockery.

Mrs. Thealby herself was in charge of the embroidery stall, while Major Thealby ran the coconut-shies on the croquet-lawn, encouraging timid clients with such exhortations as "Come along now. Six a penny. Come and have a shot. Every one of 'em's the head of a Bolshy. . . ." One of the Thealby girls and Mrs. Raeburn were in charge of the tea-tent; the other had an ice-cream barrow, and did a brisk trade at the end of the lower lawn, where competitors for the races—"Three-Legged" and "Sack" and "Egg and Spoon"—stood about in groups, panting from their exertions, or waiting their turn.

The races, run in a complicated series of "heats," were being organised by Lady Marvell, who, dressed in white tweed and pearls, a yellow felt hat cocked over one eye and a list in hand, showed an authority and efficiency which made Marigold say to Philip that she had always thought her mother would have made him a better wife. . . .

Marigold herself wandered from stall to stall, and one side-show to another. She was accompanied by Harold Stemp, whom she'd picked up again at Oliver Devereux's dress show the day before. (He had some impalpable and remunerative job there.) By half-past four she boasted to Philip that she had had her fortune told, guessed the weight of a cake, pegged an invisible ten-shilling note, bought two hour-glasses and a fireproof teapot, patronised Mrs. Thealby to the extent of a green wool bed-jacket and a piano-cover embroidered with pansies. She said: "Now I must go and get tea off Mrs. Raeburn."

The Silsbury Town Band was playing *The Barcarole*. Some spots of rain fell, and Harold put up his umbrella. Miss Blanchard, in pale blue *crêpe de Chine* and a fawn coat, came up to Philip saying that Mrs. Thealby hoped that Philip would have tea in the house before the speeches. Philip said that he would come in after he had played clock golf.

Captain Danesfort was in charge of the golf. Mrs. Raeburn's grandchildren, Anne and John, came running up while Philip was "putting," saying that they had lost the Island Lady: did Philip know where she was? As they spoke Helena came round a clump of bushes and explained that she

had been guessing the weight of the baby pig. Anne said: "If you get the baby pig, will you make a ham-sandwich out of it for me?" Captain Danesfort said: "Come and have a shot at this, Miss Marvell."

Philip moved on and bought two tickets for a lottery from a little girl with crimped hair and no eyebrows. He heard his mother-in-law's voice announcing: "Now the finals of the Wheelbarrow Race. . . . Mr. Iggulden and Miss Tanner, Mr. and Mrs. Robson, Mr. Sparrow and Miss Rymill. . . ." He saw Robson getting down on all fours and his wife grabbing his ankles and lifting them from the ground. Robson had already won the Sack Race. His Socialist principles didn't seem to prevent exertion, if not for, at any rate in connection with, the opposite party. Or perhaps he took a sinister pride in carrying off the trophies! . . . The group outside the palmist's tent were putting up their umbrellas. The band was playing *Tea for Two*. He met the Thealbys' golden Labrador with a white money-box strapped on to his back. The dog came up and licked his hand, and he read "BRITONS NEVER SHALL BE SLAVES" in blue letters, and the address of an anti-Communist organisation underneath it.

By five o'clock the rain had set in. The races had to stop, though Lady Marvell continued to command, in a white mackintosh, up to the last minute. People crowded into the tents. The band moved into the marquee tent, which had a notice "DANCING 7 O'CLOCK" hung by the entrance, and Major Thealby, disconsolately abandoning his coconuts, arranged that the speeches should take place there at half-past five. He said: "At any rate, we can get them all in there, and they'll have to listen." He, Philip, and Captain Danesfort had whiskies and sodas shut in Major Thealby's study, avoiding the crowd in the drawing-room and hall. Captain Danesfort said: "I expect it'll clear up later," but Major Thealby nodded significantly to his barometer and coughed and lit his pipe.

When they went down to the tent the band was playing *Do Shrimps Make Good Mothers?* and the crowd were dancing and slithering and treading down the grass. The air was warm and dank and smelt of wet canvas and mackintoshes and women's hair and men's mothball-kept Sunday suits. The band seemed glad to rest and let Philip, and the Thealbys and Lord Silsbury, who had just arrived in a 1912 de Dion Bouton, take their chairs on the rickety platform.

Lord Silsbury made a speech beginning: "We all know you have better things to do this afternoon than listen to our speeches. . . ." and ended up with a story about an Irishman, told in admirable dialect. Major Thealby made some curt remarks. His afternoon's enthusiasm seemed to have spent

itself on his coconut-shies. Philip made as short a speech as possible, and realised when he sat down and everyone was clapping, that he'd made a good one. A man at the back of the tent asked him a question, and he spoke again.

When he was getting down from the platform several of the audience crowded up to speak to him, and as he greeted one of them he made a false step over the edge of the platform and slipped down, putting out his hand to save himself, and fell on his wrist. He got up cursing, and Mrs. Thealby, who'd seen what happened, cried out: "Have you hurt your wrist?"

Helena was behind her. She saw Philip's pallor. She pushed through the crowd with a peremptory: "Let me see, please."

Then as she got to Philip she repeated in a different voice, with an inflection that made the women standing round look at her quickly—and then at Philip:

"Let me see, my dear."

Mrs. Thealby caught her tone, too. Philip saw her look at Helena and himself and then at her daughter. He drew his arm away, saying:

"My dear child, you can't possibly be any use" . . . and went to Mrs. Thealby. He said: "If you don't mind, I'll just go into the house—it's nothing, really. I'll put the wrist under the cold tap . . ." And got out of the tent.

But when he was half-way across the lawn Helena came up beside him.

"Philip. Please let me look at that wrist. I know quite a lot about those things. . . ."

He looked at her through the veil of rain.

"You little fool," he said. And feeling the pain of his wrist, repeated: "You utter little fool! Didn't you realise what you were doing just now? Didn't you see that every single being in that damned tent heard exactly the way you spoke to me—including Mrs. Thealby? You might just as well have got up on the platform and announced our affair to the whole lot of them! . . ."

She walked more and more slowly beside him until she was dropping behind; and he said back over his shoulder: "The only thing you can do now is to keep away from me—for the rest of the afternoon. Don't come back in my car. Go back with your mother——"

He went into the house. Helena stood watching the door where he'd gone in.

Alys Raeburn found her still standing there. She had been in the tent, seen the episode of Philip's fall, and seen Helena run across the lawn after him. She said, putting a coat round the girl's shoulders: "You'll get soaked, my child," then, taking her arm, she added: "I think you'd better come home with me——" and saw that after a minute the girl understood her words and accepted them.

"The car's in the drive. We'll go straight there." She took her arm and they skirted the house.

When they were in the car Helena shut her eyes. Alys Raeburn said:

"Look here, my dear, would you like a little brandy? Are you all right?"

The girl opened her eyes; shook her head; a very far-off amusement lit her face.

"No, thank you. I'm not all right. But I don't want any brandy."

IX

Elizabeth and William arrived on Saturday afternoon in the car that they had hired for their leave, which William referred to as "the Barouche."

Helena was still away at Cleaveden, and only Piers and his mother were in the house. But Piers had invited neighbours to every meal so that he shouldn't have to listen to William's opinions and laugh at his jokes.

Lady Marvell devoted herself to Elizabeth all Saturday afternoon, taking her for a walk and sitting with her in a corner of the library and asking her questions about people she knew, and knew by repute, who had been out in Cairo. Piers, having left William in the billiard-room with the Danesforts and Major Thealby, came and lay on the rug at his mother's feet and watched Elizabeth's face as she tried to satisfy her hostess's demand for gossip. He imagined a vulture swooping for carrion and finding hazel-nuts. Elizabeth's small friendly facts were no meat for his mother's plump, ravening curiosity. Where she hovered over a disastrous marriage, Elizabeth assured her that indeed the couple were quite happy; wherever she smelt betrayals, debts, perversions, Elizabeth could only assure her that there was no cause for sympathy or suspicion.

Towards six o'clock Edith Marvell rose unsatisfied, and proposed bridge. William would be delighted, Elizabeth said. They went off to the billiard-room to find him, and Piers was left alone.

A few minutes later Elizabeth came back and said that William and the Danesforts had made a four with his mother.

Piers said: "Then at least I shall have you alone for an hour."

She didn't answer. She sat down in the Hepplewhite chair by the lamp and took out her sewing—a child's blue dress that she was smocking in white. He said:

"William tells me that you sail in three weeks."

She said: "Yes," her head bent over her work.

"And you'll be away for how long?"

