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LITTLE  
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# THE LITTLE SOUL

By  
ELINOR MORDAUNT

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Author of  
"GARDEN OF CONTENTMENT"  
"BILLANY" ETC.

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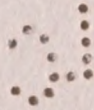
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# THE LITTLE SOUL

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

A TWO-DAYS' sale of household furniture and effects had that day been held at one of those neat, not to say smug, houses in Montpellier Square. With a bored and disillusioned air the auctioneer had rattled off the last few indiscriminate lots: carts and vans were waiting outside: men in heavy boots and hessian aprons tramping to and fro. A greater part of the furniture had been removed and the remainder was rapidly disappearing. Already the house had lost all signs of individuality; the few articles still left lying about at ugly angles wore a lost, detached air which discounted their value; mere fragments of merchandise, not so fresh as they had once been, no longer the impedimenta, the intimate accompaniment, of any individual life.

The steps were dirty, littered with scraps of straw, paper, canvas, which lay unstirred by the still air; for it was freezing hard, the sky above the peaceful tracery of bare trees in the quiet square a uniform smoky pink.

Hoyland buttoned his dark-blue overcoat across his chest with a fastidious movement which settled the shoulders and waist into their right line; glanced round for his hat, and picking it up from the bare mantelshelf dusted it with his silk handkerchief.

A trifle above middle height, he held himself well, was strikingly well made, though his figure threatened to become too heavy with the approach of middle-age. He was a fair man, with that sort of colorlessness common to town dwellers who are yet in perfect health. His eyes under their heavy lids were a dull, rather tawny gray, cold and remarkably, almost insolently, indifferent: his whole face—despite the rather narrow forehead—was, with its heavy nose, square chin and voluptuous mouth, reminiscent of the bust of cer-

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tain Roman emperors: Tiberius, perhaps; or even more that Tiberius which remains in the mind's eye after reading the description which Tacitus gives of him.

"Where on earth does all the dust come from? Do the special sort of people who frequent sales exude it, or what? I could swear that it's not out of my poor mother's furniture."

"Your poor mother!" Leila Gavin glanced round and laughed lightly. "Your poor mother! Really, my dear, as though she were dead!"

"Ah, well—'poor'—it's such a decent, widowed and resigned expression; a sort of hint of affection with which one gives away nothing whatever of oneself."

"Catch you giving away any of that precious commodity!"

"You, my dear child, you, to say that!"

"Oh, well, well, perhaps the parings! Scarcely even that. One does not give one's clothes to the wardrobe when it just happens to be convenient to hang them there."

"A grievance—?"

"Heavens, no! What should I want with the entire paraphernalia of any man?" Again she laughed, so lightly it was little wonder one of her admirers had likened the sound to the upward flight of a lark. The charming face dimpled with a smile; and yet at the back of her brilliant, green-gray eyes there was a hint of anxiety, strain, as though her airy unconcern was an effort; as though she were deliberately trying to match her companion by keeping on the top of things.

Still, for the most part, she was light enough in all conscience. Her quick movements, which never deteriorated into jerkiness; the gestures of her slim white hands, her long slender neck, her short delicate face, like a flower, with its upturned nose and faint powdering of freckles—a mockery of gaslight freckles, for she hated the country, outdoor life—above all her character, were alike set to a tender, lilting tune of exquisite lightness.

And yet all that portentous array of words used to express women who live as she lived would have been ridiculous to apply to Leila Gavin: as ridiculous as though she were a butterfly sipping, flying away, sipping again; so fragile and artificial, and yet in some ways so indomitably natural!

She held a faint rose-pink brocade curtain, shot with gray and silver, of which the fellow hung over the back of a



broken kitchen chair, in her hands; was shaking it out, smoothing it as she spoke.

"I must find a bit of paper for these; they will make the duckiest lining for an opera cloak; cushions, too, nice fat cushions, lots of them—and oh, C. H., how I do love and adore lots of anything! Double-width, and five yards long at the very least. What a mercy that I saw them in time! . . . Hey, you there!"

She beckoned to a van-boy who was staring in at the open door, sent him off in search of paper and string, and went on smoothing; humming to herself—apparently unconscious, and yet always conscious, of the tall, fair man who stood looking at her, with that air of discounting the humanity, while fully appreciative of the work of art as represented by the pretty creature in front of him.

"Make haste, Leila; it's getting too cold to be pleasant."

"All right. I'll be ready in a moment." She fluttered to the door, and, calling over the banisters, bade the boy, "Hurry up!" When he reappeared, she showed him how to hold one end of the shimmering breadths of brocade, while she folded them; speaking rather quickly all the while, in her soft, light tones, as though half afraid of Hoyland and his possible boredom.

"They did themselves well, these people of yours. Isn't that just like the old ones! Spending every penny upon themselves, never thinking of any one else, selfish pigs!"

"Pooh! we're all selfish—the religious ones who bank for the next world, and we others who bank for this. You and I now—I like you because you're prettier, more refined, less exacting than any woman I've ever met—of your type." His merciless eyes caught her flush and he added courteously, though quite callously—"Sorry, my dear; I didn't mean to hurt you; but there we are. I like you because you please me, and you like me for the same reason. Also because, though I demand less than most men, I demand the very best, which it pleases you—fastidious little person as you are—to give."

By this time the curtains were folded in their brown paper, and, raising one foot upon a box so as to form a table of her knee, Leila tied them up; deftly, as she did everything, with a sharp little tweak of the string, almost like a wince, at the last knot.

"You and I," went on Hoyland, gently, as he took out his

case and lighted a cigarette, his appraising eye upon her pretty slender foot and ankle in its silk stocking and neat patent shoe, "make a very fine art of—" he hesitated before the last word, as though conscious of the rare pleasure which it gave her—"of love, Leila."

"Practice, C. H., practice!" She laughed; then at the sound of a motor, straightened herself, with the preening movement of a bird. "A taxi! See if you can catch it for us. I can't carry this thing through the streets; besides, Clare's coming to tea, and I'm late as it is."

Moving towards one of the windows, Hoyland threw it open, and leant out to whistle; then drew back as he saw three ladies step from the taxi which had drawn up at the door, and shutting the window, bolted it with deliberate care, while Leila glanced up in surprise—"You silly goat, you've missed it! Ah, well, I daresay we'll find one opposite Harrod's."

"I daresay." Hoyland moved over to the mantelpiece and knocked the ash from his cigarette into the empty grate; took off his hat again and glancing at it removed an imperceptible speck of dust; his face was very slightly paler, more set, and yet there was an air of quiet amusement.

For a moment Leila stood with her head a little on one side, listening. Then she took a step forward; involuntarily her hand went to her hat, her hair—"Why—what in the world—? They're coming up. Who can it be? A day after the fair, eh?"

Hoyland smiled. He could have told her in a word, for he had seen; but it pleased him better to see how she would behave under the shock of surprise. There was the rustle of silk, the sound of feet mounting the stairs, and three ladies—the youngest a mere child of thirteen or fourteen, with her hair loose round her shoulders—entered the room.

The first—a tall, rather Junoesque woman, strikingly attractive, but no longer in her first youth—hesitated at the sight of Hoyland and stood still; breathing a little quickly, blocking the other two back in the doorway behind her.

She was beautifully dressed in black, with black fox furs, revealing, where they fell open in front, a high swathing neckband of soft creamy lace, a glitter of diamonds, repeated in a large solitaire in either ear. She wore a tall black toque with an osprey, rather like a Russian cap, a type of head-dress which suited her as admirably as do most styles native

to a woman's own country, for she was a Russian by birth: cosmopolitan by education and habit. She had fine dark eyes, and smooth dark hair beautifully dressed; the upper part of her face was delicate and well-cut, but the lower half was coarsening with age, the mouth showing cruelty and acquisitiveness, the chin self-indulgence, arrogance.

Excepting for the fact that she was dark while he was fair, and that her face betrayed a weaker, more petulant self-indulgence, she was so like the man who stood leaning with one arm upon the mantelshelf confronting her that it was impossible not to recognize the two as mother and son.

Hoyland, who was still smiling though he said nothing, had rather ostentatiously turned and dusted the corner of the mantelshelf upon which he now rested one elbow. Nothing disconcerted his mother like silence, and he knew it.

It seemed as though she realized his thought, for a quick flush rose to her face. She had opened her lips to speak, but closed them with a snap and raising her lorgnette, treated Leila Gavin to an insolent stare, which Leila returned with an amused smile; for Hoyland himself was the only person who was, in these days, capable of putting her out of countenance.

Still no one spoke. Mrs. Hoyland moved a step or two more forward into the room, and the younger girl, pushing in front of her sister—who hung back, in what was clearly enough an agony of shyness—stepped quickly to the center of the wall behind her mother and stood there; glancing from Leila to her brother with an air of alert excitement, her bright dark eyes dancing.

She had been dragged about the Continent, from one hotel to another, ever since she began to walk; at one moment snubbed away out of sight; at another, shown off, put through her tricks like a pet performing dog. Her brilliant good looks, her carmine cheeks—she was all rose, white and black, all sparkle and life—the daring pose of her little figure, the way in which she paid for her mother's dressing of her, had attracted attention wherever she went. She was, by this time, quite used to being stared at, whispered about, and it served Mrs. Hoyland's purpose; after all, people soon grew tired of a child, so there could be no question of rivalry, while she served as an opening for acquaintances which might otherwise have been difficult to come by.

Apart from this, the fact that she was almost always

accompanied by her two daughters gave the elder woman a firmer basis in life. If Maisie proved one too many, she could be packed off for a while with a governess. As to Rose, she was never in the way, and when that is said the implication that she was never very interesting, that she lacked individuality, is complete.

The fact was that Mrs. Hoyland could not have done without her elder daughter—advance-agent, lady's maid, secretary, all in one. Maisie might be, and often was, sent out of the way when she, or affairs in general, became tiresome. But it was then that Rose was most needed as shying-post, or buffer; while no one—unless it might be the old ladies with their eternal crochet, who appear to have been dumped down in the vestibules of continental hotels for no apparent reason—gave the daughter a second thought, once they had spoken to the mother, looked into her sparkling, insistent eyes, found themselves caught up, and rolled along, delightfully enough, upon a stream of extremely intelligent and sufficiently sympathetic conversation. For Mrs. Hoyland's crowning cleverness lay in her faculty for making other people feel clever, interesting; and this, even more than her looks, accounted for the fact that, though close upon fifty, only twenty years older than her son, she was never without a train of admirers.

After all, it was Leila who broke the portentous calm. She had no idea who the strangers might be, though she realized that the elder woman had placed her in a moment. "I'm afraid that you're rather late; the sale's over. It is—" she gave one of those airy gestures with her hands, "altogether after the ball."

It was that which set Mrs. Hoyland swinging round to her son; forced her to speech, if only for the sake of putting this masterpiece of impertinence in its place.

"What does this mean? How dare you—how dare you! I am just back from Biarritz—" She broke off as though, for the moment, her aplomb were swallowed up in a wave of incredulous wrath.

"You were not expected until Friday. This is what comes of changing your mind. If you had kept to your own original arrangements there would have been no fuss—scene, which you know," he smiled, rather ingratiatingly, "we both equally detest. You have always been like a man in that, my dear Mother."

"It seems to me that the 'scene' is the least part of it," remarked Mrs. Hoyland bitterly. She had raised her veil and held her handkerchief for a moment to her lips, which were trembling: then she dropped it, and confronted her son openly with an air of firm, swelling anger, a compact sort of anger, showing a nature as incapable of any hysterical reproach as it was of forgiveness.

"I was on the Continent with your sisters—"

"Had been away for three years. Letting this house, everything in it, run to waste."

"That had nothing to do with you—nothing whatever!"

"It had something to do with me. I am one of the trustees for their money."

Mrs. Hoyland gave a little laugh, in which one might trace the origin of her son's express belief that all alike live for themselves, fight for their own hand; it was very evident that she had but little faith in human nature, still less in her own son.

"And you mean to insinuate that this sale was held so that you might reserve the money—realized from my possessions—*mine*, mind you—for your sisters?"

"I think that my position as trustee warrants that insinuation."

"How you do lie, Charles! How you always have lied; not only by word, but by implication, appearances. There is only one virtue in your lying. You, at any rate, never deceive yourself as some people do."

"Thanks. And another—you must acknowledge that I do it well."

"Well! You've overreached yourself this time. To have the audacity to put the notice of the sale in the paper!"

"Only in the English papers, and not in the *Queen* or *Financial News*; so, you see, I thought myself safe. I was mistaken, it seems."

"You forgot that I have friends."

"Who read the 'Morning Post,' the 'Times?'—My dear Mother, I've been a fool!"

"You could scarcely be anything worse. And what did you imagine you were going to do with the money?"

"Travel.—It's a family weakness."

"Alone?"

"No; I hate being bored."

"I see." Once more Mrs. Hoyland raised her glasses and

treated Miss Gavin to a comprehensive stare: then turned again to her son. "I suppose you realize that I can have you put in prison for this. And that's what I intend to do. You—you! The amazing audacity of it—to come to my house in my absence—to hold a sale of my belongings! It passes the bounds of all belief—monstrous! And you needn't think that people will forgive you any more easily because you happen to be my own son. There are some ideals of family life, obligations, morality, still remaining, thank goodness. And a widowed mother who has been robbed—"

Hoyland gave a short laugh. "Ah, yes, 'the only son of his mother'—True; I'd forgotten that part of it. The utilitarian sentimentality of the English!"

"To break into her house, her home, his sisters' home! To put up to public auction the very beds they have slept on!"

"But surely it is human to have lost sight of that fact after—what is it, three years? But I catch your point: 'The Home.' There indeed, we touch upon something sacred. But in this case it's rather like that Greek problem,—When does a heap begin to be a heap, cease to be a heap? When does a home begin to be a home?—when degenerate into a mere uninhabited house?"

There was amusement in his voice, and there was something like amusement at the back of the still angry glance which his mother bent upon him.

"Still, I think I hold the cards, legal and emotional—you've gone too far this time."

"And you will play them?"

"Oh, yes, I will play them; don't make any mistake about that. Really, Charles, ever since you were born you have been nothing but a nuisance and expense to me—one of those terribly precocious, watchful babes-in-arms. And even then nothing but the very best good enough for you. I remember how I thought—was fool enough to think—that your nurse might as well maid me. But—Ah, well, you know yourself—you were what you are. And now—Oh, I assure you I'm not joking, though I see the humor of the thing—it will be a relief, a real relief for me to have you out of the way for a year or so. I've only to see Sir Gilbert Murray; the case is clear enough—"

"Oh, but you're joking! Mamma, it's impossible—of

course it's impossible. Why, even you could never do a thing like that.—Oh, I know you've reason enough, are right—in a way. But for all that—to send Charles to prison—to—to—” It was the elder girl who spoke, moving further into the room, standing with her back to one of the windows, glancing nervously from her mother to her brother—breaking off with an uneasy movement of her hands.

As to Hoyland's younger sister, her eyes had scarcely left Leila, and once, when their glances met, she had smiled; for to her Charles' companion represented something desperately intriguing, something which she had never so much as dreamt of meeting at close quarters.

“I am sure that Charles can—will—do something to make up—get the things back. After all, there is no real harm done; and prison—!” Rose's long, smooth face was flushed, her eyes full of tears; despite this, long habit had made her sufficiently mistress of herself to remember her mother's most vulnerable point; for it is the slightly disreputable who need to be most watchful lest any crack appear in their armor of respectability. “If Charles went to prison it wouldn't only affect him, it would affect us—all of us! People would be shy of us, afraid of being dragged into anything, mixed up with us. No decent man, no man of the world, of our sort, would want to marry the sister of a—a—Oh, I'm not speaking of myself; I know that I—Oh, I'm hopeless—” she gave a little deprecating laugh, quite free from all bitterness. “But what about—” she hesitated and dropped her voice, as though a sort of delicacy made her wish to believe that her alert, woman-of-the-world young sister was still possessed of a bloom, which must by no means be disturbed. She was full of these sort of odd twists, early Victorianisms, was Rose Hoyland; it was not humbug but the survival of certain fixed ideas as to what people ought to be at certain ages. “You must remember that there's Maisie to be considered.”

“It appears to me that I have considered my children enough, more than enough. If I had not given in to Charles in the way I have done, this couldn't have happened. It never would have happened to any really selfish mother. I've been too good to you all, that's it—too generous.”

The weakness of this complaint told Rose that her argument had struck home. “If you will only wait a day or two,”

she went on quickly, "even one night—think it over; you must realize that it's—Well, it would be a sort of cutting off your nose to spite your face, wouldn't it? If this sale has been a good one—and of course we are sure of the money."

"Heugh! are we? If it were possible to tie a string to your brother's leg."

"Well, anyhow, the other thing—It would do for us, do for all of us."

"Of course it would be a pity to take any step likely to discourage the suitors who crowd your path, my dear Rose," remarked Mrs. Hoyland cruelly. But she was fastening up her furs round her throat as she spoke; and though the girl flushed crimson she drew a breath of relief. She could always count upon her mother not doing a foolish thing—anyhow, not this sort of foolish thing—if she once gave herself time to think.

"It is horribly cold here, and perhaps if you see Sir Gilbert to-morrow, just talk over things quietly with him—After all—" she darted a quick glance of apology in her brother's direction; but she had chosen her position well, drilled in that school to which she was so ill suited, and even her mother failed to notice it—"After all, it will be the best, the surest way of keeping a hold upon Charles. And I'm sure he'll realize that if you let him off now, just make him pay everything back, it's up to him—"

"Your brother's idea of what is 'up to him' is very different from yours, my dear Rose. . . . I told that taxi man to wait—"

"He's still there."

Somehow or other the elder girl maneuvered the others from the room. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Hoyland was uncertain as to the means by which she would get the greatest amount of satisfaction out of her son, how much the law allowed her; though at the door she turned and informed him that she was staying at the "Carlton," and would expect to see him—"alone"—at twelve o'clock next morning; reminding him, which was unnecessary, that she was not, as yet, suffering from senile decay.

The two left behind in the empty room—for the workmen had gone on with their tasks, regardless of the altercation, finished them and disappeared—caught the sound of a clear girlish voice from the stairway. "I say! I wonder what her name is—Awfully smart, isn't she? What a wretch



Charles—" Then the front door banged, the taxi moved away.

"My revered—my 'poor Mother'!— Now you have seen her, Leila, been introduced to my entire family. No skeletons, nothing of the sort; excellently well covered, all of them." He put on his hat and picked up his cane. "No cupboards, even; damned little of anything! Well, as that little interlude's over, shall we take our departure—from 'The Home'?"

"She won't—do you think she will be—be nasty, eh, C. H.?"

"Nasty? Oh, yes, nasty in every sort of way. But if you mean will she have me run into prison, drag the affair before the courts?—no, emphatically no! You must have noticed, the men were still moving the furniture, and she made no effort to stop them, pretended not to notice. All the same she'll have the money out of me, trust her for that, unless I can think of something—find out something—Hopeless, I'm afraid, though,—and our little trip knocked on the head, for another six months anyhow. Sorry, Leila, but luck's dead against us. Twenty-four hours would have made all the difference—the little less, and oh, so far away—how does it go?—Sunshine and Monte Carlo, and all that makes life worth living."

## CHAPTER II

"UGH, but it's cold!" Lelia Gavin shivered as she stepped out into the gray quiet of the square, and glanced up at the small chaste slip of a moon set clear in the sky almost directly above them.

Hoyland did not answer. He had turned up the collar of his coat, sunk his chin in it with that bleak disregard for others which his companion had learnt to recognize and dread. She knew that, in common wisdom, she would do well to keep silent; but her nerves were all on edge, and after a moment or so she broke out with a little forced laugh:

"You and your mother! Really, I never did see anything quite so inhuman! You've got into my spine, the pair of you—a sort of cold trickle of Hoylands, like icicles." She thrust her hands deeper into her muff as she spoke, raised it

to her chest and drew her shoulders together; her realization of her lover and his mood so intense that the arm nearest to him was pricked with a species of "pins and needles."

"Talk of being artificial! Oh, yes, I see now what makes you what you are—artificial through and through, both of you alike. Good Lord!"—of a sudden her own artificiality relapsed into the coarseness of real feeling—"if you were pricked what would you bleed?—Would you, could you bleed?"

"You're scarcely what one might call a child of nature yourself, my dear Leila."

"That's because I can only get what I want to out of life by adapting myself to the world I live in!"

Her spirits were reviving; he had spoken to her, noticed her. "It's like the leopard and its spots," she added, with a flash of shrewd insight—"a sort of protection. If I didn't go for what was artificial in life, my life, I should get nothing but what was disgusting, gross. It's only the veneer that makes it at all possible, C. H. But I'm not like that all through—not yet, thank God!" She spoke with a sudden fierceness which Hoyland had never so much as suspected, so cleverly had she adapted herself to his demands. "Underneath—right underneath—there's a coarse, rough wood with a grain, with some sort of sap. But you, you—why, you're the same all through, drunk or sober, loving, or—Well, I wonder if you ever have loved, ever could hate? I'd like to see you with any one you hated, C. H.,—one's sure there; and perhaps—well, perhaps I'd understand you better." Her voice trailed off to a sort of wistfulness.

"I'd like to see myself with any one I took the trouble to hate. I don't let people get in my way sufficiently for that, my dear."

For a moment or so Leila was silent, biting her lip; she was a fool to display any sort of emotion or feeling apart from that which added to his pleasure. But, somehow or other, she was all on edge, had for the moment lost her pose, her light sureness, could have sat down and cried like a child. Why, she did not know, for it is certain that she had felt no sympathy for Mrs. Hoyland. Still, as she endeavored to turn the conversation, her next remark insensibly betrayed some part of the reason for her emotion.

"I like that eldest sister of yours; she looks so"—she was going to say "good," but changed the word, with a little

laugh, to "reliable." "A sort of bedside person, nice if one was ill. My word, but I expect she has a life of it with your mother!"

"Rose? Old Rose! My dear!—Rose! Talk of dullness! If my mother didn't find her useful as a doormat she'd throw her out of the window. The little one, now—oh, there are possibilities about Maisie."

"She? Oh, she didn't interest me; she's too like—like—" she was going to say "all of us," but checked herself in time. "Look here, C. H., it's got nothing to do with me, of course, but your mother will have to keep a pretty tight hand on that kid."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, the come-hither eye, don't you know."

"I wonder if you're right? Anyhow, it's not the sort of life for a young girl, if one wants her to marry—marry well. But what makes you think—?"

"My dear! I've had some little experience of human nature, haven't I?" They were moving along Knightsbridge, and she scanned the passing traffic, already flashing with lights.

As they neared Hyde Park Corner her light step grew less sure, her delicate face was flushed. "I wish we could get a taxi; I'm tired. I'm always tired now; it's this rotten cold! If only we could have got away into the sunshine!" As her companion did not answer, she relapsed into silence, then began again, shifting the parcel of curtains, with a petulant movement, from one arm to another. "It's carrying this thing makes me tired. I wish I'd never bought it. I hate carrying parcels!"

"My dear Leila," Hoyland's tone was pleasant enough, but the girl at his side knew the sound of that "dear Leila," knew that he was out to hurt. It was her own fault; she was being tiresome; she knew that she was being tiresome, and yet for once she couldn't help it—"that's almost funny when one gathers, from hearsay, observation, that your mother habitually carried home the washing—other people's washing! A little parcel like that—"

It was rather pathetically significant of their relationship that he had not even offered to take it from her, that she had not expected him to offer. But, for all this, his words found their mark—"It's not true, it's not true. You know it's not true. My mother was a lady."

"Oh, yes, my dear, that goes without saying; they all are."

He smiled benevolently upon the girl as he hailed a passing taxi and helped her into it—for she had been given her punishment, put back in her place—then raised his hat. "Well, *au revoir*."

"But aren't you coming?" She had drawn aside her skirts to make room for him, still held them back, with hands that trembled a little.

"No, thanks. I want some exercise. I'll walk down through St. James' to the Club."

"But Clare!—we were expecting you to tea."

"Clare will be very well amused without me. You can plan the cushions and the opera-cloak." He drew a handful of loose silver from his pocket and dropped it into her lap. "For the taxi. And now I'll say good-by until—Well, if you're going to be alone, at a loose end, what about some sort of show this evening; supper together?"

There was something perfunctory about the invitation. Hoyland's voice sounded bored, almost tired, for him, and Leila pulled herself together; this was what she had always set herself to guard against.

"Not to-night, C. H. I feel lazy, inclined for a quiet evening by my own fireside. And there's that book of plays you lent me."

This was another point in her favor, an unexpected link in her armor. She read everything of note which appeared: French or English poetry, prose, plays; and not only read—thought, criticized, showed a fine discrimination.

She did not ask Hoyland to share her quiet; she knew better than that. If he wished to come he would do so without any invitation. She also knew that he would not—as nine men out of ten in his position—drop in upon her, driven by suspicion as to whom he might find there.

He had, more than once, indeed, put in an appearance when she was entertaining other men. But he had brushed them aside, taken no notice of them; save upon one occasion, when her visitor had happened to be an expert upon the Balkan question—which interested him—just back from Serbia. And then it was Leila herself who was put on one side. For it was only when people are mistrustful of themselves that they suffer from jealousy, and to Hoyland's mind there was no more amusing, more futile failing.

## CHAPTER III

CLARE WHITMAN was Leila's great friend. The two had been on the musical-comedy stage together. Leila had a delicate voice which did not go far enough; her whole physique was too delicate to be altogether effectual over the footlights.

She had spoken the truth when she had said her mother was a lady, though perhaps "ladylike" would have better described her. She had been a nursery governess. Who her father was Leila did not know!

Apart from that one lapse which accounted for the girl's birth Mrs. Gavin, as she called herself, was a pathetically virtuous woman. If she did not earn her living by the sweat of her brow she earned it by a pitiless waste of nerve-tissue; by blind effort and self-obliteration; by a self-denial so ceaselessly practiced that in the end personal desires, vanities, likes, dislikes, became atrophied. Her every look, her every movement was an oblation and offering for that one sin.

As far back as Leila could remember, her mother had been thin, white, suffering; ill-dressed, ill-groomed; so sad that it seemed as though she must be suffering from some dreadful internal cancer. And so she was: her sense of forfeited respectability, her self-reproach devouring the flesh.

When Leila began to realize something of life, as she did very young, she wondered how her mother could have ever seemed desirable to any one. Vice might be ugly, but could anything be more killing than such virtue, under such conditions? Mrs. Gavin went from lesson to lesson, teaching French and music at a shilling an hour to the children of small tradesmen and superior artisans. Sometimes, while Leila was still very young and could not be left, she accompanied her mother when she went to give these lessons. Her presence at such times—well, at any time, if it came to that—could be tolerated only on the condition that she sat in a corner, said nothing, obliterated herself.

So long as she lived she could never forget those hours during which she sat silent in the corners of butchers' parlors, bakers' parlors, plumbers' parlors; her feet dangling, the prick of horsehair or coarse furniture-velvet beneath her bare knees, the almost intolerable fidgets from which

she suffered; the way in which the hands of the clocks seemed to stop, deliberately, maliciously in one place, while the world fainted to a full stop between each tick.

Never, never could she forget the stuffy smell of such places. To shut her eyes and think of it, gave her a sense of nausea—the bright-green tablecloths, scalloped in red, the chromo-lithographs, the ornaments on the mantelpieces. Above all, she could never forget the children, who seemed so oddly true to their father's trade: the fair, fat children of the baker; the red, stocky children of the butcher; the leaden-eyed offspring of the plumber. It might have been partly imagination, but that was the way in which she always remembered them. The only kind, the only cheerful people with whom her mother's duties brought her into contact seemed to be the Jews.

The Jewish mothers alone treated her like a real child; not like an umbrella, to be put away into a corner until the lesson was at an end.

At the French lessons the pupils were one and all so stupid that her sharp little mind leapt on in front of them at each sentence, each hesitating noun and verb. She suffered agonies in her efforts to keep from prompting, showing off, deriding. At the music lessons she galloped up and down the piano after the stiff, stupid fingers, for ever fumbling: her own tiny, snowflake of a hand, with every nerve alive, plump upon the right note—beating it out upon her shabby blue serge skirt—while theirs still hung, flaccid, lumpish or wooden above the wrong one.

She used to repeat to herself, very quickly, in a sort of running refrain, which gave her some comfort, the words: "Little silly!—little idiot!—Oh, you little silly, silly, silly!"

And yet if one of them wept or despaired—though they took no notice of her whatever—her heart bled for them.

Never, never under any circumstances did she utter one single word during the course of those lessons; and here she learnt a lesson of self-control as necessary in her future profession—her relationship with Charles Hoyland, for instance—as it is in every other walk of life.

She loved her mother, but she was frightened of her. There was always something about her which was held back from the child, and in her earliest days, when she was most sensitive, she fought constantly against this barrier. As a tiny creature of not more than five she remembered how

she had one day, in a sudden access of feeling, flown at her mother shaking her arm and crying aloud: "What is it? Oh, what is it? You must tell me what it is!" her voice rising to a scream, the tears pouring down her face; though when questioned it was impossible for her to explain the root of her trouble.

Another incident which she never quite forgot was seeing a mother and child playing together for the first time: rolling on the hearthrug, pulling each other's hair, tickling each other, laughing. A mother laughing!—disheveled, rosy, laughing—above all, laughing!

Everything in life seemed to grow increasingly ugly as her powers of observation, comparison, increased: the two poor rooms where they lived, the food they ate, the setting of the table, the clothes, the coarse calico lining to her frocks, the rough seams; the drabbish wool of her underwear, tortured out of all shape by constant washing indoors, drying before the sitting-room fire, in front of which some hideous garment or other seemed to be for ever steaming and dripping. For Mrs. Gavin never had time or spirit, or material or space, to do anything quite effectually.

One Christmas a Jewish mother gave Leila a box of chocolates tied round by a narrow blue ribbon, and surreptitiously she ran this, with the help of a hairpin, through the coarse lace which edged the neck of her nightdress. She had seen lovely beribboned garments in the shop-windows, and hoped much from it. But the effect was disappointing, and her mother incomprehensibly angry when she saw what had been done.

"Now, that's the sort of thing that I won't have—the beginning! You naughty, naughty girl—you vain little thing, you! To start like that now! Good God, what have I done! what have I brought upon myself! After all my teaching, all my care!"

To Leila's amazement she broke down at this—wept—and she had never before seen her mother weep despite all their difficulties, all their deprivations, often enough verging upon starvation—wept as though she were suddenly beaten, hopeless, ready to give up the fight.

When Leila was fifteen a situation in a fashionable milliner's shop was found for her, through the instance of some relative of a pupil. Mrs. Gavin did not like it, though the girl could not make out what she feared, or why she feared.

But she was by now an ever-increasing expense in the way of food and clothing; it was plain that she must do something, and nothing else offered.

At first she was little better than a runner, at the beck and call of every one. Then she rose to a place in the show-room, where her delicate beauty and refinement were assets worth considering. No amount of conscientious hard work could have helped her to this: already there was nothing about her which seemed to count apart from her looks.

She spent her days among beautiful materials, articles of luxury; among women—a thousand times less attractive than herself—who thought of nothing but their appearance; who poured out a continual stream of gold as a libation to their one god—self.

At night she went home to two drab, overcrowded rooms; to a dull meal, in which the changes—so familiar to every working-woman—were rung upon a doubtful egg, a quarter of a pound of cold ham from the pork butcher, a slice of German sausage, a kipper; with the eternal tea, bread, and salt butter; to a mother whose moods of silent, bitter melancholy became more and more frequent, until they spread into one unbroken desert of depression.

When Leila was seventeen her mother died: not from any special illness, but for the dull reason that she was worn-out, like some piece of machinery which has been kept running for years, at high pressure, without repairs or lubrication.

She had never once mentioned the girl's father; she left no letter or photograph to show what he had been like. Probably enough she had forgotten her fellow-sinner in her sense of sin, the very memory of him stamped out under the leaden feet of those hard, drab days.

For a few months Leila stayed on in the millinery business. But the pay was insufficient now that she was alone. She made a friend; she obtained a walking-on part in a revue, another part in a chorus, still another with a little song and dance of her own! But even thus she could not stand alone; every step depended upon the favor of some man or other.

She and Clare had embarked upon their stage career together. Clare was coarser, stronger, more vital, more insistent than Leila: the friends she made were of a different quality; but she held her own with them in a way that the other girl could never do. She had a strong, rather strident



voice and a fine figure. Flesh and noise being all that the English audience ask for they got their money's worth with Clare Whitman: to see her dash on to the stage, stamp her foot, throw back her head and show all her teeth in a challenging grin was enough. They did not mind what she sang, so long as she sang it loudly, while the orchestra brayed some asinine accompaniment.

She was "the real thing," and after a while her salary became "the real thing" also. She knew what she was worth: there was no false modesty about Clare.

But she was kind; oh, she was kind. The lean times, the illnesses, the period of childish panic through which she supported her friend were innumerable. Again and again she made it a point in accepting any engagement that Leila should be given a part in the same play. But one thing she never attempted, and that was to keep the other girl what was called "straight." Where would have been the use of that? Why, it was the sort of thing that even she could scarcely afford, much less Leila, whose one chance of progress, of any sort of life, lay through the affection or desire of others.

Leila, sensitive, dainty, delicate, with no reserve of physical strength, simply could not afford to be moral; that was the fact of the matter: that was what Clare said—though of course there was no question of the words "moral" or "immoral"—"too particular" was the expression which she—which they all—used; and was it any wonder that Leila with her repugnance for, her shrinking from, everything which was dull, ugly, cheap, agreed with her? Though all the same she was "particular," more particular by far than Clare, who could well afford to pick and choose.

Clare had a family—a dreadful old mother, two idle, ne'er-do-well brothers—one with a wife and family, his sole asset in life—who condemned and yet sponged upon her without ceasing. She did not mind: she was fond of them; they were her "own little lot"; but all her real wealth of affection, concern, was lavished upon her friend. She was as anxious, as watchful and concerned, with any new admirers of Leila's as a wealthy and devoted mother over the choice of a nurse for her first-born.

When Leila left the stage Clare acquiesced. She could never live by it; if she went on, the fatigue, anxiety, constant trials and disappointments would undermine her health; if

her health went her looks would go, and then what would there be left for her to depend upon?

There was one lover of whom Clare did not approve, because he was rough and coarse; and yet he was a good sort. Hoyland was not a good sort; but Leila was happier than she had ever been—though of course it was dangerous for her to be in love in this fashion—and on the whole he suited her admirably.

Still, Clare was watchful, like a mother-bird with plumage all ready to ruffle.

Over their tea in the tiny Westminster flat, this evening of the sale, with the rose-and-gray curtains spread out across the sofa, Clare was distinctly troubled. Leila did not seem well. She began with a parade of great good spirits. She was a much better actress off the stage than on it, and her mimicry of Hoyland's mother was delightful; the way in which she puffed herself out, drew herself up, stared through an imaginary lorgnette. She declared that she was famished, attacked her tea with a huge pretense of greed; and she was greedy; she loved hot buttered toast, chocolate cakes. But after a few mouthfuls she began to feed her Pekinese; forgot Mrs. Hoyland, forgot the brocade curtains, and threw herself down upon the sofa, crumpling them up beneath her. Nothing mattered, nothing was any good; she was dead-tired.

Clare took off her shoes for her, rubbed her little silk-clad feet, banked her round with cushions. When Chang, the Pekinese, settled himself upon the top of these as though they were placed there for his comfort alone, Leila laughed, pretended that she was going to kick him off. But she did not laugh for long.

"Oh, why am I so tired? Why am I always tired?" she complained, and dropping her head upon her friend's shoulder began to cry.

Clare had never seen her cry before. Most women of her sort are almost as ready with tears as laughter. But Leila had learnt her lesson sitting silent in the butchers' and bakers' parlors, trying to keep up with her mother during those breathless scurries from lesson to lesson; never complaining, lest she should be left alone at home. Even now she wondered why she wept; and then, remembering the blue ribbon incident, told her friend of it.

"I can't have been a very desperately naughty kid, if that

was the only thing I ever did to drive her to tears, poor dear! could I?" she said. "But I wasn't naughty—no chance! All I wanted was to be happy."

That was all she ever wanted. It seemed cruel that so simple, so universal a desire should not be fulfilled; though Heaven only knows what has led to such an expectation in any human being. As a matter of fact, she had been very well content for the last couple of years; free from the anxiety, the snubs of stage-life. People were kind to her, she had pretty things round her, life was easy; she could be as lazy as she liked, and, like a great many not very strong people, she loved to dawdle, lounge, dream.

Since her connection with Hoyland, which had started nearly six months earlier, she was in some ways happier than she had ever been before; and yet, in other ways, unhappier: everything was sharper, her very skin felt thinner. He gave her a great deal, and yet with love she grew to desire more than he gave; though what that was she could not have said. It is certain that marriage never so much as entered her head. No one less like Mrs. Gavin than Charles Hoyland could well be imagined, and yet she felt to him as she had felt towards her mother, as though she could shake him, with that old cry: "What is it? What is it?—Oh, what is it?"

There was something which she could never get at, understand, at the back of them both; that was the fact of the matter, and it frightened her.

With all her other admirers nothing had really mattered: she did not in the least care what they were thinking, how they passed their time away from her, what their real, everyday life and relationships were like; but with Hoyland she was devoured by a curiosity which carried a constant heart-ache. She was harassed by that dreadful, that fatal desire to possess everything which comes to women when they love.

And yet her old, hardly-won self-control held: sometimes she feared that it must break away from her, that one day she would be overcome by a passionate desire to express all that she felt; but for the meanwhile it held.

Clare could not stay to dinner; she was in the first scene of a musical comedy which began early, and waited until supper-time for her real meal, on account of her voice. But she saw her friend's dinner brought in to her, daintily set

out on a tray by Leila's maid, who would do anything for her mistress, because she allowed herself to be patronized, treated like a child.

Directly she reached the theater Clare rang up a telephone number in Soho, asked for Doctor McCabe. "I want to speak to Doctor McCabe, please."

"It's Doctor McCabe speaking."

"Oh, Phil, I didn't recognize your voice; it's Clare Whitman. Look here, I want you to go round to Leila after you've had your dinner. Go early, there's a dear, or she may be off to bed—that's the sort of mood she's in."

"Not ill, I hope?"

"N-no, not ill; got the pip. I don't know what's wrong."

"Hoyland all right I suppose?"

"Umph! I'd like to know when he isn't all right. Trust *him* for that!" Something in the sound of her own voice revealed to Clare, for the first time, how thoroughly she disliked this friend of her friend. If only he wasn't always so completely all right!

"Well—Oh, I say, Clare—if it's nothing very urgent, there's a bit of a beano on at 'The Scarlet Paint-Pot' to-night—Dolly Lane's birthday—sing-song, dancing and all that sorter thing. You'd better come along when your show's over. But about Leila—"

"Look here, Phil, go to Leila first, there's a good fellow. You'll have plenty of time. Get her to go on with you if she will; it's ages since she's been to any of those sorter giddy little shows. Yes, do get her to go, if you can."

"She's not ill, then?"

"No, no, not ill, of course—I said not ill; but, oh, all anyhow. You will go, won't you, Phil?"

"Of course I will. Don't you worry—take her with me to Dolly's party. Hope to God Hoyland won't cut up rough, though—"

"Oh, damn Hoyland!—he considers himself quite enough without us droppin' our socks over him. Ta-ta, old chap. You're a good sort, Phil, and that's a fact. Pretty well the only person in this darned old world one can always count on."

Leila had not gone to bed when McCabe arrived, nor had she got on very far with her book; she had changed into a tea-gown, done her hair, tidied herself up, in case any one should come; then, that brief effort over, returned to her

sofa. For some days it had seemed as though something queer was happening to her life; almost as though there were a tiny patch of gray mold on the edge of it—the sort of thing which one might find just above the sole of a suède shoe worn in weather for which it was not fitted—spreading and spreading; damping her down, as it were, sapping her vitality, dimming everything. She was gay enough when she was with Hoyland, but the gayety was an effort, mingled with fear.

She was glad to see McCabe because she liked him, because she would have been glad to see any one; for she was not, after all, in the mood to be alone. He dragged her sofa more in front of the fire—that was the sort of thing which he always thought of; as much a nurse as a doctor—and sat down in a low chair at her side. For a while they smoked and talked. McCabe knew all her world; sometimes, with a sort of bitter fatalism he thought that there might be a time at hand when he would know no other.

Leila ordered coffee and liquors. After that McCabe suggested that they should go to the café which had been one of her most frequent haunts in the days before she met Hoyland—a place which had gradually slipped into being more club than restaurant, frequented by much the same clientele each evening, with a stout, beaming proprietor and full-breasted, tight-corseted wife, who regarded them all alike as children. Leila knew Dolly, who would be only too delighted to see her at her party.

“You’ve forsaken all of us, lately you know,” added McCabe.

Leila was pleased at the idea. It always delighted her to have the doctor’s company at any such festivity; it amused her to witness—always with affection—his ungainly gambols, to hear his shouts of laughter; to see the way in which he threw off his deep, almost habitual melancholy; while at the same time there was some sense of tragedy deep down in her own nature responsive to his sudden lapses into silence, his somber dreaming.

On this particular night, however, anything would have seemed preferable to being stuck indoors, with the endless night in front of her. She went into her bedroom to dress, giving directions to her maid, and talking to McCabe through the open door at the same time.

“I’ll wear my green-and-blue, Freda. You’ll like that,

Phil; it's so comic; and I adore funny clothes—a sort of Turkish trouser affair—just the very thing for a party like this. You'll see.”

She had one shoulder out of her gown, when, all of a sudden, there was that feeling of dust and ashes which had come over her more than once of late, and she changed her mind; hunched herself back into her tea-gown again, and returning to the sitting-room flung herself on the sofa.

“Oh, I can't go, Pip. I'm dead-tired—done to a turn—not fit for human society! No, no, Freda; only to think of squeezing into those wretched things after being on my feet all day. Phil, I walked miles and miles—literally miles! I'm done to the world. For God's sake don't stand staring at me like that, Freda. Take those silly shoes away—I tell you I'm not going out. And you, Phil, don't look at me like that—go along to your party; leave me alone. For the Lord's sake leave me alone!”

“What about your gold shoes? They're an easier fit. . . .”

“Didn't I say I don't want to go? How stupid you are, Freda.”

“Oh, very well!” The maid turned away from the doorway where she had reappeared with the gold shoes in her hand. “If some people knew their own mind!” she muttered in a huff.

For a moment Leila was silent, pouting; then she called to her: “Freda, come here; bring me my mules. Oh, don't be such an ass—so silly!”

The girl brought the pale-blue mules, with their edging of white fur; as she stooped to put them on, still sulky, Leila laid her hand against her cheek, patted it: “I'm a pig, a beast—better give me notice—leave me alone; though what I should do without you—”

“You're a naughty girl, that's what you are,” said the maid, and gave the foot she held against her knee a little affectionate pat, got up and moved towards the bedroom, then hesitated:

“Better tell the doctor all about it now he's 'ere,” she said with averted face; and turning into the next room shut the door behind her.

Leila stared after her with wide eyes. “What in the world . . .?” she began, and stopped short, while the color flooded over her face, then ebbed away, leaving her white and trembling. It was as though the girl's words had given

actual form to what, up to then, had been nothing more than a vague sense of uneasiness.

For a good couple of minutes she sat upright, staring blankly in front of her: then bent low over her dog, pulling its ears, while the spoilt beast whimpered.

McCabe had risen, was standing on the hearthrug, looking down at her, his cigarette in his hand. He was an immensely tall man, with high, stooping shoulders and dark, prematurely-gray hair, of which one lock had a trick of falling over his right eyebrow: his large, deep-set brown eyes were tired and bloodshot; his black coat was crumpled and in need of brushing, his linen white but frayed round the wrists. He had big ears and a fine forehead and chin; indeed, the whole structure of his face was fashioned upon noble lines, but his reddened skin, the pouches under those bloodshot eyes, a sort of stiffness in his movements showed that he was in some way playing ducks-and-drakes with his life, the uncommon capabilities shown in the very shape of his head. His sensitive mouth, his beautifully-formed though large hands—at the end of rather long, ungainly arms—alone seemed to show what sort of a man he ought by rights to have been; while it was remarkable that the curves of the lips, which are usually the first part of a face to coarsen, should yet remain so austere and, in a way, sweet.

He was a man of thirty-five, who had been expelled from his school the very day after winning an important scholarship; at least, the sentence of expulsion was pronounced, although, in recognition of his general ability, of so much that was fine in character, his father was permitted to summon him home as though upon some urgent private business.

The remainder of his life was pretty well all on a par with this. He was brilliantly clever; at Oxford there was scarcely any honor in science to which he did not attain; and yet he was always in some trouble or other. To most people his amazing interludes of hard drinking, reckless horse-play, sordid love-affairs, incriminating adventures, above all, his flocks of undesirable friends, both male and female, were absolutely bewildering in contrast with his scholarship, his beautifully fine and unerring research work, his capacity for weeks and weeks of unswerving devotion to any task which he happened to have in hand; while his almost infallible judgment, the brilliant clarity of his conclusions in

relation to his work, were only balanced by his complete incapacity to judge character, weigh motives.

Among the hosts of friends who battered upon him there were very few who cared to understand him, to wonder why he wasted himself upon them—apart from a few women, and these not at all what is known as “good women.” Those were a little frightened of him, inclined to draw aside their skirts; he took up too much room, both mentally and physically, in the close little higher-thought, new-art, or tame, socialistically-decorated parlors of their minds; was an awkward sort of person to let loose among their intellectual bric-à-brac. The other young men in gray flannels, with thin-lipped, half-open mouths, retreating foreheads and big pipes, fought shy of him—he wasn’t good form; wasn’t in the right set. But those disreputable women! Somehow or other they got at the root of that weakness which was to have so disastrous an effect upon Philip McCabe’s life, when they declared that he was “too kind.”

His tutor, who liked him, believed in him—and, standing by him, amazed at the man’s intellectual ability, was driven to the first frantic and blasphemous utterances his wife ever heard from his lips—found himself drawn to the same conclusion. Setting himself to the study of McCabe’s misdeeds, as a whole, he realized that every one was the result of trying to do a good turn to some one or other, often enough in the most ridiculous and quixotic fashion.

He backed other men’s bills, shouldered their debts—because So-and-So had just lost his mother—because So-and-So’s father was a parson and darned hard-up; flaunted his friendship with the most undesirable persons, because other people were such “rotten Pharisees, confounded scandal-mongers!”

But, apart from a fluctuating and not over-insistent taste for strong drink—really, it seemed as though he only got drunk because he did not like other fellows to feel that they were making fools of themselves while he stood apart—it was with women that his greatest source of trouble was to be found.

And the odd part of the whole thing was that he did not fall in love with them, that he was shy of them, oddly reverent in the most unexpected ways; anything but a practiced Don Juan, ordinary seducer. But—Oh, well! that was just it—he was “too kind”: he seemed to be for ever pick-



ing up with other men's leavings. Any woman who was deserted, ill-treated, sick, poor, in any sort of trouble, was certain of help from McCabe; and he was entirely whole-hearted in all that he did, without judgment or reservations. If comforting meant kissing, kissing it should be, and no stint about it.

It was later, when he had taken his degree, was walking the hospitals, even more when he started upon his maternity course among the very poor, that his real trouble began. With him pity was a passion as warm, fierce, overwhelming as, let us say, love, with most men. There was never any companion who could be more jovial and reckless, more full of quaint stories, of odd, and often enough indecent, conceits. And yet at the bottom of all this the real man was weighed down by a sense of the eternal tragedy of life; the futility of everything, the endless suffering and disappointment; the waste of emotion; the bitter helplessness of humanity. No one human being could really do anything to help another, that was what it came to; impossible to move a step to the rescue without upsetting some balance or treading some one else under foot: let alone annihilating oneself, as certain male insects must needs do, on the altar of love.

In all this welter of suffering it seemed to him that women were the most helpless. His mother had spent her life, ultimately lost it, over the perpetual bearing of children, none of which apart from himself—the eldest—had survived for more than a few months; while his father, a pillar of the Church, went on his way confident that everything was right in this best of all worlds.

For women to be true to their nature, to their best instincts of loving, giving, mothering, was paramount to throwing themselves under the feet of some Moloch, which they were fools enough to run forward to meet. He did not realize the number of heartless, calculating women there are in the world, because he never came in touch with them. He never sought out women—though he was on terms of good-fellowship with many—and it was the weak and unresourceful who came to him with their troubles. The others, who were well able to manage their own affairs, regarded him a little scornfully as the sort of person who could be easily taken in.

How he escaped getting into serious trouble over the uses to which he put his medical knowledge it is difficult to say, for his exceptional ability rendered him noticeable; but it is

certain that more than once he was suspected, warned by members of his own profession, and—more kindly, more tolerantly—by that most tolerant of all fraternities, the Metropolitan Police. One might help a life, which, with a little lack of care would never survive, into a world that was eminently antagonistic, unwilling to acknowledge it; but any sort of interference in the other direction was strictly forbidden. The law was explicit upon this point, and it was right, for there must be no tampering with what is technically known as "Offenses against the Race," hard though it seems that the momentary weakness or vanity of one empty-headed girl should set in train an endless succession of miserable human beings.

At one time McCabe found himself in such a position that there was nothing left for him but to leave the country, for a while at least, and he went to Paris, where he remained for close upon four years; and where, to tell the truth, his abilities were far more clearly recognized than he could ever hope for them to be in England. But he was miserable away from London, felt himself out of touch with the French character, and was glad enough to return and take up a precarious private practice in West Central London: for the hospitals—knowing nothing for certain—fought shy of him: he was too clever, too unusual, if nothing else.

He and Charles Hoyland had been at the same public school; and later on at the University together, though not at the same college. There were never two men more diverse in character. Hoyland cared for nobody but himself; if there was one exception it might be found in his regard for Philip McCabe, though not even for him would he have made the least sacrifice, taken the smallest risk. He had never allowed himself to deteriorate outwardly, as his friend had done; but his very soul, if he possessed one, was atrophied by persistent self-indulgence, even more intellectual than physical; stultified by that most barren of all vices, contempt.

He was never diverted from anything upon which he had set his mind by compunction, though he might be by fastidiousness; while pride and scorn of the general herd stood him in the place of self-respect.

No one ever tried to overreach Hoyland; no one was ever familiar with, or impertinent to, him, in these days. Nobody had ever loved him, apart from McCabe—with his boundless belief in human nature—and a few unfortunate women.

Above all, failure and misfortune had both alike passed him by. He had done well at Oxford without any apparent effort or curtailment of his pleasures; been called to the Bar and settled himself in one of the most comfortable sets of rooms in the Temple, all because it gave him a certain standing, while the Temple was a pleasant and convenient place to live in; but he did not exert himself to obtain clients.

Sometimes it seemed to McCabe as though he were forever traveling in the wake of the other man, picking up the bits. He thought of this now, as he stood upon Leila Gavin's hearth-rug. She was pressing her dog to her breast, as though she found comfort in lavishing affection upon something. The little creature's bulging eyes glanced sideways at McCabe, half-triumphant, half-fearful: it was plain that it was getting the best of things; and yet the great brute who usurped the best of the fire was a man; and one never knew what might happen with a man; for to the depths of its miserable little soul it trembled at the very thought of Hoyland. Shut away from its mistress at ordinary times, it yelped, whined, scratched all the paint from the lower half of the door. Bundled out of sight when Hoyland arrived upon the scenes, it stayed in its basket, or crept away under the bed, remained silent, motionless, with its head hidden between its paws until he was gone.

"Come, Leila," said McCabe, "better have it out, eh?"

"Phil, you won't tell C. H. whatever you think—imagine?—and of course it's nothing, nothing at all. Only that idiot, Freda. . . . But whatever happens, whatever happens, swear you'll never, never tell—never so much as hint a word, never so long as you live, to any one—above all, to *him*."

"Of course not, if you don't want me to. Doctors and priests, you know."

"Under your oath—whatever happens?"

"Of course, of course." He spoke with a smile, but in the depths of his heart was the cry: "Not again, oh, good Lord! not again!"—a sense of fierce revolt, a determination to consider himself, his career. What good could he do any one if he went on and on to ruin?

Then Leila told him of what—Oh, no, not what *she* feared but what she imagined, that Freda was so stupid and impertinent as to suspect. She was tired because she was run down; likely enough she had caught a slight chill; that might account for much. For awhile she called to her aid some of that airy nonchalance which she used with Hoyland;

then, as McCabe persisted in his questions, her face grew whiter, her smile more fixed, almost silly.

After he had sent her into her room to loosen her clothes, examined her, there was no doubt about it. Freda was right; that fear which she had refused to acknowledge, thrust away at the back of her consciousness, was no longer even a fear but a fact; in a few months, between six and seven, she must expect to become a mother.

He wanted to go and find Hoyland, tell him what had happened; but Leila entreated him not to, reminded him of his promise—

“He would never, never speak to me again—he simply wouldn’t be bothered with me!” she cried, and McCabe knew that she was right.

Her one comfort lay in the thought that Hoyland would not want her to go abroad with him now, after all, with that disappointment over the money from the sale. “If he had been going, set his heart upon my going too, and I refused, there would be an end of everything. He simply can’t bear people going against him. But now, Phil, I’ve got more time, and you must help me, Phil—you must help me. Of course you will. It’s quite easy—no reason to worry myself now I’ve you to depend on—” She glanced at his face and hesitated; a little of her sureness sliding from her, a chill sense of fear, incredulity taking its place. “Of course—you don’t mean—you don’t imagine that I could go dragging on like this, month after month,—and then, then— It would simply kill me. Oh, I know now why my mother looked like she did—because she went through with it. She never seemed quite real before—I don’t think one’s own people ever do—but now, now—! And he would find out—of course he’d find out. But if you’ll only help me, I’ll go away for a week or so and get it over. I don’t mind what I suffer, don’t mind anything, anything—so long as I can get out of it. I must get out of it—must get out of it! It’ll be quite easy, if only—”

“Look here, Leila, it’s no good you talking like that. I can’t do anything—you know I can’t.”

“But you can, you can—you can! Every one knows that doctors can if they choose. Phil, you couldn’t forsake me—you wouldn’t forsake me! Why, you helped that Filson woman, and you didn’t know her half so well as me. You’re fond of me, Phil, dear old Phil, we’ve always been such

friends." She caught his hand and laid her cheek against it. "Phil, I'd kill myself, I would—I would—if I didn't know you would help me. You couldn't behave so to any woman—you couldn't—Phil—dear Phil!" She was half off the sofa, clinging to him. With the monstrous selfishness of love and fear, she never even stopped to wonder why he "couldn't behave so," why he should be forever expected to repair the damage wrought by other men, plastering it up with his own good name, degrading the profession of which he was in reality so proud.

"Phil, Phil, you will, you must help me! Phil! Why don't you speak?—why don't you say something?—why do you torment me like this?" Clinging to his sleeve, to the skirt of his coat, she tugged at it, shook it like a child. "I know you're only pretending—of course I know—but it's cruel—cruel! Look here, Phil; I'll do anything, anything in the world for you, only you must help me. It would kill me. And C. H.—what about C. H.? You're his friend; you must know that I'm better for him than any one else could be—I do understand him—"

"I can't, Leila. Look here, I can't—" McCabe's face was white, drawn with pain. It was agony for him to refuse his help; but only within the last few days he had received the offer of an appointment which meant the public acknowledgment of his talents. There was no knowing to what it might lead; possibly to some appointment where he would have the chance of studying tropical diseases, which had always interested him so immensely, in a country where domestic relationships were less difficult. If the slightest shadow of suspicion were to fall upon him at this juncture, there would be an end of everything.

"No, no, Leila; I can do nothing. I've sworn I'll never touch anything of the sort again. Good God, woman, have you no thought of me—of any one but yourself and Hoyland? Why should he never suffer?—why should he go scot-free?—tell me that. And you, you yourself—you women are such fools, you deserve— No—no—no—no one deserves anything like this. My God! how awful this is! Stop crying, Leila—for Heaven's sake pull yourself together!"

"You helped Violet Filson. Why did you help Violet, and won't help me?" The tears were streaming down Leila's cheeks; she slipped to the floor, clinging to him:

raised her face—twisted with grief, all the fine delicate lines of it blurred and terrible—to his.

“Oh, Phil—Phil! By God, you must help me! You shall help me. What must I do—what can I do to make you—? I’ll give you anything!—anything. Do you hear?”

“Be quiet, I say—stop it, oh, stop it!”

“You must help me—you must—you must!”

He put down both hands to raise her, and felt her heart beating wildly, like a bird’s; he had tested it once—at the instigation of that other lover who had been so much coarser and rougher than Hoyland, and yet far more concerned about her—realized its weakness. His own heart was torn with pity; she would kill herself if she went on like this; she had not the strength to bear such emotion. He knew that it was no facile, hysterical grief; he realized her habitual self-control too well to reassure himself with any such delusion. It was the sort of agony which shakes body and mind; disintegrates, annihilates, if it is allowed to go on.

“Hush, hush!—be quiet, Leila. I’ll do nothing to help you if you go on like that. Child—child—” He took her face between his hands and gazed at her tenderly—with a sort of desperation, as though she held his fate in her hands: “Won’t you go through with it—for my sake, try and go through with it. You don’t know—it might be the greatest solace, the greatest joy of your life—”

“But C. H.—Phil, think of C. H.!”

Yes, that was it; there was nothing to appeal to in her; she was nothing, less than nothing, apart from Hoyland.

“I’ll see what can be done. Sit up quietly—behave like a sane woman—you poor child, you—and I’ll see—”

“That means you will help me! I knew you would—I knew that you’d never go back on me—I knew, I knew! I’ll do anything you ask. Look, now!”

Like a child, she sat herself upright upon the sofa; gave one of her little preening touches to the lace round her breast, patted back her hair, called up the stiff ghost of a smile to her tear-stained face.

“I don’t promise anything—I can’t promise anything—”

“Oh, but you have promised; you have as good as promised. Phil, you won’t—can’t go back on me now.” Once again she was torn with agony, her face distorted.

“Well, if you make yourself ill, that will do no good. I’ll ring your bell—send Freda for something to make you

sleep, give you a quiet night." He drew a note-book and pen from his pocket, wrote a prescription, and handed it to the maid, as she entered the room.

"You must take that to the chemist—but get your mistress to bed first, she's been upsetting herself. Then give her that and a glass of hot milk on the top of it. You'll look after her, won't you?"

"Of course—There, there!—wasn't I right?—better to tell the Doctor." The woman bent over her mistress, put an arm round her, drew her to her feet. "You poor lamb, you—you come along with your Freda; nothing shan't hurt you so long as Freda's here to mind you; an' you'll feel as different as different after a good night's rest."

"Of course she will—as different as different!" echoed McCabe; watched the passage of the two women to the door, saw the maid turn and give him a look, make a motion with her chin as though to say: "A pretty to-do! A pretty to-do, ain't it?" swung round in search of his hat, trod upon Chang, and broke into a low-voiced volley of curses.

#### CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning Hoyland arrived at Leila's flat soon after twelve, expressed his intention of taking her out for an airing, and then to lunch—at the "Savoy"—the "Carlton"—wherever she wished.

It was a bright day, bitterly cold, but he did not feel the cold, was in excellent health, as always; and—which was less certain—excellent spirits. He even cast a more or less good-natured gibe at Chang, who—forgotten for once—crept away under the sofa, dragging himself flattened out upon his stomach.

Leila, beautifully dressed in dark-blue cloth trimmed with fur—preposterously dispersed round the hem of the skirt, about her wrists and down over her shoulders, while her neck and chest were bare, her ankles clad in the thinnest of silk stockings—was looking paler than usual, but very pretty; her pallor, indeed, seemed to add to her refinement, gave her a certain precious air. She, also, appeared to be in very good spirits; was enchanted at the idea of going out.

"Make haste and get your things on; I've got some good news for you. I'll tell you as we go along."

Her heart sank at his words; in a moment her mind leapt to what had happened; but she kept her self-control—no one could have so much as connected her with that desperate, weeping woman who had clung to Philip McCabe's arm the night before. She made the willful gesture of a spoilt child—tossed her head, put her hands behind her back, pouted.

"No, now! I refuse to go until you tell me—tell me now, now! Now, at once, if it's something nice."

"No, you infant, you!" He pulled her towards him by the lobe of one ear, kissed her. "Do as you're told. Get your hat and things."

"No." She sat down on the sofa, stuck her chin in the air. She was cold from head to foot, terribly afraid of fainting; but still she held to those airs of a pretty tyrant which, as she well knew, it amused Hoyland to see her assume—so long as she knew, and he knew, how very much the boot was, vulgarly speaking, upon the other foot. As a matter of fact, her very lightness at that moment buoyed her up; she clung to it for dear life, but her legs were trembling. Walking in the street, she might not be able to control herself; even now she could not have stood upon her feet.

Hoyland dropped to a seat beside her and, picking up a huge, downy cushion, pummeled her with it, laughing. "Little bully! All the same, I won't tell you."

"What if I know—have guessed it?" Like Roland, at his dark Tower, she was glad of any end. "Eh-h? Clever!"

"Well?"

"Well?—well?" Her own voice sounded extraordinary to her as she mimicked him. "Well—you've got the money, somehow or other, are going abroad—"

"Bright child! It's a mercy I've no secrets from you—they'd have burnt you for a witch in the Middle Ages. A good thing, too—we mere men aren't up to contending with the likes of you. Yes, I've got the money. I couldn't remember what the law was on the subject of auction sales, but I looked it up last night. Then, to make certain, went and saw a lawyer chap I happen to know; at least he used to be a lawyer; got himself into a devil of a mess, struck off the rolls, kicked out of his profession—the sort of thing that'll be happening to old McCabe some day, and so I tell him—clever as they make 'em, though; no twist or turn of the law too much for him. He agreed with me, it's all serene. 'Pon my word, Leila, this English law! It's just



made for people like us, my dear. If I can once get the money out of the auctioneer it's he, poor devil, who'll have to pay the piper, settle up with my mother, and no way out of it. Damned unfair, of course; she'll skin him to the bone. But there you are: some one's got to suffer, and anyhow it won't be us, brightest and best."

"You mean that, after all, you've got—?"

"The cash. Yes, that's precisely what I do mean. Fortunately my parent takes an inordinate time to get herself dressed in the morning. I don't often play the part of the early worm, but to-day I rose close upon dawn—nine-thirty to be precise—went straight off to the auctioneer, got the check out of him, and cashed it—close on eight hundred pounds—an' that's not all either. But I won't be hard on him over the rest. We'll have champagne for lunch, old girl, and then—Look here; can you be ready to cross to-night? We'll go straight off to Monte Carlo. Better give my little lot time to settle down, fizzle out—eh?"

Leila moistened her stiff lips with her tongue, plucking at the fur round her wrists. "Let's have lunch first, C. H.—I don't know about to-night; I've got no clothes or anything."

"Schemer! Look here—I'm not sure, I won't promise, but we might—it all depends upon how nice you make yourself—put in a couple of nights in Paris, give you time to rig yourself out. For the moment I'm overflowing with cash and the milk of human kindness, you'll observe. Anyhow, we'll have lunch now; then you can come home and pack."

"But, C. H., dear, really I can't get off to-night. Oh, it's out of the question! There's the flat, and Freda and all."

"And all!" he mocked, still smiling, though his expression had hardened. "I wonder you don't include that wretched cur o' yours. Besides, you know that Freda can go to Clare; she'll be only too glad to have her."

"But, C. H., really— See here, old dear—" She bent forward, laying one hand with its soft pink palm against his cheek—"let me have my own way for once. Wait a little. I have tons of engagements"—even now it gave her some sort of pleasure to pretend that she lived in a whirl, was not entirely dependent upon his favor—"there would be letters to write, all sort of things to see to."

"Look here, Leila"—he put down the cushion, turned towards her, sullen, contemptuous—"why can't you speak

the truth for once? For some reason or other you don't want to come."

"Oh, but I do, I do—really, C. H., I do. Don't look at me like that, as though you wanted to devour me. I won't have it!" It was a pitiful pretense at childish defiance, and she realized its thinness when he laughed. "The only thing is, I don't want to go just at this very moment. Surely I may be allowed some say in the matter."

"As much say as you like, my dear. The only thing is, you must understand that I am going to-night, whatever happens—take it or leave it. There's never any knowing what you women are up to. I suppose you imagine that you'll enhance your value by holding back—only, let me remind you, it's a little late in the day."

"There are other men in the world—Billy Skelton says—"

"Oh, yes, there's Billy Skelton—so there is!" He laughed again: he knew Billy Skelton, knew what Leila felt about him. Not for a moment did it enter into his head to imagine that her change of mind was owing to any rival—he knew himself, his own value, only too thoroughly. After all,—Oh, well, there were plenty of other women; she might be a nuisance, was certain to be an expense—

"Well, my dear, you know your own mind best. The flat's paid for up to the end of this month, and I'll leave fifty pounds in the bank for you; only, don't squander it all on—"

"C. H.!—Charles—Charles—look here—"

"No, my dear; no changing your mind at the last moment. What was I going to say?" He had buttoned his overcoat, picked up his hat, still smiling. "Oh, I know! Don't squander it all upon Billy Skelton an' his kind; it took some coming by. And now, brightest and best, I'm afraid that fifty will be the last you see of it."

"Charles!" She was on her feet, trembling from head to foot. She put out one hand and touched Hoyland's sleeve; desperate and yet tentative, reserved; even if she had not realized the folly of such a thing, it would have been impossible for her to cling to him as she had clung to McCabe. "Charles, listen—you must listen—you don't understand—only give me a few days!"

"No, my dear. Perhaps I don't want to; perhaps—Well, after all, is it worth it? You've made your choice, and now—as my time's short"—he took the tips of her cold fingers in his, raised her hand to his lips, kissed it—"now

I'll say good-by." He gave a little nod and a smile, while she stood silent; her trembling had ceased, it was as though she were turned to stone.

At the door he glanced round, nodded again. After all, he'd be much freer without Leila. A woman was like a fur coat, a luxury; one might need it, but it took up a lot of room, could very well be dispensed with. As McCabe's pompous old father had been so fond of saying: "Everything's for the best in this best of all worlds—"

"Good-by, and give my regards to that charmer—Billy."

## CHAPTER V

It was the end of February when Hoyland left London: it was well into May when he returned. He had spent a great deal of money in Monte Carlo; but then he had also made a good deal, for it seemed as though he were uniformly lucky in all he attempted. Even that stupidity of Leila Gavin's—it was only by an effort that he could feel that Leila had ever really existed, save when he found himself using her as a standard of comparison—turned out well, for he had made friends with a young Viennese widow with plenty of money, beautiful and quite devoid of all scruples; a triple combination which made her a pleasant companion. They had gone to Venice together, then pottered about the shores of the Mediterranean. They parted very good friends. Perhaps on the whole the widow had paid, in every way, more than Hoyland for the felicity of those few weeks; but she kept her mouth shut over her losses; and anyhow, there was this to it—she had enjoyed herself, for Hoyland could be an ideal companion when it so pleased him.

Left to himself, he went to Florence, and put in a fortnight or so with a few friends who lived there; renewing his acquaintance with the town, the pictures, the statuary—steeping himself in the whole atmosphere which he loved. People raved about scenery, nature; but to his mind there was nothing to be compared with the work of man. Nature was crude, art was subtle; Nature was forever changing, decaying; but art lasted out the lives of innumerable men, survived through countless seasons, "forever fresh and still to be enjoyed."

While in Florence he received a letter from his mother. Like a wise woman she had got what she could out of the unfortunate auctioneer who had sold her goods; had made no attempt to waste breath or notepaper upon her son. She wrote now to suggest that if he were going to stay in Florence he might have one of his sisters with him for a time.

"I'm tired of tagging two girls about the world. I ought to go to St. Petersburg; there are business affairs I must see to"—Hoyland smiled at this—how well he knew those "business affairs!"—"I'm going to send Maisie to school in Brussels until the summer holidays; she's getting altogether beyond herself. If you'd have Rose I find that I can pick up a good maid here, very cheap; and who can tell?—you might get Rose off upon some of your friends. Of course, a nice clergyman would be the thing; but I don't suppose you know one, any more than I do. That's the tiresome part of belonging to a religion with a celibate clergy, when you have daughters to provide for. Anyhow, if you'll take Rose off my hands for a couple of months, I may be able to do something for you in Russia."

Rose herself wrote: "I think Prince Versilov must have said something to make Mamma anxious about her property, for it was after a long interview with him that she decided to go." Was this malice or sheer innocence? He knew nothing of Rose, but she must be a fool as well as a saint if she did not know something of the world, after knocking about it in her mother's company.

"I know that you won't want me," continued the letter, in its neat, rounded handwriting, "and I expect she'll want me back again very soon; she never seems able to get a maid to suit her. But meanwhile, dear Charles, I do wish you would use your influence to make her let me go to Brussels with Maisie. It wouldn't cost much; I could live at the school and help teach English; but I do so want to go on with my music. Only, don't tell her I asked you, or of course she'll say 'no'; just suggest it, as though it were your own idea."

The letter was marked "Very private"—that was so like Rose! As though any one were likely to be in the least interested in her or her ideas. Anyhow, as it cost him nothing to do as she wished, and as he certainly did not intend to be saddled with her, Hoyland wrote to his mother sug-

gesting Brussels. After all, it was only a matter of a stamp and half-a-dozen lines.

At the same time he wrote to a young attaché whom he happened to know in St. Petersburg, making inquiries about this so-called prince. Mrs. Hoyland's money and estates were all in her own hands; and though her shrewd good sense had, so far, kept the upper hand over her *amours*, she was at an age where many women are made fools of by some good-looking scoundrel or other.

Treherne's letter on the subject was, however, reassuring. To Hoyland's mind the world of men—apart from the laboring classes—was divided into those who made fools of women and those who were fooled by them. Prince Versilov, it seemed—and it was a legitimate title—belonged to the last category. Apart from this, in place of being younger than Mrs. Hoyland, he was a good fifteen years her senior; so all seemed well, and with the cares of his family well off his shoulders Hoyland returned to London, hustled out the acquaintances to whom he had let his flat in the Temple, and settled down for the London season.

