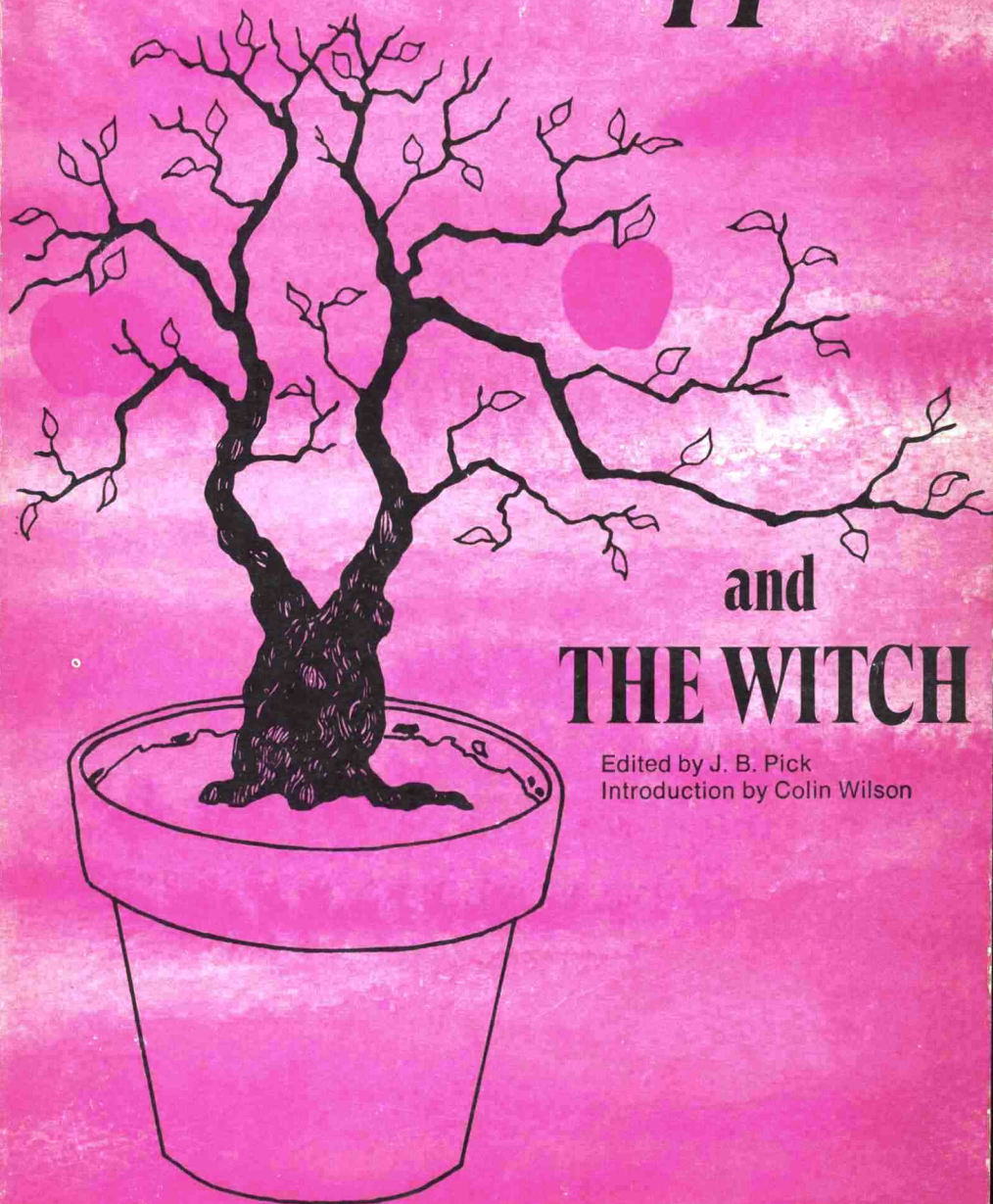


The Violet Apple



and
THE WITCH

Edited by J. B. Pick
Introduction by Colin Wilson

DAVID LINDSAY

Author of *A Voyage to Arcturus*

\$4.95

The Violet Apple

&

The Witch

David Lindsay

Edited by J.B. Pick

Introduction by Colin Wilson

Chicago Review Press

Copyright© 1976 by Chicago Review Press, Inc.
Library of Congress Catalog Number: 75-18962
International Standard Book Number: (Hard Cover) 0-914090-12-7
International Standard Book Number: (Paperback) 0-0914090-13-5
Manufactured in the United States of America.
All Rights reserved.
Chicago Review Press Books are published by
Curt Matthews and Alexander Beshar, 172 E. Walton Place,
Chicago, Illinois 60611.
Distributed by the Swallow Press, Inc., 1139 S. Wabash Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois 60605.

Contents

Introduction	1
Foreword	21
The Violet Apple	24
Foreword	253
The Witch	256

Introduction



he story of David Lindsay is one of the most peculiar tragedies in the history of modern literature.

He was born in 1878 to middle class parents. He was a quiet, shy, lonely boy. Although he actually won a scholarship to university, his grandmother insisted that he go into business; so he became an insurance clerk at Lloyds of London. He swallowed his disappointment, and became so efficient and conscientious that he was offered a directorship at the age of forty. Instead, he decided to fulfill a lifelong ambition and become a writer. Besides, he had recently married—a vivacious girl, eighteen years his junior,—and he may have felt he owed her something more than dull middle-class security. They moved to Cornwall; he produced *A Voyage to Arcturus*, undoubtedly one of the greatest novels of the 20th century, and arguably *the* greatest work of imaginative fiction of our time. He found a publisher, without too much difficulty; the book appeared when he was forty two. It should have brought him celebrity—or at least, secure recognition. In fact, it was almost totally ignored, and most of that first edition was remaindered. A second book, *The Haunted Woman*, met with no better success. And from now on, Lindsay began to have considerable difficulty in finding publishers. *Sphinx* came out, but was ignored. *Devil's Tor*, a strange, clumsy monster of a book, was rejected and rewritten many times, but finally came out in 1932—and was also ignored. A novel called *The Violet Apple* never found a publisher. The work Lindsay regarded as his major literary testament, *The Witch*, gave him as much trouble as *Devil's Tor*, and was never truly finished.

Lindsay's relations with his wife deteriorated; understandably, she felt she had made a mistake in encouraging

him to give up his business career for the heartbreaking profession of literature. She now ran a boarding house in Hove—for the burden of supporting the family, which now included two daughters, fell upon her. The war deepened Lindsay's depression; like Lord Grey at the beginning of the first world war, he felt "the lights are going out all over Europe". The first bomb that fell on Brighton actually came through his roof while he was taking a cold bath, and although it did not explode, he never recovered from the shock. And so embittered, frustrated, unrecognised, he finally died just after the end of the war, at the age of 67. His friend E.H. Visiak told me that his teeth were rotting, and that Lindsay was too fatalistic to do anything about it; so he died of some complication of blood poisoning.

And perhaps that should have been the end of the story. Lindsay had gambled and lost. The public and critics cannot really be blamed. Lindsay's prose style is awkward and amateurish; he writes like a retired maiden lady. An extremely introverted, reserved man, he could never bring himself to write easily and naturally. I am reminded of a story about E.H. Visiak, who spent some time as a telegraph operator. Visiak's manner of sending was cramped and stiff; he could never achieve the flexible wrist movement. One day, quite suddenly, it came; he found himself sending morse code as naturally as if his wrist had been made of rubber. Then he glanced up, and saw the eye of the supervisor fixed on him, in delighted surprise. His wrist seized up, and the flexible movement never came back. Lindsay's prose has the same self-conscious stiffness; he always writes as if someone is looking over his shoulder.

But the imaginative vitality of *Arcturus* refused to let it die. In 1948, the year after Lindsay's death, a small but persistent demand led the British publisher Victor Gollancz to reissue it. Its reputation continued to grow. In 1963, Gollancz brought out a new impression, as part of his series of Rare Works of Imaginative Fiction, which included titles by Sheridan Le Fanu, and M.P. Shiel. And at this point, I played my own small part in the story. I had heard of the book, and now I hastened to buy it. The Gollancz edition had an

introduction by E.H. Visiak, whose own *Medusa* was also included in the series. On first reading, I found the book puzzling, and wrote to Visiak for elucidation. Visiak had been a neighbour of Lindsay's in Hove, and he still lived there, more or less bedridden (he was 88.) We got into correspondence; I called to see him. When I was teaching in America in 1967, an utterly miserable letter from Visiak—telling me that he never expected to see me again, because he was dying of boredom—led me to suggest that the two of us collaborate on a book on Lindsay. Another admirer of Lindsay, J.B. Pick, had written a biographical essay on him, and essays on the unpublished *Violet Apple* and *The Witch*, and he agreed to allow us to include these in the volume. The result was *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay*, published by John Baker in London in 1970.

Meanwhile, I had heard that the American paperback publisher, Ballantyne Books, was looking out for 'rare works of imaginative fiction' to republish, their three volume Tolkien having broken all records on campuses. Macmillan's had finally brought out *Arcturus* in America in 1963; but, like the English first edition, it had been ignored, then remaindered. I wrote to Ballantyne suggesting they reissue *Arcturus* with an introduction by me. The Macmillan edition had an introduction by that fine writer on zoology, Loren Eiseley, but Eiseley clearly had no idea of what *Arcturus* was about, and his preface is, to put it mildly, somewhat misleading. Ballantyne's reissued *Arcturus*, but with the Eiseley introduction—explaining that it was a 'package deal', and that since they had to pay for the introduction, it seemed a pity not to use it. Still, the important thing was that *Arcturus* finally reached the enormous audience of the campus bookstores.

I cannot say that it instantly became a best-seller. But it has sold well enough to stay in print. And it seems to have excited the curiosity of certain young men associated with the *Chicago Review*. One of these, Alexander Beshler, was curious to know why *The Violet Apple* and *The Witch* should remain unpublished, so he contacted Lindsay's daughters, Mrs. Diana Moon and Mrs. Helen Baz, and also Mr. John Pick.

Even then, the difficulties were not over. In 1964, I my-

self had contacted Mrs. Moon, and learned about the existence of *The Violet Apple*. I wrote to Victor Gollancz—who was my own publisher—and asked him whether it would not be worth considering the book for his series of Rare Imaginative Fiction—in which he had also reissued Lindsay's *Haunted Woman*. Gollancz said he would be delighted, and Mrs. Moon sent him the typescript. A day or so later I received a wry little note from Gollancz, whose content could be summarised: 'Oh, *that*'. He had read it years ago, he said, and thought it too dull and badly written to publish. And in 1972 Mr. Beshar seems to have encountered the same reaction in his own attempt to get the book published. He now wrote to me—I had already agreed to write this introduction—suggesting a change of plan: a volume of selections from Lindsay that would include parts of all the novels. This view seems to have met with disfavour from the Lindsay family. And so, after some two or three years of discussion, the plan of the present volume was arrived at: the complete *Violet Apple*, and a carefully edited edition of *The Witch*. I am personally delighted. I believe that sooner or later, all Lindsay's works will find their way back into print, and that he will take his place beside Kafka, Malcolm Lowry and other previously neglected writers, as a twentieth century classic. The first step in that direction should surely be the publication of his unpublished manuscripts?

But is not this judgement a contradiction of my earlier statement that Lindsay is an atrocious writer? The answer to that question brings us to the very essence of the Lindsay problem, and to his peculiar greatness as a writer.

Lindsay is a paradox in the most genuine sense of the word. Nowadays we are inclined to use the word paradox to signify an apparent contradiction—truth standing on its head to attract attention, as Chesterton said. But a real paradox is a truth with two faces, and the faces continue to stare in opposite directions, even when they have been analysed and explained. Well, the truth is that Lindsay is a visionary, a man of Beethoven-like sublimity, a truly original genius. The history of philosophy and mysticism are full of such names—J. L. Hamann, Max Stirner, Constantin Brunner,

Theodore Lessing. (Every fifty years or so, one of them achieves recognition, like Boehme and Kierkegaard; but these remain the exceptions.) But Lindsay differs from most of these in being also a genuinely incompetent writer. He should be an inspiration to every American student who has ever sweated his way through a Creative Writing course, for he proves so conclusively that it *is* possible to write like an amateur and still be a man of genius. And, what is more, still produce books that are worth reading.

The other face of the paradox is that most of his books are genuinely bad, stylistically speaking. Any good creative writing teacher could have sent him away, and got him to re-cast them into something more satisfactory. Even *Arcturus*, the greatest of all his books, would have benefited from the labours of a good editor. (Not, I hasten to add, to make Lindsay cut. An editor at Methuens *did* that, and the excised passages have, tragically, been lost.) *The Witch* and *Devil's Tor* are not so much flawed masterpieces as shattered masterpieces, like those crystals a car windscreen dissolves into if you hit it with a hammer. What is worse, the faults are not the kind you can skip, like some of the romantic excrescences in Thomas Wolfe or Faulkner. Such faults spring from too much fluency, while Lindsay is like a man with a bad stammer. You cannot accept his style as some peculiar eccentricity, like Henry James's, and concentrate on the content. All you can do is accept that he wrote all his life with an embarrassing clumsiness that most would-be writers outgrow at seventeen. I can think of only one parallel case: *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, an incoherent document written by a man under great mental strain, which, through sheer force of tragic intensity, comes close to being great literature.

But having recognised this, we also have to acknowledge that Lindsay's clumsiness *is* actually bound-up with the nature of what he is saying. *The Violet Apple* contains this important sentence:

'He was not shrinking from her eyes because of their contained moral censure, but because they. . . could only communicate with his frightful, earthy, mortal nature, which was like an invitation to share a common coffin'.

This is the problem that runs obsessively through all his books—most notably, through *The Haunted Woman*, *Sphinx* and *The Violet Apple*: this feeling that all our activities, all our social relations, falsify the reality inside us. It is as if man lived in a world of distorting mirrors. He knows the reflection he sees is false; yet since he has never seen a plane mirror, he can only have the faintest idea of what he actually looks like.

Now in the above sentence, the words about 'their contained moral censure' are an example of Lindsay's infelicities; he would have done better to say 'the censure in them' (the word moral is actually irrelevant here.) But Lindsay's clumsiness is not always of this willful nature. In the opening paragraph of *Devil's Tor*, we sense another problem:

'No sooner had they quitted the sunken lane, with its high banks and overshadowing trees, and entered upon the long stretch of open road, bordered at first by walls of piled stones, but soon running unconfined for mile upon mile across the rising moor, than the full menace of the advancing storm struck them. The young girl Ingrid Fleming turned her head towards her male companion with an inquiring look, as by a sort of sympathy they came to a dubious standstill.

' "What shall we do? Go back?" '

That opening sentence is too long. But you get the feeling that it is too long because Lindsay is unwilling to leave the description of the moor—which suits him—to focus on the human beings with their petty personal problems. He doesn't want to make this descent. But then, a novel has to have people in it; there's no help for it. So you have to come out of the world of overshadowing trees and stormy skies to the world where girls give men 'inquiring looks.' Lindsay is much more at home in the world of the double star Arc-turus, where the characters are as alien as the landscape, and the conversation can achieve a high level of philosophical content with a minimum of merely social exchange. Shaw's Don Juan describes Hell as being like the first act of a fashionable comedy, before the complications set in. This is a fair description of how Lindsay sees most social intercourse. And he also feels, like the hero of *Man and Superman*, that

there is a more meaningful, more interesting form of existence, devoted to the real evolutionary struggle of life (or of good against evil.) This is the form he prefers. Maskull, the hero of *A Voyage to Arcturus*, is basically on the same side as Don Juan; he prefers the reality of pain and effort (Krag) to the cloying beauty and shallow futility of the devil (Crystaman) and his world.

Which brings us back to the problem of Lindsay's limitation as an artist. In one of his letters, Lindsay suggests that there are two kinds of novelist: those who describe the world, and those who try to explain it. (In one of my own essays on Lindsay, I spoke of 'high flyers' and 'low flyers'.) Trollope and Jane Austen obviously belong among the describers, while Dostoevsky, John Cowper Powys and Lindsay himself are explainers. But then, the *events* in Dostoevsky and Powys are also tremendous, to match their themes, the classic material of tragedy: murder, incest, seduction, violence. Dostoevsky's *Devils*, for example, contrasts the rather silly, shallow social world of a small provincial town with the lives of human beings—Kirilov, Shator, Stavrogin—for whom the world is an enormous mystery of good and evil. Lindsay's trouble is that he lacks the temperament for this type of writing. When he sets out to portray the world we live in, he is as confined by his social class as Trollope or Jane Austen were by theirs. No Raskolnikovs, no Rastignacs or Vautrins, not even a Stephen Dedalus or Julien Sorel. For a man of genius who wanted to be a novelist, Lindsay was singularly ill-equipped. The kind of people he seems to find himself writing about, again and again, *are* the kind you would find in the first act of a fashionable comedy. The women may have sparkling blue or brown eyes (like the two heroines of *The Violet Apple*), but the male characters always address them rather formally, and you can tell that Lindsay would be scandalised at the idea of anyone getting raped, or even seduced. Dostoevsky can make us understand what it feels like to be a murderer, Powys what it feels like to be a sadist, Joyce what it feels like to be an adulterous wife, Henry Williamson even conveys an idea of what it feels like to be an otter or salmon. By comparison, Lindsay has no power of

empathy. In social atmosphere, his novels have a certain resemblance to those early novels of Bernard Shaw, before he had discovered his true metier: they are all about rather wooden ladies and gentleman. And the exasperated reader occasionally feels that Lindsay's knowledge of the real world was hardly greater than that of Daisy Ashford, the nine year old author of *The Young Visitors*.

This, again, immediately suggests what was wrong with Lindsay, not simply as a novelist, but as a human being. In a book about Shaw, I pointed out that those five 'novels of his nonage' were all attempts to establish a *self-image*, to discover the sort of person he wanted to be. In the fifth of them, *An Unsocial Socialist*, he finally created an archetypal Shavian character, Sidney Trefusis (on whom he later based the hero of *Man and Superman*.) In a later play, Shaw remarks that art is a magic mirror in which we try to see our own faces—that is, our 'true selves'. In *A Haunted Woman*, Isbel Loment looks into a mirror which shows her her true self; her face is wiser, maturer - and somehow tragic. In many ways, Lindsay and Shaw were close together. They wrote about the same themes. But Lindsay never established a self-image. Maskull, the hero of *Arcturus*, has no character; he is just a large bearded figure. *A Haunted Woman* has a heroine rather than a hero; its chief male character, Henry Judge, is again a wooden nonentity. Besides, he is too old to provide his creator with a possible self-image. And so it goes on: Nicholas Cabot in *Sphinx*, Saltfleet of *Devil's Tor* (whose name I borrowed for a detective), Anthony Kerr of *The Violet Apple*: all are typical Lindsay males, although the explorer Saltfleet has more dash than most of them. In short, Lindsay himself had no idea of what kind of person he wanted to be. All he knew was that he didn't much like the kind of person he was: the rather stiff, reserved Scot, who found it incredibly difficult to bring himself to address even close friends by their Christian names. So, to some extent, these books of Lindsay spring out of his own frustration, his sense of not being able to express the person he basically felt himself to be. His marriage to Jacqueline (strongly disapproved by parents on both sides) and his decision to throw up his safe job and

become a writer, both demonstrate this deep dissatisfaction. Nietzsche, a philosopher Lindsay deeply admired, talked about 'How one becomes what one is'. It was a secret Lindsay never discovered.

Some critics might feel that all this leaves nothing much to be said about the later novels, from *A Haunted Woman* to *The Witch*; if they express a purely individual frustration, and do it rather clumsily, what point is there in dwelling on them? Such a view would be superficial. Lindsay's genius never found complete self-expression; but it was so considerable that even its incomplete self-expression provides material for endless discussion. It is not ultimately important that he found no satisfactory self-image. What is astonishing is that in spite of this, he managed to express his remarkable vision so fully.

So let me try to clear away a little of the thorny undergrowth that confronts the reader of *Devil's Tor* and *The Violet Apple* by mentioning some of his basic themes, and showing their development from *Arcturus* to *The Witch*.

As I have already mentioned, Lindsay was deeply influenced by Nietzsche, and also by Nietzsche's great mentor, Schopenhauer. 'The world as Will and Illusion' would be an apt sub-title for a book on Lindsay. Like all visionary idealists, he is troubled with the essentially *trivial* nature of everyday life—what Heidegger calls 'the triviality of everydayness'. The path of human beings lies on the horizontal plane. And if this world—which satisfies most people—were the only world, then men of genius like Lindsay would want to commit suicide. But we have glimpses of an intensity of consciousness that make everyday consciousness appear to be a shabby illusion. *All* men of genius, no matter how different the nature of their insight, have this in common; Plato shares it with Napoleon, Michelangelo with Bernard Shaw, Alexander the Great with Saint Francis of Assisi. They see the *real* world as non-trivial. In this sense, all men of genius belong to an elite trade union which rejects the 'reality' accepted by the other 99.9% of the human race.

The man of artistic genius attempts to create a kind of road to another level of reality; he wants to travel vertically

rather than horizontally. Lindsay likes to use the image of some immense stairway, symbolised by the rising chords at the opening of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. And he likes to speak of this 'other reality', this *real* reality, as the 'sublime'.

Like Nietzsche, Lindsay is a master of the history of ideas. And, like Schopenhauer, he is inclined to see most of these ideas as various forms of illusion, 'human all too human'. (The Greek gods, for example, strike us as absurdly un-godlike.) *Arcturus* is a book about these illusions—false ideas of reality. The hero, Maskull, is 'Everyman', and he travels to the double star with his alter-ego, Nightspore, and a curious, sneering character called Krag, who at first strikes us as a brutal cynic. On the planet Tormance, Maskull finds himself deserted—and then meets a series of characters who all have totally different views of reality. It sounds like a boring allegory; in fact, the creative invention is so dense that an adequate commentary on the book would be longer than *Arcturus* itself. Most of the people Maskull encounters accept the idea that God is a synonym for goodness and beauty, and that his name is Crystalman. Lindsay is saying that such an idea is false and trivial. In *Arcturus*, beauty is inclined to deflate like a punctured balloon into something grotesque and sickening—the 'Crystalman grin'. It *would* be possible to find cultural parallels for the various philosophies expressed in *Arcturus*: i.e. Joiwind is a kind of Blakeian mystic (out of *The Book of Thel*), her husband Panawe a Platonic idealist, Oceaxe and her husband symbols of the Nietzschean Will to Power, Spadevil a kind of Miltonic stoic, and so on. But it is doubtful that Lindsay was thinking in these terms when he wrote *Arcturus*. He seems to have written in a kind of imaginative trance. Tormance is as real as Tolkien's Middle Earth; the result is that the book can be read again and again, as you might visit a real place. Towards the end, we begin to grasp that Lindsay regards *all* existence as an illusion. Nevertheless, there *is* an ultimate reality—Muspel—which somehow lies beyond existence. This becomes manifest in what is perhaps the greatest scene in the book—in the underground land of Thire, where three ap-

parently genuine visions of God appear to Maskull, then are all shown to be 'human, all too human'. At the end of the book, the sneering Krag is revealed to be the representative of Muspel—God rather than the devil. And Lindsay expresses his own basic view of the world as a deep conflict of good against evil: not conventional good against conventional evil, but a cold and sublime reality fighting for its life against a sweet and cloying beauty that masquerades as goodness.

Arcturus is Buddhistic in its vision. My own basic feeling is that it is too sweepingly negative. But it is a masterpiece—in form as well as content, being constructed like a series of Chinese boxes, one inside the other. If it had been as 'true' as Lindsay believed, it would have left him nothing more to say. But Lindsay himself certainly believed he had more to say.

Readers who turn to *The Haunted Woman* after reading *Arcturus* are bound to be puzzled and disappointed. *Arcturus* is clumsily written, but after the first few chapters, you cease to notice this, completely absorbed in Lindsay's visionary world. In the remaining books, you are always aware of the clumsiness. The odd thing is that, in spite of this, they draw the reader back to them. When I first read *The Haunted Woman* I thought it simply a mistake that would be best forgotten. Harold Visiak, on the other hand, thought it Lindsay's best book (but Harold was a highly eccentric judge of literary merit.) On re-reading, I can see why Visiak thought so highly of it; it is, in its own way, a masterpiece.

Again, the subject is reality versus illusion. And he finds a peculiarly effective symbol for it. Isbel Loment is an intelligent and vaguely dissatisfied young woman who is engaged to be married to a fairly satisfactory young man. She goes to visit an old house that is for sale. Alone in the hall, she finds an old flight of stairs that lead to an upper storey—a storey that dates from the time of the Vikings, and now no longer exists. (It shares this characteristic with 'Muspel'.) The scenery outside is wild and completely unlike the view from the lower windows. There she meets Henry Judge, the man who is selling the house. The two recognise themselves as

soul-mates; in this 'other' world, their essence can find expression; the false personality has been left down below. Their problem now is that when they both go downstairs—by different routes—they remember nothing whatever of what they have experienced in the upper storey. (This should really have been the title of the book.) Lindsay has found the perfect symbol for the states of sudden intensity and insight experienced by poets and mystics—and their frustration at being unable to take even a memory of it back to ordinary consciousness. Isbel and Judge even try writing notes and leaving them in their pockets; but when they get back to the 'downstairs' world and discover the notes, they find them incomprehensible.

I personally get the feeling that, having developed this situation, Lindsay had no idea of how to resolve it, so the strange, tragic ending of the book is not its logical conclusion. But then, I admit that I do not understand the symbolism of the ending—the blue-clad figure with his pipes and so on. . . .

Sphinx is perhaps his least satisfactory novel. This time, Lindsay chooses the world of dreams—sleeping dreams—as his symbol of the 'other reality'. A young inventor, Nicholas Cabot, takes lodging in a house full of young women, in order to find the peace to work at his great invention, a machine that will record dreams and allow them to be 'played back' to the waking mind. A female composer, Lore Jensen, represents the artist (or philosopher) who has become confused and lost in the mazes of 'this world', and ceased to pursue her basic vision—i.e. has become untrue to herself. Nicholas's dream-machine reveals something of her inner conflict.

The trouble with *Sphinx* is that Lindsay was doing his best to readjust to the everyday world and to appeal to ordinary readers. The situation of the young inventor in a houseful of girls is conventionally romantic—which will he marry? Like Lindsay himself, Nicholas chooses the wrong girl, and gets engaged to a pretty but empty headed widow. One can sense that Lindsay was fascinated by women, and would have liked to be a Casanova, like his friend (and admirer)

L.H. Myers. (The latter's great novel *The Near and the Far* is very close to Lindsay in spirit.) His rigid moral outlook restrained him (although in later life, a close friendship with another woman caused violent quarrels with Jacqueline), but one can sense the inclination. So Lindsay's basic intentions in the book are—if not in conflict, at least difficult to reconcile.

His next book, *The Violet Apple* is close to *Sphinx* in theme and method, although, in my own view, rather more successful as a novel. The apple of the title is one of the original apples from the tree in Eden. There are two of them, and when eaten, they produce the same effect as the upper rooms in *The Haunted Woman*, of sweeping aside the false everyday personality and revealing the creative essence. Once again, Lindsay shows this sure instinct for finding symbols that enable him to express his deepest preoccupations. In this novel, the successful playwright Anthony Kerr is in the same position as Lore in *Sphinx*. He has 'sold out', lost his true vision. He is engaged to Grace—who is, predictably, the wrong girl for him. The 'right girl' is actually Haidee, who is engaged to Anthony's best friend Jim. Obviously, the climactic point of the novel is the moment when Anthony and Haidee eat the two apples, and, like Isbel and Judge in *The Haunted Woman*, realise how close they are. The chapters describing the eating of the fruit by Haidee and Anthony contain some of Lindsay's most memorable writing. Once again, he is in his own element: the world of reality that underlies the false world we live in. Readers who find the first half of the book tiresome should persist—resisting the temptation to skip—until they get to these chapters. It is worth waiting for. I had never read *The Violet Apple* until I received a duplicated typescript a few weeks ago, and I had not expected to find it such a moving experience. John Pick calls it 'a parable of death and resurrection'. I am not sure what it is, except that once again, Lindsay was expressing his most powerful longings, so that the second part of the book has the magic of certain great poetry:

· 'The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. . . .'

It seems to me that, of the three novels on this theme of the 'true and false self', *The Violet Apple* is the most artistically satisfying. It is ironical that it never found a publisher.

The Violet Apple was revised for the last time in 1926. And Lindsay was already evolving beyond it. *Devil's Tor* was started in 1928, and the sheer size of its conception reveals that Lindsay was by no means discouraged by his relative failure so far.

Perhaps the most note-worthy thing about *The Haunted Woman*, *Sphinx* and *The Violet Apple* is that they are novels that centre around women rather than men; Lore, Isbel and Haidee are their real protagonists. This is already foreshadowed in *Arcturus*, where the women—Oceaxe, Tydomin, Gleamiel, Sullenbode—all have this 'ewig weibliche' quality. In *Arcturus* Lindsay is—on the intellectual level at least—anti-feminist. Perhaps *The Violet Apple*—with its twentieth century Eve—made him fully conscious of this tendency. At all events, *Devil's Tor* represents an interesting evolution. The Muspel of *Arcturus* is so sublime as to be almost without qualities. The next three novels show Lindsay moving towards a less abstract conception of the ultimate reality. This may be less mystically sublime than Muspel-fire, but it is artistically more satisfying. What has happened, it seems, is that Lindsay has come to feel that the ultimate creative principle is female. Instead of Muspel, we now have The Great Mother. In a sense, of course, this is actually a contradiction of what he says in *Arcturus*, when he would certainly have regarded this religion of the Eternal Female as one of the manifestations of Crystalman. But since he himself obviously felt it to be an evolution, who are we to pass judgement?

Lindsay had also become more socially-conscious in the decade between *Arcturus* and *Devil's Tor*—as well as more embittered. As I have pointed out in my section in *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay*, *Devil's Tor* is in many ways close to the spirit of D.H. Lawrence. Like Lawrence, Lindsay is a political élitist. He feels that democracy is the rule of the second-rate. The whole world is turning into a grimy rubbish heap. (The debt to Nietzsche now becomes very clear.) Woman, who was originally the great creative

principle of the universe, has been degraded into mere sexuality. (In this sense, Lindsay could be regarded as the High Priest of Women's Lib.) The answer is an Avatar, a new messiah, who will save the world from its plunge into mediocrity, perhaps even by plunging it into war. . . .

Lindsay's contemporary H.P. Lovecraft had much the same attitude to the modern world and democracy, and we may be tempted to dismiss them both as embittered romantics who would like to turn back the clock. (Others who have shared that attitude, to a greater or lesser extent, have been Chesterton, Tolkien and T.S. Eliot.) Certainly, Lindsay's vision in *Devil's Tor* is harsh and apocalyptic. If he were still alive today, to see the increasingly bitter conflict between Left and Right, he would feel that the gloomy vision of *Devil's Tor* is justified.

W.S. Gilbert used to irritate his collaborator Sullivan by reviving again and again the idea for a comic opera based on a magic lozenge that can transform anyone who swallows it. Lindsay has his own equivalent of the magic lozenge; in each of the novels, he invents some device that will somehow form a bridge between 'this world' and the world of ultimate reality: in *Arcturus*, the space-ship, in *Sphinx*, the dream-recorder, and so on. In *Devil's Tor*, it is some kind of magical stone which has been broken into two halves. When the halves are re-united, the ancient forces of the Earth Mother will again be able to express themselves. At the beginning of the book, lightning breaks open her tomb on Devil's Tor. At the end of the book, after endless complications, the halves of the stone are united, and some kind of psychical explosion takes place. The hero of the book, Saltfleet, realises that it is his mystical destiny to mate with the heroine, Ingrid, and impregnate her with the Avatar. . . .

The chief fault of *Devil's Tor* is that this particular magic lozenge cannot carry the weight of such a vast book (more than twice as long as *Arcturus*.) In fact, Lindsay must have recognised by this time that all his books since *Arcturus* suffered from the same fault. The climax of the book is the moment when the magic lozenge (whatever it is) gets swallowed, so to speak. So the beginning of the book tends to be

an over-long lead up to this, while the remainder is usually an anti-climax. And in his final assault on the problem of 'the two realities', *The Witch*, Lindsay does his best to avoid the trap. There is still a 'lozenge'—Urda's house; but this is only the doorway to another mode of existence. Like the spaceship in *Arcturus*, it will transport the hero, Ragnar, into another reality. Ragnar then experiences a kind of pilgrim's progress of the soul, and learns of the 'three musics', or states of the soul in its progress upward.

These chapters of the book are so strange that there would be no point in trying to summarise them—although John Pick has made an attempt in his essay on *The Witch* in *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay*. Lindsay's admirers will feel that these chapters represent the climax of his life's work. He has always been obsessed by music—never more so than in *The Witch*—and now the prose approximates to music—a distinctly Wagnerian music. The novel was to reach a climax in a great speech of Urda's—a speech which only exists in fragments. Possibly Lindsay had in mind Lilith's great speech at the end of *Back to Methuselah*. The speech is about the process of death and rebirth; it should have embodied Lindsay's vision of the ultimate nature of reality. If the book had been completed, it would have completed the cycle of Lindsay's work that began with *Arcturus*. It was not completed; the sick, tired man found the effort too much. Yet what we have forms a remarkable testament to Lindsay's genius.

John Cowper Powys, another mystical novelist, has a book called *In Spite Of*, which might be sub-titled 'How to live without success'. Powys himself lived according to his own message. The great novels that he began to write in his forties were never widely recognised; but he lived on, in poverty and relative contentment, in his bleak cottage in the Welsh hills. But then, Powys was a far greater artist than Lindsay, and he knew it. And his novels always found a publisher, even if they brought in little money. Lindsay achieved his own brooding greatness 'in spite of' even greater obstacles than Powys had to face. When we consider the tremendous sweep of his work, from *Aecturus* to *The Witch*,

it seems incredible that such a high level of sustained creativity and insight could be achieved in the face of such total indifference. Of course, there *have* been many similar tragedies in the arts—Cezanne, Van Gogh, Charles Ives. Yet there have been few major writers on whom the gods have played such an apparently malicious trick: to grant such a profound vision, without the powers to convey it to other people.

Or so I felt when I wrote my first long essay on David Lindsay, seven or eight years ago. What has surprised me is that I *have* periodically gone back to Lindsay's 'unsuccessful' books, and each time found them more satisfying. For years I kept *Arcturus* by my bed, and often read a chapter at random before falling asleep; every time I discovered things that I had not noticed before. When I re-read *The Haunted Woman*, it struck me as a beautiful and poetic work, full of smells of autumn and spring, glowing gently with its own life. *Sphinx* I have never possessed—I borrowed Visiak's copy—so have never had a chance to re-read it. But when I came to re-read *Devil's Tor* in order to write my section of *The Strange Genius*, I found it so haunting and disturbing that I had the whole book duplicated—at considerable cost—and then bound. And recently, as soon as I began to read the typescript of *The Violet Apple*, the old magic reasserted itself, and I found myself deliberately reading slowly, so as not to finish it too quickly. *The Witch* has left me slightly dazed—yet not as much as I expected to be. John Pick's account of the book had made me expect a kind of torrential, Miltonic confusion; in fact, once you have got used to Lindsay's cast of mind, it is surprisingly clear and straightforward; as in *Arcturus*, you know you are in the hands of a man who knows where he is going. One day, no doubt, enthusiastic Lindsayites will insist that the whole manuscript should be printed, complete with its different endings . . .

A few months ago, I received a long and interesting letter from another resident in Cornwall (my part of the world)—Kenneth Gunnell, who had known Lindsay in his Hove days. He has some amusing stories to tell: for example, how, one day, the Lindsay's sitting room was so jammed with visitors that Lindsay and an elderly lady were forced to

share an uncomfortable upright chair, each occupying half the seat. They were so deep in their philosophical discussion that Lindsay failed to notice when the guests trooped into the dining room for coffee and snacks. Half an hour or so later, the guests returned—to find Lindsay and the elderly lady, still absurdly squeezed together on the narrow chair, so deeply involved in their discussion that they had not noticed they were alone. . .

Mr. Gunnell also mentions that when he told Lindsay he wanted to be a writer, Lindsay gave him a long, ruminative look, then muttered: 'In that case, young man, no power on earth can help you'.

A few weeks later, I received a visit from Lindsay's eldest daughter Diana, who brought her daughter Rosamund with her. Rosamund, now at university, is writing her thesis on her grandfather's work. As I saw them off a few hours later, it struck me as ironical that we should have spent an evening discussing a man who had died with a conviction of total failure, and yet who now seems well on his way to becoming a cult-figure. Lindsay would have smiled ironically; it would have fitted in with his own pessimistic vision of this world of Crystalman. But I am by no means convinced that Lindsay's pessimism and his genius are inseparable. Lindsay's basic vision is 'sublime'—like the music of Beethoven, like the poetry of Milton, like the painting of El Greco. Sublimity is, by nature, non-pessimistic. Perhaps I am blinded by my own natural tendency to cheerfulness, but it seems to me that Lindsay's intellectual pessimism limited his achievement, and was partly responsible for his tragedy.

At all events, we now have three of Lindsay's most important works in print: *Arcturus*, *The Violet Apple* and *The Witch*. It is time to forget about the tragedy, and concentrate on the achievement.

Colin Wilson

The Violet Apple

Foreword



David Lindsay published his masterpiece *A Voyage to Arcturus* in 1920. It was a financial and critical failure, yet its reputation has grown steadily ever since and it is now widely accepted as a work of extraordinary power and grandeur. Since the book was not republished until 1946, soon after Lindsay's death, only conviction of its quality and the corroding knowledge of its failure remained with him. That may be why after 1920 he made great efforts to accommodate himself to the conventional novel. Perhaps he feared to reach the situation of Anthony Kerr, the playwright in *The Violet Apple*: 'He had a deep mystical bent, his thoughts, doubtless, were away above the heads of the theatrical crowd, but he had conceived the happy expedient of introducing fantastic entities to his pieces, to relieve the drab monotony of the characters and manners of the modern world.' But whereas the fictional Anthony Kerr gained success the actual David Lindsay could not.

On the surface *The Violet Apple* is the most conventional of all his books. Since it is concerned, among other things, with the relationship of mask and reality, it is one of the ironies of which Lindsay's life is so full that while critics were alarmed by the wild boldness nakedly expressed in *A Voyage to Arcturus*, publishers failed to notice the wild boldness conventionally concealed in *The Violet Apple*, and refused it accordingly.

The Violet Apple was written in 1924 and after its rejection by John Long, Lindsay revised it between 1925 and 1926. There is a record of its having been returned once more before he withdrew it from offer. He wrote only one book, *The Witch*, after the completion of *The Violet Apple*. *Devil's Tor*, although published in 1932, is a reworking of *The Ancient Tragedy*, originally written between 1922 and 1923.

Since all his books had failed financially it is hardly surprising that he was bitterly discouraged by the time that he finished *The Violet Apple*, and its rejection is one reason for the desperately slow composition of *The Witch*, and for his brooding introverted obsession with that incredible manuscript. Yet *The Violet Apple* is gentler and more full of spring light than any other of his works, and leaves in the mind an abiding sense of wisdom and joy.

On the surface it is a mild tale of the misunderstandings of two engaged couples: Anthony Kerr and Grace Lytham; Jim Lytham and Haidee Croyland. It relates the wayward efforts of the enchanting Haidee to awaken Anthony to his own deeper nature and to his essential kinship with her. But breaking across the conventional story is another dimension of reality—the theme of the seed brought back from the Crusades from which grows a dwarf tree bearing two tiny violet apples; and these are indeed ‘fantastic entities’. This tree, these apples, are symbols for forces mentioned in the book itself: ‘The half-perception of the existence of these forces . . . was supplied by such authentic supernatural phenomena as knockings, the sound of falling masonry, appearances at the moment of death, and so forth. We were separated from a whole active universe by an opaque wall of senselessness.’

At a point of crisis in the story, the fruit is eaten; Haidee and Anthony plunge into this deeper dimension. Reality or illusion? The book poses that question and provides its answer. The description in Chapters 10 and 11 of their spiritual experiences is one of the most vivid and intense pieces of writing in Lindsay’s work. No one who reads it can be in doubt that this is by the man who wrote *A Voyage to Arcturus*.

The meaning of the book can be approached in a number of ways. In one sense it is an allegory of love and marriage—the original bewildering attraction, and conviction of spiritual union and joint destiny; the blind, idealistic passion; the lapse into prosaic domesticity; the slow return to deepest fullness. But in another sense it is a parable of death and resurrection: the death of self-pride, swallowed in the experience of sublimity and communion; and resurrection in simplicity and truth. It is more. It is a myth of the spiritual origin of human perceptions,

and an image and parable of the life-criterion of 'at once attaining to the sublime and performing the common task.' Before the apple, illusion and ignorance; with the eating of the apple, the experience of sublimity; after the influence of the apple wears off, an acceptance of the prosaic world and the common task; and eventually a dedication to the work which will recreate through the common task an experience of the sublime: as Haidee says: "Anthony, we will go on, and on, and on, step by step and stage by stage, till we have won it all back—and then it will be ours, not a free gift this time, but *ours* . . ." All this is achieved with a remarkable economy of means. The book has a beauty which does not depend upon the words themselves but upon its very essence; it takes root in the mind. Do not be put off by any early impression of stiffness, clumsiness and pedantry in the writing. As you read on you will be released from such concerns. What you hold in your hands is a strange and sober work of art.

J.B. Pick.

1



he mid-morning post arrived, and young Paysant rose from the table at which he was working with his cousin and employer to receive the small oblong registered parcel which the janitor brought in. As he returned to his seat, his eye glanced at the unfamiliar writing of the address and at the Settle postmark. The latter struck a faint chord in his memory which for the moment he was unable to identify. It was a bright Friday in April, a week to Easter, and Anthony Kerr, the popular playwright, the occupier of a handsome suite of rooms on the first floor of a block of service chambers at Queen Anne's Gate, was engaged in dictating, from a set of very sketchy notes before him, scribbled on odds and ends of paper, the last scene of the first act of an extraordinary fantasy, which amazed even himself as he proceeded with it, but which he had complete faith would take its place as a public favourite with the more recent of his other plays. Two of these were still running, with undiminished bookings. He believed that he was justified in flattering himself that he knew how to furnish the multitude with one of the sorts of pleasure which it instinctively desired. He was anxious to get this scene and act behind him, in order to have a clean slate for the composition of the next, which he purposed to plan out during a fortnight's visit, extending over the holidays, to his two unmarried sisters in Kent. He had made his arrangements to travel down that afternoon.

Kerr was thirty-four, a bachelor, and wealthy, by inheritance as well as by the profits of his art, which was somewhat in the nature of an unworked mine. He had a deep mystical bent, his thoughts, doubtless, were away above the heads of the theatrical crowd, but he had conceived the happy expedient of introducing fantastic entities to his pieces, to relieve the drab monotony of the characters and manners of the modern world.

In the play he was working on there was a fairy. People liked that kind of thing, and, in addition to its amusing him to bewilder them, it was a great test of artistry and brought out the best of his intelligence to translate his secret philosophy into concrete shapes of fun and mockery, which a more educated generation hereafter might appreciate at their proper worth. Not to go too closely into his creed, he soberly regarded mankind, with all its boasted skill, energy, science, law and progress, as no more than a petty heap of blind, wriggling, three-dimensional insect-like beings, surrounded by terrific unseen forces, not only the slightest abnormal variation of which would suffice completely to annihilate the human race and its memory, but which also, historically and actually, had been, and still were, responsible for the major changes of civilisation. When a new ideal, a new disposition, or a new fact entered the world, it sprang neither from development nor from inspiration, but it was *imposed*. The half-perception of the existence of these forces, he believed, was supplied by such authentic supernatural phenomena as knockings, the sound of falling masonry, appearances at the moment of death, and so forth. We were separated from a whole active universe by an opaque wall of senselessness.

He brought no heavy guns to bear in his work. He introduced his extravagant figures, and left them at that. But since they were the equivalent of his theories, it necessarily followed that his art was cynical in underlying essence, inasmuch as he deliberately regulated his fancies to meet the assumed level of his audiences, whom, accordingly, he at once flattered and despised. But this further necessitated that he carried about with him a vague, dull, but permanent distress, as of one who is pursuing a not quite honest course of conduct, though the fault is difficult to discover. He seemed to himself to be always waiting for something. His life was to take a sudden turn which would at a stroke liberate him from all these slow, grinding, chafing spiritual discomforts, to which he could hardly give a name, but which he felt to be continually sapping his manhood.

A trivial accidental circumstance had supplied him with a sort of obsession pointing in the same direction. Some years previously, just before the war, he had seen in a shop window

and bought for a few guineas a water-colour sketch, in the style of Corot. The scene depicted was a charming leafy woodland, all dark greens, greys and silver-white. A pool was in the foreground, while in the middle distance stood a cluster of slender, graceful trees framed against the pale sky behind. For months he had glanced pleasantly at the sylvan landscape hanging on his study wall opposite his accustomed arm-chair, without noticing anything unusual in connection with it; but then one day he had quietly remarked how the patch of white sky underneath the upper branches and foliage of the two centre trees, inclined towards each other, was in the form of a clear and unmistakable *cross*, which should be about twelve feet high, extending from the ground upwards. Thereafter he could never see the trees for the cross. It was a standing problem for him whether the artist, by a whimsical freak of imagination, had intended this effect, or whether it was fortuitous, but when friends had noticed and admired the picture he had always studiously refrained from calling their attention to its concealed peculiarity. By degrees he fell into the thought that the emblem was personally symbolic for him, that it was to play an austere part in his career; nevertheless he scarcely possessed the temperament for worship and could not see himself as a candidate for sainthood. He thought it somehow typified the impending change which was to revolutionise his life, for better or worse. What clinched the superstition for him was the queer coincidence that the label pasted on the back of the frame was inscribed, "Near Brasted, Kent." He had certainly not bought the painting on account of its local appeal, yet his sisters' house in Kent was not two miles from Brasted, and he was as familiar with all that part of the country as with the West End of London. In the course of his ramblings he had sometimes sought the real spot, but had never succeeded in striking that particular pool.

In person Kerr was moderately tall, wiry and muscular, with little superfluous flesh on his bones. His face was long, brown, broodingly handsome. It had a large, rather shapeless nose, black fathomless eyes, prominent ridges, a high and clever forehead, having a distinct backward slant, a long chin, and a wide mouth, with full, expressive lips. Shaved clean, it was

in moments of dreaming a little gypsy-like and womanish, supporting the justness of the contention that genius partakes of the female nature and that its possession spiritually softens a countenance. Of contemporary authors Kerr was perhaps the best entitled to the claim of genius, as distinct from remarkable talent. He was a pioneer, did new things, forked unexpectedly in his works, and put a stamp up on them which marked them distinctively for his own once and for all. He had a few good friends in both sexes, but was not personally popular. His tongue was caustic. He was in no haste to take up strangers, who would give him less than they took, in the shape of precious hours of privacy.

Theodore Paysant, his unpaid assistant during the last four months, was twenty-two, and the youngest son of his first-cousin on the mother's side, John Paysant, a colliery proprietor, resident in Cardiff. Allured by the romance of stage life, but fatally handicapped by a nervous address and an unpicturesque manner, quite precluding the possibility of a professional *debut*, he had fastened with much of the vision of a blind instinct, upon what he had been inspired to conceive of as a capital substitute for the real thing and a blessed way out from the penal servitude of trade, which otherwise threatened to be his destiny. Since cousin Tony made pots of money from play-writing (he suggested to his father), there were obviously pots to be made; and he added to himself that it was also a most excellent method of arriving, by another door, at the promised land of green rooms, masks, pasteboard and tinsel, bohemian freemasonry, mummers, leading-ladies, chorus girls, clowns and managers, suppers, revelry and night-clubs. He further insisted to his father, with a sulky emphasis prompted by the realisation of his standing precariously at last at the parting of the ways, that having attained the legal age of discretion he had a perfect right thenceforth to order his own existence, and that he meant to do so. Paysant senior pointed out that he certainly was entitled by law to go the devil by whichever route he pleased, but not with *his* money. That interview being concluded, the elder, who was no fool and knew his son, promptly wrote to Anthony to inquire if he were at all disposed to undertake the ungrateful task of breaking in

a young colt to hard work for not a penny of pay during the next twelve months or so. Anthony good naturedly agreed. He promised to initiate Theodore into the lower mysteries of his art, to keep his nose to the grindstone, to discourage, as well as he was able, his entry into fast and feminine society, to refrain from increasing by as much as a sixpence his allowance from home, and, in general, to do what he could for his moral welfare. The prospect bored him, but he remembered that he himself had been a boy once. He hardly knew Theodore, though he had no faith in artistic nobility on that side of the family.

He was right. Upon a first interrogation of the youth, he ascertained that his conception of dramatic writing was a light sketch of situations, groupings and *contratemps*, intended to be afterwards completed by the actors, with their immutable and expected personalities. Literature, as such, had no meaning for him. So ingenuous a confession made Anthony thoughtful. He understood immediately that his cousin's predilection was for production, not authorship, yet hesitated to start him on that road without his father's express permission. Finally he dismissed the whole affair with a shrug of his shoulders. Recommending Theodore to make a point of seeing as many good plays as he could, preferably those without "legs" or bedroom scenes, and analysing them as soon as he got home to find out how they were put together, he exerted himself no further in interesting him in their joint labours, but employed him exclusively as a stenographer. Theodore's smooth brow remained unruffled by the increasing dryness of manner which he attributed to the older man's embarrassment at exposing the naked workings of his soft brains to the scrutiny of another. He was throwing his first stealthy glances into the theatre world, with a view to influential introductions. In the meantime, with the aid of the free passes liberally furnished him by his cousin, he improved himself by a first-hand study of the idiosyncrasies of the favourites of the West End houses. When he knew which celebrity would jump for what type of play, then it would be time enough to take pen in hand. After all, he was not John Paysant's son for nothing.

Theodore was short, alert, strongly and smartly built,

good at sports and dancing, moderately skilful with his fists, quick and quiet in all his physical movements. He had scanty, straight, fair hair, daily plastered down with brilliantine, a fresh, fair-skinned face, which easily coloured, clear-cut, straightforward, quite good-looking but rather commonplace, thoroughly English features, with light grey eyes that bore a perpetually-questioning, fact-assimilating, ignorant scrutiny, as of one of very imperfect culture endeavouring always to better himself. His voice and manner were unobtrusively deferential, with that subtle flattery which is a part of the equipment of a not rare type of climber, and is scarcely conscious hypocrisy so much as instinct. In *tête-à-têtes* with girls of his own age and class, however, this humbleness fell from him like a mask, and he became at once jocular, enterprising and impudent.

Anthony cut the string of the registered parcel, and removed the outer wrapper of brown paper. Inside a protective layer of corrugated pasteboard and shavings, a small cardboard box, also tied with string, came to light. An unsealed envelope was under the string. He opened it, found the enclosed communication was from his Yorkshire uncle by marriage, and read it through with musing gravity: It ran:

‘My dear Anthony,

Although your poor dear Aunt made no formal disposition of her personal estate, I know that it was always her intention that her family heirloom I am forwarding herewith should come to you as the surviving head of your branch of the Kerrs. You have often seen and handled it, and are perhaps better acquainted with its legendary tradition than I, so there is no need for me to say more about it. I shall be glad to hear that it has arrived in safe condition. Should there be any other small memento of your Aunt which you strongly desire to have, I shall be most happy to try to meet your wishes.

Earnestly trusting that you are still, as ever, well in health and actively and usefully occupied in your profession, I remain, very sincerely yours,

Matthew Chamberlain.’

Anthony tossed the letter aside thoughtfully, and after a moment took up the box again, to cut the twine. From the

cottonwool which entirely filled up the space inside, he extricated a small, but exquisitely constructed piece of coloured glass, in the form of a coiled serpent, with its head lifted to strike. The glass was as brittle and delicate as Venetian. Its beauty was in the colouring—so superior to anything modern that it suggested a lost art. Twenty, or, rather, an unanalysable range of greens, all merging into one another, from sea-foam to jade, from beech to sycamore, and from emerald to olive, gave the artificial reptile, which measured no more than five inches by three, an appearance of vivid, beautiful and hateful life, while the illusion was completed by the eyes, gleaming with animation like opals according to the light in which it was held. Moving freely in the interior, from tail to neck, was what resembled a black seed, of the size of an apple-pip, but wrinkled with desiccation.

He stood it upright on the table, and sat back to look at it. Theodore meanwhile had resumed his seat opposite, and now made his characteristic motion of gently passing his palm over his shining crown, while likewise staring in amazement at the displayed little monster.

“A legacy from my aunt Rachel,” explained the playwright briefly. His cousin, a stranger to Anthony’s paternal relations, at once understood the connection in his mind of the name Settle. He uttered a quiet exclamation, intended to pave the way to the satisfaction of his further curiosity.

“Regard it, but don’t touch it,” said the recipient. “It’s as fragile as egg-shell, and not to be replaced in this wide world. Is it pretty or not?”

“I’ve never seen anything like it.” Theodore’s tone was one of restrained enthusiasm.

“You haven’t, for it has no brother. It’s been in my family for upwards of six hundred years. It was brought from Damascus by a crusading ancestor who had the misfortune to be made prisoner of war by the dusky infidels, and went through many singular adventures, of which this is the sole remaining fruit. You observe that seed inside the coils?”

The young man rose to his feet and looked more closely. “Yes.”

“From the original apple of the Garden of Eden! Is the pedigree sufficient?”

Theodore did not quite know how to take this, so concluded to smile. "Not really?"

"I fear the scientific side of your education has been somewhat overshadowed, my dear fellow, or you would know that it has been decisively established that Eden never had an existence except in the luxuriant Semitic imagination. However, let us accept the myth. I seem to recall that there were *two* forbidden trees set down in the scriptural inventory of that paradise. Am I right?"

"No, were there two?" The youth re-seated himself, staring fixedly at his cousin, with open mouth.

"The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the fruit of the latter of which only was eaten. After that lamentable mischance, if my memory serves me, angels armed with flaming swords prevented access to the tree inviolate. This pip, therefore, must belong to the other more popularly known.

"It would be interesting to refresh one's mind with the account in *Genesis*. You will find an Old Testament in four volumes at the extreme right-hand end of the top shelf of the book-case nearest the window, under the title 'Ancient Hebrew Literature.' The first volume."

But as Theodore got up to fetch it, the telephone bell sounded from the passage outside. Anthony, with the irritability of a creative artist, refused to inhabit the same room with this necessary instrument of modern torture. The younger man disappeared through the doorway to take the call.

In a moment or two he came back.

"It's Miss Rossiter."

"Say I'm engaged, and receive the message."

"She wants to speak to you personally."

Anthony pensively tapped with his finger-nails the polished surface of the table for the best part of half-a-minute before rising. His latest relations with Jocelyne Rossiter were so unformulated that every step of the way in their intimacy demanded a new examination of his heart, conscience and interests. She was a magazine illustrator, prosperous and competent, whose acquaintance he had made barely two years before. Some mutual attraction had more or less drawn them together; she was quick-witted, clever, sympathetic, she professed

to appreciate his work—he did not altogether understand what the fascination was, but at least it was not physical. She was as old as himself, and not pretty, though her height was good and she carried herself well. She inherited a dark skin and the shadow of a moustache from her Portuguese mother, with whom she lived, in a Kensington flat. There was nothing man-hunting about the girl, she was always quite decent and unaffected, yet it had begun to be borne in upon him that a certain development of their friendship was expected by both ladies. He had not the least desire in the world to drop her society, but on the other hand he was far from being prepared to pay her the supreme compliment; he would be inexpressibly relieved if the antagonising element of marriage could somehow be ruled out as inadmissible between them once and for all. His never too frequent visits to the flat began to embarrass him. He had started to excuse himself, and this distressed her.

He went to the telephone. Her clear musical voice, which one would recognise anywhere, inquired his movements and suggested lunch together that day. But Anthony was lunching that morning with the responsible director of a theatre, with the view of getting his last completed play accepted for production and in the afternoon he was leaving town for a fortnight. She discovered something cautious and inhibitory in his manner, lightly expressed her regret, and, after talking of nothing in particular for a minute or two longer, by way of concealing the sense of humiliation which had descended upon her, took the opportunity of a pause in the conversation to ring off, leaving in him a very distinct impression of a bungled business.

He returned to his room, at last sure that marriage with this young woman would be an act of highest unwisdom, and that in future he must be doubly on his guard. The hint had been too broad. Her lack of tact in forcing things at a time when, to put it at the best for her, he was still manifestly hesitating pointed to a southern coarseness of fibre which had hitherto eluded his perception. Before all else he required in a lady modesty and dignity. He pieced together in his mind the history of their recent intercourse in order to make plain to himself that he had not misled her, by word or conduct, to this last breakdown of self-control. His conscience was clear;

only he had perhaps been innocent to imagine the possibility of a platonic friendship between the sexes. A woman's ideas were naturally emotional and practical.

Theodore was in his seat, waiting to hand him the volume he had asked for, but Anthony had lost interest in the green serpent. The morning was passing, and his act was still to be finished. He sat down abstractedly to pick up the broken thread After a few minutes of drumming the table, he discovered that his mood was spoilt, and decided that he must take the scene he was working on down to Croom, to complete it there. He looked across at his cousin. He was still smiling to himself, with downcast eyes, doubtless as the result of the telephone call. A sudden antipathy determined Anthony to tighten the screws a bit, in the hope of arousing the youth's exasperation to the point of inducing him to throw up his job on the spot. Jocelyne had jarred his nerves more than a little.

"Are you specially keen on Cardiff this week-end?" he asked.

Theodore blinked, and regarded him without reply.

"Because, if not, I'll get you to come down to Croom with me. I shan't have time to finish this morning."

The other reddened.

"I thought it was arranged"

"So it was; but if you stop with me, you'll have to understand that it isn't the same as being in a City merchant's office, with fixed hours and a regular holiday list. It rests with you. I don't want to dictate in any way. If you'd rather go, I shan't be offended, but it must be permanently."

Anthony was not to know that it had been his cousin's private design to hang on in town till the Thursday of the following week. He was taking some girls around, and had planned a double deception, for while Tony was to imagine him already back home, his father was to suppose him still at work, and neither would ever be any the wiser unless something particularly malignant in the shape of accidents should happen. The abrupt turning down of this beautifully simple scheme at the eleventh hour therefore came to him as a most disagreeable surprise. However, he had no intention of cutting off his nose to spite his face. The girls could wait till another time; whereas to have to announce to the governor that Tony

had fired him was a thought that already sent little shudders down his back. Before the other had finished speaking, his decision was made.

“I’ll come with you with pleasure, of course, if you really want me. It wasn’t that. I was merely wondering . . . that is, if you could give me an idea . . . ”

Anthony resigned himself to the failure of his shot. He repented his hastiness in compelling Theodore’s company, but could not now very well retract the demand without appearing not to know his own mind. He would not be much in the way, and he supposed that a certain amount of use *could* be found for him. His sisters would welcome him. Since there was nothing to be gained by further bullying, and since Theodore had shown himself accommodating, he dropped his severity.

“You’ll be free on Tuesday at the latest, and you can have the difference at the other end, or in odd days, as you prefer. Better send your people a wire. You needn’t worry about an official invitation—there are plenty of bedrooms. Before returning from lunch, get round to your ‘digs’, and put some dress things in a bag. Then rejoin me here not later than three o’clock. Will you do that?”

Having no choice, Theodore assented, though he recorded a grudge against his cousin. If it was only till Tuesday, he could still get in forty-eight hours before the holidays, the odd four days were to be made up, and, truth, tell, it would have been a tight squeeze to make the limited funds at his disposal last out for the longer period. Now he could have a real spree. He had never seen Croom. There might be some decent fun to be picked up there, there was no knowing.

He glanced at the clock. It was nearly twelve, and Tony appeared to intend no more work that morning.

“Then I’ll clear off now?” he suggested. “Do you want this book, or shall I put it back?”

“Open it at Genesis, my dear fellow, and read aloud all the part following the creation. It will be new ground for you.”

While Theodore was still fumbling among the unfamiliar pages, maliciously unaided by his faintly-smiling relation, the door opened softly a few inches, and an enquiring head, covered by an atrocious American hat, showed through the aperture. Anthony, whose back was to the intruder, turned round

in his seat to recognise Jim Lytham, his best friend and the brother of a girl of whom, oddly enough, he had at that very moment been thinking.

In the effort to free himself from the oppressive dark, half-foreign image of that other woman, he had contrasted her, in bitter and wistful recollection, to Grace, fair, fragrant, blue-eyed and Anglo-Saxon to her finger-tips, whom, in all probability, he was to have the pleasure of re-meeting no later than the same day. She too lived at Malfait Street, with her step-mother and half-sister, their house being next neighbour to Croom. His first thought was that Jim, aware of his journey down that afternoon, had looked in to ask him to convey a message. He waved a long, brown hand to him, and bade him enter fearlessly and sit down.

Jim Lytham, a year or two Anthony's junior, impressed all his acquaintance as being essentially and above everything else a gentleman. Actually he was one. That is, not only could he do no social wrong, but his manners were really very bad, yet somehow succeeded in passing as the best. Six foot high, as thin as Anthony himself, but of a blond, nervous masculine beauty, weary and harmonious in his motions, charming in his words and smiles, he was so inwardly convinced of the universal *camaraderie* of decent society that he took not the least pains to propitiate even strangers to whom he was a spectacle of wonder. As a part to sit upon he invariably preferred the small of his back, carpets he fancied improved by the ash of the cigarettes freely and unconsciously accepted from alien cases, the general shabbiness and neglect of his originally well-cut suits would have caused fair eyebrows to go up had the delinquent been almost any other man, jerky impertinences came innocently and nonchalantly from his lips so that no one could be anything but amused, women of whose existence he had been unaware ten minutes earlier were flattered to partisanship by his pleasantly-uttered disquisitions upon whatever far-fetched intellectual topic happened at the time to have engaged his curiosity, in which his courteously sympathetic tone assumed that they were equally interested and informed with himself, while he was as likely as not put the most embarrassing questions with the *naivete* of a child, and because it was felt that any intimate facts thus gleaned would vanish forever from his

recollection a moment afterwards, his rebuffs in consequence were few.

His father, an Oxford professor, had died during the war. Jim's share of the interest on his invested capital came to about six hundred a year. He had hitherto spent most of his time travelling about the world, sampling various out-door occupations, such as fruit-farming in California and planting in Borneo; but he had also a considerable smattering of letters, and was at last drawn back to London, where he had lately been amusing himself by contributing some stylish critiques of French poetry to an eclectic journal. He had served, not without honour, as lieutenant during a part of the British operations in East Africa. Anthony knew him of old from the intimacy of their respective people at Malfait Street, but both used town as headquarters, and the friendship, since Jim's last return, had flourished apace as a personal one. Jim had a lightly nervous voice, spare, bronzed, romantic features, perplexed and uneasy grey eyes, and close-cropped hair of a colourless brown, already gleaming with a few silver threads. He clung, through force of habit, to a rather long moustache.

"What brings you under tents and habitations on so fine a day?" inquired Anthony smilingly, as the caller looked round for a seat.

"Oh, I was passing."

He nodded to Theodore, who, returning the acknowledgment by one equally casual, seized the opportunity to rise and effect his escape from the room. Jim sat down in the vacated seat.

"Bright young feller-me-led that! Still with you?"

"I can't lose him."

"University man?"

"Technical college—but his heart remains virgin gold, and he will arrive at his own destination in his own way. I'm taking him down to Croom."

"Working there?"

"Yes."

"How you can dictate straight from the Holy Spirit passes my understanding."

Anthony continued to smile.

"What's doing? I can't come to lunch."

“Nor do I ask you to. I just looked in.” He scratched his cheek awkwardly, while viewing one of the pictures on the wall.

“Can I take down a message for you?” suggested Anthony.

Jim started round, but his friend’s face was impassive.

“To whom?”

“To your people, I suppose.”

“Oh! . . . Oh, no thanks! . . . May I have a woodbine?”

He helped himself from the open box on the table, and struck a match. At the same time his eyes lighted on the glass serpent.

“What’s the image?”

“A family heirloom; just come to me.”

“Quaint!—exceedingly . . . No, I’m not here for that, thanks. I thought you meant something else. The fact is, I’ve done the deed, and it struck me as more friendly that you should hear it from me than from third parties . . . Is it glass?”

“I don’t know. What are you talking about? Have you got engaged to a girl?”

“Just so.”

“May I guess?”

“By all means.”

“Haidee.”

“Haidee it is.”

Anthony absorbed the intelligence in silence for a few seconds. He could have no personal interest in the relations of those two, yet the match in some way displeased him, although it was far from unexpected. He tried to convince himself that it was because Jim was not of the stuff that good husbands are made—that, above all, he was scarcely the man to inspire a grand passion in the bosom of such a girl as Haidee Croyland, yet it was certain she could not be marrying for money or an establishment. She was not that sort. He sensed a mystery. His sisters, however, would tell him more about it when he got down, and in the meantime duty demanded that he should stretch his hand across the table.

“She’s a noble creature, Jim, and I sincerely trust you’ll convert it into a tremendous success!”

Jim gave him a swift glance.

“But am I a fool?”

“You’ve gone to the best shop, my boy, but whether you’re the marrying kind at all, it’s not for me to decide.”

“Meaning . . . ?”

“I mean nothing worse than that your habits are precisely those best calculated to irritate any self-respecting housewife. However, if you’re prepared and content to change your skin . . . ”

“But isn’t that rather bunkum, don’t you think? Everyone has to concede in such cases. I was alluding more to the question of disparity.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Six years. But of course I’ve knocked about, and she hasn’t.”

“Much depends on your antecedents with regard to the sex. If the knocking about has been with other women . . . however, you know and I don’t. Don’t tell me.”

“I hope I’m not a rotter.”

“I apologise for having drawn so unnecessary a statement. I implied nothing of the kind, Jim. Well then, the difference doesn’t signify, and you have my blessing. But is it public property yet?”

“Oh yes—and why not? We’ve not anything to gain from mystification. We’re just two persons wanting to get married, with as little fuss and ceremony as may be . . . So that’s that! I shall be going down myself tomorrow. We’ll meet at Philippi.”

But the strange reluctance of Anthony’s congratulations was puzzling and disturbing him, and he still stayed on in the hopes of gaining a clue to this frigidity. He mechanically picked up the little serpent, to start toying with it, holding it in a variety of ways in order to behold the changing lights.

“Go easy with it!” Anthony was just recommending, when suddenly the catastrophe happened. The shell of glass slipped awkwardly from Jim’s hand, evaded his clumsy effort to recapture it, struck the edge of the table, and thence rebounded on to the floor, where it was shivered into innumerable fragments.

Both men started up in dismay.

“I say! I’m most awfully sorry! . . . ”

Anthony moved round the table to view the wreckage. There was not an intact piece larger than a sixpence. He got

He looked at it awhile. It was quite ordinary in appearance.

"Yet the receptacle was a glory of art, and the contained should be of greater worth than the container," he reflected. up, shrugged his shoulders, and at last laughed.

"Can't be helped, Jim! Leave it alone. I'll clear up the mess when you're gone."

"What's the value?"

"Probably none at Christie's. Don't be an ass. It's just an interesting souvenir of the Crusades. You'll pay the full value—whatever it is—in person when you see my sisters. Gentlemen are attached to these insignia of gentle birth. I am a rude and apathetic male."

"I ought to be scragged for a butter-fingered owl! I know it's priceless."

"I do not say so, I do not say no, but cease your lamentations, my good fellow, for not the howlings of a fortnight will reshape those pitiful splinters into what they have been."

"Dear! dear!" Jim continued to murmur contritely, shaking his head and always gazing mournfully at the ruin on the carpet. He made for the door, and Anthony was entirely assured that before he had descended to the street below the disaster would have passed from his active memory.

"Sorry I can't drink to your health and prosperity on this occasion, Jim!" he called after the retreating back. "I have to meet Samuels for lunch. We'll celebrate at Malfait Street."

"She thinks very highly of you, do you know!" responded the other in his dry, jerky fashion, turning his head.

"And I of her!" said Anthony gaily.

When Jim had departed, he got down on to his hands and knees, and, carefully selecting from the debris of the serpent six or eight of the largest pieces of glass, placed them, as evidence of its destruction, in an envelope, which he proceeded to stick down and set in a drawer for removal to Croom. The smaller refuse he brushed up and threw into the waste-paper basket. The seed, after long searching, he finally located under the bottom of his bureau, whence he dislodged it by means of a foot-rule.

“If there were one chance in a million of its being still alive, it would be a peculiar adventure to pot it.”

He went on considering it in the palm of his hand.

“I’ll pot it at Croom.”

Wrapping the pip in a screw of paper, he put it in a pocket of his purse. A minute later his vaguely wandering eye fell upon the volume which Theodore had left lying on the table. He slapped its cover thoughtfully, opened it at Genesis, and read through the narrative of the expulsion from Eden.

“ . . . And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons

“And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him: ‘Where art thou?’ And he said ‘I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ And He said: ‘Who told you that thou wast naked?’ ”

Anthony closed the volume and laid it gently down.

“What was in the mind of the man who conceived the fable of that tree of the knowledge of good and evil remains perhaps the most singular problem of savage psychology still to be solved by our dryasdusts,” he pondered. “Genesis is as piecemeal as the Iliad, and indubitably the work of many imaginations; nevertheless, all the rest is puerile and absurd, this alone has metaphysical grandeur. The meaning, the seriousness, the deep and agonising mystery of *shame*—how would it occur first to an unclothed wood man that there was part of his nature both right and wrong, necessary and sinful, beautiful, being natural, yet demanding concealment from the light of day? Afraid because naked! The single flash of insight among all the Noah’s Arks, creations of complementary sexes successively, creations of sun, moon and stars midway between the plants and animals, the implied incest of immediate descendants of Adam and Eve, and the whole circus! . . . The consequences to be drawn! . . . ”

As often as he picked up the Old Testament he was attracted and repelled. Its vast desert spaces, its bloody chronicles, its fantastic oriental stories, its endless genealogies of hard-shelled Semites as alike as peas, appealed to his easy-going modern nature as little as its rigid morality, based on arbitrary law. Its supernatural background was another matter. The thought that the world was not for itself, but was full of cracks admitting the weird and solemn light of the Unseen, was developed nowhere so powerfully as in the Bible; and on this account it remained his favourite reading in an age when the best people drifted towards an acceptance of the ethics of Christ while repudiating his mystical claims, which were the base of the whole.

He took a mental note to go into the question of that Tree of Knowledge with himself—what was its secret message for the enlightened, and what its bearing on the highly-differentiated characters and attributes of the sexes to-day.

He consulted his watch. It was the hour of his appointment with Samuels. Locking up his papers, he left the room, to smarten his person for lunch in the quiet but exclusive restaurant which the great man affected for his informal business interviews.

2



Anthony drove his cousin down to Croom the same afternoon in his own car. The house was not quite thirty miles out, and they arrived shortly before five o'clock.

Malfait Street, lying high up behind Brasted, the little town straggled out on the main valley road between Riverhead and Westerham, consisted merely of an unpicturesque string of workmen's cottages, with neither shops nor inn, and, still upwards towards the crest of the hill, a few good-class residences backing on the steep woodland dip separating them

from the Ide Hill heights to the east. Each of these better-class houses stood secluded in its own grounds, otherwise there was nothing pretentious about them. Croom was the lowest, the Lytham's place, High Cot, was next, then came two more, and finally, uppermost of all, appeared the Yellow House, the name of which sufficiently describes it, where Haidee Croyland lived with her parents and young brother. The road continued to ascend past the houses due south as far as the divide overlooking the Hever-Chiddingstone country. On both sides of it, slender, leafless beeches and their russet carpets alternated with patches of grassland. In summer it was all very beautiful, but now rather bare. Croom was a white two-storied house, with a green balcony and a clematis-hung porch. It looked from the road smaller than it actually was.

The car crawled past the fencing of the front garden to the garage round the corner. Looking back, Theodore caught a glimpse of the North Downs through the tree-tops, closing the further side of the valley from which they had ascended.

Old Kerr had bought the freehold of the land, built his house on it, and left it to his two daughters. The sloping garden behind it was their pride, delight and sanctuary. There was no level for a tennis-court, nor was there much in it to catch the eye of a casual visitor, but there they tended and enjoyed their inconspicuous odoriferous flowers and herbs—cloves, pinks, marjoram, sweet william, musk, heliotrope, mignonette and lavender—and there, on summer days, looking away towards Ide Hill, far across the wooded cleft, they read their books, knitted silk and woolen garments, and dreamed, in voluptuous solitude. It was for them a world within a world, a retreat for repose and meditation. Neither a recreation ground for perspiring youth nor an exhibition gallery of prize blooms was, in their opinion, compatible with that poetic quietude, the mother of lovely fancies, which outweighed all other considerations. And in this obstinacy of a delicate inner nature they showed their relationship to Anthony, who also persisted in seeking the small, small truth.

Theodore had met his cousins once, a month before, in town. He had found them quite ordinary, good natured, rather 'darkey' women, getting on in years, out of the running for fun, a bit countryfied, bookish and highbrow, and so forth. Be-

holding them again, framed in the doorway, his memory was refreshed, and he hoped that they were not to constitute his sole society over the week-end. The car had been lodged, and Anthony was steering him by the elbow up the garden path towards the house. The sisters appeared uncertain of his identity. Then Josephine, the taller and younger, murmured in Marian's ear, the tension was relieved, and they came forward to greet the arrivals.

Anthony dryly explained the circumstances which had compelled him to bring a guest without notice. His words were cut short by effusive remonstrances. Josephine immediately disappeared indoors to give instructions concerning a room and clean linen, but the elder sister still detained her nearly unknown cousin on the threshold for the purpose of interrogating him regarding the well-being and activities of the Cardiff folk. She was surprised that he was down for such a short time. She hoped he would reconsider and make it longer. Theodore began to think her rather nice, but still felt he should be bored to extinction there. This one must be forty if a day, and the other not far short. Their clothes hung on them like sacks, they were swarthy and shapeless, with faces which would not bear dwelling upon, while Marian, at least, had the authoritative address of a school-teacher. Josephine was a shade more presentable in looks, but seemed to discount that by a sharp tongue. He observed that they were a trifle stiff with Tony. There was no kissing, or anything like that, and after the first introduction he had kept out of the conversation. He surmised that they might have had a row—perhaps about money.

But Theodore's astuteness was at fault. The coldness between Anthony and his sisters had a deeper and temperamental origin. All three were of a type and possessed much in common by nature; Anthony, however, by force of soul had partly succeeded in throwing off the limitations he was born to and becoming universal, whereas the women had remained crystallised. He had grown to hate the old family modes of thought which he had long since discarded and wished to forget, while they, on their side, were unable to forgive him his new world of fashionable celebrities, advertisement and outward glitter. They believed that his head was in danger of being turned, and deemed it their duty as elder sisters to administer periodical

cold douches to his vanity. The short consequence was that they found very little to say to each other. Anthony understood all this perfectly, but was too proud ever to attempt to explain himself. He took refuge in sarcasms.

While he departed upstairs, with his own bag and Theodore's, Marian led the latter into the sitting-room. An exceedingly good-looking girl, wearing a small mauve hat and a cream-coloured knitted sports coat, over a dark, low-necked frock, was seated by the tea table, reflectively eyeing the not too successful blaze in the grate at her elbow, as she continued to munch the fragment of cake broken off from the piece in her hand. She had pale gold hair, clear, calm, sensible blue-grey eyes, fine features, and a wonderful complexion. Her body was slim, long and graceful, she looked entirely self-possessed, and might be twenty-five. Theodore stared at the vision from inside the door with big eyes. The girl glanced round, saw that it was not the one she expected, but a stranger, and allowed her brow to crease into a little frown of annoyance and surprise.

"Anthony's just coming, Grace," announced Marian, with a touch of reassurance which the young man did not fail to remark. It was also evident that the visitor was on informal terms with the family, to be abandoned in that fashion. "Here's my cousin Theodore that he's brought down. Mr. Paysant—Miss Lytham!"

The girl got up, bowed, and sat down again.

"He is gaining experience by serving as Anthony's secretary."

"Really!"

Theodore looked awkwardly about him for a chair. After a second Grace's head turned sharply, and her eyes swept his person like the flash of a lighthouse.

"Are you contemplating taking up that profession yourself?" she asked.

"If possible."

Marian made him sit, and afterwards handed him a cup of tea, having first replenished the pot with hot water. Grace went on speaking to him, but watched the door.

"Have you written anything?"

"Not yet."

"Then you would hardly know yet, of course."

Theodore suspected that Anthony had been handling his name behind his back, and that her remark was ironical. He was prepared to turn sulky when, feeling perhaps that she had been too severe, she hastened to add more mildly:

“I expect you have met my brother, Jim?”

“I have met him in a way.”

“You may have the pleasure of doing so entirely down here, for he’s to come tomorrow. How long are you staying?”

“Only the weekend.”

“But Anthony is not returning with you?” She consulted his face quickly, and he had a sudden malicious inspiration that an affirmative reply would disturb her.

“No, I’m going home.”

“Where is your home?”

“Cardiff.”

“Oh, Cardiff! . . . Is it a nice place?”

“Not bad, but I prefer London.”

Grace turned from the door, which had again attracted her, to address Marian.

“I hope Anthony’s not waiting till the coast is clear?”

“Absurd! He doesn’t even know you’re here.”

“I think I’ll skip nevertheless.”

“You certainly won’t do anything so impolite. Come! let me pour you out another cup.”

The visitor submitted.

“Is he acquainted with the great news, did he say?”

“My dear child!—we only exchanged six words on the doorstep. He went straight upstairs.”

“I’d like to know what he knows before I skedaddle. Jim said he was going to tell him.”

“Then he has done so. What does it matter?”

“Oh, nothing, of course.”

“Anthony will be delighted, but that kind of delight can always wait.”

“Hadn’t we better drop it?”

Theodore annexed a second bun unasked. Jim Lytham must have got himself engaged to someone, though why his sister should be so anxious about Tony’s hearing the news was not apparent. She seemed beastly interested in Tony altogether. Probably she was smitten. As soon as he started to realise

that his cousin might have *two* girls in tow, his estimation of him as a man of the world went up with a miraculous rapidity. He determined to keep his eyes open.

Anthony came into the room, and shook hands with Grace with a warmth which appeared as though it might have been warmer still, but for the presence of a desecrating outsider.

"I had no idea you were here," he said, almost joyfully, while retaining her hand. Grace laughed.

"I'm just off."

"No, you're not. I have to hear all about Jim's engagement first."

"Do sit down, you tall people!" Marian poured out her brother his tea, and, taking the cup, he complied. Grace sat down again into her own seat.

"You've been introduced?" inquired Anthony, cocking his eye at his cousin.

"Yes—rather!"

"Your room's next to mine. When you've taken tea you may like to see it."

Theodore passed over the suggestion in silence, and a pause followed.

"How are things?" asked Anthony of Grace.

"The rose bushes have been pruned, our cat's had kittens, and the fair Molly is smashing crockery at the rate of one piece a day. I can't think of anything else."

"Exciting! So Molly is your new treasure?"

"At least, if she goes on, she will be our only one."

"And now, to get back to Jim's business . . ."

"You're acquainted with the happy blushing couple."

"Then she is in her seventh heaven?"

"I hope so. I'm to be bridesmaid, if you please!"

Anthony looked thoughtful. Suddenly, by one of those queer chances that bring things together all at once, Josephine re-entered the room, Grace decided that the dumb youth sitting in their midst did not belong to the same caste with the rest of them, and the playwright made up his mind to marry Grace herself. It came to him quietly, and almost without emotion, as a deliverance from his perplexities. He watched Josephine perch herself upon the arm of the sofa by the wall.

"I have given you the room next to Anthony's," she said

to Theodore, "and it's at your disposal whenever you care to ascend."

"This grows marked!" laughed Grace. "It's the second time Mr. Paysant has had the same intimation and suggestion hurled at him."

"Oh, we're like that. What other illuminating remarks have been made during my absence?"

"We've only had local gossip." Her brother pulled out his cigarette case. "The maid at High Cot has been pruning the teacups. Will anyone smoke?—you Grace?"

She declined with a smile, and only Theodore joined him.