"Two years, anyway."

"You don't mind?"

She threaded a needle. "It wouldn't be any use minding."

He threw his cigarette into the fire and lit another.

"Because England expects every woman not to mind anything."

The needle was threaded. She took up the child's dress.

"What's the use of cheap cynicism?" she said.

The phrase surprised him.

"No use at all. Nor are cheap dramatics. But all the same, I wish I could carry you off by force in an immense—very expensive—car; and just shoot William when he followed, all outraged honour, in another very expensive car . . . and damn well force you to live with me in very expensive sin—with cheval glasses everywhere and lace on all the sheets . . . I should feel better perhaps."

When she answered, she said:

"I hate you to talk like that."

"D'you think I enjoy it?"

She shook her head. He couldn't see her face. The top of her head looked calm. He said: "If I could feel that you'd ever cared at all for me——"

She stopped sewing, but didn't look up.

"I'm very fond of you."

He said: "Fond of me—as you are of anyone you've once undertaken to like. You like me because you once liked me. You keep to your friendships as you keep your marriage vows, and as you fulfil your maternal obligations, because you think it's right, not because you really care——"

She stopped him.

"What you're saying isn't true. . . . You live among people who treat their marriage, and their children and their friendship very—lightly. That wouldn't be natural in me. . . ." She looked up with a stiff, flushed face. "I know you think I'm 'smug' and 'conventional' . . . and I know I'm not amusing." She hesitated. "I couldn't naturally discuss William with you; and it seems to me pretty obvious I should love my children. . . . But I should like you to believe that when I like people it *isn't* any feeling of obligation that binds me to them; it is just that I like them." The flush had gone out of her face.

"You mean you like me?"

"Yes." She began sewing again, drawing the needle through slowly.

He said: "That summer, my last spring and summer, at Oxford, you were a little in love with me? Weren't you?"

She said: "What's the sense of discussing that now?"

"No sense at all. But if I could even be sure that once you had a feeling for me, that wasn't utterly reasonable . . ."

"Please stop this, Piers."

He said: "That day when we lunched at Wytham—d'you remember? And it rained and we walked home through the woods (and the gamekeeper caught us and you smiled him into a good temper) . . . and we got back to my rooms soaking wet and hungry and feeling heavenly . . . weren't you a little in love with me that day?"

"Piers—what's the *use* . . ."

"Perhaps you don't remember. . . . To me it's like yesterday. Only better than yesterday, because it's so fresh and real and unspoiled. I can feel it more than I can ever feel anything that happens now; as if it were all happening again . . . I can feel the dusk beginning in the room, and the smell of our wet clothes, and the fire—And you had pink cheeks and my socks on—and we made scrambled eggs and ate chocolate biscuits and olives—and stood by the window and watched the traffic coming over Magdalen Bridge like dragons' eyes in the dusk. . . . And I was so terribly, terribly in love with you, and didn't dare to touch you. . . ."

"Piers!"

She folded up her sewing carefully and slowly, bending over it. She said:

"I must go and dress."

He didn't try to stop her. He didn't look at her, or see her face as she went out of the room.

They went for a walk on Sunday afternoon while Lady Marvell rested and William went round the putting-course.

They went through the village and up the lane beyond, which wound to the high country between Ditch Edge and King's Norton.

The morning's rain had polished the leaves and blackberries, and washed the sky to a faint green-blue.

At first they didn't talk. Then Elizabeth began a conversation about keeping dogs in Egypt. And she went on to talk about the climate and the garden she'd tried to make, and he could see her with gardening-gloves and a topee trying to build England's green and pleasant land in Jerusalem—or its dusty equivalent. And at one point he asked her:

"Is it worth while—all this? Do you believe in Our Empire when the dust and heat won't leave you alone, and your children get dysentery?"

When she answered, she said:

"The Empire was made by people standing hardships."

"And you think that it's all worth while?—you think that so much petrol and cocoa and cotton wrapped up in a Union Jack is worth any amount of 'hardship'?"

She said: "What's the use of discussing it? Whatever I thought wouldn't make any difference. . . . If you're awfully careful," she added, "you can keep children well——"

They got to the top of the hill and he led her through a gate and on to a grass track which led along the ridge. They could see far across the country, and he pointed out where three counties met. She seemed pleased; and stopped, glancing down over the field that fell steep from the ridge to a stream and bridge far below.

She said: "What a lovely field!"

And he smiled—at her words, at the little vehement turn of her shoulder, at her profile in the faint bright wind. And a sort of gaiety seemed to take hold of her, to light her, to sway her, and she turned to him, her eyes laughing and her lips pressed together, but smiling, like a child's mouth with a secret; and she said, hesitant and a little absurd: "I must run . . ." and then louder, a little defiant: "Do you know, it's years and years and *years* since I've run——" and she was off down the green hill with her hair flaring and her slim legs flying and her shoulders light as wings. And Piers shouted "Wait," but she was half-way down the hill; and he felt the impulse catch him and sway him and tip him forward running down the field after her, the green rising and switching past him on either side, and the wind in his ears, and she was far down toward the stream and the brown hedge in the hollow. . . . And when he got there, his pulses beating, she was laughing and breathing quickly, her cheeks bright pink and her eyes blue and clear and a yellow lock of hair tumbled over her forehead. . . . She was laughing and impudent and like a tall elf with her green jacket and long legs, and she said:

"Oh, *God*, how lovely to run again!"

He could only stare at her, taking in all the betrayals of that sentence, catching hold of her hand and feeling her madly, adorably alive. She didn't take her hand away; but she stopped laughing and said "Piers," still breathing quickly.

"Elizabeth. . . ."

"Piers—Piers, darling"—He thought she was going to laugh again. And suddenly she was in his arms holding on to him and crying with a quiet, dreadful bitterness.

He held her very gently. She went on and on crying. He thought: "Now I know it all. I know that she loved me." He heard her cry: "What a waste of our lives!" and he thought the word "waste" and watched a twig turn in the slow, brown stream. . . .

When she stopped crying he let her go.

They walked home side by side; and when they were in sight of the house, she said:

"I'm so sorry I'm missing your sister this week-end. She sounds so delightful."

X

Alys Raeburn arrived in Eaton Square at half-past nine. She waited for Philip in the drawing-room. When he came in he greeted her with the courtesy that had never charmed her. He looked strained, as if he hadn't been sleeping.

They both stood. She said she preferred to stand. She took off her gloves and accepted a cigarette.

"Now," she said, "we're going right to the point. Aren't we?"

She spoke with brisk suavity, and a flash of the smile that had never charmed him.

" 'The point?' "

She folded her gloves and laid them on the glass table next to the sofa.

"You must have an idea, Mr. Grant—why I'm here."

"I have an idea. Do you mind a cigar?"

"Not at all."

"Please say whatever you like."

She hesitated. "I don't like what I've got to say. Nor will you. You remember that I drove Helena home from that—memorable fête last week?"

"You were so kind."

"And you weren't."

He flushed. Moved across the room and came back. He said: "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"You understand perfectly well."

He said: "My dear Mrs. Raeburn, I simply see that you've come here to —to accuse me of some kind of negligence to my sister-in-law—to whom, anyway, I'm devoted. I know that she's devoted to you, and you to her, but I can't entirely understand——"

She broke in without raising her voice.

"Let's come down to brass tacks. The true thing you've said is that I'm devoted to her. And I think she's fond of me. That's why I'm here. . . . I

know that she's not just your sister-in-law. She's in love with you and you're her lover. Is that clear?"

"What did she say to you?"

"She said nothing to me. Even going back in the car last week. She didn't speak at all."

"Then——?"

"I knew before Vernon left. It wasn't very difficult to see the change in her. And to account for it by the change in—you."

He said: "How, in me?"

She looked him up and down. She could see how attractive he might seem with his mixture of melancholy and vitality and ugliness; with his quiet manner that veneered his restless intelligence. She said: "There was a definite period when you forgot yourself. Then you began to remember yourself again."

He folded his arms.

"You're extremely discerning, Mrs. Raeburn."

"Not extremely. But I've lived a long time."

"You never liked me. You haven't come to tell me simply what you know about me?"

Her expression changed. Her black brows relaxed. She sat down looking past him out of the window.

"I want to help her." She spoke to herself and then looked up at him suddenly. "I don't want her—broken up—She's a very great woman; the beginning, anyway, of a great woman. There are some experiences that make; others that kill. I don't want her killed."

