TIGHT BINGING BOOK

LINDA SHAWN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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CONFESSIONS AND IMPRESSIONS
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Child Education

COMMON-SENSE AND THE CHILD

ETHEL MANNIN

LINDA SHAWN

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To

VIVIAN ELLIS

WHO SAID I SHOULD WRITE THIS BOOK,

AND TO

THOSE CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF 'SHAWN'S"

ITSELF WITHOUT WHICH IT COULD NOT HAVE

BEEN WRITTEN

"Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the Summer-tide ;
Still we cannot understand
Where the waters glide."

WILLIAM MORRIS

"A child know the abyss of forlornness."

D. H. LAWRENCE

NOTE

Two chapters in this book, 'Apple-Christening' and ' Sea-Saga', appear in my collection of recent short stories, ***Green** Figs*, though a little differently from their present form here. In their original form as stories complete in themselves they occurred to me some time before this book was begun ; the reason for their reappearance here, altered slightly, and both expanded and modified to meet the needs of their new setting and usage, is that these two stories were the genesis of this novel. Having created the Shawns in the short story ' Apple-Christening ', I grew interested in their lives before and after that particular incident, and out of that interest, fused with the memories of the farm of which I wrote in my *Confessions*, grew this history of the house of Shawn.

E.M

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PART I : PRELUDE

" Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the Summer-tide——"

I: THE HOUSE OF SHAWN

IT was only when the farm changed hands that anyone realised that it had any name but * Shawn's ', or any outside interest vested in it. Then, given over to solicitors and estate-agents, its hopefulness and independence crumbled, and it was revealed as a rather poor and not very encouraging little place, rentable quarterly, a dubious ' property', with an official title and little to commend it. Tenanted it had an air of complacency and security, like that of a contented elderly matron who has her good man safely at her side; to let, it wore its weeds like a widow, huddling timid and insecure in a desolation of loneliness and neglect. The name by which it was described in its deeds, and the legal documents pertaining to it, seemed not to belong to it, for there was no one living who remembered it as other than the house of Shawn.

Even to-day, when it is no longer a farm, but the * country cottage' of a * literary gentleman', its duck-pond filled in and turned into a lawn, its oast-house converted into a guest-house, its cart-shed into a garage, and its barn into a lounge with a parquet floor, and a small cocktail bar where the machine for grinding the cow-cake had once stood, it is still * Shawn's ' as far as Flaydering is concerned, for the Shawns had farmed it for three generations.

In the beginning ' Shawn's' was a pair of keepers' cottages isolated in the midst of a wilderness which in Spring is golden with gorse, in Summer purple with heather, and in Autumn and Winter dun as the North Sea which bounds it on the East and the marshes into which it peters out to the North and South. At that time Flaydering Heath had laved its back doors, and wild duck nested under its garden fences . . . until persistently increasing taxation, together with the poorness of the shooting, decided the retired colonel who owned it all that it might be let with greater profit to himself than it yielded as barren private property.

For a long time the cottages stood empty, and the heath invaded orchard and garden, and everyone said that the colonel was mad to imagine that anyone would pay good money to rent even a single acre of such a wilderness, all gorse and bracken and heather and coarse grass, and the colonel himself was growing more and more Tolsteyian in his attitude towards land-owning, asking himself

gloomily," How much land does a man need " ? and approaching the Tolstoyian conclusion that six feet was enough, when Andrew Shawn's grandfather came to Flaydering from the town with a little money made in a small dairy business which he had acquired by marriage, and big ideas concerning farming. Unhesitatingly and unflinchingly he took over the pair of cottages and two hundred acres of wilderness, and a new farm was in the making. At first it was known locally as * Shawn's place', and then, in the course of time, simply as ' Shawn's '.

The long fight with that savagely virgin land shattered the dreams, the health, and the bank-balance of that first farming Shawn, but somehow, such is man's courage and endurance in the struggle with Nature, the heath was cleared and dug, and pasture and corn-lands emerged from the wilderness. Andrew Shawn's father added a few more acres, and in a fit of extravagant optimism built the oast-house which in the whole history of the Shawns was never used for anything else but a store-house. Beyond that the farm never expanded, for Andrew had neither his grandfather's wild dreams nor his father's plodding ambition, and so long as the farm ' paid its way ' he was satisfied.

Originally the Shawns came out of Western Ireland, which accounted equally for the romantic creative energy of Andrew's grandfather, his father's oast-house, and his own shiftlessness. It was merely a different facet of the same Celtic irresponsibility which brought' Shawn's ' into being which caused Andrew Shawn to neglect it. He had none of his father's hunger to own the land he worked—indeed, he would have been happier working for someone else, for he found the process of thinking for himself, and above all of making decisions, laborious and irksome. He had remained on at the farm during his father's lifetime, when his brothers had left home, because it was the line of least resistance, and in the same spirit he carried on after his father's death. He knew that people constantly compared him with his father and remarked to each other that Andrew Shawn was not the man his father had been, but he did not mind; he suspected, secretly, that in public opinion no man ever was as good as his father, particularly if his idea of life did not follow the same lines. It seemed to him

that he had grown up with that chant in his ears," You'll never be the man your father is." He had in his own mind no doubt that people had said the same thing of his father when comparing the second farming Shawn with the first. For himself he had no desire to emulate his father—it involved too much hard work; neither making money nor making good—and he had a shrewd idea that they were very much the same thing—interested him; he was quite content to loaf his way along, doing only as much work as was necessary to keep himself and those dependent on him in moderate comfort, since moderate comfort was all he asked of life, and people were welcome to call him * bone lazy ' if they pleased; he reckoned that he ' kept as good a table ', and paid his bills and his rent as regularly as any of them, if not quite as promptly; and he certainly wasn't going to sweat his soul out as his father and his grandfather had done, either in the interests of * getting on ', or as a protection against * a rainy day' that as likely as not would never come. He was fond of saying that it was time enough to start worrying when there was anything to worry about.

He inherited all of the Irish capacity for doing nothing. When he was not working he was content to lean on a gate and smoke and spit, and stare with an empty mind into space. Sometimes, returning from an evening at the ' Four-in-Hand ', he saw what other people might believe to be rabbits playing antics by moonlight, but which, because of his ancestors, he knew to be fairies. Sometimes he saw the stars caught in the tree-tops, and heard the wind chuckle. But for the most part when it had not to concentrate on farm matters his mind was comfortably empty.

At forty-five he was a man who had everything he wanted out of life, without ever having wanted anything much. He had never known what it was to desire anything with the whole of his being; not even his marriage.

II: SHAWN COURTSHIP

TWO years after his father's death, and a few months after his mother's, Andrew Shawn had not so much married Ellen Blunt, Flaydering's school-mistress, as allowed her to marry him. He had been ' keeping company ' with her since he was eighteen, and would probably have continued indefinitely in that state of tacit betrothal if she herself had not seized the opportunity presented by his mother's death to propose herself as the next mistress of the farm.

" How will you manage ? " she had urged. " A farm needs a woman to look after the house and the dairy and the chickens. There's no sense in getting a housekeeper when you could have your own wife about the place, and it's not as if we haven't been as good as engaged for years—and when a woman gets to thirty she begins to want to settle down in a home of her own. There's not much to school-teaching for a woman, and other people's children day after day, year in, year out."

There had scarcely been any question of decision about it for Andrew. Ellen's arguments were unanswerable; he had supposed, vaguely, that if he did not marry he would have to find a housekeeper, and it was simpler and easier to marry Ellen. Even had he wanted to he could not have withstood the force of her determination.

She had been an Easter bride, with a veil and orange-blossom and a bouquet. It had been ' a pretty wedding ', just as she had always dreamed her wedding should be, with her two unmarried school-teacher sisters as bridesmaids, in blue and pink, with picture-hats, her mother lady-like in brown lace, and herself in white satin, leaning on the arm of her father; and a shower of confetti, and the village children throwing wild flowers when she left the church leaning on Andrew's arm. He had had a new blue suit for the occasion, and a new bowler hat, and a white flower in his button-hole, and had felt hot, sheepish, and ridiculous.

There had been a reception at the drill-hall afterwards, with a big white cake decorated with wax orange-blossoms and silver paper and horse-shoes, catering by the best baker in the town, and everything done in good style. The bride's relatives and friends

had seemed very grand compared with the Shawn guests—smart, and a little consciously superior. Everyone, including the Flaydering people themselves, had said that Ellen Blunt was marrying ' beneath ' her, and wondered what she could see in ' that shiftless Shawn '. Not that Andrew Shawn wasn't honest as the day, and a good sort, well-liked by everyone, but scarcely the sort of person an educated woman like Miss Blunt might have been expected to marry. What sort of farmer's wife—and a poor farmer at that—would an ex-school-teacher make ? It was the sort of foolishness that might have been expected of Andrew Shawn—wasn't there Irish blood in him, to be sure ? And everyone knew that the Irish were a contrary race. But Miss Blunt should have known better. It wasn't as if Andrew was anything remarkable to look at, or had any special gifts. Like' Shawn's ' itself he was * nothing much '. . . . .

The Shawns had wished Andrew joy of his school-ma'am, and one some five years older than himself at that, but had decided amongst themselves, with a few grins and winks, that she would be ' hard put to it' to * make him mind his p's and q's ' the way she had made her school-children mind.

Ellen had known what they had all said, but had been indifferent. She had been in love with Andrew Shawn ever since she had come to Flaydering seven years ago. She had gazed at him yearningly every time she had seen him coming and going in Flaydering with his pony and trap. The day when her bicycle had a punctured tyre and he had overtaken her on the road out of Flaydering into the town, and given her a lift, had been for her pure romance. He had seen that she admired him, and had been a little flattered, for he was shy and clumsy with women. She had said that she thought farm-life must be ' fascinating'. He had been confusedly aware of her flushed face and bright eyes, and mumbled something about showing her over ' the place ' if she cared to come over to tea on Sunday and meet his mother. Folks often * dropped in of a Sunday ', he had explained. Ellen had said that she would * love to '. After that she had often ' dropped in of a Sunday ', and he would walk back with her in the evening to the school-house, until it became an accepted thing that Andrew Shawn and Ellen

Blunt were * walking-out' together. Andrew did not feel himself especially drawn to Ellen; he had regarded her as much of a friend of his mother's as of himself. When his mother had said, " I suppose you and Ellen be reg'lar keepin' company ? " he had been a little bewildered. He had replied that he supposed so, but he had no desire to kiss her, and he never thought of themselves as what he vaguely supposed Flaydering considered them to be—* a courting couple '. When his mother had asked, eyeing him slyly, " Be you thinkin' o' marryin' Ellen by an' by ? " he had been startled. He had answered with simple truthfulness, " I ain't thought about it. I ain't in no hurry fur marryin'. "

When he thought of women—which wasn't often—his thoughts never turned to Ellen. She was just a friend who came to tea, and with whom, at her suggestion, never at his, he occasionally went for an evening stroll. He not so much liked her company as didn't mind it. He never thought of this ' walking out' with Ellen as * sweethearting'. He would have said that sweethearting wasn't much in his line. The only women he ever wanted to embrace—and whom he did embrace—were the women who hung round the farmers at the public-houses in the town on market-days. Such women neither required going-after nor walking-out with; they offered themselves, and a man could take them if he was in the mood—and not give them another thought afterwards. These adventures were so very secret and private that he never mentioned them to anyone; other men told him of similar adventures, but he never let them know that occasionally he had similar experiences; he tried to hide them away from even his own memory. Once such incidents were over he preferred to forget about them, and as they were not very frequent, and only happened when he had had a little to drink, he did, in fact, remember very little about them afterwards, and came very near to pretending to himself that they had never happened.

This very private side of his life certainly had nothing to do with Ellen. He knew from what other men told hjm that ' walking-out' couples frequently did secretly indulge in what were supposed to be the privileges of marriage, and he didn't see why they shouldn't, it was their own business, he reckoned, and usually ended in their

getting married before they had intended to or could afford it; his attitude to Ellen had had nothing to do with either principle or convention: it had been simply that his private life was very well as it was, and so was his friendship with her.

Ellen would have liked to have felt that she and Andrew were really sweethearts; she had tried to deceive herself that they were, and that Andrew didn't kiss her only because he was shy and over-respectable, and that really he was very much in love with her. She had comforted herself with the thought that after all they weren't actually engaged, and decent men didn't kiss women they weren't engaged to, and that it was better for a man to be a bit slow in such matters than * the other way about'. From the beginning she had wanted very much to marry him, but had thought that she would not like to live there with his slatternly old mother, so that there had been nothing to do but to go on keeping company together indefinitely, until such time as something could be ' arranged '. Eventually Andrew must surely want to get married. In the meantime everyone considered them as good as engaged, and people, especially in the country, often ' walked out' together for years before getting married. In time she had come to accept their relationship without secretly grieving over the fact that he never made love to her; she had told herself that it was because he ' respected ' her too much. It had been necessary for her to believe this. The sight of other couples kissing or with their arms about each other always made her very angry. She would feel positively hysterical with indignation, and would demand of Andrew if he didn't think it * downright disgusting ' ? Andrew would always smile and say he reckoned folks had a right to please themselves, and they didn't do harm to anyone else. . . . She would have liked Andrew to have shared her indignation, but had decided that it was very broad-minded of him to take that attitude, and admired him for it. Whatever he did, or didn't do, she had to admire him. She would never admit deficiency in him in any respect. It had taken a good deal of arranging and re-arranging of her own thoughts, attitudes, desires, but somehow she had managed it.

He had been a romantic figure in her eyes ever since she had

glimpsed his tall weedy figure and brown head through the windows of the Big Girls' class-room during a needlework lesson—*a* lesson which not needing much attention on her part left her free to gaze out of the window to the village-street. She had always thought of him as ' that good-looking young farmer'. On Sundays, when he wore his best suit, with a pink or a sprig of syringa in his button-hole, and his watch-chain, with the Shawn medals won at fairs and sports' contests and cattle-shows and flower-shows dangling from it, draped across his waistcoat, she had thought him quite excitingly handsome. It had not mattered to her when she discovered that he had won none of the medals for himself, that they had all been earned by his father and his grandfather, that he himself had added nothing to the honour of the Shawn name or the Shawn farm; any more than it had mattered that people called him shiftless; she had seen a kind of swagger in his lazy indifference, a gypsy arrogance; and romanticising him in this way had fallen in love with the glamour with which she endowed him.

Dreaming of marriage with him she had told herself that his lack of ambition and his dislike of hard work would not matter, for she had energy and ambition enough for them both, and had promised herself that Shawn's should be a fine place under her management.

She had never known when, or how she would arrive at it, but she had been quite certain, after that first tea at Shawn's, that one day she would be its mistress. She had always known what she would do with it; how she would rearrange the furniture, getting rid of the old-fashioned, rickety, worm-eaten stuff which old Mrs, Shawn cherished, and replacing it with ' up-to-date', brand new things which she would polish to a mirror brightness. She had always prided herself on being domesticated and able to do anything in a house, and as mistress of Shawn's she would have * nice things', and * keep everything nice'. Andrew should see the difference. She would make the butter and eggs pay without stinting the table the way old Mrs. Shawn did. The muddle and inefficiency at Shawn's had grieved her as much as though the place were already hers. Andrew was too easy-going, and his mother too old and lazy and thriftless, that's what it was. … If

anyone had suggested to her that in actuality she was waiting for old Mrs. Shawn to die she would have been genuinely shocked and distressed.

When after Ellen's seven years of waiting and dreaming and planning and self-deceiving, old Mrs. Shawn had died, she had said, "How dreadful!"

Andrew, in his bewilderment, dazed with his loss, had thought her very kind. He had been no nearer any actual desire to marry, but it was innate in him to take the line of least resistance, and he had supposed, in his vague way, that to marry Ellen would be about the best thing he could do.

Somewhere, deep down in him, in a seemingly bottomless pool of tears, was a drowned thought that nobody would ever be able to take ' the old lady's' place, and that Shawn's wouldn't be the same without her.

He could not know that that was the apex of Ellen's dreams—that the place should not be the same.

Ill: MISTRESS OF SHAWN'S

MARRIED to Andrew—and to Shawn's—Ellen's dreams had broadened and deepened. They had reached out and embraced not merely the farm but Andrew himself. Gradually she would induce him to take more pride and interest in everything. Through her influence over him, and aided by her own energy and enterprise, Shawn's should become a shining example of efficiency, prosperity, and progress throughout the countryside, and its master all that she would have him be.

And the children—with marriage they too had come into her dreams. She would be able to educate them herself, and they would win scholarships and go to good schools and be a credit to her and Andrew, and everyone would be envious. People would see that Andrew had done a fine thing for himself in marrying a school-ma'am with a college education, and that she hadn't done so badly for herself by marrying ' beneath ' her. . . .

The Flaydering people had brought a less rosy because less romantic and dream-ridden attitude to the union. They had said that she would find that being the village school-ma'am was one thing, and being Mrs. Andrew Shawn quite another; she'd have to climb down a bit, they had said, a little grimly, and trotted out well-worn axioms about not being able to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and concerning the necessity for learning to cut your cloth according to your measure.

It had taken Ellen some time after her marriage to realise that this was the local attitude, but even if she had realised it at the beginning, it could have made no difference. Love in plenty she had brought to her marriage, and eagerness, and infinite hope, and all of her school-ma'am's self-assurance.

Flaydering had seen how it was with her, and smiled, the old, wise, sceptic smile of experience.

" She'll learn soon enough, poor thing," some of the older women had said. She did learn, but not quite soon enough.

There was something quenchless in her, so that even in the midst of frustration she never acknowledged defeat; she retained her quick, birdlike eagerness, and her hopefulness, long after there was anything to be either hopeful or eager about.

It took more courage than anyone ever gave her credit for. Flaydering never gave her credit for anything; it mistrusted her superior education; it never recovered from its jealousy over her ' smart' wedding; it was convinced that she considered herself ' superior ', and that she ' put on side ', and no amount of friendliness and neighbourliness on her part ever succeeded in eradicating the idea. As ' Miss ', the school-ma'am, she had been liked, with the rather cold liking which goes with respect; in that role she had been a superior person; it was a role which demanded superiority and respect As Mrs. Andrew Shawn she was the same superior person, with all the importance of a college education at the back of her, yet with no right to be regarded as superior. Flaydering could not accept her as one of themselves; she simply did not fit in. It was impossible not to feel that she knew so much more than any of them, yet equally impossible not to feel * she's no better than the rest of us '.

Andrew's relatives, anxious to assert their equality, were aggressively on the defensive in their manner towards her, and Ellen, over-sensitive and nervous in her anxiety to please, and to establish the fact that she did not ' give herself airs', was quickly wounded, with the result that in the first few years of her married life she was constantly finding herself not on speaking terms with her relations-in-law. Andrew invariably defended them against her, and Ellen would weep and end up by apologising all round—without ever understanding how she had come to give offence.

The relations-in-law called her ' a poor thing', and despised her; they were contemptuous of her emotionalism, and Andrew himself was embarrassed by it. As he saw it, husbands and wives were naturally ' fond ' of each other; talking about love made one feel' awkward ', like wealing best clothes on a week-day. Ellen's educated, romantic, emotional love was too much for him; he was incapable of understanding it, and it made him feel ridiculous. In his world people only ' upset' themselves over funerals or serious illnesses, and Ellen, it seemed to him, was always crying and being upset about all sorts of things. It was no wonder his relations called her a poor thing; there were occasions when he thought so himself. She was always being hurt about something, and he was

blest if he knew what she meant by it; being mortally offended he could understand, but it made you * wild ', not miserable. Ellen never got ' wild ', only unhappy. In his opinion it was a sloppiness which came of being town-bred and educated, and he had no patience with it.

Little by little Ellen learned; when she was hurt she tried to conceal the fact; she tried to be hard and indifferent, but she never succeeded for long; it was innate in her to want to please, to be liked, to make the generous impulse, to forgive.

Andrew, on his part, rather prided himself on never forgetting a wrong, and on being slow to forgive. " People can't do as they like with me," he was fond of saying. She would urge, " But it's better to be friends." His stubbornness bewildered her. For her it was a dreadful thing to be bad friends with anyone; she was quick to take offence as Andrew was slow, but she never bore a grudge. She thought it stupid to nurse grudges as Andrew did, keeping old wrongs stored up inside you long after the quarrelling itself was over. But she always resisted the thought that Andrew was stupid. " Men are different," she would tell herself. He was her husband, and she loved him, and for women like Ellen Shawn love has its own proud loyalty.

There were times when she hated him with a violence she had not known she had in her, but her hate was a fitful flame which always sank back again into the slow, steadfast fire of the love from which it sprang. On her wedding day she had promised before God to love him all her life, ' until death us do part -', and ' for better or worse', and that, for her, settled the matter. But she would have needed to have been super-human for the continual disappointment and frustration that was her life as Mrs. Andrew Shawn not to have affected her. It spoilt her temper and made havoc of her nerves. In the early years of her married life she had fits of hopeless, helpless crying; she could not have said why she cried; she only knew that she felt miserable; after she had cried she felt better; something pent up in her—she could not have said what—found release in these secret emotional storms. She would have liked to have been able to have cried on Andrew's shoulder, and had him stroke her hair, and tell her not to, and

comfort her; but she soon learned that saying soft things was no more in Andrew's line than ' sweethearting ' had been before their marriage.

In time her romantic emotional love ceased its futile beating against Andrew's less ardent nature, and with the slow realisation of the essential difference in their temperaments she began to nag, and to become almost fanatic in her over-fastidiousness in the house; after a bout of scolding, or an orgy of unnecessary scrubbing and scouring and polishing and * turning-out' of drawers and cupboards, there would be the same sense of relief that her fits of crying had once afforded her. She constantly complained that she [4] worked her fingers to the bone', but when Andrew suggested that she might get more help in the house, or employ a woman to take over the dairy work, she would be indignant; she would assert that * the place would soon be in a fine mess' if she allowed anyone else to do it, and she would trust no one with the butter-making; she found difficulty in securing domestic help because she could never find anyone as ' thorough' as herself; a greasy sink or an unpolished kitchen tap made her utterly miserable, and as for sending the sheets to a laundry in the town in order to lighten the burden of the weekly wash-day, as Andrew once suggested—tired of her continual complaints about * slaving ' from dawn till midnight—the idea was as preposterous to her as a journey to the moon, for what sort of colour would they come back, she would like to know ? Andrew came to the conclusion that she wouldn't be happy unless she had something to * grouse' about, and left it at that. But he would think sometimes with regret of the comfortable careless days when his mother was the mistress of Shawn, when it never mattered whether the supper things were washed up that night or next day or next week, and when he was never scolded for not wiping his feet before entering the house, and when his few possessions were not so tidied up that he could never find them. He could never see that the place looked any better for Ellen's bustling energy, or that anyone was any better off whether the beds were made *in* the morning, or not until bed-time; so far as he could see all this fussing made for discomfort rather than comfort. He reckoned a home was made to live in, not to be

looked at. Ellen could call his old mother a slattern if she liked, but the old lady enjoyed life and had time to ' call her soul her own'—which was more than could be said for the house-proud Ellen.

He took to spending his evenings at the ' Four-in-Hand '. A man got a bit of peace and comfort there, and could spit on the floor if he'd a mind to. Andrew did; it was in the nature of a protest.

IV: SONS AND DAUGHTERS

AT forty-eight Ellen Shawn was a thin, eager, anxious little woman, readily responsive to affection and friendliness, oversensitive to coldness and rebuff, in her eagerness to be liked and to please apt to imagine slights that were not intended, house-proud to the point of fanaticism, irritable, and a * scold ', yet fundamentally as romantic and warm-hearted as when she had been * little Miss Blunt'. And with all of her brimming love and her romantic dreams concentrated in her younger son, David.

Of her three children he was the one most like her, both in temperament and appearance, slight, dark, sensitive, emotional. He was the source of her persistent hopefulness, for he was the human being closest to her. She promised herself that through him should come compensation for all that had or might disappoint her.

She could not feel herself as close to Stephen, her first-born, a year older than David. He put up intangible yet impassable barriers against all her efforts to come close to him. She would say of him, bitterly, that he * took after his father '. Even as a child he had been like that; he had not wanted to be petted; even as a child he had been impatient of her too abundant and free-flowing love. As he grew up she could not say of him as she could of David, that he was ' a good boy '; he never kissed her, or did little things for her, as David did; often he was rude to her, and he would meet any mild suggestion from her such as that he might brush his hair before going into the village, or clean his shoes, or allow her to mend his clean shirt before putting it on, with an exasperated, " Oh, leave me alone, can't you ? " The tears in her eyes would infuriate him still more; he would hate her, then, for putting him in the wrong. And by her inability to leave him alone, by her everlasting demands upon his affection, she was always putting him in the wrong; there was nothing for it but to put up barriers against her marauding love, out of sheer self-defence. Even as a child he had always seemed to her, curiously, much older Ithan David, and so different from him as to make it seem strange, even to her, that they were brothers.

Yet in appearance they were not so unlike. Stephen, too, was

dark, but it was a sullen, sombre darkness, rough, like the darkness of a wood. Referring to the two brothers people would speak of Stephen as ' the dark one', though in physical fact he was no darker than David; but it was as though there was a darkness inside him. He had all of his father's indolence, only it was not Andrew's happy-go-lucky carelessness, but a kind of indifference, as though everything he did was unimportant, not merely to him but in itself.

" The living spit of his father," people called him, when they saw him leaning against a wall, his hands in his pockets, staring into space; but there was a hidden violence in him that was alien to Andrew's easy-going nature; he was as quick to anger as his father was slow, and he had none of his father's capacity for day-dreaming to bring peace to his indifference to external things; the son brooded where the father dreamed, and was as restless in his laziness as the father was content; so that the two were far apart, for all their seeming likeness.

Ellen had no more patience with her eldest son's restless boredom than with her husband's contented laziness.

" Take and find something to do," she would exclaim, when she saw Stephen mooning about.

Stephen's trouble was that there was nothing he cared about sufficiently to make it worth the effort—except being with David.

His dissatisfaction was not with people and things, but somewhere in himself. There had been moments in his childhood when he had flung himself face downwards on his bed in fits of blind, inchoate rage and irritability. As a child the days had nearly always seemed to him interminable, whereas for David they had nearly always been all too short. There was blackness in him, but at the bottom of the pit banked fires smouldered.

Only David could find his way through the rough darkness that was in Stephen. He guessed at the hidden potentialities of tremendous energy stored up in his brother. And a little Stephen hated the knowledge that David had of him, and a little David hated Stephen that he must share his pain and his forlornness, and they quarrelled frequently and passionately, but no one but Stephen could evoke such anger and violence in David, and no one but David could galvanise Stephen out of his sombre indifference into

those great shouts of laughter he knew with his brother, and in the brief passages of rage he knew with him there was no rankling after-resentment such as he knew in his bursts of irritation with other people.

He thought his father a fool and his mother nothing but a ' nagger '; it was difficult for him to love, and until he was seventeen there was no one but David. At school he was as unpopular as David was popular.

David loved easily, as his mother did. He had his mother's hunger for unity and peace, to love and to be loved. He saw his mother and father as far apart, and it grieved him—in some inexplicable way he pitied them both, his mother especially—but he knew no way of bringing them close, or of compensating them for the loneliness and disappointment he felt in both, but particularly in his mother. He saw very well how it was with both of them, how they were two different kinds of people, each with their qualities, yet at war with each other because of those very qualities, and he cleaved closest to his mother because it seemed to him she had greater need of him. He hardly knew why, except that she seemed so joyless, with her never-ending drudgery and her incessant scolding. It seemed to him that if he did not love her she would have no one—not even the child Linda.

There had been another child between David and Linda, a girl-child whom Ellen had named Beatrice—after the picture of the meeting between Beatrice and Dante which had hung in the school class-room, and which she had always thought very beautiful, particularly the figure of Beatrice walking with downcast eyes between her women-friends. Beatrice-Ellen she had named the child, and when she had died of bronchitis after only a few months of life, it had been as though something died in herself.

She had been proud to have sons, but she had always wanted a little girl. You could dress a little girl so prettily, she had always thought, and whereas when sons grew up they went their own ways out into the worM, a daughter stayed close. There was that old saying she had often heard her mother quoting, " A son's a son till he gets a wife; a daughter's a daughter all her life." She

liked to think that it was true; she felt that it was. She would have preferred her second child to have been a daughter, and when it was another son she had been afraid she might never have a girl. When the little Beatrice-Ellen had been born it had been for her the answering of a prayer. And when the child had died she had felt so cheated that it was as though the God in whose goodness of purpose she had always so firmly believed had mocked her. For a long time her faith had been shaken and her hopefulness submerged.

Andrew, trying to comfort her, had said, " Don't take on so. You'll be sure to have some more little gals—another one next year, likely. Everyone knows there's more gals than boys born—more's the pity."

She had known that he hadn't understood. It was like a man to think that you could replace children like broken crockery, telling yourself that one was as good as another because it might look the same. Beatrice-Ellen, her first daughter, had died, and another daughter wouldn't be, couldn't be, the same.

That Andrew could care so little, go about his work with the same carelessness and cheerfulness, sleep as soundly at nights, enjoy his meals, laugh and joke, just as though nothing had happened, had bewildered her.

She had lain awake at nights by his side listening to his heavy breathing, and brooding. " Men don't feel the same about children. What interest has Andrew ever taken in his children ? If he had his way they'd run about like little tramps, and me scraping and saving, working meself to death, morning, noon and night, day in, day out, to keep them nice. No pride in himself, and no pride in his children. He thinks more of a new-born calf than of his own flesh and blood. The fuss he made over Blossom's foal. The way he kept on about it, as if it were a baby. When the sow overlaid one of her litter it fair broke his heart. All but cried, he did. You can get five pounds for a pig. No, but it wasn't only that. He felt for it. Beatrice-Ellen dies, and he says you'll have another. Same as if it might be a cup or a plate that had got broken. I hate him. Hate him. Silly to upset meself, I suppose. It won't bring her back. He meant it kindly. He doesn't under-

stand, that's all. I don't really hate him. I wouldn't get over it if anything happened to him. I never loved anybody else. I thought the world of him before we were married. And after, too. But he's cold. A poor sort of man, really. Not much good to the farm, or to a woman either, if it comes to that. It's wicked to think that about him. He's a good husband. A kind man. No one can say he isn't a kind man. Only lazy; bone lazy. And not much love in him. But men are different. They haven't the feeling a woman has. Selfish—without meaning to be. But you can't expect a man to feel about children as a woman does. They don't have to have them, I suppose that's what it is. He's fond of the boys, and Stephen's the image of his father. Sons are more often like their mothers. David's like me. Stephen's got a look of me about him, too, when he's not scowling. A little girl would be more like Andrew, likely. I wouldn't mind. She'd be my little girl. Only it's no use now. I've had a little girl, and she died, and nothing can give her back. I had such a bad time with her, too, and then to lose her. Fancy having to go through all that again, and then it mightn't be a girl. It was funny how in the last few months I got the feeling that it was a little girl. Such a pretty little thing, too, with all that dark hair, and such a good, contented little thing. A man can't understand. I don't want any more children. I haven't got the heart. Let him sleep. What do I care ? What's the use … of anything . . .? "

But the first wild grief had passed, and with it her resentment against Andrew. He had pitied her, and, more than she had realised, known how it was with her. In his blundering, inadequate way he had tried to compensate for her loss. Whether or not it was love as other people understood it, he never knew; he never thought about it; but he was fond of her—when she wasn't nagging at him—and there was the habit of intimacy, and the intimacy of habit, holding them together.

It was a year before she conceived another child; there had seemed scarce enough life left in her body for it to quicken with new life again. David had been nearly four years old when the child she had named Linda—after her mother—was born. She had not been able to find it in her heart to call her Beatrice. She

was not Beatrice, and calling her by that name could not make her so.

" There now, what did I tell ye ? " Andrew had said," Didn't I say there was more little gals comin' to ye ? Here's the little Beatrice back again! "

She had remained silent, hating the male stupidity in him which made one baby for him just the same as another. Not merely was this child not the same as the dead Beatrice, but different from either of her other children—and from herself and Andrew.

The child Linda was a golden child. It was as though a duck had hatched a swan—a wild swan.

" Well I never! " Flaydering had said, and " Fancy! "

There were some who had said that it was lucky for Ellen Shawn that she was so respectable, and so devoted to Andrew, or it might have looked queer. Some had even gone as far as to hint that still waters ran deep, and you never knew. . . .

But Ellen Shawn was poor material for scandal; she kept herself to herself too rigidly for that; in the armour of reserve and aloofness in which she encased herself there was not the smallest chink through which the darting tongue of gossip could penetrate, so that people felt themselves cheated and had to content themselves with deciding that the child was a freak.

" My mother had fair hair," Ellen had offered in explanation.

But the child was as strange to her, for all that, as if Andrew had not been the father.

PART II: SHAWN SOWING

" Still we cannot understand—"

I: CHANGELING

LINDA SHAWN had been born in the early hours of Midsummer's Day, and Ellen, brooding on the strangeness of her golden child, had recalled the legends she had told her schoolchildren of the Lordly Ones who walked the earth on Midsummer's Eve and stole away the earth-children and left their faery changelings in their place. She had been careful to explain to her pupils that all such ideas were mere legend and superstition, yet on that night of her travail superstition had stirred in her, and she had wanted the dawn to come before the child should be born, and had afterwards despised herself for her weakness, for being ' as superstitious as a countrywoman '—or as Andrew. She did not want to be like Andrew; she was an educated person, and educated people are not superstitious—at least they do not believe in fairies.

She had known that Andrew would say that Midsummer's Day was a good time to be born. She had snapped at him, ** What nonsense! One day's the same as another! "

He had persisted, stubbornly, " There's them as don't think so. There's stars that it's lucky to be born under, and there's unlucky stars. A March flower's not the same as a June flower, my old mother used to say."

"Your old mother!"

" She had a power o' wisdom in her, had the old lady, even if it didn't come out o' books! "

The clamorous silence of their mutual hostility had dropped down between them, surging between them like a black, angry sea, washing them both with waves of hate and resentment. Andrew's peasant superstition was as hateful to Ellen as her educated scepticism was to him, but her resentment was the more bitter, for his superstition was a reminder of her failure to educate him, to make a ' gentleman farmer ' of him, instead of continuing to be —as she saw him—little better than a farm-labourer. She was ready to concede that everyone was superstitious in some way or another, but this particular superstition was more than uneducated and childish—it was unChristian. Andrew's irreligion was another of her disappointments.

Yet, with the child's strangeness before her, the superstition had revived irresistibly, and the fact that she had immediately dismissed it as uneducated, unChristian, and nonsense, did not alter the fact that the idea nevertheless had entered her mind, and she had been fearful that others might connect the child's strangeness with the fact that her mother had laboured with her on a night which was quick if not with the supernatural at least with dreams of faery. . . .

She had dreaded that whatever peculiarities the child might develop as she grew older, people would find significance in the fact that she was a Midsummer child. And Andrew would be the first to do so, and would say to her, triumphantly, " There now, what did I tell you! " Flaydering might forget, but Andrew never would.

" A lovely child, and no mistake! " was what Flaydering had said of Ellen Shawn's youngest child when she was a few years old. " So uncommon, dark eyes and fair hair! Pretty as a picture! " And they had gone on saying it, but in defence of their own less remarkable young they always decided amongst themselves that looks weren't everything, after all, and that they liked a child to *be* a child, and Linda Shawn was such a quiet, old-fashioned little thing—unnatural. They had not known what to make of her, and her mother knew least of all.

For Ellen Shawn it was not merely that this child was fair whereas her other children were dark—the sense of strangeness went deeper than the child's changeling beauty; there•was something about her, Ellen thought, which couldn't be put into words, so that you couldn't lay your finger on it, as it were; you couldn't say what it was; a little it was like the first feeling of Spring in the air, or the first sharp yet indefinable tang of Autumn on a morning in late August, something you felt unmistakably yet without being able to say exactly why. There was a solitariness about the child even when she was with other children, as though being with them she was nevertheless not of them, and coming upon her suddenly was somehow like surprising a wild thing in a thicket, an intrusion.

Other children were * quiet little things ', but not as this child was> there was a suggestion of watching and listening, a fine, subtle,

wild-creature awareness in her quietness which made the mother feel uncomfortable.

" Nothing escapes that child," she would complain to Andrew. She was constantly feeling that the child saw more of what was going on than those concerned, as though she looked in from somewhere outside. She had felt it from the time the child was three years old, and the feeling had been intensified as she grew older.

Were there tears in her eyes because Andrew had spoken roughly to her, was she miserable over some petty squabble with the relations-in-law, or some unkindness from a neighbour, she would glance up to see the child looking at her with great grave eyes that seemed to her to see everything, tears, frowns, anger, resentment, wretchedness. She would speak sharply to the child, ask her who she was staring at, tell her to mind her own business, send her out of the room, but there would always come to her the thought that the child knew why she spoke roughly to her and sent her away; somehow the child was like her own conscience which had escaped and got outside of her, and stood apart from her, insisting relentlessly on guilt, shame, humiliation; and she could no more escape this feeling of the child's awareness than she could evade her own conscience, so that always she must be a little afraid of the child, and being afraid of her be harsh with her, as she never was with her other children, not even the sullen Stephen.

" That child gets on my nerves! " she would exclaim, " Sometimes I think she's not all there! "

But in her heart she knew that the child was very much all there—too much all there. She would think, " Beatrice-Ellen wouldn't have been like that! " Whenever Linda got on her nerves her thoughts flew back to the child who had never grown up to torment her. Beatrice-Ellen was canonised.

Andrew felt himself more drawn to his youngest child than to either of his sons, and from the beginning took more interest in her. Partly it was the father's natural inclination towards the female child, and partly it was a way of getting even with Ellen—a need which he felt increasingly with the years. In this girl-child whom Ellen, the possessive, had thought to own body and

soul, but who contrived to defeat that devouring emotional love and striving will, he found something with which he could sympathise i they were two of a kind. He could not feel this about Stephen, in spite of the boy's impatient resistance to his mother's possessiveness, because Stephen, it seemed to him, would have none of him either, whereas little Linda offered no opposition, and made it easy for him to persuade himself that she loved him more than she loved her mother.

Linda's childish love was precious to him; it made him feel, as he himself would express it, on good terms with himself; it restored the self-esteem which Ellen's superiority, contempt, and nagging, took away from him. He liked to think that as a result of being born on Midsummer's Day there was ' a bit of fairy in the child ' which Ellen, with her passion for organising and shaping to conform with a set idea, would never be able to lay hold of. ... And in this he felt himself ranged on the child's side, and anger would flame up in him when Ellen boxed the child's ears, or scolded her.

" Leave the kid alone, can't you? " he would rage, and would infuriate Ellen by openly taking the child's part.

" You come along wi' me," he would say, and carry her off with a sense of having triumphed over Ellen.

He could not have said exactly why he wanted to score over his wife, but it afforded him immense satisfaction. Somewhere, unacknowledged, at the back of his mind he knew that Ellen despised him, thought him a poor sort of man, as a husband, as a father, as a farmer, and since Stephen hadn't much to say to him, and David was so emphatically ' his mother's son', his youngest child was a chance to assert himself which was too good to resist.

Linda, at least, should never think him a poor sort of a man. Linda should fill the gap left by ' the old lady', who had always thought him ' a fine, bold, upstanding man ', for all he wasn't the man his father had been. . . .

To Linda he would never admit that he didn't know; for all her questions he had answers, and a store of useless, and frequently spurious, information for her delight. He taught her, early, how

to tell the difference between a mushroom and a toadstool; how to gauge the extent of a tree's roots by the spread of its branches; how to recognise a bird by its notes; how to make whips out of bull-rushes; how to make a necklace of beech-nuts; he told her why the robin had longer legs than other birds of its size, and why some of the field-daisies were tipped with pink; he unearthed from the lumber-room of memory stories of leprechauns and pixies, and the ' Shan Van Voght'. With pride he taught her the few words of Gaelic which the English-born Shawns had treasured through the generations as a golden heritage.

Whatever she wanted done he would contrive to do, and, in the idiom of his ancestors, felt within himself that had she asked the strings of his heart for shoe-laces he would have found a way of giving them to her, " as sure as God made little apples," which was his favourite oath. Whatever Ellen disapproved of her doing, such as swinging on the stock-yard gate when she had on a clean dress, or feeding the chickens when they had already been fed, he would encourage her to do. Whenever he knew that Ellen was looking for her he would take her off somewhere, and when the child protested, as she always did when she realised what was happening, beseeching him, " No, no, I must go back—Mummy's calling me," or, " No, I mustn't—Mummy wouldn't like it," he would feel himself cheated; it would be for him, somehow, a betrayal. He would round on her then, swearing at her, and as likely as not send her flying at the end of his boot—but he never hurt her.

By the time she was twelve years old Linda had no illusions about her father, and he knew it. What she learned at school undid her trust in his reliability as a source of information; she saw the poverty of his knowledge; she knew that he lied and exaggerated in order to impress, because he did not really know, and because there was so little in himself that was impressive; with her childhood's direct vision she knew that he took her part in order to annoy her mother; more than that, she knew why he had this need to annoy her mother; she saw the thistle-harvest of his fields, and how the wild garlick choked his crops; she saw the broken fences, and the fields that lay fallow because he could not

be bothered to plant the roots that would save money for cattle* fodder in the winter; she knew that but for her mother Shawn's would be a shabbier and poorer and more inefficient place than it already was. He was easier-going, pleasanter to be with than her mother, who made' life uncomfortable with her excess of anxious bustling energy, her house-proud fussiness, and her fixed idea that there was only one way of doing everything, and that was her own way; he found time to play with her, which her mother never did, and he never demanded tiresome things of her, such as being clean and tidy, and speaking nicely; when he went in to the town with the milk, or to the weekly market, he always brought her back bundles of butterscotch or bars of chocolate; he did not mind her helping herself to the raspberries in the kitchen garden, or eating between meals, and he knew the fun of pretending such things as that the ' fairy-rings' in the meadow grass really were made by fairies who came out and danced at nights whilst the rest of the world slept, and that a certain tumble-down empty cottage on the heath with its garden gate so over-run with weeds that it would no longer open was really a witch's house; when he took the milk to the station, he would let her drive with him in the trap and take the reins, and when he stopped at a public-house he would always bring her out a packet of biscuits to munch whilst she waited for him; she was never in his way as she was in her mother's; he liked to have her around, and she liked being with him; only she could not go all the way to the friendliness he extended to her; it involved too much of a disloyalty to her mother, a taking sides against her mother; he defended her against her mother when she did not want to be defended, tried to invoke in her a defiance for which she had no need. She did not mind her mother's impatience, her scolding, her bursts of irritability; she could and did take refuge in silence, and it left her untouched, whereas her father's possessiveness caused her to shrink back into herself; she did not want to be allied with him against her mother, but to move freely between them both. She loved him, but she loved her mother, too.

That was why it was easier to be with David than with anyone else. She had an idea that David did not particularly love their

father, and that he did very much love their mother, but at least he did not attempt to divide the family into enemy camps; he never suggested that she should do something their mother would not like; he never tried to make a pact of secrecy with her against her mother as her father so often did; she thought, without knowing why, that somewhere in himself David was sorry for their mother, and a little, also without knowing why, she felt this same vague pity in herself for her mother, so that even when she scolded without reason, and was in other ways unjust, it should not be held against her. David, she thought, understood this; he never * answered back ' as Stephen did.

In the first twelve years of her life Linda was not much concerned with Stephen; nor he with her; he did not nag at her as her mother did, but he was impatient with her, and called her a nuisance if she asked him to sharpen a pencil, or untie a difficult knot, or reach for something on a shelf too high for her; he would tell her to shut up and get out of the way, and not bother him, whereas David never minded how much she bothered him.

He understood, too, how she felt about a number of things. He grieved as she did when the reaper-and-binder ruined the homes of the field-mice, and mowed down the young who could not scamper away in time; he, too, hated the sly-eyed ferrets which Stephen kept in hutches under the elder-trees at the back of the house and took out with him in a sack into the fields to thrust into rabbit-holes; he, too, felt sorry for the hunted fox; she had seen him go white with anger when the Hunt hurtled across the Shawn fields, and knew that it was not of possible damage to crops that he was thinking—there was always compensation for that—but because there was for him as for her a shudder in the baying of the hounds, and a sick pity for the hunted thing.

The first time she had heard the baying of the hounds she had been walking with David; he had stopped dead, his hand tightening on hers. " What is it ? " she had asked, frightened. He had told her, and of how once * over at Stonecroft' a fox had run into a house, right into the kitchen, and a woman had shut it in a cupboard and tried to hide it, and there had been a lot of fuss, and it had got into the papers. " You'd shelter a fox if it ran into our

house, wouldn't you ?" she had asked. He had been only nine years old, but he had answered, " If there was a gun handy I'd shoot it so that it shouldn't be hunted again." She had trembled with a kind of passionate excitement he communicated to her, and pressing close to him had felt the same shiver in him, and she had thought that there were tears in him, but not the kind that made you cry, but which made your heart beat very fast, and made you feel that you would die sooner than give in.

Once when he was fifteen David had tried to shoot a fox. It had run into the barn at Shawn's, and he had closed the great doors and rushed back to the house for a gun. Stephen had caught him on his way back to the barn with it, and had known what he was up to; he had snatched the gun away from him and knocked him down? David had sprung up and there had been a fight. Stephen had "half-killed' David. "That'll learn you," he had said. Linda had hated him. Any love she had ever had for her eldest brother died on the day when she saw David stumbling in from the rick-yard with the blood pouring from his mouth and nose and Stephen swinging wide the barn doors for the dogs to pour in.

" I hate Stephen," she had told herself then, and she had told David, but he had shaken his head. " No, no. Stephen's all right. Only he doesn't understand. He can't imagine what it feels like to be hunted. Some people can't. They can't feel for things. They can't help it; it's how you're made." Always this neutrality in David, this refusal to divide the family into camps.

There was no hatred in David, only pain.

Linda loved David. Not in the unconscious way in which she loved her mother in spite of her scoldings, and her father in spite of seeing through him, but consciously, so that when he slipped an arm through hers it was as though something inside herself parted, was folded back, like the petals of a wild rose opening out to the sun, softly, warmly, till all its golden heart is laid bare.

She had loved him in this way since she was five years old, and they had heard the baying of the hounds together, and she had felt his fear and pain and anger in her own body. It was her first conscious love.

At twelve years old she loved him as she believed she would never love anyone else.

She loved him so much even at five years old that if she could not be with him she preferred to be alone.

For no one else would do.

II: SECRET PATHS

IN the solitariness of the child Linda was no loneliness. She had grown up in almost the solitude of an only child, and begun wandering about alone at three years old. Her brothers had played together, absorbed in their own interests—boys of school-age had not much time for a baby of three, and by the time she was of school-age they were big boys who would soon be leaving school.

It had never mattered; sometimes David detached himself from Stephen, whose shadow he was, and she stayed in his shadow as he in Stephen's; but never for long, for he was Stephen's. It could not matter because for her, the child, her childhood a barrier between two worlds, there was the long shadow of Shawn's itself for a kingdom.

Through that kingdom she moved alone without knowing loneliness, towards ever-fading margins, ever-widening arcs of experience. The shadow of Shawn's was boundless with the long dreams of childhood. For her it was in the beginning, was, is, and ever should be, world without end.

In the beginning was warmth and darkness and the mother's breast, and, gradually, a white light that was a canopy of cradle-muslin, and beyond that, when the antennae of consciousness reached to it, alternately the black beams of the kitchen ceiling, and the green and gold flicker of orchard leaves, with blue beyond. Then, with expanding awareness, developing sense-perceptions of sight, sound, touch, smell, a series of separate and distinct pictures and experiences . . . the inglenook, and standing looking up the wide chimney to the sky, the unchanging delight and incredibility of it, and the fascination of the thick, soot-furred chain swinging from a hook jutting from the chimney wall, and the great black kettle suspended from it, above burning logs that were branches of trees laid whole across the brick well of the fireplace; the green, earthy smell of the burning wood, the spit and hiss of the smouldering branches too green to flame, and the swirl of thin blue smoke out into the room when the wind took a plunge down the chimney . . . the smart of it in your eyes, and the tdste of it in your mouth … all her life Linda Shawn remembered, and always the smell of a wood-fire brought back the big kitchen with its ceiling-beams

blackened as much with smoke as with age, the wooden bench which ran the length of one wall, the fuchsias, geraniums, and cactus on the inside window-ledge, the uneven red brick floor, the trough between the wall and the fire-side seats in the inglenook, where old newspapers were stored, tucked down out of sight, and in which the cats had their kittens, the little shelf to the right of the chimney where a mug of tea could be stood and kept hot for as long as need be; the wooden arm-chair with the circular back with spokes like a wheel, drawn up close to the fire, and into which her father always sank when he came in. . . .

For Linda he was as much a part of the furniture of the chimney-corner as the hissing logs and the great black kettle on its sooty chain. He would sit there in the uncomfortable arm-chair with his legs stuck straight out before him, balancing on his heels, his boots caked with dung and straw from the yards, and so yellow that it was impossible to realise that they had once been black. Once when Linda had asked how they came to be that colour, he had told her that it was the result of walking through buttercups. Her mother had overheard, and had retorted, in her acid way, " Walking through cow-dung, you mean! " Linda had seen him frown, and felt the unspoken hostility that flowed between the two of them. She had preferred her father's version.

At all hours of the day, whenever he came in, her father would want tea. " Any tea left, missis? " he would demand, when her mother came into the room. And somehow there always was tea, the big brown tea-pot always stewing on the bricks beside the burning logs.

When he went out into the fields in the mornings he always took a bottle of cold tea with him. He would thrust it into an outside pocket of his dirty old coat, so that one side of his coat always sagged heavily, and her mother would invariably remark that he looked like a tramp, which remark he equally as invariably ignored. If any tea remained in the bottle next time he came into the house—and it was her mother's perpetual complaint that he * trapesed in and out all day '—he would pour it into the blue enamel mug always to be found either on the little chimney shelf or on the mantelpiece and warm it up by perching the mug on

a log; he would complain that it tasted of smoke when he drank it, and call for more sugar to make it palatable, but he always drank it with enjoyment. He would sit with his legs stuck out before him sucking it rather than drinking it, and drawing the ends of his moustache into his mouth with it, a process which Linda found fascinating to watch.

When it was finished he would exclaim, " Ah! " loudly, a kind of satisfied grunt, and if it was the end of the day's work would bend down, stiffly, and begin tugging at his boots. The removal of his boots always seemed to Linda a very difficult and painful business for her father, involving a good deal of grunting and puffing. She would be ordered to * catch hold ', and she would crouch back on her haunches tugging at the filthy boots until she toppled over backwards as they came away in her hands.

" Ah! that's the ticket," her father would say, and sitting in his stockinged feet lean far back in his chair again with another grunt of satisfaction, his eyes staring vacantly out of the latticed windows to the wide meadow where the hop-kiln and the cart-shed stood. He would sit silent, contentedly gazing into space, until her mother hustled into the room, when he would glance up to demand, " Supper ready, missis ? "

Linda never remembered hearing her father address her mother as other than * Missis ', and when her mother spoke to her father she never gave him any name at all. It was almost, she would think, as though they hadn't any names. She wondered if all parents were nameless to each other in that way; but girls at school assured her that they had heard their parents address each other by name, and had even seen them kiss each other. Linda could not imagine her parents kissing each other.

She had a memory of her mother standing at a table in the back kitchen—where the cooking, washing, and butter-making were done, and out of which the dairy opened—slicing apples into a pie-dish with tears running down her face. It was the first time she had seen a grown-up person cry, and she had stood watching, awed. Now and then her mother sniffed, and after a few moments she took a handkerchief out of her apron pocket and blew her nose, It was then that she had seen Linda.

" Go and find your father and tell him the pig-wash is ready—when he likes to come and fetch it," she had commanded.

Linda had gone off to find her father. She had found him immediately outside, sitting on the bench on which the milk-churns were turned up to dry. He was frowning. She had given him the message, and added, " Mummy's crying."

" More fool her! " he had said, and as Linda was moving away called after her, " Here, come here, I got somethin' to show you."

He had taken a dead mole out of his coat pocket and held it out to her. " Ain't he a pretty little chap ? " he had said, and she had seen that he smiled, the frown gone.

She had taken the dead mole and made a little grave for it under the brushwood hedge that bounded the stock-yard. Then she had climbed a stack, and, lying on the shelf formed where a great bale had been sliced out, wondered why her mother had cried, and why her father had not cared5 why her mother's voice had sounded so hard when she spoke about the pig-wash, and why her father had frowned.

But the questions were only a few of so many to which there was for her, then, no answer. Only such memories remained; they lay, living seeds, in her child's mind, and slowly, unseen, they germinated, part of her unfolding consciousness.

She was part of the life of Shawn's, yet excluded from it—as a dog is a member of a household, yet apart from it. It was as though she looked in through a window rather than entered and shared the house of life that was her parents' and her brothers'.

