

PILGRIMAGE

By DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON

The Trap

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THE TRAP

THE FOUR VOLUMES

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- II. The Tunnel, Interim
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- IV. Oberland, Dawn's Left Hand, Clear Horizon, Dimple Hill

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**BY
DOROTHY RICHARDSON**

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TO
BRYHER

THE TRAP

CHAPTER I

A short by-street paved from side to side. Narrow house-fronts, and the endmost houses, hiding the passage that curved round into the further street, high enough to keep out of sight the neighbouring cubes of model dwellings and to leave, as principal feature in the upper air, the tower of St Pancras church. An old little street. A scrap of old London standing apart, between the Bloomsbury squares and the maze of streets towards the City. The light gleaming from its rain-washed flagstones gave it a provincial air and a freshness unknown to the main streets, between whose buildings lay modern roadways dulled by mud or harsh with grimy dust.

Whenever during all her London years Miriam had passed the spot where it opened into the thoroughfare, the little byway had drawn her eyes; always stating its sequestered charm. Entering it now for the first time she had a sense of arriving nowhere.

She found her number to the right, just beyond the opening, on a blistered door, whose knocker, a blurred, weather-worn iron face, gazed sadly downwards. Next the door, within a small window screened from the interior by a frayed serge curtain, were ranged small blocks of stone and

marble, polished columns, scraps of moulding; and in the centre upon an oblong mount an alabaster finger. A lady's forefinger, fastidiously posed—the nail, smooth joints, and softly curving flesh most delicately carved. Its white cleanliness seemed to rebuke the dust that lay thick upon the other objects and made their welcome quiet and impersonal. It was personal, emotional. Arrogant, calling the eye from the surrounding dusty peace.

Dust lay even upon the large grey cat compactly curled amongst the sharp angles and looking forth with a green eye, glass-clear and startlingly bright in contrast to the dried socket from which its fellow should have shone.

She raised the heavy knocker and tapped. The sounds echoed down the empty court and left a stillness into which flowed her own tremulous stillness. Down the street a black cat came towards her, serene and unnoticing, keeping aloof along the centre of the way.

Yet she was an inhabitant of Flaxman's Court. Up there, on the upper floors of the house that remained so quiet before her claim, were rooms as quiet, her own. Soon she would daily be slipping out into this small brightness, daily coming back to it, turning from strident thoroughfares to enter its sudden peace.

She knocked again, more loudly. If Miss Holland were not there, she was shut out. But certainly the door would open. She knew, so careless was her spirit, that she was not shut out. In a moment there came the sound of boots upon uncarpeted stairs. The door opened; but not upon Miss Holland. There before her was the dark passage that skirted the little shop and led to the staircase, the way up to the quiet, eager, empty rooms, obstructed.

Since he stood aside, welcoming, and greeted her by name, the man could be none other than the landlord. An unconsidered item, appearing at the outset. Not only postponing joy, but enhancing it; for if this meeting were its price, how good must be what lay ahead.

She hoped that during the swift moment of confronting once more his long-forgotten way of being, that she had shown no sign of antipathy. She could not be sure, for in that moment she had been back again in bitter conflict. The shape was a duplicate. The same tall, grey-clad form, neither thin nor solid, the same pale eyes, arrogant and embarrassed, the florid skin, the drooping fair moustache half-hiding the fleshy red lips through which had come the voice familiar and shunned from beyond memory.

She went forward followed by the voice into an air dense with shut-in odours dried brown by stale pipe-smoke. It was as if the door just closed behind her were never set open, and any egress there might be at the back, closely sealed. And here, at the centre of a fog of smells of which the air of the passage was but the fringe, someone was living.

The voice behind her on the stairs rang clear through the murk; a refined voice, musical; they always had good voices.

‘I’ve had thwee buckets of boiling water over the floors, and I’m going to have thwee more.’

Yet another price to pay. This time not intermittent but permanent. How long did scrubbing last?

Though the air cleared as they mounted the stairs, it had now a new smell, meeting and mingling with the thinned odours coming up from below, the smell of long-lying London dust. A staircase window, fast shut, showed a grimy sky. On the first floor were two rooms standing open, their doorways close together at right angles. The window of the

large front room gave a blurred view of the house-fronts over the way. The back room was a small square, with a square window. The sky here was fly-blown, but less dim than from the staircase window, and there were trees, black-stemmed, bearing many-shaped masses of drying leaves. A short flight led up to the second floor. Here were the rooms, two; open doors at right angles as on the floor below. Windows wide, smells banished; clear clean height of air. It was the height of the rooms that made these narrow four-story houses look tall.

‘Oh, they’re *nice* rooms,’ she said.

‘They’re nice old houses, they’ve been *good* houses,’ he panted plaintively. ‘I live next door, with my mother. Come *upstairs*, Miss Henderson. I’m at work up *there*.’

He went on up the narrow flight leading to the attic. When his long form had disappeared, Miriam turned into the large room; a large oblong, its end wall, opposite the broad high window, broken by a door communicating with the back room. Going through it, she found the smaller room dark. There was a pale wash on the walls of the other room, but here a dark old paper absorbed the light without reflection. And the ceiling, of course, would be dark with grime. The ceiling seemed to have looked down at her long ago. Long she had stood, with life gathered richly about her, in the empty window-lit space where she now asked whether really she had seen up there while she welcomed this superfluous second room, the thing that lay reflected in her mind, growing dim, changing to a feeling, a part of the warm sense of life all about her.

‘Won’t you come up, Miss Henderson? I’m at work up *here*.’

She had forgotten the man and the third room. At this moment, in order not to go up, she would have sacrificed the

possession of the third room. On her way out she glanced at the ceiling. It *was* painted. Floating draped figures, garlanded, in dull crimsons, faded rose and blue and gold, dim with grime, set within a moulding shaped to fill the angles of the square and filmed to a yellowish brown.

‘This is a nice room.’

The man, a good deal altered by a large white apron, was standing behind his buckets.

‘My name’s Sheffield. I *told* Miss Holland. Perhaps she didn’t tell you?’

The room stated itself, competing with the voice. It was high and airy, its ceiling sloping on all four sides; in the front to a deep lattice, having a wide shelf underneath.

‘She’s a very nice lady. Nice *quiet* lady. There’s not so many about nowadays.’

It was all coming back; the attitude towards life that had so tormented her when she listened unaided by thought. She knew now that it was blasphemy. It is blasphemy, she could say, if this man were equally armed, blasphemy to imagine that each next generation is plunging into an abyss.

‘People don’t keep themselves to themselves like they did. There’s too much running about. Don’t you think so, Miss Henderson?’

She was looking out upon the rain-washed parapet a yard away from the window. ‘Nice to have a parrypidge in case of fire; plenty of roofs and chimley-pots to walk on.’

‘Yes,’ she said hastily. ‘People run about because they wonder who they are.’

‘That’s it. Don’t know where they are. That’s the position of the L.C.C. Money to spend and must find something to spend it on. Public money. Pitched away. Not a hayputh o’ good out of it.’

The sudden presence in the room of the L.C.C. made him harmless.

‘Officials are strange people. Being officials makes people strange.’ She stood seeking something that had passed wordlessly through her mind while she snatched this borrowed thought. Something she ought to say, hidden because she was being insincere. It remained hidden, and she passed towards the door, his inferior, having nothing to offer half so good as his own mistaken convictions.

‘You going *down*, Miss Henderson?’

She was at the top of the winding stair before she spoke the leave-taking that left the room empty, as it would be this afternoon.

Very gently she went down her stairs. In this clear upper light, angles and surfaces declared themselves intimately. The thing she loved was there. Light falling upon the shapes of things, reflected back, moving through the day, a steadfast friend, silent and understanding. She had loved it wherever she was, even in the midst of miseries; and always it had belonged to others. This time it was her own. The breath she held facing it was a cool stream, bringing strength; joy. Nothing could be better than this. None of the events, none of the passions of life, better than this sense of light quietly falling.

Coming back in the afternoon, she found Miss Holland installed, her half of the larger room fully furnished.

From a low camp-bed with a limply frilled Madras muslin cover, her eyes passed to a wicker wash-stand-table, decked with a strip of the same muslin and set with chilly, pimped white crockery. At its side was a dulled old Windsor chair, and underneath it a battered zinc footbath propped against the wall. Above a small shabby chest of drawers a tiny

square of mirror hung by a nail to the strip of wall next the window. No colour anywhere but in the limp muslin, washed almost colourless.

But over the whole of the floor, gleaming, without blemish, was the new linoleum. And soon the dividing curtain would hang between her and Miss Holland's cheerless things. A length of cord hung ready, suspended in a deep loop from the top of the window frame to a hook in the wall above the connecting door, and on the floor beneath the window lay a pile of material.

She cried out at the sight of it, bringing Miss Holland in from the next room.

'Yes,' she said disdainfully, 'that is the curtain.'

Though in the course of two meetings Miriam had grown used to Miss Holland's way of speaking, it was still fruitful of wonder. She wondered now, hearing it unchanged by the informality of the occasion, how it had first come into being. At Wimpole Street it was a familiar tone, common to upper middle-class folks of the better sort. In men it was disarming; a contraction of the range of the voice to two or three fluty notes. In women it was commentary having, even in jest, a note of distress, deprecation of almost everything under the sun.

She had already discovered the exact amount of constriction of the throat necessary to its production, and felt it draw the muscles of her nose and mouth into an expression of faintly humorous contempt. Heard now, as it were in its dressing-gown, it gave a clue to the mode of being that would automatically produce it; disdain of life's external processes, of everything but high ends, any kind of high end, from the honour of England to the dignity of the speaker and

of the person spoken to, that everything in life must be moulded to serve.

Once accepted, it would ban any kind of passionate feeling, even passionate chirpiness. Even mirth would not be allowed to reach beyond a faint amusement. On the whole, so far, she had decided against it, decided that it might even be possible to become a sort of châtelaine without the constricted voice.

But on this occasion the voice showed itself in a new light. Subtly attractive. For behind Miss Holland's tone was a smile that beamed the more warmly for the frost through which it came. It reached and touched like sunlight. Garden sunlight that had been missing through all the wandering years.

Did all these people emanate from high walled gardens, scorning everything that was outside?

In any case, here she was, indefinitely committed to live at close quarters with a scorn she was not sure of being able to share. Must at least beware at the times, this was one of them, when the châtelaine way of taking life went to her head, of treachery to things that stood outside it. Meanwhile the experience would be charming. And to be a little moulded by it would not be atavism. For Miss Holland was more than the châtelaine. She had broken loose, set herself in adventurous circumstances; a châtelaine facing both ways.

‘I saw you did not like the idea of sacking, though I think it might have been made quite pretty, painted artistically, as I am sure you could have done it, with a Grecian key pattern or something of the kind, along the border.’

She had spoken standing near the heaped material conciliatingly, and now bent and caught gingerly at an end, as if uncertain of its mood.

‘Still, I thought I would get this. It is the new stuff they are calling “casement cloth” in quality rather like a fine “crash.” Very durable, and not ruinous in price.’

‘Perfect. Tones with the floor and my crocks. But you must let me pay. It’s my extravagance.’

‘Not at all. I quite like it. I shall certainly contribute my share. Your things are here. They are charming. I perceive that you have excellent taste.’

‘Joy, where are they?’

‘I had them set down in here. I thought you would prefer to arrange them yourself.’

She threw open the connecting door and stood back, a gracious hostess introducing guests. How tall she was indoors, and big. Heavy in build, yet limber and light-footed; graceful. The grey in the sleek dark mass of hair scarcely showed. Her large eyes, set well apart on either side of her good nose, when there was no street light to show the tired muscles round about them, were really beautiful. Liquid radiant blue, with a darker ring.

‘I suddenly,’ Miriam said, going into the crowded little room, ‘remembered crockery and went back to Maple’s. But there’s a tragedy. I forgot an indispensable.’

She was startled by laughter, an abrupt fairy tinkle, affectionate and gay.

‘Never mind,’ said the voice, unchanged. ‘I will obtain one for you.’

‘How?’

‘Oh, quite easily, I assure you.’

‘And, oh Lord, a pail! I forgot a pail.’

‘There is no need to invoke the Deity. I have several pails.’

Miriam turned and saw happiness shine from her. Her presence was balm as she stood so lightly there—a

momentary stillness poised for help, ready to welcome any confession, shoulder any burden that might be offered—and then turned on a dancing step towards the big room, thoroughly pleased, deep, quite deep, in delight at the prospect of settling down here in intimacy.

And here they were. And it *was* wonderful. Full of a deep refreshment. The experiment was turning to success. But not yet quite fully. Not until the curtain was up and the strips of privacy were secure.

She was not sure that Miss Holland desired a complete privacy. The curtain, for her, was an affair of modesty, a physical not a spiritual covering. Spiritually she had nothing to hide.

She had no back premises. No reservations. And here, at last, no doubt, was the secret of the effortless decorous speech of the ‘gentlewoman.’ And the secret of its tiresomely unvarying form. The quality it expressed went right through. They not only spoke as they thought, but thought as they spoke, guided and fashioned their thought, even to themselves, in forms of decorous speech. Anything that could not so be moulded was banished. Anything ‘unspeakable’—their strongest term of contempt. Thus they were, even when alone, permanently at attention.

For herself, the coming of the curtain would be the moment of dropping the mask of attention, the moment of soaring freely within this new life. Things were going ahead too fast. Strong impressions succeeding and obliterating each other too swiftly to be absorbed.

‘I’ll go round for my things. Must find a greengrocer,’ she said, looking in on Miss Holland cutting a slice from a substantial bar of plain soap.

‘You prefer a greengrocer? I am employing the Church Army myself. They are most useful. And it is quite the least expensive way of moving. The men should now be on their way with the last of my things. They could then, if you like, fetch yours.’

‘Ah! Perfect,’ said Miriam, and set forth.

Going westwards she met a sky ablaze with fiery rose thrown up behind clouds that hid the drooping sun, and saw, looking back, the London scene transformed; pink houses, grey roofs tinged with madder. The sun had still a good way to drop. The clouds might shift. Coming back she would walk in brilliance.

The Church Army men arrived as she was putting together the last of her things.

They were oppressive. Met in the freedom of a slum they would have been dreadful enough. But with their prison air of sullen shyness, overlaid by an ill-fitting respectability, they were, she felt as she stood telling them what things were to be removed, heart-breaking by reason of their ignorance of the world they now feared. They did not know that the evil that in them had come up and out into action was in everybody.

She wanted to fête them, give them tea, somehow make them cease tiptoeing about the room with that dreadful air of shame. But her voice, which she tried to make casual, sounded rallying, expressive of equality, insulting; she could only wish them to finish and be gone.

Her forgotten book was lying on the table. The book that had suddenly become the centre of her life. Now, with these

men here, the very existence of the volume seemed a mockery. She took it in her hands, felt it draw her again with its unique power. The men could, must, manage without supervision. For the second time, during which they stood listening as though she had not spoken before, she pointed out the things which were to be taken, and sat down with the book.

Sitting thus with the book in her hands and her eyes upon the title, set within the golden lines of an upright oblong in letters of gold upon the red cover, she found herself back within the first moment of meeting it. In the little book-shop, a treasure house opened by the so small subscription. Saw again the close-packed ranks of well-known names, names that had until then, whenever she thought of them, stood large along the margin of life, and that seemed now, set minutely down upon neat rows of volumes, suddenly uninteresting, irrelevant to the impulse of her search. And then this book, for all the neutrality of its title and of the author's name, drawing her hands, bringing, as she took it from the shelf and carried it, unexamined, away down the street, the stillness of contentment.

She could, so long as the men remained, get no further. Within the neat red binding lay altogether new happiness. But she was aware only of the sluggishly moving men, of the shelter from whence they had come and whither presently, when she, free and a millionaire, should have been shifted from palace to palace, they would, with their dingy barrow, shamle back.

The men were going downstairs. The last moments in this room that held the whole of her London life were ticking themselves away, appealing in vain for some sadness of farewell. Just round the corner in Flaxman's Court was Miss

Holland, expectantly at work. And here she sat with a book open upon her knee, asking only to be left in communion with a style.

She glanced through the pages of its opening chapter, the chapter that was now part of her own experience; set down at last alive, so that the few pages stood in her mind, growing as a single good day will grow, in memory, deep and wide, wider than the year to which it belongs. She was surprised to find, coming back after the interval of disturbed days, how little she had read. Just the opening pages, again and again, not wanting to go forward; wanting the presentation of the two men, talking outside time and space in the hotel bedroom, to go on for ever. And presently fearing to read further, lest the perfection of satisfaction should cease.

Reading a paragraph here and there, looking out once more the two phrases that had thrilled her more intimately than any others, she found a stirring of strange statements in her mind. A strange clarity that was threatening to change the adventure of reading to a shared disaster. For she remembered now, having hung for a while over Waymarsh's 'sombre glow' and 'his attitude of prolonged impermanence,' that she had already read on into the next chapter, that something had happened, so bitter as to have been pushed from her mind. And yet her mind had been at work upon it. It had happened with the coming of Maria Gostrey, and had culminated, at the dinner-party, in her red neck-band. Disappointing. Yes. Here she was again, drawing on her gloves and being elaborately mysterious.

The thought, too, of reading in the new room, with Miss Holland on the other side of the curtain, changed the proportions of the adventure. Made it almost improper. She imagined herself trying to explain why the phrases that lit the

scene were wonderful. And it seemed, thought of as a public matter, ridiculous to have been so excited by the way he conveyed information without coming forward to announce it. But even more disquieting was Miss Holland's reinforcement of the need to confront the author with his own cynicism, to tell him that in every word he came forward with his views, which were the most hopelessly complacent masculine ignorance.

It was only as private, shared by no one else, that the adventure was glorious. Thought of as carried under the eye of a witness, it seemed criminal—'anti-social.' She now for the first time imagined men reading the magic pages, suffering unconsciously their insidious corruption. This man was a monstrous unilluminated pride. And joy in him was a mark of the same corruption. Pride in discovering the secrets of his technique. Pride in watching it labour with the development of the story. The deep attention demanded by this new way of statement was in itself a self-indulgence. Thought of as enjoyed in a world that held Church Army men it was plain wickedness.

But the cold ignorance of this man was unconscious. And therefore innocent. And it was he after all who had achieved the first completely satisfying way of writing a novel. If this were a novel. There *was* something holy about it. Something to make, like Conrad, the heavens rejoice. Perhaps at lunch times, or in rare solitudes, she could go on, get at the whole of the light there was in him. Style was something beyond good and evil. Sacred and innocent.

The new furniture peopled the room with clear reflections. The daylight was dimmed by the street, but it came in generously through the wide high window. And upon the polished surfaces of the little bureau, set down with its back to the curtain, and upon its image, filling the lower part of the full-length strip of mirror hung opposite against the wall, were bright plaques of open sky.

The bureau was experience; seen from any angle it was joy complete. Added to life and independent of it. A little thing that would keep its power through all accidents of mood and circumstance. The inlaid design enclosing the lock of the sloping lid formed a triangle with the small brass candlesticks at either end of the level top, and the brass handles of the three drawers hung below on either side, garlands, completing the decoration.

Pools of light rested on the squat moss-green crockery of the wash-table, set, flanked by clear wall and clear green floor, between the mirror and the end of the small bed which skirted the wall as far as the door opening on to the landing. The unencumbered floor made a green pathway to the window. It was refreshment merely to walk along it, between clean sightly objects. Squalor was banished. No more smell of dust. No more sleepless nights under a roof too hot to grow cool even in the hour before dawn. Here in the mornings there would always be beauty, the profiles of things growing clear on either side of the pathway of morning light, the profiles of flowers, set in a bowl between the sentinel candlesticks.

Miss Holland's voice came unheralded, startlingly out of the silence. She must have come through from the back room in noiseless slippers. Miriam answered that she had forgotten about clothes, and proposed nails in the attic.

‘It will be no trouble at all. I have lengths of bamboo and still some yards of green material. We will regard any provision of French wardrobes down here as franking me to use the attic for my charts and other impedimenta. You, I observe, have no debris.’

‘Only a few books.’

‘You have a goodly store of books. I shall look forward to a treat.’

‘There’s a book I’m reading now——’ She began walking up and down the linoleum path in the excitement of wondering whether Miss Holland could be brought to share the adventure.

‘It is in a way the most wonderful I have met. The most real.’

‘No doubt you are a connoisseur.’

‘I’m not. But I’ve never got so much out of a novel before. I say, this stuff shows every mark.’

Miss Holland would get nothing from James. She would read patiently for a while and pronounce him ‘a little tedious.’

‘It will at first. But you need not be concerned about that. I am at home all day, and it will be a very slight matter to keep things more or less in order. Perhaps we can make a little bargain. I for my part will willingly undertake the rooms and the marketing if you will save me from the *palavering*.’

‘Will there be any?’

‘Well, for example, the rent. The landlord is a most *odious* man. I abhor the thought of tackling him. You, I am sure, will manage anything of that sort better than I. Yes. Most certainly. You have an air.’

A few words weekly seemed a small price to pay for freedom from the mysteries of cleaning and catering, and

Miriam agreed to pay the rent, to call next door and pay it; keeping Sheffield away from the house.

Miss Holland went on talking as if to herself. Expostulating. It was a mistake, she concluded, to drop domesticity. She preferred to keep her hand in, while safeguarding sufficient leisure for reading and so on.

Miriam saw her keeping house, dressmaking, and yet free to wander abroad in the sunlight, and to come home, full of the life and brightness of London, to rest and read, with her feet up, 'to counteract the strain upon the heart, of the upright posture,' following the example of 'those sensible Americans who discuss business with their feet on the mantelshelf.' She judged unconventionalities according as they did or did not serve the cause of hygiene.

'Much,' she finished hurriedly, as if to avoid further postponing anything Miriam might be going to say, '*Much* can be done with a damp duster.'