Philip was silent. He was angry and afraid, but he was moved by her words. He said:

"I don't want to—break her. Do you imagine for one moment that I ——"

She stopped him, raising her hand.

"I know that . . ."

"Then why——"

She said: "It isn't true that I've never liked you, Philip Grant. But it is true that I've never liked you for her. I know very well—so you needn't think of some polite way of telling me—that I have no right to be here. But I'm not concerned with rights; simply with the situation as it is. As I see it, you're in love with the girl—several people are, for that matter—and she's in love with you; which means she'll live and die for you. At first you were ready to feel the world well lost—in the vacations; and it was all plain sailing. Now things have got more complicated. You want the best of both worlds. You want Helena; and you want your politics; and you want it all working very smoothly and nicely. There are lots of women that such a situation would work smoothly and nicely with (they grow on every tree)—but this girl isn't one of them. She loves you as neither you nor most men deserve to be loved. But there are certain things she doesn't understand. She doesn't understand secondary emotions, or secondary motives. 'Second-rate' and 'second-best' just have no meaning for her. The other day, at the fête, you were angry and strange for reasons she didn't understand. You and I know what your reasons were. I understand them, though I haven't much respect for them. But she thought that you hated her—yes, groan if you like, but it was she who was hurt, not you—And that's only the beginning."

"I can ex*plain*—I can *make* her see——"

"My dear Mr. Grant, you will only be able to make her see at the cost of her seeing you—too."

"You mean she'll be disillusioned with me . . ."

"Yes."

"I could almost wish she were. That she could see me as I am."

Alys Raeburn stood up again, saying, with an acrid finality: "But that, Mr. Grant, is exactly what we want to avoid."

He gave her a gesture of despair and look of dislike. He said: "You don't believe in my feeling?"

"Yes. I do."

"What do you—suggest?" he broke out, believing for a moment that this fantastic and tyrannical woman might, after all, resolve the situation—by some transatlantic, some superb, caprice.

She said: "I 'suggest' that either you acknowledge your relationship openly; or you give it up altogether."

"I see. Very simple."

"Helena is simple."

"That's because she's young. Peculiarly young."

"I think not. She has a kind of greatness, which will keep her simple."

"I'm afraid I disagree."

She said: "I knew you would. But all I want you to do is to talk it out with her; instead of running away from her."

He said: "It's very good of you to have shown such interest," hearing his own stupid irony.

She was touched by the wretchedness of his expression. She said: "She's at Cleaveden."

"I know." He hesitated, too suddenly miserable to hide his next impulse. "Could she come to-morrow?"

"Here? To London?"

"Yes."

"Of course. I'll send her. . . . She's waiting to hear from you. But she won't come unless you ask her." She held out her hand, adding: "I don't have to say—that—that I know nothing, and suspect nothing. . . ."

"I know. Thank you."

She said, as he handed her into her car:

"I'm sailing at the end of the month—I should have liked to take Helena with me."

"I don't think I quite see her in New York."

For once Alys Raeburn answered absently:

"I wish I could take her— —"

Philip rang Helena up that evening. He said:

"Will you come up to London and see me to-morrow? Please come. I must speak to you. We must put all this right."

He heard her voice, deep and clear and far away:

"Philip . . . I can't come."

"Can't come?"

"I think there's no sense in my coming."

"What d'you mean?"

There was a blank. Then those remote level tones:

"We can't go on. I didn't understand before. But now I see."

"But, darling, my dear. It's because we must talk all this out that I want you to come. We must get it right again."

"What use will talking be?"

"*Helena*."

She said: "I can only do you harm. I didn't really understand before. We can't go on——" she hesitated—"in conflict."

He said: "Helena. You don't understand. There won't be any more conflict. I've come to see that. I've thought of nothing else. I can't go on. We'll go away—together." He was maddened by her remoteness. Her silence frightened him. He shouted: "Helena . . . Helena . . ."

Her voice was low and uncertain. "Philip? Do you mean what you're saying?"

"Of course I mean it. How can you imagine . . ."

She said: "I don't think you do mean it."

"Helena. You don't understand. I've been utterly stupid, brutal—blind. But now you must come. I can't give you up—you've changed my whole life . . ."

She said: "I'll come," and the receiver clicked down and he couldn't tell if that last vehemence in her tone had been elation or resentment. But he didn't care if she came gladly or resentfully. He only cared that she should come and be with him here in this room with him. He imagined her coming, imagined her beauty stained, her calm shattered, her tenderness embittered, her whole youth and happiness broken—for him to recreate.

"That grave charm." . . . His need of her was a desire that no possessing could satisfy. His life, without her, would be empty and unbearable. . . .

XI

As Roger Sichley left the Bath Club he met Philip Grant coming in.

They stood in the doorway exchanging perfunctory news. Sichley was sun-browned, his voice more penetrating, his high-shouldered gestures more emphatic than ever. He came back into the club with Philip and began a long tirade about Preferential Tariffs. They sat down in the smoking-room. Philip ordered a double whisky, and Sichley his inevitable black coffee.

Philip had meant, since he had to use the morning somehow, to have his hair cut. (Helena wouldn't arrive until half-past twelve; and he'd had enough of the house after a sleepless night and an interminable dawn.) But if Sichley wanted to harangue, that would do as well. He leaned back, seeming to listen.

Sichley began an account of his Canadian tour, beginning with the public dinner given him at Quebec and proceeding with his peculiar alternation of fatuous wit and mental force, from town to town, from conference to conversation, pausing now and then to describe a scenic effect (he spoke of "tremendous empty horizons and scarlet and purple sunsets")—or to touch on a hasty but stimulating love-affair.

Philip heard him out, occasionally glancing at his watch. (She must be past Aylesbury now. In two hours this life—which so palpably included Sichley talking, Sichley saying: "What's needed now is a kind of fourth party," this life would be over. Helena and himself—cutting away from the whole thing; getting straight with realities; getting at such a freedom as he'd never felt in his life. Move off to begin with. You couldn't make new beginnings in this country. Europe was too near, infested with trippers, reeking of old pleasures and dead enthusiasms. He saw her in bigger country, mountains and spaces. She would be most alive among mountains. He saw her beauty alight against strange skies.)

"—There's nothing," Sichley was saying, pouring himself out more coffee, "between us—except our perfectly obsolete allegiance to parties we neither of us believe in. I know we've gone over this ground often enough, but I'm more and more convinced . . ."

(. . . the Andes had a ring about them . . . a vital sort of glamour. Go on for days and never see a human being. Begin life again, alone with her, blotting out this muddled, maddening existence. . . .)

Sichley was saying: "Bradell's convinced there'll be an election before the spring. I imagine, in that case, Philip, that the grapes being so near and so attainable I should have to scratch you off my list of potential deserters. . . ." Sichley paused.

Philip asked, with half his attention:

"What grapes?"

"The sweets of office."

"My dear Sichley, there's no question of my getting any sort of office for years."

"Bradell seemed to think there was."

"Bradell always talks through his hat. What reasons did he give?"

"He only mentioned you *en passant*. His chief reasons are obvious, though: Arkell's stroke, and—Bradell told me this—Harry Cloud's made up his mind to retire."

"Why?"

"I suppose he's never felt very comfortable since the Rintoul scandal. Even if he was cleared, everyone knows the truth (and a quantity of his constituents must have had shares), so that he probably wouldn't like to face any possible mud-slinging at the election. Pity, with his ability."

Philip repeated: "Harry Cloud retiring?"

"Bradell never ventures an opinion unless it's a certainty."

"I know that."

Philip got up, walked to the fireplace, came back and sat down again.

"Bradell mentioned me?"

"Of course."

"Why 'of course'?"

"My dear Philip, why this toying with truth? You must know your own chances."

Philip got up again. Looked at his watch.

"Anyway—the whole thing's a farce."

"What is?"

"The whole business."

Sichley took a lump of sugar and nibbled it with his yellow front teeth. "It's only too easy to run down politics . . . our exigeant mistress! One's always at it, cursing her double face and her whoring habits—But '*she makes hungry where most she dissatisfies*.'" He picked out another lump of sugar—"What are you doing this evening?"

Philip took up his hat and gloves.

"I've got an engagement."

"What a pity. Bradell and Herbert are dining here with me. You might have joined us."

"Sorry."

Sichley said: "You must dine another night. I'll ring you up. Are you staying on in London now?"

"I think I'm—going away."

Sichley glanced at him. "You certainly look as if you needed a holiday. You work too hard."

