V Semester FYUGP

English

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20th and 21st Century British Literature

(DSC)

Texts Compiled

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Pygmalion

By

George Bernard Shaw



PREFACE TO PYGMALION.

A Professor of Phonetics.

As will be seen later on, Pygmalion needs, not a preface, but a sequel, which I have supplied in its due place. The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They spell it so abominably that no man can teach himself what it sounds like. It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him. German and Spanish are accessible to foreigners: English is not accessible even to Englishmen. The reformer England needs today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play. There have been heroes of that kind crying in the wilderness for many years past. When I became interested in the subject towards the end of the eighteen-seventies, Melville Bell was dead; but Alexander J. Ellis was still a living patriarch, with an impressive head always covered by a velvet skull cap, for which he would apologize to public meetings in a very courtly manner. He and Tito Pagliardini, another phonetic veteran, were men whom it was impossible to dislike. Henry Sweet, then a young man, lacked their sweetness of character: he was about as conciliatory to conventional mortals as Ibsen or Samuel Butler. His great ability as a phonetician (he was, I think, the best of them all at his job) would have entitled him to high official recognition, and perhaps enabled him to popularize his subject, but for his Satanic contempt for all academic dignitaries and persons in general who thought more of Greek than of phonetics. Once, in the days when the Imperial Institute rose in South Kensington, and Joseph Chamberlain was booming the Empire, I induced the editor of a leading monthly review to commission an article from Sweet on the imperial importance of his subject. When it arrived, it contained nothing but a savagely derisive attack on a professor of language and literature whose chair Sweet regarded as proper to a phonetic expert only. The article, being libelous, had to be returned as impossible; and I had to renounce my dream of dragging its author into the limelight. When I met him afterwards, for the first time for many years, I found to my astonishment that he, who had been a quite tolerably presentable young man, had actually managed by sheer scorn to alter his personal appearance until he had become a sort of walking repudiation of Oxford and all its traditions. It must have been largely in his own despite that he was squeezed into something called a Readership of phonetics there. The future of phonetics rests probably with his pupils, who all swore by him; but nothing could bring the man himself into any sort of compliance with the university, to which he nevertheless clung by divine right in an intensely Oxonian way. I daresay his papers, if he has left

any, include some satires that may be published without too destructive results fifty years hence. He was, I believe, not in the least an ill-natured man: very much the opposite, I should say; but he would not suffer fools gladly.

Those who knew him will recognize in my third act the allusion to the patent Shorthand in which he used to write postcards, and which may be acquired from a four and six-penny manual published by the Clarendon Press. The postcards which Mrs. Higgins describes are such as I have received from Sweet. I would decipher a sound which a cockney would represent by zerr, and a Frenchman by seu, and then write demanding with some heat what on earth it meant. Sweet, with boundless contempt for my stupidity, would reply that it not only meant but obviously was the word Result, as no other Word containing that sound, and capable of making sense with the context, existed in any language spoken on earth. That less expert mortals should require fuller indications was beyond Sweet's patience. Therefore, though the whole point of his "Current Shorthand" is that it can express every sound in the language perfectly, vowels as well as consonants, and that your hand has to make no stroke except the easy and current ones with which you write m, n, and u, l, p, and q, scribbling them at whatever angle comes easiest to you, his unfortunate determination to make this remarkable and quite legible script serve also as a Shorthand reduced it in his own practice to the most inscrutable of cryptograms. His true objective was the provision of a full, accurate, legible script for our noble but ill-dressed language; but he was led past that by his contempt for the popular Pitman system of Shorthand, which he called the Pitfall system. The triumph of Pitman was a triumph of business organization: there was a weekly paper to persuade you to learn Pitman: there were cheap textbooks and exercise books and transcripts of speeches for you to copy, and schools where experienced teachers coached you up to the necessary proficiency. Sweet could not organize his market in that fashion. He might as well have been the Sybil who tore up the leaves of prophecy that nobody would attend to. The four and six-penny manual, mostly in his lithographed handwriting, that was never vulgarly advertized, may perhaps some day be taken up by a syndicate and pushed upon the public as The Times pushed the Encyclopaedia Britannica; but until then it will certainly not prevail against Pitman. I have bought three copies of it during my lifetime; and I am informed by the publishers that its cloistered existence is still a steady and healthy one. I actually learned the system two several times; and yet the shorthand in which I am writing these lines is Pitman's. And the reason is, that my secretary cannot transcribe Sweet, having been perforce taught in the schools of Pitman. Therefore, Sweet railed at Pitman as vainly as Thersites railed at Ajax: his raillery, however it may have eased his soul, gave no popular vogue to Current Shorthand. Pygmalion Higgins is not a portrait of Sweet, to whom the adventure of Eliza Doolittle would have been impossible; still, as will be seen,

there are touches of Sweet in the play. With Higgins's physique and temperament Sweet might have set the Thames on fire. As it was, he impressed himself professionally on Europe to an extent that made his comparative personal obscurity, and the failure of Oxford to do justice to his eminence, a puzzle to foreign specialists in his subject. I do not blame Oxford, because I think Oxford is quite right in demanding a certain social amenity from its nurslings (heaven knows it is not exorbitant in its requirements!); for although I well know how hard it is for a man of genius with a seriously underrated subject to maintain serene and kindly relations with the men who underrate it, and who keep all the best places for less important subjects which they profess without originality and sometimes without much capacity for them, still, if he overwhelms them with wrath and disdain, he cannot expect them to heap honors on him.

Of the later generations of phoneticians I know little. Among them towers the Poet Laureate, to whom perhaps Higgins may owe his Miltonic sympathies, though here again I must disclaim all portraiture. But if the play makes the public aware that there are such people as phoneticians, and that they are among the most important people in England at present, it will serve its turn.

I wish to boast that Pygmalion has been an extremely successful play all over Europe and North America as well as at home. It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else.

Finally, and for the encouragement of people troubled with accents that cut them off from all high employment, I may add that the change wrought by Professor Higgins in the flower girl is neither impossible nor uncommon. The modern concierge's daughter who fulfils her ambition by playing the Queen of Spain in Ruy Blas at the Theatre Francais is only one of many thousands of men and women who have sloughed off their native dialects and acquired a new tongue. But the thing has to be done scientifically, or the last state of the aspirant may be worse than the first. An honest and natural slum dialect is more tolerable than the attempt of a phonetically untaught person to imitate the vulgar dialect of the golf club; and I am sorry to say that in spite of the efforts of our Academy of Dramatic Art, there is still too much sham golfing English on our stage, and too little of the noble English of Forbes Robertson.

ACT I

Covent Garden at 11.15 p.m. Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the market and under the portico of St. Paul's Church, where there are already several people, among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. They are all peering out gloomily at the rain, except one man with his back turned to the rest, who seems wholly preoccupied with a notebook in which he is writing busily.

The church clock strikes the first quarter.

THE DAUGHTER [in the space between the central pillars, close to the one on her left] I'm getting chilled to the bone. What can Freddy be doing all this time? He's been gone twenty minutes.

THE MOTHER [on her daughter's right] Not so long. But he ought to have got us a cab by this.

A BYSTANDER [on the lady's right] He won't get no cab not until half-past eleven, missus, when they come back after dropping their theatre fares.

THE MOTHER. But we must have a cab. We can't stand here until half-past eleven. It's too bad.

THE BYSTANDER. Well, it ain't my fault, missus.

THE DAUGHTER. If Freddy had a bit of gumption, he would have got one at the theatre door.

THE MOTHER. What could he have done, poor boy?

THE DAUGHTER. Other people got cabs. Why couldn't he?

Freddy rushes in out of the rain from the Southampton Street side, and comes between them closing a dripping umbrella. He is a young man of twenty, in evening dress, very wet around the ankles.

THE DAUGHTER. Well, haven't you got a cab?

FREDDY. There's not one to be had for love or money.

THE MOTHER. Oh, Freddy, there must be one. You can't have tried.

THE DAUGHTER. It's too tiresome. Do you expect us to go and get one ourselves?

FREDDY. I tell you they're all engaged. The rain was so sudden: nobody was prepared; and everybody had to take a cab. I've been to Charing Cross one way and nearly to Ludgate Circus the other; and they were all engaged.

THE MOTHER. Did you try Trafalgar Square?

FREDDY. There wasn't one at Trafalgar Square.

THE DAUGHTER. Did you try?

FREDDY. I tried as far as Charing Cross Station. Did you expect me to walk to Hammersmith?

THE DAUGHTER. You haven't tried at all.

THE MOTHER. You really are very helpless, Freddy. Go again; and don't come back until you have found a cab.

FREDDY. I shall simply get soaked for nothing.

THE DAUGHTER. And what about us? Are we to stay here all night in this draught, with next to nothing on. You selfish pig—

FREDDY. Oh, very well: I'll go, I'll go. [He opens his umbrella and dashes off Strandwards, but comes into collision with a flower girl, who is hurrying in for shelter, knocking her basket out of her hands. A blinding flash of lightning, followed instantly by a rattling peal of thunder, orchestrates the incident]

THE FLOWER GIRL. Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah.

FREDDY. Sorry [he rushes off].

THE FLOWER GIRL [picking up her scattered flowers and replacing them in the basket] There's menners f' yer! Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad. [She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady's right. She is not at all an attractive person. She is perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty, hardly older. She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. Her hair needs washing rather badly: its mousy color can hardly be natural. She wears a shoddy black coat that reaches nearly to her knees and is shaped to her waist. She has a brown skirt with a coarse apron. Her boots are much the worse for wear. She is no doubt as clean as she can afford to be; but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. Her features are no worse than theirs; but their condition leaves something to be desired; and she needs the services of a dentist].

THE MOTHER. How do you know that my son's name is Freddy, pray?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Ow, eez ye-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' de-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy atbaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them? [Here, with apologies, this desperate attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London.]

THE DAUGHTER. Do nothing of the sort, mother. The idea!

THE MOTHER. Please allow me, Clara. Have you any pennies?

THE DAUGHTER. No. I've nothing smaller than sixpence.

THE FLOWER GIRL [hopefully] I can give you change for a tanner, kind lady.

THE MOTHER [to Clara] Give it to me. [Clara parts reluctantly]. Now [to the girl] This is for your flowers.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Thank you kindly, lady.

THE DAUGHTER. Make her give you the change. These things are only a penny a bunch.

THE MOTHER. Do hold your tongue, Clara. [To the girl]. You can keep the change.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Oh, thank you, lady.

THE MOTHER. Now tell me how you know that young gentleman's name.

THE FLOWER GIRL. I didn't.

THE MOTHER. I heard you call him by it. Don't try to deceive me.

THE FLOWER GIRL [protesting] Who's trying to deceive you? I called him Freddy or Charlie same as you might yourself if you was talking to a stranger and wished to be pleasant. [She sits down beside her basket].

THE DAUGHTER. Sixpence thrown away! Really, mamma, you might have spared Freddy that. [She retreats in disgust behind the pillar].

An elderly gentleman of the amiable military type rushes into shelter, and closes a dripping umbrella. He is in the same plight as Freddy, very wet about the ankles. He is in evening dress, with a light overcoat. He takes the place left vacant by the daughter's retirement.

THE GENTLEMAN. Phew!

THE MOTHER [to the gentleman] Oh, sir, is there any sign of its stopping?

THE GENTLEMAN. I'm afraid not. It started worse than ever about two minutes ago. [He goes to the plinth beside the flower girl; puts up his foot on it; and stoops to turn down his trouser ends].

THE MOTHER. Oh, dear! [She retires sadly and joins her daughter].

THE FLOWER GIRL [taking advantage of the military gentleman's proximity to establish friendly relations with him]. If it's worse it's a sign it's

nearly over. So cheer up, Captain; and buy a flower off a poor girl.

THE GENTLEMAN. I'm sorry, I haven't any change.

THE FLOWER GIRL. I can give you change, Captain,

THE GENTLEMEN. For a sovereign? I've nothing less.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Garn! Oh do buy a flower off me, Captain. I can change half-a-crown. Take this for tuppence.

THE GENTLEMAN. Now don't be troublesome: there's a good girl. [Trying his pockets] I really haven't any change—Stop: here's three hapence, if that's any use to you [he retreats to the other pillar].

THE FLOWER GIRL [disappointed, but thinking three halfpence better than nothing] Thank you, sir.

THE BYSTANDER [to the girl] You be careful: give him a flower for it. There's a bloke here behind taking down every blessed word you're saying. [All turn to the man who is taking notes].

THE FLOWER GIRL [springing up terrified] I ain't done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman. I've a right to sell flowers if I keep off the kerb. [Hysterically] I'm a respectable girl: so help me, I never spoke to him except to ask him to buy a flower off me. [General hubbub, mostly sympathetic to the flower girl, but deprecating her excessive sensibility. Cries of Don't start hollerin. Who's hurting you? Nobody's going to touch you. What's the good of fussing? Steady on. Easy, easy, etc., come from the elderly staid spectators, who pat her comfortingly. Less patient ones bid her shut her head, or ask her roughly what is wrong with her. A remoter group, not knowing what the matter is, crowd in and increase the noise with question and answer: What's the row? What she do? Where is he? A tec taking her down. What! him? Yes: him over there: Took money off the gentleman, etc. The flower girl, distraught and mobbed, breaks through them to the gentleman, crying mildly] Oh, sir, don't let him charge me. You dunno what it means to me. They'll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen. They—

THE NOTE TAKER [coming forward on her right, the rest crowding after him] There, there, there, there! Who's hurting you, you silly girl? What do you take me for?

THE BYSTANDER. It's all right: he's a gentleman: look at his boots. [Explaining to the note taker] She thought you was a copper's nark, sir.

THE NOTE TAKER [with quick interest] What's a copper's nark?

THE BYSTANDER [inept at definition] It's a—well, it's a copper's nark, as you might say. What else would you call it? A sort of informer.

THE FLOWER GIRL [still hysterical] I take my Bible oath I never said a word—

THE NOTE TAKER [overbearing but good-humored] Oh, shut up, shut up. Do I look like a policeman?

THE FLOWER GIRL [far from reassured] Then what did you take down my words for? How do I know whether you took me down right? You just show me what you've wrote about me. [The note taker opens his book and holds it steadily under her nose, though the pressure of the mob trying to read it over his shoulders would upset a weaker man]. What's that? That ain't proper writing. I can't read that.

THE NOTE TAKER. I can. [Reads, reproducing her pronunciation exactly] "Cheer ap, Keptin; n' haw ya flahr orf a pore gel."

THE FLOWER GIRL [much distressed] It's because I called him Captain. I meant no harm. [To the gentleman] Oh, sir, don't let him lay a charge agen me for a word like that. You—

THE GENTLEMAN. Charge! I make no charge. [To the note taker] Really, sir, if you are a detective, you need not begin protecting me against molestation by young women until I ask you. Anybody could see that the girl meant no harm.

THE BYSTANDERS GENERALLY [demonstrating against police espionage] Course they could. What business is it of yours? You mind your own affairs. He wants promotion, he does. Taking down people's words! Girl never said a word to him. What harm if she did? Nice thing a girl can't shelter from the rain without being insulted, etc., etc., etc. [She is conducted by the more sympathetic demonstrators back to her plinth, where she resumes her seat and struggles with her emotion].

THE BYSTANDER. He ain't a tec. He's a blooming busybody: that's what he is. I tell you, look at his boots.

THE NOTE TAKER [turning on him genially] And how are all your people down at Selsey?

THE BYSTANDER [suspiciously] Who told you my people come from Selsey?

THE NOTE TAKER. Never you mind. They did. [To the girl] How do you come to be up so far east? You were born in Lisson Grove.

THE FLOWER GIRL [appalled] Oh, what harm is there in my leaving Lisson Grove? It wasn't fit for a pig to live in; and I had to pay four-and-six a week. [In tears] Oh, boo—hoo—oo—

THE NOTE TAKER. Live where you like; but stop that noise.

THE GENTLEMAN [to the girl] Come, come! he can't touch you: you have a right to live where you please.

A SARCASTIC BYSTANDER [thrusting himself between the note taker and the gentleman] Park Lane, for instance. I'd like to go into the Housing Question with you, I would.

THE FLOWER GIRL [subsiding into a brooding melancholy over her basket, and talking very low-spiritedly to herself] I'm a good girl, I am.

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER [not attending to her] Do you know where I come from?

THE NOTE TAKER [promptly] Hoxton.

Titterings. Popular interest in the note taker's performance increases.

THE SARCASTIC ONE [amazed] Well, who said I didn't? Bly me! You know everything, you do.

THE FLOWER GIRL [still nursing her sense of injury] Ain't no call to meddle with me, he ain't.

THE BYSTANDER [to her] Of course he ain't. Don't you stand it from him. [To the note taker] See here: what call have you to know about people what never offered to meddle with you? Where's your warrant?

SEVERAL BYSTANDERS [encouraged by this seeming point of law] Yes: where's your warrant?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Let him say what he likes. I don't want to have no truck with him.

THE BYSTANDER. You take us for dirt under your feet, don't you? Catch you taking liberties with a gentleman!

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER. Yes: tell HIM where he come from if you want to go fortune-telling.

THE NOTE TAKER. Cheltenham, Harrow, Cambridge, and India.

THE GENTLEMAN. Quite right. [Great laughter. Reaction in the note taker's favor. Exclamations of He knows all about it. Told him proper. Hear him tell the toff where he come from? etc.]. May I ask, sir, do you do this for your living at a music hall?

THE NOTE TAKER. I've thought of that. Perhaps I shall some day.

The rain has stopped; and the persons on the outside of the crowd begin to drop off.

THE FLOWER GIRL [resenting the reaction] He's no gentleman, he ain't, to interfere with a poor girl.

THE DAUGHTER [out of patience, pushing her way rudely to the front and displacing the gentleman, who politely retires to the other side of the pillar] What on earth is Freddy doing? I shall get pneumonia if I stay in this draught any longer.

THE NOTE TAKER [to himself, hastily making a note of her pronunciation of "monia"] Earlscourt.

THE DAUGHTER [violently] Will you please keep your impertinent remarks to yourself?

THE NOTE TAKER. Did I say that out loud? I didn't mean to. I beg your pardon. Your mother's Epsom, unmistakeably.

THE MOTHER [advancing between her daughter and the note taker] How very curious! I was brought up in Largelady Park, near Epsom.

THE NOTE TAKER [uproariously amused] Ha! ha! What a devil of a name! Excuse me. [To the daughter] You want a cab, do you?

THE DAUGHTER. Don't dare speak to me.

THE MOTHER. Oh, please, please Clara. [Her daughter repudiates her with an angry shrug and retires haughtily.] We should be so grateful to you, sir, if you found us a cab. [The note taker produces a whistle]. Oh, thank you. [She joins her daughter]. The note taker blows a piercing blast.

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER. There! I knowed he was a plain-clothes copper.

THE BYSTANDER. That ain't a police whistle: that's a sporting whistle.

THE FLOWER GIRL [still preoccupied with her wounded feelings] He's no right to take away my character. My character is the same to me as any lady's.

THE NOTE TAKER. I don't know whether you've noticed it; but the rain stopped about two minutes ago.

THE BYSTANDER. So it has. Why didn't you say so before? and us losing our time listening to your silliness. [He walks off towards the Strand].

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER. I can tell where you come from. You come from Anwell. Go back there.

THE NOTE TAKER [helpfully] Hanwell.

THE SARCASTIC BYSTANDER [affecting great distinction of speech]

Thenk you, teacher. Haw haw! So long [he touches his hat with mock respect and strolls off].

THE FLOWER GIRL. Frightening people like that! How would he like it himself.

THE MOTHER. It's quite fine now, Clara. We can walk to a motor bus. Come. [She gathers her skirts above her ankles and hurries off towards the Strand].

THE DAUGHTER. But the cab—[her mother is out of hearing]. Oh, how tiresome! [She follows angrily].

All the rest have gone except the note taker, the gentleman, and the flower girl, who sits arranging her basket, and still pitying herself in murmurs.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Poor girl! Hard enough for her to live without being worrited and chivied.

THE GENTLEMAN [returning to his former place on the note taker's left] How do you do it, if I may ask?

THE NOTE TAKER. Simply phonetics. The science of speech. That's my profession; also my hobby. Happy is the man who can make a living by his hobby! You can spot an Irishman or a Yorkshireman by his brogue. I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Ought to be ashamed of himself, unmanly coward!

THE GENTLEMAN. But is there a living in that?

THE NOTE TAKER. Oh yes. Quite a fat one. This is an age of upstarts. Men begin in Kentish Town with 80 pounds a year, and end in Park Lane with a hundred thousand. They want to drop Kentish Town; but they give themselves away every time they open their mouths. Now I can teach them—

THE FLOWER GIRL. Let him mind his own business and leave a poor girl—

THE NOTE TAKER [explosively] Woman: cease this detestable boohooing instantly; or else seek the shelter of some other place of worship.

THE FLOWER GIRL [with feeble defiance] I've a right to be here if I like, same as you.

THE NOTE TAKER. A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespear and Milton and The Bible; and

don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.

THE FLOWER GIRL [quite overwhelmed, and looking up at him in mingled wonder and deprecation without daring to raise her head] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo!

THE NOTE TAKER [whipping out his book] Heavens! what a sound! [He writes; then holds out the book and reads, reproducing her vowels exactly] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—ow—oo!

THE FLOWER GIRL [tickled by the performance, and laughing in spite of herself] Garn!

THE NOTE TAKER. You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English. That's the sort of thing I do for commercial millionaires. And on the profits of it I do genuine scientific work in phonetics, and a little as a poet on Miltonic lines.

THE GENTLEMAN. I am myself a student of Indian dialects; and—

THE NOTE TAKER [eagerly] Are you? Do you know Colonel Pickering, the author of Spoken Sanscrit?

THE GENTLEMAN. I am Colonel Pickering. Who are you?

THE NOTE TAKER. Henry Higgins, author of Higgins's Universal Alphabet.

PICKERING [with enthusiasm] I came from India to meet you.

HIGGINS. I was going to India to meet you.

PICKERING. Where do you live?

HIGGINS. 27A Wimpole Street. Come and see me tomorrow.

PICKERING. I'm at the Carlton. Come with me now and let's have a jaw over some supper.

HIGGINS. Right you are.

THE FLOWER GIRL [to Pickering, as he passes her] Buy a flower, kind gentleman. I'm short for my lodging.

PICKERING. I really haven't any change. I'm sorry [he goes away].

HIGGINS [shocked at girl's mendacity] Liar. You said you could change half-a-crown.

THE FLOWER GIRL [rising in desperation] You ought to be stuffed with nails, you ought. [Flinging the basket at his feet] Take the whole blooming basket for sixpence.

The church clock strikes the second quarter.

HIGGINS [hearing in it the voice of God, rebuking him for his Pharisaic want of charity to the poor girl] A reminder. [He raises his hat solemnly; then throws a handful of money into the basket and follows Pickering].

THE FLOWER GIRL [picking up a half-crown] Ah—ow—ooh! [Picking up a couple of florins] Aaah—ow—ooh! [Picking up several coins] Aaaaaah—ow—ooh! [Picking up a half-sovereign] Aasaaaaaaaaah—ow—ooh!!!

FREDDY [springing out of a taxicab] Got one at last. Hallo! [To the girl] Where are the two ladies that were here?

THE FLOWER GIRL. They walked to the bus when the rain stopped.

FREDDY. And left me with a cab on my hands. Damnation!

THE FLOWER GIRL [with grandeur] Never you mind, young man. I'm going home in a taxi. [She sails off to the cab. The driver puts his hand behind him and holds the door firmly shut against her. Quite understanding his mistrust, she shows him her handful of money]. Eightpence ain't no object to me, Charlie. [He grins and opens the door]. Angel Court, Drury Lane, round the corner of Micklejohn's oil shop. Let's see how fast you can make her hop it. [She gets in and pulls the door to with a slam as the taxicab starts].

FREDDY. Well, I'm dashed!

ACT II

Next day at 11 a.m. Higgins's laboratory in Wimpole Street. It is a room on the first floor, looking on the street, and was meant for the drawing-room. The double doors are in the middle of the back hall; and persons entering find in the corner to their right two tall file cabinets at right angles to one another against the walls. In this corner stands a flat writing-table, on which are a phonograph, a laryngoscope, a row of tiny organ pipes with a bellows, a set of lamp chimneys for singing flames with burners attached to a gas plug in the wall by an indiarubber tube, several tuning-forks of different sizes, a life-size image of half a human head, showing in section the vocal organs, and a box containing a supply of wax cylinders for the phonograph.

Further down the room, on the same side, is a fireplace, with a comfortable

leather-covered easy-chair at the side of the hearth nearest the door, and a coal-scuttle. There is a clock on the mantelpiece. Between the fireplace and the phonograph table is a stand for newspapers.

On the other side of the central door, to the left of the visitor, is a cabinet of shallow drawers. On it is a telephone and the telephone directory. The corner beyond, and most of the side wall, is occupied by a grand piano, with the keyboard at the end furthest from the door, and a bench for the player extending the full length of the keyboard. On the piano is a dessert dish heaped with fruit and sweets, mostly chocolates.

The middle of the room is clear. Besides the easy chair, the piano bench, and two chairs at the phonograph table, there is one stray chair. It stands near the fireplace. On the walls, engravings; mostly Piranesis and mezzotint portraits. No paintings.

Pickering is seated at the table, putting down some cards and a tuning-fork which he has been using. Higgins is standing up near him, closing two or three file drawers which are hanging out. He appears in the morning light as a robust, vital, appetizing sort of man of forty or thereabouts, dressed in a professional-looking black frock-coat with a white linen collar and black silk tie. He is of the energetic, scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people, including their feelings. He is, in fact, but for his years and size, rather like a very impetuous baby "taking notice" eagerly and loudly, and requiring almost as much watching to keep him out of unintended mischief. His manner varies from genial bullying when he is in a good humor to stormy petulance when anything goes wrong; but he is so entirely frank and void of malice that he remains likeable even in his least reasonable moments.

HIGGINS [as he shuts the last drawer] Well, I think that's the whole show.

PICKERING. It's really amazing. I haven't taken half of it in, you know.

HIGGINS. Would you like to go over any of it again?

PICKERING [rising and coming to the fireplace, where he plants himself with his back to the fire] No, thank you; not now. I'm quite done up for this morning.

HIGGINS [following him, and standing beside him on his left] Tired of listening to sounds?

PICKERING. Yes. It's a fearful strain. I rather fancied myself because I can pronounce twenty-four distinct vowel sounds; but your hundred and thirty beat me. I can't hear a bit of difference between most of them.

HIGGINS [chuckling, and going over to the piano to eat sweets] Oh, that

comes with practice. You hear no difference at first; but you keep on listening, and presently you find they're all as different as A from B. [Mrs. Pearce looks in: she is Higgins's housekeeper] What's the matter?

MRS. PEARCE [hesitating, evidently perplexed] A young woman wants to see you, sir.

HIGGINS. A young woman! What does she want?

MRS. PEARCE. Well, sir, she says you'll be glad to see her when you know what she's come about. She's quite a common girl, sir. Very common indeed. I should have sent her away, only I thought perhaps you wanted her to talk into your machines. I hope I've not done wrong; but really you see such queer people sometimes—you'll excuse me, I'm sure, sir—

HIGGINS. Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Pearce. Has she an interesting accent?

MRS. PEARCE. Oh, something dreadful, sir, really. I don't know how you can take an interest in it.

HIGGINS [to Pickering] Let's have her up. Show her up, Mrs. Pearce [he rushes across to his working table and picks out a cylinder to use on the phonograph].

MRS. PEARCE [only half resigned to it] Very well, sir. It's for you to say. [She goes downstairs].

HIGGINS. This is rather a bit of luck. I'll show you how I make records. We'll set her talking; and I'll take it down first in Bell's visible Speech; then in broad Romic; and then we'll get her on the phonograph so that you can turn her on as often as you like with the written transcript before you.

MRS. PEARCE [returning] This is the young woman, sir.

The flower girl enters in state. She has a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky-blue, and red. She has a nearly clean apron, and the shoddy coat has been tidied a little. The pathos of this deplorable figure, with its innocent vanity and consequential air, touches Pickering, who has already straightened himself in the presence of Mrs. Pearce. But as to Higgins, the only distinction he makes between men and women is that when he is neither bullying nor exclaiming to the heavens against some featherweight cross, he coaxes women as a child coaxes its nurse when it wants to get anything out of her.

HIGGINS [brusquely, recognizing her with unconcealed disappointment, and at once, baby-like, making an intolerable grievance of it] Why, this is the girl I jotted down last night. She's no use: I've got all the records I want of the Lisson Grove lingo; and I'm not going to waste another cylinder on it. [To the girl] Be off with you: I don't want you.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Don't you be so saucy. You ain't heard what I come for yet. [To Mrs. Pearce, who is waiting at the door for further instruction] Did you tell him I come in a taxi?

MRS. PEARCE. Nonsense, girl! what do you think a gentleman like Mr. Higgins cares what you came in?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Oh, we are proud! He ain't above giving lessons, not him: I heard him say so. Well, I ain't come here to ask for any compliment; and if my money's not good enough I can go elsewhere.

HIGGINS. Good enough for what?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Good enough for ye—oo. Now you know, don't you? I'm come to have lessons, I am. And to pay for em too: make no mistake.

HIGGINS [stupent] WELL!!! [Recovering his breath with a gasp] What do you expect me to say to you?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Well, if you was a gentleman, you might ask me to sit down, I think. Don't I tell you I'm bringing you business?

HIGGINS. Pickering: shall we ask this baggage to sit down or shall we throw her out of the window?

THE FLOWER GIRL [running away in terror to the piano, where she turns at bay] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—ow—oo! [Wounded and whimpering] I won't be called a baggage when I've offered to pay like any lady.

Motionless, the two men stare at her from the other side of the room, amazed.

PICKERING [gently] What is it you want, my girl?

THE FLOWER GIRL. I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel. He said he could teach me. Well, here I am ready to pay him —not asking any favor—and he treats me as if I was dirt.

MRS. PEARCE. How can you be such a foolish ignorant girl as to think you could afford to pay Mr. Higgins?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Why shouldn't I? I know what lessons cost as well as you do; and I'm ready to pay.

HIGGINS. How much?

THE FLOWER GIRL [coming back to him, triumphant] Now you're talking! I thought you'd come off it when you saw a chance of getting back a bit of what you chucked at me last night. [Confidentially] You'd had a drop in, hadn't you?

HIGGINS [peremptorily] Sit down.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Oh, if you're going to make a compliment of it—

HIGGINS [thundering at her] Sit down.

MRS. PEARCE [severely] Sit down, girl. Do as you're told. [She places the stray chair near the hearthrug between Higgins and Pickering, and stands behind it waiting for the girl to sit down].

THE FLOWER GIRL. Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo! [She stands, half rebellious, half bewildered].

PICKERING [very courteous] Won't you sit down?

LIZA [coyly] Don't mind if I do. [She sits down. Pickering returns to the hearthrug].

HIGGINS. What's your name?

THE FLOWER GIRL. Liza Doolittle.

HIGGINS [declaiming gravely] Eliza, Elizabeth, Betsy and Bess, They went to the woods to get a bird's nes':

PICKERING. They found a nest with four eggs in it:

HIGGINS. They took one apiece, and left three in it.

They laugh heartily at their own wit.

LIZA. Oh, don't be silly.

MRS. PEARCE. You mustn't speak to the gentleman like that.

LIZA. Well, why won't he speak sensible to me?

HIGGINS. Come back to business. How much do you propose to pay me for the lessons?

LIZA. Oh, I know what's right. A lady friend of mine gets French lessons for eighteenpence an hour from a real French gentleman. Well, you wouldn't have the face to ask me the same for teaching me my own language as you would for French; so I won't give more than a shilling. Take it or leave it.

HIGGINS [walking up and down the room, rattling his keys and his cash in his pockets] You know, Pickering, if you consider a shilling, not as a simple shilling, but as a percentage of this girl's income, it works out as fully equivalent to sixty or seventy guineas from a millionaire.

PICKERING. How so?

HIGGINS. Figure it out. A millionaire has about 150 pounds a day. She earns about half-a-crown.

LIZA [haughtily] Who told you I only—

HIGGINS [continuing] She offers me two-fifths of her day's income for a lesson. Two-fifths of a millionaire's income for a day would be somewhere about 60 pounds. It's handsome. By George, it's enormous! it's the biggest offer I ever had.

LIZA [rising, terrified] Sixty pounds! What are you talking about? I never offered you sixty pounds. Where would I get—

HIGGINS. Hold your tongue.

LIZA [weeping] But I ain't got sixty pounds. Oh—

MRS. PEARCE. Don't cry, you silly girl. Sit down. Nobody is going to touch your money.

HIGGINS. Somebody is going to touch you, with a broomstick, if you don't stop snivelling. Sit down.

LIZA [obeying slowly] Ah—ah—ah—ow—oo—o! One would think you was my father.

HIGGINS. If I decide to teach you, I'll be worse than two fathers to you. Here [he offers her his silk handkerchief]!

LIZA. What's this for?

HIGGINS. To wipe your eyes. To wipe any part of your face that feels moist. Remember: that's your handkerchief; and that's your sleeve. Don't mistake the one for the other if you wish to become a lady in a shop.

Liza, utterly bewildered, stares helplessly at him.

MRS. PEARCE. It's no use talking to her like that, Mr. Higgins: she doesn't understand you. Besides, you're quite wrong: she doesn't do it that way at all [she takes the handkerchief].

LIZA [snatching it] Here! You give me that handkerchief. He give it to me, not to you.

PICKERING [laughing] He did. I think it must be regarded as her property, Mrs. Pearce.

MRS. PEARCE [resigning herself] Serve you right, Mr. Higgins.

PICKERING. Higgins: I'm interested. What about the ambassador's garden party? I'll say you're the greatest teacher alive if you make that good. I'll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can't do it. And I'll pay for the lessons.

LIZA. Oh, you are real good. Thank you, Captain.

HIGGINS [tempted, looking at her] It's almost irresistible. She's so deliciously low—so horribly dirty—

LIZA [protesting extremely] Ah—ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oooo!!! I ain't dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did.

PICKERING. You're certainly not going to turn her head with flattery, Higgins.

MRS. PEARCE [uneasy] Oh, don't say that, sir: there's more ways than one of turning a girl's head; and nobody can do it better than Mr. Higgins, though he may not always mean it. I do hope, sir, you won't encourage him to do anything foolish.

HIGGINS [becoming excited as the idea grows on him] What is life but a series of inspired follies? The difficulty is to find them to do. Never lose a chance: it doesn't come every day. I shall make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe.

LIZA [strongly deprecating this view of her] Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo!

HIGGINS [carried away] Yes: in six months—in three if she has a good ear and a quick tongue—I'll take her anywhere and pass her off as anything. We'll start today: now! this moment! Take her away and clean her, Mrs. Pearce. Monkey Brand, if it won't come off any other way. Is there a good fire in the kitchen?

MRS. PEARCE [protesting]. Yes; but—

HIGGINS [storming on] Take all her clothes off and burn them. Ring up Whiteley or somebody for new ones. Wrap her up in brown paper till they come.

LIZA. You're no gentleman, you're not, to talk of such things. I'm a good girl, I am; and I know what the like of you are, I do.

HIGGINS. We want none of your Lisson Grove prudery here, young woman. You've got to learn to behave like a duchess. Take her away, Mrs. Pearce. If she gives you any trouble wallop her.

LIZA [springing up and running between Pickering and Mrs. Pearce for protection] No! I'll call the police, I will.

MRS. PEARCE. But I've no place to put her.

HIGGINS. Put her in the dustbin.

LIZA. Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo!

PICKERING. Oh come, Higgins! be reasonable.

MRS. PEARCE [resolutely] You must be reasonable, Mr. Higgins: really you must. You can't walk over everybody like this.

Higgins, thus scolded, subsides. The hurricane is succeeded by a zephyr of amiable surprise.

HIGGINS [with professional exquisiteness of modulation] I walk over everybody! My dear Mrs. Pearce, my dear Pickering, I never had the slightest intention of walking over anyone. All I propose is that we should be kind to this poor girl. We must help her to prepare and fit herself for her new station in life. If I did not express myself clearly it was because I did not wish to hurt her delicacy, or yours.

Liza, reassured, steals back to her chair.

MRS. PEARCE [to Pickering] Well, did you ever hear anything like that, sir?

PICKERING [laughing heartily] Never, Mrs. Pearce: never.

HIGGINS [patiently] What's the matter?

MRS. PEARCE. Well, the matter is, sir, that you can't take a girl up like that as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach.

HIGGINS. Why not?

MRS. PEARCE. Why not! But you don't know anything about her. What about her parents? She may be married.

LIZA. Garn!

HIGGINS. There! As the girl very properly says, Garn! Married indeed! Don't you know that a woman of that class looks a worn out drudge of fifty a year after she's married.

LIZA. Who'd marry me?

HIGGINS [suddenly resorting to the most thrillingly beautiful low tones in his best elocutionary style] By George, Eliza, the streets will be strewn with the bodies of men shooting themselves for your sake before I've done with you.

MRS. PEARCE. Nonsense, sir. You mustn't talk like that to her.

LIZA [rising and squaring herself determinedly] I'm going away. He's off his chump, he is. I don't want no balmies teaching me.

HIGGINS [wounded in his tenderest point by her insensibility to his elocution] Oh, indeed! I'm mad, am I? Very well, Mrs. Pearce: you needn't order the new clothes for her. Throw her out.

LIZA [whimpering] Nah—ow. You got no right to touch me.

MRS. PEARCE. You see now what comes of being saucy. [Indicating the door] This way, please.

LIZA [almost in tears] I didn't want no clothes. I wouldn't have taken them [she throws away the handkerchief]. I can buy my own clothes.

HIGGINS [deftly retrieving the handkerchief and intercepting her on her reluctant way to the door] You're an ungrateful wicked girl. This is my return for offering to take you out of the gutter and dress you beautifully and make a lady of you.

MRS. PEARCE. Stop, Mr. Higgins. I won't allow it. It's you that are wicked. Go home to your parents, girl; and tell them to take better care of you.

LIZA. I ain't got no parents. They told me I was big enough to earn my own living and turned me out.

MRS. PEARCE. Where's your mother?

LIZA. I ain't got no mother. Her that turned me out was my sixth stepmother. But I done without them. And I'm a good girl, I am.

HIGGINS. Very well, then, what on earth is all this fuss about? The girl doesn't belong to anybody—is no use to anybody but me. [He goes to Mrs. Pearce and begins coaxing]. You can adopt her, Mrs. Pearce: I'm sure a daughter would be a great amusement to you. Now don't make any more fuss. Take her downstairs; and—

MRS. PEARCE. But what's to become of her? Is she to be paid anything? Do be sensible, sir.

HIGGINS. Oh, pay her whatever is necessary: put it down in the housekeeping book. [Impatiently] What on earth will she want with money? She'll have her food and her clothes. She'll only drink if you give her money.

LIZA [turning on him] Oh you are a brute. It's a lie: nobody ever saw the sign of liquor on me. [She goes back to her chair and plants herself there defiantly].

PICKERING [in good-humored remonstrance] Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?

HIGGINS [looking critically at her] Oh no, I don't think so. Not any feelings that we need bother about. [Cheerily] Have you, Eliza?

LIZA. I got my feelings same as anyone else.

HIGGINS [to Pickering, reflectively] You see the difficulty?

PICKERING. Eh? What difficulty?

HIGGINS. To get her to talk grammar. The mere pronunciation is easy enough.

LIZA. I don't want to talk grammar. I want to talk like a lady.

MRS. PEARCE. Will you please keep to the point, Mr. Higgins. I want to know on what terms the girl is to be here. Is she to have any wages? And what is to become of her when you've finished your teaching? You must look ahead a little.

HIGGINS [impatiently] What's to become of her if I leave her in the gutter? Tell me that, Mrs. Pearce.

MRS. PEARCE. That's her own business, not yours, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS. Well, when I've done with her, we can throw her back into the gutter; and then it will be her own business again; so that's all right.

LIZA. Oh, you've no feeling heart in you: you don't care for nothing but yourself [she rises and takes the floor resolutely]. Here! I've had enough of this. I'm going [making for the door]. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you ought.

HIGGINS [snatching a chocolate cream from the piano, his eyes suddenly beginning to twinkle with mischief] Have some chocolates, Eliza.

LIZA [halting, tempted] How do I know what might be in them? I've heard of girls being drugged by the like of you.

Higgins whips out his penknife; cuts a chocolate in two; puts one half into his mouth and bolts it; and offers her the other half.

HIGGINS. Pledge of good faith, Eliza. I eat one half you eat the other.

[Liza opens her mouth to retort: he pops the half chocolate into it]. You shall have boxes of them, barrels of them, every day. You shall live on them. Eh?

LIZA [who has disposed of the chocolate after being nearly choked by it] I wouldn't have ate it, only I'm too ladylike to take it out of my mouth.

HIGGINS. Listen, Eliza. I think you said you came in a taxi.

LIZA. Well, what if I did? I've as good a right to take a taxi as anyone else.

HIGGINS. You have, Eliza; and in future you shall have as many taxis as you want. You shall go up and down and round the town in a taxi every day. Think of that, Eliza.

MRS. PEARCE. Mr. Higgins: you're tempting the girl. It's not right. She

should think of the future.

HIGGINS. At her age! Nonsense! Time enough to think of the future when you haven't any future to think of. No, Eliza: do as this lady does: think of other people's futures; but never think of your own. Think of chocolates, and taxis, and gold, and diamonds.

LIZA. No: I don't want no gold and no diamonds. I'm a good girl, I am. [She sits down again, with an attempt at dignity].

HIGGINS. You shall remain so, Eliza, under the care of Mrs. Pearce. And you shall marry an officer in the Guards, with a beautiful moustache: the son of a marquis, who will disinherit him for marrying you, but will relent when he sees your beauty and goodness—

PICKERING. Excuse me, Higgins; but I really must interfere. Mrs. Pearce is quite right. If this girl is to put herself in your hands for six months for an experiment in teaching, she must understand thoroughly what she's doing.

HIGGINS. How can she? She's incapable of understanding anything. Besides, do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?

PICKERING. Very clever, Higgins; but not sound sense. [To Eliza] Miss Doolittle—

LIZA [overwhelmed] Ah—ah—ow—oo!

HIGGINS. There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah—ah—ow—oo! No use explaining. As a military man you ought to know that. Give her her orders: that's what she wants. Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you're naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs. Pearce with a broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the King finds out you're not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls. If you are not found out, you shall have a present of seven-and-sixpence to start life with as a lady in a shop. If you refuse this offer you will be a most ungrateful and wicked girl; and the angels will weep for you. [To Pickering] Now are you satisfied, Pickering? [To Mrs. Pearce] Can I put it more plainly and fairly, Mrs. Pearce?

MRS. PEARCE [patiently] I think you'd better let me speak to the girl properly in private. I don't know that I can take charge of her or consent to the

arrangement at all. Of course I know you don't mean her any harm; but when you get what you call interested in people's accents, you never think or care what may happen to them or you. Come with me, Eliza.

HIGGINS. That's all right. Thank you, Mrs. Pearce. Bundle her off to the bath-room.

LIZA [rising reluctantly and suspiciously] You're a great bully, you are. I won't stay here if I don't like. I won't let nobody wallop me. I never asked to go to Bucknam Palace, I didn't. I was never in trouble with the police, not me. I'm a good girl—

MRS. PEARCE. Don't answer back, girl. You don't understand the gentleman. Come with me. [She leads the way to the door, and holds it open for Eliza].

LIZA [as she goes out] Well, what I say is right. I won't go near the king, not if I'm going to have my head cut off. If I'd known what I was letting myself in for, I wouldn't have come here. I always been a good girl; and I never offered to say a word to him; and I don't owe him nothing; and I don't care; and I won't be put upon; and I have my feelings the same as anyone else —

Mrs. Pearce shuts the door; and Eliza's plaints are no longer audible. Pickering comes from the hearth to the chair and sits astride it with his arms on the back.

PICKERING. Excuse the straight question, Higgins. Are you a man of good character where women are concerned?

HIGGINS [moodily] Have you ever met a man of good character where women are concerned?

PICKERING. Yes: very frequently.

HIGGINS [dogmatically, lifting himself on his hands to the level of the piano, and sitting on it with a bounce] Well, I haven't. I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you're driving at another.

PICKERING. At what, for example?

HIGGINS [coming off the piano restlessly] Oh, Lord knows! I suppose the woman wants to live her own life; and the man wants to live his; and each tries to drag the other on to the wrong track. One wants to go north and the other south; and the result is that both have to go east, though they both hate the east

wind. [He sits down on the bench at the keyboard]. So here I am, a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so.

PICKERING [rising and standing over him gravely] Come, Higgins! You know what I mean. If I'm to be in this business I shall feel responsible for that girl. I hope it's understood that no advantage is to be taken of her position.

HIGGINS. What! That thing! Sacred, I assure you. [Rising to explain] You see, she'll be a pupil; and teaching would be impossible unless pupils were sacred. I've taught scores of American millionairesses how to speak English: the best looking women in the world. I'm seasoned. They might as well be blocks of wood. I might as well be a block of wood. It's—

Mrs. Pearce opens the door. She has Eliza's hat in her hand. Pickering retires to the easy-chair at the hearth and sits down.

HIGGINS [eagerly] Well, Mrs. Pearce: is it all right?

MRS. PEARCE [at the door] I just wish to trouble you with a word, if I may, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS. Yes, certainly. Come in. [She comes forward]. Don't burn that, Mrs. Pearce. I'll keep it as a curiosity. [He takes the hat].

MRS. PEARCE. Handle it carefully, sir, please. I had to promise her not to burn it; but I had better put it in the oven for a while.

HIGGINS [putting it down hastily on the piano] Oh! thank you. Well, what have you to say to me?

PICKERING. Am I in the way?

MRS. PEARCE. Not at all, sir. Mr. Higgins: will you please be very particular what you say before the girl?

HIGGINS [sternly] Of course. I'm always particular about what I say. Why do you say this to me?

MRS. PEARCE [unmoved] No, sir: you're not at all particular when you've mislaid anything or when you get a little impatient. Now it doesn't matter before me: I'm used to it. But you really must not swear before the girl.

HIGGINS [indignantly] I swear! [Most emphatically] I never swear. I detest the habit. What the devil do you mean?

MRS. PEARCE [stolidly] That's what I mean, sir. You swear a great deal too much. I don't mind your damning and blasting, and what the devil and where the devil and who the devil—

HIGGINS. Really! Mrs. Pearce: this language from your lips!

MRS. PEARCE [not to be put off]—but there is a certain word I must ask you not to use. The girl has just used it herself because the bath was too hot. It begins with the same letter as bath. She knows no better: she learnt it at her mother's knee. But she must not hear it from your lips.

HIGGINS [loftily] I cannot charge myself with having ever uttered it, Mrs. Pearce. [She looks at him steadfastly. He adds, hiding an uneasy conscience with a judicial air] Except perhaps in a moment of extreme and justifiable excitement.

MRS. PEARCE. Only this morning, sir, you applied it to your boots, to the butter, and to the brown bread.

HIGGINS. Oh, that! Mere alliteration, Mrs. Pearce, natural to a poet.

MRS. PEARCE. Well, sir, whatever you choose to call it, I beg you not to let the girl hear you repeat it.

HIGGINS. Oh, very well, very well. Is that all?

MRS. PEARCE. No, sir. We shall have to be very particular with this girl as to personal cleanliness.

HIGGINS. Certainly. Quite right. Most important.

MRS. PEARCE. I mean not to be slovenly about her dress or untidy in leaving things about.

HIGGINS [going to her solemnly] Just so. I intended to call your attention to that [He passes on to Pickering, who is enjoying the conversation immensely]. It is these little things that matter, Pickering. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves is as true of personal habits as of money. [He comes to anchor on the hearthrug, with the air of a man in an unassailable position].

MRS. PEARCE. Yes, sir. Then might I ask you not to come down to breakfast in your dressing-gown, or at any rate not to use it as a napkin to the extent you do, sir. And if you would be so good as not to eat everything off the same plate, and to remember not to put the porridge saucepan out of your hand on the clean tablecloth, it would be a better example to the girl. You know you nearly choked yourself with a fishbone in the jam only last week.

HIGGINS [routed from the hearthrug and drifting back to the piano] I may do these things sometimes in absence of mind; but surely I don't do them habitually. [Angrily] By the way: my dressing-gown smells most damnably of benzine.

MRS. PEARCE. No doubt it does, Mr. Higgins. But if you will wipe your fingers—

HIGGINS [yelling] Oh very well, very well: I'll wipe them in my hair in future.

MRS. PEARCE. I hope you're not offended, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS [shocked at finding himself thought capable of an unamiable sentiment] Not at all, not at all. You're quite right, Mrs. Pearce: I shall be particularly careful before the girl. Is that all?

MRS. PEARCE. No, sir. Might she use some of those Japanese dresses you brought from abroad? I really can't put her back into her old things.

HIGGINS. Certainly. Anything you like. Is that all?

MRS. PEARCE. Thank you, sir. That's all. [She goes out].

HIGGINS. You know, Pickering, that woman has the most extraordinary ideas about me. Here I am, a shy, diffident sort of man. I've never been able to feel really grown-up and tremendous, like other chaps. And yet she's firmly persuaded that I'm an arbitrary overbearing bossing kind of person. I can't account for it.

Mrs. Pearce returns.

MRS. PEARCE. If you please, sir, the trouble's beginning already. There's a dustman downstairs, Alfred Doolittle, wants to see you. He says you have his daughter here.

PICKERING [rising] Phew! I say! [He retreats to the hearthrug].

HIGGINS [promptly] Send the blackguard up.

MRS. PEARCE. Oh, very well, sir. [She goes out].

PICKERING. He may not be a blackguard, Higgins.

HIGGINS. Nonsense. Of course he's a blackguard.

PICKERING. Whether he is or not, I'm afraid we shall have some trouble with him.

HIGGINS [confidently] Oh no: I think not. If there's any trouble he shall have it with me, not I with him. And we are sure to get something interesting out of him.

PICKERING. About the girl?

HIGGINS. No. I mean his dialect.

PICKERING. Oh!

MRS. PEARCE [at the door] Doolittle, sir. [She admits Doolittle and retires].

Alfred Doolittle is an elderly but vigorous dustman, clad in the costume of his profession, including a hat with a back brim covering his neck and shoulders. He has well marked and rather interesting features, and seems equally free from fear and conscience. He has a remarkably expressive voice, the result of a habit of giving vent to his feelings without reserve. His present pose is that of wounded honor and stern resolution.

DOOLITTLE [at the door, uncertain which of the two gentlemen is his man] Professor Higgins?

HIGGINS. Here. Good morning. Sit down.

DOOLITTLE. Morning, Governor. [He sits down magisterially] I come about a very serious matter, Governor.

HIGGINS [to Pickering] Brought up in Hounslow. Mother Welsh, I should think. [Doolittle opens his mouth, amazed. Higgins continues] What do you want, Doolittle?

DOOLITTLE [menacingly] I want my daughter: that's what I want. See?

HIGGINS. Of course you do. You're her father, aren't you? You don't suppose anyone else wants her, do you? I'm glad to see you have some spark of family feeling left. She's upstairs. Take her away at once.

DOOLITTLE [rising, fearfully taken aback] What!

HIGGINS. Take her away. Do you suppose I'm going to keep your daughter for you?

DOOLITTLE [remonstrating] Now, now, look here, Governor. Is this reasonable? Is it fair to take advantage of a man like this? The girl belongs to me. You got her. Where do I come in? [He sits down again].

HIGGINS. Your daughter had the audacity to come to my house and ask me to teach her how to speak properly so that she could get a place in a flower-shop. This gentleman and my housekeeper have been here all the time. [Bullying him] How dare you come here and attempt to blackmail me? You sent her here on purpose.

DOOLITTLE [protesting] No, Governor.

HIGGINS. You must have. How else could you possibly know that she is here?

DOOLITTLE. Don't take a man up like that, Governor.

HIGGINS. The police shall take you up. This is a plant—a plot to extort money by threats. I shall telephone for the police [he goes resolutely to the telephone and opens the directory].

DOOLITTLE. Have I asked you for a brass farthing? I leave it to the gentleman here: have I said a word about money?

HIGGINS [throwing the book aside and marching down on Doolittle with a poser] What else did you come for?

DOOLITTLE [sweetly] Well, what would a man come for? Be human, governor.

HIGGINS [disarmed] Alfred: did you put her up to it?

DOOLITTLE. So help me, Governor, I never did. I take my Bible oath I ain't seen the girl these two months past.

HIGGINS. Then how did you know she was here?

DOOLITTLE ["most musical, most melancholy"] I'll tell you, Governor, if you'll only let me get a word in. I'm willing to tell you. I'm wanting to tell you. I'm waiting to tell you.

HIGGINS. Pickering: this chap has a certain natural gift of rhetoric. Observe the rhythm of his native woodnotes wild. "I'm willing to tell you: I'm wanting to tell you: I'm waiting to tell you." Sentimental rhetoric! That's the Welsh strain in him. It also accounts for his mendacity and dishonesty.

PICKERING. Oh, PLEASE, Higgins: I'm west country myself. [To Doolittle] How did you know the girl was here if you didn't send her?

DOOLITTLE. It was like this, Governor. The girl took a boy in the taxi to give him a jaunt. Son of her landlady, he is. He hung about on the chance of her giving him another ride home. Well, she sent him back for her luggage when she heard you was willing for her to stop here. I met the boy at the corner of Long Acre and Endell Street.

HIGGINS. Public house. Yes?

DOOLITTLE. The poor man's club, Governor: why shouldn't I?

PICKERING. Do let him tell his story, Higgins.

DOOLITTLE. He told me what was up. And I ask you, what was my feelings and my duty as a father? I says to the boy, "You bring me the luggage," I says—

PICKERING. Why didn't you go for it yourself?

DOOLITTLE. Landlady wouldn't have trusted me with it, Governor. She's that kind of woman: you know. I had to give the boy a penny afore he trusted me with it, the little swine. I brought it to her just to oblige you like, and make myself agreeable. That's all.

HIGGINS. How much luggage?

DOOLITTLE. Musical instrument, Governor. A few pictures, a trifle of jewelry, and a bird-cage. She said she didn't want no clothes. What was I to think from that, Governor? I ask you as a parent what was I to think?

HIGGINS. So you came to rescue her from worse than death, eh?

DOOLITTLE [appreciatively: relieved at being understood] Just so, Governor. That's right.

PICKERING. But why did you bring her luggage if you intended to take her away?

DOOLITTLE. Have I said a word about taking her away? Have I now?

HIGGINS [determinedly] You're going to take her away, double quick. [He crosses to the hearth and rings the bell].

DOOLITTLE [rising] No, Governor. Don't say that. I'm not the man to stand in my girl's light. Here's a career opening for her, as you might say; and —

Mrs. Pearce opens the door and awaits orders.

HIGGINS. Mrs. Pearce: this is Eliza's father. He has come to take her away. Give her to him. [He goes back to the piano, with an air of washing his hands of the whole affair].

DOOLITTLE. No. This is a misunderstanding. Listen here—

MRS. PEARCE. He can't take her away, Mr. Higgins: how can he? You told me to burn her clothes.

DOOLITTLE. That's right. I can't carry the girl through the streets like a blooming monkey, can I? I put it to you.

HIGGINS. You have put it to me that you want your daughter. Take your daughter. If she has no clothes go out and buy her some.

DOOLITTLE [desperate] Where's the clothes she come in? Did I burn them or did your missus here?

MRS. PEARCE. I am the housekeeper, if you please. I have sent for some clothes for your girl. When they come you can take her away. You can wait in the kitchen. This way, please.

Doolittle, much troubled, accompanies her to the door; then hesitates; finally turns confidentially to Higgins.

DOOLITTLE. Listen here, Governor. You and me is men of the world, ain't we?

HIGGINS. Oh! Men of the world, are we? You'd better go, Mrs. Pearce.

MRS. PEARCE. I think so, indeed, sir. [She goes, with dignity].

PICKERING. The floor is yours, Mr. Doolittle.

DOOLITTLE [to Pickering] I thank you, Governor. [To Higgins, who takes refuge on the piano bench, a little overwhelmed by the proximity of his visitor; for Doolittle has a professional flavor of dust about him]. Well, the truth is, I've taken a sort of fancy to you, Governor; and if you want the girl, I'm not so set on having her back home again but what I might be open to an arrangement. Regarded in the light of a young woman, she's a fine handsome girl. As a daughter she's not worth her keep; and so I tell you straight. All I ask is my rights as a father; and you're the last man alive to expect me to let her go for nothing; for I can see you're one of the straight sort, Governor. Well, what's a five pound note to you? And what's Eliza to me? [He returns to his chair and sits down judicially].

PICKERING. I think you ought to know, Doolittle, that Mr. Higgins's intentions are entirely honorable.

DOOLITTLE. Course they are, Governor. If I thought they wasn't, I'd ask fifty.

HIGGINS [revolted] Do you mean to say, you callous rascal, that you would sell your daughter for 50 pounds?

DOOLITTLE. Not in a general way I wouldn't; but to oblige a gentleman like you I'd do a good deal, I do assure you.

PICKERING. Have you no morals, man?

DOOLITTLE [unabashed] Can't afford them, Governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me. Not that I mean any harm, you know. But if Liza is going to have a bit out of this, why not me too?

HIGGINS [troubled] I don't know what to do, Pickering. There can be no question that as a matter of morals it's a positive crime to give this chap a farthing. And yet I feel a sort of rough justice in his claim.

DOOLITTLE. That's it, Governor. That's all I say. A father's heart, as it were.

PICKERING. Well, I know the feeling; but really it seems hardly right—

DOOLITTLE. Don't say that, Governor. Don't look at it that way. What am I, Governors both? I ask you, what am I? I'm one of the undeserving poor: that's what I am. Think of what that means to a man. It means that he's up agen middle class morality all the time. If there's anything going, and I put in for a bit of it, it's always the same story: "You're undeserving; so you can't have it."

But my needs is as great as the most deserving widow's that ever got money out of six different charities in one week for the death of the same husband. I don't need less than a deserving man: I need more. I don't eat less hearty than him; and I drink a lot more. I want a bit of amusement, cause I'm a thinking man. I want cheerfulness and a song and a band when I feel low. Well, they charge me just the same for everything as they charge the deserving. What is middle class morality? Just an excuse for never giving me anything. Therefore, I ask you, as two gentlemen, not to play that game on me. I'm playing straight with you. I ain't pretending to be deserving. I'm undeserving; and I mean to go on being undeserving. I like it; and that's the truth. Will you take advantage of a man's nature to do him out of the price of his own daughter what he's brought up and fed and clothed by the sweat of his brow until she's growed big enough to be interesting to you two gentlemen? Is five pounds unreasonable? I put it to you; and I leave it to you.

HIGGINS [rising, and going over to Pickering] Pickering: if we were to take this man in hand for three months, he could choose between a seat in the Cabinet and a popular pulpit in Wales.

PICKERING. What do you say to that, Doolittle?

DOOLITTLE. Not me, Governor, thank you kindly. I've heard all the preachers and all the prime ministers—for I'm a thinking man and game for politics or religion or social reform same as all the other amusements—and I tell you it's a dog's life anyway you look at it. Undeserving poverty is my line. Taking one station in society with another, it's—it's—well, it's the only one that has any ginger in it, to my taste.

HIGGINS. I suppose we must give him a fiver.

PICKERING. He'll make a bad use of it, I'm afraid.

DOOLITTLE. Not me, Governor, so help me I won't. Don't you be afraid that I'll save it and spare it and live idle on it. There won't be a penny of it left by Monday: I'll have to go to work same as if I'd never had it. It won't pauperize me, you bet. Just one good spree for myself and the missus, giving pleasure to ourselves and employment to others, and satisfaction to you to think it's not been throwed away. You couldn't spend it better.

HIGGINS [taking out his pocket book and coming between Doolittle and the piano] This is irresistible. Let's give him ten. [He offers two notes to the dustman].

DOOLITTLE. No, Governor. She wouldn't have the heart to spend ten; and perhaps I shouldn't neither. Ten pounds is a lot of money: it makes a man feel prudent like; and then goodbye to happiness. You give me what I ask you, Governor: not a penny more, and not a penny less.

PICKERING. Why don't you marry that missus of yours? I rather draw the line at encouraging that sort of immorality.

DOOLITTLE. Tell her so, Governor: tell her so. I'm willing. It's me that suffers by it. I've no hold on her. I got to be agreeable to her. I got to give her presents. I got to buy her clothes something sinful. I'm a slave to that woman, Governor, just because I'm not her lawful husband. And she knows it too. Catch her marrying me! Take my advice, Governor: marry Eliza while she's young and don't know no better. If you don't you'll be sorry for it after. If you do, she'll be sorry for it after; but better you than her, because you're a man, and she's only a woman and don't know how to be happy anyhow.

HIGGINS. Pickering: if we listen to this man another minute, we shall have no convictions left. [To Doolittle] Five pounds I think you said.

DOOLITTLE. Thank you kindly, Governor.

HIGGINS. You're sure you won't take ten?

DOOLITTLE. Not now. Another time, Governor.

HIGGINS [handing him a five-pound note] Here you are.

DOOLITTLE. Thank you, Governor. Good morning.

[He hurries to the door, anxious to get away with his booty. When he opens it he is confronted with a dainty and exquisitely clean young Japanese lady in a simple blue cotton kimono printed cunningly with small white jasmine blossoms. Mrs. Pearce is with her. He gets out of her way deferentially and apologizes]. Beg pardon, miss.

THE JAPANESE LADY. Garn! Don't you know your own daughter?

DOOLITTLE {exclaiming Bly me! it's Eliza!

HIGGINS {simul- What's that! This!

PICKERING {taneously By Jove!

LIZA. Don't I look silly?

HIGGINS. Silly?

MRS. PEARCE [at the door] Now, Mr. Higgins, please don't say anything to make the girl conceited about herself.

HIGGINS [conscientiously] Oh! Quite right, Mrs. Pearce. [To Eliza] Yes: damned silly.

MRS. PEARCE. Please, sir.

HIGGINS [correcting himself] I mean extremely silly.

LIZA. I should look all right with my hat on. [She takes up her hat; puts it on; and walks across the room to the fireplace with a fashionable air].

HIGGINS. A new fashion, by George! And it ought to look horrible!

DOOLITTLE [with fatherly pride] Well, I never thought she'd clean up as good looking as that, Governor. She's a credit to me, ain't she?

LIZA. I tell you, it's easy to clean up here. Hot and cold water on tap, just as much as you like, there is. Woolly towels, there is; and a towel horse so hot, it burns your fingers. Soft brushes to scrub yourself, and a wooden bowl of soap smelling like primroses. Now I know why ladies is so clean. Washing's a treat for them. Wish they saw what it is for the like of me!

HIGGINS. I'm glad the bath-room met with your approval.

LIZA. It didn't: not all of it; and I don't care who hears me say it. Mrs. Pearce knows.

HIGGINS. What was wrong, Mrs. Pearce?

MRS. PEARCE [blandly] Oh, nothing, sir. It doesn't matter.

LIZA. I had a good mind to break it. I didn't know which way to look. But I hung a towel over it, I did.

HIGGINS. Over what?

MRS. PEARCE. Over the looking-glass, sir.

HIGGINS. Doolittle: you have brought your daughter up too strictly.

DOOLITTLE. Me! I never brought her up at all, except to give her a lick of a strap now and again. Don't put it on me, Governor. She ain't accustomed to it, you see: that's all. But she'll soon pick up your free-and-easy ways.

LIZA. I'm a good girl, I am; and I won't pick up no free and easy ways.

HIGGINS. Eliza: if you say again that you're a good girl, your father shall take you home.

LIZA. Not him. You don't know my father. All he come here for was to touch you for some money to get drunk on.

DOOLITTLE. Well, what else would I want money for? To put into the plate in church, I suppose. [She puts out her tongue at him. He is so incensed by this that Pickering presently finds it necessary to step between them]. Don't you give me none of your lip; and don't let me hear you giving this gentleman any of it neither, or you'll hear from me about it. See?

HIGGINS. Have you any further advice to give her before you go, Doolittle? Your blessing, for instance.

DOOLITTLE. No, Governor: I ain't such a mug as to put up my children to all I know myself. Hard enough to hold them in without that. If you want Eliza's mind improved, Governor, you do it yourself with a strap. So long, gentlemen. [He turns to go].

HIGGINS [impressively] Stop. You'll come regularly to see your daughter. It's your duty, you know. My brother is a clergyman; and he could help you in your talks with her.

DOOLITTLE [evasively] Certainly. I'll come, Governor. Not just this week, because I have a job at a distance. But later on you may depend on me. Afternoon, gentlemen. Afternoon, ma'am. [He takes off his hat to Mrs. Pearce, who disdains the salutation and goes out. He winks at Higgins, thinking him probably a fellow sufferer from Mrs. Pearce's difficult disposition, and follows her].

LIZA. Don't you believe the old liar. He'd as soon you set a bull-dog on him as a clergyman. You won't see him again in a hurry.

HIGGINS. I don't want to, Eliza. Do you?

LIZA. Not me. I don't want never to see him again, I don't. He's a disgrace to me, he is, collecting dust, instead of working at his trade.

PICKERING. What is his trade, Eliza?

LIZA. Talking money out of other people's pockets into his own. His proper trade's a navvy; and he works at it sometimes too—for exercise—and earns good money at it. Ain't you going to call me Miss Doolittle any more?

PICKERING. I beg your pardon, Miss Doolittle. It was a slip of the tongue.

LIZA. Oh, I don't mind; only it sounded so genteel. I should just like to take a taxi to the corner of Tottenham Court Road and get out there and tell it to wait for me, just to put the girls in their place a bit. I wouldn't speak to them, you know.

PICKERING. Better wait til we get you something really fashionable.

HIGGINS. Besides, you shouldn't cut your old friends now that you have risen in the world. That's what we call snobbery.

LIZA. You don't call the like of them my friends now, I should hope. They've took it out of me often enough with their ridicule when they had the chance; and now I mean to get a bit of my own back. But if I'm to have fashionable clothes, I'll wait. I should like to have some. Mrs. Pearce says you're going to give me some to wear in bed at night different to what I wear in the daytime; but it do seem a waste of money when you could get

something to show. Besides, I never could fancy changing into cold things on a winter night.

MRS. PEARCE [coming back] Now, Eliza. The new things have come for you to try on.

LIZA. Ah—ow—oo—ooh! [She rushes out].

MRS. PEARCE [following her] Oh, don't rush about like that, girl [She shuts the door behind her].

HIGGINS. Pickering: we have taken on a stiff job.

PICKERING [with conviction] Higgins: we have.

ACT III

It is Mrs. Higgins's at-home day. Nobody has yet arrived. Her drawing-room, in a flat on Chelsea embankment, has three windows looking on the river; and the ceiling is not so lofty as it would be in an older house of the same pretension. The windows are open, giving access to a balcony with flowers in pots. If you stand with your face to the windows, you have the fireplace on your left and the door in the right-hand wall close to the corner nearest the windows.

Mrs. Higgins was brought up on Morris and Burne Jones; and her room, which is very unlike her son's room in Wimpole Street, is not crowded with furniture and little tables and nicknacks. In the middle of the room there is a big ottoman; and this, with the carpet, the Morris wall-papers, and the Morris chintz window curtains and brocade covers of the ottoman and its cushions, supply all the ornament, and are much too handsome to be hidden by odds and ends of useless things. A few good oil-paintings from the exhibitions in the Grosvenor Gallery thirty years ago (the Burne Jones, not the Whistler side of them) are on the walls. The only landscape is a Cecil Lawson on the scale of a Rubens. There is a portrait of Mrs. Higgins as she was when she defied fashion in her youth in one of the beautiful Rossettian costumes which, when caricatured by people who did not understand, led to the absurdities of popular estheticism in the eighteen-seventies.

In the corner diagonally opposite the door Mrs. Higgins, now over sixty and long past taking the trouble to dress out of the fashion, sits writing at an elegantly simple writing-table with a bell button within reach of her hand. There is a Chippendale chair further back in the room between her and the window nearest her side. At the other side of the room, further forward, is an

Elizabethan chair roughly carved in the taste of Inigo Jones. On the same side a piano in a decorated case. The corner between the fireplace and the window is occupied by a divan cushioned in Morris chintz.

It is between four and five in the afternoon.

The door is opened violently; and Higgins enters with his hat on.

MRS. HIGGINS [dismayed] Henry! [scolding him] What are you doing here to-day? It is my at home day: you promised not to come. [As he bends to kiss her, she takes his hat off, and presents it to him].

HIGGINS. Oh bother! [He throws the hat down on the table].

MRS. HIGGINS. Go home at once.

HIGGINS [kissing her] I know, mother. I came on purpose.

MRS. HIGGINS. But you mustn't. I'm serious, Henry. You offend all my friends: they stop coming whenever they meet you.

HIGGINS. Nonsense! I know I have no small talk; but people don't mind. [He sits on the settee].

MRS. HIGGINS. Oh! don't they? Small talk indeed! What about your large talk? Really, dear, you mustn't stay.

HIGGINS. I must. I've a job for you. A phonetic job.

MRS. HIGGINS. No use, dear. I'm sorry; but I can't get round your vowels; and though I like to get pretty postcards in your patent shorthand, I always have to read the copies in ordinary writing you so thoughtfully send me.

HIGGINS. Well, this isn't a phonetic job.

MRS. HIGGINS. You said it was.

HIGGINS. Not your part of it. I've picked up a girl.

MRS. HIGGINS. Does that mean that some girl has picked you up?

HIGGINS. Not at all. I don't mean a love affair.

MRS. HIGGINS. What a pity!

HIGGINS. Why?

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, you never fall in love with anyone under forty-five. When will you discover that there are some rather nice-looking young women about?

HIGGINS. Oh, I can't be bothered with young women. My idea of a loveable woman is something as like you as possible. I shall never get into the

way of seriously liking young women: some habits lie too deep to be changed. [Rising abruptly and walking about, jingling his money and his keys in his trouser pockets] Besides, they're all idiots.

MRS. HIGGINS. Do you know what you would do if you really loved me, Henry?

HIGGINS. Oh bother! What? Marry, I suppose?

MRS. HIGGINS. No. Stop fidgeting and take your hands out of your pockets. [With a gesture of despair, he obeys and sits down again]. That's a good boy. Now tell me about the girl.

HIGGINS. She's coming to see you.

MRS. HIGGINS. I don't remember asking her.

HIGGINS. You didn't. I asked her. If you'd known her you wouldn't have asked her.

MRS. HIGGINS. Indeed! Why?

HIGGINS. Well, it's like this. She's a common flower girl. I picked her off the kerbstone.

MRS. HIGGINS. And invited her to my at-home!

HIGGINS [rising and coming to her to coax her] Oh, that'll be all right. I've taught her to speak properly; and she has strict orders as to her behavior. She's to keep to two subjects: the weather and everybody's health—Fine day and How do you do, you know—and not to let herself go on things in general. That will be safe.

MRS. HIGGINS. Safe! To talk about our health! about our insides! perhaps about our outsides! How could you be so silly, Henry?

HIGGINS [impatiently] Well, she must talk about something. [He controls himself and sits down again]. Oh, she'll be all right: don't you fuss. Pickering is in it with me. I've a sort of bet on that I'll pass her off as a duchess in six months. I started on her some months ago; and she's getting on like a house on fire. I shall win my bet. She has a quick ear; and she's been easier to teach than my middle-class pupils because she's had to learn a complete new language. She talks English almost as you talk French.

MRS. HIGGINS. That's satisfactory, at all events.

HIGGINS. Well, it is and it isn't.

MRS. HIGGINS. What does that mean?

HIGGINS. You see, I've got her pronunciation all right; but you have to

consider not only how a girl pronounces, but what she pronounces; and that's where—

They are interrupted by the parlor-maid, announcing guests.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill. [She withdraws].

HIGGINS. Oh Lord! [He rises; snatches his hat from the table; and makes for the door; but before he reaches it his mother introduces him].

Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill are the mother and daughter who sheltered from the rain in Covent Garden. The mother is well bred, quiet, and has the habitual anxiety of straitened means. The daughter has acquired a gay air of being very much at home in society: the bravado of genteel poverty.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [to Mrs. Higgins] How do you do? [They shake hands].

MISS EYNSFORD HILL. How d'you do? [She shakes].

MRS. HIGGINS [introducing] My son Henry.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. Your celebrated son! I have so longed to meet you, Professor Higgins.

HIGGINS [glumly, making no movement in her direction] Delighted. [He backs against the piano and bows brusquely].

Miss EYNSFORD HILL [going to him with confident familiarity] How do you do?

HIGGINS [staring at her] I've seen you before somewhere. I haven't the ghost of a notion where; but I've heard your voice. [Drearily] It doesn't matter. You'd better sit down.

MRS. HIGGINS. I'm sorry to say that my celebrated son has no manners. You mustn't mind him.

MISS EYNSFORD HILL [gaily] I don't. [She sits in the Elizabethan chair].

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [a little bewildered] Not at all. [She sits on the ottoman between her daughter and Mrs. Higgins, who has turned her chair away from the writing-table].

HIGGINS. Oh, have I been rude? I didn't mean to be. [He goes to the central window, through which, with his back to the company, he contemplates the river and the flowers in Battersea Park on the opposite bank as if they were a frozen dessert.]

The parlor-maid returns, ushering in Pickering.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Colonel Pickering [She withdraws].

PICKERING. How do you do, Mrs. Higgins?

MRS. HIGGINS. So glad you've come. Do you know Mrs. Eynsford Hill —Miss Eynsford Hill? [Exchange of bows. The Colonel brings the Chippendale chair a little forward between Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Higgins, and sits down].

PICKERING. Has Henry told you what we've come for?

HIGGINS [over his shoulder] We were interrupted: damn it!

MRS. HIGGINS. Oh Henry, Henry, really!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [half rising] Are we in the way?

MRS. HIGGINS [rising and making her sit down again] No, no. You couldn't have come more fortunately: we want you to meet a friend of ours.

HIGGINS [turning hopefully] Yes, by George! We want two or three people. You'll do as well as anybody else.

The parlor-maid returns, ushering Freddy.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Mr. Eynsford Hill.

HIGGINS [almost audibly, past endurance] God of Heaven! another of them.

FREDDY [shaking hands with Mrs. Higgins] Ahdedo?

MRS. HIGGINS. Very good of you to come. [Introducing] Colonel Pickering.

FREDDY [bowing] Ahdedo?

MRS. HIGGINS. I don't think you know my son, Professor Higgins.

FREDDY [going to Higgins] Ahdedo?

HIGGINS [looking at him much as if he were a pickpocket] I'll take my oath I've met you before somewhere. Where was it?

FREDDY. I don't think so.

HIGGINS [resignedly] It don't matter, anyhow. Sit down. He shakes Freddy's hand, and almost slings him on the ottoman with his face to the windows; then comes round to the other side of it.

HIGGINS. Well, here we are, anyhow! [He sits down on the ottoman next Mrs. Eynsford Hill, on her left.] And now, what the devil are we going to talk about until Eliza comes?

MRS. HIGGINS. Henry: you are the life and soul of the Royal Society's soirees; but really you're rather trying on more commonplace occasions.

HIGGINS. Am I? Very sorry. [Beaming suddenly] I suppose I am, you know. [Uproariously] Ha, ha!

MISS EYNSFORD HILL [who considers Higgins quite eligible matrimonially] I sympathize. I haven't any small talk. If people would only be frank and say what they really think!

HIGGINS [relapsing into gloom] Lord forbid!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [taking up her daughter's cue] But why?

HIGGINS. What they think they ought to think is bad enough, Lord knows; but what they really think would break up the whole show. Do you suppose it would be really agreeable if I were to come out now with what I really think?

MISS EYNSFORD HILL [gaily] Is it so very cynical?

HIGGINS. Cynical! Who the dickens said it was cynical? I mean it wouldn't be decent.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [seriously] Oh! I'm sure you don't mean that, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS. You see, we're all savages, more or less. We're supposed to be civilized and cultured—to know all about poetry and philosophy and art and science, and so on; but how many of us know even the meanings of these names? [To Miss Hill] What do you know of poetry? [To Mrs. Hill] What do you know of science? [Indicating Freddy] What does he know of art or science or anything else? What the devil do you imagine I know of philosophy?

MRS. HIGGINS [warningly] Or of manners, Henry?

THE PARLOR-MAID [opening the door] Miss Doolittle. [She withdraws].

HIGGINS [rising hastily and running to Mrs. Higgins] Here she is, mother. [He stands on tiptoe and makes signs over his mother's head to Eliza to indicate to her which lady is her hostess].

Eliza, who is exquisitely dressed, produces an impression of such remarkable distinction and beauty as she enters that they all rise, quite flustered. Guided by Higgins's signals, she comes to Mrs. Higgins with studied grace.

LIZA [speaking with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone] How do you do, Mrs. Higgins? [She gasps slightly in making sure of the H in Higgins, but is quite successful]. Mr. Higgins told me I might

come.

MRS. HIGGINS [cordially] Quite right: I'm very glad indeed to see you.

PICKERING. How do you do, Miss Doolittle?

LIZA [shaking hands with him] Colonel Pickering, is it not?

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I feel sure we have met before, Miss Doolittle. I remember your eyes.

LIZA. How do you do? [She sits down on the ottoman gracefully in the place just left vacant by Higgins].

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [introducing] My daughter Clara.

LIZA. How do you do?

CLARA [impulsively] How do you do? [She sits down on the ottoman beside Eliza, devouring her with her eyes].

FREDDY [coming to their side of the ottoman] I've certainly had the pleasure.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [introducing] My son Freddy.

LIZA. How do you do?

Freddy bows and sits down in the Elizabethan chair, infatuated.

HIGGINS [suddenly] By George, yes: it all comes back to me! [They stare at him]. Covent Garden! [Lamentably] What a damned thing!

MRS. HIGGINS. Henry, please! [He is about to sit on the edge of the table]. Don't sit on my writing-table: you'll break it.

HIGGINS [sulkily] Sorry.

He goes to the divan, stumbling into the fender and over the fire-irons on his way; extricating himself with muttered imprecations; and finishing his disastrous journey by throwing himself so impatiently on the divan that he almost breaks it. Mrs. Higgins looks at him, but controls herself and says nothing.

A long and painful pause ensues.

MRS. HIGGINS [at last, conversationally] Will it rain, do you think?

LIZA. The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.

FREDDY. Ha! ha! how awfully funny!

LIZA. What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right.

FREDDY. Killing!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I'm sure I hope it won't turn cold. There's so much influenza about. It runs right through our whole family regularly every spring.

LIZA [darkly] My aunt died of influenza: so they said.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [clicks her tongue sympathetically]!!!

LIZA [in the same tragic tone] But it's my belief they done the old woman in.

MRS. HIGGINS [puzzled] Done her in?

LIZA. Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza? She come through diphtheria right enough the year before. I saw her with my own eyes. Fairly blue with it, she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat til she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [startled] Dear me!

LIZA [piling up the indictment] What call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza? What become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it; and what I say is, them as pinched it done her in.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. What does doing her in mean?

HIGGINS [hastily] Oh, that's the new small talk. To do a person in means to kill them.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [to Eliza, horrified] You surely don't believe that your aunt was killed?

LIZA. Do I not! Them she lived with would have killed her for a hat-pin, let alone a hat.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. But it can't have been right for your father to pour spirits down her throat like that. It might have killed her.

LIZA. Not her. Gin was mother's milk to her. Besides, he'd poured so much down his own throat that he knew the good of it.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. Do you mean that he drank?

LIZA. Drank! My word! Something chronic.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. How dreadful for you!

LIZA. Not a bit. It never did him no harm what I could see. But then he did not keep it up regular. [Cheerfully] On the burst, as you might say, from time to time. And always more agreeable when he had a drop in. When he was out of work, my mother used to give him fourpence and tell him to go out and not come back until he'd drunk himself cheerful and loving-like. There's lots of women has to make their husbands drunk to make them fit to live with. [Now quite at her ease] You see, it's like this. If a man has a bit of a conscience, it always takes him when he's sober; and then it makes him low-spirited. A drop of booze just takes that off and makes him happy. [To Freddy, who is in convulsions of suppressed laughter] Here! what are you sniggering at?

FREDDY. The new small talk. You do it so awfully well.

LIZA. If I was doing it proper, what was you laughing at? [To Higgins] Have I said anything I oughtn't?

MRS. HIGGINS [interposing] Not at all, Miss Doolittle.

LIZA. Well, that's a mercy, anyhow. [Expansively] What I always say is—

HIGGINS [rising and looking at his watch] Ahem!

LIZA [looking round at him; taking the hint; and rising] Well: I must go. [They all rise. Freddy goes to the door]. So pleased to have met you. Good-bye. [She shakes hands with Mrs. Higgins].

MRS. HIGGINS. Good-bye.

LIZA. Good-bye, Colonel Pickering.

PICKERING. Good-bye, Miss Doolittle. [They shake hands].

LIZA [nodding to the others] Good-bye, all.

FREDDY [opening the door for her] Are you walking across the Park, Miss Doolittle? If so—

LIZA. Walk! Not bloody likely. [Sensation]. I am going in a taxi. [She goes out].

Pickering gasps and sits down. Freddy goes out on the balcony to catch another glimpse of Eliza.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [suffering from shock] Well, I really can't get used to the new ways.

CLARA [throwing herself discontentedly into the Elizabethan chair]. Oh, it's all right, mamma, quite right. People will think we never go anywhere or see anybody if you are so old-fashioned.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I daresay I am very old-fashioned; but I do

hope you won't begin using that expression, Clara. I have got accustomed to hear you talking about men as rotters, and calling everything filthy and beastly; though I do think it horrible and unladylike. But this last is really too much. Don't you think so, Colonel Pickering?

PICKERING. Don't ask me. I've been away in India for several years; and manners have changed so much that I sometimes don't know whether I'm at a respectable dinner-table or in a ship's forecastle.

CLARA. It's all a matter of habit. There's no right or wrong in it. Nobody means anything by it. And it's so quaint, and gives such a smart emphasis to things that are not in themselves very witty. I find the new small talk delightful and quite innocent.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [rising] Well, after that, I think it's time for us to go.

Pickering and Higgins rise.

CLARA [rising] Oh yes: we have three at homes to go to still. Good-bye, Mrs. Higgins. Good-bye, Colonel Pickering. Good-bye, Professor Higgins.

HIGGINS [coming grimly at her from the divan, and accompanying her to the door] Good-bye. Be sure you try on that small talk at the three at-homes. Don't be nervous about it. Pitch it in strong.

CLARA [all smiles] I will. Good-bye. Such nonsense, all this early Victorian prudery!

HIGGINS [tempting her] Such damned nonsense!

CLARA. Such bloody nonsense!

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [convulsively] Clara!

CLARA. Ha! ha! [She goes out radiant, conscious of being thoroughly up to date, and is heard descending the stairs in a stream of silvery laughter].

FREDDY [to the heavens at large] Well, I ask you [He gives it up, and comes to Mrs. Higgins]. Good-bye.

MRS. HIGGINS [shaking hands] Good-bye. Would you like to meet Miss Doolittle again?

FREDDY [eagerly] Yes, I should, most awfully.

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, you know my days.

FREDDY. Yes. Thanks awfully. Good-bye. [He goes out].

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. Good-bye, Mr. Higgins.

HIGGINS. Good-bye. Good-bye.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [to Pickering] It's no use. I shall never be able to bring myself to use that word.

PICKERING. Don't. It's not compulsory, you know. You'll get on quite well without it.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. Only, Clara is so down on me if I am not positively reeking with the latest slang. Good-bye.

PICKERING. Good-bye [They shake hands].

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL [to Mrs. Higgins] You mustn't mind Clara. [Pickering, catching from her lowered tone that this is not meant for him to hear, discreetly joins Higgins at the window]. We're so poor! and she gets so few parties, poor child! She doesn't quite know. [Mrs. Higgins, seeing that her eyes are moist, takes her hand sympathetically and goes with her to the door]. But the boy is nice. Don't you think so?

MRS. HIGGINS. Oh, quite nice. I shall always be delighted to see him.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. Thank you, dear. Good-bye. [She goes out].

HIGGINS [eagerly] Well? Is Eliza presentable [he swoops on his mother and drags her to the ottoman, where she sits down in Eliza's place with her son on her left]?

Pickering returns to his chair on her right.

MRS. HIGGINS. You silly boy, of course she's not presentable. She's a triumph of your art and of her dressmaker's; but if you suppose for a moment that she doesn't give herself away in every sentence she utters, you must be perfectly cracked about her.

PICKERING. But don't you think something might be done? I mean something to eliminate the sanguinary element from her conversation.

MRS. HIGGINS. Not as long as she is in Henry's hands.

HIGGINS [aggrieved] Do you mean that my language is improper?

MRS. HIGGINS. No, dearest: it would be quite proper—say on a canal barge; but it would not be proper for her at a garden party.

HIGGINS [deeply injured] Well I must say—

PICKERING [interrupting him] Come, Higgins: you must learn to know yourself. I haven't heard such language as yours since we used to review the volunteers in Hyde Park twenty years ago.

HIGGINS [sulkily] Oh, well, if you say so, I suppose I don't always talk

like a bishop.

MRS. HIGGINS [quieting Henry with a touch] Colonel Pickering: will you tell me what is the exact state of things in Wimpole Street?

PICKERING [cheerfully: as if this completely changed the subject] Well, I have come to live there with Henry. We work together at my Indian Dialects; and we think it more convenient—

MRS. HIGGINS. Quite so. I know all about that: it's an excellent arrangement. But where does this girl live?

HIGGINS. With us, of course. Where would she live?

MRS. HIGGINS. But on what terms? Is she a servant? If not, what is she?

PICKERING [slowly] I think I know what you mean, Mrs. Higgins.

HIGGINS. Well, dash me if I do! I've had to work at the girl every day for months to get her to her present pitch. Besides, she's useful. She knows where my things are, and remembers my appointments and so forth.

MRS. HIGGINS. How does your housekeeper get on with her?

HIGGINS. Mrs. Pearce? Oh, she's jolly glad to get so much taken off her hands; for before Eliza came, she had to have to find things and remind me of my appointments. But she's got some silly bee in her bonnet about Eliza. She keeps saying "You don't think, sir": doesn't she, Pick?

PICKERING. Yes: that's the formula. "You don't think, sir." That's the end of every conversation about Eliza.

HIGGINS. As if I ever stop thinking about the girl and her confounded vowels and consonants. I'm worn out, thinking about her, and watching her lips and her teeth and her tongue, not to mention her soul, which is the quaintest of the lot.

MRS. HIGGINS. You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.

HIGGINS. Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about that, mother. But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul.

PICKERING [drawing his chair closer to Mrs. Higgins and bending over to her eagerly] Yes: it's enormously interesting. I assure you, Mrs. Higgins, we take Eliza very seriously. Every week—every day almost—there is some new change. [Closer again] We keep records of every stage—dozens of

gramophone disks and photographs—

HIGGINS [assailing her at the other ear] Yes, by George: it's the most absorbing experiment I ever tackled. She regularly fills our lives up; doesn't she, Pick?

PICKERING. We're always talking Eliza.

HIGGINS. Teaching Eliza.

PICKERING. Dressing Eliza.

MRS. HIGGINS. What!

HIGGINS. Inventing new Elizas.

Higgins and Pickering, speaking together:

HIGGINS. You know, she has the most extraordinary quickness of ear:

PICKERING. I assure you, my dear Mrs. Higgins, that girl

HIGGINS. just like a parrot. I've tried her with every

PICKERING. is a genius. She can play the piano quite beautifully

HIGGINS. possible sort of sound that a human being can make—

PICKERING. We have taken her to classical concerts and to music

HIGGINS. Continental dialects, African dialects, Hottentot

PICKERING. halls; and it's all the same to her: she plays everything

HIGGINS. clicks, things it took me years to get hold of; and

PICKERING. she hears right off when she comes home, whether it's

HIGGINS. she picks them up like a shot, right away, as if she had

PICKERING. Beethoven and Brahms or Lehar and Lionel Morickton;

HIGGINS. been at it all her life.

PICKERING. though six months ago, she'd never as much as touched a piano.

MRS. HIGGINS [putting her fingers in her ears, as they are by this time shouting one another down with an intolerable noise] Sh—sh—sh—sh! [They stop].

PICKERING. I beg your pardon. [He draws his chair back apologetically].

HIGGINS. Sorry. When Pickering starts shouting nobody can get a word in edgeways.