But she watched and heard, and was intuitively aware, and, being a child, there was no self-dishonesty to blur her vision. She would be sometimes frightened, and sometimes saddened—by such things as the sudden anger in Stephen's eyes, and the darkness that would come into David's. There were times when she thought that Stephen only shouted and stormed because he was too proud to cry, and that David often cried ' inside himself' even when he smiled; and she would want to make better the fierce pain in Stephen, and the dull pain in David, but she was never allowed to come close enough. If Stephen caught her looking at him when he was angry he would speak roughly to her and tell

her to * clear out *} David never did that, but he would ask her about something in which he thought she would be interested, and smile, pretending that nothing was wrong, that no one was angry, that no one was sad.

Always there was this assumption that she would not understand; always between herself and those about her the impalpable walls of her childhood.

Her mother would plead with her father, with her brothers, " Not in front of the child! "

And when people came to tea they would often talk in a secret way, saying, "You know what—" and would glance at her, furtively, to see how much she had grasped of what they were saying, and there would be her mother's nervous "Sh!" and everyone looking a little anxious, and then someone would think of an excuse to send her out of the room. When she was very small they would resort to spelling words out instead of saying them.

It never occurred to anyone that the child might not be interested, and that so much caution was unnecessary. Until she was twelve years old Linda Shawn, like most solitary children, lived for the most part in a world of fantasy which had nothing to do with grown-ups and their activities. She had her own activities and secrets.

2

There was the secret of the Hidden Path which-skirted the Little Pond at the side of the house, but separated from it by a narrow path with a white gate opening on to the road. There was a pond on the other side of the path, too, the duck-pond in front of the house, but it had not the glamour of the Little Pond, for the duck-pond was there for all the world to see, with only a tangle of hawthorn and sloe between it and the high road, and being bounded on one side by the stock-yard, with its cow-sheds and barn, was muddy with the trampling feet of horses and cattle who came there to drink; it had the house and a small flagged front garden behind it; there was nothing romantic or hidden about it; it was useful, and that was all that could be said for it.

The Little Pond, on the other hand, served no practical purpose. It had an unintended look about it. Occasionally her father came by night and shot the pike in it with a shot-gun, whilst her brothers stood on the bank with hurricane lamps. But the fish was coarse, and its capture regarded as a sport rather than a serious business like rabbit-shooting. A willow-tree had fallen across the pond before Linda was born, and as there was no point in removing it, it had remained there, an excitingly dangerous bridge which stopped short of the opposite bank, tantalisingly. The meadow known as High Mead, together with the beginning of the orchard, flanked the far side of the pond. High Mead grew cowslips in the Spring and mushrooms in the Autumn, and thistles more than anything else at other times of the year. The Shawn sheep grazed there, and the mare, Blossom—there was always a mare called Blossom—and her foals. High Mead was never used for cows, and had a peculiar quality of its own which made it different from the other Shawn fields; the buttercups grew ranker there; it was isolated from the other fields, and had more * fairy-rings '.

For Linda a good deal of its strangeness had to do with the fact that it bounded the Little Pond, and that the Hidden Path petered out into a wilderness of ragged robin and bull-rushes under its hedge. There was * officially' no path round the Little Pond. The rough, boulder-like cobbles which ran along the back of the house sloped down to it near the orchard-gate, and, unless you knew the secret, there was no means of walking round the pond; you could see it through the hedge of High Mead, or through the hedge as you walked down the path to the white gate and the road; you could scramble down to it from the orchard, but only David and Linda and Stephen knew that there was a way round it, for it was they who had made the way. You went a little way down the path of the white gate, and then squeezed through the hedge and found yourself on a narrow bank upon which there was barely room to stand. By fighting your way along this bank you could get three-quarters of the way round the pond, as far as High Mead, when you had to turn Iback, for the bank crumbled away. This Hidden Path was exciting and fascinating by reason of its perilousness—it was so narrow that without clutching at the trees and

shrubs as you struggled along there was considerable danger of slipping into the pond. David and Stephen had been excited about it when they had first discovered it, but soon tired of it; Linda, alone, went on loving it. She loved its secrecy. Pressing through the hedge and coming on to the narrow bank was for her like letting yourself into another world. It was exciting to crouch there on the bank amongst the ragged robin and long grass and hear people going down the path to the white gate, feel them passing so close to you that by thrusting your hand through the hedge you could reach out and touch them and yet not be seen by them. And when you had sat there for a little time, very still, you would see a moor-hen darting about busily under the banks, and a water-rat swimming. And you could see nothing of the world that bounded that small kingdom; it was completely enclosed, and because you were alone in,it, unseen, it was your own; leaving it, squeezing back through the hedge on to the path again, was like leaving your own private room and closing the door behind you. The primroses and bluebells which grew there in the Spring were bigger than grew anywhere else, and there was nobody to trample them down or pick them; and, as you neared High Mead, blackberry brambles reached down from the high hedge, and in the Autumn you could feast there like a king in his kingdom, for there were no blackberries as big and clean and sweet as festooned the narrow bank of the Little Pond.

And it was all secret. That was the precious part of it. It was another world. A world in which no one scolded, or -raised their voices in anger, or had tears in their eyes, or made you feel little and unimportant and out of things. It was a refuge. And a victory.

3

Exciting in its own way, too, was the tangle of elder-trees at the back of the house, where the chickens wandered about, and where the ferrets lived in their hutches raised above the ground. The ground was bare under the elders, save for dumps of burdock and nettle. There was something rank about the place. In the

middle of this wildness was a syringa tree which, in June, when it was a mass of white waxen flowers with the heavy scent of orange-blossom, was like an unexpected shrine in a wilderness. From this tree the Shawns of three generations had plucked their Sunday button-holes, and it had provided many a Flaydering girl with a bridal wreath.

This place, also, Linda had to herself for a kingdom. It, too, was close to the real world, yet not of it. On one side of it was the rick-yard, and on the other a ditch which divided it from the kitchen-garden; two planks made a rickety bridge across the ditch, and then there was an even more rickety gate to contend with, so that getting in to the garden was an adventure in itself. No one ever cut the grass or hacked away the burdocks and nettles which rioted round the gate, so that it would never open more than a little way, and as it opened outwards towards the ditch, instead of into the garden, by the time you had negotiated it you were either thoroughly exasperated, or pleasantly thrilled—according to whether you were adult-size or child-size.

Linda could never feel that the garden was personal to her, like the elder-tree wilderness and the Little Pond, but it had its own flavour of adventure. The tall bean-sticks, crossed at the top, formed wigwams; huge rhubarb leaves could be plucked and worn as aprons or used as umbrellas; raspberries obligingly tumbled from their canes waiting to be picked up and eaten before the ants should get them. There was something very satisfactory about a kitchen-garden, Linda would think; it was at once so orderly and so wild; she liked the neat rows of radishes, onions, lettuces; the even potato furrows with their mauve and white flowers that nobody but she seemed to think lovely; she thought the scarlet flowers of the beans and the pale flowers of the green peas as beautiful as the tiny blue ' birds-eye ' flowers, and the scarlet pimpernel which straggled over the bare patches of earth; she liked the smell of the mint bed, and the green froth of the parsley border, the silver furriness of the sage, and the dark fragrance of the thyme; and the * lords and ladies' which stood like cowled monks under the hedge which divided the garden from the orchard, and the hazel-nuts which appeared in the hedge when the wild roses were over and the

honeysuckle past its best. She liked the untidy paths of long grass, and the rubbish-heap made beautiful with marrow-flowers.

The kitchen-garden, too, had its secrets. There was the place in the hedge where you could squeeze through into the orchard, and which no one but herself would know for a gap, so artfully was it concealed by brambles and trails of honeysuckle. There was the short cut to the heath which could be effected by climbing the barren apple-tree in the corner at the bottom, behind the marrow-bed, and dropping down from the branch which reached out over the hedge. You ran the risk of landing on a gorse-bush, it is true, but therein lay the adventure of it; the gorse-bush could be avoided if you knew how, and Linda, after one inaccurately gauged drop, had learned how.

In the Spring, when the apple-blossom was a rosy mist, and the cow-parsley, that some call ' lady's laces,' and others ' bad man's oatmeal', rode in a light foam above the long grass, like white-horses on a green sea, Linda would think the orchard the most beautiful place in the world.

And in the Summer, when the heath beyond was a sea of purple heather, she would forget the orchard and wander beyond the shadow of Shawn's to the edges of that enchanted sea. Never, at that time, farther than the margin of the wider world.

But with her body's adolescent quickening there was a quickening of interest in outside things} the long shadow of Shawn's dwindled, and less and less did she see through a glass darkly.

Beyond that unreal purple sea which laved the boundaries of Shawn's, lay the living sea. Sometimes she knew the taste and smell of it on the wind. And more often as she grew older.

Ill: SHAWN DAYS

FOR Linda, moving through her shadow-kingdom of fantasy and inchoate awareness, questioning bewilderment, and unquestioning delight, every day had its own special quality.

She liked Mondays because Monday was washing-day, and there was always cold meat and pickles for the mid-day meal, and potatoes cooked in their ' jackets' to save time. On Mondays she would hurry home from school to a smell of soap-suds, pickled onions, and boiling clothes. On Mondays her mother always wore a sack-cloth apron and an expression of grim suffering. At school, in scripture lessons, when the expression * sack-cloth and ashes ' occurred, Linda always thought of her mother's wash-day apron and the growing heap of ashes under the copper-fire. In the school reading-books any mention of the wringing of hands immediately produced in her mind a picture of her mother's hands wringing the clothes. Nor were the analogies far out in actuality, for there was an unconscious symbolism in Ellen Shawn's Monday raking of ashes and wrapping of herself in sack-cloth, and she always sighed as she wrung her hands together to rid them of the surplus suds. On Mondays, hot and irritable and flurried, life was all sack-cloth and ashes, particularly in her middle-age, when what she always referred to as ' those hot-flushes ' and fits of giddiness overtook her as she bent over the wash-tub with the steam going up round her in thin clouds.

On Mondays the cats always got kicked, Andrew more than usually nagged, and the children persistently scolded. Linda didn't mind; magnificently compensating for all this there was the cold meat and the pickled onions and walnuts, and the cold fruit pie left over from Sunday's hot dinner. And the excitement of the miniature furnace roaring away under the great copper in the back kitchen. And the hot supper in the evening to make up for the cold dinner—for Ellen Shawn prided herself on keeping a good table—tripe boiled in milk, or a stewed rabbit.

" Think yourselves lucky to get a hot meal," she would always grumble, " worn out as I am with rubbing and scrubbing." No one took any notice; there always was that hot meal, and the complaining was merely a part of washing-day, like the smell

of the suds and the long lines of clothes between the apple-trees.

Linda enjoyed being sent out to feel if the clothes were dry and to bring in those that were. There was something very satisfying about a line of washing, she thought, and she liked the clean smell of the clothes, and boasted at school about the good colour of her mother's sheets. She was convinced that nowhere else in the world were things done as well—sheets washed as white, jam made to * set' to the right consistency, pastry made as lightly, fruit bottled as efficiently—as at Shawn's. For her there was only one way of doing anything in a house, and that was as her mother did it.

Tuesday was a good day because, being ironing-day, tea was early, and a high-tea at that, so that her mother would not have to stop to prepare any supper but could go on ironing until the light was gone. Tuesdays, for Linda, meant kippers for tea, and helping her mother to pull the sheets and table-cloths into shape ready for the mangling. There was also the fun of helping with the mangling; she liked feeding the articles into the rollers and watching them come out smoothly on the other side; and she was allowed to iron simple things such as handkerchiefs and tray-cloths and d'oyleys with not much lace to them. She would have liked to have been allowed to iron more elaborate things, but her mother always insisted that she wouldn't do them ' properly.' ' And I would,' Linda would think regretfully and a little resentfully, * she'd see if she'd only let me do it just once.' " You're not old enough," her mother would say, and in her heart Linda knew that she never would be old enough, because for Ellen Shawn there was only one person in the world who knew how to do things as she wanted them, and that was Ellen Shawn herself.

Wednesday's joy was the butter-making. The dairy fascinated Linda, except when a rabbit or a hare hung there from a hook in the ceiling dripping blood on to the red brick floor, and then she kept away. She could not bear the creature's glazed staring eyes, and the red patch in its body where the shot had entered. Whenever her father or Stephen brought in a hare or a rabbit they had shot, they always invited her to feel it whilst it was still warm.

" Ain't that a beauty ? " they would say, or, " Look at this—a

young 'un," and there would be a conflict of feeling in her, a shrinking horror, and a fascination, and pity. She would stroke the warm furry body, and it would be hard to think of it as dead, and " Poor thing," she would say, and her father and brother would laugh, and say, " You won't be saying that in a day or two when he's served up with dumplings and gravy," and she would be a little ashamed, because she knew that was true, and every time she went into the dairy and saw the creature hanging there she would feel guilty and not want to look, and yet have to, and so try to avoid going into the dairy when anything was hanging there.

But there was seldom anything hanging there on Wednesdays, for Sunday was the day when her father and Stephen liked to go shooting, and what they shot was generally cooked and eaten by Wednesday, so that the great shallow pans on the shelves had the place to themselves. She liked skimming the cream from the milk put to ' settle ' in the pans, and being allowed to take her turn at the churn—only it was difficult to resist the temptation to keep stopping and lifting the wooden lid to see how the metamorphosis of cream into butter was getting on. The dairy had a touch of enchantment upon it, for the window looked out on to the elder-tree wilderness, and there was a small grating which framed the willow-green that flanked the Little Pond.

Thursday's excitement was the butter-milk cake which was a by-product of the butter-making. Friday was market-day—and a packet of sweets or a tiny muslin bag of coloured glass beads brought back by her father from the town.

Saturday was rich in blessings; there being no school on Saturdays afforded the chance of a ride in the milk-cart after the second milking, and Linda would hang about round the cow-shed fearful of moving away lest her father should go off without her, or her mother decide to send her on an errand to the village or set her cleaning the spoons and forks for Sunday. She never felt safe until the pony was harnessed and the trap had rocked its way over the stock-yard and out on to the road, herself seated up beside her father. All the time' the milking was going on, and all the time her father was fumbling with the harness, there would be something in her beating, " Hurry, hurry," for any minute her mother

might come round the corner calling, " Linda, Linda, where are you ? I want you." Or Stephen might insist that he wanted to go into the town and that there wasn't room for her, even though she offered to crouch in behind the churns.

On Saturday nights the hip-bath which hung on the hook outside the back kitchen door was brought into the back kitchen, the copper-fire was lit, and she and her mother and brothers bathed in turn in a hip-bath before the copper-fire screened by an old Japanese screen kept for that purpose, but which had been part of the furnishing of the parlour in the days of * the old lady'.

The Saturday night bathing was as much of a domestic * set-out ' as washing-day, for it meant continual going to and fro between the kitchen and the pump outside, under the big cedar tree that stood sentinel over the elders, to keep the copper replenished with water. The rain-water in the tub which stood under the dairy-window and caught the rain from the eaves was precious and saved for washing-day. Ellen always complained about all the work entailed by the Saturday night ' bathing set-out', but she was scornful of Andrew's suggestion that the weekly ritual should take place on Monday night when the copper-fire was already lighted} Saturday night was bath night, and that was all there was to it. Andrew left it at that; Ellen was Ellen, and that was all there was to *that.* He himself did not share in the ritual 5 he persisted in * the old lady's ' habit of * making do ' with a weekly jug of hot water and a zinc foot-bath in the inglenook, and having washed his feet on Saturday night, and his neck on Sunday morning, when he also shaved, he considered himself adequately ' cleaned up ' for the week. Linda could no more imagine her father taking a bath than her mother not taking one. They were ' different', her mother and father; it was one of the first things she knew about them.

When the children were small they were all bathed on Saturday night in the inglenook, Linda first because she was the baby and the same water would do for the boys. For Linda the bath before the copper-fire in the back kitchen was more exciting; she liked to see the little door opened and the fire roaring like a furnace in the

narrow tunnel under the copper. Her mother dreamed all her married life of the bath-room she would one day contrive for Shawn's when it could be afforded; there was a white-washed room used for the storing of grain, potatoes, apples, and old wooden boxes, which would just do . . . there should be a real enamel bath, not just a hip-bath, but a proper bath such as she had known at home before she was married—an educated person's bath—and a pipe connected with the well so that the water could be pumped straight into the bath. She knew just how it could be done; they had had it done over at Cross-Deep, and it hadn't cost so much, only a few pounds . . . but at Shawn's there was never even a few shillings to spare … If Andrew was a handy man like some, of course, he would fix it all up himself . . . But Andrew, broached on the subject, thought the idea ridiculous. Shawn's had always got along without a bath-house or a bath-room; what was wrong with the hip-bath, or even the little zinc foot-bath his old mother had made shift with ? Or * a good sloosh ' at the pump, if it came to that ?

Ellen had sense enough to realise the futility of arguing the point; but she went on dreaming about the nice white enamel bath in the proper bath-room which she would have one of these days. But she was alone in the dream; her sons only bathed in the house when it was too cold to go into the sea, and tended to support their father's opinion that for men, anyhow, a ' sloosh ' at the pump was good enough. Linda was not interested in the idea of a bath-room; the hip-bath in front of the fire was exciting, and she preferred the little white-washed store-room as it was, with its bins of corn and its smell of apples. All that part of the house used only for storage she found fascinating and adventurous. You came to it by way of a cold, dark, narrow passage with a brick floor and white-washed walls. A huge cider cask on trestles stood half way down the passage, and on either side of it were white-washed rooms used for the storing of apples, potatoes, grain, bran, and anything else for which room could not be found elsewhere. For Linda they also harboured fairy-spun cobwebs, dusty sunlight, and leprechaun-ridden moonlight, and were a part of her secret world.

The attics, similarly uninhabited and used for storage, frightened her. She always hurried past the steep, narrow, carpet-less stairs which led up to them, but even hurrying past she never avoided catching a glimpse of the blue-washed emptiness above. Once when she had^been tiny Stephen had told her that a ghost lived up there, 'old Grannie Shawn'; you could hear her creaking about up there at nights, he said, sorting apples by moonlight; especially when the moon was full you could hear her. … At twelve years old Linda tried not to believe in ghosts; they were make-believe, she would tell herself, like witches and the * little people * that her father spoke of, but her fear of the attics remained and she never went up there alone. Even her mother, who of course did not believe in the ghost of ' old Grannie Shawn' admitted that the attics were ' creepy'. A door at the top of the attic-stairs, shutting off the ghost's quarters, was another of the Shawn improvements she had in mind for when it could be afforded —not because of the creepiness of the attics, of course, but because the wind racketed about so up there under the eaves, it got on your nerves, and a draught blew down into the house . . . Unused rooms in a house offended her, anyhow, and if they couldn't be put to any good purpose, as in the case of the attics, she preferred that they should be shut up and forgotten about. Andrew reckoned the attics were all right as they were. Handy to have a lumber-room or two, he said. Ellen didn't hold with lumber. She believed in orderliness and regular habits, a place for everything and everything in its place, never putting off till tomorrow what could be done today, turning out one room every day of the week— except, of course on Sunday. But Sunday wasn't a day of the week; it was a day apart; it was—Sunday, dedicated to God, best-clothes, and parlour tea. A day of mild relaxation—but strictly according to schedule.

For Linda it was the best day of the week. It was then she moved most richly fulfilled in the long shadow of Shawn's.

IV: SHAWN SABBATHS

ON Sundays no work was done after the second milking; when the children were small they wore their best clothes and Shawn relations usually came to tea; as the children grew up the relations gradually ceased to come—the novelty of privately scoffing at Andrew's school-ma'am wife, and criticising the way she brought up her children and managed her home, wore off. The Sunday clothes were still produced in later years, but not until tea-time, when the boys would appear in blue serge suits, with button-holes and watch-chains and very smooth hair, and Andrew in the suit in which he was married, very shiny after its many years of weekly service, and reeking of the camphor in which it was stored for the rest of the week, but * as good as new ' for all that, Ellen said.

In the eyes of his daughter, as once in the eyes of his wife, Andrew Shawn on Sundays, flaunting the Shawn medals, and with a pink or a sprig of syringa in his button-hole, was a very fine figure. On week-days, with his dung-yellowed boots and his sagging coat with the bottle of cold-tea obtruding from a pocket —and people who didn't know might so easily mistake it for a bottle of beer, she would think regretfully—he looked, as her mother so often lamented, no more than a farm-labourer, but on Sundays, she thought, he was every bit as smart as the Colonel, who lived at the Big House and went riding on the heath on a blood horse, and had a private pew in the church for his family. Her brothers she preferred in their working clothes; they looked stiff and uncomfortable in their starched collars, and somehow ' bare' with their hair plastered down—especially David, whose hair, she thought, was not meant to be made to lie down.

Stephen was always bad-tempered on Sundays, and David yawned a lot and showed a tendency to sit about and fondle the two greyhounds which were generally regarded as Stephen's, and to keep inquiring if the grandfather clock in the hall were right. Until after tea, when he and Stephen would go off together, with the dogs.

On Sundays the parlour was used; Linda liked the parlour; it had a smell different from any other room in the house—a musty,

shut-up smell, that had somewhere in it the smell of dried rose-leaves and lavender, and upholstery that every summer was sprinkled with crushed camphor as a protection against moths. As the parlour windows were never opened except once a week the room was steeped in this blend of odours; it was as though something lived invisibly in the room, breathed there, and crept out and wrapped its presence round those who entered. It was a room in which to sit quietly and make polite conversation; a room in which to drink tea out of the best tea-cups, thin fluted cups with pink rose-buds, a wedding-present from Ellen's side of the family, and in which to bring out the blue and gold Doulton tea-pot, with the brown spout, and the silver sugar-basin that one of the Shawn's had won in a hurdling race at some country ' Sports Fete.' A room from which her father and brothers were glad to escape, but in which Linda and her mother sat very contentedly if a little stiffly, her mother doing her housekeeping accounts, and Linda looking at Sunday school prize books, relics of her mother's girlhood. The old smell of the books was part of the special atmosphere of the parlour.

There were things in the parlour which Linda thought lovely —a stuffed owl in a glass-case, a photograph album whose heavy cover was a musical box that played one tinkling little tune when you turned the key, and which contained yellow photographs of the Shawns at various stages of their career. There was a strip of green plush nailed to the mantelpiece, with a ' ball-trimming', and in the summer a vase of dried grasses stood before a white paper fan in the grate. There was an upright piano upon which Ellen Shawn occasionally played suitable Sabbath music, and hymns, and above the piano a large photograph of a wedding group from which Linda could see how her mother had looked as a young woman, and how her father looked before he allowed his moustache to grow ragged and his shoulders to sag. Next to it was a head-and-shoulder photograph of Ellen and Andrew also taken on their wedding day, Ellen with her head, with its bridal veil and orange blossom, inclining towards her husband's cheek, and Andrew looking very serious and manly.

Linda thought her mother looked very beautiful in this picture

—in a sad sort of way. She often looked at her mother to try and see how much of what the photograph showed was left in that anxious face, but she could never find anything, and she could not remember her mother ever looking as she looked on the day that picture was taken.

And it was true that by the time Linda was born there was little of Ellen Blunt left in the face of Ellen Shawn. The face of the bride was alight with eagerness; the face Linda saw when she looked at her mother was the face of a woman worn out by continual disappointment, over-work, and over-anxiety.

Wrapped in tissue paper in the bureau in the parlour was the wreath of wax orange blossom Ellen Shawn had worn on her wedding day, together with a sugar dove from the cake, and a silver cardboard horse-shoe. Linda liked to be allowed to handle these things; she thought them beautiful, only somehow she could never associate them with her mother. With the lovely lady of the photograph, but not with her mother as she knew her. Sometimes her mother would refuse to allow her to look at them. " Oh, you've seen them often enough," she would snap. " You'll only mess them up handling them." Sometimes, on the other hand, she would be invited to look at them. "Like to have a peep at mother's orange blossom ? " her mother would ask, and then her face would be soft, and her voice have a little happy note in it. It depended on what Ellen was feeling about her husband as to whether Linda was allowed to look at the wedding souvenirs or not. Usually on Sundays the fact that he looked ' presentable ', in his best suit, softened Ellen a little towards him. It was so he had looked the day she had married him. . . .

2

The parlour opened out of a little hall in which a stuffed fox glared from a glass case on a table covered with a red plush cloth; in its mouth it still held the chicken it had been killing when Andrew Shawn had shot it; its feet trampled dead bracken and artificial grass. The stair-case curved round above the table, and in the corner under the stairs was a small door which led to the

store-rooms. In the wall opposite the stair-case and the stuffed fox a window-door gave into the small flagged garden overlooking the duck-pond. Across the hall from the parlour another door led to the front kitchen. On fine Sundays the door into the garden was opened, but only on Sundays, and then only when the weather was fine; on other days it was kept dosed, like the door of the parlour; and it never occurred to anyone to use the front door of the house—the postmen, tradespeople, visitors, beggars, they all went round to the back of the house. The only person who ever went into the garden was Ellen, and then only on Sundays, so that weeds were plentiful between the flagstones and in the borders; but the lavender, which needed no attention, flourished there, and the wallflowers and forgetmenots came up year after year, and there were always tulips thrusting up in the Spring, and tobacco-plants scenting the summer-air, and evening primroses that grew as freely as weeds, and honeysuckle round the porch, and jasmine starring the wall under the parlour window, and tea-roses reaching up to the bedrooms. Ellen was always promising herself that she would * make time to have a go at the garden', but somehow there was never any time except for a little while between tea and church on Sundays. Linda liked this little garden—it was all the flower-garden there was to the farm—but she was never allowed there except on Sundays. Ellen could not have said why she kept the garden as sacred as the parlour; in an undefined sort of way it was part of the parlour, and peculiarly hers, private, something apart, like Sunday itself. She liked to think that one day she would have a sundial or a bird-bath on the flagstones just outside the porch; it would be nice, she thought, a pretty front-garden brightened a place up so. Nice to sit in, too, * of an evening '—not that she ever had time to sit … only when she thought of her garden she never thought that, only how nice it would be when it was all as she wanted it. On the rare occasions when visitors came to tea she always told them about the sundial —' or perhaps a bird-bath '—she was going to have there * one day'. In the winter, when it was too cold or wet to go out into die garden she would sit at the parlour window and think how pleasant it would be, and how when the warm weather came she

would find time to sit in the garden. It would be nice to watch the shadow slowly moving round the sundial—or the birds splashing in the bird-bath.

And scarcely a Sunday went by, summer or winter, but she thought that she really must do something about' the little room ' … it was wasted as it was. ' The little room ' opened out of the front kitchen and looked out on to the elder-trees, and it was never called anything but ' the little room '. It contained a table with a dark plush cloth on it, a leather sofa, an equally shabby leather armchair, and piles of old magazines and newspapers, and anything else which no one quite knew what to do with. On the table stood Ellen's sewing-machine, a small portable writing-desk at which Andrew laboriously wrote out cheques for those bills other than the housekeeping ones for which Ellen was responsible, and a phonograph with a yellow horn. But the phonograph, like the sewing-machine, was taboo on Sundays since Ellen had been mistress of Shawn's. Before then it ground out—with gay disregard for Sabbath propriety—" Dahn, dahn, dahn by the old Bull and Bush-bush-bush," " Under the old apple-tree," " Tell me pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you ? " and, " I wouldn't leave my little wooden hut for you-oo, I got one lover and I don't want two-oo," all of which were preceded by an announcement that they were by ' the Edison Bell Record.' Ellen didn't like the selection of records; she thought them vulgar, and the fact that she frequently heard Andrew muttering " Edison Bell Record " under his breath when she had finished, or was in the middle of, giving him a piece of her mind, confirmed her in her dislike of the phonograph.

Sometimes on a winter evening after supper the boys would bring the phonograph out into the kitchen and run through the repertoire of records. Linda thought all the songs lovely, particularly the one about the little wooden hut; it was a pity, she thought, that her mother didn't like the phonograph, so that they could play it more often. It looked forlorn standing there unused in the little room, its horn removed and turned upside down on a pile of old magazines. It might have helped Sunday along for her brothers, too, when they were mooning about not knowing what

to do with themselves. And her father—Sunday dragged for him, too, she thought.

Every Sunday after the midday meal Andrew Shawn retired to the little room with a Sunday paper to have what he called a quiet read and to pay off a few bills. Linda knew that he did neither. She knew that he would lie on his back on the sofa pretending to read the paper for a few minutes, and then, placing the paper over his face, have his Sunday afternoon nap. At four o'clock he would wake, change his clothes, and be ready for the parlour tea. After tea he would mooch about the house, go and look at the pigs, lean on the rick-yard gate, and wait for the sound of the church bell clanging dolefully across the fields—not, Linda knew, because he had any intention of accompanying her and her mother to the evening service, but because the church bell began at six o'clock, which was the time the * Four-in-Hand' opened. She thought that her father hated Sunday as much as Stephen did.

In which she was right. Andrew Shawn was always glad when Sunday was oven he hated the Sabbath deadness that seemed to invade even the fields; only at the * Four-in-Hand' was there any kind of life, any escape from the Sunday oppressiveness. He hated the formal rustle of Ellen's best dress, the sight of his sons not knowing what to do with themselves, the sight of his neighbours strolling along listlessly in their dark Sunday clothes. Sunday was somehow Ellen's day—it held all of her school-teacher's educated correctness and refinement. He always left the parlour after Sunday tea with a sense of escape. But until the church bell clanged, " God—God—God—" there was nowhere to escape to.

The pigs, it seemed to him, were the only things which escaped the Sunday aridity; they wallowed and grunted in their filth just as usual; that was why whilst waiting for the bell to clang release he liked to lean on the wall of the sties and smoke a pipe and stare at them. The smell of them, too, he found refreshing after the Sunday smell of the parlour. He always felt better after his Sunday's silent communion with the pigs. Sundays took Linda away from him, too. Sunday was altogether Ellen's day.

David hated Sunday because Stephen did. He would have liked going to church with his mother and Linda; he liked the smell

of the church, and the boom and vibration of the organ, and the feeling of peace church gave, and which he did not know how to get in any other way; he was not religious—he was neither troubled nor comforted by any thought of God; it was just that he liked church. He did not go because Stephen did not go, and somehow he must always stay by Stephen and do what Stephen wanted. The trouble was that on Sunday evenings there was nothing to do, except stroll across the fields and down to the village and lounge at a corner with a group of similarly bored youths, smoking cheap cigarettes and watching the slow, straggling procession of church-goers, or the equally slow-moving and straggling family parties out for their Sunday evening stroll} or, when the evening remained light long enough, cross the heath to the fishing village of Wildwick and the sea, but there was no more to do there than in their own village, for in their best clothes they could not assist with the launching of the boats, and there was little to choose between lounging against a capstan with fishermen waiting for a tide, and lounging against a stile with farm-lads waiting for Sunday to be over.

But Linda loved Sunday from the time she got up in the morning to the time she took off her best dress at night. Even her mother's irritable fluster over the cooking of the Sunday joint and the baking of the Sunday fruit pie, and her father's and brothers' boredom could not spoil the day for her, nor—since she was a child—could their enjoyment of Sunday make it a happier day for her. Sunday was the one completely satisfying day of the week.

She was quite content to abandon climbing hay-stacks, swinging on gates, thrusting her way through a wall of shrubs to the Secret Path, and similar delights, in the interests of protecting her Sunday dress. It was no penalty to be told to ' sit quietly ' in the parlour and look at boob. She enjoyed it in the same way that she enjoyed sitting quietly by her mother's side in church in the evening. It was all part of the Sunday ritual. The rose-leaf smell of the parlour, and the musty cedar-wood smell of the church, she liked equally, and parlour and church were equally beautiful to her. Both satisfied a gravity and quietness that was natural to

her. She liked the singing in church, and the white flowers on the altar, and the golden cross with the rubies in it.

At Easter, Harvest-Festival, and Christmas, she could not understand how anyone who was able to go could bear to stay away from church. Harvest-Festival was exciting, with the fat marrows and the long loaves made specially for the occasion, with * plaits ' down the middle of them, the sheaves of wheat and the baskets of shining red and yellow apples, the red and bronze and white chrysanthemums everywhere, and the Harvest-home hymns all about the fair waving golden corn in Egypt's pleasant land, and the harvest all being gathered in; she would think then that this was the loveliest time of all to go to church—until Christmas came with holly-wreaths and carols, and then she would think that there was no time like Christmas . . . until Easter came with narcissus and daffodils, and happy hymns about the risen Lord, and pussy-willow silver round the font, and girls near to her own age going to their confirmation in their new white dresses. . . . Presently she too would be going to confirmation classes, she too would be confirmed in a white dress and veil like a bride, and go to her first communion at Easter, kneeling on the altar steps, close up to the shining lilies and the white stars of narcissus that smelt like spice. She thought that but for Stephen, David would have been confirmed. Stephen was horrid about church; he said religion was ' soppy ' and that people who went to church were a lot of hypocrites; he said that God was ' all bunk ' and ' Johnny Christ' a ' poor mutt'. David would frown when Stephen said things like this, and say that there was ' no need to scoff' even if he didn't believe; then Stephen would say ' shut-up' and his eyes would look very black indeed, and Linda would feel frightened and her heart beat so fast that it made her feel slightly sick, for she would know that unless David laughed and said something careless Stephen would sulk and sooner or later his rage flare out, and there would be a quarrel, and perhaps a fight. . . . But she also thought that David did not really care about Stephen making fun of God and religion, only that he knew it grieved their mother; she had an idea that when they were alone together, in their room at night, or in the fields, David let Stephen say all the queer things

he liked, without stopping him. She often heard them talking together late into the night—the low persistent mumble of Stephen's voice, and an occasional laugh from David; it seemed to be only when other people were about that they quarrelled.

She said to Stephen once, " Why don't you let David come to church with Mummy and me ? Mummy would like it. You could go shooting rabbits with Daddy."

Stephen stared at her a moment, then said, " And why don't you mind your own business ? Brat! " He gave her a shove with his elbow as he pushed past her. She saw him take a gun from a corner beside the door as he went out—and knew what he would do. He would go shooting rabbits, but not with their father; he would make David come with him—David who hated seeing things killed, and he would do it because of some dark angry thing in himself which wanted to hurt—even to hurt David; perhaps him most of all … though she could not have said why she thought this.

That evening when she came in from church with their mother Stephen came out of a dark corner of the back kitchen, and coming up to her thrust something into her face; something soft and warm and wet; a shot rabbit.

" There's your dear little bunny you said I should go and shoot! Does that please you ? You said I should shoot rabbits, didn't you ? It's a baby one, and I shot it specially for you—there you are, take it," and he pressed its softness into her neck.

She flung it away from her in horror, crying, and saw that its blood had stained her Sunday dress.

" Look what you've done! " she sobbed. " Look what you've done! "

Stephen laughed. " Praps now you'll mind your own business." He went out, leaving the rabbit lying there at her feet.

David coming in a few minutes later found her at the kitchen sink frantically trying to sponge the blood-stains out of her frock.

She looked up at him with the tears streaming down her face. " Stephen did it," she sobbed," Stephen did it! He put it on me! I hate him! I hate him! " She could not stand still, she wept so.

He knelt and put his arm round her and held her close to him.

" Don't cry," he said, " don't cry. It's washing-day tomorrow—Mummy will wash the dress. The stains will come out. She won't scold, I'll tell her not to." But he knew that it wasn't the stained dress which was breaking the child's heart.

He took her upstairs to Ellen. " Stephen put the rabbit he shot on the kitchen table, and Lindy brushed against it and messed up her dress," he said. " She thinks you'll be cross, but it's all right, isn't it?"

Ellen made clicking noises with her tongue. " Clean on today, too! Why can't you be careful, child ? All right, stop crying. It's washing-day tomorrow."

David hugged the child. " There you are, what did I tell you ? "

He went in search of Stephen. He found him lying face downwards on his bed in their room. The room was dark with evening.

David went over to the window and stood with his back to Stephen, looking out. He said at last, " Why couldn't you leave the kid alone, Stephen ? You know she hates shot rabbits."

Stephen said, " Oh, shut up ! Got a fag on you f "

David took a crumpled packet of Woodbines out of his pocket and tossed it over to the bed. Stephen sat up and groped in the candlestick on the chair beside the bed for matches. There was the flicker of the match in the room for a moment, then the smell of the cigarette. For a few moments he sat hunched up on the bed smoking. David continued to stare out of the window.

Presently Stephen said, " I didn't mean to upset the kid, but Sunday gets on my nerves. All this church business,, and Ma trying to rope us all in. You especially. She don't care much about me. The kid suggested I should go off shooting rabbits with Dad, so's you could go to church with her and Ma. It riled me, I tell you. Tryin' to rope you in for their dam' Bible-punchin'. Makin' such a smarmy little goody-goody of the kid, too."

" She likes it, and it's a good thing she does, or Mother would have no one to go with."

" That means you'd like to go with 'em, I suppose ? "

" You know it don't. Let's chuck it. ' I'm goin' to lock up."

" I'll come with you. I've got to get some bread-and-milk for those stinkin' ferrets."

They went out together. In the back kitchen, making bread-and-milk for the ferrets, Stephen said suddenly, " Look here, I've been thinkin'—if you want to go off to church with Linda and Ma next Sunday—I don't mind, I wish you joy of it, but if you want to—"

" I thought we said we were goin' over to Wildwick to play billiards with Don Thorpe ? "

"I had thought of it."

" So had I."

" Well——? "

David smiled at his brother. " Well——"

Stephen picked up the bowl of bread-and-milk and a hurricane lamp. " Well, don't say I didn't offer, anyhow."

"I won't. Halfa minute with that light——"

Nothing more was said about Sunday. Stephen knew that he had won. At that time it would have taken more than the tears of a child, the love of a mother, or the mystery of God to come between them. David knew this, and in her own way the child Linda knew it, too, dimly. David might be kind to her, he might love their mother, but he belonged to Stephen. He and Stephen belonged. And when she thought this, as she thought it that Sunday night, she felt more than ever that she hated Stephen, and more than ever she loved David. She thought, " David would even follow the Hunt if Stephen wanted him to." And she was right. David would kill for Stephen.

What she did not know—then—was that every Sunday when the bell clanged, "God—God—God—" across the fields, and she and her mother walked with Sabbath solemnity up the hill to the church, David did kill—something in himself.

V: MOTHER AND SON

WHEN David had left school at fourteen, having failed to gain a scholarship for a secondary school, and joined Stephen and his father on the farm, Ellen Shawn had buried yet another dream, and told herself that there was still Linda.

She had not been so disappointed over Stephen's failure to pass the examination; she had never really expected him to pass; he didn't care enough, either for her or what became of himself; always when asked what he wanted to do when he left school he had replied that he supposed he would remain on the farm. It was not that farming particularly interested him, but that there was nothing else which attracted him. But though he did not know what he wanted to do, he knew what he did *not* want to do, and when his mother had suggested that he might like to study and become a teacher he had been quite definitely opposed to it—an opposition which his father had encouraged. Teaching was all right for women and gals, he had declared, but it was a soft occupation for a man. Besides, book-learning never made anyone any happier; it only complicated life, that he could see. Let the lad stick to the land, the same as his father and his grandfather and his great grandfather.

Useless for Ellen to protest that there was no longer any money in farming. Useless to urge, " None of you Shawns have owned an acre of the land you've worked—what chance has the boy got ? If he takes to farming he'll be nothing but a labourer all his life! He might as well be a farm-labourer and have done with it! At least he'd be sure of a living! "

" He can keep Shawn's on when I'm gone," Andrew had said, placidly.

She had stormed, " What good is that to him ? What chance will he ever have of owning the place ? What's to be got out of it except a bare living ? And lucky he'll be if he gets that—when you've done neglecting the place! "

" So long as the boy can make a living what does it matter ?"

She had long ago realised the hopelessness of trying to sow the seeds of any ambition in Andrew, and Stephen took after him,

she had told herself, bitterly. He would be content merely to make a living. Well, Andrew should have Stephen, they were two of a kind; David took after his mother, and he would want to get on in the world, not drift like his father and his brother.

" You mean to get on, don't you, David ? " she had coaxed.

David had never known the answer to that question. He had known that she wanted him to win a scholarship and go to a secondary school, and matriculate and pass on to college; he had known what it all meant—he would learn French and Latin, and wear town-clothes, and draw a salary instead of a weekly wage; he would have letters after his name, and she would be tremendously proud of him. Part of him had wanted to make all this happen, because it would have made her so happy; but a bigger part of him had wanted to do what Stephen did. A life in which Stephen had no part was as unimaginable as death . . . and Stephen had wanted to stop on the land.

Nevertheless, for his mother's sake, because he had realised how dear the dream was to her, he had worked hard at school and done his best in the examination. He knew that his father had disappointed her with his lack of ambition, his failure to make the farm the bigger and more prosperous place she would have liked to have seen it; he knew, too, about the little sister who had died; and then that disappointment over Stephen … it had seemed to him that it was up to him to make up for the ways in which life had cheated her.

It would be terrible going away from Stephen, he had thought, so terrible that he had not been able to picture it in his mind; but it had seemed to him that since heart-ache was unavoidable for one of them, himself or his mother, it had better be himself, since his mother had known such heart-ache already; it had seemed to him only fair that he should at least try not to disappoint her.

Only it had been no use; he had tried, desperately, his utmost, but it hadn't been enough; even at the time he had known that it wouldn't be. Those long evenings when he sat working at ,his home-work at the kitchen table, working until late in the night by the light of the oil-lamp, his mother hovering about him, helping him, encouraging him, drawing upon the memory of her

school-teacher days, delving into her so long unused store of knowledge for his aid, had been dreadful to him. Her own over-anxiety that he should pass got into him and unnerved him. And people saying to him at school, "Oh, you're all right—you're sure to pass, your mother being a school-teacher; look how she can help you "... the more they said it the more he was convinced that he would not pass, just because he was expected to; out of sheer nervousness he would not be able to remember a thing when it came to the examination day. Stephen hadn't passed, in spite of his mother being a school-teacher. But for some reason or other he had known that his mother expected more of him. She had not tried to help Stephen as she had tried to help him—it was true that in any case Stephen would have refused help from her. Stephen had never really tried to pass.

Ellen had found the studying for the examination dreadful, too. It had tormented her that her memory failed her so often; she had always prided herself on having such a quick clear brain. " I've got muddled with all the housekeeping," she had thought, " and aever having anything else to think about except scraping and saving and making ends met. Funny to think that I once knew all about the Repeal of the Corn Laws, and had the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington at my finger-tips! " It had grieved her; but at least she would save David from getting into a similar rut. The handling of school-books again had excited her, so that she had burned with a feverish excitement; for a little while she had been very nearly Ellen Blunt again. AH his life David remembered how she had been during those weeks when she had struggled so hard to coach him. His mind held an indelible picture of her sitting there at the kitchen-table opposite him, or at his side, turning the pages of a book, or tapping impatiently with a pencil as he tried to repeat to her the right answers to the test questions, or sitting with her lined forehead wrinkled still more deeply into a frown as she wrestled with an algebraic equation or a problem in compound interest which, though she was reluctant to admit it, was too much for her as it was for him; that thin, pale, anxious face, those feverishly bright eyes, the restless movements of her work-roughened hands pressing to her forehead as

though they would squeeze thought out of some hidden recesses of her brain, or wearily brushing back the straggle of hair that was always escaping, however much she tried to keep it strained back tightly with the rest. There had been, he thought, something valiant about her, and pitiful. She had struggled so, as he had, and to no purpose. He had failed dismally in the examination, and when she had heard she had sat down with the letter in her hand and cried. "There," she had said, "There now, who'd have thought it! " Just that, and cried quietly, hopelessly. Less intelligent boys than himself had passed; but she had no grievance, either against the educational board or against David himself. It hadn't been anyone's fault, any more than Beatrice-Ellen's death had been. It was out of the hopelessness in herself that she had cried.

David had said, stricken, " I did try, Mother; honest I did."

She had answered, " It's all right, son. It can't be helped. It's just-disappointing, that's all."

He had wanted to justify himself to her, but even at fourteen he had felt that she wouldn't understand. His father, he had thought, came nearer to understanding, for his father didn't set such store by book-learning and none at all by getting on in life. It was not that he was stupid—that had been the point he had longed to make to her, yet had known the futility of trying to explain—he had been considered a ' bright' boy at school; it had been just that he simply did not know the answers to examination-paper questions—and he could not either then or later in life see what sense there was in the questions the papers asked. He was never able to accept it as a proven fact that because you could not ' give the salient points of the Reformation', or write an essay comparing the policies of Disraeli and Gladstone, that you were necessarily unworthy of a scholarship for a better school; he did not, in himself, believe that because algebra always muddled you that you were as stupid as the remarks on your examination papers made you out to be. He did not believe that Stephen was stupid because he failed the Scholarship examination and was frankly not interested in the eighteenth century poets. He had not felt, when he himself had failed, that he ought to be ashamed. He had

been grieved because he had disappointed his mother, but his self-respect had remained untouched.

And mingled with his sadness that even he who so loved her must disappoint his mother, there had been an undeniable relief that after all he would not have to learn French and Latin and wear black clothes and go and live in a town. His failure had meant that he would stay on the farm and go on knowing the good smell of cows and horses and hay and new-turned earth; that he and Stephen would be able to go tramping the two miles of heath which separated Flaydering from Wildwick and the sea, to watch the launching of the fishing boats, and gossip with the men along the sea-wall 5 that they would continue to swim in river and sea together, and share the same room with the sloping ceiling and the smell of apples seeping up through the bare boards of the floor from the store-room below, still lie awake talking in the dark more freely than they ever talked in the light of day, talking and feeling themselves close. … It had meant, too, that now that he had left school there would be even more things they would share together, exciting things like ploughing, sowing, hay-making, reaping, and helping the cows through their calving. And for the life of him, in spite of the disloyalty it represented where his mother was concerned, he had not been able to help feeling that it was a better life than sitting in rooms poring over books and eventually teaching children things they did not want to know, and which were of no use to them even when they succeeded in learning them.

Only he could not then, or at any time, say this to his mother, because she had been a school-teacher, and thought it a splendid thing to go to college and get a degree and know the things that were written in books. She came from the town, too, where people thought more about making money and getting on, and did not care at all about the excitement of the sea or the smell of the earth. Still less as he got older could he see what good it was making money 5 it did not mean that you had to work any the less hard—in fact, so far as he could see, you had to work harder, and whilst you were working so hard to make money you were missing all kinds of fun and happiness, and he thought it was not worth it,

and that a lot of people must think it not worth it, only probably once you had started that kind of life you had to go on, because you got used to that way of living, and he expected that it wasn't easy to go back and be as you were before. It was surely better to enjoy life, and he had not been able to feel that he would enjoy life teaching, or doing any kind of work that took him into a town and away from Stephen. Even with Stephen he thought he would miss a great deal by going into the town; without Stephen it would be intolerable.

He had wished that his mother could see how he felt about things; she wouldn't be disappointed then, he had thought, only it was natural for her to feel and think as she did. It was a pity, though, that people should want you to live in the way they thought best; it would save a lot of unhappiness, he thought, if they left you to find out for yourself which way was best for *you.*

He had tried to leaven his mother's disappointment as time went on and the first shock of disappointment had passed. " Maybe it's as well I didn't pass after all," he had urged, " I'll be able to stay here with you and Stephen. And I like the country, and I'll like farming, and maybe I wouldn't be any good as a teacher or at any other kind of work, and it's better, isn't it, to stick to the things you can do ? And think how lonely you'd ha' been if Stephen and I'd a got scholarships and gone away. It's a saving, too—if the Shawns themselves work the place there's no call to pay for hired labour . . ."

But the mother had not been so easily comforted. " It's a blind alley, son, farming is, in these days, with no future to it. I wanted a career for you both—for you especially."

" Farming's a career, just as much as teaching," he had persisted.

" And a dam' sight more useful! " That from Stephen. Andrew had chuckled. That was a way any son of his *should* be talking . . .

David had seen the colour rise in his mother's cheeks and her eyes filled with tears.

And the child Linda watching had seen, and she had thought, " David shouldn't have said that to Mother. It doesn't matter

what Stephen says, but even if David doesn't agree with her he shouldn't let her know."

" Perhaps I'll win a scholarship when Fm old enough," she had said.

" That doesn't alter the fact that both your brothers are failures," her mother had snapped, and collected dirty dishes off the table with unnecessary noise and swept out of the room.

When she had gone, the child Linda had asked, " What's failures ?"

" Not gettin' on in life—like your old Dad," her father had laughed.

She had looked inquiringly at her brothers.

" Pa's right," Stephen had told her.

David had said, " It depends on your point of view."

She had remembered it, and a long time after understood.

VI: BROTHER AND SISTER

WHEN she had resigned herself to the fact that both her sons had failed her, Ellen Shawn clung to the thought, " There is still Linda." Strange little Linda, who shared all kinds of domestic interests with her, yet somehow contrived to remain remote from her, as though she didn't really belong to her at all, but was merely a child who came and went in the house. Linda with her grave watching eyes and her quiet listening ways. Linda with her maternal grandmother's golden hair and delicate features, and the same small bones and little fine hands.

There should be something better for her than the dead-nettles and thistle-harvest of a semi-derelict farm. It would not matter so much if she failed to pass examinations; there would always remain for her the possibility of a good marriage; a career wasn't so important for a girl. Growing up on a farm she would have no illusions about farm-life being romantic, Ellen would think, with a little irrepressible rush of bitterness. She would see the drudgery of it, and, as she grew older, the heart-break. It would be a good thing, of course, Ellen brooded, if she could manage to get a scholarship and go to a good school; she would meet nice girls from good homes—educated homes. She would pass on to college and meet intelligent people; she would see something of the world beyond the limited world of farm and village. It was perhaps the best way of all to a good marriage. And outside of a good marriage, what was there for the child ? Nothing but drudgery, Ellen thought, drudgery and disappointment. She must get away from Shawn's, for Shawn's, thought Ellen, wearily, was an illusion and a snare.

But for Linda Shawn at twelve years old Shawn's was the most beautiful and romantic place in the world, and, in the long dreams of childhood, she thought that she would live there forever. Even that wider world of Wildwick and the sea was touched by the shadow of Shawn's, for the smell of the sea was blended with the smell of Shawn's, and you could see the white line of the sea far away across the heath from the bottom of the orchard, and over at Wildwick you could look back and see the cowl of the hop-kiln sticking up in the fields, a landmark of reassurance, a sail in a green sea. Shawn's was a world complete in itself, and there was a world

beyond Shawn's, but Shawn's was the heart and centre of that world. And David the heart of Shawn's.

At school she withdrew from the crowd. They said of her as Flaydering had said of her mother, that she gave herself airs. " Just because your mother was a teacher here once," was their favourite gibe. Linda never retorted; it did not matter to her that her mother had been the village school ma'am. She thought her mother superior, but not because of that. She was superior because she was younger, neater, slimmer, than the other children's mothers, and because she knew more. Linda thought that she would have been the same whether she had been a school-teacher and been born in a town or not. The present school ma'am was fat and frumpish, and had hairs growing out of moles on her face, and Linda thought her stupid; it didn't necessarily make you better than anyone else being a school-teacher, so far as Linda could see, so why should she give herself airs about her mother having been one ? Only it wasn't worth quarrelling about. She was not sufficiently interested in what the other children thought; they didn't matter to her; there was nobody she cared about.

There were always girls of her own age trying to make friends with her, linking their arms with hers, trying to coax her on to their side in their feuds against other girls; but something in Linda Shawn always recoiled from these attempted intimacies; she did not want them; she could not answer to them; it was as though something inside herself shut up with a snap at this invasion of her aloneness . . . just as when David slipped an arm through hers something in her cried out in answer, and there was that parting and folding back of petals kept at other times tightly closed. But until she was twelve years old only David could do this to her.

She held interminable conversations with David in her mind when he wasn't there, and frequently with her was a fantasy in which David was unhappy and crying, and in which she put her arms round him and comforted him, and in this fantasy he always said to her, " I love you more than anyone in the world." Sometimes he said, " You are the only person in the world I love." And sometimes in these fantasies she would say something cruel to David, call him stupid, taunt him about having failed to win a

scholarship, tell him that she didn't really love him at all, so^that he would be hurt and cry, and she would know the luxury of putting her arms round him and telling him that she loved him, and that she hadn't meant it.

In these fantasies she was always alone with David; there was never Stephen intruding. In the world of fantasy Stephen did not exist, though there was a frequently occurring dream in which Stephen died and David was broken-hearted, and turned to Linda. She was not consciously jealous of Stephen; because David and Stephen had always been together it seemed to her natural and inevitable that they should shadow each other; a world in which she might have David to herself was as fantastic as a world in which there was no school, and in which one was allowed to ride in the milk-cart every day; she had all of a child's unquestioning acceptance of things as they are; sometimes she would find herself alone with David, and it was a privilege as much as the Saturday ride in the milk-cart; she accepted it as that, a privilege—and a luxury like Friday's packet of sweets, and cream with the fruit-pie on Sundays; the good things couldn't happen all the time—the best things never did. That was what made them precious.