"What's *your* news, Anthony?" inquired Josephine.

"Mine? Let me ponder . . . Samuels has practically taken my latest-born. Uncle Matthew has forwarded the celebrated family serpent."

"You should have had it long ago," commented Marian, nodding her head. "I have always maintained it belonged to you."

"And now it belongs to nobody, so it matters little."

"What do you say?"

"Here are the bits!" He produced the envelope, ripped it open, and tranquilly exhibited on his extended palm the fragments of broken green glass which he had preserved. Marian rose slowly from her seat as though confronted by a ghost, while Josephine slid from the sofa-arm to come forward. Their brother grinned.

"One not unrelated to the culprit is present, so gentle grief without swear words is indicated."

"Did Jim do it?" demanded Grace.

"Let him answer that."

Marian's face had become fiery red. "How did it happen?"

"Let Grace's Molly answer *that*. One imagines that it came away in his hand."

Grace discreetly suppressed a desire to titter. "If you want to murder him for it, Marian, I give you *carte-blanche*. It was that unique piece, wasn't it?"

"Unluckily, yes . . . I really don't know how to express my feelings . . ."

"Don't try!" counselled Anthony, and, setting down the bits of glass, he felt for his purse. He held up the seed for inspection between thumb and finger. "As evil brings forth good,

at least our accident has liberated a six-hundred years old captive. Behold it!"

"Whatever is it?" asked Grace.

"A native of Paradise."

"But what is it, you exasperating person?"

"Adam still held the core of the famous apple in his fist when driven forth, and this is one of the genuine pips, isn't it so, Marian?"

"What does he mean?" Grace turned to the elder sister.

"My dear, it's a real relic, with a fanciful story attached. It was brought home after one of the late Crusades, and in those days people's literary references, as you know, were extremely limited. Being a vegetable seed, and at the same time obviously precious, it naturally suggested to an ignorant man-at-arms the fable of the Garden of Eden. Such a person would not know that the sacred symbolical trees have been a feature of all oriental religions—I mean that what Anthony has in his hand is probably analogous to a splinter from the true Cross, or anything like that. Its interest for us is not the thing itself, but the state of faith which has nourished the idea during high centuries . . . yes, I repeat, *faith*, Anthony!—very holy, very mysterious; something which you and I cannot understand, for we are too worldlywise. That is why I hate to see you flip-pant about it. You crack jokes on the subject because the antique gravity has been sifted out of your character."

"I fancy I grasp your attitude," said Grace, in a considering voice. "You respect the ancients, not so much for their romance, colour and vitality, as for their capacity of belief?"

"Yes, they were so whole, so simple . . ."

Her brother interrupted her. "I approve. But since it's agreed that this particular seed may belong to any one of a number of cults or myths, and since my mild derision was directed towards the Israelitish story alone, I plead not guilty to the charge of poking fun at the little stranger. To prove my awe of its eminent respectability, I announce that it is my intention to take its claims with the utmost seriousness, and to pot it, to see what turns up."

Something as bizarre as one of your own plays, no doubt!" returned Josephine unkindly.

"I beg your pardon!"

"What do you think will turn up?—an apple tree?"

“You jeered. However I pass that, and proceed to urge —if corn found in the Egyptian mummy-tombs has of recent years been tried out, to be ascertained still alive and kicking, why should not this pip of unknown lineage reproduce for us, let us say, the dessert of the black-bearded, bull-fronted ones of Babylon or Nineveh?—since we may not carry its genealogy further. Have you all the mystic laws of germination accurately tabulated in that admirable neat little knowledge-box of yours?”

“My dear boy, a fruit tree is utterly distinct from a hardy cereal—besides which, the evidence as to the wheat from the tombs is very much under the shade at the present.”

“I give you the word. Still, as we must lodge it somewhere, why not in a flower-pot?”

“Do as you like with it, but don’t expect any result.”

Anthony returned the seed to his vest pocket.

“It’s our duty to afford it every chance in a hard and unfriendly world of specialised competitors. Grace, I solicit your co-operation.”

“Certainly, if I can be of any help.”

“Your greenhouse.”

“Of course. I didn’t know you really meant it. You had better walk up with me.”

“To pay my respects to the ladies. And in the meantime Theodore can entertain my sisters with intimate tales of my delinquencies in town. It’s an opportunity they don’t often get.”

“And as seldom occurs to us to want,” retorted Josephine. “So long as you keep out of the police-court intelligence, we are satisfied to remain in ignorance.”

“I am convinced that the interrogation will begin—and since I have neither murder, theft, blackmail, arson, nor a secret marriage on my conscience, you have my hearty permission thereto.”

“Will you discuss us with Grace?”

“Indeed no!”

“Then your insufferable conceit speaks for itself. ‘Larn’ him, Grace!”

The girl got up, laughing.

“No doubt he needs it, but why should you put a hopeless task on *my* shoulders?”

“You and Jim can do what you like with Anthony, so don’t pretend!”

Grace coloured, as she prepared to retreat into the hall.

“It would be very nice to think so. Unfortunately, it isn’t true.”

Outside the sun was still shining from a bleak sky, but a chill evening wind shivered the naked boughs of the trees by the roadside. High Cot was less than a hundred yards up the hill. A man riding a bicycle could not have kept his saddle at the pace which Anthony had the audacity to set, yet the girl, built for physical activity, seemed to find nothing out of the way in such a rate of progress. She rather nervously hastened to take up the conversation where Josephine had left it.

“Joking apart, why do you always adopt such a different tone with your sisters?”

“Do I?”

“You know you do. I should hate it if anyone were consistently to treat me like that. Why do you do it?”

“I admire your loyalty, but there’s more to it than meets the eye, and one day perhaps I’ll explain.”

“I don’t think it’s very nice of you.”

Anthony considered for a moment.

“That naturally would be the impression of an unbiassed outsider. Yet answer me this. Do we invariably make our own attitudes, or aren’t they very frequently made for us? My sisters are excellent and highly moral souls, but the fact is we’ve somehow drifted right out of sympathy, with small prospect of getting back to that happy state. Tenderness cannot whisper across three fields. The irony that grates your sensibility probably represents the one link still possible between us, and if we are not to be jocular and recriminatory we shall be speechless. How it has all happened would be too difficult an act of reconstruction. I suppose what I really need is a wife.”

“Do you see many women?” asked Grace quietly, after a pause.

“One does in London. The world grows increasingly feminine, and one cannot well avoid them. They begin to swarm.”

“I mean, of course, have you many women friends?”

“I haven’t the time.”

“But you must find the time if you are to marry.”

“True!” said Anthony laconically.

Grace ventured no further into the secret recesses of his soul. They were by now exactly half-way between the two houses.

“Let’s talk about a very much more interesting fellow called Jim!” recommended the playwright briskly, as one turning from an academic to a practical topic. “Well now, is it a lucky match?”

His companion pulled a face.

“Honestly, I don’t know.”

“You think—what?”

“I’d rather not say anything.”

“But you know surely whether you approve?”

“Between ourselves, not altogether.”

“I’m sorry. What’s the objection?”

“Only that I can’t convince myself that she’s frightfully in love with him,” was the somewhat hurried reply. “I wish I could think she were. Otherwise they would suit each other very well. She’s quite a nice girl.”

“But why has she accepted him, then?”

“Because she’s not acquainted with her own mind, let us hope.”

“That’s fierce! Poor old Jim! May I ask if the supposition is at all reliably based?”

“Oh, I only go on intuition and the observation of my own eyes. We’d better not discuss it. I trust I’m mistaken, and anyway, no one can interfere. If only Jim were a shade less desperately infatuated . . .”

“So he’s that?”

“He’s a changed man—haven’t you seen it? If anything occurred now to break off the affair, he would certainly buy a ticket to-morrow to some remote and inaccessible spot situated at the end of the earth. I’ve watched it in dread swelling for months.”

“My dear Grace, he’s a man, and a man’s passion has force to overcome many obstacles. The great thing is that she has consented. The rest will follow.”

“You’ll have opportunities of seeing them together while you’re down here.”

“To be sure. But how does Virginia regard it?”

Grace grimaced again. “How would she! You know there’s a settled feud between her and Haidee.”

“You women!”

“Well, it isn’t her fault if she has very acute instincts—though you may depend we don’t encourage them in this particular instance. If she starts the subject with you, you can’t do better than squash her at once. I have no influence.”

“When was it all fixed up?”

“Yesterday.”

They reached the garden gate, and turned in. After the racket of town, the crisp, pure air and the beauty and quietude of the countryside were affecting their silent work of metamorphosing the whole fabric of Anthony’s ideas, and he had already attained that condition of profound peace which is only revealed to its possessor by the entire absence of desire. He could have gone on idling thus with Grace indefinitely. The tranquil, distant pleasure of debating Jim’s problem with his sister rendered his professed interest more than a little hypocritical, and perhaps the girl was aware of something of the same feeling in herself. Both knew that matters for them were moving to a crisis—that a subtle change in their relationship had been wrought by their latest separation; yet neither at all wished to hasten the inevitable meeting of their interior thoughts. They had a fortnight in which to speak to each other. In the dim but wonderful consciousness that a vast new world had opened suddenly before her, the extent of which could not be taken in at once, Grace turned the handle of the front door and preceded her escort into the hall, as though dreaming.

They found Mrs. Lytham writing letters in the study at the back of the house, a bright fire burning in the open hearth behind her. She was a smart, slender, attractive-looking woman of forty-five, still quite young in appearance, with pretty hands and arms, modern upper-class features, a creamy skin, dark grey eyes, shaded by long lashes, plentiful dark brown hair, so arranged that her forehead was nearly hidden by a youthful fringe, a neck longer and shapelier than Grace’s, and a smile for Anthony, both intimate and searching. He bore the scrutiny well enough, but was visited by his old perplexity.

With such considerable pretensions to beauty, why did she not get married a second time herself, instead of matchmaking for others? He was morally convinced that she had had much to do with the bringing together of Jim and Haidee, and, if signs went for anything, she was now working to repeat the success in his own case, with Grace. He had no objection, but was she really an altruist or was it merely a feminine love of intrigue? It was difficult to reconcile her rather coquettish charms with the motherly guardianship of her stepchildren when they had been younger, yet the fact remained, she had been invariably good to them and had given them the best of educations, for the old Professor, as far as Anthony knew, had left all that sort of thing to her. He was a little hazy about the financial relations at High Cot. He believed that Mrs. Lytham and Grace both had independent incomes, but that the house itself belonged to Jim, in which case he might want to settle in it himself after his marriage. Then, if Grace left her, she would probably have to go off somewhere with her own daughter Virginia. Virginia she would not get off her hands so easily, assuming that she needed all these preliminaries as an excuse for taking a second husband herself, but the whole thing was quite a puzzle.

While they shook hands, Grace explained the particular purpose of his call. Mrs. Lytham laughed, and suggested Virginia's counsel. She was the family gardener. A curiosity like this would just appeal to her, she was so keen on the freakish side of floriculture, such as experimental grafting and cross-fertilising—to be charitable to the poor child, she was not physically cut out for hard spade-work. Grace asked where she was. She was probably upstairs in her own room, twiddling her thumbs. For Anthony's benefit, Mrs. Lytham added that she was subject to these fits of utter, stupefying *ennui*, which had their origin in the unsatisfactory condition of her nerves.

"You should take her to town," commented the playwright drily. "An intellectual girl like that is killing herself down here. Why don't you?"

"It may come to it."

Grace departed in quest of her half-sister, leaving the two together.

“You’ve heard about Jim’s gamble?” smiled Mrs. Lytham, gracefully inviting Anthony to a seat.

He sat down.

“He told me he’s engaged. Do you find it a gamble?”

“You know Haidee.”

“You think she’s an adventure for a man?”

“Don’t you?”

“Perhaps, but a very charming one. Personally, I’m delighted.”

Mrs. Lytham regarded him.

“Honestly?”

“Certainly. She’s straight, clever, capable, and seems to be fond of him. There’s no question about her being among the world’s things of beauty. I have no reason to suppose that she’s more extravagant than any other pretty girl of her own age.”

“Then why didn’t you go in first?”

“My dear lady! . . . For one thing, Jim is a freelance, while I am a mechanical day-labourer and drudge. My life is my work, and after my work I am as an empty bottle. What girl would propose to herself an empty bottle from which to drink happiness? Marriage, I doubt, is not for such as I.”

“That’s your first excuse—not a very good one. What is your next?”

“It is said on good authority that the artist has already a sufficient handful of a wife in his art, so that the act of getting married is for him the equivalent of setting up a second establishment.”

“Rubbish! Like all other men, you know you have a tremendous amount of vexatious and superfluous electricity to get rid of, and who but a wife will ever do it for you? You ought to marry.”

“But we change ground, I think! We were discussing Haidee but a moment ago. She is bagged, and still I ought to marry.”

“There are others.”

“For example?”

“You know perfectly well what and whom I’m hinting at.”

“I fancy so.”

“There’s no hindrance on your side, is there?”

Anthony flushed a little. “This is open warfare with a vengeance!”

“But there isn’t?” persisted the lady.

“Well no, there isn’t.”

“Jim shall talk to you when he comes.”

“Your own eloquence amply suffices. Were I really contemplating a plunge into the abyss, the arguments of a man silly with infatuation would be the very ones to bring me to my senses. Let us leave something to the spirit of improvisation, and let us resume this interesting debate in a year and a day. I’ll think it over . . . The happy fellow arrives to-morrow, he tells me.”

“Oh, that reminds me! He’s asked me to settle the arrangements for a small celebration of the event, for to-morrow evening. You’ll come, of course?”

“Could I refuse? Is it to be here?”

“Yes. Just a family gathering over the dinner-table, at eight, with a hop afterwards, or something like that. You, your sisters, Haidee and her young brother. The old people won’t come—Mr. Croyland has one of his attacks. So much the better! So I may rely on you?”

“Securely.”

“Then perhaps you’ll pass your sisters this note of invitation when you get back?”

Anthony put it in his pocket.

“I’ve brought a young cousin down with me, of the male gender. How is he to be provided for?”

“Fetch him too. Who is it?”

“The youngest son of old Paysant, the coal man, hailing from Cardiff.”

“I suppose we ought to make it dress,” said Mrs. Lytham carelessly. “Have you both your things down here?”

“Yes, I was supernaturally warned of a bust-up.”

Grace returned to the room, her waist encircled by the arm of a girl of nineteen or twenty, taller than herself, with a thick tangle of bobbed auburn hair, setting off a luminously pale face and thin white neck which showed the bones, above a body of such girlish fragility and slightness that it seemed

as though it would sink under its own weight unless supported. Her peeping brown-black eyes held something malicious in their depths. She wore a simple coloured frock, with short sleeves and a low straight neckline. It was Virginia.

Her mother viewed her rather apprehensively, while Anthony put on a propitiating smile. She was accustomed to weigh men and matters on strange private scales, and to present the bill to her company without much thought of prejudices. Her society was a school of tact—one never knew what would drop next from her lips, it was necessary to be constantly on guard to keep her conversation within banks of decorum. Haidee was the only person who dared deliberately to irritate her for fun. She had commenced by styling her 'The Virgin Princess' behind her back, in sly reference to the familiar portraits of the great queen, with the red hair and the white peaked face, and now, by way of giving a subtler flavour to the joke, openly addressed her in person as 'Elizabeth', without offering any explanation of the derivation of the name, though Virginia was too quick-witted not to guess that it was intended to imply that she could never hope to get married, besides other detestable things. She could not retaliate in kind, Haidee was too genuinely a beauty, but she had bided her time, and at last Jim's engagement promised full repayment with interest. Since Haidee chose to flaunt the impossibility of a husband for her, *she* meant to move heaven and earth to prevent the possibility of this particular husband for Haidee. Her mother and Grace watched the progress of the feud with alarm, principally on Jim's account, but understanding too well that open expostulations would only make the affair worse instead of better, they were at a complete loss how to cope with the emergency. Virginia could not be sent away, and Jim must see nothing of it. They had to rely on Haidee's good nature, but Haidee was no favourite of theirs. If Anthony had been aware of it, Mrs. Lytham's chief motive in assisting to throw Jim and Haidee together was that that dangerously pretty girl might be effectually barred for Anthony himself, whom she wanted for Grace.

He exhibited the seed, of which Grace had already spoken to her half-sister.

"What do you want done with it?" inquired Virginia,

holding it to the light between her thin thumb and finger.

“I want you, if you will be so kind, to put it in a flower-pot in your greenhouse, to give it a decent chance of coming up.”

“But what is it?”

Anthony repeated something of the legend.

“Oh, it’s as dead as Methusaleh!”

“That’s what we are to see.”

“I don’t know what it is. I’ll put it in a pot for you.”

“Thanks!”

“I’ll put it two inches deep in potting mould, in a five-inch pot, and there it will stop till the last trump, unless disturbed.”

“The image is more picturesque than theological, but I thank you again.”

“It *looks* like an apple-pip. Do you wish to see me do it?”

“I fear I must get back—I’ve only just arrived.”

“Then come up to-morrow, and I’ll show you its tomb.”

“I won’t fail.”

Virginia turned to leave the room, but had a second thought, and faced him again.

“Are you pleased about Jim?” she demanded, with a flicker of her eyes.

“Very, very pleased.”

She remained quiet for a moment.

“I wonder!”

“And so we all are,” interposed Grace quickly. “Jim’s done the right thing. Then we shall see you to-morrow, Anthony? Has mother mentioned the dinner?”

“Yes, and we’ll make a night of it.”

Virginia smiled, while looking sideways at the floor. “I hope it will pass off without accidents.”

No one answered her.

“Nothing to say, Anthony?”

“My dear girl . . .”

“No, I’m not your dear girl. Someone else might like to be—don’t blush, Grace, the remark isn’t directed at you. I’ll bet a new hat Haidee . . .”

“My child, you’re mad!” said Grace.

“Mad to hint that Haidee worships at the feet of a certain very clever man?”

“Both mad and wicked, for it’s grossly false and you’re trying to spoil Jim’s happiness besides. Luckily Anthony knows you by this time.”

Anthony coloured darkly. Virginia’s innuendo was an ill-mannered exaggeration of a certain vague and undefined and probably extremely temporary preference which at one time Haidee had been pleased to manifest, or seem to manifest, towards him. He himself had been in no sense to blame for her interest in him, which had passed without marked episode, yet in Grace’s presence he felt as though his good name were being dragged in the mud.

“I really cannot discuss an affair of which I am entirely and woefully ignorant,” he said, with an uneasy smile. “I must content myself with expressing my emphatic dissent to the general proposition, that a girl who worships at the feet of one available man—to use your own words—will without rhyme or reason accept the hand of another without having put the first to a clear test. I assure you on my honour that, as far as I am concerned, no woman in the world has yet put me to anything resembling such a test—and a very good thing, for I cannot imagine a more embarrassing situation for one as shy as myself.”

“Oh, a good deal of water flows beneath London Bridge between an engagement and a marriage, you know!” laughed Virginia, and her curls shook about her ears. “There may be wheels within wheels.”

“I fear I have no authority to act as Haidee’s defender.”

“Don’t you think you might exhibit your dislike of her in a less repulsive form?” asked Grace of her half-sister bitterly. “I suppose you’ll try to upset Jim next!”

“You’re really going too far, Virginia,” said her mother.

“Oh, I shan’t say a word to old Jim. Let him learn his own bad news!”

“Bad news!”

“Anyway, I’d rather you closed down the talk in my presence, if you don’t mind very much,” said Anthony, more stiffly than was his wont. “Grace, no doubt, will undertake the task

of convincing you of your extraordinary error.”

“Grace and I have thrashed it out pretty thoroughly already, you may be sure.”

Grace turned very pink. “That’s untrue! My share of the thrashing out was to call you mean, uncharitable and mentally unsettled.”

“Virginia happens to be in one of her puckish moods,” said Mrs. Lytham, rising from her chair. “When that takes place, the whole household is set by the ears before any of us realise where we rightly are, but it’s quite in the routine. You will get to understand us better. So to-morrow night at eight, Anthony?”

He comprehended that he was dismissed, and took his farewells, feeling strongly flushed and disturbed. He wondered what Grace really believed of him, whether Haidee was playing a straight game with Jim, and what Virginia had pieced together from the past to cause her disagreeable outbreak. He had always admired Haidee’s beauty, but it had never gone further. It was hardly possible that she had ever had more than a fleeting fancy for him—as any girl might for any man. His chief annoyance was that, in the light of this charge of Virginia’s, he would be obliged more or less to regulate his behaviour towards Haidee on future meetings, and since it was probable that he would see a good deal of Jim and his wife after their marriage, he ran the risk of offending both of them by an excessive caution. He decided, at all events, that the sooner he attached himself to Grace, the better it would be for all parties concerned. He would try to open the subject with her some time to-morrow.

3



It was still twilight out of doors on Saturday evening when the assembled party sat down to table in the low-ceilinged oak dining-room of High Cot. Rose-shaded candle-lamps illuminated the long board, but the rest of the chamber was allowed to remain in a poetic gloom, broken only by the flickering gleams from the fire in the grate at the end of the room furthest from the door. Down one side of the table, commencing from Mrs. Lytham at the top, were placed Marian Kerr, Grace, Anthony and Virginia, then came Jim at the bottom, and up the other side sat Haidee Croyland on his right hand, Theodore, Josephine and Haidee's young brother Silvester, a tall, sallow, stooping youth in spectacles, who had just completed his last term at a public school at Tonbridge, and might or might not go on to Cambridge. All the arrangements went off without a hitch. Grace had seen to the table decorations personally, the menu was delicately appropriate to the occasion, it was the cook's lucky day, while the two waiting-maids, including the famous Molly, were on their mettle and determined to deserve the praise of their mistress thereafter. Jim had selected the dinner wine in town, and champagne was in readiness for the great toast after the cheese.

Haidee was laughing and beautiful. Her age was almost exactly Grace's but in evening attire she always looked older and more accustomed to functions, which perhaps was due in part to her half-foreign aspect, as though she were a cosmopolitan beside a home-bred provincial. Her parents, as a matter of fact, were both English, and she had been educated in England. In ordinary day dress the exotic nature of her appearance was less noticeable, but at night she seemed to do her hair differently, her cheeks burned, her eyes glittered, and the serpentine grace of her movements was less impeded

by apparel. She was a woman to the bone, quick, *svelte* and not very tall, with the whitest and finest braceleted arms, terminating in small, blue-veined hands as light as leaves. Her cheekbones were high, the perfectly straight nose overhung a crimson-lipped mouth of wonderful shortness and sweetness, her forehead was low, and made still lower by her *coiffure*, her eyes were black, oriental and vivacious. She blushed easily and charmingly, while in repose she had a trick of hanging her head with an assumption of virginal modesty that imposed on men and older women, but scarcely on girls. She had dark hair, a high complexion, and lovely shoulders. She wore earrings. Her low-cut gown was pale green.

Grace's quiet fascinations, however, were more to Anthony's taste. Dressed in the delicate colours of a blonde, with no jewelry to speak of, she seemed quite willing to be effaced by Haidee on her own evening, yet the playwright reflected more than once that whereas she looked entirely a lady and a thoroughbred, the other across the table, by contrast, might very well have passed at any supper-party of actresses—and no doubt she would be quite in her element on the comedy stage. After a few stealthy comparing glances at the girls, to satisfy his mind about their respective types, he decided to his genuine relief that Haidee's so-extravagantly praised person really did leave him sexually undisturbed, and afterwards kept his eyes away from her.

Virginia, who sat next to Jim on his left hand, wore a biscuit-coloured frock which exposed her neck and long, thin arms to Haidee's pensive regard. Not a word nor an open look was exchanged between them, but before dinner was half-through the young daughter of the house felt hot and exasperated in every part of her body and was rapidly becoming worked up to a mood of desperate recklessness, which as likely as not would culminate in catastrophic speech. Anthony, her other neighbour, who had once or twice endeavoured to engage her in conversation, fancied, from the vicious curtness of her response, that by this childish demeanour she wished to express her protest against the engagement. Afraid that if she were left to simmer in her own spleen she would presently offer some impossible insult at the expense of the harmony

of the evening, he tried to interrupt her mood by giving the talk a more general character. He addressed Silvester across the table.

Josephine was relating to the latter the history of the glass serpent, while the youth appeared already to have drunk enough. His horn-rimmed eyes looked extraordinarily wise and judicial, as with cocked head he received his table companion's story, as though it were a major problem of the universe being propounded for his solution. He had been a distinguished member of the school debating society, and was only holding back until she should have finished. Anthony, breaking in upon his sister, asked him:

“Silvester, how do they reconcile the scriptural traditions with science in these days? Are they content to let sleeping dogs lie, or do they go for subtlety?”

Silvester's susceptibilities were wounded by this coarsely ignorant assumption that the higher views of the modern generation, as represented by himself, were the rigid and necessary product of a school course imposed by authority. In point of fact, a man of his years was incomparably more intellectually energetic, scientifically acute and creatively profound, better equipped in every way for treating such critiques of the foundations of knowledge, than middle-aged persons whose brains had run to seed over the money-making trifles of a so-called practical career. He wished his reply to make it clear that he entirely repudiated the inferior role. He started to rise, as if for a debate, then bethought himself, and drained the last inch of wine from the glass before him.

“First of all, let us understand what we are talking about,” he began, with an unnecessary loudness which attracted all eyes towards him. “Do you refer to traditions generally, or to this particular myth of the Garden of Eden, introduced by the art-work under discussion? I shall be very happy to enlighten you either way.”

“Silvester, shut up!” called out Haidee, laughing.

“On the contrary, Kerr has just put a question, and I must answer it. Which do you mean? All tradition, or this one tradition only? If we delimit the subject, we shall not find ourselves arguing at cross-purposes.”

Anthony smiled. "The Garden of Eden, for instance."

"More wine for Mr. Croyland!" Jim directed the maid at his elbow, in high good spirits. Things at last looked like livening up. "*You* have another glass, Haidee!" he added.

She neither refused nor accepted, but a moment later, apropos of nothing, shot Anthony a single brief yet lingering glance, as though she would read his thoughts. He did not see it, but Grace did. She cast down her eyes to her plate, with a wrinkling of her brow.

Theodore's foot touched Haidee's accidentally under the table. She shifted hers, but not until the contact had lasted for an appreciable moment. Soon afterwards she began to pay him more attention, while Jim, blissfully unjealous, employed his liberty by taking pity on Virginia, sitting tongue-tied on his other side.

In the meantime Silvester was delivering his theories about Paradise. The sitting posture checked his flow. He was mortified to discover that he had an unwonted difficulty in making himself understood by the calm-eyed dramatist half-seen through the decorations. The room was close, and there was an infernal hubbub.

"The Garden of Eden is not a trunk story, but merely a branch. The Garden of the Hesperides is a twin branch, perhaps as old We have in both a forbidden enclosure—apples—deadly guardians A later branch may be the Jack-and-Beanstalk myths . . . Of course, the trunk itself has perished. I could establish all this for you some other time . . . I hope I'm clear?"

"Admirably so, and what you tell me is most interesting. Are you still hitching your waggon to the star of a professorship?"

"I want to go to Cambridge and then a special study of Philology, ethnology, and paleo . . . paleo"

"Paleontology?"

"Yes. Don't you approve?"

"But your father is still unconvinced, I think?" put in Mrs. Lytham. She covered with the palm of her hand the glass he was about to raise to his lips. "No more now, my dear boy! You have to reserve yourself for the toast."

Silvester coloured.

“My father! He intends to make a motor manufacturer of me, if you please! Because he has no higher ideal than to build cars himself, that is to be my inspiration also. He imagines we are living in the days of the Roman Republic, when fathers had the right . . . ”

“Hear! hear!” grumbled Theodore in an undertone.

“What’s going on up there?” exclaimed Jim from the other end. “Interference with free drinking? Rats! If we’re not all frisky tonight, then I don’t consider myself engaged. Drink up, my boy!”

“Then fill Haidee’s glass!” said Virginia, with a maliciously sweet smile. “She must be exuberant, whoever else isn’t.”

“Thanks! Elizabeth, but I’ve a strong head, I’d have you know. There’s no prospect of your witnessing both members of the family returned home on a barrow.”

“Everyone shall go home on a barrow to-night, or I’ll jolly well know the reason why!” asserted Jim, filling first Haidee’s glass and then his own.

“Everyone?” queried Theodore slyly.

“Every blessed one! Aren’t we all friends together? Marian, how is it with you at your end?”

Marian bowed to him smilingly in silence, and addressed Silvester:

“How is your father?”

“He’s improving, thanks.”

“But couldn’t be persuaded to turn out?”

“No, he’s hardly well enough for company.”

“Your mother wouldn’t leave him, of course?”

“She wanted to, I know, but thought it better not.”

Virginia unkindly kept pressing wine on Haidee through Jim. The girl permitted her glass to be filled once more without protest but left it untasted. Theodore, whose barometer was steadily rising, began to murmur in the ear of the bride-elect impudent remarks, the purport of which she affected to misunderstand.

“Why haven’t we met before?”

“Oh, I’m one of the fixtures here.”

“Do you know, the colour of your frock goes just rippingly with this soft pink lamplight!”

“If dance we do, I’ve claimed my partner already,” smiled Anthony. “Tonight Haidee is Jim’s property.”

“Wisdom and prudence!” muttered Virginia.

Haidee gave utterance to a little laugh, still without looking up. “You seem very anxious to rob Jim of his prerogative!”

“Oh, I know you’ll do just exactly whatever you please in the matter.”

“Then why the weird suggestion?”

“To give you an opening, perhaps.”

“That doesn’t sound so very polite to Jim.”

“No, I’m not a polite person.”

“In fact, you’re an *enfant terrible*.”

Virginia gave her a quick, impish look from under her lashes.

“That means a child who says embarrassing things, doesn’t it, Haidee?”

“Or things meant to be embarrassing, which are not.”

“Oh well, we won’t quarrel over it. I was only offering the gentle reminder that you can dance with Jim at any time—down the country lanes, if it gives you any pleasure—whereas Anthony you haven’t always with you. Still, just as it amuses you!”

“You’re my capital amusement at this house, Elizabeth.”

“What a pity I’m not a man—then you might think it worth your while to take me seriously.”

“Yes, what a pity!” agreed Haidee carelessly, and Virginia flushed to her ears.

Jim’s *fiancée* turned to Theodore again, and the whispering and laughing between them recommenced. Jim himself stared doubtfully at Virginia, and was on the point of addressing her, but thought better of it, to drink off his glass instead. Silvester’s voice up the table once more drew all eyes to him. His ignominious inability to get past the word ‘paleontology’ still festered in his brain, and he sought to convince the party of his absolute iron-headed sobriety. Having carefully thrust up his cuffs, and settled his spectacles more imposingly on his ears, he had reopened the attack upon his most convenient victim, Josephine, who, smiling and alarmed, listened to him while toying with the morsel of cheese on her plate.

“To return to our muttons!” he started jauntily. “In order to arrive at the factual trunk of which these mythical Gardens are correspondent branches, it is essential to discard the . . . the unessential, in short, and to preserve the essential, in its . . . its essence . . .”

“Don’t speak about what you don’t understand! It’s a clash.”

Marian, during this dialogue, was whispering to Mrs. Lytham, “Haidee looks unusually pretty to-night.”

“She ought to.”

“Jim’s obviously devoted to her.”

“If only one could feel . . .”

But the approach of a maid broke off the confidence, and when the ground was clear again Grace caught at Marian’s arm.

“Don’t look at once, but isn’t Haidee behaving rather strangely for an engaged girl?”

Marian stole a glance in a moment or two, and understood what she meant.

“They haven’t quarrelled?” she inquired in a murmur. Grace replied by an expressive grimace.

“You know, I can’t help fancying you’re not English at all,” Theodore declared to his neighbour.

“What am I?”

“Roumanian, or something like that, I should have guessed.”

“Is that the birth of a compliment?”

“No, but really.”

“Why not Turkish? Can you see me in a seraglio?”

“By jove! yes.”

Hearing the silver laugh of his *inamorata*, Jim laughed too.

“What’s the jest?” he demanded.

“Mr. Paysant thinks I would look very sweet in Turkish trousers.”

“Oh, I say!” . . . Theodore started to protest.

“That’s all right, my boy! She’s a first-rate leg-puller. My sister Virginia here and I have been fixing up a shake-down for afterwards. You dance?”

“Oh, I can get round.”

“Then get round with Virginia.”

But his half-sister shook her auburn curls impatiently. “I’m not going to exhibit myself, and you dance like a pair of tongs, Jim. Us’ll sit out.”

“Guinea-pigs! We must all do our bit. I’m ready to do hand-springs, if called upon. You take Paysant, I take . . .”

“Josephine, and Anthony can have Haidee.”

“You eccentric child!” said Haidee, looking down to finger the lace of her gown.

“Sounds like a scent factory,” called out Jim boisterously. “You’re well up, my lad! What’s the dispute?”

Silvester ignored him. “My statement, Miss Kerr . . . I mean, for instance . . . on the one hand we have a dragon, and on the other hand a snake . . .”

“Snakes already!” cried Jim. “By Gum! . . .”

“What is a dragon but a glorified snake? A snake is a worm, and in medieval days dragons were styled worms. Therefore, without distortion of meaning, we may say that the dragon of the Garden of the Hesperides is identical in kind with the serpent-devil of the Garden of Eden. But next, the functions of such a worm differ in the two traditions. Here he guards, there he tempts. Therefore, one or both of these versions is corrupt. The guarding function in the Israelitish account is entrusted to seraphim. Then what is common? Seraphim?—no. Our original parents?—no. A worm?—yes. A guardian?—yes. Forbidden fruit?—yes. A Garden?—yes. From all this let us . . . je-je . . . jejuce . . .”

Jim flung his napkin on the floor, rolled in his seat, and roared with laughter.

“There’s one cooked, by Gad! Put a blanket over his head, someone! . . . Hi, there!—where’s that champagne? Haidee’s health, friends! . . .”

The maids left the room. Jim went to the side-table, where with practised skill he unwired and removed the corks of the first bottles, filling little by little the array of glasses with the foaming liquid. As fast as they were filled, Anthony and Theodore set them before the seated ladies.

Hardly had they sat down again when the playwright was

on his feet, with lifted glass.

“My very good friends all, you know what I am up to do, and I shan’t use many words about it. I invite you to drink with me to the health, prosperity and everlasting happiness of two of the best people in the world! May their married existence be as light and exhilarating as the stuff in our glasses! To Haidee and Jim!”

The toast was drunk with cheers and laughter. Virginia alone preserved an annoyed face, although she stood and sipped her wine with the rest.

Jim meanwhile gazed before him at nothing, with a proud and whimsical expression. Haidee’s lips were curved into a cryptic smile, as she sat with downbent head, drooping eyelids and hectic cheeks. Grace could not make her out.

Then Jim rose to respond.

“Good people, on behalf of Haidee and myself, I thank you! . . . We are making an experiment—adventurous it may be—but necessitated by conditions of bliss on this terrestrial globe. I have lived far too many years in ignorance and blindness, and now my eyes are opened. That describes all the business, from my standpoint. I can only add that I shall endeavour to deserve my wonderful luck. There are many Jims in the world, but only one Haidee . . . Before sitting down, I should like to say that I hope my dear old pal, Anthony will be quick to follow my lead, and, in anticipation of this greatly-to-be-desired event, I venture to propose the following return toast, which I am sure you will all honour. I lift my glass to the speedy conversion of all single men!”

Anthony levered himself up to his height by the edge of the table.

“Half a minute, Jim!”

“Aha!” exclaimed the other.

Josephine sat up, while Marian rubbed her eyes.

“I only wish to announce that I’m marrying Grace. We fixed it this afternoon.” And he resumed his seat.

“Bravo! Bravissimo!”

Jim stumbled round the table to felicitate his sister, who blushed, laughed, and affected to cover her face with her hands. Anthony’s sisters and Virginia, genuinely delighted, made

haste to follow suit, but Mrs. Lytham retained her place. She was already in the secret.

The second toast was rapidly amended, and drunk. Haidee, with burning cheeks and a fixed smile, rose like the others, but did not even wet her lips from the glass in her hand. No one noticed the omission but Virginia. When they had sat down again, and the hubbub had subsided, she challenged her.

“Apparently you’re afraid of the barrow after all, Haidee! You haven’t touched your glass.”

Haidee, obviously taken aback, seemed for an instant not to know what to reply. Then she attempted to laugh off the attack. Jim imagined that she had been innocently shirking.

“Come on, right now! Empty it down, to a pair of good’uns who ought to have found each other five years ago. No funk!”

Haidee drained the glass in sips. Afterwards, bending across the corner of the table, she caught at Jim’s sleeve and smiled right into his eyes, as though by way of reassurance, although he accepted the gesture for simple love. She gave a little shudder.

“I’m on fire!”

“Go and pay your respects to Grace! . . . My boy”—he turned to Theodore—“there’s more pop on the side-table—open up, and fill for everyone. We’ll discover extra toasts. Give young Silvester a double bumper!—Hey! Silvester, make ready. We’re going to jejuice you!”

Passing the insult, Silvester removed and started to polish his glasses, a favourite and impressive action of his late classical master in Jovian moments. Anthony had compassion on him.

“So it’s your opinion, Silvester, that those ancient fables possess a substratum of solid historical fact?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Then what would be the fact corresponding to the myth of an enclosed Garden, containing beautiful fruit, which must not be eaten?”

“My dear Kerr, it is manifest that the fable has originated with a later tribe, trespassing on the preserves of an earlier tribe. One—our sympathies are with the trespasser; we are of his race. Two—he finds something new and desirable,

belonging to somebody else. Three—he is human, while the worm is inhuman. That is to say, the worm represents the aboriginal savage. Four” Obeying an irresistible impulse, Silvester in his enthusiasm had at last struggled to his feet.

Jim rapped sharply on the table.

“Silence for Silvester there! The lad’s going to propose the ladies. Quick-sticks with the bubbly, Paysant!”

Theodore was uncorking another bottle. He hastened down the table, replenishing glasses.

“That particular toast, like so many of the ceremonies of knightly chivalry, is merely a shameless excuse for keeping the good things of the earth for your own enjoyment,” exclaimed Josephine, pulling a face at the master of the feast. “My dear boy, there’s a time for being learned and a time for being silly. Nobody understands a word you say.”

But Jim, in connection with her remark directed at himself, shook his fist at her. “Woman, you shall repent that speech in the still small hours! Paysant, my sprightly young gamecock, give your cousin a half-pint tumbler, and stand over her while she drinks it. We’ll have no mutiny aboard my ship. Are there any other recalcitrants?”

Meanwhile, complying with Jim’s suggestion, Haidee had moved round to where Grace sat. She touched her half-scornfully on the arm.

“May I too tender congratulations?”

Grace looked up at her with a swift movement. “Thank you, Haidee!”

“I hope you are both very, very—happy together!”

She returned to her own place, while Grace battled with a curiously disagreeable impression that in the pause before the “Happy”, a silent negative prefix had been mentally breathed, like a witch’s curse at the betrothal of a princess. She repressed the stupid and uncharitable idea, but nevertheless could not overlook the positive fact that Haidee had added no word to Anthony, who sat beside her, attentive to the interchange.

He bent over to Virginia.

“Time to get up, don’t you think? Will you put the brake

on Jim, or shall I?"

"Oh, you."

"Jim!" said Anthony.

"How now!"

"What about the dancing?"

"Hang dancing! We're all right here."

"Let the girls choose, anyhow."

"Soon, my boy, soon! We've some more toasts to swallow. We're all too dashed sober, that's what's the matter."

"Then let me propose the next."

"Good man! Wait till young cockadoodle has filled up."

Theodore, self-confident, pink faced, and assured of one charming associate in youth and recklessness, but otherwise feeling rather out of things, completed the round of the table. He returned the empty bottles to the buffet, then took his seat, with a jocular whisper to Haidee.

"This is going to develop into an orgy!" Grace told Anthony. "I'd better give the signal to mother. Jim's impossible."

"I'm getting you off now."

A moment afterwards he rose to address the table.

"I've one more health to propose, but it's a case of Mahomet, for my mountain has no legs. To invest the rite with all due form, ceremony and solemnity, I suggest that a procession in file be fallen in at once for our destination. Each shall bear a charged glass in the right hand and I will lead with the lamp."

It was generally guessed what he had in mind to do, only Haidee among the women appearing somewhat puzzled. She gave him a strange glance. The rest were glad on any pretext to get up and finish with the wine and overheated room. They laughed their assent. Theodore cheered aloud, perfectly ignorant and careless whether the pilgrimage was to be to an adjoining apartment, a neighbour's house, or Sevenoaks.

"What is it?—a rag?" demanded Jim.

"Only to your greenhouse, my dear fellow."

"You're going to toast your blessed pip in its flower-pot, for a quid! Come on, then! Line up, good folk!"

"As we sit?" asked Virginia, laughing so that her frail shoulders shook.

"Yes, as we sit. Grace follows me, Marian Grace, and

so on round the table. All ready?"

"Squad!" bawled Jim.

"But what pip in what flower-pot?" inquired Haidee, pulling at his sleeve impatiently.

"An old-fashioned chap inside a glass vase I had the misfortune to smash yesterday. Anthony's shoved it in our greenhouse."

"Has it anything to do with what Silvester has been babbling about all through dinner?"

"The identical. A pip from the original apple of Adam and Eve."

"How very odd!"

Anthony jumped up, went to the door to fling it open, then, seizing his glass with his right hand and a candle-lamp from the table with his left, started off with a grave, slow, majestic step in the direction of the outer passage. Grace succeeded him, a tall, poetic figure of adaptable girlhood. The comic black-browed and heavily-built person of Marian was followed by graceful Mrs. Lytham, smiling with condescension but sincerely trusting, for the sake of domestic dignity, that they would not encounter any of the maids in their progress. Silvester, the first on the other side of the table, lost his head. Instead of keeping behind his hostess, he faced the other way, directly towards the door.

"Hi! that man with the glasses!" shouted Jim jovially. "Take your place in the queue, my lad! No early doors! Josephine, kiss him till he turns round!"

Virginia closed the rear of the procession.

The greenhouse was entered from the garden. It was uncomfortably filled with its ten visitors, some of whom, in its warm and steamy atmosphere, started at once to become painfully aware that the escape from table on which they had congratulated themselves was only an exchange of the fire for the frying-pan. Grace felt faint, Josephine suffocated, while Silvester staggered, spilling the greater part of the contents of his glass. Anthony made haste to get through the mock ceremony. He set the lamp on a shelf.

"Ladies and gentlemen, inside this very ordinary-looking pot reposes, not in death, but in sleep, as we hope, the, in

that case, oldest living inhabitant of our planet. It is a thought. Let us then drink to its speedy awakening from a trance of centuries—possibly aeons. May it bring us back strange stories of the childhood of the human race, a childhood occupied with the serious affairs of childhood—giants, fairies, elves, princesses, dragons, golden apples, lovely gardens! I venture to say that in these days of iron business, steel science and brass art, we stand especially in need of such reminders of a better state. I don't know how you feel about it, my dear friends, but to me it frequently seems that every new victory of fact over fancy serves only to make our lives more inexpressibly vile. The real tragedy of the Garden of Eden was perhaps this—that upon tasting the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve became man and woman, and ceased to be children. It cannot be helped, and there is consolation for us. We cannot be children again ourselves, but—there will always be children in the world . . . I invite you to drink!"

Grace, who had blushed unnoticed at his last words, moved closer to him. A sort of gravity descended upon the company as they lifted their glasses, and the toast was drunk in almost reverential silence. Afterwards, the empty glasses were deposited on the shelves.

"We're devilish solemn!" remarked Jim.

Haidee turned her back on him, and looked out through the panes into the night. Virginia in the meantime had picked up the flower-pot casually.

She gave a slight start.

"Hullo! I say, look here Anthony!—it's up already."

Anthony brought the lamp nearer, while the others crowded round. A tiny green stem, with cotyledons attached, was elevated half-an-inch above the surface of the moist, dark mould.

"Is it the right pot, Virginia?" asked her mother.

"Yes, I put a label on it. See!"

"Then it's a weed that's come through," suggested Anthony.

"It may be, but I carefully sifted it for weeds."

"Well, it's in a deuced hurry to get here, if it's the one," said Jim. "Precocity evidently isn't such a characteristically modern virtue. This infant of yours walks and shouts at birth.

But is the ritual ended?"

"Yes," said Anthony, rather shortly. He turned to Mrs. Lytham. "I'll look in to-morrow to see it, if I may?"

"My dear boy, that's a very unnecessary question."

"Then I will . . . And now, shall we caper?"

They trooped out, Jim leading with the lamp. Virginia stayed behind to make fast the greenhouse door. In the darkness of the strip of garden they had to cross, Haidee approached Anthony, who was by himself. He could only just distinguish her person, but her voice sounded breathless and agitated.

"I must see you alone to-morrow, Anthony. Will you meet me to-morrow morning at eleven at Halse Tower?"

Halse Tower he knew very well. It was a ruined Norman shooting-box, standing in the heart of the woods, about a mile distant.

"No, I can't," was his expostulatory but entirely resolute reply.

"But you *must!* I wish it."

"I'm sorry, but there's no necessity, and I don't see my way."

"No necessity! Anthony!—when I ask you to?"

"Well, it's not the square thing. Grace wouldn't like it, and Jim would misunderstand it. What do you want to say?"

"Very well then, listen to me! If you don't come, I'm going to break off my engagement to Jim on the spot—now, this minute! I'm absolutely in earnest."

As if it had been illuminated for him by a flash of lightning, he understood for the first time the horrible insecurity of Jim's footing with this cynical and heartless girl. He thought that she was quite capable of executing her threat.

"What do you want, Haidee?"

"I simply want to say what there isn't time to say now."

"About Jim?"

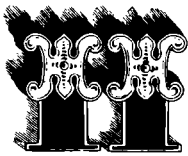
"Yes."

"Very good, I'll be there at eleven."

She broke away from him, to hurry forward into the house, and they avoided each other during the rest of the evening.

The party finished at one o'clock.

4



aidee Croyland quietly left the house the next morning to keep her appointment with Anthony. Her emotional excitement overnight had vanished with the effect of the champagne she had drunk, and she could scarcely conceive how she could have been such a fool as to expose her secret heart to a man who was, after all, little more than a stranger to her—she did not know what in the world she was to say to him when they met. She could turn back, and not go at all, afterwards pleading indisposition, but he had been so obviously reluctant about it that she felt in common fairness she must now see the affair through. She would have to patch it up as best she could, and invent some excuse for that stupid outburst. Luckily for her, he was a sympathetic, understanding individual, with plentiful tact. He would show no disposition to probe. The day was overcast; what wind there was came from the east, and rain threatened. She wore a long fur-trimmed coat, with a small blue toque, drawn down to her eyes. She had brought her umbrella with her.

Half-a-mile up the road she turned sharply off to the right along the by-path which threaded the woods in the direction of Halse Tower. In no case would she have hurried to such an embarrassing meeting, but also it happened that she was well before her time—the house had not been able to hold her; she wished to be out-of-doors, alone with her thoughts. She was not worrying about this wretched rendezvous, but about Jim. She still could not decide whether she ought to marry him. Last night, when so little had taken place, had changed so much for her.

She did not love Jim, and never had loved him, but she liked him. He was kind, generous, straight, friendly, loyal, a “man’s man” and a sportsman, chivalrous, a pukka gentleman,

a man no girl need be ashamed to accompany about the world as wife; and it went without saying that they would travel—they possessed that taste in common, and with Jim's income and her father's promised allowance they could afford it. Thoughts of home-ties and children she obstinately shut out of her mind. It was the prospect of ocean-travel and life in other lands which had tempted her to say "yes" at last to his courteous importunities. She had been the less afraid of being bored by his personality when it was morally certain that they would make scores of new acquaintances every year, with a perpetually-changing environment. As for his people, whom she disliked and despised—except Mrs. Lytham, perhaps, who, however, was thoroughly insignificant—she had determined at once in her soul to see very little of them, and Jim could do what he liked about it. She did not wish to keep him tied to her petticoat all the time; husband and wife ought occasionally to have a holiday from each other. Such a marriage offered no spiritual thrills or adventures, but at least it held undeniable advantages. Since accepting his hand, it had not once occurred to her to repent her decision, until last evening. On the contrary, having gained a status, she felt freer. She was almost no longer in her first bloom, and people, she knew perfectly well, had begun to wonder whether she ever would get married. Other careers than marriage existed for girls nowadays, yet the superstition lingered, and it was not particularly pleasant to be regarded as devoid of the supreme feminine element of fascination for the other sex. Now that she had conquered her man, she had performed the duty apparently expected of her, the atmosphere of dubious mystery which had absurdly enveloped her most innocent doings was whisked away to reveal her as human and as foolish as other women, and they must transfer their kindly solicitude to someone else. That also was to the good. She wished Anthony had stayed away. He need not have come down, and then all would have gone smoothly.

She remembered the summer before so well. They had, of course been intimately acquainted before that—ever since she had left school they had been meeting from time to time, but until the summer before last she supposed she had always rather taken him for granted as a friend of the family through

his sisters, their neighbours. He had not made any extraordinary impression on her, one way or the other; he was just a clever, busy man, who generally had a great deal to say for himself. He was probably too old for her at first. But then, in due season, fate having silently prepared the ground, came that wonderful summer when her heart had opened for the first time and she had watched from unobserved corners the light of genius playing in his eyes. Thank Heaven that she had never declared herself. She hated to know that something of her silent worship was perceived by others at the time, in spite of her restraint. Anthony himself must have noticed her interest in him, for his voice was always especially gentle in addressing her and sometimes he seemed to be trying to encourage her to confide her ideas on this, that and the other to him, but even then she was proud enough to refuse to be patronised; besides, it was not what she wanted. She did not care so much to hear him speak as to study his eyes, when listening to music, for example. It was that smouldering fire from another world which set her wondering and waiting for she knew not what. It might not even have been love, but those moments had been very magical and beautiful for her. In the light of the fact, how vulgar that spiteful little wretch Virginia's allusions to her preference for his society continued to sound! . . . Then they had seen less of each other again. He visited Croom seldomer, while she had been staying from home on her own account. The passing infatuation, such as it was, was not forgotten, but it had faded into the realm of poetic remembrances, delightful, rather than tormenting, to look back upon. By the time that Jim had returned from abroad, to fall in love with her, she was quite reconciled to recall the affair as merely an inspiring phase in her existence. She thought of Anthony as of a man who had in a way spiritualised her, but without much warmth, and with no regrets. Unconsciously, Jim had picked a happy time for coming back.

She accepted him, the betrothal had only lasted a couple of days, and then, by the mocking malice of fortune, she must discover at last night's dinner table that she had forgotten nothing — nothing whatsoever, but that Anthony's soul was still as marvellous to her own as it had been two years ago. She had ob-

served him furtively, when suddenly the old look had appeared in his eyes, and she was compelled once more to recognise in him the different nature which marked him out from everyone else, there or in the world outside. It was as though he had a mission from the unseen. Then, not at once but for a few minutes afterwards, for her reflections had been impersonal at first, the recollection of her own situation began to colour her consciousness and she bethought herself that she had chosen another man to be her mate. Jim's eyes would never signal that strange light, if he lived to be a hundred. She had truly been modest! The sunshine seemed to go out of her being, leaving everything grey and cheerless After that, she scarcely knew how to speak to Jim. She turned to Theodore to gain time for herself. He thought she was attracted by his person—God help him!

When Anthony announced his engagement to Grace, a hundred lightning ideas flashed through her head, and for an instant the wine she had drunk really intoxicated her. She wished to leave the room, but dared not. So that colourless, commonplace creature was to marry him and share his life! Couldn't he *see*? And while he stood up after making his announcement, he had distinctly—she was quite sure of it—rested his glance deliberately on her for a perceptible moment, and smiled! . . . At that smile, her heart sprang into flame. Her ears sang. Very well! since he despised her so, since he had the mean cruelty and vulgarity to mock a feeling she had never expressed and of which he was to know nothing, the tragedy was at his door, if tragedy it were for Jim. She would break this impossible contract, and Anthony should be the one to convey the news to him. She hoped he would enjoy the telling of it! She might have been a young and impulsive fool to persecute him with her silent reverence so amusingly, but at least he should pay for his bad manners. As a lady, she was at least his equal in social consideration . . . Besides, the case was altered now. When Jim proposed, he had not informed her that she was to have for her sister-in-law Anthony's wife. For all he knew, she might have objected—and she did object. She would tell Anthony so. If he was prepared to break it off with Grace, she would reconsider about Jim. She was so confused by this time

that the absurdity of the reasoning did not occur to her, nor the foolishness of dreaming of discussing it with Anthony in cold blood. She definitely made up her mind to see him alone on the next day

But this next day had arrived, and the storm in her breast had subsided to a sullen swell. She did not know what she would say to him. She did not know what she would do about Jim. Yet it was highly necessary that she should come to a decision quickly. Already, round a bend of the path, Halse Tower came into view, standing up thirty feet high, bare, ruined and roofless, in the centre of a clearing surrounded by insignificant brush and timber. The grey stones of the ancient erection, of odd shapes and sizes, were encrusted with lichen. The staircase to the top had long since disappeared, and it was a mere shell, without history. Haidee, ascertaining by a single glance that Anthony was not yet there, continued to approach it uncertainly, until she was quite within its doorless gateway. The interior was a tangle of nettles, brambles and thorns.

She must decide!—she must decide! . . . supposing she gave up the idea of marriage, and took up work instead? Her thoughts immediately flew to Olivia Carteret, who was always pressing her to join her in her frock business. The scheme, as far as Haidee had interested herself in it to the extent of comprehension, appeared to be that her father should put down a few hundreds in exchange for a partnership for herself, and that she would eventually be given the London shop to manage while Olivia concentrated more or less on Paris. She liked to have to do with pretty things, and her friend must think well of her good taste, or she would not have committed herself to the offer. Gowns or Jim, which was it to be? . . .

Of course, it also depended on her father. He was to find the money. Olivia would not take her without. What would he have to say about the rupture?

She did not believe that it would greatly disturb him. She was his favourite, and they understood each other fairly well. He had been ominously passive on the matter of the intimacy with Jim and the subsequent engagement, as if privately convinced that it was not worth combating, that it could not endure; otherwise he would surely have had a word to utter on the topic

of idlers and rolling stones. She suspected that he was waiting till she tired of "the fellow" before seriously reintroducing his own candidate, about whom there was very little mystery to her shrewd feminine sense. It was young Brownhill, her father's works manager, who would doubtless receive a share in the business as a constituent part of the whole proposition. Silvester was hopeless for trade, and naturally the senior wanted to keep the goose that laid the golden eggs in the family. She was sorry about it, and saw the sweet reason for everything, but unfortunately she found herself quite unable to contemplate Brownhill as her husband. He had an indiarubber face, and outside machinery and trading accounts possessed not an idea in his head. He was a block of wood. She had met him half-a-dozen times. Her father had brought him down for week-ends.

She did not think her father would object to her breaking the engagement and going to live with Olivia for a time, as long as she was careful to leave a loophole for the other man, which she could easily do without actually promising herself to anything. Her mother hardly counted. As an ex-schoolmistress, with strict views on moral questions, she would resent Haidee's going back upon her solemn word, but she would have no practical voice in the matter. Mr. Croyland was always master in his own house . . . Her own reluctance was the cruel blow to Jim himself. She knew indeed how he loved her, with the pitiful fidelity of a great big dog. It would be too much like driving him away with a stick—he would be unable to comprehend her action. If she still hesitated, this was her reason. She ought not to have been so hasty; it would have been better to hurt him a little at first than inflict such a wound now. If only he were less of a gentleman! These knights had no place in modern life, they were anachronisms, and a modern girl, with her quickly changing moods and needs, would never, if she were sensible, place herself in relations with such survivors of formal days. A man ought to be able to love without making himself ridiculous about it. He ought to be able to consign a girl heartily to the devil. Jim would pine like a plant pulled up by its roots.

Anthony appeared at the end of the same path she had come by. He saw her at once, and stopped for a moment to lift his hat, and bow; then he resumed his advance. Haidee's

cheeks wore a high colour as she returned his salutation, either from the nipping air or from her excited feelings. Her foot started to tap the ground impatiently. While she had still no idea what her explanation was to be, she already ceased to be sorry that she had brought him out; at any rate, something would have been settled within the next ten minutes, and her wretched state of uncertainty would come to an end, for good or ill, once and for all. She unconsciously determined to be cool rather than confidential. She was not quite sure by this time whether he really had a suspicion of that ancient admiration, or whether she had imagined his smile on the previous night, but if he did know or guess anything, if he had smiled, obviously she must be on her womanly guard with him—he must not be allowed to suppose that she had wanted his society for its own sake. The train of thought travelled behind her awareness, and the decision reached her only as instinct.

Meanwhile he had come up, and was saying:

“Good morning, Haidee!—here we are, then. I hope I haven’t kept you waiting?” And he pulled out his watch.

“No, I’ve only been here a minute or two, and anyway, you’re not late. Thanks for coming!”

Anthony smiled. “Shall we be very quick? I really have to

“I shan’t keep you—but does Grace know you’re to meet me here?”

“No.”

“You haven’t told her?”

“I haven’t seen her this morning.”

“No, but last night. It doesn’t matter . . . Shall we move inside, or stay here?”

He regarded the interior of the tower.

“It doesn’t look very inviting inside.”

“It’s going to rain, I think.”

“Another excellent reason for making haste!”

Haidee smiled too, but painfully, while her dark eyes stole an anxious glance at his face.

“So no one knows you’re here, Anthony?”

“Not a soul. Whose business is it except yours and mine?”

“I wanted to make sure.”

“Accept my word for it. I shan’t let on to anyone. And now, what’s it all about? At a fairly easy conjecture, you’re in trouble, Haidee, and need some paternal advice—correct me if I’m wrong.”

“You’re not altogether wrong.”

“Well then, don’t worry about the right expressions, but just speak anyhow. Regard me as a big brother. In fact, that is the relationship from now on, in a way. Has it occurred to you?”

“It isn’t a question of right expressions, but what I ought to say. Last night it seemed simple enough”

“But the morning brings new counsels. Then why say anything? Let us consider the meeting an accidental encounter, and go our respective ways. Is this possible and wise?”

“So you have guessed?”

“Only what your vehemence has told me. For some unknown reason you were indignant last evening, to the point of exasperation, with a certain dear fellow, but the monstrous balloon has quietly deflated itself during the hours of darkness, so that now you find yourself in the rather embarrassing situation of having called in an adviser while no longer requiring advice. However, pay me my fee, and I shall go away again perfectly content.”

“And what is your fee?”

“A light one. Merely the continued assurance of Jim’s happiness.”

“You want him to be happy?”

“I do indeed.”

“Desiring to be equally happy with Grace yourself?”

“Just so—if that arises.”

There was a pause.

“Well, if you must know, I’ve been wondering whether I ought really to marry him,” said Haidee, in a low voice and a little viciously.

“I’m sorry. But is it necessary that you should speak of it to me? Don’t do anything you’ll afterwards be sorry for.”

“If I speak of it at all, it must be to you, Anthony.”

“Why?”

“You happen to be the cause, my dear man.”

“I think not.”

“I assure you.”

“I don’t understand, and don’t want to—but aren’t you in love with the poor old chap?”

“In love? How medieval! I absolutely have never asked myself. Does one marry for love?”

“I suppose you had a reason for engaging yourself?”

“That’s the question I have been putting.”

She started to make indentations in the moist turf with the blunt end of her umbrella, while looking downwards.

“Why did you give me that horrid smile last night, Anthony?”

“I didn’t. This, I think, I can reasonably ask you to explain. What horrid smile?”

“When you stood up to make your announcement to the company. It upset me fearfully. How in the world came it to enter your head to treat me like that? Have I ever injured you in any way?”

“Let me try to get it! I smiled, you say. It may be so, though I don’t remember it, but why the adjective? It cannot have been the occasion, which was eminently a smiling one. It cannot have proceeded from any bitterness of thought on my part, for I felt none. In what did the horridness consist?—admitting, for the sake of the discussion, that I actually did smile?”

“You thoroughly succeeded in hurting me, whatever you may pretend now, for I still presumed to imagine until that moment that we were good friends in spite of my youthful follies and impertinences.”

Anthony smiled once more.

“Please, Haidee! . . . You have me at such a disadvantage. Did we meet in a former existence?—or why do you speak of mythical past relations of which I seem to know positively nothing? I apologise for having grieved you unwittingly. Will that suffice?”

“Oh, yes,” she replied indifferently. “I had already forgiven you, and wouldn’t have mentioned it except as an explanation of my conduct last night. It excited me, and I was moved to do a silly thing on the spur of the moment. I think your pretending to be ignorant of—everything makes it horribly difficult

for me, but perhaps that's what you're after. You don't want me to speak."

"Speak of Jim."

"I thought you were crushing a presumptuously romantic little girl, that's all."

"I cannot picture you in that role. But where does Jim enter?"

Haidee gave a helpless twist of her shoulders, and turned away, silent.

"You're quite right," said Anthony. "There's no need to go any further into it. Last evening you were piqued, and this morning you regret it. May I again apologise for having been the innocent cause of a stupid misunderstanding, and take it that you have now delivered yourself of all that you wished to say?"

"Oh, you'll put two and two together, I know, as soon as I've left you, if you haven't done so already."

"On the contrary, it's a sort of arithmetic I'm hopeless at, and never attempt. My idle fancies are too precious to me. They are the raw material of my work."

"I trust so."

"And Jim is still in the right train for heaven?"

"Such heaven as I can provide."

"Then I may take my leave?"

"If you like Anthony" she added suddenly.

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry to be a nuisance to you, but would you mind telling me? . . . Of course, you must be aware yourself that you're not a man like other men, but I've often wondered—exactly how far down does your nature go? Or up, if you'd prefer it."

The question really took him aback, and he was disconcerted to find that, after having so neatly evaded, as he had thought, the intimate discussion, he was still as far as ever from being safely out of the wood. He gained time for himself by drawing her notice to the fact that the rain had commenced. Haidee ignored the remark, and waited for his answer.

"My nature goes down to the bottomless depths of infinity, I hope," then he said, "and so does everyone's; but in too many cases we must suppose that the orifice of the well is choked.

The difference between man and man is, after all, only one of circumstance . . . Shall we be metaphysical and get wet, or shall we take the drier course of commonplace, and cut off home?"

She continued to look at him strangely.

"I think there's something very special about you, and I wanted to know what it is. If I were a man, perhaps you would be more communicative?"

"Not under present circumstances."

"Oh, you can't convince me that you're afraid of a sprinkle of rain! You don't want to talk about yourself."

"I am such a colossal egoist that I fear to. I shall let slip vaunts which will afterwards be brought in evidence against me. I have long since adopted the safe plan of never mentioning myself in polite society. There are plenty of others to tell me what a curious specimen of forked radish I am."

"I haven't earned the right to pry, I suppose?"

"Not so. I am much flattered by your interest, if only I were legitimately entitled to it." He made a business of putting up the collar of his rainproof coat, but though Haidee watched him, her umbrella still remained rolled.

"On one of these cold evenings, round a blazing fire, we will all disport ourselves by analysing each others's characters," proceeded Anthony good-humouredly. "I suspect that you will come off one of the best."

"I?"

"At least, Jim will be there, and I shall back him. You're sure of two votes."

"And meanwhile, my question is to go unanswered?"

"I thought it had been answered."

"No."

"The deeper a man's ideas, the less he knows about them, I take it."

"The outward manifestation of deep ideas can be wonderfully attractive to others—do you know that?"

"If the remark is for my benefit, you are too kind."

"I wonder if Grace has ever spoken to you in this strain?"

"She's much too practical."

"Is she clever?"

“Very, in her own way. You know her as well as I do.”

“But has she walked *all round* you? I doubt it . . . I wish I dare say something more, but you wouldn’t stand it. We’ll leave it at that”

Anthony turned suddenly. He had heard voices a little way off, from the direction of the bend of the path. He could not identify them, but his mind already apprehensively on the alert for intruders, at once flew to Jim and his sister. Virginia had told him, when he had called at the house before coming on, that they were out walking together. He quietly nudged Haidee to silence, and at the same instant Grace and Jim actually emerged. Haidee shook out her umbrella, as a preliminary to hoisting it.

The pair stopped dead when they saw who occupied the clearing before them, and there followed an embarrassing moment. While Jim thrust back his soft hat to scratch his head, Grace’s features became rather ominously fixed. Anthony mentally anathematised his bad luck.

“What a tramp he looks!” murmured Haidee, and he caught the remark, but was uncertain whether he had been intended to. Without question, Jim’s macintosh was very ancient and discoloured, his trousers beautifully uncreased and his shoes, in some subtle way, adorned with mire to a greater extent than those of the rest of the party; yet Anthony could not help regarding it as an unpromising sign that his *fiancée* should choose to settle upon such trivialities of appearance at this critical hour of her existence.

He summoned a smile of geniality to his face, and advanced to meet the others, who, having recovered from their first shock of surprise, were now coming forward. They all encountered, and stood grouped.

“So miracles have not ceased!”

“Evidently not,” returned Grace, unable to deny herself a little stare of unfriendliness at Haidee. The latter looked rather amused, and averted her eyes.

“But what are you two doing here?” demanded Anthony, at the same time that his brain rapidly explored its armoury of cunning for a convincing weapon of defence. He found no explanation to offer but the truth, but resolved at any rate to unbur-

den himself to Grace alone, and leave Haidee to make her own peace with Jim, if she so condescended.

“Not trespassing, I hope!” was Grace’s peaceable but dry retort to his question.

“No, I own no estate here, unless I may be permitted to consider you as such. It raineth! Shall we walk back together?”

“*You* seem only just to have discovered the fact, Haidee—the conversation must have been interesting.”

“Not particularly, Grace. We were just talking.”

“Have you just met here, then?” asked Jim, whose brow had continued throughout to maintain its wrinkles. Anthony answered him.

“You find us comrades in misfortune, that’s all, you old Othello! Whereas you were ungallant enough to permit your very charming lady to take her Sunday morning promenade alone, and whereas you, Grace, elected to play *belle dame sans merci* to a lowly squire waiting upon you at a most reasonable hour, Haidee and I have done what under the circumstances we could for ourselves, and who shall reprehend us? I have essayed wonders, but I fear it is a bored charge I deliver to your escort, James. See that you make it up to her!”

“Jim asked if you had met here,” insisted Grace quietly.

“Here or hereabouts. I hardly presumed to call for Haidee. After all, my cheek is strictly defined.”

“So our being all on this spot together is a sort of double coincidence?”

Anthony’s eyes privately signalled to hers that it would be judicious for the general examination to cease, and Grace understood.

“Or alternatively, shall we call Halse Tower a somewhat obvious stroll?” he counter-queried lightly.

They moved for home through the fine drizzle. Jim went ahead with Haidee, who made her erected umbrella the excuse for declining his arm. The others followed at several paces behind.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Grace.

Loth as he was to sacrifice Haidee’s secret, divulged in confidence, Anthony could still discover no way out of doing so. He reassured himself with the thought that his companion was

a highly sensible girl, with a legitimate interest in Jim's affairs, who might help matters forward by her suggestions.

"Haidee asked me last night to have a private word with her here this morning—I looked in at yours on my way up, but you were out. It seems that she has been entertaining certain doubts concerning the wisdom of her engagement, and, very wisely as I think, she has sought to end them by procuring outside advice. Half the mischief in the world is caused by brooding. She is an astonishingly sane young woman."

"I was afraid of it all along."

"I know you were. However, I've patched it up as best I could, and the present prognostications appear to be favourable again. No other man is visible in it, Jim's safe so far—it's probably merely a matter of an over-delicate feminine conscience; she doubts if her feelings amount to what is commonly called love. That's another excellent indication that she means to do well by the happy fellow. In the name of human charity, don't breathe a word to him!"

"You think it ought to go on after this?"

"Decidedly I do. Why not? Since she is once more persuaded that she has it in her to make Jim a good wife, and since her conduct with regard to him is irreproachable, and since he knows nothing of her hesitations, and is to know nothing, what is to gain by our seizing upon her temporary weakness and insisting that it represents the true permanent state of her soul?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"My dear girl, I'm very conscious of your lack of sympathy towards that match, and honestly, not a syllable would I have mentioned to you of this business if you hadn't caught us at it. The least you can do is to stand back, and let me act according to my judgment."

"Do you mean to take further action, then?"

"I shall help the thing forward, where and when I can. Decency towards an old pal asks it."

"Well, we needn't quarrel," said Grace, softening a little in response to the hardening of his own manner. "I only have Jim's welfare at heart, and shall be but too pleased if they can swing together."

"I am confident they can."

“Of course, as my brother he is a shade nearer to me than he is to you as a mere outside friend, and so I feel I have just that added degree of responsibility. One can escape without disaster from a disappointed friendship, but a brother in trouble is only twice a brother. The whole family will have to bear the brunt, if he gets divorced or anything; but principally I.”

“Yes, I know. I repeat, it won’t arise. Haidee’s a good girl.”

“She’s shockingly modern and unconventional, and if she gets into a fast set, as may easily happen, and most likely will, and other women lead her by the nose, I can’t see how that’s going to stand for Jim’s married happiness.”

“She isn’t unconventional.”

“I think it’s rather unconventional, her requiring you to meet here for the purpose of listening to a confession which belongs properly to her mother, if to anyone. Can you imagine my summoning a strange man to such an interview?”

“You have more restraint of character, and are stronger in every way. A girl like Haidee must relieve her feelings, and I suppose her mother is out of court. Perhaps there’s no particular sympathy between them. She wouldn’t have done it without good reason.”

The trifling physical incentive of a sharp spurt of rain impelled Grace at last to throw discretion to the winds, and speak out.

“You know what Virginia says and thinks of her!”

“I know it’s a malicious untruth,” said Anthony.

“I have always tried to believe so, but this certainly goes to show that perhaps she isn’t so far wrong. I don’t say that you are to blame in any way, Anthony.”

“Many thanks!”

“I don’t think you admire her even—especially.”

“I don’t in the sense you mean.”

“Not in the least?”

“My dear child, I am not a solitary anchorite and Haidee is no emissary of the Devil in the shape of a beautiful woman come to tempt me. I hope I am a decent man of the world, who is thoroughly up in what is due to a pretty girl on the one hand, and the laws of property and propriety on the other.”

“Yet you would hardly be human if you weren’t attracted in the smallest degree by her looks. She is so very attractive.”

“I possess the antidote.”

At that Grace looked sharply round at him, and smiled.

“I presume you imagine I’m wildly jealous, and are preparing to apply the customary restoratives?”

“Nothing of the sort,” said Anthony, “but the conversation is somewhat dismal, and, as a playwright, I am acquainted with a capital period.”

“What’s that?”

The others had passed out of sight. The rain sloped cheerlessly down through the leafless branches of the trees beneath which the grassy path followed its course, but the girl’s eyes were bright with the fresh air, moisture and exercise, and something else besides. Anthony stopped and turned to regard them better. They had hitherto had too few opportunities.

“This one!” he whispered, enfolding her in his arms, and kissing her.

“I wondered if you had forgotten,” laughed Grace.

They remained on the best terms until the house was reached.

Jim must have turned in with Haidee at the latter’s, for he had not yet arrived, and, knowing Sunday morning to be an awkward time for visits, Anthony declined to cross the threshold. Grace at the door promised him that she would certainly come to Croom to tea that afternoon herself, and would try to bring some of the others with her. He stole another kiss, not without laughing violence and confusion on both sides; then the door was shut hurriedly in his face, and he went home.

5



At four o'clock Theodore was standing at the window of the front room, staring like a melancholy ghost at the deserted lane running past the house. Reading bored him, tramping in his own society offered no attractions, and there was not even a billiard-table available, on which he might have knocked about the balls a bit. Marian had retired. Josephine, sitting at the table, was pasting savagely into a scrap-book a number of household recipes and hints cut from the newspapers. She had not entirely recovered from her reaction to the celebration. Over breakfast she had exhaustively criticised the affair, first on the ground that it had been superfluous, and secondly on the still stronger one that it had been a fiasco. With the two exceptions of Silvester, whom they had all made tipsy between them, and Jim, who had worked hard to transform the thing into a bean-feast, everyone had been thoroughly wretched and ill-at-ease. The rooms were like stoves. Haidee had behaved less like an engaged girl than any other woman present. Anthony's own announcement, though welcome enough—Heaven knew he had been sufficiently long in making up his mind to a necessary transaction!—was theatrical and perhaps not quite in the best taste. Grace could not have enjoyed the ordeal. The spectacle of three mournful couples fox-trotting round a small box afterwards, to a sonorous grand-piano which sounded badly ashamed of itself, was merely pitiful. She had been heartily thankful when it was time to go. She hoped *they* would not be expected to reciprocate on the same lines; rather than that, she would pack up and go for a holiday.

Anthony, taking her up with good-humoured roundness, had thought that it had come off admirably. Jim was in first-rate form, while he would answer for it that the maidens had had the time of their lives. So had he had, and so had Theo-

dore, in his unobtrusive way. It was Josephine's liver speaking, not she.

Marian had made dark allusions to Haidee's flirtatious propensities, till Theodore, who desired only one thing, namely to be permitted to eat his breakfast disregarded and left in peace, had visibly wilted. Meanwhile Anthony was induced by this talk to wonder within his mind whether so queer and unexpected a *camaradie* between the two could not possibly be turned to account. It would help to amuse Haidee, and keep her in a good temper, and that would be all for Jim's good. But first he must hear what she had had to say to Jim. He provisionally suggested that Theodore should call at The Yellow House to improve his acquaintance with Silvester. His cousin's brilliant blush in consequence had been agony to behold.

He now entered the room, to push his scheme. Haidee was surely just in that sort of mood when any strange company is better than none, and it seemed to be an act of wisdom to withdraw her attention from himself. He was not sexually vain, but if her seizure of him for that confession of hers did not mean that she was interested in him, at the least, he could not conceive what it did mean. If it were essential for her to be interested in someone, let it rather be Theodore, who was unoccupied and on the spot. His stay could be extended. Only he could not quite grasp the psychology of an intense young woman of her calibre, in discovering anything in common between herself and a youth whose natural habitat seemed to be in the theatre bar.

He gripped his cousin by the elbow.

"Tea-time, my lad! What about The 'Yaller' House?"

"If I had a decent excuse, I'd go like a shot," replied Theodore, facing round.

"Then ask Silvester from me whether he has any literature treating the subject of last night's discussion."

Josephine carefully mopped a liquid corner with her handkerchief. "It will be a good comedy scene. Silvester trying dimly to ascertain what *was* the subject of last night's discussion, and Theodore, equally ignorant, endeavouring to preserve his character of intelligent messenger!"

“*Tant mieux!* While they continue to fence he will have got his foot inside the door. He jibbed this morning. If he still jibs, I’ve been woefully mistaken in him, and he has more of the modesty of a damsel than one would credit from the subdued boldness of his eye.”

“He might be as bold and pushful as a manufacturer’s salesman and yet possess the modesty of a good many modern damsels! But why this astonishing anxiety to get him up to Haidee’s?”

“Has the house been made over to her, then?”

“She seems to be the principal person in it.”

“That’s just the point,” explained Theodore. “It will look as if”

“As if you were smitten. Well, there are worse disgraces than being smitten, as long as you have the circumspection to remember that she is Jim Lytham’s property. However, go up. I feel that you are having but a thin time here. You will meet Mrs. Croyland, who is a very charming and instructive lady; and her excellent husband, who will certainly be delighted by the ingenuousness of your personality, and will perhaps put you on to something good. Be sure he will extend a cordial welcome to the scion of a house of coal. He has a firm faith that traders are God’s elect, while the rest of us, whether poets, fiddlers, operatic tenors or kinema stars, are the parasitic moss which makes the fair-built world picturesque, perhaps, but crumbling and insanitary. Incidentally, his firm has a cheap line in runabouts; but don’t ever be persuaded. The house is the last up the road. You will know it by its jaundiced hue.”

Theodore thought, with Josephine, that this persistent pressure to get him away was more than a little peculiar. He would have been content to believe that Tony merely wanted a clear field for himself with Grace, who was due to tea, had not the more alluring hypothesis presented itself to him that there was possibly dark work in progress. His worthy cousin already had two in tow, to his positive knowledge—why not a third? That other girl, Grace Lytham, had distinctly been jealous of Haidee on their arrival. She must have had some cause; there must have been passages. By Jove! if so, he was a thick’un! In that case, the idea probably was to employ *him*

as go-between—to carry letters and messages, and so forth. Hence Tony's continual harping on his going. It was fair enough game, there was no property in a pretty woman, if Tony liked and wanted that kind of thing, all right, and it was up to the two Lythams to watch their own parcels; but where did *he*, Theodore, come in? Oh, he would come in some-how, bet-your-boots! He wasn't born yesterday! Supposing the guess was sound, and the fair Haidee was that sort of female, others might enter it for the running besides that brace of local veterans. He determined to study signs and symptoms at The Yellow House that afternoon.

His day-long dullness dropped from him, giving place to a new animation and purpose, as, in a speech which closed the topic, he left it to his cousin's superior *flair* to decide that he really could visit these comparative strangers without serious offence to the conventions. He forthwith retreated upstairs to his room to improve his attire, and within ten minutes was out of the house.

It was Haidee herself who received him, wearing a very smart afternoon frock, as for an occasion. She lifted her brows slightly at his entrance, but was too polite to inquire what possibly could have brought him, which was the question in her mind. Intimating that she thought Silvester was somewhere on the premises, while her parents were not down yet from resting, she invited him in the meantime to sit by the fire. Tea would not be long. She hoped that his cousins had suffered no ill-effects from their overnight dissipation?

Although rather taken aback by so cool a reception, Theodore responded easily enough that they were particularly fit, and that, as a matter of fact, his own errand was to make the equivalent inquiry regarding herself and her brother. Tony's mock message on the spot seemed to him a trifle too weak.

Haidee smiled. "I'm normal, thanks! Silvester was not altogether the thing at breakfast, but his appetite has since returned."

"It went off quite nicely, what?"

"Indeed yes."

"I trust you don't consider it colossal cheek on my part, barging in like this?"

“Oh, no—down here we all barge in on each other at any old time. It’s far the best way. Saves taxing our memory and imagination.”

But her manner was still not very enthusiastic, and so Theodore applied himself to generate heat. He mentally ran through what would be most likely to interest a girl of her stamp. Discarding the fashions as premature and dancing as barren, he selected the theatre.

“Do you go to many shows?”

“Whenever I can get,” said Haidee, with a shade of amusement.

“What class of piece do you go for as a rule?”

“I’m not very particular.”

“Nor am I, as long as there are pretty girls in it. I can’t stick high-brow stuff.”

“It’s rather educational.”

“A decent revue is alright. Have you seen ‘Heave a Brick, Quick?’”

“No, I really haven’t,” answered the girl, suppressing her laughter.

“It’s top-hole. Mai Marjoribanks and Charlie Cook. They do a great snake dance. First of all, they stagger about round a huge empty champagne bottle, and then coloured snakes are pumped out of its neck, quicker and quicker, till they get all tangled up in them. Then the devil in red tights comes up out of the bottle, they jump on his shoulders, and exeunt all! I’ve seen the show three times, and would like to go again. I know a man who can work tickets. The only thing is, it’s rather rot going alone.”

But at this stage Haidee became thoughtful and absent. She bent forward in her chair to gaze into the blazing fire, with a puckered brow and half parted lips, her shapely hands circling her crossed knees. The pose afforded a vision of her handsome petticoat, draping a pair of silken calves. It was the reign of short skirts. Theodore took courage from her juvenile attire, so coming-on in its saucy beauty, and proceeded.

“Shall we ever meet in town, I wonder! Does Lytham take you around much?”

“I’m sorry—I wasn’t listening. What did you say?”

"I was suggesting that if you ever find yourself in town one day in the near future, without an escort—shopping or anything of that sort—and feel lonesome in the crowd, my phone number"

She interrupted him. "Pardon me! It was distinctly an act of charity to look in on us on a dull Sunday afternoon, and my people will be agreeably surprised when they come down, but whose idea was it really? Your own?"

"I knew you would think it was cheek", returned the arrested youth, with a rising colour.

"I've said no. But was it Anthony's idea?"

"Well, I fancy he's a bit anxious to get me off his hands when not working together."

"Then it was his?"

"Not that I wasn't awfully eager to come."