MRS. HIGGINS. Be quiet, Henry. Colonel Pickering: don't you realize that when Eliza walked into Wimpole Street, something walked in with her?

PICKERING. Her father did. But Henry soon got rid of him.

MRS. HIGGINS. It would have been more to the point if her mother had. But as her mother didn't something else did.

PICKERING. But what?

MRS. HIGGINS [unconsciously dating herself by the word] A problem.

PICKERING. Oh, I see. The problem of how to pass her off as a lady.

HIGGINS. I'll solve that problem. I've half solved it already.

MRS. HIGGINS. No, you two infinitely stupid male creatures: the problem of what is to be done with her afterwards.

HIGGINS. I don't see anything in that. She can go her own way, with all the advantages I have given her.

MRS. HIGGINS. The advantages of that poor woman who was here just now! The manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income! Is that what you mean?

PICKERING [indulgently, being rather bored] Oh, that will be all right, Mrs. Higgins. [He rises to go].

HIGGINS [rising also] We'll find her some light employment.

PICKERING. She's happy enough. Don't you worry about her. Good-bye. [He shakes hands as if he were consoling a frightened child, and makes for the door].

HIGGINS. Anyhow, there's no good bothering now. The thing's done. Good-bye, mother. [He kisses her, and follows Pickering].

PICKERING [turning for a final consolation] There are plenty of openings. We'll do what's right. Good-bye.

HIGGINS [to Pickering as they go out together] Let's take her to the Shakespear exhibition at Earls Court.

PICKERING. Yes: let's. Her remarks will be delicious.

HIGGINS. She'll mimic all the people for us when we get home.

PICKERING. Ripping. [Both are heard laughing as they go downstairs].

MRS. HIGGINS [rises with an impatient bounce, and returns to her work at the writing-table. She sweeps a litter of disarranged papers out of her way; snatches a sheet of paper from her stationery case; and tries resolutely to write.

At the third line she gives it up; flings down her pen; grips the table angrily and exclaims] Oh, men! men!! men!!!

ACT IV

The Wimpole Street laboratory. Midnight. Nobody in the room. The clock on the mantelpiece strikes twelve. The fire is not alight: it is a summer night.

Presently Higgins and Pickering are heard on the stairs.

HIGGINS [calling down to Pickering] I say, Pick: lock up, will you. I shan't be going out again.

PICKERING. Right. Can Mrs. Pearce go to bed? We don't want anything more, do we?

HIGGINS. Lord, no!

Eliza opens the door and is seen on the lighted landing in opera cloak, brilliant evening dress, and diamonds, with fan, flowers, and all accessories. She comes to the hearth, and switches on the electric lights there. She is tired: her pallor contrasts strongly with her dark eyes and hair; and her expression is almost tragic. She takes off her cloak; puts her fan and flowers on the piano; and sits down on the bench, brooding and silent. Higgins, in evening dress, with overcoat and hat, comes in, carrying a smoking jacket which he has picked up downstairs. He takes off the hat and overcoat; throws them carelessly on the newspaper stand; disposes of his coat in the same way; puts on the smoking jacket; and throws himself wearily into the easy-chair at the hearth. Pickering, similarly attired, comes in. He also takes off his hat and overcoat, and is about to throw them on Higgins's when he hesitates.

PICKERING. I say: Mrs. Pearce will row if we leave these things lying about in the drawing-room.

HIGGINS. Oh, chuck them over the bannisters into the hall. She'll find them there in the morning and put them away all right. She'll think we were drunk.

PICKERING. We are, slightly. Are there any letters?

HIGGINS. I didn't look. [Pickering takes the overcoats and hats and goes down stairs. Higgins begins half singing half yawning an air from La Fanciulla del Golden West. Suddenly he stops and exclaims] I wonder where the devil my slippers are!

Eliza looks at him darkly; then leaves the room.

Higgins yawns again, and resumes his song. Pickering returns, with the contents of the letter-box in his hand.

PICKERING. Only circulars, and this coroneted billet-doux for you. [He throws the circulars into the fender, and posts himself on the hearthrug, with his back to the grate].

HIGGINS [glancing at the billet-doux] Money-lender. [He throws the letter after the circulars].

Eliza returns with a pair of large down-at-heel slippers. She places them on the carpet before Higgins, and sits as before without a word.

HIGGINS [yawning again] Oh Lord! What an evening! What a crew! What a silly tomfoollery! [He raises his shoe to unlace it, and catches sight of the slippers. He stops unlacing and looks at them as if they had appeared there of their own accord]. Oh! they're there, are they?

PICKERING [stretching himself] Well, I feel a bit tired. It's been a long day. The garden party, a dinner party, and the opera! Rather too much of a good thing. But you've won your bet, Higgins. Eliza did the trick, and something to spare, eh?

HIGGINS [fervently] Thank God it's over!

Eliza flinches violently; but they take no notice of her; and she recovers herself and sits stonily as before.

PICKERING. Were you nervous at the garden party? I was. Eliza didn't seem a bit nervous.

HIGGINS. Oh, she wasn't nervous. I knew she'd be all right. No, it's the strain of putting the job through all these months that has told on me. It was interesting enough at first, while we were at the phonetics; but after that I got deadly sick of it. If I hadn't backed myself to do it I should have chucked the whole thing up two months ago. It was a silly notion: the whole thing has been a bore.

PICKERING. Oh come! the garden party was frightfully exciting. My heart began beating like anything.

HIGGINS. Yes, for the first three minutes. But when I saw we were going to win hands down, I felt like a bear in a cage, hanging about doing nothing. The dinner was worse: sitting gorging there for over an hour, with nobody but a damned fool of a fashionable woman to talk to! I tell you, Pickering, never again for me. No more artificial duchesses. The whole thing has been simple purgatory.

PICKERING. You've never been broken in properly to the social routine.

[Strolling over to the piano] I rather enjoy dipping into it occasionally myself: it makes me feel young again. Anyhow, it was a great success: an immense success. I was quite frightened once or twice because Eliza was doing it so well. You see, lots of the real people can't do it at all: they're such fools that they think style comes by nature to people in their position; and so they never learn. There's always something professional about doing a thing superlatively well.

HIGGINS. Yes: that's what drives me mad: the silly people don't know their own silly business. [Rising] However, it's over and done with; and now I can go to bed at last without dreading tomorrow.

Eliza's beauty becomes murderous.

PICKERING. I think I shall turn in too. Still, it's been a great occasion: a triumph for you. Good-night. [He goes].

HIGGINS [following him] Good-night. [Over his shoulder, at the door] Put out the lights, Eliza; and tell Mrs. Pearce not to make coffee for me in the morning: I'll take tea. [He goes out].

Eliza tries to control herself and feel indifferent as she rises and walks across to the hearth to switch off the lights. By the time she gets there she is on the point of screaming. She sits down in Higgins's chair and holds on hard to the arms. Finally she gives way and flings herself furiously on the floor raging.

HIGGINS [in despairing wrath outside] What the devil have I done with my slippers? [He appears at the door].

LIZA [snatching up the slippers, and hurling them at him one after the other with all her force] There are your slippers. And there. Take your slippers; and may you never have a day's luck with them!

HIGGINS [astounded] What on earth—! [He comes to her]. What's the matter? Get up. [He pulls her up]. Anything wrong?

LIZA [breathless] Nothing wrong—with YOU. I've won your bet for you, haven't I? That's enough for you. I don't matter, I suppose.

HIGGINS. YOU won my bet! You! Presumptuous insect! I won it. What did you throw those slippers at me for?

LIZA. Because I wanted to smash your face. I'd like to kill you, you selfish brute. Why didn't you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you? [She crisps her fingers, frantically].

HIGGINS [looking at her in cool wonder] The creature IS nervous, after

all.

LIZA [gives a suffocated scream of fury, and instinctively darts her nails at his face]!!

HIGGINS [catching her wrists] Ah! would you? Claws in, you cat. How dare you show your temper to me? Sit down and be quiet. [He throws her roughly into the easy-chair].

LIZA [crushed by superior strength and weight] What's to become of me? What's to become of me?

HIGGINS. How the devil do I know what's to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?

LIZA. You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you—not so much as them slippers.

HIGGINS [thundering] THOSE slippers.

LIZA [with bitter submission] Those slippers. I didn't think it made any difference now.

A pause. Eliza hopeless and crushed. Higgins a little uneasy.

HIGGINS [in his loftiest manner] Why have you begun going on like this? May I ask whether you complain of your treatment here?

LIZA. No.

HIGGINS. Has anybody behaved badly to you? Colonel Pickering? Mrs. Pearce? Any of the servants?

LIZA. No.

HIGGINS. I presume you don't pretend that I have treated you badly.

LIZA. No.

HIGGINS. I am glad to hear it. [He moderates his tone]. Perhaps you're tired after the strain of the day. Will you have a glass of champagne? [He moves towards the door].

LIZA. No. [Recollecting her manners] Thank you.

HIGGINS [good-humored again] This has been coming on you for some days. I suppose it was natural for you to be anxious about the garden party. But that's all over now. [He pats her kindly on the shoulder. She writhes]. There's nothing more to worry about.

LIZA. No. Nothing more for you to worry about. [She suddenly rises and gets away from him by going to the piano bench, where she sits and hides her

face]. Oh God! I wish I was dead.

HIGGINS [staring after her in sincere surprise] Why? in heaven's name, why? [Reasonably, going to her] Listen to me, Eliza. All this irritation is purely subjective.

LIZA. I don't understand. I'm too ignorant.

HIGGINS. It's only imagination. Low spirits and nothing else. Nobody's hurting you. Nothing's wrong. You go to bed like a good girl and sleep it off. Have a little cry and say your prayers: that will make you comfortable.

LIZA. I heard YOUR prayers. "Thank God it's all over!"

HIGGINS [impatiently] Well, don't you thank God it's all over? Now you are free and can do what you like.

LIZA [pulling herself together in desperation] What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?

HIGGINS [enlightened, but not at all impressed] Oh, that's what's worrying you, is it? [He thrusts his hands into his pockets, and walks about in his usual manner, rattling the contents of his pockets, as if condescending to a trivial subject out of pure kindness]. I shouldn't bother about it if I were you. I should imagine you won't have much difficulty in settling yourself, somewhere or other, though I hadn't quite realized that you were going away. [She looks quickly at him: he does not look at her, but examines the dessert stand on the piano and decides that he will eat an apple]. You might marry, you know. [He bites a large piece out of the apple, and munches it noisily]. You see, Eliza, all men are not confirmed old bachelors like me and the Colonel. Most men are the marrying sort (poor devils!); and you're not bad-looking; it's quite a pleasure to look at you sometimes—not now, of course, because you're crying and looking as ugly as the very devil; but when you're all right and quite yourself, you're what I should call attractive. That is, to the people in the marrying line, you understand. You go to bed and have a good nice rest; and then get up and look at yourself in the glass; and you won't feel so cheap.

Eliza again looks at him, speechless, and does not stir.

The look is quite lost on him: he eats his apple with a dreamy expression of happiness, as it is quite a good one.

HIGGINS [a genial afterthought occurring to him] I daresay my mother could find some chap or other who would do very well—

LIZA. We were above that at the corner of Tottenham Court Road.

HIGGINS [waking up] What do you mean?

LIZA. I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me.

HIGGINS [slinging the core of the apple decisively into the grate] Tosh, Eliza. Don't you insult human relations by dragging all this cant about buying and selling into it. You needn't marry the fellow if you don't like him.

LIZA. What else am I to do?

HIGGINS. Oh, lots of things. What about your old idea of a florist's shop? Pickering could set you up in one: he's lots of money. [Chuckling] He'll have to pay for all those togs you have been wearing today; and that, with the hire of the jewellery, will make a big hole in two hundred pounds. Why, six months ago you would have thought it the millennium to have a flower shop of your own. Come! you'll be all right. I must clear off to bed: I'm devilish sleepy. By the way, I came down for something: I forget what it was.

LIZA. Your slippers.

HIGGINS. Oh yes, of course. You shied them at me. [He picks them up, and is going out when she rises and speaks to him].

LIZA. Before you go, sir—

HIGGINS [dropping the slippers in his surprise at her calling him sir] Eh?

LIZA. Do my clothes belong to me or to Colonel Pickering?

HIGGINS [coming back into the room as if her question were the very climax of unreason] What the devil use would they be to Pickering?

LIZA. He might want them for the next girl you pick up to experiment on.

HIGGINS [shocked and hurt] Is THAT the way you feel towards us?

LIZA. I don't want to hear anything more about that. All I want to know is whether anything belongs to me. My own clothes were burnt.

HIGGINS. But what does it matter? Why need you start bothering about that in the middle of the night?

LIZA. I want to know what I may take away with me. I don't want to be accused of stealing.

HIGGINS [now deeply wounded] Stealing! You shouldn't have said that, Eliza. That shows a want of feeling.

LIZA. I'm sorry. I'm only a common ignorant girl; and in my station I have to be careful. There can't be any feelings between the like of you and the like of me. Please will you tell me what belongs to me and what doesn't?

HIGGINS [very sulky] You may take the whole damned houseful if you like. Except the jewels. They're hired. Will that satisfy you? [He turns on his heel and is about to go in extreme dudgeon].

LIZA [drinking in his emotion like nectar, and nagging him to provoke a further supply] Stop, please. [She takes off her jewels]. Will you take these to your room and keep them safe? I don't want to run the risk of their being missing.

HIGGINS [furious] Hand them over. [She puts them into his hands]. If these belonged to me instead of to the jeweler, I'd ram them down your ungrateful throat. [He perfunctorily thrusts them into his pockets, unconsciously decorating himself with the protruding ends of the chains].

LIZA [taking a ring off] This ring isn't the jeweler's: it's the one you bought me in Brighton. I don't want it now. [Higgins dashes the ring violently into the fireplace, and turns on her so threateningly that she crouches over the piano with her hands over her face, and exclaims] Don't you hit me.

HIGGINS. Hit you! You infamous creature, how dare you accuse me of such a thing? It is you who have hit me. You have wounded me to the heart.

LIZA [thrilling with hidden joy] I'm glad. I've got a little of my own back, anyhow.

HIGGINS [with dignity, in his finest professional style] You have caused me to lose my temper: a thing that has hardly ever happened to me before. I prefer to say nothing more tonight. I am going to bed.

LIZA [pertly] You'd better leave a note for Mrs. Pearce about the coffee; for she won't be told by me.

HIGGINS [formally] Damn Mrs. Pearce; and damn the coffee; and damn you; and damn my own folly in having lavished MY hard-earned knowledge and the treasure of my regard and intimacy on a heartless guttersnipe. [He goes out with impressive decorum, and spoils it by slamming the door savagely].

Eliza smiles for the first time; expresses her feelings by a wild pantomime in which an imitation of Higgins's exit is confused with her own triumph; and finally goes down on her knees on the hearthrug to look for the ring.

ACT V

Mrs. Higgins's drawing-room. She is at her writing-table as before. The

parlor-maid comes in.

THE PARLOR-MAID [at the door] Mr. Henry, mam, is downstairs with Colonel Pickering.

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, show them up.

THE PARLOR-MAID. They're using the telephone, mam. Telephoning to the police, I think.

MRS. HIGGINS. What!

THE PARLOR-MAID [coming further in and lowering her voice] Mr. Henry's in a state, mam. I thought I'd better tell you.

MRS. HIGGINS. If you had told me that Mr. Henry was not in a state it would have been more surprising. Tell them to come up when they've finished with the police. I suppose he's lost something.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Yes, maam [going].

MRS. HIGGINS. Go upstairs and tell Miss Doolittle that Mr. Henry and the Colonel are here. Ask her not to come down till I send for her.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Yes, mam.

Higgins bursts in. He is, as the parlor-maid has said, in a state.

HIGGINS. Look here, mother: here's a confounded thing!

MRS. HIGGINS. Yes, dear. Good-morning. [He checks his impatience and kisses her, whilst the parlor-maid goes out]. What is it?

HIGGINS. Eliza's bolted.

MRS. HIGGINS [calmly continuing her writing] You must have frightened her.

HIGGINS. Frightened her! nonsense! She was left last night, as usual, to turn out the lights and all that; and instead of going to bed she changed her clothes and went right off: her bed wasn't slept in. She came in a cab for her things before seven this morning; and that fool Mrs. Pearce let her have them without telling me a word about it. What am I to do?

MRS. HIGGINS. Do without, I'm afraid, Henry. The girl has a perfect right to leave if she chooses.

HIGGINS [wandering distractedly across the room] But I can't find anything. I don't know what appointments I've got. I'm— [Pickering comes in. Mrs. Higgins puts down her pen and turns away from the writing-table].

PICKERING [shaking hands] Good-morning, Mrs. Higgins. Has Henry

told you? [He sits down on the ottoman].

HIGGINS. What does that ass of an inspector say? Have you offered a reward?

MRS. HIGGINS [rising in indignant amazement] You don't mean to say you have set the police after Eliza?

HIGGINS. Of course. What are the police for? What else could we do? [He sits in the Elizabethan chair].

PICKERING. The inspector made a lot of difficulties. I really think he suspected us of some improper purpose.

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, of course he did. What right have you to go to the police and give the girl's name as if she were a thief, or a lost umbrella, or something? Really! [She sits down again, deeply vexed].

HIGGINS. But we want to find her.

PICKERING. We can't let her go like this, you know, Mrs. Higgins. What were we to do?

MRS. HIGGINS. You have no more sense, either of you, than two children. Why—

The parlor-maid comes in and breaks off the conversation.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Mr. Henry: a gentleman wants to see you very particular. He's been sent on from Wimpole Street.

HIGGINS. Oh, bother! I can't see anyone now. Who is it?

THE PARLOR-MAID. A Mr. Doolittle, Sir.

PICKERING. Doolittle! Do you mean the dustman?

THE PARLOR-MAID. Dustman! Oh no, sir: a gentleman.

HIGGINS [springing up excitedly] By George, Pick, it's some relative of hers that she's gone to. Somebody we know nothing about. [To the parlor-maid] Send him up, quick.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Yes, Sir. [She goes].

HIGGINS [eagerly, going to his mother] Genteel relatives! now we shall hear something. [He sits down in the Chippendale chair].

MRS. HIGGINS. Do you know any of her people?

PICKERING. Only her father: the fellow we told you about.

THE PARLOR-MAID [announcing] Mr. Doolittle. [She withdraws].

Doolittle enters. He is brilliantly dressed in a new fashionable frock-coat, with white waistcoat and grey trousers. A flower in his buttonhole, a dazzling silk hat, and patent leather shoes complete the effect. He is too concerned with the business he has come on to notice Mrs. Higgins. He walks straight to Higgins, and accosts him with vehement reproach.

DOOLITTLE [indicating his own person] See here! Do you see this? You done this.

HIGGINS. Done what, man?

DOOLITTLE. This, I tell you. Look at it. Look at this hat. Look at this coat.

PICKERING. Has Eliza been buying you clothes?

DOOLITTLE. Eliza! not she. Not half. Why would she buy me clothes?

MRS. HIGGINS. Good-morning, Mr. Doolittle. Won't you sit down?

DOOLITTLE [taken aback as he becomes conscious that he has forgotten his hostess] Asking your pardon, ma'am. [He approaches her and shakes her proffered hand]. Thank you. [He sits down on the ottoman, on Pickering's right]. I am that full of what has happened to me that I can't think of anything else.

HIGGINS. What the dickens has happened to you?

DOOLITTLE. I shouldn't mind if it had only happened to me: anything might happen to anybody and nobody to blame but Providence, as you might say. But this is something that you done to me: yes, you, Henry Higgins.

HIGGINS. Have you found Eliza? That's the point.

DOOLITTLE. Have you lost her?

HIGGINS. Yes.

DOOLITTLE. You have all the luck, you have. I ain't found her; but she'll find me quick enough now after what you done to me.

MRS. HIGGINS. But what has my son done to you, Mr. Doolittle?

DOOLITTLE. Done to me! Ruined me. Destroyed my happiness. Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle class morality.

HIGGINS [rising intolerantly and standing over Doolittle] You're raving. You're drunk. You're mad. I gave you five pounds. After that I had two conversations with you, at half-a-crown an hour. I've never seen you since.

DOOLITTLE. Oh! Drunk! am I? Mad! am I? Tell me this. Did you or did you not write a letter to an old blighter in America that was giving five

millions to found Moral Reform Societies all over the world, and that wanted you to invent a universal language for him?

HIGGINS. What! Ezra D. Wannafeller! He's dead. [He sits down again carelessly].

DOOLITTLE. Yes: he's dead; and I'm done for. Now did you or did you not write a letter to him to say that the most original moralist at present in England, to the best of your knowledge, was Alfred Doolittle, a common dustman.

HIGGINS. Oh, after your last visit I remember making some silly joke of the kind.

DOOLITTLE. Ah! you may well call it a silly joke. It put the lid on me right enough. Just give him the chance he wanted to show that Americans is not like us: that they recognize and respect merit in every class of life, however humble. Them words is in his blooming will, in which, Henry Higgins, thanks to your silly joking, he leaves me a share in his Pre-digested Cheese Trust worth three thousand a year on condition that I lecture for his Wannafeller Moral Reform World League as often as they ask me up to six times a year.

HIGGINS. The devil he does! Whew! [Brightening suddenly] What a lark!

PICKERING. A safe thing for you, Doolittle. They won't ask you twice.

DOOLITTLE. It ain't the lecturing I mind. I'll lecture them blue in the face, I will, and not turn a hair. It's making a gentleman of me that I object to. Who asked him to make a gentleman of me? I was happy. I was free. I touched pretty nigh everybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Henry Higgins. Now I am worrited; tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money. It's a fine thing for you, says my solicitor. Is it? says I. You mean it's a good thing for you, I says. When I was a poor man and had a solicitor once when they found a pram in the dust cart, he got me off, and got shut of me and got me shut of him as quick as he could. Same with the doctors: used to shove me out of the hospital before I could hardly stand on my legs, and nothing to pay. Now they finds out that I'm not a healthy man and can't live unless they looks after me twice a day. In the house I'm not let do a hand's turn for myself: somebody else must do it and touch me for it. A year ago I hadn't a relative in the world except two or three that wouldn't speak to me. Now I've fifty, and not a decent week's wages among the lot of them. I have to live for others and not for myself: that's middle class morality. You talk of losing Eliza. Don't you be anxious: I bet she's on my doorstep by this: she that could support herself easy by selling flowers if I wasn't respectable. And the next one to touch me will be you, Henry Higgins. I'll have to learn to

speak middle class language from you, instead of speaking proper English. That's where you'll come in; and I daresay that's what you done it for.

MRS. HIGGINS. But, my dear Mr. Doolittle, you need not suffer all this if you are really in earnest. Nobody can force you to accept this bequest. You can repudiate it. Isn't that so, Colonel Pickering?

PICKERING. I believe so.

DOOLITTLE [softening his manner in deference to her sex] That's the tragedy of it, ma'am. It's easy to say chuck it; but I haven't the nerve. Which one of us has? We're all intimidated. Intimidated, ma'am: that's what we are. What is there for me if I chuck it but the workhouse in my old age? I have to dye my hair already to keep my job as a dustman. If I was one of the deserving poor, and had put by a bit, I could chuck it; but then why should I, acause the deserving poor might as well be millionaires for all the happiness they ever has. They don't know what happiness is. But I, as one of the undeserving poor, have nothing between me and the pauper's uniform but this here blasted three thousand a year that shoves me into the middle class. (Excuse the expression, ma'am: you'd use it yourself if you had my provocation). They've got you every way you turn: it's a choice between the Skilly of the workhouse and the Char Bydis of the middle class; and I haven't the nerve for the workhouse. Intimidated: that's what I am. Broke. Bought up. Happier men than me will call for my dust, and touch me for their tip; and I'll look on helpless, and envy them. And that's what your son has brought me to. [He is overcome by emotion].

MRS. HIGGINS. Well, I'm very glad you're not going to do anything foolish, Mr. Doolittle. For this solves the problem of Eliza's future. You can provide for her now.

DOOLITTLE [with melancholy resignation] Yes, ma'am; I'm expected to provide for everyone now, out of three thousand a year.

HIGGINS [jumping up] Nonsense! he can't provide for her. He shan't provide for her. She doesn't belong to him. I paid him five pounds for her. Doolittle: either you're an honest man or a rogue.

DOOLITTLE [tolerantly] A little of both, Henry, like the rest of us: a little of both.

HIGGINS. Well, you took that money for the girl; and you have no right to take her as well.

MRS. HIGGINS. Henry: don't be absurd. If you really want to know where Eliza is, she is upstairs.

HIGGINS [amazed] Upstairs!!! Then I shall jolly soon fetch her

downstairs. [He makes resolutely for the door].

MRS. HIGGINS [rising and following him] Be quiet, Henry. Sit down.

HIGGINS. I—

MRS. HIGGINS. Sit down, dear; and listen to me.

HIGGINS. Oh very well, very well, very well. [He throws himself ungraciously on the ottoman, with his face towards the windows]. But I think you might have told me this half an hour ago.

MRS. HIGGINS. Eliza came to me this morning. She passed the night partly walking about in a rage, partly trying to throw herself into the river and being afraid to, and partly in the Carlton Hotel. She told me of the brutal way you two treated her.

HIGGINS [bounding up again] What!

PICKERING [rising also] My dear Mrs. Higgins, she's been telling you stories. We didn't treat her brutally. We hardly said a word to her; and we parted on particularly good terms. [Turning on Higgins]. Higgins: did you bully her after I went to bed?

HIGGINS. Just the other way about. She threw my slippers in my face. She behaved in the most outrageous way. I never gave her the slightest provocation. The slippers came bang into my face the moment I entered the room—before I had uttered a word. And used perfectly awful language.

PICKERING [astonished] But why? What did we do to her?

MRS. HIGGINS. I think I know pretty well what you did. The girl is naturally rather affectionate, I think. Isn't she, Mr. Doolittle?

DOOLITTLE. Very tender-hearted, ma'am. Takes after me.

MRS. HIGGINS. Just so. She had become attached to you both. She worked very hard for you, Henry! I don't think you quite realize what anything in the nature of brain work means to a girl like that. Well, it seems that when the great day of trial came, and she did this wonderful thing for you without making a single mistake, you two sat there and never said a word to her, but talked together of how glad you were that it was all over and how you had been bored with the whole thing. And then you were surprised because she threw your slippers at you! I should have thrown the fire-irons at you.

HIGGINS. We said nothing except that we were tired and wanted to go to bed. Did we, Pick?

PICKERING [shrugging his shoulders] That was all.

MRS. HIGGINS [ironically] Quite sure?

PICKERING. Absolutely. Really, that was all.

MRS. HIGGINS. You didn't thank her, or pet her, or admire her, or tell her how splendid she'd been.

HIGGINS [impatiently] But she knew all about that. We didn't make speeches to her, if that's what you mean.

PICKERING [conscience stricken] Perhaps we were a little inconsiderate. Is she very angry?

MRS. HIGGINS [returning to her place at the writing-table] Well, I'm afraid she won't go back to Wimpole Street, especially now that Mr. Doolittle is able to keep up the position you have thrust on her; but she says she is quite willing to meet you on friendly terms and to let bygones be bygones.

HIGGINS [furious] Is she, by George? Ho!

MRS. HIGGINS. If you promise to behave yourself, Henry, I'll ask her to come down. If not, go home; for you have taken up quite enough of my time.

HIGGINS. Oh, all right. Very well. Pick: you behave yourself. Let us put on our best Sunday manners for this creature that we picked out of the mud. [He flings himself sulkily into the Elizabethan chair].

DOOLITTLE [remonstrating] Now, now, Henry Higgins! have some consideration for my feelings as a middle class man.

MRS. HIGGINS. Remember your promise, Henry. [She presses the bell-button on the writing-table]. Mr. Doolittle: will you be so good as to step out on the balcony for a moment. I don't want Eliza to have the shock of your news until she has made it up with these two gentlemen. Would you mind?

DOOLITTLE. As you wish, lady. Anything to help Henry to keep her off my hands. [He disappears through the window].

The parlor-maid answers the bell. Pickering sits down in Doolittle's place.

MRS. HIGGINS. Ask Miss Doolittle to come down, please.

THE PARLOR-MAID. Yes, mam. [She goes out].

MRS. HIGGINS. Now, Henry: be good.

HIGGINS. I am behaving myself perfectly.

PICKERING. He is doing his best, Mrs. Higgins.

A pause. Higgins throws back his head; stretches out his legs; and begins to whistle.

MRS. HIGGINS. Henry, dearest, you don't look at all nice in that attitude.

HIGGINS [pulling himself together] I was not trying to look nice, mother.

MRS. HIGGINS. It doesn't matter, dear. I only wanted to make you speak.

HIGGINS. Why?

MRS. HIGGINS. Because you can't speak and whistle at the same time.

Higgins groans. Another very trying pause.

HIGGINS [springing up, out of patience] Where the devil is that girl? Are we to wait here all day?

Eliza enters, sunny, self-possessed, and giving a staggeringly convincing exhibition of ease of manner. She carries a little work-basket, and is very much at home. Pickering is too much taken aback to rise.

LIZA. How do you do, Professor Higgins? Are you quite well?

HIGGINS [choking] Am I— [He can say no more].

LIZA. But of course you are: you are never ill. So glad to see you again, Colonel Pickering. [He rises hastily; and they shake hands]. Quite chilly this morning, isn't it? [She sits down on his left. He sits beside her].

HIGGINS. Don't you dare try this game on me. I taught it to you; and it doesn't take me in. Get up and come home; and don't be a fool.

Eliza takes a piece of needlework from her basket, and begins to stitch at it, without taking the least notice of this outburst.

MRS. HIGGINS. Very nicely put, indeed, Henry. No woman could resist such an invitation.

HIGGINS. You let her alone, mother. Let her speak for herself. You will jolly soon see whether she has an idea that I haven't put into her head or a word that I haven't put into her mouth. I tell you I have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden; and now she pretends to play the fine lady with me.

MRS. HIGGINS [placidly] Yes, dear; but you'll sit down, won't you?

Higgins sits down again, savagely.

LIZA [to Pickering, taking no apparent notice of Higgins, and working away deftly] Will you drop me altogether now that the experiment is over, Colonel Pickering?

PICKERING. Oh don't. You mustn't think of it as an experiment. It shocks me, somehow.

LIZA. Oh, I'm only a squashed cabbage leaf.

PICKERING [impulsively] No.

LIZA [continuing quietly]—but I owe so much to you that I should be very unhappy if you forgot me.

PICKERING. It's very kind of you to say so, Miss Doolittle.

LIZA. It's not because you paid for my dresses. I know you are generous to everybody with money. But it was from you that I learnt really nice manners; and that is what makes one a lady, isn't it? You see it was so very difficult for me with the example of Professor Higgins always before me. I was brought up to be just like him, unable to control myself, and using bad language on the slightest provocation. And I should never have known that ladies and gentlemen didn't behave like that if you hadn't been there.

HIGGINS. Well!!

PICKERING. Oh, that's only his way, you know. He doesn't mean it.

LIZA. Oh, I didn't mean it either, when I was a flower girl. It was only my way. But you see I did it; and that's what makes the difference after all.

PICKERING. No doubt. Still, he taught you to speak; and I couldn't have done that, you know.

LIZA [trivially] Of course: that is his profession.

HIGGINS. Damnation!

LIZA [continuing] It was just like learning to dance in the fashionable way: there was nothing more than that in it. But do you know what began my real education?

PICKERING. What?

LIZA [stopping her work for a moment] Your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me. [She resumes her stitching]. And there were a hundred little things you never noticed, because they came naturally to you. Things about standing up and taking off your hat and opening doors—

PICKERING. Oh, that was nothing.

LIZA. Yes: things that showed you thought and felt about me as if I were something better than a scullerymaid; though of course I know you would have been just the same to a scullery-maid if she had been let in the drawing-room. You never took off your boots in the dining room when I was there.

PICKERING. You mustn't mind that. Higgins takes off his boots all over the place.

LIZA. I know. I am not blaming him. It is his way, isn't it? But it made such a difference to me that you didn't do it. You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.

MRS. HIGGINS. Please don't grind your teeth, Henry.

PICKERING. Well, this is really very nice of you, Miss Doolittle.

LIZA. I should like you to call me Eliza, now, if you would.

PICKERING. Thank you. Eliza, of course.

LIZA. And I should like Professor Higgins to call me Miss Doolittle.

HIGGINS. I'll see you damned first.

MRS. HIGGINS. Henry! Henry!

PICKERING [laughing] Why don't you slang back at him? Don't stand it. It would do him a lot of good.

LIZA. I can't. I could have done it once; but now I can't go back to it. Last night, when I was wandering about, a girl spoke to me; and I tried to get back into the old way with her; but it was no use. You told me, you know, that when a child is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours. That's the real break-off with the corner of Tottenham Court Road. Leaving Wimpole Street finishes it.

PICKERING [much alarmed] Oh! but you're coming back to Wimpole Street, aren't you? You'll forgive Higgins?

HIGGINS [rising] Forgive! Will she, by George! Let her go. Let her find out how she can get on without us. She will relapse into the gutter in three weeks without me at her elbow.

Doolittle appears at the centre window. With a look of dignified reproach at Higgins, he comes slowly and silently to his daughter, who, with her back to the window, is unconscious of his approach.

PICKERING. He's incorrigible, Eliza. You won't relapse, will you?

LIZA. No: Not now. Never again. I have learnt my lesson. I don't believe I could utter one of the old sounds if I tried. [Doolittle touches her on her left shoulder. She drops her work, losing her self-possession utterly at the

spectacle of her father's splendor] A—a—a—a—a—ah—ow—ooh!

HIGGINS [with a crow of triumph] Aha! Just so. A—a—a—a—ahowooh! A—a—a—a—ahowooh ! A—a—a—a—ahowooh! Victory! Victory! [He throws himself on the divan, folding his arms, and spraddling arrogantly].

DOOLITTLE. Can you blame the girl? Don't look at me like that, Eliza. It ain't my fault. I've come into money.

LIZA. You must have touched a millionaire this time, dad.

DOOLITTLE. I have. But I'm dressed something special today. I'm going to St. George's, Hanover Square. Your stepmother is going to marry me.

LIZA [angrily] You're going to let yourself down to marry that low common woman!

PICKERING [quietly] He ought to, Eliza. [To Doolittle] Why has she changed her mind?

DOOLITTLE [sadly] Intimidated, Governor. Intimidated. Middle class morality claims its victim. Won't you put on your hat, Liza, and come and see me turned off?

LIZA. If the Colonel says I must, I—I'll [almost sobbing] I'll demean myself. And get insulted for my pains, like enough.

DOOLITTLE. Don't be afraid: she never comes to words with anyone now, poor woman! respectability has broke all the spirit out of her.

PICKERING [squeezing Eliza's elbow gently] Be kind to them, Eliza. Make the best of it.

LIZA [forcing a little smile for him through her vexation] Oh well, just to show there's no ill feeling. I'll be back in a moment. [She goes out].

DOOLITTLE [sitting down beside Pickering] I feel uncommon nervous about the ceremony, Colonel. I wish you'd come and see me through it.

PICKERING. But you've been through it before, man. You were married to Eliza's mother.

DOOLITTLE. Who told you that, Colonel?

PICKERING. Well, nobody told me. But I concluded naturally—

DOOLITTLE. No: that ain't the natural way, Colonel: it's only the middle class way. My way was always the undeserving way. But don't say nothing to Eliza. She don't know: I always had a delicacy about telling her.

PICKERING. Quite right. We'll leave it so, if you don't mind.

DOOLITTLE. And you'll come to the church, Colonel, and put me through straight?

PICKERING. With pleasure. As far as a bachelor can.

MRS. HIGGINS. May I come, Mr. Doolittle? I should be very sorry to miss your wedding.

DOOLITTLE. I should indeed be honored by your condescension, ma'am; and my poor old woman would take it as a tremenjous compliment. She's been very low, thinking of the happy days that are no more.

MRS. HIGGINS [rising] I'll order the carriage and get ready. [The men rise, except Higgins]. I shan't be more than fifteen minutes. [As she goes to the door Eliza comes in, hatted and buttoning her gloves]. I'm going to the church to see your father married, Eliza. You had better come in the brougham with me. Colonel Pickering can go on with the bridegroom.

Mrs. Higgins goes out. Eliza comes to the middle of the room between the centre window and the ottoman. Pickering joins her.

DOOLITTLE. Bridegroom! What a word! It makes a man realize his position, somehow. [He takes up his hat and goes towards the door].

PICKERING. Before I go, Eliza, do forgive him and come back to us.

LIZA. I don't think papa would allow me. Would you, dad?

DOOLITTLE [sad but magnanimous] They played you off very cunning, Eliza, them two sportsmen. If it had been only one of them, you could have nailed him. But you see, there was two; and one of them chaperoned the other, as you might say. [To Pickering] It was artful of you, Colonel; but I bear no malice: I should have done the same myself. I been the victim of one woman after another all my life; and I don't grudge you two getting the better of Eliza. I shan't interfere. It's time for us to go, Colonel. So long, Henry. See you in St. George's, Eliza. [He goes out].

PICKERING [coaxing] Do stay with us, Eliza. [He follows Doolittle].

Eliza goes out on the balcony to avoid being alone with Higgins. He rises and joins her there. She immediately comes back into the room and makes for the door; but he goes along the balcony quickly and gets his back to the door before she reaches it.

HIGGINS. Well, Eliza, you've had a bit of your own back, as you call it. Have you had enough? and are you going to be reasonable? Or do you want any more?

LIZA. You want me back only to pick up your slippers and put up with your tempers and fetch and carry for you.

HIGGINS. I haven't said I wanted you back at all.

LIZA. Oh, indeed. Then what are we talking about?

HIGGINS. About you, not about me. If you come back I shall treat you just as I have always treated you. I can't change my nature; and I don't intend to change my manners. My manners are exactly the same as Colonel Pickering's.

LIZA. That's not true. He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess.

HIGGINS. And I treat a duchess as if she was a flower girl.

LIZA. I see. [She turns away composedly, and sits on the ottoman, facing the window]. The same to everybody.

HIGGINS. Just so.

LIZA. Like father.

HIGGINS [grinning, a little taken down] Without accepting the comparison at all points, Eliza, it's quite true that your father is not a snob, and that he will be quite at home in any station of life to which his eccentric destiny may call him. [Seriously] The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.

LIZA. Amen. You are a born preacher.

HIGGINS [irritated] The question is not whether I treat you rudely, but whether you ever heard me treat anyone else better.

LIZA [with sudden sincerity] I don't care how you treat me. I don't mind your swearing at me. I don't mind a black eye: I've had one before this. But [standing up and facing him] I won't be passed over.

HIGGINS. Then get out of my way; for I won't stop for you. You talk about me as if I were a motor bus.

LIZA. So you are a motor bus: all bounce and go, and no consideration for anyone. But I can do without you: don't think I can't.

HIGGINS. I know you can. I told you you could.

LIZA [wounded, getting away from him to the other side of the ottoman with her face to the hearth] I know you did, you brute. You wanted to get rid of me.

HIGGINS. Liar.

LIZA. Thank you. [She sits down with dignity].

HIGGINS. You never asked yourself, I suppose, whether I could do without YOU.

LIZA [earnestly] Don't you try to get round me. You'll HAVE to do without me.

HIGGINS [arrogant] I can do without anybody. I have my own soul: my own spark of divine fire. But [with sudden humility] I shall miss you, Eliza. [He sits down near her on the ottoman]. I have learnt something from your idiotic notions: I confess that humbly and gratefully. And I have grown accustomed to your voice and appearance. I like them, rather.

LIZA. Well, you have both of them on your gramophone and in your book of photographs. When you feel lonely without me, you can turn the machine on. It's got no feelings to hurt.

HIGGINS. I can't turn your soul on. Leave me those feelings; and you can take away the voice and the face. They are not you.

LIZA. Oh, you ARE a devil. You can twist the heart in a girl as easy as some could twist her arms to hurt her. Mrs. Pearce warned me. Time and again she has wanted to leave you; and you always got round her at the last minute. And you don't care a bit for her. And you don't care a bit for me.

HIGGINS. I care for life, for humanity; and you are a part of it that has come my way and been built into my house. What more can you or anyone ask?

LIZA. I won't care for anybody that doesn't care for me.

HIGGINS. Commercial principles, Eliza. Like [reproducing her Covent Garden pronunciation with professional exactness] s'yollin voylets [selling violets], isn't it?

LIZA. Don't sneer at me. It's mean to sneer at me.

HIGGINS. I have never sneered in my life. Sneering doesn't become either the human face or the human soul. I am expressing my righteous contempt for Commercialism. I don't and won't trade in affection. You call me a brute because you couldn't buy a claim on me by fetching my slippers and finding my spectacles. You were a fool: I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: did I ever fetch YOUR slippers? I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face. No use slaving for me and then saying you want to be cared for: who cares for a slave? If you come back, come back for the sake of good fellowship; for you'll get nothing else. You've had a thousand times as much out of me as I have out of you; and if you dare to set up your little dog's tricks of fetching and carrying slippers against my creation of a

Duchess Eliza, I'll slam the door in your silly face.

LIZA. What did you do it for if you didn't care for me?

HIGGINS [heartily] Why, because it was my job.

LIZA. You never thought of the trouble it would make for me.

HIGGINS. Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble. There's only one way of escaping trouble; and that's killing things. Cowards, you notice, are always shrieking to have troublesome people killed.

LIZA. I'm no preacher: I don't notice things like that. I notice that you don't notice me.

HIGGINS [jumping up and walking about intolerantly] Eliza: you're an idiot. I waste the treasures of my Miltonic mind by spreading them before you. Once for all, understand that I go my way and do my work without caring twopence what happens to either of us. I am not intimidated, like your father and your stepmother. So you can come back or go to the devil: which you please.

LIZA. What am I to come back for?

HIGGINS [bouncing up on his knees on the ottoman and leaning over it to her] For the fun of it. That's why I took you on.

LIZA [with averted face] And you may throw me out tomorrow if I don't do everything you want me to?

HIGGINS. Yes; and you may walk out tomorrow if I don't do everything YOU want me to.

LIZA. And live with my stepmother?

HIGGINS. Yes, or sell flowers.

LIZA. Oh! if I only COULD go back to my flower basket! I should be independent of both you and father and all the world! Why did you take my independence from me? Why did I give it up? I'm a slave now, for all my fine clothes.

HIGGINS. Not a bit. I'll adopt you as my daughter and settle money on you if you like. Or would you rather marry Pickering?

LIZA [looking fiercely round at him] I wouldn't marry YOU if you asked me; and you're nearer my age than what he is.

HIGGINS [gently] Than he is: not "than what he is."

LIZA [losing her temper and rising] I'll talk as I like. You're not my teacher

now.

HIGGINS [reflectively] I don't suppose Pickering would, though. He's as confirmed an old bachelor as I am.

LIZA. That's not what I want; and don't you think it. I've always had chaps enough wanting me that way. Freddy Hill writes to me twice and three times a day, sheets and sheets.

HIGGINS [disagreeably surprised] Damn his impudence! [He recoils and finds himself sitting on his heels].

LIZA. He has a right to if he likes, poor lad. And he does love me.

HIGGINS [getting off the ottoman] You have no right to encourage him.

LIZA. Every girl has a right to be loved.

HIGGINS. What! By fools like that?

LIZA. Freddy's not a fool. And if he's weak and poor and wants me, may be he'd make me happier than my betters that bully me and don't want me.

HIGGINS. Can he MAKE anything of you? That's the point.

LIZA. Perhaps I could make something of him. But I never thought of us making anything of one another; and you never think of anything else. I only want to be natural.

HIGGINS. In short, you want me to be as infatuated about you as Freddy? Is that it?

LIZA. No I don't. That's not the sort of feeling I want from you. And don't you be too sure of yourself or of me. I could have been a bad girl if I'd liked. I've seen more of some things than you, for all your learning. Girls like me can drag gentlemen down to make love to them easy enough. And they wish each other dead the next minute.

HIGGINS. Of course they do. Then what in thunder are we quarrelling about?

LIZA [much troubled] I want a little kindness. I know I'm a common ignorant girl, and you a book-learned gentleman; but I'm not dirt under your feet. What I done [correcting herself] what I did was not for the dresses and the taxis: I did it because we were pleasant together and I come—came—to care for you; not to want you to make love to me, and not forgetting the difference between us, but more friendly like.

HIGGINS. Well, of course. That's just how I feel. And how Pickering feels. Eliza: you're a fool.

LIZA. That's not a proper answer to give me [she sinks on the chair at the writing-table in tears].

HIGGINS. It's all you'll get until you stop being a common idiot. If you're going to be a lady, you'll have to give up feeling neglected if the men you know don't spend half their time snivelling over you and the other half giving you black eyes. If you can't stand the coldness of my sort of life, and the strain of it, go back to the gutter. Work til you are more a brute than a human being; and then cuddle and squabble and drink til you fall asleep. Oh, it's a fine life, the life of the gutter. It's real: it's warm: it's violent: you can feel it through the thickest skin: you can taste it and smell it without any training or any work. Not like Science and Literature and Classical Music and Philosophy and Art. You find me cold, unfeeling, selfish, don't you? Very well: be off with you to the sort of people you like. Marry some sentimental hog or other with lots of money, and a thick pair of lips to kiss you with and a thick pair of boots to kick you with. If you can't appreciate what you've got, you'd better get what you can appreciate.

LIZA [desperate] Oh, you are a cruel tyrant. I can't talk to you: you turn everything against me: I'm always in the wrong. But you know very well all the time that you're nothing but a bully. You know I can't go back to the gutter, as you call it, and that I have no real friends in the world but you and the Colonel. You know well I couldn't bear to live with a low common man after you two; and it's wicked and cruel of you to insult me by pretending I could. You think I must go back to Wimpole Street because I have nowhere else to go but father's. But don't you be too sure that you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down. I'll marry Freddy, I will, as soon as he's able to support me.

HIGGINS [sitting down beside her] Rubbish! you shall marry an ambassador. You shall marry the Governor-General of India or the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or somebody who wants a deputy-queen. I'm not going to have my masterpiece thrown away on Freddy.

LIZA. You think I like you to say that. But I haven't forgot what you said a minute ago; and I won't be coaxed round as if I was a baby or a puppy. If I can't have kindness, I'll have independence.

HIGGINS. Independence? That's middle class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.

LIZA [rising determinedly] I'll let you see whether I'm dependent on you. If you can preach, I can teach. I'll go and be a teacher.

HIGGINS. What'll you teach, in heaven's name?

LIZA. What you taught me. I'll teach phonetics.

HIGGINS. Ha! Ha! Ha!

LIZA. I'll offer myself as an assistant to Professor Nepean.

HIGGINS [rising in a fury] What! That impostor! that humbug! that toadying ignoramus! Teach him my methods! my discoveries! You take one step in his direction and I'll wring your neck. [He lays hands on her]. Do you hear?

LIZA [defiantly non-resistant] Wring away. What do I care? I knew you'd strike me some day. [He lets her go, stamping with rage at having forgotten himself, and recoils so hastily that he stumbles back into his seat on the ottoman]. Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You can't take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! That's done you, Henry Higgins, it has. Now I don't care that [snapping her fingers] for your bullying and your big talk. I'll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.

HIGGINS [wondering at her] You damned impudent slut, you! But it's better than snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isn't it? [Rising] By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.

LIZA. Yes: you turn round and make up to me now that I'm not afraid of you, and can do without you.

HIGGINS. Of course I do, you little fool. Five minutes ago you were like a millstone round my neck. Now you're a tower of strength: a consort battleship. You and I and Pickering will be three old bachelors together instead of only two men and a silly girl.

Mrs. Higgins returns, dressed for the wedding. Eliza instantly becomes cool and elegant.

MRS. HIGGINS. The carriage is waiting, Eliza. Are you ready?

LIZA. Quite. Is the Professor coming?

MRS. HIGGINS. Certainly not. He can't behave himself in church. He makes remarks out loud all the time on the clergyman's pronunciation.

LIZA. Then I shall not see you again, Professor. Good bye. [She goes to the door].

MRS. HIGGINS [coming to Higgins] Good-bye, dear.

HIGGINS. Good-bye, mother. [He is about to kiss her, when he recollects something]. Oh, by the way, Eliza, order a ham and a Stilton cheese, will you? And buy me a pair of reindeer gloves, number eights, and a tie to match that new suit of mine, at Eale & Binman's. You can choose the color. [His cheerful, careless, vigorous voice shows that he is incorrigible].

LIZA [disdainfully] Buy them yourself. [She sweeps out].

MRS. HIGGINS. I'm afraid you've spoiled that girl, Henry. But never mind, dear: I'll buy you the tie and gloves.

HIGGINS [sunnily] Oh, don't bother. She'll buy em all right enough. Good-bye.

They kiss. Mrs. Higgins runs out. Higgins, left alone, rattles his cash in his pocket; chuckles; and disports himself in a highly self-satisfied manner.

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The rest of the story need not be shown in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-makes and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of "happy endings" to misfit all stories. Now, the history of Eliza Doolittle, though called a romance because of the transfiguration it records seems exceedingly improbable, is common enough. Such transfigurations have been achieved by hundreds of resolutely ambitious young women since Nell Gwynne set them the example by playing queens and fascinating kings in the theatre in which she began by selling oranges. Nevertheless, people in all directions have assumed, for no other reason than that she became the heroine of a romance, that she must have married the hero of it. This is unbearable, not only because her little drama, if acted on such a thoughtless assumption, must be spoiled, but because the true sequel is patent to anyone with a sense of human nature in general, and of feminine instinct in particular.

Eliza, in telling Higgins she would not marry him if he asked her, was not coquetting: she was announcing a well-considered decision. When a bachelor interests, and dominates, and teaches, and becomes important to a spinster, as Higgins with Eliza, she always, if she has character enough to be capable of it, considers very seriously indeed whether she will play for becoming that bachelor's wife, especially if he is so little interested in marriage that a determined and devoted woman might capture him if she set herself resolutely to do it. Her decision will depend a good deal on whether she is really free to choose; and that, again, will depend on her age and income. If she is at the end of her youth, and has no security for her livelihood, she will marry him

because she must marry anybody who will provide for her. But at Eliza's age a good-looking girl does not feel that pressure; she feels free to pick and choose. She is therefore guided by her instinct in the matter. Eliza's instinct tells her not to marry Higgins. It does not tell her to give him up. It is not in the slightest doubt as to his remaining one of the strongest personal interests in her life. It would be very sorely strained if there was another woman likely to supplant her with him. But as she feels sure of him on that last point, she has no doubt at all as to her course, and would not have any, even if the difference of twenty years in age, which seems so great to youth, did not exist between them.

As our own instincts are not appealed to by her conclusion, let us see whether we cannot discover some reason in it. When Higgins excused his indifference to young women on the ground that they had an irresistible rival in his mother, he gave the clue to his inveterate old-bachelordom. The case is uncommon only to the extent that remarkable mothers are uncommon. If an imaginative boy has a sufficiently rich mother who has intelligence, personal grace, dignity of character without harshness, and a cultivated sense of the best art of her time to enable her to make her house beautiful, she sets a standard for him against which very few women can struggle, besides effecting for him a disengagement of his affections, his sense of beauty, and his idealism from his specifically sexual impulses. This makes him a standing puzzle to the huge number of uncultivated people who have been brought up in tasteless homes by commonplace or disagreeable parents, and to whom, consequently, literature, painting, sculpture, music, and affectionate personal relations come as modes of sex if they come at all. The word passion means nothing else to them; and that Higgins could have a passion for phonetics and idealize his mother instead of Eliza, would seem to them absurd and unnatural. Nevertheless, when we look round and see that hardly anyone is too ugly or disagreeable to find a wife or a husband if he or she wants one, whilst many old maids and bachelors are above the average in quality and culture, we cannot help suspecting that the disentanglement of sex from the associations with which it is so commonly confused, a disentanglement which persons of genius achieve by sheer intellectual analysis, is sometimes produced or aided by parental fascination.

Now, though Eliza was incapable of thus explaining to herself Higgins's formidable powers of resistance to the charm that prostrated Freddy at the first glance, she was instinctively aware that she could never obtain a complete grip of him, or come between him and his mother (the first necessity of the married woman). To put it shortly, she knew that for some mysterious reason he had not the makings of a married man in him, according to her conception of a husband as one to whom she would be his nearest and fondest and warmest interest. Even had there been no mother-rival, she would still have refused to

accept an interest in herself that was secondary to philosophic interests. Had Mrs. Higgins died, there would still have been Milton and the Universal Alphabet. Landor's remark that to those who have the greatest power of loving, love is a secondary affair, would not have recommended Landor to Eliza. Put that along with her resentment of Higgins's domineering superiority, and her mistrust of his coaxing cleverness in getting round her and evading her wrath when he had gone too far with his impetuous bullying, and you will see that Eliza's instinct had good grounds for warning her not to marry her Pygmalion.

And now, whom did Eliza marry? For if Higgins was a predestinate old bachelor, she was most certainly not a predestinate old maid. Well, that can be told very shortly to those who have not guessed it from the indications she has herself given them.

Almost immediately after Eliza is stung into proclaiming her considered determination not to marry Higgins, she mentions the fact that young Mr. Frederick Eynsford Hill is pouring out his love for her daily through the post. Now Freddy is young, practically twenty years younger than Higgins: he is a gentleman (or, as Eliza would qualify him, a toff), and speaks like one; he is nicely dressed, is treated by the Colonel as an equal, loves her unaffectedly, and is not her master, nor ever likely to dominate her in spite of his advantage of social standing. Eliza has no use for the foolish romantic tradition that all women love to be mastered, if not actually bullied and beaten. "When you go to women," says Nietzsche, "take your whip with you." Sensible despots have never confined that precaution to women: they have taken their whips with them when they have dealt with men, and been slavishly idealized by the men over whom they have flourished the whip much more than by women. No doubt there are slavish women as well as slavish men; and women, like men, admire those that are stronger than themselves. But to admire a strong person and to live under that strong person's thumb are two different things. The weak may not be admired and hero-worshipped; but they are by no means disliked or shunned; and they never seem to have the least difficulty in marrying people who are too good for them. They may fail in emergencies; but life is not one long emergency: it is mostly a string of situations for which no exceptional strength is needed, and with which even rather weak people can cope if they have a stronger partner to help them out. Accordingly, it is a truth everywhere in evidence that strong people, masculine or feminine, not only do not marry stronger people, but do not show any preference for them in selecting their friends. When a lion meets another with a louder roar "the first lion thinks the last a bore." The man or woman who feels strong enough for two, seeks for every other quality in a partner than strength.

The converse is also true. Weak people want to marry strong people who

do not frighten them too much; and this often leads them to make the mistake we describe metaphorically as "biting off more than they can chew." They want too much for too little; and when the bargain is unreasonable beyond all bearing, the union becomes impossible: it ends in the weaker party being either discarded or borne as a cross, which is worse. People who are not only weak, but silly or obtuse as well, are often in these difficulties.

This being the state of human affairs, what is Eliza fairly sure to do when she is placed between Freddy and Higgins? Will she look forward to a lifetime of fetching Higgins's slippers or to a lifetime of Freddy fetching hers? There can be no doubt about the answer. Unless Freddy is biologically repulsive to her, and Higgins biologically attractive to a degree that overwhelms all her other instincts, she will, if she marries either of them, marry Freddy.

And that is just what Eliza did.

Complications ensued; but they were economic, not romantic. Freddy had no money and no occupation. His mother's jointure, a last relic of the opulence of Largelady Park, had enabled her to struggle along in Earlscourt with an air of gentility, but not to procure any serious secondary education for her children, much less give the boy a profession. A clerkship at thirty shillings a week was beneath Freddy's dignity, and extremely distasteful to him besides. His prospects consisted of a hope that if he kept up appearances somebody would do something for him. The something appeared vaguely to his imagination as a private secretaryship or a sinecure of some sort. To his mother it perhaps appeared as a marriage to some lady of means who could not resist her boy's niceness. Fancy her feelings when he married a flower girl who had become declassee under extraordinary circumstances which were now notorious!

It is true that Eliza's situation did not seem wholly ineligible. Her father, though formerly a dustman, and now fantastically disclassed, had become extremely popular in the smartest society by a social talent which triumphed over every prejudice and every disadvantage. Rejected by the middle class, which he loathed, he had shot up at once into the highest circles by his wit, his dustmanship (which he carried like a banner), and his Nietzschean transcendence of good and evil. At intimate ducal dinners he sat on the right hand of the Duchess; and in country houses he smoked in the pantry and was made much of by the butler when he was not feeding in the dining-room and being consulted by cabinet ministers. But he found it almost as hard to do all this on four thousand a year as Mrs. Eynsford Hill to live in Earlscourt on an income so pitiably smaller that I have not the heart to disclose its exact figure. He absolutely refused to add the last straw to his burden by contributing to Eliza's support.

Thus Freddy and Eliza, now Mr. and Mrs. Eynsford Hill, would have spent a penniless honeymoon but for a wedding present of 500 pounds from the Colonel to Eliza. It lasted a long time because Freddy did not know how to spend money, never having had any to spend, and Eliza, socially trained by a pair of old bachelors, wore her clothes as long as they held together and looked pretty, without the least regard to their being many months out of fashion. Still, 500 pounds will not last two young people for ever; and they both knew, and Eliza felt as well, that they must shift for themselves in the end. She could quarter herself on Wimpole Street because it had come to be her home; but she was quite aware that she ought not to quarter Freddy there, and that it would not be good for his character if she did.

Not that the Wimpole Street bachelors objected. When she consulted them, Higgins declined to be bothered about her housing problem when that solution was so simple. Eliza's desire to have Freddy in the house with her seemed of no more importance than if she had wanted an extra piece of bedroom furniture. Pleas as to Freddy's character, and the moral obligation on him to earn his own living, were lost on Higgins. He denied that Freddy had any character, and declared that if he tried to do any useful work some competent person would have the trouble of undoing it: a procedure involving a net loss to the community, and great unhappiness to Freddy himself, who was obviously intended by Nature for such light work as amusing Eliza, which, Higgins declared, was a much more useful and honorable occupation than working in the city. When Eliza referred again to her project of teaching phonetics, Higgins abated not a jot of his violent opposition to it. He said she was not within ten years of being qualified to meddle with his pet subject; and as it was evident that the Colonel agreed with him, she felt she could not go against them in this grave matter, and that she had no right, without Higgins's consent, to exploit the knowledge he had given her; for his knowledge seemed to her as much his private property as his watch: Eliza was no communist. Besides, she was superstitiously devoted to them both, more entirely and frankly after her marriage than before it.

It was the Colonel who finally solved the problem, which had cost him much perplexed cogitation. He one day asked Eliza, rather shyly, whether she had quite given up her notion of keeping a flower shop. She replied that she had thought of it, but had put it out of her head, because the Colonel had said, that day at Mrs. Higgins's, that it would never do. The Colonel confessed that when he said that, he had not quite recovered from the dazzling impression of the day before. They broke the matter to Higgins that evening. The sole comment vouchsafed by him very nearly led to a serious quarrel with Eliza. It was to the effect that she would have in Freddy an ideal errand boy.

Freddy himself was next sounded on the subject. He said he had been

thinking of a shop himself; though it had presented itself to his pennilessness as a small place in which Eliza should sell tobacco at one counter whilst he sold newspapers at the opposite one. But he agreed that it would be extraordinarily jolly to go early every morning with Eliza to Covent Garden and buy flowers on the scene of their first meeting: a sentiment which earned him many kisses from his wife. He added that he had always been afraid to propose anything of the sort, because Clara would make an awful row about a step that must damage her matrimonial chances, and his mother could not be expected to like it after clinging for so many years to that step of the social ladder on which retail trade is impossible.

This difficulty was removed by an event highly unexpected by Freddy's mother. Clara, in the course of her incursions into those artistic circles which were the highest within her reach, discovered that her conversational qualifications were expected to include a grounding in the novels of Mr. H.G. Wells. She borrowed them in various directions so energetically that she swallowed them all within two months. The result was a conversion of a kind quite common today. A modern Acts of the Apostles would fill fifty whole Bibles if anyone were capable of writing it.

Poor Clara, who appeared to Higgins and his mother as a disagreeable and ridiculous person, and to her own mother as in some inexplicable way a social failure, had never seen herself in either light; for, though to some extent ridiculed and mimicked in West Kensington like everybody else there, she was accepted as a rational and normal—or shall we say inevitable?—sort of human being. At worst they called her The Pusher; but to them no more than to herself had it ever occurred that she was pushing the air, and pushing it in a wrong direction. Still, she was not happy. She was growing desperate. Her one asset, the fact that her mother was what the Epsom greengrocer called a carriage lady had no exchange value, apparently. It had prevented her from getting educated, because the only education she could have afforded was education with the Earlscourt green grocer's daughter. It had led her to seek the society of her mother's class; and that class simply would not have her, because she was much poorer than the greengrocer, and, far from being able to afford a maid, could not afford even a housemaid, and had to scrape along at home with an illiberally treated general servant. Under such circumstances nothing could give her an air of being a genuine product of Largelady Park. And yet its tradition made her regard a marriage with anyone within her reach as an unbearable humiliation. Commercial people and professional people in a small way were odious to her. She ran after painters and novelists; but she did not charm them; and her bold attempts to pick up and practise artistic and literary talk irritated them. She was, in short, an utter failure, an ignorant, incompetent, pretentious, unwelcome, penniless, useless little snob; and though she did not admit these disqualifications (for nobody ever faces

unpleasant truths of this kind until the possibility of a way out dawns on them) she felt their effects too keenly to be satisfied with her position.

Clara had a startling eyeopener when, on being suddenly wakened to enthusiasm by a girl of her own age who dazzled her and produced in her a gushing desire to take her for a model, and gain her friendship, she discovered that this exquisite apparition had graduated from the gutter in a few months' time. It shook her so violently, that when Mr. H. G. Wells lifted her on the point of his puissant pen, and placed her at the angle of view from which the life she was leading and the society to which she clung appeared in its true relation to real human needs and worthy social structure, he effected a conversion and a conviction of sin comparable to the most sensational feats of General Booth or Gypsy Smith. Clara's snobbery went bang. Life suddenly began to move with her. Without knowing how or why, she began to make friends and enemies. Some of the acquaintances to whom she had been a tedious or indifferent or ridiculous affliction, dropped her: others became cordial. To her amazement she found that some "quite nice" people were saturated with Wells, and that this accessibility to ideas was the secret of their niceness. People she had thought deeply religious, and had tried to conciliate on that tack with disastrous results, suddenly took an interest in her, and revealed a hostility to conventional religion which she had never conceived possible except among the most desperate characters. They made her read Galsworthy; and Galsworthy exposed the vanity of Largelady Park and finished her. It exasperated her to think that the dungeon in which she had languished for so many unhappy years had been unlocked all the time, and that the impulses she had so carefully struggled with and stifled for the sake of keeping well with society, were precisely those by which alone she could have come into any sort of sincere human contact. In the radiance of these discoveries, and the tumult of their reaction, she made a fool of herself as freely and conspicuously as when she so rashly adopted Eliza's expletive in Mrs. Higgins's drawing-room; for the new-born Wellsian had to find her bearings almost as ridiculously as a baby; but nobody hates a baby for its ineptitudes, or thinks the worse of it for trying to eat the matches; and Clara lost no friends by her follies. They laughed at her to her face this time; and she had to defend herself and fight it out as best she could.

When Freddy paid a visit to Earlscourt (which he never did when he could possibly help it) to make the desolating announcement that he and his Eliza were thinking of blackening the Largelady scutcheon by opening a shop, he found the little household already convulsed by a prior announcement from Clara that she also was going to work in an old furniture shop in Dover Street, which had been started by a fellow Wellsian. This appointment Clara owed, after all, to her old social accomplishment of Push. She had made up her mind that, cost what it might, she would see Mr. Wells in the flesh; and she had

achieved her end at a garden party. She had better luck than so rash an enterprise deserved. Mr. Wells came up to her expectations. Age had not withered him, nor could custom stale his infinite variety in half an hour. His pleasant neatness and compactness, his small hands and feet, his teeming ready brain, his unaffected accessibility, and a certain fine apprehensiveness which stamped him as susceptible from his topmost hair to his tipmost toe, proved irresistible. Clara talked of nothing else for weeks and weeks afterwards. And as she happened to talk to the lady of the furniture shop, and that lady also desired above all things to know Mr. Wells and sell pretty things to him, she offered Clara a job on the chance of achieving that end through her.

And so it came about that Eliza's luck held, and the expected opposition to the flower shop melted away. The shop is in the arcade of a railway station not very far from the Victoria and Albert Museum; and if you live in that neighborhood you may go there any day and buy a buttonhole from Eliza.

Now here is a last opportunity for romance. Would you not like to be assured that the shop was an immense success, thanks to Eliza's charms and her early business experience in Covent Garden? Alas! the truth is the truth: the shop did not pay for a long time, simply because Eliza and her Freddy did not know how to keep it. True, Eliza had not to begin at the very beginning: she knew the names and prices of the cheaper flowers; and her elation was unbounded when she found that Freddy, like all youths educated at cheap, pretentious, and thoroughly inefficient schools, knew a little Latin. It was very little, but enough to make him appear to her a Porson or Bentley, and to put him at his ease with botanical nomenclature. Unfortunately he knew nothing else; and Eliza, though she could count money up to eighteen shillings or so, and had acquired a certain familiarity with the language of Milton from her struggles to qualify herself for winning Higgins's bet, could not write out a bill without utterly disgracing the establishment. Freddy's power of stating in Latin that Balbus built a wall and that Gaul was divided into three parts did not carry with it the slightest knowledge of accounts or business: Colonel Pickering had to explain to him what a cheque book and a bank account meant. And the pair were by no means easily teachable. Freddy backed up Eliza in her obstinate refusal to believe that they could save money by engaging a bookkeeper with some knowledge of the business. How, they argued, could you possibly save money by going to extra expense when you already could not make both ends meet? But the Colonel, after making the ends meet over and over again, at last gently insisted; and Eliza, humbled to the dust by having to beg from him so often, and stung by the uproarious derision of Higgins, to whom the notion of Freddy succeeding at anything was a joke that never palled, grasped the fact that business, like phonetics, has to be learned.

On the piteous spectacle of the pair spending their evenings in shorthand schools and polytechnic classes, learning bookkeeping and typewriting with incipient junior clerks, male and female, from the elementary schools, let me not dwell. There were even classes at the London School of Economics, and a humble personal appeal to the director of that institution to recommend a course bearing on the flower business. He, being a humorist, explained to them the method of the celebrated Dickensian essay on Chinese Metaphysics by the gentleman who read an article on China and an article on Metaphysics and combined the information. He suggested that they should combine the London School with Kew Gardens. Eliza, to whom the procedure of the Dickensian gentleman seemed perfectly correct (as in fact it was) and not in the least funny (which was only her ignorance) took his advice with entire gravity. But the effort that cost her the deepest humiliation was a request to Higgins, whose pet artistic fancy, next to Milton's verse, was calligraphy, and who himself wrote a most beautiful Italian hand, that he would teach her to write. He declared that she was congenitally incapable of forming a single letter worthy of the least of Milton's words; but she persisted; and again he suddenly threw himself into the task of teaching her with a combination of stormy intensity, concentrated patience, and occasional bursts of interesting disquisition on the beauty and nobility, the august mission and destiny, of human handwriting. Eliza ended by acquiring an extremely uncommercial script which was a positive extension of her personal beauty, and spending three times as much on stationery as anyone else because certain qualities and shapes of paper became indispensable to her. She could not even address an envelope in the usual way because it made the margins all wrong.

Their commercial school days were a period of disgrace and despair for the young couple. They seemed to be learning nothing about flower shops. At last they gave it up as hopeless, and shook the dust of the shorthand schools, and the polytechnics, and the London School of Economics from their feet for ever. Besides, the business was in some mysterious way beginning to take care of itself. They had somehow forgotten their objections to employing other people. They came to the conclusion that their own way was the best, and that they had really a remarkable talent for business. The Colonel, who had been compelled for some years to keep a sufficient sum on current account at his bankers to make up their deficits, found that the provision was unnecessary: the young people were prospering. It is true that there was not quite fair play between them and their competitors in trade. Their week-ends in the country cost them nothing, and saved them the price of their Sunday dinners; for the motor car was the Colonel's; and he and Higgins paid the hotel bills. Mr. F. Hill, florist and greengrocer (they soon discovered that there was money in asparagus; and asparagus led to other vegetables), had an air which stamped the business as classy; and in private life he was still Frederick Eynsford Hill,

Esquire. Not that there was any swank about him: nobody but Eliza knew that he had been christened Frederick Challoner. Eliza herself swanked like anything.

That is all. That is how it has turned out. It is astonishing how much Eliza still manages to meddle in the housekeeping at Wimpole Street in spite of the shop and her own family. And it is notable that though she never nags her husband, and frankly loves the Colonel as if she were his favorite daughter, she has never got out of the habit of nagging Higgins that was established on the fatal night when she won his bet for him. She snaps his head off on the faintest provocation, or on none. He no longer dares to tease her by assuming an abysmal inferiority of Freddy's mind to his own. He storms and bullies and derides; but she stands up to him so ruthlessly that the Colonel has to ask her from time to time to be kinder to Higgins; and it is the only request of his that brings a mulish expression into her face. Nothing but some emergency or calamity great enough to break down all likes and dislikes, and throw them both back on their common humanity—and may they be spared any such trial! —will ever alter this. She knows that Higgins does not need her, just as her father did not need her. The very scrupulousness with which he told her that day that he had become used to having her there, and dependent on her for all sorts of little services, and that he should miss her if she went away (it would never have occurred to Freddy or the Colonel to say anything of the sort) deepens her inner certainty that she is "no more to him than them slippers", yet she has a sense, too, that his indifference is deeper than the infatuation of commoner souls. She is immensely interested in him. She has even secret mischievous moments in which she wishes she could get him alone, on a desert island, away from all ties and with nobody else in the world to consider, and just drag him off his pedestal and see him making love like any common man. We all have private imaginations of that sort. But when it comes to business, to the life that she really leads as distinguished from the life of dreams and fancies, she likes Freddy and she likes the Colonel; and she does not like Higgins and Mr. Doolittle. Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable.

Freeditorial

Insensibility

Wilfred Owen

I

Happy are men who yet before they are killed
Can let their veins run cold.
Whom no compassion fleers
Or makes their feet
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.
The front line withers.
But they are troops who fade, not flowers,
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling:
Losses, who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.

II

And some cease feeling
Even themselves or for themselves.
Dullness best solves
The tease and doubt of shelling,
And Chance's strange arithmetic
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.
They keep no check on armies' decimation.

III

Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.
Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more ache.
Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid

Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
And terror's first constriction over,
Their hearts remain small-drawn.
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
Now long since ironed,
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

IV

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion
How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,
And many sighs are drained.
Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:
His days are worth forgetting more than not.
He sings along the march
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,
The long, forlorn, relentless trend
From larger day to huger night.

V

We wise, who with a thought besmirch
Blood over all our soul,
How should we see our task
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
Dying, not mortal overmuch;
Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

VI

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones.
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

A Cup of Tea

by Katherine Mansfield

Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces... But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces? She was young, brilliant, extremely modem, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books, and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people and... artists - quaint creatures, discoveries of hers, some of them too terrifying for words, but others quite presentable and amusing.

Rosemary had been married two years. She had a duck of a boy. No, not Peter - Michael. And her husband absolutely adored her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well off, which is odious and stuffy and sounds like one's grandparents. But if Rosemary wanted to shop she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street. If she wanted to buy flowers, the car pulled up at that perfect shop in Regent Street, and Rosemary inside the shop just gazed in her dazzled, rather exotic way, and said: "I want those and those and those. Give me four bunches of those. And that jar of roses. Yes, I'll have all the roses in the jar. No, no lilac. I hate lilac. It's got no shape." The attendant bowed and put the lilac out of sight, as though this was only too true; lilac was dreadfully shapeless. "Give me those stumpy little tulips. Those red and white ones." And she was followed to the car by a thin shop-girl staggering under an immense white paper armful that looked like a baby in long clothes....

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little antique shop in Curzon Street. It was a shop she liked. For one thing, one usually had it to oneself. And then the man who kept it was ridiculously fond of serving her. He beamed whenever she came in. He clasped his hands; he was so gratified he could scarcely speak. Flattery, of course. All the same, there was something...

"You see, madam," he would explain in his low respectful tones, "I love my things. I would rather not part with them than sell them to someone who does not appreciate them, who has not that fine feeling which is so rare..." And, breathing deeply, he unrolled a tiny square of blue velvet and pressed it on the glass counter with his pale finger-tips.

To-day it was a little box. He had been keeping it for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet. An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as

though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms round his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons. And there was a pink cloud like a watchful cherub floating above their heads. Rosemary took her hands out of her long gloves. She always took off her gloves to examine such things. Yes, she liked it very much. She loved it; it was a great duck. She must have it. And, turning the creamy box, opening and shutting it, she couldn't help noticing how charming her hands were against the blue velvet. The shopman, in some dim cavern of his mind, may have dared to think so too. For he took a pencil, leant over the counter, and his pale, bloodless fingers crept timidly towards those rosy, flashing ones, as he murmured gently: "If I may venture to point out to madam, the flowers on the little lady's bodice."

"Charming!" Rosemary admired the flowers. But what was the price? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. Then a murmur reached her. "Twenty-eight guineas, madam."

"Twenty-eight guineas." Rosemary gave no sign. She laid the little box down; she buttoned her gloves again. Twenty-eight guineas. Even if one is rich... She looked vague. She stared at a plump tea-kettle like a plump hen above the shopman's head, and her voice was dreamy as she answered: "Well, keep it for me - will you? I'll..."

But the shopman had already bowed as though keeping it for her was all any human being could ask. He would be willing, of course, to keep it for her for ever.

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling, and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas. Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her muff against her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course the car was there. She'd only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea. But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark, shadowy - where had she come from? - was standing at Rosemary's elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed: "Madam, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Speak to me?" Rosemary turned. She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

"M-madam, stammered the voice. Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"

"A cup of tea?" There was something simple, sincere in that voice; it wasn't in the least the voice of a beggar. "Then have you no money at all?" asked Rosemary.

"None, madam," came the answer.

"How extraordinary!" Rosemary peered through the dusk and the girl gazed back at her. How more than extraordinary! And suddenly it seemed to Rosemary such an adventure. It was like something out of a novel by Dostoevsky, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: "I simply took her home with me," as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her: "Come home to tea with me."

The girl drew back startled. She even stopped shivering for a moment. Rosemary put out a hand and touched her arm. "I mean it," she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. "Why won't you? Do. Come home with me now in my car and have tea."

"You - you don't mean it, madam," said the girl, and there was pain in her voice.

"But I do," cried Rosemary. "I want you to. To please me. Come along."

The girl put her fingers to her lips and her eyes devoured Rosemary. "You're - you're not taking me to the police station?" she stammered.

"The police station!" Rosemary laughed out. "Why should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear - anything you care to tell me."

Hungry people are easily led. The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were skimming through the dusk.

"There!" said Rosemary. She had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, "Now I've got you," as she gazed at the little captive she had netted. But of course she meant it kindly. Oh, more than kindly. She was going to prove to this girl that - wonderful things did happen in life, that - fairy godmothers were real, that - rich people had hearts, and that women were sisters. She turned impulsively, saying'. "Don't be frightened.

After all, why shouldn't you come back with me? We're both women. If I'm the more fortunate, you ought to expect..."

But happily at that moment, for she didn't know how the sentence was going to end, the car stopped. The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the rich little girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to unpack.

"Come, come upstairs," said Rosemary, longing to begin to be generous. "Come up to my room." And, besides, she wanted to spare this poor little thing from being stared at by the servants; she decided as they mounted the stairs she would not even ring to Jeanne, but take off her things by herself. The great things were to be natural!

And "There!" cried Rosemary again, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom with the curtains drawn, the fire leaping on her wonderful lacquer furniture, her gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs.

The girl stood just inside the door; she seemed dazed. But Rosemary didn't mind that.

"Come and sit down," she cried, dragging her big chair up to the fire, "m this comfy chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold."

"I daren't, madam," said the girl, and she edged backwards.

"Oh, please," - Rosemary ran forward - "you mustn't be frightened, you mustn't, really. Sit down, when I've taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have tea and be cozy. Why are you afraid?" And gently she half pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle.

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn't acknowledge it. She leant over her, saying:

"Won't you take off your hat? Your pretty hair is all wet. And one is so much more comfortable without a hat, isn't one?"

There was a whisper that sounded like "Very good, madam," and the crushed hat was taken off.

"And let me help you off with your coat, too," said Rosemary.

The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull. It was quite an effort. The other scarcely helped her at all. She seemed to stagger like a child, and the thought came and went through Rosemary's

mind, that if people wanted helping they must respond a little, just a little, otherwise it became very difficult indeed. And what was she to do with the coat now? She left it on the floor, and the hat too. She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: "I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint. I shall go off, madam, if I don't have something."

"Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!" Rosemary rushed to the bell.

"Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy immediately!"

The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out: "No, I don't want no brandy. I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want, madam." And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

"Don't cry, poor little thing," she said. "Don't cry." And she gave the other her lace handkerchief. She really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, bird-like shoulders.

Now at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: "I can't go on no longer like this. I can't bear it. I can't bear it. I shall do away with myself. I can't bear no more."

"You shan't have to. I'll look after you. Don't cry any more. Don't you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We'll have tea and you'll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something. I promise. Do stop crying. It's so exhausting. Please!"

The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn't eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of that slight meal was marvelous. When the tea-table was carried away a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair in a kind of sweet languor, looking at the blaze. Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

"And when did you have your last meal?" she asked softly.

But at that moment the door-handle turned.

"Rosemary, may I come in?" It was Philip.

"Of course."

He came in. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said, and stopped and stared.

"It's quite all right," said Rosemary, smiling. "This is my friend, Miss _"

"Smith, madam," said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

"Smith," said Rosemary. "We are going to have a little talk."

"Oh yes," said Philip. "Quite," and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. "It's a beastly afternoon," he said curiously, still looking at that listless figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Rosemary enthusiastically. "Vile."

Philip smiled his charming smile. "As a matter of fact," said he, "I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?"

The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her: "Of course she will." And they went out of the room together.

"I say," said Philip, when they were alone. "Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?"

Rosemary, laughing, leaned against the door and said: "I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She's a real pick-up. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me. "

"But what on earth are you going to do with her?" cried Philip.

"Be nice to her," said Rosemary quickly. "Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. But show her - treat her - make her feel -"

"My darling girl," said Philip, "you're quite mad, you know. It simply can't be done."

"I knew you'd say that," retorted Rosemary. Why not? I want to. Isn't that a reason? And besides, one's always reading about these things. I decided -"

"But," said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, "she's so astonishingly pretty."

"Pretty?" Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. "Do you think so? I - I hadn't thought about it."

"Good Lord!" Philip struck a match. "She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over when I came into your room just now. However... I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm crude and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up The Milliner's Gazette."

"You absurd creature!" said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her check-book towards her. But no, checks would be no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom.

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

"I only wanted to tell you," said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled exotic gaze, "Miss Smith won't dine with us to-night."

Philip put down the paper. "Oh, what's happened? Previous engagement?"

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. "She insisted on going," said she, "so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?" she added softly.

Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip's cheeks.

"Do you like me?" said she, and her tone, sweet, husky, troubled him.

"I like you awfully," he said, and he held her tighter. "Kiss me."

There was a pause.

Then Rosemary said dreamily: "I saw a fascinating little box to-day. It cost twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?"

Philip jumped her on his knee. "You may, little wasteful one," said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.

"Philip," she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, "am I pretty?"

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

T. S. Eliot

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —
(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —

(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”—
If one, settling a pillow by her head
Should say: “That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all.”

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
“That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.”

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.



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MRS. DALLOWAY
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE
ORLANDO
THE WAVES
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THE DEATH OF THE MOTH
THE MOMENT AND OTHER ESSAYS

MRS. DALLOWAY

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by

VIRGINIA WOOLF

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MRS. DALLOWAY

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter

Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?"—was that it?—"I prefer men to cauliflowers"—was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace—Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished—how strange it was!—a few sayings like this about cabbages.

She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright.

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) be-

fore Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over. It was June. The

King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies, whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run; and even now, at this hour, discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery; and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans (but one must economise, not buy things rashly for Elizabeth), and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party. But how strange, on entering the Park, the silence; the mist; the hum; the slow-swimming happy ducks; the pouched birds waddling; and who should be

coming along with his back against the Government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal Arms, who but Hugh Whitbread; her old friend Hugh—the admirable Hugh!

"Good-morning to you, Clarissa!" said Hugh, rather extravagantly, for they had known each other as children. "Where are you off to?"

"I love walking in London," said Mrs. Dalloway. "Really it's better than walking in the country."

They had just come up—unfortunately—to see doctors. Other people came to see pictures; go to the opera; take their daughters out; the Whitbreads came "to see doctors." Times without number Clarissa had visited Evelyn Whitbread in a nursing home. Was Evelyn ill again? Evelyn was a good deal out of sorts, said Hugh, intimating by a kind of pout or swell of his very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body (he was almost too well dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court) that his wife had some internal ailment, nothing serious, which, as an old friend, Clarissa Dalloway would quite understand without requiring him to specify. Ah yes, she did of course; what a nuisance; and felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time

of her hat. Not the right hat for the early morning, was that it? For Hugh always made her feel, as he bustled on, raising his hat rather extravagantly and assuring her that she might be a girl of eighteen, and of course he was coming to her party to-night, Evelyn absolutely insisted, only a little late he might be after the party at the Palace to which he had to take one of Jim's boys,—she always felt a little skimpy beside Hugh; schoolgirlish; but attached to him, partly from having known him always, but she did think him a good sort in his own way, though Richard was nearly driven mad by him, and as for Peter Walsh, he had never to this day forgiven her for liking him.

She could remember scene after scene at Bourton—Peter furious; Hugh not, of course, his match in any way, but still not a positive imbecile as Peter made out; not a mere barber's block. When his old mother wanted him to give up shooting or to take her to Bath he did it, without a word; he was really unselfish, and as for saying, as Peter did, that he had no heart, no brain, nothing but the manners and breeding of an English gentleman, that was only her dear Peter at his worst; and he could be intolerable; he could be impossible; but adorable to walk with on a morning like this.

(June had drawn out every leaf on the trees. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she had adored all that.)

For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, If he were with me now what would he say?—some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St. James's Park on a fine morning—indeed they did. But Peter—however beautiful the day might be, and the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink—Peter never saw a thing of all that. He would put on his spectacles, if she told him to; he would look. It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her

(she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said.

So she would still find herself arguing in St. James's Park, still making out that she had been right—and she had too—not to marry him. For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced; though she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish; and then the horror of the moment when some one told her at a concert that he had married a woman met on the boat going to India! Never should she forget all that! Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her. Never could she understand how he cared. But those Indian women did presumably—silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops. And she wasted her pity. For he was quite happy, he assured her—perfectly happy, though he had

never done a thing that they talked of; his whole life had been a failure. It made her angry still.

She had reached the Park gates. She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly.

She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.

Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on. If you put her in a room with some one, up went her back like a cat's; or she purred. Devonshire House, Bath House, the

house with the china cockatoo, she had seen them all lit up once; and remembered Sylvia, Fred, Sally Seton—such hosts of people; and dancing all night; and the waggons plodding past to market; and driving home across the Park. She remembered once throwing a shilling into the Serpentine. But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. But what was she dreaming as she looked into Hatchards' shop window? What was she trying to recover? What image of white dawn in the country, as she read in the book spread open:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages.

This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing. Think, for example, of the woman she admired most, Lady Bexborough, opening the bazaar.

There were Jorrocks' *Jaunts and Jollities;* there were *Soapy Sponge* and Mrs. Asquith's *Memoirs* and *Big Game Shooting in Nigeria,* all spread open. Ever so many books there were; but none that seemed exactly right to take to Evelyn Whitbread in her nursing home. Nothing that would serve to amuse her and make that indescribably dried-up little woman look, as Clarissa came in, just for a moment cordial; before they settled down for the usual interminable talk of women's ailments. How much she wanted it—that people should look pleased as she came in, Clarissa thought and turned and walked back towards Bond Street, annoyed, because it was silly to have other reasons for doing things. Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves, whereas, she thought, waiting to cross, half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but

to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew (and now the policeman held up his hand) for no one was ever for a second taken in. Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently!

She would have been, in the first place, dark like Lady Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes. She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere. Instead of which she had a narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's. That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well, considering that she spent little. But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

Bond Street fascinated her; Bond Street early in the morning in the season; its flags flying; its shops; no splash; no glitter; one roll of tweed in the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls; salmon on an iceblock.

"That is all," she said, looking at the fishmonger's. "That is all," she repeated, pausing for a moment at the window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves. And her old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves. He had turned on his bed one morning in the middle of the War. He had said, "I have had enough." Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them.

Not a straw, she thought, going on up Bond Street to a shop where they kept flowers for her when she gave a party. Elizabeth really cared for her dog most of all. The whole house this morning smelt of tar. Still, better poor Grizzle than Miss Kilman; better distemper and tar and all the rest of it than sitting mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book! Better anything, she was inclined to say. But it might be only a phase, as Richard said, such as all girls go through. It might

be falling in love. But why with Miss Kilman? who had been badly treated of course; one must make allowances for that, and Richard said she was very able, had a really historical mind. Anyhow they were inseparable, and Elizabeth, her own daughter, went to Communion; and how she dressed, how she treated people who came to lunch she did not care a bit, it being her experience that the religious ecstasy made people callous (so did causes); dulled their feelings, for Miss Kilman would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians, but in private inflicted positive torture, so insensitive was she, dressed in a green mackintosh coat. Year in year out she wore that coat; she perspired; she was never in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority, your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were; how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be, all her soul rusted with that grievance sticking in it, her dismissal from school during the War—poor embittered unfortunate creature! For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us

and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants; for no doubt with another throw of the dice, had the black been uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No.

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred!

Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the swing doors of Mulberry's the florists.

She advanced, light, tall, very upright, to be greeted at once by button-faced Miss Pym, whose hands were always bright red, as if they had been stood in cold water with the flowers.

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carna-

tions. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes—so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale—as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower—roses, carnations, irises, lilac—glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey-white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar

to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when—oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!

"Dear, those motor cars," said Miss Pym, going to the window to look, and coming back and smiling apologetically with her hands full of sweet peas, as if those motor cars, those tyres of motor cars, were all *her* fault.

The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Miss Pym go to the window and apologise came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window. Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey.

Yet rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson's scent shop on the other, passing in-

visibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills, falling indeed with something of a cloud's sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly. But now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew.

Edgar J. Watkiss, with his roll of lead piping round his arm, said audibly, humorously of course: "The Proime Minister's kyar."

Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him.

Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too. The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?

Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot because the motor car had

stopped outside Mulberry's shop window; old ladies on the tops of omnibuses spread their black parasols; here a green, here a red parasol opened with a little pop. Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Every one looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose?

"Let us go on, Septimus," said his wife, a little woman, with large eyes in a sallow pointed face; an Italian girl.

But Lucrezia herself could not help looking at the motor car and the tree pattern on the blinds. Was it the Queen in there—the Queen going shopping?

The chauffeur, who had been opening something, turning something, shutting something, got on to the box.

"Come on," said Lucrezia.

But her husband, for they had been married four, five years now, jumped, started, and said, "All right!" angrily, as if she had interrupted him.

People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were "people" now, because Septimus had said, "I will kill myself"; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked at the crowd. Help, help! she wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women. Help! Only last autumn she and Septimus had stood on the Embankment wrapped in the same cloak and, Septimus reading a paper instead of talking, she had snatched it from him and laughed in the old man's face who saw them! But failure one conceals. She must take him away into some park.

"Now we will cross," she said.

She had a right to his arm, though it was without feeling. He would give her, who was so simple, so impulsive, only twenty-four, without friends in

England, who had left Italy for his sake, a piece of bone.

The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's-breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first and last time, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known.

It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs. Dalloway, coming out of Mulberry's with her flowers; the Queen. And for a second she wore a look of

extreme dignity standing by the flower shop in the sunlight while the car passed at a foot's pace, with its blinds drawn. The Queen going to some hospital; the Queen opening some bazaar, thought Clarissa.