In Dover Street Philip looked again at his watch. It was ten minutes to twelve. The message had said twelve-thirty. No sense in getting back too early. He could walk through the Park—(of course, if Cloud really was giving up . . .). If he walked through the Park he'd still be back in time. . . .

He found her waiting. She was sitting in his chair at his desk.

He had forgotten the quality of her presence; forgotten between Dover Street and Eaton Square, this force in her that filled the room.

She took his hand. "Philip." No question in her voice. Simply an acceptance of everything; of what he'd done and said—and what she'd understood. He felt her voice go through him.

He said: "Darling. I'm so glad you've come."

She said: "I must have come." She let his hand go. And waited. She remained at the desk and he moved about the room.

Her position gave her a judicial air. He said:

"You look as if you were going to condemn me."

She didn't answer. He wondered if she'd heard him. He said:

"How am I to begin to explain? How can I get you to understand—about that wretched business at the—Thealbys'?"

She said: "I do understand."

He said: "When I telephoned . . ."

She cut him short.

"We needn't go back to anything. Please, Philip. We shall soon forget that."

"You mean when we've got away?"

"Yes."

He felt her absolute loyalty, absolute decision. He couldn't look at her.

He said: "I want to—discuss it all with you. Darling . . . this is such a vital step. We mustn't do anything disastrous——" He paused.

She shook her head. Her decisions were made.

He went on: "When I spoke to you—on the telephone, all I could think of was—that you were *there* again. I thought I'd lost you—absolutely. . . . I haven't slept since that ghastly afternoon. It's all been like a nightmare. I know you were there, at Cleaveden—hating me——"

"I didn't hate you. How could I—hate you?"

"You doubted me then. You doubted that I loved you?"

"Yes." She stopped. Then: "I only saw that you'd have to value me, against your work——"

"And you believed that I loved you too little?"

"Yes."

"And then, when I asked you—when I told you we must go away together, you saw that you were wrong?"

Her head was bent now. He couldn't see her face. When she spoke she said: "I saw more than that. I saw that I hadn't seen anything before."

He half heard her. He began again—standing before the desk, looking down on her bent head, whose curls had such a soft, glowing, childish life of their own. . . . He said:

"Ever since yesterday . . . I've been going over this plan of ours. And I've come to some very definite conclusions. The first is (strange that I

should even say it) that I need you; I can't, couldn't ever, go on without you. You know that? Don't you? You realise that now? Secondly—that all this secrecy—that we've both hated and that's nearly unsettled us—has got to go. Thirdly, that I don't believe our simply making off, like this, is the best way of establishing our future life."

She raised her head and waited, looking at him gravely and confidently.

He said: "Darling. I'm going to ask you to do something for me, that involves a sacrifice."

She said: "You know I would do anything for you."

He said: "If I were to divorce Marigold—then, in the end, we could marry."

She repeated: "Divorce Marigold?"

He dismissed a set of implied facts with a gesture and: "It wouldn't be difficult. I only have to keep her—supervised. As long as she doesn't suspect I'm interested I ought to be able to establish reasonable grounds."

"Divorce Marigold?"

He said impatiently: "Yes. The thing's almost ironically justifiable. . . . Meanwhile—I want you—to go away for a time. I don't want you mixed up in all this. I don't want anyone to imagine, least of all Marigold, that I've got any motive."

He didn't notice that the quality of her stillness had changed.

"Don't you *see*," he said, "how utterly worth while that would be. I've been driven mad this last week. I might have seen it before. Seen—light before . . ."

"And your work," she said, "wouldn't suffer—by that course?"

"No."

He saw her face.

She stayed sitting in the high-backed chair behind the desk. She said in a dry voice that was half a whisper:

"If you divorced Marigold, you could marry me?"

"Yes."

"To divorce her—you'd have to spy on her?"

"Yes. But my dear, in every case——"

She cut him short.

"You would make me seem 'innocent' until we married."

"Helena!"

"And meanwhile I go away and hide, so that our 'innocence' shall be quite certain."

"Helena. You don't understand. You're too young, too inexperienced to judge such a situation."

She said, still in the same dry voice: "Please. Listen to me. . . ." She stopped, lost her meaning and found it again. "When I came here this morning, you'd asked me to go away with you. I came for that. But I'm not so little a woman that I didn't see how much you must give up if you gave up your work. And I thought that later we could come back—that you would want to come back. We would have fought the thing out, I could have helped you. It seemed to me there must be some—force in being right, in—living by the truths you believe in."

She stopped for a moment, then went on as if each clear sentence was being wrenched out of her.

"Only you don't believe in the truths you say you do. It wasn't just—chance, just nervous temper (I tried to believe that) that made you speak to me as if I'd done something to dishonour you. . . . You say I don't understand. I didn't before. But now I do. I see that your love for me has always been wrong for you."

"—Helena."

She got up and stood up behind the desk and facing him. "You—pretended it wasn't wrong. Perhaps you believed, sometimes, that we were right. But you didn't believe it in your heart as—I did. That was why you were afraid. That was why you knew what your 'constituents' would say and feel and think. For a moment, when you thought you might lose me, you were overborne by your emotion for me. (I know you do love—and desire me, Philip.) But since then you've seen it all clearly again. And you've found a way out. And you think that way right. Spying on Marigold. Deceiving her—about me. Deceiving everyone about me. Getting our happiness by means that are base and cowardly and without honour."

He kept repeating phrases. "My dear child, you don't know what you're saying." "You misjudge the whole thing"—"You simply don't understand what you're talking about"—"Darling, don't hide your sense behind your

own heroics." And then in desperation, for since she'd stopped speaking she'd stood looking at him with an expression too near horror.

"D'you think, if I were dishonourable, I'd want to marry you?"

When she'd taken in his meaning she questioned him. "You want to marry me because you love me. What has that to do with honour?"

He grasped at a phrase.

"Then you *know* that I love you—Whatever else you distort and misinterpret, you see that?"

He jabbed his words at her. But he didn't know if she felt them. She seemed to grow more and more unresponsive, her lips shut and her eyes dark under her smooth brow. She said, looking past him:

"If I didn't see that, I could feel that, at least, you wouldn't be hurt. I don't want you to be. . . . If I could just 'not be' any more and you forget me."

"*Helena, what are your terms?*"

"Terms?"

He said: "Since you—set your face against all reason. What d'you want? We can go now, this minute?"

But she was saying:

"I have no terms. . . . I can't stay with you now on any terms."

He didn't believe her, and told her so, leaning across the desk to seize her hand. She drew it away with a cry that was like a note of animal pain. "Philip!"

He stepped back, staring at her, feeling that cry in his vitals. And its echo stayed, sharp-edged in her voice, when she broke out: "Don't keep asking me. But I can't stay. It's done. Since I came, something's happened I can't explain. But it's all done."

But he could only go on pressing her.

"Happened? What? Darling, you're wrecking our lives for a romantic fancy. Don't you see I'll do anything now?"

She said: "No. But that isn't really you."

He ignored that. He demanded:

"Is it something in me—that's made the difference?"

She looked at him so long that she seemed not to see him any more when she answered:

"No. I think it's something in me."

And when she'd gone her voice stayed in the air tormenting him. He kept hearing, "I think it's something in me," seeing that gesture, her hand pressed against her throat as if she were feeling for the force in her which she couldn't control.

Marigold arrived at Eaton Square just after six.

She saw Philip's stick and gloves in the hall. She read her letters and then went into the library to see him. He wasn't there.

Bishop didn't know if he'd gone out again. She said that Miss Helena had left shortly after one o'clock. She added: "Mr. Grant didn't have any lunch. Unless he went out for it."

Marigold went up to her room. She took off her hat and went mechanically to the glass and reddened her lips. As she did this she felt that Philip was in his dressing-room next door. She called out his name, but there was no answer. She put down the lipstick and crossed the room and opened the door.

Philip was sitting on the edge of the bed. His suitcase lay on the floor, and some of his suits were thrown over the chair by the window. He looked up when she opened the door. Marigold saw his expression. For once she made no comment. She shut the door silently.

She felt a shocked and sickening respect as if she'd walked in on an operation.

She knew now.

Philip and Helena!

She'd felt it from the beginning. She knew Philip. That had made her foresee it all.

And now from the same knowledge of Philip she knew so exactly why Helena had left him. "He'd tried to have it both ways. And Helena"—for a moment she thought of her sister without jealousy, with a sort of elderly pity—"hadn't been up to any tricks. Philip had wanted to finesse, and Helena, naturally, to blunder. . . ."