"To see me?" inquired Haidee, with a shade of archness.

"Would that be wonderful?"

"Rather rapid, perhaps. But did Anthony expressly send you to me?"

"I'm not his messenger quite!"

Haidee gazed at him musingly.

"How do you get on together?"

"As long as he remembers that I'm as good a man as he is, we shall get on well enough together."

"Then you will." And she resumed her staring into the fire.

As Theodore glanced at her, the suspicion at last began to force its way into his mind that she was not thinking of him at all, and never had been. Then his former surmise was right. There was a secret understanding between those two. She was playing him—Theodore—up, while studying the signals to see if he had got his instructions from Tony all right; then possibly she would plant a letter on him to take back. He was so pleased with the discovery, with the advantage it gave him over them both, and with his own cunning in having so quickly tumbled to it all, that he smiled suddenly, and, forgetting his manners, pulled out a cigarette-case.

Haidee caught the glint of the metal.

"Do," she said mechanically. So he lit up.

“You said you weren’t your cousin’s messenger, Mr. Pay-sant. Did you mean it literally? I mean, I suppose you haven’t brought me anything from him, by any chance?”

“Righto!” thought Theodore triumphantly. He closed his eyes, while leaning back in his chair, with an assumption of weary indifference.

“As what?”

“As a note, for example?”

“No. Were you expecting one?”

“Well, not exactly—only, as you came from him”

“Grace Lytham is coming to tea, I expect he wanted to shift me out, and that’s all about it,” replied Theodore unkindly.

“Aren’t you rather cynical?”

“One has to be with certain folk.” And as she looked across at him inquiringly, he went on to explain. “I could tell you things about Master Tony. He doesn’t only like blondes.”

“He may like all the colours of the rainbow, as far as I’m concerned, but what has that to do with Grace’s coming to tea and your removal in consequence?”

“You said I was cynical, so now I’m saying I’m justified. I know more of Tony than some. He’s got a whole bag of tricks.”

“You had better tell Grace that, not me.”

“Not likely!”

“I’m not interested, and what’s more, I don’t believe it.”

“What?”

“That there’s another girl.”

“All right.”

“You mean in London?”

“London’s a big place,” said Theodore tantalisingly.

“I don’t believe a word of it. Who is she?”

“That’s a secret.”

Haidee laughed, and stood up.

“However, she’s not a blonde, and when we are better acquainted perhaps you’ll condescend to tell me whether she’s black or red. But I suppose you’ll be going back almost at once?”

“It depends.”

“On what?”

“Whether I’m bored or not.”

“I should say yes, probably.”

He gave her a significant grin. “You ought to know.”

“I should stay on, I think,” said Haidee sweetly, casting down her eyes.

“Then may I call here every day?”

“To see Silvester?”

“To see whoever’s visible, and chance my luck. What’s Lytham’s time for calling?”

“Do you want to see him too?”

“Any old way, I’ve got your permission, and I’ll carry on. That girl’s name is”

“Go on. Have you forgotten it, or are you inventing it?”

“Neither, but talking of girls’ names reminds me—what’s yours?”

“I am Miss Croyland.”

“To everyone?”

“Except intimate friends and relations.”

“Right About time your people put in an appearance, isn’t it, Miss Croyland?”

Haidee glanced towards the door.

“Yes, so now be quick and tell me her name, and all about her.”

“Well, you know, on second thoughts, I don’t see how I can to an absolute stranger.”

“You little beast!” said Haidee, laughing.

“When I started to, I was thinking we were sort of related. You’re going to marry Lytham, Lytham’s sister’s going to marry Tony, and Tony’s my cousin. I was thinking we were all a happy family. How do you figure it out?”

“In that sense, certainly.”

“So as you’re my cousin, thrice removed, I ought to call you Haidee?”

“But not in front of others, or there’ll be a mild earthquake, I can assure you!”

“I thought you’d see it, Haidee. Well then, you and I are pals, and I’m going to visit this house regularly—is that agreed?”

“We’ll think about it. Now, what’s that woman’s name?”

Theodore rose, and pretending the necessity of whispering it in her ear, approached her closely upon the rug before the fire. She fended him off with a smile. He murmured something which she could not catch from the distance she had imposed.

“What?”

Again he spoke the name, and again she could not hear it.

“Come closer, then!” said Theodore.

At the same moment old Croyland stumped into the room through the only half-closed door, turning, as he did so, a pair of abnormally prominent eyes, like grey marbles, upon the standing couple. He was a short, heavily built man of sixty, having an apoplectic neck, bagging flesh, and cheeks permanently crimsoned by an open-air life and the whisky habit. Still irritable from his recent bout with his old enemy lumbago, he would have seemed a formidable image at any other time to Theodore, who possessed all a young man’s instinctive dread of age and authority, but the latter, at the moment of his entry, was so exultant at the breach which his first assault had made in the fair Haidee’s defences that not even the advent of an ogre could rob his brow of its bold assurance.

“Jocelyne Rossiter,” he said for the third time to the girl, and as on this occasion he spoke aloud she heard him very well.

“Thank you!”

Having introduced the visitor to her father in the briefest manner, she slipped from the room. The master of the house sank with an animal grunt into his customary seat beside the fire, stretched forth his slippered feet to be toasted, and started the inevitable personal interrogation by an older man of a younger where the two have been thrust into each other’s company without means of escape. Paysant the coal man he knew by repute, and appreciated, but of the puppy talking to him he reserved his opinion.

Meanwhile Grace and Jim appeared together at Croom. The girl had come to tea, but her brother excused himself. He was to go on to the Croylands’ and only wanted half-a-dozen words with Anthony. The latter took his hat, and walked up with him, wondering dubiously whether and how Haidee had

contrived to get out of her scrape that morning.

When Jim was embarrassed, his manner became courteous and his speech jerky and laconic. He cleared his throat with a tenor cough, viewed the hedge, and still hesitated. Anthony offered his cigarette-case. They lit up.

"Well, it's about this morning's business," said Jim, almost apologetically. "How shall I put it?"

"Let me put it for you. You want to know what the devil I was doing with Haidee at Halse Tower. You doubt nothing, but you are mystified."

"It's like this, my dear man. As you hint, I'm not a silly ass, but you prevaricate and Haidee refuses information point-blank. If it was a chance meeting, why not say so in as many words?"

"But if it was an arranged meeting, have you formed any hypothesis?"

Jim coloured. "Why, no."

"Have you spoken to Grace?"

"I did speak to her."

"Well?"

"She rebuked me very sweetly, and told me I was an old goose, which I accept. But"

"Any jealousy or suspicions, Jim?"

"By Heavens! No. Haidee's a dear, good soul, and you are as safe as the Rock of Gibraltar—only, why get together? What's afoot? I've thought of this and I've thought of that, and the best I can see is that you two've been confabulating about a date for a double wedding. But that's rot!"

"Utter rot!" agreed Anthony, smiling. "Try again, Jim!"

"It *was* a rendezvous?"

"Yes."

Jim contemplated the red end of his cigarette.

"Who fixed it—you or she?"

"She."

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"Then what did she want?"

"Grace hasn't said?"

"Not a word."

“Well, neither can I say, for I’m on honour.” He smilingly watched Jim’s gesture of annoyance and impatience, then went on. “But, because I love you passing well, Jim, I will strain a point, and drop a hint, and do you see that your ground is prepared to receive it! Moreover, I must swear you to secrecy. Neither directly nor obliquely, neither by jest, allusion, innuendo nor dig in the ribs, shall you notify to Haidee or Grace that I have blabbed!”

“So it’s a joke!”

“One that will cost you a pretty penny, cherubic youth!”

“I’ll not speak. What is it?”

Anthony set his hand to his mouth, and whispered: “Mend your attire, Jim!”

And because Haidee had actually scorned her *fiance’s* appearance, and because he could not speak the truth to Jim without destroying Jim’s happiness, Anthony believed that this lie would be forgiven him.

Jim looked thunderstruck.

“I twig! She wanted a heart talk with you about my get-up She has too much delicacy to approach me direct.”

“Then see to it.”

“And she is right. It’s a fact that I do wear any old rags. It doesn’t bother me, but I fully appreciate that it might and would very considerably bother any fashionable girl I might happen to be hiking around. A woman takes stock of such things. God knows the date of this overcoat!” He held up a flap of the skirt ruefully, to look at it.

“And lose no time, Jim.”

“I won’t. I’ll run up to town to a tailor’s tomorrow I’m deeply grateful to you, my dear chap.”

“Not a word to the girls, remember!”

“No, no! Everything shall be under the rose, and I respect her refinement of character in wishing it.”

Jim’s troubles thus being ended, and The Yellow House reached, Anthony turned at the gate to retrace his steps.

“I shall probably see you later, Jim, at your place?”

“But in case not, at least go visit your plantling. It’s coming on wonderfully. When I came away it was out of the pot to the height of my forefinger. Virginia can’t leave it; she stands

over it with a can of warm liquid manure. She feeds it by spoonfuls.”

Anthony was interested.

“That’s most unnatural, surely, Jim? What do you make of it?—joking apart?”

“Vegetable runaway. Unless Virginia’s coddling us.”

“Well, is she?”

“She swears not, and seems sober enough. Slide in and see it on your way back.”

“No, I’ll get up after tea. You didn’t remark an incipient serpent lying beside it?”

Dismissing the subject, he went on to say:

“By the way, you’ll find my young cousin in there,” and he flourished his hand towards the house. “I sent him up to make Silvester’s better acquaintance. If he interferes with your enjoyment, kick him out. If you are intellectually inclined, retain him. Beneath a simple pink-and-white exterior, he possesses one of the most complicated personalities it has been my happiness to meet. Its study forms a rich mental treat for the brooder. I am just beginning to understand that I know nothing whatever about him.”

“My good man, why foist him on *me*?”

“Each for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost!” said Anthony, laughing. “He has eyes like binoculars, and Grace and I have leeway to make up.”

Shaking his fist at him, Jim passed in through the gate.

After tea, Anthony escorted Grace back to her home. They were encountered at once by Virginia, who seemed to be in a state of laughing excitement.

“You don’t deserve to possess the eighth wonder of the world—neglecting it all day like this! Come and see it instantly! Don’t stop to take your things off, Grace. Come on!”

“What’s happened?”, demanded the other two, in chorus.

But Virginia, electric torch in hand, replied only by driving them before her towards the door which communicated with the dark garden, where stood the greenhouse. They entered, prepared for marvels, if one can ever be.

The white glare from the torch severed the pot containing Anthony’s plant from its companions on the shelf, and the

trio gazed their fill. The russet stem, as slender as a wax taper, stood up erect some four inches above the surface of the potting mould. Two clusters of the most vivid emerald green leaves sprang out at different heights from opposite sides. They were shaped like tiny apple leaves. After bending over the pot for fully half a minute in silence, Anthony straightened his back to regard Virginia with a whimsical smile.

“A veritable magic beanstalk, and no Kew professional could have brought it on better! My congratulations!”

“You surely don’t dare to imagine that I’ve been juggling with it?”

“Juggling?”

“Substituting a forward seedling.”

“I love your directness, my child. Since marriage is all in the air, may you marry a man without secret thoughts! You repudiate so low-down a trick, then?”

“On my most solemn and sacred oath!”

“Hm!” said Anthony. Then, after a pause:

“You’re a gardener, and I’m not. Do seeds ever develop so quickly?”

“Not apple pips.”

“And this is genuinely mine?”

“Yes, Anthony, it *is* yours. I swear it.”

He clasped his forehead and stood his full height, staring at it in thought, while the two girls remained looking at him curiously. At last he turned away.

“On your sole certificate, then, I take off my hat to a miracle. We’ll see what it does overnight. You don’t say much, Grace—I hope you’re adequately impressed?”

“I think it’s very strange, but I also think we might now return to the house.”

“There speaks the practical Eve, and if that baby tree bore a baby apple I verily believe that you would waste small time in wonder before setting your pretty teeth in it!”

“Haidee would more likely do that,” said Virginia. “With all her numerous faults, Grace isn’t greedy.”

“But is Haidee?”

“Isn’t it greed to want to take all the men of the neighbourhood to her own bosom?”

Grace laughed softly, half turning her back. Anthony heard, glanced at her shadowy form, and passed a hand across his wrinkled forehead. Two short days ago she had rebuked this irresponsible child for precisely the same sort of language; now she was approving. It was that unfortunate meeting in the woods with Haidee. He understood that she was jealous, and that for some time to come he would need to carry himself most cautiously.

Finding her remark went unanswered, Virginia added, in the malicious tone so dreaded by all her household:

“Apropos, where’s Mr. Paysant this evening?”

“Well, I was hardly going to bring him here,” replied Anthony.

“He’s gone to Haidee’s to tea,” explained Grace.

“I thought he might have done—that’s why I asked. It’s a regular case, isn’t it?”

“Which translated, means . . . ?”

“Don’t pretend, Anthony! They were flirting all last night, and you know it.”

“A very innocuous flirtation.”

“A very one-sided one, perhaps. On the other side it was for *your* benefit, my dear man, I saw it all. You wouldn’t notice her, so she was furious.”

“I’m glad I passed with honours.”

“Then you did, but this morning you behaved like a fool. Fancy being such a simpleton as to allow yourself to be inveigled into the woods by a woman little better than a vamp! How she must have laughed to herself! What was it all about?”

“My very dear Virginia, we are talking of a lady.”

“Pouff! No woman is a lady three inches under her skin. You scratch her, and see! Haidee Croyland is one big jumble of nerves, instincts and humours. You’re not likely in your short life ever to meet a more dangerous walking volcano.”

“For a *belle-soeur* I perceive I am to have a guardian angel. It enhances the felicity of my engagement.”

“And the felicity of Grace’s engagement. But if you were to play her false, I should hate you—oh, how I should *hate* you for it! . . . ”

“I am unterrified. And so are you, Grace?”

“I trust you, my dear,” said Grace, simply and without any particular emotion.

“As you should. But for you, Virginia—dismiss uncharitable thoughts from your little noddle, and give Jim a square deal! Aren’t you a Christian?”

“Not when my thumbs twitch,” returned the young girl.

They went back to the house.

Music was the order of the evening. Mrs. Lytham sat down to the piano, while Virginia brought forth her violin, and a protracted but intermittent programme commenced, of which the first and principal item was the Kreutzer Sonata. The mother played accurately, the daughter with small skill but much feeling. Anthony listened critically, with some enjoyment in places, as he sat side-by-side with Grace on the settee in the adjoining room, which was lighted only by the flickering flames of a coal fire. Presently she was pressed by her mother to sing, and then he was left alone to his own reflections. He did not care for vocal music. The ballad which she selected was banal in sentiment and commonplace in melody, while Grace’s singing voice, he had to confess to himself, was weak, colourless and uninspired. She was not artistic in any sense. However, one could love a girl for other things, and he had enough art for both. Just as she had finished, and was preparing to rejoin him in his retreat, supper was announced.

So the night passed. But at ten o’clock Jim returned, looking rather sulky. Three, at least, of the four others studied his face with solicitude.

“You’re home early,” said Grace.

Jim turned to Anthony with a ghastly attempt at a grin.

“Your beautiful young cousin out-sat me.”

“No! And you let him?”

“Why did you let him, Jim?” echoed Grace.

“Because ladies were present, and I doubt if anything short of the toe of my shoe would have done it. So that’s that!”

“But why did Haidee let him?” inquired Virginia in her most innocent tone.

“Because Haidee doesn’t care a damn about me, I suppose!”

“What do you mean?” demanded his stepmother quickly. “You haven’t quarrelled!”

“Haven’t we? Then you know more than I do.” And falling into the first easy chair, he proceeded to explain “It’s that confounded meeting in the woods this morning.”

“You haven’t been teasing her again about that, Jim?” said Anthony.

“No, not again, but I was a bit insistent about it this morning, and I imagine she hasn’t recovered her equanimity yet. What’s to be done with a woman in that mood?—you other women!”

“Have a glass of whisky, and go to bed,” counselled Mrs. Lytham. “She’ll be all right in the morning.”

“Was Mr. Paysant in very marked favour?” asked Virginia.

“With Haidee? I don’t know. She was playing him hot and cold, as a pretty woman knows how to. It was no business of mine, so I just came away.”

“Better go to bed!” said Grace soothingly.

“I guess so.”

“It doesn’t sound very serious.”

“I guess not.”

She kissed him on the forehead.

“You’re a silly boy, Jim!”

“The fact is, I’m ignorant. I don’t know women, never did, and never shall. Anthony here does, and he doesn’t make these absurd and degrading situations for himself, whereas”

Anthony got up, and pressed his hand.

“Whereas your experience has still to be gained by hard and honest application, my lad, so the sooner you start, the better. I’ll help you.”

“By ordering your young devil of a cousin off those premises, to begin with, I sincerely hope.”

“I wouldn’t insult you, Jim. If you can’t keep up your wicket against a bowler of that calibre, you’d better try some other game. I said I was going to help you, and how I’m going to do it is to keep Theodore down here the length of my

stay. If I have a voice in things, Haidee shall have his society at least once a day, every day during the next fortnight. Supposing she doesn't sicken of him by then, in God's name let her have him. But it's up to you to see that she does. You're an educated gentleman, aren't you?"

"What's that to do with it?"

"He isn't, that's all—and Haidee is a lady. Good-night, Jim!"

"But, man alive! You don't think I'm worrying about that young whelp?"

"You're worrying about Haidee, I take it!"

"Just so."

"Well, leave her to finish her own bottle of medicine, I only mean that. Don't go hat in hand to her, and ask for a great big helping of humble pie. Make yourself scarce. Be as cold and haughty as you like. Am I right, Grace?"

"Yes, if she loves Jim."

"Have you any reason to doubt it?" demanded her brother, almost fiercely.

"None." But she thought that she had.

Jim rose.

"Well, thanks to one and all! These family conclaves are most fascinating, and I expect I've been a damned fool to expose my hand, but there it is! I come home for consolation, and I get it—iced I assume that you think it an idiotic match at the best?" he added quickly, confronting Grace.

"No, I don't, Jim."

"And you, Virginia! You're all in it."

The younger girl shook her curls, smiled, and refused to be drawn.

"It's a very excellent match, Jim," said Anthony, "and that's why we need to smooth out the wrinkles. Remember what I told you this afternoon. The root of the evil lies therein, my friend, although you might fancy it absurd. Leave all to happy fortune, time, and the gentleman we wot of. And again, good-night! I won't better Theodore by out-sitting a man in his own house."

"You may stop here till morning for me, old chap! I'm off to bed."

Anthony hoped that by cutting home at once he would be able to intercept his cousin for a chat as soon as the latter should return from The Yellow House, presuming his sisters had already retired for the night, and they were early departers. He persisted in going. Grace, who seemed wholly quiet and preoccupied that evening, made the feeblest efforts to detain him, and the others none at all. Jim's trifling disagreement with his *fiancée* had somehow cast a gloomy nervousness and anxiety over the entire family quite disproportionate to its intrinsic degree of seriousness. It was like the first lowering of the grey sky after fine weather. Even Mrs. Lytham's unaided intuition told her that all was not well in that quarter, while the better-informed girls were actively aware that these were but the first mutterings of a tremendous storm to come. Both dreaded for Jim, but Grace still wished to spare him, and Virginia did not, and that was the difference between them.

However, Anthony's ingenious scheme for keeping Haidee amused by Theodore and oblivious of himself—both, he trusted, to Jim's ultimate advantage—was not destined to be opened to his cousin that night, for the latter had already gone to bed. Six glorious hours of victory and sunshine had been crowned for him by Haidee, who, immediately after Jim's departure, had in the very face of her mother's lifted brows and her father's grunts and wriggles insisted on seeing him alone to the front door. It was only to afford her an opportunity to hand him an unaddressed envelope for Tony, true enough; but having just put to flight one of his elderly rivals, he felt quite capable of now competing with the second, while any slight traces of sullen jealousy he might otherwise have felt were more than suppressed by the triumphant fulfillment of his earlier private prediction. He had known that the letter was to be given to him. One would have to get up very early in the morning to gerrymander *him*. He would convey as many letters backwards and forwards as they pleased; it was all helping him to get his footing. While in bed, before falling asleep, he carefully examined his memory for all the facts he had been able to glean regarding Jocelyne Rossiter. These properly furbished up and enlarged, should go far, in his opinion, to destroy that perfect faith which a girl must have in a man if she is to continue to prefer him to his next fellow.

6

Descending to breakfast at half-past nine on Monday morning, Anthony found his sisters already discussing their meal at table, but Theodore had not yet put in an appearance. He was one of Nature's late risers. Refusing porridge, the playwright set to work on his ham and eggs.

"What news of the plant?" asked Josephine, half in curiosity and half to make conversation.

"It was four inches up last night. I'm strolling across to see it after breakfast. Like to come?"

"I'll go with Marian later in the day, when the coast is clear."

"Many thanks!"

"But you've forgotten one hypothesis. Virginia may be hoaxing us all."

"The hypothesis has not been overlooked."

"What do you think?"

Her brother smiled. "She is a young girl, and laughter to a young girl, they say, is as the spring breezes to a tree."

"Then you had better be firm with her, and recover the seed," remarked Marian. "What is a joke to her may not be one to us. After all, it has been in our family for more than six centuries."

"If fraud peeps through and satisfaction is denied, I shall refer the affair to you, my dear sister. For your pious wrath will be a steam-hammer to crush the toughest jest."

"You have a rather happy knack of bestowing your responsibilities, it seems to me," said Josephine irritably.

"In what other matter have I done so?"

"I really can't undertake to recite your biography, but I had Theodore in mind at the moment. You bring him down here, presumably to make use of him, and finding no use for

him apparently, you resign him to us, to go off on your own account. How long is he actually staying?"

"What has our estimable young cousin done to fall beneath the weight of your august displeasure?"

"He's hardly our sort, and why Marian and I should be called upon to entertain him I cannot conceive."

"I am positively starting work to-day."

"You can't neglect Grace, and then what is he to do?"

"When in doubt, send him up to Haidee. He'll go."

"I dare say he will; but that's atrocious."

"Why?"

"I thought Jim was your friend!"

"Jim won't mind. I've spoken to him already."

The sisters were mystified. Anthony, however, vouchsafed no explanation of his words, but proceeded:

"Which being satisfactorily arranged, I take it that you will urge no objection to his remaining at Croom for an even longer period than was originally intended? Let us say till Saturday week, when I myself return to town."

Josephine sniffed belligerently. "Whose proposition is that — Haidee's?"

"How she is loved! No, mine. I need him."

"For your work?"

"Assuredly not for my recreation, since I find his society as trying as yourself. My finest *mots* leave him unthrilled, while his docility is a recurring insult. One longs to strike fire from his soul with a flint hatchet. The possessor of so profound a temperament will go far. He will finish up as the supreme director of an international film producing combine. He will throw me scenarios to write. Did you wish to interrupt my eloquence, Josephine?"

"I was merely going to suggest that people don't as a rule get wafted to those important posts on spring mattresses! He's now been late down on Saturday, Sunday and Monday."

"The holiday spirit, no more. Moreover, understand well that 'tis not the early-rising busybodies who carry off the first prizes in our paradoxical world. Just the reverse. Many a darling spirit plots from his bed, many a five-o'clock-in-the-morning enthusiast breathes in the rosy dawn with his lungs only . . .

But to revert—the extension is approved? I ask Marian.”

“If you seriously wish it, though we’re not really a hotel.”

“My cheque-book is at your disposal.”

“No, thanks!” replied Marian stiffly. “We’ve hardly come to that yet. I only meant—however, I can’t explain.”

“Let us hear, for your thoughts are always worth hearing.”

“I agree with Josephine. His ways are not our ways, and our ways are now settled The name Paysant, one is strongly tempted to guess, is derived from the word ‘peasant’—I need not enlarge.”

“I follow.”

“His tastes, certainly, have not struck me as being very noble.”

“Dear Marian, you dwell in the country, where the sun, sky, clouds and trees speak as aristocratically as ever, but in town no-one any longer uses this sort of language. The gods are dead. Preserve the ancient faith in your ancient temple, if you will, but do not require a modern youngster to cut away from the swarming millions of his fellows. Study the epitome of our age in the advertisements.”

Theodore appeared at the door, pink, fresh, and apologetically smiling.

“Here he is!” said Anthony. “Slept like a top, as usual?”

“I’m afraid I’m a bit late.”

“You are—for the third time; and you are going to cop it!”

Marian pressed the bell for his breakfast to be brought in. When he had seated himself, she addressed him rather coldly:

“Anthony has been speaking of a prolongation of your stay to the end of the fortnight. I need not say we shall be delighted.”

“Really, that’s most awfully good of you, but it’s the first I’ve heard of it.”

“Can you manage it?” asked Anthony, with a twinkle.

“Rather!” He contrived to throw into his tone and manner just a tinge of reluctant hesitation, but inwardly chuckled, and instantaneously discarded all his home plans. Now he was sure of Haidee for two weeks, and two weeks were an eternity!

“I’ve been thinking that the conditions are favourable for getting on with the next act,” explained his cousin, never re-

moving his shrewd eyes from his face. "I dare say we shan't keep your nose too desperately to the grindstone. You can vacate afterwards. But it's not an ultimatum this time, so please yourself entirely."

"I'll send off a wire to-day."

"Do. And should you yearn for youthful society in your off moments, make no bones about running up to see Silvester. He's at a loose end like yourself."

Unobserved by the two women, who were already in the act of rising from the table to quit the room, Theodore returned his cousin an audacious wink. Anthony ignored it.

When they were alone, the youth produced his letter.

"Who's this from?" inquired the playwright, in genuine surprise.

"Haidee."

"She asked you to give it to me?"

"She did so."

"Well—thanks!" And he tore open the envelope, with some misgiving.

Haidee had written:

"My dear Anthony,

I don't think it was very honourable of you to bring Grace and Jim upon the scene yesterday morning, and it was lamentable that you should think it necessary to cap your action by a distinct falsehood to me, for that was not only safeguarding yourself but trying to bring shame on me by causing us to be surprised together, when you might just as well have told me simply that they were on their way and got rid of me in that manner. But as I have nothing whatever to lose by the exposure, and don't care what either Jim or Grace may believe of me, I am afraid the shot has rather recoiled on your own head. I still forgive you, but please do try to recollect that even my extreme patience and forbearance cannot be relied upon for ever.

Yours in regret, and not in anger,

Haidee."

Anthony glanced across at the younger man, who went on eating his breakfast quietly, with a clever mask of calm uncon-

sciousness. He refolded the letter, stuffed it in his pocket-case, and rose to walk to the window, where he stood looking out. It was a grey, uninviting morning.

Haidee's mistake was absurd, yet understandable. It ought to be set right, but how? Should he show the note to Grace, and request her to see Haidee personally, to give her the necessary assurance? No, she had started to be stung by jealousy. The sight of a missive from a supposed rival might cause her to shy violently. He was not a professional psychologist for nothing, and he believed it would. The only alternative was for him to see Haidee himself, but he did not care about calling at the house; he must trust to luck to run across her outside it somewhere. The sooner the better, for as long as she credited Jim's encountering her at Halse Tower as a plot concerted among the three of them, she was not very likely to receive him back into favour; and from what Anthony could make out, her treatment of him in her own home last evening went to confirm it.

He turned round to consult the clock.

"Are we working this morning?" asked Theodore, from his seat at the table.

"Yes, but don't hurry. I'm slipping over to High Cot for a few minutes. By the way, you haven't mentioned this letter to my sisters?"

"No, rather not!"

"Nor anyone else. Haidee has her reasons for not wanting it known."

"Righto!" replied Theodore cheerfully. But mentally he added:

"Of course *you* haven't any reasons for not wanting it, you ancient blighter!"

Anthony left the room, and a minute later left the house.

He met Grace and Jim not ten yards from the gate, approaching him down the lane, but it was not so much the unexpected encounter which surprised him, as their appearance. They were evidently off to town, and he had not known that Jim was proposing to take his sister. Jim himself wore a dark overcoat and a hard bowler, while Grace's personality was quite altered by a stylish black wrap with a roll collar, and a small and smart black satin hat adorned and completed by

a dropping rosy feather. It was nearly a disguise. The fashionable grace of the attire lent her dignity; the severity of the black, relieved only by a single plume, emphasized the dazzling purity and fairness of her complexion. She was all at once metamorphosed from a young girl into a lady of society, and at the same time she looked perfectly beautiful. He felt proud of her, yet a little quelled, despite his superiority of years and experience. She seemed too good for him. He reflected that women were very sapient to give so much time to the consideration of dress, seeing that the mere donning of a couple of articles of apparel was able to override even his discerning judgment so strangely. He was hurt by her desertion of him.

Jim, who appeared nearly jovial again, gave him a sly wink.

“Grace is going to help me choose togs, and afterwards I’m to assist her to admire the pretty mannequins. Lunch at some swank-hole; and so home to tea. Will you come?”

“We were going to drop in to ask you,” added Grace. “Do come!”

“Would to Heaven I could!—but it’s impossible. My head is full of little elves and spirits, who have been assembling since early morn, and were I to dismiss them the Muses would chastise me. It is my day of inspiration.”

“But then what are you doing out of doors?” asked Grace, with a half-disbelieving smile.

“I was on my way to say good-morning to *you*.”

“Nothing more?”

“And of course to view our prodigy.”

“I thought it couldn’t only be me.”

“For your instruction, friend Jim the novice, here we have one of the most familiar and interesting feminine gambits. A woman injures a man. She does not wait to be attacked, but attacks instead. You will meet it a thousand times, in a thousand forms.”

“How have I injured you?” inquired Grace.

“By absenting yourself without permission.”

“We are asking you to accompany us.”

“I should have been invited to the preliminary discussion, therein lies my grievance.”

“You weren’t there when Jim asked me, and I thought

you would be sure to join us. I'll go home again if you don't wish it, but if you're working all day I don't see what it matters."

"No, you shall not have that against me. Go enjoy yourself, my dearest of ladies! And accept my congratulations on the smartness of your toilette!—Jim will view no mannequin to-day half as impressive . . . Now let's see what can be done. You go and return by train?"

"Not being blessed plutocrats like some people!" said Jim.

"You're too stingy to live in decent style, that's what it is, my dear fellow." Jim unaccountably coloured up, and Anthony, surprised by the spectacle, began to wonder if he could inadvertently have spoken an approximation to the truth. That explanation of some of his friend's idiosyncrasies had never yet struck him. He hastened to continue:

"However, I was about to say—you go from Brasted, as being the nearest station?"

"Yes," answered Grace. "Will you walk down with us?"

"I can't, and don't interrupt! I can't walk down with you, but if you will name a time I will pick you up in my car coming back—at Sevenoaks, for example. That will save you the local change. By what hour do you anticipate reaching the last and bottommost of your wad of Treasury notes, James?"

"I've got too dashed few of them, if you want to know. What's more to the point is, what time there's a train to Sevenoaks. Timetable on you?"

Anthony had one, and found that there was a fairly quick train down from Charing Cross at 3.20, which was timed to arrive at Sevenoaks at four o'clock precisely. It was settled that the travellers should return by this, and that the car with its owner should be in waiting there, to rush them rapidly over the six or seven miles of excellent road. These preliminaries concluded, the brother and sister prepared to continue their advance down the lane.

"Before you go, Grace!" said Anthony. "I don't wish to waste valuable working time, if not necessary, so am I to visit our tree or not? Has it performed fresh feats overnight?"

"You are permitted to visit it," replied Grace teasingly, over her shoulder.

"What has it achieved since yesterday?"

“Apples, perhaps! But you’re not to eat them till I come home.”

As women instinctively do with those whom they wish to bind to them, she gave him a lingering affectionate, coquettish, penetrating look by way of parting, and this accompanied by her felicitous choice of that word “home” as a location possessed in common by them both, quietly raised Anthony’s newborn awe of her person to something more nearly resembling infatuation than he had yet felt. It seemed to him marvellous that so flawless a pearl of young and lovely womanhood should be willing to throw herself away upon a stuffy author who rapidly advanced towards middle age and was pitifully devoid of the freshness, wholesomeness, and youthful accomplishments of the sportsmen and dancing men that were her natural contemporaries. He tried to envisage their married life together, but somehow the picture refused to fall into focus. If there were children, she would probably adore them, and he might well be left in the cold. If she entertained, her non-literary set must almost certainly bore him. If she took up golf or tennis, it would not be in his society, for he hated games. He could not now give her up, for she had grown inexpressibly dear to him, but he asked himself if she had ever seriously realised the true nature of the step she was taking; and what qualities in him had given him the preference in her eyes. He meditated her that morning in an altogether new light. Because he had begun to cast himself for the inferior role, marriage seemed an infinitely more serious and responsible business.

He found himself at High Cot, where Virginia, looking unwell and with dark shadows beneath her eyes, received him. He told her that he had just left the others and had arrived for his morning inspection of the magic shrub.

While they proceeded to the greenhouse, she asked him: “Why didn’t you go with them?”

“Because of my work. But I am to fetch them from Seven-oaks, coming back.”

“How *can* you put your work, or anything else, before Grace, at this early stage!”

“I feel you are very likely right, my dear, and my conscience already begins to trouble me.”

“I think you should make that conscience of yours move a little faster, if I were you.”

They had reached the greenhouse, so the talk ended. Anthony, setting his two hands on his knees, bent over the pot.

The main stem of the plant, already six inches high from soil to tip, had begun to show woodiness at its base. There were, as well, two or three side stems, each bearing its cluster of miniature lanceolate leaves, of the brightest green; but the miracle of miracles was that, from the centre of one of the clusters, had erected themselves a pair of tiny red flower-buds, still tightly sealed in their calyxes.

“So there’s going to be fruit,” he said, looking round and up at Virginia, with a bantering yet anxious smile.

“Some sort of very dwarf fruit, or berries.”

“When did they appear?”

“They were there this morning when I got downstairs.”

Anthony stood up.

“I believe you’re more interested in all this than you like to own!”

“I’m not ashamed of owning it, and I *am* interested. I’ve never heard of anything half so weird. I shall begin to think I’m the only person of intelligence in the house, for the others are very casual about it. Aren’t you interested?”

“Yes, but tell me. You know the antecedents, and you know about plants in general. The phenomenon has occurred in nature, and therefore it is natural. Give me your views.”

“The pip was hermetically sealed for all those centuries, wasn’t it?”

“Yes; exposed to light, but not to air.”

“It may also have been embalmed, you know.”

“How does one embalm a pip?”

“The clever ancients may have had the secret. A prick of some paralysing drug, to keep it asleep. But as soon as it felt the warm, moist brown soil around it again, its nature managed to struggle up out of the trance.”

“That’s not bad for a young girl!” said Anthony with a smile. “But how do you account for its speed?”

“I don’t know that I quite care to be laughed at, Anthony.”

“On my honour, I feel very, very far from laughing. Any theory is more respectable than none, and I have none. So proceed in all earnestness.”

“Well then, why shouldn't we conceive time, not as a kind of flowing liquid, but as *elastic*?”

“I shall understand better when you have explained.”

Notwithstanding her evident indisposition, Virginia began to be moved by her subject. Her eyes flashed sombrely, while her frail frame could not keep still in the excitement of her effort to express herself.

“I mean, we may ignore the passage of the years, and we may imagine that they don't touch us in any way, but perhaps each year as it passes is attached to our being by an elastic cord. If we go with it, all right. Otherwise, sooner or later we have to go after it and all the other years with a rush.”

“Which is what our little descendant is doing. I follow.”

“Well, there are parallels.”

“What?”

“Have you ever noticed, in the late spring, how everything in nature seems to move much faster, and really does so?”

“That's true.”

“And how much quicker, freer and easier our own movements are in the morning, after a good night's rest?”

“You would say that the hours have got ahead of us, and we are jerked after, as by a string No, I'm not scoffing. The conception is admirable, though I doubt it would have to be translated into more physiological language before it would be accepted by Science, with the big S. And thus on the identical principle, a vegetable seed which has slumbered through countless ages, when it awakes at last will do its business in double-quick time, as the result of the invisible magnetic pull left behind by the vanished years and centuries?”

“We have to explain it somehow,” said Virginia, a trifle defiantly.

“I honestly believe that you are not very far from the truth of the matter, and what you are doing in petticoats at all I cannot conceive. What do you make of the actual legend?”

“About its being from the Garden of Eden?”

“Yes.”

“It’s so thrilling that I should hate to discredit it. I happen to be one of those queer folk who have faith in Eden, or its equivalent. I hoped and thought you did too, after your speech in this very place last Saturday night; but I suppose it was only poetic licence with you!”

“My dear, don’t be unkind!”

“Well, why shouldn’t there have been a Garden of Eden?”

“Why, indeed!”

“The farther back you go, the lovelier people seem to have been. When we want to read something very deep, very wise, very sacred and profound, yet very human and answering to the best of our humanity, what book do we pick up?”

“You would say the Bible.”

“Written by men who were thousands of years nearer than ourselves to our supposed monkey ancestors. And if you wish for physical beauty, to what race, ancient or modern, will you look for it? To the English or the Germans or the French or the Americans? Not likely!—and yet we’re about twenty-three centuries farther from the monkeys than the classical Greeks Or do you imagine that the horrible modern Yankee slang is a heaven-sent improvement on the beautifully organised and thoroughly dignified Latin tongue? My dear Anthony, we’re not travelling *from* the monkeys, we’re travelling *towards* them. There never has been such a vulgar age as ours Why, all the grand religions were founded in the ancient east. The monkeys didn’t evolve *them*. So I shall go on believing in a Golden Age, if no-one else does. Somewhere, at some time, there has been a very lofty chain of celestial mountains, from which the rivers have been flowing down ever since to water our modern civilisation; and should they ever run dry, they can never, never be replenished. As for an actual Garden of Eden, I don’t believe Darwin, I believe Moses, or whoever wrote Genesis. He was nearer to the beginning of things.”

“Your enthusiasm does you credit, and me good. There is also much truth in what you say. But now I must go. If there is any change in the patient, let me know at once.”

Virginia stood to recover herself for a moment; then she asked:

“But why wouldn’t you go with Grace?”

“I have told you—I’m working.”

“You’re not seeing Haidee again to-day?”

“I don’t design to do so,” replied Anthony in a much curter voice.

“I’m *not* malicious, Anthony. After mother, I love Grace the best of all the world, and how can I bear to see that other wretch trying to spoil her happiness! I wish she’d go away—then I wouldn’t speak another word against her. And you know you’re not a strong man.”

“I am what I am, but no strength is required against Haidee, for she makes no appeal.”

“Can’t you marry soon?”

“It can’t be too soon for me, but I expect Grace will have the most to say in that matter . . . Good-bye, Virginia! You should take up some work, my child. Accept the advice of a man of the world, soon to be connected with you by intimate ties.”

Virginia ran her fingers through her thick auburn locks.

“You accept my advice, and procure a special licence!”

The day was cold, and half-way through the morning a fine drizzle began to fall, so that neither Anthony nor Theodore found it a peculiar hardship to remain in the ideal world in a heated room until late lunch. The first act got itself finished, but the second still required some preliminary thought. The playwright dismissed his assistant, and at half-past three, the rain seeming to have ceased, put on his motoring clothes and brought the car round.

Less than a mile down the lane to Brasted he overtook Haidee, walking in the same direction, a rush basket in her hand. By a stroke of luck, it was the very opportunity he had wanted. He stopped.

“Will you get in, Haidee?” The door stood open for her.

She hesitated, but eventually mounted, to sit next to him. She was wearing furs, and he became instantly aware of the sweet, fresh perfume of spring violets, from a bunch fastened to her coat. He re-started the car.

“Shopping in the village?”

“Yes, we’re out of butter,” replied Haidee, with a droll half-smile.

“I’m meeting Jim and Grace at Tub’s Hill Station.”

“Oh, did she go up too?” So evidently Jim had announced his own intention of doing so.

They were not far from Brasted, and Anthony deliberately crawled the car.

“I got your note.”

“Did you?”

“But I shan’t answer it.” And finding that she continued silent, he proceeded:

“Because there’s nothing to answer. Your fact is wrong. I *didn’t* give the game away You ought to have known that.”

“I thought it very unlikely.”

“What! Then why did you directly accuse me of it?”

Haidee pretended to be interested in the scenery on her side of the car, which consisted of a high and featureless bank, shutting out all view beyond.

“Oh, I gave you the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps I wished to see you again, or something. I forget now. I said in the letter that I forgave you.”

“We’ll drop it, then,” said Anthony, considerably astonished at her cool effrontery, but determined to be as cool himself.

Haidee only responded by settling her attire more fastidiously, as though for a longer drive, despite the circumstance that her destination was almost at hand.

“And what of Jim?”

“What of him?”

“I hear you treated him badly last evening.”

“Oh!” said Haidee, after a sufficient pause, to denote that she had at first failed to take in the remark in its bearings . . .

“But isn’t that rather my business?”

“I agree; but also mine, as Jim’s agent.”

“Official agent?”

“I should have said ‘pal’.”

“Oh, yes.”

“Well?” demanded Anthony impatiently, after another interval.

“What is the trouble?”

“You *are* marrying him, aren’t you?”

"Of course I'm marrying him. Why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, all right, then we'll drop that also."

Haidee said nothing, and they turned at right angles into the long, straight village street, where Anthony promptly stopped the car dead.

"And finally, Haidee, I'll drop *you*." He stretched across her to swing open the door.

"I hope you're not cross?"

"Not in the very least, for I've nothing to be cross about."

"Still, you seem rather anxious to disencumber yourself of me. You don't offer to take me on to Sevenoaks with you."

"I thought you wanted to buy butter."

"Coming back would do for that."

"What do you want to go to Sevenoaks for?" asked Anthony, a trifle surlily.

"Surely I must be supposed to take as much pleasure in meeting Jim as you in meeting Grace!"

"That may be, but"

"But what?"

"Well, it's inadvisable. And in plain words, on the present occasion I prefer to meet them alone."

"You are not very civil."

"Perhaps not, but you might take a hint."

"Well, I shan't—and I'm going!" said Haidee decisively. She slammed the door to, then sat back with folded arms.

"My dear girl, this is my car, and I must insist"

"How does one insist in a public thoroughfare? Does one heave the dear girl bodily overboard?"

Anthony began to lose his temper.

"Look here, Haidee! I'll explain, and leave it to your good sense. I had all my work cut out to eradicate the effect of our yesterday's meeting. I'm not sure if I've succeeded even yet, and I certainly don't want a repetition of the experience. I hate to appear discourteous, but"

"Was Grace jealous, and did she make a scene?"

He pulled out his watch. "I've just ten minutes to do five miles in. Please get down!"

"I won't."

"I insist."

“You said that before.”

“Then I’ll turn the car round, and run back home.”

“That’s better.”

“What’s the idea? Are you trying to put me wrong with Grace again?”

“So she *was* jealous!”

Again he studied his watch. “Are you hanging me up here purposely? I shall miss them altogether if I don’t hurry.”

“I don’t care.” And she added:

“Regard me in the light of an immovable fixture, and do whatever you think best. I don’t mind which way we go.”

One or two passers-by had by now stopped to gaze back at the stationary car with its animated occupants.

“Oh, very well!” exclaimed Anthony. “If there’s trouble, you’re responsible.”

So they started off again in the direction of Sevenoaks, and as the road was wide, straight, and fast, the miles slipped rapidly by.

When they were nearing Riverhead, Haidee broke the silence by remarking contemplatively:

“Grace is one of the nicest girls I know, and her shape is lovely; so is her hair. I’ve never congratulated you yet, Anthony.”

“Well, we know each other well enough to omit formalities.”

“Are you still angry?”

“I’m still exasperated by your idiotic behaviour, and likely to remain so.”

“But what can there possibly be in giving a girl acquaintance a lift to a station in broad daylight!”

“It’s too late to discuss it. I can’t put you down now, anyway.”

“But I *shall* congratulate you, whether you like it or no. I think you’ve made an awfully good choice for yourself, and I hope we shall see quite a lot of each other later on. I’ll *make* Grace care for me! But I was going to say—I think you’re very, very wise to stick to the woman you’ve selected, and not shilly-shally with others.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, I don’t mean myself—I’m well aware that you’ve never even tolerated my humble person. I fancied that, with your exceptional opportunities, there might be others.”

“There aren’t any others. I haven’t time to philander.”

“Not Jocelyne Rossiter?”

The car swerved.

“Damn!” said Anthony.

“Was it serious?” smiled Haidee.

“No, it wasn’t! But I’ll pull Master Theodore’s ears for telling tales out of school.”

“Then they’ll be longer than ever.”

They drew into Sevenoaks station yard at three minutes past the hour, to discover Grace and Jim standing forlorn side-by-side at the booking office door. Anthony jumped down after Haidee.

“You too!” said Grace in an undescrivable tone, as the latter approached to kiss her.

“The inevitable me! Have I done wrong?”

Neither answered. Jim kissed her, but immediately looked away, in his quick uneasy manner.

“Oughtn’t I to have come?” repeated Haidee laughingly, looking from one to the other.

“Most kind of you!” Jim still would not meet her eye. “Only, how did you know”

“I didn’t, till Anthony picked me up. I was tripping down the lane to buy butter in the village, mum, when the gentleman overtook me in his beautiful motor-car, mum, and he up and offered me a lift, he did!” And she waved her basket in the air by way of credentials. “So when I heard what he was doing, I naturally came all the distance.”

“Well, that’s all right, then: so now we can get back,” said Jim, without even the ghost of an answering smile.

Grace thought they had better.

“But if we are in disgrace for the escapade, oh please let it fall on my head, for upon arriving at Brasted, where I was to alight, and upon my steadfastly refusing to do so, Anthony, the faithful Anthony, practically threatened to throw me out! So annoyed he was! A puffick gentleman!”

“Why should he object to your coming on, if you wanted to?” asked Grace coldly.

“He thought it would look strange—and I take off my hat to him, since we no longer use pins, as a man of experience. It really has looked strange, to judge from your two distressed countenances. I even imagined, in my folly, that you might be pleased, Jim.”

Grace turned to her *fiancé*.

“Why should you imagine it would look strange, Anthony?”

“I didn’t want it, that’s all.”

“But I stuck tight. Oh, for twopennyworth of your so-excellent common sense, Grace! Won’t you sell?”

“You could do with it!” reflected Anthony, who began very much to dislike the look of affairs.

“How shall we sit?” he asked. “Will you be with me in front, Grace?”

“Oh, I’m cold, weary and dying for a cup of tea. I don’t care where I sit.”

Anthony, with a rather grim face, thereupon opened the door for her behind, and the two girls got in, promptly arranging themselves as best they could to shut off communication with each other. Grace neither wished to speak to her companion, nor trusted herself to do so, while as for Haidee, she probably had done all that she had desired to do, and could now afford to wait complacently the mischievous harvest. Jim took his place with Anthony, and the car moved off.

“You ran it fine, though,” Jim said presently, examining the finger-tips of his glove.

“Yes.”

“What was the notion in not wanting her to come on?”

“Grace.”

“You thought Grace wouldn’t like it?”

“Well, does she?”

“I can’t blame her,” said Jim. “No more do I.”

At Brasted Anthony stopped the car.

“Which is your shop, Haidee?”

“Jukes—a bit higher up, on the left.”

They travelled to it, and Haidee descended, to disappear for her purchase. Two, three, four minutes passed.

“Go and hunt her up, Jim,” requested his sister. “We shall never get home.”

Jim returned no sign. Anthony also sat like a statue, and another minute went by.

“Can she be keeping us waiting deliberately?” demanded Grace.

“Oh, don’t talk rot!” growled Jim.

“Well she seems to be in the mood for practical joking to-day.”

Anthony, without looking round, suggested dryly the perfectly natural and probable explanation that she had been unable to get served immediately; whereupon his *fiancée* retorted in a bitter voice:

“You would defend her, of course!”

The hoarded outburst clearly showed him the nature of his offence, even if he had previously been ignorant of it, and he also recognised that no words of his could improve the situation as at that time. Women, it seemed, were doomed, by the physical peculiarities of their sex, to dwell in a world of low barometrical pressure, where the storms were liable to spring up at a moment’s notice, and where the intervening periods of calm rested on nothing. So once more Grace’s image varied for him. She now became the irrational, temperamental female, swayed by her periodic instincts as the tides by the moon, and he wondered how he could ever have dreamt of an equal companionship. A wife was necessarily an eternal exercise in tact. He regretted nothing, but he saw that he would be called upon to surrender a larger part of his independence than he had hitherto calculated upon.

Directly afterwards Haidee emerged from the shop, her basket filled with little packages. While resuming her seat, she glanced at the dark faces of brother and sister, and laughed outright.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t help it—everybody looks so funny! Who, to regard us, would conceive that we were a brace of happily engaged couples!”

“You might have a little consideration for our fatigue!” said Grace sharply.

“Yes, I am rather a devil. Things go on ever so much more smoothly when I’m not there; but I don’t know why. I don’t believe I’m qualified to run a household, Jim. Shall we cry off?”

“Jim wants excitement for his money,” Anthony quickly and gaily interposed.

“There’s little doubt he’ll get that!” was Grace’s acid comment.

Haidee drew her skirt aside, to shut the door.

“We’ll cry off, I think.”

To avoid turning his car in the narrow lane, Anthony went no farther than Croom, so there the others alighted. Jim and Haidee having gone on ahead together, Grace whispered to the playwright as she passed him, while he too was in the act of descending:

“I must apologise for having pressed you to come to London with us, but I really had no idea!” And before he could reply, she had moved on.

Anthony gazed after her with a singular smile.

Expecting nothing pleasant from a visit to High Cot that evening, he nevertheless found fortitude to make his way thither after dinner. Things had to be put right with Grace, and he also desired the latest intelligence concerning Jim’s affair.

But Jim had gone to bed, complaining of a cold. Virginia and her mother, again, were spending the evening with neighbours, and it was Grace alone who received him, standing with a smile by the table in the cosy, fire-lit drawing-room, with its solitary rose-shaded oil lamp, but offering no salutation until the maid who announced him had gone out again, closing the door after her. Then she advanced hesitatingly, shyly and drolly, and lifted her face to be kissed.

“I’m sorry I was such a beast this afternoon! Are you going to forgive me?”

“Of course I’m not,” replied Anthony.

So they sat down side-by-side before the fire, and his heart was amazingly lightened.

“Put on your pipe!” commanded Grace. He obeyed, upon which she asked brightly:

“I wonder if this scene will be reproducing itself in five years time!”

“With a pair of little cherubs aloft!” improved Anthony, pointing with sly significance towards the ceiling.

The girl blushed and laughed.

“I’m sorry about Jim, though,” he went on.

“I don’t think it’s an exceedingly serious chill. He probably didn’t want to repeat last night’s experience. Is Theodore up there again?”

“He hadn’t left when I came out, and I didn’t think to inquire. Poor old Jim! He was badly bitten to-day.”

“Yes,” was the reluctant answer.

“We might as well thrash it out, so as to get it over. What happened to make him so? He was in fairly good spirits this morning, and surely Haidee’s coming to meet him couldn’t have upset him so frightfully by itself.”

“No, not by itself.”

“What passed, then?”

Grace appeared not very eager to speak. However, at last she said:

“Did you tell him that Haidee arranged that meeting at Halse Tower for the purpose of complaining to you about his clothes?”

“Oh, so he blabbed!”

“You might know he would. He’s temperamentally incapable of holding a secret. But did you tell him so?”

“I had to tell him something, and it was the best I could supply from the resources of my imagination when he suddenly ordered me ‘Hands up!’ yesterday afternoon. It was quite a good white lie, for I happen to know she’s dissatisfied with his rig.”

“How do you happen to know?” demanded Grace quickly.

“Because she muttered something about his looking like a tramp in my hearing.”

“What awful impudence! Jim, in his oldest clothes, is worth ten of her, with all her extravagant and unsuitable finery. How

could you listen to her in silence! . . . Upon my word! I hope it is broken off."

There was a disturbed pause, while Anthony smoked on, gazing with a troubled expression into the fire.

"Well, I'll tell you," proceeded the girl. "When Jim blurted out this wonderful secret, I *had* to look incredulous and thunderstruck, for it completely took me by surprise; and then it was his turn to look bewildered, for he knew for an absolute fact that you had confided to me. So he understood that you had been lying to him—I'm stating it from his point of view. I haven't told him a word, of course . . . So now he's found you *twice* unexpectedly in his beloved's society. Is it so extraordinary that he should be upset, when he can't make head or tail of it, and no-one will help him to?"

"No, it isn't, and I'm very sorry for him. My only consolation is that I've meant well throughout . . . At least, *you* understand?"

Grace reflected.

"Yes, I understand; but I don't think I want you to interfere any more, Anthony, dear."

"I won't. That's certain."

"I believe he fancied you might be coming up, and went to bed on that account also."

"It's a stupid business all through."

They talked of other things, and gradually the old cordiality returned. Presently Grace took him to see the wondrous plant.

It stood up eight inches high out of its pot, was well covered with new green leaves, and bore two white blooms, like apple blossom, fully expanded, but it no longer appeared so alert and vigorous as before. Premature decrepitude seemed threatened. Either its marvellously rapid growth was depleting it of sap, or Virginia's treatment of it was wrong; or it might be that its ancient stock was unsuited to modern conditions of soil and atmosphere. The topmost leaves were slightly discoloured and shrivelled.

While they were still looking at it, the young girl herself came rushing in.

“They told me you were here.” She bent down quickly to examine the tree.

“It’s *dying*, Anthony!”

“It certainly is sort of blighted.”

“I’ve been worrying about it all the while I’ve been out. Your sister Marian first pointed it out to me this afternoon, and I knew she was right, though I pooh-poohed her. What can we do?”

“Nothing.”

“We might call in expert advice.”

“But we won’t. The public is not in on this. We’ll just keep it quietly to ourselves, and if it dies, it dies. Let there only be fruit first.”

When she stood up, Virginia’s face was perfectly distressed.

“I’ve done all I could, believe me!”

“You have been the most splendid mother in the world, my dear,” said Anthony, laying a gentle hand on her shoulder. “You deserve one of these days to have the care of a real baby; and praise can go no further.”

“You may think it odd, but I should simply adore one!”

And no sooner was this confession out of the girl’s mouth than she turned a vivid red, and ran panic-stricken out of the greenhouse, leaving Anthony delighted by her candour, but Grace extremely embarrassed.

7



heodore, with a bold smirk, handed his cousin another unaddressed envelope. Marian and Josephine had only just quitted the room, and the men were still at breakfast. It was a few minutes to ten on Tuesday morning. The day was cloudlessly bright, with a hot sun and a bitterly cold east wind; real Easter

weather. Anthony accepted the missive none too eagerly, and did not immediately open it.

“From Haidee again?”

“Yes, there was nothing doing, so I thought I might as well go up there last night.”

“You certainly don’t lack brass, though I admit the suggestion was mine. And how did the elders receive you?”

Old Croyland, in fact, had chuckled secretly at Jim’s apparent ousting by this new and quite harmless and insignificant applicant for his daughter’s favours. He believed it would be a capital thing if the discomfiture could be made permanent, and to that end had elected to behave to Theodore in the most amiable way—namely, by inviting him twice to whisky, by regaling him with a long string of jokes and anecdotes more remarkable for their grossness than their wit, and by making it abundantly clear that his further society would be not only tolerated but welcomed by a hundred-per-cent he-man doomed to pass his evenings amongst women and poets. Perhaps even, vulgarity called out to vulgarity, and he had really begun to take a fancy to this coarse-fibred youth who seemed so pleasantly willing to fall in with his own tastes.

As for Mrs Croyland, she had already started sadly to compare in her mind the fresh colouring, the straight back, the agile motions of the young visitor with the stooping shoulder and sallow skin of her own darling boy, always buried in his books, and to inquire of herself whether some sort of useful out-door companionship could not be contrived between the two—if Silvester could only be induced to take an interest in manly sports! Thus she also found her account in being charming to her daughter’s latest admirer. And meanwhile Theodore, guessing nothing of these inner workings, had never a suspicion that his unaided fascinations had not done the business for him. He spared no flatteries, laid himself out to be popular, laughed with the old gentleman and listened with polite modesty to the dry scholastic sentiments of his good lady, whom privately he classified as a “dud”. Haidee continued to be amused by him. She managed to extract the rest of his information concerning Miss Rossiter, but thought in the end that it did not amount to much.

Anthony, having been briefly told that the old people had been frightfully decent and friendly towards his interlocutor—a statement which he rather questioned—proceeded without pursuing the subject further to slit open the envelope, but still paused before removing its enclosure.

“By the way, I understand you’ve been talking to Haidee about Miss Rossiter!”

Theodore realised that he was fairly pinned. He grew hot, and could find nothing to reply.

“Yes or no!”

“I may have casually mentioned her name in the course of conversation.”

“What did you tell her?”

“Nothing—only that you knew a Miss Rossiter.”

“Of what possible interest could that be to her?”

“Only that she’s interested in *you*, of course.”

“What do you mean?”

With a face alarmingly pink, the youth now spoke at random.

“Why, all these letters and so forth. I admit I didn’t rumble to it at first.”

“I see. Well, my dear fellow, the sooner you unrumble from it—or whatever the opposite locution may be—the better it will be for everybody. If you mean what I think you mean, you’re an unmitigated young ass! And as for handling the names of my professional acquaintances—drop it, or I warn you you’ll be packed off to Cardiff for good and all. Is that clear?”

“Quite.”

“I don’t choose to have my lady friends made a topic of general conversation. And while we’re still on the subject—which hasn’t got to be renewed—have the goodness to grasp that my intimacies are decent and above-board—in *all* cases. Your peculiar psychology may not be able to appreciate the why and wherefore, but so it is. Please remember it!”

“What a bully!” thought Theodore. And he reached for the marmalade dish in silence, vowing vengeance for the insulting manner of the reprimand.

His cousin jerked out Haidee’s note from its cover, and passed his eye quickly down it.

“Dear Anthony,

After this afternoon I am more undecided than ever, and cannot think what to do. I do wish to fulfil my promises and act in the best way for both of us, but I am oppressed by horrid doubts. I have no-one to talk it over with but you. Won't you meet me again? I know I have brought disaster on you twice, so I propose it as a sublime test of generosity and compassion—I don't care to add friendship. Could you be at Westerham station at eleven tomorrow morning (Tuesday)? Hardly anyone would be there, and certainly no-one we know. I wish you could. But otherwise, please send me word by your cousin in good time to stop my starting—say before ten.

Yours always,

Haidee.

P.S. This meeting is really most necessary, Anthony.”

Immensely disgusted by such a barefaced proposition after what had passed between them, he resolutely and methodically tore the sheet into four pieces, then rose to put them on the fire and watch them burn away. He determined to take no notice of the letter. It was pure insolence on her part to associate herself with him like that. Practically, it was persecution. And he also began to recognise that Jim would be well quit of a girl so hysterical and unbalanced. If she refused him this time, he had finished—in fact he had promised Grace to interfere no more.

He felt very little like work that morning, so thought that he would take a spin in the car; and perhaps Grace would accompany him. Then he remembered that he had still her ring to buy. They could run up together to Regent Street, and choose one there. It was an ideal day for it. There was also a book on Fairy Mythology that he wished to fetch down from his chambers, for his next act.

“You can have the day off”, he said suddenly to Theodore.

“Very good!” was the sullen reply. And wasting no time on barren conjectures, the younger man reflected to what best use he could put this unexpected gift of liberty. Knowing nothing of Anthony's intentions, he too decided upon a few hours in town. He was acquainted with some girls there, one of the other of whom could doubtless be extricated from her job for

the afternoon, and they could go the whole round—lunch, the pictures, dinner and a late performance—he travelling back by the last train down, if fortunate enough to catch it. He possessed the necessary cash, saved from his disappointed spree. He closed his breakfast quickly, to consult the timetable.

Anthony walked up to High Cot. He found Grace in the morning-room, crouching in a chair before the fire over a tan silk stocking, which she was mending. Still bending, she glanced at him across her needle with a friendly little smile of welcome. Jim was standing at the window, smoking a pipe, with his hands behind him. He nodded to Anthony, said "Good-morning!" and strolled out of the room. The others exchanged looks.

"I'm sorry it's like that," offered the playwright.

"He refuses to go and see Haidee."

"In his own good time he will, and since there's no sufficient ground for a lasting breach, I'm not worrying. I came to discover what *you* are doing this beautiful day?"

"Nothing, as usual," replied the girl funnily.

"What about your engagement ring?"

"Oh! You mean you want to get it?"

"With your assistance."

"Where?"

"Not at the local watchmaker's, you may be sure! In London, naturally. I'll drive you up."

Grace seemed uncertain—or rather, she seemed not to know how to avoid hurting him by a refusal. She bent more closely over her work.

"We can be as quick as you like about it," urged Anthony. "I've nothing else on."

"I'd love to, but I don't think I can leave Jim, in his present state of mind. I'm the only one he seems to care to talk to."

"Ah, bah! The poor fellow is not *in extremis*."

"The ring can be till another time, Anthony dear, but I think I'd rather be with Jim."

"As you please, of course! Then shall I get it alone?"

Grace confessed that she dreaded the ordeal of facing a cynical jeweller's assistant on such a very intimate business,

and Anthony conceived that to be a more rational base of refusal than the other. So, her preference of stone and design having been drawn from her by strength of male persistence, and he duly exhorted not to waste too much precious money upon what was after all a pure symbol and not primarily intended for public display; one of her old rings, also, having been transferred to his custody as an accurate measure; he at last agreed that on the whole he was relieved to have to perform the sacred rite unaided, since a consultation would at once have dragged the affair down to the lower level of prudence, taste and fancy, all of which were properly extraneous to it.

“And Jim would think it horribly unkind of me if I were to go away from him to-day,” added Grace, sympathising with her *fiancé’s* disappointment. Indeed, she would far rather have gone with him than stayed at home. Her excuses were genuine.

Anthony reassured her. He inquired after his eerie shrub, which last night had shown signs of withering. Fruit had set, but otherwise there was no remarkable change, she told him, so he decided on this occasion not to go through to see it. He would look in on his return, later in the day.

Had he been truthful with himself, he would never had recognised that he was dreading the possibility of running up against Jim a second time—and yet he had done absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, and his conscience was clear.

He bought the ring—a beauty, as he believed—he procured the book he needed from his chambers, his car was in the garage, and at some time between one and two o’clock he found himself walking up Victoria Street, near the Westminster end, *en route* to his particular club, where he meant to lunch, when he ran almost into the very arms of Haidee and Theodore, promenading and laughing together as though oblivious of their surroundings. All three pulled up short in amazed confusion.

“But this is devilish!” exclaimed Anthony, feeling for a moment that he was in a dream, and totally incapable of resolving what face to put upon such an extraordinary *recontre*. He had pictured Haidee as having by this time trudged her

way indignantly back from Westerham. His cousin had passed from his recollection altogether.

The girl was the first to recover her wits.

“What may *you* be doing here, Anthony?” she demanded smilingly. The wind was biting, and she clasped her fur more tightly to the throat.

“I? Oh, I came up by car—and how did you two come?”

“By train to Charing Cross. We met accidentally at Westerham, and came up together. Have you lunched?”

“No, I’m just going to the club.”

“I’m awfully hungry!” She held out a couple of gloved fingers to her escort. “Good-bye! So good of you to bring me up! I do hope you have a nice day.”

Theodore then saw through it all. This was the place of meeting appointed in that letter he had brought back the night before, and his own day’s holiday was a by-product. He had had the pleasure of paying Haidee’s first-class fare up for nothing, while his cunning proposals for the hours to follow she had accepted with her tongue in her cheek. He was properly mugged. She hadn’t even the decency to pretend it wasn’t an assignation, but here she was, all over his blessed cousin, inviting herself to lunch, and giving *him* two fingers to shake, as cool as a dolly chorus girl off with her pet stockbroker! Righto! he’d vanish—but he’d get even yet. Signor Antonio needn’t flash his dog-teeth yet. There were people down at Malfait Street who would be quite interested in this charming little *tête-à-tête* lunch. He didn’t set up to be a prude, and any man could have a bit of fun with girls for him, but there were limits, and when it came to running respectable women in dead earnest, by George! it was time for a chap to move In short, Theodore was extremely angry. He considered that he had been duped and laughed at, and this touched him upon his tenderest spot, namely, his *amour-propre*. His exact mode of retaliation had not yet taken shape in his mind, but he intended to do *something* to show his spirit, and if Anthony could have seen inside his head at that minute, he would certainly have viewed the retreating youth with very much more anxiety than he did.

Being left alone with Haidee, he fingered his chin nervous-

ly, wondering what in the world she was doing in town, but still more how he was to get rid of her without fuss. All the universe used Victoria Street, and they might have been observed together already. He could stop young Theodore's mouth, but not a stranger's. Since she had dismissed his cousin so cavalierly, presumably she meant to stick to him, and he had had a taste of her persistence.

"Where are you off to, then?" he asked rather helplessly.

"Why, aren't you going to lunch me? I sent him away on purpose."

"It's exceedingly considerate of you!" said Anthony. And again he reflected. They could slink into some hole-and-corner eating place, and no-one need be any the wiser. He supposed that she would insist on her talk now that she had captured him.

"I expect women are not allowed at your sacred club?"

"*You're* not, anyway!" was his thought.

"Well, then, Haidee, we'll get some lunch. I guess somewhere very quiet and rather private will suit our book best."

"Funk!"

"Oh, I know you don't care a Dutch damn."

"You ought to be a girl—you're frightened of public opinion."

"Well, you needn't egg me on; I've agreed to come."

He then stopped a taxi, and helped her in. He gave the driver the name of an obscure restaurant in Wardour Street.

"I know that place," said Haidee, as they glided off. "There's no band, and so we can talk the better."

"I'm glad you approve."

"Meanwhile, you haven't told me what you are doing up in London at all. You thought fit to ignore my note, and you failed to turn up at Westerham. Why?"

"Because I happened to have more pressing private business of my own, astonishing as it may appear."

"In town?"

"Since you find me here."

"But still, you might have answered my letter."

"I didn't receive it till close on ten this morning."

"If you had had it last night, would you have answered it?"

"I don't know—I can't say. It's not a correspondence I care about."

“You were furious with me for presuming to address such a proposition to you—own up!”

“I wasn’t furious.”

“No, it is an inappropriate word. Fury is not in your nature. Do you know that I’ve discovered the two poles of all the bad temper in the world? The north pole is fieriness, the south pole is just—sulks. You belong to the south, or negative pole; at least I think you do. Don’t you?”

“If it amuses you to imagine me in a bad temper.” She was deliberately irritating him. Her lips bore a childlike, elfish droop as she continued to torment him with her questions, permitting him no peace.

“And do you know why that is, Anthony? It’s because you’re weak. You’re a weak man.”

Virginia had told him the same thing. A woman’s idea of manly strength appeared to be push, brag and violence—and might they find great joy in it! It must have been so since the days of the flint hatchet, and Grace herself could not be exempt from this universal bad taste of her sex. The true masculine strength, unattainable by women, of reason, perseverance, calmness and justice, went for nothing in female eyes. It was dispassionate, and did not concern the possession of their bodies. That was the sense in which Anthony was weak But perhaps the two girls had discovered vacillations in his character of which he guessed nothing, and perhaps it was these vacillations that made him interesting to members of a sex which regards a too-clever brain as no more than a monstrous outgrowth of the soul.

Haidee pursued mockingly:

“What do little boys do when they can’t write very straight?”

“The other thing, probably.”

“I mean conscientious little boys. They beg, borrow or steal a sheet of nice paper ruled with nice pale blue lines, and then they try again, and succeed. And I think you’ve clung to those convenient pale blue lines all your life, Anthony. But it isn’t a token of moral strength, you know.”

“What is a token of moral strength?”

“When you go your own way regardless—as I’m doing at the present moment. If your writing is crooked, it’s crooked;

but by-and-by it won't be crooked, and you'll be scornful and self-reliant into the bargain. Life isn't good enough if you're to live according to the preconceived notions of your friends and acquaintances. Who made them Judges in Israel!"

"Wouldn't it be more to the point, instead of paraphrasing Emerson's Essays, if you were to fill in for my information the hiatus between your wait at Westerham for my arrival and your eventual apparition just now in Victoria Street in the company of my young fool of a cousin Theodore?"

"Certainly you have a remarkably neat knack of squashing one!" responded Haidee, grimacing.

"Was it his suggestion you should come up?"

"Yes if it matters."

"Then you're doing nothing here?"

"Except lunching with you."

"And you told him to clear! I admire it. Who paid your fare?"

"I've no conception. Somebody must have, and I didn't."

"Well, it serves him right, the young ass!" said Anthony. And at the same moment the taxi slowed and stopped before the somewhat shabby-looking restaurant in which they were to eat.

Few people were inside it. Anthony selected a retired corner, where they were out of sight of all but the melancholy moustachioed waiter who attended them. His companion removed her fur, to place it over the back of her chair, and her pretty jade frock was revealed in all its beauty, but he was too annoyed to do more than glance at it involuntarily.

The food set before them was indifferent, and neither was aware of it. Haidee scarcely looked at her plate, but seemed all the more to relish the excellent Italian wine which was a specialty of the house. The waiter filled her glass twice. As long as he limped to and fro and kept their table under observation, the meal dragged and there was but little conversation between them, and that of a disjointed kind, for Anthony saw no reason why he should open her business, while the girl felt that emotional confidences scarcely consorted with the mastication of food. She asked him if he had seen Jim that morning, whether he knew why Jim had not been up at their house on the previous evening, and if Grace had recovered from her fatigue? By fa-

tigue she meant ill-mannered jealousy, and to that question Anthony returned no reply. He said that Jim had taken a sort of chill the night before, but was up and about again and seemed to be all right now. "A sentimental chill, I expect!" commented Haidee lightly.

For the first minutes of the lunch, to judge from her shining eyes and the airy quickness of her motions, as also from her unexplained smiles, coming and going without speech, she was manifestly enjoying the novelty and thrill of the unpremeditated adventure, but before long this secret gaiety subsided by degrees into a quiet seriousness which suited her features and the occasion very much better and went far towards transforming Anthony's vexation into an answering thoughtfulness. She declared that she wanted nothing more to eat, and resting awhile her elbow on the table, and her chin on the back of the fingers of one hand, she continued contemplating her *vis-à-vis* in silence. Anthony avoided her gaze, lit a cigarette, and sat back, staring at a print on the opposite wall. So they persisted until the waiter had set black coffee before them. Haidee declined to smoke, but altered her pose, to start taking little sips from her cup, with eyes downbent on the table-cloth.

Her mental sensations at that moment were identical with those of a creative artist who stands back to meditate on his finished work. It is his, and it is not his. By an infinite series of minute dissatisfactions, deletions, and re-inspirations, he has achieved a product undreamt of in his original charcoal sketch, and through his justifiable pride filters a sort of bewilderment as to where in the world all this has come from. It has come, not on account of his intentions, but in spite of them. And so Haidee marvelled how from her impulsive demand for an interview, in the darkness of a garden three nights ago, she now by a train of small unforeseen consequences found herself in a London restaurant, taking lunch with a man who interested her more than all the rest of her acquaintance. She would have been perfectly willing to believe that her cleverness had contrived it, but knew that it was nothing of the kind; her instinctive will, acting independently of her conscious brain, and seizing upon offered chance and accident, had contrived it. She was mildly, rather deliciously, shocked, for it was as if

her fate were not in her own hand, and who knew what further strange happenings might be in store for her?

She was hardly thinking of Anthony as an engaged man, and had probably forgotten Grace altogether. He appeared to her as a mysterious individual of the other sex whose destiny and hers were very curiously interwoven. Perhaps they were a long way from having disentangled themselves yet. Deliberate seduction was not in her heart, and a shallow coquetry, to no end, would have seemed too utterly petty to her in the mood in which she discovered herself. She did not know in the least what she wanted of him. Nothing, it might be. Fatalism possessed and reassured her, so that she was content to wait for what the loom of time and fortune might weave for her. She even resolved not to force one step towards him. But all these ideas and volitions were very inchoate in her mind, and her affairs were not forwarded in the smallest degree by them.

Anthony meanwhile was probing his understanding for an analysis of the peculiar fascination of this girl who seemed so positively to deride convention and yet managed to remain so simple and lovable. She could not be called inexperienced, she apparently had no desire to impress people for the sake of the sensation, yet everything she did was more or less opposed to good manners and good sense; and he could not help feeling that it was owing to a certain superiority of her nature. Women who were unique in conduct, while retaining all the graces of their sex and exhibiting more than their due share of vivacity and intelligence, were surely deserving of a politer tag than the generic and meaningless designation "silly" On the other hand, she was not popular with her own gender, it would appear. Virginia openly loathed her, Grace was coldly embittered against her, and Mrs Lytham and his sisters regarded her with suspicion, at the least. Thus she was a man's woman, which, if it meant anything, meant that she was a flirt; and she had flirted with his young cousin, and was dallying with himself. He was not deceived by her, but still he felt that there was something in her which was worth investigation, speaking merely as a maker of plays. He would like to have the secret of her character. As for the girls, Virginia was probably prejudiced

by some imagined slight administered to her by Haidee in the past, remembered only by herself. It began to look as if Grace were of a jealous nature. She had certain excellent qualities which Haidee could never aspire to, but these very good qualities negated the possibility in her of Haidee's breadth of vision and unfailing generosity of soul Nevertheless, Haidee's course continued incalculable for him. He had the baffled sense that she was always a move ahead. Of only one thing was he sure—that her genius lay in sweetness and personal charm; which did not signify that she had begun to attract him, but merely that he recognised that these were her weapons of attraction. She was almost better-looking than Grace, and she went *with* her beauty, whereas Grace too frequently seemed to check hers. In a manner, it was rusticity in a pretty girl to pride herself upon her moral virtues. Haidee, of the same age as Grace, was infinitely more mature

The impending talk, which both anticipated would be of some extension and of a contentious, if not emotional, character, came as a matter of fact to an abrupt ending nearly as soon as it commenced. Haidee, stealing her tenth glance at the man facing her across the table, decided with a quite frivolous swiftness, as the result of one of those fantastic thoughts which so frequently overtake and overwhelm the souls of impulsive, romantic, rather spoilt young women, that she would after all move neither hand nor foot to assist that mystic providence which had so far befriended her to its further aims. By so behaving, she would really see what was being done for her; and at the same time, since she would be completely absolved of responsibility for what might next happen, her conscience would be clear, and no-one could blame her if she and Anthony continued to be thrown into each other's arms. The idea that this might still occur, despite her resolved inaction—almost because of it, indeed—filled her with a new eagerness which, illuminating her eyes, Anthony believed to be the threatened plunge into confession at last. But she was quick to relieve and astonish him.

"Perhaps it's just as well you didn't go out of your way this morning," she said, in a quiet, casual tone, looking down into her empty cup. "I've changed my mind again . . . or,

possibly it would be more accurate to say, I've now permanently made up my mind. I shall marry Jim."

After a pause, Anthony replied:

"I hope it *is* permanent this time!"

"Yes, it's permanent this time, Anthony—that is, as far as I'm concerned. He may have started to repent the bargain."

"I think you're pretty safe there."

"I'm sorry to have been such an appalling nuisance to you"

"That doesn't count," responded the playwright, without any great display of enthusiasm.

At the very moment when both were preparing to rise, since there was nothing further to wait for, their eyes chanced to meet across the table—his black, full and inscrutable, like deep pools; hers brown-black, narrow, womanish, a little fevered, furtive with a sort of frightened curiosity. The encounter, harmless as it was, affected each like a physical shock, and each instinctively felt that it belonged to the order of forbidden things. Anthony coloured, and really got up.

He helped her on with her fur, but cared so little to address her again that the counsel he had prepared in his mind was automatically cancelled, that this luncheon of theirs in a Soho restaurant should, for obvious reasons, be consigned to the limbo of buried transactions. He thought that the suggestion would sound indelicate as coming from a man to a girl, and had no doubt that her native good sense was sufficient to steer her past the danger; but he did not, or would not, recognise that his tongue-tied silence was chiefly due to his instinct that such a request would be equivalent to the acknowledgement of an association between them. As for making her the offer to accompany him back in the car, to spare her the fatiguing train journey, that, of course, was a million miles from his head.

They parted very conventionally at the door of the restaurant, to go different ways.

Washed, fresh and gay, his face reddened from his drive home in the keen air, Anthony entered the drawing-room at Croom at five o'clock, to find it full of visitors and tea in progress. Jim, Grace and Mrs Lytham were there, and unexpectedly Mrs Croyland, who rarely called. She was a gentle, shadowy,

grey-faced woman of fifty, with a pleasant and educated voice and a will perfectly unbendable, because rooted in the toughest moral prejudices; but few came up against it, since she preferred to be inconspicuous. Her husband, indeed, rode over this will and these prejudices roughshod. He had the stronger voice and the livelier temperament. But if the martyr's role was hers in many ways, she was amply compensated for all by the blessed crown of humility, the armour of the weak, against which the insults of the world, the injuries of fortune, and the malice of the Devil are equally powerless. She was esteemed by her set, but not exactly loved. She had few points in common with Haidee, who more nearly resembled her father in character; so far as a refined young girl can resemble an oldish man coarsened by drink, rough work, and low company. If marriage were not always a strange business, it would have been a singular problem how so ill-consorted a pair as Mr and Mrs Croyland had come together in the first place. However, although presumably love had long since vanished between them, they remained complementary, while, the old gentleman being the recognised Jove of the household, there were the fewer disputes. He brought in the money, and she dispensed it wisely for him.

Anthony barely had time to identify the guests before he was assailed with the same question launched from three separate mouths. Had he seen Haidee?

He was disagreeably startled, though such a result of the girl's caprice might have been predicted by him. Pretty young daughters living at home do not quietly disappear for many hours without some disquietitude being caused.

"I've been away all day. I've only just come back from town," he equivocated, reserving the lie direct until specifically demanded. He felt it was extremely shabby to leave the mother in suspense, but really, with Grace's eyes fixed on him in mute suspicion, it was utterly impossible to acknowledge that lunch in Wardour Street, or even his accidental encounter with her at Westminster.

"She left the house after breakfast, without saying where she was going, and hasn't been back since," Mrs Croyland informed him with an anxious smile. "We're at our wits' end to imagine where she can be."

Marian spoke. "I have been suggesting to Mrs Croyland—she may have gone off for the day somewhere with Theodore. He left at about the same time."

"But where to, for so long?" demanded the other. "For a walk, yes—but all day!"

Josephine suggested in her turn that they were both mad creatures and perhaps he had taken her to London.

"Spare Jim's feelings!" said Grace dryly. That individual stared moodily at his shoes, and preserved his unbroken silence.

"And why spare Jim's feelings, when Jim has brought it on himself?" smiled Anthony. "In a fit of spleen he refused to visit his dear lady last night, so now it is perfectly understandable and proper that she should punish him by banishing herself to-day."

Jim's refusal appeared to be news to Mrs Croyland.

"Why *didn't* you come up last night, Jim?"

"I wasn't feeling quite the thing. I caught a chill."

Whereupon Haidee's mother, glancing carefully at his gloomy countenance, seemed to discard a considerable part of her anxiety.

"Oh well, in that case, she *may* have gone up to town." And dismissing the affair as a lovers' quarrel, she stood up to go.

"You're never off!" protested Marian; also rising, however, lest the polite pressure to stay should be taken too literally. For she greatly admired Mrs Croyland's principles, but had no high opinion of her social resources. The good dame had never been known to offer a new point of view, which, of course, was the salt of all intelligent and humanly possible conversation.

She insisted on departing, as by this time her daughter might have returned. The others stopped on. To rectify the rather disagreeable taciturnity of the younger members of her family, Mrs Lytham initiated, according to her suave custom, a literary discussion with Anthony, hoping that Jim might be tempted to join in and forget his griefs awhile. She was an exceptionally well-read woman, and it was easy for her to fix upon a topic. She remarked that she had been dipping into the

memoirs of a certain more or less notorious lady of upper society, still living, and had found the book far cleverer than she had been led to expect. The critics had fastened exclusively upon its scandalous character. Had Anthony read it?

He had, he said; and had taken the unpardonable liberty of being delighted.