The crush was terrific for the time of day. Lords, Ascot, Hurlingham, what was it? she wondered, for the street was blocked. The British middle classes sitting sideways on the tops of omnibuses with parcels and umbrellas, yes, even furs on a day like this, were, she thought, more ridiculous, more unlike anything there has ever been than one could conceive; and the Queen herself held up; the Queen herself unable to pass. Clarissa was suspended on one side of Brook Street; Sir John Buckhurst, the old Judge on the other, with the car between them (Sir John had laid down the law for years and liked a well-dressed woman) when the chauffeur, leaning ever so slightly, said or showed something to the policeman, who saluted and raised his arm and jerked his head and moved the omnibus to the side and the car passed through. Slowly and very silently it took its way.

Clarissa guessed; Clarissa knew of course; she had seen something white, magical, circular, in the footman's hand, a disc inscribed with a name,—

the Queen's, the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's?—which, by force of its own lustre, burnt its way through (Clarissa saw the car diminishing, disappearing), to blaze among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak leaves, Hugh Whitbread and all his colleagues, the gentlemen of England, that night in Buckingham Palace. And Clarissa, too, gave a party. She stiffened a little; so she would stand at the top of her stairs.

The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way—to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves—should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey?—ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fulness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. In a public house in a back street a Colonial insulted the House of Windsor which led to words, broken beer glasses, and a

general shindy, which echoed strangely across the way in the ears of girls buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings. For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound.

Gliding across Piccadilly, the car turned down St. James's Street. Tall men, men of robust physique, well-dressed men with their tail-coats and their white slips and their hair raked back who, for reasons difficult to discriminate, were standing in the bow window of Brooks's with their hands behind the tails of their coats, looking out, perceived instinctively that greatness was passing, and the pale light of the immortal presence fell upon them as it had fallen upon Clarissa Dalloway. At once they stood even straighter, and removed their hands, and seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth, as their ancestors had done before them. The white busts and the little tables in the background covered with copies of the *Tatler* and syphons of soda water seemed to approve; seemed to indicate the flowing corn and the manor houses of England; and to return the frail hum of the motor wheels as the walls of a whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of a whole cathedral. Shawled

Moll Pratt with her flowers on the pavement wished the dear boy well (it was the Prince of Wales for certain) and would have tossed the price of a pot of beer—a bunch of roses—into St. James's Street out of sheer light-heartedness and contempt of poverty had she not seen the constable's eye upon her, discouraging an old Irishwoman's loyalty. The sentries at St. James's saluted; Queen Alexandra's policeman approved.

A small crowd meanwhile had gathered at the gates of Buckingham Palace. Listlessly, yet confidently, poor people all of them, they waited; looked at the Palace itself with the flag flying; at Victoria, billowing on her mound, admired her shelves of running water, her geraniums; singled out from the motor cars in the Mall first this one, then that; bestowed emotion, vainly, upon commoners out for a drive; recalled their tribute to keep it unspent while this car passed and that; and all the time let rumour accumulate in their veins and thrill the nerves in their thighs at the thought of Royalty looking at them; the Queen bowing; the Prince saluting; at the thought of the heavenly life divinely bestowed upon Kings; of the equerries and deep curtsies; of the Queen's old doll's house; of Princess Mary married to an Englishman, and the

Prince—ah! the Prince! who took wonderfully, they said, after old King Edward, but was ever so much slimmer. The Prince lived at St. James's; but he might come along in the morning to visit his mother.

So Sarah Bletchley said with her baby in her arms, tipping her foot up and down as though she were by her own fender in Pimlico, but keeping her eyes on the Mall, while Emily Coates ranged over the Palace windows and thought of the housemaids, the innumerable housemaids, the bedrooms, the innumerable bedrooms. Joined by an elderly gentleman with an Aberdeen terrier, by men without occupation, the crowd increased. Little Mr. Bowley, who had rooms in the Albany and was sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life but could be unsealed suddenly, inappropriately, sentimentally, by this sort of thing—poor women waiting to see the Queen go past—poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War—tut-tut—actually had tears in his eyes. A breeze flaunting ever so warmly down the Mall through the thin trees, past the bronze heroes, lifted some flag flying in the British breast of Mr. Bowley and he raised his hat as the car turned into the Mall and held it high as the car approached; and let the poor mothers of Pimlico

press close to him, and stood very upright. The car came on.

Suddenly Mrs. Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Every one looked up.

Dropping dead down the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps?

"Glaxo," said Mrs. Coates in a strained, awe-stricken voice, gazing straight up, and her baby, lying stiff and white in her arms, gazed straight up.

"Kreemo," murmured Mrs. Bletchley, like a sleep-walker. With his hat held out perfectly still in his hand, Mr. Bowley gazed straight up. All down the Mall people were standing and looking up

into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls.

The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater—

"That's an E," said Mrs. Bletchley—

or a dancer—

"It's toffee," murmured Mr. Bowley—

(and the car went in at the gates and nobody looked at it), and shutting off the smoke, away and away it rushed, and the smoke faded and assembled itself round the broad white shapes of the clouds.

It had gone; it was behind the clouds. There was no sound. The clouds to which the letters E, G, or L had attached themselves moved freely, as if destined to cross from West to East on a mission of the greatest importance which would never be revealed, and yet certainly so it was—a mission of the greatest importance. Then suddenly, as a train comes out of a tunnel, the aeroplane rushed out of the clouds again, the sound boring into the ears of all people in the Mall, in the Green Park, in Piccadilly, in Regent Street, in Regent's Park, and the

bar of smoke curved behind and it dropped down, and it soared up and wrote one letter after another—but what word was it writing?

Lucrezia Warren Smith, sitting by her husband's side on a seat in Regent's Park in the Broad Walk, looked up.

"Look, look, Septimus!" she cried. For Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself.

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks.

It was toffee; they were advertising toffee, a nursemaid told Rezia. Together they began to spell t . . . o . . . f . . .

"K . . . R . . ." said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say "Kay Arr" close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper's, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke. A marvellous discovery indeed—that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions (for one must be scientific, above all scientific) can quicken trees into life! Happily Rezia put her hand with a tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down, transfixed, or the excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave, like plumes on horses' heads, feathers on ladies', so proudly they rose and fell, so superbly, would have sent him mad. But he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more.

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were

part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion—

"Septimus!" said Rezia. He started violently. People must notice.

"I am going to walk to the fountain and back," she said.

For she could stand it no longer. Dr. Holmes might say there was nothing the matter. Far rather would she that he were dead! She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible; sky and tree, children playing, dragging carts, blowing whistles, falling down; all were terrible. And he would not kill himself; and she could tell no one. "Septimus has been working too hard"—that was all she could say to her own mother. To love makes one solitary, she thought. She could tell nobody, not even Septimus now, and looking back, she saw him sitting in his shabby overcoat alone, on the seat, hunched up, staring. And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now. She put on her

lace collar. She put on her new hat and he never noticed; and he was happy without her. Nothing could make her happy without him! Nothing! He was selfish. So men are. For he was not ill. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. She spread her hand before her. Look! Her wedding ring slipped—she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered—but she had nobody to tell.

Far was Italy and the white houses and the room where her sisters sat making hats, and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive like people here, huddled up in Bath chairs, looking at a few ugly flowers stuck in pots!

"For you should see the Milan gardens," she said aloud. But to whom?

There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hillsides soften and fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit—the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness;

reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each window-pane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red-brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye; exists again. I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park (staring at the Indian and his cross), as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where—such was her darkness; when suddenly, as if a shelf were shot forth and she stood on it, she said how she was his wife, married years ago in Milan, his wife, and would never, never tell that he was mad! Turning, the shelf fell; down, down she dropped. For he was gone, she thought—gone, as he threatened, to kill himself—to throw himself under a cart! But no; there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud.

Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the

railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death.

There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!

"What are you saying?" said Rezia suddenly, sitting down by him.

Interrupted again! She was always interrupting. Away from people—they must get away from people, he said (jumping up), right away over there, where there were chairs beneath a tree and the long slope of the park dipped like a length of green stuff with a ceiling cloth of blue and pink smoke high above, and there was a rampart of far irregular houses hazed in smoke, the traffic hummed in a circle, and on the right, dun-coloured animals stretched long necks over the Zoo palings, barking, howling. There they sat down under a tree.

"Look," she implored him, pointing at a little

troop of boys carrying cricket stumps, and one shuffled, spun round on his heel and shuffled, as if he were acting a clown at the music hall.

"Look," she implored him, for Dr. Holmes had told her to make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket—that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband.

"Look," she repeated.

Look the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness.

"Look," she repeated, for he must not talk aloud to himself out of doors.

"Oh look," she implored him. But what was there to look at? A few sheep. That was all.

The way to Regent's Park Tube station—could they tell her the way to Regent's Park Tube station—Maisie Johnson wanted to know. She was only up from Edinburgh two days ago.

"Not this way—over there!" Rezia exclaimed, waving her aside, lest she should see Septimus.

Both seemed queer, Maisie Johnson thought. Everything seemed very queer. In London for the first time, come to take up a post at her uncle's in Leadenhall Street, and now walking through Regent's Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer; so that should she be very old she would still remember and make it jangle again among her memories how she had walked through Regent's Park on a fine summer's morning fifty years ago. For she was only nineteen and had got her way at last, to come to London; and now how queer it was, this couple she had asked the way of, and the girl started and jerked her hand, and the man—he seemed awfully odd; quarrelling, perhaps; parting for ever, perhaps; something was up, she knew; and now all these people (for she returned to the Broad Walk), the stone basins, the prim flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs—all seemed, after Edinburgh, so queer. And Maisie Johnson, as she joined that gently trudging, vaguely gazing, breeze-kissed company—squirrels perching and preening, sparrow fountains fluttering for

crumbs, dogs busy with the railings, busy with each other, while the soft warm air washed over them and lent to the fixed unsurprised gaze with which they received life something whimsical and mollified—Maisie Johnson positively felt she must cry Oh! (for that young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew.)

Horror! horror! she wanted to cry. (She had left her people; they had warned her what would happen.)

Why hadn't she stayed at home? she cried, twisting the knob of the iron railing.

That girl, thought Mrs. Dempster (who saved crusts for the squirrels and often ate her lunch in Regent's Park), don't know a thing yet; and really it seemed to her better to be a little stout, a little slack, a little moderate in one's expectations. Percy drank. Well, better to have a son, thought Mrs. Dempster. She had had a hard time of it, and couldn't help smiling at a girl like that. You'll get married, for you're pretty enough, thought Mrs. Dempster. Get married, she thought, and then you'll know. Oh, the cooks, and so on. Every man has his ways. But whether I'd have chosen quite like that if I could have known, thought Mrs. Dempster, and could not help wishing to whisper a

word to Maisie Johnson; to feel on the creased pouch of her worn old face the kiss of pity. For it's been a hard life, thought Mrs. Dempster. What hadn't she given to it? Roses; figure; her feet too. (She drew the knobbed lumps beneath her skirt.)

Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m'dear. For really, what with eating, drinking, and mating, the bad days and good, life had been no mere matter of roses, and what was more, let me tell you, Carrie Dempster had no wish to change her lot with any woman's in Kentish Town! But, she implored, pity. Pity, for the loss of roses. Pity she asked of Maisie Johnson, standing by the hyacinth beds.

Ah, but that aeroplane! Hadn't Mrs. Dempster always longed to see foreign parts? She had a nephew, a missionary. It soared and shot. She always went on the sea at Margate, not out o' sight of land, but she had no patience with women who were afraid of water. It swept and fell. Her stomach was in her mouth. Up again. There's a fine young feller aboard of it, Mrs. Dempster wagered, and away and away it went, fast and fading, away and away the aeroplane shot; soaring over Greenwich and all the masts; over the little island of

grey churches, St. Paul's and the rest till, on either side of London, fields spread out and dark brown woods where adventurous thrushes hopping boldly, glancing quickly, snatched the snail and tapped him on a stone, once, twice, thrice.

Away and away the aeroplane shot, till it was nothing but a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol (so it seemed to Mr. Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich) of man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr. Bentley, sweeping round the cedar tree, to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought, Einstein, speculation, mathematics, the Mendelian theory—away the aeroplane shot.

Then, while a seedy-looking nondescript man carrying a leather bag stood on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, and hesitated, for within was what balm, how great a welcome, how many tombs with banners waving over them, tokens of victories not over armies, but over, he thought, that plaguy spirit of truth seeking which leaves me at present without a situation, and more than that, the cathedral offers company, he thought, invites you to membership of a society; great men belong to it; martyrs have died for it; why not enter in, he thought, put this leather bag stuffed with pamphlets

before an altar, a cross, the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly—why not enter in? he thought and while he hesitated out flew the aeroplane over Ludgate Circus.

It was strange; it was still. Not a sound was to be heard above the traffic. Unguided it seemed; sped of its own free will. And now, curving up and up, straight up, like something mounting in ecstasy, in pure delight, out from behind poured white smoke looping, writing a T, an O, an F.

"What are they looking at?" said Clarissa Dalloway to the maid who opened her door.

The hall of the house was cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door to, and she heard the swish of Lucy's skirts, she felt like a nun who has left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions. The cook whistled in the kitchen. She heard the click of the typewriter. It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how

moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only); not for a moment did she believe in God; but all the more, she thought, taking up the pad, must one repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it—of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling, for Mrs. Walker was Irish and whistled all day long—one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments, she thought, lifting the pad, while Lucy stood by her, trying to explain how

"Mr. Dalloway, ma'am"—

Clarissa read on the telephone pad, "Lady Bruton wishes to know if Mr. Dalloway will lunch with her to-day."

"Mr. Dalloway, ma'am, told me to tell you he would be lunching out."

"Dear!" said Clarissa, and Lucy shared as she meant her to her disappointment (but not the pang); felt the concord between them; took the hint; thought how the gentry love; gilded her own future with calm; and, taking Mrs. Dalloway's parasol, handled it like a sacred weapon which a Goddess, having acquitted herself honourably in the

field of battle, sheds, and placed it in the umbrella stand.

"Fear no more," said Clarissa. Fear no more the heat o' the sun; for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered.

Millicent Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. No vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl.

She put the pad on the hall table. She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the bannisters, as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice; had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night, or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her.

Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe. She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would

her bed be. The candle was half burnt down and she had read deep in Baron Marbot's *Memoirs*. She had read late at night of the retreat from Moscow. For the House sat so long that Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed. And really she preferred to read of the retreat from Moscow. He knew it. So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment—for example on the river beneath the woods at Clieveden—when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For *that* she could dimly perceive. She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether

it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident—like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over—the moment. Against such moments (with women too) there contrasted (as she laid her hat down) the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt. Lying awake, the floor creaked; the lit house was suddenly darkened, and if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed!

But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?

She sat on the floor—that was her first impression of Sally—she sat on the floor with her arms round her knees, smoking a cigarette. Where could it have been? The Mannings? The Kinloch-Jones's? At some party (where, she could not be certain), for she had a distinct recollection of saying to the man she was with, "Who is *that?*" And he had told her, and said that Sally's parents did not get on (how that shocked her—that one's parents should quarrel!). But all that evening she could not take her eyes off Sally. It was an extraordinary beauty of the kind she most admired, dark, large-eyed, with that quality which, since she hadn't got it herself, she always envied—a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything; a quality much commoner in foreigners than in Englishwomen. Sally always said she had French blood in her veins, an ancestor had been with Marie Antoinette, had his head cut off, left a ruby ring. Perhaps that summer she came to stay at Bourton, walking in quite unexpectedly without a penny in her pocket, one night after dinner, and

upsetting poor Aunt Helena to such an extent that she never forgave her. There had been some quarrel at home. She literally hadn't a penny that night when she came to them—had pawned a brooch to come down. She had rushed off in a passion. They sat up till all hours of the night talking. Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was. She knew nothing about sex—nothing about social problems. She had once seen an old man who had dropped dead in a field—she had seen cows just after their calves were born. But Aunt Helena never liked discussion of anything (when Sally gave her William Morris, it had to be wrapped in brown paper). There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out. The ideas were Sally's, of course—but very soon she was just as excited—read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour.

Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked

hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together—cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls. The effect was extraordinary—coming in to dinner in the sunset. (Of course Aunt Helena thought it wicked to treat flowers like that.) Then she forgot her sponge, and ran along the passage naked. That grim old housemaid, Ellen Atkins, went about grumbling—"Suppose any of the gentlemen had seen?" Indeed she did shock people. She was untidy, Papa said.

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's. For in those days she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace; smoked cigars. Absurd, she was—very ab-

surd. But the charm was overpowering, to her at least, so that she could remember standing in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud, "She is beneath this roof. . . . She is beneath this roof!"

No, the words meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion. But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy (now the old feeling began to come back to her, as she took out her hairpins, laid them on the dressing-table, began to do her hair), with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light, and dressing, and going downstairs, and feeling as she crossed the hall "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." That was her feeling—Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!

She was wearing pink gauze—was that possible? She *seemed,* anyhow, all light, glowing, like some bird or air ball that has flown in, attached itself for a moment to a bramble. But nothing is so strange when one is in love (and what was this except being in love?) as the complete indifference

of other people. Aunt Helena just wandered off after dinner; Papa read the paper. Peter Walsh might have been there, and old Miss Cummings; Joseph Breitkopf certainly was, for he came every summer, poor old man, for weeks and weeks, and pretended to read German with her, but really played the piano and sang Brahms without any voice.

All this was only a background for Sally. She stood by the fireplace talking, in that beautiful voice which made everything she said sound like a caress, to Papa, who had begun to be attracted rather against his will (he never got over lending her one of his books and finding it soaked on the terrace), when suddenly she said, "What a shame to sit indoors!" and they all went out on to the terrace and walked up and down. Peter Walsh and Joseph Breitkopf went on about Wagner. She and Sally fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something

infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!—when old Joseph and Peter faced them:

"Star-gazing?" said Peter.

It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!

Not for herself. She felt only how Sally was being mauled already, maltreated; she felt his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship. All this she saw as one sees a landscape in a flash of lightning—and Sally (never had she admired her so much!) gallantly taking her way unvanquished. She laughed. She made old Joseph tell her the names of the stars, which he liked doing very seriously. She stood there: she listened. She heard the names of the stars.

"Oh this horror!" she said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness.

Yet, after all, how much she owed to him later. Always when she thought of him she thought of their quarrels for some reason—because she wanted his good opinion so much, perhaps. She owed him

words: "sentimental," "civilised"; they started up every day of her life as if he guarded her. A book was sentimental; an attitude to life sentimental. "Sentimental," perhaps she was to be thinking of the past. What would he think, she wondered, when he came back?

That she had grown older? Would he say that, or would she see him thinking when he came back, that she had grown older? It was true. Since her illness she had turned almost white.

Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm, as if, while she mused, the icy claws had had the chance to fix in her. She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself.

How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self—pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions, like this of Lady Bruton not asking her to lunch; which, she thought (combing her hair finally), is utterly base! Now, where was her dress?

Her evening dresses hung in the cupboard. Clarissa, plunging her hand into the softness, gently detached the green dress and carried it to the window. She had torn it. Some one had trod on the skirt. She had felt it give at the Embassy party at the top among the folds. By artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour now in the sun. She

would mend it. Her maids had too much to do. She would wear it to-night. She would take her silks, her scissors, her—what was it?—her thimble, of course, down into the drawing-room, for she must also write, and see that things generally were more or less in order.

Strange, she thought, pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person, strange how a mistress knows the very moment, the very temper of her house! Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs; the swish of a mop; tapping; knocking; a loudness when the front door opened; a voice repeating a message in the basement; the chink of silver on a tray; clean silver for the party. All was for the party.

(And Lucy, coming into the drawing-room with her tray held out, put the giant candlesticks on the mantelpiece, the silver casket in the middle, turned the crystal dolphin towards the clock. They would come; they would stand; they would talk in the mincing tones which she could imitate, ladies and gentlemen. Of all, her mistress was loveliest—mistress of silver, of linen, of china, for the sun, the silver, doors off their hinges, Rumpelmayer's men, gave her a sense, as she laid the paper-knife on the inlaid table, of something achieved. Behold! Be-

hold! she said, speaking to her old friends in the baker's shop, where she had first seen service at Caterham, prying into the glass. She was Lady Angela, attending Princess Mary, when in came Mrs. Dalloway.)

"Oh Lucy," she said, "the silver does look nice!"

"And how," she said, turning the crystal dolphin to stand straight, "how did you enjoy the play last night?" "Oh, they had to go before the end!" she said. "They had to be back at ten!" she said. "So they don't know what happened," she said. "That does seem hard luck," she said (for her servants stayed later, if they asked her). "That does seem rather a shame," she said, taking the old bald-looking cushion in the middle of the sofa and putting it in Lucy's arms, and giving her a little push, and crying:

"Take it away! Give it to Mrs. Walker with my compliments! Take it away!" she cried.

And Lucy stopped at the drawing-room door, holding the cushion, and said, very shyly, turning a little pink, Couldn't she help to mend that dress?

But, said Mrs. Dalloway, she had enough on her hands already, quite enough of her own to do without that.

"But, thank you, Lucy, oh, thank you," said Mrs.

Dalloway, and thank you, thank you, she went on saying (sitting down on the sofa with her dress over her knees, her scissors, her silks), thank you, thank you, she went on saying in gratitude to her servants generally for helping her to be like this, to be what she wanted, gentle, generous-hearted. Her servants liked her. And then this dress of hers—where was the tear? and now her needle to be threaded. This was a favourite dress, one of Sally Parker's, the last almost she ever made, alas, for Sally had now retired, living at Ealing, and if ever I have a moment, thought Clarissa (but never would she have a moment any more), I shall go and see her at Ealing. For she was a character, thought Clarissa, a real artist. She thought of little out-of-the-way things; yet her dresses were never queer. You could wear them at Hatfield; at Buckingham Palace. She had worn them at Hatfield; at Buckingham Palace.

Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt. So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying "that is all" more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach

says too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking.

"Heavens, the front-door bell!" exclaimed Clarissa, staying her needle. Roused, she listened.

"Mrs. Dalloway will see me," said the elderly man in the hall. "Oh yes, she will see *me*," he repeated, putting Lucy aside very benevolently, and running upstairs ever so quickly. "Yes, yes, yes," he muttered as he ran upstairs. "She will see me. After five years in India, Clarissa will see me."

"Who can—what can," asked Mrs. Dalloway (thinking it was outrageous to be interrupted at eleven o'clock on the morning of the day she was giving a party), hearing a step on the stairs. She heard a hand upon the door. She made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy. Now the brass knob slipped. Now the door opened, and in came—for a single second she could not remember what he was called! so surprised she was to see him, so glad, so shy, so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her un-

expectedly in the morning! (She had not read his letter.)

"And how are you?" said Peter Walsh, positively trembling; taking both her hands; kissing both her hands. She's grown older, he thought, sitting down. I shan't tell her anything about it, he thought, for she's grown older. She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him, though he had kissed her hands. Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out a large pocket-knife and half opened the blade.

Exactly the same, thought Clarissa; the same queer look; the same check suit; a little out of the straight his face is, a little thinner, dryer, perhaps, but he looks awfully well, and just the same.

"How heavenly it is to see you again!" she exclaimed. He had his knife out. That's so like him, she thought.

He had only reached town last night, he said; would have to go down into the country at once; and how was everything, how was everybody—Richard? Elizabeth?

"And what's all this?" he said, tilting his penknife towards her green dress.

He's very well dressed, thought Clarissa; yet he always criticises *me*.

Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here she's been sitting all the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard. So it is, so it is, he thought, shutting his knife with a snap.

"Richard's very well. Richard's at a Committee," said Clarissa.

And she opened her scissors, and said, did he mind her just finishing what she was doing to her dress, for they had a party that night?

"Which I shan't ask you to," she said. "My dear Peter!" she said.

But it was delicious to hear her say that—my dear Peter! Indeed, it was all so delicious—the silver, the chairs; all so delicious!

Why wouldn't she ask him to her party? he asked.

Now of course, thought Clarissa, he's enchanting! perfectly enchanting! Now I remember how impossible it was ever to make up my mind—and why

did I make up my mind—not to marry him? she wondered, that awful summer?

"But it's so extraordinary that you should have come this morning!" she cried, putting her hands, one on top of another, down on her dress.

"Do you remember," she said, "how the blinds used to flap at Bourton?"

"They did," he said; and he remembered breakfasting alone, very awkwardly, with her father; who had died; and he had not written to Clarissa. But he had never got on well with old Parry, that querulous, weak-kneed old man, Clarissa's father, Justin Parry.

"I often wish I'd got on better with your father," he said.

"But he never liked any one who—our friends," said Clarissa; and could have bitten her tongue for thus reminding Peter that he had wanted to marry her.

Of course I did, thought Peter; it almost broke my heart too, he thought; and was overcome with his own grief, which rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day. I was more unhappy than I've ever been since, he thought. And as if in truth he were sitting there on the terrace he edged a little towards

Clarissa; put his hand out; raised it; let it fall. There above them it hung, that moon. She too seemed to be sitting with him on the terrace, in the moonlight.

"Herbert has it now," she said. "I never go there now," she said.

Then, just as happens on a terrace in the moonlight, when one person begins to feel ashamed that he is already bored, and yet as the other sits silent, very quiet, sadly looking at the moon, does not like to speak, moves his foot, clears his throat, notices some iron scroll on a table leg, stirs a leaf, but says nothing—so Peter Walsh did now. For why go back like this to the past? he thought. Why make him think of it again? Why make him suffer, when she had tortured him so infernally? Why?

"Do you remember the lake?" she said, in an abrupt voice, under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart, made the muscles of her throat stiff, and contracted her lips in a spasm as she said "lake." For she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete

life, which she put down by them and said, "This is what I have made of it! This!" And what had she made of it? What, indeed? sitting there sewing this morning with Peter.

She looked at Peter Walsh; her look, passing through all that time and that emotion, reached him doubtfully; settled on him tearfully; and rose and fluttered away, as a bird touches a branch and rises and flutters away. Quite simply she wiped her eyes.

"Yes," said Peter. "Yes, yes, yes," he said, as if she drew up to the surface something which positively hurt him as it rose. Stop! Stop! he wanted to cry. For he was not old; his life was not over; not by any means. He was only just past fifty. Shall I tell her, he thought, or not? He would like to make a clean breast of it all. But she is too cold, he thought; sewing, with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloways' sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure, compared with all this—the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints—he was a

failure! I detest the smugness of the whole affair, he thought; Richard's doing, not Clarissa's; save that she married him. (Here Lucy came into the room, carrying silver, more silver, but charming, slender, graceful she looked, he thought, as she stooped to put it down.) And this has been going on all the time! he thought; week after week; Clarissa's life; while I—he thought; and at once everything seemed to radiate from him; journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work; work, work! and he took out his knife quite openly—his old horn-handled knife which Clarissa could swear he had had these thirty years—and clenched his fist upon it.

What an extraordinary habit that was, Clarissa thought; always playing with a knife. Always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox, as he used. But I too, she thought, and, taking up her needle, summoned, like a Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected (she had been quite taken aback by this visit—it had upset her) so that any one can stroll in and have a look at her where she lies with the brambles curving over her, summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her hus-

band; Elizabeth; her self, in short, which Peter hardly knew now, all to come about her and beat off the enemy.

"Well, and what's happened to you?" she said. So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him. He assembled from different quarters all sorts of things; praise; his career at Oxford; his marriage, which she knew nothing whatever about; how he had loved; and altogether done his job.

"Millions of things!" he exclaimed, and, urged by the assembly of powers which were now charging this way and that and giving him the feeling at once frightening and extremely exhilarating of being rushed through the air on the shoulders of people he could no longer see, he raised his hands to his forehead.

Clarissa sat very upright; drew in her breath.

"I am in love," he said, not to her however, but to some one raised up in the dark so that you could not touch her but must lay your garland down on the grass in the dark.

"In love," he repeated, now speaking rather dryly

to Clarissa Dalloway; "in love with a girl in India." He had deposited his garland. Clarissa could make what she would of it.

"In love!" she said. That he at his age should be sucked under in his little bow-tie by that monster! And there's no flesh on his neck; his hands are red; and he's six months older than I am! her eye flashed back to her; but in her heart she felt, all the same, he is in love. He has that, she felt; he is in love.

But the indomitable egotism which for ever rides down the hosts opposed to it, the river which says on, on, on; even though, it admits, there may be no goal for us whatever, still on, on; this indomitable egotism charged her cheeks with colour; made her look very young; very pink; very bright-eyed as she sat with her dress upon her knee, and her needle held to the end of green silk, trembling a little. He was in love! Not with her. With some younger woman, of course.

"And who is she?" she asked.

Now this statue must be brought from its height and set down between them.

"A married woman, unfortunately," he said; "the wife of a Major in the Indian Army."

And with a curious ironical sweetness he smiled

as he placed her in this ridiculous way before Clarissa.

(All the same, he is in love, thought Clarissa.)

"She has," he continued, very reasonably, "two small children; a boy and a girl; and I have come over to see my lawyers about the divorce."

There they are! he thought. Do what you like with them, Clarissa! There they are! And second by second it seemed to him that the wife of the Major in the Indian Army (his Daisy) and her two small children became more and more lovely as Clarissa looked at them; as if he had set light to a grey pellet on a plate and there had risen up a lovely tree in the brisk sea-salted air of their intimacy (for in some ways no one understood him, felt with him, as Clarissa did)—their exquisite intimacy.

She flattered him; she fooled him, thought Clarissa; shaping the woman, the wife of the Major in the Indian Army, with three strokes of a knife. What a waste! What a folly! All his life long Peter had been fooled like that; first getting sent down from Oxford; next marrying the girl on the boat going out to India; now the wife of a Major in the Indian Army—thank Heaven she had refused to marry him! Still, he was in love; her old friend, her dear Peter, he was in love.

"But what are you going to do?" she asked him. Oh the lawyers and solicitors, Messrs. Hooper and Grateley of Lincoln's Inn, they were going to do it, he said. And he actually pared his nails with his pocket-knife.

For Heaven's sake, leave your knife alone! she cried to herself in irrepressible irritation; it was his silly unconventionality, his weakness; his lack of the ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling that annoyed her, had always annoyed her; and now at his age, how silly!

I know all that, Peter thought; I know what I'm up against, he thought, running his finger along the blade of his knife, Clarissa and Dalloway and all the rest of them; but I'll show Clarissa—and then to his utter surprise, suddenly thrown by those uncontrollable forces thrown through the air, he burst into tears; wept; wept without the least shame, sitting on the sofa, the tears running down his cheeks.

And Clarissa had leant forward, taken his hand, drawn him to her, kissed him,—actually had felt his face on hers before she could down the brandishing of silver flashing—plumes like pampas grass in a tropic gale in her breast, which, subsiding, left her holding his hand, patting his knee and, feeling as

she sat back extraordinarily at her ease with him and light-hearted, all in a clap it came over her, If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!

It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up into the tower alone and left them blackberrying in the sun. The door had shut, and there among the dust of fallen plaster and the litter of birds' nests how distant the view had looked, and the sounds came thin and chill (once on Leith Hill, she remembered), and Richard, Richard! she cried, as a sleeper in the night starts and stretches a hand in the dark for help. Lunching with Lady Bruton, it came back to her. He has left me; I am alone for ever, she thought, folding her hands upon her knee.

Peter Walsh had got up and crossed to the window and stood with his back to her, flicking a bandanna handkerchief from side to side. Masterly and dry and desolate he looked, his thin shoulder-blades lifting his coat slightly; blowing his nose violently. Take me with you, Clarissa thought impulsively, as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage; and then, next moment, it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them

and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over.

Now it was time to move, and, as a woman gathers her things together, her cloak, her gloves, her opera-glasses, and gets up to go out of the theatre into the street, she rose from the sofa and went to Peter.

And it was awfully strange, he thought, how she still had the power, as she came tinkling, rustling, still had the power as she came across the room, to make the moon, which he detested, rise at Bourton on the terrace in the summer sky.

"Tell me," he said, seizing her by the shoulders. "Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard—"

The door opened.

"Here is my Elizabeth," said Clarissa, emotionally, histrionically, perhaps.

"How d'y do?" said Elizabeth coming forward.

The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck out between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that.

"Hullo, Elizabeth!" cried Peter, stuffing his handkerchief into his pocket, going quickly to her, saying "Good-bye, Clarissa" without looking at her, leaving the room quickly, and running downstairs and opening the hall door.

"Peter! Peter!" cried Clarissa, following him out on to the landing. "My party to-night! Remember my party to-night!" she cried, having to raise her voice against the roar of the open air, and, overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking, her voice crying "Remember my party to-night!" sounded frail and thin and very far away as Peter Walsh shut the door.

Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour. (The leaden circles dissolved in the air.) Oh these parties, he thought; Clarissa's parties. Why does she give these parties, he thought. Not that he blamed her or this effigy of a man in a tail-coat with a carnation in his buttonhole coming towards him. Only one person in the world could be as he was, in love. And there he was, this fortunate man, himself, reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer in Victoria Street. All India lay behind him; plains, mountains; epidemics of cholera; a district twice as big as Ireland; decisions he had come to alone—he, Peter Walsh; who was now really for the first

time in his life, in love. Clarissa had grown hard, he thought; and a trifle sentimental into the bargain, he suspected, looking at the great motor-cars capable of doing—how many miles on how many gallons? For he had a turn for mechanics; had invented a plough in his district, had ordered wheel-barrows from England, but the coolies wouldn't use them, all of which Clarissa knew nothing whatever about.

The way she said "Here is my Elizabeth!"—that annoyed him. Why not "Here's Elizabeth" simply? It was insincere. And Elizabeth didn't like it either. (Still the last tremors of the great booming voice shook the air round him; the half-hour; still early; only half-past eleven still.) For he understood young people; he liked them. There was always something cold in Clarissa, he thought. She had always, even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality, and then it's all up, it's all up, he thought, looking rather drearily into the glassy depths, and wondering whether by calling at that hour he had annoyed her; overcome with shame suddenly at having been a fool; wept; been emotional; told her everything, as usual, as usual.

As a cloud crosses the sun, silence falls on London; and falls on the mind. Effort ceases. Time

flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame. Where there is nothing, Peter Walsh said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within. Clarissa refused me, he thought. He stood there thinking, Clarissa refused me.

Ah, said St. Margaret's, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. It is half-past eleven, she says, and the sound of St. Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest—like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming down the stairs on the stroke of the hour in white. It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, as if this bell had come into the room years ago, where they sat at some moment of great intimacy, and had gone from one to the other and had left, like a bee

with honey, laden with the moment. But what room? What moment? And why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? Then, as the sound of St. Margaret's languished, he thought, She has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future.

He was not old, or set, or dried in the least. As for caring what they said of him—the Dalloways, the Whitbreads, and their set, he cared not a straw—not a straw (though it was true he would have, some time or other, to see whether Richard couldn't help him to some job). Striding, staring, he glared at the statue of the Duke of Cambridge. He had been sent down from Oxford—true. He had been a Socialist, in some sense a failure—true. Still the future of civilisation lies, he thought, in the hands of young men like that; of young men such as he was, thirty years ago; with their love of abstract principles; getting books sent out to them all the

way from London to a peak in the Himalayas; reading science; reading philosophy. The future lies in the hands of young men like that, he thought.

A patter like the patter of leaves in a wood came from behind, and with it a rustling, regular thudding sound, which as it overtook him drummed his thoughts, strict in step, up Whitehall, without his doing. Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England.

It is, thought Peter Walsh, beginning to keep step with them, a very fine training. But they did not look robust. They were weedy for the most part, boys of sixteen, who might, to-morrow, stand behind bowls of rice, cakes of soap on counters. Now they wore on them unmixed with sensual pleasure or daily preoccupations the solemnity of the wreath which they had fetched from Finsbury Pavement to the empty tomb. They had taken their vow. The traffic respected it; vans were stopped.

I can't keep up with them, Peter Walsh thought, as they marched up Whitehall, and sure enough, on they marched, past him, past every one, in their steady way, as if one will worked legs and arms uni-

formly, and life, with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline. One had to respect it; one might laugh; but one had to respect it, he thought. There they go, thought Peter Walsh, pausing at the edge of the pavement; and all the exalted statues, Nelson, Gordon, Havelock, the black, the spectacular images of great soldiers stood looking ahead of them, as if they too had made the same renunciation (Peter Walsh felt he too had made it, the great renunciation), trampled under the same temptations, and achieved at length a marble stare. But the stare Peter Walsh did not want for himself in the least; though he could respect it in others. He could respect it in boys. They don't know the troubles of the flesh yet, he thought, as the marching boys disappeared in the direction of the Strand—all that I've been through, he thought, crossing the road, and standing under Gordon's statue, Gordon whom as a boy he had worshipped; Gordon standing lonely with one leg raised and his arms crossed,—poor Gordon, he thought.

And just because nobody yet knew he was in London, except Clarissa, and the earth, after the voyage, still seemed an island to him, the strange-

ness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square overcame him. What is it? Where am I? And why, after all, does one do it? he thought, the divorce seeming all moonshine. And down his mind went flat as a marsh, and three great emotions bowled over him; understanding; a vast philanthropy; and finally, as if the result of the others, an irrepressible, exquisite delight; as if inside his brain by another hand strings were pulled, shutters moved, and he, having nothing to do with it, yet stood at the opening of endless avenues, down which if he chose he might wander. He had not felt so young for years.

He had escaped! was utterly free—as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its holding. I haven't felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was, and feeling like a child who runs out of doors, and sees, as he runs, his old nurse waving at the wrong window. But she's extraordinarily attractive, he thought, as, walking across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket, came a young woman who, as she passed Gordon's statue, seemed, Peter Walsh thought (susceptible as he was), to shed veil

after veil, until she became the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry, but discreet; black, but enchanting.

Straightening himself and stealthily fingering his pocket-knife he started after her to follow this woman, this excitement, which seemed even with its back turned to shed on him a light which connected them, which singled him out, as if the random uproar of the traffic had whispered through hollowed hands his name, not Peter, but his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts. "You," she said, only "you," saying it with her white gloves and her shoulders. Then the thin long cloak which the wind stirred as she walked past Dent's shop in Cockspur Street blew out with an enveloping kindness, a mournful tenderness, as of arms that would open and take the tired—

But she's not married; she's young; quite young, thought Peter, the red carnation he had seen her wear as she came across Trafalgar Square burning again in his eyes and making her lips red. But she waited at the kerbstone. There was a dignity about her. She was not worldly, like Clarissa; not rich, like Clarissa. Was she, he wondered as she moved, respectable? Witty, with a lizard's flickering tongue, he thought (for one must invent, must

allow oneself a little diversion), a cool waiting wit, a darting wit; not noisy.

She moved; she crossed; he followed her. To embarrass her was the last thing he wished. Still if she stopped he would say "Come and have an ice," he would say, and she would answer, perfectly simply, "Oh yes."

But other people got between them in the street, obstructing him, blotting her out. He pursued; she changed. There was colour in her cheeks; mockery in her eyes; he was an adventurer, reckless, he thought, swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer, careless of all these damned proprieties, yellow dressing-gowns, pipes, fishing-rods, in the shop windows; and respectability and evening parties and spruce old men wearing white slips beneath their waistcoats. He was a buccaneer. On and on she went, across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street, ahead of him, her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the windows to make the spirit of finery and whimsy which dwindled out of the shops on to the pavement, as the light of a lamp goes wavering at night over hedges in the darkness.

Laughing and delightful, she had crossed Oxford

Street and Great Portland Street and turned down one of the little streets, and now, and now, the great moment was approaching, for now she slackened, opened her bag, and with one look in his direction, but not at him, one look that bade farewell, summed up the whole situation and dismissed it triumphantly, for ever, had fitted her key, opened the door, and gone! Clarissa's voice saying, Remember my party, Remember my party, sang in his ears. The house was one of those flat red houses with hanging flower-baskets of vague impropriety. It was over.

Well, I've had my fun; I've had it, he thought, looking up at the swinging baskets of pale geraniums. And it was smashed to atoms—his fun, for it was half made up, as he knew very well; invented, this escapade with the girl; made up, as one makes up the better part of life, he thought—making oneself up; making her up; creating an exquisite amusement, and something more. But odd it was, and quite true; all this one could never share—it smashed to atoms.

He turned; went up the street, thinking to find somewhere to sit, till it was time for Lincoln's Inn—for Messrs. Hooper and Grateley. Where should he go? No matter. Up the street, then, towards

Regent's Park. His boots on the pavement struck out "no matter"; for it was early, still very early.

It was a splendid morning too. Like the pulse of a perfect heart, life struck straight through the streets. There was no fumbling—no hesitation. Sweeping and swerving, accurately, punctually, noiselessly, there, precisely at the right instant, the motor-car stopped at the door. The girl, silk-stockinged, feathered, evanescent, but not to him particularly attractive (for he had had his fling), alighted. Admirable butlers, tawny chow dogs, halls laid in black and white lozenges with white blinds blowing, Peter saw through the opened door and approved of. A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilisation. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it's strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England; in butlers; chow dogs; girls in their security. Ridiculous enough, still there it is, he thought. And the doctors and men of busi-

ness and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable, good fellows, to whom one would entrust one's life, companions in the art of living, who would see one through. What with one thing and another, the show was really very tolerable; and he would sit down in the shade and smoke.

There was Regent's Park. Yes. As a child he had walked in Regent's Park—odd, he thought, how the thought of childhood keeps coming back to me—the result of seeing Clarissa, perhaps; for women live much more in the past than we do, he thought. They attach themselves to places; and their fathers—a woman's always proud of her father. Bourton was a nice place, a very nice place, but I could never get on with the old man, he thought. There was quite a scene one night—an argument about something or other, what, he could not remember. Politics presumably.

Yes, he remembered Regent's Park; the long straight walk; the little house where one bought air-balls to the left; an absurd statue with an inscription somewhere or other. He looked for an empty seat. He did not want to be bothered (feeling a little drowsy as he did) by people asking him the time. An elderly grey nurse, with a baby asleep

in its perambulator—that was the best he could do for himself; sit down at the far end of the seat by that nurse.

She's a queer-looking girl, he thought, suddenly remembering Elizabeth as she came into the room and stood by her mother. Grown big; quite grown-up, not exactly pretty; handsome rather; and she can't be more than eighteen. Probably she doesn't get on with Clarissa. "There's my Elizabeth"—that sort of thing—why not "Here's Elizabeth" simply?—trying to make out, like most mothers, that things are what they're not. She trusts to her charm too much, he thought. She overdoes it.

The rich benignant cigar smoke eddied coolly down his throat; he puffed it out again in rings which breasted the air bravely for a moment; blue, circular—I shall try and get a word alone with Elizabeth to-night, he thought—then began to wobble into hour-glass shapes and taper away; odd shapes they take, he thought. Suddenly he closed his eyes, raised his hand with an effort, and threw away the heavy end of his cigar. A great brush swept smooth across his mind, sweeping across it moving branches, children's voices, the shuffle of feet, and people passing, and humming traffic, rising

and falling traffic. Down, down he sank into the plumes and feathers of sleep, sank, and was muffled over.

The grey nurse resumed her knitting as Peter Walsh, on the hot seat beside her, began snoring. In her grey dress, moving her hands indefatigably yet quietly, she seemed like the champion of the rights of sleepers, like one of those spectral presences which rise in twilight in woods made of sky and branches. The solitary traveller, haunter of lanes, disturber of ferns, and devastator of great hemlock plants, looking up, suddenly sees the giant figure at the end of the ride.

By conviction an atheist perhaps, he is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation. Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women. But if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists, he thinks, and advancing down the path with his eyes upon sky and branches he rapidly endows them with womanhood; sees with amazement how grave they become; how majestically, as the breeze stirs them, they dispense with a dark flutter of the leaves

charity, comprehension, absolution, and then, flinging themselves suddenly aloft, confound the piety of their aspect with a wild carouse.

Such are the visions which proffer great cornucopias full of fruit to the solitary traveller, or murmur in his ear like sirens lolloping away on the green sea waves, or are dashed in his face like bunches of roses, or rise to the surface like pale faces which fishermen flounder through floods to embrace.

Such are the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth, the wish to return, and giving him for substitute a general peace, as if (so he thinks as he advances down the forest ride) all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea (he is elderly, past fifty now) as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution. So, he thinks, may I never go back to the lamplight; to the sitting-room; never finish my book; never knock out my pipe; never ring for Mrs.

Turner to clear away; rather let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest.

Such are the visions. The solitary traveller is soon beyond the wood; and there, coming to the door with shaded eyes, possibly to look for his return, with hands raised, with white apron blowing, is an elderly woman who seems (so powerful is this infirmity) to seek, over a desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world. So, as the solitary traveller advances down the village street where the women stand knitting and the men dig in the garden, the evening seems ominous; the figures still; as if some august fate, known to them, awaited without fear, were about to sweep them into complete annihilation.

Indoors among ordinary things, the cupboard, the table, the window-sill with its geraniums, suddenly the outline of the landlady, bending to remove the cloth, becomes soft with light, an adorable emblem which only the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us to embrace. She takes the marmalade; she shuts it in the cupboard.

"There is nothing more to-night, sir?"

But to whom does the solitary traveller make reply?

So the elderly nurse knitted over the sleeping baby in Regent's Park. So Peter Walsh snored.

He woke with extreme suddenness, saying to himself, "The death of the soul."

"Lord, Lord!" he said to himself out loud, stretching and opening his eyes. "The death of the soul." The words attached themselves to some scene, to some room, to some past he had been dreaming of. It became clearer; the scene, the room, the past he had been dreaming of.

It was at Bourton that summer, early in the 'nineties, when he was so passionately in love with Clarissa. There were a great many people there, laughing and talking, sitting round a table after tea and the room was bathed in yellow light and full of cigarette smoke. They were talking about a man who had married his housemaid, one of the neighbouring squires, he had forgotten his name. He had married his housemaid, and she had been brought to Bourton to call—an awful visit it had been. She was absurdly over-dressed, "like a cockatoo," Clarissa had said, imitating her, and she never stopped talking. On and on she went, on and on,

Clarissa imitated her. Then somebody said—Sally Seton it was—did it make any real difference to one's feelings to know that before they'd married she had had a baby? (In those days, in mixed company, it was a bold thing to say.) He could see Clarissa now, turning bright pink; somehow contracting; and saying, "Oh, I shall never be able to speak to her again!" Whereupon the whole party sitting round the tea-table seemed to wobble. It was very uncomfortable.

He hadn't blamed her for minding the fact, since in those days a girl brought up as she was, knew nothing, but it was her manner that annoyed him; timid; hard; something arrogant; unimaginative; prudish. "The death of the soul." He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do—the death of her soul.

Every one wobbled; every one seemed to bow, as she spoke, and then to stand up different. He could see Sally Seton, like a child who has been in mischief, leaning forward, rather flushed, wanting to talk, but afraid, and Clarissa did frighten people. (She was Clarissa's greatest friend, always about the place, totally unlike her, an attractive creature, handsome, dark, with the reputation in those days of great daring and he used to give her cigars, which

she smoked in her bedroom. She had either been engaged to somebody or quarrelled with her family and old Parry disliked them both equally, which was a great bond.) Then Clarissa, still with an air of being offended with them all, got up, made some excuse, and went off, alone. As she opened the door, in came that great shaggy dog which ran after sheep. She flung herself upon him, went into raptures. It was as if she said to Peter—it was all aimed at him, he knew—"I know you thought me absurd about that woman just now; but see how extraordinarily sympathetic I am; see how I love my Rob!"

They had always this queer power of communicating without words. She knew directly he criticised her. Then she would do something quite obvious to defend herself, like this fuss with the dog—but it never took him in, he always saw through Clarissa. Not that he said anything, of course; just sat looking glum. It was the way their quarrels often began.

She shut the door. At once he became extremely depressed. It all seemed useless—going on being in love; going on quarrelling; going on making it up, and he wandered off alone, among outhouses, stables, looking at the horses. (The place was quite a humble one; the Parrys were never very well off;

but there were always grooms and stable-boys about —Clarissa loved riding—and an old coachman—what was his name?—an old nurse, old Moody, old Goody, some such name they called her, whom one was taken to visit in a little room with lots of photographs, lots of bird-cages.)

It was an awful evening! He grew more and more gloomy, not about that only; about everything. And he couldn't see her; couldn't explain to her; couldn't have it out. There were always people about—she'd go on as if nothing had happened. That was the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability. Yet Heaven knows he loved her. She had some queer power of fiddling on one's nerves, turning one's nerves to fiddle-strings, yes.

He had gone in to dinner rather late, from some idiotic idea of making himself felt, and had sat down by old Miss Parry—Aunt Helena—Mr. Parry's sister, who was supposed to preside. There she sat in her white Cashmere shawl, with her head against the window—a formidable old lady, but kind to him, for he had found her some rare flower, and she was a great botanist, marching off in thick boots with a black collecting-box slung between her shoulders

He sat down beside her, and couldn't speak. Everything seemed to race past him; he just sat there, eating. And then half-way through dinner he made himself look across at Clarissa for the first time. She was talking to a young man on her right. He had a sudden revelation. "She will marry that man," he said to himself. He didn't even know his name.

For of course it was that afternoon, that very afternoon, that Dalloway had come over; and Clarissa called him "Wickham"; that was the beginning of it all. Somebody had brought him over; and Clarissa got his name wrong. She introduced him to everybody as Wickham. At last he said "My name is Dalloway!"—that was his first view of Richard—a fair young man, rather awkward, sitting on a deck-chair, and blurting out "My name is Dalloway!" Sally got hold of it; always after that she called him "My name is Dalloway!"

He was a prey to revelations at that time. This one—that she would marry Dalloway—was blinding—overwhelming at the moment. There was a sort of—how could he put it?—a sort of ease in her manner to him; something maternal; something gentle. They were talking about politics. All

through dinner he tried to hear what they were saying.

Afterwards he could remember standing by old Miss Parry's chair in the drawing-room. Clarissa came up, with her perfect manners, like a real hostess, and wanted to introduce him to some one—spoke as if they had never met before, which enraged him. Yet even then he admired her for it. He admired her courage; her social instinct; he admired her power of carrying things through. "The perfect hostess," he said to her, whereupon she winced all over. But he meant her to feel it. He would have done anything to hurt her after seeing her with Dalloway. So she left him. And he had a feeling that they were all gathered together in a conspiracy against him—laughing and talking—behind his back. There he stood by Miss Parry's chair as though he had been cut out of wood, he talking about wild flowers. Never, never had he suffered so infernally! He must have forgotten even to pretend to listen; at last he woke up; he saw Miss Parry looking rather disturbed, rather indignant, with her prominent eyes fixed. He almost cried out that he couldn't attend because he was in Hell! People began going out of the room. He

heard them talking about fetching cloaks; about its being cold on the water, and so on. They were going boating on the lake by moonlight—one of Sally's mad ideas. He could hear her describing the moon. And they all went out. He was left quite alone.

"Don't you want to go with them?" said Aunt Helena—old Miss Parry!—she had guessed. And he turned round and there was Clarissa again. She had come back to fetch him. He was overcome by her generosity—her goodness.

"Come along," she said. "They're waiting."

He had never felt so happy in the whole of his life! Without a word they made it up. They walked down to the lake. He had twenty minutes of perfect happiness. Her voice, her laugh, her dress (something floating, white, crimson), her spirit, her adventurousness; she made them all disembark and explore the island; she startled a hen; she laughed; she sang. And all the time, he knew perfectly well, Dalloway was falling in love with her; she was falling in love with Dalloway; but it didn't seem to matter. Nothing mattered. They sat on the ground and talked—he and Clarissa. They went in and out of each other's minds without any effort. And then in a second it was over.

He said to himself as they were getting into the boat, "She will marry that man," dully, without any resentment; but it was an obvious thing. Dalloway would marry Clarissa.

Dalloway rowed them in. He said nothing. But somehow as they watched him start, jumping on to his bicycle to ride twenty miles through the woods, wobbling off down the drive, waving his hand and disappearing, he obviously did feel, instinctively, tremendously, strongly, all that; the night; the romance; Clarissa. He deserved to have her.

For himself, he was absurd. His demands upon Clarissa (he could see it now) were absurd. He asked impossible things. He made terrible scenes. She would have accepted him still, perhaps, if he had been less absurd. Sally thought so. She wrote him all that summer long letters; how they had talked of him; how she had praised him, how Clarissa burst into tears! It was an extraordinary summer—all letters, scenes, telegrams—arriving at Bourton early in the morning, hanging about till the servants were up; appalling *tête-à-têtes* with old Mr. Parry at breakfast; Aunt Helena formidable but kind; Sally sweeping him off for talks in the vegetable garden; Clarissa in bed with headaches.

The final scene, the terrible scene which he be-

lieved had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life (it might be an exaggeration—but still so it did seem now) happened at three o'clock in the afternoon of a very hot day. It was a trifle that led up to it—Sally at lunch saying something about Dalloway, and calling him "My name is Dalloway"; whereupon Clarissa suddenly stiffened, coloured, in a way she had, and rapped out sharply, "We've had enough of that feeble joke." That was all; but for him it was precisely as if she had said, "I'm only amusing myself with you; I've an understanding with Richard Dalloway." So he took it. He had not slept for nights. "It's got to be finished one way or the other," he said to himself. He sent a note to her by Sally asking her to meet him by the fountain at three. "Something very important has happened," he scribbled at the end of it.

The fountain was in the middle of a little shrubbery, far from the house, with shrubs and trees all round it. There she came, even before the time, and they stood with the fountain between them, the spout (it was broken) dribbling water incessantly. How sights fix themselves upon the mind! For example, the vivid green moss.

She did not move. "Tell me the truth, tell me the truth," he kept on saying. He felt as if his

forehead would burst. She seemed contracted, petrified. She did not move. "Tell me the truth," he repeated, when suddenly that old man Breitkopf popped his head in carrying the *Times;* stared at them; gaped; and went away. They neither of them moved. "Tell me the truth," he repeated. He felt that he was grinding against something physically hard; she was unyielding. She was like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone. And when she said, "It's no use. It's no use. This is the end"—after he had spoken for hours, it seemed, with the tears running down his cheeks—it was as if she had hit him in the face. She turned, she left him, went away.

"Clarissa!" he cried. "Clarissa!" But she never came back. It was over. He went away that night. He never saw her again.

It was awful, he cried, awful, awful!

Still, the sun was hot. Still, one got over things. Still, life had a way of adding day to day. Still, he thought, yawning and beginning to take notice—Regent's Park had changed very little since he was a boy, except for the squirrels—still, presumably there were compensations—when little Elise Mitchell, who had been picking up pebbles to add

to the pebble collection which she and her brother were making on the nursery mantelpiece, plumped her handful down on the nurse's knee and scudded off again full tilt into a lady's legs. Peter Walsh laughed out.

But Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, It's wicked; why should I suffer? she was asking, as she walked down the broad path. No; I can't stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn't Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man, on the seat over there; when the child ran full tilt into her, fell flat, and burst out crying.

That was comforting rather. She stood her upright, dusted her frock, kissed her.

But for herself she had done nothing wrong; she had loved Septimus; she had been happy; she had had a beautiful home, and there her sisters lived still, making hats. Why should *she* suffer?

The child ran straight back to its nurse, and Rezia saw her scolded, comforted, taken up by the nurse who put down her knitting, and the kind-looking man gave her his watch to blow open to comfort her—but why should *she* be exposed? Why not left in Milan? Why tortured? Why?

Slightly waved by tears the broad path, the nurse, the man in grey, the perambulator, rose and fell before her eyes. To be rocked by this malignant torturer was her lot. But why? She was like a bird sheltering under the thin hollow of a leaf, who blinks at the sun when the leaf moves; starts at the crack of a dry twig. She was exposed; she was surrounded by the enormous trees, vast clouds of an indifferent world, exposed; tortured; and why should she suffer? Why?

She frowned; she stamped her foot. She must go back again to Septimus since it was almost time for them to be going to Sir William Bradshaw. She must go back and tell him, go back to him sitting there on the green chair under the tree, talking to himself, or to that dead man Evans, whom she had only seen once for a moment in the shop. He had seemed a nice quiet man; a great friend of Septimus's, and he had been killed in the War. But such things happen to every one. Every one has friends who were killed in the War. Every one gives up something when they marry. She had given up her home. She had come to live here, in this awful city. But Septimus let himself think about horrible things, as she could too, if she tried. He had grown stranger and stranger. He said people were talking

behind the bedroom walls. Mrs. Filmer thought it odd. He saw things too—he had seen an old woman's head in the middle of a fern. Yet he could be happy when he chose. They went to Hampton Court on top of a bus, and they were perfectly happy. All the little red and yellow flowers were out on the grass, like floating lamps he said, and talked and chattered and laughed, making up stories. Suddenly he said, "Now we will kill ourselves," when they were standing by the river, and he looked at it with a look which she had seen in his eyes when a train went by, or an omnibus—a look as if something fascinated him; and she felt he was going from her and she caught him by the arm. But going home he was perfectly quiet—perfectly reasonable. He would argue with her about killing themselves; and explain how wicked people were; how he could see them making up lies as they passed in the street. He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything. He knew the meaning of the world, he said.

Then when they got back he could hardly walk. He lay on the sofa and made her hold his hand to prevent him from falling down, down, he cried, into the flames! and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls,

and hands pointing round the screen. Yet they were quite alone. But he began to talk aloud, answering people, arguing, laughing, crying, getting very excited and making her write things down. Perfect nonsense it was; about death; about Miss Isabel Pole. She could stand it no longer. She would go back.

She was close to him now, could see him staring at the sky, muttering, clasping his hands. Yet Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. What then had happened—why had he gone, then, why, when she sat by him, did he start, frown at her, move away, and point at her hand, take her hand, look at it terrified?

Was it that she had taken off her wedding ring? "My hand has grown so thin," she said. "I have put it in my purse," she told him.

He dropped her hand. Their marriage was over, he thought, with agony, with relief. The rope was cut; he mounted; he was free, as it was decreed that he, Septimus, the lord of men, should be free; alone (since his wife had thrown away her wedding ring; since she had left him), he, Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilisation—Greeks,

Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself—was to be given whole to. . . . "To whom?" he asked aloud. "To the Prime Minister," the voices which rustled above his head replied. The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first that trees are alive; next there is no crime; next love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever.

No crime; love; he repeated, fumbling for his card and pencil, when a Skye terrier snuffed his trousers and he started in an agony of fear. It was turning into a man! He could not watch it happen! It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man! At once the dog trotted away.

Heaven was divinely merciful, infinitely benignant. It spared him, pardoned his weakness. But what was the scientific explanation (for one must be scientific above all things)? Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men? It was the heat wave presumably, operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution. Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until

only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock.

He lay back in his chair, exhausted but upheld. He lay resting, waiting, before he again interpreted, with effort, with agony, to mankind. He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him—the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house.

But he himself remained high on his rock, like a

drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still; he begged (he was talking to himself again—it was awful, awful!); and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen.

He had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf,

now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.

"It is time," said Rezia.

The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—

"For God's sake don't come!" Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some

colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure (and Septimus half rose from his chair), and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole—

"But I am so unhappy, Septimus," said Rezia trying to make him sit down.

The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation—

"The time, Septimus," Rezia repeated. "What is the time?"

He was talking, he was starting, this man must notice him. He was looking at them.

"I will tell you the time," said Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously. As he sat smiling at the dead man in the grey suit the quarter struck—the quarter to twelve.

And that is being young, Peter Walsh thought as he passed them. To be having an awful scene—the poor girl looked absolutely desperate—in the middle of the morning. But what was it about, he won-

dered, what had the young man in the overcoat been saying to her to make her look like that; what awful fix had they got themselves into, both to look so desperate as that on a fine summer morning? The amusing thing about coming back to England, after five years, was the way it made, anyhow the first days, things stand out as if one had never seen them before; lovers squabbling under a tree; the domestic family life of the parks. Never had he seen London look so enchanting—the softness of the distances; the richness; the greenness; the civilisation, after India, he thought, strolling across the grass.

This susceptibility to impressions had been his undoing no doubt. Still at his age he had, like a boy or a girl even, these alternations of mood; good days, bad days, for no reason whatever, happiness from a pretty face, downright misery at the sight of a frump. After India of course one fell in love with every woman one met. There was a freshness about them; even the poorest dressed better than five years ago surely; and to his eye the fashions had never been so becoming; the long black cloaks; the slimness; the elegance; and then the delicious and apparently universal habit of paint. Every woman, even the most respectable, had roses blooming under glass; lips cut with a knife; curls of In-

dian ink; there was design, art, everywhere; a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place. What did the young people think about? Peter Walsh asked himself.

Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. Now for instance there was a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water-closets. That you couldn't have done ten years ago—written quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly. And then this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff and making up in public. On board ship coming home there were lots of young men and girls—Betty and Bertie he remembered in particular—carrying on quite openly; the old mother sitting and watching them with her knitting, cool as a cucumber. The girl would stand still and powder her nose in front of every one. And they weren't engaged; just having a good time; no feelings hurt on either side. As hard as nails she was—Betty What'shername—; but a thorough good sort. She would make a very good wife at thirty—she would marry when it suited her to marry; marry some rich man and live in a large house near Manchester.

Who was it now who had done that? Peter Walsh

asked himself, turning into the Broad Walk,—married a rich man and lived in a large house near Manchester? Somebody who had written him a long, gushing letter quite lately about "blue hydrangeas." It was seeing blue hydrangeas that made her think of him and the old days—Sally Seton, of course! It was Sally Seton—the last person in the world one would have expected to marry a rich man and live in a large house near Manchester, the wild, the daring, the romantic Sally!

But of all that ancient lot, Clarissa's friends—Whitbreads, Kinderleys, Cunninghams, Kinloch-Jones's—Sally was probably the best. She tried to get hold of things by the right end anyhow. She saw through Hugh Whitbread anyhow—the admirable Hugh—when Clarissa and the rest were at his feet.

"The Whitbreads?" he could hear her saying. "Who are the Whitbreads? Coal merchants. Respectable tradespeople."

Hugh she detested for some reason. He thought of nothing but his own appearance, she said. He ought to have been a Duke. He would be certain to marry one of the Royal Princesses. And of course Hugh had the most extraordinary, the most natural, the most sublime respect for the British

aristocracy of any human being he had ever come across. Even Clarissa had to own that. Oh, but he was such a dear, so unselfish, gave up shooting to please his old mother—remembered his aunts' birthdays, and so on.

Sally, to do her justice, saw through all that. One of the things he remembered best was an argument one Sunday morning at Bourton about women's rights (that antediluvian topic), when Sally suddenly lost her temper, flared up, and told Hugh that he represented all that was most detestable in British middle-class life. She told him that she considered him responsible for the state of "those poor girls in Piccadilly"—Hugh, the perfect gentleman, poor Hugh!—never did a man look more horrified! She did it on purpose she said afterwards (for they used to get together in the vegetable garden and compare notes). "He's read nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing," he could hear her saying in that very emphatic voice which carried so much farther than she knew. The stable boys had more life in them than Hugh, she said. He was a perfect specimen of the public school type, she said. No country but England could have produced him. She was really spiteful, for some reason; had some grudge against him. Something had happened—he forgot

what—in the smoking-room. He had insulted her—kissed her? Incredible! Nobody believed a word against Hugh of course. Who could? Kissing Sally in the smoking-room! If it had been some Honourable Edith or Lady Violet, perhaps; but not that ragamuffin Sally without a penny to her name, and a father or a mother gambling at Monte Carlo. For of all the people he had ever met Hugh was the greatest snob—the most obsequious—no, he didn't cringe exactly. He was too much of a prig for that. A first-rate valet was the obvious comparison—somebody who walked behind carrying suit cases; could be trusted to send telegrams—indispensable to hostesses. And he'd found his job—married his Honourable Evelyn; got some little post at Court, looked after the King's cellars, polished the Imperial shoe-buckles, went about in knee-breeches and lace ruffles. How remorseless life is! A little job at Court!

He had married this lady, the Honourable Evelyn, and they lived hereabouts, so he thought (looking at the pompous houses overlooking the Park), for he had lunched there once in a house which had, like all Hugh's possessions, something that no other house could possibly have—linen cupboards it might have been. You had to go and look

at them—you had to spend a great deal of time always admiring whatever it was—linen cupboards, pillow-cases, old oak furniture, pictures, which Hugh had picked up for an old song. But Mrs. Hugh sometimes gave the show away. She was one of those obscure mouse-like little women who admire big men. She was almost negligible. Then suddenly she would say something quite unexpected—something sharp. She had the relics of the grand manner perhaps. The steam coal was a little too strong for her—it made the atmosphere thick. And so there they lived, with their linen cupboards and their old masters and their pillow-cases fringed with real lace at the rate of five or ten thousand a year presumably, while he, who was two years older than Hugh, cadged for a job.

At fifty-three he had to come and ask them to put him into some secretary's office, to find him some usher's job teaching little boys Latin, at the beck and call of some mandarin in an office, something that brought in five hundred a year; for if he married Daisy, even with his pension, they could never do on less. Whitbread could do it presumably; or Dalloway. He didn't mind what he asked Dalloway. He was a thorough good sort; a bit limited; a bit thick in the head; yes; but a thorough good

sort. Whatever he took up he did in the same matter-of-fact sensible way; without a touch of imagination, without a spark of brilliancy, but with the inexplicable niceness of his type. He ought to have been a country gentleman—he was wasted on politics. He was at his best out of doors, with horses and dogs—how good he was, for instance, when that great shaggy dog of Clarissa's got caught in a trap and had its paw half torn off, and Clarissa turned faint and Dalloway did the whole thing; bandaged, made splints; told Clarissa not to be a fool. That was what she liked him for perhaps—that was what she needed. "Now, my dear, don't be a fool. Hold this—fetch that," all the time talking to the dog as if it were a human being.

But how could she swallow all that stuff about poetry? How could she let him hold forth about Shakespeare? Seriously and solemnly Richard Dalloway got on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare's sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes (besides the relationship was not one that he approved). No decent man ought to let his wife visit a deceased wife's sister. Incredible! The only thing to do was to pelt him with sugared almonds—it was at dinner. But Clarissa sucked it all in; thought it so honest

of him; so independent of him; Heaven knows if she didn't think him the most original mind she'd ever met!

That was one of the bonds between Sally and himself. There was a garden where they used to walk, a walled-in place, with rose-bushes and giant cauliflowers—he could remember Sally tearing off a rose, stopping to exclaim at the beauty of the cabbage leaves in the moonlight (it was extraordinary how vividly it all came back to him, things he hadn't thought of for years,) while she implored him, half laughing of course, to carry off Clarissa, to save her from the Hughs and the Dalloways and all the other "perfect gentlemen" who would "stifle her soul" (she wrote reams of poetry in those days), make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness. But one must do Clarissa justice. She wasn't going to marry Hugh anyhow. She had a perfectly clear notion of what she wanted. Her emotions were all on the surface. Beneath, she was very shrewd—a far better judge of character than Sally, for instance, and with it all, purely feminine; with that extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be. She came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people

round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was.

No, no, no! He was not in love with her any more! He only felt, after seeing her that morning, among her scissors and silks, making ready for the party, unable to get away from the thought of her; she kept coming back and back like a sleeper jolting against him in a railway carriage; which was not being in love, of course; it was thinking of her, criticising her, starting again, after thirty years, trying to explain her. The obvious thing to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world—which was true in a sense; she had admitted it to him. (You could always get her to own up if you took the trouble; she was honest.) What she would say was that she hated frumps, fogies, failures, like himself presumably; thought people had no right to slouch about with their hands in their pockets; must do something, be something; and these great swells, these Duchesses, these hoary old Countesses one met in her drawing-room, unspeakably remote as he felt them to be from any-

thing that mattered a straw, stood for something real to her. Lady Bexborough, she said once, held herself upright (so did Clarissa herself; she never lounged in any sense of the word; she was straight as a dart, a little rigid in fact). She said they had a kind of courage which the older she grew the more she respected. In all this there was a great deal of Dalloway, of course; a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit, which had grown on her, as it tends to do. With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes—one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard—as if one couldn't know to a tittle what Richard thought by reading the *Morning Post* of a morning! These parties for example were all for him, or for her idea of him (to do Richard justice he would have been happier farming in Norfolk). She made her drawing-room a sort of meeting-place; she had a genius for it. Over and over again he had seen her take some raw youth, twist him, turn him, wake him up; set him going. Infinite numbers of dull people conglomerated round her of course. But odd unexpected people turned up; an artist sometimes; sometimes a writer; queer fish in that atmosphere. And

behind it all was that network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people; running about with bunches of flowers, little presents; So-and-so was going to France—must have an air-cushion; a real drain on her strength; all that interminable traffic that women of her sort keep up; but she did it genuinely, from a natural instinct.

Oddly enough, she was one of the most thorough-going sceptics he had ever met, and possibly (this was a theory he used to make up to account for her, so transparent in some ways, so inscrutable in others), possibly she said to herself, As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship (her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall, and they were fond of these nautical metaphors), as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners (Huxley again); decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way,—her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady. That phase came directly after Sylvia's death—that horrible affair. To see your own sister killed by a falling tree (all Justin

Parry's fault—all his carelessness) before your very eyes, a girl too on the verge of life, the most gifted of them, Clarissa always said, was enough to turn one bitter. Later she wasn't so positive perhaps; she thought there were no Gods; no one was to blame; and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness.

And of course she enjoyed life immensely. It was her nature to enjoy (though goodness only knows, she had her reserves; it was a mere sketch, he often felt, that even he, after all these years, could make of Clarissa). Anyhow there was no bitterness in her; none of that sense of moral virtue which is so repulsive in good women. She enjoyed practically everything. If you walked with her in Hyde Park now it was a bed of tulips, now a child in a perambulator, now some absurd little drama she made up on the spur of the moment. (Very likely, she would have talked to those lovers, if she had thought them unhappy.) She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite, but she needed people, always people, to bring it out, with the inevitable result that she frittered her time away, lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, sayings things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her dis-

crimination. There she would sit at the head of the table taking infinite pains with some old buffer who might be useful to Dalloway—they knew the most appalling bores in Europe—or in came Elizabeth and everything must give way to *her*. She was at a High School, at the inarticulate stage last time he was over, a round-eyed, pale-faced girl, with nothing of her mother in her, a silent stolid creature, who took it all as a matter of course, let her mother make a fuss of her, and then said "May I go now?" like a child of four; going off, Clarissa explained, with that mixture of amusement and pride which Dalloway himself seemed to rouse in her, to play hockey. And now Elizabeth was "out," presumably; thought him an old fogy, laughed at her mother's friends. Ah well, so be it. The compensation of growing old, Peter Walsh thought, coming out of Regent's Park, and holding his hat in hand, was simply this; that the passions remain as strong as ever, but one has gained—at last!—the power which adds the supreme flavour to existence,—the power of taking hold of experience, of turning it round, slowly, in the light.

A terrible confession it was (he put his hat on again), but now, at the age of fifty-three one scarcely needed people any more. Life itself, every moment

of it, every drop of it, here, this instant, now, in the sun, in Regent's Park, was enough. Too much indeed. A whole lifetime was too short to bring out, now that one had acquired the power, the full flavour; to extract every ounce of pleasure, every shade of meaning; which both were so much more solid than they used to be, so much less personal. It was impossible that he should ever suffer again as Clarissa had made him suffer. For hours at a time (pray God that one might say these things without being overheard!), for hours and days he never thought of Daisy.

Could it be that he was in love with her then, remembering the misery, the torture, the extraordinary passion of those days? It was a different thing altogether—a much pleasanter thing—the truth being, of course, that now *she* was in love with *him*. And that perhaps was the reason why, when the ship actually sailed, he felt an extraordinary relief, wanted nothing so much as to be alone; was annoyed to find all her little attentions—cigars, notes, a rug for the voyage—in his cabin. Every one if they were honest would say the same; one doesn't want people after fifty; one doesn't want to go on telling women they are pretty; that's what most men

of fifty would say, Peter Walsh thought, if they were honest.

But then these astonishing accesses of emotion—bursting into tears this morning, what was all that about? What could Clarissa have thought of him? thought him a fool presumably, not for the first time. It was jealousy that was at the bottom of it—jealousy which survives every other passion of mankind, Peter Walsh thought, holding his pocket-knife at arm's length. She had been meeting Major Orde, Daisy said in her last letter; said it on purpose he knew; said it to make him jealous; he could see her wrinkling her forehead as she wrote, wondering what she could say to hurt him; and yet it made no difference; he was furious! All this pother of coming to England and seeing lawyers wasn't to marry her, but to prevent her from marrying anybody else. That was what tortured him, that was what came over him when he saw Clarissa so calm, so cold, so intent on her dress or whatever it was; realising what she might have spared him, what she had reduced him to—a whimpering, snivelling old ass. But women, he thought, shutting his pocket-knife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men. Clarissa was as cold as an

icicle. There she would sit on the sofa by his side, let him take her hand, give him one kiss—Here he was at the crossing.

A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into

ee um fah um so
foo swee too eem oo—

the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube station from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing

ee um fah um so
foo swee too eem oo

and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.

Through all ages—when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise, the battered woman—for she wore a skirt—with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love—love which has lasted a mil-

lion years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills, and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather, there on her high burial place which the last rays of the last sun caressed; for then the pageant of the universe would be over.

As the ancient song bubbled up opposite Regent's Park Tube station still the earth seemed green and flowery; still, though it issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still the old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilising, leaving a damp stain.

Still remembering how once in some primeval May she had walked with her lover, this rusty pump, this battered old woman with one hand exposed for

coppers the other clutching her side, would still be there in ten million years, remembering how once she had walked in May, where the sea flows now, with whom it did not matter—he was a man, oh yes, a man who had loved her. But the passage of ages had blurred the clarity of that ancient May day; the bright petalled flowers were hoar and silver frosted; and she no longer saw, when she implored him (as she did now quite clearly) "look in my eyes with thy sweet eyes intently," she no longer saw brown eyes, black whiskers or sunburnt face but only a looming shape, a shadow shape, to which, with the bird-like freshness of the very aged she still twittered "give me your hand and let me press it gently" (Peter Walsh couldn't help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into his taxi), "and if some one should see, what matter they?" she demanded; and her fist clutched at her side, and she smiled, pocketing her shilling, and all peering inquisitive eyes seemed blotted out, and the passing generations—the pavement was crowded with bustling middle-class people—vanished, like leaves, to be trodden under, to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring—

ee um fah um so
foo swee too eem oo

"Poor old woman," said Rezia Warren Smith, waiting to cross.

Oh poor old wretch!

Suppose it was a wet night? Suppose one's father, or somebody who had known one in better days had happened to pass, and saw one standing there in the gutter? And where did she sleep at night?

Cheerfully, almost gaily, the invincible thread of sound wound up into the air like the smoke from a cottage chimney, winding up clean beech trees and issuing in a tuft of blue smoke among the topmost leaves. "And if some one should see, what matter they?"

Since she was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now, Rezia had given meanings to things that happened, almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them "I am unhappy"; and this old woman singing in the street "if some one should see, what matter they?" made her suddenly quite sure that everything was going to be right. They were going to Sir William Bradshaw; she thought his name sounded nice; he would cure Septimus at once. And then there was a brewer's cart, and the grey horses had upright bristles of straw in their tails;

there were newspaper placards. It was a silly, silly dream, being unhappy.

So they crossed, Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith, and was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable? Perhaps they walked more slowly than other people, and there was something hesitating, trailing, in the man's walk, but what more natural for a clerk, who has not been in the West End on a weekday at this hour for years, than to keep looking at the sky, looking at this, that and the other, as if Portland Place were a room he had come into when the family are away, the chandeliers being hung in holland bags, and the caretaker, as she lets in long shafts of dusty light upon deserted, queer-looking armchairs, lifting one corner of the long blinds, explains to the visitors what a wonderful place it is; how wonderful, but at the same time, he thinks, as he looks at chairs and tables, how strange.

To look at, he might have been a clerk, but of the better sort; for he wore brown boots; his hands were educated; so, too, his profile—his angular, big-nosed, intelligent, sensitive profile; but not his lips

altogether, for they were loose; and his eyes (as eyes tend to be), eyes merely; hazel, large; so that he was, on the whole, a border case, neither one thing nor the other, might end with a house at Purley and a motor car, or continue renting apartments in back streets all his life; one of those half-educated, self-educated men whose education is all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries, read in the evening after the day's work, on the advice of well-known authors consulted by letter.

As for the other experiences, the solitary ones, which people go through alone, in their bedrooms, in their offices, walking the fields and the streets of London, he had them; had left home, a mere boy, because of his mother; she lied; because he came down to tea for the fiftieth time with his hands unwashed; because he could see no future for a poet in Stroud; and so, making a confidant of his little sister, had gone to London leaving an absurd note behind him, such as great men have written, and the world has read later when the story of their struggles has become famous.

London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them. Lodging

off the Euston Road, there were experiences, again experiences, such as change a face in two years from a pink innocent oval to a face lean, contracted, hostile. But of all this what could the most observant of friends have said except what a gardener says when he opens the conservatory door in the morning and finds a new blossom on his plant:—It has flowered; flowered from vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds, which all muddled up (in a room off the Euston Road), made him shy, and stammering, made him anxious to improve himself, made him fall in love with Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road upon Shakespeare.

Was he not like Keats? she asked; and reflected how she might give him a taste of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the rest; lent him books; wrote him scraps of letters; and lit in him such a fire as burns only once in a lifetime, without heat, flickering a red gold flame infinitely ethereal and insubstantial over Miss Pole; *Antony and Cleopatra;* and the Waterloo Road. He thought her beautiful, believed her impeccably wise; dreamed of her, wrote poems to her, which, ignoring the subject, she corrected in red ink; he saw her, one summer evening, walking in a green dress in a square. "It has flowered," the

gardener might have said, had he opened the door; had he come in, that is to say, any night about this time, and found him writing; found him tearing up his writing; found him finishing a masterpiece at three o'clock in the morning and running out to pace the streets, and visiting churches, and fasting one day, drinking another, devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilisation,* and Bernard Shaw.

Something was up, Mr. Brewer knew; Mr. Brewer, managing clerk at Sibleys and Arrowsmiths, auctioneers, valuers, land and estate agents; something was up, he thought, and, being paternal with his young men, and thinking very highly of Smith's abilities, and prophesying that he would, in ten or fifteen years, succeed to the leather arm-chair in the inner room under the skylight with the deed-boxes round him, "if he keeps his health," said Mr. Brewer, and that was the danger—he looked weakly; advised football, invited him to supper and was seeing his way to consider recommending a rise of salary, when something happened which threw out many of Mr. Brewer's calculations, took away his ablest young fellows, and eventually, so prying and insidious were the fingers of the European War, smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's

nerves at Mr. Brewer's establishment at Muswell Hill.

Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name. It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, snapping, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog's ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire, raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. But when Evans (Rezia who had only seen him once called him "a quiet man," a sturdy red-haired man, undemonstrative in the company of women), when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War,

death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. When peace came he was in Milan, billeted in the house of an innkeeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him—that he could not feel.

For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel. As he opened the door of the room where the Italian girls sat making hats, he could see them; could hear them; they were rubbing wires among coloured beads in saucers; they were turning buckram shapes this way and that; the table was all strewn with feathers, spangles, silks, ribbons; scissors were rapping on the table; but something failed him; he could not feel. Still, scissors rapping, girls laughing, hats being made protected him; he was assured of safety; he had a refuge. But he could not sit there all night. There were moments of waking in the early morning. The bed was falling; he was falling. Oh for the scissors and the lamplight and the buckram shapes! He asked Lucrezia to marry him, the younger of the two, the gay, the

frivolous, with those little artist's fingers that she would hold up and say "It is all in them." Silk, feathers, what not were alive to them.

"It is the hat that matters most," she would say, when they walked out together. Every hat that passed, she would examine; and the cloak and the dress and the way the woman held herself. Ill-dressing, over-dressing she stigmatised, not savagely, rather with impatient movements of the hands, like those of a painter who puts from him some obvious well-meant glaring imposture; and then, generously, but always critically, she would welcome a shop-girl who had turned her little bit of stuff gallantly, or praise, wholly, with enthusiastic and professional understanding, a French lady descending from her carriage, in chinchilla, robes, pearls.

"Beautiful!" she would murmur, nudging Septimus, that he might see. But beauty was behind a pane of glass. Even taste (Rezia liked ices, chocolates, sweet things) had no relish to him. He put down his cup on the little marble table. He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting, laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could not taste, he could not feel. In the tea-shop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him

—he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily ("Septimus, do put down your book," said Rezia, gently shutting the *Inferno*), he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then—that he could not feel.

"The English are so silent," Rezia said. She liked it, she said. She respected these Englishmen, and wanted to see London, and the English horses, and the tailor-made suits, and could remember hearing how wonderful the shops were, from an Aunt who had married and lived in Soho.

It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning.

At the office they advanced him to a post of considerable responsibility. They were proud of him; he had won crosses. "You have done your duty; it is up to us—" began Mr. Brewer; and could not finish, so pleasurable was his emotion. They took admirable lodgings off the Tottenham Court Road.

Here he opened Shakespeare once more. That boy's business of the intoxication of language—*Antony and Cleopatra*—had shrivelled utterly. How Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of

clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. Dante the same. Aeschylus (translated) the same. There Rezia sat at the table trimming hats. She trimmed hats for Mrs. Filmer's friends; she trimmed hats by the hour. She looked pale, mysterious, like a lily, drowned, under water, he thought.

"The English are so serious," she would say, putting her arms round Septimus, her cheek against his.

Love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare. The business of copulation was filth to him before the end. But, Rezia said, she must have children. They had been married five years.

They went to the Tower together; to the Victoria and Albert Museum; stood in the crowd to see the King open Parliament. And there were the shops—hat shops, dress shops, shops with leather bags in the window, where she would stand staring. But she must have a boy.

She must have a son like Septimus, she said. But nobody could be like Septimus; so gentle; so seri-

ous; so clever. Could she not read Shakespeare too? Was Shakespeare a difficult author? she asked.

One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that.

He watched her snip, shape, as one watches a bird hop, flit in the grass, without daring to move a finger. For the truth is (let her ignore it) that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces. There was Brewer at the office, with his waxed moustache, coral tie-pin, white slip, and pleasurable emotions—all coldness and clamminess within,—his geraniums ruined in the War—his cook's nerves destroyed; or Amelia What'shername, handing round cups of tea punctually at five—a leering, sneering obscene little harpy; and the Toms and Berties in their starched shirt fronts oozing thick drops of vice. They never saw him drawing pictures of them naked at their antics in his notebook. In the street, vans roared

past him; brutality blared out on placards; men were trapped in mines; women burnt alive; and once a maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud), ambled and nodded and grinned past him, in the Tottenham Court Road, each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his hopeless woe. And would *he* go mad?

At tea Rezia told him that Mrs. Filmer's daughter was expecting a baby. *She* could not grow old and have no children! She was very lonely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctly; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing.

His wife was crying, and he felt nothing; only each time she sobbed in this profound, this silent, this hopeless way, he descended another step into the pit.

At last, with a melodramatic gesture which he assumed mechanically and with complete consciousness of its insincerity, he dropped his head on his hands. Now he had surrendered; now other people must help him. People must be sent for. He gave in.

Nothing could rouse him. Rezia put him to bed. She sent for a doctor—Mrs. Filmer's Dr. Holmes. Dr. Holmes examined him. There was nothing whatever the matter, said Dr. Holmes. Oh, what a relief! What a kind man, what a good man! thought Rezia. When he felt like that he went to the Music Hall, said Dr. Holmes. He took a day off with his wife and played golf. Why not try two tabloids of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime? These old Bloomsbury houses, said Dr. Holmes, tapping the wall, are often full of very fine panelling, which the landlords have the folly to paper over. Only the other day, visiting a patient, Sir Somebody Something in Bedford Square—

So there was no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel. He had not cared when Evans was killed; that was worst; but all the other crimes raised their heads and shook their fingers and jeered and sneered over the rail of the bed in the early hours of the morning at the prostrate body which lay realising its degradation; how he had married his wife without loving her; had lied to her; seduced her; outraged Miss Isabel Pole, and was so pocked and marked with vice that women shuddered when they

saw him in the street. The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death.

Dr. Holmes came again. Large, fresh coloured, handsome, flicking his boots, looking in the glass, he brushed it all aside—headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams—nerve symptoms and nothing more, he said. If Dr. Holmes found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, he asked his wife for another plate of porridge at breakfast. (Rezia would learn to cook porridge.) But, he continued, health is largely a matter in our own control. Throw yourself into outside interests; take up some hobby. He opened Shakespeare—*Antony and Cleopatra;* pushed Shakespeare aside. Some hobby, said Dr. Holmes, for did he not owe his own excellent health (and he worked as hard as any man in London) to the fact that he could always switch off from his patients on to old furniture? And what a very pretty comb, if he might say so, Mrs. Warren Smith was wearing!

When the damned fool came again, Septimus refused to see him. Did he indeed? said Dr. Holmes, smiling agreeably. Really he had to give that charming little lady, Mrs. Smith, a friendly push before he could get past her into her husband's bedroom.

"So you're in a funk," he said agreeably, sitting down by his patient's side. He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn't she? Didn't that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed? For he had had forty years' experience behind him; and Septimus could take Dr. Holmes's word for it—there was nothing whatever the matter with him. And next time Dr. Holmes came he hoped to find Smith out of bed and not making that charming little lady his wife anxious about him.

Human nature, in short, was on him—the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him. Dr. Holmes came quite regularly every day. Once you stumble, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard, human nature is on you. Holmes is on you. Their only chance was to escape, without letting Holmes know; to Italy—anywhere, anywhere, away from Dr. Holmes.

But Rezia could not understand him. Dr. Holmes was such a kind man. He was so interested in Septimus. He only wanted to help them, he said. He had four little children and he had asked her to tea, she told Septimus.

So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it, with a table knife, uglily, with floods of blood,—by sucking a gaspipe? He was too weak; he could scarcely raise his hand. Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won. But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world.

It was at that moment (Rezia gone shopping) that the great revelation took place. A voice spoke from behind the screen. Evans was speaking. The dead were with him.

"Evans, Evans!" he cried.

Mr. Smith was talking aloud to himself, Agnes the servant girl cried to Mrs. Filmer in the kitchen. "Evans, Evans," he had said as she brought in the

tray. She jumped, she did. She scuttled downstairs.

And Rezia came in, with her flowers, and walked across the room, and put the roses in a vase, upon which the sun struck directly, and it went laughing, leaping round the room.

She had had to buy the roses, Rezia said, from a poor man in the street. But they were almost dead already, she said, arranging the roses.

So there was a man outside; Evans presumably; and the roses, which Rezia said were half dead, had been picked by him in the fields of Greece. "Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—" he muttered.

"What are you saying, Septimus?" Rezia asked, wild with terror, for he was talking to himself.

She sent Agnes running for Dr. Holmes. Her husband, she said, was mad. He scarcely knew her.

"You brute! You brute!" cried Septimus, seeing human nature, that is Dr. Holmes, enter the room.

"Now what's all this about?" said Dr. Holmes in the most amiable way in the world. "Talking nonsense to frighten your wife?" But he would give

him something to make him sleep. And if they were rich people, said Dr. Holmes, looking ironically round the room, by all means let them go to Harley Street; if they had no confidence in him, said Dr. Holmes, looking not quite so kind.

It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke, and died up there among the seagulls—twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. Twelve was the hour of their appointment. Probably, Rezia thought, that was Sir William Bradshaw's house with the grey motor car in front of it. The leaden circles dissolved in the air.

Indeed it was—Sir William Bradshaw's motor car; low, powerful, grey with plain initials interlocked on the panel, as if the pomps of heraldry were incongruous, this man being the ghostly helper, the priest of science; and, as the motor car was grey, so to match its sober suavity, grey furs, silver grey rugs were heaped in it, to keep her ladyship warm while she waited. For often Sir William would travel sixty miles or more down into the

country to visit the rich, the afflicted, who could afford the very large fee which Sir William very properly charged for his advice. Her ladyship waited with the rugs about her knees an hour or more, leaning back, thinking sometimes of the patient, sometimes, excusably, of the wall of gold, mounting minute by minute while she waited; the wall of gold that was mounting between them and all shifts and anxieties (she had borne them bravely; they had had their struggles) until she felt wedged on a calm ocean, where only spice winds blow; respected, admired, envied, with scarcely anything left to wish for, though she regretted her stoutness; large dinner-parties every Thursday night to the profession; an occasional bazaar to be opened; Royalty greeted; too little time, alas, with her husband, whose work grew and grew; a boy doing well at Eton; she would have liked a daughter too; interests she had, however, in plenty; child welfare; the after-care of the epileptic, and photography, so that if there was a church building, or a church decaying, she bribed the sexton, got the key and took photographs, which were scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals, while she waited.