Miriam wondered whether, after all, housework might not hold some strange charm. Something that was lacking in a life lived altogether in the world of men; altogether on the surface of things. Always, in relation to household women, she felt herself a man. Felt that they included her, with a half contemptuous indulgence, in the world of men. Some of them, those to whom the man's world was still an exciting mystery, were a little jealous and spiky.

As if encouraged by silence, Miss Holland pursued her theme.

'I have a horror of becoming an *official* woman. It is, I think, a most obnoxious type. It abounds. In London it is to be met wherever women are in positions of responsibility. Real or fancied. And it is on the increase. There have, of course, always been official women. Even in rural districts,

where, most unfortunately, they have but one sphere of activity. We used to call them the curates-in-charge.'

Vicarage humour at first hand. Miriam laughed suitably; ensconced, an eavesdropper.

'Church workers.'

'They are the bane of a parish. Work, yes. That they most certainly do, to the accompaniment of loud complaints on the score of other people's inactivity. Implying, of course, that they themselves hold a monopoly of intelligence and efficiency. Whereas the truth is to be found in their inability to attract helpers or to collaborate with those who really desire to take part in the work. These women are actuated solely by personal ambition, the desire to run the parish and to be openly recognized as doing so. Nothing less will content them. Nothing less. It is a *most* perturbing spectacle. And I, for one, have no hesitation in admitting that I am driven to the conclusion that authority is harmful to women. They grow so *hard*. So *coldly* self-important and dictatorial.'

Miriam knew she would want to run the parish, choose the music, edit the vicar's mind, lecture the parishioners.

'In London many of them are social workers. They spend their time on committees. But not in service. They quell.'

She handled her statements as she had handled the pile of green material, pouncing, taking disdainful hold. Her sentences were sallies, each one leaving her voice halted on an interval of deprecating sounds. Her voice came from a height. She must be standing, poised, in her light way, for movement. Talking as if to herself, assuming a lack of interest. Yet the air was full of her shy desire for response.

'They must be holy terrors.'

'I fear,' chuckled Miss Holland, 'that I am not completely convinced of their holiness.'

‘I’ve never met any of these women. Avoid women on the whole. But I dare say I should be that type myself if I weren’t too lazy to achieve a position.’

‘Believe me, you could never be official. You are much too artistic.’

Miriam was too disappointed to feel flattered. There was no illumination here. Exposing herself before the tribunal, she had been judged in a class of which the judge knew nothing. Compared with Miss Holland, she might perhaps be called artistic. But it was grievous to be supplied already with a false reputation. To be imagined as cultured in a way that was respected in vicarages.

She glanced around upon the poor things that already she loved with an immemorial love whose secret eluded her, whose going forth she knew to be blind and personal. Her eye was at once arrested by a small dark something upon the white coverlet of her bed. A ladybird. Too square. Perfectly square and motionless. Even as she called to Miss Holland to come through and observe, the sight of it thrilled her in every nerve.

A swish of the curtain and Miss Holland was at her side, bent and peering.

‘Dear, dear, *dear!*’ she moaned. ‘I feared, I *feared*. I’ll get the dustpan.’

The floor rocked with her swift departure. Miriam stood fascinated. The unspeakable thing had revealed itself, and she was not only calm but curious. A moment ago it had existed only in her mind, an ultimate she could not imagine herself seeing and surviving. It looked like a fragment of an autumn leaf. Miss Holland’s voice sounded in the further room. Miriam listened to the low tones for entertainment while she kept watch.

‘I feared, I feared,’ and then a swift ferreting, drowning the anxious monologue.

Weary of the scene that was holding up her installation, she turned away to the window, half expecting to be leapt upon from behind. She was vitalized by the incident; tingling from head to foot. It was strange that one could recognize at sight an unknown thing; but far stranger that within a moment of pure shock there should be life, the keen sense of living that stood away outside the bounds of everyday life.

What a set of circumstances were these that brought only vermin to give her the pang of immortality? Not a thing one could testify at a dinner-table. Why not?

When Miss Holland came back she would remind her that monkeys were timid, and fearful of small creeping things. Being a Protestant she probably revelled in Evolution—wouldn’t see that it left everything more spooky than before.

She was looking straight in at a window of the opposite house. The panes were clean and clear, the curtains on either side a dull dark green, hanging in straight folds. Sombre. Faintly, clearer as she made it out, a thick tall white candle rose in the midst of the gloom, just inside the window, changing the aspect of the curtains, making a picture. Just visible, right and left, were the shoulders of two high-backed chairs. She imagined them occupied, the beam of the thick white candle falling on two forms. But in this street what forms? It was clear that she and Miss Holland were not the only aliens. Perhaps ‘artistic’ bachelor women who made a cult of their diggings, wore sage-green dresses and would emerge to become a spectacle known by heart, now both together, now one alone, crying cultured witticisms from the street to the window. Women standing critically aside from life, hugely amused by it. But would such have achieved that

candle, at once a person and a piece of furniture? Lamps they would have, with art shades. Or if candles, still art shades. It might be an anchorite. But the company of such a candle was not solitude. Underneath the window was a cobbler's shop.

'Just look here,' she cried to Miss Holland coming back preceded by her voice. The things in her own room seemed to greet, as she turned, the things in the room across the way. It was a man's room. It had an air of waiting for an untimed return.

'I hope,' said Miss Holland, through a rapid scrunching of paper. 'I trust, it was only those Church Army men.'

Miriam watched her go away, with the dustpan at arm's length, still gravely expostulating.

'It's dreadful,' she said to her returning form, 'but also fearfully funny, to find the ultimate horror sitting contentedly, poor little thing, on the end of your bed.'

She tinkled and tinkled at that, woefully crying out through her laughter, repudiating and agreeing and contradicting.

'But I admire your spirit,' she wailed finally.

'Do look at this huge candle across the way.'

Miss Holland moved to her side and peered anxiously, frowning in anticipation.

'Very odd,' she said sceptically. 'A ship's candle, something of the kind.'

'Where did they get it? Besides, too tall, it would burn a cabin roof. Perhaps an altar candle.'

'Very eccentric.' She turned away, busily, skittishly. Pleased about something, but not interested in the candle.

Her light busy footfall was audible upstairs as Miriam faced the boxes and parcels waiting, piled amongst the furniture of the little back room, to be unpacked. With

Sunday at hand, it would never occur to Miss Holland to leave it all and go out. But she, too, must be wanting tea. There could be tea, now, amongst the wreckage. Laughter and relaxation.

Yet not to go out now was to miss so much. To go out, leaving behind this treasure of disorder, and sit at leisure in an undisturbed world, would be to reap the full adventure of being installed. Homekeeping people missed that adventure. They slaved on and on, saying how nice it will be when everything is *straight*. And then wondered why it was not nice.

Left to herself, she would now go out, not only for tea but for the whole evening, into a world renewed. There would be one of those incidents that punctually present themselves at such moments, a link in the chain of life as it appears only when one is cut off from fixed circumstances. She would come home lost and refreshed. Laze through Sunday morning. Roam about the rooms amongst things askew as though thrown up by an earthquake, their exposed strata storied with memory and promise. There would be indelible hours of reading and dreaming, of harvesting the lively thought that comes when one is neither here nor there, but poised in bright light between life ended and a life not yet begun. The blissful state would last until dusk deepened towards evening and would leave her filled with a fresh realization of the wonder of being alive and in the midst of life, and with strength to welcome the week slowly turning its unknown bright face towards her through the London night. With great speed, at the eleventh hour, she would get everything roughly in order.

Miss Holland appeared at the sitting-room door, eyeing the disorder.

Miriam groaned her fatigue aloud.

‘Let’s leave it,’ said Miss Holland, contemptuously. ‘Oh, let’s *leave* it,’ she wailed in a protesting falsetto, with averted face and outstretched fingers disgustingly flipping.

‘Let’s drop everything and go out for tea,’ she went on, relaxing, looking into space, while with eyebrows raised disdainfully she stood halted for response.

‘Oh, agreed,’ said Miriam. ‘I’m expiring.’

‘We will *not* expire. We will seek tea *immediately*.’

She swung round on one heel and bounded lightly back into the bedroom with her tinkling laugh. The little scene remained in Miriam’s eyes, somewhere within it the exchanged glance of delighted understanding that had driven them both to cover which was not cover, for they were immediately together again, and the dividing curtain could not mask the results of their encounter, the quick movements, the duet of cheerful hummings.

Miriam went back into the little room to collect her outdoor things; checking an impulse to eager snatching, steadying herself against the sudden arrival of the personal note.

Under her hat was the red book. The *personal note* repeated itself before her mind’s eye, in print. And as she searched for her gloves the note described itself as it were aloud, in a voice speaking urbanely from the surrounding air. Its indubitable descent; its perhaps too great and withal so manifestly, so wellnigh woefully irretrievable precipitancy. Its so charming and, for all she could at the moment and within the straitly beleaguering the so eminently onerous and exciting circumstances assemble of disturbing uncertainty, so brilliantly, so almost *dazzlingly* sunlit height. In simpler words, things were going too fast and too far. An exact and

dramatic landscape of thought. Things seen as going too fast and too far, distilled into refinement. Cuyp.

She tried to imagine herself producing phrases for the landlord from a mental landscape of what would be occurring between them in terms of thought. It would certainly make her dignified, and to the landlord, mysterious. It might daunt, reduce him, keep him at a distance. But it was difficult to weave in the word 'rent' the so simple, the so potently humiliating monosyllable that was the immediate, the actual, the dreadfully unavoidable ... ornate alias. Ah! Clifford Allbutt. James was the art of beautifully elaborating the ornate alias?

Her eyes roamed as she moved about putting on her things. Seeking up and down the strip of bedroom for a centre, some running together of effects where her spirit could settle and find its known world about it. There seemed to be none, though the light was fading and the aspect of the room as it had been when her things were first set down was already in the past. Each glance produced the same picture; a picture seen and judged long ago and with which her eyes could do nothing. She took refuge with single objects, finding each satisfactory, but nowhere reaching home. Swimming in transparent shallows, unable to touch bottom, stand steady, and see forth. Her life had somehow ceased. Behind her back unawares, while she had flown from newness to newness, its thread had been snapped. The small frayed end remaining in her hand was drawing her ahead across a level that showed no coverts; no deep places to be invaded by unsummoned dreams and their good end in the recreation of familiar things.

Though it was late when they arrived, the club was just as she had seen it on her first solitary visit. The same hush in

the large drawing-room, the same low murmuring of conversation between women half hidden in the depths of easy chairs.

Seated in two little high-backed chairs by the central window, they found themselves looking down on the square, a small forest dim in the twilight, ashen where the light poured in from the street lamps. A twilit loveliness at rest. Walked through, the squares were always a new loveliness, but even at a stroll they passed too quickly. There, at last, was one of the best of them arrested for contemplation.

Away behind was a roomful of independent strangers, also aware of the square set ever before their eyes. This was freedom, in company, enriched. The sense of imprisonment she had felt on coming down the street with Miss Holland, the tangible confirmation when Miss Holland, laughter sounding in the tones of her confidently talking voice, suddenly took her arm, of the note struck too soon, and too high, vanished altogether in the freedom of this neutral territory.

Miss Holland was responding formally, in low tones, to her comments on the aspect of the square. Spontaneity, it was evident, was to be shelved just where it might be safely indulged; just where one attained an impersonality as wide as the wide world.

Suddenly she found herself wanting to say outrageous things. The decorous voices sounding all about her seemed to call for violence. With difficulty she kept her tone subdued. Level it refused to be. The gift of the square imparted to every word the sound of exciting news. News upon which the dear, the for-the-first-time-so-comfortably, so-opulently-visible London twilight closed gently in.

It was to a morning and not to Miss Holland she was speaking. The wide deep spaces of a London Sunday morning that showed invariably within the witnessed falling of a Saturday twilight. Miss Holland's responses showed her struggling between charmed appreciation and a sense that audible comments were not quite within the boundaries of club etiquette. Silence fell, and within it Miriam saw the scales of judgment descend equally balanced. She had, it was true, given no thought to her neighbours and only now, in retrospect, heard her lively tones penetrate the murmurings of the gathered ladies. But—she was wearing her lavender-grey, her mushroom hat of silky straw, both still quite able to hold their own, and still conquering fatigue whenever she put them on. While Miss Holland, though clothed in awareness of her surroundings, was not even stylishly dowdy. Piled upon her head was a mass of blue crinoline, not only faded, but dulled with inextricable dust. Beneath its shapelessness wisps of lank hair made fun of her dignified bearing. A black tie, running from neck to waist of the skimped blouse uniting her coat and skirt, fought with the millinery hat. Only her eyes took the light, and they were at a loss, turned unseeing, under faintly frowning brows, upon the prospect beyond the window.

She was uneasy, disapproving equally of silence and of speech that was not smoothly decorous.

Tea came. Lights went up all over the room; brilliant light shone down upon the stately Queen Anne service, shone through the thinness of the shallow flowered cups.

'Tea,' cried Miriam, through the shifting of chairs that followed the coming of the light, 'should never be drunk from cold white cups.'

Miss Holland laughed her laugh, and began with large, composed movements to pour out. At once her appearance was redeemed. For a moment Miriam sat basking in her manner. Then her eyes were drawn to two tall figures risen together from deep chairs far away.

‘One ought,’ she went on to lend a casual air to her first inspection of fellow-members, ‘to drink down to a pattern.’ They were without hats and therefore residents. And unexpectedly impressive.

‘Good porcelain,’ Miss Holland was saying, ‘is certainly a great enhancement of the charm of the tea-table.’

They were most strange. They radiated a definitely familiar quality as they stood there gazing down the room. At nothing. There was no trace of the awareness of exposure that set the faces of the women sitting about within view, large-hatted in deep chairs; awareness or careful unawareness. Yet as they moved, now, slowly along the clear spaces of the room, they were visibly the figures of an ordeal. Stately in their white-robed splendour, they were still piteous. Something was dispelling the conventional charm usually inseparable from the spectacle of beauty, tall and well-clothed, moving slowly through a room.

The depth of her interest inspired Miriam to feed her conversation with Miss Holland and remain at the same time free to watch. The mystery cleared as the figures drew near. They were sisters, the one quite ordinary, fully aware and fitted out with the regulation feminine charm of bearing. Conscious of piled brown hair, of brilliant oval cheeks, of dark and lively eyes. The upturning bow of her mouth was set in a smile. So it would be set, thought Miriam, years ahead, when the nose and the chin began to approach each other. She was the elder. But her few extra years, the ardour

of her head and her splendid form, were in leash to the being of the other. She it was who came unseeing and produced the strange effect. Slender, in childish muslin beside her sister's opulent sophisticated lace, she was formidable. Below her dark hair, drawn flat to the shape of her head, yet set round it like a mist, was the strong calm face of a healthy child, a mask clear of expression and colourless but for the eyes that were startling. Life flowed from her eyes as if it would wither the air before them. Where was she? Whence, round-faced child, had she gathered her wealth of suffering? Her beauty was the beauty of a transfiguration. Here, on this plain afternoon, at the Belmont, amongst friends.

Reluctantly, as they came quite near, Miriam averted her screened gaze and met the eyes of the other. Here was conciliation, a deprecating fearfulness changing suddenly as she came in view of Miss Holland.

'My,' she vowed, wide-mouthed for the leisurely vowel, 'it's Miss Halland.'

Americans! Then perhaps the other girl merely had neuralgia. Miss Holland had turned, and Miriam saw her swift disclaiming glance and its change into the shy but brightly charmed and charming smile, accompanying the greeting that was yet so formal and, in its apologetic disdainfulness, so like her voice. She was hidden now behind the tall white figures. Their voices, playing about her and expanding into the room, killed Miriam's interest. There was, for her, something in the American voice that robbed its communications of any depth of meaning. The very ease of their talk, its expressiveness, the direct swift way they handled their stores of information and communicated their thoughts, made even the most fascinating topics fall dead, rifled of essential significance.

Her stranded attention was caught by the sound of blended voices approaching from the door. Voices in the midst of talk, having come into the room talking, but not in the least in the English way of making conversation to cover an entry. They were in full swing, their sentences overlapping. Obviously noticing nothing and no one. They were using the club as a place to talk in, and were one voice. Sisters or cousins. Yet they had arranged themselves in chairs without breaking their talk, which went forward so eagerly that they seemed to be exchanging opinions for the first time. Now where had she heard, between sisters, exactly that effect? Somewhere between members of a large family that formed a society in itself?

No, the three Bannerman girls, just three, no more, living in seclusion with their parents, marching about all over Barnes for years, in perpetual conversation in high, rapid voices.

They had suddenly appeared at the church decorations, keeping it up even there, amongst themselves. Speaking to no one else. Being really interested, but somehow conveying their conviction that the people all around them were too stupid even to be noticed. They had accepted work politely, making clever comments without looking at those who instructed them, and then sat there with quickly moving fingers and a ceaseless fretting of voices. Always one shape of tone: beginning on a refined argumentative switchback of sound. Harriett had caught it, taking them off, for days.

‘Isn’t it verray *remarkable*, my dear Miriam, that such a singularly tall man as Mr Spiffkins should be a radical?’

‘Don’t you, my dear Miriam, consider it highly alarming that rain falls *down* instead of *up*?’

She listened. Here, perhaps, as the Bannermans now appeared in her mind for the first time since she left home, would be light upon that long-forgotten mystery. But a question intruded. Why, since their voices followed the same pattern of sound and bore the same suggestion of being at loggerheads with the social order, why had not the Lycurgans recalled the Bannerman girls? Certainly if they were alive and in London, all three were now active members of the Lycurgan society; the amused superiority in their voices added to the Lycurgan tide of amused superiority to everything on earth.

Yet these women who had brought them back, though they had the Lycurgan voice, had nothing of the crisp cocksurenness of the socialist intelligentsia. They were unanimously belabouring someone, hitting out right and left, but within their expressive voices, moulding their lively scorn, animating the unvarying tone-shape of the intelligentsia-in-argument, was *sorrow*.

The coming of their tea brought a pause. With the ceasing of their voices warmth withdrew from the sound of the room, and returned at the first phrase sounding together with the cheerful gush of tea hurriedly poured.

‘Well, I think it’s just simply incomprehensible.’

Miriam knew it was not. She half turned, strangely sure that they would welcome her and quite simply state a case. They were not a clique. Something in their voices related them to everybody in the world. They had the selflessness of those who keep an eye everywhere, without discrimination of persons. They would be at once interested, even in herself, and quite blind. She turned and found a group of three, three small women with one face; a face she knew well at Lycurgan meetings and liked, but always with a queer thrill

of uncertainty. It was vital, intimately intelligent, and yet alien, seeming at once to light up and to darken its surroundings.

The club, she thought as she turned gladly back to the loneliness created by Miss Holland's surrounded state, was going to get hold of her in a way of which she had never dreamed, since at the outset it had brought her to the edge of the whirlpool of people with whom this dark face was in her mind so richly associated. Set in a row of Lycurgan faces, all screened, more or less, in the English way and not different, in silence, from a row of Primrose League faces, this one face would stand out, a pale, bony oval set with crisp hair; and eyes, under dark brows, richly despairingly intent. The moment the lecture was over it would be visible, now here now there, and always in eager speech.

Small wonder, since it turned out to be three, that she was always seeing it.

'Now Mrs Wilson *is* charming,' said one. 'A far more charming personality than he.'

However indiscreet, the remark was illuminating. Set up thus on a placard, she need have no hesitation in carrying it away, for Hypo. But she must acknowledge the receipt of it. Turning full round, she met a vivid face that boldly smiled, and, smiling, was drowned in a vivid flush. Miriam smiled too, basking for a moment in the charm, glowing so brightly in its role of a prolonged haunting impression come suddenly to life at her elbow. But so formidably. In place of one figure a whole group, a multiplicity of attraction. She turned away to find that Miss Holland's friends had disappeared.

Miss Holland sat, flushed with talk, quietly but quite evidently summoning composure; as nearly flustered as it was possible for her to be.

‘How tall those women are,’ said Miriam, still intent on the group behind.

‘I did not introduce them,’ replied Miss Holland, busying herself, with downcast eyes, amongst the flowered tea-cups. ‘I—well—I thought——’ Her deprecating tone collapsed into a murmur and rose again, recovering. ‘Yes, they are tall, both mother and daughter.’

‘Astounding. I thought they were sisters.’

‘Their name is Wheeler. It is a most interesting story.’

Nothing about Americans could be really interesting. But Miss Holland, without looking up, was launched upon her narrative.

‘They are from San Antonio in Texas. The child Estella is just fifteen years of age. Yes, it is remarkable. A warmer clime, I suppose. Still it is very remarkable. Her grandmother was Spanish. And that perhaps may account for her exceptional temperament. She is a musician. The ’cello. They have travelled to London for her training. It seems that her teachers at home were obliged to confess they could do nothing further for her.’

‘Why not Germany?’

‘Well, that is just it. The reason for their coming to London is the strangest part of the story. It seems that there is a Pole, a celebrated ’cellist. The child heard him once, years ago, in New York, and has been saying ever since that he is the only man in the world who can teach her. He, it appears, is giving performances in London this winter. So they have come. The child thinks of nothing else. For the moment she is at the Philharmonic Academy. She dislikes it. I am sincerely sorry for her mother. She is most courageous; and so wise. Insists on physical culture. Very wise. Skipping and so on. At a gymnasium. The great trouble at the moment is

that it now appears that the Pole takes no pupils. Also that they are not too well off. Estella, however, is determined to see him.'

'Has she given concerts?'

'Not so far. But the Academy wishes to bring her out. At the Queen's Hall.'

'Wicked!'

'Certainly she is young.'

Miss Holland hesitated. She was evidently still full of communications about the Wheelers, but suddenly unwilling to continue. She was guarding them. Miriam saw plainly that her interest was not to go too far. That, she felt, was all to the good. Here was the beginning of an understanding that their interests were to be independent. But the possessiveness and the mystery was making her dislike these Wheelers. They had Miss Holland's interest in a way she was sure she would never do, and Miss Holland was admitting it and saying too, with her honest embarrassment, that she believed these wonderful people would not be interested in her fellow-lodger.