She sat down on the stool in front of the dressing-table and pulled her handbag towards her and lit a cigarette. Philip and Helena! She felt steadier.

Poor old Philip. . . . She kept seeing his face—staring at her and not really seeing her and his lips saying "Hello" and making no sound. Helena had left soon after one. . . .

Again a spasm of physical jealousy cramped her from breast to stomach. Ever since the spring, ever since Helena walked into the room with Piers, she'd known it—hated them, hated Philip. . . .

She didn't want him. Hadn't wanted him for years. (He'd wrecked all that at the beginning with his storms of tempestuous sentimentality, and reading poetry to stop himself making love to her—despising her if he saw she wanted him, and cursing their marriage when she didn't. . . .) She hadn't been in love with him since the first year they were married. But she'd got used to his being there. Their marriage had settled down. It didn't suit him to know about her lovers; just as it suited her to be apparently virtuous. She'd concluded that Philip had some ordinary affairs. (He was the sort of man who did best with professionals, because he wouldn't feel that sex was unnatural to them.) She hadn't minded that.

But Helena had changed him. She'd seen that by the middle of the summer when they moved down to Templedean. . . . He must have found the qualities he was always brooding about, quoting Meredith, quoting Browning about—in Helena! All his rotten complexes had been cleared up by his falling over ears in love with her. And now he was madly in love with her—and she'd wrecked it.

Marigold stared at herself in the glass. Philip had never been in love with her as he was with Helena now. He had loved an idea of her, made up of her looks and her girlhood.

She went on staring at herself. The white thin glare of the early afternoon lit her pointed face, showing the illusion of her prettiness stretched like a veil across her bleak features and strained expression. Her looks were going. Not that they'd mattered to Philip for years. But when life with Philip had become impossible they'd been useful; they'd got her amusement. There'd been a time when she meant to make a success of their marriage and read the papers and gone down to his constituency and been nice to all sorts of dreary people. It was after that, she reflected (seeing herself as she was, on the brink of that first tiresome affair with Roger Sichley. She could never understand why he should have chosen Ostend in February!), it was then that the whole thing began. . . . Fifteen years ago. And now her looks were going.

She lifted her eyebrows to see if it made her eyelids look smoother. She thought of Philip again next door. The thought of him became vivid.

For a moment she had an idea of going in to him, saying: "We've both made a mess of it. At least, we might be friends." Have it all out with him and ask him, at any rate, to be—friendly. She felt an acute need of friendliness—she wanted to tell him that she was sorry he'd been—so badly hit.

As she got up the telephone rang next to her bed. She answered. Harold's voice said:

"You back, Marigold?"

"Yes."

"Have an amusing time?"

"Yes—very."

"Are you doing anything to-night?"

". . . No."

"Come out and dine, then. Don't dress. We might do a movie."

"I—think I won't."

"Why not?"

"I'm tired."

She put down the receiver. Then went into the dressing-room.

Philip had heard her voice and gone out.

The empty suitcase was still on the floor.

XII

The nurse carried the baby from the train to the quay while the three little girls, grave-eyed and obedient in brown coats and hats, followed Elizabeth. William went ahead with the two porters.

Elizabeth was pale, her nose pinched by the raw morning, and her eyelids reddened. They waited on the quay for William to come back for them. The liner's funnels towered against the sky.

Elizabeth said: "Don't these boats look enormous?"

He said: "Yes, don't they"—(And in a few minutes she will have gone from this misty, jostling quay. In a few minutes she will be part of the boat, part of that steel-flanked, white-terraced world. . . .)

The nurse said: "I shall be glad to get baby into his pram on the deck. He hasn't slept since ten-past six this morning." And Elizabeth standing close to Piers looked at her baby without seeing it.

The little girls watched the trunks being slung into the hold. They held gloved hands, and every now and then looked at Elizabeth and Nurse to see if they were due to move again.

Piers said: "I shan't come on board."

After a silence she said: "Don't write to me."

He thought—in a quarter of an hour her forlorn, determined little profile with the pink nose will be gone. And she will begin to be Beatrice d'Este again, and she will go on and on giving me this queer, delicate agony. But if it goes on hurting as it does now I shall have to do something quick and idiotic, like killing myself; for this is unbearable. . . . And he said, when the nurse wasn't looking: "Shall I ever see you again?" and saw William coming down the gang-plank to fetch his family. She said:

"Sometime, perhaps. But now we've just got to face the music," and her under-lip trembled and she caught his hand suddenly and held on and let it go. And when William reached them—William, in a brown Homburg and a Burberry, wiping the moisture off his moustache, she said:

"Is everything O.K., darling?"

"Absolutely," he said, and picked up the youngest little girl, who said: "Are we going on the big boat *now*?"

William shook hands, thanking Piers for seeing them off. The little girls shook hands. And then they went, Elizabeth walking very upright, her lips set together and her eyes not seeing. They went up the gang-plank in single file, Elizabeth last. And when she got on deck she turned and waved her hand. Piers didn't move. She waited for a moment, and then disappeared through a doorway.

Someone jostled him. He turned slowly and then began to run to get off the quay.

As he got into one of the big hangars a siren sounded, stabbing the air.

When he got back to his flat Helena was there, crouched on the window-seat looking out. She said "Piers" without turning round.

He went and stood near the fire. After a time he said: "What have you been doing?"

"Watching people."

She glanced at him. He stood with his arms folded, staring into the fire. He said:

"I went to see Elizabeth off."

"I know."

"Desolating practice, seeing people off."

She got off the window-seat and came over to the fire, put some more coal on and then sat down on the sofa opposite him. He said: "I shan't see her again."

(She thought: "*I shan't see him again*.")

"—or perhaps," he said, "when we're old and vile and passionless we shall meet."

("*Perhaps we shall meet*," she thought, "*when we're old*." . . .) She held out her hand to him, and he took it and knelt down beside her, suddenly aware of her quiet and strength and desolation.

"How does one go on?" he whispered.

("—*go on*," she thought, "*go on, since you have to go on, have to live*. . . .")

She said: "I'm going away on Saturday. . . . Alys Raeburn invited me, if I should want to come. . . . I'm going to New York," she said, gripping his hand and speaking directly to him so that he had to listen and answer. "I cabled her yesterday."

"New York?" He took in her meaning. "New York?" He said after a pause: "That's new for you, anyway. Perhaps New York will do you good." He said: "New York either cures or kills. Either you rise to its demand to live—to be crazily but utterly and completely alive—or else it knocks you out altogether."

"Did you like it?" she asked.

He said: "You can't just like it. You either—fall for it or you don't. It's a city with no heart and racing pulses. It's got no charm, none of the things that made Henry James compare Venice to a lovely, nervous woman—only a tremendous, vital, physical power over one—the sort of beauty that comes from magnificent body and amazing features and a narrow, shameless soul. . . ."

"*Is* it beautiful?" she asked, keeping her hand on his shoulder, keeping him talking.

He said: "Yes. Beautiful enough sometimes to tear your soul up with the shock of its beauty. And then bits of it that make you feel sick. A sort of Empress Slut. . . ." He stopped talking as suddenly as he'd begun.

The dusk thickened against the windows. He stared at it.

"How autumn *smells* of autumn," he said.

She was thinking of the trees at Templedean.

He laid his head on her knees. He whispered: "You knew—about Elizabeth?"

"Only just lately."

She moved her hand across his hair, staring in front of her at the high dusk-blue windows. He was crying. His stiff shaking shoulders moved her. She wanted to speak to him, but she couldn't.

Gradually she felt his shoulders relax. The room drew dark.

They were quiet for a long time. When he looked up she could just see his features and the tears running down as if he'd forgotten to stop them. He asked: "Why go on with an existence that doesn't matter?" holding her knees and whispering his question to the veiled stillness of her face.

She said: “I think—courage matters.”

“Why? Why is there sense in living out a life—that may be cut off any minute by something as inconsequent as a germ or a motor accident?”

She said: “I don’t know. But there’s something too easy about cowardice.”

