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ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES

A Romance

By RICHARD ALDINGTON

Illustrations by ROCKWELL KENT

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FIRST EDITION

ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES

Books by
RICHARD ALDINGTON

FICTION

Soft Answers
The Colonel's Daughter
Death of a Hero
Roads to Glory

POETRY

Collected Poems
A Dream in the Luxembourg

BELLES LETTRES

Voltaire, a Critical Biography
Literary Studies and Reviews
French Studies and Reviews
D. H. Lawrence

TRANSLATIONS

The Alcestis of Euripides
Medallions (*Anyte, Meleager, Anacreontea, Latin Poets
of the Renaissance*)
The Decameron of Boccaccio
Fifty Romance Poems
The Fifteen Joys of Marriage (*15th Century*)
Imaginary Voyages of Cyrano de Bergerac
Plays by Regnard, Lesage, Marivaux, Destouches
Dangerous Acquaintances of Choderlos de Laclos
Letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great
Candide and Other Stories by Voltaire



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PART I

1900-1914



AUTHOR'S NOTE

DEATH OF A HERO is the story of a man of my own time who was killed in the European War. *The Colonel's Daughter* is the story of a girl of the same generation, who in her way also suffered. *All Men Are Enemies* is the story of a man who survived the war, and of what he did with his life afterwards.

The essential business of a novel is to interest through the action of human beings. If the love story of Tony and Katha interests you, and moves you (as I hope it will, for I felt it very deeply), then in every essential the book succeeds. But every novel which ventures beyond plain story-telling has something more to communicate—not only a succession of moods and aspirations (as in a poem) but a conception of life.

I call this book "A Romance" because for me Antony Clarendon is an example of the modern romantic idealistic temperament. A realist in his position would have settled down to a comfortable business career and a get-along-somehow marriage with Margaret. But Antony, like many of us, is an ordinary fallible human being struggling towards what he believes to be a finer and fuller life. In this struggle he holds to two instinctive beliefs which I willingly allow to be romantic: First, that the complete human being is formed by a man and a

woman; second, that living implies much more than acquiescence in a set of formal beliefs, more than getting and spending money. Just as he abandons the secular religions of Nationalism, Socialism, and Communism, so he abandons a false marriage and a false career.

But what, you ask, is this "finer fuller life" towards which Antony struggles so painfully and clumsily? It is not only life with the woman he really loves, but the energy and beauty of existence which he wants to contribute to their joint possession. It is the life of the here and now, the life of the senses, the life of the deep instinctive forces. If we do not live in these we scarcely live at all. We have been taught so long that life must have some exterior end and justification that we have forgotten that living is itself enough, that to be alive and conscious is itself an excellent and miraculous experience.

How easily and carelessly we abandon real life! Our sense of smell is atrophied; our ears are corrupted by urban noises, overworked by radio and telephone; we eat our bread without tasting the sunlight, the rich earth, the sweet air which created it; our sight is degraded in a thousand ways: and we are afraid of touch, which we have been taught to consider dangerous, base, and indecent. In trying to convey this life I have at times merged several of the senses, but I have especially tried to interpret "divine touch," to create new sensations in the mind of the reader by evoking the reactions and emotions experienced when one human being touches another. In this I have been guided by the faith that the truly civilized man does not ruthlessly suppress the gifts of his instincts and senses, but by refining and governing them creates a web of living hours. It may be that Tony's quest was doomed to failure (we do not know what happened to him and Katha after they left Aeaea), that he

aspired to be as the gods, but I think he was right to make the attempt.

I see I have spoken of Tony and Katha as if they were real people, but for months they were to me so real that I felt them as living presences. For me it was one of the saddest moments of my life when I lost these two human beings I had come to love, by writing the last words of what for everybody else is merely a Romance.

RICHARD ALDINGTON



PART I

IQOO-1914

Now when the immortal gods meet together in council, they speak of many things, and chiefly they lament the twilight that has fallen upon them, the ruined fanes, the neglected sacrifices, and the desolation of the world they would have made a delicious garden where gods might walk with men. For though the gods are immortal, they are not omnipotent; they have no potency save in and through men. Plainly it is only the feigning of poets which pretends that they discuss the fates of particular men and hurry through the air to assist or thwart some man whom they have chosen for love or hatred.

The gods met in the great megaron of Olympian Zeus, and the fair-haired serving boys set before them ambrosia and nectar, which are the deathless food of the immortals. When they had eaten and drunk and were filled, and the lyre player had gladdened them, Zeus, hurler of the thunder shaft, began to speak:

'Shame be upon men, and destruction! For when we had given them all good things and the round orb of the world for their dwelling, they have followed evil visions and phantoms of the night, and there is not one that does not hate his fellows, whether openly or in the secret of his own nature. But come now, you gods, speak and tell me your thought, for even now upon earth there is engendering in the sweet bed of love one for whom the

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Fates are plotting strange things. And it is his fate to taste much that is sweet and much that is bitter, to know many men and many cities, to struggle ever for a life like unto our own and to suffer defeat from men's evil. Tell me, then, if we shall give gifts unto this man, or if we shall let him fall like one more unnoted leaf in the flying generations of men? '

Then answered Athena, terribly clear of eye, and her breasts that never suckled child were hard as wrought mail :

ⁱ Father Zeus and you other undying gods, first let the fate of this man be my charge, for among all the gods he shall love none more than me. Now, therefore, I will pluck all guile from his nature, and I will make clear his outward and inner sight, so that he may love truth and detest falsehood. And what little knowledge is meet for him he shall have, for the mind of man is but a frail shell, and in no wise shall he gather up the great sea therein. Above all will I set in his heart restless longing for that which is good, and hope, and courage never to submit, and faith in his fellows, howsoever evil they may be.'

She ceased, and there arose a clamour among the deathless gods, each seeking to be heard. But golden Aphrodite fell at the feet of Zeus, and her lovely naked breasts touched his knees and her heavenly blue eyes which no man may resist gazed into his and she caressed his beard with her slender hand. Zeus smiled and laid his hand softly upon her tender head and touched her naked shoulder and said:

⁴ My child, is it not enough that at your coming the dread delight of love stirs among men, and among all living things of earth and water and of the air, and they burn with restless longing and they pour forth rich seed and the lovely womb is fulfilled? Will you now seek to

tempt even the immortal gods and me your father? But come now, speak, and do you other immortal gods keep silence.'

Then blue-eyed Aphrodite, golden, undying, laughed beneath her waving hair as in spring the happy fields seem to laugh under many flowers, wind-flower and hyacinth and many-petalled melilot. And she said:

'Father Zeus and all you other undying gods, have you learned so little that you believe any one of the children of men may live in truth without me? And because I have withdrawn myself from many that hate me, do you think I have no gifts for this man? Now shame be upon me if I do not shed upon him many hidden graces, so that he shall be desired by women and shall know all the ways of love, whereof none is evil. And above all I shall give him the divine sense of touch whereby he may know the immortal gods.'

Then straightway in wrath spoke the maiden Artemis:

'Out upon thee, thou dog-eyed, thou shameless! Evil have you ever wrought among men, and upon women you are a heavy curse. For when by your deceit you have filled the womb, and she groans in travail, then does a woman call upon me for aid in her sore distress, while you lie with some paramour in your island of flowers, caring nothing for her. Now, then, upon this man will I shed no gifts, but ever will I be opposite to him, for your sake. I will stir hatred against him and afflict him, and the sweet hope of children I will take from him, so much shall he fear the enmity of my people.'

So saying, she gazed in wrath upon golden Aphrodite, but she, laughing subtly, moved away from them, letting fall her garments so that all might see her naked body, glorious, immortal, a delight of gods and men. And all the gods gazed eagerly upon her, but the goddesses

turned away in anger save only Athena, for to her nothing is hidden. Then arose Ares, hasty to follow after that deathless one and to lie upon her breasts. But before he departed, he said:

'Few words, O Zeus. Strength will I give this man, and in battle I will stand beside him.'

And Ares turned and followed after undying Aphrodite, and they two lay together on a bed of gold, the work of Hephaestus, being perfect in all the deeds of love. And Aphrodite bowed the cypresses closer together to hide them from the sight-of gods and men, but in the fields many flowers sprang up, and the air was delicious with their breathing.

After they had gone, others of the gods and heroes spoke in the assembly, each one making a gift, some in good faith but most in mockery and derision; for like the children of men, the gods know pride and scorn, and press heavily upon the just man struggling against wrong. But at last spoke Isis, a goddess of the barbarians, older than all the other gods, a suppliant at their hearth; and she spoke:

'O King, it is little fitting that an exile and suppliant among the gods should bestow gifts, even upon one of the feeble race of men, who are innumerable as the sands and transitory as the light on fleeting ripples of water. Yet am I a goddess, and this is my gift. Since I am doomed to wander seeking always the lost fragments of Osiris, my lord, so do I doom this man always to wander seeking the lost fragments of a beauty which is lost, a peace which cannot be, an ecstasy which is a dream, a perfection which cannot exist. And to these my words be witness the Sun above my head and the Moon beneath my feet and the innumerable people of the stars.*

Hearing this, the gods were troubled, and sat in si-

lence, thinking of all they had lost, and how the world had grown bitter to them, as the sweet waters of the fountain Arethusa are become bitter with the unvintageable sea.

The house in which Antony Clarendon was born must have been designed towards the end of the seventeenth century. The controlled use of brick and stone together, the good breeding of the proportions, the elegance of the fenestration with its slightly daring use of the projecting broken pediment, the obese *putti* holding up an indecipherable coat of arms over the main entrance, and the florid balustrade to the semicircular steps, all suggested memories of the grand tour, the classics as seen by the wits of Versailles, High Church preoccupations, a cellar of good old caret despite Methuen's Treaty, and a modest opulence. Perhaps it was merely a dower house, entrusted by chance to a good architect as carelessly as it would have been given to a bad one if he had been cheaper or more easily available. Or perhaps it was the home of some loyalist, angered by the success of Whig intrigues, who had retired from Court in the hope of practising that refined Epicureanism so warmly recommended by worthy Mr. Cowley and the celebrated Monsieur Gassendi.

In the late nineteenth century nobody seemed to care very much about its origin. It was just a pleasant old country cottage, not too large, with comparatively modern sanitation, in a healthy situation facing south. And as such the Clarendons had rented it on a long lease, though perhaps the deciding factor was the existence of a small dome-shaped observatory built over one of the

attics—Antony's father, among other activities, was an amateur astronomer.

If you walked down from Vine House, crossed the valley and got to the crest of the long ridge opposite, the house looked like an architect's model set on a platform in a dint of the opposite ridge, as if the site had been scooped out by some prodigious thumb. From that distance you could see how carefully it had been placed, with the little spur hiding it from the village (which was in fact quite near), and the two screens of huge old elms and twisted chestnuts sheltering it from the western and eastern gales. Obviously the designer of the house had reluctantly given up the idea of a Grande Allee in the French manner—the house was on a hill, and anyway there wasn't enough land—and had compromised by these two stately lines of leafy grenadiers, whose job was to warn off all intruders and give that air of dignity which only old trees can give. From the terrace, with its very lichened and rather damaged stone balustrade, you looked obliquely down the valley and across it to the bare sheepwalks, while at exactly the right point there was a gap in the downs, which on bright days showed one spangle glitter of sea.

Even on the windy days so numerous in England, if there was not a tearing gale you could sit beside the thick rhododendrons under the trees in almost complete shelter and hear the loud rustling and creaking as the high boughs yielded to the sudden gusts and then swayed back. When the rooks were building in the budding elms, it was amusing to see how cross they got with the wind, croaking angrily at this senseless enemy which made a perpetual earthquake at their foundations and whirled away valuable building material before you could say 'Coaac.' On calm days, especially when the song-

birds had ceased, the terrace seemed to be cupped in an immense stillness between motionless trees. If you sat perfectly quiet for long enough there seemed to be no time any more, but a sense of unlapsing existence; no space, but only an airy pattern of colours. It seemed as if you had only to lift a finger to touch the high treetops, to stretch out an arm and you could caress the smooth grass of the distant hill. But you must not move; movement broke the enchantment of strange presences. A butterfly would come across the lawn, either the swift flutter, poise, drop, flutter of the tawny speckled *Fanesidae* or the rambling flicker of the Whites. Then would come the sharp, startling squawk of a blue jay from the coppice, or the flat jingle of sheep bells, or the clop-clip-clop, clop-clip-clop of a horse trotting along the hard white road. And then once more you slipped back into the timeless, spaceless world with its scent of cut drying grass and distant fruits.

Just as there are two intermingled lives in each person, one of the obvious social man, the other of the mysterious unique personality, so there are two educations, one of formal tuition, the other of unconscious influence; and in each case the latter is by far the more important. Not until much later in life did Antony realize the education of his senses and feelings which came from Vine House and the country in which it stood. Thousands of times he went in and out of the house, hundreds of times he crossed the valley and the ridges to north and south on some one or other of the absorbed, intense purposes of childhood, without consciously noticing them. Yet every time something was impressed on him.

He realized this twenty-five years later, when on one of his excursions he went back to the valley and looked at what had once been his home. He went in no maud-

lin spirit of brooding over childhood, still less in the sentimental spirit of patriotism which looks upon a landscape as a personal possession, a prolongation of the Me which must be kept intact as much as the valuable Me itself. He went merely to find out why it had meant so much to him, why he had remembered it with such astonishing clarity in the hurry-scurry and clatter of a Parisian bar, in the dark brutishness of the trenches, among the inspiring emptiness of mountains. A new branch line ruled its converging rails down the valley; the white ribbon road had swollen into a dark anaconda of tarmac, swallowing the once flowery hedges; a petrol station had heaved away a magnificent horse-chestnut and proudly displayed a line of orange and red robots, ready to vomit petrol at a moment's notice; the village had stalked round the corner, flinging out patrols of bungalows over sheepwalks which had no more sheep. The house itself had been smartened up with bow windows of inharmonious brick; more than half the elms had gone to make room for a hard tennis court, and two or three half-rotten chestnuts drooped in a melancholy way over a concrete garage.

Antony hurried away in a kind of shocked despair. But as he made his way to the new station, which squatted brickily on what had once been a copse of sal-lows, whose soft round blossoms had made him dream of the golden down on girls, he saw clearly why the old house and its surroundings had been so important. By the rarest of chances, which comes to scarcely one life in ten thousand, he had spent nearly twenty years in a harmony so complete that he had breathed it as naturally and unconsciously as pure air. The destruction of the harmony made his memory of it the more vivid. The house itself was a harmony, a creation of human beings with clear senses who had made it a symbol of them-

selves. In turn it had become harmonized with the landscape, so that the one was complementary to the other. The harmony had existed, for he had lived it, if only in the idyllic dream of childhood and adolescence; he owed to it some of his most exquisite and enduring experiences. Now it had gone, like the iris from a spring cloud, and could never be regained. How make a comparable harmony from modern forces and dissonances?

The new station was a squalid brick and varnished deal construction, looking like an abortive Swiss chalet which had never been anything but shabby. It was deserted except for a porter in waistcoat and shirt sleeves, pottering over some lamps. Antony recognized him as one of the 'village boys' grown up, but the man obviously did not remember him, for which he was grateful, since a comparison of recollections would have been distasteful. After a casual enquiry about train times, Antony said:

'Do you happen to know who lives at Vine House now? '

'London people,'aid the porter, 'they don't come often. Drives down in their cars for week-ends, like. Down the village some of them will have it there's rare old goings-on, but I've never seen them doing nothing, except tennis and playing the gramophone and wireless. It don't matter to me, I don't care.'

'They seem to have altered the place.'

'Oh, ah, spent a lot of money, they did, but it was an old place, needed a lot of improving. They was always down here at one time, but now they don't hardly ever come.'

'Well, perhaps they'll clear out soon.'

'It don't matter to me, bloody good riddance if they all went.'

Antony felt discouraged by this aimless conversation. He didn't quite know why he persisted in it, except perhaps to convince himself more fully that the dream reality of his childhood was no more. An aeroplane droned interminably overhead. Yes, the porter had been in the war, infantry, copped a packet at Loos. No, he wasn't satisfied with his job. All work, and no play. About fed up, he was. Reckoned there'd have to be a big change one of these days. The workers wouldn't stand it much longer. Why, the Council cottages were six-and-six a week, hadn't got electric light, and the wash houses were a disgrace. Trade was going down, wages going down, unemployment going up. No, he didn't see what could be done. Yes, he always voted Labour, but what was the good? Soon's they got into Parliament, they were just like the other blokes. What *he* reckoned was that there'd have to be a big change one of these days. . . . The reverse of the medal.

§ III

An important person in Antony's early life was Annie, the parlourmaid. Cooks, housemaids, kitchen boys might, and indeed did, come and go, but Annie went on for ever. First she had been called Nannie, because she was Antony's nurse, and bathed him and dressed him and took him out. She had two songs, which she believed in as if they had been sorcery. One was called 'The March of the Mulligan Guards,' and was meant to be cheerful and inspiriting, to be sung as a diversion to tantrums over baths or dressing or the tragic misfortune of having to go to bed. The other was a most dismal hymn, beginning 'A few more years shall roll.' This she considered a most potent lullaby, and indeed it did induce such a mood of morbid depression that sleep

became irresistible. Under Annie's tender musical sway, Antony felt that he had indeed died many times. Then, when Antony went to school, and was promoted from warm baths with Nannie as Eurycleia to morning cold baths on his own and a bi-weekly evening scrub still under inspection, Nannie wept, and was only comforted by promotion to the status of privileged parlourmaid, a rise in pay, and the name of Annie. She continued her hot-bath inspections long after they were really necessary, on shallow pretexts of ears and neck improperly scoured, and never failed to remark as if a desperately original idea had smitten her:

'Well, I never, Master Tony! How you do grow! Why, you're almost as strapping as our Bill, and he's a rare one, he is.'

The streak of sentimental morbidity in Annie occasionally showed itself in brief but tempestuous outbreaks of religious fervour, possibly a derivative from unholy sex instincts she would never have admitted. Annie had a young man, the son of the butcher in her native village, himself a butcher. But he was kept at an incredibly respectful distance which would have done credit to the chastest and haughtiest lady of Provence, allowed to write only once a fortnight with no guarantee of a reply, and saw her only twice a year at Vine House and on the rare occasions when she went 'down home.' Nevertheless, Annie considered herself irrevocably bound to marry her young man at some time or other, and vigorously repelled any advances from the young grocers and milkmen who came to the back door; to which they retorted by shouting 'Butcher I' as they went down the side path, causing Annie to blush while she dratted their impertinence.

So it wasn't surprising that Annie had to work herself off on religion from time to time. She had a Bible

and a prayer book bound in some shiny coloured composition which looked like onyx and was probably celluloid. The prayer book was a gift from the butcher and was inscribed in a shaky hedge-school hand: 'To Dear Annie From her loving Sweathart Charly.' Though nominally Church of England, in her crises Annie expressed rather heretical views on predestination, perhaps a vague family tradition from Puritan days. Red eyes and audible prayers from Annie's bedroom were the outward signs of these painful religious tempests. At the same time she tried to placate the wrath of a Jealous God by playing a peculiar game. She had cards for each month of the year, with a text for each day, but no indication where it came from. Apparently it was the Lord's pleasure that Annie should daily search the Scriptures at a marathon speed to discover the book, chapter, and verse of each quotation. It says much for her general health of mind that at the year's end she was usually about ten months in arrear, and even then she cheated by asking Antony and the cook to help.

Antony disliked these crises. He hated to see Annie moping about in tears and desperately skimming through the Bible instead of telling amusing stories about ⁴ 'down home' and 'our Bill.' In an attempt to distract her on one of these occasions he said:

'got kept in today, Annie.'

'ou *did!*' exclaimed Annie reproachfully, still keeping a teary eye on Leviticus. 'You naughty boy, what-ever have you been a-doing of?'

'Oh, nothing. In maths, this morning. That fool, Carter, said——'

A piteous wail from Annie cut him short:

'Oh, Master Tony, Master Tony, don't use that dreadful word! Don't you know that he who saith unto

his brother "Thou fool" is in danger of judgment? Prepare to meet thy God, prepare for instant death!'

'What's death?' asked Tony inquisitively.

Annie groaned righteously.

'Don't you know what death is? That's what comes of not going to Sunday School. When you're dead, you go all white and still, and they have to bury you, and there you stay for ever and ever until the Angel blows his trumpet for the Last Judgment, when all the wicked shall be cast into hell!'

Annie gloated voluptuously over the words 'death' and 'hell.' Antony turned pale, feeling as if all strength had gushed out from his hands and knees in a thrill of horror. It was the first time he had been told about death, the first time he had realized that the lovely days he took so happily and carelessly would end—'you go all white and still, and they have to bury you.' It seemed incredible and monstrous, but he believed her, because Annie would not tell him a lie. And he felt no resentment, although she had clumsily smashed his beautiful child's eternity. Catching her morbidity, he asked:

'What's hell?'

'That's where you go after you're dead if you've been wicked, and you burn in fire for ever and ever without a drop of water to cool your tongue, like you read about.'

'But how can they put you in fire if they've buried you in the ground, and anyway how can you feel anything if you're all still and white?'

'Oh, Master Tony, don't talk so wicked, don't I! It's the resurrection when all the dead will go into hell, all except those sealed with the seal of redemption.'

'Is Mother sealed with the seal of redemption?'

This was a nasty enfilade, but Annie stuck to her theological battery.

'Not unless she's one of the Elect, she won't be.'

'Mother will go to hell? Annie! You're a fool, you're a rascal!'

Antony had read his Bible too, with the inevitable results when it came to theological discussion.

Luckily these religious fits were rather rare and never lasted long. At other times Annie was infinitely good-natured, with a sort of physical intimacy, like a young mare looking after somebody else's colt. After luncheon, when Annie 'dressed' for the afternoon, Tony was permitted to talk to her, sitting on a large wooden box with brass nails and 'A. Gillow' printed on it in black letters. Tony used to wonder vaguely what 'A. Gillow' was, so ignorant of other worlds that he did not know his Annie was 'Miss Gillow' to the postman and to the bright young grocery man who boasted that he was passionately fond of pickles and had served his apprenticeship in the Home and Colonial. It was while Annie changed from her print dress into black with a white lace-edged apron, washed, starched, and ironed by herself, that Tony learned about 'our Bill' and 'down home.'

'Our Bill' was always getting into trouble about something, which 'Father' at once dealt with by 'giving Bill the strap.' If Annie moped a little over her washstand and sang 'A few more years shall roll,' Tony knew at once that our Bill had had the strap.

'What's the matter, Annie?'

'Mother writ me a letter this morning, and said Father give our Bill the strap.'

'What for?'

Stripped to the waist, Annie poured a lot of cold water into a large basin, to 'have a good swill.'

'Well, you see,' she began, covering a face cloth with

yellow soap, ' Father went down to the Red Lion for his pint, and when he come back he went to the cupboard for a bit of bread and cheese he'd put there, and it was gone, because when Bill come in from work, he'd ate it after his tea.'

' Why did Bill eat it, Annie?'

' Silly! Because he was hungry.'

' Why didn't your father get some more bread and cheese? '

' There wasn't any.'

' But there's plenty in the shops.'

Annie shook her head as she polished her white muscular back with the face cloth.

' You mustn't think everybody's brought up in a rich home like you are, Master Tony,' she explained.

' Father only earns fifteen shilling a week, and our Bill gets five shilling and his dinner, which isn't much of a dinner by all accounts. There's half a crown for the rent and sixpence club money and Father's ounce of shag and his pint, so Mother hasn't but fifteen shilling a week for everything. Our Bill gives Mother all his money; but there! he eats that hearty, it's like having a regiment in the house. Father give him the strap when he caught him smoking, and said he wasn't to smoke till he was a man's age and earning a man's wage.'

Annie finished up this explanation in a tone of virtuous approval and began to scrub her chest and breasts as if they had been a piece of furniture. Tony pondered these revelations.

' Is my father rich?' he asked.

' Why! ' exclaimed Annie. ' If he wasn't rich, how could you have a big house, and meat twice a day, and two horses in the stable, and you at a young gentleman's school? '

' Why isn't your father rich? '

' Because it's pleased God to put him in that station.'

Tony again pondered, while Annie dried her wet body with a rough towel, hissing slightly like a groom currying a horse.

' Well,' he said finally, ' I don't see why it pleases God to make people poor, and I think it was cruel of your father to beat Bill for eating bread and cheese when he was hungry, so there! '

' Oh, Master Tony!'

Having registered her disapproval of this anarchism in a tone of almost agonized reproach, Annie said no more, having nothing more to say, and possibly reflecting that God does have to account for some odd things. She moved to the plain deal dressing table at the other end of the room and began to do her hair. The afternoon sunlight through the ivy made dappled patterns of moving gold and dark blue on her white skin, her raised arms with the small dark wing of hair underneath made her breasts taut, and the little red-brown breast petals with the raised bud in the centre—like a red-brown poppy folded outwards—were almost orange in the bright glow. Tony watched her, as he had done scores of times, his conscious mind elsewhere, seeing her without seeing, utterly unconscious that he was looking at a half-naked woman. It never occurred to him to want to touch her (she would have been profoundly shocked), for, after all, she was ⁱ only Annie,' and anyway such things didn't interest him. Yet long afterwards he didn't remember the conversations but Annie's slim strong back and her warm-looking breasts in the sunlight. Absorbed in dressing and in thoughts of Bill, Annie quite unknowingly showed Tony that a healthy woman's body is lovely and desirable.

With his mind on far different matters, Tony asked:

'Why don't you like it here as much as you do down home, Annie?'

'Oh, Master Tony, how can you I I do like it here. But things don't grow anywhere like they do down home. You ought to see our cherries! We've got wonderful black-hearts and white-hearts that Father planted afore he was married. And the raspberries and strawberries and plums up to Marland Court, you never tasted anything like them. The head gardener give us some when there was a glut, and Mother made jam out of those we couldn't eat. What a pity sugar's so dear I '

'Why?'

'Mother makes beautiful jam, and if sugar wasn't so dear, we could have damson jam and quince jelly all the year round. It's a pity to have to let them rot, but nobody won't buy them, there's so many down home.'

'I don't like damson jam,' said Tony, 'there's too many stones in it.'

'Mother takes the stones out of hers,' Annie retorted. 'And then there's gooseberries and currants—you like black-currant jam, don't you? '

'Yes, but I like black-currant pudding better.'

'You ought to see it down home, all the fruit blossom in the spring and the bluebells and daffodils in Marland woods, and the hay-making, and the harvest-home, and there isn't better bacon in the world, Father says.'

'Will you let me go down home with you when you're married, Annie? '

'Shaw!' exclaimed Annie, blushing very red and poking hairpins fiercely in her hair, 'who's been putting ideas like that in the child's mind? '

Annie's marriage was not so long delayed. Whether Charly became insistent (which seems unlikely, considering his meekness to Annie) or whether religion became

unsatisfactory, or whether it was merely the spring and the thought of down home—at any rate Annie suddenly decided to marry, and fixed early June as the date, May brides being unlucky. After much solicitation Tony's parents agreed to let him go to Annie's wedding, on condition that he behaved in an exemplary way and was driven home next morning by Father.

For Tony, Annie's wedding began as rapture and ended with a certain melancholy—an epitome of all such ceremonies. He had the sketchiest notions of what 'getting married' meant, and certainly had not grasped the fact that Annie was leaving him for ever. He viewed the affair as a marvellous excursion with Annie to the dream land of 'down home,' that realm of faery where there were always fruits and flowers and jam and the best bacon in the world.

On the day before the wedding, Father, our Bill, and Charly arrived at Vine House to take our Annie home, in a strange ancient vehicle which might once have been a bachelor's brougham since it had only a driver's seat outside, one seat inside, and a little rail round what had once been a shiny top. It was drawn by a stuggy little cob, which belonged to Charly's butcher father and had a tendency to stop automatically at public houses. As a special privilege for Annie's departure, this peculiar relic of Victorian splendour was brought round to the front door, where the cob stood switching off flies and gazing backwards from time to time as if grievously surprised at the object it was harnessed to.

Tony had expected to find our Bill looking frail and persecuted, perhaps a little wan and gory from his last encounter with the strap. *Que nenni*. Our Bill was a stout farmer's lad, at least a hand taller than Father, with a large freckled face, a good doughy English snub nose, and mud-coloured hair with a tendency to spring

up in bristly wise though heavily plastered with water. He wore corduroys and grinned a great deal. As a specimen of domestic ogre Father was a disappointment. Could this be the tyrant of Annie's tales, this small, taciturn bandy-legged man, wiry and muscular indeed, but a little bent and twisted by forty years' labour in rheumatically English fields? As for Charly, Tony hardly noticed him (Annie had never told interesting tales about him) except to see that he had a reddish face and a large silver watch chain and perspired a good deal.

After many whispered injunctions about good behaviour, Annie solemnly ushered them into the drawing room, where Tony's father and mother were waiting for them, and Tony himself, hat in hand, in an agony of impatience to be off. The guests were gravely embarrassed and seemed not to know what to do with the cake and port which was given them, until Father set the example by nibbling the cake and sipping the port in a gingerly genteel way, as if he were weary of these delicacies and only choked them down from politeness. The atmosphere was loaded with embarrassment, until Mr. Clarendon, himself a little embarrassed, made a short speech, wishing all happiness, et cetera, and presented Charly with a couple of pints of champagne to drink the bride's health. And then Mrs. Clarendon pinned on Annie's dress one of those floridly chased gold watches then fashionable, in spite of Annie's conventional exclamations of 'Oh, Ma'am, I couldn't, reelyl' and 'Indeed, you shouldn't, Ma'am I' and the like. Which Mrs. Clarendon gently checked by kissing her and hoping her marriage would be everything she desired, whereupon Annie cried and looked as if she expected it would turn out very much the opposite. And the embarrassment grew, until Mr. Clarendon put an

end to it by looking at his watch and remarking that perhaps they had better start, which they did with great alacrity, after profuse thanks of unexpected heartiness.

Tony had to sit inside the brougham with Annie and Charly, while our Bill had all the fun on top, behind Father and in front of Annie's box and Tony's bag. It was hot inside, squeezed between Annie and Charly, who held hands behind Tony's back; so when the cob stopped of its own accord at the first pub and Father got off the box, remarking that he might as well have half a pint, Tony insisted on changing places with our Bill, in spite of Annie's repeated prophecies that he would fall off and kill himself, and then where should we be?

Once on top, Tony stuck to his seat with enlightened selfishness. Father nodded off to sleep on the box from time to time—a labouring man seldom got his bellyful of sleep in those days—but the cob knew the way and the rule of the road as well as he did. People stared at them as they went through villages, and once when Tony saw their reflection in the large plate-glass window of the International Stores, he was himself a little startled by their odd appearance. But, mostly, the drive was pure joy. The regular beat of hoofs and grind of wheels on the hard white road became a lulling music. When the sun and the glare were getting heavy they would come to a long cool tunnel of dark green elms, where cirl-buntings offered a-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheeeese. The June meadows were intricate patterns of green, yellow, and silver; the roadside was lacy white with yarrow, meadowsweet, and stitchwort; there were bright green fields of wheat and wonderful constructions of poles and string and long creeping tendrils which were hop gardens, those persecuted vineyards of England; and cows stood under shady oaks up to their knees in the

water of ponds or streams fringed with reeds, loose-strife, and water-mint. Tony wished the drive could go on for ever, with Father nodding in front and the narrow white road always unrolling before them and the coloured world gliding by. Not even the nightingales singing from the copse behind the garden of Annie's house could console him for the end of the magic journey down home.

For breakfast Tony had some of the best bacon in the world, but judged it a little salt and too fat. And though he adored Annie's cottage and her mother (who looked exactly like Annie grown fat and a little grey) he had to admit that down home was a bit of a disappointment—too flat and cultivated and enclosed. And though the garden was almost overstocked with fruit and vegetables, he knew at once that he preferred the great trees and the wide roll of hills from the terrace at Vine House. Even Annie herself seemed strange in a white dress, with a gauzy veil and hot excited cheeks.

'Isn't it a lovely dress?' she said.

'I like you better in prints,' said Tony obstinately, 'they've got flowers on them. You look sort of stuffed in that.'

At the wedding service it was Tony's turn to feel shy—here he was the intruder. Afterwards they went to have breakfast, so-called, at the butcher's house, which Tony did not like at all, especially after Annie's cottage. The air was noisy with the church bells, which went on and on for hours, since the bell ringers had volunteered to ring a double bob in Annie's honour. There was a surprising amount of food, especially meat, at the wedding breakfast, and a surprising number of strange relatives, and a surprising number of very useless and unornamental presents for Annie and Charly. Mr. Hogbin,

Charly's father—you saw ' J. Hogbin & Son, Family Butchers ' in gold over Mr. Hogbin's shop front—was very red-faced and had a large gold watch chain, bigger than Charly's silver one. He kept announcing that he was a jolly one, he was, and made jokes which were immediately shushed down by the ladies. There were large men and small men, who ate and drank a great deal, and several tradesmen's wives, who were very pinched and prim to begin with, and a bit flushed and hilarious after the champagne and beer. There was a young man from London in a blue serge suit, who picked his teeth with a quill, despised everybody very much as a pack of yokels, and informed Tony in a cockney accent that if you wanted a real old beano there was nothing like Epping Forest. And there was a facetious cousin who ostentatiously went out of the room and noisily reappeared with a chamber pot half full of beer, and begged leave to toast the bride and groom in this symbol of domesticity, but was utterly quelled by the ladies in a chorus of ' Well, I never did! ' ' To think of him doing such a thing, and ladies present too! ' ' Downright disgraceful, I call it! ' ' Not much of a credit to them as brought him up! ' and so on.

The feast broke up in a tumult of kissings and tears and embracings and exclamations. Annie clasped Tony dramatically, kissed him with a teary face, and exhorted him never to forget her and always to say his prayers. Then she and Charly got into a cab, and more confetti was thrown, and the facetious cousin tried to tie an old shoe on the back axle, but was again defeated by the cab suddenly starting, so he threw the old shoe after them. And everybody felt rather deflated.

Tony wandered about the lanes alone, feeling more and more deserted and melancholy, realizing at last that he had lost his Annie. Next day, when Father drove him

home, he had to sit inside the old brougham, which smelled musty, and the weather was cloudy with a strong wind, and all the magic had gone. He was very glad to say good-bye to Father, and to sit in the shelter of the trees and rhododendrons on the terrace, and wonder what he would do now Annie had gone.

§IV

In the lower garden under the terrace balustrade was a large neglected clump of lavender bushes, hidden from the path by Portugal laurel and lilacs. On the rare sunny days when even the terrace seemed hot, Tony took a folding stool and sat for hours watching the bees and small butterflies hovering over the tall purple spikes and drinking the inexhaustible honey. There he sat for hours in a sort of trance, as nymph-rapt as any Sicilian caught in the magical hour when Pan sleeps, listening to the long murmur of the bees, watching the flicker of blue or copper and black-spangled wings, and breathing in the scent of earth and leaves and warm lavender. He did not want to kill the flying creatures or pick the lavender, because he seemed to possess them so much more by absorbing what they had to give—an intense timeless happiness. Though he was wide awake, his thoughts were pleasant and golden like those which come when we drowse towards sleep, but what he experienced was rather a series of inexplicable sensations than a train of thought. It was like the feeling of infinity on the terrace, but more intimate, more earthy, more acute. At the same time the exchange, the flowing out from himself, the response to these mysterious presences, was less terrifying and overwhelming. He felt lapped in sound, scent, and colour, like a bee cupped in the bright world of a petunia, instead of drifting out to immensity. The homely gods

were more familiar and less exacting than those majestic and universal.

Perhaps it is true that nothing worth knowing can be taught—all the teacher can do is show that there are paths. Tony struck off on a path of his own, somewhere between his father's science and the music and poetry of his mother. He knew he disappointed them and let it go at that. He had simply no interest in the mathematical abstractions which absorbed his father. Whatever was not rooted in the reality—or illusion—of the senses had no existence for him, and even as a boy the solution of problems seemed to him only a step above the solution of puzzles in the Sunday newspapers. He much preferred to walk on the silent lawn, looking up at the lemon-white moon and feeling the deep, strange influence of her gentle radiance, than to peer through a telescope at a grotesque enlargement which was said to be a dead world, and be told fantastic names of non-existent 'seas'—names which he promptly forgot with abhorrence. This passion for cataloguing and nomenclature! Tony listened to it respectfully and patiently and forgot it with an indifference which passed for stupidity. But to himself he said:

'What is the point in thinking you've done something wonderful when you've called a sparrow a *Passer vulgaris*, or whatever they call it? And what can you learn about the sparrowness of a sparrow by cutting open his little dead body and making theories about the shape of his claws and bill? And then you stuff him, and think you're Goethe.'

And then he got all worked up, and prayed, he didn't know to what:

'O God, please don't make me a stuffer of Passers' please don't! I want——'

He didn't know how to say what he wanted, but the thought was: 'I want to live in and with living things and feel them living in me, not to cut them up and give them names.'

It was just the same with botany and zoology. Why hunt out rare plants, and make a collection of discoloured leaves and stems and faded petals, and pretend that you love flowers? He felt quite sick once when he found a different kind of St. John's-wort and proudly showed it to his father, who immediately pulled it up, pointing out that it had narrower leaves than the other kind—which Tony had seen before it was picked—and was therefore called 'angustifolia.' Angustifolia! Anyone could see it had narrow leaves without squashing it in a press. And while he was always enchanted to go up to London to the Zoo, from which he could hardly be dragged, he loathed the Natural History Museum. Those acres of stuffed birds with glass eyes behind glass frames!

So Henry Clarendon, pulling his dark beard, looked at his son with his cool, remote blue eyes and said that he would never make a scientist. Which did not prevent Tony from feeling very proud of his father's learning and thinking him the finest man in the world. So, without saying anything, they agreed affectionately to differ, though Henry Clarendon could not help feeling a faint contempt for someone who had no scientific instincts, and Tony could not help feeling amazed that people should pride themselves so much on so little—if you looked at things with your two eyes you were unscientific and liable to illusion, but if you covered one eye with a shade and put a microscope between the other eye and the object, then you were infallible.

Henry Clarendon was a conscientious atheist. Tony,

puzzled by his headmaster's exposition of Holy Writ, said to him:

'Father, what is *your* definition of God? '

Henry Clarendon looked up from a Note on the Variations in the Plane of the Ecliptic he was reading and said coolly:

'God is the exact equivalent of Shakespeare's duc-dame—a word to call fools together,'

And returned to his book, while Tony went empty away—to sit by the lavender bushes.

Henry Clarendon never interfered with his wife's religion and let her do what she liked to convert her son—he was of the extinct type which still believed that truth (his truth) was great and would prevail. Tony found his mother's religion harder to parry than his father's matter-of-fact atheism. There were too many elements in it which attracted him, and at the same time she made full use of maternal suasion in a way Tony thought a bit unfair. As Tony, then aged about fifteen, once said to his father when discussing these matters:

'You can't treat women as you do men, Father. They won't agree to differ in a friendly way, and they don't always use fair means.'

And Henry Clarendon, smothering a laugh in his beard, replied with mock gravity:

'That's an important truth you've got hold of. Stick to it.'

Frances Clarendon came from a musical family which had formed part of the admiring electrons round the Pre-Raphaelite nucleus. They were Evangelical, adored Ruskin, and took culture very seriously. Frances was particularly influenced by Christina Rossetti, whom she met once as a little girl, and by Holman Hunt, whom she

saw frequently. She intensely disliked Whistler and everything which she called 'Gallic,' and in Italy only approved of Assisi and selected objects recommended in *Modern Painters* and *Mornings in Florence*. This was mixed up with an adoration for German Romantic music, a cult of Wordsworth, and a touching faith in the social theories of William Morris. Somehow, Tony never quite knew how or why, these saints were all included in a gentle Christian hierarchy, presided over by God, who was indistinguishable from Jesus Christ, and who was preparing a crystal age millennium just round the corner. All you had to do in order to attain the millennium was to believe and to model yourself on Sir Galahad. And it was necessary to go to church.

It took Tony some time to disentangle all this for himself, in long self-communings by the lavender or under the great trees on the terrace. The first thing he discovered, with some surprise, was that church-going and all it implied were completely indifferent to him, if not repulsive. He enjoyed going into a church on week days and hearing from the vicar, an enthusiast on church architecture, all about Norman and Gothic windows, trefoils and cinquefoils, fan-vaulting and barrel-vaulting, the triforium and the rood-loft, and the whole bag of tricks of medieval symbolism. But when the otherwise pleasant vicar put on a surplice and intoned in a lugubrious way at the altar, Tony evaporated. He merely was not interested in Jesus or in any of the things done in his name—or rather he wasn't interested in the Jesus of his mother or of Annie or of the vicar. After he had read his first Greek tragedy at school and was full of theories on the subject, he hurt his mother by remarking:

'The whole point of Jesus goes if you make a god of him. The real tragedy is that he was a hero of civiliza-

tion and was murdered by those he was trying to help.'

To console her, Tony had to promise he would really be confirmed that year, though he had put it off frequently. And to console himself for this unpleasant concession, he began a tragedy about Jesus, under the original title of *Ecce Homo*, and of course never got beyond the first act.

In the matter of books he had to confess that he preferred Dickens and Browning to Christina and Ruskin, though he rather liked Ruskin when he was either preaching or cobbling purple patches. He couldn't bear Christina's trudging little verses—'Does the road wind uphill all the way?'—which his mother admired so much. Not a single picnic the whole way. He liked to sit quite still and listen to his mother playing, especially if it was Bach, which it rarely was. The later Germans, except Beethoven, rather irritated him, they were so luscious and emphatic. He resented very much having to practise every day on a silent clavier—Mrs. Clarendon could not bear the fumbling discords of a beginner—with the result that he was never able to play the piano at all. And while he was entranced by certain poems and music and pictures, he couldn't bear to have to adopt towards them an attitude of what he called 'holy Moses.' He resented the feeling that you owed a sort of sanctimonious duty to Schumann and Giotto. He particularly disliked two Holman Hunt reproductions hung in his bedroom. One represented a drooping white goat in acres of real sand, with purple mountains and a crimson sky in the distance. The other showed a woman and a child on a donkey, accompanied by a man and a number of babies who had filled the air with bubbles, each bubble containing a scene of Scripture painted with cretinish minuteness.

. . .

Thus, on both sides, he instinctively did his best to avoid the priggishness thrust upon him. But it was not always easy to hit the right mean between dissection and classification, and a refined Christ with a taste for pep-tonized fine arts. It was all the harder because he was really thrilled by the things in which his father was interested, and had a budding passion for the arts on which his mother projected her morbid sensibility. With downright intellectualism on the one side and tremulous spirituality on the other, he had to conceal his own senuous passionate approach to life as if it had been something both trivial and disgusting. He hid in a profound reticence. Even then he saw that what for him were the essential, all-important experiences could be revealed to others only at his peril. You might take life carelessly from the outside, as they did at school; or you might come to it in the abstract intellectual way, like his father; or you might make it a spiritualized abstraction, like his mother; but if you went to life with all your senses open, with your body as well as your mind, with your own fresh feelings instead of abstract laid-down ones, then indeed all men were your enemies.

Only much later did Tony attempt to sum up the advantages and disadvantages of this upbringing. Naturally it was much easier at first for him to see where he differed from his parents than to estimate their positive influence. Though he could not follow either implicitly, still less try to make a synthesis, he saw later that they were the foundations on which he tried to build life. His father's love of truth and contempt for humbug and stupidity, his mother's sensibility and faith in an ultimate human goodness—these were essential, though perhaps not as they conceived. Where they erred, Tony thought, was in disregard of the physical, as if they had

cut off connection with the earth, put a tourniquet round the artery of the life instinct. To express his own clumsy gropings for a more valid set of values, he put it in this way—it was as if you were craving for Boccaccio's vivid robust world and they fed you on the etiolated culture of Matthew Arnold, that high-school Hippolytus.

In all his life Tony could not remember to have heard his parents raise their voices in anger or exchange unkind words. If they quarrelled, they never let him know it. Only much later did he guess the disappointment and dissatisfaction which underlay his father's quizzical irony and his mother's gentle languor. But to him they gave the impression of serenity and happiness, so that he always took for granted that this was the normal state. Nor could he ever understand those domestic interiors where life is carried on in a disorder of squabbles which are apparently enjoyed. Annie destroyed his child's eternity by her gabble about death and hell. Similarly she destroyed his implicit faith in the stability of life, the belief that things would go on for ever as they were, only getting a little more enjoyable perhaps. She achieved this merely by going out of his life, thereby teaching him the commonplace but essential lesson that human existence is a perpetual flux, to which constant adjustment is necessary.

He remembered other things from those days with gratitude and often with surprise when he learned more about other people's homes. No one was ever judged by externals—there was none of the odious snobbery which corrodes English life. Money was never discussed except in terms of economics; it was not considered an important thing. True, Tony was made to handle his

pocket money carefully, but only as discipline. There was no worship of money, no special consideration for the moneyed, even rather a distaste for what was ostentatious and luxurious. Nor was there any of that grotesque cult of sport which turns so much of country England into a Valhalla of barbarians. Henry Clarendon neither hunted nor shot, and used his land as a bird and beast sanctuary, where creatures were only killed as a regrettable necessity in the interests of science. But there was no killing for killing's sake, no knocking about of balls to fill the vacant brain. Tony was given a pony and later a cob and made to ride. He needed no encouragement to be always out of doors, walking, or more often running in the impatient gusto of youth. When he accidentally made fifty not out in a school cricket match, his father gave him half a sovereign, but with a quizzical smile which let Tony see that it was no such great matter to swagger about. As for what is called 'sex knowledge,' that was imparted under the then advanced method of botanical analogy. Fortunately for Tony, he was quite unable to perceive any relation between the functions of pistils and stamens and his own body and sensations and thus retained his native senses unperverted.

It was an unreal life, because it ignored the harshness and evil of the world and baselessly assumed that its gentle ideology was shared by everyone except a few worthless and unimportant persons, chiefly of the criminal classes. No one ever told Tony that there were vast areas of England where children had never seen things growing, where the sun was hidden behind perpetual smoke, where the rain was black with smuts, and life a sort of organized hell. No one told him of the sinister struggle for power, the futile political bicker-

ings, the miserable greed of nations. No one told him of the legions of women who conceived unwillingly, brought forth in anguish, and lifted harried years of anxiety trying to feed unwanted yet tenderly loved children, because religious fiends and political cranks refused them the elementary freedom of controlling their own bodies. Or if these, and a hundred other evils, were glanced at, it was as a thing of the past or slightly regrettable matters which would immediately be attended to by 'Science' (whoever he was) or by a few healing draughts from the well at the world's end. Yet it was neither ignoble nor Vulgar, as lives go. Even at his most critical, Tony admitted that the influence of his parents, both intentional and unconscious, had at least striven to make him a human being, caring for others as well as for himself, and not a well-dressed yahoo.

§ v

'Father!' said Tony, bursting into his father's laboratory, 'don't you think Swinburne is wonderful?'

'Well, wonderful's a bit strong, isn't it? Swinburne was all the go when I was a youngster, but I've come to think he's verbose and that his emotions are all factitious—too literary.'

'But, Father, listen to *this!*'

And Tony recited with almost awe-stricken emotion:

' *"When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Ithylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain!"*

'Oh, Father, surely you see that he knew——'

Tony in his excitement was on the point of revealing something of his own experiences, but checked himself.

'Atalanta?' said Henry Clarendon quietly, going on at his work with the neat, delicate fingers which always filled Tony with -admiration, and shame at his own manual clumsiness' 'Why does he say the nightingale is bright? It has very plain plumage.'

'But he means the voice.'

'Does he? And how can a voice be bright—have you ever seen a bright voice?'

He means clear, intense, piercing, like bright light,' Tony pleaded.

'Urn.' His father pondered. 'Perhaps you're right, but it seems a roundabout way of saying it. And then in a poem on spring he talks about fallen chestnut burrs, which are autumnal phenomena.'

Tony was stumped by this, too absorbed in the charm of the incantation to note that the poem is a progression through the year.

'Besides,' his father went on, 'I seem to remember that in one of those choruses he starts off by saying it was before the beginning of years, and a few lines further on, forgets it and talks about a measure of sliding sand from under the feet of the years. Pretty bad, that.'

'I don't think so,' Tony said slowly. 'I don't think it alters the—alters the——'

He struggled for words to express a sensation rather than an idea and failed. Henry Clarendon did not help him and went on patiently with his work. Tony turned to go, but stopped at the door.

'Father, is Swinburne dead?'

'No,' said Henry Clarendon, a little unkindly, 'I haven't heard that he's dead. I believe he's taking an

inebriate's cure at Putney, under the care of a solicitor named Watts, who calls himself Dunton.'

This was a blow, but Tony faced it.

'I don't care. I think he knew—I think he felt—I—I know he's immortal!'

But as he shut the door, he heard his father's quiet laugh and felt himself a fool.

Out of doors the sunlight was strong and clear—just like a nightingale's song, Tony thought. His mother was talking to some visitors sitting in deck chairs on the shady part of the lawn. As a rule Tony liked to see people and listen silently to the talk, but now he slipped through the rhododendrons into a little path of his own which led to the lavender. The tall bushes were in full flower, giving up their perfume in the warmth and seeming to yield gladly to the delicately sipping butterflies and the closer embrace of the bees. The air was filled with a soft humming, gentle and sensuous.

Tony pulled his camp stool under the shade of a tall lilac whose white flowers were already rusty with decay, and sat watching the quick darts and miraculously swift wings of a humming-bird hawk-moth. He could see its long tongue unroll and pierce a tiny lavender flower as it hovered in a kind of mist made by its vibrating wings, but it darted about in a restless way as if never satisfied with the flower it had and always hoping the next would be perfect. A gluttonous little blue did just the contrary, sitting on one spike and getting gloriously drunk in a methodical way on one juicy flower. You can live in either of those ways, Tony thought, and then probably end up by thinking you are wrong and the other fellow right; but the hawk-moth ought to stay longer, and the blue ought to get about a bit more.

. . .

He was a little upset by this Swinburne business. He had rather expected to be commended for discovering Swinburne on his own and was rather hurt by his father's mockery of his immature enthusiasm. It was unfair to suggest that Swinburne was a drunkard—what about their mighty Shakespeare and the Mermaid? He wondered if his mother would have been more sympathetic. Outwardly, yes, and she wouldn't have made those irrelevant matter-of-fact criticisms, but he doubted whether she would approve. 'The breasts of the nymph in the brake,' for instance.

As if the words had been an incantation, his visual memory suddenly brought before him the vision of Annie, as he had so often seen her, naked to the waist, with her breasts moist and silvery with water or downy with sunlight as she sat before her wooden-framed mirror. Annie indeed was no nymph, and she had been gone from his life for so long that he had half forgotten her, but now these memories brought her before him vividly. He almost believed that if he put aside the smooth glittering lilac leaves he would catch a glimpse of a white fleeting body which would have breasts like Annie's, round, firm, and white, with the red-brown tips flushed brighter with the sun. How lovely it would be to see a girl's body naked in the sun, with the shadows of lilac leaves trembling over her skin as they rustled in the air. And how more than lovely to hold the cool breasts cupped in his hands and feel their life flow into his fingers as his flowed out in answer, and to taste their texture and odour with sensitive lips.

That was in the Whitsun recess. In the summer holidays his cousin Evelyn came to stay for a fortnight. Tony had seen her at intervals ever since he could remember, first as a girl in short skirts with long black plaits

of hair, then in ankle-length skirts with her hair piled on her head with astonishing neatness. In those days they played tennis and croquet, always arguing and accusing each other of sharp practice. Tony's father had suggested to him that since Evelyn was a girl he ought to give way, but Tony's high opinion of women wouldn't allow him to accept this. If you tacitly allowed girls to cheat, then you were making them inferiors. They had quite a long and heated argument about it, an instinctive attitude of equality clumsily and hesitatingly opposing the hereditary English contempt masquerading as chivalry—put them on a pedestal and make it your footstool.

The rapid development of youth is like mounting a steep hill, with the landscape changing at almost every step. Thus Tony scarcely connected the Evelyn of the past with this new Evelyn, who wore white summer dresses like his mother's, and went out calling with her in the brougham, or sat on the lawn reading novels which were sent down to her twice a week in a little box from London. Evelyn dressed for dinner and sat up after Tony had gone to bed and seemed definitely to have joined the hostile party of grown-ups. She kissed him perfunctorily when she arrived, but instead of tennis and croquet and expeditions through the woods to the sheepwalks, they now hardly met except at meals.

The morning after Evelyn's arrival Tony woke early, as he often did. When the day was fine, he sometimes went out on his bicycle through the white lanes which seemed strange and empty in the morning light, or saddled his cob and rode to a high bare-hill point from which he could look at the sea where the sun made a wide dazzling sheet of trembling gold. When it was

wet or cloudy he read or daydreamed until it was time to get up. That morning he did none of these things. In a second he was wide awake, and without premeditation, without any plan or reason, following only an instinctive impulse, went to Evelyn's bedroom. His senses were intensely alert, and he trembled slightly with excitement. He did not ask himself why he was doing this extraordinary thing or what he expected. It was as if his movements were dictated by some outside power, so that he made each step in turn without knowing what the next would be—one moment he was fast asleep, and the next he was opening his door. As he stole along the oak-panelled corridor, he felt the firm, cold touch of polished flooring on his bare feet and then the warmer velvety touch of thick-piled carpet. He heard the silence of the sleeping house, but walked naturally without any sense of fear or furtiveness, and even stopped for a moment to look at the soft, deep yellow sunlight gently glowing through the drawn casements of the lattice windows.

He opened Evelyn's door without pausing, still with the queer, almost hallucinated sense of obeying an impulse outside himself, still scarcely knowing why he had come. Evelyn's room faced away from the sun and was heavily curtained, so that it seemed almost dark after the lighted corridor. As the air flowed in from the opened door, one of the curtains billowed out through the window showing him Evelyn asleep on her side and turned away from him, with a long, dark braid of hair dense black on the white sheet. He shut the door, and the curtain slowly floated back, leaving but a faint gleaming of white coverlet in the dusk. Quickly and silently he glided into bed beside her. He felt her start and half turn as his hand touched her, but he swiftly whispered :

' It's only me, Tony. May I stay for a little? '

Evelyn made no answer and did not move, either still asleep or pretending to sleep. Tony lay close beside her, feeling a warm electric radiance even through their night clothes. He did not dare lift her long white shift, but lay quite still with his hand on her hip. Then with infinite delicacy, as if he were touching the slenderest and most fragile of flowers, his hand moved slowly upward, pausing frequently, partly in fear of offending, partly to feel the exquisite yielding and firmness as his hand pressed against her. At last his hand found the low-cut opening of her shift, his fingers felt the delicate slender throat, the young strength of her chest, and then quite suddenly his hand closed on the silky globe of her breast. Both lay quite motionless, though Tony felt with sudden tenderness the quickening of her breath and the stronger beat of her heart. He scarcely dared breathe himself, though his heart was pounding, as thrill after thrill passed into his blood from his fingers and made his whole body vibrate like a chord of music.

Evelyn made no sound or movement to check him, and he lay quite still, caressing her, for what seemed a golden eternity. His closed eyes were filled with a kind of golden dusk, and all his body seemed made into a sensation as pure and fluid as light. How long this sensation lasted, he did not know; in one sense, it was eternity and he would have liked it to last for ever, but in another sense it passed like a flash.

' You must go now, dear, they'll be calling me soon.'

Without hesitation or protest he rose, smoothed her bed, and went back to his own room, where he lay face downwards until he was called, trembling and saying over and over to himself: ' The breasts of the nymph in the brake, the breasts of the nymph in the brake.'

. . .

When they met at breakfast and afterwards during the day Evelyn gave no slightest sign of complicity, even by a glance, Tony sought for none, for it seemed to him that what had happened had been between two utterly different selves from those now dressed and talking as usual. Yet he lived the whole morning in a state of suspended happiness, almost unconscious but real, as we sometimes feel after a particularly happy dream. Indeed it all seemed like a lovely dream, so complete was the sensation that it had been the experience of another self; and his action had been so instinctive and innocent that he lived his mood of happiness without any precise evocations of memory. Only at luncheon, when Evelyn seemed particularly aloof and frigid, did it occur to him that she might be offended with him, might complain about what he had done. Then his mood changed to a kind of terror, and he spent the whole afternoon and early evening in a long walk. He could not bear to think of this lovely experience being sullied in his own eyes by scornful reproof, to have that ecstasy degraded.

He walked through the woods, across the bare downs glaring with heat, into another wood far inland, and sat down at the foot of a mighty beech, where a little stream ran through alder thickets. The great boughs held out their flat leafage like metallic plaques of green and gold, a gleam came from the shrunken streamlet where it fell almost silently over a miniature cataract into a dark little pool, and on every side he was shut in by shadowy trunks and undergrowth. For long minutes the wood was utterly silent in the summer hush of the birds and the dead stillness of the air. He heard a jay squawk and another answer, and heard their wings as they made their way through the wood; a water-hen emerged from the reeds and began picking at the grass, and a squirrel swung gracefully down from a tree and started to nibble beech

mast. Then they too vanished, and all was silent and motionless. Once more the strange rapture came upon him, suddenly, unawares, like a beautiful peace, yet with the sense of harmony which made him feel life flowing musically into him and out from him. It was different from the rapt delight of Evelyn's touch and yet akin, but that was more intense, personal and concentrated, and this more diffuse and impersonal, a communion with mysterious beings as tenuous but as moving as perfume. It was like holding mute converse with gods.

At last he rose and walked steadily home, completely at peace, with the mystery of the woods still in his eyes. He said little at dinner and hardly spoke to Evelyn. Tired from his walk and hot bath, he went to bed early and at once fell into dreamless sleep. Once more he was suddenly awake as if a voice had called him, and once more the impulse to go to Evelyn was there. Yet he had not planned to do this the evening before, and certainly she had not been in his mind when he fell asleep. Again he moved along the silent corridor, and again the curtain in her room billowed out as he opened the door, showing her asleep on her back with the sheet pulled right to her chin.

Either grown bolder or moved by the same mysterious impulse, he slipped off his pyjamas and stood for a moment by her bedside and then softly crept in beside her. She did not start this time, and to his amazed delight he found she was naked too, and knew that she had been awake, expecting him, but feigned sleep because words would break the spell of touch. She slipped an arm around him, his face touched hers on the pillow, and their trembling lips joined in a long kiss. Tony felt as if fainting; the dusky gold of his closed eyes went dimmer and dimmer as the blood rushed from his brain,

and then slowly returned, brighter, brighter, until he felt he would be blinded, and opened his eyes—to meet Evelyn's, soft and luminous like starry flowers. The thought which overlay this absorption in divine touch was that his hand had been made for ever beautiful. They lay in each other's arms, almost without moving. Wherever he touched Evelyn or she touched him, Tony could feel an intense quivering exchange, as if they had been opposite poles of a battery. They were rapt beyond time, and it seemed as if only one golden moment had passed before they heard a clock chime, and Evelyn whispered:

'Go, now, my dear one, but come tomorrow.'

'You are like the woods and the sun and flowers . . .'

'Hush. You must go. But come . . .'

'Yes.'

With a last kiss, half shy, half passionate homage, he left her, and was gone.

Every morning during Evelyn's visit Tony stole to her room in the clear morning light and lay in her arms in the new-found rapture of touch. It was all so spontaneous and innocent. Evelyn indeed must have been startled at his first coming, and the instinctive defensiveness of women would have urged her to snub him and send him away, if something in the touch of young male limbs on her virgin body had not seemed to paralyze her, and she had yielded to his touch, almost indifferently at first, then suddenly with a joy nearly as deep as his. She excused herself by thinking it was only a sort of play with a big boy, but inside herself she knew that the touch was also a man's. The flattery of his reverence and delight was as irresistible as the touch of the young, strong male body which sought hers so simply and naturally and awoke her senses so instinctively. Yet she had

argued with herself, and even persuaded herself that she could not again allow herself to be caressed by a great boy, and locked her door when she went to bed. Not ten minutes before Tony came the second time she had awakened, lain intensely still for a few minutes, then swiftly and noiselessly unlocked the door, stood naked a moment before the mirror, and then feigned sleep as she heard his hand at the door.

Not until three days before Evelyn's departure did Tony's strange guiding impulse lead him further. It was enough to lie with his body against hers, his mouth moving over her cheek and eyes and lips, in that golden rapture. For a fraction of a second he hesitated in surprise, and then a flood of mingled tenderness and desire swept through him, and he touched her with infinite gentleness, thrilled by the touch and by the tiny soft plaint which came from Evelyn's lips. It was a decisive moment in Tony's life—for him always women's bodies would be lovely and desirable. That morning it was he who heard the clock chime and he who rose to go, and there was a warmth and depth in Evelyn's farewell kiss which he always remembered.

On their last morning he was in an agony of grief at her going, and whispered again and again that he could not let her go. She hushed him, and he began to caress her, and then with a fuller thrill of delight felt her fingers caress him. He felt as if he were rising up, up, through billowy clouds of sensation which turned from gold to bright light to intensest silver. Blind and dumb, with a musical throbbing in his ears, he soared higher and higher in the exploding silver cloud. He felt Evelyn's body quiver with ecstasy, and with a sob he yielded his very essence to her and sank shuddering into her tender fostering arms.

At ten o'clock on the last day he was with his parents

seeing Evelyn off at the station. Both were a little pale, with dark shadows under their eyes. Taking advantage of a moment when Mr. and Mrs. Clarendon were away, Evelyn took his hand and said:

'You'll not forget?'

He looked into her eyes as he replied:

'Never, never. You'll live in my heart always, like a pearl in a shell.'

She seemed pleased and then said:

'Will you promise never to tell it or hint it to anyone as long as I live?'

Again he looked with adoration into her eyes as he replied:

'I give you my word of honour, dear Evelyn.'

They were hidden behind a pile of baggage and one of the station pillars. Evelyn suddenly leaned forward, kissed him passionately on the mouth, and then, warning him with her eyes, walked back to meet his parents. Tony was trembling slightly from head to foot, but modelled his composure on hers as she said good-bye and gave a perfunctory cousin's kiss on his cheek. He did not even wave as the train drew out, but walked from the station in front of his parents, his eyes half-blinded with tears. By the time they joined him in the landau, he was joking with the coachman.

Nearly a year after he heard that Evelyn was to be married. He said nothing; afterwards he went upstairs and kissed the pillow of the guest-room bed.

§VI

Tony had many friends in the neighbourhood, but as he grew older there was none he valued so much as old Henry Scrope of New Court. The Scropes were a younger branch of the great northern family of that

name who had come south in the fourteenth century and acquired estates in the service of Edward III. This family fascinated Tony, as representing the hereditary leaders of the English people, easily accepting the leadership due to their charm and energy, but at the same time conscious of their responsibilities. Honourable to the point of fantasy, obstinately loyal to their principles, they had very seldom been able to square their loyalty and honour with their interests. They remained steadfastly Catholic under Henry VIII and Elizabeth, though every male turned out at the threat of the Armada. A Scrope fell at Newbury in Rupert's charge; his heir was heavily fined as a malignant and went overseas to swear loyalty to the Prince. Disgusted with the general whoopee of the Restoration, this Scrope became a Puritan, and was heavily snubbed by James II, but remained loyal to the Stuarts on his abdication and flight. The next Scrope was the only trimmer in the family, joined the Church of England, served with Marlborough, and restored the family fortunes by adding another thousand acres to the estate. During the eighteenth century the heads of the family contented themselves with looking after their land and drinking mildly treasonable toasts, but the younger sons, as their portraits showed, formed an imposing array of bishops, generals, and admirals.

All this Tony found out very gradually, chiefly from his father, for though old Scrope was proud of his descent, he could very seldom be induced to talk about his family. He would, however, talk about his father and grandfather, whom he had known as living beings, puncturing his remarks with a deep laugh.

'My grandfather,' he said, in answer to Tony's eager questions, 'was a remarkable example of political levity, my boy. In his young days he was all for France and

the sans-culottes, and lighted a bonfire when they killed poor Louis the Sixteenth, ha, ha! After the Peace of Amiens was broken, God knows by whom or why, he became as violently anti-French, or rather anti-Bonaparte, as he had been enthusiastic for that ruffian Danton. His idea was that Bonaparte had to be brought down to save the Revolution. Though, mind you, it wasn't such a bad idea, but he let it carry him too far. He gave Billy Pitt his word of honour that he was sincere, and was trusted in all sorts of shady negotiations with Austria and Russia and those infernal Prussians. But he ought to have seen where the whole thing was leading, and certainly not have served that unmitigated scoundrel Castlereagh. The Congress of Vienna and the foundation of the Holy Alliance gave him an apoplexy, metaphorically speaking, and he resigned just as he was about to be named ambassador to the grand duke of Tuscany. Very characteristic, my boy, very characteristic!'

'And your father?' asked Tony. 'What did he do?'

'He was a man with very strict ideas of honour and public duty,' said Henry Scrope gravely. 'Always wore one of those high chokers even when he rode to hounds, and flogged me black and blue for telling a lie. And he a diplomat, ha, ha! But he was quite right. There's too little regard for truth nowadays. My father got on swimmingly with Palmerston for years, but then came that row when Palmerston threatened France with war without telling the Cabinet. My father took a very eccentric view and said he'd be damned if he associated any longer with a fellow who risked his country's honour. I'll be damned if I can see where the point of honour comes in, can you?'

'Well, no,' said Tony hesitatingly, 'but he might have

felt that Lord Palmerston was not acting quite honourably to his colleagues.'

'They could always have repudiated him, nothing new about *that*, ha, ha! It was confounded cheek, but not dishonourable. And our prestige stood high in those days. But, at all events, my father resigned, married and begat me, and then spent a lot of time in the East, which is how I happened to go there. An eccentric man, my dear boy. Even now when I think of his throwing up a first-rate career for such trumpery reasons, I have to laugh.'

'But,' said Tony, 'I thought you resigned from the diplomatic service?'

'I was never in it, thank God!'

'Oh, I'm sorry, I thought——'

'It was a most discreditable affair, my dear boy,' said Henry Scrope impetuously, his blue eyes flashing under the huge brows and his large white beard seeming to swell with indignation, 'most discreditable, not to me, but to the whole nation. What happened was this. Owing to my wanderings and a knack of picking up languages I was sworn blood brother with certain tribes. They wanted political independence. I went to the then prime minister merely as a private gentleman, and told him the circumstances. He gave me his word, mark you, his *word*, that England would support them. I gave them *my* word. Then some political intrigue came in, and the fellow ratted. Broke his word, by God, the prime minister of England! Imagine my feelings when brave and honourable men went to their death, believing I had betrayed them.'

And what did you do then?' asked Tony, intensely interested.

'Do?' exclaimed the old man. 'Why, I did the only **thing possible: returned** to England prepared to horse-

whip the fellow. He refused to receive me, so I published a pamphlet in very moderate terms, explaining the situation, and pointing out that he was a liar, an assassin, and a despicable time server. They said my very proper protest was a seditious libel and clapped me in jail for three months, ha, ha, ha! Did me a world of good, my boy. No man's a man until he's been jailed for his principles. As soon as I was free I started East to raise a Moslem revolt from Burma to the Sudan, but they were too artful for me. Wouldn't let me land. So I translated my pamphlet into fourteen languages and distributed it gratis. I was a fiery sort of fellow in those days and swore I'd never set foot in England again.'

' Yet you came back.'

' I came back. I was just about to start on an expedition to follow the track of Alexander's army from the Bosphorus to the Hindu Kush, when I got a round robin from some of my tenants complaining of harsh treatment from my agent. I took the first boat home, found out they had told the truth, discharged the ruffian with ignominy, and have acted as my own agent ever since.'

As Tony rode home, he could not help smiling as he thought of the old gentleman's vehement account of this affair, in which he had probably been the magnanimous dupe of both parties by assuming them to be as disinterested and honourable as himself. There was something noble in old Scrope, Antony felt. His vast body which was only at ease in loose tweeds or a burnous, the thick flakes of white hair and the broad beard always so exquisitely cared for, the delicate muscular hands, the sweeping forehead, the pure frank eyes under shaggy brows, the shapely nose and healthy tanned skin—all gave the impression of nobility. To an unsympathetic critic there might have seemed something ridiculous in

Henry Scrope's fantastical scruples, in his vehement expression of opinions and his deep laugh. Tony liked them, and even the laugh which annoyed many people seemed to him a virtue; it was as if something in the man stood back and laughed with generous mockery at his own whimsies and impetuosity. And there was something noble in Scrope's present existence, among his books and trophies and memories and the tradition of honourable lives, with the deer and horses which came to feed from his hand, the peacocks on the lawn which were always fighting with the turkeys in the yard, and his masterful but generous treatment of his tenants. He was a born leader, whom men would gladly trust and obey—only he had not been allowed to lead.

Coming to the crest of the long hill which led to the down, Antony stopped to breathe his horse and looked back. Most of the valley below and the sweep of the next ridge inland was Henry Scrope's. A blurred golden sunset gave promise of rain, and the first couriers of the coming gale passed in sudden gusts over the high ground. Through the trees he had glimpses of the white stone classical facade of New Court, and two of the turrets from the Tudor side of the house, remembering how Henry Scrope preferred the eighteenth-century rooms as 'more civilized, my dear boy,' though he put old tapestry and armour and vast firedogs in the Tudor hall, which was the admiration of all post-Pre-Raphaelite visitors. Thin wood smoke rose from the farm chimneys in the silent valley and drifted eastward. Bluish mist lay under the great domed trees, and a church spire with a little cluster of houses almost hidden in foliage marked the village. In a complete lull of the wind he heard the distant caw of rooks returning from the fields, the low of cattle passing to their stables for the night, a flat tinkle of bells and timid bleating from a hidden

flock somewhere far away from him on the down. Then another gust of the rising storm came and quenched all these sounds in the hiss of short grass.

It was a perfect civilized landscape, a harmony. Every tree, every hedge, every stem of wheat and barley, almost every blade of grass in the rich meadows, had been planted by men. It was not 'nature'; there is no wild 'nature' in England, but land civilized by toil and love. Antony thought of the hedgeless fields of Belgium and north France, where it seemed as if men cared only to wring the last farthing of profit from exhausted ground—he had not seen the opulence of central and western France. Here in England, to his imagination, men seemed to be more generous, to care more for their way of life than for their living, and in his enthusiasm he imagined that the nobility of Henry Scrope had somehow become visible in his land. That was unfair, because centuries had gone to its making. His heart tightened, as he thought that this harmony which had lived so long was doomed. Already it was half parasitic, since Henry Scrope's income allowed him to reduce rents and to care for the land like a gardener. The next heir was a gambler. . . . And there was the ruthless competition from countries where land was worked like a slave, not loved as a wife.

—A fiercer gust of wind almost blew away his hat and swished the horse's mane. The sun had almost vanished in a huge tumult of dark clouds like threatening mountains. Antony turned his horse and cantered away. As he unlatched the gate into the drive of Vine House he felt the first drift of rain.

After a visit to old Scrope, Antony always felt happy and, as it were, inspired. True, Scrope was representative of a generation long past, and the only one of the

county gentry known to Antony who inspired anything but a wish to avoid them. Yet you only need one leader, and what better leader than a strong Don Quixote with a deep laugh? If Antony had been asked whom he would like to resemble when he was an old man, he would certainly have replied: 'Henry Scrope.' Yet even with this youthful hero worship, a passion which admits little contradiction, he sometimes allowed himself to be checked by the rather acrid criticism of his acquaintance—he could not honestly call him friend—Stephen Crang. And this criticism sank the deeper, because Tony could not but admit that there were truth and justice in some of his remarks, and even confessed to himself that while Henry Scrope might represent an ideal past where faults and wrongs were hidden under the gracious patina of time, Crang perhaps was the voice of a terribly near future.

Stephen Crang was the son of a small Devonshire farmer by a Welsh mother. The land was poor, and as conditions grew harder, the farmer was forced to sell his land to pay debts, and emigrated to the grim industrial town of Huddersfield. Stephen, the third son and fifth child, made his way by sheer ability, won scholarships, and instead of the university career he had dreamed of, was forced to accept the life of an elementary schoolmaster. He had a wife and child, and while devoted to them, resented them as a main link in the chain which bound him to poverty and obscurity. This division, this disharmony, ran through his whole nature, perhaps because of his mixed heredity and the disappointment and hardship of his life. His years in Huddersfield, when he was sometimes hungry, always in patched suits from his elder brothers, always in squalor, noise, and dirt, had burned his sensitive nature like evil fire. He could neither forget nor forgive. And yet, to Tony's im-

mense surprise, Stephen hated the country too. He mocked at Tony's passionate love for woods and downs and solitudes haunted by lovely presences. For Stephen the country meant the long fight against stubborn land, piercing cold winds, drenching rains, intolerable heat, foot rot in the sheep, rust among the wheat, disease on the root crops, and all the misery of debt and failure which breaks the unlucky farmer's heart and spirit.

⁴ For you the country is a playground, as it is for most of the bourgeoisie,' Crang said to Tony. ' If you'd had to live from the land, you'd know what a bitter, cruel thing it is. Your father has about twenty acres, which he uses as a pleasure ground,' with infinite scorn, ' and a *bird sanctuary*, breeding air vermin to rob other people's land. If he had two hundred acres, do you think he could live out of them? '

' I don't suppose so,' replied Antony with some distaste. ' He's not a farmer, you know. But I haven't noticed that Mr. Scrope's tenants think their land a bitter, cruel thing.'

That old nabob! He's got three thousand acres, but they're only pleasure land too. He keeps rents low and he's always doing repairs, I grant you. But he doesn't do it out of the land. He does it because he has an income, and whatever it comes from, his money is made for him directly or indirectly by the working industrial classes. He subsidizes his land as a hobby.'

Regretfully Tony had to admit that this was at least partly true. He sighed lightly. They were sitting in Crang's little room, every wall of which was covered with books in rough deal shelves, while books were piled on the table, on chairs, and in heaps on the floor. His eye noted some of the titles and authors' names: Nie-

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tzsche, *The Industrial Revolution*, *A Theory of Money*, Ibsen, *Capital* by Karl Marx, Sorel's *Violence*, *Towards Democracy*, Max Stirner, Durkheim, Brandes, Jaures, Russell—most of them little more than names to him. He sighed again, thinking humbly of his ignorance, admitting frankly that Crang was vastly better read in these men than he ever hoped to be. And yet, wasn't Crang merely well read, not educated? Books had inflamed his discontent, and unselfish discontent may be a noble thing, but they had left his mind a chaos of abstract systems. They had closed up his senses with their abstractions and visions of perfect organization which depended ultimately on everybody agreeing with the author and carrying out his behests. These world revolutionaries, he thought, demand a more absolute obedience than any despot..

He looked up and caught Crang's eye, scornful yet affectionate. With a gust of compassion he felt the bitter years of undeserved suffering in Stephen's sharp pale face, with the deep-sunken cheeks, saddened tragic eyes, and the harsh lines round the lips which made him look disdainful and resentful. Years afterwards Antony saw the same look, but deeper, more tragical, and without the resentment, on the faces of infantrymen coming from the front line, and thought of Stephen—for whom life had always been a sort of squalid war. True, there were softness and generosity in the man, but they all went to the suffering people with whom his childhood and youth had been spent, while his hatred and contempt for what he called 'the system' and 'the exploiters' were terrible and passionate. Yet here, to Antony's instinct, there intervened a hopeless anomaly. Crang didn't love these people as human beings, he shrank from being with them; he wanted to use their wrongs and sufferings as argument for his own resentment, and at best

he wanted to impose on them *his* view of what constituted a better life. Actually Crang far preferred Tony's company to that of any of the village people or the Huddersfield workers or his own brothers. And he was in a flutter of gratified vanity when he was visited by Henry Scrope, however much he might afterwards pretend to despise the 'old nabob.'

In spite of this irreconcilable difference, which was perhaps simply a difference of temperament, Antony was glad to listen to Stephen Crang and to learn from him. He had at least the sense to realize how grossly ignorant he had been kept of the baser realities of society. Yet something in Crang repelled him, seemed to belittle everything, and to reduce all life to the problem of subsistence. It was quite natural, Antony reflected, that poor intelligent men, seeing their intelligence made useless by their poverty, seeing also the power of money, should believe that economics were the beginning and end of every problem. He never told Stephen of his silent ecstasies in the sunlight, and naturally never even hinted at the golden world he had touched through Evelyn, but his faith in the life of the senses sometimes wavered before Stephen's corroding bitterness. When Crang spoke of the misery and narrowness of farm life, or pointed out, with a kind of acrid glee, that all natural life was perpetual warfare, every tree, plant, and animal struggling fiercely with others, preying and preyed upon, Tony sometimes wondered if he had not plunged himself in a sentimental dream. He did not want to be like the artistic lady who wailed that Florence was *ruined*—they had erected a factory. And yet all his instincts cried out that his life of the senses was true life, and that»Crang's life of abstractions and systems and catchwords, with its basis of hate and envy instead of love and generosity,

was false. Tony knew as much about natural cruelty as Crang did, from the hawk which swoops on the starling and the weasel which sets its sharp teeth in the neck of a squealing rabbit to the wasp which lays its egg in a grub paralyzed to immobility by its sting and doomed to be eaten alive. Yet in the moments when he was carried out of himself in ecstasy, a modern nympholept, all this horror was resolved in a living harmony. No doubt there were hawks and weasels among men, but either they must give up being hawks and weasels or cease to boast that human society was built on nobler laws with finer instincts.

'You mustn't mix up the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution,' said Crang impatiently one day. 'The French Revolution was political, and ended in the substitution of the bourgeoisie for the King and nobles. It never really tackled either the social or the economic revolution. Gracchus Babeuf had a glimmering of the truth, as Saint-Simon had afterwards, but Babeuf was murdered—and anyway, Saint-Simon is as out of date nowadays as Fourier and Louis Leblanc'

Tony said nothing. The names meant nothing to him, and he felt that Crang's Saint-Simon could not be the snobbish duke, whose posturings and prose and malice delighted Henry Scrope so much. So he was silent, and Crang went on:

'The Industrial Revolution was a very different thing, and is primarily English, though it has swept the whole world. It was the substitution of the factory and the machine for the old cottage crafts. And don't imagine that the cottage craftsmen lived in any dream of John Ball,' Stephen went on angrily, seeing that Tony was about to speak. ⁴ They lived in hovels, whole families working fourteen or fifteen hours a day for a pittance,

while the gentlemen of England you admire so much wanted to tax their farthing dips.'

'And did they?' asked Tony.

'No,' Stephen replied reluctantly. 'They didn't in the case I'm thinking of. A man named Cowper protested, and the tax was dropped.'

'Cowper, the poet?'

'Yes. But they were ruthlessly exploited and lived lives of ghastly squalor. When machinery was installed in the weaving industry, the workers rebelled and burnt it. They were shot down and machinery was installed again, this time for ever. People flocked into the factory areas from all over the country, partly because they got higher wages and partly because they were caught by the get-rich-quick temper of the bosses. Fools! As if men got rich by working for bloodsuckers! When they had wages, they squandered it on drink, to forget their miseries; when they were out of work, they and their children starved. Oh, I tell you, the history of the Industrial Revolution is a hideous thing. Did you know that little children worked in the mines like pit ponies? Of course you didn't. You bourgeois never do know the crimes and misery that made your money. *Non olet. Pah!*'

Antony looked at Crang curiously, a little startled by his vehemence and a little repelled by it, but at the same time moved by the personal suffering it revealed. Stephen's pale face was paler than ever, his Welsh eyes glowed, and his drawn-back lips showed his teeth. He seemed possessed by a paroxysm of hatred. Tony was very little affected, rather to his surprise, by the violence of the emotion, perhaps because complete loss of control was distasteful to him. But at the same time he reflected that the wrongs implied by this hatred, the intense

resentment, must indeed have a real cause. To give Stephen time to recover, he said gently:

'What you tell me I partly knew, though your personal feeling naturally makes me feel the injustice more acutely. It was not my fault that I was born in a class and in a part of the country where these things are not understood. I refuse to look on my parents as "blood-suckers" or to believe that they are in any way directly responsible for the horrors you describe. Their error lies in their very virtues—they are too gentle and well meaning to believe that suffering is inflicted for gain. And if anything is wrong, they believe it'll all come right. Moreover, the state of affairs you describe belongs to an already distant past, and the voice of conscience about them came from the class of bourgeois artists you despise so much—Southey and Shelley, Elizabeth Brownning and Ruskin, and William Morris.'

Tony had only been talking to give Crang an opportunity to recover his control, and stopped when he saw he had succeeded. The only words Stephen had registered was the phrase about things of the past. He spoke with a sort of exhausted calm which Tony found more touching than his former violence.

'Things of the past? But does it surprise you that the memory still rankles? If you had been a worker in an industrial town in the north you wouldn't be surprised. Yet it is true that some of the most savage conditions have been modified, thanks to the trade unions.'

'Who gave them the idea of trade unions?' Tony asked. And then, as Stephen did not reply, he added: 'I've heard you say that the condition of the workers was never so bad as it is today. Is that historically true?'

Stephen flushed, and his brown eyes began to glow again, but he checked himself.

' Logic-chopping doesn't help, Clarendon, In the first place, this so-called humanitarian legislation is a farce. Children may not be employed, true, but nothing is done to make up the loss of their wages. A mother working in a factory is supposed to have four weeks' holiday—without pay. And of course she is back at work at the earliest possible moment. All this tinkering is no good. The whole system must be altered. There must be public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.'

Tony had an intense dislike for these stereotyped phrases, which to his instinct were political catchwords, grandiose in sound, but representing half-thoughts, half-truths. He said:

' That implies the transformation of half the community into state officials. Do you like bureaucrats? And on what principle will you produce, et cetera? '

' We shall produce for needs, not for profits.'

Another phrase! Tony pursued him:

' And how will you estimate needs?'

' To each according to his needs, from each according to his means.'

' And how if the sum total of needs greatly exceeded the sum total of means? I myself am but indifferent honest. I think I should probably need a deal of luxury. In my case it would be planking down my penny and pocketing your shilling.'

' The state would soon deal with you,' said Stephen grimly.

' Coercion! But your system breaks down at once—my needs are not satisfied.'

' They would be satisfied within reason.'

' Whose reason? The reason of a government department? Thank you for nothing! '

' Economically you are a parasite,' said Stephen, ' and

as such you would naturally be swept away. You benefit unjustly by the present evil system and naturally don't want it altered. But it will be altered in spite of you and your class. Nothing you say can conceal the fact that the people are in chains, chains of ignorance, poverty, labour, and hopelessness. And as Rousseau said, the people are the human race, the rest are so few as not to matter.'

'Then Rousseau did himself an injustice, for he achieved more than ten million peasants. All the real advantage of humanity comes from exceptional individuals, from leaders. Your world of bureaucrats would eliminate them, and we should stagnate—and stagnation means retrogression. The difference between us is that you take a quantitative and I a qualitative view of humanity.'

'So you think all's right with the world?' sneered Stephen.

'No,' said Tony, getting up to go, 'I honestly don't. I do believe you and my own eyes and ears, which tell me much is wrong. But I believe the lesser should serve the greater. What determines the quality of a community is the quality of its leaders, and the nature of the obedience which they receive. In your calculations you leave out almost everything that is human in mankind. You think of men only as economic units with a few elementary needs to satisfy. You leave out all the hopes, longings, aspirations, ecstasies, tragedies, comedies, splendours, failures of mankind—in fact all that makes life interesting and lovely—and hand us over to the mediocrity of committees, who will plant us in garden suburbs with the right brand of sterilized milk and the plays of Bernard Shaw. To hell with committees and systems! The people should follow their natural leaders, men like Henry Scrope. . . .'

' Ah !' Crang interrupted sardonically. ' I thought we should get back to the old Squirearchy. Once a snob always a snob. Well, enjoy it while it lasts—it won't last long.'

Antony flushed with annoyance at the insult, but let it drop and said good-bye. He wasn't going to let Crang goad him into losing his temper. He wondered, as he walked home, why he always left Crang feeling ruffled and unhappy, while Henry Scrope always stimulated him, always made him feel that life was a splendid adventure, worth all the downs for the sake of the ups. Was it, as Crang suggested, because they benefited unjustly by a state of slavery in others, and were therefore unwilling to abandon their privileges? He struggled with this thought, which was unpleasant. He admitted that his objections to Crang's arguments had been amateurish and youthful, yet he felt he must hold to his instincts.. One of them was that they had both been beside the point, trying to fit humanity to theories, instead of allowing humanity to evolve its own principles and methods. He laughed to think how seriously they had taken themselves in the role of unacknowledged legislators of humanity. And how little either of them really knew! These amateur dictators! The thought struck Tony that social reform should begin at home; but even that left him pondering uneasily its implications.

A few days later Antony took himself and his crude strugglings with a problem bigger than himself to New Court. He found Henry Scrope sitting on the lawn under a huge cedar in a carved oak chair. He had a plaid over his knees, and beside him stood a small table holding several books and a hand bell.

' I saw you riding through the park,' he called to Antony as he approached, ' and rang for another chair.

It'll be here in a moment. How are you? Your parents well, I hope? '

A huge borzoi suddenly emerged from behind the oak chair, sniffed at Tony's heels with its long delicate nose, and then sat, very statuesque, beside the old man's knee, plainly saying 'I hope you realize the enormous efforts I spend in your defense?' Henry Scrope patted its head, while Tony sat down in the chair brought him. After the usual preliminaries Tony rather hesitatingly told the gist of his last discussion with Crang. The old man listened attentively.

'Crang, eh?' he said. 'Fellow with a grievance, out of harmony with himself. Well, let him air his grievance—that won't do any harm, except to himself. I aired *my* grievances at one time. I don't dislike the fellow.'

Tony was surprised at this and at Scrope's light tone, having somehow bothered himself into the belief that a great deal depended on one's attitude to this set of problems.

'I don't dislike him,' he replied, 'but he upsets me, puts me out of humour with myself—and then he's so acrid, so violent, so envious.'

'Why shouldn't he jog you up a bit? And if we'd had his life I've no doubt we should be envious.'

'Then you agree with him!' exclaimed Antony in surprise.

'Not a bit. His attitude is the natural result of his life, as mine is.' Then, seeing that Antony looked a little hurt by his light tone, he added kindly: 'My dear boy, you're looking for the absolute in these matters as in everything else. And why not? It's the privilege of youth. To want absolute justice for all men is a noble dream, but it's only a dream. You can't make silk purses out of sows' ears, and you can't make a perfect

society out of the confounded blackguards we all are. Human society is old, a patchwork of generations. Crang wants to scrap it and start again. If I were your age, I might agree. But, however much he scrapped, he'd have the same material—human beings.'

'You're rather evading the issue,' said Antony perplexed. 'Don't you agree that there are evils in the world? Don't you think we should all try to remedy them?'

Henry Scrope laughed and patted the dog's head.

'Look here, my dear boy, these are problems for highly trained experts, not for you and me and the man in the street. Privately I doubt the experts as much as I doubt anyone else, and I particularly dislike these fellows who want to whisk us into Utopia on the strength of their reading in a few textbooks. And I doubt any real betterment—it's generally two ha'pennies for a penny, if not for sixpence.'

'I told Crang I didn't believe in his abstract systems and looking at people as if everyone were like everyone else. I said what we needed was leaders, men like yourself.'

'Ha, ha!' Scrope laughed at him. 'Ha, ha, ha! That was nice of you, my dear boy, but I must point out that I'm an incorrigible ruffian, weak-kneed and spineless, and quite incapable of leading anyone anywhere. But, come, let's drop this. What are you going to do now you've left school?'

'I hardly know,' Antony confessed hesitatingly. 'I wasn't particularly successful at school. . . .'

'Quite right,' interrupted Scrope, 'docile scholars are blockheads. Shallow soil takes the scholastic seed—deep soil needs ploughing.'

'I wasn't ploughed,' said Tony, with a feeble effort at a pun, 'but I didn't pass very brilliantly. My father

thinks it's useless for me to go to a university, since I have no scientific ability.'

'Thank your stars for that,' said Scrope emphatically. 'Intellectual plumbers, my boy, and superstitious into the bargain. Any idea what you want to do in life?'

Antony blushed. 'I'd like to make things,' he said shyly, 'I — I rather thought I might be an architect.'

An architect! 'exclaimed Henry Scrope in consternation. 'But that's only another form of plumbing nowadays. They won't ask you to design St. Peter's or the Escorial—you'll have to plan butchers' shops and rows of villas.' Then, seeing Tony's confusion: 'But we all have dreams. When I was your age I went about Venice in a black cloak and a gondola, and thought I was a bigger genius than Byron. You won't be such a fool as that, ha, ha!'

Antony couldn't help feeling that old people, however kindly, were always a little discouraging. 'It's rather difficult, isn't it?' he said.

'No need to get huffy. You've plenty of time. Look here, you've lived eighteen years of your life in England—why not ask your father to let you travel? Have a look at Europe, and then get out of it. No man knows the realities until he's seen the East.'

'I'd thought of that. In fact, I've asked Father to let me go. . . .'

'Where?'

'To Paris.'

Henry Scrope glanced at him:

'Paris, eh? Why Paris?'

Antony went red and could not hide his confusion.

'It seemed the obvious place,' he said awkwardly. 'The nearest great capital and . . .'

'Everyone should see France, especially since French

civilization and French vitality are underestimated in England. But don't imagine Paris is France, and don't go getting into mischief there.'

Seeing that Tony made no reply to this insinuation, he went on :

'Advice from old men to young is not only a waste, it's an impertinence. Each generation thinks it's entirely different from its predecessors and turns out to be much the same. When I look back on my life I see I've made mistakes, and so will you at my age. But go ahead and make them. That's life. Don't think you can be perfect, because you can't. Build your character, so that when the test comes, as it will, you meet it like a man. Don't be duped by general ideas and high-sounding abstractions. Travel, see the world, get to know what men are, work at something that interests you, fall in love, make a fool of yourself if you must, but do it all with gusto. That's the main thing—to live your life with gusto. There may be other lives hereafter, but you'll deserve them, if they come, all the more for having lived this one to the full. Avoid the lymphatic. There, I've done preaching. Now tell me I'm an old bore.'

§VII

Antony scarcely needed to be told that life should be lived with gusto; in fact Scrope might have done him a service by pointing out that in a world chiefly devoted to getting money, and hence devoted to every species of sham living and sham thinking which keeps the process going, a gusto for life would have to be paid for very heavily indeed. At all events his excitement was keen enough to satisfy the most strenuous advocate of *joie de vivre* as the train ran through the outer suburbs of Paris, rumbled portentously over the iron bridge at Asnieres,

and came slowly to a standstill at the terminus with a great hissing and gasping of self-satisfaction from the engine.

For the last fifteen minutes of the journey Tony stood by the window of an empty third-class carriage, hat on head, his bag on the seat beside him, so impatient to arrive that he scarcely noticed the squalor, the odd blocks of tall buildings with bare, unfinished sides plastered with advertisements, which had invaded the gardens of the white-fronted, green-shuttered little houses of an earlier time. He had no exact idea of what he was going to do and see in Paris, and had carefully refrained from making a clear schedule of how time was to be spent, as his father had urged. Nor did he look forward with any excitement to presenting his letters of introduction to his father's friend, the eminent professor at the College de France, or even to Scrope's friend, the Comte de Roussigny-Perincourt, who lived in the Etoile. Paris was an adventure, the first adventure on his own, where new and of course delightful things were bound to happen. And then, he would be seeing Margaret, a fact of which he had informed nobody, not even his mother. That knowledge had filled him with confusion when old Scrope had laughingly warned him against getting into mischief in Paris. An extraordinary thing, Tony reflected, that even the nicest old gentlemen always assumed that young men were panting to go to brothels.

Porters in blue blouses, with huge moustaches and deep throaty voices, were seizing the immaculate pigskin bags of the first-class English milors, who suddenly looked very English and self-consciously superior. Tony passed through them, carrying his own bag, and chose a fiacre instead of a taxi. It was bright yellow with blue cushions, and to an eye used to English hacks

the horse seemed small and miserable. However, the fiacre rattled along quickly enough over the pave street, after Tony, to his immense confusion, had been forced to write down the name of his hotel, because the driver couldn't understand his accent. He noticed the different indefinable smell of Paris—savon de Marseille with a flavour of coffee and garlic—the tall houses with white shutters, the trees in the streets, the sudden vistas, the clearer air, the speed of the traffic, and the furious altercations of cabbies and taxi drivers at cross-streets. But it was all confused and dreamlike, and the drive was over before he had calmed down enough to enjoy it.

The hotel recommended by his father in the Rue de Rivoli was of course too big, too expensive, too fussy—all red plush and gilding and ormolu and huge curtains. He saw at once he'd have to find another, but took a room for the night. When he had washed and changed, he looked carefully at his map of Paris. Yes, the Rue de l'Universite was on the other side of the river, across the garden he could see from his window. Outside again, he was conscious of the warmth, which seemed to penetrate his light clothes and smoothed his skin. The garden was different, too, with rows of trees exactly mating, a few rare flower beds, but many fountains and statues. People were walking about, some hurriedly, but most at leisure, and there were many children playing quietly and gently as if born civilized. He paused a moment to watch a merry-go-round for very little children, who sat with solemnity and some terror on horses and pigs, while an old man who looked a bit cross turned a wheel which made them slowly revolve. Tony thought he should have given them more for their ha'pence, and decided that would be a grand job for his old age. Then, as he walked diagonally across, he found himself looking at the great courtyard of the

Louvre with its elaborate facade and high slate roofs, and, turning to look back, found his sight carried down an immense vista to the Arc de Triomphe. The nobility of line and shape went to his heart.

Going on, he crossed an embankment street, tree-shaded and noisy with traffic, and was surprised to see an enormous steam tram with seats on top facing outward to both sides, puffing its way along—and to Versailles, if its placards were not false. He perceived there had been a Revolution. Midway across the bridge, he paused again to look up the river. Behind him the sun was descending in an enormous haze of gold; overhead swifts dashed and screamed across a sky of peculiarly tender blue, the delicate pale blue of the He de France; before him rippled the sun-glittering river with a train of heavy brown barges slowly surging up behind a tiny smoke-plumed tug and two long whitish river boats crowded with passengers gliding almost noiselessly. The river facade of the Louvre was nearly hidden in sunlit greenery, and the bright grey towers of the cathedral seemed to kneel among treetops. Beyond the trees to the right was a dome of good proportions which looked southern and Italian in the clear light. If only that superb vista had not been cut across by the iron foot bridge—a serious, unforgivable blunder in people who could plan with such clear-cut dignity.

A little tired by his journey, a little dazed by the light and noise and the emotional response to so much new beauty, he was glad to find himself sitting in the cool, dark parlour of Margaret's pension, waiting for Margaret. The room seemed filled with objects, all imitation Louis XV, except for a clock and candelabra with bronze sphinxes, very pseudo-Empire, and the undoubtedly nineteenth-century cushions, tablecloth and lace

chair covers. It was his first introduction to the bazaar or concierge style of furnishing so dear to the French, and rather a shock after the Sheraton at home. . . . A voice was speaking in English:

'So there you are! When did you cross?'

'Margaret!'

Her fingers were cool in his grasp as she shook hands in a rather shy way, holding her arm out as if to keep him at a distance. They sat down at opposite sides of the table, and Tony noticed her dress was a kind of brownly scarlet and that the short sleeves showed her white slender forearm and wrist. She said:

'I really never expected to see you here. How long have you been in Paris?'

'I crossed today. Oh, Margaret, I told you at Lady Hodgson's dance that I should come if you were going to be here, and I wrote you that I was coming. Didn't you get my letter?'

'How was I to know you were serious?' She laughed a little nervously. 'What are you going to do with yourself here?'

'I hoped I should see you, for one thing.'

'Well, now you see me!' Her laugh was again rather nervous and self-conscious. 'I hope you didn't make such a journey just for that?'

'I'm quite capable of doing so,' Tony replied quietly.