One evening towards the middle of May he found himself in a mood of vague amusement, more tolerant than usual; for he had been to one of those so-called spiritualistic gatherings, for which credulous fools would gladly pay five guineas in the hopes of some new thrill: a craving so insistent that they become like the daughter of the horse-leech with her "Give—give"—running from absurdity to obscenity; seizing upon the most bestial forms of negroid superstition and medieval credulity.

It was a debauch of this kind, including that pretense of so-called Black Magic, which had for some time been rife in Paris and Berlin—practiced in London by a greasy arch-hypocrite with his tongue in his cheek, and a group of women whose nakedness was inadequately veiled in the so-called mysteries of Iris—at which Hoyland had been present upon this particular evening.

Needless to say he had no idea of wasting his money over such balderdash: was the guest of a fashionable and very pretty society woman who—refusing to live with her husband upon the ground that marriage and the procreation of children were both perfectly horrid—had re-christened herself the Mistress of Heaven, muddling up her soul with her body in the way that such people have.

There were few things which enraged McCabe more than this cultivated credulity. Nothing was too low for his pity so long as it was real; but such travesty of all humanity sickened him. Hoyland, on the contrary, found perpetual amusement in seeing people make fools of themselves, watching their antics; so like apes that to his mind they were differentiated merely by the fact that they had no tails, had learnt to refrain from scratching themselves in public; while things which filled McCabe with bitter shame aroused in him no feeling beyond a contemptuous curiosity as to what lengths such people might not go.

He was thinking of McCabe, whom he had not seen since his return from England, on his way home that night, and was glad to find him waiting for him in his rooms. For he was so strong, so full of vitality, so unworn by anything in the way of nerves, that the thought of undressing, going to bed, was always repugnant to him, as a sort of lowering, giving up, of self; and he was glad of any excuse for prolonging the evening.

A fire burnt in the grate, and McCabe, standing upon the hearthrug made a curt apology for it: "I put a match to your fire, I hope you don't mind; it's turned so infernally cold."

He was generally, despite himself, a trifle conciliatory in his manner towards the other man—for it is strange how often intellect abases itself before a good tailor, the nonchalant insolence of mediocrity. Not that Hoyland was mediocre: he was very clever, very complete—so far as he went: in some ways McCabe thought him quite wonderful.

But upon this particular night all tentativeness was gone from McCabe's manner. Possibly he had got to that stage where he did not care a hang what Hoyland, what any one, thought of him. He looked very ill; he was perceptibly grayer; his eyes were more bloodshot, his clothes shabbier and more than ever in need of a clothes-brush. There were deep perpendicular lines running downwards from either side of his nose; and even his mouth—which had for so long retained something of sweet austerity—was drawn a little sideways as though with bitter thought.

For the first time, during all those years that Hoyland had known him, he saw that his fine hands shook, as, at his host's invitation, he helped himself to a whisky and soda.

His boots were thick with June dust. Hoyland, sinking

back into the depths of the easiest chair, crossed one leg over his knee, ran his hand round his own silk-clad ankle with a feeling of urbane satisfaction. Poor old McCabe's boots were deplorable; it was plain that he was letting himself go, drinking heavily.

The tumbler rattled loudly against the syphon, and he gave an impatient shrug; there was nothing he hated more than clumsiness and noise. Well, if McCabe went on like this, there was an end to his work; anyhow, so far as dissection or surgical research went.

"Look here, Hoyland, an awful thing's happened—it's broken me up—I'm at the end of my tether—don't know what the devil to do—"

He tossed off the contents of his glass, turned round to put it down on the mantelpiece, and remained standing with his back to the other man; his arms leaning on the shelf, his great shoulders bent.

The back of his clothes was even more deplorably shiny than the front; his trousers frayed over worn heels. Hoyland prided himself upon the keenness with which he noticed such trifles.

"My God!" exclaimed McCabe passionately, "isn't it too awful to think how utterly helpless one is to do anything for any one, without running—oh, the most infernal risks? And even then, likely enough, do more harm than good—make a mess of the whole thing? What in the world were we made for?—that's what I want to know. Why in the world do we ever go on—on and on—all dazed with our passions, our pity and pain; working like moles in the dark? If one only knew—oh, my God, if one only knew!—that there was another world better than this—anything, anything to hold on to! But to let any human soul go out into that awful darkness—"

Hoyland gave a little laugh, settled himself deeper into his chair, and lit a cigarette. He knew that his friend was overcharged by some desperate distress; but other people's troubles were a nuisance, and he still hoped to divert the stream to the sort of discussion which they both loved, entirely as they disagreed upon almost every subject. "Now," he said, "let us—as Socrates might say—discourse upon the human soul. I've got a theory, McCabe, which I've been waiting to try upon you—it always tonics up one's ideas to have them contradicted. Cebes—wasn't it?—who had a

notion that the soul might have existed for innumerable ages before its imprisonment in the body; that its very entrance into the body of a man—what we call birth—is the beginning of death. Well, I'm going one better than that. The soul, such as it is, does *not* perish with man, simply because he never possesses such a thing. For generations we have gone on flattering ourselves that, as the very highest form of life, we and we alone are entitled to immortality. But, oh, dear, no. During the process of ascent we have improved the body, refined upon all its functions, cultivated its emotions, its intellect at the expense of the soul. Plato himself says that the soul is at its best when it is undisturbed by hearing, sight, pain, pleasure. Well, now, my dear fellow, I've got the idea that this precious immortality is the attribute of the lowest, and not the highest, form of life. The only true immortal that ever has been, ever will be, is a unicellular organism such as the Protozoa—a creature which ought, in all conscience, to suit Plato down to the ground, with precious few distractions of sight, hearing, tasting, etc. A creature which simply divides, becomes two instead of one—the antithesis of marriage, eh?—can scarcely be said to die. With the very idea of death we associate something, at least, left for the undertaker. But the Protozoa is amazingly secure: he even, as some learned Johnny or other says, 'endures desiccation with successful patience'—a truly noble example to us thirst-ridden mortals—no need for the blue-ribbon among the immortal Protozoa. No, no, my dear fellow; in this so-called Ascent of Man we have sold our birthright of immortality just as certainly as we have sacrificed our tails. I have not yet made up my mind as to what organ of publicity I will offer my great idea; it is no use having ideas in these days unless one writes about them—many people do not even wait for that much—the *Daily Mail*, or the *Lancet*, or one of those popular issues, I suppose."

## CHAPTER VI

IN certain moods it amused Hoyland to evolve ironical and fantastic ideas. He had drunk just enough champagne to feel pleased with himself, with the silly world in general; and if one could draw old McCabe into an argument it was sure to be full of interest. But on this particular evening it



did not seem too easy to get him going. Still standing, ignoring his host's gesture in the direction of a chair, he had again turned, was leaning with his elbow stuck out behind him upon the mantelshelf—where Hoyland trembled for his china—gazing down at him, glowering.

"Well, it seems to me that, whoever's right—Cebes or myself, or the parsons with their eternal muddle of mortality and immortality; their pretense at a sexless heaven with still 'our brother in God' and 'sister in God'—that death—"

"Look here, Hoyland," broke in McCabe, in a rough, loud voice; then hesitated, moistened his lips.

"Yes?"

"I've—my God, Hoyland, I've killed a woman."

"Well, that's the end of a great deal of worry for the woman, whoever she may be. Let's hope it isn't the beginning of a great deal of trouble for you, that's all."

"A woman—a girl," went on McCabe, "so fragile, so helpless, so soft—like an unfledged bird—yes, that's it; like an unfledged bird—the delicacy, the soft white skin, the little bones of her!—and so damnably overridden by fate, environment, necessity! Christ! when I think of it—look back—I wonder what in the name of all that's holy I ought to have done—I can see nothing for it but what I did do. She would have killed herself—I knew that; I was certain of that. As it was, she had every chance, every sort of chance—it was only when it was all over, well over, that her heart gave out. It was that which killed her—the anxiety, the strain. Before God it was that which killed her. She would have died anyhow. She was preordained. There are women like that; no more stamina than butterflies—!"

"That being so, why the deuce do you say you killed her?"

"Because, if it all comes out—as it's going to, as it's bound to do—that's what will be said."

"But if there's no truth in it—if you didn't kill her—whoever she was? If you can prove—"

"But how can I prove what even I'm not altogether sure of? My God, if only I knew for certain, could be sure. There's such an enormous amount to be taken into consideration; all the contributory causes—body, mind. Not that it makes any difference. She's dead; that's one thing certain. Well out of it, I suppose. . . . Oh, yes, well out of it—though no one gave her the choice. That's where it pinches

so damnably. For what does it mean when a girl says that she would rather she were dead than such-and-such a thing should happen? Nothing; less than nothing.—Ah, well, she's dead now, and I don't suppose it matters a pin to any one, excepting to me—to me and my conscience! It's between me and God.—Ah, you may say what you like, Hoyland, look how you like, but you won't sneer God down. Then there's what *she's* thinking, feeling about it all, now, wherever she is, to be taken into consideration; and what He's thinking, what He meant; His reason—if He ever had one—for putting any human being so infernally ill-equipped into a world like this; for daring—yes, daring, that's it—to so much as think of launching another life into the maelstrom through her, poor kid, with all her sweetness and silliness.”

“Were you in love with her?”

“In love with her? No! I know too much, have seen too much, for love, as you count it.”

“Then, look here, McCabe, why in the world do you go mixing yourself up in such things? You're ruining your career, doing no earthly good.”

“Well, that's the question. After all, how can you or any one say? There may be something in that scapegoat business. The poor devil of a goat which never harmed any one, wild with the sins of the world. It's not much of a part to be cast for, but still. . . . Look here, Hoyland; if this God is like the old Jehovah, cruel, unreasoning, mad with jealousy; stopping people's ears, eyes, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears—was there ever anything more monstrously unjust so much as conceived of?—then I claim as good a right to take life as He—such a God—has to give it. It 'ud come to no more than this, a wise gardener nipping off a bud that he knows will be too much for the tree. If God's like that, nothing matters—nothing! But if He's different—if He has a reason and I've missed it—if He sees so far that our tender mercy is the ultimate cruelty, His cruelty the everlasting mercy—well, what then?”

“What does it matter, anyhow? If there was a God—which, of course, there's not—the only way to make life possible would be by counting Him out, like one does one's landlord—just swaggering on as though one owned the whole damned house! The Lord knows one has to pay enough for maintenance and repairs! There ought to be some sort of way of striking a bargain, you know, McCabe, so that after so

many years, so much time and thought spent upon the fabric, His claim lapsed, once and for all. But it's all a part of the bother of this absentee landlord business. If I were you—"

"If you were me! If you were me! By heavens, that's good!" Of a sudden McCabe broke into a wild laugh. "If you were me, you stucco-fronted man, you!—if you were me, what the devil would you be doing now?—With a darned mangy coat, off and away with your galling pack o' sins—on the rocks with the other goats."

Hoyland shrugged his shoulders, his lids drooped a little more deeply over his eyes as he looked up at the other man; but that was the only sign of annoyance which he gave. "May I ask if this sudden exuberance is the result of your undiluted native wit, or my whisky? I don't wish to appear curious, but I'd like to know."

McCabe made no answer; his short-lived mirth—if such it could be called—was evidently over. Once more he turned round, facing the fire, leant his elbows upon the mantelshelf, dropped his head in his hands, while Hoyland poured himself out another drink and lit a cigar. Plainly enough this was not yet the end, and in spite of himself he was interested. Following any step in McCabe's career was always a little like watching a performance of the Sicilian Players at their best.

There was a long silence, and then McCabe turned round again. It was evident that he had determined to take a firm hold of himself, for he sat down, stretched out his hands to the fire, spoke quietly, reasonably:

"Look here, Hoyland, I don't know why I let myself go as I did—if I said anything offensive, I apologize; I suppose it was the thought of her away under the ground with all the summer months before us—the sight of you—here—"

"Thank you," remarked Hoyland dryly; "I don't know where else I should be!"

But McCabe took no notice of his words; either he did not hear, or he was too set upon what he had to say.

"Look here—a girl got into trouble, a girl I happened to know—"

"Did I know her?" asked the other man, with a sharp sidelong glance.

"You *know* her? Good God, no!"

"All right; no need to be so vehement about it."

"She was desperate, absolutely desperate; she hadn't over-much money"—he hesitated, glancing round the room—"It's

odd to look at this, and remember the sort of place she died in. The little she had she didn't dare to spend, had no idea where there was any more coming from—"

"What about the man?—as you yourself disclaim—"

"The man would do nothing for her; she knew that."

"And 'pon my word, I don't blame him. Women should learn to take care of themselves. But continue."

"She persuaded me to help her, to take the risk. Hoyland, you know the sort of risk such a thing must be to me; that I wouldn't willingly—"

"Yes. Though why the devil—?"

"Well, she died; that's all." McCabe drew his chair back from the blaze, took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and wiped his forehead. "Everything went on all right—it was perfect. She was so grateful to me—so piteously grateful!—And then—more than twenty-four hours later, she collapsed, suddenly collapsed from heart-failure."

"You could give a certificate, surely?"

"I called in another man at the last—he gave it without a moment's hesitation. I suppose it seemed all right to him at the time. I felt it awfully. God knows, I cared little enough just then what happened to me, who knew about it. I suppose I was damned careless. But now—look here, Hoyland, I'd get out of it, put an end to myself, but there are things I know—am finding out—just beginning to get at. I have a sort of feeling that it's up to me to stick it out, so long as there's any chance of being of use to anybody."

"You're a fool, McCabe."—It is strange how often selfish callousness has logic upon its side, for Hoyland's next words were only too true.—"If you'd keep inside the law, make legitimate use of those brains of yours, you would do a great deal more good, to many more people, and get something in the way of a decent life for yourself into the bargain. The money those Harley Street men make!"

"Some day, some day," McCabe gave a wry smile. "But now—well, some one's blabbed, aroused suspicion. I don't know whether my name's come into it or not—as yet; but it's sure to do. Anyhow, I've got to get out of the country; for a while, at least, until I see how things turn out; and I want"—McCabe paused, with a little gesture which was full of humiliation. For he, who would squander his last penny upon another—any one—however little known or worthless—was overcome with shame at the very idea of

asking for money from this man, supposedly one of his best friends.

"Look here, McCabe," broke in Hoyland, with a calm which was somehow so much more wounding than violence, "if you're thinking of asking me to lend you anything, you might as well spare yourself. I'm pretty well broke myself; owe money all over the place. Besides, as you know, I don't approve of borrowing—"

"What do you call it when you take clothes from your tailor, and don't pay for them?—But perhaps you're right." McCabe gave a rough laugh. "That's something worse than borrowing."

"My dear fellow, you'll get nothing out of me by being offensive. I can't lend you money, or give it you, either, for I've got none to give. And if I had, I wouldn't—so that's straight. You make a damned ass of yourself; then you expect other people to pay the piper. It's like those philanthropists who build a church, and then whine over the debt on it. If every one would learn to look after himself—"

He broke off, as McCabe rose with a violent movement from his chair. "I knew what you would say. Do you think I didn't know it? You're my oldest friend; besides, you—well, I gave you a sort of chance. I can get the money—don't worry about that. All sorts of unmentionable people will be ready and willing to help me with it. But there's one thing you've got to do; one thing even you can't refuse me. You've got no heart, but you've got brains. If the case does come on, and I'm in it, you'll have to watch my interest—I can't afford to pay any really first-class man. You can do that; that at least will cost you nothing more than a little of your valuable time. You must do that much for me, Hoyland—and by God you shall!"

"I fail to see why you say that."

"Because—because—by heavens, it's the very least you can do."

"Give me a reason."

"Reason! There's reason enough in all conscience! If you want a reason—"

"Well, let me have it." Hoyland, who had risen at the same time as the other man, stood with one hand in his trouser pocket, one foot on the fender, half-smiling, cool, detached; as immaculate as though he had just bathed, dressed for the evening, his fair hair smooth and shining.

For a moment McCabe hung staring at him, his great head thrust forward, his face purple; then he stammered out:

"I can't—I can't! I promised. . . . But if you knew—my God, if only you knew!"—stared round, as though half-blinded, for his hat, snatched it up and plunged from the room.

Left alone, Hoyland threw another log on to the fire, sat down and thrust out his feet to the blaze. After all, it was pleasant enough; for it turned chilly so late at night, even towards the height of the so-called summer.

It was a good thing that he did not have to depend upon his profession. Sometimes it amused him to take up a case, but, anyhow, in a thing like this there was neither money nor fame. Supposing it did come to anything, and old McCabe was in it, there might be unpleasant revelations. No; it was best, far and away best, to keep clear of the whole affair. If the other man felt that he had failed in his friendship, it could not be helped; after all, one's first duty was towards oneself. If every one looked at life in that way, how little trouble there would be.

## CHAPTER VII

CLOSE upon a month later Charles Hoyland was calling upon his mother in a flat which she had taken in Savoy Court. The Montpellier Square incident had never so much as been mentioned between them, but he was not such a fool as to imagine it was closed. When his mother was silent upon any point it was there that she was most dangerous; and though, by some chance or other, he had heard of the making of a new will, that was all. He knew nothing of what was in it; she was a little too smiling, a little too urbane, and that was all.

Meanwhile he had a shrewd suspicion that she was relieved to be quit of the responsibility of a house. It was plain that she was anxious to have her entire mind free for larger affairs; though her interest in dress, her incessant care for her health and personal appearance never, for one moment, wavered. Like her son, she was one of those people one might well imagine as being rescued from a desert island, picked out of the sea, disinterred from an earthquake, with not so much as a hair out of place.

There were a good many people present upon that particular afternoon; and by no means all English. Hoyland

bowed to a little old gentleman whom he knew as a Serbian ex-minister, while a young man with rather prominent, bright onyx eyes, a pale face and shining black hair and mustache, glanced up at him for a moment as Mrs. Hoyland uttered his name, nodded, and plunged back into conversation with his hostess. There were some French people, friends of his own; a stupid husband, a fat daughter of fifteen, and a gay, smart wife to whom he devoted himself. A young English novelist, who was balancing himself—like those acrobats whom one may see climbing a ladder which rests against nothing—upon the rather precarious fame that had come to him with one peculiarly abusive book, was trying to make conversation with Rose, who presided at the tea-table. For though Maisie was still in Brussels, the elder daughter's short flight was over, and she was once more "in waiting."

In addition to these there were one or two other young men, inconspicuous save for their neatness; and a very upright, middle-aged woman, who looked as though she had been dropped there—she didn't know how or why—whom Hoyland put down as one of his mother's hotel friends; a somebody worth considering, it was evident, for every now and then Mrs. Hoyland made a palpable effort to snatch herself away from her other friends, to draw her into the conversation, with an ardor that did its best to make up for lost time. But the upright lady, with her very fine old rings, was not the sort of person to be easily amalgamated, drawn into anything; and at last the hostess beckoned to her son and introduced him. "Lady Felridge"—Hoyland knew the title—an earldom, stiff with age—then added: "I'm sure that you'll find much to agree about. My son is so ver-r-ri, ver-r-ri conservative," and plunged back into the Near East.

Presently an Englishman with an Italian wife joined the party, diffused themselves for a while round the tea-table, then drifting towards Mrs. Hoyland's special group, were drawn into it.

Lady Felridge raised her glass and gazed at them; she had the mild, long, obstinate face of an old hunter which knows the fences in its own particular lie of country. "Foreigners," she remarked, as some visitor to the Zoo might remark, "Kangaroos!" "Well, I can't say I ever take to them myself. I suppose it's bigoted; some people might call it bigoted, but my dear father was just the same."

"They're not like us, of course," said Hoyland, with one of his blandest and most enigmatical smiles.

"No; you're right there." Lady Felridge glanced at him with a sudden accession of interest. "How right! They're not like us, and never will be; that's the root of the whole trouble. Not that they can help it, poor things."

"A misfortune of birth—"

"Yes, yes"—for a moment she was doubtful, as if half suspecting, and yet not crediting, mockery.—"Though, of course, there are quite nice men among them—quite nice; and likely enough, women, too. Even my father used to say that. We had one really nice Swiss cook—almost like an Englishman. He never would have a Frenchman in the house—the French are so very immoral. It's dreadful to think—" As she raised her head, impressing her point with a nod, the voices of the little group at the further side of the room broke upon their ears; Mrs. Hoyland and her special friends all speaking French, and in no very subdued fashion.

With a gallant effort Lady Felridge gathered herself together as she rose, drew on her gloves—there is a curious line of demarcation between the women who take off their gloves to eat their toast and cakes, and those who do not; while the latter are generally the ones who can least afford such careless extravagance—"Of course, when I say French, I mean the real French—the people who live in Paris. The language, now—of course the books are too terrible, but really the language itself has nothing against it; rather pretty, I think, if only people wouldn't talk quite so loudly, and so very quickly. As to public morals—well, it's certain that with the present Government we can't afford to be censorious." She spoke with sudden decision, with swelling port, as though here, at least, she was upon sure ground. For though public immorality was very dreadful, there was no fear of any actual impropriety creeping into any discussion of it. "I know, my dear father, even in his days, used to say that England was not in the very least what it used to be."

"Going to the dogs, eh?"

"Dear me! Isn't that too curious? Those were, as a matter of fact, his very words. 'My dear'—I was young then, you know—'My dear, mark my words for it, England's going to the dogs.' But now—really I think I must be getting on." She hesitated, with a glance at the compact little



group in the corner, a trifle shy, very stiff: "Your mother is so surrounded by her friends—"

It was at this moment that Rose, so well-trained, so watchful, came to the rescue; perhaps rather glad to escape from young Mr. Fielden—even now only at the fourth chapter, and somewhere near the fifth year, of his life. For he practiced his memory, endeavored to see how far back he could really remember, in preparation for his next book, with the people upon whom it was scarcely worth while to waste his theories of moral philosophy.

Refusing to be buttonholed by either of the other young men—who would have liked to be seen about town with him—Hoyland joined his mother's group, set in a blue haze of cigarette-smoke.

The Italian lady sat silent; but the quick glances of her bright eyes from one speaker to another were even more stimulating than speech. She did not intrude her own opinions, she drew out the opinions of others. And though—in addition to French, German and Italian—she could speak Turkish and at least two of the Balkan languages, showed that keenness, that knowledge of foreign affairs which is only found among the very best of her race—and even then, for the most part among those brought up in diplomatic circles—she spoke but little. The young Russian attaché was in love with her; so, indeed, were a great number of men, for there was something like genius in her manner of listening to all they said. But this did not affect her; was their affair entirely; for both heart and intellect were entirely satisfied by her husband and the life he gave her.

It was her husband who was speaking when Hoyland joined the group. He had just relinquished a consulate post in Constantinople, and was on leave before taking up a fresh appointment in Monastir. He and his wife had counted upon several weeks in England; but now, after only three days, there was disquieting news, and they were to leave on the morrow. There was as yet no question of her not accompanying him, and the glance which she gave the young Russian attaché when he protested that it was really scarcely safe was eloquent with scorn.

"It seems to me that, having exhausted all the thrills of civilization, we're trying to imagine ourselves back in the Middle Ages; like children playing at brigands, eh?" smiled Hoyland, as he offered her his cigarette-case. "Reviving a

bogey of real physical danger, something that will jump out upon us. Don't you let yourself be put off doing anything you really want to do by alarmists like Monsieur Andreyevna, Mrs. Clauston. These diplomatic people have to do something to justify their existence, you know; and it makes them seem so clever if they can once get people to believe that everything's in a very serious state, and then say, 'Only look how well we've arranged it all. How bright we are!'"

"But, indeed, it is serious, Mr. Hoyland," protested Mrs. Clauston, looking a little puzzled; for she was not accustomed to men who said clever things for the mere sake of seeming clever. "Serious and dangerous. Not the sort of danger which means fear, but preparation; the danger of not fearing enough."

"But still danger," put in the young Russian excitedly. "And I declare—you must forgive me, Mrs. Clauston—most emphatically I declare that your husband has no right to allow you to go. I ought not to say anything—there is every sort of need to prevent a panic; but I do say—here where we are all friends I say it—it isn't safe for Mrs. Clauston, or for any other woman—certainly not safe."

"Still 'the bright eyes of danger' beckon, eh, Mrs. Clauston?" smiled Hoyland. She was so pretty, so very much of a cultivated woman of the world, that he could not imagine her doing anything save for the purpose of amusement, distraction.

"Will you think, just for a moment think, what a European war would mean?" went on Andreyevna, with a palpable effort to steady himself. "All the people in Central Europe—so crowded together—bursting out as the sea may burst its dams; pouring into Russia, terrorizing, not only terrorizing, but perverting our scattered peoples, until no man knows who is a friend and who is an enemy. . . . My God, there indeed will be a case of having sowed the wind and reaping the whirlwind! To refuse any right of individuality to a whole nation, any education, judgment, and then to look for patriotism, balance, restraint. . . . But it is not only of Russia that one must think. I think of it first because it is mine—mine. But there's Poland, that Niobe amid nations; and all the Balkan States. A breath of war and one would be at its neighbor's throat. There'd be no religion, no forces of law and order, capable of controlling people in such a war, with all its attendant horrors of disease

and famine. The only orderly peoples would be the well-fed. Talk of God!—God's forgotten when He fails to send bread at the moment it's expected, no matter whose fault it may be. You'll see the brute let loose, uppermost in every man, upon every side, as it must be in war—I know, for always with us Russians it is but just chained, never tamed. It's not only battle and sudden death that you have to look for—that's clean enough—but every sort of meanness and treachery—murder, rapine, the death of the soul. War, war!—my God! I wonder if you, any of you, ever think for a moment what it must mean, in these days. No single country safe, unless it be England, with her navy, her seas!"

He hesitated, pale and a little breathless; took out his handkerchief and brushed it across his forehead—forcing his glance to slide past Hoyland's mocking face with that sort of embarrassment that a man of another nation shows when he has given way to any display of feeling before an Englishman; then went on with a nervous little laugh: "No, no; you stick to England, Mrs. Clauston; hug her tight, stay where you are. As to your own country, your poor country and Germany— Good heavens! to think that one ever spoke of any save a misalliance there—what will she do? The lion and the lamb—the wolf, rather. She'll be in it, though—all the nations will be in it. To think of war and Europe now— Well, it won't even stop at Europe—one must think of something so gigantic that there is nothing left to measure it by: of death, and famine and pestilence, such as has never before been so much as dreamt of. For the huger, the more intricate the machinery, the sooner does it get out of order. And to take a woman out of England now—now! Above all, to the Balkans—the very eye of the vortex—it would be madness, madness! That's what I say!"

Clauston—a fair, squarely-built man, with a red, good-tempered face—glanced at him sideways and grinned. "Take! I'll leave it to you to stop her if you can, Andreyevna," he said; and then added, more gravely: "As a matter of fact, I quite agree with you; she's better out of it, just now, anyhow, until things have settled down a bit. But, there!—a willful woman, you know—"

"And whose way should you have excepting your own, eh, Mrs. Clauston?" put in Hoyland. "Well, if you have a taste for melodrama, the venture may prove interesting

enough. But that the trouble should spread in the way Monsieur Andreyevna fears—”

“It is not fear!” broke in the other man, hotly.

“No, no, of course not, in that way—in any personal way—say, rather, suspects—I simply refuse to believe it. Anyhow, where’s the use of letting oneself be put out of one’s way by other people’s quarrels—more particularly when you don’t know how far they are quarrels and how far cleverly-arranged spectacular gestures. With all due respect to you, Monsieur”—he turned to the Serbian ex-minister—“your Balkan people seem much like those sort of wives who are never happy without a grievance; while just now Austria-Hungary happens to fancy the part of the blundering, dictatorial husband.”

The little old man with the tired, and yet so eternally bright, eyes, glanced up at his hostess’s son with a tolerant smile. It was never any use wasting feeling upon people like this—above all, the passion of pity, love, patriotism, that kept his heart as young as his eyes.

“Because ‘wolf!’ has become a cry, it does not mean that there are no more wolves left in the world, young sir.”

“Pooh!” broke in Mrs. Hoyland, “don’t you trouble yourself about him, Monsieur. He is well-educated, but he has—a-h, what is it you call it?—tangoed his brains out of his toes—maps his world in boudoirs instead of boundaries.”

There was a little laugh at this. Hoyland himself was amused: it was plain that his mother was more irritated, more on edge, than he had thought.

Later on, as those events which led up to that decisive Fourth of August, Nineteen-fourteen, slid into place like the fragments of a picture-puzzle, Hoyland remembered the date of that particular afternoon—the Twenty-third of July: the day following that upon which the German Secretary of State had informed Sir Harry Rumbold that he refused to interfere between Serbia and Austria-Hungary, which he considered had shown great self-restraint in its attitude towards the smaller country.

The whole question left him untouched, for he had not sufficient imagination to precipitate his mind forward into what might happen if Serbia—that straw of destiny—were to refuse the offer which was never intended for acceptance.

It was all very well for his mother to be interested in such things, or to simulate interest for the sake of drawing to

her side the sort of people she really liked. But his mother—despite nearly thirty years spent almost completely out of Russia—was still a Russian to the backbone: while he himself was an Englishman. To his mind, Monsieur Poincaré's visit to St. Petersburg, the conversations which followed, had been the result of an effort to draw England, as well as France, into a quarrel which had nothing whatever to do with them. He was a clever enough man, but he over-rated his power to stand aside, remain unaffected; over-rated the power of the rest of the world—apart from Austria-Hungary and that wretched little Serbia—to go on disregarding a thing until it ceased to exist: in fact, he was one of those most hopeless of all men, where any larger interest was concerned, clever without vision.

Anyhow, the whole discussion was becoming tiresome; and as Mrs. Clauston—who could be so charming—seemed absorbed between European politics and her ugly husband, Hoyland turned towards the pretty Frenchwoman, who was sitting alone, looking a trifle bewildered, while her husband and fat young daughter talked to Rose at the tea-table.

The small room, with too many people in it, was very close; the atmosphere heavy with smoke and the scent of flowers—tall vases of white lilies, bowls of sweet-peas; and after every one had gone, Hoyland, who had promised to stay to dinner, accompany his mother and sister to the opera—reluctant, because he hated family-parties, acquiescent, because it looks well to be on good terms with one's own people—flung the windows wider, and moved into the little balcony.

"Charles"—it was Mrs. Hoyland, glancing through the evening paper before going up to dress, who spoke, carelessly enough, from the depths of an easy-chair just inside the drawing-room—"did you see this about your friend, Dr. McCabe?"

"No. What is it?"

"He's wanted in connection with the death of a girl—an actress—at least, it seems that she had been an actress—named—"

Hoyland shut his teeth, leant further over the rail of the little balcony, staring down into the courtyard below him. It is extraordinary what hours can seem to elapse between two words: his whole mind was bent upon the

effort to remember whether he had or had not mentioned Leila's name that day, in Montpellier Square. He was almost certain that he had not—there were people, however charming, whom one does not introduce to one's relations—and, after all, how could he be certain that it was Leila? Even upon that night when McCabe came to his rooms, though he had *felt* certain, he could not have *been* certain; it was a thing into which he did not care to pry too closely, even in his own mind. Where was the use of wasting one's energy in thinking of things which were, anyhow, over and done with?

“—Gavin,” went on Mrs. Hoyland, and she had not really paused—“Leila Gavin.”

“Well, and what in the world has old McCabe got to do with it?”

“Some people seem to be always mixing themselves up in scandals—and a doctor, too, who ought to be so careful. It appears that the girl died of heart-failure; there was another doctor's certificate to that effect. She was buried and all; then something came out—a servant, I suppose—and they got an order from the Home Secretary to dig her up again. How disgusting! As if it matters, when a person's once dead! Anyhow, they seem to think that there's been some sort of mal—mal— What do you call it? I've lost my place—it's all so long and involved—”

“Malpractice?”

“Yes; that's it. I suppose that it means that she was going to have a baby, and that Dr. McCabe tried to interfere—do something—how stupid of him, in his position!—those sort of things can always be arranged with a little tact, a check. Perhaps he couldn't afford it; though this will cost far more in the end,” she added shrewdly. “If he got the girl into trouble—”

“I don't suppose that part of it had anything to do with him—”

“My dear Charles, why in the world should he bother himself if it hadn't? Well, I must say, I'm surprised. I always thought that he was a very odd person; but with people of that sort, untidy—oh, *bourgeois*, no style or anything—one does at least look for respectability; it seems the very least. Like plain people, you know. I always expect plain people to be good—not so much men; some plain men are devils; but women.”

"I repeat I don't in the least suppose that McCabe had anything to do with the affair; in the way you imagine, anyhow." Hoyland had turned round, and was leaning with his back to the rail. His mother, who was rather short-sighted, held the paper in front of her face, so that he could not see it.

"I expect the girl badgered him out of his life, until he consented to help her. I will say this much for old McCabe"—for the moment it seemed as though he were pricked by something that was not conscience, more likely a long-dormant sense of fairness—for it was pretty evident that his mother suspected nothing—to the defense of his friend—"he's always getting himself mixed up in other people's troubles. We—you and I, my dear mother, belong to those wise people who take care to get hold of the ha'pence; while McCabe simply runs forward to meet the kicks. I'm pretty well sure that he is perfectly innocent of what, after all, no one condemns very seriously; has just let himself into this far more serious, fatal trouble, for the sake of helping some . . ." "Silly little fool," he was going to say, but caught himself up as a momentary feeling of shame, and even more of chill came over him, as though an ice-cold hand were laid upon his sleeve.

The sensation was so distinct, that he glanced down at his right arm, bent a little back as his hand clasped the rail behind him: Leila used to lay her hand upon his sleeve like that when she was a little nervous, a little horrified by his lack of humanity. . . .

"Oh, C. H.!"

Hoyland gave a start, and the sweat pricked out upon his forehead. It was over in a moment, for no one could have spoken, unless it were his mother; and no one ever called him C. H., excepting Leila, who was always a trifle shy with his Christian name.

He was an ass to be standing on that balcony: heights had always given him an odd, sickish feeling. He moved to the window and with a sort of defiance picked up his sentence; said what *something* or other had seemed to wish that he might—for his own credit—leave unsaid: "Some silly little fool of a girl who had got herself into trouble."

"But, really, Charles, you must see, it doesn't matter what he did, or what he didn't do. Why, even if she really did die of heart-failure . . . it comes to just the same thing.

Doctors and clergymen simply can't afford to get themselves talked about. It's just the other way with actors, now. Really, it's too stupid—and provoking! I'd always thought that if only Dr. McCabe would settle down, specialize in something or other, get a really good practice together, he might have done so well—he was just the sort of man—not too particular about appearance, and that sort of thing—for. . . . Who's that?" she broke off sharply, as a light chair crashed to the floor in the next room; then, as her elder daughter appeared in the aperture, as though in answer to her unspoken name, she began again, complainingly: "Rose! why in the world will you persist in creeping about like that? Haven't I told you again and again? Besides, why aren't you dressing?"

"I was waiting until you came up, to do your hair first." The girl's face was flushed; she gave a quick, embarrassed and yet half-defiant glance from her brother, who was at the open window lighting a cigarette, to her mother. "She knows," thought Hoyland, and remembered how, one far-away holiday—when he was still at Oxford, and Rose a girl of between fourteen and fifteen—they had all teased her over her *gauche* devotion to McCabe.

Later on that evening, finding himself alone with her between the acts of the play, he tried to draw her. But though she was easily taken unawares, she was completely secretive once her suspicions were aroused; and, realizing the uselessness of any further effort, Hoyland gave it up, and began to question her as to the contents of her mother's fresh will, the progression of the affair with Versilov. Regarding the will, she knew as little as himself, though she scared him by one remark: "I think there's pretty little to be left to any one." In respect to the other matter, she was at least sure of one thing.

"She's not given it up; she's always thinking of it, has it set straight in front of her. That's why she took this expensive flat. Her people are all so childish—they go by appearances. She always says no one ever gets anything out of a man by seeming to be badly off. Once I knew she was going to borrow money from some one, and suggested that if she went in her oldest clothes—she has nothing shabby, her things never get shabby like mine—he'd see more how much she needed it. And she said that if she went looking very smart, he'd realize how much it must take to



keep her nice. As to Prince Versilov—you know what she is when she makes up her mind to anything: money simply doesn't count. And she's made up her mind this time; is spending all she has on the chance of it. She's even given up cards, and, well, that shows, for she could never live without some sort of a gamble."

"Marriage?"

"I think so—oh, I'm sure. And I must say, I would be glad if she'd only settle down. I think, you know, Charles, that even she is getting tired of being on the go, afraid of growing old and having no proper place in the world. I'm sure it's that, for nowadays she can't bear any one so much as to mention the question of age." Rose was almost garrulous with the rare joy of finding some one who really listened, was interested in what she said: more particularly as that audience was her usually aloof and scornful brother.

"She nearly killed a dressmaker who remarked something about a dress being 'suitable.' Then, another time, she didn't like a hat—was in a rage with the milliner, and said, 'Why, it makes me look fifty!' She was looking in the glass, and I saw her draw herself together suddenly, as one does with a pain, and grow quite white; and Madame Camille's face over her shoulder, with a little, sneering smile upon it—for, of course, she must be fifty, if not more. She forgets, really forgets—then remembers all of a sudden, and, of course, it's dreadful for her. I believe that's what's at the bottom of her thinking of marrying again; and I think she'd like a Russian, because she would not so much mind growing old in front of a man of her own race. Of course, I can't bear Russians, but . . ."

"Well, when it comes to that, you're half a Russian yourself."

"Oh, but I'm not—not really—not in the least! That's why she despises me so; that, and because I'm not pretty. But I notice far more than she thinks," added Rose, with the rather pathetic vanity of a plain, slow person, who yet finds something upon which to pride herself. "Now, if there's a war, of course, he won't come to England. Anyhow, even if Russia took no part, he wouldn't come. He'd be frightened of being so far away; he has a great idea of his own importance—I think that's why Mamma likes him—it makes her feel grand, always talking of 'my Czar,' 'my

Sovereign.' Then, of course, all her own money's in Russia. It would be very uncomfortable if anything happened to that."

"It would be," answered Hoyland grimly, "as you express it, Rose, with your usual admirable choice words, 'uncomfortable'—damnably uncomfortable."

He had another sneer at poor Rose's expression, as he walked home to his rooms that night: "uncomfortable!" When he thought how he had plunged upon the prospect of his mother's fortune, of the creditors which any near prospect of a *débâcle* in Russia would bring about his ears! "Uncomfortable!" One might as well talk to a man with a furious swarm of bees about his head of discomfort—inconvenience.

## CHAPTER VIII

IN the end all that stir of half-hysterical surmise over what promised to be a sensational case, beaten up with the first evening paper, like a wind at twilight; all the inquiries and conjectures which had threatened to cast little Leila Gavin for a part of greater publicity in death than any she had ever achieved in life, came to nothing, and what remained of her was allowed to rest in peace.

After all, the evidence of any incorrect treatment rested almost entirely upon the tearful assertions of a maid, who corrected one moment what she had said the last, joined to some spiteful word dropped by the jilted sweetheart of the local chemist's assistant, a lad of twenty-two. In contradiction to this, the doctor who gave the death certificate was very sure of himself—he was young, had just spent all his money upon a new practice, and could not afford, having once allowed the matter to pass, to be anything else; while the landlady was ready for any sort of lie which would prevent her house being mixed up in "talk or any such disagreeableness."

Still, McCabe—of whom people were now remembering everything good which they had ever heard, particularly in connection with his work upon anti-toxins—was wanted. But not in connection with Leila Gavin's death; if only the authorities had known where to put their hand upon him, they would have very quickly reassured him upon that point. For there were certain things which McCabe knew more

certainly than any man alive, and a time had come when even doctors could, almost as much as actors, afford to disregard scandal; for they were wanted, even the least of them—terribly wanted. For years and years science had been at work with every sort of contrivance for maiming men out of all likeness to humanity—and now it was calling upon its members to at least run equal with other contrivances for patching them up again. Children who pull their toys to pieces for the fun of trying to put them together again—all odd and crooked, with the machinery not working at all as it used to do—scratched, battered, broken, with, often enough, several of the most important pieces missing—are whipped, or ought to be whipped. But the human race cannot, in its entirety, be turned up and smacked—and it is a pity that it cannot: nor can it be rendered less fractious and unreasonable by one all-powerful dose of Gregory powder—unless war, with its appalling colic, is the purge which God Himself happens to have chosen.

And thus, one set of experts being engrossed in the device of implements by which poor humanity may be torn out of all shape and semblance to itself; another set, of that sort to which Philip McCabe belonged, were needed to put it together again as best they might. Little wonder, therefore—as it is an ill wind which blows nobody any good—that the world, in the throes of that tremendous catastrophe to which Andreyevna had lent that sense of prophecy not uncommon with an ultra-sensitive nature, was in far too busy and important a state of mind to busy itself with one ex-chorus girl, and McCabe would have been more than useful. But he was not to be found. Hoyland had no idea where he was, and troubled less than any one.

The war was a nuisance: a menace to that sort of civilization which means more than life itself to a man of his caliber. But still, as he maintained, and with some reason, that was no reason for any one to go about looking as though the whole fate of the world depended upon him or her alone. The very young men in uniform, the voluntary nurses, plastered over with red crosses, the drivers of motor-cars and cycles: every little grocer swelling to the size of a Lord Mayor: even the meager grub who cut his hair in an upper room in Sackville Street—cheeky when he swore at him:—

“You mustn’t forget that there is a war on, sir.” A

preposterous little man, like a globe-fish, who sported the badge of a special constable in his buttonhole!

It was all like a draught down one's back; one could never get away from it. He hated the noise, the pushing in the streets; the drunkenness of those first few months; hated that sort of rudeness which came later on, as the difficulties of life increased: the ugliness of everything; the poorly-lighted streets; the sense of chill and depression. The whole of life seemed to have taken upon itself a sort of five-o'clock-in-the-morning, after-a-dance aspect. All feeling he characterized as hysteria; patriotism as Jingoism. He realized nothing whatever of the infinite amount of silent self-sacrifice which went on, of the force which was really "England," and which, to tell the truth, very few people ever did realize, even when it was working within them—perhaps these least of all. But the difference between such men and women and Charles Hoyland was that they found something to which to put their hands, kept on doing it, however blindly or inefficiently; and thus, in spite of the most appalling mistakes and misunderstandings, the country held together, and things did get done, somehow or other.

But Hoyland did nothing. He did not even, as so many agitators and pacifists, act as an irritant: he did not approve or disapprove; all he wished was not to be bored or made uncomfortable.

The daily papers were at this time his one unfailing source of amusement, with their petty vaunting of what did not in the least matter; their incessant fault-finding, which never by any chance suggested any workable alternate scheme. And, indeed, they were more like a mad dream than anything else—showing all the irrational inconsequence, the complete lack of perspective, common to dreams—with their ridiculous illustrations of ridiculous fashions sandwiched in between the casualty-lists—because they paid—their long notices of new plays, petty scandals.

Any serious-minded student of a hundred years hence, perusing the papers that appeared during those first years of the Great War—which has ceased even now to smell of blood, and become a sort of phrase—will experience a strangely hit-on-the-head feeling when he realizes how large a part of what is, at least, our most bulky, loudest-crowning cock on its own dunghill daily was devoted to the exposition of the new full skirts, running into an almost incredible

quantity of those materials which—or so the people were told, in the very same papers—would each month become more scarce.

But what Hoyland and his kind failed to realize was that all this did not matter in the very least. That the business of war went on just the same, whether women wore ballet-skirts in the streets, and little flat curls over either ear, or whether they didn't; whether or not young men of the pacifist policy talked about the sacred rights of the individual; whether or not old men prosed on in their clubs, swelling with a vicarious sacrifice: nothing mattered, nothing! In some amazing way the thing was going on to its own appointed end; and what that end might be nothing which was happening at the time appeared to give even the very faintest indication; while deep, deep down in the heart of every thinking man and woman was the feeling that, though they must still, every one of them, strive on they were yet, in some strange fashion, standing apart, utterly helpless—whatever they might give, whatever they might do—waiting to see if evil—brutal, aggressive, puffed-up evil—would be allowed to conquer the world; almost certain that it would not; knowing that if it did there would be the end of everything—faith, love, beauty, self-sacrifice.

Hoyland did not think like this, feel like this: he deplored the wanton destruction of works of art, the trampling-down of what he—with many others—had regarded as his special playground—the Continent. Later on, when Venice was in danger, he was angry and disgusted: it was time the thing was put an end to: why the devil didn't somebody do something?

He had been accustomed to have everything done for him all his life; and he expected to have everything done for him now, in this question of the war: he had never had any responsibilities, and he did not intend to assume them: he had no stake in the country. England, for him, was represented by London; and Paris, Vienna, Berlin, would serve him just as well—in most ways better.

As to the war, he had not started it. He quoted Diogenes and his flier at the busy-ness of the people of Corinth, when Philip was known to be marching upon the town; told how he went rolling his tub up and down the Craneum, explaining to any acquaintance who inquired why he did so: "I

do not want to be thought the only idler in such a busy multitude: I am rolling my own tub to be like the rest."

Hoyland was a more than fair classical scholar: he loved a good quotation almost as much as he loved a sneer. He did not stop to consider that, after all, Diogenes did nothing whatever to defend his fellows, or to wonder how the Corinthians took this funniness of the philosopher at such a time: getting into every one's way with his tub.

Oh, but it all sounded well; it sounded so well. He was so sure of himself, so well-bred and secure that he led a little flock of his own. When young men forsook his following, they did so with a sort of shame; creeping away as quietly as possible, deadly afraid of seeming too much in earnest about this war, for which so many fine young men gave their lives, and which Hoyland—just Hoyland, a man-about-town, a trifle worn by vice, tending to a slight, very slight, overplus of flesh, otherwise very fit, for he had never allowed his excesses to interfere with his health—he was almost as careful as his mother about that—a man who had never really loved, never really grieved, never, never, above all, never given himself away—had a trick of making appear as something petty and just a trifle ridiculous.

Some, as I say, crept away and joined up: at first wondering, rather shamefacedly, what Hoyland and their old set would say to see them in khaki; and then not caring a twopenny damn what any one said or thought.

And so that special set grew for a while gradually smaller; then remained stationary, having got down to a residue which nothing, apart from compulsion, could ever hope to touch.

The residue did not completely please Hoyland: there were plenty of people left to dance and play bridge with, to dabble in all sorts of so-called spiritualistic inanities, or grotesque growths of art and literature. But the best of the men, his own contemporaries, Oxford acquaintances—barristers, young politicians, even those intellectual triflers like himself—were gone: if they were not out of the country, they were for ever engrossed in something or other to do with the war. Those who were left were no longer Hoyland's equals: they did not admire him because of his brains, but because he had the reputation of being one of the fastest, the most quietly unscrupulous man about town.

Hoyland grew sick of them; he grew sick of the women who went about with him: he had always been fastidious in this respect, and though he sneered at the busy women, he could not fail to see how rapidly the idle ones were deteriorating. It seemed as though every one must be touched to some finer or baser end. It is certain that those who definitely set themselves—at such a time—to assuage their own thirst after attention, notoriety, by any sort of maneuver which offered itself rapidly deteriorated; while such things went on in London at this time that if God failed to send down fire from Heaven it was only because He had grown so much older since the days of the prophets, less perturbed and angered by the monkey-tricks of those whom He was once supposed to have made in His own image; realizing the fact that such people find their end in themselves.

What perturbed Hoyland more than anything else, perhaps, was the slow-growing discovery that all sorts of things and people which used to amuse him had ceased to do so. He had never before been in England for so long at a time, and it irked him beyond words.

Once, when he was a tiny boy, and his father and mother had wished to be rid of him for a time, he had been sent to board at a little farm in a place called Sotteville-sur-Mer, not very far from Dieppe.

How he had hated that farm! It was a mile or more from the village; and about the same distance from the sea, the sands, with their steep, yellow cliffs; while all around it were nothing but absolutely flat fields.

Of those fields, lying between the farmhouse and three cottages which stood apart from the village, and at the further side of it, a strange tale was told.

A man started to walk across them one day, with two or three of his fellows, all going to their work at the farm. The cottages, with their narrow strip of garden, edged the fields: there were no hedges or ditches, no quarry, no pond or stream, no group of trees, no bush: the fields were bare plow, save for one large square, still gleaming pale yellow with stubble, which they were going to plow that day. At least, The Man Who Disappeared was going to plow it: he had started the afternoon before, and cut a narrow strip along one side, left his plow sticking in the thick clayey soil.

“The Man Who Disappeared”—that was how little Charles

Hoyland always heard him spoken of, as though the words formed the well-known name of one man. For this was, literally, what did happen. The man who set out from his home at seven o'clock that late October morning, to finish the plowing of that field, vanished—dropped out of sight, for ever and a day—disappeared, absolutely and entirely.

One-third of the way across the fields from his house—flat as the sole of your foot, remember—he fancied that he had left his tobacco-box behind, and started off back for it; leaving the knotted red-and-white handkerchief which held his *déjeuner* in charge of his companion, so that he might run the faster with both hands free.

The other men walked on. But, after a very few minutes, three at the most, some said not more than two—the workmen used to argue over it in the farmhouse kitchen, though it had happened when their fathers and mothers were still young—the man who carried the bundle, holding it carelessly by the knot, so that it swung against his leg, became aware that there was something hard in it, discovered the missing box, and, turning about so that he might shout to his fellow, found, to his surprise, that he was already out of sight, must be in the house searching for his missing property, likely enough scolding his wife because he could not find it.

His comrades remarked that he must have run like a hare to have reached home so quickly—for, mind you, there was nowhere else that he could be.

When they arrived at the farm they looked round once more, but still there was no sign of him, and they had their bucolic joke over the fact that he was as slow in returning as he had been almost magically quick in going.

During the whole of that day he failed to put in an appearance at the farm, and the plow remained stuck where he had left it the night before; while the farmer, cursing, was yet too busy to waste any one's time in sending to make inquiries.

When the other men who lived in the same row got home that night, their first thought was to go to the middle house and ask after their comrade, more than half afraid, by now, that he must have been taken ill.

The good wife was getting the supper ready for her husband; the children were playing by the fire: they had been out in the strip of garden all the morning, for it was holiday-time. If their father had come home they must



have seen him. And even if they failed, the children of the neighbors at either side, or the old grandfather digging in the garden, must have seen him.

But he had not come home: he had not been to the village, or to any of the villages round. It was a mile, more, across the flat, open fields to the sea, and even then the only way of reaching the beach was by a steep ladder which ran down the side of the cliff. But an old woman sat there from dawn to dark, extracting toll from all who wished to pass up or down, and must have seen him had he gone that way.

But nobody had seen him—nobody ever saw him again. For a year or so he was spoken of by his name; then he became definitely remembered as The Man Who Disappeared.

Even at the age of seven Hoyland had very little imagination. But certain things frightened him. That flat, open stretch of fields would have affected him disagreeably, even without the sinister story which was sufficient to prevent even the hardest youngsters of Sotteville-sur-Mer from attempting any short cut across them. They were all alike pasture-land by then, because for so many years no one could be found to plow them up, and the grass had grown by itself, with the old plow still embedded somewhere in the depths of it. The cows were not tethered there as they were in other places, but let loose because when the shades of evening began to fall, it was certainly more pleasant to call them from afar than to go and untie them, stooping, fumbling after knots, and never knowing what might happen.

Once, out of sheer bravado, little Charles Hoyland elected to walk alone across those fields from the farm to the cottages.

He never quite forgot his sensation. The sky was brilliantly blue, almost without a cloud; pretty well as blue upon the horizon as it was overhead.

If Charles Hoyland had been a little taller he might have seen the sea, the village. But, as it was, he saw nothing but the grass, much longer than he liked, and, at an immense distance from each other, the three cottages and the farm buildings.

The sky was so shining and smooth that it seemed perfectly horrible to him, fitting tight down all round the edges of his world. He could not but think of the farmer's wife cutting out oatcakes with the top of a cup, for it was precisely like this that the sky cut off that disk of green.

It might have been then that his hatred of open spaces,

of undecorated nature, pushed out its first definite root.

"I hate the country," he had said when he joined his parents in Paris. "I don't want ever to go into the country again—I could smack its stupid old face for it." "Full of its own stupid secrets," he added later to one of his own special friends, a beautiful young lady of five-and-twenty or so, for he never had any great taste for other children.

That blue basin of sky was further imprinted upon his mind when he was at Sotteville-sur-Mer by the way in which one of the farm-boys used to trap the rats: putting down some scraps of food upon the granary floor and tilting up one of the big corn-measures above them with the help of two little light strips of wood placed V-wise, so that the slightest touch would send it over.

Of course the crowning difficulty of this trick lay in getting the rats out of the trap without letting them escape; and Hoyland, mounted upon a ladder, so that they might not run up his legs, used to watch this proceeding with the greatest interest. But the farm-boy, so slow in most ways, was quick in everything which had to do with animals, and though he was often bitten he seldom lost his prey.

It was borne in upon Hoyland one day that the corn-measure was to the rats what the sky was to him, the farm-boy taking the place of that mysterious something—some of the people openly said "le bon Dieu," visualizing a hand swooping down and snatching—which had dealt so summarily with The Man Who Disappeared.

This thought, however, did nothing towards making little Charles Hoyland hope that the rats might escape; aroused in him no sense of sympathy for other creatures so trapped: on the contrary, the interest he had always felt in the proceeding was converted to a sort of cold pleasure, triumph. It was good to see anything suffer as he had feared that he might suffer.

## CHAPTER IX

TOWARDS the end of the second year of the war he began to feel a little as he had felt in those far-away days; as the rats might have felt—shut in and hemmed round.

His mother and elder sister were still in London, in a much less pretentious flat in South Kensington, for there was now no possible chance of Prince Versilov getting over

to England. This did not mean that Mrs. Hoyland gave up all idea of a second marriage—only that she had felt obliged to lower her expectations. The prospect of marriage with an English business or retired army man was dull in the extreme—she knew herself too well to even think of a country squire—and insensibly the realization gave her an air of shrinking, ageing; particularly when she was alone with her family and there was no need to keep up appearances. For middle-age with a woman of her type begins when all adventurous possibilities are at an end; as to old age, that does not matter—nothing matters after this.

Maisie had been sent to school at Brighton; not a very first-class school, but that could not be helped. It was necessary to keep up appearances in other ways, and as no outsider ever went to visit a girl during her term time, there was no sense in wasting money in that direction.

“What does it matter if it is a little plain, *bourgeois*?” remarked Mrs. Hoyland. “Nothing is ever likely to make Maisie lower her standards, her ideas of what is due to her. If I had sent Rose to a school of that sort, she would have been wearing cotton gloves by choice in a month, forgotten how to go in and out of a room, receive, be received. In less than two years now Maisie will have left school. I shall want all the money I can spare for her *début*; it’s no good wasting it upon the sort of education they give to girls at these English schools. La! such misses, all teeth and stomach! Maisie will marry very soon—I shall have no trouble with her: but it’s just as well she should be kept out of sight for a while. It doesn’t do for people to grow accustomed to the sight of a girl at all ages. During the holidays she can go to the sea with Rose: somewhere in Devon or Cornwall, where it is cheap.”

Maisie at her bourgeois school, at her remote holiday-haunts, with sea-bathing and country walks, grew in beauty; even her brother could not fail to be struck by her appearance, her grace and charm, when she came up to London for those winter holidays. Carefully handled, she was going to be a distinct family asset, this younger sister of his. She was very sure of herself. Given her head for just one week, as a sort of trial trip, she was surrounded by young men.

Mrs. Hoyland was very careful with her—as careful as an Englishman with a valuable horse. If she sent her out alone with Rose, she gave the elder girl all sorts of instruc-

tions: to look every way at the crossings, not to allow her out of her sight for a moment, only to take her to ladies' shops, such as Marshall & Snelgrove's, for tea. Nothing was so stupid as to allow young girls to be seen about alone in restaurants and places of that sort.

"And yet Mamma left me anywhere, like a parcel," said Rose; "used me as a sort of messenger-boy, sent me down to Hurlingham alone one day, to give a note to some man or other; kept me waiting in the lounges of pretty well every hotel in Europe. Just because she thought that nobody would notice me, because I was plain. I wonder how plain a girl has to be before men stop staring, being horrid. That's what I'd like to know!"

She had come in very tired one evening about six o'clock, after a long day racing here, there and everywhere with her young sister; alone, because they had been at a private view together and Maisie had refused to come home when she told her, reminded her that they must be back early as she had to write some notes for her mother, help her to dress for the theater, see that the rather incompetent parlormaid set the table properly, as they were expecting guests for dinner.

In general, Rose was so patient, so long-suffering, that Maisie had gone on talking to some particular friend of her own; had never, even for a moment, thought of taking her at her word when she declared that if she did not come at once she would go home without her; while Heaven only knows what it was that overcame Rose, so that she turned away and left her—though it is to be supposed that even plain people have feelings which at times get the better of them, like every one else. The mischief lay in the fact that Rose's feelings had been so long disregarded, she had kept them so completely to herself, that there was a universal sense of rage at the thought of her even daring to possess such things.

She came up into the drawing-room, where Hoyland was sitting alone by the fire, and flung her parcels on to the nearest table, knocked over a vase of violets and, picking them up, tossed them into the fire—in place of dropping upon her knees, to mop up the water, as she should have done.

"I didn't get Mamma her new book; they kept me waiting so long, I was sick and tired of that stupid, stuffy library. Have you seen her? I forgot to take her brooch to be mended,

and she wanted it particularly for to-night—Well, she'll have to go without it, that's all. Why should some people have everything, and other people nothing? I declare I'm run off my feet." She was loosening the fur at her neck, dragging off her gloves, as she spoke: never before had her brother seen so much color, animation in her face.

"She might be really—not pretty, but handsome, if only one could keep her alive," he thought.

"As for that Maisie—" Suddenly she began to laugh, almost hysterically; and at that moment Mrs. Hoyland opened the door and came in. She always moved very quietly, almost noiselessly; and yet no one could fail to realize when she entered a room—somehow or other, people seemed to straighten themselves, become conscious of all small defects, in appearance, pose—and Rose, who was facing the fire, turned round, stood with her shoulders a little raised.

Mrs. Hoyland moved well; even in a small room this was noticeable. It seemed as though the center of her gravity was different from that of most women, as though her whole body moved from, was in concord with, her trimly-rounded waist. She was dressed in black, as always, with a string of pearls, the gleam of a small diamond brooch, at her throat; her hair smoothly waved, her face—which had grown a little leaden during the last few months—perfectly impassive. In herself she was swayed by nerves, greed, restless ambition, an overweening vanity; but though she showed these emotions in her acts, her speech, her whole physical person still hung smoothly, as though upon some unseen and upright axle.

"By Jove," thought Hoyland, "I don't wonder that Rose is afraid of her!" He glanced at his sister. Yes, it was evident enough that Rose was afraid: she had turned half-sideways, was gathering her parcels from off the table where she had placed them. With his cruel acuteness Hoyland smiled to see the way in which she endeavored to sweep away some of the water from the overturned vase with her fur boa; to rub what had fallen into the floor with her foot. What fools women like Rose were! She was so necessary to her mother that if she had chosen to assert herself she might have stood equal with her. Only to think of the things which she could have told, the rod she might have held in pickle, had she but possessed the sense!

"I must take the caviare to cook; an' there are the little dark olives you like—"

"Why are you here? Where's Maisie?" Mrs. Hoyland stared, sweeping aside her daughter's words as she had a trick of doing.

"I don't know." Rose's face set into sullenness, grew white; she stood awkwardly holding her parcels gathered up to her.

"You don't know!"

"No—I suppose she'll be back soon—she wouldn't come. I had heaps of things to do at home."

"You don't appear to be very busy. . . . Where is your sister now?"

"I don't know—I told you I don't know! I left her at the Leicester Gallery."

"You—left—her—at the Leicester Gallery!"

"She wouldn't come when I told her. I thought I'd be late—I—"

"And you dare—you have the audacity—to come back here and tell me. You!—when I gave your little sister particularly into your charge—when I told you never to let her out of your sight! You—you—to tell me that you left her in the Leicester Gallery—left her—the Leicester Gallery, of all places!"

"I went about all over the place at her age, was left anywhere. Nobody troubled . . . nothing happened!"

Mrs. Hoyland gave a short laugh; that and her stare, up and down, over her elder daughter, as though she were an utter stranger—some creature apart—was more cruel than any words; and, yet, even this did not content her; she must follow it up with words, chastising with scorpions. Rose had been unceasingly useful to her; but for all that she was ashamed of having such a daughter—so dull, so commonplace. Rose represented the one undertaking in which she did not feel that she had succeeded; and for this she could never forgive her. She felt as a woman might with an illegitimate child, that here was a continual slur upon her.

"Nothing happened! Do you imagine that I need to be told that? Do you imagine that I didn't very well know what I was doing when I allowed you to go about alone. You, you!—*mon Dieu!*—you—you who'd be safe in Leicester Square at midnight—so long as the lamps were lit, so long as men have eyes in their heads." All the secret coarse-

ness and brutality of the woman was evident in the way in which her eyes raked her daughter, in her angry laugh—the only wonder was that she did not stand with both hands upon her hips. “Safe! Safe as the Bishop of London himself—or any other old woman!”

This was too much, even for Rose. She was accustomed to her mother’s outbreaks of fury; but this! Is there any more intolerable insult to be offered to any girl than taking it for granted that she can prove no possible source of temptation or attraction? Thus it is that women who are unused to admiration will boast of, while seeming to deplore, the rare fact that they have been followed, stared at, in the streets.

“You say that—you say it because you don’t know—Because you find me so repulsive, it doesn’t mean that everybody—everybody— Things have happened to me—people have—” She broke off, choked with tears.

For a moment or so Mrs. Hoyland’s glance persisted: then she turned aside. “You’re a fool, Rose!” she said—“that’s what you are—a fool! Next time you and your sister are in a room with a large mirror, look at yourself by her side, and perhaps even you will acknowledge that I have some reason for what I do. And now—”

For the first time since she had entered the room, she appeared to notice her son.

“Look at that fire, Charles. I suppose you’d sit there and let it go out! Can no one do anything, unless I’m here to tell them? The next thing will be that I shall have to put the food into the mouths of my family, as well as provide it—pandering to their extravagance—selfishness. Do you expect me to make up the fire myself, may I ask?”

“By no means.” Without moving, Hoyland stretched out one hand and touched the bell. He did not intend to exert himself—dirty his fingers by putting coal on the fire any more than his mother would have done. Rose was the only person in that house who ever even thought of such a thing.

She dropped on her knees now. “I’ll do it; let me do it. Smart’s busy setting the table.” She began picking out scraps of coal from the scuttle with tongs which were too large for the purpose and kept crossing each other; glanced sideways at her mother, realized her impatience, and started afresh with the shovel, making an almost unbearable noise over it.

"It strikes me that you have the mind of a servant without the dexterity. Be good enough to stop that clatter and listen to me. Did you come straight home?"

"Yes—no—not exactly. I took a 'bus to the High Street, then went to Mudie's to ask about the book you wanted—and after that for the caviare and stuff at Barker's."

"Then you did not come straight home, and Maisie may—"

"I can take a taxi, if you like—go back—"

"Wasting money for nothing; likely enough passing her on the way."

"Well, if she is on the way home, it's—"

"Who said that she was on the way home? How do you know where she is?—what's happened to her? You never read the paper, you know nothing of what goes on in the world. But this is the end! Enough of your stupidity. You'll have to find something to do—I'm tired of feeding, dressing such a dolt—though Heaven only knows what! Not even fit to be trusted as a nursery governess. A companion—that's all you're any use for! An old lady's paid companion—to do the flowers—take out the lap-dog—to—"

Rose made a sudden clumsy movement—she dropped one of her parcels, but she did not seem to heed it—her face was crimson. "She is ugly—like a great calf!" thought her brother, and drew aside his foot as she stumbled over it, making blindly for the door.

"What else—" began Mrs. Hoyland again, then broke off as—of a sudden—Rose swung round, interrupted her, shouted—Rose of the subdued and doubtful voice!—

"What else? Yes, what else? What else have I ever been? A companion!—not even paid, unpaid! A companion—" She paused a moment, then launched it: "A companion to a silly—vain—empty-headed—old woman!"

"Hulloa!" It was Maisie; but Rose pushed past without even pausing to glance at her; went on out of the door, with her head thrust forward, blind with tears, hot with a strange, almost exhilarating sense of rage. What did it matter to her if Maisie had come back, or if she never came back?

But her mood had already changed; she was trembling from head to foot, by the time she reached her room. The pot of caviare was on the drawing-room floor—what would the cook be doing without it? She had meant to rearrange



the flowers upon the dinner-table; and how could she ever do her mother's hair with hands that trembled so? All her fine fury was past; she was netted in again by the thousand and one trivial duties of which her life was composed—laboriously fitted together like a patchwork quilt, made up of all the little odds and ends that no one else could be bothered with; nothing worth considering in itself, no single piece that you could really do anything with.

"That Rose!" exclaimed Maisie. "Butting into one like an old ram!"

"What are you doing here?"

"Darling, where else should I be?" Maisie smiled at her mother ingratiatingly. In her neat blue serge coat and skirt, white fox boa and muff, and little plain black velvet hat, with her carmine cheeks and dancing eyes, she was a sight to make the old young.

"Why didn't you come home with Rose?"

"She went off alone, in a huff. Oh, she kept bothering; it wasn't Rose's fault. I suppose there's been a shindy; but you know the way Rose goes on, just when one's enjoying oneself for once, about all sorts of silly little things which don't in the least matter. Anyhow, Bobbie Darrell brought me home in his car; and here I am—and I won't—I won't, have you cross." She slipped her arm through her mother's, rubbed her face against hers. She could not always manage her like this, but when Rose was in disgrace, particularly now, during the brief Christmas holidays, she was pretty well sure of her ground. Over her mother's shoulder she shut one eye, winked delicately at her brother, her long dark lashes just sweeping her cheek.

## CHAPTER X

IN the spring of nineteen-fourteen, when McCabe dropped out of sight, Charles was rather relieved than otherwise. It would have been a pity for the poor old ass to have got into any trouble—that's what he would have said. But, as a matter of fact, it was for himself alone that he feared. There was that confounded maid of Leila's; if she came into the affair, as she was bound to do, seeing that the greater part of the evidence depended upon her alone, she would be sure to get her knife into him; a nuisance, when all his life he had taken

such care to keep clear of any unpleasant publicity, had always "run straight," as he said; which meant that there had been no witness to his doublings. For to him nothing in the world mattered, apart from being found out; he and his mother held together upon this point, it was their one law and gospel.

But, later on, when there was no longer any fear of unpleasant consequences in connection with Leila Gavin's death, Hoyland was glad to hear news of his friend; news that should, indeed, have made any man proud of such a friendship.

It was latish in nineteen-sixteen that it began to come—filtering meagerly enough through the papers—telling of a certain Doctor McCabe, attached to nothing in particular—unless it were the needs of humanity—who had worked like twenty men during the evacuation of Bucharest, the retreat into Moldavia.

Then, as more invalided men came out of hospital; began to pick up again—with a strange lassitude, or still stranger avidity—the threads of London life, Hoyland came to hear more of McCabe; the tale of his doings working gradually backwards, until it reached August of nineteen-fourteen, not much more than a couple of months after his disappearance; when he was already at odds with the flood-tide of suffering in Serbia.

It was little more than a word here and a word there; for it was plain that men who had seen him at work felt strongly on the subject, and where Englishmen really feel, they say little.

"He's just one o' those sorter chaps that don't bear talkin' about," declared a haggard veteran of twenty or so; one of those sadly shattered boys—with young faces criss-crossed over by innumerable, finely-penciled lines, giving the lie to their persistent gayety—who were beginning to be seen about almost everywhere by this time.

One way and another it became clear that while the English medical authorities were growing to feel that they might let bygones be bygones and make some use of Philip McCabe, he was already known to thousands of war-racked, disease-ravaged, half-starved men—aye, and women too; though not the sort of women who were at all likely to hinder him in the old way; women whose one idea was to bear sons, and more and yet more sons, to feed the altar-fires of their fierce patriotism.

It seems that at the beginning—with the exception of that devoted rag-and-bobtail element which he never failed to attract to himself—McCabe formed a complete surgical, medical, nursing and commissariat unit in his own person.

A little later, driven out from Scutari, he was flung by some pressure of circumstances, or cry for help, into Bucharest—there was some tale of intervening weeks in Avlona—then flung out from Bucharest with his sick and wounded gathered around him, as a hen gathers its young under its wing. For weeks on end he was working incessantly, without sleep, almost without food; halting by the wayside to perform operations, which, in the old days in England, would have called for the very finest paraphernalia, the most stringent precautions of a highly-equipped theater; refusing help to none; moving like a shuttle with a silken thread, forever to and fro, through the welter of humanity; the broken soldiers, the old men, the women and children which clung so desperately to the skirts of the fleeing multitude—until men began to boast of the fact that they had worked under McCabe—Philip McCabe of shady Soho fame.

The great thing was that he did not, as so many must needs have done—appalled by the call upon their energies—work blindly on like a man endeavoring to stop the flow of the sea with his hands. There were certain things against which he was convinced that some sort of a dam might be contrived. He remembered, compared, tabulated—thanking God that his years with the swine and their husks had not permanently injured his memory—and thus, out of these crowded days, fresh discoveries in regard to his theories of anti-toxin began to take definite shape; passed in steady sequence from speculation to certainty.

After the Bucharest affair, the French Red Cross—less tangled with tape of the same color than its English *compère*—was quick enough to annex McCabe.

During the first month of nineteen-seventeen he was back in England on some medical mission or other, when Hoyland, coming down the steps of his club in St. James's, saw him pass in the becoming blue-gray uniform; so lean and brown and upright; so drawn out to a fine point of intense vitality and purpose that he was almost past before he realized who it was.

It seemed as though Charles Hoyland must have grown conscious of being a trifle out of it, apart, for his first feeling

was one of more spontaneous gladness than was common to him, and he actually ran down the steps, waving his hand to his friend. Then, finding that McCabe was too far ahead to see him, hurried in pursuit, even speaking his name.

Then, just when he was so near that he could have put out his hand and touched him, his mood changed. A feeling of sullen dislike came over him. "What am I to Hecuba, or Hecuba to me?" he thought, contemptuously.

That French Red Cross uniform!—he gave a little laugh as he pulled himself together and turned towards Piccadilly. It was exactly like McCabe, always in the limelight, one way or another—the English khaki was not showy enough, he supposed.