She was her fellow-lodger. Now that personal depths had been revealed, that strange fact remained; an achievement.

CHAPTER II

Miriam sat through the evening reading by lamplight in the disorderly little room. Unsatisfactorily. Her attention wandered to Miss Holland lecturing in the East End, and to the thoughts in Miss Holland's mind as she stood confronted by the roomful of dilapidated people.

The shaded lamplight left everything in gloom but the page whose words, yesterday so potent, brought to-night only a sense of the gulf between life and the expression of it. She had reached the conclusion that fiction was at worst a highly flavoured drug and at best as much an abstraction as metaphysics, when Miss Holland came back.

She stood in the doorway tall and dim; silent and dubious with fatigue. But when Miriam suggested going out in search of coffee she came to life in horrified resistance, announced her belief in the restorative power of weak tea, and vowed that not on any account would she issue forth without good cause at such an hour.

And out in the blue-lit gloom of the Euston Road, hurrying timidly along, she still protested. But behind her woeful protests was delight. And once they were safely inside the heavily frosted inner doors and the little padrone, as Miriam had predicted, came forward to welcome them and, waving away a hovering waiter, himself found them places and took their small order, she sat back upon her red velvet sofa evidently enjoying the adventure. But beyond a single

comprehensive glance, she had not noticed her surroundings. She remarked upon the cleanliness, the cheerful Alpine oleographs. Of all the rest she was unaware.

To have her here, disarmed of her fears, was not enough. But even if they came again and again there would never be more than that. She would never expand to the atmosphere. Would always sit as she was doing now, upright and insulated, making formal conversation; decorously busy with the small meal.

The place was not crowded. Every one there was distinctly visible—the lonely intent women in gaudy finery, the old men fêting bored, laughing girls who glanced about; the habitués, solitary figures in elderly bondage to the resources of the place.

‘Of course,’ said Miriam at last, ‘there are all sorts of queer people here.’

She sat back, unwilling to go, looking out into the room as if unaware of Miss Holland’s preparations to depart, following immediately on her last sip of the excellent coffee. But supposing Miss Holland should even for a moment sit back and contemplate her surroundings? She would see only material for pity or disgust. See only morally. Her interest in individuals would be an uninteresting interest. That young man, with his pose of careful conscious detachment, would not for her be any kind of epitome, but just a young man—‘probably some sort of student.’

‘It is now,’ said Miss Holland, glancing at her wrist-watch, ‘well past midnight. This has been a unique experience. And, just for this once, I do not object to it. But it must certainly not be repeated.’

Miriam gazed at her. She was blushing. She had seen all that there was to see. Miriam remembered her own first

horror. But that had been alone and in youthful ignorance.

‘I’m sorry you don’t like my little haunt.’

‘It is scarcely that. The place is clean and pleasant, and doubtless a great convenience to many people. But, dear me, dear me, I can only imagine the horror of my chief in beholding me sitting here, and at such an hour.’

Astonishment kept Miriam dumb and passed into resentment. Having delivered her judgment, Miss Holland now sat contemptuously drawing on her gloves. The episode over and escape at hand, she released a scorn that was almost venomous. It lingered about her politely smiling relief, an abominable look of triumph. Of personal triumph.

Miriam clung to her silence. She felt the advantage fall to her own side as she saw Miss Holland’s acceptance of her unspoken thoughts.

‘It is different for yourself,’ she said in answer to them.

‘You are free from the necessity of considering appearances.’

‘I’m a guttersnipe, thank heaven,’ said Miriam.

Miss Holland laughed. A small sound incapable of reaching the next table. She was really amused.

‘You are anything but that. And in certain respects you may consider yourself fortunate.’

Donizetti’s had been insulted. At sight of Miss Holland hurrying with bent head, as if weathering a gale of contamination, down the aisle between the rows of little tables, Miriam hated her. Hated her refusal to place herself outside the pale of feminine dignity. The narrow pale. Deep. But were they deep, these people who went about considering their dignity? ‘Dignity is absurdity,’ she vowed, keeping step with Miss Holland’s light swift walk.

There is one thing worse than a dignified man and that is an undignified woman. Chesterton. It sounded so respectful;

chivalrous. Made me try to remember to be dignified for a whole day. I tried to crush Hypo by quoting it.

‘Just so,’ he said. ‘Dignity is the privilege of the weak.’

She tried to imagine Miss Holland undignified. Rushing about and babbling inconsequently. Tiresome, men called those women, but were glad of them if they had kind hearts. Mrs Orly has no dignity. But she is neither weak nor tiresome. Her heart is a ... er ... domesticated tornado.

Walking home, estranged from Miss Holland, Miriam found her own life, that had stood all day far away and forgotten, all about her again; declaring itself independent of the success or the failure of this new relationship. Like a husband’s life ... the life he goes off into in the morning and can lose himself in, no matter what may be going on at home. If this new arrangement were a success, something would be added to life. If it were a failure, nothing would be taken away.

By the time they reached home she felt free from all interest in Miss Holland and saw their contract as it had at first appeared, a marriage of convenience; a bringing down of expenses that would allow them both to live more comfortably than they could alone. Miss Holland no doubt saw it in the same light. The extremest differences of outlook were neither here nor there. There would be no need, now that these first disordered hours were over, for any association beyond what was needed for the running of their quarters.

She looked forward to getting to bed in the new surroundings, recapturing singleness and the usual Saturday night’s sense of the spaces of Sunday opening ahead. Fatigue had given way to the new lease of strength that always came if she stayed up long enough and, when she found herself

safely behind the curtain, she hoped that Miss Holland, audible on the other side, was sharing her sense of refreshment. She began to regret the incident that had reduced their exchange to courteous formalities, and to wish for an impossible re-establishment of the inexperience of the earlier part of the day.

Only impossible because of the way people were influenced by things said and done. She was herself, she knew, but never quite permanently: never believing that what people thought themselves to be and thought other people to be, went quite through.... Always certain that underneath was something else, the same in everybody.

‘Of course, I could never feel the same again.’ She could never make up her mind whether it was good or bad not to be able to make that statement from the heart. Whether it was good fortune to have access to a region where everything was forgotten, and within which it was impossible to believe people were what they represented themselves to be. Yet speaking or acting suddenly from this region where she lived with herself was always disastrous. And still there remained that unalterable certainty that invisibly others were exactly what she thought them, and would suddenly turn into the person she was seeking all the time in every one ... the person she knew was there.

It seemed now, so far off were those first bright early hours, that Miss Holland and she had been long associated. The first freshness had gone, or she would not now find herself with her hand on her own life. But although that was recovered, there was now also something else. Something going forward even as she moved about slowly, delightfully hindered by new things and the need for new movements that made the process of going to bed a conscious ceremonial.

On the other side of the curtain Miss Holland was moving about in the same leisurely obstructed way. Her things were not new; but she was having to find her way amongst them afresh. This must be bringing all sorts of things into her mind. They were sharing adventure. At the very least, there was that. It was a great deal. From the point of view of the amazingness of life and people, it was everything. And now the strange something was growing clearer. Their prolonged silence was speaking. Of course ... ‘*C’est dans le silence que les âmes se révèlent.*’

Miriam tiptoed about, breathlessly listening. Clearly, almost audibly, the silence was knitting up the broken fabric of their intercourse. Thought of now, Miss Holland seemed young and small. She had been, once. Alone with herself, of course, she still was. And at the centre of her consciousness there was an image of her new friend, not as she appeared to be, but as she really was; just as within her own consciousness there was an image of the real Miss Holland.

Miss Holland did not know this. Only one here and there seemed to know it. And those one never came across, except in the street suddenly, walking by themselves. But Miss Holland was feeling the result of the silence. The result of their having been, *à force de préoccupations*, alone in company. Maeterlinck would call them *menus préoccupations*. But a person standing lighting candles and moving about a room is ... what?

A puff of wind touched the large window, rattling it gently in its frame. Miss Holland muttered to herself.

‘I fear that window rattles,’ she said at the next sound, but still to herself, a meditative tone.

‘Yes,’ said Miriam in cheerful conversational voice, and at once felt its irrelevance. She had answered only the tone. In

the actual communication there was a fresh source of division. She loved rattling windows; loved, loved them. Anything the wind could do, especially at night. The window was old. It would certainly rattle: perhaps bump and bang. It would be better even than the small squeak, squeak, of the small lattice at Tansley Street. And with each sound she would be aware of Miss Holland, disliking it.

‘I can’t *abide* rattling windows,’ said Miss Holland, vindictively.

‘I love them.’

‘What a strange taste,’ said Miss Holland ruefully, and immediately laughed her tinkling laugh. They laughed together, and began moving more briskly, creating a cheerful noise to emphasize small jests. Again and again Miss Holland’s laugh sounded. She was happy and pleased. How embarrassing it would have been, Miriam reflected, if the last stage of the toilet had presented itself without this cover of bright sound. The trial, once happily over, was over for good.

She sat on her pillow and slid down carefully into the freshness of the new bed. Its compactness was not disturbed. Her clothes were all out of sight. The room about her was exactly as it had been when freshly arranged.

‘Oh,’ she cried, listening to the pleasant bumping of the window as her body relaxed on the unyielding level of the new mattress and the low pillow fitted itself to her neck. ‘Oh, “music that softer on the spirit lies——”’

‘I hope you are not alluding to the window,’ chuckled Miss Holland.

‘Oh, my bed, my angelic little bed. I thought it might seem narrow, but it is so hard and flat that I feel as if I were lying on the plane of the ecliptic with no sides. And I seem so long. I can see myself like someone laid out.’

‘What a very dismal idea!’

‘Oh, no. I always think of it when I sleep in beds that don’t let you down. It doesn’t depress me a bit. You see, I have no imagination. But my bed at Tansley Street was all hummocks. There was only one way I could lie at all and I made no shape. Now I feel like a crusader on a tomb, and utterly comfortable. And the little light coming through the curtain from your side makes a quite perfect effect, a green twilight.’

‘You shall enjoy the perfect effect for a few moments longer. I am going to wedge that abominable window.’

Something almost like fear took possession of Miriam. Protest was impossible. It was clear Miss Holland must not be tormented. Her mind clung to the wind-sounds, whilst with small exasperated mutterings Miss Holland sought about for something to fit the gap. An immense discomfort settled upon her when the window was finally dumb. Its silence seemed to press upon the air. And though the window was open at the top, the room seemed close. It was as if Miss Holland had robbed her of a companion and as if far away the companion were reproaching her for yielding without protest to the world that keeps a suspicious eye on the doings of the weather, an attitude she hated like an infection. The room seemed now full of Miss Holland; rebuked by her into a dead stillness. That would be there on all the nights. Each one, dumb and dead. The prospect was unnerving. There was something of the atmosphere of the sick-room in this awful calm. Miss Holland’s candle was the nightlight, keeping going the hot pressure of the evening. Yet most people probably disliked a rattling window, the sound that made a stillness in the room and in the street. It was bad to be so different and to like being different.

How difficult to sleep in this consciously quiet enclosure. For it was not the quiet of a still night, the kind of night in which you listen to the expanse of space. It was a stillness filled with the coiling emanation of a humanity recognizing only itself, intent only on its own circlings. The darkness when it presently came would be thick with the remainder of the continuous coiling and fret of all those people who live perpetually at war with everything that is not perfectly secure.

Miss Holland's light was out. She was apparently sitting up in bed arranging draperies at great length.

'I have not locked the door,' she said, suddenly: Miriam despaired.

'I think for to-night it does not matter. We can make a point of remembering it in future.'

'I'm afraid,' said Miriam, 'I should *never* remember it.'

'Have you not been in the habit of locking your door?'

'I never even thought of it.'

'Strange,' said Miss Holland. And Miriam began to suppose that it was strange. She ran over in her mind some of the odd people from time to time sharing her lonely top floor. Foreign waiters when Mrs Bailey was doing well, or queer odd men who could not afford the downstairs rooms. She had never, at night, given them a single thought. But that was not the sort of thought Miss Holland meant, or not consciously. But all this was perfectly horrible. Yet was it foolish, or perhaps unkind, never to have been aware? O'Laughlin, dear O'Laughlin. She had been aware of him. Sorry.

'There was,' she said, 'a drunken Irish journalist who used to come blundering up the stairs at all hours of the night.'

'Horrible, horrible,' breathed Miss Holland.

‘His door,’ it occurred to her for the first time, ‘was at right angles to mine.’ Miss Holland was gasping. ‘He used to stumble about on the landing, and sometimes, poor dear, be sick.’

‘Dear, dear, dear! It was a most extraordinary establishment. But I think the oddest thing is that you should not have made fast the door.’

‘I suppose so. But I would trust Tommy O’Laughlin drunk or sober, now I come to think of it. He never paid his bills, poor dear, and he borrowed.’

‘He must have been a worthless creature.’

‘He was a gentleman, Tommy was, and a dear. Though he once embarrassed me frightfully. It was at dinner. Of course he was intoxicated, though not looking so. In the midst of a long tirade about Home Rule he burst into tears and said if he had only seen Miss Henderson earlier in his life he would have been a different fellow.’

‘No doubt he admired you immensely!’

‘I’d never spoken to him.’

Miss Holland laughed wisely, but a little scornfully. No *châtelaine*, of course, would boast of scalps.

‘He was married!’

‘Dear, dear!’ breathed Miss Holland.

‘Trying for a divorce.’

‘Dear, dear, *dear!*’

Miriam awoke in the darkness abruptly. About her were the images that had filled her mind when Miss Holland’s candle had gone out. She regarded them sleepily, wondering what could so soon have called her back. What was calling her

now, urgently, out from the thickness of sleep. She stirred and woke completely.

‘Are you awake?’ Miss Holland’s voice coming anxious and reproachful through the stillness was added to the minute, unmistakable irritations.

‘Yes, are you? I mean are you being devoured alive?’

‘Indeed, indeed, I *am*,’ wailed Miss Holland. ‘It is a *disaster*.’

‘It’s weird,’ said Miriam, lunging. ‘Where can they all come from? I’m going to get up.’

‘Indeed, that is all we can do. Light candles and make instant warfare.’

‘I’m so sleepy. I think I shall change in the dark.’

‘I fear that will be useless,’ groaned Miss Holland, striking a match. ‘I fear, I fear the worst.’

Out on the green floor and with the two candles cheerfully gleaming. Alone, such an adventure would have been misery.

She grew interested in following Miss Holland’s instructions, and was almost disappointed when the white expanse of her bed offered no further prey.

‘Seven,’ she announced.

‘All drowned?’ asked Miss Holland suspiciously.

‘M’m, poor things.’

‘I fear I do not share your solicitude,’ chuckled Miss Holland.

‘Well, perhaps I associate them with summer. In a London summer there are always one or two, having their little day. I’ve tried once or twice to keep still and endure.’

‘And then?’

‘I shake my nightgown out of the window, but always feel mean.’

‘You are *most* tender-hearted.’

‘I agree with the Frenchman, “*ce n’est point la piquûre dont je me plains, c’est la promenade.*”’

‘You speak French delightfully, toote ah fay kom oon Parisienne.’

‘Imitation; I can imitate any sound. But where do all these fleas *come* from?’

‘The floor, the floor, I fear.’

‘Heaven and earth! We must leave at once.’

‘Well, I think perhaps with perchloride in the cracks...’

‘Meantime?’

‘We must do our best.’

‘It goes from the brain to the toes.’

‘To the *toes*. But only for the unfortunate possessors of thin skins. And them, the wretches seek. If there were in the universe only one flea, it would make straight for me.’

Her voice ended on a childish wail. *Flee*, she had said, making it innocent and pretty.

‘Do you mean to say there are people...?’

‘I do indeed. During my first period of training in the slums I was amazed at the complete insensibility of many of my fellow-workers. Amazed and, under the circumstances, envious.’

‘Oh, I don’t envy them a bit. Those people with skins like felt; they miss everything.’

‘I agree. At the same time, I think a moderately thick skin is a boon. I see no disadvantage in escaping intolerable discomforts. It is possible to have too thin a skin.’

‘For survival, yes. Blond people are dying out, they say.’

‘Blondes have not a monopoly of thin skins.’

‘No. I have a friend who slums. She loathes the poor.’

‘Dear, dear; a most unfortunate qualification for her work.’

‘Not their poverty. Their sameness. She is one of the kindest people I know.’

‘Strange.’

‘They ought to be pensioned.’

‘The poor?’

‘Everybody. I should love to be pensioned.’

‘And remain in idleness and dependence? Oh, no.’

‘Not dependence. Interdependence. No compulsion.’

‘What would you do?’

‘Spend several years staring; and then go round the world.’

‘You are delightful! I am not sure that I approve of the years of staring. But to go round the world would, of course, be most enchanting.’

‘Yes; but I should not want to improve my mind. I should still stare. If I went. Probably I shouldn’t go. Nothing short of dynamite will shift me. I am astounded to find myself shifted here.’

‘I fear at the moment you must be wishing yourself back again.’

She had no realization of the adventure it was to be anywhere at all. To her it was not a strange, strange adventure that their two voices should be sounding together in the night, a double thread of sound in a private darkness, making a pattern with all the other sounds in the world. But she had accepted the compliment. There was a vibration in her voice: joyful.

Again and again they were awakened for battle, until their slumber was too deep to be disturbed.

St Pancras bells were cheerfully thumping the air when Miriam got up to wander about in the dark brilliance that filled the room like the presence of a guest, and was so

exaggerated that it not only supplied a topic wherewith to start the morning, but an occupation engrossing enough to free her, even in thought, from descent into the detail of the day. It held everything off and yet kept her in happy communion with Miss Holland, moving busily the other side of the curtain.

Yet the night had done its work. A host of statements were plucking at her mind: balancing the quality of life here and life at Tansley Street. At week-ends. Behind them was a would-be disquieting assertion of the now complete remoteness of both her working life and the eventful leisure that had for so long ousted the old-time Tansley Street evenings. It was a bill of costs, flourished; demanding to know what she had done.

But it stood off, powerless to gain the centre of her attention, making no break in her sense of being nowhere; of inhabiting, within a shadowless brilliance, a living peace that held her immensely unoccupied, and ready, whenever things should once more present themselves in detail, to see them all in a fresh light.

For a while it seemed that they could never again so present themselves. The light as she gazed into it was endless, multiplying upon itself; drawing her away from all known things. Life henceforth would more fully attain her, lived as at this moment she knew it could be lived, uncalculating from the deeps of a masked splendour.

It would not last. Already the strange moments were linking themselves with kindred strange moments in the past. But, like them, it set itself while it lasted over against the rest of her experience, with a challenge.

It was growing steadily darker.

‘It’s a thunderstorm.’

‘I think so. The air is most oppressive.’

Miss Holland came and stood at her own half of the window so that they were side by side and visible to each other. Above the curtain screening the lower part of their window, they looked across to the white pillar of candle. A flash of bright daylight lit up the grey street, and soon the wheels of the storm rumbled high up across the sky. Heavy drops fell slowly, increasing until they came in a torrent.

‘That will carry it off.’

‘Sometimes I don’t mind storms. I don’t to-day.’

They held their places at the window, watching the pale lightning light the rain, hearing the thunder follow more swiftly. Presently a blinding white fire and a splintering crash just above their heads made them both exclaim.

As the thunder rolled bumping and snarling away across the sky, they saw the figure of a man appear from the darkness beyond the candle and stand pressed close to the window with arms upstretched and laid against the panes. Through the sheets of rain his face was not quite clear. But he was dark and pale and tall and shouting at the storm. So he lived there alone. The storm was a companion. He was alone and aware. Had he seen the new people across the way?

A brilliant flash lit up the white face and its frame of heavy hair. The dark eyes were looking straight across.

Yeats: and he lived *here*. Miriam drew back and sat down on the end of her bed. This queer alley was then the place in all London in which to live. He had found it for himself. Was he dismayed at the sight of Philistines invading the retreat where he lived hidden amongst unseeing villagers? She vowed not again to look across when there was any sign of his presence. He should be invaded without knowing it. She

would see him go in and out, see without seeing: screening him even from her own observation. And all the time his presence would cast its light upon their frontage.

‘The strange room,’ said Miss Holland, who also had left the window, ‘has a tenant as eccentric as itself.’

‘Do you know who it *is*?’ Miriam stole back to the window to learn the disposition of the door of his house. He had disappeared. It was a side door, next to the cobbler’s window, like theirs next to the stonemason’s.

‘It is Yeats. W. B. Yeats ... the poet.’

‘Indeed?’ exclaimed Miss Holland delightedly. ‘A poet. That is charming. Quite enchanting to feel that poetry is being written so near at hand.’

She was peering out, as if looking for verses on the air between the opposing windows. She had no feeling of shyness in mentioning his work. If unobserved she could catch him at it, she would note his methods. Perhaps he would sit there at work in his window. But the least they could do, having innocently become witnesses of his workshop, would be to stand off and leave him free.

To disperse Miss Holland’s concentration, she rushed into speech.

‘I’ve known him by sight for years, wandering about in a black cloak. One night I was strolling along the strip of pavement round one of the square gardens. It was quite dark under the trees between the stretches of lamplight, and there was nobody about. Suddenly in a patch of light I was confronted by a tall figure, also strolling. We both stood quite still, staring into each other’s eyes with thoughts far away, each taking in only the fact of an obstruction. Then I realized it was Yeats. I can’t remember how we got past each other. One of us must presently have plunged into the gutter.

But, looking back, it seems as if we walked through each other.’

Miss Holland produced a series of bird-like sounds, each seeming in turn to refuse to make a word.

The storm was moving on and the strange light, lifting as the sky cleared, left a blankness.

Later in the morning the light from a clear high sky broke up the harmony between the things in the room and set a pallor upon the green pathway to the window. It was the end of a story, the story of the first morning—a single prolonged moment that would last.