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VII: FIRST LOVE

LINDA'S first real friend was a girl of sixteen called Rose Hanby who came to help her mother with the housework. Since Linda had been old enough to help a little in the house Ellen had tried to dispense with outside help, partly from reasons of economy, partly because she could never find anyone who did things as she wanted them done, but her increasing fits of giddiness and flushing, and chronic head-aches, forced her to give in; she needed someone who would relieve her of more than little Linda, away all day at school, could possibly do. The place would go to rack and ruin, to be sure, but it would only be for a little while, she liked to think, until' the worst of the change ' was over, then she would be herself again, and Shawn's with her. Young Rose Hanby would at least help to' keep things under ' on the days when she was laid up. . . .

Since leaving school nearly two years ago Rose had been kitchen-maid ' up at the Big House', but Mrs. Hanby had formed the opinion that the other maids were ' fast', and she did not want Rose to ' get into bad ways', and as she heard that Ellen Shawn happened to be looking for help at the time, she offered her daughter's services. Shawn's, to be sure, wasn't much of a place for a smart girl like young Rose, and a ' come down ' after working for gentry at the Big House, but it would keep her out of mischief whilst something better was being found for her. And she would learn ' manners ', and ' how to go on', from Ellen Shawn, because, after all, Ellen Shawn was a lady, whatever people might say about her. The Shawn boys weren't ones for running after girls, so Rose would be safe. And it was only ' temp'ry ', as she explained to neighbours who urged that a strong, bright girl like Rose might do better for herself. Besides which, working for an educated person like Ellen Shawn, Rose might pick up enough to become a lady's maid. Since the girl had to go into service she might as well do the best for herself.

Rose had not wanted to leave the Big House. She had been happy there. She thought the groom good-looking enough to be an actor. She wished she had been a bit older, so that he would take more notice of her, flirt with her a bit, the same as he did with the

parlour-maid. The Shawn boys weren't her ' style' at all. Stephen was bad-tempered, and she thought David ' soft'. You couldn't call either of them romantic—by which she meant ' smart'. She didn't want a farm-boy, anyway. She liked to think that bye and bye she would have a real smart feller who worked in a shop—someone like the young chap who used to come out on a bicycle to the Big House to take the grocery orders . . . he said he'd take her out any time she liked to go, over to the town at Micklefield. Only of course she didn't dare. She would catch it from her mother if she were found out—and she would be sure to be found out, people gossiped so in a small place like Flaydering. … If she could only get into service in a house in the town she would have a good time—be able to slip out in the evenings on the pretext of posting a letter, and meet some nice feller at the corner of the road. It was a bore being sent to Shawn's; it was so lonely and cut off from everything, stuck right out there in the middle of the heath, two miles from Wildwick, and nearly as much from Flaydering itself . . . but she was fond of children, and she thought Linda Shawn * perfectly sweet, so quaint and old-fashioned ', even though everyone did say she was a stuck-up little thing, and unsociable, like her mother. It would only be for a little while, thought Rose, and * never say die' was Rose's motto, and what you couldn't help you had to put up with.

Linda thought Rose beautiful. Rose had thick curling red hair and a bright clear colour and laughing blue eyes. She was a vivid, impudent thing, with a mouth which even in repose suggested laughter. Linda had never seen anyone at all like her. Everyone else seemed faded and only half alive beside her. Whenever she came near, Linda knew that soft parting of petals deep down inside her, that feeling of warmth and happy sadness which before had only come to her with David.

Rose was always laughing and singing—comical little songs, they were, which Linda didn't understand, but they had gay, catchy tunes to them—and no one had ever sung at Shawn's before. David sometimes whistled whilst he was polishing his boots to go out on Sundays, but Rose sang, right out of

the inside of herself, it seemed to Linda, like a lark up in the blue.

" *Down* the road *there's* a blooming ri-ot,
Four and *twen-ty* girls are waiting there,
And the *p'lice* they can-not keep them qu-iet,
They won't *go, for* you know
Ev'ry girl is there for *me,* for me,
They're waiting there for me,
And if anybody knows a thing worth two
It's me, me, me, me, me ! "

sang Rose. " My mother used to sing it," she explained.

She knew another song, too, which Linda liked, all about a girl who had a man ' wot done her wrong.' Linda had no idea what it meant, but it was fun, the way Rose sang it. She knew ' serious ' songs, too, ' The Raggle-Taggle Gipsies', and ' Blow Away the Morning Dew ', and when Linda had recovered from her first shyness she would sing these with her, whilst they shelled peas together, or top-and-tailed gooseberries, or folded the clothes ready for mangling and ironing.

" I like you being here," she was always saying to Rose.

" Do you, ducks ? " Rose would answer, carelessly, and Linda would feel that whilst she sang her thoughts were far away, and not at Shawn's at all.

" You like being here, don't you ? " she would urge.

" It might be worse," Rose would concede.

" It's ever so much nicer now that you're here," the child would insist.

Rose would laugh. " I always was a little ray of sunshine, duckie."

There was a song Linda learned at school, a sacred song about the heavens opening and revealing ' a world of light'. She had always seen it in her mind as dark clouds rolling back and a great shining tide of light surging through. She thought of it when she thought of Rose. Shining heavens beat in her with the thought of Rose. All day long her heart beat, Rose, Rose, Rose, and the flow of her blood said, Rose, Rose, Rose. She would hurry home from

school in order to be with her again, and she would think all the way of the funny things Rose would say—things which if anyone else said them wouldn't seem funny at all.

When Rose left the farm in the evening Linda would always walk to the bottom of the lane with her, and when Rose put an arm round her waist something in Linda would sing, and there would be a sudden warmth in her, and a curious sense of tears, and she would want to cry out," Oh, Rose, I love you," but somehow she would not be able to speak; but she would press close to Rose's side and wish that the walk down the lane could last forever.

Walking back to the farm alone her thoughts would be all of Rose, and she would think, " I love Rose. I love her more than anyone in the world. More than David even. When I leave school I will go and work wherever Rose is working if she isn't working for us any more. We shall be friends forever."

She would look up at the golden evening sky and think of the school song and the heavenly gates opening upon a world of light, and she would not want to go back home to supper and people saying ordinary things; the evening light would be alive with Rose, and she would feel it inside herself, and feel herself one with it, and Rose. Just she and Rose fusing in the golden glory of utmost heaven. Back at the farm she would be silent; she had nothing to say to anyone; in this golden glory she felt herself removed from them. The farm would seem dark, cold, empty. Only when Rose came did light come back into the world. At nights she would press her face into the pillow and cry, thinking of Rose, wanting Rose. After Rose had gone she would look forward to bed-time so that she could be alone with her thoughts of Rose, and her sorrow that was a pleasure, her first knowledge of the sweet pain of loving. She would look forward to sleep as a short cut to the next day that would bring Rose again.

She said to David once, " It's nice Rose being here, isn't it ?"

He smiled at her. " It brightens the place up a bit, doesn't it ?"

" Rose is my friend," Linda stated.

He hugged her. " I'm jealous ! "

She wriggled out of his arms. She was serious; this was no time for indiscriminate hugging.

" I knew I liked Rose the moment I saw her. I like her face. I think she's beautiful. Don't *you* think she's beautiful ? "

" I'm no judge," David evaded,"I expect she is."

It was the nearest Linda ever approached to telling David about her love for Rose. She wanted to tell him, to let him share the shining secret, but there were never any words, for her love for Rose was something which beat in her like the evening light, and for which there were no words. The days when she had not known Rose seemed far off and unreal to her, and she could not imagine a future without Rose in it.

But Rose, who had come to Shawn's with the budding of the apple-blossom, left before it had fallen. Every week she pored over the advertisement columns in the local paper, and every week she wrote letters in answer to advertisements for housemaids, and at last she received a favourable reply concerning a ' place ' which her mother thought might be suitable and an improvement on Shawn's. It was in a doctor's house in Micklefield. Mrs. Hanby took her daughter for an interview, and she was engaged. She was to start work in a week's time. She was tremendously happy and excited.

She told Linda when she arrived at the farm the day after the interview.

" You won't have old Rose to make you laugh much longer," she said, gaily, " I'm leaving at the end of the week."

Linda, strapping school-books together, looked up and stood there staring at her. " You're leaving—going away——"

Rose ruffled the child's hair. " Never mind, ducks. I'll come over and see you sometimes on my half-days. I couldn't stop here for ever, you know."

Linda went on strapping her books. " No," she said, " I suppose not." She went off to school in a dream. Rose was going. At the end of a week. She would never see her again. She said she would come over on her half-days; it was like saying that the dead would rise again. She did not believe that Rose would come and see her once she had left. If Rose loved her she would not be leaving, and since she did not love her enough to stay with her at the farm, why should she trouble to come and see her once she had gone ?

" If I were old enough to leave school," she thought, " I could rm away and be with Rose, wherever she's going to," and then, forlornly, " but she might not want me. If she wanted me to she would have said so herself."

She still hurried home from school for the rest of that week in order to be with Rose, still walked down the lane with her in the evenings, but the golden glory had faded; she was not happy-sad any more, but only sad; so sad that she could no longer smile over Rose's drolleries, or join in the choruses of her songs. Rose had gone from her already, because she wanted to go.

Nobody knew anything about the grief that went on in Linda when Rose left. She was always a quiet little thing.

" I expect you miss Rose," her mother said, brightly.

Linda answered her, carelessly, " Yes, I do, a bit."

" Never mind. I expect she'll come over and pay us a visit one of these fine days. I can't say I'm sorry she's gone. She was a slovenly little worker, and noisy. No more young girls for me—they want too much training."

Linda dawdled home from school when Rose had gone; there was nothing to hurry home for. She would look at the setting sun, and at the moon, and it would seem strange to her that Rose might be seeing the same sunset, the same moon; she seemed so far away.

At the end of a week she received a postcard from Rose. It was a view of the market-place at Micklefield. " The house is just *off* this square," she wrote. " There are some smart shops. I don't like the people I'm working for, and I don't get as much time off as I expected, but there's more life than at Flaydering. I'll try and come over on Wednesday. Love."

On Wednesday Linda ran nearly all the way home from school. She tried to tell herself that Rose would not be there, so that when she got there and found her there it would be a * surprise', but something in her beat, " She must be there; she must be there." Rose wasn't there, and though Linda kept running to the corner of the lane until it was dark to see if she was coming, she did not come.

A few days later she sent another postcard, this time of Mickle-

field town-hall. " Sorry I couldn't get over on Wednesday. A friend took me out. Don't know when I'll be able to manage it now, but never say die as the old woman said when she waved her wooden leg. Checrioh."

"She doesn't care," thought Linda, "she doesn't mean to come; she never meant to come; she only said it," and there was in her a feeling of closing-up, a hardness, and tightness, which even David could not alter.

She did not want school to break up for the summer holidays; she did not know what she would do in all the long summer days without Rose. She tried to think what she used to do before Rose came to work at the farm, but it was like trying to think what she did when she was years younger. David and Stephen had each other. She had no one. It was not loneliness which closed in on her, but emptiness. She had nothing to do, and nothing to think about. She was at the bottom of childhood's abyss of forlornness. She wandered about by herself, but the bounded world of the farm was no longer satisfying. She began to wander farther and farther afield, beyond the purple sea of heather, down to the living sea itself. She liked the movement of the sea, and the way it talked to itself; she liked watching the fishing-boats sliding down the slips into the sea; she liked the feeling of life on the untidy, rope-littered beaches; you could stare at the sea and never get tired of it as you did staring at the fields and the heath. Ever since she could remember she had been crossing the heath to Wildwick to watch the launching of the fishing-boats, but she had never until then dared to go by herself. It was an adventurous thing to do, for it was beyond the shadow of Shawn's—when you were down on the beaches you could no longer see the landmark of the hop-kiln sticking up like the sail of a ship in a green sea.

Her mother fretted, " You shouldn't go so far by yourself. You never know who you may meet. Tramps and gypsies. They're always camping on the heath. And they're a rough lot, those fishermen. Keep to our own fields, and don't go to Wildwick without David or Stephen. It's too far."

She appealed to her sons. " Couldn't you two take Linda out with you sometimes ? You know how little time I get, with no

one to help me, and these awful head-aches I keep getting, so that I have to keep lying up and can't do a thing! The child's restless in the holidays with nothing to do, and no friends of her own age, and I don't like her wandering about by herself."

" Who do you think's going to eat her ? " Stephen demanded. "She's not a baby!"

" Queer things happen," the mother insisted. " Look at the things you read about in the papers. I've always warned Linda about not speaking to strangers, of course, but still . . ."

David suggested, " Why not get another girl like Rose ? It's companionship for Linda, and you've got to get someone."

" Another girl like Rose, indeed! The little slattern! "

" But it don't follow that because Rose wasn't a good worker that there aren't girls who will work. What about Hester Wray —she's been fed-up with workin' at the vicarage for a long time. She's a bit older than Rose; she might be all right, and I'm sure she'd come if you asked her."

For a little while Ellen resisted the idea on principle; she had no faith in other people's ideas. But the fact remained that she would have to get someone soon, and that something would have to be done about Linda. . . . She had always been such a self-sufficient little thing, and now she did nothing but moon about, just like Stephen did on Sundays. She was getting to an awkward age, of course, just turned thirteen; neither child nor grown-up, as you might say; she needed something, someone, to take her out of herself. . . . She would get one of the boys to call in at the vicarage with a note for Hester, asking her if she cared to consider the idea of working at Shawn's, and if so to come along for a chat. . . .

Stephen took the note, because he happened to be going that way.

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VIII: LAD'S LOVE

HESTER WRAY did not think Linda * perfectly sweet' and a ' dear little thing'; the child got on her nerves as she so often got on Ellen's. " You feel she takes in everything you say, and even knows what you're thinking about," was how she described her to her mother when she got home at the end of her first day's work at Shawn's. " But," she added, " what a good-looking boy that youngest Shawn boy is, to be sure. I never realised it before. Seems a little while ago he was only a kid, and now he's sprung up as tall as Stephen. I'm not gone on Stephen—he's that surly and bad-tempered, and David's just the other way about—ever so friendly and nice. But the two of them seem to be as thick as thieves. It's funny, isn't it, and neither of them seem to take any notice of girls, as far as I can make out. Ma Shawn's not as uppish as people make out. I think I'll get on with her all right; it seemed to please her because I said I'd give her that new recipe for quince jam we found out. But that young Linda! ' I do hope you and Linda will be friends,' Ma Shawn says to me, ' she was ever so fond of the last girl we had. It's company for her to have someone young about the place.' That's as maybe, I thought to meself, I reckon I can get on with any kid as *is* a kid, but this one beats me. Fair looks at you askance, she does. No wonder young Cathy and Dolly can't abide her!"

Young Cathy and Dolly were Hester's young sisters who were at school with Linda. Cathy, the elder one, had tried very hard to make Linda her own especial friend, but Linda liked neither her face nor the smell of her, and that for Linda was enough. She was highly sensitive to odours, both of people and things, and remembered them by it, and one of the things she had instantly liked about Rose was the smell of her—a warm, clean, sweetish smell that seemed to creep out of her neck and the pores of her hands, and to which something in herself answered.

Rose had laughed, slightly embarrassed, when Linda had told her, " I like the smell of you."

" Oh, go on with you," she had said. " It's the scented soap I've washed with! "

Linda had regarded her with her still, serious stare. " No, it's you," she had insisted.

" Only animals smell," Rose had said, " not people. At least, they shouldn't ought to—not if they're clean, and I am."

Linda hadn't argued the point. She seldom did argue any point. But she had consulted David.

" Don't you like the smell of things, David ? And people—they smell, the same as animals, don't they ? Everyone's got a different smell. Rose smells nice, doesn't she ? "

David smiled. " I don't know. But *you* do, Lindy." He sniffed her hair. " Hm. Lovely! "

Linda was pleased. " What do I smell like ? "

" I dunno. Earth, and twigs, and moss—apple-trees. And something that isn't like anything, but is just—Linda."

So Linda knew that he understood. And she knew that if you didn't like the smell of a person you would never like them as people; and if you did, it was all right. And so she knew that she would never like Hester, and that they weren't at all the same kind of people.

But Stephen, she thought, liked Hester. He used not to come much into the house once he had gone outside after breakfast, but with the coming of Hester he was always hanging about the back-kitchen. He was always making excuses to speak to Hester, asking her, had she seen that, or this, did she know where so-and-so was.

She seldom gave him a civil answer to his mumbled inquiries. " Och! And how should I know ?" she would demand impatiently. " It's not me that's lived in this house all me life ! "

But when David came into the kitchen she would smile pleasantly and pass the time of the day, and offer him cold tea, or a nice jug of fresh-made lemonade, and want to do things for him.

" Don't you be sweatin' down here after the pig-wash," she would say, " I'll bring it along when I go for the eggs," or, " You must be fair done up in this heat, Mr. David; it's a good old sun-hat you should be wearin, weedin' turnips in the heat of the day! There's one kickin' about at home doin' nothing—I'll bring it along in the mornin'." Nothing was ever too much trouble for her to do for David. But for Stephen everything was a trouble,

and when she was going into the village any little thing he might ask her to do for him, such as to bring him a packet of cigarettes she would invariably forget.

Yet, for all that, Stephen continued to hang about the kitchen when she was there, and when he could think of no excuse for speaking to her, or for being there at all, he would lounge in the doorway, his hands in his pockets, his eyes sombre, watching her, until she would exclaim," 'Tis a pity you haven't somethin' better to do than stand watchin' others work, and that brother o' yours out there sweatin' his guts out, I'll be bound."

He would slouch off then, but if she went out to the orchard to peg out a few kitchen-cloths, or to the rick-yard to hunt for eggs, he would find her again . . . and always there was Linda, hovering in the background, with her watching eyes and her uncommeming stillness.

One day when Linda came in from her secret kingdom amongst the willow and ragged robin of the Little Pond, Hester looked up from her ironing. " Here, I've got something for you! "

She took something wrapped in tissue paper from her apron pocket.

" Open your hand and shut your eyes," she commanded.

Linda held out an open hand and closed her eyes. She heard the rustle of tissue paper and then felt something cold trickle into her hand.

Opening her eyes, she saw that a string of red glass beads lay in her hand. She gave a little cry of delight. " Oh, thank you! They're lovely! Where did you get them ? "

Hester went on ironing. " Oh, I had them given me. But I'm not struck on beads."

" They'd have gone with your red dress," the child said, fingering them lovingly.

" I daresay." Hester folded the blouse she had finished ironing and laid it aside.

Linda fastened the beads round her neck, and ran into the front kitchen to see how they looked in the smoky mirror above the bench which ran along the wall opposite the fireplace.

Stephen was in there, cleaning a gun; he had newspapers spread

over the table and was bending intent over his work, peering into the breach. He glanced up as she came in, and then straightened himself.

" Where did you get that necklace ? " he demanded.

" Hester gave it to me! Isn't it pretty ? I shall keep it for Sundays."

He closed the gun with a snap and began collecting the bits of cleaning rag together. Linda knelt on the bench and regarded herself in the mirror. Stephen went out into the back-kitchen. She heard the click of Hester's iron on the stand, and Stephen say, " If it had been David you'd ha' kept them, I suppose ? "

There was the dull thud of the iron. Thud and click, and Hester's careless voice, mocking, " Well now, what do you know about that ?"

Then the slam of a door, and Hester's laugh. Hard, like the metallic dick of the iron on the stand. Final, like the click of a trigger.

Slowly the child took the beads from her neck. She went out into the back-kitchen and laid them on the table beside the folded clothes.

" I don't want them," she said, " I'd rather not," and ran out of the house.

She found Stephen in the rick-yard prodding a heap of hay as though he hated it. " I gave Hester the beads back."

He jabbed the pitchfork into a fresh bale of hay and answered, without looking up, " What the devil do I care what you did with them ?"

Linda walked away. For a little while she amused herself swinging on the rick-yard gate. She did not want to go back to the house whilst Hester was there. Presently she heard the click of the white gate beside the duck-pond. That would be Hester going home. She sat on the top of the gate and watched her walking away down the road, a tall dark girl in a red dress with a feather in her hat. Dark Hester of the sullen eyes and the low husky voice.

" She's like a gypsy," the child thought.

She climbed down from the gate and strolled back to the house. But there would be nothing to do in the house, she reflected, and

she had an idea that David might be in the kitchen-garden hoeing potatoes; he had said he would ' have a go' at them in the evening if he had time; it would be light for a long time yet, and she had nothing in the world to do … She would go and look for David.

She followed the rough boulder path along the ditch that skirted the elder wood, and noticed with regret that the kingcups she had brought in yesterday from High Mead, and placed so carefully in a jam-jar on the ledge of the back-kitchen window, had been thrown out.

" And they weren't a bit dead," she thought ruefully. That would be Hester. It was mean of her. Rose wouldn't have done that.

She slid down the bank into the ditch to rescue the flowers. And gathering them up from the pile of that day's refuse flung into the ditch she found the red beads.

She scrambled up out of the ditch carrying the flowers in one hand and the beads in the other. Before she took the flowers into he house she tossed the beads into the pond. There, at least, Stephen would never find them.

IX: FANTASY

TO Linda Shawn, in her fourteenth summer, and with school closed down for the holidays, the days were very long. Before the coming of Rose she had walked self-sufficient in a fantasy world, but Rose had opened magic casements upon a world beyond the shadow of Shawn's, and in that world Shawn's dwindled until it became no more than a speck in an infinitely wide and varied and beckoning landscape. Somewhere in that wider world Rose walked, with her gay laugh and her little songs, but with no thought, Linda knew, for the child who had laughed and sung with her. And still Linda looked at the evening sky that was somehow bound up with Rose, and thought, " I shall never love anyone else."

She was both restless and listless. There was nothing she wanted to do, or which seemed worth the effort of doing—except being with David, but David was busy all day, and when he was not busy he was monopolised by Stephen. Once she picked a bunch of honeysuckle to send to Rose—there would be no flowers in the town, she thought, and Rose liked honeysuckle, it smelt so sweet, she said; but she could not find a box to send it in; her mother said she would turn one out for her when she had time, but she did not find the time, and the honeysuckle died, and Linda felt too discouraged to gather any more. Rose had taught her how to crochet, and she thought she would finish the mat she had begun under Rose's direction and send it to her for her dressing-table; but without Rose to guide her it went wrong, and the cotton became dirty with constant undoing, and she abandoned the task in despair. She began a number of things which she never finished, the knitting of a scarf, the embroidering of a table-centre, the making of a raffia handbag, but nothing held her interest long enough for her to finish it; at the slightest difficulty it all seemed rather a bore and not worth doing.

Her mother began to say to her, as she had been in the habit of saying to Stephen before he left school, and as she still snapped at him on Sundays, " For goodness' sake take and find something to do! Read a book or something."

But none of the things her mother suggested she might do

interested her sufficiently, and she had read all the available books long ago, several times over. There was a school prize of her mother's called *The Pink Sash,* and a Sunday school prize called *His Servants who Serve,* but she didn't like stories with a moral, or those with a lot about God in them; *Shakespeare for Little People* was ' dry,' too much like school-reading, and *The Water Babies* she felt she almost knew by heart, and there was very little else of interest in the Shawn library, except some ' grown-up' novels; there was one called *My Own Child* about a girl of fifteen who had a baby, but her mother took that away from her, saying that it was ' too old ' for her; and there was one called *The Opening of a Chestnut Burr,* which she liked at first, because it was about a young man who lay down under a chestnut tree and 'sobbed bitterly', and which made her think of David and her fantasies about him; but when the young man had done sobbing the book lost interest. Her mother gave her *What Katy Did* for a present on her thirteenth birthday, and she liked it, but she did not want to go on reading it, and *The Wide, Wide World* was too full of moralising, like *The Pink Sash.* There were a few paper-backed books which she read and liked, *Poppy's Children,* and *Teddy's Button*^ but they were rather sad, and you did not want to read sad things twice. She did not, as a matter of fact, very much want to read at all. Some of her brothers' books, Henty and Ballantyne stories of fur-traders and adventure, had interested her at one stage, but *Robinson Crusoe* she had found extremely dull. She liked *Pilgrim's Progress,* and some of Longfellow's poems, particularly the early ones, and one about ' when thou art worn and hard beset with sorrows that thou would'st forget, go to the woods and hills!' She re-read that after Rose left, and, following its counsel as nearly as possible, went to the Secret Path beside the Little Pond and brooded on her lost love. She read there for the first time some of the romances of William Morris—a battered old volume she had found in her brothers' room and which David had bought for a few pence one market day in the town.. She read *Golden Wings* and *The Hollow Land* and thought them very beautiful indeed; she liked stories in which people wept and wore long raiment and loved with a great love; they made her think of Rose. She thought

of Rose when she read, " I went up to her, and first kissed her on the forehead, and then on the feet, and then drew her to me, and with my arms round about her, and her arms hanging loose, and her lids dropped, we held our lips so long together that my eyes failed me, and I could not see her, till I looked at her green raiment." That was how she would kiss Rose—if she ever came back. In fantasy that was how she had kissed her many times. In fantasy, too, sitting amongst the weeping willow and the ragged robin of her secret kingdom she felt * through the leaves of beech and lime the many whispering winds of the Hollow Land.' And her name was Florian, and her house the house of Lilies, and Rose was Margaret who wore white raiment with the long spikes of scarlet going down from throat to hem, and sang the song of the Hollow Land:

" Christ keep the Hollow Land
Through the sweet spring-tide,
When the apple-blossoms bless
The lowly bent hill-side.

Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the summer-tide;
Still we cannot understand
Where the waters glide."

And it was Rose who said the magic, lovely words, " Come now and look for it, love, a hollow city in the Hollow Land." With Rose she walked hand in hand to that enchanted place and saw beyond the golden gates * a great space of flowers.' Rose had come when the apple-blossoms blessed the countryside; and Rose had gone with the summer-tide, and truly she could not understand where the waters glide; but Christ kept the Hollow Land, and his was the kingdom, the power and the glory. One day Rose would come back; meanwhile she dwelt in a hollow city of loneliness in a Hollow Land of dreams, moving restlessly between shadow and substance, fantasy and reality.

In shadow and secrecy the waters went gliding past, bearing with them herself and Rose, Stephen and Hester, Stephen and

David, the long Summer days, and the long light nights, and somewhere beyond the dark swirling waters and their relentless flowing, gates as golden as the evening sky opening upon a great space of flowers, if only you could get to it, and happiness was there, thought the child, if only you could find the way. . . .

X: REALITY

BEYOND High Mead the heath stretched away unbroken to the sea; High Mead was a boundary between two worlds, and with this new restlessness on her she began to go there more often. It was flanked with scrubby cedars where it met the heath, and at sundown heath and meadow were alive with rabbits. Linda liked to sit in the shadow of the cedars and watch them anticking in the pale sunlight. The banks under the hedges of hawthorn and hazel were riddled with their warrens, and the grass mysterious with ' fairy-rings' in which the purple-flowered thistles, and buttercups more lush than those in any other meadow, danced together. Stephen and her father came there on Sunday nights, with guns and ferrets, after rabbits, but at other times she had it to herself, or shared it with a mare and her colt, or a huddle of sheep whose wool got caught on the thistles giving them the appearance of having gone to seed whilst still flowering.

There was an afternoon when she went beyond the group of cedar trees on to the edge of the heath and sat amongst the bracken staring at the white line of the sea in the distance, wondering whether she dared to walk to Wildwick, and if she did whether she could get there and back without being late for tea, so that no one would know. The heat of the afternoon made her think of the sea, and the cool sound it would make breaking on the shingle, and the cold sting of it on bare feet and legs. There was no sound but the hum of flies and bees over the heather, and no movement but the quiver of heat in the distance, and she had the feeling of having the whole world to herself—until there was a sudden scurry amongst the bracken and a mongrel dog came bounding up to her, an ugly, friendly brute whose whole body shook with the violence of his tail-wagging friendliness.

She laughed as she patted him. " Where *did you* spring from ? " she demanded, " I've never seen you before." Instinctively she looked round to see who might own him, and it was then she saw the figure of a man bending intent over the bank a few yards from her. As she watched she saw him bring something white out of a sack on the ground and thrust it into a hole in the bank. Her heart began to beat very fast, as it did at the sound of hounds

crying, and the sick feeling began to creep up from somewhere in the middle of her. She saw the man fastening a net along the bank, and anger blazed up in her. She ran through the bracken with the dog following her.

The man looked up at the sound of her approach. He was a rough-looking man with a gypsy look about him, unshaven, and with a dirty scarf knotted about his throat.

He called to her," Here, you youngster, don't you know you're trespassin' ? This is private land, this is! "

She stopped before him, her heart beating so fast as to make her breathless, but she said, " That's what I came to tell *you!* This *is* private land—it's Colonel Heatley's, and you can't get rabbits here without permission. It's poaching if you do! "

The man glanced down anxiously at the spread net. " Poachin' me grandmother! The colonel's a friend o' mine." He dived down suddenly as a young rabbit bounded out of a hole into the net. Quicker than thought he had swooped upon it; there was a wild squealing for a moment, and then it was limp in his hand, its neck wrung. Another dive under the net and he had grabbed the ferret and thrust it back into the sack. Then he took a large pen-knife out of a pocket of his dirty jacket, opened it, picked up the rabbit, and proceeded to slit its legs. There was a spurt of blood over his hands. Linda looked away. She had seen it done many times before, but it always sickened her. There was something about rabbits with their soft warm furry bodies and their big frightened eyes. ...

" There's a little beauty! " She heard the satisfaction in his voice.

She said out of a throat which felt as strangled as the rabbit, " If I tell Colonel Heatley you'll get into trouble! "

The poacher laughed. He said, bending to wipe his pen-knife on the bracken at his feet, " Don't they learn yer at school not to tell tales, eh ? " He looked up at her, then straightened himself. They had the wide heath to themselves, he and this slender golden sapling of a young girl.

" A nice little girl like you wouldn't go tellin' tales now, would yer ? Wot's yer name, eh ? I like little girls." He reached out

to ruffle her hair, but she ducked and avoided him, and backed a little away from him towards the hedge. The dog stood with its tongue hanging out, panting, waiting for one of them to make a lunge at him so that he could dart away only to bound back again.

The man laughed. " Don't be frightened. I like little girls, I'm tellin' yer. S'pose you and me sit down 'ere now, in the shade, stead o' standin' 'ere in the sun. And you tell me your name, ell ? I bet it's a pretty name. As pretty as that nice little short frock you're wearin'."

He looked at her as though he would see through her thin summer frock to her budding breasts and her fast-beating heart. He took a step towards her, and she smelt ferrets and sweat and the dead rabbit; in a flash as she had seen him twist the rabbit's neck she saw the glint in his eyes; for a moment he seemed so immense as to blot out the heath, the sky, the bright sunlight, then with the panic of a hunted wild thing she had turned and fled, the dog bounding after her. She did not hear the man whistle the dog back; she never knew when the dog left her side; she remembered nothing of her plunge through the darkness of the group of cedars, or of her long stumbling rush through the thistles and buttercups of High Mead. She did not stop running until she had climbed the gate of the field and dropped down into the orchard. Then she stood leaning against the gate panting, sweating, sobbing. She had no idea what might have happened to her had she stayed; she could not have said why she was frightened.

She did not tell anyone of this encounter with the poacher, but she never went again to High Mead, or beyond the boundaries of Shawn's, unless someone was with her. That night she wakened in the grip of nightmare. She thought that a massive figure stood at the foot of her bed, and came swaying towards her, closer and closer, bending over her, smelling of sweat and ferrets and rabbit, and she could not move to get away, though she was so terrified that the beating of her heart seemed likely to choke her, and sweat started out of every pore in her body, and there were eyes glinting like knife-edgfes in the darkness, drawing nearer to her, bearing down upon her, so that she wakened screaming aloud with terror.

When her mother came in to her she found a sobbing and hysterical child sitting up in bed with her hands over her eyes crying out, " Don't touch me! Don't touch me! "

Asked what she had been dreaming about that had frightened her, she could only sob over and over again that it was eyes staring at her, wicked eyes. . . .

When she slept again she dreamed that she was in High Mead with David and Stephen; but it was David who thrust the ferret into the hole in the bank, and what came out was neither rabbit nor ferret, but a snake, with glittering eyes, and all three of them fled before it across the meadow, but when she turned to see how near or far was the pursuing evil, it had turned into Hester, and her eyes were dark and sullen and stared at David, always at David, and David was crying as he ran, " Leave me alone! Leave me alone! " Then, in the dream, she could not run any more; she dropped behind, and Stephen followed on; Stephen following Hester and calling to her to stop, and Hester following David, and David crying out to leave him alone; they ran and ran until they were out of sight . . . and then she woke up with tears running down her face and her heart beating hurriedly.

When she got up she would not put on the dress she had worn the day before, but got a fresh one out of the drawer. Her mother would scold, but she didn't care; she would not wear that dress again; whatever happened to her she would not wear it again; it was a hateful dress.

When she came downstairs to breakfast in her clean dress her mother regarded her with indignation. " What do you mean by putting on a clean dress ? " she demanded. " The one you had on yesterday was clean on."

" It's too short," Linda said, " and too thin. I don't like it."

" Too short indeed! The idea! It comes to your knees. How old do you think you are, pray ? "

" I'm thirteen," said Linda, and suddenly began to cry. " Don't make me wear it," she wept. " It's a horrid dress. I show through it. I know I do. My body sticks out in it. People stare."

" People! Who's to see you, I'd like to know! You've got

to finish it out. A clean dress on every day indeed! What next! Vain little thing! "

She went into Linda's room next morning, early. " Put on that voile dress you were wearing the day before yesterday," she commanded. " You've got to finish it out."

Linda sat up in bed. " I can't wear it," she insisted, and her eyes were bright with fear and defiance. " I won't wear it. You shan't make me! "

" A box on the ears is what you're asking for, my girl." Ellen moved briskly over to the chest-of-drawers.

Linda leapt out of bed and rushed over to her mother, gripping her wrists. " You shan't make me," she repeated. " I don't care if you hit me—I don't care what you do—you shan't make me! "

Something in the child's hysteria penetrated Ellen Shawn's armour of set ideas. " But why ? What's all the fuss about ? It's a very pretty little dress. Who's turned you against it ? "

A pretty little dress. That was what the man had said. But she could not tell her mother.

" It's what Hester said the other day."

" Oh, so it was Hester was it! She turned you against it! It's like her cheek. I'll let her have a piece of my mind! "

" No, no, she didn't say anything about it. It was what she said about me. What she said in the dairy the other day—about me getting quite a figure." She was crying helplessly, the tears running through the fingers pressed to her flushed face. " It shows in that dress. I don't want it to. I don't want to have—those things."

Ellen closed the half-open drawer. For a moment she stood still leaning against the chest-of-drawers whilst the child stood wiping her eyes on the hem of her night-dress. It was true what Hester had said. The child was growing up. Across all the years came a memory of herself at Linda's age and her mother telling her about something which might be expected to happen to her quite soon, and how she had cried. The sorrow of growing to be a woman, and the fear of it, and the ineradicable shame. And now it was Linda's turn. Little Linda. She wanted to put her arms

round the child, tell her not to cry, that it was all right. But somehow she had never been able to hug Linda and say soft things to her—as she might have been able with Beatrice-Ellen.

She said briskly, " All right. Don't cry. You needn't wear it. I'll send it to Aunt Emily for your Cousin Gladys. Get dressed now, and stop crying. There's nothing to cry about. Look sharp now, and come and help me with the breakfast."

But for the rest of that day she spoke gently to the child, and sometimes looked at her, sorrowfully.

That night when she and Andrew were in their room preparing for bed, she said, " Linda's growing up. Have you noticed ? "

Andrew yawned. " Can't say I have. But it's as should be, ain't it ?"

" It's no age—thirteen," the mother brooded.

Andrew answered, struggling out of his shirt, " I dunno about that—my old mother was married at sixteen."

Ellen's voice was hard as she said, " I wouldn't like to see any child of mine married at sixteen."

Andrew jerked himself into his night-shirt and pitched into bed with a grunt of relief that all the business of undressing was over.

He said, between yawns, "Well, I reckon we needn't be worryin' about that yet awhiles."

Ellen continued brushing her hair with long fierce strokes. She stood a long time in front of the chest-of-drawers with the mirror on it which served as a dressing-table staring vacantly at the flickering candle.

Linda growing-up; love; marriage. Oh, it was frightening, frightening. The future was dark as the black fields outside. Linda, the last of her children; it seemed such a little while ago that she was a little thing toddling around; such a pretty little thing, too. .Childhood was so short; you had your children for such a little while; they seemed to grow-up and away from you before you knew what had happened. And Linda had been so little hers—always such a withdrawn, un-get-at-able little thing. All that business over the frock; how could she know that all that had been going on in the child ? How did she know what was going on in any of them—David, Stephen, Linda ? They didn't tell her any-

thing; Stephen was in love with Hester; she could see that; but he never said anything about it to her; you would have thought a boy could tell his own mother … It wasn't as though she hadn't been a good mother to them all, yet they never told her anything; not even David. It was hard, when you'd done your best. Why shouldn't they be able to tell her what was going on inside them ? Beatrice-Ellen would have been different. She snuffed out the candle and got into bed.

Andrew was already asleep. She lay beside him staring resentfully into the darkness. Old pain stirred in her. A fat lot he cared about his children growing-up. He never even noticed it. Not even Linda, and he was fonder of her than of the boys. She'd have to run off and land herself in trouble before he'd realise she she wasn't a child any more. Linda. Little Linda. The last of her children. It was no joke growing to be a woman. A man wouldn't understand that. Men didn't understand those things. Men were different.

She closed her eyes. She must get to sleep. She had a lot to do tomorrow. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Growing-up. The days going by. The young going uphill, the old going down. Linda, the last of her children, with the last of her childhood slipping away, slipping away. . . ,

XI: HORIZONS

WITH strict instructions to keep to the road and to mind not to speak to anyone, Linda gained permission to walk alone over the heath and in to Wildwick occasionally. Her fear of going alone beyond the boundaries of Shawn's passed with the days. In the little time that is a long time in childhood the incident of the poacher faded into something which had happened long ago; being an experience she did not want to remember it was easily thrust into the background of memory; it was an over and done with thing, whereas the unrest stirring in her was present and active, and there was that increasing urge to venture beyond the shadow of Shawn's to a wider world.

There was no adventure of horizon or newness in Flaydering—it was too close to Shawn's, and part of everydayness; school was there, and church, and the post-office stores to which she was sent on errands for odds and ends of household goods; it was a known quantity, and unchanging, and bounded; whereas at Wildwicfc there was the unbounded sea, and the endless interest of the fishing-boats and net-shops, movement and colour, and a feeling of life. In Flaydering nothing much could happen; in Wildwick anything might. There the very nature of the land was removed from everydayness; the heath straggled away into marshes where sea-lavender grew, soft blurs of mauve papery flowers unlike anything in the fields or hedgerows, and beyond the marshes the long pale line of the sand-dunes was visible from afar off, a desert of coarse grass and tufts of sea-holly, blue-grey as the North Sea itself. The red and brown sails of fishing-boats, and the white sails of yachts, thrust up unexpectedly from flat fields divisioned by water-filled dykes which gave all this part of the country the appearance of a huge chess-board. Wildwick itself was a huddle of red roofs and tall black net-shops; heath and river both petered out at Wildwick; it was like the end of one world and the beginning of another, and therein lay the adventure of it, and the enchantment. Linda liked equally the desolation and the stillness of the sand-dunes, and the friendliness and activity of the beaches.

Stephen and David had been going there ever since they were old enough to wander about alone; before they had left school

they had occasionally taken Linda with them, but seldom since then; as children they had gone because of the sea and the fascination of the fishing-boats; but when they were older they went, as Linda, in her fourteenth summer, was beginning to want to go, out of the youthful need for new horizons—different faces, different talk, a different kind of life, a growing impatience of the narrow boundaries of Shawn's.

Stephen, David, and Linda Shawn were as well known in Wildwick as in Flaydering, and formed there associations which, whilst being rather less than friendship, were still rather more than mere acquaintanceship. The Chantries who owned the lugger, *North Sea Lassie,* Garry Payne who, though he was only a few months older than David, was master of the *Sea-Gypsy,* the Thorpes who shared with the Colletts the biggest boat of the fleet, the *Golden Rose,* all extended a rough, simple cordiality to the dark Shawn brothers and their golden sister, and satisfied the Shawn need for contact with a life outside their own world.

Linda could never understand why Donald Thorpe should prefer to bicycle every day from Wildwick to Flaydering to work as under-gardener at the Big House when he might have gone to sea with his father and brothers.

" Because he knows when he's well off," was the reason Stephen gave. " There's not much of a living to be made out of fishing in a small place like Wildwick—it can't compete with the trawlers from other places, and the freightage charges are so heavy."

The answer did not seem to her a satisfactory explanation; there wasn't much of a living to be made out of being an under-gardener, or even a head-gardener, she thought, and the life couldn't compare with the life of the sea for adventurousness and interest; she couldn't understand how Donald could bear to watch his father and brothers swinging themselves aboard the *Golden Rose* and not want to leap up from the beach and go off with them. It wasn't as if Donald didn't like ships and the sea; he was always to be found lounging about the beaches when he got back from Flaydering, and Garry Payne was his greatest friend—and nobody, Linda knew, could be friends with Garry without agreeing with

him that a ship was the most beautiful thing in the world, and the sea the only life worth bothering about for a man. She had heard Stephen declare that if ever Garry came to love a woman as much as he loved his boat, she would be a very lucky woman, but that there didn't seem to be much chance of that happening by the look of things, for many a girl would have been glad to have had Garry for a sweetheart, but he had no eyes for any female thing save his boat . . .

Linda saw more of Donald Thorpe than of any of the Wildwick people because since he had been working in Flaydering he came often to Shawn's. She liked him because he reminded her of David—except that he laughed more often—and because of his friendliness, and the fact that he felt as she did that Wildwick was somehow * different', as though it might be an enchanted place. She did not feel close to him as she did to David, and she did not love him as she had loved Rose, but he was comfortable to be with, and she liked wandering about the beaches and sand-dunes with him and seeking out the swampy beds of sea-lavender, and guessing which boat was which when they were all out at sea and growing faint on the horizon. He didn't talk for the sake of talking as so many grown-up people did; he never made her feel small and childish and out of things, not even when she had been a little girl of eight and he a big boy nearing fourteen; and now that she was thirteen, and he ' getting on for nineteen', she had with him a pleasant feeling of equality which she had with no one else—not even David. David, she always felt, had his secret life with Stephen, away from her, but there was no secrecy or shut-awayness about Donald. " My friend Linda," he called her, and sometimes he would bring over to Shawn's for her little bunches of grapes from the hot-house at the Big House, or a ripe peach from the garden-wall, or a little posy of moss-roses and forgetmenots which he had made up for her. He would call in on his way back to Wildwick from the Big House at the end of his day's work, bicycle up the narrow path between the two ponds, leave his machine propped against the trunk of the old yew tree, and putting his head inside the. door of the back-kitchen inquire of whoever happened to be there," Where's my friend Linda ? " so that she would know that

it was not merely because of his friendship with her brothers that he had called in, but specially on her account, and he seldom came without bringing her something. Sometimes she would ride to the end of the lane with him on the step of his bicycle, and he would always listen with interest to anything she told him—which was more than could be said for some older people, who only pretended to listen.

She liked him from the first, but she felt that he was not properly her friend until that summer when she began going over to Wildwick by herself; she often met him, then, riding home from work when she was on her way back to Flaydering, and he would always dismount and talk to her for a little while before going on again. On Saturdays, when he stopped work at one o'clock, they often had whole afternoons together, wandering about the sand-dunes and the beaches, watching the fishermen mending or making nets, helping haul the boats up on to banks of shingle out of reach of the tide, sharing the excitement of the launchings together, finding curious shells—razor-fish shells, and sea-urchins, and sinister devil's-purses like dried sea-weed; scrambling up the sides of the boats to inspect the catches when the fleet came in, watching the swarms of shrieking gulls swooping down on the throw-outs, marvelling at the rapidity with which the women and girls in the long shed which was the fish-market gutted the fish and dropped them into barrels. With Donald there was always something to do, and he always had time to devote to her—which David, living in the shadow of Stephen, seldom had. During that summer, after the passing of Rose, he became her special friend. Not as special as Rose had been—but nobody, she thought, could ever be as special as that; but her chosen friend all the same . . .

Donald liked Linda as he liked all children, but liking children more simply and genuinely than the majority of people who imagine they like children, he never talked down to her or made her feel that he regarded her as a child. For him children were small people—the loveliest people in the world, because the simplest and most sincere and direct, and therefore the easiest to get on with. He was one of a big family, and was used to children.

He was a round-faced boy with freckles, a wide mouth, hay-

coloured hair, and gentle, intelligent grey eyes. People referred to him as a ' nice lad ', and ' so good with children *. They said that it was nice for Mrs. Thorpe to have at least one son working on the land instead of following the sea like the rest of her men; it must be a great comfort to her. Mrs. Thorpe thought so, too, but not her husband; he regarded it as unnatural for a Thorpe not to follow the sea, and was uneasy about this son of his who preferred to go and weed the Colonel's garden.

" If he wasn't my own son, and a good, manly lad, I'd say he was soft," he often said to his wife, and to neighbours who commented on the strangeness of any son of his not taking to the sea like a duck to water . . .

There had been a time when the boy had shown every inclination to go to sea, when he was always clamouring to be taken out in the *Golden Rose*—an inclination the father had encouraged as proper and natural. But when it had begun to be time to begin discussing what the boy would do when he left school he had sheered away from the idea of being 'prenticed to the sea. He would like to work on a farm, he had said, and offered no explanation other than that he thought he would like it better.

One evening shortly before he had left school Donald had gone out in the *Sea-Gypsy*. He had said nothing about it to his father, but the father had seen him swinging aboard as the boat plunged down the last slip into the sea. He had taken heart of hope. Perhaps the boy wanted to join up with his friend, Garry ? It would be a pity for a Thorpe to go to sea in another man's boat, to be sure, but better that than not go to sea at all; Donald had given him the slip when they got back in the morning, but when he had seen him at home in the evening and asked him if he was going out again that night, the boy had shaken his head and said that he was sticking to the land; but in spite of the fact that he went out in the *Sea-Gypsy* several times during the next eighteen months, when he was put off work at the farm where he had been employed since he left school, he stayed at home doing nothing until the job as under-gardener at the Big House offered itself, and all he would say when asked why he did not take up the sea for a trade was that he preferred the land. It had been a bitter disappointment to the

skipper of the biggest boat in the Wildwick fleet, but he comforted himself with the thought that anyhow the boy's unnatural preference pleased his mother, and there was no accounting for tastes.

The mother's people were farming stock, so perhaps the boy was a * throw-back' to that. It was the explanation he always offered those who considered Donald's preference as strange as he did.

During that summer when she began going over to Wildwick by herself, and when she began to regard Donald as her special friend, Linda's old curiosity as to why he chose the land instead of the sea quickened again. It was all the harder to understand because Donald was always to be found hanging about the beaches in his spare time, as though the ships and the sea drew him. His friendship with Garry Payne offered no explanation, for he was to be found on the beaches even when Garry had sailed.

One Saturday after they had watched the launching she asked him, " Haven't you ever wanted to go to sea yourself? "

It was a question Donald was very tired of answering, but he replied patiently, and as he had replied to no one else, " I've wanted it ever since I was about six years old. But it ain't allus so easy to get yer own way in this world, I reckon."

" Wouldn't your father let you, then ? "

" Let me ? He wanted me to. You bet. It's unheard of a Thorpe not followin' the sea for a livin'. But gardenin's a safer way of earnin' a livin', for one thing. You ain't got to wait for tides or depend on catches."

" But it's not as exciting," Linda urged.

" No, not as exciting. That's why I wanted to go to sea."

" What stopped you ? "

He prodded the shingle, frowning. " Well, if you must know—a chap called Donald Thorpe."

They were lying face downwards on a bank of shingle, their elbows dug into the pebbles, their faces in their hands; the sea sucked at the beach a few/eet below them; it was a sunless evening, and sea and sky were dun; the fishing fleet rocked and rolled slowly towards a misty horizon. There was a great loneliness and melancholy on that grey sea.

" It's a secret why he never went to sea," thought the child, and was sorrowful, because once again she was shut out, and she had thought there were no secrets between herself and Donald.

" I don't know what you mean," she said, and then, after a moment, " does Garry know ? "

" Garry ? Yes, of course. He's my friend."

" But Stephen and David are your friends, too, and they don't know. I've asked them. They just think you like gardening best."

" Stephen and David aren't my friends in the way that Garry is. That's different. It's like you can have only one close friend."

" Yes," she said, thinking of Rose.

But she was jealous of Garry. In future when Donald said ' My friend Linda ' it wouldn't mean anything.

There was a silence between them, walls of thought dividing them from each other, walls that grew higher and thicker as thought piled on thought, until thought found expression in words and the grey spell was broken.

" It'll be a wild night at sea tonight by the look of things," the boy said, " it's not much fun being at sea when it's blowin' a gale."

He was watching the one boat which had a red sail, and which Linda knew to be the *Sea-Gypsy.*

" When you're used to it I expect you don't mind."

" No. Not when you're used to it."

Something in his voice made Linda look at him. He stared fixedly at the sea, but there was a darkness in his eyes which made her think he did not see the sea, but only some picture in his mind; she wondered what it was he meant that he had not said—something which lay behind those words, " Not when you're used to it." She thought that he did not want to talk any more about why he did not follow the sea. She lay silently by his side thinking that soon she would have to start walking back to Flaydering and wishing that she hadn't to; there was nothing to go back for, and it was a long walk.

Presently Donald rolled over on to his side, supporting himself on one elbow. He gave the back of her neck a little pinch and laughed.

" Let's see who's best at skimming stones."

They both sprang up and went down to the edge of the sea, and took it in turns to send the flattest pebbles they could find skimming out over the grey swell. Making their way slowly back in the direction of the net-shops they saw someone walking towards them, a female figure, walking slowly.

" Let's guess who it is! " Linda suggested.

" It's Nan Collett," Donald said at once, frowning, " I'd know her walk a mile off."

As they drew nearer Linda saw that he was right.

The girl said as they came up to her, " What do you two think you're doing F "

. " We've been watching the boats going out," Donald told her.

Nan brushed the hair back from her eyes. " You tell him he ought to go aboard a boat himself, Linda, not hang round watching others go to sea." She looked at Donald as she said this, and her eyes were contemptuous.

Linda saw the blood rush up into his face, and she hated Nan Collett.

" It's not everyone's job to go to sea," she defended him, and her heart began to beat hard and loudly.

Donald looked away, out to sea. " Nan despises every man who doesn't go to sea. You'd think it was the only job in the world for a man."

Nan flashed at him, " So it is—for a boy that comes of a sea-going family—a boy that's got three brothers and a father on the sea—what does he want pottering about in somebody's garden ? A boy that's got Garry Payne for a friend! Don't it make you ashamed ? There's Garry out there now, doing a man's job, and your father and brothers and their pals—whilst you mooch about throwing stones in the water, with a little girl! "

Linda's heart beat as though it would burst. " You've no right to say that, N^an Collett, Donald's been working hard all day! "

" Work! Picking the dead heads off flowers! Call that work ?"

Nan got up and began.walking away. Linda tugged frantically at Donald's coat.

" Don't let her say things like that! Tell her off! Say something! Say something, Donald!"

Donald put an arm round the excited child and pressed her against his side, " No, no, it's all right," he said, quietly, but his voice shook as he said it.

When she had gone a few steps back up the bank of shingle Nan turned, and looking down at them both spat out, " Everyone in Wildwick knows why Donald Thorpe don't go to sea—because he's afraid! Afraid he'd be sea-sick! "

" It's a lie! " Linda shouted after her.

Nan laughed and stumbled on over the beach. Linda clung to Donald. " She's hateful and wicked, that's what she is! I'd hit her if I were you, even if she is a girl."

Donald sat down on the breakwater by which they had stopped and drew the child down beside him.

He said in that low shaken voice, " You can't hit people for telling the truth, I reckon."

" But she said you were afraid to go to sea—that's not true."

He stared sombrely at the sea. " Yes it is. Quite true. Garry knows it. Before I left school Garry and me used to talk of going off on a cargo boat. I was a bit scared even then, cos I'd often been out in our own boat and was always sick, but Garry said the same as Dad, that I'd get over that. I used to think it was just being a kid was the reason I allus got ill. I wanted to get over it cos I always thought what a fine life it would be to be in the same ship as Garry and be comin' into foreign ports and bein' around with men as had all sorts of adventures all over the world. But I never let on at home that I was thinkin' of goin' off in a cargo boat when I left school, cos I knew they'd be wantin' me to stay by the fishin' trade same as Thorpes always had. Garry didn't let on to his folk either. It was a secret, see ? Well, when it came near time to leave school Garry said I must be gettin' me sea-legs on and I'd better be comin' out in the *Sea-Gypsy* sometimes—it wouldn't do, we figured it, for me to be goin' out in our own boat, else I'd find meself bein' prenticed for the fishin' 'fore I knew where I was. So I went out in the *Sep-Gypsy* several times, all weathers, but even with only a little bit of a swell I was so ill I had to stay below all the time, and the last time—just a little while ago —I had to be carried off the boat when we came in in the mornin'.