Just as he reached the top of St. James's he ran into a woman he knew, a Lady Carfax, wife of a new industrial magnate.

"Mr. Hoyland!—Just the person I wanted—really, in these days, you seem the only man who ever has time for anything sensible. Look here: Freddie's had a haul—what a mercy there's something to be got out of this wretched war! I'm sure it's made us all uncomfortable enough."

"Not you, surely? I can't imagine you allowing yourself to be made uncomfortable about anything."

Lady Carfax threw him a laughing look from her dark eyes. She had a wide sable scarf swathed round her neck and down over her shoulders, hiding her chin and mouth and her upturned, well-powdered nose; her brilliant eyes lit the small space between it and her turban-like toque of the same fur; for the rest, there was an abbreviated length of fine blue cloth, transparent silk stocking and high-heeled patent leather shoes; when she moved her head sideways like a bird there was the flash of diamonds in either ear. Looking at her, Hoyland reflected that she was probably five foot one in height, weighing little more than seven stone, flat-chested, narrow-hipped as a boy, while something well up to a couple of thousand pounds had gone to the furnishing of her; and that was an under-estimate, for there was sure to be a pearl necklace, somewhere or other, dangling beneath a transparent bodice, amidst the lace and ribbons which cost so much and hid so little.

"I said that because it is the sort of thing one does say; if one can't look miserable, dowdy, one's supposed to look depressed. But—you'll not tell if I confess?" She showed her white teeth in a charming smile as they crossed Piccadilly.

“Was there ever any man with surer instincts? I suppose that’s what makes us all love you so—I tell you Freddie’s had a haul, and without a moment’s hesitation you gently lead me into Bond Street. . . . A secret, now remember! It wouldn’t do to let Freddie know what he was doing, what a ripping time I was having. He’d draw in his horns like a snail at once. If I once showed I was contented, he’d think that he might spend half as much and still keep me in a good temper. But the fact is, I’ve never had such a time in my life. If any one asks me what I did in the great war—when I’m old enough to dare to speak the truth, and people realize what an absurd fuss they’ve been making—I shall tell that I enjoyed myself morning, noon and night. There was never anything like the freedom to do as one likes, spend how one likes. And talk about men! . . . Of course, I know that there are heaps and heaps of them being killed—one’s always hearing about it; it doesn’t bear thinking of—besides, they must be exaggerating it in the papers; how can it be true, when there never were so many men in London?—Every dance, just heaps and heaps of them, and every girl one knows getting married.”

“And married and married and married! It’s a sort of stutter with some of them.”

“What a cynic you are! What do you say about going to Asprey’s? I always think they’ve got some of the prettiest things in London, don’t you? Awfully dear—but as it’s Freddie’s treat! Let’s cross now, while there’s a little lull.”

In Asprey’s they leant over tray after tray of jewels.

“What will I have? I’ve a sort of idea of a long chain with sapphires and diamonds. Freddie wanted a tiara, but they don’t suit me a bit; I’m not big or important enough. He gave me one in the late autumn of nineteen-fourteen. I remember that because I saw some of the first flare skirts at Clarisse’s sale, when we were in town getting it—a horrid thing it was, too: great fat diamonds weighing half a hundredweight! It gives me a headache whenever I wear it—the crown of thorns—that’s what I call it. And I daren’t exchange it, or anything—at least, not yet; Freddie’s awfully sentimental about it, says it marks the turn of our fortunes. We were frightfully poor, you know.—Though for my part, I don’t see that it marks anything but my forehead.”

“I wish your Freddie would put me on to a good thing,

Lady Carfax. . . . No, don't have those sapphires; have emeralds, they're ever so much smarter and much more becoming. Carfax won't grudge you a couple of hundred more, with things as they are."

"I suppose not—he told me to get something really good. He hates me to spend money on rubbish. At the back of my mind I sometimes wonder whether he doesn't think there may be a sort of smash-up, and likes to have his money in something he can easily get away with," she added, dangling long chains of emeralds and pearls, interspersed with diamonds, in either hand, shaking them this way and that to catch the light. "I know a lot of people feel like that: the Grimfelds, now; you should see the perfectly lovely pearls he's given her; insured up to the hilt, too. . . . Yes, you're right, Mr. Hoyland, the emeralds are ever so much smarter than the sapphires—particularly at night." She turned to the shopman and gave her name and address—they all knew Sir Joseph Carfax by that time—and then, the affair being at an end, turned sideways upon her high chair, perching like some exotic bird, so bright-eyed and trim, and began drawing on her gloves, touching the end of one first-finger and thumb with the tip of her little red tongue so as to manipulate the *suède* more easily.

"How those *nouveau-riche* women did give themselves away," thought Hoyland; she was generally so clever, but it was evident that she was thinking of something else; had, for the moment, reverted to old Sheffield—or was it Manchester?—days.

"It's an awful thing to say, I suppose, but really I shall be sorry for some things when the war's over—though of course it will be nice to be able to go abroad again. Freddie *has* come out so since it started; I suppose it's having so much to do puts him in a good temper—and of course making pots! Though he'd be mad if he could hear me say so."

"Well, now you might be an angel and make some use of his amiability on my account, don't you think?"

"I wonder. . . . Look here; don't trouble about tying it up"—she turned to the shopman with one of her quick movements—"I think I'll wear it, and you can send the case. . . . It really is lovely, isn't it?" She loosened her fur and slipped the delicate, glittering thing over her head, where it sparkled with a strange suggestion of grass and dewdrops

among the laces. "I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for helping me to choose it. . . ."

"Well—and now, what reward?"

"You mean putting you on a good thing—not work, I suppose?" She eyed him with her head a little on one side.

"What do you think?" Hoyland gave a little laugh.

"Of course, I'll see what I can do. But though he's generous in some ways, Freddie's awfully funny in others; secretive and all that, you know. He has a silly sort of idea that a man ought to have made good for himself by the time he's about thirty: that it's all a matter of stupid work. Of course, he did work awfully hard; but what he forgets is that he never made more than just enough to live on with it all. Well, I suppose I must go; I've an engagement to play bridge with Muriel Phillips and some other women at her club.—A regular 'do' it is; she always wins everything; only asks the women she can win from. But as she hasn't anything else to dress on, or so they all say, I suppose it's a form of charity to play with her. Besides, she does know lots of nice people, there's no doubt about that."

With a nod and smile Lady Carfax turned off at Albermarle Street, and, strolling slowly towards Piccadilly, feeling a little at a loose end, Hoyland suddenly decided that it was about time he went to see his mother, and hailed a passing taxi.

The day was unpropitious. Lady Carfax's words: "You are the only man who ever has time for anything in these days," though intended as high praise, rankled. The sight of Philip McCabe, looking as though he were able to do so perfectly well without him, also rankled. He had almost run after him—he, Charles Hoyland, the aloof, the much-courted. He was less slender and active than he had been; the action lacked dignity, and he knew it. McCabe, now—McCabe was the make for that sort of thing—could run: probably enough—he thought with a little sneer—had run, and to some tune, more than once too, despite the smart uniform.

He had been used to declare that he did not know what jealousy was, had not the slightest difficulty in getting the best of everything he ever wanted in life. Sex jealousy, indeed, had never touched him, or never needed to. But the pride of prestige—that was a different matter. Here and now he found himself in the fork of a cleft stick. It seemed

as though he might be forced to do what was eminently disagreeable to him, the very thought of which grew more and more abhorrent, piled upon by a thousand trifling instances. He had run a few steps that day: fancy having to run, dog-trot to order, go through all sorts of grotesque maneuvers under the abusive tongue of some sergeant-major or silly young ass of a subaltern! The discomfort would be appalling, the ignominy even worse.

And yet, as against this there seemed nothing left but the loss of that sort of supremacy which was the very breath of his nostrils. It was already far gone. The values of life had changed so that, from being rather wonderful—so clever, cool, unscrupulous, so wonderfully well-dressed and attractive to women—he had become petty, a little in every one's way: another ten years or so and he would be a stoutish, middle-aged clubman. Even his minor fame as an authority on dress was gone now when nearly every man was in khaki.

He had been keeping away from his mother's flat of late. Russia was in the first throes of the revolution; mild enough, in all conscience, compared with what was still to come, but the effect upon Mrs. Hoyland was little less than devastating.

There are those who think of their country as a person, with a passionate and personal love: others who feel little beyond that sense of duty which will draw them home to it at any moment of peril: to others, again, it represents nothing more than a special tract of land, with its heart in their own few acres—a sentiment at times romantic, at times utilitarian, and most often a little of the two.

To Mrs. Hoyland Russia—that double-sex country, with its illimitable, its terrifying open spaces, its dark forests, its womanhood of summer flowers, yellow harvests and burning sun; its manhood of winter ice and snow; with its dreadful silence and still more dreadful cry of wind and wolf; its fierce seasons for ever fighting and embracing, loving, hating, giving birth to the most stupendous phenomena, the strangest paradoxes of body and soul, delicacy and brutality, sentiment and savagery; the minds of the people reflecting the many minds of the country—was never visualized save in the form of blue or white or parchment-like paper, stocks and shares leading to those dividends which made her a privileged citizen of any part of the civilized world where it might please her to perch.

Like so many women, she was more intolerant, more cruel



than any man: in any disturbance, even in England, it is the women of the upper classes who cry out for the military—to turn their guns upon the wretches who want a fair share of produce for their toil; and to Mrs. Hoyland's mind every peasant in Russia who gave the slightest trouble must be mowed down, shot or forced to fight for the country which was to be tilled or mined for her special benefit.

A sense of outrage, incredulity, was her paramount feeling. Maisie's remark: "This old revolution's clean taken the stuffing out of Mamma," was almost grotesquely true.

She had shrunk, wore a look of surprised indignation; she who had been so sure of everything was no longer even sure of herself. Incessantly she railed against the Russians having ever been such fools as to cast in their lot with the English. That was the root of all the trouble. "They make a muddle of everything they undertake. There'd have been no revolution if they had sided with Germany at once—Germany wouldn't have allowed it. Between them they would have gobbled up India and Egypt: serve you right, too. I'd like to see this wretched little parochial England in the dust. There—*there'd* be something worth living for! *Mon Dieu*, to think that one ever looked up to the English—took them at their own valuation! The pawnbrokers of Europe, that's what I call them." She laughed shrilly. "Taking advantage of every one in any sort of trouble—grabbing—grabbing! Do you know why the Albanians had the Dutch officers in to train their men, instead of English? Because the English would have stripped them bare to the bone. Versilov told me that. . . ."

And so on and on. Her fears of the discomfort of possible loss were often enough swallowed up in a vindictive delight at any misfortune which overtook her husband's people. In the bosom of her family she reviled them so unceasingly that it seemed as though she must have passed the power to desist. And yet that was far from being the case; for in society she let it be understood that she was wholly English, and nothing annoyed her more than for any one to say: "You Russians—"

She was at her writing bureau when her son entered; very upright. In whatever other ways she might, undoubtedly had, gone down before the misfortunes of the last few months, she was still as perfectly gowned and coiffured as she had ever been. To let oneself go to pieces, that was the last of

all crimes permitted to a woman. But her black dress was a year old, and though it had been carefully altered it showed the change in her, as did her own person, fight against it as she might. A year ago one might have predicted anything for her; one would not have been in the least surprised to hear of her marrying some titled man of half her own age—she was of the Helen type which does that sort of thing. But now nothing could be foretold save old age: it seemed, and she knew it, with a bitterness which no words could have expressed, that she was past the age when things “happen” to a woman. She had said to Charles one day with sudden frankness: “Life’s no longer any good when there’s no possible temptation left to it. I’ve given up going to confession; even the priest yawns in my face.”

She glanced up as her son entered the room, but she did not rise or lay down her pen. “Well? What have you to say for yourself?”

“What is there to say?”

“Nothing. Less than nothing! Ah, you English! You’d make even a world war commonplace, shop-worn.”

With a shrug of his shoulders Hoyland stooped over the fire, a spill in one hand, and lighted a cigarette. “Where are the girls?”

“I sent Maisie back to school.”

“I thought you said you couldn’t afford it!”

“I couldn’t afford to keep her here. One selfish, *exigeante* person’s enough in any house”—she put her papers together and placed a weight upon them, then rose, moved over to the fire—“and as long as I live I intend to be that person,” she added with some humor.

“She ought to marry, directly she’s out; marry well. Who knows? It may make all the difference to us, if she’s sensible.”

“I shall see to that—be sensible for two. That’s partly why I sent her back to school. If she’s here she sees too much of me, gets too familiar. I shouldn’t have the same influence when it came to the point. Maisie’s the only asset I’ve left,” she added bitterly. “God knows I can’t afford to throw her away.”

“And Rose?”

“Rose imagines that she has found her vocation in nursing wounded officers in Curzon Street.”

Hoyland looked at his mother with a smile, to which she

responded with a glance of acrid amusement. "The two V's—Vocation and Virginity—seem to go together. Who ever heard of a pretty woman with a vocation?" She had opened a cigarette-case which hung by a slender gold chain to her waist, and lit a cigarette as she spoke. "Really, Rose looks almost handsome in that white, nunlike head-dress affair, and—Well, well, one must hope for the best. If she finds any one to marry her it will be the one solitary piece of good luck that the war's brought us. All men are more or less fools—the mistake we women make is in not always making certain in which direction—while a sick man, however young, is a prophecy of senile decay. There's no knowing; she may pick up with some one or other. I take good care that she does not give too much time to her nursing in a way that's likely to injure her health, the little looks she has; her skin's quite good, you know. Really, Charles, I'd have managed to be attractive somehow or other on the strength of that skin alone. But—bah! she's one of your English lumps; that's the only word for it."

"Not all English."

"If there's any Russian it's a throw-back to some peasant or other. I never suspected my family of a *mésalliance* until I saw Rose developing into that *bonne femme* type."

Hoyland had thrown himself into a low chair, leant back with his legs crossed, smoking; while his mother stood with her elbow on the corner of the mantelpiece, looking down at him, one foot upon the fender, turned sideways so that it showed the inner arch of the instep. It amused him to see how she remembered these sort of little tricks, even with her own son. The likeness between the two was growing; there was the same look of—it is difficult to put it into words, for it was not active enough for defiance—say, thwarted greed: an air of scornful drawing-back upon themselves, as though not finding the world as it used to be, ought to be, in relation to them.

Mrs. Hoyland's fine eyes were half-closed in a way that gave her an odd expression, for there was more of a raising of the lower lid than a dropping of the upper, a peculiarity noticeable in her son as well as herself.

For a moment their eyes met, hers drooping, his upraised; "Well, now, to come to more important matters; what's brought you here?"

"A desire for the pleasure—no, not exactly that; say,

rather, the *sauce piquante* of your company, my dear Mother."

For another moment Mrs. Hoyland's glance persisted, probing his thoughts. Then she gave a short laugh: "Really, I do believe you're speaking the truth, for once—or half the truth. Poor precious! has he been snubbed, then? More white feathers, eh?—actual or emblematical? It's come to this, you'll have to join the herd, *mon cher*, for the simple reason that life will be even more difficult apart from it than with it."

"It's damned uncomfortable, anyhow; nothing to do, nowhere to go—literally nowhere to go. People fall foul of us for 'going on amusing ourselves just as usual'—how many times have I heard that said! Fools! As if it were possible to go on amusing oneself upon a little island where you feel that you may get pushed over the edge any moment, if you so much as crook your elbow at a different angle to your neighbor! Besides, if one did succeed in getting out of England now, where the devil could one go? The whole world's about as attractive, for the moment, as a woman with a sick headache."

"You'll have to marry, Charles; that's what it comes to. With a rich wife, if you were not amused you would at least be comfortable. Only not an American; they want it all for themselves."

"And how the devil could I spend her money, even if I got it, unless this confounded war comes to an end? Not but that it would be useful, even at this juncture."

"Ah-h-h!" Men had been used to say that Mrs. Hoyland's laugh always made them think of champagne, so clear and sparkling; it was clear enough now, but dry and a little flat, as she turned again to her writing-table and took up her pen. "I thought it would come to that. But let me remind you, my dear, that there's nothing to be gained by milking a dry cow. How long I shall be able to continue paying the rent of this flat, keep up any sort of appearance, meet current expenses for food and drink—let alone clothes—heaven only knows; and it seems that heaven is not disposed to concern itself."

For a moment or so she paused, tapping with the end of her pen upon the blotter, staring very straight in front of her. Seen thus, with her face in repose, hard, deep lines showed, cutting down from either nostril to the sides of her mouth, while her upper lip was marked with short perpendicular

furrows. She did not look actually old; more like a middle-aged woman transformed to a stone image, of which some sculptor had said, "Look now, and I'll show you the lines of ruthless self-seeking, bitterness of spirit!"

"I can't sleep—if only I could sleep!" she exclaimed suddenly, with one of those accesses of uncontrolled feeling which broke so oddly through her composure. "I've never closed my eyes without a sleeping-draught since the New Year, and I shall come to the end of that soon. There's something in me that awakes and awakes and awakes, defying sleep. God knows I never believed any of that talk about eternal life! But sometimes, now, I think of it as eternal wakefulness. . . . Of course, I kept on the safe side, went to mass, confessed. I was like an English mother of an idiot child, heir to an entailed property; though all the doctors declare that he can't live to grow up, she feels that he may, and turn nasty with power, and so propitiates him. I never believed, never really believed. But now I do believe, hate myself for it, just because I'm frightened, horribly frightened that this awakening habit will go on, break through death; that even then there will be no chance of a real, a lasting sleep."

She had laid down her pen as she spoke, clasped her hands in front of her; her perfect immobility giving force and passion to the almost savage intensity of her words. "Life is damnable for a woman when she's past her youth. And if I go on—*mon Dieu!* how does one go on? As a middle-aged woman throughout eternity—and the Virgin Mary forever young! Ugh! how we other women would hate her! . . . Are there any dressmakers in Purgatory, or wherever we'll find ourselves? Or shall we go on and on with the same old clothes, the same ridiculous old fashions; white kid gloves never fresh or clean? And the newly-dead in the very latest!" She gave a little laugh; once again she was like her son in the way in which this sort of talk diverted her from her brooding.

"A few fat, middle-aged women—too fat; and the rest a flat-chested, narrow-hipped down-at-the-heel crew. No marriage or giving in marriage; nothing to raise a flutter of scandal. Your Englishwomen worst of all. Sometimes I laugh when I lie in bed at night and think of them—of what the resurrection of the body might mean."

"Ah, well, the present life's enough for me—and it used to be very much the same for you also, my dear Mother—

without thinking of the future. Don't grow pious in your old age; it's a common enough outcome of *ennui*."

"Pious! Pious!" Mrs. Hoyland laughed, a trifle shrilly. "My dear Charles, the very word 'pious' implies a certain adoration, and I don't adore—I hate, hate and dread. Pious people pretend to abjure the things of this world, believe that the next will please them better, make a virtue of it. I, now—I've loved the things of this world, love them still, the more now that they're out of my reach. My God, if I only knew that this life was going on forever as it was ten—twenty—even thirty years ago—though when one was so young one really had not sense enough to enjoy—that would be heaven; but to go on as it is now!—I should feel like you—'What shall I do? Where shall I go?' One might kill oneself and be no nearer the end."

She paused for a moment, then went on: "And that's not all; there's another thing I think of; all the men I've been fool enough to refuse since I was left a widow; always so sure that something better would turn up. And now—now—what you, in your charming and refined language, would call, 'a decayed gentlewoman!'—'A decayed gentlewoman!' Was there ever such an insensitive language! Rose, now—Ah, here she is."

"Why, am I late?" Rose hesitated in the doorway, looking from one to another in that half-sullen, half-deprecating way of hers.

"For once, no." Mrs. Hoyland rose and picked up her bundle of letters, taking no further notice of her daughter than if she had been a servant. "I'm dining with the Morrisons to-night, Charles. If you can wait you'll be able to make sure of a taxi for me, and I can drop you at your club. It's no good asking you to dine here. Rose has an egg, or something insipid of that sort."

Rose pulled off her long coat as her mother left the room, and, sitting down by the fire, stretched out her reddened hands to the blaze. Her mother had been right in saying that the white veil suited her. But that was not all; there was more of poise and balance about her than Hoyland could have believed possible.

"Well?" he said, kindly contemptuous, "and how goes the nursing?"

"Pretty well—as well as it can under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"Well, you know what mamma is. Nothing matters—nothing, in comparison with her whims. She takes a sort of pleasure in keeping me, cutting into my time; pretends to think that it doesn't matter, that it's nothing but a fad—oh, well, of course, a sort of husband-hunting. They'd have sacked me long ago, but I told them straight out how it is, and they make allowances. . . . She detests me, and yet's jealous of me; can't bear to see me interested in anything or anybody."

For a moment there was silence. Then Rose began again: "She talks of my 'insipid' eggs, and yet there's never anything else when she's dining out—one egg, at that. Not that it matters; it gives me a chance to go back for an hour or so, as I am doing to-night."

"What do you imagine that you'll get out of it all?" inquired Hoyland brutally.

Rose turned her face from the fire, and looked at him with an odd directness for her. "Nothing—nothing, I suppose. At least, not what you'd call anything, understand. . . . Charles, did you know that Dr. McCabe was back?"

"What put McCabe into your head?"

Hoyland blew out a cloud of smoke, and watched his sister through it, from under half-closed lids.

"He was at the hospital this afternoon, with Mr. Hodson, our chief surgeon." She was silent a moment or two, gazing into the fire. "He seems to have done great things; they were all of them talking about him."

"Oh—and I suppose you were glad to claim acquaintance with the hero?"

"He didn't see me. I was busy in the pantry."

Hoyland laughed. "Really! isn't that rather like you, my dear sister? 'Busy in the pantry,' while the love of your life is hob-nobbing with all sorts of big-wigs. But, all the same, I wouldn't set your young affections upon McCabe, if I were you, my dear. He's all very well in his way, but there are some dashed queer stories about him." Hoyland's tone of contempt was a return for the perfectly innocent oblivion in which McCabe had passed him that afternoon.

The sound of a sharply-tanging electric bell, as though a finger were placed on the button and kept there, came from somewhere in the upper regions of the house, and Rose got up from her chair, almost stately in her plain white dress and flowing veil. "Sometimes it seems to me that the people

who get themselves talked about are very far from being the worst. You and mamma are always hitting at Dr. McCabe, saying all sorts of vile—not only vile, but paltry—things about him, because he never thinks of himself, only—too much—far too much of others. But whatever he has done—whatever you may have against him—you, you of all people, to belittle him!—Oh, you think I don't know, that I know nothing, see nothing—too stupid for words! But that day at Montpelier Square, the day of the sale. I heard you, when we were going downstairs—'Leila,' you said, 'now you have seen her, Leila,'—you were talking of mamma; of course I know you were.—But 'Leila'—I remembered the name when she read it out of the paper that night just before the war began—I saw your face, out there on the balcony—I may be a fool, but I am not an innocent fool—how could I be?—and if I hear you talking against Dr. McCabe, who has at least done something—you, you who have never done anything but talk, in clubs and drawing-rooms—I'll tell people what you are; what you've done."

"And land your friend in prison for ten years or more. You're a clever child, Rose. It's people of just your sort of cleverness who are responsible for half the mischief in the world—Half? Nine-tenths! If you'll take my advice, you'll answer that bell, and keep what intelligence you have upon the very few affairs it's equal to."



PART II



## CHAPTER I

THE end of August that same year saw Hoyland in Flanders.

In less than two months after he was back again in England, and five weeks of the interval had been spent in a base hospital! "Three weeks of crowded glory!" he told himself bitterly, turning his face to the wall in his bed at the Ascot hospital—Ascot, of all places!—and cursing fate. The last Gold Cup Day there had been a girl in a primrose chiffon gown, and they had had supper together at the "Ritz" that evening, for the race had been a lucky one for him. He didn't know why he remembered her, but he did, with a sort of rage.

He had seen some darned silly farces in his life, but there had never been anything quite so silly and futile as that in which he had taken a sort of part.

It had been as his mother said it would—everything had become impossible. There had been the choice—and by only a hair's-breadth at that—between getting a commission or being dragged into the army by the scruff of his neck as a private; to eat, sleep, live, cheek-by-jowl with the sort of men with whom he would not willingly have sat in the same railway carriage. To Hoyland's mind the working-class had no single virtue, save the necessary one of making its betters as comfortable as possible. Anything—anything was preferable to being driven to associate with such people. Partly through influence, partly by help of his knowledge of languages—through the medium of the Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps—he had got his commission. From the beginning his program had been quite clear in his own mind. He did not intend to fight. No man in the world had ever detested noise, dirt, discomfort and pain as he did; and he was quite determined that he would have nothing to do with either of the four. Men said, "War's a messy business," and then proceeded to wallow in it. Well, let them; that was all. Everything could be arranged. He would make himself indispensable to some brainless fool or other, and get on the Staff.

Very steadily he tried to put away from him the remembrance of how he had decided against the army, and how, by dint of some outward pressure, it had got him at last, sullen, reluctant as he was; had forced him into a set way of dress, a set order of life; to that humiliating exposition of "Eyes front—Right about turn!"—the motions of a marionette—but it was all of no use; he seemed made of memories.

And then, after all this tomfoolery, three weeks! Just on three weeks—not quite that. Three weeks spent in the midst of odious discomfort, noise, ugliness, filth—he—he—Charles Hoyland, who had never so much as soiled his hands, his beautifully formed, perfectly-manicured hands—such as no words could ever express; three weeks during which he seemed to be shaken hither and thither, like some too-loosely-packed and wholly unconsidered parcel!

And, somehow or other, beaten at the end of it—fooled, utterly fooled! Five weeks in hospital, then back home again. Another hospital—more chattering nurses—idiots of doctors!

He had never fought, never even seen a German, apart from a few prisoners—had been allowed to keep to his resolution in that. But, all the same, he had been fooled; one arm gone from just below the elbow and the other hand twisted and scarred to a grotesque shape which he could not bear to look at; a something perpetually humiliating; without glory, without renown.

He wondered if he would not rather have lost a leg; hopping like those bird-like creatures whom he watched from his bed, essaying their first one-sided steps with so much gayety and laughter.

Fooled, fooled! It was odd how that legend of Sotteville-sur-Mer, along with the more personal memory of the boy with the rats, had followed him—the one thread of imagination woven throughout an otherwise totally unimaginative life. In rare moments of childish indisposition it had returned to him: in the still rarer dreams which visited his manhood, the only dream he ever had was of that immense loneliness, that open space; so illimitable and yet pinching him with the idea of a trap-like boundary: that hand, darting—if one may use such a word in relation to anything so immense.

Now, looking back at that three weeks in Flanders, with his brain a trifle weakened, dominated by that other memory, he realized that the hand had pretty nearly got him that

time: he had only just struggled free, like a rabbit in a trap, leaving blood and flesh behind it; and, more—oh, much more horrible still—squealing. Yes, actually squealing.

He had heard the squeal quite plainly. wondered at it. But though he was completely conscious at the time, it was only much later—when he was at Ascot, as a matter of fact—that the sudden realization that it was he who had given vent to that shrill, humiliatingly animal sound came to him.

This was part of the thinking-back which occupied his convalescence, the days during which he lay brooding, brooding, fitting every moment of that eight weeks together as though they were to form a map upon which his whole life might depend; or, rather, as though he were adding up an account which he was determined that some one or other should pay, from which no single item must be omitted. All this while other men were amusing themselves with books and games, with all sorts of light-hearted, childish tricks: some really forgetting; some determined to forget; Hoyland alone determined not to forget, to see that some one suffered for all he had suffered.

Not that there was any fear of him forgetting it: the whole thing went on etching itself out upon his brain, stroke by stroke; he took a sort of bitter pride in the minute perfection of it.

That summer of nineteen-seventeen had been one of abnormal rainfall: twice the average amount had fallen round Ypres during the month of August. Hoyland, who had never gone out in the wet if he could help it—beyond the few steps necessary between a house or club and a waiting taxi—was perpetually wet through, morning, noon and night. It was bad enough in the open; it was even worse when they were supposed to be in shelter and the shelter leaked, as it inevitably did. If it happened that he was not actually wet with rain, he was reeking with damp and sweat. Whenever the sun did show itself, he steamed in it: his clothes smelt, his body smelt; he was like an animal, he told himself with disgust; for after the first ten days they were being pushed up and on with some force like an omnipotent policeman at the back of them—and the very sight of his own face revolted him: the jaw so strangely heavy with its stubble.

He had made sure of some sort of order; but the order was either too large or too small for him to realize its working. The great offensive in conjunction with the French,

between Ypres and Steenstraete, which was launched upon the last day in July, had left the ground in an indescribable condition: dead horses, fragments of equipments, over turned lorries, derelict aeroplanes, were rotting in the mud.

He himself a mere speck amid it all. He—Charles Hoyland, of all people! Nothing in the whole affair was stranger than its incongruities. Anyhow, it was all too damned silly, all about nothing. That was the one idea which beat through his brain, through all the discomfort and humiliation—the damned silly waste of life, time, effort: the feeling that if the thing was to be done at all it should be left to the people who were less educated, less highly civilized, and therefore less sensitive!

To add to everything else there was the supreme misery of never being alone; the lack of all decent privacy. Other men were always round him, elbowing him—talking, talking, talking; laughing, braying like asses.

The whole way, crossing in a crowded steamer, packed tight in the stifling trains, on foot, marching—plowing, rather, through a sea of mud, never knowing for one moment what one might put one's foot into—there was always the same noisy, stinking crowd.

And yet, at the same time there was that old sense of emptiness: of an immense open space as unaffected by the crawling masses as a summer sky by an ant-heap: with the aeroplanes flying in front of it, never so much as brushing its gray indifference.

The end of their last day's march found them at a farm five miles from the front, with the roar of big guns beating so continuously upon their ears that there was the feeling of having to stop and listen to be sure one really heard, was not the victim of some overpowering blood-pressure.

The rain had ceased and it was a baking hot day, but only the crust of the swampy ground was hardened, and it had been bad going: the sun fierce overhead, flies everywhere, on one's eyes and lips. The rooms in the farmhouse—the parlor quite square like a box, banked with air that one could cut with a knife, stained and flaked whitewash, flies, and worse; a look of indescribable squalor and filth—had been set apart for the officers, while the men were accommodated in the barns and outhouses.

Lying in his bed at the Ascot hospital, Hoyland went over

and over again every inch of that parlor: the scratched varnish of the sideboard; the torn green rep of the sofa, one leg gone, supported upon an empty Peek, Frean biscuit-box. The flypapers festooned across and across the ceiling, so thick with flies that they could not hold any more; the cracks and stains on the wall—one in particular which ran into a rough map of Italy and looked and smelt like beer; the black bottle set in a welter of tallow, with a fragment of candle still in the top of it; the photo of a wedding-group, with the glass starred across and across it; the funeral-cards in frames; the writings upon the walls—obscene French and outspoken English references to the inevitable co-inhabitants of the place; while precisely in front of the window was a sodden manure-heap, stinking to heaven.

There was one old woman left at the farm, and she waited upon the officers without a word, dour and brooding, as well she might be, with her three sons killed at the front and her husband struck by a fragment of stray shell while milking the cow in their own paddock close against the house.

She had buried her man; but the beast had been too much for her, and still lay in the open.

“What did he want to milk for while they were shelling the place?” inquired one of Hoyland’s fellow-officers.

“What other time was there?” answered the old woman, indifferently.

“Well, they’re further away now,” said the Major. “No chance of that sort of thing happening again.”

He meant to be consoling, but the old woman treated him to a glance of contempt, protruding her under-lip. How young he was, not to know that the mere fact of having lost everything constitutes more of safety than any woman can ever want. As to the shells, there was no knowing—shells might drop anywhere and at any moment; they were as ubiquitous as *le bon Dieu* Himself.

Hoyland was allotted a tiny sleeping-room in company with another subaltern of the name of Tiddums—a creature as ridiculous as his name, always laughing, with an air of having been thrown together anyhow and then over-ripened: loose lips, silly rabbit eyes, great red hands.

Hoyland lay down on his blanket, with his overcoat under his head, but he couldn’t sleep. Tiddums kept him awake, first with his silly tales, then with his snoring. A rat frolicked across his body in the moonlight, but he never so

much as stirred. A man! A man! "Noble in reason, infinite in faculty." Ye gods!

There was only one tiny window, and though they had broken away the glass the door was so placed that no draught was possible. Hoyland closed his eyes, and something dropped from the ceiling on to his face, ran down the neck of his shirt.

He got up at this, gathered a few of his most precious possessions together—for he trusted no one—and went out into the moonlight. At one side of the house was what remained of the cow, its stiff legs in the air; at the other the manure-heap. A few skeletons of trees raised their tortured arms towards the imperturbable heavens: the roar of guns was almost unceasing, beating heavily against the ear-drums.

There was an open shed against one side of the house, and a great heap of loose straw in it. Hoyland stuck his belongings—revolver, wallet of papers, flask of brandy, slabs of chocolate done up in silver paper—deep into the straw, and lay down, spreading his coat over his feet.

The air was chilly, but without any freshness; the whole scene ugly in a way which even the moonlight was unable to redeem.

If he could have believed that there was a God, he would have cursed Him.

Insects moved with a ticking sound amid the straw; there were the heavier movements, pushing and rustling, of rats. Sleep seemed out of the question; that asinine Tiddums had been laughing at dinner-time over the story of a man who awoke to find his nose being gnawed by a rat.

But for all that a heavy oblivion was dropping over Hoyland when there came a singing sound, like a wind among telegraph-wires, the tearing crash of a shell.

Hoyland heard some order regarding the cellars shouted from the house. A few men appeared, running, stumbling in disordered array across the yard: another shell fell, and they dropped upon their hands and knees, with their faces close against the ground, like Mussulmans at prayer; their one thought to protect their heads and stomachs.

There was another crash, and then another, so quick that they ran into each other; it was clear that more than one gun had got them.

Hoyland was half up, drawing back his two hands from out of the straw, clasping his possessions, when there was a deafening roar, a blinding flash—not outside him, as the



others had been, but inside him, through him, as it seemed.

A trap—a trap! The boy at Sotteville-sur-Mer, and his corn-measure with its heavy iron edge—They had got him somehow or other, he thought, that squeal ringing in his ears.

Something warm was running down his face and into his eyes. He couldn't raise his hands to wipe it away, but he did not realize in what fashion they were being held until a sergeant came, and, with the help of another man, raised the heavy beam which had pinned them down: nipping him there, like—well, just like a rat in a trap.

They took him down into the cellar, and some one tore off the tail of a shirt to tie up his hands. By the light of one lantern he saw that Tiddums was lying on the clay floor, face upwards, still grinning, but quite dead. There was another man, with both legs off. The doctor and orderlies were busy: no one took much notice of Hoyland, because it seemed pretty obvious that he was not going to die.

The cellars were large, larger than the house—or so it appeared in that narrow circle of light. It seemed as though pretty well all the men must be there, packed tight as herrings in a barrel; but still a shuffling step went to and fro upon the boards above them: the old woman, some one said, clearing up the mess.

They stayed together for an hour or so; some of the men snoring, propped up against each other or against the wall. After the shelling ceased, as suddenly as it had begun, they went back to their own quarters, and some one helped Hoyland up into the open air.

Directly the dawn broke a cart was made ready, the wounded men put in it, and sent back to the nearest field-ambulance.

The man with both legs gone had died in the night; but there were two other men with their lower limbs badly shattered, and one with a splinter-wound in his chest. They lay in the bottom of the cart, and the others sat round the edge. Hoyland was unable to hold on because of his hands; but one of the reclining men gripped his feet to keep him steady as they jolted through the ruts. It was raining all the way; a cold sheet of rain which beat straight into their faces.

The driver sat with rounded shoulders, a sack over his back; one horse was very lame, and, going out of step with its fellows, aggravated the jolting.

Half way to the ambulance the man who was wounded in

the chest began to vomit blood, and died before they got there.

Hoyland sat with both bandaged hands upon his knees and stared in front of him. There was no sensation of any sort in them, and he had a sort of feeling as though they were not his.

A small wound in his head, which the medical officer had not found time to trouble over, bled persistently, in a half-hearted way. When the blood trickled into his eyes the man next to him, who had lost an arm, raised his remaining hand and wiped it away with a remnant of oily rag.

He was only a private, but his sense of sublime contentment had obliterated all sense of difference.

"Blighty for me," he said, with a grin. "An' only me left arm, too—one in the eye for them! Gawd, but won't I be glad ter see the ruddy old Road again!"

Later on he explained: "The Old Kent Road. I s'pose yer know that. Somefing like life goin' on there, ain't there—?" he hesitated, and added "sir" as an after-thought, sucking at the corner of his rag, screwing up his eyes, sticking out the tip of his tongue, and deftly flicking away a trickle of blood from the corner of Hoyland's left eye.

Lying in the Ascot hospital, Hoyland remembered this man, his ugly little Cockney face, without gratitude, without even amusement: there was no saving grace in any single one of his memories of that time.

## CHAPTER II

THE wound in Hoyland's head was more serious than could have been thought, and kept him back. The nurses made allowances for him upon the strength of this, put up with his black silences, his savage cynicism. But for all that they were continually reminding him how much more lightly he had got off than so many men; while one and all were glad to see the last of him. "He's more like a Boche than an Englishman," that is what they said: and so he was, in his dogged self-insistence, his ruthless disregard for his fellow-patients, nurses, orderlies.

His mother had died while he was in hospital in Flanders: but he had not heard the news until Rose came down to Ascot to tell him of it. She had taken an overdose of some

sleeping-draught—whether by accident or design no one could say; but the assurance people were still fighting the case.

“Anyhow, it doesn’t seem as though we were likely to get much out of it,” said Rose, looking dull and heavy in her mourning—a Martha careful and troubled.

“What money will there be?”

“Nothing. There was no chance of anything coming from Russia, and she knew it; that’s what makes me think—Well, anyhow, there’s practically nothing. The little Papa left went long ago; but of course you know that.”

“Is there nothing worth selling?”

“Very little. The furniture was already gone, as you ought to know.” Rose spoke without acrimony, any show of vindictive feeling. Charles was “like that,” just as her mother had been. There was no altering it. It was really a very good thing to be selfish: she thought of it as a virtue, which, like so many others, she found impossible of attainment in her own person, because she was always forgetting, giving herself away. “She left me her jewelry and furs, and things like that,” she went on, “and made me responsible for Maisie. Of course that’s why she did it. She knew that the money from them would be nothing to Maisie, and that I should always feel it up to me to do things for her. I have been thinking: if we could all three join together in your flat in the Temple, Charles—after all, there *would* have been the furniture, if you hadn’t sold it, you know—or take a little cottage, I could do all the work, and we could live upon very little—really very little.”

“And where’s that very little to come from, may I ask?” Hoyland was sitting up in bed, with a bandage still round his head. His swathed hands lay out on the counterpane in front of him. Rose thought, “How clean he looks!” But it was not that which she really felt; rather the something repellent in an invalid—a bereaved and maimed person—being so hardly self-sufficient. She had come prepared to sympathize, with her unerring sense of what was the right, the conventional thing. She now realized that her brother was as he always had been. Still Charles, and not that strangely fabulous creature, “the wounded soldier,” as he was expected to be, half-angel and half-child.

She had wondered at the men in the wards where she had worked, at their light-hearted boyishness; lost sight of the

fact that they were jolly then because it was their nature to be jolly; as it was her brother's nature to be all sorts of other things—wonderful things, but certainly without jollity.

"I've raised every farthing I could get hold of, on the strength of my mother's property," went on Hoyland. "It was settled on me; it seemed all right— Who could have thought of those damned Russians ratting like that? Directly I am out of this, I shall have my creditors round me like a swarm of bees. You and Maisie are two perfectly sound young women, and yet you can actually propose that—hampered as I am, in every sort of way—I should take upon myself the burden of your upkeep?"

"I didn't mean that! I thought that we might live and work together."

"Then, my dear, put the thought out of your head, once and for all. Imagine—if you can imagine anything—that you and Maisie are foundlings, *sans famille*. If every one were brought up like that, there would be an end of half the trouble and worry there is in the world. Get yourselves husbands if you can; but otherwise go your own way. I shall have as much as I can do, and more, to scratch out some sort of life for myself; and as long as people believe you to be without relations, they'll be much more likely to help you. There's one golden rule in life—if only you could assimilate it—dispense with all sentiment in yourself, but learn to count upon it and use it in others. . . . And now, my dear Rose, I think that is all—unfortunately I'm not in the position to give you anything excepting advice, but you're welcome to that."

Rose had risen, stood looking down upon him. "And yet you expect me to be responsible for, look after Maisie?"

"Because you've been fool enough to get people into that sort of habit."

"You won't help us?"

"I've told you once, I can't help you. Good God! girl, are you a fool, not to see how obvious it is that I can't help any one?"

"There are ways. . . . Or stand by us?"

"No! Nor see anything of you. It's a case of sinking or swimming for oneself. I've sacrificed enough for the cause of humanity without having two girls who are perfectly well able to support themselves hanging round my

neck. It's no time for sentimentality; we're down to the bedrock of hard fact."

How true that was for his sisters, Hoyland made no effort to discover—for months and months he saw nothing of them, heard nothing of them; Rose must have had grit enough to take him at his word—but for himself it was true enough, that was certain: "rocky" and "bare" were the very words.

His creditors troubled him but little: they were, for the most part, shady customers, and his maimed condition cast a protective glamour over him, camouflaged as the gallant defender of his country.

But he had fallen with his mother's fortune, which had been considerable, and was obliged to give up his chambers in the Temple. For he had never troubled to form any sort of legal connection, and could not hope to start making a living—what he would have called "a comfortable living"—from his profession. His health was still bad, a deadly feeling of weariness and inertia possessed him; a sense of nausea, as though he were not digesting life. His temper, which had been even, from his very insensitiveness, was now uncertain, and it took very little to throw him into a state of savage exasperation.

After he was fitted with an artificial right hand, while his left hand was patched up, in a fashion which gave the doctors some pride, they suggested a country life: he must go slowly because of that wound in the head, which at times gave him excruciating pain in one eye.

"You might get some sort of job on the land: an agency business, or something of that sort," was what they suggested.

But he did not even trouble to answer them. What did they expect him to do on the land?—cart manure?

He felt that he would rather die than go and bury himself in the country; and yet the noise of London, the uncivil, pushing crowds drove him half mad.

Life in London seemed to be cut in two: there were the people who could afford to take taxis, and the people who couldn't. He was one of the latter now, and there are no words for the infinite variety of ways in which it changed everything.

And yet he clung to it. He took a room in a small private hotel, which upon closer acquaintance degenerated into a

boarding-house, where one must be punctually in to all meals or else one got nothing to eat. And such meals! The mere sodden savaging of cheap, insufficient food, eaten amid indescribable young men who wished to be friendly with him, and old ladies who kept their medicine-bottles in front of their own particular places at table.

When he plunged into his old Soho haunts, so reminiscent of McCabe, every one he met said, "Hullo, Hoyland! Seen anything of the Doc, eh?"

That stratum of society was plainly more disreputable than it had been. There were many more avid, painted women, any amount of them not yet out of their teens; but even they were preferable to the brazen and brainless horde of *nouveaux riches* among whom Lady Carfax shone like a star.

He had only seen Clare Whitman once since Leila's death; and then she had given him a glance of furious scorn, and drawn her skirts away from him. What fools women were: always running up bills and never expecting to pay them. that sort, at any rate, had no right to blame any one for the risks they ran.

He saw her again at the "Scarlet Paint-Pot" one night soon after he left Ascot. She recognized him the moment she entered the room, where he was sitting with a glass of brandy in front of him—he had a sort of idea that she had heard what had happened, was looking out for him—and chose a table exactly opposite to his. There were two men in attendance: one sat next to her, the other she made move to one side, so that she had an unimpaired view of Hoyland. And she never took her eyes off him; when she saw the clumsy movements he made with his hands, lighting his cigarette, for instance, she laughed at him, mockingly.

She was much more highly-colored than she had been, and her face was plastered with white powder, her full figure shown to the uttermost limit of decency by her low dress.

"A harridan!" he said to himself, and smiled at her, bitterly determined not to be beaten.

It seemed, indeed, as though each was equally determined upon that head. He called the head waiter, and made some remark on the sort of people they had there: the man spoke to her, and she laughed again with an insolent flier at Hoyland: "Why the blazes didn't he leave the devil to pull his own chestnuts out of the fire?" she asked.

At last her two friends prevailed upon her to leave. "Poor devil's been wounded an' all," they said; Hoyland heard, saw them, bending towards her, clumsily trying to divert her attention.

As she passed she stopped at his side. "You needn't think that evens up things"—she gave a scornful gesture right and left, towards his hands—"there's more to come. . . . Good God, if I could see you rot, piece by piece, I'd be happy. But *that's* something to go on with: that's cheered me." She shot out one hand and flicked his; then moved on.

Friedland still held his séances; eternally on the move, for the police were keen upon the track of all spiritualistic frauds, which played upon the feelings of the bereaved: but Friedland had grown sanctimonious; his meetings were thronged by woe-begone people in black; the whole affair flat and dull as the rest of the world. It was the same everywhere; even in the midst of the wildest, most outrageous revels, the revelers dropped to a sudden state of blank depression, sat staring in front of them, as though wondering why they were there, what they were doing.

The gayety was hysterical. "All flesh is grass," lamented one lugubrious toper at a night-club, sitting with his legs stretched out straight in front of him, his hat at the back of his head, both hands deep in his trouser-pockets, staring vacantly in front of him. "All flesh but grass."

"You're right there, old cock!" chimed in another; "and I'm Nebuchadnezzar"—he nipped his neighbor's bare, powdered shoulder between his teeth—"and darned sweet grass, too."

"Ah! you beast, you!"

"All flesh but grass—"

"Sprung from some darned pretty sowings of wild-oats, too— Ah, well! there's no knowing; only it's a damned silly thing to say that a man reaps what he sows, when he sows wild-oats and reaps grass, eh, old chap?"

"It's all very fine; this war now," said the man in the hat, "talking o' grass, dust-ter-dust sorter lay, don't you know; but all the same, per-per-perfectly shocking when a Johnny comes ter think of it. All those fine young fellows, by Jove!"

There was the sound of tears in his voice, and a woman began to weep noisily, hunting all over her scanty costume

for a pocket-handkerchief. "Them there darling boys!" she said.

It was hopeless: the only people who systematically amused themselves—apart from mere girls and boys—were the brainless and heartless, the vulgar of soul. The remainder were scarcely ever to be seen in public, and if they were, they were dressed in the fashion of three seasons before.

Hoyland's resources, both in patience and funds, were getting very low during the first week in March; while that feeling of having been defrauded, in every sort of way defrauded, which had been growing more and more acute ever since the first days of the war—had reached its zenith during the past winter, with no fire in his bedroom, nothing, nothing which made life bearable, let alone pleasant—when, turning the corner from Pall Mall into St. James' Street, he met a man whom he used to know at Oxford, and had since encountered at occasional long intervals only.

It had always been Ferguson who sought him out, been proud of his acquaintance, deferred to him in every sort of way; and Hoyland had got to a state when he was glad of any acquaintances of this sort. Besides, Ferguson himself was successful enough—head of one of the newer colleges in the north of England: though, like so many men, he had never succeeded in the way he had wished to succeed, which was as a man of the world, well-dressed, sure of himself, somewhat of a dog, such as he believed Hoyland to be.

Moving much faster than his friend, overtaking him, catching at his arm—with an air of skimming haste about his very coat-tails, even when adapting himself to his companion's more leisurely pace—he moved along at his side, glancing quickly from side to side, to see whether the passers-by were noticing him and his companion; for Hoyland still retained that well-dressed air of being irreproachably "some one."

It was difficult, in the face of all this, to realize that it was really Ferguson himself who was "some one;" whose name was well known as an authority upon Greek philosophy, who had attained to the very highest classical honors, was venerated and feared by an immense number of young men as some one aloof from all human needs and weaknesses; with a very well-known and secure place of his own in the world, without babbling and bounding like a mario-



nette upon the edge of Charles Hoyland's dubious domain.

"Hoyland, by all that's holy! The very person I wanted to see. Let's go and have some lunch together. What do you say to the 'Carlton,' eh? There's something I really want to ask you about, if it won't bore you too awfully, get your advice. I'm looking for a tutor for the son of some old friends of mine; more social—teach a young fellow his way about—than scholastic sort of thing, you know."

The "Carlton" was a great extravagance, a great going-the-pace, he felt as he drew Hoyland inside the door; and again, as he chose a wine from the list quite wildly, because it seemed very expensive and the name was attractive, with a classical flavor.

Some people he knew wanted a tutor for a boy of eighteen, delicate, and in some ways backward, who needed preparation for Cambridge. He, Ferguson, had promised to help, really came up to town for the purpose. Owed them a good deal, capital people and all that.

He was manifestly and benevolently concerned; but still wishful to give the impression that there might be something like an intrigue, a chorus-girl, say, at the back of the whole thing, and this tutor business with the visit to London a mere excuse for a *sub rosa* adventure. A schoolmaster to the depths of his soul, very easily shocked, intensely conventional, his one idea was to dissemble the fact.

With this end in view he made an effort to slide away from the business in hand, turned to fatuous remarks upon some of the women seated at the other tables, then jerked back again as though by an afterthought.

"I imagined that you might be able to tell me of somebody; you are always so very much in the swim. The boy's intelligent enough in a way, quite well grounded, classics above the average I should say—though he's had very little chance. But it isn't that so much; he knows nothing of the world, less than nothing, living in the depths of the country—"

"Where?"

"The Peak district—Derbyshire—lovely country; but that won't help him, with women, wine, every sort of temptation and delight to be taken into consideration. It would be criminal to let such a boy loose in a University under the conditions. . . . I say, Hoyland, do you see that girl in green there? No, no! a little more to your left. 'Pon my soul,

she's never taken her eyes off me since we sat down—*me*, mind you, my dear fellow! If she keeps on like that I shall . . . Look here, Hoyland, I shall wink, positively I shall wink at her."

"That girl happens to be the Dowager Lady Hesketh; fifty if she's a day, and blind as a bat. She stares like that because her eyes are so stiffly set round with enamel that she scarcely dares to so much as blink."

"Ah, well, one never knows." Ferguson averted his gaze, a little dismayed, blushing, while the other man's half-smiling stare remained indelibly fixed upon the gayly-tinted visage of the historic hussy in green. "Ladies get themselves up so wonderfully, especially in town. I remember my dear father always used to say: 'Women pull up their stockings tighter when they come to London.' Now, about this affair of the tutor; it's a shame to bore you over it, but I promised I'd do all I could. You know the sort of man I want—a scholar and a gentleman, and all that."

"What about myself?"

Ferguson laid down his knife and fork and stared. "You—you—my dear chap!—But of course you're joking."

"Ah, well, you know my record at Oxford. I suppose that ought to satisfy them—or is it the second attribute you're in doubt about?"

"My dear fellow, what an idea! I was simply amazed. It seemed too good to be true. Of course! What a chance for the poor dear Claytons. They would be indeed fortunate if they got you. The only thing I'm afraid of is that you'd be bored to death. Delightful country, gentlefolk and all that—but after this!" He waved a vague hand. "Really, really—*recherché* meals of this sort, you know; surroundings, company—"

"Well, I suppose you're paying for it," responded Hoyland, rather grimly. "If you're not, I don't know who the devil is, that's all. Look here, Ferguson, those damned doctors say that I must go into the country. The war's knocked me out; then my mother's death—"

"My dear fellow, I *am* sorry! I had no idea—"

"Neither had I." Hoyland's mouth twisted into a wry smile at the other's bewildered face. "Anyhow, if these people you speak of are willing to offer me a decent screw—"

"Oh, I think they'd pay, are prepared to pay; and of

course I shall tell them what a chance this will be. A chance in a thousand, if only you don't change your mind! . . . A man like you, who has seen service and all that, moved in the very highest circles; if there ever was any man capable of teaching Anthony Clayton something of the ways of the world we live in, my dear fellow, I'm sure . . ." Ferguson hesitated, beaming; not because there was any doubt at the back of his mind, the slightest hint of satire, but simply because his delight, his admiration, his sense of self-congratulation was for the moment beyond all words.

They talked for a while longer, but now Ferguson felt that his duty was indeed accomplished, and that he might, with a clear conscience, revert to subjects which were more convivially suited to the atmosphere of the wild, wicked and altogether delightful atmosphere of the Metropolis.

Only as they parted upon the steps of Hoyland's club was the Derbyshire affair reverted to.

"I shall write to the Claytons at once—it's wonderful, really wonderful to think of. I shall make a point of telling them what a chance it is for them, and of course you'll hear at once."

"Make it very clear about the screw, Ferguson."

"Of course, of course! They must understand that they can't have the best—the very best, in my opinion, my dear chap—without paying for it."



PART III



## CHAPTER I

As Hoyland got out of the train at Peak Forest Station a scurry of sleet was cutting through the air: the sun, which had been shining throughout most of his journey, had disappeared behind a hill, and the ugly gray stone houses, the disfiguring eruption of German prisoners' huts, the hill-side scarred with quarries, the bleak, bare uplands, inspired him with a sense of fierce contempt, mingled with a certain satisfaction. For, after all, the whole scene was in keeping with his mood, his expectations, with that death-in-life to which he had not resigned but committed himself.

There was a groom waiting for him, with a high yellow dog-cart and rough-coated bay mare. When the uncouth fellow put one hand to his elbow to help him in, he could have struck him for his officiousness: a common sort of servant, belonging to common sort of people—one always knew the one by the other. Oh, well, what could one expect? After all, Ferguson had told him something of what they were: manufacturing people, who had made money, taken to farming as a possible road to The County. The fact that Ferguson had introduced a sort of veneration, if not awe, into his description had nothing to do with the matter; after all, what did people like that know of the world as he, Hoyland, knew it?

“Miss Diana sent an extra coat, please, sir. She thought that, turning so cold an' all—”

But Hoyland did not hear what Miss Diana thought, trouble to wonder who Miss Diana might be. He had turned up the collar of his own coat, sunk down within it in a way which Leila Gavin would have realized meant trouble for some one or other.

The mare hesitated, clumsy, then bounded forward under the whip. As the trap swayed, Hoyland knocked the elbow of his left arm, with its maimed hand, against the rail of the cart, while the effect of exquisite agony was augmented by that sense of futile rage which always came to him with any physical suffering.

Though he said nothing, only hunched himself deeper into his coat, the groom felt his cheek burn. He had opened his lips to utter some word of apology, concern, but he closed them again, all his sympathy dried up, as it was wont to do with pretty well every one with whom Hoyland came in contact. How often other injured men had glanced up at him with feelings of friendship, fellowship; then looked away again, conscious of a sort of shame at their own warm humanity, a sense of having needlessly exposed themselves, given themselves away.

"That there tutor, or whatever 'e call 'isself!" cried the groom, later on, at tea in the kitchen. "Well, I'm danged if I ain't glad as 'ow it's Maister Anthony an' not I, as 'as ter do with 'im, that's all!"

The road wound up and up. For a long while it was impossible, with one sluggish horse, to get beyond a walk. Then, suddenly, the sun came out. They were on a fairly flat road, running with a bold sweep along the heights, and, half-turning, Hoyland glanced back the way they had come.

The ugly township—there was no other word for it, neither town nor village, dull and raw as any abomination of the back-blocks—had disappeared round an elbow of the hill. The hill!—why, it was nothing but hills banked up in infinite shades of green, brown and blue, against the wide sweep of sky with its firmly rounded masses of cumulus cloud: such an immensity of sky that it was overwhelming even now, in its shining white-and-blue—what it could look like, storm-wracked and thunder-piled Hoyland had yet to discover—smiling and yet bending its brows, at one and the same moment: benignant and awful as the old Jehovah.

Almost immediately below them, running at right angles to the way which they had come, lay one of the deep Derbyshire dales, its steep sides buttressed with sheer walls of rocks, which, breaking away in places, had gathered into rough terraces, laced over with the fine, airy green of young birches.

Eastward, in every direction, so far as the eye could reach, were more such dales; the nearer cutting dark gashes in the hill-side, the further showing in faint lines of a deeper blue, widening here and there to pools of shadow.

Far away, immediately below them, Hoyland could trace the glint of water: alongside the road stood a row of stunted Scotch firs, turned all one way, bent by the wind



of centuries, their red stems gleaming with rain, their velvety hoods folded close around them, flattened out at their backs.

Here the road ran at a steady level along the hill-side, and throwing up her head, the mare gave a sudden leap forward. Her hoofs splashed and pounded on the muddy road, the trap lurched as she shied sideways at the blue puddles. Her rough coat shone with gleams of russet and gold; it seemed as though she were a different creature here on the heights; wildly exhilarated, as horses so often are, by the rush of wind, the stir of trees.

"There, there now! Woa-oa-o! Steady, old girl, steady, Flo!" The driver sawed at her mouth. "Steady, now!"—As a dab of mud struck Hoyland in the face he drew out his handkerchief to wipe it away. "I'm sorry, sir, but the mud's some'ut chronic hereabouts, that gritty! You'll excuse me, sir, but—"

"Don't you think that you might try keeping your horse in hand, for a change?" broke in Hoyland, with an air of icy exasperation; upon which the man relapsed into sulky silence. It was none of his business to tell the stranger that, owing to some minute fragments of spar in the mud, there was a slight cut upon his face, from which a tiny trickle of blood oozed, in a zigzag line, down one cheek.

"Tutor!" he thought angrily. "A pretty sort o' tutor!" But, all the same, he gathered the mare to a more sedate pace, avoided the puddles.

After a while the open spaces were left behind, and the trees gathered thick at either side, the firs—mingled with hornbeam—growing more straightly and to some height; enfolding the road—for the sun was already low at the far side of the hill—in a wash of cold gray shadow.

As the way divided into four, and they turned sharply to the left, they emerged into yet another world.

Still so high that the clear air caught at Hoyland's London lungs like a draught of over-strong wine, the dour, rocky aspect had changed to something softer. The hills, with their white winding roads like ribbons, showed curves in the place of angles—curve upon curve, fold upon fold, wrapping themselves around the plain: never very flat, as though nature were forever astir beneath her green coverlet, but still a plain, with a far-distant spire, the smoky blur of some little town, the silvery thread of a river.

Tucked away among the surrounding hillsides were prosperous farms, with pointed ricks and buildings; more sedate and heavily-foliaged trees—elms and oaks. The hard masses of cloud which they had left behind them at the eastern side of the hill, the uniform blackish shade of the avenue, were replaced by a glowing haze of fine incandescent gold, that atmosphere of complete well-being and peace which comes with the end of the afternoon in country places, when it is yet an hour or more to actual evening; while the sunshine still lay so bright upon the white road that the starry celandines upon either bank were wide open amid their glossy leaves, shining with an almost morning air; the birds sang in the occasional thorn-bushes which, deep madder and sparse young green, broke the lines of rough gray stone walls, patched in yellow lichen.

Even Hoyland, though grudgingly enough, accorded the scene a certain meed of praise. He would have given anything for some sun-steeped southern town: a narrow street with small luxurious shops, pretty curios, gleaming, useless trifles; crowds of well-dressed people; high heels, painted faces 'neath delicate silken sunshades; casinos, theaters, a *plage* with its cosmopolitan throng; and yet he acknowledged that there were plenty of people who might find this place beautiful, in its dull way. Well, at any rate, it was better than that appalling station town, and this at least was some comfort.

"Yon's Ox Lee." The driver pointed with his whip; and in another moment or so the trap had turned through an ugly wooden gate, badly in need of a coat of paint, and up a long, straight drive at the end of which stood a three-storied gray house, fronting squarely down it.

There was nothing that could be called a park—just fields, and, in one place, an acre or so of rank turnips abutting right on to the drive itself, cut from out of the pasture and fenced, with hurdle-pens of sheep: then a sunk-fence and a garden, with rough lawns, the gleam of daffodils amid the grass—though the flower-beds seemed empty—and an array of chicken-coops, over one of which bent a female figure, in a rough, earth-colored coat with an old brown hat, like a strawberry-punnet, pulled tight down over its head, featureless and formless as a scarecrow and yet in some way, eloquent of youth.

There was a deep porch to the house, with gardening-tools

stacked at one side of it, leaning against a stone bench: upon the opposite bench were onions laid out to dry upon a piece of sacking.

The mare, unexhilarated by the prospect of home, had dropped into her former state of apathy, and the groom, looping the reins to the rail of the splashboard, left her unattended while he helped the servant—an elderly capless female—with the luggage.

The inside of the house seemed better than the outside; there was a large fire burning in the hall, and, kicking aside the dogs, which, after a thorough investigation of the stranger, had returned to their sleep in front of it, Hoyland stood with his back to the blaze, looking about him.

The windows were rather high in the wall, with pointed tops; the walls rough-cast and color-washed, a deep cream. There was a preposterous hat-rack with mirrors, a roll-topped desk piled with papers and account-books, a shabby velvet-covered couch which looked as though it had once formed part of a "suite," and some good, high-backed, dark-oak chairs with cane seats.

The whole furnishing of the place showed a strange mingling of tastes and periods, while the hall itself struck Hoyland as being a converted farmhouse kitchen. There were, indeed, steel hooks in the whitewashed beams which must have been intended for sides of bacon, while the staircase which led out of it was steep and narrow, with a plain oak rail.

Glancing nearer, a pair of bright eyes caught his attention, fixing him suspiciously from over the top of a basket which stood close to the side of the hearth. Attempting a closer inspection, he was greeted with growls and saw that it was occupied by a nondescript yellow bitch, with a litter of still sightless puppies, while some mess—maybe for her, maybe for the chickens—stood warming in a pannikin in the grate, amid the gray ash at the edge of the gleaming logs.

The elderly maid reappeared and showed him to his room, where he found his luggage, still unstrapped.

It was a large apartment, freezingly cold, with a reluctant fire burning in a high grate: very clean and well-furnished with heavy, old-fashioned furniture. But the washing-ware was all odd pieces of different pattern; and when he asked for hot water it was brought him in a tin dipper by a scared small girl with a fragmentary cap at the back of her head: boiling-hot, it is true, but with a scrap of potato-peel floating

upon the top; while the soap was a virulent yellow square, with sharp corners, evidently enough cut from a bar: the soap-dish a blue-and-white saucer.

Were these people intolerably mean, or were they poor? If poor, how in the world did they propose to pay him the sum which he, out of sheer audacity, had chosen to ask! Hoyland wondered as he dried his hands upon the rough, snow-white towel.

The parlor-maid, or whatever she might be—with her straight, appraising gaze, confessing to all it saw, so unlike the non-committal glance of the usual well-trained servant—had told him that tea was just ready in the dining-room. And already it was half-past six. This meant high tea, “with a relish.” So that was the sort of people they were; there seemed no further need for any sort of speculation. Hoyland unpacked a few of his belongings, leaving his evening-clothes at the bottom of his bag, with a little sneer at them, at himself and the world into which he had tumbled. However, and for how long, would he be able to stand it?

The wardrobe, as big as a small room, smelt of lavender, was lined with yellowish newspapers: there was a large framed engraving on one wall depicting the coronation of Queen Victoria, and a text over his bed: “Thou, God, seest me”—which gave him some faint amusement.

As he passed out of his room he paused upon the landing to light a cigarette. Whether they liked smoke or not, they must get used to it. It seemed the sort of house where anything of the kind might be forbidden, excepting in the kitchen; and yet he supposed that old Clayton patronized a churchwarden or briar.

From half-way down the stairs he caught sight of a girl's figure, in a rough brown skirt and white blouse, which he recognized as the same that he had seen on his way up to the house—minus the long coat—bending over the hearth, stirring the contents of the pannikin with a piece of stick.

“Judging from the hot water, it's more than likely to be the tea ‘mashing,’ or whatever they call it,” thought Hoyland. What a place! What people! What crudity, roughness, coarseness! Everything but dirt; though there seemed to be something hard and repellent about the very cleanliness; those bare, scrubbed boards which edged the carpet in his room, for instance. Yet there was no sign of real poverty;

probably they were not, in the least poor, simply had no idea how to do anything.

The girl at the hearth straightened herself and moved towards him, with a couple of dogs—a mud-caked Aberdeen and a rough-coated white terrier—close about her feet. She had thrown off the preposterous hat, apparently without a glance in the mirror, or so much as putting a hand to her hair which lay flattened in a dim mass round her head. He had not been mistaken in his impression of youth; and yet, for all her youth, the almost childlike simplicity of her gaze, her clear blue eyes, she was more woman than girl. A little under medium height, slender and yet deep-breasted, she had full curved lips which folded to an extraordinary calm when she was not speaking, and perhaps it was this which gave the impression of balancing towards womanhood rather than girlhood, combined, as it was, with a sort of steady gravity; a rather short face, with a firm, rounded chin, a milk-white skin with a faint veil of freckles across the nose and under the eyes—warmer in tint and yet much the same as those with which artificial light had made a mockery of the open air in Leila Gavin's face. Hoyland had not thought of Leila for months and months, and now the comparison annoyed him, though to a far lesser degree than other such comparisons were fated to do in the near future. If there was anything new or fresh in this stripped life, for heaven's sake let him have it, he would have said.

"How do you do?"—the girl put out her hand, coarsened and reddened with cold. "I hope you're not frozen. I sent an extra coat—"

"It was pretty cold," acknowledged Hoyland; then smiled. "But, as you see, I've managed to survive." He moved towards the fire and held out his hand to the blaze: after all, the girl was not at all bad; good-looking, even, in a sort of way.

"I suppose the others will be here in a minute; tea's just ready. That'll do more than anything else to revive you. Unless you'd like a glass of wine first?"

"Sherry wine!" thought Hoyland, with an inward grimace, as he refused this offer. "If only it were a whiskey-and-soda, now! But that marked the difference—'a glass of wine.'"

He supposed that they were the sort of people who had never so much as heard of late dinner, for there was no hint

of any sort of excuse or explanation. And yet, questioning the small servant a few days later, he found that there had always been late dinner, even a man-servant, until the war; and Hoyland cursed them for their coolness; partly for that calm assumption, which ran side by side with their extreme simplicity, that every one must realize what was the right thing to do at such a time, that their economies needed no explanation; and partly for that mania which seemed to possess them, as it possessed most people nowadays, for showing their patriotism by making both themselves and every one else as uncomfortable as possible.

The yellow cur which had been fawning against her mistress's knees when he started to descend the stairs was back again in her basket, watching him with suspicion from above the frayed rim.

"Carrie doesn't like strangers," remarked the girl, and pursed up her mouth in an encouraging whistle.

There was a movement of the creature's head which suggested a wag of the tail; but she did not leave her haven, nor did she take her eyes from Hoyland, who reflected upon the appalling names which these people gave to their animals.

"Flo"—"Carrie!" Florence—Caroline!

The girl stooped, gave the contents of the tin a last stir, and set it on one side. "It's for the chicks—they want something warm this cold weather," she said; and then glanced up at the staircase.

"Here's Mother. Now we'll have tea."

Mrs. Clayton moved down the very center of the narrow staircase with a curious deliberation and care, her eyes set intently in front of her. She did not touch the banister, nor did she hesitate when she reached the bottom step; but once upon level ground she paused, her head held high, a little on one side, as though she were listening.

Her daughter turned quickly towards her and slipped an arm through hers: "This is Mr. Hoyland, Mother, darling," she said; and the mistress of the house, turning a trifle in Hoyland's direction, put out her hand, still looking straight in front of her, in an oddly vague and detached fashion.

As Hoyland touched her hand, he felt that it was peculiarly hot; not moist, but glowing; she had smiled as she extended it, with the murmur of something which sounded like "Very pleased," but the moment it met his she drew it back, sharply, while a scared look came into her eyes.

“He—he’s—there’s something—” she began confusedly; and Hoyland saw that the daughter—raising the hand which held her mother’s arm—laid it along the back of hers, interlacing fingers, as they moved towards the dining-room.

“He’s frozen and starved,” she said. “As for us—I’ve been hard at work all the afternoon, and tea’s more than an hour late; in your honor, Mr. Hoyland, so you mustn’t be shocked by our appetites.”

The girl spoke gayly, and yet with the steady gayety of a naturally grave, well-balanced nature; but Hoyland scarcely heeded her. He was thinking of Mrs. Clayton and her odd welcome—if welcome it could be called. She had blue eyes like her daughter; but while the girl’s were an intensely deep blue, shaded by thick, short black lashes, the mother’s were pale, with a curious translucent quality, so that against the light one felt that one might almost see through them. Her long-lipped mouth was sensitive and closely folded; while she was so thin as to appear emaciated, with long, slender and very beautiful hands. Her gray hair was straight and fine and not too tidy, and Hoyland wondered—rather irritably—if any one of the family ever looked in the glass. For so long as he was at Ox Lee he never saw her dressed in anything but gray, while her daughter wore, for the most part, warm shades of brown, the color of rich plow-land. It was as though the two represented by nature, and without knowing it, the earth and air: while as to Anthony—as he came to know him—what could Anthony be, unless it were the fourth element—water?

Miss Clayton—he supposed that this was the “Miss Diana” of whom the groom had spoken—seated herself at the head of the table and began to pour out the tea, warming the cups by dipping them into a steaming bowl of water. There was a good deal of food upon the table: boiled eggs, toast, scones, some sort of a meat-jelly, honey, preserves; and a ham on the sideboard. But still the girl seemed anxious lest Hoyland should starve, asked him if he would not like a chop or some cold beef, whether he had missed his “dinner.” All this, however, was mere politeness; her real attention and thought was for her mother: putting everything well within her reach, even getting up to place her cup by her side, though it was not until she said: “The honey is just in front of you, dear,” that Hoyland—who had made up his mind that the older woman was more than half-crazed—realized, with a

shock of surprise—that sort of resentment which comes to a selfish nature when another person's affliction, with its possible exactions, is intruded upon it—that she was blind.

And yet that was not all. She was not only blind, she was unaccountably ill at ease. The faint color in her long, delicate face came and went, and she trembled; glancing from side to side with that odd tilt of the head, which must mean listening as it was not sight.

Once she said: "Where is Anthony? Why doesn't Anthony come?" and her daughter answered:

"He must be washing his hands, dear. But he came in when I did. Perhaps he's shy—I know he is shy; he's not used to strangers." She turned towards Hoyland, half apologetically, while he thought:

"Like Carrie! It seems a kind of asylum for every sort of defective!"