It was over, and here she was, conscious of her surroundings.

Something must be swiftly woven into the treasure she held in her hands or she would drop into the crude spaces of this midday light and lose the threads. She heard Miss Holland, as if in response to her need, leave the little back room and go upstairs. It would be in order, the little back room. A room apart, like Mag’s and Jan’s old sitting-room in Kenneth Street that used to seem such a triumph of elaborate living. Her spirit went forth and nested incredulously within the little back room.

‘It will mean growing plump and sedentary. Not wanting to sail forth and see people. Wanting people to come to me, hear the tinkle of my tea-things, sink into the world a bright little afternoon-tea scene makes on Sundays for people who have no centre.’

By Jove, yes. One of the reasons why household people like the odd, homeless sort is that they make them realize their own snugness, by revelling in it.

Miss Holland was audible upstairs rattling saucepan lids. They were to feed up there, kept warm by the ugly oil-

cooker, and reserve the back room for elegant life and tea-parties.

Already Miss Holland had made breakfast on the cooker. By means of some mechanism in its interior. Interesting to explore. One day she would explore it. Find out its secret and then, to be quite sure, ask Miss Holland. It stood out, as she thought of it, as the most fascinating thing upstairs, next to the way the light came through the long lattice; and the shadows upon the slopes of the roof.

‘You shall teach me,’ she heard her own sleepy voice over the welcome tray; ‘how to kick——’

‘How to kick a cooper!’ Miss Holland had trilled without a moment’s hesitation, and, after they had laughed: ‘Kippers require *very* little in the way of cooking.’ A memory of Eleanor: ‘Addocks don’t ’ardly *need* any cooking, de-er.’

She tipped herself off the little bed that made such an excellent sofa, and strolled into the back room.

It was darker than ever. Round and round she looked, taking in the things. Looking for more, and different, things. Absurdly half believing that the things she saw would change, would somehow become different under her eyes.

Green serge curtains, patched and faded, hung dismally on either side of the window. Two easy chairs covered with faded threadbare cretonne filled, with their huge ugliness, the main part of the floor-space. Between them stood a stained and battered bamboo table and an ancient footstool, worn colourless. Pushed into a corner was a treadle sewing-machine, and at its side a small round table bearing a tarnished lamp. That was all. That was all there would be in their sitting-room.

The worst was that nothing shone. Nothing reflected light. It suddenly struck her as an odd truth that nothing of Miss

Holland's reflected light. Even the domed wooden cover of the sewing-machine, which was polished and should have shone, was filmed and dull.

The only suggestion of life in the room would be the backs of the books stacked in piles on the mantelshelf. She found relief for her oppression in the minute gilded titles of some of the books. They gleamed faintly in the gloom, minute threads of gold.

Well, here it was, the lovely little sitting-room....

She moved about in it, still unable quite to exorcize the idea that it would change. With eyes cast down, she made her way from part to part, imagined varnish on the floor. Flowers set about. People, hiding the chairs. It would be pain to bring friends in. Cruelty to ask any one to endure the room for an hour.

There would be no tea-parties.

When her attention returned, Miss Holland's dead belongings had changed a little. They were forgotten and familiar. Here, after all, was a room and a window, and the things were sufficient. Unobtrusive, like dowdy clothes. She remembered how, between whiles, she loved dowdiness. How her heart went forth with mysterious desire to thoroughly dowdy, flat-haired women. Women who had no style but their set of beliefs.

Something of this kind must have drawn her to Miss Holland, even while she saw her only as a possible sharer of expenses.

Miss Holland had been brought by her star. She was moving about on the upstairs landing in her heavy, light-footed way, busy and intent. She coughed. Her cough had exactly the sound of her voice.

Would it be possible to go through life in the state of permanent protest expressed by that eloquent cough? For a day perhaps. But a night's sleep plays strange tricks.

Yet the shock of the furniture had confirmed her sense that something was being offered. Low-toned, apparently gloomy, yet having a strange fascination, a *quality*. If she put forth no resistance it might be the most exciting, revealing, adventure she had yet had. It was an offer; an offer of the chance of becoming a postulant châtelaine.

‘But you make tea with a *charm*! This is nectar!’

Miriam stood with the teapot in her hand, looking forward to everlasting Sundays of making tea for Miss Holland and charming her with conversation. They had talked all the afternoon without weariness. The day stretched back long and eventful, full of talk and laughter, to the far-off episode of the morning. Filled with memories, the rooms had grown dear. And the evening lay ahead, secure, if they chose to remain shut up here together. Then a week apart. No evenings. Miss Holland coming home late and tired. There would be only the week-ends for the continuation of their talk.

‘The fiancée came to tea yesterday,’ she said, unawares, and stopped. Miss Holland, surely, must be weary of her stories. ‘I must stop,’ she said, ‘finish my tea and absolutely, really unpack.’

‘By no means, mademoiselle, having uttered the fascinating word, you must continue.’

Forcing back a smile, Miriam went on with her story. Marvelling at a world that had left this woman to loneliness.

Lonely as she was, she scanned life unenviously, placed herself at once sympathetically within the experience of any one presented to her. It was as if she herself had had vast experience. Yet in her life there were only those two parts: the vicarage home until she was thirty-five, and then this life in London. She had brought with her all the old-fashioned ideas, and yet, without being a socialist, had a forward-going mind, a surer certainty of social transformation than was to be found amongst the Lycurgans.

‘I told her I hoped she knew she was marrying the best man in the world.’

‘Delightful. You made her very happy.’

‘Although extremely strong-minded and in the midst of a successful career, she is a girl, the English girl in the midst of the divine illusion.’

‘Why divine *illusion*? So contradictory.’

‘Well, illusion because its picture of what life with the beloved will be is mistaken. Divine because it reveals to both the best in themselves and each other, what they really *are*, without knowing it until then.’

‘Y ... es,’ said Miss Holland, clasping the edge of the table and gazing out through the window. ‘It is unfortunate that it is so frequently doomed to die and inevitably to change.’

‘Never. In women, absolutely never, once it’s there.’

‘Ah, in *women*.’

‘She’s an amazing person. Can fall out of a moving cab without being hurt. She said, of course, that she knew. But wanted to hear all about him.’

‘You were able to render her a charming service.’

‘No. It frightened me for her sake that she wanted to talk about him. Of course, she thought me tongue-tied. I was. But only because feeling that her best realization was just that

moment with me. If we had talked, there would have been a wilderness of detail, and the moment gone without taking its full effect.'

'Yet it is most natural that she should have wished to talk of him.'

'It frightened me. She had a charming white hat.'

Though she went on for a while humouring Miss Holland's desire for pictures and stories, she now framed her discourse in ready-made phrases, and was interested in seeing the way they made effects such as she herself had often gathered up from overheard conversations, and in discovering how they fitted a shape of thought about life and led on automatically to other phrases, little touches that finished them off; till she began to believe that life was expressible in these forms of thought which yet she knew left everything untouched.

But the centre of her interest, the thing that was making her talk grow absent and careless, and consist more and more of sounds in response to Miss Holland's lingering consideration of all that had pleased her, was the way that unawares during their long sitting the room had come to life. Nothing now looked dingy. There was a warm brightness; within the air.

When their talk had drifted to a pause and she was alone, she ruefully regarded the day's interchange. Shadowless only by being an excursion into a world she had long ago ceased to inhabit. By using only materials that would make common ground, she had woven a fabric of false impressions.

Again and again, as they talked, the set of circumstances that were the zest of her personal life had risen before her, in terms such as Miss Holland would use in describing them, and made a preoccupation that had kept her a bright and

interesting talker. Yet Miss Holland was aware. Though in her eagerness for every word she had shown only awareness of a different reach and different perceptions, she knew, without recognizing its nature, that between them there was a gulf.

To keep back even half-accepted points of view was not fair play. Brought uneasiness. Yet why tell her of things that might not happen?

CHAPTER III

Serenity had retreated outdoors, and increased there. To-day, in the space between the week's work and the weekend with its pattern ready-set, was serenity immeasurable; given by autumn. Autumn gleaming beyond the park railings through sunlit mist.

Autumn had accumulated unawares. But this meeting with it had begun early this morning in the balmy stillness of the square. Just when the lame old woman had crossed the street. Cheerfully; unhampered by heat or cold or wind.

It had made the happiness of the morning's work, its gaiety and ease. And now at its midday fullness it made the visit of the Brooms—so central as she had sat at her ledgers—retreat into the background. This still air passing into her spirit, the great trees standing in it, thick with coloured leaves upon the spread of misty grass, stamping their image, would remain when the rest of the holiday was forgotten.

Yet the Brooms, both Grace and Florrie, belonged to the unfathomable depth of autumn. Not to its wholeness. To single features. Any single feature contemplated brought them there to look and love. Only in London. They belonged to London from the first. To the heavy, tinted trees. To the first breath of exciting, oncoming cold, distilling the radiance of the sun-warmed earth. To the mauve twilights of fogless November days. To Christmas, and to June with spring and summer together in the scent of sweet brier wafted across

their suburban garden; making, in its small green space with masonry visible all about, a sharper sense of summer than was to be found in the open country. They belonged to every feature of the London weather. Taking the sting from the worst and adding brightness to the best.

But this opening, with its view of the short broad path, belongs to no one. The sight of it is always a stepping forward into nowhere with eyes on the low fence at the end, the gap, the two poplars pluming up on either side, making it a stately portal to the green expanses beyond.

The poplars say:

Les yeux gris
Vont au paradis.

And the picture remains after the high railings have come back again. Its message brings more light than there is into the thickets of shrubs and bushes, and takes the suggestion of sadness from the stretches of grass dulled even in sunlight by the thick autumn air.

Les yeux gris; in spring and autumn.

But most clearly in autumn when the air of the park is rich with outbreathed summer. Answering everything with the unanswerable beauty of autumn.

The afternoon streets were bustling with farewells to the week. Out across them went her own glances of farewell, making them newly dear and keeping them still echoing about her when she arrived to be alone by daylight for the first time in the ancient stillness of the house.

She hurried upstairs to take possession and prepare for the coming of the Brooms.

The stillness was absolute. New in her experience and disquieting. Her old room had always greeted her. Had been full at once with the sound and colour of her life.

This stillness was impermeable. Wrapped within it, the rooms disowned her. Maliciously, now that they had her to themselves, they announced the fact behind the charms of the week of settling in. Bereavement. Not only of her self, left behind irrevocably in the old room, but also, now that she surveyed it undisturbed by Miss Holland's supporting presence, of the bright motley of her outside life. Everything had thinned, was going thinly forward without depth of background. Against these ancient rooms she was powerless.

If she were living alone in them? She imagined herself living alone in them, and at once the tide of her life began to rise and flow out and change them. They dropped their ancient preoccupations and turned friendly faces towards her, promising welfare.

But as long as she stayed in them accompanied they would acquire no depth. Their depth was the level of her relationship to Miss Holland. Without her she was lost in them, a moving form whose sounds impinged less surely upon their stillness than the sounds of the mice scampering over the attic floor.

All through the week, in coming home late each evening to the certainty of talk, to hurried sleep in the orderliness created by Miss Holland, there had been a glad sense of life renewed. New, exciting life, bringing at first the surprise of an escape homeward that had left the London years unreal; a tale told busily day by day to drown the voices calling her home. That first sense of home-coming had vanished, lost among the entertainments of unfamiliar ways of living. But it had been at work all the week. All the week, serving as space

for continuous talk, the rooms had been changing, growing larger, expanding together with the life lived there, a wealth falling into her hands too swiftly for counting.

Apart from that life they were nothing. They stood defined, mean and dismal, crushing her. And for these mean and dismal rooms, set above a thick ascending darkness where other lives were hemmed and crushed, she had sacrificed the spacious house with its unexplored distances and its perpetual familiar strangeness.

And haunting each room, as in solitude she surveyed it, was the mocking image of Sheffield.

And at this moment Miss Holland, in half-holiday mood, would be buoyantly pacing some chosen part of the glad open wilderness of London. Well had she known what she escaped in refusing to deal with Sheffield. But she did not know that life set to weekly meetings with him was darkened not only because he was 'odious,' but also because the paying of rent tore life up by the roots.

The payment of Mrs Bailey's bills, looked back to now, seemed to be all a single transaction: a chance meeting on the stairs, a hurried handing of money, eye to eye, smiling. A single guilty moment and then a resumption of a relationship not based on money. It had marked, not the passage of time, but its rest, at an unchanging centre. Paying rent to this man would be counting off time; and a weekly reminder of the payment for life going on all over the world. To be obliged at the best moment of each week to face Sheffield, acknowledging another week passed in the world as he saw it, would be to fight without weapons against the mocking reflection in the mirror he held up.

Putting off the ordeal until the last moment, she prepared for the coming of the Brooms. Reflected in the long mirror

was her gay carefree self, the self that bore in the eyes watching it from their distant suburb, a charmed life; offering no resting-place for the pity they wanted to bestow. It would remain when they had gone, and would carry off the rent-paying with a high hand.

They were coming. Soon their voices would sound about her in the different rooms.

It was her happiness that had hailed them from afar and summoned them without a thought of how these new quarters would appear in their eyes. In the eyes of Mrs Philps, dressed for an afternoon call and now already on her way.

Unless she said Miss Holland was at home and ill and at once took them to the club, they would come up, through the smells and gloom of the passage and stairway, expecting at least a bright, flowered-chintz flat.

The ordeal of facing Sheffield had now turned into a reprieve. She ran downstairs and knocked peremptorily at his door, which opened immediately upon him shirt-sleeved, his sparse hair in wisps about a preoccupied face. His private face, caught unawares, reflecting thoughts turned upon detail. After all, he had a personal life, perplexities. There was nothing in the poor thing to dread. It was idiotic to hold him in mind as waiting there behind the door for her coming.

His eager, inattentive voice, bidding her upstairs, sounded about her as she stated her errand. She went up the uncarpeted stairs to set the rapid tapping of her shoes against the influences brooding in the ancient gloom.

‘My *mother* is upstairs,’ he said from behind, in his mocking sing-song. Hearing it again, Miriam thought of it as a silence, with mocking speech extending before and after;

the uniform sound of his mind. A good mind, ill-fed and circling. Recognizable English prejudices, soured.

‘*This* is Miss Henderson,’ he cried gleefully closing the door behind her, the door of a room already, with its coffee-coloured lace curtains keeping out the shadowed light of the court, in a heavy twilight. The same voice, feebler, but deeper and flexibly rumbling, came from a mass risen up at the fireside, a mass of draperies about a tall form unsteadily bowing and capped with ponderous lace.

The voice rumbled on while Sheffield put a chair for her, and it seemed at the end of a few minutes that she had been sitting there indefinitely, listening to a flow of speech that communicated nothing but its tone. Yet she had spoken. She remembered the sound of her own voice in the room, the voice of all her family. And there was the semblance of conversation, Sheffield standing by, chanting refrains, presiding. Triumphantly, as if he had purposely brought her to face and be overwhelmed by their united voices.

She braced herself to resist the influence of this life-stuff seething bitterly in its corner. But it cast shadow everywhere. Sitting smiling and inattentive, she heard the continuation backwards through the years, through all the years she had known and further back into those differently lovely years her parents had known, of these bitter life-shadowing voices. They went forward too, shadowing the future, until death should silence them.

Opposition would be futile. Her words would fly like chaff before the wind of their large bitterness, a general arraignment, she gathered, growing used to the angry sing-song, of everything in the world.

She thought of the autumn sunlight, held it in her mind, thought of it as existing in their minds and in the minds of

every one in London to-day; the hint of an answer, the moment one paused to look at it, to every problem in the world. But these two were not perceiving the sunlight in her mind. Aware of her submissive attention, they were growing more explicit, going into detail, one against the other. Mother and son, bitterness embodied, thought out, added to, grown old behind a close hedge of contempt for everything *new*.

They had a sort of clear-sighted observation. Humanity, they would say if they had the words, doesn't change *essentially*. But to get anywhere with that conviction they ought to be religious. To be in a group. They were cut off from the religion that goes with the attitude. An amateur church, self-ended. They were the offshoots of the worst kind of Protestantism. Protestant enlightenment in a vacuum.

Sadness grew in her with the sense of the utter absence in herself of anything wherewith to stem the bitter flood. The refuge she was taking in apparent acceptance was a condemnation. Leaving her less than they.

When at last the rent was paid and she was free to go, such a length of life had been passed in the sad room, so much unfamiliar experience lived through, that the parting was like a parting with old friends. Unawares, she found herself voicing regret for her forced departure and promising to come again. She felt her future divided between the two houses set so closely side by side. They smiled, pleased. Stood close, flattering and fondling her with their voices. They had had a happy hour. The old woman came to the top of the stairs to speed her on her way. Standing on the landing with escape at hand, she had a moment of hesitation. Voicelessly she cancelled her compliance, stood free and remote and felt as she went how their scorn followed her,

scorn of anything that could not ring against their hardness any hardness of its own.

Outside in the court, she paced to and fro between her door and the entrance to the main street, waiting in the free air of her own world for the coming of her friends. But no oblivion could draw out the bitterness folded into her memory. And though the voices of the friends would drown the sound of that murderous chanting, the thing behind it, the thing she had recognized in Sheffield a week ago, was something ultimate. Inexorable; a flourishing part of the world's life not hitherto clearly known to her, all the time taking effect in the sum total. Life being hated, seen only as material for bitter laughter.

She looked up at the neat respectable house-front, the best in the court, at the shrouded windows of the room where still her spirit lingered. Next week she would stand firm and pay the rent at the door. Better still, the inspiration came together with the sound of the Brooms' voices behind her, slip it into the letter-box. The Sheffields were banished. The scene ahead held now no shadow but the weekly call of the raucous-voiced, knocker-slamming men from the Snow-white Laundry that had for so long impersonally fetched and returned her things, losing nothing, and now turning out to be linked to its delighted clients not, as she had imagined, by some fresh, kindly, middle-aged woman, but by grubby cigarette-smoking, impatient men with the voices of mutinous slaves.

It was not only Mrs Philps who was dumb. The girls, too, came up in pensive amazement through the darkness and smells of the lower floors to arrive silent on the bleak top landing. Miriam displayed the rooms, making much, as they stood about gathering up with trained eyes the mournful

details, of the general loftiness, the large windows, the many doors. On the way up to the attic she remembered that she had not shown the painted ceiling.

Since the first shock of Miss Holland's furniture she had forgotten the existence of the ancient splendour brooding above. Each going into the little room had brought the hope of finding it changed, less gloomy, less dull and lifeless. Until, accepting, she had ceased to see anything but the light travelling through the square window to die. Reappearing now in her mind, the faded ceiling restored her first vision of the rooms. The way they had seemed porous to the sound and sunlight of the open.

Her visitors stood in the doorway of the attic looking in vain for something upon which their eyes might rest. In her half of the bedroom, kept till the last, they would find what they sought, feel radiating there the more brightly for their coming, something of what it was that held her life entranced and held them to herself. She, too, would feel it; the incommunicable quality that crept sooner or later into her surroundings, deep and central within the air. It was there waiting for every one, within their own surroundings. But so many seemed to ignore it, and others, chafing, imagined it elsewhere, far off.

The girls made straight for the bureau, admiring, repeating phrases of warm admiration in tones whose relief voiced all their earlier embarrassment.

'Pretty,' said Mrs Philps, who had come down the room to look. 'Imitation Chippendale.'

Glancing round, she brought her eyes quickly back to the bureau, at which the girls were gazing as if afraid to look elsewhere. Joining them near the window, to which presently all three had turned as if in the hope of finding material for

comment outside, Miriam remembered Yeats. Yeats would enlighten them. The sight of his chosen dwelling-place would bring them, nearer than anything she might try to say, a vision of her world not as a thing pitiful compared to the world they knew, but as something differently real.

‘Across the way,’ she said lightly, ‘in rooms exactly matching these, is a poet, a great poet.’ She watched Mrs Philps glance across to the opposite house.

‘He might have an *office* there perhaps,’ said Mrs Philps with an expression Miriam had seen on the faces of gentlewomen doing distasteful kitchen jobs, lips held in, the upper lip drawn slightly back showing the teeth.

She hurried them off to the club.

Out in the street, the three were at once acting upon her in their old way, revealing the power built up in their sheltered lives. How far, with their untaxed strength, they outdid her in swiftness of observation. How well they knew and how warmly they cherished every stock and stone upon the highways of London. They had due knowledge. But it was knowledge enclosed, multiplying only upon itself.

Vainly as they carried her along, surrounding her, accustomed to her silence and unresentful, she sought for a clear centre where these old friends and the friends with whom her life was now involved, might meet and understand each other. Philistia. The mental immobility of Philistines. But Philistines, within their own world, were rich and racy. Their critics, in failing to savour the essence of middle-class life, missed the essence of all life, whatsoever. They feared the *power* of the Philistines. Their power of stifling freedom. Freedom for what? Freedom, unless people became samurai, slid down into a pit. Perhaps these clever scornful ones, the moderns and the Lycurgans, were all escaped Philistines?

Hearing the life in their voices, she loved them as they were, unchangeable. Through Philistinism lay perhaps one of the ways of salvation. No. In the midst of the happiness they brought there was always a lurking shadow. The shadow of incompatibility; of the impossibility of being at once bound and free. The garden breeds a longing for the wild; the wild a homesickness for the garden. Is there no way of life where the two can meet?

And here, she realized as they went up the wide staircase, the broad way leading easily to the destruction of home-made ideas, was a small beginning of such a way of life. Within it the Brooms were small and helpless. Travellers in an unknown land, not yet able to take their bearings. They would recover. Later on, at home, they might make their severe comments, but unawares the range of their vision would have been enlarged. Gleefully she felt their irrevocable experience as they stood ranged just as they had been at the door of her sitting-room, in the doorway of the club smoking-room looking in upon women, unmistakable gentlewomen, lounging insouciantly. Representing not names and families but selves in their own right.