Sir William himself was no longer young. He

had worked very hard; he had won his position by sheer ability (being the son of a shopkeeper); loved his profession; made a fine figurehead at ceremonies and spoke well—all of which had by the time he was knighted given him a heavy look, a weary look (the stream of patients being so incessant, the responsibilities and privileges of his profession so onerous), which weariness, together with his grey hairs, increased the extraordinary distinction of his presence and gave him the reputation (of the utmost importance in dealing with nerve cases) not merely of lightning skill, and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis but of sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul. He could see the first moment they came into the room (the Warren Smiths they were called); he was certain directly he saw the man; it was a case of extreme gravity. It was a case of complete breakdown—complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage, he ascertained in two or three minutes (writing answers to questions, murmured discreetly, on a pink card).

How long had Dr. Holmes been attending him?

Six weeks.

Prescribed a little bromide? Said there was nothing the matter? Ah yes (those general practi-

tioners! thought Sir William. It took half his time to undo their blunders. Some were irreparable).

"You served with great distinction in the War?"

The patient repeated the word "war" interrogatively.

He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom, to be noted on the card.

"The War?" the patient asked. The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed.

"Yes, he served with the greatest distinction," Rezia assured the doctor; "he was promoted."

"And they have the very highest opinion of you at your office?" Sir William murmured, glancing at Mr. Brewer's very generously worded letter. "So that you have nothing to worry you, no financial anxiety, nothing?"

He had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature.

"I have—I have," he began, "committed a crime—"

"He has done nothing wrong whatever," Rezia assured the doctor. If Mr. Smith would wait, said Sir William, he would speak to Mrs. Smith in the

next room. Her husband was very seriously ill, Sir William said. Did he threaten to kill himself?

Oh, he did, she cried. But he did not mean it, she said. Of course not. It was merely a question of rest, said Sir William; of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. There was a delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after. Away from her? she asked. Unfortunately, yes; the people we care for most are not good for us when we are ill. But he was not mad, was he? Sir William said he never spoke of "madness"; he called it not having a sense of proportion. But her husband did not like doctors. He would refuse to go there. Shortly and kindly Sir William explained to her the state of the case. He had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law. He would lie in bed in a beautiful house in the country. The nurses were admirable. Sir William would visit him once a week. If Mrs. Warren Smith was quite sure she had no more questions to ask—he never hurried his patients—they would return to her husband. She had nothing more to ask—not of Sir William.

So they returned to the most exalted of mankind; the criminal who faced his judges; the victim exposed on the heights; the fugitive; the drowned

sailor; the poet of the immortal ode; the Lord who had gone from life to death; to Septimus Warren Smith, who sat in the arm-chair under the skylight staring at a photograph of Lady Bradshaw in Court dress, muttering messages about beauty.

"We have had our little talk," said Sir William.

"He says you are very, very ill," Rezia cried.

"We have been arranging that you should go into a home," said Sir William.

"One of Holmes's homes?" sneered Septimus.

The fellow made a distasteful impression. For there was in Sir William, whose father had been a tradesman, a natural respect for breeding and clothing, which shabbiness nettled; again, more profoundly, there was in Sir William, who had never had time for reading, a grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people who came into his room and intimated that doctors, whose profession is a constant strain upon all the highest faculties, are not educated men.

"One of *my* homes, Mr. Warren Smith," he said, "where we will teach you to rest."

And there was just one thing more.

He was quite certain that when Mr. Warren Smith was well he was the last man in the world to frighten his wife. But he had talked of killing himself.

"We all have our moments of depression," said Sir William.

Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless.

"Impulses came upon him sometimes?" Sir William asked, with his pencil on a pink card.

That was his own affair, said Septimus.

"Nobody lives for himself alone," said Sir William, glancing at the photograph of his wife in Court dress.

"And you have a brilliant career before you," said Sir William. There was Mr. Brewer's letter on the table. "An exceptionally brilliant career."

But if he confessed? If he communicated? Would they let him off then, his torturers?

"I—I—" he stammered.

But what was his crime? He could not remember it.

"Yes?" Sir William encouraged him. (But it was growing late.)

Love, trees, there is no crime—what was his message?

He could not remember it.

"I—I—" Septimus stammered.

"Try to think as little about yourself as possible," said Sir William kindly. Really, he was not fit to be about.

Was there anything else they wished to ask him? Sir William would make all arrangements (he murmured to Rezia) and he would let her know between five and six that evening he murmured.

"Trust everything to me," he said, and dismissed them.

Never, never had Rezia felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted! He had failed them! Sir William Bradshaw was not a nice man.

The upkeep of that motor car alone must cost him quite a lot, said Septimus, when they got out into the street.

She clung to his arm. They had been deserted.

But what more did she want?

To his patients he gave three-quarters of an hour; and if in this exacting science which has to do with what, after all, we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain—a doctor loses his sense of proportion, as a doctor he fails. Health we must have; and health is proportion; so that when a man

comes into your room and says he is Christ (a common delusion), and has a message, as they mostly have, and threatens, as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve.

Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw, who caught salmon herself and took photographs scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals. Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion—his, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw's if they were women (she embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son), so that not only did his colleagues respect him, his subordinates fear him, but the friends and relations of his patients felt for him the keenest gratitude for insisting that these prophetic Christs and Christesses, who prophe-

sied the end of the world, or the advent of God, should drink milk in bed, as Sir William ordered; Sir William with his thirty years' experience of these kinds of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is madness, this sense; in fact, his sense of proportion.

But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged—in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own—is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. At Hyde Park Corner on a tub she stands preaching; shrouds herself in white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied; bestows her blessing on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from her eyes the light of their own. This lady too (Rezia Warren Smith divined it) had her dwelling in Sir William's heart, though concealed, as she mostly is,

under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice. How he would work—how toil to raise funds, propagate reforms, initiate institutions! But conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will. For example, Lady Bradshaw. Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission; dinner in Harley Street, numbering eight or nine courses, feeding ten or fifteen guests of the professional classes, was smooth and urbane. Only as the evening wore on a very slight dulness, or uneasiness perhaps, a nervous twitch, fumble, stumble and confusion indicated, what it was really painful to believe—that the poor lady lied. Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through; so that without knowing precisely what made the evening disagreeable, and caused this pressure on the top of the head (which might well be imputed to the professional conversation, or the fatigue of a great doctor whose life,

Lady Bradshaw said, "is not his own but his patients' ") disagreeable it was: so that guests, when the clock struck ten, breathed in the air of Harley Street even with rapture; which relief, however, was denied to his patients.

There in the grey room, with the pictures on the wall, and the valuable furniture, under the ground glass skylight, they learnt the extent of their transgressions; huddled up in arm-chairs, they watched him go through, for their benefit, a curious exercise with the arms, which he shot out, brought sharply back to his hip, to prove (if the patient was obstinate) that Sir William was master of his own actions, which the patient was not. There some weakly broke down; sobbed, submitted; others, inspired by Heaven knows what intemperate madness, called Sir William to his face a damnable humbug; questioned, even more impiously, life itself. Why live? they demanded. Sir William replied that life was good. Certainly Lady Bradshaw in ostrich feathers hung over the mantelpiece, and as for his income it was quite twelve thousand a year. But to us, they protested, life has given no such bounty. He acquiesced. They lacked a sense of proportion. And perhaps, after all, there is no God? He shrugged his shoulders. In short, this living or not

living is an affair of our own? But there they were mistaken. Sir William had a friend in Surrey where they taught, what Sir William frankly admitted was a difficult art—a sense of proportion. There were, moreover, family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career. All of these had in Sir William a resolute champion. If they failed him, he had to support police and the good of society, which, he remarked very quietly, would take care, down in Surrey, that these unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control. And then stole out from her hiding-place and mounted her throne that Goddess whose lust is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself. Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up. It was this combination of decision and humanity that endeared Sir William so greatly to the relations of his victims.

But Rezia Warren Smith cried, walking down Harley Street, that she did not like that man.

Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of

proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced, genially and fraternally, as if it were a pleasure to Messrs. Rigby and Lowndes to give the information gratis, that it was half-past one.

Looking up, it appeared that each letter of their names stood for one of the hours; subconsciously one was grateful to Rigby and Lowndes for giving one time ratified by Greenwich; and this gratitude (so Hugh Whitbread ruminated, dallying there in front of the shop window), naturally took the form later of buying off Rigby and Lowndes socks or shoes. So he ruminated. It was his habit. He did not go deeply. He brushed surfaces; the dead languages, the living, life in Constantinople, Paris, Rome; riding, shooting, tennis, it had been once. The malicious asserted that he now kept guard at Buckingham Palace, dressed in silk stockings and knee-breeches, over what nobody knew. But he did it extremely efficiently. He had been afloat on the cream of English society for fifty-five years. He had known Prime Ministers. His affections were understood to be deep. And if it were true that he had not taken part in any of the great movements of the time or held important office, one or two

humble reforms stood to his credit; an improvement in public shelters was one; the protection of owls in Norfolk another; servant girls had reason to be grateful to him; and his name at the end of letters to the *Times,* asking for funds, appealing to the public to protect, to preserve, to clear up litter, to abate smoke, and stamp out immorality in parks, commanded respect.

A magnificent figure he cut too, pausing for a moment (as the sound of the half hour died away) to look critically, magisterially, at socks and shoes; impeccable, substantial, as if he beheld the world from a certain eminence, and dressed to match; but realised the obligations which size, wealth, health, entail, and observed punctiliously even when not absolutely necessary, little courtesies, old-fashioned ceremonies which gave a quality to his manner, something to imitate, something to remember him by, for he would never lunch, for example, with Lady Bruton, whom he had known these twenty years, without bringing her in his outstretched hand a bunch of carnations and asking Miss Brush, Lady Bruton's secretary, after her brother in South Africa, which, for some reason, Miss Brush, deficient though she was in every attribute of female charm, so much resented that she said "Thank you,

he's doing very well in South Africa," when, for half a dozen years, he had been doing badly in Portsmouth.

Lady Bruton herself preferred Richard Dalloway, who arrived at the next moment. Indeed they met on the doorstep.

Lady Bruton preferred Richard Dalloway of course. He was made of much finer material. But she wouldn't let them run down her poor dear Hugh. She could never forget his kindness—he had been really remarkably kind—she forgot precisely upon what occasion. But he had been—remarkably kind. Anyhow, the difference between one man and another does not amount to much. She had never seen the sense of cutting people up, as Clarissa Dalloway did—cutting them up and sticking them together again; not at any rate when one was sixty-two. She took Hugh's carnations with her angular grim smile. There was nobody else coming, she said. She had got them there on false pretences, to help her out of a difficulty—

"But let us eat first," she said.

And so there began a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of aproned white-capped maids, handmaidens not of necessity, but adepts in a mystery or grand deception practised by

hostesses in Mayfair from one-thirty to two, when, with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases, and there rises instead this profound illusion in the first place about the food—how it is not paid for; and then that the table spreads itself voluntarily with glass and silver, little mats, saucers of red fruit; films of brown cream mask turbot; in casseroles severed chickens swim; coloured, undomestic, the fire burns; and with the wine and the coffee (not paid for) rise jocund visions before musing eyes; gently speculative eyes; eyes to whom life appears musical, mysterious; eyes now kindled to observe genially the beauty of the red carnations which Lady Bruton (whose movements were always angular) had laid beside her plate, so that Hugh Whitbread, feeling at peace with the entire universe and at the same time completely sure of his standing, said, resting his fork,

"Wouldn't they look charming against your lace?"

Miss Brush resented this familiarity intensely. She thought him an underbred fellow. She made Lady Bruton laugh.

Lady Bruton raised the carnations, holding them rather stiffly with much the same attitude with which the General held the scroll in the picture behind her;

she remained fixed, tranced. Which was she now, the General's great-grand-daughter? great-great-grand-daughter? Richard Dalloway asked himself. Sir Roderick, Sir Miles, Sir Talbot—that was it. It was remarkable how in that family the likeness persisted in the women. She should have been a general of dragoons herself. And Richard would have served under her, cheerfully; he had the greatest respect for her; he cherished these romantic views about well-set-up old women of pedigree, and would have liked, in his good-humoured way, to bring some young hot-heads of his acquaintance to lunch with her; as if a type like hers could be bred of amiable tea-drinking enthusiasts! He knew her country. He knew her people. There was a vine, still bearing, which either Lovelace or Herrick—she never read a word poetry of herself, but so the story ran—had sat under. Better wait to put before them the question that bothered her (about making an appeal to the public; if so, in what terms and so on), better wait until they have had their coffee, Lady Bruton thought; and so laid the carnations down beside her plate.

"How's Clarissa?" she asked abruptly.

Clarissa always said that Lady Bruton did not like her. Indeed, Lady Bruton had the reputation

of being more interested in politics than people; of talking like a man; of having had a finger in some notorious intrigue of the eighties, which was now beginning to be mentioned in memoirs. Certainly there was an alcove in her drawing-room, and a table in that alcove, and a photograph upon that table of General Sir Talbot Moore, now deceased, who had written there (one evening in the eighties) in Lady Bruton's presence, with her cognisance, perhaps advice, a telegram ordering the British troops to advance upon an historical occasion. (She kept the pen and told the story.) Thus, when she said in her offhand way "How's Clarissa?" husbands had difficulty in persuading their wives and indeed, however devoted, were secretly doubtful themselves, of her interest in women who often got in their husbands' way, prevented them from accepting posts abroad, and had to be taken to the seaside in the middle of the session to recover from influenza. Nevertheless her inquiry, "How's Clarissa?" was known by women infallibly, to be a signal from a well-wisher, from an almost silent companion, whose utterances (half a dozen perhaps in the course of a lifetime) signified recognition of some feminine comradeship which went beneath masculine lunch parties and united Lady Bruton and Mrs. Dalloway,

who seldom met, and appeared when they did meet indifferent and even hostile, in a singular bond.

"I met Clarissa in the Park this morning," said Hugh Whitbread, diving into the casserole, anxious to pay himself this little tribute, for he had only to come to London and he met everybody at once; but greedy, one of the greediest men she had ever known, Milly Brush thought, who observed men with unflinching rectitude, and was capable of everlasting devotion, to her own sex in particular, being knobbed, scraped, angular, and entirely without feminine charm.

"D'you know who's in town?" said Lady Bruton suddenly bethinking her. "Our old friend, Peter Walsh."

They all smiled. Peter Walsh! And Mr. Dalloway was genuinely glad, Milly Brush thought; and Mr. Whitbread thought only of his chicken.

Peter Walsh! All three, Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard Dalloway, remembered the same thing—how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper; made a mess of things; and Richard Dalloway had a very great liking for the dear old fellow too. Milly Brush saw that; saw a depth in the brown of his eyes; saw him hesitate; consider; which in-

terested her, as Mr. Dalloway always interested her, for what was he thinking, she wondered, about Peter Walsh?

That Peter Walsh had been in love with Clarissa; that he would go back directly after lunch and find Clarissa; that he would tell her, in so many words, that he loved her. Yes, he would say that.

Milly Brush once might almost have fallen in love with these silences; and Mr. Dalloway was always so dependable; such a gentleman too. Now, being forty, Lady Bruton had only to nod, or turn her head a little abruptly, and Milly Brush took the signal, however deeply she might be sunk in these reflections of a detached spirit, of an uncorrupted soul whom life could not bamboozle, because life had not offered her a trinket of the slightest value; not a curl, smile, lip, cheek, nose; nothing whatever; Lady Bruton had only to nod, and Perkins was instructed to quicken the coffee.

"Yes; Peter Walsh has come back," said Lady Bruton. It was vaguely flattering to them all. He had come back, battered, unsuccessful, to their secure shores. But to help him, they reflected, was impossible; there was some flaw in his character. Hugh Whitbread said one might of course mention his name to So-and-so. He wrinkled lugubriously,

consequentially, at the thought of the letters he would write to the heads of Government offices about "my old friend, Peter Walsh," and so on. But it wouldn't lead to anything—not to anything permanent, because of his character.

"In trouble with some woman," said Lady Bruton. They had all guessed that *that* was at the bottom of it.

"However," said Lady Bruton, anxious to leave the subject, "we shall hear the whole story from Peter himself."

(The coffee was very slow in coming.)

"The address?" murmured Hugh Whitbread; and there was at once a ripple in the grey tide of service which washed round Lady Bruton day in, day out, collecting, intercepting, enveloping her in a fine tissue which broke concussions, mitigated interruptions, and spread round the house in Brook Street a fine net where things lodged and were picked out accurately, instantly, by grey-haired Perkins, who had been with Lady Bruton these thirty years and now wrote down the address; handed it to Mr. Whitbread, who took out his pocket-book, raised his eyebrows, and slipping it in among documents of the highest importance, said that he would get Evelyn to ask him to lunch.

(They were waiting to bring the coffee until Mr. Whitbread had finished.)

Hugh was very slow, Lady Bruton thought. He was getting fat, she noticed. Richard always kept himself in the pink of condition. She was getting impatient; the whole of her being was setting positively, undeniably, domineeringly brushing aside all this unnecessary trifling (Peter Walsh and his affairs) upon that subject which engaged her attention, and not merely her attention, but that fibre which was the ramrod of her soul, that essential part of her without which Millicent Bruton would not have been Millicent Bruton; that project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada. She exaggerated. She had perhaps lost her sense of proportion. Emigration was not to others the obvious remedy, the sublime conception. It was not to them (not to Hugh, or Richard, or even to devoted Miss Brush) the liberator of the pent egotism, which a strong martial woman, well nourished, well descended, of direct impulses, downright feelings, and little introspective power (broad and simple—why could not every one be broad and simple? she asked) feels rise within her, once youth is past, and must eject

upon some object—it may be Emigration, it may be Emancipation; but whatever it be, this object round which the essence of her soul is daily secreted, becomes inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking-glass, half precious stone; now carefully hidden in case people should sneer at it; now proudly displayed. Emigration had become, in short, largely Lady Bruton.

But she had to write. And one letter to the *Times,* she used to say to Miss Brush, cost her more than to organise an expedition to South Africa (which she had done in the war). After a morning's battle beginning, tearing up, beginning again, she used to feel the futility of her own womanhood as she felt it on no other occasion, and would turn gratefully to the thought of Hugh Whitbread who possessed—no one could doubt it—the art of writing letters to the *Times.*

A being so differently constituted from herself, with such a command of language; able to put things as editors like them put; had passions which one could not call simply greed. Lady Bruton often suspended judgement upon men in deference to the mysterious accord in which they, but no woman, stood to the laws of the universe; knew how to put things; knew what was said; so that if Richard

advised her, and Hugh wrote for her, she was sure of being somehow right. So she let Hugh eat his soufflé; asked after poor Evelyn; waited until they were smoking, and then said,

"Milly, would you fetch the papers?"

And Miss Brush went out, came back; laid papers on the table; and Hugh produced his fountain pen; his silver fountain pen, which had done twenty years' service, he said, unscrewing the cap. It was still in perfect order; he had shown it to the makers; there was no reason, they said, why it should ever wear out; which was somehow to Hugh's credit, and to the credit of the sentiments which his pen expressed (so Richard Dalloway felt) as Hugh began carefully writing capital letters with rings round them in the margin, and thus marvellously reduced Lady Bruton's tangles to sense, to grammar such as the editor of the *Times*, Lady Bruton felt, watching the marvellous transformation, must respect. Hugh was slow. Hugh was pertinacious. Richard said one must take risks. Hugh proposed modifications in deference to people's feelings, which, he said rather tartly when Richard laughed, "had to be considered," and read out "how, therefore, we are of opinion that the times are ripe . . . the superfluous youth of our ever-increasing population

. . . what we owe to the dead . . ." which Richard thought all stuffing and bunkum, but no harm in it, of course, and Hugh went on drafting sentiments in alphabetical order of the highest nobility, brushing the cigar ash from his waistcoat, and summing up now and then the progress they had made until, finally, he read out the draft of a letter which Lady Bruton felt certain was a masterpiece. Could her own meaning sound like that?

Hugh could not guarantee that the editor would put it in; but he would be meeting somebody at luncheon.

Whereupon Lady Bruton, who seldom did a graceful thing, stuffed all Hugh's carnations into the front of her dress, and flinging her hands out called him "My Prime Minister!" What she would have done without them both she did not know. They rose. And Richard Dalloway strolled off as usual to have a look at the General's portrait, because he meant, whenever he had a moment of leisure, to write a history of Lady Bruton's family.

And Millicent Bruton was very proud of her family. But they could wait, they could wait, she said, looking at the picture; meaning that her family, of military men, administrators, admirals, had been men of action, who had done their duty; and

Richard's first duty was to his country, but it was a fine face, she said; and all the papers were ready for Richard down at Aldmixton whenever the time came; the Labour Government she meant. "Ah, the news from India!" she cried.

And then, as they stood in the hall taking yellow gloves from the bowl on the malachite table and Hugh was offering Miss Brush with quite unnecessary courtesy some discarded ticket or other compliment, which she loathed from the depths of her heart and blushed brick red, Richard turned to Lady Bruton, with his hat in his hand, and said,

"We shall see you at our party to-night?" whereupon Lady Bruton resumed the magnificence which letter-writing had shattered. She might come; or she might not come. Clarissa had wonderful energy. Parties terrified Lady Bruton. But then, she was getting old. So she intimated, standing at her doorway; handsome; very erect; while her chow stretched behind her, and Miss Brush disappeared into the background with her hands full of papers.

And Lady Bruton went ponderously, majestically, up to her room, lay, one arm extended, on the sofa. She sighed, she snored, not that she was asleep, only drowsy and heavy, drowsy and heavy, like a field of

clover in the sunshine this hot June day, with the bees going round and about and the yellow butterflies. Always she went back to those fields down in Devonshire, where she had jumped the brooks on Patty, her pony, with Mortimer and Tom, her brothers. And there were the dogs; there were the rats; there were her father and mother on the lawn under the trees, with the tea-things out, and the beds of dahlias, the hollyhocks, the pampas grass; and they, little wretches, always up to some mischief! stealing back through the shrubbery, so as not to be seen, all bedraggled from some roguery. What old nurse used to say about her frocks!

Ah dear, she remembered—it was Wednesday in Brook Street. Those kind good fellows, Richard Dalloway, Hugh Whitbread, had gone this hot day through the streets whose growl came up to her lying on the sofa. Power was hers, position, income. She had lived in the forefront of her time. She had had good friends; known the ablest men of her day. Murmuring London flowed up to her, and her hand, lying on the sofa back, curled upon some imaginary baton such as her grandfathers might have held, holding which she seemed, drowsy and heavy, to be commanding battalions marching

to Canada, and those good fellows walking across London, that territory of theirs, that little bit of carpet, Mayfair.

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which (as she dozed there) became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider's thread is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down. So she slept.

And Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread hesitated at the corner of Conduit Street at the very moment that Millicent Bruton, lying on the sofa, let the thread snap; snored. Contrary winds buffeted at the street corner. They looked in at a shop window; they did not wish to buy or to talk but to part, only with contrary winds buffeting the street corner, with some sort of lapse in the tides of the body, two forces meeting in a swirl, morning and afternoon, they paused. Some newspaper placard went up in the air, gallantly, like a kite at first, then paused, swooped, fluttered; and a lady's veil

hung. Yellow awnings trembled. The speed of the morning traffic slackened, and single carts rattled carelessly down half-empty streets. In Norfolk, of which Richard Dalloway was half thinking, a soft warm wind blew back the petals; confused the waters; ruffled the flowering grasses. Haymakers, who had pitched beneath hedges to sleep away the morning toil, parted curtains of green blades; moved trembling globes of cow parsley to see the sky; the blue, the steadfast, the blazing summer sky.

Aware that he was looking at a silver two-handled Jacobean mug, and that Hugh Whitbread admired condescendingly with airs of connoisseurship a Spanish necklace which he thought of asking the price of in case Evelyn might like it—still Richard was torpid; could not think or move. Life had thrown up this wreckage; shop windows full of coloured paste, and one stood stark with the lethargy of the old, stiff with the rigidity of the old, looking in. Evelyn Whitbread might like to buy this Spanish necklace—so she might. Yawn he must. Hugh was going into the shop.

"Right you are!" said Richard, following.

Goodness knows he didn't want to go buying necklaces with Hugh. But there are tides in the body. Morning meets afternoon. Borne like a frail

shallop on deep, deep floods, Lady Bruton's great-grandfather and his memoir and his campaigns in North America were whelmed and sunk. And Millicent Bruton too. She went under. Richard didn't care a straw what became of Emigration; about that letter, whether the editor put it in or not. The necklace hung stretched between Hugh's admirable fingers. Let him give it to a girl, if he must buy jewels—any girl, any girl in the street. For the worthlessness of this life did strike Richard pretty forcibly—buying necklaces for Evelyn. If he'd had a boy he'd have said, Work, work. But he had his Elizabeth; he adored his Elizabeth.

"I should like to see Mr. Dubonnet," said Hugh in his curt worldly way. It appeared that this Dubonnet had the measurements of Mrs. Whitbread's neck, or, more strangely still, knew her views upon Spanish jewellery and the extent of her possessions in that line (which Hugh could not remember). All of which seemed to Richard Dalloway awfully odd. For he never gave Clarissa presents, except a bracelet two or three years ago, which had not been a success. She never wore it. It pained him to remember that she never wore it. And as a single spider's thread after wavering here and there attaches itself to the point of a leaf, so

Richard's mind, recovering from its lethargy, set now on his wife, Clarissa, whom Peter Walsh had loved so passionately; and Richard had had a sudden vision of her there at luncheon; of himself and Clarissa; of their life together; and he drew the tray of old jewels towards him, and taking up first this brooch then that ring, "How much is that?" he asked, but doubted his own taste. He wanted to open the drawing-room door and come in holding out something; a present for Clarissa. Only what? But Hugh was on his legs again. He was unspeakably pompous. Really, after dealing here for thirty-five years he was not going to be put off by a mere boy who did not know his business. For Dubonnet, it seemed, was out, and Hugh would not buy anything until Mr. Dubonnet chose to be in; at which the youth flushed and bowed his correct little bow. It was all perfectly correct. And yet Richard couldn't have said that to save his life! Why these people stood that damned insolence he could not conceive. Hugh was becoming an intolerable ass. Richard Dalloway could not stand more than an hour of his society. And, flicking his bowler hat by way of farewell, Richard turned at the corner of Conduit Street eager, yes, very eager, to travel that spider's thread of attachment between

himself and Clarissa; he would go straight to her, in Westminster.

But he wanted to come in holding something. Flowers? Yes, flowers, since he did not trust his taste in gold; any number of flowers, roses, orchids, to celebrate what was, reckoning things as you will, an event; this feeling, about her when they spoke of Peter Walsh at luncheon; and they never spoke of it; not for years had they spoken of it; which, he thought, grasping his red and white roses together (a vast bunch in tissue paper), is the greatest mistake in the world. The time comes when it can't be said; one's too shy to say it, he thought, pocketing his sixpence or two of change, setting off with his great bunch held against his body to Westminster to say straight out in so many words (whatever she might think of him), holding out his flowers, "I love you." Why not? Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle. Here he was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her. Which one never does say, he thought. Partly one's lazy; partly one's shy. And Clarissa—it was difficult to think of her; except in starts, as at luncheon, when he

saw her quite distinctly; their whole life. He stopped at the crossing; and repeated—being simple by nature, and undebauched, because he had tramped, and shot; being pertinacious and dogged, having championed the down-trodden and followed his instincts in the House of Commons; being preserved in his simplicity yet at the same time grown rather speechless, rather stiff—he repeated that it was a miracle that he should have married Clarissa; a miracle—his life had been a miracle, he thought; hesitating to cross. But it did make his blood boil to see little creatures of five or six crossing Piccadilly alone. The police ought to have stopped the traffic at once. He had no illusions about the London police. Indeed, he was collecting evidence of their malpractices; and those costermongers, not allowed to stand their barrows in the streets; and prostitutes, good Lord, the fault wasn't in them, nor in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth; all of which he considered, could be seen considering, grey, dogged, dapper, clean, as he walked across the Park to tell his wife that he loved her.

For he would say it in so many words, when he came into the room. Because it is a thousand pities never to say what one feels, he thought, crossing the

Green Park and observing with pleasure how in the shade of the trees whole families, poor families, were sprawling; children kicking up their legs; sucking milk; paper bags thrown about, which could easily be picked up (if people objected) by one of those fat gentlemen in livery; for he was of opinion that every park, and every square, during the summer months should be open to children (the grass of the park flushed and faded, lighting up the poor mothers of Westminster and their crawling babies, as if a yellow lamp were moved beneath). But what could be done for female vagrants like that poor creature, stretched on her elbow (as if she had flung herself on the earth, rid of all ties, to observe curiously, to speculate boldly, to consider the whys and the wherefores, impudent, loose-lipped, humorous), he did not know. Bearing his flowers like a weapon, Richard Dalloway approached her; intent he passed her; still there was time for a spark between them—she laughed at the sight of him, he smiled good-humouredly, considering the problem of the female vagrant; not that they would ever speak. But he would tell Clarissa that he loved her, in so many words. He had, once upon a time, been jealous of Peter Walsh; jealous of him and Clarissa. But she had often said to him that she had been right not

to marry Peter Walsh; which, knowing Clarissa, was obviously true; she wanted support. Not that she was weak; but she wanted support.

As for Buckingham Palace (like an old prima donna facing the audience all in white) you can't deny it a certain dignity, he considered, nor despise what does, after all, stand to millions of people (a little crowd was waiting at the gate to see the King drive out) for a symbol, absurd though it is; a child with a box of bricks could have done better, he thought; looking at the memorial to Queen Victoria (whom he could remember in her horn spectacles driving through Kensington), its white mound, its billowing motherliness; but he liked being ruled by the descendant of Horsa; he liked continuity; and the sense of handing on the traditions of the past. It was a great age in which to have lived. Indeed, his own life was a miracle; let him make no mistake about it; here he was, in the prime of life, walking to his house in Westminster to tell Clarissa that he loved her. Happiness is this he thought.

It is this, he said, as he entered Dean's Yard. Big Ben was beginning to strike, first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. Lunch parties waste the entire afternoon, he thought, approaching his door.

The sound of Big Ben flooded Clarissa's drawing-room, where she sat, ever so annoyed, at her writing-table; worried; annoyed. It was perfectly true that she had not asked Ellie Henderson to her party; but she had done it on purpose. Now Mrs. Marsham wrote "she had told Ellie Henderson she would ask Clarissa—Ellie so much wanted to come."

But why should she invite all the dull women in London to her parties? Why should Mrs. Marsham interfere? And there was Elizabeth closeted all this time with Doris Kilman. Anything more nauseating she could not conceive. Prayer at this hour with that woman. And the sound of the bell flooded the room with its melancholy wave; which receded, and gathered itself together to fall once more, when she heard, distractingly, something fumbling, something scratching at the door. Who at this hour? Three, good Heavens! Three already! For with overpowering directness and dignity the clock struck three; and she heard nothing else; but the door handle slipped round and in came Richard! What a surprise! In came Richard, holding out flowers. She had failed him, once at Constantinople; and Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. He was holding out flowers—roses, red and white roses.

(But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words.)

But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers. She understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa. She put them in vases on the mantelpiece. How lovely they looked! she said. And was it amusing, she asked? Had Lady Bruton asked after her? Peter Walsh was back. Mrs. Marsham had written. Must she ask Ellie Henderson? That woman Kilman was upstairs.

"But let us sit down for five minutes," said Richard.

It all looked so empty. All the chairs were against the wall. What had they been doing? Oh, it was for the party; no, he had not forgotten, the party. Peter Walsh was back. Oh yes; she had had him. And he was going to get a divorce; and he was in love with some woman out there. And he hadn't changed in the slightest. There she was, mending her dress. . . .

"Thinking of Bourton," she said.

"Hugh was at lunch," said Richard. She had met him too! Well, he was getting absolutely intolerable. Buying Evelyn necklaces; fatter than ever; an intolerable ass.

"And it came over me 'I might have married

you,'" she said, thinking of Peter sitting there in his little bow-tie; with that knife, opening it, shutting it. "Just as he always was, you know."

They were talking about him at lunch, said Richard. (But he could not tell her he loved her. He held her hand. Happiness is this, he thought.) They had been writing a letter to the *Times* for Millicent Bruton. That was about all Hugh was fit for.

"And our dear Miss Kilman?" he asked. Clarissa thought the roses absolutely lovely; first bunched together; now of their own accord starting apart.

"Kilman arrives just as we've done lunch," she said. "Elizabeth turns pink. They shut themselves up. I suppose they're praying."

Lord! He didn't like it; but these things pass over if you let them.

"In a mackintosh with an umbrella," said Clarissa.

He had not said "I love you"; but he held her hand. Happiness is this, is this, he thought.

"But why should I ask all the dull women in London to my parties?" said Clarissa. And if Mrs. Marsham gave a party, did *she* invite her guests?

"Poor Ellie Henderson," said Richard—it was a very odd thing how much Clarissa minded about her parties, he thought.

But Richard had no notion of the look of a room. However—what was he going to say?

If she worried about these parties he would not let her give them. Did she wish she had married Peter? But he must go.

He must be off, he said, getting up. But he stood for a moment as if he were about to say something; and she wondered what? Why? There were the roses.

"Some Committee?" she asked, as he opened the door.

"Armenians," he said; or perhaps it was "Albanians."

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect—something, after all, priceless.

He returned with a pillow and a quilt.

"An hour's complete rest after luncheon," he said. And he went.

How like him! He would go on saying "An hour's complete rest after luncheon" to the end of time, because a doctor had ordered it once. It

was like him to take what doctors said literally; part of his adorable, divine simplicity, which no one had to the same extent; which made him go and do the thing while she and Peter frittered their time away bickering. He was already halfway to the House of Commons, to his Armenians, his Albanians, having settled her on the sofa, looking at his roses. And people would say, "Clarissa Dalloway is spoilt." She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she had heard Richard say so over and over again)—no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)—the only flowers she could bear to see cut. But Richard was already at the House of Commons; at his Committee, having settled all her difficulties. But no; alas, that was not true. He did not see the reasons against asking Ellie Henderson. She would do it, of course, as he wished it. Since he had brought the pillows, she would lie down. . . . But—but—why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy? As a person who has dropped some grain of pearl or diamond into the grass and parts the tall blades very carefully, this way and that, and

searches here and there vainly, and at last spies it there at the roots, so she went through one thing and another; no, it was not Sally Seton saying that Richard would never be in the Cabinet because he had a second-class brain (it came back to her); no, she did not mind that; nor was it to do with Elizabeth either and Doris Kilman; those were facts. It was a feeling, some unpleasant feeling, earlier in the day perhaps; something that Peter had said, combined with some depression of her own, in her bedroom, taking off her hat; and what Richard had said had added to it, but what had he said? There were his roses. Her parties! That was it! Her parties! Both of them criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!

Well, how was she going to defend herself? Now that she knew what it was, she felt perfectly happy. They thought, or Peter at any rate thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob in short. Well, Peter might think so. Richard merely thought it foolish of her to like excitement when she knew it was bad for her heart. It was childish, he thought. And both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life.

"That's what I do it for," she said, speaking aloud, to life.

Since she was lying on the sofa, cloistered, exempt, the presence of this thing which she felt to be so obvious became physically existent; with robes of sound from the street, sunny, with hot breath, whispering, blowing out the blinds. But suppose Peter said to her, "Yes, yes, but your parties—what's the sense of your parties?" all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand): They're an offering; which sounded horribly vague. But who was Peter to make out that life was all plain sailing?—Peter always in love, always in love with the wrong woman? What's your love? she might say to him. And she knew his answer; how it is the most important thing in the world and no woman possibly understood it. Very well. But could any man understand what she meant either? about life? She could not imagine Peter or Richard taking the trouble to give a party for no reason whatever.

But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgements, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington;

some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?

An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know.

All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how, every instant . . .

The door opened. Elizabeth knew that her mother was resting. She came in very quietly. She stood perfectly still. Was it that some Mongol had been wrecked on the coast of Norfolk (as Mrs. Hil-

bery said), had mixed with the Dalloway ladies, perhaps, a hundred years ago? For the Dalloways, in general, were fair-haired; blue-eyed; Elizabeth, on the contrary, was dark; had Chinese eyes in a pale face; an Oriental mystery; was gentle, considerate, still. As a child, she had had a perfect sense of humour; but now at seventeen, why, Clarissa could not in the least understand, she had become very serious; like a hyacinth, sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted, a hyacinth which has had no sun.

She stood quite still and looked at her mother; but the door was ajar, and outside the door was Miss Kilman, as Clarissa knew; Miss Kilman in her mackintosh, listening to whatever they said.

Yes, Miss Kilman stood on the landing, and wore a mackintosh; but had her reasons. First, it was cheap; second, she was over forty; and did not, after all, dress to please. She was poor, moreover; degradingly poor. Otherwise she would not be taking jobs from people like the Dalloways; from rich people, who liked to be kind. Mr. Dalloway, to do him justice, had been kind. But Mrs. Dalloway had not. She had been merely condescending. She came from the most worthless of all classes—the rich, with a smattering of culture. They had ex-

pensive things everywhere; pictures, carpets, lots of servants. She considered that she had a perfect right to anything that the Dalloways did for her.

She had been cheated. Yes, the word was no exaggeration, for surely a girl has a right to some kind of happiness? And she had never been happy, what with being so clumsy and so poor. And then, just as she might have had a chance at Miss Dolby's school, the war came; and she had never been able to tell lies. Miss Dolby thought she would be happier with people who shared her views about the Germans. She had had to go. It was true that the family was of German origin; spelt the name Kiehlman in the eighteenth century; but her brother had been killed. They turned her out because she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains—when she had German friends, when the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany! And after all, she could read history. She had had to take whatever she could get. Mr. Dalloway had come across her working for the Friends. He had allowed her (and that was really generous of him) to teach his daughter history. Also she did a little Extension lecturing and so on. Then Our Lord had come to her (and here she always bowed her head). She had seen the light two years and three months

ago. Now she did not envy women like Clarissa Dalloway; she pitied them.

She pitied and despised them from the bottom of her heart, as she stood on the soft carpet, looking at the old engraving of a little girl with a muff. With all this luxury going on, what hope was there for a better state of things? Instead of lying on a sofa—"My mother is resting," Elizabeth had said—she should have been in a factory; behind a counter; Mrs. Dalloway and all the other fine ladies!

Bitter and burning, Miss Kilman had turned into a church two years three months ago. She had heard the Rev. Edward Whittaker preach; the boys sing; had seen the solemn lights descend, and whether it was the music, or the voices (she herself when alone in the evening found comfort in a violin; but the sound was excruciating; she had no ear), the hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her had been assuaged as she sat there, and she had wept copiously, and gone to call on Mr. Whittaker at his private house in Kensington. It was the hand of God, he said. The Lord had shown her the way. So now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled within her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God. She thought of Mr. Whittaker.

Rage was succeeded by calm. A sweet savour filled her veins, her lips parted, and, standing formidable upon the landing in her mackintosh, she looked with steady and sinister serenity at Mrs. Dalloway, who came out with her daughter.

Elizabeth said she had forgotten her gloves. That was because Miss Kilman and her mother hated each other. She could not bear to see them together. She ran upstairs to find her gloves.

But Miss Kilman did not hate Mrs. Dalloway. Turning her large gooseberry-coloured eyes upon Clarissa, observing her small pink face, her delicate body, her air of freshness and fashion, Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not Miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered.

Clarissa was really shocked. This a Christian—

this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her! She in touch with invisible presences! Heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace, she know the meaning of life!

"You are taking Elizabeth to the Stores?" Mrs. Dalloway said.

Miss Kilman said she was. They stood there. Miss Kilman was not going to make herself agreeable. She had always earned her living. Her knowledge of modern history was thorough in the extreme. She did out of her meagre income set aside so much for causes she believed in; whereas this woman did nothing, believed nothing; brought up her daughter —but here was Elizabeth, rather out of breath, the beautiful girl.

So they were going to the Stores. Odd it was, as Miss Kilman stood there (and stand she did, with the power and taciturnity of some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare), how, second by second, the idea of her diminished, how hatred (which was for ideas, not people) crumbled, how she lost her malignity, her size, became second by second merely Miss Kilman, in a mackintosh, whom Heaven knows Clarissa would have liked to help.

At this dwindling of the monster, Clarissa laughed. Saying good-bye, she laughed.

Off they went together, Miss Kilman and Elizabeth, downstairs.

With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa leant over the bannisters and cried out, "Remember the party! Remember our party tonight!"

But Elizabeth had already opened the front door; there was a van passing; she did not answer.

Love and religion! thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are! For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, it overwhelmed her—the idea. The cruelest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion. Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her, gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that—that old

woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it—but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. The odious Kilman would destroy it. Yet it was a sight that made her want to cry.

Love destroyed too. Everything that was fine, everything that was true went. Take Peter Walsh now. There was a man, charming, clever, with ideas about everything. If you wanted to know about Pope, say, or Addison, or just to talk nonsense, what people were like, what things meant, Peter knew better than any one. It was Peter who had helped her; Peter who had lent her books. But look at the women he loved—vulgar, trivial, commonplace. Think of Peter in love—he came to see her after all these years, and what did he talk about? Himself. Horrible passion! she thought. Degrading passion! she thought, thinking of Kilman and her Elizabeth walking to the Army and Navy Stores.

Big Ben struck the half-hour.

How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady (they had been neighbours ever so many years) move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her.

Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn. She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go—but where? Clarissa tried to follow her as she turned and disappeared, and could still just see her white cap moving at the back of the bedroom. She was still there moving about at the other end of the room. Why creeds and prayers and mackintoshes? when, thought Clarissa, that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant, whom she could see going from chest of drawers to dressing-table. She could still see her. And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?

Love—but here the other clock, the clock which always struck two minutes after Big Ben, came shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends, which it dumped down as if Big Ben were all very well with his majesty laying down the law, so solemn, so just, but she must remember all sorts of little things besides—Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices—all sorts of little things came flooding and lapping and dancing in on the wake of that solemn

stroke which lay flat like a bar of gold on the sea. Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices. She must telephone now at once.

Volubly, troublously, the late clock sounded, coming in on the wake of Big Ben, with its lap full of trifles. Beaten up, broken up by the assault of carriages, the brutality of vans, the eager advance of myriads of angular men, of flaunting women, the domes and spires of offices and hospitals, the last relics of this lap full of odds and ends seemed to break, like the spray of an exhausted wave, upon the body of Miss Kilman standing still in the street for a moment to mutter "It is the flesh."

It was the flesh that she must control. Clarissa Dalloway had insulted her. That she expected. But she had not triumphed; she had not mastered the flesh. Ugly, clumsy, Clarissa Dalloway had laughed at her for being that; and had revived the fleshly desires, for she minded looking as she did beside Clarissa. Nor could she talk as she did. But why wish to resemble her? Why? She despised Mrs. Dalloway from the bottom of her heart. She was not serious. She was not good. Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit. Yet Doris Kilman had been overcome. She had, as a matter of fact, very nearly burst into tears when Clarissa Dalloway

laughed at her. "It is the flesh, it is the flesh," she muttered (it being her habit to talk aloud) trying to subdue this turbulent and painful feeling as she walked down Victoria Street. She prayed to God. She could not help being ugly; she could not afford to buy pretty clothes. Clarissa Dalloway had laughed—but she would concentrate her mind upon something else until she had reached the pillar-box. At any rate she had got Elizabeth. But she would think of something else; she would think of Russia; until she reached the pillar-box.

How nice it must be, she said, in the country, struggling, as Mr. Whittaker had told her, with that violent grudge against the world which had scorned her, sneered at her, cast her off, beginning with this indignity—the infliction of her unlovable body which people could not bear to see. Do her hair as she might, her forehead remained like an egg, bald, white. No clothes suited her. She might buy anything. And for a woman, of course, that meant never meeting the opposite sex. Never would she come first with any one. Sometimes lately it had seemed to her that, except for Elizabeth, her food was all that she lived for; her comforts; her dinner, her tea; her hot-water bottle at night. But one must fight; vanquish; have faith in God. Mr. Whit-

taker had said she was there for a purpose. But no one knew the agony! He said, pointing to the crucifix, that God knew. But why should she have to suffer when other women, like Clarissa Dalloway, escaped? Knowledge comes through suffering, said Mr. Whittaker.

She had passed the pillar-box, and Elizabeth had turned into the cool brown tobacco department of the Army and Navy Stores while she was still muttering to herself what Mr. Whittaker had said about knowledge coming through suffering and the flesh. "The flesh," she muttered.

What department did she want? Elizabeth interrupted her.

"Petticoats," she said abruptly, and stalked straight on to the lift.

Up they went. Elizabeth guided her this way and that; guided her in her abstraction as if she had been a great child, an unwieldy battleship. There were the petticoats, brown, decorous, striped, frivolous, solid, flimsy; and she chose, in her abstraction, portentously, and the girl serving thought her mad.

Elizabeth rather wondered, as they did up the parcel, what Miss Kilman was thinking. They must

have their tea, said Miss Kilman, rousing, collecting herself. They had their tea.

Elizabeth rather wondered whether Miss Kilman could be hungry. It was her way of eating, eating with intensity, then looking, again and again, at a plate of sugared cakes on the table next them; then, when a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake, could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake—the pink one. The pleasure of eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her, and then to be baffled even in that!

When people are happy, they have a reserve, she had told Elizabeth, upon which to draw, whereas she was like a wheel without a tyre (she was fond of such metaphors), jolted by every pebble, so she would say staying on after the lesson standing by the fire-place with her bag of books, her "satchel," she called it, on a Tuesday morning, after the lesson was over. And she talked too about the war. After all, there were people who did not think the English invariably right. There were books. There were meetings. There were other points of view. Would Elizabeth like to come with her to listen to So-and-so (a most extraordinary looking old man)?

Then Miss Kilman took her to some church in Kensington and they had tea with a clergyman. She had lent her books. Law, medicine, politics, all professions are open to women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. But for herself, her career was absolutely ruined and was it her fault? Good gracious, said Elizabeth, no.

And her mother would come calling to say that a hamper had come from Bourton and would Miss Kilman like some flowers? To Miss Kilman she was always very, very nice, but Miss Kilman squashed the flowers all in a bunch, and hadn't any small talk, and what interested Miss Kilman bored her mother, and Miss Kilman and she were terrible together; and Miss Kilman swelled and looked very plain. But then Miss Kilman was frightfully clever. Elizabeth had never thought about the poor. They lived with everything they wanted,—her mother had breakfast in bed every day; Lucy carried it up; and she liked old women because they were Duchesses, and being descended from some Lord. But Miss Kilman said (one of those Tuesday mornings when the lesson was over), "My grandfather kept an oil and colour shop in Kensington." Miss Kilman made one feel so small.

Miss Kilman took another cup of tea. Elizabeth,

with her oriental bearing, her inscrutable mystery, sat perfectly upright; no, she did not want anything more. She looked for her gloves—her white gloves. They were under the table. Ah, but she must not go! Miss Kilman could not let her go! this youth, that was so beautiful, this girl, whom she genuinely loved! Her large hand opened and shut on the table.

But perhaps it was a little flat somehow, Elizabeth felt. And really she would like to go.

But said Miss Kilman, 'I've not quite finished yet."

Of course, then, Elizabeth would wait. But it was rather stuffy in here.

"Are you going to the party to-night?" Miss Kilman said. Elizabeth supposed she was going; her mother wanted her to go. She must not let parties absorb her, Miss Kilman said, fingering the last two inches of a chocolate éclair.

She did not much like parties, Elizabeth said. Miss Kilman opened her mouth, slightly projected her chin, and swallowed down the last inches of the chocolate éclair, then wiped her fingers, and washed the tea round in her cup.

She was about to split asunder, she felt. The agony was so terrific. If she could grasp her, if she

could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted. But to sit here, unable to think of anything to say; to see Elizabeth turning against her; to be felt repulsive even by her—it was too much; she could not stand it. The thick fingers curled inwards.

"I never go to parties," said Miss Kilman, just to keep Elizabeth from going. "People don't ask me to parties"—and she knew as she said it that it was this egotism that was her undoing; Mr. Whittaker had warned her; but she could not help it. She had suffered so horribly. "Why should they ask me?" she said. "I'm plain, I'm unhappy." She knew it was idiotic. But it was all those people passing—people with parcels who despised her, who made her say it. However, she was Doris Kilman. She had her degree. She was a woman who had made her way in the world. Her knowledge of modern history was more than respectable.

"I don't pity myself," she said. "I pity"—she meant to say "your mother" but no, she could not, not to Elizabeth. "I pity other people," she said, "more."

Like some dumb creature who has been brought up to a gate for an unknown purpose, and stands

there longing to gallop away, Elizabeth Dalloway sat silent. Was Miss Kilman going to say anything more?

"Don't quite forget me," said Doris Kilman; her voice quivered. Right away to the end of the field the dumb creature galloped in terror.

The great hand opened and shut.

Elizabeth turned her head. The waitress came. One had to pay at the desk, Elizabeth said, and went off, drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room, and then, with a final twist, bowing her head very politely, she went.

She had gone. Miss Kilman sat at the marble table among the éclairs, stricken once, twice, thrice by shocks of suffering. She had gone. Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed. Elizabeth had gone. Beauty had gone, youth had gone.

So she sat. She got up, blundered off among the little tables, rocking slightly from side to side, and somebody came after her with her petticoat, and she lost her way, and was hemmed in by trunks specially prepared for taking to India; next got among the accouchement sets, and baby linen; through all the commodities of the world, perishable and permanent, hams, drugs, flowers, stationery, variously smelling,

now sweet, now sour she lurched; saw herself thus lurching with her hat askew, very red in the face, full length in a looking-glass; and at last came out into the street.

The tower of Westminster Cathedral rose in front of her, the habitation of God. In the midst of the traffic, there was the habitation of God. Doggedly she set off with her parcel to that other sanctuary, the Abbey, where, raising her hands in a tent before her face, she sat beside those driven into shelter too; the variously assorted worshippers, now divested of social rank, almost of sex, as they raised their hands before their faces; but once they removed them, instantly reverent, middle class, English men and women, some of them desirous of seeing the wax works.

But Miss Kilman held her tent before her face. Now she was deserted; now rejoined. New worshippers came in from the street to replace the strollers, and still, as people gazed round and shuffled past the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, still she barred her eyes with her fingers and tried in this double darkness, for the light in the Abbey was bodiless, to aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself both of hatred and of love. Her hands twitched. She seemed to

struggle. Yet to others God was accessible and the path to Him smooth. Mr. Fletcher, retired, of the Treasury, Mrs. Gorham, widow of the famous K.C., approached Him simply, and having done their praying, leant back, enjoyed the music (the organ pealed sweetly), and saw Miss Kilman at the end of the row, praying, praying, and, being still on the threshold of their underworld, thought of her sympathetically as a soul haunting the same territory; a soul cut out of immaterial substance; not a woman, a soul.

But Mr. Fletcher had to go. He had to pass her, and being himself neat as a new pin, could not help being a little distressed by the poor lady's disorder; her hair down; her parcel on the floor. She did not at once let him pass. But, as he stood gazing about him, at the white marbles, grey window panes, and accumulated treasures (for he was extremely proud of the Abbey), her largeness, robustness, and power as she sat there shifting her knees from time to time (it was so rough the approach to her God—so tough her desires) impressed him, as they had impressed Mrs. Dalloway (she could not get the thought of her out of her mind that afternoon), the Rev. Edward Whittaker, and Elizabeth too.

And Elizabeth waited in Victoria Street for an

omnibus. It was so nice to be out of doors. She thought perhaps she need not go home just yet. It was so nice to be out in the air. So she would get on to an omnibus. And already, even as she stood there, in her very well cut clothes, it was beginning. . . . People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies; and it made her life a burden to her, for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the country, but they would compare her to lilies, and she had to go to parties, and London was so dreary compared with being alone in the country with her father and the dogs.

Buses swooped, settled, were off—garish caravans, glistening with red and yellow varnish. But which should she get on to? She had no preferences. Of course, she would not push her way. She inclined to be passive. It was expression she needed, but her eyes were fine, Chinese, oriental, and, as her mother said, with such nice shoulders and holding herself so straight, she was always charming to look at; and lately, in the evening especially, when she was interested, for she never seemed excited, she looked almost beautiful, very stately, very serene. What could she be thinking? Every man fell in

love with her, and she was really awfully bored. For it was beginning. Her mother could see that—the compliments were beginning. That she did not care more about it—for instance for her clothes—sometimes worried Clarissa, but perhaps it was as well with all those puppies and guinea pigs about having distemper, and it gave her a charm. And now there was this odd friendship with Miss Kilman. Well, thought Clarissa about three o'clock in the morning, reading Baron Marbot for she could not sleep, it proves she has a heart.

Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on top. The impetuous creature—a pirate—started forward, sprang away; she had to hold the rail to steady herself, for a pirate it was, reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously, boldly snatching a passenger, or ignoring a passenger, squeezing eel-like and arrogant in between, and then rushing insolently all sails spread up Whitehall. And did Elizabeth give one thought to poor Miss Kilman who loved her without jealousy, to whom she had been a fawn in the open, a moon in a glade? She was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious. It had been so stuffy in the Army and Navy Stores.

And now it was like riding, to be rushing up Whitehall; and to each movement of the omnibus the beautiful body in the fawn-coloured coat responded freely like a rider, like the figure-head of a ship, for the breeze slightly disarrayed her; the heat gave her cheeks the pallor of white painted wood; and her fine eyes, having no eyes to meet, gazed ahead, blank, bright, with the staring incredible innocence of sculpture.

It was always talking about her own sufferings that made Miss Kilman so difficult. And was she right? If it was being on committees and giving up hours and hours every day (she hardly ever saw him in London) that helped the poor, her father did that, goodness knows,—if that was what Miss Kilman meant about being a Christian; but it was so difficult to say. Oh, she would like to go a little further. Another penny was it to the Strand? Here was another penny then. She would go up the Strand.

She liked people who were ill. And every profession is open to the women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. So she might be a doctor. She might be a farmer. Animals are often ill. She might own a thousand acres and have people under her. She would go and see them in their cottages. This

was Somerset House. One might be a very good farmer—and that, strangely enough though Miss Kilman had her share in it, was almost entirely due to Somerset House. It looked so splendid, so serious, that great grey building. And she liked the feeling of people working. She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off at Chancery Lane. It was so serious; it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament, if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand.

The feet of those people busy about their activities, hands putting stone to stone, minds eternally occupied not with trivial chatterings (comparing women to poplars—which was rather exciting, of course, but very silly), but with thoughts of ships, of business, of law, of administration, and with it all so stately (she was in the Temple), gay (there was the river), pious (there was the Church), made her quite determined, whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a doctor. But she was, of course, rather lazy.

And it was much better to say nothing about it. It seemed so silly. It was the sort of thing that did

sometimes happen, when one was alone—buildings without architects' names, crowds of people coming back from the city having more power than single clergymen in Kensington, than any of the books Miss Kilman had lent her, to stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy, and shy on the mind's sandy floor to break surface, as a child suddenly stretches its arms; it was just that, perhaps, a sigh, a stretch of the arms, an impulse, a revelation, which has its effects for ever, and then down again it went to the sandy floor. She must go home. She must dress for dinner. But what was the time?—where was a clock?

She looked up Fleet Street. She walked just a little way towards St. Paul's, shyly, like some one penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting bye-streets, any more than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder. For no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting.

In many ways, her mother felt, she was extremely

immature, like a child still, attached to dolls, to old slippers; a perfect baby; and that was charming. But then, of course, there was in the Dalloway family the tradition of public service. Abbesses, principals, head mistresses, dignitaries, in the republic of women—without being brilliant, any of them, they were that. She penetrated a little further in the direction of St. Paul's. She liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good. The noise was tremendous; and suddenly there were trumpets (the unemployed) blaring, rattling about in the uproar; military music; as if people were marching; yet had they been dying—had some woman breathed her last and whoever was watching, opening the window of the room where she had just brought off that act of supreme dignity, looked down on Fleet Street, that uproar, that military music would have come triumphing up to him, consolatory, indifferent.

It was not conscious. There was no recognition in it of one fortune, or fate, and for that very reason even to those dazed with watching for the last shivers of consciousness on the faces of the dying, consoling. Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out, would take whatever it

might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on.

But it was later than she thought. Her mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this. She turned back down the Strand.

A puff of wind (in spite of the heat, there was quite a wind) blew a thin black veil over the sun and over the Strand. The faces faded; the omnibuses suddenly lost their glow. For although the clouds were of mountainous white so that one could fancy hacking hard chips off with a hatchet, with broad golden slopes, lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them. Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already, now a summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station inalterably advanced into the midst or gravely led the procession to fresh anchorage. Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive super-

ficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness.

Calmly and competently, Elizabeth Dalloway mounted the Westminster omnibus.

Going and coming, beckoning, signalling, so the light and shadow which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow, seemed to Septimus Warren Smith lying on the sofa in the sitting-room; watching the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper. Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more.

He was not afraid. At every moment Nature sig-

nified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall—there, there, there—her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning.

Rezia, sitting at the table twisting a hat in her hands, watched him; saw him smiling. He was happy then. But she could not bear to see him smiling. It was not marriage; it was not being one's husband to look strange like that, always to be starting, laughing, sitting hour after hour silent, or clutching her and telling her to write. The table drawer was full of those writings; about war; about Shakespeare; about great discoveries; how there is no death. Lately he had become excited suddenly for no reason (and both Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw said excitement was the worst thing for him), and waved his hands and cried out that he knew the truth! He knew everything! That man, his friend who was killed, Evans, had come, he said. He was singing behind the screen. She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing his mind;

wanting to add something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up.

But she heard nothing.

And once they found the girl who did the room reading one of these papers in fits of laughter. It was a dreadful pity. For that made Septimus cry out about human cruelty—how they tear each other to pieces. The fallen, he said, they tear to pieces. "Holmes is on us," he would say, and he would invent stories about Holmes; Holmes eating porridge; Holmes reading Shakespeare—making himself roar with laughter or rage, for Dr. Holmes seemed to stand for something horrible to him. "Human nature," he called him. Then there were the visions. He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea. Or he was hearing music. Really it was only a barrel organ or some man crying in the street. But "Lovely!" he used to cry, and the tears would run down his cheeks, which was to her the most dreadful thing of all, to see a man like Septimus, who had fought, who was brave, crying. And he would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into the flames! Actually she would look for flames, it was so vivid.

But there was nothing. They were alone in the room. It was a dream, she would tell him and so quiet him at last, but sometimes she was frightened too. She sighed as she sat sewing.

Her sigh was tender and enchanting, like the wind outside a wood in the evening. Now she put down her scissors; now she turned to take something from the table. A little stir, a little crinkling, a little tapping built up something on the table there, where she sat sewing. Through his eyelashes he could see her blurred outline; her little black body; her face and hands; her turning movements at the table, as she took up a reel, or looked (she was apt to lose things) for her silk. She was making a hat for Mrs. Filmer's married daughter, whose name was—he had forgotten her name.

"What is the name of Mrs. Filmer's married daughter?" he asked.

"Mrs. Peters," said Rezia. She was afraid it was too small, she said, holding it before her. Mrs. Peters was a big woman; but she did not like her. It was only because Mrs. Filmer had been so good to them. "She gave me grapes this morning," she said—that Rezia wanted to do something to show that they were grateful. She had come into the

room the other evening and found Mrs. Peters, who thought they were out, playing the gramophone.

"Was it true?" he asked. She was playing the gramophone? Yes; she had told him about it at the time; she had found Mrs. Peters playing the gramophone.

He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things—real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad. First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then, gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact. And so, gathering courage, he looked at the sideboard; the plate of bananas; the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort; at the mantelpiece, with the jar of roses. None of these things moved. All were still; all were real.

"She is a woman with a spiteful tongue," said Rezia.

"What does Mr. Peters do?" Septimus asked.

"Ah," said Rezia, trying to remember. She thought Mrs. Filmer had said that he travelled for some company. "Just now he is in Hull," she said.

"Just now!" She said that with her Italian ac-

cent. She said that herself. He shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it. But no, there she was, perfectly natural, sewing, with the pursed lips that women have, the set, the melancholy expression, when sewing. But there was nothing terrible about it, he assured himself, looking a second time, a third time at her face, her hands, for what was frightening or disgusting in her as she sat there in broad daylight, sewing? Mrs. Peters had a spiteful tongue. Mr. Peters was in Hull. Why then rage and prophesy? Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her dress, and Mr. Peters was in Hull? Miracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers.

"It's too small for Mrs. Peters," said Septimus.

For the first time for days he was speaking as he used to do! Of course it was—absurdly small, she said. But Mrs. Peters had chosen it.

He took it out of her hands. He said it was an organ grinder's monkey's hat.

How it rejoiced her that! Not for weeks had they laughed like this together, poking fun privately like married people. What she meant was that if Mrs. Filmer had come in, or Mrs. Peters or anybody they would not have understood what she and Septimus were laughing at.

"There," she said, pinning a rose to one side of the hat. Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!

But that was still more ridiculous, Septimus said. Now the poor woman looked like a pig at a fair. (Nobody ever made her laugh as Septimus did.)

What had she got in her work-box? She had ribbons and beads, tassels, artificial flowers. She tumbled them out on the table. He began putting odd colours together—for though he had no fingers, could not even do up a parcel, he had a wonderful eye, and often he was right, sometimes absurd, of course, but sometimes wonderfully right.

"She shall have a beautiful hat!" he murmured, taking up this and that, Rezia kneeling by his side, looking over his shoulder. Now it was finished—that is to say the design; she must stitch it to-

gether. But she must be very, very careful, he said, to keep it just as he had made it.

So she sewed. When she sewed, he thought, she made a sound like a kettle on the hob; bubbling, murmuring, always busy, her strong little pointed fingers pinching and poking; her needle flashing straight. The sun might go in and out, on the tassels, on the wall-paper, but he would wait, he thought, stretching out his feet, looking at his ringed sock at the end of the sofa; he would wait in this warm place, this pocket of still air, which one comes on at the edge of a wood sometimes in the evening, when, because of a fall in the ground, or some arrangement of the trees (one must be scientific above all, scientific), warmth lingers, and the air buffets the cheek like the wing of a bird.

"There it is," said Rezia, twirling Mrs. Peters' hat on the tips of her fingers. "That'll do for the moment. Later . . ." her sentence bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running.

It was wonderful. Never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, it was so substantial, Mrs. Peters' hat.

"Just look at it," he said.

Yes, it would always make her happy to see that hat. He had become himself then, he had laughed

then. They had been alone together. Always she would like that hat.

He told her to try it on.

"But I must look so queer!" she cried, running over to the glass and looking first this side then that. Then she snatched it off again, for there was a tap at the door. Could it be Sir William Bradshaw? Had he sent already?

No! it was only the small girl with the evening paper.

What always happened, then happened—what happened every night of their lives. The small girl sucked her thumb at the door; Rezia went down on her knees; Rezia cooed and kissed; Rezia got a bag of sweets out of the table drawer. For so it always happened. First one thing, then another. So she built it up, first one thing and then another. Dancing, skipping, round and round the room they went. He took the paper. Surrey was all out, he read. There was a heat wave. Rezia repeated: Surrey was all out. There was a heat wave, making it part of the game she was playing with Mrs. Filmer's grandchild, both of them laughing, chattering at the same time, at their game. He was very tired. He was very happy. He would sleep. He shut his eyes. But directly he saw nothing the

sounds of the game became fainter and stranger and sounded like the cries of people seeking and not finding, and passing further and further away. They had lost him!

He started up in terror. What did he see? The plate of bananas on the sideboard. Nobody was there (Rezia had taken the child to its mother. It was bedtime). That was it: to be alone forever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone forever.

He was alone with the sideboard and the bananas. He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out—but not on a hill-top; not on a crag; on Mrs. Filmer's sitting-room sofa. As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen.

"Evans!" he cried. There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead. The screen, the coal-scuttle, the sideboard remained to him. Let him then face the screen, the coal-scuttle and the sideboard . . . but Rezia burst into the room chattering.

Some letter had come. Everybody's plans were changed. Mrs. Filmer would not be able to go to Brighton after all. There was no time to let Mrs. Williams know, and really Rezia thought it very, very annoying, when she caught sight of the hat and thought . . . perhaps . . . she . . . might just make a little. . . . Her voice died out in contented melody.

"Ah, damn!" she cried (it was a joke of theirs, her swearing), the needle had broken. Hat, child, Brighton, needle. She built it up; first one thing, then another, she built it up, sewing.

She wanted him to say whether by moving the rose she had improved the hat. She sat on the end of the sofa.

They were perfectly happy now, she said, suddenly, putting the hat down. For she could say anything to him now. She could say whatever came into her head. That was almost the first thing she had felt about him, that night in the café when he had come in with his English friends. He had come in, rather shyly, looking round him, and his hat had fallen when he hung it up. That she could remember. She knew he was English, though not one of the large Englishmen her sister admired, for he was always thin; but he had a beautiful fresh colour;

and with his big nose, his bright eyes, his way of sitting a little hunched made her think, she had often told him, of a young hawk, that first evening she saw him, when they were playing dominoes, and he had come in—of a young hawk; but with her he was always very gentle. She had never seen him wild or drunk, only suffering sometimes through this terrible war, but even so, when she came in, he would put it all away. Anything, anything in the whole world, any little bother with her work, anything that struck her to say she would tell him, and he understood at once. Her own family even were not the same. Being older than she was and being so clever—how serious he was, wanting her to read Shakespeare before she could even read a child's story in English!—being so much more experienced, he could help her. And she too could help him.

But this hat now. And then (it was getting late) Sir William Bradshaw.

She held her hands to her head, waiting for him to say did he like the hat or not, and as she sat there, waiting, looking down, he could feel her mind, like a bird, falling from branch to branch, and always alighting, quite rightly; he could follow her mind, as she sat there in one of those loose lax poses that came to her naturally and, if he should say

anything, at once she smiled, like a bird alighting with all its claws firm upon the bough.

But he remembered Bradshaw said, "The people we are most fond of are not good for us when we are ill." Bradshaw said, he must be taught to rest. Bradshaw said they must be separated.

"Must," "must," why "must"? What power had Bradshaw over him? "What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?" he demanded.

"It is because you talked of killing yourself," said Rezia. (Mercifully, she could now say anything to Septimus.)

So he was in their power! Holmes and Bradshaw were on him! The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place! "Must" it could say! Where were his papers? the things he had written?

She brought him his papers, the things he had written, things she had written for him. She tumbled them out on to the sofa. They looked at them together. Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings—were they?—on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences—the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces

with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world. Burn them! he cried. Now for his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans, Evans—his messages from the dead; do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister. Universal love: the meaning of the world. Burn them! he cried.

But Rezia laid her hands on them. Some were very beautiful, she thought. She would tie them up (for she had no envelope) with a piece of silk.

Even if they took him, she said, she would go with him. They could not separate them against their wills, she said.

Shuffling the edges straight, she did up the papers, and tied the parcel almost without looking, sitting beside him, he thought, as if all her petals were about her. She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest. Staggering he saw her mount the appalling staircase, laden with Holmes and Bradshaw, men who never weighed less than eleven stone six, who sent their wives to Court, men who made ten thousand a year and talked of propor-

tion; who different in their verdicts (for Holmes said one thing, Bradshaw another), yet judges they were; who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted. "Must" they said. Over them she triumphed.

"There!" she said. The papers were tied up. No one should get at them. She would put them away.

And, she said, nothing should separate them. She sat down beside him and called him by the name of that hawk or crow which being malicious and a great destroyer of crops was precisely like him. No one could separate them, she said.

Then she got up to go into the bedroom to pack their things, but hearing voices downstairs and thinking that Dr. Holmes had perhaps called, ran down to prevent him coming up.

Septimus could hear her talking to Holmes on the staircase.

"My dear lady, I have come as a friend," Holmes was saying.

"No. I will not allow you to see my husband," she said.

He could see her, like a little hen, with her wings spread barring his passage. But Holmes persevered.

"My dear lady, allow me . . ." Holmes said, putting her aside (Holmes was a powerfully built man).

Holmes was coming upstairs. Holmes would burst open the door. Holmes would say "In a funk, eh?" Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes; not Bradshaw. Getting up rather unsteadily, hopping indeed from foot to foot, he considered Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread knife with "Bread" carved on the handle. Ah, but one mustn't spoil that. The gas fire? But it was too late now. Holmes was coming. Razors he might have got, but Rezia, who always did that sort of thing, had packed them. There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury-lodging house window, the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings.

"The coward!" cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she

understood. Dr. Holmes and Mrs. Filmer collided with each other. Mrs. Filmer flapped her apron and made her hide her eyes in the bedroom. There was a great deal of running up and down stairs. Dr. Holmes came in—white as a sheet, shaking all over, with a glass in his hand. She must be brave and drink something, he said (What was it? Something sweet), for her husband was horribly mangled, would not recover consciousness, she must not see him, must be spared as much as possible, would have the inquest to go through, poor young woman. Who could have foretold it? A sudden impulse, no one was in the least to blame (he told Mrs. Filmer). And why the devil he did it, Dr. Holmes could not conceive.

It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking—one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself. She was falling asleep. But the clock went on striking, four, five, six and Mrs. Filmer waving her apron (they wouldn't bring the body in here, would they?) seemed part of that garden; or a flag. She had once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she stayed with her

aunt at Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War. Of her memories, most were happy.

She put on her hat, and ran through cornfields—where could it have been?—on to some hill, somewhere near the sea, for there were ships, gulls, butterflies; they sat on a cliff. In London too, there they sat, and, half dreaming, came to her through the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on shore, strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb.

"He is dead," she said, smiling at the poor old woman who guarded her with her honest light-blue eyes fixed on the door. (They wouldn't bring him in here, would they?) But Mrs. Filmer pooh-poohed. Oh no, oh no! They were carrying him away now. Ought she not to be told? Married people ought to be together, Mrs. Filmer thought. But they must do as the doctor said.

"Let her sleep," said Dr. Holmes, feeling her pulse. She saw the large outline of his body standing dark against the window. So that was Dr. Holmes.

One of the triumphs of civilisation, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of the triumphs of civilisation, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; some one hit on the head, struck down by disease, knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself. That was civilisation. It struck him coming back from the East—the efficiency, the organisation, the communal spirit of London. Every cart or carriage of its own accord drew aside to let the ambulance pass. Perhaps it was morbid; or was it not touching rather, the respect which they showed this ambulance with its victim inside—busy men hurrying home yet instantly bethinking them as it passed of some wife; or presumably how easily it might have been them there, stretched on a shelf with a doctor and a nurse. . . . Ah, but thinking became morbid, sentimental, directly one began conjuring up doctors, dead bodies; a little glow of pleasure, a sort of lust too over the visual impression warned one not to go on with that sort of thing any more—fatal to art, fatal to friendship. True. And yet, thought Peter Walsh, as the ambulance turned the corner though the light high bell could be heard

down the next street and still farther as it crossed the Tottenham Court Road, chiming constantly, it is the privilege of loneliness; in privacy one may do as one chooses. One might weep if no one saw. It had been his undoing—this susceptibility—in Anglo-Indian society; not weeping at the right time, or laughing either. I have that in me, he thought standing by the pillar-box, which could now dissolve in tears. Why, Heaven knows. Beauty of some sort probably, and the weight of the day, which beginning with that visit to Clarissa had exhausted him with its heat, its intensity, and the drip, drip, of one impression after another down into that cellar where they stood, deep, dark, and no one would ever know. Partly for that reason, its secrecy, complete and inviolable, he had found life like an unknown garden, full of turns and corners, surprising, yes; really it took one's breath away, these moments; there coming to him by the pillar-box opposite the British Museum one of them, a moment, in which things came together; this ambulance; and life and death. It was as if he were sucked up to some very high roof by that rush of emotion and the rest of him, like a white shell-sprinkled beach, left bare. It had been his undoing in Anglo-Indian society—this susceptibility.

Clarissa once, going on top of an omnibus with him somewhere, Clarissa superficially at least, so easily moved, now in despair, now in the best of spirits, all aquiver in those days and such good company, spotting queer little scenes, names, people from the top of a bus, for they used to explore London and bring back bags full of treasures from the Caledonian market—Clarissa had a theory in those days—they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have. It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? You met every day; then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people. But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that

she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . perhaps—perhaps.

Looking back over that long friendship of almost thirty years her theory worked to this extent. Brief, broken, often painful as their actual meetings had been what with his absences and interruptions (this morning, for instance, in came Elizabeth, like a long-legged colt, handsome, dumb, just as he was beginning to talk to Clarissa) the effect of them on his life was immeasurable. There was a mystery about it. You were given a sharp, acute, uncomfortable grain—the actual meeting; horribly painful as often as not; yet in absence, in the most unlikely places, it would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding, after years of lying lost. Thus she had come to him; on board ship; in the Himalayas; suggested by the oddest things (so Sally Seton, generous, enthusiastic goose! thought of *him* when she saw blue hydrangeas). She had influenced him more than any person he

had ever known. And always in this way coming before him without his wishing it, cool, lady-like, critical; or ravishing, romantic, recalling some field or English harvest. He saw her most often in the country, not in London. One scene after another at Bourton. . . .

He had reached his hotel. He crossed the hall, with its mounds of reddish chairs and sofas, its spike-leaved, withered-looking plants. He got his key off the hook. The young lady handed him some letters. He went upstairs—he saw her most often at Bourton, in the late summer, when he stayed there for a week, or fortnight even, as people did in those days. First on top of some hill there she would stand, hands clapped to her hair, her cloak blowing out, pointing, crying to them—she saw the Severn beneath. Or in a wood, making the kettle boil—very ineffective with her fingers; the smoke curtseying, blowing in their faces; her little pink face showing through; begging water from an old woman in a cottage, who came to the door to watch them go. They walked always; the others drove. She was bored driving, disliked all animals, except that dog. They tramped miles along roads. She would break off to get her bearings, pilot him back across country; and all the time they

argued, discussed poetry, discussed people, discussed politics (she was a Radical then); never noticing a thing except when she stopped, cried out at a view or a tree, and made him look with her; and so on again, through stubble fields, she walking ahead, with a flower for her aunt, never tired of walking for all her delicacy; to drop down on Bourton in the dusk. Then, after dinner, old Breitkopf would open the piano and sing without any voice, and they would lie sunk in arm-chairs, trying not to laugh, but always breaking down and laughing, laughing—laughing at nothing. Breitkopf was supposed not to see. And then in the morning, flirting up and down like a wagtail in front of the house. . . .

Oh it was a letter from her! This blue envelope; that was her hand. And he would have to read it. Here was another of those meetings, bound to be painful! To read her letter needed the devil of an effort. "How heavenly it was to see him. She must tell him that." That was all.

But it upset him. It annoyed him. He wished she hadn't written it. Coming on top of his thoughts, it was like a nudge in the ribs. Why couldn't she let him be? After all, she had married

Dalloway, and lived with him in perfect happiness all these years.

These hotels are not consoling places. Far from it. Any number of people had hung up their hats on those pegs. Even the flies, if you thought of it, had settled on other people's noses. As for the cleanliness which hit him in the face, it wasn't cleanliness, so much as barrenness, frigidity; a thing that had to be. Some arid matron made her rounds at dawn sniffing, peering, causing blue-nosed maids to scour, for all the world as if the next visitor were a joint of meat to be served on a perfectly clean platter. For sleep, one bed; for sitting in, one arm-chair; for cleaning one's teeth and shaving one's chin, one tumbler, one looking-glass. Books, letters, dressing-gown, slipped about on the impersonality of the horsehair like incongruous impertinences. And it was Clarissa's letter that made him see all this. "Heavenly to see you. She must say so!" He folded the paper; pushed it away; nothing would induce him to read it again!

To get that letter to him by six o'clock she must have sat down and written it directly he left her; stamped it; sent somebody to the post. It was, as people say, very like her. She was upset by his

visit. She had felt a great deal; had for a moment, when she kissed his hand, regretted, envied him even, remembered possibly (for he saw her look it) something he had said—how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; it was mediocrity; then forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles, and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of. Yes; but there would come a reaction directly he left the room. She would be frightfully sorry for him; she would think what in the world she could do to give him pleasure (short always of the one thing) and he could see her with the tears running down her cheeks going to her writing-table and dashing off that one line which he was to find greeting him. . . . "Heavenly to see you!" And she meant it.

Peter Walsh had now unlaced his boots.

But it would not have been a success, their marriage. The other thing, after all, came so much more naturally.

It was odd; it was true; lots of people felt it. Peter Walsh, who had done just respectably, filled the usual posts adequately, was liked, but thought

a little cranky, gave himself airs—it was odd that *he* should have had, especially now that his hair was grey, a contented look; a look of having reserves. It was this that made him attractive to women who liked the sense that he was not altogether manly. There was something unusual about him, or something behind him. It might be that he was bookish—never came to see you without taking up the book on the table (he was now reading, with his bootlaces trailing on the floor); or that he was a gentleman, which showed itself in the way he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and in his manners of course to women. For it was very charming and quite ridiculous how easily some girl without a grain of sense could twist him round her finger. But at her own risk. That is to say, though he might be ever so easy, and indeed with his gaiety and good-breeding fascinating to be with, it was only up to a point. She said something—no, no; he saw through that. He wouldn't stand that—no, no. Then he could shout and rock and hold his sides together over some joke with men. He was the best judge of cooking in India. He was a man. But not the sort of man one had to respect—which was a mercy; not like Major Simmons, for instance; not in the least like that, Daisy thought, when, in

spite of her two small children, she used to compare them.

He pulled off his boots. He emptied his pockets. Out came with his pocket-knife a snapshot of Daisy on the verandah; Daisy all in white, with a fox-terrier on her knee; very charming, very dark; the best he had ever seen of her. It did come, after all so naturally; so much more naturally than Clarissa. No fuss. No bother. No finicking and fidgeting. All plain sailing. And the dark, adorably pretty girl on the verandah exclaimed (he could hear her). Of course, of course she would give him everything! she cried (she had no sense of discretion) everything he wanted! she cried, running to meet him, whoever might be looking. And she was only twenty-four. And she had two children. Well, well!

Well indeed he had got himself into a mess at his age. And it came over him when he woke in the night pretty forcibly. Suppose they did marry? For him it would be all very well, but what about her? Mrs. Burgess, a good sort and no chatterbox, in whom he had confided, thought this absence of his in England, ostensibly to see lawyers might serve to make Daisy reconsider, think what it meant. It was a question of her position, Mrs. Burgess said;

the social barrier; giving up her children. She'd be a widow with a past one of these days, draggling about in the suburbs, or more likely, indiscriminate (you know, she said, what such women get like, with too much paint). But Peter Walsh pooh-poohed all that. He didn't mean to die yet. Anyhow she must settle for herself; judge for herself, he thought, padding about the room in his socks, smoothing out his dress-shirt, for he might go to Clarissa's party, or he might go to one of the Halls, or he might settle in and read an absorbing book written by a man he used to know at Oxford. And if he did retire, that's what he'd do—write books. He would go to Oxford and poke about in the Bodleian. Vainly the dark, adorably pretty girl ran to the end of the terrace; vainly waved her hand; vainly cried she didn't care a straw what people said. There he was, the man she thought the world of, the perfect gentleman, the fascinating, the distinguished (and his age made not the least difference to her), padding about a room in an hotel in Bloomsbury, shaving, washing, continuing, as he took up cans, put down razors, to poke about in the Bodleian, and get at the truth about one or two little matters that interested him. And he would have a chat with whoever it might be, and so come

to disregard more and more precise hours for lunch, and miss engagements, and when Daisy asked him, as she would, for a kiss, a scene, fail to come up to the scratch (though he was genuinely devoted to her)—in short it might be happier, as Mrs. Burgess said, that she should forget him, or merely remember him as he was in August 1922, like a figure standing at the cross roads at dusk, which grows more and more remote as the dog-cart spins away, carrying her securely fastened to the back seat, though her arms are outstretched, and as she sees the figure dwindle and disappear still she cries out how she would do anything in the world, anything, anything, anything. . . .

He never knew what people thought. It became more and more difficult for him to concentrate. He became absorbed; he became busied with his own concerns; now surly, now gay; dependent on women, absent-minded, moody, less and less able (so he thought as he shaved) to understand why Clarissa couldn't simply find them a lodging and be nice to Daisy; introduce her. And then he could just—just do what? just haunt and hover (he was at the moment actually engaged in sorting out various keys, papers), swoop and taste, be alone, in short, sufficient to himself; and yet nobody of course

was more dependent upon others (he buttoned his waistcoat); it had been his undoing. He could not keep out of smoking-rooms, liked colonels, liked golf, liked bridge, and above all women's society, and the fineness of their companionship, and their faithfulness and audacity and greatness in loving which though it had its drawbacks seemed to him (and the dark, adorably pretty face was on top of the envelopes) so wholly admirable, so splendid a flower to grow on the crest of human life, and yet he could not come up to the scratch, being always apt to see round things (Clarissa had sapped something in him permanently), and to tire very easily of mute devotion and to want variety in love, though it would make him furious if Daisy loved anybody else, furious! for he was jealous, uncontrollably jealous by temperament. He suffered tortures! But where was his knife; his watch; his seals, his note-case, and Clarissa's letter which he would not read again but liked to think of, and Daisy's photograph? And now for dinner.

They were eating.

Sitting at little tables round vases, dressed or not dressed, with their shawls and bags laid beside them, with their air of false composure, for they were not used to so many courses at dinner, and confidence,

for they were able to pay for it, and strain, for they had been running about London all day shopping. sightseeing; and their natural curiosity, for they looked round and up as the nice-looking gentleman in horn-rimmed spectacles came in, and their good nature, for they would have been glad to do any little service, such as lend a time-table or impart useful information, and their desire, pulsing in them, tugging at them subterraneously, somehow to establish connections if it were only a birthplace (Liverpool, for example) in common or friends of the same name; with their furtive glances, odd silences, and sudden withdrawals into family jocularity and isolation; there they sat eating dinner when Mr. Walsh came in and took his seat at a little table by the curtain.

It was not that he said anything, for being solitary he could only address himself to the waiter; it was his way of looking at the menu, of pointing his forefinger to a particular wine, of hitching himself up to the table, of addressing himself seriously, not gluttonously to dinner, that won him their respect; which, having to remain unexpressed for the greater part of the meal, flared up at the table where the Morrises sat when Mr. Walsh was heard to say at the end of the meal, "Bartlett pears."

Why he should have spoken so moderately yet firmly, with the air of a disciplinarian well within his rights which are founded upon justice, neither young Charles Morris, nor old Charles, neither Miss Elaine nor Mrs. Morris knew. But when he said, "Bartlett pears," sitting alone at his table, they felt that he counted on their support in some lawful demand; was champion of a cause which immediately became their own, so that their eyes met his eyes sympathetically, and when they all reached the smoking-room simultaneously, a little talk between them became inevitable.

It was not very profound—only to the effect that London was crowded; had changed in thirty years; that Mr. Morris preferred Liverpool; that Mrs. Morris had been to the Westminster flower-show, and that they had all seen the Prince of Wales. Yet, thought Peter Walsh, no family in the world can compare with the Morrises; none whatever; and their relations to each other are perfect, and they don't care a hang for the upper classes, and they like what they like, and Elaine is training for the family business, and the boy has won a scholarship at Leeds, and the old lady (who is about his own age) has three more children at home; and they have two motor cars, but Mr. Morris still

mends the boots on Sunday: it is superb, it is absolutely superb, thought Peter Walsh, swaying a little backwards and forwards with his liqueur glass in his hand among the hairy red chairs and ash-trays, feeling very well pleased with himself, for the Morrises liked him. Yes, they liked a man who said, "Bartlett pears." They liked him, he felt.

He would go to Clarissa's party. (The Morrises moved off; but they would meet again.) He would go to Clarissa's party, because he wanted to ask Richard what they were doing in India—the conservative duffers. And what's being acted? And music. . . . Oh yes, and mere gossip.

For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable; suddenly she shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled waves; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping. What did the Government mean—Richard Dalloway would know—to do about India?

Since it was a very hot night and the paper boys went by with placards proclaiming in huge red letters that there was a heat-wave, wicker chairs

were placed on the hotel steps and there, sipping, smoking, detached gentlemen sat. Peter Walsh sat there. One might fancy that day, the London day, was just beginning. Like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue and pearls, the day changed, put off stuff, took gauze, changed to evening, and with the same sigh of exhilaration that a woman breathes, tumbling petticoats on the floor, it too shed dust, heat, colour; the traffic thinned; motor cars, tinkling, darting, succeeded the lumber of vans; and here and there among the thick foliage of the squares an intense light hung. I resign, the evening seemed to say, as it paled and faded above the battlements and prominences, moulded, pointed, of hotel, flat, and block of shops, I fade, she was beginning, I disappear, but London would have none of it, and rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in her revelry.

For the great revolution of Mr. Willett's summer time had taken place since Peter Walsh's last visit to England. The prolonged evening was new to him. It was inspiriting, rather. For as the young people went by with their despatch-boxes, awfully glad to be free, proud too, dumbly, of stepping this famous pavement, joy of a kind, cheap, tinselly, if

you like, but all the same rapture, flushed their faces. They dressed well too; pink stockings; pretty shoes. They would now have two hours at the pictures. It sharpened, it refined them, the yellow-blue evening light; and on the leaves in the square shone lurid, livid—they looked as if dipped in sea water—the foliage of a submerged city. He was astonished by the beauty; it was encouraging too, for where the returned Anglo-Indian sat by rights (he knew crowds of them) in the Oriental Club biliously summing up the ruin of the world, here was he, as young as ever; envying young people their summer time and the rest of it, and more than suspecting from the words of a girl, from a housemaid's laughter—intangible things you couldn't lay your hands on—that shift in the whole pyramidal accumulation which in his youth had seemed immovable. On top of them it had pressed; weighed them down, the women especially, like those flowers Clarissa's Aunt Helena used to press between sheets of grey blotting-paper with Littré's dictionary on top, sitting under the lamp after dinner. She was dead now. He had heard of her, from Clarissa, losing the sight of one eye. It seemed so fitting—one of nature's masterpieces—that old Miss Parry should turn to glass. She would die like

some bird in a frost gripping her perch. She belonged to a different age, but being so entire, so complete, would always stand up on the horizon, stone-white, eminent, like a lighthouse marking some past stage on this adventurous, long, long voyage, this interminable (he felt for a copper to buy a paper and read about Surrey and Yorkshire—he had held out that copper millions of times. Surrey was all out once more)—this interminable life. But cricket was no mere game. Cricket was important. He could never help reading about cricket. He read the scores in the stop press first, then how it was a hot day; then about a murder case. Having done things millions of times enriched them, though it might be said to take the surface off. The past enriched, and experience, and having cared for one or two people, and so having acquired the power which the young lack, of cutting short, doing what one likes, not caring a rap what people say and coming and going without any very great expectations (he left his paper on the table and moved off), which however (and he looked for his hat and coat) was not altogether true of him, not to-night, for here he was starting to go to a party, at his age, with the belief upon him that he was about to have an experience. But what?

Beauty anyhow. Not the crude beauty of the eye. It was not beauty pure and simple—Bedford Place leading into Russell Square. It was straightness and emptiness of course; the symmetry of a corridor; but it was also windows lit up, a piano, a gramophone sounding; a sense of pleasure-making hidden, but now and again emerging when, through the uncurtained window, the window left open, one saw parties sitting over tables, young people slowly circling, conversations between men and women, maids idly looking out (a strange comment theirs, when work was done), stockings drying on top ledges, a parrot, a few plants. Absorbing, mysterious, of infinite richness, this life. And in the large square where the cabs shot and swerved so quick, there were loitering couples, dallying, embracing, shrunk up under the shower of a tree; that was moving; so silent, so absorbed, that one passed, discreetly, timidly, as if in the presence of some sacred ceremony to interrupt which would have been impious. That was interesting. And so on into the flare and glare.

His light overcoat blew open, he stepped with indescribable idiosyncrasy, lent a little forward, tripped, with his hands behind his back and his

eyes still a little hawklike; he tripped through London, towards Westminster, observing.