He said: “. . . a life we’re pitched into at the beginning by some fantastic inconsequence. By the glamour of conventionalised white satin passion . . . by the extra glass of port that gives a momentary lust to a stale marriage . . . by the million absurd chances that drive a man and a woman into each other’s arms. How many of us come alive for any better reason? I didn’t. You didn’t. Look at people as you pass them in the street. Can’t you see the curse that was on their very conception? How much beauty, how much sensitiveness and passion went to making them? . . . And if by chance you get a child which has fine elements and could grow up to some sort of reasonable happiness, look what happens! Look at you, my dear. You were kept away from all the mean influences that most of us get . . . and then you came back, and even you don’t get any quarter. The rottenness is something one can’t escape from. The fuddled motives and false honour and unreal emotions of people.” He paused. The room was dark—“Elizabeth married William—because he had the qualities she’d been taught to admire, because I hadn’t any money; because her ‘people’ liked him so much; because she mistrusted her love for me, which was passionate and spontaneous and utterly without reason—or social justification. And now she ‘sticks by him,’ because they’ve got children; because she must be loyal to him; because she’d rather break her heart than undo a marriage she never wanted. . . .”

She said: “If Elizabeth were different you wouldn’t love her.”

He thought: “If Elizabeth were different”—and the idea that she could be different made him see her as she was, so simple in her emotions, so fastidious in her conduct, so moving in her nipped spring beauty. He said:

“No, I don’t want her to be different.” For I want her to be as she is, he thought. I want her as she was this morning, in an oldish fur-coat, with a pink nose—As she was at Templedean, behaving dully and beautifully—and then running down the hill. As she is now, this minute, going away (every minute now), going second-class with William and William’s children, going with them over an infinity of horizons and making them comfortable and being nice to the other people whom she doesn’t consider quite “sahibs.”

I want her as I can never have her, he thought. For "not having her" is as much Elizabeth as her voice, which I shall forget, and her expression, which I shall keep and sentimentalise . . .

But in the end, he thought, in ten years, in twenty years, she will have lost even the reality of sentiment for me and be nothing more than an occasional twinge of pain . . . a gout of the emotions.

He heard his sister's voice after she'd spoken:

"Put on the light, Piers."

His mind saw her expression. He felt the contagion of her blank fear, and he got up, groping for the switch in the corner of the room.

XIII

Lady Marvell waited for Helena's good-bye visit. She had just finished her breakfast in bed. She wore her new boudoir cap, and sat up against her pink-lined embroidered pillows. Being in bed relieved her of a sense of disadvantage usually induced by Helena's company.

Helena came up to the bed and kissed her mother, and stood by her holding her hand. And Edith Marvell's interpretation of something poised and decisive in her daughter's aspect, came out in her first remark:

"How smart you look, my dear. How well black suits you."

Helena still held her hand.

"Mother?"

"Yes, dear?"

Helena looked into the upturned face, the rouged cheeks, shallow blue eyes, white-silver curls, set in a panorama of lace and frills and ribands. She saw the stupidness of the eyes and the helplessness of the carmine, wilful mouth, and the words she'd meant to say, some sort of apology for her hurried decision to go, changed to:

"I'll write to you, from New York. I'll tell you—all about—what I'm doing. All the people I meet and the places I go to."

"That'll be delightful. Yes, you must do that," she said, and grew livelier, made Helena sit down, forgetting her resentment that Helena and Piers had sprung on her this plan of her going. "You must tell me everything. I'm sure Mrs. Raeburn will take you about . . . And you'll meet all sorts of interesting people."

"I didn't want to—trouble you with my plans."

"You know I'm always interested. Still, that's over. (You know, dear, though I hate a made-up look, I think just a *little* colour in your cheeks would suit you.) Well—when do you arrive? You leave to-morrow at—midday, is it?"

"I sail at 12.30. We're due to arrive next Friday evening."

"Wonderfully quick it is! When I think that it used to take two hours to drive from our house at Richmond to the theatre—and two hours back. And you'll be going straight to Mrs. Raeburn?"

"I'm going to stay with her."

Edith Marvell touched the swansdown on her cuff. "Well, I must say I envy you . . . And I've no doubt you'll see your young admirer?"

"Do you mean Vernon Haskett?"

Lady Marvell nodded archly.

"Yes. I shall . . ."

"I shall be very interested to know how that goes on."

Helena said:

"I'm going down to Templedean now. Piers has lent me his car. I've left —some books down there that I want to take."

"Books! Can't old Mrs. Creedy send them? She's there all the time."

"No. She wouldn't find them. I'd rather go. And I want to say good-bye to the house."

"You quaint child. Have you got an outside cabin?"

Helena didn't know. She said she must go now.

"I suppose you haven't seen the Passengers' List yet?"

Helena said: "I'm sorry. I haven't." And again, looking at this little woman who was her mother, she felt that she began to understand her. She saw now the puzzled emptiness, the sense of inferiority that lay behind the fuss and snobbery of her existence. She saw her narrowness of heart, dryness of senses, smallness of spirit (and wondered what chance had begun that attrition of her humanity?) and asked:

"Will you write to *me*?"

A glow, a faint momentary response woke in Edith Marvell. It made her say:

"Dear child . . ." and then: "But of course, darling, you know how busy I am."

Helena bent to kiss her forehead. "Yes, I know."

For a moment Edith Marvell's light-blue stare was clouded, and her quick sigh seemed to escape from some forgotten element deep in her. She said:

"When you come back . . ." She hesitated. "We've had some nice times together, haven't we? I like to think we've got to know each other."

"Yes," said Helena.

When she'd gone Edith Marvell took up the novel she'd been reading.

But she couldn't rid herself of a feeling of depression.

The drive was silted with leaves. The blinds were down.

The caretaker let Helena in, greeting her with a scrannel voice and clasping the keys in black-mittened hands. She hadn't made out, she said, from the telegram, whether she was to expect her this afternoon or the next.

The tallboy and chairs in the hall were covered with dust-sheets that looked yellow in the light that came through the blinds. The air was chill. There was an aroma of apples and wet flowers lingering on from the summer.

Helena went up the echoing staircase (the carpets were stored for the winter). She went across the landing and along the corridor to her own room. Mrs. Creedy had opened the shutters of the further window. The white-panelled walls, the dim pink and green Chinese men on the curtains, the lithograph of a house and a lake with swans above the mantelpiece hadn't been touched by the autumn spirit downstairs. The pleated blue silk biscuit-box was on the table by her bed, and the volume of Meredith's poems next to it.

She picked it up. Philip had given it her, on the same morning that he'd talked to her about the war. The book had reminded her of that talk ever since. She thought now of his remark: "For years afterwards nothing else seemed real. It was unspeakably beastly—but at least it was real."

She hadn't understood him. Now she wondered if he, and Lawrence, in the handling of violent facts had lost their fine touch on truth.

She stood holding the book, touching it as if she was blind. She opened it where it opened most easily. He'd read to her out of it. Stopped to say once, "He should have known you, Helena! You'd have been a heroine for him." (But Piers, finding her reading, had said: "Meredith's the *faux bonhomme* of Poetry.")

She knew the verses, as she knew the bitter enchanting depths of Philip's voice.

"Earth was not Earth before her soul appeared
Nor Beauty Beauty ere young Love was born.
And thou, when I lay hidden, wast as morn
At city windows. . . ."

She put the book in her pocket and went downstairs. Mrs. Creedy was no longer in the hall. She stopped to look back up the lovely staircase to the closed door of Philip's room.

She remembered how alive the house had been with summer at every window. Now she felt its blindness and emptiness.

The door of the library was half open. Through it she saw dust-sheets on the furniture and a sallow light darkening the pictures. She went in; and found Philip waiting.

He said: "I followed you. Your mother told me you'd gone here. She . . . I happened to see her, just after you left. She said you looked—ill."

His features became distinct in the gloom. She said:

"When did you come?"

"Just now. I've only been waiting a minute or two. I've sent the old woman away to give Robson tea. I didn't mean to try to see you. But when your mother said that . . ." he hesitated; he could make nothing of her expression, set blank to the dim light. She was like a mask of herself, exquisitely carved, perfectly inexpressive. He said:

"I thought—I almost knew that you still cared. . . It's the eleventh hour . . ."

Her voice was as still and blank as her features. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you love me. My dear, this is breaking us both."

For second after second she didn't answer. He saw her hand move to her coat pocket and drop again. He had no sense that, as she looked back at him, stared back at him, she was seeing him as a man who had been her lover. He had no sense of the meaning of her words, which left her, still, so perfectly impassive.

"I did love you."

For he went on, persuading her, reasoning with her, impelled by a maddened longing to knock past the huddle of chairs that lay between them, and touch her hand again. . . . He stopped finally on:

“Can’t you change your mind?”

She took in the last words. She glanced round the dim room, and slowly over the ghostly shapes of the furniture. And he caught her drawn-out whisper:

“It isn’t in my mind.”

Then she turned and went.

He heard the front door shut.

A minute later he heard her car go up the drive.