The drawing-room was again crowded, and again there was one free table near a window looking out upon the stately autumn trees and, upon it, tea set ready, waiting for them as the result of the order they had not seen her give in the hall. It was a perfect moment. Here they were at last after all the years, her guests at a table of her own. And they were much more than at home and happy. They were at court, in the heart of splendours. The girls admired openly. And Mrs Philps, whose affection for her had flourished upon a background of pity and half-indulgent disapproval, withdrew

all their past battlings in one glance, arch, bridling, altogether delighted and approving.

But in the perfect moment a light had gone up that showed Miriam a new self and a new world. It was she, not they, who was abroad in a strange land. She who was travelling ahead beyond recall. The decoration bestowed upon her by Mrs Philps was already askew, not suiting her, not desired. The understanding exchanged between them was of a pact she would never willingly fulfil. The women's pact. And while dispensing tea, talking as they liked her to talk, making a little drama for their delight, she privately thanked life for turning on this light in the presence of friends, who, cherishing her smallest expressiveness, left her free to survey this new aspect of things whilst the light was still at its first brilliance.

A disquieting brilliance. For her initiation as a hostess was so slight. To sit thus, irresponsibly dispensing club fare, was the merest hint and shadow of hostess-ship. Yet it had been enough to make the world anew.

To feel charming, to want to be charming, to join for a moment the great army of hostesses as an equal, was proud experience. But it was also a sort of death. For it included letting everything in the world go by. Feeling ready to do or say anything that would contribute to the comfort and happiness of one's guests. In Mrs Philps's smile there had been, unknown to Mrs Philps, the recognition of another victim joining the conspiracy of the regiment. And she had recognized aright.

For here, complete and full-grown within herself, was one alert to avoid anything leading to discord. Aware of convictions and points of view, personal feelings, everything that made one's own intimate vision of life, shelved;

receding and falling as if shamed, into the loneliest background of consciousness. If all this and much more, things revealed and sliding away too swiftly be caught and examined, were the price of merely entertaining friends at a club, what of the *real* hostess? What of the millions of women serving life sentences? Hostesses not only to friends but to households, willing or unwilling humbugs for life.

Yet the game is enchanting. And brings, within an immense loneliness, a sort of freedom. That was there distinctly. A sort of enforced freedom. To have nothing oneself. To seek only the being of others regardless of their quality as persons; feel only their weight as mere humanity. Humanity seen thus as guests without distinction brought back the wonder of life renewed. Pitiful and splendid. If these strange large beings taking tea were thieves and murderers, the joy of tending them would be the same. Perhaps greater. It was more thrilling to wait upon Florrie and Mrs Philips, whose lives she shared only imaginatively, than upon Grace, with whom she had a sort of identity.

CHAPTER IV

Swaggering along the middle of the empty pavement, the long cape of his short overcoat swinging like the cloak of a stage villain. With bent head he is playing his part to an imagined audience. He knows nothing of the contrast between the small figure and the big arrogance.

He swung round into Flaxman's Court, and Miriam, following, paused for joy, mentally summoning heralds to precede and a brass band to follow him, so stately with head held high and plunging gait controlled to a military strut, was his entry into the humble street. He stopped just as she moved aside to gain her door, swung right about and bore down upon her, bowing, slouch hat in hand.

'*Allow me!*'—a deep hollow stage voice.

She halted surprised. He was close by her side, his hat replaced with a flourishing movement that released from his person the thick odour of stale smoke, the permanent smell of the ground floor. The grotesque figure, now crouching, all dilapidated cape and battered sombrero, over the keyhole, was the owner of the windowful of stone and marble.

'Enter, madam,' he declaimed, flinging open the door. Thanking him, she moved into the passage and was going on towards the stairs, but the hollow tones broke forth again, reverberating in the narrow space made dark by the closing of the door.

'I am greatly honoured,' he was saying, 'by this event.'

She turned perforce. He was again profoundly bowing. She could just discern the dim outlines, the cape winged out by his deep obsequiousness.

‘You will, I trust’—the voice was meditative, suggesting words ahead to be delivered with care—‘not deem me intrewsive in expressing in your gracious presence’—indeed, Miriam felt, her presence was gracious compared to this exhalation of concentrated odours, stifling and making her long to be away and up the stairs—‘my respect, and, furthermore the great and happy en’ancement arriving upon this house by your coming, with your lady friend, *also* most gracious, to abide beneath the roof that shelters my spouse and myself.’

‘We like being here,’ said Miriam, politely, smiling into the darkness.

‘Lady, I thank you for your graciousness.’

‘Not at all,’ she said, and felt him silent for an instant before an evidently unexpected lapse from gracious ladyhood.

This was all most dreadful. His tone had been deep and broken; touching. Behind his bombast was something genuine, making high demands upon her, including her with Miss Holland, crowning her as a *châtelaine*. She had undeceived him, spoken brusquely, revealed her different state.

‘I am glad,’ she added quickly, in Miss Holland’s most stately manner, reflecting that a gracious aloofness was an excellent protection, ‘that you find us pleasant neighbours.’

‘More than that,’ came the low broken voice, and her eyes, used now to the dim light, saw that he bowed more deeply than ever. ‘No poor words of mine could avail to express the felicity experienced in the presence of beauty and

graciousness. I would have you to know’—he reared his head and spoke upwards to the staircase—‘that I am a repairer of statoos.’

Ah, here was the secret, the real origin of the attack. But it was interesting. A queer trade.

‘You have made all those things in your window?’ she said to encourage him, and standing a little nearer to the stairs composed herself to endure and listen.

‘I am a repairer of statoos. But let not that mislead you. These hands,’ he upheld and waved them in the air, ‘recall to pristine loveliness *only* the classic. In preference, the *Greek*.’ He was breathing quickly, angrily. Poor man, without an audience. In his whole circumstances, no audience. Her interest in his work changed to a desire to give him freedom from minding.

‘It would be dreadful to waste your time repairing rubbish,’ she said quickly and added, suddenly feeling that he was strong enough for an attempted truth, ‘only people sometimes love rubbish *very* much. For them it is not rubbish.’

‘Let them love their rubbish, gracious lady, let them love—mistake me not. I have no quarrel with love. The love of the Saviour, the greatest of all lovers, redeems the statoos badly made to honour it. But not to Perrance, not to *Perrance* let them come if their rubbish be broken. The classical, the Greek, that alone of the work of man’s hands can command the love of Perrance.

‘So great a love that he has’—he drew a deep breath—‘it may surprise you but it is nevertheless trew, he has mastered the characters of the Greek tongue *itself*.’

‘Greek is very difficult,’ said Miriam.

‘He can, in the rendering of an account for ’Ernes repaired, equally as well use the original *Greek*.’ He threw open the door leading to his little shop, but with no air of inviting her to enter. He wanted to provide a clearer light for her contemplation of the marvel he represented?

The light revealed weakness. Large watery eyes fierce with self-conceit, grown old in unchallenged self-conceit. An angry mouth, tremulous beneath branching buccaneer moustachios. He was waiting for responsive wonder, ready, the moment it should be spoken, to break forth again. His violence calmed her pity. He was proof against the whole world. Determined to escape, she smiled approval and remarked, in the voice of departure, on the amount of industry represented by the house as a whole.

‘Stay,’ he cried, ‘yet one moment,’ and disappeared into the shop, to return in an instant with some small object clasped, hidden by his cape, to his breast.

‘I have here,’ he patted his breast with a free hand, ‘a small work, a work of my own hands, dedicated, as is seeming and suitable, to *womankind*. Deign, gracious lady, to accept the same as a token of gratitude and esteem for your presence under this roof.’ With a deft movement he flung back the cape and presented the hidden object. It was the alabaster finger.

‘Oh, no!’ Miriam cried. ‘You must not give me *that*.’ But he was embarrassed, holding it forth, his head bent, his voice once more low and broken.

‘Take, take,’ he said, ‘I will not sell it and I shall find no recipient more worthy. Take, I beg you.’

The heavy little block came into her hands. She gazed at it murmuring appreciations, trying to thank him in the way he wanted to be thanked. His eloquence was at an end. He

bowed silently at each phrase, saying only, when at last she turned to go, 'Lady, I thank you.'

He had said his say.

But what of the future chance meetings? What could she give in return for the burden of this gift, so much heavier than its weight in her hands?

On her way upstairs, pondering this disquieting confirmation of her half-hearted candidature for the estate of dignified ladyhood, she saw that the first-floor rooms were open and the luggage disappeared from the landing. Passing the door of the front room, she caught a glimpse of a young woman, her head pillowed on arms outstretched upon a small bare table, talking and sobbing in a strangled Cockney voice. The light from the large window fell bright amongst the coiled masses of her brown hair, shone through their upper fluffiness, making a nimbus. She was young and slight; an air of refinement in the set of her black dress. Come to live *here*. Seeking now, of course, stranded alone in two rooms of this dingy aged house, her old self, life as she had known it before she was isolated with him. The absent him she was so fully revealing.

This was marriage, thought Miriam, going on up the stairs, a bright young couple welcomed by Sheffield for being so nice and respectable. Tragedy; the beginnings, before its dry-eyed acceptance, of womanly tragedy, the loss of self in the procession of unfamiliar unwanted things. In the company of a partner already re-immersed in his own familiar life.

There was weakness in such public careless abandonment. And subject for the mirth of cynics. But strength, too, strength of which cynics, comfortable well-fed people in arm-chairs, had no inkling. The strength was broken for a moment against the walls of a man's massive

unconsciousness. Upon that the woman would be avenged; breaking fiercely through in her search for something in the world about her to respond to her known self with its all-embracing radiance. That strange indestructible *radiance*, discoverable in all women, even in those who professed the utmost callousness.

How bright, how unfairly upon a gay and sunlit peak seemed the lives on the top floor compared to those being lived below! How mean it seemed to be going eagerly up to talk to Miss Holland, with an evening ahead full of varied enchantments. Miss Holland to come back to when it was over; for more talk.

The door of her room stood open, twilight within. Miss Holland was at home. In the sitting-room. There would be lamplight, heralding the brighter radiances ahead.

The sitting-room was almost dark. The light of a guttering candle set on a chair struck dimly upwards over Miss Holland in her flannel dressing-gown; mending an ancient skirt. Her hair in wisps round a face harshly lit from below, and heavy with shadows. The reek of spilt paraffin came from the small stove in the fireplace. It was only an instant's vision, rapidly erased by Miss Holland's surprised greeting and eager rearrangements. But the picture of her intense private concentration on gloomy economies had added itself to the scene downstairs.

While Miss Holland cleared away, Miriam retreated to her bedroom and set Perrance's gift down in several places in turn. Everywhere it refused to harmonize. The delicate elegant finger suggested a life moving in refined paths towards extinction; an effigy of that conscious refinement that speaks more clearly than anything else of the ugliness of

dissolution. In this room so warm with life there was no place for a hint from the tomb.

‘Ah, mon enfant, tout cela *pourrira*.’

‘Oui, mon père, mais ce n’est pas encore pourri.’

She went back to the gloomy sitting-room eager to communicate to Miss Holland the newly revealed life of the household.

‘M’no,’ said Miss Holland, ‘the man Perrance I have not so far seen. His wife I fear is a poor thing. A countrywoman from Devonshire. London conditions, though I gather she has lived here ever since her marriage, are too much for her. And it is only too evident that she does not recognize the necessity for hygiene. Everything in their quarters is, I fear, most unwholesome. And to make matters worse, they keep, like so many childless Londoners of that class, innumerable *cats*. I fear she rarely bestirs herself. He, I understand, brings in all foods. And requires a great deal of cookery. She complains in a mopy, resigned way, about *that*. I fear they do not agree any too well. There are, very frequently, loud discussions going on when I come in at night.’

She spoke with disdainful rapidity, as if eager to make way for other themes.

‘He’s a freak, from a circus, the perfect mountebank. But there’s something, as there always is in a charlatan.’

‘I fear I’m no psychologist. I’ve not seen the man as yet, but I fear, I *fear* his voice sounds suspiciously *thick*. M—— you’ve seen him?’

‘He’s given me that finger from the window. I suppose it’s a paper-weight.’

Miss Holland was transformed. Flushed and frowning with incredulous approval.

‘But what a *charming* tribute!’ she cried. ‘*Indeed*, I am surprised. Most certainly I should not have credited Perrance with so much perception.’

‘I wish he hadn’t. *I* can’t live up to graceful attentions.’

‘No need, no need.’ She was speaking meditatively towards the shaded lamp. ‘You have the secret of charm, an enchanting possession. Is it not enough?’

‘That’s an illusion. I haven’t.’ She described the scene on the first floor.

‘Yes, yes, dear, dear,’ interrupted Miss Holland, waving it away. ‘We are in *strange* surroundings. Those poor things are *not* married. That odious Sheffield who made their arrival an excuse for calling on me—I did not tell you. Eh, he is odious,’ she shook her head, childishly screwing up her features, ‘*odious*—believes, of course, that they *are*. They are both hotel employees. It is one of those unfortunate cases. And they are *quite* without circumspection, talking loudly, with open doors. The young man is a presentable fellow, nice-looking and respectful in manner. He intends, I gather, to marry her. There is, of course, an infant on the way.’ Without waiting for response she waved her glasses towards the mantelshelf.

‘I have been looking at your books. That Shoppenore is an abominable fellow.’

‘Oh, those old essays——’

‘He permits himself the most unpardonable insolences.’

The châtelaine’s response to Schopenhauer. Yet since she had not simply cut him and turned away, since she had read on and been disturbed, he was not quite disposed of. Evidently, even for her, the bare fact of his being no gentleman was not enough. She had thrown an indignant glance and was waiting.

What would she do, if he were sturdily defended? wondered Miriam, smiling at the thought of herself as champion of this man whose very name brought a pang out of the past. For years she had forgotten him, together with the reflections that had exorcized him. It would be a weary business to recall the steps of that furious battle.

‘He was most frightfully sincere.’

Miss Holland’s face turned a dull red. She had really suffered, then, under the lash of those rhythmic phrases; a little believing. This was an abyss. Here indeed was the worst Schopenhauer could do. His least pardonable outrage. She felt the shock of it reflected along her own nerves. It roused her to battle.

But as she felt her way back to the centre of the fray she found herself once more siding with the man, fearing and hating the mere semblance of woman. Its soft feebleness, its helpless blind strength in keeping life going. Felt again all her old horror and loathing of femininity, still faintly persisting. What was the answer to Schopenhauer? Swiftly seeking she passed again the point where she had first realized the collapse of the Lady, the absurdity, in the face of ordered thought, of oblivious dignity and refinement.

‘He was a Weary Willy. That is to say a pessimist. A man who attends—by the way, the schoolboy was right—only to the *feet*. Feet being, of course, always of clay. He saw life for everybody, going from gold to black, no escape, and each generation in turn fooled by nature, through woman, into going on.’

‘How beautiful upon the mountains,’ whispered Miss Holland, ‘are the feet——’

‘Peace. Yes. But the staggering thing about all these men, the Hamlets and the Schopenhauers, is that they don’t notice

that people are *miserable* about being miserable. And uncomfortable, in varying degrees, in wrong-doing. When they make up their philosophies of life they leave out *themselves*. Like the people who talk of the vastness of space and the antlike smallness of humanity. If *one* man, say Schopenhauer, *sees* quite clearly all the misery of life, and that it ends, for everybody, in disease and pain and death, then there is something in mankind that is not corruption.

‘Then again all these thought-system people must have an illogical as well as a logical side. A side where they don’t believe their own systems. If they quite believed, instead of making a living out of their bitterness they would make an end of *themselves*. But you know it’s popular. There are lots of people who revel in it. Men particularly. It makes them feel superior.

‘And there’s another thing in these people. By the way, they generally have long *thin* noses. Perhaps they don’t breathe properly. But the great thing is that you must consider life *obscene*. You must look at it from the outside, as shapes, helplessly writhing in the dark. If you *see* all this, and Schopenhauer did, you grin and snort and stand aside. Women, he proves, don’t see it. And so they *are* obscenity, blind servants of obscenity, for ever.’

‘Horrible. Horrible.’

‘That doesn’t matter. It isn’t true. It’s words. Nothing can ever be expressed in words.’

CHAPTER V

Every friend to tea at the club is an event. Never-to-be-forgotten. What each one says is written in my memory.

And all of them are more real there than on their own backgrounds. Simpler.

They are overwhelming, bringing both life and themselves; at large. Shining; so that I want not to talk to them, but to keep them there in place and contemplate them.

But for them it is dull. Perhaps embarrassing. They find me empty-minded, distraite. And do not know why I am distraite. When they go, there is no reason for asking them to come again, but my desire to contemplate them.

Except Mrs Orly.

Every moment in her presence is realization. She babbles. Has no ideas. No self. Knows nothing about any one. But redeems every one. God can't be worse than Mrs Orly. And if she were on the judgment-seat, every one would be recklessly forgiven. With a flushed little face and flashing eyes she would spank. Flare and scold. And then, pitiful helping hands. Unscrupulously covering.

Having no self, she brings every one a rich sense of self.

Most people, all the time, in every relationship, seek only themselves. Past selves, if they are old.

Affection is joy in things past or things to come?

Bereavement is losing one's deposits? That would explain why old people always think the past, the world of their own

time, better than the one that is developing under their eyes. We can take only what we have. Even from genius. The accepting party must have within himself the same genius. Otherwise, no taking what is given. There comes a new way of thinking; a new world. But ultimately the changed world is the action of one's own spirit. The only sureness in things is the action of one's own spirit. Egoism? But egoism carried far enough.

Whoso would save his life must lose it. But not for the sake of saving it. And first he must have a life he loves well enough to make it worth losing. Perhaps all those big sayings of Christ are dangerous for small people. So the Catholics won't trust them with the Bible. The Bible let loose means a crowd of uncultured little churches; fighting each other.

Insufficient egoism keeps people plaintive. That's another line of thought, but it joins. Egoism must be huge. Free from self.

Then I am the smallest thing I know. Caring only for the come and go of days, and the promise of more days. There is not a soul I would sacrifice myself for. Not even Michael, in his helplessness. When I felt that the world must stop to prevent his going to the Russian war, it was myself I feared to lose. Otherwise I should want to stop the world for all who go to be killed on battlefields. I do; a little. But that may be fear.

'You were a lovely person in your blue gown.' A lovely person in your blue gown.

'You were a lovely person in your blue gown.'

For that moment, walking across the empty spaces of the large high room full of blazing lights—that was when it was I felt him looking, and felt myself not there but looking on, with his eyes—I was a lovely person in a blue gown.

‘You were a lovely person in your blue gown. Again you surprise me with a new aspect. I’ve seen you look charming, in Miriam’s quiet way. Didn’t know you could be splendid. Don’t fly out. It’s all right. I’m staying friends. Honour bright. For the present.’

That was written in the study in some luminous interval, eyes on a person crossing a room in a blue gown. Written on his principle of the niceness of saying nice things and having them said.... He is right. It works.

‘You were a lovely person....’

Yet there is something wrong in his way of wanting effects, illusions. Seeing through them even while he goes under to them. Outline and surface, the lines of flowing draperies, carriage, the shape of a skull, he sees as fine because he sees them emerging from a fire-mist and a planet. Pitiful, and passing in their turn towards other forms. Yet those he singles out are at once in a solemn compulsion. Comically consecrated. Set somewhere between heaven and earth.

But for a while it is a real state ... changing you.

What a difference it made to the sitting here in the club smoking-room, waiting for people to arrive. This might have been shivering loneliness, nervous anticipation of coming guests. Instead, there was calm, easy anticipation and forgetfulness. Yet even now he might be moving forward to some fresh beginning that would set her definitely in the past.

Meanwhile she was launched in a tide flowing brightly to music. Launched with her own hands still steering the fragile barque ... how to continue the metaphor?... the bright firelight was intruding another. The launched barque was best, suggesting cool freedom and movement. If it stayed in mind, it would serve to shape the letter to be written to-day or to-morrow. To-morrow it must be, with the full evening ahead to be followed by the disappearance of the secret life in the companionship of Miss Holland.

To-morrow at Wimpole Street, where perhaps already another letter would have arrived.

The fragile barque; ships that pass in the Night. In sunlight. There is no night. For those who are alive there is no darkness. Meetings and meetings and meetings, and every time a new setting.

‘You are being made. You’ve no idea how you are growing.’

Better to find out for oneself and be grateful. But he must always be instructing. Yet there was joy apart from him. Joy that had lived so long in secret, flowing out now across the strange world of people and events.

She blessed the club. Its gift, at the moment when solitude had departed from her home-life, of a new solitude; strange lives surrounding her without pressure, and sometimes granting these large quiet moments.

The door opened upon Miss Holland.

Miss Holland at an immense distance. And somehow changed; coming in like a visitor. She was dressed, what she called *twollettay*, and evidently at the height of her social form. Free for the evening and looking in here on her way almost as if she knew how supporting would be her familiar

figure, ceremonially transformed, at this moment of first launching out as an evening hostess.

Miriam watched her come largely down the empty room. Ah, hers was splendour, par exemple! How well she bore the high spaciousness. Hers was an effectiveness that made its own terms, in advance.

‘They’ve made you an enchanting table,’ said Miss Holland, reaching the fireplace to stand sideways, firm hand on the mantelpiece and well-shod foot extended to the blaze.

Miriam had given no thought to the table. She gazed admiringly. What nobility of form and outline.

The large shady hat hid the limp hair and gave the eyes more than their usual depth. They were alight altogether, hesitating. She was communing with herself, eager to communicate. What? Something about Flaxman’s? No, or she would be frowning. And this high social moment was not for such things.

Miriam plunged into the story of her visit to Dr Densley, compressing it to a few phrases, and throwing up her hands with the despairing gesture of the correct hostess off duty, told how he had invited himself to her party as an awkward fifth.

‘But he gave you good news, or you would not look so bonny and happy.’