His mood of exultation was falling as swiftly as a bird shoots down from the upper air. He realized that he had over-anticipated and built too many improbable dreams round this meeting. The Margaret of his imaginings had been a dream Margaret, who had always acted and felt as he wanted, while all the time the real Margaret had been going about her daily life, cleaning her teeth every morning and having music lessons. He had dreamed of an astonishing, an unheard-of rapture

all those weeks; and now they were sitting with an ugly tablecloth between them, making dull conversation, and scarcely even friends. Fool, he said to himself, make a note of this, fool, that you can never count on others to share your feelings or respond to your moods. He heard Margaret's voice:

' Anyway, there's lots to see here, and I expect you'll find plenty of friends. How long are you staying? '

' That depends,' said Tony, rather feeling at the moment as if he would like to take the next boat; ' but I was rather hoping that we might go about and see things together. Couldn't you come out and have dinner with me tonight? '

' Oh, I'm afraid we couldn't!' exclaimed Margaret. ' You see, we're dining with the Weatherbys and then going to the Opera. But I might be able to lunch with you some time this week. I'll ask Mother.'

' Is your mother here? ' asked Tony in some dismay.

' Why, of course. You didn't think I'd come to Paris *alone*?' Her tone implied some unspeakable turpitude.

' No, of course not,' said Tony hastily and cravenly, though to himself he was wondering why on earth not—wasn't she a sane adult? He felt, probably rightly, that the reflection would not be well received.

' Let me see,' Margaret said, with an air of social importance Antony rather disliked, ' today's Monday. I know we're engaged for lunch tomorrow and Friday, and I *think* Mother accepted an invitation for Wednesday. So perhaps I could come on Thursday. I'll go and ask her.'

Tony opened the door for her, as she went out with a little self-important rustle, and felt a double stab at his heart, from her beauty and exquisite youth and from her foolish pose of superiority. What cheek! He

went back to his chair, and a slow anger took possession of him. What cheek indeed! But let me get this clear. Am I merely suffering from wounded vanity and disappointment or is she really trying to humiliate me? I'm half inclined to discover an unbreakable engagement for Thursday—but, no, that would be transparent and petty. I must be careful. Never again, never again, give myself away so frankly and unreservedly. And yet how beautiful she is!

The door was opened by a liftman in uniform, and Margaret came in. Antony stood up and remained standing.

'Mother says please excuse her for not coming down, she's just starting to dress. I can come on Thursday, and there's a concert at the Salle Pleyell in the afternoon we can go to afterwards. If you want to go, you'd better get tickets at once, because they're usually crowded.'

Antony was more than a little staggered by this cool assumption of free entertainment—and he had intended to be very economical, so that he could stay in Paris as long as possible. But he decided in a flash that the only thing to do was to be perfectly casual. He took out a pocket calendar, trying to conceal the fact that its pages were perfectly blank except for the one word 'Margaret' written under that day's date, and said:

'Right. Thursday. I'll call for you at twelve—with tickets.'

Margaret noticed his change of tone, and said half timidly:

'It's awfully nice to see you again, Antony.'

He bowed half mockingly and said:

'The pleasure is entirely mine.'

He knew she'd get that—they had laughed together at a prancing old beau at a dance, who kept making that

inane remark to every woman in the room. Without waiting a reply, Tony opened the door for her, and in the large white-and-gilt entrance hall shook her hand carelessly, saying:

' Good-bye.'

And nothing more. Though he knew she was gazing after him, he did not turn or look back.

Antony had to admit the wreck of his dream of rapturous days with Margaret in Paris, yet he was by no means unhappy. He realized quite sensibly that other young people were not allowed the freedom which had become as natural as air to him; and, after all, it was scarcely Margaret's fault if her parents insisted on her behaving like a young lady, instead of a human being. And, though this was harder to accept, it was as well to realize that his own values, which he chose to assume were the real and vital ones, were by no means accepted as such by other people. He pondered a good deal over this and saw in a flash that anyone who intended to try to live life fully for its own sake, to live 'with gusto,' was bound to be disconcerted in relations with others. Which did not prevent him from falling into the same error.

His first thought was to move from the pretentious hotel, which, in addition to everything else, annoyed him by its pompous similitude to Margaret's—which was a second-class pension masquerading as a first-class hotel. In a side street on the left bank he found a little room high up in a not too dirty *hotel garni*. True, the room was very small and had only one tiny window, but that looked right across Paris, and then it only cost a franc a day. Tony felt contented and even rather virtuous at living in a room which only cost a franc a day. What was the use of paying six or ten times as much for pseudo-furniture and tip-seeking gentlemen in livery?

He put his clothes into the drawers of the small yellow chest, arranged his books on the table, got some flowers, and felt as romantic as if he were living in *Louise*. Only there was no Louise; which did not trouble him very much. If Margaret . . . But then, since Margaret couldn't or wouldn't, it was better to be alone.

He might have been rather lonely but for a chance encounter. He presented his father's letter to the professor, who took him to a cafe, talked very solemnly about his father's researches, called him *jenne homme*, and seemed rather glad when Antony refused an invitation to dinner. Tony did not press this acquaintance and did not even trouble to risk a similar reception from Comte de Roussigny. At their second meeting Margaret was very charming, but also rather expensive and exacting. He had to take her to a large restaurant near the Champs Elysees, which was certainly delightful, but cost nearly as much each as ten of Tony's ordinary meals. After the concert they drove to the Bois, and Antony so far forgot his imposed self-restraint as to hold her hand. They parted on much warmer terms, with a promise from Margaret to spend most of a day with him at Versailles.

He tried not to think about her, above all tried not to build too much on this Versailles excursion, yet found himself thinking about her whether he was at the Louvre or the Carnavalet, whether he was sitting under the trees in the Petit Luxembourg or walking after sunset along the quays. Yet in spite of his happiness in all this and a special kind of happiness which somehow radiated from the pleasant life of Paris, he began to feel his solitude a little. Among all these people solitude was false, he felt, and though they made a perpetually moving pageant, you needed the tranquillity of woods and fields and

hills and the shy movements of wild things to be quite happy alone. He sat at a cafe for a long time that evening, sometimes watching the people, sometimes reading a Baudelaire he had bought from one of the stalls under the Odeon, and then took a long walk along both banks of the Seine, watching the reflected lights which swam like fireflies over the water and hearing the soft rustle of leaves from the dark foliage above him.

The next morning he was looking very carefully at Giorgione's Fete Champetre, partly indeed with the second-hand emotion of Rossetti's sonnet, but partly also with a real appreciation. The sense of the perfect moment in life, the harmony of the landscape with the naked woman still listening to the lute player after the last note was lost in the noon hush, made him fancy that Giorgione had here interpreted in colour a finer example of his own moods of rapt delight over beauty in solitude. It was a subtle enigmatic poetry, yet with the confidence of youth Antony believed he had found the clue to it. . . • He half started as he became aware that someone near at hand was gazing at him. He looked up quickly and saw a tall, rather shabby young man, a few years older than himself, with an awkwardly high collar, a tangle of light hair, and astonishingly blue eyes. Tony was about to look away with English haughtiness when the young man smiled, and there was something in the smile, a mixture of cheekiness and sweetness and sadness, which forced him to smile too.

'You like it very much?' said the young man, half friendly, half mocking.

'Yes,' said Tony, and then, without knowing why, he added: 'It seems to interpret me to myself, as if I also had a glimpse of the perfection he saw fully and clearly.'

The young man smiled again, and again Tony was not certain whether he was friendly or mocking.

'Ah, yes,' he said carelessly, still looking at Tony and not at the picture. 'Yes. It's perfect, certainly, but too remote and ideal, too *arranged*. You know it's really rather like Spenser's Faerie Queen. . . .'

'Oh, do you think so?' Tony interrupted. 'But that's allegory and this is symbolism. There's a whole world of difference.'

'Quite right,' said the queer man abruptly. 'I was wondering if you'd see that. But it is pastoral, and all pastoral poetry gets very tiresome—one longs for corduroys and hobnail boots—bread and butter instead of jam puffs. By the way, my name's Robin Fletcher. What's yours?'

'Antony Clarendon,' said Tony, smiling at his abruptness, but rather liking it.

'I say! An-tony Clar-endon! Oh, my, you aren't a swell, are you?'

Tony could not help laughing aloud and then stopped suddenly, as he noticed the attendant was looking rather severely at them, while an old woman copying a Titian portrait almost shook with annoyance.

'Don't mind them,' said Fletcher, 'they live on these pictures, like mistletoe on a tree, only they aren't so pretty. Let's go and sit in a cafe, shall we?'

Tony hesitated and then agreed. On the way out he stopped to look at the Botticelli frescoes at the head of the stairs and then at the Charioteer and Winged Victory halfway down.

'You like them?' said Fletcher. 'So did I, but I've come to prefer more primitive and remote art. These people are somehow the beginning of our rottenness. I want to get outside it all, outside Christianity and the

beginnings of Christianity. But we'll talk about that later on. Where are you staying? '

Tony told him.

'Just round the corner from me. I'm at the Hotel du Dragon. How much d'you pay for your room? '

'A franc a day.'

'I say! Are you staying long? '

'No, only about a fortnight. Why? '

'I'm paying two francs a day, and it'd be a great saving if you'd let me take over your room when you go. But I shouldn't have thought you'd be living that way.'

'Why? ' asked Tony, amused.

'Oh, your clothes and the way you talk and all that. May I have the room when you go? '

'Of course, I'll ask Madame. Are you going to live in Paris? '

'Here's a cafe,' said the young man, drawing Tony to a table under a large striped awning, 'What'll you have? Cafe creme? So will I. Gargon, deux cafes cremes. Look here, I'd better explain myself. I saw you in the Louvre yesterday and thought you were English. I liked your face and the way you really looked at those pictures, instead of gawping round with a Baedeker, and made up my mind I'd speak to you. I'm a novelist.'

To Antony's immense surprise, the young man burst out laughing.

'Isn't it a joke? ' he said, still gasping. ' Me a novelist, what ho! '

'Why shouldn't you be? ' asked Tony.

'Yes, why shouldn't I? ' said Fletcher mockingly, and then hitting his chest and addressing himself: 'Come on, you, have a little decent pride 1' He suddenly turned serious: 'I'm twenty-four and I've had nine years in an office, left it last week and came from Tilbury to Havre

on a cargo boat and then walked to Paris—all on the strength of fifty pounds for a first book. Bit mad, isn't it?'

Tony felt it was a bit mad, but didn't say so. He rather liked this young fellow who talked about himself so frankly, and admired his adventurousness—here at least was someone living life with gusto. Fletcher leaned forward and gazed at him with eager eyes:

'There's a new spirit about,' he said, 'you must have noticed it?'

'I've noticed that people, especially here, seem restless and uneasy, if that's what you mean.'

'No, I don't. Look here, I've been watching people for a long time and noticing how things are going. There's a marvellous enthusiasm in the working classes all over Europe, and they're going to do away with the old order.'

'Socialism?' asked Antony, disappointed.

'Yes, if you like. But not just municipal housing and state insurance—though, why not? And certainly not the class war. All classes will be in this. This is 1913. By 1918 we shall have a new world, and it'll be brought about by good will. People are sick of the old ways, and everywhere we shall have men working for life, not working for money.'

It sounded extremely simple, so simple that Tony didn't know how to voice his objections without being offensive. There was Crang over in England who was going to achieve perfect justice by hatred, and now this young man who was going to do it by good will.

'Of course,' added Fletcher negligently, 'we shall have to do away with machinery—that's what has enslaved men and made them inhuman.'

'What!' exclaimed Tony. 'Even railways and steamships?'

'Why not?'

'Why not! Good heavens, man, without railways a big modern city would be starving in a few weeks, and without ships all England in a few months. That's why.'

Oh, we shall deal with that all right,' said Fletcher airily. 'It's only a matter of good will and working out the details. Anyway, it's better to be a bit hungry than dead, isn't it?'

'I suppose so.'

'Well, most people are dead nowadays, and they've got to come to life again. You can't call it "living" to spend your whole life running a machine. I'd rather be dead and buried.'

So would I. But I rather think that you and I will be eliminated and the machine slaves will increase and multiply.'

Yes, and the machines will run them, and run them into destruction. They've *got* to be abolished.'

Antony felt discouraged; these futile arguments always depressed him. It struck him as curious that Fletcher should despise the exquisite dream poetry of Giorgione and at the same time believe that his own incoherent dreams could actually be realized. Yet it was undeniable that machines had made the world a dreary place, with mechanical slavery on the one hand and a senseless, bored luxury on the other. Could one go on drawing money from the machine world and at the same time dodging responsibility for it by living in the pleasant places of the world where the machines hadn't penetrated? He said gloomily: '

It seems to me we're rather approaching a sticky end than a glorious beginning.'

This started Fletcher off again, and, after denouncing

Antony as a capitalist blackleg and faintheart, he proceeded to sketch pictures of the wonderful pre-Christian world which was to be created by good will. Antony partly listened and partly allowed his attention to wander. Next to them a grave gentleman with a silky beard was reading *he Petit Parisien* with deep attention; two prettily dressed girls were pouring water through a lump of sugar held on the top of the glass by a nickel contraption into a clear green liquid which immediately turned cloudy; beyond them a large family had occupied three tables and seemed to be celebrating some event with decorous hilarity; and at the other end of the cafe terrace a group of students were consuming chopos with inconceivable rapidity and talking even faster. Across the square a tall belfry with a pointed top cut its pattern on the serene blue, and whenever the noise of traffic and conversation lulled he could hear the scream of darting swifts. A row of fiacres sent a faint stable whiff through the dusty, petrol-laden air, and horses and cabbies half slept in the sun. Trams jangled along the boulevard between trees, and occasionally a long green bus thundered round the 'Corner and drew up with a screaming of brakes for people to get off and on. A newsboy shouted 'Edition speciale—La Presse-e!' People passed continually, alone or in couples, and Tony caught fragments of talk—'figure-toi, mon cher'—'et p'is alors-s'—and constantly the Parisian 'vee.' It all looked very normal and peaceful in spite of the bustle, and if indeed these people were machine slaves and wage slaves, as Robin Fletcher kept assuring him, they seemed to bear up remarkably well. At that moment Antony felt that cafes were possibly a more effective instrument of good will than even municipal slaughter houses and compulsory inspection of pregnant women. . . .

The day before his promised excursion with Margaret, Antony went alone to Versailles, so that he could guide her to the best things without tiring her and wasting time. His impressions were clear, if fragmentary. The people who made the place might have been supported by infamous wrongs, they might not have been humanitarian, but at least they had the taste and sensibility to make their surroundings a civilized harmony.

Since it was a week day and early in the season, there were not many people—children with nurses or mothers and an occasional group of tourists with slung cameras and glasses. Antony was so much absorbed in the mood of the place that he scarcely noticed them or their incongruity in those stately walks and galleries. He wandered about for hours, absorbing this disciplined beauty and, at the same time, sensitive to the dignified melancholy of this deserted home of kings. Not even the fresh spring green on the magnificent trees, the song of birds, and the placid sunshine could veil the melancholy, any more than the curious, gentle sadness could destroy the beauty. It was not that he regretted the past or played in his mind any costume drama of historical figures. Indeed he found it quite impossible to imagine the place in garish newness—the palace still building, the trees mere geometrical arrangements of saplings, and the fountains oppressive with gilt. The Versailles he looked at had a more delicate beauty than the Bourbons had ever seen, though their artists might have dreamed it. The spirit of the place had not quite fled. There was a faint scent, a far-off music, of fine lives which had here found an expression quite independent of the despotism of which this was supposed to be the infamous monument. The bourgeois mechanical world is utterly incapable of such a creation. And it is glozing an inferiority on very cheap terms to sneer at the absence

of baths and water closets, or to denounce corruption and the exploitation of labour. There is no *sursum corda* in the contemplation of water closets and drains, and in the way of corruption and exploitation the industrial world makes the Bourbon monarchy seem honourable and benevolent. And—have no fear—it will bequeath no Versailles to posterity.

It was already early twilight when he got into the train for Paris. The outgoing trains were filled with people returning to the suburbs, but not many were going to Paris, and he had the dimly lit apartment to himself. From the window he saw vague, unfamiliar shapes of wooded hills and in the distance the vast glare of Paris answering the sunset. He felt that decline of energy and spirits which falls with the twilight on lonely persons in a strange land, and he was weary with walking and the sense emotions of the day. Would Margaret feel the spirit of the place, or would it be for her simply a park and a palace with scraps of history and a few names and dates one had to know? To go there with someone who did not kindle would be to lose the poetry and find the tourist haunt. How little one knows another! She might respond, might even find more than he had, or she might trot out the old commonplaces about living in the past and being 'modern.'

He closed his eyes and tried to remember the points he wanted to show Margaret—the great entrance court and the ornate Louis XIII centre, the view from the terrace down the *tapis vert* to the far, melancholy horizon, the fountain with the Donatello children in relief and the allee down to the Neptune fountain with the double row of lovely bronze children playing, the fountain with the grapes, the red-veined marble columns of the Grand Trianon and the blue-and-gold ironwork

of Trianon sous Bois, the Pompadour pavilion. . . . And, above all, the avenues of trees. Here they had made a great poem, symmetrical as a Racine tragedy, from trees, just as the English made formless lyrics from their flower gardens. How Stephen and Robin would scoff at his sentimentality over an old show place of rotten despots! But why deny an experience, especially an experience of the senses? And what twaddle the attitude of *connu*, *connu*. As well refuse to live the passion of Lear and Hamlet because everybody read them, as refuse the experience of Versailles because everybody went there.

Versailles and Paris—symbols of two conflicting human faiths, the mystical belief in the man-god, the Pharaoh, in whom all lives are centred and fulfilled, and the mystical belief in the people-god which can do no wrong, whose voice is the voice of a god and whose oracles are those of wisdom. All history might be seen as the conflict of these two principles—inextricable confusion, interminable cross-purposes. And neither could do without the other—complete victory of either led to stagnation and sterility. What are the people without heroes to inspire them, what the heroes without the people to work for? Heracles is as senseless as a Pre-Raphaelite knight-errant, unless he labours for the people. The religion of the people which dissolved the Roman empire had to be embodied in the story of the life and passion of a man-god, and then, to survive, was forced to form a hierarchy with a senate of priestly princes and a triple-crowned servant of the servants of god. When the man-god is Alexander, the people themselves become heroes; when he is Trajan, they share his tranquillity, and posterity calls it a golden age. But how when he is Heliogabalus or Louis XV? Even that passionate Revolution had to speak with the voices of

Danton and Robespierre, and when the people acted through Carrier and Fouquier-Tinville . . . Bonaparte. A century and a quarter later we are still struggling to carry out the ideas of 1789. But the passion has died down to heckling at the polls, and the Rights of Man dwindled to municipal trams, state insurance, and thirty bob a week minimum wage. Stale, stale, mediocre, stagnant, sterile. They were to renew the world, and they squabble over money and the parish pump. Let me introduce two centuries—Danton! meet Mr. Sidney Webb.

As it happened, Margaret did not want to go to Versailles, so Tony's apprehension and plans for her to see just the right points were wasted. They took one of the river boats and walked in the woods beyond St. Cloud.

It would be false to say that Antony had not looked forward to these hours alone with Margaret, but certainly he was far from the rapture of his journey to Paris. For the first time in his life he felt perplexed, even timid, in his relation to another person. He was not even certain of his own feelings towards Margaret, though he realized that the image of her had faintly or vividly coloured every moment of his days in Paris. He was struck by the contrast between his former feelings for Evelyn and his present relation to Margaret. The first had been a sudden spontaneous flowering of deep, unsuspected instincts and sense perceptions; and, although he did not know it any more than Evelyn, they had unconsciously fulfilled the old Hellenic prenuptial rite of the boy-lover, so beautifully described by Callimachus. The second was muddled with self-consciousness and uncertainty.

In Margaret's case, his passionate impulse to lose himself in another, to live wholly in and through another,

had received a check. With dismay he found himself acknowledging that very likely he could never again form a relation so clear and pure and perfect as that with Evelyn. But that idyll had been lived in the morning of the world, in the lovely fresh dawn of living. Now impulses and emotions were complicated and distracted by all that was so mawkishly described as 'soul' and by the clumsy if necessary rules of society. Evelyn and he had innocently stolen from the tables of the gods, but if they were lovers they were not companions, there could not have been any permanence. Permanence! That delusion! Permanence in a life which was no more than the rainbow on a passing cloud, as lovely but as volatile as light itself. He laughed to think of Margaret's father gravely enquiring into his means and prospects of supporting a family—not that, O gods, not that! And yet how passionately he wanted Margaret's companionship, how tender the feeling of devotion she aroused, how curious this sense timidity, this feeling that he did not really want to touch her but only to live in her presence, a presence which transformed the world into beauty and left no room for ennui.

This passed through Antony's mind, not as formulated thought, but as fragments of sensation and emotion, while they sat together on the vibrating but gently gliding river boat. Unconsciously influenced by Robin, he was rather carelessly clothed, and had committed the usual English solecism of wearing tweeds in a foreign capital. Margaret was almost elegant in white, with a red hat and red parasol, which made her look more mature, and more remote in the sense that a lady is never quite a human being. But she was unexpectedly charming and gentle, letting him feel, more by her manner than by words, that her former attitude had been unintentional, forced on her by mysterious rules of

family and social decorum. Antony did not trouble to analyze this, only too happy to be at one with her again, to feel from her gaiety and infrequent words and glances that she was happy to be with him, and that somehow to be young together was very heaven.

As they climbed slowly up the green slope from the river, pausing to look at the fountains and basins and statues, he talked to her about Robin.

'He's an interesting fellow,' he said, after describing how he had met Robin and their talks together. 'At first I thought he was just odd and one of the usual Socialist cranks. But he has suffered a lot, without going sour, like that schoolmaster, Crang, at home. His ideas sound queer and senseless at first, but they hang together. And his Socialism is really an extreme form of Individualism, but there I'm with him. We want to settle this elementary question of human subsistence once and for all, and then get on with a really human life, our own individual lives. But his personality is his real gift. . . . Can one describe a personality? '

'You like him very much?' asked Margaret, with a tiny, subtle jealousy in her tone which Antony did not notice.

'Yes, I like him. I suppose a journalist would say he is a rough diamond. He's downright, even rude from our standards, but genuine. And there's a real sensibility under his mannerisms. In a drawing room he might be merely ridiculous, but on his own ground he's—almost inspiring. He's helped me to get myself clearer.'

'I don't think you need anybody else's help,' Margaret protested, and this time Antony noticed the slight jealousy, which did not displease him. 'I've always thought you too clear and downright in your views. You make no allowances.'

'Why should one? Make allowances in passing judgment, yes, but if you start making concessions about yourself, you'll soon find you're ground into the commonplace. Other people can help us to see ourselves from outside, just as we can only feel the quality of our own country from abroad. I feel much more English here than at home.'

'Well, I think you're getting a bit Frenchified, just as that man you picked up has made you Socialistic'

'Oh, Margaret, why not? Why should I not learn from Robin? Why shouldn't I take what France has to offer me? Do you think they can alter the essential me? We have to give ourselves to others before we can get anything from them. It's right to hate what you think is evil, but we only grow through what we love. Hatred is dynamic, the sword of god. How can I not hate a gross, evil-faced man, whom I know to be an oppressor, who has wormed and bullied himself into power, and uses his power to thwart every effort towards human betterment and happiness? Is that Socialistic?'

ⁱ 'I think we ought at least to try to love everybody. . . .'

'No, no!' he interrupted eagerly. 'We can feel kindly to them, but we can't love them. Love is the most intimate, the most personal thing. It is like a flower which can only be given to one person at a time. You cannot give a flower to a crowd or a country. If you love, you must give all yourself, and feel yourself accepted—and perhaps in love it is harder to accept all than to give all. We know what we give, we cannot know what we have to receive.'

'You ask a great deal,' she said, pretending to laugh.

They had passed the top of the hill and were walking on a narrow path through thick undergrowth which was dusky yet pallid under the shade of the enormous trees high above. Antony gently took Margaret's free hand,

and they stood facing each other on the grassy path' Again Antony was caught up in the strange feeling of obeying an impulse outside himself, as if words and actions were dictated to him. His eyes were on Margaret's face, and he felt rather than saw the sparkle of light as the foliage was swept aside by the breeze, and a group of sparrows flew with shrill twitterings down the long, narrow avenue.

Margaret! I was speaking generally, but I now know that I was really speaking to you. I was not making love to you, I was and am loving you. I can't see beyond that. I can't and won't make promises. What are words? All I know is that now I seem to live in and through you only.'

She said nothing, and without knowing how or why he found that his arm was about her and his mouth on her soft lips, murmuring words which even then struck him as foolish and inadequate but somehow necessary. But the mind was overwhelmed in a second by the sense of timeless ecstasy, not the pure golden light of sensation as with Evelyn, but a rainbow of emotion where touch was lost in a vague immense yearning. It was not a woman he was holding, but love; not a lovely body, but an ideal passion. He had shut his eyes to know wholly the divine touch of Evelyn; and he now shut them to grasp a dream, not knowing that he had abandoned the real for the impossible. . . .

It was Margaret who first noticed that in the far distance a *garde-champetre* was walking towards them. They separated and went on slowly, not speaking. Margaret smoothed the hair under her hat and patted down the slightly ruffled neck of her frock; she was a little flushed but seemed to Antony strangely self-possessed, already fully clad in woman's armour of uncon-

scious duplicity. You would have sworn that not even the thought of kisses and passionate words had ever brushed so demurely frank a virginity. He almost doubted his own senses which told him that she had not only received but answered his kisses, not only listened to his incoherent whisperings but replied to them. His cheeks were still burning, his heart thumping, and all his limbs trembling as they passed the *gar de-champ etre*, Antony in silence, she with a calm 'Bon jour' in answer to his 'Bonjour, 'sieur, 'dame.' Was she as unmoved as that? As soon as the *garde-champetre* was out of sight, he kissed her again and laid his hand gently on her heart. It was beating as rapidly as his own.

Antony parted from Margaret at the door of her hotel, without exacting any pledge except that she would try to meet him for tea next day, 'to talk things over.' Neither of them knew exactly what there was to talk over, but it seemed that if a young man and a girl performed the astonishing and almost unique action of kissing each other rapturously in the woods of St. Cloud, then a situation existed which had to be discussed. Perhaps it is a merciful compensation that lovers take themselves very seriously, since nobody else does.

At a cafe Antony wrote a short message to Robin, saying that he could not meet him for dinner, and left it at Robin's hotel. He then walked about the streets, wondering how it was possible to feel so happy and why people were ever disagreeable and discontented. He was very sorry for everyone else and realized he ought not to abuse his superior position as lord of an inexhaustible treasure. He gave a beggar a disproportionately large sum, unaware that the recipient's reflection was: *Quelles poires, ces angliches, mais quelles poires!* Rapturously the stars grew out in shining

points from the dimming sky, half lost in the glow from the lighted city. Nothing had ever been more beautiful than late twilight in Paris with an invisible Margaret at one's side.

That night Antony never wholly lost consciousness in sleep, but lived a long, half-waking, always rapturous dream, partly in memories of the day, partly in vague but wholly delicious anticipation of an infinity of morrows which would all be like that day, but much more sweet. He was roused unwillingly from this by the entrance of the husky servant girl, bringing his coffee and dragging in the round tub for his bath. As he sipped his coffee, he wondered how he could endure this happiness and at the same time how he could pass the endless hours until teatime. There was a knock at the door, and the girl handed him a small folded blue telegram. Had Margaret sent him a greeting or could she not come that afternoon? He tore it open clumsily and read:

'Mother seriously injured in carriage accident return immediately Father.'

§ VIII

The journey back to England had the qualities of every journey taken in anxiety to meet some unknown disaster; it was infinitely dreary and seemed endless. By swift action Tony managed to catch a morning boat-train from Paris, and even remembered to send telegrams to Margaret and Robin. He knew perfectly well that his father would not have sent so peremptory a message unless there had been danger—and danger of something he dared not face. He was surprised at his own calmness, feeling as if he were in a grey vacuum far away from everybody, as if a stream of life in him had suddenly been turned off. Even Margaret seemed incredibly remote. At Folkestone he had to wait for a

local train, which stopped at every station; then spent an hour and a half walking up and down the platform of a small junction, and had to drive seven miles to reach Vine House.

After the shock of the telegram the first stab came when he saw that the front of the house was in darkness, and no one came to the front door, though the sound of wheels could be heard in any of the front rooms. He paid the cabman and went round to the back door. The kitchen was in darkness, too, but there were lights in the servants' bedrooms and in his father's study. And nowhere else. Antony stood quite still a minute, dizzy with apprehension, travelling, and lack of food, still with that strange feeling of greyness and remoteness, as if it were all happening to somebody else. He knocked softly and then again more impatiently. A voice he recognized said frightenedly:

'Who is it?'

'Antony. Let me in at once, Mary.'

The voice called in agitation:

'Cook, cook! It's Mr. Antony come home. Oh dear, Oh dear.'

'Hush!' said Antony angrily through the door. 'Let me in at once, and don't make such a noise.'

There was a sound of bolts and the lock turning, and he found himself facing two tearful servants in grey flannel gowns, each holding a shaky candle. He noted for ever, without noting, the cook's red, blubbered face with the hair screwed up in curl papers. A sort of wail greeted him, and he felt annoyed at their demonstrations of grief and pity.

'Hush! How is my mother?'

'She's gone, sir. Oh, Mr. Antony, she's dead.'

'When?'

'Four o'clock yesterday afternoon, sir.'

When he was with Margaret at St. Cloud, wondering how one could endure so much happiness.

'I see. Give me your candle, Mary. Where is my father?'

'Upstairs in his study, sir. He hasn't eat anything and he hasn't been to bed since the accident. Do make him eat. Shall I put some supper on the table? . . .'

'No, thanks, Mary. Go to bed now. But leave the pantry unlocked, so that I can get him something.'

Antony tapped three times at the study door, and then, as he got no answer, gently opened it. Only a green-shaded reading lamp was alight, and the soft glow which Antony had always thought so peaceful somehow looked gloomy and tragic. His father glanced up as he entered, and the sight of the bloodless face and horror-haunted eyes made Antony suddenly feel very cold.

'You've arrived,' he said, apparently more for the sake of saying something than as if he knew what he said. Antony blew out the candle and stood the candlestick carefully on some books. He went and sat on the wide arm of his father's large chair, put an arm round his shoulder, and took one of his cold limp hands in his own.

'They told me downstairs,' Antony said quietly.

There was a complete silence, except for a tiny murmur of air from the lamp which mingled in Antony's ears with the sound of his own blood buzzing. His father neither moved nor spoke. Antony found himself vaguely reading the title of a book and at the same time thinking, Is this really happening to me? and I must do something to make him go to bed. What to say?

'Did she—she say anything for me?'

'She was never conscious.'

He felt his father's hand clench slightly, and persisted:

'How did it happen?'

Flinging away Tony's hand, his father stood up abruptly :

'Don't torture me with questions! Go to bed, Antony, and leave me alone.'

Antony also stood up, pale and so dizzy that the lamp-light seemed buzzing furiously at him. Somehow he'd got to break down his father's despair. He spoke very gently :

'Don't be angry with me, Father. Remember I know nothing beyond your telegram and the few words downstairs—and she was my mother.'

'I'm sorry, Tony. But leave me, like a good lad. Tomorrow . . .'

'May I go and see her?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

He saw his father's face twitch and did not know whether it was pain or anger.

'Because—I had her put at once in a shell.'

With a shudder Antony realized that meant she had been mutilated. He fought back his tears and said still very gently :

'I can't leave you until I know what happened.'

Clenching his fingers behind his back, Henry Clarendon walked several times up and down the end of the room. Then he said:

'You have a right to know. She took out the new mare in the dog cart, and the groom did not fasten the harness properly. At any rate the mare bolted. The trap was smashed to pieces against a tree. Frances died in the afternoon.' Then he added: 'I had to have the mare shot, poor thing.'

Antony noticed that there were tears in his father's

eyes. He was succeeding, though every word was like a stab in his flesh, unendurable. Quickly he moved across the room, clung to his father, kissed him, whispering:

'Oh, Daddy, Daddy. What shall we do?'

To his horror he suddenly felt his father's body shaken with sobs, and his head fell forward on his son's shoulder. Tony stood quite still, supporting him and holding one of his hands as tightly as possible. He no longer felt remote, but frozen, and his head ached madly. He clung to one idea as if that alone mattered—somehow he must get this broken man to rest. At last, after what seemed an infinite time of pain, the sobbing stopped—it was so awful in a man, especially one who had seemed like a god to his childhood. He whispered:

'Forgive me, Father. I did not mean to hurt you so much. Tomorrow, when we are rested, we can talk. Now let us go to bed.'

Clarendon stood a little apart from him and shook his head.

'Yes.' Tony insisted. 'Take my room. I'll go in one of the spare rooms. Come.'

He led his father along the corridor, holding the candle in the other hand, and seated him on the bed. The sight of his own room somehow wrung Tony's heart again, and with a pang he wished he had not been quite so superior in casting out those two Holman Hunts. He lighted two more candles and then said:

'Wait. I'll be back in a minute.'

He groped his way down the staircase through the huge fluctuating shadows made by the candle, not daring to look towards the door of the room where It was. He noticed a faint, dreadful smell of iodoform, flowers, and something else, unnameable, which made him feel like a frightened animal. In the kitchen quarters he found

and opened some claret and gulped down half a glass. The wine steadied him and began to check the sense of miserable cold and dizziness. He found a tray and plates, arranged slices of cold meat, and tore apart a chicken with his fingers, trembling too much to use a knife. He tried to eat something and found he could not. He slipped a roll in his pocket, put two other rolls, a clean glass, and the wine on the tray with the candle, and slowly went back up the stairs.

His father was sitting still on the bed, gazing hopelessly at the wall. Tony put the tray very quietly on a small table and said:

'I had something to eat downstairs, and I've brought this for you in case you want some food later on. Don't bother to undress, just lie down. There. I'll leave one candle alight, shall I? Yes? Good-night.'

He bent down to kiss his father again, felt his hand clasped and heard the whisper.

'Good lad.'

And knew that he had succeeded.

In the spare rooms was no linen, only uncovered grey striped pillows and neatly folded blankets. Antony did not go to the linen cupboard, but made himself a clumsy bed of blankets, choosing the room which had not been Evelyn's.

§ ix

In this way Antony learned how final, how inexorable death is. And through the rather morbid ambience of his father's grief, which was the more intense since his intellectual probity refused the common consolations of survival after death, Antony was encouraged to dwell on dismal images. For weeks, waking or sleeping, he was haunted by imaginings of the accident, which nobody had seen and which remained a mystery. What had

startled the mare? In his nervous anguish Tony sometimes felt as if he were indirectly responsible, as if some force hostile to him had sacrificed his mother to wreck his happiness; and then a moment after he would feel the absurdity of such a belief. Still more frequently he cursed the clarity of his memory, which in his own despite persistently brought back things he wanted to forget. Again and again he saw the coffin awkwardly wobbling on the shoulders of men in black, whose daily task was to be mum and dismal. Then it slid to immobility in the high-wheeled hearse and looked so unutterably dead. The funeral rites themselves seemed mean and inadequate, and unendurable from their publicity. He could not rid his consciousness of the sensations of horror and revolt he had felt during the long, slow drive to the church, the waiting in miserable silence for the service to begin, the lugubrious sentimentalism which the parson and people gave to words which in themselves did not lack dignity, the awful wobbling again of the coffin to the graveside, his father's pallid, drawn face and twitch of despair as the earth rumbled down with a hollow bumping on the wood, the distant relatives he had never seen, the morbid curiosity of the village people, and the awful emptiness of the remainder of the day. It was all an atrocious outrage.

Later, when from time to time Antony visited the churchyard, it went to his heart to see the mound of broken earth gradually crumbling under rain and sun, then the covering of turfs with the lines of junction at first clear and then gradually disappearing, and finally the ugly white stone with its even uglier lettering. Tony gazed at the name and the two dates, the banal parentheses of a human life which was part origin of his own. He felt that either the terms on which humanity had its existence were atrocious and foul, or that human

sensibility had developed until it was a curse. It was so pitiful as to be almost ignominious.

Henry Clarendon withdrew into a silent brooding, which Antony was unable to break down. They scarcely met except at meals, and then the conversation was so one-sided that Tony easily succumbed to silence. His father lived in his locked study or took long solitary walks. Sometimes, when awake at night, Antony would hear him wandering restlessly about the house. All this made Tony feel as if the sun had gone out of heaven, and as if he were living an interminable series of grey, chilly weeks. Left to himself, he also walked for hours or sat brooding on the terrace or in the woods or on the wind-swept hills. But the rapture had gone, and whenever he recovered the sensation of living in the eternity of things, it was an eternity of melancholy. Apart from this, he read interminably, first his mother's books in an effort to share thoughts which had once been hers, and then almost anything he could find. This alone saved him from the mental suicide of his father's deadly apathy.

Margaret and Robin sent him sympathetic letters, which came from another world; and yet they too served to keep his vitality from sinking in the dreary atmosphere of his home. Robin had finished his second book, had it accepted, and had gone to Italy to start a third. His descriptions of Florence and Rome awakened an envious interest in Tony, and he read everything in the library he could find which dealt with Italy. Margaret wrote him about plays and operas and parties in London, and then went with her family to Scotland for the summer. The tone of her letters was friendly, but nothing more, and Tony had not the heart to feign a passion

which seemed quenched under the grey ashes of an aimless life.

The summer faded gloomily into autumn, and autumn swept into winter with a desolation of wind, drenching rains, and cold, unending clouds. Then, just as Tony was revolting against this waste of life and was on the point of tackling his father about his future, he was suddenly informed that Vine House had been given up and that in December they would move to London. Antony did not question his father's decision or enquire what they were going to do there. He gathered, though the matter did not much interest him, that their income was reduced, since his mother's money had only been a 'life interest' which she could not bequeath. Although Tony had been longing for weeks to get away from Vine House, he had never thought of leaving it for always; and London, which had seemed so attractive, now became a hated vision of fog, mud, noise and innumerable indifferent people. Even the thought of being nearer to Margaret did not allure him; he could not bear to leave for ever his terrace and the open country. In his perplexity he walked over to see Henry Scrope—since the accident he had been forbidden to ride, and the horses had been sold.

He found the old man playing chess by the fire with a young man, who was introduced as Lord Frederick Clayton.

'Just back from Central Africa,' Scrope explained, 'and very nearly didn't come back at all.'

'Why?' asked Tony stupidly.

'I was captured by a rather ferocious tribe,' the young man explained, 'and only got away by a ruse.'

By adroit questions and suggestions Scrope got through the young man's reticence, and he talked

modestly but interestingly about his experiences. From Scrope's remarks Antony gathered that this expedition had made some discoveries and had brought back a great many specimens of plants, animals, and insects. He felt rather abashed at the thought that a man only a few years older than himself should have accomplished something which interested scientists, while he was merely losing the days in mournful reveries and desultory reading. They talked on, and then Lord Frederick, guessing that Antony had something to say in private, went out, saying he was going for a walk.

'Urn,' said Scrope, when Tony had told him what was planned. 'Pleasant Christmas holiday for you, eh? But I'm glad you've spoken about this. It's all wrong for you to be moping about, doing nothing, as you have been.'

'But what am I to do? Father never speaks about it, and he's so much shattered by Mother's death, I feel I can't bother him.'

'Self-indulgence. I don't mean to criticize your father, my boy, but even if he feels that his life is over, he ought to remember yours is only beginning. We all have to lose our parents—some of us, myself for instance, lose wife and child too. My boy was killed in South Africa.'

Tony had never heard this before, and realized how deep a wound the old man's reticence concealed.

'The dead may expect remembrance, but not a self-indulgent morbidity. The business of the living is to live. You especially have to live. You're a difficult subject, though. I don't mean a *sujet difficile*, but a problem, a problem. Overdeveloped in some ways, underdeveloped in others, admirably unfitted for the rough and tumble of life. When shall we learn that education is not a

smattering of the classics and a code of manners, but a training for some definite purpose in life? Never, I suppose. Meanwhile, fellows like you pay the price. You've been made sensitive to all the attacks of life, with no shield to protect you. You should have an occupation, a profession. Still interested in architecture?'

'Yes,' said Tony, feeling somehow ashamed of his own inadequacy.

'Dreary life nowadays. But if you're serious you ought to have started long ago. Anything else you want to do?'

'I'd like to go to Italy.'

'Quite right. Travel is better education than passing exams, whatever the pedants say. Everyone should spend six months in Italy when he's twenty, and then be forbidden the place ever after. A museum, my boy, but a confounded siren if you let yourself be dragged into the foreign aesthetes' circle. Pack of effeminates and idle hounds, take my word for it. Florence is a sink. And the modern Italians, apart from the peasants, are a miserable set of self-seeking ruffians, ha, ha! They'll never be any good until they get someone with a tight hand, and where are they going to find him? But you'll see all that for yourself. I think you'd better go at once and avoid all this misery of moving and leaving your old home. Why should you be depressed any further?'

'I don't know how to set about it,' said Tony hopelessly. 'Of course, I'll speak to Father, but——'

'But what?'

'He keeps me so far away from him now. It's as if I remind him of Mother without consoling him in the least. And he'll simply think I'm trying to dodge something unpleasant.'

'Urn,' said Scrope, Mike that, is it? I think I must have a talk with him. Look here, tell him I'm coming to see him tomorrow at three, will you? '

Tony spent several uneasy days wondering what would happen. About the second week in December the housemaid came to him where he was reading and said he was wanted in the study. He went, almost with the hang-dog feeling of going before the headmaster for a wiggling.

'I understand,' said his father abruptly, 'that you want to study architecture as a profession, and that you think a couple of months in Italy are necessary for you to take certain measurements and generally make a scientific analysis of various styles? '

Antony had not formulated any such plan, but he was quick enough to see that Scrope had put the suggestion in a way to arouse his father's sympathy; so he simply said, 'Yes.'

'I should have thought that modern scientific principles could be studied better in England or Germany, but Scrope assures me that this is the right procedure. While you are away I shall make arrangements in London for you to follow—the proper lines, whatever they may be. I don't know anything about these things.'

'It's very kind of you, Father.'

This was waved aside as unnecessary.

'I should have preferred a scientific career for you—but we won't go into that. I've told you I'm not rich, and I explained about your mother's——'

'Yes, yes,' Tony interrupted, seeing with apprehension the pain in his father's eyes as he thought of the dead.

'I can't afford you anything very handsome, but this should suffice for two months or so. The cash is for your fare and travelling expenses, and you can draw on

the chief banks of Italy with this document Be careful of it, and remember you can't have any more.'

'Oh, Father, how can I thank you!'

'I shall be installed in London when you return. Til send you the address. You must make your own arrangements and—you must forget all the tragedy here—and—enjoy yourself. . • .'

And he handed Tony ten pounds in gold and a letter of credit for one hundred pounds.

§x

For the first time in months Anthony felt a lightening of spirits as the slow local train carried him through the bare, drenched landscape to Newhaven. He had discovered that by going third class and crossing to Dieppe he could get to Rome for only three pounds, and by economy he meant to stay in Italy as long as possible. And it was more of an adventure to go third class, where there would be no English and he would have to rely on the little Italian he had learned himself or picked up from Henry Scrope. Without any resentment, he experienced a growing sense of freedom and vivid interest, as if he were escaping from his father's cult of the dead.

The quay at Newhaven was dark and gusty, and the passage more than disagreeable, since the third-class passengers had only a small space at the stern just over the screw. Tony lay on a wooden bench and fought off sickness in a long reverie of his life, of Margaret, of Robin, of the books he had read and of the places he was going to see. The benches in the French carriages were hard and the night utterly dark and windy, but the speed of the train lulled him to sleep, and when he awoke the train was screaming its way into the Paris suburbs and the dawn was lifting the shadows. Alone among

the passengers he went round to the Gare de Lyon by the *ceinture* (which he discovered was included in his ticket), and then walked a little in the muddy Paris streets, had coffee and a roll and bought some chocolate. At nine he was in the train for Modane and passing through unknown country. All day he sat in his corner, reading Italian or gazing at the leafless, rather flat country. To his surprise the air grew colder as they went south. The hills near Dijon had snow on their upper slopes, and there was dingy snow at the stations farther on. It was dark long before they got to Chambery, and as the train started on the long, slow climb through the Savoy Alps he could see vague forms of solemn, snowy mountains black with pines. Up and up they climbed, stopping at small wayside stations, where men wrapped in cloaks got down from the train and tramped heavily through the snow. And in England it had been damp and warm!

Modane was icy, and even the thrill of changing his watch to Central European time did not atone for the misery of customs and interminable waiting. The empty carriage he found was gradually crowded with Italian peasants, men, women, children, innumerable bundles and infinite good humour. As soon as they were seated they began to eat (which reminded Antony that he was hungry) and to drink red wine out of large flasks. The children piddled on the floor, the women talked like mad, the men lighted black cigars which to a non-smoker stank fearfully. Then, as the train ran on through snow and darkness, they gradually fell asleep in impossibly uncomfortable positions. All, that is, but a young Italian soldier opposite Tony, who had been on leave and was going back to the war in Tripoli. His hands were huge and black-nailed and he smelt a bit, but with pleasant good nature he gave Tony a lesson in Italian and then

pulled from his knapsack a volume of Carducci's poems and read some of them with beautiful emphasis and rhythm. Antony was staggered—what was this people whose dirty private soldiers read and loved poetry? Then the soldier too fell asleep, and Tony was left as it were alone in the long carriage with its tumult of sleeping, snoring forms, its foul atmosphere, and heavily clouded windows. He nodded asleep.

He awoke to instant consciousness to find the carriage filled with cold, snow-reflected light. He rubbed the mist from the window and saw behind them the vast crests of the Alps, a lovely lucid rose against the flushing sky. Very gently he let down the window and a gust of exquisite cold air filled his lungs, and the dawn-coloured mountains seemed like a promise of beauty for ever. All the anguish and ennui of the past months slid from him like Christian's knapsack, and he felt as if he had stepped into a new life. Such moments, such a vision made life a thousand times worth living. . . . A hand touched his shoulder, a voice said 'freddo,' and a tall man wrapped in a long black cloak with a black hat politely but firmly closed the window.

A succession of tunnels and then a bend in the line wiped out the glory, and the train ran into heavy fog as they reached the great plain of Lombardy. Desolate landscape—tortured dwarf trees linked by writhing skeleton vines, and all deep in snow. At Turin, where he breakfasted and bought some food for later on, the station was grimy and cold, and everything dripping with melting snow. And there was still snow on the plain to the south, as the train made for Genoa. Antony nodded asleep, discouraged by the dreariness of snow and fog, with an almost London sun peering redly through it. He awoke feeling rather hot. They were

in sunlight so brilliant it made him blink. Not a trace of snow or mist, and the sky was a lovely cobalt, purer than he had ever seen. The train ran fast downhill, through high hills terraced with vineyards still a little golden with the last leaves, and at a level crossing he saw waiting carts harnessed to large grey oxen. They rattled through a long suburb; he caught a flashing glimpse of blue sea, white sunlit façades with green shutters, and as the train slowed down, excited voices exclaimed, 'Genova, Genova!' and the peasants agitatedly collected bundles and children.

After an interminable wait, although it was nearly an hour behind its time, the train slowly puffed off along the Ligurian Riviera. Antony had the carriage to himself, and between the annoyingly frequent tunnels, hideous with fetid smoke, kept the window open. Wafts of warm-scented air came in, and he caught glimpses of huge blue waves bursting into florid white foam as they roared on to rocks. He forgot his weariness in his excitement at the roses in white, sunlit stations, the gold oranges among dark shiny foliage, and the fluffy yellow balls of mimosa. If only there had not been so many smoky tunnels! They passed brown and white villages, with towers and campanili, and skirted little bays with palms and aloes. In one a group of naked boys rushing in and out of the surf turned and waved to the train.

By the time the train reached Pisa, darkness had fallen, and Antony was very weary. Of course there was an hour and a half to wait. He dragged his suitcase to the buffet, which was pretentious and expensive, and ate spaghetti, with rough Chianti which had a slight peppery smell. It tasted good after bottled water and hard crusty rolls with a piece of tough salami in them. In spite of weariness and the evening chill, he felt pleased

with himself for being in Pisa, and quite determined to reach Florence that night. Another weary two hours, listening in sleepy exhaustion to the grind of wheels, and he found himself half staggering across an open square with the tower of Santa Maria Novella sharply cut on a starry sky. He turned into the first hotel, fell into the bed they showed him, and in a moment was dead asleep with exhaustion. His last waking thought was one of triumph—he had gone direct from England to Florence third-class in winter, which everybody had said was impossible.

All the next day Antony wandered about Florence on foot in a dream of happiness where fatigue did not matter. It was the 21st of December, and he had promised to lunch with Robin in Rome on the 22nd.

The air in the street outside the hotel was cold, but the curving line of brownstone houses with jutting roofs was sharp as metal against the deep blue sky. He did not see the huckstering Florence of today which shows off for money the faded glories of its ancestors—he saw the Florence which its artists had dreamed. He came suddenly upon the cathedral and stopped in amazement at the great russet-red dome, the long outer wall of the nave with its patterns of coloured stones and the tall spireless campanile—recognizing them immediately from photographs, but dazzled and delighted by all that photographs cannot show: the intricate colouring, and the blue arch of sky which sets them off like jewels. It seemed to Tony as if they had always been in him waiting for this moment to come alive, as if meeting them face to face were discovering some beautiful thing in himself which needed just the flash of contact to become his for ever.

By good fortune Antony's single perfect day gave him

for always a Florence which was not a museum city but the still living symbol of beautiful and passionate lives. In his wanderings he saw the bronze gates and doors of the Baptistery, the huge chill cathedral with the altar lights twinkling in the brown gloom and cloisters and painted transepts of Santa Maria Novella, the Quattrocento altar pieces and the two basalt tombs, with none but pre-Christian symbols on them, in Santa Trinita, the tombs and frescoes of Santa Croce and the vivid Gozzoli wall paintings in the Riccardi Palace. Through a tangle of narrow streets he came abruptly upon the Piazza Signoria with the long, slender watchtower shooting into the sky like a menacing arm, the white statues at its base, the tall loggia with Cellini's Perseus and the bronze nymphs and satyrs on the fountain. In the courtyard of the palace he saw the elaborately carved columns with the vines and fruits and birds and children and sirens, delicate as goldsmith's work—blitheness, grace, a mingling of clear sensuality with exquisite idealism such as the North has scarcely dreamed and never achieved except in poetry. He went slowly down Vasari's colonnade of the Uffizi—not knowing that it was the Uffizi or Vasari's—reading the names of the great Florentines under their very mediocre statues; and then through a triple arch, like the background of a Veronese banquet, came upon the Arno running delicate green under the arches of the old bridge, the shops of the jewellers clinging like swallows' nests, the line of old houses on the other bank, and the distant cypresses and olives towards San Miniato.

It was much to see in a day, but until dark he scarcely ceased walking except to eat at a little restaurant under the cathedral where the wine was served in small flasks with long slender necks, and the food was homely but

good. At best his day was only a glimpse, but it was sufficient to feel what Florence had once meant. Everything helped him—the stainless sky, the contrast from the long gloom of a particularly dreary northern autumn, his own excitement and sensitiveness to the language of stone and colour, and the revulsion from his unhappiness in England. For the first time in his life Antony questioned one of Scrope's statements. Italy a museum? No, unless you chose to make it such by your own attitude. A liberation, a sudden letting in of light on the human spirit, like its own Renaissance. But to share it, to respond to it, you needed to love the world with your senses as they had done so perfectly. Perseus and David—the liberators.

As Antony was struggling with his bag through the throng of people in the station at Rome, he felt a hand on his arm, and Robin's voice said:

'Well done! I didn't think you'd keep your appointment. I say, you look tired.'

'Not really. I feel awfully grubby though. If I can have a wash and a change, I'll be all right.'

'Come along, then. I've got a room for you near the top of the Spanish Steps. I'm down below—Via Due Macelli.'

Robin swept him past the line of bellowing hotel touts who suddenly swarmed round them, and nipped into a fiacre.

'I say!' exclaimed Tony almost at once. 'What's that huge ruin?'

Baths of Diocletian. It used to cover the whole of this square as well. There's a church by Michelangelo and a museum of rotten Graeco-Roman stuff—you'll love it.'

'And that fountain?' Tony pointed to a dozen great jets of white water which splashed down on naked bronze women.

Oh, that's a modern thing. Rather amusing—they say there was a puritan faction against it here when it was first put up and the sculptor had to alter it. But I doubt if our own dear municipalities would allow it even now.'

No,' said Tony, glancing back at the rather nouveau-art figures which seemed to be writhing erotically under the spraying water. 'But it's better than anything of the kind in Paris. The water's superb anyway.'

That's nothing. All the aqueducts end in huge fountains. Look, there's the Moses one. There's the Paul III one near the Janiculum and the enormous Trevi and the two jets outside St. Peter's and lots of smaller ones. There's a lovely one of young human figures and turtles in the Ghetto, and Bernini's sunken boat at the bottom of the Spanish Steps, and then the round Roman basin outside the Villa Medici. Rome is the city of beautiful water, and of bells, and of architecture, and of good wine. We did very right to come here.'

'Is it always sunny like this?'

No, by Jove! It was very hot in September and lovely in October and the beginning of November, though there were thunderstorms. But we had a lot of rain until about two days ago. It's cleared up nicely for you. Don't be deceived by this sun—it's cold in the evenings and early morning.'

So I discovered in Florence. I say, there's another fountain!'

That's the Triton, and over there's the Barberini Palace. They call it baroque, but I rather like it.'

'What's that obelisk ahead?'

Egyptian—brought by one of the emperors, I forget

which. It's at the top of the Spanish Steps. You're quite near, just round the corner in Via Gregoriana.'

Antony found himself in a large, lofty room with a ceiling painted with rose garlands and *putti* and a nearly naked lady in the centre, from whose navel most inappropriately hung a shadeless electric lamp. Two tall windows looked over trees to a tumult of tiled roofs and domes and the sky. There were a huge bed, a massive round table on a curly pedestal, gilt chairs rather knocked about, several oil paintings of Rome, and a deal washstand with a cheap mirror over it. An odd mixture.

'Isay,' said Tony, 'this is a big room. Is it dear?'

'Fifty lire a month,' said Robin apologetically. 'Rooms are awfully dear in Rome, and rather scarce. There was one at forty, but it was so small and had no view—I thought you'd rather stand the extra ten and be comfortable.'

'Oh, all right. It was very nice of you to find it for me—I loathe looking for rooms.'

Antony began to wash and change, and Robin talked to him.

'Rome is an amusing place, and we're lucky to see it now—it can't keep its old flavour much longer. If you're going to see all the churches and galleries and palaces, you'll have your work cut out. I've stopped going—I'm not really interested in dead art.'

'Cosa bella mortal passa, ma non d'arte,' said Tony sententiously, quoting a phrase he had learned by heart in the train.

'Eh?' said Robin. 'For God's sake don't go aesthetic, Tony. It's the life here that's interesting. Rome's a big village stuck full of old palaces and churches, like almonds in a cake. It still has a wall, and doesn't go much outside the wall. New quarters

no ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES

are building, but it still has fewer suburbs than any other big town. Thanks to the malaria mosquito, of course. A mile or so outside Porta San Pancrazio and you're in utter solitude. It looks as if you could chuck a biscuit onto the dome of St. Peter's, and yet you can't hear a sound except the bees and grasshoppers. Rome's the headquarters of Catholicism, and yet priests have to go about disguised, and you'll find more anti-clericalism here than in Paris. There are two sovereigns, and consequently a double set of diplomats. I never dreamed there was so much diplomacy in the world. The Vatican doesn't speak to the Quirinal, and yet the royal family are Catholics. The old families still stick to carriages and have the most magnificent horses—every afternoon there's a carriage parade *on* the Pincio, and you see the most grandiose barouches with high-steppers mixed in with shabby fiacres with string harness. The Swiss Guard still wears the uniform designed by Michelangelo, and the successors of those who gently censured Galileo have a first-rate observatory. The British ambassador's Rolls is held up by wine carts. They've built an enormous new Law Courts, and it's said to have caused more graft than the famous Philadelphia scandal. The noble families have huge estates and are fabulously rich, and the slums down by the Tiber are terrific, especially in Trastevere. Yet the people seem very happy; and are certainly kind, if a bit rough. When we talk of the Romans we mean the people in Livy, when they talk of the Romans they mean themselves—they still put S. P. Q. R. on their gas lamps, and there are three senates—the cardinals, the municipality, and the senators of Italy. I'm told they mostly follow the tradition of Cataline, instead of Cato's. The other night I was in a wine shop, not far from the royal palace, and a man came in with a badger he'd just shot in the Campagna. Imagine a man

shooting a badger in Hyde Park and bringing it to a pub abutting on Buckingham Palace. I tell you, Rome's a grand place. Finished? All right, come along.'

They passed the magnificent baroque Spanish Steps, with the flower stalls at the bottom, and came upon three blind musicians, playing a primitive, monotonous, but rather touching melody on a violin and two guitars. Robin gave a coin to their impresario.

'I always give them something,' he said. 'A fellow feeling, I expect. I live on charity myself. They say the impresario treats them very badly, but they can't get away from him. Here's the Roman basin—aren't they splendid, those ilexes?'

They passed through gates and came to a sort of promenade, with gardens of oranges and mimosas in flower to their left. At the end of a gentle slope they reached an empty space, gravelled, with seats and trees and numerous busts in Carrara marble.

'Heroes of the Risorgimento mostly,' said Robin, in answer to Antony's query. 'Who cares? I've become rather pro-Pope and anti-Garibaldi here.'

'Was the papal state Socialist?' asked Tony with gentle malice.

ⁱ Next best thing to it—they left people alone.'

'I should have thought that was even better. . . .'

Antony did not finish what he was going to say. They had come to the balustrade of a high terrace and were looking over Rome. The first thing that caught his eye was the dome of St. Peter's, unmistakable in its majesty; then a vast, almost circular piazza at his feet, with trams and fiacres and people walking about like beetles on their hind legs. At one end of the piazza were two almost twin domes, and at the other end a triple gate. The rest was a sea of roofs, belltowers,

and domes, all clear and delicately tinted in the smokeless sunlight. It was beautiful but touched him less than his first glimpse of Florence—Rome was only power and splendour, Florence was human life made beautiful. . . . He started as a gun boomed over the city, and then listened to the sudden clamour of bells which started up from a hundred belfries, some deep and sonorous, others rather thin and shrill, others again clear and plangent, but all in tune.

'Midday,' said Robin. 'Now you see where Rabelais got his Ringing Island. Let's go and have lunch.'

Robin hustled him into a cab, and they drove down a winding avenue to the piazza and then into a long straight street, the Corso, to another huge piazza with a gigantic Renaissance palace to the right and a complicated mass of white marble and gilt in front.

'Horrible, isn't it?' said Robin. 'Do look at Victor Emmanuel. They still adore sculpture and architecture, but they've lost their cunning. Behind that monstrosity is the Capitol and then the Forum. This other huge thing was once the Venetian embassy—I told you this was the paradise of diplomats.'

Beyond the piazza they came to a long narrow street.

'Via delle Botteghe Oscure,' said Robin. 'Dark Shops Street, rather appropriate—look what gloom those fellows work in. Or they would be if they weren't all out at lunch. Won't start again till three.'

They turned in a porte-cochere and found themselves in a courtyard entirely overhung with vines. A few golden leaves still hung on the twisted stems, and occasionally one fluttered down in the still air.

'They've kept a table in the sun for us,' said Robin. 'Giorno, Attilio.'

'Giorno, Sigtore,' said a very fat youngish waiter with a two-days' beard black on his grinning face.

'What's his name?' asked Tony.

Attilio—Attila—ferocious-looking Hun, isn't he? He and his brother run this place with their old mother, who always grumbles about her rheumatism and cooks admirably. Shall I order?'

'Yes, do.'

'I've been thinking a lot since I came here,' said Robin, after giving rather elaborate orders to the waiter, 'and the result is that I feel more optimistic than ever.'

'That doesn't surprise me,' answered Tony, looking up through the vines at the clear soft sky and blinking a little at the sun.

'Everywhere I go I find people who are enthusiastic to do away with the evil in the world and ready to make any sacrifice for better things. It's most encouraging. We seem to be on the eve of tremendous events—by the way, do you like this ravioli?'

Very good indeed. It has interesting herbs in it. What are they?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Robin vaguely. 'Something or other. The old lady here makes them very well, rheumatism or no rheumatism. What about the wine?'

Tony sipped a little of a very clear, golden, light wine which was fragrant of grapes.

'Delicious! It's a kind of poem of grapes and sunlight—all Bacchus in a bottle. What is it?'

'They call it Trebbiano, and it's particularly good this year. They've got a muscatel too, which is rather sweet and strong, but perfect in its way. You must try it.'

'Isn't this place rather expensive?' asked Tony.

It is, rather—this lunch will cost us about three lire each. But, of course, this is a celebration. I'll show

you a place which won't cost more than a lira, including wine. You'd have to be rich to come here every day.'

They went on to fried prawns, which were curiously sweet, very tender small chicken with salad, dried figs, nuts and fresh oranges, whose flavour made Tony realize that this was the first genuinely sweet orange he had ever tasted. When they had finished, Robin recklessly ordered half a bottle of muscatel and handed Tony a cigar.

I say! ' exclaimed Tony. ' Aren't we being frightfully extravagant? I shall be drunk.'

Not on this,' said Robin. ' It's pure wine. And the cigars cost a penny each, if the expense frightens you. What I was going to say just now was this—my idea is that people like us ought to show the world how to live without waiting for all the changes which have got to be made.'

Well,' said Tony, 'aren't we doing it? If everybody felt as cheerful as I do now, the world would be paradise.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Robin. ' After all, we're enjoying this at other people's expense. No, what I think is that we ought to find some place right away from Europe and found a little colony run on the right lines—my friends and your friends and any nice people who liked to join us. We'd all do things together, grow everything we wanted and all that, and show the world what a really happy community can be, if you get away from machinery and money-making and all those horrors.'

And Robin drew a most alluring picture of all they would do and how happy they would be. He was so eloquent and enthusiastic that Tony really believed it would be pleasant and almost thought it possible. The food and wine after his long journey made him feel any-

thing pleasant was possible, but also made him very sleepy. He could not quite conceal a yawn as he answered, without much conviction:

'It sounds wonderful.'

The next ten weeks passed with such pleasant speed that Antony only discovered how long he had been away on receiving a letter from his father, asking when he was coming home and saying that he must not expect any more money. On examining his finances, he found that he still had about £65. It seemed absurd to return just when spring was beginning, so he sent an evasive reply and posted two of his sketchbooks as evidence that he had been 'studying architecture.' Tony was fully aware how slender the evidence was, for the sketches were utterly unrelated to any systematic study, and simply proved that he had enjoyed looking at buildings and sculpture. He realized he had been living agreeably, developing immensely in certain ways, but that he was no nearer the ability to design municipal abattoirs than when he left England. True, he had seen every important church in Rome, went daily to the galleries, and learned more about the arts in two months than in all his previous life. But, as Robin somewhat unkindly pointed out, all this was of no practical use to anybody and would neither be allowed nor possible in the Ideal Colony, for which Tony had been bidden to raise £500 to aid preliminary expenses.

In a sudden mood of disgust with all builders of Utopias, past, present, and future, Tony packed his bag and went to Naples. There he spent three or four weeks, completing his views on classical art, visiting Pompeii and Amalfi, and rather resenting the perpetual cold *tramontana*. When the warm weather came, he decided to follow the suggestion of the waiters at the

Roman restaurant and to spent a fortnight on the island of Aeaea, far out in the Mediterranean, about twelve hours from Naples.

§ XI

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when Antony went on deck after a night in a cabin of the weekly packet boat to Aeaea, As he ran up the rather steep brass-ridged steps to the upper deck he remembered with a twinge of surprise and remorse that he had not written to Margaret for some time. Curious how dim and remote she had become. At first he had written to her frequently, describing his excursions and trying to keep her *au courant* with what he saw and felt and the changes happening to himself; but her replies, full of small talk and little social happenings, showed him she was not interested. Yet, although nearly a year had passed since their walk in the woods of St. Cloud, he found Margaret still had not quite faded from his memory. But every other thought vanished as he came out into the sunlight and gazed with rapture on the morning.

They were headed southwest, so that the brilliant early sun was on the port beam. In the direction of the sun the sea was a rippled shield of silver and gold, intolerably bright; ahead it was dark lucent blue with a multitude of lip-like ripples, *anerithmon gelasma*, an innumerable laughter. The gliding ship cut a wave in the smooth water which ravelled out into softly hissing marble patterns of foam. The lighter but more intense blue of the sky seemed to be mixed with powdered gold, and a few very high flakes of white cirrus cloud only made it bluer and more tranquil. About five miles ahead Aeaea was swallow-dark against the light-flooded sea and horizon. Bands of light mist, already fading

in the heat, lay across the island so that it looked like a soft prism of blues, almost indigo at the summit. The island had two peaks, one higher than the other, connected by a vast saddle, where already he could see a first white gleam of the little town. Farther away were other islands, one dome-shaped, another long and ragged, and a third, far away, a mere shadow; to the east a great mountainous promontory loomed up from distant Sicily. Immortal halcyon sea, the springtime of the world, serene and stainless as it was aeons before the first men had learned speech, unsullied as when the first scarlet-cheeked ship came coasting the shore, and men saw the islands and knew there were gods.

Nearer and nearer the ship drew, and the cliffs which from a distance had seemed quite low towered higher and higher, until Antony had to bend back his head to see the crest. Huge limestone crags of yellow and pink and grey, moulded by sun and rain and vast sea winds, jutted out buttresses with a tiny fringe of foam at their base or split upwards into fantastic inaccessible pinnacles. The town, now quite clear, formed into a mass of white cubes in the hollow between the two mountains, and here and there a white roof showed between the pines and olives and vines which mounted in terraces like gigantic steps. All but the steepest and barest heights were green with trees and bushes and gardens, so that the distant blue island had now turned into an intricate pattern of greens topped by the bare crags.

At the landing stage a horde of touts and thinly disguised robbers surrounded him, some trying to take his bag, some shouting broken English and German, some thrusting hotel cards at him, some presenting hideously carved coral, while others insolently demanded that he should take a boat or a cab or give them a cigarette or

a franc. The contrast between natural beauty and human ignominy was acute. For a moment Antony thought of going back on board and leaving immediately, but then decided not to be discouraged by human vermin. He pushed his way firmly through them to a line of cabs, curtly beat the man down to half the price he asked, and told him to drive to the second village high up on the mountain.

In two minutes he got the better of his ruffled temper, for again the beauty of the place was irresistible. The white, dusty road wound upwards in long loops, first through vineyards just coming into leaf, and then with a wall of wild flowers and shrubs to one side, and the sea and sky to the other. As they mounted, the sea appeared to grow more intense in colour, peacock blue and green near the shore, and misty ultramarine to the horizon. But soon his attention was concentrated on the land. Mediterranean pines and twisted oaks and chestnuts stood among a magnificence of arbutus, giant white heath, yellow coronilla, white, red, and yellow cytisus, rosemary, budding genista, red valerian, and masses of small flowers whose names he did not know—a silvery white cluster of little bells, a tiny red pyramidal orchis, and scores of others. In a nook he noticed a clump of fading jonquils, then a slope of scented wild narcissus, and close by the road among maidenhair fern the pink petals of dwarf cyclamen.

Antony settled down at once in the one hotel of the upper village. An enormous spur of rock cut them off from the larger and fashionable village below, so that they seemed to have their backs to it and looked across the wilder part of the island to the open sea. The hotel was very simple and clean, an upper floor of tiled and whitewashed bedrooms looking over a courtyard

and garden and olive terraces, and a lower floor with two large public rooms, the kitchen, and rooms of the family. A middle-aged couple with a grown daughter and two women servants ran the place, and their homely kindness and scrupulous honesty were the more striking from the complete contrast with the shameless extortion of the beach rabble. Tony had an end bedroom, with a small white terrace edged with flower boxes of sweet-scented freesia, looking over vines and olives to a tremendous slope.

Before lunch he took a walk. He went into the small baroque church, which looked like a cheerful opera house, full of sunlight and pictures in panels with scoloped edges. The various plaster madonnas and saints dressed in seventeenth-century costume and enclosed in glass cases were like statues of the characters who took part in the various light operas which evidently went on in this sacred theatre. The organ itself, with its swollen baroque balustrade, was painted blue and white with gold pipes, and decorated with gold *putti* laughing and running, and plaques of musical instruments in low relief suspended by wooden true-lovers'-knots painted blue. Until he heard its ghastly groanings and wheezings, Tony firmly believed that no music could come from it but holy jigs and minuets and Donizetti tinklings. You could not call the church a work of art; it was a half-serious, half-playful homage to gods who were cultivated for their good offices, rather childish gods who thoroughly agreed with the inhabitants in their enjoyment of a religious romp. As Tony went out he thought vaguely of tin chapels in Wales, the puritan pomp of Westminster Cathedral, the encyclopaedic intellectualism of French Gothic, the sumptuous splendour of Roman marbles, and how many different and utterly irreconcilable Christianities there are.

The village was a cluster of white houses with gardens along an S-shaped street which ended in a tiny piazza. Here the road stopped abruptly and there was nothing but rough paths. Tony took one at random, half path, half dried watercourse, which descended rapidly and ruggedly; he perceived he would have to buy a pair of the rope-soled shoes which hung outside the village store. In two minutes he was in complete solitude, between low walls of loose stones enclosing terraced gardens. Little strips of wheat or barley or beans or pasture full of wild flowers were shaded under tall vines or olives or figs or almonds or dwarf oaks, planted to keep off the scorching sun. Farther down the walls and gardens ended, and he came to a rough slope dotted with the green battledores of Indian figs and covered with aromatic shrubs and flowers. Green and gold lizards scuttled over the rocks in terror at his approach, and butterflies hovered over the flowers. Beyond, blue sky met blue sea in a trembling haze. For a long time he sat under the shade of a pine, hearing the very faint hiss of the air through its needles, feeling the noise and throng and contacts of cities softening away under the imperceptible touch of happy solitude.

Lunch was served in the courtyard at little separate tables shaded by orange and lemon trees, which bore fruit and blossom at the same time. Antony bowed to the other guests and watched them discreetly as he ate. The lunch was simple—*pasta*, fresh fish, a dish of green peas, fruit and nuts—but the portions were so generous Antony was appalled, and he was surprised to find a bottle of red wine included. The other people were not remarkable: a tall white-bearded American with a wife who had obviously been very ill, a couple of hearty Scandinavians who ate with particular gusto, and a girl

alone who startled him by her likeness to Evelyn. It was so surprising that he partly rose in his seat to speak to her, and then recovered himself as he saw his mistake. She was only about twenty, while Evelyn would now be nearly thirty. Moreover she was taller, and, as he looked at her rather more intently than good manners permitted, he saw a dozen differences. On her table was a yellow-bound French book, but she read an English weekly as she ate, and spoke to the servant in art Italian which seemed quite native in its fluency to Antony's ear. Once she looked up and caught him gazing at her; he looked away apologetically at once, but not before his eyes had met hers for a moment and a curious little thrill passed through his blood. He was careful not to stare any more, but watched her easy, graceful walk as she left her table and went into the hotel.

Tony found the sunlight on his terrace dazzling, and land and sea intolerably bright. He partly closed his shutters, found a new sketchbook, and wrote:

'Aeaea. April 1914. I was right to come here. After fourteen weeks of looking at things I needed a pause to arrange my mind before going back to England. I find I see more and enjoy more by myself than with Robin, who nearly always jars by some belittling remark—he is terribly afraid of admiring things and of committing himself by appreciation. He says he will never allow himself to surrender to a woman; he must always be master of himself and her. We argued this constantly. "Never abandon yourself," he repeated. I said that the gift of oneself must be complete and be completely accepted, and that one must seek for this as the ideal and never persist in an incomplete relationship. He got angry and said that women were like ivy, and if

you encouraged them they strangled you with clinging—they were all parasites looking for a man to flourish *on*. Take what you want from them, and then cut away. I said that was impossible to me, and he prophesied for me life in a garden suburb with perambulators. He got more angry when I pointed out that he had described the inevitable end of his own social reform theories.

Robin is afraid that if he abandons himself to his innate love of the plastic arts he will become "aesthetic." This also seems to me wrong—how can you feel a work of art unless you give yourself to it, let it live in you? But the aesthete is like the antiquarian; both value extraneous associations and miss the vital spirit. And the morality implicit in the arts is neither repressive nor hortatory; it is a process of sublimation, a substitution of finer and finer values of physical life, which is the only life. All art is symbolic, whatever its idiom, the making tangible innumerable sense perceptions and feelings, which can no more be expressed directly than one can explain light to a blind man. The artist may believe that his art is an end in itself, but the spectator sees that it is not so—an ape is not a man. You have stopped too soon if you do not go beyond the arts, if they do not fine your perceptions and lead you to the living universe and the human nature whose infinitely varied relations they symbolize.

What I have learned here in Italy from its generations of artists is that living is an end in itself. If we do not live the here and now we might as well be dead. If there were another life I should say that the way to deserve it would be to live this one "with gusto," as Scrope said. I can imagine god would be very much annoyed at having all his good gifts cast back sanctimoniously at him. And I can imagine his dealing with these people by letting them have an endless succession of lives,

in which they always mortify the one they have in order to prepare for the next. My prayer would be: "Master, I have lived the life you gave me as richly and fully as my nature allowed, and if I have missed or misused any of your gifts it was from ignorance. If there is no more to come, accept my thanks for this unique glimpse of your lovely work. If there is another life, be sure that I shall try to enjoy it even more than this. And if you don't exist, it doesn't matter; my gratitude is unchanged." '

To Antony's surprise and disgust he awoke next morning to *scirocco*. The upper part of the island was blotted out in enormous swirling clouds which condensed in heavy showers. The wet courtyard was strewn with fallen oranges and lemons, the early roses were shattered by cruel gusts of wind, and the olives tossed madly from soaked green to dull silver. The ragged leaves of a tall palm were swept sideways like the hair of a demented virago. Through gaps in the mist he caught glimpses of a livid sea torn into crests of foam. When the servant came to tidy his room he went disconsolately down to the big common room, which was rather stuffy and looked like a jumble sale of miscellaneous chairs. A large table was covered with obsolete periodicals in several languages, obviously left by guests, and he was trying to extract a little entertainment from these withered husks when the girl he had seen the day before came in. Antony stood up to wish her good-morning, and, *scirocco* aiding as a first subject, almost immediately found himself conversing with her as if they had been old friends. Perhaps her likeness to Evelyn aided this sense of familiarity, but what pleased him was that she seemed immediately to understand and share his point of view in a way he knew could not have happened with

anyone he knew in England. She seemed to think it perfectly natural that a young man should be travelling with no defined or useful objective, just looking at things and people. It was such a relief not to be on the defensive, not to have to invent laborious explanations of oneself or hypocritically agree for the sake of peace and quiet that it was a pity there was not more golf and tennis in Italy.

He learned that she was Austrian and that her name was Katharina, abbreviated Katha. He said:

'And I'm Antony, or Tony. English.'

She smiled as she replied:

'I'd already guessed that.'

'How? By my accent in Italian?'

'No. Yesterday when I met your eye, you blushed and looked away. If you'd been a Continental, you'd have gone on staring until I snubbed you.'

'I suppose we are rather naïf and clumsy,' Tony suggested.

'Don't say it!' She interrupted eagerly. 'If you knew how sick one gets of this monkey-prancing of Italians! It's one of the nice things about Englishmen, that they respect women.'

'I wish that were true,' he replied thoughtfully, 'but I fear it's only outward decorum. In their hearts most Englishmen despise and dislike women—there's contempt even in their politeness.'

'And you are like that too?'

'No. I — —' He broke off, afraid of saying too much and appearing fatuous. 'How is it you speak English so perfectly?'

'My aunt is English, and I've twice been to stay with her. How I love England! Not only London, but those country houses and old trees—all that solid worth and comfort!'

'Yes, that is the England we like to show to foreigners. But it's only a stately facade. One real shock, and it'll collapse.'

'Oh, why do you say that? It's true enough of a—how do you say it?—an anachronism like the Austrian Empire. But not of England. England is the pillar of the world.'

Tony shook his head.

'It would take a lot of explanation—some time I will tell you about it.'

A flood of brilliant sunlight broke suddenly through the glass side of the room.

'Look!' said Katharina. 'The mist is going away. Shall we go for a walk? There's a lovely one to the end of the island.'

The moist air outside was clean and scented after the close room. The wind was falling, but the mountain mist still hung on the crests, sometimes hiding the hot sun, sometimes dispersed by it. Seawards the sky was already clear.

'It will be clear quite soon,' said Katharina, 'and then the mist will probably come back this evening. But tomorrow will be fine.'

The walled path led first through an orange grove, dripping with the recent rain and heavily scented, then past vineyards and olive terraces to a little wood of tall oaks. Beyond this the walls ceased, and there was a great open space of shrubs and flowers, with sparse, wind-twisted pines and innumerable grey boulders like an immense flock of sheep. They walked along steadily, talking and laughing, exclaiming at the flowers, the changing colours of the sea, the sudden glimpse of the domed island, an angry blue over the turbulent water. The wind was steady but not too strong. Antony felt inexplicably happy. He denied in his heart what he had

written the day before—that he enjoyed seeing things more by himself. No! It was a thousand times lovelier to see them with someone who responded immediately, and added a new perception, a keener enthusiasm to yours. He was deeply moved by the tender way Katharina touched wild flowers without plucking them, as if they spoke to her through her fingers. He had never before known anyone else who loved wild flowers in that way. Instinctively he put his hand on hers, and they walked on, lightly holding linked fingers.

The path ended at an immense jagged precipice. A thousand feet below them the blue water surged and foamed over rocks and beat itself against the cliffs. Wherever there was the tiniest ledge grew wild flowers or shrubs of dwarf feathery pines. They stood together on the edge, arm in arm, gazing down the dizzy abyss where ospreys glided over the water and screaming swifts rushed past as if playing wild aerial games. Katharina pointed to a ledge of rock about twenty feet down, already dried by the sun, and quite out of the wind. A tiny path led to it along the sheer edge.

'That's where I sit,' she said. 'Is your head steady enough to come?'

Antony was offended at her doubt.

'I've been on worse paths in Wales and Devonshire, though not over such heights.'

'Come on, then.'

Katharina went first, holding onto rock crevices and stout broom plants, and showing him where to place his feet. He was not sorry when they stood on the ledge. She looked at him smiling.

'I didn't think you'd do that. Your nerves are all right.'

Tony laughed and looked happily into her gay, frank eyes. He thought how wonderful it would be to live days like this with Katharina for ever, and that he would like to kiss her. But already she had turned away.

'Look,' she said, 'this is my seat. Even if people lean over the top they can't see you here.'

It was true. There was a wide hollow at the back of the ledge, and the rock bulged over from above, so that you could not see the hollow until you stood on the ledge itself. Long ago someone had hewed a rough seat out of the living rock, which was covered with lichen and little plants and thin grass. They sat there, mostly silent, for a long time, looking out on the now sunny sea and a sky almost clear except for an occasional trail of mist which rapidly vanished in the warm air. It was like sitting on the prow of an enormous ship, and the illusion of steady movement was made almost perfect by the occasional drifting clouds. Katharina turned her head to speak to him, but instead of listening he bent quickly forward and held her lips in a tender kiss. She put an arm on his shoulder, and he felt her mouth respond.

After a long time she whispered:

'We must go now or we shall be late for lunch.'

Tony softly kissed her hair, eyes and lips, and then released her, saying:

'All right. Let's go.'

She said:

'I ought to have made you wait longer, but I fell in love with you directly I saw you yesterday.'

'So did I—but I didn't know it until I saw you touch the flowers so beautifully.'

'You don't think I'm a wanton?'

'I should have to think myself one, if I did. I haven't one standard for myself and another for you.'

And I love you the more for frankness, for not feeling that you need play a part,'

'Many men would regret so easy a conquest.'

'Many men are fools. It is all perfect as it is.'

'So we're lovers?'

'Yes,' he kissed her hand, 'we're lovers.'

'And we only saw each other yesterday. But you're a dear lover, Antony, and,' she lifted her hands to the sun, 'you'll make us happy here, won't you, Sun god?'

On the way home, Katharina said:

'Always hide happiness, Antony. Don't let them see we are lovers. Don't. It isn't that I don't hate concealment or that I'm not proud you love me, but once people know, they always try to kill happiness.'

'How shall we explain our going about together?'

'I've thought of that. It's not a very good excuse, but it will serve, especially with Italians. I shall say at once that you are an English cousin of mine, and that we didn't recognize each other at first because we hadn't met from childhood. Remember, my Aunt Gudrun is your mother!'

On a clear afternoon Katharina and Antony climbed to the highest peak of the island. At that height the sound of the waves was inaudible; the two-sailed fishing boats, which from the level looked like large white moths just settled on the water, shrank to bright specks, and even a distant liner looked no bigger than a launch. The whole island lay beneath them like a huge green relief map, marked with the white bosses of the two villages and a twisting pattern of walled paths. The immensity of sea was given proportion by the scattered islands and the far-off promontory whose edges were lost in haze. Even in the sun the air was cool and fresh, and the only sound came from the noisy bands of swifts.

On the very top of the crest stood the ruined chapel and cell of a hermitage and a level platform which had once been its garden. There they sat down and smoked and talked.

'Curious,' said Antony, 'the lives of the hermits here. I read yesterday that there was a long succession of them until the monasteries were suppressed. I wish we knew their real lives—I don't mean hagiography, which is merely pious fiction, but their secret histories. Why they became solitaries, what their thoughts were. Whether they were just lazy, or whether they fled the world in horror at its evils, or whether they really were happy in solitude.'

'A very selfish life,' said Katha, 'and a stupid one. What could they learn of life by evading it?'

'I don't know' Probably it was boring and mechanical enough for most of them. But the finer spirits . . . So many monasteries and hermitages are in lovely places like this. I don't believe it was accidental. Perhaps some of them were really worshippers of the world's beauty hiding under a cowl. The instinctive worship—that's a bad word—of the gods never died and never can die until the world becomes a mechanized desert. And even then there will always be the sea and the stars, sun and moon, clouds and dawn and sunset. I don't scorn the contemplative life.'

'But, my dear,' said Katha gently, 'people can't live only in and for themselves; or, if they do, they're just stunted and soured. It's possible to live among people and yet feel all the beauty of the world; and isn't there great beauty in people, too? We have our own individual lives and a sort of sacred duty to make them as fine and lovely as possible.' She bent forward and kissed his hair. 'But we have a collective life too, and a sacred duty to other people. To everybody. You

might do much by working to help people. And there is a duty to the state.'

Tony sat up abruptly.

'The state!' he exclaimed. 'How sick I am of that word! It's a ridiculous god. Half my friends spend their lives solving insoluble problems by the aid of the state. But, my darling girl, the state is evil. The state doesn't mean the common good, it means governments and executive staffs. And governments spend their time and other people's money in senseless efforts to aggrandize themselves at the expense of other governments. True, they provide roads, policemen, and law courts, and the idea now is that they should supply us with jam, sardines, trams, potted ideas warranted harmless, communal gardens and amusements, and regulate most of the details of our lives, including our love affairs. States encourage breeding because they want slaves and soldiers. The Socialist state would regulate breeding in order to produce an infinite series of healthy obedient imbeciles living in state houses on state food brought by state transport in order to serve the state, and thus be reduced to a state of state stagnation. To hell with the state!'

'Perhaps,' said Katha, laughing at his vehemence, 'you wouldn't be so fierce about it if you knew more about modern Socialism. It doesn't aim at the slavery you imagine, but at providing all human beings with the necessities of life instead of allowing a few to absorb them. And by setting people free from the struggle to make a living, it would set them free to live the very life you want—the life of the senses, of the mind, of the affections, everything.'

'I don't believe it,' said Tony obstinately, 'and for love's sake, Katha darling, don't try to make me a social reformer. The very charm of life lies in the unexpected.'

Who knows where we two shall be in two or three years, except that we know we shall be together? And Socialism would organize the unexpected out of existence. It's an ideal for people without guts. I know things are wrong with human society; I know that we are all more or less dominated by wealthy crooks. But you won't improve individual happiness by collective organization, or by any kind of social machinery based on abstractions. If I say "England is happy," I say the thing that is not. There is no such thing as a human "England." There's an island, some of it very beautiful. And there are Englishmen. If I say "All Englishmen are happy," I tell a manifest lie, but I say something that is at least definite. Let's get rid of abstractions—they don't exist. I agree about duties, but I don't believe it is a duty to try to arrange other people's lives for them in accordance with abstract principles, however well-meant and high-sounding. I don't believe in trying to reform the world. The thing for me is to live my own life as fully as possible. If I can "improve" myself then I've done something towards reforming humanity. My relation with the beauty of the world, this glorious O, is my own affair, my religion if you like. And as to my duty to others, it's to men and women, not to Man and Woman. And people won't be collectively happy by becoming individually null, dull and average, as they would under Socialism.'

He thought he had convinced her, but Katha slightly shook her head and turned the conversation away. She led him to talk about English poetry, and then, a little German-sentimental, taught him some German lines which he was to repeat when he thought of her:

*' Wenn ich in deine Augen seh',
So schwindet all mein Leid und Weh;
Dock wenn ich kusse deinen Mund,
So werd' ich ganz und gar gesund'*

During several days Antony lived suspended in tranquil happiness. It was as if he had climbed to the very height of his faculties, to the mountain crest of his own islet, and then had found that he could miraculously walk forward on the air itself and inhabit the sunny blue. His senses were never so alert, so spontaneously vivid, and their multitudinous images seemed to enfold layer after layer of experience, as if they were not only real in themselves but symbols of more remote realities. In bread and wine he tasted sunlight and rain, the hard berry of wheat and the firm pulp of the grape, the fragrant essence of clean earth. The scents from the gardens and the open, sunnier spaces beyond brought back phase after phase of his own life and linked consciousness then with consciousness on the terrace at Vine House; and yet so clearly defined that the scent of lemon blossom or young bloom always meant Aeaëa. He awoke early, and the pure rose-red dawn, so clear that it looked like pellucid water gently tinted with bright colour, the song of birds, the sharp outlines of mountains and trees, undetailed and distinct as the lines in a Japanese print, were like creation, the beginning of the world. Mediterranean men had expressed that sensation by saying that the Dawn made her lover immortal. Rosy-fingered—it sounded a mere trope until you had seen it.

Living thus projected beyond himself, he did not reflect at all on his own feelings. It did not occur to him until later that it was strange to have passed those days without even desiring any closer intimacy of touch with Katharina. Yet his instinct was right—one must live the dawn before greeting the sun.

About a week after Antony's arrival on the island they went down the same path which he had partly explored on his first day. The early afternoon sun seemed

very hot to northerners although it was only mid-April. Nobody was working in the terraces as they passed, and the whole island was sunk in siesta. It was too early in the year for grasshoppers and cicadas, so that the only sounds came from their own steps and voices, the tiny rustle of a lizard, the rapid song of a warbler defying them from a bristly Indian fig, and the long shuddering swish as a grass snake glided away. Said Tony:

'You're very patient with me, Katha. I know I must sound a bit incoherent. But it's impossible to express feelings and sensations directly. One gropes about for equivalents, and I'm no good at metaphors.'

It's harder for me, because English isn't my language. But don't you think you can learn to express these things, just as a language is learned? '

I wonder. Perhaps. Yes, perhaps. But now I feel that only those who've had and responded to the same experiences can understand what I mean.'

But I haven't. How could I have had? I never saw that house in England which gave you so much.'

No, but there was that hour you felt so much in solitude in the Schwarzwald. It may have been quite different from anything I ever felt, something much more wonderful, but I interpret it through my equivalent sensations. But if one of us had never had any such experience, the other would be talking into a void. I have never known anyone else I could reveal myself to, without feeling I should be met by a stare or a sneer.'

'Nobody can really know another person,' said Katha. 'You can only make a guess if you love them.'

'We're each in a kind of prison,' Tony admitted, 'but we can come out of it sometimes; when we say we lose ourselves in an ecstasy it only means that for a moment or so we have abolished the prison. It has happened to me when I have been sitting out of doors or looking at

something beautiful, and when you kiss me. A flying fish must feel like that when it escapes from the water into the sun for a few seconds.'

'Yes, but if you only touch my hand it is more beautiful than my daydream in the Schwarzwald. How I regret that silly love affair.'

No, no! Don't regret experience. And don't say it was silly. It wasn't silly then. Perhaps, oh, years hence, you may find yourself indifferent to me, but don't say we were silly.'

They had now come almost to the far end of the island out of sight of all cultivated land, and the path was scarcely visible. To their right the ground sloped sharply to the sea, and there seemed to be a gap in the otherwise inaccessible cliffs. Tony pointed it out.

'Shall we try and get down to the sea?'

'Yes! It will be like discovering—I don't think anybody ever comes here. They told me there was no way down at this end of the island.'

As they clambered down, Tony said:

'You know how a chance word or some accidental association suddenly makes you feel another epoch? When I was in Rome I went to a rather special Mass in that side chapel at St. Peter's. At the elevation we all knelt down, and as I was at the far end of a row I knelt beside a canon's stall. Just as the bell rang to mark the divine presence, the canon ran his finger over the carved design on his stall and said to the next canon in Italian: "How ugly this is!" It was a sudden glimpse of the Renaissance—the Borgia kissing the gem engraved with a naked Aphrodite set in his crucifix.'

Fanciful I' Katha laughed. 'If he was a true modern Italian he was wondering how much it was worth. Mind you don't slip on these rocks.'

They were hot and a little breathless when they got

to the foot of the cliff. They were at the side of a little creek between two steep walls of rock, completely hidden from above by a feathery screen of pines. White water rippled gently over pebbles at the far end, and then, suddenly deepening, turned glass green over sand, and peacock blue over weedy rocks farther out. It was about four yards wide and twenty long.

'A bath cut for the sea nymphs,' exclaimed Tony. 'I say, I wish we could bathe.'

'Why not?'

'We haven't brought any bathing things.'

'Do you think that matters?' asked Katha, smiling.

At that moment Tony suddenly found his body wanting Katha's, to see her naked and touch her and feel her hands on his flesh.

Tony had the sensation that he had stood there before, looking at the same sea, waiting to bathe with a naked girl. And mingled with this was the strange sensation, as with Evelyn, that something outside himself was guiding him. He said:

'Indeed not. It was silly of me to hesitate. No one can see us here?'

'Unless a boat passes, and we can stay up to our necks until it's gone.'

In a minute they were undressed and stood looking at each other, smiling. Tony was surprised to find that he felt no embarrassment about himself, but only confidence that his body was straight-limbed, not too muscular, and without flaw. Katha looked at him frankly, saying:

'I like you better undressed. You're a handsome man.'

'And you a beautiful woman.'

She was indeed beautiful, and not one of those women who need half-lights. The strong sunshine was an embellishment. Strangely, she looked more robust than in

her clothes, cut for slenderness. Her legs were long and beautifully formed, her waist not too narrow or short, her breasts full. Tony slipped into the water and felt its coolness rush up to mid-thigh. He held up his hands to her, saying, 'Come.' As she slipped lightly into the sea her breasts brushed against his arm and chest, like an unconscious lovely caress.

Tony swam to the end of the creek. Not a boat was in sight, and what little he could see of the island was deserted and silent. There was no sound but their voices, and light splashing. Katharina stood nearly breast-deep, her white legs and body oddly refracted in the smooth moving water. Tony swam towards her, and as he dropped his legs to stand, caught her hands in his and kissed her breasts. Drawing her cool body close against his, he kissed her lips. He felt her sink a little into the supporting water as she let her feet slowly float upwards. As she was almost wholly buoyed up by the gently heaving sea, it was no more than a child's weight he held easily with one arm. The divine sense of touch awakened by Evelyn had reached its flowering.

Katharina took away her lips, and letting her legs drop stood up again.

'I want you to touch me, I want you to touch me,' she whispered ardently but with a sort of fear in her voice. 'I want you to have everything of me, but . . .'

'But what?'

'Oh my love, my love!'

'What is it? Tell me. Are you afraid?'

'Afraid! You are all tenderness.'

She loosed her hand from his and pushed half a step away from him.

'Tony, my dear, I'm not a virgin any more, and I wish . . .'

Before she could complete her sentence, he answered

her fear by the most generously passionate kiss he had ever given, and his hand, unresisted, tenderly and firmly held her.

When the harsh bell of the church clock struck eleven that night, Antony went softly to Katharina's room, and, as she had told him, entered quietly without knocking. The electric globe was swathed in a blue silk handkerchief so that the room was filled with a mysterious blue dusk. Katharina, in a light silk wrap, was sitting on the side of the bed. With an unpremeditated gesture of homage, Tony knelt and kissed her hand and the uncovered knee. But instead of taking him in her arms, as he had expected, she made him stand up, and holding him away from her, looked searchingly at him with a strangely mingled gaze of intense passion, pleading, and slight mistrust.

'You didn't answer me when I told you something this afternoon.'

Tony made a slight gesture of surprise and chagrin.

'I did answer you. My kiss, my touch meant that it was nothing, that I love you.'

As he spoke, he let her look deeply into his eyes, and saw the mistrust fading from her expression. But she said:

'It did not mean that you despised me? That you thought I was—that you could just amuse yourself with me?'

'If you can't feel how utterly such a thought was remote from me until this moment,' he said, wounded, 'then no words of mine can convince you.'

He felt her hand tighten on his.

'Don't be hurt, my love, my love. It was mistrust of myself, not of you. I wanted to be sure, quite sure.' She paused a moment. 'I cannot tell you what I feel

tonight—something deeper and more beautiful than I ever dreamed. As if not only my life, but all the world were changed. To say "this is my marriage" is saying nothing—I am yours to keep or to abandon.' And then in a low thrilling voice: 'Herz, Herz, mein Herz!'

Deeply moved, Tony made to embrace her, but again she held him off, saying almost submissively:

'Do you want to give me a child tonight?'

There was something so touching to him in this unselfishness, this complete abandonment of herself to him, that tears pricked Tony's eyes. The question itself startled him—he had not thought of it as even a possibility.

'My dear one—yes, some time—but not tonight—I am too young—I hadn't thought about—when we are together for always. • . .'

He spoke hesitatingly, partly because he was unprepared and partly from emotion. And he felt, not humiliated, but humble. Men must poetize their love because it is a lesser thing than women's, he thought. He wondered if she read this thought, for she withdrew the gaze she had kept fixed on him, saying simply and almost gaily:

'Get into bed and close your eyes.'

He slipped naked between the cool sheets and closed his eyes as firmly and honourably as a child playing forfeits. He heard Katha move gently across the room, and then silence except for the beating of his own heart. He felt he was trembling slightly, and tried to relax his body, to empty his mind of all thought, until only the dark blue light of the room remained in his conscious memory. So absorbed was he in this effort to calm himself that he did not notice Katharina was beside him until he felt her soft cool mouth on his, and almost

his heart. He put out his hands vaguely, to try and touch her, to caress her like Evelyn, but instead found her mouth again on his. Gea-Tellus bowed over her lover in the furrows of the field, holding his head in her hands and touching his lips. The blue haze seemed to flash into golden light. He tried to speak his ecstasy, but all he could say was 'Katha!' in a kind of love gasp; and then all other senses were lost in the gathering majesty of touch, except that he heard her whispering from far away:

'Herz, Herz, mein Herz!'

§XII

Antony had one anxiety only—that he would be forced to leave Aeaea before Katharina returned to Vienna. He tried to keep his expenses down to his bare pension, bought nothing, gave up smoking, and wrote no letters except cards to his father and Robin. Two rather querulous letters from his father, asking what he thought he was doing all this time in Italy, hardly moved him at all. One contained the phrase: 'Your wings are weary with flight, you must be longing to come home.' The expression jarred on him as mawkish, and he smiled to think how little he cared about 'home,' how very cheerfully he would accept a perpetual exile from England, with Katha, in the halcyon climate of Aeaea. Nothing but necessity and the hope of Katha would take him back.