“But we know that the critics have long since constituted themselves the watch-dogs of the silly sheep which, for some occult reason, they are pleased to think the rank-and-file of unlearned mankind. A man has common sense enough to make a living and provide necessities and luxuries for his wife and children; in the course of his experience he runs across all sorts of people, good and evil, sensible and foolish. He has probably, at some time or other, indulged in escapades of his own, and in any case is conversant with the highly-spiced side of life from having read his newspapers, or from having served on juries. Yet all this, say the omnipotent critics, is carefully to be concealed from him in bound volumes. He or she who dares to exhibit in naked black and white an immeasurable personality—one that refuses to fit itself to common standards—that one is forthwith bespattered with the uttermost venom of shocked morality. And why?—I hardly know if it is a professional secret. Because it has been agreed that all books *sans exception*, shall be on the side of the angels, and that the sole function and purpose of literature is to assist the progress of goodness. For my part I disagree. I say that the function and purpose of literature is to assist the enlargement of the soul. But that is what critics and editors have once for all decided to make their role, and the unfortunate author who takes upon himself to violate the unwritten edict will run up against the fact as soon as his first notices appear Forgive the outburst, *mesdames*, but the bottle had to be emptied! It is a pet grievance.”

“I call upon Jim to reply,” said Mrs Lytham, looking towards her stepson.

“Oh, I don’t feel like a debating society,” was the grunted response.

“Then let us hear *you*, Grace.”

“How hard you’re working, mother! I’d rather

not say anything, if you don't mind, because Anthony is an expert in words, and I'm only an amateur. I won't venture to compete."

Her *fiancé* lifted his eyes to her.

"You hold, with the critics, that Art should remain practical?"

"I hold that people bent on scandal and notoriety are an abomination, whether in books or in real life."

"Now, I wonder if that's one at Haidee!" thought Anthony. And he went on to ask himself the meaning of the obvious change in Grace's manner towards him since the morning. Was she actually guessing that he had met Haidee somewhere and, if he only cared to speak, could say where she was at present and when she might be expected home? He began to rebel against this continuous tension. In order to preserve his self-respect, it seemed almost necessary that he should build up a wall of antagonism on his side too.

He inquired a little tartly if she had read the book before passing judgment on it.

"I have read the reviews."

"That is, you have heard the prosecuting counsel—and all I have to reply to that is, I hope you won't ever condemn *me* to death without a fair trial."

Their exchanges had become so hard, even more so in voice than in the spoken word, that the older ladies moved in their chairs and shot sympathetic little half-glances of uneasy understanding at each other; nevertheless, being probably desirous of getting more to the bottom of things, they were careful not to interrupt the argument. Jim continued to sit sullenly apart, taking no notice of anybody or anything, but occasionally biting viciously at his thumbnail. Grace, who was not unaware of the general silence, forced herself to speak more softly, but the effort was not an easy one.

"One would think you were talking from a guilty conscience!" However even her tone might be, the company did not fail to notice that the words were escorted by a cattish smile.

"Not so," returned Anthony. "My conscience is beautifully at rest in every particular; ever has been; and, I trust, ever will be."

The girl curved her lip more contemptuously, and stood up.

“Come on, mother!—we must go.”

Being determined to face the music by walking up with her, the playwright preceded the rest into the hall for his hat and overcoat. Marian detained Mrs Lytham just inside the drawing-room.

“Have you got any idea what the trouble is?”

“Haidee, I fancy. She has upset Jim somehow, and the others must be taking sides.”

“But is Anthony backing her?”

“I don’t know, but he’s quixotically chivalrous, and I shouldn’t wonder. It will all work out.”

“You don’t suppose he’s been with her to-day and Grace suspects it?”

“Quite possibly,” said Mrs Lytham, with a twinkle. “Why shouldn’t he? She’s handsome and amusing enough. I’m not worrying. *Autres temps, autres mœurs*, you know, my dear Marian! These little deviations from the magnetic pole seem to be a recognised feature of modern courtships.”

Marian nodded her head thrice, but remained unconvinced. If she discovered that her brother really had met Haidee that day, she would have to speak to him seriously, however unpleasant it might be for both. She had no great faith in his constancy of character, but it would be treating that dear child Grace shamefully to give her cause for anxiety merely to indulge his weakness for pretty faces.

Mrs Lytham, likewise, was perhaps not so entirely unmoved by the possibility of a private intimacy between those two as she pretended. Now that she had captured Anthony for Grace, she was comparatively willing that Haidee should cast off Jim again; but it did not suit her in the least to have that young beauty dangling after her son-in-law to be. She resolved with all the feminine cunning of her nature to watch them closely, with the firm intention of putting an emphatic spoke in their wheel should an innocent mutual predilection threaten to develop into a runaway intrigue.

Grace had passed beyond the stage of suspicion. She intuitively *knew* that he had spent at all event a part of the day with Haidee. She had noticed that he was very careful not to deny it

outright when questioned. He might have an excuse, but she did not see what it could be, and he had now been in the society of that shameless coquette three times in three days. How could she put up with it!

While Jim walked on ahead with their stepmother, she demanded abruptly of her own escort:

“Where have you been all day?”

“I’ve been up to town to get your ring,” replied Anthony, putting into his voice all the calmness he could muster. He did not offer to produce the symbolic gewgaw there and then, feeling that the occasion was inauspicious.

“And what else?”

“I went to my chambers to fetch a book, and then went on to lunch.”

“Did you lunch alone?”

“I did May I ask what is this new disagreeable?”

“I think you’ve been with Haidee again, Anthony!”

“What an idea! Certainly not.” There was no help for the lie, for he had Haidee to shelter as well as himself. It would be very low-down and beastly to give away a lady on a minor point of personal honour. But he realised now that he ought to have come to an agreement with her on the story she was to tell; and he would have to buttonhole young Theodore as soon as he came home, before his sisters could get at him.

Grace halted, and confronted him.

“Will you swear that you haven’t been with her?”

“I’m sure I shan’t do anything so theatrical. If you doubt my word, your remedy is to ask Haidee.”

“Well, it’s funny you should both choose to-day for disappearing from home!”

“Didn’t I beg you to come with me?”

“You did, certainly”

“Should I have done so, if there had been this ludicrous tryst awaiting me? Do for heaven’s sake use your common sense a little, Grace!”

The girl was almost persuaded that she had wronged him. She gave his hand a convulsive press, and they resumed their strolling.

“I want you all to myself, Anthony,” she explained.

“Hence your cutting remarks down at the house just now!”

Grace laughed. “I honestly believed you were sticking up for scandalous women.”

“Haidee isn’t one.”

“On that point, you know, a feminine judgment may be the truest.”

“What are we to do for Jim?”

“I’ve definitely made up my mind neither to forward nor to hinder his affair; and you’re to do the same. I won’t have you even thinking of Haidee!”

“I don’t want to, but you’re atrociously jealous.”

“You oughtn’t to object to that. It’s a proof that I do love you.”

The others had passed into the house, leaving the front door open. Anthony said that he would go in to see his plant, and Grace drew him forward by the hand up the pathway of crazy-stones and so into the gloom of the hall. There their quarrel was finally ended.

Virginia accompanied them to the greenhouse. ‘

Barely a foot high, with brown, dry, curling leaves, harsh to the touch, and having a couple of diminutive leathery, green balls suspended as close neighbours from an upper twig, the little shrub was obviously withering to its death. It looked frightfully archaic in the gathering dusk. It resembled one of those artificially-wrought dwarf trees achieved by Japanese fanciers—quaint, clever and charming, but also pitiful and horrible. That it should be in the very act of losing its hold upon life seemed somehow to complete its degradation. This grimness of reality rendered its feeble proportions and its grotesque apeing of ancestral functions a jest impossible to laugh at. Anthony had not been stirred by anything so much that day.

“If the fruit has time to ripen, shall you venture to taste it?” inquired Virginia.

“I give free permission to anyone who has the pluck, but I think we ought to have medical remedies at hand. For all we know, they may be deadly poisonous.”

“It’s far too risky,” said Grace.

Anthony continued gazing down on the miniature tree from aloft, thoughtful and impressed. The mental picture of the great

robust and fruitful parent of the little degenerate carried him back an immense distance into antiquity, and for a moment he was enabled to view Time in its true perspective. These petty love-disputes, his futile work, his low ambitions, quietly seemed to him of no more account than the miserable activities of a tiny ant crawling up one side of a blade of grass merely to crawl down the other. In ten or twenty years from then all the cards would have been reshuffled and redealt, while some of the players would have disappeared. In fifty or a hundred years all the players would be gone. How many generations had arrived and departed since the birth of the seed from which this weird growth had sprung! Yet every individual of all those generations had laughed, wept, hated, loved, been wretched, and died; while that seed had lain forgotten in its corner. Earth-life was nothing. Only so far as man partook of Eternity could he be asserted to have reality and permanence.

They left the greenhouse in subdued silence, and at the house door Virginia parted from Anthony and her half-sister, to go another way. Grace proceeded to accompany her *fiancé* through the house to the front door, as he was returning home immediately. They heard suppressed laughter coming from one of the rooms, the door of which was half open. Anthony thought that he recognised Haidee's silver trill, and after a significant look and a wink at his companion, cautiously put his head round.

Haidee was sitting on Jim's lap, with her arms clasped loosely round his neck and the side of her face pressed against his. They appeared to be enjoying some joke together. The girl had on the same hat and fur she had worn at the restaurant.

Anthony dragged Grace forward to see the vision, and at the same moment the victims looked up and round. Jim struggled to disengage himself, but Haidee laughed and kept him imprisoned in her warm, soft embrace.

"Carry on!" called out Anthony cheerily, waving his hand at the pair as he prepared discreetly to vanish again.

"My dear old pal! . . .," began Jim, once more attempting to rise, but Haidee still prevented him.

"Not a word! Not a word!"

He silently closed the door upon them; then turned to find that Grace's arms were round his own neck.

“Forgive me, dearest! The dearest man in the world! I’ve been so wicked”

Anthony sat up after his sisters had retired for the night for Theodore, who arrived by the last train down. He let the youth in, and the latter entered the room with a glance of high appetite towards the table, to ascertain if supper had been left for him. It had not, and he announced his intention of foraging.

“Before you go away,” said his cousin. “I’m just off to bed myself I haven’t seen anything of Haidee to-day, and neither have you. Is that understood?”

Theodore grunted inarticulately.

“The meeting having been entirely accidental as far as I’m concerned, I don’t want it spoken of. No-one will speak but you, and if you speak—back you go home! Good-night. Don’t forget to put out the lights.”

Deep in sullen thought, Theodore answered not a word, but walked out of the room, and to the larder.

8



At about eleven o’clock next morning, as Anthony sat with his cousin working in the room overlooking the valley which had been appropriated to him as a temporary study, the papers before him lighted by the golden glory of April sunshine streaming through the window glass, while his back was comfortably warmed by the blazing fire behind, Jim came bolting in, in a great enthusiasm of hurry.

“My dear old fellow—no, I can’t stay your presence is urgently required up above, and I am to fetch you. Haidee and her people have at last condescended to come over to view the prize exhibit they are there now, at this minute, and it is thought fit and proper that the master showman should attend to set his *cachet* upon the bright occasion. Your fruit is ripe. We are to open a bottle of fizz in honour of it.”

she and Silvester must be off altogether. She put a significant hand on the arm of her slightly rebellious son, and the two followed in the wake of their hostess.

The rest of the party lingered on, either expecting Anthony after all, or because nothing particularly exciting tempted them back. Jim stopping to talk to Grace, Theodore seized his chance to join the deserted Haidee at the other end.

"That was a scurvy trick of yours yesterday!" he whispered ruefully.

"How do you mean? It was pure accident."

"Oh, yes! You didn't take long to plump for whose company *you'd* rather be in, what!"

"You're stupid."

"Righto! We'll have it out another time. But mind you, I haven't forgiven it, and I shan't forgive it in a hurry."

"Going to be a tell-tale-tit?" mocked the girl.

"You think you can put the blinkers on a chap, but I'm wise!"

"Oh, you're an ass—you want blinkers or something."

The recriminations ceased as Jim came up.

"That's it over there!" he remarked negligently to Theodore, pointing to the plant across his shoulder with an easy thumb. The younger man accepted the situation, and drifted with a certain defiance of manner towards Virginia, who was again worshipping at her shrine. She barely turned her head.

"By jove! It has shot up. Fruiting, too!"

"Yes, hasn't it!—and isn't it!"

Theodore, having had but few opportunities of becoming acquainted with the character of this rather rum-looking kid, as he mentally styled her, decided to let sleeping hedgehogs lie and to concentrate on the shaky little herb they were all making such a fuss about. In the first place he had no real faith in Tony's yarn about its coming from the Garden of Eden, and in the second place it wasn't much of an example if it did, and it looked like a goner to him. The fact that his mouth remained wide open during his inspection of it, signified nothing more than that he possessed a polite sense of what was fitting and tacitly demanded of him.

The two small hanging balls, of the size of greengages,

“Never drink it so early in the day,” said Anthony, rising. “I bet that’s *your* idea, Jim. Well, I’ll tell my sisters, and come along shortly.”

“What’s your notion of ‘shortly’? Come back with me.”

But the other had swiftly settled in his mind that he had no wish to meet Haidee again so soon, and that the afternoon would be time enough for a visit of inspection. He pleaded the prior demands of his work. He would run along as soon as he had arrived at a natural pause. With a spice of *diablerie*, he bade Theodore put on his hat and take half an hour off to make the acquaintance of the little wonder before it should be too late. Jim’s face changed at that. Not that he any longer associated the youth with Haidee, for the sky was clear in her quarter, thank God!, but merely that he loathed him for a young scrub. He bestowed upon his “dear old pal” a murderous glare, attempted for the third time to shake his resolution, and only then resigned himself to the failure of his expedition.

The two men set off together, while Anthony returned with a smile to his work. He had wanted to get Theodore out of the way, because he wasn’t ready for him yet, so this excuse was a godsend.

There was a whole assemblage in the greenhouse at High Cot. As Jim pushed forward the latest guest through the door, Mrs Croyland was in the act of regarding the celebrated up-start plant through her lorgnette, Silvester was laying down in his crude pedantic fashion to Grace, who seemed inattentive and absent, Mrs Lytham was conversing amicably with Haidee, the latter dressed in a smart tailored suit, at the far end of the glass structure, and Virginia, from a distance, was staring in no very friendly manner at the girl she so detested. No-one was even noticing the small tree except Mrs Croyland. The others, apparently, were just hanging about waiting for Jim to bring Anthony along.

“He’ll come by-and-by, he says, the queer old cuss!” they were informed.

“Then I think we’re too full here, and some of us might get back into the house.” Mrs Lytham spoke, while starting for the door by way of pointing her invitation. Her chief guest, the soul of decorum, accepted the words as a hint, and thought that

had acquired the colour of ripeness overnight. Their skin was a dry, wrinkled, tough-looking purple, resembling elephant-hide stained violet. This forbidding envelope, conjointly with the smallness of the circumference of the fruit, did not exactly make the youth's palate water. The leaves of the treelet were yellowish and brittle, and where Virginia had experimentally snapped a twig, the interior was sapless dust.

"Putrid little fellows, those berries, don't you think?" he hazarded.

"They're not berries; they're apples."

"Who says so except you!" The retort was rude, but Theodore was offended by her assumption of laconic superiority. The young girl did not condescend to remark his bristling, and continued to rest a pair of reflective eyes on the plant.

"You're going by the colour, but colour proves nothing. Why shouldn't there be a violet apple as well as a blue rose, or a black tulip? Look at the shape of the fruit, and the shape of the leaves."

Either Haidee heard a part of their conversation or she guessed its nature, for she called out laughingly from the other end of the greenhouse:

"We all hope it's an apple tree, and Elizabeth, as a daughter of Eve, is especially interested in what it bears on its branches. She's going to have one at lunch. Will you be Adam, Mr Paysant?"

"Nothing doing, thanks!" And Virginia was at liberty to take the words as she pleased.

Haidee advanced a few steps, pulling Jim behind her.

"They don't look extraordinarily inviting, do they! Either the serpent must have been a very, very gay deceiver, or else our ancestral grandmamma was perchance in the possession of a sixth sense, and saw that the pulp was good to eat. I wish I were similarly favoured, and dared to enter with my teeth. I adore thrills." She cast a pretended look of longing on the little globes.

"Eve came to grief, and so might you," returned Virginia.

"Will anyone bet me I won't do it?"

"Surely you had better ask permission of the proprietor first!"

“He isn’t here, and won’t come here as long as I’m here. I’m not a favourite of his.”

“Don’t talk stuff and nonsense!” growled Jim from behind her. Meanwhile Virginia rather conspicuously placed the pot on a higher shelf, more out of reach.

“The great Anthony!” jeered Haidee, throwing a sly glance at Grace, it might be to ascertain if it were at all possible to provoke her out of her silence. “The illustrious rustic demi-god, who rules us all and sets us grovelling. Your exemplar, Jim, Grace’s hero, Virginia’s superior officer, and my”

“Your what?” queried Virginia.

“My holy fraud, perhaps.”

“I believe you!”

Theodore’s *sotto voce* concurrence obtained a greater success than he had probably intended. The three girls and Jim simultaneously moved to stare at him. Suddenly Haidee was overtaken by a fit of laughter, and turned her back upon all the others.

Grace waited until she had recovered; then:

“Would you mind telling me exactly what you mean by a holy fraud?”

“I think I should mind, very much,” replied the visiting girl, in a still unsteady voice. “Can’t be done, Grace—not by this child! You tell me why he’s a hero!”

“We’re among ourselves, and if you meant anything at all, I think I’ve a right to know.” Grace had not lost her calmness, but her temper was slowly rising at the idea that those two might be sharing some secret concerning her *fiancé* which had never reached her own ears.

Haidee gave Theodore a funny look.

“He’s some bloke, isn’t he!”

Nearly as much exasperated as her half-sister by this ball-game of mysterious allusion, Virginia swiftly determined to throw herself with both feet into the squabble.

“Oh, we know Anthony can’t be a hero to Mr. Paysant, so it’s no use appealing to *him* for an accurate definition.”

“That’s one up against *you*, partner!” said Haidee, whom some imp had certainly got hold of. “Elizabeth means you’re his valet.”

The youth reddened. "I'm deeply grateful to her."

"Metaphorically, of course," explained Virginia sweetly.

"He metaphorically brushes Anthony's metaphorical trousers?"

"He types for him, and sees the seamy side of his literary output, which may very easily prevent his appreciating his true greatness."

"Oh, I'll be great on his terms!" muttered Theodore.

"What terms?"

Anthony's cousin was silent. All at once Jim stepped in, with a hot face and flashing eyes.

"What the devil do you mean by taking a man's character away by all these beastly innuendoes, when he isn't here to defend himself? What have you got against him? Let's hear, and no damned nonsense about it! . . . Come on! . . ."

Theodore glanced for assistance towards Haidee, who deliberately fleered him.

"Come on! Ten rounds of two minutes each, and I'll hold your coat, Mr. Paysant . . . Oh, it's too intense!"

"I'm glad you find it so!" snarled Jim. "Personally—of course I'm only a plain individual with plain instincts—but personally . . ."

"But Jim dear, you're getting cross, aren't you?"

"I sincerely have every hope of being so before you've finished. Will *you* be charitable enough to speak?"

"If you will tell me what you wish me to say."

"Say why you called Anthony a fraud," interposed Grace, with the same unpleasant calmness as before, only now the unpleasantness was more marked, and the calmness wore a more obvious appearance of artificiality. All tempers, in fact, were loosed in the greenhouse, and no-one was cool any longer. Haidee continued to laugh, but her cheeks were flaming. There was an ugly glint in Theodore's eye. Virginia looked vicious and spiteful.

"I called him one because he is one, I suppose."

"How is he one?"

· "Heaven help the girl!"

· Grace turned quickly to Theodore.

"I insist on knowing!"

And of a sudden the bottled-up wrath and yearning for vengeance in the young man's heart found vent, and the satanic joy of the relief was such that all impediments of right-mindedness and self-interest were swept away before the rush.

"Oh, he's a devil for girls, that's all," he replied, with a sneering smile, meaning to say more, but not until pressed.

"What girls . . . and what do you mean?"

"Haidee knows," The name slipped out, but neither Jim nor Grace took notice of the undue familiarity, so interested were they in his piecemeal disclosure.

"But Haidee isn't going to tell, because Haidee isn't a tell-tale-tit!" put in the denominated girl, fearful at last that the thing was going too far, and hoping by this anticipatory censure to put the bit between his lips.

However, nothing on earth could now arrest Theodore in his career. He intended that Haidee herself should now get some of her own dud coinage back. She had fooled him, and he would fool her. After the hell of a row to follow, he would have to leave the place, anyhow.

The thought that his next words might have the effect of changing the whole lives of four separate persons probably never struck him. If it had, it would have made no difference. He wished to punish his cousin for all those long months of bullying brutality, he wished to demonstrate to an expert flirt that he was not to be flirted with, he wished to give that patronising devil Lytham a rub, and he wished (but very incidentally) to prove to his blue-eyed housekeeping angel-girl of a sister that if he was a worm whose principal function was to be trodden on, at least he might be a highly dangerous one. He hated them all. By George! He could get to the top of the tree without Tony's help or anyone else's. He would write to his father to let him stop in London on his own. He would pay Tony out in other ways, all in good time

"What girls?" repeated Grace firmly, but with an indignant *timbre* in her voice, as she turned from one to the other.

"Oh, no further back than yesterday, if you must know."

Haidee shrugged her shoulders, and smiled.

"Yesterday! Anthony was with a girl yesterday!"

“He was when I left him.”

“But you didn’t go up with him!”

“No, but I happened to meet him. In Victoria Street, shortly after 1.30.”

“And he was with a lady? Well, why shouldn’t he be? Of course he had women friends.”

“You bet he has!”

A deep colour slowly spread over Grace’s face and neck. Perception had come to her, and she would not address a single other inquiry to the treacherous youth who seemed as eager to speak now as before he had been to hold his tongue. It was a matter between her and Anthony alone, but she felt that she could no longer endure to be in the same room with Haidee.

She was stumbling towards the door, when the latter stopped her.

“Won’t you hear the *denouement*, Grace?”

“Quickly, then!”

“Mr. Paysant has told you the less interesting half of the story, for that’s as far as his information goes. I take up the tale. After he parted from us but first of all you must know he and I travelled up together by puff-puff, while Anthony, the great swell, motored up in haughty solitude. We met—’twas in a crowd—in Victoria Street, and there this young man resigned his good offices. The *contretemps*, to give it its polite name, was ‘a accident’—but don’t believe it unless you want to. However, now we arrive! Anthony and I go to lunch together at a rat-hole in Soho . . . so ho! aha! the girl is mine! And seriousest of all, I haven’t told one single fib to Jim about it—have I, Jim?”

Jim turned his back, to look out of the window. The shock of the blow found him taut for the present, but Grace did not cease to think how he would react to it afterwards. Her anxiety for him deprived for the moment her new anger and humiliation on her own account of a considerable part of the distinctness she knew they would presently force upon her consciousness. She glanced solicitously at her brother’s squared shoulders, and realised exactly what the news was costing him.

“But, Haidee,” she said, with a determined evenness,

“Anthony quite distinctly told me he had not seen you during the whole of yesterday. That was at tea-time.”

“You had your doubts, then!”

“But do please explain! Why should he have told that falsehood if he *was* with you?”

“He very distinctly paid my lunch bill—including wine.”

“Then why are you confessing it so unnecessarily? Are you trying to make mischief between us?”

“Oh dear no!—I’m not that sort. I suppose it’s simply that I’m not sufficiently afraid of your opinion to take the trouble to conceal a perfectly harmless transaction. Mr. Paysant opened the subject, so”

“Do you say it was a right thing to do?”

“What, lunching with him? Why on earth not?”

“Of course, it depends on one’s attitude towards these cases But did he ask you to keep it from me?”

“No, he’s a gentleman.”

Grace said no more, but kept repeating to herself beneath her breath, “He’s lied to me! He’s lied to me!”

And she remembered that he had lied to Jim about that other meeting at Halse Tower and it began to look as if his whole being were compounded of lied and untruth and deception

She joined Jim at the window, putting her arm round his waist. He made no response. Behind their backs, Virginia looked at Haidee hatefully.

“I congratulate you on your success!” she sneered, in a sharp, low voice.

“Oh, be quiet, you!” was the other girl’s worked-up reply.

Virginia seemed as though ready to fly at her, had not the physical odds been so unequal.

“You unconscionable thing!”

At that Haidee also lost control. This crowning insult of the child’s long and persistent persecution of her, which hitherto she had always endured patiently under a veil of light amusement, was quite intolerable, and she discovered herself all at once to be filled with the passionate want to strike back, for the first and last time. She wished to crush her so effectively

that the need would never recur. Her eyes wandered femininely and cruelly over Virginia's frail person, all twitching and shaking with wrath as it was, to learn what the tenderest spot might be for her stab. The younger girl, encouraged by the other's unvarying forbearance in the past, apparently had no suspicion that she would dare to or could retaliate even on the present occasion of emotional upsets and nervous discharges; she appeared, indeed, to regret only that she herself could not proceed to the extreme length of bodily violence. Further words refused to come out. Theodore stood by, watching the pair sulkily, for he felt that somehow his revenge had escaped him, though he would reap the harvest all right as soon as Tony had the facts of the position. Haidee, after all, had given the game away, but *he* would have to pay for it.

No, Haidee's instinct decided for her that she could not resort to personal abuse. The child was such a wretched specimen that there would be nothing in it; she could not insult her more than her own mirror must do every day of her life. Neither could she possibly have any ridiculous love affair or romantic ideal. She was just a boy in petticoats. Yet wound her deeply and truly she must. Her eyes left Virginia's frock, to rove maliciously about the greenhouse, seeking inspiration. The other girl's flaming ones followed them, and saw how they rested with a perceptible startled halt upon Anthony's plant in its pot on the upper shelf, not more than a step or two away.

They flew towards it almost simultaneously.

"No, you don't!" cried Virginia. But she was an instant too late, and Haidee's fingers had already encircled one of the little purple fruits. It broke off in her hand so quietly and easily that she scarcely knew if she had intended it. Virginia grasped her forearm above the wrist, and tried to wrench it from her.

Haidee pushed her right away and retreated, still retaining the fruit, and laughing exultingly.

"Your fault, Elizabeth!"

Grace and Jim turned round at the sudden commotion.

"You thief!" panted Virginia. And she wheeled towards her half-sister for support and alliance. "She's picked one of Anthony's fruits!"

Grace left her brother's side.

“Be quiet, Virginia, and don’t be a fool! . . . Why did you do that, Haidee?”

“Just female curiosity.”

“You know Anthony won’t like it.”

“Oh dear!”

“It was nothing but pure devilish malice!” exclaimed the youngest girl between her gaspings.

“I think you had better go away, Virginia. And you had better put that fruit back on the pot, Haidee. It can’t be helped now, but Anthony is sure to be very angry about it.”

“So young, and so wise and managing!” laughed Haidee, peeping mischievously at the violet ball in her fist.

“Come! Put it back.”

“But I don’t want to put it back—I want to eat it . . . I think,” she added in a tone of reflection.

“Don’t be so mad. It probably isn’t fit to eat.”

“And it isn’t yours, if it were,” interposed Virginia. “But much a thief cares about that!”

Jim twirled his moustache violently. After the shortest pause of indecision he made up his mind to come into the group, and reached out his hand to his *fiancée*.

“Will you give that to me, please? . . . And you Virginia—would you have the extreme goodness to remember that you are addressing a lady!”

Bursting into tears, Virginia groped her way out of the greenhouse, pushing past Theodore, and slamming the door behind her; by which Haidee might have learnt that she was after all something more than a youth in petticoats. They saw her forlorn figure crossing the angle of garden towards the house, the bare knuckles of one hand rubbing her eyes the while.

“Thank you!” said Jim, with a still extended paw. Haidee, however, far from exhibiting that womanly submissiveness in the matter of which his new found lordly male tone was the cue, seemed only to regard the fruit in her soft grip with increasing favour. She kept opening and shutting her fingers, to peer at it and possess it securely again.

Temporarily baffled in this direction, Jim turned sharply upon Theodore instead.

“I fancy there’s nothing to keep *you* here any longer. We’re

merely enjoying a little family discussion—and would you be courteous enough to inform your cousin of the fact? His presence is *not* at precisely this minute required here Add, if you will be so kind, that his plant, in its mutilated condition, will be sent down to him during the course of the morning or early afternoon. That's all. Much obliged to you for coming!"

The youth said nothing, and saluted no-one, but with a set, evil expression of face made for the door. Grace went quietly after him, and caught him by the sleeve as he was letting himself out.

"Tell Anthony everything that has happened, and ask him, from me, to stay away till I've written explaining. We're all at sixes and sevens here, as you can see for yourself. Will you be sure to remember?"

"Righto!" said Theodore, shrugging his shoulders. The girl shut the door upon him, and returned to the others.

"You know, you can't keep that, Haidee," she at once began to expostulate. "You had better put it down—and you had better go. We all have a lot to think over and decide. Please do what I say."

"If I marry Jim, you'll decorate my house for me, won't you, Grace? I'm going to do nothing but turn all my work and troubles over to you, brag of my wonderful sister-in-law, and sit on the sofa and look pretty!"

"I'm glad you can feel so irresponsible about things."

"Oh, well, because Jim's boiling over and you're experiencing a lovely sense of high tragedy, there's no reason why I should shed my cheerfulness. If you decline to be modern, I can't help it. Make Jim take you up to town, and see for yourself what other girls are doing there. Why, a trumpery little lunch would be sniffed at—the modern damsel wants something very much more exciting, and she contrives to get it too."

"I think we've talked enough. And you might put down what you've got in your hand."

Haidee, for answer, steadied her eyes on Grace's face, and raised the hand in question to her mouth. She allowed the little fruit to remain for a few seconds lightly pinched by her two rows of pearly teeth, as if she were defying the brother and sister to interfere, for she continued calmly to confront them.

“What is it like?” Grace could not resist asking, though in the coldest voice.

The other proffered her the untouched half. “Try it!”

“No thanks!”

So Haidee put it in her own mouth, and went on chewing and pausing. Within a few minutes she had swallowed the last morsel of the solid rind and its firm, juicy interior, which had seemed to her to possess the consistence, though not the flavour, of an American Baldwin apple; and her hand enclosed only a couple of tiny black pips, with the stem. She allowed the stem to drop, but set the pips in the pot which held the parent plant.

“How do you feel?” inquired Grace, regarding her slow, half-puzzled movements with a distinct uneasiness.

“Funny!” replied Haidee. “And I think I’ll go home before worse befalls me.”

“You must tell your mother what you’ve done, so that she can be prepared. You seem to me to be perfectly reckless.”

“Yes? . . . I was trying to make up my mind whether I dared to do it, and of course the only way to ascertain was to *do* it.”

“That’s your character throughout.”

“Hinting at my meetings with Anthony! Well, I do detest prudence and caution . . .” Again she stopped and appeared to be analysing her sensations.

“I’ll clear, and leave you to it,” muttered Jim, making for the door. Neither Haidee nor his sister offered to stay him, and Grace made a half-hearted step forward, but stopped. Jim went on twisting his moustache rapidly. Then the visitor’s upper teeth descended by degrees to meet the lower in the centre of the apple. A white frothing juice gushed forth, and the fruit was bitten in two. The skin, though stout, was neither hard nor elastic, as she slowly and experimentally chewed the section in her mouth, while holding the other half in her grasp. Jim and Grace looked on in a sort of anxiety. It was too late to arrest the action now, so scientific curiosity usurped the place of the preceding practical objections.

Before her mouth was cleared, a frown crossed Haidee’s countenance, and once or twice she ceased masticating, apparently for the purpose of analysing the fruit’s novel taste.

he went out. He had addressed not one single word of reproach or scorn or anger to his *fiancée*, so that the exact degree of finality he attached to the latest development of her intriguing with his best friend remained incalculable by Grace; but she thought that he would have to give her up; and she hoped that he would. This stubborn dumbness of his was in itself an ominous sign. She had hardly started yet to reflect what she herself was to do.

She looked sternly at the other girl, wrapping her hands in the folds of the skirt of her house overall.

“Aren’t you going?”

“Oh, I haven’t a pain in my tummy, or anything like that. Just the reverse. The flavour was far too sympathetic.”

“You talked about worse befalling you, that’s all, and there’s nothing more to stay for. You’ve done what you came to do.”

“That’s untrue . . . Oh, I feel I don’t know what I’ll go. Good-bye, Grace!”

Grace moved behind her to the door, but there stopped her.

“How is it to be, then?—Do you regard your engagement as broken? I may not be seeing you again soon.”

“Surely that decision belongs to the party of righteous indignation? Jim, Grace, Elizabeth and Co. Do what you please, all of you—only, let me know quickly. I’ve never considered myself particularly honoured by the connection.”

“And to do you justice, you have barely troubled to disguise the fact from the beginning.”

“Have it as you will. I agree to anything—anything”

She was so evidently absorbed in her physical experience, and her words were so careless and distracted, that Grace let her depart. She joined the lane by the garden gate, which happened to be open, without going through the house.

Theodore re-entered Anthony’s room at midday, and gave his cousin a surly, garbled account of what had just occurred at High Cot. As soon as his narrative began to be intelligible, the playwright got to his feet and heard the rest of it while tapping the polished table with his finger-nails, in perfect coldness. The youth, though he knew that the truth must come out, in-

stinctively minimised his own share of the disclosure and fastened the chief blame on Haidee's shoulders; but Anthony was not to be deceived.

"So it comes to this—that you have been talking," he said at the end, quite dispassionately, but with that shade of menace in his voice which Theodore had learnt so well to recognise and hated so intensely. "Miss Croyland certainly would not have mentioned the incident against my known wishes, unless her hand had been forced. It is the very thing I cautioned you against, so you have no possible excuse. I don't inquire your motives, which are probably very bad. The point is, you have no right to disobey my orders on a private matter which concerns me closely, and you not at all. You'll have to go."

"I'm very sure I don't care a damn!"

"There's a train up about 2.30 this afternoon. You can catch that. How are you off for money?"

"Oh, I don't want your cursed money. I'm not a pauper."

"Very well," said Anthony.

The youth, white with anger, left the room.

An hour later Marian spoke to her brother in the dining-room, just before lunch was served. Josephine was then in the kitchen, and Theodore upstairs, packing his suitcase.

"What is this I hear about Theodore leaving us?" she asked, in a quiet, challenging tone.

"Quite true. He's off this afternoon."

"For the Easter holidays?"

"No, permanently. I've no further use for him."

"Has it anything to do with the trouble with—up at High Cot this morning?"

"Oh, so he's told you about that!"

"It's distressing. I can't understand how . . ."

Anthony made a gesture of impatience.

"I can't understand either, and probably nobody can understand. Everyone seems to me to have gone mad. Will you be kind enough to respect my desire for a short breathing-space before replunging into the vortex? Unburden your heart and gratify your sisterly inquisitiveness with Grace, Jim, or whom you please, but for God's sake take compassion on an

unfortunate author who desires to retain at least a corner of his brain for very necessary work. I'm sick of the whole business, and sorry I ever came down here."

Marian was momentarily silenced, but might have taken courage to renew the attack, had not the attention of both been diverted to the spectacle of a shirt-sleeved, hatless man turning in at the house-gate, bearing a large flowerpot in the crook of his arm. It was the bristle-headed George, the joint gardener of the little community, who gave a day a week to each of the five gentle folks' gardens, with an extra one to The Yellow House, of greater pretensions than its lower-lying neighbours. Theodore had not thought fit to deliver Jim's message, but the playwright's acute sensibility informed him at once that this pot, so strangely delivered at so unusual an hour, could only contain his plant, hitherto held in Virginia's custody, and that its return must be regarded as a sort of preliminary notice of the breaking-off of relations between himself and the residents of High Cot.

He crimsoned, and hastened to the front door. George was already standing in the porch, uncertain whether he ought not to have gone round to the side, and hesitating to ring. Anthony took the flowerpot from him, to look the plant over, while listening to his speech. His cousin had also neglected to mention that Haidee had misappropriated one of the fruits, and of course could not have told that she had eaten it, for he was ignorant of the act himself. The playwright wondered confusedly what had happened to it.

"With Miss Grace's compliments, zir, and I was to give you this. I was to zay Miss Croylan' up to th'Yaller 'Ouse, she ate t'other of the two fruits w'ot was on it."

"The devil she did!"

"This marnin', as I understan' it."

Anthony laughed, in spite of his bewilderment. There was something distinctly humourous in all Haidee's unrehearsed effects. He could visualise Virginia's helpless expostulations and Grace's sober, straight-faced astonishment while she was coolly munching and grimacing at the dubious-looking dainty. It wanted pluck, too.

"No ill effects, I hope?" he asked the man.

“I ain’t been up there to-day, zir, to fin’ out, as you might say. Queer kin’ of beggar to look at, ’tis. W’ot might it be, if I might make so bold?”

“I don’t know, George. I couldn’t put a name to it.”

Marian, perhaps to show her displeasure at the snub, had not come to the door, so Anthony carried the pot straight through to his own room and set it in the window there. He thought that the sight of the plant in the dining-room during lunch might lead to an undesirable discussion.

But if Marian had not condescended to approach the vicinity of the front door, she had nevertheless not failed to hear George’s words, spoken as they were in his barbarous outdoor voice, accustomed to strive with the loud winds and physical distance. She realised immediately that the affair “up above” must be even more serious than she had fancied, since Grace herself had sent the little tree down, and with it only a verbal message. She resolved to call on Grace that afternoon, to find out exactly how matters were, before again tackling her brother.

Theodore departed, carrying his suitcase, almost as soon as lunch was concluded, and no-one waved handkerchiefs after him from the porch or sought relief in tears when the door was closed again behind him. Yet, as not the most unamiable or insignificant member of a small party can disappear without leaving a perceptible melancholy gap in the circle, the others at once started to feel that a change for the worse in their inter-relations had set in, and that outside visitors were more desirable than they had been for enlivening the monotony of gloom and snappishness. But it was precisely at this minute that Anthony had thought fit to quarrel with their most friendly neighbours. Marian persisted in her resolution that that must be put right.

At three o’clock, accordingly, she left the house to pay her visit to the Lytham women.

Three quarters of an hour afterwards she returned, and, without removing her outdoor things, marched determinedly into her brother’s room, where he sat at the table, with all his papers before him but apparently in a mood far from that which produces work. His legs were straightened to their full length, his body was huddled up in his seat, and his eyes, di-

rected towards the ceiling, were fixed on vacancy. Theodore had told him that Grace was going to send a letter. He was very apprehensive of this letter, and was endeavouring to reassure himself by repeatedly running through the history of the last three days, with a view to confirming that his conduct had been unimpeachable throughout. His worst offence seemed to be that he had told her a deliberate untruth yesterday. But the secret had not been his own, a lady was in the case, and besides, Grace had asked for the lie by her outrageous suspiciousness. He wondered whether she would go to the length of offering to release him. Their sentimental union had not yet struck such a deep root that a separation at this early stage would constitute an actual tragedy, still, her obvious faults apart, she was a dear girl, and the change would be troublesome and upsetting. She would be hit the worse by it, and the prospect of spoiling life for a young and innocent woman repelled his finer nature. It was not a bit of good rushing up there to indulge in mutual recriminations, but the affair must be allowed to cool; it must be left to time and a pair of essentially good hearts

“I’ve just been up to see Grace,” said Marian stiffly, breaking in on his meditations. “I’ve brought back a letter from her for you.”

“Thanks!” replied Anthony, receiving the envelope and at once proceeding to break it open. But the thought that ran through his head was, “What the deuce are *you* interfering for, my worthy sister?”

Grace’s words were neither many nor violent, but he found them none the more agreeable for that.

“Dear Anthony,

I am sorry you should have believed it necessary yesterday to affirm that you had not been with Haidee, when you had, and had lunched with her. You must see that it rather knocks the bottom out of my confidence in you. I am too disturbed at present to know exactly what to say or do, and I don’t think I am quite ready to talk to you about things, so please do not come up to see me to-day at all events. I have not been able to learn how matters are to turn out between Jim and Haidee, but am

afraid that yesterday will prove to have been a most unfortunate day for everybody.

Very sincerely yours,
Grace."

Anthony flung the note face downwards on the table, and looked inquiringly at his sister.

"Well, Marian, you wish to say . . . ?"

"I know that the subject isn't a pleasant one, and that you'll get very angry with me for venturing upon it, but . . ."

"We'll take all that as understood. Please come to the point."

"You are old enough to lead your own life without my intervention. My justification is, in the present instance, that this house happens to be mine and Josephine's, and we have a perfect right to decide whether or no it shall be used as a base of operations against the happiness of a particular friend of ours. If I am doing you an injustice"

He interrupted her. "You *are* doing me an injustice, and I am conducting no underground operations from this house or anywhere else. Evidently you have been primed at High Cot. I have absolutely no affair on with Haidee, and I do wish to marry Grace. Is that satisfactory enough?"

"Yes, if your behaviour squared with your words, but yesterday it seems you lunched her in town, and afterwards you denied that you had even seen her."

"Both were obligatory. I don't care to enter into details with you, but you have my full assurance that I mean to do the fair and square thing by Grace. Well?"

"It's a most miserable business. Poor Grace was in tears. Jim's wandering about the house like a ghost, and Haidee has left home."

This last item of news had the effect of quite startling Anthony.

"What for? Where has she gone to?"

"Her mother says to London, to stay with a girl friend. It's typical of her that she should quietly slip out of her responsibilities like that. Did you know anything about her intention?"

"No, I didn't," replied her brother sharply.

“Then what do you propose to do about it all? Things can’t go on as they are . . . and after all, deny what you please, you have treated that poor girl quite shamefully.”

“What do you suggest?”

“You will have to write to her.”

“Of course. I’m going to.”

“And don’t put up too strong a defence in your letter. Make a point of procuring her forgiveness. Say you’ve been a fool—as you have—but still stick to it that your meeting with Haidee was a chance one, for she’ll never excuse you otherwise. You’ve really done with that girl now?”

While she was talking, Anthony had been reflecting.

“I shall write her an ordinary decent letter, but as I have done no wrong, I shall naturally not confess to any. I guess it will be a matter of time, more than words. Grace will come round in due course—particularly if she finds that she has driven me away. So that’s what I propose to do; take a few days off from here, and return later . . . Another thing is, it will be horribly embarrassing for all parties, my hanging around here while the business is blowing over. We shall all dread putting our noses outside the gate, for fear of running up against each other. Honestly, I shouldn’t know how to address Jim at this moment . . . I’ll return to chambers, and be off tomorrow morning. Do you agree?”

Marian paused for quite ten seconds before responding.

“I hardly like to say that it will look as if you were following Haidee to town, but it will certainly bear that appearance.”

“In your eyes as well, my dear Marian?”

“I am afraid it would.”

“Then that decides me,” returned Anthony, standing up. “I could not in any case go on staying in a house where my every most trifling and innocent action is closely scrutinised for a guilty motive. I have my own pride, as you have yours. I amend my plan in one respect only—I shan’t come back. If Grace continues to want me, she must either travel to town for me or else procure me an invitation to High Cot You will endure my presence here till tomorrow on this frank understanding, that we are at last totally out of sympathy? I would

rather not go this afternoon. Nothing would be ready for me.”

“I’m sorry you feel like this, Anthony.”

“I too. But we will still maintain an intermittent correspondence, and preserve our respective dignities by not descending to vulgar abuse. Josephine is with you, of course?”

“Yes.”

“Good-bye, then, till tea!”

Marian left him, not quite happy in the consciousness that she had in some clumsy manner offended that artistic sensitiveness of soul of her clever younger brother, but hoping at least that he would reconsider that part of his intention which referred to his return some time before the morning.

Anthony sat down again to write as follows:

“My dear Grace,

I am improving upon your suggestion that I do not come up to-day, by arranging to absent myself until after the holidays—in fact I propose not to return to my sisters’ at all, and we shall have to contrive some other mode of meeting.

I do understand the position, that you are more upset by my withholding yesterday’s lunch from you than by the lunch itself. Indeed, as the latter was scarcely even a violation of the conventions, it may be safely ignored by your good sense. I happened to meet Haidee in town round about lunch time, and we both happened not to have lunched. There was really nothing in it. Then why deny it?—you proceed. Merely to avoid entering upon elaborate explanations. Halse Tower you received with difficulty, Sevenoaks did me no good, and now this third poser might well have proved too strong for my persuasive powers. I preferred to give it a bye.

But knowing this, you object, I should have refused to lunch with her. She said she needed to speak to me about Jim again, and I had not the conscience to stand out against it.

These are the true facts, my dear Grace. Weigh them in your inimitably calm, clear, sensible fashion. Do not seek to trace in these lines any faint sign of the repentant sinner, for I swear to you that I consider myself merely

the hapless victim of a rather strange series of coincidences. When you wish to have me with you again, write to me in London, and I will come down post-haste.

I send you my assurances of continued love and respect.

In truth and honour yours,
Anthony.”

He gave the letter to Marian at the tea-table, and she undertook to forward it for him immediately.

9

Before going for the breakfast on the morning of his departure—it was Thursday morning, the day before Good Friday—Anthony paid a visit to his plant, standing in its pot in sunshine on the window seat. It was dead. Its solitary fruit still hung to the stem, and, after gazing on it for a moment or two, he plucked it off softly, to examine it in his hand. He wondered how Haidee had got on with the other, but evidently she could have suffered no immediate ill effects, or she would not have made that journey. He was strongly tempted to experiment for himself with this survivor; and then he thought that he had better wait till he reached town. Possible internal pains did not promise to consort well with motor driving.

He went in to his sisters, who were already in their places, lightly exhibited the little fruit to their vision, and was about to ask their opinion as to what should be done with it, when his eye fell upon a feminine envelope lying on his bread plate. It was addressed to him in Haidee’s handwriting. Marian and Josephine covertly watched him. He took it up, studied the writing in detail, then put it down again unopened, and turned to Marian.

“You know who it’s from?”

“I can guess—and do you know?”

“I also can guess.”

“Then the hand is familiar?”

“I did not say so. It’s from a lady, it’s from London, and Haidee owes me an apology for taking what wasn’t hers. I fancy the combination suffices.”

“No doubt,” returned Marian dryly, “but don’t you mean to open it?”

“Not here and now, I think.”

An uncomfortable silence attended the early part of his meal. Josephine, who had only sympathetically, and not directly, entered into her elder sister’s contention with Anthony, came more and more to regard it as a pity that they should part on terms of undisguised hostility, and attempted to lessen the tension by diverting the thoughts of the pair from their eternal bone of dispute. She reached over for the fruit, lying on the table-cloth in front of her brother, and started to handle it.

“When it occurs to one, the transformation of our ancient family heirloom is rather acute. From a serpent of green glass to a real live apple, nature-painted violet! And all in—how many days, Anthony?”

“Under a week.”

“It could not have degenerated all at once. Isn’t it more reasonable to assume that a number of artificial plantings have taken place, at quite long intervals, since the parent fruit was picked from the original natural tree? That would take us back a very long way, and get over the difficulty of the survival of one individual life through untold ages. I am suggesting that every five hundred or a thousand years or so the owner of the traditional seed has had the curiosity to plant it again, just as you have done; and having grown his tree and secured his fruit, has handed down the seed from that fruit to further generations. The absence during such a long chain of plantings of all cross-fertilisation would have the effect of making every next tree smaller and more degraded than the last—whereas, if you suppose that *your* seed came straight from the original healthy stock, you can’t account for its deterioration. What do you think?”

“I think it’s far-fetched.”

“I’m trying to show that the original tree may have been utterly unlike yours. It may have been immense and truly wonderful—besides so ancient that we can form no conception of its age.”

But her brother declined to be drawn into a discussion.

“You’re very enthusiastic all at once,” was his grunted response. “Only last Friday you were scoffing at the whole idea.”

“I am always willing to defer to facts.”

“Whether or not Haidee has been the first to do it, she was very reckless to swallow a dangerous-looking fruit without in the least knowing its properties,” commented Marian severely.

Josephine dropped a blob of marmalade on her remaining fragment of toast.

“I rather admire her for it. She wasn’t playing to the gallery, and she doesn’t care a rap for science—it was cold-blooded audacity for the sake of audacity, and I think it is rather splendid in a girl.”

“I disagree. It’s the modern female education. A girl is encouraged—practically forced by her mistresses—to cram for matriculation, while the rest of her time is largely spent on hockey or other violent sports. That means that nervous waste goes on continuously, at the expense of that quiet slow growth of the physical organs so beneficial to young girls, and one might almost add, so essential to a successful marriage later on. Of course, some have to pay for it more than others, and Haidee is one of the unfortunate ones. I expect her nervous system has been so exasperated during her school course that now she is sometimes hardly responsible for her actions. What she wants, she must have—not tomorrow or the next day, but at once. I blame her mother very much. She has been a teacher herself, and there is no excuse for her not recognising the evils of the modern educational methods. The blunder is appalling.”

Anthony was cynically assured in his mind that the diatribe was for his benefit.

“You’re *such* a wise woman, Marian!” he allowed him-

self to say. "I imagine there never has been a wiser troglodyte."

Whereupon Marian rose with dignity to leave the room, and Josephine with her. Their brother at once took up Haidee's letter, thoughtfully slitting it open. It was dated "Wednesday evening."

Will you do me two favours? You have of course been told that I ate one of your two fruits. Will you personally eat the other? That is my first request, and as you will see from this letter that it has done me no physical harm, I do not suppose you will hesitate to follow my example for that reason. But if you should wish to keep the fruit intact for sentimental reasons, I want you to know that it will be very much more to your intellectual profit to eat it, and not save it. The second favour I ask of you is that you will tell me your sensations afterwards. Not at once, but after five or six hours have elapsed. I have never had a stranger experience in my life.

I am writing this from Kensington. My telephone number is at the top of the letter. I shall not go out all day tomorrow until you have rung me up.

Yours,
Haidee.

P.S. This communication is not like my others, and I wish you clearly to understand that my object in writing is not to try to get to see you again. It is quite impossible to explain the importance I attach to your doing the two things I have asked you to do."

At the end of the postscript there was another sentence started but scratched out. No address was given.

Anthony let the letter drop from his fingers, and picked up the little violet apple, to turn it round and round, and sniff at it cautiously. There was no odour.

With the sensitive perception of a literary artist, he was able at once to recognise from Haidee's style the seriousness of the mood which had determined it. Not one word was an escapade, but everything was simple and to the point. She

calmly anticipated his objections, and made no use of the customary feminine lights and shades, which constitute the charming essence of a woman's correspondence. So probably she really was not attempting merely to get to see him again.

With regard to her two requests, as the first happened to coincide with his own intention, of course he could meet her there. As for the second, he could not say at present. It depended on the nature of his resulting sensations after eating the fruit. If these proved as extraordinary and mysterious as those which Haidee professed, he might be disposed to ring her up, to arrange a place of meeting for discussing their joint experience. He no longer feared to incur Grace's displeasure by so doing, for she had, in a manner, set him at liberty. Until she had come round to him again he could not quite regard himself as being still engaged—assuredly not for the purposes of an innocent interview. But why had Haidee gone to London? Had it been in sudden disgust at Jim's business, or was it an effect of her apple-eating adventure? She might have succumbed to the irresistible impulse to get away from people, in order more freely to concentrate on what had started to go on inside her.

There comes sometimes a day in the spring, neither warmer, more brilliant with sunshine, nor more radiantly beautiful than its predecessors, but on the contrary frequently dull, murky, close and threatening storm, which nevertheless, in a greater degree than other days and after a quite different fashion, bears within its still and overcast bosom the whisper, definite to the senses but inexpressible in human language, of a wondrous *change*, not to arrive, but which has already arrived. Men, beasts, and birds feel uneasy at that whisper, and perhaps plants stir in their roots, for it means that the tomb of winter has been flung open, and that the confined dead are summoned to arise and clothe themselves in the immortal garments of creation, love and joy. But the mind cannot fathom why just this one day, of all days, should possess power to sound so moving a note, and it is restless because it fancies that it has been caught unprepared. It was prepared for the promised heat and sunshine, but not for this—this is different, deeper, more troubling, more akin to tears . . . It is Earth

speaking once again to the children of Earth, after a silence of so many months. Pure, delicate natures are the most acutely responsive to such subdued moments of the spring. They are tortured by them, for they know not how to react, yet react they must.

Something of the same sort, but from another cause, began, curiously enough, to oppress Anthony's spirit, as he sat on at the breakfast table, meditating the problem of Haidee's message. He had a queer impression that this flight of hers to London signified for him the inauguration of a total break-up of his present mode of life. Grace, Jim, his sisters, his marriage, even his work, appeared quietly to be slipping into the background of his thoughts, and some new and untried phase of existence was assembling to take the place of the old. He felt as if he were in the act of discarding a burden of stupid and ugly activities too long blindly carried, to the debasement of his finer soul. Perhaps it was due to the circumstance that he was on the point of turning his back upon Malfait Street, it might be permanently, though that would not concern his work and Haidee's journey had no connection with his own return to town. Her association with his mood was probably a purely fortuitous one, suggested to his imagination by the approximate coincidence in time. The feeling that he might be about to drop his work again, was presumably the result of Marian's animadversions just now; he was tender to such criticisms, for he knew too well how disloyal he was to his own ideals.

So the working of this new leaven within him, he decided, did not and could not, even remotely, be the effect of Haidee's note lying before him, but simply meant that he was about to exchange one set of daily acquaintances for another. It was natural for a man to wish to escape for a time from a perpetual atmosphere of censure, antagonism and suspicion No, that was not it—that was not what he had felt It had to do with Haidee. This letter was starting something of which he could not see the finish. Bad or good? Ought he to stop where he was, and return a curt negative to both of her requests? He could 'phone her from the village

And exactly as plants do not retreat into the ground upon the advent of spring, so Anthony resolved to keep to his orig-

inal plan, and travel to London that morning. He wanted to hurry off as soon as he had packed his belongings, for a particular reason, which, however, he refused to acknowledge even to himself. Grace might take it into her head to send a reply to his letter, or even call, at any moment, and he especially desired to get off without this further complication. Although he would not recognise it as such, it was one more symptom of his new will to shed the old life.

While he was employed upstairs in throwing his things into his case, Josephine knocked on the door, and entered. With Marian's approval, she was to make a final attempt to soften her brother's temper to the extent of obtaining his promise to return in the course of a few days. The two lonely spinsters, no longer young, realised, when it was nearly too late, that it would be horrid to lose sight altogether of the only male in the family. Marian, however, would not trust herself to secure the desired concession, for she believed that Anthony positively disliked her, so the task devolved on Josephine.

"You're off at once, then?" she began, seating herself on a corner of the unmade bed.

"Yes."

A pause.

"I'm afraid Marian let herself say rather too much to you. She regrets it now, and I hope you're not going to punish us?"

"She practically accused me of chasing Haidee to town, and of course I can't stand that."

"She couldn't have meant it."

"I'm better at home."

"But you'll come back some time?"

"Oh, some time."

"Soon?—in a day or two?"

He discontinued his operations, to stand upright and stretch his shoulders.

"That rather depends on the gods, I fancy."

"Grace will come round."

"She may or she may not." His careless tone quite shocked his sister.

“You’re surely going to make some effort in that direction?—you’re not simply going to let things drift?”

“What can I do, my dear girl? If I’m a villain, I’m a villain. I won’t force myself on any woman. It’s entirely up to her, and if she wants me she can have me.”

Another pause ensued, longer than the previous one. Meanwhile Anthony resumed his packing. Josephine, after watching him in silence, lightly found her feet and stood up.

“At all events, Anthony, you’re not quarrelling with *us*?”

“Not if I can avoid it, but if Grace breaks with me, or if I break with her, of course it will be out of the question for me to come down here as long as she’s in residence.”

“I hope you’ve no intention of breaking with her!”

“One never knows . . . I tell you candidly, I’ve had nearly enough of it.”

“No, don’t say that . . . Why, she’s your perfect wife, Anthony, and I thought you knew it. You’ll never find another like her. You were created for each other . . . Well, I’ll have to go and see her this afternoon.”

Once again her brother straightened himself.

“Please don’t. I’m not at all sure that I want the business patched up so quickly—now that it’s gone so far, I think I’d prefer an interval for cool reflection. Frivolous jealousy’s a very nasty flaw in a woman, it’s nearly the worst of the minor vices, and possible quite the worst to live with; so I’ll need to cogitate how it will pan out after marriage. That being the case, leave her alone for the moment, and do nothing.”

“But you said a minute ago it was entirely up to her.”

“Did I? Then I meant, in the matter of casting her nature and giving me free rope with other women. If she’s big enough for that, well and good. I doubt if she’ll find it easy work such a radical change in her disposition . . . In fact, if there’s one crack, there may be others. I fear I rather took her on her face value.”

Josephine understood that the more he talked, the angrier he was likely to become, and before they had finished he might say something desperate which he would afterwards be too obstinate to retract. She agreed in her heart that there was a

certain justification for his being so incensed against Grace, who, whatever her grievance might be, ought surely to take the matter up with him a little more affectionately. Still, the essential right was on Grace's side, and it was his duty to satisfy her about Haidee. She thought that the best way to cobble the affair would be for *her* to take charge of Anthony's explanation, and try to appease Grace with it. Then to-day or tomorrow she could write to him to come down again. But she had first to get his explanation. It was not good enough for him simply to assert that he had met Haidee by accident and lunched her casually, but Josephine must be satisfied that there was positively nothing on between them in the way of a growing intrigue. If she were satisfied, she could satisfy Grace. She flattered herself that she could manage matters more tactfully than Marian.

"Well, I'll vanish, and leave you to get on with the job," she precluded, smiling pleasantly, with her hand on the door-knob. "You won't take lunch before you go?"

"No, I'll lunch at the club."

"Oh, by the way, you never told us—what did Haidee write?" And she did not see how he could possibly flare up at that as a leading question.

"I admire the postscript!" was Anthony's dry reply.

She was found out, but only laughed.

"The woman's postscript! However, what *did* she write?"

"She wrote requesting me to adventure my teeth on the second apple, in order, apparently, to compare sensations. Her own, she says, were sufficiently curious; but did not enter into details."

"Eve and Adam! Did you remark the coincidence?"

"No," said her brother, and looked thoughtful.

"Shall you adopt the suggestion?"

"I think I shall."

"And compare sensations?"

"I shan't hesitate for a minute to meet her for the purpose, if it appears to be desirable. And that is why I told you to wait and do nothing. It would be quite too idiotic to make it up with Grace today, only to fall out with her again tomorrow."

"Then he *is* going after Haidee!" thought Josephine. She

proceeded, with a quickly swelling excitement at the audacity of the invention, to speculate whether the whole thing could possibly be a fake—whether that girl could have eaten the fruit by pre-arrangement with Anthony, and whether her departure to town, his return there, and her letter, openly forwarded to him at their house, to cover and explain their meeting in London in case it came to light, were all constituent parts of the same ingenious plot! It was like a jig-saw puzzle falling into place in her head, and perceiving the complete picture that it formed, she could not doubt its actuality. Her own schemes for the reconciliation of her brother with Grace instantaneously collapsed, and her smiling gave place to an inturnd expression of hardness and antipathy, which made her look like Marian. She had only one thing more to ask Anthony, and that was if he had Haidee's present address?

“No, I've only got her telephone number.”

“Which means he hasn't troubled to remember the address she gave her mother, and she may be staying at some hotel!” said Josephine significantly to herself.

She forthwith withdrew from the room, to communicate to her sister the outrageous discovery Many times during the course of the day did they put their heads together in order to settle upon what was best to be done in the matter, but it was not until quite late in the evening that they decided that the proper person to take action in it was Jim. It was too unpleasant a business for a woman to handle, and Mr. Croyland, the only other responsible man, was not to be trusted with a situation demanding both nerve and delicacy. He would publicly attempt to horsewhip their brother, or something of the sort, and their honourable family name would be stained for ever. They hoped that Jim would behave with more discretion, but it was really because he was the sole alternative, and not from any faith in his powers of persuasive negotiation, that Marian after dinner assumed her hat and coat to pay the Lythams a call, intending that the son of the house should escort her back.

Anthony arrived in London at some time after half-past twelve, and straightway garaged his car. Walking across to his chambers, he notified his permanent return to the janitor,

handed him his case to carry upstairs, and without at that time ascending himself, passed straight out again to seek his club for lunch. After the briefest and simplest of meals, taken with a half-pint of claret, he retreated to the smoking lounge, where he remained conversing on various topics with a club acquaintance until nearly three o'clock. He then went home, to sort his papers and get straight generally, while awaiting tea. A fire had been lit in his room overlooking a corner of the park, and the place looked homelike and comfortable. He congratulated himself that he was to see no more of Theodore.

Far from his having forgotten his weird apple, reposing wrapped in a screw of tissue-paper in his side-pocket, it was burning a hole there, as the phrase is, but he had wished to get thoroughly settled in before starting this new adventure. Otherwise he would not have been at leisure to devote that close and particular attention to its consequences which he had promised himself. The idea now struck him that Haidee was still waiting in to receive his telephone call. Should he 'phone her at once to tell her his intentions, or since so much of the day had already slipped by, should he leave it till the five hours had elapsed which she had named as the time? He did not wish to appear too eager to get into touch with her, so elected to leave it.

Sitting in his chair by the side of the fire, he plunged his hand into his pocket, drew forth the little globular fruit, unwrapped its covering of paper, and threw the latter into the flames. For a moment or two he eyed the purple vision held by his fingers contemplatively, mildly wondering at the anomaly of its appearance in physical space—in aspect it was so mean and unprepossessing, in historical significance so almost sublime Now that it came to the test, he was not altogether easy in mind as to the desirability of incorporating its juices with those of his own modern body. Some manner of conflict must necessarily be set up within which would interrupt more or less powerfully the normal working of his system, and if it were a fact that Haidee had pulled through, that was no guarantee that he would do the same. Constitutions differed, and sex sometimes has a word in the matter. But for her example, he would, on second thoughts, have returned a decided shake of

the head to the proposition. As it stood, a man naturally did not like to be shamed by a girl

Meanwhile a man-servant brought in his tea-tray, and set it for him on a table beside his chair. Anthony crunched his toast, drank his tea, went on considering the apple, and at last was on the point of compromising by cutting it through with the tea-knife, when he recalled in time that its interior might spill out He next told himself that if he declined the feat, she would surely laugh at him for funking it—and she would be perfectly entitled to But why should he, a middle-aged man of the world, with responsibilities, be required to follow the lead of a capricious child and risk stuffing poison into his internals! She might jump off a roof, escape unhurt, and then ask him to do the same What was more, he did not know that she *had* come off unharmed. Her letter was written and posted yesterday, and there was the whole of the night and to-day for the appearance of delayed developments. He must first of all find that out, so he would have to telephone her in spite of his wish not to

He went out into the corridor for the purpose.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed, when he had got the call. “Is that Kensington ----” and he gave the number. A feminine voice, sharp and educated, like that of a business woman of good position, answered him:

“Yes—who is speaking?”

“Mr Kerr. Is Miss Croyland there, please?”

“Will you hold on?”

During the pause on the telephone Anthony heard his name repeated by the lady who had responded, and another voice, also a woman’s, distantly answered:

“Oh! . . .”—and a few moments later, “No, I won’t speak to him, but ask him if he has done what I wanted.” It was Haidee. So far-away sounded the two voices that he was quite unable to distinguish from hers her condition of health or humour, but he was nevertheless strangely glad that he had heard her.

The dim dialogue ceased, and the original speaker returned to the mouthpiece.

“Miss Croyland is here, but cannot speak at the moment. She asks me to inquire if you have done what she wanted?”

“Will you please tell her that I am just about to do so. Also that I am talking from my town chambers, and that I will take the liberty of ringing her later?”

“Hold on again a minute, please.”

She still did not cap the mouthpiece, so once again Anthony enjoyed the queer sensation of listening to Haidee’s tones, sounding from a mystic distance.

“Very well—I shall expect a call about half-past nine.”

The words were repeated to him by his interlocutrix, and judging from her impatient delivery that she was now about to hang up the receiver, he hastened to put in before he should be cut off:

“Would you be good enough to ask Miss Croyland one more question? I am very anxious to know how she is.”

But this time the mouthpiece at the other end was covered, and he could not hear what Haidee replied. Her friend responded for her after the interval necessary for inquiry:

“She wishes to say that she is quite well in health, but greatly distressed.”

She hung up with a rather rude abruptness, and Anthony returned to his room. He took it that she was the girl chum who was offering Haidee hospitality, and that, feeling her responsibilities in the case, she was not over-pleased at having her flat or rooms converted into a booking-office for the arrangement of appointments with strange men. However, his question had been answered. Haidee was none the worse in health for her rash experiment, so apparently it was pretty safe for him to follow suit, though what was implied by her being “Greatly distressed” he could not conceive. Was she at last repenting the wholesale scathe she had wrought in her little circle? Or was it some new phase, to which he had not got the clue?

He rang for the servant to clear away the tea things, pulled out his cigarette-case, and stood smoking and warming the back of his trousers in front of the fire until the man had departed and he was alone once more.

Then he picked up the diminutive fruit from the mantelpiece, where he had rested it, glanced at it with the same distaste and suspicion as before, and a minute later, conquering

his indecision by a definite effort of will, and casting his unfinished cigarette behind him into the fire, bit into it suddenly, and received the smaller half into his mouth.

A milky gush, like the foaming juice of a soft apple, met his teeth, and he was aware of a quick shock of freshness and coolness throughout his body.

10



aving chewed and swallowed the last of the rind, thrown the stalk into the fire, and slipped the two rudimentary pips into his vest pocket, Anthony strolled to the window, to remain looking across to the glimpse of park at the end of the street, while awaiting his next sensations.

The singular conglomeration of flavours, vaguely reminiscent of those of other fruits, which had just passed through his consciousness, he explained to himself by conceiving that the differing tastes of the many modern varieties of fruit represented merely deviations from a few simple ancient stocks. What he had eaten was a direct survivor from one of these ancient stocks, and so its taste contained in itself the hints and beginnings of all the tastes of all the fruits which had since developed from that particular group-parent. He thought that he had been able to distinguish the pippin, the pear, the pineapple, and, oddly enough, the strawberry—but the total palatal effect was kaleidoscopic and confounding; unnameable, though certainly agreeable.

The tang that still persisted in his mouth was rough, sharp, exquisite, bringing tears to his eyes by reason of its sweet acidity. Simultaneously, a long wave of voluptuous freshness continued to explore the passages and recesses of his interior like a summer breeze, and so far his exotic guest was making no movement of unfriendliness. But he was by no means reassured as yet; in fact he could not be, for he was well aware

that his experience was only just starting. And it was not so much his apprehensions that made him uneasy, as some sort of actual voiceless, menacing physical response to his deed, creeping mysteriously upwards and outwards, hardly yet evident, but merely sensed by his instinct, just as a quickly falling barometer seems to sense the instability of the weather against all outward probability, so firm and benignant appears the deep blue vault of the sky.

He was glad that he had not eaten that fruit at Croom, with his journey in front of him. He had the feeling of a wild beast which recognises the approach of sickness, and slinks away from its fellows into the remotest thicket it can find. He congratulated himself that he had not advertised his return beforehand; his friends knew that he was away, and no-one would be likely to call. Anyway, he would see nobody. There was brandy in the cupboard, in case of need.

Then he found that a thought was struggling to free itself in his head, but his best obstetric skill failed to get it delivered. In his art it was a familiar occurrence for his inspirations to refuse to take body and remain exasperatingly blurred and baffling; this, however, was not the same. It was not an impersonal intellectual thought, it referred somehow to himself—to his body . . . yet he did not think it had anything to do with the physical reactions he was watching and waiting for. At first he tried to expel it from his mind, as a preoccupied man automatically attempts to wave off a troublesome fly or midge pinging about his ears; but when it declined either to be dragged to the surface for examination or to leave him, the petty torment by degrees worked him up to such a pitch of irritation that he felt himself obliged to postpone his other introspective business in order to attend exclusively to this, and get it dismissed . . . Some alteration to his person must have happened without his being aware of it . . . But the glass showed him nothing. He tested his muscles and reactions, and they were all right

He sat down, and again began to smoke. It was already a quarter to five. Two or three more minutes passed, when a knock came at the room door and the servant came in with a message.

“Miss Lytham is downstairs, sir, inquiring if you are at home!”

Anthony stared at the man stupidly, failing to grasp at once what he had said, or what he wanted How grey and dim and lifeless and insignificant his face looked!—and what terrible eyes he had! He could not remember ever closely to have noticed the fellow before. Those eyes were positively boring holes through his head like cold steel gimlets! Yes, and that was what his thought had been! he had it now. After living with it for four and thirty years, he was suddenly realising for the first time that his face was *naked*

“Will you see her, sir?”

Anthony controlled himself violently.

“I can’t see anybody. Tell her I’m not at home.” . . . But the words were not out before his better nature reasserted itself, and he recollected the importance she must be attaching to this visit and the distance she had travelled especially to make it.

“Stop! I’ll see her Ask her to be good enough to step up.”

“You damned fool!” he apostrophised himself when the servant had departed. “You’re too gentlemanly to hurt her feelings, and now you’re going to break her heart!”

For he knew that in the conversation to follow, wrap his assurances in soothing mystery as he would, her steady, condemnatory gaze must discover through the transparency of his countenance the great and single idea which was occupying his soul. In so brief a space had his face ceased to be an opaque, plastic mask for others, an instrument for himself, on which he could play what tunes he pleased; and become a delicate, quivering, unprotected counterpart and representative of its informing spirit. What folly to clothe the expressionless body and leave the one finely-shrinking part of the human physique nude! To prevent from speaking the arms, legs and trunk, which had nothing to say, in order to gloat, from birth to death, over the revelations of the face, which could conceal nothing! It was veritably the true obscenity, for what soul had not her shame and modesties, as well as her wings and beauties? But nothing could be hidden

He wished that he had not asked her up. It would have been better for her to find out *slowly* how that old life was ended for him—had no longer any meaning for him. He did not want her to be unhappy. She could not possibly understand his apotheosis

“By God! That’s a queer word,” he said, stopping short in his reflections, for it sounded to him as clear as if he had spoken it aloud. “What apotheosis have I undergone?—and what am I talking about? What has chanted for me within the last half-dozen hours, that I should now be regarding it as quite settled that I am to part from Grace?”

And then, as the door opened, and Grace herself entered the room alone and unannounced, the name HAIDEE appeared suddenly to traverse the whole sky-arch of his thoughts, from end to end . . . Yet it was not as a beautiful and beloved woman that she was present with him. It was as if she represented for him some unthinkably lofty, maternal, protecting spiritual influence, so that he stood, not face to face with her as one person with another, but in a sort of atmosphere compounded of her being; an atmosphere as necessary to his new and higher existence as air to mammals and water to fishes And he recognised that that was the great and single idea which for several minutes back had been inhabiting his soul, and which he did not wish Grace to discover there, and profane by discovering

His face had become a real mask, though it did not seem so to him. His *fiancée*, wearing the black wrap which he had admired so much, only took three steps into the room before she stopped to look at him inquiringly and anxiously. Anthony saw her as a ghost of the past. Her face seemed small, tight, dim and mean, her entire aspect was misty and faded to him, but the scrutiny of those relentless, unwavering eyes was intolerable. He nervously shifted his head and wriggled around in the chair, from which he had not risen, in order to avoid meeting them; but still they burned into him. He had to take a strong hold of himself to conduct the interview with anything at all of his usual urbanity.

“Please sit down, Grace! I was far from expecting you.”

The girl seated herself very erectly on a straight-backed chair at some distance from himself and from the fireplace. She appeared inwardly agitated, and let a few seconds pass before she began, in a low voice:

“You did wrong to run away Anthony, but I didn’t try to stop you, because I thought we should be alone up here, and I could talk to you better.”

“Yes, but it’s a pity . . .”

“Why?”

Anthony pulled out his watch without well knowing what he did “Four and a half more hours to go!”

“Why do you look at your watch?” asked Grace. “Didn’t you want me to come, and do you want to get rid of me?”

“No, I just happened to wonder what the time was. You’re going back at once, of course?”

She regarded him silently. Then:

“Are you quite well, Anthony?”

What ought he to reply? And how was this lamentable interview to be conducted generally? What had she come for?

“I’m not quite myself,” he nearly stammered. “I ate that other fruit just before your arrival, and it’s beginning to affect me—I don’t know in what way.”

“Then do you wish me to leave you?”

“No, I’ll hear what you have to say.”

In effect, Grace had taken this long journey for the specific purpose of making her peace with him—on the usual lovers’ conditions, of course; that is, provided that he showed himself sufficiently contrite and humble on account of his misdeeds, thereby acknowledging himself to be the guilty party, and that he gave her a fast assurance that he would never more see Haidee alone, or in any shape or form communicate with her. She was sure that she was justified in asking so little. They had been estranged for more than twenty-four hours, and she had been exceedingly miserable without him, in ignorance whether they were ever to come together again in the old love. But now the strangeness of his manner, his obvious embarrassment in her company, his cold, distant, and hesitating answers, and the mechanical consulting of his watch, all these direct tokens and significant shades, down to the very turning of his

face from hers, could not but arrest the immediate expression of her intentions and start to substitute for them in her mind a renewed and augmented suspicion of his good faith. She knew, as everyone knew, that Haidee was already up in London. Hitherto she had resolutely dismissed the thought that he might have pursued her thither as unworthy of her; but things all at once began to look very black and terrible.

She had had no conception that such a crime could be committed in real life by a decent man who had always been almost like a brother to her. It seemed unbelievable even now. It was what one read about in books, but suddenly to encounter such a horror as a *fact* affecting herself was just as if Jim had murdered somebody and was hiding the body. An icy rigon took possession of her heart.

“If you think it’s seriously disagreeing with you, hadn’t you better call a doctor in?” She could not as yet bring herself to accuse him by word or hint.

“I will if I get worse.”

They sat for a whole minute in silence. Meanwhile Anthony summoned courage to steal a long glance at her, but her eyes were still boring into him and he was unable to meet them. He felt another bubble of thought forming independently of his volition inside his brain. It was as though the inspirational condition were becoming chronic—as though some alien power, seated within himself, were launching these compelling *aperçues*. upwards for his amazement

“Have you seen Haidee, or are you going to see her?” demanded Grace of a sudden.

“I haven’t seen her. I don’t know whether I shall see her.”

In the middle of another long silence Grace began to weep, but neither loudly nor in complete abandonment. She dabbed at her eyes with a square of lace handkerchief, sat up still straighter in her chair, and looked across at him with all that profound earnestness which only the eyes of a wronged and tearful woman can assume. Anthony lay perfectly crushed in his seat.

“And is this really all that you have to say to me, Anthony? . . . You’re very—*cruel*”

“Oh, ye gods! Oh, go! go! go! go! go!” groaned the play-

wright mentally—and when he clasped his forehead with his hand, there were beads of perspiration there “This is unendurable!”

She waited for some smallest sign of better feeling, but none appeared.

“Then am I to believe what your peculiar attitude requires me to believe?”

At that, the thought which had been slowly swelling within him with a quiet burst invaded and illuminated his soul. He was not shrinking from her eyes because of their contained moral censure, but because they communicated and could only communicate with his frightful, earthy, mortal nature, which was like an invitation to share a common coffin. He was as a man risen from the dead. No time had been permitted him as yet to explore his strange new kingdom, and all those ancient beings of a remote life were still beseeching him with their greedy, glassy eyes to return to their impossible fellowship. To meet their eyes was to say, “Yes! yes!”

He mastered himself once again.

“I wish you to believe nothing . . . I wish both of us to say or decide nothing at present . . . I’m not well, Grace. I want you to go home, and leave me I’ll write.”

“Very well—I’ll go. I think you’re very hard and very cruel, Anthony!” returned poor Grace sadly “Tell me only this—is it that girl?”

As if stung, Anthony covered his eyes with one hand and flung the other outwards against her. “I beg you not to name her! I beg you not to name her!” And for an instant her heart bounded, for she desired to misunderstand the words and action as an indignant repudiation. But then, following immediately upon the heels of this relief, came the chill recognition that they might equally be the outcome of infatuation—and therefore *must* be that Such emptiness of future opened up before her at this worst and at last positive proof of the truth of her fears, that she sought anger as a barrier between herself and utter nothingness. The futile speech remained unspoken. Of what use were indictments and insults when the person intended to be brought by them a sense of his conduct was under the spell of an insane passion! One thing she had still—her dig-

nity as a woman. She must do as he recommended; she must go home and wait in patience for her official dismissal. A last letter there must be from her, and in that letter she would speak her shame, and wrath, and pity

At the door she paused with downbent head, then swung round on him with a quick, feminine little gesture of appeal, a movement which appeared so dramatically odd in one of her proud, quiet, and self-contained temper that it was as if she were repeating some strange lesson of eternal and unchanging womanhood at the command of the sex-forces within her.

“Won’t you kiss me, Anthony?” And at that moment she knew that she was ready to forgive him without conditions.

He sat like wood.

She advanced a little. “Surely you love me still?”

At that Anthony sprang up.

“My dear Grace, this is Chinese torture! You see I am very, very unwell, and totally unfitted to carry on a conversation of any kind, yet you persist in dragging me into an emotional discussion of our wretched affairs! I will write to you as I said, I will come down to you, I will do any mortal thing you wish or ask for, all I request at this instant is to be left in peace—in perfect, blessed, unadulterated peace. If there is one grain of Christian charity in your constitution, go away, and go home. It isn’t much to ask.”

“I’m sorry, dear.” She saw now that he *was* ill. Such an outburst could only spring from disordered nerves, and his nerves were ordinarily of the strongest. A great flush of hope and joy swept through her, bringing with it the old angry jealousy and the old hardness, for as long as she had thought that she had lost him her heart had been full only of tears and despair. She would not irritate him further in his present state, but turned again to go. But once more she swung her head round.

“As I go past the telephone, let me ring up your doctor and ask him to call.”

“No, no!—do nothing of the sort. I won’t have it. I wish to be alone, in peace and quiet.” For in his agitation he imagined that Grace might be as good as her word and summon his medical man independently of his will or knowledge, forgetting that she did not even know his name. But the only body or soul heal-

er whose visit to him at that mysterious hour he would willingly have consented to was the ancient author of the Book of Genesis. The beginning of something was again forming in his head

Grace at last slipped out, as from the chamber of an invalid, and started her homeward journey, happier than she had at one time been that afternoon, yet still with doubts and suspicions gathering together ominously in her mind, as, the first swell of relief being past, she had more leisure to reflect how he had kept her at arm's length and refused to kiss her, which even a sick man might do, if no more than as the line of least resistance. She resolved to await his letter

"Thank God!—oh, thank God!" muttered he who had been her lover, as the door closed behind her. And dropping limply on to the settee, he repeatedly wiped the sweat from his brow After a little he completely buried his face in the cushion, and so continued lying awkwardly, mentally exhausted; trying to shut out all thoughts from his brain.

Ten minutes passed, and then he struggled up, stood dazed and swaying on his feet for a few seconds, and finally walked unsteadily into the next room, to halt in a sort of stupor before the bookshelf nearest the window, intending to take down the volume he wanted, but not sufficient present in mind to realise at once exactly what he had come to do or wished to read. When awareness dawned on him, he reached for the identical book which Theodore had fetched for him six days previously—that section of his modernised edition of the Bible which contained Genesis. This he bore back to the other room, and gradually his everyday senses returned to him. But the thought unfolding in his head like a mighty swollen bud was near to revealing its secret. He felt it arriving, and resumed his seat beside the fire so that no physical action of his might disturb his intellectual receptivity.

He opened the book at the story of the Garden of Eden. He did not believe the legend, for the swarming human race could not possibly have sprung from a single pair of highly developed beings without predecessors; and yet his attitude towards it was the reverse of sceptical. He did not attempt to account to himself for the contradiction, but was curious . . .

Almost willing to be credulous—quite convinced that there, standing before him in print, was a shorn statement which represented more than myth or allegory. Something once upon a time had taken place in connection with the eating of a supernatural fruit. Now he had done the same by the alleged traditional descendant of the very tree from which that fruit had been plucked It was absurd—yet his chaotic, indescribable sensation kept telling him that it was not so absurd

“And the serpent said unto the woman: ‘Ye shall not die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil!’ And so they ate.

“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him: ‘Where art thou?’ And he said: ‘I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ And He said: ‘Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?’ And the man said: ‘The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat!’”