XIV

When Helena got to her cabin she found a box of roses and a letter from Philip. She took the letter on deck to read it.

103, Eaton Square,
S.W. 1,
November 3rd.

My Dear,

This is good-bye.

But I must write to you. I can't let you go without saying some of the things that somehow became unspeakable that last time at Templedean.

I shall never forget seeing you go. Just as I shall never forget the first moment when you came into the drawing-room here—six months ago. In that time I seem to have lived the whole of life: to have gained a new life and lost it again.

Somewhere Proust describes the suffering of love: saying that it is as if a skilful surgeon took out some part of one's entrails and substituted a solid substance of emotional pain.

When you said to me that you felt that everything had "got dark"—did you realise in what utter darkness you were leaving me? Do you realise, even now, what you've meant to me, my dear? and that now that I've lost you I'm so obsessed by the utter futility of existence, that only the machinery of habit—the endless obligations and the detail and frictions and decisions of my work can keep me going on at all?

I keep asking myself, why you should have imposed the conditions you did? *You, who are so free, so completely unconscious of all emotional convention. That fantastic destroying theory of "honesty" (so much more vicious than the small conventions and observances that could never have touched the beauty and magnitude of our passion . . .). Idiotically, without sense, since it's all over, I'm haunted still by the magnificent might-have-been. Those concessions seem such a little thing for you to have done for me; you who have done so much and given me so much.*

How strangely and agonisingly it all comes back to me as I write, here in the familiar library, that was so minutely the same half a year ago, before the name Helena—and the sight and touch and sweetness of you—had broken up the dull driving monotony of my life. Our summer days at Templedean; and that strange interlude at Silsbury—and that evening, d'you remember, when you came in here after that party? . . . And now you're on a ship going to New York. Reading this on a ship and the time and distance between us get longer.

And I sit here, writing to you for the last time.

There's a familiar anæsthetic—work. One comes again to that. Perhaps in time, I shall come to look back on our love for each other (such a strange thing, this passion of ours, so complete and living it was—and now so completely broken—) as one looks back on a very bright and very poignant dream; a dream that in its moment makes all reality seem a dim chaos; and in retrospect has a precious unforgettable gleam, a kind of drugged vividness that keeps it apart from all the memories of everyday life.

How should I complain that you aren't like other women? And yet I do. You came to me when I hardly knew that I wanted you. Now you leave me, when I most want you.

You said that I should be ashamed to compromise, or pretend. And there you shirk reality; for reality in this world is fraught with compromise, conditioned by pretence. To do any good one must stomach indifferent means, futile people. The business of able men, these days, is to know how to work with stupidity and leaven it.

You would have me turn my back on the life that makes my work possible. (Do you realise how many years I've worked, until I was sick with work, to get even in view, as I am now, of any effective power?) How could I stop now, and refute all the means to an important end?

And all for no sane reason.

You are all contradictions. I know that you kill half your soul in going. And you know what you do to me in leaving me.

"*What is your substance whereof are you made?*
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?"

If I didn't know your simplicity—I should say that you were acting by some false heroic sense. If I didn't know, my darling, your gentleness, your loyalty, your perfect integrity—couldn't I think now that you were shallow and only half loved me—since you can make no concessions to keep our love a living thing?

If you were to come back, my dear?

Haven't you seen enough of life to accept its inexplicable ugliness side by side with its peaks of beauty?

I think now if I held you in my arms again I could persuade you. . . .

But this is good-bye.

Yours,

Philip.

She read the letter through twice. As the ship got near Cherbourg she went down to the Purser's office and sent off a telegram, saying, "Thanks letter. Good-bye. Helena." Then she went to her cabin and lay down. The stewardess had already put the roses in water and the cabin was scented by them.

She lay thinking of Philip while the porthole darkened from blue to mist and from mist to a starry black, and the shapes of the roses grew distinct, and faded out. Her hatred of him twisted round her heart. Then, slowly, the knots slackened and were undone by the pitiful fingers of the dark; and a chill grief moved through her veins, throbbing in her body and mind for hours.

The porthole showed again as a disc of leaden light. She lay staring. She remembered their perfect happiness when the summer and green country had belonged to them. . . .

She saw Philip walking back one evening toward Templedean, his profile against the sunset, and the damson-coloured house set in among the tapestry trees and a glow over the hedges and cornfields. . . . She saw the cedar trees and garden steeped in moonlight, and breathed the night, and felt Philip's arm round her shoulders and heard the owl in the trees . . . She tasted the wet woods where they'd walked all one day and saw the moss round the roots of the beeches and the sudden light in a clearing and Philip's look of startled adoration.

The moments and places of their happiness were still alive with the bright tormenting life of remembrance. And she was going away, with roses from Philip in the cabin. (She remembered putting roses in his room at Templedean the day he came with Miss Blanchard from London.) She was going away, with the line of the horizon moving up and down the whitening rim of the porthole, moving up—and down monotonously, almost soothingly . . . She shut her eyes and slept for a minute, and dreamed that Philip was beside her, lying with his arm round her, and in her dream she could feel the familiar bulk of his shoulder. And she woke again and saw the cabin walls showing pale and the green-grey arc of sea thinning and widening . . . and her trunk with its red label white-lettered WANTED ON THE VOYAGE.

They docked at four in the afternoon. . . . A city of towering steel and chiselled light. A Valhalla set between great rivers, and fringed with dirty streets.

Helena stood on deck.

The sirens blasted the shimmering air above her. She looked at the crowd of people waving on the deck. She saw Vernon suddenly. He wasn't waving, just looking.

He was waiting when she got off the gang-plank. He took her arm, saying nothing, looking at her, and then dropped it.

"My goodness," he said absurdly.

She thought he looked ill. He said something about luggage. "Luggage under M," he repeated. Then he took her to "M" and she understood. She felt a relief at seeing him, like finding a thing you'd lost.

He said, while the customs officer was searching her hats for whisky:

"I'm to take you to Aunt Alys. She sent a whole lot of apologies for not coming herself."

She asked him where he lived. He said he had an apartment on East Fifty-Sixth Street. He couldn't stop himself looking at her.

Mrs. Raeburn's car was waiting. They drove across waste streets with orange peel and dust and paper-bags blowing about and warehouses at corners with broken windows and stuck with old posters. Suddenly they were in Washington Square, skyscrapers on the south, a dingy new hotel on the west, a bleak red building with two big windows on the east, and a row

of eighteenth-century brick houses with high steps and fanlights on the north side. A triumphal arch was thrown down near the middle of the square (as if a giant's child had got tired of it) and a preoccupied municipality had scattered some grass plots, some benches and a few rubbish bins which hadn't been cleared. Vernon pointed out Fifth Avenue, running north from the square, and he said:

"There's Aunt Alys's house," and went on talking while he handed her out of the car.

There was a high hall, an oval staircase rising from it, an open door and a room fragrant from the log fire—a white-panelled double room, perfect in the absolute grace of its period. And Alys Raeburn waiting.

Helena felt her hand taken and held as they sat on the sofa. Vernon came in and stood with one elbow on the mantelpiece watching them. There were questions about the voyage, a brief account of Alys Raeburn's own doings . . . Helena was dimly reassured by the hand, by the words that needed no return from her . . . by the looks that touched her gently, seeing without seeming to see. The white, lovely room, the lamplight, the firelight, the voices—Alys's warm, finely ringing notes, Vernon's deep certain tones (voices with just that rhythm and insistence that held promise and certainty, where English voices sang certainty and indifference), all these things hung about her dead chill spirit, never quite touching her, but breathing on her a certainty that a world of order and affection still went on. . . .

"You have no idea," Alys Raeburn said, "how delighted I was—we were, Vernon and I, to get your cable."

Helena said: "I knew you both would really want to see me. So I came." She looked at each of them in turn. Finding them again, in a strange place, made them seem more intimate.

Alys Raeburn watched her as she turned to Vernon. Her skin had the silver transparency that grief gives to the young, and her brow, that had always seemed to Alys her chief beauty, dominated the structure of her face as the brow of a statue catches and holds the light. She had never seemed youthful . . . Or rather, Alys Raeburn thought, her special youth, her perfect beauty and her grave fresh spirit had made the ordinary young person appear stale and without promise.

Now the spiritual freshness and that bloom of physical loveliness had gone. She didn't so much look older . . . Rather as if she'd stepped out of the course of years altogether to move in her own dreadful darkness. Alys Raeburn thought she'd never seen a worse case of "shock"; shock to every

nerve and fragile fibre of the soul. In the first moment when the girl came in, she'd felt that she was welcoming a sleepwalker.