I made them promise not to tell anyone. I didn't want my folk to know. Ever since I'd left school my Dad had kept on about me joinin' up with him, and I'd had to pretend I didn't want to go to sea. When I left school I got a job on a farm over beyond Flaydering; when I was put off for the winter I stayed home for a bit till my sister Kate, who was in service at the Colonel's at the time, told me they was wantin' an under-gardener up there and I got taken on there. I told Garry I reckoned I'd never be any better at goin' to sea, but he said to keep on tryin'. Nelson was sick everytime he went aboard, he said. But I wasn't just sick—I was laid out like as if I was dyin'. It's no good—the sea nearly kills me. I won't never see foreign ports. The sea don't want me. It's like that it won't have me at any price. I dursn't go out in the *Golden Rose* any more—Charlie Collett's the mate, and he'd make me the laughin' stock of Wildwick if he found out how it was with me, him and that prentice Venner they've just taken on. It's no good. My family's been to sea for generations, and my best friend is crazy on the sea, and it's the one thing I'd sooner be able to do than anything in the world, but it's no good."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, then Linda asked, " How does Nan know ? Garry didn't tell her, did he ? "

" No. He wouldn't do that. He's my friend. She guesses—and she happens to guess right."

" Well, it's nothing to be ashamed of. You can't help it. It's not like being afraid to go to sea."

" I am afraid, though. It's a sort o' death to me. And it's—soft to be like that, even if I wasn't afraid."

" You can't help it," the child persisted, " I wouldn't care what a spiteful thing like Nan Collett said, anyway." There was defiance in ner voice.

The boy sent a pebble skimming over the water. " It's natural to want folks to think well of you, I reckon, but it ain't reasonable to expect a girl like Nan Collett to think well of anyone that's soft about the sea. Her folks are like mine—they was all born to the sea—it's the natural life for them, and it ought to be for me, only somehow it ain't, though it's in me to want to go to sea."

Linda sat huddled up on the breakwater staring at the grey

waves. She wanted to say something comforting to Donald, but there seemed nothing to say. It was no use saying * Never mind ', because he did mind. And it must make you very much ashamed, she thought, not to be able to do the one thing in the world you most wanted to do. To go on watching the boats putting out to sea, and wanting to go with them, yet knowing you would never be able to … Nan ought to feel sorry for Donald, not sneer at him. She was cruel to sneer. Only it wasn't any use saying that, either, because Donald wouldn't hear anything against Nan; he thought her right to despise him; he despised himself. She wanted to press his hand and say, "Anyhow, / like you and don't think you soft," but it would make them both feel shy if she did that, and it wouldn't make him feel any better about it. So there was nothing to say.

She got up. " I'll have to be going. It's coming on to rain."

He said, as they stumbled back over the shingle together, " Maybe one of these days I'll run away to sea, all the same—even if it kills me. It ud be a man's death, anyway—and the proper death for a Thorpe."

Linda didn't answer; she felt that he thought aloud rather than spoke to her.

They parted by the net-shops, and she turned her face towards Flaydering again with pity in her, and anger. All this unkindness and sadness everywhere. Nan hurting Donald; Hester hurting Stephen; Rose hurting her. There seemed so much of it going on all the time; ferrets thrust into rabbit-holes; birds and rabbits crying out in snares; hounds and men and horses hunting a wild creature to death; the look all day on her mother's face when David failed to win a scholarship; the look in David's eyes when Stephen was bad-tempered with him; the dark look in Stephen's eyes when he had made David unhappy, as though he felt David's pain in himself; the look on the face of the poacher when he reached out to touch her; all this cruelty and sorrow, and no one caring … It didn't seem to be very easy to be happy when you got older. Perhaps if people were happier they would be kinder to each other and to the animals. Perhaps it was being hurt and disappointed that made people want to hurt, to sort of get their own

back. It was wanting things which made people unhappy, so far as she could see. It was better not to want, because, as poor Donald said, it wasn't very easy to get what you wanted. Better not to fall in love, too. It hurt loving people, she thought, thinking of Rose. It was all right if they could love you in return, but it was as likely as not they wouldn't, and it didn't seem to be worth the risk. Perhaps it was better not to love people, but only God; better because it was more peaceful. You were taught in church that in the love of God was the peace that passeth all understanding. That was why you felt so peaceful in church, without knowing why.

She sat down on a bank covered with tall golden flowers like clustered dandelions and looked back at Wildwick and the grey sea, and thought," When I am grown-up I will be a nun and love only God; or I will be a missionary and go about the world telling people about the love of God and the peace that passes all understanding."

She sat for a long time, thinking about God, and looking at the tall golden flowers swaying in the wind like the masts of ships in harbour, and at the sea of purple heather at her feet; there was a green smell of bracken, and a salt smell of the sea, and a peewit sobbing, and a grey evening sadness over everything. The nameless melancholy of childhood filled her.

The spatter of rain on the wind became more pronounced, and she got up to go, shivering a little in her thin dress. The road stretching away over the heath seemed endless. She began to want her tea. The thought of bread-and-butter and jam with whole strawberries in it ousted the thought of God.

XII: AUTUMN SORROW

THERE was a day in September, when the long summer holidays had dragged to an end and school started again, which marked another milestone along that road of realisations which was the evolution of Linda Shawn.

She came up the path between the two ponds swinging her bundle of books and thinking of nothing more specific than a vague hope that as she was a little late, having stopped many times on the way to pick blackberries and eat them, tea would be ready without any waiting, and saw her father sharpening a scythe at the grindstone beside the orchard gate.

As she approached he looked up and called out to her, " There's a surprise packet waitin' inside for yer. Look sharp ! "

" A surprise ? What is it ? "

" A visitor. Guess ! "

" Not an aunt ? " Linda pleaded.

He laughed. " No; a friend of yourn."

" A friend of mine ? Not — not - "

• She dared not say the name for fear of disappointment, but a wild hope leapt into her, and she ran towards the house.

Hester came out of the dairy as she entered the back-kitchen.

" Who is it ? " she cried, flinging down her books.

" Pick up those books — littering up my kitchen when I've just tidied it! " Hester snapped, ignoring the question.

Linda kicked the bundle into a corner and rushed through into the front room.

She heard her mother's quick, " Sh! That'll be Linda! "

Then she had swung round the wooden partition which screened off the door and kept the draught from the inglenook, and there, facing her mother across the tea-cups spread out at one end of the table, sat Rose.

She had so often thought of how she would fly into Rose's arms if she ever saw her again, but instead she stood still and hung her head, not daring to look at her, and murmured, " I thought p'raps it might be you ! "

Her mother said briskly, " Well come and say how do you do

and have your tea—it's getting cold. You're late. We didn't wait. Rose was in need of hers."

"That I was!" said Rose, and held out a hand to Linda. " Come and sit here, ducks. You seem to have grown."

" She's had a birthday since you saw her last," Ellen said.

Linda slipped into a chair near Rose and reached for the bread-and-butter plate. She wanted to look at Rose, but the blinding wonder of her being there was too much for her. She munched bread and butter and looked at her plate.

Ellen poured out weak tea for Linda and pushed the cup across to her; then she said to Rose," Well, I'll leave you to talk to Linda. I must go and shut up the chickens. Careful what you say, now."

Rose did not answer and Ellen whisked out of the room. Linda munched in a shy silence; Rose poured herself out another cup of tea, and then laid a hand on the child's arm.

[u] Glad to see me again, Linda ? " There was a curious little plea in her voice which made Linda look up.

She looked at her friend steadfastly for a few minutes, then she said, " Yes—but you look—different——"

Rose withdrew her hand and looked away. " How ? How do you mean—different ? "

The child regarded her thoughtfully. " Thinner," she said, " thinner in the face. And pale. You used to have a lot of colour. And your eyes look different. YouVe got a new hat, too."

" No. It's not a new hat—just an old one that the missis turned out."

" Do you like working there ? "

" In a way I did. There was a bit more life than in Flaydering. But I've left now."

" Then you'll be able to come back and work here! "

" No. I asked your mother. She won't have me. I don't know what I'm going to do. I haven't been home yet. I was turned out, you see, at a moment's notice. I came straight here. I daren't go home. I.thought perhaps your mother would take me in."

" What made them turn you out ? Did you break something—or do something awful ? "

Rose pressed her hands to her forehead. " I've got such a headache. It's been an awful day." She put her head down on the table and began to cry.

Linda sprang up and put an arm round her shoulders. " Rose—don't cry! What is it ? Is your head very bad ? Mother's got some menthol upstairs—I'll go and get it."

She was darting away when Rose reached out and caught at her dress. " No, no, it's no good. I'm just miserable, that's all. I'll be all right in a minute."

Ellen came back into the room and saw Rose dabbing at her eyes and Linda standing with an arm round her shoulders.

She said sharply, " Crying again, Rose! That won't help you. You haven't been telling Linda anything ? "

" No. Only that I've left my place and don't want to go home." She looked up. " Oh, Mrs. Shawn, let me stay here—please—please! I can't go home. You don't know what mother's like! She'll drive me mad going on at me. And she can't have me there—my little brothers and sisters——"

She began crying again. Ellen began collecting the tea-things together noisily.

" Now, Rose, we've gone into all that. You should have thought of all that before. It's too late now. You must go home and face what you've brought on yourself."

" I'd work for nothing, and gladly, if only you'd let me stay," Rose wept, " I wouldn't be any nuisance to you. Not even when the time came. I could go into the infirmary for a week."

" Will you be *quiet*, Rose ? You know you can't stay here—I wonder you want to, with two young men around the place. You must go home now—you really must. You've been here wasting my time all the afternoon. I'm not being unkind, but it's not my business, and you brought it all on yourself. Come along now—pull yourself together! You're not the only girl in the world that's made a fool of herself."

Rose sat sobbing helplessly; Linda looked from her to her mother, an agony of pity in her eyes.

" What's the matter with Rose, Mother ? Why can't she stay

here ? Why must she go to the infirmary ? What's the matter with her ?"

"There's nothing the matter with her," Ellen said firmly. " She's just being a silly hysterical girl. Come along now, Rose. You needn't lug your basket all the way down to your mother's —Stephen or David shall bring it round for you later. But you really must go now. Do you hear ? "

Sniffing and sobbing Rose stumbled to her feet. " All right, I'll go. But she won't have me. I know she won't. You don't know what she's like when she's wild."

She began to move towards the door. Linda ran over to her. " I'll walk down the road with you," she said softly.

" You'll do nothing of the kind, Linda. Rose isn't fit company for you just now."

Rose turned her wet despairing face to Ellen. " Oh, let her come with me, Mrs. Shawn. I won't tell her anything. I *promise!* Let her come! She's the only one that cares for me now."

Linda looked from one to the other. " Why can't I go with Rose ? "

" Because I say not ! "

Rose pressed the child against her side for a moment. " It's all right, ducks. Do as Mother says." She pushed a straggle of hair up under her hat. " All right, Mrs. Shawn. You needn't send one of the boys with my basket—I can manage. I can take me time—there's nothing for me—to hurry home for. Thank you for the tea."

Ellen followed her out and across the back-kitchen to the door. Linda heard her saying briskly, " Now don't upset yourself any more. The young man must marry you. Your own mother and father will see to it that he does. They can have the law on him if he doesn't—a young girl like you, not yet seventeen. You mustn't come up here again, there's a good girl—it's upsetting for Linda."

When she came back into the room Linda was standing where she had stood when Rose had gone out. She said in the same brisk tone that she had used to Rose," Now, Linda, finish your tea."

Linda did not move. Her eyes were very bright. " What was Rose crying for ? Why mustn't she come here again ? "

" Because I don't want her to. She's disgraced herself. You'll know when you're older. Have you had enough to eat—before I finish clearing away ? "

You'll know when you're older. That meant that it was useless to ask any more questions. Rose had done something which must not be talked about. It was the old business of " Sh! Not before the child." But Rose was her friend. She loved Rose.

She turned away from the table. " I've had enough to eat."

" Then you'd better get on with your homework before it gets dark. It's bad for your eyes working by lamplight. Have you got much to do ? "

" Three sums and some g'ography questions."

" Well then, set to."

Linda set to; she knew that with her mind so full of Rose she would never be able to work out decimal fractions or state which towns made rolling-stock and which manufactured woollen goods; she knew that tomorrow she would get into trouble for bad work; but it didn't matter; when you were full of tears nothing mattered; she did not want to pass the scholarship and go to the high school in the town; tomorrow, instead of coming straight home from school she would go and see Rose; that would make her late home and she would get into trouble. That couldn't be helped either; when you are a child there is so little you can do that you want to do *without* getting into trouble. . . .

Whilst she sat working she heard her father come clattering into the back-kitchen, and her mother say to him, " Rose is in trouble. A nice thing for her poor mother, I must say! And coming up here, too, and expecting me to take her in! "

She heard her father's slow pondering voice. " In trouble, eh ? I called to her as she went past, but she was cryin' fit to break her 'eart, poor little lassie—I knew summat must be up. What'll she do now, eh ? Will the feller marry 'er ? "

" I don't know. They could have the law on him if he refuses —she's not yet seventeen, if you ever heard of such a thing! "

She heard her father make clicking noises with his tongue.

" That's a bad business," he said, " a dirty business. Poor little lassie."

And her mother's voice with its queer hard note of finality, " Well, it's no business of ours. Don't go saying anything to Linda now, she's overheard quite enough."

Her father came slowly into the kitchen. He smiled at her. " Still at the lessons, lassie ? " He moved over to the fireplace for his inevitable cup of tea, and sat back in his chair sucking it through his moustache and staring with his fixed, vacant stare out of the window.

" I shall never pass the scholarship exam," Linda stated, " I can't do sums. What's more, I don't care."

" It's a bad business," her father muttered, " a bad business."

She got up and went over to him. " What's a bad business—about Rose ? "

He started. " Eh ? What's that ? Here, you get back to those lessons, young woman, or you'll have your mother after you. Never you worry your little head about things that don't concern you. Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you. See f "

Linda went back to her lessons. It was no use, no one would ever tell her anything; you'll know when you're older; things that don't concern you; sh! not in front of the child; run away and play; get on with your lessons; mind your own business. . . .

Tomorrow she would go and see Rose and find out for herself.

The next morning as she was turning into the school playground one of Rose's young sisters handed her a note. " It's from Rose," she said. " She's in trouble, our Rose, but our Ma says we're not to tell anyone. See if it says anything in the letter."

Linda slit the envelope and took out a sheet of paper torn from an exercise book. Rose's young sister stared over her shoulder and read the letter with her.

" Dear little Linda, Please don't worry about me or come and see me; it would only cause trouble. My mother is wild with me because I've lost my pface, but never say die, it'll all come out in the wash. I often think of the fun we had together and wish I was back at Shawn's. Ever so much love from Rose."

" It doesn't say anything," said Rose's sister. " What do you suppose it is ? What was she turned out of her place for ? Me and Florrie think she's going to have a baby. D'you think she is?"

Linda turned away from the sly, eager little face beside her. Her heart beat very fast. The sick fear she had known when the poacher leered at her welled up in her. Animals had babies when they mated. People had babies when they married; but Rose wasn't married. People didn't do—*that*—unless they were married and wanted to have children. People only did that when they loved very much; then they married, and it was all right. . . . But supposing Rose without waiting to be married. . It could happen. Insidiously there wakened and stirred in her memories of things whispered and giggled about by other girls; things she had not wanted to listen to, and had heard without understanding or wanting to understand; memories of lovers locked together under hedges and in dark corners, things she had seen without seeing, heard without hearing, creeping back now into consciousness, germinating from seeds sown long ago, putting forth dark, poisonous flowers. Something hateful, horrible, had happened to Rose. That was why there was that talk about her getting married; that was why she had cried, because she was ashamed of the thing that had happened to her—Rose who had been white-gowned Margaret, loved by Florian of the Lilies. . . .

Suddenly she turned on the excited, leering child at her side. " You're not to say such things," she cried. " Your mother would give you a hiding if she knew, and so would Rose! Come on—there's the bell!"

Without waiting for the other child she began to run, not because she really cared about not being late for school, but because there was in her a need to run and run and run. Away from everybody and everything. Away from the shameful realisations stirring in her. She knew now why she had been afraid of what was in the poacher's eyes.

All that day there was a terrible burning picture in her mind of Rose being looked at by someone who reached out to her as the poacher had reached out that day, someone with glittering

eyes like a snake's. Because she could not get this picture out of her mind she could not add up that day in school, and did not know the answers to any questions, or when it was her turn to stand up and read aloud; with the result that she was kept in after twelve o'clock to write out a hundred times," I must be attentive.'[1] The words made long snakes across the page, and evil eyes leered up at her through the grey pencil-blur of the lines.

In the afternoon she was called out before the class for the same crime of inattentiveness to lessons, and her arm so severely smacked that it remained red for the rest of the day. She went back to her place holding her arm and with her heart beating fast with anger and resentment, but thinking, in spite of it, how silly the teacher had looked smacking away so hard that the puffs of her hair looped each side of her forehead flopped up and down, whilst her face went as red as a turkey-cock's.

The smacking did not oust the picture of poor tormented Rose from her mind, and at four o'clock she was kept in again to write out a hundred times, " Today I have been a thoroughly bad girl and I ought to be ashamed of myself."

Linda sighed and did her best to shorten the task by writing the lines with two pencils at a time. Perhaps the teacher would see that they had been done two at a time, and then she would have to stop in again tomorrow. " I don't care," she thought, " teacher can't keep me in for ever; she's got to go home herself sometime." It was a nuisance being kept in, though, because it would make her late for tea; it was not her mother's scolding that she minded—she was used to that—but being late for tea meant that there wouldn't be so much to eat; she would have to go without cake, and make do with whatever bread-and-butter happened to be left on the plate.

Before the task was finished the point of one of the pencils broke, and she had to do the rest one line at a time. It was a long sentence, too. She varied the monotony by doing the words in lists—a dozen ' todays ' and then a dozen ' I's ' and so on. Doing it this way was quite good fun; you could do all the ' bads' and then go back and do all the ' beens '. Once the teacher glanced up from her high desk where she sat correcting exercises in blue

covered books and asked, suspiciously, " Are you doing those lines properly, Linda ?"

" Yes, Miss," Linda replied meekly.

" Show me! " came the command, and she had to take the sheet of foolscap over to the desk with its irregular lists of words.

She was given a slap, told that she was a downright bad girl and would be caned if she didn't behave better tomorrow, and required to continue the lines standing at the desk. Finally, because the teacher was herself tired of sitting in the stuffy class-room and wanted her own tea, she was told to take them home to finish —with fifty more added for not doing them properly in the first place.

Linda knew that if she took the task home to do with her home-work she would have to listen to a lecture from her mother, so when she was a little distance from the school she sat down on a bank under a hazel-nut hedge and finished it there, doing the words in lists as before.

Then she walked on through the pale autumn afternoon sun-shine thinking of Rose and wondering what she was doing, and whether her mother was [4] going on ' at her, and whether she was still crying, and thinking of Rose the old sorrow closed over her. ' Rose, O Rose, how could you ? How could you bear to ? Why didn't you run away ? Why didn't you stay with us so that we could have gone on singing songs and having fun ? Why didn't you tell me when you wrote that note for Mabel to give to me ? I'm not so much younger than you. Why did you shut me out ? Everyone thinks I don't understand things, and it isn't fair. It was dreadful to see you cry; I couldn't ever think of you crying; you were always laughing; the way you used to throw your head back and laugh like you would die of laughing. . . . Laughing fit to bust. . . What are you two up to, Mother used to say, and Stephen used to shout to us to shut-up. . .'

There was a tight feeling in her throat and her eyes smarted with tears. * Rose not much older than me, going to have a baby. I'm not old enough to have a baby. But soon I will be. I don't want to be. I don't want to grow up.' Involuntarily she pressed her hands over her budding breasts, hating them, filled with shame.

|f only you needn't grow up. * But I don't want to go on being child and everyone shutting me out of everything and treating me like a baby. Even Rose. . . .'

Whilst she was at her home-work that evening her mother remarked, " If you don't pass the scholarship you'll be left school by this time next year, and then goodness knows what we'll do with you! Have you made up your mind what you *do* want to do when you leave school ? "

Without looking up from her exercise book Linda replied in the low, muffled voice of her withdrawn self, " Yes, I want to be a nun."

Her mother stared at her. " A what ? Don't be ridiculous! What on earth put *that* idea into your head ? "

" I don't know," said Linda, " I just thought it." Which was her child's way of saying, " You wouldn't understand."

XIII: CLERICAL INTERLUDE

IN a few days everyone in Flaydering knew that Rose Hanby had left her ' place ' in the town and come home unexpectedly, and there was a great deal of speculation as to what might be the reason. Girls who went into service in the town often came home in trouble a few months later—and it was always the same kind of trouble. Hester Wray told her mother that Rose had been up at Shawn's ' crying and carrying on ', and that when she had asked Ellen Shawn what was wrong with Rose she had said that everyone would know soon enough.

" She's going to have a baby if you ask me," said Hester, and her mother said that she ' wouldn't be surprised '. She told it to her next-door neighbour, the blacksmith's wife, as a fact, and the blacksmith's wife told Mrs. Clark who kept the stores, and Mrs. Clark asked everyone who came into the shop, " Have you heard about young Rose Hanby getting into trouble ? "

The news travelled westward over the heath to Cross Deep Farm, and northward to Stonecroft, and eastward to Wildwick. The servants gossiped about it at the Big House, and the Reverend Arthur Tracey discussed it with his wife over breakfast at the Rectory.

" You had better call," Mrs. Tracey suggested.

" Isn't it more a woman's job ? " her husband asked, anxiously.

Mrs. Tracey flicked crumbs from the pale blue swansdown of her dressing-gown. " I'm no good at that sort of thing, Arthur, as you know."

The Reverend Arthur Tracey sighed. " It's very difficult for me, you know, Anne. Ever since that tiresome umbrella business."

Mrs. Tracey laughed the gay, wicked little laugh of a woman whose memories amuse and delight her.

" You always were so human, Arthur," she murmured, holding back the sleeve of her dressing-gown as she reached for the marmalade. She considered both the dressing-gown and the gesture becoming, as also did her husband on most mornings, but that morning both were lost on him.

He frowned at the white arm revealed to him. " All too human.

Yes." He dinned thoughtfully with his butter-knife on the edge of his plate for a few moments, and out of this tom-tom beating up of inspiration came the idea, " I might make my sermon this Sunday * The Way of all Flesh ', with a plea for charity. Ye that are without sin amongst you cast the first stone. Huh ? Don't you think so, dear ? "

" And have everyone saying that you are countenancing free love ? Don't be silly, Arthur. The whole place would be in an uproar. A clergyman whose umbrella has once been found in a ditch after he has been seen walking out with his arm round a young woman's waist cannot be too careful."

" But we are married now, dear."

" We weren't then. And the first Mrs. Tracey hadn't been dead three months."

The Reverend Tracey winced. He disliked crudity in any form. " Really, dear! Three months is a long time in the life of a normal man—and everyone knew that poor Hilda had been a chronic invalid for years. There was surely some justification for a somewhat early re-marriage. It could scarcely be called—premature."

" A clergyman has his feelings the same as me and you," mocked the second Mrs. Tracey.

" You are really most unhelpful this morning, Anne," her husband protested, " I do think you might show a little more sympathy——"

Mrs. Tracey began turning the pages of a sales catalogue of fashions.

" All you have to do is to go and see the Hanbys and impress upon them that they must make the young man, whoever he is, marry the girl. There's no need to moralise about it, either in the pulpit or out of it. You know as well as I do that village people love throwing stones—that and talking about money are their favourite pastimes, so there's no sense in putting up glass-houses for them to shy at. Starf quoting Christ and everyone will think you are making excuses for yourself. Christian charity starts at home—when it does—and ends there."

The Reverend Tracey stirred his tea and supposed that his

wife was right. She was a cynical woman, he thought, and not at all suited to be the wife of a country parson, but she had a lot of hard common-sense. He was constantly being surprised both at the hardness and the common-sense of her. He suspected that you couldn't have a common-sense outlook without being hard; common-sense was itself a hard thing; but he had all of a sentimentalist's admiration for it.

Had he acted common-sensibly that regrettable umbrella incident would never have happened—it had been all her fault, making him, a clergyman, behave in so unseemly a way as to sit on a bank in the moonlight and kiss her under a hawthorn hedge like any lustful farm-lad with his servant-girl; it was enough to make any man go off forgetting his umbrella. And how everyone had talked about it; for weeks he had been ashamed to be seen in the village; he had felt that everyone knew how his umbrella had been found in the ditch and had gone and inspected the flattened grass and flowers on the bank. … It had taken a lot of living down; he had had poor attendances at the church for weeks; it had been a positive scandal; village people were so narrow-minded and spiteful; they loved nothing more than catching a clergyman out in behaving like a human being. The Reverend Tracey reflected gloomily that it wasn't much fun being a clergyman in a little place like Flaydering, especially when you weren't particularly liked; everyone hung round the rectory for free-teas and garden-fetes and poor relief, but they never missed a chance of saying something spiteful or scandalous about the rector and his lady—just because he had had a normal courtship and married a good-looking woman who refused to be as dowdy either in clothes or mind as clergymen's wives usually are. . . . But Anne might be a little more sympathetic, he thought, since it was all her fault he had once been indiscreet under a hawthorn hedge when the May moon was high, and so couldn't deliver his sermon on the way of all flesh which was always so appropriate every time a village girl fell from grace. …

He did not relish the idea of calling on the Hanbys. Mrs. Hanby was a sharp-tongued woman, and one of those who would remember the umbrella incident. Perhaps it would be better to

see the girl herself; she was a pretty girl, now he came to think of it—he liked red hair—he would find out from her the name and address of the young man, and then visit him and threaten him with the law if he refused to marry the girl; in view of the girl's age it was a serious offence. . . . Village people were really very tiresome in the way they managed their affairs, he thought, as he set out that morning on his bicycle to call on the Hanbys.

He felt very nervous as he propped his bicycle against the fence of the Hanbys' cottage and walked up the narrow path between the flaunting scarlet of dahlias and the glowing bronze and gold of chrysanthemums. The front door which gave directly into the living-room was open and Mrs. Hanby stood at the table washing the breakfast things in an enamel bowl and turning them up on a tin tray to drain. She regarded him unsmilingly.

He assumed a professional pleasantness. " Good morning, Mrs. Hanby. A very nice morning, I *must* say. I heard you had a little trouble with your daughter Rose and called to see if I could help in any way. Perhaps I could have a little talk with the young woman—it doesn't do to be too hard on the young, you know, and we must try and make the best of this—er—unfortunate mishap."

" Folks are best left to mind their own business," said Rose's mother, truculently. " Me and my husband don't want no interference from the church."

" I assure you I have no intention of interfering, but it sometimes happens that the church is peculiarly in a position to help in these matters. Sometimes through the assistance of the church marriages can be arranged that otherwise would not take place."

Mrs. Hanby continued to clatter dishes in the enamel bowl. " If you think you can do more with Rose than her father and me you're welcome to try. You'll find her round the back."

" I can but try," the Reverend Tracey suggested mildly, and followed the brick path round to the back of the cottage.

He found Rose pegging clothes to a wire line stretched between two apple-trees. She looked very pretty he thought, with the mellow autumn sunlight on her red hair, and there was something very * fetching ' about the line of her young body as she stood with her bare arms reaching up to the clothes' line.

Turning to lift another wet garment from the zinc bath at her feet she saw him coming towards her over the grass, and stood still waiting for him to come up with her.

" Now for a good old lecture," she thought.

She said, as he came up to her, " If you've come to point out to me the error of me ways you might as well save yer breath. Mum and Dad have done that already."

He smiled pleasantly. " On the contrary, I came to see if I could help. I thought I might call on the young man and convince him of the necessity for immediate marriage. You know that he can be sent to prison for his offence against you ? "

" I daresay, but a fat lot of good that would do *me,* wouldn't it ? Besides, I don't want to marry him. I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man left on earth, the miserable little skunk! "

" But my dear young lady! Don't think I don't appreciate your bitterness. Truly you have just cause. But if he does not marry you, might I ask what you propose to do ? "

"I reckon that's my own business. But there's one thing I'm *not* going to do, I'll tell you straight, and that's stop here to be lectured at and gossiped about! I only came back because I was turned out at a moment's notice and didn't know where to turn. I thought maybe Mrs. Shawn ud give me a job, her bein' a bit more intelligent than most of them in these parts, but seein' she can't I'm not stoppin' 'ere, see ? I've 'ad time to do a bit o' thinkin' since I been back, and I reckon the town's a kinder place when you're in trouble than a gossipin' village."

" But what will you *do,* my dear young lady ? " He was genuinely distressed. She looked so young and helpless standing there under the laden apple-tree in the autumn sunlight—and very, very attractive. . . .

" Oh, if you *must* know! Get a room and do daily work, likely, as long as I can, and then go into the infirmary. I've found out that they'll let you stop there if you work until you've got some place to go." She began pegging up clothes again. " So now you know," she said.

The Reverend Tracey frowned at the grass. " But how can we let you go ? " he demanded. " We have our duty towards

you—a young girl—homeless in a town—in your condition. There must be something we can do for you——"

Rose came over to him. " You really want to do something for me ? " Her voice was hard, challenging.

" Anything within my power," he said, confused by her closeness and the directness of her gaze.

" Money's the only thing that can help me," she said firmly.

He started. " You're surely not suggesting I should give you money ? "

She did not move. " You said you wanted to help me."

" Really—I—really—this is most unusual—I mean, supposing I did give you half-a-crown—what use is it ? "

' No use at all. But a couple of pounds ud be a lot of use. I want all the money I can get till I'm through with this mess."

" But my dear young lady—really I can't give you money. It would be too—too unseemly. I cannot *reward* you for what you have done——"

" I'm not askin' you to reward me. You said you'd do anything in your power to help me, and money's the only thing that can help me just now."

" But I—I never heard of such a thing. Such bare-faced impudence! Certainly not. I shouldn't dream of giving you money. What on earth would people say if they knew ? "

" They won't know," said Rose. " I'm going away tonight, money or no money. But a couple o' pounds ud tide me over for a bit until I found work."

The wind moving the branches of the apple-trees made sun-shadows on her face and on her white blouse. The Reverend Tracey was deeply troubled. She was so young—so very young—and appealing. . . . He would think of her tonight as he lay in his comfortable bed, think of her so young and helpless in a strange town, with no money, and alone. It was a hard and uncharitable world . . . and easy to stray from the straight and narrow way. There bad been that incident of the hawthorn hedge and the May moon in his own life . . . The way of all flesh . . . Ye that are without sin amongst you. . . .

" Yes," he heard himself saying, [44] yes, I suppose so. If you

insist on going … If you are sure there is no other way I can help you——"

He tugged at the wallet in his breast pocket.

" None whatever," Rose said definitely.

Mrs. Hanby came round the corner of the house to see her fallen daughter receiving the wages of sin in the shape of two pound notes from the clergyman's hands.

XIV: DARK TORRENTS

NEWS of Rose's disappearance reached Linda the next dajr at school.

" Our Rose has gone b xk to the town," said the little sister. " She went off in the night, and we don't know where she is. She left a letter sayin' she had gone, but she didn't say where. Our Ma says it's a good riddance, but me an' Florrie reckon she'd bin cryin', all the same. Looks like summat was up."

" I expect she'll write and let you know," Linda said, but in her heart she thought there would never be any more news of Rose, and it didn't matter. The Rose she had loved had gone long ago and never come back. The Rose who had returned for those few days and disappeared again without saying Goodbye, was a different Rose, not the Rose of the little songs and the laugh like a happy shout. The Rose she had loved was Rose of apple-blossom time, not the sorrowful Rose of the falling leaves, and Linda who had opened the gates of her shadow kingdom to let love in closed them again and was alone, save on those increasingly rare occasions when David broke away from Stephen to invade her solitude. But she no longer wove fantasies around David, for since he had left school and worked with Stephen he was more than ever Stephen's. And Donald could not take Rose's place; he belonged too much to the real world, part of her daily life; there was no bloom of wonder and enchantment upon him, and she was not yet wholly given to realities. She was happy with him, but within herself she was as shut-away and alone as before Rose had flooded her world with a new light; Donald in no way touched her inner life. Children like adults have the interests they pursue in order to keep on living, but with this difference, that they follow them unconsciously. Rose died out of Linda's secret life like the colours from the fading year, leaving her neither happy nor unhappy, but dormant like the year itself. Her child's life flowed, part of the life of Shawn's, part of the great universal life; high song of Spring, lazy croon of Summer, sad song of Autumn, always this flowing with the tide, ebb and flow, and repetitive rhythm. Rose had come with the Spring and gone with the Summer, and the year was growing tired, and summer dreams and summer sorrow were

shed with its leaves, changing as they changed, and fluttering out of sight. Sap that had leapt so eagerly in the trees a few months ago crept back with a slow old sorrow into the roots; bracken that had been first a green foam, and then a turbulence of green-gold, faded into old bronze and sank back to earth crumpled and dry; the last roses of the year were nipped by morning and evening frosts, and the flame of dahlias in cottage gardens was extinguished over-night. The tumult of larks above golden fields, and the hum of the reaper-and-binder, became like the laughter and tears of yesterday, a tale that is told—and forgotten. The autumn ploughing laid the earth naked before the impotence of the failing sun. Gales that sprang up in the nights ravaged the trees and left them bare and shivering in the mornings.

Linda went less and less often to Wildwick, for the weather was bad and the days drawing in. Except during the school holidays Saturday was the only day on which she was free to go, but as the days grew shorter it was no use going in the afternoons, for she had to start back early in order to be home before dark, and on Saturday mornings her mother usually found her odd jobs to do in preparation for Sunday. And Sunday at all times of the year was a day apart. Her inner life was folded and laid aside like a summer dress.

The life at Shawn's flowed with the tide of the year. The poor price the corn had fetched usurped in importance the similar summer grumblings over the hay. Apples were sprted and the windfalls sent to the cider-press; fields of stubble were given to the plough; root-crops were dug and stored against the Winter; piles of fouled straw and dung which there had been no time to clean out of cow-sheds and stables during the busy-ness of hay-making and harvesting steamed in the yards; and Andrew Shawn spent more time than ever leaning against gates and smoking his pipe and spitting and staring contentedly into space. There was no real bitterness in him over the prices of hay and corn; he grumbled, as Ellen grumbled over the making of the Christmas puddings and mince-meat, as part of the ritual. Everyone knew that farmers were badly used, and if it hadn't been the hay and the corn it would have been something else. Actually neither hay nor corn had

fetched worse prices than any other year; complaining is as much a part of farming as seed-time and harvest, milking and calving, buying and selling; the owner-farmer grumbles about the taxes, and the tenant farmer grumbles about the rents; the big farmer niggles over shillings, the small farmer over pence; and farmers of the Shawn standing over ha'pence. Always in such poor farms towards the end of the year cheap imported eggs begin to appear on the family table whilst the farm's own eggs are all sold, and if any cream is spared for family use it is the barest cupful once a week for Sunday dinner, and Ellen Shawn was no exception to that rule of anxious thriftiness. Visitors to Shawn's watching the skimmed milk being poured into their tea, and tasting the salt in the inferior shop butter, accused her of * stinginess '.

" Farming folk are always so mean," they said," always counting every ha'penny," but they knew nothing of her year-long struggles to make ends meet, or of the anxiety which racked her every year as Lady Day and Michaelmas drew near. She was always telling herself and Andrew that another fifty acres of land rented off from a big farm like Cross Deep would make all the difference to their profit and loss account, but somehow Shawn's never reached that point at which it would be safe to take on more land. But it was one of her ambitions, together with the bath-room and the bird-fountain or sun-dial, for ' presently'. . . . David also shared this dream of adding to the land farmed by Shawn's, but his own efforts were inadequate beside his father's laziness and his brother's indifference. If his mother had been a man, he often thought, her business enterprise, together with his energy and enthusiasm, might have made a big thing of Shawn's, but as things were their energy and ambition merely flogged a dead horse. Or if Stephen could have cared—but Stephen, preoccupied with his thoughts of Hester, cared less than ever about the destiny of Shawn's.

Ever since that day in early Summer, when he had taken his mother's note up to Hester at the rectory, Stephen had thought of nothing and no one but Hester. When David offered to relieve him of some of the autumn ploughing he refused; he wanted a job at which he could work alone, for then Hester could companion him in his thoughts. He was always seeing her in his mind

as he had seen her that day in the rectory kitchen. She had worn a big blue apron and a white blouse, her sleeves rolled up over strong brown arms. She had been making jam, and as she stood there, stirring the bubbling darkness in the great preserving-pan on the kitchen-range, her black hair falling about her flushed, intent face, he had suddenly thought of her as a witch reading the future in her cauldron. The kitchen had seemed very dark after the bright sunlight outside, and he had been relieved when she had said that they had better not talk there lest Mrs. Tracey should over-hear, and had suggested that they should go outside. He had felt that he would be less shy and confused in the open air. They had gone outside into the kitchen-garden and talked behind a screen of bay-trees. She had plucked a leaf and twisted it in her fingers as she talked, and its sweet spicy scent had risen up between them like an invisible spiral of incense in the thin blue summer air.

At eighteen for the first time in his life he had found himself talking privately to a woman—a young and good-looking woman, and something had stirred in him, so that for the rest of that day he had been obsessed by her; without consciously wanting to think of her she had burned all day and all night at the back of his mind; she had entered into his blood like a fever, and he had not been able to get her out again. He had been terrified that she might refuse to come and work at the farm, yet equally terrified of the daily torment in store for him if she consented.

Her presence at the farm inflamed him intolerably, yet the thought that she might one day leave filled him with panic. He would lie awake at nights thinking of her; he would think of her strong bare arms, and the swell of her breasts under her white blouse, and of her full, moist-looking mouth. He would wonder if anyone had ever kissed her, and what it would be like to kiss a woman and feel the warmth and softness of her pressed close, and thinking of this his skin would seem to be on fire and blades of lightning stab the darkness. At such times he would hate David sleeping peacefully under the sloping ceiling at the other side of the room; and he would hate Hester because she had come between him and David.

But there was no respite from his obsession. He thought of her

endlessly—endlessly. She was with him when he sat with his head pressed against the warm flanks of cows and felt the milk streaming down through his fingers; he thought of her when he knelt weeding the long furrows of the turnip field, tearing up garlic and bind-weed with savage impatient hands; when he drove the plough over the naked fields in the pale sunlight of early Winter it was her body he ravaged. He thought of her when he sweated digging roots and when he froze on bitter mornings in yards in which the mud had become as hard as iron overnight.

Through hay-making, sheep-shearing, and harvesting he had thought of her, of the way she moved, and of the husky note in her voice, and the cling of her hair to the nape of her neck, and the little face she made when she put on her hat before the mirror. When a shorn sheep plunged terrified out of his arms, released from the shears, he would laugh, thinking of how it might be with her after he had had his way with her; when he shot a rabbit he knew the same sadistic satisfaction, thinking of her.

He thought of her when he tramped the frozen or the sodden wintry fields with a gun under his arm and his dog following him unheeded; playing billiards with Donald Thorpe he would forget his cue in a dream of her; she filled his mind so that he saw only her image. When he remembered the string of beads he had tried to give her in the first flush of his infatuation, and her casualness and heartlessness over the little gift, anger and humiliation would mount in him in a hot wave; he nursed the memory as a grudge stored against her; she tormented him and he hated her, and he was always telling himself that one day he would be revenged on her.

Thinking of her in this way he became more silent and morose than ever, for if he could not talk to her he had nothing to say to anyone—not even David. To David least of all, for what did he know of what it was to be burnt up by something beyond the relief of words ? And what he felt for Hester was in the nature of treachery to David who lived in his shadow.

XV: 'GREY FEATHERS——'

THE rowan and holly berries were thick and scarlet that Autumn, and everyone said that there would be ' a hard Winter '. By the end of October the trees stood stark, and great gales drove in from the sea. Grey feathers of snow drifted down from heavy yellow skies, and the earth was frost-locked and rigid as though it would never again yield to warmth or any soft influx oflife.

Donald still stopped in at Shawn's on his way home to gossip with Stephen and David and to bring Linda a hot-house flower or a tiny bunch of grapes, and Linda was still delighted with the pretence that he called in specially to see her, but since that day at Wildwick when he had told her about Garry and his dreams of going to sea, she no longer believed in it; friendliness, she knew, was not the same thing as friendship. Stephen and David were friendly with a number of people in Wildwick, but they had no friends there—not in the special way in which Donald and Garry were friends, and Stephen and David, and as she and Rose had been, and anything less than that did not matter much.

Usually when Donald called he stayed to have a cup of tea before starting out again, but there was a day in November when he would not stop for tea.

" There's a dance at the life-boat mission-hall," he explained, " and Nan Collett's asked me to go along with her."

" I thought you and she didn't get on none too well ? " Stephen said.

" That's true enough," Donald admitted, " but all the lads she cares about'll be at sea, and it's the dancin' she's thinkin' of, not who goes along with her—even a landlubber like me'll do when it's a matter o' dancin', I reckon."

Ellen looked up from the bread she was slicing to remark, tartly, " I'd have more pride than that, I would. I wouldn't be made a convenience of. If anyone didn't want me——"

Andrew, from his wheel-back chair in the chimney corner spat into the fire and broke in on her with a laugh. " That's where you're wrong, missis. It's allus the unwillin' ones that's most fascinatin'."

Ellen made a short contemptuous noise in her throat. " Oh, ii it ? If I'd been the unwilling kind we should never have been married! Some men have to be pushed into marriage! "

Andrew winked at Donald. " They ain't allus so fascinatin' once you've wed 'em, lad, so take care! "

The boy laughed, confusedly. " Oh, there's no chance of me and Nan gettin' wed. It's only a sea-farin' lad as '11 do for her."

" It's a great thing to know your own mind! " This from Hester crouching before the fire making toast and speaking out of shadows. She looked over her shoulder at David as she said it.

David went on dangling a piece of string for the amusement of a kitten. He replied without looking up, " That's all very well, so long as the other person is of the same mind, I reckon."

There was a moment's self-conscious silence, in which Donald got up from the corner of the table, where he had been sitting with the remark that he must be getting along. Stephen said that he would walk down to the gate with him, and they went out together.

Hester rose and set a dish of toast on the table, turned down her sleeves, and asked if there was anything else she could do. " I'd like to get away early tonight, if you don't mind," she explained, " me and Elsie Carter have been offered places in the Arkwrights' waggon to drive over to Wildwick for the dance."

" That'll be nice for you," Ellen said, " leave the washing-up till the morning."

" Thanks ever so. It's not often we get a chance of a bit of fun in this part of the world, goodness knows! " She helped herself to tea, and sipping it, remarked after a few moments, " I reckon Nan Collett must be hard up to ask Donald to go along with her. I'd sooner go alone and risk being a wallflower! "

" What's wrong with Donald, then ? " David demanded.

Hester shrugged. " Oh, I dunno. Just that he's a poor thing, to my mind. I dunno what you and Stephen see in him—Stephen specially."

David flushed with anger. " Why Stephen specially ? "

" Well, there's not many people Stephen likes, and I should ha' thought Donald Thorpe was the last person in the world he'd want hanging' around. But then Stephen always was a queer

one—if you don't mind me saying so. Always speak your mind, I say."

She spread butter thickly on a hunk of toast, whilst Ellen watched her anxiously, grieving for the extravagance as much as for the criticism of Stephen.

" How do you mean, queer ? " she asked, whilst she thought, " servants are always the same, just because it's not their money they're wasting. And I ought not to let her talk about Stephen like that."

Hester replied with her mouth full of toast, and a little excited at her daring, and by the fact that she had made David angry, " Well, kind of stand-offish, and hard to know. Not that it's anything against him, of course."

David picked up the kitten and held it against his face to hide the hot colour he felt beating there. " He thinks a lot of you, anyhow," he said.

' " That's true enough," Ellen supplemented, and turning her back to the table to exclude David and Linda from the conversation, asked in a low voice, " No chance of you and Stephen making a match of it, I suppose f Everyone knows he's set on you, and I'd like to see him settle down with a nice, sensible, domesticated girl like you." She added a mental rider that she hoped when Hester was doing her own housekeeping that she would be more economical with her own things than she was with her mistress's. But taken all round Stephen might do worse than settle down with Hester; she was a good worker and a good plain cook, and a respectable girl with decent hard-working parents.

Hester gulped down the rest of her tea and wiped her mouth on the back of her hand. " Oh, it'll be a while yet before I settle down with anyone," she evaded, " I must fly now, if you don't mind."

On his way back from seeing Donald off, Stephen met her hurrying down the path between the ponds. He stood still blocking her way.

" You're goin' off early tonight, and in a mighty hurry! "

" I'm going over to Wildwick, to the dance."

" Who you goin' with ? "

" What's that to do with you ? "

" Only that I was goin' to offer to take you myself.*'

** A bit late in the day, aren't you ? "

44 1 didn't know about it till tonight. The first I heard of it was from Donald. I'd ha' asked you before if I'd a known. Let 'me take you, Hester."

44 I'm going with Elsie Carter and the Arkwrights."

44 Can't I come along with them ? You can't have too many fellers at a dance."

44 1 bet you couldn't dance no more than fly ! "

44 I bet I could—with you I "

He stood very close to her on the narrow path; he had not been so close to her and alone with her since that summer day at the rectory. Her face was a pale blur in the starlight. His heart began to race with the sense of her closeness and their aloneness.

44 Let me come along, too," he pleaded, and reached out and touched her hands in his urgency.

She stood silent a moment, thinking. Then she said,44 On one condition, then."

" Anything you like." He drew closer to her in his excitement.

She laughed softly, excited as he was, but for a different reason.

44 That you make David come along, too."

Anger leapt up in him at that like tongues of flame. 44 What's the use f David wouldn't want to come—he doesn't like girls—or dancing."

44 He'd come if *you* asked him to. He'd do anything for you."

He heard the challenge in her voice. He had a sensation of waves of fire going over him, wave after wave, waves within waves. Wlien he spoke it was difficult for him to keep a tremor out of his voice. 44 All right. But I've got a condition, too."

44 Oh, really f " She tilted her head a little, in the way she had when she was being mocking, and he saw the curve of her chin and the line of her throat.

44 Yes. You've got to let me kiss you—now ! "

She wanted to say,44 ft's like your cheek, Stephen Shawn," but she had no chance, for without waiting for an answer he pulled «er to him, clumsily, and was blind for a few moments with the

release of the pent-up longing of months. Hester was a big girl, and strong, but not as strong as his desire, and in a dark world beyond thought he could not spare her.

It was so that David and Linda, who had gone out to inspect the thickness of the ice on the Little Pond, found them, two figures standing locked together under a tree.

Linda's shrill voice coming from the Secret Path at the other side of the hedge, " Look, David, see—it doesn't give——" startled them and they broke apart, Stephen shaken with spent violence, Hester crying with rage because for a few moments lib passion had carried her with it against her will. Had they remained together David and Linda could not have seen their faces; as it was they were revealed, white and guilty in the wan light.

David grabbed Linda and drew her down under the hedg<- " Sh! Pretend we haven't seen them," he whispered, and thn crept back along the path that skirted the frozen pond. When tluv regained the opening in the hedge David straightened himself anc pulled Linda up beside him.

She looked up at him. " It was Hester and Stephen, wasn'r it?"

" I don't know. It don't matter. Sweethearts mustn't be spied on. Let's go round the other way and try the duck-pond."

Linda was silent, but she thought, " David knows it was Hester and Stephen and he was ashamed."

She had an impression of the two white startled faces and the sound of Hester crying. More than ever she thought she would be a nun when she grew up. Her heart beat heavily and the old siek fear mounted in her.

She pressed close to David's side. As they were crossing the stock-yard, slippery with frost, she said, taking his hand, ** I don't want ever to be sweethearts with anyone, do you, David ? "

She felt his fingers tighten on hers. ** No. I hate it," he said, « all that——"

He had not meant to say that; he had meant to go on being the tactfully non-committal big brother talking to the little sister; but it came out of him, involuntarily, out of his own shocked disgust.

Stephen and that great lummox of a girl who was always looking at him, David. The child spoke his own thought, " I don't want to see Stephen at supper-time."

He pressed her fingers again in silent endorsement. They came down to the edge of the pond, walking cautiously over the ridges of frozen mud, and tested the ice by putting one foot on it* it cracked a little as they pressed down on it.

[44] It should be all right by Sunday," David said.

He put an arm round her shoulder as they turned away. " It's a lovely night—don't let's go in yet—if you're not cold."

[44] I'm not cold." She could not feel cold with David's arm about her.

[44] Let's go for a sharp walk over the heath, then."

[44] We'll be late for supper, then Mother will go on."

" Never mind; it will give Stephen a chance to get out of the way. I'll take the blame. We'll try not to be late back."

They went out on to the road through the stock-yard gate and walked rapidly, with long strides, and arm in arm, in the direction of Wildwick.

Until they reached the bottom of the lane they were enclosed by dark hedges; at the end of the lane they struck the road winding across the heath, and the world opened out. There was a smell of the sea and^pf dead bracken on the cold air, and a stinging wind. The sky seemed closer on the heath and as thick with stars as a wall of jasmine in full flower. Frozen puddles at the side of the road gleamed like swords with the glint of the stars on them. They walked so fast that they had a sense of being borne along on the wind, and their blood tingled with energy and invigoration.

[44] Isn't it lovely ? " Linda cried, as they strode along.

" Such a lovely clean cold wind," David answered her, and they laughed out of the pure exhilaration of well-being.

" It makes you want to shout! " said the child, and they began to run, because they could not walk fast enough to keep pace with the rushing wind and the electric energy of the sparkling air.

Presently they slowed down, glowing with warmth, and walked [w]ith their arms round each other's waist.

" Let's sing something," said Linda.

David began the first thing that came into his head.

" One man went to mow,
Went to mow a meadow;
One man and a dog
Went to mow a meadow;
Two men went to mow,
Went to mow a meadow,
Two men, one man, and a dog
Went to mow a meadow;
Three men went to mow——"

They went on until they got to ten, and then decided that they had had enough of it, and changed to the Raggle-Taggle Gipsies, at Linda's suggestion. It made her think of Rose, but she could think of Rose now without sorrow. Rose had made a separate, private life of her own and was no more to do with her. She did not want anyone in the world now but David, whom she had loved in the beginning. It was better to be as she and David were, not dreaming lovely untrue things in a make-believe Hollow Land, but striding over the real earth, wanting to laugh and shout, not dream and cry, being glad to be alive, instead of seeing a son of sunset sadness in everything, the way it was with you when you cared for people in the special way. . . .

At the cross-roads the lights of Wildwick huddled like a cluster of fallen stars, and the harbour lights winked red and green over a black sea.

" I suppose we must turn back," David said, and she heard the sigh in his voice, and knew that like herself he had the feeling of wanting to go on and on as though forever. Striding through that cold dean darkness was like having broken through the crust of the world in which you were shut in every-day life and having climbed up on top amongst the winds and stars.

Swinging back along the frozen road towards Flaydering the lights and the shadowy hulk of an approaching vehicle pressed I forward through the blackness, and there was a sound of singing. As they drew closer what had been red blurs in the distance were

revealed as a medley of Japanese lanterns, and they saw a crowd of people, men and women, seated on chairs and boxes under the hood of a covered farm-waggon.

" Looks like it was the Arkwright crowd," David said, peering up into the confusion of faces.

Suddenly a face thrust forward beside the driver, and a woman's voice called out, " It's David Shawn, isn't it ? Here—let's stop a minute—I want to speak to him——"

The heavy, lumbering cart-horse was reined in, the singing broke up into a babble of voices and laughter, and in a moment Hester Wray had scrambled out from under the hood and swung down over the front near-side wheel into the road. She was hatless and a flimsy dress showed below her coat.

She peered into David's and Linda's faces. " I thought it was you two, but I couldn't be quite sure. We're all off to the dance over at Wildwick. I told Stephen to ask you to come with us, David. Do come! "

David asked, surprised, " Stephen's not coming, is he ? He didn't say anything about it to me."

" He wanted to come, but I said I didn't want him without you came, too. Do come. It's going to be fun."

She laid a hand on his arm in her eagerness and drew close to him. David stiffened, involuntarily, and moved ever so slightly away from her. " Dancing's not in my line. Besides, we got to be gettin' back to supper, Linda an' me. But I'll tell Stephen—if he's not on the way already! "

Hester tossed her head and stepped back towards the waggon. She said, with her hands on the shafts, " You needn't bother. If it comes to that—Stephen's not in *my* line! "

She clambered up the wheel and disappeared under cover, and the waggon rolled on, like an old ship with all canvas spread, and a cargo of lights and laughter. There was the crunch of wheels and the plop-plop of the horse's hooves on the iron-hard road, and a sound of singing receding into the distance.