Was everybody dining out, then? Doors were being opened here by a footman to let issue a high-stepping old dame, in buckled shoes, with three purple ostrich feathers in her hair. Doors were being opened for ladies wrapped like mummies in shawls with bright flowers on them, ladies with bare heads. And in respectable quarters with stucco pillars through small front gardens lightly swathed with combs in their hair (having run up to see the children), women came; men waited for them, with their coats blowing open, and the motor started. Everybody was going out. What with these doors being opened, and the descent and the start, it seemed as if the whole of London were embarking in little boats moored to the bank, tossing on the waters, as if the whole place were floating off in carnival. And Whitehall was skated over, silver beaten as it was, skated over by spiders, and there was a sense of midges round the arc lamps; it was so hot that people stood about talking. And here in Westminster was a retired Judge, presumably, sitting four square at his house door dressed all in white. An Anglo-Indian presumably.

And here a shindy of brawling women, drunken women; here only a policeman and looming houses, high houses, domed houses, churches, parliaments, and the hoot of a steamer on the river, a hollow misty cry. But it was her street, this, Clarissa's; cabs were rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn together, it seemed to him because they bore people going to her party, Clarissa's party.

The cold stream of visual impressions failed him now as if the eye were a cup that overflowed and let the rest run down its china walls unrecorded. The brain must wake now. The body must contract now, entering the house, the lighted house, where the door stood open, where the motor cars were standing, and bright women descending: the soul must brave itself to endure. He opened the big blade of his pocket-knife.

Lucy came running full tilt downstairs, having just nipped in to the drawing-room to smooth a cover, to straighten a chair, to pause a moment and feel whoever came in must think how clean, how bright, how beautifully cared for, when they saw the beautiful silver, the brass fire-irons, the new chair-covers, and the curtains of yellow chintz: she

appraised each; heard a roar of voices; people already coming up from dinner; she must fly!

The Prime Minister was coming, Agnes said: so she had heard them say in the dining-room, she said, coming in with a tray of glasses. Did it matter, did it matter in the least, one Prime Minister more or less? It made no difference at this hour of the night to Mrs. Walker among the plates, saucepans, cullenders, frying-pans, chicken in aspic, ice-cream freezers, pared crusts of bread, lemons, soup tureens, and pudding basins which, however hard they washed up in the scullery seemed to be all on top of her, on the kitchen table, on chairs, while the fire blared and roared, the electric lights glared, and still supper had to be laid. All she felt was, one Prime Minister more or less made not a scrap of difference to Mrs. Walker.

The ladies were going upstairs already, said Lucy; the ladies were going up, one by one, Mrs. Dalloway walking last and almost always sending back some message to the kitchen, "My love to Mrs. Walker," that was it one night. Next morning they would go over the dishes—the soup, the salmon; the salmon, Mrs. Walker knew, as usual underdone, for she always got nervous about the pudding and left it to Jenny; so it happened, the salmon was

always underdone. But some lady with fair hair and silver ornaments had said, Lucy said, about the entrée, was it really made at home? But it was the salmon that bothered Mrs. Walker, as she spun the plates round and round, and pulled in dampers and pulled out dampers; and there came a burst of laughter from the dining-room; a voice speaking; then another burst of laughter—the gentlemen enjoying themselves when the ladies had gone. The tokay, said Lucy running in. Mr. Dalloway had sent for the tokay, from the Emperor's cellars, the Imperial Tokay.

It was borne through the kitchen. Over her shoulder Lucy reported how Miss Elizabeth looked quite lovely; she couldn't take her eyes off her; in her pink dress, wearing the necklace Mr. Dalloway had given her. Jenny must remember the dog, Miss Elizabeth's fox-terrier, which, since it bit, had to be shut up and might, Elizabeth thought, want something. Jenny must remember the dog. But Jenny was not going upstairs with all those people about. There was a motor at the door already! There was a ring at the bell—and the gentlemen still in the dining-room, drinking tokay!

There, they were going upstairs; that was the first to come, and now they would come faster and

faster, so that Mrs. Parkinson (hired for parties) would leave the hall door ajar, and the hall would be full of gentlemen waiting (they stood waiting, sleeking down their hair) while the ladies took their cloaks off in the room along the passage; where Mrs. Barnet helped them, old Ellen Barnet, who had been with the family for forty years, and came every summer to help the ladies, and remembered mothers when they were girls, and though very unassuming did shake hands; said "milady" very respectfully, yet had a humorous way with her, looking at the young ladies, and ever so tactfully helping Lady Lovejoy, who had some trouble with her underbodice. And they could not help feeling, Lady Lovejoy and Miss Alice, that some little privilege in the matter of brush and comb, was awarded them having known Mrs. Barnet—"thirty years, milady," Mrs. Barnet supplied her. Young ladies did not use to rouge, said Lady Lovejoy, when they stayed at Bourton in the old days. And Miss Alice didn't need rouge, said Mrs. Barnet, looking at her fondly. There Mrs. Barnet would sit, in the cloakroom, patting down the furs, smoothing out the Spanish shawls, tidying the dressing-table, and knowing perfectly well, in spite of the furs and the embroideries, which were nice ladies, which were not. The dear

old body, said Lady Lovejoy, mounting the stairs, Clarissa's old nurse.

And then Lady Lovejoy stiffened. "Lady and Miss Lovejoy," she said to Mr. Wilkins (hired for parties). He had an admirable manner, as he bent and straightened himself, bent and straightened himself and announced with perfect impartiality "Lady and Miss Lovejoy . . . Sir John and Lady Needham . . . Miss Weld . . . Mr. Walsh." His manner was admirable; his family life must be irreproachable, except that it seemed impossible that a being with greenish lips and shaven cheeks could ever have blundered into the nuisance of children.

"How delightful to see you!" said Clarissa. She said it to every one. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst—effusive, insincere. It was a great mistake to have come. He should have stayed at home and read his book, thought Peter Walsh; should have gone to a music hall; he should have stayed at home, for he knew no one.

Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure, Clarissa felt it in her bones as dear old Lord Lexham stood there apologising for his wife who had caught cold at the Buckingham Palace garden party. She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticising her, there, in that corner. Why,

after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away like some Ellie Henderson! It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then, merely to criticise? Why always take, never give? Why not risk one's one little point of view? There he was wandering off, and she must speak to him. But she would not get the chance. Life was that—humiliation, renunciation. What Lord Lexham was saying was that his wife would not wear her furs at the garden party because "my dear, you ladies are all alike"—Lady Lexham being seventy-five at least! It was delicious, how they petted each other, that old couple. She did like old Lord Lexham. She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat. Anything, any explosion, any horror was better than people wandering aimlessly, standing in a bunch at a corner like Ellie Henderson, not even caring to hold themselves upright.

Gently the yellow curtain with all the birds of Paradise blew out and it seemed as if there were a flight of wings into the room, right out, then sucked back. (For the windows were open.) Was it draughty, Ellie Henderson wondered? She was subject to chills. But it did not matter that she should come down sneezing to-morrow; it was the girls with their naked shoulders she thought of, being trained to think of others by an old father, an invalid, late vicar of Bourton, but he was dead now; and her chills never went to her chest, never. It was the girls she thought of, the young girls with their bare shoulders, she herself having always been a wisp of a creature, with her thin hair and meagre profile; though now, past fifty, there was beginning to shine through some mild beam, something purified into distinction by years of self-abnegation but obscured again, perpetually, by her distressing gentility, her panic fear, which arose from three hundred pounds' income, and her weaponless state (she could not earn a penny) and it made her timid, and more and more disqualified year by year to meet well-dressed people who did this sort of thing every night of the season, merely telling their maids "I'll wear so and so," whereas Ellie Henderson ran out nervously and bought cheap pink

flowers, half a dozen, and then threw a shawl over her old black dress. For her invitation to Clarissa's party had come at the last moment. She was not quite happy about it. She had a sort of feeling that Clarissa had not meant to ask her this year.

Why should she? There was no reason really, except that they had always known each other. Indeed, they were cousins. But naturally they had rather drifted apart, Clarissa being so sought after. It was an event to her, going to a party. It was quite a treat just to see the lovely clothes. Wasn't that Elizabeth, grown up, with her hair done in the fashionable way, in the pink dress? Yet she could not be more than seventeen. She was very, very handsome. But girls when they first came out didn't seem to wear white as they used. (She must remember everything to tell Edith.) Girls wore straight frocks, perfectly tight, with skirts well above the ankles. It was not becoming, she thought.

So, with her weak eyesight, Ellie Henderson craned rather forward, and it wasn't so much she who minded not having any one to talk to (she hardly knew anybody there), for she felt that they were all such interesting people to watch; politicians presumably; Richard Dalloway's friends; but it was

Richard himself who felt that he could not let the poor creature go on standing there all the evening by herself.

"Well, Ellie, and how's the world treating *you?*" he said in his genial way, and Ellie Henderson, getting nervous and flushing and feeling that it was extraordinarily nice of him to come and talk to her, said that many people really felt the heat more than the cold.

"Yes, they do," said Richard Dalloway. "Yes."

But what more did one say?

"Hullo, Richard," said somebody, taking him by the elbow, and, good Lord, there was old Peter, old Peter Walsh. He was delighted to see him—ever so pleased to see him! He hadn't changed a bit. And off they went together walking right across the room, giving each other little pats, as if they hadn't met for a long time, Ellie Henderson thought, watching them go, certain she knew that man's face. A tall man, middle aged, rather fine eyes, dark, wearing spectacles, with a look of John Burrows. Edith would be sure to know.

The curtain with its flight of birds of Paradise blew out again. And Clarissa saw—she saw Ralph Lyon beat it back, and go on talking. So it wasn't a failure after all! it was going to be all right now—

her party. It had begun. It had started. But it was still touch and go. She must stand there for the present. People seemed to come in a rush.

Colonel and Mrs. Garrod . . . Mr. Hugh Whitbread . . . Mr. Bowley . . . Mrs. Hilbery . . . Lady Mary Maddox . . . Mr. Quin . . . intoned Wilkin. She had six or seven words with each, and they went on, they went into the rooms; into something now, not nothing, since Ralph Lyon had beat back the curtain.

And yet for her own part, it was too much of an effort. She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being—just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it; yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn't help feeling that she had, anyhow, made this happen, that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs. Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background, it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an ef-

fort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow.

"How delightful to see you!" she said. Dear old Sir Harry! He would know every one.

And what was so odd about it was the sense one had as they came up the stairs one after another, Mrs. Mount and Celia, Herbert Ainsty, Mrs. Dakers—oh and Lady Bruton!

"How awfully good of you to come!" she said, and she meant it—it was odd how standing there one felt them going on, going on, some quite old, some . . .

What name? Lady Rosseter? But who on earth was Lady Rosseter?

"Clarissa!" That voice! It was Sally Seton! Sally Seton! after all these years! She loomed through a mist. For she hadn't looked like *that*, Sally Seton, when Clarissa grasped the hot water can, to think of her under this roof, under this roof! Not like that!

All on top of each other, embarrassed, laughing, words tumbled out—passing through London; heard from Clara Haydon; what a chance of seeing you! So I thrust myself in—without an invitation. . . .

One might put down the hot water can quite composedly. The lustre had gone out of her. Yet

it was extraordinary to see her again, older, happier, less lovely. They kissed each other, first this cheek then that, by the drawing-room door, and Clarissa turned, with Sally's hand in hers, and saw her rooms full, heard the roar of voices, saw the candlesticks, the blowing curtains, and the roses which Richard had given her.

"I have five enormous boys," said Sally.

She had the simplest egotism, the most open desire to be thought first always, and Clarissa loved her for being still like that. "I can't believe it!" she cried, kindling all over with pleasure at the thought of the past.

But alas, Wilkins; Wilkins wanted her; Wilkins was emitting in a voice of commanding authority as if the whole company must be admonished and the hostess reclaimed from frivolity, one name:

"The Prime Minister," said Peter Walsh.

The Prime Minister? Was it really? Ellie Henderson marvelled. What a thing to tell Edith!

One couldn't laugh at him. He looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits—poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace. And to be fair, as he went his rounds, first with Clarissa then with Richard escorting him, he did it very well. He tried to look somebody. It

was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society. Old Lady Bruton, and she looked very fine too, very stalwart in her lace, swam up, and they withdrew into a little room which at once became spied upon, guarded, and a sort of stir and rustle rippled through every one, openly: the Prime Minister!

Lord, lord, the snobbery of the English! thought Peter Walsh, standing in the corner. How they loved dressing up in gold lace and doing homage! There! That must be, by Jove it was, Hugh Whitbread, snuffing round the precincts of the great, grown rather fatter, rather whiter, the admirable Hugh!

He looked always as if he were on duty, thought Peter, a privileged, but secretive being, hoarding secrets which he would die to defend, though it was only some little piece of tittle-tattle dropped by a court footman, which would be in all the papers tomorrow. Such were his rattles, his baubles, in playing with which he had grown white, come to the verge of old age, enjoying the respect and affection of all who had the privilege of knowing this type of

the English public school man. Inevitably one made up things like that about Hugh; that was his style; the style of those admirable letters which Peter had read thousands of miles across the sea in the *Times*, and had thanked God he was out of that pernicious hubble-bubble if it were only to hear baboons chatter and coolies beat their wives. An olive-skinned youth from one of the Universities stood obsequiously by. Him he would patronise, initiate, teach how to get on. For he liked nothing better than doing kindnesses, making the hearts of old ladies palpitate with the joy of being thought of in their age, their affliction, thinking themselves quite forgotten, yet here was dear Hugh driving up and spending an hour talking of the past, remembering trifles, praising the home-made cake, though Hugh might eat cake with a Duchess any day of his life, and, to look at him, probably did spend a good deal of time in that agreeable occupation. The All-judging, the All-merciful, might excuse. Peter Walsh had no mercy. Villains there must be, and God knows the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in a train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread and his kindness. Look at him now, on tiptoe, dancing forward, bowing and scraping, as the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton

emerged, intimating for all the world to see that he was privileged to say something, something private, to Lady Bruton as she passed. She stopped. She wagged her fine old head. She was thanking him presumably for some piece of servility. She had her toadies, minor officials in Government offices who ran about putting through little jobs on her behalf, in return for which she gave them luncheon. But she derived from the eighteenth century. She was all right.

And now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings, and a silver-green mermaid's dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed; turned, caught her scarf in some other woman's dress, unhitched it, laughed, all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element. But age had brushed her; even as a mermaid might behold in her glass the setting sun on some very clear evening over the waves. There was a breath of tenderness; her severity, her prudery, her woodenness were all warmed through now, and she had about her as she said good-bye to the thick gold-laced man who

was doing his best, and good luck to him, to look important, an inexpressible dignity; an exquisite cordiality; as if she wished the whole world well, and must now, being on the very verge and rim of things, take her leave. So she made him think. (But he was not in love.)

Indeed, Clarissa felt, the Prime Minister had been good to come. And, walking down the room with him, with Sally there and Peter there and Richard very pleased, with all those people rather inclined, perhaps, to envy, she had felt that intoxication of the moment, that dilatation of the nerves of the heart itself till it seemed to quiver, steeped, upright; —yes, but after all it was what other people felt, that; for, though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting, still these semblances, these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart; and it might be that she was growing old but they satisfied her no longer as they used; and suddenly, as she saw the Prime Minister go down the stairs, the gilt rim of the Sir Joshua picture of the little girl with a muff brought back Kilman with a rush; Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real. Ah, how she hated her—hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power;

Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile (Richard would say, What nonsense!). She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends—not Mrs. Durrant and Clara, Sir William and Lady Bradshaw, Miss Truelock and Eleanor Gibson (whom she saw coming upstairs). They must find her if they wanted her. She was for the party!

There was her old friend Sir Harry.

"Dear Sir Harry!" she said, going up to the fine old fellow who had produced more bad pictures than any other two Academicians in the whole of St. John's Wood (they were always of cattle, standing in sunset pools absorbing moisture, or signifying, for he had a certain range of gesture, by the raising of one foreleg and the toss of the antlers, "the Approach of the Stranger"—all his activities, dining out, racing, were founded on cattle standing absorbing moisture in sunset pools).

"What are you laughing at?" she asked him. For Willie Titcomb and Sir Harry and Herbert Ainsty were all laughing. But no. Sir Harry could not tell Clarissa Dalloway (much though he liked her; of her type he thought her perfect, and threatened to paint her) his stories of the music hall stage. He chaffed her about her party. He missed his brandy.

These circles, he said, were above him. But he liked her; respected her, in spite of her damnable, difficult upper-class refinement, which made it impossible to ask Clarissa Dalloway to sit on his knee. And up came that wandering will-o-the-wisp, that vagulous phosphorescence, old Mrs. Hilbery, stretching her hands to the blaze of his laughter (about the Duke and the Lady), which, as she heard it across the room, seemed to reassure her on a point which sometimes bothered her if she woke early in the morning and did not like to call her maid for a cup of tea; how it is certain we must die.

"They won't tell us their stories," said Clarissa.

"Dear Clarissa!" exclaimed Mrs. Hilbery. She looked to-night, she said, so like her mother as she first saw her walking in a garden in a grey hat.

And really Clarissa's eyes filled with tears. Her mother, walking in a garden! But alas, she must go.

For there was Professor Brierly, who lectured on Milton, talking to little Jim Hutton (who was unable even for a party like this to compass both tie and waistcoat or make his hair lie flat), and even at this distance they were quarrelling, she could see. For Professor Brierly was a very queer fish. With all those degrees, honours, lectureships between him

and the scribblers he suspected instantly an atmosphere not favourable to his queer compound; his prodigious learning and timidity; his wintry charm without cordiality; his innocence blent with snobbery; he quivered if made conscious by a lady's unkempt hair, a youth's boots, of an underworld, very creditable doubtless, of rebels, of ardent young people; of would-be geniuses, and intimated with a little toss of the head, with a sniff—Humph!—the value of moderation; of some slight training in the classics in order to appreciate Milton. Professor Brierly (Clarissa could see) wasn't hitting it off with little Jim Hutton (who wore red socks, his black being at the laundry) about Milton. She interrupted.

She said she loved Bach. So did Hutton. That was the bond between them, and Hutton (a very bad poet) always felt that Mrs. Dalloway was far the best of the great ladies who took an interest in art. It was odd how strict she was. About music she was purely impersonal. She was rather a prig. But how charming to look at! She made her house so nice if it weren't for her Professors. Clarissa had half a mind to snatch him off and set him down at the piano in the back room. For he played divinely.

"But the noise!" she said. "The noise!"

"The sign of a successful party." Nodding urbanely, the Professor stepped delicately off.

"He knows everything in the whole world about Milton," said Clarissa.

"Does he indeed?" said Hutton, who would imitate the Professor throughout Hampstead; the Professor on Milton; the Professor on moderation; the Professor stepping delicately off.

But she must speak to that couple, said Clarissa, Lord Gayton and Nancy Below.

Not that *they* added perceptibly to the noise of the party. They were not talking (perceptibly) as they stood side by side by the yellow curtains. They would soon be off elsewhere, together; and never had very much to say in any circumstances. They looked; that was all. That was enough. They looked so clean, so sound, she with an apricot bloom of powder and paint, but he scrubbed, rinsed, with the eyes of a bird, so that no ball could pass him or stroke surprise him. He struck, he leapt, accurately, on the spot. Ponies' mouths quivered at the end of his reins. He had his honours, ancestral monuments, banners hanging in the church at home. He had his duties; his tenants; a mother and sisters; had been all day at Lords, and that was what they

were talking about—cricket, cousins, the movies—when Mrs. Dalloway came up. Lord Gayton liked her most awfully. So did Miss Blow. She had such charming manners

"It is angelic—it is delicious of you to have come!" she said. She loved Lords; she loved youth, and Nancy, dressed at enormous expense by the greatest artists in Paris, stood there looking as if her body had merely put forth, of its own accord, a green frill.

"I had meant to have dancing," said Clarissa.

For the young people could not talk. And why should they? Shout, embrace, swing, be up at dawn; carry sugar to ponies; kiss and caress the snouts of adorable chows; and then all tingling and streaming, plunge and swim. But the enormous resources of the English language, the power it bestows, after all, of communicating feelings (at their age, she and Peter would have been arguing all the evening), was not for them. They would solidify young. They would be good beyond measure to the people on the estate, but alone, perhaps, rather dull.

"What a pity!" she said. "I had hoped to have dancing."

It was so extraordinarily nice of them to have

come! But talk of dancing! The rooms were packed.

There was old Aunt Helena in her shawl. Alas, she must leave them—Lord Gayton and Nancy Blow. There was old Miss Parry, her aunt.

For Miss Helena Parry was not dead: Miss Parry was alive. She was past eighty. She ascended staircases slowly with a stick. She was placed in a chair (Richard had seen to it). People who had known Burma in the 'seventies were always led up to her. Where had Peter got to? They used to be such friends. For at the mention of India, or even Ceylon, her eyes (only one was glass) slowly deepened, became blue, beheld, not human beings—she had no tender memories, no proud illusions about Viceroys, Generals, Mutinies—it was orchids she saw, and mountain passes and herself carried on the backs of coolies in the 'sixties over solitary peaks; or descending to uproot orchids (startling blossoms, never beheld before) which she painted in water-colour; an indomitable Englishwoman, fretful if disturbed by the War, say, which dropped a bomb at her very door, from her deep meditation over orchids and her own figure journeying in the 'sixties in India—but here was Peter.

"Come and talk to Aunt Helena about Burma," said Clarissa.

And yet he had not had a word with her all the evening!

"We will talk later," said Clarissa, leading him up to Aunt Helena, in her white shawl, with her stick.

"Peter Walsh," said Clarissa.

That meant nothing.

Clarissa had asked her. It was tiring; it was noisy; but Clarissa had asked her. So she had come. It was a pity that they lived in London—Richard and Clarissa. If only for Clarissa's health it would have been better to live in the country. But Clarissa had always been fond of society.

"He has been in Burma," said Clarissa.

Ah. She could not resist recalling what Charles Darwin had said about her little book on the orchids of Burma.

(Clarissa must speak to Lady Bruton.)

No doubt it was forgotten now, her book on the orchids of Burma, but it went into three editions before 1870, she told Peter. She remembered him now. He had been at Bourton (and he had left her, Peter Walsh remembered, without a word in

the drawing-room that night when Clarissa had asked him to come boating).

"Richard so much enjoyed his lunch party," said Clarissa to Lady Bruton.

"Richard was the greatest possible help," Lady Bruton replied. "He helped me to write a letter. And how are you?"

"Oh, perfectly well!" said Clarissa. (Lady Bruton detested illness in the wives of politicians.)

"And there's Peter Walsh!" said Lady Bruton (for she could never think of anything to say to Clarissa; though she liked her. She had lots of fine qualities; but they had nothing in common—she and Clarissa. It might have been better if Richard had married a woman with less charm, who would have helped him more in his work. He had lost his chance of the Cabinet). "There's Peter Walsh!" she said, shaking hands with that agreeable sinner, that very able fellow who should have made a name for himself but hadn't (always in difficulties with women), and, of course, old Miss Parry. Wonderful old lady!

Lady Bruton stood by Miss Parry's chair, a spectral grenadier, draped in black, inviting Peter Walsh to lunch; cordial; but without small talk,

remembering nothing whatever about the flora or fauna of India. She had been there, of course; had stayed with three Viceroys; thought some of the Indian civilians uncommonly fine fellows; but what a tragedy it was—the state of India! The Prime Minister had just been telling her (old Miss Parry huddled up in her shawl, did not care what the Prime Minister had just been telling her), and Lady Bruton would like to have Peter Walsh's opinion, he being fresh from the centre, and she would get Sir Sampson to meet him, for really it prevented her from sleeping at night, the folly of it, the wickedness she might say, being a soldier's daughter. She was an old woman now, not good for much. But her house, her servants, her good friend Milly Brush—did he remember her?—were all there only asking to be used if—if they could be of help, in short. For she never spoke of England, but this isle of men, this dear, dear land, was in her blood (without reading Shakespeare), and if ever a woman could have worn the helmet and shot the arrow, could have led troops to attack, ruled with indomitable justice barbarian hordes and lain under a shield noseless in a church, or made a green grass mound on some primeval hillside, that woman

was Millicent Bruton. Debarred by her sex and some truancy, too, of the logical faculty (she found it impossible to write a letter to the *Times*), she had the thought of Empire always at hand, and had acquired from her association with that armoured goddess her ramrod bearing, her robustness of demeanour, so that one could not figure her even in death parted from the earth or roaming territories over which, in some spiritual shape, the Union Jack had ceased to fly. To be not English even among the dead—no, no! Impossible!

But was it Lady Bruton (whom she used to know)? Was it Peter Walsh grown grey? Lady Rosseter asked herself (who had been Sally Seton). It was old Miss Parry certainly—the old aunt who used to be so cross when she stayed at Bourton. Never should she forget running along the passage naked, and being sent for by Miss Parry! And Clarissa! oh Clarissa! Sally caught her by the arm.

Clarissa stopped beside them.

"But I can't stay," she said. "I shall come later. Wait," she said, looking at Peter and Sally. They must wait, she meant, until all these people had gone.

"I shall come back," she said, looking at her old

friends, Sally and Peter, who were shaking hands, and Sally, remembering the past no doubt, was laughing.

But her voice was wrung of its old ravishing richness; her eyes not aglow as they used to be, when she smoked cigars, when she ran down the passage to fetch her sponge bag, without a stitch of clothing on her, and Ellen Atkins asked, What if the gentlemen had met her? But everybody forgave her. She stole a chicken from the larder because she was hungry in the night; she smoked cigars in her bedroom; she left a priceless book in the punt. But everybody adored her (except perhaps Papa). It was her warmth; her vitality—she would paint, she would write. Old women in the village never to this day forgot to ask after "your friend in the red cloak who seemed so bright." She accused Hugh Whitbread, of all people (and there he was, her old friend Hugh, talking to the Portuguese Ambassador), of kissing her in the smoking-room to punish her for saying that women should have votes. Vulgar men did, she said. And Clarissa remembered having to persuade her not to denounce him at family prayers—which she was capable of doing with her daring, her recklessness, her melodramatic love of being the centre of everything and creating

scenes, and it was bound, Clarissa used to think, to end in some awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom; instead of which she had married, quite unexpectedly, a bald man with a large buttonhole who owned, it was said, cotton mills at Manchester. And she had five boys!

She and Peter had settled down together. They were talking: it seemed so familiar—that they should be talking. They would discuss the past. With the two of them (more even than with Richard) she shared her past; the garden; the trees; old Joseph Breitkopf singing Brahms without any voice; the drawing-room wallpaper; the smell of the mats. A part of this Sally must always be; Peter must always be. But she must leave them. There were the Bradshaws, whom she disliked. She must go up to Lady Bradshaw (in grey and silver, balancing like a sea-lion at the edge of its tank, barking for invitations, Duchesses, the typical successful man's wife), she must go up to Lady Bradshaw and say . . .

But Lady Bradshaw anticipated her.

"We are shockingly late, dear Mrs. Dalloway, we hardly dared to come in," she said.

And Sir William, who looked very distinguished, with his grey hair and blue eyes, said yes; they had

not been able to resist the temptation. He was talking to Richard about that Bill probably, which they wanted to get through the Commons. Why did the sight of him, talking to Richard, curl her up? He looked what he was, a great doctor. A man absolutely at the head of his profession, very powerful, rather worn. For think what cases came before him—people in the uttermost depths of misery; people on the verge of insanity; husbands and wives. He had to decide questions of appalling difficulty. Yet—what she felt was, one wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man.

"How is your son at Eton?" she asked Lady Bradshaw.

He had just missed his eleven, said Lady Bradshaw, because of the mumps. His father minded even more than he did, she thought "being," she said, "nothing but a great boy himself."

Clarissa looked at Sir William, talking to Richard. He did not look like a boy—not in the least like a boy. She had once gone with some one to ask his advice. He had been perfectly right; extremely sensible. But Heavens—what a relief to get out to the street again! There was some poor wretch sobbing, she remembered, in the waiting-room. But she did not know what it was—about Sir William; what

exactly she disliked. Only Richard agreed with her, "didn't like his taste, didn't like his smell." But he was extraordinarily able. They were talking about this Bill. Some case, Sir William was mentioning, lowering his voice. It had its bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock. There must be some provision in the Bill.

Sinking her voice, drawing Mrs. Dalloway into the shelter of a common femininity, a common pride in the illustrious qualities of husbands and their sad tendency to overwork, Lady Bradshaw (poor goose —one didn't dislike her) murmured how, "just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army." Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought.

She went on, into the little room where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton. Perhaps there was somebody there. But there was nobody. The chairs still kept the impress of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton, she turned deferentially, he sitting four-square, authoritatively. They had been talking about India. There was nobody. The

party's splendour fell to the floor, so strange it was to come in alone in her finery.

What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the

impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding hi treasure? "If it were now to die, 'twere now to l e most happy," she had said to herself once, coming down in white.

Or there were the poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had that passion and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a grea doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex r lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, th it was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times,* so that she could crouch like a bird

and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself.

Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success. Lady Bexborough and the rest of it. And once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton.

It was due to Richard; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank. Many a time had she gone, at Bourton when they were all talking, to look at the sky; or seen it between people's shoulders at dinner; seen it in London when she could not sleep. She walked to the window.

It held, foolish as the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky above West-

minster. She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was—ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles

dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room.

"But where is Clarissa?" said Peter. He was sitting on the sofa with Sally. (After all these years he really could not call her "Lady Rosseter.") "Where's the woman gone to?" he asked. "Where's Clarissa?"

Sally supposed, and so did Peter for the matter of that, that there were people of importance, politicians, whom neither of them knew unless by sight in the picture papers, whom Clarissa had to be nice to, had to talk to. She was with them. Yet there was Richard Dalloway not in the Cabinet. He hadn't been a success, Sally supposed? For herself, she scarcely ever read the papers. She sometimes saw his name mentioned. But then—well, she lived a very solitary life, in the wilds, Clarissa would say, among great merchants, great manufacturers, men, after all, who did things. She had done things too!

"I have five sons!" she told him.

Lord, Lord, what a change had come over her! the softness of motherhood; its egotism too. Last time they met, Peter remembered, had been among the

cauliflowers in the moonlight, the leaves "like rough bronze" she had said, with her literary turn; and she had picked a rose. She had marched him up and down that awful night, after the scene by the fountain; he was to catch the midnight train. Heavens, he had wept!

That was his old trick, opening a pocket-knife, thought Sally, always opening and shutting a knife when he got excited. They had been very, very intimate, she and Peter Walsh, when he was in love with Clarissa, and there was that dreadful, ridiculous scene over Richard Dalloway at lunch. She had called Richard "Wickham." Why not call Richard "Wickham"? Clarissa had flared up! and indeed they had never seen each other since, she and Clarissa, not more than half a dozen times perhaps in the last ten years. And Peter Walsh had gone off to India, and she had heard vaguely that he had made an unhappy marriage, and she didn't know whether he had any children, and she couldn't ask him, for he had changed. He was rather shrivelled-looking, but kinder, she felt, and she had a real affection for him, for he was connected with her youth, and she still had a little Emily Brontë he had given her, and he was to write, surely? In those days he was to write.

"Have you written?" she asked him, spreading her hand, her firm and shapely hand, on her knee in a way he recalled.

"Not a word!" said Peter Walsh, and she laughed.

She was still attractive, still a personage, Sally Seton. But who was this Rosseter? He wore two camellias on his wedding day—that was all Peter knew of him. "They have myriads of servants, miles of conservatories," Clarissa wrote; something like that. Sally owned it with a shout of laughter.

"Yes, I have ten thousand a year"—whether before the tax was paid or after, she couldn't remember, for her husband, "whom you must meet," she said, "whom you would like," she said, did all that for her.

And Sally used to be in rags and tatters. She had pawned her grandmother's ring which Marie Antoinette had given her great-grandfather to come to Bourton.

Oh yes, Sally remembered; she had it still, a ruby ring which Marie Antoinette had given her great-grandfather. She never had a penny to her name in those days, and going to Bourton always meant some frightful pinch. But going to Bourton had meant so much to her—had kept her sane, she be-

lieved, so unhappy had she been at home. But that was all a thing of the past—all over now, she said. And Mr. Parry was dead; and Miss Parry was still alive. Never had he had such a shock in his life! said Peter. He had been quite certain she was dead. And the marriage had been, Sally supposed, a success? And that very handsome, very self-possessed young woman was Elizabeth, over there, by the curtains, in red.

(She was like a poplar, she was like a river, she was like a hyacinth, Willie Titcomb was thinking. Oh how much nicer to be in the country and do what she liked! She could hear her poor dog howling, Elizabeth was certain.) She was not a bit like Clarissa, Peter Walsh said.

"Oh, Clarissa!" said Sally.

What Sally felt was simply this. She had owed Clarissa an enormous amount. They had been friends, not acquaintances, friends, and she still saw Clarissa all in white going about the house with her hands full of flowers—to this day tobacco plants made her think of Bourton. But—did Peter understand?—she lacked something. Lacked what was it? She had charm; she had extraordinary charm. But to be frank (and she felt that Peter was an old friend, a real friend—did absence mat-

ter? did distance matter? She had often wanted to write to him, but torn it up, yet felt he understood, for people understand without things being said, as one realises growing old, and old she was, had been that afternoon to see her sons at Eton, where they had the mumps), to be quite frank then, how could Clarissa have done it?—married Richard Dalloway? a sportsman, a man who cared only for dogs. Literally, when he came into the room he smelt of the stables. And then all this? She waved her hand.

Hugh Whitbread it was, strolling past in his white waistcoat, dim, fat, blind, past everything he looked, except self-esteem and comfort.

"He's not going to recognise *us*," said Sally, and really she hadn't the courage—so that was Hugh! the admirable Hugh!

"And what does he do?" she asked Peter.

He blacked the King's boots or counted bottles at Windsor, Peter told her. Peter kept his sharp tongue still! But Sally must be frank, Peter said. That kiss now, Hugh's.

On the lips, she assured him, in the smoking-room one evening. She went straight to Clarissa in a rage. Hugh didn't do such things! Clarissa said, the admirable Hugh! Hugh's socks were without

exception the most beautiful she had ever seen—and now his evening dress. Perfect! And had he children?

"Everybody in the room has six sons at Eton," Peter told her, except himself. He, thank God, had none. No sons, no daughters, no wife. Well, he didn't seem to mind, said Sally. He looked younger, she thought, than any of them.

But it had been a silly thing to do, in many ways, Peter said, to marry like that; "a perfect goose she was," he said, but, he said, 'we had a splendid time of it," but how could that be? Sally wondered; what did he mean? and how odd it was to know him and yet not know a single thing that had happened to him. And did he say it out of pride? Very likely, for after all it must be galling for him (though he was an oddity, a sort of sprite, not at all an ordinary man), it must be lonely at his age to have no home, nowhere to go to. But he must stay with them for weeks and weeks. Of course he would; he would love to stay with them, and that was how it came out. All these years the Dalloways had never been once. Time after time they had asked them. Clarissa (for it was Clarissa of course) would not come. For, said Sally, Clarissa was at heart a snob—one had to admit it, a snob. And it was that that

was between them, she was convinced. Clarissa thought she had married beneath her, her husband being—she was proud of it—a miner's son. Every penny they had he had earned. As a little boy (her voice trembled) he had carried great sacks.

(And so she would go on, Peter felt, hour after hour; the miner's son; people thought she had married beneath her; her five sons; and what was the other thing—plants, hydrangeas, syringas, very, very rare hibiscus lilies that never grow north of the Suez Canal, but she, with one gardener in a suburb near Manchester, had beds of them, positively beds! Now all that Clarissa had escaped, unmaternal as she was.)

A snob was she? Yes, in many ways. Where was she, all this time? It was getting late.

"Yet," said Sally, "when I heard Clarissa was giving a party, I felt I couldn't *not* come—must see her again (and I'm staying in Victoria Street, practically next door). So I just came without an invitation. But," she whispered, "tell me, do. Who is this?"

It was Mrs. Hilbery, looking for the door. For how late it was getting! And, she murmured, as the night grew later, as people went, one found old friends; quiet nooks and corners; and the loveliest

views. Did they know, she asked, that they were surrounded by an enchanted garden? Lights and trees and wonderful gleaming lakes and the sky. Just a few fairy lamps, Clarissa Dalloway had said, in the back garden! But she was a magician! It was a park. . . . And she didn't know their names, but friends she knew they were, friends without names, songs without words, always the best. But there were so many doors, such unexpected places, she could not find her way.

"Old Mrs. Hilbery," said Peter; but who was that? that lady standing by the curtain all the evening, without speaking? He knew her face; connected her with Bourton. Surely she used to cut up underclothes at the large table in the window? Davidson, was that her name?

"Oh, that is Ellie Henderson," said Sally. Clarissa was really very hard on her. She was a cousin, very poor. Clarissa *was* hard on people.

She was rather, said Peter. Yet, said Sally, in her emotional way, with a rush of that enthusiasm which Peter used to love her for, yet dreaded a little now, so effusive she might become—how generous to her friends Clarissa was! and what a rare quality one found it, and how sometimes at night or on Christmas Day, when she counted up her

blessings, she put that friendship first. They were young; that was it. Clarissa was pure-hearted; that was it. Peter would think her sentimental. So she was. For she had come to feel that it was the only thing worth saying—what one felt. Cleverness was silly. One must say simply what one felt.

"But I do not know," said Peter Walsh, "what I feel."

Poor Peter, thought Sally. Why did not Clarissa come and talk to them? That was what he was longing for. She knew it. All the time he was thinking only of Clarissa, and was fidgeting with his knife.

He had not found life simple, Peter said. His relations with Clarissa had not been simple. It had spoilt his life, he said. (They had been so intimate—he and Sally Seton, it was absurd not to say it.) One could not be in love twice, he said. And what could she say? Still, it is better to have loved (but he would think her sentimental—he used to be so sharp). He must come and stay with them in Manchester. That is all very true, he said. All very true. He would love to come and stay with them, directly he had done what he had to do in London.

And Clarissa had cared for him more than she

had ever cared for Richard. Sally was positive of that.

"No, no, no!" said Peter (Sally should not have said that—she went too far). That good fellow—there he was at the end of the room, holding forth, the same as ever, dear old Richard. Who was he talking to? Sally asked, that very distinguished-looking man? Living in the wilds as she did, she had an insatiable curiosity to know who people were. But Peter did not know. He did not like his looks, he said, probably a Cabinet Minister. Of them all, Richard seemed to him the best, he said—the most disinterested.

"But what has he done?" Sally asked. Public work, she supposed. And were they happy together? Sally asked (she herself was extremely happy); for, she admitted, she knew nothing about them, only jumped to conclusions, as one does, for what can one know even of the people one lives with every day? she asked. Are we not all prisoners? She had read a wonderful play about a man who scratched on the wall of his cell, and she had felt that was true of life—one scratched on the wall. Despairing of human relationships (people were so difficult), she often went into her garden and got from her flowers a peace which men and women

never gave her. But no; he did not like cabbages; he preferred human beings, Peter said. Indeed, the young are beautiful, Sally said, watching Elizabeth cross the room. How unlike Clarissa at her age! Could he make anything of her? She would not open her lips. Not much, not yet, Peter admitted. She was like a lily, Sally said, a lily by the side of a pool. But Peter did not agree that we know nothing. We know everything, he said; at least he did.

But these two, Sally whispered, these two coming now (and really she must go, if Clarissa did not come soon), this distinguished-looking man and his rather common-looking wife who had been talking to Richard—what could one know about people like that?

"That they're damnable humbugs," said Peter, looking at them casually. He made Sally laugh.

But Sir William Bradshaw stopped at the door to look at a picture. He looked in the corner for the engraver's name. His wife looked too. Sir William Bradshaw was so interested in art.

When one was young, said Peter, one was too much excited to know people. Now that one was old, fifty-two to be precise (Sally was fifty-five, in body, she said, but her heart was like a girl's of twenty); now that one was mature then, said Peter,

one could watch, one could understand, and one did not lose the power of feeling, he said. No, that is true, said Sally. She felt more deeply, more passionately, every year. It increased, he said, alas, perhaps, but one should be glad of it—it went on increasing in his experience. There was some one in India. He would like to tell Sally about her. He would like Sally to know her She was married, he said. She had two small children. They must all come to Manchester, said Sally—he must promise before they left.

There's Elizabeth, he said, she feels not half what we feel, not yet. But, said Sally, watching Elizabeth go to her father, one can see they are devoted to each other. She could feel it by the way Elizabeth went to her father.

For her father had been looking at her, as he stood talking to the Bradshaws, and he had thought to himself, Who is that lovely girl? And suddenly he realised that it was his Elizabeth, and he had not recognised her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock! Elizabeth had felt him looking at her as she talked to Willie Titcomb. So she went to him and they stood together, now that the party was almost over, looking at the people going, and the rooms getting emptier and emptier, with things scattered on

the floor. Even Ellie Henderson was going, nearly last of all, though no one had spoken to her, but she had wanted to see everything, to tell Edith. And Richard and Elizabeth were rather glad it was over, but Richard was proud of his daughter. And he had not meant to tell her, but he could not help telling her. He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, Who is that lovely girl? and it was his daughter! That did make her happy. But her poor dog was howling.

"Richard has improved. You are right," said Sally. "I shall go and talk to him. I shall say good-night. What does the brain matter," said Lady Rosseter, getting up, "compared with the heart?"

"I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?

It is Clarissa, he said.

For there she was.

THE END

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS

By SEAN O'CASEY

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SEAN O'CASEY AND HIS PLAYS

SEAN O'CASEY (Shaun O'Cathasaigh) was born in Dublin in 1884 and spent most of his early life struggling against poverty and disease in the slums. Ill health, poor eyesight, and the necessity of earning a living at the earliest possible moment prevented him from obtaining a formal education. As a boy, O'Casey was sent off to push carts, dig ditches, wrap parcels, deliver papers; later he became a laborer on railroads and construction projects. He early interested himself in the workers' movement, and in the Gaelic League, and took part in the Easter Rebellion of 1916 which forms the setting of *The Plough and the Stars.*

Out of this background, and a love of Shakespeare and the theatre gratified only by a few hard bought visits to the Abbey, O'Casey became the leading playwright of post-war Ireland. His first produced play, *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1922), written, not surprisingly, out of his own experiences, deals with the Fenian troubles with England in 1921. It is a somewhat ramshackle composition with nonetheless the close observation and engaging characters which are his chief stock in trade. He followed this with two trivial farces, little more than exercises in construction. His great talents were fully realized in *Juno and the Paycock* (1925), a tragicomedy which has become a classic of the modern theatre. He recalls the Easter Rebellion in which he had participated, and the play is his observation (without auctorial comment) of the effect of the sacrifices of himself and of those others who thought "no man can do enough for Ireland." It is bitter and disillusioned and at the same time affectionate and understanding. The play is constructed almost in the manner of Tchekhov, with sudden juxtapositions of comedy and pathos, and audiences are often uncertain whether to laugh or to cry. This characteristic structure is what lends O'Casey's works their sense of being a picture of life, of reality.

In *The Plough and the Stars,* O'Casey paints on a larger canvas. He seems here to have recaptured the whole existence of the urban Irish working classes, as Synge had the peasants. The play throbs with life, with humor and tragedy, sympathy and hatred. The genius for comic portraiture which created Captain Boyle in *Juno* produces in this play Fluther Good, the carpenter, Peter Flynn, and the Young Covey. The pathetic and human Juno here becomes Nora and Bessie Burgess. Comic or tragic, these characters are not types but complex human beings.

The play was received by yet another in the long series of riots which have accompanied opening nights at the Abbey Theatre. The audience resented the pessimistic attitude taken about the Revolutionaries, and the degraded picture of city life. At one point during the performance, a dozen women climbed out of the pit and onto the stage to debate the importance of "morality, patriotism, and the virtues of home life" with the actors; and at the end of the play, W. B. Yeats came forward and announced to the howling audience, "You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be the ever-recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius?"

Yeats, although opposed to the realistic drama as a whole, was a stanch advocate of O'Casey, comparing him at one time with Swift. But after *The Plough* riots, the playwright left Ireland and settled in England where, removed from his immediate inspiration, he began experimenting with form and trying his hand at expressionism. *The Silver Tassie,* his first play in the new genre, was rejected by Yeats with the explanation, "Your great power of the past has been the creation of some unique character who dominated all about him and was himself a main impulse in some action that filled the play from beginning to end." This, coupled with the Tchekhovian structure (although he had seen only a one-act play by the great Russian), is the secret of O'Casey's success and the basis of his technique.

He has continued to write in England semi-expressionist plays and volumes of autobiography. Several of the plays have been produced with some success, most notably *Within the Gates* (1933), but they are largely without life except when a realistically observed or comically conceived Irishman is on the scene, and some of the latest have been marred as drama by a tendency to lecture the audience on communist doctrine. But his

tragedy, *The Plough and the Stars,* and the tragicomic *Juno and the Paycock,* are contributions of lasting value to the contemporary drama, and their great central figures incarnate in the inimitable performances of Barry Fitzgerald are among the most memorable of the post-war theatre.

The Plough and the Stars was first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1926, with F. J. McCormick as Clitheroe, Barry Fitzgerald as Fluther, and Maureen Delaney as Bessie Burgess. In the same year it was presented in London with Arthur Sinclair as Fluther and Sara Allgood as Bessie.

CHARACTERS

JACK CLITHEROE, *a bricklayer-commandant in the Irish Citizen Army*
NORA CLITHEROE, *his wife*
PETER FLYNN, *a labourer—Nora's uncle*
THE YOUNG COVEY, *a fitter—Clitheroe's cousin* } *Residents in*
BESSIE BURGESS, *a street fruit-vendor* } *the tenement*
MRS. GOGAN, *a charwoman*
MOLLSER, *her consumptive child*
FLUTHER GOOD, *a carpenter*
LIEUT. LANGON, *a civil servant—of the Irish Volunteers*
CAPT. BRENNAN, *a chicken butcher—of the Irish Citizen Army*
CORPORAL STODDART, *of the Wiltshires*
SERGEANT TINLEY, *of the Wiltshires*
ROSIE REDMOND, *a daughter of "the Digs"*
A BAR-TENDER
A WOMAN
THE FIGURE IN THE WINDOW

ACT I—*The living-room of the Clitheroe flat in a Dublin tenement*
ACT II—*A public-house, outside of which a meeting is being held*
ACT III—*The street outside the Clitheroe tenement*
ACT IV—*The room of Bessie Burgess*
TIME—*Acts I and II, November 1915; Acts III and IV, Easter Week, 1916. A few days elapse between Acts III and IV*

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

ACT ONE

SCENE—*The home of the* CLITHEROES. *It consists of the front and back drawing-rooms in a fine old Georgian house, struggling for its life against the assaults of time and the more savage assaults of the tenants. The room shown is the back drawing-room, wide, spacious and lofty. At back is the entrance to the front drawing-room. The space, originally occupied by folding doors, is now draped with casement cloth of a dark purple, decorated with a design in reddish-purple. One of the curtains is pulled aside, giving a glimpse of the front drawing-room, at the end of which can be seen the wide, lofty windows looking out into the street. The room directly in front of the audience is furnished in a way that suggests an attempt towards a finer expression of domestic life. The large fireplace on* L. *is of wood, painted to look like marble (the original has been taken away by the landlord). Below the fireplace, on the wall, is a small mirror. On the mantelshelf are two candlesticks of dark carved wood. Between them is a small clock. Over the clock, on wall, is a picture of "The Sleeping Venus." On the right of the entrance to the front drawing-room is a copy of "The Gleaners," on the opposite side a copy of "The Angelus." Underneath "The Gleaners" is a chest of drawers on which stands a green bowl filled with scarlet dahlias and white chrysanthemums. Near to the fireplace is a couch which at night forms a double bed for* CLITHEROE *and* NORA. *Near the end of the room opposite to the fireplace is a gate-legged table, covered with a cloth. On top of the table a huge cavalry sword is lying. To the* L. *above fireplace is a door which leads to a lobby from which the staircase leads to the hall. The floor is covered with a dark green linoleum. The room is dim except where it is illuminated from the glow of the fire.*

FLUTHER GOOD *is repairing the lock of door,* L. *A claw hammer is on a chair beside him, and he has a screwdriver in his hand. He is a man of 40 years of age, rarely surrendering to thoughts of anxiety, fond of his "oil" but determined to conquer the habit before he dies. He is square-jawed and harshly featured; under the left eye is a scar, and his nose is bent from a smashing blow received in a fistic battle long ago. He is bald, save for a few peeping tufts of reddish hair around his ears; and his upper lip is hidden by a scrubby red moustache, embroidered here and there with a grey hair. He is dressed in a seedy black suit, cotton shirt with a soft collar, and wears a very respectable little black bow. On his head is a faded jerry hat, which, when he is excited, he has a habit of knocking farther back on his head, in a series of taps. In an argument he usually fills with sound and fury, generally signifying a row. He is in his shirt sleeves at present, and wears a soiled white apron, from a pocket in which sticks a carpenter's two-foot rule. He has just finished the job of putting on a new lock, and, filled with satisfaction, he is opening and shutting the door, enjoying the completion of a work well done. Sitting at the fire, airing a white shirt, is* PETER FLYNN. *He is a little, thin bit of a man, with a face shaped like a lozenge; on his cheeks and under his chin is a straggling wiry beard of a dirty-white and lemon hue. His face invariably wears a look of animated anguish, mixed with irritated defiance, as if everybody was at war with him, and he at war with everybody. He is cocking his head in such a way that suggests resentment at the presence of* FLUTHER, *who pays no attention to him, apparently, but is really furtively watching him.* PETER *is clad in a singlet, white whipcord knee-breeches, and is in his stockinged feet.*

A voice is heard speaking outside of door L. (*it is that of* MRS. GOGAN *talking to someone*).

Mrs. Gogan [*outside door* L.]. Who are you lookin' for, sir? Who? Mrs. Clitheroe? . . . Oh, excuse me. Oh ay, up this way. She's out, I think: I seen her goin'. Oh, you've somethin' for her. Oh, excuse me. You're from Arnott's. . . . I see. . . . You've a parcel for her. . . . Righto. . . . I'll take it. . . . I'll give it to her the min-

ute she comes in. . . . It'll be quite safe. . . . Oh, sign that. . . . Excuse me. . . . Where? . . . Here? . . . No, there; righto. Am I to put Maggie or Mrs.? What is it? You dunno? Oh, excuse me.

[MRS. GOGAN *opens the door and comes in. She is a doleful-looking little woman of 40, insinuating manner and sallow complexion. She is fidgety and nervous, terribly talkative, has a habit of taking up things that may be near her and fiddling with them while she is speaking. Her heart is aflame with curiosity, and a fly could not come into nor go out of the house without her knowing. She has a draper's parcel in her hand, the knot of the twine tying it is untied*]

[MRS. GOGAN *crosses in front of* FLUTHER, *behind the couch, to the table* R., *where she puts the parcel, fingering it till she has the paper off, showing a cardboard box.* PETER, *more resentful of this intrusion than of* FLUTHER'S *presence, gets up from the chair, and without looking around, his head carried at an angry cock, marches into the room at back. He leaves the shirt on the back of the chair*]

[*Removing the paper and opening the cardboard box it contains*] I wondher what's this now? A hat! [*She takes out a hat, black, with decorations in red and gold*] God, she's goin' to th' divil lately for style! That hat, now, cost more than a penny. Such notions of upperosity she's getting. [*Putting the hat on her head*] Swank! [*Turning to* FLUTHER] Eh, Fluther, swank, what!

[FLUTHER *looks over at her, then goes on opening and shutting the door*]

Fluther. She's a pretty little Judy, all the same.

Mrs. Gogan. Ah, she is, an' she isn't. There's prettiness an' prettiness in it. I'm always sayin' that her skirts are a little too short for a married woman. An' to see her, sometimes of an evenin', in her glad-neck gown would make a body's blood run cold. I do be ashamed of me life before her husband. An' th' way she thries to be polite, with her "Good mornin', Mrs. Gogan," when she's goin' down, an' her "Good evenin', Mrs. Gogan," when she's comin' up. But there's politeness an' politeness in it.

Fluther. They seem to get on well together all th' same.

Mrs. Gogan. Ah, they do, an' they don't. The pair o' them used to be like two turtle doves always billin' an' cooin'. You couldn't come into th' room but you'd feel, instinctive like, that they'd just been afther kissin' an' cuddlin' each other. . . . It often made me shiver, for, afther all, there's kissin' an' cuddlin' in it. But I'm thinkin' he's beginnin' to take things more quietly; the mysthery of havin' a woman's a mysthery no longer. . . . She dhresses herself to keep him with her, but it's no use—afther a month or two, th' wondher of a woman wears off.

[MRS. GOGAN *takes off the hat, and puts it back in the box; going on to rearrange paper round box, and tie it up again*]

Fluther. I dunno, I dunno. Not wishin' to say anything derogatory, I think it's all a question of location: when a man finds th' wondher of one woman beginnin' to die, it's usually beginnin' to live in another.

Mrs. Gogan. She's always grumblin' about havin' to live in a tenement house. "I wouldn't like to spend me last hour in one, let alone live me life in a tenement," says she. "Vaults," says she, "that are hidin' th' dead, instead of homes that are sheltherin' th' livin'." "Many a good one," says I, "was reared in a tenement house." Oh, you know, she's a well-up little lassie, too; able to make a shillin' go where another would have to spend a pound. She's wipin' th' eyes of th' Covey an' poor oul' Pether—everybody knows that—screwin' every penny she can out o' them, in ordher to turn th' place into a babby-house. An' she has th' life frightened out o' them; washin' their face, combin' their hair, wipin' their feet, brushin' their clothes, thrimmin' their nails, cleanin' their teeth—God Almighty, you'd think th' poor men were undhergoin' penal servitude.

Fluther [*with an exclamation of disgust*]. A-a-ah, that's goin' beyond th' beyonds in a tenement house. That's a little bit too derogatory.

[PETER *enters from room, back, head elevated and resentful fire in his eyes; he is still in his singlet and trousers, but is now wearing a pair of unlaced boots—possibly to be decent in the presence of* MRS. GOGAN]

[PETER *comes down* C. *and crosses, front of settee, to chair in front of fire; he*

turns the shirt which he has left to air on the back of the chair, then goes, front of couch, to the chest of drawers, back L., *opens drawer after drawer, looking for something; as he fails to find it, he closes each drawer with a snap. He jerks out things neatly folded, and shoves them back into the drawers any way*]

Peter [*in anguish, snapping a drawer shut*]. Well, God Almighty, give me patience.

[PETER *returns, front of couch, to the fireplace, gives the shirt a vicious turn on the back of the chair, and goes back, front of couch, to room, back,* FLUTHER *and* MRS. GOGAN *watching him furtively all the time*]

Mrs. Gogan [*curiously*]. I wondher what is he foostherin' for now?

Fluther [*coming* C.]. He's adornin' himself for the meeting to-night. [*He pulls a handbill from one of his pockets, and reads*] "Great Demonsthration an' Torchlight Procession around places in the City sacred to th' memory of Irish Pathriots to be concluded be a meetin', at which will be taken an oath of fealty to th' Irish Republic. Formation in Parnell Square at eight o'clock." Well, they can hold it for Fluther. I'm up th' pole; no more dhrink for Fluther. It's three days now since I touched a dhrop, an' I feel a new man already.

[*He goes back to door* L.]

Mrs. Gogan. Isn't oul' Peter a funny-lookin' little man? . . . Like somethin' you'd pick off a Christmas Tree. . . . When he's dhressed up in his canonicals, you'd wondher where he'd been got. God forgive me, when I see him in them, I always think he must ha' had a Mormon for a father! He an' th' Covey can't abide each other; th' pair o' them is always at it, thryin' to best each other. There'll be blood dhrawn one o' these days.

Fluther. How is it that Clitheroe himself, now, doesn't have anythin' to do with th' Citizen Army? A couple o' months ago, an' you'd hardly ever see him without his gun, an' th' Red Hand o' Liberty Hall in his hat.

Mrs. Gogan. Just because he wasn't made a Captain of. He wasn't goin' to be in anything where he couldn't be conspishuous. He was so cocksure o' being made one that he bought a Sam Browne belt, an' was always puttin' it on an' standin' at th' door showing it off, till th' man came an' put out th' street lamps on him. God, I think he used to bring it to bed with him! But I'm tellin' you herself was delighted that that cock didn't crow, for she's like a clockin' hen if he leaves her sight for a minute.

[*While she is talking she takes up a book from the table, looks into it in a near-sighted way, and then leaves it back. She now lifts up the sword, and proceeds to examine it*]

Be th' look of it, this must ha' been a general's sword. . . . All th' gold lace an' th' fine figaries on it. . . . Sure it's twiced too big for him.

[FLUTHER *crosses from door* L. *behind couch, back of table, where* MRS. GOGAN *is examining the sword, and looks at it, standing to* L. *of* MRS. GOGAN]

Fluther [*contemptuously*]. Ah, it's a baby's rattle he ought to have, an' he as he is, with thoughts tossin' in his head of what may happen to him on th' Day of Judgement.

[PETER *appears at the curtained door, back, sees* MRS. GOGAN *with the sword, and a look of vexation comes on to his face. He comes down* C. *to the table, snatches the sword out of* MRS. GOGAN'S *hands, and bangs it back on the table. He then returns into room, back, without speaking*]

Mrs. Gogan [*to* PETER, *as he snatches the sword*]. Oh, excuse me. [*To* FLUTHER] Isn't he the surly oul' rascal, Fluther?

[*She wanders from the table, back of the couch, to the chest of drawers, where she stops for a few moments, pulling out drawers and pushing them in again*]

Fluther [*leaning against left side of the table*]. Take no notice of him. . . . You'd think he was dumb, but when you get his goat, or he has a few jars up, he's vice versa.

[FLUTHER *coughs.* MRS. GOGAN, *who has wandered from the chest of drawers, down* L., *to the fireplace, where she is fingering* PETER'S *shirt, turns to look at* FLUTHER, *as soon as she hears the cough*]

Mrs. Gogan [*with an ominous note in her voice*]. Oh, you've got a cold on you, Fluther.

Fluther [*carelessly*]. Ah, it's only a little one.

Mrs. Gogan. You'd want to be careful, all th' same. I knew a woman, a big lump of a woman, red-faced an' round-bodied, a little awkard on her feet; you'd think, to look at her, she could put out her two arms an' lift a two-storied house on th' top of her head; got a ticklin' in her throat, an' a little cough, an' th' next mornin' she had a little catchin' in her chest, an' they had just time to wet her lips with a little rum, an' off she went. [*She begins to look at and handle the shirt*]

Fluther [*a little nervously*]. It's only a little cold I have; there's nothing derogatory wrong with me.

Mrs. Gogan [*warningly*]. I dunno; there's many a man this minute lowerin' a pint, thinkin' of a woman, or pickin' out a winner, or doin' work as you're doin', while th' hearse dhrawn be th' horses with the black plumes is dhrivin' up to his own hall door, an' a voice that he doesn't hear is muttherin' in his ear, "Earth to earth, an' ashes t' ashes, an' dust to dust."

Fluther [*faintly, affected by her talk*]. A man in th' pink o' health should have a holy horror of allowin' thoughts o' death to be festherin' in his mind, for [*with a frightened cough*] be God, I think I'm afther gettin' a little catch in me chest that time—it's a creepy thing to be thinkin' about.

[FLUTHER *sits weakly in chair* L. *of table*]

Mrs. Gogan. It is, an' it isn't; it's both bad an' good. . . . It always gives meself a kind o' thresspassin' joy to feel meself movin' along in a mournin' coach, an' me thinkin' that, maybe, th' next funeral'll be me own, an' glad, in a quiet way, that this is somebody else's.

Fluther [*very frightened*]. An' a curious kind of a gaspin' for breath—I hope there's nothin' derogatory wrong with me.

Mrs. Gogan [*examining the shirt*]. Frills on it, like a woman's petticoat.

Fluther [*panic-stricken*]. Suddenly gettin' hot, an' then, just as suddenly, gettin' cold.

Mrs. Gogan [*holding out the shirt towards* FLUTHER]. How would you like to be wearin' this Lord Mayor's nightdhress, Fluther?

Fluther [*vehemently*]. Blast you an' your nightshirt! Is a man fermentin' with fear to stick th' showin' off to him of a thing that looks like a shinin' shroud?

Mrs. Gogan [*startled at* FLUTHER'S *vehemence*]. Oh, excuse me.

[PETER *appears at curtained door, back. Sees his shirt in* MRS. GOGAN'S *hand, comes rapidly down* C., *goes front of couch to* MRS. GOGAN, *snatches shirt from her, and replaces it on the back of the chair; he returns the same way to room, back*]

Peter [*loudly, as he goes to room, back*]. Well, God Almighty give me patience!

Mrs. Gogan [*to* PETER]. Oh, excuse me.

[*There is heard a cheer from the men working outside on the street, followed by the clang of tools being thrown down, then silence*]

[*Running into the back room to look out of the window*] What's the men repairin' th' streets cheerin' for?

Fluther [*sitting down weakly on a chair*]. You can't sneeze but that oul' one wants to know th' why an' th' wherefore. . . . I feel as dizzy as bedamned! I hope I didn't give up th' beer too suddenly.

[*The* COVEY *comes in by door* L. *He is about 25, tall, thin, with lines on his face that form a perpetual protest against life as he conceives it to be. Heavy seams fall from each side of nose, down around his lips, as if they were suspenders keeping his mouth from falling. He speaks in a slow, wailing drawl; more rapidly when he is excited. He is dressed in dungarees, and is wearing a vividly red tie. He comes down* C. *and flings his cap with a gesture of disgust on the table, and begins to take off his overalls*]

Mrs. Gogan [*to the* COVEY, *as she runs back into the room*]. What's after happenin', Covey?

The Covey [*with contempt*]. Th' job's stopped. They've been mobilized to march in th' demonstration to-night undher th' Plough an' th' Stars. Didn't you hear them cheerin', th' mugs. They have to renew their political baptismal vows to be faithful in *seculo seculorum.*

Fluther [*sitting on the chair* L. *of table, forgetting his fear in his indignation*]. There's no reason to bring religion into it. I think we ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can, so as to keep it out of as many things as possible.

The Covey [*pausing in the taking off of his dungarees*]. Oh, you're one o' the boys

that climb into religion as high as a short Mass on Sunday mornin's? I suppose you'll be singin' songs o' Sion an' songs o' Tara at th' meetin', too.

Fluther. We're all Irishmen, anyhow; aren't we?

The Covey [*with hand outstretched, and in a professional tone*]. Look here, comrade, there's no such thing as an Irishman, or an Englishman, or a German or a Turk; we're all only human bein's. Scientifically speakin', it's all a question of the accidental gatherin' together of mollycewels an' atoms.

[PETER *comes in from room, back, with a stiff collar in his hand, comes down* C., *crosses, in front of couch, to the mirror on the wall* L., *below the fireplace. He stands before the mirror and tries to put on his collar.* FLUTHER *gets up from the chair, goes* C. *and stands to* R. *of the* COVEY]

Fluther. Mollycewels an' atoms! D'ye think I'm goin' to listen to you thryin' to juggle Fluther's mind with complicated cunundhrums of mollycewels an' atoms?

The Covey [*rather loudly*]. There's nothin' complicated in it. There's no fear o' th' Church tellin' you that mollycewels is a stickin' together of millions of atoms o' sodium, carbon, potassium o' iodide, etcetera, that, accordin' to th' way they're mixed, make a flower, a fish, a star that you see shinin' in th' sky, or a man with a big brain like me, or a man with a little brain like you!

Fluther [*more loudly still*]. There's no necessity to be raisin' your voice; shoutin's no manifestin' forth of a growin' mind.

[FLUTHER *and the* COVEY *turn to look at* PETER]

Peter [*struggling with his collar*]. God give me patience with this thing. . . . She makes these collars as stiff with starch as a shinin' band of solid steel! She does it purposely to thry an' twart me. If I can't get it on to the singlet, how in the name of God am I goin' to get it on the shirt!

[FLUTHER *and the* COVEY *face each other again*]

The Covey [*loudly*]. There's no use o' arguin' with you; it's education you want, comrade.

Fluther [*sarcastically*]. The Covey an' God made th' world I suppose, wha'?

The Covey [*jeering*]. When I hear some men talkin' I'm inclined to disbelieve that th' world's eight-hundhred million years old, for it's not long since th' fathers o' some o' them crawled out o' th' sheltherin' slime o' the sea.

Mrs. Gogan [*from room at back*]. There, they're afther formin' fours, an' now they're goin' to march away.

Fluther [*scornfully taking no notice of* MRS. GOGAN]. Mollycewels! [*He begins to untie his apron*] What about Adam an' Eve?

The Covey. Well, what about them?

Fluther [*fiercely*]. What about them, you?

The Covey. Adam an' Eve! Is that as far as you've got? Are you still thinkin' there was nobody in th' world before Adam an' Eve? [*Loudly*] Did you ever hear, man, of th' skeleton of th' man o' Java?

Peter [*casting the collar from him*]. Blast it, blast it, blast it!

[PETER *angrily picks up the collar he has thrown on the floor, goes up* C., *right of couch, to the chest of drawers, and begins to hunt again in the drawers*]

Fluther [*to the* COVEY, *as he viciously folds apron*]. Ah, you're not goin' to be let tap your rubbidge o' thoughts into th' mind o' Fluther.

The Covey. You're afraid to listen to th' thruth!

Fluther [*pugnaciously*]. Who's afraid?

The Covey. You are!

Fluther [*with great contempt*]. G'way, you wurum!

The Covey. Who's a worum?

Fluther. You are, or you wouldn't talk th' way you're talkin'.

[MRS. GOGAN *wanders in from room, back, turns* L., *sees* PETER *at the chest of drawers, turns back, comes down* C., *goes, front of couch, to the fireplace*]

The Covey. Th' oul', ignorant savage leppin' up in you, when science shows you that th' head of your god is an empty one. Well, I hope you're enjoyin' th' blessin' o' havin' to live be th' sweat of your brow.

Fluther. You'll be kickin' an' yellin' for th' priest yet, me boyo. I'm not goin' to stand silent an' simple listenin' to a thick like you makin' a maddenin' mockery o' God Almighty. It 'ud be a nice derogatory thing on me conscience, an' me dyin', to look back in rememberin' shame of talkin'

to a word-weavin' little ignorant yahoo of a red flag Socialist!

Mrs. Gogan [*at the fireplace, turning to look at the disputants*]. For God's sake, Fluther, dhrop it; there's always th' makin's of a row in the mention of religion.

[*She turns her head, and looks at the picture of "The Sleeping Venus," hanging over the mantelpiece. She looks at it intently and a look of astonishment comes on her face*]

God bless us, it's the picture of a naked woman. [*With a titter*] Look, Fluther.

[FLUTHER *looks over at the fireplace; comes slowly to the fireplace; looks steadily at the picture.* PETER, *hearing what was said, leaves the chest of drawers, and comes down, standing a little behind* FLUTHER *and* MRS. GOGAN, *and looks at the picture. The* COVEY *looks on from* C.]

Fluther. What's undher it? [*Reading slowly*] "Georgina: The Sleeping Vennis." Oh, that's a terrible picture. . . . Oh, that's a shockin' picture! [*Peering into it with evident pleasure*] Oh, the one that got that taken, she must ha' been a prime lassie!

Peter [*laughing in a silly way, with head tilted back*]. Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee!

Fluther [*indignantly, to* PETER]. What are you hee, hee-in' for? [*Pointing to the picture*] That's a nice thing to be hee, hee-in' at. Where's your morality, man?

Mrs. Gogan [*looking intently at it*]. God forgive us, it's not right to be lookin' at it.

Fluther. It's nearly a derogatory thing to be in th' room where it is.

Mrs. Gogan [*giggling hysterically*]. I couldn't stop any longer in th' same room with three men, afther lookin' at it!

[MRS. GOGAN *goes upstage* L., *and out by door* L. *The* COVEY, *who has taken off his dungarees, seeing* PETER'S *shirt on the chair, throws dungarees over it with a contemptuous movement*]

Peter [*roused by the* COVEY'S *action*]. Where are you throwin' your dungarees? Are you thryin' to twart an' torment me again?

The Covey. Who's thryin' to twart you?

[PETER *takes the dungarees from the back of the chair and flings them violently on floor*]

Peter. You're not goin' to make me lose me temper, me young covey!

[*The* COVEY, *in retaliation, takes* PETER'S *white shirt from the back of the chair, and flings it violently on the floor*]

The Covey. If you're Nora's pet aself, you're not goin' to get your own way in everything.

[*The* COVEY *moves to the back end of the table, enjoying* PETER'S *anger*]

Peter [*plaintively, with his eyes looking up at the ceiling*]. I'll say nothin'. . . . I'll leave you to th' day when th' all-pitiful, all-merciful, all-lovin' God'll be handin' you to th' angels to be rievin' an' roastin' you, tearin' an' tormentin' you, burnin' an' blastin' you!

The Covey. Aren't you th' little malignant oul' bastard, you lemon-whiskered oul' swine!

[PETER *rushes to the table, takes up the sword, draws it from its scabbard, and makes for the* COVEY, *who runs round the table* R., *followed by* PETER]

The Covey [*dodging round the table—to* FLUTHER]. Fluther, hold him, there. It's a nice thing to have a lunatic, like this, lashing round with a lethal weapon!

[*The* COVEY, *after running round the table, rushes up* C., *and runs back of couch, out of door* L., *which he bangs to behind him in the face of* PETER. FLUTHER *remains near the fireplace, looking on*]

Peter [*hammering at the door—to the* COVEY, *outside*]. Lemme out, lemme out. Isn't it a poor thing for a man who wouldn't say a word against his greatest enemy to have to listen to that Covey's twartin' animosities, shovin' poor, patient people into a lashin' out of curses that darken his soul with th' shadow of th' wrath of th' last day!

Fluther. Why d'ye take notice of him? If he seen you didn't, he'd say nothin' derogatory.

Peter. I'll make him stop his laughin' an' leerin', jibin' an' jeerin' an' scarifyin' people with his corner-boy insinuations! . . . He's always thryin' to rouse me: if it's not a song, it's a whistle; if it isn't a whistle, it's a cough. But you can taunt an' taunt—I'm laughin' at you; he, hee, hee, hee, hee, heee!

The Covey [*jeering loudly through the keyhole*]. Dear harp o' me counthry, in darkness I found thee,
The dark chain of silence had hung o'er thee long——

Peter [*frantically to* FLUTHER]. Jasus, d'ye hear that? D'ye hear him soundin' forth his divil-souled song o' provocation? [*Battering at door* L.] When I get out I'll do for you, I'll do for you, I'll do for you!

The Covey [*through the keyhole*]. Cuckoo-oo!

[NORA *enters by door* L. *She is a young woman of 23, alert, swift, full of nervous energy, and a little anxious to get on in the world. The firm lines of her face are considerably opposed by a soft, amorous mouth, and gentle eyes. When her firmness fails her, she persuades with her feminine charm. She is dressed in a tailor-made costume, and wears around her neck a silver fox fur*]

Nora [*running in and pushing* PETER *away from the door*]. Oh, can I not turn me back but th' two o' yous are at it like a pair o' fightin'-cocks! Uncle Peter . . . Uncle Peter . . . UNCLE PETER!

Peter [*vociferously*]. Oh, Uncle Peter, Uncle Peter be damned! D'ye think I'm goin' to give a free pass to th' young Covey to turn me whole life into a Holy Manual o' penances an' martyrdoms?

The Covey [*angrily rushing into the room*]. If you won't exercise some sort o' conthrol over that Uncle Peter o' yours, there'll be a funeral, an' it won't be me that'll be in th' hearse!

Nora [c. *back, between* PETER *and the* COVEY, *to the* COVEY]. Are yous always goin' to be tearin' down th' little bit of respectability that a body's thryin' to build up? Am I always goin' to be havin' to nurse yous into th' habit o' thryin' to keep up a little bit of appearance?

The Covey. Why weren't you here to see th' way he run at me with th' sword?

Peter. What did you call me a lemon-whiskered oul' swine for?

Nora. If th' two o' yous don't thry to make a generous altheration in your goin's on, an' keep on thryin' t' inaugurate th' customs o' th' rest o' th' house into this place, yous can flit into other lodgin's where your bowsey battlin' 'ill meet, maybe, with an encore.

[*The* COVEY *comes down, back of couch to the fire, and sits down in the chair where* PETER'S *shirt had hung; he takes a book from a pocket and begins to read*]

Peter [*to* NORA]. Would you like to be called a lemon-whiskered oul' swine?

[NORA *takes the sword from* PETER, *goes to the table, puts it back in the scabbard, goes to the chest of drawers, back* L., *and leaves it on the chest of drawers*]

Nora [*to* PETER]. If you attempt to wag that sword of yours at anybody again, it'll have to be taken off you, an' put in a safe place away from babies that don't know the danger of them things.

[NORA *goes across back, taking off her hat and coat, which she leaves.* PETER *comes down* C., *takes up the shirt from the floor, and goes back* C. *towards room, back*]

Peter [*at entrance to room, back*]. Well, I'm not goin' to let anybody call me a lemon-whiskered oul' swine!

[PETER *goes into room, back.* FLUTHER *moves from the fireplace,* L. *of couch, to door* L., *which he begins to open and shut, trying the movement*]

Fluther [*half to himself, half to* NORA]. Openin' an' shuttin' now with a well-mannered motion, like a door of a select bar in a high-class pub.

[NORA *takes up the hat and coat from the table, carries them into the room, back, leaves them there, comes out, goes to the dresser, above table* R., *and puts a few tea things on the table*]

Nora [*to the* COVEY, *as she lays table for tea*]. An', once for all, Willie, you'll have to thry to deliver yourself from th' desire to practice o' provokin' oul' Pether into a wild forgetfulness of what's proper an' allowable in a respectable home.

The Covey. Well, let him mind his own business, then. Yestherday, I caught him hee-hee-in' out of him an' he readin' bits out of Jenersky's *Thesis on th' Origin, Development an' Consolidation of th' Evolutionary Idea of th' Proletariat.*

Nora. Now, let it end at that, for God's sake; Jack'll be in any minute, an' I'm not goin' to have th' quiet of his evenin' tossed about in an everlastin' uproar between you an' Uncle Pether.

[NORA *crosses back to* FLUTHER L., *and stands on his* R.]

Nora [*to* FLUTHER]. Well, did you manage to settle the lock yet, Mr. Good?

Fluther [*opening and shutting the door*]. It's betther than a new one, now, Mrs.

Clitheroe; it's almost ready to open and shut of its own accord.

Nora [*giving him a coin*]. You're a whole man. How many pints will that get you?

Fluther [*seriously*]. Ne'er a one at all, Mrs. Clitheroe, for Fluther's on th' wather waggon now. You could stan' where you're stannin' chantin', "Have a glass o' malt, Fluther; Fluther, have a glass o' malt," till th' bells would be ringin' th' ould year out an' th' New Year in, an' you'd have as much chance o' movin' Fluther as a tune on a tin whistle would move a deaf man an' he dead.

[*As* NORA *is opening and shutting the door,* MRS. BESSIE BURGESS *appears at it. She is a woman of* 40, *vigorously built. Her face is a dogged one, hardened by toil, and a little coarsened by drink. She looks scornfully and viciously at* NORA *for a few moments before she speaks*]

Bessie. Puttin' a new lock on her door . . . afraid her poor neighbours ud break through an' steal. . . . [*In a loud tone*] Maybe, now, they're a damn sight more honest than your ladyship . . . checkin' th' children playin' on th' stairs . . . gettin' on th' nerves of your ladyship. . . . Complainin' about Bessie Burgess singin' her hymns at night, when she has a few up. . . . [*She comes in half-way on the threshold, and screams*] Bessie Burgess 'll sing whenever she damn well likes!

[NORA *tries to shut the door, but* BESSIE *violently shoves it in, and, gripping* NORA *by the shoulders, shakes her*]

Bessie [*violently*]. You little overdhressed throllope, you, for one pin, I'd paste th' white face o' you!

Nora [*frightened*]. Fluther, Fluther!

Fluther [*breaking the hold of* BESSIE *from* NORA]. Now, now, Bessie, Bessie, leave poor Mrs. Clitheroe alone; she'd do no one any harm, an' minds no one's business but her own.

Bessie. Why is she always thryin' to speak proud things, an' lookin' like a mighty one in th' congregation o' th' people!

[*The* COVEY *looks up from his book, watches the encounter, but does not leave his seat by the fire*]

[NORA *sinks down on back of the couch.* JACK CLITHEROE *enters by door,* L. *He is a tall, well-made fellow of* 25. *His face has none of the strength of* NORA'S. *It is a face in which is the desire for authority, without the power to attain it*]

Clitheroe [*excitedly*]. What's up? What's afther happenin'?

Fluther. Nothin', Jack. Nothin'. It's all over now. Come on, Bessie, come on.

Clitheroe [*coming to couch and bending over* NORA—*anxiously*]. What's wrong, Nora? Did she say anything to you?

Nora [*agitatedly*]. She was bargin' out of her, an' I only told her to go up ower that to her own place; an' before I knew where I was, she flew at me, like a tiger, an' tried to guzzle me.

[CLITHEROE *goes close to* BESSIE, *standing in front of the chest of drawers, and takes hold of her arm to get her away*]

Clitheroe. Get up to your own place, Mrs. Burgess, and don't you be interferin' with my wife, or it'll be th' worse for you. . . . Go on, go on!

Bessie [*as* CLITHEROE *is pushing her out*]. Mind who you're pushin', now. . . . I attend me place of worship, anyhow. . . . Not like some of them that go neither church, chapel or meetin' house. . . . If me son was home from the threnches, he'd see me righted.

[FLUTHER *takes* BESSIE *by the arm, and brings her out by the door* L. CLITHEROE *closes the door behind them, returns to* NORA, *and puts his arm around her. The* COVEY *resumes his reading*]

Clitheroe [*his arm around her*]. There, don't mind that old bitch, Nora, darling; I'll soon put a stop to her interferin'.

Nora. Some day or another, when I'm here be meself, she'll come in an' do somethin' desperate.

Clitheroe [*kissing her*]. Oh, sorra fear of her doin' anythin' desperate. I'll talk to her to-morrow when she's sober. A tast o' me mind that'll shock her into the sensibility of behavin' herself!

[NORA *gets up, crosses to the dresser* R., *and finishes laying the table for tea. She catches sight of the dungarees on the floor and speaks indignantly to* COVEY. CLITHEROE *leaves his hat on the chest of drawers, and sits, waiting for tea, on the couch*]

Nora [*to* COVEY]. Willie, is that the place for your dungarees?

Covey [*irritably rising, and taking them from the floor*]. Ah, they won't do the floor any harm, will they?

[*He carries them up* C., *into room back, comes back again, down* C., *and sits by fire.* NORA *crosses from the table to the fire, gets the teapot from the hob, and returns to the table*]

Nora [*to* CLITHEROE *and* COVEY]. Tea's ready.

[CLITHEROE *and* COVEY *go to the table and sit down* L. *of same,* COVEY *nearest the audience.* NORA *sits down on* R. *of table, leaving the chair for* PETER *below, on same side*]

Nora [*calling towards room, back*]. Uncle Peter, Uncle Peter, tea's ready!

[PETER *comes in from room back.* PETER *is in the full dress of the Irish National Foresters: bright green, gold-braided coat, white breeches, black top boots and frilled, white shirt. He carries a large black slouch hat, from which waves a long white ostrich plume, in his hand. He puts the hat on the chest of drawers beside the sword, he comes down* C., *goes round front end of table, and sits on the vacant seat facing* COVEY *on opposite side of the table. They eat for a few moments in silence, the* COVEY *furtively watching* PETER *with scorn in his eyes;* PETER *knows this, and is fidgety*]

The Covey [*provokingly*]. Another cut o' bread, Uncle Peter?

[PETER *maintains a dignified silence*]

Clitheroe. It's sure to be a great meetin' to-night. We ought to go, Nora.

Nora [*decisively*]. I won't go, Jack; you can go if you wish.

[*A pause*]

The Covey [*with great politeness, to* PETER]. D'ye want th' sugar, Uncle Peter?

Peter [*explosively*]. Now, are you goin' to start your thryin' an' your twartin' again?

Nora. Now, Uncle Peter, you mustn't be so touchy; Willie has only assed you if you wanted th' sugar.

Peter [*angrily*]. He doesn't care a damn whether I want th' sugar or no. He's only thryin' to twart me!

Nora [*angrily, to the* COVEY]. Can't you let him alone, Willie? If he wants the sugar, let him stretch his hand out an' get it himself!

The Covey [*to* PETER]. Now, if you want the sugar, you can stretch out your hand and get it yourself!

[*A pause*]

Clitheroe. To-night is th' first chance that Brennan has got of showing himself off since they made a Captain of him—why, God only knows. It'll be a treat to see him swankin' it at th' head of the Citizen Army carryin' th' flag of the Plough an' th' Stars. . . . [*Looking roguishly at* NORA] He was sweet on you, once, Nora?

Nora. He may have been. . . . I never liked him. I always thought he was a bit of a thick.

The Covey. They're bringin' nice disgrace on that banner now.

Clitheroe [*to* COVEY, *remonstratively*]. How are they bringin' disgrace on it?

The Covey [*snappily*]. Because it's a Labour flag, an' was never meant for politics. . . . What does th' design of th' field plough, bearin' on it th' stars of th' heavenly plough, mean, if it's not Communism? It's a flag that should only be used when we're buildin' th' barricades to fight for a Workers' Republic!

Peter [*with a puff of derision*]. P-phuh.

The Covey [*angrily, to* PETER]. What are you phuhin' out o' you for? Your mind is th' mind of a mummy. [*Rising*] I betther go an' get a good place to have a look at Ireland's warriors passin' by.

[*He goes into room* L., *and returns with his cap*]

Nora [*to the* COVEY]. Oh, Willie, brush your clothes before you go.

The Covey [*carelessly*]. Oh, they'll do well enough.

Nora. Go an' brush them; th' brush is in th' drawer there.

[*The* COVEY *goes to the drawer, muttering, gets the brush, and starts to brush his clothes*]

The Covey [*reciting at* PETER, *as he does so*].

Oh, where's the slave so lowly,
Condemn'd to chains unholy,
Who, could he burst his bonds at first,
Would pine beneath them slowly?

We tread th' land that . . . bore us,
Th' green flag glitters . . . o'er us,
Th' friends we've tried are by our side,
An' th' foe we hate . . . before us!

Peter [*leaping to his feet in a whirl of rage*]. Now, I'm tellin' you, me young Covey, once for all, that I'll not stick any

longer these tittherin' taunts of yours, rovin' around to sing your slights an' slandhers, reddenin' th' mind of a man to th' thinkin' an' sayin' of things that sicken his soul with sin! [*Hysterically; lifting up a cup to fling at the* COVEY] Be God, I'll——

Clitheroe [*catching his arm*]. Now then, none o' that, none o' that!

Nora [*loudly*]. Uncle Pether, Uncle Pether, UNCLE PETHER!

The Covey [*at the door* L., *about to go out*]. Isn't that th' malignant oul' varmint! Lookin' like th' illegitimate son of an illegitimate child of a corporal in th' Mexican army!

[*He goes out door* L.]

Peter [*plaintively*]. He's afther leavin' me now in such a state of agitation that I won't be able to do meself justice when I'm marchin' to th' meetin'.

[NORA *jumps up from the table, crosses back end of table to the chest of drawers, back, and takes up* PETER'S *sword*]

Nora. Oh, for God's sake, here, buckle your sword on, an' go to your meetin', so that we'll have at least one hour of peace.

[PETER *gets up from the chair, goes over to* NORA, *and she helps him to put on his sword*]

Clitheroe. For God's sake, hurry him up out o' this, Nora.

Peter. Are yous all goin' to thry to start to twart me now?

Nora [*putting on his plumed hat*]. S-s-sh. Now, your hat's on, your house is thatched; off you pop! [*She gently pushes him from her, towards door* L.]

Peter [*going and turning as he reaches the door* L.]. Now, if that young Covey——

Nora. Go on, go on.

[*He goes out door* L.]

[CLITHEROE *goes from the table to the couch and sits down on end nearest the fire, lights a cigarette, and looks thoughtfully into the fire.* NORA *takes things from the table, and puts them on the dresser. She goes into room, back, and comes back with a lighted shaded lamp, which she puts on the table. She then goes on tidying things on the dresser*]

[*Softly speaking over from the dresser, to* CLITHEROE] A penny for them, Jack.

Clitheroe. Me? Oh, I was thinkin' of nothing.

Nora. You were thinkin' of th' . . . meetin' . . . Jack. When we were courtin' an' I wanted you to go, you'd say, "Oh, to hell with meetin's," an' that you felt lonely in cheerin' crowds when I was absent. An' we weren't a month married when you began that you couldn't keep away from them.

Clitheroe [*crossly*]. Oh, that's enough about th' meetin'. It looks as if you wanted me to go th' way you're talkin'. You were always at me to give up the Citizen Army, an' I gave it up: surely that ought to satisfy you.

Nora [*from dresser*]. Aye, you gave it up, because you got the sulks when they didn't make a captain of you.

[*She crosses over to* CLITHEROE, *and sits on the couch to his* R.]

Nora [*softly*]. It wasn't for my sake, Jack.

Clitheroe. For your sake or no, you're benefitin' by it, aren't you? I didn't forget this was your birthday, did I? [*He puts his arms around her*] And you liked your new hat; didn't you, didn't you? [*He kisses her rapidly several times*]

Nora [*panting*]. Jack, Jack; please, Jack! I thought you were tired of that sort of thing long ago.

Clitheroe. Well, you're finding out now that I amn't tired of it yet, anyhow. Mrs. Clitheroe doesn't want to be kissed, sure she doesn't? [*He kisses her again*] Little, little red-lipped Nora!

Nora [*coquettishly removing his arm from around her*]. Oh, yes, your little, little red-lipped Nora's a sweet little girl when th' fit seizes you; but your little, little red-lipped Nora has to clean your boots every mornin', all the same.

Clitheroe [*with a movement of irritation*]. Oh, well, if we're goin' to be snotty!

[*A pause*]

Nora. It's lookin' like as if it was you that was goin' to be . . . snotty! Bridlin' up with bittherness, th' minute a body attempts t'open her mouth.

Clitheroe. Is it any wondher, turnin' a tendher sayin' into a meanin' o' malice an' spite!

Nora. It's hard for a body to be always keepin' her mind bent on makin' thoughts that'll be no longer than th' length of your own satisfaction.

[*A pause*]

Nora [*standing up*]. If we're goin' to dhribble th' time away sittin' here like a pair o' cranky mummies, I'd be as well sewin' or doin' something about th' place.

[*She looks appealingly at him for a few moments; he doesn't speak. She swiftly sits down beside him, and puts her arm around his neck*]

Nora [*imploringly*]. Ah, Jack, don't be so cross!

Clitheroe [*doggedly*]. Cross? I'm not cross; I'm not a bit cross. It was yourself started it.

Nora [*coaxingly*]. I didn't mean to say anything out o' th' way. You take a body up too quickly, Jack. [*In an ordinary tone as if nothing of an angry nature had been said*] You didn't offer me evenin' allowance yet.

[CLITHEROE *silently takes out a cigarette for her and himself and lights both*]

[*Trying to make conversation*] How quiet th' house is now; they must be all out.

Clitheroe [*rather shortly*]. I suppose so.

Nora [*rising from the seat*]. I'm longin' to show you me new hat, to see what you think of it. Would you like to see it?

Clitheroe. Ah, I don't mind.

[NORA *hesitates a moment, then goes up* C. *to the chest of drawers, takes the hat out of the box, comes down* C., *stands front of the couch, looks into the mirror on the wall below the fireplace, and fixes hat on her head. She then turns to face* CLITHEROE]

Nora. Well, how does Mr. Clitheroe like me new hat?

Clitheroe. It suits you, Nora, it does right enough.

[*He stands up, puts his hand beneath her chin, and tilts her head up. She looks at him roguishly. He bends down and kisses her*]

Nora. Here, sit down, an' don't let me hear another cross word out of you for th' rest o' the night.

[*The two sit on the couch again,* CLITHEROE *nearest the fire*]

Clitheroe [*his arms round* NORA]. Little red-lipped Nora.

Nora [*with a coaxing movement of her body towards him*]. Jack!

Clitheroe [*tightening his arms around her*]. Well?

Nora. You haven't sung me a song since our honeymoon. Sing me one now, do . . . please, Jack!

Clitheroe. What song? "Since Maggie Went Away"?

Nora. Ah, no, Jack, not that; it's too sad. "When You Said You Loved Me."

[*Clearing his throat,* CLITHEROE *thinks for a moment, and then begins to sing.* NORA, *putting an arm around him, nestles her head on his breast and listens delightedly*]

Clitheroe [*singing verses following to the air of "When You and I Were Young, Maggie"*).