They had made all arrangements, absolutely perfect and proof against every accident or unforeseen event. They were to stay in Aeaea until Antony had spent all his money except his fare to London and a little over. They would go to Milan, and after a last night there together, Katha would go to Vienna and Tony to London-

On the 10th of August of that year Tony would be twenty-one, and free to do as he chose. He was to find a small temporary flat in London for them. He was to be frank with his father and tell him that he intended to live with a Viennese girl, and perhaps to marry her. They happily decided not to marry until they had lived together for at least two years. If his father made a fuss and refused to give him any money, it wouldn't matter. They could live on Katha's, and he could work at something he wanted to do, or they could come back to Italy. Out of bourgeois scruples Tony insisted on this rather vague work, professing himself ready to be a bootblack or a dustman for her sake; but Katha sensibly said she preferred a cleaner trade. And, of course, *if* Tony's father turned out a brick, and *if* he adopted the proper attitude, why, then, they'd come back to Italy for a year, and Katha would paint and Tony would plan a superb temple of Venus to be erected in Hyde Park at the public expense.

As for Katha, she would tell her family she was going to live with an Englishman, but she would tell them that by post from London—they might interfere otherwise. She would arrive in London on the 10th for Tony's birthday and arrange for her money to be transferred from Austria to a London bank at the same time.

A perfect plan. They talked it out over and over, examined every possibility of a flaw, and decided triumphantly that nothing on earth could stop them.

About the beginning of June, Antony found that all his money was gone except for the sum put aside and a hundred lire. Their departure was not hastened in the least by three telegrams and two letters which arrived in quick succession from Katha's father, insisting that she return to Vienna at once. She read these to Tony, and

they laughed and then felt a little grave. Tony was convinced that someone had written to tell him that his daughter was misbehaving, and was desolate at the thought of Katha having to face dismal family scenes when she got back. But Katha was positive to the contrary. No one on Aeaea knew her, and she had been most discreet in her letters. It must be some family upset. They were discussing this curious insistence on her returning, which Katha said was very unusual, since she was allowed to do practically what she liked, when a fourth more urgent telegram was brought to her, with reply prepaid.

'Oh, tell him you're starting tomorrow,' said Tony carelessly. 'It's only a few days, and after August we shall have all life together, Katha, Katha, darling Katha!'

Yet in spite of their plan the actual parting at Milan station seemed tragical enough, and they kept having to cheer each other up by talking of how quickly the time would go between then and August—only just over two months, sixty-two days, and then never a parting any more. Only until August.

Tony put Katha in a compartment of the long coach marked 'Wien,' and looked curiously at the notices in German which somehow seemed like a new language of his own, so completely did he feel identified with Katha and all that was hers. He kissed her and then got down from the compartment and stood on the platform, trying to look very cheerful and feeling as if the heart were being torn from his body.

'Only a little time,' he said, with that horrible last-minute sensation that something must be said, however inane.

'Yes, and you'll write?'

' Yes, and you ? '

' Yes.'

A rather stiff-looking, fat-necked Prussian was watching them languidly as he smoked a long blond cigar three windows nearer the end of the train. Tony hardly noticed him, except with that unconscious noting which years afterwards brings back details of a moment deeply felt. The engine whistled. Katha leaned far out of the window and kissed him once more, whispering:

' Herz, mein Herz.'

The train gave a slight jerk.

' Au revoir, Katha darling, au revoir.'

' Au revoir.'

' Till August.'

' Till August.'

Tony walked with the train, but its speed relentlessly drew Katha away. She leaned from the window, to see round the Prussian. Tony waved and shouted:

' Au revoir—till August—der Tag! '

PART II

1919



PART II

1919

THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY

A P R O C L A M A T I O N

1914

don't want to lose you
you ought to go
your King and your Country
kiss you
when you come back

1915

a long way
it's a long way to go
a long way
goodbye farewell
it's a long long way

1916

I want to go home
home
take me over the sea
don't want to die
home

1917

take the cylinders out of my kidneys
the connecting-rod out of my brain
from under my backbone
assemble again

1918

I know where they are,
where they are
on the old barbed wire
I've seen them I've seen them
hanging on the old barbed wire
I've seen

1919

and when I die
don't bury me at all
just pickle my bones
in alcohol
in al-co-hol

GOD SAVE THE KING

§ II

• • • smoke cleared away, and he saw the equipment and helmet of the man in front, and other helmets and bayonets. The trench was deep, but without astonishment he found he could see everything on the top. Ahead was the line of the barrage, bursting shells and a huge canopy of smoke. He was so tired he didn't notice the battle was utterly silent. Nobody made any remark when they passed a soundless battery in full action—

flash, recoil, half-naked men toiling madly, but no sound. Tremendously slow work getting along the trench. He sweated with the effort. Oddly enough, he was not walking, but moved with a slow, too slow glide. Obviously they were late, and he ought to have got there earlier. The agony of being late was unendurable, but with all his efforts he could not glide any faster.

Now he was outside the trench and quite alone. There was the soundless barrage ahead, but much nearer, and lines of men advancing. About two hundred yards away he saw an officer standing with an orderly. Gliding over in a second, he said peremptorily: 'Where is my battalion?' The officer turned his head, and he saw at once that the man had been dead a long time. It was nothing but a skeleton in a tattered uniform. And then he noticed that none of the advancing men was moving—all that moved was the soundless flashing shells and the smoke. With intense anxiety he glided quickly to a Lewis-gun team, lying round their gun, and put his hand on a man's arm. It crumbled in his grasp, and they all looked at him with skull faces. This was an old battlefield; he must have lost direction. He must find headquarters' dugout.

With incredible swiftness he glided over wire and shell holes, into a trench, and found the dugout at once. The awful leaden grasp came on his legs again, and he sweated at the effort and time needed to get down. The chamber was quite empty and smelt of fusty chalk. There was no light, but he could see perfectly. He noticed there was an arch in the wall and found it led to a long gallery. He groaned and swayed his head from side to side at the awful toil of gliding heavily along this tremendous mine shaft. Just round him it was light, and he could see the rough damp walls, but ahead and behind everything was dark. Uneasiness became terror at

being lost deep underground, quite alone. He fought it off and glided heavily on.

The gallery opened out into an enormous cave. The roof was lost in darkness, and on either side were rows of black columns like those in Milan Cathedral with immense shadows behind them. The floor was white and shining and stretched far away into the distance. His strength melted to despair at the thought of the enormous way to go, but his utmost exertions could not make his slow glide any quicker. The white floor, he perceived, was made up of infinite rows of small marble flags with lettering on them, and he knew this was the memorial cathedral where they were all buried. He felt terror-stricken, alone in this enormous cathedral with millions of dead. He felt the sweat running off his forehead and down his back.

For weeks and weeks he toiled on, with the rows of shadowy pillars slowly passing on either side, and the bright floor always stretching ahead to infinity. Suddenly, with a deeper quickening of terror, he saw two shadowy forms lurking beside a pillar to his right. He passed them too swiftly to see more than a gleam, but knew they were pursuing him. Fly, fly, somehow escape. He groaned again at the terrible effort, and by an almost maddening expenditure of strength glided faster and faster—the pillars ran by and the stones passed so quickly he could not now read the names and dates. Yet by the shrinking of his flesh he knew they were gaining on him.

The floor abruptly ended in a wide oak staircase, in two flights and a landing. Somehow he knew they led to the cloisters of Westminster Abbey and that there he would be safe. But oh! what an age it took to mount each stair and how quickly they were gaining on him. He sobbed aloud with the agony of effort and the fear.

If they caught him it would be inexpressibly horrible. He could not move his feet, but only glide leadenly, and, in spite of frantic efforts, more and more slowly.

He reached the landing and could see into the cloisters of safety. But at the moment of hope he felt their hands on his shoulders. He turned on them in the savagery of despair and saw their skull faces and German helmets. Their clutch was stifling him, and his chest heaved madly for air. He smashed at one with his fist and felt the bruise of the hard bone, while the hot stifling sensation nearly overcame him. At the same time he clutched at the other's throat with his unwounded hand and felt the awful square wooden bone in his fleshless throat. But they had got him. He tried to scream, but his tongue vibrated helplessly in his dry mouth, and he only uttered a rattling groan. . . .

Antony lay quite still, recovering his breath, and hearing the thump, fchump of his heart. Somehow he had got twisted across the bed, the pillow was partly over his face, and his left hand still clutched one of the wooden rails. The knuckles of his right hand hurt. He released his grasp, and with a feeble gesture of exhaustion pushed the pillow off his face, breathing more deeply and regularly. His pyjamas were soaked with sweat, and though he felt the chill as he lay almost uncovered, he still did not move. Still only partly returned from that dark world of sleep inhabited by terror, he was scarcely able to formulate a thought, and the relief of escape was still haunted by dreadful dream images. That made the third in a week.

He shivered slightly as the cold, wet cloth touched his flesh, and widening consciousness brought the thought 'must change.' Still he did not move, but stared up sideways at the faint grey of the large studio skylight.

At last he made an effort and swung himself to the side of the bed. His limbs felt as weak and broken as if he had been walking all night, and he shivered with cold. Standing by the night table, he groped with trembling hands, nearly knocked his watch onto the floor, and then the room flashed alive with tranquil light. Released from the unknown of darkness, he recovered self-mastery. He lighted the gas fire, switched on the main light, stripped off his pyjamas, and went into the tiny rather squalid bathroom. He turned on both taps full—stone-cold, of course, the hot water had cooled long ago—and, gasping from the icy water, sponged himself rapidly and poured cold water repeatedly over his close-cropped head. He dried himself in front of the fire, noting with indifferent apathy the disfigurement of his left thigh by a lump of shrapnel and the red blotches on his skin—blood still poisoned by bad water.

There were no other pyjamas in the chest-of-drawers, so he partly dressed, put on slippers, and took his British-warm instead of a dressing gown. He held his watch to his ear and then looked at the time—ten past three, and no further chance of sleep that night. Standing still under the skylight, he sighed unconsciously—the clinging ennui of those unconsumed hours. The thought, never far from his mind, repeated once more: What a fool you were to come back, what a double fool to be glad of it. Staring upwards at the skylight, he noticed that dark flakes of snow were falling gently on it—not much good trying to take a walk. He sighed again and began to move about the room. It was a large windowless studio, lighted only by the frosted glass of the skylight; the walls, marked with nails where pictures had once hung, were bare and covered with a depressing buff distemper. They were a bit damp and sweaty. The

place made him feel restless, like an animal trapped in a pit. Yet how grateful he had been to escape to it from the misery of a London boarding house. He could never be grateful enough for that kindness, the only real piece of human kindness, it seemed, that he had received for years; and the man who had done it only knew him slightly. Everybody was so rich from the war, flats were so rare and expensive, that to let a place like this for an honestly small sum was a prince's gift, a miracle. Tony walked up and down, clinging almost desperately to the thought of Dick Waterton's kindness. It seemed his only hope in the world—that he had met one man who had done an act of spontaneous kindness. How thank, how show his humble, humble gratitude? Not just personal gratitude for a valuable favour, though that indeed, but a wider impersonal gratitude for a symbol, one spark of faith in human goodness. Yet even in that moment of intense feeling he knew that he would say and do nothing, that his agonized self would continue to hold between him and other human beings the impenetrable shield of mistrust he had bitterly forged in the past five years.

Tony went over to the night table to look at his watch again; twenty past three; ten minutes only gone of the interminable hours, and they had seemed like a hundred. For some minutes he had been fighting against an inclination. Suddenly he threw back his head and uttered a sound, half cynical laugh, half sob, and walked over to a small cupboard, from which he took a glass, a siphon, and a bottle of brandy. Half-filling the glass with brandy, he splashed in soda and gulped down several distasteful mouthfuls—he hated the taste of brandy. Then he put the glass on the wooden arm of a large lounge

chair near the fire and walked up and down the room again, counting the cracks in the bare boards outside the square of worn carpet. Presently he halted beside the small writing table. Above it were Alinari photographs of a lovely Aphrodite and majestic Apollo, framed in *passe partout*. Tony unhooked them, laid them on the table, and gazed at them intently. The mysterious smile of the god never altered, the exquisite poise of the goddess never moved. He stared at the two images until they grew blurred, trying to remember where he had seen them—in Italy certainly, but where? He laughed again and then dashed them to the ground, where the glass crashed and splintered. 'There are no gods,' he said aloud. 'The real gods are murdered. The rest are impostors.'

The alcohol began to take effect and soothed him. Another thought, also seldom far from his mind, occurred to him—that he was a bloody fool. Half-past three; twenty minutes gone. He decided to read until breakfast came or unlikely sleep, found a book, sat down in the armchair, and after a sip of brandy began to read. This, he discovered, was a novel of high life and began with 'a glittering reception' at 'the splendid Piccadilly mansion of a great political hostess.' He read with wan attention until he came to the lines:

'World-famous generals whose uniforms were laden with medals of every campaign fought by Britain's glorious sons; cabinet ministers hiding the cares of state under smiling brows and talking with lovely debutantes in tones of courteous homage; peers of the realm with their splendid orders; peeresses, whose queenly brows were surmounted by glittering tiaras, while their toilettes vied with each other in splendour; diplomats, millionaires, great newspaper owners, the foremost amateur

sportsmen of today, beautiful women; all the wealth, power, and glory of the greatest City of the world's Greatest Empire was there.'

'Pack of swine,' Tony grumbled to himself, and read on. Very soon he discovered that he had read a page of words without registering a single idea or impression of any sort. He forced himself to go back and read attentively, but in a few minutes found that he was gazing blankly over the top of the page, thinking. His own thoughts were more insistent and absorbing than these poor inventions. It was a reverie, not so much of thoughts, but of images and emotions, which were not and perhaps could not be formulated in words. Confused war scenes mingled with far clearer and more torturing memories of places and people from earlier days in a sense of wreckage and despair. Everything that made life beautiful and interesting seemed to have been destroyed or smirched or violated in some way. It was a kind of disgrace to have survived, and what was the worth of survival when body and mind were poisoned? Even solitude was poisoned. How and where live—not with delight, that was gone for ever—but with some self-respect, some positive values?

If he turned in on himself or out to other people and the world, it was the same innumerable confusion, like trying to organize an angry sea. Whether it was more painful to think of present evil and misery or of past beauty and happiness? One set of memories he tried consciously to avoid—over-torturing—and inevitably returned to them. Katha. No, No, NO ! Don't think of Katha. And as if she had been there he saw her eyes filled with lovely warm devotion and heard her voice: 'Do you want to give me a child?' Tony sprang

from his chair and walked about the silent room. The memory of her voice was as if she had whispered wounds. He wrung his hands in misery and beat his forehead with his fists; then stood quite still, drawing deep breaths, fighting for self-control, for mere sanity. Almost all of him wanted passionately to die, to be out of it. He found he was senselessly repeating, 'Any-where, anywhere, out of the world,' The whole glow of life in him had died down to a single spark of obstinate pride, a negative determination not to let all that evil and the pain it had caused triumph over him too.

The spark grew to a tiny glow. He had passed through the uttermost depths. Nor did he feel anything extraordinary in what he had just endured—it was only one more brush with death. But the determination to fight on was there. He wiped the sweat from his face and neck and went back to the fire; with a shaking hand he took the half-empty glass of brandy and drank it off. In a corner of the room lay his valise; he rummaged in it and found his service revolver and jerked it open so that six heavy bullets shot into his palm. He snapped the revolver shut and laid it on a small table and then took the bullets into the bathroom. When he opened the window, snowflakes and a gust of raw air blew on his face. The silence of sleeping London seemed more silent in the falling snow. He tossed the bullets into the little sooty garden, now turned to a soft brooding white, and saw one of them cut a little jag in the snow where the shaft of light from the window fell. Back in the room, he went to his jacket to get pipe and tobacco. The evening paper still lay by the waste-paper basket where he had flung it the night before. The glaring headline was still there: 'Hang the Kaiser.' 'Rot!' said Tony and gave it a kick. After lighting his pipe, he took his foun-

tain pen and a large letter block over to the table, and wrote:

'Katha, Katha, dear Katha, this is another effort to reach you, though God knows it seems hopeless after all the others which have failed. But I must make this as calm as I can, for if I start to tell you my feelings it will never end and be unreadable.

'The last letter I had from you was the pencilled one written at the Austrian-Swiss frontier and posted by Swiss acquaintance in Switzerland. It told me your father had been arrested for supposed Russian sympathies, and that you had been held up by the Austrian frontier guards in an attempt to get to London. This letter was delayed, and reached me on the 10th of August, 1914. That wasn't what we'd planned for that day, was it? But I mustn't think of that.

By that time we had been at war nearly a week, and everything was in confusion. I tried to telegraph to you, and wrote repeatedly, but no answer came. Later, after I was in the army, I tried to get in touch with you through the Prisoners of War Committees in Switzerland, but nothing came of it. The day after the Armistice I wrote to you, but the Field Post Office returned the letter. Then from Cologne I wrote three times and posted the letters in the civilian post office—but of course everything was censored, and still is here. I tried to get leave to come to Austria, but was told I should need a special permit from the War Office. I couldn't get it. I was poor and unknown.

'My letters must have miscarried, like yours. Since the beginning of the war my father has been restless, and has had three different flats in London and has been twice to the country. I don't think he'd destroy any letter from you, much as he objected to our great, our

accident-proof plan. What I fear is that even if a letter from you reached England, it may never have been delivered owing to these eccentric movements—and, of course, you have only my pre-war address as I have yours. I've been to the General Post Office, but they're understaffed, overworked, and snappy—anyway they haven't found anything. I've also been to the old flat. The people have only been there a year, didn't remember any letter for me, were rather annoyed at being questioned, and promised to send anything on in a way that showed they didn't care a tinker's dam and only wanted to be rid of me.

'All this to show that I've done everything I can. I still can't get permission to go to Austria, but one day these alleged peace negotiations will end, and I shall try once more. Soon I am going to the country to see old Scrope (I told you about him) and see if he can help me to get a passport for Austria. Meanwhile, I can do nothing but fret. I'm a bit restless and depressed sometimes, and find I've developed a habit of frank speaking which seems to annoy people. My father, who has a touching faith in every species of scientific bunk, insisted on my seeing a doctor. This Harley Street merchant was quite a genial bloke, felt my pulse, et cetera, asked me a lot of irrelevant questions, and analyzed my water, and finally told me I was suffering from "delayed shock," advised me to take a long holiday, amuse myself, and look on the bright side of things. I told him I'd love to take a holiday if I had the money, but that I couldn't bear to amuse myself, and that if he'd show me something, bright I'd gladly look at it. He then gave me a long lecture, and I departed as wise and healthy as when I arrived.

'What a mess it all is, and who's going to put it right? Who indeed! Do you still believe in the spot-

less integrity and good will of the state? It seems to me that but for the various claims of various "states" you and I would have been happy. In my opinion the modern state is merely an improvement on the old highway robber—it wants your money *and* your life. You see that here at least I haven't changed. I refuse to take part in a "collective life" of murderers and robbers and congenital idiots. I loathe the British state as much as I loathe the daily paper. Evil, evil, evil! Show me a genuine collective life, and I'll gladly give myself to it. All I want of the state is you and to be left alone. I gather that this is too much to ask. I wish we could emigrate to another world, as beautiful as this, but inhabited by human beings instead of malevolent and greedy apes.

ⁱ Here I come to a difficult part of this letter, which would be impossible with any other woman, and if I did not feel the same utter confidence in you and your love as I felt in Aeaëa. I told you this letter was to be calm, so excuse me if I seem cold-blooded. During the war I had an affair with Margaret. I'm not trying to excuse myself when I say that it was after Passchendaele, that I was in despair, that I knew I was going back and believed I should be killed, and that Margaret was in that curious excited state when a soldier from the trenches was somehow infinitely desirable. It was wrong of me. And I'm not trying to sneak out of it by saying that it makes no difference to my feelings to you if you have done the same. It just doesn't matter. What *can* such things matter if only we find each other again; if only, if only!

But what is called a situation has cropped up. During the war nobody bothered about such things the morning after, but now it's finished all the old humbugs are in full blast again. Margaret wants to marry me, and

has got my father on her side. Well, I'm not going to—at least, while there seems a single chance of finding you. It's curious how old-fashioned people like my father now appear—I feel when I talk to him as if I were trying to make myself understood by an obstinate and rather foolish child. He talks about being "honourable." As if it were honourable to link up with someone just for the sake of some legal status and social prestige. There's the stupid warping of the "state" again. The real human fact is the wrong of people being together if they don't want it, and the wrong of their being apart if they do. I believe Margaret does want me in a way, but what she really feels is that nobody else will want to marry her now and that I must "repair the wrong." Considering we both thought at the time that I was booked for a wooden cross, I don't see where the wrong comes in. Would she have posed as a war widow if I had gone west with the rest and the best of them?

You may have noticed, my darling, that really virtuous people are always very unscrupulous, especially about money when dealing with sinners. Well, I'm the sinner, and Margaret and my father are virtuous. My father has lost some money (I don't know how much) in the war. He wants me to live with him, or to marry Margaret. At the moment I cannot bear the presence of other people—I've got to be alone, or with you. I don't mind you seeing my wounds, but no one else. (I'm a bit barmy, as a matter of fact, and only you can heal me.) Well, as I won't do either of the things he wants, he's too poor to give me any money, though he promised once in an unguarded moment to give me £6,000 if I married Margaret. I begged him to give me a third of it to try to find you. He said "an *Austrian*" as if he had said "an anaconda." I try to tell him that all this

nationalist hatred is bunk, that patriotism is bunk, and that we're all exploited by catchwords to enrich a set of devils and gratify the power sense of sadistic old men and women. He won't listen. He'll give me money to marry a woman I don't want, and won't give me a fraction of it to find the woman I do want. Delicious! With £1,000 I'd bribe my way to Vienna.

I've nothing but what the soldiers call my blood money. I've put aside £75 of that to come to Vienna, as soon as it is possible. On Monday I start a job, a miserable clerking job, but it gives me £' a week, and I can keep the £75 intact. On Saturday I'm going to Scrope (to try to wangle a passport), and if I get it I shall of course walk out of their damned office at once. If only I can find you! We'll get out of this miserable Europe. Where shall we go? South America, I think. The people are not Nordic blonds (thank God!) and they weren't in the war. And the country is beautiful, even if the insects do bite. I'd rather be bitten by insects than by human vermin. Anyway, the main thing is to meet again—we can deal with the rest afterwards.

This letter is the result of a little debate with myself. I got in a mood of thinking nothing was worth while. Then I pulled myself up and decided to try again. I shall work at this job until I can get a passport, and try to find one or two people here I used to like and also meet new people. It's going to be difficult, but I shall try. And I try not to be annoyed when I think how easy it would all be if I were rich and had powerful friends.

Answer this, if you can. If not, don't let hope die. I don't even apologize for not making this a love letter, for I know you know I have not forgotten.

Always and always, dear Katha,

' TONY.'

This long letter occupied several hours in the writing. Each paragraph was the inadequate summary of a long reverie, during which Antony smoked and walked about and sipped brandy and soda. He deliberately excluded his emotions, deliberately stifled the cries of longing, of revolt, of despair which rose from his agonized spirit. The imposed restraint, the task of writing, the fatigue of a long vigil gradually calmed him; and when he came to the end of the letter he was in a state of grey equilibrium which left him without energy to add any words of passion. Once during his writing he started violently, when a large block of wet snow fell from the roof of the house and thudded heavily on the skylight. When the letter was written he read it through carefully, a little contemptuous of its rigid inadequacy, and addressed the envelope—no need to look in an address book. The skylight was already grey with a late, heavily clouded morning when he put the thick envelope on the mantelpiece and once more sat down by the gas fire.

The emotions of the night had left him exhausted, but without the least tendency to sleep, though he yearned for sleep's oblivion. But what was the good of a sleep whose phantasms were more terrifying if less squalid than the images of waking life? He wondered vaguely which was the reality, sleep or waking, and wished he could believe that his present life was a dismal nightmare from which he would some time awake to a happier world. His spirits sank more and more heavily as he faced the reality of his life, where every movement seemed checked by some devilish chess player, and realized with dismay how completely he had lost all gusto for living. Even Katha and the search for her seemed a trap, a mere playing with memories, a futile attempt to reconstruct a vanished happiness. Even if he found her, both would have changed and probably

have moved away from each other. Or, if Katha was the same, what had he to offer her? Gone the radiance, gone the passion, gone the vivid spirit which once made every moment magical. He had not the same body to offer, the body she had touched with such reverence and delight. Why pretend that a crock, affrighted by dreams and every sudden noise, was the man she had loved?

He was startled by a sharp rap at the door. Before he could answer, the landlady came into the room, one of those virtuous landladies much soured by doing for gentlemen. She feigned surprise, though obviously she had seen the light through his door and had come to see what he was doing.

'Oh, I beg pardon, I didn't know you was *up*, sir,'

Her voice conveyed extreme disapproval of a man who was up and half dressed before eight on a winter morning, in a room cloudy with tobacco smoke and rather heady with hours of a gas fire. Tony wished devoutly that Waterton's room had not been weighted by this harpy's service. He also wished her to the devil, but tried to speak civilly.

'Yes, I got up early this morning,'

'Shall I send your breakfast in, sir? Are you sure you wouldn't like a nice bit of bacon and hegg? I've got some lovely bacon this morning.'

'No, thanks. But I should like my tea and toast.'

She lingered a moment, twiddling the doorknob, obviously trying to think of something else to express her immense opposition to someone who sat up all night and refused bacon and hegg. Her presence irritated Tony madly, and he wanted to shriek at her: 'Get to hell out of here, you miserable bitch!' He bit hard on his pipe

to check the words, a little startled by his own senseless rage. If she didn't stop twiddling that doorknob . . .

'Oh, very well, sir, just as you wish.'

And went, reluctantly, in a cloud of contemptuous dislike. Tony scolded himself—must get accustomed to these casual contacts—you determine their attitude by your own—after all she likes Waterton. But he couldn't purchase her esteem by eating bacon and eggs for breakfast—reminded him of the line, and anyway made him feel sick if he hadn't been on duty all night.

The servant girl came in with a tray, and making a prodigious effort Tony smiled at her and said 'Good-morning' with too much affability. Without answering, she slapped the tray down on the table and went out, banging the door like a bomb. The tea was weak, the toast cold and brittle, only too evidently buttered with margarine. He tried to scrape the stuff off, but it had soaked in too deeply. After one nauseating mouthful he gave it up and drank the weak tea milkless with plenty of brandy in it. A foul mixture, but soothing. When he had finished he put the tray outside the door, to avoid being disturbed, and sat brooding over the fire again. So this was the Peace so ardently longed for! Against all his own principles, he more than half wished his batman would come in with his equipment, saying: 'P'rade to go up the line in half an hour, sir.' He perceived that inaction and ennui are more deadly enemies than misery. . . .

Another rap and the servant put her head in the doorway.

Can I do your room now, sir? '

'No, no, thanks,' he exclaimed desperately. 'I—I've got something—some letters to write. I'll do it myself.'

The head sniffed, and the door slammed again. Left

to himself, Tony fell back into his wretched lethargy. He tried hard, but could think of nothing he wanted to do. He didn't want to go out or to stay in, didn't even have the energy to bathe and dress and shave, though he felt sticky and beastly and his head ached from the close atmosphere. He went on smoking, though his tongue was already sore from the pipes he had smoked in the night. He played games of naughts and crosses on his pad, counted the number of letters on a page of a book, made a sketch of the Pantheon from memory, but soon fell back on the diversion of sitting down when he was tired of walking about, and walking about when he was tired of sitting. He looked at his watch—eleven. Eight hours since he had wakened from that dream—eight hours longer than the longest in the worst trench or shell hole. Time is a mirage, which contracts for happiness and expands for misery. Twenty-five years old. He looked forward with displeasure to another thirty or forty years of such hours. He wondered if he could get into the back garden.

Another, gentler tap at the door.

'Come in,' shouted Tony angrily; adding under his breath, 'Stay out.'

He sprang to his feet in surprise as Margaret came in. She had on a new winter coat trimmed with fur and a large fur collar, high-laced boots, a pair of fur-lined gloves, and a new, carefully chosen hat. In fact she had chosen everything well except her moment. She looked charming with her clear untroubled eyes and delicate colour freshened by walking in the cold air. Tony admitted her charm and freshness, but it made him all the more conscious that he was unwashed and unshaved, and felt frousty. Margaret stressed this by her first spontaneous remark:

' Oh, Tony! How dreadfully hot and stuffy it is in here.⁵

' I'm very sorry,' he replied stiffly ' I didn't know you were coming.'

He turned off the gas and then opened the bathroom door and window.

' It'll soon clear,' he said, coming back, and added a bit ungraciously, ' Won't you take off your coat and hat and sit down? '

Margaret had evidently made up her mind to be particularly sweet-natured. Ignoring his coolness, she took off her gloves and let him help off her coat and hang it up with the hat. She sat down, and Tony noticed that her other clothes were also new. The slight frown on his face deepened. Among the many warpings which had so curiously disfigured his nature in the war was an almost puritan dislike for feminine luxury. Before, he had not only taken for granted that a woman should dress as prettily as she could, he had liked to see it. Now he resented it. He pulled his dirty old British-warm close about him and sat there, vaguely resenting her, almost unconsciously hostile, like a wounded beast when someone tries to tend it. Margaret gossiped gaily and laughed, until he wondered sourly whether she thought she was on a charitable errand—cheering up the weary empire-crasher.

At that moment there was a scuffling on the floor, and three letters were pushed in under the door. Tony picked them up and laid them unopened on the mantelpiece beside his letter to Katha, which he quickly laid flat on its face, but not before Margaret had seen the name. She made no comment, but smiled with a little hurt tolerance and sweetness Tony found offensive, and said:

'Do read them, if you want, Tony. Don't be silly and formal.'

He did want to read them, recognizing the handwriting. One, very brief, was from Scrope, confirming the arrangement for Tony to come down for lunch on Saturday and stay the night. The second was a huge screed from Robin, the first word Tony had received from him for years. He shoved it into the overcoat pocket to read at leisure, and opened the third, from his father. It was a well-meant, slightly sentimental letter which exasperated Tony by referring to his mother (whose death was still a wound), dwelling on his war sufferings (the least mention of which made him furiously angry) and exhorting him to the incompatible activities of ⁱ 'settling down' and ^c 'going about and amusing himself.' A check for £50 was enclosed. When he saw the amount, Tony's heart gave a jump—he could use it for Katha. His face lighted with a faint smile, which immediately vanished as he looked up and saw Margaret watching him with a sort of tender complicity. His mind jumped at once to a conclusion—she had been talking to his father, and they had determined to redeem him by kindness. He threw back his head and uttered his harsh scornful laugh. Hah!

'What is it?' asked Margaret, brightly and innocently, so affectionate, so tolerant, so pure-eyed.

'A letter from Father,' he said, watching her, 'full of good, of excellent advice, and a check. I must be careful.'

'Why?'

'Haven't you heard about suspecting the Greeks when they offer gifts?'

'Oh, Tony! How wrong-headed and cynical you've become! Your father's a dear. He's terribly fond of you and worried about you and wants to help you.'

'No doubt. But does he want to help me as I want or as he wants? It makes a lot of difference, you know, A starving man, or any sane person for that matter, w^ould rather have a tin of bully than the V.C

'Am I the V.C? I suppose *she's* the tin of bully!'

'What do you mean?' said Tony feebly. Awful to have to face a scene of jealousy after a night like that.

Why, that German woman. You've been writing to her again. Tony, Tony, why do you go on like this, making yourself ill about someone who can't care for you, and an enemy too? You cared about me enough when you were on leave. Why have you changed now?'

'You shouldn't read other people's letters,' he said coldly.

'I couldn't help it!' Margaret flared up indignantly. 'You left it there for anybody to see. You reproach me with the trifle of reading an addressed envelope, but you don't think of what you do yourself. You forgot enough about her in the war to want me. . . .'

She broke off, and very prettily dabbed away tears. It was on the tip of Tony's tongue to say, 'I thought and you thought I was going to be killed then,' but he checked himself. It was too brutal a thing to say to a woman. He sat silent, cold and rather hostile, staring at the white asbestos in the gas fire and mechanically counting the holes in it. He felt unendurable sorrow and regret and bitterness; the trite, common phrase, 'a broken heart,' came into his mind. You have to experience them, he thought, to know the real meaning behind these old threadbare phrases. . . .

Before he could move or guessed what she was doing, Margaret was on her knees before him, clasping him tightly in her arms and pressing wild kisses on his face. Through his annoyance and the shame at being dirty and unshaved, he heard her voice:

' Tony, Tony, why are you so hard to me, so bitter? You weren't like that on any of your leaves, and last time when we . . . you were so gay and charming, and I thought how brave you were, and I thought you loved me. I didn't mind you drinking then, because you were happy. But now you sit here alone, drinking brandy and getting horrible. Writing to that woman.' She gave a little moan, and he felt her warm breasts against him, as she tried to kiss his lips. ⁱ 'Don't sit there so hard and still! Answer me! '

For a moment Tony felt murderous. If he had not thrown the bullets into the garden, he felt he would have strangled her and then shot himself. The moment after he experienced an intense revulsion. It was not Margaret sobbing there and wetting his face with tears, but a poor human creature in distress, an agony for which he was at least partly to blame and which needed soothing as much as his. He could not help but pity her, and pity seemed to warm away a little of his own icy pain. The mere suffering of human flesh touched him, and he held her gently as he would have held a man dying of his wounds. He did not deny to himself that this woman stirred his flesh nearly as much as her emotion touched his heart—had he so much affection in life that he could reject her passion out of fidelity to a dream? He kissed her lips softly and then held her gently but with determination away from him. As he spoke, she gazed piteously at him with eyes brimming over with tears, in an attitude which even then struck him as a little false and theatrical, though the tears distressed him. His words came slowly and hesitatingly, and he felt her hands limp in his:

'I didn't meant to hurt you, Margaret. If I've wronged you, I'm very, very sorry. But do me the justice to admit that last year we went into that affair

light-heartedly, or rather in despair—like thousands and thousands of others snatching at a little happiness when all life seemed slipping from us. That's true, isn't it?' She nodded, still gazing fixedly and mournfully at him, as if she were taking farewell of one going to the gallows. It irritated him, but he restrained himself and went on: 'You said I was gay then, and I'm dreary now. Well, let me put it like this: When you're running a race you keep on though you're dropping, but when it's over you do drop and gasp for breath. I'm gasping for breath—give me a chance to recover.'

He paused, but she did not speak. He turned his eyes away from hers and continued:

'I feel scarcely human, and I know I'm not in a state to live with anyone, which is why I came here by myself. I've got a long war of my own to fight with myself. Every single fibre of me's in rebellion and confusion. I've scarcely a coherent idea about myself or anything else, and murderous, violent instincts once aroused have got to be checked. I must reestablish human contacts, see my friends and make new ones. On Monday I'm starting a job—anything's better than brooding here. You're not appealing to a human being, but a human chaos. Later on I'm going away for a time by myself. . . .'

'Where?' she interrupted sharply.

'To the Continent,' he replied evasively. It was in his mind to tell her frankly that he was going to look for Katha, but the wary mistrust he had acquired prevented him. 'And now about ourselves. You *must* leave me free. But listen to me. You know I—how I felt about you in Paris before the war. Well, we seemed to drift apart and . . .'. He still could not mention Katha. 'And then came last year. I'm not the same person I was in Paris, not even the same as last

year. I rather feel as if I'd fallen down a cliff and were trying to put the pieces together. It's now March. Let me breathe until November or December. Whatever happens, I should like us to be friends, very near and close friends.'

He saw the anguish in her face at this usual and trivial plea of friendship. Weakly, trying to comfort her, he added:

'Let's be friends till then. If—if things turn out that way, perhaps then I shall feel I can ask you to marry me. There! Now let me wash and dress, and we'll go out to lunch. Where shall we go?'

'Shall we go to the Pooh-Bah Club?'

'And eat with that pack of fat-arsed conchies? To hell with them!'

'Tony, I won't have you using such language!'

'Sorry,' he said apologetically. 'You see I do need to scrape the mud off me, don't I? But they are a rotten set.'

'But Lloyd FitzBalfour's a member!'

'To—I mean, pooh-bah to him. Buried better men any day . . . Never mind. Forgive me. But do you mind if we go somewhere else?'

'Anywhere you like, dear,' she said submissively, but in a sub-acid tone which jarred on him. He thought of Katha's magnificent self-abandonment, 'Do you want to give me a child?' and sighed. Then he turned silently and went, taking his clothes, to the bathroom.

When Tony came back, dressed, into the room, he found Margaret smoking a cigarette. His hair was plastered flat, he had been trying to get rid of his nervous headache by putting his head under the tap. He had not succeeded, but felt more cheerful, and determined to be nice to Margaret.

' Shall we go ? ' he asked.

He helped her on with her coat after she had put on her hat, and then turned to take the letter to Katha. It had gone. He turned on Margaret swiftly:

' Give me back that letter, please, Margaret '

' What letter? '

' The letter you took from the mantelpiece. '

' I didn't. '

Tony's face flushed with anger—how loathsome this pettiness, how insulting! Without meaning to, he spoke as peremptorily as if reprimanding a soldier.

' Hand it over at once! Or I shall take it from you. '

Margaret was frightened by his tone, but still more by the cold anger in his eyes. She handed him the letter, saying with a sneer:

' You needn't play the bullying subaltern. '

A sharp retort flicked into his mind, but he took the letter silently. Then he said, a bit wistfully:

' I asked for us to be friends, Margaret, not enemies. '

' You would have done the same in my place. '

' I think I can swear I would not——'

' Yes, you would,' she interrupted, ' if you cared for me as I care for you. But you don't. You don't care about anybody but yourself. You don't really want a woman. You're incapable of really loving. '

He looked at her in amazement, thinking, as so often, how strangely difficult it is for one human being to know another.

' Perhaps you're right,' he said ironically. And then added once more: ' Shall we go? '

The lunch was not very happy, because Margaret still felt injured and not in the least resigned to Tony's suggestion that they should be ' friends,' and wait for some vague prospect of matrimony at the end of the year.

Her jealousy made her suspect that he was already in touch with Katha, whom she hated with a sort of pale rage. Tony could feel the hatred emanating from Margaret like waves from a wireless station, and thought he was the cause. He was unhappy about it but also relieved, as if it released him. He was not quick enough to guess that the hatred was jealousy of the unknown Katha, and that the jealousy, the sense of rivalry, made Margaret the more determined in her passion. But this erroneous belief that he was being released through hatred of him made Tony the more tender to her, in an attempt to spare her pain; and she in turn mistook this for a revival of his passion. And it was true that Tony could not be quite indifferent to Margaret. She had been the dream symbol of adolescent love—loved for what his imagination had made her, instead of as a real person—but, even if he had not met Katha, would Margaret have been enough? True, they had been lovers, in that reckless, despairing war way. He knew well enough that she was desirable. He had lived weeks in the trenches on the memory of her lovely body, a warm symbol of life among all that foul acreage of death and corruption. . . .

With these thoughts and feelings underneath, they talked of indifferent things. About the middle of the meal, a young man, passing down to his table, recognized Margaret and was introduced as Walter Cartwright. He had stiff golden hair and a very clear skin, which made him immediately conspicuous. He talked for a minute or two with a lightness, a gaiety, a confidence which Tony sincerely envied, though without jealousy. He was attracted and also a little mystified, as he always was by any apparently intelligent and sensitive person who seemed quite at ease and comfortable in

London life. When he had gone on, Tony asked about him,

'Oh, he's frightfully nice and clever,' said Margaret, hoping to make Tony a little jealous. 'He's in some government department, and they say he's brilliant. And he writes books. But he's not a bit stuffy. He goes out a lot, and he dances really perfectly. I'm very fond of him.'

'I should like to get to know him,' said Tony a little wistfully, not noticing the attempt to arouse his jealousy. 'You know, Margaret, I feel I've become a kind of savage, unfit to mix with civilized people. For nearly four years I've lived from day to day, pretty roughly some of the time, with nobody I could talk to—I mean, talk to from myself. Oh, there were affections of a kind, born of a common misery, a fraternity of danger, but no real interchange. I want to get in touch with people again.'

Margaret encouraged this—it looked hopeful, she thought—and talked about his practising dancing. He admitted that he lumped about as if he had hobnail boots on. The lunch ended, to Tony's satisfaction, in a much more friendly way than it had begun. They walked down to Trafalgar Square together, and he put her on a west-bound bus, with a promise to meet soon. But he refused to give her a promise not to accept the clerk's job he was offered—that money for Katha had to be kept intact.

Antony stood alone on the pavement outside the National Gallery, feeling the inhuman loneliness of a great city. It is not solitude, because it is inhabited; it is not human because all these passers are anonymous, self-absorbed, indifferent. Even in the mingiest village people pass with some greeting, some vague recognition of a

human contact. And in real solitude the mind and body open out to the mind and body of a cosmos. In the city there is loneliness, but not solitude. Even if you creep back to your niche in one of the rows of brick boxes, there are people above and all round. If you can go with them, build a self-importance, run to and fro along the kennels and catch the excitement of mere moving and casual contact, then it is all right. Tony felt desperate at the thought of all the streets and houses and people between him and the open fields—and how little open they are nowadays. Stifled with people, arid swarms of indifferent superfluous people. Oh, to have the world fresh and clean and lonely, and just a few people to live its loveliness! This inhuman humanity was terrifying.

He turned to go into the gallery and found it was shut, still occupied by some war organization. The pictures were in prison, crushed like himself by the murderous greed and destruction in men of which the war was but a symptom. Veronese and Titian, Piero, Raphael, Uccello, Velasquez, Goya—imprisoned in a cellar, or hanging dead on the walls amid a rattle of typewriters. These were the people who loved pictures so much that they were going to 'force Germany and Austria to disgorge their stolen art treasures.' Pictures belong to those who love them, not to the caretakers who house them.

After lingering uncertain a little, he walked off rapidly through the muddy streets towards the British Museum. There were still plenty of soldiers about, and he almost saluted a brigadier. Women bravely exposed silky legs and clutched their coats to them, their hands encumbered with parcels and umbrella and handbag. Buses flipped along through the thin mud. Strange to think

the war was really over' The streets were the familiar streets, but to Tony desolatingly melancholy. Yes, it was no longer the spirit of the war, but a new spirit, a rather nasty one; one he found very discouraging. He tried in vain to find words to express his feeling—it was discouraging, he got no further than that'

The smoked columns of the museum looked rather noble against the snow and grey sky, but once inside the swing doors he was struck by the gauntness of the place. It was not a museum, but a tomb of art. Bored attendants stood about the damp hall with its trails of wet footsteps; people passed in and out of the reading room; an exceedingly sour-faced official, thin, baggy-seated, shambled insolently past him, carrying several Chinese books. Tony walked through the gallery of Roman busts, which were dead and hideous, failed to kindle either at his once-beloved Maenad plaque or at the stately Demeter, and came to the Parthenon marbles. In the cold raw light, against the public-lavatory red distemper of the bare walls, they looked like wretched ghosts of themselves. He gazed for a long time at the line of young men, thinking of others he had seen and helped to bury, and then had to confess with consternation that the marble had ceased to mean anything to him. What had once been a glimpse of a divine humanity had become a streak of dull carved stone on an ugly wall. No good pretending. The incredible had happened, and the frieze of the Parthenon was no more to him than a boarding-house dado.

He went upstairs to the ethnological room, where the Mexican and South Seas art had once excited him so much—and found himself yawning. He perceived that in determining to build up his life again he had under'taken more than he had guessed at the worst moment

§m

On the Saturday morning, going down in the train to see Scrope, Antony was happier and more confident in himself. This was, at any rate, action.

In the intervening days Tony had been to see his father, and, though he had to admit that the war had gashed an immense gulf between them, they had been quiet and affectionate. Tony had spent better nights, without revolting dreams of terror. He had partly bought, partly borrowed from his father a stack of real books—Shakespeare, Sterne, Keats, Dickens, Gibbon—and read himself to sleep each night. He found he responded most to *Timon of Athens* and *Tristram Shandy*; to the first because it spoke his own blind rage so eloquently and truly, and the other because of its witty tenderness. Shelley, once so much adored, had seemed mere lovely words, and almost anything later in date appeared contaminated with the falsity and filth that had gone to make the war. He had seen Margaret again, and they had parted understandingly, almost affectionately—at least he hoped so. After warning her that he still held to his freedom, that she must expect nothing definite before December, he had replied to the look in her eyes by taking her onto his knee and kissing her. He would not give her his body until he felt certain Katha was lost, but—perhaps deceiving himself—he believed that Katha would understand and even approve. He knew he did not really want to live with Margaret, but to feel her kisses and to touch her body and taste her sensual ecstasy was infinitely healing, like drinking from a fountain of life. Touching that delicate living flesh helped to wipe out the unspeakable memories of too many torn and wounded and slain human bodies. It was through touch that he felt himself returning to life, and

he felt he had a right to take that life touch even from Margaret.

A groom came out of the little group which somehow always collects round the doors of a country station at train time, touched his hat to Antony, and said:

'For Mr. Scrope, sir?'

'Yes.'

'I've got the brougham waiting for you, sir.'

So Scrope still held to his horses—he hadn't changed there. Tony felt rather glad; he'd had enough of mechanical transport for a time. The groom spoke in a gentle, resigned voice. He was very spare and sun-burned, and his eyes had that indescribable war-soldier look Tony knew so well. It was not so much the veiled suffering and horror Tony found touching, but the lifeless, unhoping resignation, the tragical indifference. He was certain he could diagnose the man in four words: Yeomanry, Egypt, Gallipoli, Palestine, and almost uttered them as they walked across the muddy road to the carriage. But it seemed an intrusion, so Tony simply said:

'How is Mr. Scrope? Well, I hope?'

'A bit poorly, sir. He's aged a good bit and seems to feel the cold like. But he keeps his head up wonderful.'

The country they drove through was at first unknown to Antony, since the station was on the new branch line. As long as they were on the wet tarred road, he was fully occupied in watching the horse, which he expected to fall any minute. More than once it slipped on the polished surface, and Tony could see the straining thews and muscles embossed on the hind legs as it fought to keep a balance. Presently they turned into a narrow untarred lane and immediately came to country he knew. He gazed eagerly at the sodden fields and leafless trees and

the sheepwalks dimly rising towards the low misty clouds. So late and cold was the spring that the hedges were budless, with here and there a clump of primroses and the green spearheads of wild arums. In a sheltered hollow he saw the little golden figs of sallow-blossom, and one spray of blackthorn just coming into flower. But, moved though he was by these familiar fields and the first promise of English spring flowers, he could not help feeling that the country was dun and sad and spiritless, and to him disappointing. He had yearned for them so often in the mud and clamour of the trenches of London, and now he was just disappointed and longed for huge flower-sprinkled cliffs above a peacock sea with grave mountains couched nobly in the distance. England had turned insipid in his mouth.

To his surprise, Scrope was not in his favourite eighteenth-century room, but in the tapestried Elizabethan hall, sitting in front of a fire of smouldering elm logs, a plaid over his knees and a screen behind his back. Only later did Tony discover the reason for this change of habits—coal was almost unobtainable, and the small grates would not burn these long rough branches which rested on the iron dogs in the huge fireplace. Yet even as he entered the door, Tony was seduced by the charm of this ordered, seemingly untroubled life—here, at least, was something uncrushed by the tanks of war. But that happy feeling lasted only the time from the door to the fireplace. It went as soon as he saw his old friend, and tried to keep from his own face any expression of his startled pity. Scrope's body seemed to have shrunk inside his tweeds, his face was sunk and wrinkled, his voice had developed the slight quaver of age, and as he looked up with the pathetic try-not-to-hurt-me expression of very old people, Tony saw in his eyes for a second the

strange dull gleam he knew only too well—the eyes of those about to die. Antony was so much shocked that at first he had some difficulty in talking coherently, and was glad when lunch was announced.

After lunch, a nurse in uniform came to tell Scrope that he must rest. Tony's heart was wrung as he watched the old man walk slowly out, leaning on the nurse's arm—to this must we all come, with a woman to guide our last steps, as our first. A cow's death, the Norsemen called it. Better perhaps the quick bullet, the roughly sewed blanket, the utterly unsentimental but terrifically real committal at the hands of cold-eyed men whose brief phrases of regret are the only true epitaph. And then forgotten. What a hideous clutch of corruption on the living is the wish to be remembered after death.

During the afternoon Tony went for a long walk. He was distressed by the sight of Scrope dying. For him the death of Scrope meant the death of something in himself and in England. Once that orderly ideal was gone—and it was on its death bed—nothing was left but confusion and anarchy, the base struggle of plutocrats, or a tyrannous ant-hill organization for paltry ends. There would be no more great characters, no more plenitude of life.

He came to the crest of the long hill and stood looking towards Vine House. In that misty air he would have failed to see it, if he had not known exactly where to look. It was the faintest trembling little ghost of a house in the dark mist of its leafless trees. Down in the foggy valley he knew a railway now ran, and that there was a station for his village. It occurred to him that the new line now touched Annie's home, and he deter-

mined to go and see her next day before returning to London. He had an impulse to walk on and visit his mother's grave, but rejected it almost violently—there was too much death in his life. Let the dead bury the dead. He had chosen not to die, and therefore must turn to the living. He began to walk back, wondering if he dared trouble with his errand a man on the verge of the grave. A light cold rain began to fall, and he thought with distaste of his clerk's job. He tried not to think of Katha or of Margaret.

When Tony returned, he found Scrope taking tea and apparently strengthened by his sleep. They sat and talked for a long time by the light of two small table lamps, which made only an oasis of yellow glow in the great shadowy desert of the hall. Occasionally when a log flared, the shadows would rock and scatter, figures loomed up dimly from the tapestry, and there was a gleam from the carved, hammer-vaulted roof.

'It will take a long time to recover from this disaster, whatever people may think,' said Scrope presently. 'You may live to see it. I shan't. And I'm not sorry. My world was already dying, and now it's gone beyond hope. People of my name and blood have lived here for many generations. I'm the last. My heir is almost a stranger.'

'It's sad enough,' said Tony, 'though I hope you'll keep New Court for many years to come.' The old man shook his head. 'Well,' Tony continued, 'I hope so anyway. But there must always be change. You and I disappear, but England goes on.'

'Does it!' exclaimed Scrope, with a flash of his old self. 'I've long said that Jew empire of Disraeli's was a mistake. A greater mistake was making ourselves the industrial cheap-jacks of the world. We've ruined our

people, and they were a fine people, to pile up imaginary bank balances. It's too late to retreat, impossible to regain our lost position or even maintain our present one. You'll find the future England very different from the past.'

'One must hope.'

'Yes, hope, but don't hope foolishly. Don't live in a fool's paradise, like the people who try to rule us. Perhaps it is because I'm an old man, perhaps because I see the doom of my class—as they call it—and all we stood for, perhaps it is because I have no son . . .'

He broke off, and though his face was in shadow, Tony could see that the old man was gazing fixedly at the red logs with his death-laden eyes. For Antony it was a moment of pure loss. If 'England' had meant anything it had meant the ideal of a relation between natural leaders and followers, duties increasing with privileges. 'Now they doubted themselves, they abdicated—they were still honest enough for that—because they knew they were inadequate to the situation. The younger, more insolent ones might go on trying, but they'd fail. They could no longer control the huge masses, those terrifying, almost mechanical masses who were one huge smoulder of resentment. The ideal of the gentleman was as dead as the reality. Faith in Scrope as a symbol was a tender fibre holding him to his past—he cut it through ruthlessly. It seemed to Tony that to live he must be painfully born again, enduring the pangs himself; that he had really and truly died, and that a new life exacted an entire abandonment of his past. Must the exquisitely sensitive fibre joining him to Katha be cut too?

Scrope stirred in his chair, and Tony heard his voice:

'I'm depressing you. And it's waste of time to think

too much about these things. Tell me about yourself, my boy. You look well enough, but there's no need for you to tell me that all isn't well with you. Can I help? '

'Yes,' said Tony slowly, 'I think you can. Presently I shall ask if you can do me a service. Not money,' he added hastily, and went on. 'Just now I was thinking that I'd died and had to come to life again, had to build up a life myself. Only the new edifice has to be built with the ruins of the old. Or rather, I feel like a tree that has been blasted level with the ground, with only the roots still living. Some even of the roots are dead, some I have to kill, the rest have to grow again somehow.'

'That's all a bit metaphorical. Don't get highfalutin, my dear boy. But I see what you mean. What are you going to do about it? '

'You used to tell me to live with gusto,' said Tony, ignoring the question, 'and I did. I took some tumbles, but they were nothing. I was more than contented, I was rapturous, I lived with gusto. But I couldn't live the war with gusto. I merely endured it. To me it was senseless, horrible, tyrannous. It didn't seem to me to matter who won—it was a victory for evil anyway. The fact that the war existed was a victory for evil. And it destroyed me. I've talked with some of these fellows who professed to enjoy it. Some were liars, the rest cretins, Neanderthals, baboons in spurs. I wrong the genuine baboons. I don't hate baboons, I hate this cold, warped destructiveness. . . .'

He stopped, almost choked with rage. He knew he was no Christian, no conscientious objector. He was ready to kill right enough. But no fake enemies in field grey—the real enemies at home. He could feel his hands at their throats, his heels stamping out their faces

ruthlessly. . . . He caught a glimpse of Scrope's face, peering at him curiously, almost a little mockingly. All right, old man, you are the grave's, not mine, but you shall listen to me.

'Understand me,' said Antony, clearing his throat to hide the tremble in his voice, 'this is not a time to whine, and I'm not whining. Neither do I ask for sympathy. I spit at it. You among others taught me that the world is a place for gladness and almost infinite delight. My own senses and instincts told me the same. Men have taught me otherwise. What the world of men might be, I no longer try to imagine; it's enough to know what it is. And it is evil. Oh,' he interrupted, as Scrope began to speak, 'I know there are more good sheep than evil wolves, but what's the good of that, if they let the wolves get the better of them, always, all the time? You told me just now not to live in a fool's paradise—do you think I still need the warning? '

No,' said Scrope gently, 'but don't condemn yourself to a fool's hell. I think perhaps you've despaired of humanity too quickly—age brings tolerance. I needn't point out to you that your case isn't unique—you must have thought of it. Indeed you've been luckier than many. And is existence so important? I've had my qualms about all you youngsters, but isn't there a *beau geste* in risking your life, even losing it, for a *panache*, something of no importance? '

'No I' Tony was emphatic. 'That seems to me twaddle. If I give my life, it must be for something which seems to me more important. Your *panache* is a dirty silly lie. I'm angry, angry with myself, for having been a pawn in a conflict between two evils. My one satisfaction is that I was a very useless pawn. I sincerely hope I wasn't worth my pay and keep. I'm sure I wasn't. But the fact that I've consented to live means

that I'm not in a fool's hell, that I hope in myself and hope in humanity.'

'You've considered suicide, then?' asked Scrope quickly.

'Certainly. And rejected it. I *won't* let them destroy me utterly. Looking at the first, rather frosty flowers here, touching a woman's body the other day, show me I am not wholly destroyed, I'm living again, beginning to live. But I shall be more cautious and cunning now.'

He paused abruptly, and then, changing the subject, talked frankly and at some length about Katha and Margaret. Scrope listened attentively and then said:

'Certainly I will try to obtain you the passport and visa. I needn't tell you I'm not *persona grata* with officials. They sent down here more than once during the war to see if I were harbouring German emissaries—they found none, and had to be content with requisitioning my horses. But I know a man, I'll write to him, I'll do my best.'

'That's generous of you,' said Tony, 'and all that I ask' If I find her, it seems to me I shall have found a centre of life. If not . . .'

He flung his hand up with a gesture, meaning 'I shall not give in.'

'Old men,' said Scrope thoughtfully, 'are always accused of caution and cold-bloodedness, forgetting their own youth and trying to discourage hot blood. But I would ask you if you should not be more cautious with this English girl, if you are being quite fair to her? Would it not be honester, more like a gentleman, to cut free from her entirely?'

'Ideally, yes; practically, no,' Tony replied. 'You forget that I'm a man struggling for my life, a kind of Ishmael with every hand against me. The Catholic

Church will absolve a starving man who snatches a loaf to keep alive. I'm that starving man. I'm sick of death and dead bodies, sick of cold loneliness, and honour. The touch of that living woman's body gives me life. Besides, I don't know the future. I may not find Katha, or I may find us worlds apart. I may need Margaret. And I must keep friends with my father.'

It is not the code in which I was reared,' said Scrope a little loftily.

'No doubt.' Tony could not keep a tinge of bitterness out of his voice. 'But then you were not reared for the shambles. I took my chance. Why shouldn't women take theirs? And I don't believe in your gentleman's chivalry, Scrope. It was only the good manners of contempt. Much has changed. We have a wholly different outlook. We've lost your sense of exclusive possessiveness, your craving for permanence. At the same time we attach more importance to the touch of bodies, to the flowering of life. You approached women socially—they were either outcasts and contemptuously touchable, or Mem-Sahibs and untouchably beyond reproach. We approach them as individuals, as much entitled to the liberty of their bodies as ourselves. True, the ideal is one woman—but how find her, except by trial and error?'

Scrope shook his head.

'I don't think you'll find women have changed. They'll always be millstones round a man's neck. You're on dangerous ground, my boy. Be careful. If a woman accepts you without loving you, she'll make you pay for it; and if she loves you, she'll make you pay still more heavily.'

'What to do, then?' cried Tony impatiently. 'I'm neither a eunuch nor a sodomite.'

' You must dree your weird,' said the old man grimly.

' Yes, I must dree my weird,' he retorted with a deeper grimness.

The parting was difficult. Antony knew that he would never see Scrope alive again, and that was painful, so painful that he was surprised. After so many deaths, and of young men, he might excusably have been callous to the death of an old man whose life had at least been full, if not always happy. Instead he minded terribly, as if this one death made all the others less endurable, while the parting itself caused him nearly as much suffering as if it had been at the grave's edge.

Under this dominant of farewell were other tones of distress. Antony knew that his old friend was disappointed in him, somehow disapproved, didn't care any longer to comprehend him. He got the feeling, why he didn't quite know, that Scrope's 'live with gusto' was now qualified by the important clause 'but within the accepted rules.' Was it harsh, Tony reflected, to feel that the crash of the war had made Scrope timid, and that he had scurried back to the protection of the old, but so obviously crumbling walls? Again, the mixture of old splendour with new poverty in the house itself rather jarred on him—one should not be allowed to feel pity for the privileged leaders of the splendid life. And there was the collapse of an old ideal. Yes, it was undeniable that the Scropes had lost touch, could no longer lead, were impotent before the huge swarms and the huge forces of modern life. Yet Tony believed more than ever that human beings were not and could never become mechanisms, imitation machines, but were living tissue, highly developed and complex animals, and therefore the inspiration of their lives must always be some-

thing personal, not something abstract. Masterless men.

Tony debated all this once more with himself, as he walked from the little station to Annie's village, and once more he threw it up in despair. He could see no collective life existing to which he could give himself, therefore he was forced back to making the best of his individual life. But he didn't in the least enjoy the feeling of society as a Roman arena of prowling carnivores and himself as one of the fugitive victims. He was glad to find himself at the entrance to the village, so that he forgot these and the thousand futile thoughts which worried him.

The village disappointed him. For years he had carried with him a vision of its full summer lushness, the wide empty white road with the broad border of turf still called 'the butts,' and the serene quality of the old cottages. But the fruit trees were leafless and flowerless, the road tarred, the turf ploughed up by lorry wheels, and the cottages commonplace—several had been rebuilt, and two of the oldest had gone to make way for a large shop with a plate-glass window. Even Annie's shop looked smaller and shabbier than he had expected, and he noticed with a shock that the name was changed to 'A. Hogbin.' So Annie was a widow! The shutters were up, and the whole house seemed deserted. It occurred to Tony that he was violating the Sunday-afternoon repose of the tradesman, and that he ought to have let Annie know he was coming. Strange how one forgets other people's habits. There was no reply to his first knock on the side door, so he knocked again harder. Presently a window opened, and an old woman he didn't recognize looked out.

'What be knocking for?' she cried in a shrill voice.

'I want to see Mrs. Hogbin,' said Tony, looking up.

'I'm Mrs. Hogbin. What do 'ee want? '

'I mean Mrs. Annie Hogbin. Will you tell her Antony wants to see her? '

The head vanished, there were muffled sounds of what seemed like a dispute, then a shuffle of feet, a clatter of bolts, and the same old woman opened the door.

'Will you walk in, sir? Why, I remember you at Annie's wedding when you wasn't but a nipper. Dear, oh, dear, how time does fly. That's what I always say. Now you set there, sir. Annie'll soon be down. Dear, oh dear, if I haven't forgot to put the kettle on.'

And she shuffled off down the passage. Tony guessed she must be Annie's mother-in-law. The room where he was to 'set' was the parlour. He had just time to notice the upright piano covered with framed photographs standing on a lace-edged cover, a soldier's medals and badges framed, two fine old Chelsea figures on the mantelpiece between two dreadful imitation lustre vases, when the door opened and in came Annie, looking rather short and dumpy.

'Why, Annie!' he exclaimed, kissing her cheek. 'How are you after all these years? '

She gazed up at him and fell back on one of her stock remarks:

'Why, Master Tony, how you've grown! And how you've changed! '

'Not so much that you don't recognize me, I hope,' he said lightly.

'Oh, no, sir. I should always recognize the baby I helped to rear, I hope. But you look so much older and so severe like, it give me quite a turn.'

They sat down and talked about Tony's childhood, trying to re-form old links, but almost at once he saw that he had lost Annie too, really lost her this time.

Just as her once fine figure had gone shapeless and flabby, so the hard simplicity of her working-girl nature had degenerated into a sort of tradesman's flabbiness. Once the first emotion of meeting was over, she kept calling him 'Mr. Clarendon' until he insisted that to her he must always be Tony. He noticed she was wearing a long gold chain, a gold link bracelet, and several rings. It occurred to him as one of the oddities of life that Annie was now probably better off materially than he was. Presently Tony's mother was mentioned, and Annie said:

'We heard the sad news, Master Tony, and I'm sure we grieved for you and poor Mr. Clarendon. That horrible accident.'

'Yes, it was a shock. And my father has never really recovered. He looks old and rather fragile. But what of your husband, how is he?'

'Oh, Master Tony!' And Annie burst into tears. 'Those are his medals up there, sir. He would go off to the war, though he could 'a got exempted as a master man. He was killed up Ypes way.'

'And Bill, your brother?' said Tony, feeling that there was nothing to be said in consolation.

'Oh, he done wonderful in the war,' said Annie, cheering up at once. 'He was that good with horses, he got made sergeant, and now he's over to Newbury way looking after a gentleman's stable. He's married, and they've got two.'

'And how do you get along now your husband's dead?'

'It's a hard time, what with all these rationing orders. But I've two good assistants, and that was released to help the business, and the other demobbed as they call it. Friends of poor Charly's they was, and they've

promised to work till my young Charly's old enough. . . .'

'You've got a son! I didn't know that.'

'Yes, he'll be eleven year old come Whitsun, and there's a girl too, she's eight. If you knew the trouble I had rearing those two, Master Tony, you'd never believe it. You was nothing to them. Croup and 'oop-ing cough and measles and chicken pox, dear, oh dear, nothing but worry, worry, worry. And the boy's a handful, not having no father. Many's the night I lie there worrying over what's going to happen to them. What I say is, what's the world coming to?'

'What indeed,' said Tony. 'But at least you have the consolation of your children, Annie, and some chance of providing for them.'

'That's what I always say!' exclaimed Annie admiringly, as if this banal remark were a piece of strikingly original wisdom. 'After my Charly was took, and he was a good husband to me, Master Tony, never a cross word, and he always would have it I was to have the best he could provide, and then he was killed, and I used to cry myself to sleep every night for pretty nigh a year. It did seem so cruel like, and him so gentle, and not wishing anybody no ill, and then Father died, and it was all too much. Then when the children got measles, I prayed to the Lord to take us all to Him, but them measles was a blessing in disguise,'

'How?' asked Tony.

'They was sent by God!' said Annie very seriously. 'Night and day I set up with them, hoping we'd all die, and then they begun to get better, and it came over me of a sudden like that we was to be spared, and that it was wicked of me to go on grieving over Charly when I ought to be fending for my children.'

'You did right,' said Tony, though he saw clearly

enough that Annie's loss would never be made good. He felt he could forgive her anything for her devotion to the memory of Charly, yet raged inwardly against the accursed greeds which wrecked the lives of these decent, simple people.

'Was you in the army, Master Tony? '

'Yes.'

'Was you ever up Ypes way? '

'Yes.'

'You didn't happen to see my Charly's grave? '

A vision of that desolation as he had last seen it flashed into Tony's mind. Remember a grave. What square yard of it wasn't a grave?

'I'm afraid not, Annie,' he replied gently. 'There are a good many buried there.'

'He was only a private,' said Annie wistfully, 'and they can't tell me nothing about where he was buried.'

'It would have made no difference if he'd been a colonel,' said Tony quickly; 'there was no distinction. But you mustn't dwell on it, Annie. You must . . . '

He was about to offer the usual commonplaces, but to his distress Annie began to cry again, murmuring: 'He was such a good husband, and as the others come home one by one, it seems so bitter cruel that he'll never come back.'

Fortunately old Mrs. Hogbin came in to announce tea.

'You won't mind having tea in the kitchen, Master Tony? ' asked Annie through the rearguard of her departing sobs.

'Of course not. Why should I? But you shouldn't have troubled.' As they went along the narrow corridor, Tony took Annie's arm, saying: 'It's all a bad business, Annie. We're all more or less broken-hearted. But the past can't be altered. We must just try to make the future happier.'

But as he spoke these words, he realized how futile they were. He felt that the best thing Annie could do was to marry one of the assistants, but didn't dare venture the suggestion. And, anyway, it was a poor solution.

Annie cheered up over 'tea,' which seemed to Tony a tremendous feast in those rationed days. Mrs. Hogbin had cooked sausages and eggs; there was home-baked bread, the first real butter he had tasted for many months, a large pie made from home-preserved fruit, and three sorts of jam. Annie lamented the poor quality of the jam, on account of the scarcity of sugar. Tony noticed she spoke of its scarcity, not of its dearness, as in the old days; and felt glad that at least poverty was not added to her other woes. The two children gazed at Tony with round eyes and answered his attempts at friendliness with shy monosyllables; then, when they got over their shyness and wanted to talk, Annie checked them. Tony tried to make the meal cheerful, but only partly succeeded. He felt he had only disturbed Annie by reminding her of her troubles. And though they parted with warm promises to meet again soon, Tony could not avoid the impression that this too was a final parting. Another root dead.

§IV

During the succeeding weeks Antony had the opportunity of verifying for himself among other common-places the obvious fact that the least tolerable stretches of life are those of mere waiting, of eventless expectation, when growth is silent and hidden, and day succeeds day with desperate similarity. Outwardly he appeared like any other young man of his time, except that he seemed restless and rather at a loose end (neither very

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uncommon symptoms), and that in company he was usually rather listless with occasional flashes of energy. Inwardly he was a turmoil, and if he had been less desperate he would have seen that this very pain was a symptom of life and growth.

He was haunted by the sensation that in all essentials he had died and had to come to life again if he were to escape a living death. It occurred to him that every life was a series of such deaths and renewals, and that middle age was simply the acquiescence in living death, the lack of power or courage to go through the agony of rebirth. He attempted to discuss this with his father one evening, about six weeks after he had seen Annie and Scrope.

'You must have passed through something similar when Mother died, and you—' he was going to add 'never recovered,' but feeling the cruelty of the remark, he quickly changed it to 'you were a long time in recovering.'

'I don't see the analogy,' said Clarendon, who always shrank from speaking of an event whose effects had been only too truly what Tony had hesitated to express. 'You have suffered no such irreparable loss. I mean that however much you might grieve——'

'Yes, yes,' Tony interrupted, 'I didn't mean that I suffered then as you did. But at present my sense of loss is just as real. I seem to have no connection with my former self, except a kind of regret. Even the people I knew and liked are quite different, at least to me. I remember what I was then, but it's scarcely more real to me than it would be if you described to me in detail the first three years of my life. I should believe you, I should know that I had once been like that, but I should feel it happened to somebody else.'

. . .

Henry Clarendon had reached that state of mind when people insist that everything must be going perfectly well; not, as in the exuberance of youth, from an excess of vitality, but from indifference, a desire to be left alone, an unwillingness to grapple with difficulties, especially those of others. He wanted to pretend that all was well with Tony, even if the opposite were proved twenty times over. Like many people he could display every sympathy for physical injury and remain totally unaware of the acutest mental suffering. He said:

'I thought that wound of yours was entirely healed. If it still troubles you, see a doctor,'

Tony gazed at him in perplexity. What wound did he mean? The wound of finding the world so base? The wound of losing Katha? And he'd already seen a doctor. . . . He meant that little flesh wound in the leg, which at its worst had caused him a little pain and inconvenience. He was amazed that two people, so near in blood, could so misunderstand each other. And a little angry.

'It's no spatter of shrapnel,' he exclaimed, 'and, anyway, that cut was forgotten long ago. But what is the good of my going to a doctor and asking him if he can minister to a mind diseased, if he can pluck from my heart a rooted sorrow? It is you I must consult, as I've already quite uselessly consulted two other old friends.'

'I don't understand you,'

'Can I put it more clearly? I'll try. What I suffer is not from my body, but in myself; and it isn't merely egotistic—in my way I suffer for others. When I was young I learned from you, from my mother, from others, to believe in justice, truth, kindness, and happiness. You curbed my selfish and violent instincts and tried to make me polite, unselfish, generous, gentle, considerate for others, and so on. I don't say you succeeded, but

you gave me the impression that one should try to behave according to such principles, and that the world is made up of such people. My experience shows me it isn't so. I don't say you taught me a lie, but you taught me the thing that is not.'

'A gentleman is always in the minority,' said his father, 'that's his privilege.'

'But I have no privileges. I'm a penniless ex-officer. What is the use of teaching the creed of *noblesse oblige* if one hasn't the privileges and responsibilities of *noblesse*? I don't fancy the part of a Gascon cadet. Besides, I took these principles, that training as universal human truth, not as the accomplishments of a caste—to which I don't belong.'

'You have as good a right to call yourself a gentleman by birth and breeding as anyone,' said the older man, offended.

'Dear, dear Father, don't let's quibble! You may be quite right, but it's of no importance. The point is that I've seen, even if you haven't, that the world, whether run by gentlemen or not, is the opposite of all you taught me—greedy, self-seeking, treacherous and murderous. Which lesson am I to follow? Theirs?'

'God forbid!'

Tony thought it not worth pointing out that his father professed not to believe in god. He went on, trying clumsily to put into words feelings which were beyond words.

'All right. But you won't deny that I might reasonably feel some pain, some confusion of mind under these circumstances? I feel that I and those like me have very little chance in this world of men about which you so grievously misled me. You taught me to look at things, to use my senses. I did not as a scientist, but as one who feels the beauty of the physical world. Per-

haps without knowing it, you taught me to be sensitive to colour and form, to love mountains and skies and trees and flowers and animals. And more than many I am deeply sensitive to the attraction of women.'

'You cannot blame me for that,' exclaimed Henry Clarendon indignantly. 'You were brought up most rigidly in that respect.'

Perhaps that contributed the element of forbidden fruit,' said Tony. 'But, no. That's unfair to myself. I never thought or felt in those terms. But have I made myself clear? Do you see why life now seems savourless and that I don't know what to do?'

Henry Clarendon, who had looked deeply offended at his son's remarks, brightened a little at the last sentence.

'From all you say I feel the time has come for you to settle down, my dear lad,' he said affectionately. 'I should like to see you settled and happy before I die. And I should like to see you do the right thing by Margaret. You owe it to her, as a man and a gentleman. I've lost a certain amount of money during the war, but I'll gladly give you £6,000 if you marry. That will give you £300 a year, and Margaret has something, a good deal more, I think. Give up this solitary life. Give up this humiliating post you've taken. Live here until your marriage, and after if you wish. And try to find some more—more suitable career.'

Tony had heard all this so often before that he scarcely needed to listen. A wild longing possessed him to get away from these people to Katha—Katha who never talked about incomes and settling down, Katha who wouldn't want him to be a gentleman, and wouldn't care how poor they were so long as they could wander in the world's beautiful places and sleep in each other's arms. The longing affected him physically, as if a hand were clutching his chest. He bent forward to hide his

face, thinking that he had received no news about his passport from Scrope beyond a brief letter to say the application had been sent in. He looked at the clock—just after six, plenty of time for a trunk call to New Court. Tony said:

' May I put through a trunk call, Father? '

'What?'

' A trunk call. I want to speak to Scrope.'

' I don't——' Henry Clarendon was obviously perplexed by this abrupt change, and yet not sorry to be relieved from the discussion. ' Certainly, if you wish.'

Tony went out of the room and put through the call. He then went to the small kitchen and talked for a few minutes to the servant who was preparing dinner. When he returned he said:

' They may be some time getting through. I told your girl I should be here for dinner. You don't mind, do you? '

' Not a bit, my dear boy. Delighted to have you. I wish you'd make up your mind to stay here permanently.'

Tony ignored this hint. He imagined he was being rather unkind in leaving his father alone, and he hated the dreariness of his own room. But he believed that this independence was somehow due to Katha, that he would be betraying her if he gave in to this safety-first life. ' Settling down' merely meant acquiescence in ready-made values. . . . As if thinking aloud, he said:

' I don't want to be a good citizen. I don't want to found a family. To devote my energies to " paying my way," with the addition of a little mild gambling, golf, jazz, and theatre-going, seems to me an ignoble waste of life. Above all, I'm determined not to become part of the industrial-commercial machine.'

' How otherwise can you live? '

'I don't know. That's what I've got to work out,'

'But you're working for an industrial concern now,'

'I don't intend to stay,' said Tony incautiously.

'Business is a bluff. I'm appalled by the enormous waste in alleged organization, the pompous talk and filing of documents, while the real work is done by a few technical enthusiasts who really love their jobs. I don't love mine. Which is why I shan't stay.' He laughed. 'The joke of it is, they think I'm rather good—it's child's play compared with running a company in the line—and I'm promoted. Instead of filing useless reports and schemes which are never looked at and never will be, I've got to prepare them for the neat oblivion of well-dusted shelves. They call this "getting in new blood." Rot. The meanest of their workmen, who actually handles their beastly cement and steel, knows more about the real job than I do, or they for that matter.'

'Then,' said Henry Clarendon, who was not in the least interested in these remarks, which seemed to him rather dangerous, an unnecessary criticism of the god that-which-is, I hope you mean that you'll give up this present unsatisfactory way of living and build a home with Margaret. Together you would have enough to live on in a small way, and there will be a little more after my death. But I think you should have an occupation. Capital is an elusive thing nowadays. And an aimless life is unsatisfactory.'

How boring this sort of conversation is, thought Tony, and how devastating is obvious good sense.

'You've read the Odyssey?' he asked.

'Of course. But my Greek was never very good, my boy. I preferred science. Still I've not forgotten it all. *Deur' ag' ion poluain Odysseu mega kudos AchaionJ*

'Yes,' said Tony wearily, 'quite so. But you re-

member that the king's daughter went down to the sea to do the washing, and the king's sons unyoked her mules and carried in the baskets. And Odysseus boasts that he can cut as much wheat with a scythe as the next man. That's what I was thinking of.'

'I don't understand you,' said Henry Clarendon, staring at his son as if at last he thought something might be wrong.

'I only mean that Homer implies one should enjoy the obvious, essential things of life,' Tony tried feebly to explain.

'You live too much in the past,' was the retort. 'It's impossible to return to an outworn form of life. The tendency of modern life under the guidance of science is to subdivide labour and to eliminate it. Why cut wheat with a scythe when a machine will do it far more easily and cheaply?'

'Only because you may enjoy it more—the difference between living and business.'

Henry Clarendon laughed contemptuously:

'I should like to see you cutting a five-acre field with your own hands. I've seldom seen anyone less handy at manual jobs.'

'Oh, quite,' said Tony, 'but I have to work out these things for myself. Why shouldn't I admire manual skill?'

'Meanwhile you must live. And you cannot dodge the realities.'

'But are they realities? And why shouldn't I try to dodge what is death for me?'

Tony felt annoyed with himself for having betrayed his intention of leaving his job and for having expressed himself so feebly and incoherently. A sense of discouragement and futility came over him. What the devil *did* he want? . . .

'After all,' his father's voice broke in, 'what is human life? It's getting up at eight, having breakfast, going to your work, coming home tired and contented in the evening, and spending a few hours in quiet recreation, which is all the better if you have a wife to share it with.'

'Good god!' said Tony passionately. 'If I thought life was nothing more than that, I'd cut my throat, here and now, on your carpet!'

Fortunately dinner was announced, and they left it at that. But Henry Clarendon had got into his head the idea that he must help Tony by introducing him to some of the marvels of science. Over dinner he nearly made Tony sick by telling him how the heart of a fowl could be kept alive and would grow year after year in the proper solution, and how frogs with their brains cut out still performed some of their functions. This, he said, was most important, since it proved there was no such thing as a soul. Tony did not attempt to dispute this, but felt that its perceptions and logic must now be ranked among the marvels of science.

The sharp ringing of the telephone bell in the next room interrupted these interesting revelations. In his haste Tony did not trouble to turn on the light, but sat in darkness at his father's writing table, holding the receiver to his ear. A beam of light from an opposite window fell across the table, and his eye caught a glimpse of his father's fine, neat handwriting, '. . . new epoch of scientific progress will greatly increase the sum of human happiness.' The telephone transmission was very bad. Tony had to repeat his name a dozen times, and then the unknown voice from New Court kept saying 'What? I can't hear you,' in answer to his request to speak to Scrope. Some unintelligible words caused

him to start in turn a series of 'What? I can't hear you,' until he suddenly perceived the voice was saying: 'Mr. Scrope is dead . . . two days ago.' For a moment he was too stunned to reply, and the faint voice repeated: 'Mr. Scrope is dead. Do you hear me?'

I'm so sorry,' he managed to stammer, 'I didn't know.'

'What?' said the voice, 'do you want . . . speak . . . Lord . . . ?'

No, thanks. I'm very sorry to have troubled you.'

And then as the voice went on to say something about the funeral, he quietly put the receiver down and cut off communication. For a minute or two he sat quite still, looking at the shaft of light. He had his answer from the fates, and it was a blow between the eyes. A good friend was gone for ever, and with him the chance of a passport for Austria. More waiting. The Peace Treaty was not signed, and demobilized soldiers were still liable to be recalled. Now, if only he could claim financial interests in Austria. . . . Katha was farther away than ever. His despair turned to anger, and for the hundredth time he cursed the stupid greed of a world where only property and the propertied were esteemed.

Tony returned to the dining room, shading his eyes from the dazzle of light after darkness, and stopped short in the doorway. Margaret was sitting in an arm-chair beside the fire. She had an air of being settled in, rather like a stray cat adopting the house where it finds a saucer of milk; and this offended Tony.

'Come and finish your dinner, Tony,' said Henry Clarendon. 'I've ordered coffee for Margaret. How was Scrope?'

'Dead,' said Tony bluntly, sitting down, and pushing

away his plate. He filled a liqueur glass from the brandy decanter with a violently trembling hand and drank it off. His father and Margaret observed this with evident displeasure.

'Dead!' exclaimed Henry Clarendon. 'But he must have been an old man. Strange I didn't notice it in the *Times*. I must look it up.'

Calculating the difference between his age and Scrope's, thought Tony; oh, miserable condition of humanity! He lit a cigarette. As soon as Henry Clarendon had left the room, Margaret said:

'Tony!'

'Yes?'

'I want you to come out with me soon. Will you?'

'Of course, if you wish. Has anything happened?'

Before she could reply, Henry Clarendon returned with the newspaper.

'Here it is,' he said. 'Scrope was eighty-one. I wonder if the heir will sell New Court?'

Tony made no answer. He did not want to discuss his dead friend. He was quite convinced that this death was not of the slightest importance to him, that he was quite callous, and at the same time found his eyes filling with tears. He puffed at his cigarette and pretended the smoke had got into his eyes. Margaret talked with his father for some time and then said she must go; Tony of course got up and said he would see her home. He disliked intensely the look of benevolent complicity given them by his father as they went out. On the way downstairs Tony said to her:

'How did you know I was here?'

'I didn't. But you weren't in your room, and I came on here in the hope of seeing you.'

'Did you want me for anything?'

'Tony! You haven't been near me for almost a week, and you say that! You're so cold-hearted I sometimes wonder if you're really a man at all.'

'You should be able to contradict that rumour,' said Tony, annoyed.

'How beastly and cynical you are!'

Tony stopped in the ugly street and said:

'Well, we don't seem to be getting on very well to-night. Shall I put you in a taxi?'

He noticed the row of street lights, still dimmed and blackened against air raids, the sordid shrubs in the front garden of the house opposite, the puddles of water in the worn suburban road—unreal, unreal. Oh, Katha, Katha, where are you?

Margaret stamped her very neat black shoe on the pavement.

'I won't let you wriggle out of things like this, Tony. I want to talk to you seriously. Take me somewhere, anywhere, so that we can be quiet and alone.'

'Hyde Park?' said Tony gloomily. 'We should undoubtedly be run in, and you'd have to marry me to save my reputation. I hate cinemas. Pubs, being the only amusing places in London, are naturally overcrowded. You'd better come to the studio.'

Margaret hesitated.

'You needn't be afraid,' said Tony, smiling at her. 'Waterton has tamed down the landlady marvellously. I have a key to the front door, and I'm even allowed to make my own breakfast with real tea.'

Even as he spoke, and she acquiesced, he cursed himself for folly and weakness. This was exactly what he had promised himself not to do—Scrope had been right, it was a mistake to allow this ambiguous relationship with Margaret to drag on. Even if Katha were lost

for ever, better be quite, quite alone than disharmoniously involved in a sort of intrigue. Before he had time to think out an excuse, Margaret had waved to a taxi returning from some outer suburb, and they were driving off. As they came to more brightly lit streets, he caught glimpses of Margaret's clear face, with the thick curved eyelashes and the gentle mouth which could change so swiftly from sweetness to hard determination. He thought she looked wistful and hurt by his defensive attitude and silence, and all his boyish affection for her seemed to revive in an instinct to protect and comfort her. Why should they be enemies? For a moment he felt very tender to this English girl who had been the pretext for so many romantic dreams long ago. And now when she was at his side and a grown woman in love with him, he was struggling to keep faith with a dream. Five years since he had said good-bye to Katha, and during four of them he had remained completely faithful to her. And even now . . . He wondered how much of Margaret's ardour was due to jealousy, how much to social prejudice, how much to real passion. Before he had time to formulate an answer to his mental questioning, the silent ride was over, and he was switching on lights and putting a match to the gas fire.

'Do you mind turning off the upper light?' said Margaret. 'It hurts my eyes.'

The small shaded bed lamp left most of the room in semidarkness, and the reddening asbestos glowed softly on Margaret's silk dress. Tony poured water into the tin above the stove to keep the air from becoming dry and heady. Then he sat down opposite her and gazed at her abstractedly, wondering if it was true that one could be in love with two women at the same time. He was startled by Margaret's saying:

'Why do you look at me like that, Tony?'

It seemed such a silly question, and his heart drooped within him as he thought how often Margaret and he passed their time in futile word-fencing, an odious pre-domestic bickering. With Katha he had talked nonsense by the hour, feeling it tremendously important, and there had never been this sense of incompleteness and conflict. With Margaret there was nearly always this irritating contest. Yet even as she sat there, apparently hating him for his silent indifference to her question, how beautiful she was, how exasperatingly attractive! Why couldn't she leave a poor devil alone to wrestle in his spirit's darkness with principalities and powers?

'Why don't you answer?' Margaret's voice angrily interrupted his interior monologue. 'Haven't you anything to say?'

'What is there to say?' asked Tony wearily. 'I'm sorry if I looked at you disagreeably. I didn't mean to. As a matter of fact I was thinking how beautiful you looked in this soft light.'

'Don't try to be flattering!' she retorted sharply. 'And don't think you can deceive me. I know what you were thinking.'

'Do you?'

'Yes, I do! You were thinking how much pleasanter it would be to have that Austrian woman here instead of me!'

This was near enough to Tony's actual thought to distress him. He certainly *had* been comparing Margaret unfavourably with Katha.

'You're a thought reader,' he said, mockingly. 'But I was thinking you beautiful and regretting that so often we seem to jar on each other. I wish we'd be friends.'

'People who've been lovers can't be friends. They've either got to be lovers or enemies. You——'

'I question that,' Tony interrupted. 'I don't doubt it's true in a general way, but I think it ought not to be. Why shouldn't people with better instincts get over that love and hate convention? It is only a convention. For the sake of memories and old affection, they should learn, if they cease to be lovers, to remain tender friends.'

'Tender friends!' Margaret sneered at him. 'So you want me as your *tender friend*, at hand when you want a little love-making, and out of the way when something better or especially somebody better comes along?'

'You're defining the ideal mistress,' said Tony, laughing. 'But I don't see why two people who have passed through a sexual experience shouldn't feel tenderly about each other, instead of bitterly.'

'Instead of "jarring," as I "jar" on your sensitive nerves! How false and sentimental you are, Tony!'

'Don't use jargon, and don't be duped by it,' he interrupted. 'Any feelings can be disparaged nowadays by calling them sentimental. I deny that my feelings are false. They are real to me, and I try to express them honestly. But the quality of feelings is the most difficult thing in the world to——'

'Tony!' Margaret interrupted in her turn. 'What is the good of talking about feelings—especially when you haven't got them, as you haven't?'

'The heart knows its own bitterness.'

'Bitterness! You've plenty of that, but no love. You got what you wanted from me, and now you don't care.'

'Why should we dispute like this?' said Tony gently. 'Words can build a bridge between two people, but they can also destroy it. I told you that I needed a few months to recover myself——'

'You talk as if you'd been the only man in the war,' Margaret interrupted.

'I've never said other men mightn't need it too,' he answered patiently. 'But if I don't help myself, nobody else will. Don't think I'm grouching against my lot or that I'm a "delayed shock" case, as that doctor said. My nerves are stronger than his. Also my muscles. I could still march twenty miles a day, still go a week with an hour's sleep a day, sleep on the floor as easily as in bed. He couldn't.'

'What has all this to do with me?'

'Nothing whatever,' said Tony coolly; 'but get out of your mind the idea that I'm a battered hero-boy needing feminine comfort and that I'm the seducer of your virtue. You went to bed with me because you wanted to, on your own responsibility, when I knew and you knew there was every chance of my being killed, or unpleasantly maimed. If I'd come back legless, I should have driven you from me for your own sake.'

'And now you're trying to do it for yours?'

'No. Try to understand this—my moral world, my interior life have collapsed. My present life is purely reflex, almost vegetable. If it were not for the suffering, the confusion, I should say I am dead. At the moment I'm plagued by mortal indifference, so that one thought or act seems in no way preferable to another. I don't want an ideology, I want my sensibility again, but I want it healthy and invulnerable. Can you give me back my vital energy, my delight in living, the million sense impressions which made my days beautiful? Of course you can't. My father's idea that marriage and three hundred a year plus expectations will meet the case is kindly cowardice—he won't face the inner reality. . . .'

'What does all this rigmarole mean?' asked Margaret angrily. 'You're talking for the sake of talking, Tony. Trying to evade. What is it you want?'

'If I could tell you that I should be a long way towards where I want to be. Do you think a man in my state of mind should commit himself to another person? Especially by marriage. As I told my father, I don't want to found a family. I think it monstrous cruelty to bring a child into a world like this.'

'If you had a child, you'd think differently,' said Margaret, gazing at him with a peculiar look. 'It would take you away from your selfish absorption in yourself and give you an object in life.'

Tony registered something significant in her look and tone, without being able at the moment to interpret it. He shook his head.

'If you want me to ask some definite favour,' he said, looking down, 'be my friend but leave me free for this year, don't ask me to commit myself. Let me have my trip abroad, let me find out where I stand and what I feel. I need to invite my soul.'

Margaret sprang to her feet, her face white and twisted with hatred and jealousy.

'You're telling lies, Tony! You invent all this to put me off. You want to get back to that Austrian woman, and I hate her, I hate her, I hate her!'

'Don't hate like that I' exclaimed Tony. 'Hate qualities, hate meanness, cruelty, and hypocrisy, but don't hate persons!'

'I do hate her! And I love you. But either you're my lover or I never see you again!'

She had her hands clutched over her breasts, as if, Tony thought, she wanted to tear them like the wild mourners for Thammuz. He was shocked by the violence of her destructive emotion. He knew he ought to bring her sharply to order, but could not bear to lose the one person in England who was deeply linked with his affections.

'Margaret!' he exclaimed. 'You know I'm fond of you, and you know perfectly well that you attract me. Even when you stand there with that dreadful look of hate on your face, I can't feel anything but tenderly about you. But when I say "give me time," "be my friend," I'm trying to be fair to you as well as to myself. Life, one's feelings aren't just black and white. The point is that we must find out how we really feel before we act——'

'It isn't the point! The point is, am I desirable to you or not? Do you want me, or don't you?'

Before he could reply, she slipped lithely out of her sheath dress, threw off her underclothes, and stood before him in her stockings and shoes, a beautiful white fury of consuming possessive desire.

'Do you want me?' she cried, offering herself almost brutally to his eyes.

Tony was stunned into silence. He had never believed the common myth of the outwardly cold, inwardly passionate, sensual Englishwoman, and this demonstration left him amazed. He scarcely recognized the restrained, rather well-bred, rather gentle Margaret of ordinary life in this elemental creature, this craving female body, which seemed to taunt him with frigidity and insensibility. He tried to speak, tried to stammer some evasion, but before he could move a hand she was on his knees, with her naked arms about his head and her breasts touching his face. Her passionate invective changed to a passionate pleading and caressing. She kissed his hair, his forehead, his cheeks, and he felt her wet tears as she exclaimed:

'Oh, Tony, Tony, my darling one, my beautiful! Forgive me, forgive me, but I love you so much. I want you, I want you. Forget her. No one can desire you, your lovely strong body, as I do. I must have you.'

She held his lips in a desperate kiss and seized his hand. A thrill of desire went through him as his fingers touched her. He tried to free his lips from hers, to fight off the sudden glow of his own flesh, but she clung to him and clutched his wrist and hand. A kind of angry desire possessed him—let her have it then and take the consequences. He answered her kisses almost brutally. Not until she was shaken by a quivering far more violent than Tony had ever known her experience, did she release her lips from his. She wrenched away her lips with a long sigh and shudder, and lay quite inert in his arms. He let her lie there until her breathing quietened, then carried her to the bed, switched out the light, undressed rapidly, and got in beside her.

In the darkness Tony felt her body press against his. The contact seemed curiously anonymous—she was not Margaret, but Woman. Her fingers clutched his shoulder so tightly that they hurt his flesh, and he tried to calm her by kisses and firm gentle touch. Then, as he still hesitated, she whispered:

'Take me!'

Her words lighted up in his mind. Instantly he connected them with what she had said about his having a child and the strange look in her eyes when she had said it. He felt she had laid a trap for him, that the scene had been prepared, and that while she had not needed to pretend jealousy and passion, she had all along meant to betray him into paternity—then indeed he would be held. In spite of her desperate clinging to hold him to her, almost savagely he wrenched himself free. He had escaped the trap.

They lay quite silent and still. Tony experienced a reaction of remorse, almost dislike. He hadn't really wanted this, not in that way. And yet he tried to feel

tender towards her—after all they had been lovers, even if she had tried to trap him. But at the same time she seemed to draw far away from him, to grow hard and cold, instead of drawing closer in the warm communion of bodies which have mingled. He lay in a kind of horror, feeling her draw away, away, further, further, until all the glow of her recent desire seemed chilled into a dry sullen hate. It was paralyzing to lie pressed against this hating body, hostile and sullen, cold to his touch. So paralyzing that he could neither move nor speak, agonizedly searching for some excuse to unclasp her, to leave that cold hating body.

It was Margaret who spoke first, in a clear dry voice, as if nothing had happened:

'What time is it?'

He marvelled at her self-control, so utterly different from her consuming passion only half an hour earlier, and that she seemed to accept almost indifferently the peculiar intimate humiliation he had been forced to inflict through the suspicion she had aroused in him. He was glad to break the contact with her body, and yet, as he switched on the light and looked for his watch, his mind was absorbed in self-questioning—had she really meant to trap him into giving her a baby or was he deeply wronging her? O misery, when desire is poisoned by mistrust.

'Half-past ten,' he said, as calmly as he could, though his voice shook like his hands.

Margaret sat up in bed, her lovely white torso turned flame-coloured by the red-shaded lamp. Even then, angry and humiliated and mistrustful, he was moved by the pure beauty of her half-naked body, as delicate and lovely as a young Aphrodite rising from the white foam of bedclothes.

'I must go at once,' she said, 'they'll be worried if I'm late. Give me my clothes, Tony.'

She refused to let him accompany her home in the taxi, and left him standing bareheaded on the curb, baffled and mistrustful, above all mistrustful of himself, gnawed by the thought that he might utterly have misjudged her, have construed as a shifty plot what was actually the passionate self-abandonment of entire devotion to him. He stood there for some time, trying to hush down the tumult of misery within him. As he walked back to his studio, he saw the faint gleam of stars through mist above the darkened street, and in their aloofness he found comfort.

§V

Going to and from his office, Antony found himself oppressed by the multitudes of people. Although about one in fifteen of the male population had been killed or maimed, London seemed and perhaps actually was more suffocatingly crowded than ever. The innumerable war organizations still kept many thousands of persons trepidantly active about nothing in particular, while the City was stimulated by the trade boom and the natural effort to resume and extend its normal activities. The dislocation from war to alleged peace was far more violent in England than the dislocation from peace to war. Food was rationed, all manufactured goods were scarce and dear, often unobtainable, transport was worn and inadequate, everybody bad-tempered, while there was a prodigious jostle to 'get in,' a really vile devil-may-take-the-hindmost rush for the illusory spoils of war.

At the rush hours people stood in queues to get a strap-hanger's standing room in the tubes, stood in queues

in the hope of a place in a bus. Even when he had struggled his way to a place, Antony strangely and perversely was not happy. People, people, people, always different people and yet always horribly the same—men in office clothes, women in office clothes, the awful mob army of readers of newspapers. Human bodies, anonymous, indifferent, wedged all round, making an intolerable prison of living walls. More frenziedly than Sterne's starling Antony's whole nature cried: I can't get out, I can't get out! And whatever will remained to him answered: I must get out, I will get out! Often he watched the crowds, who gave him the heart-sinking sensation of galvanized corpses wondering what their feelings were, hoping eagerly for some sign of a kindred revolt and horror. Obviously they couldn't enjoy it, but submitted with the pachydermatous patience of the unhoping. That was pathetic; but he was exasperated to think that many of them would assert and even believe that their lives represented the apex of human achievement, needing only a rise of from 5s. to £100 a week to achieve felicity.

That was the impression he got from odd snatches of conversation in the cheap and nasty eating houses he was forced to frequent for lunch—that all would be well if only the person speaking had more money. No one seemed to doubt the beauty and Tightness of the going concern, and there was no sighing for a 'life of adventure' as had been common enough before the war—those who wanted that had got it, and often their quietus as well. Antony found some difficulty in maintaining these conversations; and rather resented it after the easy friendliness of the line. Why this pose of sham gentility?

. . .

Tony tried to talk about this one Saturday afternoon with Dick Waterton, as they came up from the City together on top of a bus. It was a bright day, a few days before the signing of the Peace Treaty, and they were on a Richmond bus, intending to walk along the towpath to Kingston where Robin Fletcher was living.

'I hope you'll like Robin,' said Antony, as they just managed to scramble to a seat. 'I used to like him very much, but I haven't seen him for years. But people change so much I get more and more afraid of linking up with old friends—this damned war has spoiled everything. Robin used to have all sorts of benevolent theories about Humanity with a big H, and getting up ideal colonies and all that sort of bunk. But he's a good fellow—I've never forgotten how delightful he made my first day in Rome. I hope he hasn't changed.'