David drew Linda's arm through his and tucked her hand into his coat-pocket. " They're gay enough," he said as they strode on.

Linda said, " Hester shouldn't have said that about Stephen—

after she let him kiss her.[0] And she thought, " It was funny letting Stephen kiss her when it's David she likes best. P'raps she didn't want to. P'raps that's why she was crying and looked ashamed when she saw that David and me had seen her."

David was silent. More than ever now he dreaded meeting Stephen.

They did not sing or shout or run on their way backj the dark, furtive outer world from which they had fled had broken in upon them, and suddenly they knew that they were tired and cold and that they would be late for supper.

XVI: 'AND BLIND EYES'

WHEN David and Linda came in from their walk on the night of the Wildwick dance they found their mother sitting alone beside the lamp with her mending-basket on the table beside her, and a pile of socks in her lap. Supper was laid for three only.

As they entered she took a handkerchief from the pocket of her black afternoon apron, blew her nose in the quick, impatient way she had—chuff-chuff-chuff, with a sniff at the end—and regarded them with feverish, tearful eyes.

"I'm sorry if we're a bit late—" David began, but she cut in Ion him with a storm of tearful resentment.

"A bit late indeed! A nice thing, all of you going off and leaving me! On a night like this, too, with the wind howling like a pack of wolves, enough to drive anyone mad! Every blessed one of you trapesing off and leaving me alone! I'm sick of the whole lot of you! A fat lot of thanks I get for all I do in this place, slaving from morning till night, and not one of you giving me a hand's turn or a heart's thought! I can sit here by myself, can I ? Well, nnc of these days you'll all get the surprise of your lives. I'll clear Dut and leave the lot of you, and then you'll be sorry, and maybe wish you'd been a bit more considerate! "

She blew her nose again and dabbed angrily at her eyes. " You'll pc sorry when I'm gone," she repeated.

David asked, bewildered, "But where's Father—and Stephen ? pic didn't say he was going to the dance——"

" He hasn't gone to the dance—more's the pity! He's gone to rhe pub with your father, that's where he's gone. And where have you two been I should like to know ? "

"We just went for a little walk," David explained. " It was ^uch a nice night. We didn't know you'd be alone——"

"Oh, don't stand there making excuses! Your supper's in the bvcn, and you can get it for yourselves—I'm sick of waiting on pverybody hand and foot."

Linda looked up at David and pressed his arm. " I'll get it," \he whispered, and tip-toed out of the room.

David hung his coat up on the peg behind the wooden partition

between the door and the fireplace, then came back to his mother.

He said, " Truly I wouldn't a gone off if I'd a known you was to be alone," he pleaded, " but I didn't think Stephen was goin' out—he never does 'cept to go over to Donald at Wildwick of a Saturday night. And it's rare for Dad to be goin' to the pub of a week-night."

Ellen rested an elbow on the table and shaded her eyes with her hand. She said, in a voice choked with tears, ** I can't for the life of me think what came over them. Stephen came in in a tearing rage from seeing Donald off, and saying he was fed-up with everything, and was going out to get drunk." She pressed her wet handkerchief to her eyes for a moment. " A slip of a lad like that, saying such a thing to his father and me, if you please! But instead of correcting him as any decent father would, what must your father do but say it was a good idea, and he'd go along with him! " She looked up at David with eyes bright with indignation,

David's heart ached for her. He said, " I wouldn't worry about them. Maybe they were only sayin' it. You know what Stephen is when he's in a temper."

" I'll temper him when he comes in, the impudent little puppy! " She jabbed a darning-needle into one of Stephen's socks and went out to the back-kitchen to scold Linda for being so long getting the supper out of the oven.

" The dishes are so hot, and I can't find a cloth to lift them with," the child explained, timidly.

" Why couldn't you come and ask ? " Ellen demanded, irritably.

" I didn't like to," Linda murmured.

" Didn't like to! Well, come along now, for goodness' sake let's get supper over—it's waited about long enough! "

Whilst the three of them sat eating shepherd's-pie in the farir kitchen, Stephen and his father sat in a corner of the public bai of the' Four-in-Hand ' drinking whisky. If either had been alone he would have drunk beer, but this was a special occasion.

When his father had volunteered to go and get drunk witk him Stephen had been indifferent. It made no difference to him whether he went to the * Four-in-Hand [f] alone or with someone}

f his father chose to walk along with him and drink in the same >ar he could not stop him, but he had no intention of talking to iim. He had done one thing that night which he had never done >efore, and it had filled him with anger and humiliation, and now ic was going to do another thing he had never done before in order to forget it.

" What's amiss, son ? " his father had asked as they had blundered their way across the stack-yard to the road.

"Nothing," Stephen had answered curtly, " I'm fed-up, that's all."

He had resented his father's curiosity; they had nothing to say to each other at the best of times; his father knew that as well as he did, so why the devil couldn't he leave him alone now ?

" Folks don't get fed-up for nothing," his father had persisted, f* and when a young feller like you says he's fed-up, and is goin' to [get drunk, it's generally a woman as has upset his apple-cart."

Stephen was silent. If his father imagined that on the strength lof having a few drinks together he could pave the way for a heart-|to-heart talk he would find he was mistaken.

" Women are queer cattle," Andrew had said thoughtfully as they turned into the lane.

Stephen still making no reply, they had walked the rest of the way to the ' Four-in-Hand ' in silence.

Injustice to Andrew Shawn it should be recorded that when he had expressed it as his opinion that it was a damned good idea to join his son in getting drunk, he had done so with the thought that if the boy was going to make a fool of himself it was better his father should be with him. Moreover, he had been sympathetic; he knew what it was to be fed-up and to feel that it was impossible to sit at home listening to the complaining of a nagging, querulous woman, as the only alternative to going to bed. He knew as well as Stephen that they had as little—or even less—to say to each other as most fathers and sons, but misery sometimes opened the heart and loosened the tongue. . . .

All this had stirred in Andrew Shawn with the impulse to support his son in his quest For forgetfulness of whatever was worrying him, but once in the warm and mellow and genial atmosphere of the familiar bar the spirit of adventure had entered into him.

He derived a pleasant satisfaction from the memory of the outraged look on Ellen's face when he had announced his intention of accompanying Stephen; to be going down to the * Four-in-Hand' on a week-night was itself so unusual as to constitute an adventure; it was an assertion of independence, and for once he had somebody on his side, and that somebody none other than his eldest son.

It pleased him, too, that Stephen should seek consolation at the * Four-in-Hand '; it was the natural refuge for a man when he was fed-up, particularly when he was fed-up with women; he was glad that the boy was recognising that fact early in his manhood; it proved that his son was a proper man. It was in this spirit of approval and adventure that he had ordered whiskies for himself and his son instead of the beer of more ordinary occasions.

The ' Four-in-Hand ' was as quiet as usual during the week. A few labourers leaned on the bar drinking beer and engaged in very elementary political discussion with each other and with Mr. Pinker, the landlord, who presided in shirt-sleeves and with his usual empty amiability which consisted of never committing himself to any side of any argument.

" Aye, there's something in that," he would say when required to endorse an opinion, and, " I shouldn't wonder," and thus maintain a friendly neutrality which kept him on the right side of everyone, whilst at the same time presenting him in the light of a reasonable man open to conversion.

In the course of many years of bar-tending Mr. Pinker had long ago learned that nobody really wishes to argue, but only to state his own opinions without contradiction.

Two youths were amusing themselves throwing darts at a board fastened to the wall at one end of the bar; a bored-looking commercial traveller who was spending a night in the house sat in a corner sipping a brandy-and-soda and sombrely watching the youths. A shabby bowler hat lay on the table in front of him like an insignia of office. There was a moment's pause in the hum of talk as Andrew and Stephen entered and everyone stared at the gaunt, genial-looking farmer and his sullen, weedy son.

" Evenin', Mr. Pinker," Andrew said cheerfully, pushing his

hat to the back of his head and blinking in the light. " House quiet tonight, eh ?" He stood a moment with his hands in his pockets looking around for acquaintances. He nodded to several of the men, then moved across to the bar.

" Evenin', Mr. Shawn. Not often we have the pleasure of seeing you here of a week-day." Mr. Pinker smiled with a friendly curiosity at Stephen, who had dropped down into the corner opposite the commercial traveller and was fumbling with a crumpled packet of cigarettes and feeling hot and uncomfortable.

When they had taken in the surprising fact that Andrew Shawn was there * of a week-night', and with his son, the labourers resumed their conversation with each other, but a little self-consciously, a key lower.

Andrew, pleased with the impression of his unexpected entry with Stephen, lounged against the bar with his thumbs stuck into his waistcoat and declared, with a touch of bravado, " It don't do to get into a groove, Mr. Pinker."

" Aye, there's something in that," Mr. Pinker affirmed. " A couple o' bitters, Mr. Shawn ? "

It was the cue for which Andrew had been waiting. " Not on your life! " he said, loudly, " a couple o' good stiff whiskies is what me and my son is needin'! " He glanced round at the community with a challenging smile.

" Celebratin' summat, Shawn ? " one of the men asked.

" Maybe," Andrew replied, enigmatically, and turned to wink at his son.

Stephen pretended not to notice.

When Andrew turned back to the bar he saw Mrs. Pinker, plump, friendly, magnificent in black satin with heavy amber beads, waddling along behind the counter.

" Evenin', Mr. Shawn. Cold tonight. Winter fair set in on us now, and *no* mistake! "

" Aye," said Andrew. " Have a drink on me and warm yeself up a bit."

Mrs. Pinker beamed. " I don't mind if I do, thanking you kindly." She glanced in the mirror behind the array of bottles and smiled at herself, pleased.

" What'll y'ave ? "

" A nice port'll do me," said Mrs. Pinker.

She smiled across at Andrew from the back of the bar as he picked up his change.

" My best respects," she said, raising her glass to him.

Andrew solemnly raised his forefinger to his forehead. " Many *appy returns," he responded and, pocketing his change, carried the whiskies and a small bottle of soda-water over to the corner where Stephen sat. He sank down on to the bench beside his son and poured a little of the soda-water into each of the glasses, then, " Here's hoping," he said, raising his own glass and looking encouragingly at Stephen.

Stephen raised his glass. " Cheerioh," he muttered, and took a sip. He found it difficult not to make a wry face. The stuff tasted like medicine, he thought. He found it very hard to believe that people drank whisky because they really liked it.

His father took a long gulp, sucked his moustache appreciatively, and leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction and an air of complete relaxation.

" Whisky's a good thing," he said, " a very good thing. Especially," he glanced slily at his son, " especially in a world where there's women to plague a man."

Stephen said nothing. He was picturing himself sitting in the Arkwrights' waggon with Hester pressed close against his side. She would have had to have sat close to him, he thought, whether she liked it or not. On the way back, perhaps, after they had danced together, she might have melted towards himj she would be warm and a little excited from dancing; she might have let him kiss her again, and that time willingly. He had felt cold, and somehow * dead ', when he had set out for the * Four-in-Hand ' a little while ago, but with that thought his blood began to flow warmly again. He sat up, his elbows on the table, one hand unconsciously fingering his glass. His thoughts raced on with his quickening blood. Perhaps then she wouldn't have said the cruel ugly things she had said to him beside the pond, when David and Linda had blundered upon them. Tomorrow she would probably say more hateful things to him; or perhaps she would not

speak to him at all; he wasn't sure which was worse. David wouldn't say anything; and Linda—she wouldn't understand; she was only a kid; it didn't matter about her; but now every time David looked at him and at Hester he would remember—and wonder. The hot tide of his blood ebbed with that thought . . . He took another and bigger sip at the whisky.

His father had finished his first whisky and started on his second before Stephen was half way through his. He was growing talkative.

" This place has been a Godsend to me, these many years," he confided, " your mother's a good woman, but she's got a bitter tongue. A very bitter tongue. She'd find fault with God Almighty himself, she would. A good woman's mighty hard for a natural man to live with. Your grandmother now—that was a great old lady. Your mother'd say she had all the faults under the sun. Just because she wasn't house-proud, mind you. Just because she liked a bit o' comfort and wasn't always frettin' and worryin' after things. My poor old mother . . ." He gazed with a pleasant alcoholic melancholy into his glass. " Worth her weight in gold, she was. But that mother o' yours, if ever she gets to heaven she'll be up and polishing the throne of God A'Mighty himself, so she will, as sure as God made little apples."

He finished his second whisky and looked inquiringly at his son. " Drink up, lad, or ye'll be sober before ye know where y'are, and s'bad thing to be sober in a—mad—world."

Stephen gulped down the remainder of his whisky, and inquired, a little fuddled, " Who said it was a mad world ? " He felt a little sick and the room seemed to be growing very hot and smoky.

[44] Donst think s'mad world ? Course s'mad world. Lissen—me. You work—wot for ? T'earn the money to buy bread to keep up strength to work t' earn money to buy bread. So on. Wasser sense of it ? Mad. Better drink—forget about it."

He rose unsteadily and went over to the bar and ordered two more whiskies. He carried them back to the table and sank down heavily beside Stephen.

" We'd better be going," Stephen said. He felt that if he did

not soon get out into the open air he would be sick. Mr. Tinker's bland face swam in a haze.

" Nonsense," he heard his father saying, " night's young yet. Better here than sitting up home listenin' your mother naggm' and scoldin'. Wass she get out of life, frettin' and fussin' ? There's no peace in such a woman. Must always be doin' somethin'. * Why don't ye read a paper, Andrew ?' * Why don't ye go and mend that fence ?' Allus put off till tomorrow what ye might do today, I ses. Tomorrow never comes, says she. All the better, ses I, then we needn't worry. Sittin' there starin' at nothin', says she. But I seen more wonders starin' at nothin' than she'll ever see tearin' around with her everlastin' doin', doin'. Ye can't see pictures in the fire if yc're ever-lastin' pokin' at it. Ye'11 never get on in life, says she. Ain't ye got enough to eat, and more, says I, ain't ye got more clothes than ye'll ever wear out in a year o' Sundays ? Ain't ye got a roof over yer head and a feather-bed to rest yer bones on f What more d'ye want, I says to her ? But it's the woman of her to be wantin' and wantin'. S'the same wi' lovin'j they don't never have enough; they can't let a man be; they can't sit quiet in themselves."

At the farm the mother sat sipping her after-supper cocoa and talking to the younger son. Linda was in bed; the supper things were cleared away and stood piled up in the back kitchen for Hester's attention in the morning; a few charred fragments of logs still smouldered in the well of the fireplace, as though they too lingered until the grandfather clock in the hall should strike ten, when they would collapse into a grey ash of oblivion.

" It's not that your father hasn't been a good husband to me all these years," Ellen was saying, " nobody can say he hasn't been that, but a man that's got no ambition and takes no pride in himself is hard for a natural woman to live with. I've no business to be talking to you like this about your father, I know, but disappointment eats into a woman's heart. It takes the heart out of a woman, disappointment after disappointment, year in and year out. I thought the world of him when I married him. I reckoned we'd make something of Shawn's between us. I'd always wanted to be a farmer's wife. I was fond of the country, and I always

liked housekeeping better than school-teaching. I took such a pride in keeping everything nice, but I might as well let it be a pig-sty 'the way that slatternly old mother of his kept it in her time, for all the notice your father would take. Look at him now, with a nice home, going off to the pub, and encouraging his own son to grow up like him. Oh, it takes the heart out of anyone, I tell you. Life's just eating and sleeping and working, day in, day out. There's no reason to it. I used to think it was God's will, and that there was some sort of method in all the madness, but—I don't know. And it's a terrible thing when even believing in God can't help you any more."

David was silent. He knew that nothing he could say could help her. He thought, too, that she did not want comforting, but only to pour out some of the bitterness that had been stored in her through all the long lonely years. You could not help people in their loneliness, it seemed; living was a lonely business.

Upstairs Linda lay listening to the wind that came howling in from the sea, and thinking of the boats rocking out there in the darkness and Donald grieving because he could not spend his life in that way. She thought of the dance at Wildwick, and streamers of coloured paper, and paper hats like those that came out of Christmas crackers, and music and lights, and people laughing; she pictured it all as a super Sunday school-treat, with all the glamour of going on till midnight. Then the people who came from a distance would drive away in waggons like the Arkwrights', with kitchen chairs in them for people to sit on, and Japanese lanterns swinging under the hood, and someone playing a concertina, and everyone singing and being happily tired. . . . She thought of Stephen kissing Hester beside the Little Pond, and of the hardness of Hester's face when she had stood beside the waggon and declared that she didn't want Stephen; and of the misery of her mother's face when she and David had come in and found her sitting alone; and of David's dumb helpless pity, all through the silent, sorrowful little meal the three of them had had together, and of her mother's asking questions about the farm-work, every ncfw and then, for the sake of something to say;

and of how loudly the clock in the hall had ticked in the long silences between them, and how great had seemed the sudden crunch of a falling log in the fireplace, so that they all started; and of how her mother had picked at her food, with no heart to eat, and how she and David hadn't been able to help eating a great deal, in spite of feeling sorry. She thought of Stephen and her father at the * Four-in-Hand', Stephen thinking about Hester, and her father sitting smoking and drinking with his legs stuck out before him and not minding much about anything.

She heard the clock in the hall strike ten, and there was a scrape of chairs on the brick floor of the kitchen, and a bolting of doors. David and her mother were coming up to bed. She heard their soft tread on the stairs and saw the faint gleam of their candlelight under her door. They would leave the door of the back kitchen on the latch for Stephen and her father; they would both lie awake in the darkness listening for them to come home, her mother alone in the big bed, David in the narrow bed under the sloping eaves of * the boys' room '. They wouldn't know that she also lay awake staring into the darkness and listening. They would expect her to be sound asleep long ago; it was no business of hers what her father and Stephen did; nothing was her business except getting on with her lessons and doing as she was told; all that was going on around her was nothing to do with her; though she was a part of all that life she had no part in it; thinking of this the deep loneliness of childhood closed over her once more.

Presently she dozed a little, and after a long time which seemed only a little time, started up at the sound of strange noises blowing on the wind and mounting it, as a song mounts its accompaniment. She laid wide awake, her heart hurrying with excitement, and even her blood seeming to listen. Gradually she became aware that it was a sound of singing carried on the wind and drawing nearer.

" For tonight we'll merry, merry be,
For tonight we'll merry, merry be,
For tonight we'll merry, merry be,
And tomorrow we'll be sober." •

She scrambled out of bed and peered out into the darkness. She saw a bobbing red light and two shadowy figures.

At the rickyard gate the red light came to rest on the gate-post. She heard her father's voice roaring huskily, " Whoa, laddie! Steady there! Thass th' ticket! " Then the gate swung open, and by the wavering light of the hurricane lamp they had stolen from a night-watchman, she saw her father and brother swaying arm in arm across the yard, stumbling on the cobbles, and laughing.

When they were close under the house she heard her father shouting, " Mustn't make lot o' noise, laddie. Muss remember sleeping house." Then Stephen leading another song—Stephen who so seldom even whistled.

" One more riv-er, one more river to Jordan——"

They made a good deal of noise in the back kitchen in their attempts to put the chain on the door, then there was the creak of the back stairs as Stephen groped his way up to David, and the sound of her father blundering up the front stairs to her mother.

She heard the door open before he reached it, and her mother's shrill voice, " This is a nice way to come home, I must say! " And her father's thick laugh. " Thass all right. Thass quite all right, my girl."

Then the slam of a door, and silence.

XVII: WINTER

THAT initiation at the * Four-in-Hand ' was the beginning of a new chapter for Stephen. He had no desire to repeat the experience of getting drunk—the night's exhilaration did not seem to him worth the morning's sickness, but a bar could be, as his father had said, a refuge; it was better sitting there in an atmosphere of freedom and friendliness than killing time at home listening to his mother's ever-lasting complaining about the price of things and his father's inefficiency and inconsiderateness, and waiting for the grandfather clock to strike ten; it was better than sitting staring into the fire and seeing pictures of Hester looking hardly at him and softly at David; it was better than meeting the silent questioning of David's eyes, and the candid wonder in Linda's. And with a little alcohol in him he had a sense of release, a relaxing of that tightness which bound him at other times and made him reserved and withdrawn.

He would take the pony and trap, or borrow a bicycle, and drive or ride over to Wildwick, to spend the long dark winter evenings with Donald Thorpe at the * Fisherman's Arms.' He liked the rough sound of men's voices, and their jagged laughter The * Fisherman's Arms' was a house of men, whereas the farm was a house of women, with the watching eyes of his mother and Hestei and Linda. Merely putting the heath between himself and the farm afforded him a sense of escape. He never invited David to accompany him; he enjoyed going out alone into the darkness to the refuge he had discovered for himself. Whenever he encounter^ Hester's cold eyes and sullen contempt he would tell himself that it didn't matter, he knew a way of forgetting her, and the though! would afford him a subtle satisfaction and feeling of triumph.

Nan Collett was the barmaid at the * Fisherman's Arms', an<l she liked Stephen Shawn for the same reasons that she was impatient of Donald Thorpe. Nan was fond of saying that she * liked a man to be a man '. By which she meant that she liked men to I* like her father and brothers, with rough voices and broad shoulder^ hearty drinkers and standing ' no nonsense' from women; they must be hard and relentless, with nothing soft about them. Shf had no patience with women who complained when their husbani

struck them; she herself would have fought like a wild cat if any man had raised a hand to her, but she would have respected him for that assertion of his strength and power. " A man ought to be the master," she would say, and knew in her heart that she could never love any man who could not master her; she was not prepared to submit meekly to any man, but if there should come a man who could make her do what he wanted against her will she knew that in spite of all her resistance something in her would exult. She could not understand why all the other Wildwick women and girls raved about Garry Payne; she thought him * effeminate,' with his fair hair and his slender body; she was indifferent to good looks in a man; that sort of thing was for women; a man must be strong, above all things, both in body and will. She liked a man to live a hard and dangerous life, as her father and brothers lived it on the sea. Stephen Shawn attracted her because of a kind of dark, gaunt strength about him, and because of his dourness and silence—and his apparent indifference to her. It I was a pity he did not follow the sea for a living, she thought—he would have looked ' a proper man' in jersey and breeches and sea-boots. But at least farming was hard work, even if it wasn't hazardous like following the sea; it was a pity he was so set on a great lump of a girl like Hester Wray; he ought, she thought, to have a girl with some spirit, like herself—a girl who would tell him to go to hell when she felt like it, and who would respect him if he half-killed her for saying it. And Stephen Shawn would half-kill anyone if he were in a rage, she thought, but she also thought that he would half-kill anyone with passion too if he fell in love; and the fact that he did not respond to the challenge in her eyes when she smiled at him delighted and excited her, and she had sufficient insight, born of her deep pleasure in the maleness of the full-blooded male, to suspect that Stephen was not as indifferent to her as his manner would indicate.

In which she was right. Stephen was perfectly well aware that Nan Collett of the flashing eyes and insolent mouth was interested In him, and something in him answered the unspoken challenge °f her. Like her he was impatient of the easy conquest; like her he wanted power; he guessed that she would bring a violence

like his own to any passion she might know. And because of this she attracted him as he attracted her, and he enjoyed the sense of being attracted to her because it, too, was a form of revenge upon Hester, He knew, also, that it was his apparent indifference to her, his remoteness, which made him interesting to her. And he wanted her interest—as compensation for Hester's indifference. He felt as Nan herself felt, and as he guessed she felt, that he and she were two of a kind. There would be provocation in Nan's resistance to him, he thought, whereas in Hester's there was only frustration and exasperation. It was better to have something in oneself stabbed to death with hatred, he thought, than frozen to death by indifference. Violence he could understand, but not apathy.

He said very little to Nan when she served him with his drinks, yet he always left the [c] Fisherman's Arms' filled with much more than a transient alcoholic new courage. In some subtle way Nan fanned the flame of fight in him. Without ever having spoken to her of Hester he felt that she was on his side, and that she would respect him for his refusal to allow Hester to defeat him. And there was a hardness about her which afforded him relief from the femininity which through Hester and his mother and Linda brooded over Shawn's and made it, in his obsession, intolerable to him She obtruded no femininity upon the * Fisherman's Arms' as a house of men; men did not moderate their stories or abstain from the •coarse epithet in her presences because she did not demand respect from them as a woman, they respected her with the same respect that men mete out to each other* she stood level with them.

David was torn between relief that Stephen didn't ask him to join him on his evening excursions, and being bitterly hurt that Stephen no longer had need of him. Allegiance to his mother, and pity for her, demanded that he should stay at home with her, but he was bewildered by Stephen's breaking-away, because for him there was still no one but Stephen, and he could not imagine that there ever would be. He could not sleep until Stephen came in at night; he would lie awake listening and waiting, but when Stephen came into their room he would pretend to be asleep, because he knew that his brother would resent 'being waited for,

knd he was fearful of intruding upon the new privacy in which (Stephen had lately chosen to wrap himself.

. Sometimes Stephen would come and bend over his bed, asking, I" Are you awake, David ? "

. Then David would pretend to waken slowly from sleep, and Lit up in bed and listen to Stephen's gossip of the people he had seen [it Wildwick.

" She's a handsome bit, that Nan Collett," he said once. " She'd bot a red blouse thing on tonight and her black hair all crimped up P—bright as a poppy she was, but I reckon it's paint makes her mouth ko red."

" She's hard," David said.

" Maybe. But not the way Hester is. She's got a great laugh on her. She might tear your eyes out if she'd a mind to, but she'd not sulk like t'other sour-faced sow. It ud be all over when her rage was spent and she'd be friends again. She's more like a man, ivhen you come to think of it, for all her littleness and her red mouth. She's got a man's kind of hardness, not a woman's sulky spitefulness like Hester."

*' I reckon a woman should be a soft thing," David said, thoughtfully.

" All curls and kisses ? " Stephen mocked him.

" No, not like that. But with a sort o' sweetness to her. The way I reckon our Lindy will grow up. And the way I reckon our mother was when she was first married—you can see it in that picture of her in her weddin' dress in the parlour."

Stephen snuffed out the candle impatiently and pitched into bed. f That ain't my idea. I like a woman to look like Hester, a kind ' strong gypsy look about her, but with a bit o' life to her, like Nan."

He lay staring into the darkness and thinking of Hester standing beside him in the summer sunshine twisting a bay leaf in her fingers so that a sweet incense rose between them, but he could think of her now without bitterness because he had discovered a way of forgetting her, and when she came to him now in the darkness it was because for his own pleasure he invoked her image. He could make her so real that wtien his hands clenched upon his pillow it was her

shoulders they grasped. He knew how to be revenged on her, too, for that evening beside the pond; he would summon up her image only to dismiss it and think of Nan instead. Then when he saw Hester in the morning and she looked at him coldly it would afford him satisfaction to recall that in fantasy it was Nan he had possessed.

Hester, for her part, found her position at Shawn's not at all unsatisfactory; she had the comfortable knowledge that if the younger brother's indifference finally defeated her she could always fall back on the older brother's infatuation; and both were exciting, David's indifference as much as Stephen's ardour. But to win a smile from David was much more of a conquest than to condescend to Stephen. Stephen was too easy . . . and another year might make a lot of difference to David, for he was, after all, very young, and everyone knew that boys took longer to grow up than girls, especially in this matter of falling in love. And she might do worse for herself, she thought, than marry into the Shawn family; it wasn't much of a farm, to be sure, but the Shawn boys were * a cut above' the ordinary farm-lads; they had a more educated speech and some kind of manners, the result of having an educated mother; they weren't * common', and Hester set great store by not being common—her mother had been in good service before she married, and her father was groom to the Colonel, which, of course, was rather better than being a common labourer, just as Hester prided herself on being rather better than a common-servant; she had been * working housekeeper' rather than * general servant' at the rectory, and at Shawn's she was treated as * one of the family' .... so there was really no reason why she shouldn't end up by marrying into the family, and then in time she might become a small farmer's wife herself. ... If the Shawns farmed fifty acres of Cross Deep, as Ellen Shawn had once confided she hoped in time they would, one of the Shawn boys might take over when he married, and the bailiff's cottage become the farm-house; that was the way small farms grew up, Hester knew, and she would think wistfully, " A place like that would be just big enough for a young couple to start off with."

Ellen also thought a good deal about the acquisition of more lanfl that Winter, though not in connection with Hester. If only sh«

could be sure that it could be made to pay, so that the increased rent would be justified! If only Andrew would show a little enterprise and enthusiasms but whenever she tried to get him to discuss the idea with her he would say that things were very well as they were, and they had all the land they could manage without taking on outside labour. It was useless for Ellen to urge that if they employed two more hands for nine months of the year they could put two more fields at present used as pasture under hay or corn; Andrew always asserted that it wouldn't pay; cattle paid better and were less trouble. " Less trouble! " It was always Andrew's answer—and Ellen's despair.

Winter was always a bad time for Ellen; she had time in which to think—and thinking for her meant brooding on might-have-beens, and might-bes that never would be. It was a bad time for everyone, she would think, since it gave Andrew time in which to indulge his laziness, and the boys showed a tendency to hang ibout the house with a Sabbath listlessness through not having enough to do—which was bad for them, in her opinion, apart from the fact that it irritated her * having men mooning about the place ' when she was busy with house and dairy work. And any bad luck that was coming to the farm always seemed to pile up in the Winter.

That Winter the old pony kept for the trap which took the milk to the station, and for other light work, slipped on an ice-bound road and broke its leg and had to be shot; the sow overlaid three of her young; Blossom, vicious daughter of a quiet mother, ran amok in a field and lamed the best cart-horse; one of Stephen's beloved greyhounds impaled itself on an iron fence taking a jump too high for it and died in agony, and Ellen had failures with three ducklings in spite of her efforts to rear them by hand in a basket in the farm kitchen.

" It never rains but what it pours," Ellen sighed, and added the remark she invariably made some time towards the end of every year, " I'll be glad when this year's out! "

XVIII: FAMILY GATHERING

APART from the bad luck which invariably overtook the *Ji\.*farm in the Winter, Ellen had another reason for wearying of the year's end—Christmas was a great trial to her, for then all manner of Shawns kept at bay during the rest of the year descended upon the farm, so that in self-defence she must invite a few of the Blunts, who got on her nerves even more than the Shawns, though for a different reason. The worst that could be said of the Shawns was that they were ' common ' and * shiftless', whereas the Blunts were that most difficult sect of people in the world—well-intentioned busy-bodies. Ellen's family had never got over the fact that she had married * beneath her', and at these annual family reunions they let the Shawns see that they still thought so—as much as on her wedding-day. Their attitude of superiority and condescension re-awakened all the old Shawn hostility to one of their number marrying a school-ma'am, with the result that somebody always went home mortally offended, and Ellen was left limp with the strain of trying to keep the peace.

And when all the guests had gone she and Andrew would tell each other what they thought of the disgraceful behaviour of their respective families.

" No wonder that mother o* yours has been a widder these twenty years," was one of Andrew's favourite remarks. " She can't open her mouth without bitin' yer 'ead orf."

" That brother Jimmy of yours is enough to make anyone lose their temper! " Ellen would retort, furiously, " turning the place into a tap-room with his concertina and those low songs, and spitting about as if he was in his own home! "

" Enough to make him with that sweet sister Nellie of yours being so la-di-da! Folks come 'ere to enjoy theirselves, not to listen to the likes of her showin' off at the planner! "

" Just because an ignorant lot like your family can't appreciate good music! Nellie's got a diploma from the Royal Academy of Music——"

Andrew Shawn made an obscene suggestion as to what Ellen's sister Nellie might do with her diploma. These Christmas party quarrels invariably ended with an outburst of this kind on Andrew's

part, after which Ellen would relapse into a sullen, bitter silence, in which she would resolve never to have another relation of Andrew's inside her house againj whilst Andrew would mentally register a similar vow that next time one of Ellen's high-falutin' family came near his farm he would take himself off to the * Four-in-Hand ' and stay there till they'd cleared out. . . .

The Yuletide family gatherings were equally trying to Linda and her brothers. Linda would always be called upon to recite poems she learned at school, and out of sheer nervousness she always broke down in the middle, and got black looks from her mother, teasings from the Shawn aunts and uncles and cousins, and well-meant but embarrassing condolences from the Blunts. Her mother's relations always asked her how she was getting on at school and remarked what a big girl she was getting. There was a dreadful Uncle Tom who always teased her about giving him a big kiss. " Or are we too grown-up now ? " he would ask, with the dreadful heartiness some people employ towards children. He was the husband of her mother's sister, Aunt May, who also had been a school-teacher before her marriage, and who was always excessively kind to Linda. " Come and sit by me, darling," she would say, and wher^ Linda obeyed would insist on holding her hand and remarking to everyone who came near what a sweet child she was. Aunt May had two sons, Linda's Cousin Ernie and Cousin George. Cousin Ernie was a year older than Linda, and being a choir-boy was always made to sing * O for the wings, for the w-ings of a do-ove ' at parties; he wore stiff white collars and his ears stuck out and he was very rude to everyone, but Aunt May always smiled indulgently and said boys would be boys, and her boys were *real* boys—at which she would look pityingly at David, who always suffered agonies of shyness at these family gatherings. Ellen would bridle and say that personally she liked [a] boy to have manners. The situation was generally saved by the fortyish spinster Aunt Nellie offering to play * The Bee's Wedding* or * The Maiden's Prayer'. After which some member of the Shawn family would retaliate with the concertina and ' Dahn, dahn, dahn by the old Bull and Bush-bush-bush/ Linda and David both rather liked Aunt Nellie* she had fair hair

and gentle face, and wore transparent blouses through which gleamed pink ribbons, which made her seem very feminine; they both thought her quite lovely; Stephen thought her so awful that he couldn't be civil to her; he thought all his mother's relations awful, but the sweetness of her sister Nellie was for him the nightmare of every family gathering. Whenever she smiled sweetly at him he would want to spit an obscene word into her face; or he would imagine tying her to a cow-shed door and forcing her to watch a cow calving.

Cousin George was Linda's *bete-noire;* he was a freckled, sandy-haired boy two years older than herself, and he liked playing kissing games such as * Postman's knock * and ' Come and sit in my chair.' " Proper little sweethearts, those two, aren't they ?" Aunt May would say delightedly, when Linda was obliged to kiss her Cousin George as a forfeit in some game or other; at which the boy would grin sheepishly and the colour flame in Linda's cheeks.

Aunt May had a passion for organising games, and there was always a great deal of bickering between Shawns and Blunts as to the right way to play different games. Aunt May, having been a school-teacher, would not stand for argument, and the Blunts respected her dogmas and backed her up, with the result that the Shawns would determine not to play and go off to the back-kitchen to play cards and open up further bottles of the beer they always brought with them.

On the whole Linda did not mind her father's family. Her father's sister Kitty had a lot of untidy red hair and a gay laugh; she was married to a weedy, horsey little man whose name was Jake and who wore khaki breeches and leather gaiters and smelt of stables; these two had three wild-looking children with Irish names—Sheila, Moira, and Patrick—and dirty faces. Ellen said it was a downright shame the way the McGuffys neglected their children, and that Kitty McGuffy was a dirty slattern—which was for her the worst thing that could be said of a woman; but Linda thought they all seemed very happy, and the children seemed fond of their mother, even if she did neglect them. Ellen said that all Irish people were dirty and lazy—to which Andrew's stock

answer was " That's what makes them so easy to be with!" Stephen thought his father was probably right; in any case he preferred his Aunt Kitty to his domineering, gushing Aunt May, and his sweet Aunt Nellie, and Uncle Jake at least treated him as a grown-up person instead of as a school-boy, as his mother's people did. David thought the McGuffy children lovely, but he shared his mother's desire to wash their faces and comb their matted curls, and he thought their father might have got out of his stable-clothes and their mother put on a clean blouse before coming out to a Christmas party. …

Uncle Harry Shawn was a soldier, and always arrived at the farm with his sweetheart, who was never the same young woman two Christmases running; Ellen considered him * fast * as well as common, but he was the life and soul of the party, and his young women were always friendly creatures who came prepared to enjoy themselves. Uncle Jimmy Shawn was like his brother Andrew in appearance, but gayer; he owned the concertina, a plump wife, and two daughters called Queenie and Gladys; he was bailiff on a big dairy farm and was always telling Andrew how much better off he was than if he were farming on his own; Gladys was considered to have a gift for the piano, and Queenie had won a scholarship and went to a high school—a fact which made Ellen very bitter indeed, for if a silly little thing like Queenie could win a scholarship there must be something very unjust about an educational system which made it impossible for her children to do likewise. As if Stephen and David weren't miles ahead of Queenie and Gladys in every way . . . but she felt that she would never be able to face her sister-in-law again if Linda didn't win a scholarship.

Gladys and Queenie were colourless little girls to whom some catastrophe always happened whenever they went to a party. One year Gladys upset a cup of tea over her party-dress which she was wearing for the first time on that occasion; another year Queenie was sick during supper, and her mother said that the cake they had had at tea must have been too rich for her. Ellen said Nonsense she had made it herself; it was as plain as anything could be, the child must be delicate; to which the mother of Queenie

and Gladys retorted that on the contrary her girls were very strong and healthy even though they weren't as boisterous as some. . . .

Linda thought her cousins Gladys and Queenie * soppy *—an opinion heartily endorsed by Stephen; David felt sorry *for* them because their mother kept on at them so and made them say recitations and sing school-songs and play their pieces on the piano even though they pleaded with tears in their eyes to be let off. Stephen thought Uncle Jimmy a bit of a fool, like his brother Andrew, only more so. David and Linda liked him because he always said, " Now, now, Emily," to his wife when she scolded the girls, and used his wheezy concertina to change the subject when any family difference arose.

Supper always went off more successfully than tea at these Christmas parties; the crackers kept the excitement up to the proper pitch, and Aunts May and Nellie, Kitty and Emily, exchanged views on the making of mincemeat and Christmas puddings, and, however much they disagreed concerning each other's methods, were always unanimous in their opinion that Ellen's recipe * took a lot of beating'. . . . After supper there was the bran-tub full of surprise packets, and port circulated amongst the grown-ups, and ginger-wine for the children. By the time the party broke up everyone was very cordial, and the Shawns would forgive the Blunts their trespasses to the extent of offering them lifts in their buggies, invitations which the Blunts would be forced to accept graciously, unless they wanted a two mile walk through the cold darkness to the station. . . .

Ellen's mother and the unmarried Nellie arrived on Christmas Eve and never went home until the day after Boxing Day, with the result that Andrew and Stephen were always bad-tempered on Boxing Day, and Ellen irritable with the strain of her mother's criticisms of how she ran her house, the rudeness of Andrew and Stephen, and the vulgarity of the relations-in-law.

When Stephen gave a sullen answer, his grandmother would demand, " Is that the way to speak to your mother, my boy ?" And Stephen would feel that he would cheerfully wring his grandmother's neck, and that if his Aunt Nellie gave liim one more

more-in-sorrow-than-anger look he would throw something at her.

After the midday meal, when Andrew would turn his back on the table and sit with his legs stuck out before the fire picking his teeth, Ellen's mother would never be able to resist the remark, " Don't you ever give your wife a hand in the house, Andrew f " To which Andrew would retort with some muttered remark about it not being necessary in a house full of women, or that household chores weren't a man's work. Then when they were alone together Ellen would burst out with," There was no need to be rude to Mother, Andrew!" and the old annual bicker would start all over again.

On the afternoon of Boxing Day Ellen and her mother and sister and Linda would walk over to Cross Deep for tea if it was fine, or if it was wet sit in the parlour talking over family affairs. Linda dreaded wet Boxing afternoons, for the spate of family gossip flowed on endlessly, so that she would think, despairingly, " They can't go on forever; there can't be anything else left to talk about." Sometimes Aunt Nellie would take pity on her and play Ludo with her, but all the time Linda would be wondering what David was doing, whether he had gone off somewhere with Stephen, and whether there was any chance of slipping away and going in search of him. Christmas Day at least had the Christmas dinner and crackers to make up for all the relations, but Boxing Day was merely arid, an anti-climax with no compensations.

That Christmas of Linda's fourteenth year was very much like all the other Christmases she could remember, except that the monotony of Boxing Day was broken by the unexpected arrival of Donald and Nan and Garry who had walked through two miles of frost which lay on the countryside as heavily white as snow to ask if they might skate on the Shawn ponds. Ellen was not very pleased to see them; she felt constrained to give them tea after their long walk, and she regarded Boxing Day as sacred to her mother and sister; also a young fisherman, an under-gardener, and a bar-maid, were not the sort of people her mother could meet without repeating all over again how Ellen had lowered herself by marrying [a] Shawn. Stephen, David, and Linda were delighted by the

unexpected relief; they took hurricane lamps and Japanese lanterns out to the Little Pond and fixed them in the trees and skated long after the moon was up.

Mrs. Blunt remarked a good many times after tea that she was sure that Linda would catch her death of cold outside on such a freezing night, but Ellen said wearily, " Oh, let them be—they're all hardy enough.*' She was worn out with the strain of the family gathering and all the bickering and criticism it involved, and * at least let the children be happy,' she thought.

She looked at the unmarried Nellie, girlishly forty, and wondered whether she was content with her lot, or whether she regretted her spinsterhood. * At least,' thought Ellen, * what you've never known you can't be disappointed about. If I'd never married I'd have gone on all my life thinking how lovely it would be to have a husband and a home of one's own, and bring up my own children instead of other people's. But the best part of it all is dreaming about it; some dreams are all the better for not coming true, for when they come true they turn out to be all too true! It's better to be disappointed by never getting what you want, than to be disappointed when you've got it, I reckon.'

There was her mother, an old woman; you'd think that life had done all it was going to do to her by now, that she was beyond disappointment, but there she was grieving because her daughter did not run her house according to her idea of how it should be run, and because she did not manage her men-folk according to her idea of how they should be managed, grieving because her daughter's children made friends with people like Donald and Nan and Garry. " A barmaid, did you say, dear ? But that is surely not very good company for little Linda, is it ? " And, " A fisherman ? Fisher-folk are surely very rough people for young people like David and Linda to associate with ? " The middle-classes looked down on the working-classes, and the upper-classes patronised the middle-classes, and the working-classes despised both. But you would think that when people had lived over seventy years they would have got beyond such little superficialities as class-distinctions; just as you'd think they'd get beyond having fixed ideas about anything; it was funny how people never learned

by their experiences; funny f No, not funny, it was a sad thing.

'I suppose I'll be the same when I'm her age,' Ellen thought, looking at her mother, * I'll have the same complacency, a self-righteous old woman sitting by the fire and telling my daughter how to run her house and manage her husband and bring up her children, and instead of it being my own children disappointing me it'll be my grandchildren; I'll have forgotten the failures in my own life; I'll think I know all about living, just because I'm old. That's why the old can't bear to be contradicted—their convictions are all they've got to cling to; it's no use admitting at seventy that life's too much for you—it's too big a confession of failure.'

" It's cosy here," she heard her sister saying dreamily from a shadowy corner of the chimney-place. " There's something romantic about a farm kitchen, I must say."

" It's cosy enough, but I could do with a more comfortable armchair," the mother remarked, fidgeting in the wheelback chair.

" I'll get another cushion from the parlour," Ellen said.

When she came back with it, the mother went on, " You know you don't make the most of this inglenook, Ellen. What you want are some proper cushions for the benches, like one has for window-seats—something covered with a nice chintz, with a valance, and a frill to hang from the mantelpiece . . ."

" I could have my children run the frills up for you in class during needlework lessons," Nellie suggested.

Ellen looked from one to the other. She was a little dazed with her thoughts, and with tiredness.

" Frills ? Oh, no, not frills. . . ."

" Why not, pray f " the old woman demanded.

" I don't know. I expect I'm either too old or not old enough —to fuss with such things." She rose, nervously.

" I wonder where Andrew's got to. I must be thinking about supper. And the young "people—perhaps I should take some jugs of cocoa out to them . . ."

She escaped to the back-kitchen, took her old tweed coat down

from a peg on the door, and went out. The sky was a diamond blaze of stars, and the air was so cold that her breath hung on it like a thin smoke. She wrapped her coat closer about her and cautiously crossed the slippery cobbles and stood under the cedar tree listening to the shouts and laughter of the skating party, The hurricane lamps and lanterns in the trees suggested carnival, A lop-sided moon was threatrical in its brilliance; it looked, thought Ellen, as though Linda herself had cut it out of silver-paper and pinned it up there amongst tinsel stars, for fun.

She heard Linda laughing. What a laugh the child had, to be sure, when she was happy and excited. It made you want to laugh yourself, listening to it; it seemed to come right up out of the pit of her stomach. She hadn't heard her laughing like that since Rose had gone away. It was a pity Rose had made a fool of herself; it had been nice for Linda to have a friend; it was lonely being an only girl with brothers older than herself. Perhaps it was a pity some of the young cousins didn't live nearer; not that Emily's girls were much use to Linda, but she liked the McGuffy children ... It was a pity you couldn't have the children without their parents. She wondered if Linda had enjoyed her Christmas. It wasn't much fun for the child, really, with swarms of relations. It was senseless mixing families; Christmas ought to be a quiet family affair with peace on earth and goodwill to all men; but family life wasn't a peaceful affair; it was a little world of conflict all the time. . . .

She went down to the edge of the pond and stood there under a red paper lantern and a silver cardboard moon and watched the carnival youth had made for itself out of a few feet of ice, a few million stars, a handful of lights, its innate sense of rhythm, and its own abundant laughter.

XIX: SKATING PARTY

HOLDING David's hand and rushing over the ice with the dark hedges flying past and the moon whirling through the trees, Linda was in a star-spangled heaven. " It's like having wings," she said, breathlessly, " I wish it could go on forever 1" Linda always wanted anything she enjoyed to go on forever. She loved the icy sting of the wind in her face, and the feeling of her blood singing and tingling. She fell down a good many times, but she was too excited and happy to feel any bruising. It was such a relief to get out into the cold darkness after the two days of being shut up with relations that she felt that if she went into the house again she would suffocate. It was like dancing, it was like flying, it was like a dream she sometimes had of being bodyless and floating in space; *you* felt that you couldn't stop yourself, that you would go on forever gliding over the whole world, over the sky itself} the ice was like a dark gleaming sky, and the sky was like blue ice, with the moon for a lantern; you felt that it had to go on forever because it couldn't stop; you had nothing to do any more with stuffy rooms in which people crouched over fires and talked about each other and the prices of things; you rushed through space, between glittering heaven and gleaming earth, like the wind; and you wanted to laugh without knowing why, and you wanted to shout, and you did, and you weren't yourself any more, you had escaped from your body, and were free to go where you pleased without effort, merely by wishing. And it was heaven, a shining heaven of rollicking stars and dancing moon and dark polished glass slipping away under you. . . . .

When they stopped to rest on the fallen tree-trunk she was breathless and glowing, and laughing out of pure exhilaration.

" Oh, it's so lovely," she kept crying, " I want it to go on and on and on! "

David smiled and hugged her. He, too, was very happy- It was as though out there in the clean cold air nobody had any worries, as though they had all somehow got free of the selves which grieved and worried and could be hurt. He felt as Linda did that to go back into the stuffy house was somehow impossible.

They sat watching Nan and Stephen gliding past and laughing;

Donald experimenting, solemnly, alone, and constantly falling down, only to pick himself up and try again; Garry flashing past, swerving and turning, leaning like a slender tree against the wind, superbly sure of himself, and graceful as a lovely ship. Linda watched Garry, fascinated; she wished she could skate as he did—he skated, she thought, as birds fly, dipping, drifting, circling, as though his out-flung arms were really wings. And he was beautiful, she thought, his face looking pale in the starlight, yet warming to the familiar brown as he passed the lanterns; but when he looked up his face was silver-white with the moon, and his throat was stretched like a gull's in flight, and there was something unearthly about him, so that it was hard to believe that he was a real person to whom she had spoken down on the beaches.

She said to David, " Garry looks different, doesn't he ? No like himself. More like a fairy person."

And then Garry was sitting next them, laughing and breathless, ** I feel like a ship in full sail," he said.

" I wish I could skate like you," Linda said, wistfully.

" It's easy," he assured her, " come on—I'll teach you." And then she was flying away over the ice with Garry, screaming out in a wild delicious terror, an ecstasy of excitement and exhilaration. More than ever with Garry she felt that she was flying and could not stop herself. Garry looked down at the child's lifted eager face, and saw her as she had seen him with the moon white on her, and her hair flying, and he thought that in all his life he had never seen anything so beautiful, not even an apple-orchard in full blossom, nor a ship in full sail.

And David, looking at them both, was startled by the re\elation of a beauty he could not explain, something unearthly, as though somehow they had ceased to be mortal people, and were related only to the white moon and the dark wind, the two of them with their fair hair flying and their throats stretched taut) like birds in flight, and the stars in the'V ~yj$. He did not want to skate any more, but only to look a; them, and he saw them suddenly as the Lordly Ones of his ancestors' legends, remote and untouchable, one with the stars and tJ:<; ice in their shining beauty- And tha ice would melt and the atars dim, but'the golden child

and the golden youth would go on forever, immortally. It was right that they should be fair and all the others dark, it was the outward sign of their inner difference; he wondered that he had not seen them like that before; they were the same kind of people, he thought, with the same kind of difference which you couldn't explain, but only feel and wonder at. …

And Stephen, looking at Nan, vivid in the starlight as in the garish light of the 'Fisherman's Arms,' had the same thought concerning himself and her. "The same kind of people," even though she was gay and he was sombre; somewhere deep down inside themselves they were the same, with the same hidden violence of love and hate. When they drew in under the hedge to rest and regain their breath he asked her, "Is it true as they say that you'll never take a sweetheart that isn't a sea-farin' man?"

She laughed. "I used to think so. But I reckon it don't much matter what he does for a living so long as it's a man's job and he's a proper man. Whether he works on the land or on the sea, then, won't make any difference, so long as he's that—a proper man."

"He'd be your master," Stephen said, sombrely. "You wouldn't be able to speak to him the way you speak to us all over at the 'Fisherman's Arms.' There'd be great fights between you, I'm thinkin'."

She looked at him with the old challenge in her eyes. "Maybe that's what I'm wantin'," she said, and pulled at his arm. "Come on—or the ice will melt with the thoughts that are in me."

They flew over to the far side of the pond, and in the deep shadow of the overhanging trees paused again and looked at each other. They had the measure of each other, those two, beyond the need of words. But it was Nan who said, "Let's go somewhere else."

In silence they sat down on the bank and removed their skates, then, still without speaking, crashed through the crackling, frozen branches and came into High Mead where the grass sparkled with the frost, and the moon, disentangled from the trees, swung free like a silver chandelier from a spangled ceiling.

Only Donald saw them go, and it did not matter to him. There foras for him something sweeter than love, more relentless than

lust; for him above the smell of cow-byres and hay-stacks, there rode upon the icy wind the salt smell of the sea, and because he too was excited with the exhilaration of rushing over the ice the old hunger stirred again in him, and the old dream of himself swinging aboard the *Sea-Gypsy* as she slid down the ways into the impatient sea, like a woman coming to her lover.

PART in: SHAWN HARVEST

'Where the waters glide—'

I: NEW LEAVES

HUMAN nature being what it is, the first week in every January sees human hope taking a new lease of life in all but the very young and the very old, and the Shawns and those connected with them were no exception to this general rule.

On the evening of the thirty-first of December Linda Shawn wrote in her best hand-writing on the fly-leaf of a Christmas present diary, " Linda Shawn, Aged 13^. Shawn's Farm, Flaydering, Near Wildwick, Suffolk, England." Then she drew two lines neatly in red ink, being careful to use the ruler the right side up so that it shouldn't smudge, and underneath she wrote in equally painstaking writing, " I am writing this on the last day of the old year, and I am thinking that all the pages of this book are days of the year that is coming, and they are all blank pages and I don't know what I shall have to write on any of them, but when I get to the last page of this book it will be a year that I have lived and I shall sign it Linda Shawn aged 14^, so the only thing that will be the same as this page will be the address, but it would be funny if after all something happened so that I had to write a different address. I don't expect it will happen, and I shouldn't like it to, but you never know. I don't know a single thing I shall write on any of these pages, and that is a funny thought."

Underneath this she printed in large capitals, " I WONDER," and underlined that, too, in red ink, but she added a * s^uiggle-' below the underlining to show that that was the end.

Then she opened the diary at random and the page happened to be July 15th, and she wrote, " I wonder what will happen on this day. It will be funny to see. Perhaps something exciting w'll happen, and perhaps nothing much will happen."

Then she opened the diary at January 26th and wrote, " On this day I shall know whether I have passed the scholarship or not. I don't expect I will, but if I do will put a big tick right through this, and if I don't I shall just put a tiny cross."