Th' violets were scenting th' woods, Nora,
Displaying their charm to th' bee,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Th' chestnut blooms gleam'd through th' glade, Nora,
A robin sang loud from a tree,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Th' golden-rob'd daffodils shone, Nora,
An' danc'd in th' breeze on th' lea;
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

Th' trees, birds an' bees sang a song, Nora,
Of happier transports to be,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me!

[NORA *kisses him*]

[*A knock is heard at the door,* R.; *a pause as they listen.* NORA *clings closely to* CLITHEROE. *Another knock, more imperative than the first*]

I wonder who can that be, now?

Nora [*a little nervous*]. Take no notice of it, Jack; they'll go away in a minute.

[*Another knock, followed by the voice of* CAPTAIN BRENNAN]

The Voice of Capt. Brennan. Commandant Clitheroe, Commandant Clitheroe, are you there? A message from General Jim Connolly.

Clitheroe [*taking her arms from round him*]. Damn it, it's Captain Brennan.

Nora [*anxiously*]. Don't mind him, don't mind, Jack. Don't break our happiness. . . . Pretend we're not in. . . . Let us forget everything to-night but our two selves!

Clitheroe [*reassuringly*]. Don't be

alarmed, darling; I'll just see what he wants, an' send him about his business.

Nora [*tremulously—putting her arms around him*]. No, no. Please, Jack; don't open it. Please, for your own little Nora's sake!

Clitheroe [*taking her arms away and rising to open the door*]. Now don't be silly, Nora.

[CLITHEROE *opens door, and admits a young man in the full uniform of the Irish Citizen Army—green suit; slouch green hat caught up at one side by a small Red Hand badge; Sam Browne belt, with a revolver in the holster. He carries a letter in his hand. When he comes in he smartly salutes* CLITHEROE. *The young man is* CAPTAIN BRENNAN. *He stands in front of the chest of drawers*]

Capt. Brennan [*giving the letter to* CLITHEROE]. A dispatch from General Connolly.

Clitheroe [*reading. While he is doing so,* BRENNAN'S *eyes are fixed on* NORA, *who droops as she sits on the lounge*]. "Commandant Clitheroe is to take command of the eighth battalion of the I.C.A. which will assemble to proceed to the meeting at nine o'clock. He is to see that all units are provided with full equipment: two days' rations and fifty rounds of ammunition. At two o'clock A.M. the army will leave Liberty Hall for a reconnaissance attack on Dublin Castle.—Com.-Gen. Connolly."

Clitheroe [*in surprise, to* CAPT. BRENNAN]. I don't understand this. Why does General Connolly call me Commandant?

Capt. Brennan. Th' Staff appointed you Commandant, and th' General agreed with their selection.

Clitheroe. When did this happen?

Capt. Brennan. A fortnight ago.

Clitheroe. How is it word was never sent to me?

Capt. Brennan. Word was sent to you. . . . I meself brought it.

Clitheroe. Who did you give it to, then?

Capt. Brennan [*after a pause*]. I think I gave it to Mrs. Clitheroe, there.

Clitheroe. Nora, d'ye hear that?

[NORA *makes no answer*]

[*Standing* C.—*there is a note of hardness in his voice*] Nora . . . Captain Brennan says he brought a letter to me from General Connolly, and that he gave it to you. . . . Where is it? What did you do with it?

[CAPT. BRENNAN *stands in front of the chest of drawers, and softly whistles "The Soldiers' Song"*]

Nora [*running over to him, and pleadingly putting her arms around him*]. Jack, please Jack, don't go out to-night an' I'll tell you; I'll explain everything. . . . Send him away, an' stay with your own little red-lipp'd Nora.

Clitheroe [*removing her arms from around him*]. None o' this nonsense, now; I want to know what you did with th' letter?

[NORA *goes slowly to the couch and sits down again*]

[*Angrily*] Why didn't you give me th' letter? What did you do with it? . . . [*Goes over and shakes her by the shoulder*] What did you do with th' letter?

Nora [*flaming up and standing on her feet*]. I burned it, I burned it! That's what I did with it! Is General Connolly an' th' Citizen Army goin' to be your only care? Is your home goin' to be only a place to rest in? Am I goin' to be only somethin' to provide merrymakin' at night for you? Your vanity 'll be th' ruin of you an' me yet. . . . That's what's movin' you: because they've made an officer of you, you'll make a glorious cause of what you're doin', while your little red-lipp'd Nora can go on sittin' here, makin' a companion of th' loneliness of th' night!

Clitheroe [*fiercely*]. You burned it, did you? [*He grips her arm*] Well, me good lady——

Nora. Let go—you're hurtin' me!

Clitheroe. You deserve to be hurt. . . . Any letther that comes to me for th' future, take care that I get it. . . . D'ye hear—take care that I get it!

[*He lets her go, and she sinks down, crying on the couch. He goes to the chest of drawers and takes out a Sam Browne belt, which he puts on, and then puts a revolver in the holster. He puts on his hat, and looks towards* NORA]

[*At door* L., *about to go out*] You needn't wait up for me; if I'm in at all, it won't be before six in th' morning.

Nora [*bitterly*]. I don't care if you never came back!

Clitheroe [*to* CAPT. BRENNAN]. Come along, Ned.

[*They go out; there is a pause.* NORA *pulls the new hat from her head and with a bitter movement flings it to the other end of the room. There is a gentle knock at door* L., *which opens, and* MOLLSER *comes into the room. She is about 15, but looks to be only about 10, for the ravages of consumption have shrivelled her up. She is pitifully worn, walks feebly, and frequently coughs. She goes over and sits down* L. *of* NORA]

Mollser [*to* NORA]. Mother's gone to th' meetin', an' I was feelin' terrible lonely, so I come down to see if you'd let me sit with you, thinkin' you mightn't be goin' yourself. . . . I do be terrible afraid I'll die sometime when I'm be meself. . . . I often envy you, Mrs. Clitheroe, seein' th' health you have, an' th' lovely place you have here, an' wondherin' if I'll ever be sthrong enough to be keepin' a home together for a man.

[*The faint sound of a band playing is heard in the distance outside in the street*]

Mollser. Oh, this must be some more of the Dublin Fusiliers flyin' off to the front.

[*The band, passing in the street outside, is now heard loudly playing as they pass the house. It is the music of a brass band playing a regiment to the boat on the way to the front. The tune that is being played is "It's a Long Way to Tipperary"; as the band comes to the chorus, the regiment is swinging into the street by* NORA'S *house, and the voices of the soldiers can be heard lustily singing the chorus of the song*]

It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go;
It's a long way to Tipperary, to th' sweetest girl I know!
Good-bye, Piccadilly, farewell Leicester Square.
It's a long way to Tipperary, but my heart's right there!

[NORA *and* MOLLSER *remain silently listening. As the chorus ends, and the music is faint in the distance again,* BESSIE BURGESS *appears at door* L., *which* MOLLSER *has left open*]

Bessie [*speaking in towards the room*]. There's th' men marchin' out into th' dhread dimness o' danger, while th' lice is crawlin' about feedin' on th' fatness o' the land! But yous'll not escape from th' arrow that flieth be night, or th' sickness that wasteth be day. . . . An' ladyship an' all, as some o' them may be, they'll be scatthered abroad, like th' dust in th' darkness!

[BESSIE *goes away;* NORA *steals over and quietly shuts the door. She comes back to the lounge and wearily throws herself on it beside* MOLLSER]

Mollser [*after a pause and a cough*]. Is there anybody goin', Mrs. Clitheroe, with a titther o' sense?

ACT TWO

SCENE—*A public-house at the corner of the street in which the meeting is being addressed from Platform No. 1. One end of the house is visible to the audience. Part of the counter at the back,* L., *extending out towards* L., *occupies one-third of the width of the scene from* R. *to* L. *On the counter are glasses, beer-pulls, and a carafe filled with water. Behind the counter, on the back wall, are shelves containing bottles of wine, whisky and beer. At back* C. *is a wide, high, plate-glass window. Under the window is a seat to hold three or four persons seated.* L. *are the wide swing-doors. At wall,* R., *is a seat to hold two persons. A few gaudy-coloured show-cards on the walls.*

A band is heard outside playing "The Soldiers' Song," before the CURTAIN *rises, and for a few moments afterwards, accompanied by the sounds of marching men.*

The BARMAN *is seen wiping the part of the counter which is in view.* ROSIE REDMOND *is standing at the counter toying with what remains of a half of whisky in a wine-glass. She is a sturdy, well-shaped girl of 20; pretty and pert in manner. She is wearing a cream blouse, with an obviously suggestive glad neck; a grey tweed dress, brown stockings and shoes. The blouse and most of the dress are hidden by a black shawl. She has no hat, and in her hair is jauntily set a cheap, glittering, jewelled ornament. It is an hour later.*

Barman [*wiping counter*]. Nothin' much doin' in your line to-night, Rosie?

Rosie. Curse o' God on th' haporth, hardly, Tom. There isn't much notice taken of a pretty petticoat of a night like

this. . . . They're all in a holy mood. Th' solemn-lookin' dials on th' whole o' them an' they marchin' to th' meetin'. You'd think they were th' glorious company of th' saints, an' th' noble army of martyrs thrampin' through th' sthreets of Paradise. They're all thinkin' of higher things than a girl's garthers. . . . It's a tremendous meetin'; four platforms they have—there's one o' them just outside opposite th' window.

Barman. Oh, ay; sure when th' speaker comes [*motioning with his hand*] to th' near end, here, you can see him plain, an' hear nearly everythin' he's spoutin' out of him.

Rosie. It's no joke thryin' to make up fifty-five shillin's a week for your keep an' laundhry, an' then taxin' you a quid for your own room if you bring home a friend for th' night. . . . If I could only put by a couple of quid for a swankier outfit, everythin' in th' garden ud look lovely——

[*In the window, back, appears the figure of a tall man, who, standing on a platform, is addressing a crowd outside. The figure is almost like a silhouette. The* BARMAN *comes to* L. *end of counter to listen, and* ROSIE *moves* C. *to see and listen too*]

Barman [*to* ROSIE]. Whisht, till we hear what he's sayin'.

The Voice of the Man. It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the sight of arms, we must accustom ourselves to the use of arms. . . . Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. . . . There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them!

[*The figure, moving towards* L., *passes the window, and is lost to sight and hearing. The* BARMAN *goes back to wiping of the counter.* ROSIE *remains looking out of the window*]

Rosie. It's th' sacred thruth, mind you, what that man's afther sayin'.

Barman. If I was only a little younger, I'd be plungin' mad into th' middle of it!

Rosie [*who is still looking out of the window*]. Oh, here's th' two gems runnin' over again for their oil!

[*The doors* L. *swing open, and* FLUTHER *and* PETER *enter tumultuously. They are are hot and hasty with the things they have seen and heard. They hurry across to the counter,* PETER *leading the way.* ROSIE, *after looking at them listlessly for a moment, retires to the seat under the window, sits down, takes a cigarette from her pocket, lights it and smokes*]

Peter [*splutteringly to the* BARMAN]. Two halves . . . [*To* FLUTHER] A meetin' like this always makes me feel as if I could dhrink Loch Erinn dhry!

Fluther. You couldn't feel anyway else at a time like this when th' spirit of a man is pulsin' to be out fightin' for th' thruth with his feet thremblin' on th' way, maybe to th' gallows, an' his ears tinglin' with th' faint, far-away sound of burstin' rifle-shots that'll maybe whip th' last little shock o' life out of him that's left lingerin' in his body!

Peter. I felt a burnin' lump in me throat when I heard th' band playin' "The Soldiers' Song," rememberin' last hearin' it marchin' in military formation, with th' people starin' on both sides at us, carryin' with us th' pride an' resolution o' Dublin to th' grave of Wolfe Tone.

Fluther. Get th' Dublin men goin' an' they'll go on full force for anything that's thryin' to bar them away from what they're wantin', where th' slim thinkin' counthry boyo ud limp away from th' first faintest touch of compromization!

Peter [*hurriedly to the* BARMAN]. Two more, Tom! . . . [*To* FLUTHER] Th' memory of all th' things that was done, an' all th' things that was suffered be th' people, was boomin' in me brain. . . . Every nerve in me body was quiverin' to do somethin' desperate!

Fluther. Jammed as I was in th' crowd, I listened to th' speeches pattherin' on th' people's head, like rain fallin' on th' corn; every derogatory thought went out o' me mind, an' I said to meself, "You can die now, Fluther, for you've seen th' shadow-dhreams of th' last leppin' to life in th' bodies of livin' men that show, if we were without a titther o' courage for centuries, we're vice versa now!" Looka here. [*He stretches out his arm under* PETER'S *face and rolls up his sleeve*] The blood was *boilin'* in me veins!

[*The silhouette of the tall figure again moves into the frame of the window, speaking to the people*]

Peter [*unaware, in his enthusiasm, of the speaker's appearance, to* FLUTHER]. I was burnin' to dhraw me sword, an' wave it over me——

Fluther [*overwhelming* PETER]. Will you stop your blatherin' for a minute, man, an' let us hear what he's sayin'!

[*The* BARMAN *comes to* L. *end of the counter to look at the figure in the window;* ROSIE *rises from the seat, stands and looks.* FLUTHER *and* PETER *move towards* C. *to see and listen*]

The Voice of the Man. Comrade soldiers of the Irish Volunteers and of the Citizen Army, we rejoice in this terrible war. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields. . . . Such august homage was never offered to God as this: the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country. And we must be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding of blood there is no redemption!

[*The figure moves out of sight and hearing*]

[FLUTHER *runs back to the counter and gulps down the drink remaining in his glass;* PETER *does the same, less rapidly; the* BARMAN *leaves the end of the counter;* ROSIE *sits on the seat again*]

Fluther [*finishing drink, to* PETER]. Come on, man; this is too good to be missed!

[FLUTHER *rushes across the stage and out by doors* L. PETER *wipes his mouth and hurries after* FLUTHER. *The doors swing open, and the* COVEY *enters. He collides with* PETER C. PETER *stiffens his body, like a cock, and, with a look of hatred on his face, marches stiffly out by doors* L. *The* COVEY *looks scornfully after* PETER, *and then crosses to the counter.* ROSIE *sees possibilities in the* COVEY, *gets up and comes to the counter, a little to the* L. *of the* COVEY]

The Covey [*to* BARMAN]. Give us a glass o' malt, for God's sake, till I stimulate meself from the shock of seeing the sight that's afther goin' out.

Rosie [*slyly, to the* BARMAN]. Another one for me, Tommy; the young gentleman's ordherin' it in the corner of his eye.

[*The* BARMAN *gets a drink for the* COVEY, *leaves it on the counter;* ROSIE *whips it up. The* BARMAN *catches* ROSIE'S *arm, and takes glass from her, putting it down beside the* COVEY]

Barman [*taking the glass from* ROSIE]. Eh, houl' on there, houl' on there, Rosie.

Rosie [*angrily, to the* BARMAN]. What are you houldin' on out o' you for? Didn't you hear th' young gentleman say that he couldn't refuse anything to a nice little bird? [*To the* COVEY] Isn't that right, Jiggs? [*The* COVEY *says nothing*] Didn't I know, Tommy, it would be all right? It takes Rosie to size a young man up, an' tell th' thoughts that are thremblin' in his mind. Isn't that right, Jiggs?

[*The* COVEY *stirs uneasily, moves a little farther away, and pulls his cap over his eyes*]

[*Moving after him*] Great meetin' that's gettin' held outside. Well, it's up to us all, anyway, to fight for our freedom.

The Covey [*to the* BARMAN]. Two more, please. [*To* ROSIE] Freedom! What's th' use o' freedom, if it's not economic freedom?

Rosie [*emphasizing with extended arm and moving finger*]. I used them very words just before you come in. "A lot o' thricksters," says I, "that wouldn't know what freedom was if they got it from their mother." . . . [*To the* BARMAN] Didn't I, Tommy?

Barman. I disremember.

Rosie [*to the* BARMAN]. No, you don't disremember. Remember you said, yourself, it was all "only a flash in th' pan." Well, "flash in th' pan, or no flash in th' pan," says I, "they're not goin' to get Rosie Redmond," says I, "to fight for freedom that wouldn't be worth winnin' in a raffle!"

The Covey [*contemptuously*]. There's only one freedom for th' workin' man: conthrol o' th' means o' production, rates of exchange an' th' means of disthribution. [*Tapping* ROSIE *on the shoulder*] Look here, comrade, I'll leave here to-morrow night for you a copy of Jenersky's *Thesis on the Origin, Development an' Consolidation of the Evolutionary Idea of th' Proletariat.*

Rosie [*throwing off her shawl on to the counter, and showing an exemplified glad neck, which reveals a good deal of a white*

bosom]. If y'ass Rosie, it's heartbreakin' to see a young fella thinkin' of anything, or admirin' anything, but silk thransparent stockin's showin' off the shape of a little lassie's legs!

[*The* COVEY *is frightened, and moves away from* ROSIE *along the counter, towards* R. ROSIE *follows, gliding after him in a seductive way*]

[*Following him*] Out in th' park in th' shade of a warm summery evenin', with your little darlin' bridie to be, kissin' an' cuddlin' [*she tries to put her arm around his neck*], kissin' an' cuddlin', ay?

The Covey [*frightened*]. Ay, what are you doin'? None o' that, now; none o' that. I've something else to do besides shinannickin' afther Judies!

[*The* COVEY *turns to* L. *and moves slowly to* L., *away from* ROSIE; *she turns with him, keeping him facing her, holding his arm. They move this way to* C.]

Rosie. Oh, little duckey, oh, shy little duckey! Never held a mot's hand, an' wouldn't know how to tittle a little Judy! [*She clips him under the chin*] Tittle him undher th' chin, tittle him undher th' chin!

The Covey [*breaking away and running out by doors* L.]. Aye, go on, now; I don't want to have any meddlin' with a lassie like you!

Rosie [*enraged—returning to the seat at the window*]. Jasus, it's in a monasthery some of us ought to be, spendin' our holidays kneelin' on our adorers, tellin' our beads an' knockin' hell out of our buzzums!

[*The voice of the* COVEY *is heard outside doors* L. *calling in a scale of notes, "Cuckoo-ooooo." Then the swing-doors open, and* PETER *and* FLUTHER, *followed by* MRS. GOGAN, *come in.* MRS. GOGAN *carries a baby in her arms*]

Peter [*in plaintive anger, looking towards the door* L.]. It's terrible that young Covey can't let me pass without proddin' at me! Did you hear him murmurin' "cuckoo" when he were passin'?

Fluther [*irritably—to* PETER]. I wouldn't be everlastin' cockin' me ear to hear every little whisper that was floatin' around about me! It's my rule never to lose me temper till it would be dethrimental to keep it. There's nothin' derogatory in th' use o' th' word "cuckoo," is there?

[MRS. GOGAN, *followed by* PETER, *go up to the seat under the window and sit down,* PETER *to the* R. *of* MRS. GOGAN. ROSIE, *after a look at those who've come in, goes out by doors* L.]

Peter [*tearfully*]. It's not the word, it's the way he says it! He never says it straight out, but murmurs it with curious quiverin' ripples, like variations on a flute.

Fluther [*standing in front of the seat*]. A' what odds if he gave it with variations on a thrombone? [*To* MRS. GOGAN] What's yours goin' to be, maam?

Mrs. Gogan. Ah, half a malt, Fluther.

[FLUTHER *goes from the seat over to the counter*]

Fluther [*to the* BARMAN]. Three halves, Tommy.

[*The* BARMAN *gets the drinks, leaves them on the counter.* FLUTHER *pays the* BARMAN; *takes drinks to the seat under the window; gives one to* MRS. GOGAN, *one to* PETER, *and keeps the third for himself. He then sits on the seat to the* L. *of* MRS. GOGAN]

Mrs. Gogan [*drinking, and looking admiringly at* PETER'S *costume*]. The Foresthers' is a gorgeous dhress! I don't think I've seen nicer, mind you, in a pantomime. . . . Th' loveliest part of th' dhress, I think, is th' osthrichess plume. . . . When yous are goin' along, an' I see them wavin' an' noddin' an' waggin', I seem to be lookin' at each of yous hangin' at th' end of a rope, your eyes bulgin' an' your legs twistin' an' jerkin', gaspin' an' gaspin' for breath while yous are thryin' to die for Ireland!

Fluther [*scornfully*]. If any o' them is ever hangin' at the end of a rope, it won't be for Ireland!

Peter. Are you goin' to start th' young Covey's game o' proddin' an' twartin' a man? There's not many that's talkin' can say that for twenty-five years he never missed a pilgrimage to Bodenstown!

Fluther [*looking angrily at* PETER]. You're always blowin' about goin' to Bodenstown. D'ye think no one but yourself ever went to *Bodenstown?* [FLUTHER *emphasizes the word "Bodenstown"*]

Peter [*plaintively*]. I'm not blowin' about it; but there's not a year that I go there but I pluck a leaf off Tone's grave, an' this very day me prayer-book is nearly full of them.

Fluther [*scornfully*]. Then Fluther has a

vice-versa opinion of them that put ivy leaves into their prayer-books, scabbin' it on th' clergy, an' thryin' to out-do th' haloes o' th' saints be lookin' as if he was wearin' around his head a glittherin' aroree boree allis! [*Fiercely*] Sure, I don't care a damn if you slep' in *Bodenstown!* You can take your breakfast, dinner an' tea on th' grave, in Bodenstown, if you like, for Fluther!

Mrs. Gogan. Oh, don't start a fight, boys, for God's sake; I was only sayin' what a nice costume it is—nicer than th' kilts, for, God forgive me, I always think th' kilts is hardly decent.

Fluther [*laughing scornfully*]. Ah, sure, when you'd look at him, you'd wondher whether th' man was makin' fun o' th' costume, or th' costume was makin' fun o' th' man!

Barman [*over to them*]. Now, then, thry to speak asy, will yous? We don't want no shoutin' here.

[*The swing-doors open and the* COVEY, *followed by* BESSIE BURGESS, *come in. They go over and stand at the counter. Passing,* BESSIE *gives a scornful look at those seated near the window.* BESSIE *and the* COVEY *talk together, but frequently eye the group at the window*]

Covey [*to the* BARMAN]. Two glasses o' malt.

[*The* BARMAN *gets the drinks; leaves them on the counter. The* COVEY *puts one beside* BESSIE *and keeps the other. He pays the* BARMAN]

Peter [*plaintively*]. There he is now—I knew he wouldn't be long till he folleyed me in.

Bessie [*speaking to the* COVEY, *but really at the other party*]. I can't for th' life o' me undherstand how they can call themselves Catholics, when they won't lift a finger to help poor little Catholic Belgium.

Mrs. Grogan [*raising her voice*]. What about poor little Catholic Ireland?

Bessie [*over to* MRS. GOGAN]. You mind your own business, maam, an' stupify your foolishness be gettin' dhrunk.

Peter [*anxiously—to* MRS. GOGAN]. Take no notice of her; pay no attention to her. She's just tormentin' herself towards havin' a row with somebody.

Bessie [*in quiet anger*]. There's a storm of anger tossin' in me heart, thinkin' of all th' poor Tommies, an' with them me own son, dhrenched in water an' soaked in blood, gropin' their way to a shattherin' death, in a shower o' shells! Young men with th' sunny lust o' life beamin' in them, layin' down their white bodies, shredded into torn an' bloody pieces, on th' althar that God Himself has built for th' sacrifice of heroes!

Mrs. Gogan [*indignantly*]. Isn't it a nice thing to have to be listenin' to a lassie an' hangin' our heads in a dead silence, knowin' that some persons think more of a ball of malt than they do of th' blessed saints.

Fluther [*deprecatingly*]. Whisht; she's always dangerous an' derogatory when she's well oiled. Th' safest way to hindher her from havin' any enjoyment out of her spite, is to dip our thoughts into the fact of her bein' a female person that has moved out of th' sight of ordinary sensible people.

Bessie [*over to* MRS. GOGAN, *viciously*]. To look at some o' th' women that's knockin' about, now, is a thing to make a body sigh. . . . A woman on her own, dhrinkin' with a bevy o' men is hardly an example to her sex. . . . A woman dhrinkin' with a woman is one thing, an' a woman dhrinkin' with herself is still a woman—flappers may be put in another category altogether—but a middle-aged married woman makin' herself th' centre of a circle of men is as a woman that is loud an' stubborn, whose feet abideth not in her own house.

The Covey [*to* BESSIE—*with a scornful look at* PETER]. When I think of all th' problems in front o' th' workers, it makes me sick to be lookin' at oul' codgers goin' about dhressed up like green-accoutered figures gone asthray out of a toyshop!

Peter [*angrily*]. Gracious God, give me patience to be listenin' to that blasted young Covey proddin' at me from over at th' other end of th' shop!

Mrs. Gogan [*dipping her finger in the whisky, and moistening with it the lips of her baby*]. Cissie Gogan's a woman livin' for nigh on twenty-five years in her own room, an' beyond biddin' th' time o' day to her neighbours, never yet as much as nodded her head in th' direction of other people's business, while she knows some [*with a look at* BESSIE] as are never content unless they're standin' senthry over other people's doin's!

[*Again the figure appears, like a silhouette, in the window, back, and all hear the voice of the speaker declaim-*

ing passionately to the gathering outside. FLUTHER, PETER *and* MRS. GOGAN *stand up, turn, and look towards the window. The* BARMAN *comes to the end of the counter;* BESSIE *and the* COVEY *stop talking, and look towards the window*]

The Voice of the Speaker. The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. Heroism has come back to the earth. War is a terrible thing, but war is not an evil thing. People in Ireland dread war because they do not know it. Ireland has not known the exhilaration of war for over a hundred years. When war comes to Ireland she must welcome it as she would welcome the Angel of God!

[*The figure passes out of sight and hearing,* L.]

The Covey [*towards all present*]. Dope, dope. There's only one war worth havin': th' war for th' economic emancipation of th' proletariat.

Bessie [*referring to* MRS. GOGAN]. They may crow away out o' them; but it ud be fitther for some o' them to mend their ways, an' cease from havin' scouts out watchin' for th' comin' of th' Saint Vincent de Paul man, for fear they'd be nailed lowerin' a pint of beer, mockin' th' man with an angel face, shinin' with th' glamour of deceit an' lies!

Mrs. Gogan [*over to* BESSIE]. An' a certain lassie standin' stiff behind her own door with her ears cocked listenin' to what's being said, stuffed till she's sthrained with envy of a neighbour thryin' for a few little things that may be got be hard sthrivin' to keep up to th' letther an' th' law, an' th' practices of th' Church!

Peter [*to* MRS. GOGAN]. If I was you, Mrs. Gogan, I'd parry her jabbin' remarks be a powerful silence that'll keep her tantalizin' words from penethratin' into your feelin's. It's always betther to leave these people to th' vengeance o' God!

Bessie [*at the counter*]. Bessie Burgess doesn't put up to know much, never havin' a swaggerin' mind, thanks be to God, but goin' on packin' up knowledge accordin' to her conscience: precept upon precept, line upon line; here a little, an' there a little.

[BESSIE, *with a vigorous swing of her shawl, turns, and with a quick movement goes* C., *facing* MRS GOGAN]

[*Furiously*] But, thanks be to Christ, she knows when she was got, where she was got, an' how she was got; while there's some she knows, decoratin' their finger with a well-polished weddin' ring, would be hard put to it if they were assed to show their weddin' lines!

[MRS. GOGAN *springs up from the seat and bounces to* C., *facing* BESSIE BURGESS. MRS. GOGAN *is wild with anger*]

Mrs. Gogan [*with hysterical rage*]. Y' oul' rip of a blasted liar, me weddin' ring's been well earned be twenty years be th' side o' me husband, now takin' his rest in heaven, married to me be Father Dempsey, in th' Chapel o' Saint Jude's, in th' Christmas Week of eighteen hundhred an' ninety-five; an' any kid, livin' or dead, that Jinnie Gogan's had since, was got between th' bordhers of th' Ten Commandments! . . .

Bessie [*bringing the palms of her hands together in sharp claps to emphasize her remarks*]. Liar to you, too, maam, y' oul' hardened thresspasser on other people's good nature, wizenin' up your soul in th' arts o' dodgeries, till every dhrop of respectability in a female is dhried up in her, lookin' at your ready-made manœuverin' with th' menkind!

Barman [*anxiously leaning over the counter*]. Here, there; here, there; speak asy there. No rowin' here, no rowin' here, now.

[FLUTHER *comes from the seat, gets in front of* MRS GOGAN, *and tries to pacify her;* PETER *leaves the seat, and tries to do the same with* BESSIE, *holding her back from* MRS. GOGAN. *The positions are:* BARMAN *behind the counter, leaning forward;* BESSIE R.; *next* PETER; *next* FLUTHER; *next* MRS. GOGAN, *with baby in her arms. The* COVEY *remains leaning on the counter, looking on*]

Fluther [*trying to calm* MRS. GOGAN]. Now, Jinnie, Jinnie, it's a derogatory thing to be smirchin' a night like this with a row; it's rompin' with th' feelin's of hope we ought to be, instead o' bein' vice versa!

Peter [*trying to quiet* BESSIE]. I'm terrible dawny, Mrs. Burgess, an' a fight leaves me weak for a long time aftherwards. . . . Please, Mrs. Burgess, before there's damage done, thry to have a little respect for yourself.

Bessie [*with a push of her hand that sends* PETER *tottering to the end of the counter*].

G'way, you little sermonizing, little yella-faced, little consequential, little pudgy, little bum, you!

Mrs. Gogan [*screaming and struggling*]. Fluther, leggo! I'm not goin' to keep an unresistin' silence, an' her scatherin' her festherin' words in me face, stirrin' up every dhrop of decency in a respectable female, with her restless rally o' lies that would make a saint say his prayer backwards!

Bessie [*shouting*]. Ah, everybody knows well that th' best charity that can be shown to you is to hide th' thruth as much as our thrue worship of God Almighty will allow us!

Mrs. Gogan [*frantically*]. Here, houl' th' kid, one o' yous; houl' th' kid for a minute! There's nothin' for it but to show this lassie a lesson or two. . . . [*To* PETER] Here, houl' th' kid, you.

[MRS GOGAN *suddenly rushes over to* PETER, *standing, trembling with fear, between the end of the counter and the seat under the window. Bewildered, and before he's aware of it,* MRS. GOGAN *has put the baby in his arms.* MRS. GOGAN *rushes back* C. *and puts herself in a fighting attitude in front of* BESSIE]

[*To* BESSIE, *standing before her in a fighting attitude*] Come on, now, me loyal lassie, dyin' with grief for little Catholic Belgium! When Jinnie Gogan's done with you, you'll have a little leisure lyin' down to think an' pray for your king an' counthry!

Barman [*coming from behind the counter, getting between the women, and proceeding to push* BESSIE *towards the door*]. Here, now, since yous can't have a little friendly argument quietly, yous'll get out o' this place in quick time. Go on, an' settle your differences somewhere else—I don't want to have another endorsement on me licence.

[*The* BARMAN *pushes* BESSIE *towards the doors* L., MRS. GOGAN *following*]

Peter [*anxiously calling to* MRS. GOGAN]. Here, take your kid back ower this. How nicely I was picked now for it to be plumped into my arms!

The Covey [*meaningly*]. She knew who she was givin' it to, maybe.

[PETER *goes over near to the* COVEY *at the counter to retort indignantly, as the* BARMAN *pushes* BESSIE *out of the doors* L. *and gets hold of* MRS. GOGAN *to put her out too*]

Peter [*hotly to the* COVEY]. Now, I'm givin' you fair warnin', me young Covey, to quit firin' your jibes an' jeers at me. . . . For one o' these days, I'll run out in front o' God Almighty an' take your sacred life!

Barman [*pushing* MRS. GOGAN *out after* BESSIE]. Go on, now; out you go.

Peter [*leaving the baby down on the floor* C]. Ay, be Jasus, wait there, till I give her back her youngster!

[PETER *runs to the door* L., *opens it, and calls out after* MRS. GOGAN]

Peter [*calling at the door* L.]. Eh, there, eh! What about the kid? [*He runs back in,* C., *and looks at* FLUTHER *and the* COVEY] There, she's afther goin' without her kid—what are we goin' to do with it now?

The Covey [*jeering*]. What are *you* goin' to do with it? Bring it outside an' show everybody what you're afther findin'.

Peter [*in a panic—to* FLUTHER]. Pick it up, you, Fluther, an' run afther her with it, will you?

Fluther [*with a long look at* PETER]. What d'ye take Fluther for? You must think Fluther's a right gom. D'ye think Fluther's like yourself, destitute of a titther of undherstandin'?

Barman [*imperatively to* PETER]. Take it up, man, an' run out afther her with it, before she's gone too far. You're not goin' to leave th' bloody thing there, are you?

Peter [*plaintively, as he lifts up the baby*]. Well, God Almighty, give me patience with all th' scorners, tormentors, an' twarters that are always an' ever thryin' to goad me into prayin' for their blindin' an' blastin' an' burnin' in th' world to come!

[PETER, *with the baby, goes out of the door* L. FLUTHER *comes from the front of the window to the counter and stands there, beside the* COVEY]

Fluther [*with an air of relief*]. God, it's a relief to get rid o' that crowd. Women is terrible when they start to fight. There's no holdin' them back. [*To the* COVEY] Are you goin' to have anything?

The Covey. Ah, I don't mind if I have another half.

Fluther [*to the* BARMAN]. Two more. Tommy, me son.

[*The* BARMAN *gets the drinks,* FLUTHER *pays*]

Fluther [*to the* COVEY]. You know there's no conthrollin' a woman when she loses her head.

[ROSIE *appears at the doors* L. *She looks over at the counter, sees the two men, then crosses over to the* L. *end of the counter, where she stands, with a suggestive look towards* FLUTHER]

Rosie [*to the* BARMAN]. Divil a use o' havin' a thrim little leg on a night like this; things was never worse. . . . Give us a half till to-morrow, Tom, duckey.

Barman [*coldly*]. No more to-night, Rosie; you owe me for three already.

Rosie [*combatively*]. You'll be paid, won't you?

Barman. I hope so.

Rosie. You hope so! Is that th' way with you, now?

Fluther [*with a long glance at* ROSIE, *to the* BARMAN]. Give her one—it'll be all right.

[*The* BARMAN *gets a drink, and puts it on the counter before* ROSIE; FLUTHER *pays for it*]

Rosie [*clapping* FLUTHER *on the back*]. Oul' sport!

Fluther [*to* COVEY]. Th' meetin' should be soon over, now.

The Covey [*in a superior way*]. Th' sooner th' betther. It's alla lot o' blasted nonsense, comrade.

Fluther. Oh, I wouldn't say it was all nonsense. After all, Fluther can remember th' time, an' him only a dawny chiselur, bein' taught at his mother's knee to be faithful to th' Shan Vok Vok!

The Covey. That's all dope, comrade; th' sort o' thing that workers are fed on be th' Boorzwawzee.

Fluther [*a little sharply*]. What's all dope? Though I'm sayin' it that shouldn't: [*catching his cheek with his hand, and pulling down the flesh from the eye*] d'ye see that mark there, undher me eye? . . . A sabre slice from a dragoon in O'Connell Street! [*Thrusting his head forward towards* ROSIE] Feel that dint in th' middle o' me nut!

Rosie [*rubbing* FLUTHER'S *head, and winking at the* COVEY]. My God, there's a holla!

Fluther [*putting on his hat with quiet pride*]. A skelp from a bobby's baton at a Labour meetin' in th' Phœnix Park!

The Covey [*sarcastically*]. He must ha' hitten you in mistake. I don't know what you ever done for th' Labour movement.

Fluther [*loudly*]. D'ye not? Maybe, then, I done as much, an' know as much about th' Labour movement as th' chancers that are blowin' about it!

Barman [*over the counter*]. Speak easy, Fluther, thry to speak easy.

The Covey [*quietly*]. There's no necessity to get excited about it, comrade.

Fluther [*more loudly*]. Excited? Who's gettin' excited? There's no one gettin' excited! It would take something more than a thing like you to flutther a feather o' Fluther. Blatherin', an', when all is said, you know as much as th' rest in th' wind up!

The Covey [*emphatically*]. Well, let us put it to th' test, then, an' see what you know about th' Labour movement: what's the mechanism of exchange?

Fluther [*roaring, because he feels he is beaten*]. How th' hell do I know what it is? There's nothin' about that in th' rules of our Thrades Union!

Barman [*protestingly*]. For God's sake, thry to speak easy, Fluther.

The Covey. What does Karl Marx say about th' Relation of Value to th' Cost o' Production?

Fluther [*angrily*]. What th' hell do I care what he says? I'm Irishman enough not to lose me head be follyin' foreigners!

Barman. Speak easy, Fluther.

The Covey [*contemptuously*]. It's only waste o' time talkin' to you, comrade.

Fluther. Don't be comradin' me, mate. I'd be on me last legs if I wanted you for a comrade.

Rosie [*to the* COVEY, *taking* FLUTHER'S *part*]. It seems a highly rediculous thing to hear a thing that's only an inch or two away from a kid, swingin' heavy words about he doesn't know th' meanin' of, an' uppishly thryin' to down a man like Misther Fluther here, that's well flavoured in th' knowledge of th' world he's livin' in.

The Covey [*bending over the counter—savagely to* ROSIE]. Nobody's askin' you to be buttin' in with your prate. . . . I have you well taped, me lassie. . . . Just you keep your opinions for your own place. . . . It'll be a long time before th' Covey takes any insthructions or reprimandin' from a prostitute!

[ROSIE, *wild with humiliation, bounds from the end of the counter to* C. *and with eyes blazing, faces towards the* COVEY]

Rosie. You louse, you louse, you! . . . You're no man. . . . You're no man . . . I'm a woman, anyhow, an' if I'm a prostitute aself, I have me feelin's. . . . Thryin' to put his arm around me a minute ago, an' givin' me th' glad eye, th' little wrigglin' lump o' desolation turns on me now, because he saw there was nothin' doin'. . . . You louse, you! If I was a man, or you were a woman, I'd bate th' puss o' you!

Barman. Ay, Rosie, ay! You'll have to shut your mouth altogether, if you can't learn to speak easy!

[FLUTHER, *with a dignified walk, goes over to* ROSIE C. *and puts a hand on her shoulder*]

Fluther [*to* ROSIE]. Houl' on there, Rosie; houl' on, there. There's no necessity to flutther yourself when you're with Fluther. . . . Any lady that's in th' company of Fluther is goin' to get a fair hunt. . . . This is outside your province. . . . I'm not goin' to let you demean yourself be talkin' to a tittherin' chancer. . . . Leave this to Fluther—this is a man's job. . . . [*He turns from* ROSIE, *comes back, crosses the* COVEY, *then turns and faces him. To the* COVEY] Now, if you've anything to say, say it to Fluther; an' let me tell you, you're not goin' to be pass-remarkable to any lady in my company.

The Covey. Sure I don't care if you were runnin' all night afther your Mary o' th' Curlin' Hair, but, when you start tellin' luscious lies about what you done for th' Labour movement, it's nearly time to show y'up!

Fluther [*fiercely*]. Is it you show Fluther up? G'way, man, I'd beat two o' you before me breakfast!

The Covey [*contemptuously*]. Tell us where you bury your dead, will you?

Fluther [*with his face stuck into the face of the* COVEY]. Sing a little less on th' high note, or, when I'm done with you, you'll put a Christianable consthruction on things, I'm tellin' you!

The Covey. You're a big fella, you are.

Fluther [*tapping the* COVEY *threateningly on the shoulder*]. Now, you're temptin' Providence when you're temptin' Fluther!

The Covey [*losing his temper, knocking* [FLUTHER'S *hands away, and bawling*]. Easy with them hands, there, easy with them hands! You're startin' to take a little risk when you commence to paw the Covey!

[FLUTHER *suddenly springs into the* C. *of the shop, flings his hat into the corner, whips off his coat, and begins to paw the air like a pugilist*]

Fluther [*roaring*]. Come on, come on, you lowser; put your mitts up now, if there's a man's blood in you! Be God, in a few minutes you'll see some snots flyin' around, I'm tellin' you. . . . When Fluther's done with you, you'll have a vice-versa opinion of him! Come on, now, come on!

[*The* COVEY *squares up to* FLUTHER]

Barman [*running from behind the counter and catching hold of the* COVEY]. Here, out you go, me little bowsey. Because you got a couple o' halves you think you can act as you like. [*He pushes the* COVEY *to the doors* L.] Fluther's a friend o' mine, an' I'll not have him insulted.

The Covey [*struggling with the* BARMAN]. Ay, leggo, leggo there; fair hunt, give a man a fair hunt! One minute with him is all I ask; one minute alone with him, while you're runnin' for th' priest an' th' doctor!

Fluther [*to the* BARMAN]. Let him go, let him go, Tom: let him open th' door to sudden death if he wants to!

Barman [*grappling with the* COVEY]. Go on, out you go an' do th' bowsey somewhere else.

[*The* BARMAN *pushes the* COVEY *out by doors* L., *and goes back behind the counter.* FLUTHER *assumes a proud air of victory.* ROSIE *gets his coat, and helps him to put it on; she then gets his hat and puts it on his head*]

Rosie [*helping* FLUTHER *with his coat*]. Be God, you put th' fear o' God in his heart that time! I thought you'd have to be dug out of him. . . . Th' way you lepped out without any of your fancy side-steppin'! "Men like Fluther," says I to meself, "is gettin' scarce nowadays."

Fluther [*with proud complacency,* C.]. I wasn't goin' to let meself be malignified by a chancer. . . . He got a little bit too derogatory for Fluther. . . . Be God, to think of a cur like that comin' to talk to a man like me!

Rosie [*fixing on his hat*]. Did j'ever!

Fluther. He's lucky he got off safe. I hit a man last week, Rosie, an' he's fallin' yet!

Rosie. Sure, you'd ha' broken him in two if you'd ha' hitten him one clatther!

Fluther [*amorously, putting his arm around* ROSIE]. Come on into th' snug, me

little darlin', an' we'll have a few dhrinks before I see you home.

Rosie. Oh, Fluther, I'm afraid you're a terrible man for th' women.

[FLUTHER *leads* ROSIE *to the seat with the round table in front,* R. *She sits down on the seat. He goes to the counter*]

Fluther [*to the* BARMAN]. Two, full ones, Tommy.

[BARMAN *gets the drinks.* FLUTHER *brings them over to seat* R., *leaves them on the table, and sits down beside* ROSIE. *The swing-doors* L. *open and* CAPTAIN BRENNAN, COMMANDANT CLITHEROE, *and* LIEUTENANT LANGON *enter, and cross quickly to the counter.* CAPT. BRENNAN *carries the banner of The Plough and the Stars, and* LIEUT. LANGON *a green, white and orange Tri-colour. They are in a state of emotional excitement. Their faces are flushed and their eyes sparkle; they speak rapidly, as if unaware of the meaning of what they say. They have been mesmerized by the fervency of the speeches*]

Clitheroe [*almost pantingly to the* BARMAN]. Three glasses o' port!

[*The* BARMAN *brings the drinks,* CLITHEROE *pays*]

Capt. Brennan. We won't have long to wait now.

Lieut. Langon. Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.

Clitheroe [*to* LIEUT. LANGON]. You have a mother, Langon.

Lieut. Langon. Ireland is greater than a mother.

Capt. Brennan [*to* CLITHEROE]. You have a wife, Clitheroe.

Clitheroe. Ireland is greater than a wife.

Lieut. Langon. Th' time for Ireland's battle is now—th' place for Ireland's battle is here.

[*The tall, dark figure again appears in the window. The three men stiffen to attention. They stand out from the* L. *of the counter,* BRENNAN *nearest counter, then* CLITHEROE, *then* LIEUT. LANGON. FLUTHER *and* ROSIE, *busy with each other, take no notice*]

The Voice of the Man. Our foes are strong, but strong as they are, they cannot undo the miracles of God, who ripens in the heart of young men the seeds sown by the young men of a former generation. They think they have pacified Ireland; think they have foreseen everything; think they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools!—they have left us our Fenian dead, and, while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland, unfree, shall never be at peace!

Capt. Brennan [*lifting up the Plough and the Stars*]. Imprisonment for th' Independence of Ireland!

Lieut. Langon [*lifting up the Tri-colour*]. Wounds for th' Independence of Ireland!

Clitheroe. Death for th' Independence of Ireland!

The Three [*together*]. So help us God!

[*They lift their glasses and drink together. The "Assembly" is heard on a bugle outside. They leave their glasses on the counter, and hurry out by doors* L. *A pause. Then* FLUTHER *and* ROSIE *rise from the seat, and start to go* L. ROSIE *is linking* FLUTHER, *who is a little drunk. Both are in a merry mood*]

Rosie. Are you afraid or what? Are you goin' to come home, or are you not?

Fluther. Of course I'm goin' home. What ud ail me that I wouldn't go?

Rosie [*lovingly*]. Come on, then, oul' sport.

Officer's Voice [*giving command outside*]. Irish Volunteers, by th' right, quick march!

Rosie [*putting her arm round* FLUTHER *and singing to the air "Twenty-four Strings to My Bow"*].

I once had a lover, a tailor, but he could
do nothin' for me,
An' then I fell in with a sailor as strong an'
as wild as th' sea.
We cuddled an' kissed with devotion, till th'
night from th' mornin' had fled;
An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin' boy
Was dancin' a jig in th' bed!

Dancin' a jig in th' bed, an' bawlin' for
butther an' bread.
An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin' boy
Was dancin' a jig in th' bed!

[*They go out with their arms round each other*]

Clitheroe's Voice [*in command outside*]. Dublin Battalion of the Irish Citizen Army, by th' right, quick march!

ACT THREE

SCENE—*A corner house of a street of tenements; exterior of house in which the Clitheroes live. It is a tall, gaunt five-storey tenement. Its brick front is dull from weather and age. It juts out from* L. *more than half-way across stage, showing part of the front elevation, with wide, heavy door, having windows above and on both sides. The windows on* L., *looking into the rooms of the Clitheroes, are hung with good casement cloth. The others are draped with grimy lace curtains. Stone steps lead from the door to the path on the street. From these steps, on each side of the door are railings to prevent anyone from falling down the area. To the extreme* R. *the front of another house is merely indicated by the side aspect of a wall with steps leading from the door, on which the wounded* LANGON *rests later on in the scene. Between the two runs a lane which, upstage, turns to the* R. *At the corner of the lane, nearest the house shown almost full front, is a street lamp.*

As the house is revealed, MRS. GOGAN *is seen helping* MOLLSER *to a chair, which stands on the path beside the railings, at the* L. *side of the steps. She then wraps a shawl around* MOLLSER'S *shoulders. It is some months later.*

Mrs. Gogan [*arranging shawl around* MOLLSER]. Th' sun'll do you all th' good in th' world. A few more weeks o' this weather, an' there's no knowin' how well you'll be. . . . Are you comfy, now?

Mollser [*weakly and wearily*]. Yis, ma; I'm all right.

Mrs. Gogan [*bending over her*]. How are you feelin'?

Mollser. Betther, ma, betther. If th' horrible sinkin' feelin' ud go, I'd be all right.

Mrs. Gogan. Ah, I wouldn't put much pass on that. Your stomach maybe's out of ordher. . . . Is th' poor breathin' any better, d'ye think?

Mollser. Yis, yis, ma; a lot betther.

Mrs. Gogan. Well, that's somethin' anyhow. . . . With th' help o' God, you'll be on th' mend from this out. . . . D'your legs feel any sthronger undher you, d'ye think?

Mollser [*irritably*]. I can't tell, ma. I think so. . . . A little.

Mrs. Gogan. Well, a little aself is somethin'. . . . I thought I heard you coughin' a little more than usual last night. . . . D'ye think you were?

Mollser. I wasn't, ma, I wasn't.

Mrs. Gogan. I thought I heard you, for I was kep' awake all night with th' shootin'. An' thinkin' o' that madman, Fluther, runnin' about through th' night lookin' for Nora Clitheroe to bring her back when he heard she'd gone to folly her husband, an' in dhread any minute he might come staggerin' in covered with bandages, splashed all over with th' red of his own blood, an' givin' us barely time to bring th' priest to hear th' last whisper of his final confession, as his soul was passin' through th' dark doorway o' death into th' way o' th' wondherin' dead. . . . You don't feel cold, do you?

Mollser. No, ma; I'm all right.

Mrs. Gogan. Keep your chest well covered, for that's th' delicate spot in you . . . if there's any danger, I'll whip you in again. . . .

[MRS. GOGAN *crosses to* R., *goes up the lane, turns and looks* R., *as if looking down the street*]

Oh, here's the Covey an' oul' Peter hurryin' along. [*She comes down the lane, and crosses to* MOLLSER] God Almighty, sthrange things is happenin' when them two is pullin' together.

[*The* COVEY *and* PETER *come into the lane* R., *come down, and stand* R.C. MRS. GOGAN *stands* C., *near the steps. The two men are breathless and excited*]

[*To the two men*] Were yous far up th' town? Did yous see any sign o' Fluther or Nora? How is things lookin'? I hear they're blazin' away out o' th' G.P.O. That th' Tommies is sthretched in heaps around Nelson's Pillar an' th' Parnell Statue, an' that th' pavin' sets in O'Connell Street is nearly covered be pools o' blood.

Peter. We seen no sign o' Nora or Fluther anywhere.

Mrs. Gogan. We should ha' held her back be main force from goin' to look for her husband. . . . God knows what's happened to her—I'm always seein' her sthretched on her back in some hospital, moanin' with th' pain of a bullet in her vitals, an' nuns thryin' to get her to take a last look at th' crucifix!

The Covey. We can do nothin'. You can't stick your nose into O'Connell Street, an' Tyler's is on fire.

Peter. An' we seen th' Lancers——

The Covey [*interrupting*]. Throttin' along, heads in th' air; spurs an' sabres jinglin', an' lances quiverin', an' lookin' as if they were assin' themselves, "Where's these blighters, till we get a prod at them," when there was a volley from th' Post Office that stretched half o' them, an' sent th' rest gallopin' away wondherin' how far they'd have to go before they'd feel safe.

Peter [*rubbing his hands*]. "Damn it," says I to meself, "this looks like business!"

The Covey. An' then out comes General Pearse an' his staff, an', standin' in th' middle o' th' street, he reads th' Proclamation.

Mrs. Gogan. What proclamation?

Peter. Declarin' an Irish Republic.

Mrs. Gogan [*with amazement*]. Go to God!

Peter. The gunboat *Helga's* shellin' Liberty Hall, an' I hear that people livin' on th' quays had to crawl on their bellies to Mass with th' bullets that were flyin' around from Boland's Mills.

Mrs. Gogan. God bless us, what's goin' to be th' end of it all!

Bessie [*opening and looking out of a window*]. Maybe yous are satisfied now; maybe yous are satisfied now! Go on an' get guns if yous are men—Johnny get your gun, get your gun, get your gun! Yous are all nicely shanghaied now; th' boyo hasn't a sword on his thigh, now! Oh, yous are all nicely shanghaied now! [*She shuts down the window viciously*]

Mrs. Gogan [*warningly to* PETER *and the* COVEY]. S-s-sh, don't answer her. She's th' right oul' Orange bitch! She's been chantin' "Rule, Britannia" all th' mornin'.

Peter. I hope Fluther hasn't met with any accident, he's such a wild card.

The Covey. Fluther's well able to take care of himself.

Mrs. Gogan [*dolefully*]. God grant it; but last night I dreamt I seen gettin' carried into th' house a sthretcher with a figure lyin' on it, stiff an' still, dhressed in th' habit of Saint Francis. An' then, I heard th' murmurs of a crowd no one could see sayin' th' litany for th' dead; an' then it got so dark that nothin' was seen but th' white face of th' corpse, gleamin' like a white wather lily floatin' on th' top of a dark lake. Then a tiny whisper thrickled into me ear, sayin', "Isn't the face very like th' face o' Fluther," an' then, with a thremblin' flutther, th' dead lips opened, an', although I couldn't hear, I knew they were sayin', "Poor oul' Fluther, afther havin' handin' in his gun at last, his shakin' soul moored in th' place where th' wicked are at rest an' th' weary cease from throublin'."

[*While* MRS. GOGAN *is speaking,* PETER *wanders up the lane, looks* R., *then stares; then puts on spectacles and looks again. He turns and shouts at* MRS. GOGAN *and the* COVEY]

Peter [*shouting*]. Here they are, be God, here they are; just afther turnin' the corner —Nora an' Fluther!

[*The* COVEY *runs up the lane and looks* R. *with* PETER]

Covey. She must be wounded or something—Fluther seems to be carryin' her.

[FLUTHER, *half carrying* NORA, *comes in* R.; NORA'S *eyes are dim and hollow; her face pale and strained-looking; her hair is tossed and her clothes are dusty. They pass by* COVEY *and* PETER, *come down the lane, and cross over to the door of the house* C. PETER *and the* COVEY *follow, and stand* R. MRS. GOGAN *goes over solicitously to* NORA. NORA *wears a brown mackintosh*]

Mrs. Gogan [*running over to them*]. God bless us, is it wounded y'are, Mrs. Clitheroe, or what?

Fluther [*confidently*]. Ah, she's all right, Mrs. Gogan; only worn out from thravellin' an' want o' sleep. A night's rest, now, an' she'll be as fit as a fiddle. Bring her in, an' make her lie down.

Mrs. Gogan [*to* NORA]. Did you hear e'er a whisper o' Mr. Clitheroe?

Nora [*wearily*]. I could find him nowhere, Mrs. Gogan. None o' them would tell me where he was. They told me I shamed my husband an' th' women of Ireland be carryin' on as I was. . . . They said th' women must learn to be brave an' cease to be cowardly. . . . Me who risked more for love than they would risk for hate. . . . [*Raising her voice in hysterical protest*] My Jack will be killed, my Jack will be killed! . . . He is to be butchered as a sacrifice to th' dead!

[NORA *sinks down on the steps at the door.* BESSIE BURGESS *opens the window, and shouts at them. They do not look at her*]

Bessie. Yous are all nicely shanghaied now! Sorra mend the lassies who have been kissin' an' cuddlin' their boys into th'

sheddin' of blood. Fillin' their minds with fairy tales that had no beginnin', but, please God, 'll have a bloody quick endin'! [*She shuts the window with a bang*]

Fluther [*losing control*]. Y' ignorant oul' throllope, you!

Mrs. Gogan [*coaxingly, to* NORA]. You'll find he'll come home safe enough to you, Mrs. Clitheroe. Afther all, there's a power o' women that's handed over sons an' husbands, to take a runnin' risk in th' fight they're wagin'.

Nora. I can't help thinkin' every shot fired 'll be fired at Jack, an' every shot fired at Jack 'll be fired at me. What do I care for th' others? I can think only of me own self. . . . An' there's no woman gives a son or a husband to be killed—if they say it, they're lyin', lyin', against God, Nature, an' against themselves! . . . One blasted hussy at a barricade told me to go home an' not be thryin' to dishearten th' men . . .

Peter [*unctuously*]. You'll have to have patience, Nora. We all have to put up with twarthers an' tormentors in this world.

The Covey. If they were fightin' for anything worth while, I wouldn't mind.

Fluther [*to* NORA]. Nothin' derogatory 'll happen to Mr. Clitheroe. You'll find, now, in th' finish up, it'll be vice versa.

Nora. Oh, I know that wherever he is, he's thinkin' of wantin' to be with me. I know he's longin' to be passin' his hand through me hair, to be caressin' me neck, to fondle me hand an' to feel me kisses clingin' to his mouth. . . . An' he stands wherever he is because he's brave? [*Vehemently*] No, but because he's a coward, a coward, a coward!

Mrs. Gogan. Oh, they're not cowards anyway.

Nora [*with denunciatory anger*]. I tell you they're afraid to say they're afraid! . . . Oh, I saw it, I saw it, Mrs. Gogan. . . . At th' barricade in North King Street I saw fear glowin' in all their eyes. . . . An' in th' middle o' th' sthreet was somethin' huddled up in a horrible tangled heap. . . . An' I saw that they were afraid to look at it. . . . I tell you they were afraid, afraid, afraid!

Mrs. Gogan [*lifting her up from the steps*]. Come on in, dear. If you'd been a little longer together the wrench asundher wouldn't have been so sharp.

Nora [*painfully ascending the steps, helped by* MRS. GOGAN]. Th' agony I'm in since he left me has thrust away every rough thing he done, an' every unkind word he spoke; only th' blossoms that grew out of our lives are before me now; shakin' their colours before me face, an' breathin' their sweet scent on every thought springin' up in me mind, till, sometimes, Mrs. Gogan, sometimes I think I'm goin' mad!

Mrs. Gogan. You'll be a lot betther when you have a little lie down.

Nora [*turning towards* FLUTHER *as she is going in*]. I don't know what I'd have done, only for Fluther. I'd have been lyin' in th' sthreets, only for him. . . . [*As she goes in*] They have dhriven away th' little happiness life had to spare for me. He has gone from me for ever, for ever. . . . Oh, Jack, Jack, Jack!

[*As* NORA *is led in,* BESSIE *comes out. She passes down the steps with her head in the air; at the bottom she stops to look back. When they have gone in, she takes a mug of milk from under a shawl she is wearing and gives it to* MOLLSER *silently.* MOLLSER *takes it from her*]

Fluther [*going from* C. *to the* COVEY *and* PETER, R.]. Which of yous has the tossers?

The Covey. I have.

[BESSIE *crosses from* MOLLSER *to* R. *She pauses at the corner of the lane,* R., *to speak to the two men*]

Bessie [*scornfully, to* FLUTHER *and the* COVEY]. You an' your Leadhers, and their sham-battle soldiers has landed a body in a nice way, havin' to go an' ferret out a bit o' bread, God knows where. . . . Why aren't yous in the G.P.O., if yous are men? It's paler an paler yous are gettin'. . . . A lot of vipers—that's what the Irish people is!

[BESSIE *goes up the lane, turns* R., *and goes out*]

Fluther [*warningly*]. Never mind her. [*To the* COVEY] Make a start, an' keep us from th' sin of idleness. [*He crosses from* R. *to* MOLLSER *and speakes to her*] Well, how are you to-day, Mollser, oul' son? What are you dhrinkin'? Milk?

Mollser. Grand, Fluther, grand, thanks—yes, milk.

Fluther [*to* MOLLSER]. You couldn't get a betther thing down you. . . . This turn-up has done one good thing, anyhow; you can't get dhrink anywhere, an' if it lasts a

week I'll be so used to it that I won't think of a pint.

[FLUTHER *returns and joins the two men* R. *The* COVEY *takes from his pocket two worn coins and a thin strip of wood (or tin) about four inches long. He puts the coins on the strip of wood and holds the strip out from him*]

The Covey. What's the bettin'?

Peter. Heads, a juice.

Fluther. Harps, a tanner.

[*The* COVEY *flips the coins from the wood into the air. As they jingle on the ground the distant boom of a big gun is heard. They leave the coins where they are and listen intently*]

Fluther [*awed*]. What th' hell's that?

The Covey [*awed*]. It's like the boom of a big gun!

Fluther. Surely to God, they're not goin' to use artillery on us!

The Covey [*scornfully*]. Not goin'! [*Vehemently*] Wouldn't they use anything on us, man?

Fluther. Aw, holy Christ, that's not playin' th' game!

Peter [*plaintively*]. What would happen if a shell landed here now?

The Covey [*ironically*]. You'd be off to heaven in a fiery chariot.

Peter. In spite of all th' warnin's that's ringin' around us, are you goin' to start your pickin' at me again?

Fluther. Go on, toss them again, toss them again. . . . Harps, a tanner.

Peter. Heads, a juice.

[*The* COVEY *tosses the coins as before; they fall on the ground and roll a little.* FLUTHER *waves the other two back as they bend over the rolling coins*]

Fluther. Let them roll, let them roll—heads be God!

[BESSIE *runs in* R., *runs down the lane towards the three men. She is breathless with excitement. She has a new fox fur round her neck over her shawl, a number of new umbrellas under one arm, a box of biscuits under the other, and she wears a gaudily trimmed hat on her head. She speaks rapidly and breathlessly*]

Bessie. They're breakin' into th' shops, they're breakin' into th' shops! Smashin' th' windows, batterin' in th' doors an' whippin' away everything! An' th' Volunteers is firin' on them. I seen two men an' a lassie pushin' a piano down th' sthreet, an' th' sweat rollin' off them thryin' to get it up on th' pavement; an' an oul' wan that must ha' been seventy lookin' as if she'd dhrop every minute with th' dint o' heart beatin', thryin' to pull a big double bed out of a broken shop window! I was goin' to wait till I dhressed meself from th' skin out.

Mollser [*to* BESSIE, *as she is going into the house* C.]. Help me in, Bessie; I'm feelin' curious.

[BESSIE *leaves the looted things in the house, and, rapidly returning, helps* MOLLSER *in*]

The Covey [*to* FLUTHER]. Th' selfishness of that one—she waited till she got all she could carry before she'd come to tell anyone!

Fluther [*running over to the door of the house and shouting in to* BESSIE]. Ay, Bessie, did you hear of e'er a pub gettin' a shake up?

Bessie [*inside*]. I didn't hear o' none.

Fluther [*in a burst of enthusiasm*]. Well, you're goin' to hear of one soon!

The Covey [*to* FLUTHER, *excitedly*]. Come on, man, an' don't be wastin' time.

Peter [*calling to them as they run up the lane*]. E, eh, are yous goin' to leave me here, alone?

[FLUTHER *and* COVEY *halt in middle of the lane, and turn to look and reply to* PETER]

Fluther. Are you goin' to leave yourself here?

Peter [*anxiously*]. Didn't yous hear her sayin' they were firin' on them?

The Covey and Fluther [*together*]. Well?

Peter. Supposin' I happened to be potted?

Fluther. We'd give you a Christian burial, anyhow.

The Covey [*ironically*]. Dhressed up in your regimentals.

Peter [*to the* COVEY, *passionately*]. May th' all-lovin' God give you a hot knock one o' these days, me young Covey, tuthorin' Fluther up now to be tiltin' at me, an' crossin' me with his mockeries an' jibin'!

[FLUTHER *and* COVEY *run up the lane, and go off* R. PETER *looks after them and then goes slowly into the house,* C.]

[*After a slight pause,* MRS. GOGAN *appears at the door of the house* C., *push-*

ing a pram in front of her. As she gets the pram over the threshold BESSIE *appears, catches the pram, and stops* MRS. GOGAN'S *progress*]

Bessie [*angrily*]. Here, where are you goin' with that? How quick you were, me lady, to clap your eyes on th' pram. . . . Maybe you don't know that Mrs. Sullivan, before she went to spend Easther with her people in Dunboyne, gave me sthrict injunctions to give an occasional look to see if it was still standin' where it was left in th' corner of th' lobby.

Mrs. Gogan [*indignantly*]. That remark of yours, Mrs. Bessie Burgess, requires a little considheration, seein' that th' pram was left on our lobby, an' not on yours; a foot or two a little to th' left of th' jamb of me own room door; nor is it needful to mention th' name of th' person that gave a squint to see if it was there th' first thing in th' mornin', an' th' last thing in th' stillness o' th' night; never failin' to realize that her eyes couldn't be goin' wrong, be sthretchin' out her arm an' runnin' her hand over th' pram, to make sure that th' sight was no deception! Moreover, somethin's tellin' me that th' runnin' hurry of an inthrest you're takin' in it now is a sudden ambition to use th' pram for a purpose, that a loyal woman of law an' ordher would stagger away from!

[MRS. GOGAN *pushes the pram violently down the steps, pulling* BESSIE *with her, who holds her up again when they reach the street*]

Bessie [*still holding the pram*]. There's not as much as one body in th' house that doesn't know that it wasn't Bessie Burgess that was always shakin' her voice complainin' about people leavin' bassinettes in th' way of them that, week in an' week out, had to pay their rent, an' always had to find a regular accommodation for her own furniture in her own room. . . . An' as for law an' ordher, puttin' aside th' harp an' shamrock, Bessie Burgess 'll have as much respect as she wants for th' lion an' unicorn!

Peter [*appearing at the door of the house*, C.]. I think I'll go with th' pair of yous an' see th' fun. A fella might as well chance it, anyhow.

Mrs. Gogan [*taking no notice of* PETER, *and pushing the pram on towards the lane*]. Take your rovin' lumps o' hands from pattin' th' bassinette, if you please, ma'am; an', steppin' from th' threshold of good manners, let me tell you, Mrs. Burgess, that it's a fat wondher to Jennie Gogan that a lady-like singer o' hymns like yourself would lower her thoughts from sky-thinkin' to sthretch out her arm in a sly-seekin' way to pinch anything dhriven asthray in th' confusion of th' battle our boys is makin' for th' freedom of their counthry!

Peter [*laughing and rubbing his hands together*]. Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee! I'll go with th' pair o' yous an' give yous a hand.

Mrs. Gogan [*with a rapid turn of her head as she shoves the pram forward*]. Get up in th' prambulator an' we'll wheel you down.

Bessie [*to* MRS. GOGAN *as she halts the pram again*]. Poverty an' hardship has sent Bessie Burgess to abide with sthrange company, but she always knew them she had to live with from backside to breakfast time; an' she can tell them, always havin' had a Christian kinch on her conscience, that a passion for thievin' an' pinchin' would find her soul a foreign place to live in, an' that her present intention is quite th' lofty-hearted one of pickin' up anything shaken up an' scatthered about in th' loose confusion of a general plundher!

[MRS. GOGAN, BESSIE *and the pram run up the lane and go off* R. PETER *follows, but as he reaches the corner of the lane the boom of the big gun brings him to a sudden halt*]

Peter [*frightened into staying behind by the sound of the gun*]. God Almighty, that's th' big gun again! God forbid any harm would happen to them, but sorra mind I'd mind if they met with a dhrop in their mad endeyvours to plundher an' desthroy.

[*He looks down the street from the lane for a moment, then runs to the hall door of the house,* C., *which is open, and shuts it with a vicious pull; he then goes to the chair in which* MOLLSER *had sat, sits down, takes out his pipe, lights it and begins to smoke with his head carried at a haughty angle. The* COVEY *comes in* R. *and down the lane, staggering with a ten-stone sack of flour on his back. He goes over to the door, pushes it with his head, and finds he can't open it; he turns slightly in the direction of* PETER]

The Covey [*to* PETER]. Who shut th' door? . . . [*He kicks at it*] Here, come on

an' open it, will you? This isn't a mot's hand-bag I've got on me back.

Peter. Now, me young Covey, d'ye think I'm goin' to be your lackey?

The Covey [*angrily*]. Will you open th' door, y'oul'——

Peter [*shouting*]. Don't be assin' me to open any door, don't be assin' me to open any door for you. . . . Makin' a shame an' a sin o' th' cause that good men are fightin' for. . . . Oh, God forgive th' people that, instead o' burnishin' th' work th' boys is doin' to-day, with quiet honesty an' patience, is revilin' their sacrifices with a riot of lootin, an' roguery!

The Covey [*sarcastically*]. Isn't your own eyes leppin' out o' your head with envy that you haven't th' guts to ketch a few o' th' things that God is givin' to His chosen people? . . . Y'oul' hypocrite, if every one was blind you'd steal a cross off an ass's back!

Peter [*very calmly*]. You're not goin' to make me lose me temper; you can go on with your proddin' as long as you like; goad an' goad an' goad away; hee hee, heee! I'll not lose me temper.

[*Somebody opens door and the* COVEY *goes in*]

Covey [*inside house, to mock* PETER]. Cuckoo-oo!

[PETER *gets up from chair in a blaze of passion, and follows the* COVEY *in, shouting*]

Peter [*shouting*]. You lean, long, lanky lath of a lowsey bastard. [*Going in door of house,* C.] Lowsey bastard, lowsey bastard!

[MRS. GOGAN *and* BESSIE, *pushing the pram, come in* R., *come down lane to front of the house,* C. BESSIE *is pushing the pram, which is filled with loot.* MRS. GOGAN *carries a tall standard lamp, topped with a wide and bright-coloured shade. The pram is filled with fancy-coloured dresses, and boots and shoes. They are talking as they appear* R.]

Mrs. Gogan [*appearing* R.]. I don't remember ever havin' seen such lovely pairs as them with the pointed toes an' the cuban heels.

Bessie [*they are now* C., *lifting one of the evening dresses from the pram, holding it up admiringly*]. They'll go grand with th' dhresses we're afther liftin', when we've stitched a sthray bit o' silk to lift th' bodices up a little bit higher, so as to shake th' shame out o' them, an' make them fit for women that hasn't lost themselves in th' nakedness o' th' times.

Peter [*at door, sourly to* MRS. GOGAN]. Ay, you. Mollser looks as if she was goin' to faint, an' your youngster is roarin' in convulsions in her lap.

Mrs. Gogan [*snappily*]. She's never any other way but faintin'!

[MRS. GOGAN *runs into the house with her arm full of things. She comes back, takes up the lamp and is about to go in, when a rifleshot very near is heard.* MRS. GOGAN, *with lamp, and* BESSIE, *with pram, rush to the door which* PETER, *in a panic, has shut*]

Mrs. Gogan [*banging at the door*]. Eh, eh, you cowardly oul' fool, what are you thryin' to shut the door on us for?

[MRS. GOGAN *pushes the door open and runs in, followed by* BESSIE *dragging in the pram. They shut the door. A pause. Then* CAPT. BRENNAN, *supporting* LIEUT. LANGON, *comes in* L., *along the street in front of the house,* C. *As* BRENNAN *and* LANGON *reach* C. *going* R., CLITHEROE, *pale and in a state of calm nervousness, appears at* L., *walking backwards or looking back in the direction from which they've come; he has a rifle held at the ready in his hands.* LANGON *is ghastly white and now and again his face is twisted in agony*]

Capt. Brennan [*back to* CLITHEROE]. Why did you fire over their heads? Why didn't you fire to kill?

Clitheroe. No, no, Bill; bad as they are, they're Irish men an' women.

[BRENNAN *gently lets* LANGON *recline on the steps of the house indicated to the extreme* R., *holding him by an arm.* CLITHEROE *is* C., *watching* LANGON]

Capt. Brennan [*savagely*]. Irish be damned! Attackin' an' mobbin' th' men that are riskin' their lives for them. If these slum lice gather at our heels again, plug one o' them, or I'll soon shock them with a shot or two meself!

Lieut. Langon [*moaningly*]. My God, is there ne'er an ambulance knockin' around anywhere? . . . Th' stomach is ripped out o' me; I feel it—o-o-oh, Christ!

Capt. Brennan. Keep th' heart up, Jim; we'll soon get help, now.

[*Door of house* C. *opens and* NORA *rushes out, dashes down steps into* CLITHEROE'S *arms at bottom. She flings her arms around his neck. Her hair is down, her face haggard, but her eyes are agleam with happy relief*]

Nora [*to* CLITHEROE]. Jack, Jack, oh, God be thanked. Kiss me, kiss me, Jack; kiss your own Nora.

Clitheroe [*kissing her, and speaking brokenly*]. My Nora; my little, beautiful Nora, I wish to God I'd never left you.

Nora. It doesn't matter—not now, not now, Jack. It will make us dearer than ever to each other. . . . Kiss me, kiss me again.

Clitheroe. Now, for God's sake, Nora, don't make a scene.

Nora [*fervently*]. I won't, I won't; I promise, Jack—honest to God.

[BESSIE *opens window of house to the* R., *puts out her head, and shouts at* CLITHEROE *and* BRENNAN]

Bessie [*at window*]. Has th' big guns knocked all th' harps out of your hands? General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice now, than standin' at a barricade. [*To* BRENNAN] An' the professor of chicken butcherin', there, finds he's up against something a little tougher than his own chickens, an' that's sayin' a lot!

Capt. Brennan [*over to* BESSIE]. Shut up, y'oul' hag!

Bessie [*down to* BRENNAN]. Choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken!

Lieut. Langon. For God's sake, Bill, bring me some place where me wound 'll be looked afther. . . . Am I to die before anything is done to save me?

Capt. Brennan [*to* CLITHEROE]. Come on, Jack. We've got to get help for Jim, here—have you no thought for his pain an' danger?

Bessie. Choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken, choke th' chicken!

Clitheroe [*to* NORA]. Loosen me, darling, let me go.

Nora [*clinging to him*]. No, no, no, I'll not let you go! Come on, come up to our home, Jack, my sweetheart, my lover, my husband, an' we'll forget th' last few terrible days! . . .

Lieut. Langon [*appealingly*]. Oh, if I'd kep' down only a little longer, I mightn't ha' been hit! Every one else escapin', an' me gettin' me belly ripped asundher! . . . I couldn't scream, couldn't even scream. . . . D'ye think I'm really badly wounded, Bill? Me clothes seem to be all soakin' wet. . . . It's blood . . . My God, it must be me own blood!

Capt. Brennan [*to* CLITHEROE]. Go on, Jack, bid her good-bye with another kiss, an' be done with it! D'ye want Langon to die in me arms while you're dallyin' with your Nora?

Clitheroe [*to* NORA]. I must go, I must go, Nora. I'm sorry we met at all. . . . It couldn't be helped—all other ways were blocked be th' British. . . . Let me go, can't you, Nora? D'ye want me to be unthrue to me comrades?

Nora. No, I won't let you go. . . . I want you to be thrue to me, Jack. . . . I'm your dearest comrade; I'm your thruest comrade. [*Tightening her arms round* CLITHEROE] Oh, Jack, I can't let you go!

Clitheroe [*with anger, mixed with affection*]. You must, Nora, you must.

Nora. All last night at the barricades I sought you, Jack. I asked for you everywhere. I didn't think of the danger—I could only think of you. They dhrove me away, but I came back again.

Clitheroe [*ashamed of her action*]. What possessed you to make a show of yourself, like that! What are you more than any other woman?

Nora. No more, maybe; but you are more to me than any other man, Jack. . . . I couldn't help it. . . . I shouldn't have told you. . . . My love for you made me mad with terror.

Clitheroe [*angrily*]. They'll say now that I sent you out th' way I'd have an excuse to bring you home. . . . Are you goin' to turn all th' risks I'm takin' into a laugh?

Lieut. Langon. Let me lie down, let me lie down, Bill; th' pain would be easier, maybe, lyin' down. . . . Oh, God, have mercy on me!

Capt. Brennan [*encouragingly to* LANGON]. A few steps more, Jim, a few steps more; thry to stick it for a few steps more.

Lieut. Langon. Oh, I can't, I can't, I can't!

Capt. Brennan [*to* CLITHEROE]. Are you comin', man, or are you goin' to make an arrangement for another honeymoon? . . .

If you want to act th' renegade, say so, an' we'll be off!

Bessie [*from window*]. Runnin' from th' Tommies—choke th' chicken. Runnin' from th' Tommies—choke th' chicken!

Clitheroe [*savagely to* BRENNAN]. Damn you, man, who wants to act th' renegade? [*To* NORA] Here, let go your hold; let go, I say!

Nora [*clinging to* CLITHEROE, *and indicating* BRENNAN]. Look, Jack, look at th' anger in his face; look at th' fear glintin' in his eyes. . . . He, himself's afraid, afraid, afraid! . . . He wants you to go th' way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin' you an' missin' him! . . .

Clitheroe [*struggling to release himself from* NORA]. Damn you, woman, will you let me go!

Capt. Brennan [*fiercely, to* CLITHEROE]. Break her hold on you, man; or go up an' sit on her lap!

[CLITHEROE *tries to break her hold with his right hand (he's holding rifle in the other), but* NORA *clings to him*]

Nora [*imploringly*]. Jack, Jack, Jack!

Lieut. Langon [*agonizingly*]. Brennan, a priest; I'm dyin', I think. I'm dyin'.

Clitheroe [*to* NORA]. If you won't do it quietly, I'll have to make you! [*To* BRENNAN] Here, hold this gun, you, for a minute.

[*He hands the gun to* BRENNAN]

Nora [*pitifully*]. Please, Jack. . . . You're hurting me, Jack. . . . Honestly. . . . Oh, you're hurting . . . me! . . . I won't, I won't, I won't! . . . Oh, Jack, I gave you everything you asked of me. . . . Don't fling me from you, now!

[*He roughly loosens her grip, and pushes her away from him,* NORA *sinks to the steps at the door, and lies there*]

Nora [*weakly*]. Ah, Jack. . . . Jack. . . . Jack!

Clitheroe [*taking the gun back from* BRENNAN]. Come on, come on.

[CLITHEROE *hurries over to* BRENNAN, *catches hold of* LANGON'S *other arm; they both lift him up from steps, and supporting him, turn into the lane and go off* R.]

[BESSIE *looks at* NORA *lying on the street, for a few moments, then, leaving the window, she comes out, runs over to* NORA, *lifts her up in her arms, and carries her swiftly into the house. A short pause, then down the street is heard a wild, drunken yell; it comes nearer, and* FLUTHER *enters, frenzied, wild-eyed, mad, roaring drunk. In his arms is an earthen half-gallon jar of whisky; streaming from one of the pockets of his coat is the arm of a new tunic shirt; on his head is a woman's vivid blue hat with gold lacing, all of which he has looted*]

[*The evening begins to darken*]

Fluther [*singing in a frenzy, as he comes down the lane*].

Fluther's a jolly good fella . . .
Fluther's a jolly good fella . . . up th' rebels!
. . . that nobody can deny!

[*He reels across to* L., *staggers up the steps of the house,* C., *and hammers at the door*] Get us a mug, or a jug, or somethin', some o' yous, one o' yous, will yous, before I lay one o' yous out!

[*Rifle firing is heard some distance away and the boom of the big gun.* FLUTHER *turns from the door, and looks off* R.]

Bang an' fire away for all Fluther cares. [*He beats at the door*] Come down an' open th' door, some o' yous, one o' yous, will yous, before I lay some o' yous out! . . . Th' whole city can topple home to hell, for Fluther.

[*Inside the house,* C., *is heard a scream from* NORA, *followed by a moan*]

[*Singing frantically*] That nobody can deny, that nobody can deny,
For Fluther's a jolly good fella,
Fluther's a jolly good fella,
Fluther's a jolly good fella . . . up th' rebels!
. . . that nobody can deny!

[*His frantic movements cause him to spill some of the whisky out of the jar*] [*Looking down at jar*] Blast you, Fluther, don't be spillin' th' precious liquor! [*He kicks at the door*] Give us a mug, or a jug, or somethin', one o' yous, some o' yous, will yous, before I lay one o' yous out!

[*The door suddenly opens, and* BESSIE, *coming out, grips him by the collar*]

Bessie [*indignantly*]. You bowsey, come in ower o' that. . . . I'll thrim your thricks o' dhrunken dancin' for you, an' none of us knowin' how soon we'll bump into a world we were never in before!

Fluther [*as she is pulling him in*]. Ay, th' jar, th' jar, th' jar. *Mind th' jar!*

[*A short pause, then again is heard a scream of pain from* NORA. *The door opens and* MRS. GOGAN *and* BESSIE *are seen standing at it*]

[*The light gets dim*]

Bessie. Fluther would go, only he's too dhrunk. . . . Oh, God, isn't it a pity he's so dhrunk! We'll have to thry to get a docthor somewhere.

Mrs. Gogan. I'd be afraid to go. . . . Besides, Mollser's terrible bad. I don't think you'll get a docthor to come. It's hardly any use goin'.

Bessie [*determinedly*]. I'll risk it. . . . Give her a little of Fluther's whisky. . . . It's th' fright that's brought it on her so soon. . . . Go on back to her, you.

[MRS. GOGAN *goes into the house, and* BESSIE *softly closes the door. She comes down steps, and is half-way across to* R., *when rifle-firing and the tok-tok-tok of a machine-gun bring her to a sudden halt. She hesitates for a moment, then tightens her shawl round her, as if it were a shield*]

[*Softly*] O God, be Thou my help in time o' throuble; an' shelther me safely in th' shadow of Thy wings.

[*She goes forward, goes up the lane, and goes off* R.]

ACT FOUR

SCENE—*The living-room of* BESSIE BURGESS. *It is one of two small attic rooms (the other, used as a bedroom, is on the* L.), *the low ceiling slopes down towards the back. There is an unmistakable air of poverty about the room. The paper on the walls is torn and soiled. On the* R., *downstage, is a door. A small window* C. *back. To* L. *of window, a well-worn dresser, with a small quantity of Delft. On the* L. *wall, upstage is a door leading to a bedroom. The door on* R. *leads to the rest of the house and street. Below door on* L. *wall, the fireplace. Inside fender is a kettle and saucepan. On the hob a teapot. In front of fire a well-worn armchair. In front of window, back, a little to* R., *an oak coffin stands on two kitchen chairs. On floor, front of coffin, is a wooden box, on which are two lighted candles in candlesticks. In front of coffin, a little to* L., *a small kitchen table. At* R. *end of table, a kitchen chair. In corner where* R. *and back walls meet, the standard lamp, with coloured shade, looted in Third Act, stands; beside the lamp, hanging from nail in wall, back, hangs one of the evening dresses. There is no light in the room but that given from the two candles and the fire. The dusk has well fallen, and the glare of the burning buildings in the town can be seen through the windows in the distant sky. The* COVEY, FLUTHER *and* PETER *have been playing cards, sitting on the floor by the light of the candles on the box near the coffin. When the* CURTAIN *rises the* COVEY *is shuffling the cards,* PETER *is sitting in a stiff, dignified way opposite him, and* FLUTHER *is kneeling beside the window, back, cautiously looking out into street. It is a few days later.*

Fluther [*furtively peeping out of the window*]. Give them a good shuffling. . . . Th' sky's gettin' reddher an' reddher. . . . You'd think it was afire. . . . Half o' th' city must be burnin'.

The Covey [*warningly*]. If I was you, Fluther, I'd keep away from that window. . . . It's dangerous, an', besides, if they see you, you'll only bring a nose on th' house.

Peter [*anxiously*]. Yes; an' he knows we had to leave our own place th' way they were riddlin' it with machine-gun fire. . . . He'll keep on pimpin' an' pimpin' there, till we have to fly out o' this place too.

Fluther [*ironically to* PETER]. If they make any attack here, we'll send you out in your green an' glory uniform, shakin' your sword over your head, an' they'll fly before you as th' Danes flew before Brian Boru!

The Covey [*placing the cards on the floor, after shuffling them*]. Come on, an' cut.

[FLUTHER *creeps,* L. *end of table, over to where* COVEY *and* PETER *are seated, and squats down on floor between them*]

[*Having dealt the cards*] Spuds up again.

[NORA *moans feebly in room on* L. *They listen for a moment*]

Fluther. There, she's at it again. She's been quiet for a good long time, all th' same.

The Covey. She was quiet before, sure, an' she broke out again worse than ever. . . . What was led that time?

Peter [*impatiently*]. Thray o' Hearts, Thray o' Hearts, Thray o' Hearts.

Fluther. It's damned hard lines to think of her dead-born kiddie lyin' there in th'

arms o' poor little Mollser. Mollser snuffed it, sudden too, afther all.

The Covey. Sure she never got any care. How could she get it, an' th' mother out day and night lookin' for work, an' her consumptive husband leavin' her with a baby to be born before he died.

Voices [in a lilting chant to the L. *in an outside street].* Red Cr . . . oss, Red Cr . . . oss! . . . Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance!

The Covey [to FLUTHER*].* Your deal, Fluther.

Fluther [shuffling and dealing the cards]. It'll take a lot out o' Nora—if she'll ever be th' same.

The Covey. Th' docthor thinks she'll never be th' same; thinks she'll be a little touched here. *[He touches his forehead]* She's ramblin' a lot; thinkin' she's out in th' counthry with Jack; or, gettin' his dinner ready for him before he comes home; or, yellin' for her kiddie. All that, though, might be th' chloroform she got. . . . I don't know what we'd have done only for oul' Bessie: up with her for th' past three nights, hand runnin'.

Fluther [approvingly]. I always knew there was never anything really derogatory wrong with poor Bessie. *[Suddenly catching* PETER'S *arm as he is taking a trick]* Eh, houl' on there, don't be so damn quick—that's my thrick!

Peter [resentfully]. What's your thrick? It's my thrick, man.

Fluther [loudly]. How is it your thrick?

Peter [answering as loudly]. Didn't I lead th' deuce!

Fluther. You must be gettin' blind, man; don't you see th' ace?

Bessie [appearing at door of room, L.*; in a tense whisper].* D'ye want to waken her again on me, when she's just gone asleep? If she wakes will yous come an' mind her? If I hear a whisper out o' one o' yous again, I'll . . . gut yous!

The Covey [in a whisper]. S-s-s-h. She can hear anything above a whisper.

Peter [looking up at the ceiling]. Th' gentle an' merciful God 'll give th' pair o' yous a scawldin, an' a scarifyin' one o' these days!

*[*FLUTHER *takes a bottle of whisky from his pocket, and takes a drink]*

The Covey [to FLUTHER*].* Why don't you spread that out, man, an' thry to keep a sup for to-morrow?

Fluther. Spread it out? Keep a sup for to-morrow? How th' hell does a fella know there'll be any to-morrow? If I'm goin' to be whipped away, let me be whipped away when it's empty, an' not when it's half-full!

*[*BESSIE *comes in a tired way from door of room* L.*, down to armchair by fire, and sits down]*

[Over to BESSIE*]* Well, how is she now, Bessie?

Bessie. I left her sleeping quietly. When I'm listenin' to her babblin', I think she'll never be much betther than she is. Her eyes have a hauntin' way of lookin' in instead of lookin' out, as if her mind had been lost alive in madly minglin' memories of th' past. . . . *[Sleepily]* Crushin' her thoughts . . . together . . . in a fierce . . . an' fanciful . . . *[she nods her head and starts wakefully]* idea that dead things are livin', an' livin' things are dead. . . . *[With a start]* Was that a scream I heard her give? *[Reassured]* Blessed God, I think I hear her screamin' every minute! An' it's only there with me that I'm able to keep awake.

The Covey. She'll sleep, maybe, for a long time, now. Ten here.

Fluther [gathering up cards]. Ten here. If she gets a long sleep, she might be all right. Peter's th' lone five.

The Covey [suddenly]. Whisht! I think I hear somebody movin' below. Whoever it is, he's comin' up.

[A pause. Then the door, R. *opens, and* CAPT. BRENNAN *comes timidly in. He has changed his uniform for a suit of civies. His eyes droop with the heaviness of exhaustion; his face is pallid and drawn. His clothes are dusty and stained here and there with mud. He leans heavily on the back of a chair* R. *end of table]*

Capt. Brennan. Mrs. Clitheroe; where's Mrs. Clitheroe? I was told I'd find her here.

Bessie. What d'ye want with Mrs. Clitheroe?

Capt. Brennan. I've a message, a last message for her from her husband.

Bessie. Killed! He's not killed, is he!

Capt. Brennan [sinking stiffly and painfully on to a chair]. In th' Imperial Hotel; we fought till th' place was in flames. He was shot through th' arm, an' then through

th' lung. . . . I could do nothin' for him—only watch his breath comin' an' goin' in quick, jerky gasps, an' a tiny sthream o' blood thricklin' out of his mouth down over his lower lip. . . . I said a prayer for th' dyin', an' twined his Rosary beads around his fingers. . . . Then I had to leave him to save meself. . . . [*He shows some holes in his coat*] Look at th' way a machine-gun tore at me coat, as I belted out o' th' buildin' an' darted across th' sthreet for shelter. . . . An' then, I seen The Plough an' th' Stars fallin' like a shot as th' roof crashed in, an' where I'd left poor Jack was nothin' but a leppin' spout o' flame!

Bessie [*with partly repressed vehemence*]. Ay, you left him! You twined his Rosary beads round his fingers, an' then, you run like a hare to get out o' danger!

Capt. Brennan [*defensively*]. I took me chance as well as him. . . . He took it like a man. His last whisper was to "Tell Nora to be brave; that I'm ready to meet my God, an' that I'm proud to die for Ireland." An' when our General heard it he said that "Commandant Clitheroe's end was a gleam of glory." Mrs. Clitheroe's grief will be a joy when she realizes that she has had a hero for a husband.

Bessie. If you only seen her, you'd know to th' differ.