Just as Miss Clayton rose to put the scones and tea down to the fire, the door opened, not very wide, and a youth of eighteen or so slipped into the room; moved across to Mrs. Clayton and bending over her kissed her cheek.

It was evidently an acknowledged rite, for his sister delayed her introduction until it was over. Then she said: "This is my brother Anthony, Mr. Hoyland," upon which Hoyland shook hands with his pupil, an inordinately tall, narrow-shouldered boy who looked as though he had outgrown his strength; with his mother's light eyes, long, delicately-cut face, and a thatch of straight hair, many shades lighter than his sister's.

There were, indeed, noticeable differences between all three of them; the girl so much stronger, more vital, self-reliant, altogether robust; all the pigments of her hair, eyes, vivid red lips, more intense than was the case with either of the other two. And yet, despite this, they were in some ways so alike, showed so little physical sign of any other strain that strangers were momentarily overcome by a whimsical wonder as to how it was possible for either boy or girl to have possessed a second parent.

Taken roughly, as a whole, the world of youth—that strangely blurred and devious way betwixt boyhood and manhood, with its warm air, its sudden chills, its perilous heights, depths—seems to be divided between two sorts of boys. If we cut out the bold—who are all seeming, never really bold, only bent upon proving their independence—there



remains the shy and the reserved; the latter leaning most to the masculine, the former to the feminine type; and it was to these that Anthony Clayton belonged. His shyness—with none of that set, all-surrounding armor of reserve, which always means pride and strength to fall back upon—was far more sensitive than any girl's; tinged with something wild and rustic—though more in the faun-like than the boorish, clumsy sense of the world.

Blushing to his forehead, half lost beneath its thatch of pale brown hair, the boy shook hands with his tutor, glancing at him sideways; then sat down by his mother, bending towards her as though glad of some diversion; the very back of his neck, the skin fine and clear as his sister's, tinged with color.

“What are you having, old dear?—What's nice?—I'm as hungry as twenty hunters.”

Mrs. Clayton put out one hand and clutched his sleeve. As the boy laid his own upon it Hoyland could not fail to notice the likeness between the two; both so long and narrow, the son's far whiter and thinner than it ought to have been. At any rate, these people were not vulgar, they were not coarse; they were interesting, however odd they might be. That remained, anyhow, until they began to bore him, he thought: his cold, appraising glance, so like a parrot, full upon them.

The mother whispered—he could only just catch the words—“I don't know, Anthony, I don't know, but there's something wrong; some—some—” She raised her head and her delicate nostrils quivered; for the moment she was like a finely-bred dog upon a faint, inexplicable and yet certain scent; the pupils of her eyes contracted to mere pin-points. Then, suddenly, she clung to her son, her face against his shoulder, and broke into a sort of wail: “Oh, there is something; there must be. You know, you know—”

Brother and sister both bent over her. It seemed to Hoyland that he was forgotten. Then the boy's eyes—moving round the room as though, oddly enough, in search of something which might be distressing the blind woman—rested for a moment upon his tutor, and he gave a little, half-amused, half-embarrassed laugh.

“I am awfully sorry, sir, but—Mother, darling, it's nothing, nothing! I expect—” he turned again to Hoyland—

“I expect you just nicked yourself, shaving; but my mother

notices far more than we do, seems to know by some sort of instinct—gets in an awful state—don't you, old darling?—over, over—Well, there *is* just the tiniest trickle of blood! On your right cheek—no; more to the right.”

Hoyland put up his handkerchief, then glanced at it. Yes, there it was: a minute smear of crimson. Already it seemed as though he must have caught some of the savage attributes of these lunatics, for he could not have so much as glanced at himself when he brushed his hair before he came downstairs.

“A lump of mud flew up from the horse's hoof and hit my cheek; there must have been a stone in it,” he explained. But he might as well have kept silence, for no one seemed to heed him.

“Only the tiniest cut on Mr. Hoyland's face, that's all. The minutest cut; nothing more, nothing but that,” said Diana.

“Nothing? Are you sure that there's nothing more?” inquired Mrs. Clayton; then added, with an air of desperate obstinacy, “Oh, but there is something—there is!”

## CHAPTER II

ONCE tea was over the little party moved into the hall and quickly dispersed. It struck Hoyland that Clayton *père* must be engaged in some sort of business which kept him late away from home, for there seemed to be no question of leaving anything ready for him. After a moment or so of fidgeting from one foot to another, picking up things and putting them down again, Anthony retreated, through a baize door, leading, apparently, into the back regions, while Mrs. Clayton stood nervously in the middle of the hall; then—just as Hoyland was wondering whether he should offer the poor lady a chair in her own house—moved into a room to the left, from which, after a moment's pause, came the notes of a flute, at first so confused, so blurred, that Hoyland gave a shudder of disgust at the thought that this was to be added to the other horrors of the place, but gathering in clearness after a moment or so, each note falling surely and more surely, until the whole was as clear, as sweet and pure as the spring notes of a blackbird after rain.

Miss Clayton had raised her tin of chicken-food from off the hearth; the dogs had gathered round her, even the mother

had come out of her basket. It was evident that they were all certain of a walk of some sort, when, of a sudden, with one arm in her overcoat sleeve, the girl remembered her manners.

"I must show you your study, the room I have made ready for you and Anthony to work in. I only hope the fire's all right. Nanny doesn't always remember fires very well. You may have some letters that you want to write."

It was evident that she was anxious to have him off her mind, for there was real relief in her voice as she led the way along a narrow, flagged passage to a room at the right of the hall, and exclaimed: "Oh, that's right. A lovely fire!"

It was, indeed, a lovely fire, a generous glow of half-burnt logs. A reading-lamp with a green shade stood upon the writing-table—an immense affair, with drawers to either side and a hole for the knees—upon which lay a careful assortment of books, papers, pens. Picking up a book at random, Hoyland glanced into it: an obsolete algebra, with "Richard Clayton, Tideswell Grammar School, November, 1856," written on the fly-leaf, and beneath this in a school-boy scrawl:

"Black is the raven, blacker is the rook,  
But blackest is the blackguard who steals this book."

"It was my father's room," said Miss Clayton, "and some of those are his books—yes, that one—and some Anthony's. But he has missed so much, got so behindhand, that I was afraid they would seem rather childish. He's really clever, I think—we all think him clever; but he's been so delicate up to now, had so little chance; besides, how can we tell, with nothing to compare with? When he was just on twelve we thought that he might get on better at school—that was before my father died. But he had rheumatic fever there, and that affected his heart. . . . Then we tried again, when he was fifteen; but he couldn't play games like other boys, and, of course, that made him miserable. . . . He didn't feel it here, with his fishing and the farm, and all the animals, which he loves. Since that he has worked with the vicar, and the village schoolmaster has taken him in mathematics. Mr. Hankin says he has a sort of instinct for Greek, for anything purely classical. But I'm not sure whether he doesn't make allowances. . . . I have a sort of feeling that Anthony ought to be with somebody who judges him on his own

merits, like any other boy. But I'm afraid you must expect all sorts of odd gaps in his knowledge—" She hesitated, her concerned eyes full upon Hoyland, weighing him up, wondering as to his patience. "I don't know, you see; I can't tell."

"What schools was he at?"

"First at my father's old school—Tideswell Grammar School; so high up, so washed with air that father had an idea that it must be good for him—harden him off. Then, later, I tried Repton—I always wanted a proper public school for him. Now, as you know, his great desire is for Cambridge, to go deeper into his Greek and Latin studies—take up philosophy and classical history. That's why I wrote to Mr. Ferguson, who put me into communication with you. I do so want Anthony to have the very, very best; to have everything he wants; be prepared for everything."

"Then it was you who wrote?" Hoyland smiled. It was impossible for him not to at least start off with being pleasant to a pretty girl: and there was no doubt about her prettiness. He hesitated in his thought. After all, "pretty" was not the word; something in her balance, her calm, the fine yet generous lines of her, spoke of beauty more than prettiness, though her nose was perhaps a trifle too heavy for the completely classic.

"Yes, it was I who wrote—didn't you know? Oh, of course not; you addressed the letters 'D. A. Clayton, Esq.!' But it did not seem to matter; it made no difference. It happens so often. My father died six years ago; he left everything in my charge. I write all the business letters—a great many people take it for granted that I'm a man; I suppose it's my writing—give all the orders, decide everything in connection with Anthony. Of course, when he is older, it will be different—everything will be his. My mother is very fragile; she must not be bothered about anything. Everything I do is—must be—done upon my own initiative."

"You strike me as very young for so much responsibility," said Hoyland, with something deliberate, subtly tender in his glance and voice.

The girl raised her eyes and looked up at him, fully and gravely, as though she were, indeed, another man. "I am five-and-twenty—not very young." She had taken up a book, was turning it over and over in her hand, glancing

at it—not fidgeting, but considering. “Mr. Hoyland,” she began again, “you will remember, won’t you, if you want anything, if anything’s not to your liking, you will speak to me or Nanny—”

“Nanny?”

“Yes; she brought in the tea. I expect she showed you to your room.”

“Oh, the parlor-maid—”

“Well, I suppose she is the parlor-maid—among other things.” For the first time since they met a smile crossed the girl’s face. “She was my old nurse; now she is everything to all of us, above all, to my mother.” Again she hesitated, then laid the book which she was holding upon the table, and faced Hoyland, definitely. “But won’t you sit down?”

“You—”

“Oh, I like to stand.”

“Then I will stand too.” In some odd way Hoyland was piqued. Did she mean to challenge him, standing so near, facing him in that fashion? A girl like that wanted kissing, that’s what she wanted. He wondered whether she ever had been kissed by any one, apart from her mother and brother, insipid women-friends?

“I think that perhaps I ought—that it will be better—make everything much easier—if I ask you not to seem to take much notice of my mother until you’ve been here a few days; until she’s had time to get used to you. She’s very highly-strung, very nervous with strangers. She—

“Oh, no, no! you mustn’t think *that*; indeed, you mustn’t think *that*—never *that*!” she broke off, for Hoyland’s thoughts were clear enough in his half-contemptuous glance. “You mustn’t imagine that there’s anything worse than nerves—all she’s been through, and then the want of her sight and all. But, really, as you’ll soon find out, she is cleverer—much, much cleverer—than any of us. She has the most extraordinary insight, the clearest judgment, if only she’s not upset in any way. Sometimes I think that there’s no end to the things my mother knows: only it’s never good to force her into any fixed determination—”

“Or dislike?”

“Or dislike.” She made no effort to palliate the meaning in Hoyland’s words. “She’s, somehow or other, startled now—but, then, she is so often startled. It would not be fair to you that any one of us should start with any—any

sort of feeling of definite antagonism. And so—well, it seemed better to explain.”

“You thought you saw signs of it?” Hoyland was smiling; more genially now. He didn’t care a hang about the mother, but he would be a fool to antagonize the daughter, apparently the one sane person in the place.

“I don’t know, really I don’t know. I think it was only the accident of that little scratch on your face. But I want you to know this. . . . It was she who was so anxious for you to come. We”—she hesitated, with the first hint of shyness that she had shown—“we get into our own ways; are rather afraid of strangers. But Mother was determined that there ought to be some one here who, apart from his preparation for college, would teach Anthony something of the world which he has, after all, got to live in.

“I can manage the farm, the business, the house—though Nanny does most of that now that we’re so short-handed; but for anything else I’m perfectly hopeless. I don’t know how other people look at things—their sense of values. It would be awfully hard on Anthony to go to Cambridge knowing as little as he does about life. Of course, my mother’s absolutely right there. Besides, a man has to learn to play as well as to work, and in a man’s way; with a woman it’s different. It took my mother to see this; and you must never, never think—never even appear to think, to notice—oh, other things—things that don’t really count.”

“You mean, if she is upset, like she was to-night, not to deduce—”

“Yes, yes, that’s it; not to deduce anything—anything of *that* sort.”

“Just to carry on?”

“Yes, just to carry on.” Hoyland’s tone was so matter-of-fact that the girl was grateful. It was such a relief, living among highly-strung, emotional people, to be able to speak with any one so untouched by any sort of vulgar surprise, or even that pity, which could hurt so much more than anything else.

“She is so extraordinarily sensitive, she would know in a moment if you thought—well, that she wasn’t in some sort of way responsible. It would spoil her as far as you are concerned: you’d never get to know her then—never. It is as though she were like a pool which, when it is stirred, is all

muddy and indistinct, but when it is still gives back all sorts of beautiful, clear reflections. A very dreadful thing happened just before my brother Anthony was born.—I think I'd better tell you this, it will help you to understand, to realize.—My eldest brother, who was three years older than I am, had a new pony given him for his tenth birthday: he had often ridden an old horse we had then, and it seemed that a pony must be so much safer. My father didn't know anything about horses—of course, he didn't know, thought it would be all right. He had always wanted to live in the country, thought of little else; his grandfather and all the Claytons before him had been tenants of Ox Lee, and he used to tell me that from the time he was quite a small boy he made up his mind to come back as the owner of the place. But apart from his school-life he had always lived and worked in Manchester. He was wonderful. He made his own way. He looked after the whole family; my grandfather was never very much good for anything. He was over fifty when he did at last retire and buy this place. You see, he couldn't know anything really of country life, of animals, but his one desire was always that we should grow up with it, love it—really belong to it. He had great ideas of making my brother plucky and independent; and so had my mother. She was used to the country, took all sorts of sports and things for granted, did not know what it was to be afraid—in those days.

“My brother didn't like the pony—it was so different to the old horse, which would stand like a rock while he scrambled on and off—I remember the look of it now: its shining chestnut coat, the way it showed the white of its eye, dancing from side to side. Dad called my mother to see Johnny mount—I suppose he thought that he would shame him out of his fear. He thought it was all nonsense, that he was doing the right thing—of course, that's what he thought”—the girl spoke as though she were determined to check any shadow of blame which might, even at the back of her own mind, attach to her father—“he could never have been consciously cruel to any one. But he had had a hard life, believed in determination, that you could do anything by determination. My mother was never hard, but—though I think that even then she had odd, nervous fears which we could never understand—she knew nothing of physical fear. I remember now—and, of course, she never forgets, never can forget,

that's the cruel part of it!—how she used to laugh at Johnny for his cowardice—how she laughed then, and how he scrambled on to the pony directly she appeared upon the scene."

For a moment she paused; her face grew stiff with the effort of self-control. "The pony reared," she went on in a low voice. "He was thrown; his head was cut open against the very step upon which she was standing—I was a tiny thing, but I can never, never forget—no one could ever forget. And what it must have been for her! She who worshiped Johnny. . . . She was very, very ill for months afterwards—it was that which gave her that horror of blood. And now she knows at once, even if one of the dogs comes into the house with so much as a scratch upon it.—Well, you know what happened this evening, how distressed she was—it must have been that; it couldn't have been anything else." The girl's clear, sexless gaze was full upon him, searching, weighing—a little doubtful.

"Then Anthony was born, and she lost her sight. Mother, darling Mother! Oh, do you wonder that we feel we can never do enough for her? The worst of life, the desperate part of life, is that one can do so little, however much one cares. If your mother were like this—blind—so sorrowful, always reproaching herself—Oh, well, you know what you'd feel!"

"My poor mother died close on a year ago." Hoyland spoke gravely, but the expression amused him, as it always did: that "poor," so common to the devout, who vaunt death as the happier state.

"Oh, I am sorry; but there—it's all fresh enough for you to realize—know—what you'd feel if she were like my mother is now. That it was impossible—impossible ever to do enough."

She hesitated for a moment or two, glancing round the room—the book-shelves with their glass doors and trellis of brass wire, the heavy maroon curtains, the fire, over which she leant and threw another log. "I must go and finish off with the chickens; we have quite a large farm here, and nearly all the men, the bailiff and all, have been called up. There's a lot to do."

She moved to the door, then glanced up in some surprise as Hoyland held it open for her. "You will ask for anything you want—you won't feel lonely or strange? Per-



haps you would like one of the dogs to keep you company?"

"I'm sure that the dogs would rather be out of doors with you."

"Well, perhaps. To-morrow, of course, there will be Anthony. You and Anthony will get used to each other; you'll soon slip into our ways." There was a sort of decision about this; despite all her concern as to his comfort it was evident that their ways were not to be altered to fit in with his. "Nanny will bring you your supper about nine. I'll be with Mother, so I'll say good-night now. You are sure you would not like one of the dogs?"

"No, thanks; I don't think, Miss Clayton, that I really have any great passion for animals."

"No?" He had been seized with a sudden desire to offend, hurt her, but she glanced at him gravely, with no particular concern. "Well, it's better than liking them too much, as some people do; liking them because they never contradict or disagree. Liking them better than children, for instance! Well, good-night, Mr. Hoyland. I hope you'll sleep well."

"Good-night, Miss Clayton; and, believe me, that I value the confidence you have shown in me—almost more than I can say." The look he bent upon her might have been labeled, amidst his panoply of conquest, as "Tender and Respectful Understanding," so well had he calculated its value, its appropriate use.

As he closed the door behind Miss Clayton, he realized that she had not so much as noticed it; was still thinking of what had gone before, and gave a little laugh. So this was the end of the day! There was no alternative to solitary imprisonment, or so it seemed, unless it were feeding the chickens with his employer. His employer! Good Lord, only to think of it!

He glanced at the black marble clock upon the mantel-piece.

It was a quarter-past eight: the sort of time when he would, in the old days, have been just starting the best part of the day with dinner. The thought of champagne struck across his senses like a whiff of perfume—champagne and all it meant; a civilized dinner, and after that the last two acts of a play, or an hour at a music-hall; maybe with Leila Gavin or one of her predecessors; more likely with one of those society women who were so much more flagrantly con-

spicuous than Leila and her kind; trading upon the place they held in the world, their husband's names.

Later on would come supper at the Café Royal, a night club, the Tango: an utter disregard of the fact that night was made for sleep: painted eyes, red lips, dead-white faces, the smell of flesh and wine. And, better than all of these, those endless discussions, running far into the morning, upon everything in and out of life: the deference paid to his opinion, the way in which people remembered him, reminded him of what he had said, months and months ago: arguments in which, second to him, came old McCabe, with that Rabelais-like humor which arose through his immense melancholy at such times as he was just sufficiently mellowed by good wine or fine old brandy.

The light beneath the green shade burnt steadily: the books behind their trellis-work were in ordered array—the works of Dickens and Thackeray; "The Annals of Agriculture"; dissertations upon "The Dog," "The Horse," "Stock-Breeding and Rearing."

The wind had risen and was raging round the house, and when Nanny appeared with his supper—bread and cheese, a loaf of bread, beer in a brown jug—the plaintive notes of the flute floated in through the open door, a minor accompaniment to the wail and roar, the sudden boom which every now and then beat like a fist against the window pane.

"Miss Diana can't get the mistress away from her music to-night." Nancy glanced at him gravely, as though he were the cause of her mistress's uneasiness. Hoyland realized the look now, the "old nurse look," summing up and disapproving. It had been like that when he was a child; strange servants had never liked him, spoken of him "upsetting their charges." This woman actually said it, reprovingly, deliberately. "She's upset, that's what she is."

"Where's Mr. Anthony?"

"In bed, I reckon; we're early folk here."

"What time's breakfast?"

"Eight o'clock. Oi'll call yer at seven."

There was no "if it suits you." It was an ultimatum, very different from the insinuating, half-questioning reply of a well-trained servant.

Making his way to his room soon after half-past ten—driven there by sheer boredom—just at the top of the stairs, in the clear sheet of moonlight which swept in through the

unshaded hall windows, Hoyland met Miss Clayton, with a candle in one hand, coming out of what he afterwards found to be her mother's room. She was wearing a thick white dressing-gown, and her hair was in two plaits down her back; but she did not seem in the least embarrassed at the encounter, and with a kindly-expressed hope that he would sleep well, turned away in the opposite direction.

For a moment Hoyland thought of following, making love to her; breaking through that virginal calm which, in an odd way, outraged him, forcing a sort of scene—anything to shatter the deadly silence, the emptiness, the *ennui* of the place. But after a moment's hesitation he turned aside to his own room. He had got to stick it out for a bit, until things improved, until he was fit again, and some of these middle-class countrywomen were such hopeless prudes. Better leave it alone for the present, anyhow; and, after all—though he could but admire her—there was not a thrill, or anything in the least like it.

In his own room, with the fire sunk to a glow of crimson ash, he moved to the window and pulled aside a crack of curtain. The sky, of that dim, periwinkle-blue so seldom seen apart from old Chinese color-prints, was swept by torn fragments of silvery cloud; the moon, almost at its full, swum in an infinity of space, flattening down the surrounding hills to a mere nothing; the sharp, wild bark of a fox on some rock-strewn slope, echoing and re-echoing through the clear air, was followed by the exasperated tumult of dogs imprisoned in an outhouse beneath his window.

Drawing the curtains together again, Hoyland took a candle and held it close to the looking-glass on his dressing-table; bending forward and peering at his face—even thus, with the curtains drawn and windows shut, the flame was blown all sideways, the wax guttered down and over his hand.

There was the tiniest scratch upon his right cheek, almost invisible had it not been for the clot of dried blood, the minutest pin-head, at one end. How in the world had that blind fool come to guess at it, he wondered, as he washed his face and applied a strip of black sticking-plaster? What odd, over-sensitive sense of smell or intuition did it bespeak? There were mystery-mongers in London who would give anything to be put in touch with such a case: Friedland, with his Black Magic, for instance. All very well—but to be shut up

alone with people of that sort, it was beyond a joke! The boy Anthony did not look much better—half-baked. A savage determination to make his pupil suffer for his boredom swept over Hoyland. Teach him! What wouldn't he teach him? Classics? They wanted classics: well, they should have them, with all their cold degeneration. Catullus, for instance—how would Catullus taste to an Ox Lee mental palate?

### CHAPTER III

LIFE in the Army is supposedly monotonous. To Hoyland's brief experience it was nothing to the life at Ox Lee. Both in France and in training in England the monotony had been mostly surface. Where you have any large body of men, they may seem to move in unison; in reality they are for ever pushed and pulled this way and that by the diverse intelligences which are set over them—by the way in which they themselves take things. Apart from this, which is usual, it must be remembered that the period during which Hoyland was with the forces was one of excitement which was to remain unparalleled until the autumn following upon this very spring, which saw him derelict in the wilds of Derbyshire; while apart from the constant alarms and excursions, the zig-zag of rumor, there was every sort of personal passion, pain, pleasure, nobility, vice, self-sacrifice, greed—the yeast of life astir in its starkest phases.

One never knew what might happen, what was happening: that was the truth of the matter. The pendulum of life and death, success and failure, swung widely from one extreme to another; if it stopped, it was only for a sort of gathering of forces, as the heart seems to stop between two of its intensest beats. To the unintelligent there may, indeed, have been monotony; they were out there to fight, and if they were unable to fight their nerves grew raw with boredom. In this might be found the reason why the most stolid—the athletes, the agricultural laborers, and such-like, were the most likely to panic after a long period of inactivity. But for any student of life, the excitement, the interest was unending.

Hoyland had grumbled like the rest over the monotony. He now realized that he had not so much as known the

meaning of the word; while at Ox Lee, he was, as it were, stripped down to it at its very barest.

The languor of spring in his veins might have eased things a little; but arriving the last week of March, a fortnight or so of comparatively mild weather was followed by another couple of weeks of cruel cold—a sprinkling of reluctant snow, an east wind which cut to the bone, iron-gray skies, storm-rent and dour.

He was sensitive to cold as he had never before been: he had lost flesh; his muscles were slack. Naked in his tub-bath, glancing at himself sideways over his shoulder in the glass, he realized that where his spine had once lain sunken between two ridges of muscle, it now stood out, with the flesh fallen away upon either side of it. McCabe would have had something to say to that: if a man was as old as his arteries, he was as sane as the protection of his spinal cord allowed him to be. This was one of McCabe's special fancies, and no new one either; for there lay that small bone which was designated in the time of Hadrian as "Luz"—the seat of eternal life: with much of what was known as morality and immorality, genius and insanity. There, in the very marrow of man's inmost being, lurked those devils which—or so the Australian aborigines believe—are stirred to malignant life, should any one be rash enough to sit with his back to the fire.

And there, likely enough, was to be found much of the reason for Hoyland's new sense of exasperation, desperate impatience, furious irritability.

He had been tranquil before because his bones were well covered; satisfied with life as it was—very much in his own hands—padded away from the tiresomeness of other people. Apart from this, he had that freedom of movement which belongs to the monied classes—could come and go as he wished.

It now seemed as though he were raw to the rest of the world. He had never known shame for anything before, but—Greek in spirit as he had always been—he was bitterly ashamed of his maimed hands. The very sight of that stiffly gloved artificial member, that parody which was, after all, so much more useful than the other, insulted him.

At first the people at Ox Lee—"Ox Lee"—what a name!—people whose "talk is of oxen"—tried to help him, showed—apart from Mrs. Clayton and Nanny—a clumsy

sort of solicitude; they made allowances, and perhaps that more than anything else infuriated him.

And yet, when Diana, realizing his mood, sympathizing with it, left him alone, that did nothing to allay his sense of grievance.

He took it out on Anthony—without a doubt he took it out on Anthony; and yet, from the very beginning, the boy had that adoration for him which a stay-at-home, romantically-minded youth will have for a man of the world, whom he is unable to understand.

He was extraordinarily humble; if Mr. Hoyland was impatient with him, it was his own fault; he was an ignorant ass, there was no doubt about that.

But here the boy underrated himself; he was far from ignorant; with all sorts of odd gaps in his knowledge, the remainder was up to a standard which the tutor could hardly have believed possible. He must have read widely, sopped up knowledge. His sister had been right when she expressed a fear that some of his books might appear babyish; with mathematics he was, indeed, a complete infant, but in classics and general literature he was well above the average.

And yet there was the oddest lack. The human application of things missed him; there was a sort of wide, sweet emptiness about his mind, which took the melody without the meaning.

He was indolent, too. In the outdoor world he loved to laze, to look on; his one passion for fishing seemed a part of this dreaming. Now and then his sister would sweep him into helping her about the farm, but not for long; he would linger to look at a nest, a flower, and then drift away.

She had never in all his life seen him really stick to work as he did with Hoyland. And, after all, that was what she wanted for him. From her father's death she had taken a man's burden upon her shoulders. The war, the calling up of all the younger farm hands, the loss of the bailiff, had added enormously, not only to her cares, but the actual hard work which devolved upon her. Anthony could never have been of much use in that direction; he was not physically strong enough. Besides, the last thing she wished was to see him drawn into the monotony of farm life and labor. It was a relief to know that he was working so steadily; for herself, she had her own job, and it took her all her time to get through it. In addition to everything else, the intri-

cate reports which the agricultural department required of farmers at this time were an-intolerable burden upon any one whose days were filled, almost from dawn, by arduous labor in the open air. Passing through the hall, on his way up to bed one night, Hoyland saw her seated at her big writing-table, bent forward, asleep, with her head among the mass of papers, the account-books, the dull yellow forms.

It was difficult to get on to the land, which was sodden with rain and half-melted snow; the lambs were suffering, the spring-sowing behindhand. A week later, when the weather cleared again, every man had to be at work in the fields, and all the lesser tasks slid to her shoulders. Hoyland had never seen any woman work so hard, apart from the hospital nurses in the Base hospital. But she never seemed hustled or impatient. She was not stolid, but she was infinitely calm, considerate towards everything and every one; though to lose any animal, even to have it ill, weighed on her as much as though it were a human being.

Hoyland had been arrogant—almost childish—enough to imagine that he would make some sort of impression upon, stir in, such a place, and the Vicar's three daughters, two gushing, high-colored and mature young women, and a half-grown, pretty piece of insipidity, were visibly fluttered. But, apart from them, the inexorable rural life went on without deflecting from its routine; almost without touching him, while—

“Poor things, they've really not got much to think of,” was Miss Clayton's unflattering verdict upon the thick-falling shower of invitations to sing at concerts, to help with this and that with which the Vicarage party deluged him.

At first, indeed, he rather encouraged them; he had a silly idea that he would make Diana Clayton jealous—all women were jealous; it was the one attribute to be counted upon. But all she said was: “It's really awfully kind of you, and I daresay it will help to pass the time. I'm afraid it must be very dull for you here”—and that put an end to it. Did she really imagine that he was futile enough to be so easily amused?

As to jealousy . . . How he hated her for her want of it, for her indifference, tempered by so much thought and kindness! He wondered if anything could ever move her:

if, being so impervious to love and vanity, she could be stirred to anger.

And then one day he happened to see her with a lad who was ill-treating a calf, which he had been sent to fetch up from a group of buildings—a barn and a few sheds at the bottom of what was known as the “Long Field.” The creature’s mother had been left behind in one of the lower fields, and its desperate lowing followed them as they made their way up to the main farm buildings between two hedges which left a sparse strip of muddy lane, deep in ruts and pools.

The calf, just too big to carry, was softly, persistently obstinate, as such meek creatures can be; its mother’s cry dragged at its heart-strings, and its large, bewildered eyes were full of actual tears as it hung back, with a moaning sound, against the rope which the boy had about its neck. Its hind legs slithered in the mud. He tried pulling, then he tried pushing it in front of him; but it was so wobbly, so soft and boneless, so loose-legged, that there seemed nothing to go against. At last, out of all patience, he fell to cursing, then to kicking, his dull, rustic face red and aggrieved. He’d—“larn yu blasted, bluddy yung varmint!”

Hoyland and Miss Clayton—who had met on the road from the village, when she had offered to show him a short cut home across the fields—happened to be walking up a narrow strip of turf which edged the plow at one side of the fence. Hearing something of what was going on, Diana climbed the bank and peered over the low-cut hedge, still more black and purple than green; then, with a stifled exclamation, swung her leg over it and dropped into the lane.

By the time that Hoyland followed her she had the youngster by his coat-collar, was laying into him with her stick, while the cause of all the trouble stood back, with outsplayed legs, staring, making no attempt at escape.

“My God!” said Diana, “but it’s I who’ll ‘larn’ you, my lad!” Her face was absolutely white, her lips set in a hard line. But she ended the beating cleanly—did not go on slashing, as most women would have done, while the bellowing boy set up no defense.

Then she put out her hand to the calf, which mumbled it with moist, pink lips; moving along at her side so that the rope was slack in her other hand.



All the way up to the farm, with the blubbering boy behind them, she did not speak a word. In the yard they ran against his father, who had just got back from the plow, and was leading his horses to the trough: a huge, stooping fellow, reddish-brown skin and hair, reddish-brown corduroys, plastered over, merged into one, beneath a thick coating of reddish-brown soil, moving slowly, as heavy-footed as though the pull of earth, his absorption with it, were almost too much for him.

"I thrashed your boy, Jabe, for kicking the calf."

"E-h, well, missus, I reckon 'e won't be none the wuss for that, the young varmint," said Jabe, with a grin, and chirruped to his horses, thick in mud as himself.

"I'll skin you alive another time, if I catch you ill-treating any beast of mine, or any one else's, either—mind that!" said Diana, and those who had known old Clayton would have recognized the threat; her face was still white, but her glance was kindly. "And when you go for the pails, you may tell Fanny I said to give you a bit o' cake by way of sticking-plaster." She turned to Hoyland as the boy shambled off. "I must get my milking-smock; the cows are all up."

"I thought that class wouldn't have a hand laid on its children."

For a moment she stared, then took in his meaning. "What, Jabe? . . . Oh, we're used to each other here, understand each other. It's the new people they won't take anything from; it's they who make the trouble."

So she could be angry, reflected Hoyland, as he turned aside to the house and stood scraping his boots at the front door. What more might there not be to her? he wondered, as he turned first one foot, then the other, heavy with mud, from side to side, finishing off with a besom which stood leaning against the side of the porch. Glancing up as he finished, he saw that Mrs. Clayton stood just within the shadow of the hall, watching him. "The mud's awful," he said.

"Yes, yes—it's awful," she answered vaguely; hesitated a moment, then added: "But, for all that, it's part of us. It belongs to us and we to it; we live by it, through it—will lie cheek-by-jowl with it—Best make friends with it while we can. It's a hard enemy—a hard, inexorable enemy!"

She turned aside, moved a few steps further into the hall;

then flung over her shoulders: "You're a classical scholar—do you remember how Orestes chances upon the Furies, asleep for once, and so snatches a brief respite? . . . Take it, Mr. Hoyland; take it while you can. . . . For what is the mud but the dust of many graves? And where shall any rest be found for 'the bitter in soul'?"

Hoyland gave a short laugh. "You're in a melancholy mood, Mrs. Clayton," he said; but, for all that, he was chilled—in some vague way scared—by her words, by her manner; the fashion in which her blind eyes seemed, by their disregard, to make him, leave him, of so little account.

Heavens, what a household to find oneself among! A hoyden with a stick, walloping plowboys; a mad woman; a half-baked lout of a boy! Even in the warm seclusion of the study, bent close over the fire, with a cigarette, he shivered. Somehow or other he must have taken a chill; one did not have that sensation of cold water trickling down one's back for nothing.

Anthony was bent over his books, his wide mouth twisted all to one side with the effort of concentration. He had a trick of holding his pen a little on one side, so that it made a scratching sound as it traveled over the paper. That was one of the things which all utterly common people did—wetted their finger as they turned the pages of a book, scratched with their pens—thought Hoyland, and turned upon him in a fury, finding some relief in self-assertion, abuse.

## CHAPTER IV

THE bay mare had been clipped, and with this transformation something at once more ordered and more alert had crept into her bearing. There was a clean-limbed, aged gray hunter in the stable, which Diana rode. It had been her father's, and, excepting for Anthony, no one else ever crossed its back; but Hoyland was made free of the bay. She was, indeed, as much as he could manage with his maimed hands, and he occasionally rode her upon fine afternoons—those interminable afternoons which at times drove him to the thought that it would be a change to keep his pupil at his studies through the entire day; there, anyhow, was some sport of alternately tormenting and dazzling. It amused him to try every sort of corrosive upon the boy, though it was

piquing to find him so much true gold, that, as yet, nothing had really stuck, blurred, for more than an hour or so, a day at the most; besides, he was so difficult to get at, so incurably shy, drawing back within himself. Still, he was more largely influenced by what he read than by what he heard; was simple enough to attach immense weight and truth to the printed matter.

Sometimes Hoyland thought that he would keep worming on and on at him till he had routed him out of his shell, held him at his mercy—a winkle on a pin; then he grew tired of the whole thing, could scarcely bear the sight of the boy. After all, Anthony was nothing to him; it was Diana whom he wanted. One of two things was open to him: he might torture her brother, as one may torture a little animal so that it cries out, attracts attention; or he might seem to be so good to him, for him, that the girl's gratitude would be aroused. As it was— Oh, curse her! with her half-alooof air of grave consideration and courtesy!

She had ridden with him once over the high, heathy uplands, from which they could look down at Chatsworth, sulking in its park. She rode cross-legged with long stirrups—as her namesake might have ridden, with the easy pose of a huntress—"chaste"—damnably chaste!—"and fair"; very thoughtful for her companion, keeping back her gray mount with its longer stride, in case the bay should pull too heavily upon his hands, pointing out all the places of interest. It had been a wild, windy day, with sweeping gray clouds and a damp coldness in the air; the tight knob of misty dark hair at the back of her head, her very eyelashes, were dewed with the moisture which was, at times, wrapped close around them, then flung down in varying strata across the plains far below where they rode.

Hoyland could not have said why he remembered that ride, compared it with all others taken alone, or in the company of his pupil. But remember it he did, though the way in which Diana had talked of crops, growth, stock—then, quitting her own interests, questioned him politely upon his own affairs—drove him to that state of blank exasperation which so often overcame him in her presence; and he was seized with a desire to recount some utterly lewd, personal experience, to prove that he was at least a man, not a mere automaton.

Was she utterly without life, sex, feeling? he wondered.

The coolness, the self-possession of her when she drew rein in the farmyard, upon their return journey; questioning the herd about a cow, which groaned heavily in one of the byres, amazed him.

"She was too small to mate with that bull—we shouldn't have done it. She'll suffer—and the calf, too. Ten to one we'll lose it."

She did not attempt to lower her voice. There were other details; she discussed them anxiously, and yet as easily as though she were speaking of one of her mother's headaches.

Another day Hoyland encountered a burly, farmer-like individual upon the door-step in conference with Nanny. He had a bill for Miss Clayton, but it seemed that no one knew where she was to be found. "An' yet she won't have nothing run on," declared the man. "It ain't my wish to come worritin'; the money's safe enough with a Clayton, I know that."

As it happened, Hoyland knew where Diana was to be found, and volunteered to take the note to where she was planting out young cabbages in the upper kitchen-garden.

She had dug and prepared the ground, and now—her course made straight by a tautly-pegged string—was dibbling holes with the pointed shaft of an old spade; dropping a limp young plant—of which she carried a number in an old fishing-basket hung over her shoulders—into each of them with one hand; then pressing the earth close about the stem with the other.

Hoyland had watched her from his bedroom window, exasperated by the calm method of her every movement. To go on, and on, and on, planting cabbages in holes! Lord, what a life! Now, nearer to her, his impatience was turned to disgust as he saw her pick up a large, obscene-looking worm and throw it on one side, with her bare hand covered in chocolate-brown mold.

She looked up and smiled, with that preoccupied, half-tender air that he had so often noticed upon her face when she was busied over any young things, either plants or animals.

As Hoyland handed her the paper, she glanced at it with dismay. "I can't touch it with these hands. Smooth it out for me, will you?" she said; then bent forward and read the brief announcement, neatly worked out in purple ink, frowning a little, her brows contracted, for she was a

trifle short-sighted. It was perfectly explicit: "For the services of the bull, Blackboy," upon such-and-such a date. Hoyland's eyes sparkled maliciously as he watched her face, but there was not so much as the shadow of any confusion upon it when she raised it to his.

"Oh, old Glaisher! The fee for the bull. I wonder if you would mind, Mr. Hoyland? There's some loose silver and a couple of pound notes in the top drawer of my writing-table. It's guineas, isn't it? Perhaps you'll settle with him; it will save my leaving my work, washing my hands."

What was one to think of such a girl?—Oh, well, Hoyland did think, thought and thought; presupposed the more human application of such knowledge, and all the while knew that he was wrong.

It was a week or so after this that—returning from a ride just in time for the hated high-tea—he was putting down his cap and whip in the hall, when he heard a loud, gruffish woman's voice: "Of course, any one would notice him, a cut above most of the people in these parts. But temper, my dear! Talk of temper—that flogging sort of mouth, for all its Belvedere Apollo curve. See him? Oh, in Buxton, some time last week. Miss Hervey was driving me, and so intent upon looking as though she saw nobody, it was impossible not to notice him—making a procession of one down Spring Gardens!"

"I don't think he's bad-tempered." It was Diana's voice, and Hoyland knew that it was himself of whom they were speaking; the door into the hall was wide open, every word audible. "He seems very quiet, almost indifferent—too indifferent for temper. But, all the same, it's rather restful. I'm sure he's very clever, a man of the world. Oh, yes, Carrie, you are right there: quite a different sort of world! However, we all like him—except for poor old Nanny, who has a sort of mortal antipathy; but I think that's partly Mother's fault."

"I don't like him." It was Mrs. Clayton who spoke, with quiet decision. "And I'm not alone, either—they none of them like him."

"My dear, who do you mean by 'none of them'?" It was the stranger's voice again.

"Well, look at the dogs: your namesake, Carrie, and all the others; the people about the place—people who never reason themselves into anything. Oh, and more than

that! The earth, which draws back and snarls at him; the sky, which holds him pinned beneath it—never enfolding, bending; the wind, the trees—”

“You’re an odd fish, Lucy.”

“—But most of all, the earth: the trees and the earth, they conspire—they’ll have him, between them.”

“They’ll have us all, I fancy—best oak, silver handles, name-plate; and six-foot-by-two—or whatever it may be—o’ sod. But it won’t bear thinking of, Lucy. Diana, my dear, I’ve a passionate desire for some of that ham.—Why will they never let me have ham at tea in my own house?—ham and watercress an’ all.”

The speaker broke off as Hoyland entered the room, and stared at him frankly, with a pair of very small, very bright eyes set like two black beads amid a vast expanse of weather-beaten face, three chins and an undisguised mustache: an immense, solid bulk of a woman, devoid of all refinement of feature, coloring, form; and yet with that unmistakable air of being, despite all this, “some one”; the secret of which remains unknown save to a very few Englishwomen of the bluest possible blood.—“We were talking of you,” she remarked coolly, as Diana introduced them—“Mr. Hoyland, Lady Caroline Stendall—”

“I’m afraid I must plead guilty to having overheard something of the sort.” Hoyland was surprised: this was not the sort of friend—and evidently so familiar a friend, that even the girl called her by an abbreviated Christian name—with whom he would have credited the household at Ox Lee.

“Ah, well, now you know what we think of you the ground’s clear—no need for any inanities. Still, you don’t quite come up to the Rectory report, let me tell you.”

“What was that, may I ask?”

“Sweet, ‘perfectly sweet’—Still, if you can cut ham, thin—really thin—”

“‘Thin as remembered kisses after death,’” answered Hoyland, and Lady Caroline laughed, throwing back her head, and opening her mouth like a man. “Good! very good! There was precious little religious teaching in our family; but this cutting the ham—there was a point of ritual! My father never really forgave my cousin’s husband—” a jerk of the head showed that she was alluding to Mrs. Clayton—“because he hollowed the ham when they first came to stay

with us as an engaged couple. We thought he would hate the idea of trade; and so he did, until the ham episode, then he thought of nothing else. Hams and foxes—the only two things he held sacred. Do you remember that little catechism, eh, Lucy?—We were brought up together, you know, Mr. Hoyland—‘What is the greatest sin in the world?’ ‘Murder.’ ‘What is the worst form of murder?’ ‘Shooting a fox.’”

“How well I remember Terry Burke—” began Mrs. Clayton. The clear ring had gone out of her voice, her color came and went. She had edged her chair closer to Lady Caroline, laid a snowflake hand upon her stout arm; and yet, despite the manifest uneasiness which came with Hoyland’s presence, she made an effort to speak lightly. “How well I remember Terry Burke, that funny little man with his brogue. They were shooting in the Long Wood—just where the butterfly-orchids grew along that moist hollow—and John Harrih was there, so nervous and short-sighted.—He tipped your father once; do you remember, Carrie, how he tipped your father? thought he was the gamekeeper?—He must have seen something bright brown moving through the undergrowth; I suppose he imagined it was a bird, or perhaps he didn’t mind—anyhow, he raised his gun—do you remember? Oh, Carrie! do you remember”—with her shoulder close to her cousin’s, her voice gathered that note of pure merriment of which Hoyland had caught an echo more than once when she was alone with her children—“how Terry ran forward, waving his hat and crying, ‘Shoot me—shoot me—for the Lord’s sake, shoot me, if it’s murder yer afther!’”

It was then that Anthony came in, with the yellow cur at his heels, showing her teeth at Hoyland and making a circuitous, sidelong course towards her namesake, whom she greeted with obvious affection.

“Poor little bitch! How many pups did she have, eh, Di?”

“Eight.”

“Well, she looks like it—thin as a rake—and called after me, too—a disgrace! I only hope you drowned ’em.”

“All but two.”

“An’ hopeless curs they are, I take my oath on that! Never had much taste in the matrimonial line, had you, eh, old girl?”

But Carrie the Second, reared up against her knees, show-

ing no signs of shame, merely grinned and panted with affection, making sidelong movements to lick the hand which caressed the top of her sandy head, pulled her uneven ears with their tangle of goose-grass seed and burr.

"No, no, you little beast, I don't want your kisses, much as I love you. What have you been doing with yourself, eh, Anthony?"

"This afternoon? Oh, fishing. My hat, what an afternoon, too! Everything just smells of growth!"

"Bill says the May-fly are out upon mill stream."

"It gets more sun than our stream; there's no sign of them here. But the trout are in perfect condition. I landed a beauty, just on a pound, with Greenwell's Glory, the first time I've tried it this season. Mother gave me a new rod for my birthday. You must have a try with it; a little eight-foot greenheart, just the very thing for these narrow streams. I wish you'd been there, Carrie; it was just topping this afternoon! I saw two orange-tipped butterflies. Early, isn't it?"

"There are lots of tortoise-shell—"

"Oh, yes, but you know they're always pretty well the first, and white cabbage. But orange-tips!—up here, and only the second week in May!"

The boy's face was glowing, the thin cheeks had a touch of bronze, the sensitive mouth stretched to a wide, boyish smile. It was evident that he, along with the rest of the household, regarded Lady Caroline as an easy pal, capable of understanding, entering into every sort of interest or grievance. Even Nanny, who appeared with a fresh brew of tea, had her word, remarking on the dirty paw-marks upon the visitor's skirt.—"That varmint and her pups.—I wonder as you'll 'ave it, me lady, that I do! An' that destructive as they are now, they're getting about; tore me best hearth-brush to pieces on me only yesterday, that's what they did!"

Anthony had broken off in his recital, his glance wavering towards Hoyland, his smile growing just a trifle uncertain.—"All this fishing-talk and stuff bores Mr. Hoyland to tears. And no wonder, when one remembers the things he's seen and done. All very well for us, stuck away here, mucking about after trout—all very well for a fellow with a crocky heart—"

"How is the heart, Anthony?"

"Oh, miles better. It's getting all right, will be all right.



Only Diana fusses if I ride too hard, or anything. An' as to tennis—!"

"The wonder is that she thinks you worth bothering about," remarked Lady Caroline, as the girl looked up with her grave smile; and then, turning to Hoyland, she began to question him about the life which Anthony seemed to picture as having been so wonderful; testing him with the names of places, people, putting him through his paces, as he well knew.

At the sound of a motor drawing up to the front door, she rose with a sigh, shaking off the dog, which had, by this time, established itself upon her knees.

"Miss Constance Hervey! Ah, well, I suppose I must go."

"I wonder if she's had her tea—" began Diana.

"Of course she's had her tea; she's one of those people who always have everything—of the very best, too! A woman with a true champagne standard is my secretary-cum-chauffeur; I can tell you that much, Miss Di. Only to think of it! If any one had told me I would ever let myself be driven in one of these stinking contraptions—they've not left us a horse in the stables—by a blonde miss with a drawl an' a powdered nose, I'd have given them the lie to their faces—four years ago!"

"But, my word, can't she just drive!" put in Anthony.

"Drive! Of course she can drive; do everything—the most exasperatingly competent person I ever met in my life. Not that I'd be bothered with her for a moment, if only my parents had taught me to spell in place of speaking indifferent French and worse Italian—a fat lot of use with these Women's Land Army Committees, Red Cross Minutes and accounts, National Defense Leagues, and all they expect of us these days!"

It seemed as though they were all talking together as they moved towards the door. Hoyland, following, saw a finely-cut pink-and-white profile, a thinnish mouth, a slightly-hollowed cheek, a one-sided sweep of pale-gold hair beneath an irreproachably severe little hat, as Miss Hervey turned to speak to her employer. Then, as Diana ran down the steps, leant over the motor-door for one last word with Lady Caroline, she raised her head and swept a careless glance across the little group on the steps; allowed her eyes to rest upon Hoyland for the merest fraction of a second, then fixed them straight above her wheel.

"I believe old Caroline leads her an awful life of it," remarked Anthony, as the motor bumped its way down the ill-kept drive. "Poor little thing! And she's so awfully pretty. Don't you think she's pretty?" he added, turning to Hoyland with that eager, self-mistrustful air which reminded him of a dog not quite certain whether or no to wag its tail.

"Decidedly; quite pretty," he agreed, though he gave no utterance to the remainder of his thought, which was to the effect that Miss Hervey was by no means the sort of young person to be kept under by Lady Caroline, or any one else. He knew that ultra-feminine type too well to be mistaken there; had measured to a nicety the appraising glance of the greenish-gray eyes. Here was some one who knew his world; at least such part of it as was comprised by certain studio sets, the Café Royal, and the more select of the night-clubs.

A week later there was an invitation to dinner at Setons, Lady Caroline's home: an invitation which included Diana and her brother. And in a separate note, a fine, clear handwriting which somehow or other suggested Miss Hervey's profile—very different from the untidy scrawl with no particular beginning or end, which still lay open beside Miss Clayton's place when Hoyland came down, late, as usual, for breakfast—a formally-worded request for the pleasure of his company: it being, as it seemed, an understood thing that Mrs. Clayton never went out to any sort of entertainment.

## CHAPTER V

NEVER since he first came to Ox Lee had Hoyland felt more at ease, more sure of himself, than he did that night of the Setons' dinner-party. It seemed, indeed, as though the mere donning of his immaculately-cut evening clothes gave him back something of his old cool sureness and indifference.

Then Diana, in white, with bare shoulders and satin slippers, seemed to meet him more upon his own ground: a different, and hitherto unguessed-at Diana. It was odd to realize how the girl swayed between those attributes which it was evident enough she inherited from her dead father, with his force, his crudity, and the finer strain of her mother's blood.

Diana's skin—though her hands were easily reddened with

cold—was of that clear, milky whiteness which is only seen, and even then very rarely, with dark hair and lashes. But this had not prepared Hoyland for the beauty of her arms, her girlish, softly-curving breast. Her gown, too, of some shimmering, crêpy stuff, was well made by some one who understood her business; he knew enough about women's clothes to realize this from the way in which it clung to her figure over the shoulders, and up under the arms, a matter of cut in which the raw country, or even lesser London, dressmaker finds herself hopelessly at sea.

She wore a twisted rope of small seed-pearls round her throat, and a pair of old-fashioned ear-rings, also of seed pearls, which gave her a more sophisticated air than was usual to her. Her white satin slippers lay close to either side of her slim feet: if there was anything which Hoyland disliked more than another, it was a transparent white silk stocking and red ankles; but here the whole effect matched the pearls. She was just right, and he experienced a sense of relief: he had never been more afraid of disappointment, and one could never be really sure of a woman until one saw her in evening dress.

At one time he had stayed about at country houses a good deal; his father's name, the attraction he himself had for women, bringing him more invitations than he cared to accept. There had been transitory affairs with married women at those sort of houses where they were asked to come and bring a man, while the husband went off in the wake of some other enchantress: houses where it did not matter much who one was, or what one did, so long as one played cards, was not "stuffy" or "goody-goody"; and at the same time ran oneself into no open scandals. These were the kind of women who are not content with possessing a man, but must train him to fetch and carry, to lap-dog like acts of devotion; flourish him for all the world to see, and yet count upon him to keep his head: women whose brains were in inverse ratio to the perfection of their *coiffures*; such brains as they did possess shaped to two fine cones as presented by their insistent power of getting all they wanted and playing a profitable hand at bridge.

Hoyland had dropped out of this sort of thing because these women, with their cold, self-conscious sensuality—their lips to their lovers and their eyes on the clock, for fear that they should miss the dressing-bell—who always expected him

to be the one to be careful—became tiresome beyond words: just as tiresome as the frequenters of those more stately gatherings, which had been part of his heritage from his father; where the guests bored him to extinction.

They had bored his mother in just the same way, with their absorption in killing or growing something or other, when the young attaché had first taken his Russian bride home to England, looking forward with delighted anticipation to the effect which her beauty and brilliance would have upon country house-parties. But he had been disappointed in this, at least, for she had been completely neutralized by that curious sullen dullness which obscured her as by a cloud, whenever she was *ennuyée*. And *ennuyée* she was; showing it openly, after the fashion of her race, at once the most sophisticated and crude of all European peoples.

As to her son, he had always hated the country, the country people with their stupid insistence upon trifles. But he had never before been brought up against it in all its naked simplicity, as he was at Ox Lee, upon its bare hill-side, amid its gray rock and ravine; and it was, without doubt, this which accounted for the fact that, although he realized the sort of house, dinner, people, whom he was likely to find, Hoyland had been glad enough to accept Lady Caroline's invitation.

But it was, on the whole, better than he had expected. The house, the dinner, the greater part of the company—the Rector, and his wife and one daughter; a county magnate or two with wives and daughters; a gentleman-farmer, a stray politician, a secretary for something or other, condescending through his eyeglass; and a middle-aged bachelor peer—were all commonplace enough; but the wine was exceptional, and he had the good luck to find acquaintances in common—"real people," as she called them, to differentiate from country folk—with the woman whom he took in to dinner: acquaintances with a sufficiently comet-like train of scandal, forever afloat behind them, to render them more interesting in conversation, with its embellishments, than they had ever seemed in their own proper, or improper, persons.

Mrs. Vesey Horton—married to a dullish squire with a good deal of over-ripe neck—was frankly delighted with Hoyland, and invited him to lunch with her one day the

following week: "Tom will be off to a silly race-meeting—of all insipid things commend me to a country race-meeting!—so we really can talk," was the inducement she held out to him.

Miss Hervey was sitting opposite to them, demure and exquisitely fair in a black dress, trimmed with not too many sequines. Glancing at her, Hoyland and his companion saw her make a low-voiced remark to the man on her right; followed, with some amusement, his hasty glance from one side to another, as if to make sure whether any one had heard what was said. "Men know that those sort of women look too good to be true, are always wondering if other people realize it, too," was Mrs. Vesey Horton's comment. Then, "Ah, he's taken the fly!" as Miss Hervey's partner bent over her, his sleek, dark head—running upwards in an almost straight line from his neck—whispering, eagerly, urgently.

"Who is he?"

"Young Yarborough; no sort of a catch, hasn't got a penny to his name: farms—at least, pretends to. Anyhow, she's got him on a string, excited and more than half-frightened. Likely enough," she added shrewdly, "using him as a decoy of some sort. You'll generally notice women like that, demure hole-and-corner flirts, are bent on something entirely opposite to what the casual observer might be led to suppose."

It was difficult for a stranger to say what Miss Hervey might be bent upon. But, later on, Anthony, in his naïve way, supplied the clew, for directly the men returned to the drawing-room she was headed into a corner by a tall, ugly man, with an aggressive jaw and frightful stammer.

"Poor Miss Hervey, what a shame! Lord Yeanham's got hold of her, will bore her to death—far away the prettiest girl here too. I've a good mind to go and attempt a rescue—shall I?" He glanced sideways at Hoyland as he spoke; glowing, blushing. So pathetically young and shy; yet ready for any sort of knight-errantry on behalf of the fair, slender girl in black, the top of whose smoothly-waved, yellow head was only just visible, cutting a dark curtain above her attendant swain's awkward shoulder.

"It—i-i-it's all very w-w-w-e-ll, but wh-wh-wh-what the deu-uce have I d-d-one that you should have su-su-such a

down on me all of a su-su-sudden!" Lord Yeanham's half-quarrelsome stutter ricocheted across the room. Every one could hear what he said, though there was no sound of so much as a murmur from Miss Hervey. "I'm hanged if I'll p-p-put up with it! A-a-after all I've done an' . . ."

"Shall I? I say, shall I? She's awfully shy. Any one can see that. Lady Caroline's house and all! She can't snub the bounder as she'd like to do. Oh, the brute! Look there, now—" cried Anthony.

Hoyland threw the couple a glance, and saw Yeanham's great hand on Miss Hervey's bare white arm—those sort of men were always pawing. For all that, it seemed that the girl, far from resenting, wore it as a sort of momentary pledge, was complacent over the publicity of the thing; he saw her quick glance of triumph, but no one took any special notice, apart from young Clayton—no longer like a dog wanting to wag its tail, but all ready to "go for the fellow;" though, still sensible of the leash, his wonderful tutor's knowledge of what was the proper thing to do; of— Oh, well, of everything.

"You'll only get yourself disliked if you interfere with people in that sort of way," remarked Hoyland coldly, and turned aside to where the servants were setting out the bridge-tables. He had enough of the cub at home, in lesson-time; he did not want him here: once he had glanced at him across the dinner-table with conscious distaste. If his sister could dress so well when occasion demanded, why on earth didn't she see that her brother had some properly-cut clothes? he had asked himself, though all the while he realized that it was not Anthony's clothes which were at fault, but the fact that he seemed to be growing—sprouting out like an animated windmill—in every sort of odd, angular direction at once.

To some people there was charm in the boy's *gaucherie*, his blushes, the innocent trustfulness of his clear, light-blue eyes; his shrinking back into himself, his plunges forward, all eagerness when any one spoke an encouraging word—"Good dog, nice dog!"—something at once pleasing and pathetic; something which made people think of their own lost youth, with a sigh for themselves, a tenderness for this gawky young thing, with all his troubles before him.

Hoyland, however, had no thought for such sentiment. At some time or other he must have been innocent; but, if

so, it was too far back for remembrance; certain it was that he had realized more of some sides of life at nine than Anthony Clayton at close on nineteen.

As a very, very small boy, he remembered sitting quietly in corners, not because of any natural taste for retirement, not that he was not ready to assert himself when there was any need for it—and there had generally seemed a certain need for it, if he was not to be pushed aside by the all-absorbing selfishness of his parents—but merely because, if he kept quiet enough, these queer human animals who frequent Continental hotels forgot that he was there; carried on with their feints of courtship: feints which, in nine cases out of ten, meant nothing more than a desire for excitement: behaving in a fashion for which his French *bonne* would have inevitably smacked his hands, or whipped even the dogs.

His host had moved to his side, feeling it incumbent upon him to be polite to this stranger, whom he regarded as a trifle too good-looking—"barber's-blockish" would have been his simile, for want of something better. Mr. Stendall was almost as much like a rat-catcher as his wife was like a washerwoman; and still with that assured air of being something quite different. A friend of Hoyland's father had been used to saying, "People of K.P.," or "Not *quite* K.P."—meaning thereby, "of known position;" and, somehow or other, it was impossible not to realize that there could be no two opinions about this, with either Lady Caroline or her spouse, unless it might be among the middle-classes: workpeople and servants knew only too well what was what.

"Must be dullish for you here," went on Mr. Stendall, after those inevitable preliminary remarks about the weather which so surprise foreigners: "But there's some good trout fishing about here—Dovedale, now—awfully shy, darned difficult to catch, but fine sport, for all that. And Chatsworth: one can always wangle a day's fishing there, if you cared for it."

"I don't fancy it appeals to me, do you know?"

"A pity; there's so little to do in the country in the summer; dead sort of season, unless you're interested in farming, or anything of that sort. Of course, I'm hardly ever at home just now; remount work an' all that. But there's some fairish rough shooting—rabbits, a few hares if you—" Suddenly the little man's eyes dropped to his

guest's right hand, then turned aside. "—But I'm afraid—"

"Yes; it doesn't leave one overmuch to do, does it?" remarked Hoyland, with smooth civility; though that strange, burning sense of antagonism and revolt, which had astonished him more than once of late, was hot within him. What right had these damned fools, these country bumpkins, to patronize, to pity—?

"Oh, well, come to that, you've done bigger things than potting a few wretched bunnies," said Mr. Stendall awkwardly. "I only wish I'd any chance of getting out there, up to the front, in the thick of things; but they wouldn't have me—too old, though I tried all I knew. You, now, I daresay you could tell me—"

"I never went up to the front— chance shell miles away—" His indifferent eyes strayed round the room; he was bored and determined to show it. "Excuse me, but isn't Lady Caroline—?"

He broke off, as his host, obviously glad of any interruption, moved across the room to where his better half was signaling to him to come and help her make up the bridge-tables. Lord Yeanham didn't care to play, neither did some of the younger members of the party. Still, there was just the right number for a couple of tables, that was if Miss Hervey did not mind sitting out. And, of course, Miss Hervey was not the one to make any objection to this arrangement, which she accepted with the docility of the dependent; although Lady Caroline apologized a good deal more than she would have considered necessary in the case of any other member of the party—being one of those people who keep their best manners for the people they most dislike. Very different was her peremptory command to her godson, Anthony Clayton, whom she adored, and snubbed and bullied.

"Go and play us something, Tony, there's a good boy. Not too loud or jumpy, else it will put us all out. What! don't want to? Who cares what you want, I'd like to know?"

With a shy glance at his tutor, who took no notice of him, Anthony slipped away into the drawing-room, from whence, after a few moments' pause, came the sound of Schumann's "Préambule," tenderly drawn forth from a mellow grand by a pair of hands that knew their business, fine, sensitive,



sure, backed by a mind that thought, a heart that felt. It was the first real music—apart from the elusive notes of Mrs. Clayton's flute, which Hoyland had heard since he left London; and in a pause in his game he asked Lady Caroline who it was that was playing, his thought far away from his pupil.

"Why, Tony, of course. Didn't you hear me tell him to play us something? Queer things he chooses, though; no go about 'em. I like something to tap your foot to. But he's supposed to play very well—they're all musical."

"Miss Clayton—?" Hoyland's eyes strayed to the next table, where he could just catch a glimpse of Diana's white shoulders, the back of her neat head, with its soft mist of dark hair.

"Oh, Diana sings—sings like a bird. She used to play the fiddle, but I suppose she's given it up now, with all her farming. That's the worst of this wretched war, gels give up—"

"Lady Caroline—" interposed the patient voice of her partner across the table.

"Oh, is it my deal? Sorry, partner."

## CHAPTER VI

ON the way home—driving through the clear, cold moonlight, which Diana faced so unconcernedly in an open trap—a white gauzy scarf tight around her head, a thinnish coat none too carefully buttoned up to her throat—Hoyland spoke of Anthony's music.

"I didn't know he played; how is it I've never heard him play?" The feeling, the natural talent with which young Clayton had touched the piano, endued him with quite a new sort of interest in his tutor's mind. There were all sorts of possibilities to people who were really musical; so much more to work upon, as it were. It wasn't only the music which they made, felt; it was the temperament which it presupposed; in this case, an absolutely different phase of emotionalism to that with which he had before credited the boy.

"He's always played, always loved it. We had an idea of going to Dresden for a year or more, if it had not been for this war—though he would have hated anything like making

a profession of it. Too proud? What an odd idea! No, just caring too much."

"But how is it he's never played since I've been at Ox Lee?" persisted Hoyland.

"What's that you're saying about me?" interposed Anthony's voice from the back seat.

"Your music—"

"Oh, but I say! did you mind awfully? I'd hoped you wouldn't hear. Anyhow, it seemed better than to have Carrie—dear old soul as she is—making a fuss, every one staring."

"He didn't play before, at home, because he was frightened of you," said Diana, in a low voice, her hands firm upon the reins, for Flo was coquetting with her own shadow, an immense, lean caricature of a horse, darting on ahead, stretched out to an unnatural length before them; or, gawky as a giraffe, climbing the bank, first one side, then another—a mocking nightmare of a shadow.

"Oh, at first—but now—"

"Even now—steady, Flo—now, only in a different sort of way. At first not sure whether he would like you, holding back, afraid of giving in to you— Oh, boys are like that; talk of girls being shy and reticent! I was at school, and I know; there's nothing girls mind talking about—nothing interests them unless they can, and do, talk about it."

"Some girls—" remarked Hoyland meaningly.

"Most girls, I think."

"What about you, you yourself? You never talk of what you think, feel; you never give yourself away, share the least bit of yourself with your poorer fellows."

"But what have I got to talk about? Nothing ever happens to me. What possible interest could any one ever find—"

"The greatest interest, the greatest interest in life. Just because you hold yourself aloof, just because you ride apart like your namesake, do you imagine that you leave other people as unaffected? That we poor mortals—"

He broke off as they drew up at a gate, and Anthony jumped out to open it, his shadow shooting out sideways across the sloping field which lay to the left of the rough, unfenced road.

The high, full moon filled the misty hollows amid the hills with pools of milky whiteness: there were no trees or

hedges anywhere near them, no shadows save for their own. Of a sudden the indifference of the whole scene, so aloof from humanity and its needs, the chill unconcern of the stripped air, cold and clear, unwarmed, untainted by those emanations which arise from any great town; the wide stretch of country; not sleeping, as it should be, as townfolk would imagine that it must be, but awake and watching; the immensity of sky, unchallenged by a single lighted window, the flicker of one solitary street lamp, overcame Hoyland, chilling through the warmth which still lingered in his veins from Mr. Stendall's excellent champagne, that last whisky-and-soda.

It seemed that he had always mastered everything in life, until it came to that infernal war, which was a universal muddle, too much for every one; but here was something, concerning himself alone—though why, he did not know—with which he was quite unable to grapple. It was so precisely as though he had found his enemy; but who?—what?

From mere dislike to, boredom with, the country he had, during the last few weeks, grown to a state of active exasperation, intense hatred; and—yes, a sort of terror; as of something from which it was almost impossible to escape; not unlike that blind terror which overcame him the night when the Germans scooped him and his fellows into their range, a grim echo of that old childish fear of wide, open spaces. As some men might, in moments of desolation, long for the arms of wife or mother, he longed for close-pressed houses, narrow streets—a jutting wall, a chimney-stack—anything to break that menacing, wide-stretching arch of sky.

It was an absurd fancy, but it seemed as though, at any moment, a clutching hand might scoop down upon him, against which his maimed left hand, the other silly sham—and not only that, but all that there was to him, body, mind, and what people chose to call soul—would be absolutely incapable of putting up any sort of a fight; just tweaking him away out of the world, like that man at Sotteville-sur-Mer.

The thought came, and was gone again almost before Anthony was back in his seat behind them—but he was glad of the feel of Diana's firm arm against his shoulder, as she drew the rein to keep Flo from breaking into a canter.

Perhaps it was all this which robbed him of his usual judgment, led up to what happened later that same evening: this, or the recurrence of that glow from Mr. Stendall's champagne; or else, curiously enough—curious because such a thing was so out of all keeping with his character—the living remembrance of that unparalleled sense of loneliness, desertion.

Disinclined for bed, he threw a few logs on to the gray ashes of the study fire, and sat down by it to smoke—smoke and brood. Carrie and the Aberdeen—a person of set affection and stubborn temper, Mactavish by name—had met them in the hall upon their return. The dogs were not allowed upstairs, and the two had sat desolate on the mat, as Diana and her brother, candle in hand, moved upwards through the surrounding darkness; robbing them of all that made life worth living for a good eight hours or more.

It was then that Hoyland put out a tentative hand, snapped his fingers, offering them the hospitality of his own fireside; though why he could not have said, for in general he hated dogs: "Dirty, smelly brutes, ready to fawn upon every one, any one." Devoid of constancy himself, he condemned the lack of it in brute beasts—faithful friends were as often as not a nuisance, human constancy a species of mental paralysis. But even dogs were not always fickle, ready to fawn, for Carrie shrank aside from his hand, growling; while Mactavish, after one glance of contempt, turned towards the deserted stairway, and laid his chin upon the first step, with a long sigh, as though settling himself for the night.

Hoyland, finding him still there an hour later, kicked him savagely to one side. His candle, a new one, flickered in the draught which swept down from some open door, hesitated for a moment, and then went out. Thus, having no matches, he stumbled up the remainder of the stairway as best he could, cursing such God-forsaken places, where the lamps were all put out at ten, where there was no electric light, no gas—no anything which made life tolerable.

Then, just as he felt his way cautiously on to the landing, Diana came out of her mother's room—Diana by sunlight, by moonlight, by candle-light, but never, never by electric light; that was unthinkable, he realized it now—Diana in her white dressing-gown, with her hair in long plaits, as he had seen her that first night.

She gave him a little smile as she closed the door behind

her. It seemed as though she were in a dreamy, contented mood, as softened as a mother who has just soothed her child to sleep; such a mood that she took his interest for granted, as though he were one of the family. At first she had not liked him; but now, as she told Lady Caroline, she was beginning to depend upon him, found a sort of rest in his sameness.

"Poor mother! she never settles down when we are out. She was playing her flute—but it's all right now we're back. Good night, Mr. Hoyland."

"No, by God, no!" She had moved a step or two away from the door, but he caught her against the wall—while she stared at him in amazement. His usually pale, indifferent face was flushed, his drooping lids raised above hot, devouring eyes, which left her face for her neck, as he dropped his candle and caught at either side of her dressing-gown, hanging loose from her shoulders—white as that darnation moon, Diana, her namesake! "I wonder if you are alive, you beautiful thing! If you ever have been alive! 'Good night, Mr. Hoyland,'" he mocked, with an ugly laugh. "'Good night, Mr. Hoyland.'—No, no, my child—Diana—Diana, chaste and fair! There are some good nights which need no words—later, oh, yes, later, these may—will—must come. But for now, just for now, this—and this—and this—"

He had her in his arms, pressing her back against the wall, kissing her cheeks, eyes and mouth; holding her so that, despite all her strength, she was unable to break free until he bent his lips to her breast.

"You're mad—you must be mad!" By some instinct she had held on to her candle, and he could see that even then, though her face and neck were marred with red patches where he had kissed her, she was not blushing; she even remembered her mother, spoke low, gave one glance at the closed door; then turned again, staring: not touched or moved, only half scared, but wholly amazed, as she might have been by the sudden assault of some animal which she had grown to regard as friendly.

"If one didn't realize something of what you've been through, what a beast one would think— Oh, but what beasts war does make of some men!" she cried, one hand holding the folds of her dressing gown close to her throat; outraged, yet still making excuses more than half solicitous.

Something must be wrong; people didn't behave themselves like that—normal people.

As Hoyland stumbled along the passage to his room, up and down those break-neck little groups of steps, which are common to such houses, he glanced back from the first corner, and saw that she had turned; was standing holding the candle high in her hand to light him on his way—him.

He was beaten. First the war; then this damned, dispassionate country; and now this girl—a country girl!

He did not mind the thought of her struggles, anything she said; that might well be part of the game. No, it went far deeper than that. What he did mind was the fact that the feel of her lips, her breast, pressed close against his own, had given him no thrill of any sort; no feeling apart from that sense of balked exasperation with which one rattles the handle of a locked door.

And the fault was his; he realized that; couldn't help realizing it, knew too much to miss it. There was something in this girl, something which he could not get at; something which he had either lost the power—or never had it—of possessing: a depth of passion, which—and it was strange how, with the sense of futility, the realization of this came to him for the first time—nothing he said or did could touch.

## CHAPTER VII

It was the first day of June, and the solemn black clock upon the study mantelpiece had just struck twelve. Master and pupil had passed an unusually tranquil morning, and Anthony was at the end of his work; though he had got through it in a sort of fatigued dream, oddly sapped by the book which his tutor had left, apparently by mistake, in his room a couple of days ago—Weininger's "Sex and Character," which he had picked up, glanced at out of curiosity, and then been unable to put down. For the last two nights he had read until it was close on morning, then dropped plumb into a deep, dream-laden sleep, awaking to a sense of dissipation and weariness, such as he remembered when he was a small child and had been unable to keep away from a box of chocolates: made up his mind not to touch another, and, growing from delight to loathing, still ate on and on, until he was sick.