‘Said Densleyish things. A number of old saws. Overwork, late hours, heading for a crash. Said that for a New Woman I am disquietingly sane, and that my criminal carelessness about things that most women are in a reasonable hurry over, may possibly mean that I’m in for a long life.’

‘A most ingenious theory!’

‘I don’t know. He’s been reading Shaw. Can’t believe that women really think about anything but capturing a man; for

life. He wound up by imploring me not to miss marriage, and what of all things do you think is his idea, or at least the idea that most appeals to him in marriage? The famous “conflict for supremacy”!’

‘Indeed an unfortunate definition of matrimony.’

‘Yes, but wait. That’s not all. Talk about women getting hypnotized by ideas! His mind, his so scientific mind—is putty. With immense solemnity he informed me, “*No* woman, dear girl, is truly happy until she is the loser in that supreme conflict.”’

‘Dear, dear! An essentially pagan view.’

‘It’s the view of a man who knows he would lose.’

‘I trust you did not tell the poor thing that!’

‘Oh, but I did. I know it’s begging the question. But I say things like that on principle. Anything to break up addleheaded masculine complacency. Not that it matters a toss to women, but because it’s all over everything in the world like a fungus, hiding the revelations waiting on every bush.’

‘What was his response?’

‘He looked very sick for a moment, and then laughed his laugh and began repeating himself. Went back to his saws about wasting youth.’

‘Indeed, indeed, many are doomed to that. There, at least, he is right. Though most certainly not in regard to yourself. A propos, I am dining here, with the Wheelers. The child is in great trouble. The Polish ’cellist, it seems, is not after all to be in London this season. She is in despair.’

‘Of course, after coming across the world to see him.’

‘In despair. They must now, if they can raise sufficient funds, go to Poland. It seems that there is a lady, high up in the social scale and a patroness of musicians in general, who might be willing to help, provided that the ’cellist is willing

to see the child and to make an exception to his rule of not taking pupils. It is therefore imperative to communicate with him by *letter*. I have been wondering whether your Russian friend....’

‘Michael. Of course. I’ll ask him to-night. What is he to say?’

Miss Holland was flurried, transfigured; but still polite. Managing to phrase her decorous thanks before she hurried, almost running, away down the room. She returned in an instant, radiant.

‘The Wheelers are *delighted*.’

But she was blushing. Evidently the Wheelers were in the next room. Could easily be brought in to state their needs. She wanted to keep them to herself. Be all in all to their stranded helplessness. And when a moment later a maid announced Dr Densley, she made at once for the door, where she was held up for a moment by his entry, and so escaped back to the tremendous consultation.

Hands outstretched, he had made his smiling rush down the room and taken her lightly by the shoulders when the door opened to admit Michael. Summoning Densley from the hearthrug to the bright central light, she introduced them. They stood in a strange little silence. Densley, robbed of his usual soft-voiced flow of words and laughter by the spectacle of Michael, of whom he had heard so much, was taking a moment for contemplation, sure no doubt that she, like all the women of his world, would immediately emit suitable remarks. She ignored the obligation, flouted a suddenly realized desire to please him by filling up the measure of his large admiration, for the sake of watching these two old friends for the first time confronted.

It made them strangers to herself, people seen for the first time. Divested of their relationship to her, they were at once diminished and enlarged. Large and separate, each set in the stream of his own life. And small; small figures in a moving crowd.

It was Michael who broke the silence, announcing with stern shyness and courteously bent head that the profession of medicine was arduous and at the same time most fascinating. Miriam saw the other man, as he stood listening with a dawning smile to the slow stately English, read Michael's gentle spirit and hand him on the spot a protective affection. They stood talking. Michael bowing to punctuate his phrases but with a pleased smile shining behind his pale features, ready to emerge when the gravity he thought fitting to the occasion should have had its due. Densley, below a brow grave and thoughtful as Michael's but without its sadness, smiled his smile that was laughter, the laughter of his everlasting enchantment.

She left them to spy from the landing for any sign of the arrival of the Taylors. The silent empty hall brought her a vision of Dora, hurrying home to dress, meeting a friend on an island in the midst of traffic, one of those encounters that occur whenever one is in a hurry, and to which Dora would give herself as if space and time had no existence.

The gong rang out and residents became audible descending from the upper rooms.

She went back to summon the men and warn Densley that he had committed himself to a meal prepared in honour of the Taylors, without meat. Also that he would hear from Mrs Taylor all about the medical profession. His to-and-fro gust of laughter left him open-mouthed like a mask of Comedy,

silently gazing at her his assurance of his readiness for all her friends might do.

Through the open door she heard the continuous rustling descent of residents. All the tables would be full. So much the better, in case her oddly assorted party should produce long silences. She felt no desire for conversation and wondered, as she led the way downstairs, whether hostesses in general suffered the indifference that now held her in its grip. And if they did, why the business of entertainment was not abolished. She remembered how porous to the onlooking eye were people gathered talking at a feast. To be merely a silent guest was troublesome enough, but it was nothing to the burden of being obliged to produce, before the assembled eyes of the twenty residents, even the semblance of a dinner-party.

The dining-room was full of sound as she went in followed by the two men, held a little in the rear by the backward sweep of her long gown; a fabric of sound unbroken at any point in the rows of tables set against the walls, and all, even the one she had selected, fully occupied. All heads were averted, intent towards centres.

Gentlewomen. Yes; but those were just the people who saw without looking.

Here was the secretary at her elbow, smilingly indicating. Miss Holland was right, there in the central pool of light, well away from the serried ranks of small square tables, was the club's settlement of the problem of five diners, a round table, gleaming with silver and glass and festive with bowls of flowers.

As they took their places, falling accidentally into the best distribution for her serenity, herself facing away from the main wall and its unbroken row of diners, Michael on her

right giving them his impressive profile, and Densley across the way, his fine easy presence set full towards them, a servant announced the arrival of the Taylors. She left her party begun, with Densley, grave and kindly, set towards Michael to draw from him, and cherish, just anything it might occur to him to say.

Dora and George, unbelievably there, brought to the decorous hall its furthest reach of odd experience. They came from so much further than the long distance they had travelled across London to spend an evening in the land that to them was not even Philistia, but just Bedlam. The Bedlam of an illusion so monstrous as to be comic—for all observers but those who toiled helplessly at its provisioning: George's 'under-dog.'

They stood face to face, not seeing her. George in the half-light and against the dark ancient furniture, looking more than ever like the young Beethoven, his searching eyes bent beneath a frowning brow upon Dora's serene face of an intellectual Madonna upturned in absent-minded protest, while he explained, certainly not for the first time, exactly where, in their passage across London, they had missed their way. For an instant Miriam watched them, the beauty that together they made standing there in perfect physical contrast, a rare pure balance, as rare as their unmistakable equality of spirit. She rejoiced in the thought of them set down with Michael and Densley. Four widely separated worlds met together.

When actually they were so set down, George on her left and Dora all delicately harmonious colour between Michael's and Densley's black and white, the enchantment was so strong that she felt it must radiate to the four corners of the room. It served to support her in face of the absence in her

thoughts of anything that could form a starting-point for general conversation.

She took refuge with Dora. Dora's was the mind that could enclose all the others, and gaze over each of their territories in turn. She began at once by accusing Dora. Making her the culprit of the wandering pilgrimage.

Delicately flushing, her limpid absent eyes aware of the presence about her of disturbed people waiting for conversational openings, aware also of the restraining influence of her own serene beauty, Dora defended herself in the leisurely dimpling way that showed her armed for no matter what conflict. Dora was at her best. Densley hung towards her, delighted at once.

Here in strange garb and unfamiliar bearing was yet, he was assuming, the woman he understood, the woman existing in such numbers in his own set, and vocal, until Miriam had revolted and silenced her, in all his conversation; the woman who professes to be either amused or shocked by sexual allusions, disguised in commonplace remarks, and jests back, or tactfully heads off. How far, she wondered, would Dora, with her hobby of endless cool sampling of humanity, go out to meet this naïve masculinity? So far she sat screened, gently glowing, harmless.

If she held to this mood, went on turning upon him her lovely mild eyes, and Densley's warm-hearted worldliness took the field, then it was George, indulgent to Dora's adventure, who would be the enclosing, contemplating mind. Already, amidst the jests that carried them through the first courses, he was gathering fuel for the sole recreation afforded him by chance social festivities. For mirth over the spectacle of evasions. To-night the spectacle was all about

him, all over the room, rampant and unconscious, distracting him almost completely.

By the time the sweets appeared there were two groups at the table: Dora and Densley, averted towards each other in animated talk; George and Michael responding to everything Miriam offered, usually both at once, refusing to blend. Here, already, at her first party, was the English separation. No general conversation. Not even the English alternative, the duel between two men; the prize-fight. The party had fallen to bits. But it was worth while. For on the far side of the table, Dora's sweet mezzo was dominating Densley's baritone. She had tackled him. It was his opportunity, perhaps his utmost chance of being lifted outside his complacent dogmas.

It was presently evident that he was remaining impermeable. Though still listening and responding, he had lost interest, discovered that she failed, for all her soft appeal, to fall into any one of the classes he thought he understood, into the fascinating, the maternal, or the saintly. His mind gave her its ear, but his eyes with their everlasting message went again and again to a far corner of the room. Which of the disdainful club residents had become his chosen companion?

Dora was questioning him now, collecting physiology. Her voice penetrated the subdued, rapidly thinning talk coming from the small tables. Glancing round as if in search of an attendant, Miriam discovered the long row of diners, lingering over their coffee, one and all intent upon the centre table. And in the far corner that was drawing Densley's glances, Mrs Wheeler, talking with Miss Holland and her daughter, both with their backs to the room and unable to see the distant bourne of her eyes, dark and gleaming above the

heightened flush upon her cheeks as she sat there, mutely wise, telling him a plain tale of gallant endeavour.

The women at the table near the fireside were now openly staring.

As if by arrangement, by some operation of the fascinated attention of these two listeners, there was a sudden silence all over the room.

‘Of course,’ said Dora’s voice into the midst of it, dreamy as her pose, elbow on table, hand supporting chin, brow lifted in thought above eyes gazing into space, ‘we shan’t get parthenogenesis until we want it.’

The silence ended in abrupt risings and departures.

‘Not in our time,’ Densley had said, encircling the departing ladies with a smile that was not only homage and benediction, but glee. Private glee over the addition, to his store of anecdotes, of such a fine new specimen. He, at least, thought Miriam, as they rose from the table, would not regret the evening spent outside his world.

Michael, half risen, bowing towards the centre of the group, had something to say. One of his generalizations. The party was united at last.

‘These speculations,’ he announced, to the group Miriam rejoiced to see not only arrested by the inevitable topic but charmed by his gentleness, feeling the pull of him in their midst, ‘are most-interestink. There are it is sure in these matters no absolute certainties, but what is sure *is*, that the realization of this idea would be, not advance, but retrogression.’

‘Hear, hear,’ said Densley, in his smoothest girlish falsetto.

As they all went down Fleet Street on their way to the Lycurgan meeting, Miriam wondered whether she would be asked to resign from the club. But much more pressing than

this question was the feeling that her party had, in bringing together three of her worlds, shown her more clearly than she had known it before, that there was no place for her in any one of them. So clearly that she now wished it could end and leave her to go to the meeting alone.

There was in Lycurgan meetings some sort of reality, either coming from the platform or, more often, from irrelevant things rising in her own mind as she sat surrounded by so many speculative minds.

But to-night she would not reach unconsciousness of her surroundings. And the ideas coming from the platform would be severely tested by these alien presences. Already in advance, these ideas looked like a mere caprice of her leisure hours, a more or less congenial background of thought upon which presently might emerge a sudden enlargement of her own life. More and more lately they had been growing to mean things shared with Hypo, bright with life because they were his, and for the same reason suspect, suspect because of his unrivalled expressiveness, a faculty that might be turned with equal conviction in a quite opposite direction.

And once they were in the hall, and she was sitting with the serene worlds of Michael and Densley and the Taylors close to her, the urgency of all the Lycurgans stood for grew immediately less. This world of clear ideas summoning mankind to follow like an army, seemed again, as when she had first met it, to contain a trick, to be too clear, too hard, too logical to embrace the rich fabric of life. She experimented in unthinking it; and a silence fell on many of the flagrant cruelties of civilization. They lost their voice. Their only educated, instructed voice. The Lycurgans were a league to arrest cruelties. But a cold, cynical, jesting league, cold and hard as thought, cynical as paganism and cultivating

a wit that left mankind small and bleak, in a darkness where there was no hope but in intelligent scheming. Even the women. The Lycurgan women were all either as hopelessly logical as men, or methodically pink. And the men; the everlasting prize-fight, the perfect unsociability underlying their cold ideas. Except for one or two. And they were idealists, blind with the illusion that humanity moves with one accord.

Each one moves singly. To join the movements of others is harmful until you have moved yourself. Movement is with the whole of you. Ideas come afterwards.

How much time had passed? Only a moment or two. The chairman was still bleating. And they had not noticed her inattention.

They were sitting in a row at the back of the hall. The proceedings seemed very far away. Held off by their nearness to each other, by the way after one short hour and in spite of their incompatibilities, they were, when placed amongst strangers, in touch with each other.

It was worth while. Worth while to miss the intensities. To be happily surrounded. And this way, the social and domestic way of meeting things, the cool easy way of normal people, was perhaps the best way. It robbed things of all but their obvious surfaces, the practical data of life. Reduced them to the terms of what could be said about them and handed round from one to the other. Small wonder that reformers tended to become tub-thumpers, so immense must be the resistance offered by people living, as nearly every one did, in groups, closely related and drawn this way and that by perpetual single instances.

Less wonder that most people assumed the fact of life, took it without amazement, for granted, so thinly of necessity

was spread their awareness of anything whatever.

She gave herself up to joy in her party, in being linked with them in profane, mirthful detachment from all that was going forward, shockingly accompanied by the crackling of Michael's disgraceful bag of hardbake. Was it her fault that they were so detached? The result of some demoralizing influence at work behind her imagined interest in socialism? She felt it was not. They were all on a moral holiday, not only from their own worlds, but from any world whatsoever. Happy in being together, passing through an uncalculated interval, a strange small time that they would remember with pleasure.

Going homewards through the spring evening with Densley she felt the world even further off; thin, irrelevant. That was his influence. For him the world was something against which every one was fighting with weapons feeble or stout. Single people, the individual battle, that was the centre of his preoccupation. His interest in Mrs Wheeler was his sense that she was making a good fight, sturdily, perhaps unscrupulously ... that she was what he would call a real woman. Herself he regarded as so far unreal, good material for reality, holding back.

His wide, varied experience of humanity seemed all about them, as they wandered at truce arm-in-arm through the darkened evening streets. And she found herself, as always, leaning upon his ordered knowledge and yet repudiating it, so entirely did it imply an incomplete conception of life. Every symbol he used called up the image of life as process, never in any direction as completeness.

Faced alone, it appeared to him as bitterly sad, and the last disaster of an unhappy fate.

Faced in groups as he knew it best, it showed in his eyes only as material for comedy. It was of the comedy he was always trying to convince her. In life itself, the bare fact of life, there seemed for him to be no splendour. For men there was ambition, hard work, and kindly deeds by the way. And for women motherhood. Sacred. The way to it pure comedy; but once attained, life for the mother in a mansion of the spirit unknown to men, closed against them and for ever inaccessible. The attainment of full womanhood was farewell, a lonely treading of a temple, surrounded by outcasts.

He stood, it was true, to some extent within the lives of women, but witnessed again and again the farewell, saw the man lessened, left behind for ever on the threshold of magnificence, the woman left in a loneliness mitigated only by the fireside companionship.

The strange thing was that seeming to value her for what he called the intellectual heights that had kept her uncorrupted by petty social life, he yet wanted her to come down from them and join the crowd. That if even for one moment she could show any unguarded feeling, anything free from criticism, even deliberately freed from criticism, he was ready to become the gay priest of initiation into the comedy whose every dramatic possibility he knew by heart.

CHAPTER VI

The morning lays cool fingers on my heart and stands there an intensity of light all about me and there is no weight or tiredness. When I open my eyes there is a certain amount of light—much less than I felt before I opened them—and things that make, before I see them clearly, an interesting pattern of dark shapes; holding worlds and worlds, all the many lives ahead. And I lie wandering within them, a different person every moment. Until some small thing seen very clearly brings back the present life and I find a head too heavy to lift from the pillow and weariness in all my frame, that is unwilling to endure the burden of work to be done before the evening can come again bringing strength.

Yet what ease of mind I have now. What riches and criminal ease, exemptions and riches. Everything is done for me and I am petted and screened from details. Secretly she plans my comfort, saying nothing.

And at Wimpole Street it is the same. And there also it is the work of a woman. The fiancée, who has altered so many tiresome things, lifted off so many burdens.

‘You ought not to carry those heavy ledgers up and down stairs. You are killing yourself.’ Perhaps it was the heavy ledgers. Anyhow there is now always this fearful weariness side by side with the happiness.

Life flowed in a new way. Many of the old shadows were gone; apprehensions about the future had disappeared. Side by side with the weariness, and with nothing to explain its confidence, was the apprehension of joy.

Wearily she tumbled her happy self out of bed, feeling, as her feet touched the floor, the thrill of the coming day send a small current of strength through her nerves. If only she could preserve it. But everything nowadays came headlong and smiling, everything and everybody. No enemies, no difficulties. With every hour glad tidings calling. Calling from yesterday. Crowding to-day so closely that much must be missed, joy scamped and missed and waiting and pouring over into to-morrow that would bring yet more things.

Why me? What have I done? Why is it that something seems to be looking after me?

One can't change one's nature, which is one's fate. Yet there is a sense of guilt in finding everything so easy.

Perhaps I shall have an awful old age? No, from forty to sixty is the best of life. I shall go on getting happier and happier. Because it takes almost nothing to make me as happy as I can bear.

But there is this terrible tiredness. Densley may be right. But one can't marry just to escape fatigue. 'Have you noticed, dear girl, that we have spent a whole evening together without argument?'

'I never argue, bless you.'

'You give me your blessing?'

'What need have you?'

'My dear girl.'

'I'm neither dear nor in the least girlish.'

'You're a girl, my dear, unspoiled by worldly women, the dearest I know—with a man's mind.'

‘It’s your fashionable patients, parasites, helpless parasites, I’m not blaming them, who make you think women are all cats.’

‘My dear golden girl, all grace and charm if only she chose, when do I see you again?’

The milk boiled over and Miss Holland laughed from her bed. Again it had made a frightful mess on the oil-stove. Nearly every day Miss Holland had somehow to make that mess disappear. Yet she always laughed. Was now gaily getting up to the accompaniment of her usual jests on the catastrophe.

It seemed enough for her that she lived in the glow of another life. For that she seemed willing to pay any price in unseen labour.

‘Did you speak to your friend about writing to the musician?’

‘No.’

‘Indeed?’ What a strange, sharp note.

‘Not last night. I shall see him to-day probably, or to-morrow.’

Miriam could feel wrath coming through the curtain.

Miss Holland was speechless, her large frame, moving now impatiently about, a boiling wrath. Evidently she had undertaken; would now have to explain to these cherished friends. But what a turmoil! How easy to find words for them and carry them along a little. Was the whole world to be stopped for their letter?

She was glad she had spoken with serene indifference. Evidently her evening, the shape of her evening entertaining friends, was nothing. Her usefulness, to these wonderful acquaintances, all she was worth. It was careless, of course, to have forgotten. But she was glad now that she had

forgotten. Glad to see for how little Miss Holland could adopt a tone of frigid annoyance. Damn, she thought, I've undertaken it. I'll do it in my own time.

Almost immediately on the heels of her own words and preceded by little sounds expressing the depth of impatient scorn, came Miss Holland's most fastidious voice:

'Had it been made to a *man*, your promise would at once have been carried out.'

Miriam forgot her anger in amazement at the spectacle of a *châtelaine* with a volcanic temper and a spiteful tongue. She searched her memory in vain for anything to equal the venom of this attack.

'After that, you count upon my asking him?' she said, feeling herself adream, lost in pity before the revelation of the importance to Miss Holland of these club acquaintances.

For herself, the little idyll in the rooms was at an end. That could be marked off at once, at the cost of a small pang that turned, even as she wondered in what form, short of an instant withdrawal of herself and her belongings, the insult could be wiped out, to an indrawn breath of freedom. But side by side with the thought of vengeance, came forgiveness. It was all simply pitiful.

The answer to her quiet question, reaching her as she passed into the next room, was a burst of weeping. She paused for a moment to be sure of the astonishing sound and fled from it, closing the connecting door. This, she felt, was the last depth of shame, to be involved, to have been subject to, this meanest of all abandonments.

She and Miss Holland were separated now, utterly. The principle at stake was before her like a sanction, holding her at peace. She dressed serenely, her thoughts browsing far away. The milk, boiled afresh, made a tea more excellent

than usual. The two biscuits were a pleasant feast. The dreadful little room seemed for the first time to establish a direct relationship with herself.

With never a backward thought, she went out into the spring sunshine, five letters, found waiting in the box, rich in her hand. One from him. There might be another on her table at Wimpole Street. But the letters, even for to-day, his letter, stood away, waiting friends around her spellbound calm. It was not, she told herself, the calm of mere indifference. It was the calm of perfect opposition to a certain form of baseness. It brought peace and strength.

In beatific mood she sat down at her table and wrote to Miss Holland that on the terms set by her this morning she must decline to discuss anything whatever. The moment her letter was dispatched, anger seized her. She hoped Miss Holland would suffer all she could in anxiety over the success of her project.

Miss Holland, it was clear, despised her and had found, in wishing to make her look small in her own eyes, crushing eloquence. And what she had said was true, in a general way. Often and often, memory told her, she had sacrificed women for men, baldly, visibly. But then there had always seemed to be something at stake. Now there seemed to be nothing at stake. She wanted nothing so much as to be charmed and charming. And that she was so, or her thoughtless happiness mysteriously made her so, things multiplied perpetually around her to declare. Apart from the menace of devastating fatigue, she swam in joy, felt even dark things turn to joy within her mind.