'Well, we shall see,' said Waterton, with the air of an open-minded person on whom this sort of polite preparation was quite wasted.

'By the way,' Antony hesitated, 'he was in prison as a conscientious objector—you don't mind?'

'Why should I?'

'A lot of people do,' said Tony wistfully; 'my father for instance. I wanted to ask him to dinner tomorrow night, and Father absolutely refused. I must say civilians have rum ideas about the war.'

The bus was held up in a line of traffic near the Mansion House. Although the Stock Exchange was shut, the pavements were densely crowded with employees hurrying away to their suburbs for a few hours of amusement. The air was filled with the hum of stationary engines and noisy with accelerations and tootling horns from the moving traffic lines. The intense activity had a more cheerful air than that of a

Monday morning; and yet Tony found it almost frightening.

Look!⁷ he said, 'this is one of the intense spots of modern civilization, a centre of men's real interests and real worship—ininitely more real than their conventional religion. They believe in this—this ghastly beehive which secretes paper and calls it life.'

A patriotic cockney would call it the 'ub of the universe,' said Waterton as the bus moved off. 'Let's say it's a centre of a very great commercial-financial city.'

But isn't it horrible? '

Well, no,' said Waterton, with the cool deliberation he sometimes used to provoke Antony's retorts, 'not horrible. It's a great human dynamo, a vast generator of energy which keeps people active all over the world, as far off as Australia. You must admit the energy.'

I do admit the energy,' said Antony gloomily, 'but I wish to God it'd break down.'

That would only mean famine, misery, and anarchy—rather like the war—without discipline and rations.'

I can't get excited about these anonymous energies,' said Antony, ignoring the obvious truth of this last remark. 'I must lack the sense of *civisme* or something—I can only admire personal energy, a man's own interior god. Well, none of these people, so far as I know them, has a ha'porth of real personal life. They do their jobs more or less conscientiously, more or less out of fear, and that's about all. If ants were six feet high, a really good nest would beat New York hollow. As to these human ants here, their lives seem to me entirely exterior, they're the husks of men. I talk to them and try to get them to talk to me, and their lives and ambitions seem to me so poor, so cheap!'

What would you have them do? ' asked Waterton, with a side glance at Antony's excited face.

'I don't know. And I wouldn't say it, even if I thought I did know. I'm sick of people telling other people what they ought to do. Damned impertinence. Who am I, who are they, to tell other people what they ought to do? To hell with them! My business is to find out what I ought to do. Maybe that's their business too, but it's not my business to tell them so.'

'And what ought you to do?' asked Waterton, smiling.

'Not allow myself to be caught up in your horrible human dynamo,' retorted Antony.

'But you are part of it—you're working in the City of London.'

'Not for long.' It was in his mind to tell Waterton about Katha and his plans, but the acquired mistrust of everybody checked the revelation. 'I have my mind made up. Before the end of this year I shall be out of it, and for good.'

'What will you do, and how will you live?'

'Money doesn't worry me. And anyway, if I starve, I starve. But I won't lose myself in this damned human machine. I'd rather lose myself in death!'

He spoke so vehemently that Waterton slightly raised his brows, with that dislike of expressed feelings inherent in middle-class Englishmen, even when kind and tolerant as Waterton undoubtedly was. He said coolly:

'How can you really get away from what you call the machine? It is simply the organization of human life, the means by which we all live. You want to enjoy the production of the human machine without giving anything to it. What you say amounts merely to a declaration that you won't work.'

'All right! I won't work. At least I won't work at this concern, because I think it's all wrong. And I think it's going to collapse. And I'm glad of it, even if I'm

squashed in the collapse. Something better will come.'

'You're very romantic,' said Waterton teasingly, 'but isn't it rather silly to object to commerce, like some of the young gentlemen who write poetry?'

Antony flushed.

'I don't object to commerce, I object to the enormous parasitic growth *on* commerce. I object to the divinizing of paper transactions. I believe in making things. Have you ever watched the ships unloading down the river?'

'Yes.'

'Well, have you thought that the men who grew or made those things, the men who drove that ship, the men who loaded and unloaded it, just live and no more? But the various "owners" and "agents" are pretty comfortable, thank you very much. I don't object to real commerce. I like markets, they make me feel rich; I hate department stores, they make me feel poor.'

Waterton laughed.

'If you pursued your line of thought about owners and makers I think you'd find it'd lead you pretty far from individualism. But never mind; if you've got a private income you can afford anomalies. But why do you like markets and dislike stores?'

'Because markets are human, and stores inhuman,' said Tony promptly. 'In markets of the kind I think of there are no damned parasites—human ones, I mean; there are plenty of fleas—and no human dynamo. Nobody's in a hurry, nobody expects to retire for life on the day's proceeds. The fishermen bring up their baskets with the night's catch, the peasants bring in their extra cheese and fruits and vegetables, and so on. Instead of telephoning to the stores, you pick out what you want.'

'And get nicely cheated!'

' I'd rather be cheated out of a few ha'pence in the pound over personal bargains than be cheated out of ten shillings in the pound on fixed prices in order to pay profits and dividends to a chain of companies.'

' You couldn't run big communities on those lines.'

' Who wants to? I don't.'

This rather vague discussion might have gone on indefinitely, if the bus had not reached its terminus and changed their talk. When they came to the towpath, Waterton tried to revive the topic, but Tony avoided it. He knew he had expressed himself feebly and illogically, but then how was it possible to explain as logical idea something which was experienced as instinctive feeling? He hadn't argued himself into hating the 'human dynamo'; all his instincts and feelings revolted from it. Why should they be invalid because they couldn't be arranged in the straight lines of mental logic? Aristotelian convention, anyway. And being intensely displeased with human society as he found it, Tony was perfectly willing to question and abandon its most fundamental and least-questioned assumptions. The thought that the human mind might quite legitimately move non-logically and reach results more valid and fruitful pleased him greatly. It occurred to him that he had really always more or less thought and felt non-logically. He didn't communicate this to Waterton, for he was once again sick of this eternal abstract discussion, in which people seemed to waste so much of themselves. Far better to feel the rhythmic movement of his body, the cloud-rigid sky, the new leaves, and the liquid silent river; and let Waterton do the talking.

It seemed to Tony that he ought to be more or less tranquil and contented, if not actually happy, and it was depressing to feel only too convinced that he was neither.

There was something in having a firm path underfoot, gasless air and no shelling, but otherwise he found nothing to rejoice in. The dank, sweetish breath from the river rather revolted him, and the whole shabby-genteel landscape—eighteenth-century elegance worm-eaten by democracy—seemed smug. And Waterton there talking amiably about that venomous little squab, Pope, and Horry Walpole with his cold coxcomb's heart and red nose. . . . He was being ungracious, Tony thought, to despise the gifts of Nature and Art in this way; but then it was better to know exactly how one felt, and not to pretend to have the feelings one thought one ought to have.

His mood was not cheered, as he hoped, but rather intensified by the meeting with Robin. They wasted some time wandering about dismal back streets, until they found his very dingy lodging—the parlour of a six-room house, with a narrow iron bed in the corner. There was a faint sour smell of dirt under cracked linoleum and from unswept corners, a litter of books and papers, an odorous memory of unwashed windows and distant cabbage water. All this hit Tony's senses the moment the door was opened for them by the red-handed woman who had not even troubled to take off her sacking apron. Then with a shock all his perception was concentrated on Robin, who threw down his pen and held out an ink-stained hand, saying in something like his old voice:

'Well, Tony, it's good to see you again, old man,'

Tony warmly returned his grasp and introduced Waterton. Tony felt glad he had brought Waterton, as a kind of shield, for apart from the voice he scarcely recognized his friend. Robin was dressed in shabby working-man's clothes; he had grown a ragged black

beard, and his hair was long and untidy; his face was thin and peevish-looking, and the eyes, which Tony remembered as so good-humoured, had a fanatical gleam in them. He looks exactly like a Hyde Park orator, thought Tony regretfully. At the same time he felt Robin's eyes gazing at him with disfavour and felt uneasily aware of his own neat clothes, short soldier's hair and moustache, which he had not troubled to abandon. The sense of Robin's hostility saddened him, the dismal apprehension that yet another friend had turned into something not unlike an enemy. The wilful squalor of Robin and his room oppressed Tony—he could never get in touch with him in that room. If only Kingston had possessed a vine-trellised wine shop, where they could drink golden moscato and warm to each other.

As soon as the first greetings were over, Tony suggested that they get a boat and row on the river for a couple of hours; but Robin would not hear of it.

'It's filled with stinking bourgeoisie and hulking great brutes of soldiers with girls,' he said disdainfully.

Tony winced; he'd seen some of them, nearly all in hospital blue, with a twinge of the heart at the pinned-up sleeve or trouser leg, and occasional blank white face in dark glasses. He was ready to accept any denunciation of war and war-mongers, of himself for taking part in it, but he could not bear sneering at the broken men who had suffered for it. He checked his resentment and said nothing, but Waterton broke in:

'Suppose we go and have tea at one of the river hotels,' he said cheerfully. 'I saw a charming place as we came along, and I should like some tea after that walk.'

But Robin made a face at this proposal too.

'I wouldn't be seen dead in one of those foul places,'

he said bitterly. 'I can get you some tea here, or there's a Workers' tea room close at hand. Which shall it be?'

'Oh, let's go to your tea room,' said Tony, eager to get away from the smelly little room and hoping unhelpfully that in other surroundings he would somehow recover the old gay Robin and his charm. But the Workers' tea room was almost worse, with its flyblown window panes, greasy tables, and stale memories of past fish-frys in the air. The cups and saucers were chipped and looked dirty, and the tea was thin and horribly reminiscent of washing up. Tony saw Waterton take one rather timid sip and then quietly abandon his cup, at which Robin sneered openly. Tony took a gulp of his, not much worse than dixie-tea tasting of stew, and lighted a pipe. Almost immediately Robin began to talk about his experiences in prison with extraordinary rancour. They had been barbarously treated, he said, insulted, knocked about, confined in solitary cells, deprived of all reading except the Bible, starved, so that some had fallen ill and one had nearly died.

'It was all a great pity,' said Waterton gently, 'and I think everybody concerned with it should be ashamed. The men in the trenches suffered too, Mr. Fletcher.'

The fanatical light blazed up in Robin's eyes, and he retorted sharply:

'They ought never to have gone there. If they were ready to kill other men, they deserved all they got.'

'I think they did what they believed was right,' said Waterton smiling. 'And I don't think they were particularly bloodthirsty. In any case, they took what was coming to them.'

'What did you do?' asked Robin sharply. 'Did you object?'

'No,' said Waterton, still smiling. 'I crashed, and

they put me on home service for the duration, when I came out of hospital.'

The sneer with which Robin greeted this was insulting, but Waterton lighted a cigarette, after offering one, and refused to be drawn from his quiet good humour. Robin turned almost savagely on Tony.

'And you, Tony ! Why did you go? You betrayed us!'

'I don't think I betrayed you or anyone,' said Tony, flushing. 'I never pledged myself not to fight, and I couldn't honestly swear there mightn't be moments when I'd want to kill someone.'

'If you saw a German trying to rape your sister?' Robin sneered.

'No. But if I were intolerably oppressed, or if somebody tried to kill me.'

'That didn't arise. It was against all your principles to go, and you went. You betrayed yourself and us.'

'My principles,' said Tony lightly. 'Did I have any? I don't think I ever talked of principles, and I'm certain I never acted on them.'

'But you didn't approve of the war? '

'No, I can't honestly say I did. But, my dear Robin, I met very few soldiers who "approved of the war." Most of them were only too humanly anxious to get out of it, but once in they endured it.'

'You were different, Tony. Weren't you a Socialist, didn't you believe in the brotherhood of man? '

Tony sighed, more than a little restive under this crude cross-examination.

'Robin, you know perfectly well I had no politics. The only time I've ever voted was after the Armistice, when it was a parade. And I give you my word I haven't the faintest idea which party I voted for—I didn't know who the candidates were from Adam.'

'It wasn't a question of politics,' said Robin disdainfully, 'it was a question of human decency, of solidarity with the workers.'

'Well, I thought it more decent to go,' said Tony a little impatiently, 'and I wager there were more "workers" in my battalion than in your jail. You can say I went because I hadn't the courage to stay out, if you like. And for me it wasn't something to reason about, it was a matter of following an impulse—my conscience, if you like.'

'Your conscience!' cried Robin angrily. 'What do you mean? How could your conscience allow you to support the bosses—all that filthy scum?'

Tony hesitated, and glanced at Waterton's cigarette, which was moving with a just perceptible tremor in his fingers. Robin hadn't noticed the tremor, but Tony knew that Waterton would have it until he died, knew also that since his crash Waterton's life was a sort of daily gamble against death.

'I can only tell you this,' he said quietly. 'Fairly early in the war I was going back to my father's flat about midnight. In a side street I passed a company of territorials marching to a station to entrain. They might have been going to camp, they might have been going overseas. Most of them were boys. Nobody stopped to look at them, except myself. They were whistling, and at the end of the line was an old-fashioned Red Cross wagon. I can't tell you why, but that little procession was one of the saddest and most moving things I've ever seen. It seemed to turn my inside over. I wished I could slip quietly into the ranks and go with them, wherever they were going. I couldn't; but deep inside me I felt that whatever my abstract duty as an enlightened member of society might be, my irresistible

human impulse was to go with them and share their fate.'

'Pah!' exclaimed Robin. 'Sentimental rot!'

Tony had been gazing at the greasy cracks in the table while he spoke. As he lifted his head, his eyes accidentally met Waterton's and caught a look there which more than compensated for all the wounds of Robin's acrid scorn.

'I had no such excellent feeling,' said Waterton chaffingly, trying to turn Robin onto himself. 'I went because I was out of a job and wanted to fly.'

Robin, brooding, seemed not to hear Waterton's remark. Tony was silent too, wondering how he could divert the talk to something less controversial, but Robin interrupted:

'What will you do now, Tony? Are you going to waste your life in the dilettante way you used to?'

'I don't call our days together in Rome wasted, Robin,' he said, hurt, and at the same time making an appeal to old affection. 'It was one of the happiest times of my life, and you seemed happy too. I've never forgotten that wonderful lunch we had together under the vines. Was that book you were writing ever published? I've read practically nothing for years.'

Robin frowned.

'Those were our callow days,' he said, 'though I believe I had a deeper sense of reality than you did. Now we've got to work, and with one definite aim,'

'What aim?'

'Why, the overthrow of this whole bourgeois regime,' said Robin, his eyes almost cat-like cruel with hatred. 'We've got to work in with the Russians and establish a proletarian dictatorship,'

'And how's that to be done?'

'By preaching and preparing the class war. I've given up writing novels—they're only read by the bourgeoisie—and give my time to lecturing and Writing for one or two left-wing journals.'

'It seems to me very illogical to object to national war and preach class war,' said Tony doubtfully.

'They're totally different things,' Robin snapped at him. 'One was to enslave the people, the other is to liberate the people.'

'I dislike bloodshed and violence. And if you're going to murder everybody who isn't of the people, as they seem to be doing in Russia, you'll have to dispose of about half the population in England. But tell us what you're wanting to do.'

'You must come to our meetings. There's one tomorrow night. Will you come, too?' he added rather ungraciously to Waterton.

'Well, no,' said Waterton lightly but decisively, 'thank you, but I don't think I will. I've seen a good many political meetings, and they no longer amuse me.'

Robin turned from him with unconcealed disgust and began pointedly to talk to Tony alone, trying to indoctrinate him with his violent ideas. Tony listened for some time and then determined that he could not ask Waterton to endure this spate of rancour any longer. He looked at his watch, stood up, and said they must be going. Tony paid for the tea, and they walked back with Robin to his lodgings. At the door Robin said:

'You'll come to the meeting? I've promised I'll bring you along as a possible recruit.'

'I think you'd better make no promises on my behalf,' Tony replied, as carelessly as he could, 'and I'm sorry I can't come tomorrow. I've promised the evening to my father.'

'Oh, you're hopeless!' said Robin rudely. 'Weak-

knead and weak-brained too, I should think. Good-bye.'

Waterton and Tony walked along for some time in silence until they came to the bridge. There were still two hours of daylight before them, and Tony said:

'I should like to walk and get the taste of that filthy tea room out of my lungs and mouth. Will you come as far as Teddington? We can get a train there.'

'Certainly. Let's walk.'

'I'm sorry all that happened,' Tony went on hesitatingly. 'I feel I ought to apologize. But I hadn't seen him since before the war, and it was as much a surprise to me as to you.'

'I thought you stood his attack very well,' said Waterton kindly. 'In your place I might have lost my temper. I'm sorry for the fellow. He's a sort of casualty.'

'It was a bit of a shock to me. I used to think of him as one of my few real friends. He's utterly changed. Damn the war once again! You don't believe in what he said, do you?'

Waterton shrugged his shoulders.

'It's one political theory among many, and I suppose it's attractive because it seems to promise so much. To me it's distasteful and seems to involve a lot of suffering and violence for ends which might conceivably be attained by other means.'

'I couldn't avoid thinking that the violence and suffering were what he liked. He wants to be revenged, even more than he wants to make the people happy.'

'That's the result of identifying your own passions too closely with any form of politics. We're all liable to that danger. And as to the people—are not you and I as much part of "the people" as anyone else?'

'Yes,' said Tony abstractedly.

The evening was very gentle, and they heard voices and laughter from the people passing up and down the river in small boats. He noticed how the late slanting sunshine brought out the exquisite golden green of young leaves. 'You know, Waterton, people have got politics and sociology on the brain. It's a disease, like that ghastly influenza which polished off so many thousands last winter. They don't seem able to consider any aspect of human life, apart from sport, except from a political or sociological point of view. They make a religion of it—I suppose if you really do believe in the omnipotence of the state, it does become a kind of religion. God, how I loathe these political sects! Last night I dined with Walter Cartwright at his club. I believe he's a very brilliant civil servant and I quite like him, but he talked half the evening of what the Conservatives will do for the country when they break free from this Coalition.'

'It is tiresome,' said Waterton, laughing. 'Perhaps there's something to be said for the army in that respect.'

'Oh, good lord, they never think about anything. But at least they don't talk shop. This continual political shop suffocates me. I'm quite prepared to believe all these people mean well, but they can't all be right. And I don't see how you'll get more justice, peace, and happiness in the world except by having more just, peaceful, and happy people.'

'Quite so, but how are you going to get them?'

'I don't know. But it won't be through the class war or the Conservative party. It can only come from individuals. And now for god's sake let's talk of something else.'

. . .

That evening Antony ate a frugal dinner alone in his studio and then washed up himself. He thought of going down to the Alhambra and standing for an hour or so to look at the ballet, but decided against. His weekly earnings had been raised to five pounds ('in consideration of general inefficiency,' as he told his father), but living was horribly dear, and he stuck to his determination not to break into the money which would take him to Austria. Instead of going out, he lighted a pipe and sat down with *Tristram Shandy*. But, as so often happened to him, he soon found that his attention drifted from the book to human life.

The memory of his meeting with Robin gave him great pain. Another old friend lost, another root cut; and he had counted on Robin. Lost, lost. He thought with some bitterness that if ever he were silly enough to adopt a coat-of-arms, he would take 'Lost' as his motto. It seemed to sum up his life admirably. Robin's accusation that he had betrayed a cause moved him very little. To hell with causes! What mattered was the essential human loyalty. When it came to the point, Robin was the real traitor, because he had allowed his rancour to sour him into acquiescence with a violent and tyrannical theory of society, and had abandoned the real quest, the real adventure—the search for abounding life, the poem of existence. And what absurdity, this elevating of everybody into a divinely inspired legislator or the architect of the perfect life for all! What confounded cheek! Not philosophers becoming kings, but Tom, Dick, and Robin ordering the whole world according to their notions of the fit and perfect. Make a note: Never attempt to make others what you've failed to be yourself. And, apropos, it is written: Resist not evil,

Tony pondered that for some time, having himself a strong propensity to resist evil, and an impatience with

its continued existence when abolition seemed easy. Resist not evil. In other words, let everybody act decently, and evil will automatically disappear. Will it? Well, anyway, I didn't make the world. His mind veered off to his conversation with Waterton about refusing to make part of the industrial machine. It occurred to him that since he had justified his taking part in the war-machine on grounds of human compassion and comradeship, he ought logically to enlist in the industrial machine. There indeed the lists were set from of old and the warfare endured for ever. If it were true that people at home had benefited by the labour and hardship of soldiers, it was even more true that those who escaped the industrial machine benefited by the work and suffering of others. He felt uneasy, disliking the dilemma he had created for himself. The analogy seemed perfect, even if it could be argued that conscientious objection to industrialism was as dangerous as conscientious objection to war. In his case, it would not be so, since he would inherit from his father what was the monetary equivalent to exemption from service.

Antony walked slowly up and down the room, filling his pipe again, and pondering. Or rather he allowed the situation to sink deeper and deeper into his consciousness, knowing it would come up again. He dismissed the question of war service—that was of the past, and he had long ago made up his mind that he would not serve again, could now refuse with a clear conscience. But this other business was worrying. If Robin established his dictatorship of the proletariat and tried to conscript his labour, Tony felt with every fibre that he would escape from the country if possible, and, if not, be shot rather than be enslaved. For a long time he walked about, then returned to his chair, struggling with

a horde of half-formulated thoughts and confused feelings. Presently he got his writing block and wrote:

' DEAREST KATHA :

' No answer has come to my last letter, and this is the merest shot into the blue. I shan't write again if I get no reply. Why amuse postal censors?

I'm still in London, still trying to get a passport, and still no nearer success. It is thought the Peace Treaty will be signed in a few days, and I hope to god this means a return to sanity and decent living. The last few years have been more than fiend-tormented, and must have been worse for you than for us. When I meet you, if only I can! I shall feel I have to apologize for this abominable blockade. These blockaders are the people who squealed about making war on women and children!

Recently I've met a man belonging to the upper grades of the British civil service. He's quite young and was too important to be in the war. His name's Walter Cartwright, and he thinks the British empire a divine manifestation of superior wisdom, and that the civil service is the brains of the empire. I don't contradict him; I only listen. I've grown patient, dear Katha, and perhaps, you will think, a little liable to dissimulation. At any rate I'm going to try to make use of him to get a passport and the necessary permits and visas, whatever they may be. I don't like doing this, especially since I was introduced to the man by Margaret, but for me there's still a war on. The war's between me and my dear country for my liberty and happiness, and I hope for yours.

There was a most agonizing scene with Margaret the other evening, which shattered me, and left me with the suspicion (perhaps unjust) that she tried to make me give her a child. You see what a mess that would be?

However, if that was her plan, she didn't succeed. I've only seen her once since then, and in the company of other people; and her attitude was one of polite indifference. It's all very puzzling and disagreeable.

'Do you remember Robin? I spoke about him at Aeaea—the man who was with me in Rome. I met him today, for the first time since the war. He attacked me for having been a soldier, perhaps rightly, and also for not joining his revolutionary schemes. It was rather upsetting, since I was very fond of him. But I'm so utterly, utterly *sick* of all these schemes and plots for the regimenting of human beings into alleged happiness. I've had quite enough regimenting for my life, and only ask to be let alone.

'I wish I knew some little fragment of your life, so that I could talk about you. To say I hope this and that in the void seems so ridiculous, and I know absolutely nothing, nothing about you. If by a miracle you get this letter, tell me something about yourself, but above all tell me where I can find you. I'll come to you as soon as it's humanly possible.

'Katha dear, this letter will almost certainly be read by censors, so I shall add no more, except to say that I've forgotten nothing, and live yet on the memory of our days in Aeaea.

Always and always,

'TONY.'

When he had sealed and addressed this envelope, Tony wrote briefly and clearly to Walter Cartwright, giving an account of his efforts to get a passport and permission to go to Austria, and asking for Walter's assistance. He stamped both envelopes and posted them before going to bed. On the way back he lingered a little in a large square planted with trees, near his own

street. The locked garden looked dark and mysterious, and the new leaves rustled gently in the evening wind. The distant roar of traffic seemed like a great waterfall in the distance, and he felt healed by the darkness and silence. He did not go away until a party of men and women, most of them drunk, came noisily round the corner and killed the mystery and silence with discordant shouts and high hysterical laughter.

§ VI

After dinner on the day when peace was officially proclaimed, Antony went out by himself, with no particular purpose beyond a vague feeling that one ought to be present at historical celebrations. He had been unavoidably prevented from taking part in the Armistice night celebrations, of whose spontaneous gaiety he had heard much from Margaret and others. Tony felt he would be exceedingly glad to take part in a little spontaneous gaiety.

He walked towards Trafalgar Square, which seems the inevitable centre for scenes of national crisis, but noticed nothing particular in the side streets, except an absence of wheeled traffic. When he came to one of the bigger streets, he halted. From east to west moved a steady flow of dark silent figures, speechless and without laughter, just moving like dark silent water down the ill-lit street. He stood minute after minute, watching these floods on floods of dark people silently flowing past, perfectly orderly, perfectly quiet, and as perfectly lugubrious as death itself. They exuded all the dismal discouragement of an aimless crowd. They too had come to join the spontaneous gaiety, and there didn't seem to be any. And still the floods and floods drifted on, not speaking, not making any demonstration, just moving, a

heart-chilling spectacle, and terrifying. There was no sound but the slough and scuffle of their feet and the distant hooting of motor horns.

Unwillingly, Tony joined this lugubrious march of triumph, feeling immediately the sense of oppression and imprisonment which comes from being hemmed round by an anonymous mass. The odour of the crowd led him to suspect that the soap shortage was still acute. With some difficulty he managed at last to get to Piccadilly Circus. The crowd was thicker and a little more animated; there was more light, and a few taxis filled with young *men* and women were endeavouring to arouse spontaneous gaiety. This they evidently hoped to accomplish with the aid of that northern Bacchus who does not wear vine leaves in his hair. Tony watched this hopefully for a time, and then a large boot descended on his toe with some violence, and a small, possibly feminine, certainly sharp, elbow found very accurately where his breath dwelt. He disengaged himself from the crowd after a struggle and walked back to his studio by dim side streets. At one point he could see the floods of dark people still drifting westward. At a street corner near his studio he came abruptly on a boy of about eighteen supporting a very pretty girl who could not have been more than sixteen. She had one arm on an iron railing, and the other was held by the boy, who was saying:

'Don't be so mucking silly, Lil, don't be so mucking silly.'

The girl was violently sick and groaned.

'Don't be so mucking silly, Lil.'

Tony watched them, quite unobserved, from a few paces' distance, wondering if he should interfere or try to get some assistance. The girl seemed to recover, and said in a rather whiny voice:

'What d'you make me drink all that gin for, Bert?'
'Aw, don't be so mucking silly,' was the reply.
Tony moved away—drunk as owls, obviously.
It was all rather depressing.

Towards the end of August, Tony had a fortnight's leave; and the puzzle was to know what to do with it. He had hoped to use this time for his journey to Austria, but no passport had come. Walter Cartwright had not been very encouraging and had let Tony see that he didn't like the job; however, he had promised to do what he could, while pointing out that it was 'quite irregular' for an officer in one department to approach an officer in another department. Tony felt quite sure it was 'irregular' to do anything official for human motives. Meanwhile there remained the problem of what to do with his fortnight's 'holiday,' when he didn't want to do anything in particular in England.

He had just about made up his mind to stay in London when he received an invitation to stay with Margaret and her family in a furnished house they had taken for the summer near Studland Bay. Tony pondered this letter closely, sitting with a pipe in his studio tank. He knew Studland slightly, having explored the coast to some extent on a bicycle during the war, when he was at the bombing school the other side of Bournemouth. Margaret knew he liked the place. But a fortnight in a family—he thought of the forced hilarity and only too real gloom of English breakfasts where liver so often appears, the ritual of tennis, tea in flannels on the lawn, and the music parades. An acceptance of this quasi-domesticity with Margaret would go perilously near to accepting the status of an understood engagement. Tony's instincts were all against accepting; at the same time he was tempted by the idea of Dorsetshire.

He was still smoking a pipe over the letter, when there was a knock, and his father came in. Tony greeted him cheerfully and sat him in the better armchair with a whisky-and-soda.

'I don't like your living in this unhealthy place,' said Henry Clarendon, looking round the studio disparagingly.

Neither do I. But there's nowhere else.'

'And you still mean to spend your holiday in this gloomy windowless place? My dear boy, you make a great mistake. You should rouse yourself from this lethargy, you need exercise and fresh air.'

'So I think, too,' said Tony, determined not to give away the fact of his invitation and suspecting a collaboration with Margaret in this visit. 'But then fresh air and exercise are expensive things nowadays, like everything else.'

'But you've had an invitation to go to Studland, haven't you?' asked Henry Clarendon, who was totally inapt for concealment.

'Yes,' said Tony with a fine show of indifference.

'And you've accepted? No? I wish you would, if only for my sake. It really worries me to have you moping alone here.'

'It's very kind of you, but then I've no clothes for such a place. I should feel uncomfortable.'

'But at the seaside you can run about in anything.'

'Yes? Forgive the suggestion, Father, but I feel you are too much absorbed in science to notice things. "Running about in anything" at a seaside English cottage means clean flannels every day, tweeds if it rains, and a dinner jacket in the evening.'

'Well, you've got a dinner jacket, and we can get you flannels tomorrow.'

'That's kind. I accept the flannels with all my thanks, but then the family is an obstacle.'

'The family? I don't see——'

'I don't mind Margaret's father,' Tony interrupted, 'though he's quite empty and false under that well-cut garb of geniality. A genuine business Englishman. But Margaret's mother—do you know her well?—is one of those tall, musical, clear-voiced women who are very frightening. She plays Chopin as if it were company drill. That upright figure, that commanding bosom—even when she's not at the piano she reminds me of the regimental bandmaster. Her ordinary conversation is like the band playing in the Park—so precise and brassy. She's really very intimidating, Father.'

'Well,' said Henry Clarendon, laughing, 'I daresay you can put up with her for a fortnight. You know what women are.'

'Do I? Well, perhaps I do. The knowledge, such as it is, doesn't reassure me.'

'You won't see much of her. You'll be out and about with Margaret and her friends most of the time.'

'And supposing it rains? It does sometimes in England. And the tennis. And the inevitable rounds of golf with stern-eyed sportsmen in club ties. And I know I'd have to go fishing. I feel it in my bones.'

'A very nice holiday, too, I should think.'

'Not for me. And not for you either, I know. I can't stay in that house, Father. But'—an idea suddenly came to him—I tell you what I will do. I'll stay in one of the cottages at Corfe, and go over on a bicycle to see them when I feel like it.'

'That'll look rather queer and rude.'

'I can't help it. It's less rude than staying there and being unable to conceal a sense of restraint, or even breaking out into open rebellion.'

Henry Clarendon argued against this, but Tony had made up his mind.

A room with board was easily found—the rush to the country was nothing like so large as that which began a year later—with a working carpenter and his wife. Tony liked them very much, especially the man, a tall dark fellow who had worked hard all his life and had a profound contempt for all Socialists and social legislation. Sometimes he sat with them in their kitchen in the evening, talking about the war and their son, not yet demobilized from the Eastern Expeditionary Force, and the news of the day. The carpenter's working-man Toryism was both bigoted and limited, but Tony liked his independence and the entire absence of proletarian whine and grouse which had fed him up for life in the army. It struck him that the carpenter was the natural complement to old Scrope, equally doomed to extinction as a type—jerry-built furniture would soon obliterate him and his little trade. A pity. Already it was difficult to make a living, and the carpenter was puzzled and restive. He had worked hard and lived frugally, was ready to go on working hard, and could not understand the annual shrinking of his earnings. He blamed politics and 'agitators,' not seeing that his fate was the result of huge economic forces quite beyond politics, while the 'agitators' he abhorred were often men struggling to control those forces to more humane ends. It seemed useless to tell him this, so Tony could do nothing but listen sympathetically—and feel sorry.

Tony lived very quietly, but not unhappily, walking and reading, and sometimes cycling over to Studland for half a day. Sometimes he fell into moods of unaccountable depression and sat brooding for hours among the whitish grey ruins of the great castle; at other times he

was seized by intense nervous restless and walked for hours at top speed as if fleeing from himself, until he was forced to rest from exhaustion. But he generally slept well, and for the whole fortnight was free from the nocturnal world of dream horrors which had made him come to dread even sleep itself. In his quieter moods he thought often of Katha and Margaret and the curious chain of circumstances which had brought him to this unsatisfactory dangling between two women, one now almost a dream, the other only too palpably near. He felt like Buridan's ass, which starved between the two bundles of hay.

It was the kind of dilemma which to the outsider seems perfectly simple, and to the person concerned as complicated as the universe. Common sense urged: 'Choose the one you want, and go for her.' Precisely, but which did he want? And since it was almost certainly Katha, how the devil could he 'go for her' without a passport? Not to mention the slight difficulty of offending his father and risking his inheritance—not that he wasn't prepared to risk that, but it was a complication. It occurred to him that under the Victorian-novelist convention of conduct a very cut-and-dried solution would be forced on him—Katha would be the wicked Continental vamp who had regrettably entangled the young Englishman and could be safely left to a sticky fate, while he 'repaired the wrong' done the pure English maid by a wedding in double-quick time. The only difficulty was that Tony felt entirely unwilling to accept either Victorian premises or Victorian deductions. So the help of this idea, if any, was purely negative.

There was one certainty from which he could not escape, and that was that his relation with Margaret had never been wholly right, never the complete liberation and utter self-forgetting he had experienced with Katha.

Margaret could never, never be the companion that Katha had been. In the thousand little tastes and feelings which go to the tissue of daily life, Margaret and he were so often disharmonious. Not that he wanted her always to agree with him or to be a mere reflection of himself. On the contrary. But when he and Katha had differed, Tony had always felt that she saw and enclosed his point of view, that her judgment ran parallel with his, whereas Margaret either failed to perceive there was any point at all, or judged on blind prejudice. All another way of saying that Margaret lived for the usual middle-class values, while Katha did not. True, he had been wrong in thinking Margaret unsensual, but his instinct told him that she used her body to frustrate and dominate his will, rather than to foster the flowering of their senses. How different with Katha! Never the *amari aliquid*, never suspicion or disappointment. And yet he had to ask himself if the comparison were altogether just. He had lived with Katha a few weeks of the happiest and fullest part of his life in lovely surroundings under perpetual sun—and through the jagged ruins of the castle he saw imaginatively the intense clear sky, the groves of arbutus and olive, the majestic pinnaced mountain, and the deep untroubled water of Aeaëa. Margaret was inevitably associated with the grim loneliness of London, the stress and misery of war. He asked himself if he were not loving a dream Katha, now, seeing her far off in an idealized land of youth and happiness through the barren arches of the war years.

With these and a thousand similar thoughts, equally inconclusive and torturing, he passed the interminable hours of waiting. It seemed to him that his whole life had become just that—waiting. Everything else was unreal and futile, like platform devices for passing the

time until the train came. With his whole nature in a turmoil of confusion and anguish, he had to wait, wait upon the pleasure of the world's rulers until they graciously pleased to allow a humble Englishman to go in search of his mistress, whom he had the odd whimsey to think he needed. Meanwhile, the great ones explained how much they were doing for everybody's happiness. 'Little lives,' murmured Tony, 'what do we need with all these big words?' He felt blinded with the rush of blood in a sudden rage with the idiotic collective greeds, stupidities, and meannesses which blasted the world like huge *Flatmenwerfer*. To hell with governments, glories, nations, parliaments, princes of industry, trade supremacy, red flags and striped flags and spotted flags—to hell with them! Our national honour is at stake. Well, let it be—who cares? Homoousian disputes . . .

He laughed and lighted a pipe, watching the sheep nibbling at the soft grass apparently ignorant that the world was full of butchers.

When he could free himself from tormenting reveries, Tony was happy in his walks, and for the first time for years began to absorb again the indefinable happiness of solitude, the beauty of things. He liked the big heath and marsh which lay to the north and east of Nine Barrow Down, the tufts of coarse grasses among brown bog water, the white cotton grass and nooks of soft blue gentians which he had never seen growing wild before. He lingered in the villages, particularly Worth Maltravers, with its strange air of remoteness and primitive antiquity, went to look at the old chapel at St. Aldhelm's Head, and was never weary of the long brambly path across Warbarrow Down, with its immense prospects over land and sea. His frozen apathy melted a little at

the touch of this gentle country, which he knew was doomed to exploitation sooner or later, but at that time still retained its civilized dignity—a land lived in for many generations, harmonized to men, not violently subdued and despoiled by them. The huts of the big infantry camp at Wareham and of the Tank Corps south of Wool were the advance guard of the inevitable invasion of destruction and vulgarity. Why 'inevitable,' he wondered—how easily we resign ourselves to the destruction of essential and irreplaceable things, how little we really care! But no artificial preservation, no self-conscious beauty-doctoring. Let it go on. Let the tanks go over it, make way for Bungalow Bill. If you acquiesce in the blind overbreeding and machine-made profits, then it is snivelling hypocrisy to wail over the loss of 'beauty spots.'

About every other day Tony rode over to Studland. He fancied that the older people were not at all sorry not to have him in the house, and he felt convinced that his instinct had been right. The peculiarly aimless life of a family on holiday depressed him and reminded him of the awful do-nothingness of an English Sunday. It was physical life *a rebours*, a relaxing, not an intensifying of vitality. As far as possible they transferred ail their town habits to the country, including gramophone and bridge—most of their food even was sent down from London. Even bathing was a 'dip,' not a physical worship of the sea. Tony marvelled at the poverty of life in this opulent household, where everybody seemed so bored that even his arrival was a diversion. They seemed like rather stupid children who needed a great many elaborate and expensive toys. Tony preferred his own unhappiness—it was at least a passionate misery.

Margaret went about indifferently, looking very cool

and virginal in white. He was glad that the presence of other people made any intimacy almost impossible, and he made no effort to be alone with her. The attitude of the parents was neutral—he was a 'friend of the children.' He wondered how much or how little they knew of the tragic contest between himself and Margaret. Certainly there was not the slightest effort to throw them together—and, after all, Tony admitted cheerfully that he was not much of a catch for Margaret. He began to think she might have resigned herself to the status of 'tender friend' she had scorned so much. But no, once or twice he surprised her gazing at him with a brooding flame of possessiveness. It struck him that he had acted very naively—his alternate approach and recoil, the pre-occupation with Katha which he had been unable to conceal, were the very things most likely to turn a mere wartime affair with a former boy-lover into a consuming passion. But it was too late to change, and anyhow he knew he could never play a part consistently.

Margaret's brother of eighteen, who was going to the university next term, was there, rather O.T.C. and sporting. Tony liked him all the same, more than his friend Harold Marsland, who was younger and seemed to have a boyish devotion to Margaret. She flirted with him a good deal, always walking about arm in arm and lavishing the 'darlings' which were then fashionable. Tony wondered vaguely if he was supposed to be jealous. He noticed with amusement that whenever Margaret was with Helen Marsland, Harold's sister, they immediately formed a feminine alliance against him, trying to push him into the same class as the schoolboys. He found it impossible to get up any resentment against this childish female cheek, as was apparently expected. It was all so unimportant. But whenever Margaret happened to be absent, Tony thought he perceived a great change in

Helen's attitude to him, a sort of clinging blonde's deference to the blood-stained he-man.

What saddened him was the sense of the gulf between himself and them, between his inner anguish and their fresh, unconscious youth, their untroubled confidence in life. Even Margaret, so near his own age, who must have suffered, seemed so much nearer to them than to him. It was another reason for being glad that he had refused to stop in the house. He could not bear to think that his own feeling of utter loss, his shattered life, his distrust and agony should be even slightly communicated to them and rouse a suspicion of the real hell of the age they lived in. Why should not a few people be happy if only for a little time? But he knew he could not have kept up continually the surface of light gaiety he tried to assume with them. Even so he did not always succeed. One day he talked a little unguardedly and found Harold gazing at him suspiciously and resentfully, saying:

'Why, what do you think's the matter with English society? It's the finest country and we're the finest people in the world.'

Antony looked at the boy's round, quite handsome face, with its tow-coloured hair, and blue eyes not very intelligently scowling at him; and did not answer. Why indeed should Harold Marsland think there was anything wrong with the world? He had lost nothing by the war—indeed the family fortune had gained immensely by it. Harold knew that he would pass from school to the university, and then, after a year or so abroad, enter the business controlled by his father, with the certainty of succeeding him. Nearly everybody he met showed him that sort of kindness which goes to heirs—society's metaphorical touching its hat to substantial

money. All the expensive toys would be his, and with those eyes and forehead it looked doubtful whether he would ever be consumed by *Vamour de Vimpossible*. Women would be quick to discover his talents, and he would ride his income to hounds. What *could* be wrong with such a world?

A few days later Tony discovered with surprise and pain that all these children were not quite as healthily callous to suffering and as care-free as he had thought. Tony and Margaret's brother Julian took the train with the idea of walking back to Corfe along the coast. They forgot about the Tank people at Wool, and were turned back by the picket. Another reminder of the freedom for which they had fought. Tony talked war shop to the sergeant for a few minutes, in the hope that he would let an ex-officer through, but soon saw that he was already merely a civvy.

As they made their way back towards the main road, which incidentally meant a huge detour, the boy said:

'I wish I'd been in the war.'

'Don't say that!' cried Tony. 'You're well out of it. If you say your prayers, thank god every night you missed it.'

'No,' Julian persisted obstinately, 'I wish I'd been there. I wish I could have talked to that man as you did.'

'What a feeble ambition! I was only trying to blarney him into letting us cross.'

'All the same there was a bond between you. He was much more respectful at the end. Oh, how I envy you!'

Tony was aghast. Envy them, envy men who thought it as well to chuck away their revolver bullets in case of accident.

'It's nice of you,' he said ironically, 'but I don't quite see what there is to envy.'

'Oh, but there is. You saw and did real things, and you've got that companionship which'll keep you sticking together all your lives. But what have we got? Nothing. Antony, you don't know what it was those last two years at school. Every term the older boys going off to cadet battalions, the news of casualties, always casualties. All our lives were concentrated on the day when we'd be called up too. I used to think I'd run away and join up as a private, just to get the suspense over. And then suddenly, after we'd thought of nothing else day and night for months and years, there was the Armistice, and we were not wanted. We'd made up our minds for death, and even death didn't want us.'

He turned his head away to hide the trembling of his lips. Antony was touched and at the same time consternated. They walked on in silence, and when Antony saw Julian had recovered his control, he said gently:

'I see now. It hadn't occurred to me before. You must feel rather blank and let down. But you see whether we served or not, we're all more or less in the same boat. And we must help each other, by looking forward and not dwelling too much on the old miseries. If we think too much of the casualties we shall go off our heads. You needn't mind not having those bits of ribbon to stick on your chest, and there are much greater things than the war waiting to be done. We can each do something quietly in our own way, not expecting too much, of course, and not claiming too much.'

'Yes?' said Julian.

Tony looked at him curiously and anxiously, uncertain whether he had said the right thing or had left him totally unmoved. After his outburst, the boy was very remote and noncommittal, shut far away in the walls of

his own suffering. Tony sighed, impatient with himself for being ineffective, yet unwilling to force any more confidence, and not wanting to preach. Very soon they talked of other things, and Tony had a miserable sense of having failed. When they parted at Wareham station, Julian said haltingly:

'Thanks for what you said, Antony. I shall think about it. You were decent not to laugh at me.'

'Laugh at you! Good god, Julian, it's nothing to laugh at. I only wish I could do something positive to help.'

Julian looked as if he were going to say something, but the engine of his train whistled, and as it started he merely smiled and waved his hand. Antony walked the four or five miles back to Corfe in the twilight, thinking hard, and sometimes cursing aloud. What, he didn't quite know.

§ VII

Back in London, Antony found a postcard from Walter Cartwright:

'Ring me up when you get back. I have some news for you.'

Tony rang up at once, and after the ordinary enquiries about the holiday and Margaret's family, Walter said:

'About that passport of yours. I don't think there'll be any difficulty, now that peace is signed—the difficulty will be the Austrian visa. And you didn't complete the form. They've been trying to get in touch with you.'

'Didn't complete the form?'

'Yes. There was only one signature. But, look here, I've talked about it to a man in my department, who says he knows you. He wants to see you, and says he'll help.'

'Someone in your department I know? Who is it?'

'I'm not to say. Can you come to my club for tea tomorrow? I'll bring him along.'

'All right, but I can't get there much before five.'

'Nevermind, we'll wait for you.'

After a little more talk, Walter rang off, leaving Tony in great perplexity. Who on earth in Walter's department could know him and be so mysterious about it? Tony ran over his acquaintances in his mind, and finally decided it must be someone he'd known in the army. He fervently hoped it was not someone who might bear a grudge. But he went to bed in a cheerful mood. At last! Walter's voice had sounded quite confident. A nuisance about the form—had Scrope or Lord Frederick Clayton omitted to sign it?

The next afternoon Antony waited in the marble lobby of Walter's club while his name was taken in. Men were walking in and out, exchanging greetings as they met or parted. An indefinable ennui, as of twice-read newspapers, radiated from the pompous walls and portraits of forgotten somebodies. Strange institution, the English club. 'Sir John is a most unclubbable man'—supposed to be a crushing summary. Tony felt a sympathy with Sir John, but before his meditation on clubs could go any further, he heard Walter's voice, followed him into one of the large smoking rooms—and found himself shaking hands with Stephen Crang.

'Well, Clarendon, how are you? It's very pleasant to see you again. Sit down, and have some tea.'

Crang spoke in an easy, rather 'cultured' voice, very different from the harsh tones of the past. He was neatly, almost elegantly dressed in a ribbed grey suit, very well cut, and his once disorderly hair was carefully brushed and parted. The lean sharpness had gone from his face, which now had an expression of urbane wariness, as if he were perpetually afraid of making some

mistake. Antony was so much astonished by this unexpected reappearance of Crang and his transformation that he sat sipping his tea in almost complete silence, listening to their talk, which he found allusive and shoppy. How on earth did Crang come to be in government service, and apparently in the First Division, for from something that was said he gathered that Crang was Walter's superior.

Presently Walter got up and said he must go, obviously to give them an opportunity to talk privately.

'A most remarkably able fellow,' said Crang in the smooth voice Tony found such difficulty in believing was really his. 'Have you known him long?'

'No, only since I came back.'

'Ah, you were in the war?' This was said with a patronizing sympathy, almost condescension, which Tony resented. A most wretched business altogether. It was a pity we were dragged into it, but there was no alternative. We must all try to see it doesn't happen again.'

The attitude was so reasonable and sympathetic that Tony was inclined to blame himself for feeling annoyed. But what a change from the revolutionary Crang of the old days! Tony hoped his surprise did not show too much in his face.

'Now about this passport of yours,' said Crang, taking out a document. 'You need another signature, and your address. The passport people tried to get in touch with you, but Lord Frederick didn't know your address. By the way, have you known him long?'

'Before the war—at Scrope's,' said Tony absently, looking at the document. 'Why?'

'Oh, he's a personal friend of mine,' Crang replied, with a note of patronage in his tone, 'and I've not seen

you at his house. I suppose Scrope omitted his signature?' he added.

'It was a few days before he died.'

'Well, look here, my dear fellow, get another signature for that application. Your banker'll do. It won't be difficult to get it endorsed for France, Italy, and Switzerland, but of course Austria's the difficulty. And there'll be visas. Naturally, the government don't want our people running round ex-enemy countries, nor are they frightfully anxious to have us at present. Can you give any valid excuse for wanting to go?'

'Only urgent private affairs,' said Tony, with memories of Orderly Room applications for leave. He certainly wasn't going to tell Crang the real reason.

'That's rather vague, but still we'll see what can be done. It may take a little time. Does that matter?'

'The sooner it's granted, the more welcome. But I've waited so long, I suppose I can wait a little longer.'

Tony could not keep bitterness out of his voice—it was a bit too much having to sit as a suppliant at the feet of Crang.

'Try not to be too impatient,' said Crang, not unkindly but still with that trace of patronage Tony resented. 'Government has to be carried on, you know, and it can only be done through regulations, which must be obeyed. I grant you, they're far from perfect, but then this is a time of great difficulty and disorder, and as individuals we have to put up with discomforts and delays in the public good.'

'Yes?' said Tony. 'It's been going on for some time though, hasn't it? But I fail to see how it can matter to Great Britain or any of the other high contracting powers if I go to Vienna.'

He was wondering if Katha had a passport, and, if not, how to get her one.

Crang laughed.

'Put that way, of course it sounds absurd. But regulations have to be framed on general lines, and executive officers must use their discretion within limits. But Austria's in a state of political turmoil as well as in economic distress. . . .'

Their talk drifted off into a long argument about the Austrian empire, Crang defending the partition and Tony arguing that Austrian civilization was a fine one and depended on its curious union of states, and asserting that self-determination was only one more means of making everybody individually unhappy in the name of collective happiness.

Presently Crang changed the subject and said:

'I suppose you are surprised to find me in my present position?'

'As the natural result of your talents, no,' said Tony politely, 'but I confess I am curious to know how you evolved from a revolutionary into a highly respectable civil servant. You don't mind my saying this?'

'Not at all, not at all, my dear fellow,' said Crang with a great show of geniality, though Tony noticed something of the old flash in his eyes. 'It's exactly what I should have thought myself in your position. But don't suppose my views have changed. Oh, not in the least. It's only a change of method.'

'I see,' replied Tony, though in fact he was as mystified as ever.

'It happened in this way. Soon after you left Vine House—what a charming old house that was, by the way—I left my—my then occupation to take up political work in London. A couple of years' experience convinced me that no sudden break was possible or desirable. What was needed was a gradual reformation, the grafting of new methods onto old institutions. And I

found that this was actually going on, quite irrespective of party. When a new department was formed, it happened that the minister who organized it was a friend of mine. And since he knew I'd made a special study of the problems involved, he appointed me on a temporary basis which has since been made permanent.'

'But are you still a Marxian Socialist?' asked Tony point-blank.

The old resentful light jumped into Crang's eyes at this blunt question, but he replied with a wonderful show of urbanity:

'Well, now, I don't think I was ever actually that. Poor dear Marx, he was a marvellous creature, but ignorant of the practical problems of government. One of the elements is to know the extent of your problem, and this he scarcely troubled about. The betterment of the general lot will come about through the scientific analysis of each problem as it arises and the application of the appropriate solution.'

'Will it?' said Tony sardonically. 'You remind me of the gentlemen who experiment on frogs and rabbits. And that reminds me of a rather coarse army expression—"I don't wish yer no 'arm, but may yer rabbits die."'

Crang laughed in the genial manner he affected, with an air of deprecating all low and ignorant talk. 'Quite the gent,' thought Tony ironically. However, he said no more on those lines; he couldn't afford to—he wanted that passport too badly. After a little more general talk, they parted, and Tony carried away a general invitation to have dinner at my cottage in the country some time.'

'Well,' said Tony to himself, as Crang drove off in a taxi, waving an oh!-so-genial hand at the window, 'strike me pink I wish I had the Sern-Major here to put it all c'rect and proper, but—strike me pink!'

With which reflection he made his way home, to dine on a little cold ham and a couple of eggs.

§ viii

After so many delays, so many vexations, so much disappointment, Antony could hardly convince himself that he was actually in the train on his way to Vienna. Yes, they were really moving faster and faster out of London—that must be Purley draped appropriately in the grey flannel of late October rain. Nearly a year since the Armistice. And what a year! In anticipation the 'first year of peace' had seemed like the promise of a golden age, the portal of a new epoch when old hatreds and errors would be atoned for and forgotten. In fact, it had merely proved to be a prolongation of the war and the odious war and greed spirit. A childish inapt and greedy readjustment of the map, compared with which the decisions of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 had been wise and beneficent—so much had the political sense of Europe degenerated in a century.

For himself Tony knew that the year had been one of sheer imprisonment, of heart-sick waiting for release. Imprisonment in the Rhineland as he waited for demobilization, imprisonment in England, in his job, in the damp windowless studio, waiting, waiting on the pleasure of war-fools and their underlings for kind permission to cross a small portion of the earth's surface. They acted as if they owned the earth and its people—O Pallas, where is your aegis? Tony took out his passport and looked at it, rather as an innocent convict might look at his ticket-of-leave, with mingled relief and indignation. There it was, with the pompous idiocy of the Foreign Secretary's arms and 'style': We, Bill Bailey, Baron of Nowhere, Nothing and Nowitt, one of His Majesty's

Principal et ceteras. There it was, duly endorsed for France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria, but not Germany, Germany being an even more wicked land of ex-enemy aliens. Tony felt he'd be shot before he went to Belgium, having had enough of that bloody, muddy little land to last several lifetimes. But there the passport was, duly visaed for three countries with stamps and signatures, graciously allowing him to move about a little bit of men's common birthright, the earth. Planetary lice. For all of which he had paid in money, time, and humiliation of spirit, being hypocritically polite to the Crangs and Cartwrights, hanging about mouldy offices at the beck of weedy, insolent *ronds-de-cuir*.

Tony laughed and shoved the thing back in his pocket. He began to walk up and down the empty swaying compartment, singing. He was too happy at his release, too full of eager expectation of finding Katha, to care about these annoyances of the Age of Progress. The damp, foggy fields glided swiftly past, with dun ghosts of houses and bare leafless trees—*mein Vaterland, mein Vaterland!* Antony felt he didn't care a damn whether he ever saw it again or not. Katha, Katha, I'm coming to you. And over and over again he sang to the rhythm of the beating wheels

' Wenn ich in deine Augen seh' ! . . . '

One of a long line of impatient pushing people, Antony, bag in hand, advanced slowly step by step towards the wooden hut of the watchdogs of the fair free land of France. At last he reached the *guichet* and handed in his passport, receiving in return a whiff of hot foul air. Two men sat on stools at the opening, one apparently to watch the other, with a fair sprinkling of police and sol-

diers in tin hats with fixed bayonets. Tin hats at Havre—military mad.

'You're English?' asked the man who was doing the work.

It seemed fairly obvious from the passport, but Tony said politely:

'Yes, I am English.'

'What are you going to do in France?'

'I want to pass through it to Basle.'

'Ah, you are going to Switzerland?'

'Yes.' It seemed unnecessary to add that he was going on—so far as they were concerned they'd be rid of him at Basle. The man examined the dates on the passport with minute care, compared the photograph (an unfortunate specimen of that art) with the original, and scanned the French visa eagerly. He shrugged his shoulders slightly, as one who notes with disapproval that all is unfortunately in order.

'So you are only passing through France?' said the man, reaching his hand for the embossed stamp, and still turning the passport pages languidly with the fingers of his other hand.

'Yes.'

At that moment he turned up the page with the Austrian visa. He quivered, like a bloodhound scenting prey, and exclaimed:

'Austria!'

'Austria!' said the other man, with intense suspicion. Their heads came together as they examined this shameful stain on an orderly document, and tried in vain to spell out the German words.

'You are going to Austria?' he cried indignantly.

'Yes.'

'But why did you say you were going to Switzerland?'

Tony sighed.

' But I am going to Switzerland. Then I'm going on. I can't get to Austria without going through Switzerland, can I ? '

' Why are you going to Austria ? '

' That, surely, is my business,' said Tony firmly. ' You see my passport is in order so far as France is concerned.'

' But why did you say you were going to Switzerland ? '

Tony did not answer, and the worker said to the watcher:

' This is a visa for Austria ! '

' Yes,' said the other, ' evidently it is a visa for Austria ! '

And they both shook their heads ominously.

' Come,' said Tony, keeping his temper with some difficulty, ' surely, sir, you will not obstruct the progress of an ally, one who has fought on French soil, who did the Sommes, Artois, Picardy, and Flanders.'

' Ah ! You were a soldier in the war ? ' exclaimed the worker, as if astounded that an Englishman had actually been in it.

' Yes,' said Tony, ' three years.'

Bimf ! The stamp came down, and very reluctantly the passport was handed over—some lingering hope, perhaps, that at the last moment something not-in-order might poke its little head out of the pages and squeal, ' Here I am I '

By this time the anguish of impatience in the people waiting had translated itself into pushing, so that in spite of his efforts Tony only managed to cling to the far end of the *guichet*. As he grasped the document, a final shove sent him plump into a cloaked *agent*, who deigned no reply to his polite apology. Arrived at the customs, Tony put down his bag, opened it, and prepared to wait again. He wiped the perspiration from his face, and

gently hummed the Marseillaise—*Liberte, Liberte cherie*.

This scene was repeated in slightly different terms on leaving French territory, and in entering Switzerland, where the fat-witted stupidity of the official reminded Tony of Renan's definition of infinity. He sweated with impatience and anger, but retained a politeness of manner with desperate hypocrisy. Nothing would have induced him to lose his temper with these heralds of the new epoch of peace and good will, though he would gladly have flung them on the ground and trampled on them. They were 'only doing their duty.' What lick-spittle bullies to accept such a duty! He despised them and despised himself for having to endure them.

The train had been very late in leaving Havre, owing to the duty of the subtle watchdogs. Consequently he missed his connection at Paris and did not reach Basle until noon on the second day. The train moved with exasperating slowness and innumerable waits; it was overcrowded, and everybody was very snappy and ill-tempered, as if nerves were frayed beyond endurance. Happy, happy victors, happy possessors of glory and Alsace! Unfortunate 'liberated' Alsace, where Johann Meyer must now be perky Jean, and blonde, blue-eyed Gretchen be promoted to Marguerite. *Liberte, Liberte cherie*. As the train crossed the old line, he caught a glimpse of trenches and wire, and then refused to take another look—sat with his eyes firmly concentrated on a volume of Heine, to the disquiet and suspicion of his enlightened fellow travellers.

But his heart leaped up as he walked about the streets of Basle, feeling released and tranquil in the surprisingly warm clear autumn sunlight. It was exhilarating to be

free, if only for a few hours, from the awful brooding suspicion and hatred and tragic memories of the war countries. Disliking the Swiss for their lack of distinction, for their fretwork cuckoo clocks, their yodelling, their winter sports and other vices, he nevertheless felt he could have kissed their soil—they had kept some respect for freedom, some humanity. Nobody stared at him as he walked, nobody asked for his papers, nobody seemed to resent him as a foreigner. The town was still alive. There were plenty of men of his own age, going calmly about their lives, and very few uniforms.

Tony loved the clean winding streets, with the coloured gabled houses and Gothic script. Here Johann could be Johann, and Jean, Jean, and Giovanni, Giovanni. He wondered what they would say—that tall, solid German-looking man, for instance, if he went up to him, held out his hand, and said: 'Sir, on entering your country I find myself happier than I have been for years. You have learned the elementary lesson of living peaceably together without interfering unduly with one another. Allow me, sir, to take your hand. Permit me, sir, to shake it.' Probably the man would be offended and think Tony was having him on, especially if he didn't know his Dickens. On the whole he decided it was better to refrain from any public demonstration of approval; so he contented himself with patting affectionately a carved wooden post representing a florid citizeness of the Renaissance painted in bright colours. As he walked on, it occurred to him that the man might actually have been a German. Shaking hands with murder! He thought of the wounded German soldier who had insisted on shaking hands with him in an ecstasy of gratitude for finding him a stretcher. How the long-fanged English spinsters would dislike that. Disgraceful, and

an *officer* too. He hummed 'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh!' ' Oh, Katha, Katha, I'm coming to you, I'm coming to you, my Katha, my Katha. *Herz, mein Herz.*

A clock on a public building marked ten minutes to two, Central European time. Tony realized he was hungry and that he could not exist entirely on approval of Basle and dreams of Katha. He walked along a street of painted houses, looking apprehensively for a restaurant, with sharp memories of the culinary inhospitality of small English towns. His eye fell on an inscription in large black Gothic: Munchener Bierhalle. Yes, positively, and though it was less than a year since the Armistice, it said: Munchener Bierhalle. Tony pushed open the door and went in.

A not unpleasant odour of sauerkraut, sawdust, and beer met his nostrils. Men, portly men, who seemed not to know what was meant by iron rations, were drinking beer, reading newspapers, playing chess, or eating with astounding appetite and gusto. Tony wanted to say: 'Stop! Don't you know there's been a war? Don't you know millions of people are starving in Germany, Austria, and Russia? Don't exceed your rations!' But instead of making this unpopular remark, he sat down and ordered a *Wiener Schnitzel* with potatoes and beer. The *Wiener Schnitzel* because of Katha, naturally. Suddenly it occurred to him that Katha might be hungry in that starved, downtrodden Austria. The thought was so awful that, hungry as he was, he could scarcely choke down the first mouthfuls. Katha hungry! O god of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts. Oh, brave, brave war on women and children.

The *Madchen* seemed surprised that Tony ate only one dish and not all of that—the portion was so huge. She pressed him to eat *Apfel-kuchen* or some cheese.

He tried to explain that through living on short rations he could not eat more, that he came from a country still strictly rationed.

'*Ein Engländer!*' she said, in great excitement. 'Then you were in the war?'

'Yes.'

Her broad good-natured peasant's face smiled down at him with maternal kindness and sympathy. How good to hear the deep German voice, to feel the warm-hearted flow of human friendship, to see her placid untroubled face, neither mourning for a dead lover nor trying to be coquettish nor snobbishly showing off. Just a decent woman, whose instinct made her guess at hidden suffering.

'And you are going to rest in Switzerland? What a pity the winter is coming. In spring the flowers are beautiful, so, so beautiful.'

Tony felt the tears pricking his eyes. He could not help it. He simply couldn't help it. Bronze against bronze, hardness against hardness, scorn against scorn—that was always easy. Human hatred and indifference might break but never move him. But against kindness, against this warm German feeling, he felt utterly helpless and childish. He had an irresistible impulse to tell her what he had hidden so savagely and mistrustfully in his heart for so many weary months.

'I'm not staying in Switzerland,' he said, 'I'm going to Vienna.'

'To Vienna? *Ach, so!*'

'Yes. Before the war I loved a Viennese girl. I've heard nothing of her since August 191'. Now I'm going to Vienna to find her—if I can.'

The girl looked at him with wide blue eyes.

'You have remembered her all these years?'

'Yes.'

'And though you fought as a soldier, you still love her?'

'Yes.'

'Ach!' she exclaimed, clasping her hands, 'that is good. Good.'

'If only I can find her.'

'Oh, you will, you *must*. I didn't know that the English ever felt like that. They are so *frivolous*. So scornful of natural feelings. So *arrogant*. I'm glad they are not all like that. When you find your woman, you must bring her back here. I should like to kiss the hand of a woman who is so much loved.'

Antony stood up. The woman was unknowingly wringing him to unendurable pain. He laid down five Swiss francs.

'Is that enough?'

'More than enough. I'll get you change.'

'No, don't. I must go. But—thank you for your goodness. It is something new and precious. *Auf Wiedersehen*.'

'*Auf Wiedersehen*.'

He held out his hand, which she clasped warmly. He walked out of the stuffy little place, hardly seeing where he was going, almost stifled by his emotion. There were more delicacy and depth of feeling in that ordinary *KelUnerin* than in all the pretentious and would-be 'refined' he had met in years.

For some time he wandered about the streets at random, scolding himself for this sudden outburst of feeling and realizing that long repression had left him liable to unexpected force of emotion directly the pressure was lifted only a little. He would have to be careful with Katha. For the first time he realized that he had formed no particular plan for finding her, that it was

pretty chancy looking for one person in a city of two million people. Yet he couldn't feel discouraged, and felt that the queer emotional little scene with the *Kellnerin* was somehow a good omen.

He found himself in a tranquil triangular *Platz*, with long dignified gabled houses and a large church of red sandstone. From a plaque in the corner he saw it was the Domplatz. He walked slowly through low cloisters, lined with tombstones elaborately carved with florid armorial bearings, and came unexpectedly on a small terrace overlooking the Rhine. The swift whitish water rushed by with extraordinary speed and by its sheer force carried across the ferryboats, which were attached to an overhead wire by a running wheel. He looked down on the bridges and a section of the town bristly with factory chimneys. In the distance low hills ringed the horizon. It was his first view of the upper Rhine, and he sat on the terrace until the sun set, looking at the dimming sky and the hurrying water.

Fortunately for Antony's Swiss enthusiasm, he left early the next morning. The relief of being out of the war countries was so profound that he easily forgave the antics of the square-headed railway official. A window slightly opened to relieve the ghastly fug in the overheated compartment roused this gentleman to intense agitation. Shutting it with a reproving crash, he informed Tony that it was now officially winter and all windows must be kept closed. Regulations. *Auf strengste verboten* to leave a window open—somebody might catch cold. Well, yes, the Herr was certainly the only occupant of the compartment, but somebody might get in at any moment, and then, regulations are regulations. *Nicht wahr?* Similarly, he turned up every fifty kilometres to inspect Antony's ticket, though he had been

told that Antony was going straight through to the frontier. If he had had a taste for scholastic sophistry, Tony thought, he might have argued that as a man he knew quite well that ticket and passenger were going direct to the frontier, but in his sacred office of ticket inspector he had no such knowledge. Tony wondered if the Swiss President were allowed just a teeny bit of open window when it was officially winter? Probably not. With anarchist disregard of elementary social duties, Antony solved the problem of the window by opening it as soon as the Embodiment of Regulations had gone and shutting it when he heard him open the door of the next compartment. He sniffed the cool air suspiciously, but the window was shut, Regulations had been complied with; possibly the Herr had a block of ice in his pocket, but so long as it didn't melt on the cushion, there was no breach of Regulations. In time they became quite friendly. For the first time in his life Tony had a momentary taste of the exquisite pleasures enjoyed by the French in getting round their own infinitely exact Regulations.

He braced himself for a prolonged battle on the Swiss-Austrian frontier, quite expecting a fierce cross-examination under military guard, and determined to struggle to the last against a refusal of permission to enter. Leaving Switzerland was quite easy, directly he had convinced the watchdogs that he had no half-hundredweights of Swiss gold concealed on his person. Getting into Austria was even easier, to his amazement and relief. A tired-looking officer asked him how long he intended to stay, warned him he would have to report to the police, and politely wished him a pleasant trip. Another good omen! Amazing. He was so elated and surprised that he took a turn or two up and down the bitterly cold platform. Then he noticed a small group of pinched-look-

ing people gazing hopelessly and enviously at the lighted restaurant car, where the waiters were laying dinner. He made straight for his compartment and tried to forget the look on their faces by reading the Austrian and Italian newspapers. As the train drew out, he noticed the same people huddled up in the third-class waiting room and wondered why they were not on the train. But, of course, this was the international train—there were no third-class carriages.

When the train reached Vienna, Tony was so tired that he drove straight to a small hotel near the Stephans-Platz and went to bed. It was after midday when he awoke. While he shaved and dressed, he debated whether he should have lunch before going to Katha's address, or not. It would be delightful to have lunch with her, a good way of reestablishing the broken contact; but then it was late, she might have lunched, she might be out, she might be away. All things considered, it would be better to lunch first. He went into the nearest restaurant and made a meagre meal for a fantastically large number of *kronen*, though it was cheap enough in sterling. He was so agitated by the hope of seeing Katha and fear that he would not find her that he ate rapidly, almost without tasting the food; then found he could not eat another mouthful. His hands were trembling. To calm himself, he sipped a glass of wine very slowly and smoked a cigarette as deliberately as he could. He told himself he must read a newspaper for ten minutes and reestablish complete self-control; otherwise he would break down on meeting Katha and distress her while making a fool of himself. But it was no good. He could not read the meaning of two consecutive lines, and discovered he was either tremulously imagining what they would say to each other or looking at the clock.

He decided he was simply making himself worse by this feeble effort at self-discipline, so paid and went out into the street. He told the cab driver to put him down at the end of Katha's street, thinking there might be reasons why she would not want him to drive up to the door. For the first time he wondered what they would do if Katha were married or had a lover. His blood stood still for a second, and then he angrily told himself to stop inventing bogeys and not to face difficulties until they were realities. As an effort at distraction he forced himself to look out of the window. He was surprised at the amount of traffic and apparent opulence, though time and again he noticed beggars and haggard, unhoping faces. So heart-rending a contrast of utter want and luxury. He tried to think only of the stately appearance of the city—a florid fountain, the bold Italian-looking frontispiece of a baroque church, or a magnificent palace. Often he remembered things without knowing that he had looked at them, but now he looked deliberately, trying to memorize, and instantly and completely forgot. Afterwards he remembered nothing of Vienna but his own emotions, against a background of noisy movement and people, with here and there the vivid image of a pathetic or insolent face, the corner of a restaurant, the number plate of a car, the furniture in his hotel bedroom.

The cab stopped in a quiet, rather broad street of large houses, and Tony paid it off—they could easily get another. He looked up at the street plaque; yes, it was the right street. He lighted another cigarette and walked about a hundred yards up a side street, trying to quiet the rapid beating of his heart and to make his hands stop trembling. Suppose she were not there? This was as bad as waiting to go over the top. But how idiotic to prolong this suspense, which simply made him lose what little self-control he had left. Impatiently he

threw away his cigarette and walked rapidly back to the corner.

Katha's number was 32, and he saw that the even numbers beginning with 2 were on the other side. He carefully waited until a string of fast-moving cars had passed—not going to get run over at this stage—and then crossed. It seemed a frightful way, since the houses were large, with bits of garden between them. At number 28 he stopped and breathed deeply several times; really, this feeling of faintness was too idiotic. Three houses off—he could just see the corner through trees. He almost ran the last few paces and then stopped; number 32 was empty, and the gate padlocked.

For a few moments Tony stood gazing blankly up at the blank windows, vaguely wondering why he felt nothing in particular. What should he feel? It was one of those minor but so unexpected shocks which are more stunning than some great but foreseen misfortune—just like that whack of shrapnel in the leg which had sent him spinning without any definite pain. That had come after. Of course, he had realized that Katha might have moved away, and had prepared all sorts of polite German speeches of enquiry to the occupants. He even had his visiting card, all ready in a correctly gloved hand, to present to the servant. But he had never expected to find the house empty, especially in an overcrowded city like Vienna. He had prepared himself time and again for a long search, but he was utterly unprepared to have the trail end at once in what appeared to be a complete dead-end.

Mechanically he took out his wallet and carefully slid the visiting card into its proper compartment. His hand was quite steady and his heart beat almost normal—curious. It occurred to him that this prolonged inspection

of an empty house might look suspicious to nervous neighbours or a zealous policeman, so he walked on to the end of the street, crossed over, and walked back again. From the opposite side he noticed an advertisement of sale, which he had not seen before. At the moment when action became possible, when a new thread to follow appeared, the sense of anxiety and suspense returned. As he copied down carefully the name and address of the house agent, and hope faintly rekindled, he began to feel the first real pain of his disappointment. So slender a thread! By the time he had found a cab and given the house agent's address, he was again in a fever of uncertainty and infinite speculation.

The office was on the other side of the town, and Tony urged the driver to go quickly. He looked at his wrist watch—twenty-seven minutes past three. How much time he had wasted in mooning about that street and empty house. Now, if only he could get the owner's name and address at once, find whoever it was that day, he might be with Katha next day. The cab was involved in a knot of slow-moving traffic and seemed to dawdle almost on purpose. Tony beat his fists on his knees—hurry up, hurry up, for god's sake hurry up! He hated the obstructing drivers murderously. His driver tried to cut through and was held up by a policeman in neat uniform. There was a brisk altercation in Viennese dialect before they were allowed to proceed, and once more they were hemmed in and just crawling. Maddening. Tony was too eager and flurried to realize that this frantic haste was absurd and defeating his own ends. He could only see a point to get to and wanted to be there immediately.

It was after four when he reached the narrow street, and as he ran up the dirty stairs to the office he was in an

agony of fear that it might be shut. Thank god, oh, thank god, it was still open. He paused a moment outside the door to get his breath and wipe the sweat from his face; then entered. Tony asked the boy if he could see the house agent at once. The agent was out and would not be back that day.

'Is there anyone else I can see? A partner or clerk?'

'No, there was nobody else.'

'Well, perhaps you can tell me. I want to find the name and address of the owner or last tenant of a house.'

The boy didn't know. It would be better if the Herr came back tomorrow.

'But surely youVe got a register,' cried Tony. 'You can look in that and tell me. Look it up.'

And he repeated the address several times, as if this would clinch matters. Very slowly and reluctantly the boy (odious little brute, thought Tony) turned over the leaves of a fat book, scanning each page with an alphabetic minuteness and helplessness.

'No,' he said with dreary satisfaction, 'I can't find it.'

'Let me look,' said Tony peremptorily. 'Give it to me.'

The boy unwillingly slapped the heavy volume on the counter. Tony spun it round, found the index, ran his finger rapidly down it till he came on the correct item, turned up the page. For Sale. Never mind description. Owner's name: Baron E. von Ehrenfels. But no address.

'What is the address of Baron von Ehrenfels?' asked Tony.

'I don't know.'

'Well, look it up.'

'I can't.'

'Why not?'

'I'm not allowed to.'

'If you let me have that address now, I'll give you twenty *kronen*. And I give you my word that it won't hurt your master's interests.'

'No, I can't,' said the boy mulishly.

'Well, thirty *kronen*, then.'

'I'm not allowed to. It's against the *Rules*,⁹ the boy almost wailed in anguished devotion to the rules.

'Damn the rules. It won't hurt anybody, I tell you, and I need that address most particularly.'

But the boy stuck to his beloved Rules, and after wasting another ten minutes in futile argument, Tony called him a *Dummkopf* and left. He was so much annoyed that he forgot to make an appointment with the agent for the next day.

For some time he walked aimlessly about the streets, seeing nothing, and cursing the boy's ill-judged integrity. Damn stupid honesty, he said to himself; an Englishman would have given me the address for nothing, I could have bribed an Italian in two minutes and a Frenchman in three; these damned Boches have no suppleness. He felt utterly exhausted, and turned into a large cafe to rest. *Que faire?* How pass the time until ten next day? As he stirred his coffee an idea came to him, and he asked the waiter for the Directory of Vienna. He ran swiftly through the pages and found what he wanted: 'Ehrenfels, Baron E. von,' and then shut the book with a snap—the address was that of the empty house. Another idea. He looked up Katha's name. There were fifteen entries of her surname, but no Katharina. He puzzled for a long time trying to remember the Christian name of Katha's father, and decided it was either Rupprecht or Rudolf. There were two 'R. von,' one a Graf, who Tony felt sure could not be Katha's father.

However, he carefully copied the two addresses and drove to them at once. At both he drew a blank. No, they knew of no Katharina of their name, and no other Rupprecht or Rudolf. Profuse of apologies, Tony withdrew, feeling the kind of humiliation in these visits which he imagined a commercial traveller must endure until he becomes case-hardened. Still, it was much that they were at least frigidly civil. An Austrian on a similar errand in England at that time would have been kicked downstairs or handed over to the police by self-righteous patriots averse from shaking hands with murder.

Too worn-out and heart-sick to eat, Tony drove back to his hotel and lay clothed on the bed in darkness. What to do next? There was the slender thread of the house agent and Baron Ehrenfels. Follow that up next morning. Should he call on each of the other thirteen Viennese with Katha's surname? His cheeks went hot. He simply couldn't face another of those dignified poverty-stricken interiors, where every piece of furniture, every fibre of the stiffly polite inhabitants seemed to whisper reproachfully: 'Blockader! Starver of women and children!' No, he couldn't face it.

In this search Tony was handicapped in every way, and most seriously where he least suspected. His being a foreigner, an ex-enemy, with very faulty German, was bad enough, and that was aggravated by his having no credentials, no introductions to anyone in authority. But the worst handicap was his own state of mind. He was in such a state of nervous tension, such utter despair mingled with such frantic hope, such restless impatience and agonized misery that he seemed and perhaps was a little deranged. The smallest obstacle became in his imagination a desperate complex of difficulties. Each of

his interviews with hostile strangers, on an errand which must seem to them futile and a pretext for something shady, left him physically and mentally exhausted. He had to make prodigious efforts of will to face them with politeness and an appearance of calm, and their very natural indifference or impatience filled him with resentment, the sensation that all men were hostile. He thought of the Basle *Kellnerin* with a mixture of bitterness and exaggerated emotion. Sentimental fools both of them, and he the worse for having exhibited himself.

He got up and drank a little weak brandy and water, and then lay down again. What other possibilities were there? Obviously the British diplomatic people and the Austrian police. But he was extremely averse from both. His experience of the British diplomatic abroad was that they catered exclusively for the *Tatler* class, and that anybody else had not the faintest chance of getting anything from them except polite contempt. He had no letters of introduction, and imagined himself explaining to a haughty third secretary that he was trying to find an Austrian girl he was in love with. If Tony had been a press peer or connected with money on a large enough scale, of course the aspect of the case would be entirely changed. But with only a hundred pounds to his name and a passport as introduction—he nervously felt in his pockets to be sure he had not lost either.

A further and most cogent objection against approaching either of these official powers was the fact that in 1911 Katha's father had been arrested for real or supposed dealings with Russia, and that Katha herself had been turned back from the Swiss frontier, possibly under arrest. It was ominously significant that he had heard no more from her since that moment. For all he knew, she and her father might still be suspects or still im-

prisoned. If the vindictive mentality of the English war hounds was any guide, they certainly would be. And official enquiries might merely land him in trouble and call most unwelcome attention to them. Even if they were at large, they might well be living under assumed or changed names. After all, in free and happy England there had been a rush to convert German-sounding names into solid English Montmorencys and other mounts and fords. How hopeless, how utterly hopeless, what a fantastic wild-goose chase among all this selfish tyranny and greed, these yahoos of belligerent commerce. He bit his hands in an agony of despair and helpless rage. May the curse of God Almighty, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, be upon them now and for evermore.

Nevertheless, early next morning Tony was at the house agent's office and waited until he arrived. The man was at first obsequious and then insolent, and Tony had great difficulty in making him understand that he only wanted the address of Baron Ehrenfels. The house agent was one of those very numerous commercial men who divide humanity into those with whom they do business (very important so long as the business lasts) and those with whom they do not do business, who do not exist. He simply could not believe that Tony's request was not an oblique method of trying to buy or rent a house, and, even when he had very reluctantly given the address, persisted in showing photographs of houses and descriptions of flats, all the time explaining that Vienna was very crowded and that Herr Clarendon would not find so extensive a selection anywhere else. As Tony finally escaped, he felt the man's resentment and baffled greed following him like a cloud of poison gas.

. . .

Baron von Ehrenfels received him standing, very erect, clean-shaven, monocle. Staff, thought Tony at once, clicked his heels, bowed stiffly, and stood to attention. The Baron noticed the military manner and relaxed slightly. Tony explained his errand, and when he mentioned the name:

'Ah,' exclaimed the Baron, 'you are looking for the Graf?'

'No,' Tony replied, 'I had the honour of interviewing the Graf yesterday, and it appears this is not the same family.'

The Baron stiffened up again and said:

'But since these are old friends, you must know other members of the family or their friends in Vienna?'

'No,' said Tony, feeling he was flushing under the Baron's very glassy eye. 'You see I only knew them in Italy and in England'—he felt he must make that lie for respectability's sake. 'They had English relatives. I was never with them in Vienna. And think, five years have passed.'

'I don't see what I can do,' said the Baron curtly.

'Can you give me the name and address of the person from whom you bought their house? He might know.'

'He was a Jew,' replied the Baron with infinite contempt. 'My man of affairs dealt with him. Naturally, I didn't meet him.'

'Then, forgive my persistence, could I be allowed to call on your man of affairs?'

Tony could feel the sweat standing on his face and trickling down his back under the stress of this interview, but stuck to his guns as fiercely as if they had been real ones. For Katha's sake, for Katha's sake, he whispered to himself.

The Baron hesitated and then wrote something on a piece of paper and handed it over stiffly.

ⁱ 'May I express my thanks for your very great courtesy and kindness?' said Tony formally but with real gratitude, half-holding out his hand, 'I am deeply indebted——'

'*Bitte*,' said the Baron, cutting him short and giving a curt nod of dismissal. Tony could only bow in silence and go.

Outside in the street Tony laughed nervously. What did he care about these humiliations, when the first touch of Katha's hand would wipe them out for ever? Yet he did care, all the same.

The Baron's man of affairs was genial and portly, but oh, so businesslike. He listened carefully to Tony's often-repeated story which was now very fluent, making notes. He meditated, tapping his pursed-out lips thoughtfully.

'It's no use your looking for that Jew dealer,' he declared. 'There was immense speculation in property during and just after the war, so many families were forced to sell for anything they could get. And it's a thousand to one whether the creature would remember your friend or know anything about him, even supposing he was the vendor and that the Jew did not buy from some other Jew. You might have to run through half the ghetto, and to no effect, ha, ha!'

'Can you make any suggestion?' asked Tony desperately.

¹ 'Why, of course. Your embassy and the police.'

¹ 'Is there no other way? You will see at once that I feel some delicacy about going to the police in a private matter like this.'

'You could try a private detective agency, but they're expensive and not always trustworthy. If there is any

reason for your concealing the matter from the police, they might immediately denounce you,'

'Oh, there's no reason for concealment,' said Tony as confidently as he could, aware that the man did not believe him. 'Perhaps I had better go direct to the police.'

'It is your best method. The Polizeidirektion is at Scotten-Ring, number eleven.'

Tony thanked him and then very awkwardly asked what fee he owed for the consultation. The voluble refusal to take any fee for so slight a service to a friend of so distinguished a client as Baron von Ehrenfels convinced Tony that he must pay something. He took out a folded fifty-krone note, laid it on the table, and bowed himself out.

Again the trail had finished at a dead-end. There was nothing now but the police or admission of failure. Tony was depressed almost to the point of suicide, and his spirits were not enlivened by the numbers of wretched beggars who asked for alms. He was tortured by the thought that Katha, sensitive, delicate Katha, might be begging somewhere in this ghastly city, whose baroque splendours seemed to mock the misery of its inhabitants. He kept his pockets filled with small change, and never refused any beggar, with a superstitious feeling that this futile charity might somehow be counted as a merit and earn supernatural aid to find her. But even as he gave he realized the stupidity and hollowness of the gesture. What is the merit of giving in hopes of receiving an immense reward? And, anyway, he didn't believe in god, least of all any of the numerous Christian gods, not even Money,

Three days passed before he gathered resolution to go to the police, three days of agonized debate and self-

torture, three days of restless wandering about **the** streets, in restaurants, in shops, cafes, churches, the public gardens, the Volksgarten, the Stadtpark, the Augarten, above all the Prater, scanning the faces of women, anxiously looking for a figure and walk like Katha's. Time and again he thought he saw her pass in the distance, or caught a glimpse of someone who must surely be Katha. Then came the breathless anxiety of pursuit, the strained effort not to lose sight of the moving figure in the crowd, the obvious pretexts to get a glimpse of the face. He followed these will-o'-the-wisps along streets and the Prater paths, into shops and public vehicles, even into cinemas. Of course, the women thought he was pursuing them amorously. It was a relief when they were annoyed and disdainful. When they loitered or cast come-hither glances at him, he felt abominable; and at night dreamed of running after women and being pursued by fiendish legions of them.

This interminable tramping about, often in rain, nearly always in cold, exhausted him so much that he spent the morning of the fourth day in bed. He had now been in Vienna a week, with his limited store of money trickling away; worn-out, miserable, and he had achieved nothing, absolutely nothing. He lay in bed, easing his aching legs and wretchedly brooding. At noon he shaved and dressed with special care, ate as much of a good lunch as he could, and then drove to the Polizeidirektion. He had some difficulty in getting in, and still more in obtaining an interview with anyone in authority, but persistence, waiting, and bank notes achieved that end. He felt extremely nervous as he walked along a corridor behind a policeman to an office. It was partly that inevitable nervousness every innocent person feels on personal contact with the police, partly a last-minute doubt of the wisdom of his step. He firmly made up his mind not to

give Katha's name until he felt sure it would not harm her.

It was a relief to find the police official was a soldier. Tony always felt more at his ease with a soldier, more certain of frank even if brutal treatment. He duly clicked heels and bowed, received a slight military salute, and once more told his tale, ending up:

'And since all other means have failed, I have come to you on the advice of Baron von Ehrenfels's man of affairs.'

'You are a friend of Baron von Ehrenfels?'

'I can't say that. A mere acquaintance, but he was good enough to try to help me.'

The officer gazed at Tony with that Orderly Room would-be gimlet stare he knew so well, and asked:

'And what do you want of me?'

'You must have archives, registers of people. Couldn't you give orders for them to be looked through and tell me the present whereabouts of this family I'm looking for?'

'It's rather strange that you shouldn't know the address of people you claim as old friends.'

O god, thought Tony, he thinks I'm a fraud and trying some new wheeze for getting money on false pretenses.

'Not at all strange,' he protested. 'Communication with England was cut off for years, as you know. I come here and find my friends have sold their house. It has changed hands so many times that it has been impossible to find them by that means.'

The officer reflected a moment, never taking his eyes from Tony's. Although Tony knew he was entirely innocent of any crime or misdemeanour whatsoever, he could not help a creeping sensation in his spine and a guilty-looking flush from appearing on his face.

'Have you any credentials?' rather sharply.

Tony produced his passport, which was carefully examined and returned.

'Anything else? Any business documents or letters to the authorities?'

'No. I have a letter of credit from an English bank.'

This also was examined and returned.

'I'm not inclined to give you this information without more satisfactory credentials. In any case, I think I should ask for an authority from the Minister of the Interior.'

'But how am I to get that?' cried Tony imprudently.

'That is your affair. You can apply to them through your ambassador.'

'Then you can do nothing?'

'Nothing.'

This was accompanied by a slight scowl, which seemed to say: And you may think yourself lucky in not being arrested as a suspicious character. There was no more to do.

'Then, good-day,' said Tony, and turned to go.

'One moment,' the officer called him back. 'Where are you staying?'

Tony gave the name and address of his hotel.

'Have you registered with the police?'

'Yes.'

'Let me see the certificate.'

It was examined with the same care as the other documents and then handed back.

'Very well. You may go.'

And Tony went, very erect, and making no bow or salute. That was imprudent, but he wasn't going to be browbeaten by that brute.

. . .

Tony walked back to his hotel, shaking with rage and indignation. What a fat-head, and what a beastly bully. But it was the same everywhere. His annoyance was lost in the sudden heart-breaking realization that the last card he possessed had been played, with complete, utter failure. All very well to encourage himself by saying 'Faites donner la Garde.' There wasn't any *Garde* to *donner*. He remembered how the English soldiers at the end of the war had shouted, 'Kaput, Fritz,' to German prisoners, and he now felt the bitterness of being *kaput*. There simply and literally was nothing more to do. His rage with the stupid policeman returned, and he determined to pack and leave Vienna at once. Yes, pack and get out of it. Accept defeat and go.

Yet long before he reached the hotel, he found himself anxiously glancing at the faces of passing women, eagerly pursuing the hopeless and miserable search which had occupied his recent days. He decided he would take one more turn in the Prater. True, it was raining, but she might be there. And when darkness slowly fell on his insuccess, he began restlessly to hunt through the cafes and shops of a new quarter. Twice he bought unwanted cigarettes in order to have enough change for beggars.

He lingered two more days, in hopeless, atrocious despair, yet unable to give up the obviously ridiculous search, unable to leave while there was the dimmest afterglow of hope. Pale and unspeakably weary, he tramped street after street, jostled and stared at, whispering over and over to himself: Katha, Katha, my Katha, where are you? Why can't I find you? O lost, lost.

Late at night, on the second day after his interview with the Polizeidirektor, a thought came to him. Yes, the search was hopeless; yes, he must resign himself to

leaving Vienna without Katha, without hope of ever seeing her again, but at least he could say farewell to the memories of their love, look for the last time and then never again on the sky and sea and rocks where they had loved so passionately and planned so secure a happiness. Yes, say farewell, go into a lover's retreat, and in bitter agony but with all tenderness wave good-bye to love and youth.

Aeaea.

§ix

The boat was only about fifteen minutes away from the little harbour of Aeaea when Antony went slowly and stiffly on deck. His body still ached all over from the fatigue of the endless journey from Vienna to Naples, though he had slept nearly the whole ten hours of the sea passage. What a journey! And how often he had cursed himself and his obstinacy in continuing this sentimental pilgrimage, which at best was a kind of inner suicide, a last stab to make certain that the corpse was a corpse.

The dark-blue sea undulated with a heavy but subsiding swell, and he watched great tongues of white foam rushing up the broken cliff base and heard the distant boom of the surf. The morning was windless and cloudless, already filled with the soft glow of southern November sunshine, and the mists were shrinking back to the higher peaks. The planes and outlines of Aeaea, with their timeless nobility, were already clear, but the glittering white cubes of the houses seemed set in a metallic leafage of gold and bronze. Only the pines and olives kept their distinct greens.

Tony half saw, half missed it, absorbed in his own thoughts. Those hellish days in Vienna haunted him like an evil dream from which he was not thoroughly

awake. And then the flight had been almost worse. The hanging about to get an Italian visa, the early drive through streets in wet and mist to the Siidbanhof, the wrench of agony as the train started and inexorably stressed the failure of his search, the long dismal jogging through soaked foggy landscape with glimpses of snow mountains, the delays. Then the interminable hanging about and examination at the Italian frontier, lousy with officials and insolent soldiers, Italia *cock-a-hoopissima*. Caporetto was forgotten, forgotten the fact that the Piave had been crossed by Anglo-French divisions. Italia had won the war. There had been no French, no Russians, no English, no Americans. Alone Italia did it, and was already busy inscribing her glory on marble in gilt lettering in every piazza from Trieste to Syracuse. But who cares? Tony certainly didn't.

And then how dreary Italy can be under rain and cloud! Venice misty and dank, Milan with icy rain, Bologna a mud bath, the Apennines one enormous fog, Florence chilly with a sky like Newcastle. And, as contrast to all this brag about victory, the slow, dirty, incompetently run trains, packed to the windows. The Italians seemed to have lost their old warmth and hard-working simplicity and to have retained only their faculty for promiscuous existence, their insensitiveness, their impertinent curiosity. He very soon got sick of their indiscreet questionings, and their complaints about the wickedness of England in the matter of coal and the exchange, invariable phrases flung at him as if he were personally responsible. And always the song and dance about what 'WE' did in the war. *Not, not, not; to, to, to.* Tony decided that some nations, like some people, are sympathetic and charming when bottom dogs and utterly odious when they think they're top dogs. After Milan, Tony pretended he knew no Italian and, as

he listened to far from complimentary remarks about himself, England, and America, mused vaguely on historical verdicts, the policy of the Hapsburgs, and the Aeschylaeian theory of justice, which shows how 'right' shifts from one side to the other, is lost by excess and only regained by measure.

At Rome there was a violent thunderstorm with sheets of rain, but just before Cassino, at sunset, the clouds parted in a magnificent drop-scene of sullen crimson and violet, and he saw that the vines were still yellow with late leaves. As he crept wearily on board ship at Naples, he felt the warm southern air blowing off the sea and saw stars above the broken outline of the Sorrentine hills.

Two tin-hatted men with fixed bayonets were 'guarding' the little jetty at Aeaea—how they love playing at soldiers when there's no danger! The landing charges were exorbitant, and Tony had a very sharp passage with the cabby before he could beat him down to a fare about three times the normal sum. The man only asked ten times the pre-war fare, and both his horse and cab seemed dedicated to the gods of decay. However, when Tony gave him the address, an unaccountable access of honesty smote him, and he said:

'It's shut, signore.'

'But the owners are still there?'

'Yes.'

'Very well. They are old friends. I'll see them, and if they can't take me in, go somewhere else. Avanti.'

After checking the man's inevitable and impertinent *spiegazione* of local features obvious to a child of five, and refusing his offer to take the Signore on a daily excursion to beauty spots (there was exactly one carriage road on the island), with the remark that the Signore

wouldn't be seen dead in such a mouldy turn-out, Tony lost himself in musings and memories. Five and a half years since he had driven up that road for the first time, in how different a mood and on how different an errand. He compared his delight and ecstasy on that first morning with his present apathetic weariness and indifference—an apathy which was a bore and an exasperation. Yet there was a lovely fresh quality in the autumn sunlight, new green was coming up in the gardens and undergrowth after the early rains, and the light over land and sea had a delicacy and depth quite as beautiful as spring. He wondered if it was only in youth that one was alive and happy and moved by beauty, and if he must now resign himself for the rest of life to the dulled sensibilities of middle age.

Tony ordered the cabman to wait a minute outside the little hotel. How impossible that it should still be there so unchanged, and no Katha. The front door was shut and barred, but he went by the side gate into the courtyard, where he found the old woman pottering about. She recognized him at once, with shrill ejaculations and piercing screams to Babbo and Filomena to behold the Signor' inglese Antonio who had arrived. This was the old warm-hearted Italy, and in the effusive but sincere clamour of their welcome Tony mentally apologized for the hard things he had been thinking and saying about Italians. How good of the Signore to remember them all those years, and how kind of him to come all the way from England to see them. Filomena! A bottle of wine, the good wine, yes the strong, extremely old, three-year-old, wine!

Tony asked their news and received it in ample measure, with plenty of polite enquiries about himself. He remembered to ask after the relatives in the Roman restaurant. Yes, the boys had come through the war

safely, thanks be to the Madonna and Saint Calogero, and the old mother was all right; still complaining of her illness, Tony sipped his wine carefully, good though it was, knowing the potency of southern wines on an empty stomach. Then he came to the point—though they were still officially shut, could they take him in for a few days? Only a few days—he returned to England very soon—and he promised to give no trouble.

Followed a long debate, from which it appeared that they were liable to some terrific tax if they had a guest in the hotel, and a still more terrific fine if they failed to declare him. The old people were doubtful and obviously frightened, but Filomena was with him. Was not the Signore an old friend? Very well, as an old friend he should stop. And if, by chance, a little money passed between them when he left, well, why not? Friends give each other presents, don't they? And who was to know? The parents still hesitated, so Tony went out to get his bag as a clinching argument and to give Filomena a chance to tell them in his absence that they were fools not to take Opportunity by the forelock. When he came back he saw it was settled, and followed Filomena upstairs with his bag, through the white, empty corridors dim with closed shutters. Outside the room which had been Katha's he paused.

i May I have this room? '

i *Sicuro*. But wouldn't you rather have your old one at the end, with the terrace? It's larger, and the view——'

No. I took a fancy to this room. May I have it? '

Filomena unlocked the door and then threw open the shutters with two sounding thwacks, so that the sunlight flooded in. Nothing was changed. 'Their' bed still stood in the same corner under the same blue and red madonna, with the same local furniture of dark walnut

wood carved in a debased baroque tradition. Tony quickly turned his back to the light.

'Are you sure you want this room, signore? It's not our best, and you should have the best.'

'I prefer it,' said Tony in a choking voice, which made Filomena stare at his turned back. 'Can I have a little water to wash?'

'At once.'

Left alone, Tony went over and gently touched the iron bedrail as if it had been a living thing, and then stood looking out of the window, swallowing at a pain in his throat, and trying to pretend he was lighting a cigarette when Filomena came back with a white tin jug and an armful of bedclothes.

'I'll make the bed presently,' said Filomena, glancing curiously at him. 'Now I must cook you something to eat. You must be very hungry—all that way from England.'

She seemed to think that a foodless desert stretched from England to Aeaea and that Tony must therefore be starving. He knew Filomena's super-generous portions, and that she would be deeply offended if he left one scrap on his plate.

'Yes, I'd like lunch. But, Filomena . . . I—I've been rather unwell, and I'm not allowed to eat much. Only *pasta*, and some vegetables and fruit. And not much of anything.'

Filomena clasped her hands tragically.

'Ill? Not eat much? Ah, *poverino!* *Misericordial* But you will eat what I shall make. *Si, si!*'

And she bustled out with wailing '*poverinos*' and '*Madonna santissimas*' all down the corridor.

When she had gone and the deep wave of silence flowed back into the room, Tony locked the door and threw himself on the mattress with his face in his hands.

ⁱ 'Katha, Katha, oh, Katha!' he whispered aloud.

All his weariness, his disappointment, his poignant misery and longing, the utter exhaustion of long years of outer hardness and struggling for courage, the sense of defeat and utter irreparable loss swept over him like a huge irresistible wave of the sea. He broke down completely and sobbed aloud, with not even pride to reinforce his complete inner collapse.