On this second morning he was so done, it is certain that, had Hoyland been in one of his bitter, harrying moods, it would have ended in disaster; as it was, he got through, somehow or other, with that part of his consciousness which still remained untouched.

As the clock finished striking, he gathered up his books, glanced at his tutor. "I've finished the translation—is that all, sir?"

"Yes, that's all; you can go."

Once outside, he made for the farmyard; then, after questioning the men who were lading manure, took his way toward the sheep-pens, lying in the shelter of a barn a quarter of a mile away, where Diana was busy drafting out some of the earlier lambs, with the help of the old shepherd, Daniel Haele.

It was a day of such brilliance that the whole scene, hills, dales, the vivid bronze-green of young oak and sycamore, the springing fields of oat and barley might have been enameled upon copper, each single color distinct, as though without atmosphere. At one side of the old barn, with its gray roof, was the crude green of turnips, their pungent stench mingling with the smell of the ewes, whose uneasy bleatings sounded clear as a bell upon the still air.

Diana was flushed and serious: some of the lambs were ready for market, and she hated this business of choosing out the victims. Old Haele was garrulous about them; he took the butcher's knife, the more distant prospect of roast with mint sauce, as a matter of course. He had tended them as though they were his own children, night and day, through the fierce, reluctant spring which comes to the Peak district as maternity to some women—a thing to be fought against, resented, deferred to its uttermost limit; but for all that, he loved a tender bit of loin for his Sunday dinner, never even thought of associating it with his nurselings.

His reminiscences did nothing to weaken himself, though they brought the tears to his young mistress's eyes. "That un wur let fall afore we 'ad time ter get th' old un to the fold—dug 'em both outer the snow, to me waist near about." Again: "That un there were real naish, and no mistake, neither; the missis 'ad un indoors afront o' the kitchen fire for the best part o' a sennight." "This chap—real spry now 'e do be—one o' three 'e was, an' so weak as 'e couldn't not take the titty; brought un up with me finger dipped in

milk, I did, and then with the bottle. That's wot makes un so saucy-loike, rubbin' against my knee an' all— Get outer that now, you varmint, or I'll be treading yer under foot, sure as eggs is eggs!"

It hurt Diana. If only farming could be all rearing, and cossetting and no killing, she would have felt content. In any lower-lying or less bleak portion of the country she might have increased the proportion of arable land; but at Ox Lee this was scarcely practicable. As it was, she had endeavored to meet the appeals of the Food Control by putting down a few dozen acres in wheat, which had never before been attempted in those parts; with reason, as she well knew, though the agricultural authorities condemned it as mere obstinacy; for tradition in rural districts is seldom to be found without good reason at the back of it, and wheat in the North Derbyshire heights, with their reluctant spring, has not time to ripen to harvest ere the first frost, the heavy rains of autumn, are upon it.

She was glad to see Anthony, and slipped her arm through his. "Come, let's go down to the bottom of Three-acre Field and see how they are getting on with the drain."

She moved quickly and springingly at his side, her very touch was full of firm reassurance; then, of a sudden, she cried, "Let's run; there's no one to see us," and started off down the steep slope, with its tussocks of rough grass, camomile and rest-harrow; picking up her feet cleanly, keeping her head well back. In her leggings and short skirts she ran like a boy, only more lightly. Anthony's long legs flew out to either side of him like a colt's; every now and then he caught his foot upon a clod and stumbled forward, but for all that he kept ahead of his sister.

Half-way down the field was a spring, grown round with shining kingcups, petering out in a rush-grown trickle to the edge of a spinney where Reuben Haele, old Daniel's son, was digging a new drain, filling the shallow trough with loose rubble. The hedge which bounded the spinney was brilliant with the green and white of hawthorn. The spinney itself was carpeted with bluebells and wood-mercury. There was the sound of rooks among the elms, as preposterously immersed in their own affairs as though this were the primal spring, the first mating of the universe; while a cock-pheasant stuttered out his eager note of defiance, love, delight.



Anthony was glowing from head to foot; all that weary, deadening ache had gone from out of his limbs, scattered loose upon the hillside. Months later he remembered that hour, remembered how happy he had felt; remembered how he and his sister had laughed at the pert airs of the water-wagtails, swaggering about in their clean black-and-white, with that oddly consequential Lilliputian stride—walking, while other birds were content to hop—fly-catching over that spot where the thin stream from the spring gathered to a shallow pool, dotted with gray and green stones.

Never a single thought of "Sex and Character" until he went up to his own room that night, when he glanced sideways at the red-covered volume, stuffed it away out of sight in the drawer among his socks; then, after an hour's tossing, lit his candle, got up and glanced through the book in feverish haste to find some special passage.

What was it Diana had said that morning? "It's all very well to tell us to grow this and that, all of a sudden; they ought to know that the ground has to be prepared."

They didn't know—they, the Government, taking no thought for the reasonable exactions of Nature—any more than Charles Hoyland would have known, thought. But human nature—that was another affair; that he knew through and through: "As any one might know it," or so he said, "if only they'd base their expectations low enough, begin in the cellars; the upper stories are mostly empty."

Hoyland, left alone in the study, sat staring out of the window, idly tapping the table with the end of a pen. The long day stretched out in front of him like a desert; the hard, clean colors of the outer world wearied him. In spite of the fine air his health did not improve. He was restless, bored; often enough curiously tired, he who had never known what it was to weary. The thought of Diana was beginning to possess him. Perhaps he had never been so close to real love in his life, and yet there was that continual sense of irritation which showed how largely it was mingled with pique. A sense of deep, cold anger overcame him whenever he thought of that ignominious evening when he had attempted to steal a kiss, accompanying it with such insolence as she could scarcely have understood, or else it was certain that he would not be where he now was.

He had apologized next day with a sort of mock humility, and she had accepted his excuses, quite gravely. It was

evident that she quite believed what he said as to the faintest taste of spirit going to his head, since he was wounded; and once having forgiven him, put the whole thing out of her mind.

But Hoyland himself could not forget; and yet to think of all the women he had kissed and forgotten! It was as strange that he should be the one to remember—and the fugitive touch of the girl's fresh cheek seemed to be forever with him like a perfume, so that he could scarcely look at her without feeling his lips tingle—as that he should know, at last, the shame of repulse. He who had always boasted that he could have any woman for the asking; that he had come across no retreat which was not in itself a beckoning.

And it was not only Diana herself, the thought of her, of all that she might mean to a tired man, with her amazing freshness, well-balanced vitality—so different from the half-hysterical, restless excitement that passed for the same quality amid the town-people whom he knew—which exasperated Hoyland's consciousness until it was like an open sore; there was the wonder as to whether other women had proved so pliable merely because he aimed low; because they were that sort, would have been the same with any man. Here was an idea to rasp his vanity; but there was even more to it.

The memory of these other women was forever pushing itself in between himself and this girl; there was not a thought of her which he was able to keep unsoiled by some odious comparison. He was like a sponge, so full of dirty water that every clear drop which falls upon it is fouled. He was sick to death of all those old ways of love, not because they were bad, but because they had become boring. He had run through the entire gamut of vice; if there was one ultimate joy left, it might be found in a clean, fresh palate; to enjoy as a boy enjoys, to hope as a boy hopes, to be free of memories! But how was it possible? When he was with Diana he saw her more or less as she was—though his vision was always a little distorted—a creature of the open air, the clear heights, simply wise, infinitely kind. But alone with his thoughts, she was dragged through brothel and boudoir; there were creatures in the London night-clubs, in Brussels, Paris, Vienna, Buda-Pesth, forever elbowing, rubbing the bloom off her; no end to the tawdry procession of light loves, stretching back almost to his boyhood.

For many years Hoyland had managed to carry a certain

freshness into each succeeding amour ; here, where the object of his desire was fresh as the spring itself, he realized that his every thought was vitiated, poisoned at the spring.

He might win her ; he still retained so much self-confidence ; but what would he not lose in the winning ? It would be like snaring a wood-nymph, painting her face, dyeing her hair, tricking her out in the foul finery of a pawn-shop. The essential nymph might still remain, at the back of it all, but even then not for him ; one does not catch butterflies with a pig-net.

Mrs. Clayton was out in the garden ; he could see her from the window, pacing to and fro upon the lawn. The wonder was that she could walk so near to the edge of the sunk fence and never fall over it ; but, come to that, as he realized watching her, she never actually stepped upon any of the sparse clumps of late daffodils which still pierced the untended grass. He was getting very interested in Mrs. Clayton ; sometimes he tried to set a limit to the things she realized, saw, with that strange, inward vision of the blind ; but every time he thought he had her there would be some fresh pique to his curiosity. This not stepping upon the flowers, for instance, was something which he had never before realized.

“My God,” he said to himself, “I don’t believe that the woman’s blind at all ! It’s a pretense, a pose.”

He said this, had said it before ; but of course he knew that it was not true, and it was one sign of his disordered nerves that he even pretended to such a thought, for in the old days, whatever he had been or done, he had never attempted to deceive himself. And to actually repeat the preposterous statement ! It was like an uneducated person shouting to a foreigner who does not understand his tongue.

He went out of the study, through the hall lying at the eastern side of the house—cool and shady, with wide-open doors and the gray ashes of a wood fire dozing in the grate, then round the outside of the house and across the lawn.

Quite close to the path the grass was mown smooth for a width of twenty feet ; and here at first sight it looked as though the green were close-speckled with black ; but it was only the dark calyxes of the daisies which turned their white-and-gold faces all one way to the sun, like the units of a vast, though pigmy, army, pressing forward, with their shields upon their backs.

Mrs. Clayton stood still as Hoyland approached ; for a

moment it seemed that she trembled, though very slightly. Then, to his surprise—for she never spoke to him of her own accord, answered his remarks or questions with a hurried, timid air—she addressed him, quite calmly, reasonably.

“It is very pleasant out here; will you walk with me a little, Mr. Hoyland?”

“Of course; but won’t you take my arm?” He made the suggestion maliciously, though he knew that she would refuse, though he wished to have something of her mind as it was when she was undisturbed, at peace; knew perfectly well how she hated to feel him too near to her. But it seemed that, as he could not hurt Diana, he must hurt some one belonging to her; he even touched her sleeve, felt the way in which she vibrated away from him. “Come now, Mrs. Clayton, why are you so set against me? Can’t we be friends?”

They were standing close against the one cedar which dominated the neglected lawn with its wide sweep of boughs. As he hesitated, waiting for Mrs. Clayton to speak, Hoyland, usually so oblivious to everything in nature, was conscious of that curious tick-tick-tick—like a multitude of minute clocks—which hangs around these trees during the first hot days, the bursting of innumerable tiny cells, or the note of certain insects.

The sound, small as it was, got upon his brain, irritated him almost beyond bearing, so that it was with difficulty he prevented himself from breaking in upon Mrs. Clayton’s thoughts, anxious though he was to drive her to some direct answer by his silence. At last she spoke, her face turned toward the stretch of open country which lay beneath them. It was always like that; she looked away from him. And yet it could not be her eyes which she wished to avert. “One would think I stank!” Hoyland declared to himself more than once, exasperated by her attitude.

Her answer now, when it did come, amazed him. Yes, he had been right, there was no knowing how to take her, what she would say, do, seem to see, next.

“I don’t think I’m set against you—that isn’t it. You don’t understand. I’m sorry for you, for it must be dreadful—oh, how dreadful! When I think what it is to me, what must it be to you!—To you who carry it, cannot get rid of it!”

Oh, of course, she was mad. “Rid of what, may I ask?”

"Yourself, the burden of what you have made of yourself. All the things that are in your mind—all your memories. Not regretted, never regretted, but cumbering, poisoning."

The words came so pat upon what he had been thinking, not more than ten minutes earlier, that Hoyland was startled. It was as uncanny as though some one had casually put a hand inside his shirt through to his bosom, taken out his heart, held it upon an open palm, and said: "There!"

He gave a little laugh, which sounded oddly strained, even to his own ears. "Thank you, Mrs. Clayton, but all the same I'm doing nicely, as the doctors say."

For a moment or so they walked on in silence; reached the end of the lawn and turned. "How do you know when to turn?"

"I feel the warmth of the trees, smell the laurels."

"Ah!" There was another pause, then Hoyland began again. "So you think me a bad lot, is that it?"

"Yes, you are bad. Perhaps it is not your fault—who knows?—but it's dangerous; dreadful for you—of course, dreadful for you—and dangerous for others; that's why I wish you would go away. It is cruel of me, in one way, for it might do you good to be here. But no, it is past changing—"

"Chronic, eh?" Hoyland laughed; he was sure that it was all very amusing, and yet deep down in his inner consciousness he realized something like fear.

"I don't know—I can't say, I—" began Mrs. Clayton confusedly. "How can I know, seeing nothing?—But I feel—I feel. I feel it here." She touched her breast. "There are currents of fate in the very air; an inevitable consequence to every step we take, our every thought, word; something which will have us at one with Nature, forever watching and waiting. If we don't try to understand the meaning of life, the way the stream flows, what are we to do? We are never alone; never, never alone . . . encompassed about. Yes, that's it; encompassed about. If you once set yourself against everything you are worn away—you, the real you, frayed to nothingness.

"Oh, I can't explain what I mean. How can I explain?" she moved her head uneasily—"to you, set there so blankly hard? How can one ever explain anything excepting to the people who already half know it? How—"

Suddenly it seemed as though she had lost her momentary

sureness; she broke off, with the air of a spider at the end of a single strand, helpless in a gale of wind; hesitating, wringing her hands, half-turned away from him.

"Oh, don't you feel—don't you know it?—the infinite entanglement with everything else in life, by which, with which, alone we live. We are all part of a community; if we are not in fellowship with all the members of it—the earth, the air, running water, trees, birds, beasts, they'll hound us out of it, one way or another. You, you now.—If there is nothing left of you beyond the body, and if the other sane creatures of the world, the very elements, are against you, what is there for you to do, where is there for you to go? With no thread of meaning in your life, what is there left for change? This only. The wind and the sun and the earth which you have despised having their will of you at the end; a pinch of the dust of you driven into the crack of some wall, molded amid the clay of a swallow's nest, with other dust around the root of some plant, or trodden into the earth itself. Nothing more—nothing, nothing. Nothing to go on, nothing to change. The soul, that valiant little porter bearing its load, long, long ago crushed out of existence.

"Oh, you—you—you who are always poking and prying—" Suddenly she turned towards him, pointing. "Don't you realize how all the big things of life have passed you by? Even you, you must feel that. Perhaps it was always too late for you—just the load and no porter to raise it. But for us others—that's why I ask you to go—"

Hoyland had taken out his cigarette-case, was lighting a cigarette, gazing at her from under his heavy lids; wondering how soon her family would have sense to clap her into a lunatic asylum; when—God only knows by what an effort—she pulled herself together, began again clearly, sanely. "To go away; not to change—why should I waste words asking you that? The true elements of character—a character such as yours—never change; unless it be from some intense outer force, power of evil."

"Why not of good, since you believe in good?"

"Ah, yes, I believe in it; but for all that, it must come from the inside—you can corrupt a man from the outside; but goodness, in a greater or lesser degree, must always have been there, however deeply hidden. There's no impurity in nature. Human beings alone are responsible for that—pos-

turing, squinting. Easy enough to foul a clear spring far from its source, however clearly it may have risen—but if it rises salt, brackish, poisonous, nothing can make it pure.”

“A parable, eh? On the soul, *my soul*—a ‘salt, brackish’ stream. ‘Pon my word, Mrs. Clayton, you’re a little hard on me.”

They had reached the cedar-tree again, were standing beneath it, the “tick-tick” sharp as a bat’s note upon Hoyland’s ear. Mrs. Clayton had turned; seemed to be looking at him, so straightly that it was almost impossible to believe that she did not see him.

“A-h—your soul! You are fond of saying ‘My soul’—‘Upon my soul’—but are you so sure you have a soul?”

“I thought every one was credited with something of the sort—vague enough, in all conscience.”

“But what do you mean when you use the word ‘soul’—you—you yourself?” She put the question so quietly, so reasonably, and yet in so detached a manner, that it might have been one of Hoyland’s college friends challenging him to an argument.

“Well, what is it popularly supposed to mean—the immortal ego?”

“Ah—yes—yes. But the mortal must put on immortality. It is not inevitable, no sort of a birthright. ‘What is a soul?’ you’ve asked me. Come now, I’ll tell you. A fine thread that may be twisted to a rope; a little flame which, guarded, grows to a fire there is no quenching; a tiny seed which spreads to a great tree, sheltering innumerable birds amid its branches. If the soul does not grow, gather, it flickers out; if at the end it is less than the body, it is less than nothing. To go to God with what you call your soul in your hand, your little soul, pinched up between your finger and thumb even—so dry, so shriveled and small—the most unconsidered part of you—to say: ‘Take this; it is worth keeping, perpetuating through all ages. I never troubled to make much use of it; but it’s the sort of thing you like—valuable because it is Me—The Me—and, of course, immortal.’ What would God say to that? He would say nothing. He’d laugh. A soul? A soul? No more a soul than a canker’s a rose.”

“Ah, well, have it as you like. Perhaps, on the whole, it’s a good thing I realize the value of all such beliefs in a future world; the egregious conceit, the total inability to under-

stand one's own place in the universe which they presuppose. My body—oh, it's not what it was, I grant you," he interposed bitterly; "but, such as it is, it's enough for me."

"Ah, well; that is *you*, that's what you've made of life, of yourself. Something rigid, fixed for its little allotted space; something without growth; something which takes without giving, and then of the material only. Come to that, such a man has been dead for years; dead from the time when he first found that with all his cleverness he could not accomplish the whole of his desires; from the moment when, tipping his cup too fast, he caught sight of the lees, thick at the bottom of it. Such a man is a mere specter of motion, an echo of speech; where would be the use of perpetuating a thing like that? He is neither in the mind of God or the heart of man; he is nothing."

"Come now, Mrs. Clayton, at least 'the evil that men do lives after them'—or so Shakespeare said."

"Shakespeare didn't say that," she flashed at him, with sudden shrewdness; "he made Mark Antony say it—because he knew it was the sort of thing he would say. All evil's sterile—it destroys itself."

"Ah, well, it's evident that you think I'm a bad lot, that there's little chance for me, here or hereafter," said Hoyland, shrugging his shoulders, turning a little on one side to light a fresh cigarette. "But, after all, there are two sides to such an understanding"—he paused for a moment; then added, with a sort of cold brutality—for, after all, where did all this mad twaddle lead him?—"I mayn't know much, be good for much, according to you, your theories; but one thing I do know—you're frightened of me, scared to death."

"Yes, yes—" once more Mrs. Clayton hesitated, turning her head aside, twisting her hands. "I am—afraid of you."

"Because of your daughter, because of Diana?"—that was what he had been aiming at; that was what he was after—Diana—Diana—always Diana. He brought out her name scornfully, with studied insolence. But to his surprise Mrs. Clayton gave a little laugh; that rippling laugh which he had only heard once or twice, clear as the notes of her flute.

"Diana! You can never touch Diana."

"Anthony, then; you are afraid of my influence with Anthony. Ah, I am right there!" Once again Hoyland saw that fine shiver which passed over her when she was dis-



turbed, alarmed, and knew that he had struck home. After all, she was no fool. There were many points upon which they might well touch, if she would but have it so—things which he knew, and others which she knew. There was no end to what they might do between them, he with his will and she with her odd powers of clairvoyance. This thought mingled with his resentment at that laugh with which she had greeted the mention of her daughter's name, the desire to crush her and her crazy impertinence away down out of sight, out of mind. So easy, too, for she looked almost incredibly frail, standing there on that vivid green lawn, arched over by that cloudless immensity of metallic blue sky; gray dress and gray hair, fine as a cobweb: delicate hollow of cheek turned away from him, with its faint pink flush, innumerable, finely-penciled lines.

"Diana," he said, "Diana comes next. Meanwhile I have the boy here"—he stretched out one hand, palm upwards, smiling, then closed his fingers, with the upward gesture of a man plucking ripe fruit from a bough and turning, moved away from her; leaving her with her arms hung slackly at her side, vacant as though he had actually robbed her of all hope, everything which steadied and maintained.

She was mad, of course, mad as a hatter! Glancing back, he saw that she had sat down like a child among the daffodils, there in the open, plump on the bare ground.

He went into the house, crossed the hall, and opening the baize door called through it for Nanny, who appeared in a coarse hessian apron, her sleeves turned up to her elbows.

"It's a fine day," remarked Hoyland coldly; "but, all the same, it was raining last night and the grass must be damp."

The woman stared at him, blankly, her dislike unchangeably set in the plain, weather-beaten face with its network of red veins, the small honest gray eyes. "How she hates me!" he reflected with amusement; life must be getting very petty, in the old days he had never so much as thought of how a servant regarded him.

"Of course, it's got nothing whatever to do with me," he added—after a pause in which it became evident that Nanny did not intend to commit herself by any question or remark—"but your mistress has chosen to sit down in the very middle of the lawn. Her own lawn, I grant, still, unless you want a funeral—"

Nanny's face flamed. "You're the devil himself, that's

what you are!" she cried, and, turning, ran across the hall and out of the door, pulling down her sleeves as she went.

Back in the study Hoyland glanced out of the window. Mrs. Clayton was still sitting upon the grass, while the old servant knelt at her side, wiping her mistress's eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII

It is very characteristic of certain characters to belittle what they do not understand.

The ugly contempt which Hoyland infused into his communication to Nanny, slight as it might seem, was the outcome of the baulked feeling which he carried away from that talk with her mistress. It was all very well to declare that he had come off best; but this was not the case. He was conscious of that helpless feeling which Jabe's boy might have had pushing against the soft obstinacy of the calf in the lane, weeks and weeks ago—the first and only time when he had seen Diana shaken out of her usual calm.

One thing Mrs. Clayton had done for him, stimulated him to fresh ideas. He resented, scorned her; but for all that the interest in the study of such a character, the suggestions it evoked, grew upon him.

Sometimes, if he kept very quiet, obliterated his personality—and *there* was a curious discovery, that he actually could so get rid of that self which frayed upon the blind woman's consciousness—Mrs. Clayton would talk to her children as though he were not there, or even include him in the conversation, as if—well, as if he were some one else; though it was only when he put his real self upon one side, made himself void, as it were, that she was sufficiently at ease for him to get at anything of her real mind.

She seemed to have traveled a great deal when she was young, to have read widely. He had discounted her as knowing nothing whatever of his world; but the fact was that she had merely assimilated a different part of it.

Now and then he went over to Setons, sat talking to Lady Caroline, amused at her shrewdness, her odd Victorianism, with its tang of Georgian coarseness. He knew that she thought him more or less what she would have called "a bad hat;" crediting him with no particular conscience or morality; and yet believed that it was good for

Anthony to learn something of the world, have this chance of being hardened off a little from the idealism of his general surroundings, his mother's company. For, despite her shrewdness, Lady Caroline was very simple; her idea of a "fast man" comparatively primitive and clean.

It was during one of these visits that Hoyland gathered something more of Mrs. Clayton's history. She had been brilliant in the days when girls were not expected to be anything more than "nice;" when it was part of the general creed that men did not care for clever women.

Likely enough they did not—her class of men, anyhow—and it might have been this which drove her into marrying Richard Clayton; anyhow, that was what Lady Caroline thought. She had been a great horsewoman, excelling in every form of sport; but she had been more than this, which the men whom she met upon those grounds were not.

She did not marry until she was twenty-eight, had been to college, taken high classical honors, traveled with friends of her own through Italy and Greece: "The mischief of it all is that she's always been a little scared."

"Scared of what?—Oh, just scared! One never quite knew how to take her." Lady Caroline's entire face was corrugated with a wide-spreading frown. "The nerve she had in some ways! She would sail through the most appalling examinations, ride anything, go at anything, start off anywhere, quite alone—I think it was partly that which made men, men of the conventional type, a little shy of her. And yet all the time she was afraid; though I'm blest if I knew what she had to be afraid of; I suppose I shouldn't have noticed anything, only I was so fond of her. It might have been that, too, which drove her into Clayton's arms—his bigness, his sureness, his practical brain—all the traits she hadn't got. Not a bad man, by any means, a good sort, but one of those people you must cut into if you want 'em to feel—and Lucy knowing what you thought before you realized it yourself. He had a way of saying, 'Ah, you wouldn't understand,' as though she were stupid. And so she was, in some ways; though he didn't need to say it, only to feel it—trust her to know! Let me tell you this, Mr. Hoyland; he might as well have been of that class which knocks their wives down, kicks 'em in the mouth, as have so much as an impatient thought of my cousin Lucy."

"She must have been pretty."

"She was lovely! But in the oddest way, like the Madonna people What's-his-name painted—there are any amount in Florence—and some in the National Gallery in London. Pictures bore me, I can never remember their names, the names of the people who paint 'em; though I like Landseer; but I noticed these because they made me think of Lucy—very long-legged women—little daisies over everything, even the sea—"

In a flash Hoyland's mind leapt to what she meant—Botticelli. Yes, that was it. That look of hanging 'twixt heaven and earth. It was odd that any one so blunt, so half-educated as Lady Caroline should have hit upon it.

He had walked home that evening, meeting Constance Hervey in the water-loud ravine which lay across the most direct route from Setons to Ox Lee. She amused him, was ready for any sort of intrigue; to meet her there was like drinking heady wine at a rural picnic. Cool and calculating, with a daring wit and clear brain, she arranged all such meetings, inaugurating them with the merest quiver of her lids when Lady Caroline mentioned some special path through the dale. At times it amused Hoyland to make love to her, to discover that there were practically no lengths to which he might not go in his stories, his innuendoes. Apart from this, she pleased his fastidious eye: her well-cut coat and skirt of fawn-colored cord, her white silk shirt and natty tie, her hair, her shoes, her stockings; the beautifully-kept hands, from which she drew a pair of doeskin gauntlet gloves, her very cigarette-case, were all perfect in their own way, too perfect for remembrance. She was like a little animal, a finely-finished little animal, neat as a weasel, no trace of soil to her fur.

Only that morning he had been revolted by the patches of brown earth upon Diana Clayton's rough skirt, evidence that she had knelt to tend some small sick animal or plant; while the finger and thumb of her right hand were engrained with a greenish stain. He was accustomed to that class of women who are forever brushing, filing, polishing and—"Why can't she keep herself tidy—clean, anyhow?" he had asked himself angrily, realizing all the while that the open-air scent of Diana, brushing carelessly past him, was of the very essence of cleanliness compared with the perfume which hung around Constance Hervey, her head against his shoulder. After all, he was not revolted; he was jealous, horribly jealous

of everything to which she gave her thought, her time.

They were growing increasingly short of men at Ox Lee, and on his way to Setons he had seen Diana farrowing with two bay horses, across and across the steep side of what was known as the Five-Acre Field; had stood in the far distance, moodily watching until she reached the sharp elbow of the hillside, where she and her horses were cut out against the blue and white of the sky; then flung savagely aside, dipped into the somber green and gray depths of the dales. He had never felt more like murder; he would have liked to have throttled her, stamped her down into the earth, with a "There—there—you loved it, and you've got it; over your face, into your mouth; the only sort of kisses you'd care for."

No wonder that the touch of Constance Hervey's smooth, scented hand against his face pleased him; but, for all that, he soon wearied of her company—like a dinner of *hors-d'œuvres*—and upon this particular day the very moment he left her his thoughts were back with what Lady Caroline had told him of Mrs. Clayton.

Sometimes, much as he disliked them, it seemed that his mind was forced into as great an engrossment with the mother and son as with the daughter. But they were that sort of family, one could not get at the one without the other; though one day, yes, one day, there must be an end to all this.

The memory of something he had heard or read of Matteo Palmieri's "Città Divina," in which the human race is represented as drawn from those angels who were neither completely for or against Lucifer, for or against Jehovah—a belief so profoundly interesting to the Florentine mind of the fifteenth century—returned to him. Mrs. Clayton was not altogether of the world, or apart from the world; was unable to concentrate upon the spirit alone, though the mundane things of life held her not at all, apart from her sympathies. It was this which gave her that Botticelli air of ineffable, mistrustful melancholy; that aloofness which yet longs for a closer intimacy with, understanding of, humanity.

This religion of sympathy and feeling—for there was never any woman with less dogma or of less churchly habits—might well account for that drawing away from him, that plain repugnance to something in his personality. For a woman of that sort to live with any one she mistrusted or disliked must be something like the company of the damned;

or rather, thought Hoyland, with his usual cynicism, those who are damned for lesser—or different, or grosser—reasons than we ourselves.

Something in her slender, pointed fingers suggested a manipulation of fine threads, a winding or disentangling. He watched her with her few friends—her complete blankness in the company of the Rectory party amused him—with the servants; with the cruder agricultural people and animals in whose company she was so entirely at home. She drew the very best out of these: old Haele, the shepherd, was almost epic when he was in her company; the cowmen and plowmen, the ancient gaffer laying the hedges—all alike ready with a store of rustic lore. It was as though she actually found the thread of gold in the thick of each tangled skein, drew it out, wove it to a pattern.

What was it old Haele was saying to her one day? “Aye, aye, missis, us do pass away out o’ the world as grasshoppers—and our life is astonishment an’ fear—” weaving Biblical language into the woof of his own rough accent; gaping upwards, resentful of the way in which an aeroplane slid unregarding by, above his green pastures, his lambs, his ewes, his “owd tups.”

Oh, yes, she drew all sorts of simple people with those fingers of hers, with the flow of her own wistful feeling. Hoyland, remembering his own hands as they used to be—the smooth, white skin, the broad palm, the pointed fingers thick at the base—stared with gloomy mockery at all which remained to him. His one scarred hand and his will against her hands and her soul; not the soul as religionists believe it to exist through all eternity, that was sheer balderdash, but the something which he was beginning to acknowledge might prove sufficiently existent to demand a name—psychic inheritance, or whatever you were pleased to call it.

It was the idea of this as something fluid and fluctuating, something of which he could not but realize that she was afraid that he might defraud her son, which Mrs. Clayton had left in his mind that day, when he looked back and saw her so oddly seated among the daffodils. Well, she might be right. If the thing existed at all, there might be greater or lesser flow. In some natures—as in Diana’s—so full and steady, so widely river-like, that there was no diverting it; in others easily turned aside; in yet others dried up at

the very source. Granted this, might it not account for the fact that some people may be mesmerized and not others; or, again, some by the will alone; others by an actual laying on of hands. Any mesmerist could juggle with such things, take a weak-minded man's individuality out of his body—his very ability to speak King's English, behave with decorum—put some alien individuality in its place; then there were those people with dual personalities, to whom such things happened automatically, apart from their own volition or any one else's.

If one could—and it had been proved—tweak out a man's self in this fashion, why not keep it out? A brutal comparison came to Hoyland's mind. How amusing to hang an assortment of fellow-beings, all that mattered of them, like scalps to one's belt; use one as a breviary; swing another like a pounce-box between oneself and the common herd.

It was only a few days later that the full possibilities of this thought came to him. Diana and her brother had taken their tea down to the river. They were both fishing, and Hoyland, who had been invited to accompany them, refused, then followed on and watched the boy land a trout—a fine enough fish. But what patience, what ardor, to waste to such an end! If it were a woman, now—a sudden thought of what it would be like to bring Anthony Clayton's fresh delight to bear on such a sport came to him with a sickening sense of envy.

Diana had lain down her rod and was waiting for the kettle to boil. She had seated herself upon the bank amid a forest of purple willow-strife and creamy meadow-sweet; her long legs, with the feet together, were straight out in front of her; the strength of her back was shown by the way in which she sat upright upon the steeply-sloping bank; her chin was a little raised, her eyes dreamy. For once there was something of her mother's Botticelli air about her, but far more approachable, warmly human. As Hoyland dropped to the ground beside her, he caught his breath in a silent curse.

That perfume of crushed meadow-sweet! There was a little Hungarian dancer who had used some scent just like that with her linen—*crêpe-de-chine*, lace and ribbons, rather. She it was who had first said: "You and I, Charles, we make a fine art of love." He had used the same phrase

to Leila Gavin, innumerable times, and it was true, for that sort of love was an art in Plato's meaning of the word as something artificial. "Other men—" she had gone on to say. . . . The lewd reminiscences with which they had endeavored to rival one another flooded in upon him now, borne on that perfume of meadow-sweet as clearly as though the whole thing had happened but yesterday. And yet that particular affair had been over in a week, forgotten—he could have sworn to it—years and years ago. She, too—that Hungarian woman—had been dark and white-skinned, like Diana, but her eyes. . . .

With an effort he shook off the odious comparisons and rose to his feet, bending over the kettle which bubbled above the spirit-lamp. "I think it's boiling, isn't it?"

Those infernal memories. He felt stiff and old, sitting on the grass like a boy, trying to make love like a boy. What a damned silly game! He had actually been turning over in his mind some phrase likening Diana to the spring, when that memory of Zieska ran through his brain. And yet—and yet . . .

To be like that boy Anthony, free of the satiation of the past, and still not to waste oneself as Anthony was doing.

The thought took a more exact form that night. Something of the clear, cold excitement, which had been one of the joys of his old life, came back to him, as possibility upon possibility was added to the structure, which had begun to form itself in his brain. If Mrs. Clayton's hands were made for weaving, why not his for building? Already he had his fingers upon Anthony's heart and brain: the boy was all eagerness to please him, to think as he thought, do as he did—be, in short, the very sort of man he imagined him to be.

To take what he wished for from young Clayton's individuality, to take all that would go to the making of emotions as fresh and clear as first love, to draw out what he wanted, and then—in case the whole fabric should collapse—put all that was outworn, that he was so bored with, of himself in its place.

He would have as much of Anthony as he wanted, and Anthony—well, Anthony should have all that he did not need, was ready to discard of his old self.

It would be like the *Pêche de Mer*, that delicacy of the Celestials which turns itself inside out, starts life afresh each spring.



## CHAPTER IX

As the spring merged into full summer, the austere summer of the Peak district, Hoyland began to see more of Mrs. Clayton. She no longer kept out of his way, slid aside from him as she had done; sometimes it amused him to fancy that she was crossing his path with the trailing wing of some mother-bird. In the face of such mistrust he could not imagine why it was that she did not take upon herself to dismiss him. After all—as he told himself scornfully—he was nothing more than a superior sort of servant, and the fact of his having been installed by her daughter would not have prevented her from exercising her own judgment. Indeed, it was odd to note the interchangeable quality of the relationship between mother and daughter. Sometimes it was Mrs. Clayton who was the petted, the consoled and soothed, the beloved child. Hoyland himself had seen her leaning her head against the girl's shoulder, had watched, unseen, while Diana dried her tears, led her off to bed. Whatever tucking-up there might be, it is certain that it was the daughter did it.

But then, again, in certain family discussions, conclaves, particularly when they affected her son, it was Mrs. Clayton who held the reins of decision. Anthony had been wild to hear Rosing sing, and it had been as good as decided that he and Hoyland should go up together and spend a night or two in Town, when she interposed. No; if Anthony really wished to go, he could stay with cousins, or Diana might accompany him. When they protested that it was impossible to leave her alone, she still showed no signs of relenting.

Hoyland, conscious of her usual weakness, timidity, wondered why neither of her children pressed the point. It was Anthony who supplied the reason:

“The mater doesn't often put her foot down, but when she does, there's no turning her. Even my father realized that, though she was usually so frightened of him—”

“Frightened, was she?” Hoyland was vaguely interested; after all, these people and their foibles were all that was left to amuse him.

“Yes; he behaved abominably to her—oh, abominably!” The boy's voice was vehement; his face flushed. Hoyland

had never seen him so moved, and it was evident that this was one of those sores which, received in childhood, are deeply embedded into the more mature consciousness, never completely healed. "Why she ever married him the Lord only knows—a rough brute! Yes, that's what he was, although he was my father, worse luck! He who ought to have gone on his knees to her! She would never discuss him with me, never take sides against him; but I remember how we used to hold hands, clutching each other, just like two kids, when he was in one of his moods, when we heard him coming. Frightened!—I was terrified! I used to bite my lip, look at her and see her biting hers—it was like seeing one's own face in a looking-glass—our eyes all hard and stiff—you know the sort of look—with holding back our tears. Diana declared it was partly us being so afraid that made him angry. Oh, but, of course, he was angry first, or why should we have started it? She said—sticks to it now—that some people are made like that—angry and impatient with the people they love most. Rotten sort of love, I call it. After all, it's only just because she never is afraid, never has been afraid of anything."

Anyhow, the Rosing concert was out of the question; Mr. Hoyland would realize now why they could not bother her, why it was impossible for them both to be away together, leave her remembering, thinking over things. It would not be any fun to go alone; and, as to the cousins, they cared for nothing but ragtime—devastating company for a really good concert.

Less than a week later another instance of what Anthony described as "the mater putting her foot down" was brought to Hoyland's notice, upsetting his own arrangements; though this time it was in connection with her daughter, not with her son, that Mrs. Clayton intervened.

There was to be a specially large sale of stock at a town some miles off, and Diana wished to go.

As it happened, Reuben Haele, who usually accompanied her, was laid up with lumbago; it was an almost impossible place to reach by rail or road, and altogether too far for Anthony to ride, fifteen miles or more.

Thus Hoyland's offer to accompany the girl seemed opportune, natural enough, and she accepted it as simply as she did everything.

"It's very good of you. It's a dull ride all alone, and one

horse goes so badly; but still I'm afraid it will bore you. I may be there the best part of the day—I want some young beasts, we've more feed than we need; and a heifer or two ready for milking next season. With such a late spring in Scotland they're running short of fodder, sending them down here; likely enough they will go cheap, but I may have to wait to the end of the sale."

"I don't mind that in the least; I daresay I can find something to do while you drive your bargain." Hoyland's tone was complacent; the whole thing seemed as good as settled, and Diana was debating upon the hour when it would be necessary for them to make a start, when Mrs. Clayton intervened, quietly, unexpectedly; her head turned aside in the way of a seeing person who is scarcely thinking of what she says:

"You'd better arrange to ride over with Reggie Stendall—he and Bob are sure to be going." Bob, always spoken of by his Christian name, apparently some distant relation of Mr. Stendall's, who was staying at Setons—a lanky youth, invalided out of the army—seemed to be continually quoted, discussed, considered. "We'll make a farmer of Bob yet," Mr. Stendall had said; and Hoyland had sneered at the thought of this as the pinnacle of any young man's ambition, oblivious of that kindness which tried to draw him towards the only sort of life for which he was now fitted.

They were all seated at the tea-table. Mrs. Clayton had her back to the window, and Hoyland could not see her face; but her voice was so vague and detached, that, mentally, he shrugged her aside. He had set his heart upon this long day with Diana, for up to now he had never been quite sure how far the incident which followed upon the Stendall's dinner-party was really forgotten or forgiven.

"But, Mother, darling, it's miles out of the way to go to Setons first."

"You could sleep there the night before."

"Oh, but such a bother, and I've so much to do. Of course, I can go alone, but if Mr. Hoyland really doesn't mind—"

"Yes—yes, that would be better—far better to go alone." Mrs. Clayton had risen from her chair, stood with the fingers of one hand just touching the table, one shoulder turned a little on one side, as though hesitating.

"Of course, if you'd rather—"

"Yes, that's it—I would rather. You will be very well alone."

Clearly it was the blind woman's body alone which hesitated, hovered; her mind had gathered to a firm point of decision, as it had an odd and disconcerting way of doing, just when one were most ready to count her out.

"Of course—as you like, dear." Diana's face was puzzled as her eyes followed her mother to the door; but apart from this, it was plain that she did not mind one way or another—was exasperatingly sufficient for herself. Two horses went better than one—that was all.

"You don't think it worth while—don't even pay me the compliment of protesting," said Hoyland.

"Oh, it's no use; not worth bothering my mother about. Though I can't see why—" The girl was pouring herself out a fresh cup of tea. As she broke off in the midst of her sentence, it was plain that she was engrossed in the effort to find some reason for her mother's prohibition.

"What's the good of listening to her? Crazed, that's what she is." The words were on the tip of Hoyland's tongue; one day he would say them, and much more, too; but meanwhile—well, it paid best to be silent, submit. At the same time his thoughts were cutting out the people, the sort of life that he would not put up with, once he was married to Diana.

By the merest chance he got at the meaning of Mrs. Clayton's veto, later that same evening. He was always telling himself that she was mad, and yet at the back of his mind was a growing conviction that, foolish as her words might appear to be, her instincts had something more than mere reason at the back of them, were almost uncannily acute. And here he lighted upon another proof that this strange insight of hers took her further than even he could have imagined, was mingled, at times, with a certain worldly shrewdness.

Only a few interrupted words, and yet there it was. She was right, amazingly right!

Mother and daughter were sitting upon a bench just outside the drawing-room, where he had gone in hope of finding something worth reading upon one of the low bookshelves which ran under the windows, packed with a curiously indiscriminate medley of literature.

"I wonder why you say that? I've ridden with him before." It was Diana who spoke—indifferently enough, for it seemed as though the question of riding or not riding with her brother's tutor came in at the end of some weightier discussion. A steady click accompanied the words, for she was one of those women—the sort of women he had always hated—who knit in their spare moments, with busy hands and far-away, clear eyes.

Sometimes, looking at her, Hoyland thought impatiently: "Why, she's like an old woman!" And yet at the back of his mind was a sense of safety in the picture of her growing old at his side; a realization that she was the only woman he had ever fancied whom he could think of as gray-haired and wrinkled, without repugnance.

"But this is different—not the just riding."

"What, then? Going to the sale? But it can't be what people would say; you'd never bother your dear head—"

"No, no! But you must trust me, Diana; I know, believe me, I know. . . . The men who will be there—the men whose 'talk is of oxen'—" Mrs. Clayton's sentences were broken; Hoyland wondered if she were twisting her hands together. Always, as it seemed, she agonized over any decision, and yet, even now he realized that she did not mean to give way.

"I've been so often; they all know me."

"But it's not them I mean. Oh, my dear, don't you see it isn't what they, the country people, will say—it's what he, the town man, will put into it all: the parallels, suggestions."

"But what does that matter? I have my business to do." Hoyland might have imagined that she was anxious for his company, but he knew her better. She wished to understand her mother's point of view; it was a part of her unflinching thought and care for her.

"Ah, yes, yes, you have your own business to do; that's it—forgetting everything else—choosing cattle for breeding, milking, discussing every point. With country people—oh, yes, there it's all right—the sex in the animal is part of their life; they see it through the eyes of their own need; its adaptability to their own ends: will discuss it as openly as any doctor discusses the affairs of the body. But with a town man, a man like that! Don't you realize, my daughter, that you can't go buying cattle with a man whose

own sensations are involved in everything he does, sees, thinks—a man who—”

“Mr. Hoyland”—it was Anthony peering through the open door into the dim room—“I say, I’ve been hunting for you everywhere. Are you looking for a book? Shall I get you a candle?”

“No, no, I’ve found what I want.” Hoyland straightened himself and took a book at random from a shelf immediately in front of him. Either Mrs. Clayton had ceased speaking, or the remainder of what she said was lost to him. But, anyhow, he had heard enough. He was amazed: this woman—why, she was like a child who, with a sudden pointed finger, strips you bare of all your most cherished illusions.

That any one so apparently simple should be so astute, so wavering, and yet capable of such judgment.

Why—again and again he asked himself the same question—why, why, in the name of all that was holy—did she tolerate his continued presence in the house? That day, more than a month before, when he had talked so wildly of his soul, she had spoken of his going, suggested it. But that was all; since then she had not so much as hinted at such a thing.

He challenged her with it one day: “I wonder why you don’t give me my *cong e*, get quit of me, once and for all.” His tone was the more insolent in that he was puzzled, at the back of everything, a little afraid.

But as she turned aside from him, shaking, confused, he was momentarily conscious of a thrill of triumph. “So I’ve got her at last, nailed her down,” he thought. And yet, had he? What, after all, was to be made of her answer?

“Because—ah, now, how can I tell what you might take with you?”

All very well to tell himself that it was Diana, the girl herself of whom she was thinking, when he knew perfectly well that this was not the truth, or anywhere near it; that she realized possibilities in his influence over her son, which he, himself, had, as yet, only dreamt of as possible.

How far it was her unspoken knowledge which influenced him it would be difficult to say; but it is certain that it was in some measure her beliefs and fears which gave him that idea upon which he now began to shape his life, his every waking thought.

He remembered laughing at some boon companion of his

own, who had joined the Roman Catholic Church, abjured his sins: "Virtue, the ultimate vice of the vicious—like an olive clearing the palate for a fresh flask of wine."

And yet was it not this, or something like this, which he needed before he could get any clear, unspoilt flavor out of life.

The first step, as he realized, was, without doubt, so to manipulate Anthony: so work upon his mind, as to render it amenable to one outside influence alone—his influence. From the very first night at Ox Lee that idea of corrupting his pupil—not so much physically as mentally—had held certain attractions. But the interest had fluctuated; he had never really set himself to it serious, definitely; had allowed his irritation, that desire to hurt which had come to him so strongly since he himself had been marred, to interfere with his influence; had run the risk of antagonizing or frightening the boy, merely because he had never felt sure which sort of game was most worth the candle.

Now, with a direct objective in front of him, all this was changed—a new and vivid interest added to life. He kept Anthony at work because when he was at work his own influence was at its zenith; he was master, and he mastered. Out of doors, in the open air, amid the animals—cattle, dogs, horses; with the workmen at hand—old Haele with his instinctive dislike, less active but as deep as Nanny's, the other men, who cared for him no more—among all the sights and sounds of country life he was at a disadvantage; while in the somber depths of the dale, dark with its river and its rocks, its brooding masses of foliage, in the open reaches of the wind-swept highlands, he felt himself helpless; forever reminded of the words which he had heard Mrs. Clayton use to Lady Caroline—words which she had practically repeated to his own face: "The earth which draws back and snarls at him; the sky which holds him pinned beneath it—never enfolding, bending; the wind, the trees—the trees and the earth—they'll have him between them."

He could not only do nothing out there—"among them all," as she would have said—but he was somehow frightened of himself and his tricks. He seemed to have caught a sense of something listening, watching, and endeavored to guard his very thoughts as he did in Mrs. Clayton's sensitive presence. After all, it was a sort of warfare.

One day he had been foolish enough, after a day in Shef-

field, to attempt the short cut across the wildest heights which lay between Ox Lee and the station. As he topped the steepest portion of the hill, stood among scattered rocks and dwarfed bent thorns—twisted all one way with the wind—breathless, and conscious of that strange sense of utter fatigue which had come to him now and then since that time in France, he was overcome by a sudden vertigo. The whole scene swam in a dancing mist of black and yellow; while, just for the merest fraction of time, some atavistic memory seemed to show him himself—himself, though he was at one and the same time spectator and actor in the scene—running, crouching, bent half double beneath an oval shield of woven willow—willow from the greatest dale. It was strange how he knew that, realized at the same time the terror in the heart of the beast-like thing, which, tossing its shield desperately aloft against a flare of lightning—stupid, stupid fool!—fell stricken to the ground.

In the moment that he fell Hoyland realized that he—or the creature he had been—was dead; there was for that fraction of time something in himself, some feeling of shock, some awful cessation of warmth and heartbeat which told him as much, driving it home with a sense of utmost, helpless terror. And yet, as a peal of actual thunder burst above his head, rolled, shouting, off among the hills, he could not believe that he had seen anything. He hadn't seen anything—no more than a person who has a handkerchief whisked across his face may be said to see. He had pretty nearly fainted, that was all; had mounted the hill too quickly at the side furthest from the oncoming storm, had been half blinded, half knocked silly by the lightning flaring straight upon him as he topped the steepest part of the rise, with beating heart and overstrained arteries—or so he told himself.

That night he woke from a heavy, dreamless sleep with a sudden sense of certainty that some time or other—hundreds and hundreds of years ago—so long ago that men ran naked with spear and shield—he had been killed by lightning in just such a place. The impression was gone in a moment, and he dropped asleep again. But, for all that, when he awoke next morning, he remembered how the Vicar had told him that part of the Peak district was the last resort of the Britain in England; remembered how one other night he had awoken all in sweat with the certainty that he



heard wolves; had almost seen them, red-eyed and fierce, upon the track of something which, so vivid was the sense of terror, might have been him himself, were it not that he was safe in bed at Ox Lee, with the feel of the smooth linen up against his chin; the curtains only half-drawn and the moonlight streaming into the room, showing it reflected in a large old-fashioned pier-glass which stood at right angles to the window.

Of course, it was all the result of nerves, weakened by physical suffering. He was certain of that; and, after all, there had always—ever since those days at Sotteville—been that same tendency to panic in wide-open places; but, all the same, there was no use in putting any unnecessary strain upon his strength, for he needed it all just now. Thus, he kept Anthony indoors, and the windows pretty constantly shut. The bees came in, he complained, and how could one work with that incessant buzzing in the room? Then there was the sound of cocks and hens, the distant lowing of cows, the song of birds—all the infernal din of country life.

Anthony grew paler with the lack of air, the concentration upon books—it was all classics now and philosophies—certain philosophies . . . it was somewhere about this time that Hoyland started upon Freud and his theory of dreams: what is known as “The Wish.” And here, almost before he had dared to hope for any change, his belief in the power of the will began to be proved. He had set himself to do a thing: got it going, and now it was almost doing itself. It seemed that Anthony’s mind was like certain sorts of ground upon which one can go on and on pouring water with no apparent effect, until, quite suddenly, it becomes impregnated, workable. A little more and he would be able to mold it between his finger and thumb, pinch it into the required form.

And yet, not always; sometimes for a while the whole thing seemed to slip away from him, and the boy became so moody, so restless and irritable, that it was almost impossible to do anything with him. Sometimes he would escape from his tutor’s control, wander for hours alone among the hills; sit brooding beside the river, his fishing-rod held loosely and disregarded between his fingers, his flies—one of his precious dry flies—dragging upon the stream.

At other times he would sit at the piano for hours together. Sometimes it seemed to Hoyland that his playing marked the

alteration in him more than anything else; it had lost its sensitive, dreamy quality, was wild and uneven.

Once he heard him talking to his sister. It was at the end of one of those days when he had broken away from his tutor, fretful and manifestly unhappy. There had been a scene between mother and son—if that could be called a scene in which one of the participators was so dazed and silent as Mrs. Clayton. Anthony had been brutally impatient: the sound of the words in which he flung back some appeal which she had made for his confidence upon the most insignificant point amazed him almost as much as it amazed her. The thing had happened at tea-time, and Hoyland could not forget the way in which they had both risen to their feet, pushed back their chairs, stood facing one another, shaken like leaves.

“You want to make a perfect fool of me! You want every one to be as soft as yourself—the laughing-stock of the place!” the boy had cried. “If you don’t know how every one laughs at us, what fools they think us, I do—so there! And I won’t have it any more: once for all, I refuse to be treated like a child in leading-strings. No wonder every one thinks you’re mad. But, by Jove, if you’re mad enough to think that I’m going to make such a bloody—”

It was there he broke off, stood for a moment with the consciousness of what he had said dawning slowly in his haggard young face; and rushed from the room.

Diana went to her mother, drew her back into her chair, knelt by her side, put her arms round her. “My darling, oh, my darling, don’t mind. He doesn’t know what he’s saying; he’ll be frightfully sorry—he—” Her voice dropped to a murmur as she pressed her face against her mother’s breast. But Mrs. Clayton had ceased to tremble; there was no sign of tears; and Hoyland realized that she felt her son to be more nearly hers in a moment like that which had passed, than during those long periods of absorption, indifference to everything which had to do with his own people, his own home, which had enveloped him so completely of late.

It was after this that Hoyland, discussing the boy’s changes of mood with his sister—showing a concern and sense of responsibility which could not fail to touch her—suggested that it might be a good thing to try some new form of diversion—“I believe that the great thing is to keep a boy of that age interested and amused: his work isn’t enough, and perhaps he’s grown a little tired of country amusements.”

"Perhaps you are right; perhaps that's it." Diana was gravely concerned. She was not very quick to notice things, but when she gained any impression it sank deep.

On his way up to bed that same night, Hoyland heard voices in the drawing-room, which could have nothing to do with Mrs. Clayton, the plaintive notes of whose flute were audible from her room at the head of the stairs. It was very late for Ox Lee—past eleven—and all the lights were out: but the whole house was so flooded with moonlight that Hoyland had not troubled to take a candle.

He was stepping softly, as he always did—"For all the world like any old Tom," as Nanny said—and the voices continued as he passed the open door, then stood to listen.

"But can't you tell me, my dear? If only you could tell me what it is!" That was Diana: he could even see her, or rather the silhouette of her, against the white light of the window, bent over a darker bulk which crouched at her knee. Always bending over something; always damnably concerned about something or somebody.

"How can I tell you? If I knew—Oh, God, if only I knew!" Anthony's voice had retained until later than usual the light, broken notes of extreme youth, with comical rough breaks—but the tone which Hoyland now heard was deep as a man's, full of desperate regret and fear. "If I knew, it would be all right—something to fight against. But—well, it's like a sort of disease no one knows anything about—there's no curing it because no one has any idea what it is, and so a fellow dies! It's like—Di, look here; I swear to you it's like this—like in the Revelations—the Seven Vials of Wrath. If I knew when it was coming, even, but I don't. I know I'm all wrong—everything wrong about me, gone crooked, warped.—Sometimes, just for an hour, I seem to get back to my old self, and then it's like waking from an awful dream.—Do you know those dreams in which you struggle and fight to awake, feeling that if it goes on another moment you'll be stifled?—Well, it's like that. Only I remember—as I remember now those awful things I said to Mother—Mother, of all people!—whom I'd give my life for—things that we've spent our time in trying to keep her from thinking; lies, too, filthy, rotten lies! . . ."

"Is there anything, anything I don't know of, worrying you? Perhaps, then—"

"Me—me, myself!" The boy's voice rose to a note of

sheer desperation. "That's all—that's everything! If it was outside, I could sort of get at it—but it's in myself. If it was possible to get into another person—or if another person could get into you—well, there you'd have it—the wrong song to the wrong tune . . . all a sort of awful misfit. Oh, how can I explain when I don't know?—I don't even know myself: only now and then I awake and remember what I've said, done—and even worse, the vile, the filthy things I've thought. And where does it all come from? It's poured into me—it's like the emptying of a town sewer: everything I read, everything I do—even the very sight of the animals about the place, even the things you say of them, talking to Haele or any one, are contaminated—give me all sorts of devilish ideas. And that's not all. I gloat over them, want to get away alone, hug myself and them. Mr. Hoyland is such a good chap, he never thinks—of course, no decent-minded man ever would think—he's a scholar to his fingertips; it's just the beauty of the literature he's out for. But at work sometimes, translating Latin stuff—even worse now I'm getting on with my Greek, so easily that it seems that there must be something wrong about that, too—something infernal—I feel all—oh, too awful! I never even noticed the license before; but now it's all I look for, care for. If he had any idea of the things I think of, the pictures I have in my mind—!"

"But tell me the sort of things."

"If I told you—if I told you a thousand, thousand times, in all the words there are to it, you'd never understand. . . . Thank God, Di, you'd never understand."

The boy flung to his feet and moved upright against the light of the window: Hoyland saw him fling both arms aloft with a gesture of despair. "Life's awful, and death's awful—sometimes I'm half wild with terror, at the thought of it going on and on— Thousands of other people may be feeling as I'm feeling; with little ribald souls laughing at the back of them—grinning skeletons, not like real people at all; just pretending to be real people. Even when I'm not like that, ten to one I'm all stuffed up, frowsty—not caring about anything. Just like a room, dusty and dirty, with all the windows shut: dead flowers, scent and all that: used up and stale!"

"I think you'd better go away for a bit. Perhaps . . ."

"What's the good of going away?—to take myself with

myself!" The boy's tone was suddenly changed, sullen. "Look here, Di, do you believe in devils?"

"I suppose, yes, I suppose I do, powers of evil, anyhow."

"Well, there you have it. That's what's wrong with me—I'm possessed of a devil; running down a steep place—making my own steep place—but not to the sea,—no such luck—there's oblivion in the sea—but to that bottomless pit old Haele's always yapping of."

His voice had lost its note of despair, was bitterly defiant: he flung round so quickly and out of the room that Hoyland was no further than the third step of the stairs when he brushed past him; turning towards him, for one moment, a face at once, so derisive, and so seamed with wretchedness that the tutor could not fail to realize that he had guessed at his eavesdropping.

## CHAPTER X

It was after this, following upon the talk which he had with his "employer," as he chose to call her; trying to belittle her, bring her down to his own level by his sneers, that Hoyland and his pupil began to go into Manchester or Sheffield for the matinées, once or twice each week. At the latter, upon the occasion of their first visit, there was a musical comedy, and among the faces in the back row of the chorus was one which momentarily teased Hoyland with a vague sense of memory: but the costumes and head-dresses were so preposterous and exaggerated that it was impossible to form a mental picture of what any one of the girls might have been like in ordinary life; and, after all, in the old days, he had many slight acquaintances among such people: apart from this, the lighting was bad, and they had not particularly good seats. Thus, even before the end of the performance, the impression of some memory was lost.

He did not think much of the show; and at first Anthony had seemed merely irritated by the music, which was jerky and tuneless. The Manchester play had been very much the better of the two, and if the boy was to be launched out upon a life of gayety, it seemed that the larger city held the greater attractions.

But when, a few days later, Hoyland spoke of wishing to have his hair cut, Anthony seemed bent upon Sheffield.—

"I want to get some ties and things, and I know the shops there," was what he said.

He went off to do his shopping while his tutor was at the hairdresser's: but he did not return, neither was he at the station to meet the train by which they had arranged to return. Hoyland waited for the next; but still there was no sign of Anthony; and taking it for granted that they had missed each other in the crowd which rushed for the first, he went home alone. It was then that he tried that short cut across the hills from Peak Forest station; though it was only when he got back, and found that the boy had not yet returned, that he realized he might even now have been building better than he thought.

When young Clayton did return, by a very much later train, from which he did not reach home until close upon ten o'clock, he announced that he had been to an afternoon performance at the theater. "Why didn't he tell Mr. Hoyland he was going?"—Well, he didn't know himself. He had gone just because it came into his head to go, had missed his train and decided to have dinner in town, that was all. He was listless, indifferent and irritable under their questioning—there was something more of "a fellow not being kept in leading-strings."

After this he seemed to be forever in Sheffield upon one pretext or another. Sometimes he must have been there when he gave every one to believe that he was fishing down the river: Hoyland had seen him hurrying furtively home across the hills; had, with his man's eye, noticed the difference in his dress.

And this was not all. Hoyland had tried the experiment of taking him over to Mrs. Vesey Horton's one afternoon, when he knew that she had friends of her own staying there. After the first greeting, she had turned aside to him with a grimace. "What are we to do with that child here? I had planned bridge; and they are—well, not exactly a pastoral set: Lady Filsham, now, there's no knowing what she mayn't say or do next. Really, my dear man, I do think you might have known better."

"It's difficult to get away without him," was Hoyland's imperturbable answer. "But really he plays quite a decent hand. Give him my place—I'm stony-broke—and be kind to him; but not too kind. I'm responsible, remember."

"It's as bad as having a child in the room—we'll have to

talk French, or spell our words," grumbled the hostess. But she was a good-natured woman, with young brothers of her own, and at the bottom of her heart she felt sorry for the youngster, who must feel out of it among so many old stagers.

But her pity was wasted. Hoyland was right. She played with Anthony herself, and they lost the first game—but that was through no fault of his: the tutor had tested him during a couple of intolerable evenings at the Rectory, and one other evening at Setons: from the beginning he had shown a flawless memory—"If only you would keep your mind on the game, you'd be all right," he had said, and added a few hints.

Anthony did not need to be told to keep his mind on the game now. That first game was his only failure. There was something avid and curiously unyouthful in his absorption: it was he who ran up the stakes, the others, so much older, were amused at him, humored him. "A real good sport!" That was what they said; and, "By gad! not much that young fellow'd stop at, eh?"

"Anyhow, I've helped him to stand on his own feet," thought Hoyland; and swelled with a sense of something like benevolence.

Soon after six, the players at the second table laid down their cards and gathered to watch. When some one spoke, Anthony glanced up and frowned, with a look which held so much of the fierce exasperation of an old gambler that Mrs. Vesey Horton was faintly uneasy. Hoyland oughtn't to allow it! After all, he was the merest boy; it was a shame to let him play so high—all the worse in that he was winning. At the next break she said, "Don't you think you good people have had about enough? For goodness' sake let's go and get some fresh air before dinner."

"Oh, let them play it out, dear lady," interposed some one else, easily: "It's what one might describe as practicing the young idea in the art of shooting, eh!"

"Well, this must be the last. Tom will be furious if he comes home and finds us still at it. He hates bridge in the afternoon, anyhow. Now, remember, I leave it to you, Mr. Hoyland."

Hoyland, playing against his pupil, looked up and nodded. When Mrs. Vesey Horton had stopped playing, upon the pretense of pouring out the tea, Lord Yeanham had taken her place: then a Miss Stanley, who was of their party,

grew tired of playing, and a man staying in the house had come across from the other table.

Thus it was three mature men and a boy whom Mrs. Vesey Horton left at play, and whom she found still gathered round the table, when they all came hurrying back at the sound of the dressing-gong.

Lord Yeanham and Anthony Clayton were partners. Against them were Cathcart, a thin, colorless man who sat tapping with his cards upon his lips, one eyebrow twisted all askew, and Hoyland. The latter, sitting a little forward in his chair, extraordinarily neat and impassive—"The best-groomed man I ever saw," thought Mrs. Vesey Horton, "and the most mysterious;" mysterious was a word she used, even in her own thoughts, for everything which she failed to understand—had his heavy-lidded eyes fixed upon his pupil, whose turn it was to play. Lord Yeanham, also, was watching him; his bestial face, with its immense sweep of smooth shaven jaw, more deeply flushed than ever, drawing in his lips and puffing them out again.

As the party from the garden entered by one of the open French windows, Vesey Horton himself appeared in the doorway, in riding-kit, with a whip in his hand; a stout, sanguine man, with reddish hair and eyes.

"Well, I must say! A nice sorter way to spend a fine summer afternoon—at a time like this, too—by Gad, a time like this—a war on an' all! Did none of you hear the dressing-gong, eh?"

All the players, with the exception of young Clayton, glanced up at the master of the house.

"A moment, old chap," said Lord Yeanham. "We've just finished the rubber."

"Time, too! What the hell do you want to be playing cards here in the afternoon for? You know I hate it," grumbled Vesey Horton: his sulky glance turned persistently away from his wife and the little group who surrounded her. "One 'ud think that when you knew a fellow, in his own house—"

"Will you be quiet, please?—How can I think what I'm doing?" The amazed glance of every one in the room swung round from the host to young Anthony Clayton, as he rapped out the words, sharp with irritation. There was a flaming spot of color on either cheek: frowning, his pale lips drawn tight, he did not even glance up as he spoke.



"You young puppy!" roared Vesey Horton, purple with amazement. "Who the devil do you think you're speaking to? What the devil—" The veins stood out round his neck, on his temples, like cords, as his wife went up to him and laid her hand on his arm.

"Be quiet, Tom; don't make a scene—it's only a boy."

"A boy be damned! Boy or no boy—"

"Oh, for God's sake shut up!" broke in Anthony; then, in the amazed silence which followed, laid a card upon the table.

Vesey Horton took a step forward, his riding-whip raised, pulling away from his wife's hand:

"If I don't give you the soundest thrashing you ever had in your life, you insolent young dog, you—"

The other men had laid down their cards on the table and risen to their feet: there was a babel of talk. Lord Yeanham had his host by the lapels of his coat and was stuttering furiously: Cathcart was white to the lips; he hated a row; there was nothing like it for shaking a fellow's nerves: Mrs. Vesey Horton was laughing, rather hysterically.

"Don't be so silly, Tom! Can't you see . . . ?" They were gathered in a group around the master of the house: Anthony alone was left seated at the table. Hoyland was watching him, puzzled and a little scared—things were going a trifle too fast, even for him.

Suddenly young Clayton looked up and smiled across at Lord Yeanham.

"Our rubber, anyhow, partner," he said calmly; then paused, his mouth a little open, as though suddenly awakened to something which he did not understand; the color slowly draining from his cheeks, as Mr. Vesey Horton broke into a sudden, loud, unexpected laugh.

"Well! Of all the cheeky young devils!" he exclaimed; then—"But look here, you fellows. Let me tell you this. I'll have no plucking of coots in my house; got me there, eh?"

"I don't think you need be afraid of that, Horton," put in Cathcart, speaking for the first time. "This special coot seems to have done very well for himself—with Yeanham's able assistance," he added bitterly. "Anyhow, they've cleared me out, between them."

"Serve you right—playing cards in the afternoon—afternoon like this, time like this!" Vesey Horton crooked a

thick forefinger and beckoned to Anthony—"Look here, you're young Clayton of Ox Lee, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you take my advice, young man: keep clear o' this sorter thing for another ten years, at least. Better still, keep clear of it altogether. Who brought you here, eh?"

"No one. I—"

"You know Mr. Hoyland, Tom," broke in his wife, for she was angry with Hoyland; all this upset was his fault, he ought to have had more sense. "You remember, Mr. Hoyland's staying at Ox Lee, tutoring—"

"Well, upon my word! a pretty sorter tutor!" interrupted Vesey Horton, with a loud laugh, half drowned in a second peal of the gong.

"A pretty sorter tutor," thought Hoyland, as he sat alone in the study that evening, nursing a wood fire. Anthony had gone off to Nanny in the kitchen, would scarcely look at him. "A pretty sorter pupil, rather!" For he and Yeanham between them had cleared him out of just on twenty pounds, a sum which he could but ill afford to pay for an afternoon's amusement—or instruction: instruction too well given, too well taken to heart.

## CHAPTER XI

ONE afternoon when Hoyland was sitting with Constance Hervey upon some rocks just above the path which lay close against the river, cutting the cleft of the dale, Diana Clayton coming down it, saw them and turned aside to speak to them; a little surprised and yet not liking to pass them by as though there could be anything clandestine in such a meeting. She did not greatly care for Constance Hervey, though she admired her; but if she and Hoyland were in love with each other, as she supposed they were, it might help him to build up something in the way of a new life. The thought pleased her, more especially because—mingled with a deep sense of bewilderment and grief at the change in her brother—there was a slow-growing doubt of his tutor; and if—well, if he were not a success at Ox Lee, it was a comfort to feel that he might find happiness elsewhere.

She was carrying a half-grown wild rabbit: its ears lay back flush with its body as it stretched along her arm: one

hand supported its hind legs, with the other she was stroking the top of its head. The creature's eyes were bolting; Hoyland could just see them as it pushed its nose into the crook of the girl's arm, but it made no effort to escape.

"I found it in a trap, poor thing! One leg broken; but I think I can mend it, it will be all right."

"Better put it out of its misery, I should say," remarked Hoyland, who had risen to his feet. He tried to speak calmly, but there was yellow clay and blood upon Diana's hand, where it supported the wounded animal's hind-quarters, and his eyes were fixed upon it resentfully; it made him sick and savage,—why in the world was she like that, contaminating herself with such things?

"Ugh!" Miss Hervey gave a little shudder. "How can you? Don't you know that they're simply swarming with fleas?"

Diana smiled, that odd, wide smile that had once been so much a part of her brother's expression—the exasperating way in which this family was interwoven with each other! thought Hoyland; not that there was much smiling about Anthony in these days; he had seen to that.—"You mustn't misjudge even fleas, Miss Hervey—" there was quiet malice in Diana's voice; she had forgotten her shyness in a sense of resentment at this girl's finicky niceness; remembering the sneer she had often noticed at the back of her seeming deference to dear old Caroline—"they won't forsake their host so long as it's alive—true to their salt."

"Give it to me—filthy—bleeding—!"

Hoyland's voice was hoarse as he put out one hand to the trembling animal lying along the girl's arm. It seemed as though his brain were on fire with resentment, jealousy—yes, jealousy—that there should be a thought wasted upon this wretched vermin. Why, he himself . . . But, oh, yes, no doubt that she would be kind to him if he were ill—just as kind as she was to the rabbit!

She must have turned back her sleeve in her efforts at rescue, for as she raised it, drawing the creature closer to her, staring at Hoyland, he saw that the under surface of bare forearm was smeared with the same yellow clay as her hand. "Dust to dust"—that was all very well—inevitable; but could there be anything more revolting than the people who met death half-way by this absorption in the things of the common earth?

"Give it to me—give it to me, I say!"

"No!" Diana's face was absolutely white as she raised one arm to defend herself and her charge. But what could she do? In a moment Hoyland had snatched the rabbit from her, wrung its neck and tossed it aside into the bushes.

"There!" He flung round again, facing her; it seemed as though they had both forgotten the trim, shallow thing, still sitting and smiling on the bank above them.

Once again—as upon that night of the Setons' dinner-party—which until this moment, seemed so far away, completely done with—Diana's expression showed not only amazement, horror, but that deep underlying sense of pity.

"Good God! are there no human beings for you to waste your thought, your sympathies upon?" Hoyland's appeal was childish, petulant; to his own surprise he realized that he was trembling from head to foot.

"Yes."

For another moment or so, the girl's steady gaze was upon his face, frowning a little, her lips set in a close line of pain, as though she were trying to think, to realize what lay at the back of him and his actions.

Then she turned aside, and addressed herself to Miss Hervey gravely and courteously, almost as though nothing had happened:

"Perhaps you will come back to tea with Mr. Hoyland? I have to go further up the dale to see to some sheep, but I'll be home in half-an-hour."

"Thanks, no: I think I'll go back to Setons for tea." However much the other two might be stirred, Constance Hervey was still unmoved; a little bored by the interruption to a carefully-arranged afternoon, more than a little amused: the appraising glance which she ran over the other girl was insolent; if she had put it into words she could not have said more plainly—"Thank you, but I like my tea free from the possibilities of mud, vermin—."

It was so clear that the color flooded into Diana's face; but she had that breeding which the other lacked. "Another day, then, any time you feel inclined," she said; and with a slight inclination of her head turned away.