“But that shame,” said Anthony to himself, remembering his earlier feelings, “was not physical shame, but shame of the soul—not guilty shame, but a high delicacy, a shrinking of the spiritual from the low and bestial familiarity of all who were not ‘as gods’ like themselves. And just as a pure young girl hates to be unclothed even in the privacy of her own chamber, so those two were suddenly terrified of their unprotected nakedness even in an unpeopled world. But it was their faces, not their bodies, that they covered; and for ‘aprons’ we ought doubtless to read ‘veils’.”

After a moment he added, still mentally:

“Theirs was not the shame of sex, for sex played no part in it throughout. That is where the interpretation of the ignorant

has always gone wrong. The eating of the apple has been taken as an eternal symbol of the first marriage, but the people who say so have not themselves eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. It is an eternal symbol of the first resurrection from the dead—of the first rising of man and woman from a world of unconscious animals, of which hitherto they were but the chief, by reason of their greater dexterity and material intelligence.” . .

And pausing, once again he added:

“Sex shame, so peculiar to mankind, can be no more than the derivative, or sympathetic bass, of this other nobler shame which concerns the soul alone; and without the one, we should not have gained the other. Considering human beings as animals, the shame of sex is laughable, fantastic, even a hindrance to eugenic selection; but regarding them as immortal souls, it is a necessary corollary and consequence of that higher shame, inasmuch as to be an animal at all is shameful, while sex is the extreme manifestation of animalhood.”

All at once a voice seemed to sound in his ear, but it was toneless, and he knew it to be an hallucination.

“Haidee is not a woman; she is a spirit!”

And when the statement quietly proceeded to complete itself logically in his mind without the break or shock which would denote a strange intruder, he understood that it belonged to him, and yet that it was no other than the thought which had been striving to get through to the surface since before Grace's departure. The phenomenon was growing queerer. His intuitions, breaking away one by one from their moorings in the depths, were beginning in the violence of their ascent to overshoot the walls of his conscious brain and to rebound towards him from outside as sense perceptions.

Haidee was a spirit. Anthony went on to meditate that not poetically, but literally. Not only did he see now that she had always been a spirit, but all the apparent incongruities of her puzzling human personality were suddenly resolved for him by this quiet discharge of long-accumulating vision. Her body was far more beautiful than those of other women who cared far more for the possession of beautiful bodies, just because she, as a spirit, could not dwell in clay without ennobling and refining it. She was disliked and maligned because she was an alien

on earth, and mortals loved only mortals. She was gay, capricious, light-hearted and witty because the affairs of earth seemed to her of small gravity. Her wonderful homeland, for which she reserved the ardours of her soul, was not here. She would not breathe a word of it, or shed one tear for it, for the admiration of pigmies . . . Then he had not climbed to heaven himself, but he was seeing heaven through the miraculous nature of that girl! And that was his apotheosis . . . Then she had known that all this would happen when she invited him by letter to eat the other fruit! She had chosen him, of all men, for her great compassion. She loved him

But not one pulse of vanity or desire stirred the playwright as he arrived at the grandest of all periods. Lovely as her face and shape might be beyond compare, he yearned not to fondle or dally with her, he knew no irresistible impulse to assure her quickly of his passionate admiration lest she should still be unaware of it. For she belonged to the wild spirit world, where no-one can be possessed by another; it would be degradation; where love consists in something totally different—in ever rising, perhaps, and ever helping to rise Yes, that spirit world, that so-distant yet possibly contiguous field of actually existing life, no doubt far solidier than the solid world of matter, which he had ever known to be its travesty and mockery! That spirit world, unrepresented in men and animals, but suggested by nature in the lonely hills, the blue rolling seas, the thunderstorm, the colours of the dawn, the eternal snows, the spring gale, the April shower, the dark green pools of the rocky shore, the pine forests “Haidee! Haidee! Haidee! . . .” What could she tell him of her thoughts and wisdom? What was to happen? Never could they marry—he would cut his throat rather. Never could he continue separate from her. Then must they die?—Or must *he* die? . . . Very likely. She would tell him

It was now half-past six. Three hours more! But why wait longer? He had experienced all that there could possibly be to experience alone, and he was ready for her at that minute But she had definitely said half-past nine, so perhaps she could not receive him by herself till then. Her friend might be going out late. He did not know how he would

pass the time. He dared not go out among these worldlings, with their corpse faces and glassy, peering eyes. The thought of food sickened him. He could not read Rising, he mixed himself a very stiff whisky and soda, and drank it off

The strong spirit presently began to tranquillise his nerves, and then his emotional and intellectual exhaustion could dictate their natural remedy. He dozed off in his chair.

When he awoke again with a stupid start, it was quite dark out of doors. The electric light had been switched on by the manservant, who was still in the room, in the act of making up the fire, which had been allowed nearly to go out.

“What time is it?” asked Anthony, not looking at the man, however, for he did not wish to renew his sensations until he should be obliged to on leaving the house to call on Haidee.

“A quarter past eight, sir. You’ve been asleep a long time. I didn’t wake you, because you mentioned nothing about dining out.”

“Quite right. Thank you!”

“Mr Ilyitch called an hour ago—that’s when I looked up. He doesn’t want to see you particular, but he says he may look back.”

“Very good—show him up when he comes.”

“Anything to eat, sir?”

“Nothing, and I shan’t want you any more.”

The servant, having finished attending to the fire, left the room.

Anthony was in a semi-somnambulistic condition. Only just aroused from sleep, he was up to the present thinking or feeling nothing, it was merely in his mind like a dull weight that those pre-slumber thoughts and feelings were waiting immediately beneath the surface to possess him again as soon as he should make the liberating movement. There was no reason why he should see Ilyitch, he was unfit to see him, his trouble would break out again at the sight of a new face, only an hour and a quarter remained to pass and he had best do it quietly; but he had instructed the man while hardly yet awake, and the Russian was his old personal friend, unconnected with all that business, the individual in the world with whom he always felt

most at ease; and at all events, if he came soon, Anthony would not be left alone to his intolerable brooding . . . and watching. He would let the instructions stand . . . That servant was a treasure. Another fellow, finding him asleep, would have shaken him up to tell him he was missing his dinner

A sort of burning excitement was in his bones. His brain continued torpid, but he was nervous, restless and feverishly set to ninety minutes ahead—though of that he refused to think again. His eyes were dark, and his cheeks hectic. He got up to pace the carpet, with hands behind his back, and his head erect. After a spell of this feverish pacing up and down he helped himself to another whisky

At about twenty minutes to nine the door opened quietly, and a thin man of middle height, in dark, tightly fitting clothes, stepped with a light footfall into the room, inquiringly and nearly diffidently, as though ready to accept his instant dismissal if the visit were inopportune, yet with a pronounced native dignity showing through the action. He had a long face, delicate features, a pale transparent skin, melancholy black eyes, black hair beginning to be threaded with white, and a small pointed beard; and he was forty-five, but looked older. What one noticed in him the first thing of all was his aristocratic courtesy of manner, which could not have had its origin merely in his having mixed for the greater part of his life in the highest Petersburg society, but was obviously fundamental in the man, the inevitable outcome of long generations of noble and gentle ancestors. He was the younger son of a Russian prince, formerly well known in Court and Army circles, and his mother had been a Polish lady, of birth little if at all inferior; from her he derived his features. Count Igor Pavlovitch Ilyitch was his title and name, but he dropped the first for the purposes of his exile in England, electing, through a motive of pride, to be known as plain "Mr." He would never more than hint at his circumstances, but Anthony was aware that he had brought very little away with him in his flight beyond jewels, and that he was reduced to giving pianoforte lessons in London to keep body and soul together.

He had once offered to recommend him for a post at a

musical academy. Ilyitch had smiled and shaken his head. "It would embarrass our friendship, and it does not become the son of my father to go hat in hand to these serfs". He said this in French, and a great deal of their conversation took place in the French language. His English accent was good, but he often had to pause for the right word.

While reaching out his hand, Anthony looked at him carefully . . . How far could this high-souled person, the truest gentleman of his acquaintance, reach up to *his holy communion?*—so did the thought frame itself in his mind. In what degree were his eyes worthy to be shown his inmost spirit and what was contained therein? . . . He turned away. No, he could not show them. This man, with all his refinements, and tact, and bred disdains for the crude and little in humanity, was still not supernatural, he was always a lump and a clod of the earth. He dared not show his heaven to those mournful, ignorant, down-dragging eyes, as of an unhappy dead!

"I came earlier," said Ilyitch, in a tone of whimsical gravity. "You then slept. I come again, and you are in trouble. I would not have you wakened then, and I will not have you *put out* now—so I shall go?"

They took opposite seats across the hearth.

"Will you have some whisky, Ilyitch?"

"In better times, my good friend!" It was his unvarying formula.

"I have only just got back from the country."

"And you have brought back trouble with you in your portmanteau. It is in your eyes. Do not deny it."

"All mental commotions are not necessarily troubles, Ilyitch."

"No? Then I do not know," said the other vaguely. "I think, nevertheless, that men are formed for quietness, and the soul does not love these horrid tempests, whether they come from south or north. Who now could endure passion for one little half-day, but for the serene . . . the *unchanging* picture of the beloved which serves for talisman through all the storms! I do not ask you, my friend Kerr. When you wish to speak of your affairs, you will speak of them. I say only, you

are in trouble. You are not well. You do not dine, I think. You go to sleep in your chair, and the whisky bottle is on your table. Are these your habits, then?"

"Let us not discuss it further . . . What have you been doing?"

"I have been teaching to play little girls whose husbands in ten years' time will buy them pianolas. I have been keeping alive, for the benefit of none, this miserable body, which in less than ten years' time, I think, will not longer need to be kept alive. Twenty, even fifty times each day have I been desiring a place in hell for those savages yonder"—he flourished his fingers indefinitely towards an imaginary Russia—"when places from the beginning have been reserved for them without my prayers. *Tout court*, I have been futile. It is my rôle, to which I am well accustomed."

"Will you play to me?"

Ilyitch rose at once.

"Always you are wise. When demons inhabit the head, to make thoughts is a sickening business; but music is a cool hand on a hot brow. Only if money is your trouble can you not be helped thus." And he paused interrogatively.

"It isn't money, Ilyitch."

"*Tant mieux!* Other griefs come from God, but this from the Devil."

He crossed to the upright grand piano, raised its top, adjusted the seat to his liking, then turned his head to ask:

"What do you wish?"

"Anything not modern."

"That again is well said. We are too clever today, but the brain cannot speak to the heart. I would flay some of these intellectuals, then they would know what feeling is."

He faced about, and lifted his hands in readiness to play. No music was before him, for his capacious memory was stored with a hundred works. The long, nervous fingers, strong as wire, after hovering above the keyboard for a few seconds, descended suddenly like the downward dart of a bird of prey to crash into the opening chord of the "Don Juan" Overture.

The sinister commencement of this composition—dashed off at the eleventh hour by Mozart, dragged by his friends from

a party for the express purpose and inspired in its creation by copious draughts of punch—is, for those with ears, among the most terrible creations in music, reaching even to the diabolic sublime. Ilyitch's interpretation of it was characterised by a delicate, penetrating taste, an exact perception of its super-human message, a noble restraint, that brought out all the peculiar beauty of the piece in quintessence, so that the partial lack of masculine vigour in his playing would have passed unnoticed by Anthony even at another time—as, indeed, he had often enough overpassed or forgiven it in works not this one, which his friend had never given him before—but now criticism was far distant from him. The mighty ascending and falling scales electrified his heart, he became pale, forgot to breathe, and before long his brow was again moist with perspiration. He had not remembered what music was like. It was no self-existent thing, but a gigantic magnifying-glass to enlarge a man's emotions a hundredfold. He did not know what he was feeling, but it seemed to him as if he were wrestling with an angel, and as if all the forces of his body and soul were engaged in the life-and-death struggle . . . In struggling up out of his chair, he fell over, face-forwards, on to the floor

“How now! You show your displeasure in a strange manner, I think!” exclaimed Ilyitch, who had jumped up at once from his seat on hearing the noise. He put a hand under Anthony's armpit, and assisted him to rise.

“You are not hurt?”

“No.”

“How came you so to fall?”

“I got up for something, and tripped.”

“Then some more whisky for you, my friend, that is what I advise. And do you sit down.”

“No, I'm all right, Ilyitch. Go on playing.”

The count, however, continued from his height to regard the playwright, who had now seated himself again.

“I do not know if I play more for you, or if I go home.”

“Stay a bit longer. I have an appointment at half-past nine.”

“With the physician, I hope!”

“No, you're under a misapprehension, Ilyitch, I tell you I

merely tripped Play something else—less”

“Less noisy—I understand But I do not know. It is for you to say, however—only, do you call out to me ‘Stop!’ if the desire to trip comes into your feet again. Well then, the little old gnome. He has something for each, sick or well” He meant Beethoven.

“Yes, play one of his adagios,” said Anthony, to whom the affectionate appellation was familiar. Indeed, the love of the Bonn composer was a principal bond of union between them.

Ilyitch resumed his seat at the piano, glanced round at his friend to satisfy himself that he was well enough to sit and listen, and then, facing the keys again, sat in silence for a few moments while meditating what to give. The “Andante Favori” in F occurred to him. Its quiet, noble theme was appropriate for disordered nerves, and it had haunted him for a long time that morning on getting out of bed. For those who do not know the piece by name, it is that exquisite slow movement which is not included in the Sonata collections of Beethoven, though originally intended for the “Waldstein”. It was found too long for that place. Its unsanctioned performance from memory by Ries to delighted friends brought about the historical breach between the angry *maestro* and his favourite pupil.

Under the peotic touch of the Russian’s fingers, the celestial first melody opened with all the quietude and purity of a still Sabbath morning. Tears started soon to Ilyitch’s eyes, even as he played on. More than a just individual portion of human distress had there been in his life, but if he now silently wept, it was not for himself—it was the universal man in him understanding through this music the immense gulf lying between the actual and the unattainable states. He possessed the old Muscovite goodness of heart in juxtaposition to the finer Polish aesthetic sensibility.

Anthony, reclining his head on the back of the chair, breathed a sigh of wonderful contentment, and closed his eyes But the glare of the electric light irritated them through their lids, and he got up suddenly and noiselessly to turn off the switch. The darting fire flames sufficiently illuminated the keyboard, while Ilyitch was not playing from the book.

“I thank you!” said the count with mechanical brevity.

He had never discontinued, and in the new flickering gloom his music seemed to acquire a still more quiet and sacred expressiveness. It was like the morning after the eternal loss of a loved one

Anthony trod as soundlessly back to his place, and again rested his head back and closed his eyes.

Before long, while he yet remained awake, his soul responsive to the least *nuance* of the painful-wonderful air which floated it on a sea of entrancement, out of the double darkness of the dusky room and his shut lids arose one of those optical visions which sometimes affect the retina of a man lying awake in bed with active but locked eyes on a dark winter morning. The at first uncapturable full-length person of a draped woman, dimensionally as distant from him as the far wall of the room, wavered nebulously and provokingly before his mental sight. At last, by keeping still, he succeeded in fixing the image, and the visionary woman steadied and became brighter. Then he recognised her as Haidee, clothed in a sort of antique body-veil of silver gauze, through which the lovely moulding of her limbs, breasts, and waist showed; and her face was for colour in harmony with her attire. Her hair was dark, her lips red, but everything else in the apparition was silverpale.

It grew ever brighter and more luminous, until her flesh was like an angel's. She was standing opposite to him, looking at him, and one arm was hanging loose by her side, while the other was curved upwards as its hand lightly touched her breast, with a bent wrist. Startlingly sad were her eyes, so that he could never have conceived her as possessing that nature. Their expression seemed to endow her with the wisdom of the ages, knowing all the griefs, sorrows and sufferings of mortality; and for this reason he knew that her sadness was everlasting and beyond assistance. But it was always Haidee.

The vividness of the wraith now so increased that she floated before him like a supernatural being compounded of glittering silver snow. Had he been Catholic, he would have fallen on his knees before her in the certain conviction that she was the Holy Virgin in visitation Then a dull, luminous crimson glow began to light up the background behind her in scattered and fantastic patches They were an optical

effect of the breaking up of a reddening sky by intervening trees. It appeared to him just as if he were regarding a fearful sunset, but the illuminated silver form of the girl threw no shadow towards him. The music went on, and his heart felt like breaking

The sunset through the forest at Haidee's back was a conflagration. It was no mere sunset, but the threat of a cataclysm—something had happened; some old order was to be swept away. A frightful night was to come He understood that he was seeing Eve, immediately before the expulsion

Their eyes met. He read that Paradise was not all, and not the best

Anthony was overcome suddenly by a convulsion of low, dry sobbing, and the vision disappeared. He crouched down in his chair, burying his face in his two hands.

Together, then, they must thenceforward walk, for she was bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh. They two were one; all the rest of existence the other. At once must he go to her, to tell her of his great wonder To tell her what she already knew, for what had dictated her letter of yesterday but this very thing! Spirits seemed to rush through him with their wings. Naked! Naked! Naked!—yes, now they two were naked, before God and men, because they two alone held in their crystal-clear eyes the wondrous deeps of a heaven nobler than Paradise!

He glanced up through his fingers, to perceive the shadows cast by the fire-light dancing grotesquely upon the walls, and Ilyitch standing over him. The latter laid a hand as light and sympathetic as a woman's on his shoulder, but Anthony disregarded it, and him, and gathered not one word of the consolatory speech that followed.

“It is well done—it is well done, my friend! I too have not disdained to shed a tear or so, for in good truth that music is from the Deity himself. And do you think that same God that it is in your power to weep—today, it seems, men can but make others do this. I rejoice in your good fortune, my friend Kerr Now I go. You will be better hereafter, and you may put away your whisky bottle. Not that which enters the body relieves, but that which comes out of it. The women know this—

the women who are like cats, inasmuch as always they know more than they will tell I still do not inquire your trouble, my good friend, but one thing more I will say, and then I go. Do not expect happiness here without payment. Before or after you must pay, and that in grief. Pay then your debts like a man, but add not grief to grief, for that is silly. We do not need to turn about the knife in the wound, which perhaps is deep enough. Silliest of all, however, is that one who desires happiness for no payment, for very clear it is he has blundered at the beginning. He has come to the wrong place, and one spot after another will give way beneath his foot-treads And so good-night, my friend Anthony Kerr!”

“*Adieu*, then!” he repeated from the door, directing a parting anxious glance at the playwright’s shadowy shape, where he stooped forward in his chair, with his face buried. No response was returned, and, shaking his head in the manner of a doctor who takes leave of an unsatisfactory case, Ilyitch proceeded gently to let himself out of the room.

A minute passed, then Anthony jumped up to walk with an unsure step to the telephone outside. He produced Haidee’s letter from his pocket for her number, and while the operator was obtaining it, glanced at his watch. It was already nearly ten o’clock. He had overshot the mark, and she would not be knowing how to account for his extraordinary delay! The receiver was lifted at the other end.

“Who’s there?” he demanded sharply, and was surprised by the sick eagerness of his own voice, over which he had no control. “I wish to speak to Miss Croyland at once. I don’t want a message given—I must speak to her in person. Is she there?”

A wonderful voice answered:

“I am speaking, Anthony.”

“Oh, Haidee! . . . Haidee! Forgive—forgive me; I have a difficulty in speaking. Have you been waiting? Where are you?”

The girl’s voice came back very quietly and distinctly:

“Listen! I am at my friend’s flat in Alexandra Gardens, South Kensington—No 21, the third floor. Have you got that?”

“Yes—yes”

“Wait. I don’t wish you to come over tonight, Anthony. I will stay in for you in the morning. I can’t explain my reason over the ’phone. It’s late, besides, and I’m all alone—Olivia has gone off to a *musicale*. Still, I would strain a point, if that were all. You *do* understand?”

“I understand nothing at all—nothing at all! I am starting now.”

“Please! You will offend me very much.”

“Haidee, what’s the matter?”

There was a pause, then across the wire came:

“I’m *thirty hours ahead* of you, Anthony—that is what the matter is.”

“Oh, God!—what’s happened?”

“This is a public wire, unfortunately. Somebody may be listening in. Come over tomorrow morning—and in the meantime you’ll find that *the thing* will go on. At least”

“Haidee, I can’t go through the hell of this night alone. If it is only for five minutes”

“I know what you are feeling. I had to go through last night alone, however—and did, and am alive.”

“I am coming.”

There was another short silence.

“Very well, then,” said Haidee. “Come at once.”

“Yes, I will—I will. Oh, it’s inhuman to hear your voice speaking like this, and not dare to speak! I’ll take a taxi, and be with you in fifteen minutes. Good-bye, good-bye!”

“Good-bye, Anthony!”

He flew back to his rooms, hurried into his overcoat, crushed his hat on his head, and ran down the stairs of the chambers and into the street, looking wildly around for a cab. It was not until he was nearly at Victoria Station, however, that he was able to secure one, and then the drive took him ten minutes longer.

Half-past ten had struck before the taxi drew up with a sudden jerk at 21, Alexandra Gardens, a retired thoroughfare in the neighbourhood of Earl’s Court, where he had never been previously.



s Haidee had said, her experience was nearly thirty hours older than Anthony's, for she had adventured her apple at about noon on Wednesday, and he his at half-past four on Thursday afternoon. So that at the moment of time of his second telephone call his reactions to the peculiar juices both had swallowed were still simple, strong, and ascending, while hers had become descending, dispersed, and psychologically more complex. And although she could not know it, at no stage had those reactions of theirs been exactly identical. Constitutions and mentalities are unlike; circumstances differ; she was female, and he already fascinated her.

Thus, upon leaving High Cot in that condition of inturned perplexity, she had gone straight home and to her room, where she had locked the door and sat for a long time on her bed, without removing her things; and not once did she think of Jim, not once did Anthony's image cease to haunt her. She was not repentant, but more and more glad as the minutes went by that she had purloined and devoured his ridiculous fruit, about which they were all making such a commotion, for she felt somehow that the act had brought them together . . . no-one else had had the privilege—had dared to do it. Surely at last her *difference* would appear! She was on those special terms As for the fruit itself, it was not disagreeing with her in the slightest, and she had already left off expecting any novelty in the shape of aches or thrills. It was just a little fraud, which had gone down quietly and was being good. But then, as she was neither worrying about her digestion nor distressing herself over Jim, why was her room door locked, and why was she sitting on her bed? . . . This puzzled her for another considerable while.

She supposed that it was that absurd *fracas* in the Ly-

thams' greenhouse which had rather taken her breath away and left her stranded, although she was really not giving another thought to it Why hadn't Anthony been there? Would things have fallen out as they did, or would he, like the wise Jupiter that he was, have applied his never-failing oil to the troubled waters? He was a being in a different category from all those others. They were they were mean little wriggling *selves*, each intent on their own advantage, while he was a universal pacificator and benefactor—of such bigness of mind that the hours he wasted on people not deserving of it seemed given away as a sort of careless largesse, as if he had all eternity at his disposal to bestow. Only look how he had accepted his cousin with a shrug, when his work demanded a very much intelligent and sympathetic secretary—and Grace! Obviously an act of chivalry and his impossible sisters and Haidee herself. How she had annoyed him during the last few days, like a mischievous flea, and with what patient good humour and big nature he had surrendered to her under protest! Why couldn't he love her? No doubt because he was too large to love any girl or woman. Men in love were the most selfish beasts imaginable, and she simply could not visualise Anthony demanding untimely kisses, and silly uncandid endearments, and sacrifices of all kinds, which was what every engaged girl had to go through before she could reach her goal of comfortable settlement. Girls loved too, of course, but then they had their destiny to fulfil, whereas men at once took up the proprietary role and insisted on possessing body and soul together. She had had a taste of it with Jim! Anthony was too not universal—what was the word she wanted?—too he was too *deep-natured*, too cosmic, too much a *whole* to find his satisfaction in fondling and bullying an individual person.

She was sure that he was only marrying Grace from charity. How could it be otherwise? What could he possibly want from her that she could give him? A pretty face and a soft body?—with those extraordinary eyes of his! Haidee uttered a sharp, disdainful laugh. His eyes were profound from exploring a different sort of beauty. The vulgar prettiness of petticoats was not for such as he. Did he expect sympathy of her, then?—he with his strange and wonderful ideals and Grace, who rarely if

ever opened a book and was the complete housekeeper! Or did he need such a housekeeper? Possibly that Or perhaps, with his love for children, he might be longing for some of his own.

Well, others could give him children besides Grace, and she did not see why she should be so honoured. Where love was on both sides, there the children were healthiest and cleverest and most beautiful, that was well known; it was the principal argument against scientific eugenics—she had read it in the newspaper. Now supposing that, by a heavenly chance, he had fallen in love with *her*—with Haidee herself—in the first place in the first place he would secure at a blow all those things—the pretty face, the soft body, the sympathetic understanding, the capable wife, the darling children—she could have promised him all that at once; and next . . . and next and next her train of ideas seemed to slip from her suddenly and she discovered herself asking, what were his eyes like? Yes, they were black, and full, and beautifully-shaped, especially that small part of the lids which showed when the eyes were open—such perfect curves were sometimes to be seen in women’s eyes, but hardly ever—never—in men’s, his were the single exception, and she supposed it was those feminine orbits which softened and spiritualised his face however, she knew all that, what she wanted to get a clear understanding of was how the eyes themselves came to go down and down and down, as it were to the depths of a bottomless well, to use his own figure, which was exactly descriptive. Did some lucky limpidity of the eyes create the suggestion of an infinitely deep soul, or was it the rays of the sun-soul forcing their way through dark strata? It must be *that*, because he was so absolutely apart from others. Other people were clear-cut, definite individuals, finished, completed, and living their own lives, but Anthony was rooted . . . his sources descended to the supernatural heart of things, he was not a free-moving animal like the common crowd, but a divine plant, whose living sap rose as far as his eyes, and that was what she saw in them.

And perhaps unknown to herself the very same sap was in her eyes, it must be so, or why should she cry “Brother!” to it

in his? But then it followed that she too was rooted in that deep, deep nature—they were from an identical womb. So if they had ever sought each other's eyes curiously, it meant that they had known and not known; their strange reunion in the open world had prevented the complete recognition, but the intuitive awareness of kinship was always there . . . Brother and sister, from out of the unseen! How puzzling! How very queer!

And that would explain why she had never flattered her voluptuous fancies by the thought of a marriage to him. That such a thought was ruled out for her by the circumstances signified nothing—young girls dream of husbands as a pastime, and their dreams take no account of possibility. It was really quite strange that her at one time painful interest in Anthony, her absolute study of him, and the mild recrudescence of that feeling within the last week, should never have accommodated itself to the obvious and conventional feminine form. It had needed Grace's interposition to remind her of the fact that he was a marriageable man.

Was that why she hated Grace? Yes, it must be, for it certainly wasn't ordinary jealousy that she felt—no, it was justifiable anger at the impertinent intrusion of a mere physical girl between the two souls that were trying to get to know each other. Common rivalry was oh so far from her head! For what were marriages? A girl during the flowering time of her life met a limited number of men. She more or less admired, or was more or less flattered by one of them, accepted his hand, fancied herself to be in love, and behaved accordingly. It was sex instinct first, and the individual second. But *she*—what was *she* now feeling? Why, the whole world was changed for her! All the world was a sort of golden mist for her, against the atmospheric glory of which stood out the not the person of a man, but the visible presentment of a spirit come into a body by God knew what accident.

He seemed with her now. As an impalpable presence a shadowy companion, whom by the sheer force of her yearning she had conjured up out of the astral part of his being but if this were all, if he was never to be more distinct than this in her life, she might well weep!

She believed that she would not see him again. If Grace still meant to keep him, he would strictly shun her—Haidee—as a man of honour persuaded that he had already gone too far. But if Grace, like the narrow-minded country girl that she was, stood on her stupid dignity and dismissed him for his delinquencies, then he would go right away, and never come back. It was no use deluding herself; there was no third alternative
. . . oh, if she could buy a magic potion, to bring him to her! He would now never know her. He would never guess the tortures she was suffering on his account. Perhaps he would never give her another thought

She slid off the bed, and moved slowly to the window, where she stood gazing bitterly over the valley, all gilded browns and greys in the Easter sunshine, for the trees had hardly started yet to put out leaves. Only a reddish thickening of the twigs where the buds were ripe to burst gave a cloudlike effect to the smaller bushes. The season was backward.

A minute later the lunch gong sounded downstairs, and Haidee broke into a passion of tears.

The maid came up to knock at the door, and announce through it that lunch was on the table and the mistress waiting. Haidee controlled her voice sufficiently to reply that she was just coming, then had instant recourse to her handkerchief and powder puff to remove the tell-tale trace of her weeping. She never thought whether she could eat or not, but was so overcome by weakness that she felt she must obey the common routine. Her father was at Tunbridge Wells on business. Silvester, immediately upon his return home with his mother, had set off again for a half-day's ramble; two half-crowns, for bread, cheese, and beer, a packet of evil-smelling Russian cigarettes, and a small volume treating of the ancient Minoans, in his various pockets. Mrs Croyland and her daughter, accordingly, were to take their meal alone.

Haidee painfully swallowed three spoonfuls of soup, and could eat no more. She set down her spoon, to lean back with wide eyes and a hopeless expression. She fancied that her situation required that she must go away somewhere, and without delay. If Anthony was to remain in the neighbourhood it was im-

possible for her to continue there, but if he were going back her utter desolation would be still more unendurable. Her mother's glances were suspicious and accusatory. She could not meet them. She could not bear that awful family loneliness and unsympathy. Sharp spasms of grief and distress kept assailing her.

"Aren't you well, that you can't eat, Haidee?" inquired Mrs Croyland at last, teased into speech by her girl's chastened manner and disinclination to food.

An excuse came to Haidee's lips, but then she remembered in time that if she were to leave home so suddenly, some explanation must be vouchsafed. Cowardice she always scorned, so she told the truth.

"I've quarrelled with Jim, mother. It may be nothing, but I think I must get out of this and go away for a few days. . . I thought Olivia would have me."

"Do you mean today?"

"Yes."

"She may be off herself somewhere for Easter."

"She isn't. I had a letter from her."

"Inviting you?"

"No—how could she!"

"Well, you had better telephone her first and find out if it's convenient. And of course you will wait until your father gets back?"

Haidee said nothing.

After a pause, her mother continued:

"What is the quarrel with Jim over?"

"A silly misunderstanding on his part. He's entirely to blame."

"But how is it left?—you oughtn't to leave me quite in the dark, Haidee."

"Oh, why should you burden *your* intelligence! These rows just happen. I honestly don't know how it's left—ask Jim."

And Haidee got up abruptly from her unfinished meal.

"I think there's a train up from Sevenoaks about three. I saw George working at the Lythams'—would you send Annie round to ask him if he'll run me over in the two-seater, start-

ing at two-thirty sharp?" Her father was using the big car that day.

Mrs Croyland thereby understood that both her suggestions, that Haidee should first communicate with her friend and that she should await the return of the master of the household, were negated, and sighed inwardly at the headstrong will of this girl who resembled her paternal parent and all that family in so many ways. She had often lamented the ironical destiny which had the more active and violent of her two children a girl, and the more sedate and placid a boy; but these things, of course, were in higher hands. She was convinced that her husband would make a scene when he came home and found Haidee missing, though to be sure he might considerably calm down as soon as he learnt the cause, he had always disliked that match so intensely. Furthermore, she knew very little about Olivia Carteret, except that she made gowns, which nowadays, she supposed, must be a quite respectable occupation, even for ladies, but all the same sounded rather frivolous and could certainly not be regarded as a high moral profession like teaching. She did not wish her daughter to have her head stuffed with silly fancies about the all-importance of personal adornment. Her tastes in that direction were already more than strong enough, and she was not so positive that Olivia had had no hand in their furtherance.

Mechanically, with the dreamlike actions of one moving in a vivid, paralysing sorrow, Haidee packed some changes of underclothing, a spare frock, and her toilet necessities in a case, closed it to, then put on her hat, fur-trimmed coat and gloves, and picking up her handbag, which contained her purse with money in it, went downstairs to say good-bye to her mother, and wait for George outside the garage. Mrs Croyland asked her when she thought of returning, and she replied, "In a day or two." It was in fact a real flight. But the flight was from her own torments, and this she scarcely realised. A great, vague, phantasmal Anthony seemed to accompany her at her elbow, or just behind her shoulder, wherever she went, even while she had been packing her clothes. From that king of men she was travelling, because he did not belong to her, and never

would or could. Eve, at least, when she had eaten her apple and been expelled from Paradise in consequence, had been privileged to retain her Adam, but the malice of the angry Jehovah must have got craftier with experience—now they were confined in separate wildernesses

Oh, if she could be given power for ever to read from any distance what was passing in his mind! Surely sometimes—for one little infinitesimal moment in a whole week or month her image must come to the surface and be noticed, however carelessly! Then she would put out the whole energy of her living soul, and *force* him to recognise her for what she was She would scream to him: “Anthony, it is I! Hold me fast! Hold me fast! I am precious to you” No, she was mad, and he would never know her

George appeared, touched his hat to the young lady, who happened to be his especial favourite, and proceeded in workmanlike fashion to unlock the garage and get out the little car. Haidee received her mother’s farewell kiss with an absent, distraught gaze across her shoulder, then started off with the red-bristled gardener in the glittering afternoon sunlight down the lane. As they passed Croom, she abruptly averted her head. A minute afterwards she suppressed a choking sob, but her bosom continued to heave and shudder. George, for whom the manipulation of a car was still an awesome experience, attempted no conversation.

At Sevenoaks she dismissed him on the main road outside the station, and then crossed the bridge to the up booking office.

The train she had relied on from memory was earlier than she had thought; it was already signalled. She asked for her ticket in a whisper which had to be repeated, obtained it at last, and was about to go on to the platform, when a strange incident occurred. She came face to face with Anthony, in the act of passing her by without either hat or overcoat. That in itself was sufficiently singular, but what was so unbelievable almost as completely to rob her of her presence of mind was the additional circumstance that, although his face appeared perfectly normal, even unusually calm and friendly, the steady glance he gave her in going past held not the faintest trace of recognition — they might be entire strangers!

“Anthony!” she cried. Afterwards, however, she reflected that she could not have done so, that it was her imagination. But whether or not any sound had left her, she quickly turned after him—and he was not there. He could not have crossed the half-dozen steps to the outer door in that tenth part of a single instant, but neither was there among the few working men and country women in the little booking hall anyone she could possibly have mistaken for him So it was a ghost Not frightened, but much shocked, she stared in bewilderment around her for a moment or two longer, then in a kind of stupor hurried on to the platform to board the now approaching London train.

Her journey up was a nightmare. There were two other persons in the compartment, both ladies, one young and one middle-aged, and that was all she knew about them. She kept fancying that Anthony was sitting next to her, kept turning her eyes to encounter nothing there, and all the while her heart sank, and sank, and sank, in the full consciousness of the sane part of her brain that she was being rapidly whirled away from him, and that in all probability they were never to meet again.

Then she thought of that phantom in the booking office at Sevenoaks, and she read it as a message that, excruciate herself as she pleased with such dwelling upon him, his eyes were *intended* to be sealed. It was her punishment—his as well Ah, how if in sober reality they were Eve and Adam incarnate! How if in all their existences they were doomed to eat the apple and be torn apart like Paolo and Francesca in Hell—they by hideous winds, but she and Anthony by their far more dreadful failure in time to recognise each other! Her cheeks at one minute were a glowing crimson, at the next as white as lilies. Her heart hammered inside her like a furious engine in a frail-built boat—it nearly shook her body to pieces, yet she disregarded it for that crueller passion in her soul. She wanted Anthony—oh, she wanted him! “Please God, give him to me!” But no, no, no, no, she was going from him for ever and ever

The middle-aged lady, observing her agitation and frequent alarming changes of colour, offered to let down the window for her, but Haidee refused in a nearly inaudible voice . .

. . She never knew how she got through the rest of the journey.

At Charing Cross station, amidst the dense holiday crowds, she saw his ghostly double again. Again he came straight towards her, almost brushing her as he passed, again he sought her eyes calmly and musingly as in an accidental encounter of no special significance, and again the expected flash of recognition failed to appear. This time she actually called out, for an encumbered traveller, who had happened to jostle her on the other side, mistook the ejaculation for one of annoyance, and mumbled a hurried apology. She turned sharply round on the phantom Anthony, but once more he had vanished.

It never occurred to her that this repeated phenomenon was an hallucination caused by the fruit she had eaten. So distracted was she by her agonised yearnings, which she knew no happiest fortune could possibly allay, that she had even forgotten that trivial episode of earlier in the day. Or if she recalled it, it was in fantastic allegory—she was his Eve, she had taken one apple, leaving another for him, so the figure persisted, perhaps because she was too mentally exhausted to seek a substitute. But that her sufferings could have their origin in acute physical disorganisation brought about by the drug she had consumed, she had then no conception. She preferred to imagine that his eidolon was a *warning*. Her thoughts were not to linger on him, she was wholly to dissociate herself from him; he was not for her. The joy was forbidden her.

How she ever reached Olivia's she could not have told. Afterwards she supposed that she must have taken a taxi from Charing Cross and quite unconsciously settled with the man at the house door. She stumbled up the long stairs, and was met by her thunderstruck friend in person. It was a quarter past four.

By the luckiest of chances Haidee had hit for her visit upon a day when the Hanover Square shop was to close for the holidays. There was still another town business day before Good Friday, but Olivia Carteret's best clients were mostly abroad and she fancied that an attitude of haughty independence in such a matter would add, with the "casuals", to her reputation for exclusiveness. So she herself had departed early, to commence in good time her six days' vacation of restful idle-

ness, which she felt she needed. Her professional journeys to France were so frequent and so tiring that now she preferred to stay at home. She was a tall, fair, rather pretty girl of nine-and-twenty, very capable and self-assured in her ways, with a wonderful flair for dress. She had the best heart in the world, and Haidee had known that she would never turn her down as long as she had a spare bed—their friendship was too old.

She took in the visitor's flushed face and strangeness of manner at a glance.

“My child, you're in a fever! Whatever is the matter?”

Haidee permitted herself to be led to the easy chair by the fire and seated there. The room was femininely elegant, hung in soft pastel shades, and decorated with the minimum of vases, bowls and water-colours for effect. An old-ivory unmade length of one of the new crêpes had been flung with careless grace over one end of the sofa; presumably, Olivia wished to make some experiments in draping.

She had already noticed the younger girl's suitcase.

“You've come to stay, of course?”

Can I tell her—What can I tell her? passed through Haidee's mind stupidly. And she said:

“Livy, I've lost my boy, and I'm feeling frightfully weak and low. I want you to put me up, like a good Samaritan, and I want to spend the first part of my time in bed—all alone. I shan't be any trouble to you. I don't want any sort of meals, and if you will go out all day and leave me, I shall be only too eternally grateful to you.”

“Of course I can put you up,” replied Olivia, who was gifted with much tact. “The room you had before is empty, and I always make a point of keeping the bed well aired—for stray visitors like you. Would you like to go up to it at once? It won't take a jiffy to heat a bottle.”

Haidee looked into the glowing fire with such wide, intent eyes that it seemed as if she wanted to scorch out the vision in them. “Will he come up to town now?” she thought “He might now. Then supposing we were to meet by accident in the street!” She answered her friend after a quarter of a minute—her words just penetrated her understanding:

“Thank you, yes! You are a jewel, Livy.”

“Tea is just coming in, though. You’d better stay and have a good strong cup, with some of my special liqueur cognac in it. It will pick you up tremendously, you poor baby! I promise not to worry you about Jim—you mean Jim?”

“Do I mean Jim? I suppose I must stick to it that I do,” said Haidee’s inward voice. And again she responded “Yes” and “Thank you”.

“Your mother knows you have come to me?”

“Yes, she knows.”

“Then after tea I’ll drop her a card to say you’ve arrived safely—I wish I could add, soundly. You look a perfect wreck, but I won’t torment you at present by suggesting a doctor. I’ll dose you myself, and we’ll see what you look like in the morning.”

Her long, slender legs, encased in perfectly-fitting lemon-tinted silk stockings, moved with professional grace from under their sheath of short black satin skirt to carry her to the door, through which after peering out, apparently to see if the maid were coming, she next moment wholly disappeared to make her arrangements for Haidee’s reception and well-being. The girl, left to her own company, went on for a while gazing into the fire; but all at once for no reason at all and just as if a magnet had drawn her eyes, she turned her head swiftly round to glance at an occasional table of polished walnut standing on the other side of the room. Anthony’s plant, in its pot, was on it!

“What in the world is *that* doing here?” she asked herself, less mystified, however, than in a dream. She could not quite realise that she was seeing it And then she remarked that it bore two fruits, when it ought only to have borne one and a second later, while she was actually looking at those two little purple fruits, one passed out of existence, and there *was* only one on the tree. After which, the tree itself disappeared So, it was another spook!

“I had to see that,” she thought, while her eyes, distended and inattentive, wandered about the apartment. “It called me, and I couldn’t help it. It was just like saying something to me—oh, what could it be? First two fruits, then one, and then none at all, nothing. Well, I ate the first, Anthony will eat

the other . . .” She stopped, for her thoughts had suddenly dived too deep for her to distinguish. When they emerged again she clapped her hand to her forehead.

“Oh, what a fool! He very likely won’t dare to eat it unless I reassure him. I must write to him now, at once”

But she had no idea why she believed it important that he should follow her example, and could not have said what she expected to come of it. A quiet flame of unreasoning faith seemed to burn within her that the act was to unite them. Until then he would not come to her. It was out of the question for her to ask herself why, even assuming that that strange juice should possess the quality of inflaming passions, it should necessarily move him to *her*, a girl he had never cared for; for such an assumption was entirely remote from her. It was no human passion that she experienced, but a delicate and violent spiritual affinity, with infinite roots—roots stretching down to *primaeval* times, to Adam and Eve, and down and down to beginningless days before the creation of the worlds. She did not want his kisses, or to feel his arms round her. She wished . . . she wished that their two beings should become mutually absorbed in the meeting of the twin streams from heaven issuing out of their eyes

Now she was all alertness. When Olivia came back, she asked her with a new eagerness in her voice for writing materials—she had a letter to write instantly. Her friend, who was no novice in the world, thereupon entertained her first twinge of suspicion. It began to wear the aspect of a triangle. But still she put no questions, proceeding quietly to comply with the request, but also taking the artful precaution to give her notepaper without the address, with the telephone number only, since she found it convenient to be provided with all sorts for her own use. She did not wish Haidee to make her flat a rendezvous; on the other hand, the telephone was in the living-room, so she could listen to any conversation which might result from the letter. While the maid was setting the tea table, Haidee wrote the lines which Anthony read on the following morning at Croom. Then she insisted on going out herself to post it before tea.

“No, I’ll run out with it after tea. It won’t get there any sooner by posting it now.”

Haidee hastily put on her things, and made for the door.

"You're not fit, darling," protested the other.

"Livy, I don't dare to trust anybody but myself with it—my whole life depends on its reaching its destination in time."

"Oh, I see. Is it to Jim, then?"

But Haidee did not answer that. She went out with the letter. And since she had not trusted her to refrain from looking at the name and address, and could not say it was to Jim, Olivia was now quite convinced in her mind that she had written to another man, who was no doubt responsible for the rupture. She had sufficient pity for Haidee's physical plight to leave her in peace that evening and doctor her up as best she could, but next day, if she were better, she meant to depute for her father and mother, and have it thoroughly out with her.

"Now where are your night things? Get them out, and I'll be airing them while you're getting undressed."

But she saw that Haidee was incapable of undressing herself. Her teeth had started to chatter, her fingers were all thumbs and her mind far away. So the older girl came to the rescue, and one by one her deft hands removed the pretty garments, as though her guest were a little child again, being put to bed by a nurse. At last Haidee lay back on her snowy pillow, which had been held before the fire, with an exquisite sigh of relief at its sudden warmth and softness. She closed her eyes.

Olivia, gazing down at her with her dark tresses all unbound, mused that she had rarely seen a more perfect specimen of beautiful womanhood. Her features in repose were tranquil and classically delicate, yet firm, with the merest suggestion of voluptuousness in the moulding of the chin. The neck was like a young queen's, white, fresh, tender and graceful, the faint blue veins in it marking the fineness of her constitution. Her colour, which had ebbed, was that of a blush rose. The vision of a lovely young woman affected Olivia in the manner of a poem. She cared nothing for men, even disliked them, and preferred to have as little to do with them as possible, but women could make her feel rhapsodic. Far from being a perversion of sex instinct in her, this attitude simply meant that she lacked amativeness and was temperamentally unable to understand the delights of loving and being loved, whereas the beauty of form,

flesh and colour made the strongest appeal to her, but these happened to be confined to the feminine half of the race. And that was why, while she was very, very fond of Haidee, and always would be, she had absolutely no patience with her for wasting her time juggling with men in the way she seemed to be doing. It showed both bad taste and bad sense, for surely the idea was long since exploded that a pretty girl necessarily lives for the gratification of the other sex. Women dressed for other women, as anyone in the dress trade knew, so their beauty was for other women too, and Haidee ought to be content with that critical appreciation. Anything else there was to it could only be mere nastiness—though of course, it was *done*. However, she would take very good care to permit no clandestine visits to *her* flat. Why, it was less than a week since the child announced her engagement!

She left the room quietly, feeling a kind of involuntary respect for a girl younger than herself and not half so well versed in the world's ways, who evidently possessed the power of so attracting to her side those awkward, selfish, brutal creatures called men, who always seemed to shun herself like a being of a different order. In the deserted sitting-room she stood in front of the mirror over the fireplace, viewing the image of her features, for quite five minutes. And neither Haidee nor she would ever know what had been wrought in her hitherto manless life by the former's visit.

Haidee slept fitfully for an hour or two, in an on-and-off fashion. In her intervals of half-consciousness she made no attempt to recover the fantastic dream web which her slumbers had spun for her without ceasing. The sense of physical well-being induced by the narcotic prevented her from feeling unhappy, and she did not remember Anthony as a person, only she was aware of some great business which she must take up again as soon as the morning should come. Olivia came in twice to look at her.

But when it was now quite dark out of doors, and the fire had sunk to a dull red glow, her sleep became deeper, and presently another dream attacked her—she never understood at what hour, but at least before midnight—which for coherence and violence of realism was as different from the light fantasies

that had hitherto ruled her brain as direct light is different from reflected.

She thought that she was in a mighty forest of all unknown trees, grotesque and beautiful. The bits of sky visible through the branches were of a very strange colour. She was looking for Anthony, who was lost somewhere, and she kept rushing from tree to tree to peep round the other side, in a kind of awful game of hide-and-seek, for her heart was nearly broken. She incessantly called out his name, and a bird on a tree-top always chattered back at her in mockery. It was all so real that nothing had ever seemed realer to her. The search went on for hours, till her feet were cut and bruised, and her clothing was all in tatters, and on her forehead was a deep bleeding wound from a thorn which had caught her. The blood trickled down her cheek and into her eye, but still she rushed blindly hither and thither, crying out to Anthony, and still the magpie mocked her.

Then she stopped exhausted, to press her face against the rough bole of a tree and stand there in hopelessness, dry-eyed and anguished, her strength departed and every resource vanished, so that she knew now that she could never find him. And quietly a voice just behind her said:

“Haidee!”

She turned quickly, and it was Anthony, but oh, how changed! His face and body were indistinct, his whole existence was in his eyes, so black and bright and wonderful they were, speaking to her in music. She thrust forward into them, as a woman thrusts her bosom forward into the embrace of her lover. But this spiritual kissing of their eyes was not impure and personal, it was an act of eternal beauty and wisdom. Instead of talking of loves and passions, they conversed in that soundless concerted music of heavens and worlds, and Anthony was always the wiser, she always the wife, which made her inexpressibly glad. And with every new gain of insight her soul grew sublimer and joyfuller, but still he continued the larger.

Then it came to pass that nothing else existed, or could exist, save they two alone. And time after time it seemed as though their double spirits were just upon the very point of merging, which she knew would be the final bliss towards which

all things moved. Yet that infinite contact held off, and off, and never came

She awoke, but dared not open her eyes, for she wished to continue—to be there, in that forest, again, alone with Anthony. So she must sleep again, she must dream again, and she must not open her eyes, she must not think, even of what she had seen. With this idea paramount in her head, while a thousand exultations sang in every nerve of her body, she compelled herself to a slow, soft rhythm of breathing, and soon was really slumbering once more But this time she did not awake until the morning.

At half-past seven, before Olivia's first appearance, Hai-dee got out of bed to draw the window curtains back. The dismal little railed-in enclosure of sooty shrubs and mangy grass, which gave the Gardens their title, looked too horribly squalid in the pale depressing sunshine, and yet on previous visits she had found that identical outlook quaint and charming and picturesque. She quickly came away, to stand thinking in the middle of the room, in her night attire.

All the extraordinary details of her yesterday's mania remained with her, including the culminating dream, and she was forced to realise in the coldest of cold blood how mad she had been. Well, now that she was in her right senses again, was she any the better off for it? She wished she could feel the satisfaction of such a conviction. She knew she was worse off. The subsiding of that weird condition had not merely brought her back to the original dreary level, she seemed to have dropped something in the process—and she proceeded to try to think what it was she had dropped Anthony, for example, no longer appeared to her such a wonderful man. He was just a plain author, with a very clever pen and a certain superior refinement of mind. Then all those supernatural virtues she had credited him with were nothing but the golden haze she had seen him through yesterday afternoon? No, no, that experience was true for what it was. The change was in her. He must be like that, but she had lost the faculty of reaching up to it—it might be only temporarily, but her nature seemed completely to have shed its idealism. It was as if they had cut a tendon of her soul and she could not mount any more, but

only flutter along the ground. It had been a frenzy while it lasted, but a divine one. Even her old mystical interest in him was gone too—he was just . . . just Anthony Kerr, the playwright, the brother of Marian and Josephine Kerr, the friend of the family, the rather nice-looking man, with agreeable manners; and all his background was a blur—she could see where it was, but she could not see *it*. Her life had lost its inspiration, and the recovery of her sanity did not seem to her to be a very happy compensation for that.

She quite understood that it was the fruit she had eaten. He should get her letter in about an hour's time, and then, if he obeyed her urgent recommendations, he would follow suit, and they would see. If he underwent a similar storm to hers . . . of course it would have to be in connection with a person, with a woman. Whom would he fall to? Grace, very likely. That was a contingency she hadn't realised when she had scribbled off the letter, but now it didn't seem to matter. Anyway, she envied him the exultations which awaited him if he took her advice. In sanity or insanity, torture or no torture, *she* would very willingly go through it all again! It had been *life*. There was not the faintest hope of her attaining such heights a second time . . . she wondered if he would telephone her.

Olivia entered, the routine of the day started, and Haidee had to play her dull, false part in it. She suffered herself to be treated as an invalid, took what food was offered her, agreed that it would be wiser for her not to go out at all that day, which indeed was what she had promised Anthony, and under the plea of sick nerves expressed the desire to be left very much to her own chamber and her own company. She reclined in bed all morning with an unopened novel.

In coming in later to consult her about lunch, Olivia thought the occasion a good one to address her on the subject of her mysterious correspondent. So she sat down on the foot of the bed.

“You are really feeling better, aren't you, pet?”

Haidee assented.

“Then wouldn't you like to tell me what it's all about?”

The younger girl, sitting propped up on her pillow, considered, while contemplating her friend from the corner of her eye.

"I suppose you want to know who that letter was to. I don't mind saying, as long as you won't pass it on. It was to Anthony Kerr."

"Do you mean the play writer?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know you knew him."

"I've known him since I was a small child. His sisters' house is quite close to ours."

"And . . .," prompted Olivia, observing that she had stopped short in the confidence.

"And that's my trouble with Jim."

There was a pause.

"Haidee, which do you love?"

"I'm not so very sure that I love either. But I'll tell you how it stands, and put your mind at rest once and for all. I was half-mad yesterday—as you know—and I thought I loved Anthony. Hence the letter. He's to telephone me some time today, and I may have to see him . . . I suppose it would have to be here. You don't mind?"

"I'm afraid I should like to hear more about it first. I don't wish to be unpleasant, darling, but I feel I have a certain responsibility to your people. I wrote your mother. Honestly, I can't conceive how you can love a man one day and have your doubts the next. How long has it been going on for?"

"Oh, I promise you there won't be any passion scene—on my side, at least. But if you won't allow him here, I must go round to his place. He may not telephone."

"What sort of man is he?—quite respectable?"

"My dear Livy! . . . I wish I were half as respectable."

"But have you definitely broken with the other?"

"Oh, yes, I believe so."

"But you are not certain about *this*?"

"I think I don't love either."

"Then you want me to clear out when he comes?"

"I'm sure I should never dream of dictating to a woman like you on a point of tact."

But when Olivia, after giving her half-consent to the proposition, had quitted the room again, the girl's meditations took a new course.

Her dead spiritual response to Anthony's higher nature

now appeared to her to resemble *colour-blindness*. Supposing a person who had hitherto always been enraptured and enthralled by the beautiful blues in Leonardo's pictures, for example, were suddenly able to recognise all the other colours in those pictures, but not the blues—supposing the place where those blues were suddenly became of no colour at all, but merely a sketchy black and white and that was how she seemed to be seeing Anthony. She knew it was her fault and misfortune that she couldn't see him properly, but the fact remained that she couldn't To idealise—to see, and grasp, and understand the ideal world—it was a sort of act of putting together, generalising; and her thoughts simply declined to stick together, except for common purposes, where they had concrete objects for a backbone

And during the course of the afternoon, when she was up and sitting with Olivia in the other room, she made a further discovery, which shed still new light on her present feelings towards him.

Olivia was explaining the germ of a new frock creation to her, and had seized hold of the ivory-tinted material on the sofa, which she was twisting in clever folds about her own skirt to picture her meaning. Whereupon Haidee ventured upon some suggestion or other which was in such perfectly appalling taste that the *modiste* could only stare at her aghast. She felt that she must have entertained an absolute misconception of the girl's sense for dress, and immediately cancelled in her mind that plan of introducing her into the business. No more than a few such atrocious ideas would suffice to send all her clients packing! Haidee became anxious at the silent language written on her face, as the drapery was hastily returned to the arm of the sofa.

“No good?”

“My dear child, we are discussing a reception gown for a lady, not a female clown's fancy dress.”

“Would you mind showing me exactly where I'm wrong?”

“My good woman, if you can't see it, I can't explain it to you. It isn't a case of laws and details—it's the *ensemble*. If you haven't an eye, you haven't one.”

But it was not so much that answer as her own earnest question which assured Haidee of the astounding truth of the matter, and even so she could not accommodate herself to it at once. Simultaneously with her idealism, her taste in beauty was gone! Yes, the suspicion had been lurking in her brain for hours, it had simply needed the occasion to come to light. So for the future she assumed she would have to consult other women about her clothes if she was not to look a fright—she, of all people, who was the oracle of her circle of friends!

Yet, degrading as it was, she felt she had no force to dispute the fact. It was in her inner consciousness. She gazed about the room, endeavouring to discover which colours harmonised with which, and what in the past had always been an affair of immediate intuition now had to be worked out by her puzzled wits as a problem, and an inconclusive one at that. She never knew if she was right. She found herself mentally criticising Olivia's water-colours as cold and uninteresting.

“Poor Anthony!” . . . Now she was thinking of *his* art, which was also his livelihood. It was too late to try to stop him at this hour of the day—but perhaps he wouldn't do it at all, she hoped for his sake he wouldn't. Anyway, this last blow in the face prohibited all thoughts in that quarter. He was not for her. Her soul, if she still possessed such a commodity, was apparently incapable of putting two and two together in simple colours, let alone aspiring to the contemplation of sublimities and universes! So all that elaborate symphony of beauty, evolved so laboriously and lovingly by a long, thin chain of dimly-apprehending men and women for the noble heritage of all mankind, was stolen from her by an insidious drug in a day and a night! The seat in her brain of the love and appreciation of beautiful things, of the body and of the spirit too, had suddenly become attacked and disintegrated. She would have the lesson to learn all over again for herself—or it might be that the faculty was gone. For she *knew*—some unmistakable deep feeling told her, that the failure was permanent, that it would not all come back to her as abruptly as it had left her. A temporary lapse was not felt in the same way as a reversion . . . she saw her life to come as one long masquerade, for how could she go out

in the world among refined and intelligent people without desperately hiding the creature she had turned into? She expected that she would not comprehend half the conversations that she heard . . . she had better marry Jim and have done with it. At least he had a human side, and travelling would do something towards relieving the embarrassment of the situation. . . .

When Anthony first telephoned, she was having tea with Olivia. They exchanged glances as the bell buzzed, and though both girls suspected who was at the other end, of course it was the mistress of the flat who had to take the call.

“It’s Mr Kerr.”

Haidee would not speak herself, and did not know what to do. She hadn’t expected this, so late in the day. She had no idea he was coming up to town today. She found herself on the spur of the moment quite unable to decide whether or not she ought to stop him from eating that fruit. There would certainly be two of them in the same boat, which was very awful and lonely at present. So she told her friend to reply “Very well”, and added a time for a further call, to hear the result of his action. To his parting inquiry concerning her state of health she answered no more than the truth.

“What is it he is to do, then?” demanded Olivia the moment she had hung up the receiver.

“I won’t tell you, and you have no right to ask!” It was a long-deferred reaction from the daylong strain, and Haidee started to her feet with flashing eyes.

Olivia said no more, for she felt that she was too angry. She believed that her guest was hiding a whole intrigue from her, and had the impression that she was being imposed upon.

Presently, when they were cooler, she announced her intention of going out that evening. She had meant to put off the engagement for Haidee’s sake, but no longer had any such consideration for her. She only hoped that she was not playing into her hands, for that man might put in an appearance at the flat while she was absent, but she would not permit herself to dwell on that unworthy possibility.

At nearly ten o’clock, when she had long since departed and her maid had retired to bed, Haidee, sitting alone, wonder-

ing why she had not yet been rung up again, was startled by the sudden whirr of the bell. The first tones of his voice told her what had happened, and it was like a ghost of the dead to her she tried to calm him by her own calm manner, she tried to put him off, she explained and excused herself—he seemed to hear nothing, he was mad—quite mad! She knew what it was, for she had been through it all. She told him so. And although he did not say so in so many words, she also knew the name of the woman on whose account he was suffering. It was herself. She felt no thrill, but it was pitiful to listen to the impassioned agony and tenderness of those tones, knowing that she had nothing to offer him in exchange. She did not dread that he would recognise her lowered nature, for to himself he would idealise her out of all likeness to the reality. It was the storm itself she feared to face. It was to be an interview with a man who had drunk a cup of heaven too strong for him, and of his divine ravings she was too conscious that she would not grasp the height of one single phrase

She heard a taxi drive up and stop outside the house, and a minute later a man's steps sounded mounting the stairs as though two or three at a time, which immediately put her out of doubt as to whether it were Anthony or somebody else. Accordingly, she opened the room door in readiness for him, and stood waiting a little farther back. As she had brought with her from home no very suitable clothes of her own, Olivia had lent her for the second part of the day a graceful black and gold *negligée*. She was now wearing it, and its tragic folds, with her unusual pallor, her low fringe, her sombre eyes, with violet shadows beneath them, combined to form a figure of forbidding dignity and beauty which would have arrested any other man, not expecting it, at the threshold before a further advance. Anthony strode in, unseeing everything except that it was she. He flung the door backwards behind him, and it shut with a slam. He was as pale as herself, while his breath came and went from the exertion of running up the three flights of stairs. He held out his arms.

“Haidee!”

She made no physical response, but at the first sight of him, of his eyes, her fear of encountering him vanished, and

she found herself troubled by a vague complex feeling of pity, deep interest, womanly curiosity, and envy as well. What he was at this moment, she had been. He moved in a world of unseen shapes and his words and actions were not his own, but he was no brute or drunkard; he was actually nobler than she, his state was superior and blessed. She paid especial heed to his eyes, which rested on hers in a sort of dark glory. She wished that she could shake off her paralysing coldness and insensibility, and re-enter those high delights, which she remembered as the sweet spring of the soul.

Anthony took another step forward to fasten his eyes on hers in a still closer examination. She gazed unflinchingly back in the same perturbed thoughtfulness.

“Am I the one, Anthony?” she asked at last.

“Who else is there? How could it be otherwise? . . . Oh, Haidee! I have just had the most wonderful vision of you as Eve You are identical.”

“Yes, I know, but I am only an utterly commonplace woman—and a not very happy one . . . so why have you chosen me?”

“We two are alone in the world, Haidee.”

“It may be so. But do you know how you appear to me, as we stand facing each other? You are like a very queer and significant book written in characters I could read yesterday, but now can’t, however much I may want to. And how can I drive it into your head that you are to suffer the same setback, probably in the morning!”

“You are my deep well, and my nature!”

Haidee glanced helplessly away.

“You loved another girl,” she said next minute. “You never loved me. So why have you come to me?”

“My eyes were opened, and then I suddenly knew that I had always loved you, and worshipped you.”

“You mean, as we were?—as a man loves a woman?”

“I mean we were created together, man and woman, when the foundations of the world were laid, but your spirit was created the more glorious by virtue of your womanhood.”

“It is a pity we didn’t eat our fruit together, Anthony. Yesterday I saw and felt you everywhere, and then such a meeting

as this would have been heaven itself. You were Adam to me too, I think, in a dream. But now it's all no more than an outline. I recollect what I felt, but not the feelings themselves. Am I speaking to make myself understood?"

"No, it's your eyes that I am listening to."

"You are loving a phantom, unfortunately."

"I am unworthy to stand up before you."

At that Haidee felt an inclination to tears. And suddenly she stepped forward, put a soft arm over his shoulder, and kissed him, with a single deep, lingering kiss, on the cheek. She knew that it would be for the last time, as it was for the first, and all the warm, womanly violence of her pent-up emotion went out into it . . . She uttered a little gasping sob, as she as quickly released him.

Anthony sank on to his knees before her, in an attitude of adoration, his head bowed low towards the floor. He had flung his hat away earlier, neither knew when. And while she gazed down at him with beating pulse, as in a mad dream, wondering what she had done and how all this was to resolve itself, the sound of another taxi was heard below, drawing up outside the house.

She thought it was Olivia returned, and was surprised that he did not immediately jump up.

"Anthony, are you quite out of your senses?" she exclaimed, though quietly. "It's my friend come back."

But when he continued motionless where he was, it occurred to her to hasten to the window, the curtain concealing which she moved aside, to look down into the street. A man was settling with the driver, and there was no sign of any woman's figure, so perhaps it wasn't Olivia after all, unless she had already passed in at the door. She came back to Anthony, who had not stirred.

"Please get up! Oh, I do wish you would get up!"

It failed to strike her as ridiculous that he should have knelt on before an imaginary person while she had been at the window. In the quite long silence which succeeded her last appeal, and either he had not heard it or would not notice it, a kind of new compassion for him, even, stole into her heart—he looked so boyish and pathetic kneeling there, with his up-

turned crown of waving, unruly hair of the darkest brown; and then, besides, she could no longer see his eyes, which had daunted and troubled her so. It was as if he were a little boy, preparing to say his prayers to his mother. And surely his dead mother, gazing down from heaven, would forgive her much for loving her dear son, and being kind to him. She rested her hand softly on his head, standing directly over and in front of him; and the warm contact thrilled her more sweetly than her kiss had done.

She had heard no footsteps on the stairs. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and in the swift catalepsy of terror which held her members and retained her rooted to the spot where she stood facing it, she beheld Jim framed in the aperture. The first thing that she understood was that he must have stolen up so quietly of deliberate purpose.

Anthony seemed unaware of his presence, for he still did not move. His back was towards the door. And Haidee, though her caressing hand fell away from his hair, was incapable of retreating from him. She stared at Jim wide-eyed, in a mute fascination of amazement and horror.

His soft hat was crushed on anyhow, his rough overcoat collar was buttoned high round his throat, and his face appeared pale, stern, and menacing, while he remained twisting his moustache and watching the picture they formed. One could have counted twenty seconds, and still the attitudes of the three were unchanged.

Then Jim, in a voice which his *fiancée* would have found unreal, but that every detail of that strange scene was unreal—the dead silence of the flat, the weird pink glare of the electric lights, one man kneeling at her feet, another bursting in at near midnight from the heart of the country, the still-sounding chord of wondrous emotions in her heart—Jim said:

“You might at least do it like a man, Anthony Kerr!”

The spell was broken. She fled across to the window, burying her face in her hands, the door slammed to in her ears, and she knew that Jim was gone again, out of the house and out of her existence.

The reaction came immediately.

“Oh, get up! get up!” she cried to the still kneeling playwright. “Can’t you see what a fool you look!”

Anthony, however, could see nothing but the vision of spiritual loveliness towering softly above him like a divinity. He rose indeed, but it was to approach her again. Haidee retreated as he advanced. At the same time an idea struck her.

“Are you aware that Jim’s been here?” she demanded, in an odd intonation.

“It doesn’t matter.” And he smiled, not fatuously or horribly like a demented man, but with a dark archangelic beauty which, with the vigorous power of the deep blazing of his eyes, for an instant transfigured him, so that she was crushed by the meanness of her own words. He resembled the Anthony of her last night’s dream. She felt that he was recalling her to that lost state by the unaided force of his faith and marvellous love.

When, a moment afterwards, the transient bubble burst again, she sped from the room, to lock herself in her own chamber. There, sitting in the darkness, with a heaving bosom and a hundred phantasms dancing through her head, she presently heard Anthony go out into the passage and commence the descent of the stairs with a slow, uncertain tread.

12



Three days afterwards, on Easter Sunday morning, Anthony, his pale and much-thinned face wearing a new expression of sorrowful resolution, travelled down to Brasted by train. He carried no bag, for he intended to get back the same day. On the way down he looked at no-one, and scarcely anybody noticed him, so quietly dressed and inoffensive in manner was he, to all appearance no more than a very ordinary citizen proceeding on very ordinary business; and yet, if the heart could be read, his mission would surely have attracted to him some passing glances. With a high courage born of chivalry, he was to visit Grace, in order to clear Haidee’s honour and re-offer his own hand.

He was only too bitterly aware that his love for Grace had been shattered by the happenings of that Thursday. A sublimer passion had rendered impossible his loving response to her old calm affection, although that sublimer passion, too, had passed. But he could be honest, and marry her, and be a good husband to her, if she would still consent. He thought she would not. Whether or no, the smutch on Haidee's reputation must be wiped off, and this could only be by boldly confronting her detractors, and insisting upon her innocence and purity. What he continued to feel for Haidee he did not know. He had not seen her again, and in all probability would never see her again. Her lady friend had told him over the telephone that she had gone back home. He was ignorant whether her parents had any inkling of that flat incident. It depended entirely on what Jim and Grace had thought fit to divulge of the matter, and though Jim might be a gentleman, there was no security to be reposed on the reticence of an injured, jealous-minded woman. It was especially to stop her mouth for the future, in case she had not already spoken, that he wished to talk to her personally.

When he left the little country station for his three miles walk, a dry gale from the south-west was blowing. The strong, sharp buffets of sweet wind met him all the way. Overhead, the vaporous cloud-roof was shining white, sprinkled with pale blue, and sometimes the sun came out for a brief minute, dazzling his eyes and transforming bits of straw or broken stone lying ahead of him on the road into diamonds. The weather had completely swung round since his return to town on Thursday. Now the trees were sprouting new green life indeed. The songbirds were in full chorus.

It was with a natural furtiveness that he passed his sister's house, for it was possible that he might look in to see them afterwards, but he had no intention of doing so until this preliminary interview with Grace was over; and they would of course be amazed to observe him from the window going past. He dared not turn his head to ascertain whether he were being watched, but hurried by. It was then just after twelve o'clock. When at last he reached High Cot, and stood with his back half-turned on the front door while awaiting admittance, the sun once again broke through in a narrow rift of blue sky over the

upper part of the lane, and instantaneously it flashed across his mind as a consolatory inspiration that, since his art had failed him, he could not do better than take a house and a few acres in some remote part of the south of England, there to lead the life of a recluse. That obstinately-shut door, which formerly had been accustomed to fly open at his first approach, seemed to him symbolical of an everlasting unforgiving animosity in Grace. He felt that he was going to expose himself to insults for nothing; yet, as it was for Haidee's sake, he must not shirk so humiliating a meeting.

At length the door opened, the familiar countenance of the maid-servant gaped at him in rosy wonder, and with a new-born formality necessitated by the changed situation, he inquired for the mistress of the house. The girl showed him into an unoccupied room, and left him. A minute afterwards Mrs Lytham came in.

She had on a dark, elegant dress, and bowed stiffly, but did not invite him to sit.

"I wish to see Grace for a few moments, if I may and she is willing."

"She is not at home." Noticing his crestfallen look, she added by way of explanation:

"She and Jim are down at Bournemouth, making the most of their very short time together. He starts for Valparaiso on Saturday week."

"I am sorry to hear it. I am particularly sorry to have missed Grace. I have much to say to her which I cannot say in a letter . . . When will she return?"

"Not until Jim sails from Southampton."

"It's indeed unfortunate."

"I think I could almost deputise for her. . ." She was on the point of addressing him by name, but arrested herself. *Anthony* was impossible, *Mr Kerr* too vulgarly stiff. So she called him nothing. "She asked me, for example, to return you your ring, being unable to bring herself to write to you personally. I had a presentiment that you might call, so did not send it by post."

She went to her locked bureau to fetch it.

"Here it is."

“Thank you!” said Anthony, dropping the glittering trifle into his vest pocket.

“I am afraid you have broken her heart. For the sake of the short time your engagement lasted, it was surely hardly worth while!”

“It is to say that I am willing to renew this engagement, that I have called.”

Mrs Lytham shook her head slowly and reflectively, but with certitude.

“That’s out of the question. It would be asking too much of a proud girl. A mild flirtation occurring in the middle of a long engagement Grace might know how to forgive, but your action has been quite too sudden and incomprehensible. I say nothing of her loyalty to her brother. If you had tried, you could not have lit on a worse choice than Haidee. You have positively brought down two birds with one stone.”

“I know—I know. I am a hopelessly dishonoured man in the eyes of all in this household, and not without excellent cause. And yet, Mrs Lytham, there *may* be extenuating circumstances of which Grace, Jim, and yourself know nothing. I ask you if it is justice to condemn a man before he has had a chance to put up his defence?”

“What is your defence?”

It had been in Anthony’s mind to tell of his eating of the strange apple, and of its extraordinary effect upon his volitions. But all at once, and now that it had come to the point, he found that he could not. To profane the holy memory of those few supernal hours by producing them as evidence in a private court of law—no, that was a procedure not within the conscious power of his will. Whatever happened, that mystery must remain everlastingly a secret between Haidee and himself.

“My defence,” he said simply, “is that I was not in my right senses at the time.”

“I am told that you followed her to London, and met her there more or less clandestinely—I know nothing beyond that. Do you mean that you were overwhelmed by a passing infatuation which got the better of your self-control, or what?”

Anthony sighed. “Well, it’s no use speaking of it, and Grace must have her way . . . I shall of course keep well

out of her road down here, please give her that assurance. Do Haidee's people know?"

"Not from this house. Jim wrote to Haidee herself, but otherwise nobody has met."

"I also came to ask Grace to hold her hand in the matter. I wish to make it quite clear that the blame is all mine, and that if a conversation took place in London, it was wholly against her wish or will."

"Didn't she write to you?"

"That was previously, and on another matter. She has nothing whatever to reproach herself with in this . . . Mrs Lytham, she is as pure a girl as your own daughter Virginia—please believe me!"

"I would rather you left my daughter right out of it."

"May I have your word for it that the episode will be allowed to die a natural death?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs Lytham dryly, "I can promise that for myself, and I think for Grace as well. But now may I ask *you* a question?—Wouldn't it be Haidee's best protection against slander that you should marry her? Seeing that you are free once more."

Anthony reddened, and bowed. The courtesy was an indication of his acquiescence in the inevitable, for her cruelly-cutting interrogation showed him that to the women of this house Haidee had already sunk to the rank of a guilty sister, and that nothing he could say on her behalf would ever undeceive them. And simultaneously he comprehended his own folly in proposing that Grace should resume relations with him. For the ruination of her own happiness she might in course of time have pardoned him, but for his brutal robbery of another girl's honour one of her upbringing and temperament must loathe him until the last day of her life. He smiled grimly when he thought how very far removed from all that the reality had been!

As he proceeded down the lane towards Croom, this swift shattering of his week-old romance reminded him curiously of the destruction of the green glass serpent, and of his futile endeavour to recover its splinters. He had picked them up to find them worthless; only that little seed had survived in

the living sense. So, perhaps, from every calamity a seed might survive, to spring up into new wonders and glories . . . He would like to have seen Haidee again, but dared not call. So barefaced a visit would add fuel to the fire of scandal, and God knew what her neighbours were saying of her already! She was not for him. She would marry some man not yet appeared on the scene. Grace would do likewise. He was the fool in the story, standing gaping in the centre of the stage while all the rest went off laughing in couples, arm in arm!

He passed in at the home gate. He would not stay to the midday meal, but merely notify the breaking of his engagement, and go straight on again.

Josephine was in bed unwell, so he saw Marian alone. Her manner was not unsympathetic in the beginning, but only somewhat subdued.

“Well, Anthony,” she opened, when both had sat down, “I am exceedingly sorry to see you down here again under such conditions. You are getting back immediately?”

“Yes. I came down to have it out with Grace, but find she’s away. However, I have learnt one thing—the engagement’s definitely off.”

“I know. Grace told us. It’s a thousand pities in every way.”

“And what are *our* relations to be in consequence?”

Marian sighed. “You are our only brother, and we shall have to stick to you, but I’m afraid you have brought a terrible disgrace on the family. I can’t mince my words, Anthony. It was an unheard-of act How came you to be possessed to do it? There never has been insanity among the Kerrs.”

“I think I was indeed possessed.”

“Does this mean that you are now repentant?”

“It means that I am deeply grieved for Grace and Jim, and in a lesser degree for you and Josephine, as well as Haidee’s people, if they know anything of it? . . .” He paused inquiringly.

“I have not heard that they do,” said Marian. “We certainly haven’t mentioned it.”

“I am less disturbed that henceforward it appears likely I must go about in certain circles bearing the tag ‘Blackguard’

on my coat-collar, since in a fashion I have deserved it and must regard it as my expiation. But if by repentance you mean remorse—no, I have no remorse. I have offended the conventions but I have done no sin.”

“If I could be convinced of that, I could almost forgive you everything, Anthony.”

“I swear that the soul of that poor girl is as spotlessly white as the driven snow! She did not wish me to come, and I forced my society on her.”

“But were you mad?”

“I believe so—in a sense of which you can have no conception Yes, I believe I was mad. But in the spirit, Marian, not in the flesh. For a short few hours I worshipped her as a divinity. To this moment I have never kissed her, or desired to kiss her. She is now, as always, an honourable lady.”

“Do you love her, Anthony?”

“I shall never see her again.”

“I think you must always have loved her, if you had those feelings but it’s disastrous about poor Grace . . . and Jim. It has all happened so suddenly and unexpectedly. I don’t know what to say.”

“I was overtaken.”

“And she—how do you say she feels towards *you*?”

“I shall never know.”

A rather long silence followed, for Marian had fallen into a deep muse. At last she said:

“You must leave it to time. In another twelve months things will be clearer, and in any case you couldn’t with any decency marry her so soon”

But his sister’s allusion to the possibility of his marriage to Haidee did not wound and shock him as Mrs Lytham’s had done, for it proceeded from a different source. He knew that she was considering his welfare and reflecting whether this might not be the best. A great heat of gratitude expanded in his heart, although he was aware that the suggestion itself was but a chimera.

“At least, you will be kind to her, Marian?”

“If she is what you say, it is my duty. I see the awkwardness. Grace, naturally enough, is very, very hard on her, and

we cannot throw Grace over . . . However, we shall see. In any case—on your authority, Anthony, but something tells me you are speaking the truth—Haidee shan't be slandered in my presence."

He gave her an affectionate look, and got up to go.

"Won't you stay to dinner?" asked Marian. It was Sunday, when they dined early.

"I couldn't eat, thanks!"

"Then you are going straight back?"

"No, I shall go for a walk round first. I've been a prisoner for two days."

"You have been suffering?"

"The tortures of the damned!"

She kissed him on the forehead, and he could not remember when she had last done such a thing.

At the front door she said:

"You had better not come down here again yet awhile."

"No, I'll make myself scarce."

"But you might write more frequently and fully. Will you?"

"Yes, I shall probably have more time for it now. I'm giving up writing for the stage."

"I wish from my heart that you would!"

"I am."

"Then what will you do instead?"

"I thought of buying a small property in Devonshire or Cornwall, and developing it, as a recreation to keep the devils away."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Marian, and she seized his hand warmly. Then, as he was about to turn away, she added in her impressive manner:

"Remember what day it is, Anthony, and try to believe in the promise of the Resurrection. It isn't only the dead who can live again, but we living ones too, if we wish it. I am going to regard it as a happy sign that all this has happened on Easter Day."

"Kiss Josephine for me, and wish her a speedy recovery!" exclaimed her brother almost gaily.

At last he turned down the path, and the door closed upon

him. Desiring to get away from roads and people, he decided to take the cross-country cut to Wych Hill, about three quarters of a mile down the lane, and so work up again to the crest beyond the top of Malfait Street, whereby he could avoid the necessity of passing Haidee's house to reach the same spot. Afterwards . . . afterwards he would decide further. And so he started off, armed with an ash stick, but feeling no inclination towards the other tried old companion of his solitary tramps, his ancient briar. That remained in his pocket. The rough, soft winds propelled him forward.

His sensation of bodily lightness, which was due to long abstinence, the strong whipping of the air, seeming to come from all quarters at once, the miles he had already covered and the present regular stretching of his legs, stimulating all the interior organs of his frame, everything combined to free his mind from the heavy sluggishness which had depressed it since Friday morning. His thoughts no longer dwelt exclusively in the past, but surveyed past, present, and future with equal activity and alertness; only the sudden mysterious failure of his artistic ideals and metaphysical flashes of insight had diminished something of his intellectual pride, and he found himself taking a sort of pleasure in regarding himself as one of the common crowd, possessing none of the responsibilities of a phenomenal brain. He meditated on that miraculous little tree, whose springing up had caused such rapture and misery to the set of people into whose hands it had fallen; and proceeded to the following soliloquy:

“Like this it is. In the beginning of creation, when all was virgin and wonderful in the world, and men talked with God, a strange tree throve, carrying alluring fruit, the sight of which our first parents were unable to resist; and small wonder, when it was lovelier than the loveliest! . . . And now, on the strength of an impossible tradition palmed off by cunning Asiatics upon a beefwitted Englishman some few hundreds of years ago, I grow a miserable shrub from a desiccated seed, I experiment with the stupefying berries it barely succeeds in producing, I am drugged, and it pleases me to imagine that the tremendous and awful supernatural drama of the earliest age is repeated in my experience—that is to say, in

the puny experience of a clever London dramatist of this present century of grace, which is no more than a hotch-potch of glitter, tinsel and nastiness. Neither is it the tree, nor am I the man. All sin is frightful, but no sin of mine could conceivably launch the whole human race into everlasting terrestrial woe. Nor have I sinned, for the fruit was not forbidden me. These are the delusions of vanity, and the analogy is not even distant, in any one particular. But if I wash out all this background of disordered fancy, what is there left? A drug falsely stimulates my brain for a few hours, and I am deceived into imagining that this artificial exaltation corresponds to something real. Therefore, the cessation of so pathological a deception, far from being a matter for lament, is a matter for self-congratulation; and I am well out of it. I have brought nothing away except a deteriorated intellect and an awakening to the disagreeable consequences of my conduct during those few hours; which would also precisely be the effect of whisky, or opium, or cocaine. So what I now have to do is to forget all that, in order to build up my life anew from a fresh start."