Vernon was asking:

"—what d'you mean to do over here?"

"Do?" She shook her head. "I don't know."

"Anyway, we don't have to think about that yet," said Mrs. Raeburn, "and the first thing after that voyage is to get some rest."

A few days later Vernon took Helena for a drive along the Storm King Road. The frozen sunlight, the speed of the car, the great river far below the narrow cliff-road, the steep, wild-wooded country woke Helena from a despair that had lasted on from the night.

Vernon hardly spoke. Once he stopped and put an extra rug round her. She thanked him and he smiled and didn't answer. His smile left warmth in her. As they went on she looked at him, seeing how deep and certain he was and feeling his honesty as something crystalline and vigorous as the air they drove in.

On their way back he stopped at a corner of the road, saying: "This is one of the best views. I ought to have been saying more about views. I'm afraid I haven't been a very good guide this afternoon." He added: "You see, I feel I've just got a few hours with you—in which I can be absolutely happy. You know that, don't you, Helena? What I feel, just being with you like this?"

She looked away up the magnificent distances of the river. She said: "It's just that you've got a—little sentimental feeling for me."

He said: "No one could have a little feeling for you, my dear. As for sentimentality—" he looked at the averted line of her brow and cheek—"it just doesn't fit any idea of you. I might as well feel sentimental about the Sphinx—or the Sun—or the Theory of Relativity."

She turned her face to him with a half-humorous, half-forlorn wonder. "Am I like those?"

He said: "No. You aren't like anything. You're so much your Self that if you say the stupidest thing—if you say 'Have a cigarette,' the words stick in my mind and get to be part of you, and part of me . . ."

She gave him a look that seemed to drag upward from the depths of her innocent and mysterious soul. She said, monotonously, sadly:

"I'm not like other women."

He stared with a quick intake of breath at her head, throttled in the soft, dark-brown furs; at the curves of her hair, the serenely-chiselled temples, the lips that seemed to him to hold all the generosity of affection, all the sweetness of sensuality; the wide-set eyes watching life, as they watched him now, marvellously young, marvellously alight—and yet darkened by some secret incurious wisdom.

"You're all the women in the world," he said. He didn't touch her hand, which rested ungloved on the leather seat between them.

She half smiled at him.

"When I first knew you I was young. And now you are."

He asked: "Did you understand, that day at Cleaveden, how much I cared?"

"I didn't think about you."

He said: "It's getting cold. Let's be getting back."

They started back towards New York, the tree-smelling wind nipping their lips and eyelids. He said:

"Can I ask you something?"

"Yes."

"Shall you be seeing Philip again?"

They passed a patch of snow by the roadside. Its light flashed in his eyes.

"No."

Her "no" gave him the same shock as he'd had when she came down the ship's gang-plank. Her tone now, her expression then, was a statement of what had been agony, and was now fact.

It was his first glimpse of tragedy as unromantic and final. Until now he'd assumed that all ills (even his own) could either be remedied or compensated. Since he left Cleaveden he'd managed to make a sort of destiny for himself out of a hope that he'd see her again. And now she was next to him. Now he remembered Aunt Alys's "people get the sort of happiness and unhappiness that fits them . . ." and he thought that, so far, a torturing jealousy of Philip had "fitted" him; and the everlasting thinking of

her and wanting her and hating her. Now that all seemed petty enough. (They passed a charred-out "inn" with a Coca-kola sign still standing . . .) The whole thing had got on another level; stopped being just "in love" and her "not loving." (Jealousy could be different kinds of torment. Philip had possessed her spirit.)

And she'd got through somehow.

Now he was going to have to get through. Get through to the end of his life, with her realness burnt into him.

The wide distances of the river were staining yellow to rose, rose to flame. . . . Beyond, the skyline of Manhattan was carved out in steep shadows and plaques of light. The Washington Bridge spanned a gold sky.

As they got near New York they could hear the insistent hooting and throbbing of the shipping along the docks; and nearer, as they crossed the bridge, first faintly then swallowing them, the battering roar of the city itself, a timeless roar like a train going through a tunnel for ever.

As they drove out of Central Park into Fifth Avenue she said:

"I shall stay here."

"In New York?"

"Yes." She shut her eyes for a second, seeing the fields and the stream below Templedean.

"Why d'you want to?"

"I can be alone."

They crossed Forty-Third and were held up by the lights.

"It's a grand place to be alone. Nobody worries you—you could die in any of the best hotels and nobody'd worry you until you called down for the 'mortician.' I would always choose a city myself if I wanted to be alone . . ." He heard his own voice. The lights changed.

"Where'll you live? The Plaza, the new Waldorf, the Astoria-Florence, where you get free cultural lectures twice weekly, the . . ."

"*Vernon*."

"Sorry," he said. They crossed Thirtieth Street. The street chasms were filled with glittering freezing dusk and the buildings were their own skeletons lit by a million little blank-gold windows. She said:

"This afternoon was lovely."

He couldn't answer.

They got to Washington Square. She said:

"Aunty Alys won't be back yet. But won't you come in?"

He hadn't meant to.

There was a log fire in the room, and dusk in the deep white windows. She slipped off her coat and stood warming her hands. The flames lit her and the white walls and the flowers and the high folds of the curtains, and New York was outside, the skyscraper opposite lighting up and the square darkening.

She lifted her head:

"There's a siren again."

He listened. The lost thin booming died out and sounded and died again. She said:

"Come and warm your hands."

He came, saying: "That's such an—English gesture," getting the words out nicely.

She looked up. "We had fires on the island!"

He said: "I think I'll go. I won't wait." He waited, getting his words straight. He said: "You understand me—if I just fade out. . .?"

She was standing still, with her peculiar stillness that was like the calm of an element, profound and unaccountable. She seemed not to have heard him. . . . A log shifted. Then he could just hear her words:

". . . stay with me."

She hadn't moved. But she was looking at him. He repeated, "Stay with you?"—and again, after a pause, with a sort of fury, "Stay with you?"

She whispered: "Yes."

He'd got hold of the edge of the mantelpiece with both his hands. He stared away from her. "You're crazy or something. What is it you want?"

She waited.

"Stay with me."

He looked at her again. A flame leaped. He saw tears glistening on her face. The flame died down. The firelight became equable.

"How can I stay with you?"

She began to dry her tears with a little handkerchief. Then she dropped the handkerchief and looked at him. Her look steadied him. He couldn't analyse its questioning and desolate quality; he simply felt that it made a demand on him and that he must wait and fulfil it. The look blurred. With a slow unbearable gesture she lifted her hands and covered her face.

And then he heard her whisper:

"*I must live. . . .*"

The words seemed to be driven out of her by a force that wouldn't let her rest behind those blind hands; that beat in her secretly and insistently, making her will hold on to life. He said:

"If you want me, I'll stay. If my friendship's any use to you."

He waited. He noticed her high-crouched shadow on the wall.

At last she dropped her hands, and he saw that she was tired out, but vivid, as she'd been the first time he set eyes on her. She spoke slowly, choosing the words.

"I want your friendship. But I want more than that. I want you to love me. I don't want you to go away." She hesitated. "It sounds base and—negative. Only it's true."

"It's enough for me," he whispered, not daring to move. He felt that even this moment could be enough—her face turned towards him in the firelight and her voice echoing and dying out in his nerves.

She went on, still explaining with an almost clumsy simplicity, the thing that she felt. "You must stay; and in the end I shall love you; partly because you love me, partly because we're both young; and I must love someone." She hesitated. "I feel as if I'd had two lives already. There was—Lawrence. And then there was Philip. I loved them, really—but they weren't real. Philip doesn't hurt me—any more—only my love for him hurts me now."

He said: "I'm not worth anything at all. It's just that I care about you so terribly."

His tone touched her, changing her expression as if a lamp had been moved nearer to her face. She said:

"I want that. That's why I asked you to stay."

He whispered: "Stay and look after you? Live with you?"

She held out her hand.

"Yes."

He held her fingers uncertainly. "D'you understand what you're saying?"

The faintest smile flickered in her eyes and died out. He saw her lips saying "Yes."

He muttered: "For better or for worse?" He said, dry-lipped: "If I stay I shall marry you."

A flame danced, lighting her face and neck and hair. And she said—a phrase that came so strangely from her grave lips and carried so oddly the weight and passion of her meaning:

"Just as you like, Vernon."

THE END

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.

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[The end of *Helena* by Sylvia Thompson]