For a moment or so Miss Hervey sat looking at her own hands, pushing back the skin round the carefully-manicured nails—there had been a discussion at Ox Lee as to how she contrived to keep the Setons' car clean and herself so im-

maculate: a problem to which Lady Caroline herself had put an end—"Calls herself a chauffeur! A pretty sorter chauffeur!—Has to have a man to wait on her; wouldn't soil the tip of that little finger of hers. Lord! how I did always hate a woman who quirked her little finger!"

As she drew out her cigarette-case and lit a match, she gave a little laugh:

"Really, my dear, I can't compliment you upon your housemates. It's bad enough at Lady Caroline's—cold water, whips, dogs, horses, square-toed boots, flannel underclothes sort of life—But that Ox Lee *ménage*, good heavens! The impossible youth, the half-baked mother, the appalling factotum person—what is it they call her? Nanny?—above all, that girl—Diana of the plow! I do think—" She broke off with a hasty, "Well, what now?" suddenly conscious of Hoyland's hard stare.

"What a pity"—he spoke meditatively—"what a pity that they glazed you!"

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Well, a china doll, you know—biscuit china—so delightful in its way—clean, neat, unchanging, cheap. But glazed. Oh, well, don't you see, a sort of extravagance of finish—takes away all the little resemblance it ever had to nature—"

His sullen contemptuous gaze dropped from her shining hair, the unvarying pink-and-white of her thick, flawless skin, to her polished nails. Ugh! the woman stank of varnish! And what would Diana think? What would Diana think?—Nothing else mattered.

She came to him in the study, just after tea, that evening. It was still light outside, and very warm—that still, maternal warmth of mid July; but here the heavy curtains were drawn, the lamp lighted, a fire burned in the grate.

For a moment the girl hesitated by the door, her lips parted as though she felt some difficulty in drawing her breath in an atmosphere so different from that out of which she had come. Hoyland rose and offered her a chair, but she would not sit down. Her face was very grave as she stood facing him across the hearth, one hand resting upon the mantelshelf. It struck him that she was thinner, in some ways older-looking than she had been a few weeks earlier; and yet in a way younger because less sure of herself, puzzled, anxious; up against something which she could not understand.

"Mr. Hoyland, I—I think—perhaps it would be better if you could make some other arrangement."

Hoyland gave a laugh.—"Because of Miss Hervey, eh?" He knew that this had nothing whatever to do with the case; but it gave him some sort of bitter amusement to pretend that Diana was that kind of prude; or, better still, jealous.

But her transparent honesty of purpose, the indifference of her, "Oh, no! What could that possibly have to do with me?" swept away even this make-believe, with its salve of vanity.

"Then why?"

"I don't think you are happy in the country, I don't think that you're suited to it. Things get on your nerves—"

"You mean this afternoon, what I did?"

"Not what you did—what it showed."

"But, all the same, what I did," persisted Hoyland—"wringing that little beast's neck for it."

"No, no—perhaps the way you did it."

"And yet you yourself hunt, fish."

"Yes"—she hesitated, looking at him gravely, as though trying to understand what it was that had so revolted her in his action.—Mr. Stendall, or Bob, would have been just as likely to persist in putting the little creature "out of its misery."

"Look here, Miss Clayton, can't you see—realize—" Hoyland spoke more roughly than usual, with that sort of boyish impetuosity which was so new to him—"it's more than I can stand to see you touching such things—the earth, and blood upon your hands. You don't seem to mind—"

"Yes, that's it; I don't mind. That's why we can't understand each other. You fight against, hate things which are natural, part of everyday life, and yet you can do a thing like that—cruelly, wantonly. You mustn't think that I don't realize our ways must be as strange to you as yours are to us, what a different way we look at things here in the country. To us—oh, well, one's nearer to birth, life and death—they don't seem to count for so much: we grow to take things as a matter of course that are—oh, well, sort of furtive—horrid in books, or to people in towns. I suppose we're more part of the soil that feeds us; we live by it; of course our whole idea of what is clean or unclean must be different—"

Hoyland's sidelong glance was suspicious. What did she

mean by that? One of those sudden, all-engulfing memories of things in his life, which nobody by any stretch of sophism could call clean, swept across him—scents, sights, words. But next moment it was plain that she only hesitated because she found it difficult to express what she wished to say and yet keep clear of any chance of hurting him.

“Things make you angry which wouldn’t make us angry, upset you. Of course I know men have been through such awful things, out there—that none of you, after all you have suffered, can ever be quite the same again.” She glanced at his hands—the only person who ever did look at them; her quiet gaze so much less galling than the quickly-averted eyes to which, as he told himself, he ought by now to be accustomed. “But if you can lose control of yourself in that way with a helpless, dumb animal—I am thinking of Anthony, Mr. Hoyland.”

“Afraid of what I might do to Anthony, eh?”

“No—not of what you might do, in that sense.”

“Of my influence, then?”

“Yes.”

“It seems to me that, just now, I am the only person who has any influence, of any sort, with your brother.”

Diana did not speak; she was looking at him gravely, as though waiting to hear what more he had to say; and he went on:

“Have you thought what it might mean if that influence were suddenly removed? He keeps away from his mother as much as possible now; he’s afraid—or so it seems to me—afraid of what she may know, what she may be thinking. Then, again—you must forgive me for saying so—but, as things are now, he defies you: will take no notice whatever of what you say. That’s so, isn’t it?”

It was with difficulty that Hoyland could keep a note of triumph out of his voice.

“Yes, yes, you are right—he defies me. But why? He never did before; and now—it’s almost as though I were his enemy.”

“And you ‘blame it on me,’ as Nanny would say. Don’t you know that men grow up very suddenly: that your brother remained a boy, almost a child, longer than most; that he is realizing himself now, getting impatient of leading-strings, more particularly when those strings are held by a woman?”

"I have thought of that."

"But you still feel that I am a bad companion for him? That he would be better without me?"

"Yes." The answer was so straight that it astonished Hoyland, accustomed as he was to the girl's directness in any matter where she was deeply concerned.

"It is not that I think you are bad in yourself—only bad for him. You have been very patient with us all, with our ways, which must have seemed so strange to you; most patient of all with my mother, who has not been—not been—well, always at her best with you. But it seems to me that it cannot be good for a boy like Anthony, weak and easily led, to be with any one who has no particular aim or ambition in life. I want him to be—oh, not so much successful as happy, really happy. And you—"

"You think that I'd be a bad guide in that direction?"

"I think you are cynical—and cynicism and happiness don't seem to go together." She spoke slowly, with that sort of awkwardness she always showed in any expression of her own feelings. "It seems that you mistrust everything—that something in your life or your nature has led you to mistrust—to—well, in a way resent simple things. That you are prepared for—for a sort of horridness in other people; and that you may really look for it until you—oh, until you think them into being like that."

"Ah, now we have it. You're afraid that I'll 'think' your brother into being 'horrid'?" He managed a laugh, but for all that he was scared by the penetration of her thought—she whom he had always, despite his need for her, thought of as the slow one of the family—all the more restful because so slow; had named her, in one of those moments of spite which seemed to assuage his own pain, "Io, the lovely cow." But then, they were amazing, these Claytons, with their stupidities, their insights! "Come now, do you really believe I have nothing, apart from your brother, to interest me—that I am so engrossed?"

"I don't, somehow, feel that you have very much to think of," answered the girl, with her amazing directness; her eyes full upon him. "At least, not very much that really matters. Of course, I know how clever you are; what you've read and seen; how stupid we must seem to you. But still, it does seem that you have nothing which really engrosses you; and perhaps that—that might start you trespass-



ing on other people's lives, in a sort of way." She flushed as she spoke, that clear flush which comes to women of her complexion, as though from some inward light. "If you were really engrossed—oh, you know, yourself," she went on; "you'd have no time for unkindness, malice."

"Why do you say that I'm malicious? Have I ever been malicious to you?"

"That wouldn't matter." She raised her head a little, stiffened; but he did not resent the rebuff, was childishly engrossed in the discussion of his own character, had almost forgotten the question which led up to it.

"And unkind. What a character!" He was smiling.

"Yes, and unkind—because you are unhappy—because you have too much time for that sort of thought—"

"What sort of thought?"

"About things that are over—things that can't be helped. It seems now," she went on, more slowly, as though the words came with some difficulty, "as though I wished you to go for fear that your unhappiness—your restless unhappiness—might overcloud my brother's life. But it isn't that. That would be brutal, cruel. Oh, believe me, it's not that." She moved a step nearer to him, her face flushed, full of feeling. "At least, not only that—not like that, not the unhappiness—"

"What, then?"

"Oh, well, it seems as though suffering, life—everything had grown to a sort of canker. In other places, with other people, people who are cleverer, people who understand, of your own sort"—she was thinking of Constance Hervey, and he knew it—"it might be different; better for you. But here, in this lonely place, where there is nothing but the seasons ever happening, where we just go on, you rub yourself, rub all of us, to a sore."

"And you think that is what's happened to Anthony?"

"Yes." She spoke as though with an effort: and yet quite decidedly. "If he was strong enough to be just a man of the world, your sort of world, it wouldn't matter. But he isn't—he'd go—well, you know he'd go all over the place."

"He seems to be doing that pretty thoroughly already."

Diana's face had paled; she made a motion of her head, as if she were suddenly afraid to trust her voice to speak.

"Again and again I've put the curb on him—prevented him from going off to Sheffield, from drinking more than is

good for him—you know that. I've interfered between him and the friends he's made: checked him, the insolent young fool, when he's been rude, almost bullying—you must acknowledge that, almost bullying—to your mother."

"Yes, but—"

"But you'd rather I didn't; rather I went away—ceased to interfere?" Suddenly as it seemed, the girl was defeated; she gave a hopeless gesture with both hands, then, turning to the mantelshelf, propped her elbows upon it and rested her chin in her open palms. There was a mirror in front of her, and Hoyland could see her face, the way in which she stared at herself, blankly, her unseeing eyes heavy with tears.

He did not desire her, never had desired her, in the way in which he desired other women; but now he wanted to take her in his arms, to press her head down upon his shoulder, to feel her dependent upon him, resting against him like a tired child. It seemed as though all the ardor and freshness which he had sucked from her brother was now drawn towards this one end: that she might rest and that he might rest, that this new passion, so full of wonder and surprises, should yet be based upon a life of rest and security: that there should at last be one woman of whom he would never grow tired, who would never cloy or weary him, as the others had done: that all the while he would be finding out different things—new and unexpected things in life—that the coming years should be an endless smooth stream of delightful discoveries, down which he would sail, upborne by that sense of youth which was now, each day, gathering strength within him.

So the thing had come to him at last, with an entirety for which he could scarcely have hoped. This something which he supposed was what he had heard men speak of as tenderness, must be the outcome of his engrafted youth; though the difference between it and the first real spontaneous youth lay in the realization, the appreciation of a quality otherwise taken for granted.

Those meetings with Constance Hervey meant nothing; had begun while his appetite was still a trifle jaded. But from this afternoon all that must be at an end; he could not afford to take risks. If Diana were ready to dismiss him, it must be because she was afraid of him, beginning to doubt him. A sort of clammy fear swept over him as he thought of what it might mean if Diana actually pitted her

strength against his. In some ways his will was not so strong as it had been, he was running it off too persistently in one direction. . Supposing she should so bear upon him, upon the rest of the people at Ox Lee, upon Lady Caroline and her husband, that he were forced to lay down his cards? With the protective instinct which comes to all of us in moments of panic, he suddenly realized from whence he might look for help, however unwilling.

"Miss Clayton, you spoke of your mother, of her old mistrust, dislike for me. Will you do this? Will you put it to her as to whether I should go or remain—abide by her decision?"

Diana hesitated; she had raised her head and was looking at his reflection in the glass, still puzzling: she was so simple, so unsubtle in herself, that Hoyland's subtleties spun a sort of web around her, tangled her thoughts.

"You have a good deal of confidence in Mrs. Clayton's instincts. If she likes me better than she did, if she thinks it as well that I should remain until Anthony is ready to go to college, couldn't you trust her judgment?"

"Of course I trust her; but I don't understand—"

"What don't you understand?"

"That she should change—if she has changed."

"Come now, you yourself think that I've improved. Own up; you've said as much."

"It wasn't you I was thinking of. Mother—well, she likes or dislikes. I've never known her alter her opinion of a person—"

"But, surely, if that person alters—turns over a new leaf—"

"People don't alter." She turned upon him there, with one of her grave, direct glances. "They vary—they deteriorate, improve, develop—but they don't change." It was her mother's judgment.

"Ah, well, if you feel like that. But I put it to you: even if I'm only something of a whited sepulcher—count the affair of this afternoon as a glimpse into the depths of it—there may be reason in her decision, either way. And there's another consideration. Your brother is still working, and working well. I can't treat him like a child, I can't keep him at it all day, I can't always keep him from breaking away. But will any one else keep him at it at all? And if he doesn't pass into Cambridge, if he doesn't work—and, of

course, you must realize that at times like this the best thing in the world would be for him to get among other men of his own age—what is he going to do? It's a pretty grave responsibility, Miss Clayton."

For a moment or so Diana was silent; she took up a black marble spill-vase from the mantelpiece and turned it round in her hand, examined it carefully, then put it down as gently as though it had been a morsel of fragile china.

"Yes, you are right; it is a very great responsibility; it's—" She paused, her eyes heavy, her lips drawn. "Sometimes—just now, it seems—" She shook her head—"oh, more than I can bear!"

"And yet you won't let me help—"

"I think that no one can help. Any one—oh, any one can hinder—that's the awful part of it; and hinder without meaning to hinder. But to help—to help another—that's so different. I was never undecided about anything before; but now—perhaps you're right. I don't understand—only this, that Tony is changed, terribly changed—. It's as though he were not himself at all, but somebody else, some one I never knew, can never know, because I can never understand—never. Oh, I know that—not while he is like this; any more than I can understand why he's like this. It gives one the sort of feeling of being in a dark wood, seeing nothing, afraid to move. Yes, that's it; I am afraid; and I know that I have no right to judge, only—only by what I feel. I'll do as you say—yes, it's only fair—ask my mother, abide by her decision."

"Absolutely?" Suddenly Hoyland felt as though a weight had been lifted from him; like a boy at school, reprieved from disgrace, expulsion.

"Of course. What would be the use of asking her, otherwise?"

"But you hope—?" He knew that he was a fool to venture even that far, but his old self-confidence, love of conquest, was too much for him, and he cursed himself afterwards for being such an ass as to imagine that she might change color, show some sort of feeling. There was a tone which he could throw into his voice which he had never before known to be without effect; it was almost pathetic how slow he was to lose his belief in it, how amazed he felt at Diana's response—or rather lack of it—the weary indifference of her voice, which made him feel, all of a sud-

den, as though she were years and years older than himself.

"I don't think it matters much what I hope. Hope's not much good for anything."

## CHAPTER XII

"ANYTHING, anything can be done by will. People are too lazy to use their powers, that's all. They've let themselves get tangled up with all sorts of fantastical beliefs, delusions—half afraid of themselves, more afraid of their fellows—have settled down under an army of astute priests who manipulate the wires of their silly little intelligences to their own end, use the sheep habit for all it's worth. The way they juggle with words alone! Miracles, for instance—not at all the sort of thing for the common herd, oh, dear, no! 'Pray, oh, yes, pray away, but never imagine that you are capable of doing anything for yourself.' Canny beggars, those inventors of souls!—dangling eternity before their flocks like a bundle of moldy hay in front of an ass, which would be much better browsing on grass at the roadside. Look here, McCabe, if every man chose to realize his own power, use it for all it was worth, what would become of professional religionists and their box of tricks? Will—will—will—I'll back it against everything, even a balance at the bank—and that's saying a good deal. My God, there's simply no end to the power of it—nothing, absolutely nothing beyond it!"

This had been a part of many arguments he had used when McCabe had stood out for something, not always higher than the will, not always, by any means, beneficent; perhaps nothing more than a sort of brute force—a universal press of necessity which was yet the master of determination. "A jolly lot of good all your willing with an empty belly," McCabe said, "with a cancer eating out your throat—one lung gone. I'm not much of a hand at religion myself, but it strikes me that the prayers of a righteous man, etc.—Your will may fight on after it's beaten—just butting away, inevitably beaten in the end. The will to live may keep death at bay, that's all—there's more to life than that. No one can follow my profession and not know it; something which'll uphold some poor devil through a perfect hell of physical suffering and yet slip away with the prick of—how does it go?—'a bare bodkin.' Something so damnably elusive, so slight

and yet beyond all our power of holding, willing—something apart, that we feel, pretty well see, when we drop a man's hand and say—out of sheer habit, mind you—'It's all over.' All over! I wonder if there's any medical man living who hasn't felt himself balked—suddenly and completely balked—helpless—at moments like that; just the blatantest liar; with that Something, which he knows will never be 'over,' at his very elbow."

"An inherited imagination. You've got it, McCabe,—a sort of germ every man more or less seems to catch," Hoyland would mock. "Men were frightened of death, and so they invented eternal life—against every proof of reason—have grown to believe in it. Whoever said: 'All that a man hath will he not give in exchange for his life,' slipped into a truth. It's the only thing he's ever likely to have—the key industry, so to speak. So long as he has life there is every sort of extra available to him, brain, will, desire, and—oh, yes, I'll concede you that much—a something else, which is a sort of compound of character, hereditary, insight and instinct; that odd fluid part of a man which your professional religionists pretend to believe goes on for ever. For ever, and ever, and ever, mind you! They don't really believe it; if they do they are scared to the death of it. They go into mourning; they say: 'Poor So-and-So was so fond of flowers,' and heap rotting vegetation round a decaying body which they profess to despise. They tie themselves up into such knots that they don't know which is their left hand and which is their right—mesmerize themselves with their mummery. If they would cultivate the will as it can be cultivated—if they would learn to use that part of themselves which is—well, let's give it any name you like—psychic power—if you can acknowledge psychology without immortality—instead of frittering themselves away on that stupendous vanity of eternal life, there's no end to what they might, men in the aggregate, I mean, accomplish."

The will! He felt himself swell with a sense of power at the evidence of his old assertions. Why, the thing went beyond his own most arrogant expectations. He realized how men might feel imagining themselves gods: taking humanity between a finger and thumb in this fashion: moving an individuality here, there, like the pieces upon a chess-board.

A bigger man might have grown frightened of his own achievement; but Hoyland's curiosity, sense of exhilaration,

was far greater than his awe. There are, indeed, natures incapable of awe, and his was one.

For a long while the whole affair was rendered the more exciting by its fluctuations. Within himself flashes of a quite new insight, fresh powers of enjoyment, came and went. Sometimes, in between these, he went back to his old habit of mind; at other times he was conscious of a sense of dead fatigue, as though something were gone out of him. In moments such as these it seemed as though he were neither himself nor Anthony; and then, if ever, there was a sense of panic.

But these times were few and far between: he was beginning to taste, as he had never done before, the "fun" of life. Diana grew upon him: he realized possibilities of delight which had been a sealed book. He had always observed, now he felt: felt things which were quite apart from passion. He used words that he had never used before, simply because they were so alien to his nature as to be without meaning, even in his childhood.

Downstairs earlier than he had ever been before, one day during the first week in August, he went out of doors into the hot, still air, blue with the haze of morning. The grass upon the further side of the lawn, which had already had one crop of hay off it, was fine and sparse, brilliantly green, as are all such second crops: starred with small moon-daisies, crimson sorrel seeds, mauve scabius, all pale and delicate, the children of a late life; silvered over with dew. The cedar-tree, like dim blue velvet, melted into the sky: the plain was indistinguishable from the distant hills, which showed only by a faint wash of color along their extreme heights. Beyond the sunk fence—where the sheep-pens had stood that far-away day of his arrival—there was a flare of yellow ragwort and a fresh strip of plow, purplish in the soft light.

As he went round to the side of the house, Diana opened a gate and let out the cows from the yard.

"A jolly morning!" cried Hoyland, and she looked at him and nodded with a puzzled air. He would not have said that a couple of months ago: the change in him frightened her almost as much as the change in her brother, for it seemed as though she were losing her bearing.

The cows moved a little sideways past Hoyland, and then to the right through another gate which led into the home meadow—sloping to a marshy bottom, gray with willows—

their shining dappled flanks like ripe horse-chestnuts: thirteen of them, and only Diana and a boy left to milk them. He wondered what time she was up in the morning, and a fancy seized him that some day he would come downstairs at dawn and see if he could catch the household asleep—impossible to imagine Nanny without her armor, her thick, clumping shoes, her all-enveloping white apron, that look of obstinate dislike which had become so fixed upon her red-grained face that it seemed as though she must be souring inwardly. But he pictured Diana with her head pillowed upon her arm, the thick black lashes on her soft, flushed cheek; and for once the thought came to him, fresh and free from all comparison.

This special morning Anthony was later than he had ever been. It was close upon half-past ten when he lounged into the study, took the cigarette from his mouth to yawn:

“Look here, do you mind if I cut work to-day? I want to go into Sheffield—see a chap I know.”

“You went into Sheffield a couple of days ago.”

“Oh, well, one’s got to do something—” With a shrug of his shoulders the boy moved towards the window and stood staring out, both hands deep in his coat pockets. By leaning a little forward in his chair Hoyland could catch sight of his profile; it seemed that his face had grown heavier; the clear, almost girlish pink-and-white of his skin was replaced by a dusky sallowness.

“You’ll never get through your exams if you go on like this.” Hoyland was conscious of a real sense of disapproval. It was almost as though he were beginning to be a little shocked at young Clayton, as he had made him.

“Oh, hang the exam! There are more important things than exams in life: after all, it isn’t as though I’d got to make my own living.”

“Well, if that’s how you feel! But if you don’t mean to work, what am I here for?” said Hoyland.

“Ah, there you have it!” Anthony flung round, staring hardly, half insolently. In a flash Hoyland saw him as he had once seen himself. “Why are you here?—or, rather why do you stay here?” Suddenly he flung back his head and laughed harshly. “If you ask me, I’d say: ‘*Cherchez la femme*’—eh?—Anything you want in Sheffield? No? Then I’ll be going.”



He had his hand upon the door when he hesitated, turned again with that look of odd hesitation which even now broke off his most defiant moods.

"Look here, Mr. Hoyland, I'll do some work when I come back this evening; 'pon my word I will. But this morning, you know—such a jolly morning to waste indoors, swotting."

"A jolly morning!" Well, there were his own words. A little longer and the change would become concrete, fixed; the only danger to guard against was that he might lose the power of realizing it, and so miss half the appreciation. Meanwhile the old Anthony came and went; it was like the shadow of the mare, that night, driving home from Setons'; there were still odd twists, distortions, sudden starts, reversions, in this new Anthony. It was all very well for the boy to take himself off to Sheffield, but half his own amusement went with him. For there was no end to his pleasure in watching Anthony, by turns sullen, restless, glowering; with odd, wild bursts of gayety. The new Anthony and the old Anthony like a couple in a dance: now one advancing, now another: approaching, touching, retreating, feinting: first one, then the other, holding the floor: while he felt the same ebb and flow in himself, rising and falling inversely to the other's mood; was happiest when Anthony was most sadly bitter, with that deep bitterness and despair of youth which is unable to understand itself.

Now and then it seemed as though there were actually four of them at it—a *pas de quatre*—but gradually two of the party dropped out.

No wonder that it had seemed a jolly morning, for it brought with it a very definite, clear-cut triumph.

The sun was almost too hot in the study, and he took his book into the drawing-room. The green venetian blinds were down: the tempered light like a cool wash of pale-green water, in which the faded chintzes, the spindle-legged tables and whatnots, the faintly-colored paintings upon the walls, the delicate china, floated apart from everything which had to do with actual daily life or necessity: indeed, the only person who ever used it seemed to be Mrs. Clayton with her flute.

She came into the room now, before Hoyland had been there more than half-an-hour. Carrie, at her heels, hesitated in the doorway, bristling, for of late her dislike had grown

more and more insistent, she trembled if Hoyland put out a hand to touch her, though from a safe distance she showed her teeth, snarled; but Mrs. Clayton came straight forward into the room, hesitated a moment, and then smiled.

"Anthony, I thought you were in the study or had gone out. Anthony, I want—" Suddenly she broke off, a piteous, wild look came into her face; for the very first time since Hoyland knew her she put out both hands, gropingly, like any other blind person, trembling from head to foot: "It is Anthony? It—it— Oh, but, oh, what have you done with my boy? What have you done with my boy?—you stranger, you dreadful stranger, you!"

The triumph had been short-lived, but it was there. "When she mistakes me for him, then I shall be sure—" that was what Hoyland had said: and the mistake had been made.

"I think that you might give him back to me. He's nothing to you, you can do nothing with him." The blind woman had gained command of herself, spoke quietly, reasonably, as she seemed capable of doing when the welfare of one of her children was in question; though her face was absolutely white, and she rested one hand upon the back of a chair as if to support herself.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean—it will come to no good end, I tell you. Even Lucifer, Lucifer, Son of the Morning, fell over just such an issue. Though he pulled down—oh, God only knows who he pulled down with him!"

"Look here, Mrs. Clayton, if we understand each other so well, let's at least be frank. You are afraid that I am having some sort of a bad influence over your son—and why? Because of his going off to Sheffield—Sheffield of all places to sow your wild oats!—because he is less even-tempered, docile, less the good little mother's boy. . . . You imagine him as going headlong to ruin, propelled in some strange and obscure way by his villainous tutor—a sort of fiction tutor, something between Mephistopheles and Heathcote. But what you don't realize is that he is growing from boyhood—almost childhood—to manhood: that you can't go on keeping a boy of nineteen in leading-strings. He's got his own money. . . . If any one's to blame there, it's your daughter: she herself told me that she had paid money into the bank in his name—given him a check-book, thinking that it would make him learn the value of it. The theory

is right, but it has failed here; as so many well-intentioned theories do fail, because they pre-suppose virtues which very few possess. I don't see what I can do. I can't whip him, I can't shut him up in his room until he's finished his task."

"Oh, but you can, you can—you know you can."

"What can I do?"

"Everything—everything. Take yourself away from him."

"That means my dismissal?"

"No; you know better—you're too horribly clever not to know that your actual bodily withdrawal—leaving Ox Lee—" She hesitated, a look of infinite dejection which was almost sullen in its despair came into her face. "You know, only it amuses you to play with me—. I have told you before why I can't let you go. Oh, I'm helpless, helpless. A blind old woman, and helpless!" she cried: then turned away with a dragging step, moving indeed like an old woman, and made her way out of the room. Hoyland heard her go upstairs: a few moments later the clear, far-away notes of her flute came floating down to him.

So he had driven her out of her own special sanctum, had he? If he could only drive her a little further; her and her precious son—so much as was left of him—that Nanny, with her fierce, challenging stare,—and have Diana to himself, once and for all. Why, if he could get her free from her preoccupations with her half-crazed family, this filthy farm, there was no knowing what she might not bring to him in the way of new life.

### CHAPTER XIII

WEEK after week slid by, during which Hoyland was, for the most part, conscious of an extraordinary sense of exhilaration, as though he were being swept forward on the crest of a wave. He was no longer very greatly engrossed by Anthony: the boy was sinking as he swam—there was no doubt about that—breasting the billows with all the heady delight of youth.

Here was no dull level of sea. Diana was difficult and aloof; whatever progress he had made in her esteem was gone. If it were not plain that she was built upon too generous lines for such pettiness, he might have thought that

those gray eyes of hers watched him with the hope that he might in some way definitely commit himself.

That was the one fear in his own heart. At times his every thought and feeling was so clearly fresh that it was shown, unmistakably, through his every word; while his very expression gathered a sort of candor. But there were other days when the beast within him whined through the bars, with roving, lustful eyes.

His great difficulty at this time was even to appear to keep any sort of a hold upon Anthony: if that illusion vanished there could be no possible reason for his remaining at Ox Lee; he would have overshot himself, and his own ends would be defeated. But it was not always easy to cover the boy's open insolence. The one point in his favor was that his pupil did not give up his work. There were odd days when he could settle to nothing—days which followed upon his visits to Sheffield, or those evenings, that were beginning to be whispered of, when he caroused with the farm yokels, small clerks and quarry-hands in the public-house which stood at the four cross-roads between Ox Lee and Peak Forest station—but at other times he seemed to be possessed with a passion for learning.

One evening, close upon ten o'clock, Nanny came into the study and told Hoyland that Reuben Haele was wishful to speak to him.

"Is he in the hall? I'll come out to him."

"Miss Diana's in the hall; 'e'll come along ter you 'ere." It was a mandate, not a suggestion. The woman did not look at him as she spoke, turned her head sideways with her sharply-angled chin in the air; not as though she wished to avoid his eye, but rather save her own.

Hoyland half thought of debating the point. But this was one of the days when he could not feel very sure of anything. There were such times; always when Anthony was away, out of sight, when he could not be certain what he was doing. Sometimes he imagined it was when the boy was drunk, and he was certainly taking a great deal more than was good for him, that he lost his hold upon things; was overcome by a suspicion that Anthony had got all there was of him, while what he had of Anthony was so negative as to leave him empty.

In addition to this he was never quite sure how much the country people knew, with their shy, sly glances: better not

to insist, even for the sake of his own dignity, upon seeing Reuben where there was any chance of Diana overhearing what was said.

Not that Nanny gave him any chance, for she merely turned and beckoned with a jerk of her thumb towards the back premises.

As Reuben entered, heavy, sheepish,—stooping as though bowed to the earth in which he habitually worked, his battered felt hat pressed against his breast—she did not leave the room, merely shut the door and stood with her hand upon the handle. Hoyland glanced at her significantly, with raised brows, but she creased one thin lip tight above the other.

“’Ere I bide. If so be that it’s got ter do with my boy, it’s got ter do with me.” She folded her arms as she spoke.

Reuben shuffled his heavy boots on the floor: dropped his built man of a uniform red-brown tint. In that warm room head sideways, raising his deep-set eyes. He was a heavily the stench of soil and flesh and manure was as palpable as though he were breast to breast with Hoyland, pushing aside the perfume of good cigarettes, clean linen and bath salts which hung around him.

“It’s this way, yer see: the young maister’s down along o’ ‘Silent Woman,’ and there’s a roughish lot o’ them quarrymen there, seeing as ’ow it’s Saturday night an’ all.”

“Well?” Hoyland’s voice was smoothly indifferent.

Haele shuffled his feet again and was silent for a moment; while Nanny opened her mouth, then bit back her words under a couple of front teeth, pressed so tight above her lower lip that it was beaded with blood.

“It’s like this ’ere. It ain’t not the proper sorter place fur young maister ter be, along o’ that there lot. It ain’t not so much the liquor, in a manner o’ speaking—not ter say the liquor”—he muttered shamefacedly, twisting at the brim of his hat.

“I’m his tutor, not his nurserymaid. All that has nothing to do with me. I’m here to teach him classics, not manners or common-sense. Thank God—!” Hoyland broke off, hating his own volubility, so new, so difficult to control: it would have been quite enough to bid this lout mind his own business.

“Devil! Devil! ’Arken to you! A devil, that’s what you

be, an' I don't care who 'ears me say it, neither. Up ter the ill-begotten day as yer set yer evil foot inside o' this 'ere door . . ." It was Nanny, the words torn from her like a shriek of split calico.

"Now then! just you bide quiet, woman." Reuben broke in upon her with sudden, loud decision: then flung up his head and thrust it forward towards Hoyland with the stubborn threatening motion of a bull.

"Look 'ere, you, whatsumever yer call yersen—an' yon female's not far out, neither—yer comin' along o' I, an' no mistake about it, neither! So ther, Mister Tutor, yer 'ave it, fair an' square."

"Where, may I ask?" The contempt of the tone did not disguise the weakness of the question. Hoyland realized this before the words were out of his mouth, yet could not stop himself.

"Ter get young maister out er that."

"It's got nothing to do with me, I tell you."

"'Earken ter 'im, 'earken ter 'im!" cried Nanny. "The brazenness on 'im! What were the boy like afore ever 'e came? tell me that—Oughtn't I ter know?—I as dandled 'im from the day as 'e was born. 'Im with his pretty ways, 'an 'is blue eyes so like 'is mammy's, and the fine clean limbs o' 'im. Near on a man 'e was, an' simple as any babe unborn until that there spawn o' Hell were set upon us. An' now, with all 'is drinking an' carousing, 'is shameful doxeys—that there piece up at Setons as 'is lordship the tutor 'as done wid an' chucked aside—an' the good God only knows what o' cards an' company and stinking baggages in them there great cities where he 'ticed 'im—my boy, my boy!—Oh, Lord 'a mercy, Lord 'a mercy!"

The tears choked her, and flinging her apron over her head, she half turned, leant sideways against the lintel of the door.

"Now, then, Mister Tutor, get yer 'at an' yer coat, or whatsumever it may be—mare's in trap."

It was as though Reuben were actually throwing the weight of his great body against the other man, pushing him to his will, though he had not moved a step forward. One could not even think of spiritual power in connection with such a creature—rustic lout—and yet there must have been some primitive force which was not wholly physical.

"Cum along."

"I'll be damned—" began Hoyland sullenly; but he was drawn, and he knew it: showed it by his very sullenness.

"Outer that, Missus!" Reuben laid his hand upon Nanny's shoulder and moved her gently to one side, cramming his hat on his head.

"Now then." He glanced at Hoyland, then jerked his chin in the direction of the passage: "I ain't not goin' ter moither the young missus about this 'ere; this 'ere's a man's job."

"A man!" Nanny dropped her apron to crow; but Reuben did not even glance back to see whether Hoyland was following him. It was as though he had said, "Yup!" to one of his cart horses; so sure of obedience that he made no motion of his hand toward the whip; and after a moment's hesitation Hoyland picked up his cap and followed him.

"Anything to save that poor girl any more trouble," he told himself, lying on the top of his thoughts. For Diana's possible pain was no reason for his docility, and he knew it: rather that feeling of being at sea in the dark; of having reached a point when he was not even—and this for the first time in his life—sure of himself; scared by the sensation which had come to him more than once of late, as if he had started something it was beyond his power to control.

"The Gadarene swine!"—that was the simile that came to him as the trap rocked at the tail of the bay mare—smarting under the plowman's use of rein and whip—down the steep hills and round the sweeping curves which led to the Peak Forest cross-roads; though whether it was more applicable to himself or his pupil he could not have said: perhaps to all of them, even the stolid man at his side—to humanity itself; yet more than all others to Anthony Clayton and himself, so strangely loosed from all bonds of character and habit.

The bar and parlor of "The Silent Woman" were, both alike, incredibly sordid, and Hoyland's stomach turned at the first breath of the rank smoke, the liquor and sweat-laden air, following as it did upon the pure fragrance of the outer world.

Both rooms were full of men, for the most part navvies—still in their shirt-sleeves and corduroys, as they had worked all day—with a sprinkling of narrow-chested, hatchet-faced clerks. In one corner forgathered a group of farm-laborers,

with their mugs of ale; speechless, their mouths open, gorming. But the quarry-men dominated the scene. They were the landlord's best customers, and he did not dare to oppose them; though it was certain that the parlor, with its pretentious gentility—that look of an outworn and slatternly woman of the street, pretending to an over-late respectability—with its ancient piano, yellowed oleographs and many ornaments, had been originally prepared for a better sort of *clientèle*.

There was a hoarse roar of laughter as Hoyland put his hand upon the door, breaking off as suddenly as it had begun. When he entered there was silence: no one turned a head or spoke. He had an impression of something almost incredibly gross and primitive; huge bowed shoulders, crimson bull-like necks and bullet-heads—the hair cropped at the back and tousled low over the forehead—amid a haze of smoke. There was a thin cackle of forced merriment from the barmaid; but for the rest, it was as though that deep roar of laughter had burst forth from the depths of those clod-like beings like the blastings that shook the greater dales at irregular intervals throughout each day.

Then a slightly blurred voice took up what was evidently the climax of an exceedingly dirty tale, with a slow sweetness of intonation which made it seem even worse than it would otherwise have done.

It was Anthony Clayton. He leant back against the bar, with the points of both elbows upon it, a glass in one hand. He wore no waistcoat, and the front of his shirt was open, his tie on one side: a lock of hair hung almost in his eyes, which were curiously dilated and glassy. As he neared the climax of his tale, he paused, glanced round at his audience, solemnly winked; then made his point and tossed off the contents of his glass.

There was a moment's hesitation while they took it in. Then, once again, came that hoarse roar of laughter: breaking off suddenly, followed by the barmaid's high-pitched, self-conscious cackle, with the genteel little cough at the end of it.

Hoyland elbowed his way up to the bar and asked for a glass of ale, realizing that it was of no use to attempt anything high-handed, with his pupil in this mood, surrounded by his friends.

Anthony's blue eyes were bloodshot. He glanced at him



sideways: resentful, and yet in a way puzzled, as though his tutor's presence in that place drew his mind to something which he was unable to understand, account for.

"Hullo, Mr. Hoyland," he said: then, "What the—what the— Oh, well—unexpected honor, an' all that; but I'll be damned—" He shrugged his shoulders and, breaking off again, stretched out one unsteady hand, touched the hairy arm of a man who stood to the right of him, his shirt-sleeves rolled up far above the elbow.

"I say, I wonder if you ever heard the story of . . ." He bent more forward, and whispered.

"Spit un out, Maister!" It was a roar.

"Cum along; damn it all, cum along; gie us another o' that there breed."

"A' right . . . but, here, Miss, fill this up first." The boy twisted round and pushed his nobbler along the counter to the barmaid, who filled it with brandy—then glanced at Hoyland.

"I'm afraid we may shock this gentleman."

"Oh, damn the gentleman! If we ain't good enough for the likes o' 'im, 'e can clear out." Looks of sullen contempt were cast at the tutor, and Anthony grinned as he embarked upon his story.

In its own way it was a good one; more subtle than the last; surpassing it in sheer viciousness, though not quite so blatantly unclean. But where in the world had the boy got it from? It was not at all the sort of story for youth, or for mixed company, and not for anything would Hoyland have lowered his own dignity by permitting his inferiors to hear such a thing from his lips. No; it took a young fool like Anthony Clayton, with no *savoir faire*, to regale a crew of this sort with such caviare of the brothel.

He was genuinely horrified. It seemed revolting that a boy of his age, supposedly a gentleman—the brother of the girl he himself intended to marry—should be guilty of such behavior. What was the world coming to?

The second story was not so successful as the first, and it wasn't likely that it would be. Apart from the subtlety of the thing, Anthony had drunk that last glass of brandy before he embarked upon it, and the fine ironical point was so blurred that his audience shouted to him to speak up; while the guffaw which followed showed more of contempt than laughter.

"I darn't not see much in that there," was the general verdict.

The boy was plainly crestfallen, though he affected a sneer.

He drooped so heavily against the bar that it seemed as though his legs were going to give way under him; and when Hoyland touched his arm, suggesting that they should go now, mentioned the waiting trap, he allowed himself to be drawn from the room without a protest.

The fresh air outside overcame him. Clinging to the back rail of the trap, he felt the ground heaving in immense staggering waves beneath his feet. It was as though it took him, turned him bodily upside down; till at last this sea of his own sick imagining, his throbbing head, the shivers running over his heated body, were too much for him, and he was horribly ill.

Reuben Haele sat impassive in the driving-seat; nobody spoke; after a while, with a heavy groan, Anthony made as though to climb into the back of the cart, but Hoyland checked him.

"Get up in front. I don't want to have you breaking your neck on the road," he said, and helped the lad's inert length into the deeply-sunken seat at Reuben's side, then climbed up at the back.

They went slowly, for it was nearly all uphill. The whole world was flooded with clear moonlight, as it had been the night they drove back from Setons'. As they rose they could see the clefts of the dales like dark fingers spread out upon the smooth bleached slopes; the sky, lightly flecked with an occasional pale amber cloud, was clear indigo; the air fresh and sweet.

Hoyland had not so much as put his lips to the ale which he had ordered and paid for. He had been exhilarated by wine that night of the dinner-party; but now he was exhilarated by something far better, a sense of lightness and clearness, of youth and power. All that fear and hesitation which had oppressed him when Reuben Haele first came to the study that night was gone. Once again he swam as Anthony Clayton sank, springing from off him, spurning him with his foot.

The smell of liquor offended him, as it does offend the man who does not drink of it. The boy's young body, so close against his own, reeked with the sordid odors of "The Silent

Woman." He would kill himself if he didn't look out. That was what would happen. Hoyland's mind paused upon the thought; and then added—What better could happen?

Diana came out to the porch to meet them, with a lamp in one hand. There was no sign of Nanny, but as she showed no surprise, it was evident that the old servant had prepared her: obliterating herself now, so that she might not witness her nursling's shame under the very eye of the man she abhorred, held guilty of it.

Reuben got down and helped his young master to the ground. After which Diana—who had handed the lamp to Hoyland, without a word—drew him into the hall and then, by an untold effort of strength, up the stair.

The boy's face was ghastly; his mouth hung a little open; his eyes, half-closed, showed slits of white, but no pupils. As his sister moved slowly upwards, with one arm round his waist, the other hand clutching the banister, his legs were almost doubled under him; his head drooped sideways so that it touched her shoulder.

Nanny must have been watching; for the moment they were out of sight she came running into the hall; took a big kettle of water from off the glowing logs, and hurried upstairs, her white apron drawn aside with one hand, the heels of her felt slippers flapping.

The door of Anthony's room was closed; the house was still. The dogs, which had followed the little procession to the foot of the stairs—twisting all sideways, wagging their tails—returned to the hearth and sat down, gazing sadly into the embers, their attitude one of resigned despair.

As for Hoyland, he went upstairs, undressed, and got into bed, with a sense of such self-satisfaction, such unctuous self-esteem, as might have possessed the Good Samaritan. Diana must now realize, could not fail to realize, how careful an eye he kept upon her brother, what pains he went to for her sake. As she helped the limp revolting figure across the hall he had murmured his condolences:

"I can't tell you how sorry I am for you."

Where would Anthony be now if he had not gone to the rescue? Prone on the foul floor of "The Silent Woman!"

He went to sleep upon this; then, an hour or so later, he awoke suddenly to the recollection of those stories. They were his own stories! He had told them again and again; though always to a picked circle of friends. Where in the

world could the boy have got hold of them? Certainly not from him.

There was a sudden jolt at this. How could he be sure—however certain of them having remained actually unspoken—that it was not from him, after all?

He felt the sweat prick out upon his body. He was scared; he had started the strange transference of self; but could he put any bounds to it? Where was it going? Where would it end? In Anthony's possession of his entire past?—reliving what he himself had lived?—gathering away from him all his fruits of experience, sweet as well as bitter?

#### CHAPTER XIV

FOUR days after this Lady Caroline sent for Hoyland. It was not an invitation to tea, it was a royal command, for a specified time—three-thirty; the sort of hour when one does not feel the offer of hospitality in any way incumbent upon one.

He told himself that he'd be damned if he'd go. But Anthony, in a condition of sullen depression, had quite ceased to amuse him; it was like landing a sluggish fish who gives no play to the angler. Diana was absorbed and silent; it was impossible to say what she thought. Hoyland had qualms of fear that she was planning something at the back of that calm, grave demeanor. After all, one never quite knew what those apparently candid and simple people might not be at.

He was nervous, with that new nervousness which alternated with his bursts of spirits, exhilaration. Everything seems a matter of compensation in this world; one can hold so much, and no more. With all pouring in there is a corresponding spilling over and loss. He had gained a sort of youth, but he had lost the sureness of maturity.

Still his old restlessness remained. At times like this, when Anthony was so much dead-weight upon him, when Diana and the whole world at Ox Lee seemed to have condemned him—forced to a temporary silence, to a delayed sentence, by nothing more than the habitual slowness of their life and ways—he found himself unable to keep still. He had thoughts of making such love to Diana as would break through all opposition; was in the mood for rape. But something of the old animal greed was gone, vitiated by a sort of senti-

mentality. He wanted and yet he did not want—or perhaps it was that he wanted more than he had ever wanted before.

The days were drawing in, and it was now close upon the end of September. He had a sickly idea, for which he despised himself, that when the autumn and winter were over he would win Diana with the spring; it was like Tennyson's "Queen of the May."

He was a fool, getting nothing, giving all. On this particular day the thought of the uneventful afternoon dragging its length to an endless evening proved too much for him; and though he had not answered Lady Caroline's note, never intended to go, he turned up at Setons'; a little late, as a salve to his own pride. Anyhow, old Caroline, "Carrie the First," as Constance Hervey called her, had never failed to amuse him.

But upon this particular day she was far from amusing. A few months ago and the whole interview would have delighted Hoyland; but he had lost his nerve; his sardonic sense of humor was gone. He could laugh at silly, childish jokes which he would have despised, but Lady Caroline cowed him.

She received him in state in the drawing-room; not in the library, where, in general, the whole party congregated; where no one ever read; where there were as many whips and dogs, sporting and agricultural papers as there were books—the "Glory-hole" he had heard the mistress of the house call it.

She came in from the garden, where she labored like any navvy, wearing a big leather apron and a preposterous hat, tied under her chin with a piece of string. But, all the same, she was immensely imposing; in an odd way she reminded him of the cliffs of Dover; so impregnably English, so sure of herself.

Her small black eyes were cold and inimical in that vast expanse of countenance; her upper lip, with its iron-gray mustache, was folded as tightly as Nanny's; they were all the same, these hide-bound country people, despite the differences of class.

She did not offer her hand, though she drew off her rough gardening gloves; but told him to sit down, indicating a chair, and then plunged straight into her subject.

"I sent for you because I want to hear the rights of all this talk about my godson."

"May I ask what talk? There are so many varying winds!" Hoyland essayed one of his most persuasive smiles, but it dropped dead before Lady Caroline's impassive gravity.

"I think you know what I mean."

"I'm afraid I can't even guess."

"If that was true, that alone would show how very completely you have failed in your duties." She was at once shrewd and stern, perfectly self-possessed. It was odd to think that this was the woman who could rap out such fine, mouth-filling "damns," whom he had seen almost roystering. She sat very upright upon a high chair, her hands on either arm; a sweeping, almost unbroken curve from chin downward. Hoyland did not speak; he hated himself for the knowledge that his face was sullen; if he could only have seemed amused!

"Since you refuse to be frank with me, I ask you nothing. I tell you what you know already. He is everlastingly up in Sheffield, alone; back at all hours. When he is not in Sheffield, he is in that disreputable public-house at the cross-roads to Forest Peak, or making love to my chauffeur-secretary."

"You can hardly blame me for that."

"No, and I don't blame her, either. I don't waste words. Anyhow, she's going next week. And for you—my husband and I have been talking it over, Mr. Hoyland, and we both think it would be better if you also made a change."

"You mean leave Ox Lee?"

"Yes, that's what I do mean."

"You're not a particularly young woman, Lady Caroline, haven't you yet learnt the mistake of interfering in other people's concerns?"

"Of course your salary will be paid up to Christmas." Her voice was as imperturbable as though he had not so much as spoken.

Hoyland rose from his chair, so roughly and clumsily that it clattered to the floor.

"I'll be damned if I take your notice to quit. I'll be damned if—"

Lady Caroline had also risen: "Well, think it over," she said calmly. One hand was in the pocket of her leather apron. Maybe she was in search of her handkerchief; but she had been picking snails from off the chrysanthemum beds, and absent-mindedly she drew out two or three, looked

at them and put them back again; pulled her apron on one side, and fumbled for the patch-pocket of her skirt, which her own bulk hid from view.

Nothing could have been more ridiculous—in the telling; but her stupendous dignity was unimpaired. She found her handkerchief; then looked at Hoyland, and from Hoyland to the door. Finally, as he did not move, she sailed towards the bell, remarking that she did not think that anything more remained to be said.

With a sharp effort Hoyland pulled himself together; took a couple of steps forward and faced her, forcing that smile which he had once known how to make so winning.

“I’m frightfully sorry, Lady Caroline; I don’t know how to apologize. I had no business to speak like that, it’s unforgivable. But the truth is, I was taken aback; we had always seemed such good friends, and now. You must realize that the boy’s hopelessly weak—”

“All the more chance for you, and if you’re not equal to it— But it’s not that, an’ you know it”—she faced him squarely. “You’ve corrupted him, Mr. Hoyland; by hook or crook that’s what you’ve done, an’ God forgive you for it.”

“I don’t see how you can say that. A boy makes a fool of himself when he’s under the influence of no one but his own father or mother, and do people say they’ve corrupted their son? It’s in him, that’s all.”

“It’s not in Anthony, an’ no parents can ever influence their own child as you’ve influenced that boy. My husband saw it before I did—but all women are more or less fools about men. However, we both see it now, and it’s time it came to an end. We’ve never interfered with Miss Clayton before, but we mean to interfere now; that is, unless you—”

“I fancy you’ll find Miss Clayton has her own opinion on this subject, as on every other!” broke in Hoyland loudly.

“We shall see.” Lady Caroline had her hand upon the bell, and pulled it sharply; it was quite evident that she did not intend to be drawn into any argument.

“There is nothing more to be said,” she repeated, as the butler appeared in the doorway; and with a slight inclination of the huge head in its grotesque hat Hoyland found himself dismissed in a fashion against which there was no appeal.

He had made a mess of things, as he always seemed to be doing nowadays. Lady Caroline had given him a chance of handing in his own resignation to Diana, of saving his dig-

nity. She had even, out of the fairness of her mind, given him an opportunity to explain circumstances which she well knew were without extenuation. But now she had done with him, and she and her husband would bring all their influence to bear upon his dismissal from Ox Lee.

Strange to think that his only ally at this juncture would be his first enemy in that place. Mrs. Clayton would never dare to let him go; and seldom as she exerted her will, it was law. He was sure of this, and yet uneasy; one had no actual basis to go upon in dealing with such people.

He took a short cut from the house leading through the shrubberies to a cart-track across the fields. It was a twisting path bordered upon either side by high Portuguese laurels; at one place broadening into a small bay with a rustic seat.

Anthony Clayton's Aberdeen, MacTavish, was sniffing about the bushes which fronted this bay; and as Hoyland passed he saw that Anthony himself was standing there, talking to Constance Hervey, who was seated.

The boy swung round as he heard his tutor's footsteps. They both nodded, and there was something amused and triumphant in their glances; though the girl's eyes were hard with the resentment of a woman who realizes that she has been put on one side for another.

She left Setons' the following week, and about the same time there was an announcement in the paper that Lord Yeanham was going abroad for the autumn.

Curious to know how much his pupil might know or feel, Hoyland hazarded a speculation as to whether they had departed together.

"Of course. That was it all the time!" His laugh, his glance at his tutor was full of insolence. "We—you and I—were never anything but decoy ducks, I can tell you that. The only difference between us is that I twigged her little game and you didn't."

Hoyland was furious. It was true that he had been completely taken in, that he had believed Miss Hervey to be devoted, desolated by his desertion.

It was partly this sense of exasperation at being in the dark and out of things, partly the sort of anxiety resulting from his own interview with Lady Caroline—the talk with Diana and her mother which he knew to have followed it—that impelled Hoyland to force his company upon his pupil



when he took himself off to Sheffield the following Saturday.

There had been a long interval between these visits, during which young Clayton seemed to have found his amusement nearer home. He now raised no objection to his tutor's company as he had done before; was sullenly indifferent. It appeared to Hoyland as though he were in two minds as to whether they should keep together; whether he might not be glad of his company, or whether he should give him the slip.

Hoyland had some shopping to do, and Anthony hung about with him for some time; even suggested dropping in for the latter half of a matinée. Then, quite suddenly, as it seemed, he nerved himself to some determination; and with a muttered excuse of having his hair cut, slipped away.

Here was the elder man's chance. Any move which his pupil was willing to make in his company held no possible value for him; he was consumed with anxiety to know something of what went on behind his back.

He followed the boy easily enough; through a maze of mean streets, and into a mean house. Here he found an almost incredibly sordid entrance-hall and stairway; while a slatternly landlady directed him up to an untidy room, bearing unmistakable evidence of a woman's occupation; though there was no one in it save Anthony, who stood with his hands deep in his pockets, staring moodily out of the window.

There was an argument, something which might have flared into a fierce quarrel—for Hoyland was as angry as a man might be when another, borrowing his clothes, wears them amid scenes disgusting to his fastidiousness—had it not been that at the back of all Anthony's anger over his spying lay that relish with which one realizes something very special in the way of a coincidence of anti-climax. It appeared to Hoyland, indeed, that all the boy's blustering, all his reproaches, were a mere mockery, and he would have given anything to wait, as he had found him waiting, just to see who would appear upon the scenes.

But there young Clayton took a line which beat him. He had come in search of a truant. Well, here was the truant, far from docile and yet willing to go with him. What more could he want?

As a matter of fact, he wanted a good deal more; marked time by scolding, questioning. But at last, when no one

came, and it was manifestly impossible for him to scour the house, he found himself obliged to give in, and lead off his pupil, a mockery of protest in his every movement.

They had tea together. Anthony was more amiable than he had been for weeks, months, ever since Hoyland started with his tampering, indeed; and he had an idea that, at the back of his mind, the boy was glad to be quit of whoever he had been awaiting in that room.

An enigmatic room, too, all things considered; poorly furnished, untidy, and yet so manifestly not the room of any ordinary creature of commerce. A room that was evidently used for both cooking and living in: for all the endless petty occupations which go to the preservation of life on the smallest possible means; yet, in some inexplicable way, a lady's room.

And that was not all. Instinctively Hoyland had glanced round in search of those photographs which usually reveal so much of any unknown occupant of a strange house, and found but one; a curled snapshot of a group on what was evidently enough the loggia of a hotel at some Continental resort. Monte Carlo!—A curve of bay, a distant mountain brought it back to him; he moved nearer and peered.

It showed a huddled bunch of people; the faces were blurred, wrinkled and grimacing, with the sun full upon them. It was impossible to recognize any single individual, and yet in a sudden flash he knew them all, remembered exactly how they had stood, the silly jokes, the laughter.

There was his mother, with one of her special admirers, himself, Rose and Maisie in a short white frock; ah, yes, Maisie was plain enough—he could see her long, slim legs in white shoes and stockings. She was half kneeling, bending forward with outstretched hand—he remembered that, too—trying to induce a ridiculous bat-eared French bulldog, for which Mrs. Hoyland had shown a brief passion, to sit up and beg, show itself to the best advantage.

How the devil? Oh, yes, there were other people in the group; the photo might be there on their account. And yet—and yet— Well, how the devil could he or any of his friends be connected with Anthony Clayton's unknown enchantress, the Circe of this smoke-grimed and sordid manufacturing town; surely, the utmost antithesis of such a group, such surroundings as those in which that laughing, well-dressed group was represented?

## CHAPTER XV

It was some weeks after this that young Clayton elected to remain out all night, returning by one of those trains which shunt into Millers Dale and Peak Forest stations to fetch the early morning's milk.

It had been a day of heavy, brooding oppression. The sense of exhilaration which had possessed Hoyland was still at a low ebb, fed by no fresh tide. Diana was no nearer to him, was, indeed, rising further above him, still serene in her clouded sky. He had not counted upon this, realized that with the spirit of youth might come a sense of unsureness, a lack of that perfect self-confidence which had acted as a sort of pneumatic wadding between himself and the rest of the world. It was Anthony who was sure now, brutally indifferent.

Apart from all this, an idea that the boy knew something regarding which he himself was still in the dark began to grow upon Hoyland. Young Clayton's glance was arrogant, malicious, full of amusement; more than once the tutor found himself endeavoring to probe him in a roundabout way; cursed himself for the sort of diffidence, the efforts at conciliation, which he discovered in himself.

He had never calculated upon this—that the cub, Anthony Clayton, should have taken his cynical coolness and sureness with the rest of him; that this pilfering of souls should have so oddly shifted the boot to the other foot.

But whatever the boy's triumph consisted in, he kept it to himself, hugged it as a mature man hugs his secret pleasures; with none of the boastful bruiting abroad of youth, that enjoys the telling more than the actual doing. Though it was clearly not only the doing which pleased Anthony; there was evidently some strange and peculiar sense of triumph over his tutor in particular, setting that inscrutable smile upon his young face, giving it an expression of settled evil.

It was Charles Hoyland who would have chattered had he dared. It became more and more difficult to keep things to himself; he grew so voluble that he would draw himself together with a sudden sense of horror, when he found Diana's calmly puzzled gaze upon him—humming, singing about the house.

He heard Nanny describe him once: "Got ter rattlin' like a dry pea in a tin! The devil take 'im! I mistrusted 'im when 'e useter be in them there black moods o' 'isn, but I mistrust 'im a deal worser now."

The truth is, they all mistrusted him with the sure instincts of primitive people who mistrust any sort of change. The passage from childhood to youth, to manhood, to old age, to death—the days, the seasons; seed, flower, fruit—these are all a part of the orderly routine of nature. But to hear Hoyland humming, whistling, to see him walking briskly, swinging his stick! There was something "demned contrariwise, outer natchur"; the very dogs became, if possible, more distant.

On the morning of the day upon which Anthony did not return home—that Mrs. Clayton should mistake the one for the other, and then, again, that the boy should stay out all night, those were the crowning proofs which he had put before himself—Hoyland came downstairs in tearing high spirits.

Diana was in the hall, arranging some long sprays of brilliant crimson-and-gold blackberry foliage in a tall earthenware vase; standing sideways to the window, so that the sunshine outside ran a thin nimbus of gold round her dark head, edged her profile.

As he spoke she glanced up, turning so that her face was altogether in shadow, her eyes pools of darkness.

His half jocular greeting broke off shortly; all of a sudden, for the first time in his remembered life, he felt shame, that sort of shame which might have overcome a grotesque, gamboling faun beneath the grave gaze of some nymph.

It was about at that moment the clear morning became overcast. Breakfast was eaten almost in silence. Anthony did not appear until a full hour after the meal was at an end. Here again the rôles of pupil and preceptor were reversed. "All as ever 'e larned 'im is idleness an' sauce, breaking 'is mammy's 'eart!" That was what Nanny said.

Still there was nothing strange—for these days—in young Clayton's dilatoriness, or in his mood when he did appear; breakfasted, yawned over his books for a couple of hours, and then swaggered off, with no word as to where he was going, what he meant to do. It could have been only the day which upset Hoyland, or so he told himself; the greenish pall of sky, the heat, the stillness. That, or the sense of

something gathering; as a Greek tragedy gathers to its climax, far off though that may yet be.

There was no remark made regarding Anthony's absence from the midday dinner. At first Hoyland was indignant with the young cub for being late for meal after meal; then, as he did not appear, concluded he had taken himself off to Sheffield. What the devil drew him to that confounded place? Why couldn't he have the common decency to say where he was going, what he meant to do?

Mrs. Clayton did not speak; scarcely touched a mouthful of food. Every day she grew thinner, whiter, as though life were being drained out of her; while Diana's every thought and glance were for her alone.

The meal over, Hoyland went out of doors; wandered about aimlessly for awhile; then suddenly turned and hurried home, scared. It seemed as though everybody, everything, looked at him with queer sidelong glances; he had an odd feeling of being stripped. Hot as it was, he put a match to the piled logs in his grate; he must have some reason for sitting somewhere, and it could not be by the window.

He dropped asleep there and had an odd dream. He was out of his body—the real he, the personality, the soul, the spirit, the true *ego*, whatever you choose to call it—and alone on those bleak, rock-strewn moors where he had ridden with Diana. It seemed as though he had been enjoying himself in some strange, impish sort of way; for he had the memory, even on waking, of hearing himself laugh with a high, shrill note. Then panic overtook him and he was seized with a wild desire to get back to his home, which was his own proper body, built in the odd semblance of a house, and yet a body, in that dream-fashion in which one and the same thing can have two distinct appearances.

Here his heart was the door, and there was a knocker on it. He knocked and shouted and pushed; but he could not stir it, and no one answered, or opened, or looked from the two tightly shuttered windows which were the eyes, though he shrieked himself sick.

At last it was forced upon him that the porter, of whom Mrs. Clayton had spoken, was gone; that there was no one left to answer or open; and on that realization all there was left of him withered, shrank, dried to the powdery substance of rotten wood.

It was then that, looking out towards the wide-open stretch of country, which was no longer heath but desert, he saw a wind upon the horizon, sweeping up circles of sand; gyrating towards him, growing ever nearer and nearer, until in a mad panic he endeavored to catch at himself, to hold himself together, to preserve some sort of entirety. Again, what was it Mrs. Clayton had said? "A pinch of dust driven into the crack of some wall—trodden into the earth itself."

He shrieked as the first breath of the wind touched him, clutching at himself, feeling himself—all there was of him—as a child playing at the seaside feels the dry sand running through its fingers. And it was either that shriek, or a blinding flash of lightning which awoke him, showed him the familiar study, and Mrs. Clayton standing before him.

He saw her open her mouth as though to speak; but at that moment the darkness fell again, and a heavy peal of thunder shook the house, echoed and re-echoed away among the hills.

For a moment he thought that she had gone, or had never been there, was part of his dream. Then there was a glow of crimson light as she stooped and gathered the logs together with the long-handled hook which lay upon the hearth.

That was another of the strange things about this blind woman: her realization of darkness, the way she made light for others. He had known her come into a room, and, exclaiming: "What, all in the dark!" find the matches, take the glass from the lamp and light it, raising the wick to exactly the right height.

She turned and looked at Hoyland now; not merely as though she saw him, but as though she were reading him through and through.

"You don't know where he is?"

"No, I don't know." Hoyland's voice was sullen; he was still oppressed by his dream, felt a strange sort of awkwardness, like a boy caught out in some misdeed.

But Mrs. Clayton did not press the question, and as another flash of lightning whitened the room, she turned and slipped from the door without another word.

He had his tea alone; Diana was busy in the dairy; the thunder had delayed the butter coming in the churn, and Nanny had taken her out a mug of tea and a slice of bread-and-butter—a "piece," as she called it. Mrs. Clayton was

upstairs; Hoyland could catch the sound of her flute, a long-drawn blur of soft, melancholy notes.

There was nothing out of the way in all this. But upon that particular evening it seemed to Hoyland as though he could not bear the loneliness: the sense of misery induced by the wind and rain which had followed upon the thunder.

Late that evening Diana came into the study. Hoyland's spirits rose at the sight of her. Her face was flushed with fatigue, her strong body drooped. She was infinitely desirable, and she was his; of course, she was his, beyond any possible dispute. He was exhilarated, triumphant; her very lassitude helped him by making her seem less unapproachable than usual.

"It's a terrible night," she said, and paused; then: "Mr. Hoyland, have you any idea where Anthony has gone?"

"Sheffield, I suppose."

"I suppose so; but I hoped—" She broke off with a weary gesture, then began again: "The hillsides are running torrents; it's absolutely black darkness. If he was trying to walk from the station now, if he was not quite himself, he'd never get home."

"Would you send the trap to meet the last train?"

"It's too late; it was in an hour ago. I thought of that, but no horse could face it. Listen!"

She moved to the window and opened it. In a moment the lamp was out, the room in confusion, as the wind tore in, round it, and up the chimney. There was nothing to be seen outside. The darkness was like a wall pressing in upon them, the combined noise of wind and rain deafening.

Together they shut the window, pressing themselves against the wind, and Diana re-lit the lamp; stooped to the hearth and raked together the scattered embers; then turned and faced him.

"Can you suggest anything?"

"To send out men with lanterns—" he began, then broke off, smiling as though the whole thing were a joke.

After all, why all this fuss about that fool of a boy? They had each other, and a wonderful youth; life was full of endless possibilities. He put out one hand and laid it on hers, resting upon the edge of the mantelshelf.

"What—" he began; it was on his lips to say: "What does it all matter? You have me, and I love you!"

The fatuity of it! How quickly and scornfully he would

have realized it in another! But with all his many advantages the vain man is strangely handicapped.

Diana had jerked away her hand. He had never believed that she could look as she did. The glance she gave him was full of contempt. "I might have known!" she said, while he cursed his folly. She had actually appealed to him, and he had been fool enough to let slip the chance which offered itself in this display of unexpected weakness.

An hour later he passed through the hall and saw that she and Nanny were fastening up a lamp in the porch, and helped them, their task completed, to shut the door against the wind. Then he went into the drawing-room and began picking out tunes upon the piano with his left hand—gay, lilting tunes, scraps of operettas. Likely enough, young Clayton would never come back; it would certainly kill his mother if that happened—and then—and then—how free they would be, Diana and he, untrammelled, with the whole world before them.

It was extraordinary the life there was in that twisted left hand; he even touched a few metallic notes with the other, as he took up the refrain of one of the latest and most popular Gaiety songs.

Then he felt, rather than saw, that Diana was standing by him.

"I'm going down to Peak Forest station to make inquiries—The wind's dropped a little—it's close upon twelve o'clock. If he comes while I am away—"

So, so! She was turning to him, after all, was she? He gave her a quick sidelong glance. She was wearing one of her brother's overcoats and the little brown, punnet-like hat was tied down with a scarf knotted under her chin, giving her, in spite of her gravity, an adorably childish look.

"How—are—you—going?" He was still busy with the refrain—a note or so between each word—but his spirits soared higher.

"With Flo—in the trap. If Anthony does come, and Nanny needs any help—"

"Oh!" He got up, moved into the hall without another glance at her, and took down his big military coat and cap from a peg. The ridiculous child! Did she imagine for a moment he would let her go alone?—that he did not realize that this was their hour?



As it happened, she did not protest, though he failed to grasp her reason. After all, if Anthony once reached the house, he would need no more help than Nanny could give him; whereas if she found him fallen upon the way, it might be impossible to get him into the trap without assistance.

Her every thought was for her brother; she would have used anything or anybody in her need.

They lit a lantern, and made their way to the stables; no one slept on the place, and they harnessed the mare between them. The air of the stable was warm and moist, cushioning them away from the still howling wind, from the rain which still fell, though with less violence, as though worsted in its fight with the wind, which, though it had lessened a little, still blew in great gusts like guns.

The lamps were lighted and the mare backed into the trap. For a moment or so it seemed as though she would refuse to move; then she sprang forward into the darkness.

All the way to Peak Forest station the wind pressed sideways upon them. There was a little breathing space where the trees grew thickest; but here the noise among the boughs was almost deafening, like a wild sea tearing its way up a shingly beach. Flying twigs and splashes of mud struck their faces; the air had grown cold, and Hoyland felt the skin of his face stretched tight, stiff and raw. The only warm portion of his body was that side of him which was pressed against Diana; there alone was a feeling of strange restfulness, of perfect ease, of something like growth.

Every now and then the wind ripped the blackness, shredding it so that it showed a frayed edge of pale gold: or, again, the lightning cut it. But for the most part there was nothing save the darkness, the wind and rain, walling them in.

Once past the shelter of the trees the gale was terrific, the trap swayed. It was like being in an open boat upon a wide uncharted sea.

They were long upon the way, for the mare took short, uncertain steps in the darkness. But for once Hoyland was oblivious to all discomfort, unaffected by the darkness which seemed like an illimitable space to either side of them, leaving them poised upon a knife-blade edge of earth.

A sense of wild elation had taken possession of him. After all, he had always got the better of everything and everybody; just for a little he had felt himself treading upon

such alien ground that his nerve had failed him. But now the world was his, with the girl at his side. This damned countryside, with its winds and its thunders, its horrible indifference—why had he ever been fool enough to fear, even in his secret, subconscious self, that they might beat him?

What was it Mrs. Clayton had said? "They will have you at the end. . . ."

Fool! when all the time he held the key to their mastery: the strength of two, that was all which was needed—Diana and he.

Peak Forest station was in darkness. They banged and rattled at the stationmaster's door, but even when they did succeed in rousing him he could tell them nothing: "Wakin' a man out o' 'is sleep fur the loikes o' that!" How could he be expected to notice, to remember the face of every arrival by the crowded last train? "An' on a night loike this'n, too!"

Hoyland was triumphant, and yet punctilious; cunning; more than a little mad, as every man must be when he dares to tempt fate by triumph. It pleased him to make an elaborate comedy of this pretense of finding Anthony; as though he said to his companion: "See, now, the way in which I leave no single stone unturned."

He insisted upon knocking up the landlord of the inn nearest the station; and though Diana sat stiffening in the trap, hating the exposure of his question, she dared not protest; they must do what they could.

At "The Silent Woman" the whole performance was repeated again; and here Hoyland's solicitude was more damning than the rankest abuse of the missing lad.

Then a new idea came to him. He worked upon her fears that, overcome by drink or fatigue, her brother might be found, dropped by the wayside; and more than once she drew rein at Hoyland's suggestion, so that he might investigate some mass of broken wall or fallen bough. The darkness was less intense than it had been; there were patches of intenser blackness which left easy room for such doubts, and Diana, consumed with anxiety, was an easy prey.

All this gave Hoyland a sharp sense of delight. He had tormented women before, but he had never realized the joy of tormenting the creature he loved. There was a real sensual pleasure in feeling her shoulder stiffen, shuddering,

against his own as he laid a hand upon her wrist. "Wait— one moment! It may be—I fancy I see—"

He was very slow clambering out of the trap; but even then she remembered his maimed hands, refrained from hurrying him.

When they got back, the hall door at Ox Lee was wide open, and Nanny stood in the aperture. The light at the back of her, the glittering wall of rain in front gave her stiff figure the flat effect of an ancient and grotesque piece of stained glass. Her gesture, as the horse and trap leapt in upon her from out of the darkness, was all of a piece, her arm jerking sharply upward from the elbow, palm outward.

But for all its stiffness, the gesture was so plain in its significance that Diana did not even draw rein, drove straight on to the stable.

She could hardly stand as she climbed down from the trap; but Hoyland would not put out a hand to her—not yet.

Standing either side of the mare, they unbuckled the harness without a word. The wind had dropped, the rain fell straightly; there was no other sound.

Hoyland held the cart while Diana led the mare into the stable. She had taken one of the lamps, and when he followed her, he found that she had stuck it in a socket on the side of the loose-box.

She finished taking off the harness, and hung it over the partition. He was in the box beside her; their own wet bodies, the mare's warm, wet sides, hung them round in mist. Diana's face was deathly-white beneath her brown hat, all dark and sagged with rain; her eyes were heavy; the lamp on the wall behind her edged her head and shoulders with hazy gold. She moved her shoulders wearily, as she placed the last piece of heavy harness in place; her arms dropped straight at either side, as though she were utterly done.