'Katha, Katha, that it should come to this.'

And 'this' was his second death.

When self-control returned, he sat quite still for a time, almost without sensation or feeling. All capacity for emotion was temporarily worn out, and the weather of his mind was that dull stillness which follows a violent storm. When Filomena called him for lunch, he went down with a feeling of indifference and calm and talked and joked with her as she lingered by the table after serving him. Presently he was able to ask her quite offhandedly if she remembered the Signorina *tedesca* who had been staying there at the same time as himself.

ⁱ 'Oh, yes,' Filomena said. 'I remember her well, so *graziosa*, so *carina*, so unlike those others with big feet and ugly clothes. Yes, yes. We have often spoken of her and you, after you went away together. And we wondered . . . we hoped . . .'

Filomena was too polite to say what they had wondered and hoped, and Tony ignored the hint.

'Have you heard from her since?'

'Yes. She sent a postcard. I'll get it.'

She came back with a faded card showing a walk in the Prater.

'Read it, signore, read it.'

'May I? Thank you.'

It was dated Vienna, 22nd December 191', and written in Italian. No mention of the war, but Christmas greetings and might next year be happier for everyone. And then Tony realized that he was sufficiently alive to feel a pang, for the next sentence said: 'Do you remember Signor' Antonio, my cousin? Has he ever written to you? If you have his address, I should be *greatly* obliged if you would send it.'

What a fool I was, Tony thought; of course, Austria was not at war with Italy until 1915. If only I'd thought of writing here, we could have kept in touch long enough to make some arrangement for after the war. Obviously, as she got no letters from me, she thought I had left my address, or the enquiry was simply a pretext to find if I sent a letter to her here.

He looked at Katha's address—it was the same house he had found empty in Vienna.

Glancing up, he found Filomena gazing at him curiously.

'And this is all?' he asked.

'Yes. Soon there was war, and we heard nothing else,' Then, after a pause: 'Would you like to have that card, Signor' Antonio?'

'If you can spare it. I should like to have it very much indeed.'

'Then keep it.'

Tony thanked her, promising himself that he would buy Filomena as handsome a gift as he could find on the island, and put the card in his pocketbook.

Each morning he walked out to the end of the island, climbed down to Katha's ledge, and sat there for an hour or more, hardly thinking, hardly with any emotion, just feeling the memory of her presence, remembering her touch and her kisses, in these quiet, not wholly un-

happy memories saying farewell to her, taking leave of the past. In the afternoon he climbed to the mountain top where they had sat and talked together and eaten fruit, looked over the changeless sea to the unaltered outlines of the islands and the far promontory, saying good-bye, living his valediction. He went to the little rocky inlet where they had bathed together, and thought of her beautiful white body in the clear water and the touch of her breasts on his lips and body. Before he left he gathered a little garland of autumn flowers and scattered them on the sea ripples, strewing these poor blossoms of regret and tenderness as a last leave-taking. And each night he lay down to sleep in the bed where they had lain in each other's arms as lovers.

Each evening he told himself he must go the next day, hurt himself no longer by living where every path and every moment reminded him of Katha. Somehow he must live out his life, as he had vowed to do that night in London when he threw the revolver bullets in the snow. And each day he lingered. Filomena was alarmed at his pallor, his quietness, and what she considered his lack of appetite, though he really ate well in comparison with Vienna. He had to be very firm to prevent her calling in a doctor when he caught a cold, one of those dreadful snuffling Italian colds, by getting wet through on the way back from Katha's ledge. That settled it—ridiculous to moon about sneezing over memories of a lost, too romantic love. He stayed in bed a couple of days and then got up early to catch the morning boat.

Tony felt he must have been a depressing guest and tried to stage a cheerful departure, among gifts and good wishes. When they made him promise to return soon, he hadn't the heart to tell that never, never again could he bear to come to Aeaëa, that to them also he was

saying a last farewell, *A rivederla. Buon viaggio.* Good-bye. At each bend of the road he said farewell to a memory and looked his last at each aspect of the sunny sea and autumn-coloured land. On board the steamer, he went straight to his berth and stayed there until he heard the anchor rattle up, the long siren blasts so flattering to the southern ear, and felt the boat moving away from harbour.

At last, when they were some distance out, he went on deck and walked to the stern. Aeaea, in a delicate gold haze of autumn sunlight, was beginning to recede. The human figures on the shore and jetty had vanished into invisibility, and the houses were already turned to bright cubes of white. He could not see the upper village or any of the places he had been with Katha, except the little platform on the mountain peak. For a long time he watched it growing smaller and less distinct, as if he were a dead soul ferried over the waters of death and gazing back at the last glimpse of the warm land of the living. Before he turned to go down to his cabin, he made a little gesture of farewell, and whispered:

'Herz, mein Herz.'

PART III

1926



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1926

THE others refused to leave their chairs and the fossil sunlight released from the hearth, so Antony threw on the first overcoat which came to hand and went out into the dark, scentless winter garden. He stepped across the path of crazy pavement (a bit of Margaret's upper-suburban *chi-chi*) and was glad to feel damp, softish turf under his thin shoes. He bent down and touched the ground lightly with his fingers. It was rough with half-dried worm casts, and the winter grass blades were stiff and unfriendly, like the coat of a dead animal.

Antony groped his way to the small pool, instinctively holding his right arm before his face, though there was nothing to run into. The almost windless air felt cold to his neck and fingers—mustn't stay out too long. In the distance a train suddenly became audible as it ran out of a deep cutting with a sound like an eighteen-pounder shell keening away diminuendo. Antony stood with his head half bent, thinking of dead, ruined villages, and waiting for the shell to burst beyond no-man's-land. But it never did. As always, the keening sank to a whisper and then was abruptly cut off by a hill. Yet there was something ominous and threatening in this perfect imitation of a rushing shell—the peace of peace lost in the threat of war.

The row of old pines was just blackly visible against

the misty sky, a sort of jagged architrave on slender dark pillars, like the ruined flank of a temple. Above them, where the mist was thinner, a few stars glowed feebly. The whole universe is an exchange of light through darkness. Or a ceaseless drum fire of rays. Or an interchange of warm greetings. What happens in interstellar space when rays meet? Nothing. They pass through each other without even a by-your-leave.

Antony started. Something soft but firm had pushed itself against his left ankle. He bent down, and his fingers touched a small, whiskery face and cool, smooth fur.

'Well, puss, what do you want? '

'Pr-aaa-o,' she said and pushed against him again.

'What are you trying to say, Mimi? Happy new year? '

He could feel her treading amorously in the darkness and pushing her head against his hand to be scratched. As much alive as I am, but she lives in a world of other dimensions, where time is infinite, and doesn't bother about her own consciousness. Wise pussy! Approves of me solely as purveyor of luxuries and thoughtful caresses. *Femme forte et dure*. Trying to be friendly, aren't you, puss? But if you were ten times bigger or I ten times smaller—how you'd chaw me up. Scrunch.

'Pr-aaa-o.'

Now what is she trying to say? I should like to give her some advice. Pregnant again. At her age she really ought to do a little birth-control.

He became aware of a distant pealing of bells, lost and pathetic but rather friendly in the immense darkness. He listened intently. Only four notes—yes, it must be Stapleton. Almost together the nearer eight-bell chime of Crowhurst came in with the deeper, more sonorous, but more distant cathedral bells of Midchester. The gentle

sounds were like tenuous, ineffective ghosts of bells. They could not flood and saturate the air like sunlight or gently suffuse it like moonlight, but tinkled like little star points of sound, dim and remote as the small misty gleams over the pine tops.

They ceased, and the dark solemn silence flowed back as if it had never been dispersed, Antony shivered slightly, either from cold or because he was thinking that all human existence, all the splendour and glory of succeeding civilizations are no more than a brief tinkling of bells in the eternal darkness and silence. He bent down to touch the cat, to reassure himself against the terror of nothingness by the touch of living flesh, but she had gone off silently and did not come to his call. Only when he turned and saw light streaming steadily through the warm yellow curtains of the closed windows did he feel comforted against the enormous indifference of cold silence and space, the two parentheses of oblivion.

Antony did not return directly to the drawing room; while he was taking off his overcoat the whimsey came to him to consult the Homeric lots for a hint of his fate to come. Perhaps for ninety-nine hundredths of him it was simply a joke; but for the last deep fraction it was a consultation of the gods. He went into the small room which served as his library and refuge from domestic upheavals, switched on the light, and took down his old school *Odyssey*, still bound in brown paper with his name scrawled on it in the unformed hand of boyhood. He opened the book at random and dabbed his finger on a line. The Greek was so simple that he did not need to turn up a dictionary to read:

¹ And for you, may the Gods grant you to see your wife and to reach your home, since for a long time you have endured misfortunes far from your friends.'

A curious thrill came into his blood as he slowly read the two stately hexameters and caught their meaning. For the first time in years a doubt came to him, and with it the first painful stirring of what might be new life. He read the lines again. But he was in his home, and from where he stood he could hear the distant murmur of his friends talking and the laughter of Margaret who had been his wife for nearly six years. Yet the doubt whispered: 'How if this is not really your home, nor she truly your wife, nor those your friends?' For a minute or more he stood gazing at the crisp letters, seeing through them to a far-off tumult of old memories and old desires and old hopes, long since crushed down to oblivion and buried under wilful forgetting. Then, 'What nonsense!' he said aloud, snapped the book shut, and returned it to the shelf.

Back in the drawing room, Antony kissed his wife and wished her happiness in 1926.

'Oh,' she replied indifferently, 'we finished with that long ago.'

He drew back hurt, uncertain whether her ambiguous remark was meant to be a hint of general disillusion with him, or whether she only meant that they had exchanged their greetings while he was away.

'Did you hear the chimes?' she added, merely for the sake of saying something, it seemed.

'Yes. Stapleton, Crowhurst, and the cathedral. It was rather touching, that ghostly little message of peace to men of good will. There is something in these old customs.'

'Ring in the old, ring out the new,' said Walter with a snigger. Growing more like an owl than ever, thought Tony, and ejecting would-be witticisms like funny pellets. A bit drunk too—I made the punch too strong.

'Peace and good will?' Harold said, with a trace of the sneer in his voice he so often had when speaking of or to Antony. 'It sounds like a limited liability company. What value would you put on the assets, Tony?'

He took a small gulp of punch with wet rounded lips. And you get more fish-like every day, thought Tony, with that sleek head and carp-like mouth. Long slender Helen over there on the couch with her bright dress—a checkered snake. And Margaret? Something feline and something bird-like, a cat-bird, supple, predatory, and rather mindless.

Tony moved over to the piano stool away from the fire, without replying to Harold. The room seemed small, hot, stuffy with tobacco and punch fumes and the women's scent. Planes of sensibility collide—impossible to communicate. Step from the friendly room and meet the eternal dreadful verities; adjust to their hostility; step back, and then the room is hostile. And we still live in artificial caves, squatting round the fire discovered by some hairy Prometheus. He heard Margaret saying:

I think it's dreadful that *you men*'—æons of unconscious female scorn in that *you men*'—simply accept war and fighting and laugh at peace and good will. The world'd be different if women ruled it.'

'It's the law of the jungles,' said Walter with the air of saying something profound.

'Well, if you believe in the law of the jungle,' retorted Margaret with a cogency which surprised Tony, 'why don't you go and live in the jungle?'

Grotesque vision of Walter owling it in the jungle, tu-whit, tu-whoo! Where would he be if a government department failed to provide his daily mice?

'You can't get away from it,' Harold interjected. 'It's the survival of the fittest.'

'Struggle-for-lifer,' Tony murmured.

'Why,' Harold went on triumphantly, not hearing him, 'our own bodies are a perpetual battlefield of micro-organisms. And human society is the same. It doesn't matter whether the war is overt, or latent, whether it's fought with clubs, bombs, or bank notes, it's always war, always the law of the jungle. And quite right. Let the best man win.'

'Then what are governments for?' exclaimed Margaret.

'To hold the ring.'

Tony felt it was up to him to come to the support of his jungle mate.

'I can't let you get away with a world of malarial criminals and quinine cops,' he said. 'Obviously human society exists precisely because it's got away from the law of the jungle—which by the way isn't a law at all, it's an anarchy. We are the Great Experiment. I don't know Why the experiment or What's making it. Neither do you. In pessimistic moments I'm inclined to think it's already failed. Our backs are to the wall. So there's nothing to do but carry on.'

'With our Tony sentimentality begins at home,' sneered Walter, who had plainly read his Whistler. 'Have you become a Dickensian Christian under the influence of *The Chimes*?'

'There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet,' said Tony. 'It's all one to me. Whatever is formularized is dead. Mnemotechnics for the lazy-minded. The problem is to attain complete harmony—of oneself with oneself, with other human beings and the common destiny, with what is known and what isn't known, which is Mystery or God.'

'Rather an ambitious programme,' said Harold. 'Why not limit yourself to the rational organization of

society?—if you think the elementary facts can be disregarded, which they can't.'

But I'm not sure that's what I want,' replied Tony.

'What else can you want?' exclaimed Walter, scandalized by this affront to the Ministry of Tram Lines. 'You won't have *laissez-faire*, which is the law of the jungle. The only alternative is some form of socialization. Fundamentally and wholly a problem of economics. And that is a matter of collecting accurate statistics and interpreting them correctly. For which you need a large, efficient, and intelligent service.'

Before Tony could reply, Margaret broke in:

'Must we have all this over once more? It's frightfully boring. I'm so tired of hearing you men solemnly debate what you think you'd do if you were dictators of the world, which you never will be. You didn't make life, and you can't alter it. So have as good a time as you can. Only schoolboys think they can reform the world.'

'Hear, hear,' said Tony; 'but suppose it's a matter of reforming ourselves?'

'Then get on with it, and leave the rest of the world alone.'

Tony laughed.

'Quite right,' he said abruptly. 'Give me some punch. Let us be drunken and awhile forget.'

Margaret was pleased, thinking she had silenced him. She filled his glass with an old ebony and silver punch ladle, a wedding gift, saying:

'We must all work out our own salvation, mustn't we, dear?'

'Oh, quite so,' said Tony ironically, 'very much so indeed. Here's long life to our salvation.'

He sipped the punch and then asked:

'Do you think I put in too much rum?'

'No, dear, I think it's perfect.'

'Very good,' said Harold.

'A I,' Walter added, 'I'll have some more.'

Tony went back to his piano stool and twisted to and fro moodily. They get you down, they get you down every time. It takes them exactly ten minutes to bring you down from the eternities to have-I-put-too-much-rum-in-the-punch. I got on much better with the cat—perhaps because she can't interrupt. They reduce everything to the same formula—food, clothes, shelter, machine toys, what will people say. *Those* are the real and the useful. Who am I to criticize them? Haven't I sacrificed to their gods for six years, serving for Saul's daughter? But what a zoo it all is. Walter there, owl-eyed at Margaret's just-not-revealed breasts, and Harold caressing her with conversational fins. Margaret the sacred cat-bird, used to being worshipped. And Helen over there, coiled up ominously and silently over some only too digestible book, like a green-and-gold snake. Reading for them is a substitute for life, or for sleep. They can't stand responsible consciousness, want to get away from it, back to the primeval inertia. Only they can't sleep all the time. So they glide off on irresponsible dreams. . . •

At that moment the thread of his thought broke abruptly as his eyes met those of Helen, gazing steadily at him over the top of her book, with a peculiar expression. Several times during these Christmas holidays Antony had caught a similar glance from her, without responding, partly because he was absorbed by his duties as host, but chiefly because he shrank from the complications and deceit to which response would lead. True, Margaret professed the usual doctrines of 'freedom,' and pretended

not to enquire into what he did, just as he left her more or less at liberty. But this alleged freedom was in fact an illusion, a mere froth of fashionable talk-twaddle, and Tony knew perfectly well that if Margaret suspected him of indulging a wandering fancy, he would be brought up by a sharp jerk of the matrimonial leash. Then it would have to be either break altogether or return to heel. And he was not sufficiently interested in Helen to want to break away with her and exchange one leash for another. Having sold himself long ago in despair to the bourgeois fleshpots, there was nothing to do but keep to the bourgeois bargain. Which he had grimly done.

Yet there was something in that look of Helen's to which he automatically responded, entirely against his conscious judgment. Her eyes made so desperate an appeal, so unreserved an offer of herself, that he felt his flesh yearn to her—poor girl, isn't there any man to comfort you in his arms? Without reflecting that he was committing himself, Tony got up from his stool and went and sat at the foot of Helen's couch. A small screen entirely hid her from the others by the fire, where they sat eagerly discussing futile plays and imbecile actors with that obstinate predilection which passes as intelligence in their mouldy middle-class world. Tony was visible to them if he leaned back, hidden if he leaned forward. Absorbed in their theatrical titbits, they seemed not to notice his change of position. Helen's eyes again met his, but with a different expression—gratitude mixed with a triumph which should have made him wary. He was embarrassed by this tense silence in which her gaze held him, and merely to break it by uttering words, said:

ⁱ How is your headache? Is it better? '

'Much better. I think it will soon go altogether.'

He shrank a little from the obvious implication and went on clumsily:

'You don't find the room too hot or tobaccoy?'

'No.' She seemed a little amused at his uneasiness.
'I'd rather be here than anywhere.'

He mentally supplied 'near you,' as he was intended to do, vaguely resenting this wooing of himself, while he was made to seem to take the initiative, yet a little flattered in his vanity.

'How are you getting on with your book? Is it a good story?'

It interests me. Two women each marry the wrong man, who would probably have been the right man for the other woman.'

A little smile moved her lips, and he saw plainly that she was inventing, to make him a declaration. It seemed to amuse her to do this in front of Margaret and her husband.

'And what happens?' he asked.

'That I don't know yet. I'm very curious to see how it will work out.'

She moved herself a little higher on the couch, and whether intentionally or accidentally allowed him to see much more of her than was necessary. She saw he had looked at what she had meant him to see, and smiled again with a faint, rather devilish look of desire, smoothing down her frock and tucking it under her knees.

'Will you get me a cigarette?' she asked in matter-of-fact tones, but with a glance which made Tony wonder.

'Certainly.'

He went over to a side table to get an inlaid wooden box full of cigarettes and the matches, and heard Mar-

garet's voice: ' . . . I think she was perfectly sweet in that part, though, mind you, I don't say she's a great actress, but . . . ' Standing beside the couch, hidden by the tall screen, he offered Helen a cigarette which she took and held in her fingers. He put the box on a small table beside her handbag and fumbled for a match. Helen looked up at him, still with that queer, rather lecherous smile, and silently formed a kiss with her lips. Shyly and unwillingly he stooped and kissed her, so evidently constrained that her look changed to an irony which mocked his lack of enterprise—Mrs. Potiphar sneering at Joseph. He struck a light for her cigarette, and after a few banal remarks rejoined the others by the fire.

Next morning Margaret privately suggested to Antony that he ought to take Walter for a round of golf.

'The links are probably closed,' said Tony, 'but in any case I shouldn't go. I'm giving up golf as my New Year's resolution. It's a waste of life.'

'But shouldn't you keep it up for business reasons?' Margaret asked quickly, sensing revolt with deadly intuition.

Tony made a wry face, watching her.

'There are more things in the world than business,' he said slowly, 'especially out of business hours. I think you'll find that only the stupider sort of person now insists on playing golf. I believe Walter only does it because he thinks I expect it. At any rate, the last time we went out, we sat and talked under the lee of a hedge on the second hole instead of playing round.'

'Then what will you do this morning?'

'I intend to read. Other people can do what they like.'

'You're not very sociable—or much of a host.'

ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES

Tony made no reply, and Margaret did not press him; she had come to know the signs of determination in him, when all opposition merely reinforced his will.

In the afternoon a car came to take Harold off to visit some wealthy friend of his. To his annoyance Antony found himself condemned to take a walk with Helen, while Margaret and Walter went off for a drive in Walter's car. The last thing he wanted was a long *tete-a-tete* with Helen. However, no escape was decently possible, and they started out just as the others drove off. Margaret waved to them, as the car turned out into the main road.

Tony took a path leading away from the village and golf course to a large wood which covered the low hills to the north. There was a keen wind under the heavy winter sky, and they were both glad to be in the shelter of the coppice. The wood was soundless and dead-looking, the ground strewn with faded soaked leaves, the very lichen pinched and lifeless. Tony found himself hating this long, deathly winter sleep of the north, this numbed suspension of living for so many months. He tried to imagine how the wood looked in June, the trees a green flame of foliage, the undergrowth lush and starry with blossoms, the air vivid with wood smells and alive with sounds. The reality defeated him, and he sank into the mood of dull resignation to boredom which now so often washed its muddy waves over him. They came to a small clearing where the trunk of a cut tree lay among second-growth of ash and elm. Helen sat down to rest, and perforce he sat beside her.

'You don't seem very bright today,' she said, glancing quickly at him, but accepting the cigarette he offered as a kind of protection.

'I'm sorry. I'm afraid I am rather dull.'

'Are you angry with me?'

'Why should I be?'

She looked at him with curiosity.

'I thought——' She broke off, and then added sharply, 'Did you notice how Walter and Margaret arranged to go off alone together in the car? The third time since we've been here.'

'Did they?' Tony spoke with genuine indifference. 'What of it?'

Helen sat silent, with her lips pressed together, then puffed impatiently at her cigarette.

'Do you know Walter well?' she asked.

'No. I don't flatter myself I know anybody well. Other people are always rather mysterious to me. Sometimes I think I see their real motives under those they assume or those they believe they have. But why do you ask?'

'It hasn't occurred to you to wonder why those two are always trying to be alone together?'

Tony's turn now came to look at her with curiosity. Her face was white with suppressed anger and jealousy. So she was jealous of Margaret's intimacy with her husband, at the same time that she was trying to work up an affair with Margaret's husband. Odd how the mere fact of marriage makes people jealous of a partner to whom they have long been indifferent, while they expect every liberty themselves. He wondered if she wanted him merely as a diversion to the platitude of marriage, or whether he was to be her vengeance on Margaret.

'No,' he said, answering her question. 'After all, they've been friends since childhood.'

'Margaret would have been much happier if she'd married him instead of you,' she said vehemently.

'Possibly,' he replied calmly, 'but she didn't, so the question is academic'

'Don't try to pretend you don't see.' Helen attacked

him. 'You men are so cowardly. If you don't know Walter, I do. He's the sort of man who cannot resist the temptation to use his charm on women—and he does attract them.'

'Do you think that's so uncommon? I should say it's the general rule. Anyway, even if what you hint is true, do you expect me to have a row with Walter? They would then immediately begin meeting in secret.'

Helen puffed at her cigarette. Obviously the conversation was not going as she wanted, and Tony certainly found it distasteful—was he expected to make love to her to pay back an imaginary and unproved infidelity on the part of Walter and Margaret? Helen's attitude destroyed whatever sensual power and charm as a woman she might have had over him. She seemed to guess this and changed her line of attack.

'Do you remember that summer just after the war when we first saw each other?'

'Very well indeed.'

'I think you were nicer then than you are now, though you were in a queer, distracted unhappy state of mind. I often wondered what it was and felt sorry for you. It wasn't Margaret. I don't think she even saw that you were going through deep waters, and she wasn't the woman to help you. Why did you marry her?'

'Why do any of us marry? We set out hopefully after the mirage and finally grow accustomed to the desert.'

'Then you admit you're not in love with her?'

'I don't admit anything of the sort. I was only describing the common fate—a bit pessimistically.'

'There's something in all this I don't understand,' she said thoughtfully, 'and probably never shall, since you're as close as an oyster with me. I could have sworn you weren't in love with Margaret that summer, just as I

was sure that I could have helped you where she couldn't.'

'But you were already engaged to Walter,' Tony replied, as lightly as he could.

'I might have found a way out of that if you'd asked me.'

He made no answer, and she went on:

'I've been watching you two, and neither of you understands the other. There's no real bond between you.'

Tony made a gesture of protest, but she interrupted with a kind of brutality:

'Oh, I daresay you're more or less all right in bed together. So are Walter and I, so are scores of other couples. But there's something unsatisfied in you both, and though you're always gentle and nice with each other, you don't really fit. And neither of you does justice to the other.'

'What do you mean?' asked Tony, a little frightened by her penetration, yet curious to hear what she had to say.

'Secretly you both despise each other. Now, Margaret would make an excellent wife for another type of man, someone like Walter. He's ambitious, successful at his work—he'll soon be assistant secretary—anxious for social success and getting it. He fits perfectly into the scheme of things, and that's what women like Margaret admire and want in a man. You don't. Neither do I. You constantly disappoint Margaret, just as I disappoint Walter. I'm no more made to be the successful man's wife than you to be the successful man. You're not a business man, Tony. You know that as well as I do. And you're not happy in your life. You're not as restless and miserable as you were when I first met you,

but if you think you're satisfied with your life, you're deceiving yourself.'

Antony thought he saw an opportunity to draw the conversation away from the dangerous ground of personal relations.

'I think perhaps you're right in saying I'm not altogether satisfied with my life,' he said cautiously, 'but of course you're quite wrong in making Margaret the cause. Women always believe they're the sole begetters of men's happiness—the *primum mobile* of our lives as well as the ultimate good. You came much nearer the facts when you said I'm not a business man. I never was, and I never shall be. From the point of view of worldly common sense I'm what is called lucky. On any rational view of human labour I'm immensely overpaid for doing nothing in particular. I owe that to being Mr. Margaret. I'm a sort of sinecurist. True, I'm intelligent enough to understand all that goes on and even to make suggestions which are sometimes adopted. But my role is to look after Margaret, who had to be provided for, and for the rest sit back and applaud the going concern. The few thousand pounds of my inherited money I put into the business is practically eyewash. But for Margaret they'd have wanted fifty thousand from me.'

Unintentionally he spoke out what had been going on in his secret thoughts and much more than he had meant to say.

'Yes,' said Helen, 'but you see Margaret does come into it.'

'Only indirectly.' He was regretting he had said so much. 'It has nothing to do with our personal relationship.'

'Hasn't it? I should have thought it had. But what is it you dislike in business?'

'Everything,' said Tony bitterly. He hesitated and

then talked rapidly, almost incoherently, as if thinking aloud, oblivious of Helen as anything but a human being who had cared enough about him to guess a little of his carefully concealed disappointment with himself and life. 'In 1919 I was just about down and out, morally and physically. I was more than fed up, I was desperate. Life seemed to crumble in my fingers. Certain things I'd believed in completely, failed or seemed to fail me. The kind of life I'd struggled for eluded me utterly. Even my old friends were out of joint so far as I was concerned. It seemed to me that of all men I was among the poorest—not materially, but in life. I'd wanted to make things, buildings which would mean something—and they put me onto writing reports about concrete bungalows. I'd nothing but my father and Margaret—and like most benevolent people they wanted me to do and be what they wanted, not what I wanted. That's how I came to be in business, as they call it.'

He stopped abruptly, staring gloomily at the sodden tangle of dead wild plants at his feet, nervously breaking a dry fennel stem into smaller and smaller pieces. Helen said nothing, waiting in a sort of cat-like intensity for him to say more.

'Business!' he exclaimed suddenly, making her start slightly with his vehemence. 'Busy futility, laborious idleness. Buying cheap and selling dear—about the lowest activity of which the human mind is capable, and the most esteemed and rewarded in modern life. A *blague*. A cheat. A degradation. I'm sick of it.'

'Poor lamb!' said Helen, with a facile pretense of sympathy. 'I didn't know you hated work so much.'

'I don't hate work,' retorted Tony angrily. 'It's precisely because what I do isn't work that I hate it. Work is making something, doing something, not handling the paper symbols of other people's work.'

He broke off abruptly, feeling instinctively that he was talking into the air, that of all human beings the well-off upper middle-class women are the remotest from all reality. Their idleness, their luxury, their vanity, he thought bitterly, help to keep the whole bloody sham running. They dodged the war, they dodge the work, they dodge child-rearing even if they don't dodge child-bearing, and each of them wants to be a little queen sitting on the dunghill of her husband's muck-raking in the money world. And then they complain of their wrongs. What was she saying?

' . . . of course, Walter's work is different,' he heard. ' It's really building up the country. And I *do* understand why you resent wasting your time in mere business routine. You're not in the right intellectual surroundings. Why don't you let us introduce you to some of the *really* interesting people in London ? '

' No, thank you,' said Tony grimly. ' If there's one sham feebler and emptier than the business sham, it's the sham of your superior intellectuals. I'd rather be a kitten and cry Mew.'

' Then what do you want? ' she asked tartly, her vanity offended by his contempt.

' The moon,' he replied, standing up. ' Hadn't we better be getting back? It's cold sitting here.'

During the next two months Antony fought out a long and stubborn inner battle, and necessarily fought it alone, since there was nobody in whom he could fully confide, with the possible exception of Julian and Waterton. In spite of his affection for Julian, or rather because of it, he shrank from binding the younger man to keep a secret from his sister. Indeed the knowledge that he was mov-

ing towards a conception of life utterly different from Margaret's and an action which she would neither understand nor approve was one of his worst difficulties—had he the moral right to force his decision on her (supposing it was a decision to break with his present life) either by argument or by ignoring her? Consulting Julian really meant asking for Julian's support, as most asking for advice is. He hadn't much doubt but that Julian would support him; the point was that he couldn't place Julian in the dilemma of a divided loyalty. Not that Julian professed or felt close sympathy with any of his family, while he was certainly more friendly with Tony than with any of them. To please his family, Julian was still reading for the bar and eating his dinners; but like many barristers who are too sensitive for the rough-and-tumble of their profession, Julian had already turned to journalism. And Tony alone among his relatives encouraged him to this hazardous career.

No, Antony decided, Julian had enough difficulties of his own without being asked to share his brother-in-law's. So Julian was decisively ruled out. There remained Waterton, good-natured war-smashed Waterton, living cheerfully enough on his disablement pension and rich with tolerant wisdom. But then Tony had seen very little of Waterton in the past five years. Margaret didn't altogether approve of him. And, as does sometimes happen with wives, Waterton had been skillfully eliminated along with his other pre-marriage friends. Even Crang, though respectable as Walter's senior in the ministry, was discouraged, on the not altogether unfounded excuse that Mrs. Crang was not a lady. As if that mattered, Tony muttered angrily to himself—she's a decent, warm-hearted woman anyway, all the better for not pretending to be 'a lady,' whatever that may be. He decided he would have a talk with Waterton one of

these days, in spite of the fact that he was poor, spoke his mind freely, and, in Margaret's phrase, was 'a death's-head at a feast' with his shrunk left arm and expression of hidden suffering.

Early in March, Antony went down alone to the country for a long week-end, to try to come to a decision about himself. He didn't attempt to explain to himself why it seemed necessary to get away to the country, except that he couldn't think properly in London, fenced in by the wills of those millions of people.

On Saturday morning he dressed in his oldest clothes, with a sense of satisfaction as if making a gesture of defiance, and set off for a long walk. The nominal objective of the walk, which went nearly the whole way by footpaths and abandoned lanes half choked with undergrowth, was a hamlet about eight miles to the southeast. The few houses and farmsteads almost hidden among huge elms and beeches made the village look like a ship of greenery stranded in a little bay of the bare chalk down, with the church trying to tug it off. In the church were several fourteenth-century tombs, crude, vigorous work, lacking both the grace and intellectual subtlety of contemporary Italian and French sculpture, but authentic.

The morning was misty, but gradually turned into a Still, sunny day, as sometimes happens in March, with a light southeasterly wind. Tony walked along steadily and easily, a very different figure from the man who had hurried in anguish over the Dorset hills nearly seven years before.

He turned from the road into a footpath through the meadows, where the cropped grass was moist and gleaming with condensed mist, and paused on the footbridge across a little gravel stream. Two or three brook trout

darted off, swift shadows in the brownish water, skimming away like underwater birds. A moor hen scuttled off with a flurry of wings and feet, and Tony stood watching the swirl of the water and the shiver of withered reeds, thinking. He noticed the specks of gold blossoms on a sallow farther up the stream.

Through the cool half-tones of English landscape he saw the Trouville of the summer before. Trouville—no more France than the Mayfair mansion of a German Jew millionaire is England. But Margaret had wanted to go there—it was the thing to do. Expensive hotels, golf links, tennis courts, Adonises in chic white flannels or becoming bathing dress, beach Aphrodites in simple 5,000-franc gowns or still more becoming bathing suits, lying about on the sand, cocktails, gambling at the Casino, a perpetual susurrus of malicious personal gossip. A vulgar Baiae. And that had started it all, started with a sense of shame and uneasiness to break down his acquiescence in his own life as a favoured parasite of business, to melt away the shell of his induced habits. The old submerged Tony had at last begun to rise up through a deep sea of despairing indifference, but stronger, more confident, in spite of hesitations. Instead of accepting Trouville along with everything else, he had instinctively condemned it. If these were the fine flower, the heirs of all the ages, then to hell with them. To hell with them in any case.

Still gazing at the cold gushing water, he began to fill his pipe slowly, and then paused as the thought came to him that his dislike for the Trouville beachcombers might have been nothing more than puritanism. But no, it was essentially the old problem turning up again, the problem he had discussed crudely and ineffectively so long ago with Scrope and Robin and Crang. But essentially a personal problem now. No more wasting of life

in a theoretical smashing of the world to bits and highly problematic remoulding of it to suit his own whimses. Got to take things as they are to that extent, and not wait for the millennium before beginning to live.

He moved on, trying to remember and hum the melody of a Mozart concerto he liked. About half a mile farther on, he paused again in the last meadow before the path broke upward and became a deep lane through a coppice. A cock pheasant crowed sharply, and he heard it whirl off in alarm. A herd of bulky short-horns munched away steadily with heavy regular breathing—munch, munch, munch, whooh. The eternal mother. Municipal milk. One or two of them looked up at him with maternal foreboding eyes; the others munched on with magnificent indifference. Munch, munch, making calves and milk. He held out his hand towards the nearest one and called softly:

'Coop, coop! Do you want to be a municipal mother, Susie? Grade A, my dear, and fodder rationed to a centigramme. So much better for you, Susie, none of those tummy-swellings through incautious feeding. And *such* a nice municipal bull, *such* a nice municipal man to take away your calf—that'll be a comfort, won't it, Susie?—and an even nicer municipal man to do you in, and make you into beef. Lucky Susie!'

She backed away from him, with lowered head and fear-laden soft eyes, filling his nostrils with her sickeningly sweet breath. No escape from her fate. She's got to give everything: calf, milk, and body. The spirit of service. Would it console her to wear a municipal medal for services rendered? Good-bye, Susie, your mayor and municipality need you.

Inside the shelter of the wood the air seemed milder, and the brightening sun through the branches made

shadow patterns on the ground. Primroses sprang from the heart of their green crinkled leaves, and the ground bristled with the sharp green spear thrusts of the springing wild hyacinths. Through arum leaves and the first indistinguishable growth of young plants were wandering gold stars of celandine. He picked one to put in his buttonhole—primroses were a little polluted by last-century courtiers. Farther on he came upon a patch of periwinkle—Rousseau's *pervenche*. Is Rousseau the author of our discontents? He came through the wood to the bare crest of the little hill and saw far ahead the long wavy ridge of the down. The first lark he had heard that year began trilling invisibly overhead.

His mind took him to La Rochelle, where he had fled by himself when Trouville became nauseous and unendurable. Appropriate memories of the great siege had soon been lost in the interest of watching the port. The sailors in their patched blouses and trousers, some blue, some russet, some faded orange or even peach pink; the deep blue nets spread out to dry; the brown-and-yellow sails; the women clattering down to meet their men as the boats returned, and the boys going off so seriously and contentedly to learn the hard, risky job by watching their fathers; that was the right antidote to Trouville. A hard, narrow, rough life but a real one. No futile playing with the sea, but genuine living with it. Taking them as symbols, which was it to be—Trouville or La Rochelle?

He let it drop there, and walked steadily on until he came to the crest of the last ridge before the great chalk outcrop began. All the country near him was broken and wooded, civilized remnants of the old forest and swamp, dominated by the austere, treeless chalk hills. It was easy to see why the earliest civilization had kept

to those heights, spreading out along the bare edges from the centres at Avebury and Stonehenge. The valleys were too tangled and dangerous. In the clear air he saw the outlines of one of the great primitive earthworks which guarded the ridge from northern invasion, and then far up the valley his eye caught the new outline of a rising factory chimney—an advance guard of the industrial invasion of the south. The same blind struggle to survive at the expense of others' Walter's law of the jungle. Examples: the Roman legion and the mediaeval church. Interesting that the only European colonizers who were not conscienceless blackguards and cut-throats were the Spanish Jesuits in Paraguay.

He reached the village soon after twelve, spent half an hour looking round the exceedingly cold church, and then went to the village pub for lunch. The usual penury of country England—with all that rich land in the neighbouring valleys, they could only provide imported bread and cheese and very second-rate beer. After lunch he lighted a pipe, pulled out a notebook, and began to write, often breaking off to ponder:

'What I'm looking for is a personal equivalent to the life of the Rochelle fishermen. An equivalent authenticity. Naturally, it would be absurd for me to go and imitate them; I should simply be a crank. But by allowing myself to be shoved into the Trouville class, I'm being something much worse than a crank. It's not puritanism in *me*. *They* are not sensual enough. They live on coarse stimulants—cocktails, gambling, loveless sex. Not my responsibility. God made them for themselves to mar. But that existence is not for me.

'Life is nothing if not an adventure. At present I'm

a sort of business gigolo; what should be my life is patronizingly pushed into the status of spare-time hobbies. Not good enough. What then? Resign and live on my patrimony. And become a *petit rentier*, narrow, safety-first, opposing every generous effort towards the liberation of mankind, to save my beastly capital? No, take risks. If it goes, it goes. The worst is death, and men live even in Siberia.

Nobody can really get away from the financial-commercial machine. Directly or indirectly it grips the whole world and is slowly or rapidly destroying everything not itself, and finally *must* destroy itself too. Not now, not even soon, but eventually, because it destroys all the natural impulses to live. To get richer than others and then drug boredom with stimulants cannot lead to anything but death. It is an inadequate motive. Better a hard life than a silly one.

Nobody can get away, but I at least need not acquiesce. If I resign my job, it is not just resigning, it is a condemnation. I can go on as an overpaid, unnecessary cog in the machine, tacitly accepting and supporting it, and therefore compelled to accept its values; or I can revolt, I can try to live, I can go for something I think better. True, I shall still be living out of the machine, but one can't avoid it; it holds the entire world in a greater tyranny than the Roman empire. Which is its doom. Render unto Caesar. Yes, but I'm now rendering unto Caesar the things that are God's.

This is a personal problem, with only a personal solution. I don't presume to instruct other people or to construct a theoretical perfect world. Nothing can ever be perfect. True, I have now come to think that some form of Socialism is inevitable, but the better sort of Socialist is often ultimately a philosophic anarchist. I'm

trying to step over to that. Not very logical, but true to my feelings. Can one do more? '

He walked back in the afternoon sunlight, quickening his pace as the sun sank and a sharp evening wind sprang up, completely at peace with himself for the first time in years. The real decision was made—the rest would be tactics. The only qualification to his sense of hard-won freedom was the thought that instead of walking tamely back, he should have walked on. Some of the bonds still held. Margaret, for instance.

This happy mood lasted for nearly a fortnight, during which, like a man who hears he has inherited a spiritual fortune, Antony made infinite plans for living. The sense of rebirth filled him with exultation, and he felt he was looking at the world with new eyes, and that it was good. He even found it in his heart to like parts of London. Instead of lunching with one or other of his colleagues among interminable chatter of money, newspaper scandals and games champions, he went without lunch altogether or ate a little at one of the cheap restaurants among the poorer clerks and typists. Sometimes he walked by the river, watching the trains of barges and the white gulls soaring over the turbid water. Mostly he sought out what little art was left in Shakespeare's city—the cool aisles of Southwark Cathedral, the statues in Greater St. Helen's, the spacious airy nave of the Dutch church which had once belonged to Augustinian friars, the Torrigiani alderman like a Florentine senator in the chapel of the Record Office. When he could afford the time, he spent an hour among the Venetians in the National Gallery, or with Hellenic vases and Etruscan terra-cottas in the British Museum, with a daily heightening of appreciation. How alive they

were, how vivid, how clear a language of energy they spoke! Not dead bones or dead culture, but a living record of the feelings and vital sensibilities of the human race. Strange that they had all seemed so dead seven years before, strange that he had lived so long with these things so close at hand without ever looking at them, and strange that they should now mean so much. Splendid irony that the bourgeois-commercial-financial sham should smugly preserve as trophies the antidote to itself, the witness that men had once lived with passionate sensibility, and might so live again.

Partly because he would have much less money in the future, partly from revolt against all the useless clobber of alleged civilization, he took delight in shedding the encumbrances of comfort. What a pest, all these unlovely gadgets! He found infinitely more pleasure in abandoning useless property than he had ever felt in acquiring it. What a mistake to seek permanence and stability by surrounding oneself with objects, which impose the slavery of possession. A palace, yes, but not a nice little weighty home. Better a rucksack and freedom. Recognize the flux, the impermanence, the transitoriness of the world. Conform to that reality. One afternoon he walked slowly up and down Bond Street, looking carefully at the windows, and emerged with deep satisfaction, having seen nothing he really wanted to buy, although he had fifty pounds in his wallet and allowed himself the maximum of temptation. He went back to his office, read and noted documents, signed letters, and gave orders as blithely as a soldier who knows he has wangled his ticket.

Yet, since there is always some confounded spoke in the wheel of human affairs, Antony found his present and

anticipated happiness held up by the thought of Margaret. He knew instinctively that Helen had betrayed to Margaret what he had said in the wood, and cursed his lack of caution, his inability to realize after so many lessons that nobody can be trusted. He felt Margaret was watching him, but as he continued to go quietly about his usual routine, she said nothing. She did not seem to notice that he excused himself more and more frequently from going out in the evening with her friends, when he sat alone rereading the English poets or thinking. All the same, he felt the situation latent between them, and was aware of a subtle divergence. He shrank from giving Margaret pain, and still more disliked the anticipation of a scene or series of scenes over his decision.

Uneasiness began to infect Tony's confidence and happiness. He passed from the question: What will Margaret do about it? to the more disturbing problem of whether he had a right to impose such a decision as a *fait accompli*. The more he thought about this, the more perturbed he grew and the less certain that he was justified. He was prepared to stand alone and to find everyone's hand against him. How quickly Margaret would whip up her allies! He could see them coming up, like the ghosts to Richard Crookback's tent, to curse him back to the fleshpots and the golf links. Margaret's father, benevolent and artful; her uncle, the business despot, with a terrific will, yet almost an idiot outside the realm of besting other people for their money; his fellow directors, contemptuous and patronizing; Walter, diplomatic, cynical, and disparaging; Helen, sweetly venomous and insultingly pitying; Harold, honestly wondering what-on-earth-you-find-to-kick-at-old-man; beyond these, numerous pockets and groups of acquaintances and semi-acquaintances, each with a little *ton mot*, a snigger, and a lie: All, all would be there. Well, if they're all ene-

mies, let them come. Give me another horse, bind up my wounds!

Next Saturday afternoon Tony got on the bus for Highbury to consult Dick Waterton. The day was dreary dull with a sharp gusty wind; however, he went to the front seat on top of the bus and turned up his coat collar. The bus soon emerged from the West End, and after moving slowly through the sordid clamour of Theobald's Road, turned off swiftly in the direction of Islington. Warehouses, offices, little shops, rows of musty houses, some with steps, iron railings, and a porch, some without, respectability gone more than shabby, gone squalid, gracelessness, dirty windows, yellow bricks smoked drab, the black street surface polished to a hard shine by innumerable wheels. Such a sense of ennui and discouragement even with the rattle of traffic and the movement on the thronged pavements—what must it be like an hour before dawn, when only the silent squalor of the houses filled the streets like a fetid mist? If you want the monument of a century of misdirected fevered effort, look about you. Even the vicarious burden of these lives is unendurable.

Beyond the Angel, street stalls were already set out for the Saturday-evening shopping—tiers of reddish meat, piles of not-quite-fresh vegetables and inferior fruit, mass-produced clothes, welcome to the street dust and the petrol fumes. The bus hooted slowly through the black opening waves of people like a boat ploughing heavily through a lake of pitch. In a chill depression Tony sank deeper and deeper into doubt of himself and his feelings and his hopes. The bleak dread of the crowd came over him, mingled with an intense sympathy, an almost desperate desire to do something for them. The disinherited. But do what? Industry had wanted

hands and had got them; now industry didn't want so many hands, but they were still there. Awful, awful responsibility. At one end this hopeless, endless treadmill; at the other end, Trouville. From the point of view of those on the treadmill, he was as much an enemy as Trouville; from that distance the differences were invisible. They all got or seemed to get something for nothing. Perhaps Robin and Crang, in their different ways, were nearer to essential human truth than he was—trying to do something about the mess, anyway. What right had anyone to draw his garment about him and walk by on the other side of the road in a self-righteous passion for beauty and the lovely places of the world? But what would Robin do with them if he succeeded in goading them to successful revolt? Where would he find loaves and fishes for such a multitude?

Waterton's street was far less depressing than Tony had feared. It was a broadish avenue, with tall leafless plane trees filling the sky with the dark complex pattern of their branches; lilacs were coming into bud in small front gardens, and the Portugal laurels were meanly in flower. Waterton had a couple of rooms on a top floor, looking upon trees and small strips of garden, some neglected, some neatly kept. One room was lined with bookshelves; a coal fire was burning, and a covered typewriter stood on a small table in the corner. Waterton kept his useless arm in a black sling and had the appearance of a man in almost continuous pain; but he greeted Tony cheerfully and warmly and seemed glad to see him. They looked over some of the books together and then sat down on either side of the fire. Tony didn't quite know how to bring up his difficulties and felt extremely shy about it.

'Have you still got that studio?' asked Tony presently.

'No, I gave it up long ago.' He hesitated and then added, 'I once had an idea that I might take up sculpture, but . . .'

Tony nodded, knowing that the unfinished sentence meant that it had proved impossible for a disabled man.

'I shall always be grateful to you for providing that shelter just after I was demobbed.'

'Pah!' said Waterton, laughing. 'It was nothing. You paid rent, didn't you?'

It wasn't a mere nothing. It was extremely important to me. I suppose you wouldn't understand if I said that your action helped me to decide to live?'

Waterton stared at him and laughed again.

'No, I don't suppose I should.'

'Well, I shan't try to explain. But you can understand that I feel a debt of gratitude to you which remains unpaid. I've wanted to say this for years to you.' He paused and then added awkwardly, 'If I can be of any use to you now or in the future, you can call upon me.'

'That's very good of you. I shall remember it. But I don't think there's anything at present.'

'But are you satisfied with your life?' Tony persisted. 'Are you happy? Couldn't you be happier if . . .'

He was going to add 'if you had a little more money,' but checked the words. Waterton laughed with just a touch of cynicism.

'The scope of my life can't be anything but limited. You knew I was an actor before the war?'

'Yes.'

'Well, naturally I can't return to the stage like this. I can't look a part. The sculpture idea was always a washout. I've had one or two office jobs and dropped them. Now I write notices of plays for one of the eve-

ning papers. I've been trying to learn to use a typewriter, but with one hand it's hopeless. However, it's the best job possible for me. I can still keep in touch with the stage.'

'And you're not dissatisfied with your life?'

Waterton shrugged his shoulders.

'What would be the good of that?'

'Well,' said Tony, coming abruptly to the point, 'I'm dissatisfied with my life, and considering a big change.'

'Dissatisfied I' exclaimed Waterton. 'Why, I've always looked upon you as a peculiarly fortunate and happy person. A thundering good job, a charming wife, and a nice house in the country as well as a town flat. I wish I could get to the country more often.' Tony made a mental note of that last remark. 'Why on earth should you be dissatisfied? Perhaps you need a holiday?'

Tony sighed. With dreadful certainty he perceived that everybody would advise him to take a holiday.

'In the first place,' he said slowly, 'I've come to the conclusion roughly that business is bunk. Worse than that, it's the gradual death of all vital instincts and feelings. At least for me. I don't say it is for everybody, though I don't see how it can fail to be. It substitutes possession of objects for the true possession of oneself and of life; it substitutes stimulants for sensation, parties for conversation, self-interest for friendship, competitive games for the fine arts—and so on through everything. Working and trading are essentials, but business is a parasite, it is the art of exploiting trade and work. To me it's a betrayal of the fundamental things. It enriches a few and impoverishes many and destroys the genuine life of everybody.'

'Urn,' said Waterton thoughtfully, 'and what do you propose to do about it?'

'Get out. I don't propose to play Don Quixote and smash myself to pieces against its cotton mills. Business is the going concern, it's the way things are done at present, and I think it's wrong, and I think it's devouring my life. Understand me. I believe in work; I believe in trade when it's honest; I don't believe in this huge parasite organization which calls itself business. I can't alter it, but at least I needn't actively support it. Nor need I draw money from it.'

'But you can't avoid it. If you give up all your money, you must either starve or work for someone and be far worse off than you are. If you live on the interest of capital, you live directly or indirectly out of what you call the going concern.'

'D'you suppose I haven't thought of that?' cried Tony impatiently. 'I've settled all that in my conscience. But getting out is only the negative side. The positive side is that I shall cease to take living as a spare-time hobby and give all my time to it. I don't want money, I want life. There are a million things I want to see and do and enjoy. In a small way I intend to practise the art of living, to spend the little time I have on this noble earth in knowing the best of it. I want to come into my inheritance.'

'It sounds grand,' said Waterton doubtfully, 'if you've got the money to do it. But won't you get bored in time?'

'Bored!' retorted Tony, flushing. 'The only things which bore me are footling about an office to make money I don't want, and having to mix in the futile pestilential life of people who believe in money. I shan't be bored.'

'I suppose I must say you're right, since you feel so strongly about it,' Waterton admitted. 'But how about your wife? Does she approve?'

'Ah, there's the rub,' said Tony ruefully. 'I haven't told her yet.'

'I think perhaps you should have discussed it with her,' Waterton suggested mildly.

'Perhaps I should. The fact that I haven't possibly implies that I couldn't. Morally, ideally, my decision is made. The only thing worrying me is the question whether I've the right to go to Margaret and announce as an accomplished fact something which must affect her life.'

'It's a difficult point,' said Waterton thoughtfully, 'and I don't know that any outsider can advise you. From the cut-and-dried-right-thing-to-do point of view, I suppose I should urge you to tell her at once. But obviously you have good reasons for not doing so. You think she'll object?'

'I'm quite certain she will. And from her point of view, with perfect reason. She wants to live in a certain way, which I've come to abhor, and to some extent that depends on my continuing to make more and more money as a good little business boy. Having implicitly accepted this bargain for a number of years, can I suddenly chuck it up?'

'Nobody can decide that but you,' said Waterton. 'Speaking as a bachelor, I should say that most marriages degenerate into a kind of dog fight for supremacy. Who's to be top dog? Women will tell you it's always the man—men that it's the woman. I don't know. I'm only a spectator. Failing the very rare occurrence of perfect understanding, I should counsel tolerance and give-and-take. On the other hand, don't give in weakly.'

They were silent for a little while, Tony brooding over what had just been said, and Waterton watching him. While Tony acknowledged that what Waterton said

seemed true enough as a generalization, it didn't seem to help him much in particular.

'It must seem to you that I'm making a devil of a fuss about a trifle,' he said at last. 'Perhaps I am. A chap of thirty-two wants to chuck up a cushy job and go adventuring in a mild way. Well, what of it? Who cares? Why should anyone care? I don't ask them to. But to me the decision's supremely important and seems to involve a revised attitude to everything in the world. Sometimes it gets too complicated, and I just chuck it up. All I can hang onto is the feeling that my present life is wrong and that I could build a better one. If you knew my life—I won't afflict you with the story, though it might interest you—perhaps you might see me as a humble example of human effort, with its hopes and failures and weaknesses. But I don't claim to be any more than a common man struggling towards what he thinks is the light. I had a very happy childhood, and my way in life seemed perfectly clear. Then I was injected with some of the half-baked Socialist ideas—some of them not unjust, by the way—and like many of my contemporaries spent a lot of time worrying about things I couldn't alter. Perhaps I expected too much and let myself feel disappointment too keenly, chucked in my hand too soon. I got a feeling of almost universal thwarting and hostility, as if everybody were an enemy. And, after all, that seems to be the general assumption, especially among those who cant about peace and good will. I——'

'By the way,' interrupted Waterton, who like most people in a conversation had evidently been following his own thoughts rather than listening in any but a casual way, 'are you a Communist?'

No. I think that Communism in practice is poisonous bunk. I don't believe in the class war. I hate it, as I hate all war and killing. The alleged dictatorship

of the proletariat is such a swindle that only the proletariat would swallow it. In practice it's the dictatorship of a junta of unscrupulous quasi-scientific fanatics, who'll turn human society into a desert of ennui. But Communism is only Capitalism upside down. Any real revolt must go far, far deeper, and . . . But what's the good of all this? I'm concerned with my own individual life, and at least I'll say this for Capitalism, it doesn't wholly prevent my having one.'

But Waterton had obviously had enough of Tony's private troubles and refused to take the hint. He turned the conversation onto the threatened strike of the coal miners in the coming May and drew a lurid picture of civil war and disaster 'if the government were not firm.' Tony assured him that the government would be as firm as it knew how in defense of vested interests, but this appeared to give little comfort. And so the talk ended, as most talks do, very much where it had begun, except that Tony felt a little more certain that he would persist, in spite of everybody, including Margaret.

§ III

By the end of March, Tony had made his decision and acted on it as quickly as possible. He would have found difficulty in explaining exactly what had determined him. Probably the virtual decision had really been made long before when he left Trouville, and action had only been a question of time and of finding reasons for an instinctive belief.

At the April board meeting, after the usual pompous bobbery had been enacted—rather like priests of the money cult going mechanically through the prescribed but unimportant ritual—Tony presented in writing his resignation and the request for the return of his small capital.

If he had been less in earnest, he would have been delighted by the unconscious humour of the situation and the various degrees of comic consternation and moral disapproval caused by his simple action.

'What's this? What's this?' exclaimed the chairman, glancing over the brief document with protrusive eyes, 'Resignation? Come, come, Clarendon, April Fools' Day was yesterday.'

'I'm quite serious,' said Tony quietly, trying to use their phraseology. 'That document represents my considered determination, and I ask the board to give effect to it.'

'But this is a most extraordinary and unheard-of proceeding!' said the chairman, leaning back in his throne and slapping a hand on the table with a gesture meant to proclaim inflexible will and keen-as-mustard intelligence.

A man of your age, with life before him, with the prospects we can offer, *resigning!* I—really, Clarendon, I must seriously ask you for an explanation. An explanation!' he repeated, looking round the table as if expecting applause for this magisterial profundity. And there was a murmur of 'Yes, yes, indeed,' 'Perfectly right,'

'We must get to the bottom of this.' The comic side of the situation nearly betrayed Tony into a fatal laugh, and the stony, amazed glare of Margaret's uncle did not make it easier for him to choke down the laughter which heaved inside him.

'I'm sorry if you feel there's anything—er—irregular about it,' said Tony, struggling with his laughter, 'but—it's what I intend to do. Surely there's nothing so extraordinary in a resignation?'

'At your age?' asked the chairman. 'And how do we know that you might not join our rivals, carrying with you the valuable secrets you have learned here?'

'I have no valuable secrets,' Tony replied, 'but in any

case I give you my word that I shall reveal nothing of the little I have found out here, and that I'm not joining any other company.'

And about withdrawing your capital.' The chairman ignored Tony's last remark. 'A large sum. It would be extremely inconvenient. Do you intend to throw your shares on the market?'

Certainly not. If other holders want to buy them I'm willing to wait any reasonable time. Otherwise I shall get rid of them in small lots.'

Why not leave them? You have excellent security and a high dividend.'

I've strong personal reasons for wishing to withdraw this money.'

The chairman drew a deep breath and looked round the table with an expression of 'Well, what are we to do with this ungrateful scoundrel?' Margaret's uncle, who had been getting redder and redder, intervened at this point and addressed Tony.

Are we to understand that you are really serious in this absurd proposal?'

Perfectly serious.'

And suppose we refuse to entertain it?' The famous strong will in full action here.

I'm afraid you'll have to,' said Tony simply. 'My mind is made up,'

May we assume that your—er—unaccountable action implies a doubt of the company's financial standing?'

Not a bit,' Tony answered indifferently. 'I've no doubt it's what you'd call perfectly sound.'

Then you're going into another type of business? Think well. It's a mistake at your age, especially when you have your foot firmly planted on the ladder.'

I shall not be doing anything you would call business.'

'Do you mean to tell me that at your age you propose to retire and do nothing? Vegetate in idleness? How can you with your paltry capital?'

'It will be enough for me. And I assure you I shall be far more occupied than I ever was here.'

'I don't understand you.'

'Does that matter?' asked Tony wearily. 'I can't help it. Surely it's enough that I know what I want to do.'

The uncle got redder than ever, and Tony braced himself for an outburst of bad temper; but an idea seemed to come to the old man and he addressed the chairman in his best board-room manner, which, as Tony knew, he hoped one day to transfer to the Commons.

During a long experience of business,' he said, 'many young men have come within my purview. I think I may venture to say that I know all the difficulties and dangers which beset a successful business career, and, with your permission, I should like to adumbrate a suggestion in this—unfortunate—and short-sighted—proposal of our young friend.'

'Certainly,' said the chairman.

'In times of stress and trade uncertainty like these, every man must be at his post in the national interest. I need not remind you that taxation is heavy, and profits increasingly harder to earn. Not a man can be spared.'

How he fights to keep the money in the family, thought Tony; we shall hear next that god will be angry.

'In my opinion, our young friend, who has neither our experience nor responsibility, is acting with inconceivable frivolity. But young men are young men, and we who know more of the world must be prepared to treat them with indulgence until they have thoroughly settled down in harness.'

Old hypocrite, muttered Tony to himself, don't think you'll succeed in keeping my nose to the grindstone.

'In my opinion, our young friend has acted hastily on the spur of the moment without fully considering the consequences, and I think—no, I am sure—that he must be given an opportunity to thoroughly explore every avenue of—the matter. The proposal I would adumbrate is that he should think the matter over on a two months' holiday.'

'To be sure!' said the chairman. 'Of course. He needs a holiday.'

'Yes, a holiday!' said everybody, as if vastly relieved by finding both an explanation of Tony's heretical outrage and a way to smother it out of sight.

Your resignation shall lie on the table until the June board meeting,' the uncle said to Tony, 'and by the time that arrives I feel sure, and I feel sure we all feel sure, that you will voluntarily withdraw it. Take a holiday, my boy, enjoy yourself, but from time to time think seriously of your prospects and of your duty as a useful and respected citizen.'

Tony had lost all disposition to laugh. He felt he couldn't stand this stuffy sort of cant any longer and saw perfectly well where the old gentleman's artful dodge was leading him. During the alleged holiday—funny that Waterton had made the same idiotic suggestion—all the family batteries from Margaret downward would be trained on him and he would be badgered out of his life. Not that they cared one hoot about him personally, but because his job in life was to get money and more money for Margaret to spend in social climbing and the like. Thanks.

Tony stood up and faced them.

'I see it's quite useless for me to try to explain my motives,' he said. 'You wouldn't understand them. I

respectfully refuse this offer. My decision's absolute and final. Take it or leave it; I've resigned, and I shall not accept another day's salary or director's fees. Nor, so long as my money remains with the company, shall I accept more than five per cent.—anything above that will be returned. The only favour I ask of you is to continue to employ my secretary and typist. I'm going and I shan't come back. Good-bye.'

And he walked out, ignoring their protests and exclamations.

So that was that. Tony had said farewell to his subordinates before the board meeting began and had left his desk and papers in perfect order for his successor—if so useless a profiteer of industrial nepotism should have a successor. Consequently he was able to walk straight out of the office. But as he went down the polished granite stairs with the shiny brass and varnished balustrade he had that waiting-sniper feeling in the back of the neck—Margaret's uncle might emerge suddenly from one of the side doors and begin another virtuous altercation. The commissioner touched his hat, and Tony gave him half a sovereign in paper—a sort of heave-out offering.

Once in the street his mood changed to a discreet exultation. He knew that the battle was only joined, that all the domestic shock troops had yet to be launched against him, but he also knew with intense conviction and satisfaction that he was now free for ever. Eleventhirty, and a red bus advertising a play 'you simply must see.' Insert 'not,' He decided that he must immediately sell, pawn, or give away his City clothes. Already the 'firm' and all it stood for seemed about five thousand light-years away.

He stopped on the edge of the pavement outside the Bank of England, waiting for an opportunity to cross, and remembered how long ago he had harangued Waterton on top of a bus about not joining the human dynamo. It had taken a long time and he'd gone by devious and unsatisfactory ways, but this time the exit was definite. He hummed:

*' Only one more kit inspection,
Only one more church parade, . . . '*

From a public telephone box he rang up Julian's chambers and arranged to call for him for lunch. A little later he turned into St. Paul's for quiet, but was driven out almost immediately by the terrific din of mechanical repairing in the crypt and the sight of Holman Hunt's mistake about the Messiah. Like any other outcast he took refuge *on* the Embankment, listening to the symphony of the trams and contemplating the splendours of industrial art on the other side of the river. As a tribute to their splendid initiative, he registered a vow never again to drink that brand of Scotch whisky or to besot his intelligence with that particular penny paper. It pays to advertise. At half-past twelve he turned into Julian's chambers, having spent a very pleasant hour enjoying his sense of freedom.

With his chubby face and light hair Julian looked comically young in his black morning coat, striped trousers, and stiff white collar. A natty bowler and kid gloves lay on his briefless desk. There was really no occasion for this professional finery, since it was most unlikely that Julian would ever be called on to plead; but as he drew a thousand a year from his parents on the ground that he would eventually be Lord Chancellor, the clothes had some justification as camouflage. Tony

sympathized, but wondered why pride demanded that a born journalist should waste his young life in chambers instead of getting on with his job.

'Do I interrupt?' asked Tony, seeing that Julian was writing.

'Not a bit. I'm only doing a couple of reviews to help out a fellow who wanted to go to Twickenham. They won't let him report football matches—his style isn't good enough.'

'I see. Where shall we lunch?'

'Club?'

'No. Unless by accident or through God's wrath, I shall never enter a club again.'

Julian stared.

'What d'you mean?'

'I'll tell you presently. I've got a confession to make.'

'Oh,' indifferently. 'Well, how about Simpson's?'

'No. It must be a pub, and a cheap one.'

'A *pub*!' exclaimed Julian, looking instinctively at his immaculate clothes. 'What on earth for?'

'I'll tell you when we get there. Meanwhile, put on that elegant derby and come along.'

Like most young Englishmen of his class, Julian was exquisitely sensible of ridicule, and detected fine shades of decorum invisible to less favoured persons. He got red in the face as he pointed out that it was impossible, quite impossible for them to go to a pub in their present clothes, and besought Tony to come to his club.

'My dear Julian,' said Tony, 'what is your club, what is any club but a snobby pub where bores do congregate? Never again shall I listen to the clotted voice booming of Lords or the birds flyin' wild or what the P. M. ought to do. Besides, I want to talk to you.'

. . .

In the Adelphi, Tony found a place with sawdust on the floor where you sat on high stools against the counter and ate toughish meat, two veg., and drank beer. Julian looked so vexed and unhappy on his stool that Tony pitied him, for he would have great possessions.

'Why did you bring me here?' Julian asked crossly.

'First of all—will you drink to my new life?' Seeing Julian looked puzzled, Tony added: 'I forgot to tell you that I resigned today, and this morning walked out of the office for the last time.'

'Did you?' said Julian calmly. 'Why?'

'Explanations! Why does everybody want explanations? Put it that I'm fed up,'

'Perhaps you need a holiday?' Julian suggested innocently.

'Hell!' said Tony, cross in his turn. 'If anyone else says "holiday" to me I shall smite him to the earth. Holiday be damned. I want a lifetime. Surely you at least can see, Julian, that all that City running round in circles is a waste of life?'

Julian shrugged his shoulders.

'We can't get on without it. And I should say it *is* life. What else is there to do? If you want to clear out, that's your affair, but I should think you'd pretty soon be bored and want to be back in harness again. Do you want to be a loafer all your life?'

Tony sighed. Julian was taking off a little from the fine edge of his pleasure. He was like nearly everybody else who benefited by the going concern; when it really came to the point he was indistinguishable from his uncle.

'Well,' said Tony, 'I'll drink my own toast and not ask you to join me. Here's to my luck this time next year.'

By the way,' Julian enquired as Tony put down his

tankard, 'what does Margaret say about this? Does she approve? '

'She hasn't said anything yet, because I haven't told her. One doesn't need to be a prophet to surmise that she will not approve and that she'll say a good deal.'

'Not to mention other members of the family.'

Tony was filling a pipe and made no reply. Julian looked at him sideways.

'I've often wanted to ask you,' he said hesitatingly, 'why you married Margaret? '

Tony registered this direct question with a slight inward start, since it brought up a problem and old memories he always tried to avoid. He struck a match and lit his pipe with a great show of calm deliberation.

'That would be a long story,' he said, 'or perhaps you could make it a short story. But why *do* people get married?'

'Still, I've often thought Margaret wasn't the right woman for you. There's always seemed something a little mysterious about it all.'

'Most brothers can't imagine what other men see in their sisters,' said Tony as lightly as he could, 'unless, of course, they happen to be one of the my-sistah's-honour sort. But, look here, Julian, will you come to France with me tomorrow? '

'What on earth for? '

'To walk and talk and look at things. We can get rucksacks this afternoon and take the first train tomorrow. I want to go to Chartres.'

Julian grimaced.

'I hate walking tours,' he said carelessly. 'One gets so tired and hot. Besides they're undergraduate. Why don't you get a car, Tony? '

'Because I don't want one. But won't you come,

Julian? We can go in easy stages and study local wines.'

'Sorry, I can't come. I shouldn't enjoy it—too slow. And then——' He hesitated. 'You see, it's still a secret, but next week I start regularly as a leader writer——'

'No, really?' Tony interrupted. 'But that's splendid. I'm awfully glad, Julian. I've always thought your metier lay that way. Imagine you a pillar of the Conservative press! Well, here's luck to you. Funny we should both have branched off at the same time.'

'You won't say anything about it, will you? Even to Margaret?'

'Of course not. Get yourself well dug in first and have the row afterwards. I'll back you up—for the little I can do. I imagine I shan't be very popular with the family.'

'There's not much money attached to it at present,' said Julian apologetically, 'but a reasonable chance of reaching a couple of thousand a year.'

'Why think always about money?' Tony replied impatiently. 'So long as you can live, it's the job that matters. I wish to heaven there were some job I felt I wanted to do. Mine's a different problem altogether. The man to be envied nowadays is the artist who can make a living without being forced to do cheap or bad work. He's outside the machine all right, and his job's his life. But I imagine even he won't be able to last much longer. At best it's tight-rope walking, with everybody shaking the rope. But I'm sorry you can't come with me, Julian. I was looking forward to a couple of weeks' walk with you. I shall go alone.'

'You won't take Margaret?'

'Good Lord, can you see Margaret carrying a pack and sleeping in possibly buggy inns? I'd like her to

come if she'd enjoy it, but she's going to stay with some classy friends of your mother's next week, and then there'll be the season.'

'I doubt whether there'll be a season this year,' said Julian.

'Why on earth not?'

'You as an ex-business man ought to know I There's going to be trouble with the miners, and in the sub-editor's room they were saying that if a settlement isn't reached a strike is inevitable.'

'Well, that won't hurt the season. Miners don't go to Court or the Royal Academy or lunch at the Savoy grill.'

'Don't be silly, Tony. It'll mean immense loss of trade and money anyway, but if the other unions back them up, as they seem inclined to, it may lead to a revolution.'

'A revolution!' exclaimed Tony. 'On a question of wages? It takes more than that to launch a revolution. Especially when the leaders of the revolutionary party walk as delicately as Agag and believe in the inevitability of gradualness. Really, I get sick of all this violent talk. People have been prophesying a revolution to me ever since I was fifteen, and that's going on for twenty years now. It hasn't come off yet. Don't get infected with scaremongering, Julian.'

'But the war came off.'

'Yes,' said Tony sadly, 'the war came off all right. But just because it came off on such a thundering scale, it makes anything else look petty. People worked off their instincts for violence.'

'But suppose there were a revolution, what would you do?'

'Keep out of it. A plague on both their houses.'

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And now I'll have to go home and do some more explaining.'

'You'll have some difficulty in explaining to Margaret why you've chucked up two thousand a year and a business career—or to anybody else for that matter. But I bet you'll be back again this time next year.'

 'won't take your bet. It wouldn't be fair. And as to explaining—well, well.'

Left alone, Tony walked slowly towards Trafalgar Square, hardly noticing the lines of traffic and the people hurrying or sauntering along the pavements. The talk with Julian had been unsatisfactory, and Tony's affection, perhaps vanity too, were a little wounded by Julian's indifference. It was disconcerting to have taken pains to spare someone else's feelings only to find they didn't exist. Through perpetual brooding Tony had come to believe that he was not merely Antony Clarendon throwing up a lucrative job for personal reasons, but the symbol of a generation and a race passing judgment on the fraudulent values of a debased civilization. And Julian's attitude was important to him, for in Tony's mind Julian also was a symbol; he had never forgotten the boy's sudden outburst years before near Corfe, the revelation of an inward despair which seemed to imply a hidden struggle towards some ideal. He had counted on some immediate response, some enthusiasm; and found only a cool indifference which turned the conversation onto a journalistic *fait divers*. If even Julian didn't care, didn't bother to understand . . . Tony felt the oppression of complete loneliness, the sense of a perpetual *malentendu* between himself and everyone he knew. If only there were one person, just one, to accept him without angry or contemptuous requests for him to explain himself. But it was up to them to explain

why they continued to acquiesce in a deathly humbug. Or were they right after all, and he the perverse fool and dupe?

He turned into the National Gallery, and after wandering through one or two rooms, sat down in front of Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne. What would Titian have said if he had been asked to 'explain' his picture, as he would undoubtedly have been asked if he lived among these desensitized barbarians? Told them to go to hell probably. His eyes moved over the rich Venetian tones, faded like an old tapestry, but still suggesting the original vivid brilliance—the wine-coloured cloak like an emperor's garment, the white and blue of the girl's clothes, the dappled leopards, the tanned russet and carmine of the bearded satyr, the half-naked nymphs. A pattern of colour and shape sufficient to itself. His memory recalled Guido Reni's child Bacchus, vine-crowned and smiling, in Florence, and the age-mellowed panels of Veronese in the great Venetian palace. The god Dionysus, mysterious flame of the dark earth, render of flesh and giver of ecstasy, a white flame of desire leaping from his chariot. . . . Explain it! 'Excuse me, Mister Titian, I should vurry much like to know what maarl lesson you inculcate in your wurrld-famed masterpiece? Stand up closer to the mike, can't you, and let's have the dope. This is a coast-to-coast hook-up. Speak up, Mister Titian, the wurrld's listening. Let's have your message to humanity, and don't forget there's a thousand bucks bonus if you let on you smoke La Pianola Cigars. Get busy. Go on, explain it. Tell the yahoos they're Olympians.'

The Titians are in dull museums, not in our lives. If there came a new Titian he would be insulted by sterile universitaires and smelly-souled journalists, starved on the theory that the artist is much better kept poor (but

not jockeys, prize fighters, and pimps) and finally jailed for indecency. There shall be no more gods; there shall be no more quiet and holy places of the earth; and the sea shall be filled with our dirty works. Your women shall breed like sows, and you shall work like robots. You shall value nothing for its own sake, but only for its market value. As for living, the machines will do that for you. In the morning you shall say, Would God it were evening; and in the evening, Would God it were morning. One with the pterodactyl and the giant sloth.

I must get away from England, said Tony to himself, not that England is any different or any worse, but because here I am involved and feel responsible. It is better for me to be very poor, to starve and die, than to live this living death.

He looked intently at the picture again, admiring its measure and delicacy, thinking how Rubens would have given the theme a dynamic but gross energy, a bit vulgar; and then how the pre-Raphaelites represented the etiolation of the English soul, cut off from reality by dividends. With a passionate sense of loss and thwartment he envied the artist, whose life is complete in itself, who lives to enrich his work and whose work enriches his life. I could have painted pictures like that youth ye praise so. But no. Above all things avoid joining the immense foolish throng of those who want to be artists without being born artists. Avoid the life and mentality of the *rate* and the venal flatterer of business taste. The artist is overesteemed. Unless he brings to life, makes articulate, the spirit of me, the common man, he does nothing. And the supreme, the most difficult art is to live. If I can do that, I do not need to envy Titian.

A voice began to shout 'All out,' with an energy combined of delight at interrupting other people's medita'

tions and relief at the ending of another day of monotonous ennui. Heroes of Mafeking, bored sidesmen of this non-conformist chapel of art, dreary defenders of the Buonarroti's Leda, why not make them race-course touts and let them be happy?

For a few minutes Antony stood on the terrace in front of the gallery, looking down Whitehall, which was soft and dim with mist after a drizzling shower. A pale, whitish light came from the cloud-veiled late sun, and the wind was cold. Buses flipped through the thin mud, and umbrellas bobbed along like huge terrestrial bats. There was a kind of pallid beauty about it, a momentary vision of soft light and mist, the hour of innumerable teas and toasts, with windows one by one jumping alive with yellow electricity. At the office they would be bringing in the last batches of letters to sign. He walked down the ugly stone steps and turned westward, trying to realize that he would never again be 'yours faithfully, A. Clarendon, Director,' looking with curiosity at the indifferent passers. Only an inner glow of complete confidence, a softly burning exultation kept him from a sense of melancholy and isolation. Even that morning he had been at one with these people, hurrying his own way, indifferent to them, but secretly united by acceptance of their common life. Now he was the spectator, the outsider—renegade or pioneer, deserter or advance guard? He lingered for a moment at the corner of the Haymarket and Pall Mall, watching the innumerable movement, asking himself if he was turning his back on reality or whether he had indeed started on the adventurous search for the deeper reality of himself. What was certain was that he would never, could never go back—the last bridges were down. If he were ever forced back into the machine, it could only be as one of

the exploited, not as an exploiter. There was a satisfaction in that.

He pulled himself out of this plaintive mood of self-analysis and walked off briskly on his way home, looking for a shop to buy a rucksack. At the entrance to a large department store he remembered that somewhere in a cupboard he still had his army pack. Why not use that, a perfectly efficient thing, instead of wasting money on a flimsy make-believe?

It was dark when he got to his flat and learned from the servant that Margaret was out. After a good deal of searching he found the old pack, crumpled up in a corner with rubbish, and shook it clean of dust. He looked at its tarnished brass and dirty leather straps meditatively. Inside the webbing flap his name and regiment were still written in indelible pencil underneath the erased name and regiment of somebody else, a casualty, probably a dead man. A Tommy's pack. The only personal war souvenir he had, and a bit mouldy at that. How gone, how lost those years, slipped away for ever down the great noiseless cataract of time. So remote that their experience seemed to belong to an entirely different person. That pseudo-military Antony was as dead as the boy who had loved Vine House and believed Annie's tales of down home, as dead and forgotten as the enthusiast who had roughed his way through pre-war Italy in search of—what exactly had the search been for? To find the best that men had lived and built? Why seek the living among the dead?

He took the pack into his bedroom and began to fill it quickly and neatly with necessary changes of underclothes; then paused and looked round the room he had shared so long with Margaret, and for the first time perceived with devastating clarity that he must inevitably,

even if gradually, drift away from her. Something of the kind had come up more than once before, and again at lunch that day when Julian had dropped a hint about it; but hitherto he had dodged the issue, with the vague hope that 'things would adjust themselves.' Nothing ever adjusts itself, at least in personal relations; everything he had been feeling and doing in the past year, everything he hoped to become and be, must estrange him from Margaret.

With his hands behind his back, he walked unhappily up and down the small room, as he had walked Water-ton's studio years before. As if it weren't enough to toil in the spirit in a struggle onward which was never-ending—and then to discover that every step of the way you had to consider how every action, almost every thought, would affect somebody else. How far can two people live together and sleep together, and yet preserve their individual lives? And if their lives branch apart, is it worth pretending that they can live together in any but the most squalidly unreal way? Horrible to hurt someone who can't understand why, who must feel it as a wanton perversity. Strange how there had always been something missing between them, how often he woke up with a feeling of unhappiness and impermanence, as if—how put it precisely?—as if the inner unconscious self which went on living in sleep knew prophetically that their relation could not last. Yet it had lasted six years. Oh, damn, how avoid giving pain? How avoid a seeming-cruel egoism?

He was aroused by hearing the sound of a latchkey and the closing door. Margaret came in to take off her hat and coat, saw the open cupboard and half-filled pack, and glanced at him resentfully. She brought with her an ambience of sulky disapproval, and Tony guessed that she had already been primed for her part—to accept

this maddening 'holiday' subterfuge and to treat it as a silly freak. By a meek wifely acquiescence, somewhat foreign to her nature, she was evidently schooled to bring him back even more meekly to the bull ring. This feeble plot to 'manage' him, with its insulting underestimate of any intelligence he might have, wiped out a lot of his recent scruples.

'Hullo,' she said, trying to feign a careless surprise. 'You back already?'

'Yes. I've left the office and thought I'd go abroad for a little to think matters over. I've been wanting to talk to you about it, but didn't seem able to, somehow.'

'Very lame, all this. Never mind.'

'Oh,' said Margaret, 'where are you going?'

'To Chartres first. Then on, partly by train and partly on foot. Would you like to come?'

'Tony! Don't be hypocritical! You know you want to be alone, you know I should hate going about mouldy cathedrals and pushing about like a tramp, and you know perfectly well I'm going to say with the Brankshire Cholmondeleys.'

'I know. I asked Julian to come. I hoped you possibly might come too, and that as we went along I could explain to you both—well, what I've been feeling, what I'm groping for, what I'm trying to be. After all, I've taken an important decision, which affects you as well as me. You ought to know about it.'

Margaret looked extremely angry, and Tony thought she was going to break out into denunciatory rage. But, instead, she restrained herself, and with an air of injured maternal humouring which was more exasperating than a direct attack, said:

'No, dear, we won't discuss it now. I know you've been overworking and you've earned a good long holiday. Go off happily, and do as you like, and loaf, and

don't worry about me or business or anything. Just have a real good time. And when you come back, it'll all look different.'

'But——' Tony began, when she stopped him with a kiss, and patted him on the head as if he were a petulant infant or a slightly foolish invalid who must be kept quiet and not openly thwarted. Tony shrugged his shoulders.

'All right,' he said, 'if you won't face the fact, I won't try to force you. But let me tell you this, Margaret—your uncle hasn't the faintest idea of the situation and talks through the top of his hat. I have left, and left for good.'

'Never mind what he says, Tony, though he has your best interests at heart, believe me. And now, dear, let me dress for dinner.'

Tony turned to go but stopped at the door.

'You must excuse me if I don't dress. I'm going to sell my dress clothes and all those ignoble office suits.'

She went into the bathroom without answering.

§ IV

Although Antony managed to get away at the time he had planned, he went off with less gaiety and exultation than he liked. For one thing it was a dismally wet day, with a stiffish southwester, so that the prospect of a Channel passage was miserable. He found, too, that the cross-country trains to Chartres were so slow and complicated that he would have to go by Paris, which was exactly what he didn't want to do. Margaret had behaved with exemplary bitchiness, not uttering a word of the disapproval and self-commiseration she so obviously felt, replying to his remarks with forced social smiles, and emanating such sullenly obstinate hatred that

Tony could have lifted up his head and howled like a dog at a violin. She insisted on coming to Victoria to see him off, though he begged to be allowed to go off quietly alone. But, no, Margaret knew her duty as a wife—what would people say if she did not see her poor, misguided husband off? They disputed this so long that they had to rush off in a taxi, instead of quietly taking a bus; and Margaret occupied the whole time by earnest entreaties to him not to get wet (he'd only been in three winter campaigns) and by 'worrying' about his clothes and whether he'd be able to get proper food—in France.

He tried to be patient and kissed her with an attempt at affection just before the train moved out. Her eyes filled with tears, and a peculiar expression came into her face, so that Tony—who might really have thought of this before—suddenly perceived with a shock of horror that she was convinced he was going off to meet another woman. Plainly, no argument or explanation would convince her to the contrary, and he felt disinclined to wear the fibula of the Attic athlete. He almost groaned aloud in a frenzy of irritation and turned to get his pack and walking stick, determined to have the matter out once and for all with the whole lot of them. But almost before he moved the train had started, and he was left at the window gazing helplessly at Margaret's waving handkerchief, which she contrived to make more melancholy than a flag of surrender or quarantine. In a few seconds the train was clear of the station, and he was contemplating the backs of sooty houses with dingy windows.

There was something symbolical in this departure, as if it were one of those trivial happenings which alter a whole life. Antony felt a deep longing to get away for a time from human contacts, especially those which are intimate without being sensitive and agreeable. He

could almost have wept with relief at the thought of days and weeks of comparative solitude to come, with none but casual contacts and ordinary passing friendliness. If one must be alone, then be really alone, and don't violate instincts and feelings by false intimacy. Yet it would be good, how good to exchange life with another. He'd been living in a kind of exile, living as a stranger even to Margaret and Julian.

Tony found a room in a small hotel near the Gare Montparnasse, and enquired the time of the first morning train to Chartres. After dinner he walked down the Boulevard towards a couple of cafes, which he remembered vaguely as meeting places of students and painters before the war. How long ago was that? Twelve, thirteen years. Curious to be walking in Paris again, and a bit uncomfortable to be in English tweeds in a capital. Never mind, it was go-as-you-please on the left bank. What worlds apart he and Margaret had been even in those days. It might have been well to take warning—perhaps, perhaps—and not to have let her clutch at him as a refuge from loneliness and despair. . . . He was roused from his thoughts by coming upon a blaze of light and the brazier-warmed terraces of three enormous cafes. Although past ten o'clock, people were constantly arriving in taxis, and waiters were scurrying about. Tony paused in amazement. Were these flashy and ostentatious places the little cafes where a few years before poor men, starving for an ideal, had come to find warmth and a place to talk together for a few pence?

Antony walked slowly past the terraces to the edge of the Boulevard Raspail, noted that a night club had been opened on the opposite corner, and then slowly walked back. The long lines of tables were occupied by a

heterogeneous and unpleasing multitude of freaks and pretenders—men-women and women-men, charlatans, pimps, amateur prostitutes, Negroes, numerous wops and Middle-European Jews with American passports. He did not stop, but walked back along the Boulevard until he came to a small cafe, Aux Rendezvous des Cochers et des Chauffeurs, where he sat down and ordered a coffee and *fine*. From a distance he could see the blaze of artistic light and even hear faintly the blare of artistic conversation. Another example of business enterprise. These were the blood brothers of the gentlemen who in 1919 had scratched their names on the skulls of soldiers near Verdun.

It was still early morning when Tony reached Chartres, and he spent most of the day in and about the cathedral. The rain had changed to high white clouds with an occasional gleam of sun, so that the light was clear without being dazzling; but the wind was cold, and he was glad to wear a muffler and gloves. All sense of physical discomfort was soon lost as he became absorbed in the great mediaeval encyclopaedia of stone and coloured glass—the learning, the life, and the aspirations of an epoch fixed in an eternal moment by generations of artists. In another mood Antony might have found much to criticize in this gigantic picture book of superstition, but he was inwardly so much exhausted by his long struggle and so much in revolt against the noisy boastful destructiveness of an Americanized world that the vision of Chartres was infinitely comforting and inspiring. True, the impulse and faith which created it had long ceased to have any vital significance, but even if you looked upon it as merely a beautiful tomb, its dignity and conception of life and human destiny had profound meaning. Struggling for words to express to himself

his own feelings, Tony put it that the makers of Chartres, in spite of their aspiration towards a supersensual world, had lived fully and intensely through their senses. Their gift was not the vain spiritual and intellectual structure of Chartres, but the vivid love of the visible and tangible world with the sense of respect for the mystery underlying it.

He soon saw that to read this great book, as Huysmans had tried to read it, would be an affair of weeks rather than hours, and made no attempt to do so, contenting himself with absorbing what he needed from it—which was tranquillity and a new belief in the dignity of common life. Here were celebrated no business men with their blatant vanity and monstrous belief that 'making money' justified anything; or if they were present, it was very properly in an obscure corner of hell, since they must be either put firmly in hell or they make hell of heaven and earth. The usurer, the impresario, and the parasite had no place of honour at Chartres. The mystery of creation and conception, of birth and death; the glory of great leaders, princes, and prophets; reverence for the arts and sciences; respect for craftsmen and husbandmen, shepherds, carpenters, masons, harvesters, grape gatherers; all these had their place, and among them the eternally significant scene of man and woman sitting down together to share the food they have earned together, the very root of human existence. Here and there was a touch of humour or mockery which immediately dismissed any thought of pomposity and sanctimoniousness. While the scenes of creation were expressed with extraordinary tenderness and reverence—as in the faces of God and Man looking out to watch the enormous flights of invisible birds—the mawkish excessive piety of sentimental hermits and saints was mocked in their long lugubrious faces and beards, the rusticity of

the shepherds in their clownish looks and spindle shanks, while the mockery became satiric farce in the figure of the ass-headed musician praising the Lord. Behind the Jewish abstractions and fanaticism, underlying the 'spiritual' adventure which was bound to fail because it was unreal, there still existed memories of an older, sounder religion which set man in harmony with his surroundings and the mysterious cosmos.

Delight in the place mingling with his sense of escape to a new, even if far more difficult and uncertain, life made Tony feel that the whole building, with its clear-cut spires, elaborate porches, and softly glowing picture windows, was a kind of portal to his confused but deep aspirations towards a fresher, truer mode of existence.

From Chartres he moved on to Blois and spent an afternoon going round the palace, half listening to the precise, utterly unmeaning facts which the gruff-voiced guardian insisted on supplying. How really terrifying, from its suggestion of worlds ignored, the material precision of the French can be! And all the time the Loire ran swiftly outside. The palace, with its memories of frantic crimes and relics of gorgeous splendours, was a little unpleasant to him. It symbolized, he thought, the moment when the real degeneration had started, when men began to believe that a crass tyrannizing of nature was the ideal, when they began to lose touch with sky, earth, and water as mysterious god-like things and to think of them only as forces to be exploited for an immediate gain, and when all splendour and beauty came to be used only for self-glorification.

When Tony came out of the palace at Blois, rain had begun to fall. Instead of walking about the town and along the river as he had intended, he was forced to sit in his room at the shabby inn until dinner. He wrote a

few postcards, and then, after trying to read the Landor he had brought with him, slipped into a long reverie. He was aware of a peculiar state of mind, where his own weaknesses and blundering efforts became unpleasantly conspicuous. If a plant has been long starved of light, and then is suddenly brought into the sun, its pallor and sickliness are more apparent than in the dark. Without knowing it, he had temporarily exhausted his inner energies by the intense emotional strain of the past months—the more intense because he had been able to communicate with nobody and the struggle had been that of a divided self. Now, indeed, he felt whole and at one with himself, yet, so far as his conscious mind went, both weak and uncertain.

Tony lit a caporal cigarette and watched the rain in the twilight speckling the livid stream and turning the shivering poplars to grey ghosts. It was the dim melancholy hour when all the inner fires sink down and we mistake our own depression for the reality of the world. He looked at the burned-out ashes of his own days and tasted the bitterness of failure and solitude. His young eager passion for life lived with gusto, the shattering knock-down blow of the war, the year of almost frantic struggle to regain what had been lost, then the second death and the gesture of despair, his marriage and acquiescence in all that he most despised, the effort to live the life which contented those about him, and then his dumb feeble revolt—all seemed as futile and wasted as the rain on the Loire, water lost in water. At thirty-two he was sitting utterly alone in the chilly bedroom of a little French inn, having achieved nothing, having failed in life as he had failed in love. He had dreamed and asserted that life was the supreme and most difficult art, evanescent, but demanding a more vital creative effort than even architecture and poetry. A pretty work of

art he had made of his life. For twenty years he had been a happy child, for four years a wretched soldier, for a year a half-demented crock, and for the rest a business parasite. Wonderful record for the annals of time. And when I am forgotten, as I shall be . . .

Defeat. Useless to say: 'My right has gone, my left is broken, my centre is pierced; I am attacking.' Useless also to accuse the society of which, willy-nilly, you are a member. If you ask more of life than circumstances can give, you must be defeated; and if you are one of those who are condemned to be eliminated by the evolution of society, eliminated you will most certainly be. England hath need of thee? England hath need of a deeper sand hill to hide its diminished ostrich head. Fallacious the appeal to history—how do we know what really was said and done by the Nile and the Ilissus? Or if not fallacious, then discouraging. It seems to be a law that the gentler 'civilization' shall always go down before the more brutal. The bullet beats the brain and brother every time. Evidently 'Nature' does not want 'civilization.' . . . By their fruits ye shall know them. . . .

After dinner Tony stepped into the common room and turned over some of the periodicals lying on a large dusty table. Among them was a propaganda journal from the Riviera, one of those real business periodicals, supported by hotel keepers, which fub up the spurious romance of tourism in order to peddle off a limited amount of bad accommodation for an exorbitant amount of paper money. His attention was caught by a column in English, headed, 'Armistice Day Dinner.' He ran through it swiftly: '. . . if I may say so—jolly well organized . . .'' . . . a cheery crowd, a real good dinner, a topping band.' 'The dinner? Good, and built

or cooked to suit we Britishers.' 'It was, as I say, a really cheery evening.' And then:

The "fellow feeling" spirit seemed to permeate the room, and a few well-chosen words by General Sir Wuffly Whim—who took Colonel Whiffle for his chief-of-staff—just seemed to hit the vital spot, and had the same effect on us as that sentence—watchword of the Empire—Carry On.

We did, and loved the doing of that same, and so we'll number down. . . .

Quite a cheery crowd, and to add bouquet to our port—or special cognac—Mr. Jollop provided us with a dancer, who emphasized that song of Amy Woodford Findens, "Pale Hands We Love."

"And so to bed" as Mr. Pepys puts it. Now let us thank good master Marples and his charming spouse for ye very gaie and truly happy evening.'

Tony threw the journal back on the table and walked up and down the room in consternation. By their fruits ye shall know them. *Heenaurne!* as Daddy Flaubert used to say. What on earth had happened to the English brain and feelings that they should go so utterly soppy and false? A senile childishness' afraid of itself, and coquettishly apologizing for being nothing. Carry On be damned. Carry Off these corpses and start fresh.

Quite a cheery crowd. Yes, phosphorescence on a dead fish. Such are the ladies and gentlemen of culture and leisure, the hewers of empire and the drawers of dividends, the cynosure and envy of neighbouring eyes' the salt of the earth, the heirs of all the ages.

Oh, for a draught of Lethe.

Next morning rain was still falling, but Tony made up his mind to leave Blois at once. He decided that for the present he wanted no more cathedrals and chateaux,

which only excited him cerebrally, whereas he needed to give himself time to start growing again, without digging up the roots daily. He also decided that it was a mistake to allow himself to get worked up over the world's tyrants and cretins. Live and let live. True, they were utterly wrecking the world that he wanted and loved, but then it wasn't possible to do anything effective about them, and he felt more than ever averse from a life of political agitation or crank theorizing. The agitators when in power would be no better than the others—they all had the same squalid notions in one form or other. To hell with them, anyhow. Live and let live. Since you can't alter them, dodge them. Alas that one cannot dodge their deeds in the shape of wars, industrialism, income tax, and bankruptcy.

So he took the first train to Tours and set out in the rain to walk south. For nearly a fortnight he tramped steadily southward, zigzagging from village to village, sometimes wet through, faring roughly in some places and unexpectedly well in others, walking down to meet the spring. He read nothing and visited no 'sights,' except that occasionally he turned into a village church and sat still there for half an hour in the perfect silence. Far better than that was to sit in a wood or by the roadside or on a bridge and think of nothing—just allow the sensation of being alive to grow up in him again. For the first few days nothing seemed to grow. At times he felt irritable and impatient and was very near to being bored by his loneliness and more than once passed through moods of really desperate depression. But he persisted, telling himself that at least the air and exercise were toning up a body grown flabby in cities. At first he was footsore and very stiff, but gradually grew inured; and his sleep was perfect.

On the fifth day he struck a spell of fine weather and

realized that he and spring had met. Trees which had been leafless farther north, were here delicately budding? flowers appeared everywhere instead of in sheltered corners only; and the birds were in full song. He lunched frugally but delicately that day at a small wayside inn_y where a young woman wearing a white frilled cap served him and some working men with fresh brook trout, sweet-smelling bread, good butter, and white wine of Bordeaux. The bread and wine were the basis of the meal, as they' have been for tens of centuries throughout southern Europe, where their essentially sacred nature is still instinctively recognized—it is not just avarice which objects so strongly to the waste of bread or wine. They are gods. And no attempt at spiritualizing can destroy their material godhead. So, at least, Tony thought as he watched the men at their meal, served by the quick, silent woman. He was pleased by their instinctive decorum and lack of self-consciousness, as they ate without the uncouthness of Italians or the munching ungratefulness of the English. Nor again did they show any stupid hostility to the stranger or attempt to violate his privacy by indiscreet questions—they accepted him quietly and decently as the passing traveller.

Greatly pleased by this glimpse of a living tradition of civilization, Tony went on his way in a happy mood, with the hope that the village might for ever be preserved from the improvements of business. About two hours later the footpath he was following through a wood brought him to a wide clearing where a brook ran among sloping banks covered with dog-violets. At an angle to the stream a long ride was cut through the trees to the horizon, and as he looked down it he saw a wild boar break cover, trot a couple of hundred yards along the open, and then plunge into the undergrowth on the opposite side.

Except for the occasional croak of a magpie and a twittering of finches, the wood and clearing were strangely silent. Even the brook flowed with only a low unchanging murmur which seemed like another silence. There was strength in the spring sunshine, which glittered powerfully through the scantily-leaved branches and brought the dark violets alive. Tony sat down by the one-plank bridge and let all these things flow gently into him. For one moment a flash of the old ecstasy came to him, the sense of being entirely and happily at one with all things, as if the mysterious presence of gods had floated swiftly by, touching him transiently in forgiveness and acceptance. After so many unhappy wasted years. He remained quite motionless, afraid to move or breathe, feeling the old almost-forgotten happiness of being alive, which had so much peace in it. With surprise but no shame he found tears were running down his face; then, lying full length with his face hidden in his hands, he felt his body gently accepted by the earth. Later he stripped and bathed where the brook formed a deep cold pool; and before he left laid a few violets at the foot of an ash, and dropped two or three into the water.

At the end of three weeks he had covered between two and three hundred miles, and was in full spring. Then heavy rain held him for a day in a village built on an island, which somehow did not feel like an island because it was too big for the narrow arms of the little river to give the sensation of enclosing it. Although the map showed that he was actually south of Turin, the country was still rich and northern with Atlantic rains. The stone village, with its old houses made vital by carved window frames and huge corbels, its ancient abbey and balustraded eighteenth-century walks, could

show superb avenues of old elms and chestnuts, while the sheltering rock slope was covered with ashes and oaks. When he walked into it, late on a sunny afternoon, Tony thought—as he had thought of other privileged places before—that he had never seen anywhere so harmoniously sited, or so expressive of genuine humanity. But next morning all the trees were swaying in a gale and the rain was drenching.

Tony decided not to risk the inevitable soaking. He arranged to stay on while all his clothes were washed, and spent the morning reading his notes and looking rather disconsolately over his rough sketches. He accepted the fact that he was not a writer or a draughtsman, but knew that he could enrich his own life by noting down what he saw and felt. He admitted an unvenomous envy for the genuine artist, but was glad that he didn't have to join the huge army of pretenders peddling their spurious gifts. In the afternoon he wrote several letters, including the following to Julian:

DEAR JULIAN:

Forgive me for not having written to you, but except for a daily postcard to Margaret, I have written to nobody. I had to loaf and invite my soul for a time, though as a matter of fact the actual tramping has been quite strenuous. You owe this letter to my being held up here by heavy rain, but also partly to the idle wish that you at least should have some glimpse of the meaning in my madness. Why you? Well, I've never forgotten that talk we had years ago near Corfe, when you were still a boy. Do you remember? It has given me a clue to what otherwise would have puzzled and irritated me—I mean the dead-alive indifference (as it seems to me) of you and others of your age. You are a symbol to me of the people who are most difficult to under-

stand and accept—those who come after us and deny us. At the same time I feel a responsibility towards you (as a symbol as well as an individual) and a desire that you—all of you—should not be smashed or maimed as so many of us were. Enough of this.