The fact that she had had diaries before and made no entries in them after the first week in January did not prevent her from regarding each new diary as a potential complete record of the

new year. She had failed with other diaries, but this diary would be different because it was the diary of a new year—a brand new year which she knew nothing at all about and in which anything might happen, and which, being new and inexperienced, could not possibly be like any other year, any more than this term's exercise books would be filled with the same things as last term's.

Ellen Shawn approached the new year in a similarly naive spirit. With Christmas * over and done with '—and * thank goodness for that', said Ellen—she could get a fresh start. She would not make the same mistakes this year as last; she would not get so easily discouraged} she would be more patient with Andrew; life was what you made it, after all. This year she would do something definite about taking over more land, and she would go into that matter of the bath-room again, get new estimates. She had David on her side, and perhaps presently Stephen would settle down and take more interest in the farm.

David also started out the new year with a firm resolution that somehow this year Shawn's must be enlarged and improved; he owed it to his mother, having failed her over the scholarship, to make this dream come true. Besides, he had no other mission in life; he did not feel that he would ever want to marry, as Stephen did, and it was a fine thing—in the first week of the new year—to add to the growth of a farm, especially one which had been farmed by the same family for generations. He had no clear idea how he was to realise the dream this year any more than last, but he felt full of hope and courage.

Stephen told himself that this year he was not going to be the fool he had been last year over Hester. He'd stay around with David more, and there was always the * Fisherman's Arms'—and Nan—to break the monotony.

Donald Thorpe told himself that this year, somehow, whatever it did to him he would go to sea with Garry. Even more important than what other people thought of him was his own self-esteem. He had to earn his respect for himself; he couldn't and wouldn't go on feeling inferior like this; it was up to him to make his dreams come true. He, also, told himself that life was what you make

it, and that this year should be an improvement on the last. For him, also, the new year was a fresh start.

Hester Wray promised herself that this year she would settle down and get herself betrothed to someone; she would be more tactful with David and more civil to Stephen; she wouldn't waste this year as she had last.

Rose Hanby reminded herself that her trouble would soon be over; it * wouldn't be long now '; and, after all, this year couldn't be worse than last, a run of bad luck was nearly always followed by a run of good luck, and that nothing was so bad that it couldn't be worse. . . .

Nan resolved that this year she would try to save a bit of money, not touch any drink at all because she was sure it was bad for the complexion, have a good time, treat herself to a permanent wave, and make a point of manicuring her nails for five minutes every morning; also that she would try and see more of Stephen Shawn and make him come with her to some dances.

The Reverend Arthur Tracey resolved that this year he would somehow win the confidence of his flock, and refused to be disheartened by previous failures, though, he comforted himself, with his new year courage, it was true as the poet said that * high failure overleaps the bounds of low success '.

Anne Tracey told herself with a similar new year valour that having married poor dear Arthur it was up to her to make the best of it, and after all things must be worse, and that in any case this year could not possibly be drearier than last, and it might quite possibly be a shade better.

Up at the Big House the Colonel confronted the new year with the grim defiance with which he had faced all the other years since he had retired to the mingled boredom and irritation that for him was country life; and his lady faced it as always with a gentle inner reminder to herself that if Winter comes Spring can't be far behind. . . .

Only Andrew Shawn, sitting in the wheelback chair in the inglenook, a Christmas present cigar between his lips, his thumbs stuck into his waistcoat and his legs stretched out before him, stared into the fire and listened to the tumble of bells ringing out

the old year and ringing in the new, and asked himself what all the fuss was about, since one year was very like another, and there was no reason to suppose that tomorrow would be any different from today or yesterday just because according to calendar reckoning it happened to be the first day of a new year. . . •

II: RISING TIDE

IT was not until some weeks after the date that Linda remembered to put the sorrowful little cross on the January 26th page of her diary. She had scraped through the written part of the examination, but failed hopelessly on the viva voce. She had been taken with all the other candidates, in charge of the schoolmistress, to the big High School in Micklefield, and she had been terrified at having to enter the examination room alone and stand before a long table at which elderly ladies and gentlemen sat making notes on sheets of paper every time she answered or tried to answer a question. She had said that Walter Scott wrote Hereward the Wake, though the moment she left the examination room she knew that it was Kingsley, and she had no idea what was the population of England—it had not occurred to her that she would be asked questions like that. Asked what she wanted to do when she left school, she said she didn't know; she hadn't felt that she could tell the board of examiners that she wanted to be a nun; she thought they would laugh, or anyhow not take her seriously, because being a nun wasn't a way of earning your living in the same way that being a school-teacher or going into an office was.

So the board of examiners had decided that the pretty little girl with the hair the colour of laburnum with the sun on it, and the face as brown as a berry, was really rather stupid in spite of her attractiveness, and that a good education at the expense of the rate-payers could not be wasted on her; she would do better to go into service when she left the Village school, since servants weren't required to have brains, or stay at home until she was of a marriageable age. It was a pity, though, for she had a touch of refinement about her which most of the children from the village schools lacked, and so far as appearance went she would have done credit to the High School, which was full of the daughters of country and market-town tradespeople who were inclined to be fussy as to who their children mixed with.

For herself, Linda was immensely relieved that she had not passed; she had not looked forward to having to stay at school until she was sixteen—or perhaps longer than that. At Easter she would be confirmed, and she would finish with school at the

end of the midsummer term, and after that she could discuss with Mr. Tracey the way to set about becoming a nun; she would ask him to come and talk seriously to her mother about it, and to persuade her.

When the last of her children failed to win a scholarship Ellen told herself, and everyone with whom she discussed the painful subject, that the board of education had a * down ' on her children because their mother had been a school-teacher. " They're afraid that if my children were awarded scholarships people would say that it was favouritism, just because I was once a teacher." In time she came to believe that this was an actual fact. She also told herself that it was a good thing, really, that Linda would be able to leave school in the Summer; she would be able to help in the house; it was nice for a mother to have her own daughter about the place instead of hired help. Girls like Rose and Hester were upsetting influences in a home, apart from not being * thorough ' in their work.

All through January, February and March Linda could think of nothing but her Easter confirmation. She went to Sunday school every Sunday afternoon, to evensong with her mother every Sunday evening, and to Bible classes every Wednesday evening—Stephen would take her on the back of his bicycle on his way over to Wildwick. She went to the special services every evening during Lent, kneeling shivering in a cold and empty church in company with never more than half a dozen other people, and thinking how bare the church looked in its Lenten barrenness, and wishing Mr. Tracey wouldn't sniff and wouldn't gabble the prayers, and that the other people would * sing up' as she did, so that the absence of the organist and the choir wouldn't be so noticeable. Also she thought it mean of Mr. Tracey to choose hymns no one knew very well, because when there were only half a dozen of you it was as well that everyone should know the tune properly.

She met Rose's young sisters at Bible class and at these special services, and gathered from them such news as there was of Rose—which was never more than that their mother had had a letter from her with the Micklefield postmark but no address, saying that she had daily work and was getting on all right, and

sent her love. She thought very little about Rose at that time, she was too full of her confirmation. David always came to fetch Linda from her Bible classes and churchgoings, and her one regret was that he had never been confirmed and so would not be able to come to her first communion with her. She confided to him the secret about wanting to be a nun.

" Do you think mother'll let me ? " she asked, anxiously.

" I don't know. But you may not want to be a nun when the time comes."

" Of course I shall," said Linda.

" Write it in your diary," David suggested, " and see when the time comes."

Linda wrote in her diary that night on the page dated July 24th, " School will break up on this day and I shall not be going back, because I shall be turned fourteen, and leaving, and it will be time for me to start making plans to be a nun."

She began writing' arrangements ', but could not decide whether there were two r's or not, and she wanted her diary to be kept properly, with neat writing and correct spelling, so used the word * plans' instead.

Through January sleet and snow, February rains, and March gales, she never missed a Bible class or a church-service; she had a large and varied assortment of texts and celluloid crosses decorated with painted flowers, forgetmenots and pansies and willow-palm threading the words, * God is Love," The Lord is my Shepherd * and similar words of devotion. Allowed to select a book for a Sunday School prize she chose *The Imitation of Christ,* and read a little of it every day and tried to live up to it, only that was very difficult, for it involved wearing clothes and eating food of which her mother would not approve; it also involved having no possessions, which meant that she must part with her collection of crosses and texts, her boxes of butterflies and birds-eggs, and her precious diary. But she thought that God would understand how difficult it was for anyone living with a family on a farm to follow all the instructions for the devout life, and that as she had so few possessions it would not matter if she didn't part with them; it wasn't, after allj as if she had a lot of things, silver bracelets like Florrie Hanby,

for instance, or a lot of dolls and books and paint-boxes like Cathy Wray. And when she had become a nun she wouldn't have anything at all, so perhaps it didn't matter so much having just a few things for the time being.

2

There was a day towards the end of March when housewives going out to their wood-piles, and shaking dusters out of windows, and sweeping up yards, and pegging out clothes, and men setting out to work, and children dawdling along the budding lanes to school, felt a new softness in the air, and smelt a green smell on the wind like the scent of wet grass and primroses, and the hedges were suddenly white with the blossom that comes before the leaves, and everyone knew that the storm months of the year were over, and that the earth was released from its iron bondage of frost and the scourge of lashing rains, and that from then onwards more and more flowers would creep mysteriously up out of the dark soil, and a wooing gentleness sweeten the song of birds, and that once it had begun it would all happen quickly, and daffodils and bluebells would follow primroses and celandine before the reawakened world had got over the excitement of the first crocuses. And people smiled at each other and took joy in proclaiming the fact that you could feel Spring in the air, and told each other how many crocuses they had out, and where they had seen the first primroses. The earth was alive with the torrents of Spring, unfolding buds, and germinating seeds, and now that the dark days were over it seemed but a little while ago that hedges were luscious with blackberries and hazel nuts and the scarlet and jade of briony.

And if you were young little shivers of excitement shook you, and you were restless with a kind of happy sadness without knowing why, and you wanted to be good, and to love, and to be loved, and it was all as though it was happening for the first time; and if you were not young any more something stirred in you for which you had no name, and you were a little ashamed of your unrest, but felt that all your life it would be the same with you.

Young men slept badly and had strange dreams they told to no

one; young women looked at themselves in their mirrors and thought of new ways to arrange their hair, and of the new clothes they hoped to have for Easter* children went primrosing and thought of painted cardboard eggs with chocolate eggs inside, and of little nests decorated with artificial moss and violets, and stuck with chicks of yellow wool; housewives washed their curtains and scrubbed woodwork and lined shelves with clean white paper; lilacs and chestnuts raced each other into leaf; catkins danced in the light winds and shook out their pollen to the passive female; the energetic worked with new vigour, and the lazy lazed with a new delight. The swallows came home to familiar nesting places under farm-house eaves, cottage thatches, and the cowls of oast-houses. The heath which had been dun and desolate for months broke into a green fire of new grass, and the marshes were full to running over with the rising tide of Spring poured into them from swollen rivers.

And on that soft day when it all began all over again, this annual miracle, Linda Shawn looked out over the heath from the budding branches of the apple tree which reached out over the hedge, and felt the sea calling once more, and because it happened to be a Saturday afternoon dropped down from the tree into a bed of dead bracken that hid new life under last year's rust, and ran with the wind in her face to\ ^rds Wildwick.

And at Wildwick found not Donald Thorpe, but Garry Payne lounging against a capstan with his hands in his pockets, a cigarette dangling from his lips, fair hair blowing in the wind, doing nothing as only a fisherman waiting for a tide knows how. He smiled at her and she saw for the first time how blue his eyes were—startlingly blue, and what gaiety there was in the sudden flashing out of his smile, as though somewhere inside himself he was bubbling with laughter over some tremendous cind inexhaustible joke.

She had a sudden memory of his tall slender figure in the high-necked fisherman's jersey and the breeches terminating in the high boots racing them all over the ice, his face lifted to the glitter of the Winter moon, his hair flying. . . . He had seemed beaui'ful to her then, but on that soft Spring afternoon it was as though she not merely saw but felt that quality which put a warmth into the

voices of both men and women when they spoke of him; he suddenly became personal to her, as though he had reached out and touched her and she had felt the warmth of his hands, and She knew again that soft parting of petals within herself which had begun with David and which she believed had finished with Rose. And feeling this warm tide rising in her hung her head and spoke huskily with shyness, and said that she must go, though with all her being she wanted to stay.

When she had gone Garry trudged over the beach to his boat and found himself not so much consciously thinking of her as carrying her image in his mind, not as the shy child, who had stood before him that afternoon, nor as the excited child who had rushed with him over the ice, but as a young girl lowering her eyes before his own.

And as such she rode the dark sea with him that night, which was a strange thing for Garry Payne for whom for the greater part of seventeen years a boat had been the only female thing to hold his mind for any length of time worth mentioning.

Ill: LENT LILIES

ON the afternoon of the Saturday before Easter Sunday Linda stood before the wardrobe mirror in her mother's bedroom and regarded her bridal reflection with immense satisfaction—new white dress, long white veil, white canvas shoes, white cotton stockings, white cotton gloves, and a brand new prayer book with a crinkly black leather cover and shining gilt edges, and a colour picture of the Good Shepherd for a frontispiece. On the fly-leaf of the prayer book was written in her mother's neat school-teacher's writing, " For Linda on the occasion of her Confirmation, with love from Mother."

Her dress was made of an artificial silk material with a bright sheen, and Ellen had sat up late for weeks making it by hand, because her sewing machine * cockled ' the material; on the front she had embroidered three snowdrops and a single leaf. After the confirmation it would be used as Linda's best Summer dress, so she had wanted it to be * not too plain '. She pulled a puff of the child's golden hair out each side of her face under the veil, and decided that she looked * a picture', and she was quite certain that no other girl who knelt before the bishop that day would look anything like as refined and pretty.

Linda was a little dubious about her hair showing, and also about the embroidery on her dress; her appearance on that day, she felt, ought to be one of a nun-like plainness; but it was a nice dress, she thought, coming well down below her knees, and she could easily tuck her hair back after she had left her mother in church. One of her new shoes pinched a little, and she felt odd wearing gloves, but the veil made up for everything. It made her fcel tall and stately; it made her want to walk with her head thrown back and a rapt vision of heaven in her eyes.

" You'll do," said her mother, and wrapped a big white shawl round her and fastened it with a bent safety-pin, and they set out, her mother rustling beside her in her best dress. On the way to *he church they met other mothers, also in their Sunday clothes, Balking beside white figures bundled into shawls.

" They've got £ nice day for it," said Mrs. Hanby, plucking at Florrie's veil in an attempt to bring it further forward over her

head, and the two mothers agreed that the weather couldn't have been better, for the girls might well have caught a chill had there been an east wind blowing instead of that mild April softness on the air, and the sun shining. They agreed also that it was shocking bad taste on Mrs. Wray's part to finish Cathy's veil off with white muslin rose-buds; it was altogether too showy, and they were sure that the bishop wouldn't like it; they wouldn't be surprised, they said, if Mr. Tracey didn't make her take the rose-buds off before Cathy was allowed to go up … and they did think Mrs. Clark might have made her daughter a new dress, instead of making their poor child wear that washed out Jap silk slip she had worn to the Sunday school outing last Summer; it only cost a few shillings to run up a little dress, but there, she was such a poor hand with a needle, and if you had to put your sewing out it cost you a tidy bit by the time you were finished. …" I put a good big hem on young Florrie's dress," Mrs. Hanby confided, " I wanted it to last her all Summer, and come in for Katie in the Spring."

" Young Florrie " walked in silence by her mother's side, wishing she had gone to the W.C. before leaving home, and giving occasional little jealous glances at the length and fullness of Linda's veil.

Linda also walked in silence, busy with her thoughts. She wondered whether Donald had given Garry the note she had taken up to the Big House for him that morning, and in which she had written, " I am going to be confirmed at three o'clock this afternoon, I wish you would come. Love from Linda.". She added a post-script, " It is going to be a full choral service with a solo anthem."

The chances were, of course, that Garry wouldn't care for such things, but there was also the exciting chance that he might, and more than anything in the world she wanted him to see her looking like a holy bride. She could not have said why she wanted this; she only knew that she wanted it, and that if it could be it would make the day perfect.

Ever since that day when the sudden shyness had overtaken her she had thought about Garry—or, not so much, thought about him as had a constant picture of him in her mind. She had a fantasy

in which she met him by net-shops on the beach, seeing him from a long way off before she came up with him, knowing him by the bright signal of the scarlet handkerchief he sometimes wore knotted about his throat, and in which they walked with their arms about each other's waist, she with her fingers twisted in the steel knife-clasp of his broad leather belt, and by way of the beaches and the sand-dunes came, not to the marshes where she had walked with Donald, but to * a great space of flowers' whither the Lady Margaret had brought Florian of the Lilies, saying to him, " Come now, and look for it, Love, a Hollow City in a Hollow Land." There were thousands of white daisies there, blowing in a sea-wind, and sky and sea were blue, and white clouds in the blue above raced the white horses on the blue below, and she was wildly happy as she had been with David the winter night they had tramped the heath, but it was a more excited happiness, like the excitement of the first breath of Spring and the first sting of Autumn on a September morning.

And this day of her confirmation, when she was looking like a bride, she wanted Garry to be there to see. Perhaps he would be there, with that dark group of people gathered at the church porch to watch the confirmation candidates arrive. Her eyes searched the crowd eagerly; all Flaydering seemed to be there, staring, nudging, whispering; but not Garry.

The church was almost full—a dark mass of mothers come to watch their white-clad daughters and their navy-blue suited sons initiated into Christianity's inner circle. The boys looked hot in their starched collars and with their stiffly parted hair; the girls shed their shawls into their mothers' arms with girlish twitterings; the organ boomed; a few white narcissi bloomed round the font and starred the altar, as symbol of the dark days of betrayal and ᶜnicifixion being over. Tomorrow virginal Lent lilies and the gold flame of daffodils banked in every window and climbing 'ectern and pulpit would'signify that Christ had Risen. Today ᵃ few white flowers blossomed for virgin youth seeking the Kingdom of God. Boys nudged each other and suppressed giggles; &rls eyed each other's veil and dress; mothers whispered to each °ther the price per yard of material, and how many yards they had

used; said what a sight little so-and-so looked, and how sweet little so-and-so; and wasn't it just what you might have expected of Andrew Shawn's wife to try and go one better than anyone else, putting embroidery on the child's frock and getting her up to look like a bridesmaid, so out of place, and making the child vain, not that she wasn't a pretty little thing, you hr.d to admit. .. And there was Mr. Tracey in his best surplice, and my Lord Bishop in his magnificence . . . and everyone kneeling.

It was very fine and impressive, and it was exciting and glamoroial and romantic, with boys' voices pure as bells, and sunlight streaming through stained glass, and the old veined hands of the bishop laid on bowed young heads. Almost you could see the Holy Gh^l come down in a Pentecostal flame. . . . .

Ellen Shawn thought of her youth and how she had worn a white veil and walked up the aisle to the altar with Andrew in his best suit, and wearing a sprig of syringa, at her side. Mrs. Hanbr thought of Rose and wished she had been kinder. Mrs. Tracey in her front pew thought of a hawthorn hedge white as snow with blossom, and a May moon . . , And in a pew at the back Ros Hanby watched her young sister kneeling by the side of Lindi Shawn and thought of her own confirmation two years ago, a/** all that had happened since, and was blinded with tears. . . Such a few years separating her from those white-veiled girls kneeling on the altar steps, and yet so wide a gulf of experience. . . . The girls at the infirmary had envied her when her baby ha< died. " You're lucky," they had said, out of the bitterness o their hearts. Before the baby had been born she would haw thought herself lucky if she could have known, but it had been such a pretty little thing, a girl, too . . . That Irish girl Kathleen had cried and cried because her baby which was expected to di< having been prematurely born, had lived after all. Had it did she could have gone back to Dublin and no one would have known; but she couldn't go back with a baby, and she had nowhere to g°> . . . Alice had been hard; she was going to get the baby farmd out and get work again and have a good time again, fellers art dancing and pictures; only she wouldn't be such a fool next timci she had learnt her lesson; she had thought the Irish girl a fool to

sit and cry all day, and Rose a fool for crying when her baby died. ** God looks after his little ones," she had said, cynically; she was only twenty-two and had worked in a jam factory; Kathleen was eighteen and had been a general servant; Rose had been the youngest there, and the nurses had liked her. " The little red-haired one," they had called her, and said what a shame it was for any man to play a dirty trick on a bit of a kid like that. They had advised her to go to another town or village and start fresh, and make sure of the marriage service first next time . . . But Rose had come home because it was Easter, and she could not spend the Bank Holiday alone in a room; she felt very weak, and she had only a few shillings left. She had come back to find no one at home, and white-shawled figures passing up the lane had explained the reason why. Well, maybe it was as well to meet her mother in a church, she had thought, for there at least she couldn't say harsh words to her; and she would like to see young Florrie and little Linda Shawn in their white veils. Linda would look sweet, she thought. She saw Linda's mother in a pew near the back, but she hadn't the courage to go and sit by her. She sat instead in the first pew just inside the door, where the spicy scent of the narcissus round the font laid a springtime sweetness on the fusty air of the church.

Linda did not see her until, the service over, she crowded out into the aisle with her mother.

Rose pressed forward shyly, a pale, shabby Rose, but with the same flame of red hair and the same smile. " Hullo, Linda."

" Rose! " Linda cried, bewildered by the surprise, and felt the familiar hug of Rose's arm about her waist.

Ellen Shawn said cordially, " Why, hullo Rose, where did you spring from f "

" I've come—for Easter," said Rose, and then, hurriedly, " There's mother—I must go." She pressed away through the crowd, and Linda and her mother came out into the April after-floon sunlight, where people stood about in groups between the old yews that flanked the gravel path gossiping and eyeing each °&er. There was the white gleam of tombstones and the gold

gleam of daffodils, and billowy white clouds like yachts with all canvas spread racing across a blue sea of sky.

For Linda the golden notes of the organ still boomed on the golden air, and she was still blinded by the Pentecostal flame which had crept out of the scent of the altar flowers and out of the bishop's hands laid on her head.

She could not listen to Mrs. Hanby's chatter, or answer Florrie's questions as to whether she had been nervous; and whether she was glad it was over, and what did she think of the bishop; she was in a dream of the Kingdom of God; on a surge of music and the incense of altar flowers heaven had opened before her in celestial glory.

The organ was still crashing and booming like a mighty tide; it seemed to roll out of the church doors in a flood of sunlight . . . and then, slashing across her dream came the flash of scarlet, and standing a little beyond the crowd, a cypress yew behind him, she saw Garry, his hair falling down in a lock over one eye, a scarlet handkerchief knotted about his throat, his eyes searching. . . .

She darted away through the groups of people and came to him.

[44] Oh," she cried, " I didn't see you in church—I thought you hadn't come! "

He laid a hand on her arm and drew her to the other side of the yew tree. " I wasn't in church," he said. " Church ain't in my line, I reckon. I came to see you—and my, don't you look fine! A reg'lar bride! "

She laughed, excitedly, shyness melting in her delight that he was really there after all.

[44] 1 wanted you to see me," she cried, eagerly. [44] Have you just come from Wildwick ? "

[44] Yes, an' I got to get back. I brought you something, but I don't want to give it you here, case anyone sees. It's a secret! "

Linda's eyes sparkled. " Where shall we go f "

[44] Down this little path to the meadow."

He took her hand and they ran down a narrow path towari the bounds of the church-yard, where a little gate gave on to * meadow which in a few months time would be a hayfield. They

went through the gate and stood behind the hedge, the flowers laving their feet like a white-capped sea.

Garry pulled a small white box out of a sagging pocket of his old sea-stained jacket and put it into her hands. He stood watching her with smiling eyes as she lifted the lid and a layer of cotton-wool, and drew out a thin silver chain from which hung a tiny silver cross.

"A confirmation present," he explained, proudly, jauntily.

Linda looked up at him with shining eyes. "Oh," she cried, "it's lovely," and in a sudden rush of joy flung her arms round his waist and hugged him. The knife-clasp of his belt caught in herveil.

"Let me do it," he said gently, and as she looked away from him shyly, saw the field as the great space of flowers of her fantasy.

"I want to wear my chain," she said. "I shall wear it always —even when I'm a nun, if they'll let me."

"A nun? You?" She nodded, eager-eyed, fastening the chain about her neck.

"You ain't goin' to be a nun," he said. "Shutting yerself away from the fields and the sea an' everythin'—and folks that care for ye? You ain't goin' to do a fool thing like that, surely?"

She looked up at him and saw that the laughter had gone from his face and that it was troubled.

"It's a secret," she said, "you mustn't tell anyone."

"I won't tell anyone. All the same—it ain't goin' to be. In a couple o' years time you won't want to, maybe."

"That's what David said, but I think I will."

He laughed, the old careless laugh. "You're a funny one," he said, "but mighty sweet. Slip that chain inside yer dress, sweetheart, for it's a secret, too, a secret between me and you, see? Until I give you another present—and then it won't be a secret any more. But that can't be just yet."

She slipped the chain inside her dress and felt its coldness on her skin, a coldness that yet burnt, like a little cross of fire, Pentecostal …

"You'd best be goin' back," he said, 'fore they miss you, and

maybe I'll be seein' you at the fair in Bartlett's meadow on Monday eh ?"

" I didn't know there was to be a fair——"

44 Well, there is, and maybe you and me'll go on the roundabouts and shy at the coconuts, eh ? "

44 Yes," she breathed, " yes."

He laughed happily. " There could be lots of fun like that—if you don't go into any old convent. One day you got to be a real bride, see ? "

The old panic surged up in her. " Oh, no, I wouldn't like that. That's just why I want to be a nun. I don't want to be—sweethearts with anyone—ever."

They stood looking at each other, the tall young fisherman and the white and golden child, with the blue and white, and green and golden waves of Spring's tide breaking above and below them, and no more than three Springtides separating them in years, and the same magic casements opening for them both upon an April-enchanted sea.

44 You don't have to do anything you don't want," the boy said, 44 but maybe you won't always think the same, an' you got to wait—to know."

She answered with all the confidence of childhood, 44 1 won't ever be any different. I've come to the years of discretion—it says so in the Prayer Book—you can't be confirmed till you've done that."

He smiled. " Them's big words for such a little bit of a thing, I'm thinkin'. But you'd best be runnin' along now, or folks'll be wonderin' where you got to."

44 Yes. And I'll see you at the fair ? " Unconsciously as she said this she twisted her fingers in the knife-clasp of his belt, and she thought, 4i Garry is beautiful, and I love him, and I shall love him for ever."

The boy had no thoughts for the tide of Spring was racing in his blood like the mounting sap in the trees.

He said, 4t I'll be there all right."

Then she was walking away with the tall white* flowers brushing her white dress, towards the gate which gave on to that great space

of flowers, and he was walking in the opposite direction, plucking at the green tips of the hedge as he passed, and he thought, " She's nigh on fourteen, and many a girl is wed at sixteen, and I can wait; in two years time I'll have a bigger boat and be doin' better for meself," But when he tried to picture how it might be with them both, they two marrying, the mounting tide rushed over blotting out all thought, so that all his mind held was the picture of a childish face framed by the simple veil of confirmation.

IV: MERRY-GO-ROUND

ELLEN SHAWN did not approve of fairs. You met * such a rough lot', there, she said; she was surprised at Harriett's letting their meadow for such riff-raff as would gather there; but Linda could go with the boys, if they liked to take her along.

Linda looked eagerly at David. " Do let's! " she pleaded.

David looked at Stephen inquiringly. " Someone's got to stop along home with that old cow," Stephen grumbled, " and it had better be me, I reckon. The last calving made all the rest of you pretty sick."

Andrew spat into the grate. " I'll stay here. It ain't her first calf, and she ain't a delikit critter like that God-forsaken Jersey lily, neither. You young folks get alone and enjoy yeselves."

" I ain't keen," Stephen said, " I half promised to go over to Wildwick."

It was settled that David should take Linda and Stephen would " see how he felt." David knew, to his sorrow, that that meant he would go if Hester did.

Stephen sauntered out into the back-kitchen and stood a moment watching Hester trim the pastry round the edge of the pie-dish. The back door was open and the wind carried the rise and fall of the music of the merry-go-round across the fields.

" What about the fair tonight, Hester ? " he asked, " David's taking Linda along, an' if you ain't got anything special to do—it might be fun for half an hour——"

Hester, who had had the carnival music of the fair running in her head all the afternoon, had a sudden vision of herself seated next to David on the roundabouts, and soaring up to the stars with him on the swings, looked up with a smile sweeter than she usually bestowed on the elder brother.

" I'd like to go," she said, " if you and David and Linda don't mind me coming along with you."

" There's one of us as ud like it," Stephen said, eagerly.

Hester tossed her head. " No messing about, mind you."

Stephen answered, a little sullenly, " We'll all be together."

" All right; I can call in and tell them at hdme on the way down."

A sound which was a cross between a moan and a roar broke across the lilt of the distant fair. Hester frowned. " Oh, that cow! She's been goin* on like that for hours. Can't you do summat for her ?"

" Not yet. She'll be worse afore she's better. But I'll go and see how she's gettin' on."

Stephen went out and Hester went on trimming the pastry from the edges of the pie-dish and marking it with a pattern of crosses on the top, and thinking, " It's easy enough to lose anyone in the crowd, and maybe the excitement and the lights and music and all that will wake David up a bit."

Stephen had bitter thoughts as he crossed the rick-yard to the cart-shed under the oast-house where the labouring cow was stalled; it was funny, he thought, how people, women especially, had pity enough to spare for animals, but mighty little for each other. Hester could feel for a calving cow, and white as a turnip she had gone when she had seen him bathing the torn flesh of his impaled greyhound; even a chicken that had to be forced from its shell could rouse her pity—anything that bled; it was a pity, he thought grimly, that folks didn't bleed when they were hurt with words and hard looks; she in turn thought him callous because the sight of blood didn't turn him sick as it did David. Well, God help the creatures on that farm, if they were all as lily-livered as her and David over a little blood. Dam' nigh fainted, David had, when they had had to drag the Jersey cow's calf out of her with ropes. Tender-hearted he supposed Hester thought it, but he reckoned the cow didn't owe David much thanks for the little help he gave her, nor the ewes, either, during the lambing season, for all David's rages about hunting and rabbit-snaring. . . .

When Andrew came out to the shed he found his eldest son hanging on to the cow's tail and yelling rough words of encouragement at her.

" You get along and doll yerself up for the fair, lad," he said, [44] I'll look after the old lady."

Stephen was damned ff he was going to doll himself up. Hester ^as only coming because David was; she'd only despise him if he tried to please her.

Hester looked at him coldly when they all set out for the fair, David in his Sunday suit, Linda in her white confirmation dress.

" I thought you'd a smartened yourself up a bit," she said, critically.

" Then you thought wrong," Stephen answered curtly, and for the rest of the way was silent, hating her.

Bartlett's meadow was a blaze of naphtha flares and a tumult of crashing music.

At the gate they found Garry and Donald. " We reckoned you'd be comin' along," Donald said. Linda smiled shyly at Garry, and he took her hand.

He bent down to her. " I'd ha' gone home if you hadn't a come," he told.

She pressed his fingers excitedly. " I'm still wearing the chain and cross," she whispered to him.

He smiled. " Is it still a secret ? "

She nodded and he hugged her to his side. " Me and Linda's goin' on the roundabouts right away," he announced.

David grabbed Donald's arms, determined that Hester should not pair off with him instead of Stephen.

" We'll go and have a crack at the rifle range, then."

Linda asked, as she and Garry pressed their way through the crowds, " The *Sea-Gypsy* won't be going out tonight as you've come here ? "

[44] She's never yet missed a tide, no more than I have," he said, " but she can go without me tonight."

He looked down at her. " Won't you be cold with no wrap or anything ? Here—wear this! " He took off the scarlet handkerchief he wore round his throat, folded it three-corner wise, and draped it round her shoulders. " It suits you a treat," he laughed.

Joy surged up in her in shining waves. " Oh, Garry, I'm so happy," she cried.

[44] Not more'n me, I reckon." He threw back his head and laughed as she had seen him that night on the ice.

His fingers were tight on hers as they stood watching the roundabouts, and the music rode the air gay as the prancing painted horses. When the glittering whirl slowed down he lifted her into

the nearest saddle and sprang up behind her. They rode round and round, and up and down in a vortex of music and lights and laughter. His arms were round her waist, and she leaned her head back against his shoulder drifting on a multicoloured tide of pure joy.

The music sang, and the stars wheeled down and reared up again in a mad dance, and earth became a far away darkness remote from all that brilliance of spinning colours and flashing lights and carnival recklessness, and the child heart of Linda Shawn beat with the throb of the music," Garry. Garry. More than David; more than Rose. Forever. Forever."

And youth's romanticism answered out of its own glamorous heaven, " Linda. Linda. More than the sweetest ship that ever rode the tides5 more than the sea itself. Forever. Forever."

When the merry-go-round slowed down they smiled at each other and kept their seats, a communion of unspoken mutual agreement flowing between them, each fearful of the return to the dark earth where time was, and age, and barriers that dam youth's torrents of pure being.

They were both too dizzy with excitement and giddiness when they finally descended to be aware of any re-establishment of contact with solid earth. They looked at each other and laughed in a delirium of sheer joy, and breasting a dark sea of people climbed into swings and were flung up to the stars, and knew the mad rush of wind in the skyward hurtle and the wild sweet terror of the downward plunge that always threatened to dash them to the ground, yet always at the high peak of imminence swept them past it and upwards again, drawing the lights and music in its wake, as waves draw shingle in their ebb and flow.

Afterwards they strolled round the booths bright with naphtha flares and their gay, tawdry wares, and flung hoops that never encircled anything, and fished with magnets that never attracted anything, and bowled balls that never found goals, and shot with rifles that always missed, and played games of chances in which luck was always against them, and laughed and did not care. They went into a tent and saw a man with pink tights and padded musdes wrestling with a man whose face was blacked and who wore an

imitation leopard skin5 they watched ' the strongest woman in the world' lifting weights, and ' the human serpent' clad in bedraggled black tulle and golden spangles tying herself into knots; they bought bags of sherbet which they sucked up through tubes of liquorice; they restored a weeping lost child to its not very far away mother, and fed nuts to a mangy caged monkey, and in all that time Garry did not think once of the strangeness of the *Sea-Gypsy* putting out to sea without its skipper—whose boast it was that he had never missed a tide in any weather, and had no eye for anything female except a boat—but only of the happy, excited, shining-eyed child at his side, and she seemed to him more beautiful than any thing he had ever seen, lovelier than the clean lines of his boat, and the sky at evening, and the arms of the harbour held out to the homeward bound fleet in the grey morning, and he felt for her a tenderness he had never felt for any living thing, and knew in her a delight greater than the delight of his boat running before the wind.

And Linda loved him because more than with any one who had ever come close to her with him the barrier of her childhood ceased to exist, and because in a curious, indefinable, satisfying way he was different from anyone else, something in his laugh, in the way he moved, in the touch of his hands, the fall of the lock of hair over one eye, some note in his voice, all combining in a subtle quality which flowed out from him invisibly, intangible as the excitement of Spring, and the sorrow that seeps out of the earth at sundown, something eluding words, yet insistent.

" Different; more like a fairy person than an ordinary person," was all the definition possible for her, but it was enough, for she moved with him through a magic world, and was given to enchantment.

They would have stayed all night at the fair had not David found them sitting on the steps of a showman's waggon and insisted that it was time he took Linda home.

" But we haven't been here any time at all," Linda protested, dismayed.

'* We've been here nigh on three hours," he told her, " and it's long past your bedtime."

" Perhaps you'll be allowed to come again tomorrow," David encouraged her.

She looked eagerly at Garry. " Will you be coming again tomorrow ? "

He looked away from her. " It wouldn't be the same—a second time," he said.

" But it'll all be here, just the same—the roundabouts and swings and everything. Won't it, David f "

David said slowly, " I know what Garry means. If you've been happy it's best to leave it at that, not try to make it happen a second time."

" I think that's silly," said Linda, " why shouldn't the nice things be just as nice the second time ? "

Garry pressed her arm. '* I dunno; but it's as well not to risk it, I reckon." He turned to David, " Where's Donald ? We go the same way so we might as well go together."

" I left him at the coffee-stall with Stephen and Hester—Stephen ud thank you for taking him off with you."

" So long, then."

Linda felt his fingers linked with hers for a moment, then he had gone, a tall slender figure threading its way through the crowds, a lazy strolling figure yet somehow insistent.

She was silent walking back with David, the lights and the music behind them.

" You enjoyed yourself ? " David asked, presently.

"Yes. It was lovely."

** There's nothing to go a second time for, though. You can see it all the first time. It's true what Garry said—things aren't so good the second time; seems like they can't be the same way twice." He was silent, pondering the thought, he who had never known anything rapturously once.

" It was funny Garry coming along," he said, his thoughts leading him to Garry. " He reckoned he couldn't be bothered with the Wildwick dance, and it's his boast that he never misses a tide. The sea comes first with him always, he reckons."

Linda remained silent, but she thought, " But he came to my confirmation, and he came to the fair, and it wasn't just for the

fair he came, because be said he'd have gone home if I hadn't been there/[9] and it was a secret she carried hidden in herself as she carried the silver cross secretly under her dress.

It was not until she got home and her mother demanded what on earth she'd got round her shoulders, that she realised that she was still wearing Garry's scarlet handkerchief.

" The idea of it," said her mother, " a common workman's handkerchief! And on your new dress, too."

When Linda undressed she tossed her new dress carelessly on to a chair, but the red cotton handkerchief she smoothed out lovingly on the bed and folded carefully. It was the colour of flame, but it was not of the Pentecostal flame and Lent lilies she thought, as her fingers caressed it, but of naphtha flares and the merry-go-round like a great whirling sun, and the light that shone out of Garry's face.

V: DREAMS

NEARLY every day of those Easter holidays Linda crossed the heath to Wildwick, to find Garry lounging against the sunny side of the net-shops gossiping with men who like himself waited for the tides—and the opening of the * Fisherman's Arms.' She was too shy to approach him when the other men were with him, and would turn on to the beach before reaching the net-shops and the terrace of fishermen's cottages, and wait for him under the bows of his boat, or at the sea's edge. Sometimes she waited in vain, but not often, for usually he saw her small hurrying figure from afar *off* and watched where she went, and then, casually, he would detach himself from his companions and stroll over the beaches in search of her.

They never stayed long together; the boy knew what the child did not, that in a small community only a very little material is needed for a great deal of gossip; the fact that he had refused to go to the dance in his own village yet had gone over to the fair at Flavdering had caused talk enough.

" You could understand it if it were some wench he was after," they said in Wildwick, " but no, he spends the whole evening with Shawn's little girl, romping about with her on roundabouts and swings like they were two children together."

u 'Tis just the coltishness of a young feller," some said. " Presently some wench will cure him of such nonsense. Let the boy be young whilst he can—there's time enough for being old and falling into love, the way it makes a man old before his time."

When school re-commenced and Linda could come over to Wildwick only once a week, and then not always, Garry's restlessness increased. His mind always held some picture of Linda; Linda standing amongst the daisies in her confirmation dress; Linda flying over the ice and laughing up at him; Linda flushed and excited on the swings and roundabouts; Linda running down the heath road to the sea with a sheaf of bluebells too big for her hands to clasp pressed against her slender body; Linda standing in the bows of the *Sea-Gypsf* with her hair blowing round her eyes; Linda laughing and Linda grave; Linda with tears in her eyes because the cat's kittens had been drowned; Linda indignant

because Hester would not spare her a jam-jar for her primroses; Linda lying face downwards on the beach, her chin propped in her hands, watching the scaj Linda with her head thrown back watching the gulls; Linda crouched against the black flanks of his boat showing him how to do * cats-cradles,[9] her small fingers diving in and out between his own and sometimes touching his, so that it was as though all his blood dissolved in a great wave of tenderness for hen Linda in a gay and teasing mood, ail child; Linda listless and moody with the rising tide of adolescence in her; Linda silent and unapproachable, shut away in herself; Linda making fun of the school-ma'am; Linda talking of God.

He worried a good deal about Linda's preoccupation with God. He wondered whether the Shawns would encourage her childish religious fervour, and allow her to go into a convent and become a novice. Young girls did that, he supposed, when they were serious enough about it—and everyone knew that Ellen Shawn was religious and encouraged the child in her church-going. He searched his mind for a phrase he had heard remotely somewhere; * taking the veil', they called it, didn't they ? Well, he had seen her in a confirmation veil, and the next veil he hoped she'd wear should be a bridal veil, not the veil of a nun. And the next present he wanted to give her should be a betrothal ring; many a girl had been betrothed at fifteen—he had only a year to wait; she'd be fourteen next month. But young girls were romantic, and by the time she was fifteen she might have fallen in love with someone else and be lost to him. Perhaps he should go and see the Shawns and talk to them about it ? But he shrank from that; Ellen Shawn had a sharp tongue, and Andrew Shawn might laugh at him and talk about calf-love and getting over it, and Stephen would sneer, and David might be jealous. He decided that he couldn't do it; what he felt for Linda was a secret, not to be talked about in cold blood as though he were calculating the price of a catch. He couldn't tell anyone about it, least of all the men who worked with him and drank with him in the fisherman's Arms'} the young ones had their sweethearts, but he couM not feel that loving Linda he had anything in common with them; it was * different % what he felt for Linda, and it made him feel differently about many

things. Before, when the other men had talked and laughed about what they did with their women, he had listened with a boy's curiosity and laughed with them, now it made him feel ashamed; all that beastliness had nothing to do with Linda. He was glad he had never experimented with girls like other lads of his own age; but even that was not enough; he wished that he had no cause for any kind of shame; he wished he had never even listened to other men talking. He began to wash his hands a great deal; they seemed so rough and clumsy and grimed, yet he had never thought about them before; his nails were broken by the constant handling of ropes, but he began to try and keep them clean; he sent to a big fishing port farther up the coast for a pair of rubber gauntlets such as he had seen the men on the trawlers use—and used them in spite of it making him the laughing stock of Wildwick; he combed his hair and tried to make it lie flat; he bought a toothbrush—though his teeth had a negro whiteness that could not be improved upon; he tried to remember not to spit, or to use the fornicatory words that were part of the common speech of the community; and increasingly he wanted his friend Donald Thorpe to be mate of the *Sea-Gypsy* so that he might part company with the foul-mouthed Tom Chantry who sailed with him at present. He and Donald and the boy Peters could manage the boat well enough, and later on instead of that bit of a punt with a single sail, they'd have a lugger and take on a couple more hands, and he'd have a more up-to-date engine fitted, and mechanical pumps . . . Not that the *Sea-Gypsy* wasn't as sweet a ship as ever slid down the ways, but she wasn't big enough for the money he meant to make . . . lovingLinda.

Not even to Donald could he talk about Linda, and if Donald spoke of her he would remain silent as though she held no interest for him, and he would be jealous because Donald saw Linda most evenings of the week, and could take her little gifts of grapes and peaches and posies of flowers—jealous, and yet glad for her.

Dreams of which youth cannot speak; dreams that cannot die . . . thelong, long dreams of youth, delicate as spray of apple-blossom, and as rich in promise; sweet as the song of wind in the [n]8ging> and as wild. If it was wrong to love Linda Shawn, then

love itself was a crime. With all the passion of youth's first love he was ready to die for beauty—and a dream.

He was too young to know that beauty and love and sorrow are all dreams within dreams.

He did not know, and, as it turned out, he was spared the pain of learning.

*

VI: LINDA'S DIARY

ON the twenty-first of June Linda wrote in her diary, " I am fourteen today, but we are not having a party because it's a Sunday, and Mother says it's the only day she gets for a good rest, so I must go without. I could not go over to Wildwick yesterday because Aunt Nellie came to tea. She brought me *Little Women and Good Wives* which doesn't look very interesting. I had a pair of brown shoes from Mum and Dad, but it isn't really a present, because I'd have had to have them anyway. I had a box of paints from David with two brushes and some tubes of oil paint that will make the other girls at school jcllus. Stephen gave me a tin of toffees because he could not think of anything else, which is silly, because I told everyone that I wanted one of those big texts with apple-blossom on them in a gilt frame to hang up in my bedroom. There was a lovely one in the town only three and six, so if I get any money given me I shall save up. I expect I could take it into the convent with me. But perhaps after all I will go to Africa and be a missionary. Donald gave me a slide for my hair, but Mother says I am not to wear it as it has some glass dimonds in it and she says it is common, but I think it is pretty, and I shall put it on when I am by myself and wear it when I go over to Wildwick. The best present I had was from Garry. It is a big red silk handkerchief with white spots which I can wear for a scarf like the one he wears sometimes, only his is cotton. But Mother says it is volgar to wear bright colours and Dad says does he take me for a gipsee, so I shall hide it in my pocket or up my bloomers and put it on when I am by myself. Rose remembered it was my birthday and sent me a nice card with forgetmenots and bluebirds on it. She wrote on it that bluebirds mean happiness and she hopes I will have a lot. She has got work in a house near Wildwick and has two babies to look after which she says she likes, though they don't give her much rest at nights. Hester gave me three handkerchiefs, one pink, one blue, and one yellow, with an L in the corner of each. They are very pretty. I had a pencil box from Aunt May, but I hati two given me at Christmas so it is a waste. I had some chocolates from Uncle Jake and a lot of cards from the others so I have had a lot of things but Garry's was the

best. Hester was going to make me a cake but she was busy with the dairy and didn't have time. Mother says I am getting too big for that sort of thing and she thinks it's unhigeenic to put candles on cakes the same as it is sticking holly into Christmas puddings but I think it's nice." When she had written all this she sucked her pencil and thought for a little while, then she added, " It doesn't make any difference being fourteen except that it's nearer leaving school." She added this because there was still a little room at the bottom of the page and it seemed a pity to waste it.

On the first of July she wrote, " June is over which is a good thing as the weather has been fowl. Father says it will rooin the hay, but you never no becos he says that every year and Mother is foorious becos nearly all the cider has been drunk and it should have been kept for hay-making which hasn't begun yet, but Father says a man must do something when it's rajning catsjuidjlogs. Stephen still goes over to Wildwick most nights oFHe^eekand Hester says he is after Nan Collett wich is silly becos he is still mad about her but I think she is bad tempered and I don't like Nan but at least she is jolly. David hurt his foot ditching and Mother says it never rains but what it pours becos David can't get about till it's better so they are one hand short, but I should say one foot, (that is a joke)."

A week later she wrote, " I am writing this on a Sunday. I am supposed to be in bed and asleep, but after Mother had said Goodnight-God-bless-you I got up again and lit the candle so that I could write this. I saw Garry yesterday and I wore my slide that Donald gave me, and the scarf Garry gave me, and he said 0 Linda you are luvly and I was so happy I hugged him round his nice thin waste and then he kissed me, but it wasn't like when Stephen kissed Hester, becos I didn't cry and it wasn't dark but sun shining and it wasn't privit or secrit. And Garry is luvly and 1 love him and we are going to love each other for ever, so perhaps I won't be a nun after all when I leave school but perhaps Garry and me could go to Africa and be mishunries together. I asked Garry and he said it would be nicer to itfait until I was old cnuf for us to be married and then we could have a little' house and I could keep it dean and do the cooking and he would go on going to sea,

but I don't no. Only it would be nice to be with Garry all the rime. I should like that becos I think of him all the time and I liked him kissing me and I keep thinking about it/'

When she had written this she closed the diary and hid it away at the bottom of the lowest drawer of the chest-of-drawers where she kept her few possessions. Then she blew out the candle and got into bed and lay staring into the darkness thinking of Garry, and how the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her, more wonderful than skating with him on the ice, or riding with him on roundabouts and swings, was when he had kissed her; and thinking this she cried a little, without knowing why, the old happy sadness she had known with Rose, and she pressed her hands down between her knees because they felt somehow weak, and the whole of her body as though it had melted away, which was how she had felt when she had stood under the bows of the *Sea-Gypsy* and he had kissed her, with the sun on them both like a soft fire and the sea-gulls crying in their mournful way.

The next day she wrote in her diary again, " This morning there was a row because I forgot to take off my cross and chain which I put on after Mother had gone downstairs last night and when she came in this morning she saw it and I had to own up where I got it, and she said it was a disgrace, that I must never take julery from anyone outside of the fammilly, and she is going to speak to Garry about it. I don't care only now I won't be able to go over to Wildwick. But I am going to write to Garry and perhaps he will be able to come over for the Apple-Christening on St Swithin's day, and if he can't or they won't let him come here I shall play truant from school and go and see him. They can't stop me. But perhaps it will die down as I didn't say anything about loving Garry, only that the cross was a confirmation present. I heard her telling Dad and he said the child's growing up you no, and then they closed the door so I couldnk hear any more but I think his voice sounded as if he was on my side."

On the 14th she wrote, " Tomorrow is our Apple-Christening and Hester has been voted<he Apple Queen. Donald took my letter to Garry, and he brought the answer back that Garry said he couldn't come but I was not to mind and Donald thinks he can

make it all right with Mother about my going over to Wildwiclc sometimes if I am with him and he promises to look after me. All the same I feel misserbul and wish I could run away and that Garry and me could go off in his boat to France and never come back but we don't speak French so I don't suppose it would be any good."

Underneath this she printed in large letters, * BUT I LOVE GARRY SO THERE.' On the opposite page, dated the 15th, were the words she had written back in January, " I wonder what will happen on this day. It will be funny to see. Perhaps something exciting will happen."

She thought, " Well, there's going to be an apple-christening, and I didn't know that when I wrote it, so that is one exciting thing." She felt like a prophet; it was an exciting thing keeping a diary. She let the pages run through her fingers, and thought as she had thought on New Year's Eve when she had tried to guess what she might have to record in the diary, " They are all days that I have to live." It was an exciting thought, but a little frightening.

VII: APPLE-CHRISTENING

ELLEN SHAWN'S anxiety over her discovery of Garry's confirmation present to Linda faded before her fluster over the fact that an apple-christening was to be held at Shawn's. Mr. Tracey was responsible; he Liked to See the Old Customs Preserved, and this old St. Swithin's festival had never yet been held at Shawn's. He found a distressing tendency in the farmers to allow these old customs to die out, and it was several years since there had been an apple-christening in Flaydering—the last had been at Cross Deep five years ago. Mr. Tracey thought it would be ' nice ' if Andrew Shawn now took his turn; moreover, it might help to make the Shawns a little more popular. He had gone over to discuss the matter with Ellen Shawn; as an educated woman, he pointed out, she would appreciate the value of preserving those traditions of rural life which the rush and cynicism of modern life threatened to exterminate. No one thought of allowing Harvest Thanksgiving to die out, therefore why should we not call down the Lord's blessing on the apple-harvest ?

Ellen was torn between her pride in Shawn's and her passion for economy. She could not help feeling, however, that the Reverend Tracey was right; after all, Shawn's looked to the apples to pay the rent, and a blessing on the apple-harvest was badly needed that year, what with the cost of everything, and so much rain. Added to which all the school-teacher in her rose up in response to Mr. Tracey's appeal to her as an educated woman; religion apart, it *was* only right that the old traditions and customs should be preserved, and people should see that poor as the Shawns were they had the intelligence to appreciate this necessity. Besides, little enough glory came the way of the Shawns, she thought, bitterly, and folks should see that when called upon * Shawn's place ' could * cut a dash ' with the best of them—even with big and prosperous farms like Cross Deep. Flaydering should see that Ellen Shawn's cider and apple-wine were as good as anyone's, and her baking better.

Andrew Shawn said lhat he didn't reckon the Almighty had much to do with good harvests or bad, whether of apples or hay or corn, it was just fanner's luck, but if a few casks of cider and a

bonfire or two could persuade the ghost of old St. Swithin to hold off the rain on the fifteenth it would do a power o' good and he'd be mighty obliged.

Ellen had long ago given up protesting against Andrew's innate superstition and lack of religion; it did not matter for what reason he agreed to the apple-christening so long as he did agree; she knew that neither pride in his farm nor belief in the value of invoking God's blessing on the apple harvest would carry weight with him; all she wanted was his consent; she no longer expected anything of him; all she wanted was that he should not interfere with her plans. There was a time when she would have tried to arouse his enthusiasm, but not any more.

So there was to be an apple-christening at Shawn's, and Mr. Tracey went round getting votes as to who should be the apple-virgin—whom tradition insisted should be the best-looking girl in the village, and one, of course, whose chastity was unquestioned; he stressed this point very firmly, for it would not do if Rose Hanby should be chosen; she was pretty enough with her red hair and her ready smile, but the apple-virgin must be above reproach. The vote fell easily to Hester; there was no doubt that she was the best-looking girl in the place—and as to chastity, why she hadn't even a sweetheart. There were a few who suggested Linda Shawn, but Mr. Tracey discouraged this idea; she was too young, he said; she would * keep '; he hoped to arrange other apple-christenings and her turn would come; there were not so many girls who were both pretty and chaste that they could afford to waste any •—and by next year Hester Wray might be married; then, if they had already had Linda Shawn, they would be hard put to it to find a suitable virgin.