"He's not come back," she said. Hoyland waited, smiling a little, and saw her moisten her lip with her tongue. Her whole face stiffened as though she were nerving herself to some special effort: that sort of effort which it always cost her to speak of abstract things; above all, anything that had to do with her own personal emotions, feelings, fears.

"If Anthony would come back—oh, I don't mean just

come home—not himself at all, another person! If he is lost among the dales, that's a lesser loss, and you know it—You, only you—”

She hesitated, gazing at him intently, as though to force his knowledge, his help; then, as he was still silent, still slightly smiling, broke out with an abandonment of passion utterly unlike herself.

“Oh, you know we hate you, and yet daren't let you go! You know all that—and yet—well, it's come to this: I'd give, do, anything, anything, to have him back as he used to be!”

“Anything?” Hoyland had moved in front of her, pressed in the narrow space between the mare's reeking side and the partition of the loose-box. He had both hands upon her shoulders, was looking down into her eyes, and as he repeated the question, “Anything?” he saw her nod stiffly; caught her to him; then pressed her back against the woodwork, his lips to hers.

As they crossed the yard to the house, the sky, still torn with clouds, had partially cleared, and a reddish moon was floating above them. Hoyland placed one hand under the girl's arm to guide her, for she walked as though half-blind. He felt her tremble, and was filled with magnanimity. He would marry her, be kind to her—everything very proper and above-board. If ever the young cub did come back, he would see to it that, in future, he behaved himself.

He took off the girl's rain-heavy coat at the door of the hall, untied the scarf from under her chin, smiling, proprietary: “You must have something hot to drink, go straight to bed.”

He hung up his own coat, and turned towards the fire. “Ah, there's the kettle! Nanny's—”

He broke off as he realized that Mrs. Clayton was sitting very upright in front of the blazing logs.

In the first moment he expected some sort of a scene. But he determined that he would not speak first, and there was a long silence, for some reason weighted with feeling, meaning. Then, as she rose to her feet, lifted her head in that strange, staglike way she had, as though scenting something—but no, it was not like that now, more like a pointer, rigid at attention—he realized that there was relief, almost triumph, and yet a sort of horror in her expression.

“Again!” she said; “just exactly the same as on that first night. But I'm not frightened this time.” Her face

had that sort of stiffness that one may see in a child, braving out some old terror. "That was the beginning—this is the end. Why did I ever doubt? How could I doubt? Diana, shut the door; we can go upstairs, and to rest."

She made no reference to, no inquiry for, her son. Hoyland's puzzled eyes followed her as she moved up the stairs. "Doesn't she know he's not in? Does she think—" he began doubtfully.

There was a moment's pause; then Diana, who had bent over the heavy bolts of the door, raised herself and looked at him. Her gaze was direct, but, all the same, he realized that she scarcely saw him, that her whole mind was bent upon some point in her mother's words. They were like that, these Claytons, pretending attention, really engrossed in the windings of each other's minds.

"Oh, yes, she knows—she always knows when he's out of the house! But she's not disturbed; in some way she's relieved. I wonder . . ." She hesitated, pondering; then her glance became more personal.

"But—oh, now I do see what she meant—partly. But still, why—?"

"Why?"

"Well, in a way, it is the same; there's mud on your face, and a scratch, a little spurt of blood. But, still—" She broke off, as though the intensity of her thoughts had taken her beyond speech, and after one long glance, turned towards the stairway, infinitely far removed from the woman he had held in his arms, kissed, not ten minutes earlier.

Left to himself, Hoyland felt that it was impossible to go to bed; he was like an author at the first performance of his own play, bound to see the thing out to the very end. The only pity was that it did not really end now; must drag on and on, like one of those interminable Chinese dramas; for, of course, Anthony did come back, as those sort of people always do.

Out of a kind of perversity, having changed his wet things, Hoyland elected to spend his night by the hall-fire. Diana might join him there. In his own mind he knew that she would do nothing of the kind, and yet there was a sort of pleasure in thus blocking the best post of observation.

Wherever she spent her vigil, however, she caught sight of her brother before he did, was at the door to meet him, when he did appear close upon seven o'clock.

Hoyland heard her speak, but not what she said; then the boy's savage retort: "For God's sake leave a chap alone, can't you?"

Up in his room, bathed and changed, he looked at his own face in the glass, consciously, for the first time since he got back to the house, when he had changed his wet things, wiped the mud from his face with a rough damp towel. Oh, so this was what the mad fool had been yapping about, was it? He had felt one special smart when a flying lump of mud hit his wet cheek; then forgotten about it, his whole face sore and stiff with the beat of wind and rain; but there, once again, was much the same cut in much the same place as upon that first day. It seemed that this confounded country was determined to set some sort of a trade-mark upon him.

He sponged the cut—there must have been a splinter of flint in the mud, and applied a scrap of black plaster; larger than last time, for the wound, still ridiculously trivial, was deeper, and in some way more definite.

For the life of him Hoyland could not have said why, but it reminded him of a pointed finger.

For a moment or so his own face, heavy, whiter than usual, gazed at him somberly from out of the glass, with that strange antagonism which one may sometimes find in one's own reflection.

What was there in this insignificant accident to make that crazed fool so elated, so desperately elated, and yet in some way horrified—seeing too dreadfully far with those blind eyes of hers?

He jerked himself aside from the glass with an angry laugh. Of course, all mad people were extra mad at the very thought of a coincidence. All the same—well, he wished it had not happened the very evening when everything seemed so perfectly within his grasp. "The gods are jealous!" Where was it that he had heard those words?

After all, what did it matter? He had mastered fate, beaten the lot of them with their omens and elements. He had Diana's word: if she attempted to find any reason for going back on it, he could play with Anthony as easily as a man may slip his hand in and out of a glove. Even that lingering fear of those old Sotteville days was scotched; he had found the panacea for that also.

After all, it was the allurements of Manchester, not Sheffield, which had been responsible for Anthony Clayton's absence; for a couple of days later he whisked the half of a return-ticket, which he must have forgotten to give up, out of his pocket with his handkerchief.

Why had he stopped going to Sheffield? Hoyland was puzzled, and despite his sense of triumph, a little uneasy. He did not like things that he could not understand, and his memory was still teased by that room where he had found his pupil, the photograph stuck into the frame of the mirror.

The boy stayed at home now; was more docile, more like a rather dulled replica of his old self; and Diana, watching them both, was faithful to her agreement. There was really nothing to fear, and yet he feared.

To add to his trouble, he was not feeling well. He must have taken cold that night of the storm, for his neck was stiff, and the sense of rigor spread to his jaw. He felt himself chilly and reluctant to move away from the study fire.

All the same, his thoughts clung to Diana; he wanted to be with her; had a feeling as though he were safe from some impending horror in her company, and in that alone; and he would drag himself out to seek her, shivering in the dank air.

It must have been ten days later that he met old Daniel Haele in the rickyard, inquired for his mistress, and then, hearing that she had gone to some outlying field, turned and dragged himself back to the house, with a feeling as though the distance were too immense even to think of.

Speaking to the shepherd, he felt his head give a sharp backward jerk, and straightened himself angrily, scowling at the old man.

As he moved away, Reuben, coming out of the stable, joined his father, and the two men stood looking after him with slow, ruminating glances.

"Looks danged queer, ter my mind, that 'e do!" remarked Reuben at last; "a-grinnin' and jerkin' for all the world loike a chap at a fair."

"'Ragin' waves o' the sea foamin' at their own shame'—that's what Book do say; that's the loikes o' 'im. 'Wanderin' stars ter 'oom is reserved the blackness o' night for ever.' 'E's a bad lot, that 'un, 'e is; an' I ain't not been a shep'erd ower fifty years and dwarn't know a bad 'un the

first toime as ever I do clap eyes on 'im. Why, the very beastesses do fight shy o' 'im."

"There 'e do be again," exclaimed Reuben, and, rightly enough, for half-way back to the house Hoyland once more felt his head give that odd jerk upon his stiffened neck. He must have got a touch of fever, he thought; his nerves were going to pieces—that damned war!

At tea-time Diana noticed his stiffness. "You must get Nanny to iron your neck for you," she said.

But Nanny must have refused her good offices, for Diana herself appeared in the study later on, with the hot iron and sheet of brown paper, which rustics consider an infallible remedy, and ironed the back of his neck as carefully as she would have ironed anything else.

But she was smiling as she finished; of course, it *was* ridiculous, but, all the same, comforting. "Now, I think if you'd go to bed, and have some hot bread-and-milk instead of that—" She eyed the untouched supper-tray.

"I can't eat anything hard, my jaws are so confoundedly stiff," complained Hoyland. He was bent nearly double over the fire; his face was flushed, his eyes, usually so veiled, bright like those of a child upon the point of tears.

"Diana—I feel awful—awful!" He put out one hand, but she moved away from it.

"I daresay you'll be better in the morning," she said, and at this actual tears did come into Hoyland's eyes. He wanted to lay his head against her shoulder, more than he had ever wanted anything in life before; but she was so damnably hard! He was not sure that he would ever really care to marry her, bother about her again—once he was well.



PART IV



## CHAPTER I

NOTHING can well be more lonely than the life of a young girl in a large town, where she finds herself with no old acquaintances. A man may pick up friends of both sexes, here, there, everywhere; winnow out some true intimates from among them. A girl who is by nature chaste, reserved, must wrap herself round, fence herself off with an air of indifferent coldness, be chary of her smiles, her interest. With some this attitude is retained by conscious endeavor; with others, it is as instinctive as the shrinking movement of a sensitive plant. These are timid, mistrustful of all intimacy, even with one of their own sex. It is almost more than they can bear to have so much as a finger laid upon their person, their beliefs, thoughts. They hug themselves away and apart from humanity as a bird from the snow; are never truly happy or at ease save when they are alone.

Picture a nature like this condemned to live for ever in the public eye; at the mercy of all the petty exaction of some dominating and selfish elder, of constant and scornful comment; sharing everything, even the bedroom—and that alone bites deep—with another; never certain of a moment's privacy; and you may realize what life had been to Rose Hoyland, understand something of that extraordinary sense of relief—which overcame all difficulties and privations—at the mere fact of being alone, at liberty, possessing herself.

She was devoid of imagination, of any trace of that brilliance which irradiated from her younger sister. But she had brains, determination of a slow, persistent sort, great accuracy, and a very fair knowledge of other languages than her own; a semi-business knowledge, for she was the only one of her family who had attempted anything like a system of housekeeping and accounts; had clung to it like some women cling to religion, others to corsets—as an ordered mainstay of life.

The money which accrued from the sale of her mother's jewelry and furs she used in sending Maisie to a good school, where she hoped to be able to keep her for at least a

year; while she herself managed to get a war-time appointment as foreign correspondent clerk in Sheffield, with a salary upon which she could just contrive to exist; superimposing the added loneliness of a bed-sitting-room life upon that other loneliness of unknown people, an unknown town.

Thus it was that she returned from her work each evening to one small room where she spent the remainder of the day; ate her evening meal, slept, rose and breakfasted, as completely solitary as any beast in its lair. When her landlady came up with anything, she knocked at the door, opened it a crack and handed it in; a dour woman, who scarcely ever spoke to Rose, though she was garrulous enough, in a complaining way, with her neighbor over the fence.

Around this inner wrapping of one small room the great, sprawling, ugly town, with its network of tram-lines, its chimneys, its smoke, its roar and hum and rattle, wrapped her like the multiple folds of a cocoon. She had visited most of the beautiful cities in Europe, moved at ease—outward-seeming ease—through lofty and gracious rooms, whereas she could now scarcely stir without knocking over something or other; but she had never, in her entire life, been so happy. She had no longing for the open, for wider liberty, for movement; all she cared for was to be alone, to be let alone.

A certain small ambition to excel at her work sprang to life within her. Though she was at the office from nine to six—she who had never before done any definite work—she had never known what it was to have so much unbroken leisure; the hours which stretched out before her upon her return each evening seemed to fill her lungs, like mountain air, open spaces.

She was no longer obliged to take a hand at bridge, which she hated and in which people hated her; to entertain those admirers whom her mother did not need for the moment; to sit under the hands of dressmakers, hairdressers, manicurists; to read aloud, to shop, to take out the dog; to attend upon headaches with aspirin and eau-de-cologne; to lie politely—for other people—and to order; to be dragged through a long succession of amusements which had long ceased to amuse; to be set in the shop-window of life—with no one offering to buy—and then poked away out of sight with other stale stock.

She began to learn shorthand, to add the study of Spanish to the French and Italian which she had always seemed to

know. She had never before been able to really study anything, and it is difficult to overestimate the delight which it gave her. Add to all this the fact that she found herself appreciated, praised, for the first time in her life, given authority over others, a good deal looked up to on account of her attainments, and you will realize a little of the sober pleasure which life began to hold for her.

"Oh, Rose is so stupid! It's no good explaining anything to Rose! *Mon Dieu!* was there ever any one cursed with such a dull lump of a daughter?" And even from Maisie: "Rose is never up to anything; there's no fun to be got out of that stupid old Rose!"

That was what it had been. And now there was the half-envious admiration of flappers: "Fancy knowing foreign languages like that, Miss Hoyland! I never! Just as though they were your own—natural as natural!" The more considered praise of the elder male clerks: "We know that we can always depend upon you, Miss Hoyland."

It was nothing to Rose that other girls found presents of sweets and flowers upon their desks; that they were taken out to theaters, suppers, "given the glad eye"; found life a perpetual crescendo of giggles, all sparkle and fizz and scent, like third-rate champagne.

Though she had never actually participated in such things upon her own account, she had seen them—seen them—seen them—passing and repassing in endless reiteration, and far worse than they were now, with the excuse of nature, hot youth; amplified by a more complete lack of all constraint—going on, and on, and on, until she was sick of the very words, "pleasure," "admirers," "love"; seen them all, veneered over by a pretense of refinement which could do nothing to balance that nausea which youth feels at anything like a foolish or dissolute middle-age.

No; she did not want to be loved, to be amused; she wanted to be let alone, and she was alone. The only disturbing element was the girl who came twice a week for an hour, to teach her Spanish—and that added expense meant walking each day either to or from work. But Rose threw wider the windows every evening, directly she had gone, with her scent of powder, her emotions, love, despair; calculations and exhilarations, worldliness. She wanted love, passion, but she also wanted a comfortable home and a steady, well-to-do husband; she never thought of combining the

two: the exact amount of give-and-take necessary for each was plainly defined in her shrewd, ignorant mind. Life, however, getting what one wanted, was difficult under the circumstances.

“Ah, but is it not ter-rible, Mees, to be poor when one is young, wants to live, must live before it is too late? For what is life worth to the old and ugly? Men, perhaps, yes; but women—pouf!” She snapped her fingers in contempt. “To ’ave to wear so ugly clothes that nobody not look at you; your youth all going and your blood frozen out of you in this so white and tight-lipped England. Zee country—oh, zee country so chilly, so gray—but zee men—Christ! only to see zee men! A gentleman of my own country is more warmer behind iron bars—ah, but you can burn your fingers there—than your Een-GLISH men with their arms around you. I zee the girls and the men in the parks, sittin’ oh so!—and lying on zee grass. An’ I say the worst must ’appen. But ’appen—’appen!—pouf! Nothing not ’appens. In my country, I tell you—oh, I tell you—!” She nodded fiercely, half closing her eyes, protruding her red lower lip.

“An’ as for kiss! Kiss—they call it kiss! Mother of God! but they kiss their mistresses as they was their grand-mothers. Is it not so, Mees ’Oyland?” Her eyes gleamed with malice and amusement, for trust one woman to know when another is unkissed, unsought.

One evening she came in laughing. “An Eenglish mees, in a porch outside ’er door, I ’eard ’er—‘’Old me tight-er, Jeem!’” she mimicked, biting her under-lip to one side, jerking back her head, throwing out her hands in scorn. “‘’Old me tighter, Jeem!’ Mother of ’Eaven, to think of that!”

Rose did not think, did not care; the Spanish girl was common; had she not been common she would not have imparted her own language for a shilling an hour. But Rose Hoyland was a born virgin; if she had married, had children, she would have still kept the tight-enfolded, timid, grudging, innermost core of herself untouched.

And yet she was not altogether unmoved by nature. Walking home through the public gardens one evening in early April, mild as May—one of those evenings when, even in the dirtiest of cities the air clears itself to the translucency of a pink pearl beneath a veiled immensity—old Khayyam’s

“upturned bowl”—of palest gray, some germ of spring must have found a transitory resting-place in her blood.

The almond-trees were in flower; a few pale daffodils shone in sheltered corners, drinking the rare sun. Already there was a hum of bees amid the ribes; while thrushes and blackbirds sang as though for ever assured of spring.

There had been any number of young couples sitting beneath the chestnut-trees, with their little fanlike spurts of green; but Rose Hoyland had not lingered, scarcely looked around her. They had kept her late at the office, and her mind was intent upon her evening work; tea and a curtailed hour at shorthand, then her Spanish lesson. Next week she was going to commercial classes; this girl was all light chatter, and she was getting beyond her.

Her one thought was to get to work. Her tea, supposedly a solid meal, to save the trouble of supper—thin slices of cold sausage, bread and margarine—was disposed of as quickly as possible, the table cleared. Then in the midst of getting together her books and writing materials, Rose was overcome by a sudden nostalgia, a feeling that it was all no good, led to nothing—at least, nothing which really mattered.

Her heart ached, her limbs were heavy. She moved to the window, flung it wide open, and stood with her forehead leaning against the upper half. Tears ran down her face, though she did not sob, had no sensation of weeping; could not have said why they fell, what ailed her. She had been so happy, and now she was unhappy for no apparent reason.

A man came down the narrow gray street, in which every single house was alike—even to the lace curtains at the shallow bay windows of the ground-floor—pushing a barrow full of daffodils, narcissus, mimosa, poppy-anemones. Her mind went back to Biarritz, Pau, Monte Carlo. She had not been happy there; she did not want to go back; it was not that which she wanted. She did not know what she wanted, only that the memory of other days augmented her sorrow. She was not happy then, and she was not happy now. Was she always to be, in some odd way, defrauded, left out? She could not bear it—no, she could not bear it.

The shorthand hour—for which she had hurried home through the gardens, scarcely sparing them so much as a thought—slipped by unnoticed; and she was still standing at her window when the Spanish girl arrived, wearing a new

hat, flushed and breathless, with little beads of moisture upon the faint mustache which followed the line of her upper lip.

"Ah, it is zee spring at last," she said. "It is not so bad, after all, it is not so bad, this England of yours, Mees 'Oyland. 'Ot—'ot—but then I 'ave 'urried."

At her breast she wore a bunch of cream narcissus, the perfume of which made Rose feel faint as she bent over her, following the line of translation with a long pencil.

Every moment or so she glanced at the clock, broke into the lesson with little humming airs and trills.

"I mustn't be late—it is verri, verri par-ticular." When her eyes were not on the clock, they were on the mirror; she was pulling out the little curls upon her forehead, settling the lace frill and flowers upon her pigeon-breast. "Perhaps Mees 'Oyland will be so verri good as to make the lesson—five—ten—minutes shorter this time. It could be—what is it you call it?—given back on the Thursday."

"I shan't need you again," said Rose. "I will pay you for the next lesson, but you need not come."

The Spanish girl flared up at this. "Why, and why? Because I ask to leave a little more early for this once?—because I have warm blood in my veins, and not water?—because it is spring, because I have a friend to meet me—to be've pretty to me? That's good, verri good, that is! 'You need not come.' Ah, well, verri well; but you must pay me, all the same, and I 'ave friends 'oo—"

"It's not that at all," said Rose; "but I think I am working too hard, doing too much. I am very tired. Of course, I will pay you—I said I would."

"Ah, well, it is nothing, nothing whatever to me," remarked the preceptress, slightly mollified. "A little less money, and more liberty, more love, more of everything else that makes life—" She broke off, glancing at Rose, her expression softened. "It is true; you are very pale, Mees. You should go out and take the air, look around you. You are only young once, and there is no knowing what will 'appen. I myself, I sat in the gardens. I did not look at any one; I did not even smile. We Spanish ladies, we know 'ow to be've; but I found a friend. Next Sunday we go out for the whole day; 'ee take a little carriage on purpose, an' drive me; we 'ave dinner out. Already he say he never not see such a girl. What is the good of being young if nobody not loves you? That's what I say. Yes,



yes, you work too 'ard. Go out into the gardens, where all the birds are singing, an' 'oo knows what may 'appen?"

The lesson, such as it was, was soon over. While the signorita was touching up her lips at the glass, Rose opened a drawer, and taking out a pair of green silk stockings, which had belonged to her mother, gave them to her; was embraced in return, a warm embrace redolent of powder, scent and the heavy perfume of narcissus.

Next day the sense of failure, of something lacking, had vanished clean away. All her interest was in her work, though her limbs still ached as though she had been through a fever. Returning home that evening, it was cold and rainy; premature nests were being blown out of the half-leafless trees; the almond-blossom scattered to the ground. The day before she had thought that she would linger on the way, perhaps sit for a while if she could only find a secluded spot; but now her one idea was to get back to her own room, and make up for lost time.

But when she did reach home, wet and cold, a surprise awaited her. The landlady, who opened the door, informed her that there was a young lady waiting for her upstairs. "Says as 'ow she's your sister," she added. And then: "I can't 'ave all this stuff littering up 'ere; no room for nothing."

The little hall was, indeed, full of familiar luggage, still half covered with Continental labels, and Rose's heart sank. It must be Maisie. What had happened? A sense of deadly depression swept over her. She had been discontented the day before, full of all sorts of vague desires; but now nothing seemed to matter save her right to quiet study, her own life, her own room, which had grown to seem like a second and less sensitive body for her shrinking soul to nest in.

Maisie was standing by the window. She moved towards her sister and offered her cheek. "Hulloa, Rose!"

"Maisie! What *has* happened? What's brought you here?"

"You don't seem overjoyed to see me."

"Of course, I'm glad to see you; but you ought to be at school. I heard nothing of holidays. Is there illness? What?"

"My dear, there isn't anything, only— Well, I got into a row." The girl's manner was half-sulky, half-defiant. "The silliest thing—the silliest ass of a subaltern, a few notes over the wall. I wouldn't have looked at him if I hadn't

been so kept in—sick of those perpetual women—their everlasting ‘Oh, Maisie!’ Stupid girls with their silly mistresses. ‘Such darlings!’ ‘Dear Miss Earnshaw, dear Miss Crawshay’—a thing with eyes like a cow—‘Isn’t she too sweet!’ And sucking up to that old Courland beast like anything. Ugh! Well, anyhow, they were going to write to you, ask you to take me away; but I didn’t mean to wait for that, so I came off on my own. But I say, Rose, what a poky little room! What an awful hole of a town! And that old horror downstairs said there was no bath-room, when I wanted to wash my hands. Is this the only place you have? Where do you get your meals and all?”

“There’s nowhere else. I have only one room.” Rose sat down by the table and leant one elbow upon it, her shoulders drooping heavily. She felt weighed down, crushed.

“Perhaps if I write to Miss Courland she’ll take you back; there is still another month of term. But even then there would be your fare.”

“Catch me going back to that hole! I’ll nurse soldiers, or something like that. I love those white veils, like you used to wear.” She moved to the glass, and taking out her handkerchief, stretched it across her brows. “It’s awfully becoming, and there are always orderlies and people to do the dirty work.”

“How did you get the money to come up here?”

“I sold my watch.”

“Oh, Maisie! The last present Mamma gave to you!”

“‘Oh, Maisie! Oh, Maisie!’ What a humbug you are, Rose! I’d a better time of it than you did, because she liked to show me off; but what’s the good of pretending? She was just our mother because she married our father—relation by marriage; that’s what I call it. She did not care twopence, not twopence for us, ourselves. Charlie was the only one who ever got anything out of her, and that only because his selfishness flattened down hers. Come to that, I don’t believe that anybody ever does care for any one else, unless they’re in love—and that doesn’t last.”

She had taken off her hat, was busy at the mirror, brushing out her hair and twisting it up again. “I only put it up to-day, but I like it. I shall keep it like this. I’m really grown up; some girls are married when they’re my age. You don’t care for any one, either, any more than mamma, Rose—not really care. I don’t even believe you *could* be

in love. Now with me—I could be most frightfully in love; I've got that much to me, and I would make the best of it while it lasted, trust me!"

She had taken a powder-puff out of her little bag, and was powdering her nose; her eyes were dancing. It was a horrid town, a horrid, poky little room; but, after all, it was a sort of adventure. Anything—anything might happen.

She had grown to her full height, a good five-foot-eight, showing a clear sweep of unusual length from waist to knee. She was still girlishly thin, but there was no sign of an angle; her carnation-and-white skin was clearer than ever, her crisp dark hair shot with threads of red and gold; her greenish eyes danced and sparkled. There was never any girl more full of life than Maisie Hoyland, excepting when enveloped in one of those periodical fits of sulks which wiped her out like a long, ugly illness.

"I'm frantically hungry, and I've had no tea!"

"I'll make it now." Rose got up from her chair slowly, moving as if she were an old woman, though she could be brisk enough when her younger sister was not there to draw the life out of her. She took off her hat and smoothed down her hair with one hand, without looking in the glass, took the kettle to a tap outside the door and filled it; then lit the paraffin stove and put it on to boil while she set the table.

She had brought back one egg with her, and Maisie ate it. "Aren't you going to have one?" she inquired; but when her sister answered in the negative she took no further notice, and went on with her own tea, showing a schoolgirl's appetite for bread and margarine, though she complained and grimaced at "the stuff."

Rose was thinking. One egg at fourpence-halfpenny, that was all very well. But ninepence was a different matter; and it would be like this through everything. How could she do it? She must ask Mrs. Raikes about the price of the little slip of a room which adjoined her own; there was a trestle bed there; that and a chair—no room for anything else. It ought not to cost a great deal—three or four shillings a week; but where was even that much to come from?

All her thoughts seemed to be concerned with these petty calculations; but at the back of them lay a far deeper sense of concern and resentment. Her two months of self-expression had given her just enough imagination for despair, but

not enough for hope. In the old days she had neither despaired nor hoped; had just gone on.

Her own life was at an end: at an end for ever. It seemed as though Maisie was like the sun, which is believed to put out the fire.

Directly tea was over, the younger girl suggested a cinema. "I've money enough over from my fare. Don't let's be poked in here all the evening; I want to go out and see something; I want to feel free. Likely enough it will be a rotten show, but it will be something; better than nothing."

Rose knew that she ought to insist upon her saving her money; but really it did not matter—nothing mattered—and for once she agreed with Maisie. She could not have borne to be shut up in that little room, which had seemed so big for one, and was now so overcrowded; not only with Maisie herself, and Maisie's belongings, but with the exuberant air of her.

They interviewed Mrs. Raikes about the room; it was three-and-sixpence a week—not so bad, after all; but the washing of the sheets extra. Maisie was laughing as they went out of the house together—it all seemed so comical—while Mrs. Raikes looked sourly after them. She didn't want any of "that loud lot in her house." Maisie caught at Rose's arm and pinched it. "Poor old Rose, of course it's an awful nuisance for you to have me planting myself down on you like this. But I'll be awfully good, I can tell you. I'll get some sort of a job—you see."

"You're not old enough for nursing: besides, that doesn't pay, unless you're properly trained."

"Oh, well, I'll do something else. Perhaps they'll take me on where you are. Anyhow, you'll find I can be an awful help; there are all sorts of things I can do. Cooking now—we used to make topping scrambled eggs over the gas-jet at school, and once an omelette—only it stuck to the pan and got burnt."

It was already almost dark; the flare of foundries, the glimmer of street lamps grew against the twilight. The rain had ceased and the streets shone like canals. The cinema was a combination of American divorce drama, cowboys and politicians. Every time the lights went up men seemed to be staring at Maisie.

On the way home, despite the darkened streets, some one followed the two girls to their very door. Maisie flew.

"We'll make him run," she said; bolted round wrong corners and giggled; actually drew Rose back into an inky doorway, so that their pursuer overshot his mark. But he was close behind them again by the time they reached Mrs. Raikes' house; actually lifted his hat, began to speak as they waited for the door to be opened. Maisie was a little frightened at this, but her cheeks were glowing, her eyes dancing. "My hat! what would old Courland have said!" she exclaimed, holding on to her sister in the narrow hall, panting and giggling.

"A good thing as you've come in when you 'ave," remarked the landlady sourly. "I was just on my way up ter bed. Folks as expect other folks ter be at it night an' day 'ull find themselves mistaken, that's all!" She went off, muttering, grumbling.

It was only just on half-past nine, and Maisie leant over the banisters and put out her tongue in the direction of the frowsy gray head. A distinct smell of cooking floated up from the basement; Mrs. Raikes was not going to bed at all; only preparing her supper—bloaters and toasted cheese, to judge by the odors.

"The old beast!—What in the world possesses you to stay?"

"If you only knew how difficult it is to get cheap lodgings of any sort anywhere? I walked miles and miles—we simply can't afford to quarrel with her."

"Oh, money, money, money! Rotten old money! It's no good worrying about it; it doesn't make it go any further," cried Maisie, still good-natured and exhilarated, but impatient.

She was hungry again and would have liked some cocoa, but there was no milk.

"Let's ring the bell, and see the old Gorgon's face when she comes up," she suggested. But fortunately enough there was no bell, so that danger was averted; and she went to bed grumbling, declaring that she would never be able to sleep a wink.

## CHAPTER II

NEXT day Rose managed to get a post for her sister in the commercial house where she herself was engaged. Maisie was quick enough, very observant for so long as she took an

interest in anything, amused by the sense of independence, the importance of starting off to work like a man each morning. She pictured what her friends would have thought could they have seen her; she had never known any girl who worked for a living, for one could not be said to "know" one's dressmaker. She felt important, almost unique. Then she found that she was living in a world of working-girls, and that no one thought anything about that; the only difference was that her clothes were far better cut than theirs—at once smarter and plainer—her knowledge of business methods far less.

She was hopelessly inaccurate. During the first few days this did not matter; her ardor counterbalanced her other deficiencies; besides, every one made allowances for a beginner, and her personal attractions counted for a good deal. But when once she grew bored her attractions were dimmed: she did not take the trouble to hide her feelings, her contempt. She was careless and idle; always staring out of the window or glancing at the clock. More than once she was late in the morning. Rose was in a fever trying to get her off, but she could not wait for her, was obliged to go ahead, leave her the price of a tram-fare to make up, so far as possible, for lost time.

Then, one rainy morning she refused to stir from her bed, and Rose was given a week's salary for her in lieu of notice. The head clerk was very nice about it.

"I don't think the work is quite suitable for your sister, you know, Miss Hoyland. It seems like keeping a bird in a cage; and then— Well, you'll understand, it doesn't do to be too easy, on account of the other girls. I'm sure there are plenty of openings—"

Doubtless he was right; the difficulty was to find these openings. Rose was engaged all day, Maisie had no idea of where to go, what to do; one could not even trust her to answer an advertisement. If she did not want to go out, or fancied another direction, she would put it off, declaring that it would do quite as well next day. She did, however—and she could act upon her own initiative shrewdly enough when it so pleased her—get in touch with some cinema-producing firm, earn a guinea or two as part of a crowd. But that could not last: the cinema people were impudent, vulgar; gross men like pigs and goats made love to her. She lived for admiration, but not of this sort; had even

looked down her nose at the clerks in Skeffington & Clegg's.

At last she got a position in the show-room of a large dress-making and millinery establishment. Her good looks, her pretty, graceful figure, the fact that Sheffield was full of foreigners and that she spoke French fluently was all in her favor. She kept this position for close on a month; but she was always late in the mornings—later and later as time went on; there was difficulty with one of the shop-walkers, and a senior assistant to whom he was engaged, and Maisie was dismissed. Then came a short engagement to take out a couple of children for a few hours each day. But that also ended in disaster.

One of the children, a boy of five, refused to come when she called him, stood engrossed, watching a man with a hose in the public gardens; and to mark her displeasure Maisie walked on ahead, alone with the other child.

When she turned, she discovered that the boy had vanished among the crowd, and, finding no trace of him, was obliged to go back to her employer's house and report upon what had happened.—“Anyhow,” as she said to Rose later, “if I had a kid like that, I'd be only too thankful to any one who would lose him for me.”

The boy, who had been taken to the nearest police-station, enjoyed himself hugely, and was back at his own home within an hour; but, of course, it meant Maisie's dismissal, which the mother was glad enough of a chance to give; she had always thought Miss Hoyland looked rather “fast,” not quite the sort of person she really needed. Though she had appeared well enough satisfied until her husband remarked upon the girl's good looks, took to opening the door for her—“just as if she was one of ourselves!” as the indignant wife remarked.

At last Rose was bound to acknowledge that her sister would never give satisfaction in any sort of work which was without variety, some spice of interest and amusement—what filled her with satisfaction would fret Maisie to a fever—and so, much against the grain, allowed her to answer an advertisement for “several young ladies of good appearance to walk on at the Queen's Theatre.” She could not leave her own work to go with her when she made her application; but there was evidently something stimulating in the interview, for the girl was in a state of wildest excitement during the whole of that evening.

Anyhow, she got the job, and now Rose found herself at work night and day, for she would not allow her young sister to come home from the theater alone. It was bad enough to be obliged to leave her unchaperoned at rehearsals and afternoon performances; to be out all day and not know what she might be up to; but there seemed nothing else for it. The intervals between getting back from the office and going to the theater were filled up with cooking, shopping, washing-up, tidying their two rooms. She was too tired to look at a book, and got through her petty tasks very slowly, continually forgetting things, dropping things. Her whole strength was absorbed by the effort of keeping her intelligence screwed up to concert-pitch for so long as she was at business; for if that stand-by went, there was no knowing what they would do, with nothing but Maisie's pound a week to depend upon. As to Spanish lessons and shorthand, all that was quite hopeless.

To add to her other worries, Mrs. Raikes gave them notice on account of the hours they kept. She had grown so accustomed to Rose's quiet regularity that she was spoiled for anything else, from them at least, though she might put up with all sorts of tricks from new lodgers.

There was great difficulty in finding fresh quarters. A night or two had to be put in at the Young Women's Christian Association. In the end they were forced to take more expensive and not over-clean rooms, with a landlady who did not care what her lodgers did or what hours they kept; indeed, it seemed as though people were coming and going all night, talking, laughing, singing, quarreling.

Maisie—being one of those people who inevitably spend money before they earn it—declared that the extra rent really did not matter, for she was certain to get a rise before long.

But the rise did not come. Instead of this, she grew bored with her work, talked of giving it up. There was some difficulty which Rose could never get at quite; Maisie was sulky and out of sorts; nothing pleased her, and, indeed, life was at its dullest, flattest. The weather was hot and thundery, everything one touched felt gritty; the freshness of spring was past, the town summer like some frowsy, over-stout matron. All the clerks at Skeffington & Clegg's were talking of their holidays, asking where Rose meant to go.

But how could Rose go anywhere, when she had no money,



when there was Maisie to be considered? She had hated the idea of the stage, but now was obsessed by the fear lest her young sister should do something stupid, lose her job.

It came inevitably, but for once not through Maisie's own fault; indeed, she had suddenly, and quite inexplicably, turned over a new leaf, ceased to grumble and repine, shown herself in one of her rare moods of gayety and sweet temper. But it was already the middle of the slack season; the manager had hoped that with the crowds of war-workers superimposed on to the ordinary population he might have been able to carry on until the autumn. The interest in that particular show, however, went out all of a sudden, like a blown candle which has promised to flicker on indefinitely; it was not worth staging anything else during the summer months, and the theater was closed down.

To Rose's intense surprise, Maisie answered another advertisement for a young lady to take out children, three this time; obtained the position and, by some effort of will, kept it.

It was only for the mornings, and the pay was miserable; but yet, when Rose suggested her finding something of the same sort for the afternoon also, she absolutely refused.

"I must have some time to myself. Besides, look at all I do at home."

This was true, for she had suddenly taken to furbishing up her clothes, keeping the rooms immaculately neat and tidy. When she did choose to put her hand to anything, she was far defter and quicker than her sister. Rose just "did" things, very carefully, rather slowly; but Maisie added a polish, an air. And not only was she industrious: she was gay, good-tempered, obliging; forever singing or laughing; more affectionate, too, in a new, coaxing sort of way.

This peaceful state of affairs went on for so long that the elder girl grew uneasy. She was not very clever, but she had seen enough of life to realize that it takes a very great deal to really change any one; that such contentment and docility were hardly natural.

Then there came a day when she happened to get off work earlier than usual, on account of the sudden death of one of the junior partners of the firm, and, going home, met her landlady as she passed through the hall: a stout, untidy woman, with large artificial diamond earrings and a quantity

of dyed hair, whom she but seldom saw, as both girls had their own latchkeys.

She nodded to Rose, wished her good afternoon; then, just as she was half-way up the stairs—careful not to touch the banisters, greasy with dirt—she called after her.

“Oh, Miss 'Oyland, I didn't see your sister when she came in, but perhaps you'll tell her as 'er gentleman friend said he wasn't able to wait no longer.”

“What—who?” Rose was stupefied.

“The young fellow as comes to see 'er. You don't mean to say that she never told you anything about it? Ah, well, girls will be girls, same way as boys will be boys—though there's many as won't allow it, and that's where the trouble comes in. Any'ow, I'm sorry if I given the show away; not but— Look 'ere, Miss 'Oyland”—she moved a step forward and touched Rose's hand, which lay along the banister and clung to it, for by this time she was forgetful of dirt, forgetful of everything apart from Maisie, Maisie's astounding duplicity—“I'm not one as goes in for being too straight-laced myself; it ain't wholesome nowadays; human nature's like cream, and goes sour with over-much bottling-down, that's what I says. But she's a fine girl, and young, and young blood's hot an' sorter don't-careish—I know what I'd feel like if she was my own. But there—I wouldn't 'ave said anything if the cat 'adn't 'opped out o' the bag, so to speak. Come to that, it ain't no business o' mine; but they've been too much alone in those there rooms o' yours, and that's the truth. Walkin' out, that's a different matter, now!”

Rose was beaten; her legs dragged so that she felt as though she would never surmount the two long flights of stairs leading to their rooms.

Maisie, who was washing up the breakfast things—which had to be left until one or another of them returned home—began talking directly her sister entered the room. For the first time for weeks she seemed thoroughly out of temper, her cheeks unnaturally flushed, her eyes clouded and sullen.

“Rose! Well! Whatever brings you home now? Of course, the very day that I'm behindhand with everything. But isn't that just like it! If one thing goes wrong, everything goes wrong—beastly old world!” She flung out of the door with a basin of dirty water; then came back and wrung out her dish-cloth with an impatient grimace.—“Good

Lord! how sick I am of all this messing and muddling! All for nothing—nothing out of it! Just the stupidest food, the filthiest lodgings—no new clothes, no amusement, no anything; one might as well be dead, or half-dead, like you are.”

Rose had sat down by the table, but she did not speak. She had taken off her hat, and began pulling out the faded bows—only two years ago, how it had shone in one of the smartest of the Biarritz shop windows, all blue ribbon and cornflowers. Her face wore a curious expression of apathy, almost vacancy; she looked like some one who has suddenly received a violent blow on the head.

“I shall go down to the theater and see when they’re starting again,” went on Maisie. “Those rotten people with their miserable children! They kept me close upon an hour late again this afternoon. It’s too much of a good thing—for eight shillings a week, too! I’d rather do anything: beg—go on the streets and have done with it!”

She flung out the last sentence in defiance, half frightened. After all, she was not supposed to know of such things, and the veil of correct maidenhood had grown to be a sort of sheath beneath which anything might hide, so long as it was not rent by word or deed. “That girl in the fur coat whom we saw with Charlie; she doesn’t pig it like we do—you bet!”

“Well—?” She had paused, waiting for some protest, and as none came, glanced at her sister angrily. Suddenly it seemed as though Rose, stupid old Rose, were the cause of all her trouble. And yet, after all, what a mercy it was that she had chosen that particular afternoon to come home a couple of hours earlier than usual. Maisie’s sullen temper was crossed by a half-hysterical titter as she wondered what might have happened if it had been a couple of days earlier.

Then, all at once, she was struck by her sister’s immobility; impatient, disappointed, full of all the seething yeast of youth, such dullness seemed to be almost beyond bearing.

“What! Isn’t there going to be any ‘Oh, Maisie!’?”

Still Rose neither spoke nor moved, and, darting forward, the younger girl shook her by the shoulder. “For goodness’ sake, say something—anything!” she cried. “You might as well be dead, sitting there in that way!”

Rose moved a little aside from under her sister’s hand. Her face was deadly white, for there was nothing in the

world which her life with her mother had taught her to dread like anything in the way of a scene, accusations, recriminations: the very thought of it enfeebled, deadened her; she gathered herself together, shrinking as some people shrink from the report of a gun.

"You have no business to receive men here alone, when I'm out—to deceive me like that," she said in a low voice.

Maisie, with her young cynicism, had known that the thing could not go on for ever, that she would be found out; had counted upon "an awful row," and not altogether cared. But Rose's tone, the manner of her accusation, if such it could be called, was so altogether out of proportion to what she had expected, realized as deserved, that she was thunder-struck, almost frightened, though she managed to retort with something about "men."

"Men! One man—a mere boy! I don't see the harm in that."

"You shouldn't do it; it's not right; you oughtn't to. If you thought there was no harm, you would have told me. But there"—Rose gave a deep sigh—"what am I to do? What can I do? Everything's difficult enough, as it is.—Oh, dear, dear!"

Suddenly, to Maisie's surprise, she began to cry, altogether as though she were the guilty one. The tears streamed down her cheeks, on to her hands, her lap, the blue bows of her hat; reviving them to something of their primal glow.

"I don't see what there is to make a fuss about," protested the younger girl uneasily; though the greater part of her dismay arose from the fact that Rose was making so little fuss, or rather making it in such an odd way. "It isn't as though you really cared, as though any one had ever cared. And now—when somebody does love me, oh, madly—like that—is it any wonder? One might as well be dead as always going on and on with nothing ever happening."

She moved to the window and stood gazing out, a slim figure against the sunlight which filtered in, mote-laden, through dirty panes.

Suddenly Rose's heart was torn with anguished feeling: she had resented Maisie's coming, disagreed with her in every sort of way, nursed a resentment against her which was no whit diminished by the fact that she did her duty, said nothing. She felt curiously dimmed, left behind, out of it, in her sister's presence; always had done, ever since the

younger girl was eight or nine years of age. But there had been a time before this when she was the one unfailing sun of Maisie's universe: a time when Maisie could not have gone to sleep without Rose's good-night kiss, have slept anywhere save at her side: when a bruised knee or scratched finger was healed by her kiss alone; times such as those when she had been laid up with measles or whooping-cough, and could not bear her out of her sight for a moment; take food or medicine from any other hand, find rest save in her arms.

It all came to an end quite suddenly. Maisie discovered that Rose was stupid and slow; there were lots of other people to make a fuss of her; besides, she had got over all her childish ailments, did not know what it was to be ill.

But now the memory of those old days returned to Rose—it was like it is when a person dies, and one remembers nothing but the good that was in them, the far-away, happy, loving hours. Apart from all this, Maisie had been so gay and kind the last few weeks, seemed to cling to her again; it was, indeed, as though she was so overcharged with excited affection, feeling, that it overflowed on to her sister.

"Oh, Maisie, Maisie!" she said, in a tone so different from that "Oh, Maisie!" which the younger girl had been expecting that she turned, saw that Rose was holding out her arms and, moving to her side, knelt beside her, held herself stiffly for a moment, then yielded, pressing close against her.

"I do love you, Maisie. I do love you—there is no one else but you."

"Rosie-posie—dear old Rosie-posie!" It was the old childish name; for awhile they clung together, their cheeks pressed against each other. Even Maisie, the hard, confident Maisie, was crying; there was no separating their tears.

It was she who spoke first, whispering: "Rosie-posie, who told you?"

"Mrs. Saunders. He was here this afternoon; he left a message with her—she didn't mean to tell, made sure I knew; just gave me the message to say that he could not wait."

"Ah-h!" Rose could feel a tremor of delight pass through the girl, close-pressed to her side. "I knew he must have been—I knew he wouldn't have failed me. But those pigs—how they kept me hanging on and on! And all the

time I was in a fever, thinking what a mess the room would be in, if he was waiting here. Why, just fancy! you might have got back first, seen him. We had a plan, such a plan—a sort of lark—that if ever you did come you would open the door and hear him say—of course the stairs creak, so we would have heard you—‘Well, Miss Hoyland, you agree to that, then? A pound a week—six evening performances and two matinées?’ He practiced looking like a sort of stage-manager or agent, puffing himself out like old Grice. Funny, too screamingly funny, for if ever there was any one more completely different—”

“Where did you meet him?”

“Oh, he used to wait for me after rehearsals and matinées. Sometimes in the evening he would be outside the door, and I would brush past him, quite close, quite. Oh, Rose, it was fun! You so grave and worried, thinking of nothing but trams or wet feet—you never saw us look, my cheeks on fire! The only wonder is they didn’t burn you. We used to laugh at that, too; we were always laughing then. ‘Some day,’ he said, ‘your sister will fly to the nearest fire-alarm, break the glass before you can stop her’—then again—he is so silly!—‘I saw a beggar warming his hands at your face, six yards away, more!’ Oh, what fun it was—most fun of all, just then.” She sighed, hung silent for a moment or two, then moved uneasily within the fold of Rose’s arm.

“I’m getting all cramped up!” The elder girl loosened her arm and Maisie rose to her feet, moved again to the window. “Ah, well!”—there was an air of finality about the words, as though to say—“that’s over and done with!”

But Rose was more tenacious. “Is he a gentleman?—Oh, but he can’t be, coming here like that, taking advantage of your being alone.”

“Of course he’s a gentleman!” Maisie flung round, flaming. “Do you think that I’d take up with any one who wasn’t—like those bounders at Skeffington and Clegg’s—those awful cinema-men?”

“What does he do?”

“I don’t think that he does anything. Every one doesn’t have to work, to grind out their lives. Why, you yourself, you never even thought of it in the old days.”

“Anyhow, it’s not right, Maisie, dear; you know it’s not right.” Rose spoke humbly, pleadingly; at a greater dis-

advantage than ever now that her affections were aroused, that she feared to alienate her sister afresh.

"Oh, for goodness' sake let's stop about it! Let's go out; we can't stay shut up here all the rest of the day. Let's have tea somewhere—a real tea."

"Yes, let's!" The elder girl rose with alacrity, trying to enter into the spirit of the proposal. She thought: "If I take this away from her, I must try and make up." Then: "Better to say nothing more about it."

But her thoughts were too deeply engaged for her to remain silent. As she tidied her hair, put on her hat, she burst out again. "You don't know how dangerous it is, Maisie; of course, you can't know!" Her face was crimson. So much that was ugly had been forced upon her own observance; she was so quiet that people had often forgotten her, or taken it for granted that their looks, innuendoes, and worse, passed by the stolid, silent girl unnoticed. Her own mother was continually forgetting her presence or passing it by with contempt. But for all that, Rose still retained her belief in her younger sister's innocence, the necessity for maintaining it. "Things happen—dreadful things. Of course, you don't understand, but you must take my word for it: girls get into trouble—girls that you'd think were quite nice, didn't know about anything horrid."

Maisie was putting on her hat at the same glass, in front of it. Rose, doing her best over her shoulder, realized that the girl's face was flushed, that a withdrawn, half-shamed look had come into her eyes, and blamed herself for putting things too plainly.

"Anyhow, all that's at an end," she said, trying to speak brightly. "You won't see him again, and we won't say anything more about it."

But Maisie had turned away, was already at the door. "Oh, do come along, Rose," she cried. "You *are* so slow; the afternoon will be gone."

Two or three times that afternoon and evening, during which they sat out a sordid cinema in some dirty, stifling hall, Rose returned to the question of Maisie's friend. She was too timid to say, "Now let's have this out, once and for all; give me your word that you won't see him again." Instead of this, she dropped hints, wavered round and round the subject, could not let it be. As a matter of fact—added to her fear of losing the younger girl's lightly-poised affection

—the realization of her own helplessness overcame her. If Maisie refused to give up this man, what could she do, unless it were to turn her out into the street? And could anything be worse than that? Her sister was six years younger than herself; she was responsible for her; there was no one else to care what happened. Once she thought, and, more disastrous still, remarked: "What would Charles say?" Upon which Maisie laughed, a curiously hard and mature laugh.

"Charles! My hat, I like that!"

Then, back home again, preparing for bed—in the room which they now shared, opening out of the sitting-room—she declared her mind. Rose was mildly religious, or not so much mildly as gropingly. She did not believe anything very much; her life had not taught her to have any confidence in human nature, and she could not think of God save as a sort of man, even more jealous and exacting than the rest of His kind. But still, she repeated certain fixed prayers each night. If she was in any difficulty she added a special petition; not with any active hope that it would be granted, but rather because it seemed best to try everything, and, anyhow, one did not have to meet God face to face, insist, argue things out, as one did with people. The request might just fall to the ground, probably would; but there was no fear of any sort of scene, disagreeableness.

"If you put it in your prayers—" said Rose. Maisie knelt each night because it was expected of her, because there would have been a fuss if she hadn't—even at school, which had a High Church tendency—glancing from side to side between her fingers, calculating when she might, with decency, rise from her knees. Generally she counted a hundred, going rather fast towards the end, and that just did it.

"Put what in my prayers?" she demanded, flinging round and staring at Rose.

"Oh, well, you know. For strength to be able to give up meeting that man; to help you not to mind."

"To help me not to mind! As if I wanted not to mind! One might as well pray to be turned into a toad, no feelings, no anything!" cried Maisie, half savagely, pulling off her clothes anyhow, with sullen, averted face. "Anyhow, I'm not going to give him up, so there you have it; and if you keep on worrying, I shall go away with him, live my own life"—the old, silly, futile phrase. "I've had enough of it, so there!"



"If he really wants to marry you—" began Rose doubtfully, after a long pause, during which the younger girl had climbed into bed, drawn the sheet up to her chin.

"Marry!" She laughed rather shrilly. "Marry! Why, he's a mere boy, I tell you—not twenty."

"Then you oughtn't—I can't allow— Really, Maisie, I can't—"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, stop it! Anyhow, I've given you fair warning. If you come home and find me gone one fine day, you'll know what's happened, that's all!" cried Maisie; and, dragging the bedclothes up over her head, she turned round with her face to the wall, the very curve of her huddled figure eloquent of resentful obstinacy.

For an hour or more Rose sat idle in her chair, bent a little forward, her brush and comb lying in her lap, her hand hanging at her side. Then, at last, cramped and chilled, she finished undressing and crept into bed, where she lay staring out in front of her, trying to think, to reason, to make up her mind as to what was the best course to pursue, listening the while to her young sister's tranquil and even breath.

### CHAPTER III

LIFE sagged on, July and August stiflingly hot and jaded; September a little fresher and less hectic, as though the year were beginning to settle down to middle-age.

September—October—the anxieties of war—the long-delayed peace—the change of seasons: what it all meant to Rose Hoyland was cold, dark mornings swooping down upon her with the end of a breathless Indian summer; chill walks through dull and misty mornings; life, as a whole, growing more rather than less difficult.

As to Maisie, she had one petty engagement after another, while for weeks between, she was out of work. But, for all that, there was a more or less fluctuating supply of funds. "Saved over from my last job," she would say, knowing, and knowing that Rose knew, this could scarcely be the case, with jobs as badly paid and as short-lived as hers were. And yet it seemed certain that she must have at least one good meal a day during her sister's office hours; for while she barely touched any of the mean food it was possible to provide in their own rooms, she did not grow any thinner; it

seemed to Rose, indeed, as though she were putting on flesh; but, for all that, it was plain that she was not well—indeed, far from well. She was listless and dreamy, she moved more slowly and heavily, as though continually tired—Maisie, whose every motion had been swift and skimming as a swallow! At the same time she became extraordinarily secretive. It was not only in relation to that secret lover that she “kept herself to herself,” as the saying goes, but in every—even in the most trivial, as it seemed—motion of her daily life.

She had up to this shown all a modern young girl's disregard of what used to be regarded as the lesser decencies of life. Rose had fought with her over her trick of going to the water tap on the public landing in nothing but her night-dress; of wandering about their room, careless of the open window, in totally inadequate clothing. But now she had grown sensitive, or so it seemed: insisted upon a bedroom of her own, and actually managed to pay for a tiny slip of a place out of her own pocket. Another reason she gave for this move—apart from her dislike to Rose's “staring”—was that she liked to read in bed at night, and did not want to keep her sister awake. But she could not have read much, for Rose observed that one book was allowed to lie on the chair by her bed for weeks at a time, until it was thick with dust, though when she mentioned this fact she was flown at for “spying.” It was always like this now; she could not comment upon anything without drawing down upon herself this accusation from Maisie, who at one time had insisted upon the conversation being incessantly engrossed with herself and her own affairs.

She hated Rose going into her room; would bundle whatever she happened to be busy with out of sight; sit upon her bed with a sullen, aggressively idle air, until her sister withdrew. And yet, why?—why?—for she never seemed to be engaged with anything more important than her clothes: for ever fiddle-faddling over them, spoiling the clear, neat line of them, or so it seemed to Rose.

She grew to look older, almost haggard, and yet more appealingly childish than she had ever done before, despite that persistent air of hardness, hands-off-ishness, which was worn like a glass mask betwixt the outer world and her appealing, half-scared self; the fear, excitement, wonder which every now and then peeped out through her eyes and

drew swiftly back again; while even Rose could not fail to notice the way in which she would flush suddenly, open her mouth as though to speak, and close it again in a hard, tight line, which shut herself, her real self, firmly away behind it. There had always been just one Maisie—there was never any girl more single-minded, uncomplicated, in her greed for pleasure and admiration, displaying herself, her every mood, as a peacock displays its tail. But she was not like that now: there were two Maisies, and even the one which showed itself was not at all the one to which Rose had been accustomed in the old days; that, indeed, seemed to be gone for ever.

There was really no getting at her. That sudden, spontaneous flow of affection, on the day Rose made her discovery, was the very last glimpse of feeling which showed itself. It had softened Rose so completely back into her old state of love and solicitude for her younger sister that she was constantly longing for something of the sort to occur again, pathetically eager. It was the sort of thing which drives so many women to scenes—the sense that they cannot get at any real feeling without them. But it seemed as though the very fact of having shown any feeling had sealed up the fountains of it in Maisie—anyhow, so far as Rose was concerned—for ever and a day; it was like a rush of blood which staunches itself with a hard clot.

If Rose had not been forced to spend the whole of each work day away from home, she would have noticed something more definite than all this. For the first few weeks after they had that talk together Maisie was defiantly happy. It was as though she said to herself: “I *will* be happy; I will go on being happy; I daren’t stop even for a minute, for there’s no knowing what might happen if I did.”

She kept on the top of everything, was gay and rather noisy, swam in a sort of maze of excited pleasure. There were new and rather *outré* clothes which Rose had never so much as seen; presents of sweets and flowers, hidden jewelry. Maisie was generous; she did not care for keeping things to herself; now and then she brought out a few sweets in a screw of paper for Rose’s benefit, as though she had just bought them, breaking up the gay boxes into bits and burning them. But even an ounce of chocolates was an extravagance in those days; and as for the other things, she simply dared not show them.

It was nice to get presents; she had always adored them, particularly anything in the way of "a surprise." But after a little while a dark shadow swam across even that pleasure; for at the back of her mind, which was in its own way shrewd enough, there grew up an idea that these presents represented a sort of apology for something greater which ought to be offered and was not going to be. Yes, that was it; as time went on, this became more and more certain; they were an apology, and not a surety.

Still she persistently refused to look forward. The more frightened she became, the more frantically she sucked at such honey as life offered to her.

The pathetic part of the whole affair was that if existence had continued along the same lines which she had always been brought up to believe that it must inevitably follow, nothing would have happened as it did happen. Her fancy would have flitted from one person, one thing, to another; she would have been constantly amused, spoon-fed with admiration. Life, so much less dull—indeed, shorn of all dullness by its very variety—of the sort to which she was most suited—would, in its darker, graver and more dreadful aspects, have slid past her; satisfied by a perpetual succession of trifles, she would have shown herself far less avid. It would have been like a dinner of a great many little courses, in which one never eats quite enough of anything for it to disagree. And then there was Rose. If Rose had been less virginal—"proper," as Maisie called it—she would have talked to her more; and the very fact of putting her own feelings, what seemed like the glamour of temptation, into words might have cleared her ideas, shown her the ugliness of the risks which she ran.

But she had no one to talk to, no outlet; nothing to amuse her and no tastes for any sort of amusement, not even a hobby. Upon one thing only was she insistent—she would be happy; she would, and she would, and she would. Better any sort of disaster than a life like Rose led, colorless as that of a silkworm.

But even before her elder sister had found out anything, before that talk, the flow of delight and wonder had become less regular. The parts in her comedy, that of the one who was to amuse and the other who was to be amused, had shifted a little; it was she who had to arrange meetings, etc., in place of having them arranged, entreated for.

And upon this, from a feeling that she could not endure the flatness of life without him, with nothing, nothing—there it was, the thought so common, so fatal to women—that he must be given more if she were to keep him—had come that episode which had turned mere fun to fear, terrifying until it was repeated; and then, oddly deadening, saddening, because it seemed all that was left to her, until the dawn of a deeper and more specific fear.

She was not even happy in her love; there was no comfort to it. Her lover was not to be counted upon. Sometimes he was brutally greedy, sometimes as brutally indifferent, sometimes tender; while at times—and these periods puzzled her more and more—he was painfully formal and shy, as though half forgetting what she was to him. And at first it was partly this glamour of never understanding, never being certain, of something altogether mysterious, which held her.

Once, when it had been arranged that they should meet, she waited and waited for close upon two hours at the appointed place—a damp, secluded spot in some smoke-blurred and infinitely dreary public garden, little more than a deserted square.

At last, in complete despair, worn out by the hope that every figure which entered the place might be his, nearly blinded with tears, her heart sick within her—for she was her old self in this, that, as she had been used to say so frankly, she could bear anything in the world apart from disappointment—she was making her way home, when she caught sight of him standing hesitating at a street corner—standing there as though he had been suddenly dropped from he knew not where to he knew not where; looking so distraught, so utterly scared and miserable—as scared as herself—that the reproaches with which she was prepared died away upon her lips as she approached him; took one hand—hanging loose at his side, while the other was to his lips—and slipping her arm through his, drew him along, faltering, at her side, her whole being flooded with love and pity—real love, something very different from the combination of greed, vanity and excitement which had before possessed her, the hard vulgarity of that thought of “paying him out,” which almost amounted to the “seeing herself righted” of the lower classes.

“Oh, my dear!” she said; then: “Oh, my dear, my dear, what is it?” There was a tiny restaurant near at hand, and

she drew him into this, where over hot tea and stony, tasteless buns he seemed to revive a little, while a faint color came into his ashy face.

But still there was something about him so strange that she was appalled; for though there is a mystery which arouses curiosity, there is a deeper sort of mystery which spells fear, and Maisie was afraid.

There had been a girl at school who was given to all sorts of boring quotations. There was one something like: "Oh, knight at arms, why art thou palely loitering?" or was it: "alone and palely loitering?"

Why had he "palely" loitered alone like that when she was waiting for him? Why did he look at her now in that gently puzzled fashion, as though he scarcely remembered her: so oddly appealing, so like a lost child?

It was this childishness which roused the girl to something over and above her fear, which loosed in her some well-spring of true affection, tender solicitude. Her spoilt-beauty airs were at an end for the moment. She was possessed by a maternal passion for this strange creature who had so dominated her—foreshadowing, as it seemed, something deeper and less sensual than she had yet known.

They had seated themselves in what passed for a "cosy corner" in the inner room of the restaurant, which was nearly empty, for it was late for tea and too early for dinner.

Every now and then Maisie heard herself saying: "Never mind, my darling, never mind—don't worry; it's all right; don't worry." But, for the most part, they sat silent, clinging to each other's hands, shoulders close-pressed together. Life was very dreadful, not in the least like it had seemed to be. One came into it with no weapon, no knowledge of tactics, was caught up in it, whirled here and there, and dropped to earth astounded.

Maisie, for all her lightness, was the only one of her family with any imagination, and the last few weeks of suffering had stimulated it; she saw life as neither Rose nor Charles could ever have done; felt it, too, despite the superficial hardness of youth.

It might have been thought that she attained to complete womanhood quite a long while ago, before she and Rose had that talk together. But this was not the case. Even those weeks of excitement—the shame and fear, which at first came and went, then gathered until it threatened to over-

whelm her—had not really touched the depths of her nature; merely diverted, spread it out; disturbed the ever-shifting shallows. She had still been the young girl, in spite of everything: that “hard thing,” as George Eliot calls her. And it was not in her love, her passion, that she ultimately attained to the best that was in her; rather in her half-fearful, altogether bewildered desire to help the man whom she must still count upon to help her.

One satisfying thing he did say: “I love you, Maisie; never forget that I love you. I don’t know what happens, what possesses me. I am brutal, cruel to you. I don’t know how things can happen as they do—oh, I don’t know. But there is always this—always this—I love you, my darling—my own!”

They clung together as though they were drowning; as though, desperate in a way which they could scarcely understand—even Maisie, with her greater shrewdness—their only safety lay in each other.

#### CHAPTER IV

AND yet, after this came weeks of absolute silence. Weeks! And that at a time when Maisie was beginning to count, was everlastingly counting, months, weeks, days: fitting everything to it; the ’buses that passed their door, the flowers on the sitting-room wallpaper.

They had arranged their next meeting for the following Wednesday, because that last day had been a Saturday, and trains were most convenient upon Saturdays and Wednesdays. But though she was punctual at the appointed place, he did not appear; or the next Wednesday, or the next Saturday either, or the next, or the next. It seemed as though everything had stopped dead, like a clock; apart from that fear at her heart, which advanced by bounds, eating up the days.

There had been something attractive in the way in which her lover came and went; from where, to where, she knew not—a sort of Cupid and Psyche touch. She was amazed now at her own stupidity, at the things which had seemed to matter so much more. He had never told her his address, never mentioned the place at which he lived, and she had never made any inquiries upon the subject. She had thought

of it, idly enough, in between their meetings; but when they were together there seemed so many more important things to talk about.

And now—only to think of how lost she was! She hunted through the local time-tables for places from which there were extra trains upon Wednesdays and Saturdays; but there were so many that no help was to be found there. Directly she was certain that it was one place, she became, in a bound, just as certain that it was another.

Hope was at an end; she shut her teeth upon that. She must bear her fate alone, or else put an end to herself; and as the one thing which youth cannot bear is the lack of an audience, she wept more bitterly over this thought than over any other.

Then, one wet Saturday, when she had given up every thought of going to the gardens, was sitting desolate in their little sitting-room—for she had relinquished all idea of regular work—there was the sound of his footstep upon the stairs.

The moment he entered the room Maisie realized the change in him—so deep that by comparison all the others had been mere pencil-scratches. As she rose from her seat he took it, the one arm-chair in the room, pulled her to his knee, kissed her, and then pushed her aside.

“Well, what’s wrong now? You look as though you had got the pip about something—just like you women! Always some grievance or other. And such a damnable day, a fellow wants something to cheer him, not a face like a funeral—enough o’ that at home.” He blurred his words so doggedly, that Maisie had a dreadful idea that he had been drinking; and she remembered with incredulous horror that there had been a time when she had laughed, actually laughed, at the stage presentation of a drunken man.

He plucked at her sleeve, holding her standing at his side. “What the devil do you want to wear that shade o’ blue for? It makes you look so rottenly pale, doesn’t suit you. Peufh! but this room’s stuffy. Get your hat; let’s go out somewhere or other, have a bit of a beano. And, for the Lord’s sake, change that frock!”

He was right about the frock—it didn’t suit her. And yet, how few weeks ago it had seemed just the right foil for her brilliant, rose-carnation coloring! But she was pale now, would have been pale in anything, with dark lines beneath



her heavy eyes. When she flushed, as she did at his words, her color was muddy, and he stared at her with sullen distaste. "What have you been doing to yourself? You usedn't to look like that. You want some fresh air—that's what you want. Sticking, moping in here! The rain's stopped, thank goodness, and we'll go out and have tea somewhere."

"I must speak to you. Look here"—she drew nearer and laid her hand upon his arm. "Look here, there's something I must say to you."

"All right, all right—you can do that as we go along. Only hurry up and make yourself decent, and let's get out of this. It beats me how you can live in such a place."

He looked round the untidy room with disgust. At one time everything unsightly had been bundled out of the way upon his approach; but now Maisie was not only unprepared, she was sunk deep into that sort of despair where there is a kind of comfort in everything being as bad as it can be. It is always difficult to preserve the niceties in a room where one is obliged to cook, eat, and carry on all the ordinary avocations of life, and she had given up the attempt.

In her slip of a bedroom, upon a turn of the stairs a little higher up, she struggled with her dressing. It was like one of those dreams where everything goes wrong, and she was in despair. She had difficulty in finding a clean blouse; when she did, it was all crumpled, and the running-string gone. The safety-pin with which she fastened it to the back of her skirt kept on bursting open whenever she raised her arms. She ripped a faded ribbon from her hat and pinned on another; then, after trying it on before the mirror, replaced it with the old one, for the fresh, bright color made her look paler than the other. Her skirt wanted brushing; it dipped at the back. She had noticed that in a shop-window the very last time she went to the gardens, but had been too disheartened to alter it when she came back.

The climax of all this came when she soiled her freshly-washed hands polishing her boots, and had to wash them again. Then, just as she was ready, she heard Mrs. Saunders' voice upon the stairs, and a man's deliberate step, muffled by the distance. The door of the sitting-room opened and shut again. Leaving her room and leaning over the stair-rail, Maisie was just able to catch the murmur of voices.

She was in a state of the wildest panic. Who could the man be? What had he come for? His footstep had sounded middle-aged. Was it her lover's guardian? She knew that his father was dead, that he was not yet of age; had he come to make a scene, to forbid him to visit her again? As little as a month ago she would have laughed at the very idea, but she did not laugh now.

She visualized the sordid untidiness of the shabby room. What would the stranger think? What could he think?

With Maisie's upbringing it seemed worse than it really was. All of a sudden she remembered, with cruel distinctness, life as it used to be. Oh, it was impossible for any decent man to marry a girl out of such a hole—a wretched hole! That was what any guardian on earth would say, and no blame to him, either. And yet she must be married, she must, she must! That was what she had been going to tell her lover this very afternoon. And, of course, he would then have realized all she had suffered—been softened, bitterly self-reproachful and sorry for her. If only this stranger had not appeared, that very day of all days! Now there was no knowing what might happen.

Once more she flew back to her room and glanced at herself in the glass. She might be called upon to interview this mysterious man, and, even if this were not the case, she must be looking her very best when she rejoined her lover. There was no longer any of that "Oh, well, take me or leave me—lucky to get such a girl" feeling.

She moved on to the tiny landing again, overcome by a fever of restlessness; she would stay there and peep, kneeling on the floor, looking through the banister to watch the stranger come out, she thought. And yet, the moment she saw the handle of the sitting-room door move, she ran back into her own room; shut the door and stood there, with her heart beating so that she could hear nothing beyond the pulses which throbbed through her own head.

At last, appalled at the thought of what her lover might say to her, keeping him waiting in that fashion, she ran to the head of the stairs, and seeing the sitting-room door wide open, down the stairs.

"My dear!—who in the world was it? I thought—" she began a little shrilly, for whatever it cost her, she must be gay; then broke off, her mouth open, staring in a silly fashion, white to the very lips.

For the room was empty. Whoever the stranger might be, he had taken her lover away with him.

That was the end; she thought it had come before, but it hadn't—nowhere near. There was no hope now, no chance of telling; she would never see him again, never, never, never so long as she lived.

## CHAPTER V

THAT "never" was a certainty; to Maisie Hoyland, in her ridiculous youth—a youth in which all the precocious knowledge incidental to a cosmopolitan life would not quite cover the most incongruous gaps, the oddest freaks of ignorance—it seemed certain at four o'clock that day that she could never, never, never tell any one of her fears, her misery.

And yet, by nine the same evening it was all out.

Rose questioned her upon her air of blank despair, and was told to be quiet and not bother—"for God's sake" to be quiet.

Then, later on, gathering her work together, tidying the room as a preparation for bed—studiously quiet, pretending to notice nothing freshly amiss—Maisie, hunting feverishly through a drawer for nothing in particular, flung round upon her.

"How you can go on and on the way you do without a word! Well, now, look here. I suppose I might as well tell you—if I didn't tell you, some one else would. . . . Anyhow, there would be coroners and people. . . . I'll tell you—not that you'll care—then I'll put myself away out of your sight once and for all. It's no good turning down my bed, or anything."

"But why?—why?"

"Why?—why?—why? Are you an idiot? Seeing me every day. Why, even Mrs. Saunders, just meeting me upon the stairs, long coat and all, turns and stares, sniffs! Beast! Trust her to see, to think! But, oh, Rose, Rose! what am I to do? What can I do? To be stared at like that by everybody—everybody!"

She was in Rose's arms, clinging to her. The elder sister had her baby, her spoilt child, back again. But, good God, at what a price!

They talked, wept and talked, far into the night. The

flood-gates of all Maisie's grief and fear—not unmixed with an odd sort of pride in knowing so much more than Rose—were unlocked, swept over and around her, soaked into her; so effectually, that at last the young girl was sufficiently eased to sink to sleep in her sister's arms, her eyelashes still wet, her breast caught with sob; while Rose lay wide awake until it was time to rise once more, light the gas, start the day—dank, unwilling, draped in the first fog of the season.

Luckily, that day's work was not very exacting. She went on with it just as steadily as ever, but in each moment of respite her mind reverted back to her sister. She must think what was the best thing to do. It all rested with her; there was no one else to arrange anything. Not for one moment did it occur to her to ask her brother's help; she did not even think of him save in one connection, as the aforetime friend of Philip McCabe.

That evening, when she took her orderly sheaf of letters in to her chief to read, he found one mistake. It was the first that he had ever found, and not unnaturally he was annoyed.

"If you're going to get careless, too!" he said.

She knew where McCabe was to be found. He was still in Paris; he had come to England to be decorated by the King, and then returned. Nothing is stranger than the odd likenesses which are as marked as the dissimilarities in human nature. If Maisie had her secret lover who was of the flesh, Rose had hers of the spirit.