The old life and death struggle between conflicting ideas had died down. She could see the self who had lived so long upon that battle ground, far off; annoying, when thought of

as suffered by others. But it was not without a pang that she looked back at that retiring figure. It had been, at least, with all its blindness, desperately sincere. She was growing worldly now, capable of concealments in the interest of social joys, worse, capable of assumed cynicism for the sake of advertising her readiness for larks she was not quite sure of wishing to share. And thought was still there, a guilty secret, quiet as a rule. Sometimes inconveniently obtrusive at moments when she most wished to approximate to the approved pattern of charming femininity.

Fearful of really forgetting her commission, she wrote at once to Michael and floated off into her day, her mind away in the bright pattern of life, the scenes of the many dramas being played out all round her, of the new worlds into which unawares her obscure career had led her, secure in the knowledge that while she lived thus sunnily, all difficulties in the daily routine would solve themselves under her hand.

A charm, the charm that came over the leads where the birds hopped, and into the conservatory-office in the spring sunshine, lay over everything. Shadows were there. The shadow of Nietzsche, the problem of free-love, the challenge of Weiniger, the triple tangle of art, sex, and religion. Poverty and Henry George. But she was out in the dance of youth, within hearing of all that was happening along the rim of life as it pressed forward into a future that was to be free of much that had darkened the being of those who went before, and had freed her already from the fear of isolation and resourcelessness. She was ready now to drop all props and wander forth.

Lo here, lo there. But the kingdom of heaven is within. Communist colonies were not a solution of anything.

Yet the kingdom within is a little grey and lonely. Marriage is no solution, only a postponement. A part solution for some people.

I am a greedy butterfly flitting in sunlight. Envidable, despicable. But approval of my way of being speaks in me, a secret voice that knows no tribunals. The joy and ease of this evening-lit life is a presage because it is a fulfilment. Man never is, but always to be blest. But I *am* blest. *Alles ist relativ*. I am blessed beyond anything I ever dreamed of, within these inexorable circumstances.

The happiness that came when they were even bleaker was a presage. Of what? Someone says there is nothing meaner than making the best of things. But happiness is incurable. A thing you can't help. Perhaps it is the result of being a woman. One of Wells's crawling cabs waiting to be hailed? Bosh. If I wait for any one, it is for one who will show himself to have been hailed by the same kind of happiness.

Mrs Cameron, running singing up the stairs, pushed open the door and stood tall, a bright questing figure; determinedly bright, a deliberately cheerful blue overall covering all but the sleeves of her multi-coloured gown; hanging from her arm a great basket of primroses.

'Good morning,' she laughed. 'How is't with thee?'

Miriam delighted in the gaiety of colour she made standing there in the flood of top-light; in the heroic tilt of her head, in everything but the deliberately rousing, deliberately gloom-flouting ring of her laugh, which yet, so frequently breaking forth, was the thing that compelled her tired eyes, tired bright hair, and thin face into harmony with the gay colours of her house and clothing.

She smiled from her place at the table, made room for Mrs Cameron in her mind, and prepared to squander, in seeing

life with her, a bit more of the morning hour. Mrs Cameron came in pleased, and began at once with her legends. Miriam read off in her own thoughts legends to match. It was a clear shape, deliberate. A way of ignoring all but the shining surfaces. Of setting everything, even the old woman dying penniless in the mews, in a light that made surfaces shine.

But her way of denying gloom brought gloom in the end. Spread it everywhere. Miriam felt herself drooping, was glad when she rose, spindling up to her full gay height and settling herself on her feet with a little spring that made the primrose bunches jostle each other in the basket.

‘I’m off to kirk with Donald. A special service. There’s a call,’ for the first time her face clouded, ‘a need abroad in the air for intercession, Mr Groat says, a *wonderful* turning for help and guidance. *Such* a hopeful sign.’

‘Yes,’ said Miriam sympathetically, ‘certainly it is.’ But her mind was arguing that there is nothing in the world that is not a hopeful sign.

‘The state of *society*,’ breathed Mrs Cameron, eagerly dropping her voice. But Miriam had left her. The whole day would not be long enough for the enterprise of getting Mrs Cameron down to underlying things. She wanted the bright figure to stay, gathering the beams of the spring sunlight before her eyes, but Mrs Cameron had read the opposition in her face.

‘Fare thee well, lassie,’ she chanted in hillside voice and flung, as she went, a bunch of primroses on to the table. Miriam pursued her for a word of thanks. From half-way down the stairs she turned with her piercing smile, and sang out:

‘It’s your *life* you are living here, lassie, and flowers are for all.’

Miriam turned back. The small bunch lying upon the scatter of charts and letters was there to brighten her life that was spending itself, had spent itself for the ten years since she left home, the years that are called 'the best.' So Mrs Cameron saw it. So perhaps every one would see it. She herself the only blind spectator. It was true. This scene that she persisted in seeing as a background, stationary, not moving on, *was* her life, *was* counting off years. The unlimited future she meted out for the life she was one day to lead appeared to Mrs Cameron defined, a short span.

A tap at the door and Eve coming in with the mid-morning soup and her look of adoring care. She moved in the room with a restrained eagerness. Taking her time. Never still, yet waiting, savouring, as Miriam was savouring, their perfect interchange, the sudden lift into happiness that came to them in each other's presence. Miriam stood motionless, suddenly conscious of herself as standing considering Mrs Cameron's judgment with bent head, and then as utterly relieved of it by Eve who passed to and fro close by her as if she were not there, and was gone with a light click of the gently closing door. And there had been an endless moment of communion, a moment for both of them, of oblivion and renewal in the presence of a lover.

It was part of Eve's wonderfulness that she should have come in just then, to answer Mrs Cameron. Miriam held the image of her in her mind, her gently rounded, ever so little stocky and stumpy figure; the deep rose flush on her cheeks over which the cloudy black hair cast a margin of shadow; the pure serenity that radiated from her, that was independent and ultimate. Past accounting for, and independent of knowledge. That was itself knowledge.

And ever since, a year ago, she had first appeared in the house, she had come punctually, at bad moments, into the room. And had grown shyly and quite silently to know how near she was and how precious. She had come so unobtrusively, replacing the jaunty careless Ellen, gone away with the Orlys. It was strange, one of those strange hints life brought, that she should have appeared at the very time of the other Eve's unbearable death, bearing not only her name, but her gentle certainties. And her way of gathering all spears to her own breast.

Miss Holland's reply came by hand at teatime. Victorian hand-writing, with a difference. Something of rounded warmth in the longish uprights. She strongly deprecated the unfriendly tone of Miriam's note. In after-teatime mood, her mind flooded with the bright light of the evening ahead, Miriam faced the distasteful problem. Clearly Miss Holland wanted her to admit that they had both been foolish and to suggest that the incident should be forgotten and a fresh beginning made. But the balance was not equal between a deadly insult and an unfriendly tone. Or was it?

Was passionate anger better than cool reason? Perhaps Miss Holland was right all through. Be that as it might, it was impossible to countenance emotional scenes or run any risk of a touching reconciliation. Still less any bright amiable forgiveness with its wicked life-insulting suggestion of 'fresh beginnings.'

To-morrow, perhaps, in far-away mood after the evening's revels, something would come in words that would straighten things out without offence. There is a straightening-out process going on in life itself, if left alone. Already it was possible to smile at the whole occurrence, at both parties.

‘I can’t,’ she wrote at top speed, ‘be a party to the way of settling differences that is known as feminine. Can’t play any part in scenes. Can’t face explanations, apologize or be apologized to. So there we are. My friend has been written to and will probably act without delay. There for me the matter ends. Any further consideration of it would induce a regrettable attack of profanity.’

CHAPTER VII

The enclosed golden light of a party. People transformed. All wearing the air of festival. All wandering about with happy eyes, expectant; the eyes of the beginning of a party. All but a few. At every party there were those few.

And at this party, very soon almost all were like the few. For a while they had gone in and out of the three rooms as if looking for something that was about to reveal itself. Something they know is there and are always seeking.

Something very joyous. The joy of a party is the newness of people to each other, renewed strikingness of humanity. They love each other, to distraction. Really to distraction. Before they fall into conversation and separate.

A large party. More than large enough and varied enough, as the crowd thickens, to represent the world. Whatever that is. And because, at least by sight, all are known to each other, each one's quality already tested, expectation is baffled. A few go on seeking, will go on all the evening, looking forth from themselves as if sooner or later the gathering would assume a single shape and perform a miracle.

This must be true of all gatherings, of all except religious meetings. The strangeness, and the hopes aroused by strangeness, are illusions. Mirages arising wherever people gather expectantly together. The few who at parties have not the glint of expectation in their eyes are those who know this.

Some are cynical. Some enduring. One or two ignore people as persons. See them only as parts of a process.

It is true, then, though town life hides the fact, that individual life cannot begin until the illusion of wonderful people presently to be met is vanquished. The whole world, all the scattered people brought together and made known to each other, would soon be like this party, each tested and placed. Even the best of them known as limited.

Then domestic life, troglodyte life, is the severest test of quality. The coming to the end of the charm of strangeness. Of exogamy. The making terms and going on, or the hard work of silently discovering near things afresh. Re-thinking them. Keeping them near, as strange things are at first near, and, like strange things, beloved.

‘What have I to do with thee?’ Yes. But that was a man who had a message for every one in the world and very little time to get round with it. Not the voice of one who is weary of the near in space and time and hopes to find the distant more appreciative.

Yet even he demanded a personal allegiance. ‘If ye love me, keep my commandments.’ What is love? Who can interpret commandments? They all stood round adoring, begging for explanations and instructions. Perhaps he meant, ‘You admire what I am. Take my hints. You will find out the rest.’

Wandering eyes were growing rarer, though still newcomers arrived and toured hopefully. Groups were forming of people masked, or visibly bored, sustaining the familiar. Wit, surrounded, was hard at work. Here and there rival theorists were audible, disarmed by the occasion and affably wrangling. And every one, even the schemers circulating girt and keen, or wearing the veil of nonchalance, waited now for

the gathering to do something of itself. For here, for good or ill, in the circling Lycurgan year, was a party, and every one counting on at least a moment's distraction.

How intolerable with its challenge, its throwing back the self empty on to the self, and its revelation of the weariness of selves, would be the whole spectacle, but for here and there a figure of sincerity bearing the burdens of the rest, drawing nerve-poisoning influences from the air.

Full, the rooms were now. A moving bright maze of people and amongst them many strangers, guests. A leaven of the unthinking world, as the Lycurgans were the leaven that was to drive through the world of thought. But the strangers were not the zest of the meeting. Now that they were here, with their bearing of eager curiosity or amused polite deference, being introduced, talked to, some already the centres of arguing groups, it was through the familiar figures that life seemed most strongly to flow. Again as in family life; the quality of the familiar showing clearest under the beam of an alien light.

Densley, hurrying from far away with arms outstretched.

With the sense of coming down through space, that held her still, yet welcoming, with a welcome not for him, but for the strange journeying, his and hers, she reached level in time to rise and greet him as he seized her hands. For a moment he surveyed her through his laugh. Then they were off, arms linked, on a tour of the rooms.

Eyes gleamed at him as he went debonair, talking, not listening, needing no response but her radiance and abandon to his guiding arm. Solace at once; a rebuilding of strength to face this crowd that now stood off, no longer impinging, no longer eloquent except of a friendly indifference. Life, through all happenings, could pass like this. Happenings

would be disarmed, bright strangeness rooted in an unexamined sameness. There would be solace for all the wounds of thought in his unconsciousness. But no companionship. For a long while nothing at all of profound experience and then, perhaps, her whole being arranged round a new centre and reality once more accessible, but in a loneliness beside which the loneliness of the single life was nothing.

He would never know this. A listening radiance, and superficial statements and activities, would satisfy him. Yet he suspected a rival and respected, while contesting, its power. Offered, as a substitute, his own secret life of faith in humankind, his shining love. For him all these special people gathered here represented not a determined movement to arrest Juggernaut, but material for joyous existence.

Is civilization Juggernaut? Are there not within it as many, and more, of those who promote its best qualities as there are of socialists attacking its defects? And of those like Densley, who work consciously for the increase of human happiness, how many there are and how much kindlier than these people, most of whom seem so little kind, so much merely the jealous custodians of ideas.

‘Ideas are such chancy things. We not only can’t get along without them. There’s no escaping them, and they are all figures of speech.’

‘*Homo sapiens*, eh? Well, so long as he has a good figure...’ Kind imbecile, imbecile, but kind. ‘But ideas, my dear girl, are not the greatest thing in the world. And they easily take one too far away from life.’

‘That wouldn’t matter. But while they last they keep you on a monorail. All specialists are on monorails.’

‘Monomaniacs, eh? Now tell me who is the lassie in the white smock?’

‘That’s a djibbêh. And her name is Nora Beaworthy. Keep your pun. Although I dare say in the end she will. All those pink people will be worthy when they’re grey. Anyhow it’s no good. Having had a thoroughly vivid time and made a number of hurried young men take up socialism, she’s now engaged.’

‘She leaves me heart-whole, my dear. But I saw her on the way here, running at top speed down Pall Mall in her white gown, the spirit of spring.’

His glance was wandering as it always would, gathering up and delighting in bright youth, in the appearance of animation; utterly blind to all the tricks of conscious attractiveness. Blind, too, to cattish subtleties. He was wax in the hands of his mondaines.

She looked round for people upon whom he might exercise his social graces. Who would give him what he needed to keep him at his glowing best. But there were none here of his kind. None who rushed thoughtlessly through ready-made evolutions. Refusal to accept these evolutions at their surface value he would see only as uncharitableness.

Alone together, he and she might make terms. But in his ready-made social surroundings they would at once be antagonists. The so much less sociable, so much more discriminating socialists became suddenly dear, the salt of the earth. They were, after all, little as she knew them, her own people. She thought with them, was ready to act with them. They, and not those others, were her family.

She chose a group of young women and set him in the midst of their ready smiles and swift replies. Saw them sum him up.

Dancing was beginning in the end room. The first dancing she had seen since she left home. It held her eyes. People transfigured, circling, lit from above. But only for a moment. It was memory that had put the happy haze about them. They were clear and cold, not lost in their dancing. Not even those whose heads gleamed with youth. They danced with a difference. They were the new generation.

She longed to dance and drop the years. And here, as if in ironic commentary, was old Hayle-Vernon, handsome in smooth evening dress, stepping elegantly towards her. With a light in his young dark eyes. He too felt his youth beckon and come close.

‘Shall we dance?’ His pallor was flushed. With boyish uncertainty. With the distance he came in ignoring that they were strangers.

To him her twenty-eight years were infancy. He was saying so with his smile. Knew, besides, no more of their number than of her. She felt her youth rise to lead him back to his, and his gratitude for the gift vibrating in his smooth voice as he began, the moment they swung in amongst the dancers, by remarking that it was pleasing to see Lycurgans as ready to hop as they were to hope. On and on as they circled—the tails of djibbêhs beating about them, every couple vocal, some straining away from each other as they danced, to argue more effectually—his voice persisted. Her scraps of reply, though he bent his head for them until his beard brushed her cheek, did not get through his slight deafness. But all they had in common, known to them both, was speaking between them, making a sadness; making them hate each other for apprehending. Never again would they attract each other from afar, nor ever, now that they had spoken, want to speak again. Unless presently they could

meet in some mental difference. She gathered as his voice went on, emerging suavely above the primitive swinging pressure of his body and theorizing now, about art in the socialist state, material for discussion when presently they should be seated.

But on their sofa in the alcove they were immediately joined by Arnold Englehart who stood before them deferentially, yet like a threat; equally oblivious of Hayle-Vernon's deep-seated indifference to socialism and of the sacredness of sitting-out couples, pouring out his newest plan to bring about socialism in a fortnight.

Englehart was real, and his plans burned as enthusiastically as upon his bent head his hair, lit from behind and standing out like a bush above his unseeing face. Hayle-Vernon was alight in pursuance of his hobby of pulling a thread of thought through shapeless assertions. But in every word he spoke sounded his central unbelief. Prominent Lycurgans. Good men. Keeping an eye on injustices. Trying, from whatever motive, to reform the world. One chasing an abstraction called humanity, and the other an abstraction called intelligence.

It seemed that the air grew icy about them. It was a relief to catch sight of Densley, beaming with social happiness. Through the rising tide of Englehart's talk she watched him afar. Tall and lean and swiftly graceful in all his movements. Yet padded. A lean tall firmly-padded baby. The slight rotundity of his slenderness, like his bantering man-of-the-world society talk, was the radiation of his substantially nourished mind. His mind spoke from his broad unconscious brow. Serene and attentive between his frivolous words and friendly curling hair. A Harley Street brow. Calm where all these Lycurgans were irritable. And in his shapely nose,

slightly blunted, like so many professional noses, was the cause, or the expression, of his interest in philosophy. Flirtatious interest, in the intervals of listening for the ever-changing gossip of science and accepting, because they bore out his own kindly experience, the statements of evangelistic religion.

‘Multiple shops, proliferating’—she glanced in time to catch Hayle-Vernon’s flicker of amusement—‘like a cancerous growth.’ But Englehart’s adoration of Wells was a charming décor, taking nothing from his individuality. He had so much intensity that it blazed, like paraffin, a little wildly, but never with the wind. That was the great thing about the Lycurgans. That they thought. They were not impressionists further than every one, merely by being alive and not sure of the whence and the whither, must be helplessly impressionist.

The accumulations of two years of attention to Lycurgan thought, the images fashioned by their more articulate intelligentsia to express their sense of the destruction of modern civilization by disorderly forces grown out of that civilization, were again uppermost as she returned to the thought of Densley and his indiscriminate social happiness. His friendship, for instance, with little Mr Taunton. Perhaps that was inevitable. Poor little Taunton, shocked into worldly wisdom by his experience at the hands of Eleanor, flying, from his refuge under the tiles with his Plato, into marriage, must now have visitors. And doctors and clergy and lawyers must hang together. And their wives support the fabric. ‘A *charming* little woman,’ said Densley, ‘she listened while her man and I discussed the sacraments.’ Meaning that Densley and Taunton, putting their heads together about religion, were swimming in waters beyond her depth; that she, being

not only a woman, but charming, that is to say an apparently uncritical listener, sat respectfully by and earned in due course the indulgent lowering of the conversation to matters she could understand. But would they have talked so busily, kept on for so long their amicable duel, without an audience? And would they have been so serene if they had seen into her thoughts, seen her read them as she watched their play?

Conversation of this type, comfortably fed and arm-chaired men discussing in the presence of deferential wives, was the recreation of his less frivolous leisure. And for the rest, fashionable dinner-parties, opinions about the latest plays and the latest novels, scandals, the comparing of notes about foreign travel, hotels and so on—always the same world, always shut in however far away, with the same assumptions, not about life, for these people never thought about the fact of life, only about the details of living, and about behaviour. His world was ready-made, and clearly now as she watched him for the first time from afar and socially surrounded, she saw that if she went into that world she would fail him; fail just where a rising doctor's wife must be a tower of strength.

The sadness of farewell, bringing with it in equal companionship a humiliating annoyance, was shallow; farewell to a selfish coveting, doomed all along by its heartlessness. Yet even as she saw him cut off, going his own bright way, it stirred within her, asserting a depth she had not guessed; prompting to recklessness, reminding her with a long backward glance how clearly, through all the years she had known him, 'fate' had been at work throwing them together in solitude, carefully not revealing him in association with grouped humanity until now. To draw back now was to reduce their common past, from the moment of

his coming, bounding lightly at midnight into Eleanor Dear's garret, an abrupt tired man, prescribing a sleeping draught and thankful to get away as soon as he knew there was someone prepared to stay all night and not afraid to go out and ring up a chemist, to waste of time.

Waste of time in an alcove—a comfortable alcove inviting waste of time by being there and being unable to protest. Waste of time; except for the gathered knowledge of his goodness? Perhaps Hayle-Vernon, whose elegant sophistries had at last broken the tide of Englehart's talk and left him standing, still eager, aware that his ardour had miscarried, and though not actually looking about him, yet already on the look-out for another listener, had gathered, in the time Englehart had wasted with him, a knowledge of Englehart's unconscious goodness?

Wilkins the author, gesticulating greetings, came up and hooked Englehart away by the arm.

With Englehart gone, Hayle-Vernon was left in a void, statuesque, draped only with his manner of a prominent Lycurgan. He had joined the society for the sake of self-realization, consciously contributing his proud talent for straightening out the statements of those who, in so far as they were driven by feelings that were clearer than their thoughts, were careless about language? Separated from passionate conviction he was inoperative. Perhaps, identifying me with the new group of young Lycurgans, he credits me with passionate convictions? And here I sit—while from far away in the cold centre where he formulates his criticisms, facing cessation, he is coming back to make suitable remarks—equally stranded, in a perfect equality of inoperativeness.

‘You are going to write for *The New Order*?’

‘Not in *The New Order*. I write about socialism in an anarchist paper.’

‘The Impossibility of Anarchy?’

‘No. That anarchy and socialism are the same in spirit. Only that socialists think they can define the future and anarchists know they can’t.’

‘That’s very amusing. But, I think, scarcely true. To begin with, anarchy, as defined——’

Densley, swinging about on his tall stride, halting for a moment with head turned, near at hand; seeing her sitting at the feet of a distinguished-looking elderly Lycurgan, moving clear of groups, keeping himself free to come forward when the next dance should begin. Sounding through Hayle-Vernon’s undulating vocalization came her own thoughts, as if he were speaking them.

Farewell to Densley is farewell to my one chance of launching into life as my people have lived it. I am left with these strangers—people without traditions, without local references, and who despise marriage, or on principle disapprove of it. And in my mind I agree. Yet affairs not ending in marriage are even more objectionable than marriage. And celibates, outside religion, though acceptable when thought of as alone, are always, socially, a little absurd. Then I must be absurd. Growing absurd. To others, I am already absurd.