He came to his stile on the left-hand side of the lane, climbed it, and set foot on the narrow footpath of hard trodden earth which traversed the field beyond. The flogging gusts of wind, which here met him more directly, had already introduced a ruddier glow of health to his cheeks, while his footfall was brisker and firmer. As he made for the second stile immediately before the thicket at the further end of the field, a new amazement seized him that he had deliberately elected during all these precious, irrecoverable years to turn his back on the beautiful, open, blowing world of God, in order to sit day after day within the four walls of a room to pump his brains for pasteboard spectacles with which to amuse the ephemeral night crowds of a city of godless moneymakers. Woods, hills, streams and meadows, the sun and rain, clouds, breezes, thunder and lightning—they are a man's natural environment, and out of them sprang the true inspirations of heaven, in the shape of the first sharp blades of growing crops, piercing through the rich brown soil. Art—the stillborn travesty of life! A remarkable poem, or play, or picture, or statue, was produced; that was, it was pieced together and chipped and pol-

ished after the conception of the original single thought which resulted from a perverted instinct of motherhood; and it was presented to a number of admiring or critical persons, who praised, or failed to praise, it on the ground that it assisted, or failed to assist, their own spiritual development, when all the time it remained a mere dead symbol of an impossible isolation and repose, not to be found in real life, where all things moved together and perpetually, so sought in so-called Art, the progress of which was one long succession of pitiful and absurd efforts to produce children through the brain.

A small farmhouse, a trifle of land, a few pigs, cows, fowls and the like, two or three honest, kindly neighbours, good health, money to spend, but not to waste—a man could wish no more A wife, and babies—yes, but they were for others, not for him. He had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and never again could he endure a woman's loving smile. The smiles of women were too much alike. She would remind him of unutterable things, which his heart could only bear by forgetting.

He crossed the other stile, and entered the gloom and comparative quietude of the wood, where he had not been for many years. After about a quarter of a mile of this, he had to pass out again through a swing-gate into the meadow on its western border, at the far end of which a reedy pond or lake appeared, fringed beyond by swaying poplars. The footpath went straight towards this water, but there bore round to the right in a wide curve, skirting the pool, then proceeding under the trees across it, as through an archway. Anthony remembered little of the place. He was not sure, after all, whether he really had been there before.

He reached the pond, and then, over its discoloured, ruffled surface, saw two things, which sharply pulled him up.

One was the Cross of his picture in his chambers. The other was Haidee, standing with her back towards him. He had not caught sight of her earlier because her close-fitting jersey frock was of much the same colour as the bole of the tree behind which she had got for shelter from the wind, and which half hid her.

He was quietly pleased by the meeting, but before going

round the water to surprise her out of her meditations he stayed to contemplate that natural emblem, the location of which he had so long and hitherto so vainly sought. At the same time it occurred to him that all these deferred happenings were falling together—this mystic Cross, the giving up of his professional work, his adoption of a simpler and better faith and also, and above all the rest, though indeed there was little traceable connection, this vision of Haidee in an out-of-the-way spot, when he had least expected her. He felt that she was somehow associated

Yes, it was here that the painter of his picture had set up his easel, and he had changed or exaggerated nothing, so perhaps he had not even seen the effect. The cross of white sky formed by the two inclined trees and their leafless branches, stood up from the ground to twice the height of a man, and the only pictorial respect in which the natural scene varied from its artistic presentation lay in the slow, and as it were animated, waving and weaving of the branches which shaped the upper part of the symbol, as they were caught by the mad dancing swoops and whirls of the half-gale. Anthony removed his eyes from the spectacle for a little while; and as he did so, it seemed to him that this sweet-smelling spring hurricane was trying to blow everything deathly and sepulchral out of his perception of the token of man's salvation erecting itself yonder before him. He could not consent to that; the slight idea was still stronger than the blustering wind, and persisted, just as the cross itself always returned to its solemn shape. So then he thought he saw how it was intended that the sign should be a *living* sign for him—no mere dry historical memento of what had taken place in Palestine two thousand years ago, but something which existed at this very moment as a force, a surety, a prediction

He went on round the pool to Haidee, and was nearly up to her before she turned round suddenly, as by instinct. It was more sheltered where she stood, so they were able to converse without particularly raising their voices. They met like friends who are thoroughly accustomed to each other's ways and between whom all formality is unnecessary. It did not occur to

them even to shake hands. Yet their last meeting had been in Olivia's flat that night, and nothing had happened since to make them companions, unless it were their common disgrace. But that was not it. Both were too calm; too full of quiet thoughts.

"I've been looking at that clump of wild daffodils," said Haidee, pointing her finger to the yellow heads standing a little way off in a grassy hollow, all nodding and twisting frantically as though possessed. "I never saw anything half so quaintly beautiful. Oh, I do love this time of the year!"

"Yes, it's wonderful. What do you think I saw as I came along on the other side of the water? The original of a picture I've got in town. I knew it was in this part of the country, but have never been able to locate it before, and that I should do so just today is a strange thing. This tree we're standing under and that one there form a distinct Cross, but you can't see it from here."

"Yes, I noticed it too."

"Curiously enough, the Cross has always symbolised patience and long-suffering to me, after the example of Christ bearing on his own shoulders the pieces of wood he was to die on, but now I seem to see it stands for more. Has it ever occurred to you what a Cross is, in its most elementary form? One makes a stroke in writing, and wishes to cancel it—by natural instinct the pen does a second stroke at right angles to the first, and that is the sign of the Cross. I am cancelling my career."

"I fancied you would have to. You can't write any more, can you?"

"Well, it's rather complicated, Haidee. I think I could go on writing plays of a sort, but the higher motive has disappeared. I don't understand it myself yet. It was that higher motive that constituted the cement, and now I can't co-ordinate properly . . . in fact, I've lost the desire to attempt it. This good old solid earth under my feet seems to me now the one thing that matters. I'm going to buy some land, probably in Cornwall, and work on it . . . How is it with you?"

Haidee smiled faintly "I have lost some cement too, I believe. It frightened me at first, but now I'm much more recon-

ciled. My artistic sense — I won't say it has vanished, but it has launched out in new directions It really interests me more than it troubles me."

"And probably your heart is even lighter for it?"

"I think so—now For example, simple colours appeal to me as strongly as ever, but I don't seem any longer to appreciate the meaning of *harmony* in colours. If a thing is beautiful in *itself*, what body, beautiful or ugly, is there for the combination of those two beauties to inhabit? That kind of harmony or discord isn't a direct sensation, but an illusion of the eyes. I was looking at a piece of gleaming polished copper for a long time this morning, and the thought seemed to burn itself into me how extraordinarily beautiful it was and then a bowl of freshly-gathered yellow primroses delighted me exquisitely. But when I came past the garden of the house next to ours, and saw the beds of polyanthuses and wallflowers and jonquils all neatly and artificially laid out in patterns of colour, I thought to myself, 'Where is the beauty of that?' There was nothing solid for that kind of beauty to attach itself to. It had no body"

"Yes, that is so," said Anthony thoughtfully, endeavouring to apply her innovating idea to his own case.

"And I met a well-dressed woman coming up the lane—a visitor, probably—and she had on what a few days ago I should very likely have raved over as a really delicious creation, apple-green and pale mauve, and she was tall and slim herself. Well, do you know, Anthony, I could admire the shape of that woman, and I could admire the colours of her dress as colours, but I absolutely couldn't see any third beauty springing from the connection. It seemed to me that she was just wearing protective clothes which naturally didn't belong to her However, I'm far from grasping it all as yet. I hope I shall get along all right, but being a woman makes it more difficult. I wish I could go right away like you."

A silence followed, not of embarrassment, but simple because neither had anything further to say immediately. And if the marvellous experiences from which all these changes had arisen remained unREFERRED-to, that also was not on account of

any delicate reluctance on the part of either to introduce an awkward topic. It merely meant that both felt there was nothing to be said about it. The high, sacred hour was past, and to analyse it, even between themselves, would be profanation. It was always in their hearts.

Presently, in a longer lull, for the wind seemed to be spending itself at last, Anthony informed her:

“Grace has returned me my ring, so I’m a free man again . . . I also looked in at my sisters’. Marian declares she is going to support you.”

“She is a dear! . . . I’ve lost Jim too. He’s off to South America.”

“I know—and meanwhile he and Grace are down at Bourne-mouth.”

“Yes.”

“How do you feel in yourself, Haidee?”

“Not so unhappy as you would think. I spend most of my time walking about and trying to puzzle things out. My people are very considerate and indulgent—of course, they believe it’s a simple break with Jim. I’m missing lunch today, as you see.”

“I am glad to have met you. It’s a remarkable coincidence we should both have come this way.”

“Our intercourse seems almost wholly made up of coincidences.”

“That’s singularly true.”

“And I suppose you’re in much the same boat, Anthony? You have a lot of puzzling out to do too?”

“That’s one of my reasons for going away. I shall never understand myself in London. You agree that I’m doing the best?”

Haidee mused

“Are you giving up altogether? Writing for the stage, yes—but altogether?”

“Altogether, Haidee. I am going to lead a decent, quiet, man’s life.”

“Farming?”

“Yes.”

“But perhaps you’ll see differently later on.”

“No. What have I to write about? And what is writing, when all’s said and done!”

“But there are great books.”

“Name them.”

“Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy—they were great writers.”

“I am like you, Haidee—I have become critical. A mighty work of art is a very clever intellectual exercise, but nothing more. I would rather hear ploughman Dick rolling his Rs across the table of the local pub than listen to words which have been spoken through the wrong organ of speech and bear the traces of their ghostly origin. No man ever talked as such books are written. The spoken word has a life, because it is warm and spontaneous from the character of a person, and *is* that person; but like your harmonies of colour, the written word has no body, it represents nothing What you call a great book is the ponderous compilation of a vast number of polished and repolished ideas, which stand up like tombstones to show where once upon a time some brain faintly heaved and worked. If a man wants progeny, let him take a wife!”

The girl sighed, and turned a little from him. Then suddenly she swung round again, stretching forth her small hand, which was bare of any glove.

“Oh, Anthony, my dear, surely all this lovely world must give you the clue to what you want and need so badly!” But she was not referring to his hint of solitude, and he knew it. Nor did the caressing term she had employed bring flattery to his heart. He understood her well.

“Haidee, you and I both realise that we have a far more important matter to recover than the writing of books or the understanding of art. But since that is past our power in this life, let us just go forward quietly, as best we can, without plaguing ourselves about all the rest. When I lost you again, I lost my soul.”

There were tears in her eyes, as she seized his hand with both of hers.

“No, Anthony!—oh, no! no! no!”

“Then am I to you at this minute, or is there any remot-

est possibility of my ever becoming to you again, what I was to you last Wednesday?"

"We can go towards it Oh, I don't want to lose you altogether! I can't—I can't!"

"My poor girl!"

"You are going right away into another part of England, and you are leaving me here all alone to my horrible thoughts, among people who know nothing about it. What is to become of me?"

It was his turn to hold her wrist, while gazing at her sadly.

"Is it possible that you can still love me, after what has passed, Haidee?"

"Yes, I love you." She released herself, and stood erect facing him, with a smile half daring, half anguished.

"As a woman?"

"Yes, I love you as a woman. But the rest will follow—it must follow! I will *will* it. We will both will it. Anthony, we will go on, and on, and on, step by step and stage by stage, till we have won it all back—and then it will be ours, not a free gift this time, but *ours*—our very own! It will be so, I know it will It's starting to come back already. Your eyes seem changed to me"

"We cannot have it both ways, Haidee. I can't have your love both as a woman and as an angel of God. But indeed, as you say, we can continue to move *towards* the other, in full confidence that we shall never attain the full perfection in the body—though, let us trust, in another world. I think it would kill us, even So, in God's name, let us get married, and go away together. I could not marry any other woman."

"Oh, we will help each other so!"

Anthony kissed her slowly, gravely and tenderly on the lips.

"Now you are my dear wife—that much, at least, is certain! And what next? The ceremonies must perforce be of the simplest, our acquaintances already hold us in scorn and derision, so what is there to wait for? I'll walk back with you, to speak to your father and mother. Let the affair take place this week."

“Yes, Anthony—today, if it could!” She threw her arms round him convulsively and kissed him many, many times.

Beyond the pool, they stopped to look across at his representation carved in air of the emblem of the world’s best faith. The persistent gusts still swayed and disfigured it, but it always came back. For more than a minute they stood gazing without speech, then Haidee pressed her companion’s arm.

“What are you thinking, Anthony?”

“I was thinking how singular it was that the spiritual course of our world should run between two trees. The tree of knowledge marked the fall of man, the tree of the Cross his rescue. We also know that the wood of those trees was identical.”

She could not comprehend.


“Pride,” he explained. “For the fruit was eaten in pride and independence, while the Cross was representative of the dying pride upon which every man must be miserably extended who wishes to imitate Christ. This particular death, out of all others, was selected by the godhead, for the purpose of presenting, not pain and sacrifice merely, but a spectacle—of degradation. A spectacle for sneerers and mockers, and even the well-intentioned hard-hearted. A sacrifice in the manner of Decius or Regulus is not enough. All sin has its beginning in pride, and it is on our pride that we must be crucified And I went on to reflect that I certainly, for one, have been living very much in pride all my life, so perhaps the fall has not come before it was due. That being the case, I cannot be worth much, I have been let off easily. Without my asking for either, they are giving me a better life and a nobler bride. The ways of Providence are truly mysterious, but I must take care not to sin twice in the same direction.”

Haidee attempted no reply. Instead, when he had quite stopped speaking, she again swiftly encircled his neck with her arms, to kiss him on the mouth with her cool, ripe lips, which seemed to him there, amidst the buffeting winds, to possess the perfume of sweet spring violets.

They stayed thus for a few minutes, then slowly made their way across the meadow to the wood.

The Witch

Foreword

he last years of David Lindsay's life were strained and unhappy. Through their tensions and depressions he laboured in the lightning-shattered darkness of this strange, powerful, creaking, beautiful, stilted, sombre, unearntly, labyrinthine book, *The Witch*. It is not surprising that he failed to complete it. The failure was due not just to his own spiritual situation but to the impossibility of the task he had set himself.

He writes in the note he left with the typescript, and which was found after his death: "The last chapter (unfinished) is numbered as to the pages. The numbered pages may probably have to be restored to their numerical order.

"There are also a quantity of sketch pages, and pages since revised, which should not be too carelessly destroyed.

"The whole book, which is unpublishable as it stands, requires deletion, reduction and revision. No one can do this but myself; nevertheless the book must by no means be destroyed or lost. It is, as to its material, one of the world's greatest books, and cannot be replaced.

"I know no one who would understand it, or appreciate it, save in parts."

If I have attempted what Lindsay felt that no one could do but himself, I have done so only because the book was indeed unpublishable as it stood, and because it is in truth, 'as to its material', of permanent value and importance.

What I have done is to reduce the length of the typescript by pruning repetition and excessive elaboration, and to modify slightly some of the conversation where diction in the original is particularly stilted and peculiar. I have also on occasion simplified a sentence where the oddities of syntax which grew on Lindsay in his later years have made it a serious stumbling-block to the reader. I am sure that none

of these minor adjustments have in any way distorted the original.

The book describes the haunting of a man's consciousness by the 'music' of a 'witch', and culminates in a description of the soul's experiences after death. Ragnar Pole is privileged, through Urda's enchantments, to suffer these experiences while yet living.

The action, such as it is, reflects spiritual states, and stands for nothing apart from them. The drawing-room encounters, the conversations and relationships, are merely reflections of inward passions. The events are never intended to take place on a level of outer realism. The violent excitements and adventures of *A Voyage to Arcturus* are entirely absent. The book depends for its power on the profundity and truth of the spiritual states it embodies.

Ragnar's journey is a progression, and his state of soul alters with each stage of the journey; no adequate summing-up is possible until the journey is finished. Unfortunately, the end of the journey is lost to us. In reality, how could it be otherwise?

We have to accept Lindsay's vision as he presents it, and any account must be unsatisfactory. But I think the attempt is necessary. There are three stages in the soul's journey: it discards self and discovers the meaning and fullness of love; it attains tranquillity beyond the storms of passion and emotion, resting in the second self, or what Lindsay speaks of as 'the immortal soul'; it moves on into 'the third music'. These 'musics' are not merely stages in a journey, and states of soul, they are whole experiences comprising the richness of possible worlds. Music is not sound, but the experience which creates sound, the experience to which it gives rise and the atmosphere which surrounds it.

Behind this account of Ragnar's experience lies the total conception of the book, which as nearly as I can express it is this: From the original source of the 'Ancient' came the breath of 'Voice'. The breath of 'Voice' brought into being Life, which is the Mother, and the Mother separates the Ancient from all forms of living individuality. Despite this vast and bewildering separation which makes the world into a mysteri-

ous, echoing shadow-house, the spirit that is within living beings derives from the 'Ancient' and must strive always to return to that source so infinitely dark and far back through the physical and metaphysical universes. (In considering the nature of this spirit we are once more with the Muspel spark of *A Voyage to Arcturus*, and realise how constant Lindsay's vision was.)

The loneliness of the Ancient causes metaphysical pain. The spirit, twisting and turning in its ceaseless search for the way through the heavens, home, and in its striving to avoid unavoidable pain, makes the world into a terrible clash of wills. It seeks to overcome this loneliness trivially through pleasure and nobly through love. In love it longs for unity with other beings. Such unity can never finally be attained except through translation into unity with the Ancient when the breath of Voice ceases at last.

If this seems formidable, it *is* formidable. Lindsay's whole work is a struggle with the intractable and ends with a raid upon the impossible. Only in *a Voyage to Arcturus* did he find a form which successfully embodied the subject matter. That any writer in this century should have the courage, however, to make such an assault upon the eternal significance of existence seems to me both amazing and deeply moving. No one can with attention and humility confront the journey of David Lindsay from the magnificent *Voyage* through the profound and limpid *Violet Apple* to the astonishing *Witch* without the most sincere and sober admiration.

J.B. Pick

1



agnar Pole trod noiselessly into the large, hushed drawing-room at the Waylands' Kensington house. The piano was being played in another room, with both doors open, and the atmosphere was intense.

He whispered his brief apology for lateness to Lois Wayland.

"Who is playing?"

She murmured back, "Cecilie Toller."

He sank down in the cushions of a solitary chair, and covered his eyes with a hand, to listen. Surely she was playing with a strangely daring sympathy of understanding and passionateness of heart. He had hardly remembered that Mrs. Toller was musical. She was of Vienna; she had married a rich English bibliophile, since dead; had remained in England, and practised translating books into German that else might escape translation.

The piece he had recognised from its first heard notes. It was Beethoven's sonata, Opus 31, No. 3; the movement in it that put a question. Under such music he had no power or will to stay calm. But how queer was fate!—how could he have dreamt, in his reluctance to come to-night, that sacredness was prepared for him? Truly she was a translator. All his wisdom, beneath the spell of these deep-moving, significant tones, was if welling up to overflow into his emotional apprehension of a stir of new life, until almost he could have sworn that something of importance was round the corner for him, the first faint roots already acted.

When, however, the movement being ended, its sequel was never attempted, and talk sprang up and triumphed in the room where he was, Ragnar thought "She's temperamental—in tune with one mood only of the composer, and

honours her artistic conscience; she is wilfully eccentric, perhaps, but perfectly right." He lit a cigarette, preparing to get up, but his languor of fatigue, joined to the music's enchantment still upon him, kept him sitting for another minute.

He was 39, and a bachelor. His father had been an amateur of coins, pictures, rare books, arms and armour. The collections were sold after his death, only the armour had been saved by Waldo, Ragnar's younger brother. The mother was dead too. She had been a Virginian heiress; her estate had descended to her children, these two brothers and two sisters. Ragnar and Waldo were maternal family names. It was odd that there was something suggestive of a redskin in Ragnar's appearance. He was long, lean, quick-moving and alert; shapely, with slim, strong hands, a long skull, a rather wide brow. His thinning black hair was straight and lustreless. The face was a sallow bronze, mounting to red on the high cheek-bones. Beneath his ease was a dormancy that a number of women found attractive, the hint of a dangerousness holding itself in reserve. The eyes and whole expression could become positively snake-like. Out of a settled false torpor, the narrow brown-gold eyes, at sight of a summoning object, would shoot through their slits the equal of a lightning venom.

This supposed outlaw in him was exciting to the imaginations of women. For on all hands it was repeated that he was handsome. His face was too nervous, constrained and aloof to come under the category of male beauty, but it was felt that a foe lay coiled just underneath the skin, and women romantically wished to see it roused. He possessed in full measure his father's fastidiousness, and that was very well; but people could take umbrage at being daunted by one who was obviously a dilettante. Despite his fine brain and finer taste, a man of tougher nature, in dealing with him, had the sense that he lacked the right force of humanity which consisted in long purpose.

He rose, and wandered through the room, talking to a few, saluting others. . .conscious still of an indistinct, confused impression of events about to take place. Should it be truly intuitional and not merely from a disordered fancy, then he was aware that intuitions were but the crystallised aggregate

of ignored previous perceptions.

He felt that his condition was abnormal, the inevitable result of these absurd embarkations upon major works of literary imagination. Some devil was in it that he should write his books, read by few, comprehended by fewer, wanted by none!

The analogy came to him of a gathering brightness behind a sky still of lead; but outside this house, what was there of magnificent promise in his life? Nothing!—and yet again, supposing it to be an influence of the house, what actually unusual had met him in twenty minutes? . . . The din, these artificial, loudly-chattering, untrue shapes around him, they were offensive to his mood.

Then he saw Adrienne, his brother's wife, standing in the doorway, calmly examining the assembly, perhaps to find him.

She discovered him while he was moving towards her.
“Well, Adrienne. . .”

They sat, and his eyes lingered on her dress, that was of a perplexing shade of green. It suited her well. Her feminine taste in clothes always mildly astonished him, there was so much of the man in her—activity, bustle, mixing, the kindness towards business, the real love and knowledge of machines. Yet he would be a fool in psychology to be confounded by the meeting of the sexes in one person; it was as common as the traditional meeting of the sexes in two persons. Her tallish, slender form had those inconspicuously graceful motions as though nothing came between a light and beautiful will and the execution of its desires.

What he admired in her was that her face's smooth ivory pallor of perfect health, the cheeks barely flushed with the hue of a wild rose, was unspoilt by aids—she used no more than powder. She told him so, and he knew it. Her lips were harmonious with the other features, shapely and eloquent of her character, like another voice. The dressing of her fine, light brown hair seemed not to copy any style, and indeed Adrienne was original in all ways. She was twenty-nine, the only daughter of the Cambridge sociologist Tyack. She herself had graduated, but her chemical career was cut short by

marriage. There were no children.

Under her eyes, he grew conscious of the old embarrassment. In the quiet fearlessness of their pellucid, greenish-hazel meeting was that which provoked his defence, stopped warmth; he was baffled to understand why. He was nearly sure that she too was anxious for the wall of strangeness dividing them to be thrown down, permitting the peculiar friendship—romantic, affectionate, devoted, irresponsible—that should subsist at best between brother and brother's wife. But the wall never went, being built of some harder substance than their timidity. Perhaps, more than he guessed, he was vexed with her for her neglect of Waldo; perhaps her practicality and his own reflectiveness instinctively shrank from each other.

Her mother had told him, "It's a good thing Waldo, not you, married Adrienne, for she is far cleverer than you in most ways except words; but in Waldo it matters less—he has other qualities." He did not care if she were indeed cleverer than he. Of late years he had realised that a man's wisdom was otherwise compounded than of brains. Innocence, simplicity, the nearly constant refusal of instincts, imagination to enter the situations of others—these mattered. If he delayed to obey such counsel, soon it would be too late, for already his life's shadows began to lengthen.

It was nothing extraordinary, that Waldo had not accompanied his wife this evening; he hated general society, and avoided it as he could. At the present moment, doubtless, he was engaged in burnishing some antique fragment of armour at the Chelsea house. Their father's collecting craze was in Waldo directed into this single channel. As obsessions went, it was comparatively inexpensive, yet if it was to become a form of monomania, was it so inexpensive?

In looks, Waldo was a larger, watered facsimile of his father. He had his burning blue eyes, dark brown hair, and shrinking delicacy of face; but his brusqueness and *gaucherie* were his own. Ragnar suspected that his early fondness for Adrienne had turned by now to lassitude. The two allowed themselves no quarrels before him, he could not exactly read their hearts, but words escaped, and actions spoke. Adrienne

might be scorning him as a dullard; or it might be that her stuff was ignobler than Waldo's. His love of armour, perhaps, meant psychologically that he strove to forget, in these characteristic male memorials, the insistent existence of women.

She asked Ragnar how long he had been in the house. Mrs. Toller had been playing the piano marvellously in the other room. He replied that he had heard her from this; it had disturbed him. Adrienne discriminated that Cecilie Toller seemed less concerned to interpret the piece she of course had interpreted very well, than to interrogate the composer's soul as she went along; and that, just because it had no direct reference to the satisfaction of her listeners was necessarily all the more unusually impressive.

Her voice was low and cultivated, with an odd harsh pleasantness, difficult to grasp. The tone was attractive independently of her words, but it told the same story: some hardness of superficial nature was arresting the reaching out towards him that he felt beneath. He wished he could tell her how fragility was often far stronger than rigidity; how the tender, frangible, free-moving young green shoots of spring, full of new life as they were, had power to conquer and occupy empty space itself, whereas the hoary, rigid oak was but a sullen monument. . . .

Now she was describing Mrs. Toller's circle in that other room. She had all the magic of an Austrian woman old in the world, still young in years. There was a girl with her, besides, Ragnar could hardly not want to know. . . She did not mean that the girl was lovely, or amusing, but she looked quite. . . supernatural.

"Do go and see her, if just for a moment. Do you know Mrs. Toller?"

"Yes, but not well."

"What do you think?—she lives at Swayning, of all places; where we have taken the cottage."

"The girl too?"

"She is on a visit there. . . We are going down on Saturday, for a month at least. Then we shall run down from time to time during the summer. We are in the actual Downs, and it's adorable. I want you to come."

“But when can I?”

“On Monday. Waldo is anxious for it too.”

“You tempt me. What will Waldo do there?”

“He loves nature and walking, and there’s always the car. Mrs. Toller is our neighbour, so there will surely be music. The girl is a ward or protegee, I don’t know what, of the famous Marya Klangst, the violinist. They are both guests of Cecilie Toller’s, and Mme. Klangst has her instrument with her, for they played together on Monday. I have never been so much moved by any music; it was the Kreutzer. I realised the torture of heaven, not hell, in Beethoven’s spirit.”

“Does the girl play?”

“She wasn’t present. I’ve met her tonight for the first time.”

“What is her name?”

“Urda Noett.”

While she covertly watched him, he gathered that she still wished to say something. He suspected it concerned Waldo. . .

“So Waldo isn’t here tonight?”

“No.”

“He abominates parties, I know; but has he quite made up his mind to go his own way?”

“It looks as if we both have! Let’s not talk of him. I’m very sure he is either not thinking of me at this hour, or trying not to. . . I’m the complete worldling; I’m light, and I’m selfish. I refuse to stay at home. Does any woman stay at home these days?”

“You haven’t fallen out?”

“I fear we are past the disputing stage. There comes a time when the hopelessness is understood.”

“That’s a bad word, Adrienne.”

She grimaced.

“Oh! I love him. Too much, probably. I want his respect, and see it vanishing all the time. What’s to be done?”

“Be more with him. Leave him less.”

“My company isn’t desired.”

“Make it desired.”

“How can I force it on him, Ragnar? The sudden show

of unwanted amiability absolutely wouldn't win his respect. . . Yet don't mistake me. Really, I am fearfully practical, and always looking for means. A failure, and worse, a fiasco, is hateful to me in anything—can I want one in my marriage? What gives me most satisfaction in life is to feel a work growing under my hands. If it escapes me, and breaks to pieces, and all my toil and solicitude have been for nothing, can I possibly find that good, do you think? I married Waldo without any sort of impulsiveness, with no thought of his money, from no constraint. If our marriage is to fail, have I been a wise woman or a fool, Ragnar? Answer me that. . .”

“Shall I speak to Waldo?”

“Children might have helped.”

“I will talk to him. He is not bad-hearted.”

“No, he is only as self-centred as everyone, and rather more stubborn than most. A bit of positive sin in him might make him sympathetic, pliable—I don't know.”

Ragnar mused.

“You want me to do it when I come next week? Perhaps that was another reason for the invitation?”


“No, I want you to come, and stay a fortnight.”

“Well, I'll try at least to get away on Monday. I will telephone tomorrow.”

Adrienne flashed him a wistful farewell smile, and they went their ways about the room.

For a minute he kept apart, meditating her case. Waldo needed, not companionship—but a sphinx; not known moods and finished thoughts but ever new, strange strokes and out-springings from an invisible spirit. . . a growth, indeed, but without direction, destination or meaning. The meaningless, in woman's shape. . . What was this meaninglessness? Was it not as if someone should knock upon the door of man's ancient heart, untamed by the world's discipline, and cry: “Cast off your chains!”. . . Was not he himself always waiting for such a knock, such a voice? . . .

2

wo women had just left Lois as he came up to her, and she was alone. He saw how her eyes had hardly time to relapse into their own trouble before she was forced to smile at him. Then it struck him that Felix might not be here tonight, since most of the people in the room seemed her friends, not her husband's.

His own relation to Lois was rather delicate and special. He knew her before her marriage, so that she was the original friend, if Felix had become the closer. His mother and Lois's had been girls together in America, the daughters of neighbouring houses, of the same age, both pretty and sought after. An attachment had sprung up between them, and the story was that for years they were truly inseparable. Perhaps it was strange between girls so attractive generally. One would have expected vyings and jealousies.

Lois's mother had been the first to marry, Lois was born, and after a few years his own mother had married his father in England. The two young wives, divided by an ocean, would have something else to do than keep up a sentimental correspondence, yet their hearts, of course, would not forget. More years passed; he was born, Lois's mother died, and that was the beginning of Lois's disasters, leading to a new life for her. Her father took another wife, who made it clear to the girl that there was to be no room in the house for her. Following that, he lost—probably in a business gamble—not only all his money, but Lois's too, left in trust for her by her mother. She suddenly had nothing at all. Ragnar's mother, as soon as she learnt the facts, wrote inviting Lois to England for a long stay, while she made her plans. She came over. She was twenty, Ragnar himself a schoolboy of twelve. She stayed with them for upwards of a year.

She met Felix Wayland, a youngster of very moderate means, but with supreme confidence in his future. He had just obtained the assistant editorship of an obscure weekly paper. They fell in love, and pretty quickly got married. The match displeased Ragnar's mother, but she never quite broke off relations. Accordingly, if Felix and she should now be in difficulties, he knew what his mother would have wished him to do. He had lately been hearing disquieting rumours that Felix's journal—not that ancient defunct paper, but the very different one of which he was owner and editor—was within the immediate shadow of catastrophe.

Lois had dark hair and eyes, a sallow skin and a slim person that fell of itself into harmonies. She kept her American accent, with the lazy southern drawl. He could not open with her the topic of her affairs; it must be with Felix. Felix would not have turned the business over to Lois to broach; he was no coward. He knew the two had but one soul between them. Their children had grown up and left home, they lived again for each other.

“It's good to have you here. . .”

Was it significant that she wore, he fancied, more jewelry than usual, and that her black gown was the most notable in the room? “Felix is out of this. He has to fix up an urgent column for the morning, and has gone upstairs, where he will be *very* pleased to see you. But will you please not give the password to anyone?”

“I'll go up now. . .”

Why should he want to escape what he had come to do? It was all part of the queer emergence of an invisible event. . . And if it seemed tonight that all his friends were communicating some distress, this too was in it. He must not hesitate, but obey. . .

Near the door, however, he came upon a girl in a rose-coloured frock, that contrasted with the mauve cushion she squashed in leaning as if half-collapsed across the arm of a chair in the corner; while her grey eyes, alarmingly dilated, were staring at emptiness. He did not conceive her paleness to mean that she was dropping into a faint, or coming out of one; it was natural to her sensitive face. She was Gas-

pary's daughter. He forgot her Christian name. Gaspary wrote on ancient and medieval magic; he knew him reasonably well.

"Is anything the matter?"

After a curious moment, she looked round at him, then slowly sat up.

"Yes. Something is wrong here this evening—what is it?"

"Wrong?"

"Then you aren't psychic? I thought you were. There's something very wrong in this house. . . ." Some quality of quietness, delicacy, clearness, in her voice—a voice she seemed deliberately to restrain from excitement—impressed him more than he knew. At the same time she got up to face him, when he recollected her grace. He had seen her perhaps twice before. "I've just had to leave that other room because of a girl. I felt myself growing hysterical."

"What was she doing?"

"Nothing at all. She is just sitting quietly."

It was of course Cecilie Toller's companion, who also had amazed Adrienne. So she must really be odd. Indeed, he "could hardly not want to know her". Only first he must finish with Felix.

"Won't you describe her?"

"Her face is without any sort of colour, with black, black eyes, looking continually away. . . I assure you, she is a witch."

"Young?"

"No older than I."

"Queer."

"I thought you might have felt her even in here. She would be sending out waves to reach beyond the room. Are you positive you haven't been aware of anything?"

"I'm not sure."

"Father is coming soon. Please be with me till he comes. I can't talk to anyone. What is the time?"

"Close on eleven. I'm expected outside. Go to Mrs. Wayland."

She was still hesitating when he left the room.

He knew the house. Felix's study was high up at the back,

for the sake of the privacy and silence. Two flights at the opposite ends of a long first-floor passage led to it. There were no guests in those upper regions. The confused babel from below died out on the second stairs. From the landing above stretched another ill-lit passage.

The quiet and gloom were restful after the bright noise he had escaped from. He passed a door that had always been shut on his previous visits, but now it was open. He could not imagine what the dwarf, square room was for. There were a couple of chairs, a small polished table, a strip of expensive rug, nothing else. A curtain was across the window. A faint diffused light was thrown from the overhead electric bowl, that appeared like a delicate phantom green life. One could have played cards, or supped, by such a light, but hardly read. The curious remote little chamber was so improbable, he had to turn and stop to give it a longer, dreamier regard; it told him no more, however.

His gentle tapping on Felix's door brought the muffled invitation to enter. Within, he saw again the familiar lines of shelves with mostly ancient books, in many languages; the big leather-topped centre table, mountainous with editorial papers, always different, ever the same. There was a smell of pipe-smoke. Felix, the withdrawn briar in his hand, was up to greet him. His square, ruddy, bearded face loomed unalterable, with the brown eyes peering shrewdly out from behind spectacles. He had discarded his dress-coat for a working jacket. Whisky was on the table.

"You're late, Ragnar . . . The whisky's there—take a lot! You look fagged . . . Then sit down."

"In fact, I am tired," returned Ragnar. "Without your tremendous endurance, I have still been working. But tell me—you've a party down below, and you're up here."

"Lois's, not mine. I've shown my face. My time's too precious to sacrifice to the convenience of idlers. . . . I have to talk to you, Ragnar. . . ."

Ragnar drank some whisky. He sat down slowly, while Felix reseated himself in the revolving chair before the table, swivelling it round to face him.

"What's that small room on the way up here, Felix? I've not seen it before."

"It's just a room. I left the light on to light the passage for you, supposing you should come up. Once in a while we play chess there, or besique."

"Lois plays chess?"

"She's very good at it—mostly beats me."

"You're well named Felix."

"Get married too, my dear fellow! You have too much good sense to go wrong in your choice of a wife."

Ragnar was sure that calamity hung over Felix like a suspended wave, but that luck had not permanently deserted him and that he would be a difficult man to break. . .

He changed the talk.

"They may be idlers below, Felix. But some are interesting."

"Most likely. But that reminds me—you know Gaspar?"

"Yes. I've just spoken to his daughter."

"Faustine. An attractive, neurotic girl—Lois likes her. Well. Gaspar is bringing along a man tonight to meet you. The name has slipped my mind. I understand it is to discuss something in your books. Is it all right?"

"Of course. But in that case I had better get downstairs again. Miss Gaspar is expecting her father almost at once."

"There's no appointment—let them wait! We haven't talked yet."

Ragnar finished his whisky and refused more.

"I find Mrs. Toller is here, Felix, and with her, they tell me is a remarkable girl named. . . ." He had forgotten the name. Felix supplied it.

"Urda Noett. I have met her. She looks like a witch."

"You say so too? But who is she?"

"She's from somewhere in Europe, I know no more. No doubt Cecilie is showing her off: women do that. Perhaps the girl consents to be shown off—there is half your mystery."

"How is she like a witch?"

Felix laughed. "Have we time? And what's the interest? However, the idea is, all staring at a pretty woman is actually a hidden process of trying to convert a metaphysical into an intellectual spectacle. If the sensualists deny it, why are women themselves just as interested in another pretty woman? But

when you attempt to analyse the beauty, into hair, eyes, teeth etc. that is where we come to grief. Beauty can be prevented by the failure of a feature, and still the whole unprevented beauty is metaphysical. We ask ourselves the *meaning*. An ugly woman has no meaning. Try it, Ragnar. Well, this girl downstairs, without possessing, I should say, any beauty in the strict sense, all the same is very suggestive of meaning. Hence the excited curiosity. But whether there's an inwardness to correspond, I cannot tell you. See her, by all means!". . . He rose to help himself to whisky, drank standing, then, sitting down again, relit the pipe, and through his glasses blinked awhile at Ragnar.

"But I'm glad you were able to get here. I particularly wanted to bring a matter up with you. Lois has said nothing?"

"No."

"Just as well. This is business. I'll be quick, then you can go down to Gaspary. . . It's the *Memnon*. It's a money scheme, but more, I hope. I'll not occupy you above eight or ten minutes of your time, if only you will reserve your remarks to the end."

He went on:

"Reports of the impending finish of my journal may have reached you. I've fancied a certain reticence among my friends of late. I'll tell you. It is true and not true—the *Memnon* is not paying, but it's still an influence, and so far the assets easily cover all liabilities. It is just because I don't choose to deceive myself about the possibility of its quick recovery on present lines that I am talking to you now.

"There are practical reasons for the falling off of distribution, with the consequent dropping off of advertisers. I am considering the feasibility by bold changes, of stopping the swing. This needs new money, and the naming of the calculated figure will be your cue. . . . But understand me!"—he laid the pipe on the table, and shot a quick glance to Ragnar's troubled face, then instantly averted his eyes again—"I accept charity from nobody. Under that designation would come any interests against your better business sense.

"I'm not inviting you to throw your cash into a ditch. The *Memnon* has no competitor in spirit, and the times are changing, there's seriousness abroad—the result of social

conditions. The abuses of professional literature must produce revolt and we of the *Memnon* will benefit from that. At a lower level, trade is improving. The wireless should begin to settle into its own place instead of cutting the throat of books. It's unlikely that the ancient joy of reading will be permanently displaced. Those who wish to make a nobler use of their leisure time than concert music or abbreviated popular lectures can offer, will still know where to look. I find signs everywhere of a tide on the turn. . .

"Given peace, security, food, common education, what should be the aim of a civilised society? The internal heightening of men and women through stimulation, not fear. And what is the engine for that? Literature. So what I have to propose is not personal. I am outside, Lois is outside, even you are. Our friendship initiates it, yet friendship is outside it. It's business, with its feet on solid ground; but its face is raised to the sky. . . ."

Ragnar sat back relaxed, sad, no longer looking at Felix. He closed and opened his eyes by turns, while the singular restlessness in him contended with a lethargy like nothing he had known. It was no physical somnolence, but as if an oppressive trance waited for the first gap in his vigilance to seize his body and substitute for the world—a vision. He had to exert himself to attend to Felix's words. Inattention at such a juncture would be worse than discourtesy, it would be a crime. Felix's whole future, Lois's with it, perhaps depended on his reception of these sound-symbols falling on his consciousness—somehow making such a blurred impression on it, that soon it threatened to become for him pure *unsymbolic* sound.

For Ragnar Felix was not now the busy editor, the man for whom a working day of sixteen hours was all too short, the man whose incredible activity stood on so many legs and who wrote, so to speak, with six pens simultaneously. He was that other Felix Wayland who, mournfully beholding a general iniquity in the commonwealth of books, became neither womanishly angry nor foolishly cynical, but had set himself with the wholly inadequate weapon now breaking in his hand, to fight the three-headed Cerberus of mercenariness, vainglory and counterfeiting, in

order to recover the magic purity of true writing for the sons and daughters of men, now groping in darkness towards the precipice. Ragnar knew what the name *Memnon* signified. The colossal Theban statue called Memnon—that, in fact, of the Egyptian king Amenophis—of black stone, gave forth when struck by the first rays of the rising sun a sound like the snapping asunder of a chord. And so Felix's principle was that a true book, being quickened by the ray of pure intelligence in the reader, must display its authenticity by the repeated sounding within the soul of a sudden note, like sharp music. And such books, that need not be the best written, or the most immediate transcript of actual life, were those which could permanently expand and ennoble the spirit of man, whereas the other sort were like a cargo of corpses.

The proletariat, desiring above everything to be immediately fascinated, the bright, quick manner of journalism, with its instant effects, had now seized hold of books; and long beauty was dead, or dying. Another fashion was of power—not the power *to do*, but the mere aspect and outward character of power, as a thing admirable in itself without the result. So was the gentle power of performance ignored. Woe betide him who rejected all fashions!

And Felix would reply to the lament of inevitability: "Unless the evil existed, no need for a reformation." His historical analogue was Luther—one insignificant provincial doctor of theology against the might of a corrupt universal Rome. Yet ten thousand differences showed between that old straightforward religious rebellion and this other infinitely more hopeless declaration against a phantom enemy everywhere and nowhere. . .

The harsh abrupt voice of Ragnar's host went perseveringly forward like an intrepid steamer ploughing through heavy seas. He no longer caught the words. This retired, silent room at the top of the house, by contrast with the confused assembly he had left below—the many voices, the movement, life, brilliance, colour, bewilderment, overlying the enduring heaviness of it all—that was a dream, and this yet a deeper one. Here, in a cave where it might echo and re-echo, his spirit's reiteration of its mystic expectancy could

grow swiftly—and grow insupportable. He must go downstairs again. This was not his place. . .

Then, inside his head, the recollection which gave him understanding exploded softly. The girl, Mrs. Toller's friend, Urda Noett—*she* was the cause of his disturbance! *She* was the house's extraordinary element tonight. *She* was causing his troubled lethargy. Surely he must get down to her at once. The hour was late, and she might be going. . . .

As from the depths of his dream, he looked with a new fixity at Felix, whose own eyes were downcast while his fingers went on drumming the table. . .

He stood up suddenly.

"Felix, pardon me! . . . I am not feeling fit tonight, and I shall have to get you to defer it!" Then, when Felix too was up, astonished and concerned, crestfallen as well, he added before a reply could come, "I am perfectly well, but very tired. It's impossible for me to concentrate. This is not a business for a single short discussion and a quick answer. I am staying in town—lunch with me at the Club tomorrow. There I will hear you out, and say what I have to say."

"Very well! But you have heard me so far. I am entitled to ask, at this point, and without committing yourself, is it at all probable that you will be sympathetic?"

"What is the figure?"

"I'm hoping it will be subscribed. Gaspary has very earnest views on literature as the one saving force of a civilisation going fast to the devil. I don't know how well off he is. They live simply, but he is a dark horse—he may have money. Cecilie Toller is anxious for the coming together of English and German modern literature at their best. There's no objection to that, and we can embrace it. If necessary, I would run without profits for three years, and I am trying to raise ten thousand pounds; but the estimate is provisional."


"I am in sympathy with your work," said Ragnar. "Show me that you're on the best course and perhaps I shan't want to stay out. Further than that I can't go now. You must not consider anything definitely promised."

Felix reddened, while without more words he reached out his hand.

In farewell at the door, however, he remarked nonchalantly, his momentary escape of emotion already suppressed:

“I may still see you downstairs if you are stopping on. I’ve just recalled the name of Gaspary’s friend. It is Bluewright. . . .”

3

losing the door after him, Ragnar moved towards the stairs. But all at once such a heaviness came on him that he found himself swaying and staggering. He must rest somewhere for a minute. . . He could sit in this tiny green-lit room without anybody knowing. Felix was fast in his study, and otherwise this top part of the house was deserted. He dropped into an armchair. An absolute silence—perfect peace!. . . This little chamber had invisibly accumulated through months and years an occult quality—it seemed, of *dream*. . .

Why did he wish to see a strange girl merely from her report? Or if he were being mysteriously attracted to her, why did her influence produce the unnatural languor which delayed him? It was an apathy of his will. A very slight exercise of will would dispel the inertia, and probably the better part of his superstitiousness. . .

It was imbecility to suppose that he found her alluring from the description. Both Felix and Adrienne had discounted her looks, and even if they had extolled them he was not a boy, to rush headlong to a new beauty. But she was a witch. Perhaps that word and her youth combined to persuade him that *he* would find her beautiful, whatever the grosser perceptions of others might report. But this was more like the slow pull of fate.

Sometimes he had wandered in the great mystic house of women. He did not shun their treasure of love; but he was no longer tormented by its shadow. Before his eyes grew a familiar, lovely form, in the very colour of humanity, and still he knew he was in the nameless state between waking and sleeping . . . It was Jenny—half his live years dead, eyes endless as grey halls and voice akin to the music of the winds and waters, who seemed in her person to carry humanity back to its first nature. . . . Was it not the magic essence of love that its characters must be from a mould thereafter broken? . . . She passed and another shape took her place—Rachel; who might still be in life, he could not say. She had married and had vanished from his knowledge, until this instant when she showed again as a mask to taunt him. Always she was a mask—these serene features, smooth, pale, noble, set high above smiling, as a moon above intercourse; her shrine-eyes, veiling the sacred poetry unknown to her lips. . .

He stirred and woke, yet had never slept. Those visions were unreal deceits. The past was dead, the future was unborn: he required nothing. Perhaps *he* was dead, and only dreamed he lived—a glamour was upon all his thoughts in the way he had always seemed to know in dreams. This was Felix's house, however, and he had stayed upstairs too long. He felt like one who went to a singular and incomprehensible appointment. . .

He must have been away longer than he had imagined, for the room was appreciably emptier; the party was drawing to a close. The first detail caught by his eye reduced him to a dull stupefaction. He could not have said why, but it was as if, although it was here before him and he could see it uninterruptedly, this scene challenging him was outside his understanding. Two persons he did not know, who could not have been in the room when he had left it, were standing opposite each other, apparently together, except that they were neither talking nor showing any of the ordinary signs of acquaintance. The girl he guessed at once to be Urda Noett, the other was a man. It was not long past Easter, the night was chilly, and there

was a low fire in the big Victorian grate that Lois would never part with; but against a corner of the mantelpiece the man seemed to rest an elbow, yet was more erect than leaning. The pose gave him an air of quiet, aloof contemplation which Ragnar felt to be rather terrible.

He tried unsuccessfully to distinguish his face. Either it was turned too much away or it was somehow in shade; Ragnar's eyes continually slipped past it to meet nothingness. The form was long, thin, and he could shrinkingly have fancied—*deathlike* . . . He was positive that this individual must be Gaspary's friend, here to be introduced to him. It was Bluewright. . .

His thoughts came to him as through a fog, and he could not answer one of his own dim questions. Why was she not with Cecilie Toller? Why was Gaspary not here? What were they doing together? There was no attempt at conversation between them, yet the man's hidden eye seemed endlessly to rest on her form.

Urda Noett stood real-unreal, shadowy as the other. . . a motionless womanly shaft but those few steps away; no girl at all except in age and shape, but a statue—a thing of mythology. Past Bluewright, her eyes were set in an unvarying slant upon a corner of the floor across the room. The face being in profile to him, he could not see the eyes to have known their thought; only he felt the shock of living black. Her face was as white as stone—she was the figure of a dream. Her intertwined gleaming hair was black, her dress a dark and deep-turning misty violet. Every particular of her appearance was a unity with her whole emblem. The smallest breath of vanity in her must destroy the emblem. . .

The quality of coldness, classicism in her face was unparalleled in a person actually alive . . . yet there was no hardness. It was in the Greek way delicate and female; the slender bones, the high cheeks falling sharply away, the lips suspended between decision and indecision. Upon everything lay the calm of sculpture, that her pallor only assisted and that a spectral faint smile, perhaps only fancied, did not prevent. . .

Women had been formed to beauty since man's beginning, and still the last laws of beauty went unguessed. The familiar modes of beauty were loved, the appreciation of rarer kinds was to be won by taste; yet beyond even that there might be high single instances so unique as to be unrecognisable even by the noblest, most open intelligence. This beauty before him was too difficult for immediate acceptance. Because the lines of her face were born of extraordinary inward characters, the eye could not understand them, therefore was dissatisfied, and the name of beauty was withheld.

Felix's remark came back to him of the essential *meaning* lying behind all women's beauty. He saw now how it was. The beauty of a face rested in the harmony of its parts; where there was harmony, and the successful expression of an internal natural design—the woman was self-sufficient against the world, she had meaning. But where there was not perfect harmony, there accident came in, and the outer world had a voice in the face's design, which then represented no whole of personal meaning. . . .

And so Urda must be beautiful, for he found it plain that all her features sprang to one idea which was not of the world. Further, her stone exterior already began to seem untrue. It was merely the failure of his own power of perception, that, taken by surprise, was still incapable of penetrating into the obscure territory of her spirit. In the same way, in some moment of awful tragedy the human countenance, forsaken by the soul seeking greater depths, could appear as if carved out of rock. . . .in Urda's case it was permanent. Was it her secret that she was in such a hell, and none could see it? More likely, in a tragic heaven—that word, also, had been given him tonight, by Adrienne. Nothing this evening had been without its reason. But if Urda Noett were in pain, it was not connected with her life as a girl, as a human creature; the pain must be unearthly. It was her meaning, which nobody could read. If he had been brought here tonight, was it not because she would presently choose to communicate to him some indication of this secret pain? Then at last she would sud-

denly reveal herself as most beautiful. But it could not possibly be now. . . .

A hand lightly touched him and, turning, he saw Lois.

“Have you seen a spirit, Ragnar?—or was the spirit’s name Felix?”

“Have I seen Felix?”

Lois laughed. “I guess you have. What news from heaven?”

She alluded of course to the height above the street and the secretness of Felix’s sanctum, and yet he thought there was to be no end to these hints of mystery. He answered her peaceably, while trying to control his ideas:

“We began to talk, but I broke it off for tonight. He is lunching with me tomorrow.”

“You have been gone an age.”

“I don’t know.”

Her holding eyes prevented him looking round again at Urda and Bluewright—and he thought how odd it was that she should neither openly refer to them nor seem to notice their presence. She also quietly gave up the indirect discussion of Felix’s business with him, to say instead:

“You were entertaining Faustine Gaspary before you went up—meanwhile her father has been here to fetch her, and they have gone. There is a message for you from him. That friend of his could not get here after all. He is very sorry, and will write.”

Ragnar paled. He paused.

“Do you mean Bluewright?”

“His name is Bluewright.”

“Then who is that man, behind me?” He pulled her arm rather quickly, and her half-startled eyes followed his direction.

“I don’t understand, Ragnar. . . .”

“There were two people there. . . .”

They had vanished. His rapid glance failed to show them anywhere near, or in the room. The door was indeed close by—but to have absconded in this lightning style with no sign of any such intention . . . How could the man have carried off as in a flash of magic a girl strange to the

house and to him? If anyone at all had been there before his eyes, it was Bluewright. . .

“Lois, a man I was sure was Bluewright stood there, against the mantelpiece, actually as you came up, and with him was the girl Urda Noett. Didn’t you see these two, past me, right in front of you?”

“No.”

“Then what have I seen??”

“Ghosts, maybe. You were right for ghosts tonight, Ragnar. As for the Noett girl, she and Cecilie left half an hour ago, while you were still upstairs; and your Mr. Bluewright has not been here at all.”

“It was a hallucination, then??”

“It was not those two. Here is Adrienne.”

Adrienne told him that she had seen Mrs. Toller and Urda off in their car. Cecilie remembered Ragnar very well. She was sorry to have missed him this evening. Adrienne added that he must get to know all those three very exceptional women—they were representatives of the class of true *individuals*, so fast dying out. They offered no reminders of other people. . .

“How was the girl dressed??” he interrupted her. “What was the colour of her dress??”

His sister-in-law looked surprised.

“She was in a very difficult shade of violet.”

So although it were apparition, it was not false. And she being Urda’s living phantom, that companion shape was Bluewright’s. . .Next week he was probably to meet Urda, and Bluewright was sending him a letter. Were not these the tokens that the apparition was nothing in itself, but the forerunner of real events to come? . . .

He feared that Lois would question him further before Adrienne about his vision, that Adrienne would catch her curiosity, and they must all play, fence, deceive—in order that the great true ghostly world of living ghosts, who were men and women, should remain unconfessed. . . . He brought their talk to an abrupt end; making his excuses to Lois for not staying on till Felix should come down. A kind of music was sounding in his head.

4



n the following evening Ragnar stopped his car just past a second that waited outside the front door of his home, Copschill. The wide, low, shapeless, century-old house, in which all three had been born, had passed to Ragnar and his sisters. Bigger than it seemed, proud, hidden and neighbourless, it stood perched amid the trees, now in April still only opening, of a high hurst; and picturesquely thrust out its glassy south-face above a stream fifty feet down. The other car was his sisters'. Passing into the hall lobby, he threw off his overcoat, then entered the hall itself.

As he had half-expected, the girls were there, adding the last touches to their decking-out. Leonore was bending to arrange a fold of Elsa's skirt. She looked up to greet him briefly while Elsa, standing idle, smiled and questioned him. Then he remembered—how had he forgotten it—that this was the all-important night of the decision of Elsa's destiny. Adrienne, Lois, now Elsa—in the strange glare of these hours the hearts of women were to be shown to him, living and tormented. Elsa was twenty-five, Leonore thirty-two and Waldo thirty.

Blue-eyed, timid, temperamental, hating unfamiliar persons and places, Elsa resembled Waldo in these and so many other ways. He was convinced that she resented her present mode of life—all the parties, dances, occasions, in and out of London; but dark, tameless Leonore, with her American soul, ruled for both. She would rule him too, if he let her. It was an even match between Leonore and Adrienne; each admired the other, but they never cared to meet. For himself, he rarely escorted his sisters; Leonore was managing and unescortable. Some called her handsome, but Elsa, taller than she, was unquestionably pretty. She

possessed a mist of pale gold hair and was exquisitely fair-skinned, with gentle features, and a soft, low voice.

Tonight she was to meet for the decisive time the man who had already obtained his father's sanction for marriage. The signs were that he would become a successful counsel; he might be marked for the highest offices.

The father himself was a High Court judge. This son was clever, personable, sharp-edged like a cutting tool, eager in his stride. . .Ragnar was uneasy whether all that was a right complement to his young sister's quiet passion for the tranquil beauties of life. Opposites might join in marriage and be blessed, but seemingly only on condition that they held a large invisible character in common. Leonore maintained that a marriage was the woman's work of art—that even acute differences of taste, disposition and habit were reconcilable by wifely artistry, yielding here, more than recovering there.

Everything rested on one point of love. Elsa had never spoken to him of her heart. Leonore, who was instead of a mother to her and so possessive, had won her from him, or Elsa shrank in her immaturity from his fourteen more years and harsher sex. Yet doubtless, as the natural head of the family, he should more manfully have shouldered his responsibilities . . . somehow, everything about the inauspicious imbroglio seemed new to him. He was like one walking on a beach shut in by cliffs, who, utterly to his dismay, was overtaken by the tide. . .

The manservant appeared, to bring him a letter on a salver.

“Your other correspondence is upstairs, sir, but this letter is marked ‘immediate’.”

Ragnar took it. The writing was educated, and a man's, the paper of good quality. He guessed it to be the expected one from Bluewright. This indistinct postmark looked like *Bodiam*—that was in Sussex, but nowhere near Swayning. He put the letter in his pocket, meaning to read it afterwards in quietness.

“Wait a moment!”. . .He detained the servant, and addressed Leonore, who was now facing him while she

fumbled with the fastening of her cloak.

"Gaspary is coming this evening, Leo, but not to dine. . . He will be off in the morning again." . . . And to the manservant he said, "Please see that sandwiches and coffee are brought to the study as soon as Mr. Gaspary arrives—about nine o'clock; and have his room got ready." The man went out.

It mattered nothing to Leonore that a man was coming whom she was probably not to see. She did not reply. He went on to tell her of his intended visit to Adrienne and Waldo at Swayning, adding: "They have neighbours—Cecilie Toller, and stopping with her, Marya Klangst. . ."

"The musician?"

"Yes."

"I once met that Madame Klangst," said his sister carelessly, lifting a hand to her hair. "It must have been twelve years ago, in Prague, when I was studying music there. She was quite nice to me, but extremely awe-inspiring. I was young enough to be impressed."

"Was she then at her height?"

"She was perfection climbing towards perfection, as I thought. Her speaking voice was her soul. How am I to describe it? Imagine the calm at the centre of passion—but this you did not realise till she left off speaking, when whatever she had just expressed remained as if . . . an annunciation from the regions lying beyond death. Clothe that in the delicacy of women's ordinary subdued talking tones, and in the beautiful High German of the best society, and you will understand the inadequacy of your question."

Leonore was now speaking so easily, so freely, that again his bewilderment became conscious. This facility and the fantasy of her words were not in character. Since last night the world and its persons had begun extraordinarily to change.

She was going on: "One remark of hers I have never forgotten. The company (mostly of Germans, and they were talking German) was discussing what in England could never be discussed, the ideal ground of music—its absolute

value in life, its claim to reality. Then someone of course had to try to establish the seriousness of music by showing our so-called reality to be the reverse of serious—by likening life to a dream; Shakespeare was quoted . . . as if music might be a dream within a dream. . . when Mme. Klangst transformed all her hearers into true dreamers, by causing the dead rod of triteness in the debate to become the living serpent of spiritual immediacy. “And I feel it most probable,” she said, “that music is the struggling up from the dream of life, and that our waking at last from the dream will find us on *that* side of music.”. . . Her palm swept out, and there was a long silence, and through half the night, in bed, I revolved the mystery of music.”. . . Leonore stopped to lift her skirt, glancing towards Elsa. “I’ve forgotten something in my room. Wait here, Elsa.”

Twelve years ago Urda must have been a child, and Leonore could not have known her. . . A great taciturnity was on his spirit, preventing his profanation of these assembling darkneses by their confession. . . Elsa had approached him, and was talking.

“Suppose it were true, though, what Mme. Klangst said: that people were doomed to stay enchanted in the dream of life until aroused by the right music. . . could not that be a religion?”

“A religion opening to the pursuit of pleasure, Elsa, therefore unfitted for a rule to wretched mortals only too apt to pleasure!. . . And yet since yesterday my head has been filled with a tuneless music that I could almost fancy gives a distance promise of waking.”

“Perhaps you met a woman yesterday?”

“A man is not everlastingly concerned with love.”

“I didn’t say love. Are women only able to inspire love?”

“It’s easiest.”

Elsa went on earnestly:

“At this minute we could both be in a dream, expecting the music which could wake us up. You may be beginning to hear yours, Ragnar, but mine is sunk in a horrible dead sepulchre of stillness, as wide as God’s hand of punishment! You know what I’m to do this evening?”

“I know.”

“Perhaps you want me to marry that ghost? As it’s ‘easiest’ for him, so it’s the sensible thing for me. In a whole lifetime my music may not arrive, then I shall have sacrificed the lower happiness to nothing. But suppose I marry, and *afterwards* hear my music, to call me from the dream—what then? Why have you never advised me, Ragnar?”

“I’m afraid it’s too late.”

“It *shan’t* be too late, though nobody ever again believes my good faith.”

Ragnar hesitated, then replied with difficulty:

“Marry him who has once seen your highest, were it but a passing flash of perplexity. We should have known each other better, Elsa. Do nothing quickly. Speak to Waldo. . . .”

Leonore was back. Elsa retreated to a deep corner of the hall’s dusk. . .

He stood for a few moments at the window of his room upstairs, regarding the darkened landscape across the invisible stream below. . . Returning into the room, leaving the curtain undrawn, he switched on the light, then took from his pocket the letter the servant had handed him.

What seemed many sheets of thin paper were filled with a bold and heavy writing—he had a sensation nearly of fear. But when instantly he turned to the signature, it was “Bluewright”, without prefixing initial. It was as if the writer disavowed his inclusion in any social community. He was alone, and just because there could be no second Bluewright in the world, the surname was sufficient and characteristic. . .

“Sir,

I desired to meet you, and thank you for having acceded yesterday to my request to this effect through Mr. Gaspary. Unhappily I was prevented from availing myself of your courtesy.

I am bold enough to trouble you by a letter instead. I know and admire your work. It is no business of mine to eulogise it from my lower ground, and my single object in this letter is, after citing a few passages of your books,

and then relating an experience of my own, to see your opinion regarding the feasibility of an application of the one to the other.

“You imagined a dream, that doubtless was a real night adventure of yours: ‘A deserted city street at dead of night. Round a corner moves a procession of little girls, dressed in white, with flowing hair; bearing wands, that are torches. It is a funeral. A little afterwards, still at night, I am in the nick of time to see (and I am trying to make a friend see) a group of stars in the act of slipping downwards through the sky, out of place. It is the Pleiades. But while I am pointing out the spectacle, other stars slip down in the sky; and *all* are slipping down. A fearful supernatural horror at the sight makes another sort of being of me. . .’

“And you speak, in another place, of

‘...the strange witching glamour of dreams; a positive property, transcending anything of the kind in waking life. . . and yet this glamour may be in lightning—white, bleak, illuminating, withering. . .’

“Of music, you say:

‘It is, or should be, a spirit language. Just as in speech one hears and understands without thought of the letters building up the words, or even the words themselves, spoken; so in music one should not attend to the tones, harmonies of tone, or even phrases. . .’

“And of reality:

‘*Ourania*: or phenomenal life. . .The world of *Ourania*, nevertheless, is a city of the Jetuns—a home of illusions. Simply it is a dream. For instance, in viewing a sky of bright stars (probably, the most realistic of earthly spectacles), we find ourselves, not brought closer to reality, but repelled farther from it, towards strangeness and the sense of the impossible. . . .’

“These are the passages, the inter-relation of which will be shown. My experience is a recurrent dream, overtaking me more than a few times within a few years. A cause in life is not traceable. It does not repeat itself mechanically, but each time develops. Unlike even an exceptional single dream, it is somehow complicated with the fabric of my waking future. Your books alone seem to contain the hint of the interpretation I am after, and so I ap-

proach you for help.

“I am always walking, or escaping, through a supernatural, old-fashioned house, which is mine, and where I have too often been before, though I do not know all its parts. The house is peculiarly planned: two, or at most three, storeys high, but of an extraordinary continuance, round three sides of a quadrangle. I never look out of doors to see; yet I have the impression of streets and sunshine; yet again, it is all gloom and dusk in the house. There must be an entrance from the street at either end of the house’s length.

“In awful multiplicity, rooms, passageways, lobbies, short flights up and down, every nightmare of twist and turn meet me anew on each occasion; and always I remember the great part of what I encounter, and always too, there is something different. Last time I found myself in a lofty empty haunted room. I saw nothing in it. It is indeed ghostly to be in the house, where nothing happens. I have, however, carelessly used the word, *nightmare*: it is not one.

“I quoted themes from your books: the very spirit of death; the horror of the occult; the dreadful-beautiful over-reality of glamour; the emotional acceptance of music not listened to for itself; the passing of reality at its height into another state, not reality—all these themes translate me as I move through the house, alive yet dead (as I am never alive and dead in the life of daylight consciousness), less a man than a quivering trepidation, underneath which, however, burns constantly the tiny, living flame of imperishable courage, that is like a principle of pioneering.

“Therefore, I have been considering whether it is possible that you as well know this house, seeing that you have sometimes described its atmosphere so faithfully. But if you do know it, partly or wholly through dreams, then perhaps there is some real house of the world to correspond—some ancient, isolated, empty house in a lonely country; which once upon a time you saw, and may or may not have forgotten since; to serve as substratum to your later dreamings and imaginings.

“Will you, accordingly, be so good as to examine the case with yourself in quietness, and ascertain if it be not as

I have conceived? I would gladly learn the house's whereabouts. It might even be not too far removed from the reach of either of us. And meanwhile I do not ask you to reply directly to this letter, or endeavour to meet me personally; as I now think the house should first be recovered, before we debate what else it is to do to us.

“But if the inconsistency occurs to you, how a house among streets should be sought in a countryside, in fact this is difficult to reconcile; yet it all serves to establish the genuineness of my dream, since both impressions—of a deserted country, and of streets—are very insistent with me, but square them I cannot.

Very obediently yours,
Bluewright.”

How he came to be sitting in darkness on the balcony outside his window, Ragnar could not grasp. He must have been there a long time; night had fallen, and the room's light was out. There was a yellow gibbous moon in the sky and all the earth under it showed pale and mystic. The air was sharp. He could not believe he had slept, but it was just as if his mind had taken a long journey. . .

When, however, on lighting his room, he sought Bluewright's letter to re-read it, he could not find it. He searched his pockets, and even unlikely places in the room. Then slowly he ceased to hunt; it was impossible to tell what his automatic reactions had been during an hour. Or perhaps he had dreamt this letter! Yet quite certainly the servant had passed him one downstairs before his sisters, and now he had not got it.

5



he light was out again, but the flickering of the fire continued to show Ragnar his guest's strange features; he could not remove his eyes. Gaspary appeared unconscious of his regard. Periodically drawing at his cigar, he was gazing through the window at the moon. The two illuminations, of the fire and the moon, in alien conjunction transformed the room to a quiet chaos of tones and suggestions—magic shine, shadow, darkness, *faerie*. The night was still, and the house silent.

He found himself conceiving Gaspary as one of those singular and dreadful commanders in the Thirty Years' War—Wallenstein, or perhaps Tilly . . . so rugged, bony, with his prominent cheek-bones, dark scarlet and yellow of the skin, small peaked reddish beard, bristling rufous hair turning grey, and iron eyes. Let him don buff and steel, wearing a hat with a coloured cock's feather, then his tough brevity of stature, his high, metallic voice, like the hard challenge of a trumpet; would be more properly lodged than in those dark, peaceful garments of a sedentary culture, drab and mean. Why had he never found him so vivid and luminous before? His own spirit's atmosphere was changed; this change, like a phenomenal physical daylight, was bringing about an enhancement of the world. Gaspary's enchanted aspect also was a foreshadowing of some purpose not yet announced. . . .

Ragnar rose to pour wine for them both, but the guest, receiving his goblet in silence, set it down without tasting. . .

When Gaspary's high, sharp voice began again, Ragnar waited for those other words which would separate themselves from the rest like a flower from leaves, dis-

closing suddenly the whole occult plan of this spectral moonlight visitation.

“In its outward form our civilisation is nothing but the amassed triumphs of the practical and mechanical brains of the age. The inventors and discoverers and contrivers, the investigators of the inch-deep material secrets of nature have by degrees made us what we are. No doubt they have generally been sincere, single-minded men, with little nonsense, moved by a more or less unconscious will to serve their fellow-creatures. But they have been wanting in the sense of mystical wonder.

“And now the result begins to show in daylight. We are languishing in a place swept clear of mystery, equipped as a penitentiary. Who any longer entertains the bare suspicion that man is a spirit, in an immaterial setting? Yet there is nothing more unreal physically than man’s so-called animal life during a few revolutions of the earth about the sun. It comes from nothing, and goes back to nothing. And I say a thing which must vanish is already nothing. . .”

“Against every order of mind there has always been another order,” said Ragnar. “So where is the existing contradiction of the overwhelming spirit of physical progress?”

“Some would point to religion, but I do not. The churches have for too long made money for survival their chief concern. The excuse has been charity, which has changed nothing. He who touches money, touches death. Nor do I point to the spiritists, who wish to see with their eyes, and hear with their ears. . .”

“Where else, then, is faith?”

“If the line of wise women survived, they could be the ones to save the world.”

“Who were those wise women?”

“They have been called witches.”

Ragnar was silent. Out of his few blind questions events had marvellously raised Urda’s insistent shape, and now the talk must be of her. He would not name her, and yet she surely would be named. . .

“You probably know that I have written a good deal on the subject of witches,” Gaspary continued. “The conclusion is that I have not found them shams. Witchcraft has become discredited, partly as opposed in general to the spirit of physical progress, partly as lending itself so easily to fraud and vulgarity.

“The malignant blighting of unconscious victims, the transfixing of wax images, love-potions, the drying up of cows, petty acts of reprisal and more atrocious acts of pure malevolence; such is the popular story of witches. There is truth as well as fable in it. Magic, the enemy of progress, has been obliged to recruit its workers from the ranks of the unsocial. They were found puddling in the marshy backwaters of communities—the dregs of the ignorant class, the ancient hags and crones envying those younger, comelier, richer, happier than themselves. . . Yet it is they who have helped to keep alive in men the sense of mystical wonder. Not intending it, the witches have helped to keep the world a place for spirits. In so doing they have merely inherited, while abominably misusing, a magnificent bequest.

“The true wise women preceded them. They were those noble figures of legendary romance; the entirely human, not yet whimsical prototype of the fairy, the diminutive elf, which came in with the Elizabethans. Of this kind was Arthur’s magic sister, Morgan le Fay. They were not gossamer creatures of the air, but flesh and blood women, ladies by birth, frequently of the highest worldly rank; only skilled in enchantment. . .”

Ragnar asked him: “A single act of magic affects only one person; and if they were so wise, then they loved, not hated. Whom did they love? What could their power do for love?”

“The tales relate that they did good and harm. It is because only particular persons could be acted on, that the whole business of witchcraft, then and later, fell so emphatically to the charge of women, with their particular natures. The wisdom would lie in the lofty aim, which nevertheless, the woman being still a woman, might have its

origin in indignation or loathing. But where the act is of kindness, no doubt few men cannot be served by magic. . . .”

“Could the act of influence be without the woman’s knowledge?”

“It is improbable,” replied Gaspary. “Even an ordinary woman in company knows very well whom she is affecting. But if you are distinguishing between *influencing* and *willing*, there is a sure test. In a case where magic is directed against a man so that he can see it with his own eyes, and recognise its character, then the deliberate willing may be taken as certain.”

“What if it were hallucination?”

“An apparition?”

“Of two persons.”

“The source of that could be tested,” said Gaspary.

To Ragnar this conversation, that continued to avoid Urda as a planet the sun it swung round, was disturbingly like those rooms, passages, flights of stairs, in Bluewright’s house—and here also *nothing happened*.

Gaspary, throwing the stump of his cigar into the fire, folded his arms.

“If your apparition were the hallucination of a disordered brain, it would not be preceded by a state of suspense and bewilderment; but assuming it to be directly inflicted on you by some other nature, then both eye and ear would be involved in such a state. That mental state of silence, to which all of us are born, would supernaturally be changed to one of inward sound. . . .”

“The outward ear would hear nothing but the mental faculty corresponding to the ear would feel itself deprived of its bed of peace. Could the ear hear it, it would be a magic music—but the long continuance of that kind of music would be beyond human capacity. . . .”

“I am full of hesitations. . . . How can an influence bear doubly on different senses, so that the one is affected during whole hours and days, the other during minutes only; yet in some way they act together?”

“You know the endless accounts in modern and former times of appearances at the instant of death? The image of the dying man or woman hovering between two worlds

may be so shaken off that a relation or friend is visited. The spirit leaving the world has power to cast this image if it desires."

"Yet the desire need not be conscious. . . It could be a *loneliness* of the spirit about to pass to strange adventures. Involuntarily it seeks a friend. The will might at the approach of death project something of its fears and passions to that friend. These projections would be the long introduction to a subsequent quick apparition. They could break up the silence within the mind by bringing the sound of another world. . . .

"The double of a living person is much rarer than the wraith of the dying. The cases are often difficult to establish. It is easy to confuse one man with another; or a man may choose to hide his identity. Genuine cases must be rare because it would seem to need great violence to expel from the living person an image of his likeness. He must be in great passion or distress. And if the will to be delivered from distress were sleeping in the person, the double might be a simple one; but if the will were consciously alive, the image might be *magic*. . ."

"How can I know?" Ragnar asked.

"Your apparition was of two persons. Could two be independently and simultaneously needing to communicate with you? That would be piling prodigy on prodigy. One therefore was unreal. From the material standpoint, they were both shadows, but one again was the shadow of the other. The will of that single living person casting the two-fold apparition was not unconscious, or the image would have been single. But the apparition being magic, then either the second image was intended, or it was present inescapably.

"You alone can say if the second person of your apparition was a creature of art or a true prophetic ghost. If the latter, and could prophesy, then he was necessary and unavoidable. Then you would have to ask, how far such a phantom could represent a real living man in the world. What man do you know who could be indispensable to another person's apparition?"

Ragnar fixed Gaspary with his eye. "It is for you to

answer. It was Bluewright; you know whether he exists."

"I don't know him, I can't vouch for his existence. He is a friend of Marya Klangst. I took what steps I did at her request."

"She is everywhere!"

"I could not have refused her, her seriousness is too great. If not a witch herself, she might be the mother or fountain-head of witches; and comes from Moravia."

"Urda Noett also. . ." Despite everything, he had named her.

"Yes, they are here together."

"Why were you needed? Mrs. Toller knows me well enough to have introduced Bluewright."

"My daughter seems to be involved."

"He has written to me since, but I can't find his letter, so now I doubt if he really has written me. How to find out if he is what they pretend?"

"What did he look like?"

"He reminded me of death."

"That points to a living personality behind. Who was the other?"

"It was Urda Noett."

"I guessed as much."

"At once?"

"Yes, from the first. Faustine told me about her, and I'm quite clear that she alone is entangling you. And you have expressed no doubt as to who was the principle of your double vision."

"I never saw her in actuality."

"Nor have you seen Bluewright. You must wait with as much patience as you can find, having faith that such an apparition will be quickly followed up. . ."

"Why does she persecute me?"

"A ship would leave the shore, and cannot because of its anchor—but what if the anchor were unimaginable to the mind of men? Urda Noett, by supernatural craft, standing beyond the world, lives in another light. Might not a fantastic shadow be thrown?"

"I have no such power of attachment over a strange soul."

“It needs no special virtue, genius or spirituality, to bid for the peculiar notice of heaven. But there must be secret tokens, illegible by others, legible by heaven. I don’t pronounce the surrender good or bad. Someone nearer in spirit to you will discern it with you. . . .”

Ragnar got up and went to the window. He knew that Gaspary had come tonight to invite him to visit his daughter, and he must obey the summons. He was thinking not of what might be said between them, but of her nature, all at once remembered and shining forth. She was wiser than her father, whose wisdom was from his brain, but hers from a natural response. Her character was earnestness. By such an earnestness the light intellectual imagination was transformed to a nobler weapon.

It might be that Faustine was discerning for him a danger invisible to others.

He returned to Gaspary, who now had risen also.

“When does she want me to come?” Yet the other had neither suggested a visit nor named his daughter.

“As soon as possible.”

“And you consent?”

“Faustine is twenty-six, and her own mistress. I must trust you, in your larger experience of men and affairs, not to increase her agitations more than necessary.”

“I will drive you over in the morning,” Ragnar said quietly.

6



y the elegant dark car standing before Gaspary’s house at Leigh, Ragnar was reminded of that other last evening waiting outside Copse-hill. That too had seemed to be a sign.

The house was strange to him. It stood solitary in a quiet landscape of fields and trees. A long private

drive, narrow, curving, in places arched over by meeting branches, had brought them to it. The weathered dark-brick front was overgrown with jasmine. Brown smoke ascended from a chimney against the toneless grey sky, in the dull peace and emptiness of a chill spring morning.

He was convinced he had never in his life before been near Leigh, but under the influence of the constant, low musical excitement of his brain, the house was assuming the character of a memory. It was like the tormenting effect of a scent, the recovery of whose name and nature would bring forgotten circumstances with it.

Gasparly sounded the house bell then, without waiting, opened the door and drew Ragnar into a square hall, simple and pretty with flowers. A young, pleasant-looking maidservant told Gasparly that the visitor was Mrs. Toller.

"I must learn what Mrs. Toller wants," said Gasparly. "Would you come to see her?"

"Simply tell her that I'm here."

When Gasparly had gone Ragnar stood at a window that looked out onto a narrow garden thoroughfare of grass, whose farther wall was a box hedge.

Of these three women, Mrs. Toller was the nearest in spirit to the everyday world. She would be the first to meet him personally. It was to be a progress—upwards, as by stone steps, three in number. . .

The man under the notice of heaven, Gasparly said, bore peculiar tokens that some on earth might read. Who were these three, like three strange steps from earth to heaven? Who was Bluewright? If Urda were as a ship desiring to leave the shore, and he himself her holding anchor, then perhaps his only part was to release her. As the ship swung, at one time she might be nearer, at another farther off from him. Exactly so a soul might swing at the morning of the body.

Gasparly came slowly in again.

"Mrs. Toller very much wishes to see you. . ."

They passed together through the house to the great drawing room at the back, which seemed both gay and stately. Its long window opened to an acre-big, half-wild

garden, backed by a wood. On this cold day the window was shut. The room was without a fire.

Faustine left the chair to meet him. Her slender middle stature and unpretentious dark indoor frock accentuated for him the handsome heaviness of the older woman, in her beautiful, insistently and lingeringly attractive clothes. She remained seated. An unfastened reddish scarf lay lightly on the low dress now of blue, now green; a graceful, cumbrous motoring fur cloak was partly slipped from her shoulders; a stained vivid green feather swept her neck from the tilted small dark hat. She looked a foreigner. In face and form she was more mature than he recalled her. Her left hand wore a pale gauntlet; she offered him the uncovered right—soft, shapely, firm. Faustine shrank back a little to allow their talk.

At once he began to feel again the old, odd, willing thralldom. Yet he knew her too little ever to have come under a spell. Again he seemed to remember something which he had never experienced. She who was altogether music—he had known nothing of it. He would have assumed her heart too wise, realistic, loving, to be an artist's. Perhaps it was nobler still; music and humanity were wedded in her so that one could not speak without the other.

As she sat here before him, this woman of the world, music was everywhere like an element. The lips showed unceasing indiscernible movement in rest; her dark eyes, secret as the deepest shade of summer trees, were in a suspension of the passions; the fine forehead could be the well of a temple of inward trumpets and violins; the wide, pleasant jaw was but the power defending all. An invisible music-nature was softening every shape that the beating waves of the world sought to fix and harden.

He took a chair to keep her all the time in view, when Faustine also sat down again; but Gaspary continued standing by the door, a motionless upheld thumb towards his mouth, as though he restrained himself from gnawing the nail.

They talked a little of their former encounters—of

Lois and Felix—of Vienna. . . Once he saw how Faustine, beneath her mask of composure, looked pale, cold and displeased. But his only way of resisting Cecilie Toller's possessive, strange voice was to confine their conversation within rapid channels of safety. She spoke to him as courteously and as lightly as any other woman, and her slow English was almost faultless, only she made her syllables too exact. Whatever she said was like the breathing of a quiet sea. It seemed to have the hushed waiting might of a passionateness at rest. It was in considering the unspoken meaning that he fell under the voice's power.

To refrain from asking directly about Bluewright must appear odd. But to ask was silently to ask about Urda—and he dared not come as near to her in open question. But until her name was spoken Mrs. Toller's purpose here was hidden. . . .

"I have not met him," quietly, and it began to seem inevitably, replied Mrs. Toller to his enquiry. She went on—"He moves frequently. So perhaps you may say of him, that he lives nowhere. You will meet Mme. Klangst, through whom his advance came. I hear that next week you visit your brother at Swayning?"

"I hope to."

"I hope it also. Mrs. Pole is notable and charming—she is a woman one would always wish to know still better. Then, too, you will honour my house down there; and perhaps often? Mme. Klangst, who is staying with me, you will find an experience to remain in your mind after many others are dead; and she, if anyone, will tell you of Mr. Bluewright. Another friend is with me—Urda Noett. Urda knows your work, and would like to meet you. You have heard of her?"

"Yes."

"People say that her appearance is singular, and so it is, but it is the least, and the least significant, part of her strangeness. I would like to explain something of this strangeness to you, to persuade you more to the visit, but I fear that in no printed dictionary are there suitable words. You yourselves must exchange spirit for spirit when you meet. She wants to help you in your destiny. That sounds

exaggerated. However, I have the intuition that it lies within her capacity. I hope that my candour will not keep you away from us."

"I would have to come, now."

"Do not be prevented by any bad report from others. Can it be so bad that Urda is unlike the rest of women? Is there a virtue in likeness?"

"No one has told me, but I have received the impression that she must be very beautiful?" Yet Ragnar immediately wondered why he had asked this. As quietly as before, Mrs. Toller answered:

"She would appear so to many: and usually it is thought that she resembles a witch. That is because the beauty she truly possesses obeys first of all her inmost soul. In the human shapes of the world people see themselves and those they love and call beautiful; but there is another interior and private beauty. At least, if she is a witch, nobody has suffered by it. . . ."