In London I was disappointed that you wouldn't come with me on this trip, but I now see that it would have been a failure if I hadn't come alone. I had to be at one with myself, before I could proceed. At the same time I'm still disappointed that our last talk together got nowhere in particular (talks seldom do)—hence this letter. The fact that you've had to struggle against the whole of the family except me, and that you'll have to go on struggling, in order to live the life your nature demands, should make you understand my struggle, which is probably a more difficult and fundamental one. There is a recognized niche for you, and none for me. You're no more interested than I am in the game of buying, selling, and besting, but you *are* interested in the human kaleidoscope, the superficial movements of event. In other words you love news. And since you believe in style without having one, you are obviously a born journalist. Stick to that and let the Law go to the devil. Why shouldst thou be a hangman of sinners? But I care for none of these things.

'You asked me why I married Margaret; and if I could answer that question in a sentence, I could give you the clue to myself in a sentence. But I can't. When I was young I had a conception of life which seemed to fit my nature; it did not consist in doing things (or people) but in becoming and being. I saw life, not as action but as experience, not as the exercise of power but as sensual communion with living things, the mysterious forces behind them, the ideal expression of them in the arts. At twenty I was entirely in harmony with myself,

and could stand wholly alone. I don't boast that I was complete (I was far from it) but I was on the right track.

¹ When I was still younger, I went through a romantic, rather unreal passion for Margaret, who at that time seemingly had very little use for me. Before the war I believed I had grown out of it, but at the same time I felt the need for some person in my life who would be wholly intimate, not merely for the sake of the sexual experience (though that is supremely important) but because I believed and still believe that such a relation does enormously increase the living power of both. (I won't bore you now with my theory of marriage.)

'Across this came the war like a prairie fire—unescapable. For four years it condemned me to be all the things I was not and most hated to be. It warped me, set up an agonizing disharmony. (At the same time I recognized and never deny the grandeur of human character in others which it enabled me to see.) After the beginning of the Peace which you are now enjoying so much, I went abroad to try to put things right, but failed. I was no longer able to stand alone, and craved for human intimacy even while I was repelled by it. (You won't understand this.) There was really nobody left in my life but my father and Margaret, and soon after I returned my father died. For some reason Margaret seemed to want me very much. Nobody else wanted me; I didn't want myself. . . . So there you are.

ⁱ The inevitable consequences of this escaped me at the time and for long afterwards. I admit I ought to have seen them, but I was not in a state to think or feel clearly—and after twenty we all make mistakes. I ought to have seen that it was a mistake to try to share lives with someone whose whole nature was so antagonistic. But at that time I was like a lump of quick-

silver which had been scattered into bits—I couldn't tell what shape the bits would take as they re-formed. My great blunder was in thinking they might just as well take the shape Margaret wanted them to be as any other. Indeed, for years I tried to live her sort of life, and actually thought I was doing so. I actually believed I fitted that world, and was content in it. Uneasiness, wretchedness, the feeling of futility, the instinctive hostility of the people of her world, I put down to the effects of the war on my character and temper.

'Well, the quicksilver gradually re-formed, and re-formed almost entirely in the old shape, with the added fact that it was a mature instead of a youthful shape. To put it briefly, for about a year I have found that I utterly abhor this business of "making" money and wasting it in ostentatious and foolish ways. So far from it being "Life," as Margaret and her friends call it, I consider it death. Sometimes I wonder why people who are so little interested in the world they inhabit trouble to go on living in it—I suppose they apprehend there will be no bridge and cocktails in Abraham's bosom. A conception of life which results in their empty twaddle isn't worth the trouble of getting out of bed in the morning. But I go further, and utterly abhor and condemn the whole "business" system, which is pure bunk (though dangerously and destructively powerful), a paper-money substitute for the realities of life. Like Lot, I have come out of Sojdom; if my wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt, I can't help it. Quite possibly "business" will go on triumphing, and I'm quite prepared for it to eliminate me. But in the end it must eliminate itself, because it won't know how to deal with the innumerable masses it has senselessly brought into being for the sake of profits, and won't be able to stop them going mad with boredom and smashing up the

whole concern. Babies and boredom are the Nemesis of business. . . .

I've just read this over, and am considerably pained by its failure to explain either myself or the universe—the fate of all philosophers, amateur or otherwise. I don't know whether you'll see what I'm getting at, which for me (and I believe for others too) is the absolute necessity to clear a way to simple instinctive human values, and drop all this clobber of false civilization, which isn't civilization at all. Civilization, I've read somewhere, is in the minds and hearts of men and women, or it is nowhere. It is certainly not in the multitude of their gadgets. Or in being "smart." Or in the quasi-science of self-appointed organizers of humanity. We've each of us got to work the thing out for himself. I can hear you murmur: "Tell that to Margaret"; and indeed that is an altogether difficult matter.

Enough, enough, enough of this. And yet I've only scratched the surface, if that. We must dig into the depths.

I shall have to come back to London soon—Margaret, the final row with the Grand Panjandrums of the adjectival Board, the disposal of the house in the country which I can't afford, and Margaret doesn't want, and half a dozen other things conspire to jerk me back. But not for ever, and not even for long. I've found my way again at last, and I must follow it.

Ever yours,

' TONY,'

After rereading this rambling letter, Tony carefully folded it, put it in an envelope, and stuffed it in his empty pack. Why be an exhibitionist? And why care whether anyone else, even Julian, does or does not 'understand'? To hell with their understanding. For some time he

watched the rain falling without any feeling of discouragement. It would stop when it stopped. A little later he went down to the cafe part of the small inn and joined the postman and the *garde-champetre* over a cup of coffee and a long discussion about local wines, in which the postman demonstrated that the produce of his own vines was greatly superior to the first growths of the Bordeaux chateaux. He invited both his hearers to come along—some day—and test the matter by actual experiment, and meanwhile ordered another cup of coffee, for which Tony paid.

§v

It was very far from a spick-and-span Tony who landed back in England some weeks later. He had gone on his way as far as the Spanish frontier and turned back from the Pyrenees to take the train with the greatest regret. Never mind, life was not yet over, and there are new worlds for those who can see them beyond every horizon. The sun and rain which had given colour to his face had taken that and the shape out of his clothes, while his nailed boots were bulgy and down at heel. Naturally he was an object of suspicion to the English customs officer, who insisted on searching his pack in spite of Tony's assurances. It was pleasant to reflect that he had nothing but very dirty clothes to handle. When the pack was quite empty, he shook it intelligently upside down, to see if any cocaine would fall out. As nothing happened, he passed on haughtily, leaving Tony to repack. Tony was surprised to find how little he cared about the man's insolence. As he walked down the train to the third-class carriage at the far end, he was amused to see that almost everybody was drinking strong India tea with an expression of deep satisfaction and relief.

And why not? A nice cup of tea is very refreshing, I always say.

Margaret met him meekly in London, and they went straight down to the country, as Tony had arranged. The streets were full of scare posters about the T.U.C. and Mr. Baldwin and The Threat. Tony paid no attention to them and talked about some of the things he had seen and asked Margaret what she'd been doing, glad to find that she appeared gentle and pleased to see him again. As they walked down the platform they passed another flaring display of posters, and Margaret bought three or four evening papers, which she turned over hastily in the carriage.

'Oh, Tony I' she exclaimed. 'Do you think they really will?'

'Will what?'

'Why, proclaim a general strike!'

'Has it come to that?' asked Tony, interested. 'I haven't looked at a newspaper since I left. Julian said something about it, but I forgot. It can't be very general—everything seems quite normal.'

'It's not supposed to happen for a couple of days yet, and they're having conferences all the time. How funny you are, Tony, not to take the slightest interest in things which concern everybody. Why, we might starve!'

'Fussing won't settle it, and don't worry about starving—I used to be rather a good hand at scrounging. Besides, it's all bluff on both sides. I don't care what they do.'

'You may have to care,' said Margaret indignantly, as if indifference were a personal affront. 'How can you sit there and tell me you don't care about these horrible T.U.C. men plotting civil war and disloyalty?'

'Pooh! They're all right. They're only trying to get the best terms for themselves and their men. And

they're up against a tough set of blackguards, if they're dealing with business.'

'Tony! How can you go against your own class like that!'

'Have I got a class? I rather fancy it's lost me. In any case I shouldn't be influenced by the newspapers. The whole business is rather like the ass and the lion quarrelling over the prey they haven't got, while the other brutes step in and get it. And quite right too. A plague on both their houses.'

Margaret retired behind one of the newspapers and wiped away a plaintive tear. It was evident that she was half-inclined to comfort herself by a theory of lunacy, since otherwise she would have to write him down a brute. In fact Tony felt sorry that he had snubbed her foolish sensationalism so heavily, but it had jarred, and he wanted to live at peace with her. So he talked as gaily as he could of other indifferent things, until she was smiling again. At the same time he was not so utterly at ease about the situation as he had believed at first. He remembered Chesterton's rhyme about the people of England who have not spoken yet. Were they now about to speak? And to some purpose? He knew the bitter resentment which had been created in them, not by low wages (after all, there was better money pay in England than in most other countries) but by the dreary conditions of living and the inconceivably silly uppishness and snobby arrogance of the class which lived on the wage earner's surplus. If that really got loose, there'd be hell to pay. But if they had the resentment, they hadn't got the guts; besides, what could they do against tanks and machine guns? Anyway, it was a sordid, beastly squabble, and the more silly, since nobody in England believed that a revolution would change anything. Of course it wouldn't. The only effective

revolution is a change in people's minds and hearts. And then violence isn't necessary.

The next two days passed quickly and not unhappily. Tony spent a good deal of time destroying old papers and arranging most of his personal possessions in three heaps—one to destroy, one to give away, and one to sell. Extraordinary the amount of useless junk one accumulates; whereupon a house is necessary to shelter it; whereupon one is tied by the leg. How insane to buy freehold property 'in perpetuity,' when you have only forty or fifty more years to live! The only point in having it would be to found a family, and who thinks seriously of founding a family in the old sense when capital is as elusive as water and any estate is reduced to insignificance in three generations by death duties? And parenthood itself—very often either mere accident or worse, vanity, something to talk about at the club. Before they have it, two people should want a child till they ache for it. . . .

What pleased Tony most was that after dinner on the evening of their arrival he had had a long, easy talk with Margaret. Avoiding any discussion of money and controversial subjects, such as his throwing up business, he had talked to her rather on the lines of his unposted letters to Julian. They had gone over a great deal, from early days in Paris, though without actually getting to the real crux of their relationship. However, Margaret had seemed surprisingly reasonable and listened without hostile comment to his rather involved account of himself and his development. She even agreed to his tentative remarks about simplifying his material needs and said she was sick of parties herself—which was not remarkable, seeing she had been to at least a dozen in the past fortnight. But inconclusive as all this was,

Tony rather optimistically began to believe that he could live as he wanted and yet save the essential—whatever that might be—of his relation with Margaret.

He was therefore all the more disgusted when Helen unexpectedly turned up next day, full of lurid stories of what was happening 'behind the scenes' (her phrase) and of the calamities in store. Walter, she said, was very worried about the situation, and worked to death. Odd, Tony reflected, how she saw the whole thing entirely in terms of Walter, as if it were some abstract chess problem which he had to win, and not a question of the lives and living of millions of human beings. They were only the shadowy legions, where Walter was a Caesar and the T.U.C. a feeble kind of collective Vercingetorix. According to her, Walter was one of the powers, if not *the* power, 'behind the scenes,' constantly prompting the council of ministers with his wit and wisdom. If Walter won (*i.e.* inspired an agreement between the miners and the owners) it would be a terrific feather in his cap; if he unthinkably lost, it would be several feathers out of his tail. So, obviously, immense issues were at stake. Helen could talk of nothing else; and at meals they were entertained by a long monologue in the we're-in-the-know jargon of political fringers which Tony found intensely exasperating. Margaret thought it all very interesting, and was surprised at the magnanimity with which Helen spoke of persons 'on the other side,' especially when she said Jimmy Thomas was a pet and quite sound really.

All this would not have mattered and could have been cheerfully endured' but for Helen's influence over Margaret. Tony was slow to suspect malevolence in others, but he could not avoid the suspicion that Helen concealed a fair portion of rancour and ill will towards him

under an appearance of careless camaraderie. After the unfortunate episode at the New Year, Tony had avoided her, and when they had to meet allowed her to set the tone as she chose. She had not been in the house two hours before he noticed a subtle change in Margaret's attitude to him—a withdrawing of her acquiescence, a hardening, and a significant hinting at the omniscience of 'common sense,' particularly that of women. Moreover they formed again the silly feminine alliance against the male, such as he had noticed and laughed at years before at Studland. But now it was more important. If Helen succeeded on these lines, it would not only destroy all he believed he had re-created between Margaret and himself, but might lead to the permanent estrangement he wanted to avoid.

After lunch Tony took a long walk alone to think over this new complication. Margaret went off with Helen in Helen's car to visit some friends. Towards evening, as he returned, he came abruptly out of a small sunken road onto a crest of the main road, along which he could see for nearly two miles—and stopped dead. The road, usually busy with cars, was quite empty except for a long line of lorries, lumbering away from London at intervals of about two or three hundred yards. One rattled past him, and he saw that two men were on board and that it carried a distinctive sign not unlike the divisional marks on war lorries. Another similar one roared by as he stood watching, and another and another and another; while in the distance more dots of lorries kept appearing over the horizon. There could be no possible doubt—there was a General Strike, and these were government lorries going to fetch the milk supply.

Tony walked on. He had about half a mile to go before he reached the other small road which led to the

village; and long before he turned off, the methodical procession of lorries got on his nerves. It was a damned sight too much like a divisional lorry train on the western front to be pleasant. Too much like another war, and at home this time. The silent country, the otherwise empty road, the loud hum of the heavy engines rising to a roar and rattle as another lorry passed him—sinister and ominous. It was a relief to get onto the side road, yet as he walked rapidly along he still heard the diminished but always ominous hum of the lorry engines. Not until he got into his own room and closed the windows was he able to shut it out.

From the window he could see a corner of the garden, and noted that the clove-pinks were budding and that the irises would be early. A pity to have to leave it, but then who can own the freehold of a clove-pink? They'll grow without my ownership. And at the same time he was thinking, What a pack of quarrelsome monkeys. It's impossible to live in this demented menagerie of a world. And how cross and vindictive they get if you won't take sides either with the blue-rumped monkeys or the red-rumped ones. I'd just cleared up the mess they left me with their last squabble, and here's another. What happens if a General Strike is prolonged? Within three weeks, if the transport breaks down or is cut off, big cities begin to starve—then the slums sweep down on the country. . . .

He was interrupted by the sound of Helen's car coming up to the door, and almost immediately heard Margaret's voice calling excitedly:

' Tony I Tony! Where are you? '

And she dashed into the room with the well-known animation of the self-appointed Chooser-of-the-Slain, the Kensington Walkyrie, tum-tiddle-tee, dee-dee.

'They've begun,' she said, pouring out her words in one long confused sentence, 'the road's full of those big lorries, isn't it splendid? Helen says she must go back to Walter at once and I can go with her, I must be at the centre of things, you'll have to find someone to drive you up, I feel sure we shall win, don't you?'

'I don't want anyone to drive me up,' replied Tony calmly. 'I shall stay here.'

'Stay here! Whatever for? Why, we've been listening-in to the wireless, and the government asks for everyone to volunteer. Aren't you going to volunteer?'

'No.'

'You're not going to help the government in this crisis?'

'No, I've had enough of helping governments in crises. Let them get on with it.'

'Are you going to help the strikers?'

'To the extent of doing nothing, yes. I shall follow the Empire's Watchword I read about the other day, and Carry On.'

'Oh, Tony, you are *awful*. And suppose there's a revolution, what'll you do?'

'Jump with the cat, and emigrate if the cat scratches.'

'And you once called yourself a *soldier*!'

'I think you'll find more wound stripes on the passive side than on the other, my dear.'

'Oh, well, stay here and moulder if you want, I must go and pack.'

And she dashed out of the room.

So vanishes the hope that we should understand each other and be friendly. Confound that Helen!

Which reminded him that he must at least say good-bye to 'that Helen.'

He found her fussing over the entrails of the car.

'Hullo! Sorry there isn't room to give you a lift,' she said, 'but I expect you'll find someone to bring you along. Do you think *they'll* try to stop us?'

'I shouldn't think so. But if I were you I'd paint two paper flags—one a Union Jack and the other T.U.C., and show either according to circumstance.'

Helen sniffed, and the conversation might have taken an acrimonious turn if Margaret had not arrived with her dressing case. Tony strapped the bags on the luggage carrier, said good-bye to Helen, and kissed Margaret. He watched them drive away with a calm feeling of defeat, and was not even grateful for Margaret's promise, shouted over her shoulder, that she would telephone news. The only news he wanted to hear was that people had become a little sensible and decent and peaceful; he disliked this Cup-Tie attitude, in which people took sides for the sake of excitement, and rooted for their team to win without any sense of responsibility. This passion for vicarious belligerence! Obviously neither of them really believed that anything unpleasant would happen to them, and the bogey of being stoned by strikers was only evoked for the sake of a little uncstly excitement. Let them go. And as for Margaret—if she would make no real effort at companionship, if she could be influenced in a twinkling by Helen, well, she must go.

The evening passed very tranquilly. Tony wrote a letter to Waterton explaining that he was selling the house but intended to keep a four-roomed cottage which had gone with it. He offered this to Waterton rent-free as a place to go to whenever he was sick of London, and suggested they might sometimes stay there together for a week-end of talks and walks. After dinner he worked out an excursion to Sicily over maps and guide

books. For years he had wanted to see a Sicilian spring, though he had been warned that the island was overpopulated and overcultivated, so that you might almost as well look for Theocritus in Balham as at Syracuse. Never mind—see for yourself. Unfortunately, it didn't seem an easy place to explore without a car. Perhaps Julian might find something to report there? He could work up some sensational guff about the Mafia. . . .

Next morning, just as Tony was going out, the telephone rang. He took down the receiver, expecting to hear 'news' from Margaret, and was astounded to find he was listening to the voice of the firm's managing director. The Voice said that of course Tony knew there was a general strike and an effort to paralyze all the Business Activities of the Country? (Great horror in the Voice over the last part of the sentence.) Tony said he'd heard there was a strike, but hadn't noticed it much himself. The Voice ignored this, and said that all the inside staff had remained loyal, though unfortunately (it regretted to say) the outside and manufacturing staff had deserted their posts. A full board meeting was called to decide on what terms they would be taken back after they had acknowledged defeat, and Tony was required to attend it. Moreover, it said, they were organizing the loyal staff to carry on distribution of existing stocks—which fortunately were heavy—as far as possible, in which the directors were personally assisting, while it was felt to be a fitting gesture for all heads of departments and directors to volunteer as special constables. It was unlikely, the Voice added, that they *would* be called upon, but the moral effect would be considerable, and if the worst came to the worst, of course they would all do their duty. Of course, of course. His instructions were that Clarendon was to consider his

holiday as ended and was to report at once. Should they send a car for him?

Tony listened to all this with a growing sense of indignation at their impudence. When the Voice had finished, Tony said loudly:

'Certainly not!'

And hung up the receiver. After which he went out, and stayed out till lunchtime. On the threshold of the small dining room he was met by the servant in a state of some excitement.

'Please, sir, the mistress rang up, and asked how you were, and sent her love, and everything's going splendid, and she does hope you'll come up at once and not miss everything.'

'Thank you,' said Tony.

Oh, and a gentleman rang up from the office, and wanted to speak to you very particular. I told him you were out, and he said had you left for London, and I said I didn't know.'

'Quite right. If he rings up again when I'm out, tell him I'm here for the duration. And now let's get on with lunch.'

However much he struggled against it, Tony could not prevent a sensation of uneasiness from invading his solitude. He did not know what was happening (the newspapers, on the one occasion they were wanted, had not turned up), and he found he could not really remain indifferent to a conflict where one half of England was drawn up against the other half. Could one continue to play Atticus if the struggle turned out to be a real one instead of a melodrama staged to frighten people into one attitude or another? He was haunted by a vision of men in khaki shooting at the men who had worn the same uniform ten years ago on the Somme. The

'old comrades' stuff was nonsense, but the thought of shooting one another down was very repugnant. So was the shooting of anybody, for that matter. He found some difficulty in finishing his lunch.

Almost immediately he left the table and rang up Margaret, only to find that she was out. He went to his sitting room and took up a French description of Sicily, written about 18'0, and illustrated with the beautiful English steel engravings of the period. Comparing one or two of them with photographs of the same building, he saw how the draughtsman had 'poeticized' by skillful exaggeration and elimination. In exactly the same way most modern artists 'de-poeticized' in a reaction against bourgeois prettiness and insincerity. But was ugliness the only truth? He picked up a volume of reproductions of Rouault, and tried to find some excuse for these grotesquely flatulent nudes. . . . And all the time his uneasiness was increasing. Putting the books down, he went and stared out of the window, wondering if he would have to go to London after all, if willy-nilly he would be forced into taking sides? Oh, curse them! What does it matter if they are my race? Am I the keeper of my cousins five hundred times removed?

The telephone bell rang, and Tony went out to answer it, prepared for another dust-up with some unctuous member of the firm; but this time the voice was Julian's.

'Hullo, is that you, Tony? I say, there's all sorts of pranks going on here—aren't you coming to join the fray?'

'What fray?' asked Tony crossly.

'Hasn't Margaret told you? Well, we're trying to come out like some of the other newspapers, though we hear the government's going to bag our reels for a comic paper of its own. Anyway, we got one of the machines

going last night, printed a one-sheet edition, and distributed it by private cars.'

'Well, what of it? I didn't get a copy.'

'You will. I'm keeping you a set. But, Tony, I wish you'd come along. I've got permission for you to be here.'

'I don't see why I should.'

'All right! Don't be stuffy about it. But there was a scrap last night, and there'll probably be another to-night. . . .'

'What!'

'Yes, a scrap. Some bright lads—not our own men, of course—attacked one of the cars and there was a battle in modern Alsatia.'

'Were you in it?'

'Of course. Now we're organizing on military lines by platoons. Most of the fellows are ex-officers, I find. They're awfully friendly and nice.'

'Did you get hurt last night?'

'Oh, no, bit of a black eye, that's all.'

There was a pause, during which Tony heard the low hum of the wires. 'Military lines,' 'platoons.' In his ignorance of what was going on he imagined street fighting. . . . And he had always vowed to himself that if there were another war he'd keep Julian out of it or at any rate look after him. Sort of reckless kid who always gets himself knocked on the head. My duty towards the younger generation is to be mocked by them in peace and take their place in war.

'Julian.'

'Yes?'

'Why on earth did you get yourself into this silly business? Why didn't you keep out of it?'

'I hadn't any option. I came along as usual, and they roped me in.'

'Well, you're a damned fool—why couldn't you mind your own business?'

'Thanks. Anything else?'

'Yes. I'm starting for London at once. You'd better warn your C. O. and the hall porter that I'm coming, so that they don't shoot me at sight.'

'Do you really mean you're coming?'

'I've said so, haven't I? And Julian——'

'Yes?'

'Can I come and dig with you? I can't be waking Margaret up in the small hours. Besides, she's so horribly patriotic. . . . Do you mind putting me up?'

'Of course not.'

'All right, then. If I get to London after nine, I'll come direct to your newspaper office.'

'How will you get up?'

'Jump cars and lorries. Good-bye.'

Tony hung up the receiver with an impatient click. Another bloody war, and on the wrong side. *Chi se ne frega*. Confound the boy for getting me into this mess, just when I most wanted to keep out of it. I'd just finally cleared up the debris left by their last demonstration of culture, and now they drop another one. God bless them. And a-a-all the Roy-al Fam-i-ly. . . . He rapidly and neatly folded things and stowed them in his pack. The sensation was so like that of returning to duty that automatically he put in the packet of chocolate, the electric torch, and the spare muffler to make the pack softer as a pillow. He changed into a suit of darkish tweeds, which would stand rough wear and be warm to sleep in, if necessary. Then he remembered that he was only going to London and would sleep in a comfortable camp bed in Julian's chambers. A bit ridiculous, these melodramatic preparations.

Downstairs, he called the servant and said:

'I'm going to London for a few days. Here's some money to carry on with, but leave all bills till we get back. If you want company at night, you can have Mrs. Cromble to sleep in the house. Just go on as you usually do when we're both away. One or other of us will ring you up every morning. Good-bye.'

Almost as soon as he got to the main road he saw a small car coming along in the direction he wanted to go. Tony signalled and the car slowed down; it was a two-seater, driven by a man.

'Can you give me a lift to London?' asked Tony, adding, 'It's not joy-riding. I'm one of these voluntary alleged workers.'

'I'm only going to Midchester,' replied the man, 'but that'll get you on your way.'

'Right.'

The man dropped him in the main street of Midchester, and Tony thought there was something ironic in the calm of the great cathedral towers and spire. Like the cardinal in Browning's play they had seen three-and-twenty revolts, and the rest. The verger still showed you the marks of musket balls left by Essex's troopers when they routed out some of Rupert's dragoons. Which side would you have taken in the Rebellion? . . . 'he would ingeminate: "Peace! Peace!"' Curious—my second name is Lucius, I've always hated it. . . .

No trams or buses were running in Midchester, but there were a good many private cars, some with little flags to show they were on some official business. He noticed one with a smashed windscreen. Stone-throwing. Not very pleasant. He realized that he must look a bit of an ass, standing there with a pack on his back and staring up at the cathedral and down at the traffic. It wasn't his cue to indulge in historical reminiscence or to see the sights of the strike, but to reach Lon-

don as soon as possible and get on with the job. Now, would it be better to walk out of the town on the main road to London and hail cars, or to try for a train? He walked along until he found a policeman and consulted him, mentioning his errand. The man spoke with the exaggerated calm of one in a bit of a funk. He hardly listened to what Tony said, but seemed only to catch the word 'train.'

'Oh, the trains are running all right,' he said, with a hearty business-as-usual manner Tony felt was false. 'We shall have a complete service tomorrow. There's one due for London in about ten minutes. You'll just catch it if you hurry up.'

Rather against his own judgment Tony went quickly to the station and bought a ticket for London. Of course there was no train in ten minutes, or in fifty minutes. Several times Tony thought of leaving the station and trying his luck on the road, but each time the ticket inspector assured him that the train was signalled and would soon be along. There were no porters or other railway servants about except the stationmaster, one or two ticket inspectors, and a few clerks. Down in the big yard he could see lines of smokeless engines and freight trains, some loaded, some empty. A few clerks or perhaps civilian volunteers were trying to clear away some of the perishable foodstuff and were awkwardly loading a lorry. He could see at a glance that they didn't understand the job. Not a very bright lookout for food distribution.

Finally a train puffed slowly into the station, nearly three hours late, and was met by a feeble cheer. With some difficulty Tony found a seat in a crowded third-class carriage, and, while the train waited interminably at Midchester station, listened to the talk of the people sitting with him. Excitement had broken down the

usual stodgy reserve and they argued—about the strike of course—with exceptional animation. Most of them were average representatives of bar-parlour patriotism, and their conversation was chiefly remarkable for the variety and absurdity of the rumours they circulated. A quiet young man, who still bore evident traces of his heroism on his face, hands, and clothes, described how he had stoked a train down from London that morning, was travelling back to sleep, and would stoke another tomorrow. He said it was hard work, but rather fun, only you had to keep shovelling like mad. He was certain the services would be greatly improved in a day or two—the volunteers were coming in shoals.

'How long will the coal last?' Tony enquired.

The young man shrugged his shoulders; the government would look after that.

'How?'

'Oh, the navy'll bring over coal from Antwerp and France.'

'But isn't that rather unpatriotic and below the belt?' said Tony. 'After all, they stopped the other people getting money from Russia, and yet they'll use foreign coal. And the navy's a strictly national thing. It belongs to the unions as much as it does to them.'

He was howled down with cries of 'National Emergency,' and a beery individual explained heavily that the strike was a conspiracy of agitators, that the men didn't want it, and that the whole nation was against it.

'Well,' said Tony, 'I don't quite see that. If the whole nation's against it, why isn't the whole nation at work?'

This question was so ill-received and he got such black looks which plainly said 'Bolshie' that Tony thought he'd better shut up, and remained silent during the rest of the weary journey. Darkness had already descended

when they arrived, and the ill-lighted station was very empty and silent. As he walked out, he noticed enthusiastic passengers shaking hands with the driver and stoker—a couple of hoary old blacklegs—and giving them shillings and sixpences. He had expected a scene of animation at the terminus, and was disagreeably surprised to find it practically paralyzed—whatever might be said to the contrary, he had no doubt that the strike was general and effective.

Outside the station the sense of paralysis was even more acute. The streets were ill-lighted or not lighted at all; there were no buses or taxis, and practically no motors or people. He walked to the nearest underground station; it was closed and unlighted. A couple of policemen assured him that everything would be running 'tomorrow,' but said he'd have to walk to Fleet Street, if he couldn't beg a lift. It was over three miles away, and Tony didn't feel exactly pleased. When he had been walking for about ten minutes, a man with a motor bike and side car drew up beside him and asked if he wanted a lift. Tony said he would be very grateful, explained that he was a volunteer worker, and asked to be taken to the address of Julian's paper in Fleet Street. Towards the centre of the town the sidewalks were thronged with people excitedly pushing about, but there was something sinister about the almost empty streets at nine o'clock at night. In ordinary times they only looked like that at three or four in the morning. When the side car reached Fleet Street, the man demanded five shillings. Tony had optimistically believed him to be a disinterested patriot, and was more than a little shocked by this cynical exploitation. However, he paid the man and restrained an inclination to give him a sock in the jaw as a tip.

. . .

The entrance to the newspaper office was through a large brick arch with display windows on either side; these were usually brightly lit up at night to show the press photographs, but were now in darkness. About forty *feet* inside, the entrance opened out into a courtyard round which the whole office was built. To the right, as you faced the entrance, a narrow lane came down into Fleet Street, and about twenty yards up there was a second entrance to the courtyard. In ordinary times the fast delivery vans waited at the top of the lane, came down one by one as called, were loaded in the courtyard and then moved off by the Fleet Street gate. The whole arrangement was very English in its mixture of old-fashioned methods with a certain efficiency. In the past Tony had watched the loading-up process going on, while waiting for Julian to come down, and had been surprised by its swiftness as well as by the actual size and extent of the buildings hidden behind the very unimposing facade.

As Tony turned away from the motor-bike patriot, he saw that three policemen were standing at the entrance to the lane and three more at the entrance arch, all keeping an eye on him. He caught a glimpse of other helmets in the courtyard. Immediately Tony realized that he had exaggerated the gravity of the situation and the possible danger to Julian. If police could be spared to guard a newspaper office, there couldn't be serious rioting or very much fear of it.

Tony went up to the police sergeant, gave his name and Julian's, explained his business, and asked to be let in. After a close scrutiny the sergeant led him part way down the long entrance to the porter's room, where the uniformed porter was having a cup of tea with two constables. Yes, the porter had heard about Mr. Clarendon and he was to be allowed in. He led Tony through

the courtyard, where about a dozen policemen were lounging about and three or four cars were parked, to the inner entrance, where he was handed over to another porter and police sergeant. This exuberance of coppers made Tony feel as if he were on his way to Wormwood Scrubbs, instead of rallying round the Prime Minister; and he was thankful when Julian appeared and released him from the supervising eye.

'I say,' said Tony, 'you seem to have half the Metropolitan force on the premises. Do you have to find them all in beer?'

'I don't know,' Julian answered, rather shortly. 'I'll get a pass ticket made out for you, and then you can go in and out as you want.'

'But is all this display of law'n'order necessary?'

'Well, they tried to smash up a car last night and then to raid the place.'

Tony whistled.

'The devil they did. How's the black eye? It looks rather painful.'

'It is, a bit. Shall we go in and see Rawlinson, and get your pass and job allotted?'

Tony was a little startled to find that Rawlinson was a very young and rather perky little man, of the Lance-Jack type; he had expected at least somebody of Brigade status. The young man was polite if a bit patronizing. After formal introduction he said:

'Very good of you to come along and help us in this crisis, Mr. Clarendon. The situation is roughly this—we print normally a morning and an evening paper, but we're now trying to get out a daily sheet on the evening paper machines, which are easier to handle. They're trying to get the machine started now. You heard about the attack last night?'

'Yes.'

'Well, we want men to assist with tying up the bundles, and packing the cars, and then as escort to each car until it's well under way. The police are standing by to help if there's another attack tonight. But we want still more assistance in the machine room. Are you an engineer?'

Tony saw the opening he had been waiting for.

'No,' he said. 'I'm afraid you'll have to consider me as unskilled labour. But my brother-in-law here is very good with machines. How would it be if you put him in the machine room and let me take over his present duties?'

'All right' Rawlinson agreed at once. 'You'll be in number two platoon, then. Gregory's your commander; he'll tell you what to do. Your brother-in-law will introduce you. Cheer-oh. Excuse me, won't you, but I'm expecting the owner any minute.'

Julian led Tony along empty corridors and opened the doors of numerous rather dirty and ill-furnished rooms, most of which were inhabited by little groups of men, smoking and talking. Everybody said that Gregory was somewhere he proved not to be. Finally it was definitely asserted at the very top of the building that Gregory was in the courtyard; so they went back to the courtyard.

'There's Gregory I' said Julian, pointing to a tall, bearded man a few paces away. Before they could speak, a respectful shudder went through everybody, as a tall, lugubrious-looking man, dressed entirely in black, with an opera hat and an umbrella, descended from a Rolls-Royce and walked towards the inner entrance. A touching of helmets by constables and murmurs of 'Good-evening, sir,' from Gregory and Julian and the rest.

'Who's that?' asked Tony.

'That? Why, that's the *owner!*' said Julian with awe.

'He looks a frightful ass,' said Tony frankly.

'Hush, hush!' Julian was really scandalized.

'And who are those three men on the steps who touched their hats to him?'

'Oh, those. That's one of the strike pickets. There's another somewhere in the street. You know, to prevent any of them trickling back. We're not to speak to them.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, discipline, I suppose.'

'Look here, Julian, all this pseudo-military stuff about platoons and escorts and not communicating with the enemy seems to me sheer bunk. Do they *want* a war? I'd like to know what out-of-work staff wallah has worked up all this twaddle. It gets my goat.'

'Hush,' said Julian again and introduced him to Gregory, who was passing. Tony liked him at once; he seemed a genial, unaffected sort of person, not in any hurry, though Tony later discovered that Gregory organized most of the real work. The fuss and eye-wash came from other sources. Gregory looked critically at Tony and said:

'You look a fairly hefty bloke. You'll be all right. Be here as soon as you hear two whistles. But there won't be anything doing until they get the machine going. If I were you, I'd cool off in the bar for a bit. It's in the board room. Show him where it is,' he added to Julian. And off he went.

As Tony followed Julian along more dingy corridors, the building suddenly vibrated with a deep roar, which was greeted by a cheer.

'What's that?' asked Tony, stopping.

'They've got one of the machines going. The

paper's being printed. I must go up at once. Look, Tony, there's the room. Make yourself at home until Gregory wants you.'

The long board-room table was laid with plates, and its centre was occupied with huge trays of sandwiches and bottles of beer. More sandwiches and beer stood on a buffet at the far end. There was nobody in the room except one man in professional morning clothes with a stiff collar, brooding over a glass of beer. The sight of food reminded Tony that he had eaten nothing since lunch. He took a couple of sandwiches, opened a bottle of beer, and introduced himself to the other man, who turned out to be a barrister and a friend of Julian's. Said Tony:

'How and where do we pay for this?'

'It's provided free by the management.'

'Very handsome,' said Tony approvingly. 'So far, this is the most luxurious general strike I've been in.'

'They're very decent employers here,' said the other man. 'I noticed last night that they sent out coffee and sandwiches to the strike pickets.'

'And did they accept?'

'Of course.'

'I've been abroad for some time,' said Tony, 'and found this situation as a kindly welcome home. Can you tell me how it came about and what's going to happen? I'm entirely in the dark.'

'It's been working up for a long time,' replied the barrister. 'Nominally, the strike is based on resistance to a reduction in the miners' wages and perhaps directed towards nationalization of the mines. The unions say it's a lockout. In my opinion it was at least partly provoked by the intransigent set in the Cabinet. That gave

an opportunity to the more impatient lot in the T. U. C., who believe in Socialism in our time.'

'I see. And what's going to happen?'

A fizzle-out sooner or later, provided all the demonstrations of armed force and special constables don't lead to rioting. So far there's only been a little hooliganism—Communists perhaps. The police are delighted—they're running in everybody they've been waiting for. The would-be revolutionaries have no plan, beyond a vague belief in Marx and a slavish admiration of the Russians. The brains of the Socialist party are against violence. After all, they've been slowly socializing England for the last thirty years.'

Tony was about to ask another question, when he heard two blasts from a whistle, and jumped to his feet:

'That's my signal. I must go.'

'I shouldn't hurry unnecessarily, if I were you,' said the other man, without looking up. 'It takes some time to collect everybody.'

But Tony had already dashed off, feeling that one should not be late on parade.

The work was very simple and not laborious. Bundles of the papers, tied up and addressed to various news agents in different towns, came tumbling down a chute and had to be carried out and packed in the waiting cars. The only brains needed were supplied by Gregory, who watched that the right bundles reached the right cars. Otherwise it was somnolently easy. As Tony came out with his first bundle, one of the strike picket stepped up to look at it. Thinking he wanted to see the address, which was Grantham, Tony held it out, and heard the man say to the others:

'Christ! They've got the proper knot.'

This appeared to impress the picket, and one of them went out into the street, apparently to communicate the news. Tony thought this very mysterious, until Gregory explained that the packers tied with a certain knot which they fondly imagined was a secret of their craft, only to be learned by an apprenticeship. Later, when the picket was relieved by another, he heard one of them say gloomily:

My machines won't half be in a rotten state when I get back to 'em. It makes my belly ache to hear the way they're running.'

Which remark, Tony felt, did not sound so blood-thirstily revolutionary.

As each car went slowly out of the courtyard, it was accompanied by a little knot of 'escort,' some on the running board and some trotting behind. Nominally the 'escort' was by rotation, but in practice it was anybody who happened to be there, usually the same men, immediately recognizable because they were all bareheaded. The policemen watched them with benevolent contempt-Tony went out with many of the cars, but nothing happened; Fleet Street was deserted and silent.

With one or two breaks, this routine went on till about half-past four. By that time most of the cars had got away, everybody was getting sleepy, and the police had gone, except for a sergeant and two constables at the inner entrance. A voice said:

Escort for Maidstone and Dover car.'

Tony jumped on the running board, and the car slowly passed through the now unguarded entrance. Just as it turned into the street, there was a sudden fracas on the side away from Tony, the car accelerated with a jerk which threw him staggering against the wall, and the police came rushing through the courtyard. Tony picked himself up and ran to help the others, who were

sparring wildly with a little knot of men, and as he ran something heavy sharply grazed his left cheek and gave him a terrific whack on the shoulder. He turned furiously on the man who had hit him, seized his left wrist as he attempted another blow, and swung back his own right fist to punch the man's chin. At that moment his attacker's hat fell off, and Tony saw the face of Robin Fletcher; it had the same look of frenzied hatred Tony had once seen in the face of a wounded German he had tried to help.

Still holding Robin's wrist, Tony pushed him back against the wall, as the others went in pursuit.

'Good god!' exclaimed Tony angrily. 'Why on earth are you doing this sort of thing, Robin?'

'I might ask you the same,' retorted Robin.

Before Tony could reply, he heard the gruff voice of the sergeant saying cheerily behind him:

'Got him, sir? There's three others for the lock-up.'¹

Tony whispered sharply to Robin, as he dropped his wrist:

'Don't try to run—do as I do.'

Tony's consciousness seemed to be divided into several different portions, one part deeply hurt that he should have been struck by an old friend, another agonizedly ashamed at the whole thing, another feeling the pain of the blow, and yet another functioning at top speed to save Robin from prison. He turned to the sergeant, saying:

'No, the fellow got away.'

'But I saw this man hit you, sir. Your face is bleeding.'

'It's nothing. This is Mr. Fletcher, one of the inside workers who joined the fray. We were both after the same man and collided here. Stunned for a moment. The man got away.'

'Well, I could have sworn I saw this man hit you with a sandbag or a knuckle-duster or something, sir. But, of course, if you say——'

'Yes, yes,' Tony interrupted. 'Come along, Fletcher, let's go in and get a drink. Anyone hurt, Sergeant?'

'Nothing much, sir.'

Tony whispered fiercely to Robin:

'Put your right hand in your pocket, you fool, and don't pick up your hat.'

They walked slowly into the courtyard, which was full of men excitedly discussing the raid and paying no attention to anything else. The police were busy with their prisoners. Tony drew Robin gradually towards the still unguarded side entrance.

'Go up that lane to the left,' he whispered. 'And take the first turning to the right. That'll bring you out near Ludgate Circus. Don't go to the far end of this lane—it may still be guarded and you haven't a pass. And, for god's sake, Robin, drop this violent business. Now, off with you.'

'And to hell with *you*,' said Robin vindictively and was gone.

For a few moments Tony stood staring down the empty lane, as if he expected Robin to come back and make things right and friendly again. Then he became aware that his shoulder was still hurting, the scratch in his cheek still bleeding, and that he felt rather sick. Passing quickly through the little knots of jabbering men, he made for the washroom and cleaned the blood off his face. The scratch was nothing—about half an inch on the cheekbone, but a little bruised. A glance at his shoulder showed a nasty broken bruise, which would be pretty stiff for a day or two. Lucky that the blow

missed the collar bone. The mirror showed him that he was rather pale, and his muscles were shaking slightly with the exertion and emotion of the fray. He kept bathing his face in cold water until he felt better and the sensation of nausea diminished, and then went to the board-room buffet, where he sat down and drank some coffee.

The sound of the printing machine had stopped, but he heard a car start up and move out of the courtyard—he ought really to be there. But he sat on, feeling angry and ashamed. What a fool to get himself involved in this! The old friendship between himself and Robin was far more important, far more real, than this sordid quarrel between a couple of miserable juntas. And what an equal fool was Robin, making himself important by playing the hooligan in the small hours and reporting same to the comrades in Clapham. And so once more—a plague on both their houses.

He was interrupted by the entrance of Julian, looking rather hot and very smeary with black grease.

'Hullo!' said Julian. 'You do look glum, Tony. Fed up already?'

'Yes, to some extent. How soon can we go?'

'Now, if you like. The last car's gone. Some of them are still sending off copies through the post. I've brought you one down—we did a hundred thousand. Do you mind if I have a glass of beer before we go?'

'Go ahead,' said Tony, taking the very limp sheet Julian held out to him. When he looked at it, it hardly seemed worth the trouble and effort. The news was meagre—the Prime Minister's declaration, the call for volunteers and special constables with statistics of those enrolled, descriptions of what trains had run and might run, a leading article—somebody with a title had been

divorced. Truly, an expense of spirit in a waste of time'

It was curious to find dawn lightening over the city as they walked back to Julian's chambers. In spite of the litter in the dirty streets, the world seemed clean and fresh, shapes and shadows of houses washed in pale umber against a paler sky. They passed nobody, and the dead, unlighted silent streets reminded Tony of war nights—he half expected to come on a draft of men, softly whistling on their way to entrain. But nothing disturbed the silence, and London was as still as a sepulchre.

Tony was not sorry to get to bed.

§VI

Almost immediately they fell into a routine. Julian's charlady made them an eggs-and-bacon breakfast about one, and in the afternoon Julian went off on his lawful occasions, while Tony walked out to his own flat and later dined with Margaret, except on the evenings when she was engaged. Margaret said that the strike had given a great fillip to bottle parties, from which you went home ten in a car, and was highly pleased with the witty device of a young man who had found *the* job of the moment—he sat in bar parlours and contradicted rumours. Whereupon Tony said that it made him understand Caligula—he wished all strikers and volunteers had only one backside, so that he could kick it. His shoulder was still a bit sore.

Margaret spent a good deal of time driving about with Helen in the two-seater, and announcing (like Mr. Winkle) that she was going to begin work—tomorrow. Tony gathered that meanwhile these two ladies of the

lamp were of inestimable service in soothing the fevered brows of those Behind The Scenes. Margaret did not seem to resent Tony's staying with Julian and was even amiable. A bit too amiable, Tony thought. It seemed to him that her unspoken attitude was that when it came to the point she'd always known he'd be a good boy and do the right thing. No family thunder developed from his abrupt refusal 'to assist the firm in the crisis,' apart from a gentle hint that it was a pity he did not stand by 'his own' instead of helping strangers. The calculation obviously was that they'd soon have him back in harness, in spite of a little kicking and plunging.

The routine at the newspaper office was even more banal. Each night was just like the first, except that there were no further raids. For a night or two there was a strong force of police, but these were soon drafted away to more important work. There was a cheer one night when a second printing machine came into action, and another cheer when the normal circulation was reached and passed. This would have been very satisfactory, since with the scarcity of news people eagerly bought up any newspaper available, but for the fact that the paper was running at a dead loss—it was only one page folded (four numbered pages), and the same dummy advertisements were kept standing. Tony spent one night in the packers' room, under the command of the head packer, a Scotsman who frequently remarked that his volunteers were the lousiest set of incompetent eediots ever seen—which was perhaps true. Most of the men working were ex-subalterns and very quickly fell back into the free-and-easy methods and manners of the trenches, plus the good-fellowship. Thus, a young gentleman who would have said genteelly and sub-acidly a fortnight earlier: '*Would* you mind letting me pass,

please ? ' now said with a cheery grin: ' Get out of the bloody way, you.'

The strike dragged on. That was the only essential piece of news they could publish, with the important exception that there had been very little violence. Eminent gentlemen made 'rousing speeches,' and equally eminent gentlemen made de-rousing speeches on the other side. The leader writer said they were all excessively important. Meanwhile Julian's barrister friend informed Tony that the strike was indirectly costing about four times as much per day as the war at its worst. The eminent gentlemen made more speeches.

Occasionally Tony sauntered about the streets in the afternoon. Buses began to appear, manned by amateurs, with a policeman up beside the driver. In accordance with the grand English tradition of taking nothing seriously, these vehicles usually bore facetious notices in chalk, such as: ' If you must throw bottles, throw full ones.' Undergraduates appropriately acted as conductors on the underground and varied the monotony by expert imitations of the genteel voices of radio announcers. All this was very pleasant and friendly and humorous, but perhaps hardly worth the expense of twenty millions a day. Everybody, as usual, was splendid.

Returning from a walk in the City one afternoon, Tony vaguely noticed that two policemen were on point duty at cross-streets. At one point he saw them peremptorily hold up all traffic, and looking back, beheld a sight he had never expected to witness in the streets of London. An armoured car, driven and manned by two officers, a belt ready in the Vickers gun, came slowly past, followed by loaded lorries, driven by a Guardsman with an armed sergeant beside him and an armed man on the tail. After every four or five lorries came another

armoured car. They were bringing food supplies from the docks, which hitherto had been isolated by a huge crowd of dockers standing continually round the gates and passively refusing to move. The Guards had occupied the docks by night from the river and got away this convoy, which had been made the occasion for a display of military menace. Tony watched it with distaste and noted that it was chiefly the women who cheered.

A few mornings later Tony was awakened from his sleep by the telephone bell ringing, and heard Julian answer it sleepily and then exclaim. A moment later he opened Tony's door and called out:

'Strike's over, official. Margaret's on the phone and wants to speak to you.'

Tony scrambled out of bed and went to the telephone. He heard Margaret's voice say with a ring of belligerent triumph which made him shudder, so completely did it evoke bitter memories of another earlier 'victory':

'We've won! Isn't it *splendid*?'

'Splendid,' Tony agreed ironically. 'It's only cost me twenty pounds, a hat, and my temper.'

'Oh, but Tony, you mustn't think only of *yourself*. Why, the trade unions are smashed!'

'Are they? I sincerely hope not.'

'They *are*, and everyone says it's the beginning of a new epoch.'

'Well, I'm sorry to be so enthusiastic,' Tony replied, 'but I suspect official announcement of new epochs. I've known at least two in my time, and they were both most unpleasant. However, I really am glad it's over. I believe in peace and hope for common sense.'

Over breakfast he said to Julian:

'I suppose your people won't want me any more?

Frankly, I shan't be sorry, in spite of the excellent hospitality in the way of sandwiches and beer.'

'I don't know,' Julian replied. 'Perhaps we'd better walk down and see?'

'All right, but let's come back by the Embankment; after a nightmare, I like to breathe the air and look at the sky.'

They found the office in a great state of excitement and were warned they would be needed for two or three days. Tony asked why and was told that time was needed to negotiate the terms on which the men would be taken back. Agreements had been broken, and the opportunity for revision was too good to be missed. Tony made no comment on this, but thought a good deal.

After leaving the office, they reached the Embankment by way of a side street. A few taxis were whizzing up and down, and a single tram moved slowly over Blackfriars Bridge. The otherwise empty street was littered with dirty paper and all sorts of debris, which blew about dustily in the wind. Sea gulls hawked over the filthy river water, which churned round the lines of barges moored near the opposite bank. The sky was overcast.

'Let's sit down,' said Tony, seating himself on a bench.

'Tired?'

'No. Aged though I am, I'm not as aged as that; but I feel depressed and annoyed.'

'Why? You ought to be glad it's over.'

'So I am, but I'm annoyed by this making us stay on while they jew the men down to suit themselves. Cheek, I call it. In any case, we—I—turned out to help maintain essential services in a crisis, not to fight the employers' battle for them. I'm inclined to desert.'

'Don't do that,' exclaimed Julian, vexed. 'Think how awkward it'd look for *me*. Besides, I don't think you need worry about the men. For competitive reasons, wages have been pushed fantastically high, and Gregory assures me that the men don't save their extra money or even use it in their homes—they spend it on drink and betting.'

'How does Gregory know? And, anyway, why shouldn't they spend their earned money as they like, when people who don't earn theirs would be furious if you hinted otherwise? It's a remarkable thing, Julian, that people of what I must call our class claim to do exactly as they please, and are most virtuously indignant when those they call their inferiors imitate them. Have you noticed any falling off in the consumption of cock-tails, or of betting in the Members' Enclosure?'

Julian shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, it isn't our business.'

'Isn't it? It's our business all right when they're in a mess and want help. When they've got what they want—whoop! *adios*, it's not our business any more. All right, I'll most emphatically mind my own business in future. One lesson ought to have been enough. I was a fool. As a matter of fact I knew it beforehand, and I shouldn't have done what I did if it hadn't been for . . . well, never mind that. Never no more, as prepotent William says.'

Julian said nothing and lighted a cigarette. Tony guessed he was bored by the discussion and anxious to avoid any loss of his own prestige through Tony's defection. After all, what did it matter? The boy had his own difficulties—strange that someone only seven years younger should seem such a child. And then he'd gone into the thing solely for Julian's sake, from a personal

motive, and therefore had no right to take up a disinterested attitude.

¹ 'Don't worry,' he said, 'I'll see it through.' Then he added hesitatingly: 'I've my own reasons for being annoyed too. When I was away—by myself—I reached a state of mind which satisfied me—after a good many years of worry and disharmony. I felt and was self-contained, able to stand alone. This strike has reminded me unpleasantly how utterly helpless one is—how at the mercy of the social machine. Suppose this strike had taken a nasty turn—we might all have gone down the sink together. Do you know, I think if there'd been one forceful man with an ideal and a plan, it might have turned into a revolution? We've been saved, if we have been saved, by our mediocrity.'¹

'Oh, I don't know about that,' Julian answered huffily. 'We don't do things in that way in England. We're really the most incomprehensibly marvellous people.'

'Lay not that flattering unction to your patriotic soul. We're mediocre and afraid. But no matter. I think I should like to go away for a time, perhaps for a long time,' he added, looking a little wistfully at the dun sky.

'Well, why don't you? Have you anything to keep you here?'

'Not really. But there are material things to settle—there always are. And the strike provides your worthy uncle and his compeers with a magnificent excuse for hanging onto my little dib of money. And then I can't desert Margaret.'

'I don't see why not,' said Julian brutally. 'As far as I can see, you're virtually living apart now. You see as little of each other as possible, and when you are together, you get on each other's nerves.'

'I've often vowed to myself that I'd never say to anyone, "If you were my age, my boy . . ." and I won't

say it now. What I will say is that if you were in my position you'd understand all the difficulties and hesitations. One can't break associations without pain, even when they seem to be breaking themselves. Oddly enough, marriage is a bond.'

'You must please yourself,' said Julian.

'No! Try to find out what seems to be the right thing. But Julian, may I ask something of you?'

'What?'

'That we'll remain friends, whatever happens?'

'Of course,' said Julian carelessly. 'Everybody gets divorced nowadays. Why should it make any difference?'

Tony said nothing, for he felt there was simply nothing more to be said. Julian's attitude was so indifferent that it amounted to hostility and made Tony's little gesture in the strike look foolish and melodramatic. A strange sensation—to feel entirely friendless; but appropriate to the Embankment.

Julian stood up, saying:

'Well, I must get off now. I'll see you at the office at nine, then?'

'Yes.'

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Julian, good-bye.'

Tony lit a cigarette and smoked it composedly. The dirty paper and debris danced about occasionally in the gusts of wind, and the squealing of the gulls seemed peculiarly melancholy. After a time he got up and walked about the streets for a long time, noticing that the volunteer-driver movement was turning into a licensed rag, with girls in place of policemen.

That night Tony arrived at the newspaper office late and in a gloomy mood. Over dinner Margaret had re-

turned to the tactics of silently exuding disapproval. Apparently his reception of the news that morning had aroused a suspicion in her that he was not after all going to be a good boy and do the right thing. In fact she had hinted as much and had accused him of frivolity and irresponsibility. For this sort of thing he was prepared, but not so prepared to combat or assimilate reflections, which had certainly come to him before, but now arrived with renewed force. Apart from his personal loneliness, which he was ready to accept either as his own fault or as the common fate, he felt that it was becoming more and more impossible for any moderately intelligent or sensitive person to share with conviction in collective life. The requirement of governments, corporations, and leaders of society might be summed up crudely but accurately in the vulgar phrase—It's your money we want. At the same time it was also becoming more and more difficult to prevent other people from interfering with your life on some more or less crass pretext, and thus making it impossible; which perhaps explained why so many people of all sorts of nations wanted to live out of their own country. The good citizen had become a sumpter-mule to carry the burden of other people's ambitious designs and failures.

Unfortunately there was nothing to be done about it. The multitudes of people, bred from the stupid optimism and narrow-minded scientific dogmatism of the last century, were too many to be civilized, and therefore would probably retrograde further into a washed and mediocre barbarism. Everywhere you went there were too many people, treading on one another's toes and breathing down one another's necks. They had evolved an economic system which was plainly collapsing, while, mad-deningly, you were entirely dependent on it. The only

stable economic units were the self-supporting monastic communities, and in the event of a collapse they would immediately be raided by mobs who were no longer restrained by superstitious terrors. Between the mobs and the millionaires, what a chaos! And there was no modern equivalent of an interdict to frighten the millionaires into decency. . . .

There was a great rush of volunteers at the newspaper office directly the strike was called off, and they provided some amusement. Many of them immediately attached themselves to the mysterious *etats-majors* which had unaccountably been formed in the interior of the building, chiefly, it seemed, for the purpose of hogging the limited amount of transport available for getting home comfortably. Others ran about and got in the way of those at work. There was a profusion of cars for distributing copies of the paper, so that an incredible number were printed to convey the glad news far and wide, though it was long ago known to everybody in England over the age of three; The men who ran in and out with packages on their shoulders whispered that Distinguished People were among the volunteers.

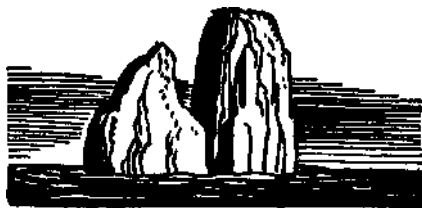
One of the cars which chuffed and panted and obstructed the courtyard was alleged to belong to a marchioness, who had undertaken to deliver. Tony happened to be one of those who loaded the car up and then stepped back to watch it depart. A small group of men stood by the front of the car, beaming with pleasure at the lady's conversation, while a sandy-haired ex-subaltern who believed in doing the job properly was verifying the stability of the piled-up packages. Without looking round, the lady smiled and bowed to her little court and started her car. An agonized yell from the ex-gentleman echoed fearfully through the court:

' Hell! That bitch has run over my bloody foot!'

After verifying that the man was not seriously hurt, Tony went in, found his hat, and left. So far as he was concerned that ex-subaltern had uttered the precise epitaph on the Great General Strike.

PART IV

1927



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1927

ON THE way to the bathroom Tony paused to look through the window at his own small section of London in February. A ragged sky hung about three yards above dripping roofs, and the texture of the air was like that which Dante's angel in hell moved wearily from his face like dirty veils. With consummate skill a bus driver corrected a fearful skid and tobogganed his heavy cargo to safety. Absently Tony murmured to himself:

'Give peace in our time, O Lord, because there is none other that fighteth for Thee, but only we, O Lord—and we're Fred Karno's army.'

Excellent defeat, how I love thee! Is there any battle but a lost battle, any cause but a lost cause, any life but the potsherds at Selinunte? Cold the wind, but I, dithering with fever in the chilly sunlight, saw them pass, sharp-bearded men furrowing land and sea. I, shaking with fever, beheld, and refused a fortune in the three per cent. Give me wild celery, and you plant cabbages in Bucks. . • .

In another room the good ship Margaret was preparing for the day's voyage by hauling tight the silk stockings, bracing the camiknickers, slinging the *soutiens-gorge*, and lipsticking the bowsprit. . . .

Tony left the window and proceeded to the bathroom. He hated shaving, but enjoyed the bath—the bath, last solitude of a crowded Europe. All poets now compose in their baths—only time they have to think.

Assume *one* millimetre of beard shaved daily for fifty years, very nearly fifty yards in a lifetime; Charlemagne, *barbe fleurie*, was nothing to it. Shave, bath, teeth, hair, nails—what sort of a life-symphony is this? They say Queen Elizabeth got tired of living when she was three-score, and never washed again. Certainly Michelangelo warned his nephew that baths are very dangerous; he was a dirty old Christian.

Tomorrow is never a new day, we have always mortgaged it. Or it has been mortgaged for us—troops will parade in fighting order at three A. M. Today—and Tony slipped under the warm water with his knees bent; why are not all baths six feet long?—today I have mortgaged my lunch to Harold and Walter. I don't want to see Harold and Walter. I know exactly what they will say, they have said it so many times before. They will exhort me to live a man's life and not fool about any longer; and they will hint at the obvious fact that Margaret and I are now only joined together in holy appearances. I shall endeavour to pull their legs and shall certainly give away nothing about Margaret. Why should I? We spend nearly six months of the year together. Why don't I dodge this appointment? Because I know that in a fortnight I'm going to Tunis with Waterton and don't care how I waste the days of my exile here.

He heard the muffled slam of the front door. Now, where was she going so early, or perhaps it wasn't so early? She might at least have said *au revoir* through the keyhole.

Tony got out of his bath and went back to dress in the room which served him as bedroom and study. His bathroom meditation was over for the day. Several newly opened letters lay on the table, from which he picked one, which ran:

DEAR TONY:

I wonder if you remember me, Evelyn? I used to see you long, long ago, when you were only a boy at Vine House, so it wouldn't be surprising if you had forgotten me.

Your mother's death was a great grief to me. She was a sweet woman, and showed me great kindness.

In two or three days I'm going back to India. My husband is in the Indian Civil Service, and I've been in England to see the boys—two such wonderful boys, Tony!—safely settled at school, and do some shopping.

I've often wondered what happened to you, and now I hear you're married! I suppose you must be grown up, but I always think of you as that queer intense boy I used to know. And I made up my mind I'd try to see you before I left. I've only just found your address—never thought of looking for it in the telephone book, of course. But will you and your wife come and dine with me tomorrow night at seven-thirty? I should love it if you would. Please let me know. How queer to see you again!

Yours very sincerely,

EVELYN.

P. S.—I forgot to say I'm at the Residency Hotel.'

The letter was on a sheet torn from an ordinary writing block and undated. Rather a jumbled, incoherent sort of note; and quite colourless. She'd forgotten to give her address until the last moment and had omitted

her surname. How on earth was he to find her? And what did she mean by 'tomorrow'? The tomorrow of the day she wrote, or the tomorrow of the day on which he received the letter? Obviously, not a methodical or careful woman.

He stood holding the letter and wondering how to get in touch with her. Forgotten Evelyn! His mind might have forgotten her, but not his blood. Standing there in the damp February air, he saw the golden light coming through the yellow blinds in the corridor of the hushed house, and his body remembered the ecstasy of her touch. Eighteen years ago, and his blood still was warm with the memory of her. And now she was a mother with growing sons, and, good heavens, forty! Would it be wise to see her, and perhaps lose something exquisite, something that had always gone on living in his blood and had helped to keep a sweetness in life? What had the man and woman they now were to do with that girl and boy?

What silly curiosity to want to see him again. If that revelation of touch had meant anything to her, as to him it had been a golden ecstasy, surely, surely it was infinitely wise to let the memory remain like a wistful fragrance, and not to risk losing it for ever? He felt the blood grow hot in his face as the thought sprang up that perhaps her body was still subtly attracted by his memory, that she might even have imagined—consciously or dimly—that they might consummate in maturity the beauty they had discovered in adolescence. He tried to cast the idea violently away—how absurd, how fatuous, how exactly like the vanity of the strutting male he was always despising. That would spoil everything. Much better not reply at all; she'd given him the excellent excuse of not signing her surname.

He found that he was looking at the clock and calcu-

lating that he had time to go to the Residency Hotel before he met Walter and Harold for lunch. After all, why not? She was the only living relative for whom he had any warm feelings, and the idea that they might . . . Ridiculous and absurd. Of course, she didn't intend any such thing. Better not to take Margaret, though. With that genius for suspicion of hers, she'd immediately 'suspect things' and probably be rude to Evelyn. No, see her alone if at all, have a quiet dinner together, and then say good-bye. Probably they would never meet again.

Tony hurried along the greasy streets to the nearest underground, took a ticket and entered the magnificent lift—chased iron grills by Donatello di Middlesborough, pictures by masters of the Illustrated Ads school, parquet flooring by the Nomoreart Company. Just before he got to the lift somebody pushed a circular into his hand, which he unconsciously took and held while looking at the advertisements on the sinking walls. Strange that after so many years of exhortation he had never given her Bovril, never built bonny babes, never joined the Abbey Wood Building Society, and always furnished on the non-Drage plan.

The station platform made him think of the empty counter of a tiled express dairy, as you see it through the window after hours or on Sunday. While he was hunting in his memory for the resemblance, which had in it something of a kindred ennui, a similar emptiness without repose, a train rumbled out of the tunnel and stopped with a jerk. 'Pooofiist!' it said. And several voices chanted: 'Len-kester Ghete. Len-kester Ghete.' Tony made his way into a smoking carriage, and then the chant altered to an appealing anthem: 'Pahss daoun centre of the ca's, please.' So genteel. He dropped

into a seat and began to look over the reading matter which had been so generously pressed upon him at ground level. It was a coloured folder, entitled 'Mediterranean Cruises,' with pictures of the pyramids as they never were, Athens as it ought not to be allowed to be, and Venice as it couldn't be, all the romance of the gorgeous whatyoumaycallit.

Flutterings to escape, but why and where? Industrial man, parasite or producer, yearns like an exiled Swiss. The tune of London's traffic is a *ranz des vaches* from a land which does not exist. Restless in the cities and out of them—even the peasants flock to America. Oh to be something different, oh to be somewhere else, *fuirf la-bas fuir*. Frankenstein me no Frankensteins; they love their machines. The machine does not think, the machine does not feel, the machine has no complications, no worry about the future. It makes things. It makes sardine tins to the moon, steel girders to Jupiter, artificial silk hose to Aldebaran. We are getting richer, you are getting richer, they are getting richer. The universe is expanding more quickly than light. Miracles, miracles! Everything out of tins, fish out of tins, meat out of tins, asparagus out of tins, music out of tins, magic pictures out of tin lanterns, speed out of tin lizzies.

Yet, oh, industrial man yearns; yet, ah, how he yearns! Flutterings to escape from the miracles of tinned living. Come to Australia—come to South Africa—come to China—come to Cannes—no, come here—no, come here—no, come here! (It's your money we want.)

Bournemouth Station poster: Visit romantic Assisi. Church of St. Francis. E. N. I. T.

Assisi Station poster: *Visitate VInghilterra. Spiaggia di Bournemouth.* S. R.

Oh, Assisi!

Ah, Bournemouth!

All culture in a tour.

It's your money we want. . . .

The Residency Hotel stood in a quiet side street near St. James's. It had a Georgian portal, very clean windows, and its shining brass had been worn away by much polishing. A large fire burned in the hall. Obviously the sort of old-fashioned place where sensible people came to be comfortable. Tony went up to a headwaiter sort of man who looked like a family butler, and said:

'You have a lady staying here, a cousin of mine from India. Mrs. Evelyn——'

'Mrs. Morshead?' said the man.

Tony remembered the surname as soon as he heard it.

'Yes. Is she in?'

'I think so, sir. Would you wish me to announce you?'

'No. Will you say that a messenger is here from her cousin, Mr. Clarendon, who sends his compliments and will be very glad to dine with her tonight. Mrs. Clarendon regrets that she will not be able to come.'

'Very good, sir.'

The man went off, and Tony had leisure to study an enormous framed steel engraving of the last century, representing The Coming Of Age Of The Young Squire, all in Jacobean costume, with a roasted ox, old English sports, and a speech from the Young Squire in full blast. The sort of thing people kidded themselves they were supporting when they voted for Dizzy. Ineradicable love of bunk.

'Mrs. Morshead's compliments,' said the man's voice, 'and she will expect Mr. Clarendon at seven-thirty.'

'Right,' said Tony, 'thank you.' And took his de-

parture, resisting the Dickensian ambience sufficiently not to ask for sixpennorth of brandy and water luke.

In accordance with Tony's expectations, the luncheon with Harold and Walter was not much of a success and contributed nothing to the sum of human happiness. Directly he arrived and found them seated at a table, waiting with the air of injured superiority of the strictly punctual, Tony felt instinctively that something portentous was in the air. There was. He suspected that this luncheon was a put-up affair, that these two had held an inquest on him with Margaret and Helen, and that he was about to be given valuable advice and 'helped.' Tony decided that he must avoid a row and therefore not pull their legs too much. He must listen to the wisdom of the owl and the seal.

Walter opened the attack by saying, with an air of assumed negligence which gave the game away at once:

'By the way, is it true, Tony, that you've resigned from your firm in the City?'

'Haven't been near them since last April,' said Tony cheerfully, 'and I've signed the pledge never to enter the office again.'

'May one ask why?'

'It wasn't good enough for him,' Harold interrupted, sneering.

Walter frowned at him to be quiet, and Tony said:

'Well, perhaps there's something in that, Harold. Anyway, I had my own reasons.'

Tony watched with amusement their different methods of attack. Harold, who already ate business, talked business, lived business, and was business, could hardly conceal his annoyance and seemed to take Tony's defection as a personal slight. He was all for the rough stuff and putting on the screw—can't have people going Bol-

shie like this. Walter, on the other hand, was more intelligent, and from his own particular perch looked down with some sympathy on anybody who disliked business methods; in fact, if only Tony had confessed a yearning to enter the civil service, Walter would have been on his side. In any case, he so much enjoyed bringing into play his famous 'behind-the-scenes' diplomacy that he could not share Harold's acrimony.

'My dear Tony,' he began in the easy tones and with the graceful wave of the hand which had already influenced the deportment of Second Division clerks, 'you know we are old friends of yours and still older friends of your wife. You may not give us credit for it, but we're genuinely fond of you, and, as far as friends can, we want to do our best for you and we want to see you prosperous and happy.'

Hell! What a Chadband, thought Tony.

'This being so,—*quae cum ita sint*, a Ciceronian construction—we've naturally been—shall I say?—a little alarmed, even a little hurt, to learn from outside that you've taken what seems to us a very reckless and thoughtless course, without consulting any of us. Moreover, when something like this happens, and a man's friends are unable to defend him because he has not confided in them, nasty things are said and go uncontradicted.'

'My good Walter,' Tony interrupted, flushing slightly, 'can you suppose that I've lived a number of years in London without knowing, and despising, "what people say"? I know perfectly well there's nothing too fantastic for them to say and believe. As, for example, that in six months I shall be in a lunatic asylum, or that I was kicked out of the firm for stealing the petty cash, or that I compelled my wife to take part in fearful orgies which are about to cause a scandal. I know them all,

down to the hint sodomitical: " Yes, he's got to live abroad—you know why." Pooh. Do you suppose I care tuppence about such imbeciles?"

Walter looked a little disconcerted, and Harold broke in:

' You can't get out of it by that sort of parody of reality, Tony. I grant you it's clever, but it won't do. And you can't get away from the fact that public opinion condemns you.'

' Public opinion!' exclaimed Tony, laughing. ' Some public. Why, I don't think I'm known to two hundred people all told.'

' They're the people you have to consider,' said Walter ingratiatingly. ' After all, my dear fellow, your reputation is in their hands.'

' Farewell reputation,' said Tony, taking a draught of beer. ' I warn you I shall survive this disgrace.'

' That won't do,' said Harold angrily. ' You're evading the issue, and playing the fool, as you always do. We've a right to demand from you a sensible explanation and a definite statement, if not for your sake, then for your wife's.'

¹ Ha, ha!' said Tony gleefully. ' So you *have* been gossiping about me with Margaret? '

Walter hushed Harold down with the waving hand and began again:

' My dear Tony . . . '

He thinks I'm a public meeting, thought Tony, like Gladstone and the old Queen.

' My dear Tony, you're taking this in quite the wrong way and giving us both considerable pain. Nobody appreciates humour more than I do, but this is not a proper place for it. Do try to be serious.'

' Serious I' exclaimed Tony. ' I'm dead serious. It's you who're frivolous.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'I mean that I know perfectly well what I'm doing and why, and you're interfering in what you don't understand.'

'I don't see why you should call common sense interference,' Harold muttered gruffly.

'Well, I do, in this case,' Tony replied bluntly.

Harold was about to retort contemptuously, but Walter intervened with a diplomatic *detente* which amused Tony immensely.

'No, no,' he said hastily, 'don't let's get away from the point. Harold, you'll join me in some Stilton? And you too, Tony? Yes. And a glass of port to settle it? Of course. Waiter! Three Stiltons and three glasses of port. Dow's oh-eight, mind. Do let us keep this discussion friendly. We all have the best intentions, and I'm sure we shall be able to reach a satisfactory formula. Tony, will you allow me to ask you a few questions, as one old friend to another?'

Certainly,' said Tony, privately determined to reveal himself to his 'old friend' as little as possible.

'Are we to understand that you have definitely and irrevocably abandoned your career?'

'Yes—if you call that sort of thing a career.'

'Ah,' Walter brightened up a bit, while Harold glowered at this implied insult to god. 'And have you any plans for the future?'

'Oh, yes, I'm going to Tunis in about a fortnight.'

'I didn't mean that. I mean is there any serious work you'd like to take up? I might be able to help, perhaps? There are all sorts of official and semi-official activities where an intelligent man——'

'Thank you,' Tony interrupted, 'I shall be quite content to go on as I am, without official sanction.'

'Then, are we really to understand that you intend to

spend the rest of your life idling about from one holiday resort to another, and coming to London when you feel you can't neglect your wife any longer? '

You can understand what you like, or rather what you can,' said Tony annoyed, 'but please keep Margaret out of it. That's my affair.'

I beg your pardon,' said Walter hastily, 'I didn't mean to be offensive. Excuse me. But really, my dear fellow, if you'll forgive me for saying so, your conduct is quite incomprehensible and very foolish.'

I can easily forgive you for saying that, my dear Walter, because I pay no attention to it.'

Walter looked ruffled by this blunt snub, and Harold, who had obviously been restraining himself with difficulty, came in:

Look here, Tony, I know it's bad manners to discuss a fellow's wife and all that, but we can't leave Margaret out of this. Do you really mean to assert that you think you're not doing her a wrong? '

Of course I'm not doing her a wrong.'

But it means a considerable reduction of *income*,' Harold stressed the word 'income,' as if it were something mysterious and holy.

If Margaret married me as a financial proposition, she made a mistake,' said Tony.

But don't you think she has a right to insist that you should keep up the standard of living to which she's accustomed?'

Certainly not. What pseudo-feminist twaddle is this, Harold? If it comes to the point, I have a right to insist that she accept my standard of living, which, I fear, is somewhat too plain to please her. But the situation doesn't arise—she has a very good income of her own.'

Umph,' said Harold, losing his temper, 'all I can say is that you're behaving like a cad.'

'That's all I should expect you to say,' Tony replied coolly. 'I've seldom known a man so deficient in repartee, and so dependent on catch phrases. Have you any other questions, Walter?'

It's useless to proceed,' said Walter stiffly, 'since you refuse to be serious. But I must give you a warning, and I hope you'll think it over carefully. Every man has a duty to the state to perform, and after a year or two of idleness you'll find you'll be bored and discontented and wish yourself back in active life—and then it will be impossible to get back, because you're estranging all your friends.'

But, forgive me,' said Tony cheerfully, 'I've already performed prodigies of service to the state in the little war and the great strike. If there weren't so many of us, we'd all be entitled to a statue in the Comitium and as much good cornland as two strong oxen can plough from morn to night. As to being discontented and bored, allow me to point out that I certainly was both when engaged in what you call an active life and what I should call something far less complimentary. But for the fact that Margaret's nature makes it impossible for her to share my real life, I should now be perfectly happy. If I live my life as I want, I *know* I shan't be bored or discontented. If I find I become so, I promise you I'll come to you and tell you so frankly; what's more, I give you leave to call me horse and spit in my face. Any more questions?'

'No!' said Walter, trying to be crushing. 'Waiter! Our bills, please.'

Bills? thought Tony, I should have said bill. These chaps take some living up to.

No,' said Walter reflectively, in the tones of one speaking more in sorrow than in anger, 'I shall ask you

no more questions. I disapprove entirely of what you're doing, Tony, and I disapprove because it shows an entire lack of discipline. I can see you have some sentimental whim about a life of freedom. But that is merely a piece of disorderly emotion, and you will find in the long run that formalized emotion is ever so much better than the disorderly kind. Whatever you may feel yourself, the forms of life and of society have to be kept up. Why can't you have faith in a social order, submit to it and support it? '

'Ah,' said Tony, gathering up his change and carelessly leaving a tip whose extravagance caused Harold to frown, 'that sounds like a declaration of faith, Walter. What I Believe, by Hall Feign. It's not my faith, however. Like Mr. Peggotty, I'm going out in the wide world fer to seek my Em'ly. And my Em'ly is the daily and hourly sense of living as a human being, and not as a monkey wrench. And so farewell.'

A year earlier, or even a few months earlier, Tony might have been disturbed by this meeting with Harold and Walter and by the things they said. He would have worried over it afterwards, doubting himself, asking himself whether they were not right after all. Now, within ten minutes he had dismissed them and their saws from his thoughts for ever. No doubt they were wise in the wisdom of their world, but not his world. What they said and felt touched him only superficially, leaving the essential core utterly untouched and unmoved. It gave him a sense of exultation, as if he had discovered that he was invulnerable, while it mattered nothing that they thought him a fool. If it was presumptuous to as-

pire to be a fool for god's sake, one might at least dare to be a fool for life's sake.

During the rest of the day he thought much about Evelyn in a mood of detached tenderness. Looking back, possibly with something of the common tendency to idealize the persons and experiences known in youth, he imagined that she had possessed a mysteriously lovely quality which she had been forced to dissimulate from the world. Through her touch she had been able to communicate—how hard to find words!—an intense physical life which was so much finer than ordinary life it had to be called 'godlike.' At her touch the small flame of his life had grown brilliant and clear, as a flame does when transferred from ordinary air to oxygen. And it was that experience which, among others, had helped to set for him a standard of what he desired from life. He wondered if this quality in Evelyn had developed in maturity or whether it had been stamped out, as society took care to try to stamp it out from all the young. With a certain grimness he thought of the obstinate losing battle he had been forced to wage for years, so that the best of his life had been wasted just to get back to where he had been at twenty. And even then, what wounds!

The more he thought of Evelyn, the more deeply he was convinced that it would be utterly wrong, a profanation, to attempt any renewal of their intimacy at Vine House. Incomplete in a sense, it had been completed as an experience. Nothing had been left unfulfilled, there was no feeling of having been thwarted and bereft, as there had been . . . He regretted very much now that he had consented to see Evelyn, and felt half inclined to telephone the hotel and say he couldn't come. But that would be too rude. He consoled himself by imagining

that they would talk quietly together over dinner, understanding each other without the need for any direct reference, and that she would perceive how something of her quality had always gone on living in him. If she had kept any of that quality she would see that a respectful tenderness was much more precious than any crude attempt at love-making, which would necessarily be a shameful failure. And if not . . .

On arriving at the hotel, Tony was surprised to hear the pseudo-butler say 'Suite Three,' as he was handed over to a waiter. A suite sounded ominously like Anglo-Indian pretentiousness. He was ushered into a room where a fire was burning in a large ugly grate. There were heavy rep curtains and Edwardian wallpaper, and near the centre of the room was a table neatly laid for dinner for two. The waiter said:

'Mrs. Morshead will be in immediately, sir,' and. departed.

Tony walked over towards the fire, where a large arm-chair stood beside another table, a very poor imitation of the magnificent Florentine tables inland with patterns of coloured stones. Needlework and two or three novels had been dumped on it, but Tony's attention was immediately attracted by three framed photographs, *one* of a middle-aged man in white tropical clothes holding a pith helmet, and the others of two boys in Eton collars and school caps. The elder was ordinary, but Tony thought he saw something of Evelyn's grace in the rather wistful expression of the younger boy. He picked up the photograph to look at it more closely—yes, there was a something which reminded him of the slender girl he had known—and became so much absorbed that he did not hear the door open. He started, when a clear, rather commanding soprano voice said:

'So you're looking at my treasures, are you?'

Tony put the frame down hastily and went to meet her, saying:

'I beg your pardon, Evelyn. How are you?'

They shook hands, and Evelyn scrutinized him with an R.S.M. closeness which made him uncomfortable.

'So you're Tony,' she said. 'You've grown and filled out, but I should have recognized you anywhere. Well, well.'

There was a tang in that 'well, well' which suggested that he had already been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Tony found himself embarrassed and almost dumb; perhaps because the real Evelyn before him was so completely different from the Evelyn he had known or any Evelyn he had imagined. In his most pessimistic moments he had never thought of her as this personification of the Mem-Sahib on leave, complete with full evening dress which was not quite fashionable, and jewels which were just a little wrong. He saw he had committed a *gaffe* by not coming in evening dress, and found small comfort in the thought that his lounge suit was a relic of his Savile Row days. He decided not to offer the apology which was evidently expected, and said:

'I couldn't help looking at the photographs of your sons. It seemed to me that the younger one had something in his face of you as I used to know you.'

'They're such darling treasures I' said Evelyn, ignoring his remark about the likeness, and speaking in that tone of maternal patronizing possessiveness Tony always found offensive. 'I wish you had seen them before they went back to school. Jim's a *real* sportsman, works when he works, and plays when he plays. He'll get his school colours this term. Bob, the younger one, is a bit of a worry to us. Always dreaming about the place, and taking no interest in the real things a boy should like.'

We both felt he needed discipline and healthy companionship to wake him up. Of course he's young to be away, but he's only in the Junior School. I had to keep a stiff upper lip when I parted from him, I assure you. I wasn't going to have him cry and disgrace himself and me on his first day. Jim, of course, is different, never seems to mind, though he always writes punctually once a week. But I hope they'll knock the nonsense out of Bob. By the way, have you children of your own, Tony?'

'No,' said Tony, putting down Bob's photograph with a mute Alas, poor Bob!

'Ah, then you won't be interested.'

On the contrary, I'm very much interested. I'd give a lot to know what children of that age are thinking about us and the world we're leaving them.'

'I'm sure they never bother their heads about such absurd ideas,' said Evelyn, laughing, and pressing the bell. 'What cocktail will you have? Martini? Side-car?'

'I'd rather not have any, thanks.'

Oh, but you must! I'm going to have a side-car. If you don't like cocktails, have a sherry.'

'Very well, I will, thank you.'

When Evelyn had given the order to the waiter, Tony said:

'Margaret, my wife, asks me to say how much she regrets not being able to come. It was very short notice, you know, and she had an appointment she couldn't break.'

I'm sorry too. I wanted to see what sort of a woman would pick you up, Tony. I'd asked a man to dinner to complete the four, but he'll come in afterwards. Captain Martlett. You know Captain Martlett of the Indian Army, of course?'

'No, I'm afraid I don't,' Tony answered, never having heard a whisper of Captain Martlett's fame until that moment.

'Oh, you'll like him very much. He did splendid work on the northwest frontier. Of course there's not so much work for mountain gunners now—they're using the air force more and more to bring the heathen to reason.'

A little dazed, Tony sat down sadly to dinner in the ruins of a dream. Anglo-India had done its work to perfection, and there remained no indication, no memory whatsoever of the Evelyn he had known. He thought of her girl body, fresh and sensitive like a dawn opening to a fresh, lovely world, and mourned to think what man has made of woman. Almost everything this Evelyn said jarred on him as false, as coming from a factitious social personality so long and carefully played up to that it had ended by destroying the real personality. Only the substitute personality now existed. Her mind, her feelings, her appearance even were those of a provinciality which is so entirely unconscious it believes itself to be the very reverse. It did not have the genuine quality of a rooted provincialism, which may be authentic and profound, but merely the flavour of the metropolis gone stale.

He wondered desperately how he should keep up a conversation during the meal, but need not have troubled. Evelyn had become one of those women who pride themselves on being good hostesses, which means that they do nine tenths of the talking and are content to receive only polite remarks of acquiescence, however insincere. She talked of India and of England, blaming the policy of the government freely; the sports and pastimes of the British Isles; the fluctuations of prices on the Stock Ex-

change; the trade policy of the empire; the advantages and disadvantages of different makes of motorcars; and the absolute necessity of having a good time before one got too old. As long as she held to these topics, his course was comparatively easy, since experience of her prototypes had showed him what to expect. Difficulties began when she switched over to the arts. He was forced to confess that he had not seen any of the plays she mentioned, that he seldom went to night clubs, that he never played bridge, that he belonged to no clubs, did not listen-in, and had never heard of the novelists she seemed to admire.

'Well, you are an old stick,' she said, 'but I suppose you're one of the hard workers who've no time for proper recreation. Jim—my husband—is a bit like that. I'm always having to drag him out and make him enjoy himself a bit instead of mugging over his work. Still, I don't blame you, Tony. A man's got to make himself a position when he's young, hasn't he?'

Undoubtedly,' said Tony.

And then came the question he'd been dreading to hear:

'By the way, what is your profession?'

Tony had made up his mind that he was not going to quarrel with Evelyn even in this strange and repellent metamorphosis. He would not let this painfully commonplace woman kill his beautiful memory of her dead self, even though it meant playing a humiliating part and being written down as an old stick. He therefore told her quietly that he had been one of the directors of a company and had resigned.

'Resigned!' she exclaimed. 'Whatever for? Oh, I suppose you had your eye on something better?'

Precisely,' he answered, seeing how an ambiguity would get him out of a horrible discussion.

' But isn't it a bit risky? Are you sure you've got something better? '

' Absolutely certain. I've no doubt whatever.'

Tony enjoyed this innocent piece of deception, but it was all the enjoyment he got; and as the conversation continued, he found himself praying, like Wellington, for Martlett or night. He tried to make her talk about her children, feeling that at least she would be genuine there, but she glided away and demanded a history of his life. This was a further difficulty, but he told as little as he could in as many words as possible; and since Evelyn abounded in commentaries, he even contrived to work up a little of the warmth which had been so lacking.

A clock on the mantelpiece tinkled nine. Evelyn rose and said:

' There's port, or whisky and soda if you prefer, on the side table. Captain Martlett will be here in a moment. Will you entertain him until I come back? '

Tony failed for a moment to understand that a ceremony, which even then was dropping out, had been introduced into a simple meeting of cousins, but managed to precipitate himself forward in time to open the door for her. She swept through with a smile that was meant to be gracious. When the door had closed, Tony drew a deep breath, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and drank a glass of soda water. A waiter, evidently tutored, appeared and offered to show him the lavatory, and, as he declined, another waiter announced Captain Martlett. In a few minutes he and Tony made acquaintance and were soon absorbed in talk. Martlett's interest was in exploring, or, since there is not much of the world left to explore, in visiting very remote and scarcely known places. Tony found him extremely well-informed and intelligent, and was amazed to discover how often they genuinely agreed in their ideas. He was

listening with deep attention to an account of an expedition when Evelyn returned, and naturally Martlett had to interrupt what he was saying.

After a few minutes Tony tried to bring the talk back to what he felt was a safe subject, which had the additional merit of interesting him, but Martlett soon showed that he had no intention of continuing it. In Evelyn's presence he seemed to take on another and much more commonplace personality. Tony listened with a certain amount of envy to the glib politeness with which Martlett produced a stream of small talk, so insignificant that Tony could not remember one sentence of it. Evelyn seemed not only to expect it but to enjoy it. Almost the only genuine thing Martlett said was something appreciative about 'Jim,' Evelyn's husband, which led Tony to suppose that Martlett and Jim were warm friends, even though Jim was much older. Under cover of Martlett's brisk fire, Tony puzzled over the problem of why men apparently so decent and intelligent trained their wives to be what Evelyn had become. Their fault or the women's?

Just before ten, Tony rose to go, pleading that he had promised to meet Margaret and take her home. As if Margaret needed taking home! But it seemed the sort of excuse which would go down and was accepted. Martlett's presence had been in every way a godsend, and the atmosphere during the past hour had become positively cordial. Tony hoped that the coolness during the earlier part of the evening could be passed off as natural embarrassment at meeting after so many years. He dropped a hint to this effect and was glad to find it well received. Evelyn walked downstairs with them, and, just as they were leaving, said to Tony:

'Is there any chance of seeing you and Margaret before I leave? I should so much like to meet her.'

'I should like it above everything,' said Tony with social hypocrisy, 'but I'm afraid it's impossible. I'm going to Tunis immediately.'

'To Tunis! Whatever for? On business?'

'Yes, on the real business this time.'

'I'm afraid you won't get any golf there.'

Tony could not resist one tiny Parthian shaft in answer :

'Oh, I don't know, I'm told there are prodigious bunkers in the Sahara. Good-bye.'

In Piccadilly, Tony said good-bye to Martlett, regretting that the excuses he had been forced to make to Evelyn prevented his going along to hear the rest of the expedition. Now for ever it would remain an unfinished fragment for him, simply because one had to tell people silly lies instead of saying frankly, 'I'm going now,' and 'No, I shan't be able to see you again before you leave.' The annoying thing was that they knew perfectly well the lies meant what you hadn't the courage to say. There was the enormous advantage of the cafe over the private house; you weren't a guest, you paid for your seat and drink, and left when you wanted. Which was the true reason and excuse for the perpetual parties of the young—why on earth should they be the slaves of the family circle and the drawing-room hostess?

The streets were still muddy from the morning rain, but Tony decided he would walk home. He had to digest the metamorphosis of Evelyn before he could sleep. There was really nothing to be done about it. He merely had to grow accustomed to the fact that the Evelyn of his memory had now no other existence. Hitherto, when he had thought of her, he had imagined his Evelyn as still living somewhere in the world; and

now he must accept the fact that she was as much dead for him as if he had seen her buried.

A cold northwester was driving the clouds from the sky, and in the darker streets Tony caught the occasional glimpse of a chilly star. With a certain melancholy he reflected that everybody he had known and loved in pre-war years was either dead, or estranged from him, or had somehow drifted out of his life. His own fault? Most likely, but none the less true and regrettable. It was indeed time for a renewal of himself, a re-creation of vital impulse.

§ m

The idea of visiting the Tunis oases had come from Waterton. He had spent part of the war in Egypt and Palestine, and ever since had been hankering to get back. He could not afford either Palestine or Egypt, with their regularly established tourist rookeries, and detested the very idea of a conducted tour; but had ferreted out all sorts of information about Tunis, and had discovered the valuable and interesting fact that in many places there existed a very expensive (advertised) hotel for Americans and English, and a cheap (unadvertised) one for the French. With this information and the accurate French timetables, Waterton worked out a three-weeks' budget, wisely adding twenty-five per cent, for incidentals and unexpecteds. Since the French exchange was then favourable to the pound, it was remarkably cheap. The only difficulty was that cars would be needed for two or three of the most interesting places, and these Tony agreed to stand, provided that otherwise they kept rigidly to economy.

The date of their departure was easily settled. During that winter there was given a series of concerts of music for strings and wood-wind, and Tony wanted to

hear them all. So it was arranged they should leave the day after the last concert of the series. Tony returned from this last performance in a very happy mood. He had been particularly pleased by a trio of Haydn, an elaborately worked out septette for strings and woodwind of Mozart, and a small string orchestra piece by Handel, which had a really exquisite poetic quality, utterly unlike the declamatory oratorios. The whole evening had seemed a particularly pleasant send-off to a trip he had been looking forward to for many weeks. His only regret was that Margaret had refused to accompany them, and his only fear that the oases would be exploited and Europeanized. But the regret was tempered by the knowledge that Margaret would greatly have disliked the whole expedition, and the fear by a hope that something of the native life would remain.

Tony let himself in quietly with his latchkey and tip-toed to his room in case Margaret should be asleep, intending to see her in the morning and to arrange where and when they should meet on his return. A small suitcase and rucksack, easy to carry and so be independent of porters, lay packed at the foot of the bed. He added one or two little things he had forgotten, and, since there was room in the suitcase, put in a light summer suit—it might possibly be warm so far south. Humming softly a few phrases from the Handel piece which had remained in his memory, he walked across the room to his bookshelves and stood with his back to the door, wondering which books, if any, he should take with him. That always was a problem. . . . He started and turned quickly as he heard Margaret's voice say sharply:

Tony !

'You startled me,' he said- 'I didn't hear you come in. I hope I didn't make a noise and wake you up?'

Margaret did not answer his question. She had obviously got out of bed, since she was wrapped in a dressing gown and had forgotten to put on slippers. She was pale, and her eyes had a queer contracted look.

'Tony,' she exclaimed again in a tone of suppressed hatred which made him wince, 'who is this woman? I *insist* on knowing.'

'What woman?' asked Tony in natural bewilderment, and going across the room to light the gas fire so that she should not take cold. 'Is there any woman I know whom you don't know?'

'Don't try to evade me! I mean the woman you're always going off to see abroad. Who is she?'

Tony sighed and passed his hand several times over his hair, which was always a sign with him that he was vexed.

'If I declare solemnly that there is no such woman, that when I'm away I'm either alone or with somebody like Waterton, would you believe me?'

'No! Because you wouldn't be telling the truth. Why should you always be going off like this unless you were meeting someone on the sly? Never mind, I shall find out sooner or later. But if you won't tell me *her* name perhaps you'll tell me the name of the woman you stayed with a fortnight ago at the Residency Hotel? I might need it if I decided to divorce you.'

Tony was so much taken aback that for a moment he could only stare at her and mutely observe that she was interpreting his amazement as a confession of guilt.

'Good lord!' he said. 'Whoever told you that?'

'Never mind who told me,' she retorted tightly. 'I've my own sources of information. Who was she?'

'Well,' Tony answered slowly, taking out his pipe and

beginning to fill it, 'in the first place, I didn't stay there, I had dinner at seven-thirty and left at ten with one Captain Martlett. The woman in question is my cousin, Evelyn Morshead, whom I haven't seen since—yes—since 1909. At present she's somewhere east of Suez, headed for Bombay, where she will meet her husband.'

'Do you expect me to believe that?' asked Margaret contemptuously. 'Can you prove it?'

'And do you expect me to allow you to doubt my word?' said Tony flushing. 'But still . . .'

He went to his table, turned over "some papers, and came back with Evelyn's letter which he handed to Margaret. Odd, he reflected, how jealousy, which usually is so blind a passion, has sometimes an instinctive clairvoyance—Evelyn is one of the two women for whom she might justly feel a retrospective jealousy. She will never know it, and never know that if Evelyn had still been Evelyn——

'Why didn't you tell me about it?' interrupted Margaret, who had skimmed through the letter. 'Why didn't you take me to see her as she asked?'

'Because from what I knew of her in the past I thought you'd probably dislike each other, though now I've seen what she is in 1927, I think I may have been wrong. But you'll admit, Margaret, that it was part of our agreement on marrying that we wouldn't thrust our in-laws on each other. I think I can claim that I've observed that part of the treaty more exactly than you have. I must say your uncle's no joke.'

'You needn't bring him up,' said Margaret tartly. 'If you'd only done what he told you, instead of behaving like an idiot, we should be well off instead of poor.'

'Poor!' exclaimed Tony indignantly. 'You call us poor? Why, in comparison with nine tenths of the world we're well off, we're rich. What nonsense! But

since you've brought up this question of our money affairs, perhaps you'll sit down and let me tell you what I've arranged.'

He pushed a small armchair over to the fire for her and sat down opposite on a bedroom chair.

'I've been thinking this out for a long time,' said Tony, ignoring her several attempts at interruption.

'As we agreed at first, we always have kept our money more or less separate, but since it looks as if we're going to live more and more apart, it's best to have them entirely separate. You have about eight hundred a year of your own—and since you'll inherit at least another thousand, I don't think you're doing so badly as a poor woman. I inherited about six hundred a year, so if we went shares, I should do rather better than you. But while I was in business I saved a little money——'

'You saved money! Without telling me! Tony, how sly and secretive you are!'

From the interest on which,' Tony went on, 'I shall pay you two hundred a year, which brings you up to a thousand. I shall also pay out of it the fifty-five pounds a year which are my half of the unfurnished rental of this flat. And if there's any balance, you shall have that. I shouldn't dream of running a flat like this myself, but still . . . I'll pay half the servant's wages, which is about another fifty, and five pounds a week as usual towards housekeeping when I'm here.'

'That means I've practically got to run the flat myself,' said Margaret indignantly.

'It's only kept on because you want to spend most of the year in London,' said Tony firmly. 'If you cared to live my kind of life, we could give it up and live much more cheaply. But never mind that. I think it's not unfair. Then there's the eight hundred pounds I got for the house in the country. Strictly speaking, this

should be mine, since I bought the house with my money. But I've paid four hundred of it into your account, and you can either invest it or buy yourself the car you're always wanting. I shall keep my four hundred on hand for emergencies. Is that all clear? '

'Well, I must say you've arranged things nicely to please yourself,' said Margaret, unable to find any real objection. 'But suppose I refuse to accept it? '

Of course you can run up debts in my name,' said Tony coldly, 'but I should soon deal with that, I can tell you. And you'll observe that I'm paying you more than the third of my income to which you'd be legally entitled if you wished to divorce me. Moreover, that law was intended to protect dependent women, not those with independent incomes.'

This seemed to silence Margaret, for she said nothing for a minute or two. Then she looked at him and said abruptly:

'Am I very bitchy, Tony? Do you hate me? '

'No, no,' he replied, shocked, 'I certainly don't hate you, but I can't disguise from myself or from you that we've gradually been growing further and further apart, especially in the last year or so. I suppose it was natural for you to think I'd found another woman I preferred. But I assure you I haven't. If I do,' he added half jokingly, 'I'll let you know at once.'