She did not wish McCabe to belong to her; she did not wish to belong to him; she thought of him without a thrill, unless it might be of pride. But she thought of him constantly, searched the papers for his name, for every mention of the hospital where she knew him to be working.

She walked home so as to have more time for thought. Her mind did not work quickly, but it worked with great sureness. She now traced back that conversation she had heard between her mother and Charles during the time that they were in Savoy Court—her mother in the drawing-room and her brother in the balcony. Then there were, even before that, things which she had heard them say about McCabe: contemptuous fleers at him for a Quixotic fool: that girl who had been with her brother at the sale of her mother's furniture. It was certain that he had tried to help her in the sort of way in which Maisie now needed help.

There was only one person in the world who never changed, who was always ready to stand by a friend, that was certain, and this was Philip McCabe. She felt less shame at the idea of telling him what had happened—though she was even more Puritanical concerning Maisie than herself—because he was a doctor and he would understand. But still, it was difficult enough, and her cheeks burned at the very thought. She had told her sister that she would not tell any one. But at the time she knew that this was not a promise which it would be possible to keep; the people she had lived among insensibly helped her here.

She turned into a little stationer's shop just close to their lodgings; purchased some paper and envelopes; then asked for permission to write a letter at the accountant's desk.

Her sense of driving necessity, the business methods of expression which had grown upon her during the last year, her awkwardness and embarrassment combined to make of it a singularly crude epistle; so crude that even McCabe was deceived, until he read it a second, even a third time, saying to himself: "Well, upon my soul, she doesn't seem to bother much; and if she doesn't, why the devil should I?"

Anyhow, there was nothing he could do, nothing he would do. He had always thought that Maisie Hoyland looked like the sort of girl who wanted a firm hand. If they needed help, why didn't they appeal to their brother, and not to him? Once and for all, this was the sort of thing in which never again, so long as he lived, would he meddle.

He wrote and told Rose as much, gave her a little advice which had a deliberate air of putting an end to the correspondence.

And yet, when no answer came, he grew uneasy. He had been a brute. That poor girl! Ever since he could remember, she seemed to have been a sort of Cinderella, busied over the dirty linen of the family. He recalled her set, grave ways, as a careworn little old woman of ten or eleven; watching her mother anxiously, to make sure that she was doing everything that was expected of her.

It was all a damned shame! Why hadn't Hoyland kept an eye upon his sisters? Where was Hoyland? What was he doing? He had been wounded, he knew, but not incapacitated.

McCabe had torn up Rose's letter, thinking to get rid of

the thought of it. But gradually the memory of every word grew upon his mind, and with it the realization of its absolute unselfishness.

He had no personal feeling of any sort for the girl, very much doubted whether he would recognize her if he saw her; to his mind she seemed so exactly like every one else. But there was that genius for friendship which was almost a vice, as so many geniuses are. It was no use for him to tell himself that he owed nothing, less than nothing, to Charles Hoyland's sisters. Supposing something dreadful were to happen—suicide, or anything like that! The absence of a further appeal in answer to his letter struck him as more ominous than any outpourings, reproaches; it was so evident that he had been implicitly counted upon to help.

Work was pretty slack; the hospital would very soon be demobilized; it was easy enough to get away for a few days—he wished to God that it wasn't.

Anyhow—though he could never give the sort of help which Rose, with that queer, innocent coolness, had asked of him—he might be able to make it easier for the girls with advice, with money, he thought; and at last, as there was no further word, he packed his bag, left a junior man in charge, and, crossing to Dover, made his way straight up to Sheffield.

The two girls had moved from the address which Rose Hoyland gave to him. "I'm easy enough," said the landlady, "but there are limits, and I'm not as easy as all that; 'avin' my own character to consider!"

Fortunately, however, she could give him their new address, and he went straight on there that very evening. Rose had spoken of work; after all, the evening might be the best time to find her at home.

It was just after nine when he reached the house, after passing through a succession of stale streets, which, in their gathering meanness, were a tragic revelation of the sliding-scale possible to a more or less squalid respectability. The slattern—more like a floor-cloth than a woman, collarless, ragged, down-at-heel—who answered his knock was civil to him, or his uniform, though she did not accompany him upstairs.

"I can't not do it, what with them there veins in me legs, as are something awful; no woman could, with my family an' all on me. Besides which, there ain't no service given with them two top floors. But you'll find the room right

enough, the very top an' opposite ter the 'ead of the stairs."

McCabe, with all his newly-won alert activity, moved as slowly and heavily as an old man up the long flights of stairs. What a place! The whole house reeked of stale cooking and damp dirt! The banisters were dank to the touch; the yellow marbled paper hung in strips or bulged in huge blisters. The one gas-jet, away down in the hall, shed a flickering light—uncertain as the breath of a dying man—as far as the third landing, after which he had to feel his way, conscious that the carpet of the first flight, the torn oil-cloth of the second and third, had given way to bare boards beneath his feet.

The whole place seemed emblematical of what he was going to—hating it, and yet driven by that strange force of pity within him.

How damnable it was that birth, all that came before and after it, should be so lauded—the sanctity of motherhood, and all that!—so fussed and gushed over in some circumstances, and in others so pushed away out of sight. How fearful that any child should come into the world furtive from his first conception, his very cry a menace: people looking at each other, shaking their heads or raising their eyebrows!

The memory came to McCabe of how once, going upstairs in a well-known and luxuriously-appointed house, he had, out of absent-mindedness, opened the door of a housemaid's cupboard instead of that of the beautiful bedroom to which he was bound. Well, that was what life, the giving of life, the beginning of life, was in places like this—a housemaid's cupboard.

He was stumbling against the door which faced the stairs almost before he realized that he had reached the last step. Directly he knocked at the door there was a scuffling sound, as though some one were moving quickly about the room, tidying it, poking things away out of sight; a drawer was opened and shut; then, almost at the same moment, some one cried, "Come in," and he turned the handle.

Rose Hoyland stood in front of him; she was so thin that she looked as though she might be the flat presentment of a woman cut out in paper and faintly tinted. Her long, rather horse-like face was sallow; her mouse-colored hair, swept aside from her high forehead, showed straight strands droop-

ing over either ear; her tidy blouse, of some indeterminate color, with the collar neither quite high enough nor quite low enough, was pulled down so tight, that it emphasized the flatness of her bosom. She had always needed very careful dressing and hair-waving; now she not only had no money, she had no time or thought for such things; every day was a scurrying, shuffling, undignified race against time.

Another figure, bent over the fire, flung aside a mass of wavy dark hair and glanced up. It was Maisie, and McCabe's first thought was, "What a child, and how unchanged!"

There, indeed, was the old Snow-white-and-Rose-red—as he used to call her, running all five words together. By some miracle of nature, shut indoors day after day as she was, her color and brilliance had come back to her, though she glowed now instead of sparkling as she had done. Her neck showed plump and white as milk, above the dull-red dressing-gown; her eyes were wide and bright. It seemed as though that evening, when she cried herself to sleep in her sister's arms had, in some strange way, permanently relieved her, soaking her oppression out of her, clearing her skin, brightening her eyes; as though Rose had actually become the scapegoat, the sin-bearer.

She had intervals of sullenness, but they were incomplete, for her old desire to talk was always the stronger of the two. Then there were other periods of intense longing to see her lover once more, less acute because she was physically engrossed by other claims; of something like despair—and yet not quite despair, for underneath it lay the certainty that something must, and would, "turn up," something wonderful and romantic; while over all hung that protective, smug self-satisfaction, the conviction that they are the only people to be considered, which comes to certain women in her state—the antithesis of that hysterical fear which oppresses others of her sex.

"Why, Doctor McCabe!" cried Maisie, and flushed crimson, drawing her dressing-gown closer to her throat a little disturbed, but still delighted. How long it was since she had seen a man to speak to, how dull the interminable evenings!

Rose shot him an entreating glance as they all shook hands, and in a moment he had taken his cue—that the younger girl was not to know that she had written.

"I got hold of your address, went to the other old hag



first, and she sent me on here. I say, you're awfully comfortable! How jolly to see you again, have a chance of talking over old times!" He sat down, rubbing his hands in front of the fire—which blazed up as Rose added a meager shovelful of fresh coal—and smiled at Maisie. "Well, Snow-white-and-Rose-red, how goes the world with you, eh?"

"It's awfully dull, Mac. And the cold! I really do think Sheffield's the coldest place in the world, and only the first week in November! How I long to get abroad again—long for the sun, the South! Do you remember when we were all at Mentone together? To think of it now!"

"Remember? Of course I do; and the nuisance you were, exacting little wretch; never allowing your sister out of your sight, and with a perfect train of adorers—from sixteen to sixty!"

"How ripping it all was!" Maisie ran off into a rather shrill stream of laughter and reminiscence. What a child she was! And yet, what a woman in the way in which she sat bent forward in front of the fire, obscuring her figure by the position in which she sat, the folds of her red dressing-gown—never once forgetting.

She did not even rise when McCabe took his leave; she looked up at him, smiling. "I daren't get up—this rag"—she indicated her dressing-gown—"is a remnant of my far-away childhood, far above my ankles, and I've no shoes or stockings on. You'd be shocked! But you must take the wish for the deed. Good-by, Mac—dear old Mac. It has been so awfully jolly seeing you again!"

A sudden thought struck McCabe. "I'll come back to-morrow when Rose is at work—an assignation, eh? We'll have a lark together, if you can imagine such a thing with an old fogey like me. Lunch out, anyhow, and perhaps there'd be a *matinée* somewhere, eh?"

She blenched at that; it was piteous to see the change in her, as though some hand had suddenly wiped the youth and color from her face; the old, guarded look which came into her eyes, though her lips were still smiling. She had not counted upon this; that was clear.

"I'm afraid I shan't be at home to-morrow—I'd thought of going into the country, with a friend. Mac, I'm awfully sorry, but—"

"Well, it's not exactly the sort of weather for the country, is it? Anyhow, I'll come on the chance." He stooped down

and raised her chin, turning her face so that he looked straight into her eyes. "We used to be great pals in the old days, Snow-white-and-Rose-red—don't go back on me now. We can none of us afford to lose any friends in this saddened old world of ours."

"I'll light you down the stairs; the hall light's always put out at ten," said Rose, and lit a candle. "It's the only punctual thing about the house!"

She walked down the stairs in front of him, holding the candle high. In the hall, close against the front door, she spoke for the first time, apart from an occasional: "Can you see?" or: "Mind that hole in the oil-cloth."

"I mustn't stay—she'll guess we're talking about her. You will help us? Of course, you'll help us?"

"Not in the way you mean, Rose," he answered gently. "You must know what the law is upon that subject."

"But you have—" she whispered.

"Never again. Rose, if you only knew what it meant!"

She raised the candle higher and gazed at his face, her own gray and drawn: then lowered it and gave a deep sigh.

"I won't ask you; I've no right to ask you! Ah, well, it can't be helped!" Her instant submission, her understanding of his position; her patient re-shouldering of the burden touched him more deeply than any entreaties, however desperate.

"But I'll do all I can; there's a very great deal that I can do. Maisie must go through with it now; but there's every sort of alleviation possible. Do you know the man's name?"

"No—she says she doesn't know it; but that's not true."

"Or where he lives?"

"No. But even she can't tell me that—she speaks the truth there. Sometimes she seems to know so much of the world—then again, she's such a child—so transparent! When I asked his name she would say nothing but 'I don't know—I tell you I don't know.' But when I asked where he lived, she began to cry, clung to me: 'If only I knew!' she said. 'Oh, if only I knew!'—like that."

"I must make her tell me his name when I come tomorrow."

"She won't be in."

"Oh, yes, she will. She was scared, and lied, poor kid! But she's shrewd enough to know that some one must be

told, that I'm really her friend. She'll be in, trust her for that."

McCabe was right in his conjecture; and calling between eleven and twelve next morning, he found Maisie at home and dressed. The room was tidy, but by daylight its crowded air of poverty became more evident. It had an air of sour defiance; as though saying, "Look at me, how ugly I am—a part of the life of these people, as fate, and themselves, and their forbears and this vaunted civilization of yours have made it: there is no concealment anywhere, no attempt at concealment."

The dancing firelight, the lamp, the red dressing-gown and flowing locks of the night before had given a glow to the picture. McCabe had been sincere in his exclamation, "You're awfully comfortable here." He now realized his mistake; they were anything but comfortable; neither in her dress nor her words did Maisie Hoyland make any pretense of anything of the sort; any more than the room itself: that single room to which they were now reduced.

"You know," were her first words, as she shook hands with him, standing upright in the full daylight. "You know. If you didn't know before, and I expect you did, Rose will have told you. You know, so where's the good of pretending?"

She spoke with extraordinary calm and character. The shame of her position had been brought home to her by this incursion of a fourth person; she felt it terribly, as McCabe realized. For weeks she had allowed her elder sister to shoulder the weight of the burden—Rose "would manage things somehow or other"—but the coming of this comparative stranger, his air of grave knowledge, stripped her of that sophism. It was "no good pretending." Philip McCabe might be able to help her, and she needed help. Rose could hide away with her, scrape and save for the end: but she had no initiative; and Maisie realized that she had been mentally drugging herself in her dependence upon her.

McCabe put a few questions, then went straight to the crucial one.

"Now, you must tell me his name."

They had been sitting over the handful of fire, talking frankly as any doctor and patient; but now the girl turned her head on one side, with a dull color in her cheeks, pleating up a tiny fold of her skirt between two fingers.

"I can't do that—I absolutely refuse. Besides, what possible difference would it make?"

"It would help; it's got to help."

"You mean to get him to marry me?"

"Wouldn't that be best, my child? Remember, you've not only got yourself to think of."

"It's too late now—anyhow, it's too late."

"I don't think so." There was silence for a moment or two; then Maisie got up from her seat, moved over to the window. "I won't tell you, that's flat—I can't see that it's any business of yours, of anybody's. It's no good worrying me. It's like Rose—always on and on; but it's no good—I won't tell you, so there you are. If you like to go away and leave me to it. . . . Oh, well, I suppose I shall muddle through somehow—"

McCabe gave a little laugh, so cool and impersonal that she turned round and stared at him in amazement. "You've not got the right word, Snow-white. You don't really mean that you won't tell me his name, you mean that you can't; that it seems impossible to you—like a person who again and again approaches a jump, and then funks—can't rise a step from the ground. It's more than interesting to me, because I've been working on that sort of thing for months and months, in relation to shell-shock. It's as old as the world; an ancient, deep-rooted fear inherited down into an imagined inability—the fear of the spoken word, which goes back to unguessed-at ages. Look how you feel it, the way in which, the more you think over telling any one anything, the more impossible it becomes; until you get so that you can't bear the thought of hearing yourself say it. We see it everywhere: when a man's dying, none of his relations, none of the people round him will mention the word 'death'; they talk of 'passing away,' of 'the end.' It comes in joy as well as sorrow—not 'counting your chickens before they're hatched' is the modern variant of the dread of the census—counting over the people, the flocks and herds, the spoken number. The people of Madagascar won't let any word be used which bears the slightest resemblance to the name of their king, such words are wiped out of the language for the time being. The Ewe tribe in Southern Togo will give their children all sorts of repulsive nicknames, so that they'll not be recognized: such as 'Pig's-trough,' or 'Muck-heap,' poor little devils! Certain men of Toradja tribes must never,

under pain of death, mention the name of their wives' parents, uncles, cousins. It's world-wide. Why, some of the people in the Congo—"

McCabe ran on and on, while Maisie, moving back to the hearth, stood with one arm upon the mantelpiece, staring down at him, her air of bewilderment giving way to one of aggrievance. What in the world was he talking about? What had all this to do with her and her affairs?

"If you really want to know," she said at last, "—though I can't possibly imagine what his name has to do with you, or any one else"—even then she flushed crimson—"it's—" Once again she hesitated. McCabe's talk was in the main that sort of by-play which a conjuror will use to distract the attention of his audience. But at the same time, he had been speaking from a deep knowledge of human nature, as Maisie, half frightened, realized when she did at last utter her lover's name, almost under her breath; that name, the withholding of which had become ingrown with the deepest, because the most primitive, part of her nature.

And yet, once she was out with it, everything else came easier, and she was eager to talk of him; all the more so because, while she realized Rose as antagonistic, McCabe took everything almost as a matter of course, showed no inclination to throw all the blame upon the man as a brute.

As to McCabe himself, the revelation of unguessed-at character and powers of affection in the young girl were more than reassuring: here indeed was stuff of which something might be made. One point in special touched and relieved him; it was evident that she had no idea of trying to get rid of the child which was to be born to her; maybe, she herself was too near the doll age, had seen too little of the world to realize how cruel it could be. At any rate, it seemed odd that, with her easier morality, she rose, in this at least, above her sister. Perhaps the difference lay in the fact that at the back of her mind Maisie still believed that the world was made for her and hers; while Rose, in every thought, action, word, acknowledged herself as fearful and enslaved.

Another reassuring element which slipped out through Maisie's relieved stream of talk, was the fact that her lover was a mere boy, little older than herself. To McCabe's mind unrestrained nature seemed so much more excusable in youth. It was only in later years that it hardened with

deliberation into vice; the very young were seldom altogether cruel or depraved.

After all, their last words were of Charles Hoyland. "Did you never think of telling your brother, asking his advice, help?"

"Never. Never, never, never!" The young girl drew herself up sharply. "Mac! Why, you know what Charles is—how absolutely up to the mark you must be for Charles to be bothered about you. Talk of a champagne standard! If Charles saw the Angel Gabriel, on the last day, with so much as a feather missing, he'd pass by on the other side: 'Not quite my sort. . . .'" Oh, don't you remember Mama, and 'the sort of people worth knowing?'—'people of a K.P.'" Of a sudden she was bitter and smiling. "I wonder what she'd say to me now: 'The sort of person one doesn't know!' And Charles is just the same; you ought to know that, Mac. And you do know—you do know. Is there any one, even those women he used to go about with, who'd be mad enough to turn to Charles in any sort of trouble?"

## CHAPTER VI

PEOPLE do not speak the truth when they declare that love is far-seeing, resourceful. A happy love dazzles, dazes: love and pain together bewilder and stupefy. In any case, the whole mind is bent upon the lover alone, isolated from all else that might help: trifles loom so large as to hide any larger interests at stake.

If Maisie Hoyland had wished to discover the whereabouts of any casual friend, she was quite astute enough to have done so: her lover's disappearance into space seemed so stupendously fateful that it baffled her, deadened her, as though she had run her head against a wall: also, little as she realized this, her physical condition drained her of all initiative. In strange contradiction to her otherwise light nature, she was the instinctive mother: unless her lover were recalled to her by some feeling of shame—the difficulties of keeping up appearances, of life in general—the thought of the new life which was coming to her absorbed her. There was something fine in the amazement with which she met McCabe's warning against any attempt to rid herself of the consequence of her folly. As she was so much less con-

ventionally good than Rose, to that same extent was she better; less dependable, more warmly human.

Having the name, Philip McCabe found little difficulty in discovering the address of Maisie's lover. The family was well known. The very first day, he heard that, though there was no one of the name in Sheffield, there had been a well-known firm in Manchester. A visit to Manchester gave him the actual address of the place where the one-time senior partner had settled when he retired and the business was converted into a company.

The then manager who interviewed him, had been foreman of the spinning-rooms in the old days, and could not speak too highly of his late employer: "There's never been any one like him for hard work and grit, an' fair-dealing: no moving him, no bending him once he had got the notion as ter what was the right thing ter do. But fair, through and through. It ain't likely we'll ever see his like again; they don't breed 'em nowadays, that's the fact."

"Is he still alive?"

"No; dead some years. But they do say as how he's left a daughter as is the dead spit o' him in her ways. There's a son, too, but he's younger, delicate, too, in a sorter way, or so I've heard tell. Queer, ain't it, how the strong, pushing men o' that sort often as not leave poorish sons an' fine daughters? Seems sorterways as though they'd spent all the masculine strength o' them on themselves."

The hatchet-faced man's long chin went out, and his gaze was fixed; with his Northern thoroughness it seemed as though he were as set upon getting to the bottom of this question of race decay as he was upon the meaning of, the reason for, the perfecting of all else which he attempted.

He spoke loudly: for even in the office where this interview took place, with its thick carpets, heavy mahogany furniture, its air of aloof dignity, ordered, and almost leisurely—because so well-ordered—Industry, the vital spirit of the whole place made itself manifest in the roar of machinery, the whirr of hundreds of shuttles. It was like a man's heart, pumping up blood, feeding brain and limbs; in some way performing its functions, however unevenly, through all his paroxysms of hate, love, fear.

To McCabe the whole place was a revelation full of strange comfort. The mills were only working half-time, owing to the shortage of cotton, or so the manager said. But that

meant less than nothing: the thing was going on and on. Nothing could really stop it. What did a day's break here or there matter? It was the significance of the thing which counted. All through the horrors of the war, those wild retreats, those famished, frozen days and nights, those parched and fever-stricken heats, those unimaginable agonies of millions of men, aye, and women, too, this had gone on—unchanging as the smooth, indifferent motions of those dark sisters who throw and twist and cut the thread of Life.

The whole of Manchester, with its roar and rattle, brought to McCabe the same strange sense of comfort. The war was drawing very near to its end. With so awful a sense of loss and upheaval, any real elation or triumph was out of the question; at least, for men like himself, with such abiding memories. The only real hope remaining for them was to be found in holding fast to the commonplaces of life. With a nation as with an individual, it was all very well for a man to lament his loss of youth and love, with its passionate delusion, its pride; let him be thankful that his arteries were still clear, his heart beating, his brain working. So long as that went on, so long as a place like this hummed and stirred, the country had life, at least, to its credit.

McCabe went back to Sheffield that night strangely cheered. He had found fresh lodgings for the sisters, and they were already moved into them. Rose had dropped back to her old habit of acquiescence; it might almost be said of her, as of John Stuart Mill's wife, that there was her one talent. Even to herself those first few months in Sheffield—when she lived alone and decisively, felt her own will, her independence, something which was her one small version of ambition, pushing itself to life, like a slender, sturdy sprout of young wheat—seemed very far away. For that short period she had lived more actively than she would ever live again. Her very love for McCabe was an acquiescent resignation, so little vital, that she realized his absorption in her sister's case without a single pang. He needed her, and that was enough; though it were only as a stand-by, a fellow-support for Maisie. Even the one thing that she had really held to, her financial independence, gave way beneath McCabe's insistence that it would be the rankest selfishness on her part if he were not allowed to help.

He did not mention his expedition to Manchester; it was better not, until he was quite certain; and neither of the



girls asked any question. What agonies of shame and reticence Rose had overcome in writing to him, and worse, far worse, in speaking to him on her sister's behalf, she alone knew. She could never mention it again, never—never—never. Yes, here at least, was something above acquiescence; she was almost passionate in her determined shrinking from the subject. Maisie must be cared for, shielded from any shock or over-fatigue: a remote illness must be prepared for: in her own room at night Rose knitted tiny garments of soft white wool—it was Maisie, for all her frivolity, who could cut out, actually put together into new shape, the fine lawn and lace of her own garments—but the actual reason for it all must never be so much as mentioned. She could not bear to think that the man who was responsible for all this trouble might be found, brought to book: in her almost adamant Early Victorianism she endeavored to shut her eyes to his very existence. It was a priesthood, a people, composed of such natures as Rose Hoyland, who first made the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception possible.

As for Maisie, though she realized what McCabe had been attempting, she asked no questions. She was protecting herself against disappointment, conscious—to the depths of her instinctive, necessary selfishness—that this was far more important than that "Take care" of poor old Rose's; with a hand to her arm whenever the tram started suddenly, or there was a press of traffic crossing the road.

But for all that, something in McCabe's lightened expression raised her from her engrossment, quickened a fresh hope. At any rate, she had reshifted a part of her burden on to his shoulders, and she sprang more upright with this relief, quite unembarrassed by an indebtedness which flattened her sister back to oblivion.

McCabe took them both out to supper at a restaurant that evening, and all through supper and on the way back to their lodgings, Maisie was brilliant and gay—the old Rose-red-and-Snow-white. Her cheeks were like carnations, her brilliant eyes, all the more noticeable for the dark shadow which lay beneath them, wide with excitement. She was wearing the blue dress of which her lover had disapproved, but it would have been a captious man, indeed, who had any fault to find with her upon this special evening.

"Hush, Maisie, you're fey!" was Rose's dulled reproach,

as she sat crumbling her bread, scarcely able to bear the glances of the other people in the restaurant; feeling out of place, shamed. Not ashamed of her sister, but actually shamed. Her head was bent; the short ends of her soft, fair hair—which her mother had insisted upon being daily crisped with curling-irons—fell in wisps at the nape of her neck; her chest was drawn together, her blouse hunched over the shoulder at the back, showing in the front two sharp horizontal creases from under each arm-pit.

Maisie's chatter, Maisie's brilliant beauty, which attracted so much attention even in the quiet little place that McCabe had purposely chosen, was a martyrdom to Rose. She did not put it to herself that because Maisie had been wicked she ought to be unhappy: she never even thought of it; had she done so she would have remembered that the world was not like that; she was simply crucified for her: every curious glance a nail.

She herself had summoned McCabe, and this alone was the ultimate martyrdom of self: the added sum of Maisie's shame weighing upon her shoulders was augmented almost beyond endurance by his presence, the picture of what he might be thinking.

Once when Maisie made some simple girlish jest which set him laughing, she wondered why *she* should be the one to suffer, crushed to earth.

"Trust Maisie to get off scot-free. She always has, always will do." It was the very first time such a thought had come to her. Doubtless Maisie must bear her own physical agony when the time came; but could any mere bodily pain be as bad as this?

"She doesn't feel anything; she has no shame!" she thought again; when, just by chance, her younger sister preceded her down the long room—innumerable Maisies, tall and still slender beneath the loose evening cloak, a succession of dark heads, rosy cheeks and long, slender necks, processing through the mirrors which lined either side of the restaurant; flashing victoriously as a waving flag above the dull, heavy shoulders, dowdy heads of the people, who were still seated at the tables; glancing up at her, following her with their eyes as she passed.

"Walking on in front like that! As if she was already married—for all the world as if she was married!"

How many, how small and subtle are the things for which

women envy each other! Those soft little dark curls at the nape of Maisie's neck, now!

Rose found herself wondering over them in bed that night, during the long hours which passed before she slept. She had never even thought of them before, but quite suddenly she felt that here was something almost more than she could bear; a superfluity, a wantonness in the way of advantage.

And Maisie had walked out of the restaurant first. There had seemed to be nothing which Rose would grudge her sister, but— Oh, well, this dignity of seniority was the only advantage to which she could lay claim. It meant a great deal to her, and she was almost incredibly touchy about it; for the less we have the more we hoard our little mite:

"She has no feeling," she told herself again. But she had not seen Maisie, when—back at their new lodgings, going into the bedroom to remove her hat and coat, fold away her gloves and veil—she and McCabe were left alone in the sitting-room.

Maisie—standing by the fire and gazing down into it: stooping for the poker, and drawing together the half-burnt fragments of coal—was silent for a minute or two; then she straightened herself and turned to McCabe, fixing him with a question that she could no longer resist; a question which—though she still refrained from putting it into words—was so plainly expressed in her glance, that quite involuntarily he answered it:

"Yes; and I'm going to-morrow."

Again there was silence: then Maisie moved towards him, laid her hand upon his arm, plucked at the lapel of his coat, then patted it smooth in a coaxing way she had.

"If you see—see him, don't be hard, Mac, dear; don't be cross and hard. It was my fault just as much as his. I—Mac, he's only a boy—poor old kid!"

Her eyes were dim. She thought of her lover, not as he had been when he had visited her last—hard and contemptuous—but as he was that day when she saw him:

"Alone and palely loitering—"

Ah, yes, those were the words. At the thought of his helpless bewilderment and pain, her heart yearned towards him: there was a chill ache in the breast, against which she would have given worlds to draw his head: holding him close: rocking him, comforting—poor kid!

She was laughing again when her sister reappeared; but the look he had caught upon her face was still in McCabe's mind when he set out upon his distasteful journey next morning.

That maternal instinct, embracing the lover as well as the child, was a devilishly odd, elusive thing: one never knew where one would meet it or where one would miss it.

Sometimes in the most cow-like women it was non-existent; and then, to think of the queer little sprats he had seen absolutely devoured by it!

## CHAPTER VII

ON his journey up to Sheffield, McCabe had seen something of the country through which he passed next day, on his way from the station to the address given him.

At that time, however, the mist-laden dusk had been thickening, and he gathered little beyond the impression of a landscape almost incredibly rugged and broken, strangely split and distorted, harsh, aggressive. It was not until later that he realized the sort of loveableness which one finds in bright, dark eyes beneath an overhanging forehead, harsh, beetled brows.

It was eleven o'clock when he left the ugly little station: passed through the stark gray town, and, even before he was out of it, started to climb a long road which he could follow with his eyes, winding up and up for miles, until it was lost in a belt of trees which fringed the futhermost top of the hill.

Though it was the second week in October, crops of barley and oats were still uncarried, with a few old men laboring among them: laying down their sickles and stooping every moment or so to gather together the shocks: tying them with swathes of straw.

In the lower corner of one precipitous field, running up to the sky-line, an ancient hunchback and meager young boy toiled together; never so much as lifting their heads, as though they lacked courage to face the task before them: an epitome of war.

As McCabe mounted a volley of blasting shook the valley beneath him.

There was not a breath of wind—though the air was dank and cold, biting to the bone: no sound save the far-off bleat-

ing of sheep, the sharp bark of a dog, those occasional deafening roars echoing and re-echoing amid the hills, and up and down the valleys—narrow and precipitous, more fissures than valleys—which, as he rose, stretched out like dark fingers beneath him.

To McCabe's mind the whole countryside gave an impression, despite the blasting, of an immense calm strength, a quiet that went far too deep for any outward sound to touch it. It was altogether apart—as a god—terrible and yet not menacing: a master of men: hard, grasping: neither benign nor comforting, and yet just: a god which, once this was acknowledged, with its clearly-defined boundary to man's presumption, might be leaned upon, sheltered under. A country to love or to hate, never to merely like.

There were sparse bunches of red berries still remaining on the leafless mountain ashes, a coquetry as superficial as a flower behind the ear of a giant. For the rest, it was all of shades of gray: grayish-green grass, gray rocks, verging to blackness, gray sky; and, as McCabe mounted, gray-white mist; in rolling masses beneath him, gossamer-like around him. His hair and lashes were wet, his clothes sparkling with tiny drops: he was possessed by such a feeling of cleanliness as he had never known. It was as though he were washed through and through, inside and out.

An old, yellowish man was breaking a heap of yellowish stones on the far top of the hill. McCabe felt sure that he must have climbed a good dozen miles, and yet at the station they had said six. He took off his cap and wiped his forehead, as he inquired the way.

Only another mile or so, dipping down yonder. It was some time before the old man could catch the question: he came close to McCabe, putting his hand behind his ear, opening his mouth, with its fringe of yellowish-white hair, as wide as possible.

Having answered the stranger's question, he leant his huge shoulder against him, and began to talk: "Whiles," he broke stones and "whiles" he was "put away," on account of something "danged queer" in his head.

"Swellin' an' swellin' fit ter busst. There Oi be some days thinkin' as 'ow the Lord's good an' it's fine ter be alive up among o' these 'ere quiet hills, and the beasts an' all: and Oi willin' ter go on just breakin' stones an' breakin' stones, day in an' day out, till 'E do see fit ter call Oi. Then,

fur no reason as Oi can see, Oi do cum over that gait as Oi feels as 'ow I must be bashin', some'un or other. All the blood boilin' up in me, thick in my eyes the way as Oi can't see folk comin' along the road, but they looks all gory-red: settin' me thinking 'ow they'd be supposin' Oi was ter taeke 'em an' break their cops in bits, same as these 'ere stones. It's plain then the way as Oi do be goin', Bible plain; an' I sez ter my daughter, Oi sez, sez Oi: 'Oi'm off.' 'Er don't not ask no questions at that, 'er dursn't, mind yer—not fur 'er life 'er dursn't: but 'er does up me bits o' traps an' off Oi goes ter 'sylum down away yonder." He jerked a vague thumb. "The doctor there, 'e knows Oi, 'e do, and a main pleasant gentleman 'e do be. 'Cum away in,' 'e says, 'an' welcome, too.' And in Oi goes, an' there Oi do bide until this 'ere takin' do be overpast— All on account o' that there danged war it be, or so they do say."

"But surely you've not been in the war?"

"Nay, nay, maister. But, look 'ee 'ere. The war do be in Oi—in Oi"— he smote his chest, still so wide between the bowed shoulders, like some great cave but half fallen in—"it be in Oi—that's what it do be: all our fine young fellows maimed and dyin'; all the slayin'; all the squawking out an' pain, the fearsome pains o' 'Ell— All the wild ways o' the world, bent on killin', an' on naught else, loike ter a ravening lion. Past all bearin' an' reason—it do be in Oi, in Oi! Eh, dearie me, wid my poor 'ead the way it do be—an' the very sky aw bloody red at sunrise an' sundown—past all bearin' it do be, maister!"

"The war do be in Oi." How horribly true it was for many; and would be, too, for another generation, at least, thought McCabe, moving down the incline into a more urbane and sheltered region; turning in at the open gate and up the rough drive leading to the long, low house, which a group of urchins had indicated to him as the one of which he was in search.

There were onions laid out to dry upon pieces of sacking on the stone seats at either side of the porch. The door was open, and three dogs lay dozing in front of the wood fire—a nondescript yellow bitch; a half-grown mongrel, with a waving tail, dragging it all sideways—like a ship that is over-engined—and a solemn Aberdeen—which got up and came out to meet him: sampled with their noses such portions of his person as they could reach, and then, passing

him as one of their own sort, thrust cold, wet muzzles into his palm.

An elderly woman hurried across the hall, wiping water-sodden hands upon a large white apron.

"Well!" It was an odd greeting, or rather interrogation. To McCabe's mind it seemed as though her strong, spare form, her face with its high cheekbones—its network of fine red veins, tight, wistful mouth, small, light-gray eyes, spun round with innumerable wrinkles—were somehow characteristic of the austerity of that countryside to which she so evidently belonged.

For a moment or so she stood on guard, piercing him with her gaze, weighing him up. When he said, "I want to see Mr. Anthony Clayton," it struck him that a quick shade of fear ran like the shadow of a passing cloud across her face, but her glance never wavered.

It seemed, however, that searching, remorseless and un-biased, into the very depths of the stranger's nature—his past and present—she found something which she instinctively trusted, for she loosed her hand from the door which she had barred, standing well across the threshold.

"Cum away in, Oi'll call the lad."

Once inside, she again hesitated, then glanced round the hall. There was a narrow staircase running straight up out of it; to the side of the stair, almost under them, was a baize door; to the left a door; to the right a wide passage, which evidently led to other rooms, and to the left of this yet another door. The whole place was a series of eyes and ears.

"It's—well, private business," said McCabe, and she nodded sharply; then opened the door immediately to the left of the stone-flagged passage and showed him into a long drawing-room, with pale chintz-covered furniture: an air of eternal waiting, a deathlike resignation to its own loneliness, the stepmother-like care that was accorded to it.

She pulled up the blinds, rearranged a chair or so; moved towards the door, and then turned and looked at him. Her whole face was gathered up into innumerable wrinkles, buttoned at the mouth; her eyes, strained and shining, met McCabe's once more. She hesitated for a moment, and then put up one rough hand to her mouth, which had begun to twitch, wryly.

"Mind yer, 'e's nowt but a lad," she said, an agony of

appeal in her voice, and, turning, left the room, moving with the swiftness of a beetle, barely raising her feet from the floor.

McCabe walked over to the window and looked out. There were a few frost-wilted chrysanthemums, a rough strip of lawn; but beyond that nothing, for the mist had rolled up from the valleys and gathered like a gray wall around the house.

The air was perfectly still, the house silent. The dogs had returned to their own fireside, but they were not resting. McCabe could see them through the open door: the two elders sitting upright, with lifted chin, the puppy glancing uneasily from one to another, waving its tail.

A girl in a rough, brown tweed coat and skirt passed the window. McCabe heard her scraping her boots at the door; then the woman who had admitted him scurried across the hall. There was a low-voiced confab, and a moment later Diana Clayton entered the room in which he stood waiting.

She had removed her hat; the hair round her ears, across her forehead and at the nape of her neck, her eyebrows and thick, short lashes, were glistening with moisture as McCabe's had been.

As she came straight into the room and shut the door behind her, his first thought was that he had never seen any one so perfectly self-possessed, or rather, oblivious of self; not from any cocksureness, but from a deep engrossment in something apart from all personal feeling.

Her hair, flattened back from her forehead by her hat, showed a brow low and broad, white as a child's: her eyes, between the reddish-brown lashes, a shade brighter than her hair, were dark blue, steady as a sailor's; rather broadly-built and deep-breasted, she moved with a balanced sureness and poise. Although he realized that she was still unmarried, McCabe's passing idea of her as a girl had gone in a moment. She was a woman, and, more than this, all that womankind may mean to a wanderer—England, home, sureness, rest.

At one side of her mouth there was a dimple. It was incongruous, and yet he was grateful for the feeling it gave him. It seemed like a sort of flag of truce—something at which he might laugh, the excuse for a possible teasing tenderness.



"You wanted to see Anthony?" she said, and her voice matched her presence—low-pitched and steady.

"Yes."

"He isn't dressed—he was late last night, but he's coming." It was noticeable that she did not ask McCabe to sit down; that from the beginning there was no sort of pretense between them: at one with the very aspect of the country, the house, the old servant, she seemed to be prepared for something inevitable in the way of trouble—if not tragedy. "My brother's not yet of age—I'm his guardian, responsible for everything; if there's anything wrong—"

"I'm afraid there is. It's a difficult thing to speak of—I don't know if I ought—to a woman—"

"If it's difficult to speak of to a woman, then it's connected with a woman?"

There was a North-country shrewdness in this question, her grave, direct glance. She might be simple, but it was certain that she was no fool.

"Yes."

"Doctor McCabe—I think that is what Nanny said—" She hesitated a moment, then, as McCabe bowed, went on: "I am altogether responsible for my brother. We have always been a very great deal to each other, he and my mother and myself; but somehow I've lost his confidence—failed him. I know that there has been"—she hesitated and flushed crimson—"some change in him. It's not that he's grown up"—she paused again, her steady gaze full upon him; then, quite suddenly, as it seemed, she gave him her confidence—"not grown up, no more of a man, but aged—oh, terribly aged! And if I knew what it was, if only I knew—if you could tell me, I might do something. As it is, it is all so vague, so—dreadful."

McCabe moved to one of the windows and stood staring out. The mist had closed up, like a besieging army: pressing forward, noiseless, persistent, it surrounded them.

From somewhere far away in the house the faint notes of a flute floated down upon the still air.

An odd feeling came to him, that though he and this steady-eyed girl were drawn apart from the rest of the world—with that amazing sense of intimacy which comes in the first moment of meeting, or not at all—they were cast for nothing more than the principal chorus in some pre-ordained

drama, in which the bitter-sweet serving-woman, the distant flute-player, were no more than other auxiliaries. Nay, the flute itself was a prelude, the close-pressed mist not a curtain—certainly not an army, as he had first thought—so much as a pale audience: critical, watchful: just too patient for antagonism.

The bareness of the chill room, with no sign of familiar occupation, strengthened this impression. Here was all the austerity of a Greek stage; the faintly-tinted walls with their faded water-colors, counted for nothing, impeded nothing; the amphitheater of the hills constituted the true setting.

"There are two girls in Sheffield, the sisters of an old friend of mine," began McCabe slowly. "One of them, the younger, is the merest child. It seems that she had a lover of whom no one knew anything. They have been very poor, earning their own living, totally unprotected—" He broke off; the whole thing seemed so de-humanized by telling; it was almost impossible to believe that it was Maisie of whom he spoke.

"Yes!" It was the merest breath, but it helped him.

"She has not seen anything of him for a long time; he has left her." McCabe had realized a sort of bald monotony in his tone, but it broke now, roughly, passionately. "She is the merest child, I tell you! the prettiest creature!"

"Yes—and you mean—my brother—"

"Oh, but surely there is some one older—more responsible!" McCabe gave a rough gesture of despair, impatience.

"I am responsible; there is no one else."

"Well—as you will have it"—if he had not spoken brutally, he felt that he could not have spoken at all—"She is a child, I tell you, the merest child, and yet—and yet, within a few months she will be a mother."

"And Anthony—?"

"Yes. Oh, good God! to think—!"

"A moment—he—"

She broke off; for the first time her eyes, heavy with pain, turned from McCabe. There was a hesitating hand upon the door; a pause; then it opened—not very wide—and a tall boy entered the room; closed it, advanced a few steps, and stood glancing from his sister to the stranger, who had turned with her; then back to his sister, biting his lip, frowning.

"You're Anthony Clayton!" McCabe's tone was harsh, but some of the righteous anger with which he had been charged was gone. Miss Clayton had been right: this boy was not grown up, though in some strange way he was—yes, he was, actually, old. It was as though youth had been quite prematurely drained out of him: nothing save the dregs of life, of unutterable memories, left in its place. The outward appearance of him was like some clean surface scrawled over with lewd words, wantonly defaced. His blue eyes were sullen, yet strangely pitiful. His mouth quivered like a child's, and yet there were plain lines of dissipation, still faint because they were so fresh. He was very tall and thin; his rough tweed suit hung loosely to his immature figure.

As he did not stir from the door, his sister moved a step towards him, put out one hand, then drew it back and stood silent between the two men.

"There is a young girl in Sheffield"—McCabe's tone was set, and he spoke slowly, with difficulty; the whole thing was too horrible, remembering Maisie as he had seen her sitting by the fire in her red dressing-gown, her curly hair about her shoulders—"a girl—a lady—who has been brought up in the midst of every sort of refinement, who knows—or, rather, knew—nothing of the world, a beautiful girl, as innocent— Oh, but you know all that, better than any one!" he broke off. Once more his anger was working within him, but it was the outcome of a desperate exasperation more than anything else. He would like to have shaken the boy, shaken out of him—what— Well, what?—unless it were that intangible something which, even then, he felt as alien, responsible for the suddenly assured hard stare, the sneer.

"Is one allowed to ask what in the world you're talking about?"

"As if you didn't know! My God! for you to stand there and ask me that, you young devil, you! Weren't there enough women in the world already spoilt, that you couldn't leave her alone? Maisie—" He took a step forward, almost threatening—the old McCabe, as fiercely partisan as ever—then paused, conscious of an amazing change in the boy's expression, his whole face, the very pose of his body.

"Maisie!" he breathed; then again: "Maisie?" It was like a slate and some one with a sponge; he flushed as

delicately as a girl, his eyes were limpid. "He's only a kid"—McCabe remembered that. All the ugly contempt and sullenness was gone; and yet—and somehow this was more extraordinary than anything else—there was no hint of shame, rather a sort of tenderness; above all else, an air of bewilderment, a half-frowning, half-smiling retrospection: that sort of drawing-back into his own mind to be seen in one who catches something of the aroma, the teasing memory, of a first love.

"Maisie?" he repeated again.

"Yes, Maisie Hoyland." McCabe's tone was patient, gentle; all the interest of the physician was alert. Here was something which he could not account for. As he spoke, Diana Clayton turned and gave him a look of which he could make nothing; for a moment it seemed to him that her mouth was framing the name "Hoyland!" But she did not speak.

Then, quite suddenly, her brother's expression changed. It was as though his real character, personality—call it what you will—was reversed, the simple boyishness which McCabe realized as his true self snatched back out of sight.

It was like a scene shown by a magic-lantern, in which the operator places the wrong slide into the frame; then—realizing his mistake almost before it is done—tweaks it away so quickly that it gives nothing more than a fleeting impression of something half guessed at.

He turned away from under McCabe's eyes with a harsh laugh, and slouched over to the window, with his hands high in his hip pockets, his shoulders hunched.

"You've got it there, whoever you may be. Hoyland! I owed him that much, anyhow. His own sister, too! That's the cream of the whole thing. After all, it was he who first showed me life!"

"Life! You call it life! To ruin a young girl like that. You unspeakable young blackguard, you—!"

"Oh, well, what else is it? Life—all a sort of carnage, preying upon each other. But, of course, if you're in love with the young lady yourself, I'm quite ready to relinquish my claim. As it was, I'd half forgotten—forgotten—" McCabe, who could catch nothing more than his side face, saw him frown, put up one hand to his mouth, while his insolent tone broke, was slurred as though he were but half sure of his part. There was a moment's silence, then he

swung round, almost savagely, exasperated as McCabe himself.

"Damn it all, what do you mean?—comin' here reminding me, when I'd almost forgotten—half forgotten? Maisie—Maisie—so devilishly pretty, so—so—"

"You can't deny that you're the father of the child—even you, callous, hardened!"

If McCabe had not spoken roughly, loudly, he could not have spoken at all. All the while, he knew that the real Anthony Clayton was neither indifferent nor callous; but the whole thing was like a dream in which the dreamer hears himself shouting at the top of his voice. He was irritated beyond bearing by his own lack of understanding, by having to say such things with the boy's sister standing there, silent, between them.

The door opened again, and Mrs. Clayton entered the room. For a moment she hesitated, then with the unswerving directness of the blind moved across the room to her son's side, laid her hand upon his arm.

McCabe's confusion and bewilderment grew; he felt meshed round, with something intangible, far removed from real life; guilty, drawn into an affair which had nothing whatever to do with him.

Despite the fact that the boy shrugged away from his mother's hand, turned, staring out of the window, there was something strangely united about the family. Of course, it was rank nonsense to have any idea of treading upon holy ground, with the memory of Maisie Hoyland, and yet that was the thought which came to him.

The only person who seemed quite real, apart from himself, was Diana Clayton—grave, puzzled. The other two were mere shadows in the dim room, with the fog pressing in at the windows, filming the atmosphere.

Through the open door McCabe could see the dogs, turned towards them now; even the puppy motionless, bolt upright; while the old servant, with no pretense at concealment, stood on guard, watchful, listening.

There was a silence which, for the life of him, McCabe could not have broken. Then Diana began to speak, putting what McCabe had stammered over into words almost Biblical in their directness.

She made no effort to palliate or excuse; there was no sign of doubting his word; she did not even blame her

brother, blame the girl—any one. She was very pale, but her level glance moved calmly between the three of them.

“And her name?” McCabe had been sure of some sort of outcry from the mother—amazement at, denial of, what her daughter told her. But to his astonishment there was nothing more than this calm—“And her name?” What, by all that was holy, could a name matter at this juncture? It was scarcely even a question: there was something in the lift of the blind woman’s head, as though she knew it already, as though it were the keystone to some fabric slowly building up in her own brain; while over and above this there was a meaning to which he missed the clew in the girl’s glance, in the tone in which she repeated it:

“Maisie Hoyland.”

“Wait.” As Mrs. Clayton put up a hand, for some reason or other McCabe’s glance was drawn to the old servant. He saw her turn her head, while her look of half-scornful incredulity changed to one of abhorrence; she moved back a little, pulled her large white apron on one side, while the dogs backed away from the hearth.

Once again the feeling as though, apart from the boy, they were supernumeraries in some incredible drama flashed over McCabe.

Here, as he felt certain—though he could not have said why—was the principal. The old servant seemed to hang for ages, rigid in her aversion, and yet it could not have been more than a moment before Charles Hoyland stumbled across the dim hall, entered the room.

“That’s why she was so astonished!” thought McCabe, with the memory of Diana’s expression when he had mentioned Maisie’s name; then: “Good God, what’s the fellow done to himself?”

His trained senses were alert in a moment. Hoyland looked horribly ill: his eyes were dazed, his every movement strained and jerky; his forehead wet with sweat. “It looks like—” The thought broke off in horror. The suspicion was such that he hesitated to formulate it, even to himself; besides, there was no telling, at the first glance, like that.

Hoyland’s gaze had made straight for Diana, and hung upon her with strained entreaty: his hands went out to her in a strangely awkward gesture. His expression, the way in which he held himself, were so alien to the man whom

McCabe had known that a doubt swept through his mind. Was this really Charles Hoyland? He knew that it was—well, to the common acceptance; and yet what was it that really constituted a man's self, his personality? If it was what one was accustomed to, that was gone. He was as little like what he had always known of him as a Guy Fawkes is like the figure which it represents. There was no sign of the smooth suavity, the curves, the cool self-confidence; whatever it might be that had blown him out, filled him, was gone; he was pricked, flaccid, despite those strange starts of physical rigidity.

"Doctor McCabe—" began Diana, and raising his blood-shot eyes, his head still bent, Hoyland ran his glance round them. For a moment McCabe's eyes held his, uneasy, shifting; then they dragged themselves back to Diana.

His chin jerked, his limbs twitched. McCabe saw him clench his hand, in the endeavor to keep quiet, this man who had been so imperturbable. The whole thing was too frightful; he might have been a marionette upon a piece of elastic, or the thief embracing his cross.

"Hoyland," McCabe heard himself speaking more loudly than usual, with exaggerated plainness. It seemed as though he were addressing the other man from a distance, as though he were outside the ordinary pitch of voice, focus of sight.

"I want to speak to you about your sister—Maisie. If we were alone—"

He had expected the other man's attention to turn to him at this, made sure that he would lead him apart—Hoyland, who had so abhorred any exposure, washing of dirty linen in public. But here again was a change.

"Auch!" He made an impatient gesture, as though to brush McCabe on one side, as if nothing he could say or do was of the slightest importance. He had moved up quite close to Diana, and as she stepped back, put out one hand with a pawing gesture.

"Diana—there's something—something—I'm damnably ill. You must help me, you know—look, now, I—I—horrible—scared—I can't—can't—" There were tears in his eyes and voice; he broke off, blubbering.

"Look here, Hoyland." McCabe put a hand upon his shoulder, twisting him round. His manner to the girl, the way in which he touched her, nauseated him so that the calm aloofness of the physician, his amazement and pity,

were lost in the feeling with which one regards that which is unhuman, eminently disgusting.

"I've got something to tell you. Do you hear what I say? Will you listen to me? I come from your sisters. I suppose you knew they were in Sheffield, quite near to you, alone and miserably poor?"

"What the devil—?" Hoyland shrugged his shoulder petulantly aside.

"Come, now, did you or didn't you?" McCabe went straight to his point. After all, there could be no question of greeting, smoothing the way, drawing the other man apart. They were all too much in it, too inexplicably tangled, for any such niceties. The whole thing was, already, so apart from real life, and yet so inevitable, that his whilom friend's presence failed to surprise him. Even his changed appearance slipped into a sort of fitness.

It was all like a puzzle in which the last fragment makes the whole thing complete, set as it was meant to be.

"How could I know!" retorted Hoyland fretfully. Once again he made that gesture as though to brush the other man, his tiresome, trivial question aside. Nothing and nobody on earth mattered save the remnant still remaining of himself—that was all, that was life; even Diana only counted as a part of himself, necessary to him. He was like some wild animal at bay—cringing, fearful, and yet ready to snap. All the smooth veneer, so deeply inlaid that it had seemed part of himself—that work of art, matured and perfected through generations to the appearance of a perfectly civilized man, shaved down and then super-added to—was rent. Drunk or in love, his calm cynicism had held; but here was something out of the very depths, bestial and cowardly.

"Your mother died and left them alone, practically penniless," went on McCabe. "Oh, I'm not telling you—you know already; but these others, so deeply involved, this unhappy boy! They appealed to you, at least Rose did—perhaps the other knew you better. But you'd do nothing to help; you disappeared, you didn't even let them know where you were. You didn't care what became of them, though you knew well enough—who better?—the sort of temptation such girls were likely to be exposed to. A week or so ago Rose wrote to me."

"Rose! Temptation! That congealed piece of virginity; that's good!" There was a flash of the old Hoyland in



the sneer, the glance he threw at McCabe, though the next moment his eyes were back upon Diana, entreating for what?—for what? Through all his anger and contempt McCabe realized and wondered over this air of desperate entreaty, craving dependence. Did this frightful egoist realize at last all that he had missed in life?—the plight of the moth with the star.

By the window the boy Anthony was staring from one to the other, like some one who is just awakened from a dream, half in one world, half in another.

“Rose—thank God, she is so quiet, cold—it’s the only possible chance for a girl in that position, out of her own world. But Maisie—what of Maisie? By God! Hoyland, I don’t believe that any sin committed could touch what you’ve omitted to do there. You knew that she was going to be beautiful. What don’t you know of women, of what attracts men? You actually counted upon it as a family asset—the chance of a legalized sale. Then, when it seemed that you might be called upon to sacrifice something, not so much money, but time, thought, personal freedom, you just let her go—the game not worth the candle, I suppose you thought!”

“Wh—wh—?” For a moment Hoyland turned to him, stuttering; then jerked himself aside.

Distraught as he was, something of his old worldly wisdom still held. These middle-classes were so absurdly proper; if that little fool Maisie had made a mess of things—and there was only one slip over which one was so portentously solemn in regard to women—it might make everything more difficult between himself and Diana.

“Where? Well, don’t you—*you*, of all people!—know the road for pretty, weak creatures like that, brought up to every sort of luxury?” insisted McCabe mercilessly; “with absolutely no equipment for life, fighting their own battles, earning their own living. Is it any wonder that Maisie has—?”

“Diana, Diana, listen!” He would not even look at McCabe. “My sisters chose to go their own way—what could I do? I don’t know what lies that fellow’s told you. But that younger one—I tell you she was always like that—always—fast—headstrong—a little animal. Why, I could tell you things about her when she was the merest child,” Hoyland ran on. McCabe was amazed at his volubility, so

different from that he had known of him. "The other one, Rose, was as stubborn as a mule—they broke my poor mother's heart between them. I swear to you, Diana—swear it!—I knew nothing of their movements. They wouldn't tell me—trust them for that!—they'd laid their plans—but if ever two girls were pre—"

The word, the sentence, snapped sharply with the effect of cutting a taut string upwards with a knife. His head gave a backward jerk. As he put up his hand to his chin, McCabe realized the purplish flush round the scrap of black sticking-plaster at one side of his mouth.

"You neither knew nor cared, but you've got to know now—by God, you've got to know, if I have to brand it into you!" said McCabe grimly. The others were close to him. They were so much one that it would not have seemed strange if he had put his hand into Diana's. Before Hoyland's appearance they had been two parties—"those Claytons" and himself; but now Hoyland alone stood apart. For a moment his eye ran furtively from one to another; his head was bent; if he had actually slavered it would have seemed all of a part.

"You left those two girls to face the world alone, as best they could—perfectly good girls until this happened—you know that; you—"

"If Maisie's got herself into trouble it's nothing to do with me, do you hear!" shrieked Hoyland. "She was always like that, I tell you, a born wanton. Do you think I don't know the type? I—I—! Let her lover marry her, if he's fool enough. He'll pay for it, pay through the nose. 'Perfectly good until now!'" His voice rose higher and higher. "Don't we all know what that means? Every girl's 'perfectly good' until there's sufficient temptation! Good heavens! isn't that why there are so many perfectly good? Untempted, because they're untempting; no other reason. Diana, if you knew the world as I do—Diana—"

"Perfectly good—and you know it, you foul-mouthed beast! I think Miss Clayton knows it, too. Upon my soul, Hoyland—your condemnation would clear any one. Apart from them, did it ever occur to you to wonder what your pupil might be doing in Sheffield?"

"Up to no good, I'll be bound. I knew what he was from the first—any man of the world would have known it. I tried to keep it from his people here—I've done my best—"

before Christ I've done my best! You believe that—Diana, you must believe that!" He moved a step forward and put one hand upon her arm. There was something terrible in his every gesture: a dog, fawning, yet savage. "He's corrupt through and through. Every vice, every—every imaginable—" He broke off, then caught himself together again. "But what in the name of all that's holy has Anthony got to do with Doctor McCabe—with my sisters—with—with—"

Suddenly it came to him. For what reason, in what extremity, did women turn to McCabe? During the last few days he had felt deadened, confused; but now the memory of that day when he had tracked young Clayton through the mean streets of Sheffield flashed upon him, clear-cut and complete. As though it had been thrown upon a screen, he saw that untidy living-room, where he had found his pupil, littered with the innumerable signs of a woman's occupation; the curled snapshot stuck into the frame of the mirror, and everything else slid into place.

"Diana, listen to me! You must listen to me!"

The girl had drawn away her arm, but he caught at her hand, cool and smooth to his burning touch. He was half wild with fear, a sense of some inexplicable horror. Unless Diana would help him, hold by him, he was lost. Everything else was cut away from under him. His will, helpless in the grip of those physical tremors, which shook him from head to foot, had let Anthony slip; left him drained of all that the boy had once yielded to him; it was like being bled.

His old self, with all its impregnable self-confidence, was gone. There was nothing left; he was hung in space, an agonized body, no more. A man who had lived for self, bereft of self.

"You never told me that you had sisters in Sheffield—so near. If you didn't know where they were, what does that show—in itself?"

It was Diana who was speaking, drawn definitely apart from him. These good women! how damnably hard they were! He was a fool to turn to her, and yet she seemed the only one who could help, the one possible antidote to the agony which racked him. Wasn't there some method of deadening pain by freezing? Whoever invented that must have known Diana Clayton.

And yet, to others, how kind she could be!—her own

family—McCabe there. The devil take the fellow, but there was already something between them; he had caught their glances.

“Oh, now we know, your sister can come here; we will have a chance to do all that’s possible,” she went on. “But for you—before God, Mr. Hoyland, I believe that you are the one who is responsible. For them, if she is so young, if she loves Anthony, if Anthony loves her—”

“Di! Of course, isn’t that plain? She knows that—always, always!” broke in young Clayton. “No one could see her and not understand—she knows that herself. Why, that’s the only thing that’s clear-cut—our caring for each other. There was one evening we had tea together; I felt rotten . . . a damp, cold evening, and I remember”—he hesitated, searching his memory—“I remember—Oh, if only I *could* remember—if only—”

He was trembling from head to foot, but he held himself erect; the slouch was gone. His glance was bewildered, distressed and yet cleared, passing from one to the other. If ever devils were cast out, they might have left a man thus, clean, emptied: “It’s all like a dream, the sort of dream in which one is some one else, and yet oneself: doing awful, filthy things—trampling people underfoot, and not caring. But if ever I’ve harmed Maisie—Di, Mother, you must believe me—it wasn’t me, not really me—I was at the back of myself. Sometimes I realized what I was doing, all of a sudden: then the Thing—before God, I don’t know what it was—took possession of me again. I couldn’t make myself care. I wanted to hurt; to be up to all sorts of beastly, low tricks. I know it must be jolly hard to understand—I don’t understand myself; but look here, sir,—”

He raised his mother’s hand from his arm, and took a step towards McCabe, his troubled eyes full upon him. “I didn’t know—I myself—I didn’t. I give you my word I didn’t.”

“That’s good! A sort of moral kleptomania; the old excuse—irresponsibility, the ignorance of innocence! You and that young sister of mine—a born harlot!—a pair of you, a pretty—a pretty—” broke in Hoyland; then stopped with a jerk which swung him on his heels, his spine curved, his head thrown back.

For a moment it seemed as though he must fall, and McCabe put out one hand; but he pulled himself together again; turned to Diana, catching at her sleeve.

"If you knew that fellow as well as I do—that McCabe—doctor he calls himself!—the questionable cases he's been mixed up in—prison, that's the place for him! If the police knew where he was, if I gave so much as a hint—" Hoyland snapped his fingers with an oddly wild gesture: then caught at Diana's arm, dragging her round towards him. "Look at me—by Christ, I'll have you look at me!"—he almost shouted the words as he realized the way in which the girl's eyes had turned towards McCabe.

"I love you—no one can ever love you as I do—Don't I know life? Haven't I tried everything?—come to you at last? What milk-an'-water fool could ever teach you—show you life—appreciate you—waken you, as I can?—you beautiful, cold thing, you! I hate you—and yet I love you—worship you! You've brought me down—I could crawl to you. I never cared before—it was always the others—always—those damned clinging, weeping women!—but now . . . Diana, look at me, look at me! Don't mind those others, they're nothing to us, nothing. It's you and I against the world. You have no faintest conception what life might be—stuck up here, among these hills—frozen, starved!—all the sunshine, the laughter, the beauty—Art, music, passion. You and I, Diana—you and I, with the world before us—only think what it means. There's that young cub of a brother of yours, killing himself with dissipation—my precious sister—Let them go their own way. We, you and I, have the will to live—Let them go; they and your mother—Mad—mad—of course, you know, mad as can be. But you—you—"

The short, broken sentences had rapped out of him like hail on an iron roof—quickenings at every word, sharp, distinct. For a moment he paused, his face horribly distorted; then launched forward again on a slurred stream of abuse, foul invective.

It was as though the sewer of the sin, filth, degeneration of the entire world, penned up through all ages, had accumulated in this single human being—this semblance of humanity—and now, breaking bounds, swept over them; bearing on its tide a revelation of things but half guessed at, a selfishness, a lust and cruelty beyond all words.

The whole thing was so amazing that the flow was at its full before McCabe, gathering himself together, stepped forward, and was laying a hand upon Hoyland's shoulder,

when he was jerked backwards with a crash upon the floor.

"And the devil rent him—"

McCabe, kneeling beside the distorted figure, raised his head and glanced up at the blind woman. She was standing with her son's arm round her, one hand in her daughter's—  
"Those Claytons!" as Hoyland would have said.

The old servant had entered the room, was looking down at the prostrate man, her lips pinched tight. A scared girl, with her cap at the back of her head, peered round the lintel of the door, and McCabe called to her—"Fetch a couple of men, if there are any about. We must get him up to bed." He half-turned to Diana—"Is there any one with a horse, that I can send to—I suppose Buxton's the nearest town?—there are things I must have."

"I'll go myself—I can get off quicker than any one else." She moved forward and stood for a moment so close to McCabe's shoulder that he could smell the damp air upon her skirt, feel the strength and the quiet of her; then, turning aside, she pulled a coverlet from the sofa, and spread it over the twitching figure upon the floor, while McCabe took out his note-book and pencil.

"I'm afraid it's not much use; it's evidently gone pretty far. He must have got some sort of cut or abrasion—Perhaps that—" Hoyland's reddened eyes were dragged wide, as though held open—the lower lid pulled down—but they never wavered as McCabe indicated the scrap of sticking-plaster—"Do you know what that was? Is there any chance that some soil—?"

"Yes, we were driving—it must have been a piece of mud kicked up from the horse's hoofs; with a sharp splinter of stone in it. Do you think—Why, it happened before, the first day he was here—only clean earth and a bit of stone; it couldn't—" She broke off, slow-dawning comprehension in her grave eyes as she took the paper from McCabe's hand.

"An anti-toxin to be injected along the spine—and sodium bromide—or hyoscine—there's no knowing what they'll have in a little country town. But—" he gave a gesture of despair. "Oh, well; the first thing's to get him to bed, of course—absolute quiet. Ah, now—"

A couple of men in earth-stained corduroys appeared in the doorway. The old servant moved towards them, beckoning, her chin sideways in the air so that she should not see

what lay upon the floor: the thought came to McCabe—"How unalterable those sort of people are in their hatred, their affections?"

They were all gathered round Hoyland—the men stooping over him—and yet they remained intangibly apart. It was as though, while their bodies advanced, their innermost selves, all that was most native to them, drew back, separate and aloof.

"The end—What else is there for one who has sinned against his soul? The people, our people, the very birds and beasts of the fields, drew back from him, always, from the very beginning—What could he do, where could he go?" It was the blind woman who spoke; her voice was wrung with pity, and yet she was no nearer to Hoyland,—McCabe realized that, realized, with a sudden sense of horror, that no one had ever been near to him; even those unhappy women who had loved him—"His own kind was raw to his touch"—it was as though she had voiced his thought—"The wind, the sky, the very trees, held apart, waiting,—and now, at the end, the earth from which he sprang—the resentful earth—has conquered."

## CHAPTER VIII

THE SNOW came early that year—in the Peak district, at least—the white banner of a promised peace. Here and there it was broken by the sides of the sharp gray crags, black in contrast. For the rest, it lay smooth above the sleeping earth; in deep, rounded drifts down the roads, heaped up against the walls, almost immeasurably deep in the dales.

It began upon the evening of McCabe's arrival at Ox Lee; wild with storming winds, frantic in its fall; as though the decaying earth could never be shrouded quickly enough: wrapped away decently beneath its smooth swathings, hidden out of sight until the resurrection of the new year, spring-time and the sprouting blade.

Daniel Haele lost two ewes that first night, saved others only at the risk of his own life. Deep in Millers Dale, an old woman lay ready for burial, and there was no getting her coffin up the steep wild ways to her resting-place at Tideswell. A day later and the milk carts, on their way to the station, were forced to cut across the fields, the narrow

roads lying full and smooth with snow from wall to wall.

It was with difficulty that Rose and Maisie Hoyland, coming in reply to McCabe's telegram, could be got up from Peak Forest station.

At the end of twenty-four hours, however, the wind dropped as though it had fallen suddenly asleep in the very midst of its passion. The snow still fell, steadily, thickly; but with an effect of slow, sweet peace. All its fear and flurry had passed with the spent wind; it knew what it was about and did its work surely, with infinite gentleness.

It was Diana who had met the two girls, hardly any one else could have negotiated the hills at such a time.

Maisie entered the hall first; her shoulders thickly yoked in snow. Her head was high, her eyes bright, her cheeks like rose-tinted carnations: gallant and defiant, she gave McCabe the impression of a fine steel blade, fresh from its scabbard.

Rose walked behind, burdened with wraps. Her face was white and blue, her nose pinched with cold, her eyes anxious and shamed, her shoulders bowed—"poking" as her mother would have said.

Diana Clayton had told them something of how matters stood during the drive from the station, had gone alone on purpose.

Heaven knows, Rose Hoyland had no reason to love her brother, to wish for his life to be prolonged; but her conventionality was so engrained that she really did feel as the world might imagine she ought to feel.

As to Maisie she thought of nothing but Anthony, and the new life which lay between them: defiant and yet ardent.

There had been a large fire lighted in the drawing-room, so piled with logs that it filled the wan place with warmth and color. The flood of rosy light dappling the walls, rising, falling, gave the impression of a beating heart, stirred to new life by a generous bumper of red wine.

Without a word Anthony took Maisie's arm, drew her into the room and shut the door.

They were very young and they had no thought for Charles Hoyland; there was themselves and that other—a completely rounded world—to talk over, plan for.

When they did at last re-appear all the doubt and distress had dropped from Anthony; he was no longer a boy—would never be a boy again—but a grave man.



Maisie's face was soft and womanly. As Anthony presented her to his mother—sitting on the sofa by the hall fire—she dropped down at her feet, laid her cheek against her knees; not in humility—nothing—nothing—could ever make Maisie humble—but with a sudden sense of deep understanding, of affection, for the woman who had borne the man she loved, the father of her child.

As Mrs. Clayton's hand rested upon the soft dark hair, her face became very peaceful. She would never be affected by Maisie's poutings, by all the silly, hard things she said and did: the sort of person she so often appeared to be. At that first touch—that wonderful touch, which realized so much more than the stupid blank eyes of so many people—she had reached to the best that was in the girl, the infinite possibilities awakening within her.

Charles Hoyland died at three o'clock that afternoon, and three days later he was buried in ground so iron hard that it seemed as though it must have clenched its teeth; holding itself back in fierce resentment against the incursion of what remained of the man who had scorned it; as though even its victory—the more than ordinary triumph of earth—had not satisfied the bitterness of despised motherhood.

To the very end he was dependent upon those he had so looked down upon. It was Jabe and Reuben Haele who—reeking of the soil, the breath of animals—had carried him from the drawing-room to his bed that day, when his illness had got beyond control of even his will; and it was relays of just such men—clods, as he would have called them—who bore him to his last resting-place. For the deep winding road to the little churchyard, lying in the hollow between Setons' and Ox Lee, was impassable for any sort of vehicle, however urgent its mission; though by this time a powerful steam plow had cleared the middle of the main road leading to Peak Forest station.

Rose Hoyland was going back to Sheffield, to the sureness and peace of well ordered toil, while McCabe was returning to London. One of the farm lads, all "a'gorm" with interest, brought the trap with their luggage to the nearest point of the road above the churchyard; but it was Diana herself who drove them.

For the first time for days the sun was shining. Catching a glimpse of Ox Lee as they passed, they saw that some one, likely enough Nanny, was pulling up the blinds one after

another, so that the house looked like a person awakening from a long dark night, bright-eyed, blinking in the sunshine.

As far as the eye could reach—save for the winding strip of clear road, the clumps of trees, the black sides of steep masses of rock—the world was of an unbroken, shining whiteness: even the deeper dales showed nothing more than a blue shade; in some places dark as periwinkles, in others paler than the faintest hare-bell.

The Sheffield train left first. Having waved a last good-bye to Rose, Diana and McCabe paced up and down the narrow platform.

There was a young woman with her mother, and a bright yellow tin box, who looked as though she might be on her way to her first place; and a couple of quarry-men, in dark corduroys and red neck-cloths, waiting for the London train, but that was all.

They took their tickets, but still McCabe and his companion walked up and down, without speaking; though as they turned, his arm touched Diana's shoulder.

At last he looked at his watch; "Only two minutes till the train's due—I suppose I'd better get my ticket."

He moved towards the booking office. The clerk was momentarily engaged and he stood tapping gently upon the counter, not in the least impatient, quietly and dreamingly happy; unable to realize that he was really leaving this place, all it had so quickly grown to mean to him.

Still the clerk did not come. He heard the train rush into the station, the clatter of empty milk cans, and glanced across the little barricade at Diana, who was standing, quietly waiting, with that same leisurely air, as though there was a whole life-time before them.

"Oh, look here, I don't want to go!" said McCabe, suddenly, with an air of inexpressible youth, boyishness, despite his gray hair, lined face. His bright eyes met Diana's, equally bright and steady, glowing like a blue flame.

"Then why go?" she asked, and smiled at him, her face flooded with a wave of color.



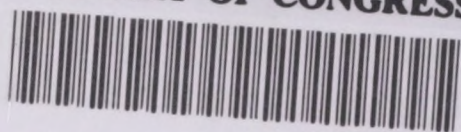








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