Suddenly the truth of his conversation with Gaspary was coming back upon him with redoubled force. . . he realised as he had not done before how Urda had *sent* that apparition, but not by her will the shape of Bluewright. Before these singular and knowing minds he was forbidden by some deadweight instinct of common worldly sanity to discuss that very wonder which must have brought them all together. . .

Faustine broke her trouble by addressing him:

"Mrs. Toller has come to invite us—my father and me—to stay a short time next week at Swayning. She is returning today. I think you ought to know this. . . I can't pretend, for either of us, that it will be inconvenient. . ." As she turned to Mrs. Toller, her face unconsciously hardened. "May we leave it, that we will write to you?"

"Of course, though if you wish to refuse me now I shall not have the right to be offended, because my proposal is so unorthodox. You would say our acquaintance is too slender that I should ask you. But we, in our retreat, go little by the rules, we hold the inclinations of the heart supreme."

"I would rather write, if I may."

Ragnar, frowning, said abruptly to Mrs. Toller: "I have not been in Swayning. Are the houses old?"

But Faustine exclaimed, looking at Ragnar: "I have never understood that rather macabre taste for inhabited tombs. A house with roots too firm is surely an unfair contest. One can't agree to such a subjection. It's always troublesome, and may prove sinister."

They were silent.

"Don't you describe the whole world?" asked Mrs. Toller, drawing up her cloak. "It is all the dust of death. Yet we must live here, and do what we can. A tiny isolated ancient house is but the far symbol of this other grand ancient house of all men and women."

"In the world death becomes life again," Faustine replied. "In the house it is still death, and the house's death acquires a will. The world's will is life and joy—heaven knows what the house's is!"

"Death, life!—life, death!—it is a rhythm. How can you divide them? From birth one starts to die; one must die, perhaps, to be born. The first hour in your ancient house might be the stirring towards a new life. This wouldn't be understood by people going backwards down the hill to death."

She got up to leave, and Faustine rose with her, but for moments Ragnar remained where he was, dazed. . . . Something dim, stupendous, formed in a remote niche of his mind, a bewildering architectural interior, but not in piers, vaults, buttresses, a series of upward-flowing waves rather, breaking to ghostly structure. Staring out of doors, he saw the great wall of bare trees closing the garden. At any moment, Urda's supernatural form might part that boundary, to step free, facing the house and him!. . . He stood up.

"Then we shall meet again!" said Mrs. Toller, while he grasped her hand, nonplussed by the warm reality of its flesh. . . . Faustine accompanied her from the room and he was left alone with Gaspary.

He approached Ragnar, his head down, perhaps to hide the thought in his eyes.

"Faustine will be back immediately, and she will

want to talk alone. I have to go. I would like to thank you for last night's hospitality. . ."

He disappeared, and still on his feet, Ragnar awaited Faustine's return.

7

Nervously pushing back her hair from her brow, Faustine fixed on him those grey eyes, sharpened by anxiety. Her voice arrested him by its acute human quality, and his ferment began to subside into perceptions, thoughts and the frame of speech. It seemed to him that he was hearing that voice truly for the first time.

"Thank you for not refusing me. It's unfortunate another visit coincided. . .If she hadn't come, your attention would have been different. You understand now that the girl who upset me at the party was the Urda Noett she has been talking about—girls who look like witches aren't exactly the rule. And she came *from* Urda."

Ragnar said nothing.

"You never saw Urda?"

"She left before I could meet her."

"You do intend to meet her?"

"If I can."

"Had you known of her before now?"

"I haven't been on such intimate terms with Mrs. Toller that she would discuss her friends with me."

"Then why has she suddenly changed?"

"Everything has changed."

Now she was silent. . .While Ragnar's brain went on with its quiet work of webbing over the torn gaps of thought. He no longer wanted to retain that mood of grandeur and confusion created by Mrs. Toller, but sought to resume his habitual life, which was breaking these vapours with an

emerging solidity. And yet the vapours might be life itself. A powerful creative energy, whose character was music, was sinking again within him in submission to common facts.

“Before I came up to you at all,” he said slowly, “I heard her playing from the other room, and was indescribably moved. But today, without playing, she has been just as musical, while my resistance is less.”

Faustine sat up.

“Then I am sure, since you are telling me this, that you are willing to talk openly. You must be preternaturally susceptible to music. Because I feel only a most disagreeable uneasiness from her, would you pronounce me unmusical?”

“I shall believe whatever you say about it.”

“I hate and fear music too much not to be under its spell. I call it a really terrible enchantment. We listen, and must believe in a second world, not this one—far richer and mightier, more splendid, full of flowing colours and the flashing of wings. I suppose it is heaven. Then it stops, and we are left empty. We have lavished our spirit on nothing, for the heights we flew to weren't the heights of reality, not one enduring thing have we brought to pass, but our spiritual will is exhausted. Music spoils us for the world; it is the worst preparation for it. . .

“Music is a free-spinning wheel attached to nothing, whereas the greater feelings of deep-natured men and women should help to shape the world. Only compare a real passion of the heart with the expression by music of a similar passion. Both reach to the stars, but the real has a use and purpose, a result. . .it *lives*. . .Urda is music. This morning you have found her deputy musical—then she is Urda's instrument, and Urda has been playing her. . .”

She went on: “When you meet her, will it be as a man meets a girl, and will you begin with the usual polite, insipid things? She invites you—her messenger does—to exchange spirits, and allow her to rule your fate. If you take all that to be simply the awkwardness of women who are only half-educated in our language, you have just heard Mrs.

Toller speak. From her literary work, she knows German and English thoroughly, down to the finer shades of words. If they were ordinary people the message would have to be considered monstrous and extravagant. But Urda is extraordinary. She couldn't convey her meaning by other expressions. She has a different brain and dreadfully different powers. Who knows why she wants to bind you?—but the words of her message are calculated to bring you into a certain frame of mind. Don't doubt it. On reaching home from the party, I had an awful dream. . . .”

He had a weird feeling that it was almost as if he had died and two daemonic beings, both girls he hardly knew, disputed for his immortal soul. . . .

Urda's light was the stronger, but Faustine's light persisted and could not be put out. . . . He saw her sitting there before him, a pale bright crescent moon in a dying sunset sky—a strange enemy among these magic confusions. The quick, troubled grey eyes were still ready suddenly to soften and yield. In Faustine it was as though a high indwelling spirit spoiled her beauty. Physical loveliness must be supreme or not at all.

“I'll tell you the dream, and you shall judge,” she said.

“You hate her, don't you?”

“If I do, it is like that music of heaven, which is not for us. I couldn't personally hate her, I only hate her will. I feel she is trying to bring you to some earthly counterfeit of heaven. So have all the great enchantresses done in the case of their victims. When you're on earth you may not dwell in heaven, it's not permitted—it is forbidden, wrong, *evil*. . . I hate her so far. I don't know her, to hate her otherwise.”

“Let me hear your dream,” said Ragnar.

She began simply, her eyes wandering, not looking at him.

“It was morning when I arrived home with father and went straight to bed. I tossed for a long time, unable to sleep; then I must have slept, and had the dream.

“I was sitting in an old, broken arbour, on a flaming summer day. The floor was littered with dead leaves and

the rubbish of years. The front door was open. A shaky narrow wooden bench went all round the inside, rotten in parts; I was perched on an end of it. Green leaves intruding from both sides and above made a curtain for the opening, serving to keep off the sun. To see better I plaited a long trail of leaves out of the way, through a slit in the woodwork.

“Between me and the house this arbour belonged to was an expanse of rough, tall grass, that could once have been a lawn; of the size of a croquet-lawn. Both sides were bordered by nettles and shrubs run wild, and all was shut in by trees. Opposite me was the house. There was the entrance to an old walled-in orchard. There was the ruin of a long, low greenhouse, joined to the house’s end. The panes were gone, weeds were grown up inside; a great white stone urn and pedestal lay in pieces on the floor. How I made all this out from where I was, I don’t know. An old twisted lilac, out of flower, leant partly over the door of the house.

“Not a breath stirred, the air was hot and voluptuous. Everything was still, except that now and then came a quiet twittering from the thicket, or a call like a low flute sounded from another bird in some tree; otherwise it was a perfect and wonderful silence. Without having to think about it, I seemed to know that this secluded garden was only a private part of far more spacious grounds all around the house. I understood equally well that the house stood quite alone, perhaps miles from any other house. It was deserted and empty. The same state must have endured for generations. And no one could ever live there again. Let that be the introduction. . .

“Now I’ve to try to describe its door facing me. It was a low and plain side door, with a single step before it, a latch instead of a handle, and the paint entirely vanished, so that you couldn’t tell what colour it had been. The door wasn’t for visitors or servants, but it was an intimate way out to this retreat. Age after age of dreamers, women specially, seeking an escape, might have used and delighted in it. How often would *I* have come out that way! It wasn’t merely the situation, but some unspeakable at-

mosphere. It was about a hundred feet between the door and the arbour, across the level of the grass; so if the door naturally led to the arbour, the arbour as naturally watched the door. It had been put there to watch it. Whoever had built the arbour had consciously felt the same fascination for the door that I was feeling.

“One could sit in that arbour by the hour together, doing nothing, dreaming, watching the door for somebody—anybody—to issue. If the door swung open, the watcher would still have time to shrink back out of sight into the recesses of the arbour. . . And even then, with real people coming out, the imagination would expect dream-shapes and ghosts; but now, from the dead house as I was viewing it, *only* a ghost could step through the gap of the opened door. Like the dropping of a single petal of a flower in a vase, in a silent room, at night. . .

“The door so predominated that the house itself was obscure and vague. It was low and ancient. The windows seemed boarded up. The lichened roof was of sagging tiles, as though its back were broken. I had a shadowy picture in my mind of a whole labyrinth of small chambers and passages, the floor-boards bare and warped, the stripped rooms thick with dust—all to the hollow, solemn, fearful sound of one’s own tread or voice. . .

“Round the unseen other side must have been the yards, sheds, outhouses, all the appurtenances of a farm—the granaries, barns, pens, sties, ponds, wells and the rest—all fallen into death. It was of the land itself, planted in the land, as the face of an animal is planted in its body. . . The true age was impossible and past belief, yet since I must see something, I saw *towards* that true age. And I suppose it was because I only saw towards it that the appearance for me was vague and indistinct. . . .

“My account is getting into difficulties! But you know that the further back in history we go, the more were things for use, not for display and idle pleasure. Poetry, song were for use, religion was for use; so how could a house not be? That’s how I must have come to imagine a farm. Yet what made it appear so exceedingly ancient, I can’t say. It

went beyond that everything was dead. A dead pear-tree stood crucified against the wall, its white skeleton reached nearly to the roof-gutter. . .It's truly difficult. . .What is a house? It is an enclosure, it shuts off something from the world. There is all the world outside the house, and there is the small void, or not-world, inside it. In the house we know, the void is purely imaginary, the world continues without a break through all the walls, to incorporate the house. But conceive a house that is a true void, everything inside its solid bounds belonging not to the outer world, but to another altogether. . .that was how it seemed. . .

"It was not only so old, but all the time growing older and older—and the older, the more terrible it grew. That other interior was steadily pushing through the house's barrier; at any instant the barrier would give—the sign would be when the door opened. So that was the door's fascination, and why I must watch it. . .My ordinary clothes had become extraordinarily tightfitting; I was unable to move in them, as if they were an iron shell made fast to the seat of the arbour. The visible substance of the house was quietly dissolving—fading, passing out of the world's reality, under the steady increase of its interior world. . .

"Then the door did open—inwards. That I hadn't expected. It was neither suddenly nor very slowly; but simply I hardly realised it till it stood open. The opening inwards was not a point of indifference, but meant something. It meant that whatever person was being invited to enter, was to seek, was not being sought out. Who was invited to enter the house? I knew that I was not. . ."

She hesitated how to proceed, and looked at him for a while before going on.

"On the opening of the door, no ghost came out, and someone really entered. . .But first, that reason for my detestation of music wasn't quite the whole truth. By depriving the real world of certain energies of the spirit, music must be an evil. But a counteracting positive good might be left out of the reckoning. My antipathy is deeper grounded. Music is impure. . ."

He was silent, waiting for her explanation.

“It is an alloy. The precious in music is joined to a commoner element before we can receive it. From the highest music downward, always there is something in it *over and above*—never heard, never listened for, never dreamt of. . . Such an unheard tone may be even the very nature and essence of music, lifting it from mere sound, that an animal can hear as well. The quiet tone joins itself to the beauties of sound like reality to art; but now the reality is unearthly. The tone is foreign, unnatural, silent, dreadful. . . utterly contradictory of all our pleasure in life. You may call it the flashing and gleaming from a tragic heaven. . . Only, in the lower musical forms, as in the darker and more complicated, the tone, the glamour, is too completely hidden to be discoverable even by conscious effort. . .

“The glamour is for those whose passion touches the height of music. The highest, grandest, tragic music is the composer’s will to bring down fire from heaven. The attempt must be unsuccessful, because the composer is a mortal man—the perpetual willer of pleasure; while that glamour is unconcerned with pleasure, it is from heaven. The alloy is made purer by a sublime mind, but, for this world, the pure supernatural metal may not be. . .

“But the glamour must be constantly present, in consistent whole works, in the movements of a work, in phrases, themes, single chords, simple tones. . . Isn’t it as if our musical efforts for our own delight were seized upon by heaven?”

“You think the glamour acts at once, or afterwards?” asked Ragnar.

“Music, as art, is flat, it is length and breadth only. The length and breadth are bright to our senses. But behind them like a third lies depth, which is a shadow. We don’t discern the shadow till we are actually in it. And once in it, we are slow to discover that a mere pleasure-giving art has changed to a mysterious power forcing us towards eternity. To the length and breadth, which are common musical tone and progression, there is added this depth, which is the shadow of heaven. . . From the moving,

solemn, passionate in music, we emerge like persons from an extraordinary bath. Or we have supped in heaven. The gods were invisible, and their conversation was unheard, but, by a sign on us, we know we were there. All this was never the handiwork of a musician."

"Music has sometimes begun to torment me afterwards, but I have not thought that bad."

Faustine smiled strangely—yet it was not a smile; no scorn, no drollery was in it.

"The world is shot with heaven. Everywhere you find love, beauty, sacrifices great and small, kindness, surrender, purity, courtesy, but all have the homely ground of persons and bodies. Music alone is directly from heaven, possessing heaven's power. . .

"It's fortunate for us that it is adulterated. The Greeks had a myth for this. Semele was consumed like a leaf of paper in a furnace because she must see Zeus in his proper shape. There is another myth. The sight of the face of Medusa's cut-off head changed people to stone. So Perseus carried it covered; and that veil is the saving impurity of earthly music. But think how it would be for us if we saw the naked face of Medusa—if heaven could reach us unhindered. Could the saint, with all his triumph over the vices of the rest of us, face heaven and still go on living? No one understands heaven. You can no more climb to it than you can climb to lightning. . .

"This is just to explain my house. I can go on now. . . Through the dark, wide opening of that doorway, in the burning sunshine, there flowed such a magic of fearful, quiet passion that I was reminded of that other passion of heaven which lies behind music. Not a sound left the house, yet it was music. Suppose . . ." She stopped, then continued more slowly:

"Suppose I could have found freedom and courage to rise from my seat in the arbour, tread swiftly across the grass, and into the house—I should find myself dragging through interminable rooms, up and down stairs, all hollow-sounding under my feet. . . helplessly and surely towards—what? Towards an encounter as grisly as death, but not death. Towards that unspeakable nakedness of

heaven. How can I presume to say that the house was evil? It was only evil for the prepared visitor—for a living man. . .

“It was the long entrance of heaven—I’ve no other name than heaven for it. I mean the unutterable burning darkness of passion. The house wasn’t to be entered without calamity. And the casting away of human personality and a secure mortal life. Heaven is to be won by the infinitely slow steps of work, grief, humiliation, despair, loss—every kind of agony and degradation. Music is the devil’s invitation to heaven. It’s the wrong door. . .”

She fell silent.

“Is that the whole dream?” Ragnar asked.

“*You* went into the house. But I never saw you.”

“What does it all mean?”

“It was Urda’s house. I *knew* it to be so.”

Ragnar’s brain had recovered its calmness, yet there was something twisted and strange in its whole outlook, so that clearness and complexity lived together. The state was not caused by Faustine’s words; on the contrary, it was she who had effected his return to calmness. . . Faustine’s dreads and repulsions were surely outside Urda’s magic. Urda might turn them to her service, but they were hostile to her and able to start new currents of their own. . .

Bluewright too had dreamt of an old house. But if Bluewright were only a shape or pretence of Urda’s, then his dream was from Urda. So Faustine’s dream might be from Urda. . .

“I too have a dream to tell. It was Bluewright’s, in a letter he wrote.”

“Who is Bluewright?”

“Only Mme. Klangst seems to know.”

He told Faustine of the receiving and vanishing of the letter and its contents. She kept on gently pressing her closed eyelids while he talked. . . Then Ragnar described his vision on the night of the party.

“Is that all?”

“Except my own state of mind.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“Go to Swayning next week.”

“Do you truly feel nothing against it?”

“My brother and his wife are expecting me. I am not going there for the sake of meeting Urda. It would be cowardly and humiliating to keep away.”

“Do you need to go to see your brother and his wife?”

“It’s a promise. . .” Then after a silence he said: “Let me be more honest. An apparition, a letter, dreams—they are wonderful, but may be irrelevant. If they were certainly from Urda, perhaps I would choose another time to go to my brother’s. But it would be absurd to run away from her.”

“Her music is not absurd. She is doing her wonders by her music. It is a living force at work all the time. Music is prodigious, like a child born to parents in their old age. The passion of the soul, in a musician, bursts spontaneously into harmonic sounds in beauty, and the conscious arrangement of these sounds is art; and the use of art again is to transmit the original passion to other minds, other souls. Why must that passion necessarily find a body in sound? It could burst into direct communication through minds, and still it would be music. Its achievement would be a new leap forward. Couldn’t this phenomenal musician be a woman? The great musical creators have all been men, but here the communication isn’t art but a passion more like *love*. . . And that would be fitting for a woman. And the communication, being instinctive, would carry with it all the smaller communications and workings necessary to its complete execution—all without effort or mistake, all by the single act of will. That is Urda’s music. . .

“Perhaps she doesn’t wish you harm. But I know she isn’t good for you. . . I felt her hold on you when you first came up to me at the party. Her presence in the house seemed suddenly explained. I felt her heaviness lying on you from another room—but you denied it. Then came my dream. And all yesterday the business went round and round in my head like wheels, so that I had to send for you. Now I’ve no more doubt. Didn’t Mrs. Toller’s coming to bring her invitation seem altogether dream-like to you? Urda knew you were to come here. She obliged you to

come. It's like a peal of bells in my head."

"Then how can I avoid her?"

Faustine returned no reply.

"I must meet her quickly, and end it," said Ragnar.

"Even if I were to try to persuade you not to, but to keep entirely away from her, it would still somehow turn to her plans. . . If you were a stronger and rougher man. . ."

"These things would not be happening."

"No, I am stupid. . . And why Swayning? Why must you meet there? The dreamt house—my dispute with Mrs. Toller about old houses in general. . . there may be some real old house at Swayning that you are to be taken to see. That's what Bluewright's letter leads up to."

"But who *is* Bluewright?"

"He may not be a real person; but he can't be without meaning. There's something behind that name."

Then Faustine returned suddenly to the subject of Urda.

"Suppose you do refuse to meet her. . . Will she take the rebuff, or will she persevere? I'm sure she will persevere. Not like a huntress—like a fisher. You may refuse her casts once, twice, three times. But you will have to meet her at last."

"I know."

"She isn't a woman at all. She is . . . she is a *mara*—a true nightmare, come out of sleep into the waking world. She's a witch."

"Why are you so anxious for me, Faustine?"

"You mustn't believe that it was easy for me to send you a message. I hated it. But I saw someone drifting insensibly into a horrible situation, quite outside ordinary worldly experience; was I to hold my peace out of modesty or fear of the consequence? If I'm anxious for you, it is *only* for you. The tremendous silence of my real being strives to close everything and send you away from me again. Probably I can't help you any more. But I'm still afraid to let you go. I wish I knew what to do."

"That silence of yours which tries to close everything—it may be that which I shall value most when I have left the house. I feel and know it as a deep calm.

Before you spoke of it, I had become aware of it. . . In the end it might outweigh Urda's enchantments. If Urda's music is heaven, your silence, that I call calmness, is earth. I'm more accustomed to earth. If it were given to me to choose between music and silence, I might at last find silence grander."

She drew an uncertain sighing breath, and stood up. A moment later, she said:

"I'm so convinced that she will be calamitous to you that if any state of mine can cross her purpose, I'll set most store by it. But how *do* I benefit you?"

"Imagine a man's head so filled by urgent cares that he's oblivious of his surroundings, and knowing neither where he is going nor what he is doing; but then he suddenly finds himself walking beside a stream, in sun and shadows, in a wood. . ."

"Well it's curious that calmness can wake people. . . Urda, as soon as you are under her eyes, will immediately change it all again—I'm only good while she's absent."

"Unless this is something altogether new."

He rose from his seat.

"You won't remember it when you're alone with her," Faustine replied.

"Then come with me. Aren't you going down to Swayning?"

"I shall refuse their invitation. A meeting must be by Urda's grace."

"I would wish it simpler, and not by her grace."

An unreal smile quickened her lips. "Both conditions could be met in another way; only I don't know how bold you are."

He considered this. "You mean we should pay her a surprise call?"

"Yes. We needn't acknowledge her control. You want to find out why she's troubling your peace. And if the call seems odd—well, the example has been set by Mrs. Toller. You shall drive me down to Swayning tomorrow morning. Urda will be back. She wants to see you. I have been asked to the house, so won't be left standing in the road. The plan is so simple, there is nothing in it to fail."

“I’m bold enough. But what about you?”

“Urda won’t misunderstand, and no one else matters.”

“If her mind were ordinary, she must suppose our friendship more intimate than it is; and I wonder if you can accept this?”

“I know her mind isn’t ordinary, so the case falls to nothing.” She went on. “There are two kinds of attachment between men and women. The first is the spirit’s attempt on another spirit, from outside, bringing rapture and loneliness. All the noblest love music is in the minor key, sad, tragic; on the wedding-day tears are shed. Though the love grows in perfection for fifty years, it can never end the division of identities—make two into one. And the foolish strength exerted in the attempt must be wrenched to impotence by death. Urda, who has the other sort of love, could not be afraid of this sort.”

“What is her sort of love?”

“A soul may be so much wiser than the common that instead of vainly beating against the walls of its loneliness, it may apply itself to find a door out. The soul on earth lies between the dying self and the awful fires of heaven. Beyond heaven is the Something to which the soul may join itself, and end its loneliness. The other love isn’t goodness. You abandon your selfish will, and in its place the wonderful state of purity, freshness, the conquests of sin, fear and death, making you believe that the world is now at your feet; but there’s illusion in it. To the soul and body alike belong other dark strengths, energies, passions, failing which the world would lose its meaning; but they can’t be fed on goodness alone. Purify the soil from all the foul elements of decay, and see what fruits you will get. Heaven is a barrier for light, and for meaningless good, as well as for the base and the bad. Loneliness goes beyond it. Urda must be the most lonely creature on earth. She doesn’t love anyone in life. She isn’t waiting to be loved.”

“Then what kind of attachment is she seeking?”

“I only know that she is trying to attach you, that her music is direct from heaven, and that she is very lonely. The attachment isn’t any sort of human love, but it is

real.”

“How can love and loneliness be the same?”

“Plainly, they aren’t; but I think they are different moments and all aspects of the same consuming will.”

Awe descended on Ragnar’s spirit. This seemingly ordinary girl was as unearthly as Urda. Watching her pacific, wise grey eyes he felt that she might even know things that Urda did not. More by silence than by speech she was seeking to chain him to the solid world. She had not said half of what was in her mind. If he was to try his heart against the music of Urda’s heaven he was also to put forth his strength against the spirit, gravitation of the earth itself, magnificently terrible in the mass of all its ghosts of men, creatures and things, fading back into the darkness of the first eternity.

8



That afternoon the red-gold ball of the sinking sun was still high above the vague, long wall of sky and mist and far off trees away below him when Ragnar, hatless, paused to finger his chin, confusedly trying to recollect his surroundings. They should be familiar, but were not. He was but a few miles from his own house, yet the strangeness of the scene troubled him.

Straight ahead the gentle downward slope of heath plunged sharply through trees to a much lower invisible country. There, below, there might be a village, where he could take tea—sit, smoke, think. He must find out where he was. At home awaited him only the dumb endurance of all the hours till tomorrow.

This healthy upland was so dry and sweet, and the air could not be stiller; it was like autumn. Mists were wrapping the ground; the night would be frosty. He wished

to see the first faint stars come out from nowhere. Accordingly, lighting a cigarette, he started on again down the steep hill beneath which were the earliest sentinel trees of that falling wood. They were larches, already in green leaf, and beautiful red-boled pines. The rays of the western sun came through the tall, pagan sacredness of the wood, painting it in contrasts, throwing shafts of light and shade, so that he could be letting himself down into a wild temple. The horizon was gone. . . But soon, when the slope grew so steep that he had to catch at trees to keep his balance, far down, through the highest tops of other giants, he caught the glimpse of roofs, houses squashed within a pot-hole of hills, like toadstools clustered in a pit. . .

The houses were deep in the chill dusk from the hills, whose heights only remained warm and golden. So, as if guided by a gnome, he had happened upon this extraordinary hamlet surely unknown to any map, and appearing to him like the theatre of a dream! . . .

The lane he emerged into could run from nowhere to nowhere. A farm-cart lumbered by. The driver's whiskered face in the twilight was red as blood, or as a moon seen through fog. He never looked up. A small boy of four or five, with Saxon hair, played in the ditch with an antique bicycle. The doors of the decayed cottages were all shut; no woman gossiped with her neighbours, or man tended his patch of land. . . But at the forking of a road there was an inn, in shadow and thatched like the cottages, but white-washed, wide and low, having a green before it set with long, bare tables and benches for drinking. It had a sign; he read and forgot the name.

Opening the door, he encountered an oldish woman, pale as a spectre, taciturn and grave, who in the fewest words accepted his request for tea, and brought him to a room. It was dark and fusty, overcrowded with a hundred worthless ornaments. He threw open the window, before sitting down. The springs of the chair were broken. . .

Behind the woman of the house, bringing his tea on a tray, a man in tweeds appeared, entering the room, who looked a pedestrian like himself. He was in the act of taking his cap off and smoothing his black, shining hair. . . when

Ragnar knew another shock to increase his bewilderment; for this intruder was a man he had been at school with, his name Flint, but he had thought him many years dead. . . His nickname had been "Captain Flint"—"The Captain." Someone, whom he had fancied to be this Flint, had been drowned years ago off a ship in East African waters. Now this sudden compulsory rectification of his ideas left Ragnar for a moment without his last hold on reality. . .

Flint recognised him, and they shook hands after a separation of perhaps fifteen or seventeen years. They sat down together, Ragnar to begin his tea, Flint to smoke a pipe while his was preparing.

Flint's rather short, but compact and muscular frame, his sallowness, the abbreviated beak, the blue-black hair, wide jaw, and keen, vigilant, vigorous grey eyes—these characteristics, at school, he had always claimed as emphatic tokens of Norman ancestry. Now he wore a tuft of beard, black as his hair, which stressed his graceless masculinity. Bachelor was written large on him. He had excelled at most of the sports demanding strength, and was a little older than Ragnar.

Even as a boy he had been drawn to history. His later antiquarianism was the particular direction imposed by his other passion for exercise and the open air. He had covered all Britain on his iron legs, in quest of the nearly-invisible mosaic parts to compose a new square inch of the paving of national history. This field research into local origins, place-names, genealogies, folk customs and traditions, dates and happenings, charters and privileges—it expressed some sincerity of the man's nature, for there was little fame to be collected in such a field, and he would hardly make money. His written books embodying the results of his work, must be few and insignificant, since only the smallest public would interest itself in them. Probably at this very time Flint was following some clue of neglected word or sign to open the door of still another chamber of the past, and though it should prove empty, yet by anywhere establishing the limits of research, he was doing useful work.

Had he not owned tenement property in the north of

England? If so, the elemental bitter life-and-death struggles of modern times supplied the means towards a reconstruction of the disappeared past unwanted and unguessed by those contributors; in this way the world paid for the world.

In his categorical voice, as unsympathetic as a boy's, Flint was in fact explaining his presence. He was on a month's exploration of the southern counties—something between work and an idle pilgrimage. Today he had covered a good stretch from Mayfield; and meant to sleep at Shere. Yesterday he had got to Mayfield from Bodiam. . .

So Flint too was sent to him!

“What's the name of *this* place?”

But Flint passed the question over. He was concerned to vindicate his mode of existence. His chosen employment was never a holiday, although he enjoyed it. He did something worth doing, he also kept himself fit and out of mischief. He saw no merit in helping to swell the number of competing necessary workers. The larger part of the vices and avoidable evils of the leisured section of any society started from the varying compound of three defaults: the want of hard exercise, the want of serious occupation, and the instinctive attraction of other persons in mass, breeding snobbery and the inability to endure solitude. Solitude was as essential to the purification of mind and soul as diet to that of the body. So that if both men and women would adopt the habit of solitary hard walking—preferably with an intellectual object, half the doctors in the land could be put out of practice, while the luxury trades would have to think again.

Ragnar objected in reply that such a counsel ignored the biological needs of people, who seemed in the main to derive from primitive gregarious forms; who also were subject to some strange instinct or will to speed in transit; who went for parade and display as an increasing of the consciousness of their rank in the world; who fear opinion; and would be as dulled and stupefied by the withdrawal of luxury as a voluptuary brought low on bread and water. When men lost their vast submerged instinctive natures, it would be time enough to consider a world ruled by rea-

son—by virtue . . . But he was thinking: How would Urda know Flint, to send him here? While Flint's tea was borne in, he lit a cigarette.

"So yesterday you were in Bodiam? Did you by any chance meet a man named Bluewright there?"

"I only stayed a night, and met nobody."

"A man of that name, unknown to me, wrote me from Bodiam yesterday, which you will agree is a coincidence."

"On a literary matter?"

"About some dreams he has had."

Flint, who was preparing to eat, shot Ragnar a sharp glance.

"How do you spell the name?"

Ragnar told him. For another minute, while the other ate and drank, there was silence. Then Flint looked across the table again.

"I know no person of that name; I know a place, but even so the name's a perversion. It is nowhere near Bodiam."

"Where is it?"

"In the vicinity of Swayning, in the West Sussex Downs."

"Do you know Swayning?" asked Ragnar.

"Yes, very well."

"Do you know anybody there? A Mrs. Toller?"

"No."

It seemed to Ragnar that the part of his brain sustaining this conversation were grown like a self-acting machine. So perfectly adapted to their requirement were all his words that they could be from the most delicate perspicacity and cool craft, yet they were uttering themselves by no art of his. He was like a duellist who had found a supernatural dexterity, automatic and accurate past thought. His fear of Flint had gone. . .

"What is the place?" he pursued. "An estate? A village? I happen to be visiting Swayning, and I'm interested. If this is a corruption, what is the right name?"

"*The Bluewright* is an old name, as good as dead, applying to a few acres of wild ground apparently worthless

for all purposes, unfrequented, innocent of history, without separate identity in the records, and at last, today, even nameless as well. For you may speak that name publicly in the bar of the nearest inn, and none will take you up, unless an aged countryman or so were there; yet it has no current successor.”

“How far is it from Swayning?”

“Less than an hour to walk and climb there.”

“It lies high?”

“Off the ridge. You know the country?”

Ragnar shook his head.

“It doesn’t matter. Swayning itself is a shut-in downland street of pretty houses. The people with money have not let it fall into death quietly, and it offers a rather horrible picture of galvanic second life. However, within a couple of miles the scenery runs ancient again; then you may walk long distances without meeting two men together. . . And there, or but little farther on, hidden neighbourless under the south of the ridge of downs, within an island-wood of archaic wind-stunted trees—ghastly oaks with extruded entrails, spectral white beeches, funereal holes, pale, evil ashes, witchlike birches. . . a hill-side forest ring of that disturbing and ominous character—there you may discover, supposing you know what to look for, *Morion House*—unknown to the Post Office, since nobody lives there, as it possesses neither roof nor walls, is unnamed in any book, and, to judge from appearance, is scarcely less natural than nature itself. . .”

This was the third of Ragnar’s singular houses of dream and phantom; and each was in a different place.

“The shepherd who gave me the name, *Morion House*,” Flint went on, “had a most imperfect enunciation, and no gleam of education to attempt a spelling. . . and no second person that I could ever find is aware of the tradition.”

“Of a house? But others know a peculiarity of the ground, seeing that it is waste and yet has been privileged to bear another name?”

“As you say.”

“Then from what ancient form is the name ‘Blue-wright’ derived?”

“The earlier name seems to have been *Bloodweds-wyrht*—which is a tortured compound of British and Saxon elements. There is a single reference in some old book I once read, that I have never been able to recover. In the ninth century the Danes appeared off the Sussex coast with a small fleet of longships, landed at a named place near Littlehampton, and began to harry. They were driven back to the ships by a collected force, but intercepted bands perished. One such small band of Danes, shut off from the sea, made a fighting retreat to the heights, which they barely reached before being slain to a man at a ground whose name is given as *Bloodweds-wyrht*. *Wyrht*, *work*, *wright*—they all mean the same thing; *wyrht* is the work, *wright* is the worker, as in ‘shipwright’, ‘wheelwright’, even ‘playwright’. *Bloodweds-wyrht* is identical with *Blue-wright*, because the locality is the same, and the name is near enough. The account ends with these words, as I remember them: ‘But because the place was unlucky, men say that those came not to old age who had most to do with that killing.’ . . . I was incorrect in stating that the ground has no history; it has that history. No other is recorded, however.”

“How is this name to be connected with *Morion*?”
Ragnar asked.

“I surmise only that *Bloodweds-wyrth* represents the legend, *Morion House* the personal experience. In the old Norse tales you have *Jarnvidr*, the Iron Wood, the abode of the witch-brood called *Jarnvidjur*. Say, *Iarnvidr*. *Moriarn-vidr*; *Mor-ion-wood*. . . where someone, at some time, saw, felt, dreamt, or imagined a house. Of course, it is the wildest guessing. Only no better guess occurs to me. Oissa’s South Saxons may have so named it, independently of its existing name transformed by them to *Bloodweds-wyrht*.”

“What is the *Mor* of that name?”

“Perhaps, the old Norse *Mar*, the sea. Paraphrase it, if you like—Sea-witch-wood.”

“If I should go there from Swayning, how can I identify it?”

“I’ve told you of the wood. Inside it is this quarry, as it looks. Certainly, no quarrying of chalk has gone on there during the last generation. Picture a great waste amphitheatre of six or eight acres, half-heartedly imitating the hill’s downward slope towards the distant sea, its floor roughly levelled to the incline, so that on three sides small cliffs, twenty to fifty feet high, shut in the arena, the fourth joining unbroken the general fall of the down. The natural walls of chalk are old, stained, overgrown, the floor is thrown-up hummocks and rabbit-holes, and weeds. There’s nothing to suggest the site of a house. It’s no use looking for remains.

“Further, picture the enclosure as made quite secret by that dense zone of strange ancient timber. It is like dropping from space into an unsuspected hole. Once inside, it is as if you were in a dream—you can see only the sweep of sky, the old chalk walls mounted by that haglike progeny of trees, and, from end to end across the open entrance, the brothers of the same trees brought to your doorstep, like a waiting ambush. If you have the fortitude to spend a great while there alone, the secrets and wonders will go on growing. I have no faculty to explain them to you; I only judge—although I have always been there alone—that human companionship, even without talk, must destroy the spell. Otherwise, from the first minute, you will perfectly appreciate what sort of bewitchment you are in.”

“What of a house? Have you experienced one?”

Flint laughed.

“Perhaps, if I had, I should now be in it!”

“You mean, you would be dead. That is very probable. But I am grateful to you for what you have told me.”

“I can still tell you of Bloodwed. She, of course, was no other than Blodeuwedd, from out of the ancient Cymric literature—the girl mystically fashioned from the blossoms of the oak, broom, and meadow-sweet, to provide a wife for a youth laid by Arianrod the lovely under a ‘destiny’; that

never should he wed of the race then inhabiting the earth. Accordingly, he took her; but she contrived his death, which was but narrowly averted, and joined herself to the man who wounded him. Gwydion, by his occult power, transformed her to an owl—‘Never shalt thou show thy face henceforth in day, but hateful shalt thou be unto all the other creatures of the air.’ . . .

“That chalky hollow in the South Downs of England, therefore, had for its name the name of Blodeuwedd, the Welsh maiden, beloved of the bards. Perhaps the legend of Blodeuwedd as it survives among the Welsh has become changed from its original general form. It relates, essentially, to a witch. Within the secret circle of that wood lived a woman banished from society on account of some atrocity, made to resemble an owl in her habits. Blodeuwedd’s ‘factory of evil’ would be a fair rendering of the name now expiring as *The Bluewright*.”

“And the one who served her memory as priest or worship-master, might bear the name Bluewright, since he would be Blodeuwedd’s *wright*, or doer?”

Flint stared at him curiously.

“How do I get there from Swayning?”

“You must leave Swayning by the east. There are then many ways up to the ridge; and when once on top, it is still above a mile, always walking east. But when you see the queer wood before you, a little off the ridge, towards the sea, then you may get to it by the nearest way.”

“I am going outside,” said Ragnar. “The air of this room is unbearable. I’ll wait for you there.”

Flint nodded.

“I shan’t be long.”

Ragnar paid his score, and went out. He sat down on a bench, his back to the table, the open ground before him; his two hands resting on the crook of his upright stick. A thick, white ground-mist hid his feet, and changed the green, with the roads bounding it, to a fantastic rolling floor. It was damp, and colder; night was coming on.

Flint joined him and it was as if they had never discontinued talking.

Ragnar said: "You know that your Gwydion, the punisher of Blodeuwedd, has been identified with Woden, the Teutonic sky-god?"

"I do know," replied Flint.

"Woden, I fancy, was the same with Zeus. And in the ancient Indian Rig-Veda, I remember reading, were two primal conceptions for the sky—Dyaus, 'the shining', or the brightness of day; and Varuns, 'the concealer', or the overarching canopy of night. Varuna and the Greek Ouranos are identical. So are Dyaus and Zeus. Then might not the pursuit of Blodeuwedd by Gwydion, with her metamorphosis to a bird of night, have typified the shunning of day by some woman of magic powers—some sybil, enchantress, of old? What if, further back in time than any of your origins, such a woman had that link with Varuna! Suppose a witch of the morning of humanity—the archetype of future witches; then her wisdom would be from Night-divine, not evil, except in the judgement of the light children of Day? Her house, too, would remain Night . . ."

Flint shrugged. "I confess I never thought to introduce Sanskrit supernaturals to the Sussex woods and downs. So Morion House would be—the House of the Heaven of Night?"

"The gate of such a house."

"Nothing is cleared up, only new problems are started. I don't wish to go as far as India for my guesses."

Ragnar looked forward into the dusky whiteness.

"I can't begin to tell you the full wonder of the accidents and coincidences which have overtaken me. A letter reaches me from Bodiam, and you have been there. I am to visit Swayning, and you tell me, of your own accord, of a ground, a house, in which I am more interested than anything else in the world. If I persisted in calling these things strange chance, heaven might lose patience with me for a fool. Yet are they therefore fate?"

"Supposing a man is to receive his fate in twenty events, reaching him at different times, from different quarters, but all within a week. They have passed through one single door—of a person. The archetypal witch might be

such a door. If she appeared in modern times, what must we think of her?—what must we call her?"

"A human soul may convey fate to another," returned Flint. "You speak of a witch—a woman. The woman might attract fate, as a lightning-rod, lightning. With this distinction, however; that the lightning-rod is no more than a path for a force of destruction that in any case will find a path; whereas of the whole human race, perhaps, only this woman would be adapted to pass on to another living creature his fate.

"But presupposing fate at all, it cannot be a substance under law. It is a spirit. It only *has* an operation. You see the operation, and call it fate.

"Neither by witchcraft nor by any other means can fate be discharged. The whole world is a mighty web of fate. But what may be conveyed to a man is not fate, although we call it fate; but the motion of fate.

"One man buys of another a clump of standing oaks; and what the oaks, had they eyes, would understand of the transaction is, that a small, forked, moving thing has passed a slip of white stuff to another, whereupon both have mysteriously taken themselves off, going different ways. Are you better qualified to judge of the earthly actions of heaven, than those trees of the doings of men? Of the workings of fate, however, we can see something. We are confronted together today, you and I, by a witch. She proceeds from the extraordinary to the miraculous. The same line being prolonged, she will be brought to the unreal. But rather than allow her to be unreal, you will perhaps discover the world to be unreal. It is your dilemma. . ."

"Flint, these are not your words! What are you doing here with me? Who are you?"

The other chuckled rather oddly.

"When the first sky of the day breaks into a hundred mystic colours, can one more matter? I am Flint. Forget me. Each word you will find to have had a shadow; and the shadows agree."

. "Am I dreaming you?"

"You might be. Heaven sends its dreams, which are followed."

Ragnar turned his head aside to collect his ideas. When he glanced back, Flint had gone. He himself at once got up to go.

9



Waldo sat sunk in his chair over against him in the fire-light, and to Ragnar there seemed no interval since Gaspary had been with him in the same room; was it the night before?

Waldo had called in on his way back from Swayning to speak to Elsa, who had refused the man who wished to marry her—not without remorse, loneliness, distress. But Leonore had not allowed Elsa to stay at home to brood and Waldo was alone with Ragnar.

Ragnar gazed at the other's delicately intense face—its timidity of seriousness that yet went with a secret persistence and fire, the innocence of the searching deep blue eyes. To Ragnar it did not seem surprising that Adrienne should still love him notwithstanding the distance which had grown between them. Waldo's evident inward striving, mysteriousness of soul, his very helplessness of bearing, were all invitations to women. But to any signals of willingness his younger brother seemed blind. One could fancy him formed for women, and still there was this remarkable failure of sensuality.

Ragnar found himself uneasy about the reason for Waldo's unexpected call so late. Surely Elsa's affair was not so urgent. The talk with Elsa might be merely the cover for a second purpose.

Waldo brought from his pocket a cold, half-smoked pipe, relit it and began to smoke, while his wide eyes wandered. When he spoke it was of Adrienne.

"We have been caught in different drifts, time must show where they will take us. Altogether it is too fatal a

business for sentimental regrets. No one sees her good qualities more clearly than I."

"Women of Adrienne's kind don't appear any more."

"I know it. There's something heroic in Adrienne that, unfortunately, neither serves herself nor stimulates me. She could make unusual sacrifices. The life she leads—one of nonsense and luxury—is only a dream-garment for her proper soul. I see and understand it, and it fills me with contrition at times. But her will is modern, and I am archaic. You are, too. So it has come to this—that I can stand by to see her slowly destroyed by the repression of her own nobility, and still feel nothing but impatience. This alone is sufficient reason for division. If you could conceive a heavy iron knife slowly cutting down through an apple by its own weight. . ."

"Are we so archaic?"

"Yes, both of us. It is declared by my troglodytic awkwardness and suspicion; but your antiquity is the more profound of the two. It is generally allowed you are sharp-eyed, quick of body and will, even sinuous. Underneath, I tell you, Ragnar, is the troll! You crave the very ancient things. You won't touch the modern married life. You walk in a secret anxiety."

"Only a short time ago, I would have denied it."

"How often you have tried to make my craze for armour ridiculous to me, Ragnar! You were wrong. In mediæval days, any man desiring to escape the world must become one of two things—a monk, or a crusader. I would have chosen the crusades. The deadly trials and hardships—the wounds, fevers, agonies, captivities, despairs, tortures, horrors, death—to be endured and dared in the name of Him who died on the Cross, from the first to the last of those long adventures from which few returned—they at least destroyed greed. . . .

"So while I am cleaning, polishing, handling any new acquisition in the shape of a weapon or piece of defensive armour, my fancies are away, seeking the original bearer. The man was probably no more than a plain, rough, bloody-minded mercenary or adventurer, risking his life for the

lowest form of gain—the spoil from another's misfortune. And yet, since he wasn't principally concerned with the preservation of his life, he stood in the same rank as the crusader. Such ideals are not ridiculous, Ragnar."

"No."

"The great world of humans presses rudely on you, and some faint-heartedness or vitiated taste in you persuades you to accept it. Your friends are convinced you have accepted it, since you are at least equal to your worldly circumstances; yet at bottom you have not accepted it. Your money is locked up, you don't care to increase it, or much to spend it, you have scarcely any pleasures, you don't marry, your work is a habit not an enthusiasm, you don't want to travel, you seek company and remain lonely and listless in it, you won't even kill time, you allow it slowly to murder *you*. . . ."

"Have done, Waldo! I do not accept the world. I have no other place to go to."

"I say you are waiting for something, Ragnar. I predict that when it comes, the recovery of your deeper nature will be over sharp precipices and horrid chasms.

"My case is not heroic. You would be wrong to suppose that I seek the knightly qualities in my panoplied ghosts. The soul of chivalry—its fantastic courtesy, caste consciousness, exaggerated spirit of honour, always for display, nearly always covering a complete insensibility outside its peculiar field—no sincere modern can regret the disappearance of such artificialities. Those gay-bloody personages, prancing over the long-suffering heads of husbandmen and providers—they could only excite a dismayed astonishment at the disguised brutality in all ages of the class in effective power So absolute is our impotence—so at the blind mercy are we of terrific outside happenings, that the standards of a Bayard, a Sir John Chandos, *must* be counted ridiculous.

"The standards only, however. In the instinct beneath the standard the man-at-arms was nearer than we to the world's dreadfulness before the coming of men. His foot was always set on the bridge between life and death.

Therefore, to me, arms and body-armour are tokens of the spectrality of the flesh. Today, because we consider the body so real, our soul is dishonoured."

"I recognise you for my brother in this, Waldo. But why haven't you ever spoken to me like it before?"

"It was never the time. My unwise career is as full of wrong destinations as the road of a drunken man. I seek the mystical beginnings of things, and find steel-clad fighting men. I attempt a refuge from loneliness, and take a wife who leaves me lonelier. I think to meet in my wife a beautiful concord and harmony, and learn that such prizes are not given, they are paid for in advance in the hardest coin of experience; and hardly a man, by the suppression of a hundred natural vices, shall after twenty years begin to live in concord with a person of other sex and spirit. . . In effect, I know very well that I am unhappy in life, and even why, but some misbegotten nonchalance in me is always too prompt to accept the relief nearest to hand. One is punished for such spiritual languor. You haven't the same impatience. Let the way only be right, you don't mind how long the journey is. And yet you can't have good without bad, Ragnar, and the danger of fastidiousness is this: that since no man on earth can escape changes and happenings, if we continue to put off contriving our own, they will be contrived for us. So at last my mistakes may have been the precautions of an instinctive wisdom, while your avoidance of mistakes could be viewed as an awful challenge to the Fates."

"I have put off nothing and avoided nothing. Lately, I have seemed to have no will at all. It may mean the imminence of a change, as a bare branch means the approach of new leaves."

Ragnar stretched unquietly and went on: "Every man of us is bound to modern life by a million connections. Your talk of an archaic self lacks reality. Certainly, I may be on the threshold of change; but I haven't attained to complexity in order to return to simplicity, for that is not the fashion of cosmic evolution."

"You are bound to the contemporary world indeed;

but still more surely, you are bound to your source. The contemporary world may be an unreal shadow, but your source, to have given birth to you, must be real. And what continues to bind you to your source could never be melted or severed except at the cost of the disappearance of the universes.”

“Were the old in plain fact so mystical!” returned Ragnar.

“I heard the cuckoo today for the first time this year, and its hollow note went like a voice in an empty hall, back, back, through all the later ages and those before them, to the primeval beauty itself. That is the archaic. Not a dawn, not a spring, yet *of* the dawn and the spring.

“We are moving from, not towards, the grandeur of heaven. The earth is to grow cleverer, humaner, perhaps happier, wiser in physical secrets, and many good things; but the most distant picture in that direction holds no awe, unless the purely intellectual shock of the thought that the line of human life is indefinitely to continue. The men and women of far ages to come are not to be greater than we, but rather less; and less mysterious. All the new talents civilisation piles up, century by century, amount only to the smartness of dwarfs. Self-admiring man gives it the name of enlightenment, and is now ready to deny the very existence of heaven.

“That primal nearness to heaven had no need to be consciously expressed, for consciousness is a later thing.”

“You explain much; not everything,” said Ragnar, hesitatingly. “What of love,—the love of man and woman, which also is a spring and dawn? Love is a present thing, it isn’t archaic. Yet it is of heaven, they say.”

Waldo sought his eyes in the flickering firelight.

“For a time,” he replied, “we men are excited and increased by a woman, when the false image of heaven forms itself in us like a dream. But it is the strange, palpitating flesh and form that we desire. The body is predominant in woman. The past is not for her, it saddens her; the future is not for her, it frightens her—her self is here and now, she wishes to keep what she has, she dreads its loss, which

all the same is inevitable.”

“Is love then worthless?”

“The spirit of the dawn in love is purest joy. Clearly, love is not worthless. The man in love is prepared to sacrifice his settled course, his money, his convenience; in case of need, his very life; to one who will perhaps betray him in a year or so. Judged by reason, the passion is foolish. It fails to balance values, and gives up worldly advantages which may afterwards be wanted again. Yet as all personality is base, and its surrender always good, love, which is the most joyful and dangerous way to it, can't be bad. It is not of heaven, however, and it is no seeking of heaven. To seek heaven is to renounce the sun. . . .Nights ago, I woke from sleep, and was impelled to get out of bed and go to the window. A bright moon hung in the sky. My own being seemed to me a harp, self-sounding in an unreal breeze. My abnormal sensitiveness was like a dark luminosity—a very clear, dark scene of nature under lowering heavy rain-clouds. I had finished with the earth, and my calm clairvoyant exaltation realised the whole secret bale, ghastliness and savagery of the life of earth; its never-ceasing griefs and tortures. It was the lovely picture of a slumbering hell, which for once I could be outside. Then if I could have signed a parchment with my blood, I was in the frame to have renounced the sun, creator of the day and the world of day. . . .But any man who, in daylight, should be like me at that hour, must not expect to excite the fears of a woman because of his renouncing of the sun, unless she were ruled by a personal motive to retain him in the day.”

“Why do you say this to me, Waldo?”

“You spoke of love.”

“I am concerned with Gaspar's daughter, Faustine, but there is no love between us.”

“I've seen something today to give me different sight; and if you try to destroy the ancient heaven by love, the opposition has arisen, and a woman is influencing you. Her motive must be one of personal relation.”

“In a dream Faustine has seen me moving to a fear-

ful, musical heaven.”

“She could only have dreamt so if there were another woman.”

“There is another . . . who isn’t allowing me to escape her.”

“Urda Noett.” There was the barest suspicion of interrogation in his voice.

“Yes,” replied Ragnar.

“I visited their house at Swayning today, but nobody was in. I was anxious to see her—Adrienne had spoken of her. And in thinking of her, I also thought of you.”

“Faustine is joining me in the morning to call on Urda in Swayning.”

“It is a house of dreams, and you may need support. She wishes to stop Urda’s harm. What is her reward to be?”

“She asks for none.”

“In surrendering to Urda after all, take care you don’t terrify Faustine’s spirit and assassinate her heart at once.”

“There can be nothing of the sort in her heart. I have scarcely met her but once.”

“A glance may be a meeting, a single meeting enough for a full understanding.”

“You came tonight to warn me of something?”

“Yes. It is a man who haunts the back of the house. The path to the top of the downs runs through that back garden.”

“There will be other ways up.”

“I saw a board,” said Waldo. “It was against the high right-hand wall of the garden before the house, and a hand drawn rudely on it pointed through the grounds of the house to the back. Perhaps there was a right of way prior to the building of the house; and now the path cuts through its grounds.”

“What place does it go to?”

“The name on the sign is almost obliterated,” his brother replied, “but it seems to read, *Morion House*. . . .”

10



rom the half-consumed wrinkled log lying like a black dragon on its bed of crimson fire, played lambent flames of peacock blue, metallic green The house's stillness seemed to grow. Then Waldo spoke again.

"You haven't met Urda?"

"No. . .No, I haven't met her."

"They say the house is mad with music. . .As music doesn't belong to the world, it lies outside time. Music is the higher speech; so that if truly there are angels and they converse with each other, it must be in music. By music I don't mean composed music, but what in the composer's head precedes the composition of music. A man could possess that original music. Its name would then be *passion*. Is Urda, perhaps, an angel? Do I amaze you, Ragnar? But would your Faustine be so fearful of a woman?"

"If she were a witch. . .?"

"The witch is like someone attempting to penetrate the mansion of heaven by the servant's entrance; but the angel descends from it to visit the world. A witch must labour and be cunning. If you were to talk to a witch, you would be immediately conscious of her intense alien will. But in an angel you would see your inmost self."

"Urda was born on earth, and is a woman."

Waldo shook his head. "I don't ask about her parents, of whom you can know nothing. But show me even a small continuous part of her existence. . . ."

Bluewright was already a myth. Now Urda was becoming one. The dream, however, persisted—he was still in it. . .Perhaps he, alone of men alive in the world was to be brought beyond the prison of earth to the dreadful 'outness' by another way than the personal gate of death;

sealed to some purpose by the experience he might return for a further while to prison.

“In fact you are right, and there is no proof of anything regarding her,” said Ragnar.

Waldo laid down his pipe.

“Now I will tell you what I saw at that house today.

“The afternoon itself was beautiful down there, Ragnar. It rained in the morning, and now the sun was shining, and all the smell of the spring earth was abroad. . . the wet hedgerows and shining fields, the great swollen downs, the quickening sunshine, the air like a woman’s cool hand on one’s cheeks. . . anciently, a god would have been walking. The trees were vying in young leaves; the ash-trees were late, and like dead. . . But I, as soon as I had finished at the cottage, made all haste to leave it and be on foot in the open. I walked. Someone directed me to the house. It stands alone, out of the village; Adrienne knows it. Ten minutes past the last house of the street, coming towards London, is a lane on the right, seeming to run up into the downs, but in fact only taking one as far as Mrs. Toller’s. The house is entirely by itself, and very lonely. Then the lane narrows to a path, that either has got grown over and stopped, or becomes a chalk track you see climbing the grassy side of the first down.

“Once away from the confusion of the heights of Swayning, the road runs underneath the high ridge of the downs, hanging over it like an endless wave. Sometimes there are fields between, sometimes the chalk spurs sweep right down to the road, but everywhere you are given an impression of immensity, beyond the absolute size of those hills. A very high point of the ridge rises above the house. A great chalk pit scores the side of the hill, and the path skirts it. Between the two chalk-pits and the house below is a no-man’s land of trees and tangled bushes, very singular for its atmosphere. Only the lane and carelessly kept garden all round the house seem to hold the steady invasion of nature at arm’s length. You think of a wizard’s circle, as if a deadly creeping green growth were forbidden to pass. Many of the single trees are exceedingly tall.

“The house is difficult to place. It is not like a farmer’s house, it is not big enough for the house of an estate, it is in the style of about 1876, and would they build for pleasure so out of the way in those days? It is a stone house, of great simplicity of design, not at all severe-looking, and much wider than tall. It has the perfect plainness of good breeding. Adrienne says the interior is beautifully furnished and full of treasures, but insidiously alarming—there is a subtle something that isn’t right. She also told me odd things about the menage, gathered from Mrs. Toller’s own statements. The two resident servants are middle-aged foreign women, who have long since exchanged their individualities for a devotion and loyalty nowadays very rare. Meals are irregular and peculiar in that house. The tone is set by music. Only persons of a nature to be ennobled by music are invited to pass the door. No one visits from the neighbourhood. But sometimes there are extraordinary guests from abroad. Music is heard there intermittently at all hours—at three, four, five in the morning. Then there may be a silence of days. . . .”

“They are home again?”

“They must be. . . But that inhospitality for all but the few was in my mind as I approached the house. No sound came from it. . . It was not a house of the world. It had stolen from the world to this waste, unwanted by others, it could retreat no farther for the wall of downs; here it had entrenched itself with magic, silence and antipathy. . . I saw it first, of course, from the lane. The neglected large garden before the house gave the lane look for look, across a crumbling yellow brick dividing-wall, a yard high. Higher walls shut out the threatening wild on either side of the house, leaving broad spaces of garden between, but the largest ground of all was probably at the back. I could make out little of that. In this front garden, however, were gnarled old fruit-trees, with beds of rich, black mould from the melted forest leaves of long decades. Besides weeds, the beds contained such wild and easily cultivated flowers as primroses, wood-anemones, jonquils, dark pur-

ple columbines, hanging their heads. They bloomed there as they would, untended. . . .

My purpose to meet Urda sank, till merely its form remained and all the audacity was gone. The late afternoon sun, striking the back of the house through the trees, caused the entire garden to lie in deep shade. I became very conscious that I was personally unknown there, without plausible errand.

“And when, heavy-hearted, I lifted my hand to the knocker, it was made foolish by the empty air; the door was already opened to me. A woman addressed me with the actual opening of the door. She must have seen me from a window, but at that moment it struck me as wholly inexplicable and disconcerting. Her voice, besides, was so far-off, so flat and lifeless that I could have fancied her truly supernatural—the impassable guardian of the mysteries of the interior. Her first tones told me I was not to enter.

“ ‘If you are Mr. Pole,’—impossible to describe the dusty weirdness of that foreign-sounding utterance—‘they are not at home. But perhaps you are not the expected Mr. Pole.’ I answered through a mist:

“ ‘Is a Mr. Pole expected here today?’”

“ ‘Today is soon, but Mr. Ragnar Pole is expected.’”

“ ‘That is my brother. Who expects him?’”

“ ‘Urda Noett.’”

“ ‘Should I wait, supposing I, too, want to see her?’”

“ ‘It is useless.’ . . .

“She shut the door against me, although without conspicuous rudeness, and for the best part of a minute I stood there undecided, eyeing the panel. . . . I was loath to decamp without at least having seen something of the house, yet wanted the hardihood to knock again. There were the windows . . .

“The room I tried to see into was large, but the bright reflection in the window-glass of the sun-dappled trees behind me, across the lane, prevented my distinguishing anything whatever inside. The image of the trees

was as vivid as reality, only the softening of the glass made it far more beautiful. The foreground of shadowy garden was invisible except as an imaginary perspective. I repeated the attempt at the next window along the front, but again the same thing happened; I could make out nothing for the reflected trees. Then, since I could hardly undertake the circuit of the house, I gave it up. So small my curiosity had been, after all, that I remained standing yet a little while to admire the fascination of wonder given back by this new glass world. Its beauty was as soft as if vision, too, might have another sex. . . .

“Now all at once, in that mirror of the window, I became aware of a man’s dark standing shape against the hollow trunk of a dead tree. It mildly surprised me, not that he was there, but that I could have passed him over. Some instinct of secret advantage opposed my natural impulse to turn about to see the man himself. . . . I kept my back to him, and went on observing him in the glass. He was thus like a man in a glamour. . . .

“His elbow rested lightly on a remaining low dead branch of the tree, the feet were crossed, the face, though it was towards me, I couldn’t distinguish, because it was in rather heavy shade and some way off. His shape was abnormally thin and exaggeratedly tall. He was in dark, tight clothes. . . . If he was no more than a stray wanderer, why should his odd garments, odder attitude and fantastic proportions be seeming to invest him with an eeriness—almost a figurativeness—to include him in the whole prodigy of this ambiguous house?”

“And thereupon, of their own will, came scurrying through my head a medley of illustrative superhuman figures, all of one kind, though remote from one another. . . . the central Emblem-Ghost of the Crucifixion of the painters . . . Mephistopheles—for instance, in Auerbach’s cellar . . . symbolic Don Quixote, lank and worn by mad nobility, dismounted from his Rosinante. . . . a Chicot, resting from the death of an enemy. . . . any imaginable caricature of the human male form, the most lean and long and travesty-like, that nevertheless should excite a feeling stranger than laughter!

“Wasn’t this mirrored idler in a wood, resting against a death-touched tree, as inauspicious there as a shadow of death itself? A motionless cobra in the forest, poised to strike. . . . Nature’s dull pleasure and harmlessness should suddenly be made insignificant by the knot of death expressed by the cobra. In such a fashion this man alone seemed of importance in my bright tree-world of the window. . . .

“This lurker seemed to wait for someone—someone expected . . . *you*, Ragnar!. . . Sharply I turned round at last. . . He wasn’t there. The real scene was at least different from the reflection in that there was no man within it. . .

“Twice, thrice and more times I compared the true and imaged woodlands to resolve the paradox. So slowly the truth dawned on me. . . For this presumed reflected vision of trees behind me, beyond the lane, was actually the direct view of different trees seen through the house, the background of its invisible garden. An extraordinary scene was reaching me through opposite windows of the front and back of the house—there was no impediment that couldn’t be explained. These lower rooms ran from back to front, or else doors stood open between. Nothing of the inside of the house was visible, because its gloom was quite overpowered by the brightness beyond. The glass panes, the interior dusk, softened the scene to the likeness of a reflection. Only I should have seen immediately how the sinking sun in the west was shining through the trees, not on them.


“To allow me thoroughly to realise the phantom nature of the phantom, the natural scene containing it was to be given an enhanced naturalness. A startling recoil from optical illusion to optical truth was to impel me with violence past the common sight. That I was disporting myself with no mirror, however phenomenal, but unwittingly steadfastly beholding existence itself—the transition was to supply my mind with the momentum which should easily carry it on to receive the supernatural.

“It was a phantom—for already its humanity was gone. With no difficulty, my eyes always found the dead

tree again, but not any longer was there a man beside it; yet where he had been remained. A black gap, fissure of darkness, occupied exactly his remembered outline.

“This gap wasn’t opened before me in innocence. Intolerable sightless waves from it were making nothing of the house between, in ever faster reducing my spirit to the colour of death. I mean, death in its positive character—its utter joylessness and loneliness, the awful falling of the shadows of night, the whispering of secrets not of earth, the white majesty of the tomb. So death swept me, from that man-shaped crack of blackness past Urda’s dwelling, which it guarded; until, step by step, backwards, I must have retreated to the lane. . . .”

11

verywhere the cool, grey, quiet April morning air, always more magically as they ran towards the coast, was transforming the world to dreaming shifting halls of crystal; each new stretch of country another hall, filled by shapes that seemed to come forward in strange silent animation. Ragnar drove through unknown landscapes. This near fifty miles of unfrequented by-ways between Faustine’s home and Swayning avoided till now the towns and crowded villages. He saw no map, and signs were often wanting, but some instinct in him was threading an unhesitating course.

Though Faustine sat beside him her nearness, the intimate touch of her clothes, gave Ragnar no pleasure. This morning she seemed less to him. Her society itself was a fundamental, he could not interrogate it; but in her womanhood she vaguely disquieted him.

Glancing round, he asked her:

“What is the day like to you?”

“A most extraordinary light is over everything.”

She never took her eyes from the long, low horizon-line of the South Downs before them.

“To me it seems like a general advance of huge other scenes out of sight at the back of these, pushing these into the world towards us. . .”

“Yes, I see it too. . .It’s rather dreadful if we are to lose our control so soon. . .We shall want all our sharpness and presence of mind when we get to that house. . .Quickness and awakesness give us things as they truly are. They are what they have always been. When the active joy of movement fades in us, we begin to conceive fancies; and when we pass altogether into sleep, we dream absurdities. But as soon as we are sharply awake again, everything returns to focus. We can apply that now, if it will help.”

“The alertest mind sees the most truth? It should be so. . .”

Like a note persisting under a changing figure in music, the car had sped on beneath their talk. Now they were swiftly bending and dropping among trees. The great sky-long apparition of the downs, miles distant yet, was removed for one more time.

Now, somehow, the things he was meeting and looking at had ceased to be inseparably associated, and were no longer the part of a whole picture of nature. Each shape or group was confusedly connected in his thoughts with an invisible source behind.

No wayside tree, caught by his eye before its overtaking and passing, suggested merely its common nature of a tree. Instead, he was imagining the slow entry into the world of a resistless strangeness, the oncoming wedge or ram of some whole invisible mass of mystic *tree*. And so, not only with trees, but with all the things that should be real and solid.

The sky seemed neither arch nor atmosphere, it was the slow weight on him of a descending ideal *sky*, of which what he saw was no more than the first face. The heavy general landscape divided by the car was no longer that old compromise of particular claims to notice, but rolled in on him portentously like a monster inexhaustibly multiplying itself. The fantastic impression of an immense

aggregate silent motion towards him, as of an entire world, began to paralyse his will with its image of the first hateful stirrings of a nightmare.

Perhaps his fast-moving car represented his futile endeavour to slip from under the phantom menace—to find refuge where? For if the menace were indeed in physical space, were not all places alike within the trap? Or if the experience had centre and circumference, they must now be travelling rapidly towards the centre—towards Urda—towards her ancient house of heaven! Yet in soberness, there was no menace, and nothing moved this morning except the machine they sat in. The magnetic grey brightness of the air, that caused the delusion, would never in normal times trouble his brain.

Music being the single natural destruction of the great silence of the world, just as now the equivalent great inseparableness of the world's appearance promised to be destroyed by this stepping forth of its parts, now he was beholding the parallel of a music. He was seeing not the equal of tones and musical progressions, but the emergence of a mighty *silence*. And not only was such a silence for the eye perfectly consistent with the destruction of silence for the ear, but without the one, the other could not be; and so, when music played, the seen world should start to disintegrate to silence. In music, the spirit of man, moving forward on the deepest feelings as on a quaking floor, was no longer to hear the speech to the eyes of the relations of things, but to see beneath them to the blackness of the invisible, which was the same as silence. The other natural silence for the ear was a waiting for the sounds of heaven. . . .

If these motions towards him suggested music, was it not because his whole frame was of music? So the peculiar silence of the nobler sort of dreams seemed to be fashioned of an unheard pulsing emotion of music. Suddenly, at any time, he might understand himself a captive in the glass house of a dream, desperately fighting its impossibilities. . . .

It amazed him that he could go on securely driving, with no thought of what he did—he watched the continuous

feat as if his personality were divided. Should they fall in with anyone else today, unquestionably this second man inside him would wear a mask successfully. But were Faustine, sitting with him like a shade, now to begin to talk again, he did not know which man would give the replies.

Music Faustine had named the most direct terror of heaven. The terror was in music always, but its degree was according to the music, and in its supreme degree it was still so little recognised that men accounted for it in any other way. This dream-scenery could also be the terror of heaven, slowly intensifying. Before its full invasion, the advancing fire of heaven was silently throwing forward its ominous heat and licking tongues. The earthly living principle was disappearing from all he saw, the physical presence remained—so a fire, still quiet, would lick the life out, yet despise the form.

He was to be brought from mystery to mystery, until the catastrophe. Faustine, faintly participating in all these matters—she was joined to him for a moon; why should he need a moon? . . .

He was not two, but many men—many wills. Besides this driver of a machine, and that one who slept and was confounded, was a third who desired but to return to the old, comfortable things; another who breathed in the sheer adventure like a mountain air; another to whom the horror of such an encounter with the likeness of heaven was everything. This strange sleep instead of death implied that he was to taste the sensations of death. Those who had passed to heaven without death—the horror of their translation must have been increased by so far as they were able to *know* the passage. . . . While still another man in him appeared to wish but to do right. Evil might lie before him; until it was more clearly shown to be such, he must refuse nothing, decide nothing. A necessity might soon appear that would make his doubts like struck matches before the rising of the sun. . . .

When the crest was won of the long rise they had been climbing, the downs came in sight again, and now

very abruptly they seemed close at hand. Towering dark and stationary across the sky, a great fact, they were like the arrival of an expected hour. Ragnar eyed them strangely, while his heart beat more heavily, for they were more than a simple range of hills, they were the confining line of this dream; beyond them the dream ceased, the world returned. Faustine stirred in her seat.

High-soaring, poised motionless like a hawk in the upper air, his ultimate intelligence was enduring in quietness, able to review his diverse wills. . . It was his antique, imperishable spark, already existent before the existence of these dim, partial, half-blind wills; not itself a will, and determining no action of his. His action at any time was determined by some other thing, choosing out of his different wills. In him was a will of wills, invisible to him just because it was *himself*. It was inferior only to his soul, the imperishable spark. The soul, taking no part in life, but merely observing it, was no more the unwavering needle to his fallible lower will of wills.

But then a man's life must be useless to the soul. The soul must part from the world as it had joined it, a timeless, changing essence. . . Yet this could not be the last truth concerning the soul. . .

The soul must also possess life and will. The ancient breeze from its home, which was eternity, must agitate it. Then, when agitated, it would shake the chains of the world. And if in this hour he were entering music and dream, that were as the beginning shadow of eternity, his soul would be moving in its peculiar will, and opposing all his lower wills, and defeating them effortlessly.

Reality was what the mind perceived so vividly that, with the perception, the worlds fell away, leaving only a thing of passion. Nowhere in the natural world was such a passion to be found, but in the human mind alone. Therefore the natural world was of inevitable unreality. The passion which could sometimes stand out from it as a phenomenon had nothing in common with the human passions and emotions of living men and women. It was one world appearing through another. . .

Their road joined another running east and west. Both ways it stretched unchanging beneath the immense mural towers and buttresses of the downs. They dwarfed the earth, those grey-green ancient heights, which, as often as he glanced upwards, seemed to grow in clearness, and to move on him. Morion House was somewhere there; but invisible—over the topmost ridge. He took the right hand road, immediately slowing down. Already he had caught a glimpse of the distant roofs that must be Swayning, but they were not to go so far. The house was in a previous lane to the left, which now he watched for. Fields separated them from the foot of the downs.

He identified the lane by Waldo's high chalk-pit behind, deforming the heavy sweep of the nearest hill. A field bordering the lane, given over to weeds, had its broken far gate open; he ran the car in under a hedge, then both got down. The narrow roadway was muddy from recent rain. They had to pick their steps and he allowed Faustine to go first. It must have been past noon. The day remained grey and cool, with sun or drizzle. . . So, without having spoken, Faustine and he proceeded through the mud; past one bend of the way, then a second.

He wondered at her form's sensitive grace. It was not the half-insolent ease of a woman used to dancing, but was more like a natural speech. Each movement of her body seemed in its perfect fitness to the purpose to express her spirit as well, no movement repeated any before it, none could be conscious. He could not attend to the new curious pleasure she was giving him. No doubt, she was even very beautiful, if mere grace could make a woman so. Perhaps it was not a heightening of her personality, but a lowering. Woman, for men, was the chief and symbol of the pleasures of earth, her beauty was the perfection of the symbol. So now, as his only representative of the old earth, Faustine must descend from him to be its perfected symbol, and show in beauty. Similarly, under black storm-skies, the green of fields and trees became more green. Altogether gracious, like a delicate vase, or statue, she walked on ahead, choosing her way. . .

Then quietly the house came in sight, and it varied in no respect from Waldo's account of it. He stopped short—he had not quite reached the corner of the garden; but already Faustine had turned back to him.

"She isn't here. . ." Her voice was lifeless, cold and even. "Now I shan't go in at all; you had better go alone."

"What will you do?"

"I will wait."

"Here?"

"Here or somewhere."

"Don't go round the back - remember Waldo!"

"I shan't be hurt by shadows."

"Why won't you come with me?"

"I don't wish to. The house is already unpleasant to me. I hope it doesn't play you tricks, but at least Urda isn't in it. You must go, to find out what we are to do next, or else I would beg you not to, either."

Ragnar took the few steps, she following, to where he could see the front of the house completely across the low garden wall. He stood staring strangely at it for longer than a minute, and when he spoke at last, he still did not turn to Faustine. In his eyes was a slow considering which seemed to tremble on the edge of inspiration, while his words were more like a soliloquy, but Faustine heard them. . .

"I have never seen so extraordinary a house, and Waldo didn't tell me the first truth about it. It is the fulfilment, if not the explanation, of what has been troubling me all the way down—it is the most real, most isolated thing to look at I have ever known. . .it can't be in solidity, definition, anything physical, but I must be feeling *twice sure* of its existence. Other things say, I seem to be; this house says, I am. And still it appears more unreal than other things. . .It has an enchanted air impossible to analyse. It must be half out of, only half in the world. Perhaps, because the part of the world is necessarily unreal to any preconceptions, all the more the part in it must shoulder the full load of such a reality as never belonged to the things of the world. . . ."

"It isn't the house I dreamt about," Faustine answered him. "If you are already frightened of this house how would you behave confronted by that? It was a vanishing house. This before us is a house lived in. . ."

"Nevertheless it is no light thing to go up and knock at the door. . .and the reality of the house is increasing while we speak; soon it may become the one fact here. . . . The garden and woods are a blur. . ."

"Be quick, then! for nothing today is important except Urda."

She moved away to cut short the discussion. Ragnar immediately passed through the gate into the garden.

12



hough it had stood shut but the moment before, the front door was now open. And while he still crossed the garden, a woman appeared in the gap, looking out towards him, whom at once he saw to be Mrs. Toller herself. Her air, in greeting him, was calm and friendly.

"You are alone?" she inquired.

"No, Faustine Gaspary is with me."

"Then will she not come in?"

"It is not a call."

"So why have you come?"

"To see Urda, if she is at home."

Mrs. Toller gave a little laugh. "It ferments so quickly! . . .But she is not at home."

"Where is she?"

"I think she is out walking."

"Which way? It might be possible to find her?"

"I do not know which way."

"Does no one here know?" he demanded.

"Perhaps Mme. Klangst. . . ."

“Will you not ask her for me?”

“Better still, you shall ask her yourself. . .”

She closed the door behind them, when instantly they were in gloom. She led the way along the passage.

“It is a pity that Faustine Gaspary will not consent to see something of my house. . .It is not one of those old houses, and dead houses, her spirit abhors. It is a very living house.”

“Surely it is singularly dark for the time of day?—and I had no notion that the house was so large! Where are we going?”

“It is a deceptive house; it is exceedingly big, in truth—many persons have experienced the same astonishment. What did Faustine say of it?”

“That its single fearfulness was its music.”

“She is so wise. But do *you* hear this music?”

“Not with my ears. . .I merely feel as if I were descending into a pit.”

“There are stairs down for some way, but low ones, and wide apart.”

The already invisible way was dropping though slowly. The long and unequal spaces of floor between the separate stairs were never more than a few inches deep. It was as if they were using the terraced falling path of a hillside. . .The carpet had changed to rough, bare ground, that felt to his feet like rock and earth. He was kicking loose stones aside, and now and then his toe stubbed itself against an obstacle. . .and it was no more an indoor air, but fresh, sweet, lively—a breeze played round his head. He heard the noise of trees softly bending under the wind. Certainly, he was not in a house, but out of doors again. . . .

This darkness was not night—the hour was not night, and the shadow against his eyes was not the colour of night, but more purplish. Nor were any stars showing.

His eyes saw the darkness as the prevention of light, but his mind understood it to be his first correspondence to a new kind of light, unknown to physics. . .His ears heard the breeze, his cheek caught it, his nostrils tasted it, only his mind distinguished it from other breezes. It

was no mere stirring of things from without, the pressure of an alien wind. A million rooted natures were faintly straining towards him from their individual prisons—and the freshness on his cheek was their breath, the tree-sighing was their speech, the sweetness of the air was their purity—the authenticity of their authority. Sombre and awful now was that slow coming and dying call to him. . . .

Truly his legs moved, truly his steps measured the ground, yet they were taking him to an unreal place—he was there now. He was there and not there. He thought of the shifting of a theatrical scene on a dark, curtainless stage; sitting alone there in the night-like auditorium, one could hear the draggings and shufflings, guess what went on, but nothing was to be disclosed until the moment.

He called, not very loudly, through the dark:

“Where are we? Are we out of doors?”

“ . . . out of doors ”

It was an echo that broke in upon his words, to outlast them and end alone. It was the startling hollow return of his voice—its unexpected mockery shocked him curiously . . . A moment afterwards a woman’s faint cry seemed to answer his call. The remote voice was sharper, higher than Mrs. Toller’s. It was more like Faustine’s.

“Ragnar Pole! . . .”

“I’m here. . . .”

The echo no longer derided him, he had moved outside its range. There was silence. Then the cry came again:

“Ragnar Pole! . . .”

His feet sped on and sometimes he stumbled over broken ground, but never fell headlong, while the shock of stumbling seemed only to waken him to still heightened excitement. . . He and Faustine had fled apart. . . But at last, understanding the uselessness of their fleeing, would be together again. For between them had been no strife. A *fear* had separated them. . .

This was his secret place, that only Faustine shared. His fear was also hers. She was silent now. Her silence was more pregnant to him than her cries had been. . .

This place was so wonderful that in it meaning must

follow meaning, yet also it was so weak, so trembling, that one strange examining eye would have power to extinguish it. Therefore he feared to raise his voice to call to Faustine. . .

What was Faustine? She could not be a natural woman here; she was an essence - the spirit of this enshrouded place. . .As he created her for himself by her name. . .so he strengthened and preserved the creation by her face and form. He imagined, not her graces or physical surprises, nor recalled that ever-seductive contrast between a friendly, equal human intelligence and the careless, blind, automatic workings of an unalterable female organism, but their extraordinary connection here rose pure, high, bare, above the sensual love, and the half-sensual. . . He might almost be embedded in her, as a tree in the earth; she was his earth, out of which he could grow aloft towards these scenes now dark. If she were snatched from him altogether, he must somehow lose his life of the scenes, and return to the world. . . . She was both the spirit of these cloaked scenes and likewise his companion, his *wife*, mystic, not carnal. . .

Far down on the right, away from Faustine's last cry, he heard flowing water, like the dim trotting of horses—quick, hollow, crystal, wild, confused, yet staccato; so deep below him that he understood his falling path to be skirting, perhaps all the time, the very edge of a ravine. One wrong step could have been his destruction. He could not see the edge to avoid it now, though the purple of the night turned weirder, distincter from the darkness. And from this heightened sinister stimulation of his eyes sprang his agitations. There came to him the analogy of the blustering, undirected winds, mounting and multiplying in the beginning of a night of tempest. . . Where the vagaries of the cliff-line were unreckonable, there in superstitious animal rashness he yet plunged blindly down the hill.

But now, ascending to his ears, the tragic soliloquy of the deep, hastening water was like another mood within himself, a premonition; another facet of his storm of planes, each meeting the rich emptiness of mystery. The unquiet rapid talked to itself of calamity at hand. He and Faustine were implicated.

There was no one else here. . . The purple glare, like a magnet drawing each moment to life, loosed and lifted every sleeping emotion from its bed of his heart.

Low thunder was growling intermittently. The wind was no stronger against him, but sang like the wind in the tall shrouds of a ship; he must be nearer to the trees. There was a distant waterfall, as well. The noises, of the thunder, the waterfall, the torrent, the wind, were interblended. . . It was as if he were in a great wild park, or garden. . .

His feelings had the character of music. . . What by inspiration was presented to the brain to be moulded and remoulded, *that* was the soul's right music. More intimate than an impossible general music, deeper and more supernatural than any product of composition, it was the soul's moving in feeling—*feeling*, which must also subsist, magically entombed, at profounder depths than any thought. . . His soul, in this other place, was risen in inspiration, not now to knock at the door of his thoughts, but to touch with a strange transforming wand his senses, his will, his very consciousness.

This mystic place was around him by the passion of his exposed soul. The arising of his soul in the passion was instead of inspiration—it was on Faustine's account. Without her the scenes must altogether pass away. Out of an audacity of the same passion must have sprung their sin to separate them. Passion caused this place to be, an excess, an audacity of passion shook its continuance.