There is no one on earth who knows the right and wrong of these things. There are only prejudices. Where do they come from? People are prejudices. Life is a prejudice. Or it wouldn’t go on. Your life is the prejudices you are born with. That is determinism. But something must be determined. By their prejudices ye shall know them. Not by anything acquired. By instincts. Which are judgments ready-made.

Free-lovers seem all in some indefinable way shoddy. Born shoddy. Men as well as women. Marriage is not an institution, it is an intuition. Marriage, or sooner or later absurdity. Free-love is better than absurdity...

Yet the free-lovers dancing there seemed both sadness and mockery. Dancing is shimmer. Satin and silk and white slippers. Rooms white and gold. Massed flowers. Rapt faces to whom problems and socialism are unknown. Youth, and an audience of elderly parents and friends. It seems mockery for these people with their brains full of ideas and their bodies decked in protests, to dance. Dancing brings an endlessness in which nothing matters but to go on dancing—in a room, till the walls disappear—in the open, till the sky, moving as you dance, seems to cleave and let you through.

People from South Place, gravely circling.

‘That’s not dancing, it’s the Ethical Movement.’

Shaw. The darling. Religiously enduring. Coming to Lycurgan gatherings as others go to church.

The ring, made by those who remained, extended when their linked hands were stretched at arm’s length, all the way round the large room. These people were part of the crowd that had stood shouting the refrains of the folk-songs led by the woman on the estrade with the determined voice. Seen thus they had seemed threatening, inhuman; an édition de luxe of the noisy elements in a street crowd. And more threatening, because they were driven by ideas. The massed effect of djibbêhs and tweeds and dress-suits, bellowing, was of a wilful culture banded together in defiance of a world it could not see.

But now, standing ringed round the room with linked hands they were charming. Innocent; children linked for a game, dependent on each other. In the midst of them,

somehow in the centre to which all their faces were turned, was something beyond the reach of socialism. It sounded even in the dismal notes of *Auld Lang Syne* with its suggestion of mournful survival from a golden past. To stand thus linked and singing was to lose the weight of individuality and keep its essence, its queer power of being one with every one alive.

But it was also embarrassing. Made an embarrassment that every one had to share. For the thread of song was stronger than any one there. Even those who, meeting known eyes above an unusually opened mouth, or imagining themselves to be objects of hilarious scrutiny, tried to be individually funny, were presently overwhelmed and drawn along. The thin beginning on a few voices had swelled to a unison of varying octaves and strengths. She heard her own voice within it and felt as she sang how short and wavering and shapeless was her life, and short and wavering even the most shapely lives about her.

As the dismal refrain was lifting its third monotonous howl there came from behind her, where a door opened on to a cloak-room, a woman's voice, angry, deep, and emphatic, like an ox roaring at a gate. Her hand was torn from her nearest companion's and the newcomer was in the ring singing with stern lustiness below a hat askew. The last words of the song echoed round the room upon the might of her voice.

CHAPTER VIII

Another spring vanished....

A sheet of crocuses singing along the grass alley.

White, under trees still bare. Crocuses dotting the open grass with June gold....

Suddenly a mist of green on the trees, as quiet as thought. Small leaves in broad daylight, magic reality, silent at midday amidst the noise of traffic.

Then full spring for three days. Holding life still, when the dawn mists drew off the sea and garden and revealed their colour.

Every one had loved it, independent of other loves. Become for a while single. Wanting and trying and failing to utter its beauty. Every one had had those moments of reality in forgetfulness. Quickly passing. Growing afterwards longer than other moments, spreading out over the whole season; representing it in memory.

CHAPTER IX

The room is still in midnight darkness and full of the feeling of midnight. There must have been a sudden sound—perhaps a wild squealing of cats, too soon after I fell asleep. In a minute it will begin again; a low yowling, just beneath the window, growing louder. Then a scuffle and piercing shrieks. Silence; and more shrieks, at a comfortable distance.

Savage night-life of cats. Welcome, heard far off making shrill streaks of light in the darkness and suggesting daytime; all the friendly little cats of London.

There is no sound. Not a breath. In spite of the wide open window the air is stifling. And though there is no breeze, the reek of cats comes up and in. All the summer it has come in. It is part of the air of the room.

Yet the nights in here have been paradise. Cool sleep. Escape from the night-sounds of the court. Escape from Miss Holland's obliviousness of the sounds of the court.

She is dull not to hear. Or strong? Dull strength in not hearing.

Noisy home-comings in the spring. Strident, hideous voices in a reeling procession along the court and dying away in the distance. Drunken monologues. Every sound echoing near and clear in the narrow court. And she heard *nothing*. The cobbler, noisily taking down his shutters in the early light, had called her from sleep, not from feverish

dreams. And when the summer came and sounds filled the court till dawn, still she heard nothing.

Why is all this saying itself over so freshly? At some moment every night before I go down into sleep, it says itself. And now I have come back from half-way to sleep it is all there is in my mind. Because I am always trying to ignore it. Never thinking of it by day. And here it is, belonging to me. Closer than anything that happened yesterday.

Hoarse-voiced lovers lingering on after the roistering has died down. Men and women coming in quarrelling from the main street. Voices that had once been gentle for each other, madly seeking lost gentleness in curses. Curses and blows dying down to a panting stillness; out there, in the dismal court.

Night-long, through open windows, thick, distorted voices in strife. Shut in, maddened. Maddened confined men. Women despairingly mocking. Worst of all, children's voices sane and sweet in protest, shrilling up, driven by fear, beyond the constriction of malformed throats, into sweetness.

And she had heard *nothing*.

But this same thickness or dullness had kept her unaware of what it was that in the end had turned this stuffy little back room into a refuge.

She did not know that there were sounds more intolerable than those coming in from the street. The street sounds varied. Were sometimes obliterated by wind and rain, and were at their worst only at the height of the summer. And even at their worst they were life, fierce and coarse, driving off sleep; but real, exciting. Only unendurable because there was no hope during their lifetimes of any alteration in the circumstances within which all these people were confined.

But those other sounds never varied. And spoke of death. That was the worst, that they filled the room with the sense of death and the end.

They cast a long shadow backwards over the whole of life, mocking it.

Night after night they had to be anticipated and then lived through. One by one. To come home late was not to escape them. They were all there collected in the quiet room. Centring in the imagined spectacle of the teeth waiting in their saucer for the morning.

To sleep early was to wake to the splutter of a match and see the glare of candlelight come through the porous curtain. To hear, with senses sharpened by sleep, the leisurely preparations, the slow careful sipping, the weary sighing, muttered prayers, the slow removal of the many unlovely garments, the prolonged swishing and dripping of the dismal sponge. All heralding and leading at last to the dreadful numb rattle of vulcanite in the basin.

Yet the worst to bear was the discovery of the hatred these innocent sounds could inspire. Still there unchanged, pure helpless hatred, rising up as it had risen in childhood, against forced association with unalterable personal habits....

But the shock of discovering that hatred anew, finding I have not moved on, only been lulled into good humour by solitude, did not lessen the first joy of the little back room. For a while, in spite of the ugly things in it, and the never-ending reek streaming in through the window, the joy remained. There was that night when I sat writing until morning. Once more able to expand and think. And the air seemed as pure as if it had come in over the countryside.

And something of the first joy has remained. A lower tone. But still here. In the quietude. In the certainty of deep sleep

and a happy mood in the morning.

To-night, with Miss Holland away, there is a double stillness. Perhaps I woke because she is away? For some *reason*, I woke. Something to say itself. And all these thoughts, bringing back the joy of the little room anew, are getting in the way. Idling along, going round and round. Me, gossiping with myself.

And all the time something is waiting. Just at hand. Behind the things in my mind. And now, with me more awake, here come the remains of yesterday. Crowding in to be looked at. Taking me back to stand and look again to find out what remains; what really meant something to me, if I could find out what it meant.

Strangeness of London on Bank Holiday. Its underside turned uppermost and spread over the whole surface. Daily London grown invisible, incredible. Never to come back.

I'm glad I've spent one Bank Holiday in London. Seen and heard its reality. I'm glad it's over. It's like being separated from a lover. The blank feeling, at the end of the afternoon, that it is for ever.

The certainty that this wild tumult of people is the reality and the rest a sham. I almost feared to look at them lest they should see me wondering *why* they all go back. Why they don't know their power and end the system that holds them. I fear them. And to-morrow, with my lover back again, I shall feel more glad of that than sorry at the thought of all these people who keep London what it is to me, gagged again, and chained. Taken out of my sight. Toiling, out of my sight.

Mean. Fear of losing small comforts and accustomed dreams. Like a timid elderly man of fixed habits settling comfortably in the autumn into his usual chair at the club.

The peacefully noisy streets. Kept clean. Unconsciousness in the lulling song of the traffic.

Why should I wander in bliss while they toil in grime and darkness?

In the evening, *Yeats*. Far away from the tumult; hidden, untroubled in his green room. Sitting in the window-space, not giving a thought to the rampant multitudes. Not minding, not giving a thought to them. Yet they threatened him as he sat there. Made his joy small and absurd. Even while it was balm to see his unconsidered detachment. To see him, poor and outcast, a king for the evening, throned in his shadowy little kingdom in the security of the London night. If he had given a thought to the unleashed thousands, or to any one watching, in some way his face would have changed. But he was aware only of his poetry and the sounding-board, the green-robed woman sitting low in the opposite chair. Radiant and composed. But not only listening, not as he thought, just listening. She, like him, was special, lived in his world, as an appreciator. But besides hearing, seeing what he saw, feeling as he felt, she saw him. Saw, far away within the form turned towards her alone—declaiming from the book held sideways so that he could see her face and make towards her delighted hand-swayings for the passages that pleased him most—the halting, half man's half woman's adoration he gave to the world he saw, his only reality.

And while she admired, she pitied.

And fifty yards away the toilers raged. The sound of them made the two engrossed figures, softly lit by the high presiding candle, a little absurd. Irrelevant and insecure. As if they might topple. Ought to topple. Ought to listen and topple down.

Gerald and Harriett. Drawn, driven, washed about by tides they do not see. Flung on rocks, washed off and flung forward. Their unaware faces. Strength of unawareness; pushing on. That was my comfort—that they did not know. And because they did not know, I would not. Clung only to the things they saw and got away without realization. Yet I realized it all. Here it is, tormenting me.

There is no choice of what one shall see on waking by accident. Things are there, set out clearly, stating their essence. What they meant when I passed through them feeling only the movement, from behind closed doors, of *le sort*. Not thinking, because they were long prepared and there was nothing to be done. But there is always, when *le sort* moves, a sense of guilt. Of having brought things about; let things happen that need not have happened. That is why, when they happen, one does not think. The fear of being crippled by condemnation. Yet it is all written in the book of consciousness.

Written indelibly. Because one can look to and fro, from one thing to another, and each remains in place, presenting always one face, like a photograph.

Gerald and Harriett and Elspeth starting for Canada. Without good-bye. None of us dared to say good-bye. Outside the gaslit compartment there seemed to be nothing but whirling darkness and cruel laughter. We jested without a gap. Annoying Elspeth, who longed only for the train to start and the relations, who kept attention from centring on herself, to be gone. The sound of her childish complaints was one with the laughter of the outer darkness. She stood on the seat, a shining little figure in the harsh gaslight, clutching the doll Sarah had found time, on that awful last day, to dress.

Beneath her unconscious feet was the machinery that would carry her into exile.

There they were in the imprisoning carriage. And then gone. It was a death. Something buried alive. I dared not feel. There was relief afterwards in walking down the platform with Gerald's sister, a stranger just met, in knowing by the hard clutch of her hand that she, too, was not daring to feel. We both knew we had witnessed a crime.

'Can you get home?'

'Yes.' Our voices were rough and shuddering.

'We'll meet again.'

We unclasped our hands and parted abruptly, our faces distorted with not weeping.

I came home and read the *Punch* Gerald had left behind.

Michael's telegram. Once more the presence of him in the early morning, plunging along across the wide shadow of St Pancras Church, his voice at my side and again the discomfort of hearing unknown people lightly and swiftly described as they appeared to him: delocalized, people in a void. The things he said about her told me nothing but that she was courting him and he had no idea of it. And I let him go in ignorance. Pushed him into the arms of a stranger.

'Take flowers. One always takes flowers to people when they are ill. And stay long enough to tell her all she wants to know about the congress.'

And I knew when he told me of the engagement that he was uneasy, neither happy nor confident. And it was broken. Broken by him. And no one will ever know why, and the obstinate little gentleman can't see that it casts a greater shadow on her than if he spoke out and that if he can't speak out he should invent. There she goes, back into her life with a shadow, cast by Michael.

‘Methodical culture, my dear young lady, yes. But with plenty of revolution.’

Raymond wanted me to look at the programme and I told him crossly that I wanted the music first and didn’t believe in methodical culture. That was before I noticed the man in the cloak on my right, watching us.

‘And now it’s over, by way of methodical culture, I’ll look.’

Raymond was genuine and the strange man was genuine. I was more pleased by his manner than by the truth in either of them. I held both their views. But wanted to impress both of them. Partly for the sake of the truth. Men are either-or, all the time. But what I liked best was peacocking out of the hall with both of them talking, one in each ear.

Strangeness of the seaside at Christmas time. Sunlit frost on the morning grass. Green garden in full sunlight. Blaze of blue sea and blue transparent sky. Blue and green and gold of summer, and warmth in the tingling air.

All the things of an old-fashioned Christmas except religion. Deliberate Christmasing, without belief.

And she came to midday dinner in an old woollen tam, held in place by a grubby motor-veil tied under her chin.

‘She gets *one* good, annihilating dress. Devastates about in it. On occasions. For the rest of the time she allows her things ... to accumulate atmosphere.’

He thought her a bit of a charlatan. ‘No end of a rogue really. But when she smiles that *brown* smile—she’s a gipsy,

you know, a certain amount of grime sets her off—one would do *anything* for her.’

He’s always complaining that women don’t do anything, and when they do, and make others do, he’s at once ready with some belittling explanation.

And I hated them both. Was surly behind politeness till she had gone. When at once I forgot she was still in the world. There’s stupidity. Enough to exclude one from the élite of all worlds.

Yet Selina Holland is afraid of losing me.

Selina has no doubt that death will transfer her into the presence of God. Yet she wants, for the time that remains to her, wide circumstances, ease. Is willing, for the sake of the ease and space she sees so clearly, to go to the ends of the earth. ‘*Wide sky; unstinted air; room to move,*’ exactly in the voice she uses for ‘*Good Bermaline.*’

A religious woman, living on prayer; blossoming, in middle age, into splendid health on the power of prayer and teaspoonsful of Listerine. Ready to give up her work amongst the poor and systematically seek wealth and comfort.

Perhaps in the end she will actually go; to California. Make her way. Master hotel-keeping as she has mastered hygiene and midwifery, and confectionery. Leave London as coolly as years ago she came. And contrive her transference just as she had contrived this holiday to Edinburgh. Ingeniously. Horrible ingenuity of genteel poverty: two coats and skirts, one on the top of the other, and a little handbag. By the midnight train.

She despises the world, yet uses it. Is using it now to accumulate money. The being here with me is now altogether an affair of economy. But if I were religious, it would not be.

I should be the centre of her personal life. She would try to get me to California. ‘Would you like to come?’ and then answering herself before I had time to speak: ‘No; you are too cultured.’ But that was long ago. Whilst there was still the sense of being her great adventure. Before the trouble about the letter. Before Miss Trevelyan came to tea. Badly dressed, with a cold in her head. Tall, like Miss Holland. Two tall figures sitting upright in front of the little fire, not lounging, sitting as if they were just going to move. Both looking into the fire, Miss Holland with a pleased smile, Miss Trevelyan stolidly, as she told without a break and almost without questions from Miss Holland everything that had happened to her family and friends during the year. She had Miss Holland’s indifference to surroundings and her obliviousness of differences in the quality of experience. Assumed that everything affected every one in the same way.

‘Miss Brown has married and gone to live in Birmingham.’

To hear them talk was to feel that one person was making remarks aloud; talking to herself of shadows in a dream. I began to understand why Miss Holland found me lively and charming.

And then, when they had formally said good-bye and Miss Trevelyan had gone out into the rain in her cloak: ‘A perfectly happy year together. We would both gladly repeat it.’ I can see their year. A peaceful association of two workers. Both disciplined and incessantly active. Sharing disapprovals. Living as if in a siege; enclosed and conspiratorial and happy. Prayers and puns and loyally exchanged services. A life of perfect agreement untroubled by thought. And I am jealous. Perhaps it was then, knowing that if she still desired a renewal of life with Trevelyan, I was

only second-best, that I really moved away from her. Feeling inferior as well as superior to Miss Trevelyan. Feeling hidden in them both something I cannot reach. That I shall reach one day and meet them suddenly, when they have both passed out of my life. Something they have given without knowing it.

It is since then that she has more and more effaced herself and no longer courted every opportunity of standing, if only for a moment and deprecatingly, at fresh angles of vision. Miss Trevelyan reinforced her. But she still thinks there ought to be personal affection between us. Doesn't notice that I can't call her Selina.

Failing with her, leaves other successes shadowed.

To and fro, linked by their common quality of condemnation, went small forgotten incidents of the year, covering it. There was nothing else. The central things standing so brightly in her daytime consciousness were nothing. Unfounded. Mirage of youth. Sunlit reflections on the sea within whose depths she would presently be lost. Life was being spent in watching the glint of sunlight upon waves, believing it her own sunlight and permanent, while all the time it was light created by others, by millions of lives in the past, by all the labour that now kept the world going. And while she had watched the penalty had been piling up.

I am left in a corner with death. But it is I who am left, and not dead. Only out of my own element in which, if I were alone, even death would look quite different.

And far away below evidence and the clear speech of events, even now something was answering. Suddenly like a blow bringing her sharply awake, it came: refusal. Surging up and out over everything, clearing the air, bringing a touch of coolness in the stifling air.

Profanity. My everlasting profanity.

She listened guiltily, glad of its imperiousness. Everything had been thought out. There was nothing appearing behind it. There was in the depths of her nothing but this single knowledge that she was going away from this corner where she had been dying by inches. No consideration of right or wrong. No feeling for persons; either Miss Holland or those people downstairs, or those of her own she had been able to help by this cheaper way of living.

She sighed in pure sadness as she faced this deeper self. For it was clear now for ever that to be good was not all in all to her. To endure, suffer long, and be kind was not her aim. She had never been quite sure whether it was not the hidden secret of all her decisions, born in her, independent of thought. Now and then hearing commendation of endurances that did not bring bitterness, she had been tempted to feel that there must be, since she had endured much and not become bitter, in her own character the things called sweetness and fortitude.

It had always been a strange moment. Two impressions side by side. The certainty that conscious fortitude and sweetness could not persist in their own right, and the uncertainty of approving of these things in their unconscious simplicity; a dislike of being discovered in a state of helpless merit.

Greater than the sadness of not being good, more thrilling, was the joy of feeling ready to take responsibility for oneself.

I must create my life. Life is creation. Self and circumstances the raw material. But so many lives I can't create. And in going off to create my own I must leave behind uncreated lives. Lives set in motionless circumstances.

A voice sounded in the hot darkness. Just outside the window. Almost in the room.

‘I’ll do you *in*. If I get you, I’ll do you *in*.’ Sound of furniture violently collided with. Perrance. Mrs Perrance.

And I’m sitting up trembling. This, the beginning of this, was what woke me a few moments ago. The end of their Bank Holiday.

Again a crash.

I’m full of horror. Too full of horror for pity. It is *my* voice this time that must sound that awful cry from a window.

With her feet on the floor and her hands feeling for garments, she listened. Perrance was in monologue. Perhaps he was helpless. Probably more drunk than Mrs Perrance. Perhaps he would talk himself out. Poor man. Poor woman.

This is life. However far I go away, this will go on. To go away is only to get mental oblivion of it. Yet that is just what I am planning. Here in the midst of it is the hope that my lucky star, the star that keeps even my sympathies clear of being actively involved, will carry me through this, too, without bringing it into my hands.

The voice of Perrance was growing high and thin. Lying down once more in the darkness she could hear each word wailing out into the night. He was chanting his loathing of the mystery of womanhood, cursing it, its physical manifestations, cursing them to heaven in the vile den created by his ignorance and helpless poverty. The den where lived the despair of his isolated mind. Miriam felt its dailiness. Seemed to be within it and to breathe its thick odours as she listened. And to rebel and curse with him. In his soul was light. Something he felt his wife fought against with her dark, silent ways. Why did he not murder her?

And the woman was there with her youth. Before her eyes, pictures of Devonshire. In her mind, wonder at the way things had slipped down and down, to this; and fear, of this maddened stranger who desired only her death.

Well, they adore each other, they adore each other, muttered Miriam as quietness fell. It is terrifying to me because I'm not accustomed.

A shriek brought her to the middle of the floor feeling cool and strong. 'Stop! stop!' she shouted down out of the window. 'I'm coming.' But her voice was drowned in the tumult below. A blazing lamp crashed out into the garden and then came the man's voice feeble and sane:

'We mighta been killed. We mighta been before our Maker, Maria.' And a sobbing. Mrs Perrance sobbing in serene despair. Without fear.

Away. Away....

Transcriber's Notes

This text is taken from: Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage III: The Trap*. Dent and Cresset, London, 1938, p. 397-509.

The original spelling was mostly preserved. A few obvious typographical errors were silently corrected. Further careful corrections, some after consulting other editions, are listed here (before/after):

- ... let's leave it,' she wailed in a protesting falsetto, which averted ...
... let's leave it,' she wailed in a protesting falsetto, with averted ...
- ... refuge was she taking in apparent acceptance was a condemnation. ...
... refuge she was taking in apparent acceptance was a condemnation. ...

[The end of *The Trap: Pilgrimage, Volume 8* by Dorothy M. Richardson]