All day in Flaydering on the fifteenth of July, in fields and lanes and rick-yards, over garden-fences, at the post-office stores, at the * Four-in-Hand', even in the school playground, there was tossed to and fro the shuttlecock of question and answer: " Going over to Shawn's place for the apple-christening this evemV ?"

ft* Aye; we'll all be goin* over, right enough.'* •

" Up at Shawn's place " there was an atmosphere of flurry and

excitement a full hour before sunrise, a baking of cakes, an uncasking of cider and apple-wine, a stringing of Japanese lanterns among the apple-trees, a great arranging and re-arranging of trestles and boards and benches the whole length of the orchard, and everyone short-tempered.

The routine of the farm was completely disorganised. Returning from taking the first consignment of milk to the station, Andrew had to wait for his breakfast because Ellen and Hester, and Mrs. Hanby who had been called in to help, had other things to doj they resented the fact that he expected his breakfast as usual on such a day; looking up with faces flushed as much with fluster as with the heat of the oven, they pointed out that *they* hadn't had time to stop for any breakfast, and as likely as not would have no time for dinner either.

When he went in search of Stephen and David for field-work he found them sawing planks to make trestle-tables for the night's feast, and Ellen challenged him to take them off their jobs if he dared.

" How do you suppose we're going to be ready in time ? " she demanded. That was at seven in the morning, and the guests were not expected until seven in the evening. Andrew asked what he could do to help—and was told that the best thing he could do was to keep out of the way. He sighed and went off to the fields by himself.

Linda was given sandwiches to eat at school instead of coming home for the midday meal, because she too would * only be in the way' if she came home. She also sighed; she did not want to be shut out of the circle of excitement. " I wouldn't be in the way," she thought, " I could do a lot of things to help. I could fix the candles in the lanterns, and help lay the tables, and put the little paper frills round the cakes."

She was very excited over the apple-christening. She had not been allowed to go to the one at Cross Deep five years ago because she had been considered too young to stop up late enough, but the girls at school had told her about it, and how it had rained, which meant that St. Swithin himself had christened the apples and that the apple-virgin had failed, and how everybody had said it would

rain for forty days, and it had, and the apples had rotted and the hay been spoiled.

Mixed with her excitement was the fear that a similar disaster at this apple-christening might happen, but there had been a good sky the night before, and the glass was set fair. And there would be a moon. If only Garry could come. But Donald had said it was better Garry shouldn't come, and perhaps Garry was right not to come, she thought, for her mother might speak to him about the confirmation present and make a fuss, and if he stayed away it might die down. The fusses grown-up people made about things usually did die down if like Brer Rabbit you [4] lay low and said nuffin'.

She tried to imagine what Hester would look like as the apple-virgin. She wondered what sort of wreath she would make for her hair. Honeysuckle and roses had been the wreath of the Cross Deep apple-virgin, the girls told her. She could not think of Hester in a white dress like a bride, with honeysuckle and roses in her black hair. " Poppies would be better," she thought. " Red flowers would be more like Hester." Because Hester was more like a gypsy than a white bride. Rose would have been beautiful, she thought; she would have worn a long white dress and worn a crown of big, hayfield daisies. But Rose wasn't good enough to be the apple-virgin; you had to be good for that, and Rose had done something shameful. And with this thought came the memory of Hester beside the pond that winter night with Stephen, and she thought that if people knew about that perhaps they wouldn't think her good enough cither. . . . .Only that was a dark secret which only she and David and Stephen knew. But the only difference between Hester and Rose, so far as she could see, was that poor Rose had been found out. And whatever Rose had done she was a nicer person than Hester, who had eyes like black stones, and a glance that could slash like a whip when she was angry.

2

Between the setting of the sun and the rising of the moon, the whole of Flaydering, and most of Wildwidc, men, women and

children, made their way by road and lane and footpath, on foot, bicycle, and in waggons and gigs, to Shawns. Nan could not get time off from the * Fisherman's Arms,' but Rose was there, and Anne Tracey, looking less like a clergyman's wife than ever in floral chiffon and a picture hat and a liberal application of lipstick, and the Colonel sporting in white flannels and panama hat, and his lady, gracious and condescending in cream lace, and the school-ma'am and her assistant in washing-frocks, and Mrs. Clark, who kept the stores, with an ostrich feather and violets in the bonnet perched on the top of her head, and a cape which glittered with sequins and dangles of jet, and old Mr. Clark in his bath-chair, and old Miss Pringle who lived in a bungalow by herself, and had religious mania and a poultry farm, came with a red sash fastened over one shoulder bearing the words in white letters, " Are you Saved ? '* They were all there, even Mrs. Pinker, well primed with several * nice ports' before starting out, deserted A the business ' for that one evening.

Those who came early were shy, wondering if they had arrived too soon; they stood about under the trees in stiff, awkward groups, self-conscious in their Sunday clothes, and for about an hour Ellen was tormented by the fear that the Shawn apple-christening, which was to help the Shawn prestige so much, was going to be a failure. Mrs. Hanby assured her that it had been the same at Cross Deep at the beginning.

44 It gets livelier later," she said, " there's courage in numbers, as you might say. Give 'em plenty to drink and their tongues'll wag fast enough presently."

By the time the last smear of sunset after-glow had faded and the moon had the sky to herself, the wheezy gaiety of a concertina crept out, at first cautiously, and then recklessly, under the lantern-festooned trees, and with it a rising tide of singing and laughter, and a babble of talk as the apple-wine did its work. Individual self-consciousness was swallowed up in the crowd, and spontaneity was released. Clumsy young farm-labourers discovered that they could dance; plain girls felt themselves suddenly attractive and dashing; older women began to feel themselves not as middle-aged as all that. The lights and the moon had their potency as

much as the free-flowing apple-wine, till there was the bravery of flying flags and the swagger of soldiers marching to martial music whipping the commonplace to a gay recklessness.

Linda, being a child, needed no apple-wine to release the carnival spirit; she was wildly happy, on that night on the ice, and at the fair. It was as though being out there under the moon at a time when you were usually in bed put a kind of spell on you, she thought; it was as though something ran wild in you and you couldn't help yourself; as though flags waved and music beat and lights danced inside you as well as all round; and not merely to yourself but to everyone else, so that they weren't the same selves that did ordinary things on ordinary days, but different in a new and exciting way, so that you hardly knew them for the people who frowned and grumbled and scolded at other times. Oh, but Garry should have been there; then it would all have been perfect—as the fair had been, and the skating party, and her confirmation....

Hester had made herself a wreath of poppies and cornflowers and wore a scarlet handkerchief on her white dress, and even the moon could not make her look anything but a great glowing gypsy.

" A fine, handsome girl," people said, and looked hopefully at the serene sky, telling each other that this year old St. Swithin would be cheated of his job, for it wouldn't be him would be christening the apples, by the look of things, but the apple-virgin herself, as was right and proper. And they speculated among themselves as to how soon they might be expected to be drinking at the wedding of Hester Wray and one of the Shawn l>oys, and which of them 'twould be. But which ever 'twas, they said, 'twould be but a step to another kind of christening.

Both Hester and Stephen knew what was said. It pleased Hester that all Flaydering should believe that either of the Shawn boys was hers for the choosing; it afforded her a sense of power which was sweet to her. More than ever that night she found Stephen's despairing passion flattering, and David's indifference excitingly provocative; and more than ever she felt that the melting of the younger brother's coldness would be infinitely more exciting than surrendering to the older brother's heat. Unlike Nan Collett, her need was to conquer, not to be conquered.

Stephen hated it that all Flaydering should know how his heart was set on Hester. He dreaded the game which he knew it was the custom to play at some point during the apple-christening, and which the Reverend Tracey, in his officious way, would be sure to insist upon—the ring game, in which all the unmarried men sat on the grass in a circle, whilst each girl took it in turn to enter the ring and approach the man she liked best of those presented to her; if the man accepted her, he nodded, and she sat down at his feet and did not leave the circle; if he rejected her, he shook his head, and she must retire with as good a grace as possible amidst jeers and laughter until her turn came to re-enter the circle and try her luck again with some other man. The game was played until all the girls were paired off, when it became the turn of the girls to form a circle and accept or reject the men. Whilst the game was being played, all who were not playing, either because they were married, and therefore not eligible, or because they were too bashful to risk rejection, stood round watching, cheering or jeering according to how the game went.

Stephen felt that if when Hester entered the circle she stood before anyone but himself he would die of jealousy and humiliation, and yet he dared not hope that she would choose him—for how would she be able to resist the opportunity to snub him once and for all, before the eyes of everyone ? He would have liked to have stood out of the game, but it would cause too much comment; people would say that he was afraid to chance his luck. He would not have minded if only Nan had been there, for then he could have chosen her when his turn came, and been revenged on Hester. There was, of course, the wild remote chance that out of sheer provocation she might choose him—for was it not the Shawn apple-christening and the Shawns the most important people in Flaydering that night, and he the eldest son ?

Linda also feared the ring game, for, she thought, if Hester does not choose Stephen, whoever she does choose will have to reckon with Stephen . . . and if it should be David, Stephen would never forgive him, even though David only accepted Hester out of politeness and because after all it was only a game.

After Hester had ' christened the apples ' by flinging a jug of

appl&-wine over one of the trees, Mr. Tracey decided that it was time the traditional game was played. After that pairing-off of the young people the dancing could begin. Mr. Tracey liked everything done in an orderly manner—even enjoyment. And he prided himself on being a born organiser.

Whilst the circle was being formed under the Reverend Tracey'$ direction, Linda pressed forward to the front of the crowd of non-players, and there was in her the incessant repetition of a prayer. '* Please God make Hester choose Stephen. Please God make Hester choose Stephen. For Jesus Christ's sake." She added that because it said in the Bible that whatever was asked in the name of Jesus Christ would be granted. Jesus Himself had said it. And she could not believe that Jesus would not see the importance of making Hester choose Stephen. Otherwise, anything might happen —anything, and the whole apple-christening would be spoiled.

She looked up at the moon, remote and impersonal as God, and remembered something else encouraging from the Bible. Something about if ye have faith enough ye can remove mountains. She stared at the blank fi^ce of the moon and concentrated her faith, willing Hester to choose Stephen, and when at last she looked away and saw Hester stepping into the circle there was nothing in her mind but the beat, beat of her striving will.

As queen of the occasion it was given to Hester to be the first to enter the circle—she must have first choice of the assembled youth, even though it be only a game. " Choose Stephen. Stephen," Linda's mind shouted, and she thrust herself forward so that Hester should see her, and feel her will fixed upon her. But Hester saw only the upturned faces of the young men sitting on the grass, their smiles, they eyes, laughing, mocking, inviting, expectant, eager, and the tiers of faces above them, all of them concentrated on her, wondering whom she would choose. She saw Stephen's hungry eyes concentrated on her as though he would draw her to him magnetically; she saw David's eyes that avoided her and stared into space. She played the game elaborately, spinning out the moments of her power, strolling round the circle and looking at each man with bold eyes and a smile that might have meant anything or nothing. Should she condescend to Stephen,

or force homage from David ? Either suited the arrogance of her mood Debating the choice, savouring her sense of power, she moved slowly round the circle, with a cool, insolent deliberation, tantalisingly appraising.

Linda clenched her hands and prayed. And while all of her being was beating, " Stephen, Stephen," she saw Hester pause in front of David, and stand there, smiling down at him.

Before anyone had properly realised that it was the younger Shawn brother Hester had chosen, something even stranger had happened. David had looked up at her and shaken his head, refusing her.

Flaydering could not believe its eyes. Hester could not believe her own eyes. She was the chosen apple-virgin of Flaydering, and David Shawn had refused her. She, the queen of the occasion, must retire from the circle defeated, to await her turn to re-enter and try her luck again, just as though she had never been singled out for the great honour of the year. She had conferred a supreme favour on David Shawn, and he had rejected it. There was not another man or boy present who would have done such a thing; not another man or boy but would have been flattered to have the privilege of accepting her and have her sit at his feet, even though it was only a game. But in this choice between the Shawn brothers everyone knew that it was not merely a game. That she had chosen David in the game indicated her preference for him as a lover.

She heard the excited buzz of comment on all sides. " Well I never! " " Did you ever ? " " Just fancy! " " Impudent young puppy!" "That's taken her down a peg or two, anyhow!" People being indignant; people being malicious; people being amused; a small rain of spite and jealousy, the inevitable gloating over another person's discomfort, self-righteous moralising over the pride that goes before a fall, and one swallow not nuking a sum* nier. A moment ago she had been a queen and a heroine; now she ^as a laughing-stock—or an object of pity.

She hated them all in that moment, with a black hatred, and she could have spat in the pale face of David Shawn, but she laughed and turned away with a shrug.

[44] That's one up on David Shawn, anyhow," she said carelessly

to the people standing near her as she strolled out of the ring with the same slow, half insolent unconcern as she had entered it.

The game was spoiled; it was impossible to take much interest in the acceptances or rejections of the other girls, when the apple-virgin herself had been snubbed. How David Shawn had insulted the apple-virgin would be a choice tit-bit of scandal for many a day, so that it could scarcely be expected that it should be brushed aside as a mere trivial incident on the night that it happened.

Flaydering was divided into two camps, those who considered the episode * disgraceful', and those who insisted that a game was *9.* game, and that if David Shawn didn't ' fancy' Hester Wray he had every right to refuse her as much as any other girl in the game, if he'd a mind to. Ellen was both angry and bewildered; [4] upset' was the word she herself used to describe her state of mind; it was so unlike David to behave badly; if it had been Stephen, now. . . .

Hester did not re-enter the ring. She was queen for that night, and she was not going to sit at the feet of any Tom, Dick, or Harry; nor when it became the turn of the girls to form a circle did she join in. Rose went straight to David when she entered the circle, and he smiled and accepted her. When it was the girls' turn he went equally directly to her, and she accepted him—amidst cheers from the onlookers. There were people who said that young Rose Hanby had a nerve to turn up to the apple-christening in that brazen way, when everyone knew all about her goings-on, and that if David Shawn had a mind to turn any girl down, it had better be her, " No good," was the phrase they used about her—whilst Mrs. Hanby, bustling about with dishes of cakes and scones, and rinsing glasses, tried not to hear. Rose knew what they were all saying, but she did not care; all that black sorrow and suffering was behind her, and Linda had smiled at her and taken her hand, and said, " I'm so glad you could come," and David instead of snubbing her had chosen her himself when his turn came. What did it matter what the majority of people said—so long as the few people you cared about forgave you your sins ?

To the people who expressed their indignation over David Shawn's daring to refuse her, Hester laughed, and said, " What

does it matter ? It's all in the game ! The apple-virgin ought to take her chance along with the rest when it comes to the matter of a game, I reckon! "

Some people admired her courage; it was * sporting * of her **to** take it like that, they said; some believed that she really did not care; others sneered, saying, "Trust Hester Wray to save her face! "

Stephen, who had accepted the first girl who came to him after Hester had left the ring, did not play in the second part of the game, and when the dancing began he waited until he saw Hester standing beside one of the refreshment tables with no one talking to her at the moment, then went over to her. He said, " I wouldn't have done that to you, Hester."

She tossed her head, laughing at him. [u] Chance is a fine thing! "

He persisted. " I wouldn't have done it."

She poured herself out another glass of apple-wine and said, carelessly, without looking at him, " And do you suppose I'd have cared a tinker's curse if you had ? " She turned her back on him and began talking at random to someone else. Stephen walked away in the direction of the house, telling himself that he would take the pony and trap and drive over to Wildwick—and Nan; he had had enough of the apple-christening.

As he crossed the rickyard to the stables something darted out of the shadowy corner between the hen-roost and the barn, flashed across his path and was gone. Instinctively, quicker than thought, Stephen swooped down and picked up a stone and flung it at the darkness of the hedge behind the stacks. He stood a moment watching and listening, and was just entering the stable when he beard a soft furtive sound, looking up he saw David creeping along the wall of the house with a gun under his arm. Seeing Stephen, David put a finger to his lips as signal for silence.

Stephen said curtly, ** Yes, it was that durned fox again, but he's sheered off."

David straightened himself. " I saw him from the window, linking across the yard, just as I was turning in. Which way did ^e go?"

"' Behind the stacks. But it don't matter now. I want a word with you, so you'd best put that gun down and listen."

An ominous note in Stephen's voice set David's heart racing; he stood still with his back to the wall staring at his brother.

Stephen strolled over to him, his hands in his pockets, on his face the look he had had on that Sunday when he thrust the newly killed rabbit into Linda's face.

" Ain't yer got anything ter say for yerself ? " he demanded.

[44] What's up ? " David asked, bewildered.

The next he knew was that he was lying on his back on the cobbles with Stephen standing over him, shouting at him, " Come on, get up, you little swine! You got ter fight, or I'll kick the stuffin'out of yer! "

He stumbled blindly to his feet seeing nothing but Stephen's white savage face; knowing nothing but that so long as Stephen willed it he must fight. He struck out at that white face, and suddenly all the devils that Stephen alone had power to release in him stormed over him like an invading army; a red mist blotted out Stephen's face and he fought, as Stephen fought, in a black, mad inferno of haste.

VIII: CAIN

WHEN Stephen had gone Hester went in search of David. She was determined to make him talk to her, even if he should refuse to dance with her; people should see that an insult from David Shawn was too unimportant to her for her to treat seriously; that she did not even regard it as an insult; that it meant nothing to her, either as Hester Wray or as the apple-virgin.

Not finding him amongst the dancing couples, or the groups standing about the tables, talking, eating, drinking, watching the dancers, it occurred to her that he might have gone off with Linda to High Mead where the bonfires had been started. She found there only a few children, and youths who did not care to dance. She saw Linda crouching beside a bonfire with some other children, and went over to her.

She asked, " Have you seen David ? "

Linda started out of a reverie that had nothing to do with the bonfire and looked up. " Yes, he was here a few minutes ago, but he's gone to bed now. He said he was tired."

Hester said impatiently, " What nonsense! He can't have gone to bed yet—it's not much past ten! "

Linda defended him. " He's got to be at market early in the morning. It's his turn—Stephen went last week.'*

Hester persisted, ** Anyhow, he won't have had time to get to bleep yet—be a good girl and run over to the house and say * Hester would like to speak to you.* Oh, and say, * She says she's not angry, and it's not about that'. He'll know what you mean."

Linda rose reluctantly, and she thought, " I know what you mean, too, and David won't care whether you're angry or not," but she said merely, " All right. Where will you be ? "

" I'll wait here. Somewhere about here. And you'd better not come back, had you ? It's long past your bedtime."

Linda turned away without answering and ran off in the direction of the house. Hester thought triumphantly, staring at the leaping flames of the bonfire, ** He's afraid of me. He's avoiding me,'* and knew again that exultant sense of power. She turned her back on the bonfire and returned to the orchard. David should

come back to find her dancing gaily. And she would keep him waiting.

Linda, squeezing through the hedge into the orchard, as a short cut back to the house, wondered whether David had really gone to bed because he was tired, or because he wanted to get away from Hester. Perhaps if he weren't really tired he would come and watch the fireworks with her, privately, from the top of a hay-stack. All her carnival excitement had evaporated when God had made it clear to her that he did not intend answering her prayer; David had gone to bed, Stephen had disappeared, Rose was dancing with Donald, her mother was endlessly occupied cutting sand-wiches and gossiping with friends, and her father was at the bottom of the orchard playing shove ha'penny with a few of his * Four-in-Hand' friends who like himself would sooner be leaning against a bar-counter drinking beer than lolling under apple-trees drinking home-made wine 5 nobody took any notice of her except to ask her if she had seen so-and-so, or to run and fetch something from the house, or take a message, or to ask her if it wasn't getting rather late for her to be up. . . . Even Donald had forsaken her when the dancing had begun. And the moon stared cold and unheeding as the God who did not answer prayers in spite of holy promises; and an owl cried like something in pain—the way something would be crying in Stephen, she thought.

She wondered whether Stephen was glad that David had refused Hester in the game. She thought he must be glad of that; he couldn't have been anything but angry and jealous if David had accepted Hester. She was glad that David had had the courage to act as he did; now, perhaps, she thought, Hester would understand that David didn't want her, and that it was no use her looking at him and trying to make him feel about her as Stephen did.

She left the orchard, with its lights and singing and music, and was swallowed up in the darkness of the jungle of elder-trees, and picking her way between hen-coops and ferret-hutches came out on to the cobbled path at the back of the house. The milk-churns, upturned on the low bench against the wall, glinted like pure silver where the moonlight touched them. A lantern swinging from one

of the kitchen beams made of the window a yellow square above the churns.

[44] It might be a witch's house," thought Linda.

Coming into the kitchen she saw Stephen bending over the sink. He turned as she entered, and she saw that he had a long cut over one eye, and that in one hand he held a piece of wet, blood-stained rag.

He scowled at her, and demanded, " What the devil do *you* want ? "

She answered timidly, " I came to find David. Hester wants him."

She wanted to ask Stephen how he had hurt himself but his manner made her afraid.

He said,[4A] Well, you can go back and tell her that she needn't bother—I've said it all for her. Go and tell her I've given the little swine a lesson in manners that he won't forget very quickly."

Linda's heart began to beat fast, and there welled up in her the sick feeling she always knew when she was frightened. Stephen looked terrible to her standing there in the great shadowy cavern of a kitchen, with the blood oozing out from the cut above his eye, always a fresh spurt of blood the moment he took away the piece of wet rag with which he dabbed at it.

His eyes were black stones, and the violence of his words beat on her like blows.

She knew what had happened. Stephen was angry with David for refusing Hester. He hadn't understood that it was for him that David had done it. Because he loved Hester, who was hard and not worth loving, Linda thought—all that Stephen could see was that David had insulted her.

She said in a small shaken voice,[4i] David did it for you. You should be glad, not angry. He thought you would be pleased."

[4*] You mind your own dam' business and get off to bed," Stephen stormed at her, raising his head from the sink, and the blood beginning to spurt out of the cut again and to run down his cheek. " What the devil's it to do with a kid like you ? Mind your own business, can't you ? It's time you were in bed, anyhow!"

Linda knew that it was no use pleading for David. It was

never any use trying to reason with Stephen when he was in a rage. She crept away, out of the lantern's arc of light, towards the back stairs which led up to ' the boys' room'. She had to find David; she had promised, and Hester was waiting; if David was there she must go to him. The stairs creaked frighteningly, and she had a sudden fear that Stephen might come after her; she did not know what he might do; she was afraid with a blind instinctive fear. She groped for the string of the latch on the door at the top of the stairs and pressed the door open, cautiously. The moon-shadow of the window on the floor was like a reflection in a mirror in its hard brightness, and barred with shadow like a grating. She saw David lying, fully dressed, face downwards on the bed under the high lattice window. He lay with his head on his arms, and there was a ladder of moonlight and shadow flung across his body. Perhaps he was asleep and would not want to be disturbed; perhaps he was crying; that was a frightening thought, for when people cried they wanted to be alone. Yet when you loved them as much as she loved David it was when they were unhappy that you most wanted to go to them. You loved them so much then that it became a pain in your own body, as though their pain got into you; but there were never any words that could be said aloud, only something in yourself crying too. She stood there in the darkness with love and pity welling in her, trying to think what she could say, what she would do, how she should comfort David, how make him understand that Stephen was only angry because of the great pain in himself.

She moved over to him and touched him lightly, whispering his name.

He moved slightly. " What is it ? "

She could not give him Hester's message; she knew he would not care; it seemed completely unimportant now.

She said, " I came to see how you were."

" I've got a headache, that's all." His face emerged into the whiteness of the moonlight as he moved, and she saw that his lips were swollen and bleeding, and that one eye was half-dosed from the flesh that had swelled up round it, and there were smears of blood on the pillow.

She wanted to put her arms round him, but he wanted her to think he had only a headache, and it would make him ashamed if he knew that she knew the truth. All of her being cried out to him in an ache of love, " Let me in. Tell me about it. There's no need to be ashamed with me. It's me, Linda, and I love you, and I know how it is with you, and with Stephen."

But she could only say, in her thin, tremulous, frightened child's voice," Should I wring out a doth in some cold water to make your head better ? "

He answered her impatiently, in an agony of wanting to be left alone, " No, no; you run along to bed, there's a good kid. It's long past your bedtime."

And she knew how much he wanted to be alone, yet she could not go. She stood there blinded with tears. David whom she loved . . . and all this pain . . . and not being able to do anything. She saw his hands clench on the pillow and he turned his face away into shadow, but she knew that he was crying. She put out a finger and touched the back of his hand, running her fingertip down from knuckle to wrist, and there was a wild silent sobbing in her. "David! David!" but she stood there without speaking or moving. She saw him groping under the pillow, and knew that what he sought was his handkerchief, and she knew that it was on the floor beside the bed, close to where she stood, but she dared not pick it up and give it to him, because then he would know that she knew he was crying, and he would be ashamed. There was nothing to do but go away; go to bed.

She tiptoed away as quietly as she could, but her feet made scuffling noises on the bare boards. She knew that he would not know that she had not gone some minutes ago, when he had told her to go.

As she crossed the landing to her own room she heard the thin scream of a rocket. The fireworks were just starting. . . .

It was all going on out there—the drinking and the laughing and the dancing; the banging squibs and the golden rain and the Roman candles ; . . and Hester waiting, and the moon staring unheeding as God.

It didn't matter. Lights and flags and music , . * and crying alone in the dark. It didn't matter who christened the apples, God or the moon or St. Swithin—or a woman with whips in her eyes.

There was nothing to say to sorrow. And to her all that even God himself would probably say was, It's long past your bed-time—time you were in bed.

IX: 'HOLLOW CITY—[f]

BY the time he had finished bathing his cut and bruised face Stephen decided that it was too late to go over to Wildwick; the * Fisherman's Arms ' would be shut, and Nan would have gone home to bed; in any case he was no longer in the mood to talk to anyone. He supposed he had better go and see if David was all right—he had looked pretty sick when he had staggered back to the house. With the collapse of his anger remorse filled him. Somewhere deep down in him he knew that his anger had never really been directed against David, but against Hester; it had been a pretty dirty trick taking it out of David; he had had to hurt someone, and there had been that excuse for a fight with David. . . .

He did not take a candle when he went up to bed; it would be easier to apologise in the dark. But when he went into the room he shared with David he found it empty—and irresistibly knew a sense of relief. He undressed hurriedly and pitched into bed. For a little while he lay listening, waiting for David, not to speak to him, but to have the reassurance of him there in that room, as though nothing had happened. David seemed to be a long time; he struggled against sleep, but it finally overtook him. He lived the fight over again in his dreams, but when he knocked David out and bent over him as he lay stunned he saw not David's face, but Hester's.

Whilst Stephen was dreaming this, David sat in the barn writing by the light of a hurricane lamp. He wrote first to Stephen. " Dear Stephen, by the time you read this I shall have gone. It's not my fault Hester prefers me to you, and I don't want her, but maybe if I clear out you'll stand a better chance with her. You needn't feel it's your fault; it's not because of our scrap I'm going, but since you've been mad on Hester it's not been the same for me; everything's different, and it don't do either of us any good if I hang on here, so Good-bye and Good Luck. Please give the letter to Mother. Your ever loving brother, David. P.S. Do your best for Mother with the farm; you know how much it means to her, and she'll have no one if you don't help her.'* To his mother he wrote, " My darling Mother, You mustn't be upset when you get this and find I've gone off without saying Good-

bye to you. It would make us both cry to say Good-bye, but I've got to clear out so that Stephen stands a chance with Hester. Maybe she'd be nicer to him but for me. Anyway I want to give it a chance. You always wanted me to work in the town, so I'm going to have a shot at it. Maybe I'll get a good job in an office and you'll be proud of me. I don't know where I'm going yet, but I'll be all right, never you fear, and I'll write when I'm settled down, and you're not to worry, I can take care of myself and shall soon be able to send money home to help you more than if I stayed on. Don't say anything to Hester about the reason I've gone, and tell Stephen not to, for that would spoil everything. Tell Linda I'll write to her, and don't worry about Garry Payne giving her that confirmation present; Garry's all rightj ask Donald. Maybe Stephen and Father will do a bit more about the place now I'm gone so you won't need to get an extra hand except for harvesting, and in time we'll get more machinery about the place. I'll save when I've got a job and send you all I can, and don't you lose heart about Shawn's or think I'm deserting it, because I'm not, and maybe I can help more by going. So you can tell Hester that if she doesn't marry Stephen she'll be sorry one of these days when she sees what she's lost in the way of a grand farm. Now don't you go upsetting yourself, because everything's all right and will work out for the best, you'll see. Your ever loving son, David." He under-lined [4] all right' heavily. He put this letter into an envelope and stuck it down and wrote * Mother' boldly on the outside, and then folded it and enclosed it in the envelope whicl^ held the note to Stephen.

He put the packet in his coat pocket, made a comfortable place for himself in the hay, then blew out the lamp and lay down. The barn was black except where thin wires of moonlight came through the cracks in the door. He heard the gay wheezing of a concertina drawing near as a party left the orchard, then receding as they turned down the path between the ponds. The apple-christening was breaking up. There was the laughter and commotion of good-byes, the crunch of wheels and the spatter of hooves, and singing, and the uneven rise and fall of a mouth-organ. His mother and Hester and Mrs. Hanby would be busy till midnight, he thought,

clearing away the crockery and glasses and bringing in the chairs; he ought to be helping them; but they would see his cut and swollen face and ask questions, and he would not know what to say. His mother would resent it that neither he nor Stephen gave her a hand, but when she got his note in the morning she would understand. It had been a good apple-christening; she would be pleased about that, and perhaps if he could get a good job in the town he would be able to get her some of the improvements for the farm that she had had her heart set on for so long—the sundial, and the bath-room, perhaps, even, the motor-plough, and a more up-to-date reaper-and-binder. Perhaps it was really a good thing he was going on Stephen's account; perhaps it would all turn out for the best, and he'd be helping the farm and his mother, as well as Stephen. . . . But he'd miss the good smell of the hay and the cows, and the fields in the morning . . . and lying talking in the dark with Stephen. Only he mustn't think of that, but only that it was for the best he was going. But it was so hard to go; a kind of death, as he had always known it would be if ever it had to be, the way he had dreaded it that time there was the talk of him getting a scholarship and going into the town to work. Now, as then, he could not imagine a life away from Stephen ... It didn't matter about crying there in the darkness of the barn with no one to see or hear.

In the road beyond the stock-yard there was a chorus of singing, [4] Pack all your troubles in your old kit-bag and smile, smile, smile.* David rolled over in the hay and covered his ears with his hands. Stephen, Stephen, there can't ever be anyone but you. We've been so close, like as if we were twins. That time I had toothache so bad, and you got up in the night and came downstairs to find ginger for it. That time we were sparring about jumping in and out of the empty waggon in the big field and I got pitched out. David, you said, David, speak to me. When I opened my eyes you were so white you looked all different. That time we had the heat-wave and we bathed naked and lay on the sand-dunes and the sky looked almost violet-it was so hot, and we walked on without speaking, full of Sun and feeling like as if we weren't ordinary folk at all. We were close then. You'd never looked at a girl then,

and everyone ud say you were queer and unnatural, but you were happy the way you haven't been ever since you took that note up to Traccy's asking Hester would she come and work at Shawn's. . , . Oh, it's a good thing I'm going} I couldn't have stood much more of the loneliness of it, Stephen going out night after night, and coming in too tired to talk, or to talk only of Hester or of Nan, and working together day after day yet feeling so alone, shut out, after all the years of closeness. . . . We didn't have to talk to each other, Stephen and me, there wasn't any need. I: was all there without saying anything, our thoughts goin' the same way, and when we quarrelled it didn't matter; it all blew over and then we'd be closer than before . . . Stephen . . . Stephen . . .

He dozed a little, between the rushes of thought and memory, and somehow the darkness lifted from the barn, and it was grey morning, and a cock was crowing. He got up then and went out; he must hurry, for the whole household would be up and about before it was properly light, and Stephen and his father coming over to the cow-sheds for the milking. He stuck his letter in the long bar which secured the door of the cow-sheds, where Stephen must find it when he came to open them, and hurried away across the rick-yard to the road. He walked rapidly over the heath road towards Wildwick. He knew what he must do; he must get something to eat, and he must get some money—and advice as to the best way to set about getting work in the town. He had thought it all out in the night; Rose would help him; Rose had once sought refuge in the town herself; she would know where to look for a cheap room, she would give him something to eat, and lend him a little money, because she liked him, and would be grateful to him for having chosen her last night at the apple-christening.

It was a ong walk over the heath to the other side of Wildwick where Rose Iworked, and the sun was up by the time he reached there. He had a little difficulty in finding the house, for he met no one to ask, but he found it at last, a prosperous, ornate house of the villa type, with carriage gates and shrubberies and a tradesman's entrance. He walked up the path and found the scullery door

standing open so that he could see through into the kitchen, and there was Rose in a blue cotton frock and a big white apron kneeling before the range raking out the fire. He called to her, and she turned round, startled.

She jumped up as she recognised him and ran through to where he stood leaning against the door.

"David Shawn! At this hour! What on earth's up ? "

"I'm running away. To the town. I want you to help me. And I'm dying for a cup of tea! "

She looked at him anxiously. " You've come all the way from Flaydering without breakfast! Look, sit here, and I'll boil up a kettle on the oil stove in no time."

He felt a little faint with the excitement of his adventure, and walking so fast and so far on an empty stomach, and sat for a few moments with his head in his hands. Rose did not speak; she sliced bread and buttered it rapidly and thrust it into his hands.

"Eat," she urged, "you'll feel better."

He ate ravenously whilst she stood alternately watching him and the kettle.

She laughed ruefully, "Watched pot never boils. Never mind, it won't be long now. Tell me—why have you run away f What are you going to do ? "

" I can't tell you why I've run away. Not yet. But I want to get work in the town. Not Micklefield, it's too near, but some bigger place, farther off. And I wondered if you could let me have a few shillings to tide me over till I get something. It shouldn't take more'n a few days, should it ? "

"Of course Til lend you some money—I was paid this week for the month, thank goodness. I could let you have nearly all of it—the whole of two pounds."

"It's good of you, Rose, but I wouldn't need all that, would I ? What would a room cost me ? "

"You could get one like I had for five or six shilling a week, but you've got to eat as well. What sort of work will you be lookin' for ?"

"1 don't rightly know. But I'm good with figures, so maybe I could get something in a shop or an office, I thought. Failin'

that, I'm good with horses, so maybe I could get taken on at * stables. I'd take anything to start with."

The kettle sent out a puff of steam, and she made tea, quickly.

[44] It won't get you into trouble, me bein' here ? " he asked, anxiously, as she brought him the tea.

[44] Lor' bless you no. They won't be up for another three hours yet. But I have to get up early to get the fire going, and get started before the children wake—they hinder me so. There's only me for all the housework and cooking and to look after the children, you see. *She* doesn't do a thing. It's worse than the places I had in Micklcfield. I wisht I'd never come back,"

[4]* Why did you—the second time, I mean ? "

[44]1 got fed-up. It was one of those houses with a basement kitchen and ever so many stairs. And it was Easter and I kept thinking of the country and the primroses, and my young sister being confirmed, and little Linda. You get terrible homesick in the town after a bit."

[44]1 expect so. But it don't do for me to think o' that—just yet."

She saw that his eyes were suddenly blinded with tears and knew that he was homesick already. Running away was a sorrowful thing—she reckoned she knew all about that. He was so young—no younger than she was in actual years, yet she felt years older. It wasn't how old you were in years, but what you'd been through, she thought, and her heart was soft towards him. There had been no regret in her at leaving her homes she had been glad to go, but she knew what it was to feel as desperately alone as David Shawn was feeling now.

Suddenly she dropped down on her knees before him and looked up at him. [4t] David—don't go off alone like this. Let me come with you! There's no place for me here, either, you saw how they all looked at me and whispered and nudged each other last night, and no one but you being nice to me. And I'm fed up with this place—slavin' me soul out all day, on the go from the time I get up till the time I go to bed, and kept awake half the night with the kids. I wouldn't ha' stopped a week but for the kids—they're sweet, but it's too much, with all the cooking and housework as well. I'd be leavin' any way at the end of the month. Let me

Irun away with you—we'll help each other, and it'll be less lonely [with the two of us! "

He stared at her, bewildered. ** But—I don't see how we kould——"

" Yes, we could. I can get my few things together in no time. It'll do them good to have to shift for themselves for once. I don't owe them nothing. They've had their money's worth out o' me. Let me come with you and we'll take a couple o' cheap rooms and find work—I got a reference from the last daily place I had that'll L'ct me a job tomorrow, and we can live on my two pounds easy tnough till we're settled in work. I'm not makin' up to you, David—I know you don't care that way about girls. It's not that, David. But the loneliness you're goin' to if you go alone. And there's nothin' for me here."

" But—what'll everyone say when it gets around that you ran |t if from your place the same day as I left home ? "

44 I don't care what they say. What does it matter ? We won't be there to hear it."

44 That's true." He stirred his tea, his mind working rapidly. Rose was right about the loneliness; it was something he had been dreading; and Rose knew how to manage in a town, in the "utter of getting work and finding rooms. People would say they Had gone off together as sweethearts—his mother would think that, and Stephen, Hester—everyone. . . . Suddenly it came to him that it might be a good thing they should think that. Hester would think he had run off with Rose. It was the best thing possible she could think about him; and thinking that she'd have to give up thinking about him as a possible sweetheart for herself; he would be lost to her forever. Not merely had he gone—but with someone else. It would be splendid if she thought that—t must surely strengthen Stephen's chance with her. And his mother, though she mightn't like the idea of him going off with Rose, would at least grieve less over that, he thought, than over *he thought that he was lonely and unhappy. It was an insptra-tj on! It nude everything easier in every way.

" There's nothing to worry about on my account," she urged, r I'd be goin' at the end of the month anyway."

He set his cup down and seized her hands. " Then let's go together—now! As you say, we may be able to help each other!"

She jumped up. " It's not seven yet—we can get the eight o'clock train easily! Til go and pack—wait for me in the lane! "

Eight o'clock found them sitting side by side in a third-cla« compartment, a little frightened by their daring, but adventurous. The few people who saw them wondered about them; they looked 80 very young, scarcely more than children, not brother at ii sister, one would say, the dark, pale boy, and the flushed, mi-haired girl, yet somehow not lovers, for all they sat huddled so close, holding hands less from affection than from need of comfort and reassurance, it would seem. , , .

X: 'IN A HOLLOW LAND'

NOT since the Reverend Tracey's umbrella had been found in the ditch had there been such a scandal throughout the countryside as when the news spread from Flaydering to Wildwick and back again, that Rose Hanby and David Shawn had run away together. Everyone said that there was no getting away from it that still waters ran deep; who would have thought such a quiet reserved lad as David Shawn would have dreamed of such a thing, least of all with a fast little baggage like that Rose Hanby. It only went to show how deceptive appearances could be. But David Shawn of all people. . . . .

Ellen Shawn passionately and bitterly denied it. Why should Jt be assumed that just because Rose Hanby had run away from her place the same day that David left home to take up work in the town, that they had gone off together ? It was a disgraceful buggestion. But the fact that David had accepted Rose in the ring game at the apple-christening, and chosen her himself when it became the turn of the men to choose, was confirmation enough; they had ' fallen ' for each other, that night, there was no doubt about that, and it was no use Ellen Shawn trying to deny it.

In her heart Ellen did not know what to believe. It was true enough that David and Rose had chosen each other at the apple-christening, and they had always liked each other, but David never looked at girls, and young people didn't fall in love overnight and run away together the next day. David had said that he was going for Stephen's sake, and to help make some money for the farm. And Rose had left no note, though a few days after her Disappearance she had sent her mother a postcard giving no address but merely saying she had gone back to the town because she was ' fed up ' with the country, and that it was no use to look for her because though this card would bear the Micklefield postmark she wasn't there, but a good many miles away.

" David wouldn't do anything would make me ashamed," Ellen kept saying to herself, to Andrew, to Hester, to her neighbours.

Andrew said, " Why should you be ashamed if the boy *has* gone off with a girl ? It's natural enough, ain't it! "

Hester's one cry was, " That little good-for-nothing of all people, and a boy like David! "

Only Stephen did not believe that David had gone off with Rose: but he wanted his mother to believe it because that would encourage Hester to believe it; and he wanted Hester to believe it for the same reason that David did.

[44] It's no use you frettin' after him," he told her, *[4] Rose'll make him forget you and all of us."

Hester eyed him stormily. " What's the good o' sayin' that r You might as well tell me not to breathe! "

But her heart was hardened against David. She told herself bitterly that she was a fool to care; he had insulted her at the apple-christening, and now he had gone off with a girl who had got herself into trouble once and looked like doing it again, a girl with no shame in her. She hated Stephen because he had witnessed thu double humiliation; she told herself repeatedly that she would leau Shawn's, but there was always present in the background of all her surface anger and resentment and hatred the wild insuppressiblc hope that David might come back; and she dared not leave Shawn'* whilst there was that hope, however remote. There was always the hope, too, that everyone might be mistaken, and that Rose'* flight on the same day as David's might be after all nothing but coincidence.

[44] David wouldn't run away from us to go off with Rose," Linda said, but she did not say what she believed, that David had gone off so that Stephen would have a better chance with Hester, for that would spoil what David was trying to do. And one day Daviu would come back; she was quite sure of that; David wasn't hard like Stephen, and he loved them all too much to stay away for ever, or even for long. David had to do what he thought right, and what David thought right wouldn't be a selfish thing.

She could not grieve after David as her mother grieved, for a week after David's departure school broke up and she would never have to go back. All the Summer stretched ahead, and she could go over to Wildwick—and Garry, not as often, rt was true, as when she had been a school-girl enjoying summer holidays that would come to an end, for now that she had left school she must help more in the

house, her mother said, but still, several times a week. She read the note for July 24th which she had entered at David's suggestion earlier in the year, "* . . . it will be time for me to start making plans to be a nun." Below this she now wrote, " But now that the day has come I don't want to be a nun any more, because I have Garry."

Because she dared not confess to her mother that she was going over to Wildwick when she went out, and must not stay out long for fear of arousing suspicion, Garry would come halfway across the heath to meet her; they never had more than an hour together, but they were precious hours. And now Linda knew quite certainly that she would never be a nun, but that one day she would marry Garry and live with him in a little house by the sea and be happy ever after. When she was old enough to be engaged to Garry he would give her a ring and they would tell everyone; in the meantime it was a lovely secret. They did nothing when they met but walk through the green sea of bracken, or sit and watch the rabbits scampering in the sweet warm grass, talking fitfully of everything and nothing, as children do, laughing and teasing each other, or growing close in silence. Sometimes on Saturdays she went over to Wildwick with Donald, and knew again the old excitement of the launching of the boats, and when the *Sea-Gypsy* slipped down the ways she would watch it until its red sail was a faint smear on the horizon, and for her it was the most beautiful ship in the fleet, because it was Garry's.

David wrote from time to time; but giving no address and the postmarks on his letters varying. He had not done as well for himself yet as he had expected and hoped; he was a milk roundsman, but it wasn't so bad, he said, for he had a horse to look after, and he was in the open air all day. Presently he might be put to work in the shop keeping accounts, and then he would get more money. He missed the country, he said, particularly at this time of the year when the mornings were so good. He hoped the crops had done well and that Linda would enjoy the Harvest Festival.

Ellen took every letter she had over to Mrs. Hanby to compare it with anything she might have received from Rose; but there

was never any news, though Rose's occasional postcards continued to bear the same postmarks as David's letters.

"They're together, right enough," Mrs. Hanby would say, grimly. "Let's hope that if she gets herself into trouble a second time she'll make him marry her."

Which was the sort of remark which always sent Ellen home crying, because, like most mothers, she could not bear the thought of any son of hers making love beyond a few chaste kisses, and even that she would prefer not to know about.

Every time David wrote, Stephen would say to Hester, " He doesn't mean to come back, you see, so you might as well make up your mind to it! "

Once when Hester turned away with her eyes full of tears, he pleaded, " Hester, what's the use o' grievin' after him ? I love you, and if you'd have me I'd work hard to make a good thing o' this place. But as it is I haven't the heart."

She said despairingly, " It's no use, Stephen. You can't make yourself love people, I reckon, any more than you can stop lovin' them when it's no use."

"Maybe we could get along without lovin'," Stephen urged, "I'd work if I had anything to work for, and stop drinkin' anJ fooltn' around with Nan Collett. It's not her I want, but you, and you know it."

She shook her head. "It ud be no use, Stephen; I'm no good to you; you'd be always rememberin' it was David I wanted."

"I wouldn't care about that if you was married to me. And it it didn't work there's nought to stop us partin' company."

But it was no use, and always after such attempts Stephen would go off in a rage to the * Fisherman's Arms'—and, increasingly as the restlessness of Autumn stirred in him, to Nan Collett's arms. Yet even there, like his mother in her brooding and disappointment, and Hester in her grieving, he walked lonely in a hollow land.

XI: SEA-SAGA

IT is as fascinating as it is terrifying a thought that it is the apparent trivialities of everyday which most profoundly affect human life. It is quite certain, for instance, that had not Mrs. Chantry mislaid her tin-opener on the first of November, the *Sfa-Gypsy* would not have gone to sea on the night of the fourth, and thereby altered the whole course of Linda Shawn's life.

Or perhaps it was because Mrs. Chantry decided that there should be sardines for supper that evening instead of the fried fish which was her first idea; but it was washing-day, and she was tired, and it was easier to open a tin of sardines. That would have been all right had she been able to find the tin-opener. Or perhaps the balance of destiny pivoted upon the fact of her tiredness, for had she been less tired she might have made a more thorough search tor it, instead of allowing her son to prise the tin open with his jack-knife and cut his thumb in the process. Whether you decide rlut it was Mrs. Chantry's tiredness, or her domestic inefficiency which resulted in her being unable to find the tin-opener when it was wanted, which was the root-cause of the scries of events which followed, the fact remains that had the tin-opener been in us proper place in the knife-box on the dresser on that evening of November the first, Tom Chantry would not have cut his thumb with a rusty jack-knife on that day and developed a poisoned hand a few days later. And but for his poisoned hand he would have met Garry Payne at the beach-head on the evening of the fourth and dissuaded him against putting out to sea with that tide.

But at that high tide Tom Chantry was sitting over the fire in his mother's kitchen nursing his bad hand and so consumed by pain that he could think of nothing else, and Garry Payne was down at the * Fisherman's Arms' protesting that it wasn't the weather which was keeping him at home, but the fact that he couldn't find anyone to take Chantry's place. Chantry might not have been able to convince Garry that he was mad to consider going out in such a gale and with such a sea running, but he would have undoubtedly settkd the argument by taking Garry off to the men's club. As it was Garry hung about the * Fisherman's Arms*

brooding and fretting, until Donald Thorpe came in—and volunteered to take Chantry's place.

"I can look after the nets," he urged, " and it'll be different Chantry not being there—I won't be *abU* to give in! It might be the makin' of mel I won't have any choice but to hang on-whatever happens to me! It'll be kill or cure, I reckon—and folks don't die as easy as that! "

" That's true enough," Garry agreed. " If you can live through a night at sea like we're in for tonight there won't be any weather you won't be able to stand, and as you say, folks don't die as easy as all that! Come on! Young Peters is game, and we'll have the laugh of all these softies that say it can't be done! We'll show 'em that there's no weather the *Sea-Gypsy* can't stand up to! "

That had always been Garry Payne's boast—that and the fact that he had never missed a tide; but there was more than bravado and pride in his own and his ship's powers of endurance at work in him that night; now that he had Linda he could not *afford to* miss a tide, certainly not at the height of the herring season; every shilling he might earn was precious now.

But before the harbour lights were half a mile astern he realised that with that shrieking head-wind beating down upon his boat, and shipping seas with every wave, it was' useless attempting to pay out the nets; in such a sea they would be torn from the rollers the moment they were over the side; there was nothing for it but to admit defeat and make for harbour. But that was easier said than done; the *Sea-Gypsy* was shipping water faster than it could be pumped out of her, and presently the flooded engine gave a final splutter and stopped; she heeled over, then, in the black trough of the waves till all her keel was laid bare, and, righting herself a moment, with the next savage impact plunged like a wild horse.

Garry, turning at the helm to shout to the boy, Peters, to run up the sheet, saw Donald clinging to the rail amidships, his face livid in the dim light of the swinging lantern. He saw that, and the boy lurch blindly towards the stern; he saw him stumble, flung against the hatch . . . then the sea swept over in a black deluge. When the bows reared up again there was only Donald dinging to the rail, but now instead of gazing dazedly at the

dipping lantern he was staring at the sea, shouting frenziedly, a maniacal horror on his face. The ship righted herself and rode the next wave instead of lying down to it, and in that moment's pause in chaos Garry, straining at the helm which no longer answered, saw Donald tear frantically at his flapping oilskins, and, freeing himself of them, jump overboard . . . then another gigantic wave crashed over tearing the tiller out of Garry's hands and he knew only a roaring blackness. . . .

In those few frenzied moments between his realisation that Peters had been washed overboard, and his own mad plunge after him, it had come to Donald suddenly, in a lightning flash of realisation, like seeing God in a great light, that if he did not succeed in saving the boy it were better to drown with him than to be carried ashore once more defeated by the sea when the ship got back to harbour. At least it would be a man's death he would be dying, the way a Thorpe should die. . . .

By morning the wind had dropped and the sea gone down a little; when the Wildwick lifeboat turned out, in response to a wireless message from a French trawler, nothing was found, dead or alive, aboard all that was left of the *Sea-Gypsy*. The three bodies were washed up at different parts of the coast later in the day.

XII: THISTLE-HARVEST

ON the morning after that wild night Stephen did not return from taking the milk to the station until nearly an hour after the time he or Andrew usually got back. Ellen began by being annoyed because his lateness kept breakfast waiting, but as the time went on began to be anxious.

"What could have happened to him ?" she kept repeating, "the train couldn't have been as late as all that, surely ? "

Finally she sent Linda down the lane to see if she could see him not that it would bring him any quicker, butit would be a relief, to know that he was on the way.

At the bottom of the lane Linda met the postman.

"Any letters f " she called out to him. There was always the hope that there might be something from David.

He dropped off his bicycle and smiled at her. "Nought but a bill, by the look on't," he said, handing her an envelope addressed to her father. She saw that it had a half-penny stamp and her hopes subsided. Nothing interesting ever came in an unsealed envelope.

"Nothing else ? " she urged.

"Not today, Missie. Better luck next time,*' he added, preparing to mount his bicycle again. ** You're up early—goin' over to see the wreck ? "

She stared at him, and he repeated the news he had been carrying from house to house ever since he had left Wildwick that morning. "The *Sea-Gypsy*—over at Wildwick. The lifeboat went out early this mornin', but there was no bodies, and none been found yet, by all accounts. Poor young Donald Thorpe was one of them. It's a terrible business. They've towed the boat into harbour if you want to go and see it." He mounted his bicycle and rode away whistling cheerfully. He was feeling very pleased with himself; trust a postman to get the news first. . . .

Linda was still standing in the lane where the postman had left her when Stephen drove up ten minutes later. He reined in and she climbed up beside him.

"Stephen—there's been a wreck—r-" She was crying hysterically without knowing that she did so,* "the postman says——"

[44]1 know. That's why I'm so late. I got it from the guard on the milk-train. The station-master at Wildwick told him. I drove over. All Wildwick is down on the beach——" He hesitated a moment, then added, without looking at her, " You know—Donald went——[f]*

She sobbed noisily with the wild uncontrolled grief of childhood. " P'raps they were rescued. Garry had—prizes—for swimming——"

He said, relentlessly, because it was better she should know, [44] The strongest swimmer in the world couldn't have lasted in last night's sea. The *Sea-Gypsy* was the only boat that went out from Wildwick last night—the others wouldn't face it. They say that if Tom Chantry had been about he would ha* stopped them goin', but he was laid up with a poisoned hand."

They jolted along between the brown hedgcsj the earth lay as peacefully in the pale sunlight as though it had never known the ravage of the night's gale. At the rick-yard he reined in, and Linda climbed down, mechanically, to open the gate, and having done so, walked blindly across the yard, and instinctively, in her desire to hide and be alone, went behind the stacks. She looked about distractedly to find a place where she could curl up with her pain, like a sick animal, and found a shelf half way up the stack where a wedge had been hacked out. She climbed up and lay there, alternately fighting the thought that she would never see Garry any more, and trying to realise how it would be, and moaning aloud with her face buried in the hay, [44] What shall I do F What shall I do ? I don't know what to do! "

Her father found her here half an hour later. When Ellen had recovered from the first shock of the news, she had demanded, [u] Where's Linda ? Shall we *ever* get breakfast over ? "

And as she had said that a new thought had struck her. " Garry and Donald—both of them—Linda was fond of them both," and then, rushing in upon that thought, another, [44] And David and Rose—all the ones she most cared about——"

[44] Somebody go and find Linda," she had commanded.