How should an audacity of passion be sin, in a place where were no persons to injure, laws to transgress? Was sin only for a society of greeds and hunger, all fighting, plotting, snarling for the same possessions, whence sin, too, must be born? On the earth he knew, in the descending degree, were the countless different sins—simple, joined, modified, vivid, faint—ranging from malignancy and unnatural vileness, at the head, to the mere disobedience to authority as the lowest stirring of immorality of all. The lesser sins, perhaps, were of the human character, requiring for their conception the coincident presence of other men or creatures; the fiendish and monstrous sins as well needed the occasion, yet he thought they were already in the soul. A peculiar stamp marked them out from other sins, other crimes. . . They were motiveless. Their

reward was in themselves. They brought nothing. The sins of pleasure brought, at least, pleasure to the body, but these, if pleasure were procured too, gratuitously super-added a senseless wicked joy to the soul.

Their perpetration went with a dark joy of audacity and triumph. A work was destroyed, and the destroyer metaphysically felt himself mightier than the creator of the work. It was a snapping of supernatural chains. God was not denied; He was given look for look, and flouted. These crimes were accompanied by a sort of contempt.

Holding such evil in its most secret catacombs, the soul could not be even the most imperfect representation of the spirit of God, but it was a flawed piece, possessing in association with its elements of deity another nature of diabolism, insanity, passion, the pride of the destruction of the works of God. When deliberately sealed within the soul, perhaps this wicked nature must bring about the soul's corruption. Thus the lesser human sins and trespasses, or were it only lawful surrenders to desire or to the disinclination to duty, could be indispensable to the preventing of the corruption. If faultless virtue in a man were usually viewed with deep distrust by the plain-minded, surely it was from the instinct that the blocking of every free passage between man and the world must be attended by the most fearful internal perils.

By the relief of the lesser worldly sins, or the pleasures not directly hurtful and tragic to men, those greater horrors could be left asleep in the soul. But by rejecting every vice and declared pleasure, the soul often became uneasy in its evil sleeping part, when the struggles between day and night in the soul begin which sometimes must eventuate in the stripping of the man of all earthly honour. Now in this place, with only Faustine for society, he should be withdrawn from the occasions to transgress, the temptations to dally with pleasure; and insensately had asked if it were possible for his soul, being so alone, to sin!

The fierce sun burned through the miles of earth's atmosphere, producing the earthly lives of men and women, animals, plants. Those lives and the earth-born sins and pleasures of men were parallels. Both sprang from a source out-

side themselves—a fire, an evil of the soul. Without the sun, life on the planet could not be; without the soul's evil and propensity to delight, the small sins and pleasures of earth equally could not be. Thus he had not been here with Faustine alone, but also with the evil of his soul. It required no other society to conceive a crime.

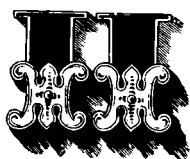
The ghastly glare cast throughout his being from the stirring of his soul's evil was sufficient to drive him from Faustine in terror. A sudden pride in them, a will of mastery—they would be like gods, he and she. . . . But immediately with the triumphing that sense of dark, heavy irremediable evil which, no doubt, was the heaviness and living tragedy of life itself; the evil of the individual soul, that had no private existence save dissevered from the body of God. Commonly the state was concealed by the world's illusions; but being of a sudden exposed by the death-pale lightning of triumph—a glare lighting a glare—so that the soul in that flash should behold its own essential abomination as a thing writhing and self-living apart from God, without ability to end it, then surely, for such a soul, all matters would stagger to fear and night! But with persisting audacity, fear and night might be made to give way before the triumph.

So in his present spirit were fear, audacity, joy, horror, music, glamour, all interwoven, half interfused. . . .

“Ragnar! . . .”

Faustine's voice called him for the third time, from quite close at hand. It was almost soft—she had discovered him. He could just make out her shadowy form not many paces away, appearing to face him from lower down the hill.

13



is first words died. She was silent. Then, standing like dark statues, the talk quietly arose between them.

“I want a world which can be a home,” Faustine said. “I don’t want a house with mysterious, unseen rooms. I want to know my house, and live in it. You must go nowhere without me.”

“I want that too,” Ragnar returned. “What was the fear in your heart that made you run away?”

“I saw myself as worm-eyed, spider-blooded—hideous, wicked, hopeless, loathsome. . . lest someone else should see it too, I fled terrified. . .”

“But if you gain a deathless home this evil heart must share it with you.”

“I cannot help it,” Faustine replied. “My home shall be of love; my love shall live, and not die.”

“Whence come our evil hearts, that we ourselves disown?”

“I do not know, unless a foul spirit were at our making.”

“You are the world, and no older than the world; but I am the spirit of man, and older than the world. I will not live within a framed world, but I shall frame a world according to my vision and desire; and your love . . . shall pervade the world.”

“You shall never cease to create, nor I to love. . . The darkness yields. They will be able to see us soon. A mighty tree stands on a hill—a palely shining fountain of life. I called out to you, I would not approach it alone. You did not answer me. I can’t tell if it waits there for us, our need and life and salvation—whether, indeed, I can find it again.”

“We have stood too long!” he exclaimed.

“These few minutes have seemed precious to me.”

They went lightly down the hill, their hands clasped. What he saw appeared dimly a wild country of many waters, with the cones and slanting battlements of weeded hills, and stark crag-faces, hollows, basins, the mouths of secret valleys, phantasmal islands amid the waters. The visiblensness of this mystic scene was passive, its time was *storm*.

He knew that Faustine saw it too—their spirits were joined. It was their world, where they had always lived.

The trees he passed by were strangely unlike each other. Each tree was a solitary intelligence seeking new shape for itself. And through the boughs and leaves of all, the wind moved like an inspiration. They sang his death-song of this world.

The sky was like a seat of storm. Thunder rolled as if from the ancientness of the beginning of time; this world was near its origins, when thunder had been its perpetual voice out of eternity. . . From the untranslated sky of purple darkness came its own peculiar, awful sound as of a great tolling.

Faustine stopped, still holding him, and through the gloom found his eyes.

“Is it not my *self* you love?”

Like a communication from the pressure of her hand, he knew that in the supernatural fever of the storm they had told each other thoughts not their own, that a plan might be unfolded to them which would instruct them, like souls under sentence, what next awaited them in this fearful hour.

The storm, called love—it was not love. Generated of rapture, worship and obstruction, the rapture was the heart's bare tasting of immortal delight, the worship was of an untrue image, the obstruction was the damming of passionate desire till all other will and feeling perished in that flood. By weird chance or mystic fate, or under some facility of illusion, one out of countless persons of another sex was intimately met and known during the few years of passion. . . . That was not love, but the passage to love. Deep, quiet, unchanging, was the current of love. . . The rapture of passion must fade like the colours of the dawn, the beloved's image become familiar and human, the dammed waters of desire escape to those equable permanent depths, before love could settle within the spirit of

men, to fructify his life and make him noble.

The passage to love was of violent desire, ecstasy alternating with the torture of deprivation in all its degrees; but love was steadfast, quietly rejecting the self's most plausible, most natural promptings, in order to listen only to the enjoins and discernments of pity. For but in those two ways, of desire and pity, might persons be spiritually attached, and one soul must seek to possess another, or else give itself to another. . . Never could he have wished to possess her—by love they were joined. He gave himself to her in such a way that no joy or liberty would he accept that was refused to her. The effortless abandonment was pity; it was love. . . In truth, she was as a second *I* to him—forgotten, and the cause of nothing, yet the invisible condition of all. . .

“You are the world,” he said at last. “The world possesses self. Its self is that which gives birth to dying creatures and drags them down to death again. . . If it is your *self* I love, I love the mother of death.”

“You have not answered me,” returned Faustine.

“A living nature of oneness is beneath the deathly self. When we were severed from the great Unself, we partly died—that death lives on as the self in us . . . Another nature, not of the Unself, nor of the self, but original came into being in us; which we call, the soul. That it is not the self is shown by its desire for everlasting things, whereas the self desires none but the perishable; and the soul is not the same as the Unself, which is *spirit*. For *spirit* is in all living forms, or they would be dead, but alone of all forms you so strangely bind me that we are like one. Your soul I love, while spirit is but the life and sustenance of both our souls.

“So is this living world habitable, but yonder dying world that overhangs us like a terror, stricken and beyond remedy. There the self must lie with the soul as a frightful incubus, producing the progeny of death to the soul. There my love for you must always be sad and sorrowful, for the dreadful subjection of your soul to the dead self, and the false world of all the selves; and for my endless vision of your going forth to death at last. . . Lonely the soul moves there, in that world, through those mushroom, shadowy halls of death.”

“Would you not love me yonder?” she asked.

“There too, souls must meet, but as captives, and in each other’s griefs.”

“And here?”

“The living spring shall renew our souls from the Unself; and the evil self will awake as dazed from the dead. Then the evil will vanish from it. No more shall the soul fight it as an enemy, but live in it as a spirit in its body, denying it nothing save the right to fall back into death. For as hand clutches, eye sees, leg walks, lip speaks, so self shall have its function, to the soul’s glory. Thus we are to unite in this world. . . in each other’s inspirations, not griefs.”

She said: “There are other souls than ours. Of what worth to us is our love while that world of death and evil is heavy with the sounds of pain—while one single other soul remains in need of love? The oneness we boast to bring each other, we receive back, and nothing has been given. . . Could it even be granted, in this world, to cast away my life for you?”

“Your life shall not be cast away.”

“I think that love is so wonderful a fire, it may be greater than the worlds, greater than creatures. What then if all love were a living soul, wide as the worlds and heavens, whose shadowy instruments men and women were. So would all life be unreal, but love real. Here we are in an abode of phantoms, that but seems to us real because we ourselves are phantoms. Where is love, that we might find it? In that dark world it holds dominion; I know not where its home is. Never shall we enter its home till first we have given all we are. Our phantom must be made to die before we may begin to live. . .”

He thought the darkness fell again while she talked and every sound too was much less. A larger change was over him . . . He could be on the summit of a high pass, all at once gazing down over a different country.

He knew why his desire to seek the stronghold and eternity of that tree of welling life had vanished. He knew why Faustine’s ghostly wisdom had won their dreadful field and there were no dead upon it. In this new dimension was his escape from calamity, as a man should stay unthreatened by a murderous axe poised silently over his shadow. . .

Simply he was conscious of his own soul, in pure tranquillity. This world would be destroyed, but other magic tempest-worlds would come again, and behind them all his soul would endure, throughout timelessness. This calmness was a flowering serenity of storm, a continuance of extraordinary delicacy, trembling and wavering within its bounds of peace.

And when his sight of this vast supernatural world was withdrawn again to burning darkness, that was his soul's retreat from the suspended gathered passions lying yet at distance around it like a universe of space, and when the trees and waters, the low thunder and that uncapturable noise of awful tolling, were all so stilled that only their faint, far-off grandeur remained to keep alive strange terror, he once again sought Faustine, before it should be too late, to understand if she also were changed: but another woman stood in her place, and she was gone. . .

She was woman or angel. Through the dusk fast becoming night he indistinctly discerned that her face was not young like Faustine's, but far older, yet unwrinkled, living, quiet, incomparably noble. So harmonious seemed her vision with the tranquillity possessing him, surely she could not be here by chance; but either she had projected her peace before her coming, or stood against him the mystical personification of his spirit's peace. . .

Now it was full night and silence, and still he could imagine her form as a yet deeper shadow in the blackness. Nor was the outer world gone, but was incorporated with his spirit in one mental frame of wildness, gloom, marching, flame, music, enclosing his soul's abiding calm like an air—ignored, unfelt, yet the conditioning of life.

“There are *tr ee* musics,” she said, in a singular low, wind-like breath, “and the road to the second lies through the first, and that to the third through this; but from any of the three musics you may return directly to earth. Because you are now in my second music, you have necessarily been where you have been, and that first music subordinately endures. So, when you go on to the third, will this endure. The first music, which is passion, has been to liberate you from earth. But next, in order to gather together again what is now diffuse

through that liberating passion, you must rediscover in yourself a principle of oneness, which yet cannot be the personality with which you have walked the earth, for just the dissolution of that personality is your liberation from earth. The oneness, therefore, is your immortal soul, and its rediscovery of itself in this my second music is attended by great calmness and the sense of great power. . Yet, however superior may be this second music to the first, were the first suddenly to vanish, the earth must return, your parts fly together again in the old person, and your calm soul retire once more to its living grave.

“But your soul has its long journey, and accordingly you shall pass to the third music, that is not mine, but belongs to one still superior to me. In it the soul shall find heaven beyond heaven, distance beyond distance, and at last gain the wisdom of its loneliness. And still again, were my second music singly to vanish, those heavens and distances equally must disappear for the soul . . .”

“What is Faustine?” he asked her.

“She is all-fearing and all-loving, but not all-wise. She is very wise, for she has seen the necessary course of the three musics, from the earth and one from another; but she does not see that there is no other course, no other journey, for the soul. She fears music, and loves the earth. She shall even restore you to earth, for your years there. . . Yet this your vision must continue as far as the third music against her will. . .”

“Where is she?”

“You will meet her again directly, in the world, but it will not be the same world. . .”

“Why is this vision necessary to me?”

“That you may bear witness to these matters among men.”

“Why am I chosen?”

“The hour, the work, the instrument are all one, and never has there been a human choice.”

Urda was this third music to come.

He said: “I have remembered Urda. I have seen but her shape in phantom; and she has no shape. Unable to know her

by shape, how may I love her?"

"It is true that you have not seen her. The root under the ground, however, also strives upwards for the daylight it cannot see."

"Love needs a person."

"The love of person is not all love."

"I speak but of the love I know," he rejoined.

"There is the earth-proverb: 'Love is blind'—by which you must think that it is blind like the buried root . . . The eyes that see shapes, see hindrances."

"Do I seek Urda's music, and am I not hindered?"

"You are indeed hindered by your mortality. But this hindrance too, as a man, you cannot see, and so unknowingly you seek to penetrate it. Till death you cannot know these three musics except in shadow. But after death they shall endure together; in their different degrees, through many heavens. And in ceaseless progression the third music shall wax, the first wane, until at last the third shall be alone. . ."

In silent rapidity it grew grey, to full daylight, and he was in a room. He knew the house again, though the room was strange. Through its glass door he saw a great and shapeless wild garden, with tall trees and a wood behind it, but all in greyness. . .

The woman who had been talking to him was in the room. It could only be Mme. Klangst . . . There was no smallest smile on her lips or concealed strangeness in her face . . . She had a pale, occult beauty, with haunting dark eyes; like a spirit's . . . A half-sternness in her face met there a reserved, unearthly pride.

"Where is Urda?"

"She has gone up on to the downs. . . ."

"Where could I find her?"

"She is at Morion House."

"I will go there."

"You may go by this door, through the back. A path leads through the garden."

She opened the door to the garden, and stood quietly holding it for him to pass out.

"And Bluewright . . . ?" he asked.

“He is here—he, too, is on the downs. You will avoid him if you can. You will meet him one day, but to-day it is Urda.”

Accordingly, inclining his head to her with a last strange look, Ragnar entered the garden.

14



Faustine was there, waiting. She would not question him till they were past the garden, out of sight of the house. The often indiscernible path through the coarse grass and among trees seemed yet established at last by a low stone stile in the boundary wall that surely marked the way, for beyond it, directly towards the downs, ran a disused track piercing the woods—wet, narrow, bramble-infested, inhospitable. So on the farther side of the stile she stopped to be told his adventure. They looked ahead while talking. The great down shutting off the sky was already nearer, and through the trees they saw, high above them, the place they must make for, in that steep, broken, white chalk stairway following the line of the rising edge of Waldo's quarry.

“Are we going to Morion House?” Faustine inquired.

“She is there. Madame Klangst told me.”

Her eyes wandered through the trees before them. “Why did I dream of a house? The house you have come from could be like a lodge or gatehouse. What happened?”

“Both the others received me in turn. They put me under enchantments. Each had her enchantment, and they were musics. There are three musics. Now I go to the third, which is Urda's.”

“How three?”

“The first music is passion, the second rests on passion, but itself is calmness. The third, I think, is the soul's longest journey through heavens and spaces, to its wisdom of loneliness. The three musics will be the history of our soul

after death. I dare not despise the prophecies of these women, with their magic of worlds. I was alone with you in a different world—wild and lovely and ominous. You and I were united. The world enclosed us, and still it was our own creation and possession. We were frightened in it, and helpless; we feared to lose it. We were losing it, unless we could find a certain spring of life. But my excitement was so unearthly, I was like a god facing doom. . .”

“What then?”

“That first music gave place to the second. Afterwards I knew it was Mme. Klangst’s. And you were gone. The feeling of this music has continued ever since, and I have it while I talk.”

“The fear wasn’t put in you by malice, your peace is no conquest over it, the fear and peace together are an introduction to Urda and heaven. . . We framed a plan that seemed wise, and it was foolish. . . Let us go back while we may.”

“I must go on to her, though it should be alone.”

“Where is Bluewright?”

“He too is on these downs today, but I am told that this time I need not meet him.”

She looked at Ragnar.

“A fear is a warning of our pain to come . . . Imagine someone fallen from a lofty cliff. The journey starts in sudden terror, ends in a pain of crushed, mangled members—the mental pain, with it, of a finished happiness. I say that between that terror and that anguish is an interval of fearless and painless falling when the man’s soul is calm to carelessness. . . A murderer glides swiftly from the night to strike you without warning. You have scarce time to fear before you must feel his knife; and between the first quick, shadowy consciousness of mortal attack and the true pang of death is still a lightning instant when you scorn fear and pain alike. . . when the soul laughs and says, it is nothing. . . And that intermediate condition you call supernatural tranquillity. Long-lasting or shorter than a flash, it is always the same mild, weird shining of the soul before its re-plunging into new clouds. A train rushes into sunlight from the black roaring of a tunnel, only immediately to enter another: is that bright moment a liberation?”

“I am not seeking liberation or relief,” he answered her, “but to meet Urda. If my other constraints have been forerunners of pain from her, I must support what I can of it. . . .”

“It is her pain. You have no curiosity because of it, you have only an uneasiness. . . . Could there be a house, would you also dare to enter that?”

“In face of unknown things I will dare what my courage dares.”

“Then perhaps I am of no more use to you . . . You will remember that I also exercised a calm. We both thought—I hoped—it might prove a counterpoise to Urda. But now this other calm has sunk mine; and still you ought to understand the difference between the two calms more plainly than you do. Our earth, thousands of miles deep to its centre, has for its surface the thinnest skin of soil, permitting the life of plants and animals; underneath that, the tormented fire-rocks; but underneath these still, as far as the earth’s centre, is great heaviness. That is like my calm. Beneath my limited thoughts, my often too-sharp speech, my often stupid ordinary feelings and actions, is a silence growing heavier and more inaccessible the farther down through it you try to reach. In that ground no phantom imagination can live. It is my calm—a whole world; which we thought was to have held you from Urda, not by any beauty or virtue of it, but by its weight. . . . This other calm fascinating you, from Mrs. Klangst, is false. It is a long-drawn-out flashing of the soul in the interval between the body’s terror and its certain death.”

“Let it be enough now that my nature’s attractions are unchanged, and that you continue to draw me,” Ragnar replied. “Here, out of doors, our bond remains enigmatical, but in the house I learnt its name. . . .”

She gazed at him silently.

“I never meant to tell you, though the magic was not mine. But in the first enchantment you were my wife . . . And then again you seemed to wish to renounce a world so unutterable, in order to return to the old earth of sacrifices. Therefore, in the end it was *love* you loved—love, in its surrenders and self-immolations. . . .”

“I am not so noble,” said Faustine. “My place is indeed on earth. . . . and now you, as well, renounce our mystic mar-

riage—if it were one—for Urda's heaven.”

“As we have not sought each other in materiality, so we may part without the sin of conscience; but I have renounced nothing. Soon, perhaps, I must be alone, but still I shall have renounced nothing. Now, while it is allowed, I wish you to be with me.”

“I will go to the top with you. . . .”

Ragnar went before her. For a time the track ran nearly level, while all their care went to holding back the thorny branches, to skirting the pools they met at every step. The house's garden was gone, and on all four sides were woods and thickets. Some trees were bare, others were in the delicate green of their opening; the sunless day spoke of the trees themselves in their slow and unencouraged waking. Through the silent boughs in front loomed, as a dark astonishment that never ceased, again and again striking Ragnar's perception like a quiet blow, the mighty base of the down, green and ghostly—it seemed an unescapable sheer mountain, whose scaling would bring them to a giant world aloft.

He could not forget Faustine's words about pain. Indeed, he might hardly experience the increase of heaven without suffering a corresponding augmentation of his natural pain. Heaven's light must throw intenser shadows for life, but these shadows, even in the dusky light of earth, were always *pain*; men could not go without it.

The will loved pleasure; enjoying and seeking to increase it when present, desiring it when absent, mourning its heights when irrevocably departed. Pain, however, was so constant in its multiple forms that scarcely could there be any pleasure in human life if the will had not long since contrived a weapon wherewith to subdue pain; the weapon was endurance. It was the will's quiet breathing during the violent access or fearful monotonous continuance of pain; its patient accompanying effort to reconvert pain to pleasure. Apparently unbearable pains thereby became accustomed and presently unheeded, sometimes growing even to be loved.

Few were the persons not chained unwillingly to a spot, a routine, a limitation of character taken for granted by others; to work. Men were perpetually tormented by the withhold-

ing of delights seeming but just beyond their reach. The urgent need to get, hold and not lose money, without which no one could live, brought fear, care, unwanted business, outward and inward servitude. Loved ones disappeared from earth and no more returned. Not less were the apparently chosen and gratuitous, but actually indispensable, pains of sexual passion, class or rank ambition, competition, the slow climb to power, the heart-breaking practice towards perfection in any skill or talent, the nigh-impossibility of final ideal expression in the arts. These, to be called the great ills, that were the warp of human pain, were incessantly crossed by the woof of the small vexations and distresses, which were only singly small. Obligation, baulk and disappointment, apprehension and anger, mortification and regret, accident and incident, with all the unpleasant trivial offices of the day—they were the filling up of the empty spaces of life by pain. Nearly unrecognised went its essential nature, so wide-spread were its nets; they were so in order that all might be caught. Other circumstances, by no means hidden, showed how blind were the victims of pain. Sleep, that men thought beautiful and natural, was but the drooping of the body, once in every day, from the effort of life itself. Life, therefore, in its nakedness, as its own lowest expression, was exertion and pain. Still more immediate was the silent pressure of life upon the consciousness at every minute of the waking day. This silent pressure was the dullness, the ennui, the *taedium vitae*, that stood in relation to the events and excitements, whether of the mind or of the outer world, as space to the stars scattered throughout it. So men and women, to escape from themselves, sought to create artificial excitements in big or little societies, or saw plays, or read books, in which all was events, and nothing ennui; but those plays and books were never the picture of life, whose whole dominating ground was weariness itself. . . .

The universality of human pain was certain. . . . Either one original pain was underlying the multiplicity of earthly pains, or the unity of name but represented, for all the forms of pain, the same failure of pleasure. . . . The human will, so far as it incessantly sought and expected, after a million contrary experiences, pleasure without pain, must surely be in-

sane like one who expected sunshine without shadows. If the will did not possess its shadow of pain, there could be no heaven.

His earthly will could not endure in heaven, for heaven already destroyed it even on earth. With all its instincts it must go before he could enter heaven, and yet something of him should enter, after death; his soul should enter there, without parts, instincts or earth-characters. . . . But suppose he could now sustain the bare spectacle of heaven without entrance, wanting the preparation of death, would he be given to understand painlessness, the pain of heaven being only for the world? Yet there might be the pain of heaven of another kind, unimaginable by human faculty.

He saw how in the world an instinct was a channel of pleasure which, if stopped or broken, must bring pain instead. But all the instincts of a conscious person could not simultaneously fail, so that, either in part or wholly, one instinct should always take the place of another in case of need. . .

In heaven, however, the will of instincts being unable to subsist, a pain experienced by the soul could not be relievable by the soul's recourse to another part of itself for help against the pains; for the soul in heaven would have no parts.

They emerged from the woods, reaching an open space just before the beginning of the bare steepness of the climb to come. She asked him:

“Do you feel the pain?”

“Not yet, but I am thinking about it.”

“Is it loneliness?”

“It must be,” Ragnar answered.

15



gain he went before Faustine, on the down itself, by the chalk-pit edge. The clarity of the air did not extend to the increasing view behind, but the wide world of patchwork fields and woods, villages and farmsteads, merged at but a mile or so into a haze that swallowed the horizon . . . The old chalk of the quarry cliffs was like a perpendicular sea of green-tinged white waves, caught and fixed by time.

When, the sharpest part of the ascent being accomplished, he halted over the quarry to allow Faustine a minute's relief, he distinguished the faint bleating of many sheep out of sight; and now comprehended, as one more perception in an endless chain, that it could be no vividness in the message of his senses that conveyed the intenser likeness of reality. For such a distant voice of sheep, subdued to the day and so little characteristic that it might nearly equally well be the shouting of a crowd of people, seemed nevertheless as true in ancientness as the chalk of the pit, with the reality of awful ages. Hearing the sheep, he was hearing *time*—all time, stretching back to the ancient. . . And this was made possible by the absence of all violence and abruptness of sound, enabling him to hearken to the world's long, quiet noises expressive, not of its acts of life, but of its own enduring existence.

The greyness, quietude, suspense, crystal continence of freshness and coolness, the illumination from out of the gloom, as it were the mysterious bright dusk of a sea-cave—all this frame of outward day was but to create the symbol of the opening marvels of Urda's heaven. . .

The sense of *ancientness* brought by a deepened awareness of outer reality lay as much outside him as his own mortal body, which could be imagined severed from his spirit, separate from it—what men called *dead*. But this advancing of

every part of the world upon him, this movement of all appearing space towards himself as centre, was unimaginable and impossible without the fact of his consciousness, which was a spirit. It was not proceeding outside him like an independent body, but within him like the movement of his spirit. He saw his own spirit moving.

That the revelation of heaven on earth should be through the tender, delicate spirit, not through the brutish natural senses of men, was so evident that he must not hesitate before this present course of its contradiction of the body.

If it were *time* that changed space to an earthly world, so that a timeless universe must be one no longer extended, slow, heavily visible, but all its forms being simultaneous, another kind of life must prevail, of which passion should be an element—if this were so what of the ancientness of heaven? For ancientness, too, was time—time, that changed things to earth, and therefore changed heaven itself.

There must then be two ancientnesses: of the accumulation of time, and of its annihilation. The first related to earth, the other to heaven. On earth, just as distance changed the colour of a far-off natural height by aggregating the impurities of the intervening air, so ancientness changed the aspect of things past by interposing its myriads of invisible departed lives and deaths. But were heaven to be more truly seen by reason of the annihilation of time, this annihilation also should be ancientness. For a man was not in heaven like one at the centre of a sphere, prevented from knowing heaven whichever way he turned by the coming between of invisible time, but he was outside heaven, while time was the stream to bear him steadily away from it. Waldo knew it. Only *up* the stream might one look in order to see heaven; to the past—to ancientness; not to the future.

He turned to Faustine.

“If all life is one, and I may never escape from it, but it must at some time bring me to heaven, why do you now try to stop a journey that must be made?”

“It is wrong for a living man to rank himself with the *déad*,” replied Faustine. “The road of nature is always the right road, and nature has set your death before heaven.”

“I may even die today.”

“That would not be nature, for you are still young, with work to do.”

“So you would have me go on living?”

“Yes.”

“Then are our two spirits joined?”

“In such a way, that I know I cannot keep you always, yet I shall always wish to think our intimacy has not been useless to you. . .”

“Is this love?”

“You were told so in the house.”

“I was told of my own heart, but now I would see yours.”

“Indeed, my heart has not concealed its actions. . .”

Their eyes met, but Faustine's face continued pale, calm, while Ragnar seemed to himself only to be absently trying to penetrate its mysterious sense. So a man, standing before a mirror, might regard silently his own features, in a growing perplexity for their familiarity, yet strangeness.

Now they resumed their climb, eastwards. The higher slope was on their right; but on the left an unaccountable fog had rapidly gathered, to blot out everything even as near to them as half-way down the hill. The air was clammy colder. Everywhere on the right of that lower wall of fog, as regular in its long line as though cut by art, the old grey luminousness prevailed. Nothing else showed above the wall but the vast shoulder of grass, the sky. . .

16



It was as if the ground itself were passing shadow-wise into him, constricting his limbs and heart. The dull sky was no more that old vast upper hall for his breathing and freedom of thought, but incessantly came down upon him, to stifle him; though never could stifle him, because his unending

half-dread was as endlessly relieved. . . And the world's advancing colours flowed towards him. . .

As the breaking flower, in bursting the prison of its sheath to gain the outer light, at the same time disclosed its mystic form and odour, so he himself in throwing off his old dark existence to gain Urda, was to create another world, which should then be as his new body, through which alone he might know her. Through his own creation he was to meet her. Soon afterwards he had the notion that a *house* was shaping before him . . . There were no walls to it, but the emptiness where the old weald had been was somehow separating from the visible hill.

Its shaping was his approach. Not before it was complete could he enter. His will, creating it, was from Urda, therefore it was not only his house, but hers too. It was of music . . . He felt a silent rhythm passing through him. Rhythm was life; nature was ordered by rhythm. Passion, wanting rhythm, fell to convulsive rages and derangements; but having rhythm its strokes were to a plan, its intervals allowed for the gathering of beauty . . .

Urda waited—while he had forgotten Bluewright; he had forgotten death . . . He had no doubt that Bluewright was to be his death . . . He might himself be the threshold of Urda's house of heaven, to cross which was death. So long as Faustine was with him, he might not leave the earth; he might not cross Bluewright's threshold. She was his assurance of still being alive. . .

They gained the top of the ridge. Now their course was straight along, and level, as if they passed over a viaduct into the very heart of an unreal world.

A supernatural house was condensing. Its roof was lost above the sinking sky, while its length and breadth were the distance he could see.

But if the incomprehensible heavenly architecture of this entranceless corridor between walls of emptiness were yet failing to draw him past confusion, dumbness, petrification, to the last nightmare quaking of his animal will, then, truly, another heavenly counterpoise must be at work within him, thus to undo the strangeness of heaven, and leave him quiet and

watchful. The house must be of music; being Urda's, it was her third, last music—but what one had called loneliness, another had called pain.

His instincts of earth defended him from the indivisible pain of heaven, unless, softened and beautified, it could reach him in the guise of music. So the more exalted earth-music was sad, sombre, laughterless, even when written to celebrate the occasions of pleasure, as the marriage of man and woman, the lower heaven of woods and streams and skies, the thanksgiving to God. So the love of lovers, nearest of all human things else to music, was never far from tears. And in an hour of social gaiety and abandon, quietly, without reason or warning, might descend the stroke of solemnity, when, like music again, the nameless pain of heaven reappeared to remind man of his ghosthood.

The delicate dawn was not the torrid full noon, yet the colours of the east, finishing the night, were from the same sun that in some hours more might fell a man like a beast in a shambles. In their destructive height those rays were the pure pain of heaven, but in their cold beauty of the dawn they were music. If he must die death itself would no doubt be his direct passage to the heart of heaven. . .

“What do you see of this place?” Ragnar asked.

“I see what I know you see,” said Faustine, “and it is very strange. Nearly all the world is gone for you, except myself, but Urda is not here. . .”

She seemed to turn her face from him, to address someone on her other side in a lower and more hurried voice. Ragnar's quick single glance barely discerned the shadowy tall form of a man. He presumed it was Bluewright. . .

“You must go away. . . He cannot spare himself to you.”

He could hear no second voice in reply, only Faustine's broke again, quietly indignant:

“I shall not allow it. He is unwilling and unready and on another business. You have had opportunities, you will have others. Please go. . .”

When Ragnar glanced round for a second time, the shadow was no longer beyond her. She was in a disturbed silence. He did not want to question her; he was singularly incurious

about Bluewright, and all his concern with death had vanished too.

Then, a minute later, Faustine moved out her hand with a queer hesitation, and he saw Flint's wood.

17



uddenly, by a turn of his sight, he knew heaven was here already . . . He could only see it as a house. But it was one without scale, suggesting neither earthly distance nor measure, save that another intuitive perspective told him it was still remote. This new vision was indeed related to the vast shadow-house of earth and sky; although the association was mystical and difficult. The shadow-house persisted while yet it seemed to give visibility to yonder nameless phantom of heaven, enveloped by it.

It was of the type of dreams; . . . not the broken, inconsequent character of dreams, but what came through it, as reality showed through appearance. In truth, all dreams possessed that twofold nature: of glamour, vividness, deep wonder, on the one hand; of mad fancy, to very impossibility, on the other. Under the reckless and disorderly processions of dreaming the dark tides of uncovered emotion whelmed the dreamer with musical weirdness, richer and more wonderful than a sensitive young child's solitary living fancies; as much more real than the waking experiences of men and women as the surprises of art would be, were they transferable to life. But while everyone in dreaming knew this essential nature of dreams, afterwards it was forgotten. The extravagance, the impossibilities were remembered; the music, glamour, darkness, emotion, disappeared.

The heavenly likeness of a house displayed nothing of the flitting madness of a dream. It was as if he were given to see in purity the other, deeper, nobler dreaming nature. And as

his stupefaction began to separate into thoughts he seemed to know what dreams stood for: for the spirit's backward walking those few steps into the region of *death*, while having its gaze still fastened on the incongruous things of night life.

While, in dreams, the weird emotional reality bore no true correspondence to the fantasies of the all but uncontrolled imagination, but those alien invasions from different worlds met in one defenceless mind, now the same deep, weird reality, come to him without the fantasies of dreaming, was joined instead to an image accordant with its nature. Thus he knew immediately that the vision before his eyes, though truly of the type of dreams, was yet none.

The wood of trees, lay some way down from the height of the ridge, on the south side, where the sea should have been. Directly under the wood came the emptiness of space—so far down he must look away to the wood. It was a diminished black, sinister ring of low trees; but was always vanishing before that which showed through it.

All the elements of the natural world between these two invisible walls of space continued to press on him, the very wood seemed slowly to approach by its own movement. The shadow-house moved on its peculiar line of quiet emergence. His legs were walking. So many simultaneous diverse motions, against the steadfastness of heaven and the twin nothingnesses, unconsciously stretched his understanding mind to embrace all, until, for refuge from the strain, his thoughts turned inwards; and found as little fixity. . .

He apprehended how one who should completely realise the gruesomeness of his own flesh would expire with horror. The soul, however, was but a second interior covering, or flesh, to the impersonal spirit; therefore, the death of the body was not the destruction of the ground of horror. There could be no such facile escape to an everlasting land of spiritual wholesomeness and fairness. The body died, and went its physical ways; the soul in heaven was to die, and go its immaterial ways. But as the substance of the soul should surely be more vitally interwoven than that of the body, so its disintegration must be correspondingly more shocking.

Thus, in heaven, the soul's fear of its death must underlie

and darken all that passage of existence in a manner that simple men and women could never conceive. Yet as in the world the universal ineradicable secret fear of the body's death, in being ever present as a silent background to the thoughts of human creatures, exerted a final influence on all the activities of life, and formed life's awful frame, not otherwise the fear of the soul's death should be the character of heaven. These death-fears of body and soul were doubtless the spirit's immediate knowledge of the spectrality of its place of passage, whether earth or heaven; with the perpetual instinct of always a ghostlier seriousness beyond.

Nevertheless, though lifted beyond the innumerable instincts of the world, each seeking its own satisfaction, the soul in heaven could still not live on fear alone; it must know a desire of the continuance of its life. It had so many parts that it could know desire and fear, pleasure and pain, together; was so far compound, and in heaven had not attained to elemental singleness. Thus it could separate into its constituent parts; it could die. Its substance was more vitally interwoven than the substance of the body, its death must be accordingly fearfuller, as it had passed undestroyed through that world of gloom and lingering terror which had at last slain the body. In spite of this, the soul's close interweaving could not be of a multitude of instincts, as on earth, for even the weakened air of heaven on earth, appearing in the *taedium vitae* and dragging men down to sleep and death, was mortal to the body of the instincts; in heaven itself, how could so frail a frame of adjustments and contraries withstand the pure awful air that should instantly burn up the opposing will of excitement, activity, pleasure, which the world called *life*?

But that heaven stood in the way, and the spirit of man passed not directly from the body to the All at death, was manifested in the eternal coincidence on earth of tragedy and exaltation. Man's spiritual height reached to pain. The tragedy of earth, in its grandeur, ceased not until it joined the pain of heaven . . . It was manifested, also, in the spectacle of the dead. In sacred pity a living person regarded the features of the dead, not understanding that the pity was for the still existing soul of the dead ones, now launched into loneliness.

Out of heaven must open a farther door with the death of the soul, as here of the body—it was all written on the face of the dead. But were the spirit of man to pass at once to the All, there could not be such a pity in the living, but only a supernatural envy. . . .

He strove to comprehend this music which rose in him like a new blood.

Music was a living thing, an animal. It sprang upon and seized a man, measuring itself against him, face to face, body to body, as it were a dreadful Salmacis . . . to fill his veins with the fluid fire of another world, and during that rude, soft violence set him among the angels. Sound, moreover, though the body as well as vehicle of the music of the world, was not its essential being. For all musical sound procured its mental effect by natural analogies and unconscious reminiscences, but that was the body only of music, it could not be its ideal soul. So if the human soul survived the human body, equally music might live on without sound. But further, in the heaven where souls, too, must go to death, truly the soul or ideal message of the fearful toneless music of heaven might perish, like its body of earthly sound with the death of the natural body; yet still leave an interior spirit of music. Then could this interior spirit of the toneless music be the same with the pain of souls in heaven.

Thus Urda's third music grew clearer to him.

But against this imperishable pain running through the worlds, were not the pleasures of men like the playing of little children in a house of care and death? Strange that all creatures—not man alone, but the sane, thoughtless lower creation too—should have the instinctive presumption of the absoluteness of pleasure, the accidentalness of pain! The least examination showed pain to be no less an absolute; representing, indeed, the eternal of the two Lives of creatures. The active Life of the will sought pleasure, the outer Life ceaselessly pressing on the will brought pain—it was not accidental, but necessary and eternal.

Unless pain were positive, and not the mere spoiling of pleasure, the human grandeur arising out of the enduring and seeking of pain would be impossible.

The universal instinct of the creatures of the material world to put pleasure as the nature and meaning of life, and to strive with pain as an intruder to be quickly dismissed, might be no other than the first unconscious desperate field fought with inadequate force against advancing *pain*, in an entire war to come; whose next pitched battle, darker and more terrible, for the souls of creatures, should be already in progress in the heaven that now opened yonder gap to his eyes. But pleasure, having proved inadequate on earth, should in heaven turn to grandeur, whose gleams and echoes sometimes faintly descended to earth. The field of heaven must be between that grandeur and indestructible pain.

Thus grandeur, too, must prove insufficient, and die with the souls that lived beneath its rule; the spirit of these souls, however, surviving their heavenly death, to fight other ghostly fields, always with one enemy—*pain*, the permanence among vanishing things, the fearful mocker of the changing armaments of the spirit, drawing the spirit on and on.

He realised that he stood with Faustine at only the shortest distance from the door of the house. . . He could not understand if the door led into the house, or *were* the house. His two conceptions, of a door and a house, were confused. It also bewildered him that except this door or house there was nothing any longer—that all the other world was gone. . . His own stature suggested no measure for the door. It stood ajar.

He was struggling with a strange loneliness. Of all the disappeared world, Faustine alone remained to him, and she was no more than shadow. Urda was not yet come. Perhaps, when she issued forth, his body and ghost were to be parted.

The worlds were constructed of loneliness. It was the emptiness surrounding individuals, and not till the individuality was dissolved could loneliness go. For love might bridge the emptiness, but love was broken by a single death, its surviving end must fall back on memory, and, infinitely augmented, the loneliness reappear. Work sought to forget loneliness in activity; but all work must be put by, when again man remembered the isolation of his existence. Pleasure would stop all the windows of the spirit against loneliness, but the internal air grew fetid; the windows presently burst open of themselves, and

once more the everlasting void appeared.

There were those who deemed loneliness noble, declaring the degree of ability to endure it to be the test of the spirit's worth; contrasting the quiet depths of sustained loneliness with the vulgar social agitations and excitements of the crowd. That delicate solitary temper, however, was but another pleasure; the true loneliness was still under it, affording no pleasure, but only dread and despair. Being stripped of the quiet delights of contemplation, solitariness was revealed a fearful thing.

The soul's consciousness in heaven of its solitude must be intensified by the liberation from a body. Such an intensified consciousness of solitude, through purer vision—was it not the *pain* of heaven?

Like stars of the sky were the individuals of earth. Each went forward upon his appointed course, each was circumscribed by the bounds of self, while between self and self flowed that oceanic space which with improved power of vision, ever assumed vaster extent and significance, the shocking concept of universe beyond universe, in a seemingly infinite streaming of stars and the stuff of stars.

With the finish of the body there must step forth in heaven the soul, stripped now of its sight-darkening biological ignominy, suddenly loosed from its illusions of a near communication. Then it should be as in the latest earthly astronomy. Distances between soul and soul so immense must be disclosed, that, failing another faculty, the exploration must be without hope. But as in the world pleasure essayed to shut the windows of the spirit against this awful spectacle of the enlarging spaces, so in heaven it was grandeur that should do so. Again and again, the soul in heaven should endeavour to draw height and sublimity to itself from the nearer vision of its eyes, yet always yearn at heart for the impossible meeting with other souls; and know that it must die at last, in order to confront spaces still more fearful. Yet that unthinkable loneliness should grow to be the image of God.

The door had swung wide, whether quickly or slowly; now it had vanished, and the old world was gone. His place in the old world was gone. Faustine was barely with him.

A silent music filled and transformed vision, while

strange scents tormented him like a dark message in the undecipherable first hieroglyphs of earth. His body was so quiet, it might be dead; he knew it was not. How could he *be* this scene?—yet it and he were somehow one. He seemed for the first time since birth to know substance again, after intervening long dream-years of flat shadows for his eyes only.

It was wonderful to him how that other vanished world had held his spirit such long years in the delusion of its reality, when now suddenly it was gone like a dream. Mysteries of the disappeared dark life that he had been used to account impenetrable, such as death, seemed now explainable could he wish to go back to those smaller questions of earth.

Reality had no fixedness or absolute until the end of all things; but its successive appearances were but the changing scenes of the same journey of the spirit, and only at the end of the journey could reality be gained and held. So that the spirit, in moving in knowledge towards the ever-widening lonely spaces, should likewise move in being towards the last reality. Its name was surely God.

18



quiet, unopposed and easily breathing, he stood—or floated—in the stupendous, swaying depths of an endless sea. . . It could as well be air as water, and its perpetual and irresistible waves could be peculiar winds. They were passions, immaterially flowing over and past him like mighty bursts of silent music. . . Soon, though Faustine was still with him like a phantom memory of the dead world, his solitude grew complete. He was fast within this heaven. Within this nameless reality he was but a point of mystic space, without safeguarding faculties of correspondence which could assure him of immediate transformation. Nevertheless, his very insignificance here being as the measure of the grandeur of all

else, it was thus that he could be exalted, and out of his personal abasement sprang heaven.

The character of the smaller grandeurs of earth came back to him: black night, the stars, the mountains, lightning, ocean, the death-voice of heroes. This place accepted them all into itself, as the sea the tribute of a thousand petty streams.

From the thought of loneliness he could not escape, for its pain was never gone. He asked himself whether in heaven, loneliness could be countered and vanquished by love made wilder, fiercer, more winged and awful? . . .

In the preconception of love transcendent, he had grown up. Love was the spell against self, against despair, insanity. It was the soul penetrating and surviving adversity, the deathless courage of sacrifice, the genius of pity, the living truth of worship, the fulfillment of the earthly nature, and beginning of the angelic; the saving bond between man and man; that by which God ceased to be merely idea. The two roads of goodness and pleasure had both love for their extreme. Its forms were as diverse as the circumstances of men and women. It shone forth in saintship and martyrdom, in passion, in marriage, in the life of the mother, in the linking of families, clans, peoples, in every order of friendship, in affection for animals, in the attachment to a land, in all sympathy and kindness; and whatever on earth was greatly and nobly liked was rightly said to be loved. By its illustrations of love, history was made sacred. So mighty a thing—could it not also be potent against the loneliness of the eternal spaces?

Yet were love the spirit's effort to overcome that solitude whose culmination it was destined throughout the worlds and heavens to travel, then the power of love should but be the proof of the greater power of solitude. But supposing love the primary, solitude only its deprivation, love, on another account, was still the lower state; since it was the spirit's pleasure, thus its descent. Love always held more pleasure than its hardest sacrifice pain; loneliness, however, was an endless hill of pain that must be climbed without present compensation or promise of reward.

Illusory and adventitious pleasure love gained, but the designed perfected pleasure from the bridging of loneliness

was impossible to it. For how should love be even of equal rank and generation in the universe with loneliness, when, in the fearful journey of the spirit, ever the separating emptinesses must reveal themselves more appalling and distinct? Not narrow seas, between spirit and spirit, the last loves should find to cross. No matter whether love reached out from weakness or pity, it was still powerless against loneliness.

It had no other source. Were there no loneliness, there could be no love. Loneliness was the very nature of eternity . . .

While quietly he remembered Urda, he saw her.

A region of the element before him, always carried along by the great submarine waves, had grown dark, and this was the frame for her shape as she faced him. She was upright and motionless among the waves, that all the while went through her, as if supplying her spirit. Her form deepened downwards in gloom until the feet were invisible. The gloom was the attenuating of dark fires defending her person, by which he was enabled to see her; yet because of these very fires the vision was indistinct, and she showed among the waves less a woman than an alien burning mist . . . She seemed at once living and symbolic.

The cryptic whiteness of her face was neither of the flesh nor was it a spiritual luminousness, for those would be the effects of other causes, but this whiteness was uncaused. It was the emblem of a passion so deep, silent, essential and indestructible that he could not judge if she were in the passion or merely its outward apparition.

Her hair was a mystery of black and living flame. As she faced him her eyes were slanting from him in the habit he knew of and had seen before.

So she opposed him there, unmoving; it was as if she thrust him back from all farther advance, till shortly he must know himself resourceless and alone. A desolation in him took the road of sadness—like a night coming on, it could darken to terror. Urda, then, whom so blindly he had pursued here, doubting nothing, was still unencounterable. So to what end had she ever appeared a woman? Her strange, waiting love indeed might be for a heart fitter than his to receive its magic implantation.

Love strove to complete incomplete natures. From sensuous admiration, deference, intimacy, an inner door opened to love, and the step was immediately into a foreign place. For the preface to love had been content to see, hear, know and share—to stay in the everlasting contrast of companionship; but impatiently love demanded incorporation. And often the incorporation was not difficult for those to whom the body was all or very much, since so nature had ordered it, that so the world might continue for its supernatural purposes. Yet that love, incorporating love was but love forestalled and spoilt. At a finer altitude were men and women enabled to love, not the body alone in its rare qualities, but, even pre-eminently, the soul and character. Then love became other than an instinct of pleasure to be quickly and simply discharged. It grew to be an intertwining of natures, of which the bodily desire could come to express the symbol only. In ideal conjunctions the body could be altogether ignored; the higher love between spirits on earth grew changeless, perpetual. Thus it must remain undischarged.

Yet never in the world, save by means of the flesh, could men and women so unite as to occupy one another, not even for the briefest moment. While bodies, in a physical world, might join, spirits never could. For bodies were in their own home, but spirits were exiles and captives in a strange land. Fast within the thicknesses of the inherited self, the spirit of man on earth might hear the voice of other spirits, and grow to love their neighbourhood; it never could become one with them.

And so the earliest wild hopes and ecstasies of love too soon died down because of the refusal of spiritual incorporation. As often as not love became the affection between the man and woman whose lives were joined. But that fruit—lasting affection—grown from the heart of the fallen petals of a flower, illusory passion, was no more than the realisation of another's aloneness, instead of one's own. Thence sprang the incessant thought, anxiety, labour, sacrifice for another. Still the spirits had not joined. The sign of joining was rapture, but married love proceeds from quiet pity and sorrow and permanent fear. The loved one at last was to go on alone into the fearful void.

Here, in the heaven of which this was the outer door, souls might join in marriage, as bodies on earth. The inter-

fusion must be finer, swifter and more terrible. . . . But the joining in marriage of souls in heaven must bring with it the immeasurably more awful loneliness. And in the states beyond heaven, successively the next inwardness of spirits might find love and intermarriage, each each new pinnacle of joining must be more immediate and terrible in delight than that before; and each must bear with it two things: the ever nobler other love, of fear and pity; but also the ghostlier loneliness preventing the true consummation of the love . . .

Urda's lingering womanhood was surely figurative of the sweetness of love. She had attracted him through dream upon dream invisibly by love. Love, seeking to overcome loneliness—loneliness, necessarily giving birth to love; they must be together from the beginning, and express one nature.

19



Urda was as those awful half-shapes before the coming of the gods—fate, night, chaos, sleep, death.

Her bare image came to him, like the reflected light from a glass, but her passion remained impenetrable. Because he was not yet dead, her power could only come so shadowed. He must die before this hindering cloud of earthly languor could dissipate . . .

But she also resembled a shape of dream, in that he was at her supernatural mercy. Elusively within her face lurked, like the uncertain rustling of leaves in a wood on a still day in autumn, the equivalent of a baffling murmur of loveliness. It was like the unsmiled smile, the unglanced glance on the features of a mortal woman, of whose soul no other thing should ever be discovered.

If the waves were a passionate music, whose sound he should hear at death, and they created for his eyes her un-

known form of heaven, how could she remain as the cold image of a mirror? She was issuing from a different world. Her departing woman's body furnished her with sex and name and personality, without which he might not be aware of her at all, whereas her heavenly beauty declared itself in these other indescribable sighing gleams.

But beauty was love . . . As surely as a plant depended on its sap for life, living beauty was impossible without love to impregnate it. What men loved in beauty was not the physical form but that behind the form which could be met on equal terms by their immaterial part, nobler than the physical body. They loved not form, but love itself.

The world was thronged by empty forms of beauty without love, like ghostly facades. By far the greater number of semblances had never even lived, yet went for beauty. Custom, opinion, example, hearsay—the love in beauty was not met, but had once been met by others . . . Through great parts of a lifetime the same beauty might break in love, and retreat, and break again, like the waves on a beach of a tide either rising or falling. The immortal beauty of unexampled women had always been celebrated through one man alone, whose eyes alone had seen it, as his love alone had joined the love behind the beauty.

Urda's living nature was of loneliness. Either loneliness was the eternal passion of spirit, or of its increasing agony through the worlds was being forged another passion of love, unimaginable in its height and destination.

The lungs breathed in and out, the heart obeyed systole and diastole, the peak of ocean rose and sank beneath the changing moon; not otherwise love, to give, must receive—to receive, must give . . . From grasping or coveting without return sprang all the ills of self, while from surrendering all natural pleasures and desires in order to serve others unrewarded came about that disappearance of the character which made the very good unloved at last, save for what they brought.

By self-forgetfulness and unlaboured humility the saint, in seeming to adopt pain and mortification for his lot, in practice overcame for himself, as far as man might, all suffering, to lead a life of inward joy surpassing the interrupted pleasures of those about him. Such a joy prevented still deeper love which

must grow from the soil of suffering and aloneness, so that the life of universal love with unfailing joy was already an arrested condition. This men and women knew in heart, through the other human explanations of their perplexed minds, in avoiding the saint for a companion. He had forsaken the road of the worlds for a premature earthly heaven. Love passed no longer between him and the world of man, inasmuch as, ceasing to wish anything for himself, he had forgotten the need to receive.

He who thought of himself *desired*—he would drag all the world to himself, in the shape of food, drink, money, honours, power, beauty, love. And this desiring, however disguised, was the whole will to incorporation, the whole impulse of love, founded upon this personal loneliness. He, again, who suppressed in any one thing the consideration of his own need and state, in order to consider the need and state of another living creature—he, in the language of the world, was said to *love*. It was still the whole will to incorporation, for now—if only temporarily and for a single purpose—he would throw all his personality within that other to help to stem a danger or distress. Such was earthly nature that the single case and purpose, being found good, should presently become a habit, and the habit, another sight; seeing living men and woman not in their shapes, but in their afflictions. And thus the saint, coming to behold and live in an obliterated world, whose only remaining characters were happiness and unhappiness, could no more receive from abroad the messages of that other love, individual and astonishing, whose fires, if met, should sometimes seem to throw all the least parts of earth into eternal reality and meaning.

Desire was loneliness, selfless love was earth's farthest from loneliness. The two were incompatible, yet both were in the will to incorporation, and they were united in the ideal passionate love of the sexes. The lover, desiring with all his vital force not only the person, but the very soul of the beloved, at the same time and with an equal recklessness and violence laid at her feet his own soul, counting this new transcendence of self a glorious liberation. Such was the peculiarity of earth's highest meeting love, differing from all other earthly states in

simultaneously surrendering the soul and requiring its increase by incorporation. For of the other meetings in the world, sensual joining was the body's meeting of body, when the same percipient organism gave and received love, but necessarily could not yield the soul, which was not within its gift. Beauty, again, was the soul's meeting with the impersonal mystical soul of physical appearances, or its analogies. Mystically the living soul of man surrendered itself to that which was mystical. But only in the ideal passionate sex love soul met animate soul. Then, as on a different magic plane of existence, these inconsistent wills of desire and surrender fell incomprehensibly together in a third possession of the mind, that, in denying neither will, was the apotheosis of both.

The outer supernatural life, pressing relentlessly on isolated *spirit*, forced it upwards, as will, through all the earthly stages of unconsciousness, dark instincts, the shadows and full daylight of awareness, human self-consciousness . . . At no stage was there not the desire to unite with other neighbouring life. And all this was from the unrelaxing pressure of the outer life, that was but solitude disguised.

Where patiently the will sustained the outer pressure, not seeking at every turn to oppose it by pleasures and excitements, the conservation of the force grown up against the pressure should come silently to passion, and this was unspent will. With its saved force, it might for a moment tear away the first earth-skin of the outer pressure, and enter heaven. Yet such a dark, bitter root of temper no doubt required many generations of simplicity and endurance to its formation. With the increasing excitements of the world, it grew scarcer; less frequently was heaven's door opened to men and women. Amours, whose design was always pleasure, came to replace the ideal loves that were earth's single supernatural communion of souls.

Because the contradictory wills of desire and surrender were united in no other communion, this of ideal love was unique and unnatural on earth, it was supernatural, and of heaven. Three great overshadowings there were of all other human events, everlastingly fastening the strange interest of mankind as by a spell, so that all else in life bowed before

these three. Nor was the reason far to seek. For every other real occurrence of the world belonged to the world; but birth was the door into the world, death was the door out, the passionate spiritual love of man and woman was the sight of heaven

In heaven, where bodies might not enter, souls, in many things, should be as the bodies of earth. The love which on earth was hallowed by nameless desire, but profaned again by that connecting of bodies that was the false satisfaction of the desire, should in heaven still be hallowed by nameless and unattainable desire, now, however, the desire should have its false contentment, and therefore the love in heaven its profanation, in the connecting of souls. Thus must love, equally on earth and in heaven, be always hallowed by desire, profaned by the inferior contentment of the desire. But the sign of sacred love was that the self would cast itself away. . . So that even if, according to the blind faith of many men and women, souls that had passionately loved in the world could enjoy rapturous reunion in heaven, still desire would only have assumed a higher, more terrible nameless shape. For could two identities completely merge, the loved would vanish, and love must cease; but the meeting in love necessitated a continued separation, which was of the outer loneliness, everlastingly generating desire.

The coming of heaven could not bring the ceasing of the pressure of the outer supernatural life, or there could be no souls in heaven. Only because the fragments of immortal spirit must be divided from one another by loneliness, could they be of the nature of souls. And enabled by their nature, souls should unite among themselves in acts of heaven nowise less than the physical sexual acts of earth, as quintessential of living finality and exquisite delight as those sweet earthly acts, but purified from the animal grossness of the body's direct incorporations; surpassing in delicate splendour the ideal loves of the world, while fulfilling their design. Yet that within the souls which was not mortal, and belonged not to heaven, must still be prevented from uniting. And therefore the hallowing desire in heavenly love was for the incorporation impossible in heaven.

Spirit, imprisoned in heaven within souls, as on earth within bodies, by the unrelaxing oppression of outer loneliness, became of necessity the will to resist the oppression. Now was the will active, now passive. In its attempted active defeating of the oppression, the will found for itself occupations and excitements on which to spend its passion. The excitements lay outside the will, so that the motion was of shadowy and imperfect love. But being the relief of the pain of passion, the motion, if unthwarted, took shape as concrete pleasures. The silent, passive endurance of the will, however, under the oppression of outer loneliness brought the deepening of passion, that at last might break out in full love. Then, instantly, the love must divide itself, in heaven as on earth. As it should be satisfiable by a lower nature it was profane, but as it should escape from earth to heaven, or from heaven to spiritual mysteries beyond, so it was sacred.

The breaking out of deepened passion could only be in love. Like a lonely swimmer in the sea, who should strike out for nowhere but land, the escaping passion, whether on earth, in heaven, or in the places beyond heaven, moved towards incorporation. On earth it was attempted first of all by means of the body, but quickly that was passed, and heaven dawned. In heaven, the full day of that glow for earth surely brought the consummated incorporation of souls. Nevertheless, it must be of the mortality of heaven, doubtless serving its internal meanings, as bodily love served the world. Passion was the unspent will, and will was spirit, only self-changed to resist the pressure of outer loneliness. Passion was thus identical with immortal spirit. When the spirit no longer expressed itself by passion, its loneliness would have ceased. Then love would be perfected. But then, with that coming of perfection, love too would have vanished, since only in the separating loneliness could spirits co-exist, to love and seem to join.

Ignorant as in the world he remained of the creatures and natures of heaven, of its appearance for unearthly perception, of its strange rule and harmony, of its disorders, necessarily arising from the incessant collision of the heavenly individual wills. How the soul should enter heaven—if full-grown or by birth; whether it should bring with it from earth much or

little or anything at all of character; whether its characters of heaven were otherwise inherited there, or mystically self-inherent; whether the living creation of heaven passed through another awful, endless evolution, like that of earth, simultaneously at every hour displaying the infinity of degrees and forms, wrong roads and impasses, shames, viciousnesses and servitudes, such as gave to earth its pleasing horror of picturesqueness; in what manner, if so, these in heaven should follow upon those of earth; whether, indeed, one single heaven

could receive the after-death lives of all the worlds of all the physical universes . . . before this dark curtain of his mortality he stood, knowing already that the shape of heaven must be invisible save from its living interior.

He saw instead, how heaven stood forth in darker glory and fearfulness. As the loneliness separating souls exceeded that for bodies, so the love temporarily dispelling it must be sterner, more significant, winged, enduring, beautiful in all ways than physical love, but terrible must be the return to solitude from love. By the alternations of wondrous love and a crushing emptiness of soul beneath the eternal pressure of the outer life, must be produced in heaven movements and actions of such grandeur that they must surely express the peculiar character of heaven, just as the feebler alternations of love and solitude gave to earth its characteristic movements of pleasure.

Men on earth had strange, indistinct recollection of another world before the coming of the physical. A substance was required as far below matter as the invisible essence of the soul was above it. It was the world of *numbers*, whose mathematical frame still underlay the world of bodies, and seemed to give it laws. Yet *oddness* should be a loneliness, *evenness* an incorporation; and from that disappeared living world, the extraordinariness of which survived only as dead rule, the foreshadowing of the more perfect incorporation of bodies in a world to come should appear as exquisite a rapture as the vision of heaven from earth.

That world of numbers, too, was in Urda. But her womanly face itself was possessed by the higher world of the body,

while from within its shape and mask there came through to him the third world of the soul.

Unlike the bare, light intellectual thoughts of earth, the intuitions of heaven must be compound of divination and heavy feeling, which was *pain* . . . To that inherent pain of every existence of the spirit seemed added the other two pains, of the terror of the next existence to come, appearing as the horror of death, and of the psychic frame surviving from the falseness of the preceding existence. Even the mathematical frame of earth must be of pain, since it dispossessed men of liberty, and forbade the miraculous, that was the human vision of God.

There must be a road of pain running throughout the supernatural worlds. None should ever distinctly discern the road save by experiencing its pain. The road mysteriously sprang from out of the ancient silence.

No life could quit the road of pain, nor hasten it by hastening death. The spirit hated pain. It could not seek it—could not move along a road towards it; but pain must ceaselessly move upon the spirit. So it was the world's grand deceit that the lives of creatures travelled between birth and death. The lives were stationary, while Life continually passed through and over them. Men willed events beforehand, and they came to pass, wherefore men thought that they could shape the future. It was necessary practically for society that they should think so. Man, however, was compulsorily born in a sex, period, race, land, character, physique, temperament, predisposition of interests, happiness or unhappiness of luck, as well as worldly station, fortune, rank of mind. It was the sum of these in his unfolding affairs that determined the acts of his will. Man of himself never shaped the future, but That outside him shaped it, which had so framed and circumscribed his nature that necessarily his will's acts at any time must correspond to the fated happenings they seemed to bring about.

Ragnar heard a soundless voice speaking to him, as one might hear an unuttered tune inside the head. The words seemed a sad running inscription on his mind or heart. They were clear like dark silver, or like a sunless dawn, yet their pain held no retrospective melancholy.

“The energy of escape from the pain of solitude is called by the spirit its *life*. The spirit’s will is incessantly changed by renewal and thence springs the illusion of a road of empty *time*; but the road is not of time, it is of life.”

Ragnar asked: “Are all appearances on earth like sparks, useless and unfollowed?”

“This you cannot know. For the knowledge is too far off for earthly thought, and heavenly perception itself may scarcely reach to its outer shadow. The truth lies enshrined in opposites which cannot meet in these lower worlds. There is no appearance but either has its use or, in going out like a spark, it drags down all the rest to vanishing.

“While expecting sleep, a man returns in thought to scenes of the day, and is astonished how so short a time ago he saw and acted in them, and now they are vanished as though they had never been. . . If what is real can disappear, and come no more, how can it ever have been real? And what dream dreams itself? Yet every scene of every world is from the spirit. While those scenes and pictured happenings are borne away, yet that which gave them form and character remains . . . The spirits being still one with life. . .”

“How can life and spirit be one?” Ragnar demanded. “How shall same crush same through all the worlds?”

“The motion by which spirit seems to proceed through time is illusory, for it is life that flows while spirit stands; but the motion and the stillness are different forms of one essence.”

“For what reason was I brought here?”

“You were not brought; but like life to the spirit, Urda has come to you. Your spirit has formed her for you a shape of sweetness. The living will of heaven is another thing than sweetness.”

“Yet if she is Life, how shall Life be within life? My spirit was already crushed by Life.”

“She is not Life, but its image.”

“Her womanly form is nearly gone, and I am too weak to detain her.”

“The world of the body is departing from you; her shape as well.”

“I am indifferent as to life or death, so only I may know her.”

“Her house has many rooms, and the enchantment in them all is difficult to withstand. Yet Urda uses no enchantment, but so much as you shall find within the house shall be your own, fleeing before Urda. You have never been outside the house . . .”

Just distinguishable was the shadowy indication of Urda's face in the greenish gloom. The sea-like waves had queerly yielded to a quietness and emptiness. The infinite void of green dusk was solitude itself, for it was Urda, in being her house, and she was pain and solitude. Her fading apparition was the emblem of the entrance into his spirit of her loneliness.

Through the walls of the worlds there was no road of escape from pain, but there were through the worlds many doors of death. Now, if he could endure it, those worlds were all to be dissolved by Urda's loneliness, and his spirit must move through pain to Urda.

All earthly nature had dropped from her. Witch he had thought her, but now of her witch-hood nothing remained except her dark compulsion. She was not woman, witch or person—she was not *she* . . . nor was she his pain; while the loneliness overpowering him from her now quite invisible presence was but like the sounding of the distant horn of her true being, elsewhere.

“Ragnar!”

Out of the spectral green dimness, unbroken everywhere, the voice came to him as a quiet arrow of sound, unexpectedly striking his ear . . . He knew it distinct from that toneless other utterance which had seemed half his own volition. This was Urda's.

It bore no sex, or personality, yet was her voice. By this single quiet articulation of his name he felt himself drawn down into the very night of all his memories. The voice was so close to his spirit that it seemed one with it, if he could but reach its place. It was not in time, but time obscured it. Like a great drift of clouds time moved everlastingly onwards. Its truer name was Life, and Life was loneliness, because it divided the spirit from That which had just spoken to his spirit

as a voice. Urda's voice had spoken through the length of all the worlds, with all their deaths; and was true, from a true place.

Oncoming Life swept spirits through the deaths and worlds. But while the worlds were false, and while the spirit's refuge within them from oncoming Life must be delusive accordingly, Life itself, sweeping through the worlds, was true.

Urda cast spirits into the illusions of escape. Endlessly, also, in the guise of time and fate, she made escape impossible. She would not suffer spirits to regain her save by the interminable dreadful road of the worlds; but she would not let them go. They must escape from Life, and could not. Yet existence in the worlds could not be meaningless. Each spirit must directly support loneliness, and indirectly, pain. To the feeling of loneliness and pain a personal identity was indispensable—the tortured fragment of that spirit which had been before the false foundation of time and the worlds.

Pain issued out of loneliness. Always pain was the stopping of spirit's attempted escape from Life. Life, by loneliness, continually impelled the spirit into the illusions of the worlds, but as continuously came pain among these illusions to hunt the spirit back to Life. The grimness of loneliness and pain, with the fact that an individual must sustain them, invested the spirit's fallen nature with fearful significance.

The pain of the worlds was to restore the spirit to the empty oppression of oncoming Life, to escape which all the living fragments of spirit together had produced the enchanted refuge of the worlds. Where pain was absent the splendours were less. Even to earthly sight the painless act of simple kindness was slighter than the painful sacrifice. So beauty without darkness or menace lacked beauty's deepest, most weird magic; while love without affliction seemed like a sleep.

Pain was not divine. It held no virtue but to return the spirit perpetually to the pressure of Life, which was the silent, unsleeping bed of reality. Persons long buffeted by pain came at last to acquire that look of aloneness that was the peculiar earth stamp of unearthly reality.

It was the *self* in spirit that hid from Life in the worlds of its creation . . . But the spirit had another part which, be-

cause it anciently knew Urda, could neither fear her nor Life, and did not hide from Life. It was the spirit of his spirit. It was ancient and unfearing. It retained the whole original quality of *spirit* that had animated it before its tragedy of disintegration which had begun the ages. His *self* had come into being with the disintegration.

Urda knew that hideous ghostly splitting, the womb of all storms, horror, chaos, evil, cannibalism of souls and bodies. Then had come the impossible archetype of death. The fragments—numberless beyond the power of number—of a living entity whose mystic extension was unreachable, had found themselves in the desolation the agony of which compelled the phantom loves, the insane ceaseless wild hungerings for reincorporation, in all the worlds. Thus every fragment of spirit became a miniature whole, and self was born, straightway turning to will and world. Towards one another the parts of shattered spirit had rushed again, thinking to recover their lost entirety, and had found but their first false world. Then invisible was struck the fateful root of the sexes, that long afterwards were to be the spectral symbol of the spirit's vanished perfection of life.

Never had he conceived such a silence as this, where not only the imagination of sound was absent, but there prevailed a positive character of silence, which was both ancientness and pain. It was Urda's silence. . . Space by space the secret dust and night of the interior of an ancient temple advanced on him, spelling out a forbidden oracle which he had no choice but to hear.

In that pale hour before the frame of time, spirit had been shattered. A mystic *avatar*, a Breath, whose earthly phenomenon was Urda, had departed from spirit, so that suddenly it had become a living dust. The ceaseless coming on of Urda's Life through all the worlds and ages was nothing else than the slow, dreadful refilling of spirit by that whose departure had shattered it into fragments past number . . .

The refilling seemed dreadful to the spirit, which had no desire except to regain its original fullness of life. It saw the false projections of other spirits, and where its projections met it saw falsely the spring of all love, joy, hope, goodness

and sanity, excitement and energy. But Urda's other Life, bearing inevitably upon its stream change and loss and death, assailed perpetually those projected worlds, at last destroying them for every spirit.

The self in spirit must come to ultimate dissolution, since it was unable to exist without the worlds, and they for every spirit were to be destroyed. Slowly and piecemeal through the worlds the self was crumbled by Urda's oncoming Life, appearing in the semblance of time.

But as each outwall of self vanished in turn under the incessant contact of Life, that always brought death, new solitudes were successively opened to the spirit. Weirder, vaster, more significant and austere each following world must show than that gone before, while the will of self, which must create the worlds, in creating them drew increasingly from its decline to final death. Pain would never relent until the last death should have come, and the self altogether vanish, and Urda's Life be no longer destructive, having no more to destroy.

Why anciently had That within withdrawn itself from spirit, which now throughout the worlds returned in pain to its fragments? Why had his spirit been broken off and set in loneliness through the evil false aeons of the worlds, merely in order to recover its original at last?

Farther than the border lay the unknowable first and last of spirit, beyond the sight of the worlds silent to all questions . . . The worlds, too, should all vanish, and the lonely agony of their dreadful ages be like a brief, troubled dream departed, —how, spirit being timeless and changeless, should that departed ghostly woe be other than symbolic?

In the first and last of spirit he might be even now with That, whose sign for him was Urda. Her earthly sex expressed no more than his unhappiness within a low world of dream. . . But from *waking* had been that voice sounding his name. Yonder, in the waking, was the meaning of the dream of the lonely worlds. There every least thing of earth would be declared for what it truly was, and no light phantom happening of the dream but should have its terror of indispensability. . .

From a simple natural riddle of the bodily world Urda had, step by step, drawn him to where he might no longer seek

her save by the passing of the dream.

Some small way in heaven he might go on this side of death. It was as if he were already in a green chamber of dusk in heaven, facing a door so indistinct he could not say if it were open or shut. His body felt light as air, only his heart was heavy under the deathly silent pressure of this unseen Life from Urda. . .

This pain indescribably crushing his heart was surely loneliness itself in unmixed purity. . . No secondary pain of earth or heaven weakened it. Yet because it was still the self's loneliness it was of the worlds that must pass.

A dream was a sleep, a sleep was the half of death. As sleep prefigured death, the loneliness of the dream worlds prefigured the Dismay of an unthinkable state of death after the vanishing of the worlds. Then spirit, too, must die . . . Spirit indeed must die, but an ever-living principle of spirit must go on. Therefore spirit, as well was woven of separable parts. So the paradox was, that though seen from time, spirit should be truly unchanging through timeless eternity, yet in the timelessness beyond time it as inevitably passed to death as did the symbolic self of spirit in the worlds.

Like black waves rolling endlessly across ocean upon ocean without shore, the recurrences of death, each in its peculiar terror, interrupted life throughout time and timelessness. But death could not be an inborn quality of life, serving its mystical nature. Accordingly, the soul of man, the spirit of the soul, that thing which had no name, but was always the inmost thing of life would be compelled to pass altogether out of life; yet how should it pass from life, when death but changed the form of life?

But death was not a quality of the life of the spirit. What his mind's despair sought to see as the endlessness of death was but the receding line of doors of Urda's great house, through which the inmost of spirit must thread its way, in always weirder life, yet always preserving its unlosable nature of life, until the body's ceaseless wonder was reached, and entered by incorporation.

The deaths were not endless, since Urda was beyond them. She *was*, but time and space were not, and the deaths

were not. The journey of the inmost of spirit to her through the deaths had no other distance than that as between her void and presence, for Urda was *nowhere*, while the inmost of spirit, in being perpetually invaded by her Life, itself moved not.

Unless through all existence she were so near to what could know her, never could loneliness and Dismay have meaning, nor be. He thought of a dark and narrow dungeon, divided by no more than its wall from the free, all-containing earth, beneath sun and wind and rain—another universe. So in his pain he was hardly divided from Urda's ending of all pain and death. From the dungeon of the body's world he must pass through a death-door to mysterious others, continuing ever past the worlds—stretching frightfully beyond the very horizon of his mind; and the door from each was death, while everlastingly Urda was yet no farther from his inmost being, that must live on when his self was crumbled and vanished, than the invisible face of the bounding wall.

The reality his mind could conceive should truly be the nature of timeless spirit. . . but Urda, sustaining reality, was not of it. For her, therefore, equally loneliness, Dismay, the worlds of time, timelessness, symbol, reality, self, the inmost of spirit, must be equivalent to phantoms. But because these phantoms depended on Urda, they must be necessary to her. Nothing in the lowest symbolic worlds could be inessential to her. . .

Insensibly, for a long time he must have seen her earthly shape; standing in the doorway, facing him.

She was no more that ambiguous spirit introducing heaven, but incomprehensibly restored from his mind's first darkness, opposed him again as the apparition he could mistake for a living woman. White was her face, black her hair, and her avoiding, slanted eyes refused his gaze. She was half witch, half shade.

So in these mocking hours it was as if he had completed the revolution of a spiral, to come again upon Urda's changed beginning. And now his perpetual approach to her also was recommenced; yet nothing could be repeated. For while all within the finished circuit had belonged to reality—except her

voice alone, calling him—inasmuch as his mind had sustained no wonderful thought or feeling or vision but a mystical judgement in him had tested it for its consistence with the real, now, if it were meant for him still to draw to her, he must pass quite out of reality.

The anonymous humanity shining through her phantom was like an eye for him in the night The extraordinary fumes of his brain, in its persistent vain striving to reach her in thought, had during those long passages of time stopped her living semblance. Always from the first she must have been before him, but unknowingly he had denied her. Even when in the world of men and women he had planned to meet her, and other persons had been like the stairs to her expected appearance, still she had been present. The cloud-creations of his mind had come between her shape and him.

Neither by alien image nor by ineffectual thought could he ever have known her, while now a simple quietness of his heart yielded this correspondence, whose sign was her recovered human form. She showed to him at the first and last as a human woman, to indicate that all between had been reality, but now unreality began. The inexpressible feeling of her humanity was as beautiful, singular, true as if he had been standing in a cave, deep and dark, to hear the quiet, slow dropping of water in an unseen place, so true was its mystery, so present, yet ancient and awful.

Just as a colour of earth, besides its sensible distinction from other colours possessed for perception a mental quality that should have no other ground than its own unsearchable being, so earthly beauty offered, besides its interpretable strangeness, an uninterpretable oneness with the perceiving mind, the ground of which was in nothing real, but in itself. It was the principle of life in beauty. "This beauty is foreign to me," considered the mind. "How far-off and magic is its foreignness! Yet how near, also, is this beauty to me!" But without the strangeness, the nearness would be impossible, as wanting a body; in the same way as a colour brought no mental quality earlier than its sensible distinction from other colours. And without the nearness, the strangeness of beauty, like an uninhabited body, would be dead.

So were love and beauty alive only in the transient imperfect uniting of earthly spirits with an unreality lying beyond otherness in love, beyond strangeness in beauty. The will to incorporation, though all the time achieving fleeting appeasements of the body or mind, yet remained ever hungry on earth, but drew its food from strangeness and otherness; with each appeasement appeared the gleam of a truer mystic union with unreality.

Like bodies in the world, the mortal souls of heaven should join imperfectly in love, but now all the pangs of earthly ideal love must be transferred to that within the souls, singularly multiplied in torment by the deeper wisdom of separation permitted in heaven. Yet the agitations being voluntarily encountered and sustained to the extent of the spirit's living strength, even so should the grandeur of heaven flash forth in contrast with earth's weaker, dimmer passions of sex.

Urda's lingering womanhood was surely figurative of the sweetness of love, and of nothing else but love was he thinking. So also she had attracted him through dream upon dream to this place, that had no name among men, and whose only hospitality for him was in her apparition. The attraction had invisibly been love. The pain of loneliness she otherwise carried could never have seduced him from his common life.

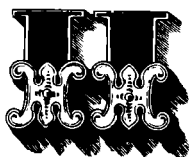
Love, seeking to overcome loneliness—loneliness, necessarily giving birth to love: must they not, therefore, be together from the beginning, and express one nature? For love was not an accident of meeting. It was all the time, in all lives, and they who endeavoured to grasp any part of the world to their own selfish uses were none the less in love with the world, and combating their isolation. They were not indeed drawn to other beings by wonder and reverence, they sought to compel them to their purposes, but still it was the desire in them of incorporation. The very taste of food owed its pleasantness to some likeness between eater and eaten, and the incorporation was the lowest form of love. As little, however, as the spirit's solitude could be without the love that sought to overcome it, could love be without the solitude that gave it sense and meaning. If there were no ground, the stone in the air, straining to fall, could have nowhere to fall; its strain must cease. So was

love impossible without the seeking of incorporation; but that implied an existing gulf, which being everywhere produced, was solitude. Wanting such a gulf, love, that was a motion from within to without, could have no space to travel through.

And as all lives, for all time, must love some part of the world in which they were, so all must be divided from that and every world, and suffer loneliness. Man, who only fancies himself in love when one person has power to wrest the remaining world from him, likewise thought himself lonely or unlonely solely as he should be without companions and sympathy, or have them. From cradle to death-bed he was lonely through his identity. His upper consciousness, by long custom, could forget this loneliness of identity, yet at last ever earthly action was from it.

These were the two Lifes Ragnar had understood, shaping man on earth: of his own will, and of the outer pressure of heaven.

20



ere any consecutive writing ends. There remains a collection of unnumbered pages, many of which repeat each other over and over again with only small variations, and most of which do not run in sequence. These pages consist of sections of a speech of Urda's to Ragnar.

The speech deals with the culmination of the whole process of death and rebirth. 'Ceaselessly even by the way of death shall living being move to ancientness. For the seeming dying of living beings' which is its translation into 'ancientness', a translation by which all lives are joined to Life. 'The translation of the lives shall be their journey's ending. Thereby no longer shall they fall in mortal natures. . . nor shall they enter life, and to it be joined . . .' At this translation will come 'the dreadful ceasing of the breath of Voice', which

breathes out the music of all forms. 'These three, life and ancientness and deathly being, together shall become living meaning in translation.' 'To this end, no other, shall be the dying of living being.'

We have therefore a record of the soul's journey through the realm of life, ruled by Urda, through the loneliness of the Ancient, to the Ancient itself, and to unity in translation with the Ancient.

To repeat the conception, as given in the foreword: From the Ancient came the breath of Voice. The breath of Voice brought into being life, which is the Mother, and the Mother separates Ancientness from all the forms of living being. Despite this vast and bewildering separation which makes of the world a mysterious shadow-house, the spirit that is within living being derives from the Ancient and must strive always to return to that source so infinitely dark and far back through the physical and metaphysical 'worlds'.

An individual may resist the force of life and strive to retain its form, parted as it is from Ancientness. If it does so, it will perish; or it may move forward through pain and love, through the three musics, the death of the body, the death of soul and the final translation of spirit.

The loneliness of the Ancient causes metaphysical pain. The spirit, twisting and turning in its ceaseless search for the way through the heavens, home, makes the worlds into a terrible clash of wills. The spirit suffers always the agony of its separation from the Ancient, for its loneliness is the loneliness of the Ancient. It seeks to overcome this loneliness trivially by pleasures and nobly through love. In love it longs for unity with other beings. Such unity can never finally be attained except in the translation into unity with the Ancient when the breath of Voice ceases at last.

How would the book have ended? It is indicated in the text that Ragnar will return to ordinary life, and to Faustine. At some stage he will encounter Bluewright, as place or person, and Bluewright means his death. More than that cannot be said.

"I believe that sooner or later Lindsay will take his place beside Kafka, Malcolm Lowry and other previously neglected writers, as a twentieth century classic. . . . Lindsay is a visionary, a man of Beethoven-like sublimity, a truly original genius."—Colin Wilson

The Violet Apple is a love story infused with Christian themes. The story centers around the cultivation of an apple tree from a seed which, according to legend, belonged to the original tree in the garden of Eden. The tree grows, gives forth two violet apples, and dies. The lovers eat the violet apples, and what happens next will be hauntingly familiar to all fans of *A Voyage to Arcturus*.

The Witch is David Lindsay's final novel, and one he considered to be his major work. This manuscript had been missing for over twenty years, and only just rediscovered. It describes the haunting of a man's consciousness by the "music" of a "witch," and culminates in a description of the soul's experiences after death.

Critical Praise for David Lindsay

"*A Voyage to Arcturus* is an exacting novel, a vivid and visionary book, fit to be compared with the so-called Prophetic Books of Blake, or the mystical writings of Swedenborg and Boehme."—*New Statesman*

Paper ISBN: 0-914090-13-5

CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS