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PROPOSAL

by

ANNE STRETTON

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to my brother

GEOFFREY

Part I

*

Chapter I

"Poor old Papa," Angy said. "He's tactfully leaving us together."

The door had closed behind Mr. March. The large, gloomy room was blue with the smoke of his cigars. The heavy red curtains received it. A tray, held by the carved figure of a negro, was full of ash.

Rupert Forrest opened the window. Outside, the rain poured down. The damp air brought a little freshness into the room.

"He has been very kind," Rupert said.

"Kind? No. Father's sentimental and sometimes he's soft, but he isn't kind."

Angy stood, lovely against the ugly crowded background of brasswork, meaningless pictures and embossed walls. Rupert smiled, thinking of other surroundings in which, one day, he would put her. In this atmosphere she was incongruous enough. The

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"furnished chambers" looked as though they had been furnished for a Commissar. But then, old March *was* a little like a Commissar. . . .

"Come here, darling."

She came at once, slipping her arm into his.

"These are our last few minutes together for eighteen months," he said. "Do you think I want to look at you across a room? Or listen to you being modern about your father?"

"Well, I feel modern about him. So would you, if you were me. No wonder Mother left him." Angy smiled. "Rupert, shall you *really* see Mother?"

"I suppose so."

"Will you write and tell me what she's like?"

Rupert nodded. Looking down at the mocking face of his beloved, he wished that she had been a foundling.

"You'll see my young sister," Angy said. "I bet *she* has a good time—lucky little beast. . . ."

"I don't want to see either of them."

Angy stared out of the window.

"Rupert, you *don't* know what a dull life I have with father; trailing round Europe with him while he does his deals. I never see anyone under sixty. It's a good thing you were eligible. He knew about you, and that meant a lot."

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"Do you want to know a crowd of young men?" Rupert asked.

"Not much—now. And, if I did, I wouldn't be allowed. Father's afraid I'll take after Mother."

Rupert led her away from the window. The clock on the chimney-piece struck the quarter. Time raced. A few more minutes. . . . As he looked down at her something troubled him a little. That mention of her mother. . . .

She lifted her face to his.

"I *do wish* you weren't going."

"Oh, my darling——"

He turned her into the big chair. As he kissed her he felt the minutes tick themselves away. When he rose, she clung to his hands.

"Rupert—take me too. You *could*. *Don't* leave me

He looked down at that dark red head.

"I can't."

"Why not? *Why* should we wait all that time?"

"I won't marry on your money."

"Oh, what does that *matter*? You don't love me. If you did love me you'd want me——"

He had her by the shoulders.

"You know I want you." Yes; she knew it. Her eyes told him that. But she said: "You care for your

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old Roones more than for me. You wasted *two whole* days there——"

He smiled a little. The hands of the clock gave him three minutes. She was in his arms, her eyes closed. He kissed her as though he couldn't let her go.

"Take me with you, Rupert." Her eyes were still closed. Her voice had changed. "I can't get through a year and a half. . . ."

He held her, and held the hand that wore his ring.

"Angy, will you be good while I'm away?"

Her glance slid round to his.

"Then you *won't* take me?"

He shook his head.

"Perfectly, perfectly good," she said.

"My darling, good-bye now ... I must go."

She looked up at him and burst into tears.

Rupert sat, next day, in Angy's mother's sitting-room. He felt, calmly, what he had expected to feel: faint embarrassment; dislike.

Hermione March raised her glass.

"To you and Angy," she said. "It was nice of you to break your journey to see me."

"It was kind of you to ask me."

"It wasn't. I wanted to meet you. . . . You know, I haven't seen Angy for twelve years. I remember

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when she was small she was like me." Hermione put her hands behind her head, and the bracelets moved up on her arms. Rupert contemplated her. What was it that one disliked? An exaggeration of manner? . . . The life that Hermione had led had blunted her perceptions. She must always be in the picture; every second. A kind of perpetual shop-window. . . .

"When will you marry?" she asked.

"Next year, I hope. I shan't be in a position to marry before that."

"Won't Angy's father do something—make it possible for you to live at Roones? He's rich enough."

Rupert smiled.

"I don't mean to live on Angy's money," he said. There followed a little silence. He glanced round the room. It had the usual depressing vulgarity of an expensive French hotel. There came to his mind a sudden picture, almost disturbing in its clarity, of the serene rooms of Roones. With distaste, he remembered that this woman had known his home years before he had seen it. She had stood at the head of the wide steps that would be a perfect frame for her beauty, and she had walked on the grass that grew so close and green up to the stone house-walls. It was strange, he thought, that this room and Roones should exist

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in the same world and should be linked together, however lightly.

"You are older than I expected," Hermione said.

"I am thirty-two."

The door opened. A young man entered. He paused, smiling, at the sight of Rupert, before he crossed the room to where Hermione sat, and bowed, kissing her hand. He was tall, dark and sallow. His mouth was like the mouth on an Egyptian figure. Hermione introduced him: "Señor Alvarez—Mr. Forrest."

She leant back, glancing from one man to the other. Rupert, watching the sheen of her pearls as she ran them between her fingers, reflected that riches, nowadays, were held by strange people. This close room was full of the signs of wealth. The young South American was, he supposed, one of them, and the vulgar little cigarette-case on the table beside him, with the name "Philippa" sprawled across it in diamonds, was typical of the rest.

"You stay long in Paris?" Alvarez asked.

"No; I sail for India to-morrow."

"You are, perhaps, in the Army?"

"No. I am in a firm that manufactures fats and soap."

"Ah?"

The Brazilian dropped into a chair beside Her-

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mione. She seized his wrist, lighting her cigarette from the cigarette in his hand.

"Where's Phil?" she asked him. "Seen her?"

"Oh, yes; I saw her. But she would stay downstairs. In the dance-room? In the bar? You know what these young girls are."

Hermione shrugged.

"My God, yes. It's hard enough to bring them up." She looked up at Rupert from under the bright lock on her forehead. Abruptly she asked: "When you and Angy are married, will you have Phil to stay with you sometimes?"

Rupert smiled.

"In two years from now, Phil will probably be married herself."

"I don't think so." Hermione turned in her chair, searching for an ash-tray. "In the life we lead the chances of a good marriage aren't bright. . . . I thought you might like to help her."

"I can't promise that."

"Pity. . . . Poor Phil"

"She is a nice girl," Alvarez said.

Rupert rose. For a moment, before she rose too, he looked down on Angy's mother and her Brazilian. As he said "good-bye" he thought: "Cut the whole connection,"

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He turned towards the door. Alvarez followed.

"I will see you to the lift, Forrest."

The door of the sitting-room closed behind them. They went out into the small, stuffy anteroom. It smelt of steam, and slightly of scent. Opposite, another door stood a little open. A young voice called: "Mother! I'm not going out to-night! I'm dead to the wide."

"It is not your mother, Pheel-bébé," Alvarez answered. "It is Luis."

There was silence.

Olvarez put his head round the door.

"You are not going to see the new brother-in-law?"

"No, thank you. . . . Hasn't he gone yet?"

Olvarez laughed.

"He is here. With me."

"Oh——" The voice was startled. "I'm sorry——"
Rupert had let himself out into the corridor.

Chapter 2

Phil, taking her mother and Luis to the station, drove in silence. It was late in the season, and there was not much traffic. Monte Carlo seemed a little strained and exhausted.

"Give me a match, Luis." Her mother spoke from the back of the car.

Luis was sitting in front. That, thought Phil, was a damned bad arrangement—enough to darken the next few hours; as Luis, if anyone, knew well enough. And it had been a bad day. She caught the reflection of her mother's face in the driving-mirror, and her heart sank. Hysteria, jealousy—it didn't matter much whether they were kept just in control or whether they were unloosed. The atmosphere was charged with them, so that the storm, when it came, was almost a relief. But, for the next few days, while her mother and Luis were in Paris, there would be neither

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storms nor black calms. Because of that, she had expected to feel cheerful this evening; but somehow the sensation of heaviness wouldn't lift. Perhaps the atmosphere of the car was too full of other people's thoughts and feelings. "I'm played out," she thought. "I need a cocktail."

At the station, she bought papers, keeping away from where her mother, wrapped in furs, stood with Luis. He spoke, but Hermione made no answer, staring up the platform. Then, unexpectedly, she turned.

"You had better stay here, Luis!" Her voice was sharp, so that people standing near, looked round. "Stay here!"

Luis touched her arm. He murmured something, but she flung his hand away. Then, suddenly, she noticed the onlookers and stood silent again. Her face was quiet, but it showed what raged behind it.

Phil waited, a few paces off. If only the train would come quickly. Why shouldn't one escape, now? Because one's mother was particular about politeness. It was a relic of her upbringing. . . . Luis was standing as still as Hermione, but *his* face showed nothing at all. Phil looked again at her mother, and her thoughts jerked in her head. How much longer would Luis stand all this? Not much longer. He had become more difficult. Lately, he had withdrawn himself more

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often. One day, fairly soon, he would withdraw for ever. . . . Better not think of that day.

The train drew into the station. The air was filled with shouts. People ran beside the long coaches, but Luis and Hermione didn't hurry. Someone in a gold-braided cap found their coach, and they went with him, slowly. Phil followed. She mounted the steep steps and stood in the corridor with her mother, smiling at her. Only two or three minutes left: there was that to smile about.

A whistle sounded. Phil got out and stood on the platform, looking up at her mother and Luis. Luis was hatless, his black hair waving back. He seemed, all at once, quite gay. Beside him, her mother looked almost old; or else it was the light on the window that played that trick.

The train was moving. Phil ran with it for a little way. She raised her hand as though to blow a kiss to her mother; then, suddenly, she was ashamed of the mechanical gesture. She stopped. Without glancing up again, she turned away, towards the station entrance.

It was four days later. Phil stood on the balcony of her room. She looked out through sunlight on to the strong blue of the sea, where fishing-boats were beat-

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ing up against the wind, but what she saw was something very different—pictures at which her whole mind darkened and which nothing would wipe away. She saw the photographs in the papers—corpses and steam and twisted metal. And she saw her mother's face, hard and old, looking at her from the windows of that train which, leaving Monte Carlo, had never reached Paris. . . .

A little, salt breeze lifted her hair. The thin smell of hotel rooms left her nostrils. If one could only get away for a few hours—take the car into the mountains. As one drove up the long reaches of the road, one's thoughts, perhaps, would change a little. But to go out meant facing the photographers who were waiting for the chances of a "shot". As daughter and co-heiress of Pat March, one was "news". And as daughter of Hermione March one was "news".

She stared down at the shabby, green shrubs. At this moment, in Paris, the funeral was nearing its end. She had thought that her mother might be buried at Roones, where she had lived the first twenty years of her life. But perhaps the family had refused to receive her, even dead. . . . Phil turned away from the balcony. It was horrible to feel like this—to feel no grief; only this bitter sensation, half wretchedness, half relief.

In the sitting-room her mother's maid was straight-

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ening the books on the table, and twitching cushions into place. Phil, glancing at her, felt distaste: that colourless face and those sucked-in lips. Elise looked as though she had long been paid to keep confidences—to be discreet. Well, and so she had been, Phil supposed.

The telephone buzzed. Phil crossed the room, slowly, trying to still the hope that rose at that insistent sound.

"Allo?"

"*C'est Major Stonor qui desire voir Mademoiselle*" said the clerk, and Phil's sudden hope died.

"Oh—say to him——" she hesitated. "No; all right: ask him to come up."

She put down the receiver, and took a cigarette from the box on the table. Her reflection looked at her from a mirror, and its tired pallor startled her. But cinnamon-coloured hair made you look whiter than you were. She put back the cigarette. Old Stonor would be shocked to find her smoking on this day.

A page rapped on the door of the suite. Major Stonor entered. Confusedly, he took her hand.

"I'm just back from London. I heard the news there. It's a dreadful business. A dreadful business. Your mother. . . ."

Phil was silent. If there was a correct thing to say

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she couldn't think of it. She moved a chair forward. "Oh, thanks. Thanks," Stonor murmured. His usual loud geniality had vanished. He seemed strange without it. Looking at him, Phil could have smiled through the blankness in her heart. "Dreadful," he murmured again. His voice died helplessly away, and suddenly she knew that he was thinking, not of the wrecked train—the flames, the screams and groans and the smashed bodies hastily covered with sheets and coats—but the columns of print under the photographs of her mother.

*"Millionaire's ex-wife dead in luxury-train smash.
. . ."*

"Famous Mrs. March and Brazilian tennis star"

"Mrs. March and Mr. Alvarez were apparently travelling together. The sleeping-car was smashed to matchwood. . . . Their bodies were found——"

Phil rose, jerkily. She went over to the table and took a cigarette. If old Stonor didn't like to see her smoke to-day, she thought, he could do the other thing. . . .

When she turned, he was seated, staring down. He didn't look as he usually looked—debonair and martial. Instead, he looked shrunken and sad, and suddenly she was sorry for him.

He glanced up.

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"Then you didn't go to Paris?" he said.

"No." She looked down at the ash-tray in her hand. "Mother left instructions in her will: there were to be no relatives." Her mother had wanted no one but Luis Alvarez at her burial. And, Phil reflected, Luis Alvarez had been there.

"You won't stay on here, Phil?"

Phil shook her head.

"No. I expect I'll go back to England."

"Will anyone come to fetch you?"

"There's no one to come, except Aunt Norah Leadbury—mother's half-sister. And she wouldn't want to."

"Will she have you to live with her?"

"No. I used to stay with them for a little, sometimes. But I don't think she likes Mary—my younger cousin—to see much of me."

"Old Stonor" was silent. Phil reflected that he would agree with Aunt Norah. If he had a daughter he would keep her from the daughter of his friend, Hermione. But he thought it in poor taste that one should show one's knowledge of Aunt Norah's attitude. And perhaps he was right.

He rose from his chair and went over to the window, blocking out the sun with his erect presence. Phil contemplated his back. He was a nice old thing

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—unless you had seen him, rather tight, being "unconventional". You couldn't like him much, after that. Something furtive appeared, then, and you saw him as neither able to let himself go nor to hold himself in. But he had always been kind to her, Phil remembered. Kind, and embarrassed by her presence in Hermione's life.

He came back to his chair.

"You're very young to be left in this position," he said.

"I expect I shall cope."

"What?"

"Nothing. . . . I shall be all right." She smiled at him.

"I should like to think you were going to have a home with your aunt."

"I shouldn't," Phil replied.

Major Stonor looked at her.

"Your life hasn't been suitable. Quiet country life would be good for you, my dear."

Phil smiled. "Quiet country life." . . . The trouble about life with Aunt Norah was that it wasn't quiet—only outwardly so. Aunt Norah and Uncle Basil saw Pat and Hermione March reflected in one's nature. To be with them was to feel one's self disliked.

There was a pause. Phil smoked in silence. There

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wasn't much, at any time, that she and her visitor could say to one another. They weren't intimate—he was one of her mother's friends—part of the frieze which, for the last year and a half, had made the background of her life. . . . Suddenly, she saw herself arriving from England to join her mother, eighteen months ago. She had been stupidly young, then. Very anxious to please; and giving herself away too easily.

Major Stonor rose. He held out his hand.

"Good-bye, my dear. I'll come round to-morrow. I'm staying at the Melbourne. Can't afford this place."

Phil rose, too.

"Good-bye. And thank you for coming."

Major Stonor turned towards the door. Then, abruptly, he stopped.

"Phil—are you going to look through your mother's things—letters and so on?"

"Yes. . . . I suppose so."

"Will you listen to me, my dear?"

"Yes; of course."

"Take my advice, Phil. Don't look into things. Leave the past alone."

There was a little pause. Phil looked at that troubled, self-indulgent face.

"Thank you," she answered. "It was kind of you

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to come. . . . And I'll remember what you've said."

Phil entered her mother's room. She closed the door and locked it. For a moment, she stood still. The room gazed back at her, blankly. It was very tidy, but it had not been otherwise when her mother lived. She moved forward, and a faint perfume floated on a little eddy of air. With that scent in one's nostrils, it was difficult to believe that Hermione March was dead. Dead and buried. . . . Phil's eyes wandered round the room. Her thoughts came slowly. The dressing-table looked vacant. What should one do with the little objects that filled the drawers—the bags and the scarves and little boxes? The jewel-case was not there. Her mother had had it with her when she was killed. "If the jewels come to me," Phil thought, "I'll send them away—to Aunt Norah or to Angy." She wanted none of them. Nothing.

The photograph of Luis Alvarez gazed at her from the table by the bed as she opened the locked drawer in which her mother had kept letters. She paused for a moment, staring back at that oval face, those perfect teeth. As she looked, memories of the past months returned to her, wave on wave: the hatreds and scenes: the desperate efforts to pretend, on those days when Luis withdrew himself, that she had noticed

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nothing: the rising note in her mother's voice. And, clearer than any other picture, the vision of her mother, seated on the bed, quite silent, her face distorted.

Phil carried the drawer across the room. Kneeling, she emptied the contents on to the hearth. A yellowing square of cardboard lay on the heap. She turned it over. It was an old, spotted water-colour of a house. The house was not large. Its lines were severe, almost gaunt. Behind it was a curtain of tall trees, their branches lacey against the sky. The picture was dull—as plain and spare as an architect's drawing. The artist had given no hint of the country that would show itself beyond the narrow limits of his sketch. But Phil could imagine the purple hills and pale meadows, for she had seen them, once. It seemed, now, incredibly far away—that countryside in which one had waited so long for the spring, and to which the summer, it had seemed to her, never came. To look at its faint likeness gave her, for a moment, a feeling of unreality. Under the sketch was written: "Roones".

She laid it aside and turned to the pile of letters on the hearth. Striking a match, she set the heap alight. The flames wavered a little and then, suddenly, blazed. The papers curled away from the fire,

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and words and half-phrases looked out at her. As the flames died down, she stirred the charring pile. The papers made a dry, whispering sound. Her heart felt as dry. She looked away to where the clear sunlight poured in through the windows. She thought: "Oh, God—I wish I could get away—lose myself—lose my memory. . . ." Suddenly, she felt the tears fall on her hands. She was crying. Not for her mother's death, but because of the hopes that she had brought to that meeting with her mother eighteen months ago. And because of what she had been then, and would never be again. And because of her mother's beauty, gone for ever—crushed and torn and shattered.

Chapter 3

Phil drew the car up in the dark shade of an ilex, and switched off the engine.

The silence was complete. The air was still, and no birds sang. She took a packet of sandwiches from the seat, and, getting out of the car, she left the road and made her way down the steep hillside. A hundred feet below, a rock jutted out, splashed with lichen. A little myrtle grew from a crevice, its glossy leaves warm from the sun. The air was full of the sharp scent of herbs.

Phil sat down and pulled a letter from her pocket. She hadn't yet looked at the envelope. If she didn't look at it—if she waited till she was away, in quiet, by herself—Fate, she had chosen to believe, would be kind to her, and she would find that it was from Derek.

She turned the envelope over. It was not from Derek, and she saw that it was addressed in a handwriting

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she didn't know. She didn't open it at once. Instead, she sat looking over the gulf to where, far below, the coast and the sea slept in the sun.

After all, she thought, there was no reason for Derek to write. It wasn't as though they were engaged—or thinking of it. . . . Yes, but there *was* a reason: surely one's friends should write, if they knew one wasn't happy? A lizard flicked into sight, and was still, its throat palpitating. She watched it, while disappointment, cold and heavy, dragged at her thoughts. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." That was true enough.

She opened the letter. It was written from the Locarno Hotel, London. The small, bold signature startled her. "Angy". . . . She hadn't seen Angy, or heard from her, for five years. Was Angy writing to condole with her? When, three months ago, their father had died, she hadn't written to Angy; she hadn't thought of it.

"My dear Phil," she read.

"I've heard of mother's death. Not having seen her since I was seven, I can't say much except that I'm sorry if you are. Do you think there's any chance that you and I would click? If so, I thought we might try living together for a bit? If we didn't get on, we could

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say so after a month's trial, if not sooner. I shan't be getting married for six months. You and I could have some sisterly life, first. I have taken a top flat (luxury and all that) in Park Lane. Please wire definitely one way or the other. I've got friends who'd like the chance if you wouldn't.

"Great haste,

"Angy.

"P.S. I don't see why we shouldn't get on if we each mind our own business. I can't stand questions and answers."

Phil stared down at the invitation. It was very unexpected but perhaps the idea was good? . . . She tried to remember what Angy had been like. The memory came dimly. She thought: "I could ask Derek about her. He's met her . . ." It was decent of Angy to have made the proposal. If one didn't accept it, where would the trustees expect one to go? With half her mind, she tried to consider Angy's letter. The other half of her mind still thought of Derek Langley. She saw him clearly, as she had last seen him, standing in the hall of the Paris, his elbow in his hand, watching the door.

So Derek had just been amusing himself. It had been what the last generation called "a flirtation".

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The point about a flirtation was, of course, that both sides should be equally light-hearted; and she hadn't been light-hearted enough, she reflected, as she traced a pattern on the rock. She hadn't felt careless. But surely she had seemed to be? . . . Suddenly it struck her that in all these months on the Coast of Pleasure not many people she had met had been light-hearted. Only Derek had been gay. "I suppose it's because they're mostly middle-aged," she thought vaguely. She remembered a friend of her mother's, who, a week ago, had won a maximum at the Sporting. Mrs. Levey's avid glance hadn't been changed by the stroke of fortune for which she had played and hoped, night after night, month after month.

A pebble rattled down the hillside. She looked up. Someone was coming down from the road. It struck her, suddenly, that she had not been wise. The road was lonely; her car gave away her position, more or less; she was alone, and wearing her pearls.

The footsteps slipped on a stony patch. She twisted round. A man appeared on the rock behind her. She leant back on her heels, gazing up at him.

"Hullo, Derek," she said.

"Hullo, Phil."

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Derek sat down, his buckskin shoes hanging over the gulf. With one hand, he swayed the myrtle to and fro. He smiled sideways at Phil.

"Clever of me not to lose you," he said.

Her bewildered glance hadn't left his face.

"But I *don't* understand. Derek—how did you come here?"

"I arrived at the hotel as you were driving off. I followed you. . . . Are you pleased to see me?"

"Yes. Very, Derek."

He watched her redden. She looked down at the packet on her knees and began fidgeting with the string.

"Have some lunch?" she said. "But it's only sandwiches."

That little breathless note in her voice—it was what he had meant to hear.

"No," he answered. "I'm not hungry."

"But I don't want to eat by myself." She glanced up. Her hand lay on the rock. He put his hand over it. She made a little movement, and his fingers closed.

"This is a pretty place, Phil," he said, in a level, ordinary tone.

She nodded, shaken by his touch. She wanted, desperately, to seem calm and cool. Other girls, she

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knew, seemed calm, even when they were in love. Calm as candles.

He still studied her, smiling. And then, at something in the sight of her black clothes, incongruous against the brilliant sky and the silver of the olive-trees, his glance altered. His hand shifted from hers.

"Get on with your lunch, Phil," he said. "And give me half a sandwich."

She divided the bread and gave his share to him in silence.

"You've had a rotten time," he said. "Were you alone?"

"Yes. It's the end of the season. All mother's friends had left. Not that I wanted them. . . . Old Stonor turned up the other day."

"Stonor. . . . *He's* no good."

"He was kind."

"Was he? . . . What are you going to do now?"

"Oh, I'll clear out." She got Angy's letter from her bag and gave it to him. "Look, Derek——" She frowned a little, feeling that she lacked judgment. Her swift decisions, she knew, were never founded on much. "Don't act on impulse." No; but so often when one tried not to act on impulse, one found that one had nothing else on which to act.

Derek smiled as he gave her back the letter.

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"Shall you accept?"

"Well—I thought I would."

She waited, but he said nothing. He was wondering how much of her parents' natures she had inherited. It was difficult to tell. Perhaps her attraction lay in that uncertainty.

"What is Angy like?" Phil asked.

"Rather like you—now. But, later on, she'll be the type that looks best in a leopard-skin, with vine-leaves in her hair."

Phil laughed.

"Tell me about her."

"She has a good time," Derek said.

"Well, I like a good time."

"Yes. . . . She's more all out for it than you are."

"She couldn't be."

Derek said, slowly: "There's not much that Angy hasn't done. She's not very like you, really."

Phil was silent. She smiled uncertainly, thinking: "He's laughing at me." He didn't understand that one wasn't really different from Angy, but that it was as though, in the last year, one had seen a lot of people sick-drunk on champagne. After that, one wouldn't much want to get drunk, but that didn't mean that one didn't like champagne. . . . She remembered too much, too clearly. She remembered

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Luis's face as it had looked when, early one morning, she had seen him. She had been returning from a party. He had come towards her down the long, hot corridor from her mother's room. His glance, drowsy and suffused, had fallen on her, absently: "*Allo, bébé*". . . . There were other memories: the Princess Mitchoskaya, complacent with young Winford. The dreary look on young Winford's face. His rather timid advances—little attempts at conversation, and one or two dances. The break-up of the Princess's calm—the sweet mask cracking. Well—that had taught one something: don't play around with *gigolos*—they're not paid for that.

Derek offered her a cigarette. She saw, upside down, the inscription in the gold case. She couldn't read it, but she knew that the case was a woman's gift. No man would have his handwriting reproduced like that. . . . Many women must have been in love with Derek. How could he help it—and how could they?

"What's Angy's fiancé like?" she asked. "I nearly saw him, once."

"Forrest? A bit stiff. Not much bonhommy. But he's a good fiancé." Derek smiled. "He's abroad, all the time."

Phil understood Derek's smile. Angy, then, still

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"had a good time", engaged or not. "I suppose she doesn't love Rupert, much," she thought. For a moment, against her will, she imagined herself engaged to Derek. But she knew he would never love her enough to want to marry her. And her wealth meant nothing to him. He was rich. His father had made a fortune in something—she had forgotten what. She wished, now, that he had been poor. "He might have married me for my money," she thought. "I don't believe I would have minded that, much." It didn't seem to her unlikely that Derek, if he had been poor, would have married her. In her experience, people would do most things at a pinch. "And perhaps," she thought, "when we were married, he would have loved me and the money wouldn't have counted."

She asked: "Why did Angy get engaged?"

"She was in love—then. . . . And your father was keen on the match—Forrest will come into a title sometime. And he's got Roones."

"Father could have bought six places like Roones."

"Well, he couldn't buy Roones."

"Why should he want to?"

"I don't know. He was always pleased at having married a connection of the Forrests, and he used to talk of Roones as 'our family place'—till your mother

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left him. I suppose he thought that if Angy's husband had it, he could talk of it again."

Phil laughed.

"That's funny—considering that mother wasn't even a Forrest."

"Well, he was an odd bird."

"Was he?"

"If he hadn't been, would he have handed you over to your mother?"

"Oh. . . ." Phil gave a half-smile and was silent. She knew why her father had done that. He had known that nothing he could do would annoy her mother more. Not, Phil reflected, that her mother had been much troubled by her. The divorce had taken place when she was four years old, and from then till she was seventeen, she had hardly seen her mother. She had lived at schools and holiday homes. Sometimes, she had stayed for a little with her Aunt Norah. And once, years ago, Angy had stayed there, too, and they had played together, and fought.

Derek said, unexpectedly: "You haven't had much of a time, have you?"

"Oh, I don't know," Phil answered, slowly. "I had a good time at school. And I've had a good time in France, pretty often: parties and things.... I had fun in Paris."

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Derek looked at her. He caught the glint of her eyes between their lids as she glanced down. Yes; he was willing to believe that she had fun. She was attractive enough.

Phil looked up.

"Derek—I shall wire to Angy, and accept. It was nice of her to ask me, wasn't it?"

"It's probably a convenient arrangement for her, at the moment.... Don't fling yourself on her bosom, 'all eagerly'."

"I don't fling myself at people," Phil answered, coolly. And then, with a pang, she thought of her mother. But she had been younger when she came to live with her mother. Surely, she didn't give herself away, now? If being hurt didn't teach you to arm yourself you might as well be dead. . . .

"Perhaps I shall meet you at Angy's," she said, carelessly.

Derek said: "If you're going to England, we can go together."

At his words, she smiled up at him. He felt an unaccustomed sensation. As he rose, his hand struck the little myrtle, and, with a wrenching movement, he snapped the thin, tough stem. He leant over and seized her arms.

"Well, young Phil?"

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She tried to get up, but her legs were trembling.

Derek's grip tightened. He had kissed her before. It had been happily light-hearted. Now she looked different. And, by God, he felt different.

He bent over her.

"Well?" he smiled.

She could find nothing in his face—nothing but his intention of doing what he wanted. He kissed her, long and hard, feeling her heart beat under his hand. Then he put her away, suddenly, so that she staggered a little. She sank down on a ledge of rock, and met his glance, smiling dimly and wondering why he should look almost angry—sullen.

There was a little silence. Then he said: "Phil—will you marry me?"

For a moment her voice wouldn't come.

"Yes, Derek. . . . Of course," she answered, and leant forward and took his hand.

Chapter 4

Phil leant back in the corner of the compartment, looking out on little English fields and hedges and squat houses. She stretched like a cat, smiling at the light horizon, and the woman in the other corner smiled too, glad that anyone should be so pretty. Pretty in spite of fine-plucked eyebrows, a brilliant mouth and brilliant nails. Nice men, the woman had been told in her youth, were not pleased by such things. But surely any man would be pleased by those impossible eyelashes, shadowing down, and by that pointed face, though it was painted, too? The young man opposite was obviously pleased by it; his lazy glance rested there so often. He couldn't really, the woman reflected, come into the category of "nice men". His suit was just too well cut—that slight, betraying waistiness. And his gold cigarette-case was too heavy. But he was more than good-looking, his brown

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head against the moving background beyond the window, his white teeth just showing in a smile. And he was, clearly, very much in love. Together, she thought, they made a piece into whose lovely shining vulgarity couldn't enter.

Dinner was cried. She rose, and the door closed behind her.

"Thank God that old camel's gone," Derek said.

Phil turned slowly from the window.

"You know, Derek, this is a nicer country than France. Even the modern houses. In France they look like teeth. And the old ones look decayed—covered with scabby plaster." Phil thought of the French villages which she had seen, dreary and bare.

"What about the chateaux on the Loire?"

"They're no good—too much restored. You should go to Burgundy to see chateaux, someone at school told me."

"Old things don't interest me."

"Nor me."

"Where were you at school, Phil?"

"Well, I was at three schools."

"Sacked from them all?"

"Only from one."

"What for?"

"Reading a dirty book."

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"What book?" Derek smiled.

"*Secrets of the Harem*. But it wasn't mine. I had an enemy and she slipped it under my pillow and left the corner sticking out—on purpose. And of course Matron saw it."

"And wouldn't the authorities believe you?"

"No—they were so sure it was my parents coming out in me. . . . After that, I was at school in Devonshire. But that went bust. Then I went to a school in Sussex. That was fun; I liked it there. But they were all rather bad places—cheap, you know."

"Cheap? I should have thought you'd have been sent to one of those expensive finishing-places where you learn to use your lipstick and your eyes."

"Oh, no; mother hadn't really much money; and what she had she wanted. And father didn't give her anything for my keep. . . . But don't worry," Phil smiled a little. "I've picked up the lipstick part since."

"Kiss me, Phil." Derek left his corner. He sat beside her and put his arms round her shoulders.

Helplessly, she put her hands on his wrists.

"Derek—that woman will come back; she'll see us."

"Let her; do the old stick good."

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Bathed and changed after her journey, Phil powdered her nose at the dressing-table. She rose and stood for an instant, looking at herself in the long mirror. Clothes: they did give one confidence—not that one needed confidence, much, now that one was so happy. The ring glistened on her left hand, swearing nicely with her hair. . . . To-morrow, she would see Derek again. Not to-night—to-night he had "something on"—an old fixture. As she gave a careful tilt to her hat, she thought, "If Angy doesn't keep me to dinner, I think I'll go to bed." Tired by her journey and by happiness, she rather wished that she wasn't going to see Angy this evening. "But I do like to get a thing *over*" she thought. As she left the room, pulling on her gloves to hide her ring, she felt nervous. But after all, she reflected, if Angy didn't like her, it wouldn't so much matter, now; and she smiled, thinking of Derek. All thoughts led to him. She felt as though she were in harbour after a long voyage—a voyage that had been rather dreary in the past year and a half, what with the tensions and the scenes, and the mistakes that one had made.

Coming out of the hotel into Clifford Street, she paused for a moment. London smelt odd—so different from Paris. So heavy—not that nice tang of wood-smoke. The streets were narrow and the buildings

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were low and the people in the streets were tall. It was a pleasant place. A woman walked quickly, a brindle bulldog padding beside her. A policeman gave the dog a slow smile. Two men, sticks and gloves in their hands, came up the street. How unmistakably English they were. In French literature, the hero was described as having "*des traits énergiques*". No "*traits énergiques*" here, Phil thought, as the men passed her with a brief glance, their long faces expressionless.

A gypsy sidled up, a baby on her arm.

"Buy a nice vi'let, buy a bunch o' vi'lets! Spend the money, darlin'! . . . God bless you, lidy!" And, as Phil stood for a moment, her face buried in the flowers, the woman added: "Ye'll be lucky, darlin'—yeVe got a lucky face." Phil smiled. "Perhaps my luck *does* show in my face," she reflected, as she turned in the direction of the Locarno Hotel.

The clerk at the Locarno leant across the gleaming desk. Over his head shone the word "Enquiries", in modern letters not easy to read.

"Miss March? Yes, madam. . . . Page! Take this lady to Miss March in the lounge."

Phil followed the page, threading her way between little tables and groups of people. She had imagined that she would see Angy upstairs. But perhaps to

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meet her like this in public made it all less "heavy"? She tried to pick out Angy in the crowd. There were many pretty, well-dressed girls, but she could see none sitting alone.

The page went over to where a man and a girl sat talking in a corner. They looked up. Phil smiled, feeling a little lost. The occasion was, somehow, flatter than she had expected.

"Lady t' see you, miss." The page vanished.

Angy rose. "Hullo, Phil," she said.

They shook hands. Angy turned to the man at her side.

"Poynton—my young sister, Phil. Phil, this is Poynton Shefford."

Phil shook hands. Poynton Shefford was not young. His hair was going grey. He looked large—heavy and moody. His hand felt thick.

"What will you have?" Angy turned to Phil.

"Oh—a dry martini, please."

"Hook a waiter, Poynton," Angy said.

Phil sat down. She put the bunch of violets on her knees. They looked silly, now. She couldn't give them to Angy.

"You're very like your photos," Angy said to her. Phil smiled.

"You aren't like yours." Looking at her sister, Phil

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wondered what Derek had meant when he spoke of leopard-skins and vine-leaves. Angy was slim. There was a lovely bloom on her that didn't show in photographs.

"Had a good crossing?" Shefford asked.

"Not very."

"Cigarette?" He held out his case. Phil took one. Shefford's movements, as he lit a match, were deliberate. There was a silence. Something in the atmosphere oppressed Phil a little.

"Well, I must be getting along," he said. But he didn't rise.

"Here's your drink," Angy replied.

He felt in his pocket for change. Then he picked up his glass.

"Well—here's mud in your eye!" Shefford's laugh was thick, like his hands. Phil, looking at him, knew that Angy found him attractive: Angy's voice had been so careless. And, to many women, he would be attractive, Phil thought, detachedly—she knew the type. But not to her. "I can't stand *any* fat on a man," she reflected.

"You got to meet Lily?" Angy asked him. She spoke as though she could scarcely trouble to let out the words with the smoke of her cigarette. Phil felt again that slight sensation of oppression. Angy con-

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cealed nothing from her by the lightness of her tone, and, Phil was certain, she concealed nothing from Shefford. It wasn't much use trying to sound careless with a man if you didn't feel careless. And it wasn't a game at which you got better as you grew older. Phil had heard women of fifty give themselves away more obviously than girls of twenty-two. She looked down at her cocktail, unwillingly conscious of every shade in the voices of the other two.

"I wouldn't say I'd *got* to meet Lily," Shefford answered Angy, thoughtfully. He stood up. "She's in town, buying clothes for the kiddies, and I said I'd take her down in the Rolls."

"Run *along*, then," Angy replied.

"Ring you up, to-morrow?"

"If you like."

Phil followed Poynton Shefford with her eyes, as he made his way down the room. "Kiddies"—that was a word. You wouldn't have used it twice in front of mother. Mother was down on a bounder, unless she was attracted by him. And she wasn't attracted by Shefford's type.

"This meeting is amusing," Angy said. "Glad you liked the idea of sharing a flat."

"It was nice of you to ask me."

"No; one gets tired of one's female friends, some-

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times. They're all right; but I don't want one always about."

Phil smiled. Angy glanced at her.

"You look young for your age, Phil."

"Do I? I don't feel very young." There was a little pause. Phil added: "I think you'll find I'm all right, Angy: I shan't lean on you."

Angy laughed. She said: "Well, anyway, you're not stupid. . . . Have another drink?"

"I think I will, please."

Angy called a waiter. As she turned, her eyes rested on Phil's clothes.

"I hadn't imagined you in mourning," she said.

"I didn't get any 'blacks'."

"Well, I was living with mother," Phil replied.

"You weren't. It was different for me."

"Yes," Angy said, slowly. She glanced down at her green frock. "I'm not mourning anyone—father or anyone. He wouldn't have let *my* death get between him and a good time. I know that."

Phil made no comment. She knew very little of their father. Less than Angy knew of their mother. She looked at Angy's face and wondered whether she was being a success with her.

"By the way, Phil," Angy asked, "you're not kept short of money, are you?"

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"No. I don't get my real income till I'm twenty-five or married. But I get an allowance. I could go half shares in the flat. ... If you still want me in with you?" Phil smiled a little, nervously.

"I think we'd get on all right."

"It will only be for six months. Then you'll get married?"

"I suppose so," Angy replied.

The waiter brought the cocktails and Angy paid for them.

"Did you make a lot of friends abroad?" she asked Phil.

"Not many. I met Derek Langley. ... I came over with him to-day."

"Oh, *that* young man." Angy seemed amused. "Did he look after you well?"

"Quite well."

They sat for a little in silence. Phil, drinking her cocktail, looked at the other people in the long room. She had never before been inside the Locarno; her mother had always stayed at the Berkeley. The Locarno was one of the newer luxury hotels. The rooms were low. The lounge was like a wide, gilded tunnel. There was no sense of lightness or space. The people didn't look like the *habitués* of the Berkeley.

Phil turned and met Angy's eyes. Angy had finished

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her cocktail. She nibbled her olive, dropping the stone into her glass.

"Mother was a bit trying, wasn't she?" she asked, suddenly.

"She was all right," Phil replied.

"I suppose the gossip was true: the lovers and the *gigolos* and so on?"

"No."

"I'd heard it was."

"Well, it wasn't."

Phil rose. As she pulled on her gloves, she felt unexpectedly tired, so that she wished that she could find herself suddenly alone. She was glad that Angy hadn't asked her to dinner.

Angy was looking at her with a little smile.

Phil said: "I'd like you to know my news, Angy." She spoke rather hurriedly. "I got engaged to Derek the other day. . . . But I can come and live at the flat. I expect we'll be married about the same time as you."

Chapter 5

The guests stood, laughing, in a ring.

Phil knelt on the floor, her thin body bent back in an arc. Slowly, she brought her head down, straining and groping for the orange on the floor behind her.

"Phil! You're an *cell*" Joan Bird shouted. "I couldn't do that!"

"We believe you, darling," Angy answered her. There was a laugh. Joan smiled with good humour above her well-developed figure.

Phil picked up the orange between her teeth, and sat up again, laughing and flushed. She looked up at the circle of faces. No; Derek hadn't yet come. He hadn't seen her do her only parlour-trick.

She sat there for a little, relaxing from the strain and breathing quickly, while the clapping and applause sounded in her ears.

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"That was damned clever," Poynton Shefford said. The young man beside him didn't answer, and Phil, avoiding Shefford's stare, was caught by the young man's glance. He looked down with grey, light eyes, his expression unexpectedly intent.

The party was going well. Anything could raise a laugh. The room was loud with voices and blue with smoke, Phil felt exhilarated. It was a change, to be with people who were young. No one there was middle-aged, except Poynton Shefford.

"Have a drink, after that." Someone handed her a glass.

She drank, still sitting. The stuff was pretty strong. The difficulty, at a party, if you hadn't a head like teak, was to avoid getting tiddley. But it could be done. To refuse a drink when offered had a damping effect on people, but you could keep on parking your glass and then forgetting it. That cut down your consumption so that it didn't seem as though the room moved each time you moved your eyes.

A voice behind her said: "Hullo! Evening, Angy." It was Derek's voice. She heard him add: "Where's Phil?"

Angy laughed. Phil couldn't hear her answer. She heard Shefford say: "Yes; Phil's a supple nymph." Then Derek stood before her. He nodded and held

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out his hand and pulled her to her feet. Someone had turned on the gramophone. She put down her drink on the chimney-piece. Derek swung her round and out into the room. As they began to dance she felt, suddenly, giddy with joy.

The party was in full swing. The room was hot, now, in spite of wide-open windows, and so full of smoke that Phil's eyes smarted. There weren't enough chairs. Phil and Derek sat on the floor, near where the air streamed in past bellying curtains. Someone was thumping out a tune on the piano. There was laughter and shouting. A girl burst from the group near the end of the piano, where Poynton was dispensing drinks. Screaming with laughter, she ran, holding a bottle behind her. Then, as Poynton pursued her, she dodged and held it above her head. Poynton caught her and dragged her arm down. She fell across him. He seized the bottle and then let her go.

"Oh, you swine—my shoulder strap!" She sank into a chair, holding up one side of her frock and looking for sympathy.

Angy glanced round.

"If you're *sure* you want it mended, Pamela" she said, "Beckett will do it. She's in my room."

Phil looked up. Angy was annoyed. But what did

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Angy expect, with Poynton? If you were in love with a man like that——He reminded Phil of Matteoni, who had followed her about, that winter. Matteoni had been good-looking. Supposed to be the best-looking man at Monte Carlo. And for all she had cared, he might have been at Leningrad. . . . "*Leetle Pheel: com heear*". He and Poynton both had those heavy eyes, that moist mouth. "*Not my cup of tea*," Phil thought again, glancing at Angy's face and then at Shefford's. Yes, Angy was angry. But she would get over it: she wouldn't spoil the party.

Shefford came over to where Angy sat. He said: "We want some more ice, darling. Help me fetch it?"

"Can't you get it without help?"

"I can; but I don't want to." He seized her arm.

Angy shook herself free.

"I'm not Pamela."

Someone stood in front of Phil. She could see Angy no longer. Angy in a temper could be fairly formidable. She had got that from her mother, Phil reflected, and the rest from her mother *and* her father. "We're a *frightful* blend," Phil thought, suddenly. "There's nothing good in it. . . ." But she didn't feel troubled. Sitting there with Derek, her bare shoulders against the cool wall, she felt at peace. And she felt as

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though she were a long way from everyone else in the room. The party was a sort of show, and she and Derek were looking on at it.

"Nice room, this," Derek said.

"Yes." Phil looked round contentedly at the odd mixture of furniture. "Angy and I bought everything, all in one morning."

"And you paid twice too much for it, I suppose. The shops saw you coming."

"Perhaps," Phil replied calmly. She had slipped easily into the consciousness of wealth. She didn't often think of it. But it was nice to be able to get more or less what you wanted.

It was a good room, rather large, and with such a view, at such a height over Park Lane as made the Park look like a much-thinned-out wood. But it was a good room at the expense of the other rooms in the flat; they were dog-kennels.

"The party's going well," Derek said. "And Angy's going well," he added. "That's the third time she and Shefford have been to the pantry together."

"Oh, well—if she likes it——" Phil replied, with the tolerance of her training.

"Very much the host, isn't he?"

"He is, rather.... Do you like him?"

"No."

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"Nor do I. I don't like that kind: always *leaning* over women, and slurring his words. . . ."

"Young Angy had better watch her step," Derek said. "From what I remember of Rupert Forrest, he won't stand much of that."

"But he must know what Angy's like?"

"My dear child, a year ago Angy was a good little girl. . . . Yes; she'd better get rid of Poynton, or break off her engagement. She's piling up trouble for herself."

Phil was silent. The figure of Angy's future husband loomed a little. After all, five months wasn't long, and then he would be upon them. She wished, rather, that she had seen him; she would be able to judge the situation better then. . . . She thought of Angy married; but Angy, she felt certain, would never "settle down". If, later on, it wasn't Poynton, it would be some one else. Angy was that kind. Probably she couldn't help it. If you were like that it was silly to get married. But then no one liked to be called "Miss" for ever.

"Who's your boy-friend?" Derek asked, lazily.

"Where?"

"By the door. Staring at you, now."

Phil glanced up.

"I don't know," she answered.

The young man with light eyes was looking across

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at her. As he met her glance, he looked elsewhere. His hands were in his pockets. He was shifting from foot to foot with the music. Suddenly he crossed the floor*

"Can I have this dance?" As he looked down, Phil saw that his intent-seeming gaze came from the pale colour of his eyes. It was curious.

"Yes." She smiled at him and rose to her feet.

Derek rose, too, and went over to the piano to get a drink.

Phil and her partner crossed the floor. Near the gramophone there was space, cleared of furniture, for perhaps four couples. Only one other couple was dancing. The rest were laughing, drinking, talking or ragging. Someone had just put on a new record. It was Phil's favourite tune. It held memories. She wished that she had been dancing it with Derek.

She and her partner remained silent for a little. He danced competently, but without suppleness, holding her rather tightly. She thought of nothing in particular and then she wondered what she looked like to Derek as she danced in the arms of a stranger.

"I've been to Angy's parties," her partner said, "but I haven't seen you before."

"I was abroad with my mother."

"Where?"

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"Paris. And Monte Carlo in the winter."

"They didn't let you inside the Rooms, I'll bet."
He looked down at her, holding her, for a moment, away from him. "You're very young, aren't you?"

"Well, I'm not pre-war," Phil replied.

"And you're engaged."

Phil nodded. "How did you know?"

"I saw your ring. ... But I should have guessed."

"How?"

"You dance like a girl who's engaged—to someone else."

"Oh."

"It's Langley, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Have you known him long?"

"About three months."

"You should know him six months." Phil's partner smiled at her. It seemed to her an odd remark. She asked: "Do you know him?"

"I know *of him*."

They remained together for the next ten minutes. Phil gave her partner the polite half of her attention. She didn't feel that he was giving her even that.

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Phil sat on the window-seat. It was late—about three in the morning. No one had made a move to go. She felt sleepy. She had danced and ragged and talked for six hours. Now, as she looked round, she thought: "Being in love is awful: I want to be alone with Derek." A gentle dawn wind blew in through the window. Her thoughts wandered on, a little confused and darkened by fatigue. Did Derek want to be alone with her? Not obviously. But men didn't need to be constantly reminded of happiness.

Lettice Laycock dropped down on the window-seat. Phil smiled at her. She hardly knew her.

"Have a drink?" Phil said.

"I'd adore one."

Phil rose and went over to the piano. There was plenty to drink. She looked round. Dirty glasses stood on every flat surface. There were no clean glasses. She took an empty one and went to the kitchen. The kitchen looked very different from the little gleaming tiled room that Angy had shown her a fortnight ago. It struck her that Beckett wasn't keeping it very clean. It ought to be easy enough to wash a glass, but you couldn't use those repulsive rags in the sink—slimy, and with bits of food sticking to them. And what did you dry things on? Some cloths lay in a heap by the

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Frigidaire. There was a much-used roller-towel behind the door. In the end, Phil got two clean handkerchiefs from her room.

"Sorry," she said to Lettice, as she brought her the drink. "I couldn't find a glass."

Lettice said: "You ought to have a man in when you have a party. ... If I was rich, I'd damn well see I was comfortable," she added.

Phil smiled. The criticism was justified. And the man idea was good: someone to keep on cleaning up the mess. There was plenty to clean up. There was some splintered glass and a little pool of *crème-de-cacao* on the piano. Ragging, someone had broken a half-empty glass. Things looked squalid in a luxurious sort of way.

"That's a good idea," she answered. "You should see this room the morning after a party."

"*You* don't see it."

"When I get up early to ride I do."

"God! What a thing to do!"

"I like it. ... Not that I can ride, really. But Smith's give me an old, quiet horse."

"You must be a hearty."

Phil, watching her get out her powder, reflected that Lettice ought to start again from scratch—wash her face, first, and then make it up. The old make-up

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was greasy after six hours: powder could only coat it.

"I suppose you don't happen to want a new car?" Lettice asked.

"Well, my car *is* rather new."

"Got a virgin on you?"

Phil reached for the box behind her. Lettice took a cigarette. She lit it and threw the match out of the window before she said: "Reason I asked you about the car, was—I happen to know of a beauty. Going a bargain, too. Not that that matters to you."

Phil felt the little flick of dislike or envy. It was depressing. She asked: "What sort of car?"

"Isotta. . . . It might do for Angy."

"I don't think it would. Angy's just got a Bentley,"

"Every second person's got a Bentley."

"That's true." Phil smiled. She felt, as always, nervous in the face of hostility. She looked down, out of the window. Park Lane lay below, as quiet as a country road.

Lettice said: "This car is wizard: specially-designed body and all that. She belongs to a friend of mine. He only bought her a month ago, but he's had filthy luck and can't afford to run her."

"But then—can't he return her to the shop?"

"And lose four hundred pounds? She's done a thousand miles."

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"Does he want the same price as if she was *quite* new?"

"Fifty off. She's only run-in. Anyone will tell you what sort of driver Reggie Jesmond is."

"I couldn't afford to buy a car like that."

Lettice raised her brows.

"You're not precisely broke, are you?"

"I'm allowed two thousand a year. ... I know it sounds a lot, but I go half shares with Angy in the flat."

"I can't think why Angy took this place. It must swallow money, for its size."

"We like it."

Lettice was silent as she flicked cigarette-ash on to the floor.

"I hear you're engaged to Derek," she said.

"You're the first that's got *that* far."

"Am I?"

"When is the wedding?"

"I'm not sure. Derek hasn't fixed it, yet."

Lettice laughed.

Phil thought how tired someone could make you feel if they disliked you. She glanced round, looking for Derek. He was standing by the gramophone, laughing at something. She couldn't hear his laugh above the other sounds in the room,

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"And Angy's going to be married in the autumn?" Lettice asked.

"Yes."

"Breakers ahead, there?"

Phil didn't answer. After a moment, she left Lettice and made her way across the room to Derek. She thought: "This was a nicer party when it began."

Angy and Phil had seen off the last guest. They returned to the empty drawing-room. The daylight streamed in through the windows, killing the electric lights. There were cushions and cigarette-ash and glasses on the floor, and glasses and ash on everything else. Phil rested her hand on the chimney-piece. The stone was sticky. She wiped it with her handkerchief.

Angy yawned.

"The sun rises too early."

A strange noise came from the corner.

"Some fool has left the receiver off," Phil said. She went over to the telephone.

Angy surveyed the room.

"Well, anyone could tell we'd had a party." She took a Sea-krisp from a dish and nibbled it. "Definitely a good party——Pamela's a fool. Her technique's crude. Men only laugh at her." Angy glanced at her-

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self in a mirror. Her reflection gave her reason to smile, even at half-past four in the morning.

"You're looking a bit hollow, Phil," she said. "It rather suits you."

"I'm so sleepy."

"Go to bed, then. . . . You made a marked impression on Claude. He talked about you a lot."

"Claude?" Phil puckered her forehead.

"Claude Withan. You danced with him."

"Has he got pale eyes?"

"Yes; like a fish. . . . Dances woodenly."

"Oh__*Him.*" Phil smiled. She was glad that she had made an impression. If other men admired her, Derek, she thought, would be pleased.

Chapter 6

Mrs. Leadbury stood with her elder daughter in the rose garden. The clip of their scissors broke the silence. A fat terrier lay beside them, snapping at the flies. The dead roses fell into their hands and were thrown into the basket.

Mrs. Leadbury was saying: "If I hadn't had to think of Mary, we might have had Philippa here when she left school."

"It might have turned out well. She might have been happy."

"She had been expelled from one school. If I had been willing to take the risk, your father would not have been. As he says, it's bad blood: the worst."

"Hasn't she a guardian?" Eleanor asked.

"No. Her father made two of his business associates trustees for his daughters. One of them I hear, hasn't an 'h' to his name. The other spends most of his time in South America."

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Eleanor looked down the length of the wide bed, her eyes half closed against the sun. Mrs. Leadbury cut the last dead rose and dropped the scissors into the basket. She rubbed the stickiness from her hands and sat down on an old, white-painted seat.

"It's horrible to think of these last eighteen months—of any girl having lived in such an atmosphere. . . . I have asked her down here, Eleanor, because I thought that I ought. But I am not looking forward to her visit."

Eleanor was silent.

"I don't know what we shall do with her," Mrs. Leadbury went on. "She and Angy have a gay time in London, I expect. . . . To my mind, it's a pity that Rupert doesn't insist on Angy's living with some older woman. I sometimes think that one ought to write and tell him what one feels."

"That sort of letter is almost always a mistake, I think," Eleanor replied. She spoke unemphatically, but her mother, after a glance at her, was silent. Mrs. Leadbury loved few people but she loved her daughter and respected her judgment.

Eleanor came and sat beside her mother. The terrier rose and flopped down again between them. The roses blazed before them, but, with a gardener's eye, Eleanor saw gaps in their array.

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"Shot-silk *has* done badly. She does so well at the Rectory."

Mrs. Leadbury gave Shot-silk a glance.

"The Rectory is on clay. And Mr. Charlton's man understands roses, which Franks never did and never will." From behind the octagonal wall there came the sound of a car in the stable-yard. Mrs. Leadbury said: "Your father must really speak to Franks. He will *not* be punctual with the car."

"He likes driving fast."

"And I particularly dislike being driven fast. . . . Now Franks will either keep Philippa waiting at the station, or he will smash the car up on the way."

Eleanor said: "I didn't know Philippa was arriving by train. I could have gone to the station."

"She won't expect it," Mrs. Leadbury replied decisively.

Eleanor didn't reply. Her eyes were on the low-flying swallows, skimming the grass by the tulip-tree. She said: "I saw a photograph of her, the other day. Such a pretty face."

"I don't suppose you could see the face for the paint on it," her mother replied.

Phil entered the drawing-room. Aunt Norah,

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Uncle Basil and Eleanor sat at tea. Phil shook hands with her uncle, who had not been present when she arrived. She saw that he hadn't changed. He still wore check jackets, cut by a good tailor in an outmoded style. His pale face and narrow eyes still seemed resentful. Her own clothes, she knew at once, were out of place—too smart. But then, at Barnables, anything would be. Angy had warned her of that: "Go to Oxford Street and buy something and then roll in it," Angy had said. Aunt Norah was wearing a black flannel skirt and a faded woollen jacket. Eleanor's frock was obviously old. It could never have been pretty. How frightful it must be to wear such a frock, Phil thought, and shoes that were like Aunt Norah's shoes and like boats. Eleanor, she decided, was older than Angy—old enough, Aunt Norah must have thought, not to be corrupted. And indeed, Eleanor looked unchangeable—or as though she could only be altered from within.

"We're sorry Angy couldn't spare time to visit us," Aunt Norah was saying.

"She was sorry, too," Phil replied, politely.

"I hear that she is not in mourning."

"Well, she hadn't seen mother since she was nine. She didn't feel like mourning her. . . . It seems reasonable, to me."

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Aunt Norah said: "I don't pretend to Understand modern ways."

Phil sat down. The week-end stretched before her. She thought: "/M." Looking at Aunt Norah, she felt mild astonishment that her mother should ever have wanted to be reconciled to her. "But she connected her with Roones," Phil thought, vaguely, and she remembered the day when she had first realized that her mother had sent for her only in the hope that Aunt Norah might be moved by the gesture—the mother-touch. Well, it had not been worth while. Aunt Norah had remained unmoved.

Uncle Basil handed Phil her cup.

"No milk? Are you slimming?"

Phil shook her head.

"No."

"It's an unhealthy craze. Looking like a lot of hop-poles."

"I don't really need to slim." Phil helped herself to the good home-made jam.

"We expected you to come down in your Rolls," Uncle Basil said.

"I haven't got a Rolls," Phil replied, mildly.

"You have a car, haven't you?" her aunt asked.

"Oh, yes." It wasn't worth while to explain that she had lent it to Angy while Angy's car was being

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repaired. The explanation would only lead to something else.

She drank her tea. It had a strange, smoky taste—very good. She thought of French tea, tasting of hay or of warm lead. And Beckett's idea of tea, dark and bitter. The conversation drifted over her head. It was dull. She didn't want to understand it. She looked round the room. It had shrunk since she was a child. In a way, it was a pleasant room—if you could bear all those photographs and little silver messes. Her uncle was saying "... and I told him: put down thorns. They won't try netting again. . . ." Monte Carlo, Phil thought, had its strong, unmistakable atmosphere, but Barnables had an atmosphere as strong. And she wouldn't care if she never saw either place again.

Monte Carlo. Paris. . . . Faces came clearly to her mind, and Aunt Norah's drawing-room—a little faded, a little shabby, smelling of polish and of the pinks below the window—seemed, suddenly, strange. She thought of "Old Stonor" in his little hotel on the Condamine, well-dressed, amiable, living on his friends, and, when he couldn't do that, living in discomfort. He was always short of money. Well, he had made some, she supposed, when he sold that last conversation with her, as an "interview", to the jour-

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nalists. *"Monte Carlo Heiress. Exclusive Interview". . . .*
"Miss Philly March. A slim, pathetic little figure in black.
. . ." She remembered, clearly, that half-hour with him, and she thought: "He wasn't thinking of interviews then." The reporters, probably, had stopped him in the hall. He wouldn't have been able to resist that. . . .

"Are you wearing an engagement ring, Philippa?" Uncle Basil asked.

She looked up, colouring a little.

"Yes. I'm engaged to Derek Langley."

"Langley? Don't know the name."

Phil was silent. She could say nothing about Derek that would convey anything to her audience. What *was* he? Amateur racing-driver. That wouldn't interest them.

"He's very nice," she said.

"Where did you meet him?"

"At Monte Carlo."

There was a silence. Then Aunt Norah said: "You ought to have properly constituted guardians."

Phil said nothing. She reflected: "They might have congratulated me. . . . Foul manners."

Phil and Eleanor leant on the low, brick wall that ended the green path by the yews. The view, not very

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extensive, and framed in the downspread bough of beech, showed a gently rolling grass-country. The hedgerows were heavy with leaf, the trunks of the elms thick in their green shoots. The narrow river hardly flowed between its reeds.

Phil contemplated the little view in silence. She felt happy, thinking: "Soon I shall be with Derek. . . ." Barnables wasn't so bad. And even Aunt Norah. . . . This morning, Aunt Norah had been knitting chinchilla wool. Phil had admired the soft furriness, and Aunt Norah had said: "I'll knit you a little jacket—if you wear such things." That had been rather touching. Lots of people would give one a present, if it meant no trouble. But when it came to something that meant hours of work—they'd see you damned first.

A horse, at grass in the near meadows, flung up his head with a squeal and trotted round the field. Phil watched him with pleasure. Perhaps, she thought, he was a hunter, though, for all she could tell, he might be a light vanner. "*God*, how frightful country life is," she had thought, yesterday, hearing two women discuss a garden fete. But at dinner, listening to a hitherto speechless man describe a run, she had had the idea that hunting might be fun—if you did it from London. "But of course I should fall off," she thought.

Eleanor turned to her.

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"That *is* a pretty frock, Phil."

"I don't like mauve, much. But it's mourning."

"You'll look very nice. Some people are coming to tea."

"God!"

The quality of the ensuing silence struck Phil. She said: "I'm sorry." Eleanor looked at her, and she went on, nervously: "Everyone says 'God'. It doesn't mean anything."

"It's a horrid habit."

"Yes. . . . But it sounds much worse, here."

Eleanor smiled. Phil smiled, too, across the gulfs that separated them. Her cousin reminded her, somehow, of some charming landscape, cool and rocky. She would have been glad she thought, if, Eleanor had liked her.

A cuckoo, shouting overhead, broke the silence.

"Where will you live when you're married, Phil?" Eleanor asked.

"Oh, in London, I expect. I don't like the country. I like dancing and restaurants and something always going on."

Eleanor, listening to her young cousin, remembered how the little housemaid, in "giving notice" had used almost the same words. "Café" or restaurant, they meant the same.

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"Do you and Derek go house hunting together?" she asked.

"Oh, no. . . . We don't." What an odd picture Eleanor had conjured up. But why, Phil wondered, should it seem odd? . . . Her eyes fell on Eleanor's left hand.

"Are you engaged, Eleanor?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh—but——" Phil was distressed. "You shouldn't wear a ring on that finger, or you never *will* be."

Eleanor coloured.

"I was engaged, you see. But he was killed, flying."

Phil looked up. Uncertainly, she said; "You mustn't be angry with me for the stupid things I say. . . . I say them so often."

Eleanor smiled. Then, rather awkwardly, she drew Phil's arm through hers.

The lift stopped outside Angy's flat. Phil slid back the gates.

It was a quarter to three in the morning. Nine hours ago, she had left Bargables. Derek had met her at Oxford, and they had dined there. Afterwards, he had motored her to London and they had had supper at The Florida. Now, as she switched off the light, Phil paused to recall his face. She could see it,

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clearly; and, just as clearly, she saw that she would love him for ever.

Suddenly, there was a sound. The door of the flat across the landing opened. She waited. Poynton Shefford appeared in the doorway. He didn't see her. He stood there, smiling a little as he stretched himself.

Carelessly, he shut the door behind him. He came towards the lift and then, suddenly, he saw her. He stopped. She watched the thick colour flood his face to the roots of that fair, greying hair.

"Oh—'lo, Phil," he said. He stared at her like a steer, his head a little lowered. "We—I didn't know you were back."

Phil said nothing. She glanced at his face, damp with heat, and knew how much she loathed him.

"Didn't know it was so late," he muttered. "Well, well—must be gettin' along, I suppose." He passed her with a smile on his mouth only. "Good night."

"Good night."

Phil heard, behind her, the gates shut. With a sighing sound, the lift descended. She thought: "But I knew—I guessed—before. . . . What does it matter
_____"

She stared down at the square of the entrance hall, far below and brilliantly lit. Her thoughts moved through her mind. They left nothing—only a feeling

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of oppression, of dreariness. The atmosphere in which she lived, it seemed to her, was thick—as thick as the sound of Shefford's laugh . . . she felt a sudden longing that, for a moment, was so like a longing for air that she went to the window at the end of the passage. But that window was not made to open.

She walked back, slowly, to the door of the flat, and in her thoughts a vague figure went with her—the image of Rupert Forrest whom she had never seen. She turned her key in the lock. For a moment, she stood, listening. The flat was silent. The long, silk curtains in the little hall moved slowly forward as though to wave her back. From under Angy's door there came a faint line of light.

Chapter 7

Phil counted the cherry-stones in her lap. "*Il m'aime, un peu, beaucoup, passionément, pas du tout. Il m'aime, un peu, beaucoup.* . . ." " 'Beaucoup' isn't much," she thought, and smiled.

She lay back and looked at the sky, where massed clouds were motionless. The punt drifted, while Derek hardly used the pole. Her fingers trailed in the water. The sun beat down, striking through her thin frock. For an hour—but it seemed longer—Derek had hardly spoken, and therefore, after a little, she hadn't spoken, either. But that was all right: if two people were happy together they didn't need to talk.

An electric launch slipped by, gleaming in chromium-plating and varnish, a gramophone in the bows. Why did even the most expensive gramophones sound, outdoors, so beastly? A girl with dark curls sat with a man in the stern of the launch. She was

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vaguely like one of Angy's friends. Angy. . . . One didn't want to think of her—one didn't want to think of anything but just surface things. Phil put her hand on Derek's jacket, flung down on the cushion. The rough tweed under her fingers was comforting. The waves from the launch rocked the punt—slap, slap, slap. . . . This faint sensation of unhappiness, like a little, constant tremor—surely it had no reason? Or if it had a reason, she didn't want to know it. Why shouldn't Derek be silent and different, sometimes? "Men are moody." Words, spoken by her mother, had taught her that. Let Derek be moody when he liked, and she would wait on his whims.

Her thoughts hovered when she tried to dismiss them. She reflected on the months that would pass before she was married. They seemed, somehow, dangerous, as though happiness might spoil if it was held for long under Angy's observant eyes.

Derek sat down. He glanced at his watch. Perhaps, Phil thought, he was tired of the river. To-day, there were too many people. There was nowhere to tie up—only neat lawns with "no mooring" notices, and, by the other bank, a boat under every tree.

"Well—what are you thinking about?" Derek asked.

"Nothing much."

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As his eyes returned to the river bank, Phil said: "I was only thinking about us when we're married." And she wondered why she had needed courage to say it.

Derek didn't answer.

"When do you think we'll be married, Derek?"

"Oh, some day we'll drop into a Registry."

Phil had meant to say no more. But she heard herself ask: "Will it be soon?"

She didn't know whether Derek had heard her. The moments passed in silence. She relaxed, trying no longer to fight off the strange, unhappy sensation. It was not like misery in her heart but it was as though misery whined outside. A week ago she had never felt it. "Nothing stands still"—and nothing was more true than that.

She looked at Derek's bent, brown head as he reached for the cigarette-case in his jacket. But of course everything was all right. One day—suddenly, like everything that Derek did—they would marry. Till then—be quiet: leave things alone. Derek disliked arrangements made much in advance. She might have remembered that. . . . She glanced again at him. He didn't look at her. How could he guess that she longed to be taken into his arms and comforted? And how could he take her in his arms with a dozen people in sight?

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"You know, Phil, you're a bit young to marry," Derek said.

Phil was silent for a moment. Then she answered: "That's what Aunt Norah says." She grinned a little, stiff grin. It remained on her face.

Derek turned the punt before he spoke again.

"Time to go back," he said.

Phil nodded. But she had been certain that they would spend the rest of the day together, and, in the evening, "go on somewhere" and dance.

"I've got to dine a man this evening, Phil. . . . I'm sorry about it."

Phil smiled.

"Derek—we don't have to live in each other's pockets even if we *are* engaged." There was a pause. She searched desperately for wisdom. "Anyway, we shan't, for a couple of nights. I said I'd go out with Angy, to-morrow."

And then, for one moment, there came to her from her experience sufficient knowledge to see herself and him detachedly. The first cracks had appeared. Such cracks never closed again. Never. They widened, and, in time, the whole fabric fell. She had seen the break-up of other couples. The symptoms were always the same—just the same. She knew "He has gone". She thought: "How have I lost him?" And then, as some-

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thing in her struggled in panic, she thought: "It isn't true—it isn't true! To-morrow—it will be all right."

Phil, in her dressing-gown, wandered into Angy's bedroom. Angy was still in bed. She sat up, the breakfast-tray pushed to one side. Her nightgown had slipped down over one arm. Her skin was incredibly white against the green silk. She glanced up, quickly, and it struck Phil that she looked, somehow, sharpened.

"Got a *Cachet Faivre*, Angy?"

Angy jerked her head towards the dressing-table.

"In the drawer."

As Phil went over to the dressing-table, Angy said: "By the way, Claude Withan rang up, yesterday, to ask you to dine. He says he's been trying to get you for the last ten days."

"I don't particularly want to dine with him." Phil sat down on the bed. If only Derek would ring up....

Angy's eyelids drooped.

"I wouldn't do the engaged-girl turn too much."

Phil felt a spurt of anger.

"Wouldn't you?"

"Not if I was engaged to Derek."

"And apparently not when you're engaged to Rupert."

Angy smiled.

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"All right, my dear. I can keep my temper. . . . But if you must dine alone, don't do it in public. Pamela saw you at the Little Asturias. She's made a good story of it."

Phil was silent. She had dined by herself, leaving it to be understood that she had gone out with Derek. Well, it did make a good story.

"Haven't you *any* sense?" Angy asked. "I'll give you some advice, Phil."

"Yes?"

"Go out with other men. Let them kiss you. You've lost colour, lately. That'll put it back. . . . And Derek will like you better that way."

Phil rose.

"Advice is no good to me." The words came at random.

"That's the truest thing you've ever said, my dear."

Phil went over to the hearth and stood there. She had believed that she had succeeded in hiding her suspense and misery. But of course one never did. . . .

She found that she had been staring, without seeing it, at a snapshot, stuck into a corner of the mirror. It showed a man, stooping over a puppy. He was frowning a little as he glanced up. The snapshot, one felt, was a good one. . . . She asked: "Who's this, Angy?"

"Rupert."

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"Oh. . . ." Phil looked at the photograph more closely. It was an unexpected face; not exactly good-looking. A good jaw—no jowl. She reflected: "*If that's* what Angy used to like——" She thought of Poynton Shefford. There was nothing fleshy about Rupert Forrest.

"What is Rupert like?" she asked.

Angy glanced up, sideways.

"Well, he's not the sort of man you'd call 'Rupe' for short." She added: "I've had a letter. He's coming home earlier. . . . In two months." She laughed a little, moving in the bed.

The sound of that laugh struck Phil through the deadness that lay between her and everything. Something in Angy's expression struck her, too. Angy had she supposed, been hoping that the situation would change. She had hoped that Poynton would break up his marriage for her. And if that didn't happen—well, then she would have had her good time and she would settle down to marriage with Rupert Forrest. But the news of Rupert's early return must be disconcerting. Two months, in this sort of affair, could make a lot of difference. And there wasn't even two months. The letter had come by air-mail. There was less than seven weeks. Time might have worked on Poynton; and now, perhaps, time wouldn't have the

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chance to work. . . . Phil tried to imagine Angy, married. She tried to imagine herself married. She glanced again at Angy, who was staring down at her hands. "Marriage", "home"—how odd those words seemed in the atmosphere of her life and Angy's. But "love"—that was in common use; that went well enough.

"I expect you'll want to alter your plans about the flat if Rupert's coming back so soon?" she asked, a little nervously.

Angy's answer shut a door on all view of her intentions,

"I'll let you know if I do."

Chapter 8

Rupert Forrest stood at the window of his office. The sun poured down into the broad Bombay street, blazing where it struck the white stone buildings. A dot appeared in the sky—a kite from the Towers of Silence. He followed it with his eyes. His mind, suddenly, felt dry with dislike of everything in sight and each detail of the day's work. Then, as he turned from the window, he felt impatient with his own mood. There was nothing wrong with his work. It was varied and interesting enough. . . . The truth was that, when a man was going to marry a girl, he wanted to be with her and not five thousand miles away. Angy's letters didn't tell him much; they never had; and lately they had told him less. That was the danger in this long separation: one got out of touch. He would have liked to have had a clearer idea of the life she was leading since her father's death. He had

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not wanted her to live alone; but now he thought: "I'd rather she was alone than with her sister." Philippa March might be young in years; he didn't believe that she was young in much else.

He sat down at the large writing-table, and, for a moment, put his head in his hands. The hot weather: it took it out of a man. One felt like a dying fish. Clearly, nature hadn't intended the Englishman for the summer climate of Bombay. Not that it did any permanent harm. One could stick it all right if one had no worries outside one's work. He turned to the papers before him. He had spent yesterday and half to-day dictating and emending the long memorandum which lay on the top of the shelf. Now, he thought, it was in good shape. Many years after he had left the firm it would still have some importance. Well, the firm appreciated hard, responsible work—in the end. Humanly speaking, he might look forward to a career of which the rewards would allow him, in his old age, to live at Roones and not to sell it. And the saving of Roones would be due to his own efforts and not to Angy's fortune. That was as it should be. He was marrying Angy for love and he was keeping an uneconomic old place for love. And, though it was pleasant that Angy should have money, he could only be at ease if the safety of his two loves

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did not depend on Angy's wealth but on himself. . . . But if Angy spent some of her money on the place—on new gates and better farm-buildings and better stock—that would be right. He would expect that. Otherwise he wouldn't be able to "keep up" Roones for their son. He would only be able to hold on to it while, day by day, it decayed under his hand.

A Eurasian clerk entered with a file.

"Have you brought that letter about the Bangalore agency?" Rupert asked.

"I can't find it on the file, sir."

"Don't you know, yet, that Bangalore is under Madras?" Rupert asked, evenly. One's temper played one up in the hot weather. He had felt a sudden desire to curse the man for his stupidity.

"I am sorry, sir."

"Fetch me the Madras file at once."

"Yes, sir." The clerk laid a letter on the writing-table. "Your chauffeur brought your mail down from the house."

At sight of the letter Rupert felt his heart lighten. He knew Angy's sky-blue stationery.

"Mr. Morgan would like to see you, sir," the clerk continued. "If you are disengaged."

"Very well."

Tim Morgan, head of the Country and States

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Bank, entered Rupert's room and dropped into a chair. Tall, stout and fair, his face expressed little. A stranger might have thought him stupid.

"I've only looked in for a minute. It took an effort of will to cross the street."

"Getting off to the hills this week?" Rupert asked.

"No. There's this loan coming through. I shan't get away till next month. Do you sail on the tenth?"

Rupert nodded.

"Why didn't you book by air?" Morgan asked.

"All places were taken."

"Well, Reece is cancelling his passage in the aeroplane. I thought you might like to know."

Rupert looked up.

"Thanks very much, Morgan. I'll take his berth."

Smiling a little, he put out his hand to the telephone. He thought: "In less than three weeks, I shall see Angy." Three weeks: that wasn't long. He realized now that, for no reason, he had been feeling uneasy.

Morgan rose.

"No need to telephone. I'm meeting Reece at the club this afternoon. He'll fix it. Aeroplane leaves on the tenth. You'll gain more than a fortnight."

When Morgan had gone, Rupert wrote out a message. He would cable to Angy, and perhaps they could be married earlier. At the thought of their

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honeymoon other thoughts were dissolved from his mind. Why had he felt uneasy? . . . He would take Angy to Italy, and they would travel without hurry from one little town to another. Surely Italy would make a strange, happy interlude for Angy between the life that she had led till now—dragged round in the train of her old father—and the life that they would live in India. That life would be good but he longed to show her the other things that he loved—things that she had never seen, and which, in India, one forgot for too long. It was easy to get lost in one's own work and sport. One made little time for reading. To wander again in Europe gave one, somehow, a feeling of being renewed. England could give one that feeling. But Angy might think it dull to spend her honeymoon in England.

He picked up her letter. It was disappointingly thin, and, as he opened it, he saw that it was short. When he had read it twice, he laid it on the table. The phrases were dulled, he saw, and perfunctory. His heart sank a little. . . . He stood, looking down at the blue sheet. Had she been tired when she wrote it? The words seemed so hollow, as though she had driven herself to write anything. He re-read a sentence. No; tired or not, it was an unsuitable little letter; and, somehow, opaque. . . . After a moment,

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the cloud of his disappointment and anger thinned, leaving his thoughts clear. He felt desolate and heavy, though there was no sufficient cause. . . . The cable that he had written stared up at him. He took it off the pad and tore it up.

Chapter 9

“Well—good night, Derek.” Phil paused by the lift.

“You’re sure you understand?”

Phil glanced up at Derek’s brown head, outlined against the Empire-wood panelling. There was nothing in his face to show that he cared much whether she understood.

“Of course, Derek. . . . It was silly—getting engaged. For people like us. We’d never settle down.” She took out her flap-jack. Gazing into the little mirror, she thought that her face was expressionless enough. As Derek spoke, she put powder on to a nose already without shine.

“Phil—I should feel happier if you were Angy,” he said unexpectedly.

“Why?” Phil smiled. Her mouth felt oddly stiff. “It’s been great fun; and it isn’t as though we’d

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been *Morning-Posted*. . . . Lots of engagements are broken off—" she heard herself babbling on, and stopped.

She moved a little so that she leant against the wall. She felt stifled. The ceiling was very low—Derek's head came quite near it. And there wasn't much air—only a rich luxury-smell. There they were, boxed up for this parting-scene in a low, glossy cave. Well, she had expected the scene. "*You have been warned*".... Oh, God—would she always feel like this—as though her heart were full of ashes? No. No: she would grow out of it. Everyone would tell her so.

"Oh—your ring! I forgot!" Desperately, she jerked at her finger, frowning, her head averted.

"Don't, Phil—I don't want it." He put his hand over hers, but she stepped back quickly.

' Well—I don't!" The voice didn't sound like hers. At last the ring came off and she held it out.

He didn't take it. Instead he stood for a moment, looking down at her. Yes; if, instead of being attracted by her, he had been attracted by her sister, everything would have been easier. He would not have become engaged to Angy, and, while the affair lasted, both he and Angy would have had what they wanted. But Angy, he reflected, couldn't have stirred him as Phil had done. He had asked Phil to marry

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him. He had never before asked anyone to do that; and he wouldn't again.

He looked at the ruby lying on her palm. It had gone so well with her reddish hair.

"Do keep it," he said.

"No."

She glanced up, a little spark in her eyes, and, suddenly, he felt with unexpected strength the attraction which she had for him. He ceased to feel tenderness. Taking the ring, he slipped it into his pocket.

The colour left her face again.

"Good night," she said. It was strange to be near him, like this—to be saying good night to him and not to be taken in his arms. As she held out her hand, she felt a pang of almost unbearable misery.

"Well—good-bye, Derek."

Quietly, Phil closed the door of the flat. Aimlessly enough, she wandered into the drawing-room and switched on the light.

She put her elbows on the chimney-piece and sank her face in her hands. There was nothing to be done. Nothing. The battle lost. Better go to bed. But for a long time she stood there without moving while the words of her conversation with Derek ground themselves to and fro in her mind until they were worn

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smooth and meaningless. Seated opposite him at Masiglio's, she hadn't said much, but, she thought, she had done what she could. She had tried to seem careless, talking desultorily. The band had played dance tunes that she and Derek knew well. Little Masiglio had come, bowing and clasping his hands, to ask them whether they were satisfied. It would have been kinder of Derek to have taken her to a place which didn't hold so many memories; but he always went to Masiglio's and it wouldn't occur to him to alter his habit. He wasn't sensitive for himself, and why should he be sensitive for other people? She had never wished him different. He was always certain of what he wanted and of how to get it. That, she supposed, was what had attracted her. . . . She came away from the hearth, rather blindly. There wasn't much use in wondering what the attraction had been when one had run oneself on a rock—and a well-charted rock, too.,.. She sat down, shutting her eyes nervously because she could see him quite clearly—his hand, playing with his cigarette-case on the table. . . . How could she have hoped to hold Derek? One didn't know enough. Angy would have known. Angy and her "technique". But he hadn't seemed to look at Angy. Perhaps he had wanted a short rest from technique.

Proposal

"It hasn't lasted long," she thought. "Only a few weeks. . . ." The room swam in a distorting mist. She pressed her hands against her eyes, pressing back the tears. Suddenly she felt inexpressibly tired. Too tired to get up from the arm of her chair and go to bed.

There was a little sound at the door.

Phil looked up with a jerk, feeling her heart sink. Angy stood in the doorway, smiling, a white and silver cloak over her nightgown.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo." Phil held out her cigarette-case as Angy sank into a chair.

"Have a good time?"

Phil was lighting a cigarette. She made no articulate answer, and there was a little pause.

"Do you know—I'm not sure that frock *does* suit you, Phil—black-lacquer finger-nails and all."

Phil glanced down at the riot of pale grey and white.

"Give it to Beckett," Angy said. "God knows what she'd do with it, but it might put her in a good temper."

Phil said: "Yes; I think I will."

"Have a drink?" Angy went over to the tray of bottles. "Tony brought in some Napoleon brandy."

Phil nodded.

"Is there a sandwich?"

Proposal

Angy looked round at various crumby plates, and shook her head.

"Hungry?"

"No; but I thought—blotting-paper for the brandy."

"You don't need blotting-paper."

Phil thought: "No. Not while I feel like this." Mechanically, she put her hands round the glass as Derek did. She asked: "Does this stuff wake you up, or put you to sleep?"

"Oh, puts you to sleep—if anything." Angy drank her own. "It had no effect on me this evening." She put the glass down with emphasis on the chimney-piece and turned round, a little flushed. "I heard you come in half an hour ago, but everything was so quiet—I said to myself: 'She's brought Derek in'. ... I was damned tactful. I always am. Always slinking about this flat, out of your way, darling."

Phil sipped her brandy.

"Well, you needn't, in future," she said. "It's off between Derek and me."

Angy looked at her.

"What?"

"I said: '*It's off between Derek and me*'. "Phil held up her ringless left hand. "We thought, after all, marriage would cramp us."

Proposal

Angy flung away her cigarette and sat down on the arm of Phil's chair.

"My poor sweet. . . . But are you sure it's not just a quarrel?"

"Quite sure."

Glancing at her sister's profile, Angy said: "No wonder you look rather wilted."

"Oh, well—we were neither of us the faithful, everlasting, 'let-no-man-put-asunder' kind."

"*You're* rather faithful," Angy replied. "You know, darling, I was always a bit nervous about you and Derek. He wouldn't have let marriage cramp *his* style." Phil said nothing, and Angy added: "I somehow always saw you as his semi-deserted, slightly weepy, wife."

"Did you?" Phil rose and went over to the window. She looked down, two hundred feet, on to the lamps of Park Lane and across the black vacancy of the Park. With part of her mind she thought: "I've often listened to Angy when she wasn't as wretched as I am now." It was funny—Angy's instinct to give the down-dog a kick. . . . Funny or not, it made everything a little more dreary. She thought of Derek's rooms off St. James's Street. In her mind she could see them—rather dark and smelling a little dusty. He would be there now. Or had he "gone on some-

Proposal

where"? No; it was a bit late for that. Well, anyway, she was no longer entitled to follow him with her thoughts night and day.

Angy's voice came to her across the room as she had known it would.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am, darling. . . . If there was only something one could do. . . ."

Phil drew the curtain.

"There's nothing to be sorry about, really. Thanks awfully. . . . That brandy's made me sleepy. I think I'll go to bed."

Chapter 10

Angy glanced into the teapot as Phil entered.
Phil dropped into a chair.

"It's all right," she said. "I've ordered fresh tea."

"I don't suppose it'll come."

Phil smiled.

"Oh, yes, it will"

Angy glanced at her.

"You *have* changed. You used to be a damned sight more frightened of Beckett—or anyone else—than I was."

"Oh, well ____" Phil took a scone.

"It's this Derek-business, poor darling. ... It makes you feel all strong and silent, doesn't it?"

"Can't you shut up, Angy?"

"You'll get over it," Angy said after a little pause.

"We've most of us been through it."

"Of course."

Proposal

Phil curled her legs up on the chair. Her feet ached a little in their thin shoes. How much longer, she wondered, would one feel the desire to walk and walk? As long as the pain lasted in one's heart; and five weeks hadn't made much difference to it. You wanted to range alone, because, while you were moving, your thoughts, somehow, were kept at bay.

"Lettice turned up, this afternoon," Angy said.

"What for?"

"Talk, I suppose."

"Lettice comes for more than talk."

Angy shrugged.

"Well, she only got a *curacao*"

"Not many of our friends come for nothing." Phil took a slice of lemon.

"My God, you *are* in a pleasant mood."

Phil looked up. She said: "Lettice would blackmail you for five shillings, Angy."

For a moment, Angy didn't answer. She glanced at Phil, and her eyes were unfriendly.

"I can manage my own affairs, my child. As well as you can manage yours."

Phil laughed a little.

"I hope you can manage them better," she said.

In the silence that followed, a bell rang. They heard the front door shut. A man's stick was put

Proposal

down with a rattling sound on the little marble-topped chest.

Beckett opened the drawing-room door.

"Mr. Shefford, Miss."

Poynton entered. He surveyed Angy and Phil. His glance fell on the table.

"Tea," he said and laughed.

"We get hungry," Phil explained as sheshookhands.

"Yes, my God," Angy said. "I can't live on Seakrisps and Pretzel-sticks."

"And what about the little figure?" Poynton twitched the knees of his trousers as he sat down.

"My figure's all right."

His eyes lingered on her.

"And how."

"Ring the bell, Phil," Angy said. "Beckett can clear away." She stubbed her cigarette-end on her plate. The hot ash touched some cream, and fatty smoke rose.

"Beats me," Poynton said, "how you girls keep this flat cool—right under the roof. The City was hot today. Hot? You could fry an egg on the pavement." He lay back in his chair. "I thought of taking you to Bray this evening, Angy, But I don't know. . . , Couldn't we have a quiet evening here?"

Angy laughed.

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"You talk as if we were married," she said.

Poynton laughed, too.

"Married? When you're married it isn't Bray—it's Kew Gardens."

"Depends on who you're married to, I should think," Angy replied.

Phil, getting drinks from the cupboard, felt the silence behind her. Angy didn't give herself away. No. But neither did Poynton.

When Phil turned, Poynton, his lips pursed, was looking at a corner of the ceiling. There wasn't much happiness for Angy, with him. There never was much happiness in such relations—or so Phil thought, having seen too much too soon. There was only strain, shifting from point to point, and a sense of being handled in the thoughts of the onlookers. You meant the thing to be light and careless. You had as much chance of that as of dancing an airy dance with your feet chained to a leaden ball. ... It was intended to be a happy, temporary affair—in theory, you both realized that it couldn't last. And the spectacle of your friends—Pamela and Beaumont, Reggie and Lettice—monkey-caging round you, ought to rub that lesson home. But, in practice, you learnt no lesson. How you loathed all other women—and how often your eyes came back to them. "Angy'd hate me,"

Proposal

Phil thought, "if I wasn't careful." But, with Shefford, one was damned careful. If you're left alone in a room with him, don't sit on the sofa; and if you sit in a chair, don't sit in one with arms. That was the way to conduct life, "and never put a foot wrong", as Uncle Basil's friends would say.

"Are you going out, Phil? Or staying in?" Angy asked.

"I'm meeting Sally at the Savoy for cocktails. We're going down to Hurley, I think. About eight of us."

Angy nodded.

"Well, bye-bye, Philly," Shefford said. "Be good. And if you can't be good, be careful."

Phil walked through the entrance hall of the flats. She walked slowly, not much wanting to arrive at the Savoy or anywhere else. The bronze doors were open for coolness. The evening was hot and the seven stories, piled in austere brick above, seemed to press down on the coffered ceiling.

As she went towards the door, a man entered the hall. He glanced at her and paused suddenly. At sight of his face she paused, too. Recognizing him, she felt a strange sensation as though her spine were weakening.

Proposal

"You're not Angy," he said, and smiled.

"No; I'm Philippa." She forgot to smile. Her brain fumbled in panic. Why, she wondered, had she said "Philippa"? Perhaps because it took longer to say than "Phil".

"I am Rupert Forrest."

"Yes; I knew that—from your photograph." They shook hands. "We didn't expect you yet," she said.

"I flew from India."

There was a little pause.

"Is Angy in?" he asked.

"No_____She'll be awfully disappointed."

"I'll go up and wait. Or leave her a note."

"I *am* sorry, Rupert. But she's away till to-morrow."

He was silent, glancing down at her. He looked kind, she thought, and sure. Perhaps more sure than kind. You wouldn't choose to have his glance scanning your face when your heart was beating like a rabbit's. Why should one feel like this—almost as though one were Angy, dishevelled upstairs, and Rupert had found one there?

"Look, Rupert: I'm meeting a girl at the Dorchester for a cocktail. Come and have a drink with me." Angy didn't go to the Dorchester. It was fairly safe. And one could telephone from there and lose no time.

"Thank you," Rupert replied. He was smiling

Proposal

slightly—hardly a smile at all. Phil thought: "I suppose, in the Great Open Spaces, girls don't offer drinks."

They strolled towards the car. She slid into the driving-seat, slipping her legs over the gear-lever. He got in beside her.

"Slam that door hard." She averted her eyes from the entrance. She knew that nothing was more likely than the sudden appearance of Angy and Poynton. They'd have had a drink or two, and, by now, they'd be feeling different; more like postponing the quiet evening till later.

She let in the clutch with less than her usual smoothness. They shot into Park Lane, missing a bus by the possible number of inches.

"Do you generally drive at this speed?" Rupert asked.

"Well—must get somewhere. See?"

"The drinks are on me," Rupert said. "What will you have?"

"But I asked you to come."

"Never mind."

"Oh—a side-car."

"Waiter—two side-cars."

Yes, Phil thought, you couldn't imagine him hail-

Proposal

ing the waiter as "George". She accepted a cigarette. The familiar atmosphere of a big hotel helped to calm her mind. She was more at home here than Rupert was, she thought. ... A low murmur of voices didn't much disturb the silence. There was a gentle clink of ice from the little bar. Two men, meeting near the door, exchanged an earnest handshake. Levantines: luxury hotels would go smash if it weren't for Levantines.

"Do you see your friend anywhere?" Rupert asked.

Phil coloured a little, less because she had lied than because she was forgetting to do it well.

"No, but if Betty was here, we should have seen her at once," she explained. "She's vivid, and all that."

"I look forward to meeting her."

Phil laughed.

"She's vague, as well. She may not turn up."

Rupert looked at Phil before he spoke again.

"I see," he replied; and, at something in his voice or in that unexpected glance, she no longer felt much at ease.

"Angy *will* be pleased you've come," she said.

Rupert didn't answer. He looked at the clock. Abruptly, he said: "Philippa, I should like to telephone to Angy. Will you give me her address?"

"I don't know where she is, Rupert." Phil's eyes

Proposal

were a little too candid. "We don't always leave our addresses."

In the pause that followed she felt again a jarred sensation. It was like being pulled up with a faint jerk. Well, even if Rupert wasn't convinced by her—even if she hadn't lied well enough—she had prevented him from entering the flat and finding Angy there, and Shefford. That was something. It was everything in fact. . . . She tried to think of anything to say; but it was Rupert who broke the silence.

"And so you stay alone at the flat, when Angy's away?"

Phil nodded.

"Of course. . . . But I go out a good bit."

"Do you?" Rupert's glance, resting on her, held no liking. She was—how old? Eighteen. And with the assurance of thirty. And with all that paint on her face and varnish on her nails. To look at her made him angry. . . . She made him feel, somehow, that Angy might have changed and become like her. And, with all her damned assurance, this girl couldn't prevent him from seeing that she was concealing something.

"So you do what you like?" he said. "Have you a guardian?"

Proposal

"No; thank God."

"I think you ought to have."

She looked up at him with a smile.

"You *are* like Aunt Norah."

"Your aunt is a sensible woman," Rupert answered. Phil made a face into her cocktail, and he added: "If I had a young sister in your circumstances I should probably make Mrs. Leadbury her guardian."

"You have to like a person, to be a good guardian to them, I think," Phil replied drily. "And if you had a young sister you'd find she wouldn't stand for all that."

"All what?"

"Guardians and so on."

"My young sister would do as she was told."

Phil smiled.

"You're very pre-war."

Rupert smiled, too.

"I think we're different from your contemporaries," Phil said. "Not so hard-and-fast and black-and-white."

"I don't doubt it."

Phil, finishing her cocktail, thought: "He does dislike me." It made it easier to cut short the conversation. When she had telephoned to Angy her responsibility would be ended. Not before.

Proposal

"If you don't mind, I think I'd better telephone to Betty's flat—as she hasn't turned up."

He rose.

"And I must go back to my club and unpack."

"Can I drop you anywhere?"

"No; thank you very much."

"Well—au *revoir* then."

"Good-bye."

As he crossed the lounge to the door she stood for a moment, looking at his back. She hadn't disliked him, and perhaps, in other circumstances, he might not have disliked her so much. But one wasn't at one's best after panic had raced through one's mind. And, anyway, one probably ran counter to his codes or standards or something at every step. . . . She thought of Angy. To be married to Rupert—it might be uncomfortable. You would be tied to something unbending—and, in spite of Angy's ideas on marriage, you would probably be tied closely: you could choose between the edge and the flat. And all the time you would know that what you were tied to—everything it represented—was utterly out of date.

Nevertheless, as Phil turned towards the telephone she thought: "If Angy *does* take him, he might be good for her. . . ." And anything would be better than Shefford. Shefford: he made one's gorge rise.

Chapter 11

In cinnamon jodhpores, Phil sat astride a chair by Angy's bed. Her arms were on the back of the chair, and her chin was on her arms. She and Angy looked at one another. Angy's eyes seemed even larger than usual. Frightened. And well she might be frightened, Phil thought. A good deal would depend for Angy on the next few days.

"Have you let Poynton know about Rupert?" Phil asked. She looked down at one brown boot as though considering its cut.

Angy shook her head.

"He doesn't let me ring him at his house."

"Well, he'll be at the office, now."

"I can't tell him."

"You *must*."

"I can't."

Phil looked at her sister. "Then I'll do it,"

Proposal

Angy was silent,

Phil stretched out her arm for the telephone. As she dialled Shefford's number she remembered Angy's first letter to her; and Angy's words of yesterday: "I can manage my own affairs". All very brave. . . .

"Shefford, Murphy and Shefford," said a voice.

"Can I speak to Mr. Shefford, please?"

There was a pause. She was switched through.

"That you, Angy?" Poynton gave a little laugh.

"No; it's Phil."

"And what can I do for little Phil?"

She heard herself hesitate.

"Rupert Forrest is back. . . . I thought you'd better know." It sounded bald enough, put like that. But this was a bald moment.

There was a long silence. Then "very well, my dear," Shefford replied. "Ask Angy to ring me when she can."

Phil waited. She heard him replace the receiver.

Angy sat hunched in the bed, her face half turned away. Suddenly, Phil saw the tears in her eyes. She felt a sharp stab, between pity and anger. Couldn't Angy *see* when bed-rock was reached? Have your cake and eat it, and all the jam and cream on the table, too. That was all right, if it could be done. The point was—it couldn't be done... .

Proposal

"Angy—you'd better break off with Rupert."

"Why should I? ... *Poynton* won't do anything for me."

Phil was silent. Angy was difficult to understand. Their mother had been easier; she had been more single-minded. . . . It's our mixed blood, Phil thought, as she added the ash of her cigarette to that already on the carpet. Middle-class respectability—it threw up strange reefs in Angy's restless sea. If Angy couldn't have *Poynton*, she would like to marry Rupert. It was the assured position that she wanted. And perhaps the title; though Rupert, accidents apart, wouldn't come into that for years. People who didn't know would say that Angy could marry whom she chose. But they would be wrong. Angy and she were rich, only; they weren't fashionable, they weren't "received". Their lives were far removed from the lives of girls who were securely placed—girls who went to deb balls and to Ascot and to Lords.

She glanced at the clock, and rose.

"Rupert will be here in an hour, Angy," she said, quietly. Angy didn't reply and Phil came back to the bed. "Angy: take a pull."

Proposal

Phil dined by herself that evening. Lingered in the little dining-room where the twilight fought with candles she thought of Angy and of Rupert Forrest. She had seen them together during the day but she hadn't been able to tell, in those few minutes, whether things were going well. She smiled a little at the memory. Clever Angy. Angy had taken the scarlet off her nails before she saw Rupert; her face had been rather pale, her lips hardly rouged. Rupert would be impressed. And perhaps, presently, he would ask his new-found Angy: "Does that young sister of yours give you much trouble?"

Phil looked round the room at the shiny grey walls, the grey waxed-hide chairs, the black glass on the wrought-iron sideboard, but she didn't see the things at which she looked. Her thoughts had turned to Derek. She wondered whether, perhaps, one day they would cease to do that. It was one's thoughts that came back first to one's control. And would one's feelings follow? Would this pain ever vanish? ... On some stray current of thought her mother came to her mind. Her mother had known this misery; and, with Luis, she must sometimes have known aching jealousy, too. "I'm luckier than she was," Phil thought. "I don't know what girl is with Derek, now. . . ."

Proposal

Beckett came into the room, the coffee-pot rattling on its tray.

"Oh, Miss," she said, "there's a gentleman on the phone."

Phil rose. She went, not to the drawing-room but to the telephone in her own room. But it could be, she knew, nothing that mattered—some invitation, or a message for Angy,

"Hullo?"

"Hullo," she heard, and then, as, at the sound of that voice, she just caught her breath: "That you, Phil? Can I come round this evening?"

Phil sat at the piano. She couldn't play but she could strum, and she vamped out, thinly, the tunes of the day. She didn't want to hear Derek ring at the door of the flat. But if, suddenly, he appeared before her that, somehow, would be lucky.

Happiness seemed so near. Mightn't it be caught again? In these last weeks, when she had so longed to see him, she had felt that, if he could only see her again, he would love her again, too. Surely it wasn't just conceit that gave one that belief? It was that, when love had seemed so strong, one *couldn't* believe that it was quite dead——The minutes passed slowly in a long, painful excitement. She thought: "I shan't

Proposal

be able to please him." Her nerve was gone. She hadn't known why he had fallen out of love with her. And now, if he loved her again, she would know no better how to hold him.

The door opened. She had meant when he came to go on playing, and to look at him across the piano as though her heart beat quietly. But her hands left the keys. Derek, standing there, didn't speak. He smiled at her, and kicked the door shut behind him.

They were seated on the sofa and she was in his arms. Still smiling he looked down at her; so certain of her, he was.

"Well, my sweet?" He kissed her then. "My God, I needed that," he said, at last.

Somehow, she had expected him to say something about these last, wretched weeks. He said nothing. But that, perhaps, was best. She was happy now. One day that bitter time would be forgotten. But not yet, she thought, with a little shiver. . . .

"I couldn't keep away from you, Phil," he said.

"Couldn't you?" She was frightened of words. She felt as she did when she rode—afraid of doing the wrong thing. But her voice, she thought, was all right—clear and cool.

"Do you still love me?" he asked.

She thought of the answer she ought to make if she

Proposal

had any pride. But with Derek she hadn't a rag of pride.

His hand was on her shoulder. He could feel her tremble. In her face he read all that he wanted to know. There had been no need of questions—she was his, quite certainly. And, he knew, she wasn't the innocent kind. She would understand what he meant without explanations. He looked down into those fox-brown eyes and the sum of his thoughts was: "If it's not me it will be some other man."

"I've wanted you," he said. "You don't know how much."

She smiled round at him. He leant over her as he asked: "Phil—why should we wait? . . . Come with me—*now*."

She was suddenly still, and, though he couldn't see her face, he knew that he had been right—she understood quite well what he meant. But she was silent for so long that he might have thought that she hadn't heard him. At last she said: "I thought you came to—I thought you wanted to marry me."

He laughed a little. "Darling—I can't stay *that* course. But I know what I do want. And you want it, too. . . . Phil—kiss me——"

She made a sudden movement. He held her, helpless.

Proposal

"Let me go! Derek——!"

His voice changed. He said: "You love me. Why should I let you go?"

She struggled no longer, but when he raised his head she looked at him with something so desperate in her face that, suddenly, he released her. She rose, then, and stood with her back to him. He saw that she was shaking.

"Phil?"

"Go away. Please go, Derek."

He rose to his feet at that. Seizing her arm he turned her to him. Her face was very white.

"What's the matter?" He spoke roughly.

The thoughts racing through her mind meant nothing.

"I'm changed, now," she said at last, but the words, too, meant nothing. She couldn't express her confused knowledge that some certainty that she had possessed—some bulwark—had gone.

"*Changed?*" Derek's hand tightened on her arm. "You're not a little innocent. You knew I wanted you."

"I thought you loved me."

"I love you all right! What do you think love is?"

"Please go."

Chapter 12

The bar of the Vigo Club was full. On sofas against the walls, different groups sat, a little turned away from one another, too close for comfort. Those in the bright-painted chairs called their orders over their shoulders. There was a hedge of men and women round the bar. The barmen stood at their work, calm and grave.

Angy looked round the small room.

"This place is marvellous."

Poynton shrugged.

"With a place like this the first month or two's always all right."

There was a silence. Poynton, his eyes on the table, drank his Pink Gin, but when, after a little, Angy looked quickly at the clock, he nodded.

"Phil's late."

Angy glanced at him. It was always like that.

Proposal

Poynton didn't miss the smallest thing one did. Perhaps that was how he had piled his fortune. . . . Did he know, she wondered, how she felt, nowadays, night and day, as though she were in a dream, fighting a losing battle against time? Probably. He knew everything—or at least, everything about her.

"I told Phil to bring a man," she said. "But we're lucky if she comes at all."

"How's that?"

"Don't know. . . . I don't know what's the matter with her these last few days. Half the time, she's got no life in her—the other half she's got too much."

Poynton made a sound.

"Poor kiddy. She had a raw deal with that fellow, Langley."

"You pity Phil, but not me," Angy said. The words, so unlike her, seemed to ring. She picked up her glass and a little of the drink was spilled.

"No." Poynton smiled. "You'll always have an iron or two in the fire, Angy. 'Safety First', eh?"

She looked up for a moment, and he might have pitied her, then. With her finger she made patterns in the liquid on the table.

"When does your young man come back from Scotland?" he asked.

"Perhaps to-morrow. Perhaps not for days."

Proposal

"What's he doing?"

"Watching an uncle die."

Poynton laughed.

"Poor fellow!"

There was a long silence. Angy broke it.

"I can love just as hard as Phil can, Poynton," she said. "Phil has never given a man what he wanted."

He pursed his lips over a smoke-ring. So that hardness of hers had broken up? Yes; and it would set again.

He put his hand on hers.

"I'm not complaining."

There was a pause.

"Poynton—I could make you happier than Lily does," Angy said. "Babies' napkins is all *she* thinks of."

Poynton sat back in his chair as Phil and Claude Withan entered.

"We'll leave Lily's name out of it, please," he said.

Angy whitened. There was nothing to say. With Poynton it was easy to go too far—in words.

Poynton's Rolls was drawn up at the door of the Vigo. He and his guests stood on the pavement; the chauffeur waited.

"Well, Angy—which is it to be? The flickies, or Lettice's party?"

Proposal

"Oh—I don't know!" Angy laughed on a high note.

Shefford looked at her.

"Now then—tumble into the car!" His voice was sharp.

"Don't s-speak to me like that!"

Shefford, smiling, took her by the arm and thrust her into the car. Angy sank sideways on to the seat.

Phil got in beside her. The car was open. She glanced up. The sky was very low. No stars showed themselves. The walls of the houses breathed out the heat.

Poynton didn't give Claude the seat between the two girls. He took it, and Claude sat opposite.

"You're a bit silent?" Claude addressed Phil.

"Am I?" She looked back over the evening. Yes; she hadn't really been an asset. To spoil the party—that used to seem unforgiveable. Now, like anything else, it didn't much matter.

Her cigarette was unlit. Claude leant forward, and she lit it from the cigarette between his lips. His hand was on her thigh. His knee was pressed against hers. After a moment he leant back again, but his knee didn't move and he withdrew his hand slowly. She didn't care. His touch meant nothing to her. Nothing was real—only this feeling, as though a slow, hot river

Proposal

in one's heart covered the old barriers.

Angy had been making up her lips. Now she said: "Phil can't help being silent. She's been crossed in love." She laughed.

Phil felt, for an instant, a flash of fury. Then it died. She looked at her sister. Angy was a little tight. Anyone could see that. Poynton *had* seen it. It didn't matter. . . . It was unimaginable, now, that one should ever have felt troubled about what Angy chose to do.

The car fled on down Piccadilly. The signs shone hotly. Phil, staring ahead, reflected, with a dry imitation of detachment, that she was not the only girl who had ever been badly hurt. It had been silly, in the hot chaos of her life, and Angy's, to expect love or truth. There were no such things—or, if there were, she could no longer see them.

Poynton turned to her.

"And what's Philly thinking about?"

She shook her head, smiling a little.

"Nothing important."

"You look cool enough," he said. "It's more than I am. God! What a night!"

"Phil's always cool," Angy said. "Haven't you heard? She's pure, you know."

"And—all—that," Phil said.

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Claude smiled. She looked up, feeling his glance on her face.

Phil stood against the wall. The noise was dizzying. A hundred people, with plenty of drink, squeezed into a rather small room. Lettice sat, singing, on a table. Those near her, listened. Those further away didn't stop shouting. Phil couldn't hear the words of the song and could hardly hear the clear, high voice. When Lettice, her head on one side, ceased to sing there was a roar of laughter.

Someone had written, with lipstick, on the wall. On the last word, the lipstick had broken, smearing the distemper. Someone, Phil thought, must have been pretty drunk to have written that up, even at *this* party. . . . To get drunk—that would help. So they said. But it wouldn't. Nothing on earth would help—

Claude, standing beside her, rolled a cigarette. Apparently he didn't expect to be talked to. He turned as she glanced at him.

"Have another drink?"

She shook her head.

"I'd be quarrelsome; or maudlin."

"Not maudlin. . . . You might become amorous. I should be glad of that."

She laughed, shutting her eyes which smarted with

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smoke. Her mind felt black. Someone came along with drinks on a tray. Claude took two and gave her one. A man and woman dropped on to a divan. The woman slid on to the man's knees. He was elderly and fat. Absently, he ran his fingers through the curls on her neck. In a corner there was a sudden eddy, a yell, and then, in the second's silence that followed, a good-humoured laugh.

Phil turned to the window. She leant out, her hands on the low sill. The leads were a foot or two below. Roofs, lower than the leads, fell away in the darkness. The window was wide, but she felt Claude's shoulder was against hers.

"This is a marshy party," he said.

"All Lettice's parties are the same," Phil replied, indifferently.

Claude threw away his cigarette. It made a faint glow where it struck the steep-pitched roof. He put his leg over the sill and slipped out on to the leads. Carefully, he took her glass. He held her arm while she climbed out; the curtains fell to behind her. He kissed her, as she had known that he would. After a moment he let her sit down on the low coping.

Summer lightning quivered harmlessly across the sky. The chimney-cowls were motionless. Out here

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the noise from the room was vague. Phil looked down. Far below, the narrow well was lit. A cat crossed the flagged space, looked up and made a howling sound. Claude sat beside her. His hand held hers. She could see his pale face but not his eyes. In the half-dark they were black hollows.

He picked up her glass. It was full.

"Drink it up." He smiled.

She drank it obediently. Waiting for him to speak she knew what he would say. She thought of Angy and Shefford, and her mother and Luis and some others, and of Pamela and Beaumont—and of Derek. "Everyone does it." There was no need to be different. Perhaps, if one had been easy in the past few months, one might have kept Derek.

She made a little sound.

"What?" Claude asked.

"Nothing."

The brandy confused her mind a little. But it didn't do what, she knew, he had meant it to do. That was done before; her feet had been set off the road, days before.

"There's no need to talk," Claude said.

"Not really."

"i've wanted you—since I first saw you."

She smiled at him.

Proposal

"Come to my flat, Phil," he said. He pulled her to her feet.

She tried, for a moment, to summon back something to her heart. But there was nothing to summon.

She nodded.

"Yes; if you like."

Chapter 13

The morning was hot and sunny. Phil, kneeling on the floor of her room, closed her suitcase. The telephone began to ring. She didn't answer it. The maddening sound continued; at last it ceased. She got out her hat and pulled it on, her hands moving jerkily. The sun, falling on her face, gave it a flinty whiteness.

She went to the window. No; her car wasn't there yet: it couldn't be. At the garage they had said: "An hour", . . . She sat down. She found that she was trembling. The room stared, bright in the bright sun. At first, she thought of nothing; then of her life till this moment—her impulses and her actions and her thoughts. Hatred of herself and a kind of fury shook her and died away again, leaving her heart empty.

Presently she rose, and, carrying her suitcase into the hall, went on into the sitting-room and stood by

Proposal

the window. To stand, waiting, seemed to bring nearer the moment when she could leave. . . . Her mind jolted, turning away from the past. She looked at the future and saw nothing clearly—only pictures of a countryside of which she had no understanding and which she had never wanted to see again. Capeldun. One knew of nowhere else to go—nowhere that was far enough. But there one would meet no one. Roones—that house where, once, she had stayed near Capeldun—was empty now. And no one, returning from there, would say to the gang: "My dear, *who* do you think I saw yesterday?" And at Capeldun there were no memories.

Beckett appeared at the door of the sitting-room.

"Miss Angy not back yet?" she asked.

"No."

The maid smiled. Phil didn't look at her. She knew the expression on Beckett's face. She had seen it before, that morning, when she had entered her own room and found Beckett there, dreaming over the unslept-in bed. Well, when one had leapt, it was stupid to feel surprise at the mud below the waters.

"There's a letter from 'er," Beckett said. "It come by 'and."

Phil took it.

"Very well, Beckett; that's all."

Proposal

"My dear Phil," she read.

"Poynton and I are off. Last minute berths on a Baltic Cruise. We decided last night. When we get back, he's going to get his divorce—we'll give Lily oceans of evidence. Poynton says no time to write more, but my dear there's one thing you *can* do for me. Will you tell Rupert it's off between him and me? I can't do it—don't know how to put it. He'll be back from Scotland in a day or two. Write to his club.

"Poynton sends love.

"Ghastly haste,

"Angy."

Phil re-read the note. It was very like Angy, she thought. And now Angy had got what she had been working for all these months. . . . "Tell Rupert", Phil found that she could hardly imagine Rupert. She felt sorry for him, but only *as* she might have felt sorry for someone of whom she had read—someone who had come home to find himself tricked and cheated. . . . Yes; the letter *was* like Angy. How, Phil wondered, was she to write to Rupert when she didn't know which was his club? She stuffed the letter into her bag. The thing must sort itself. In an hour she would be gone, and Angy's affairs would be behind her, seeming more unreal even than they did now.

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... She thought of where she would be, that evening, and again the picture rose to her mind—long hills, folding in, blank-faced villagers, white stone walls and great trees. The white and grey village street—not picturesque, not comforting. Surely one couldn't stay there long? *Couldn't one?* ... One could face staying there more easily than the thought of returning.

Her mind edged back. ... It was strange to think that in the last few months every step had led to Claude. Angy's parties, Pamela's parties, and Lettice's, and Shefford's—and Derek's. On the river, at the flat, at the Locarno, at the "Bell". She saw herself as she had been during that time—a little fool, always, and, in the end, a rotten fool. No one but herself to blame. . . . Claude's flat voice sounded in her mind. In a second, she was with him again. Memory brought a kind of sickness. Her mind clicked into vacuum, and she stood, staring down.

Eleanor Leadbury rang at the door of the flat. She carried a basket and a bunch of flowers. The door was opened and her glance fell with distaste on Beckett's dirty apron.

"Is Miss Philippa at home?"

Beckett stared at her.

"Well, she is, Miss. But she's just goin' away."

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"Perhaps she will see me for a few minutes."

"I can't say, I'm sure." Beckett led the way to the drawing-room.

As Eleanor entered, she saw Phil standing at the other end of the room. Phil looked up and there was something more than startled in her face—something vague that, for an instant, struck her cousin.

"Oh, Eleanor! You're the last person I expected to see." She repeated it. "The last person." For a moment she still held her cousin's hand.

Eleanor laughed. She spoke a little abruptly, as always.

"I brought some jam. The sort you liked."

"How kind to have remembered." Phil stared at the Bargables pots, neatly marked, and at the flowers—Michaelmas daisies and dahlias and small, purplish asters. Not the flowers to which she was used.

"Your maid says you are just going away," Eleanor said.

"Yes—but not for a little. Please stay for a little." Phil looked round. "Will you have a drink, or anything?"

Eleanor smiled.

"No, thank you."

"I'm glad you came," Phil said. "I'm glad I've

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seen you." The words sounded odd, almost surprised. Perhaps it was some sudden consciousness of this that made Phil look up, quickly. Again, Eleanor felt faintly troubled. It was, she thought, as though one felt a slight vibration in the air from some sound one couldn't hear.

Phil went to a cupboard in the corner. She got out a tin of cigarettes and began to open it.

"Is Angy out?" Eleanor asked.

Phil nodded.

"She's away with friends. On a cruise."

"How is Derek, Phil?"

There was a little silence.

"Oh....That'sfinished."

Eleanor said: "My dear. ... I am sorry."

Phil wrenched at the tin.

"It happened two months ago.. .. I've got over it, Eleanor."

Eleanor felt the hardness in Phil's voice. She remembered Phil's happiness, and, for a moment, she was silent.

"I think you should come and stay with us and have some country air," she said.

Phil's eyes gleamed a little between their lashes as she looked down at the tin.

"I shall have that. . . . I'm going away for a bit."

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"I expect that will do you good. . . . You look as though you hadn't slept, Phil."

Phil lit Eleanor's cigarette. She sat down. Her arm lay along the table, as, without looking at them, she played with the heads of the flowers.

"Have you been doing anything exciting?" she asked.

"No. One's days seem full, and it's difficult to say how. Londoners think its all church bazaars and Women's Institute; but it isn't."

"I know." Phil thought of the ordered existence at Barnables.

"We've had one excitement: Lady Stokefield gave a dance for her daughter's coming-of-age. I wish you'd been there, Phil. You would have brightened things." Phil smiled, and Eleanor went on: "*We are* rather dowdy, round Ormond St. Gregory. I suppose it's always the same in the country. We put too many frills on our frocks I think; or we trust too much to girlishness."

"Have you been buying clothes, Eleanor?" Phil asked.

"Yes." Eleanor coloured a little. Searching in her bag, she brought out a bundle of patterns. "Will you give me your advice, Phil? I've been all round the sales. Mother and Mary and I are going to a garden

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party—in London. I want something that will do for that and will come in useful at Ormond afterwards."

"Darling—there isn't such a frock."

"Isn't there?" Eleanor smiled. "Mother wanted me to get a cool green."

Phil looked at the pattern.

"That isn't cool, Eleanor. It's slime-coloured."

"Yes.... But I *must* get something, to-day."

Phil said: "Look here, darling: you're looking for a frock which will do for a garden-party and won't be overdressed for tea at the vicarage and that you can wear for dinner at home or at a tennis party where you're not playing. It's hopeless. It's better to be right for *one* occasion than just off the note for everything."

"Is it?"

"Yes."

There was something contorted in Phil's smile. Eleanor laid down the patterns. She said: "Phil dear—is anything the matter?"

"No."

"Couldn't you tell me?" Eleanor didn't add: "because I'm fond of you," but her smile said it.

"There's nothing. There's nothing," Phil answered harshly. Eleanor tried to take her hand. Phil looked

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up. Suddenly, she drew a gasping breath. Her arms came down on the table. As she sobbed she tried to speak, but the words were quite incoherent.

Part II

* *

Chapter 14

The river, brown, clear and shallow, ran quickly over its stony bed. At the hump of the bridge, Phil leant over the parapet. The rain fell steadily, as it had done, on and off, for the past week. She had ceased to expect a fine day at Capeldun—the sort of day on which, in London, one used to pile into a car and go down in a party to the "Dragon". Somehow, one had thought of the country as sunny. But of course when one went to the country one had always been careful to choose a fine day. . . . She looked down the valley, past the low-towered church and the little, bow-fronted house by the bridge. What, she wondered, would this place be like in winter? Well, she would have plenty of time in which to find out. She imagined the great, sparse trees, stripped of their leaves, and the river no longer sprawling on its bed but whirling down, deeper and more silent.... There

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would be more mud about then, she supposed. If that were possible.

The landscape darkened slowly, until Phil could hardly see the corner of Roones, pale grey, half a mile away among the trees. Some men came over the bridge. "Night," they said. She answered, and they were silent until they had passed her. In the village, a light appeared, here and there. She turned and walked up the wide street.

The bell on the door tinkled as she entered the post-office. A woman, standing by the post-hatch, looked round. "Well, Mrs. Skell, I'll be getting along____" The door shut on her and her staring child.

Phil put a shilling on the counter.

"Good evening. . . . A packet of Goldflakes, please."

Mrs. Skell smiled at her, and Phil thought: "I do come here more often than I need." Ridiculous to feel so pleased by a few words exchanged each evening when she dropped in to buy cigarettes or stamps or sweets or notepaper. Eight days ago, when she had arrived at Capeldun, it had been Mrs. Skell who had told her of Mrs. Gartside's rooms; and Mrs. Skell still seemed friendly.

"Run out of cigarettes again?" She reached down a packet from the shelf. "You smoke a lot."

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"I suppose I do." Phil thrust her hand to the wrist in a sack of Indian corn, fascinated by the cool pressure against her skin. A spaniel ran in from the room behind the shop and paused to look at her, the worried wrinkles puckering on its forehead,

"Now you get along, back!" Mrs. Skell moved round the counter with angry voice and gentle movements. "*In you go!*"

The door shut on the spaniel's ruby and white back and Mrs. Skell explained: "It's two months ago, the Vicar came in here with his terrier. Bob set on him and there *was* a fight. *Blood?* The floor was a mask. And a piece torn right out of our dog's ear. The Vicar—he did create! . . . We don't allow him in the shop now. The dog, that is. . . . Will that be all, Miss?"

"I'd like some acid-drops, please."

Mrs. Skell took the big jar and banged it expertly on the counter.

"Two penn'orth?" she murmured. Reaching for the thin paper, she made a screw of it. "It's dreadful weather we're having. No summer at all. And the autumn'll be as bad, my husband says. You'll have to get a radio, if you're staying any time. You'll be getting low, cooped up by yourself."

Phil smiled. But she wouldn't, she thought, get a

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radio. To sit in Mrs. Gartside's front parlour and hear the tunes one knew: it would be a gloomy pastime—like talking to oneself.

"I should like a dog," she said.

"A dog." Mrs. Skell's voice was dubious. "I doubt Mrs. Gartside'd have a *dog*, all among her things." She glanced up, and saw how the young face before her changed in a second to its former bleakness. "Not a puppy, that is," she added. "It's mop, mop, mop all day with a puppy. A grown dog might be different."

Phil didn't answer. Standing there in the little shop breathing the scent of meal, soap and spices, she felt suddenly such overwhelming, hopeless loneliness that she could not have spoken. She opened the packet of cigarettes and lit one.

"The shop's as black as a cellar." Mrs. Skell was large, but she mounted the old, wooden chair with ease to light the oil lamp. She was silent while she did it, and, after a moment, Phil said, "Good night," and turned towards the door.

Mrs. Skell disregarded the "good night". She looked down at her young customer.

"Make up your mind to it, Miss: this is a dead-alive hole, winter *or* summer. There's nothing going on. It isn't even as though the Big House was open."

"Isn't it let?" Phil asked.

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"No. There's none would take it, these days. And Mr. Forrest likes to stay there in a couple of rooms and look round the place when he's back from abroad. . . , There was a telegram he sent to the agent, yesterday, saying he should come for two nights."

Phil, pocketing her cigarettes and her acid-drops, was silent. So one didn't get away from things, after all. She hadn't thought that Rupert might come to Roones. . . . Well, surely they could avoid each other—perhaps do no more than exchange a nod. Perhaps not even that. . . . And then, suddenly, she remembered Angy's letter.

"Good night, Mrs. Skell. Thank you very much."

"Good night, Miss."

The rain had almost ceased. The air was milder, now. The white houses showed palely through the dusk, their roofs black against a deep sky. In the shafts of light from the doors, women stood and clasped their elbows, turning towards their neighbours. A dog barked outside the "Swan". Someone threw a stone, and a howl followed. The shouts of children echoed in an alley. At the end of the street a motor bicycle started up. It tore through the village, smashing all other sound. A second later it was gone and the faint scent of burning leaves and the cold air from the hills drowned the reek of Castrol. The music

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of a wireless came from the inn, cutting across the murmur of voices. Phil, walking to Mrs. Gartside's house, paused. At the sound of that tune the sights and scenes and catchwords of the life she knew had so blotted out the present, that, for a moment, the dark street in which she stood was as strange as a stage. Suddenly she realized: "I shall never fit into any life but that" She imagined herself returning to that life and it was as though a shadow slipped across her mind and darkened it.

Phil sat in Mrs. Gartside's parlour. She was writing, and her face, in the light of the lamp, was frowning and intent.

"Dear Rupert," she wrote for the third time. She paused, and then went on quickly.

"I am staying in the village and I have just been told that you are coming here for two nights. I thought the house was let and that you never came here now. But we shall not meet as I am going to Harrogate for three days.

"I am very sorry but Angy has gone on a cruise and has written asking me to give you an important message. I couldn't give it to you before because I didn't know your address but now I had better tell

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you what she says. She hopes very much that you will understand and forgive her, but she has made up her mind that you and she wouldn't be happy together and therefore she would rather not go on with her engagement. I am very sorry to have to give you this news. I wish she had written to you herself. She thought I would put it better but I am afraid she was wrong.

"Yours,

"Phil March."

Harrogate, Phil thought, vaguely, as she folded the letter, would do as well as anywhere to spend three days in. A long time ago, when she was a child staying at Roones, Aunt Norah had taken her to the dentist at Harrogate. There would be shops there where, she could perhaps get shoes that wouldn't be sucked off her feet each time she stepped off the road.

When she had addressed the envelope she sat for a little, her fingers in her hair, her elbows on the green wool tablecloth. The photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Gartside at the time of their marriage gazed down at her, blurred by enlargement, from the walls of the little room. Photographs of their daughters, in white frocks and black stockings, stared from the piano,

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The tropical grasses stood stiffly in their vases. Above the fireplace hung a framed verse which Phil now knew by heart.

*Look upward, for the sky is not all cloud.
Look onward, think not of the dismal shroud.
No lane but has a turning and no road
But leads not somewhere to a warm abode.
Take courage, though the day seems rather long,
The cooling dews will fall at evensong.*

She had looked at it so often that it had ceased, now, to seem funny. And its tone of cheer seemed rather to invite ill luck. But she lacked courage to ask Mrs. Gartside to take it down. And, anyway, her little private superstitions and omens had, all of them, turned out to mean nothing.

She took another sheet of paper.

"Dear Eleanor,

"I have meant to write to you ever since I saw you the other day. I am sorry that I behaved so stupidly. I had been unhappy but it was my own fault and anyhow that is no excuse for being so silly. I was *very glad* to see you.

"I am still in the country and perhaps I shall stay

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here for a bit. I think I like it better than London which I was getting a bit tired of. It rains a good deal or else one notices it more in the country. I am going to get a dog and take him for long walks. I am reading a lot, having got a subscription to a library. I have just read a long novel but I didn't like it—I hate books which describe what the bannisters looked like when you were five years old.

"I am afraid you will think this is silly but please will you tell no one about my being here? I think I am tired—Paris and Monte Carlo were a bit feverish and London wasn't exactly peace personified. Apparently Rupert Forrest is coming to Roones for three nights but I shall go away while he is here. I don't want to meet him, as Angy has just broken off her engagement. I am sorry about it, but I think Angy and Rupert might not have got on very well. She and I don't seem very good at engagements, do we?

"This is sweeping country, isn't it? I like the views.

"If you have time do write to me. I would so much look forward to getting a letter from you.

"With love, dear Eleanor,

"Phil."

Chapter 15

Poynton Shefford stood with his back to the fire, solidly at home. The drawing-room of Angy's flat, un-lived in for two months, was a little strange in its tidiness. Angy, surveying it from the sofa, said: "It looks cold. I forgot to order flowers."

"Seems all right to me."

Beckett entered with liqueurs and whisky and soda. There was silence till she had left the room. Poynton began to pour out drinks.

"Any friends likely to drop in to-night?"

"Oh, no. I didn't tell them we—I—was back. . . . I didn't know what you wanted me to do, Poynton."

"You could have asked," Poynton replied, mildly. He stood, lifting the bottles with his large hands, apparently unconscious of her gaze. Her eyes were very bright. Her face was pale and the rouge stood out a little, making her look older than she was.

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Poynton said nothing more. There was no sound but the clink of glass on glass.

"Poynton——"

"Well?" He poured out two liqueurs, carefully.

"Isn't your luggage coming here?"

He turned, the glasses in his hand.

"You fuss too much, Angy," he said. "That's your trouble."

"Is it?" She laughed.

"Yes. . . . And you drink too much."

She stared at the glass he offered her.

"You never told me that, before."

"Now, now." He looked down at her. "There's no need to cry. If I don't pull you up, life will." He sat down, stretching his legs before him.

There was a pause. Then Angy spoke, lightly, carefully: "It'll seem funny here without Phil. . . . But I'd rather have you."

Poynton smiled.

"And where's little Phil, nowadays?"

"At Capeldun—depths of the country. Says she may stay there." Angy sipped her cocktail. "She doesn't explain. . . . I should think she's going to have a baby."

Poynton held his liqueur to the light as though it were wine.

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"You're a hard little bitch, Angy."

She turned her startled face to him.

"No. . . . Why do you say that? . . . Poynton—you don't know—Phil's just the same as me." Poynton, smiling a little, didn't answer. As though she realized, now, that whatever she said she blundered, the tears had come back to Angy's eyes. "Lettice told me Phil spent the night with Claude—the night of Lettice's party. . . . Claude says so, too."

There was a silence,

"That kid," Poynton murmured to his feet.

"Kid—She pretends—and you think she's different."

Poynton rose heavily, and, going over to the little table, he poured himself another drink.

"Well—whatever she's done, she's made nothing out of it," he murmured. "I'll bet on that."

"If you think I'm hard, you must change me when we're married," Angy's voice shook a little.

"Ah, now. . . ." Poynton came back to his chair and sat down. "We're coming to it: I'm afraid that marriage won't go through, Angy."

"Poynton——" She waited, staring at that expressionless face. "Won't—won't Lily divorce you?" she asked, at last.

"I haven't asked her, darling."

Proposal

There was a long silence. From far below, the rumbling of the buses troubled the air. The electric clock marked away the minutes.

"Then it was all—you never *meant* to marry me?"

Poynton leant forward and took the empty glass from her hand. He put it down before he said: "You've a lot to learn, Angy: you're clever; but you're not clever enough."

She didn't speak.

"Yes, my dear: you're on the make—and you can't help showing it. You know—I've watched you playing your little game and I've laughed."

She still stared at him.

"I don't understand. . . . Poynton, I did love you, always."

"Love? You don't know how to spell it. You've lived with me all these months, but you wouldn't break off your engagement to Forrest, would you? No—because you might still want to drop me and be the future Lady Forrest. It's been Angy, Angy, Angy all the time, with you, and let the others go to the wall: you weren't clever enough to see that I'm not the kind that goes to the wall."

Her hands moved a little as she looked at him.

He said: "I've had a damned good time with you,

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my dear, and I'm fond of you. But you're not the sort I'll break up my home for."

She rose.

"You can't go—Poynton—you *can't* leave me!"

"Yes, baby. We've had our fun."

She put her hands to her ears as though to shut out the sound of that smooth voice.

"Poynton. . . . Oh, God—what shall I *do*? . . ."

Poynton looked down at her for a moment. The question was not meant for him, but he answered it.

"You'll marry, later on—have kids, have a home. If you've learnt your lesson. If you haven't, you'll find another man and live as you've lived so far. . . . I wasn't the first."

She lifted her head, twisting round, her face smeared with tears.

"You *darned* swine."

"Yes, my dear—that was bound to come. But we'll take it as read." He leant forward. As he put his hands on her shoulders her voice died.

"And now——" she stared up at him. "Now you'll go?"

Poynton smiled down.

"Presently," he said.

Chapter 16

Rupert strolled back across the park-field. The beeches slowly added their leaves to the brown carpets at their feet; the tussocky grass was wet and dead. The windows of Roones gazed out, their view interrupted by the short avenue of sycamores which, beginning unexpectedly some distance from the house, ended, as abruptly, in the field. Pausing to light a pipe, he looked up at that austere facade. It had been built in prosperous Georgian days to cover the irregularities of the old house, which, till then, had showed in the bays and angles of gradually added rooms the rise of the yeoman Forrests, As Rupert looked at Roones he felt again that squeezed sensation which nowadays so often accompanied his thoughts of it. The words of half an hour ago lingered in his mind: "Set your affections on things above, not on the things of the earth". . . . This morning it

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had seemed strange, as always, to find himself back in his own village. People had glanced at him with curiosity. Well, they understood well enough that he wasn't an absentee from choice. And if, in the end, in spite of all his efforts, Roones had to be sold, they would give him credit for the reason. . . .

He walked on slowly, leaving the house behind him, and his thoughts returned to an incident of that morning. Outside the church he had stopped to speak to a neighbour, and as they talked he had seen a girl come out of Mrs. Gartside's house and walk up the village street. Looking at that thin figure in jodhpores of the wrong shade, he had recognized Angy's young sister. He had felt himself reddened and anger had filled his mind as always when he thought of Angy. It was two months since the breaking of his engagement and he knew now that that anger would outlast the feeling of wretchedness and loss that still went with it. At sight of Philippa it had renewed itself to include her. What such a girl could be doing in a place like Capeldun he didn't know or care. The last time he came she had removed herself from the neighbourhood. He hoped that she would do so again.

The gate of the park-field shut behind him. His mind occupied itself with the problems of Roones.

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The Dammas farm was carrying too much stock—Broughton was evading the terms of his lease; and that was what came of letting to strangers. But what else could one have done? . . . To-morrow morning he would interview Broughton. Elland should have dealt with him a year ago. But Elland was weak.

From near at hand a dog barked suddenly, interrupting Rupert's thoughts. It leapt into view from behind the screen of beeches—bluish-brown with white markings and four white paws. A half-bred sheep-dog. Still barking foolishly, it bounded across the field. He whistled but it disregarded him. Then suddenly it galloped towards him and as quickly lay down, its blue eyes staring up at him.

"Bob! Bob! *Bob!*" The clear shout came from the beech hangar. From between the trees Phil rode slowly into view down the gentle slope. At sight of Rupert she tried to draw rein, but her rough-coated beast walked imperturbably on. Rupert recognized him as Thornleigh's old cob with a mouth like a bucket. Young Thornleigh, he remembered, used to drive him in the milk-float.

Rupert took off his hat. They didn't shake hands. Phil spoke first.

"I'm very sorry, Rupert. I didn't know you were back or I wouldn't have come through here."

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"Why not? This bridle path is a right-of-way."

Phil flushed a little.

"But that isn't what I meant." Ineffectually, she tried to drag up the cob's head. She glanced round for her dog, which now sat panting on its haunches.

"Will you—are you going to be here long this time?"

Rupert smiled a little. Not a friendly smile.

"About six months," he replied.

"Oh. . . . You see—the thing is——" ("Oh, why must I *gibber*?" she thought.) "I came here because I wanted to be in the country and this was the only place I knew. . . . I didn't know you ever came here now."

"I see."

"Yes, but—I do realize that it's beastly for you, seeing me about. I mean—after Angy, and all that. I could go away. But I *would* rather not have to start all over again somewhere else." She looked at him a little desperately and he noticed that her airs of assurance had left her. "If we could just arrange not to see each other——"

Rupert said: "There is no need for you to change your plans. . . . But I don't think you will like it here in winter."

"I shan't mind it," she answered. Rather vaguely, she added: "Thank you very much."

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Rupert was looking down the long slope of the field.

"I think you had better call your dog," he said.

Phil turned in the saddle. A hundred yards away, Bob streaked across the grass to where, in a corner of the field, sheep were feeding.

"Bob! Bob!"

Barking now, Bob hurled himself towards the sheep.

"Damn!" Rupert began to run. Phil tried to follow but Thornleigh's cob, his head towards home, was immovable. Dismounting, she dragged him nearer the gate and threw the reins over the gatepost. She turned, and through the misty air, saw Bob, a long way away, hounding the white mob.

Rupert, after one useless shout, had wasted no more breath. The sheep, mad with terror, were surging across the field. The foremost, crushed against the stone wall, tried in vain to climb it. Bob, barking ecstatically, had leapt on one wretched animal. As it sank to the ground, he tore out the thick, close wool. Rupert reached him at last and dragged him off. He unbuckled the dog's collar and held him by his silky scruff. Then, in a silence full of the tremulous panting of sheep, he beat him till he howled. When Phil ran up, breathless as the sheep, he had just released him. Bob crouched ten feet away.

"As he's young, that may cure him," Rupert said,

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as the final yelp died.

"He's *my* dog——" Phil choked.

"And they're my sheep."

"You've got no right—I would have punished him!"

"You wouldn't have given him what he needed,"

Rupert answered. He turned to the dog.

"Bob."

Bob came forward slowly, his eyes on Rupert's face, and Rupert buckled the collar.

"If a dog runs sheep, he has to be put down." Then, seeing the incomprehension in Phil's face, he added: "He has to be shot."

"Shot?"

"Yes. And if he runs sheep in the lambing season he may let you in for hundreds of pounds."

"Well, I'd pay it."

Rupert looked at her. "If you're going to live in the country, Philippa, you had better learn country ways. Rich-girl airs will merely get you disliked."

Phil flushed scarlet, speechless with humiliation. She backed a little against the tree behind her.

"I didn't——" she began, and could get no further. Bob came up, pushing his nose against her. She rubbed his head. All her training in not showing what she felt didn't help her. "Gome, Bob!" She turned to walk back to where the cob was tied.

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Rupert, his face set homewards, walked beside her. He glanced once at that down-bent profile. It seemed that Phil's attention was set on avoiding the yellow tussocks; but he was not deceived by the pretence. He had thought her hard and so he hadn't tempered his words. He saw now that she wasn't hard; she was as foolish as Bob because she was untaught. "Well," he thought, "it won't be my job to teach her."

Thornleigh's cob was standing impatiently. Rupert held him. Phil mounted, settling herself in the saddle with the stirrup-leather twisted. Rupert opened the gate. Before he could untwist the leather the cob moved forward, snorting, and broke into a hard, determined trot.

Rupert, feeling something that was a little like pity, stood to watch them: Bob, capering subduedly; the cob, moving now in a canter as clumsy as his trot; and Phil, with elbows carefully down, rigid to each lurching plunge, her heels in and her toes out.

Three weeks later, Rupert, talking to his bailiff, stood in the lee of a barn. The weather was bitter. The early, unexpected snow lay on the crests of the hills. In the valley there was no snow but a freezing wind that brought the leaves whirling down and brought the sleet with it. Elland spoke in wise, sharp

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sentences. Rupert listened and calculations followed one another through his mind. One sum after another, and never any margin. "If this year I don't do this, can I do the other? If I leave the gates this season, can I afford new stock? Can I gamble on prices rising a little? . . . No. . . ." After hours of such thoughts one's mind felt overstretched and irritable with the checks that met it. Nevertheless, he had been happy in these weeks, as he had hoped to be. The calm of the place that he cared for had surrounded him even when he was most worried by its problems. And, gradually, the wound that Angy had given him had begun to heal. It seemed strange, now, that he should ever have imagined that Angy could be happy with him. It was useless to tell himself that in those long months of separation she had changed. The girl who had behaved to him as she had behaved must have been the same always. And he had been a fool, he supposed, not to understand her better. . . . A long time ago Mrs. Leadbury had advised him: "Marry some nice girl of your own kind". And then, on the boat, he had met her. niece, Angy, trailing in the wake of her old vulgarian of a father, and he had fallen in love with her on that first day. He had been desperately in love, he had made many plans, he had lived in his dreams, and in the end he had been hor-

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ribly hurt. He realized now that, in his absence, she had found some other man. How could he ever have believed that she loved him? Passion apart, she would have been bored by one hour in his company. . . .

Elland was saying: "It sh'd be Wensleydale and Black-faced, first cross. There's nothing to beat it... ."

Rupert, listening, stamped his cold feet. He reflected: "Sheep-farming is Greek to me. I must learn." To him, sheep were the least interesting of stock. Cattle were different, and horses: shorthorns and shire-horses. And, if one hadn't been an exile and poor—hunters. But hunters, now, must be for one's old age.

"Aye: Rigg will talk sheep wi' ye," Elland said. "He's wanting to see ye."

Rupert looked at the hills whose folds hid the shepherd's cottage.

"I'll go up and see him now."

The sleet, striking down with sudden fury, whipped Rupert's cheek as he took the narrowing road up the hillside. The curlews were dumb. There was no sound but the little dry rustling of the wind on the heather. The winter had come early, and, he could feel it in his bones, it had come to stay. For months now the valley and the hills would be as he always thought of

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them—stripped of all inessentials and still most beautiful.

He turned to light a pipe, his back to the wind. The village lay before him, halfhidden in the curtains of sleet, and he was reminded of the little exile from London who had chosen to live there. The wind cut at his hands, and, as he thrust them into his pockets he thought: "Surely she won't stick it long." In these weeks he had hardly seen Angy's young sister. She had, apparently, kept off his land where she knew its bounds, but he had sometimes caught sight of her in that unsuitable waterproofin which—a livid patch on the colours of the countryside—she walked through the autumn weather. And once, as he went through the village, her dog had appeared, lanky and absurd, and had jumped up at him as at a friend.

The dusk was gathering as he came in sight of the dark-weathered stone cottage. A thin trickle of smoke was blown flat from the chimney and firelight flickered at the window. As he crossed the little stream before the door Rigg's dog barked furiously. Rupert knocked but his knock was apparently unheard. He pushed open the door, and, removing his hat, went in.

A man lay in bed opposite the door. He moved, muttering. A dog—not Rigg's—rose and thrust its muzzle into Rupert's hand. A girl was stooping over

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the hearth. She turned, staring at him. Her face was pale, smudged with black.

"*Philippa?*" Rupert felt for a moment stupid with surprise.

"Oh—hullo, Rupert." At sight of him she had flushed a little but her voice was collected as she wiped her hands on her handkerchief.

"What are you doing here?" Rupert asked, and the words sounded more sharply than he had meant. The old man tossed a little. Phil glanced at the bed. Then she slipped past Rupert so that they stood together on the doorstep.

"Rupert—that man's very ill. ... I was lost on the hills all day and I came to this place and found him. There was no fire—"

"How long have you been here, Philippa?"

"I don't know. ... I thought I'd try to get help, presently. But I don't know where the village is, from here. Or how far."

Looking down at her, Rupert saw how she hugged herself in the icy wind. Abruptly, he drew her back into the room and shut the door.

She turned again to the hearth and began to make up the fire. He took the log from her. She sat down then in the old, slippery wooden chair. Her hands lay slackly on her lap. In the firelight her eyes seemed

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too large. She was, he saw suddenly, very tired. Looking at her as she sat there, he felt a sense of incongruity—of strangeness.

As he turned to the bed, Rigg's dog growled. Rigg lay shivering under a pile of coverings—his own greatcoat, Phil's waterproof, a piece-rug from the floor; and the dog lay on them all. Rigg's eyes were closed. His breathing was hard and quick. Rupert, frowning, gazed down at him, measuring the time that it would take to get help and the chances that might stand in the way after the message had been sent.

Phil whispered: "It took a long time to light the fire. I've used all the matches. And there was nothing in the house to give him except tea."

Rupert took a pencil and paper from his pocket. Phil, stroking her dog's head, watched him write a message. She felt relaxed and, suddenly, desperately sleepy. How cold it had been on the hills, hour after hour. Nothing on any side but the miles of dark heather and the sudden outcrops of the rock, and, once, a dead sheep rotting in a bog. It had been unexpected to come at last, in all that wide, unfriendly landscape, to this cottage, standing alone by its stream. . . . She saw again the scene that had confronted her when she entered: the man, grey-haired and gaunt, half on and half off the bed, delirious, and

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glazed with cold; and his dog, grey and savage. The dog's growls and Bob's opposition growls had been distracting enough while she piled the coverings. And all the time the man's deep voice had run on and on in north-country speech that she couldn't understand. And then, when she had got a flame on the hearth after endless clumsy efforts, the dogs had begun to fight. That had been no joke. . . . How hungry she was—almost weak with it. She saw in her mind Mrs. Gartside's clean parlour, lamplit. Mrs. Gartside would be there, hovering grimly, and so anxious to make her comfortable. . . . She glanced again at Rupert where he stooped over the table, writing in the light of a candle. The sick man, she thought, would be looked after, now. One didn't much like Rupert, but one could see in his face that he'd take charge all right. . . .

Her head dropped forward and, for an instant, she slept.

"Philippa."

She started awake. Her eyes turned blankly to Rupert's and, for a moment, he was struck by something in their expression. It wasn't, he thought, the right expression for her years.

"I want you to go back to the village now," he said, "and leave this message on the way."

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Her glance passed from him to the window which, now, was a black square in the candlelight. A thorn bush tapped the pane. She said: "I'd rather stay here with Rigg. You could go for help."

"No; he's delirious. He might get out of bed and fall into the fire. Anything. I can't leave you here."

"I don't know the way to Capeldun."

"Straight down the path—about a mile." He smiled at her a little. "You don't like the dark, do you?"

She didn't smile back.

"Not much. . . . I'm more used to neon signs."

"Well, it's not as dark as it looks from here. You'll come to no harm, Philippa. . . . You've done well, and I don't suppose you'll give in, now." He handed her the message. "Give this, please, to Elland, at the farm. It's the first group of buildings you'll see."

"Yes." She yawned uncontrollably and then, suddenly, smiled over her yawn.

"Good night, Philippa," he said.

"Good-bye."

They shook hands. He crossed to the door and opened it.

"Come, Bob!" she said; and those words and the sight of her dog, bounding up, reminded him, unexpectedly, of their last, ludicrous meeting.

Chapter 17

Phil, seated in the deep window of Mrs. Gartside's parlour, waved to Eleanor. Eleanor, with Bob romping before her, shut the little gate at the end of the cobbled path. Rupert emerged from the post-office and greeted her. Together, they turned down the village street, and Phil, following them with her eyes, was struck suddenly by their vague likeness to one another. Physically, she could see, they weren't alike; Rupert was dark and Eleanor was fair. But it seemed to her that, in the certainty of their glance and in a certain air of freedom and of indifference to anything which they didn't like, they were of one kind. And, Phil reflected, she would never be like them. "I'm defensive," she thought, "and so is Angy. And I don't expect much." Her mother, perhaps, had once been of Eleanor and Rupert's sort. It was impossible to tell. In Hermione, the traces of

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one passion had overlaid all other attributes long ago.

The sun shone, clear and weak, without power to melt the frost. The sky was of the palest blue. In the windless air all sounds were magnified and footsteps echoed against the stone-walled houses. Rupert, walking in untroubled silence, thought of Eleanor and of her unexpected visit. For a week, now, she had been Philippa's guest. She had found her convalescent after 'flu—white, and anxious to do too much. And then there had been a relapse; and after that, it appeared, Philippa had been willing to do what Eleanor and Mrs. Gartside asked: she had remained still and rested herself. He had been to the house to see Eleanor, and there Philippa had been, lying on the sofa, polite and rather silent. And to see her there with Eleanor had seemed to him strange—as strange as though he had met some little foreign creature in the well-known glades of his own woods.

He paused to light a pipe.

"How is Philippa to-day?" he asked.

"She's better. She'll be out to-morrow for the first time, I think."

Rupert walked in silence for a little before he said: "It seems so odd that you and she should be friends, Eleanor."

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"I suppose it does. I have seen very little of her; and I've liked her since I first saw her."

He said nothing to that, and Eleanor went on: "But sometimes, I think, I seem strange to her; and she seems strange to me."

Rupert smiled a little.

"I can believe it."

"It happens suddenly. I realize, all at once, that in some ways she is so old for her age: too old. ... I don't think she's very happy, Rupert. I think she came here because of that. But I don't know. She doesn't dramatize herself."

"No," Rupert acknowledged; "she doesn't do that." He remembered old Rigg's cottage, empty now; and Philippa, asleep for a moment before the fire. There wasn't much doubt that she had caught her bout of 'flu on that occasion. And because of that and because he had been sorry for her, alone and ill, he had sent, once or twice, presents of game. He had been civilly and coolly thanked; and he had felt that she would rather not have received them.

"I'm fond of her," Eleanor's serious gaze was fixed on the horizon. "Perhaps it's because I know she's fond of me. And then—I like simple people."

"*Simple?*" He echoed the word.

"Yes; she *is* simple, Rupert. She's reserved, too, so

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that one doesn't know her reasons for doing things. But I don't believe they're twisted reasons."

Rupert said nothing for a moment. Then he said: "It's a strange life, alone month after month. What does she do all day?"

"She just walks by herself, I think; and rides that awful animal. And she reads a lot."

"Novels, I suppose?"

Eleanor looked at him.

"You are too severe, Rupert. When you were eighteen did you read much except novels?"

"Yes; as a matter of fact I did."

"You had more advantages than Phil has had."

At the end of the long street, Eleanor, turning back, said good-bye. Rupert strolled on to the narrow, embrasured bridge. There, leaning on the parapet, he looked upstream to where tall trees stood, their branches a pattern against the lightest blue. How pale and clear were the colours of his countryside. The view at which he looked was like a Cotman. He thought of the Cotman that he had possessed. It was sold, now. . . . His mind went back to Eleanor's little rebuke, and, suddenly, without cause, a bleakness invaded his heart—a kind of fatigue of the spirit. He had not known it before. . . . He had, he supposed now, always been serious, and, when he was younger,

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he had perhaps been, as Eleanor had suggested, too serious for his age. But not when he was a child: he had been, he remembered, a gay and happy little boy. And then, while he was at school, had come the death of his parents whom he had loved. And, after school, the war. And, on his return from the war, he had entered on his heritage of Roones and on his career of selling fats and on the long battle to keep what he most cared for. Only once in his life—when he had loved Angy—had he followed a bright, dancing gleam. And it had led him into arid places. He felt, now, more than ever, turned in upon himself. But he didn't want to become narrow—ensorious. It was so easy to become that. . . . He looked across the water to where his home stood, grey and aloof, under the hill. His life seemed, suddenly, pointless. "Stupid," he said, half aloud.

Phil lit a cigarette. It tasted of nothing. Then it tasted horrible. She threw it away.

From her chair in the window, she looked on to a narrow strip of green grass and low, white, iron railings. Beyond, she could see fifty yards of the village street. In the last hour five people had passed. Now two men stood by the railings. Their hands were in

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the pockets of their breeches and their eyes on the ground as they spoke. "No," one man said. "I'll not give him more for her. ..." And then, before the other man answered, one of those silences which always disconcerted Phil. But she had learnt, now, to allow for them. Otherwise, she found, she was not understood.

On the other side of the window-seat, Eleanor was reading her correspondence. Phil had read hers. On her knee lay a letter from Angy. It was a wretched letter, strident and unhappy; and angry. Not the letter one would choose to get when one was recovering from 'flu. The words stared from the page. ". . . Are you mad or what? Everyone asks what you're doing. I can't tell them and they invent their own story. . . . ought to come back here. After all, you undertook to share the flat—I've been let down good and proper. My *God* I'll never believe in a man again. I'm out for myself in future. ..." And then, over the page: "Beaumont's always on the doormat. Can't beat him off with a stick. You can imagine Pamela! Well let her look out for herself. . . . Pretty foul for me alone here. You're getting off with Rupert, I suppose? ..."

Phil tore the letter into small pieces and dropped them on the window-seat. She saw Angy "beating Beaumont off with a stick". Pamela, she thought,

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would be in a flat spin—she wasn't the type to collect a man easily. . . . But Beaumont—he'd have no real attraction for Angy. . . . Phil's thoughts went to Shefford. A dirty trick he'd played. Wretched Angy. But Angy had been very blind: Poynton was all domestic, really—Weybridge and the wife. But he liked his "bit of fun". He couldn't do without it. . . . Her mind went back over the time that she had spent with Angy in the flat. She remembered the expression that would come into Angy's face when Poynton entered the room. And Poynton's eyes when they rested on Angy. There was a tough bond between those two. She thought: "Poynton can have Angy again, any time he wants." And, she thought, he *would* want. Angy and Poynton would see each other again. And again. But now, perhaps, Poynton would no longer have the field to himself.

Eleanor looked up from her letters. Phil, meeting her eyes, smiled.

"You were looking so serious," Eleanor said.

"Was I? I don't feel serious. . . . I'm *so* glad you came to stay with me, Eleanor. You can't think what fun it is having you."

"I wish I had been here when you had 'flu."

"But I didn't want you to come just because I was ill. I wanted you as an ordinary guest."

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Eleanor was silent for a moment.

"Phil—when I leave here, mother and I want you to come and stay with us."

"No. Thank you *very* much, darling. . . . I'm not really suited for Barnables."

"Don't be silly!" Eleanor spoke sharply.

Phil smiled at the sharpness.

"Was I being tiresome? I didn't mean to be. . . . But I think I know what I'm talking about." She swept the fragments of Angy's letter into a little heap.

"You talk a great deal of nonsense," Eleanor said.

"Yes. But not always. . . . Don't be cross with me, Eleanor."

"I'm not really cross, Phil dear. I'm disappointed."

Phil rose. She began to wander round the little room. "You know I'm here because I like it," she said. Her legs felt like asparagus stalks. She sat down on the arm of Eleanor's chair. "Darling, I'd rather stay here, . . . I don't want to talk about it any more."

Mrs. Gartside entered the parlour, rattling the laden tray against the door. The lamp, she saw, was unlit. Phil, apparently reading, sat in the fading light. After one glance at her lodger, Mrs. Gartside laid the

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table in silence. She put coal on the fire, poking it so that it blazed.

"Your tea. Miss," she said.

"Thank you." Phil didn't look up and Mrs. Gartside left the room.

Bob rose with a long yawn. He put up a paw, scraping Phil's knee. She left her chair and came slowly over to the fire. In her mind she asked: "But wasn't it as lonely before Eleanor came? . . ." The spoons on the table winked in the light of the lamp. The brown teapot shone, almost black. The scones stood in their covered dish on a basin of hot water. There was a large cake and two kinds of jam. Everything was as it had been each evening since she had come to Capeldun. And as it would be each evening in the future. She sat down and poured Bob's milk and tea into the basin. As he began to drink, she put her elbows on the table, her head between her hands. She thought: "Now I wish that Eleanor had never come. . . ." The tears ran between her fingers, "I must stop. . . I can't. . . ." But it was so silly: when wretched and dreadful things had happened one hadn't cried. But, now that one again found oneself alone, it was as though, suddenly, there was nothing to look forward to in the whole of life. . . . And there *was* nothing. . . .

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There came a knock on the door. Phil didn't look round. Mrs. Gartside's voice said: "A visitor for you, Miss."

Phil rose at that, but she didn't turn.

Rupert entered the room.

Chapter 18

For a moment, Phil didn't move. A mirror hung on the wall, and, in that moment, while Bob leapt against him, Rupert had a clear picture of her. She had crammed her hands to her eyes in a desperate effort at composure. An instant later, because she could do nothing else, she had turned to greet him.

They shook hands. The traces of tears still showed on her face, and, perhaps because she was conscious of them, she told him with sudden, nervous abruptness: "Eleanor went, this morning. And I miss her, very much."

"I know," Rupert replied quietly.

There was a little pause. She looked at him and he saw again at what a defenceless moment he had caught her. And, clearly, she was at a loss to know why he had come. With Eleanor she had met him several times in the last ten days, but she had always been

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silent in his company. She didn't look on him as a friend. And, he reflected, there was no reason why she should. And yet it had been on a little impulse of friendship that he had turned aside to see her this evening. Eleanor's words about her had remained in his thoughts. They had seemed true and he had wanted, somehow, to wipe out the memory of an attitude of mind which, in the last few days, had changed—which hadn't really been the same since that meeting in Rigg's cottage, a month ago.

He said: "I came to ask whether I could take Bob till you're fit for long walks and rides again. He'll need exercise."

"It's very kind of you—thank you." The surprise was not quite kept from her voice. "But wouldn't he be a nuisance? I don't think he's the kind of dog you like."

"I like most dogs," Rupert replied.

There was a little silence. She looked from Bob to the table laid for tea. It took up a great deal of the room.

"Won't you stay and have tea?" she asked.

Rupert hadn't meant to stay, but now it seemed to him that, rather than that she should, this evening, be left by herself, it would be better that she should have tea with someone whom she didn't like.

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"Thank you," he said, surprising her. "I should like to."

He sat down and they faced one another across the square table. Phil, pouring out tea, was composed, now. As composed as at their first meeting when they had sat in the hall of the Dorchester, drinking cocktails that neither had wanted. Her composure didn't, now, make him dislike her; and he didn't mistake it for assurance. It was a kind of armour, and, in the life that had been hers, she had needed it.

She broke the silence; it had seemed too long:

"When I can ride again, I should like a nicer horse," she said. "Do you think I could find one, round here?"

"You can hire from Gregor at Cardenbrigg," Rupert replied. "Are you keen on riding, Philippa?"

"Yes. . . . But I don't know anything about it."

"You could have lessons from Gregor. If you do, you had better use the paddock behind Roones. There are made jumps. You know where I mean?"

Phil nodded.

"I used to walk that way, when I first came," she answered, and then reddened at the slip.

Rupert didn't ignore it. He said: "You can walk, or ride, over my land, whether I'm here or not. I'm not an ogre, you know."

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"I know. . . . And thank you about the paddock. It's very kind of you." She looked at the teapot. Frightful to have been so clumsy. She thought: "I usedn't to be like this."

"Do you get bored here, Philippa?" Rupert was asking unexpectedly.

"No. Not at all." Her voice was cool. Suddenly she was angry with Rupert—he always saw her at a disadvantage. Each time they met, she said something stupid. They had nothing in common. Surely it would be better if they didn't see each other.

He rose to cut bread. She looked up at him. His face was sure; as she had remembered it from their first meeting. And now, glancing down at her, his slight smile was kind. He was sure enough still to be friendly even though one had been ungracious. . . . Suddenly, she said: "I'm sorry, Rupert: it wasn't true: I *do* get bored, here, sometimes. But then, I was bored, sometimes, at Monte Carlo."

He smiled.

"Monte Carlo——"

His eyes wandered round the little cramped room. It might, he thought, have been lived in by a boy. There were no signs of letter-writing or of needle-work. A pile of books lay on the window-sill. They were all fiction and all from the current stream; as

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though there were nothing else. Well, that was what he had expected; and it was feminine enough. Leaning over, he picked up a book that lay open and turned the leaves. Turgid stuff, it seemed to him. If, for the next few days, she could do nothing but read, he would send down some books from the house. It would, he thought, do her no harm to read, for once, something that had stood the test of a little time.

"Do you like that book?" he asked as he put it back.

"Yes; in a way. She goes just on and on—six hundred pages; and there seems no reason why there shouldn't be six thousand. . . . But I've got oceans of time."

"You mean to stay here a long time, Philippa?" he asked.

"Yes; years, I expect." Smiling, she flushed a little. She held out her hand for his cup.

He looked at her.

"Wouldn't you have a more amusing time in London?"

"I suppose so. But I got tired of it." She still smiled that rather nervous smile. "It's always the same good time you know. The parties are all the same. . . . And, if you're rich, you're expected to be more—*everything* than anyone else. . . ." She paused, staring

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down at her plate, unable to explain clearly. Rupert said nothing. She went on: "Our friends didn't like each other, much. And yet one's always throwing a party—or somebody is. You get so tired of laughing; and there isn't much to laugh at, really, except 'you're another' stuff. You know? . . . Just the same, always. And the men——" She was silent for a moment. "It's all so *hot*," she said. "I wanted it once. I don't want it any more. I'm tired—you get tired of everything, don't you think?"

"No; not everything."

"Perhaps not. I shall find out in time."

"But you're very young, Philippa," he said. "You can't stay here, at Capeldun, for ever."

"No. Not for ever. I can see that. And perhaps the whole thing—my liking the country—is a phase. But I don't think so." She glanced up as though half expecting to be snubbed. "You say I'm young. But I don't believe I am, very. My mind is young, I suppose. But, you know, I think my character is quite old."

Rupert, looking at her, was silent.

"If I left Capeldun, I don't see where I'd go," she said, slowly. "I wouldn't go back to London and all that. . . . When I'm twenty-five I shall buy a house in the country and make some friends and have people to stay."

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"I see. . . . And, till then, does Mrs. Gartside look after you well?"

"Very well."

Phil took out her cigarette-case. He lit her cigarette and his own. They rose and went over to the fire. In the silence that followed it seemed to Phil that she had talked too much. The thought troubled her a little. Rupert stood looking down into the grate. How different he was, she thought, from any man she had known. No man she knew looked shabby. But Rupert was shabby. His tweeds were worn, and frayed at the cuffs.

"If you're going to live here, Philippa, would you like to read one or two books about this part of the country? I could send them down to you."

"Yes, please. I should."

He moved away from the hearth.

"I must go, now. I have to see Elland at six. . . . Then I'll take Bob, and exercise him till you're fit."

"Thank you very much."

Rupert caught the glance she gave her dog.

"It's only for a few days, you know. And it will be better for him."

"I suppose it will. Much better." She rose, slowly, and took Bob's lead from the dresser. As she knelt to fasten it she said: "He's fairly obedient, now, Rupert.

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... But he's used to being talked to, a lot, and following one about from room to room——"

"He shall have all that."

"It's very kind of you."

"No. . . . Thank you very much for my tea. I enjoyed it." They shook hands. At the door he turned, and Bob strained back towards Phil.

"By the way, Philippa—when you go for walks again and while it's winter, you must not walk on the hills. You could be lost, and dead before morning."

"Could I?" She smiled.

"Yes. I realize perfectly that you go there so as to avoid walking on my property. But that is ridiculous. We are not on those terms. ... Is that understood?"

"Yes, Rupert. Thank you."

Chapter 19

“**B**eaumont, darling, put on a record,” Angy said. Beaumont went to the gramophone. There was silence, as there had been before she spoke. Then the gramophone sounded.

Angy, humming the tune, glanced round the room. Surely to-night her friends weren't very good value? She had rung up three or four of them, and, now that they were together, the occasion wasn't going with a swing. One should ask a lot of people, always: they give out noise, and that makes for bonhommy; but there was little bonhommy about, this evening. Lettice hadn't brought Reggie, and her glance roved as though she looked for something and envied the possessor of everything she saw. Beaumont, perched, now, on the arm of Angy's chair, hadn't so far contributed much—only an irritated voice. He couldn't for an instant hide his thoughts and feelings. He couldn't, Angy reflected, for one moment keep his

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eyes off one. Nor could little Carnforth who stood by the fire, his arm on the mantelpiece because he wasn't tall enough to rest his elbow on it. But Carnforth was quiet. He didn't speak, but looked at one, adoring, his dark, shiny eyes prominent in a pale face. . . . Sally Pittall was a pathetic sight, one-stepping alone as though carried out of herself by the beat of the music. Bright; and getting brighter as the minutes passed. It was true then that Sally hoped and dangled for Beaumont? Angy looked at her and: "God, what a hope!" she thought, derisively. Beaumont had no eyes for Sally, nor ever would have. He had eyes only for Angy March. How untouched one could remain and yet work a man up to such a pitch. . . . But if one only *could be* touched, and could forget, for one moment, what one ached for. . . .

"Where's Reggie?" Beaumont asked.

Lettice turned.

"Gone to see Rubenstein. . . . This is a bloody year—one loses money all the time. Reggie's trying for a job."

Beaumont nodded, uninterested. There was silence, and then: "My God!" Lettice said, suddenly. "What I could do with money!—" She looked from face to face. No one answered. The music ceased. Beaumont went over to the gramophone again.

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"Tell you what, Angy"; he turned the record. "You ought to get one of the new 'grams that give you eight records on end."

Lettice laughed a little. She went to the table and poured herself a drink. Shaker in hand, she turned.

"Drink, anybody? Drink?"

The music began again. Carnforth moved from the hearth. He sat down on the pouffe near Angy. His hands were locked, and he looked at them, wrenching at his fingers as he spoke.

"Angy—would you come out with me to-night? Dine'n' dance, somewhere?"

Angy didn't answer. The door had opened, suddenly, and, over Carnforth's shoulder, she stared across the room. For the first time for many weeks Poynton Shefford stood in the little hall, big in his thick overcoat. He slipped it off, nodding to her through the door.

"Angy?" Carnforth glanced up.

She looked at him, vaguely. A little sigh escaped from her as her heart ceased beating in her throat.

Poynton entered. She didn't rise as he came towards her. She felt unsteady. But no one would know that. Except Poynton.

"Lo, Poynton." Her voice was suddenly husky. Almost a whisper.

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"Well, Angy?" His eyes met hers.

Carnforth rose, abruptly, and crossed the room to the window.

"Can you give a friend a drink?" Poynton asked. She pointed to where the bottles stood.

"No," he said. "It's a whisky I want. I'll get it from the pantry. Come help me." He held out his hand.

She shook her head slowly. The voices of Beaumont and Sally beat on her ears and: "Blast them all to *Hell!*" she thought. "Why can't they go?"

Poynton returned with a bottle and glass. Lettice came up to him. Her glance on his face was sharp.

"You're a little stranger, Poynton. . . . *Arent* you?" He looked down at her, benevolently.

"Business, my dear. Can't run about as we like when we're doing business. And that's something *you* know nothing about. But would you like to make a little money? Straight from the horse's mouth?"

"*Would I?*" Lettice put her hands on her hips, her head on one side. A *gamine*. But her nose was too long for a *gamine*.

"Well, now—listen: you go, to-morrow—early—and buy Clothiers' Preferred Stock. And don't forget. And don't say I told you."

"Forget! ... Poynton—you're a darling."

"No. No." Poynton put the whisky-bottle between

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his knees. "I help my friends; and I expect my friends to help *me*." Slowly, he drew on the corkscrew. "And carefully, carefully does it," he said, as the cork came out without a sound, and he put the bottle on the table.

With a fixed little smile Angy watched him as he sat down.

"My God, that touched the spot!" He looked up from the half-tumbler of yellow liquid into Angy's wary eyes. "Well, kid—what have you been doing with yourself these months?"

"The usual stuff. Had a good time." The effort at carelessness failed. The words were too carefully spaced.

Poynton nodded.

"And who's the new friend?"

"Do you mean Lord Carnforth?"

"So that's the Earl of Carnforth?" Poynton looked at the slight figure in the window. "I met his father, once. On business." A shout came from across the room where the others wrangled round the gramophone. Poynton, crossing his legs, leant back in his chair. "I don't want company, Angy," he said. "Can't you get your little friends to go?"

"Why should I?" She stared at him boldly. And then, under his glance, her eyes dropped. Her senses

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swam a little. "I can't, Poynton." She shifted her gaze away, across the room, and her eyes fell on Beaumont. Beaumont's expression wasn't pleasant. But if he felt like that why didn't he interrupt this *tête-à-tête*—help her? Because, in the face of Poynton, he hadn't the guts. How unsubstantial he and the others seemed. . . .

"Can't?" Poynton finished what was in his glass. Then he turned, and, across the room, caught Lettice's eyes. He jerked his head, smiling a little. Lettice came towards him, hesitantly, full of tact.

"Now, Lettice——" he spoke slowly. "What do you think? Isn't Angy looking a bit tired?"

"Yes—I——" Lettice glanced from face to face, uncertain what he wanted of her.

"Yes" Poynton reached for a cigarette. "Well—what she needs is to be left alone—have a bit of rest——" He hadn't troubled to look up as he spoke, but now, as Lettice wandered away, he watched her for a moment.

"*Thafs* a little bitch," he said. "But she'll do as I tell her. She'd train up well as a sheepdog. Look at her—she'll break up the party."

"Lettice could break up anything." Angy fumbled in the box for a cigarette. "But I don't want my friends to go——"

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Poynton leant forward, match in hand.

"Let me light it," he said. "Your hands are shaking."

The guests had gone, and, with them, Poynton. But he had returned. Now he lay back in the big chair, on the other side of the hearth, his legs stretched before him, his eyes half closed. His glance dwelt on Angy as though he were rested by the sight of her.

"Do you know why I'm here?"

She shook her head.

"No." Her voice was gentle. She was very white.

"Because I was tired." He glanced at the clock. "I shall have to go, soon. ... I wanted a little peace."

She smiled.

"You're very pretty to-night, Angy——But you're not the same."

"I haven't been happy."

There was a silence.

"We've neither of us had a good time," Poynton said. He leant forward, grinding the butt of his cigarette into the ash-tray. "Lily's very ill," he told her without looking up.

"*Lily?*" Angy glanced at him, startled. No words came. The occasions when she had wished Poynton's wife dead stood before her mind. But she hadn't

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meant——How could one control one's wishes or one's thoughts?

"She's been ill for months. She's worse now. . . . You wouldn't know her. She's always in pain—no rest."

Angy spoke at last.

"I'm sorry——"

"You don't know. . . . I tell you it's getting me down. The house—I can hear her sometimes. And in the evenings when I sit with her——" He broke off, glancing again at the clock. "I ought to be there. I must go. . . ."

"No. Not yet, Poynton."

There was a silence. His expression was relaxed, open, as she had never seen it. He looked at her.

"Poor kid," he said. "These months haven't done you much good. I hear about you oftener than you hear about me."

"I thought you had forgotten me."

"No. . . . You're not worth it—but I never forget you."

Suddenly the tears were between her lashes. One fell on her hand. She brushed it off.

"Carnforth, now," Poynton mused. "I suppose he'd marry you?"

"Yes____That's what he wants."

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"And he wants it badly. . . . You'd like it, Angy. The fifteenth earl. You'd look well at Beethame, and in Fortinn House, Manchester Square. . . . And it would last about a year. He couldn't hold you."

"He's very kind."

"You don't want some one very kind," Poynton rose without haste. He crossed to the sofa and sat beside her. "Poor kid," he murmured. "Poor Angy."

There was a long silence. At last she stirred under his hand.

"You can't help the way you're made," he said. "And I can make you feel. And Carnforth can't."

"Don't, Poynton——"

"And now I must go. I never meant to come. Lily will be watching——" But, for a moment, he remained still. Then he moved his hand from where it lay and stood up. "She tries to talk but half the time she——" his voice died. "You don't know what it's like. If they'd only give her more *dope*. . . ."

Angy stared up at him. The memory of Poynton's wife as she had once seen her, a year ago, came dimly: Lily, without charm or a vestige of youth, fussing placidly over her own tea-table. Just dull, she had been. Suddenly Angy remembered how much Lily had admired her leopard coat. "But you can wear anything," Lily had said,

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gazing at her. Lily hadn't tried, much, to join in the conversation. Or, if she had, it hadn't been noticeable. . . . Impossible to imagine her apart from that fidgety room filled with photographs of her children. "*Pain*" Angy thought. As though Poynton's words had put it there, a sudden picture came to Angy's mind of Lily's faded, placid face, sunken and twisted.

"Well. . . ." Poynton's eyes came back to her. "So long, kid."

She went with him to the door. They stood in the little hall.

"You going out to-night?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"That's a good girl." He put his hand under her chin and tilted it up. His face, now, was as she had always known it. He spoke with his eyes on hers.

"Listen, Angy: you move too quickly. You won't get what you want that way; and you'll knock yourself about. You must learn to wait. . . . *Wait, Angy.*"

"Yes, Poynton—anything——"

He disengaged himself, gently, from her hands.

"Get out of my way, kid—Now, open that door."

Chapter 20

"**W**hat nice places you buy your bulls from," Phil said.

Rupert smiled, glancing up the green slope of the field at the farmhouse, solid and sheltered.

"Can I come with you?" Phil asked.

"No. That would embarrass the farmer and me."

"All right."

Rupert closed the door of the car. The sound of his footsteps receded up the lane. In the little landscape of the driving-mirror, she could see him clearly.

She took off her hat, sunning herself on this mild, winter day which was as though it had been stolen from the south. Ducks yattered happily in the black mud of the pond. The larches bent their brown tops to a little, soft wind, which, down here, hardly stirred the loose straws on the stacks. Over the edge of the valley, ten miles away, one could still see the village

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of Capeldun—a vague, buff mark where the river flashed. Phil lit a cigarette. She had learnt something of the leisurely ways of the countryside, and Rupert, she thought, wouldn't return quickly. She was content to wait. In that life which she had led with her mother and which seemed, now, so distant, she had had good training in waiting on the movements of others; and, in these last few months, she had become used to being alone.

Bob, who had sat between Rupert's knees, leapt on to the seat. She stroked his head while her thoughts passed slowly, vague as her mood. She thought of her mother. It was strange that the memory of her mother's face should come so dimly—more dimly than other faces which she had known so much less well. It would not be summoned to her mind. But sometimes, for an instant, as she looked into her mirror in the uncertain light of the candles, that face would glance out at her, startlingly, from her own reflection. . . . Gazing down, now, at the blue spread view before her, she remembered that her mother had cared for this country. It had been, surely, an incongruous taste in Hermione March—as incongruous, Phil thought, as her own liking for it. But then, in this last half-year, had she not learnt how much she was her mother's daughter? Perhaps, after all, it was

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not surprising that she should share her tastes. . . .

Her mind, leaving the darkness, fled as always to the familiar things that made up her life, now: walks, the last book that she had read, village acquaintanceships, a letter from Eleanor. She thought of Rupert, and remembered her mother's belief that a girl and a man could not be friends. But her mother had been wrong. You *could* be friends; but perhaps, first, you must have been so unhappy that you couldn't imagine yourself thinking again of love. . . . And it was true, she reflected, that friendship with a man was different from friendship with a woman; a man was apparently thinking of other things for a good part of the time that he was with one. And that, somehow, gave one a kind of cool comfort.

Rupert's footsteps sounded on the stones of the lane. Bob pricked his ears. Phil, turning, threw away the stump of a cigarette.

"Did you buy him?" she asked.

"No." Rupert pulled Bob off the seat. He got into the car and settled the ribby, blue-grey body between his feet.

"Wasn't he a good bull?"

"Too good. Jelf wants more than I can give. He'll get it, I think; but not from me."

Phil backed the car out of the little lane into the

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steep, twisting road. She thought: "I would like to give him the bull." But that, probably, would be a mistaken suggestion. "Rich-girl airs." She remembered those words, and flushed a little. For her, it was easy to say the wrong thing to Rupert. Realizing this, she was sometimes a little timid with him, and uncertain of herself. Knowledge of the men she was used to, had not, she knew, been any preparation for a friendship with Rupert. . . . Thinking of him, now, as he sat silent beside her, she reflected that it must be horrible to care for anything as he cared for Roones and then to have to scrape and pinch and go without and still to feel it sliding through your hands. And he had loved Angy, and Angy had abandoned him. That, Phil thought, had been as well; but it must have left him desolate. It was painful to know how desolate—and one *did* know if one had been wretched oneself. For a second the past crowded in on her mind, and suddenly she thought: "If he really knew what I was like he wouldn't want to be friends." She glanced sideways at him. He was smiling a little as he played with Bob's ears. She realized that she was fond of him, and she reflected: "I've never been fond of anyone, except Eleanor. . . ." She had thought once that she would be fond of Angy. But that hadn't worked.

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There was a smell of mist and earth and a sound of rooks. From the saddle, Phil glanced down at her long, breeched leg. Her mount, an aged black, stood quietly. He seemed, after Thornleigh's cob, very tall—a long way from the ground.

Rupert glanced up through the smoke of his pipe. At sight of her grave face, he smiled a little.

"Take him, first, round the paddock at a trot."

Phil turned her horse's head. At once, disconcerting her, he broke into a canter, his ears pricked at the furze-jump on her right. She pulled him up. Rupert spoke clearly from behind her: "Keep your knees *in*, Philippa!" As she jerked her knees into the saddle, Phil wondered whether, if he knew that she was frightened, Rupert would be sorry for her. She could imagine that he would not. . . . The turf was soft under her horse's feet and she tried to find comfort in that. Surely a fall wouldn't hurt much? . . .

Rupert followed her with his eyes, as, squaring each corner conscientiously, she rode slowly round the paddock. A kind of brightness went with his thoughts, as though, somewhere, there was a light in his mind. He felt it, and felt its strangeness, as he had done for many days.

He held up his hand. She drew rein and he walked

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across to her. How seriously she took this business of riding. And, he saw, she was afraid as well as keen.

"Take him over the pole now. And remember: sit forward and stay there."

She nodded.

The horse snorted a little as he approached the jump. There would be, Rupert knew, no refusal—the old black could have jumped round a school in his sleep. Gregor had certainly provided the right animal. . . .

The horse jumped faultlessly. His rider was "left behind", jabbing him in the mouth as he landed.

"Did you keep your finger in the martingale?" Rupert asked, as Phil rode up, breathing a little quickly.

"Oh.....No."

"No; I thought not. ... Do it again."

She wheeled round. Rupert smiled, contemplating those thin shoulders which bowed suddenly as the black wrenched at the bit. How quickly, he thought, the weeks had gone. Too quickly. He would always remember them, because, in these weeks, he had been content and careless—Irrelevantly, he found himself thinking: "And I don't know her. Secret little creature. . . ."

The minutes wore on. Phil took the jump again

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and then again, while the light of a red sun struck sideways across the paddock and her horse's breath rose smokily on air just touched by frost.

"And now—without stirrups," Rupert said. "Cross your stirrups."

She gave him a startled glance. He had heightened the pole several times. He didn't lower it in answer to that glance but he smiled.

"You need more confidence, Philippa. You don't now ride as badly as you think you do."

Once more she approached the jump, stirrupless this time, her face a little set. There was a sudden, startling rattle, a scurr of wings and a pheasant rose from the ditch. The old horse shied violently.

"Ah!" Phil fell.

Her horse galloped on to the jump, stopped abruptly and began to snatch grass. Rupert seized the bridle.

Phil got up, trembling a little. Her beret had come off. Rupert came up without hurry.

"That was bad luck," he said.

She smiled.

"But, next time, keep hold of the bridle as you fall," he told her.

He held her stirrup. She mounted again in silence. He saw that she didn't want to mount, and that she had expected more sympathy than he had given her.

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She looked away, across the fields, and, at something in her aloofness, he felt sudden tenderness. But he put his hand on her knee and crammed it in against the saddle.

"Don't hang on by your heels."

Her little, withdrawn air vanished.

"When will the lesson be finished?" she asked in a small voice.

He smiled.

"Would you like to give up now?"

She hesitated for a second. Then she shook her head. It would, she found, have needed more courage to say "yes".

Twenty minutes later, her horse handed over to Gregor's man, she and Rupert walked together down to the village, while the clear, grey, washed light fell slowly across the fields and the sun still touched the stone-pines above Roones.

Rupert glanced at Phil. She was as he had never seen her—full of gaiety and impudence. A reaction from the solemnity of the lesson,

"Rupert—have you ever been frightened?"

"Sometimes."

"Not more than I was this afternoon, I bet. . . . Rupert—I feel so cheerful. Quite happy." He saw how she glanced round, as though in her surround-

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ings she might find the reason; and he realized that perhaps he had never before seen her happy.

She took a quick stride. A moment later, suddenly and unexpectedly, she had turned three handsprings on the wet grass.

"*There!*" She gave a tug to her jodhpores. "*Most girls can't do that.*"

He had stood still to watch her. Now, as she turned a laughing face to him, something jerked at his heart. What was it that, in these last weeks, had passed so quietly into his thoughts that at no moment could he have recognized it and given it a name and barred its passage?

He opened a gate. Her hand lay along the wood.

"Why do you put that red stuff on your nails?"

She laughed a little.

"Oh—to keep my self-respect, I think."

"Self-respect?" he repeated.

She stopped dead, staring at him.

"Why do you say that?" Her voice was different. She had turned scarlet.

There was a little pause. Before he could say anything, she spoke again, uncertainly: "It's all right—I thought—Rupert, I'm sorry. . . . I'm stupid."

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The winter dawn slipped through the thin curtains. Phil lay in bed, looking at the long cracks which, stretching across the ceiling, seemed like the sketch for a seascape. Her mind, remembering its pre-occupation, had woken her, and now her thoughts were insistent and apprehensive—as apprehensive as her dreams had been. And yet what use, now, to worry? The letter that she had written to Rupert had been received and answered and was beyond recall. ... But had the writing of it been wisdom, or the depths of folly? She didn't know. She had brooded over it too long—ever since that first riding lesson, weeks ago. While she wrote the letter, and before, the idea that she had carried in her heart had *seemed* like wisdom. But how many of her impulses had seemed like that and had turned out to be—something different?

The note to Rupert had been very short, and his answer, too, had been short:

"Dear Philippa,

"Thank you for your note. I am not busy tomorrow afternoon, and I shall be glad to see you. At

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about four o'clock? I hope that you will have tea with me.

"Yours,

"Rupert Forrest."

Light, now, filled the room. She could see the brass knobs at the foot of the bed; the pink sateen-covered eiderdown; the burnt-out candle; Bob, in his basket, thoughtfully chewing the wicker side. In a few minutes, Mrs. Gartside's niece would come in to light the fire—that luxury which no previous lodger had demanded. The text opposite the bed stood out plainly, now, from its border of disconnected daffodils. "*Blessed are the pure in heart*" "That counts me out," Phil thought. She felt suddenly hollow and bereft of the courage that she needed. From where had she got the high, gambling hopes which, for a little, had filled her heart? They were gone, now.

Chapter 21

Phil sat by the fire, turning and turning the cigarette-case in her hands. It was curious, Rupert thought, how much her face would alter—if she were anxious or unhappy it seemed too thin. As he looked at her he thought: "What is it, my darling?" and, at the unspoken words, his heart lifted. He had fought angrily against any feeling for her and perhaps, he thought, it was his knowledge of this and his realization that it was nearly ended that made the sharpness of his present happiness. In a few weeks, he would leave Roones and leave behind him the winter days and this quiet companionship.

She had arrived a little late. When he had taken her coat she had stood by the hearth, looking round rather vaguely at the pleasant room. At tea she had been very silent. She had seemed as nervous as when, months ago, she had shown her knowledge of a dis-

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like that he hadn't attempted to hide. The trouble, whatever it was, that she had come to speak about clearly occupied all her mind.

Now, he leant back in his chair, his hands linked behind his head. He didn't want to hurry her——Peace: to be with her always gave him, oddly, a sense of peace.

When at last she turned to him her face was set. Her courage, he saw, was at the sticking-place; but only just. Well, he reflected, smiling a little, she never had more than just enough courage for any occasion.

"Rupert, I've come to ask you something." She began confidently enough. "It won't take long. But I must explain, first, so that you'll understand——" She stopped, and he realized with what an effort she had found words.

"Well, Philippa?"

"Well—you see——" She looked down at Bob, as though she might draw reassurance from his sleepy indifference. "You see, Rupert, a few months ago, I never thought of coming to Capeldun. I came because I had been very unhappy. Oh, very. . . ." She glanced away, into the fire. "I know it must sound cowardly to tell you this. But it's part of what I want you to know. I had been engaged to a man, you see; and—he had got tired of the idea. But it wasn't only that. There were other things——" Her

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voice shook a little. "Anyway, I've been different, since. I know I shall never love anyone, again. You *must* believe me, Rupert: it's not just what every girl says who has been unhappy. . . . Then, after I came here, I was lonely at first. But I haven't been lonely since you've been friends with me. . . . And so I thought—I know you've been unhappy, too: about Angy. And I can't help knowing how much you care about Roones, and that there isn't enough money for it. Rupert, I know I'm putting it all clumsily. . . . But I thought perhaps—if you thought it was a good idea—you—we—might get married?" For one instant she looked at him. "We'd always be friends, I think. . . . And—I shall have a lot of money. But I don't want to splash it. I've seen all that—smart places and rich people and the rest. I feel as if I'd seen everything—too much. . . ."

The jerky, halting phrases ceased while he watched the flush on her cheek. His mind moved painfully: "Strange poor child." And suddenly the thought came to him: "I have never before felt love. . . . Not for Angy——"

"Philippa——".

She put out a narrow hand.

"Please don't say anything, yet. . . . There's something else." The colour had left her face. "I haven't

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been like the kind of girls you know. . . . Rupert—I'm not——" She stopped. "I've slept with a man."

To Rupert the clumsy words seemed to echo in the silence that followed. Their crudest sense obsessed him. As he rose, Phil shrank back a little but he didn't see that. Staring down at her, he saw no more than her eyes, wavering from his, and her mouth, red on her white face.

"The man you were engaged to?" he asked at last.

"Oh, no—no. Another man. Since." She looked away. "I can't explain. There's nothing to say."

At that answer, he was silent. Passion and fury flared suddenly together, shaking him. She was motionless and he wanted to seize her, to drag her from where she sat among the shadows. His hands moved a little. He stepped back. The minutes passed and the primitive, violent passion that had blinded him died slowly, leaving only anger. She still stared into the fire, and presently, as he gazed down at that rusty-brown head, a kind of coldness stilled his rage. How gradually, gradually this love for her had grown. . . . But had anyone ever gathered figs from thistles or flowers from an ash heap? He remembered that day—it seemed long ago—when, in that Paris hotel, he had heard her voice and chosen not to see her. He thought of her mother's life. Philippa had more than

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knowledge of that life. Its mud had stained her. . . .

"No; you can't explain," he said.

Phil felt the edge in his voice. In the silence, she heard her own heart. How hard it beat under the weight of his anger, stifling her. How cold one felt. She would have risen, but her strength seemed to be ebbing away. . . . It was all over—a stupid, blind bid for happiness. . . .

"No; I see now, Rupert. I oughtn't to have thought

She rose quickly. She was looking for her coat. It was under her hand, but, for an instant, she seemed not to see it. Then, before he could move, she had taken it.

"Good-bye, Rupert."

She crossed the room to the door, and he watched her from the hearth. This, he knew her well enough to be certain, was the last time that he would see her. She wouldn't again remain where she might meet him. And where would she go? Back to the bright scenes of the life she knew so well? Or to live, somewhere else, the life that she had lived at Roones?

As she fumbled at the door, the light from the lamp fell on her face. How young that face was; and how stony. Something moved, then, in his mind or heart—some stiff barrier—and, in that instant, he saw, sud-

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denly, what she was to him. In clear anger he saw it: she had broken the laws that should have governed her; she was light; and still she could make him feel this storm of fury and tenderness.

"Philippa."

She didn't turn.

"Philippa—come here."

She paused then, because it would have needed courage to go on. Slowly, she came back and stood leaning against the chimney-piece.

"Why did you live with this man?"

She shook her head.

"You said I couldn't explain. . . . You wouldn't understand."

"We will see."

There was a long pause.

"Do you really want to know?" Her voice was quiet. "The man I was engaged to came back. I thought he wanted to marry me. But he didn't. He wanted to live with me.... And then this other man came; and I—it——" She stopped. "Rupert—it's no good: you can't know. It's a different life—everything. . . . Nothing seemed worth while. But you don't know."

"How long did this last?"

"Oh_____ It was 'for one night, only'." Her little

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smile was strange. "And now—please may I go?"

Rupert was silent. So this was what she had done. Untaught, desperately hurt, without traditions or discipline or help, she had torn herself in her pain. She had flung all that she had prized after her love; and then she had learnt her lesson. But at that price. . . . Looking at her he felt as though his heart filled slowly with her bitterness.

"I see," he said at last, and: "No, you can't go." She was, he saw, very white. He took her by the shoulder and put her into a chair. She sat there, relaxed, as though she had come to the end of effort. No girl, no woman, that he knew could wear that expression—so schooled and blank. Had there ever been a time before she learnt to be so closed?

"I wish I hadn't come to Gapeldun," she said. "I *didn't* come to ask you to marry me. But I can see it must look as though I did. . . . I'll go to-morrow," she added. "I never meant to stay anywhere very long."

He thought: "You'll stay with me. You'll stay for ever." He said: "Philippa, I want you to marry me,"

She glanced up, then, startled.

"Oh, no! . . . You wouldn't like my kind."

"I don't know that you belong to any 'kind'." And that, Rupert thought, was true.

He stood by her chair, so near her that Phil couldn't

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see his face. His voice was gentle, but now that she had known him angry his presence, she thought, would always seem formidable. . . . The sensation of exhaustion didn't leave her. Her mind felt clouded, slipping. She glanced round the quiet room. At the portrait of a woman gazing down tranquilly. At the portraits of horses standing so woodenly, with a name under each. At the ranks of books lining the walls with pleasant dim colours. It was all so inexpressibly far from the world that she knew best. . . . And then, suddenly, she saw Rupert's face as she had seen it a few minutes ago.

"We shouldn't be happy, Rupert."

He moved away to the other side of the wide hearth.

"I think that we should," he said.

And, he reflected, the past should have no more hold on her. She should never move again among the scenes and the people from which she had come. He would prevent that. . . .

"Perhaps", he went on, "my idea of marriage is different from yours. As you once reminded me, I am almost pre-war. I shouldn't marry as an experiment. Divorce doesn't enter into my scheme of things. And, in the last resort, I should expect my wife to do as I told her."

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Phil smiled a little.

"Like your young sister."

"Yes." Rupert smiled, too, at the echo from that uncomfortable, half-forgotten conversation.

Phil was silent. Her thoughts came more quietly, though still, edging away in fear from the main issue, they were not quite at her command. Vaguely she thought: "I get myself into my troubles. . . . But I can't see. . . ." It was strange, she thought, that she should have been so right in her first view of Rupert. She hadn't, in these months, needed to change it. Not even now. . . . He was kind. Mostly. And if, sometimes, she found him a little formidable, wouldn't she find him sure, too? . . .

"But," she murmured at last, "you'd always mind—you'd always remember—what I've told you."

"We won't talk again about that, Phil."

Phil, catching the sudden glint of his eyes between their rather narrow lids, missed that first use of her short name.

"If we were married, would we still be friends?"

Watching her, he saw quite well her longing to be reassured, to lay down her arms.

. "Yes; I think we should always be that," he said.

Again, she smiled a little, as though, he thought, that might put off his next words and give her more

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time. But he would give her all the time that she needed. He looked at her as she lay back in the chair. How defenceless she was, though she had learnt so much of the wisdom of the serpent. He remembered what Eleanor had once said of her. Yes; knowing little of Phil's life, Eleanor had been right: Phil was simple: she wasn't twisted. But, he thought, in its vain impulsiveness, her heart held a flaw that could splinter her.

Chapter 22

Phil sat on the bed in Eleanor's bedroom at the Wilmington Hotel. From the street below there came the vague London noise. It was strange to hear that sound. To see the familiar landmarks or to catch a glimpse of some known face was to feel one's mind confused, because now, being with Eleanor, one was in a different world—a world to which that other did not exist.

Eleanor turned from the dressing-table.

"You do look nice, Phil."

Phil smiled, glancing at herself in the long mirror. Would Rupert like the tight silver jumper? He noticed, more than one would have guessed, what one looked like.

"I only know about one kind of clothes," she said. "I shall never look right in country things."

"Of course you will."

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Phil shook her head. She thought of Eleanor in her old tweeds. And that friend of Eleanor's—the Crome girl; they both looked the same. She thought of the coat and skirt that she had got at a good tailor in York. Somehow, she hadn't chosen the right tweed. It had been *just* too bright and light.

"Well, I'll learn if you and Rupert teach me."

Eleanor smiled.

"Rupert will like whatever you do, Phil. One can see that."

Phil, glancing up, bit off a startled comment. The telephone bell rang and she turned over to answer it.

"Rupert's come." She put back the receiver and slipped off the bed. She had thought that she had ten minutes more. One might keep Rupert waiting—that had been the done thing in the world which she knew. But why should one want to? Only because of this sinking nervousness which attacked one nowadays when one was going to see Rupert. One felt it because, in a fortnight, one would be married to him. "I'll never fit in," she thought as somehow she hadn't thought in those last, quiet days at Roones. . . . But why go into battle defeated?

Phil raised her glass. Burgundy—she hadn't often drunk that. Men usually gave one champagne. . . .

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She glanced round the restaurant. Why had she been nervous? After a little the feeling had passed. She had slipped back into untroubled friendliness. But that first twenty minutes hadn't been so easy. Rupert had suggested taking her to Masiglio's. When she said "no", had he guessed her reason, or did he suppose that it was just a whim? She didn't know. . . . Thank God', the gang didn't come much to the Berkeley. It wasn't their haunt, though they changed their feeding grounds often enough. Derek, perhaps—but one couldn't keep out of every restaurant in London because of Derek, whatever one's heart told one to do.

Rupert had liked the silver jumper. And he liked being with her. Why, Phil reflected, had she doubted that? She ought, surely, to be able to please him if she tried?—in these last two years she had been taught so much about pleasing men. But at Roones she had never tried to please Rupert. And now, when she did try, did he know it? She couldn't tell. But sometimes, unexpectedly, she would feel that her careful little attempts at the right technique were as transparent to him as the efforts of a child.

"What is it, Phil?"

She coloured faintly.

"I was thinking: I won't try to please you anymore."

Rupert smiled at that odd frankness, knowing that

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she was not always as frank.

"No; you won't find it necessary."

There was a silence. Her thoughts, not bewildered by the familiar sounds—the noise of the band, the shuffling of the dancers, the merged babble of conversation—went forward into the future. Would it—their future—be a success? Surely there was *some way* of ensuring happiness—

She stared down at the table. With that little fine between her brows, how careful she seemed, as though, Rupert thought, she balanced something precious.... Those preposterous eyelashes—he had noticed them at that first angry, awkward meeting, months ago. Her face still had that odd expression, as though something in her strove without direction. Would it vanish when she was married to him? He would see that it did.

Phil glanced up, smiling a little. Leaning forward, her chin on her hand, she gave him unexpectedly the result of her meditation.

"Rupert, when we're married, I'll never lie to you.... However difficult it may be."

"Do you tell lies, Phil?"

"Sometimes."

"You told a good many, didn't you, that first time we met?"

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"Oh——" She made a little gesture with her hand. "That would have been an exception, any way. Anyone would have done it."

"Would they? In future there will be no exceptions."

"No." She screwed up her eyes. "None——" The confused noise of their surroundings had increased, but he felt now as though he were alone with her—as alone as in the fields at Roones. "I wish it was six months from now," she was saying. "We could guess, then, whether we were going to be happy. . . . But I suppose six months isn't long, really."

"Not really." His smile was dry. "We can hope that our marriage will last forty years."

"Forty years. . . . I've never looked more than six months ahead." And then, at something a little grim in his glance, she added: "I don't think much about time, Rupert. I just think it will be nice to be with you. Most people are such quagmires."

Her face was unguarded now, as it had never been in the first weeks that he had known her. He smiled. Of what was she thinking? Of Roones, of her dog, of cloudless days? ...

A man came down the floor of the restaurant. Avoiding the dancers, he brushed against Phil's chair. He sat down at a near table and, as he spoke to the

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maitre d'hôtel, Rupert saw Phil glance up. Then, quite suddenly, she was still. Her face had changed—all colour had left it. Only her eyes moved to his, imploring him; then, a moment later, they were blank.

For an instant Rupert stared back. And then, in the mirror, he saw again what Phil could see over his shoulder—the man at the table behind him. The stranger was looking now musingly at Phil; he didn't move his glance.

Long after, Rupert remembered that moment. One could do nothing—nothing that wouldn't have been cried all over London. The hand, clenched on his knee, was as powerless as though it had been Phil's.

She made a little clumsy half-movement, as though it were possible to leave the restaurant—to get out of sight of that intent pale glance.

"Philippa!" he said quietly, and at the sound of his voice her eyes came back to his and he could hold them. He pushed his cigarette-case towards her. "It's all right, my dear," he murmured; "it's all right."

The drawing-room of the Wilmington was, at midnight, dark and deserted. Rupert turned on the light and shut the door. He sat down on the arm of a chair and drew Phil down beside him.

Stubbornly, she stared before her, her lashes wet.

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"Rupert, it's no use—no use: I'll never fit in."

"Hush. . . . silly child."

She shook her head. In the bleak light that filled her heart and mind she saw everything so clearly.

"You'll never like me. . . . My plans—they were like dreams, really."

He turned her face up to his. How clear her eyes were. They always were.

"Phil, when we were at Roones—you told me everything?"

"Everything. There's nothing left to tell. . . . But it's different when you—meet it face to face; isn't it?"

Rupert didn't answer that. There was a pause. He said: "We'll be married in three days' time, Phil."

"Oh, no ___"

"Yes."

She was crying now. Her head went down on his knee as she clutched at his hand.

"Rupert—must we go to India? Can't we live at Roones? . . . I don't want to meet anyone, ever—only you and Eleanor——"

"But that's not possible, darling."

Chapter 23

The big car, lent to Rupert by a friend, crept through the little, crowded town. The broad street was split by an arcaded market. The sun, shining from the west, gilded red the clock-hands in the church tower: half-past four. From the top of the hill the town had looked like painted scenery. But now the grey stone houses seemed welcoming and kind, reminding Phil of the greyer houses of Roones. To be going to Roones was, a little, like going home. Would the sight of it make this day seem less unreal?

"Tired, Phil?"

She shook her head, glancing at her husband's quiet face. To look at it composed one's thoughts and made fear seem far away. This morning, as she stood with Rupert in the church, her eyes on the carved wood behind the altar, she had felt panic. And perhaps most people felt that, as they tied themselves for

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life with solemn words. . . . But if things had been different—if it had been Derek who stood beside her—would she have felt afraid? . . . No. But then she had known Derek so well. Or so she had thought. He had seemed like that sunlit landscape in which she had first seen him. And Rupert was not like that. Rupert wouldn't have cared at all for that atmosphere in which one lived only for pleasure; and, on the whole, didn't get what one lived for.

Her mind slipped back to the morning. How empty and echoing the church had seemed. Only Eleanor and a friend of Rupert's had been there to wish one luck. When it was over Eleanor had said: "You looked so pretty, Phil. . . . But I wish she had worn a wedding dress, Rupert. It seems such a waste of her."

"No." Phil had shaken her head. The smartest coat and skirt, a blouse the colour of new leaves, and a little black felt hat—they were all right to be married in; and leave the veil-and-orange-blossom touch to Angy. . . . Would Angy be angry because she hadn't been told of the day and hour of the wedding? Probably not: she didn't find many things important; in that way she was restful. But if one had told her, she *might* have turned up. And her presence wouldn't have been auspicious. It would have been depressing.

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Phil thought of her meeting with Angy five days ago. The familiar flat had looked as though it needed—what? Spring cleaning, perhaps. It had seemed rich enough, but a bit littered and trampled. The truth about luxury was: you must keep on at it—She and Angy had lounged in chairs in front of the fire, and it had all been like the old days; but different; because one was no longer part of the scene. And one wouldn't have been there, slowly having the confidence taken out of one, except that blood *was* somehow thicker than water. One couldn't quite cut Angy out. . . . There had been no sign of Poynton. His name wasn't mentioned. And yet, somehow, one had been conscious that at any moment he might walk in. Angy was still seeing him. "I can always tell," Phil thought. Well, naturally: hadn't one received one's training in a good school? "If Rupert has affairs, I shall know at once," she reflected. She looked sideways at him, and unexpectedly her glance met his.

"Well?" He smiled.

"Rupert—if you ever have another girl, it will make me unhappy; even though——" she stopped, colouring. One couldn't say: "Even though ours is only a marriage of friendship." Stupid to have said anything. Only that one's thoughts came and one spoke them easily to Rupert.

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"You don't know me very well, Phil."

And if that answer reassured part of one's mind, it left another part still groping.

Her thoughts returned to Angy. Gently mocking, Angy had been. And not so gently, either. In a way, Angy's view of things was funny. It never changed: "Why are you marrying Rupert, Phil?"

"The usual reason: because I want to."

Angy had turned incredulous eyes on her.

"Oh no, my dear; it's too soon after Derek. . . . Look, young Phil—you're not going to have anyone's baby? Because, if you are, there's no need to be so drastic. There's a woman in Channle Street——"

"No. No one's baby; thanks."

"Well, it's your good I'm thinking of. . . ."

And after that they had talked of other things.

The car, driven all day more swiftly than Phil had expected, dropped down into a long valley. Leafless beeches looked down on the road and a brow of rock overhung it. A stream, like no south-country stream, rushed shallow among the meadows and then, suddenly, wild and deep under the smooth cliff. The air had that clear quality that she had learnt to know. The hills, grey and green, were aloof and lovely, the valleys friendly between them. These were the marches of Rupert's country and, at sight of them,

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Phil's heart contracted a little, as though round the next bend she might see the future like a map before her. Strange that she should ever have come to this country. And stranger still that it should have captured her for ever.

Rupert changed gear on the familiar, winding hill. Phil, her head against his arm, woke with a jerk and saw that Roones and the darkness had crept upon her while she slept.

"But, Rupert—we're *there!*"

Rupert smiled, and if, in the startled words, he heard a sudden reluctance he made no sign.

The door of Mrs. Skell's shop stood open, showing dim figures within. Here was the curve in the street where the houses drew together and where, on the dark road, there was always a square, gold patch from the window of the "Swan". Mrs. Gartside's house stood out in the light of its own lamp, white and neat, its laurel hedges glistening. But one would drive past it now, on the way to the Big House.

"It all *smells* the same," Phil murmured as Rupert took the well-known turn out of the village. The keen faint scents of that countryside, drifting past the window of the car, caught her back to those days, not long past, when Rupert had been just a friend. If

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those days could have lasted—but they couldn't have lasted. And in this marriage, she saw now, their untroubled peace wouldn't be continued. Rupert had made no demands on one then. But now——"There's nothing in me that Rupert could like for ever," she reflected with what seemed to her not humility but sudden knowledge. She didn't look at him but it was as though she sat beside a stranger.

Rupert's own gate barred his way. He stopped the car and Phil got out, her feet crunching on the damp gravel. The air was still and strangely mild. There were no near sounds—only the far whisper of the river. The gate opened with a familiar, wooden click. The mass of blackness that was the hills and the near, tall, dark shade that was a screen of trees were known and kind. Everything was the same; only she was different. As the car crept towards her and she swung to the gate, stopping, as Rupert had taught her, to see that it was shut, she tried, with a sense of desperation, to recapture what she had felt for him so short a time ago: certain friendliness, and happiness in his company. But now she could feel nothing—only blankness. And if she tried to throw off that blankness, she would find fear below it, as she had felt it this morning.

In silence she got into the car. Rupert said: "Thank

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you, Phil." By the light on the dash she could see the little smile on his lips as he drove up the twisting road, home.

Roones stood, pale in the beam of the headlights. Except in that corner where the inhabited rooms lay, every window was black. A dog barked excitedly.

"Bob!"

Phil was out of the car, running towards the house. In two strides Rupert was up with her. She stumbled on the first step. As the door opened he caught her up in his arms and lifted her over the threshold.

The wood-fire sang a little on its red, heaped bed of ashes. Rupert sat by the hearth where he had spent so many solitary evenings, and Phil, lying back in her chair, and Bob on the deerskin rug, turned their faces towards him as though, perhaps, they waited on his word—Bob in sleepy peace and Phil in something very different.

Dinner was over. It had been well cooked by Mrs. Shaw, the saturnine caretaker of Roones. Now Mrs. Shaw had gone back to her cottage in the village, and the house was quiet round its core of light. During dinner Phil had spoken in disjointed politenesses only. Nothing else. And now she was silent, and Rupert, conscious of the quality of her silence, was glad that

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he was older than she was and that he had acquired patience and a little wisdom. He forced his mind back to time past, when he had been as young as Phil. In those days, had he tried to avoid the consequences of his own decisions, painfully made? Perhaps. But he had learnt to abide by them. And Phil would learn that too. She would learn that one couldn't "run out" and that there were positions from which there was no retreat.

Bob yawned audibly. His mistress sat very still, but to Rupert it was as though he could see her plunging desperately in the trap that she had set herself. He longed to go over to where she sat and comfort her. But he couldn't comfort her. He realized that clearly. For the last hour, huddled a little in her chair as though the room was cold, she hadn't met his glance. Now her eyes turned towards him for a moment as though she looked for help. But he had no help to give her; or not of the kind for which she looked.

The clock struck the quarter-past eleven. Rupert threw the end of a cigarette into the fire. He stood up.

"It's a lovely night. Shall we go out for a minute, Phil?"

She nodded.

"Yes."

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Rupert got his travelling coat from the hall. When she had put it on she looked small and ludicrous, her hands in the deep pockets. Standing behind her, he glanced away from that muffled figure, wanting so much to take her in his arms. They passed through the high hall, Bob's paws scuttering on the flagstones, and Phil looked round with eyes that seemed unseeing at the curve of the stairs mounting to the light where a lamp stood on a pedestal; at a portrait that might have interested her because it was so like her husband; at the fluted pilasters that ran up into the blackness of the cupola, and at a rack of hunting-crops, their silver bands kept bright though now they were never used.

A small moon had risen behind the hills. The terrace, the garden and the quiet fields were bathed in that dim silver light. They walked across the terrace and down the stone steps and on to the lower path. There Rupert paused and Bob ran on ahead, vanishing suddenly in the black shadows near the sunk fence. Rupert took out his cigarette-case. Phil shook her head as he offered it. He lit his own cigarette, cupping the little light against any air that blew, and she looked at that grave face and thought: "There is no way out." But wasn't there? Wasn't there *some* way? . . .

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"Rupert." She spoke at last, as he had known she would.

"Yes, Phil."

She stood still and desperate before him. In the cold light her cheeks were a little hollow, the colour was gone from her hair. As he looked down at her he felt pity, and, if he felt too something more primitive and immediate, he put it aside. How hopeless she was; more hopeless than she knew as she confronted him, and confronted, also, the stare of the old house at his back, which looked, he thought, with benign approval on the course that he would take. The leafless trees sighed in a little breath that came and was gone again. It was a strange night. So mild and kind. And this hour was apart from present time. Any night this three thousand years it might have been the same. Nothing that Phil had learnt in a short, modern life would guide her through it. Talk: that would help one sometimes; but not now.

She was saying: "Rupert—if two people get married and then—a few hours after the wedding—they feel—they know it has all been a mistake and they leave one another: it doesn't count as a marriage then——Does it?"

"Not in most cases."

There was a pause.

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"I know you'll be angry. . . ." She glanced away at the near, dark hills, and he knew what she would say next. "I've been wrong, Rupert—surely it's better to say it now?" She was trembling a little. "I didn't realize before; but I *can't* go on with it. . . . I want to go away. Now."

"No, Phil dear. I'm not angry. But that won't do."

Her narrow hands were out of her pockets, holding one another.

"I don't want to be married."

At that he smiled a little.

"You are married."

She looked at his face as though her mind tried to make some other sense of the words. Then, glancing over her shoulder, she stepped back. Rupert didn't move, but suddenly she knew, as though he had told her, that in flight she wouldn't make two strides. A silly impulse. . . .

"Rupert, you *won't* keep me? You can't make me

"Yes."

"I'll do anything if you'll let me go." She choked a little. "I'll——"

He moved then, and slipped his arm through hers.

"Poor child."

She was silent. For a moment they stood there.

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Then, as Bob, galloping up from the shades, stopped to gaze from one face to the other, Rupert turned towards the house.

He opened the heavy door. Phil took her arm from his and leant back against the wall, the stones hard and cold under her hands. Bob passed like a shadow into the hall, and Rupert, waiting, held the door open.

"Rupert—*please*——"

"No, my dear."

The sky beyond the tall, shallow, thin-framed windows was light and high. The rain had dashed in silver drops against the glass. Now it drew away across the valley and it was as though, suddenly, the landscape was lit from within. The hills, with the village at their feet, were startlingly near in the washed air. The birds chattered again in the eaves, and Phil, propped against the pillows, moved a little so that the sun fell on her. She looked out on that familiar countryside where now the shadows of the clouds chased each other, sliding across the fields, and she felt quietness, security, peace. And more than that. Timidly, her thoughts moved: "If this is happiness, I have never known it." Not like this: not without any strain or fear. For no reason, she felt a sudden

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pricking behind her eyes. Then, as she lay there, it was as though her mind, knowing now that the past was folded away for ever, relaxed in quiet content and rest.

There was a footstep on the landing. She heard Rupert's voice. An unmistakable voice, she thought; not raised. There was a knock on the door and Rupert entered. As he came towards her, she smiled a little nervously, afraid that words might, somehow, break the calm in her heart. He smiled back. Then he sat down on the bed. She said: "I thought you'd make me get up for breakfast."

"No." When, that morning, he had woken to find her lying so angularly beside him, she had seemed, suddenly, small and very thin. "I thought it would be good for you to stay where you were."

"But I'm hardy, really. When I was at Mrs. Gartside's I got up for breakfast, and I went out in all kinds of weather."

"I know." He remembered the determined, solitary figure, seen across fields or across acres of dark heather. "When it sleeted I used to want to send you home." Pity had touched him in those days, he remembered, coming in the guise of annoyance. And had it, even then, been only pity?

"There wasn't much to do indoors," Phil said.

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"And if I'd waited for fine weather——" her tone made its comment on the climate of the north.

"Were you happy there, Phil?"

"Well, not very. But more than I should have been anywhere else, I think. . . . And when you became a friend it made a difference."

He put out his hand and took hers. At his touch, she turned her head and, in that look, he saw how tranquilly she laid down her defences and gave herself into his hands.

"But I'm happy now, Rupert."

Chapter 24

The wind cut across the hillside. Phil, seated on her shooting-stick, turned up the collar of her coat and presented her shoulders to it. Rupert stood with his back to her. She was silent, hearing, as they drew nearer, the cries and whistles of the beaters and the tock-tock of their sticks as they struck the trunks of the trees. She glanced down the line to where the next gun stood. The woman with him was still talking—one could just hear her murmuring voice. But probably, in this sort of thing as in everything else, if you knew the rules you could afford to disregard them. Phil glanced again at the old, rubbed velvet beret above Mrs. Joddrell's aquiline features. Velvet with tweeds: that was surely wrong? But if Mrs. Joddrell chose to wear a fireman's helmet out shooting or anywhere else she would do so. That fact was written clearly on that weather-beaten face. Though it was

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likely that, in the case of her daughter's clothes, she was rigidly for correctness. The daughter certainly looked as though she were.

The cries drew nearer, Rupert shifted his gun from his left arm to his right. Phil, listening to those now familiar sounds, reflected that she didn't care for shooting, much. Only that, somehow, it thrilled her a little to hear the click of Rupert's gun as, with a little jerk of his arm, he opened the breech. And she liked to hold his gun, the barrels carefully perpendicular, while he climbed a fence or crossed a ditch. But it seemed to her that people were, considering that there was no danger, rather ponderous about it all. And it was such a *cold* sport. She thought: "Thank God we've got central heating at Roones." One could bear to be chilled to the bone if one knew that, some time, one would be warm. She thought of her host's two sisters. All day their faces had been blue with cold. Soon they would return to that *tomb* of a house where they were never warm, Phil supposed, except in their baths; and perhaps not even there. ... No; shooting wasn't the best way to spend Saturday. When it was successful it remained uncomfortably cold-blooded and massacring; and, when it wasn't, everyone looked annoyed. And Saturdays had become precious since that day, two months ago, on

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which Rupert had received from Amalgamated Products that unexpected letter. As he read it, Phil had heard him murmur: " 'To him that hath shall be given'," and his voice had altered as he smiled. Absently he had glanced round the high, square dining-room, and Phil, standing by the fire to eat her porridge—less because she was now "north-country" than because she was cold—had turned to look at him, feeling that slight apprehension which, for her, would always accompany the unexpected.

"Well, Phil." Rupert had folded the letter. "The Management must be very certain that I wouldn't take you to India."

"But you will, won't you?"

"I would have." Still smiling, he had strolled across the room to where she stood. "But now I shan't have to." Again she heard his voice change a little. "They have given me the Area-Management of the North of England. . . ."

They had remained at Roones. Every morning Rupert caught an early train, and Phil spent the day alone. It seemed short and not empty—filled with the things that one would naturally do or the things that one was expected to do: reading, seeing the cook—which meant, really, listening to a description of the meals that one would eat in the next two days—rid-

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ing, going for walks with Bob, listening to the gardener, being called on, strolling down to the village. It sounded crashingly dull if one imagined describing it to anyone whom one knew. But one didn't find it so. And, in the foreground of one's mind, all day, was the thought of the evening as it drew nearer with each hour.

It had been fun, opening the rooms of Roones, having them repainted, unsheeting the furniture. As the shutters were pushed back, letting in the winter light, it had seemed as though the old house smiled, glad that all its life must no longer be concentrated in two rooms. But the greater changes had been made outdoors: reconditioned buildings and new stock and plantations of trees; red-white shorthorns with backs as straight as boards, grazing, or standing in their well-lit shippons, their faces mild above new aluminium drinking bowls. And wired acres of tiny trees. And horses with feathered hocks beside whose enormous, rounded bulk the attendant man looked ludicrous. She liked it all, even the conversations that she couldn't understand. She would lean on a gate or sit on a wall while Elland talked slowly and Rupert answered more quickly; and sometimes she listened and sometimes she abstracted her mind. She had returned calls punctually, for life in other surround-

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ings had taught her that all its aspects have their less pleasant side; but she was rather silent in those drawing-rooms that were mostly so reminiscent of Aunt Norah's. She couldn't yet speak on the subjects that interested her neighbours. In a year or two it would be different, she would think, as she said good-bye to her hostess of the afternoon and got into the car to drive herself home along the stone-walled roads with their green verges, where, even now, one sometimes met a farmer, ash-plant in hand, riding his cob. She liked many of the women whom she met. They seemed kind, even if most were abrupt as well. And those that were abrupt without being kind were not as difficult to deal with as, in the old life with her mother, Mrs. Levey had been or the Baroness Ludenbenck. If they had tempers they didn't, really, show them.

The cries of the beaters ceased. Rupert turned to smile at her. She stood up, quickly. "*Mark over!*" The shout came from the right of the line. Rupert put up his gun. Phil thrust her hands in her pockets because she wanted to put them to her head. "Gun-shy?" someone had asked her at her first shoot, and, since then, she hadn't covered her ears when a gun was fired. A first, solitary bird appeared, skimming the treetops as it flew from the wood. "*Hen!*" came the shout. "*Hen!*" Rupert echoed as he lowered his gun.

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Phil, uncomprehending, shuffled her icy feet in the wet grass. In the silence that followed, her mind, not sharing the suspense of the guns, returned to that thought which had coloured all these last days: less a thought than a question and an odd wonder. And one couldn't yet know the answer. . . . Suddenly, she wished that she was at home. She was glad that this was the last beat of the day. In a little, she and Rupert would return to where Roones waited in its wide valley. Generation after generation, it had stood there, serene and a little austere, while, within its walls, the history of the Forrests unrolled itself. Perhaps sometimes, in all those years, it had known misery and cruelty, but one didn't feel as though it had: one felt that it had known only natural, uncontrived things—joy and happiness and unhappiness and love and death and grief and peace. At Roones, panic would always seem foolish. Nor could one imagine, on this subject that held one's mind, showing fear before Rupert. "And after all," Phil reflected as she fumbled in her pocket for a cigarette, "the world *does* get populated. . . ." And she glanced round her as though she might find reassurance. There, in the distance, stood the solid figures, male and female, whose mothers had borne them and had probably done it unscathed. "And if it's true that I'm going to have a baby," Phil

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thought, lighting her cigarette, "Rupert *will* be pleased"; and, at that thought, she smiled, remembering the end of a conversation that they had had, weeks ago. They had stood on Corseghyll hill, looking down on Roones. And "Yes," Rupert had said; "I'd like the place to be in order for our son." "You want to have a son *very* much, don't you, Rupert?" she had asked, and Rupert, narrowing his eyes a little against the level rays of the sun, had answered; "More than anything, I think. . . ."

Rupert put up his gun. Phil stood stiffly. *Bang*—one barrel. The bird fell. It lay without moving, and Phil was glad of that. Rupert, shooting with one gun, had reloaded. The birds came quickly, now; how fast and high. *Bang. Bang. . . . Missed. . . .* Rupert had turned quickly, but Phil moved quickly too, and was still behind him. "Good child." . . . A rabbit fled across the ride that cut through the wood—so short a space of danger and then safety among the trees—*Bang*—and it lay on the pale grass, kicking silently.

Rupert drove up to the door of Roones. A large, battered car with a strapped bonnet stood before the house. Phil looking at it, frowned a little. She said nothing; and Rupert missed her usual shattered comment: "*Callers.*"

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Lampson, the butler, murmured his news in the hall. A lady—a Miss Laycock—had called on her way north. She had said that she would wait. He had given her tea, and she was in the drawing-room. There had been a trunk call from the London office: please would Mr. Forrest ring up directly he came in? And Mr. White, from the Leeds office, was in the library.

Phil turned towards the drawing-room, and Rupert saw how that sharp little line still lay between her eyes. Her face was harder than he had seen it. It struck him that she looked as one might who found herself on familiar, dreary paths. He watched her as she opened the door and paused on the threshold.

"Hullo, Lettice," he heard her say.

The door closed behind her.

"Well, my sweet?" Lettice greeted her. "I just looked in to give you love and greetings from all. And a letter from Angy."

"Nice of you to come," Phil said, her tongue slipping easily to the insincerity. She took the letter and put it in her pocket. As she looked at her guest, at that unquiet face, she thought: "It's all right. I'm not afraid of Lettice.... After all." No; it was the sudden reminder of the past that had shaken one. It would always, for a moment, be able to throw a shadow across one's mind.

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"Angy seemed a bit edgy about something," Lettice said. "But she didn't tell *me*"

Phil nodded.

"Have some sherry?"

"I ought to be going. Still—time for a drink, I suppose."

Phil, standing over the sherry-tray, listened, hoping; but there was no sound of Rupert's footsteps on the flagged floor of the hall.

"Well—here's how!" Lettice drank. "Where's your husband, Phil?"

"He's seeing someone on business."

"*Business*: considering the money you've got, I shouldn't have thought he need worry."

Phil smiled. She didn't answer. With people like Lettice that was sometimes best, even though it angered them. One had learned that, long since.

"I didn't imagine you in a place like this," Lettice said. "Quiet as the *grave*. . . . You're a bit changed, aren't you?"

"Yes, Lettice; if you like. Quite different."

"'County'. . . . I suppose, if Rupert does come in, it'll be tactless to mention old friends?"

"It wouldn't matter."

Lettice smiled.

"What—none of them?"

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"None."

Solemnly, Lettice nodded.

"Well, that's good."

There was a silence. Phil, sitting on the window-seat, kept her eyes just averted from her guest. Why had Lettice come? Curiosity? . . . In a few minutes she would be gone. But how one hated to see her here, even for that few minutes.

"Don't talk too much," Lettice said.

"Sorry. I was thinking."

"Look here, Phil—this margarine business: could Rupert get Reggie a job? I suppose he's got pull?"

"I don't know.... Rupert says pull doesn't get you far in that firm." In her mind, Phil was seeing Rupert confronted by Reggie Jesmond. No: Reggie, she thought, wouldn't go down big.

"What you mean is: you won't trouble," Lettice answered, and Phil heard the venom in her voice.

"Would Reggie mind going out East?" she asked.

"I should think so. Why should he go? Amalgamated Products employs people in London." Lettice strolled over to examine herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece. "It wouldn't pay Reggie to leave town. He makes a bit on commission. He's got a lot of friends."

"I'll ask Rupert," Phil said. And, she reflected,

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those last words should have been her first. But one got out of practice for dealing with people; thank God.

"You sound keen, don't you? Like hell."

"I can't *make* Rupert do anything, Lettice."

"No?" The silence was bleak as Lettice dusted powder on to her face. Now she was applying the dark lipstick. "Phil, dear," she murmured. "I thought you'd like to know: Claude Withan sent you his best love."

For a moment Phil didn't speak. Claude's image had appeared too clearly to her mind.

"Kind of him," she replied at last.

"Yes. Rather forgiving, I thought. . . . Nice stuff, this new Louis-Philippe—good colour." Lettice still turned her back. "Phil—I want a hundred pounds. Badly. You don't know how badly."

There was a silence.

"I'm sorry, Lettice. The past is no use to you. Rupert knows anything there is to know."

"You say so."

"You had better believe me."

Lettice turned, then. She gave Phil a long glance.

"If you've told your husband about Claude, darling," she said, "you're clever. Wisdom beyond your years."

A wave of Lettice's scent reached Phil. It was good

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scent—not heavy—subtle; but she opened the window behind her so that the air streamed in. She knelt on the window-seat, her elbows on the sill, her head on her hands, and, without seeing, she looked at the last falling veils of the dusk and at the night sky. Those cold depths—black on palest green—cooled her eyes a little. The familiar hills seemed high, tonight. The trunk of the great beech on the lawn showed faintly silver. Beyond, on the lower meadows, a slight mist was rising. Gradually Phil saw these things at which she looked; and slowly the turmoil died in her mind.

Lettice was speaking.

"I'm going on from here to stay with the Bankes. When I get there, I shall have five shillings in my bag. I shall have to borrow from old Bankes to tip his servants. And he'll say: 'too bad, little girl. You come to me in the study, after dinner, and I'll lend you ten pounds'.... And you don't know what that's like, do you? ... And do you know why I'm going there? Old Bankes said, once, he might find Reggie a job. But he won't___He won't."

Phil didn't answer. After a moment, she felt Lettice beside her.

"The little châtelaine, aren't you? . . . Well—must be going."

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Phil turned to look up at that white face. Lettice had always reminded her of something running, running through the dust. What must it be like to be Lettice? Impossible to know. To fawn, and perhaps not to be successful even in fawning, because one couldn't help showing the teeth that longed to bite. To scramble, after weeks of wary touting, for a fag-end of commission. To attempt blackmail. To love Reggie Jesmond—loose lips and yellow fingers. Reggie was nothing. Nothing at all. Only, if you had a car, he would keep it in good order . . . Looking at Lettice, Phil reflected: "I've never had to turn and twist and eat dirt for money," and she remembered those she had known who had had to do that—or who, any way, had done it.

"What are you staring at me for?" Lettice asked.

Phil, crossing the room to the writing-table, didn't answer. Lettice took her fur coat from the sofa and put it on.

"Well—bye-bye." She paused to light a cigarette. Then she went towards the door.

Phil, scribbling, spoke quickly.

"Wait—Lettice: look—I'd like you to have this——" She had reddened. Her voice tailed off as she held out the cheque to Lettice. Then, as Lettice, staring, took it, Phil felt, suddenly, a strange sensa-

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tion. It was as though she could see through the clumsy embarrassment of the moment to something else. It seemed to her that Lettice stood there as a messenger from the world that one had left—from all the past. And clearly, for a second, Phil saw herself confronting that world and trying, without much hope, to buy it off with money. . . . But surely that wasn't a true picture? Surely it was because she had felt sudden pity that she had given Lettice the cheque? As she wrote it, she had known of no other reason.

Lettice still looked down at the slip in her hand.

"So you *hadn't* told Rupert?" she murmured.

"Yes. Yes. I had. It was only——" At Lettice's smile, Phil was silent. Lettice didn't believe her. But it didn't matter. One didn't understand one's own impulses—only that they were shallow enough, and therefore unexpected—and why should other people understand them?

Lettice's car had roared down the drive half an hour ago. Phil, seated on the hearth in the library, played with her dog's harsh coat. The sight of Lettice, she found, had stirred old, unhappy thoughts unreasonably. And Rupert, looking down at her from his chair, could see that. With distaste, he thought of that departed guest—too eager, she had seemed to

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him in those few minutes; jerky; a little hungry-looking—those deep-set eyes that had looked at him as though with any man there might perhaps be hope. . . .

It was stupid, Phil was reflecting, not to lose quickly the impressions made by Lettice's presence. And surely it was stupid to allow one's thought to open a door to the past. . . . A vague depression worked to and fro in her mind. She thought: "It's the result of my interesting condition." But perhaps one wasn't *in* an interesting condition. Well, time, as they said, alone would show.

Reluctantly she took Angy's letter from her pocket. She read the close-written sheet and, as she looked up, Rupert saw how the old, nervous shadow lay across her face. "Oh, God," he thought, "if I could wipe all fear from her mind, and all thought of the past. . . ." It was strange to see her sister's handwriting again and to feel, at sight of it, only anger.

"Angy wants me to go to her," Phil said.

"Why?"

Phil glanced up again, a little startled by his tone.

"She doesn't say. But she's in some kind of trouble _____"

"She will have to do without you, Phil." Rupert's voice was tranquil now, but it held no uncertainty.

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"I don't want you to go alone to London, at present. And I can't, just now, go with you."

"Well——" Phil screwed up her eyes as, absently, she folded the letter. She thought: "I couldn't really help Angy. . . ." But if Angy was wretched, mightn't one go and see her—make certain that there was nothing that one could do—perhaps go just for the day? Would Rupert mind that? Start *very* early. . . . For a moment, she could imagine Angy, huddled in bed, not caring to get up, surrounded by friends, the air of the room thick with voices and smoke. . . . Her thoughts, in uneasy pity and anger, glanced away: it was so *like* Angy to write like that: "despairing", and not saying why. "It's something to do with Poynton," she thought. "Something that no one can help her with——"

"Rupert—if you knew *how much* I never want to see anyone again but you and ordinary people——"

Rupert laughed, and, looking up at him, Phil was comforted. Yes; when one was with Rupert one could think calmly of Angy and of everything connected with her; even of Lettice. . . . She gazed round the pleasant room, yawning a little, grown suddenly sleepy after a day spent mostly outdoors. *Blackmail*: no wife of a Forrest, she supposed, had ever suffered it; for Rupert's forbears, so far as was discovered, had

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not adventured in their marriages. And probably, she thought, her eyes on the miniatures of nineteenth-century Forrests, they had been the happier for that. . . . Her thoughts ceased to hover over the past.

"Do you know, Rupert, I shan't mind growing old, here."

He smiled.

"No, but Rupert—you can't think what the old women are like at Monte Carlo. They've got nearly nothing left, you know, except the pleasures of the table, and everything else that they've clung to for years shows in their faces. *Everything*. . . . But I shan't be like that. I shall read. And I suppose I shall garden a bit. I can't imagine that, but probably I shall; like Aunt Norah. And you will have retired from margarine. And I shall ride round the place with you on a quiet horse." Yes. And one's children would visit one.

"Can we have Eleanor to stay soon?" she asked. "I should like her to see how happy I am."

"We'll have her early next month." Rupert noticed that she hadn't said: "how happy *we* are". "She takes nothing for granted," he thought. And love least of all.

The dressing-gong sounded. Phil stirred, her brows a little drawn.

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"I'll write to Angy, and say I can't come *just* now?"

"Yes."

Phil nodded. And now, as Rupert rose and stood looking down at her, Angy's bright-coloured scene—the flat and the crowded life and that brand of laughter—seemed to her like something seen and heard through a tunnel: strange and far away. A kind of show. Unreal.

Chapter 25

Rupert, soaking and blackened, confronted Lampson who was as wet and smoky.

"By what train did Mrs. Forrest leave?" Rupert asked. Obscurely, he felt that if he could imagine Phil's movements he would be more in touch with her; as though he might protect her with his thoughts. Protect her from what? . . . Anger and anxiety moved together in his mind.

"Mrs. Forrest caught the 4.18, sir," Lampson replied; and then, perhaps because of something he saw in his master's grimed face, he added: "The lady that rang up—Mrs. Forrest's sister, I understand, sir—was very desperate. Well, sir, she was more like hysterical, if I may say so. She quite shouted to me to fetch Mrs. Forrest. I found Mrs. Forrest just starting out for a walk with Bob, sir, and I told her that Miss March was in a dreadful way on the telephone. Mrs. Forrest

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ran indoors then to the telephone in the library. And presently she came out here, sir, where I was. She sat down in that big chair and she said nothing for a minute or two. She was white, sir. I noticed it at the time, and Mary noticed it afterwards. 'Lampson,' she said, 'please find Mary and tell her to put some things into a suitcase quickly. And tell Crosby to bring the car round in a quarter of an hour. I must catch the 4.18,' she said. 'Well, m'm,' I said, 'won't you have nothing to eat first?' 'No,' she said, 'there isn't time. Please try to get Mr. Forrest on the telephone. But I don't think you'll get him,' she said, 'not on a Wednesday. I'm going to write him a letter; and you must give it to him *directly* you see him.' ... Yes, sir; that's how it was. . . . And of course it was just after Mrs. Forrest had gone the fire broke out, and we all had our hands full."

Two hours before, Rupert had arrived at Shapton Junction by his usual train. He had looked, as he looked each evening, for that first sight of Phil, standing on the platform, the high collar of her driving coat turned up, Bob wriggling beside her. But there had been no sign of her and no sign, either, of Crosby. Only the old mechanic from the local garage came forward, as Rupert, anxiety rising a little in his mind, walked up the platform.

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"They've a fire at Elland's," the man began without greeting, and the one porter came nearer to listen. "Ye can see t' glow far as Cardenbrigg. They're all there—Lampson and Crosby and all t' village. Crosby's a younger man nor me—more use where'e is. I said I'd fetch ye. Happen ye'll go straight there?"

Rupert, running to the car, wrenched the door open and slid into the driving seat. He thought of Phil. Why hadn't she met him? . . . But, if there had been any accident, surely he would have been told. And if, perhaps, she was at Elland's, and remaining with Mrs. Elland, that was right. . . . Deliberately he had dismissed the thought of her from his mind as he steered his car out of the cramped station-yard and settled down to drive at a speed that would need concentration while the man beside him spoke in the sharp tongue of that countryside.

"Aye; there'll be nowt left o' t' farm. T' engine from Whicken's in ditch. She skidded in t' mook——"

Yes, Rupert had reflected, in an emergency men stood fast, but how often machines played them false. Listening to the mechanic, he had a vivid picture of the terrified horses, plunging in the drifting billows of smoke as the men harnessed them to the engine; and a picture of Elland, reeling two steps on the grass before he fell, his thigh broken by a kick. As the car

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took the long climb that lay between Stone and Capeldun, the sky was rosy where no after-glow could be, and, as they reached the crest of the hills and the valley lay below them, they saw the great pillar of clear flame that was the burning ricks, and the more sombre mass of fire that came from the burning house.

For hours Rupert and the men worked, not quite uselessly. Their eyes half closed against the smoke, they had demolished the outhouses that lay beyond the blazing stables and shippens, saving the great barn. The farmhouse was past saving. The flames had roared as they devoured it, pouring out of the windows and cracking the old stones and dancing upwards. And reflected, the flames had danced, too, on the bright brasses of the engine that was powerless for help, however much its furious crew struggled round it with sacking and horses and their own willing strength.

After hours of feverish labour, the barn had stood isolated. The rain, coming up with the night, had hissed on the blackened wood, slanting down on the tired men and on the household goods of the Ellands, piled in a heap and inadequately covered with a tarpaulin. Halfway through those hours, the ambulance from Whicken had backed up to the barn where Elland lay groaning while his wife squatted beside

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him on a truss of straw. Presently it drove away, bumping hideously on the rutted lane into the road. And at last, when the beasts had all been driven to other farms and there was nothing left to do but set a watch on the ruin, Rupert had motored to Whicken Infirmary to fetch Elland's wife and drive her fifteen miles into the hills to her brother's farm. All the time, listening to the woman's repeated tale and giving her the reassurance that she wanted, he had imagined Phil. He had spoken to Lampson and learned where she had gone, and, in his mind, he saw her, travelling to London, apprehensive and worried, escaped out of his care.

And now, her letter in his hand, he walked slowly upstairs. He felt wearied and confused by the flickering light and ceaseless noise of the past hours. His thoughts raged because fate had led her helpless, and because he was helpless too. In the face of urgent problems that had risen in his Area, and in the face of the other more human problems and duties that would rise from the fire at Elland's, how could he go now to London—with no definite reason to give himself for going? For there could be no danger to Phil. Only that one so loathed the idea of her being again surrounded by the people and the atmosphere from which she had fled. . . . She should have waited till he re-

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turned: there had at least been no need to go at once. ... If, he thought, he could have found himself beside her, now, he knew what he would have said to her. For he was angry.

He opened a door, his blackened hand marking the white paint. How empty her room seemed, though the fire crackled in the grate as though at any moment she might come in, and Bob rose from the hearth and came towards him, wagging his whole body. ... He looked round at the familiar things—at Bob's chewed basket, at the book that Phil had been reading, at the photograph of himself, at the bough of gorse that she had cut yesterday. Outdoors, a strong wind was rising. It swept gustily round the corner of the house, and the hard patter of the rain ceased suddenly. He went to the window and opened it. In the soft shaft of lamplight from behind him he saw that the rain had changed to the inaudible snow. For a stupid moment he felt as though Phil were out in that weather___No, he knew: if she were to come in now, he would not be angry with her. But perhaps, for a moment, in the sharpness of his relief, it might seem to her as though he were.

He sat down on that big stool that she always dragged so near the fire, and opened her letter.

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"Don't be angry," he read in her hurried writing. "I wish *so much* that I could have seen you first. Or that Angy had written instead of telephoning as then I could have left the letter for you to read and you would have seen that I *had* to go. Angy was so desperate. She wouldn't say what was the matter but she was crying, nearly screaming. She said if I didn't swear to come she would throw herself out of the window. It was horrible. I won't try to tell you how much I mind going. I mind so much that it seems silly. And it isn't only because you will be angry, though that is enough. I shan't stay at Angy's flat. I shall stay at the Wilmington, which reminds me of you. Do you remember when Eleanor and I stayed there? I wish Eleanor could be there now. I have only taken enough things for two nights. That isn't long. Please don't worry about me at all. No one can do me the faintest harm. Can they? And I can look after myself very well. When I have settled Angy *this one time* I won't leave Roones again. I never want to.

"Your loving wife,
"Phil."

Phil lay in bed at the Wilmington, waiting for her breakfast. The electric light was lit. A fog seeped in a

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little. She looked round the old-fashioned room with its patterned ceiling, its wall-paper that forced one to count its trellised stripes and its bunches of roses, its ill-lit dressing-table and its wardrobe in whose long mirror one couldn't properly see oneself. Nothing in the room—and, Phil thought, nothing in the hotel—was really convenient. But she had unwelcome memories of other places; and something in the solidity and calm of these surroundings seemed to put Roones less far away. . . . Lying flat she clasped her hands behind her head. In that position, on the whole, she felt less sick. Well, one needn't wonder now whether one was going to have a baby. Surely no one could feel like this—so sick and yet so longing for breakfast—who *wasn't* going to have one?

She hadn't seen Angy yet. Her train, running into fog, had arrived two hours late. With Angy's threat to kill herself ringing in her mind she had rung up the flat from the station. Angy's voice had answered her, and something in that voice had told her that Angy wasn't alone. "That's all right," Phil had replied in a voice from which all expression was as carefully withdrawn as from Angy's own. "See you to-morrow." . . . Angy, she had reflected, always ran true to form. It was so like her to fetch one bolting down from where one wished to be and then to hand one off until to-

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morrow. "*Blast!*" .. It was a raw night. As she came out of the telephone-box she had felt, suddenly, chilled to the bone.

The symptoms of a feverish cold hadn't really gone, this morning. But surely, after breakfast, she would feel better—after hot coffee and the kipper for which she craved as she couldn't remember having craved for anything. No use to take one's temperature; that didn't bring it down; and, anyway, one could tell for oneself that, though it wasn't normal, it wasn't high either. Usually, one would have sent out for a bottle of "Cold-Cure"; but now, wasn't that dangerous? Drugs. . . . Probably one oughtn't to take anything. ... A doctor would tell her. But a doctor would make her stay here till her temperature was normal. At that thought a little panic stirred in her heart. "*I will go home,*" she thought. Only at Roones, with Rupert, would she be safe. Her mind told her that. And her heart tugged at her to return.

There was a knock on the door. The waiter brought in her breakfast. A telegram lay on the tray.

"Return please no later than Friday Rupert."

Smiling, Phil stared out at the yellow screen of fog. She thought of her husband and his image was clear

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to her mind. Presently, she laid the telegram on the table by her bed, under his photograph. She lifted the lid from the dish of kipper. It smelt very good. She was so hungry. Already she felt better.

Angy lay on the sofa. Phil watched her. What *was* the matter with Angy? She looked sullen and—something else. "But she *is* beautiful," Phil thought. She had forgotten how lovely her sister was.

Angy had explained nothing. She had given little tag-ends of news about different people. She had discussed the inconveniences of the flat and Beckett's idleness. Perhaps, she had said, she would move into a service flat.... Phil had listened with half her mind until, presently, Angy's voice flattened a little on a note that she recognized.

"Did you know Lily—Poynton's wife—was dying?"

"No."

Angy glanced away out of the window where the fog was withdrawing a little before a thin wind.

"Well. . . . It's a good thing, really. For her. She's got cancer. No one would want to live like that."

"No. I suppose not," Phil replied; but it was as though, for a moment, she could see herself and Angy sitting there, young and strong, discussing the tormented death of that other woman. She had never

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seen Poynton's wife, but Angy, she supposed, had taken from Lily everything that she cared for. And Lily, probably, had guessed—had known. One would, of course. And after that one *would* rather be dead.... She remembered Angy's description of Poynton's wife: "like the back of a taxi". Angy must have found it an easy game. . . . But of course, even if Angy hadn't appeared in Poynton's path, he would never have been faithful except to a much younger woman. If it hadn't been Angy, it would have been—it had been—someone else. That was written all over him.

"Will it be long?" she asked.

Angy made a little movement.

"They can't tell. A week—or a month. People linger on."

There was a silence.

"You know, Phil—I've got a hunch you bring me luck."

"Good."

"Anyway, you're not after just what you can get from me."

Phil looked at her sister. She saw that there was fear as well as sullenness in her face.

"Angy?"

"Well?"

"What is it?"

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"Oh——" Angy laughed suddenly, jerkily. "You'd never guess." As suddenly, she choked. She was crying, while Phil stared at the fear and misery in her eyes. "Blast it to *hell!* I've—I'm going to have a baby!"

"Angy——"

Angy half rose.

"My God—I *won't!* I *won't!*"

Bang. Bang. Bang. Her hand came down on the little table. Phil got up quickly. She went to the door. For a moment, before she locked it, she leant against it, trembling. Strange, how shaken one felt. . . .

"Angy, I'm so sorry——"

"Oh, get *out!*—" Angy twisted on the sofa. Her arm, jerking blindly, struck Phil. "And damn me for a fool! I'm caught—I'm *caught.*"

Phil sat down, still trembling a little. She was silent. That twisting figure sobbed and sobbed and her own heart was wrenched. Slowly the long minutes passed. But one could do nothing. . . . The tearing sobs died at last in exhaustion. Angy sat up, bowed over her knees, her eyes glancing from side to side of the floor.

"I knew you'd be different from the others," she whispered presently. "I wanted you."

"Does anyone else know?"

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"I told Sally. And Lettice."

"*Why?* Angy, that was no good."

"I thought they'd help. ... I thought no one need have a baby now." Angy's answer came incoherently. "It always sounds so easy. Doesn't it? ... Sally *said* it was so easy. . . . She said: '*Don't you worry*'; but *she* didn't know any doctor——And every week it gets more dangerous——" Angy's face twitched.

Phil didn't speak.

"Lettice knew of someone. A woman. She took me there yesterday. But it's dangerous. I didn't know, till I saw in the paper that a girl died——" Angy turned her tormented eyes on her sister. "The woman Lettice took me to—she was foul. Such a *foul* place. And all Lettice thought about was the money she'd get. I could see——" Angy's face was hidden, now, but the tears ran on to her hands. "I don't want to die with those people round me—like vultures." There was a desperate silence. "I thought you'd come with me," she said.

Sudden nausea, physical and mental, surged up in Phil's heart like a wave.

"Angy, *need* you?" she said at last. "You could come near Roones—you could stay with us. Or we'd move out for a little——Anything——"

Angy laughed without mirth.

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"Hide in the country and have my child? That's what I thought *you'd* done, last summer."

"No." But, Phil thought, she might have had to do that. . . . She was silent. Then, her eyes on Angy's "bleak face, she felt her way, timidly. "But if it's Poynton's baby—if his wife is dying—won't he marry you?"

"*I don't know* _____ Yes; I think so."

"Then——"

"Oh, you bloody little *fool!*" Angy sprang to her feet. "Can't you *see?* I don't *want* to have it!" She dropped on her knees on the sofa. Her voice rose: "I'd die—I know I'd die!"

Phil had stood up too as that voice clamoured in her ears. "I can't stand much more," she thought. "And I'm no use——" The room for a moment moved round her as Angy spoke again.

"If Lily dies—if Poynton marries me—he'll make me have it. And I *can't*——"

Phil sat down. The singing in her head ceased. There was a silence as she tried to gather herself together and to gather what wisdom life had taught her. It hadn't, she supposed, taught her much; but it had taught Angy *nothing*. Her mind and heart felt empty. She looked round the room, and suddenly and incongruously she thought of her cousin Eleanor, seeing her as she had once seen her, seated rather

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awkwardly on that low couch, the basket of jam-pots in her hand. . . . But Eleanor, if she had been here now, couldn't have helped: she would think herself moving among the lost.

"Angy—do you want Lettice, all your life, to have you in her power? I'd rather trust an adder. You *must* tell Poynton."

"I won't!" Angy put her hand to her mouth. "Sally's sister had a baby. Sally says *she'll* never have one, now she knows what it's like."

"Sally", Phil said, "hasn't the guts of a louse."

Angy turned her head. She looked at Phil with something like hatred in her eyes.

"Damn you! I wish you hadn't come. I don't know why I sent for you."

"I don't know either." Phil rose. Maddeningly, she felt her lip tremble. It had all been useless: the long journey, the apprehension that dogged one, the familiar scenes that one hated to see. One might have been at home and with Rupert instead of battling in this sea of—mud.

"You can keep your advice for other fools," Angy was saying. "No bloody baby's going to spoil *my* life. I'm not going to be hurt——"

There was a rap on the door. Angy's hand jerked. The words were cut from her lips.

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The rap was repeated.

"Open it," Angy whispered.

Phil crossed the room. She unlocked the door. Poynton stood there. For a moment, he paused on the threshold.

"Well, well. Little Philly, eh?" He entered and closed the door behind him.

Angy had turned very white. Poynton looked from her to Phil. Impossible to know how much he saw.

Chapter 26

In the empty drawing-room of the Wilmington Phil sat, waiting. Poynton Shefford had rung her up that morning. It was important, he had said, that he should see her. Could he come round at two o'clock? ... At the sound of that voice Phil had felt angry. She would have told him that she wouldn't see him; only that, she had supposed vaguely, would do Angy no good.

She looked down at the colourless street-scene, and her thoughts ran forward. In four hours she would be in the train. In ten hours she would be with Rupert. ... To-day one wasn't as unhappy, even about Angy. But, last night, how depressed one had been; depressed beyond all reason.

She had returned to the Wilmington after that conversation with Angy. Her head had felt hot and presently, though it was early evening, she had gone to

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bed. There, shivering a little, she had thought confusedly of her sister. It had been strange to see Angy as she had been in those last minutes at the flat: different; gabbling a little; white-faced. It was horrible to know how frightened Angy was. Helplessly frightened of everything: of having a baby, of Lettice, and, perhaps not least, of Poynton. . . . What could one do? Nothing. Even Rupert, if one could have asked him, could have done nothing.

She had fallen asleep and into uneasy dreaming. Endlessly, Angy and Lettice and Poynton had appeared to her. The landscape of her dreams was hotly lit, the rocks flaked. How hard she had tried, in her sleep, to escape; and, waking, she had still felt that longing. It had seemed as though the next twenty-four hours couldn't pass. . . . It was still unbelievably early—only ten o'clock—and she had tried to get through to Roones on the telephone. But that wasn't possible. The line had broken down under the snow and wild weather that swept the North of England. "Wild weather". The words had brought to her mind pictures that took her, for a moment, two hundred miles away. The dark clouds massed above the darker hills; the river, flooded and furious; the creaking dimness of the close fir-wood where one's feet fell soundlessly and the wind never came.

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In the morning, the nightmare light no longer shone in her mind. Only a little apprehension remained and that, she thought, would be with her until she was in the train, drawing out of St. Pancras. With the breakfast that she hadn't felt like eating there had been a letter from Rupert. She knew it now by heart. It had begun: "My darling child." . . . He wasn't angry—or only with Angy. Further down the page had come one's instructions: "the last and best train is the 5.5. I shall expect you by that, and I will meet you at Shapton. It is very cold here. Dress warmly." . . .

A clock somewhere struck two. The door was opened by a page. "Mr. Shefford," he announced.

As Poynton advanced, Phil felt again that slight astonishment that always accompanied her first sight of him. To look at him was, somehow, like being confronted by a poster. You couldn't disregard him but you wouldn't want to see him often. She thought: "How *could* Angy——" But certainly he had a kind of awful good looks. . . .

"Don't get up_____Well, Phil_____"

They shook hands. Poynton sat down. He was dressed in black, and that, and something different in the expression of that heavy face—something a little shocked and troubled—prepared Phil for what

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he would say. For a moment, he stared at his knuckles without speaking.

"Lily—my wife—died last night. She's been very bad, you know; for a long time. But we hadn't expected it so soon."

"I'm sorry." In her dislike of Poynton and her pity for the dead woman Phil had nearly said nothing.

He made a flat gesture as though he closed something.

"It's a release for her. It's hard on the children. . . . If I told you what I'm feeling, you wouldn't believe me."

Phil didn't contradict him. What *did* he feel? she wondered. Perhaps he felt as though a room in his house was shut for ever. . . . But he and Angy were in luck. Whatever his sorrow, it couldn't hide that fact.

He looked up.

"I suppose you're wondering what I'm here for?"

"I suppose I am."

"Well, Philly, I won't beat about the bush. I haven't the time. . . . There's something I want to say about Angy."

"Oh___"

He gave her an unexpected glance.

"You don't like me, do you?" he asked,

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"Not much."

"You think Angy's the worse for me?"

"Yes."

"You're wrong. Angy would have got herself into a mess, anyway. She's silly: cautious at the wrong times."

Phil uncrossed her knees.

"Is that what you came here to tell me?"

"Now, *now*." Poynton raised a large hand. "No need to have me thrown out. Always listen to what people have to say. That's a good rule. . . . And you needn't worry about Angy: I'll look after her all right."

"Look after her?"

"See here, Philly: my wife isn't in her grave yet; and she was a better wife than Angy'll ever be. But I'll marry Angy within a year."

"But that won't——" Phil paused.

Poynton smiled.

"It's all right: / know. . . . Angy'll be married in plenty of time."

"Did Angy——What did she tell you?" The sharp line lay between Phil's eyes. Her head ached, and Poynton was as he had been in her dreams of last night.

"She told me what was coming to her. But I knew

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that already. . . . Poor Angy." Poynton smiled again. "Well, she can have any fancy doctor she likes; twilight sleep, and all the rest of it. But she'll *have* her baby—and no monkey-tricks. . . . You worry yourself too much about her, Philly. When she's married to me she'll settle down. Perhaps you don't think so, but that's where I know best. . . . Mind if I smoke? . . . I'll be marrying Angy with my eyes open. I know what she's like and I can deal with her. If she tries playing fast and loose with me she'll learn what she'll get." He lit his cigar with care. "Yes. . . . And this marriage won't be too one-sided. Angy's rich, but I've got money; her money's nothing to me. And—mind you, I don't talk till my road's clear—you can take this from me: in a year or two I shall be *Sir* Poynton. . . . She might have chosen worse."

"Perhaps . . ." was all that Phil found to say in answer to that glance.

"And all this fast life," he ruminated. "A girl can stand it for a few years. After that, it's time to stop; and Angy'll stop now. As for me—I've enjoyed my bit of fun in the past, but I've never been mistaken about myself yet. I know I've come to an age, now, when I shan't want to racket round any more. No; Angy'll be enough for me. . . . And there'll be plenty of amusement for her: nice friends. And we'll travel

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a bit—cruises—cruise up the Amazon. I shall be taking things a bit easier at the office in future. When we're at home, we'll come up to town pretty often—make up a party—dine at the Savoy. . . . And there'll be the kid to keep her occupied, and his brothers and sisters. I've got kiddies already, but they're growing up. I don't mind a second lot. There's enough to support them."

"*Don't*" The word was jerked from Phil, but she could have given no clear reason.

Poynton rose. He looked down at her, kindly.

"Now you listen to me, Philly, before you fly off the handle: what would have happened to your sister if she hadn't met me? Think of that. She'd have married someone else, perhaps—someone who couldn't control her; and, believe me, there's damn few that could. Then there'd have been a smash, and she'd have been the talk of London. . . . It's better as it is. The life she'll have will do her good. It won't be all she's pictured. Granted. But she'll get used to it."

Phil looked away, out of the window. Still she felt him, large and immovable, gazing down at her, friendlily.

"You can't do any good here, kid. You run along home—back to your husband. I don't like to see you with Angy's friends till I've had a clean-up. . . . Fact

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is, Philly, you ought never to have gone round with that gang. I was always fond of you—I didn't blame you for not liking me—and I used to worry, seeing you with that push. You're too young. They might have done you harm." His eyes rested for another moment on her face. "I was damn glad when I heard you were getting married."

Phil, looking at her future brother-in-law, was silent. How much more helpless one felt in realizing that he might, perhaps, sometimes be kind. If he wasn't entirely dreadful, that made him at once more real, less the creature of a dream, more certain to have his way. Yes; he would have it. Angy would fall to him, and the words of the hard old proverb would be true: she would have made the bed that she would lie on. . . . With a pang, Phil remembered Angy's voice on the telephone that morning. Angy, it seemed, was going to give a party that afternoon; and she had begged for one's presence. That wasn't like her—not just for a party. She had enough friends. But now she was hag-ridden. "To bring me luck: Phil—*promise* you'll come," she had said. Then she had laughed, and her voice had relapsed into listlessness. "You'll counteract Lettice. . . ."

Yes, Phil reflected. Lettice would be viping about, now and after one had gone, wriggling into any

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cracks in Angy's defences. And, God knew, there were enough. . . . But hadn't Poynton spoken of a "clean up"? Then let him do what he could.

"Poynton——"

"Well, baby?"

"Look here: Lettice Laycock sees too much of Angy. She's dangerous——"

He gave her a sharp glance.

"Ah," he said. "*Lettice*. . . . Yes. . . ." He stared across the room. His face had changed, and Phil saw, then, that if Angy feared him it was because she might have reason. "Don't you worry, kiddy," he said gently, "I know Miss Lettice. I can handle her. I've got a little hold, there"—Phil watched the thick fingers closing—"and I know when and how to use it. I'll drop a word. . . . Truth is, Philly, you try to manage what's too much for you. Leave Angy's troubles to *me*, and we'll get along better."

"All right, I will." And, Phil reflected, there wasn't much choice.

Poynton threw his half-cigar into the fire.

"Must be going," he said; but, for a moment, he didn't move. Absently, he looked at the hearth. "Home. That's a dreary place, now. The children'll be arriving this evening. Funeral's on Saturday. . . ." He turned to her, "Y'know, Philly, I'll tell you some-

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thing: Lily was a good mother and a good wife. . . .
Well—sometimes when I see Angy screaming for what she wants and being sick when she's had it, and when I remember the life Lily had at her age, I could rub Angy's nose in it. . . . Yes; there wasn't any money in Lily's home, and she didn't marry money when she married me. I hadn't got any. All I'd got was thirty pounds of debts and a job at Wheeler and Laski's at three-pound-ten a week."

"Angy can't help being born rich."

"She can help whining though." Poynton held out his hand. "So long, Philly. And just you remember one thing: Angy wouldn't be everybody's money, but she's mine. She's coming to me. You can't change that. No good trying. See?"

Phil nodded, seeing very well. Poynton held her hand in a large grasp.

"That's right. You're a good kid, Philly. And I'm not as bad as you think. . . . Well—bye-bye, black-bird_____"

The widower turned to the door. Phil watched those wide, broad-clothed shoulders and that thick neck. From her thoughts there rose for a moment a confused vision of Angy: as lovely as ever; in a room without windows. Caught; as Angy herself had said.

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"Oh—there you are." Angy said.

Phil entered the flat. The porter put down her suitcase. Angy didn't seem particularly pleased to see her, but that was like Angy: if she had given herself away she tried to take herself back. Phil glanced past her into the dining-room. The table was littered, the room still full of smoke.

"Had a lunch party," Angy said.

There was noise enough coming from the drawing-room. The little green-painted hall was peaceful. Phil thought: "I'd give a tenner to lie down." Her cold felt unexpectedly worse.

"I oughtn't to have come, Angy. I think I've got 'flu, or something."

"Give it to me then. It might do a spot of good."

Phil saw the tears in Angy's eyes. Gin, they came from—the little glass in her hand held gin—and worry and her condition.

"Poynton's wife's dead," Angy said. "Do you wish me luck?"

"Oh, God, Angy——" Phil stopped. "I wish you luck. . . . But you'll throw it away."

Angy shrugged. As she opened the drawing-room

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door there was a burst of noise. People looked round. There were sudden cries: "Why, *Phil!*" "Hullo, *Phil!*" "Hullo, *Baby!* Haven't seen you for one long time—"

Seated in a chair, *Phil* smiled at the faces round her. Some old faces, she saw—and some new ones. Why, she wondered, should this party, noisy as ever, seem different from those of the past? It wasn't really different, only that one felt it to be doomed, knowing that these people wouldn't meet here again. *Angy* would give no more parties. And *Lettice*, over there—trying to twinkle at some man and succeeding only in glittering—was near the end of her rope. She would learn that from *Poynton*. It was better that she should learn it from him than from *Rupert*. The measures that *Rupert* would take if he knew of her attempt at blackmail might land her in jail. . . .

A knot of two or three laughed together by the door. *Phil's* eyes, turning that way, fell on a young man who pushed his way through the group. As she saw him, her heart halted in sudden shock. Then it beat again too quickly. *Derek*—As he came towards her she hated herself; for her nerves, jangling, had played her false, bringing to her cheek the hot colour that she could feel there now.

"*Phil*. . . ." He touched her hand. He sat down, looking at her in silence while she returned his glance

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with a little smile. That jerk of her heart—it had, after all, been meaningless. A recoil of the nerves, too suddenly weighted with memories. And now, a moment later, those memories seemed light. But he would try to weight them again. She could see that. And he wouldn't succeed.

"Eight months, Phil, since I've seen you."

She nodded. Impossible not to remember too well the manner of their parting.

"And now—Angy says you're going."

"Quite soon." Phil, glancing at the clock, saw Angy look at her, morose and a little sly. Angy, no doubt, had foreseen this meeting and thought it funny. Phil met, too, Lettice's sidelong glance. And others, old acquaintances, watched and pretended to look elsewhere.

"I've missed you, Phil." Derek still turned those dark eyes on her; but now, to her, they meant nothing. His face was so good looking; and it was as though there was nothing behind it. She thought: "He just *uses* his looks. . . ." She was silent, remembering many things and feeling an odd pity for that girl who had been herself a year ago and who had thought that happiness and peace would be so easily found.

"Did you think about me?" he was asking.

"For a bit, I did—very often."

"And afterwards, not?"

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"Afterwards, not."

There was a scream of laughter from the hearth. The wireless boomed, wordlessly. Then, not properly tuned in, it howled.

"There's a damned lot of noise at this party." Phil put her hand to her head. Her eyes ached when she moved them. Her thoughts, quickened by slight fever, came, she knew, too vividly, so that she saw things distorted—feeling that something or someone here might turn on her—might get her. . . . And all the time her cooler sense laughed, a little late, at these sick fancies.

"Phil—I've never stopped thinking of you. And I don't know when I shall." Derek leant towards her, his voice sunk, the cigarette unlit in his hand.

"Oh, Derek: you're rushing your fences." And, at that phrase, a harder face than Derek's rose before Phil's mind. "That remark takes *hours* of leading up to," she said, and, glancing at him, saw that no more than in the old days did he like being laughed at.

"You don't understand. I'm a curious sort of bloke. You didn't understand what I was feeling—last summer."

"Well, you're looking awfully fit now, Derek. *Bronzed and fit.*"

"Oh—shut up, Phil!"

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Phil shrugged a little, looking away, down to where the scarlet buses swayed along Park Lane. A tiring talk, this was. But now Derek was silent. A minute passed before he spoke again.

"God—*how* did I let you go?" he said.

"I—simply—can't—think." She stretched lightly, her hands before her. Then, meeting his eyes, she realized suddenly and with a little shock, how much she still attracted him. "I call this a pointless conversation," she said.

"Phil—my *sweet!*—" Sally Pittall, rushing towards one. And others came up with Sally, grinning down at one. There stood Lettice. . . . Phil smiled up at them, wishing that they might dissolve as the thoughts seemed to dissolve, now, inside her head.

"Look; I must go," she said.

"Back to the country." Lettice spoke. Funny how her voice always penetrated, however much noise there was. "Ever seen our Phil in the country, Derek? She's *very* different: all tweedy and doggy."

"Better than being all bitchy, Lettice," Derek said.

There followed a roar of easy laughter, but Lettice didn't reply. She was trained to take a kick in silence, and, Phil thought, she wouldn't answer Derek immediately. Perhaps not for six months.

"Phil—listen," Derek said; "I'll take you to the

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station." His voice was low but Sally Pittall heard it.

"Let's *all* see our Phil off!" She spoke in clumsy good nature. "*Come* on, chaps! We'll all go——"

Lettice smiled, her eyes on Derek's darkening face.

"No. Hell——" He stared round as the shouts rose.

"I won't have the car wrecked——"

Phil stood up: "I'll take a taxi——"

But now it was too late. Tired of a party that didn't go too well, Angy's guests shouted for a drive through the streets, crushed together in no matter whose cars.

"Oh, damn. . . ." Phil's heart sank. She had been so sure that in two or three minutes she would be free. She clutched the back of the chair, feeling it strange that the tears should try to rise.

"I'd rather go alone—not break up the party——"

"*Rot.*" Derek stood up. "You'll come in my car. . . . All right!" He raised his voice. "*All* comers! . . . And Phil will sit with me!"

He seized her wrist but she wouldn't struggle, as, with his shoulder, he pressed her towards the door. She turned her head. Yes; Angy, bored and bitter, was coming. They all swept into the little hall, clutching at their coats heaped on the chest. Phil's face was so blank that when, suddenly, she slipped her hand free it took Derek by surprise. She heard him grunt

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and remembered how, in the old days, he would sulk. But now he smiled at her.

They had all piled into two cars. Phil, seated by Derek, stared ahead at the long, gleaming bonnet. There had been relief in coming out into the cold air. And now she felt calm. . . . Certainly, when one was going to have a baby one wasn't always reasonable. What harm had she imagined might come to her among these people?

"You haven't much to say to me, Phil." Derek edged into the traffic of Marble Arch. Then, accelerating suddenly, he swept into Oxford Street.

"Oh, Derek, I have _____"

He ignored her attempt at an answer.

"Well, I shall come north and look you up."

"Do," Phil replied, and felt Angy's smile. One could always tell what would make Angy smile. Well, when one was back at Roones nothing would trouble one much. Anyone was welcome to come there, if they must; for Rupert would be there or thereabouts.

How quickly the car, turning out of Oxford Street, fled into Portman Square and on into Baker Street. Phil felt a little warmth towards Derek—gratitude because he was taking her so quickly where she wished to be. And, though he drove quickly, he was careful.

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The houses flicked past. Passers-by stared, for, in Lettice's car which followed so close, the passengers waved and shouted, urging Lettice to a race, and then, as a policeman came in sight, became suddenly still. Phil turned to look at them. Their cries weren't audible, so that it seemed as though they mopped and mowed.

She looked ahead, her eyes once more on that long bonnet from which bright pipes sprang unexpectedly.

"This is a lovely car, Derek," she said, trying to please.

"Yes; she's a real car all right."

He accelerated. An unexpected traffic-light flashed from green to yellow. A car ahead pulled up too sharply. Derek checked, smoothly,

There was a warning scream from Sally, a yell from a passer-by, and then, as Lettice, in the car behind, tried, too late, to brake, came the appalling, grinding crash.

Phil was hurled against the windscreen. The great car, spinning across the road, crashed into an island. She was flung over the steering-wheel.

"The—bloody—fools!" She heard Derek's voice. Pain tore through her like a rusty blade. And again. Her eyes, wide and anguished, wavered to his face.

"They've got me——" She spoke the words aloud; but not to Derek.

Chapter 27

Phil sat huddled on the pavement, unconscious, her back against the railings, her head hanging forward.

She gave a long sigh. There was a rushing, singing sound in her head. As she opened her eyes, staring down at her hands, she felt deadly nausea. Someone said: "Oughtn't we to get some water?" And Angy's voice: "You're sure she's only fainted?" "God, yes. There isn't a mark on her. I've knocked my own head. ..." Then came a woman's cockney voice. "Why don't you let the pore young thing lay down?"

Phil raised her head. There was a sickly colour on everything. Her thoughts came in unconnected rushes with blankness between.

"*There!* There's nothing the matter with her. She's come round." The voice sounded relieved, "The police'll be here in a second——"

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Angy knelt on the pavement.

"Reggie, get a taxi. I'll take Phil back to the flat."

"No——" Phil tried to scramble to her feet. She rose to her knees. "I'm all right——" Sudden pain struck the words from her lips. White-faced, she clung to the railings. The wave receded. "I'm going home."

"Rot, Phil." Angy seized her arm. "You're not fit."

Phil struggled out of Angy's hold.

"Let her go," Reggie said.

Derek advanced.

"Here, Phil! Stop this!" He gripped her wrists. "All right, Angy—I'll bring her along——Open that taxi door. . . ."

"*Damnyou!*" Phil, her face contorted in terror and fury, fought in his stronger grasp. Panic blinded her. "*Let me go! Let me go!*" He smiled as he lifted her. Then, suddenly, like an animal trapped, she had stooped her head to the hands that held her.

"Well—I'm*damned!*" Derek, releasing her, nursed his bitten hand. He stared at her as she stumbled away from him.

Clumsily, she jerked at the door of the taxi.

"St. Pancras—*quick!*"

The driver let in his clutch. The taxi started with a jolt. She didn't look round. It picked up speed and fled smoothly along the Euston Road, Rigid, she

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leant forward. "Oh, God. . . . Not that pain again. . . ."⁵⁾

Two minutes later the taxi turned into the station yard. A clock struck the quarter, gravely; but Phil didn't hear that. The taxi drew up. Phil raised her head. She got out, quickly, and a porter came forward as she fumbled in her bag.

"The train to Shapton. Which platform?—"

"Gone ten minutes since. 5.5."

Phil turned to the taxi driver. She thrust a note into his hand.

"I'm *very* sorry," she said. "I'm awfully sorry: I've been sick on the floor of your taxi."

The old car jolted over the frozen Yorkshire roads. A loose skid-chain jingled rhythmically. The snow had so packed on the windscreen that Phil could see nothing of what lay in the beam of the headlights. Hunched on the back seat, her legs drawn up under her, she felt as though she were falling, dropping into immeasurable depths. It hurt one to breathe; and one *must* breathe—but less and less deeply, trying to wince away from that repeated stab. "Pleurisy." Phil remembered the symptoms of a woman she had known at Monte Carlo.... Dreadful to die in a Monte Carlo hotel. They took you down in your coffin, up-ended

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in the lift, at six o'clock in the morning, when, with luck, all revellers had returned and no one would meet you. . . . But that woman at Monte Carlo had been oldish, and worn to the bone. One didn't die when one was young and strong. Even when one longed, as now, to lie down and never to move again. It was partly this stiffening cold that took the life from one; while one's mind, sinking in pain and weakness, flicked from picture to picture as though someone turned, feverishly, the pages of a book. . . . And perhaps, Phil reflected, she might be glad that her thoughts were scattered, for they were wretched and bitter enough. She had done no good by her journey to London. Nothing in Angy's life would be altered by it. Everything would happen as it would have happened if one had not answered her appeal or seen her or Poynton or returned to that well-remembered scene. But one's own life had been altered. Rupert's child, now, would not be born. The savage pain that had attacked once or twice in these last hours, told one that too certainly.

She closed her eyes. The car rattled on, but she felt, now, suspended in a void where the tides of fear succeeded each other, or swept together. . . . She thought: "I shall have other children." A silence followed in her mind. And then, held for an instant in the strange

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warning blankness that went before that tearing pain, she thought: "No. I am injured—I can have no more. . . . No other chance. . . ." But that wasn't true. Or, if it were true, one had better not be living. Far better. For surely Rupert, looking down the long, future years, would think so. . . .

The onslaught passed. Phil opened her eyes. She put her hand to her forehead. It was wet. Her glance rested vaguely on the frame of the window. The wood was streaked and patterned like the surface of a hurrying river, and her mind fixed on that and would think no further. . . .

Nine hours ago, at St. Pancras, she had succeeded in finding a train that left for Roydley at 8.18. It had arrived at half-past one in the morning. A dead hour. And, shivering, she had stood in the only garage that was open, begging the owner to drive her the thirty miles to Roones.

"Nay. Tha doosn't get me to drive over t' hills i' this." And indeed, the snowflakes, close and small, were a white veil in the light from the garage.

"Is the road blocked?"

"They've cleared it to Whicken. But if tha skids into drift, tha'rt fast. Morning, tha'rt dead. Nay, lass; go to King's Head. I'll take 'ee i't' morning."

And if now, two hours later, that same man was

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driving her, jolting over the Whicken road, she owed that fact to her own breakdown—to a scene of which one should be ashamed.

"Very well," she had answered him. And then, in that bitter disappointment, it had seemed as though such little courage as she possessed had left her for ever. She had dropped, suddenly, on to the step of his car. Her head had felt like hot lead, and each sob had cut through her. "I'm sorry—I've been in an accident—I did so want to get home——"

For two hours now, the car had ground and shaken its way through icy darkness. Phil could see nothing, but she knew that it twisted at last round familiar curves. There was a sharp turn to the left followed by the well-known little dip, the hump, and then the long, slight, curving rise. Slowly she leant forward and opened the window. No snow drifted in—only a numbing wind so cold that it held no remembered scent. The car slowed cautiously to a stop. The door was opened. Phil rose. Moving uncertainly, she stumbled out on to the frozen snow.

The car had slipped away, down the drive, its tail-light winking in the darkness. Phil, standing on the steps of Roones, banged on the door. The house rose in blackness above her and only in the window of the

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library was there a thin rod of light. Gasping a little, she hugged herself as though that might ease the pain of breathing or keep within bounds this feeling which, at the sound of that footstep on the other side of the door, seemed as though it must choke her.

The door had not been bolted or locked. It was opened quickly. Bob rushed out, whining and leaping up. Rupert stood, looking down at her. She found she couldn't even smile.

"Phil—I shall whip you."

"Oh——" She laughed. The laugh was cut off. "I thought I'd never get home." She held his arm with both hands and felt how her last store of strength ran away like sand. "I *couldn't* help it," she whispered, and looked round the loved place and dropped one hand to feel Bob's cold nose.

Rupert held her. In the shadows he couldn't see her face.

"Where is your luggage, Phil?"

She put her hand to her head as her mind laboured. It was no use. Her thoughts would not obey her, however carefully she shepherded them.

"I don't know."

Abruptly, Rupert moved. He picked her up and carried her towards the stairs. She wasn't heavy—not heavy enough. On the landing, holding her for a

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moment in the light of the lamp, he frowned down at her pallor. Her lips were not reddened. The shadow round her mouth was grey.

"I thought I'd have to walk upstairs." Her voice, so oddly thin to-night, was content.

In her room the fire burned redly. She slipped down on to the hearth.

"And now, undress," Rupert said.

"Let me warm myself a minute?" She smiled up at him, and her heart sank, knowing that she couldn't stand.

He sat down in the chair. She leant against him. Her thoughts wavered like the flames. The room seemed strange, and, though Rupert held her hands in his, yesterday and all the moments of her journey seemed more real than this small hour.

"Why did you miss that train, Phil?"

"Well, you see. ..." There was a silence. Suddenly, she moved. "I was in a car smash. . . . I've hurt myself. . . ." She shivered and that wave of agony gave, again, its first warning surge. Her face, turned up to his, changed suddenly. She clutched at him with slippery hands. "Rupert—I'd started to have a baby; but now—I think I'm going to be ill——"

Chapter 28

The sunlight of a June evening streamed into the library, level and clear. It changed the dark, shining depths of an old press and lay pale on the carpet where Bob stretched himself. A little fire of wood and peat mingled its scent with the scent of may that drifted into the room. A ruffled call of pigeons filled the silence.

The door opened. Eleanor entered with a bowl of flowers. She set it down, and sunlight fell on the brilliant heads.

"Have you been asleep, Phil?"

"No. Just thinking." Phil lay back on the *chaise-longue*, her hands white on the red shawl that covered her legs. "When I'm well again, I'll try to arrange the flowers like that, Eleanor—browns and pinks and blues together. Lovely."

"But it's a very ordinary arrangement, Phil dear."

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"Is it?" Phil remembered herself and Angy, buying flowers. Sheaves of them. And they would put them round the sitting-room—a fat vase of carnations here, a vase of lilies there. Like a florist's, it must have looked. She could see that, now.

Eleanor knelt to brush up the ashes in the hearth. Phil, turning her head to watch her, was comforted by her presence, and, vaguely, she thought: "If I'd known Eleanor long before——" But that wouldn't have been possible. Eleanor in the same atmosphere as Hermione March and Luis and Mrs. Levey: one wouldn't want to imagine that. And if, later, when one lived with Angy, Eleanor had come to the flat, that wouldn't have been a success. Angy would have judged her on her clothes and tied some silly phrase to her and dismissed her from her mind. . . . Eleanor would have been silent in her presence. And, if she had met one there, perhaps she would have thought of one as being of the same kind. . . . And so one was: not in what one wanted of life; but in what one *was*. . . .

Eleanor rose quickly.

"Dear Phil—what is it?"

"I *don't* know—weakness——" Phil groped for her handkerchief. "It's so *silly*——" But worry, suspense—one's mind felt stretched thin by them. "I am getting better, aren't I?"

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"Of course you are."

"But will I get quite well?"

Eleanor felt behind the pillows for Phil's handkerchief.

-Quite."

Phil was silent. Her eyes, wet-lashed, turned to the window. Crying—scenes—there was nothing a man hated more. Or so her mother had said, who had never been able, in those last years, to deny herself a scene. . . .

-Don't tell Rupert how stupid I've been."

Eleanor shook her head.

"But you mustn't worry, Phil. You'll be so much better soon. This is the worst stage—"

"Yes_____"

What did they all mean by "quite well"? . . . One could ask, and then one would know. And if knowledge should mean the end of hope—even that would be better than continuing to believe that a dead future lived. . . . One could ask Rupert. He had always told one the truth. Only if, this time, he should choose to lie, one wouldn't be able to tell. One wouldn't gather much from his face unless he meant that one should. . . . But one might ask Eleanor. Surely Eleanor wouldn't lie? Looking down at one now, with that blue gaze, she made one think, unexpect-

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edly, of some hill-flower seen long ago. Strong, friendly and sweet, it grew in rocky places, the rock and the coolness part of its nature. No; Eleanor wouldn't lie—not for anyone's sake. Or if she tried to, she would do it so badly——

"I must get your medicine, Phil dear."

With her eyes, Phil followed the tall figure to the door. How well Eleanor fitted into the atmosphere of Roones. The old house received her happily. Above her, as she stood, had hung a portrait. Between Eleanor and the woman painted there was no relationship, and yet they were alike. They would have understood one another across no matter what gap of time. . . . Disconnectedly, Phil's thoughts drifted, without, it seemed, any direction. And then, quite suddenly, she knew: "If Rupert had never met me, he would have married Eleanor; in time." And that would have been suitable, and right. There would have been no trap for him, there. . . . She glanced again at the painting—at that woman who held by one brown hand a strong and plain little boy. He looked out into the room. And the woods and fields in the picture were the woods and fields of Roones.

Phil moved abruptly. The door opened and Eleanor entered. She paused for an instant. It struck

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her that Phil was too white—as white as though these long weeks of convalescence had never passed. But, for a moment, Phil smiled at her.

"*More* medicine." Phil took the glass and drank what was in it and set it down. Then she leant back on the pillows. She looked up at Eleanor and her glance was very clear.

"Eleanor—I want to know: *please* tell me. . . . I can have another baby?"

"Phil dear——" Eleanor put down the tray with hands that trembled a little.

"Did the smash finish me?"

"I haven't spoken to the doctors. Rupert will tell you——"

"*Ah*——"

There was a long silence. Bob raised his head. He rose and, sniffing vaguely, came across the room. With a sigh, he dropped down by the *chaise-longue*.

-Phil——"

Phil looked up, and it seemed to Eleanor that, suddenly, her cousin was a stranger. Her thin, white face was hard; all her thoughts hidden.

"I'm tired," Phil said. "I'd like to go to sleep. . . . I'd like to go upstairs."

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The dust rose in a thin cloud under the horses' hoofs. It settled whitely on the tall grass and the cow-parsley that fringed the rising path. The heat of the day was over. The valley fields lay in shadow and only the hillsides were clothed in gold. The horses turned the narrow corner with a scrambling of loose stones. The path was steeper here, where the sharp ridges of the rock pushed up to the surface. A little, swift stream ran thinly beside it; the foxgloves stood back in the shadows.

Rupert, glancing at Phil, smiled a little. How carefully she rode, her gloved hands on the double rein, remembering always all that he had taught her. The knowledge wasn't, yet, part of her mind; and perhaps it never would be. His horse shied, snorting, as Bob leapt out from a clump of bracken. Justina, well-mannered little mare, went equably on her way. Rupert felt relief. He would have held her on a leading-rein, only that would have taken from Phil, on this first ride after months of illness, the feeling that she was strong again. Strong. . . . He felt again the anxiety that didn't, these days, often leave him. She rode, her eyes on the path before her, her face serious.

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This occasion—this release from the bonds of convalescence—was to have been very happy. He looked at her. She was as far from him as she had been before their marriage. She was as nervous of him. . . .

The path was level now. The little mare broke into a trot.

"No," Rupert said.

Phil turned her head.

"It won't hurt me, Rupert."

"Phil—do as I tell you." Rupert rode alongside, putting his hand on the rein. She returned his smile. She seemed too slight. There was no substance between her bones. He could have lifted her with one arm and held her, safe before him on his horse; and so he would have liked to do.

The path twisted, narrowly. Water glistened on a wall of rock and, soaking through the moss, beaded on the ferns. The horses' tread sounded more loudly here. Then the little ravine ended. Beyond, a green terrace cut into the hillside and ran up to where the bracken met the heather.

Rupert drew rein. Phil dismounted. He saw how she leant for a moment against her mare's side, her hand on the saddle. He had brought headstalls, and now he led the horses away. As he picketed them, loosening the girths, he glanced again at her. Bob,

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standing beside her, stared at some distant sheep. She seized him, quickly, and, looking round, met Rupert's eyes. She smiled a little, and he knew that she, too, remembered. ... Ten months.... It wasn't even that since they had first met under these hills. From here one could see the very place, green and sloping. One could learn a lot in ten months—learn that fate doesn't give with both hands or give anything free; and that, if one's heart has treasures, one should be grateful for being allowed to see clearly which is the greatest, and for being allowed to keep that.

He walked over to the edge of the terrace and looked down the long, wide valley to where his home stood, lovely and austere. The sun had withdrawn now from the familiar hills. In the cool light, each detail was near—the white stone walls, the great trees, the clear, brown, shallow water. How often had he seen it, almost as clearly, though he had been four thousand miles away? . . . His thoughts went back to that night, months since, when his valley had lain under snow: Phil had so nearly died, then, and the wind, howling, had sounded as though the malice and stupidity and envy that had caught her in their trap had found one voice. It was to the whining of that voice, and while he watched her blank face, grey on the pillow, that he had learned

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where his heart lay. If she had died... If those vivid, unexpected threads had ceased in the sober pattern of his life. . . .

He went over to where Phil sat on the cropped turf, flinging little lumps of earth against a rock. She didn't speak. She was often silent now. As silent as in, those days when she had lived at Mrs. Gartside's house and he had gone to that house to see Eleanor and had seen there, too, his future wife. He sat down near her on the grass. Presently he said: "What is it, Phil?"

She didn't answer. He might have thought that she hadn't heard him. Only that her fingers ceased to pull at the turf.

"What is the matter?" he asked quietly.

"There's——"

"Don't lie to me, Phil. Don't say: 'there's nothing'."

"I won't lie," she answered. Perhaps, he thought, she remembered a promise given before their marriage. "There is something. . . ." Her face looked pinched. "It's no good talking about it."

"I shall know best about that," he said.

She was silent. He asked: "Where is your wedding ring, Phil?"

"It drops off. My fingers are thinner." She sat up, fumbling in her pocket. "I've got it, here."

"Give it to me.... Hold out your hand." He slipped

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the ring on to her finger. "Now, Phil: answer me."

He waited while she stared down at her hand in his.

"Rupert, I know that I can never have children. Eleanor told me."

"Eleanor *told* you?"

She glanced up, quickly.

"Don't be angry. She tried not to."

"Why did you ask Eleanor?"

"I wasn't certain you'd tell me. . . . And Eleanor's so bad at anything but the truth."

At that reply, so characteristic, there was silence.

"And when you knew," he said, "you didn't tell me, Phil." But, knowing her, he saw how her heart would have closed on that knowledge.

"I would have told you, later." She paused. "When I saw that you didn't speak any more about our children."

He took her in his arms and felt how her heart galloped, drumming under his hand; more revealing than her voice.

"Rupert, I've wanted so much to be a success. More than anything. . . . It's hopeless, now. . . . I *won't* cry! I *won't* cry!" Fiercely, she seized his handkerchief. "Oh, Rupert, I believed I'd thought of every danger—that you mightn't like me when we were married: that I mightn't learn quickly enough——"