" Til go," Andrew had said, and turned to Stephen. " WhereM you last see her *t"*

[44] In the rick-yard. She'd got the news from the postman before I got here and was crying her heart out."

Andrew went out, and to him, too, came the pitying thought, [44] First Rose, then David, now Garry and Donald/'

His first thought was that she might be hiding in the barn, but **as** he passed the pig-sties to go to it he heard the sound of sobbing from the direction of the ricks.

She was not aware of him until he had climbed up beside her and put an arm round her. There was a choking in his throat he had not known since his mother had died.

He knew of nothing to say to comfort her, except, [4t] You still got yer old Dad, lassie." And she could say nothing but " Garry—Garry—What shall I do? What shall I do?"

He sat there holding her, helpless, feeling that he had never loved her so much, yet that she had never been so far away from him. No one had ever got close to her, he thought, except David, even when she had been a little thing; it had always been David; and David could have comforted her now, but David was not there, and, as always, no one else would do. . . .

In his despair he made wild promises. " We'll get David to come back. Somehow we'll get David to come back. Then you'll be fine, eh ? You don't want to go upsettin' yerself, lassie; it'll be all right; you got me, and we'll get our old David back, and Rose, too, likely; you'd like that, eh ? You leave it to yer old Dad to fix it. And now you come in 'long o' me and 'ave a nice 'ot cup o' tea and you'll feel as right as rain! "

He climbed down and pulled her down beside him. " That's the ticket. Now you wipe those pretty eyes. W'y, if our David was to come along now he wouldn't know our Lindy. * 'oo's that pie-faced galoot ?' 'ed say. [4] That's not our Lindy V He pulled an extremely dirty handkerchief out of his coat pocket and mopped her face. " That's better. Now you come along and save yer old Dad from gettin' into the soup with yer mother for bein' so long gettin' yer to come in."

She blew her nose on her own handkerchief and'let htm lead her back to the house. Outside the kitchen door she suddenly looked,

up. ** There was a letter for you—that the postman gave me, but I must have lost it. It had a ha'penny stamp."

** Don't you worry about that," he told her. ** If it was only a receipt it don't matter, an* if it was a bill it's all the better for bcin' lost."

They went into the house together. Stephen and her mother and Hester were already seated at breakfast. They stared at Linda as she came in, and Andrew said hurriedly, winking, " Here's our Lindy—bless my soul if she 'adn't forgotten all about breakfast."

Linda said, seating herself, '* I went back to find a letter with a ha'penny stamp the postman gave me."

Andrew sat down beside her and reached for the bread, and repeated, with a heartiness from which he intended Ellen to take the cue that she was not to fuss with the matter," That's all right. I was tellin' her, likely it's all the better for being lost."

[44] You should have brought it straight in," Ellen said, distributing plates of egg and bacon and flinching a little at the heat of the plates.

Andrew said, with his mouth full, ** We'd best get on with fixin' up that fence in the big medder, Stephen lad, or we'll be 'avin' more trouble with they sheep."

[44] Goodness knows it's time you did," Ellen snapped. [4<] More tea, Hester ? "

Except that it was over an hour later it was a breakfast time no different from any other.

Nothing was said in Linda's presence about the disaster, but when Ellen went to bed that night she said to Andrew, [4t] I suppose it's a terrible thing to say now, but Linda was getting too fond of that Garry. Not that I would have wished anything so dreadful to happen to the poor boy—it's terrible for his poor mother, but one's own child comes first."

" We must get David back," Andrew said. " She's got no one now, the poor lassie."

Ellen finished plaiting her hair down to the last few hairs, and fastened the lortg tight tail with a piece of tape. [4<] She's got her mother," she said, defensively. She combed at the plait, briskly,

not for any purpose, but because she always did it; it was the finishing touch to her bed-time toilet.

** She's gettin' to an age when she wants more than her mother," Andrew said, slowly. " It's only natural. She was in love with young Garry, if you ask me, and the first time you fall in love it's mighty painful."

[44]Nonsense! "Ellensaid.

Andrew did not argue the point; unless it directly affected himself or Linda he did not care very much what Ellen thought; she was a hard, bitter woman, that wanted everything her own way, and always had; in the beginning he must love her the way she wanted, so that he never had any peace unless he went off to the * Four-in-Hand '; then it was the farm—he must do this, he must do that, just as if it was her farm, and he a hired man; then it was Stephen must win a scholarship and be a credit to her; then David; then Linda. And now it didn't matter that two fine lads had been drowned, so long as it kept Linda from getting too fond of one of them. All that fuss about Stephen going out at nights and maybe carrying on with Nan Collett, and David going off with Rose; and Hester must marry Stephen because Stephen's mother would sooner he had her than Nan Collett; never mind what Hester wanted; never mind what anyone wanted; never anybody mind their own business, but always someone else's; and what joy did she get out of life with all her worrying and fretting? Why couldn't she leave folks alone to live their own lives, instead of this everlasting trying to shape them the way she wanted them. . . .

And whilst Andrew Shawn lay awake staring into the darkness thinking these thoughts, Ellen Shawn lay by his side hating him because she held him responsible for the thistle-harvest that was her life. He had begun by failing her, and he had done nothing but fail her ever since, as a husband, as a father, as a farmer. He always took the children's side against her instead of trying to help her with them. It was he who had encouraged Stephen to drink and to take so little interest in the farm; he had known how much she wanted David to get on in life, but he bad never done anything but sneer, so how could he expect the boy to pass his examination *i* He had seen what had happened to Rose, a very little older than

Linda, yet instead of being sympathetic with her in her anxiety over Linda all he did was say it was ' natural' for a child of that age to get so fond of a boy older than herself that she broke her heart when something happened to him. So there she was, with one son left home and probably leading an immoral life with a girl who was no good, another one going to public-houses and letting the farm go to rack and ruin, and her only daughter moping over a drowned fisherman. Any other father would have encouraged his eldest son to marry a decent girl like Hester and settle down and take a pride in the farm; any other father would have scoured the whole countryside to get a run-away son home again; any other father would have worried as she worried over Linda falling in love; any other husband would try to comfort his wife when he knew she was worried instead of lying there with his back to her sleeping like a hog, as though everything in the garden was lovely. . . .

She could not know that her husband lay as wakeful as herself gathering his own thistle-harvest of bitterness and disappointment and sorrow, and thinking," Ifshe'd any kind o' real natural warmth in her she'd have a soft word to say to a man after an upsettin' day like this, 'stead o' lyin' there thinkin' hard thoughts that are bitter as gall. . . ."

XIII: YEAR'S END

ELLEN had no heart for a Christmas gathering of relations that year; she felt that she could not face all the questions as to why David had left home, why he had not come back for Christmas, and what had come over Linda that she went about without a word to say for herself, and never a smile, and growing as thin as a rake. . . . Besides, without David there couldn't be any Christmas for her. Thank goodness it came on a Sunday this year, so they could treat it as an ordinary Sunday, and she could do her washing on Boxing Day just as on any other Monday. She wrote to her mother and sisters, and to Andrew's relations, that she had not been feeling well lately, and did not feel up to any fuss over Christmas, but was going to spend it quietly, just like any other Sunday. She wrote that she would come and see them all in the New Year—without in the least intending to do so.

So if Ellen had had her way, except that there was a plum pudding and mincepies on the 25th December that year, and that they killed one of the older chickens instead of a turkey, there would have been nothing to indicate that it was Christmas. Ellen hadn't even the heart to arrange the Christmas cards she received along the parlour mantelpiece, but put them away in a drawer.

Andrew protested that this lack of celebration wasn't fair to Linda. " A bit of a party would have taken her mind off all that's happened," he said, and determining that Linda should have a Christmas, in spite of her mother, went out and lopped .the top off one of the young fir-trees on the common, and made a special journey into the town to buy candles, tinsel, ornaments and some red crinkled paper. He planted his tree-top in a wooden box and wrapped the red paper round, and in spite of Ellen's indignant, [44] You've no right to interfere," stood it on a parlour table which he daringly cleared for the purpose. On Christmas night, when they were all sitting round the fire and Linda was disconsolately roasting chestnuts without much caring whether they burned or not, he lit the candles, and then produced a box of crackers he had been keeping as a surprise.

*[4] Really, Andrew," Ellen said,[<4] you know we'said we weren't going to keep Christmas this year, with David not here, then

you go and do this! I do think *you* might have asked me first!"

Andrew flared up into one of his rare rages. '* Christ Almighty, can't a man buy a box o' Christinas crackers without gettin* permission first ?" he demanded, and flinging the box on the floor stormed out of the room. He had already loosened the string of the crackers and they flew out in all directions over the room.

Linda began gathering them up, and when she had restored them all to the box she went over to the door.

"Where are you off to?" She knew by the tone of her mother's voice that there was a storm gathering in her too, but though her cheeks flushed and her heart beat rapidly she ran out of the room without answering. She found her father sitting in front of the kitchen fire, scowling and sucking away at one of the cheap cigars which were his Christmas present from Stephen.

She went over to him, holding out a cracker. " Pull with me ? " she asked. He looked at her and saw the colour in her cheeks and the challenge in her eyes, and felt again the old sense of triumph over Ellen he had known in the days when he encouraged Linda to swing on gates when she had a clean dress on, and to go off with him when he knew she was wanted by her mother.

[44] You bet I will!"

The cracker was hard to pull and Linda nearly fell over backwards when it finally exploded, and they both laughed.

Linda pulled out a pink paper cap from the remains of the cracker and perched it on her father's head.

[44] Don't I look pretty ? " he asked, and had the joy of hearing her laugh again.

[44] Let's read the motto," she cried, eagerly.

Whilst they were reading it Stephen came to the door. " It this a private Christmas, or can anyone join it ? What's wrong with your little brother Stephen having a cracker ? "

For a few moments Ellen sat alone beside the lighted Christmas tree, her eyes filled with-tears. *[4] David, David, why didn't you come back for Christmas ? It isn't Christmas without you. You're all I've got, David, with Linda moping after Garry, and

Stephen with his heart set on Hester, and your father not caring . . ."

She got up and stood at the door of the parlour. " *Why* not bring them in here ? " she said," it's warmer.'*

And Stephen allied himself on her side, as it might have been David, and said, " Yes, come on—let's," making it possible for them all to return to the parlour without self-consciousness.

Linda wrote in her diary that night, **^I haven't written in my book for a long time because I've been too misserbul, and I didn't want to see what I'd written about Garry, because it would make me misserbler, but I've had this diary a year now, so it seems I ought to write something more in it before the year is finished and it's no good any more. Not having the relations here it didn't seem like Christmas, but it would have seemed funny having them and not David. But we had a tree and some crackers, and David sent us all cards, and some handkerchiefs for mother, and a little bag for me, and there was a card for me from Rose, and I had a few other presents. I am glad there is no frost this Christmas and that it's a green Christmas so that the pond won't freeze and there can't be any skating even if there was anyone to skate with."

On Boxing night she wrote, " I have gone to bed early because there is nothing to do, and mother is tired after washing-day and cross as two sticks. This time last year we were all skating. In a way it seems ever so long ago, and in a way it seems only a little while ago."

She wrote no more in her diary until New Year's Eve, and then she read what she had written on the fly-leaf last New Year's Eve: ** When I get to the last page of this book it will be a year that I have lived . . ." and the words *' I wonder" printed below, and then she thought of all the things that had happened that year —her confirmation, the fair, picking bluebells on the way across the common to Wildwick and Garry, her birthday, Garry's kiss under the bows of the *Sta-Gypsy*$_y$ with the sun shining and the gulls crying and the sea dancing, the apple-christening, David's going away, walking on the common with Garry through the green summer-tide, sitting on * bank with him witching the rabbits •camper in the afternoon sunlight, and behind them call golden

flowers moving lightly in the wind like the masts of ships in harbour, the bracken turning to gpld and bronze, and the days drawing in, with a gay sparkle in the morning air and a grey chill at evening, then all the colour withdrawn from the world, only the brown leaves clinging with a kind of desperation, and the earth dun and sodden, seeing Garry less and less, yet carrying the memory of him in a setting of sun and sea and gorse-gold, then heavy November skies shedding grey feathers of snow, and gales sweeping in from the sea ... and a morning of pale sunlight in a lane, and someone talking about a wreck over at Wildwick, and riding off whistling, and never again the scarlet gleam of Garry's scarf or her fingers twisted in the knife-clasp of his old leather belt, and never again Donald calling in with an offering of grapes or a hot-house flower, and not being able to realise it, and waking every day with a sense of disaster, and the days going by somehow, taking eggs down to the stores, turning the handle of the butter-churn until your arm ached, cleaning silver for Sunday, running errands, mending stockings, saying * quite well, thank you ' when people asked you how you were, helping with the mincemeat, blanching almonds, peeling apples, stoning raisins, and so, somehow, Christmas again, and the year's end. . . .

She licked the point of her pencil and wrote, " It is a frightening thing keeping a diary, because you never know what you may have to write in it, and I am glad I haven't a new diary, for I should be frightened to look at all those white pages that are really days not yet lived and wonder how they would turn out; it is like trying to see in the future, and that is a very worrying thing to think about, and it's better not to think about but to live one day at a time."

Then she drew a heavy line and dosed the book and put it away at the bottom of the drawer, and climbing into bed, blew out the candle and put her head under the clothes so that she would not hear the bells insisting that one year was over and a brand new one beginning, whether you liked the idea or not. . . .

Downstairs Ellen Shawn sat alone over the fire listening to the bells, * seeing the New Y^ar in', and hoping for better things next year. There was ho reason to suppose that the new year might be any better than the old, but all the same you never knew, and after

alt when things were very bad there was always the comfort of the thought that they couldn't very well get worse, and, that being so, they might improve. This coming year might bring David back, it might see Stephen settling down; and the Spring would come with the better weather and the new hope that goes with it; you turned over a new leaf and started fresh; you wouldn't make the same mistakes as you made last year, you would try to be more patient, you resolved not to get discouraged so easily; life was what you made it, and tomorrow you started fresh. . . . There was always tomorrow, and new beginning . . . tomorrow. . . .

XIV: MARRIAGE LINES

THE first shock of the new year for Ellen Shawn was a letter JL from David, giving an address at last, and asking permission to marry Rose. " She says that being under-age we must both get the consent of our parents; she says hers won't raise any difficulties as they'll be only too glad for her to be made respectable, and I hope you and Father won't mind either, because really it's the best thing. It's Rose's idea, but I think it's a good one. She says it's simpler if we just get married quietly at a registry office here in the town, things being what they arc; then we can live together and two together can live cheaper than two on their own, Rose says, because there's the saving of a room to begin with, so we can save. I don't want to come back to unsettle Hester again because I am thinking that perhaps by now she may be feeling a different way about Stephen and if I came back it might spoil everything. It would be nice if Hester and Stephen would settle down the same as Rose and me, then we could all be happy, and in time Rose and I could come back and live near and start a little place on our own; that is what I would like, for I miss the country and my heart's not in the town, and Rose doesn't mind where she lives so long as there's a bit of peace, and if we came back she could see Linda again if you would let her, and she would like that, and so would I. So if you would have Father sign the form I am sending we could be married by the time the first primroses are out and perhaps be really settled down by Easter."

When she had recovered from the immediate shock, Ellen's first reaction was one of indignation; why should David, who had a good home with his parents, want to marry and start a home of his own ? And a girl like that, too, who wasn't even a good girl! David could have done better for himself; you wouldn't think a well-brought-up boy from a good home would want to many a girl like that; but then you wouldn't have thought he'd have gone off with her in the first place—and David of all people, her youngest son, and the one closest to her, so fond of his mother and his home . . . and not saying anything about it until it was all arranged, not even telling his own mother. It must have been going on all these months and she never dreamed . . . She had

tried so hard not to believe he had gone off with that girl . . . She'd got him in her clutches, that's what it was, the scheming little hussy; she thought if she could become Mrs. David Shawn people would forget her past goings-on . . . and a boy like David, too, such a good boy, so nice-mannered and gentle-spoken, so much more like one of her own people than a Shawn; he was so young, and he might have done so much better for himself, she had hoped for so much from him, he was to have made up for all her disappointments with the others. . . .

She wept the hopeless, helpless, tears of self-pity, and, as always, having wept felt better. Perhaps there was, after all, something to be said for it; with David safely married to Rose, Hester might take Stephen—if only out of despair; then David would come home, and Stephen might settle down instead of spending so much rime at the ' Fisherman's Arms '. And she supposed they'd all have to marry in the end, and perhaps as things were it would be better if they got it over early. ' Marry young, marry fair', people said; she wasn't so sure about it; but still, she hadn't married young herself, and marrying late hadn't found marriage such a bed of roses. . . .

Andrew said, " Let the boy marry if he's a mind to-—after all it's his own funeral"—and signed on the dotted line. Privately he thought, " She's a nice little thing, is Rose, and he might do worse, and if they want each other. . . ." Very laboriously he wrote a letter to his son, and he did not show it to Ellen.

He wrote," I am not much of a hand with letter riting and your mother don't no I am riting so don't let on I am riting to say I think Rose would be all rite for you if you want her but don't marry her or anyone else son if its not in your hart women have a way of making men do what they want weather men want to or not and its a grate mistake take my word for it but don't let on to your mother I said so or the *fat* will be in the fire so don't be talked into doing anything you don't want and never forget there is always your old home to come back to so do what you want to do son and may your shadow never be less i> the wish of your loving father Andrew Shawn." P.S. I have stned the form and your mother is sending it. Excuse riting. It is the nib.

Ellen wrote in her neat school-teacher hand, " My darling David, Your letter came as a great shock to your father and me, but as we do not wish to stand in the way of your happiness, we give you our consent and hope you will be happy and that Rose will be a good wife to you, though I am sorry you are not going to be married in a church, as I never think a registry office wedding is the same, but as things are (with Rose's unfortunate past, I mean) perhaps it is as well. We both miss you very much and wish you would come home, but perhaps it would not do, as you say, to unsettle Hester and Stephen just when there is a chance of things going right. I will speak to Hester; she seems to be nicer to Stephen than when you were here, so perhaps there is hope. Being away from home I don't know if you will have heard the terrible news about Garry and Donald, though you may have seen it in the paper. Linda was dreadfully upset; I am afraid she was getting too fond of Garry. The Jersey cow has calved again, and we expect to do well with the pigs this year. We now have the big meadow under corn and it is to be hoped we do better than we did last year. Your father, needless to say, would like the whole place under grass, but for once Stephen was on my side} the hay fetched a shocking price last year, and the sheep your father was so mad on having brought next to nothing and gave us more trouble than they were worth . . ." She wrote several pages in this vein, but it served to relieve a good deal of pent-up bitterness in her.

She asked Stephen if he had any message. He replied, gloomily, *' Tell him he needn't wait till Easter to come home—Hester's no nearer thinking about me than she ever was."

Ellen did not send the message. First let David marry Rose. - Then," she thought, " we shall see."

XV: RESURGENCE

HTMHERE was an afternoon in late March, when that insidious JL softness was once again in the air, when Nan Coliett came walking over the heath towards Shawn's. She wore her best coat and skirt, a clean blouse, new shoes, and a renovated hat, and as she walked she hummed a tune of no particular form, but which always wandered across her mind when she was feeling pleased with herself. The height of her heels made walking on the heath road tiring, and she wished she had brought her fur after all, because in spite of the sunshine and the softness in the air there was still more of March than April in the wind; but her satisfaction in her appearance, and the lightness of her heart, outweighed these minor discomforts.

When she came to Shawn's she hesitated a moment at the rick-yard gate, then decided that there really was too much mud about for her best shoes, and went round to the front entrance. She walked up the narrow path between the two ponds and round to the back of the house, where she found Linda sitting on the bench where the churns were turned up to dry engaged in scraping with a broken knife the caked mud and straw from a pair of her father's top boots.

" Hullo, Linda. Busy ? Where's Stephen ? "

" Dunging out the cow-sheds. D'you want him ? "

"Yes. But don't bother. I'll go round."

She found Stephen pitch-forking rotten straw and manure into a waggon; there was the pungent, acrid smell of byres and stables, and a low steam rising. The wheels of the waggon were deep in yellow mud; the horse stamped restively in the slush and shook its head to free itself of the flies swarming up out of the dung; there was the small incessant bell sound of the shaken bridle, the excited ducking of hens, and Stephen's hoarse, monotonous, ** Whoa there! *' Nan stood by the gate of the yard and sniffed the Strong farm smell with a deep satisfaction. She felt, as twenty years ago the school-teacher Ellen Blunt had felt, that it would be a fine thing to be mistress of Shawn's. But, also .like that school-teacher, unconsciously ' Shawn's' was a man for her, more than a farm. She saw Stephen Shawn as Ellen Blunt had seen Andrew Shawn,

as a fine figure of a man, * that good-looking young farmer*, with a kind of gypsy swagger and arrogance about him, romantic in that faint quality of unapproachableness which enveloped him.

She pulled a tiny bunch of primroses bound with darning wool out of the lapel of her jacket and flung it over to him. He looked up and she laughed, and he saw how alight and eager her face was, and jabbing the great fork into a pile of the manure came over to her.

** That's funny—you comin' over—I was thinkin* of you,*' he told her.

She leaned against the gate post, her head a little thrown back, and laughed up at him.

44 1 was thinking of you—that's why I came. I couldn't wait till this evening."

She was flirting with him, and he knew it, and it delighted him.

He stood beside her, smelling of sweat and manure, and she loved him as she had loved him that night on the ice when they had broken through the frozen trees into High Mead. And he knew that the same mood was on her now, and loved the candour of her and its gay courage. No nutter how much she loved a man Hester would never go to him like that, with laughter on her and sunlight; for her there was no gaiety in loving} it was all a sombre business of passion and darkness. It was like that for him, too, but whereas Hester would padlock the gates of the darkness in him, Nan opened them to admit a lightness he lacked in himself. Moreover, Nan wanted him, and Hester didn't, so that his desire for her atrophied with frustration. And there was Nan with a Spring gaiety in her eyes, and a Spring softness behind the laughter.

44 1 durstn't touch you with all this muck on me," he said, " but that's lucky for you, or likely you'd find yourself inside that barn with the door closed, and if the hay didn't smother you I would! "

She laughed. 44 1 like barns."

He looked at her a moment and she did not lower her eyes but stood there—challenging.

" Co-ne on, then !"

He lifted her* and waded through the muck of the yard and set her down on the raised floor of the barn and climbed in after her.

As he turned to close the great door he heard her low eager laugh*

Hester, searching for eggs in the hen-roost next door heard Nan's laugh and Stephen's voice.

She stood there listening, and her heart raced angrily, Stephen —and that Nan Collett. Her hand trembled as she slipped it under a hen; the hen pecked at her, but she did not notice. When she left the hen-roost she was blinded with more than the emergence into sunlight after the darkness. Anger blinded her, and moral indignation, and a kind of excited fear, yet behind all this confusion of emotion there was a sense of release. Now there was nothing more to stay at Shawn's for, with David married to Rose, and Stephen no longer wanting her. She had never seriously thought she might take Stephen, even when David's marriage to Rose had become a fact, but in the absence of any other interest in life it had been exciting and flattering to live on at Shawn's in the romantic atmosphere of Stephen's hopeless passion. Nan had Stephen, and Rose had David, and she, Hester Wray, who was not a * bad' girl like Rose, nor a * fast' girl like Nan, had been left. . . . Well, she was young yet, and David and Stephen Shawn weren't the only lads in the world, thank heaven. But before Stephen had a chance to tell her that he didn't want her any more, she would tell him once and for all that she didn't want him and that she was going. Or perhaps she would not condescend to tell him, but just go, since there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. …

When she walked up the garden path of her home that evening she knew that though she had said nothing to Ellen Shawn she would never go back there. In the morning she would send word round that she was not feeling well and would not be able to come in for a few days. At the end of the week she would write a note to Ellen Shawn saying that the work was too much for her, and that she was taking an easier place—owing to her health, she would say … but she would also write a note to Stephen Shawn telling him that the real reason she waa leaving was because she was [4] tijred of his attentions' and felt dm ft was * oniy fair to him', because the could * never mean anything to him[9]. . . . She

almost succeeded in convincing herself that this really was the reason why she was leaving Shawn's. But not quite—Spring was in the air and she was restless. She did not want Stephen, but she wanted someone to be in love with her even though she could not respond. The days were drawing out, and soon the long light summer evenings would be here, and the air would smell of hay* fields and clover and honeysuckle, and she could not face it all over again, another Spring, another Summer, with no one. . . .

She remembered Stephen's wild kiss beside the pond on the night of the Wildwick dance, and wondered if it was so he had kissed Nan in the duskiness of the barn. She told herself that[4] that sort of thing' wasn't love, and that * decent' lads didn't behave like that. Yet, leaning out of her bedroom window that March evening and looking at the evening star and smelling the incense-scent of narcissus rising from the garden, her mind circled with a curious persistence round the memory of that blind moment, though she would have denied, passionately, that it did so with any regret.

XVI: FAILURES

STEPHEN was very silent during supper that night, and afterwards instead of going out he sat opposite his father in the tnglenook and stared into the fire.

44 Not goin' out tonight, lad ?" Andrew asked.

Ellen said, exasperated," For goodness[9] sake, when the boy *dots* take an evening at home——"

Stephen looked up. 4i I got somethin' to tell you all." He hesitated a moment, then blurted out, 4t I'm goin' to marry Nan Collett, come Midsummer."

There was a little silence, then Ellen said, " Whatever for ? "

Stephen frowned. 4t What *do* people get married for ? "

Andrew knocked out his pipe against the wall of the chimney and laughed. 44 God knows, son I "

Ellen cried, nearly in tears, " Oh, don't joke about it! It's no laughing matter. First David—now Stephen. How *can* you marry Nan, Stephen, when it's Hester you're mad about ? "

** I'm not mad about her any more. Besides—she don't want me, you know that, and I'm not goin' to spend all my life mopin' after a wench as doesn't want me! "

Ellen sat down helplessly and stared at her son. " And are jwu going to leave home now ? "

** Well, yes, I reckon it's the only thing to do. You won't be wantin' us here. Besides, Nan's been born and bred by the sea. I was thinkin' we might rent a little place over at Wildwick and work up a bit of a farm."

*4 But you don't like farming, and you can't start with nothing."

tt Nan's got a few pounds saved, and there'll be a bit comin' to her from the family when she's married, and we can start with a few chicken first. An' I'd work—with summat to work for."

Ellen said in a choked voice," And be as poor as church mice--worse than we are here."

" We'll manage. Nan will go on working at the pub for a bit. Maybe we won't never get beyond a few chicken, and maybe we will. It don't matter as long as you're happy, I reckon." He turned and faced his mother. " I know what you're thinking—that David and me have both made a mess o' things, that we're

both failures, because we didn't get on the way you wanted us to, and because we've both chosen gals you reckon ain't good enough for us——"

Ellen broke in on him, stormily. " Failures! I should think you are both failures! Like all the rest of the Shawns! Oh, you needn't snigger, Andrew, you ought to be ashamed to see your two sons settling down to poverty and failure the same as yourself! I wanted big things for them both—and look at them both 1 They can't even speak good English! They talk like you and they think like you—country yokels—peasants! After all I've tried to do—the way I've tried to improve you, and to bring them up nicely I I thought because I'd had a college education and been a school* teacher and was an educated woman I could make something of my sons if I couldn't of my husband—and look at them both—-failures! Nothing but ignorant Shawns—after all I've tried to do for them! One of them runs off with a common little slut like Rose, and another wants to dear out and marry a barmaid! That's all the thanks I get—for all I've done! "

Her voice broke and the tears streamed down her face. She rose and stood there staring at them both, a thin withered little woman with a fierce flame in her eyes, trembling as she stood there, yet terrible in her anger, so they sat silent with nothing to say to her.

[44] For twenty years I've been dreaming and scheming and hoping, and there's not one of you tried to help. Even David had to run off in the end. And I could have forgiven him that if he'd sent money home to help the farm as he promised, but not a penny does Jie send! Why? Because he doesn't care—not in his heart—any more than the rest of you. All you can all think of is yourselves. The Shawns had better to have stopped in Ireland along with their pigs than to have come here and started something that would be nothing but a monument of failure! Why didn't they leave the earth alone for the rabbits and the gorse and the thistles, instead of coming scratching at it ? It could have been a fine thing, this place, if any of you had cared! It was a big thing to do, coming here and making a farm out of a wilderness of common, but there's not been a Shawn since has had enough pride to go on with it! And

it's more than a woman can do single-handed to undo the mesee* men make of the things they set out to dol Who's going to look after things when Stephen's gone ? Me, I suppose! Weil, that's where you're all mistaken. I'm sick of it all! The best thing Shawn's can do is to 9ell out and let someone with a bit more ambition come and make something out of the place I We've no business here—niggling away at the earth; we've no right …"

The storm of her words crumbled away into silence. She sat down, limply, exhausted by the release of that bitterness of unfulfilled dreams stored up in her for years; she shaded her eyes with her hand; she was defeated, and she knew it; and that was the final bitterness.

Andrew looked from his wife to his son, then jerked his head in the direction of the door.

They both got up and went out, without speaking.

When they had gone Ellen rose, wearily, pressing a hand to her forehead. She saw Linda sitting beside the lamp pretending to darn a stocking. Linda, the neutral one; Linda, the changeling, the lovely child whom she had resented because she could never take the place of Beatrice-Ellen; if Beatrice-Ellen had lived—but even she had failed her, by dying.

She said, " I'm going to bed. My head aches. Don't sit up late, there's a good girl."

She moved slowly over to the door, and Linda, full of something to say, thought, " I must say it now—before she goes up to bed—whatever she says I must say it."

When her mother's hand was on the latch of the door she looked up and said, "If Stephen goes, David could come back. They could both come back, David and Rose. We could all live here together—David always cared more about Shawn's than Stephen."

Ellen stared at her, sombrely, " David's got Rose," she said, " that's all he cares about. If he'd cared for Shawn's he'd never have gone."

She went out and Linda sat still by the lamp, the mending unheeded in her lap, thinking. Something David had said once before, long ago, when her mother had been speaking of failures, came back to her, something he had said in reply to her childish

question, " What's failure ? " He had said, " It depends on your point of view." She hadn't known then what he had meant, but now she thought she understood. Her father and brothers were failures in her mother's eyes because they hadn't got on in the world; but they were happy, her father with his daydreams, David with Rose, Stephen with Nan; they didn't feel that they had failed: somehow they had got what they wanted out of life; it wasn't what her mother wanted for them, but it was what they wanted for themselves, and they were happy; perhaps it was because they had never wanted anything much, except to be happy in the simplest sort of way, that they had found happiness, whilst her mother, who had wanted so much that all her life had gone into it, was somehow empty of everything.

" It's mother who's the failure/' she thought. Her father, so far as she could see, instead of being the biggest failure of them all, as her mother thought, was really the biggest success. He had never wanted anything very much, and so he was content . . . and she smiled a little to herself, thinking of her father with his shabby old clothes and his idleness and his careless ways, as a success . . . But there it was, he was happier than any of them; and her mother who had wanted more than any of them was more likely than not crying alone in the dark. . . .

" But David will come home," thought Linda, *' and then everything will be all right." David who had always cared more than the others for their mother and the farm; David the dearly beloved. , . .

XVII: OLD SHADOWS..*

ELLEN was too much upset over Stephen's betrothal to Nan to care about Hester leaving. Now that she had Linda at home all day she could manage without outside help—and it saved money. And if Hester wasn't going to marry Stephen she might just as well go. For Stephen Hester's departure was a relief; somewhere deep down in himself he hated her for the year ami a half of torment she represented for him; she belonged to a dark part of his life he wanted to forget; with Nan he had emerged into the sunlight; Hester had done nothing but torment him; Nan did nothing but delight him—not merely had she helped him through those dark days of his bondage to Hester, but it was she who had finally released him-—with a posy of primroses slung at his feet, and her gay candour.

But with this new peace in him the shadow of David reached out and touched him again, and thinking of David more than ever he hated Hester; because of her he had known the black rage of Cain in his heart against his brother; because of Hester David had gone away, and nearly a year had gone by without the sound of his quick, curiously eager step, or his low, half-shy laugh, and the warmth of his presence, and the peace of their communion beyond the need of words. A woman could be a fever in your blood, but she was not related to you; she was outside of vourself, touching only the surface pan of you; whereas brotherhood was a blood relationship; your brother came forth from the same womb, and the same blood flowed in your veins and his; and in the end it was the only real relationship, closer than your relationship to your mother, and infinitely closer than your fathers they had their separate lives and their different beginnings, but brotherhood sprang from the same source; and it was closer than sisterhood, for she was divided from you by her female difference of body and mind.

In the beginning there had been no one but David, and in the end there was no one but David in that relationship which is a blood closeness. Only, for a little while, it seemed a red mirage had come between them, and in that mirage% a woman had danced in female nakedness. It was like the delirium of fever, he thought, you were yourself yet not yourself, shut off from the other person

by a power beyond your control. The dark presence of Hester being withdrawn you saw again your own shadow thrown from the sun, and for him the sun and the shadow fused in the form of David. And Hester did not count, and Nan did not count; they were female, outside of this blood relationship, touching the surface of male being, yet not of it. A man might come to a worfan and take her, but he was not one with her; it was all a surface thing; and a man might walk by his brother's side in silence, yet he was one with him, with the same blood flowing between them, invisible tides of relationship, a silent rhythm of communion. And a woman might come to a man in the flesh, but she could not lay hold of his secret self, that something which abided and was still, mysteriously, like the breath of God breathed into a man's body, and which flowed on invisibly and secretly when the brief passage with the woman was over, spent like the futile surge of waves that rush forward irresistibly only to fall back upon themselves, dissolved, lost.

He wrote to David, " I am going to marry Nan Collett at Midsummer, and Hester has left Flaydering, so there is no reason why you shouldn't come back, and I want you." And how much he wanted him, he thought, David could not know unless there was that same longing in himself. But David replied, " There's many a slip 'twixt betrothal and marrying, I reckon, and it's better I shouldn't come till you and Nan are safely wed, for something might go wrong, and then Hester would come back, and then, likely, it would all start all over again, and I couldn't come back without Rose, and it's likely we wouldn't be welcome at Shawn's, the two of us."

Stephen took this letter to his mother. " Write and tell David he's welcome at Shawn's, and Rose, too," he urged, but Ellen, with the last spark of her hopefulness extinguished, set her mouth in a hard line. ** It's all one to me now, what any of you do. There was a time when I'd have cared, but it's gone now. We've all got our own lives to make, David and you and me and all of us, and we must go our separate ways as best we can."

Andrew, who'heard her say this, laughed somewhere inside himself, as though life was a secret joke he shared with the Lordly

Ones, and said," Tis all on the knees of the gods what happens to any of us, I'm thinking" and went out to commune with the pigs who had no thought for the morrow but were content with a lazy wallowing in the today.

Linda thought," David will come back when Stephen and Nan are married and gone away over to Wildwick, then Mother will be happier, and things will be better with the farm, with Davffl to care for it again," but there was no eager straining forward in herself as there was in Stephen, for Easter was drawing dose again, with buds and blossoms, and a new sweetness in the early morning song of the birds, and with it the ghost of Garry, and, " It would be better if I could be a nun as I used to want to be," thought Linda, shut away again in her secret self, " but somehow I don't want to any more."

But what it was she wanted, beyond the impossible dream of Garry's return, she did not know, and she was alone once more in childhood's abyss of forlornness.

XVIII: HIGH SUMMER

ELLEN knew what all Flaydering said when it heard that Stephen was going to marry Nan Collctt—that neither of the Shawn boys could be said to have done particularly well for themselves in the matter of marrying, for all Ellen Shawn fancied herself and her sons a * cut above * other folks because she had been a school-teacher; one of them marrying a barmaid and the other a girl not as good as she might be, it was a * come down * for her, right enough, and it only wanted for young Linda to take up with a common farm boy in a few years' time; likely it would have been poor Donald Thorpe if he'd lived a few more years, poor lad . . . Maybe Ellen Shawn would think her sons had married beneath them the same as she thought she had herself, and you couldn't help laughing when you thought of that. And Ellen did think it, and she knew that Flaydering had the laugh of her, but it didn't matter any more, for all the spirit had gone out of her, and there wasn't anything more life could do to disappoint her now. All that she did for Shawn's she did mechanically now, and for no other reason than that whatever happened, or didn't happen, the rent had to be met every quarter-day, and you had to eat . . . and the place had to be kept dean. But she no longer dreamed of a sundial and a bath-room or one of those up-to-date rcapere-and-binders and a motor-plough; she cared as little as Andrew what happened to Shawn's now, so long as it made enough to keep a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs, and food on their table. High Mead ran riot with thistles; the cheap seed Andrew had bought for the Big Meadow was coming up more garlic than corn; a sheep fell into a ditch and broke its leg and had to be killed out of its due time; rats got at the grain stored in the oast-house, and one of the stacks was found to be damp and had to be opened for fear of fire, but somehow it didn't matter much, any more than it mattered that Andrew would never mend the fences to keep the sheep from straying on to the common, or put a new wheel on the waggon that had been laid up since last June and would soon be wanted again for this year's hay-making. Shawn's greatness was a dream which in* breaking had smashed to atoms for the wind to scatter into oblivion.

She no longer expected anything of life; every Sunday wet or fine she and Linda went to church; every Monday wet or fine she did her washing. Wednesday was still butter-making day, and Thursday still baking day, as surely as Saturday night was bath night; the routine of her life was as inexorable as the rhythm of night and day, Spring-tide and fall. She no longer looked at Linda and felt remote from her, because she no longer expected to be close to anyone; she was neither happy nor unhappy; she was merely Ellen Shawn doing her best as she had always done it, but without hope of anything particularly good coming of it; she kept things [4] nice ' because it was natural to her to bend and pick up a thread of cotton from a rug, or snip a dead leaf off an indoor plant; she was * made that way ' and couldn't help it, arid she would be like it till she died, just as she would always blow her nose chuff-chuff-chuff with a sniff at the end—because she had always done it that way.

ror months she saved her egg-money to help Stephen with his new home. He had made arrangements with a farm beyond Wildwick to be taken on as cow-man beginning Midsummer. He would get twenty-five shillings a week and live in a two-roomed cottage rent-free. " Fancy giving up a good home to pig it like that," Ellen said, but Stephen smiled that new soft smile of his. ** We'll manage," he said, confidently, " there's a little bit of a garden, and you can hear the sea from there. We'll be happy enough, and presently we'll get a few chickens and a goat, and a pig or two, and start on our own." Ellen * spared ' him a few sheets and pillow slips and tablecloths from her linen cupboard—they'd be better than the cotton rubbish she supposed Nan would have bought otherwise. She sponged and pressed his best blue suit for the wedding, and gave him a new pair of boots for a wedding present. Linda was to wear her confirmation dress and be a bridesmaid, and as the great day would also be her fifteenth birthday, Ellen bought her a summer * crinoline ' hat, suitable for a bridesmaid, for a birthday present. Ellen always believed in * lulling two birds with one stone ' whenever possible.

It should be a pretty wedding, everyone thought, for it was to take place in the fisherman's church on the beach beside the net*

shops at WHdwick. The church was built with stones from the fore-shore, and its walls were draped with nets and applicable texts, which everyone thought such a good idea, but in spite of that the * Fisherman's Arms' held more attraction than the fisherman's church; except on special occasions such as weddings, christenings, and funerals, few fishermen ever went inside it, and save for a few summer visitors, old women, and Sunday School children, it had been more or less neglected since the bodies of Garry Payne, Donald Thorpe, and the boy Peters, had been brought there for their burial service. All Wildwick had crowded in then—as it crowded in seven months later for the wedding of the barmaid of the [4] Fisherman's Arms.'

The little church was as gay then as on that other special occasion it had been cold and bare; bunches of cowslips and wild-roses gathered by the Wildwick children glowed on the grey stone of the window-ledges and round the font; honeysuckle trailed from the lectern; branches of the Shawn syringa, which Ellen had sent over the day before, decked the altar and filled the whole church with its strong sweet scent. Nan was as virginal a bride as ever wore myrtle in her hair, and Stephen wore in the button-hole of his best suit a sprig of syringa from that same Shawn tree which had supplied his parents with mock orange-blossom for their own wedding, and Linda carried a sheaf of it, tied with white ribbon … to the annoyance of Nan's mother, who had arranged for the bridesmaids to carry posies of forgetmenots and moss rose-buds from the Collett garden, and had told Ellen Shawn so when the wedding arrangements were being discussed, but of course Ellen Shawn *had* to be different. . . . Ellen, as a matter of fact, had simply forgotten; when she thought of wedding flowers for a Shawn wedding she thought inevitably of Shawn syringa.

Linda wore Garry's cross and chain openly on her white dress, and standing behind Nan clasping her bunch of mock orange-blossom thought of two other important occasions when she had worn that dress—at her confirmation, and at the fair, and recalling those events thought of a field of white daisies, and had a fantasy in which she was the bride and Nan merely a bridesmaid, and the tall blue-suited figure who stood beside Nan was Garry, and in

a moment he would turn away from Nan, to her, Linda, and smile at her and take her hand, and she would see the leather belt clasping his slim waist, and once again her veil would catch in the knife-clasp of his belt, and as he unhitched it he would whisper to her, " This time it's a bridal veil. . . ." Garry would be sure to wear his belt, she thought, even with his best suit, though it was hard to think of him in anything but his sea-stained breeches and his dark fisherman's jersey, with the scarlet handkerchief like the one he had given her on her last birthday knotted at his throat, making his face look browner than it really was, and somehow emphasising the blueness of his eyes. It was queer to think of Garry's body being washed up lifeless on a beach with that belt still clasping him; queer to think of Garry dead, bright, beautiful Garry with his happy laugh, and his lean body that loved to lounge against a wall in the sun or grow taut against the wind; gay, careless Garry strolling through the fair, and flashing like a shooting star over the ice; Garry who so enjoyed merely being alive.

The church was full of tall fisher-lads in dark jerseys and wearing the same kind of belts, but they were somehow none of them in the least like Garry, for Garry had been ' different', though you could not say exactly how, only it was in the way his hair fell over his brow, and in the way he moved, with a kind of lazy carelessness, and in something which was breathed out of his body, invisibly, yet so real and unmistakable that it set your heart racing and your blood singing, and it was as though something unfolded inside you and was laid open, as it might be a flower parting petals drawn back by the sun.

He would have been there to-day, thought Linda, standing dose to her, and Donald would have been Stephen's best man, and when the ceremony was over she and Garry would perhaps have slipped away for a few moments together under the bows of the *Sea-Gypsy^* and once again Garry would have seen her looking like a bride. She was glad of the big crinoline hat which shadowed her face, for it would not do to be seen crying at a wedding.

David marrying Rose; Stephen marryjng Nan; but Linda at fifteen thought she would never marry anyone. • But also because the was fifteen, when the bridal party left the church and came out

into the June sunshine, and she saw the sea sparkling, and the flags flying on the *Goldtn Rose,* and the bunch of white heather swinging from its mast, the ghost of Garry melted away, and she was excited and happy as she had been at the apple-christening with that feeling of being lifted out of everydayness into a carnival world in which flags waved and bells tumbled and music beat inside oneself as well as all round.

The wedding-breakfast was given by the proprietor of the * Fisherman's Arms.' It was laid out in style at the drill-hall, with trails of green creeper tastefully decorating the long trestle table, and piles of sandwiches and cakes, and a three-tiered bridal cake subscribed for by Wildwick, and as much port and beer as you could drink, and a real band, with a violin, piano, and 'cello, and dancing to go on half the night.

Ellen drank a glass of port and nibbled a piece of cake handed her on a cardboard plate, then said she must be going, for it was ironing-day, weddings or not, and she couldn't leave it over till tomorrow, for she would be dead-tired after the butter-making. Andrew could stay if he liked, but Linda had better come back with her, or she would only go eating a lot of rich things and make herself sick. . . .

Linda sighed; it would have been nice to have stopped for the dancing, and when it got dark the fairy-lamps outside the * Fisherman's Arms' and the drill-hall would be lit, and it would all be exciting and gay, like the apple-christening. But she could not have stayed even had she had permission, for she could not let her mother go back alone, and she supposed the ironing had to be done.

So Linda and her mother walked back over the heath through the June sunshine, and their feet ached in their best shoes, too thin for the rough road, and it seemed strange to be going back to the lonely farm and leaving all the dancing and laughing behind them. The farm would seem queer without either Stephen or David, Linda thought, but she did not say so, for she felt the same thought in her mother's mind, so they walked in silence with their separate thoughts that were yet the same.

'*1 could do with a cup of tea," Ellen said, as they drew near to

Shawn's, and sighed when she thought of the weariness of taking off her best dress, kindling sticks in the hearth, pumping water, waiting for the kettle to boil, assembling the tea-cups.

" We'll soon get it, between us," Linda said, encouragingly, but that feeling of being unable to make the effort was on her too; taking »ff her best dress and changing into an everyday dress she would change back into everydayncss—that everyday world *in which one made tea and drank it and cleared away and got on with the next thing to do ...

But when they walked into the farm kitchen they found the table laid and the kettle singing quietly to itself beside the fire, and Rose very clean in a big white apron sitting on the bench folding clothes ready for ironing, and David standing beside the window, waiting, a great light in his face.

" David! " Linda cried, and rushed to him.

Rose stood up twisting a tea-cloth in her fingers, nervously. " We'll go if you want us to," she said.

Ellen stood by the door staring at them both, and for a long moment there was silence, and then at last she said, " I—didn't expect you. You should have let me know."

She came forward into the room and took off her hat and pressed a hand to her forehead. " I've got such a headache. I could do with a cup of tea." She sank down into the nearest chair and looked at David. " You're looking well," she said.

And David said, *[4] Yes, I keep pretty well," and went over to her awkwardly, and kissed her on the forehead.

" It's nice to see you again," Ellen went on, in that flat matter-of-fact voice. " I hope you and Rose are stopping ? "

[44] For always—if you'll have us," David answered eagerly.

[44] It's your home, isn't it ? I don't know why you ever left. I must go and change." She rose and picked up her hat and walked blindly out of the room.

David, Rose and Linda looked at each other. After a moment Rose said, " How pretty you look, Lindy. That's your confirmation dress, isn't it ? "

[44] Yes.[11]

Rose stood the tea-pot to warm near the kettle.

" 111 go and cut the bread-and-butter," she said, " I didn't like to before—I wasn't sure if you'd be comin' back to tea."

She went out into the back-kitchen. Linda looked up at David and her arm tightened round his waist.

" David," she cried. " Oh, David! " and there were tears in her voice, and a wild joy.

^ie pressed her close to him. " Linda—oh, Linda!" He hid his face in her hair so that she should not see his eyes.

From upstairs Ellen called, " Linda—what are you doing ? Come and change your dress! "

At that Linda flung back her head and laughed. " It's just the same for her really—only she won't let on! "

There was the happy excited pressure of her hands on his arms for a moment, and then she was gone, running up the stairs two at a time, her heart shouting and her blood singing, " David, David," in a great dashing chorus of joy like a tumble of wedding bells.

XIX: SUMMER'S END

WITH the washing over of the high tide of Summer, life at Shawn's swung back to normal; dairy and back-kitchen knew again the lilt of *' Down the road there's a bloomin ri-ot," and David came * trapesing in ' from the fields for the mid-morning snack. Lying in bed at nights Linda heard again the low hum of two voices in * the boys' room ', and Ellen once more begarf to plan the bath-room with the proper bath, and the sundial for the beautifying of the front garden; and there was the pleasant certainty that now the hay-waggon would be mended, and the much-needed fencing done in High Mead. Shawn's should be something yet, and Flaydering should see that after all Ellen Blunt hadn't done so badly for herself by becoming Mrs. Andrew Shawn, and that her youngest son might have done much worse than marry a nice domesticated girl like Rose. After all everyone made mistakes when they were young, and Rose Hanby and Mrs. David Shawn were two very different people. ... By next Lady Day at latest Shawn's ought to be able to take over another fifty acres, the way things were shaping. . . . Linda was turning out to be [4] a good little worker ', and in a few years' time Linda Shawn might be a very good match from the point of view of some comfortably off young farmer, who was a cut above poor tenant farmers like the Shawns—but not so very much above, for Shawn's was going to be a big thing before long. . . ,

With David taking the place of Garry in her heart, and Rose once more the happy laughing Rose she had loved, Linda was happier than she had been for a long time, yet there were times when she felt that she had nothing to do with either of them; it was not any feeling of being shut out, but of being unable to go out to them. At those times she did not want to be with them or with anyone, and everything would seem a trouble and nothing worth the doing. She knew again the listlessness of those childhood days when she began a number of things without finishing them, and when everything she attempted went wrong, so that she became impatient with it and lost interest. She wanted nothing except negatively; to be left alone; not to be required to do anything} not to have to answer questions; she sighed a great

many times during the course of each day without any particular reason.

There was a day towards the end of August when the feeling of her skin not fitting properly made her want to cry out with irritation. Her back ached and every nerve in her body seemed to have pressed forward to the surface of her body, and even the simple ta^t of shelling peas seemed too much for her. She sat on the bench outside the back-kitchen, whilst Rose stood under the yew-tree cleaning shoes and humming to herself, and with every pod that slit open under her fingers there beat in her the thought, ** I can't do another one; I can't; I can't." Suddenly her hands sank down amongst the pods, and in a mingling of rage, irritation, and despair she cried out, " Oh, *dear!* "

Rose looked up with a smile. [u] What's up, ducks ? [f]*

Linda answered truly, " / don't know! "

Rose laughed. " Poor old girl! Leave the peas—I'll do [f]em."

'* Oh, I'll do them," Linda sighed, and sat there with her eyes blinded with tears and feeling sick with sheer misery.

When the peas were shelled she took the bowl containing them inside, leaving the husks lying on the bench for Rose to clear away, then wandered away through the elder jungle and crossed the plank bridge into the kitchen-garden.

Vaguely she thought she might pick the red currants Rose intended gathering herself when she could find the time. But she realised that it would mean going back to the house to find something to put them in, and she couldn't be bothered. She pulled a few off their stalks and ate them. They were useless things, she thought, all seed, and turned away from the bushes in a weary disgust. She trailed through the long grass of the narrow paths, and thought how hot the sun still was although it was evening, and what a nuisance the flies were, and how odd it was to think that one had ever been small enough to lie down beside the dumps of rhubarb and pretend the great leaves were tents or umbrellas. Funny to think that one had ever been able to imagine the elder trees a forest, or the secret path beside the Little Pond an enchanted kingdom. And that the long grass had ever seemed almost waist-high, and the buttercups reached to one's knees. And that not

long ago to climb the apple-tree at the bottom of the garden and look out over the heath had been like looking out over the whole world. A world of which Shawn's was the giant heart.

She squeezed through the gap in the hedge and came into the orchard. There were shadows here, and a coolness of deep grass starred with pale milk-maid flowers, and the rank green smell of nettles, and the warm smell of honeysuckle that has been all day in the sun, and forgetmenots gentle and cool as evening beside the ditch with the meadowsweet frothing above, and the delicate lady's laces that some call bad man's oatmeal riding the green sea of grass like summer foam.

She lay down in a stretch of shadow under the hedge and listened to the incessant buzz of insects that was part of the siesta stillness and sultriness of Summer's end. She lay face downwards with her head on her arms and after a while crooned a forlorn, tuneless, little song which petered out into a silence in which she heard, more insistent than the humming of insects, the beating of her heart. If you listened long enough, it seemed, you could hear the small murmuring song of your blood as it hurried through your veins, flowing out from your heart in all directions, along your arms, up to your face, downwards to your knees, hurrying, yet not hurried, taking its time, flowing, flowing, never pausing; and it was your life flowing, and it carried you with it on its warm tide.

She rolled over and lay flat on her back, her arms against her sides, and thought of her blood flowing silently and unseen down from her heart, down her arms into her finger-tips, down her thighs and legs into her toes, and there pressed upon her increasingly this sense of her life flowing all one way like a river. Like a river flowing out to a limitless sea, life flowing, flowing, into a sea of eternity. . . .

She closed her eyes and tears crept out under her lids, and pain smarted at the back of her eyes and crept down to her throat to ache there, and onwards to her heart, and down to some hidden place deep in her body. She lay rigid, given to this pain, yet resisting it; and slowly it subsided, sinking back into the hidden currents of her blood, lost like rain in a river, *yet* entered into it forever, part of its rhythm.

When she rose to leave the orchard, after a long time, the last of the sunlight was fused into shadow, and a great orange moon stared across at the sinking, defeated sun. And standing between them she knew herself from that time forth bound up with the cycle of the moon, and that henceforth it would draw her life as it drew the tides of rivers and seas, in regular relentless ebb and flow, and she was filled with awe at the mystery of this life-rhythm, and a nameless sorrow.

She walked slowly out of the orchard, carefully closing the gate behind her, she who a few hours before had entered it as a child through a gap in the hedge.