'Then what have you got against me? Why do you want to live away from me? '

'I've nothing against you, except that you are you and I am I, and that we want such very different things from life we can't possibly get them together. If I live your sort of life all the time I feel miserable and degraded. You would be equally miserable if you tried to live as I want to live.'

'If you felt like that about me, why did you marry me?'

Margaret, that's a question which people in our present unhappy situation can always ask, and generally do. Might I not just as well ask you that? And isn't it better for each of us to go quietly and decently our own way, instead of utterly sacrificing one or other, as so often happens in marriages? After all, it isn't as if we had children to consider.'

'No,' said Margaret bitterly, 'you took care to safeguard yourself there.'

'And you too,' he replied gently. 'We should inevitably have come to this present moment, and it would have been bitter indeed if we had to go on living a false marriage for the sake of children, especially since such children are invariably miserable. Besides, you agreed with me that we wouldn't face the responsibility of bringing children into a society like this which is plainly heading for destruction. The next war will be hell.'

'Perhaps there won't be one.'

'It's inevitable in one form or another, even if it's only a war of men against their own machines.'

They were silent for a little, and then Tony said:

'Perhaps we were wrong, perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps a marriage without children is always wrong. I don't know. I do know that I had a profound repugnance against having children after the war. I think of many perhapses. Perhaps our marriage was never really a marriage. Perhaps men like me, flotsam of the war years, are incapable of living tranquilly with a woman. Perhaps in our own case we are the victims of sexual prejudices, and we should have been lovers when we were in Paris together and then have parted. Perhaps it was something unfulfilled in us at that time which brought us back to each other and led us to make what

should have been a three-months' idyll into a contract for life.'

'You're telling me pretty plainly now that you think you ought never to have married me.'

No, no. There is no one else, at least living, I'd want to marry. But it makes me sad, sad, sad.'

And indeed he felt sad, for he had a deep sense that this was virtually his parting from Margaret. Although he would come back to her, although they would continue to meet and to live together part of each year in London, he knew that the long failure of their marriage was confessed, at least by him.

He was so much absorbed in his thoughts that he scarcely heard her when she said, a bit nastily:

'Perhaps you're sad because your conscience knows you're doing wrong.'

No,' said Tony, catching only the words 'doing wrong,' and sitting up. 'I know I'm not doing wrong. As far as I can look into myself I know I'm doing right. And at the same time—this will sound ridiculous and superstitious—I feel some vast insistent force outside me which urges me on.'

'Well,' Margaret said, ignoring his last words, 'I accept your assurance that you're not going after another woman. But I think I've a right to ask you to explain why you've suddenly taken such a dislike to me and my friends and my "way of living," as you call it.'

It sounded a very reasonable request, so reasonable that Tony felt almost desperate as he answered:

'Everybody for months past has been asking me to explain myself. It's not a question of twice two makes four, or of anything which can be expressed in social or financial weights and measures. It's a question of all the imponderables, of the inner something that is me struggling for life.'

'I'm afraid I don't understand you,' said Margaret ironically, 'unless this is a big bow-wow way of saying you mean to be entirely selfish.'

'Selfish! I think perhaps only a selfish person would make that interpretation. I don't ask you to commit suicide for me, and say you're selfish if you refuse.'

'So you mean that living with me's suicide? Thank you.'

'No. I don't. But to go on living what, to me, is the false and wrong life I led up till about a year ago would be a form of suicide. You'd be more unhappy with such a person, Margaret, than without him.'

'Well, what is this life you want?'

Tony pondered a little and then said slowly:

'Here again the language of arithmetic or of society is useless. Will you understand me if I say that the life I want is a sort of search for the vital realities, for god if you like, and that for me god is physical ultimately, not spiritual or social or national?'

'You talking about god!' she exclaimed, sneering.

'It's a word which is polluted, I admit,' he replied, keeping his temper, 'but I said "vital realities" first. In any case, why should I not use the word "god" to mean all the not-me of this world, the thing which is so much greater than me and which I want to know and to communicate with through all my senses, in cities and people, in quiet and beautiful places, and in the arts?'

Margaret burst out laughing.

'You remind me of Humpty-Dumpty when you make one word mean all that,' she said. 'Do you really believe that old-fashioned twaddle?'

'I believe that my words mean something for me, though evidently they mean nothing for you,' he said simply.

'Well, if you want to know what I think, you're trying to find highfalutin excuses for getting away from me. I never heard such nonsense—communicating with the not-me indeed!' She paused and then added vindictively: 'And don't suppose I shall break my heart over you. I shan't. There are better fish in the sea . . . I give you fair warning, Tony, that if I find someone I care for, well, I shall be lofty like you, and communicate with my not-me.'

'You will do what you think best,' he said coldly, standing up. 'If you wish to divorce me, I shall not oppose it. And now, as I have to be up early in the morning, perhaps you'll excuse me, unless you have anything more to say?'

'So I'm to be dismissed, am i?' she exclaimed, in a frenzy of anger. 'Sit at home and twiddle my thumbs while you go off on your own god knows where? And be at hand whenever you choose to come back? I won't stand it, Tony.'

'But you go off by yourself whenever you wish.'

'I don't care, I don't care. I'm not going to have you trotting off like this whenever you want, picking up with all sorts of women for all I know.'

'And what do you think you'll do?' he asked calmly.

She faced him without speaking for at least a minute, with the dreadful look of white unreasoning jealous hatred, obviously trying to think of some wounding threat to throw at him and unable to discover one terrific enough. Tony again had the sensation that the inner reality which was him had become invulnerable, as if an impalpable but impenetrable shield had been placed between him and human enmity. At last Margaret spoke, but all she could find to say was the infinitely feeble threat:

' You'll see!'

And she dashed out of the room, slamming the door.

After she had gone, Tony undressed slowly and thoughtfully, had his evening bath, put on pyjamas and a dressing gown, and sat by the fire. The happy mood of earlier in the evening had certainly gone, but he did not feel so upset as he had expected. The scene with Margaret, which he had dreaded so much because he knew it was inevitable, had indeed been painful but not shattering, because in a sense he had never been essentially involved in it. He had long ago grown used to the knowledge that he could not communicate with Margaret in the profound ways of feeling which cannot be spoken. Words simply made a surface confusion; they were useless if the mind of the person to whom they were spoken could not leap beyond them to the reality of which they were hesitating symbols. Yet it was true that 'something had existed between Margaret and himself, something which had been broken that night and had given pain in the breaking. Some mysterious physical tie perhaps, which is one among the many things we feel without understanding.

He sat there for a very long time, thinking over his past life, trying to see himself and the people he had known and the events which seemed to have determined his fate, not as things to be blamed or commended, but to be understood and accepted. Know thyself. He wondered whether that was a precept of supreme wisdom or of impossible futility. What is oneself that one can know it? The mind always conscious of itself is perhaps purely self-destructive. Perhaps the really dangerous thing in modern life is that people without minds try to use the tools and methods of those who have minds; for when the ordinary citizen prides himself upon

his 'civilization' he is only boasting of other men's inventions and creations to which he has contributed nothing. And what is success in life? He decided that for him it could be stated negatively as not having to go to an office and never being bored.

§iv

During the three weeks they were in North Africa, Tony allowed Waterton to determine all their plans and movements. It was Waterton's expedition, and then his time was limited, while Tony was free to linger where he chose. They spent a few days in Tunis, long enough to visit Carthage and to get a superficial acquaintance with the native town and the rather gaudy *souks*. A day was enough for Kairouan, and they went on by train to Tozeur, visited the next oasis, Nefta, and then drove more than two hundred miles across desert country to the seaside oasis of Gabes. They hired another car to take them to Medenine and the island oasis of Djerba, and then returned to Tunis by train, stopping at Sousse and Sfax.

It was a superficial enough trip, and they barely touched the fringe of the Sahara, which was what Tony had most wanted to see, but certain scenes and sensations made an impression on him.

It was disconcerting to discover that many of the natives in Tunis wore florid socks and fancy Boston garters in full view under their short trousers; and it was also a blow to discover that the call to prayer was a long blast from a factory siren on the top of a minaret. Moreover, nobody in Tunis seemed to pay any attention to it. Thus even conservative Islam joined step with the march of progress. Nor was Tony much impressed by the works of Islam, though he admitted to a disappointed

Waterton that his impression was naturally of the most superficial or tourist kind. He could not help pointing out to Waterton that Islam had turned a once fertile province into a desert, and such a desert that nearly fifty years of patient French effort was only just beginning to recover parts of it. Prosperous cities had been destroyed, so that the great Roman amphitheatre at El Djem looked down on a desolation like that which surrounded Shelley's Ozymandias. Their architecture had a certain quality, but greatly inferior to the best in Europe, and even the great mosque at Kairouan depended largely for its effect on columns and pillars filched from Roman and Byzantine buildings. And the whining which came from the mosques—it was Ramadan—was barely distinguishable from the sabbath droning to be heard from any tin chapel. As to the carpets which were pressed upon them in the *souks* at fantastic prices, they were mostly horrors, scarcely worth giving away with a pound of tea—with the exception of a few they saw in Tozeur of Negro design, and even those were inferior to the real African art. As Tony pointed out, monotheism is a terrific handicap to the arts, which are fundamentally more essential to humanity than the spiritual religions; while monotheism and industrialism are absolutely fatal in alliance, since a desert of cheap, mechanized people is much more awful than a genuine uninhabited desert.

'I'm quite ready to accept all you say about the achievements of Islam in the past,' he said to Waterton, as they were returning to Tunis, 'and that there are marvellous things in Cairo, Damascus, and Stambul. Also that Tunis was a mere outlying pirate state, though you must admit we were told Kairouan was one of their most sacred cities and had a great university. Islam

was creative only while it had conquered Byzantines and Romans to be parasitic on; when, by its stupidity, it had finally destroyed them, it ceased to be creative and fell into that stupid formalism which seems to be a peril of the Semitic mind. These people seem to me to be uncreative, like the Jews, but without Jewish intelligence. And, really, my imagination boggled when you invited me to think myself in the Arabian Nights as we passed those fat bundles of women in those hideous black veils and when we watched those dreary Ouled-Nail girls dancing to the tune of ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay.'

'Oh, you're prejudiced,' said Waterton.

'I don't think I am,' Tony replied. 'I'm only trying to see what's really here instead of seeing potted sheik romance. One proof of my candour is that before I came I was all against the French being here, and now I'm for it—what ghastly meals we should have had if we'd had to rely on couscous! I admit that a little hobby of mine is gratified by discovering the harm done by another spiritual religion, but even there I cite you as evidence—it was you who pointed out that the more fanatical our various dragomen were in carrying out pedantically the rules of Ramadan, the more dishonest and untrustworthy they proved.'

'Oh, my dear Tony, you can't judge any race by the casual servants of foreign trippers, who are bound to be the scum of the country.'

'No. I shouldn't judge Italy by the Neapolitan cabbies, who always take off their hats to the Blessed Virgin and never forget to rob you to make up for that spiritual exercise. But, hang it, who was it warned me not to leave anything about when we were near those Bedouin nomads?'

'Well, I'm sorry you've so poor an opinion of the Arabs, though there aren't many pure Arabs here,

they're all more or less mixed with Berbers and Negroes.'

'I can't criticize the women, because we haven't spoken to one. But I've now said everything that I can say on the wrong side. I've enjoyed the trip immensely, and it has knocked some prejudices out of my mind and barked away a little of my ignorance. For one thing this country shows me how artificial the wealth of Europe is, and how insane are all paper schemes for making the whole world rich.'

'You should be the last to reproach them with their poverty,' said Waterton.

'I don't reproach them, I laud them. I think those people in Tozeur who spend three weeks in marrying the date palms, and then meditate for the rest of the year, and even employ nomads for the gross task of plucking the dates, are philosophers. They could say with more justice than old Johnson: "Sir, we in Tozeur are philosophers, and make the boobies of Birmingham work for us," for I swear more than half the stuff in the *souks* is French brummagem.'

'Oh, come now,' Waterton protested, 'we saw some lovely old silks.'

'Old,' said Tony succinctly. 'The new stuff was all bad in quality and colour. Djerba was the only place where they were making anything interesting. And you will notice that the jewelry which pleased you so much was degraded Byzantine, and that the pots I got such a thrill seeing the potter make were pure Roman. . . .'

'I'm glad you found *something* to like.'

'Don't be huffy,' said Tony. 'I liked a great deal. I can tell you that I've seldom been so much impressed by human beings as by those men we saw coming in from their desert wrapped in their burnouses. They've kept their manhood, whatever else they may have lost or

never had. They've not been degraded by cheap industrialism. Their dignity and self-possession, even when they're in rags, are a lesson. And they really possess their souls. I shall always think of them and many others away from the towns sitting so quiet and possessed, hour after hour, without impatience or boredom. I'm glad there are still men like that in the world. I'd rather have their complete poise and self-harmony than all the wealth of all the Rockefellers.'

Tony was shy of speaking to Waterton about other experiences which had touched him more deeply. Going inland by the little night train from Kairouan, he had awakened from the uneasy sleep of *couchettes* about two hours before dawn. In spite of the hot-water pipes the carriage felt chilly. Tony looked out of the window and immediately forgot all about being cold. The dome of the sky was clear and vast, filled with white moonlight which shone over a great sea of lion-coloured sand. There was a tinge of yellow in the white of the moonlight, a tinge of white in the yellow of the sand. Here and there were tiny patches of dark scrub, which looked very like floating seaweed in the uncertain light. The train moved slowly and, it seemed, gently, not unlike a ship, so that the sensation was of sailing over this ocean of tawny sand under a bell of yellowish crystal. About five they had to change to another train and waited for a long time on a siding. Contrary to all that Tony had heard, the dawn was very slow, and quite an hour passed between the first brightening of the east and the appearance of a red tip of sun over the sand. The light shone on a desolation, but its silence was majestic. For a couple of hours the train ran through deep sunless gorges of bare, furrowed red rock, and then suddenly emerged 'onto the flat *bled* again. They had been sitting in over-

coats with the collars turned up and the windows shut; the carriage was now filled with dazzling gold sunlight, and within fifteen minutes they had shed overcoats, mufflers, and waistcoats, had turned off the heating and had opened both windows. Long caravans of camels or the brown and ring-straked sheep and goats of the nomads were making for the wells to drink.

In Tony's imagination an oasis consisted of about fifteen palms, a fountain with a little grassy plot round it, a few tents, and a dozen camels. He was therefore rather staggered by the really big oases, which are miles long and sometimes have as many as two hundred thousand immense palms with jasmine-scented gardens beneath them. Here, on the edge of the Sahara, where the sand began to rise into wave-like dunes, the sense of being in a sea was even greater than in the *bled*. The oases were islands which had constantly to be protected against the ceaseless attack of the sand waves. Indeed in some places the wall of threatening sand, curled like a huge breaker in suspense, was forty or fifty feet high. And when they drove across the wet, salty sand of one of the *chotts*, the illusion was complete. For a time you were out of sight of 'land'—it was like driving by car across the Channel.

Round about these two general experiences of the desert and the oasis clustered dozens of more intimate sensations and feelings. There was the almost ecstatic peace which gradually occupied your whole nature as you rode in the sunlight over the sand in the brisk scentless air. You heard nothing but the soft pad of camels' feet and an occasional mutter from the drivers. The silence, the space, the limitless on and on of the desert were intoxicating. Tony longed to charter camels and guides and ride forward day after day across the Sahara to the Niger. When they had to turn back, he sat for a while

on his beast looking longingly at the mysterious south, and turned his back on it with infinite regret.

When they got back to Tunis, Tony decided that he would not accompany Waterton back to England or even to Marseilles. It was the third week in March, and he could not endure the idea of leaving the sun for northern mists and darkness. At first he thought that he would return on his steps and go farther into the desert by himself, but decided that it would be unkind to Waterton (who was very gloomy at having to leave), and rather a mistake until he had learned some Arabic. Moreover, after this alien and rather repugnant Islam, he felt he wanted to dip back again into traditional Europe; not the Europe of factories and radio, but Mediterranean civilization, which, alas, existed only in its relics.

On Waterton's last afternoon they took the tram out to a small seaside place near Carthage and sat over drinks on the flowery terrace of the hotel. Waterton was soon absorbed in one of the out-of-the-way books he delighted in, and Tony walked up and down the terrace, looking at the brilliant flowers and the still more brilliant sea and sky. They were an astoundingly deep ultramarine. From the northern shores of the Mediterranean we always look into the sun, so that the blue is lost in the glow of sunlight; but here the sun was on the landward side, and the light intensified instead of diminishing the double blue. Something in its quality reminded Tony of the spring sky over the Roman Campagna, and with the evocation of that mental image he knew with complete certainty where he must go.

It was eight years since he had been to Italy. He had avoided the country as he had avoided Austria, because each held memories for him which were too poignant both in happiness and in grief. But time had passed,

and at last he could bear to see Rome again. It would be pleasant to go to the places he had seen with Robin in the old days of friendship, provided any of them were left in the rebuilding of the city. Sarcastic devotees of the old Rome had remarked to Tony that the twentieth century had found Rome marble and obviously intended to leave it plaster. Good to see what was left before it was all swept away. And in any case his idolatrous soul, weary of Islam and Whitehall, could bow down before the graven images of Bernini and Borromini. Yes, Rome. Boat to Palermo, boat to Naples, and then on. With the utmost clearness he saw imaginatively the brown-and-red moving pattern of an Italian crowd, going up and down the great marble stairway to the Ara Coeli at Christmas, when hawkers with baskets of coloured toys for the children sat on the steps, as they had sat on the steps of Mediterranean temples, selling much the same little emblems, for at least three thousand years. . . .

Waterton looked up as Tony came back to his chair, and said:

'I've found a passage here which will interest you, the one marked in pencil. It represents your view pretty closely, doesn't it?'

'Who is this fellow?' asked Tony, taking the book and looking at the unfamiliar name and title.

'Nobody of importance, a philosopher of the time of the Flavians.'

Tony wondered why Waterton delighted in these obscure people when he couldn't possibly have read all the greater ones, but looked at the passage which ran:

For if virtue and vice exist in men alone, and if of men the majority are evil, so that barely one or two of them are in fables described as good, like some incredible and unnatural animals rarer than the phoenix of Ethio-

pia; how can man escape being the most wretched animal of all, having evil and madness in his very nature, and allotted to him by destiny?'

Tony shut the book and looked at Waterton.

'What on earth makes you think I should agree with that?' he asked in amazement. 'It only shows how even one's intimates may be entirely mistaken. I gather from the context that this bloke was a Stoic. Well, I think the "virtue and vice" of the Stoics was entirely artificial. Their senseless notion that a virtuous man should be happy on a red-hot gridiron is not only contrary to all common sense, but the origin of the beastly psychology which made possible the horrors of martyrology. A really beastly psychology, because it sets out to make man spiritually superhuman, and ends up by making him physically and humanly subnormal.'

'But I thought you hated human beings—you liked the desert because there was nobody in it.'

'I think man's nature needs solitude from time to time, just as a child needs to get away from school sometimes and be alone with its mother. I think we haven't enough quiet places in the world where we can become at peace with the living universe. I don't believe in an abstract spiritual god, any more than I believe in a world of abstract mechanical forces. I know that I am alive and that the universe is alive and that I get life from it. If you tell me the universe is dead or simply an immense machine, which comes to the same thing, I shall point out that your senses are atrophied. I hate human beings! But I love them, when they're not perverted and made destructive by priests and military men and business brutes. I tell you, Waterton, I believe in men and women. When they live rightly and naturally, they're so far from being the wretchedest of animals that they're the happiest and most beautiful. What I have against

them is that there are far too many of them for their own good, and that they let themselves be forced or deluded into leading such worthless and destructive days. I want them to know their own glory and the glory of the world they live in. Why, they could make a paradise, and the idiots make Glasgow and Pittsburgh.'

Waterton laughed and shook his head.

'You're an enigma, Clarendon, and if there's any sense in what you've been saying it's not revealed to me. One of these days you must explain it all to me. But hadn't we better be getting back now? There's a tram in ten minutes, and I've got to do my packing and write some letters.'

§ V

Palermo proved to be more of an enchantress than Tony expected, and the two days he had allotted to it stretched into a week before he could tear himself away. The wretched food and wine were a disagreeable surprise after the excellent French fare in Tunis, but then, as Tony pointed out to himself, his life search was not exclusively a gastronomic one. In spite of the noise and fearful overcrowding he enjoyed walking about the narrow streets of Palermo, watching the people and looking at stalls and wine shops. The word '*gessato*'⁹ on many of the wine casks puzzled him, until he found out that lime was added to the wine. In a flash he understood the bitter reproach implied in Falstaff's, 'You rogues, there's lime in this sack!'

The great attraction was the interior of the churches and oratories. True, the great Norman cathedral was a wreck, and even the mosaics in the royal chapel, though magnificent in conception, showed the nerveless hand of the restorer, as all mosaic must. As for the few relics of Arabic art—he felt no interest in them. The

churches, in which he spent many hours a day, were the elaborately decorated baroque masterpieces of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which received only silence or a few cold words in the guide books. To someone who had passed the winter in London and then a few weeks among the eternal whitewash of Tunis, these amazing fantasies in coloured stone gave the impression of entering some magical garden, with human figures and lovely children and birds and animals and chimeras of all sorts peering through the foliage. Waterton could say all he liked about the dreams of the Arabian Nights, but they were here in the churches of Palermo, not in the *souks* of Tunis.

After lunch he walked in the neglected botanical garden or along the sea front, from which on clear days he saw the Lipari islands to the east, and once, far far off, a shadowy suggestion of Aeaëa to the northwest. In spite of the mild air and tranquil sky and great memories, there was something violent and tragical about Sicily, which men had found a paradise and had made the distressful isle of the Mediterranean, treeless and malarious. Every civilization there had been an alien one, and none had succeeded in lasting, from the Carthaginians and Greeks to the Arabs and Spaniards. Creation and destruction had been equal and apposite. Nothing remained alive of all those centuries of intense creativeness except the marionette theatres, the religious processions, the bright pictures on the peasants' carts, and the gaudy harness decorations and plumes which were almost like the work of South Sea islanders in their crudity. From Acragas and Syracuse to those clumsy peasant productions—what a descent! Even the gorgeous Spanish baroque had a certain agonized quality, the exuberance which precedes death, a despairing effort to survive, like the fantastic growth of the trilobites in

the period before they suddenly disappeared, Mediterranean civilization is dead. Perhaps the race itself is dying. Excessive proliferation without quality always means degeneracy and death, whether in trees, trilobites, or men.

Yet it was with some regret that Tony took the night boat for Naples and watched the lights of Palermo diminishing in the distance, first to clusters, then to a seeming chain of bright points, then to a hazy glow. If the impulse to go to Rome again had not been so strong and imperative, he would have stayed—there was still much to experience in Sicily.

He went to his second-class berth and slept well, though he had to share it with a stertorous Milanese commercial. Soon after dawn he awoke, washed, and shaved quietly, dressed, packed his rucksack and suitcase, and went on deck. The boat was about two hours from Naples, crossing the Gulf of Salerno and making for the channel between Capri and the Sorrento peninsula. Mist was settled in the valleys and dwelt in enormous clouds on the mountain peaks; and although the sun glittered on the moving water, the air was cold. Tony was glad to warm himself by walking briskly up and down the deck. After about ten minutes he strode from the starboard to the port side to get another view of the gulf, and nearly collided with an English clergyman. Tony was beginning to apologize when he was interrupted by a mellow clerical voice:

Why, my dear Clarendon, how extraordinary to meet you here! How was it we didn't see you last night? '

The voice was the voice of Canon Styckleigh-Waughmough, one of the columns of Midchester Cathedral, and thought to have a good chance of a bishopric one of these days.

'I came on board late,' said Tony. 'How are you?'

'Rather poorly, rather poorly,' said the canon, falling into step and walking beside Tony. 'My wife and I have spent a month exploring Sicily in the car, and the wretched food and accommodation have told on my health. A very savage populace, Clarendon. Were you long in Palermo?'

'Only a week.'

'A week! Whatever did you find to do? I believe Palermo is a healthy place, provided you stay in that Grand Hotel Villa Whatshisname and avoid the appalling slums. I ventured into them once, and fled, I fear, with a handkerchief to my nose. Is Mrs. Clarendon with you?'

'No, she preferred to stay in England,' said Tony, not relishing the question. 'I'm on my way back from Tunis. . . .'

'Ah, Tunis. I've often meant to visit Carthage, but never plucked up the courage. Is the food very bad?'

'On the contrary, it's" very good in one or two of the French restaurants.'

'You astound me,' said the canon. 'I always understood one had to subsist on greasy rice, an abominable mess called couscous, and tough lamb eaten with three fingers of the left hand, ha, ha, ha! Now that I know one can go there without risking starvation and poisoning, I shall certainly pay it a visit. Apart from the classical remains, which of course are the most interesting, the country would have a special appeal to me as the home of Augustine, not to speak of such minor luminaries of the Early Church as Tertullian and Cyprian. I suppose you found the memory of Saint Augustine warm in the hearts of the people?'

'No,' said Tony, who had shamefully to admit to himself that he never once thought of that great man in

Tunis. 'I'm afraid I didn't. Besides, it's a Moham-medan country now, you know.'

'To be sure, I'd forgotten. And I suppose the French have done nothing to alter such a deplorable state of affairs? Dear me, it may sound uncharitable, but I fear they're little better than atheists. Though, to be frank, Mrs. Styckleigh-Waughmough and myself were scandalized by the ignorance and superstition we found in Sicily.'

'I suppose,' said Tony, 'that the Church has been forced to adapt itself to the habits and mentality of the people.'

'True,' said the canon, nodding. 'I fear there must always be compromise. But there the compromise has gone too far. I couldn't help reflecting at Syracuse that the visit of St. Paul, which should have remained a rallying cry to them, appeared to be totally forgotten. But we heard a very tolerable sermon in the English Church at Taormina, and had comfortable quarters. Let us hope civilization will radiate from that small beacon.'

'Were you very uncomfortable in Sicily, then?' asked Tony, wondering how he could drop the canon without rudeness.

'Dreadfully,' said the canon with a look of horror on his smooth face. 'At times we had to endure positive squalor, as well as the most unappetizing food. I went in terror of indigestion, especially on behalf of Mrs. Styckleigh-Waughmough, who is delicate. But the classical remains!' he exclaimed, suddenly growing enthusiastic. 'The classical remains atoned for everything. A positive inspiration. My wife will tell you that Pindar and Thucydides were seldom out of my hand and mouth. By the way, what a mess they have made of Syracuse! I had great difficulty in following the de-

scription of the siege. If only one could see the place as it was in its days of glory!'

Tony had never suspected this classical enthusiasm in the canon over the humdrum teacups of Midchester, and his heart warmed to the old man. It was distinctly in his favour that he had dragged himself and his wife round Sicily to look at 'classical remains,' in spite of the absence of a plain but perfect table and the prevalence of deplorable superstition. So he continued to walk with the canon, who discoursed learnedly of Augustus and Tiberius, Pliny and Suetonius, and expressed a fear that he might not live to behold the classical library which would inevitably be discovered at Herculaneum. All this was mixed up with laments about discomforts and discourtesies, and regrets that the Italians no longer understood Latin. At last Tony discovered that the poor man was in mortal dread of the petty difficulties which would arise over the landing of his car and luggage, especially as he wanted to get to Rome that day.

'Well, look here,' said Tony, 'I can speak a little Italian. Will you allow me to take charge of the landing for you?'

'I couldn't think of troubling you,' said the canon, obviously longing for Tony to take on the job.

'It would be no trouble, I assure you.'

By an intelligent anticipation Tony informed a ship's officer and one of the landing officials that the canon was an English bishop, and distributed a few tips. The car was landed and ready to start before the canon had got over enjoying the respect with which he was treated. Wearing his rucksack and carrying his bag, Tony went up to say good-bye to them. The canon whispered something to his wife, who nodded.

'We are deeply indebted to you,' said the canon heartily. 'Positively, you have worked a miracle.'

'Oh, nonsense. It was perfectly easy.'

'Would you like us to give you a lift to Rome? There's plenty of room if you didn't mind sitting beside Roberts, and your luggage is light. And you would confer another favour on us by helping Roberts to find the right road—he's a most stupid man in that respect.'

Tony hesitated. He didn't much fancy motoring, especially in Italy, or the canon's company, but then it would be fun to go along the Appian Way, and he would get to Rome quickly and easily.

'All right,' he said, 'I will come. Thank you.'

The canon very willingly handed over to Tony a large collection of maps and guides.

'I think the distance is about two hundred and fifteen kilometres,' he said. 'Perhaps you could find some tolerable place to lunch on the way?'

'Shall we go by the Via Appia,' asked Tony, 'and then we can lunch at Terracina? It's said to have good wine.'

The journey proved much more interesting than Tony had expected. The view of the country was better than from the train; they stopped to look at Capua and Formia; the lunch at Terracina was unexpectedly good; the canon abounded in classical references and applied Horatian epithets to the wine; so that when they dropped him at the foot of the Spanish Steps, Tony said farewell almost with regret. Nice old bird, the canon, and he deserved to be a bishop.

At this point Tony fell upon a series of little disappointments. The house where Robin had found him a room was no longer available, and he had to go to a hotel, which was much more expensive and not so pleasant. The narrow streets were very noisy with motor traffic, and the Corso, which had been so unhurrying and

dignified, looked like a poor imitation of a Milanese street. Already through the rebuilding the churches and palaces were beginning to look like public monuments, instead of integral and harmonious parts of the city. And, in the evening, he found that two of his favourite restaurants had been pulled down, and the one he finally chose was bad and dear. He went to bed feeling he had made a mistake in coming back to Rome. It was no longer the Rome he had visited so enthusiastically with Robin. Or was it that he was no longer the same Antony?

However, the next morning was brilliantly fine, and as he stood looking over the town from the terrace above the Piazza del Popolo, he told himself that after all he had been right to come—Rome was still Rome. Having all the time he needed, he made out a schedule of less-known places and visited two or three every day. He walked in the Borghese Garden and along the Tiber, and dropped into one or other of the Trastevere wine shops to listen to the amusing talk which went on. For the present he decided not to look up any of his friends in Rome; they would keep until he wanted a change from sight-seeing. Besides, the important thing was to recapture the 'feel' of the place, to get in touch again with the *genius loci*.

On the Wednesday after he arrived, he was lingering near the Trevi Fountain, watching its splendid gush of water and wondering where he should lunch. The sun was warm on its time-softened travertine, and the clear light brought out its design and proportion, so that he almost persuaded himself it was a work of art, from its oversized and melodramatic Neptune down to its rocky flowers three times as big as life and nothing like it. Tony felt in a particularly happy mood. He walked down to the rim of the great basin and dipped his fingers

in the cool, clear water, humming to himself the Handel music he had heard on his last night in London, and trying to persuade himself against all sense of style that it had something in common with Heine's lyrics. Then his mind went back to the question of lunch, with the suggestion that he might try the restaurant under the vine trellis where he had lunched that first day long ago so happily with Robin. He hesitated a little, thinking that he might only run on another disappointment—it might have been pulled down in the general rush of improvement, the old woman might be dead, it might have become detestable.

Nevertheless he found himself walking through the line of streets parallel with the Corso in the direction of the Piazza Venezia. Here more devastation was in progress, but he found the right street, and, to his great pleasure, that the restaurant still existed. The two waiters were there, fatter and lazier and more unshaved than ever, and young leaves were sprouting from the snaky grey vines. He saw the waiters did not recognize him (why should they?), and made no reference to past times as he ordered his lunch and a bottle of the famous moscato which was still on the list. The food was quite good, though the *ravioli* was far from being up to the old standard and seemed to Tony to have something familiar about it. Somewhere or other he had eaten this sort of lunch, and yet the food was not at all Roman. Something Neapolitan about it, but better. However, he soon ceased to think about such a trifle and ate a very leisurely meal, looking up at the vines with the sky beyond them in the intervals, or turning over a volume of Thucydides, which had been suggested to him by the canon's enthusiasm for classical remains. Tony decided that he didn't like Thucydides—he was one of the

earliest of those political chicanery people who had made wars so damnably possible.

The minutes drifted pleasantly past; he had long ago finished eating, nearly everybody had left the restaurant, the bottle was more than half empty, and even the dilatory brothers were beginning to give waiters' indications that they would like his money and his absence. Still he lingered on, and at last from very shame called for the bill, paid, and decided it was a sin to leave so much good wine undrunk. He was just about to pour himself a last glass, when something made him glance up, and he saw, standing in the doorway to the kitchen, a woman whose face he remembered perfectly. It couldn't be! Yes, it was.

'Filomena!' he called, 'Filomena! Come here. Come and speak to me. You remember me, don't you?' he added, as she walked towards him, looking a little puzzled.

'Why, of course,' she said, recognizing him. 'It's Signor' Antoni. Ah, signore, why have you never been to see us all these years? When you promised?'

'Business,' said Tony, smiling to himself. 'I was kept by business, Filomena. But sit down and have a glass of wine. How are they all at Aeaea? Your father and mother well?'

'Old, signore,' said Filomena, sitting down, 'but still able to work. How often we have spoken of you on winter evenings, and wondered how you were. Each year we looked for you, and each year you did not come.'

'But how do you happen to be up here?' he asked, to change the subject, and forgetting that the restaurant people were related to his friends at Aeaea.

'Ah, signore, a dismal story. How I long to get back! You must know that the old woman, for all her complaining, was really ill and died in the winter. No

doubt the most holy Madonna punished her for complaining so long, don't you think? '

' *Sicuro*,' said Tony.

' And these two lazy boys think so much of themselves because they were at the war, and everybody in Italy makes such a fuss about it, so of course they couldn't run the restaurant and decided to sell it. But in three months they made it such a bad restaurant that people stayed away, and they couldn't get half of what it was worth. So Nino, the fattest one, poof! ' and she puffed out her cheeks to show how fat he was. ' Nino came to us and begged me to cook for them until clients came back and they could show good takings and get their price. Oh, how sick of them I am! Every night I ask Sant' Antonio to find me a ticket back to Aeaea. And I worry—*Dio mio*, how I worry!—about the two old ones and how they are not doing things properly.'

Tony listened for some time to these and sundry other lamentations and finally got up to go, thinking he would return in a day or two when he might hope to find her in a more expansive mood. But she put her hand on his arm and said :

' Sit down for a moment, Signor' Antonio, there is something I must say to you. From the moment I saw you I knew I must say it, and if I've been talking foolishly about my little troubles, it was because I didn't know how to say it.'

' Tell me what it is,' said Tony, sitting down and wondering what could need so much preparation—was Filomena wanting to get married? 'We're old friends, Filomena, and you can say what you like to me.'

' It's because I feel the Signore is a friend that I dare to speak of it. Otherwise I should be silent.'

' Well, come on,' answered Tony, a little impatient of all this preparation. ' What is it? '

'Does the Signore remember coming to us in the autumn of 1919?' asked Filomena, very solemn, and gazing at him with her great dark eyes.

'Perfectly well,' said Tony, feeling the pang of hurt in an old wound.

'And that you insisted on a room which is not the best?'

'Yes.'

'And that you asked us about the Austrian Signorina?'

'Yes.'

'She has been to Aeaea, and stayed in the same room.'

'What!' exclaimed Tony, jumping up from his chair and then abruptly sitting down again. 'You are sure? It was Signorina Caterina?'

It was the first time he had spoken her name for more than seven years, and the utterance brought back almost unbearably poignant memories.

'Yes, I'm sure. Fraulein Katha.'

'What does she do in Aeaea?' he asked, trying to control his bewilderment and fighting against a sudden fantastic hope.

'Very little. She walks most of the day. Sometimes when she comes back I know she has been crying.'

'O god!' said Tony.

'She has been now for three years, always at the same time, but only for ten days. And each time she has asked for you.'

'What! Filomena, be careful what you are saying! Is this true?'

'*Per Bacco!* Why should I deceive a friend?' answered Filomena proudly and resentfully.

'I'm sorry, Filomena, I beg your pardon,' said Tony, throwing out his arm in a gesture of repentance and up-setting a glass. 'Tell me more about her.'

'I think she is poor, signore,' said Filomena, with the rather brutal frankness of Italians and just a tinge of their universal contempt for poverty. 'Indeed I know she is, very poor, for she told me she had to save the whole year to have ten poor little days in Aeaea, and then she cannot afford full pension. She has only breakfast and dinner, and we charge her only the cost, we are so sorry for her.'

'O my god!' exclaimed Tony, hiding his face in his hands, 'O my god, my god I'

'If you had come to us or written, signore——'

'Don't say that, Filomena. If only I had, but it hurt too much. O god, what a fool! I should have waited at Aeaea.'

They sat in silence, Tony trying to recover himself after the shock, Filomena gazing at him with large watchful eyes, a bit reproachful. Presently she said:

'Signore.'

'Yes?'

'Fraulein Katha is at Aeaea now.'

'What!' Tony sprang to his feet again. 'Filomena! Help me, tell me what to do. I feel half insane. Do you think I could go to Aeaea? Should I find her there?'

'Let me think,' said Filomena. 'Mamma wrote me that she arrived last Tuesday, yesterday week. She always leaves on the Friday ten days afterwards, by the early morning boat. If you could catch tonight's boat from Naples, you'd be in time.'

'Quick,' said Tony, feeling for his hat and raincoat. 'Have you the *orario*? I must get a taxi. Is there a train?'

'I know there's one at three-twenty. I always take it.'

'And it's three now!' exclaimed Tony, looking at his

watch. 'Can I catch it? I *must* go to the hotel—my money and passport are there. Filomena! Good-bye. I'll write to you.'

He caught her hands, kissed her on each cheek, and ran into the street. Almost at once he found himself so out of breath that he had to walk. Of course there was not an empty taxi in the street, it would have to be the stand in the Piazza Venezia. He hurried along, jostling people without knowing it, with only one thought in his mind—find a taxi. Such a time it took getting through the press of people, and when he ran up to the first of a long line of taxis, the driver waved him to take the one at the other end. Tony cursed the pedantic stupidity of their confounded rules and ran along the line. He gave the name of his hotel and added:

'Go quickly, go quickly. I want to catch the Naples train.'

The man drove skillfully, but it was impossible to make speed in the narrow streets, and they were twice held up by traffic police. Tony fumed and fretted and kept looking at his watch and uttering mute maledictions on everything and everybody in their way, and generally went through all the agonizing and futile emotions of his drives in Vienna. Ten minutes past three when they reached the hotel. 'Wait!' Tony shouted to the chauffeur as he ran into the entrance hall. He told himself firmly that he must be calm—fussing would only waste time—ordered the desk man to prepare his bill immediately, went up to his room in the lift, packed in two minutes, stuffing things in anyhow and forgetting his pyjamas and sponge, put his passport and money in his pocket, and ran downstairs. The bill was a hundred and seventy lire. He put down two hundred and, without waiting for change, ran to his taxi, and noticed that the

man had intelligently turned the car towards the station.

' Quick, quick,' said Tony, ' we may just do it.'

Alas, they ran into a traffic jam almost at once, and the chauffeur had to take a wiggling from a policeman for trying to cut through. That wasted four valuable minutes. As they whizzed into the Piazza del Esedra, Tony saw that the clock marked twenty-two minutes past. He felt as if all strength had gone from his body. Too late. In the faint hope that the outside clock might be purposely kept fast, Tony jumped out and went to one of the Fascists on duty, asking:

' Have I time to catch the three-twenty for Naples ? '

The man glanced into the station, and Tony saw that the ticket collector was just taking down the notice marked: ' Napoli. Direttissimo.' He shook his head.

' It has left, signore. The next train is at six.'

' Thank you.'

And that also would be too late.

For a moment Tony stood still in utter misery, asking himself what cursed thwarting of fate always kept him from meeting Katha. Then he had an inspiration, and blessed the canon, but for whom he would not have thought of it—if the train couldn't take him, the car might. He walked over to the taxi, which had drawn out a little and was waiting with his baggage, and looked at the driver. He was a young man, one of those wiry Italians with clear-cut intelligent faces, who look both efficient and handsome.

' You drove well,' said Tony quietly, ' but we missed it. What is your name? '

' Giovanni, at your service.'

' Listen, Giovanni. I must be in Naples, at the quay of the Immacolatella, before eight tonight. Will you drive me ?'

'Yes,' said Giovanni, as calmly as if he had been ordered to go to the Piazza Colonna.

'Can you get there in time?'

'I think so. But I can't promise. Tires burst, engines go wrong.'

'Will you try?'

'Yes.'

'How much?'

'A thousand lire.'

He's trying it on, as usual, thought Tony. I can't let him best me, or he may miss the boat on purpose, in the hope that I'll ask him to drive back. Oh, damn their bargaining.

'Nonsense,' he said cheerfully, 'you're dreaming. It's two hundred and fifteen kilometres if you go by the Via Appia, which is better because there's less traffic. That makes four hundred and thirty lire. I'll give you five hundred.'

The man shook his head.

'Not worth it.'

'Well, six hundred.'

'No, signore, I should lose money.' And he began to reel off a list of expenses and losses and profits to be covered. Tony cut him short.

'I'll give you six hundred anyway, and seven hundred and fifty if you reach the Immacolatella by ten to eight. Is that a bargain?'

'Very well.' Giovanni accepted reluctantly in appearance, with the gesture of one whose good nature is imposed on, but in reality with pleasure. Allowing a hundred litres of petrol and two tins of oil, his out-of-pockets would not exceed two hundred and fifty. He might lose fifty or sixty lire in fares in addition. But he was doing very well.

'Right,' said Tony promptly. 'Put my luggage in the car. I'll sit beside you. And *avanti!*'

As they started out towards the Porta San Sebastiano, Tony looked at the clock on the switchboard. It marked twenty-seven minutes to four; so nearly fifteen minutes had been wasted in bargaining. Better to have paid, perhaps, and have saved time. Allowing ten minutes to buy a ticket at the quay and find the boat, they had roughly two hundred and fifty minutes to do two hundred and fifteen kilometres. An average of sixty kilometres—only about thirty-seven miles—an hour would do it easily. Tony's hopes rose. He had often heard people in England boast that they had done a long journey in an average of forty-five or more, and he had noticed that the canon's car had several times done that even going up hills—and they were not hurrying. If he had been less ignorant of motoring he would have been less optimistic. A fast run on English or French main roads is child's play compared with the same distance on Italian roads, with their windings and gradients, long narrow crowded village streets and strings of carts all over the road. Moreover, he hadn't reflected that the canon's was an expensive high-powered car, while the taxi was meant for running about towns and couldn't climb hills.

Since he knew nothing of this, he felt almost confident, and was even able to admire the coloured hoods of the wine carts at which Giovanni honked furiously. They had not been running five minutes and were not clear of Rome when Giovanni drew up by the side of the pavement.

'What's the matter?' asked Tony sternly. 'Why are you stopping?'

'Petrol, oil, water,' said Giovanni, pointing to a filling station.

Tony's hopes fell; he had forgotten that the beastly machine had to be fed.

'Shall we have to stop again?'

'Once, perhaps twice.'

The garage owner was very leisurely pumping in petrol, while Giovanni poured in oil and Tony fidgeted about, looking at his watch every twenty seconds.

'How long does this last?' he asked impatiently.
'Do you think we shall do it?'

'We shall do it. Of course, it would have been quicker by Frosinone and Cassino, but the Signore wanted to go by the Via Appia.'

It was nearly ten to four when they started again, and Tony was beginning to despair, especially since the wine carts returning to the *castelli* encumbered the road. The indicator waggled between thirty-five and fifty—hopeless. But then they came onto a stretch of excellent road, and it rose to sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five. Tony's hopes rose with it. Not too bad. The kilometres were beating the minutes. In between the indicator and the clock, from which he could hardly take his eyes, Tony caught glimpses of the Campagna with its ruined aqueducts, new farms, and lovely distant hills. This is one of the most agonizing dreams I ever had, he said to himself. At the foot of the long hill leading to Albano, Giovanni spurred up to ninety, but soon the gradient began to tell on the small engine, they dropped into second, and the indicator fell to thirty. Now the minutes were gaining on the kilometres. Despair.

The whole journey was an agony of these alternations. Giovanni, looking quite calm but a bit grim, was driving his little car magnificently, though Tony didn't know it. He hardly spoke, except to say, 'We shall do it, signore,' in answer to some of Tony's muttered exclamations of

pessimism, and to tell him the names of the towns. They reached the top of the hill, whizzed round a huge palace, crossed a viaduct and passed a village.

'Ariccia,' said Giovanni.

Beyond this they came to a winding road with a tram-line at one side, where Giovanni took appalling risks in cutting corners, hooting madly. A hill town came into sight, but they kept to the road which circled round its foot.

'Velletri, signore.'

Tony nodded impatiently, remembering vaguely how the canon had discoursed there on Augustus for ten minutes on the way up. For some reason the memory annoyed him. Who the devil cared about Augustus? He couldn't make the car go any faster, and the minutes were still ahead of the kilometres. But now they were on a straighter road with an excellent surface, and the little minute hand steadily rose. 'Cisterna,' said Giovanni presently, and pointing ahead. 'Pontine marshes.' They came out onto the great embankment of Appius Claudius which goes as straight as Roman determination. Giovanni knew his chance and took it; the indicator rose slowly to ninety, passed it, touched ninety-five, and finally hovered over the hundred and ten. Tony watched it, fascinated, dimly aware of an interminable line of trees rushing past, of the glint of water in the canal, of stately mountains to his left, but all his senses concentrated on that quivering dial finger and the clock. The kilometres were easily beating the minutes—they'd do it.

Alas, this was too good to last. They were slowed down by a curious suspension bridge with a surface of loose logs, then came to the main street of lower Terracina, and lost the tarred road. Giovanni said 'Terracina' rather crossly, the setting sun was beginning to be an annoyance. They passed Itri castle, sun-dried on its

crag, and drew up at Formia, still twenty minutes ahead of time. Tony watched the refuelling with comparative calm, and did not notice the look on Giovanni's face when he saw how hot his engine was; he had done the 1'0 kilometres from Rome on an eleven-horsepower engine in less than two hours. It seemed to Tony that the remaining eighty-five could easily be done in the same time. He had forgotten that the road was dusty, bumpy, narrow, twisting and full of ups and downs, which slowed them down continuously. And it seemed to him that Giovanni was intentionally going slow, which he was, for he was afraid of his engine boiling on the hills. Tony's spirits fell lower and lower as the minutes inexorably overtook the kilometres. When at last Capua came in sight, they had only fifty-five minutes left, with thirty-five kilometres to go, through the suburbs of Naples and Naples itself and an awful stretch of pot-holed road to Capodimonte.

Giovanni crossed the bridge at Capua at a reckless speed, just escaped the end of a cart, and swerved to the right, with his regulation mutter: 'Capua, signore.' He hooted his way through Aversa, where he had to switch on his lights, bumped and lurched frightfully over the bad stretch, muttered 'Capodimonte,' and went full tilt down the hill with twenty minutes in hand. They were held up at the bad corner by the Museum and had to crawl down the Via Roma, but when at last Giovanni stopped at the gate to the Immacolatella and wiped his face, his clock marked twelve minutes to eight.

'Put my baggage out, Giovanni,' said Tony, jumping down.

He went to one of the officials at the gate.

'The boat for Aeaea, please?'

'The third on the right. Passport?'

Tony handed it to him and went back to Giovanni.

He struggled into his rucksack and handed the man eight hundred lire.

'You have done well, Giovanni,' he said, 'all my thanks. There are eight hundred lire. Have a meal before you go back to Rome. *Addio*

A white-coated steward met Tony as he walked on board and asked for his cabin reservation number.

'I haven't got one,' said Tony, showing the ticket he had just bought at a *guichet*, 'but you'll find me one to myself, please. I want to be alone.' He put twenty lire into the man's hand.

As they went down the hatchway to the berths, Tony heard the first rattle of the donkey engine getting up anchor, and blessed Giovanni and his driving. Through the cabin porthole he could see the side of another ship slowly moving backwards.

'Dinner is served from eight o'clock onwards, *signore*,' said the steward.

'All right,' said Tony indifferently. 'What time do we get to Aeaia?'

'With a fast boat like this we could be there at six,' said the man, with the inevitable trace of Italian boasting, 'but as passengers don't want to be up so early, we go slow, and arrive at eight.'

When the steward had gone, Tony locked the door, sat down on the little bed, and put his head in his hands. He had heard of people being in a whirl, but had never before realized that the worn metaphor might be a reality. Katha, Filomena, Aeaia, the restaurant, the vibration of Giovanni's engine, the road, the kilometre stones, the clock, the dial finger, went reeling past like the trees by the roadside across the Pontine marshes. Certain of Filomena's words kept coming up in his memory and each time with a pang— Sometimes I could see she had been

crying' and 'She is very poor, signore.' That going without her lunch was too damned painful. Ah, Katha, Katha, will it be all right this time at last? You shall never go without your lunch again if I can help it. The fact itself was nothing—after all, he often missed lunch himself from preference—it was the symbol of a pinched life which had to count every penny, and of a sacrifice to their memories. Tony stood up in the cabin and said aloud to nothing:

' Really, Katha dear, some things in life are almost unbearable.'

Tony felt so remorseful about Katha's going without lunch that he could hardly allow himself to eat dinner. However, by the time he had washed and changed his collar, he decided that if he was feeling groggy after the drive, the reason was that he was hungry in spite of Filomena's lunch, and that his duty was to eat, so that he would not reach Aea in a lugubrious mood. From the window of the dining room he could see the lights of Torre del Greco and Torre dell' Annunziata, and noticed that they were swaying up and down; however, the steward said the sea would not be rough—it was only the night breeze. Tony devoutly hoped it would prove so; he had no ambition to present himself to Katha in the dismal condition of recovering from sea sickness.

After dinner he went on deck to take a walk before going to bed. The boat was steaming straight out of the gulf, a little to the south of Ischia, and the lighted towns of the mainland formed a bright bow of radiance. A strong cool breeze was blowing under a sky streaked with cloud, and Tony could hear the thud of water and the hiss of foam as the waves broke against the hull. For once he turned his back on Naples and Vesuvius, with the slender arrow of golden light on its side, and stood look-

ing forward into the darkness, thinking how one's life runs on a thread of big and little events, A European war had barely been strong enough to separate him from Katha; the good-natured kindliness of a *contadina* was sufficient to bring them together again after so many years.

He had a superstitious feeling that the gods on his side had given him a chance to triumph over the gods against him, and remembered the Homeric lot which he had picked almost as a joke on New Year's Eve sixteen months ago. Was it going to prove true? Were the evil gods bidden to hold their hands for a while? It seemed as if all the events and decisions of the past two years formed a chain, leading him at last to the one person in the world with whom he had been completely happy and might hope to be happy again. If he had not grown to feel the degradation of business and revolted from it, he would never have chanced into that Roman restaurant just in time. While he had believed he was only struggling to do what was for him morally right, trying to live without greed, haste, and shallowness, he had unconsciously been moving step by step towards fulfilling the love he had so long hidden even from himself. At Chartres he had felt that the cathedral was a portal to the search for a[%] new life; and as the ship slowly rose and dipped its way through the dark sea he said to himself that he could count the next day's dawn as the beginning of that life. He remembered the grief he had felt when he last left Aeaea, and stretched out his hand, saying aloud:

'Katha, Katha 1 Only one more night alone, Herz, mein Herz I'

§ vi

Reflected sunlight awoke Tony, and he lay for a few minutes still half asleep, watching the golden snaky lines

of light which writhed on the white ceiling of the cabin. Of course there was a very good reason why he should wake up like a child on its birthday with the conviction that he was going to be happy—Katha. He nipped out of bed and looked through the porthole. The morning was windless and cloudless with a marvellous gold dragon sun, perfect Aeaea weather. Beyond the ridge of foamy wave cut by the ship, the water lay unrippled with a gentle underswell; and peacock blues, crystal, and emerald swam over and through one another like a mingling of clear vitreous pastes. What a grand omen of a day! Sometimes the gods do indeed come down handsomely. He craned through the porthole to look as far ahead as possible and caught a glimpse of limestone rocks. Aeaea already? In haste he looked at his watch and saw it marked nearly half-past seven. A scramble then, but a judicious one—a man who has cut himself shaving looks as abject as a cat which has fallen into water. Was Guinevere grateful to Lancelot for all bleeding the bed?

The steward, who had all the common Italian's vulgar notions of what constitutes a gentleman, looked contemptuous as Tony walked off the ship carrying his own luggage; why on earth should foreigners come to a dull country like Italy except to get rid of their money? Ignoring the clatter of touts, now disciplined into a clamorous line and forbidden to snatch bags from the visitor's hands, Tony walked down the quay to take a cab. As he walked he found that all his muscles were trembling and that he felt faint—result of a continuous state of excitement and the fatigue of yesterday probably. For a few minutes he sat still on his bag with closed eyes and felt better. Then he recollected that he had eaten no breakfast, and decided that it would be ridiculous to

appear before Katha, and immediately ask hungrily for breakfast like the hero of a mid-Victorian novel. He must go and get some coffee.

Sitting on the narrow cafe terrace just on the edge of the little harbour to wait for the breakfast he had ordered, Tony fell into a sudden panic. Hitherto he had acted entirely on the sudden impulse given him by Filomena's unexpected announcement that Katha was at Aeaea, and had not reflected what he was going to say or do when he met her; nor had he considered the far more important matter of what Katha would now be, what she would want and do. Filomena's words had put him back into the mood and passion of the pre-war Tony, who had immediately rushed off like a madman to catch the pre-war Katha. But they were now a post-war Katha and Tony. For all he knew, Katha might be married with a posse of infants and a Boche husband. True, Filomena said she came alone and asked for him, but women, even married women, hold strange dreams in their hearts which they do not allow to influence their practical conduct. The annual visit to Aeaea might be a matrimonial safety valve. And, come to that, he was married himself—what would Margaret say to all this? Bless you, my children? And then—O god!—suppose Katha had changed like Evelyn? What a catastrophe!

The breakfast arrived, confirming Tony's worst fears. It was the usual Italian small cafe breakfast, consisting of coffee made from our own national liquorice, tinned milk unconscionably diluted, butter that had forgotten the cow, and uncomely slices of thick bread. Tony gazed at it with disrelish and a strong inclination to send it back and order a brandy and selz; he only refrained because he knew the brandy would be our national kind with a strong flavour of sweetened kerosene. He put in enough sugar to disguise any taste and drank some of the

alleged *cafe latte*, which was not even hot, and ate a piece of dry bread. The gods had slipped up badly over breakfast. *Absit omen.*

This is a moment to be severely realist and practical, Tony told himself; let us begin at the lowest point.

'Waiter!'

'Signore?'

'What time does the bank open?'

'Nine o'clock, signore.'

'Thank you.'

Curious that the less they have to do, the longer the hours. He dawdled until the waiter had done watching him out of the corner of one eye, and then counted his money. Just under two thousand lire and seventy-two pounds still in the letter of credit. Rummaging in his pack, he found a writing pad and envelopes, and wrote to his bank manager, asking for another letter of credit and an immediate draft for a hundred pounds, payable at Aeaea. If Katha turned out to be awful—how could Katha be awful? What a parody of a lover!—or firmly married to young children, then he'd have to find some way of making her a little less poor. If these horrid contingencies didn't occur, well, there were things one might want to do. Fortunate that he had that four hundred and nearly a year's income in his current account, though the bank manager had begged him to put some of it in War loan. Tony had only one financial rule—never do what the bank manager advises. He decided there and then that he would divide his money into three parts, and reinvest it equally between France, Holland, and Switzerland.

What next? Obviously, nothing could be decided until he had seen Katha. It would be better to try to meet her as she was out walking than in the hotel—why in heaven hadn't he thought of sending her a warning

telegram, instead of bursting suddenly upon her like a jack-in-the-box?

Well, there hadn't been any time between Rome and Naples, and he'd forgotten the wireless bloke on the ship. Always forgetting these out-of-date contraptions. He saw that it was ten minutes to nine, so paid his bill with a scowl at the extortionate price, walked over to a cab whose owner was fast asleep on the box in an unconscious miracle of balance, and told him to drive to the piazza of the lower village. He noted with interest that a tariff of authorized charges was firmly screwed on the inside of the *fiacre*—trying to make them honest from the outside.

The drive restored Tony to some of his morning happiness; it was impossible to feel doubtful or uneasy in such beauty. Aeaëa was fresh and lovely in its spring garments. The vines were in leaf; beneath them the young strong wheat was already tall, and the beans were in flower. Here and there up the hillside a blossoming pear tree stood like a fragile white pyramid, or an apple tree, whose flowers were like a swarm of pink moths arrested in flight. Wonder of wonders—there were birds singing, and young oleanders had been planted all along the road. There must be a new *podesta*, a man of taste with a will of iron, otherwise the birds would be eaten and the oleanders chopped down for firewood.

In the piazza Tony paid off his cab and took his luggage to the cafe, where he drank a second and much better cup of coffee. Leaving his bags in the waiter's charge, he sauntered about the little town, noting changes and the spread of Anglo-Saxon civilization in the form of notices: 'Whisky, Gin, Te, Cocktails.' He bought himself another sponge, but after looking over pyjamas decided not to buy any—they were ridiculously dear, and

very poor in quality. At a decent time after nine he went to the bank, and after producing his passport, his birth certificate, his discharge from the army, an old British Museum reading-room pass, and signing two documents in triplicate, he was suspiciously allowed to draw the remainder of his letter of credit—lucky in not having to produce two residents he didn't know to swear to his identity. By that time, the clock in the piazza pointed to a quarter to ten, and he felt that he could now go on to the old hotel in the upper village, secure that Katha would be out when he arrived.

To say that Tony leaned back in the *fiacre* and enjoyed the prospect as they wound upwards would be an exaggeration. The control he had forced upon himself a little earlier had gone, and he was in a high fever of expectancy and impatience, blaming himself for having dawdled. It was wasting minutes he might have spent with Katha. He, who frequently abused the modern lust for speed, now found himself cursing the slowness of horses. Oh, get *on*, you clumsy brute; clump, clump, clump, haven't you ever learned to trot? How will she look, what will she say, what will she be? Oh, Katha, if they've broken you down into being one of them, I shall feel like killing myself. O gods, let it all be as it was, perfect. . . .

At last the *fiacre* came to level road and the horse was whipped into a sharp trot. They passed the little avenue of acacias, just coming into flower; then the old opera-house church which had a new clock and a new yellow-distempered front; and drew up before the hotel. Tony's heart was beating unnecessarily hard, and he observed that his hand shook as he paid the man. He tried to pull himself together, picked up his bags, and made his way into the courtyard, where he came face

to face with Filomena's mother. Of course there had to be a dramatic scene of welcome, with shakings of hands and callings for Babbo, and reproaches for not having come sooner. When this was over, Tony let his bags be taken upstairs and went into the kitchen with the two old people. Now that he was actually arrived, his uncertainty and overexcitement had gone; he felt serenely confident, certain that everything would be well.

'I saw la Filomena in Rome,' he said.

'Ah!' exclaimed the old woman, looking closely at him. 'And did she say that you should come here?'

'Yes, it was her suggestion, and I'm very, very glad I came. Do you know that today is my birthday?'

This, of course, was quite untrue; but Tony had his plan.

'Your birthday? *Buona festa, signore, buona festa!* Babbo, you must get up a bottle of the stravecchio to drink to the Signore's birthday.'

'Not now,' said Tony, preventing the old man from rising. 'But might I have a bottle for lunch, and then we can all drink together?' He paused and then added: 'By the way, Filomena told me that Signorina Caterina, the Austrian, is here? Is that true?'

'Yes,' the old woman replied, still looking at him in the same enquiring way, 'she's here, but she's gone out.'

'Ah!' Tony drew a deep breath. 'Do you know, coming up in the cab, I thought it would be very nice if you could make me a birthday luncheon and that I would ask the Signorina to join me?'

He looked at the old man as he said this, knowing that he was the real cook of the family and would have to be cajoled into showing his art.

'Sicuro,' he nodded. 'I'll do my best, signore, though the notice is short. But I fear the Signorina won't be here.'

'Why not?' asked Tony, knowing perfectly well why.

'She always stays out for lunch,' the old woman put in tactfully.

'Well,' said Tony, standing up, 'I tell you what we'll do. You make as good a lunch as you can for two, and serve it—when shall we say? It's after half-past ten. Twelve-thirty? All right. And I'll go to look for the Signorina. Do you know which way she's gone?'

'I'll show you,' said the old woman, getting up, and hobbling beside him to the gate. She pointed in the direction of the path which led to the end of the island, the path Tony knew so well since it led to the cliff edge where Katha had her hidden nook. 'She's gone that way, you know it.' Then she clutched his arm and whispered: 'Signorino, Signorino! Don't see her unless this time you can stay. She pines for you, and she isn't strong.'

'Don't worry,' said Tony, patting her old shrunken hand. 'You see that Babbo gets a good lunch—I'll do the rest.'

When all the sons of God sang together for joy . . .

Tony did not hurry. There was no point in getting hot, and he was sure that he would find Katha in her nook high above the sea; and even if she had gone to the place where they had bathed together, there was plenty of time. He knew the path so well, and nothing seemed to have changed, except that the cultivated land had eaten up a little more of the wild part. After getting free of the village, the path widened, and he came to the older vineyards, propped on tall poles like hops, and smelled the delicious scent of bean flowers. Maidenhair fern, saxifrage, and other little rock plants grew in the crevices of the rough terrace walls where the lizards lived; and in the wild edges the first of the poppies bent scarlet

beside the last of the wild narcissus. In fifteen minutes he reached the end of the older vineyards and came to the little wood of tall trees, where the short grass was rich with white violet and snowflake and cyclamen. Beyond this, newer gardens had been cleared among the arbutus and dwarf oak which swept down almost to the sea edge, like a green cataract.

What was left of the arbutus grove beside the path was tall enough to keep off the sun and to hide the view—heavenly place where you find yourself enjoying the cool shade at eleven of a morning not halfway through April. He stopped to look at a magnificent yellow coronilla covered with blossoms, and through an opening in the copse saw that the broom was already out on the lowest slopes of the island. Ah, thought Tony, were I the sovereign prince of Aeaëa, I would make it a paradise—or bankrupt the place in a year and be slain by my revolting subjects; I wonder what Katha's thinking of now? He sang softly to himself, *'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh','* to a little tune composed by himself; it only had about five different notes, but he was rather proud of it. Where do you get your ideas for musical settings, Mr. Clarendon? Oh, they come to me when I'm shaving, madam.

Just as he reached the other side of the arbutus grove, he stopped dead, and his heart gave a jump. There, sitting on a low rock with her hands folded on her lap, looking across the gold and white torrents of broom and cytisus to the sea, was Katha. Her head was half turned away, but he had no need to see it to recognize her; his body had not forgotten hers. He knew at once the curve of her high wide breasts, the line of her throat, her slender forearm and slim fingers. His heart smote him as he saw the outline of her cheek, pale and rather sunken. He called softly:

'Katha!'

She was so deeply sunk in her thoughts that she did not hear, and he called again more loudly:

'Katha!'

She started violently to her feet, her hands suddenly clasped, and he saw, first with surprise and then with an agony of remorse, that her eyes were darkened with terror,

'Katha! Don't be frightened. It's Tony. I didn't mean . . . I've found you at last!'

As he spoke, he walked slowly towards her, holding out his hand, as if she were a terrified wild thing which might suddenly dash away, and he had to reassure her. Two paces away he halted, and held out both hands, saying:

'Katha! I came directly I knew where to find you,'

The terror faded from her eyes, but he saw that her face was very white and that she was trembling. She said:

'Tony! Oh, my love,'

And before he knew she had moved, she had caught him to her in a close embrace where her whole body seemed to welcome his in an ecstasy of relief and longing, as he had seen and envied men embraced by women when they returned on leave from the front. It was so spontaneous, so much the expression of a woman who is completely at one with her body, that he felt as if those thirteen years of English life had dropped from him like a shell and he had found his body again. They stood without speaking. Tony could feel her cool cheek against his, her trembling body and the violent beating of her heart. He was shaking all over himself, and yet already the wonderful peace of mated bodies entered him, as his blood instinctively began to harmonize with the rhythm of hers.

To his despair and horror, she suddenly broke into tears, but a passion of weeping, all her flesh shaken with sobbing, as if all the pain and misery and loneliness of years had at last found an outlet. Tony held her tenderly, but in consternation, trying to comfort and soothe her with the speechless sympathy of his body. He could feel her tears, first warm and then cold, soaking through his thin shirt; and this, which in another woman would have annoyed him, seemed right, since it was Katha. To whom should she give her tears, if not to him? Presently she recovered a little, but her deep sighing sobs, like those of a hurt child, were too frequent for her to speak. Tony gently freed himself from her anxious tight clasp, put an arm round her waist to support her, and led her a little way in among the arbutus. Katha was trying to dry her eyes with a tiny hanky. A dozen yards inside the thick screen of arbutus, Tony found a small open space of rock and cytusus, sheltered from the sun. He sat down and took Katha into his arms and held her very gently and tenderly, as if she were a hurt child who had been lost and was at last found, touching her hands to bring them alive, putting warm lips to her face, and whispering—he didn't know what, but he knew she needed the sound of his voice.

The sobs ended and she ceased to tremble. Putting a gentle hand to her breast, he felt that her heart was beating with a less frightening violence, and the tension of her body slowly relaxed as her blood answered his. Only from time to time she still drew a deep shuddering breath, so unconsciously a hurt sigh that it hurt him too, like a wound. She kept her neck bent so that he could not see her face, but with exultation he felt her timidly lift a hand and lay it against his throat where the shirt was open. He knew then that she had not forgotten. When she seemed almost calm, he said:

'Katha, darling, I am sorry I startled you like that. Prancing after you like a bull of Bashan. But I only heard you were here yesterday.'

'Who from?'

'Filomena.'

'In Rome?'

'Yes.'

'How quickly you got here.'

'I hired a cloud from Ariel. I wish it had been a quicker one, but all the fast ones were engaged.'

'It's been so, so long a time for me, Tony.'

'And for me. I looked for you so desperately, wanting you so much, my Katha.'

'When?'

'In 1919.'

'Here?'

'Yes, and before that in Vienna. I combed that damned town looking for you.'

'What time of the year?'

'October.'

'I was ill in the country, at Bischofshoven.'

'The gods were against us.'

'What did you do when you couldn't find me?'

'Came here and moped about, then felt you must be dead, and wept on our bed at the hotel, then went back to England and hired myself as doorkeeper to the devil.'

'Was she nice?'

'Who?'

'The devil.'

'No, beastly. I ran away.'

'Who with?'

'Myself.'

'What made you go to Filomena in Rome?'

'I don't know. The gods, I think. I was in Tunis, wondering where I should go, and had an impulse to see

Rome again. Then I dropped into that little restaurant for lunch yesterday, found Filomena, who told me you were here, and—you know the rest. Or rather you don't. But you will in time. How much we have to say to each other! '

Katha abruptly sat up on his knees, leaned back and looked at him. It seemed to Tony quite perfect that one should be looked at like that by the only person from whom one wanted that look. But there was another deep pang in his heart when he saw the expression of deep sadness in and about her eyes, and the grief mixed with the sweetness of her mouth. She was beautiful, even more beautiful than she had been as a girl, but, O god, why was it necessary that she should suffer so much? It was too deep a wrong to think of vengeance, but, O hell, that evil and cruelty and greed are so strong. And all this time Katha was watching his face, as if it were an enigma she only could read.

'You've changed very little, Tony, except that now you're a man.'

'And you're a woman, Katha. Even more beautiful than you were.'

'Do you know what I was thinking about when you startled me so? '

'About me?'

'No. How conceited you handsome men are I I was thinking that I was over thirty, and I should have to resign myself to lonely old age.'

How absurd! Anyway, I'm not so self-centred as you are. I can swear I've thought of little but you or how to get to you in the past twenty-four hours.'

Katha laughed, and he was happy that sadness had not made her forget how to laugh. He said:

'And Katha . . . •'

'What?'

'You haven't kissed me yet,'

With a swift movement, which had both grace and graciousness in it, she leaned forward and put her lips to his. It started with the intention of being one short kiss, but became many long ones; and as she so beautifully and frankly gave herself with her lips, he knew that the dream Katha of his memories was already one with the real Katha in a lovelier now.

Tony caught a glimpse of his wrist watch and saw that it marked almost twelve o'clock.

'I think we'd better be getting back to lunch,' he said, as carelessly as he could feign, but watching her.

A startled, slightly anxious, and hunted look came into Katha's face, the look of a person who in happiness remembers that life is always pinched for pennies.

'I'm afraid you must go alone,' she said hesitatingly, with the look of sadness already growing up round her eyes. 'I brought my lunch with me. It must be lying up on the bank there somewhere.'

'Ah,' said Tony, 'I expect the bears have eaten it. But even if they haven't, I want to ask you a favour. Sacrifice your picnic for today and have lunch with me at the hotel. We can have picnic lunches any day afterwards. I told them at the hotel it was my birthday and that you were going to lunch with me in consequence.'

He was deeply touched by the look of pleasure which came into her face at the prospect of even so small a fete, and yet she shrank from accepting with all poverty's dread of intrusion and expense.

'I really ought not to. I . . .'

He could see she was longing to come, and replied :

'Oh, come, you won't refuse to let me be your host

on our first day together? And you mustn't disappoint Babbo—he's performing terrific feats of culinary skill in your honour. Besides, it's my birthday.'

'Tony, what a liar you are! You know your birthday's in August.'

'Well,' said Tony, pleased as anything that she remembered, 'and yours is in December. Split the difference and it's April. We'll have a joint birthday lunch. Come on.'

They made their way back through the arbutus, to the place near the path where Katha had been sitting, keeping hand in hand as they walked, as if each were afraid that the other might be snatched away. Tony bent down to free a thorn which had caught Katha's skirt, and noticed how poor and old the material was, though she had made it up in a way which looked almost elegant. And then the little linen bag with her lunch contained only two oranges and a roll of bread. Tony turned aside, trying to swallow the lump in his throat, and picked some of last year's red arbutus fruit which still hung on the branches as a pretext for turning.

'Look,' he said, clearing his throat with a cough, 'aren't they beautiful? Put them in your hanky, and keep them as a reminder of our re-meeting.'

'It's all wet and teary,' said Katha, looking at the little screw of material in her hand.

'Take mine,' answered Tony, pulling the clean handkerchief from his top pocket.

'What a handsome one, and what good stuff you have in England. You're grown quite a dandy.'

'A dandy I like that. Why, I bought those at Woolworth's, sixpence each.'

'Well, they're better than we get in Austria.'

'Poor Austria,' said Tony. 'She has been *delenda* with a vengeance. But, never mind, darling, there's one

Austrian who isn't going to be *delenda* any longer. And now let's hurry, or Babbo will be fuming.'

As they passed the flowery grass plot under the tall trees, Tony said:

'Look, Katha, there are still white violets.'

§VII

When Tony clicked open the gate into the courtyard for Katha to enter, he saw Filomena's Mamma scuttle across the courtyard into the kitchen—obviously she'd been watching for them. A clamour of rapid dialect: arose at once, and, though he understood not one word, he guessed from the excitement that she was saying they had come back together. How Italians love their bit of drama, especially when they can feel sentimental about it.

Katha went on ahead to her room, while Tony lingered in the courtyard to make sure that everything had been properly arranged. As he watched the unconscious, grace and dignity of her moving body, the Vergiliaa school tag about the walk of goddesses came into his mind—what is wrong with graciousness and sweetness, that we have banished them? Barbarians. He smiled in answer to her quick glance as she went through the open door. If she looks like that in those Austrian rags,, what would she look like in clothes with a real tradition? Rumanian? No, too gaudy and arty; and so' are the Czech. Tyrolese or Schwarzwald? No> they're a bit gawdy, and too humble in a bad way. Calabrian? Yes, perhaps; these women in Tiriolo still have the grand manner, and they're not ashamed of their bodies being women's. God, how I dislike these test-tube figures.

With some alarm he noticed that no table seemed ta

have been prepared for them. Next to the entry were four noisy Italians, and beside them another table with two Germans. The man had one of those square bald heads with three red double chins at the back, which Tony always felt as a menace to European civilization. The old woman came out of the kitchen and looked up at him anxiously and enquiringly. Tony nodded reassuringly and asked:

'Where have you put our table?'

'In the garden, behind those canes. I thought the Signore would rather be there.'

Quite right,' said Tony, greatly relieved.

They walked over to the garden, and he saw that the gods had again done things handsomely by the hands of Filomena's Mamma. The table was decorated with a pattern of flower petals, and a bunch of spring flowers lay by each plate, with a card inscribed: *Auguri delta famtgltà*. Mamma had laid the table with the special service from her china cupboard and the silver she kept hidden under the bed and never used herself. Tony was touched.

'It's perfect,' he said. 'YouVe done everything as I should have wished, signora, and more than I expected. I can't thank you enough.'

He looked round the screen of canes to make sure that Katha was not coming, and said in a lower voice:

'How much does the Signorina pay you?'

'A hundred and fifty lire for ten days, signore, but we can't——'

'I know, I know,' Tony interrupted. 'Look, I'm going to pay that. You understand? Tell her it's paid, and refuse to take any money. I'm going to look after her now. Put us both on full pension, and if you serve any extras I'll pay, of course.'

Yes, signore.' Though she had been generous in

the cheapness of her terms to Katha, the old lady was not a bit sorry to find things taking a turn more profitable to herself. Besides, Italians have still enough of the artist in them to love a little opulence and doing things properly.

'I think that's all,' said Tony reflectively. 'No, stop a minute. What does she have for breakfast?'

'Black coffee and bread, signore.'

'Hell!'

He remembered how Katha loathed black coffee in the morning, and how she liked fruit and honey and plenty of hot milk.

'I suppose it's impossible to get any real honey?' he asked.

'The postman has some, I think, but it's very dear.'

'Get it. In the comb if possible. You must get her Viennese rolls and butter, honey, and fruit, *and* a lot of milk *and* hot. And buy us a kilo of proper coffee—not this liquorice muck. Here's three hundred lire. That pays her bill to date and those breakfast things. Mind you get them. You can account to me for the change. Hush! Here she comes.'

'You look like two conspirators,' said Katha, coming round the cane hedge, 'I heard you whispering away most tragically.'

'I thought you knew,' said Tony. 'My name's Borgia, and this is my daughter, Lucrezia. So you know what to expect.'

'Shall I serve, signorina?' asked the old woman.

'At once,' said Tony, '*subito*.' Then in English to Katha: 'I must run up and wash, but if I told her in two minutes, she'd make it half an hour.'

When he came back, Katha was standing by the table, unwinding yards of thread from the bunches of flowers.

'How charmingly they've done this table!' she exclaimed, glancing at him with happy eyes. 'Was that your idea?'

Partly. But the table decoration is wholly due to Mamma. She's a dear. If you turn me down, Katha, I shall run away with her.'

Then Babbo will shoot you from behind a tree. This is near to Sicily; they have the vendetta. Oh, these poor flowers, how terribly tightly they're bunched. They can't breathe. It makes me feel as if I had a big snake round my chest.'

'It's the neo-classical spirit,' Tony explained. 'Everything all neat and tight and trim, and no nonsense about nature.'

'There,' said Katha, shaking the flowers free at last. 'Now they're happier. Don't you like those little wild cyclamen, Tony?'

Very much. An English poet says they look like greyhounds' ears. I think they're like girls running fast against the wind, with their heads bent down.'

He stepped back to glance at the courtyard, to make sure nobody was coming, and then returned to the shelter of the heavy green canes. Katha was busily freeing the flowers, touching them with the ends of her sensitive fingers as if they were indeed alive. He noticed that she had changed her dress and put on a small coral necklace; it was she who gave them distinction. As she worked over the flowers she sang quietly to herself, in the unconscious way people do when they are happy. Yet how bitter her life must have been for how long, that even in happiness her face bore that look of tragic sadness. Tony reflected that no doubt he looked pretty glum at times. And yet how little they had asked of their fellow creatures—simply to be left alone together.

'Katha!'

She looked up enquiringly as he went towards her and took her hands.

'Have you thought, my Katha, that we are alone together, in Aeaea, with the sun shining?'

'I was thinking of little else when I was upstairs and when I was arranging those flowers.'

'And that there is no reason why we need ever separate?'

She did not answer, and he saw in her eyes a flash of the anxious dread he had noticed before—someone so hurt by life that she dared not imagine happiness. Tony bent down and kissed her, because he wanted to, and because there seemed no words to make her the promises he longed to give. A lover is the chastest of all men, thought Tony; he wants only one woman.

They separated as they heard Mamma's hobbling patens on the stone pavement, and sat down hastily, smiling at each other.

That lunch seemed to Tony by far the most remarkable he had ever experienced. It certainly was not the food and wine, though Babbo had ably seconded the gods by conjuring up a lobster salad, quails, young peas, and an interesting cheese, the small pear-shaped Calabrian cheese made of buffalo milk and smoked. Nor was it even the sky over the quiet garden with its scent of lemon blossom and roses. It was living those things through Katha. He remembered the Chartres figures of the man and woman sitting down to eat together, and how he had felt something august and sacred in them. At the same time he was surprised by the waves of different feelings which passed over him. In the depths of himself he felt a deep peace and certainty; but above that he was at one moment gay and laughing, and the next moment forced to take a sip of wine to loosen a tight

sensation in his throat. And more than once he saw tears in Katha's eyes even when she was smiling. It was still so frail a happiness, only able to forget at moments the suffering of the past, and fearful of trusting the future.

Katha exclaimed over Tony's extravagance as Mamma produced the lunch with an air of virtuous triumph and lingered to receive their compliments.

Do you always live like this, Tony? ' asked Katha.

' As a matter of fact, I don't. I'm rather frugal really. But then it's thirteen years since I sat down to eat with you, and I couldn't help feeling it was rather a special occasion.'

He drank some wine to get rid of the damned lump in his throat.

' This wine of Babbo's is very good,' he said, examining the bottle to avoid seeing the tears in her eyes. ' Don't you think we ought to drink a toast?'

' Yes.'

He pretended not to notice that she swiftly touched her eyelids with the handkerchief he'd given her.

' What shall it be? ' he went on cheerfully. ' The bride and bridegroom? That's horribly stilted. And I dislike the selfish Scotch way of drinking to oneself. It must be someone else. Absent friends? We haven't got any, at least I haven't. And I won't drink a damnation toast at this lunch. I know. We have got one friend, whom I shall never forget.'

' Who?'

' Filomena, of course, silly! But for her we shouldn't be here together. Let's drink to Filomena, shall we? '

' Of course, let's. To Filomena! '

' To Filomena—and not only what the world thinks

is good for her, but what she really wants. God bless Filomena.'

'I suppose,' said Katha, laughing, 'that polite people might give a nasty name to the service she has done us.'

'Damn polite people. Have some more lobster?'

'I can't and I mustn't, Tony, I shall be ill. I never eat much lunch.'

'No?' said Tony, taking another gulp of wine. 'I suppose not. But you mustn't slim too much, Katha. I don't like scraggy women.'

'Do you think I'm too thin?' she asked anxiously.

'No, but you must rest and eat a bit more. I wish Filomena were here to cook for us. Babbo's too decorative and fanciful, and Mamma's a little on the slap-dash side.'

'Oh, Tony, you are fussy. She makes delicious things.'

'There's orange blossom on a tree over there,' said Tony, ignoring this. 'Shall I get you a spray? No, I don't think I will. It's a bit Hanover-Squarish, isn't it? I wonder why it's used? Was the orange tree sacred to Hera? I must look that up some time.'

Katha laughed.

'Oh, Tony, *mein Herz*, you're just the same! Always looking up information, or, rather, always going to look up obscure facts you forget about immediately.'

'You think it's very ridiculous?'

'No, I adore it.'

Mamma came round the cane hedge at that moment, bearing four quails and an immense dish of peas. Katha drew a breath of horror.

'Tony! Do you expect me to eat all that?'

'No, I want some myself, but you can have three quails and most of the peas.'

'What a pig you make me out. I don't think I can eat a morsel.'

'Oh, try. And leave it, if it defeats you. By the way, Katha, you aren't married, are you?'

'What a funny question, all mixed up with quails and peas! No, of course I'm not married. But you are, aren't you?'

Tony looked down at the tablecloth, and then met her eyes frankly.

'Yes. But I can't tell you how little I feel married over there, what an error it seems, what a strange wrong dream from which I've gradually awakened. And you haven't any children?'

'How could I have,' said Katha, laughing again, 'when I'm not married?'

'Oh, lots of people do, I assure you.'

'Yes,' she said reflectively, 'that's true enough.' And he noticed once more the swift fear in her eyes, and wondered why it was there. How queer to feel so intimate and united with each other, and yet to know so little of the events in their lives that they had to ask each other the elementary questions of strangers. The fear returned that he might have let his hopes jump too far, that however much Katha wanted to be with him, there might be something in her life to prevent her. But, no husband, no infants, bastard or otherwise—how could there be?

With the coffee, which was real coffee, the two old people came to sit with them at Tony's invitation, and Babbo finished up the bottle of wine. Katha talked to them gaily, and Tony admired her fluency in Italian and real knowledge of the idiom, whereas he knew he merely translated English when he talked. Gradually, however, she dropped out of the conversation, and sat quite

silent, absently drawing lines on the tablecloth with the end of a spoon. Tony didn't interrupt her, remembering how often as a child he had been checked for doing the same thing; and went on talking about Filomena. and when was she coming back, and how much they must miss her. Finally Katha said to him in English:

'Tony, do you mind if I go and rest for a little while?'

'Of course not. You must be exhausted by all this. Do go and rest. I shall be in my room this afternoon, so if you'd like to take another walk later on, will you come there?'

'Which is your room?'

'At the far end of the corridor—the one with the terrace.'

Katha excused herself charmingly to the old people, and went away, it seemed to Tony with a little droop in her grace. He hoped she wasn't tired out with the morning's emotions.

About three o'clock Tony went to his room, tiptoeing along the carpetless corridor so as not to wake Katha if she were asleep. He kissed his fingers to her door as he passed. The shutters of his room were closed tight, and after the brilliant sun outside the room seemed Cimmerian. He groped his way over to the tall window-doors, and walked out onto the dazzlingly white terrace. There were little pots of flowers on the tiled wall, mostly freesias and cyclamen. All the southern end of Aeaea lay before him in the hushed noon calm, sweeping up on one side to the mountain crest and on the other sinking down and down until with a last drop the land touched the calm sea. The silence was so complete that he could hear the jingle of harness as a horse standing in the street shook the flies from its head, and far in the distance the monotonous wailing work-chant of a woman among

the olives. The scene was an exact replica of some of the afternoons in April 191' when he had left Katha in precisely the same way and had looked across the island to the sea from the same place on the same terrace. The illusion of time arrested was so powerful that he almost doubted the reality of the intervening years. Were they just an evil dream, all that misery and wretchedness and struggling and error—the war, the despair, Margaret, business, all of it? These two similar moments enclosed the most tumultuous and unhappy part of his life and Katha's, as if in between they had been tossed to and fro by contentious gods. Now, surely, they had served long enough to have earned each other? Sky and sun, and you, divine foam-born, and you, Isis the searcher, be favourable!

For some time he lingered *on* the terrace, lost in feelings too deep to be called thoughts; and then, finding the sun too hot for his liking, went back into the room, where he walked up and down debating with himself. Finally, he took his writing pad and wrote a short letter to Filomena, thanking her, and giving her a cautious outside version of what had happened. The next letter was more difficult, and it was a long time before he got beyond 'Dear Margaret,' Once he had started, however, he wrote rapidly and continuously, pouring out the whole story of himself and Katha, accusing himself, excusing Katha, begging Margaret's forgiveness, and asking her to divorce him at once. When at last he had finished he reread the four pages he had written in close handwriting, put them in an envelope, sealed and addressed it, and then threw himself on the bed to rest. But no sooner was he there than doubts of the wisdom of this letter began to tap at his mind. He told them to go away, and they returned in greater force. Had he learned so little of human nature, of women in general and of Margaret

in particular, as to give himself bound into her hands, provide her with a tragical story she could mock at to him and laugh over with her friends, and even to let her have his address so that if she chose she could come and smash a happiness won after so much agony and shame? Was it not more than a little naif to trust to her generosity in such circumstances?

Tony swung himself off the bed, tore up his letter, burned the fragments in the stove, and wrote again:

DEAR MARGARET:

I have thought over the conversation we had together on the night before I left England, and I have come to the conclusion that it would be far better for us not to try to continue to live together. For us to go on pretending would be a farce, and an indecent one.

This letter is simply to say that I shall not be returning to you. This is quite certain. Probably you won't want a divorce any more than I do, but if at any time you do, I daresay it might be arranged.

My bank will forward anything you want to say.

Yours,

TONY.

Be ye soft as doves, and cunning as serpents. Don't let them get you down by being too open and trustful. He reread the letter, wondering if he had feigned enough reluctance in the matter of the divorce or whether it would be better to allow her to suggest it and then seem to oppose the suggestion, decided to let it stand, and enclosed the letter with another to his banker, asking for mail to be forwarded and requesting that his address should be kept entirely secret. He then wrote brief notes to Waterton and Julian as from Cooks, Madrid, and enclosed these with a fifty-lira note to the Mail De-

partment, requesting that the letters should be posted and mail for him forwarded, and repeating the request for secrecy. Finally he wrote to Rome and asked for his letters to be sent to Madrid. That at any rate would set a bit of a puzzle to anyone who tried to find him. Tony was very much pleased by this innocent and rather ineffective Machiavellianism, which seemed to him prodigiously artful and dishonest.

It was now after five, and very much cooler as the sun declined, so much so that Tony began to doubt whether they would be able to dine out of doors. He was surprised that Katha had not come to start on their walk, but decided that she must be tired out and sleeping. There was no point in waking her, especially since he had declared himself that she needed rest; and, after all, they had the rest of their lives together. But when six o'clock arrived with no Katha, he began to feel anxious. What could have happened? He walked up and down the room, working himself into a great state of uneasiness until, just as he had made up his mind to go and call her and find out what was wrong, she tapped at his door and entered.

'Are you all right?' he asked. 'Did you rest well?'

'Yes, thank you.'

He expected her to say something about having delayed so long, but as she did not speak, he added:

'It's too late to go any distance, isn't it? I've got some letters to post, and then we can stroll about.'

'There's a new path at the back of the village a little way up the mountain. It has wonderful views. Shall we go there? I'd like to see it once again.'

'Of course.'

Tony wondered a little at that 'once again,' which seemed to have a valedictory hint in it. Why want to see it 'once again,' when she could see it every day for

months if she wished? He made no comment, however, and tried to forget immediately the tiny stab he had felt at this apparent taking for granted that she would be leaving. After posting the letters, they went back through the village to the new path, which was planted with flowers on both sides—huge clumps of big white marguerites and blue lupins.

'Do you like it?' asked Katha.

'Yes, in a way. I can't ever dislike flowers, except in cemeteries and most public gardens, and the view is as good as any on the island. Yet I liked the old Aeaea better. This fixing up means tourists.'

Katha did not reply, and he suspected that she had misinterpreted his remark about the old Aeaea into a slight criticism of herself. All this was so slight and he was so happy to be walking with her again, chattering with her, living in her ambience, that it would have left his mind at once if he had not felt in Katha a slight constraint, so utterly different from the frankness with which she had met him. It was as if she were trying gently to withdraw from him without hurting, as if she were just a little on her guard. He would have passed this over as a fancy, if he had not noticed it again at dinner, and noticed too that the expression of sadness and the scared hurt look of her eyes scarcely left her. Tony did his best to be gay, and she laughed with him; but his instinct warned him that something was not quite right.

They lingered over dinner, or rather Katha caused them to linger by saying she did not want to go out again, and that she must soon go to bed. Tony watched her anxiously, and this watchfulness, which he was not able to conceal entirely, seemed to make her more nervous. Twice she stood up as if to say good-night and twice sat down again. At last she made an effort, and as she

stood up a third time, held out her hand to him, saying:

'Really I must go to bed. Good-night, Tony.'

He rose to his feet at the same time, and taking her hand was about to speak, but she went on in a low quick voice:

'I can't try to thank you for this beautiful day. You have been perfect. It's the only thing I hoped for in life—to find that you were alive and still yourself. If I was terrified when you came on me this morning, forgive it—I thought you must have been killed in the war, and that they were lying here when they said they'd seen you. The day you've given me will sweeten all my life. I'm glad I didn't die as I wanted. Good-night.'

Her lips trembled as she spoke, and she did not look at his eyes. He kept tight hold of her hand, as she tried to disengage it and turn away.

Katha,' he said tenderly, 'just one moment. Knowing you've been happy today is all I needed to make up perfection. Life has been maimed without you, and now at last I've found you again, I'm afraid to let you out of my sight. If I had my way I should be saying good-night until the sun rose. Give me a few more minutes of the loveliest day, it will never be quite the same on any tomorrow even if it is far more lovely. Come to the end of the garden. It's only fifty yards, and the flower scents are so rich at night, and there'll be stars. Come.'

The air in the garden was warmer than Tony had expected. He had forgotten that Aeaëa was not the Sahara, that after the sunset chill the air becomes or seems to become warm again. In the starlight he could see dimly the shapes of vines arching the path and the sharp edge of the mountain blackening the northern sky. Scents of earth and roses and freesia were lost in the Tasso sweetness of orange and lemon blossom. Katha walked lightly beside him, as silent as the silence itself;

she had linked her arm with his, and took his hand in both of hers.

They walked slowly to the end of the garden, stood for a minute looking up at the speckled sky, and then walked back again to the courtyard. Neither spoke a word, yet Tony felt and knew Katha felt that all was indeed perfect between them. Tony thought of Plato's myth of the Men-Women who had once been a single complete living thing, and then had been severed, so that the half, Man, and the half, Woman, must always go seeking the other lost half for completion. He wanted Katha's blood to run with his, as if they had but one heart; to enter her body with his flesh and give her the mysterious seed which was his blood; to drink the breath of her life in her kisses and breathe back life to her; to give his body as her shield and his toil to foster her days; and if they must die, to die with her, so that even their ashes would be together. Why is it that to lovers the infinity of death alone seems commensurate with the infinity of love? Because the mind dies, but the flesh lives. We are the living loves of all our ancestors, and if they had loved perfectly, so should we be perfect. Love then perfectly that the flesh you make of your love may be perfect.

When they reached the door of Katha's bedroom, Tony kissed her, and said:

'Shall I come to you? Will you lie in my arms to-night?'

He was so certain they were at one, so sure in his flesh she needed him, that he was amazed when she shrank back and exclaimed in tones of infinite pain:

'Oh, no, no ! Not tonight. Oh, please.'

By the crude light of the unshaded electric bulb in the passage he could see the grief and pain in her eyes, and

yet knew that she was fighting against her own flesh and desire. He drew back, trying not to be hurt, and said :

'Then, good-night, dear Katha. Sleep well. Tomorrow is a new day.'

Before he knew she had moved, her arms were about him and her lips on his. Then she said:

'Heart, my heart, don't be hurt, don't hate me. I can't, I can't! Oh, how I want you! '

And was gone.

Tony stood irresolute in the passage. Here was some mystery which he longed to make clear. What was the reason for this denial of themselves, which he saw plainly cost her a tremendous effort? Perhaps she had her illness, perhaps she was very tired? No, it must be something far deeper, for she could so easily have said that, and in any case that was no reason why she should not sleep in his arms. She had not locked the door, he was certain of that; should he enter and insist on an explanation now? Did she mean that he should insist? He felt perfectly sure that if he did enter and insist, she would not refuse him; and he felt even more certain that this would be wrong, a violation. It was not Katha to play coquettish games. Nor would he try to snatch what must be offered freely and frankly. Tomorrow, if Katha were willing, they would clear away this mysterious something that was troubling her.

He walked on slowly to his room, deep in thought, and yet acutely conscious of the white walls, so bare and cool in the summer, the scrubbed grain of the carpetless boards with their edging of blue tiles, the badly made grey doors with brass handles like those on money safes. As he opened his door, he said to himself that Katha might well feel tired, for he was very tired. It was not a moment for explanations, which might heed the fresh-

ness of morning and the gaiety of sunlight to avoid being tragical. He had said himself, tomorrow is a new day. And today had indeed been full—weighted by all the unspoken burden of thirteen years. As he fell asleep, his last conscious thought was that somehow that sadness and fear must be taken from Katha's eyes.

§ vin

Perhaps it was morning light which awakened him through the bright window pane, as it had awakened him the morning before, reflected from the water, but it seemed to Tony that someone had called him. He was awake and out of bed in an instant, immediately alert as he had learned to be in the line, and with an urgent sense that something had to be done at once. It was five minutes to six, and he could see from his terrace that creamy white mist lay in the coves and dwelt thickly on the mountain. Another fine day. A shame to wake Katha so early; and yet he had an irresistible impulse to go to her. They *must* clear up this mystery. To give himself time to make sure, he shaved deliberately and took a shivery cold bath in the little tub they had remembered to put for him. How scandalized he had been as a boy by the absence of baths in small Continental hotels, and how he had lectured Filomena's family on the subject! When he had finished bathing he felt more than ever convinced that he must go to Katha, that she needed him. Without waiting to dress, he put on slippers and his light dressing down and went to Katha's door.

At his tap he heard her reply immediately: '*Avanti,*' as if she thought it was the servant. Tony entered and then paused inside the door, amazedly face to face with a frightened Katha. He had imagined himself kissing her as she lay sleepily in bed, and here she was partly

dressed in her underclothes, with her bag almost packed, in a most evident determination to catch the morning boat to Naples.

'Katha!' Tony exclaimed. 'What are you doing, my heart? Are you mad? You aren't going?'

She sat down in a collapsed sort of way on the bed, obviously trying to be very calm. Even in his anxiety and distress, perhaps more acutely because of them, Tony saw with delight how beautiful her body was, her round undrooping breasts almost uncovered, and the gracious, scarcely hidden legs.

'I *must* go, my dear one. You see, my holiday ends today. I must be back at work on Monday morning.'

But,' said Tony, striding up and down the room in agitation, 'why should you go back to your job at all? I didn't say it in so many words yesterday, but I took it for granted that you would want to live with me, as we planned so long ago. Don't you want to?'

'I think I'd be willing to die, and die happily, if I might have a year or two of happiness with you, Tony. But things are not as they were in 191'. I have no money.'

'Who, the devil cares about that?' said Tony explosively. 'You're not going to let a silly thing like that part us, Katha? I haven't much, but enough for two quiet people. We'll share. D'you think I wouldn't take from you? Of course I would. Why should you fetch up this bourgeois scruple from a distant past? Won't you share with me?'

'Of course I would, but it isn't only that, Tony. The people I work for will be expecting me.'

'How much do they pay you?'

'Forty schillings a week.'

'What! That's about twenty-five English shillings, isn't it? What monstrous thieves. Look here, you

wire them you've got a better job and they can go to hell. I offer you eighty Austrian schillings a week to be my secretary. There'll be no duties that I know of, so it's a good offer.'

'But, Tony, I've things in Vienna, and a room there to pay for.'

'That's easily dealt with. You can wire them to pack your things and send them here, and we'll wire them the rent at the same time. Anything else?'

'Yes. I had thought of all you say, but there's something much more important.'

'What?;

'Your wife.'

Tony paused in his marching about and rubbed his hands several times across his hair.

'Ah!' he said, as if the clue to the mystery had been found at last. 'So that's what's worrying you! It's like you to be so scrupulous, and I love you for it. Listen, Katha. What we're saying now's important, so important that all the years of our lives hang on it. There mustn't be any false reasoning, still less any false feeling. Be frank with me as I'll be frank with you, and I *know* we'll clear away what kept us apart last night. Promise you'll hold nothing back?'

Katha nodded and pulled up the little blue underbodice which had slipped from her breast. Tony went on, speaking deliberately and emphatically:

I swear I'm telling you the truth, Katha. I married Margaret because I thought you were dead or at any rate lost for ever, because I was in despair and a nervous wreck, because I thought she wanted me and that I could at least give one person what she wanted, though I could never give all myself—that was yours. I swear to you that for at least two years we have been more and more rapidly drawing apart, that I saw clearly how the kind

of life I wanted to live would mean separation. More still, before I left London in February we had a terribly painful scene which was virtually the end. And among the letters I posted yesterday was one to her saying I should not return and hinting at divorce. Even if you vanished from before my eyes and I knew I should never see you again, I should still not go back to her. This is true. You believe me? '

He went towards her, holding out his hands to take her in the belief that all was now cleared up, but she gently repulsed him.

'Tony, I do believe you. And even if what you said were false, I'm woman enough not to be too scrupulous. But there is something else, something much worse which I shall have to tell you, and then you must let me pack. The boat leaves at eight.'

'What is it?' asked Tony, with the fear in his eyes now.

'Stand farther away—farther—by the window—and turn your back. Don't look at me.'

Katha paused and then spoke in a low but unfaltering voice, the sadness in which was for Tony unendurable.

'My father was imprisoned under suspicion of communicating with Russia during the war and died in prison. My brother in the army committed suicide because of the disgrace. I was imprisoned for nearly a year and then released under surveillance. Most of my father's money was lost. I sold his house and the contents and lived only for the end of the war and you. No letter came from you, no news. My letters disappeared, perhaps never left Austria—they thought I was a spy. We starved in Austria during the war, and I was ill. After the Armistice I tried to get permission to come to England and was refused—my record was against me. I was very ill for months in a hospital, and when I got bet-

ter I had to go to the country, I was there when you came to Vienna to look for me, as I told you yesterday. Meanwhile my money dwindled.'

Tony kept his back turned as he had promised and put his hand over his eyes. He longed for her to finish this terrible story, so that he could take her in his arms and try to comfort her and say that it must be forgotten in happiness—but how could all this be a barrier to them?

'Then the krone collapsed, as you know,' Katha went on, quite steadily but in so hopeless a tone it was to him like shedding blood, 'and all the dealers of the earth came to buy up cheap the relics of a dead empire. I had little, I had nothing. I tried to find work, still hoping you would come, or that I could reach England. I got a passport, but the English consul refused me permission to land in England, though I went on my knees to him. I sold papers in the street, I worked at washing plates in a restaurant. And Austria grew poorer and poorer. The streets were filled with unemployed. . . .'

'Oh, Katha,' said Tony brokenly, 'must you go on? This is like death. But—go on—I must suffer it too. And then let me turn and come to you.'

'Not yet. Don't turn round. I starved for three days, and it was winter, and I sold my body to a man for food. Then I thought I would kill myself in shame, but he was not a bad man, he tried to find me work and failed. I had to live in that way for three months, until they took me to scrub floors in the shop where I now work. That is what I had to tell you, Tony, and why I have to go. I would give you my blood and my life, but I can't give you a dishonoured body, a prostitute's body.'

Tony brushed his arm savagely across his face and asked:

'May I turn round now?'

' Yes.'

Katha was still seated on the bed, very pale but quite calm and tearless, staring hopelessly at the floor. Tony felt his face hot and swollen with tears wept and suppressed, and knowing that there is no sight so disgusting as that of a man who has been crying, said:

'Katha! Look at me.'

She slowly raised her head and let her eyes meet his, and though he believed that he had touched the verge of suffering, the look of infinite sorrow and shame in her face smote him.

'I've scarcely ever in my life felt murderous, Katha,' he said slowly, 'but I do now. I would kill, I would stamp to bloody mire the faces of those who did you, who did us, this wrong, who wronged and stamped on us and millions like us. I would kill them with my naked hands and know I was doing a good deed. But, Katha, we must pluck murder from our hearts along with old sorrow and old regret. We must sow love and happiness where they planted destruction and misery. You say your body is dishonoured. Do you think my body was not dishonoured by every hour in that foul conflict? I'm worse than you, I'm murder's prostitute. Look.'

He threw aside his gown and pointed to the wound scar in his naked thigh.

'That is the mark of my dishonour, which I must suffer you to see, and know that you see, every time I am naked before you. Even when you touch me in the dark, you will feel the scar of my dishonoured body. It is your pain and your suffering which hurt me, not what you think your shame. Even if it's true, even if you can only give me a body dishonoured, what can I give you but a body which has endured far more dreadful shame? I don't speak of forgiveness—what is forgiveness? But since I accept and gladly take as mine your little shame,

will you accept and take as yours my greater dishonour? '

Katha's eyes were lost in tears as she held out her hands to him. In a second he was kneeling at her feet, kissing her hands, her knees, her uncovered breasts, and then her lips. He bent back his head, looking at her with anxious scrutiny.

'You'll stay now, Katha? '

'Yes, I'll stay now. And, Tony . . . '

'Yes?'

'Thank you—for life.'

Katha had pulled down her bodice to her waist, and Tony was softly drawing his cheek along her arms and sides and alternately kissing her breasts, when there was a sharp tap at the door. Their relaxed bodies tightened at the shock, and Tony whispered:

'What's that?'

'My breakfast. I told them to bring it at seven and have a cab ready at ten past.'

'Go to the door and take it in, and tell her to bring mine to my room at once.'

Katha hastily pulled on a yellow jumper which was lying on the bed and went to the door. He heard her say something to the girl, and the reply: 'Yes, yes, signorina, it's yours,' and then Katha gave the order for his own breakfast.

'Look what they've sent me!' said Katha delightedly after the door had shut. 'Real rolls and honey and fruit and lots of milk. How sweet of them! I suppose it was a farewell gift, as they thought I was going.'

As she put down the large tray, she glanced up and saw Tony's smile.

'Ah!' she exclaimed. 'Now I know. It was you who thought of it? '

'I suppose I ought to let them steal the credit, but I'm

so greedy to please you that I'm going to claim my right. I did order it. And, Katha, as soon as the girl has gone, do bring it along, and we'll have breakfast together on my terrace. We've nothing to hurry about, and those telegrams can go later.'

'All right. But go quickly. She'll be back in a minute.'

Tony closed the door behind him and then opened it again, just poking his head round.

Katha.'

'What is it?'

'I wish there were a long mirror in this room,'

'Whatever for?'

'So that you could see yourself in your yellow jumper and those little blue drawers. It's charming, much better than *he Rot Pausole*.'

As he quickly shut the door again, he heard her laugh, and the laughter sounded like a beginning of happiness.

Tony ran along barefoot to his room, for he heard the girl coming up the stairs with his breakfast. He had just time to jump into bed and cover himself, when she knocked at the door and came in at his '*avant*'

'Put the tray on the table,' said Tony, 'and give me my trousers.'

He fumbled in the pockets and took out fifteen lire.

'A cab was ordered to take the Signorina to the boat,' he said, giving her the money. 'Well, she isn't going, and asked me last night to settle it for her. Give the cabman this, and teil him he can come back at the Greek Calends.'

'When, signore?'

'At the Greek Calends. He'll understand.'

She went off, looking rather doubtful. Tony jumped

out of bed, pulled on a shirt and a pair of flannel trousers, carried the table out to the terrace, and then the two small armchairs. He contemplated this arrangement to see what was lacking, had an idea, and going to the end of the terrace picked a few cyclamens and freesias and put them in Katha's place. A moment later he heard her discreet tap at his door.

'Oh, my,' he said, seeing she was fully dressed, 'what a formal call! *Guten Morgen, gnadige Frau!* Let me assist you with your parcel. *Bitte, bitte schon!*'

When Katha smiled or laughed, and the frightened sad look slipped away, Tony felt a lost sun had come back to the sky.

'Have your milk and coffee got cold?' asked Tony, when they were seated by the table.

'No,' said Katha, putting her hand to the jug. 'Oh! It's hot! What a sumptuous breakfast, Tony. I can't possibly eat all this.'

'Nor need you. Don't you know that we idle rich merely pick the cream off life? Just eat up that honeycomb with a spoon if you want.'

'That would make me sick,' said Katha practically, 'and I mean to be well and get as fat as a Turkish lady. That's your ideal, isn't it? I think I'll start with an orange.'

'When I was a child,' said Tony, sipping his milk coffee, 'a fat old judge used to come and stay with us, and every morning, five minutes after we'd sat down to breakfast, he used to say to my father: "Well, Clarendon, what are we going to do today?" What fidgets those people must be. Aren't you glad we don't have to ask each other that question?'

'If we sat here together all day and did nothing else, it would be heavenly. Oh, Tony, Tony, my heart, if

you knew how I want to dance and sing at the thought of not going back to that hateful shop in that hateful Wien!

'It is a pleasant thought, isn't it? But, Katha, Katha, my heart, if you knew how I want to dance and sing at the thought of not going back to that hateful office in that hateful London!'

'How patriotic we are,' said Katha, laughing, 'How we love our fatherlands!'

'They've done little enough for us,' replied Tony a little grimly, 'except try to kill and ruin us. If we owed them anything, it's more than paid. They get no more of us. My god, you'll see how I swing the lead and dodge the column.'

'What does that mean?'

'Scrimshank, scrounge, dump the white man's burden on the government's toe, hop it, clear out.'

'I wish I knew more English,' said Katha thoughtfully. 'What a lot of strange slang you have. Is my accent very bad, Tony?'

'Terrible. You ought to ask for your money back from Mr. Berlitz.'

'Well, you have a *beastly* English accent when you try to talk German. It just shouts: I'm English, I'm English, I'm English!'

'So I am. I'm proud of my English accent. If I weren't English I'd want to be English.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Katha, laughing. 'And you were the one just now who wasn't going to be patriotic, to—what was it?—to skimshank the column?'

'Well, you're proud of being Austrian, aren't you? That means you're proud of yourself and what you came from. But that doesn't mean you'd let yourself be pushed about like a ninny into committing any crime or stupidity an idiotic government likes to think you ought

to commit. We have other, higher standards of life than these dismal cavemen. To hell with them!'

'Oh, my heart, my love, I don't know whether you're talking nonsense or great wisdom, but I do know that my heart feels like a flower, a cyclamen full of honey for you, because we're here together and talking as we used to talk. I'm so happy I can't even eat any more honey! If I'm sad sometimes, don't mind, don't take any notice. It takes time to grow used to being not lonely and not unhappy.'

Tony leaned over and kissed her hand; and they sat silent for a while. Seeing that she had finished breakfast, he went into his room and fetched cigarettes and matches, his writing pad and fountain pen.

'Why not draft those telegrams while you smoke your cigarette?' he said. Then, later on in the morning, we can go down to the piazza and enquire how much it will cost to send a trunk from Vienna. Is it a big one?'

'No. And they're such poor little things, they hardly seem worth sending. But there are your letters and the bead necklace you gave me the day before we left Aeaea. Do you remember? They meant so much to me for so long, I don't want to lose them even now. And Tony . . .'

'What?'

'There's one thing and only one more to say before I accept all your generous giving, or rather two. First, I'd rather be your mistress than be an empress or—the Virgin Mary. Second, that I won't drag on you. From this minute on you're always free to leave me if you want,'

'I don't want,'

'But you may. And I mean it.'

'I don't know that I'm as generous as you are, Katha,' said Tony thoughtfully. 'I should be awfully annoyed

if you wanted to go away. But perhaps in thirty-three years' time——'

'Why thirty-three years?'

'Because I'm thirty-three now. That's another lifetime. The first belonged to you, and we were defrauded of it. The second must be yours. I'll go and finish dressing while you write those telegrams.'

'It isn't really necessary to send a telegram about my things,' said Katha. 'They'd get a letter on Monday morning if we post it in the piazza down below.'

'Do you want the trunk here?' asked Tony.

'Not particularly.'

'Well, tell your landlady to pack it, and ask Cooks of Vienna to collect and send to Cooks, Naples, and that we'll pay on delivery. Send her this fifty lire to pay for it.'

'No. I've got a week's rent and ten schillings in Austrian money. I'll send that.'

'All right,' said Tony, though he hated to see her sending away the last of her money. How to make her accept more. He went back into the room, washed and finished dressing, and then put a clean towel over the breakfast trays to keep off flies.

'What have you telegraphed to your damned employer?' he asked.

'Oh, it's so difficult and sounds silly. I've said: "Deeply regret unable to return have accepted other employment." Is that all right?'

'Pooh! You're much too polite. These are *business* people, they haven't any feelings. Wire this: "Take notice employment terminates forthwith not returning." Don't be polite to those swine.'

'I won't telegraph at all,' said Katha, tearing up the piece of paper. 'Why should we waste the money?'

I'll just write what you've said on a sheet of paper and sign it. Will that do?'

Splendid. Don't have any scruples. With that measure they mete out shall it be meted out to them. And when you've finished, we'll start.'

Starting was not quite so easy, however. Mamma and Babbo had to enjoy their little bit of drama in the courtyard, with smiles, and how glad they were the Signorina was staying on, and was there anything they could do to make her more comfortable? Tony could see they were burning to know what had happened and didn't dare ask.

'I say, Katha,' he said in English, 'would you mind if I told them we're going to be married?'

'No,' she said, blushing a little.

'It'll please them frightfully—they're just longing for something like that. And, after all, they must know we're lovers, or they will soon, and it's only fair to take them into our confidence.'

So Tony told them that he and the Signorina were going to *sposare* (you can't say 'convoler en justes noces' in Italian), and the two old people became trepidant with excitement over all this romance going on in their house; and Mamma kissed Katha's hand, and Babbo kept patting Tony's shoulder and saying, 'Bravo! Bravo!' as if he'd made a speech in praise of the regime or swum the Channel. At last they got away, followed by smiles and waves and *a rivedercis*; and were in the street.

'We don't need to go by the road,' said Katha. 'There's a new path all the way down now, leading to the piazza. The road's so dusty and cab-horsy. And the *vetturini* are such a pest.'

'I rather disliked these flowers last night,' said Tony, when they reached the marguerites and lupins, 'but now

I'm all in favour of them. Do you know, Katha, I felt something was wrong when we came along here, and couldn't imagine what it was. Why didn't you tell me then?'

'I couldn't. I was so afraid you wouldn't want me any more, that you'd be polite about it. That would have killed me. So I thought it better to have one perfect day and then go away for ever.'

'And now you're glad you stayed? '

'Oh, so glad, so happy. This morning was like getting up for my own funeral, and I was so terrified when you came in. I knew you'd make me tell you. And I didn't want to spoil your memory of me. And now it's like—I can't remember any time of my life happy enough to compare with it, except our days here before, and now it's so much deeper and sweeter. Perhaps because of all the suffering. And then it's wonderful to be released from that horrible shop and that Vienna I used to love and now hate so much. I feel as if you'd redeemed me from slavery. Perhaps other women like work, but I hated it.'

'I wonder how it was you didn't marry—you're young and beautiful.'

'Men in Austria now can't afford to marry girls like me unless they have money. I could have had plenty of affairs, if I'd wanted, but I didn't want. Or I might have married some clerk or petty official. What gods shall I thank for preserving me from that?'

'Wouldn't it have been ghastly if I'd met you here on your honeymoon with the official?'

'Ghastly! What hideous things you imagine, Tony,'

'It's only to show how much worse it might have been. What would you have done? '

'Run away with you, if you'd asked me; or killed myself, if you hadn't.'

'Talking of hideous things,' said Tony, 'I haven't yet told you how I searched for you and missed you. Can you bear it now? Or shall I save it up? You had by far the worst of it.'

'You'd better tell me now,' answered Katha, bending to smell a scented wild narcissus, 'or it'll be boiling about in you. And then:

*'Herz, mein Herz, set nicht beklommen,
Und ertrage dein Geschick.
Neuer Fruhling gibt zuruck,
Was der Winter dir genommen'*

*'Und wie viel ist dir geblieben!
Und wie schon ist noch die Welt!
Und, mein Herz, was dir gefällt,
Alles, alles darfst du lieben!'*

They arrived at the piazza just as Tony's reminiscences reached the point of his landing in Vienna.

'Here we are,' he said, 'let's post your letters. I'll tell you the rest another time.'

'What did you do in Vienna?'

'Oh, wandered about like a lunatic trying to find you, went to your old address, interviewed all sorts of unpleasant people, got snubbed by a confounded Boche cop—sorry, darling, but he was a Boche.'

'I've no doubt,' said Katha, sighing. 'We've still plenty of them even in Austria.'

'He wasn't so bad really, nothing like the never-sufficiently-to-be-detested Prussian ones. But let's forget them. My Germany is the Germany of Heine and Mozart and Katha.'

They posted the letters and then turned into the little street of shops which led uphill from the piazza to an acacia walk and a garden with a cafe. The shops were not very good, and prices were marked absurdly high;

but Tony wanted very badly to buy Katha some clothes. It had to be done that day, or it wouldn't be so much fun. He asked her to wait a minute outside the *Farmacia*, bought some toothpaste he didn't want, and then asked for a reliable inexpensive dressmaker. The chemist said his sister kept a ladies' clothes shop, six doors down on the right, and gave him a card of introduction, somewhat unnecessarily.

'And underclothes?' asked Tony. 'Someone who won't overcharge absurdly.'

'Ah, signore, that I don't know. You must ask my sister.'

A row of cotton frocks hung outside the shop, and Tony stopped as if by chance in front of them. He pulled out one or two and showed them to Katha:

'What do you think of them? Very poor, aren't they?'

'Oh, they're not at all bad, Tony, but dear, almost as dear as with us.'

'Let's go in and see what she's got. Come on. We needn't get anything if you don't want it.'

Tony presented the chemist's card and demanded the *padrona*, to whom he whispered that the Signora wanted a dress immediately and would have two made—provided the materials were good and the prices those appertaining to Christians.

'You mustn't mind if I bargain,' said Tony to Katha. 'One simply has to with these people. It's part of the fun to them.'

'Don't I know them! But truly, my darling, I don't need a dress. I have this one and another with me, and there are several to come from Vienna.'

'Never mind. Let's look.'

They were showed a number of made dresses, remarkably good considering it was in an out-of-the-way island.

but there was a villa population and the winter resorters to cater for, Katha held up the dresses in front of her one by one before the mirror, and Tony noticed she was particularly pleased with one of red silk. Then she looked at the price ticket and put it down as if it had bitten her.

'I rather like that one,' said Tony. 'Try it on, Katha.'

'It's terribly expensive, Tony.'

'How much?'

'Seven hundred lire.'

'Never mind. Put it on. I want to see you in it.'

The woman dragged a screen round, and Katha changed into the dress.

'Come out into the light,' said Tony, 'and let me look at you.'

She was charming in it, and to Tony's inexperienced eyes the fit seemed perfect; so far as he was concerned the look of pleasure in Katha's face was worth far more than the price of the dress. A moment before he had been tempted to moralize on the best-of-women's love of gewgaws, but now he admitted that women were right to pay attention to their clothes. They were much more than a social passport; they were an acknowledgment of an aesthetic principle, a moral truth—a beautiful body should not be unworthily displayed. The difference between Katha in a model, even an Italian model, and Katha in a poor cotton frock, was so striking that even a husband would have noticed it. She seemed to draw moral support from the good material and design. This passed through Tony's mind as he listened to the shopwoman explaining volubly that the dress had been made for the Duchessa di Pignatelli Montaleone and never worn—capricious but rich, the duchess; of course they'd been forced to take it back.

'Do you like it, Katha?'

'It's lovely. But, Tony, it's far too dear. You mustn't think of it.'

Yet she couldn't resist the pleasure of looking at it again in the mirror, turning gracefully from side to side, and looking back over her shoulder at her image. Amazing capacity for adaptation, thought Tony; you can see at once that she has been perfectly used to good *couturieres*, and yet yesterday she was the humble little clerk on holiday. If I now announced that I am the King of Spain in disguise, having shaved off my Hapsburg chin, she'd rise to the situation perfectly. I shouldn't.

'There are one or two small alterations needed,' said the dressmaker fussily, 'and then it will be perfect for the Signora.'

'We'll have that one,' said Tony in English, 'let her make the alterations, Katha. . . .'

'Oh, I could make those myself, but, Tony . . .'

'I'm sorry to bully you so much, darling, but I must insist. Look, try on one or two others and pretend you want them, and then go over her unmade materials and choose some dress lengths to be made up. Don't show what you really want—you know the technique. I'll be back in a minute.'

Coming down the street Tony had noticed in a window an eighteenth-century necklace of semiprecious stones in what looked like the original setting, and it occurred to him that this would probably suit the dress. In any case, it was a pretty thing. The debate and battle with the dealer occupied about fifteen minutes, and then Tony came out with the necklace in his pocket, knowing that he'd paid too much for it and not caring. Things are only worth the pleasure they can give.

He found Katha, in her old dress, turning over rolls

of material and talking animatedly with the dressmaker.

'Some of these are very nice,' Katha said excitedly, as he came in, 'but one dress is enough. Really it is.'

But Tony was firm. Two dress lengths at least must be chosen and orders given for the making. All this and the bargaining took time, but finally all was settled—they were to pay five hundred lire for the silk dress and settle for the others when made and approved. Katha took the silk dress and held it up again in front of her to the mirror.

'Would you like to wear it now,' asked Tony, 'or are the defects, invisible to me, so bad that you'll have to alter it first?'

'Oh, no. Would you think me very vain if I wore it now?'

'That's just what I wanted. Tell her to pack up your old dress.'

Katha changed again and stood patting down the silk and admiring herself.

'Just shut your eyes a moment, will you, please?' said Tony and fastened the necklace on her.

'Is it all right?' he asked anxiously. 'I arranged that you can change it for something else if you don't like it.'

'Even if it were hideous I wouldn't change, because you chose it,' said Katha, swiftly kissing him while the dressmaker's back was turned, 'but it's beautiful, and I think it goes very well with this dress.'

'I suppose I can't call it a wedding present,' said Tony. 'Anyway I hate weddings, don't you? Formal ones, I mean. Shall I say it's my living-in-sin present to you?'

'Living-in-love present, you mean. I don't feel sinful, even if you do. I feel beautiful—and rather condescendingly pitiful to the rest of the world.'

'I don't feel sinful myself,' answered Tony. 'In fact

I never did—only that I'd been silly or mean or unkind or mistaken, and regretted it. But I'm glad you like the necklace.' He put a thousand-lira note into her hand, saying: 'Will you pay for the dress with that for me, please? And would you mind putting the change in your purse? I've got such a wodge of things in my wallet I've no room for more. Besides, you may need it for little things when I'm not with you.'

From the dressmaker's they went to the shop she pointed out for stockings and underclothes. Katha protested, but Tony insisted, and insisted also on making her buy the pretty things he saw she wanted and refrained from choosing because she thought them expensive. Tony was aware that he was being reckless, but, as he pointed out to Katha, few people have more than five or six marriages in the whole course of their lives, so they might as well enjoy the best one.

'Besides,' he added, as she demurred over a very attractive set of embroidered underthings, 'remember that I've got to look at them, not you.'

Here again he practised the device of the thousand-lira note and then turned Katha loose in the *Farmacia* to stock up with creams and perfume and the like.

'You'll have to do the choosing here,' he said. 'My scanty feminine technique was long ago exhausted. I don't know what you like. But play fair, and get what you do want. I expect they've got most German things.'

As they returned to the street with their parcels, laughing and chattering, the bell began to jangle from the little church Aea^a proudly called its cathedral, followed by the bells from two other churches.

'Good heavens,' said Tony, looking at his watch, 'it's noon already. How quickly the morning has gone. We'll have to take a *vettura*, Katha. Stop a minute—is

there anything else you need? Ah, yes, I know, a parasol. You won't want to take it with you, so we'll get one of those cheap ones you can throw away. Come along.'

'Do you know,' said Tony as they drove, 'I've driven up to the higher village four times in my life, and this is the first time with you? How clearly I remember the other three, and how I shall remember this, the best of all. The first time was in 1911 when I drove up in an ecstasy about the beauty of the place and didn't dream I should find you when I arrived. The second was after the war, when I came to say farewell, as I thought, to all this place meant to me because of you. And the third time was yesterday. What a long time ago that seems I was it really only yesterday? Are you sure, Katha? Do I gossip too much? I don't give you time to speak.'

'No, you don't gossip too much,' said Katha, laughing, 'and yes, I am sure you only arrived yesterday. Oh, Tony, could we have planned anything lovelier than this, anything that went deeper? I hate suffering and deprivation and pain and degradation and I *don't* believe they make people finer, and yet all this morning I couldn't help thinking that if we hadn't been so far down in the depths we couldn't have jumped up to such high happiness.'

'I don't know,' Tony answered slowly. 'We'll never be able to know what we've lost and gained, because we can never guess what our lives would have been if we hadn't been violently separated in 1911. Perhaps, as we were young and foolish, we might have thrown away the pearl of great price; perhaps we might have reached something we haven't yet imagined can exist. As to this morning, shopping is fun, but it's primitive fun. And, in fact, what I enjoyed was not the things but the giving,

and what you enjoyed was giving me the joy of your acceptance. Do you know I think that's rare in women? I don't mean acceptance of goods and chattels—the worst of them are best at that—I mean the acceptance of man. Do you see what I mean?'

'That we are taught we must "give" ourselves, and get so egotistically pleased with doing it, we haven't the sense or humility to know how to take a man's gift of himself? Is that it?'

'Something like that, though you make it too harsh. The little things we bought this morning are only symbolically valuable to me. At any moment, if you had insisted, you could have spared my purse and spoiled my morning. But you didn't. My life, my body, my mind and whole nature are much more valuable—incomparably so—than those dirty bits of paper we got rid of. If you can accept those, as you will, as graciously as you accepted my living-in-love presents, then you will really be giving yourself. How badly I put things!'

Katha did not answer, but took his hand and kissed it.

How bourgeois I was about those notes, thought Tony as he washed for lunch. She's simple and right about all such things, and she'd have taken sweetly and graciously the little I can afford to give her. She doesn't resent it. doesn't have any false modesty. I believe it makes her happier to eat my food and to drink my wine and to wear the poor clothes I can give her than to have her own. But, damn it, one can't tip a duchess. And, damn it, I forgot to buy her a new hat, she looked so lovely in the old one.

§IX

'I'm very glad Babbo has restrained his talents to-day,' said Katha, helping herself from the huge dish of

spaghetti *al burro* which Mamma had left on the table. 'I loved our lunch yesterday, Tony. It was perfect, but I couldn't eat it again today.'

'Neither could I. And I think we'd better have Nocera instead of wine. It's too much in the middle of the day. We'll have wine tonight.'

'What an enormous amount of spaghetti,' said Katha, gazing at the coiled masses which had hardly been diminished by what they'd taken. 'How do the Italians eat it all? Is it the climate or the wine or a habit, like German beer-drinking?'

'How nice you look in that dress,' said Tony, admiring her. 'I must get a pair of rope-soled shoes to live up to it.'

'Ah, don't spoil the compliment. Will you always remember to say pretty things about me when you feel them, Tony?'

'I should be saying them all day long, then.'

'Well, occasionally, every hour or so? Do you know how important it is to women to be told they're admired and loved and wanted? We have to pretend we're so certain of ourselves, and we're not really. We have to be reassured all the time. If you knew how grateful a woman is for a little genuine admiration! We're like cats and cream, we just lap it up. But it must be real cream, you know.'

'Now you've made me self-conscious. I was going to say something about your eyes.'

'Oh, do say it! Please!'

'It sounds rather fatuous now I come to think of it. I was only going to say that yesterday I kept getting a hurt feeling because your eyes looked unhappy and a little frightened. And today . . .'

'Today?'

'Almost gone, but not quite. Let your hand rest

lightly in life's, my beautiful, and trust to it. But there was something else I was going to say. And, Katha, how I go on gabbling to you! I haven't talked so much since——'

'Since when?'

'Oh, since long ago, when I was with a girl in a place called Aeaia in April 191'. She was charming. You'd have been jealous of her.'

'Do you regret her, Tony?'

'No, I like her twin sister so much better.'

'Was that what you wanted to say?'

'No, but wait till the old lady's gone. I can't talk in front of her. *Grazie, grazie, signora,*' to Mamma, who was lingering over them broodily. 'I knew this veal would be tough as soon as I saw it,' he added to Katha, 'it always is. They wait till the calf's a bull before they kill it, so's to get more *vitello*. The hugest ox carcass I ever saw was one in Pistoia, labelled *vitello giovanissimo*'

'Well, was it the veal you wanted to tell me about?' asked Katha, laughing until she had to lean back in her chair.

'No,' said Tony seriously. 'I began to try to say it when we got into the *vettura*, but somehow cheerfulness kept breaking in. It occurred to me, Katha dear, that I've scarcely done anything but impose my will on you since I arrived.'

'It's been very pleasant. I'll gladly go on being your odalisque if it goes on being so lovely.'

'No, but Katha, I mean it. I arranged yesterday, I arranged your morning, I butted in everywhere, I even dictated a telegram.'

'But, Tony, dear one, I loved you to do it. I wanted you to do it. Surely you know women well enough to know that in a situation like this they adore to resign themselves to the man they're in love with. I shouldn't

have liked it so much if you hadn't been rather commanding, a little at the head of your troops. Besides, you twice let me have my way against yours.'

'When?'

'In the afternoon, when I went off and cried to myself for hours about giving you up, and . . . and, at night,' she added, lowering her gaze.

Well, I think it's time I gave up commanding,' said Tony. At least for a bit. During the rest of today, you'll take charge of the party, and I won't make even a suggestion. After you've had your rest today, do whatever you want, together if you like, or by yourself if you prefer.'

But, Tony, I don't want to be by myself. I want to be with you. And as for resting, I never want to lie down in the afternoon.'

'Why did you go yesterday, then?'

Oh, my dear, I was so much upset, and sort of trembling all over inside me. And I wanted to think out what I ought to do.'

I don't believe one can "think out" such things,' Tony answered. Do you? I think you should just have waited and followed your feelings. You wanted me, all of you wanted me, last night. And what you had to say, as you felt you must, could have been said and forgotten between two kisses. But never mind all that. How are you going to arrange us today?'

'You don't want to be by yourself?'

Not for more than five minutes at most. Katha, you're the only human being I've ever been able to say that to honestly. With other people, I must be alone for several hours a day, or I feel crazy. They cut across me, they impose thoughts and feelings I don't want on me. But you not only leave me free to think and feel exactly as I should alone, you make all that living keener

and finer; and, what's more, you suggest to me better feelings and thoughts than I should have by myself.'

'Do you think all lovers feel like that, Tony? You've just described, better than I could, how I am with you. Now shall I tell you my plans for the day, or shall I just lead you from one to the other?'

'Oh, lead from one to the other. I love surprises.'

'And you'll obey me?'

'Most faithfully, *donna mia bella ed adorata*.'

They sat for about three quarters of an hour over coffee, and then Katha rose from her chair. Tony stood up and looked at her enquiringly.

'Ah!' she said, smiling. 'I see you mean to keep to your compact. Come along.'

They stopped outside Katha's door and Tony said:

'Shall I wait for you in my room?'

'No, I want you to come in.'

Katha shut and locked her door behind them and looked at him, partly with mischievous gaiety and partly with a timidity he had never known in her.

'Now I shall find out if you can really do what I ask,' she said.

'What is it? Something very hard?'

'I want you to lie on the bed with me and take me in your arms. You're not to undress at all. I want you to hold my hand and kiss me, and nothing else. Is that asking too much?'

'Heavens, no!'

'It's not being unfair—taking without giving?'

'Why, of course not! I'm not a rampager.'

'What's a rampager?'

'Oh, something between a Latin Don Juan and the Johnny in the stalls.'

'Does it mean that? You do have curious slang in English.' Then she added: 'I can't crush this new

dress by lying down in it. I'll change into the old one. You may watch me if it pleases you.'

'It does please me. I don't know why men like to see women undress, but they do. And almost every minute I'm grateful to you, Katha, yes, grateful, for the grace of your movements.'

'I'm going to take my stockings off too,' said Katha, 'but that doesn't mean anything. It's not an invitation.'

'May I take off my shoes—for the sake of your counterpane?'

He interpreted her laugh as meaning 'yes.'

They lay down, and Tony took her to his arms, with her head resting on his left shoulder, and her free hand in his. Presently he began to kiss her, and gradually felt her cool firm lips grow hot and soft under his kisses, and her breasts press close to his body. If he had doubted before, which he had not, he would have known for certain then that this gentle body beside him was the lost half of his own. At the long pressure of her lips he reached an intensity of physical life not only beyond anything experienced before, even with Katha in the past, but beyond anything he had imagined. It seemed to him that the whole room throbbed with the beatings of their blood.

Katha gently took away her lips and for a long time lay quite still with her head bent downward on his chest. Tony did not move, but let the golden life flow to and fro between them.

'Tony!'

'Yes?'

'Shall I tell you why I asked you to do this?'

'If you want, dear one.'

'I—I've been chaste for such a long time.'

'Poor darling.'

'Oh, I don't mind now. But I found I'd got shy.'

You wouldn't have believed it of me, would you? I felt ashamed to be naked before you, ashamed to be touched by a man, even by you—even by you.'

'Don't be frightened, Katha. I won't do anything you don't want.'

'I'm not frightened any more.'

'That's good.'

'And I'm not ashamed.'

'That's better still.'

'In fact—I'm quite shameless!'

'That's best of all.'

She was silent again, and then, lifting his hand to her face, began to kiss the palm softly.

'Tony!'

'Yes?'

'Would you like to know how shameless you've made me?'

'Very much.'

With exquisite care, as if he were touching the wings of butterflies and feared to brush away their bright scales, Tony pressed the cool firm skin very gently from time to time. She was quite naked underneath her skirt, and this moved him deeply, because it meant that if he had chosen to demand it, she would have yielded; but how much lovelier to give her the joy of giving.

'Keep quite, quite still,' Katha murmured.

'Have no fear.'

In the tensiety of keeping relaxed, Tony lost some of the delight he would otherwise have known in this communion of touch. It seemed to him that above all he must precisely carry on what Katha wanted in these new minglings of touch, on which their life together depended. Nothing must shock or violate her, and plainly there were violations of the body and of the soul which must be smoothed out for her before she could live freely

in her body again. She too had to grow strong and sane after her war, as he had done; and Tony vowed silently to himself that he would let her lead the way step by step in their marriage, whatever it might cost him in temporary control.

Katha lay so still that Tony believed she had fallen asleep, until he craned his head a little and saw by her long eyelashes that her eyes were wide open. Minute after minute they remained quite motionless, except for that gentle pressure, so light as scarcely to be perceptible. He almost started when she said quietly:

'Tony.'

'Yes?'

'Very slowly—will you move your hand?'

Katha groped for his hand, and held it in hers, and again they lay quite still.

'Tony.'

'Yes?'

'Lift my head and look into my eyes and kiss me.'

He did as she bade, but as her gaze met his he felt a tremor of exquisite happiness run through all his flesh. He had never seen that look on a woman's face, never met eyes with that clear glow, starry and flower-like, an acceptance into the most intimate of another's life. Tony gazed at her eyes and kissed her; raised his head to gaze again at that most secret miracle, and again kissed her. She shut her eyes and slightly turned her face, and at once he drew back, watching her.

'Do you need me to say I love you?' said Katha.

'No.'

'I do.'

'You couldn't speak a tiny portion of what I saw in your eyes.'

'You saw?'

'Yes.'

'I hope they were as beautiful as your eyes,'
'Far more beautiful. My eyes indeed I'
'You didn't see them,'

Katha sat up and moved away from the bed, straightening her hair in front of the small mirror, with her back to him.

'Tony,' she said in more ordinary everyday tones.
'Yes?'

'That wasn't a strain on you? '

'On the contrary. It was more lovely than anything I've ever known.'

'This morning I thanked you for giving me back life. Now I can thank you for giving me back my body and my womanhood.'

Tony could only get rid of the throat lump enough to utter:

'I'm happy . . .'

Katha washed and powdered her face and then turned to him, saying gaily in her usual voice:

'Shall I still lead? Or does the General want his troops back?'

'Quite content to leave them to the Ober-Leutnant-ess.'

'We'll go for a walk, then. What time is it? '

'Ten past three. I must put my shoes on.'

They went swiftly through the courtyard, to avoid Babbo and Mamma, who, however pleasant at other times, weren't quite wanted then. Already the mid-April sun was hot, and Katha opened her new parasol, as they came into the one street of the village.

'Shall I take your bag?' asked Tony, seeing she was carrying her linen lunchbag, pinned carefully shut.

No. It's part of the next surprise, though I'm afraid you'll soon guess it.'

'Won't you rub your heels without any stockings? '

'You're too quick, Tony! The first part of this surprise is getting us rope-soled shoes, and I'm going to buy them for us,'

'What about our other shoes?'

'Leave them at the shop, silly, and pick them up later. That time you weren't quick!'

'I was playing down to you.'

'That's the first lie you've told me today, Tony.'

'Oh, don't deceive me,' hummed Tony, 'how could you treat a poor maiden so?'

They changed into rope-soled shoes at the small general shop, with the obligatory portrait of the King, looking as if he just tasted something nasty, gazing at that of the Capo, whose expression was that of one upon whom castor oil exerts its effects at a public function from which it is impossible to escape.

'Have you got a handsome president in Austria, Katha?' asked Tony, as Katha led the way out of the village.

'No, my dear. Why?'

'Oh, nothing—I was just mentally taking off my hat to King George.'

'That must be curious. Have you got a mental hat?'

'Haven't you noticed me talking through it?'

'Talking through—is that some more English slang?'

'I suppose so. But I assure you, Katha dear, it's about the feeblest joke ever made. So feeble that the only possible excuse is that being in love has driven me out of my wits.'

'That isn't a compliment—to say I make you feeble-minded!'

'Look!' exclaimed Tony. 'There's a lizard. Have you ever caught a lizard, Katha?'

'No, I never did. But I should be afraid to touch one. If it wriggled I should want to squeal.'

'They're frightfully difficult to catch,' said Tony very solemnly. 'In your fingers, that is, and if you play fair. You're not allowed to squash them. I've never caught one yet. There! You see? I missed him.'

'You should lie quite still for hours until one runs into your hand,' said Katha, laughing. 'How absurd you are, Tony. And haven't you guessed where we're going yet?'

'I guessed when you said "rope-soled shoes"—we're going to the little creek where we bathed, aren't we?'

Katha nodded.

'Well, let me have the bag now. The path's very rough and steep.'

'No, I want to keep it, but you can take my parasol when we get to the worst part.'

They passed through the open flowery part, covered with broom and cytusus and clumps of Indian fig, and clambering down the steep part at the end of the path, stood silently hand in hand at the edge of the clear water.

'We've one thing to be thankful for,' said Tony at last, feeling he must speak lightly or the lump would be returning again, 'and that's the happy fact that business has not yet discovered this tiny nook. If they saw a chance of making money, they'd blast away the rock and make the creek into a mammoth Beauty Chorus Swimming Pool, and build a Casino, and have coloured flood-lighting at night, and——'

'Oh, don't, don't, Tony! Please stop. I can't bear it. I could kill anyone who wanted to alter this place. I've been down here every afternoon this time, except yesterday.'

'What did you do?'

'Sat down, and thought and thought, and remem-

bered you, and cried a little, and wished I'd died the day we left Aeaea together—but I'm glad I didn't now.'

'I came here too in 1919,' said Tony reflectively. 'It was an autumn day, and warm but melancholy.'

'And what did you do?'

'Remembered it all so clearly that I saw your white body in the pellucid water, and wanted you so much, it felt like having my flesh torn. Then I felt like crying, so I picked some flowers and threw them in to your memory, and said good-bye, and went away. I never thought then that I should stand here again, still less that it would be with you, the new, lovelier Katha.'

'Was I very seducing and forward then, Tony? I could almost blush to remember how I egged you on.'

'Seductive, yes; not forward. I was already what seemed deep, deep in love with you, though that was but a puddle to my present ocean.'

'You were very sweet and gentle. Did you have to be very self-restrained to behave so nicely?'

'My dear, I very nearly threw you on the r-rocks and r-raped you!'

'You didn't. You were very timid.'

'And clumsy. I know. But don't insist too much, or I shall grow ashamed of that awkward boy.'

'Never clumsy, and I loved your shyness, though I didn't know then how charming it was. And as to shame,' she added, beginning to take off her clothes, 'you know you made me shameless this afternoon. So you must live up or down to my example.'

'How wonderful that we can bathe here again,' said Tony, starting to undress too. 'Do you think the water'll be cold?'

'No colder than it was then, and we thought it warm.'

She let her last garment fall, and stood before him,

smiling a little shyly in spite of her boast of shamelessness.

'Do you like me as much as you liked that girl who seduced you into undressing and bathing here?'

'She was beautiful,' said Tony, 'but she was only a girl. You're a woman, and far more beautiful. Your breasts and body are formed, and all your proportions in harmony.'

'No criticisms?'

'No. Except that you're just a trifle thin, Katha.'

'I don't want to get fat,' said Katha, pinching up a small silky-looking fold of her smooth belly. 'Wouldn't it be awful if I got Teutonic and waddy?'

'You won't,' he reassured her. 'It's only the blonde ones who go like that. You're dark. I daresay your grandmother played the wanton with an Italian and your great-grandmother with a Frenchman.'

'Do you think so?' asked Katha, interested. 'I've always wanted not to be all Teuton. And I'd adore to be a love-child descended from love-children, but I'm afraid I'm hopelessly legitimate. My mother was a good woman—unlike her daughter.'⁵

'Oh, you never can tell,' said Tony encouragingly. 'The worst of us break out sometimes. Half an hour's perfect weakness, and there's a Katha. Let me feel the back of your head.'

'Why?' asked Katha, bending forward.

'I want to find if you're dolichocephalic or brachycephalic. It's extremely important.'

Tony took his hand away and touched the back of his own head.

'Oh, do go on feeling my head like that,' said Katha. 'It's *delicious*. Why is it important whether I'm—what are those words?'

'Sensual little pig,' said Tony, caressing the back of

her head with his fingertips. 'This is science, but it only means long- or short-headed. But if you're a dolicho you shouldn't marry a brachy.'

'Why ever not? Oh, that feels wonderful. What does the shape of our heads matter?'

'It matters because the dolichos were always murdering the brachys or vice versa, so if we're different we shall always be trying to murder each other.'

'What nonsense. Don't tire your fingers, dear one. That's enough for now, but you must do it again. Isn't that what women are always supposed to say? But which are we—dolichos or brachys?'

'Well, in the strictest scientific confidence,' said Tony gravely, 'I don't think we're either. We seem both to be half-and-halfers. We must belong to a special race, Katha, of which all other specimens are extinct.'

'How lovely! So we shan't murder each other?'

'I don't suppose so, unless ypur head sinks in and mine swells out. But we'd better keep all this to ourselves, or they might poison us to see what kept us alive. All in the interest of Science, of course.'

Tony slid down into the water.

'Is it cold?' asked Katha, standing on the brink and stretching her arms down to him.

'Coolish,' said Tony, with a shiver of delight as her warm breasts pressed against his cheek while he lifted her down.

'Oh, it's quite warm,' exclaimed Katha, splashing a little water in his face and then kissing it from his eyes.

'That was to keep you from thinking it was going to be very warm, and so disappointed.'

They swam out to the end of the creek together, to see there were no boats about, and then slowly drifted back. Tony stood nearly breast-deep in the clear water and Katha came towards him.

' Ah I' she said, dropping her legs and standing, ' last time I stood and you swam to me. That was our first real kiss.'

Tony took her hands and drew her gently through the water until her cool wet body lay against his, and kissed her. But, this time, when Katha stood up again, Tony did not touch her as before, remembering his voluntary compact. Katha put her hands on his body and slowly passed them down his sides under the water.

' Beautiful body,' she said. ' Beautiful male body. Wide hard chest and strong ribs, and smooth sides, like lovely polished metal, narrow male hips. How good to be loved by the beautiful male, Tony.'

Then she clasped hands with him and leaned a little back in the water, saying:

' That kiss in the water here decided my whole life, Tony. Up till then I'd thought you charming and attractive and thought I was in love with you, as I told you when you kissed me first out in my nook. Do you remember? We must go there again. But it was when you kissed me here that I knew I was really in love with you. It was something new and indescribable. I yearned for you, and that was why I couldn't help embracing you. And then, I felt I'd serve a million years in hell to be your mistress. Did you guess that then? '

' Partly, but not wholly. I was young, Katha, and absorbed in my own feelings of delight in touching you and in my own emotions about you. I only hoped you were feeling what I felt.'

' Help me onto the rock, Tony dear. We mustn't get cold. The mystery bag contains two small towels, better than nothing. Dry yourself quickly.'

While they lay in the sun and dressed, Tony told Katha about Evelyn and how much the memory of her

touch had meant to him, and wound up by relating their disastrous meeting in London.

'Is she pretty?' asked Katha.

'She was twenty years ago.'

'Do you ever regret her?'

'Regret her?' said Tony in astonishment. 'How could I? Why, it was like gathering a bunch of spring flowers, which one knows must wither. Are you jealous, Katha?'

'I envy her, and I'm grateful to her. There must have been something lovely in her to awaken your sense of touch so perfectly.'

'There was, but could she have awakened it, if it hadn't been there potentially? I thought her lovely then, but I was horrified when I saw her recently. She made me think of that Venus of Capua, you know, that very beautiful one which has been so brutally mutilated by some barbarian. Do women always become what men want them to be?'

'Nearly always, I fear.'

'My god!' said Tony. 'What a responsibility. Do you think I shall spoil you, Katha?'

'Only by too much kindness, my darling.'

On the way up the hillside Katha began to gather wild flowers, and Tony cut for her with his penknife the sprays of broom she pointed out. They wandered slowly along, chattering and gathering flowers until they each had a large bunch. Presently Tony said, smiling:

'Are the flowers part of the next surprise, Katha?'

'No! They're to put in our rooms. I must ask Mamma for vases or glasses. You mustn't try to anticipate surprises, Tony. But I'll tell you this, the flowers are not to be strewn on my bed or on yours.'

'I'm glad of that,' answered Tony, sighing. 'Of

course, it *sounds* a lovely idea, but flowers are cold and squashy and stick to one almost like treacle. And it's a shame to spoil them. The living flowers which sprang up for Idalian Venus would be the only satisfactory ones. And she must have been as light as air.'

'Do you believe in gods and goddesses, Tony? You're always talking about them.'

'Believe! Don't you believe in love and the sun and the moon and the earth and the pool where we've been bathing?'

'Why, of course, but is that the same as believing in them as gods?'

'It is, if you believe in them properly. Do you see what I mean when I say that, for me, god or the gods or ultimate realities are physical, not spiritual or social or national or abstract?'

'I think I do,' said Katha, pondering, 'or rather I feel it. You mean it's the mysterious life in things which is god, and not definitions of them, and not abstract ideas?'

'Yes, yes,' exclaimed Tony eagerly, 'that's it. Oh, Katha, you do know! It's that physical god in things which makes you love and revere them and not want to destroy them. When you were so horrified at the thought of our bathing pool being destroyed to make money, you were respecting the little god which is the mysterious physical life of the place. Every flower is a tiny, tiny goddess. People call it a quality or an essence or even beauty—though there are ugly terrible gods, war's one—but it's not something abstract, it's something living, though the life mayn't be as concentrated and aware of itself as ours is. Why not have reverence, and acknowledge the quality and power and life in things as gods?'

'Ah, yes,' said Katha, 'why not? How you have let

things touch you and grow into you, Tony, that you can find the life in them. You open a door to a whole world for me; I knew in myself it was there, but I was afraid to go in. I was stupidly afraid of not being "enlightened," and being "enlightened" seems to mean believing in a godless, dull world. And I do dislike those bleeding Christs and weeping Madonnas so much.'

'That's what comes of being "spiritual," ' said Tony. 'In the end you come to worship pain and misery and destruction and even disease. It's the opposite of that unwholesome spirituality I mean.'

'What I like so much,' Katha went on, following her own thought, 'is that one needn't think of the earth as a great lump like an enormous lifeless Christmas pudding floating in a sauce which isn't there. The god earth's living for me again, as it was when I was a child. Tony, you've filled the world with gods and goddesses for me I'

'As certain also of your own poets have done.'

'Oh, my darling,' said Katha, blowing him a kiss, 'I like you so much better than Goethe.'

At dinner that night they were both amused and disturbed by a large party of peasants who dined in the courtyard and grew more facetious and noisy as the number of empty bottles increased. One of them had a guitar, and began playing Neapolitan songs, including the inevitable 'Santa Lucia,' 'Oh, Mari',' and 'O sole mio.'

'Is there something wrong with me, Katha?' asked Tony. 'Do you know I rather like those songs, especially "O sole mio." They wouldn't be very appropriate in London on a foggy afternoon in November, but they fit in here. And I like that syncopated pause—the art of arousing expectation. I wonder why they're carousing tonight? It isn't Sunday.'

'There's been a wedding, I think. You will not know it, but last Sunday was Easter Sunday.'

You only *think* there's been a wedding. Infirm of purpose. . . . And as to Easter Sunday, gnadige Frau-lein, give me leave to say that I attended High Mass at the Lateran, the mother of all the churches of Christendom.'

'I wonder they let you in, or that a corner stone didn't miraculously fall on your head without disturbing the arch. Do you like going to church, Tony?'

'Very much, when it's in the South and not Protestant. Rome is a little too northern and sophisticated for me. What interests me are the places where very old religions still exist under Christian names. What the Madonna is in Paris I don't quite know, something between a soldier's *marraine* and a sentimental nun. But down here in Sicily she's the Great Mother, she's Venus Genetrix, she's Artemis, she's Hera. The Mediterranean must have goddesses and prefers the old ones, without fussing about names. The Byzantine theologians tried to roll them all into Hagia Sophia, a sort of etiolated Athena, but the peasants wouldn't have her. Why, on Sunday the girls of Croton still go in procession to the church on the promontory, just as thousands of years ago the girls went to the temple of Hera which stood there. And all over Sicily there are the most fascinating beliefs and ceremonies.'

'Shall we go to those places together, some time, Tony?'

'Why, of course, we can go tomorrow if you like.'

'Oh, not yet. I want to stay here now. But later on. I've been nowhere except Aeaea since 191', and I feel dreadfully ignorant and cityish.'

The noise from the peasants' table was now so riotous that Tony and Katha almost had to shout to each other.

'Let us go upstairs and sit on your terrace,' said Katha. 'We shan't hear them there. Mamma has forgotten our coffee, but I don't want any. Shall I get some for you?'

'No, thanks.'

They went upstairs, and Tony dragged the two chairs onto the terrace. The night was marvellously still, cool after the sunny day but not cold or damp, and the sunset mist had cleared away from the mountain, leaving its dark ridge clear-cut against the moonless sky, with its multitudes of clustered stars and the soft, luminous scarf of the Milky Way. The stars were not sharp and twinkling as on a clear northern night, but still and glowing, larger and nearer. Occasionally a faint echo of laughter came from the merry party on the other side of the house, a dog barked in the distance, the sound of a mandolin and a man's voice singing floated across from the street; and then silence. The church clock struck the four quarters, and nine, with astonishing loudness; the echoes seemed to go on reverberating more and more faintly for a long time, until all the waves of sound were still again.

Katha and Tony sat without speaking, of which there was no need. Though they would certainly be thinking different thoughts, he knew their feelings would be similar, that Katha would not be irritated by the silence and darkness which delighted him, and that the strokes of the chiming bell beat on his sensibility as on hers. From the Mediterranean goddess Tony's reverie had passed naturally to San Giuseppe and San Calogero, the men gods of Sicily; San Giuseppe, a sort of peasant Zeus, and Calogero not unlike a disguised Dionysus—they carried his image at a run in processions, like the Corybants. How much he had missed that sense of gods during his few days under the barren monotheism of

Islam, and how much he preferred to have graven images constantly reminding people of the sacred physical realities, rather than an ark with nothing inside it, or a safe of paper money, which was the same thing. Joanna Southcott's box.

Here his reverie forked. One line wanted to run on the mystery of the Me and the not-Me, on his own identity with and difference from Katha; the other line started off on the ascetic fallacy, the belief that woman is evil, the fierce desire to suppress the flesh. Somehow, as he felt his sensibility widening out and out with the silence to enclose the whole sky, the two problems seemed vaguely related, but he didn't care to follow that up. He was thinking indignantly of the foul monks who invited one to consider women as bags of ordure. Bags of ordure to them, the brutes. Are not my love's entrails wholesome, is not her womb a nest of spicery? Strange that Katha could be a mother, strange, strange that for the first time in his life his bowels yearned at the thought that of their love they might make a living body, which would be themselves and not-themselves . . .

Katha stirred in the darkness and took his hand. Tony wondered if she could have known what he was thinking, or whether she only knew instinctively that he was moved. He was saying to himself: Yes—perhaps—some day—but not yet—not for a long time—not certainly until I know that she feels it too.

The clock struck the half-hour, and Katha's voice said, a little tremulously:

'Will you give me a cigarette, Tony?'

As he held out to her a lighted match, which seemed a beacon after the long darkness, he saw with grief that she had been silently crying. The match went out, making a deeper darkness, and Tony said:

' You're not unhappy Katha? You're not thinking sad thoughts ?'

'I was crying because I'm happy—women are like that, always tearful about something—and I was thinking that if it hadn't been for miracle after miracle I'd now be sitting in a third-class carriage, just going out of Naples, and crying my heart out. And, being sentimental, I got to feeling sorrowful over that lonely woman who isn't there, and about all lonely women, and wishing I could comfort them. And I can't yet grow accustomed to feeling secure and tranquil in my happiness. You won't mind if I'm sometimes a little sad about the past, Tony, and you'll give me time, a little time, to get used to living in your sunlight after being so long in the darkness ? '

Tony did not know how to answer this, which to him at least was poignant. He said, as lightly as he could:

' Take all the time you need, my Katha. Feel free in yourself. We were half joking when we arranged that you should take control of our hours together. Let's prolong your dictatorship. I feel myself that awakening to a new life hurts nearly as much as dying to an old one. Move gently, be alone when you want. I shall not urge you. Only, be frank. Much I can guess, much I can do or not do by instinct, but there is also much you must tell me. If you must halt for a time, if you must set limits, tell me—and don't wrong me by thinking I'm such a vain fool as to be offended. I know what I know.'

' What do you know? '

' That we couldn't part now even if we tried, so we shall go on together.'

'I didn't think of parting now, Tony. And yet it was only this morning, only fifteen hours ago that I felt

desperately, desperately that—oh, you know, I needn't repeat it.'

'Was it only this morning!' exclaimed Tony. 'Has this only been one day? After this, I shall count time by living, not by hours or fourth dimensions. Happy nations may have no history, but happy people have. Why, if I knew how to, I could write a whole book about our day.'

Katha was silent for a time, and he saw the red glow of her cigarette in the darkness, reddening and fading. Presently she said lightly and gaily:

'We were up early this morning, my heart, and we've lived a life in a day. If you're not tired, I am. I must go to bed.'

'As soon as you wish,' answered Tony, standing up.

'Don't turn on the light,' said Katha, 'I can see.' She felt for his hand and held it as she said, still gaily but tenderly:

'There's still a surprise to come, Tony. Last night I refused to let you be in my room, but tonight I shall come to yours, if you want me.'

As answer Tony kissed her, and then she whispered:

'I shall come in boldly, without knocking, after the clock has struck ten.'

When she had gone, Tony switched on the light, which seemed quite blinding. He muffled it down to dimness as well as he could with his pyjamas, then washed and prepared for the night, arranged the shutters, and lay beneath the cold sheets, waiting. It was true, as Katha had said, that they were tired, and he had half fallen into a doze when he heard the door open and saw Katha enter and lock it. She came over to the bed and kissed him lightly, then shook off her dressing gown—I must get her a nicer *one*, thought Tony—and slippers, and sat down on the bed beside him.

'Won't you get in?' he said, pulling down the sheets.
'You'll get cold.'

'Not for the minute I shall be here,' Katha answered, and took his hands. 'Tony, if ever a woman was dotingly, uncritically, in love with a man, I'm in love with you. I'm more in love with you tonight than I was this morning—though god knows I loved you then—and it's partly because you were so gentle to my hurts, but——'

'But what? Tell me!'

'Would it be unfair to you, would it be unkind and unwomanly if I just lay in your arms, and we sleep together?'

It will be so easy to do all you wish and nothing more that I shall not even think there might be more. O god, isn't it enough to hold you in my arms after all those lost years?'

§ x

Every morning they leisurely took breakfast on the terrace, except when there was *scirocco*, when Katha had hers in bed, and Tony sat beside her. Every sunny afternoon they went down to the rock pool and bathed. No one ever came near the pool; there were no gardens or olives to tend, the fishing grounds and the lighthouse were on the other side of the island, and the quail nets were on higher ground over a mile away. The path itself was so obliterated by broom and cytissus that it was invisible to anyone who did not know the way, and those few visitors who were tempted to start out in that direction always turned back where the open ground began. In the mornings they went to Katha's nook or climbed the mountain or tried paths that were new to them or went down to the piazza to buy books and an ice, or even just sat in the garden. But the reading was very desultory—they had so much to say to each other—and in that

climate only the infirm or melancholy stay indoors. And every night Katha lay in Tony's arms, growing a little bolder in touch each night, yet still shrinking from the consummation of the flesh. Sometimes, as Katha slept, Tony felt his body goldenly alive when it pressed against her, and he mourned over the wrong that had been done her; it was so incredible that the frank, sensual Katha of the old days should have been so hurt that she had to relearn the joy of touch, should feel so degraded that she needed gradually to purify herself by happiness before she could entirely accept him. What is the matter with men and women that they dementedly turn the sweetness of life into poison and miscall murder Love?

About ten days after his arrival at Aeaëa, Tony found on his breakfast tray a packet of letters forwarded to him from Madrid.

'They're of very little importance,' he said to Katha. 'A friendly one from a man called Waterton whom I like, though we were never intimate. Silly ones from other people. My banker wants some signatures. And that's all except for this.'

And he held up an unopened letter.

'What is it?'

'A letter from Margaret.'

'Hadn't you better read it?' asked Katha quietly.

'I suppose so, but I rather dread it. I rather dread the stone people can throw into the garden of the Hesperides. But here goes.'¹

He ran through the letter rapidly, while Katha watched his face anxiously.

'But this is extraordinary,' he exclaimed.

'What is it?'

'Wait a bit—I must read it again more carefully.' He turned back to the beginning, and reread. 'Some-

thing must have happened. She must be in love with someone.'

'Why? May I know what she says?'

'She says her people call me all the cads and villains in creation, but are really very glad to be rid of me and have increased her allowance in consequence. She says she's given up thinking I'm a cad and a villain—I'm like a character in a play she saw whose title she can't remember. She's ordering a special divorce trousseau and is going to have *the* most fashionable solicitor in London, and will I send the thrilling evidence. There's a lot more in that strain, but she winds up by saying we shall be happier apart, and adds a postscript to the effect that she renounces all alimony—I've earned it by my labour in Naboth's vineyard. But read for yourself.'

Katha read the letter through and then said:

'What a strange girl she sounds, Tony. Is she like that herself?'

'Not a bit. That's her cocktail-party manner and entirely put on.'

'It sounds so frivolous to me. I don't think I could write like that to a man I'd loved, however much it was all over,'

'It's the accepted jargon, and one is supposed to assume that under this light mask terrific emotions are seething. A sort of jesting with a broken heart, or smiling with the eagle at your liver, or joking when you're crazy with love. I don't believe in it myself, and I don't believe there's anything under the surface but what's on top. I need more evidence of these secret, profound passions before I believe in them. However, that's neither here nor there. The great thing is that she's turned out decent. If she doesn't change her mind, she's being exceptionally generous.'

'Shall you accept her offer?'

'What offer? Oh, that! Not yet. I shall put aside what I should have to pay her, and offer it again when the case is settled. Then if she refuses once more, I don't see why I shouldn't keep it. She's well off, she'll be better off, and she'll probably marry a young man with great possessions. Besides, I want it for you.'

Tony, don't do anything for me that wouldn't be entirely honourable for you alone. We don't need more. We're living in what's luxury to me now. Let her have it.'

We'll see, when the moment comes. I shall press it on her anyway. And now let's forget it all. Oh, but one thing.'

'What?'

Tony hesitated and then said:

'English divorce law is a highly peculiar thing, especially since it is supposed to be based on logic. In English law marriage is a contract. But unlike all other contracts, it cannot be dissolved by the consent of both parties. In fact, if both parties agree to cancel it and let the cat out of the bag, the law won't cancel it. That would be too simple and would lose the lawyers thousands of pounds in fees. So the law assumes there must be one guilty party, and one innocent party who has been wronged by desertion of the matrimonial bed. Therefore the wronged one sues for what is called restitution of conjugal rights, and the court orders the guilty one to go to bed with his partner at once. Does this sound very mad to you?'

'A bit queer,' said Katha, 'but you're joking, aren't you?'

No, that's exactly what happens. Well, the guilty party says "shan't," so the contract's broken, and the innocent one is "deserted" and crying like mad for some money to salve the broken heart. But if the guilty

party's the man—and he usually is, because however often the wife's committed adultery, it's "good form" for the husband to be guilty—adultery must be proved. Now very likely the guilty husband has someone he wants to marry and with whom he is in fact committing adultery. But on no account must her name be brought into the proceedings—that would be "real bad form." No, a lady must be hired to consent to stop one whole night with the guilty party in a Brighton hotel, while they sit up and drink whisky and soda and discuss the Derby and last year's plays and how hard life is. That's evidence. So then a divorce is granted, but so tender is the law's conscience about separating those whom god wants to divide that it gives them another six months to return to each other, during which a mysterious person called the King's Proctor is supposed to spy on them. If he doesn't spy, or having spied finds nothing savoury, or decides to hold his hand, the decree *nisi* is made absolute. Meanwhile, if the wife has been the guilty party, the vile adulterous paramour or co-respondent must pay the husband damages for the use of his wife. But if the husband has been the guilty party he must pay his ex-wife one third of his income for life. Thus no man in England can have or have had more than three wives.'

'Is that the law?' asked Katha in amazement.

'Thyself shall see the act. But what I'm leading up to is this—don't you think the lady-in-Brighton part is horrible?'

'I think it's all horrible.'

'So do I, don't let's talk about it.'

'But you were leading up to something?'

'Oh, never mind.'

'I can guess what it was. You think we ought not to use a subterfuge but admit we're together?'

'I don't say that. I was only going to ask which you prefer.'

'Then I prefer to be guilty with you. I'll stand beside you and admit it to the judge, though I hate to think of such people prying in. I'm not ashamed of loving you, I'm proud of it.'

Oh, you wouldn't have to go to court. But I may act on those lines?'

Yes.'

And now I won't ever speak about it again, unless your signature is needed. Have a cigarette.'

No, thanks. And Tony . . .'

Yes?;

Promise you won't marry me.'

Good heavens, why? Aren't we married?'

Really and in truth, yes. But not any of this legal horror. It's degrading.'

Oh, Katha, you're not angry with me for speaking of it? You don't feel I've been sordid?'

No, no, my dear. You had to speak of it. But it shocks me. Shall we go out and let the sun clean all this away?'

Down to the piazza?' asked Tony, glad the subject was settled, but still with a sense that Katha was right in feeling it to be degrading. 'I have to go to the bank and——'

No more shopping, Tony.'

Oh, please. I want to get some German books, and a new sketchbook, and just a tiny, tiny dressing gown for Katha.'

Do you make sketches, Tony? Will you show me how to?'

I'll try, but it would be showing you what I can't do myself. My sketches are infinitely amateur, but as I don't try to make people look at them, I think them

harmless. Their value to me is that I see things more clearly when I make them, and that they remind me of what I've seen and liked.'

'May I see them, Tony? I should love to.'

'Nobody has ever seen them before, and I don't think anybody even knew I made them. But you shall see them. You're the only person I could show them to. But I warn you they're only crude personal scrawlings.'

Tony went into the room and returned to the terrace with six sketchbooks of different sizes.

'There,' he said, 'that's all I've got there. The others are locked up in England, but I'll get them some day.'

'Where is this place?' asked Katha, showing a sketch of a river with trees, old houses, and a Romanesque church.

'A little village in France, called Broutain. You'll find most of that book was filled up there. It's just a year ago that I made them.'

'It looks most charming. Can we go there some time, or would you rather not?'

'No, I should love to go there with you. It was an important stage on my roundabout path back to you.'

'And where's that?' she asked, pointing to an elaborate piece of decorated sculpture in another book.

'It's part of a side chapel in a church at Palermo. I had to leave it unfinished, because the verger came up and said sketching was offensive to god, *after* he had shaken a money box and got some money.'

'And that?'

'In Rome. But do stop looking at those old books now, Katha, let's go out.'

'All right,' said Katha, hastily running through them. 'But, Tony, you don't need another one. Two of these have only a few drawings in.'

'Yes, I do. I want a Katha-sketchbook. I want to learn your body with my eyes as I learn it with my touch. Will you sit naked sometimes when you're reading or sewing? I don't mean pose. You needn't sit still.'

'I'd love to. And I'll get one as well. No, I'll be extravagant and get two. One for Tony and one for Aea. There are places here I must draw.'

As they started out for the piazza, Katha said:

'Did you make sketches when I first knew you, Tony? I don't remember it.'

'Yes, I did. In fact, locked up in a special little box in England is a drawing I made of your head one evening and a sketch of you standing by our pool, and some other relics.'

'What are they?'

'Oh, your letters, a little hanky you dropped and I stole, and such sentimental trifles.'

'It was nice of you to keep them. May I have the two sketches?'

'Of course, but they're terribly crude, though better than what I can do now. I did none from August 1911 until about eighteen months ago, and then I had to begin all over again. But it's the doing them that is the pleasure.'

'Tony!' said Katha suddenly.

'What, dear?'

'May I buy a guitar?'

'Of course. Do you need some money?'

'No, I've got masses. But you don't think it's ridiculous?'

'Why ever should I? It would be fun. Can you play?'

'A bit. I used to have one when I was a student. We all did. You're sure you don't think it's • • .'

'What?'

'Oh, childish and affected, sort of *Wandervogel*?'

'I'd a million times rather you had it than a radio. I don't see anything childish or affected about having a musical instrument, even if you can't play it. And you can. Will you play and sing some of Heine's songs, Katha?'

'I'll try, but I'll have to practise a bit first. I wonder if they'll have any music in Aeaea.'

'They might. If they haven't we'll make them get some from Germany.'

'Isn't it curious,' said Katha, 'how modern life and modern people make one self-conscious about doing natural and simple things, like having a guitar or making love? I think men and women must be very evil, naturally evil.'

'I think it's business's handmaids, War and Religion, which do it. I don't believe human beings are naturally evil, at least not in that way. After all, if you watch very young children before they speak, you'll see them offer their food to those they like. It seems silly to speak of it, but after all food is the only possession the child has. And they offer to share it or give it away.'

'They also snatch it back.'

'True, which proves the fragility of human nature. But the point is that they do make the offer and sometimes allow it to be accepted. That proves the very young human animal isn't entirely selfish.'

'Do you like babies?' asked Katha, glancing at him anxiously.

'I've never met one I liked yet,' said Tony, laughing, 'but I might, you know. Yours, for instance.'

ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES

'Oh, mine,' said Katha and immediately talked of something else.

Tony went to the bank to cash his draft and verify that his new letter of credit was valid, while Katha tried on the dresses which had been made for her. Then they had another orgy of shopping, buying Katha a bright scarf and some handkerchiefs and a hat, a guitar and some music, and ordering more music from Leipzig. They got sketchbooks and pencils, and rubber—the most necessary part of the outfit, as Tony said—two volumes of Heine and an Ariosto, which Tony suddenly thought he'd like to read. After which they sat at the cafe in the piazza, drinking iced lemonade and watching the people, until it was time to drive back. Apart from the dresses, they spent about two pounds and felt very luxurious and extravagant; certainly they had more than two pounds' worth of happiness out of their morning.

'I'm glad we live up in the mountain village,' said Katha, 'though I love coming down to the piazza sometimes. The people are amusing. But I like to get away from them, quick, quick, with you. It isn't only that I want you to myself, though you know how much I love that, but I'm afraid.'

'Afraid! What of?'

'People. When I see soldiers or officials, I always have a dread that somehow they're coming to separate us. Is that foolish of me?'

'I don't see how you could feel otherwise, for I feel that all men have been hostile to us. But I also feel that they can't harm us any more. We were too ignorant, too truthful, Katha. We should never have separated in 1914. That was our mistake.'

'But we couldn't have stayed here, Tony.'

'No, but we should have gone at once to Vienna, and

you could have concealed me in a small hotel somewhere, and we could have kept in touch. Then we could have gone to England together when you were ready. We should have been back in Aeaea by the time the war started.'

'But Italy came into the war.'

'Not at first. We could have gone to Spain or America.'

'Do you think there'll be another war, Tony?'

'I wish there wouldn't be, but it's inevitable while people go on believing in their false gods. War is not human nature," as idiots say, it's imposed on human nature by false ideals. It'll come, but not yet.'

'Oh, Tony, what shall we do?'

'Run away, my dear. When I see a war coming on the scale of the last one, we'll rush at once to the neutralest country there is, provided there's still standing room. But we breakfasted on horrors today, don't let's lunch on them. Law and War in one day are too much.'

'Tony, promise you'll kill me before you go to another war.'

'I won't promise anything of the kind, darling. Very soon I shall be too old and stiff for fighting. Besides, it's the civilians who'll get it next time, and that is the one hope for peace.'

As they were sitting down to dinner that evening, Tony said:

'Do you know, Katha, I should rather like a bottle of Babbo's stravecchio tonight; we haven't had one since our first lunch, several lovely weeks ago. I ought to have ordered one last night when we were all drinking together over Filomena's return. Shall I get a bottle and ask them to join us at the end of dinner?'

'Get the wine, darling, but don't ask them to join us tonight.'

'Another surprise?'

'You mustn't ask questions. But do get the wine. I should like some.'

'That's good. It gives me so much pleasure when you enjoy the good things of life. You don't miss your Austrian wine, do you?'

No. I don't miss anything Austrian. Besides, I haven't drunk wine for years.'

It's pleasant having Filomena, isn't it?' said Tony, quickly trying to stave off the wrong memories. 'It really was a terrific scene. Have you ever been so much congratulated in your life?'

I'm glad there's one person approves of us, Tony. I'm afraid very few others will.'

Oh, they might, if they knew all about us. And anyway, we don't care.'

'It was rather selfish of us not to buy Filomena a little present today,' said Katha regretfully. 'I ought to have remembered it.'

As a matter of fact, I ran out from the music shop and bought her a scarf,' said Tony. 'The gaudiest one I could find. That's why I proposed inviting them, but we can give it her tomorrow morning.'

You give it to her. She adores you.'

'We'll give it her together and make a speech in chorus: We beg your acceptance of this elegant scarf, Filomena. We must practise it. Now begin: We—beg—your—acceptance . . . You mustn't laugh, Katha, unless you arrange that we both laugh at the cue "acceptance." Now start again . . .'

After they had been sitting for some time over their coffee, Katha said:

'What time is it, Tony?'

'Nearly half-past nine,'

'You have been very dear and lovely, Tony, in allowing me to be in command, as you call it. I haven't been good at finding surprises, but, after all, the great hourly surprise is to be together in this beautiful place. If you had insisted, I would have given you everything of me the first night, but it would have been a strain, not quite the lovely thing I want it to be and that it will be. By giving me these days and nights to grow closer to your body and also to forget what I want to forget, you did something that moves me more deeply and makes me yours more than any love-making could have done in that mood. Have I said enough to show my thankfulness?'

'More than was needed, dear Katha, more than I deserve. It is so easy to adapt myself to you.'

'We won't continue like this, though,' Katha went on. 'And I haven't any silly ideas about consummating marriage. Anyway, the surprise for tonight is that at ten o'clock I want you to come to my room and to take command.'

'You mea I . . . ?'

'Yes, I mean I want you to love me, as you did long ago. That's why I say, Come to my room, because it was there we loved.'

'Are you quite, quite sure you do want it, Katha? You're not saying this because you have some conventional idea that a man suffers and that it's your duty, et cetera?'

'No, my heart. Now for three nights, lying beside you, I've wanted you so much, so much, I yearned to seduce you. But I wanted to be certain, I wanted all bitterness to be gone,'

She stood up and added:

' Come when the clock strikes, and as soon as you hear the first stroke. I shall be waiting.'

When Tony softly opened Katha's door while the last bell notes were still chiming, he found the room dim with a suffused blue light—so that was why she had insisted on buying a blue silk scarf. He sat down on the bedside and kissed her tenderly as she lay smiling up at him, her eyes already clear and large, and no sadness or fear in them.

' Do you want me beside you, my Katha ? '

' Oh, Herz, Herz, mein Herz. Do you remember I said that to you before ? Yes, I want you beside me.'

He took her in his arms and kissed her many times, and then gently touched her, softly pressing his hand so that she could feel the deep tremor of his blood.

' You do really want me, Katha love? If you'd rather wait . . . '

' No, no, I want you now.'

With all delicate tenderness he held her, closed his eyes at the shock of delight of her body's acceptance. Her lithe limbs clasped him with a passionate eagerness, and almost at once he felt her body shaken with ecstasy, and she moaned softly. Her face was so pale that Tony paused, gazing anxiously at her and wondering if she had fainted. She opened her eyes and looked at him. The whole world, all but Katha's eyes, seemed to vanish in a golden glory of delight, and then as his lips left hers and his head drooped on her shoulder, he heard once again, but with how much deeper a happiness, her low thrilling voice:

' Herz, Herz, mien Herz I '

Tony remembered nothing after he fell asleep until he felt Katha's cheek and breath on his cheek and heard her saying:

' My love, my beautiful, you must go to your room. It is long past dawn, and Maria will be here with the breakfast in a few minutes.'

But it was impossible to go at once with Katha leaning on her elbow beside him and looking into his eyes. Tony held her close against him and whispered:

' Katha.'

' Yes.'

' Were you happy last night ? '

' Very, very happy. There are no words.'

' There was nothing wrong? No sadness? '

' No, all happy and beautiful and glad.'

' I loved you so much, so much.'

' And I you.'

' I wanted to give you my life.'

' You did.'

' I love you even more today because of it.'

' You are loved, Tony.'

' And it's only the beginning.'

' Yes, just beginning.'

' You won't be able to stop loving me, Katha ? '

' Not until I die.'

' Don't die, Katha. Let's live for ever. Shall we?'

' Yes, and always love a little more every day.'

' Yes. You're a beautiful woman, my love, and there's a goddess in your breasts.'

' And a god in your hands and loins.'

' I must go now.'

' Yes. She'll be coming in a minute.'

' Kiss me once again.'

Tony was safely in his own room to take the tray when it was brought, but smiled to see that the benevolent and economical Filomena had put both breakfasts on one tray. He carried it out to the table, arranged

chairs, got the cigarettes, and moved a small tree in a tub to shade Katha's place from the sun. There was no need to call her—she always heard the girl go down, and appeared a minute later with her own tray. He wondered what she would say when she saw the compromising tray sent up—perhaps she'd proudly ordered it. The sound of a guitar came from the garden underneath the terrace, and he walked forward a few steps to listen. Then he heard Katha's clear voice, singing: 'Wenn ich in deine Augen sehV How charming of her to think of that way to show she was happy in her love.

When the song finished, Tony went to the edge of the terrace and, looking over, saw Katha standing below in her new dressing gown, with the guitar slung over her shoulder.

'Thank you, troubadour,' he said.

She looked up.

'Ah, you there? Catch.'

And she threw up a little tied bunch of flowers, which he caught in the air.

'There are flowers for you, my lord, and rosemary—that's for remembrance.'

'Thank you, troubadour, I shan't forget. Wasn't it Fraulein Katha sent you to sing so prettily?'

'I thought men shouldn't have all the fun of loving, so I'd sing an *aubade* to my love,'

'How shall I thank you, troubadour?'

'With some breakfast,' said Katha realistically.

'I'm coming up. Is it ready,'

'Yes. The milk's getting cold,'

'I'll fly up,'

'Katha,' Tony called after her, as she began to run.

'Yes,' she answered, stopping, and looking up over her shoulder.

' But there isn't any " so muss ich weinen bitterlich " now, is there?'

Katha shook her head and threw him a kiss.

§ xi

In the cool, dark room nothing could be heard but the loud shrilling of the cicadas, in a rhythm so regular that the ear unconsciously varied it. As Tony lay half dozing beside Katha and listening to the cicadas during the afternoon siesta, he counted up the days and weeks to the accompaniment of chir-chir, chir-chir, chir-chir. He imagined them sitting on the trees in the morning, in comes the conductor cicada, all rise and bow, 'Good-morning, gentlemen,' 'Good-morning, Herr Nikisch,' then off they go, chir-chir, chir-chir, chir-chir, fiddling away like mad. Thinking of that made him forget his counting, so he had to start all over again, while the cicadas became a loud, splashing fountain in the garden. The middle of May—therefore they'd been together just over five weeks. He lifted his head to look at Katha, who was lying with her back turned to him and her dark head propped on her elbow. What lovely lines of back and loins and flexed leg; they flow like a fountain made flesh. What would the post-Darwinians say was the reason for the cicadas making that noise from morning to night? Oh, yes, to attract the female. Thus, when Velasquez painted the Rokeby Venus he was trying to attract Mrs. Velasquez. Katha is more beautiful than that. How the lady cicadas must adore music and how hard to please—those poor males go on all summer, chir-chir, chir-chir, until they fall dead with exhaustion. When do they get time to make love? At night? But that's when they don't sing. And what conversations

among the girls: 'Are you going to marry Alfonso, darling?' 'No, darling, he chirred a note out of tune yesterday, and I *couldn't* marry a man like that.' 'Well, never mind, darling, come and have a dew cocktail.'

Tony.'

'Yes, my beautiful.'

'What are you thinking about?'

'You and Velasquez, and how long we've been here, and cicadas and fountains and dew cocktails.'

'All at once?'

'No, all mixed up in what they call my stream of consciousness.'

'Who were the dew cocktails for? Me? Or Velasquez?'

'No, for the poor little she-cicadas when they had to take to drink because their lovers disgraced themselves by chirring out of tune.'

'Oh, Tony, you do think of sad stories. Poor little cicada-esses. Don't they ever get a lover?'

'They get so tired of the cicadas' devotion to art they have passionate affairs with tree toads, and then they have to take the veil and go into toadstool convents.'

Katha turned on her back, stretched and yawned, and drew up one knee. Curious, thought Tony, and lovely for me that she is always graceful even in her most unconscious moments. There can't be much German in her.

'What time is it, my lordship?' asked Katha.

'Fraulein Katharina, haven't I told you that "my lordship" can't be used?'

'Yes, my lordship.'

'It's ten to four, darling. Once I had to go and have tea with an old man who'd just been knighted, and the servant brought in the tea when his wife wasn't there. He glared at the woman and said in a marvellous deep,

pompous voice: "Inform her Ladyship that tea is served," And the poor servant, who was as nervous as brides aren't, squeaked out: "Yes, my Lordship." He was furious. I suppose they'd been rehearsing her for days, and overdid it.'

I didn't know you had all that Herr Geheimrat business in England,' said Katha, getting out of bed and opening the shutter slightly, so that her body suddenly looked like a white-gold statue in the sun ray.

How sunburned your face and arms and ankles are,, Katha.'

Yes,' said Katha, turning gracefully before the mirror, 'I look like one of those black-and-white harlequin pigs, don't I?'

Oh, what blasphemy! Why is your body so smooth and white?'

I was hatched out of an egg among the hyacinths. You told me that or I shouldn't have known it. I am thirsty.'

Shall we go and eat *cassata alia Siciliana* in the cafe and then go very slowly down to the bathing pool?'

Oh, yes, that would be lovely. Who invented *cassata*, Tony? He must have been a wonderful man.'

He was a Sicilian poet at the Court of Frederick the Second,' said Tony, unhesitatingly inventing. 'His mother was a Saracen emiress and his father a Norman knight. And he was in love with a Byzantine girl, who was a glutton about ice cream, like some other ladies. And one day she said to him: "You're always singing about my eyes and hair and my hands, why don't you do something practical for once? You shan't come to my bed again until you invent an ice cream as perfect as you say I am." So he went off and invented *cassata alia Siciliana*.'

'And will you inform your lordship that it's time to get up? I'm nearly dressed.'

After the cool dark room the sunlight outside, reflected from white walls and a dusty road, was super-dazzling, and the direct and radiated heat was fierce. Katha put on dark glasses and held her sunshade to shield them both. Even so, the walk to the cafe seemed long and torrid.

'I say, Katha,' said Tony, after he had ordered the ices, 'it's really getting too hot, my darling. We shan't be able to stay much longer.'

'Oh, don't say that, Tony. I'm so happy in Aeaea, and I'd like to stay for ever.'

'We couldn't stay for ever in a small island. We should go melancholy-mad and write novels. But I'll try to find a villa tomorrow if you really want.'

'Oh, no, I like our little rooms and Filomena. But I suppose we must go. We'll come back, though, won't we, Tony?'

'Yes, we'll come back. I've been thinking about this, Katha. But first of all tell me where you'd like to go when we leave.'

'Anywhere, so long as I am with you—except Austria, though I could be happy there with you. Anywhere but Austria.'

'You haven't anywhere you're pining to go?'

'Yes, the place you want to go to.'

'There are several reasons against staying permanently in Aeaea,' said Tony, smiling at her. 'One I've just given. Then it's too hot in summer, and surprisingly cold in winter, so Filomena tells me. There's no malaria, but you can never tell when a Sicilian is going to import an anopheles in his beard, and there is a summer microbe which plays hell with your tummy. Lovers

mustn't have indigestion, which explains their longevity statistics. Then, there's much inconvenience in even renting a place under this regime—taxes, taxes all the way, and officials mixed in your path like mad. Besides, it's bad to live under it too long.'

'You do make our dear island sound gloomy, Tony.'

That's to prevent other people from coming here. But what I suggest is that we arrange with Filomena always to reserve us our two rooms for April and May—March too if you like, but it's nearly always wet. We'll always come here for one of our annual honeymoons. Am I being too arranging, Katha?'

No, but I'm sad we can't tow Aeaëa about with the seasons. Never mind. Where shall we go now?'

'What about Paris?'

'Paris!' exclaimed Katha. 'That would be rather nice. I haven't been to Paris since I was eighteen. But wouldn't they be horrid to a Boche, even an Austrian Boche?'

'Not a bit. In fact, there's rather a cult for Germans there now, and I'll deal with officials. I've friends in France. I suggest Paris for several reasons. It seems to me that there are only four stable and liberal countries in Europe—Switzerland, Holland, England, and France. I count Belgium in with Holland, and the Scandinavian countries as too far north for more than a summer visit. Well, we need some small permanent place for all the valuable personal rubbish we shall collect and not want to throw away, and a place for summer and winter. It seems to me we might find a tiny house somewhere in the southwest of France for summer and winter, so cheap that we wouldn't mind shutting it up for months at a time, and the rest of the year move about or come to Aeaëa. What do you think?'

'It sounds quite perfect, Tony. Have you got a French village up your sleeve?'

'No, only a district. Can you drive a car, Katha?'

'I could before the war, Tony, but I've scarcely been in one since.'

'Well, you'd soon remember and I could learn. I thought of Paris for several reasons. It's the greatest possible change from Aeaea, and we can see people. Yes, you must risk it, darling, we mustn't be entirely alone. Then I thought I'd ask my friend, Crilain, to buy us a car—you know, one of those little French ones like a Roman sarcophagus on wheels. Then we could go to Broutain, and explore all round. And if we don't find the ideal place this year, we shall next or the year after. As to Paris, we needn't be there more than a fortnight, but it would be nice to hear some music, wouldn't it? And see what the painters are doing, and look round the Louvre? And drink a little French wine? And—perhaps—get Katha some clothes?'

'Tony, what a seducer you are! I believe you're the original serpent that tempted Eve. You make me long to pick the forbidden apple of Paris, which I never dreamed I'd see again.'

'Then that's settled. And we needn't stick too rigidly to plans, Katha. Always change them if something which seems better turns up. Have you ever been by boat from Naples to Marseilles?'

No.'

'It's pleasant, if the sea's calm, and it should be now. I think you'll like it. We'll go that way and get a cabin with two little beds and sleep in one of them. Shall I get the Naples newspaper and find the boat sailings?'

'Yes.'

'Here we are,' said Tony, turning to the back of the

paper, 'there's a boat on the 20th. We're now the 1'th. Is that too soon? '

'A little soon. Fm so afraid that leaving here will break my little bowl of happiness, Tony. But, yes, yes, let's go then. But keep close beside me all the time and hold my hand at night, so that I don't even dream that I've lost you.'

The sun was so hot that they lingered on and on in the bathing pool, unable to drag themselves away from the fresh clear water, and were late for dinner in consequence. Tony pointed out that they were three degrees south of Naples, that the sun would go on getting hotter until September, that Aeaea received all the African winds, and that though the evenings would still be cool and fresh, they would be practically kept indoors for more than half the day. And Katha regretfully acquiesced.

During dinner Tony was silent, visibly preoccupied with something, and Katha did not make any effort to talk. She enjoyed the occasional silences when she could feel herself beautifully at one with her love and need no speech to interpret it. At last just before bedtime Tony said:

'I've been thinking, Katha. . . .'

'So I noticed, darling.'

'Was I very dull? I'm sorry.'

'No, I liked it. But what were you thinking? '

'A lot of things. I'm not sure that I can put them all into words. You'll have to guess between the sentences. How silly those people are who talk about simplifying language—we need a much more subtle and complex one.'

'Was that what you were thinking? '

'No, that's an aside. First of all, do you think I've been too arranging today?'

'No, my dear, of course not. You always arrange what I like, and if by chance I don't like, you angelically find you don't like it either.'

'Nearly always we like the same things, Katha. And yet it's the difference between us that makes the spell even more than the likeness. Not only your woman-ness, which is a perpetual surprise and loveliness, but your different sensibility. But may I arrange once more tonight?'

'Yes, what is it?'

'In a minute. Do you feel there are tides in your blood, all sorts of wavy rhythms, as well as the big regular tide?'

'Yes.'

'So do I. And it seems to me already that my blood rhythms have altered and ebb and flow with yours.'

'Yes, I have felt mine changing gently too. They've each adjusted to the other to be in harmony.'

'I think that's very important, Katha, though it isn't much understood, or even recognized by law.'

'It's more than important, it's divinely and sensually lovely. It brings to life.'

'Yes, it brings to life,' said Tony, glancing quickly at her.

'Shall we go to bed now? And may I come to your room for once?'

'Why, of course.'

When he later on came to her room, Katha was sitting on the edge of the bed, wearing only the necklace he had given her as a living-in-love present.

'How do you like me in this costume?' she said gaily.

'Most charming. I like it best of all your dresses.'

'Would you like me to go out in it? '

If everybody were different, if they knew how to look at a beautiful body beautifully, yes, but they'd hurt you with their nasty eyes and dirty thoughts. It will take centuries to wipe out all that.'

He moved towards her and knelt down between her knees, kissing her, while she smoothed his hair and leaned one arm across his shoulder.

'Katha.'

'Yes.'

Do you remember when we sat silent together on the terrace on the second night? '

'I remember.'

I was thinking something, and you seemed to feel it, because you put out your hand and took mine. I wonder if you knew what it was? '

'What was it? '

Something I'd never known before, a strange yearning to you and beyond you. It has been with me often these past weeks, and I was clutched by it again tonight, so deeply, when I spoke about the rhythms in our blood.'

Katha did not reply, but ceased to stroke his head and held her arms round his shoulders.

'I was thinking that I would ask you something,' he said to her silence. 'Something that seems to me very beautiful. It needn't be now, it needn't be this year or next year. It needn't ever be if you don't want.'

He felt her arms abruptly clutch his shoulders, and thought she had guessed his desire and shared it. He did not look up, though, but went on:

No, it needn't ever be if you don't want. Remember that. It mustn't be, unless you yourself want it even more than I. '

'What is it?' Katha asked in a quick, choky voice.

And if it happens, it must be in this room. Oh>

Katha, do you remember what you said when I first came to you here? You must. But you can't know how deeply I was moved, even that immature boy was moved, when you said so beautifully and simply: "Do you want to give me a child tonight?"'

She did not answer as he had expected, but her arms held him more and more tightly, and she bent forward till her face was pressed upon his shoulder and her thick, dark hair rested on his cheek.

'Katha! What is it? O my heart, have I hurt you? How I wish I hadn't spoken!'

She lifted her head and leant back from him, allowing his anxious gaze to meet her eyes. To his horror he saw that the sadness and terror he believed had gone for ever had come back to her face.

'O Katha! What have I done? Have I wounded my love unawares?'

'You couldn't know, Tony, and you were right to speak. It is I who've wounded myself. Look in my eyes, Tony. When I made my confession to you, I didn't dare to meet your gaze. Now you have made me strong enough to bear your pain, even your anger.' She hushed him as he tried to protest. 'I made my confession to you that morning, but it was not complete. O Tony, believe me, it wasn't deception, it wasn't a calculation. I forgot. And I forgot because I was so intensely happy, so relieved, so overwhelmed by your tenderness to me, your generosity. Do believe me, oh, you believe me?'

'I would sooner doubt myself than you, Katha. I would walk into fire if you told me it would not burn. I would take your word against the world's. But, Katha, Katha, don't feel hurt, don't. Forget what I asked you. Forget, forget. How I wish I hadn't spoken.'

'You had to speak, Tony. And in a way, I'm glad you spoke, even though what I must tell you may separate us. At least, I shall have known what it is to live. And even though this part us, I shall always love and bless you.'

'No parting, Katha, no separating. Don't speak, don't think it.'

'Wait. And one reason you had to speak was that it has been in my heart too from time to time, a yearning, and then an agony, a sharp dagger in my love when I thought of it. Tony, I told you of those dreadful days in Vienna.'

'Yes, but I hoped they were forgotten.'

'They are, but I must recall them. Tony, I was so terrified that I might have a child—there were doctors back from the army, so kind, so understanding, so bitterly pitiful—one had been my brother's friend—he pitied me and did what I asked—I can never, never have a child. Oh, Tony, Tony, and I want your child.'

For a moment Tony was frozen by pity and horror and could neither speak nor move; then, as the blood returned to his face, he saw one thing only—comfort her, reassure her, as she sat there so lonely, so unhappy, hiding her eyes in her hands.

Katha! Look at me, please look at me. Yes, don't turn aside. You can see that it's all, all right, can't you? You can see that it hasn't hurt the love? All I feel is sorrow for what you suffered and sorrow that I, of all men, should have torn open that old wound so brutally. But you understand? Now, if ever, we must be frank and tonight realize for ever that this must not hurt us or poison our blood. It was selfish in me who have the perfect flower to want the fruit as well. I believed you just now and told you my faith in you. Have faith in me when I tell you that the flower of you is enough for

my life's happiness, more than enough, measure pressed down and overflowing, and that I shall never, never think of the fruit again. Don't let your heart ever think: "He withdraws from me, he despises me, because I'm a barren woman." Don't think it, because it won't be true. The wrong is not yours and not mine. You believe me? '

Katha leaned forward and kissed him in a passion of tenderness and regret.

'Oh, Tony, I believe you, I have faith in you. It shall never again hurt me. But, Tony, Tony, there are tears in my heart to know that they even took from me my child and yours.'

§ xii

On their last evening at Aeaëa, Katha and Tony climbed to the crest of the mountain, so that they could look down on the whole island and bid it farewell until they returned next spring. A golden lion of a sun crawled slowly westward, while the whole air seemed filled with an ocean of clear light. The lower slopes of the mountain were blazing hot, and the noise of cicadas from the olives sounded like a mad orchestra of violinists constantly playing the same two crotchets. But as they climbed higher and higher and the sun sank, the air grew cooler and the clatter of the cicadas fainter and fainter. Through their curtain of noise, sounds floated up from the village—the shout of boys playing, the ting-ting of an anvil, the church clock striking the half-hour. The placid sea gleamed under the late afternoon light, waveless, and streaked in long, winding lines like currents or the broken track of ships, fitting like enamel round the jewels of the distant islands. Sicily was invisible, **but huge** thunderclouds, white and bronze-tipped, hung

over the unseen promontory. Every step of the way brought more and more of the island into sight and softened down the sounds from below, and when at last they stood on the peak, they stood in a silence only broken by the shrill screaming swifts, and once again saw Aeaëa like a coloured relief map at their feet.

They sat down in the shade of the ruined chapel wall, away from the village, looking out over a boundless and sail-less sea. Katha closed her sunshade and sat down with a sigh of relief.

'That was a hot, long pull,' she said, 'but how beautifully cool and clear it is now.'

'Yes, but I'm glad I brought these,' said Tony, producing a bottle of white wine and two glasses from his rucksack. 'Will you drink now, or shall we wait?'

'Oh, wait till we're a little cooler and have got our breath.'

Tony laid the wine in the shade, and they sat for a time without speaking, watching the incredibly rapid gyrations of the swifts and looking out into the depthless sky. It does seem a pity to leave all this, thought Tony, but then how stifling the air was at midday. Besides, we might get ill. And then he drifted off into a reverie, which was more sensation than thought—sensation of air and sky and sea, sensation of the living rock under his body, sensation of the mountain crest which seemed so motionless and was really rushing through space, sensation of Katha's presence.

At last he turned to look at Katha and noticed that she looked rather pensive.

'Sad, Katha?'

'No,' she answered, looking up and smiling at him, 'not sad, just thinking.'

'About . . . ?'

'About a lot of things. How all my Vienna days are lost days.'

'Not really lost, Katha. We were coming nearer all the time.'

'If only we'd known it. But then would the waiting years have gone any quicker? We might have got impatient-mad with waiting.'

'Yes. Perhaps it was better not to know. Any other thoughts?'

'You don't regret anything, Tony? I mean, about me? You don't feel restless or that you lack something?'

No. I want to go on living and I want to see and do and be different things, but I want them all with you. And I wouldn't exchange anything for you. Not anything. If the devil suddenly appeared and showed me all the cities of the earth and offered me the lordship of them in exchange for you, I should . . .'

'Should what?'

'Tell him to go to hell.'

'There's been one little fear in my heart, Tony.'

'What, dear Katha?'

'That you were regretting something.'

'The fruit? No, no, my flower. Throw away that fear. I don't regret it.'

'Are you sure?'

'So sure that I never even think of it. Besides, I should have been a rotten father.'

'Oh, Tony!'

'Yes, I should. I should have expected your child to be quite perfect, and as it obviously wouldn't have been, I should have been a tyrant. There's no tyrant like the loving parent who thinks its infant should be perfect. Believe me, we are better as we are.'

'How did you learn to love, Tony?'

'How did you? One doesn't learn; it exists or it doesn't. It all depends on the sort of person you are. Just after the war I read in a newspaper about four soldiers who all wanted the same girl. And do you know how they settled it?'

'No.'

'They produced their money, and the girl accepted the man who had the most. Fortunately human nature asserted itself, and they began quarrelling and were arrested. But how monstrous! If someone appeared and said: "Katha, I've got ten times as much money as Tony, come on!" would you go?'

'I should say to him what you said you'd say to the devil.'

'Shall we have some wine? Yes? We must drink to something. What shall it be?'

'Why, to Aeaea, of course.'

'Of course, and to our future?'

'Yes.'

After another long silence Katha said:

'I think this mountain crest must be a very delicate and shy little goddess.'

'A little goddess? Oughtn't it to be a big god? But, no, you're right, it's a shy goddess always hiding under those big white clouds. Hark! There's the angelus. We must go back. Nine Hail Marys and two Our Fathers. Lord Apollo, now lettest thou thy servants depart in peace. Are you sorry to be going, Katha?'

'How could I not be sorry? And then leaving Aeaea always makes my heart tighten a little. I think of other departures and of how we went off so happily together, so young and confident. And I'm a little afraid. Tony, do you really think that life can go on being beautiful like

this, go on and on and on, and not be spoiled, not have the glory fade ? '

Don't let's look forward too far, my Katha. If we do, we must look to an inevitable end we can't bear to see. We've been apart and unhappy; now we're together and happy. Today and today, that must be enough. It is enough. Our hardest task will be to guard our love from the world of men. May they pardon us the happiness we have made for ourselves, as we pardon them the misery they have laid upon us. Now let us go.'

THE END