[NORA *appears at door,* L. *She is clad only in her nightdress and slippers; her hair, uncared for some days, is hanging in disorder over her shoulders. Her pale face looks paler still because of a vivid red spot on the tip of each cheek. Her eyes are glimmering with the light of incipient insanity; her hands are nervously fiddling with her nightgown. She halts at the door for a moment, looks vacantly around the room, and then comes slowly in. The rest do not notice her till she speaks.* BESSIE *has fallen asleep in chair*]

PETER, COVEY *and* FLUTHER *stop their card-playing and watch her*]

Nora [*roaming slowly towards* R. *to back of table*]. No . . . not there, Jack . . . I feel very, very tired . . . [*Passing her hand across her eyes*] Curious mist on my eyes. Why don't you hold my hand, Jack. . . . [*Excitedly*] No, no, Jack, it's not: can't you see it's a goldfinch? Look at the black satiny wings, with the gold bars, an' th' splash of crimson on its head. . . . [*Wearily*] Something ails me, something ails me. . . . [*Frightened*] You're goin' away, an' I can't follow you! [*She wanders back to* L. *end of table*] I can't follow you. [*Crying out*] Jack, Jack, Jack!

[BESSIE *wakes with a start, sees* NORA, *gets up and runs to her*]

Bessie [*putting arm round* NORA]. Mrs. Clitheroe, aren't you a terrible woman to get up out o' bed. . . . You'll get cold if you stay here in them clothes.

Nora [*monotonously*]. Cold? I'm feelin' very cold . . . it's chilly out here in th' counthry. [*Looking around, frightened*] What place is this? Where am I?

Bessie [*coaxingly*]. You're all right, Nora; you're with friends, an' in a safe place. Don't you know your uncle an' your cousin, an' poor oul' Fluther?

Peter [*rising to go over to* NORA]. Nora, darlin', now——

Fluther [*pulling him back*]. Now, leave her to Bessie, man. A crowd 'll only make her worse.

Nora [*thoughtfully*]. There is something I want to remember, an' I can't. [*With agony*] I can't, I can't, I can't! My head, my head! [*Suddenly breaking from* BESSIE, *and running over to the men, and gripping* FLUTHER *by the shoulders*] Where is it? Where's my baby? Tell me where you've put it, where've you hidden it? My baby, my baby; I want my baby! My head, my poor head. . . . Oh, I can't tell what is wrong with me. [*Screaming*] Give him to me, give me my husband!

Bessie. Blessin' o' God on us, isn't this pitiful!

Nora [*struggling with* BESSIE]. I won't go away for you; I won't. Not till you give me back my husband. [*Screaming*] Murderers, that's what yous are; murderers, murderers!

[BESSIE *gently, but firmly, pulls her from* FLUTHER, *and tries to lead her to room,* L.]

Bessie [*tenderly*]. Ss-s-sh. We'll bring Mr. Clitheroe back to you, if you'll only lie down an' stop quiet. . . . [*Trying to lead her in*] Come on, now, Nora, an' I'll sing something to you.

Nora. I feel as if my life was thryin' to force its way out of my body. . . . I can hardly breathe . . . I'm frightened, I'm frightened, I'm frightened! For God's sake,

don't leave me, Bessie. Hold my hand, put your arms around me!

Fluther [*to* BRENNAN]. Now you can see th' way she is, man.

Peter. An' what way would she be if she heard Jack had gone west?

The Covey [*to* PETER, *warningly*]. Shut up, you, man!

Bessie [*to* NORA]. We'll have to be brave, an' let patience clip away th' heaviness of th' slow-movin' hours, rememberin' that sorrow may endure for th' night, but joy cometh in th' mornin'. . . . Come on in, an' I'll sing to you, an' you'll rest quietly.

Nora [*stopping suddenly on her way to the room*]. Jack an' me are goin' out somewhere this evenin'. Where I can't tell. Isn't it curious I can't remember. . . . [*Screaming, and pointing* R.] He's there, he's there, an they won't give him back to me!

Bessie. S-ss-s-h, darlin', s-ssh. I won't sing to you, if you're not quiet.

Nora [*nervously holding* BESSIE]. Hold my hand, hold my hand, an' sing to me, sing to me!

Bessie. Come in an' lie down, an' I'll sing to you.

Nora [*vehemently*]. Sing to me, sing to me; sing, sing!

Bessie [*singing as she leads* NORA *into room,* L].

Lead, kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
Th' night is dark an' I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.

[*Leading* NORA, BESSIE *goes into room,* L.]

[*Singing softly inside room,* L.]

Keep thou my feet, I do not ask to see
Th' distant scene—one step enough for me.

Covey [*to* BRENNAN]. Now that you've seen how bad she is, an' that we daren't tell her what has happened till she's betther, you'd best be slippin' back to where you come from.

Capt. Brennan. There's no chance o' slippin' back now, for th' military are everywhere: a fly couldn't get through. I'd never have got here, only I managed to change me uniform for what I'm wearin'. . . . I'll have to take me chance, an' thry to lie low here for a while.

The Covey [*frightened*]. There's no place here to lie low. Th' Tommies 'll be hoppin' in here, any minute!

Peter [*aghast*]. An' then we'd all be shanghaied!

The Covey. Be God, there's enough afther happenin' to us!

Fluther [*warningly, as he listens*]. Whisht, whisht, th' whole o' yous. I think I heard th' clang of a rifle butt on th' floor of th' hall below. [*All alertness*] Here, come on with th' cards again. I'll deal. [*He shuffles and deals the cards to all*] Clubs up. [*To* BRENNAN] Thry to keep your hands from shakin', man. You lead, Peter. [*As* PETER *throws out a card*] Four o' Hearts led.

[*Heavy steps are heard coming up stairs, outside door* R. *The door opens and* CORPORAL STODDART *of the Wiltshires enters in full war kit—steel helmet, rifle, bayonet and trench tools. He stands near door* R., *looks around the room, and at the men who go on silently playing cards. A pause*]

[*Gathering up cards, and breaking the silence*] Two tens an' a five.

Corporal Stoddart. 'Ello. [*Indicating the coffin*] This the stiff?

The Covey. Yis.

Corporal Stoddart. Who's gowing with it? Ownly one allowed to gow with it, you knaow.

The Covey. I dunno.

Corporal Stoddart. You dunnow?

The Covey. I dunno.

Bessie [*coming into the room*]. She's afther slippin' off to sleep again, thanks be to God. I'm hardly able to keep me own eyes open. [*To the soldier*] Oh, are yous goin' to take away poor little Mollser?

Corporal Stoddart. Ay; 'oo's agowing with 'er?

Bessie. Oh, th' poor mother, o' course. God help her, it's a terrible blow to her!

Fluther. A terrible blow? Sure, she's in her element now, woman, mixin' earth to earth, an' ashes t'ashes, an' dust to dust, an' revellin' in plumes an' hearses, last days an' judgements!

Bessie [*falling into chair by the fire*]. God bless us! I'm jaded!

Corporal Stoddart. Was she plugged?

Covey [*shortly*]. No; died of consumption.

Corporal Stoddart [*carelessly*]. Ow, is that all—thought she might 'ave been plugged.

Covey [*indignantly*]. Is that all! Isn't it enough? D'ye know, comrade, that more

die o' consumption than are killed in the war? An' it's all because of th' system we're livin' undher.

Corporal Stoddart. Ow, I know. I'm a Socialist, myself, but I 'as to do my dooty.

Covey [*ironically*]. Dooty! Th' only dooty of a Socialist is th' emancipation of th' workers.

Corporal Stoddart. Ow, a man's a man, an' 'e 'as to fight for 'is country, 'asn't 'e?

Fluther [*aggressively*]. You're not fightin' for your counthry here, are you?

Peter [*anxiously, to* FLUTHER]. Ay, ay, Fluther, none o' that, none o' that!

The Covey. Fight for your counthry! Did y'ever read, comrade, Jenersky's *Thesis on the Origin, Development an' Consolidation of th' Evolutionary Idea of the Prolitariat?*

Corporal Stoddart [*good-humouredly*]. Ow, cheese it, Paddy, cheese it!

Bessie [*sleepily*]. How is things in th' town, Tommy?

Corporal Stoddart. Ow, I think it's nearly over. We've got 'em surrounded, an' we're closing in on the blighters. It was only a bit of a dorg-fight.

[*Outside in the street is heard the sharp ping of a sniper's rifle, followed by a squeal of pain*]

Voices [*to the* L. *in a chant, outside in street*]. Red Cr . . . oss, Red Cr . . . oss! Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance!

Corporal Stoddart [*going up* R. *and looking out of window, back*]. Christ, there's another of our men 'it by the blarsted sniper! 'E's knocking abaht 'ere somewheres. [*Venomously*] Gord, wen we gets the blighter, we'll give 'im the cold steel, we will. We'll jab the belly aht of 'im, we will!

[MRS. GOGAN *enters tearfully by door* R.; *she is a little proud of the importance of being connected with death*]

Mrs. Gogan [*to* FLUTHER]. I'll never forget what you done for me, Fluther, goin' around at th' risk of your life settlin' everything with th' undhertaker an' th' cemetery people. When all me own were afraid to put their noses out, you plunged like a good one through hummin' bullets, an' they knockin' fire out o' th' road, tinklin' through th' frightened windows, an' splashin' themselves to pieces on th' walls! An' you'll find, that Mollser in th' happy place she's gone to, won't forget to whisper, now an' again, th' name o' Fluther.

[CORPORAL STODDART *comes from window down* R. *to door* R., *and stands near the door*]

Corporal Stoddart [*to* MRS. GOGAN]. Git it aht, mother, git it aht.

Bessie [*from the chair*]. It's excusin' me you'll be, Mrs. Gogan, for not stannin' up, seein' I'm shaky on me feet for want of a little sleep, an' not desirin' to show any disrespect to poor little Mollser.

Fluther. Sure, we all know, Bessie, that it's vice versa with you.

Mrs. Gogan [*to* BESSIE]. Indeed, it's meself that has well chronicled, Mrs. Burgess, all your gentle hurryin's to me little Mollser, when she was alive, bringin' her somethin' to dhrink, or somethin' t'eat, an' never passin' her without lifting up her heart with a delicate word o' kindness.

Corporal Stoddart [*impatiently, but kindly*]. Git it aht, git it aht, mother.

[*The men rise from their card-playing;* FLUTHER *and* BRENNAN *go* R. *to* R. *end of coffin;* PETER *and* COVEY *go* L. *of table to* L. *end of coffin. One of them take box and candles out of way. They carry coffin down* R. *and out by door* R., CORPORAL STODDART *watching them.* MRS. GOGAN *follows the coffin out*]

[*A pause.* CORPORAL STODDART, *at door* R., *turns towards* BESSIE]

[*To* BESSIE, *who is almost asleep*] 'Ow many men is in this 'ere 'ouse? [*No answer. Loudly*] 'Ow many men is in this 'ere 'ouse?

Bessie [*waking with a start*]. God, I was nearly asleep! . . . How many men? Didn't you see them?

Corporal Stoddart. Are they all that are in the 'ouse?

Bessie [*sleepily*]. Oh, there's none higher up, but there may be more lower down. Why?

Corporal Stoddart. All men in the district 'as to be rounded up. Somebody's giving 'elp to the snipers, an' we 'as to tike precautions. If I 'ad my wy I'd mike 'em all join up an' do their bit! But I suppose they an' you are all Shinners.

Bessie [*who has been sinking into sleep, waking up to a sleepy vehemence*]. Bessie Burgess is no Shinner, an' never had no thruck with anything spotted be th' fingers o' th' Fenians. But always made it her business to harness herself for Church when-

ever she knew that God Save The King was goin' to be sung at t'end of th' service; whose only son went to th' front in th' first contingent of the Dublin Fusiliers, an' that's on his way home carryin' a shatthered arm that he got fightin' for his King an' counthry!

[BESSIE'S *head sinks slowly forward again. Door,* R., *opens and* PETER *comes in, his body stiff, and his face contorted with anger. He goes up* R., *to back, and paces angrily from side to side.* COVEY, *with a sly grin on his face, and* FLUTHER *follow* PETER. FLUTHER *goes to* L. *and* COVEY *goes to* R. *end of table.* BRENNAN *follows in and slinks to back of table to* L. *corner between dresser and door,* L. CORPORAL STODDART *remains standing a little in from door* R.]

Fluther [*after an embarrassing pause*]. Th' air in th' sthreet outside's shakin' with the firin' o' rifles, an' machine-guns. It must be a hot shop in th' middle o' th' scrap.

Corporal Stoddart. We're pumping lead in on 'em from every side, now; they'll soon be shoving up th' white flag.

Peter [*with a shout at* FLUTHER *and* COVEY]. I'm tellin' you either o' yous two lowsers 'ud make a betther hearseman than Peter! proddin' an' pokin' at me an' I helpin' to carry out a corpse!

Fluther [*provokingly*]. It wasn't a very derogatory thing for th' Covey to say that you'd make a fancy hearseman, was it?

Peter [*furiously*]. A pair o' redjesthered, bowseys pondherin' from mornin' till night on how they'll get a chance to break a gap through th' quiet nature of a man that's always endeavourin' to chase out of him any sthray thought of venom against his fellaman!

The Covey. Oh, shut it, shut it, shut it!

Peter [*furiously*]. As long as I'm a livin' man, responsible for me thoughts, words an' deeds to th' Man above, I'll feel meself instituted to fight again' th' sliddherin' ways of a pair o' picaroons, whisperin', concurrin', concoctin', an' conspirin' together to rendher me unconscious of th' life I'm thryin' to live!

Corporal Stoddart [*dumbfounded*]. What's wrong, Paddy; wot 'ave they done to you?

Peter [*savagely to the* CORPORAL]. You mind your own business! What's it got to do with you, what's wrong with me?

Bessie [*in a sleepy murmur*]. Will yous thry to conthrol yourselves into quietness? Yous'll waken her . . . up . . . on . . . me . . . again. [*She sleeps*]

Fluther [*coming* C.]. Come on, boys, to th' cards again, an' never mind him.

Corporal Stoddart. No use of you going to start cards; you'll be going aht of 'ere, soon as Sergeant comes.

Fluther [*in surprise*]. Goin out o' here? An' why're we goin' out o' here?

Corporal Stoddart. All men in district 'as to be rounded up, an' 'eld in till the scrap is over.

Fluther [*concerned*]. An' where're we goin' to be held in?

Corporal Stoddart. They're puttin' them in a church.

Covey [*astounded*]. A church?

Fluther. What sort of a church? Is it a Protestan' church?

Corporal Stoddart. I dunno; I suppose so.

Fluther [*in dismay*]. Be God, it'll be a nice thing to be stuck all night in a Protestan' church!

Corporal Stoddart. If I was you, I'd bring the cards—you might get a chance of a gime.

Fluther [*hesitant*]. Ah, no, that wouldn't do . . . I wondher. . . . [*After a moment's thought*] Ah, I don't think we'd be doin' anything derogatory be playin' cards in a Protestan' church.

Corporal Stoddart. If I was you I'd bring a little snack with me; you might be glad of it before the morning. [*Lilting*]

Oh, I do like a snice mince pie,
Oh, I do like a snice mince pie.

[*Again the snap of the sniper's rifle rings out, followed by a scream of pain.* CORPORAL STODDART *goes pale, runs up* R. *to near window,* C., *with his rifle at the ready*]

Voices [*in street to* R., *chanting*]. Red Cr . . . oss . . . Red Cr . . . oss! Ambu . . . lance . . . Ambu . . . lance!

[*The door* R. *is dashed open, and* SERGEANT TINLEY, *pale, agitated, and angry, comes rapidly in. He stands inside the door, glaring at men in the room.* CORPORAL STODDART *swings round at the ready as* TINLEY *enters and lets*

his rifle drop when he sees the SERGEANT]

Corporal Stoddart [*to* SERGEANT]. One of our men 'it again, Sergeant?

Sergeant Tinley [*angrily*]. Private Taylor: got it right through the chest, 'e did; an 'ole in front as ow you could put your 'and through, an' arf 'is back blown awy! Dum-dum bullets they're using. Gang of assassins potting at us from behind roofs. That's not plying the gime: why don't they come into the open and fight fair?

Fluther [*unable to stand the slight, facing* SERGEANT]. Fight fair! A few hundhred scrawls o' chaps with a couple o' guns an' Rosary beads, again' a hundhred thousand thrained men with horse, fut an' artillery. . . . [*To others in room*] An' he wants us to fight fair! [*To* SERGEANT] D'ye want us to come out in our skins an' throw stones?

Sergeant Tinley [*to* CORPORAL]. Are these four all that are 'ere?

Corporal Stoddart. Four; that's hall, Sergeant.

Sergeant Tinley [*roughly*]. Come on, then, get the blighters aht. [*To the men*] 'Ere, 'op it aht! Aht into the street with you, an' if another of our men goes west, you go with 'im. [*He catches* FLUTHER *by the arm*] Go on, git aht!

Fluther [*pulling himself free*]. Eh, who are you chuckin', eh?

Sergeant Tinley [*roughly*]. Go on, git aht, you blighter.

Fluther [*truculently*]. Who're you callin' a blighter to, eh? I'm a Dublin man, born an' bred in th' City, see?

Sergeant Tinley. Oh, I don't care if you were Bryan Buroo; git aht, git aht.

Fluther [*pausing as he reaches door* R., *to face the* SERGEANT *defiantly*]. Jasus, you an' your guns! Leave them down, an' I'd beat th' two of yous without sweatin'!

[*Shepherded by the two soldiers, who follow them out,* PETER, COVEY, FLUTHER *and* BRENNAN *go out by door* R.]

[BESSIE *is sleeping heavily on the chair by the fire. After a pause* NORA *appears at door* L., *in her nightdress. Remaining at door for a few moments she looks vaguely around the room. She then comes in quietly, goes over to the fire, pokes it and puts the kettle on. She thinks for a few moments, pressing her hand to her forehead. She looks questioningly at the fire, and then at the press at back. She goes to the dresser* L., *back, opens drawer, takes out a soiled cloth and spreads it on the table. She then places things for tea on the table*]

Nora. I imagine th' room looks very odd, somehow. . . . I was nearly forgetting Jack's tea. . . . Ah, I think I'll have everything done before he gets in. . . . [*She lilts gently, as she arranges the table*]

Th' violets were scenting th' woods, Nora,
Displaying their charms to th' bee,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me.

Th' chestnut blooms gleam'd through th' glade, Nora,
A robin sang loud from a tree,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me.

[*She pauses suddenly, and glances round the room*]

[*Doubtfully*] I can't help feelin' this room very strange. . . . What is it? . . . What is it? . . . I must think. . . . I must thry to remember. . . .

Voices [*chanting in a distant street*]. Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance! Red Cro . . . ss, Red Cro . . . ss!

Nora [*startled and listening for a moment, then resuming the arrangement of the table*].

Trees, birds an' bees sang a song, Nora,
Of happier transports to be,
When I first said I lov'd only you, Nora,
An' you said you lov'd only me.

[*A burst of rifle-fire is heard in a street near by, followed by the rapid tok-tok-tok of a machine-gun*]

[*Staring in front of her and screaming*] Jack, Jack, Jack! My baby, my baby, my baby!

Bessie [*waking with a start*]. You divil, are you afther gettin' out o' bed again!

[*She rises and runs towards* NORA, *who rushes to the window, back* L., *which she frantically opens*]

Nora [*at the window, screaming*]. Jack, Jack, for God's sake, come to me!

Soldiers [*outside, shouting*]. Git awoy, git awoy from that window, there!

Bessie [*seizing hold of* NORA]. Come

away, come away, woman, from that window!

Nora [*struggling with* BESSIE]. Where is it; where have you hidden it? Oh, Jack, Jack, where are you?

Bessie [*imploringly*]. Mrs. Clitheroe, for God's sake, come away!

Nora [*fiercely*]. I won't; he's below. Let . . . me . . . go! You're thryin' to keep me from me husband. I'll follow him. Jack, Jack, come to your Nora!

Bessie. Hus-s-sh, Nora, Nora! He'll be here in a minute. I'll bring him to you, if you'll only be quiet—honest to God, I will.

[*With a great effort* BESSIE *pushes* NORA *away from the window, the force used causing her to stagger against it herself. Two rifle-shots ring out in quick succession.* BESSIE *jerks her body convulsively; stands stiffly upright for a moment, a look of agonized astonishment on her face, then she staggers forward, leaning heavily on the table with her hands*]

[*With an arrested scream of fear and pain*] Merciful God, I'm shot, I'm shot, I'm shot! . . . Th' life's pourin' out o' me! [*To* NORA] I've got this through . . . through you . . . through you, you bitch, you! . . . O God, have mercy on me! . . . [*To* NORA] You wouldn't stop quiet, no you wouldn't, you wouldn't, blast you! Look at what I'm afther gettin', look at what I'm afther gettin' . . . I'm bleedin' to death, an' no one's here to stop th' flowin' blood! [*Calling*] Mrs. Gogan, Mrs. Gogan! Fluther, Fluther, for God's sake, somebody, a doctor, a doctor!

[BESSIE, *leaving* R. *end of table, staggers down towards door* R., *but, weakening, she sinks down on her knees,* R.C., *then reclining, she supports herself by her right hand resting on floor.* NORA *is rigid with her back to wall,* L., *her trembling hands held out a little from her sides; her lips quivering, her breast heaving, staring wildly at the figure of* BESSIE]

Nora [*in a breathless whisper*]. Jack, I'm frightened. . . . I'm frightened, Jack. . . . Oh, Jack, where are you?

Bessie [*moaningly*]. This is what's afther comin' on me for nursin' you day an' night. . . . I was a fool, a fool, a fool! Get me a dhrink o' wather, you jade, will you? There's a fire burnin' in me blood! [*Pleadingly*] Nora, Nora, dear, for God's sake, run out an' get Mrs. Gogan, or Fluther, or somebody to bring a doctor, quick, quick, quick! [*As* NORA *does not stir*] Blast you, stir yourself, before I'm gone!

Nora. Oh, Jack, Jack, where are you?

Bessie [*in a whispered moan*]. Jesus Christ, me sight's goin'! It's all dark, dark! Nora, hold me hand!

[BESSIE'S *body lists over and she sinks into a prostrate position on the floor*]

I'm dyin', I'm dyin' . . . I feel it. . . . Oh God, oh God! [*She feebly sings*]

I do believe . . . I will believe
That . . . Jesus . . . died . . . for . . . me,
That . . . on . . . the . . . cross He . . .
shed . . . His . . . blood
From . . . sin . . . to . . . set . . . free.

[*She ceases singing, and lies stretched out, still and rigid. A pause; then* MRS. GOGAN *runs hastily in by door* R. *She halts at door and looks round with a frightened air*]

Mrs. Gogan [*quivering with fear*]. Blessed be God, what's afther happenin! [*To* NORA] What's wrong, child, what's wrong? [*She sees* BESSIE, *runs to her and bends over the body*] Bessie, Bessie! [*She shakes the body*] Mrs. Burgess, Mrs. Burgess! [*She feels* BESSIE'S *forehead*] My God, she's as cold as death. They're afther murdherin' th' poor inoffensive woman!

[SERGEANT TINLEY *and* CORPORAL STODDART, *in agitation, enter by door* R., *their rifles at the ready*]

Sergeant Tinley [*excitedly*]. This is the 'ouse! [*They go rapidly to window, back,* C.] That's the window!

Nora [*pressing back against the wall*]. Hide it, hide it; cover it up, cover it up!

[SERGEANT TINLEY, *looking round room, sees body. He comes from window to* BESSIE, *and bends over her*]

Sergeant Tinley [*bending over body*]. 'Ere, wot's this? Oo's this? Oh, God, we've plugged one of the women of the 'ouse!

Corporal Stoddart [*at window*]. W'y the 'ell did she go to the window? Is she dead?

Sergeant Tinley. Dead as bedamned. Well, we couldn't afford to tike any chances.

[SERGEANT TINLEY *goes back to window, and looks out*]

Nora [*screaming, and putting her hands before her face*]. Hide it, hide it; don't let me see it! Take me away, take me away, Mrs. Gogan!

[MRS. GOGAN, *who has been weeping softly over* BESSIE, *rises, and crosses by front of table to room,* L., *goes in and comes out with a sheet in her hands. She crosses over and spreads the sheet over* BESSIE'S *body*]

Mrs. Gogan [*as she spreads the sheet*]. Oh, God help her, th' poor woman, she's stiffenin' out as hard as she can! Her face has written on it th' shock o' sudden agony, an' her hands is whitenin' into th' smooth shininess of wax.

Nora [*whimperingly*]. Take me away, take me away; don't leave me here to be lookin' an' lookin' at it!

Mrs. Gogan [*going over to* NORA *and putting her arm round her*]. Come on with me, dear, an' you can doss in poor Mollser's bed, till we gather some neighbours to come an' give th' last friendly touches to Bessie in th' lonely layin' of her out.

[MRS. GOGAN *puts her arms round* NORA, *leads her across from* L. *to* R., *and they both go slowly out by door* R.]

[CORPORAL STODDART *comes from window to table, looks at tea-things on table; goes to fireplace, takes the teapot up in his hand*]

Corporal Stoddart [*over to* TINLEY, *at window*]. Tea here, Sergeant; wot abaht a cup of scald?

Sergeant Tinley. Pour it aht, pour it aht, Stoddart—I could scoff anything just now.

[CORPORAL STODDART *pours out two cups of tea.* SERGEANT TINLEY *comes from window to table, and sits on* R. *end;* CORPORAL STODDART *sits on opposite end of table, and they drink the tea. In the distance is heard a bitter burst of rifle and machine-gun fire, interspersed with the boom, boom of artillery. The glare in the sky seen through the window* C., *back, flares into a fuller and a deeper red*]

Sergeant Tinley. There gows the general attack on the Powst Office.

Voices [*in a distant street*]. Ambu . . . lance, Ambu . . . lance! Red Cro . . . ss, Red Cro . . . ss!

[*The voices of soldiers at a barricade outside the house are heard singing*]

They were summoned from the 'illside,
They were called in from the glen,
And the country found 'em ready
At the stirring call for men.
Let not tears add to their 'ardship,
As the soldiers pass along,
And although our 'eart is breaking,
Make it sing this cheery song.

[SERGEANT TINLEY *and* CORPORAL STODDART *join in the chorus as they sip the tea*]

Sergeant Tinley and Corporal Stoddart [*singing*].

Keep the 'ome fires burning,
While your 'earts are yearning,
Though your lads are far away,
They dream of 'ome;
There's a silver lining
Through the dark cloud shining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out,
Till the boys come 'ome!

THE END

Waiting for Godot

A Tragicomedy in Two Acts

By

Samuel Beckett

Estragon
Vladimir
Lucky
Pozzo
A boy

Act I

A country road. A tree.
Evening.

Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting.

He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.

Enter Vladimir.

ESTRAGON:
(*giving up again*). Nothing to be done.
VLADIMIR:
(*advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart*). I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (*He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.*) So there you are again.
ESTRAGON:
Am I?
VLADIMIR:
I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.
ESTRAGON:
Me too.
VLADIMIR:
Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this. But how? (*He reflects.*) Get up till I embrace you.
ESTRAGON:
(*irritably*). Not now, not now.
VLADIMIR:
(*hurt, coldly*). May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?

ESTRAGON:
In a ditch.
VLADIMIR:
(*admiringly*). A ditch! Where?
ESTRAGON:
(*without gesture*). Over there.
VLADIMIR:
And they didn't beat you?
ESTRAGON:
Beat me? Certainly they beat me.
VLADIMIR:
The same lot as usual?
ESTRAGON:
The same? I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
When I think of it . . . all these years . . . but for me . . . where would you be . . . (*Decisively.*) You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.
ESTRAGON:
And what of it?
VLADIMIR:
(*gloomily*). It's too much for one man. (*Pause. Cheerfully.*) On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties.
ESTRAGON:
Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.
VLADIMIR:
Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. (*Estragon tears at his boot.*) What are you doing?
ESTRAGON:
Taking off my boot. Did that never happen to you?
VLADIMIR:
Boots must be taken off every day, I'm tired telling you that. Why don't you listen to me?
ESTRAGON:
(*feebly*). Help me!
VLADIMIR:
It hurts?
ESTRAGON:
(*angrily*). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!
VLADIMIR:
(*angrily*). No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.
ESTRAGON:
It hurts?
VLADIMIR:
(*angrily*). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

ESTRAGON:
(*pointing*). You might button it all the same.
VLADIMIR:
(*stooping*). True. (*He buttons his fly.*) Never neglect the little things of life.
ESTRAGON:
What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.
VLADIMIR:
(*musingly*). The last moment . . . (*He meditates.*) Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?
ESTRAGON:
Why don't you help me?
VLADIMIR:
Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer. (*He takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.*) How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time . . . (*he searches for the word*) . . . appalled. (*With emphasis.*) AP-PALLED. (*He takes off his hat again, peers inside it.*) Funny. (*He knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into it again, puts it on again.*) Nothing to be done. (*Estragon with a supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his boot. He peers inside it, feels about inside it, turns it upside down, shakes it, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, feels inside it again, staring sightlessly before him.*) Well?
ESTRAGON:
Nothing.
VLADIMIR:
Show me.
ESTRAGON:
There's nothing to show.
VLADIMIR:
Try and put it on again.
ESTRAGON:
(*examining his foot*). I'll air it for a bit.
VLADIMIR:
There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet. (*He takes off his hat again, peers inside it, feels about inside it, knocks on the crown, blows into it, puts it on again.*) This is getting alarming. (*Silence. Vladimir deep in thought, Estragon pulling at his toes.*) One of the thieves was saved. (*Pause.*) It's a reasonable percentage. (*Pause.*) Gogo.
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
Suppose we repented.
ESTRAGON:
Repented what?
VLADIMIR:
Oh . . . (*He reflects.*) We wouldn't have to go into the details.
ESTRAGON:
Our being born?
Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his

pubis, his face contorted.
VLADIMIR:
One daren't even laugh any more.
ESTRAGON:
Dreadful privation.
VLADIMIR:
Merely smile. (*He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.*) It's not the same thing. Nothing to be done. (*Pause.*) Gogo.
ESTRAGON:
(*irritably*). What is it?
VLADIMIR:
Did you ever read the Bible?
ESTRAGON:
The Bible . . . (*He reflects.*) I must have taken a look at it.
VLADIMIR:
Do you remember the Gospels?
ESTRAGON:
I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.
VLADIMIR:
You should have been a poet.
ESTRAGON:
I was. (*Gesture towards his rags.*) Isn't that obvious?
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Where was I . . . How's your foot?
ESTRAGON:
Swelling visibly.
VLADIMIR:
Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?
ESTRAGON:
No.
VLADIMIR:
Shall I tell it to you?
ESTRAGON:
No.
VLADIMIR:
It'll pass the time. (*Pause.*) Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Saviour. One—
ESTRAGON:
Our what?
VLADIMIR:
Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other . . . (*he searches for the contrary of saved*) . . . damned.
ESTRAGON:
Saved from what?

VLADIMIR:
Hell.
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
He does not move.
VLADIMIR:
And yet . . . (*pause*) . . . how is it –this is not boring you I hope– how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there –or thereabouts– and only one speaks of a thief being saved. (*Pause.*) Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?
ESTRAGON:
(*with exaggerated enthusiasm*). I find this really most extraordinarily interesting.
VLADIMIR:
One out of four. Of the other three, two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.
ESTRAGON:
Who?
VLADIMIR:
What?
ESTRAGON:
What's all this about? Abused who?
VLADIMIR:
The Saviour.
ESTRAGON:
Why?
VLADIMIR:
Because he wouldn't save them.
ESTRAGON:
From hell?
VLADIMIR:
Imbecile! From death.
ESTRAGON:
I thought you said hell.
VLADIMIR:
From death, from death.
ESTRAGON:
Well what of it?
VLADIMIR:
Then the two of them must have been damned.
ESTRAGON:
And why not?
VLADIMIR:
But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.
ESTRAGON:
Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.

VLADIMIR:
But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?
ESTRAGON:
Who believes him?
VLADIMIR:
Everybody. It's the only version they know.
ESTRAGON:
People are bloody ignorant apes.
He rises painfully, goes limping to extreme left, halts, gazes into distance off with his hand screening his eyes, turns, goes to extreme right, gazes into distance. Vladimir watches him, then goes and picks up the boot, peers into it, drops it hastily.
VLADIMIR:
Pah!
He spits. Estragon moves to center, halts with his back to auditorium.
ESTRAGON:
Charming spot. (*He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.*) Inspiring prospects. (*He turns to Vladimir.*) Let's go.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
(*despairingly*). Ah! (*Pause.*) You're sure it was here?
VLADIMIR:
What?
ESTRAGON:
That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR:
He said by the tree. (*They look at the tree.*) Do you see any others?
ESTRAGON:
What is it?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know. A willow.
ESTRAGON:
Where are the leaves?
VLADIMIR:
It must be dead.
ESTRAGON:
No more weeping.
VLADIMIR:
Or perhaps it's not the season.
ESTRAGON:
Looks to me more like a bush.

VLADIMIR:
A shrub.
ESTRAGON:
A bush.
VLADIMIR:
A—. What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
ESTRAGON:
He should be here.
VLADIMIR:
He didn't say for sure he'd come.
ESTRAGON:
And if he doesn't come?
VLADIMIR:
We'll come back tomorrow.
ESTRAGON:
And then the day after tomorrow.
VLADIMIR:
Possibly.
ESTRAGON:
And so on.
VLADIMIR:
The point is—
ESTRAGON:
Until he comes.
VLADIMIR:
You're merciless.
ESTRAGON:
We came here yesterday.
VLADIMIR:
Ah no, there you're mistaken.
ESTRAGON:
What did we do yesterday?
VLADIMIR:
What did we do yesterday?
ESTRAGON:
Yes.
VLADIMIR:
Why . . . (*Angrily.*) Nothing is certain when you're about.
ESTRAGON:
In my opinion we were here.
VLADIMIR:
(*looking round*). You recognize the place?
ESTRAGON:
I didn't say that.

VLADIMIR:
Well?
ESTRAGON:
That makes no difference.
VLADIMIR:
All the same . . . that tree . . . (*turning towards auditorium*) that bog . . .
ESTRAGON:
You're sure it was this evening?
VLADIMIR:
What?
ESTRAGON:
That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR:
He said Saturday. (*Pause.*) I think.
ESTRAGON:
You think.
VLADIMIR:
I must have made a note of it. (*He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.*)
ESTRAGON:
(*very insidious*). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (*Pause.*) Or Monday? (*Pause.*) Or Friday?
VLADIMIR:
(*looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape*). It's not possible!
ESTRAGON:
Or Thursday?
VLADIMIR:
What'll we do?
ESTRAGON:
If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.
VLADIMIR:
But you say we were here yesterday.
ESTRAGON:
I may be mistaken. (*Pause.*) Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?
VLADIMIR:
(*feebly*). All right. (*Estragon sits down on the mound. Vladimir paces agitatedly to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into distance off. Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir halts finally before Estragon.*) Gogo! . . . Gogo! . . . GOGO!
Estragon wakes with a start.
ESTRAGON:
(*restored to the horror of his situation*). I was asleep! (*Despairingly.*) Why will you never let me sleep?
VLADIMIR:
I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON:
I had a dream.
VLADIMIR:
Don't tell me!
ESTRAGON:
I dreamt that—
VLADIMIR:
DON'T TELL ME!
ESTRAGON:
(*gesture toward the universe*). This one is enough for you? (*Silence.*) It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?
VLADIMIR:
Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that.
ESTRAGON:
(*coldly.*) There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part.
VLADIMIR:
You wouldn't go far.
ESTRAGON:
That would be too bad, really too bad. (*Pause.*) Wouldn't it, Didi, be really too bad? (*Pause.*) When you think of the beauty of the way. (*Pause.*) And the goodness of the wayfarers. (*Pause. Wheedling.*) Wouldn't it, Didi?
VLADIMIR:
Calm yourself.
ESTRAGON:
(*voluptuously.*) Calm . . . calm . . . The English say cawm. (*Pause.*) You know the story of the Englishman in the brothel?
VLADIMIR:
Yes.
ESTRAGON:
Tell it to me.
VLADIMIR:
Ah stop it!
ESTRAGON:
An Englishman having drunk a little more than usual proceeds to a brothel. The bawd asks him if he wants a fair one, a dark one or a red-haired one. Go on.
VLADIMIR:
STOP IT!
Exit Vladimir hurriedly. Estragon gets up and follows him as far as the limit of the stage. Gestures of Estragon like those of a spectator encouraging a pugilist. Enter Vladimir. He brushes past Estragon, crosses the stage with bowed head. Estragon takes a step towards him, halts.
ESTRAGON:
(*gently.*) You wanted to speak to me? (*Silence. Estragon takes a step forward.*) You had something to say to me? (*Silence. Another step forward.*) Didi . . .
VLADIMIR:
(*without turning*). I've nothing to say to you.

ESTRAGON:
(*step forward*). You're angry? (*Silence. Step forward*). Forgive me. (*Silence. Step forward. Estragon lays his hand on Vladimir's shoulder.*) Come, Didi. (*Silence.*) Give me your hand. (*Vladimir half turns.*) Embrace me! (*Vladimir stiffens.*) Don't be stubborn! (*Vladimir softens. They embrace.*
Estragon recoils.) You stink of garlic!
VLADIMIR:
It's for the kidneys. (*Silence. Estragon looks attentively at the tree.*) What do we do now?
ESTRAGON:
Wait.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, but while waiting.
ESTRAGON:
What about hanging ourselves?
VLADIMIR:
Hmm. It'd give us an erection.
ESTRAGON:
(*highly excited*). An erection!
VLADIMIR:
With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?
ESTRAGON:
Let's hang ourselves immediately!
VLADIMIR:
From a bough? (*They go towards the tree.*) I wouldn't trust it.
ESTRAGON:
We can always try.
VLADIMIR:
Go ahead.
ESTRAGON:
After you.
VLADIMIR:
No no, you first.
ESTRAGON:
Why me?
VLADIMIR:
You're lighter than I am.
ESTRAGON:
Just so!
VLADIMIR:
I don't understand.
Use your intelligence, can't you?
Vladimir uses his intelligence.
VLADIMIR:
(*finally*). I remain in the dark.

ESTRAGON:
This is how it is. (*He reflects.*) The bough . . . the bough . . . (*Angrily.*) Use your head, can't you?
VLADIMIR:
You're my only hope.
ESTRAGON:
(*with effort*). Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi heavy—bough break—Didi alone. Whereas—
VLADIMIR:
I hadn't thought of that.
ESTRAGON:
If it hangs you it'll hang anything.
VLADIMIR:
But am I heavier than you?
ESTRAGON:
So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly.
VLADIMIR:
Well? What do we do?
ESTRAGON:
Don't let's do anything. It's safer.
VLADIMIR:
Let's wait and see what he says.
ESTRAGON:
Who?
VLADIMIR:
Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Good idea.
VLADIMIR:
Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.
ESTRAGON:
On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.
VLADIMIR:
I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.
ESTRAGON:
What exactly did we ask him for?
VLADIMIR:
Were you not there?
ESTRAGON:
I can't have been listening.
VLADIMIR:
Oh . . . Nothing very definite.
ESTRAGON:
A kind of prayer.
VLADIMIR:
Precisely.

ESTRAGON:
A vague supplication.
VLADIMIR:
Exactly.
ESTRAGON:
And what did he reply?
VLADIMIR:
That he'd see.
ESTRAGON:
That he couldn't promise anything.
VLADIMIR:
That he'd have to think it over.
ESTRAGON:
In the quiet of his home.
VLADIMIR:
Consult his family.
ESTRAGON:
His friends.
VLADIMIR:
His agents.
ESTRAGON:
His correspondents.
VLADIMIR:
His books.
ESTRAGON:
His bank account.
VLADIMIR:
Before taking a decision.
ESTRAGON:
It's the normal thing.
VLADIMIR:
Is it not?
ESTRAGON:
I think it is.
VLADIMIR:
I think so too.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
(*anxious*). And we?
VLADIMIR:
I beg your pardon?
ESTRAGON:
I said, And we?

VLADIMIR:
I don't understand.

ESTRAGON:
Where do we come in?
VLADIMIR:
Come in?
ESTRAGON:
Take your time.
VLADIMIR:
Come in? On our hands and knees.
ESTRAGON:
As bad as that?
VLADIMIR:
Your Worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?
ESTRAGON:
We've no rights anymore?
Laugh of Vladimir, stifled as before, less the smile.
VLADIMIR:
You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.
ESTRAGON:
We've lost our rights?
VLADIMIR:
(*distinctly*). We got rid of them.
Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.
ESTRAGON:
(*feebly*). We're not tied? (*Pause.*) We're not—
VLADIMIR:
Listen!
They listen, grotesquely rigid.
ESTRAGON:
I hear nothing.
VLADIMIR:
Hsst! (*They listen. Estragon loses his balance, almost falls. He clutches the arm of Vladimir, who totters. They listen, huddled together.*) Nor I.
Sighs of relief. They relax and separate.
ESTRAGON:
You gave me a fright.
VLADIMIR:
I thought it was he.
ESTRAGON:
Who?
VLADIMIR:
Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Pah! The wind in the reeds.
VLADIMIR:
I could have sworn I heard shouts.

ESTRAGON:
And why would he shout?
VLADIMIR:
At his horse.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
(*violently*). I'm hungry!
VLADIMIR:
Do you want a carrot?
ESTRAGON:
Is that all there is?
VLADIMIR:
I might have some turnips.
ESTRAGON:
Give me a carrot. (*Vladimir rummages in his pockets, takes out a turnip and gives it to Estragon who takes a bite out of it. Angrily.*) It's a turnip!
VLADIMIR:
Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot. (*He rummages again in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips.*) All that's turnips. (*He rummages.*) You must have eaten the last. (*He rummages.*) Wait, I have it. (*He brings out a carrot and gives it to Estragon.*) There, dear fellow.
(*Estragon wipes the carrot on his sleeve and begins to eat it.*) Make it last, that's the end of them.
ESTRAGON:
(*chewing*). I asked you a question.
VLADIMIR:
Ah.
ESTRAGON:
Did you reply?
VLADIMIR:
How's the carrot?
ESTRAGON:
It's a carrot.
VLADIMIR:
So much the better, so much the better. (*Pause.*) What was it you wanted to know?
ESTRAGON:
I've forgotten. (*Chews.*) That's what annoys me. (*He looks at the carrot appreciatively, dangles it between finger and thumb.*) I'll never forget this carrot. (*He sucks the end of it meditatively.*) Ah yes, now I remember.
VLADIMIR:
Well?
ESTRAGON:
(*his mouth full, vacuously*). We're not tied?
VLADIMIR:
I don't hear a word you're saying.

ESTRAGON:
(*chews, swallows*). I'm asking you if we're tied.
VLADIMIR:
Tied?
ESTRAGON:
Ti-ed.
VLADIMIR:
How do you mean tied?
ESTRAGON:
Down.
VLADIMIR:
But to whom? By whom?
ESTRAGON:
To your man.
VLADIMIR:
To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. (*Pause.*) For the moment.
ESTRAGON:
His name is Godot?
VLADIMIR:
I think so.
ESTRAGON:
Fancy that. (*He raises what remains of the carrot by the stub of leaf, twirls it before his eyes.*)
Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets.
VLADIMIR:
With me it's just the opposite.
ESTRAGON:
In other words?
VLADIMIR:
I get used to the muck as I go along.
ESTRAGON:
(*after prolonged reflection*). Is that the opposite?
VLADIMIR:
Question of temperament.
ESTRAGON:
Of character.
VLADIMIR:
Nothing you can do about it.
ESTRAGON:
No use struggling.
VLADIMIR:
One is what one is.
ESTRAGON:
No use wriggling.
VLADIMIR: The essential doesn't change.
ESTRAGON:
Nothing to be done. (*He proffers the remains of the carrot to Vladimir.*) Like to finish it?

A terrible cry, close at hand. Estragon drops the carrot. They remain motionless, then together make a sudden rush towards the wings. Estragon stops halfway, runs back, picks up the carrot, stuffs it in his pocket, runs to rejoin Vladimir who is waiting for him, stops again, runs back, picks up his boot, runs to rejoin Vladimir. Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, they wait.
Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck, so that Lucky is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears. Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat, Pozzo a whip.
POZZO:
(*off*). On! (*Crack of whip. Pozzo appears. They cross the stage. Lucky passes before Vladimir and Estragon and exit. Pozzo at the sight of Vladimir and Estragon stops short. The rope tautens. Pozzo jerks at it violently.*) Back!
Noise of Lucky falling with all his baggage. Vladimir and Estragon turn towards him, half wishing half fearing to go to his assistance. Vladimir takes a step towards Lucky, Estragon holds him back by the sleeve.
VLADIMIR:
Let me go!
ESTRAGON:
Stay where you are!
POZZO:
Be careful! He's wicked. (*Vladimir and Estragon turn towards Pozzo.*) With strangers.
ESTRAGON:
(*undertone*). Is that him?
VLADIMIR:
Who?
ESTRAGON:
(*trying to remember the name*). Er . . .
VLADIMIR:
Godot?
ESTRAGON:
Yes.
POZZO:
I present myself: Pozzo.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). Not at all!
ESTRAGON:
He said Godot.
VLADIMIR:
Not at all!
ESTRAGON:
(*timidly, to Pozzo*). You're not Mr. Godot, Sir?

POZZO:
(*terrifying voice*). I am Pozzo! (*Silence.*) Pozzo! (*Silence.*) Does that name mean nothing to

you? (*Silence.*) I say does that name mean nothing to you?
Vladimir and Estragon look at each other questioningly.
ESTRAGON:
(*pretending to search*). Bozzo . . . Bozzo . . .
VLADIMIR:
(*ditto*). Pozzo . . . Pozzo . . .
POZZO:
PPPOZZZO!
ESTRAGON:
Ah! Pozzo . . . let me see . . . Pozzo . . .
VLADIMIR:
Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?
ESTRAGON:
Pozzo . . . no . . . I'm afraid I . . . no . . . I don't seem to . . .
Pozzo advances threateningly.
VLADIMIR:
(*conciliating*). I once knew a family called Gozzo. The mother had the clap.
ESTRAGON:
(*hastily*). We're not from these parts, Sir.
POZZO:
(*halting*). You are human beings none the less. (*He puts on his glasses.*) As far as one can see. (*He takes off his glasses.*) Of the same species as myself. (*He bursts into an enormous laugh.*) Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!
VLADIMIR:
Well you see—
POZZO:
(*peremptory*). Who is Godot?
ESTRAGON:
Godot?
POZZO:
You took me for Godot.
VLADIMIR:
Oh no, Sir, not for an instant, Sir.
POZZO:
Who is he?
VLADIMIR:
Oh he's a . . . he's a kind of acquaintance.
ESTRAGON:
Nothing of the kind, we hardly know him.
VLADIMIR:
True . . . we don't know him very well . . . but all the same . . .
ESTRAGON:
Personally, I wouldn't even know him if I saw him.
POZZO:
You took me for him.

ESTRAGON:
(*recoiling before Pozzo*). That's to say . . . you understand . . . the dusk . . . the strain . . . waiting . . . I confess . . . I imagined . . . for a second . . .
POZZO:
Waiting? So you were waiting for him?
VLADIMIR:
Well you see—
POZZO:
Here? On my land?
VLADIMIR:
We didn't intend any harm.
ESTRAGON:
We meant well.
POZZO:
The road is free to all.
VLADIMIR:
That's how we looked at it.
POZZO:
It's a disgrace. But there you are.
ESTRAGON:
Nothing we can do about it.
POZZO:
(*with magnanimous gesture*). Let's say no more about it. (*He jerks the rope.*) Up pig! (*Pause.*) Every time he drops he falls asleep. (*Jerks the rope.*) Up hog! (*Noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage. Pozzo jerks the rope.*) Back! (*Enter Lucky backwards.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Turn! (*Lucky turns. To Vladimir and Estragon, affably.*) Gentlemen, I am happy to have met you. (*Before their incredulous expression.*) Yes yes, sincerely happy. (*He jerks the rope.*) Closer! (*Lucky advances.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Yes, the road seems long when one journeys all alone for . . . (*he consults his watch*) . . . yes . . . (*he calculates*) . . . yes, six hours, that's right, six hours on end, and never a soul in sight. (*To Lucky.*) Coat! (*Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.*) Hold that! (*Pozzo holds out the whip. Lucky advances and, both his hands being occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his place. Pozzo begins to put on his coat, stops.*) Coat! (*Lucky puts down the bag, basket and stool, helps Pozzo on with his coat, goes back to his place and takes up bag, basket and stool.*) Touch of autumn in the air this evening. (*Pozzo finishes buttoning up his coat, stoops, inspects himself, straightens up.*) Whip! (*Lucky advances, stoops, Pozzo snatches the whip from his mouth, Lucky goes back to his place.*) Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (*he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes*) even when the likeness is an imperfect one. (*He takes off his glasses.*) Stool! (*Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances, opens stool, puts it down, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.*) Closer! (*Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances, moves stool, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket. Pozzo sits down, places the butt of his whip against Lucky's chest and pushes.*) Back! (*Lucky takes a step back.*) Further! (*Lucky takes another step back.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops. To Vladimir and Estragon.*) That is why, with your permission, I propose to dally with you a moment, before I venture any further. Basket! (*Lucky advances, gives the basket, goes back to his place.*) The fresh air stimulates the jaded

appetite. (*He opens the basket, takes out a piece of chicken and a bottle of wine.*) Basket! (*Lucky advances, picks up the basket and goes back to his place.*) Further! (*Lucky takes a step back.*) He stinks. Happy days!
He drinks from the bottle, puts it down and begins to eat. Silence.
Vladimir and Estragon, cautiously at first, then more boldly, begin to circle about Lucky, inspecting him up and down. Pozzo eats his chicken voraciously, throwing away the bones after having sucked them. Lucky sags slowly, until bag and basket touch the ground, then straightens up with a start and begins to sag again. Rhythm of one sleeping on his feet.
ESTRAGON:
What ails him?
VLADIMIR:
He looks tired.
ESTRAGON:
Why doesn't he put down his bags?
VLADIMIR:
How do I know? (*They close in on him.*) Careful!
ESTRAGON:
Say something to him.
VLADIMIR:
Look!
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
(*pointing*). His neck!
ESTRAGON:
(*looking at the neck*). I see nothing.
VLADIMIR:
Here.
Estragon goes over beside Vladimir.
ESTRAGON:
Oh I say!
VLADIMIR:
A running sore!
ESTRAGON:
It's the rope.
VLADIMIR:
It's the rubbing.
ESTRAGON:
It's inevitable.
VLADIMIR:
It's the knot.
ESTRAGON:
It's the chafing.
They resume their inspection, dwell on the face.
VLADIMIR:
(*grudgingly*). He's not bad looking.

ESTRAGON:
(*shrugging his shoulders, wry face.*) Would you say so?
VLADIMIR:
A trifle effeminate.
ESTRAGON:
Look at the slobber.
VLADIMIR:
It's inevitable.
ESTRAGON:
Look at the slaver.
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps he's a halfwit.
ESTRAGON:
A cretin.
VLADIMIR:
(*looking closer*). Looks like a goiter.
ESTRAGON:
(*ditto*). It's not certain.
VLADIMIR:
He's panting.
ESTRAGON:
It's inevitable.
VLADIMIR:
And his eyes!
ESTRAGON:
What about them?
VLADIMIR:
Goggling out of his head.
ESTRAGON:
Looks like his last gasp to me.
VLADIMIR:
It's not certain. (*Pause.*) Ask him a question.
ESTRAGON:
Would that be a good thing?
VLADIMIR:
What do we risk?
ESTRAGON:
(*timidly*). Mister . . .
VLADIMIR:
Louder.
ESTRAGON:
(*louder*). Mister . . .
POZZO:
Leave him in peace! (*They turn toward Pozzo who, having finished eating, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.*) Can't you see he wants to rest? Basket! (*He strikes a match and begins to light his pipe. Estragon sees the chicken bones on the ground and stares at them*

greedily. As Lucky does not move Pozzo throws the match angrily away and jerks the rope.) Basket! (*Lucky starts, almost falls, recovers his senses, advances, puts the bottle in the basket and goes back to his place. Estragon stares at the bones. Pozzo strikes another match and lights his pipe.*) What can you expect, it's not his job. (*He pulls at his pipe, stretches out his legs.*) Ah! That's better.

ESTRAGON:

(*timidly*). Please Sir . . .

POZZO:

What is it, my good man?

ESTRAGON:

Er . . . you've finished with the . . . er . . . you don't need the . . . er . . . bones, Sir?

VLADIMIR:

(*scandalized*). You couldn't have waited?

POZZO:

No no, he does well to ask. Do I need the bones? (*He turns them over with the end of his whip.*) No, personally I do not need them any more. (*Estragon takes a step towards the bones.*) But . . . (*Estragon stops short*) . . . but in theory the bones go to the carrier. He is therefore the one to ask. (*Estragon turns towards Lucky, hesitates.*) Go on, go on, don't be afraid, ask him, he'll tell you.

Estragon goes towards Lucky, stops before him.

ESTRAGON:

Mister . . . excuse me, Mister . . .

POZZO:

You're being spoken to, pig! Reply! (*To Estragon.*) Try him again.

ESTRAGON:

Excuse me, Mister, the bones, you won't be wanting the bones?

Lucky looks long at Estragon.

POZZO:

(*in raptures*). Mister! (*Lucky bows his head.*) Reply! Do you want them or don't you? (*Silence of Lucky. To Estragon.*) They're yours. (*Estragon makes a dart at the bones, picks them up and begins to gnaw them.*) I don't like it. I've never known him to refuse a bone before. (*He looks anxiously at Lucky.*) Nice business it'd be if he fell sick on me!

He puffs at his pipe.

VLADIMIR:

(*exploding*). It's a scandal!

Silence. Flabbergasted, Estragon stops gnawing, looks at Pozzo and Vladimir in turn. Pozzo outwardly calm. Vladimir embarrassed.

POZZO:

(*To Vladimir*). Are you alluding to anything in particular?

VLADIMIR:

(*stutteringly resolute*). To treat a man . . . (*gesture towards Lucky*) . . . like that . . . I think that . . . no . . . a human being . . . no . . . it's a scandal!

ESTRAGON:

(*not to be outdone*). A disgrace!

He resumes his gnawing.

POZZO:
You are severe. (*To Vladimir.*) What age are you, if it's not a rude question? (*Silence.*) Sixty? Seventy? (*To Estragon.*) What age would you say he was?
ESTRAGON:
Eleven.
POZZO:
I am impertinent. (*He knocks out his pipe against the whip, gets up.*) I must be getting on. Thank you for your society. (*He reflects.*) Unless I smoke another pipe before I go. What do you say? (*They say nothing.*) Oh I'm only a small smoker, a very small smoker, I'm not in the habit of smoking two pipes one on top of the other, it makes (*hand to heart, sighing*) my heart go pit-a-pat. (*Silence.*) It's the nicotine, one absorbs it in spite of one's precautions. (*Sighs.*) You know how it is. (*Silence.*) But perhaps you don't smoke? Yes? No? It's of no importance. (*Silence.*) But how am I to sit down now, without affectation, now that I have risen? Without appearing to –how shall I say– without appearing to falter. (*To Vladimir.*) I beg your pardon? (*Silence.*) Perhaps you didn't speak? (*Silence.*) It's of no importance. Let me see . . .
He reflects.
ESTRAGON:
Ah! That's better.
He puts the bones in his pocket.
VLADIMIR:
Let's go.
ESTRAGON:
So soon?
POZZO:
One moment! (*He jerks the rope.*) Stool! (*He points with his whip. Lucky moves the stool.*) More! There! (*He sits down. Lucky goes back to his place.*) Done it!
He fills his pipe.
VLADIMIR:
(*vehemently*). Let's go!
POZZO:
I hope I'm not driving you away. Wait a little longer, you'll never regret it.
ESTRAGON:
(*scenting charity*). We're in no hurry.
POZZO:
(*having lit his pipe*). The second is never so sweet . . . (*he takes the pipe out of his mouth, contemplates it*) . . . as the first I mean. (*He puts the pipe back in his mouth.*) But it's sweet just the same.
VLADIMIR:
I'm going.
POZZO:
He can no longer endure my presence. I am perhaps not particularly human, but who cares? (*To Vladimir.*) Think twice before you do anything rash. Suppose you go now while it is still day, for there is no denying it is still day. (*They all look up at the sky.*) Good. (*They stop looking at the sky.*) What happens in that case– (*he takes the pipe out of his mouth, examines it*) –I'm out– (*he relights his pipe*) –in that case– (*puff*) –in that case– (*puff*) –what happens in that case to your appointment with this . . . Godet . . . Godot . . . Godin . . . anyhow you see

who I mean, who has your future in his hands . . . (*pause*) . . . at least your immediate future?
VLADIMIR:
Who told you?
POZZO:
He speaks to me again! If this goes on much longer we'll soon be old friends.
ESTRAGON:
Why doesn't he put down his bags?
POZZO:
I too would be happy to meet him. The more people I meet the happier I become. From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's blessings. Even you . . . (*he looks at them ostentatiously in turn to make it clear they are both meant*) . . . even you, who knows, will have added to my store.
ESTRAGON:
Why doesn't he put down his bags?
POZZO:
But that would surprise me.
VLADIMIR:
You're being asked a question.
POZZO:
(*delighted*). A question! Who? What? A moment ago you were calling me Sir, in fear and trembling. Now you're asking me questions. No good will come of this!
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). I think he's listening.
ESTRAGON:
(*circling about Lucky*). What?
VLADIMIR:
You can ask him now. He's on the alert.
ESTRAGON:
Ask him what?
VLADIMIR:
Why he doesn't put down his bags.
ESTRAGON:
I wonder.
VLADIMIR:
Ask him, can't you?
POZZO:
(*who has followed these exchanges with anxious attention, fearing lest the question get lost*). You want to know why he doesn't put down his bags, as you call them.
VLADIMIR:
That's it.
POZZO:
(*to Estragon*). You are sure you agree with that?
ESTRAGON:
He's puffing like a grampus.
POZZO:
The answer is this. (*To Estragon*). But stay still, I beg of you, you're making me nervous!

VLADIMIR:
Here.
ESTRAGON:
What is it?
VLADIMIR:
He's about to speak.
Estragon goes over beside Vladimir. Motionless, side by side, they wait.
POZZO:
Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? (*He looks at Lucky, jerks the rope. Lucky raises his head.*) Will you look at me, pig! (*Lucky looks at him.*) Good. (*He puts the pipe in his pocket, takes out a little vaporizer and sprays his throat, puts back the vaporizer in his pocket, clears his throat, spits, takes out the vaporizer again, sprays his throat again, puts back the vaporizer in his pocket.*) I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready? (*He looks at them all in turn, jerks the rope.*) Hog! (*Lucky raises his head.*) I don't like talking in a vacuum. Good. Let me see.
He reflects.
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
POZZO:
What was it exactly you wanted to know?
VLADIMIR:
Why he—
POZZO:
(*angrily*). Don't interrupt me! (*Pause. Calmer.*) If we all speak at once we'll never get anywhere. (*Pause.*) What was I saying? (*Pause. Louder.*) What was I saying?
Vladimir mimics one carrying a heavy burden. Pozzo looks at him, puzzled.
ESTRAGON:
(*forcibly*). Bags. (*He points at Lucky.*) Why? Always hold. (*He sags, panting.*) Never put down. (*He opens his hands, straightens up with relief.*) Why?
POZZO:
Ah! Why couldn't you say so before? Why he doesn't make himself comfortable? Let's try and get this clear. Has he not the right to? Certainly he has. It follows that he doesn't want to. There's reasoning for you. And why doesn't he want to? (*Pause.*) Gentlemen, the reason is this.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). Make a note of this.
POZZO:
He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him.
ESTRAGON:
What?
POZZO:
Perhaps I haven't got it quite right. He wants to mollify me, so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him. No, that's not exactly it either.
VLADIMIR:
You want to get rid of him?

POZZO:
He wants to cod me, but he won't.
VLADIMIR:
You want to get rid of him?
POZZO:
He imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity.
ESTRAGON:
You've had enough of him?
POZZO:
In reality he carries like a pig. It's not his job.
VLADIMIR:
You want to get rid of him?
POZZO:
He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I'll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were short of slaves! (*All three look at Lucky.*) Atlas, son of Jupiter! (*Silence.*) Well, that's that, I think. Anything else?
Vaporizer.
VLADIMIR:
You want to get rid of him?
POZZO:
Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each one his due.
VLADIMIR:
You waagerrim?
POZZO:
I beg your pardon?
VLADIMIR:
You want to get rid of him?
POZZO:
I do. But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his arse, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them.
Lucky weeps.
ESTRAGON:
He's crying!
POZZO:
Old dogs have more dignity. (*He proffers his handkerchief to Estragon.*) Comfort him, since you pity him. (*Estragon hesitates.*) Come on. (*Estragon takes the handkerchief.*) Wipe away his tears, he'll feel less forsaken.
Estragon hesitates.
VLADIMIR:
Here, give it to me, I'll do it.
Estragon refuses to give the handkerchief.
Childish gestures.

POZZO:
Make haste, before he stops. (*Estragon approaches Lucky and makes to wipe his eyes. Lucky kicks him violently in the shins. Estragon drops the handkerchief, recoils, staggers about the stage howling with pain.*) Hanky!
Lucky puts down bag and basket, picks up handkerchief and gives it to Pozzo, goes back to his place, picks up bag and basket.
ESTRAGON:
Oh the swine! (*He pulls up the leg of his trousers.*) He's crippled me!
POZZO:
I told you he didn't like strangers.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). Show me. (*Estragon shows his leg. To Pozzo, angrily.*) He's bleeding!
POZZO:
It's a good sign.
ESTRAGON:
(*on one leg*). I'll never walk again!
VLADIMIR:
(*tenderly*). I'll carry you. (*Pause.*) If necessary.
POZZO:
He's stopped crying. (*To Estragon.*) You have replaced him as it were. (*Lyrically.*) The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. (*He laughs.*) Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors. (*Pause.*) Let us not speak well of it either. (*Pause.*) Let us not speak of it at all. (*Pause. Judiciously.*) It is true the population has increased.
VLADIMIR:
Try and walk.
Estragon takes a few limping steps, stops before Lucky and spits on him, then goes and sits down on the mound.
POZZO:
Guess who taught me all these beautiful things. (*Pause. Pointing to Lucky.*) My Lucky!
VLADIMIR:
(*looking at the sky.*) Will night never come?
POZZO:
But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things. (*Pause. With extraordinary vehemence.*) Professional worries! (*Calmer.*) Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me. So I took a knook.
VLADIMIR:
(*startled from his inspection of the sky*). A knook?
POZZO:
That was nearly sixty years ago . . . (*he consults his watch*) . . . yes, nearly sixty. (*Drawing himself up proudly.*) You wouldn't think it to look at me, would you? Compared to him I look like a young man, no? (*Pause.*) Hat! (*Lucky puts down the basket and takes off his hat. His long white hair falls about his face. He puts his hat under his arm and picks up the basket.*) Now look. (*Pozzo takes off his hat.* [All four wear bowlers.] *He is completely bald. He puts on his hat again.*) Did you see?

VLADIMIR:
And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant!
ESTRAGON:
Swine!
Pozzo more and more agitated.
VLADIMIR:
After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a . . . like a banana skin. Really . . .
POZZO:
(*groaning, clutching his head*). I can't bear it . . . any longer . . . the way he goes on . . . you've no idea . . . it's terrible . . . he must go . . . (*he waves his arms*) . . . I'm going mad . . . (*he collapses, his head in his hands*) . . . I can't bear it . . . any longer . . .
Silence. All look at Pozzo.
VLADIMIR:
He can't bear it.
ESTRAGON:
Any longer.
VLADIMIR:
He's going mad.
ESTRAGON:
It's terrible.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Lucky*). How dare you! It's abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!
POZZO:
(*sobbing*). He used to be so kind . . . so helpful . . . and entertaining . . . my good angel . . . and now . . . he's killing me.
ESTRAGON:
(*to Vladimir*). Does he want to replace him?
VLADIMIR:
What?
ESTRAGON:
Does he want someone to take his place or not?
VLADIMIR:
I don't think so.
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know.
ESTRAGON:
Ask him.
POZZO:
(*calmer*). Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. (*More and more his old self.*) I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it. (*Drawing himself up, striking his chest.*) Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer? Frankly? (*He rummages in his pockets.*) What have I done with my pipe?

VLADIMIR:
Charming evening we're having.
ESTRAGON:
Unforgettable.
VLADIMIR:
And it's not over.
ESTRAGON:
Apparently not.
VLADIMIR:
It's only beginning.
ESTRAGON:
It's awful.
VLADIMIR:
Worse than the pantomime.
ESTRAGON:
The circus.
VLADIMIR:
The music-hall.
ESTRAGON:
The circus.
POZZO:
What can I have done with that briar?
ESTRAGON:
He's a scream. He's lost his dudeen.
Laughs noisily.
VLADIMIR:
I'll be back.
He hastens towards the wings.
ESTRAGON:
End of the corridor, on the left.
VLADIMIR:
Keep my seat.
Exit Vladimir.
POZZO:
(*on the point of tears*). I've lost my Kapp and Peterson!
ESTRAGON:
(*convulsed with merriment*). He'll be the death of me!
POZZO:
You didn't see by any chance– (*He misses Vladimir.*) Oh! He's gone! Without saying goodbye! How could he! He might have waited!
ESTRAGON:
He would have burst.
POZZO:
Oh! (*Pause.*) Oh well then of course in that case . . .

ESTRAGON:
Come here.
POZZO:
What for?
ESTRAGON:
You'll see.
POZZO:
You want me to get up?
ESTRAGON:
Quick! (*Pozzo gets up and goes over beside Estragon. Estragon points off.*) Look!
POZZO:
(*having put on his glasses*). Oh I say!
ESTRAGON:
It's all over.
Enter Vladimir, somber. He shoulders Lucky out of his way, kicks over the stool, comes and goes agitatedly.
POZZO:
He's not pleased.
ESTRAGON:
(*to Vladimir*). You missed a treat. Pity.
Vladimir halts, straightens the stool, comes and goes, calmer.
POZZO:
He subsides. (*Looking round.*) Indeed all subsides. A great calm descends. (*Raising his hand.*) Listen! Pan sleeps.
VLADIMIR:
Will night never come?
All three look at the sky.
POZZO:
You don't feel like going until it does?
ESTRAGON:
Well you see—
POZZO:
Why it's very natural, very natural. I myself in your situation, if I had an appointment with a Godin . . . Godet . . . Godot . . . anyhow, you see who I mean, I'd wait till it was black night before I gave up. (*He looks at the stool.*) I'd very much like to sit down, but I don't quite know how to go about it.
ESTRAGON:
Could I be of any help?
POZZO:
If you asked me perhaps.
ESTRAGON:
What?
POZZO:
If you asked me to sit down.
ESTRAGON:
Would that be a help?

POZZO:
I fancy so.
ESTRAGON:
Here we go. Be seated, Sir, I beg of you.
POZZO:
No no, I wouldn't think of it! (*Pause. Aside.*) Ask me again.
ESTRAGON:
Come come, take a seat I beseech you, you'll get pneumonia.
POZZO:
You really think so?
ESTRAGON:
Why it's absolutely certain.
POZZO:
No doubt you are right. (*He sits down.*) Done it again! (*Pause.*) Thank you, dear fellow. (*He consults his watch.*) But I must really be getting along, if I am to observe my schedule.
VLADIMIR:
Time has stopped.
POZZO:
(*cuddling his watch to his ear*). Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it. (*He puts his watch back in his pocket.*) Whatever you like, but not that.
ESTRAGON:
(*to Pozzo*). Everything seems black to him today.
POZZO:
Except the firmament. (*He laughs, pleased with this witticism.*) But I see what it is, you are not from these parts, you don't know what our twilights can do. Shall I tell you? (*Silence. Estragon is fiddling with his boot again, Vladimir with his hat.*) I can't refuse you. (*Vaporizer.*) A little attention, if you please. (*Vladimir and Estragon continue their fiddling, Lucky is half asleep. Pozzo cracks his whip feebly.*) What's the matter with this whip? (*He gets up and cracks it more vigorously, finally with success. Lucky jumps. Vladimir's hat, Estragon's boot, Lucky's hat, fall to the ground. Pozzo throws down the whip.*) Worn out, this whip. (*He looks at Vladimir and Estragon.*) What was I saying?
VLADIMIR:
Let's go.
ESTRAGON:
But take the weight off your feet, I implore you, you'll catch your death.
POZZO:
True. (*He sits down. To Estragon.*) What is your name?
ESTRAGON:
Adam.
POZZO:
(*who hasn't listened*). Ah yes! The night. (*He raises his head.*) But be a little more attentive, for pity's sake, otherwise we'll never get anywhere. (*He looks at the sky.*) Look! (*All look at the sky except Lucky who is dozing off again. Pozzo jerks the rope.*) Will you look at the sky, pig! (*Lucky looks at the sky.*) Good, that's enough. (*They stop looking at the sky.*) What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky. It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. (*Pause.*) In these latitudes. (*Pause.*) When the weather is fine. (*Lyrical.*) An hour ago

(*he looks at his watch, prosaic*) roughly (*lyrical*) after having poured forth even since (*he hesitates, prosaic*) say ten o'clock in the morning (*lyrical*) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale (*gesture of the two hands lapsing by stages*) pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until (*dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart*) pppfff! finished! it comes to rest. But– (*hand raised in admonition*)– but behind this veil of gentleness and peace, night is charging (*vibrantly*) and will burst upon us (*snaps his fingers*) pop! like that! (*his inspiration leaves him*) just when we least expect it. (*Silence. Gloomily.*) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth.
Long silence.
ESTRAGON:
So long as one knows.
VLADIMIR:
One can bide one's time.
ESTRAGON:
One knows what to expect.
VLADIMIR:
No further need to worry.
ESTRAGON:
Simply wait.
VLADIMIR:
We're used to it.
He picks up his hat, peers inside it, shakes it, puts it on.
POZZO:
How did you find me? (*Vladimir and Estragon look at him blankly.*) Good? Fair? Middling? Poor? Positively bad?
VLADIMIR:
(*first to understand*). Oh very good, very very good.
POZZO:
(*to Estragon*). And you, Sir?
ESTRAGON:
Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong.
POZZO:
(*fervently*). Bless you, gentlemen, bless you! (*Pause.*) I have such need of encouragement! (*Pause.*) I weakened a little towards the end, you didn't notice?
VLADIMIR:
Oh perhaps just a teeny weeny little bit.
ESTRAGON:
I thought it was intentional.
POZZO:
You see my memory is defective.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
In the meantime, nothing happens.
POZZO:
You find it tedious?

ESTRAGON:
Somewhat.
POZZO:
(*to Vladimir*). And you, Sir?
VLADIMIR:
I've been better entertained.
Silence. Pozzo struggles inwardly.
POZZO:
Gentlemen, you have been . . . civil to me.
ESTRAGON:
Not at all!
VLADIMIR:
What an idea!
POZZO:
Yes yes, you have been correct. So that I ask myself is there anything I can do in my turn for these honest fellows who are having such a dull, dull time.
ESTRAGON:
Even ten francs would be a help.
VLADIMIR:
We are not beggars!
POZZO:
Is there anything I can do, that's what I ask myself, to cheer them up? I have given them bones, I have talked to them about this and that, I have explained the twilight, admittedly. But is it enough, that's what tortures me, is it enough?
ESTRAGON:
Even five.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon, indignantly*). That's enough!
ESTRAGON:
I couldn't accept less.
POZZO:
Is is enough? No doubt. But I am liberal. It's my nature. This evening. So much the worse for me. (*He jerks the rope. Lucky looks at him.*) For I shall suffer, no doubt about that. (*He picks up the whip.*) What do you prefer? Shall we have him dance, or sing, or recite, or think, or—
ESTRAGON:
Who?
POZZO:
Who! You know how to think, you two?
VLADIMIR:
He thinks?
POZZO:
Certainly. Aloud. He even used to think very prettily once, I could listen to him for hours. Now . . . (*he shudders*). So much the worse for me. Well, would you like him to think something for us?
ESTRAGON:
I'd rather he dance, it'd be more fun.

POZZO:
Not necessarily.
ESTRAGON:
Wouldn't it, Didi, be more fun?
VLADIMIR:
I'd like well to hear him think.
ESTRAGON:
Perhaps he could dance first and think afterwards, if it isn't too much to ask him.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Pozzo*). Would that be possible?
POZZO:
By all means, nothing simpler. It's the natural order.
He laughs briefly.
VLADIMIR:
Then let him dance.
Silence.
POZZO:
Do you hear, hog?
ESTRAGON:
He never refuses?
POZZO:
He refused once. (*Silence.*) Dance, misery!
Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances towards front, turns to Pozzo. Lucky dances. He stops.
ESTRAGON:
Is that all?
POZZO:
Encore!
Lucky executes the same movements, stops.
ESTRAGON:
Pooh! I'd do as well myself. (*He imitates Lucky, almost falls.*) With a little practice.
POZZO:
He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy. Now that's the best he can do. Do you know what he calls it?
ESTRAGON:
The Scapegoat's Agony.
VLADIMIR:
The Hard Stool.
POZZO:
The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net.
VLADIMIR:
(*squirming like an aesthete*). There's something about it . . .
Lucky makes to return to his burdens.
POZZO:
Woaa!
Lucky stiffens.

ESTRAGON:
Tell us about the time he refused.
POZZO:
With pleasure, with pleasure. (*He fumbles in his pockets.*) Wait. (*He fumbles.*) What have I done with my spray? (*He fumbles.*) Well now isn't that . . . (*He looks up, consternation on his features. Faintly.*) I can't find my pulverizer!
ESTRAGON:
(*faintly*). My left lung is very weak! (*He coughs feebly. In ringing tones.*) But my right lung is as sound as a bell!
POZZO:
(*normal voice*). No matter! What was I saying. (*He ponders.*) Wait. (*Ponders.*) Well now isn't that . . . (*He raises his head.*) Help me!
ESTRAGON:
Wait!
VLADIMIR:
Wait!
POZZO:
Wait!
All three take off their hats simultaneously, press their hands to their foreheads, concentrate.
ESTRAGON:
(*triumphantly*). Ah!
VLADIMIR:
He has it.
POZZO:
(*impatient*). Well?
ESTRAGON:
Why doesn't he put down his bags?
VLADIMIR:
Rubbish!
POZZO:
Are you sure?
VLADIMIR:
Damn it haven't you already told us?
POZZO:
I've already told you?
ESTRAGON:
He's already told us?
VLADIMIR:
Anyway he has put them down.
ESTRAGON:
(*glance at Lucky*). So he has. And what of it?
VLADIMIR:
Since he has put down his bags it is impossible we should have asked why he does not do so.
POZZO:
Stoutly reasoned!

ESTRAGON:
And why has he put them down?
POZZO:
Answer us that.
VLADIMIR:
In order to dance.
ESTRAGON:
True!
POZZO:
True!
Silence. They put on their hats.
ESTRAGON:
Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!
VLADIMIR:
(*to Pozzo*). Tell him to think.
POZZO:
Give him his hat.
VLADIMIR:
His hat?
POZZO:
He can't think without his hat.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). Give him his hat.
ESTRAGON:
Me! After what he did to me! Never!
VLADIMIR:
I'll give it to him.
He does not move.
ESTRAGON:
(*to Pozzo*). Tell him to go and fetch it.
POZZO:
It's better to give it to him.
VLADIMIR:
I'll give it to him.
He picks up the hat and tenders it at arm's length to Lucky, who does not move.
POZZO:
You must put it on his head.
ESTRAGON:
(*to Pozzo*). Tell him to take it.
POZZO:
It's better to put it on his head.
VLADIMIR:
I'll put it on his head.
He goes round behind Lucky, approaches him cautiously, puts the hat on his head and recoils smartly. Lucky does not move. Silence.

ESTRAGON:
What's he waiting for?
POZZO:
Stand back! (*Vladimir and Estragon move away from Lucky. Pozzo jerks the rope. Lucky looks at Pozzo.*) Think, pig! (*Pause. Lucky begins to dance.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Forward! (*Lucky advances.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Think!
Silence.
LUCKY:
On the other hand with regard to—
POZZO:
Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Back! (*Lucky moves back.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Turn! (*Lucky turns towards auditorium.*) Think!
During Lucky's tirade the others react as follows.
1) Vladimir and Estragon all attention, Pozzo dejected and disgusted.
2) Vladimir and Estragon begin to protest, Pozzo's sufferings increase.
3) Vladimir and Estragon attentive again, Pozzo more and more agitated and groaning.
4) Vladimir and Estragon protest violently. Pozzo jumps up, pulls on the rope. General outcry. Lucky pulls on the rope, staggers, shouts his text. All three throw themselves on Lucky who struggles and shouts his text.
LUCKY:
Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunnard it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattmann it is established beyond all doubt that in view of the labors of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished it is established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and Cunard that man in Essy that man in short that man in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation wastes and pines wastes and pines and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports such as tennis football running cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding conating camogie skating tennis of all kinds dying flying sports of all sorts autumn summer winter winter tennis of all kinds hockey of all sorts penicillin and succedanea in a word I resume flying gliding golf over nine and eighteen holes tennis of all sorts in a word for reasons unknown in Feckham Peckham Fulham Clapham namely concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown but time will tell fades away I resume Fulham Clapham in a word the dead loss per head

since the death of Bishop Berkeley being to the tune of one inch four ounce per head approximately by and large more or less to the nearest decimal good measure round figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown no matter what matter the facts are there and considering what is more much more grave that in the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and Peterman it appears what is more much more grave that in the light the light the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and Peterman that in the plains in the mountains by the seas by the rivers running water running fire the air is the same and then the earth namely the air and then the earth in the great cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in the great cold alas alas in the year of their Lord six hundred and something the air the earth the sea the earth abode of stones in the great deeps the great cold on sea on land and in the air I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis the facts are there but time will tell I resume alas alas on on in short in fine on on abode of stones who can doubt it I resume but not so fast I resume the skull fading fading fading and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labors abandoned left unfinished graver still abode of stones in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard (*mêlée, final vociferations*)

. . . tennis . . . the stones . . . so calm . . . Cunard . . . unfinished . . .

POZZO:

His hat!

Vladimir seizes Lucky's hat. Silence of Lucky. He falls. Silence. Panting of the victors.

ESTRAGON:

Avenged!

Vladimir examines the hat, peers inside it.

POZZO:

Give me that! (*He snatches the hat from Vladimir, throws it on the ground, tramples on it.*) There's an end to his thinking!

VLADIMIR:

But will he be able to walk?

POZZO:

Walk or crawl! (*He kicks Lucky.*) Up pig!

ESTRAGON:

Perhaps he's dead.

VLADIMIR:

You'll kill him.

POZZO:

Up scum! (*He jerks the rope.*) Help me!

VLADIMIR:

How?

POZZO:

Raise him up!

Vladimir and Estragon hoist Lucky to his feet, support him an instant, then let him go. He falls.

ESTRAGON:
He's doing it on purpose!
POZZO:
You must hold him. (*Pause.*) Come on, come on, raise him up.
ESTRAGON:
To hell with him!
VLADIMIR:
Come on, once more.
ESTRAGON:
What does he take us for?
They raise Lucky, hold him up.
POZZO:
Don't let him go! (*Vladimir and Estragon totter.*) Don't move! (*Pozzo fetches bag and basket and brings them towards Lucky.*) Hold him tight! (*He puts the bag in Lucky's hand. Lucky drops it immediately.*) Don't let him go! (*He puts back the bag in Lucky's hand. Gradually, at the feel of the bag, Lucky recovers his senses and his fingers finally close round the handle.*) Hold him tight! (*As before with basket.*)
Now! You can let him go. (*Vladimir and Estragon move away from Lucky who totters, reels, sags, but succeeds in remaining on his feet, bag and basket in his hands. Pozzo steps back, cracks his whip.*) Forward! (*Lucky totters forward.*) Back! (*Lucky totters back.*) Turn! (*Lucky turns.*) Done it! He can walk. (*Turning to Vladimir and Estragon.*) Thank you, gentlemen, and let me . . . (*he fumbles in his pockets*) . . . let me wish you . . . (*fumbles*) . . . wish you . . . (*fumbles*) . . . what have I done with my watch? (*Fumbles.*) A genuine half-hunter, gentlemen, with deadbeat escapement! (*Sobbing.*) Twas my granpa gave it to me! (*He searches on the ground, Vladimir and Estragon likewise. Pozzo turns over with his foot the remains of Lucky's hat.*) Well now isn't that just—
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps it's in your fob.
POZZO:
Wait! (*He doubles up in an attempt to apply his ear to his stomach, listens. Silence.*) I hear nothing. (*He beckons them to approach, Vladimir and Estragon go over to him, bend over his stomach.*) Surely one should hear the tick-tick.
VLADIMIR:
Silence!
All listen, bent double.
ESTRAGON:
I hear something.
POZZO:
Where?
VLADIMIR:
It's the heart.
POZZO:
(*disappointed*). Damnation!
VLADIMIR:
Silence!

ESTRAGON:
Perhaps it has stopped.
They straighten up.
POZZO:
Which of you smells so bad?
ESTRAGON:
He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet.
POZZO:
I must go.
ESTRAGON:
And your half-hunter?
POZZO:
I must have left it at the manor.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Then adieu.
POZZO:
Adieu.
VLADIMIR:
Adieu.
POZZO:
Adieu.
Silence. No one moves.
VLADIMIR:
Adieu.
POZZO:
Adieu.
ESTRAGON:
Adieu.
Silence.
POZZO:
And thank you.
VLADIMIR:
Thank *you*.
POZZO:
Not at all.
ESTRAGON:
Yes yes.
POZZO:
No no.
VLADIMIR:
Yes yes.
ESTRAGON:
No no.
Silence.

POZZO:
I don't seem to be able . . . (*long hesitation*) . . . to depart.
ESTRAGON:
Such is life.
Pozzo turns, moves away from Lucky towards the wings, paying out the rope as he goes.
VLADIMIR:
You're going the wrong way.
POZZO:
I need a running start. (*Having come to the end of the rope, i.e., off stage, he stops, turns and cries.*) Stand back! (*Vladimir and Estragon stand back, look towards Pozzo. Crack of whip.*) On! On!
ESTRAGON:
On!
VLADIMIR:
On!
Lucky moves off.
POZZO:
Faster! (*He appears, crosses the stage preceded by Lucky. Vladimir and Estragon wave their hats. Exit Lucky.*) On! On! (*On the point of disappearing in his turn he stops and turns. The rope tautens. Noise of Lucky falling off.*) Stool! (*Vladimir fetches stool and gives it to Pozzo who throws it to Lucky.*) Adieu!
VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON:
(*waving*). Adieu! Adieu!
POZZO:
Up! Pig! (*Noise of Lucky getting up.*) On! (*Exit Pozzo.*) Faster! On! Adieu! Pig! Yip! Adieu!
Long silence.
VLADIMIR:
That passed the time.
ESTRAGON:
It would have passed in any case.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, but not so rapidly.
Pause.
ESTRAGON:
What do we do now?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know.
ESTRAGON:
Let's go.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON:
(*despairingly*). Ah!
Pause.
VLADIMIR:
How they've changed!
ESTRAGON:
Who?
VLADIMIR:
Those two.
ESTRAGON:
That's the idea, let's make a little conversation.
VLADIMIR:
Haven't they?
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
Changed.
ESTRAGON:
Very likely. They all change. Only we can't.
VLADIMIR:
Likely! It's certain. Didn't you see them?
ESTRAGON:
I suppose I did. But I don't know them.
VLADIMIR:
Yes you do know them.
ESTRAGON:
No I don't know them.
VLADIMIR:
We know them, I tell you. You forget everything. (*Pause. To himself.*) Unless they're not the same . . .
ESTRAGON:
Why didn't they recognize us then?
VLADIMIR:
That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them. And then nobody ever recognizes us.
ESTRAGON:
Forget it. What we need– Ow! (*Vladimir does not react.*) Ow!
VLADIMIR:
(*to himself*). Unless they're not the same . . .
ESTRAGON:
Didi! It's the other foot!
He goes hobbling towards the mound.
VLADIMIR:
Unless they're not the same . . .
BOY:
(*off*). Mister!

Estragon halts. Both look towards the voice.
ESTRAGON:
Off we go again.
VLADIMIR:
Approach, my child.
Enter Boy, timidly. He halts.
BOY:
Mister Albert . . . ?
VLADIMIR:
Yes.
ESTRAGON:
What do you want?
VLADIMIR:
Approach!
The Boy does not move.
ESTRAGON:
(*forcibly*). Approach when you're told, can't you?
The Boy advances timidly, halts.
VLADIMIR:
What is it?
BOY:
Mr. Godot . . .
VLADIMIR:
Obviously . . . (*Pause.*) Approach.
ESTRAGON:
(*violently*). Will you approach! (*The Boy advances timidly.*) What kept you so late?
VLADIMIR:
You have a message from Mr. Godot?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Well, what is it?
ESTRAGON:
What kept you so late?
The Boy looks at them in turn, not knowing to which he should reply.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). Let him alone.
ESTRAGON:
(*violently*). You let me alone. (*Advancing, to the Boy.*) Do you know what time it is?
BOY:
(*recoiling*). It's not my fault, Sir.
ESTRAGON:
And whose is it? Mine?
BOY:
I was afraid, Sir.

ESTRAGON:
Afraid of what? Of us? (*Pause.*) Answer me!
VLADIMIR:
I know what it is, he was afraid of the others.
ESTRAGON:
How long have you been here?
BOY:
A good while, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
You were afraid of the whip?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
The roars?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
The two big men.
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Do you know them?
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Are you a native of these parts? (*Silence.*) Do you belong to these parts?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
ESTRAGON:
That's all a pack of lies. (*Shaking the Boy by the arm.*) Tell us the truth!
BOY:
(*trembling*). But it is the truth, Sir!
VLADIMIR:
Will you let him alone! What's the matter with you?
(*Estragon releases the Boy, moves away, covering his face with his hands. Vladimir and the Boy observe him. Estragon drops his hands. His face is convulsed.*) What's the matter with you?
ESTRAGON:
I'm unhappy.
VLADIMIR:
Not really! Since when?
ESTRAGON:
I'd forgotten.
VLADIMIR:
Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays! (*Estragon tries to speak, renounces, limps to his place, sits down and begins to take off his boots. To Boy.*) Well?

BOY:
Mr. Godot—
VLADIMIR:
I've seen you before, haven't I?
BOY:
I don't know, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
You don't know me?
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
It wasn't you came yesterday?
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
This is your first time?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Words words. (*Pause.*) Speak.
BOY:
(*in a rush*). Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Is that all?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
You work for Mr. Godot?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
What do you do?
BOY:
I mind the goats, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Is he good to you?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
He doesn't beat you?
BOY:
No Sir, not me.

VLADIMIR:
Whom does he beat?
BOY:
He beats my brother, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Ah, you have a brother?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
What does he do?
BOY:
He minds the sheep, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
And why doesn't he beat you?
BOY:
I don't know, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
He must be fond of you.
BOY:
I don't know, Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Does he give you enough to eat? (*The Boy hesitates.*) Does he feed you well?
BOY:
Fairly well, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
You're not unhappy? (*The Boy hesitates.*) Do you hear me?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Well?
BOY:
I don't know, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
You don't know if you're unhappy or not?
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
You're as bad as myself. (*Silence.*) Where do you sleep?
BOY:
In the loft, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
With your brother?
BOY:
Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR:
In the hay?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
All right, you may go.
BOY:
What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?
VLADIMIR:
Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw us. (*Pause.*) You did see us, didn't you?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
He steps back, hesitates, turns and exit running. The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene.
VLADIMIR:
At last! (*Estragon gets up and goes towards Vladimir, a boot in each hand. He puts them down at edge of stage, straightens and contemplates the moon.*)
What are you doing?
ESTRAGON:
Pale for weariness.
VLADIMIR:
Eh?
ESTRAGON:
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us.
VLADIMIR:
Your boots, what are you doing with your boots?
ESTRAGON:
(*turning to look at the boots*). I'm leaving them there. (*Pause.*) Another will come, just as . . . as . . . as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy.
VLADIMIR:
But you can't go barefoot!
ESTRAGON:
Christ did.
VLADIMIR:
Christ! What has Christ got to do with it. You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!
ESTRAGON:
All my life I've compared myself to him.
VLADIMIR:
But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!
ESTRAGON:
Yes. And they crucified quick.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
We've nothing more to do here.

ESTRAGON:
Nor anywhere else.
VLADIMIR:
Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better.
ESTRAGON:
How do you make that out?
VLADIMIR:
Did you not hear what the child said?
ESTRAGON:
No.
VLADIMIR:
He said that Godot was sure to come tomorrow. (*Pause.*) What do you say to that?
ESTRAGON:
Then all we have to do is to wait on here.
VLADIMIR:
Are you mad? We must take cover. (*He takes Estragon by the arm.*) Come on.
He draws Estragon after him. Estragon yields, then resists. They halt.
ESTRAGON:
(*looking at the tree*). Pity we haven't got a bit of rope.
VLADIMIR:
Come on. It's cold.
He draws Estragon after him. As before.
ESTRAGON:
Remind me to bring a bit of rope tomorrow.
VLADIMIR:
Yes. Come on.
He draws him after him. As before.
ESTRAGON:
How long have we been together all the time now?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know. Fifty years maybe.
ESTRAGON:
Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?
VLADIMIR:
We were grape harvesting.
ESTRAGON:
You fished me out.
VLADIMIR:
That's all dead and buried.
ESTRAGON:
My clothes dried in the sun.
VLADIMIR:
There's no good harking back on that. Come on.
He draws him after him. As before.
ESTRAGON:
Wait!

VLADIMIR:
I'm cold!
ESTRAGON:
Wait! (*He moves away from Vladimir.*) I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. (*He crosses the stage and sits down on the mound.*) We weren't made for the same road.
VLADIMIR:
(*without anger*). It's not certain.
ESTRAGON:
No, nothing is certain.
Vladimir slowly crosses the stage and sits down beside Estragon.
VLADIMIR:
We can still part, if you think it would be better.
ESTRAGON:
It's not worthwhile now.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
No, it's not worthwhile now.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR:
Yes, let's go.
They do not move.
Curtain.

Act II

Next day. Same time.
Same place.
Estragon's boots front center, heels together, toes splayed.
Lucky's hat at same place.
The tree has four or five leaves.
Enter Vladimir agitatedly. He halts and looks long at the tree, then suddenly begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the boots, picks one up, examines it, sniffs it, manifests disgust, puts it back carefully. Comes and goes. Halts extreme right and gazes into distance off, shading his eyes with his hand. Comes and goes. Halts extreme left, as before. Comes and goes. Halts suddenly and begins to sing loudly.
VLADIMIR:
A dog came in–
Having begun too high he stops, clears his throat, resumes:
A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.
Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb–
He stops, broods, resumes:
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb
And wrote upon the tombstone
For the eyes of dogs to come:
A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb–
He stops, broods, resumes:
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb–
He stops, broods. Softly.
And dug the dog a tomb . . .
He remains a moment silent and motionless, then begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the tree, comes and goes, before the boots, comes and goes, halts extreme right, gazes into distance, extreme left, gazes into distance. Enter Estragon right, barefoot, head bowed. He slowly crosses the stage. Vladimir turns and sees him.

VLADIMIR:
You again! (*Estragon halts but does not raise his head. Vladimir goes towards him.*) Come here till I embrace you.

ESTRAGON:
Don't touch me!
Vladimir holds back, pained.

VLADIMIR:
Do you want me to go away? (*Pause.*) Gogo! (*Pause. Vladimir observes him attentively.*) Did they beat you? (*Pause.*) Gogo! (*Estragon remains silent, head bowed.*) Where did you spend the night?

ESTRAGON:
Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!

VLADIMIR:
Did I ever leave you?

ESTRAGON:
You let me go.

VLADIMIR:
Look at me. (*Estragon does not raise his head. Violently.*) Will you look at me!
Estragon raises his head. They look long at each other, then suddenly embrace, clapping each other on the back. End of the embrace. Estragon, no longer supported, almost falls.

ESTRAGON:
What a day!

VLADIMIR:
Who beat you? Tell me.

ESTRAGON:
Another day done with.
VLADIMIR:
Not yet.
ESTRAGON:
For me it's over and done with, no matter what happens. (*Silence.*) I heard you singing.
VLADIMIR:
That's right, I remember.
ESTRAGON:
That finished me. I said to myself, He's all alone, he thinks I'm gone for ever, and he sings.
VLADIMIR:
One is not master of one's moods. All day I've felt in great form. (*Pause.*) I didn't get up in the night, not once!
ESTRAGON:
(*sadly*). You see, you piss better when I'm not there.
VLADIMIR:
I missed you . . . and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a strange thing?
ESTRAGON:
(*shocked*). Happy?
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps it's not quite the right word.
ESTRAGON:
And now?
VLADIMIR:
Now? . . . (*Joyous.*) There you are again . . . (*Indifferent.*) There we are again. . . (*Gloomy.*) There I am again.
ESTRAGON:
You see, you feel worse when I'm with you. I feel better alone too.
VLADIMIR:
(*vexed*). Then why do you always come crawling back?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
No, but I do. It's because you don't know how to defend yourself. I wouldn't have let them beat you.
ESTRAGON:
You couldn't have stopped them.
VLADIMIR:
Why not?
ESTRAGON:
There was ten of them.
VLADIMIR:
No, I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing.
ESTRAGON:
I wasn't doing anything.

VLADIMIR:
Then why did they beat you?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
Ah no, Gogo, the truth is there are things that escape you that don't escape me, you must feel it yourself.
ESTRAGON:
I tell you I wasn't doing anything.
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living.
ESTRAGON:
I wasn't doing anything.
VLADIMIR:
You must be happy too, deep down, if you only knew it.
ESTRAGON:
Happy about what?
VLADIMIR:
To be back with me again.
ESTRAGON:
Would you say so?
VLADIMIR:
Say you are, even if it's not true.
ESTRAGON:
What am I to say?
VLADIMIR:
Say, I am happy.
ESTRAGON:
I am happy.
VLADIMIR:
So am I.
ESTRAGON:
So am I.
VLADIMIR:
We are happy.
ESTRAGON:
We are happy. (*Silence.*) What do we do now, now that we are happy?
VLADIMIR:
Wait for Godot. (*Estragon groans. Silence.*) Things have changed here since yesterday.
ESTRAGON:
And if he doesn't come?
VLADIMIR:
(*after a moment of bewilderment*). We'll see when the time comes. (*Pause.*) I was saying that things have changed here since yesterday.

ESTRAGON:
Everything oozes.
VLADIMIR:
Look at the tree.
ESTRAGON:
It's never the same pus from one second to the next.
VLADIMIR:
The tree, look at the tree.
Estragon looks at the tree.
ESTRAGON:
Was it not there yesterday?
VLADIMIR:
Yes of course it was there. Do you not remember? We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?
ESTRAGON:
You dreamt it.
VLADIMIR:
Is it possible you've forgotten already?
ESTRAGON:
That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.
VLADIMIR:
And Pozzo and Lucky, have you forgotten them too?
ESTRAGON:
Pozzo and Lucky?
VLADIMIR:
He's forgotten everything!
ESTRAGON:
I remember a lunatic who kicked the shins off me. Then he played the fool.
VLADIMIR:
That was Lucky.
ESTRAGON:
I remember that. But when was it?
VLADIMIR:
And his keeper, do you not remember him?
ESTRAGON:
He gave me a bone.
VLADIMIR:
That was Pozzo.
ESTRAGON:
And all that was yesterday, you say?
VLADIMIR:
Yes of course it was yesterday.
ESTRAGON:
And here where we are now?
VLADIMIR:
Where else do you think? Do you not recognize the place?

ESTRAGON:
(*suddenly furious*). Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! (*Looking wildly about him.*) Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!
VLADIMIR:
Calm yourself, calm yourself.
ESTRAGON:
You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms!
VLADIMIR:
All the same, you can't tell me that this (*gesture*) bears any resemblance to . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . to the Macon country for example. You can't deny there's a big difference.
ESTRAGON:
The Macon country! Who's talking to you about the Macon country?
VLADIMIR:
But you were there yourself, in the Macon country.
ESTRAGON:
No I was never in the Macon country! I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you! Here! In the Cackon country!
VLADIMIR:
But we were there together, I could swear to it! Picking grapes for a man called . . . (*he snaps his fingers*) . . . can't think of the name of the man, at a place called . . . (*snaps his fingers*) . . . can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember?
ESTRAGON:
(*a little calmer*). It's possible. I didn't notice anything.
VLADIMIR:
But down there everything is red!
ESTRAGON:
(*exasperated*). I didn't notice anything, I tell you!
Silence. Vladimir sighs deeply.
VLADIMIR:
You're a hard man to get on with, Gogo.
ESTRAGON:
It'd be better if we parted.
VLADIMIR:
You always say that and you always come crawling back.
ESTRAGON:
The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.
VLADIMIR:
What other? (*Pause.*) What other?
ESTRAGON:
Like billions of others.
VLADIMIR:
(*sententious*). To every man his little cross. (*He sighs.*) Till he dies. (*Afterthought.*) And is forgotten.
ESTRAGON:
In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

VLADIMIR:
You're right, we're inexhaustible.
ESTRAGON:
It's so we won't think.
VLADIMIR:
We have that excuse.
ESTRAGON:
It's so we won't hear.
VLADIMIR:
We have our reasons.
ESTRAGON:
All the dead voices.
VLADIMIR:
They make a noise like wings.
ESTRAGON:
Like leaves.
VLADIMIR:
Like sand.
ESTRAGON:
Like leaves.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
They all speak at once.
ESTRAGON:
Each one to itself.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Rather they whisper.
ESTRAGON:
They rustle.
VLADIMIR:
They murmur.
ESTRAGON:
They rustle.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
What do they say?
ESTRAGON:
They talk about their lives.
VLADIMIR:
To have lived is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON:
They have to talk about it.
VLADIMIR:
To be dead is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON:
It is not sufficient.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
They make a noise like feathers.
ESTRAGON:
Like leaves.
VLADIMIR:
Likes ashes.
ESTRAGON:
Like leaves.
Long silence.
VLADIMIR:
Say something!
ESTRAGON:
I'm trying.
Long silence.
VLADIMIR:
(*in anguish*). Say anything at all!
ESTRAGON:
What do we do now?
VLADIMIR:
Wait for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Ah!
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
This is awful!
ESTRAGON:
Sing something.
VLADIMIR:
No no! (*He reflects.*) We could start all over again perhaps.
ESTRAGON:
That should be easy.
VLADIMIR:
It's the start that's difficult.
ESTRAGON:
You can start from anything.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, but you have to decide.
ESTRAGON:
True.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Help me!

ESTRAGON:
I'm trying.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
When you seek you hear.
ESTRAGON:
You do.
VLADIMIR:
That prevents you from finding.
ESTRAGON:
It does.
VLADIMIR:
That prevents you from thinking.
ESTRAGON:
You think all the same.
VLADIMIR:
No no, it's impossible.
ESTRAGON:
That's the idea, let's contradict each another.
VLADIMIR:
Impossible.
ESTRAGON:
You think so?
VLADIMIR:
We're in no danger of ever thinking any more.
ESTRAGON:
Then what are we complaining about?
VLADIMIR:
Thinking is not the worst.
ESTRAGON:
Perhaps not. But at least there's that.
VLADIMIR:
That what?
ESTRAGON:
That's the idea, let's ask each other questions.
VLADIMIR:
What do you mean, at least there's that?
ESTRAGON:
That much less misery.
VLADIMIR:
True.
ESTRAGON:
Well? If we gave thanks for our mercies?
VLADIMIR:
What is terrible is to *have* thought.

ESTRAGON:
But did that ever happen to us?
VLADIMIR:
Where are all these corpses from?
ESTRAGON:
These skeletons.
VLADIMIR:
Tell me that.
ESTRAGON:
True.
VLADIMIR:
We must have thought a little.
ESTRAGON:
At the very beginning.
VLADIMIR:
A charnel-house! A charnel-house!
ESTRAGON:
You don't have to look.
VLADIMIR:
You can't help looking.
ESTRAGON:
True.
VLADIMIR:
Try as one may.
ESTRAGON:
I beg your pardon?
VLADIMIR:
Try as one may.
ESTRAGON:
We should turn resolutely towards Nature.
VLADIMIR:
We've tried that.
ESTRAGON:
True.
VLADIMIR:
Oh it's not the worst, I know.
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
To have thought.
ESTRAGON:
Obviously.
VLADIMIR:
But we could have done without it.
ESTRAGON:
Que voulez-vous?

VLADIMIR:
I beg your pardon?
ESTRAGON:
Que voulez-vouz.
VLADIMIR:
Ah! que voulez-vous. Exactly.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
That wasn't such a bad little canter.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, but now we'll have to find something else.
ESTRAGON:
Let me see.
He takes off his hat, concentrates.
VLADIMIR:
Let me see. (*He takes off his hat, concentrates. Long silence.*) Ah!
They put on their hats, relax.
ESTRAGON:
Well?
VLADIMIR:
What was I saying, we could go on from there.
ESTRAGON:
What were you saying when?
VLADIMIR:
At the very beginning.
ESTRAGON:
The very beginning of WHAT?
VLADIMIR:
This evening . . . I was saying . . . I was saying . . .
ESTRAGON:
I'm not a historian.
VLADIMIR:
Wait . . . we embraced . . . we were happy . . . happy . . . what do we do now that we're happy . . . go on waiting . . . waiting . . . let me think . . . it's coming . . . go on waiting . . . now that we're happy . . . let me see . . . ah! The tree!
ESTRAGON:
The tree?
VLADIMIR:
Do you not remember?
ESTRAGON:
I'm tired.
VLADIMIR:
Look at it.
They look at the tree.
ESTRAGON:
I see nothing.

VLADIMIR:
But yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves.
ESTRAGON:
Leaves?
VLADIMIR:
In a single night.
ESTRAGON:
It must be the Spring.
VLADIMIR:
But in a single night!
ESTRAGON:
I tell you we weren't here yesterday. Another of your nightmares.
VLADIMIR:
And where were we yesterday evening according to you?
ESTRAGON:
How would I know? In another compartment. There's no lack of void.
VLADIMIR:
(*sure of himself*). Good. We weren't here yesterday evening. Now what did we do yesterday evening?
ESTRAGON:
Do?
VLADIMIR:
Try and remember.
ESTRAGON:
Do . . . I suppose we blathered.
VLADIMIR:
(*controlling himself*). About what?
ESTRAGON:
Oh . . . this and that I suppose, nothing in particular. (*With assurance.*) Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That's been going on now for half a century.
VLADIMIR:
You don't remember any fact, any circumstance?
ESTRAGON:
(*weary*). Don't torment me, Didi.
VLADIMIR:
The sun. The moon. Do you not remember?
ESTRAGON:
They must have been there, as usual.
VLADIMIR:
You didn't notice anything out of the ordinary?
ESTRAGON:
Alas!
VLADIMIR:
And Pozzo? And Lucky?

ESTRAGON:
Pozzo?
VLADIMIR:
The bones.
ESTRAGON:
They were like fishbones.
VLADIMIR:
It was Pozzo gave them to you.
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
And the kick.
ESTRAGON:
That's right, someone gave me a kick.
VLADIMIR:
It was Lucky gave it to you.
ESTRAGON:
And all that was yesterday?
VLADIMIR:
Show me your leg.
ESTRAGON:
Which?
VLADIMIR:
Both. Pull up your trousers. (*Estragon gives a leg to Vladimir, staggers. Vladimir takes the leg. They stagger.*) Pull up your trousers.
ESTRAGON:
I can't.
Vladimir pulls up the trousers, looks at the leg, lets it go. Estragon almost falls.
VLADIMIR:
The other. (*Estragon gives the same leg.*) The other, pig! (*Estragon gives the other leg. Triumphantly.*) There's the wound! Beginning to fester!
ESTRAGON:
And what about it?
VLADIMIR:
(*letting go the leg*). Where are your boots?
ESTRAGON:
I must have thrown them away.
VLADIMIR:
When?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
Why?
ESTRAGON:
(*exasperated*). I don't know why I don't know!

VLADIMIR:
No, I mean why did you throw them away?
ESTRAGON:
(*exasperated*). Because they were hurting me!
VLADIMIR:
(*triumphantly, pointing to the boots*). There they are! (*Estragon looks at the boots.*) At the very spot where you left them yesterday!
Estragon goes towards the boots, inspects them closely.
ESTRAGON:
They're not mine.
VLADIMIR:
(*stupefied*). Not yours!
ESTRAGON:
Mine were black. These are brown.
VLADIMIR:
You're sure yours were black?
ESTRAGON:
Well they were a kind of gray.
VLADIMIR:
And these are brown. Show me.
ESTRAGON:
(*picking up a boot*). Well they're a kind of green.
VLADIMIR:
Show me. (*Estragon hands him the boot. Vladimir inspects it, throws it down angrily.*) Well of all the—
ESTRAGON:
You see, all that's a lot of bloody—
VLADIMIR:
Ah! I see what it is. Yes, I see what's happened.
ESTRAGON:
All that's a lot of bloody—
VLADIMIR:
It's elementary. Someone came and took yours and left you his.
ESTRAGON:
Why?
VLADIMIR:
His were too tight for him, so he took yours.
ESTRAGON:
But mine were too tight.
VLADIMIR:
For you. Not for him.
ESTRAGON:
(*having tried in vain to work it out*). I'm tired! (*Pause.*) Let's go.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.

ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Ah! (*Pause. Despairing.*) What'll we do, what'll we do!
VLADIMIR:
There's nothing we can do.
ESTRAGON:
But I can't go on like this!
VLADIMIR:
Would you like a radish?
ESTRAGON:
Is that all there is?
VLADIMIR:
There are radishes and turnips.
ESTRAGON:
Are there no carrots?
VLADIMIR:
No. Anyway you overdo it with your carrots.
ESTRAGON:
Then give me a radish. (*Vladimir fumbles in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips, finally brings out a radish and hands it to Estragon who examines it, sniffs it.*) It's black!
VLADIMIR:
It's a radish.
ESTRAGON:
I only like the pink ones, you know that!
VLADIMIR:
Then you don't want it?
ESTRAGON:
I only like the pink ones!
VLADIMIR:
Then give it back to me.
Estragon gives it back.
ESTRAGON:
I'll go and get a carrot.
He does not move.
VLADIMIR:
This is becoming really insignificant.
ESTRAGON:
Not enough.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
What about trying them.
ESTRAGON:
I've tried everything.

VLADIMIR:
No, I mean the boots.
ESTRAGON:
Would that be a good thing?
VLADIMIR:
It'd pass the time. (*Estragon hesitates.*) I assure you, it'd be an occupation.
ESTRAGON:
A relaxation.
VLADIMIR:
A recreation.
ESTRAGON:
A relaxation.
VLADIMIR:
Try.
ESTRAGON:
You'll help me?
VLADIMIR:
I will of course.
ESTRAGON:
We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?
VLADIMIR:
Yes yes. Come on, we'll try the left first.
ESTRAGON:
We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?
VLADIMIR:
(*impatiently*). Yes yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. (*He picks up a boot.*) Come on, give me your foot. (*Estragon raises his foot.*) The other, hog! (*Estragon raises the other foot.*) Higher!
(*Wreathed together they stagger about the stage. Vladimir succeeds finally in getting on the boot.*) Try and walk. (*Estragon walks.*) Well?
ESTRAGON:
It fits.
VLADIMIR:
(*taking string from his pocket*). We'll try and lace it.
ESTRAGON:
(*vehemently*). No no, no laces, no laces!
VLADIMIR:
You'll be sorry. Let's try the other. (*As before.*) Well?
ESTRAGON:
(*grudgingly*). It fits too.
VLADIMIR:
They don't hurt you?
ESTRAGON:
Not yet.
VLADIMIR:
Then you can keep them.

ESTRAGON:
They're too big.
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps you'll have socks someday.
ESTRAGON:
True.
VLADIMIR:
Then you'll keep them?
ESTRAGON:
That's enough about these boots.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, but—
ESTRAGON:
(*violently*). Enough! (*Silence.*) I suppose I might as well sit down.
He looks for a place to sit down, then goes and sits down on the mound.
VLADIMIR:
That's where you were sitting yesterday evening.
ESTRAGON:
If I could only sleep.
VLADIMIR:
Yesterday you slept.
ESTRAGON:
I'll try.
He resumes his foetal posture, his head between his knees.
VLADIMIR:
Wait. (*He goes over and sits down beside Estragon and begins to sing in a loud voice.*)
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye–
ESTRAGON:
(*looking up angrily*). Not so loud!
VLADIMIR:
(*softly*).
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye . . .
Estragon sleeps. Vladimir gets up softly, takes off his coat and lays it across Estragon's shoulders, then starts walking up and down, swinging his arms to keep himself warm. Estragon wakes with a start, jumps up, casts about wildly. Vladimir runs to him, puts his arms around him.) There . . . there . . . Didi is here . . . don't be afraid . . .
ESTRAGON:
Ah!
VLADIMIR:
There . . . there . . . it's all over.
ESTRAGON:

I was falling—
VLADIMIR:
It's all over, it's all over.
ESTRAGON:
I was on top of a—
VLADIMIR:
Don't tell me! Come, we'll walk it off.
He takes Estragon by the arm and walks him up and down until Estragon refuses to go any further.
ESTRAGON:
That's enough. I'm tired.
VLADIMIR:
You'd rather be stuck there doing nothing?
ESTRAGON:
Yes.
VLADIMIR:
Please yourself.
He releases Estragon, picks up his coat and puts it on.
ESTRAGON:
Let's go.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Ah! (*Vladimir walks up and down.*) Can you not stay still?
VLADIMIR:
I'm cold.
ESTRAGON:
We came too soon.
VLADIMIR:
It's always at nightfall.
ESTRAGON:
But night doesn't fall.
VLADIMIR:
It'll fall all of a sudden, like yesterday.
ESTRAGON:
Then it'll be night.
VLADIMIR:
And we can go.
ESTRAGON:
Then it'll be day again. (*Pause. Despairing.*) What'll we do, what'll we do!
VLADIMIR:
(*halting, violently*). Will you stop whining! I've had about my bellyful of your lamentations!

ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
VLADIMIR:
(*seeing Lucky's hat*). Well!
ESTRAGON:
Farewell.
VLADIMIR:
Lucky's hat. (*He goes towards it.*) I've been here an hour and never saw it. (*Very pleased.*) Fine!
ESTRAGON:
You'll never see me again.
VLADIMIR:
I knew it was the right place. Now our troubles are over. (*He picks up the hat, contemplates it, straightens it.*) Must have been a very fine hat. (*He puts it on in place of his own which he hands to Estragon.*) Here.
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
Hold that.
Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Estragon's hat. Estragon adjusts Vladimir's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Estragon's hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Lucky's hat. Vladimir adjusts Estragon's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Lucky's hat in place of Vladimir's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes his hat, Estragon adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on his hat in place of Estragon's which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes his hat. Vladimir adjusts his hat on his head. Estragon puts on his hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Lucky's hat. Estragon adjusts his hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Lucky's hat in place of his own which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon hands Vladimir's hat back to Vladimir who takes it and hands it back to Estragon who takes it and hands it back to Vladimir who takes it and throws it down.
How does it fit me?
ESTRAGON:
How would I know?
VLADIMIR:
No, but how do I look in it?
He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.
ESTRAGON:
Hideous.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, but not more so than usual?
ESTRAGON:
Neither more nor less.
VLADIMIR:

Then I can keep it. Mine irked me. (*Pause.*) How shall I say? (*Pause.*) It itched me.
He takes off Lucky's hat, peers into it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Will you not play?
ESTRAGON:
Play at what?
VLADIMIR:
We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.
ESTRAGON:
Never heard of it.
VLADIMIR:
I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. (*He imitates Lucky sagging under the weight of his baggage. Estragon looks at him with stupefaction.*) Go on.
ESTRAGON:
What am I to do?
VLADIMIR:
Curse me!
ESTRAGON:
(*after reflection*). Naughty!
VLADIMIR:
Stronger!
ESTRAGON:
Gonococcus! Spirochete!
Vladimir sways back and forth, doubled in two.
VLADIMIR:
Tell me to think.
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
Say, Think, pig!
ESTRAGON:
Think, pig!
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
I can't.
ESTRAGON:
That's enough of that.
VLADIMIR:
Tell me to dance.
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
VLADIMIR:
Dance, hog! (*He writhes. Exit Estragon left, precipitately.*) I can't! (*He looks up, misses*

Estragon.) Gogo! (*He moves wildly about the stage. Enter Estragon left, panting. He hastens towards Vladimir, falls into his arms.*) There you are again at last!
ESTRAGON:
I'm accursed!
VLADIMIR:
Where were you? I thought you were gone forever.
ESTRAGON:
They're coming!
VLADIMIR:
Who?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
How many?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
(*triumphantly*). It's Godot! At last! Gogo! It's Godot! We're saved! Let's go and meet him! (*He drags Estragon towards the wings. Estragon resists, pulls himself free, exit right.*) Gogo! Come back! (*Vladimir runs to extreme left, scans the horizon. Enter Estragon right, he hastens towards Vladimir, falls into his arms.*) There you are again again!
ESTRAGON:
I'm in hell!
VLADIMIR:
Where were you?
ESTRAGON:
They're coming there too!
VLADIMIR:
We're surrounded! (*Estragon makes a rush towards back.*) Imbecile! There's no way out there. (*He takes Estragon by the arm and drags him towards front. Gesture towards front.*) There! Not a soul in sight! Off you go! Quick! (*He pushes Estragon towards auditorium. Estragon recoils in horror.*) You won't? (*He contemplates auditorium.*) Well I can understand that. Wait till I see. (*He reflects.*) Your only hope left is to disappear.
ESTRAGON:
Where?
VLADIMIR:
Behind the tree. (*Estragon hesitates.*) Quick! Behind the tree. (*Estragon goes and crouches behind the tree, realizes he is not hidden, comes out from behind the tree.*) Decidedly this tree will not have been the slightest use to us.
ESTRAGON:
(*calmer*). I lost my head. Forgive me. It won't happen again. Tell me what to do.
VLADIMIR:
There's nothing to do.
ESTRAGON:
You go and stand there. (*He draws Vladimir to extreme right and places him with his back to the stage.*) There, don't move, and watch out. (*Vladimir scans horizon, screening his eyes with*

his hand. Estragon runs and takes up same position extreme left. They turn their heads and look at each other.) Back to back like in the good old days. (*They continue to look at each other for a moment, then resume their watch. Long silence.*) Do you see anything coming?
VLADIMIR:
(*turning his head*). What?
ESTRAGON:
(*louder*). Do you see anything coming?
VLADIMIR:
No.
ESTRAGON:
Nor I.
They resume their watch. Silence.
VLADIMIR:
You must have had a vision.
ESTRAGON:
(*turning his head*). What?
VLADIMIR:
(*louder*). You must have had a vision.
ESTRAGON:
No need to shout!
They resume their watch. Silence.
VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON:
(*turning simultaneously*). Do you—
VLADIMIR:
Oh pardon!
ESTRAGON:
Carry on.
VLADIMIR:
No no, after you.
ESTRAGON:
No no, you first.
VLADIMIR:
I interrupted you.
ESTRAGON:
On the contrary.
They glare at each other angrily.
VLADIMIR:
Ceremonious ape!
ESTRAGON:
Punctilious pig!
VLADIMIR:
Finish your phrase, I tell you!
ESTRAGON:
Finish your own!
Silence. They draw closer, halt.

VLADIMIR:
Moron!
ESTRAGON:
That's the idea, let's abuse each other.
They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.
VLADIMIR:
Moron!
ESTRAGON:
Vermin!
VLADIMIR:
Abortion!
ESTRAGON:
Morpion!
VLADIMIR:
Sewer-rat!
ESTRAGON:
Curate!
VLADIMIR:
Cretin!
ESTRAGON:
(*with finality*). Crritic!
VLADIMIR:
Oh!
He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.
ESTRAGON:
Now let's make it up.
VLADIMIR:
Gogo!
ESTRAGON:
Didi!
VLADIMIR:
Your hand!
ESTRAGON:
Take it!
VLADIMIR:
Come to my arms!
ESTRAGON:
Yours arms?
VLADIMIR:
My breast!
ESTRAGON:
Off we go!
They embrace.
They separate. Silence.
VLADIMIR:
How time flies when one has fun!

Silence.
ESTRAGON:
What do we do now?
VLADIMIR:
While waiting.
ESTRAGON:
While waiting.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
We could do our exercises.
ESTRAGON:
Our movements.
VLADIMIR:
Our elevations.
ESTRAGON:
Our relaxations.
VLADIMIR:
Our elongations.
ESTRAGON:
Our relaxations.
VLADIMIR:
To warm us up.
ESTRAGON:
To calm us down.
VLADIMIR:
Off we go.
Vladimir hops from one foot to the other. Estragon imitates him.
ESTRAGON:
(*stopping*). That's enough. I'm tired.
VLADIMIR:
(*stopping*). We're not in form. What about a little deep breathing?
ESTRAGON:
I'm tired breathing.
VLADIMIR:
You're right. (*Pause.*) Let's just do the tree, for the balance.
ESTRAGON:
The tree?
Vladimir does the tree, staggering about on one leg.
VLADIMIR:
(*stopping*). Your turn.
Estragon does the tree, staggers.
ESTRAGON:
Do you think God sees me?
VLADIMIR:
You must close your eyes.
Estragon closes his eyes, staggers worse.

ESTRAGON:
(*stopping, brandishing his fists, at the top of his voice.*) God have pity on me!
VLADIMIR:
(*vexed*). And me?
ESTRAGON:
On me! On me! Pity! On me!
Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo is blind. Lucky burdened as before. Rope as before, but much shorter, so that Pozzo may follow more easily. Lucky wearing a different hat. At the sight of Vladimir and Estragon he stops short. Pozzo, continuing on his way, bumps into him.
VLADIMIR:
Gogo!
POZZO:
(*clutching onto Lucky who staggers*). What is it? Who is it?
Lucky falls, drops everything and brings down Pozzo with him. They lie helpless among the scattered baggage.
ESTRAGON:
Is it Godot?
VLADIMIR:
At last! (*He goes towards the heap.*) Reinforcements at last!
POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
Is it Godot?
VLADIMIR:
We were beginning to weaken. Now we're sure to see the evening out.
POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
Do you hear him?
VLADIMIR:
We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for . . . waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted. Now it's over. It's already tomorrow.
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:
Time flows again already. The sun will set, the moon rise, and we away . . . from here.
POZZO:
Pity!
VLADIMIR:
Poor Pozzo!
ESTRAGON:
I knew it was him.
VLADIMIR:
Who?
ESTRAGON:
Godot.

VLADIMIR:
But it's not Godot.
ESTRAGON:
It's not Godot?
VLADIMIR:
It's not Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Then who is it?
VLADIMIR:
It's Pozzo.
POZZO:
Here! Here! Help me up!
VLADIMIR:
He can't get up.
ESTRAGON:
Let's go.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Ah!
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps he has another bone for you.
ESTRAGON:
Bone?
VLADIMIR:
Chicken. Do you not remember?
ESTRAGON:
It was him?
VLADIMIR:
Yes.
ESTRAGON:
Ask him.
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps we should help him first.
ESTRAGON:
To do what?
VLADIMIR:
To get up.
ESTRAGON:
He can't get up?
VLADIMIR:
He wants to get up.

ESTRAGON:
Then let him get up.
VLADIMIR:
He can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know.
Pozzo writhes, groans, beats the ground with his fists.
ESTRAGON:
We should ask him for the bone first. Then if he refuses we'll leave him there.
VLADIMIR:
You mean we have him at our mercy?
ESTRAGON:
Yes.
VLADIMIR:
And that we should subordinate our good offices to certain conditions?
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
That seems intelligent all right. But there's one thing I'm afraid of.
POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
That Lucky might get going all of a sudden. Then we'd be ballocksed.
ESTRAGON:
Lucky?
VLADIMIR:
The one that went for you yesterday.
ESTRAGON:
I tell you there was ten of them.
VLADIMIR:
No, before that, the one that kicked you.
ESTRAGON:
Is he there?
VLADIMIR:
As large as life. (*Gesture towards Lucky.*) For the moment he is inert. But he might run amuck any minute.
POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
And suppose we gave him a good beating, the two of us.
VLADIMIR:
You mean if we fell on him in his sleep?

ESTRAGON:
Yes.
VLADIMIR:
That seems a good idea all right. But could we do it? Is he really asleep? (*Pause.*) No, the best would be to take advantage of Pozzo's calling for help—
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:
To help him—
ESTRAGON:
We help *him*?
VLADIMIR:
In anticipation of some tangible return.
ESTRAGON:
And suppose he—
VLADIMIR:
Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently.*) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say? (*Estragon says nothing.*) It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—
ESTRAGON:
Ah!
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:
Or for night to fall. (*Pause.*) We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?
ESTRAGON:
Billions.
VLADIMIR:
You think so?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
You may be right.
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:

All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which –how shall I say– which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning?

ESTRAGON:

(*aphoristic for once*). We are all born mad. Some remain so.

POZZO:

Help! I'll pay you!

ESTRAGON:

How much?

POZZO:

One hundred francs!

ESTRAGON:

It's not enough.

VLADIMIR:

I wouldn't go so far as that.

ESTRAGON:

You think it's enough?

VLADIMIR:

No, I mean so far as to assert that I was weak in the head when I came into the world. But that is not the question.

POZZO:

Two hundred!

VLADIMIR:

We wait. We are bored. (*He throws up his hand.*) No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! (*He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.*) In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!

He broods.

POZZO:

Two hundred!

VLADIMIR:

We're coming!

He tries to pull Pozzo to his feet, fails, tries again, stumbles, falls, tries to get up, fails.

ESTRAGON:

What's the matter with you all?

VLADIMIR:

Help!

ESTRAGON:

I'm going.

VLADIMIR:

Don't leave me! They'll kill me!

POZZO:

Where am I?

VLADIMIR:
Gogo!
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
VLADIMIR:
Help me up first, then we'll go together.
ESTRAGON:
You promise?
VLADIMIR:
I swear it!
ESTRAGON:
And we'll never come back?
VLADIMIR:
Never!
ESTRAGON:
We'll go to the Pyrenees.
VLADIMIR:
Wherever you like.
ESTRAGON:
I've always wanted to wander in the Pyrenees.
VLADIMIR:
You'll wander in them.
ESTRAGON:
(*recoiling*). Who farted?
VLADIMIR:
Pozzo.
POZZO:
Here! Here! Pity!
ESTRAGON:
It's revolting!
VLADIMIR:
Quick! Give me your hand!
ESTRAGON:
I'm going. (*Pause. Louder.*) I'm going.
VLADIMIR:
Well I suppose in the end I'll get up by myself. (*He tries, fails.*) In the fullness of time.
ESTRAGON:
What's the matter with you?
VLADIMIR:
Go to hell.
ESTRAGON:
Are you staying there?

VLADIMIR:
For the time being.
ESTRAGON:
Come on, get up, you'll catch a chill.
VLADIMIR:
Don't worry about me.
ESTRAGON:
Come on, Didi, don't be pig-headed!
He stretches out his hand which Vladimir makes haste to seize.
VLADIMIR:
Pull!
Estragon pulls, stumbles, falls. Long silence.
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:
We've arrived.
POZZO:
Who are you?
VLADIMIR:
We are men.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Sweet mother earth!
VLADIMIR:
Can you get up?
ESTRAGON:
I don't know.
VLADIMIR:
Try.
ESTRAGON:
Not now, not now.
Silence.
POZZO:
What happened?
VLADIMIR:
(*violently*). Will you stop it, you! Pest! He can think of nothing but himself!
ESTRAGON:
What about a little snooze?
VLADIMIR:
Did you hear him? He wants to know what happened!
ESTRAGON:
Don't mind him. Sleep.
Silence.
POZZO:
Pity! Pity!

ESTRAGON:
(*with a start*). What is it?
VLADIMIR:
Were you asleep?
ESTRAGON:
I must have been.
VLADIMIR:
It's this bastard Pozzo at it again.
ESTRAGON:
Make him stop it. Kick him in the crotch.
VLADIMIR:
(*striking Pozzo*). Will you stop it! Crablouse! (*Pozzo extricates himself with cries of pain and crawls away. He stops, saws the air blindly, calling for help. Vladimir, propped on his elbow, observes his retreat.*) He's off! (*Pozzo collapses.*) He's down!
ESTRAGON:
What do we do now?
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps I could crawl to him.
ESTRAGON:
Don't leave me!
VLADIMIR:
Or I could call to him.
ESTRAGON:
Yes, call to him.
VLADIMIR:
Pozzo! (*Silence.*) Pozzo! (*Silence.*) No reply.
ESTRAGON:
Together.
VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON:
Pozzo! Pozzo!
VLADIMIR:
He moved.
ESTRAGON:
Are you sure his name is Pozzo?
VLADIMIR:
(*alarmed*). Mr. Pozzo! Come back! We won't hurt you!
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
We might try him with other names.
VLADIMIR:
I'm afraid he's dying.
ESTRAGON:
It'd be amusing.
VLADIMIR:
What'd be amusing?

ESTRAGON:
To try him with other names, one after the other. It'd pass the time. And we'd be bound to hit on the right one sooner or later.
VLADIMIR:
I tell you his name is Pozzo.
ESTRAGON:
We'll soon see. (*He reflects.*) Abel! Abel!
POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
Got it in one!
VLADIMIR:
I begin to weary of this motif.
ESTRAGON:
Perhaps the other is called Cain. Cain! Cain!
POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
He's all humanity. (*Silence.*) Look at the little cloud.
VLADIMIR:
(*raising his eyes*). Where?
ESTRAGON:
There. In the zenith.
VLADIMIR:
Well? (*Pause.*) What is there so wonderful about it?
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Let's pass on now to something else, do you mind?
VLADIMIR:
I was just going to suggest it.
ESTRAGON:
But to what?
VLADIMIR:
Ah!
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Suppose we got up to begin with?
VLADIMIR:
No harm trying.
They get up.
ESTRAGON:
Child's play.
VLADIMIR:
Simple question of will-power.
ESTRAGON:
And now?

POZZO:
Help!
ESTRAGON:
Let's go.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Ah! (*Despairing.*) What'll we do, what'll we do!
POZZO:
Help!
VLADIMIR:
What about helping him?
ESTRAGON:
What does he want?
VLADIMIR:
He wants to get up.
ESTRAGON:
Then why doesn't he?
VLADIMIR:
He wants us to help him get up.
ESTRAGON:
Then why don't we? What are we waiting for?
They help Pozzo to his feet, let him go. He falls.
VLADIMIR:
We must hold him. (*They get him up again. Pozzo sags between them, his arms round their necks.*)
Feeling better?
POZZO:
Who are you?
VLADIMIR:
Do you not recognize us?
POZZO:
I am blind.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Perhaps he can see into the future.
VLADIMIR:
Since when?
POZZO:
I used to have wonderful sight— but are you friends?
ESTRAGON:
(*laughing noisily*). He wants to know if we are friends!

VLADIMIR:
No, he means friends of his.
ESTRAGON:
Well?
VLADIMIR:
We've proved we are, by helping him.
ESTRAGON:
Exactly. Would we have helped him if we weren't his friends?
VLADIMIR:
Possibly.
ESTRAGON:
True.
VLADIMIR:
Don't let's quibble about that now.
POZZO:
You are not highwaymen?
ESTRAGON:
Highwaymen! Do we look like highwaymen?
VLADIMIR:
Damn it, can't you see the man is blind!
ESTRAGON:
Damn it, so he is. (*Pause.*) So he says.
POZZO:
Don't leave me!
VLADIMIR:
No question of it.
ESTRAGON:
For the moment.
POZZO:
What time is it?
VLADIMIR:
(*inspecting the sky*). Seven o'clock . . . eight o'clock . . .
ESTRAGON:
That depends what time of year it is.
POZZO:
Is it evening?
Silence. Vladimir and Estragon scrutinize the sunset.
ESTRAGON:
It's rising.
VLADIMIR:
Impossible.
ESTRAGON:
Perhaps it's the dawn.
VLADIMIR:
Don't be a fool. It's the west over there.

ESTRAGON:
How do you know?
POZZO:
(*anguished*). Is it evening?
VLADIMIR:
Anyway, it hasn't moved.
ESTRAGON:
I tell you it's rising.
POZZO:
Why don't you answer me?
ESTRAGON:
Give us a chance.
VLADIMIR:
(*reassuring*). It's evening, Sir, it's evening, night is drawing nigh. My friend here would have me doubt it and I must confess he shook me for a moment. But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day and I can assure you it is very near the end of its repertory. (*Pause.*) How do you feel now?
ESTRAGON:
How much longer are we to cart him around? (*They half release him, catch him again as he falls.*) We are not caryatids!
VLADIMIR:
You were saying your sight used to be good, if I heard you right.
POZZO:
Wonderful! Wonderful, wonderful sight!
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
(*irritably*). Expand! Expand!
VLADIMIR:
Let him alone. Can't you see he's thinking of the days when he was happy. (*Pause.*) *Memoria praeteritorum bonorum*— that must be unpleasant.
ESTRAGON:
We wouldn't know.
VLADIMIR:
And it came on you all of a sudden?
POZZO:
Quite wonderful!
VLADIMIR:
I'm asking you if it came on you all of a sudden.
POZZO:
I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune. (*Pause.*) Sometimes I wonder if I'm not still asleep.
VLADIMIR:
And when was that?
POZZO:
I don't know.

VLADIMIR:
But no later than yesterday—
POZZO:
(*violently*). Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too.
VLADIMIR:
Well just fancy that! I could have sworn it was just the opposite.
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
POZZO:
Where are we?
VLADIMIR:
I couldn't tell you.
POZZO:
It isn't by any chance the place known as the Board?
VLADIMIR:
Never heard of it.
POZZO:
What is it like?
VLADIMIR:
(*looking round*). It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing. There's a tree.
POZZO:
Then it's not the Board.
ESTRAGON:
(*sagging*). Some diversion!
POZZO:
Where is my menial?
VLADIMIR:
He's about somewhere.
POZZO:
Why doesn't he answer when I call?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know. He seems to be sleeping. Perhaps he's dead.
POZZO:
What happened, exactly?
ESTRAGON:
Exactly!
VLADIMIR:
The two of you slipped. (*Pause.*) And fell.
POZZO:
Go and see is he hurt.
VLADIMIR:
We can't leave you.
POZZO:
You needn't both go.

VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). You go.
ESTRAGON:
After what he did to me? Never!
POZZO:
Yes yes, let your friend go, he stinks so. (*Silence.*) What is he waiting for?
VLADIMIR:
What are you waiting for?
ESTRAGON:
I'm waiting for Godot.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
What exactly should he do?
POZZO:
Well to begin with he should pull on the rope, as hard as he likes so long as he doesn't strangle him. He usually responds to that. If not he should give him a taste of his boot, in the face and the privates as far as possible.
VLADIMIR:
(*to Estragon*). You see, you've nothing to be afraid of. It's even an opportunity to revenge yourself.
ESTRAGON:
And if he defends himself?
POZZO:
No no, he never defends himself.
VLADIMIR:
I'll come flying to the rescue.
ESTRAGON:
Don't take your eyes off me.
He goes towards Lucky.
VLADIMIR:
Make sure he's alive before you start. No point in exerting yourself if he's dead.
ESTRAGON:
(*bending over Lucky*). He's breathing.
VLADIMIR:
Then let him have it.
With sudden fury Estragon starts kicking Lucky, hurling abuse at him as he does so. But he hurts his foot and moves away, limping and groaning. Lucky stirs.
ESTRAGON:
Oh the brute!
He sits down on the mound and tries to take off his boot. But he soon desists and disposes himself for sleep, his arms on his knees and his head on his arms.
POZZO:
What's gone wrong now?
VLADIMIR:
My friend has hurt himself.

POZZO:
And Lucky?
VLADIMIR:
So it is he?
POZZO:
What?
VLADIMIR:
It is Lucky?
POZZO:
I don't understand.
VLADIMIR:
And you are Pozzo?
POZZO:
Certainly I am Pozzo.
VLADIMIR:
The same as yesterday?
POZZO:
Yesterday?
VLADIMIR:
We met yesterday. (*Silence.*) Do you not remember?
POZZO:
I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you.
VLADIMIR:
But—
POZZO:
Enough! Up pig!
VLADIMIR:
You were bringing him to the fair to sell him. You spoke to us. He danced. He thought. You had your sight.
POZZO:
As you please. Let me go! (*Vladimir moves away.*) Up!
Lucky gets up, gathers up his burdens.
VLADIMIR:
Where do you go from here?
POZZO:
On. (*Lucky, laden down, takes his place before Pozzo.*) Whip! (*Lucky puts everything down, looks for whip, finds it, puts it into Pozzo's hand, takes up everything again.*) Rope!
Lucky puts everything down, puts end of rope into Pozzo's hand, takes up everything again.
VLADIMIR:
What is there in the bag?
POZZO:
Sand. (*He jerks the rope.*) On!
VLADIMIR:
Don't go yet.

POZZO:
I'm going.
VLADIMIR:
What do you do when you fall far from help?
POZZO:
We wait till we can get up. Then we go on. On!
VLADIMIR:
Before you go tell him to sing.
POZZO:
Who?
VLADIMIR:
Lucky.
POZZO:
To sing?
VLADIMIR:
Yes. Or to think. Or to recite.
POZZO:
But he is dumb.
VLADIMIR:
Dumb!
POZZO:
Dumb. He can't even groan.
VLADIMIR:
Dumb! Since when?
POZZO:
(*suddenly furious.*) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) **They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more**. (*He jerks the rope.*) On!
Exeunt Pozzo and Lucky. Vladimir follows them to the edge of the stage, looks after them. The noise of falling, reinforced by mimic of Vladimir, announces that they are down again. Silence. Vladimir goes towards Estragon, contemplates him a moment, then shakes him awake.
ESTRAGON:
(*wild gestures, incoherent words. Finally.*) Why will you never let me sleep?
VLADIMIR:
I felt lonely.
ESTRAGON:
I was dreaming I was happy.
VLADIMIR:
That passed the time.
ESTRAGON:
I was dreaming that—
VLADIMIR:
(*violently*). Don't tell me! (*Silence.*) I wonder is he really blind.

ESTRAGON:
Blind? Who?
VLADIMIR:
Pozzo.
ESTRAGON:
Blind?
VLADIMIR:
He told us he was blind.
ESTRAGON:
Well what about it?
VLADIMIR:
It seemed to me he saw us.
ESTRAGON:
You dreamt it. (*Pause.*) Let's go. We can't. Ah! (*Pause.*) Are you sure it wasn't him?
VLADIMIR:
Who?
ESTRAGON:
Godot.
VLADIMIR:
But who?
ESTRAGON:
Pozzo.
VLADIMIR:
Not at all! (*Less sure.*) Not at all! (*Still less sure.*) Not at all!
ESTRAGON:
I suppose I might as well get up. (*He gets up painfully.*) Ow! Didi!
VLADIMIR:
I don't know what to think any more.
ESTRAGON:
My feet! (*He sits down again and tries to take off his boots.*) Help me!
VLADIMIR:
Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?
(*Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at him.*) He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. (*Pause.*) Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (*He listens.*) But habit is a great deadener. (*He looks again at Estragon.*) At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (*Pause.*) I can't go on! (*Pause.*) What have I said?
He goes feverishly to and fro, halts finally at extreme left, broods. Enter Boy right. He halts. Silence.
BOY:
Mister . . . (*Vladimir turns.*) Mister Albert . . .

VLADIMIR:
Off we go again. (*Pause.*) Do you not recognize me?
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
It wasn't you came yesterday.
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
This is your first time.
BOY:
Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
You have a message from Mr. Godot.
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
He won't come this evening.
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
But he'll come tomorrow.
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Without fail.
BOY:
Yes Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Did you meet anyone?
BOY:
No Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Two other . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . men?
BOY:
I didn't see anyone, Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
What does he do, Mr. Godot? (*Silence.*) Do you hear me?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Well?

BOY:
He does nothing, Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
How is your brother?
BOY:
He's sick, Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Perhaps it was he came yesterday.
BOY:
I don't know, Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
(*softly*). Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?
BOY:
Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR:
Fair or . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . or black?
BOY:
I think it's white, Sir.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Christ have mercy on us!
Silence.
BOY:
What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?
VLADIMIR:
Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw me and that . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me. (*Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.*) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!
Silence. Vladimir makes a sudden spring forward, the Boy avoids him and exits running. Silence. The sun sets, the moon rises. As in Act 1. Vladimir stands motionless and bowed. Estragon wakes, takes off his boots, gets up with one in each hand and goes and puts them down center front, then goes towards Vladimir.
ESTRAGON:
What's wrong with you?
VLADIMIR:
Nothing.
ESTRAGON:
I'm going.
VLADIMIR:
So am I.
ESTRAGON:
Was I long asleep?

VLADIMIR:
I don't know.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Where shall we go?
VLADIMIR:
Not far.
ESTRAGON:
Oh yes, let's go far away from here.
VLADIMIR:
We can't.
ESTRAGON:
Why not?
VLADIMIR:
We have to come back tomorrow.
ESTRAGON:
What for?
VLADIMIR:
To wait for Godot.
ESTRAGON:
Ah! (*Silence.*) He didn't come?
VLADIMIR:
No.
ESTRAGON:
And now it's too late.
VLADIMIR:
Yes, now it's night.
ESTRAGON:
And if we dropped him? (*Pause.*) If we dropped him?
VLADIMIR:
He'd punish us. (*Silence. He looks at the tree.*) Everything's dead but the tree.
ESTRAGON:
(*looking at the tree*). What is it?
VLADIMIR:
It's the tree.
ESTRAGON:
Yes, but what kind?
VLADIMIR:
I don't know. A willow.
Estragon draws Vladimir towards the tree. They stand motionless before it. Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Why don't we hang ourselves?
VLADIMIR:
With what?
ESTRAGON:
You haven't got a bit of rope?

VLADIMIR:
No.
ESTRAGON:
Then we can't.
Silence.
VLADIMIR:
Let's go.
ESTRAGON:
Wait, there's my belt.
VLADIMIR:
It's too short.
ESTRAGON:
You could hang onto my legs.
VLADIMIR:
And who'd hang onto mine?
ESTRAGON:
True.
VLADIMIR:
Show me all the same. (*Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.*) It might do in a pinch. But is it strong enough?
ESTRAGON:
We'll soon see. Here.
They each take an end of the cord and pull.
It breaks. They almost fall.
VLADIMIR:
Not worth a curse.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
You say we have to come back tomorrow?
VLADIMIR:
Yes.
ESTRAGON:
Then we can bring a good bit of rope.
VLADIMIR:
Yes.
Silence.
ESTRAGON:
Didi?
VLADIMIR:
Yes.
ESTRAGON:
I can't go on like this.
VLADIMIR:
That's what you think.

ESTRAGON:
If we parted? That might be better for us.
VLADIMIR:
We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes.
ESTRAGON:
And if he comes?
VLADIMIR:
We'll be saved.
Vladimir takes off his hat (Lucky's), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.
ESTRAGON:
Well? Shall we go?
VLADIMIR:
Pull on your trousers.
ESTRAGON:
What?
VLADIMIR:
Pull on your trousers.
ESTRAGON:
You want me to pull off my trousers?
VLADIMIR:
Pull ON your trousers.
ESTRAGON:
(*realizing his trousers are down*). True.
He pulls up his trousers.
VLADIMIR:
Well? Shall we go?
ESTRAGON:
Yes, let's go.
They do not move.
Curtain.

Church Going

Philip Larkin

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new-
Cleaned or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
"Here endeth" much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognizable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these - for whom was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

FLIGHT

by Doris Lessing

Above the old man's head was the dovecote, a tall wire-netted shelf on stilts, full of strutting, preening birds. The sunlight broke on their grey breasts into small rainbows. His ears were lulled by their crooning, his hands stretched up towards the favourite, a homing pigeon, a young plump-bodied bird which stood still when it saw him and cocked a shrewd bright eye.
'Pretty, pretty, pretty,' he said, as he grasped the bird and drew it down, feeling the cold coral claws tighten around his finger. Content, he rested the bird lightly on his chest, and leaned against a tree, gazing out beyond the dovecote into the landscape of a late afternoon. In folds and hollows of sunlight and shade, the dark red soil, which was broken into great dusty clods, stretched wide to a tall horizon. Trees marked the course of the valley; a stream of rich green grass the road.
His eyes travelled homewards along this road until he saw his granddaughter swinging on the gate underneath a frangipani tree. Her hair fell down her back in a wave of sunlight, and her long bare legs repeated the angles of the frangipani stems, bare, shining-brown stems among patterns of pale blossoms.
She was gazing past the pink flowers, past the railway cottage where they lived, along the road to the village.
His mood shifted. He deliberately held out his wrist for the bird to take flight, and caught it again at the moment it spread its wings. He felt the plump shape strive and strain under his fingers; and, in a sudden access of troubled spite, shut the bird into a small box and fastened the bolt. 'Now you stay there,' he muttered; and turned his back on the shelf of birds. He moved warily along the hedge, stalking his granddaughter, who was now looped over the gate, her head loose on her arms, singing. The light happy sound mingled with the crooning of the birds, and his anger mounted.
`Hey!' he shouted; saw her jump, look back, and abandon the gate. Her eyes veiled themselves, and she said in a pert neutral voice: 'Hullo, Grandad.' Politely she moved towards him, after a lingering backward glance at the road.
'Waiting for Steven, hey?' he said, his fingers curling like claws into his palm. Any objection?' she asked lightly, refusing to look at him.
He confronted her, his eyes narrowed, shoulders hunched, tight in a hard knot of pain which included the preening birds, the sunlight, the flowers. He said: `Think you're old enough to go courting, hey?'

The girl tossed her head at the old-fashioned phrase and sulked, 'Oh, Grandad!'
'Think you want to leave home, hey? Think you can go running around the fields at night?'

Her smile made him see her, as he had every evening of this warm end-of-summer month, swinging hand in hand along the road to the village with that red-handed, redthroated, violent-bodied youth, the son of the postmaster. Misery went to his head and he shouted angrily: 'I'll tell your mother!'
'Tell away!' she said, laughing, and went back to the gate. He heard her singing, for him to hear:
'I've got you under my skin,
I've got you deep in the heart of ...'
'Rubbish,' he shouted. 'Rubbish. Impudent little bit of rubbish!'
Growling under his breath he turned towards the dovecote, which was his refuge from the house he shared with his daughter and her husband and their children. But now the house would be empty Gone all the young girls with their laughter and their squabbling and their teasing. He would be left, uncherished and alone, with that square-fronted, calm-eyed woman, his daughter.
He stopped, muttering, before the dovecote, resenting the absorbed cooing birds. From the gate the girl shouted: 'Go and tell! Go on, what are you waiting for?' Obstinately he made his way to the house, with quick, pathetic persistent glances of appeal back at her. But she never looked around. Her defiant but anxious young body stung him into love and repentance. He stopped, 'But I never meant...' he muttered, waiting for her to turn and run to him. 'I didn't mean...'
She did not turn. She had forgotten him. Along the road came the young man Steven, with something in his hand. A present for her? The old man stiffened as he watched the gate swing back, and the couple embrace. In the brittle shadows of the frangipani tree his granddaughter, his darling, lay in the arms of the postmaster's son, and her hair flowed back over his shoulder.
'I see you!' shouted the old man spitefully. They did not move. He stumped into the little whitewashed house, hearing the wooden veranda creak angrily under his feet. His daughter was sewing in the front room, threading a needle held to the light.
He stopped again, looking back into the garden. The couple were now sauntering among the bushes, laughing. As he watched he saw the girl escape from the youth with a sudden mischievous movement, and run off through the flowers with him in pursuit. He heard shouts, laughter, a scream, silence.
'But it's not like that at all,' he muttered miserably. 'It's not like that. Why can't you see? Running and giggling, and kissing and kissing. You'll come to something quite different.'
He looked at his daughter with sardonic hatred, hating himself. They were caught and finished, both of them, but the girl was still running free.
'Can't you see?' he demanded of his invisible granddaughter, who was at that moment lying in the thick green grass with the postmaster's son.
His daughter looked at him and her eyebrows went up in tired forbearance.

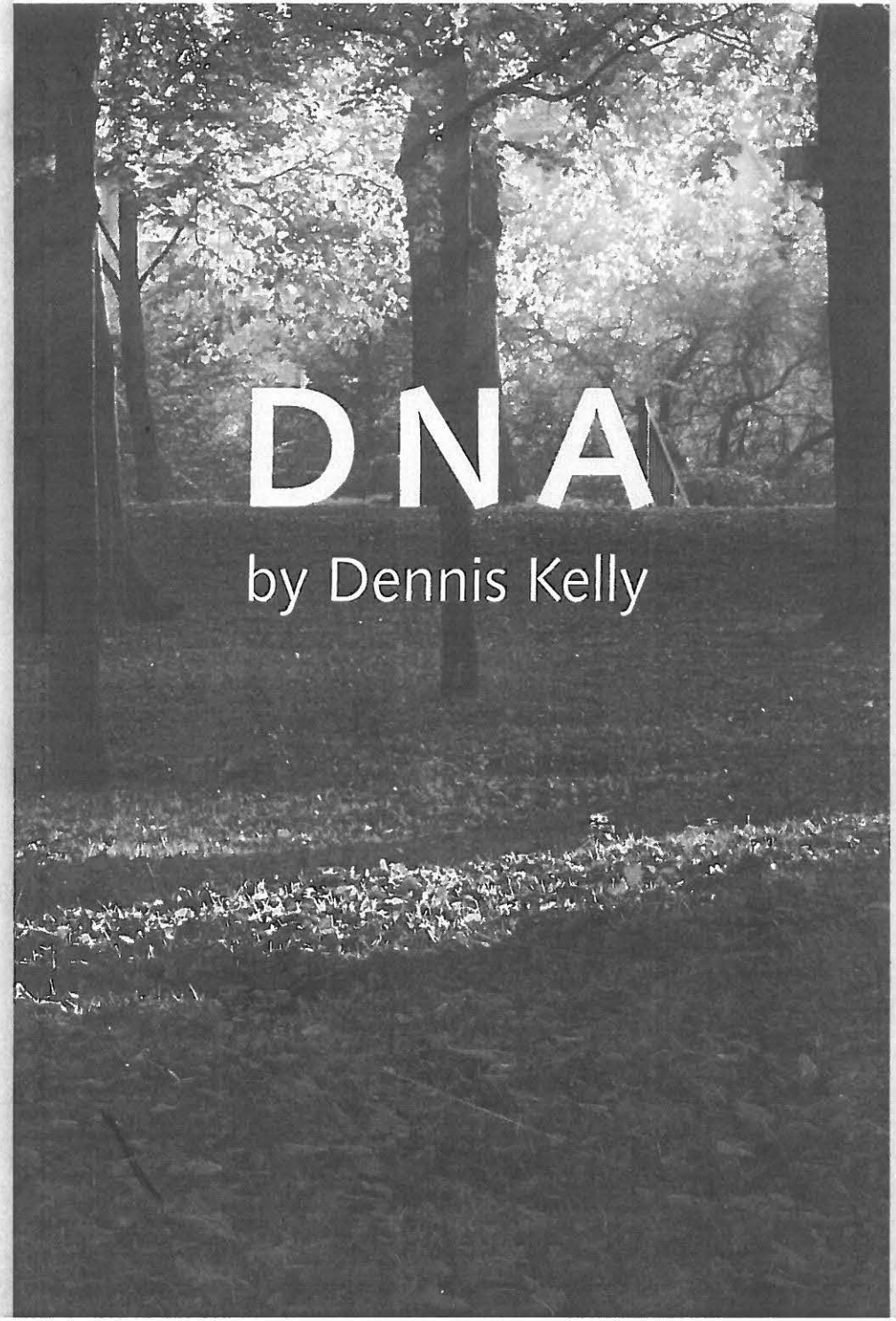
'Put your birds to bed?' she asked, humouring him. 'Lucy,' he said urgently, 'Lucy...'
'Well, what is it now?'
'She's in the garden with Steven.'
'Now you just sit down and have your tea.'

He stumped his feet alternately, thump, thump, on the hollow wooden floor and shouted: 'She'll marry him. I'm telling you, she'll be marrying him next!'
His daughter rose swiftly, brought him a cup, set him a plate. 'I don't want any tea. I don't want it, I tell you.' 'Now, now,' she crooned. 'What's wrong with it? Why not?'
'She's eighteen. Eighteen!'
'I was married at seventeen and I never regretted it.'
'Liar,' he said. 'Liar. Then you should regret it. Why do you make your girls marry? It's you who do it. What do you do it for? Why?'
'The other three have done fine. They've three fine husbands. Why not Alice?'
'She's the last,' he mourned. 'Can't we keep her a bit longer?'
'Come, now, Dad. She'll be down the road, that's all. She'll be here every day to see you.'
'But it's not the same.' He thought of the other three girls, transformed inside a few months from charming petulant spoiled children into serious young matrons.
'You never did like it when we married,' she said. 'Why not? Every time, it's the same. When I got married you made me feel like it was something wrong. And my girls the same. You get them all crying and miserable the way you go on. Leave Alice alone. She's happy.' She sighed, letting her eyes linger on the sunlit garden. 'She'll marry next month. There's no reason to wait.'
'You've said they can marry?' he said incredulously.
'Yes, Dad, why not?' she said coldly, and took up her sewing.
His eyes stung, and he went out on to the veranda. Wet spread down over his chin and he took out a handkerchief and mopped his whole face. The garden was empty. From around the corner came the young couple; but their faces were no longer set against him. On the wrist of the postmaster's son balanced a young pigeon, the light gleaming on its breast.
'For me?' said the old man, letting the drops shake off his chin. 'For me?'
'Do you like it?' The girl grabbed his hand and swung on it. 'It's for you, Grandad. Steven brought it for you.' They hung about him, affectionate, concerned, trying to charm away his wet eyes and his misery. They took his arms and directed him to the shelf of birds, one on each side, enclosing him, petting him, saying wordlessly that nothing would be changed, nothing could change, and that they would be with him always. The bird was proof of it, they said, from their lying happy eyes, as they thrust it on him. 'There, Grandad, it's yours. It's for you.'

They watched him as he held it on his wrist, stroking its soft, sun-warmed back, watching the wings lift and balance.
'You must shut it up for a bit', said the girl intimately. 'Until it knows this is its home.' 'Teach your grandmother to suck eggs,' growled the old man.
Released by his half-deliberate anger, they fell back, laughing at him. 'We're glad you like it.' They moved off, now serious and full of purpose, to the gate, where they hung, backs to him, talking quietly. More than anything could, their grown-up seriousness shut him out, making him alone; also, it quietened him, took the sting out of their tumbling like puppies on the grass. They had forgotten him again. Well, so they should, the old man reassured himself, feeling his throat clotted with tears,

his lips trembling. He held the new bird to his face, for the caress of its silken feathers. Then he shut it in a box and took out his favourite.
'Now you can go, he said aloud. He held it poised, ready for flight, while he looked down the garden towards the boy and the girl. Then, clenched in the pain of loss, he lifted the bird on his wrist, and watched it soar. A whirr and a spatter of wings, and a cloud of birds rose into the evening from the dovecote.
At the gate Alice and Steven forgot their talk and watched the birds.
On the veranda, that woman, his daughter, stood gazing, her eyes shaded with a hand that still held her sewing.
It seemed to the old man that the whole afternoon had stilled to watch his gesture of selfcommand, that even the leaves of the trees had stopped shaking.
Dry-eyed and calm, he let his hands fall to his sides and stood erect, staring up into the sky.
The cloud of shining silver birds flew up and up, with a shrill cleaving of wings, over the dark ploughed land and the darker belts of trees and the bright folds of grass, until they floated high in the sunlight, like a cloud of motes of dust.
They wheeled in a wide circle, tilting their wings so there was flash after flash of light, and one after another they dropped from the sunshine of the upper sky to shadow, one after another, returning to the shadowed earth over trees and grass and field, returning to the valley and the shelter of night.
The garden was all a fluster and a flurry of returning birds. Then silence, and the sky was empty.
The old man turned, slowly, taking his time; he lifted his eyes to smile proudly down the garden at his granddaughter. She was staring at him. She did not smile. She was wideeyed, and pale in the cold shadow, and he saw the tears run shivering off her face.

SCHOOL EDITION



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Characters

MARK and JAN,

LEAH and PHIL,

LOU, JOHN TATE and DANNY,

RICHARD,

CATHY and BRIAN, and

a BOY.

Takes place in a street, a field and a wood.

Names and genders of characters are suggestions only,
and can be changed to suit performers.

DNA was first performed in the Cottesloe Theatre of the National Theatre, on 16 February 2008, with the following Company:

MARK, Gregg Chillin
JAN, Claire Foy
LEAH, Ruby Bentall
PHIL, Sam Crane
JOHN TATE, Jack Gordon
DANNY, Benjamin Smith
RICHARD, Troy Glasgow
CATHY, Claire Lams
BRIAN, Ian Bonar
BOY, Ryan Sampson

All other parts played by members of the Company.

Director Paul Miller
Designer Simon Daw
Lighting Designer Paule Constable
Sound Designer Rich Walsh
Associate Video Designer Paul Kenah

This play was commissioned by National Theatre Education as part of its Connections project.

One

A Street. MARK and JAN.

JAN: Dead?

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: What, dead?

MARK: Yeah

JAN: Like dead, dead

MARK: Yes

JAN: proper dead, not living dead?

MARK: Not living dead, yes.

JAN: Are you sure?

MARK: Yes.

JAN: I mean there's no

MARK: No.

JAN: mistake or

MARK: No mistake.

JAN: it's not a joke

MARK: It's not a joke.

JAN: coz it's not funny.

MARK: it's not funny because it's not a joke, if it was a joke it would be funny.

JAN: Not hiding?

MARK: Not hiding, dead.

JAN: not

MARK: Dead.

JAN: Oh.

MARK: Yes.

JAN: God.

MARK: Yes.

JAN: God.

MARK: Exactly.

Pause.

JAN: What are we going to do?

* * *

A Field. LEAH and PHIL, PHIL eating an ice cream.

LEAH: What are you thinking?

No answer.

No, don't tell me, sorry, that's a stupid, that's such a stupid –

You can tell me, you know. You can talk to me. I won't judge you, whatever it is. Whatever you're, you know, I won't, I won't...

Is it me?

Not that I'm –

I mean it wouldn't matter if you weren't or were, actually, so –

Are you thinking about me?

No answer.

What good things? Phil? Or...

I mean is it a negative, are you thinking a negative thing about –

Not that I'm bothered. I'm not bothered, Phil, I'm not, it doesn't, I don't care. You know. I don't...

What, like I talk too much? Is that it? That I talk too much, you, sitting there in absolute silence thinking 'Leah talks too much, I wish she'd shut up once in a while' is that it, is that what you're, because don't, you know, judge, you know, because alright, I do. There, I'm admitting, I am admitting, I talk too much, so shoot me. So kill me, Phil, call the police, lock me up, rip out my teeth with a pair of rusty pliers, I talk too much, what a crime, what a sin, what an absolute catastrophe, stupid, evil, ridiculous, because you're not perfect actually, Phil. Okay? There. I've said it, you're not...

You're a bit...

You're...

Pause. She sits.

Do I disgust you? I do. No, I do. No don't because, it's alright, it's fine, I'm not gonna, you know, or whatever, you know it's not the collapse of my, because I do have, I could walk out of here, there are friends, I've got, I've got friends, I mean alright, I haven't got friends, not exactly, I haven't, but I could, if I wanted, if I wanted, given the right, given the perfect, you know, circumstances. So don't, because you haven't either, I mean it's not like you're, you know, Mr, you know, popular, you know, you haven't, you know, you haven't, you know, you haven't, but that's, that's different, isn't it, I mean it is, it is, don't say it isn't, really, don't, you'll just embarrass us both because it is different, it's different because it doesn't matter to you. Does it. Sitting there. Sitting there, all...

all...

You're not scared. Nothing scares, there, I've said it; scared. Scared, Phil. I'm scared, they scare me, this place, everyone, the fear, the fear that everyone here, and I'm not the only one, I'm not the only one, Phil, I'm just the only one saying it, the fear that everyone here lives in, the brutal terror, it scares me, okay, I've said it and I am not ashamed. Yes, I am ashamed but I'm not ashamed of my shame, Phil, give me that much credit at least, thank you.

Everyone's scared.

S'not just me.

Pause.

We've got each other.

We need each other.

So don't give it all...

You need me as much as...

Don't give it all the...

Beat.

What are you thinking?

JAN and MARK enter.

Pause.

MARK: We need to talk to you.

LEAH: Oh, shit.

* * *

A wood. LOU, JOHN TATE and DANNY.

LOU: Screwed.

JOHN TATE: No, no, it's not, no, Lou, we're not

LOU: We are screwed.

JOHN TATE: No, Lou, we're not...it's not...we're not... nothing's....

LOU: It is.

JOHN TATE: No, no, no, look, there I have to, I really have to, you're going to have to listen to me on this one, and you are going to have to believe me. Everything is, everything's fine.

LOU: Fine?

JOHN TATE: Not fine, no

DANNY: Fine?

JOHN TATE: not fine exactly, alright, fair enough, I mean things are bad, things are a little, alright, yes, I'm not trying to hide the, this is tricky, it's a tricky

LOU: Tricky?

JOHN TATE: situation, but it's not, because actually what you are saying is a very negative, and that's...

Look, haven't I looked after things before?

LOU: This is different.

JOHN TATE: Lou, are you scared of anyone in this school?

LOU: You?

JOHN TATE: Apart from me.

LOU: No.

JOHN TATE: Exactly

LOU: Richard, maybe

JOHN TATE: exactly, that's exactly, that's what I'm saying – Richard, you're scared of, are you...? – I mean you can walk down any corridor in this – I don't think Richard's – any corridor in this school and you know, no-one bothers you and if you want something it's yours and no-one

bothers you and everyone respects you and everyone's scared of you and who made that, I mean I'm not boasting, but who made that happen?

LOU: You.

JOHN TATE: Thank you, so are things really that bad?

LOU: Yes.

JOHN TATE: Richard? I mean are you really?

DANNY: I can't get mixed up in this. I'm gonna be a dentist.

LOU: This is different, John. This is

JOHN TATE: Alright, it's a little bit

LOU: This is really serious.

DANNY: Dentists don't get mixed up in things. I've got a plan. I've got a plan John, I've made plans, and this is not...

JOHN TATE: It's a bit serious, but let's not, I mean come on, let's not over play the, the, the

LOU: He's dead.

JOHN TATE: the gravity of... Well, yes, okay, fair enough, but

DANNY: This is not part of the plan. Dental college is part of the plan, A levels are part of the plan, dead people are not part of the plan, this is not Dental college.

LOU: He's dead, John.

JOHN TATE: Alright, I'm not denying, am I denying? no, I'm

LOU: He's dead.

JOHN TATE: Well, don't keep saying it.

DANNY: This is the opposite of Dental college.

LOU: But he is dead.

JOHN TATE: Well you just, you're saying it again, didn't I just –

LOU: Because he's dead, John, he's dead, dead is what he is so we have to use that word to –

JOHN TATE: Alright. New rule; that word is banned.

Beat.

LOU: What, 'dead'?

JOHN TATE: Yes.

DANNY: Banned?

JOHN TATE: Yes. Banned. Sorry.

LOU: You can't ban a word.

JOHN TATE: and if anyone says it I'm going to have to, you know, bite their face. Or something.

DANNY: How can you ban a word?

JOHN TATE: Well just say it then.

Pause.

Say it and see what happens.

They say nothing.

Look, we have to keep together. We have to trust each other and believe in each other. I'm trying to help. I'm trying to keep things together.

RICHARD enters, with CATHY and BRIAN, CATHY grinning, BRIAN crying.

Pause.

RICHARD: He's dead.

JOHN TATE: Right, that's...now I really am getting a little bit cross, do not use that word.

RICHARD: What?

JOHN TATE: No-one says that word, okay, no-one.

RICHARD: What, word?

CATHY: This is mad, eh?

JOHN TATE: You know.

CATHY: Talk about mad. I mean, it's quite exciting as well, though, isn't it.

RICHARD: What, 'dead'?

JOHN TATE: Don't say it again, Richard, or I'm gonna

CATHY: Better than ordinary life.

RICHARD: What?

JOHN TATE: I'm gonna

RICHARD: What?

JOHN TATE: I'm gonna

I'm gonna hurt you, actually.

Beat.

RICHARD: You're going to hurt me?

JOHN TATE: Yes.

RICHARD: Me?

JOHN TATE: Yes. If you use that word.

CATHY: I mean I'm not saying it's a good thing, but in a way it is.

DANNY: Shut up, Cathy.

CATHY: You shut up.

JOHN TATE: I am trying to keep everyone together. Ever since I came to this school haven't I been trying to keep everyone together? Aren't things better? For us? I mean not for them, not out there, but for us? Doesn't everyone

want to be us, come here in the woods? Isn't that worth keeping hold of?

They say nothing. RICHARD steps forward, a little hesitantly.

RICHARD: You shouldn't threaten me, John.

JOHN TATE: I beg your pardon.

RICHARD: I'm just saying. I'm just saying, I've just walked in here. I've been with these two. I've walked all the way from school with these two, with him crying and with her being weird, and I've just walked in here and I've got you threatening me, you shouldn't threaten me, you shouldn't threaten me, John.

Pause.

JOHN TATE: Or what?

RICHARD: What?

JOHN TATE: No, I mean, you know, or what?

RICHARD: Well...

JOHN TATE: Because I'm interested.

DANNY: He's just saying, John.

JOHN TATE: Are you on his side, Danny?

DANNY: No, I'm just saying that he's just saying.

CATHY: Shut up, Danny.

DANNY: You shut up.

JOHN TATE: Don't tell Cathy to shut up, Danny, that's really, not...

DANNY: I'm not telling her to –

CATHY: He's on Richard's side.

DANNY: I'm not!

JOHN TATE: Are you, Danny? Are you on Richard's side?

DANNY: No –

CATHY: He is.

RICHARD: What do you mean by my side, there is no –

JOHN TATE: Have you got a side now, Richard?

RICHARD: No, no, there's no –

JOHN TATE: because that's a bit, is that what you've got?

DANNY: John, I'm not on –

JOHN TATE: Because if you've got a side that means you're not on my side and if you're not on my side that means you're setting yourself up against me and I thought we'd got over all that silliness.

RICHARD: We have, we –

JOHN TATE: I thought we were mates now.

RICHARD: We are, we are mates now, we –

JOHN TATE: So if me and Richard are mates now, which we are and all that silliness is over, which it is, and you're on someone's side, Danny, then you're on your own side, which is very, well, to be honest, very silly and dangerous.

DANNY: No, you've got it wrong, that's not –

JOHN TATE: Are you on my side?

DANNY: Yes, I'm on your side!

JOHN TATE: Which means you want...?

DANNY: I want to keep calm, I want to say nothing, just like you, you're right, you're right, John.

JOHN TATE: So what are you on about, Cathy?

CATHY: I'm –

JOHN TATE: Are you on my side? With Richard and Danny? Are you on our side, Cathy?

CATHY: Yes.

JOHN TATE: Good. Lou?

LOU: Yes.

JOHN TATE: You're on our side, Lou?

LOU: Yes, John.

JOHN TATE: You sure?

LOU: Yeah, I'm –

JOHN TATE: That just leaves you, Brian. You crying little piece of filth.

Beat. BRIAN stops crying. Looks up.

BRIAN: I think we should tell someone.

JOHN TATE begins to walk towards BRIAN.

MARK and JAN enter with LEAH and PHIL, PHIL drinking a Coke.

JOHN TATE stops.

Goes back to where he was.

JOHN TATE: I'm finding this all quite stressful. You know that? I'm under a lot of stress. You lot shouldn't put me under so much stress.

LEAH walks forward.

LEAH: Can I just say John, that we haven't done anything. First I want to say that, but if we have, John, but if we have done a thing, which we haven't, but if we have then we did it together. Whatever we did, we did, me and Phil, it wasn't just Phil, if that's what you're thinking, if you're thinking it might just have been him, on his own, without me, well

that's not, we are completely, I am responsible as much as he, as much as Phil, but we didn't because –

JOHN TATE places a finger on her lips. She is silent.

JOHN TATE: Have you told them?

MARK: No.

JOHN TATE: Brilliant. Is there one thing that I do not have to do?

Beat.

JAN: So you want us to tell them?

JOHN TATE: Yes! Please.

He takes his finger away from LEAH's lips.

MARK: It's Adam. He's…

I mean we were just having a laugh, weren't we, we were all, you know…

You know Adam, you know what he's like, so we were sort of, well, alright, taking the piss, sort of. You know what he's like he was, sort of hanging around

JAN: Trying to be part of

MARK: Yeah, trying to be part of, yeah, yeah, so we're having a laugh

JAN: with him

MARK: yeah, with him, I mean he's laughing as well, see how far he'll go… We got him to eat some leaves.

JAN: Great big ones, dirty leaves off the floor, he ate them, just like that

MARK: Just like that, we were all

JAN: stitches

MARK: We were in stitches, weren't we

JAN: Adam too, he was

MARK: Oh yeah, Adam was, he was laughing harder than anyone.

JAN: Nutter.

MARK: Nutter.

JAN: complete

MARK: complete nutter

JAN: Big fist fulls of leaves, eh John

MARK: laughing his head off, eh John

JAN: He burnt his own socks!

MARK: Yeah, yeah, he did, that's right he, he set them alight

JAN: anything, he'd do, just a laugh

MARK: we got him to nick some vodka

JAN: you could tell he was scared

MARK: oh, he was terrified, he was completely, but like you know, pretending, you know, pretending he's done it before, big man, pretending he's

JAN: You know what he's like, he's

MARK: Do anything. And you're thinking 'Will he do anything? What won't he do?'

JAN: Let us punch him.

MARK: he was laughing

JAN: In the face.

MARK: He was laughing.

JAN: at first

MARK: Yeah, at first he was, I mean we took it a bit far, alright, half hour, forty minutes

JAN: I mean he was still joking all the way, but

MARK: you could tell

JAN: He weren't really

MARK: fear

JAN: well

MARK: you don't want to admit, you know what he's like, Phil…

JAN: Stubbed out cigarettes on him.

MARK: joking, we were

JAN: Arms, hands, face

MARK: having a laugh, really, he was laughing

JAN: and crying, soles of his feet

MARK: or crying, sort of, a bit of both

JAN: Made him run across the motorway

MARK: you're thinking what is this nutter, and with the vodka making you feel a bit, you know, you're having a laugh, together, what is this nutter gonna do next, we can make him do, we can make him do –

JAN: That's when I went home

MARK: anything, yeah, only because you had to.

JAN: I wasn't there when –

MARK: Only because you had to, you would've been there otherwise, you did all the…

Beat.

We went up the grille. You know, that shaft up there on the hill. Just a big hole really, hole with a grille over it, covering, just to see if he'd climb the fence, really and he did, and we thought, you know, he's climbed the fence

which we didn't think he'd do so walk, you know, walk on the grille, Adam, walk on the, and he did, he's walked on, you know, wobbling and that but he's walking on the grille and we're all laughing and he's scared because if you slip, I mean it's just blackness under you, I mean it's only about fifteen foot wide so, but it might be hundreds of feet into blackness, I dunno, but he's doing it, he's walked on the grille. He's on the grille. He is.

And someone's pegged a stone at him.

Not to hit him, just for the laugh.

And you shoulda seen his face, I mean the fear, the, it was so, you had to laugh, the expression, the fear…

So we're all peggin them. Laughing. And his face, it's just making you laugh harder and harder, and they're getting nearer and nearer. And one hits his head. And the shock on his face is so…funny. And we're all just…

just…

really chucking these stones into him, really hard and laughing and he slips.

And he drops.

Into…

Into the er…

So he's…

So he's…

So he's –

JOHN TATE: Dead. He's dead.

Cathy says you're clever.

So. What do we do?

Pause. They all stare at LEAH and PHIL.

LEAH goes to say something, but nothing comes out.

Silence.

More silence.

PHIL puts his Coke carefully on the ground.

PHIL: Cathy, Danny, Mark, you go to Adam's house, you wait until his mum's out, you break in

DANNY: What?

PHIL: through an upstairs window so it's out of the way, make sure no-one sees you. Get in, go to his bedroom, find a pair of his shoes and an item of his clothing, a jumper or something, don't touch the jumper, that's very important, do not touch the jumper, but you have to get it in the plastic bag without touching it

CATHY: What plastic bag?

PHIL: The refuse sacks that you are going to buy on the way, do not use the first one on the roll, use the third or fourth, do not be tempted to use a bin liner you have knocking around the house as that will be a DNA nightmare.

Richard, you take Brian to the Head, tell him that you found Brian crying in the toilets, asked him what was wrong and when he told you, you brought him here.

RICHARD: Me? But I hate him!

PHIL: Brian, you cry

RICHARD: Me with Brian?

PHIL: and you tell them a man showed you his willy in the woods

BRIAN: Wha...what?

PHIL: by the bridge, last week, a fat Caucasian male, 5'9" say, with thinning hair and a postman's uniform, sad eyes, softly spoken

DANNY: Who's that?

PHIL: The man who showed Brian his willy in the woods, please keep up, I'm making this up as I go along

DANNY: What were his teeth like?

PHIL: Bad, very bad.

DANNY: Thought so.

PHIL: Lou, Danny and Jan you take the shoes, Lou you put them on, and you enter the woods from the south entrance

CATHY: Which one's south?

MARK: By the Asda.

PHIL: Danny you enter from the east entrance with Jan on your back

DANNY: Is he taking the piss?

PHIL: the weight of the two of you combined should equal that of a fat postman with bad teeth, you make you way into the woods, do not put her down unless it's on concrete or a tree trunk, never when you're walking on mud. You meet Lou near the bridge, you move around a bit, you exit from the South,

MARK: By the Asda.

PHIL: Cathy and Mark you meet them there, but on the way you find a quiet street, you wait until it's just you and a man, you walk ahead of him and when you're far ahead you drop the jumper. The man picks it up, runs after you covering it in DNA and then gives it back, make sure you let him drop it in the bag, say you're taking it to a charity shop. Take it to the south entrance, tear it a little, chuck it in a hedge, all go home and wait a day or two until Adam's declared missing and then John Tate comes forward and says he thinks he saw Adam with a fat man in a uniform by Asda's but he can't be sure, they'll think he's been

abducted, they'll be inquiries, police, mourning a service and if everyone keeps their mouths shut we should be fine.

Any questions?

They stare at him open mouthed.

He bends down. Picks up his Coke.

Starts to drink his Coke.

* * *

A Field. LEAH and PHIL sitting.

Pause.

LEAH: Apparently bonobos are our nearest relative. For years people thought they were chimpanzees, but they're not, they are completely different. Chimps are evil. They murder each other, did you know that? They kill and sometimes torture each other to find a better position within the social structure. A chimp'll just find itself on the outside of a group and before he knows what's happening it's being hounded to death by the others, sometimes for months. For years we've thought that chimps were our closest living relative, but now they saying it's the bonobos. Bonobos are the complete opposite of chimps. When a stranger bonobo approaches the pack, the other bonobos all come out and go 'Hello, mate. What you doing round here? Come and meet the family, we can eat some ants.' And if a bonobo damages its hand, whereas the chimps'll probably cast it out or bite its hand off, the bonobos will come over and look after it, and they'll all look sad because there's a bonobo feeling pain. I saw it on a program. Such sadness in those intelligent eyes. Empathy. That's what bonobos have. Amazing really, I mean they're exactly like chimps, but the tiniest change in their DNA… The woman was saying that if we'd discovered bonobos before chimps our understanding of ourselves would be very different.

Pause. PHIL pulls out a bag of crisps.

You don't care, do you. I could be talking Chinese for all you care. How do you do it? You're amazing. You're unreal. I sometimes think you're not human. I sometimes think I wonder what you would do if I killed myself, right here in front of you. What would you do? What would you do, Phil?

No answer.

Phil, what would you do? Phil?

Still no answer.

Suddenly she grabs her throat.

I'm gonna do it!

She squeezes.

I mean it! I'm gonna do it…

No answer. She strangles herself, her face turning red.

She falls to her knees with the exertion.

PHIL looks on.

She is in considerable pain. Grits her teeth and squeezes.

She strangles until she is lying prone on the floor.

(*Gasping…*) Phil! This is it…

She stops.

Lies there, panting.

PHIL opens his crisps and begins to eat them.

LEAH gets up, sits next to PHIL.

PHIL eats on.

Course, they shag a lot. Bonobos. Always at it. Sex mad. Sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, sex, constant sex, randy, in the bonobo world having it off is like saying I like your shoes. Partner swapping, men and women, women

and men, women and women, men on men, fathers, mothers, oral, group masturbation, the lot. It was like an orgy, when bonobos get going. It was fairly disgusting, actually.

Pause.

But that's bonobos for you.

Pause.

We're in trouble now.

We're in trouble now, Phil. Don't know how this'll pan out.

Trouble now.

Two

A Street. JAN and MARK.

Pause.

JAN: What?

MARK: He's not going.

JAN: What do you mean he's not going?

MARK: He's not going.

JAN: He's not going?

MARK: Yes.

JAN: That's what he said?

MARK: Yes.

JAN: He said he's not going?

MARK: Yeah, he said he's not, he's not...

JAN: What?

MARK: Going.

Beat.

JAN: Is he off his head?

MARK: I know.

JAN: Is he insane?

MARK: I know.

JAN: Is he joking?

MARK: I know, I know.

JAN: No, that's a question.

MARK: He's not joking, he's not going, he's said he's not going, I said you've gotta go, he said he's not going, 'I'm not going' he said.

JAN: That's what he said?

MARK: That's what he said, I'm saying that's what he said.

JAN: Shit.

MARK: Exactly.

Beat.

JAN: What are we going to do?

* * *

A Field. PHIL and LEAH, PHIL slowly eating a pack of Starburst. LEAH has a Tupperware container on her lap.

LEAH: Are you happy?

No, don't answer that, Jesus, sorry, what's wrong with me, sorry –

Are you?

No, I'm just wondering. I mean what is happy, what's happy all about, who says you're supposed to be happy, like we're all supposed to be happy, happy is our natural, and any deviation from that state is seen as a failure, which in itself makes you more unhappy so you have to pretend to be even happier which doesn't work because people can see that you're pretending which makes them awkward and you can see that they can see that you're pretending to be happy and their awkwardness is making you even more unhappy so you have to pretend to be even happier, it's a nightmare. It's like nuclear waste or global warming.

Beat.

Isn't it Phil? Phil? Isn't it, like nuclear…

PHIL doesn't answer.

Yeah, you know, you know it is, you know more than I do, I can't tell you any, you know. People getting all upset about polluting the natural order? When this planet is churning molten lava with a thin layer of crust on top with a few kilometres of atmosphere clinging to it? I mean, please, don't gimme all that, carbon dioxide? Carbon dioxide, Phil? And look at the rest of the universe, Venus, Phil, there's a, look at Venus, what about Venus, hot enough to melt lead or Titan with oceans of liquid nitrogen, I mean stars, Phil, a billion nuclear reactions a second, I mean to be honest it's all either red hot or ice cold, so, so, so… No. It's life that upsets the natural order. It's us that's the anomaly.

But that's the beauty, isn't it Phil. I couldn't say this to anyone else they'd say 'That's a pretty bloody grim view of the world, Leah' but you can see the beauty, which is why I can talk to you, because you can see the incredibly precious beauty and fragility of reality, and it's the same for happiness, you can apply the same theory to happiness, so don't start Phil, don't come here giving it all the, you know, all the, all the…

Beat.

Can you remember the happiest moment in your life?

Beat. PHIL eats another Toffo.

I know mine. I know my happiest moment. Week last Tuesday. That sunset. You remember that sunset? Do you? You don't do you. Oh my God, you don't.

He says nothing.

She opens the Tupperware container.

Shows it to PHIL.

It's Jerry. I killed him. I took him out of his cage, I put the point of a screwdriver on his head and I hit it with a hammer. Why do you think I did that?

PHIL shrugs.

No. No, me neither.

She closes the lid.

Everything's much better, though. I mean really, it is. Everyone's working together. They're a lot happier. Remember last month, Dan threatened to kill Cathy? well yesterday I saw him showing her his phone, like they were old friends. Last week Richard invited Mark to his party, bring a friend, anyone you like, can you believe that? Richard and Mark? Yep. Everyone's happier. It's pouring into the school, grief, grief is making them happy.

They say John Tate's lost it though, won't come out of his room. Bit odd. Maybe that's what's making people happier. Maybe it's just having something to work towards. Together. Do you think that's what it is. Are we really that simple?

Where will it stop? Only been four days but everything's changed

Pause.

Adam's parents were on the telly again last night.

PHIL looks up.

Yeah. Another appeal.

To the fat postman with bad teeth.

What have we done, Phil?

MARK and JAN enter.

JAN: We need to talk.

* * *

A Wood. PHIL and LEAH, LOU and DANNY. PHIL has a muffin.

Pause.

LEAH: What?

DANNY: They've found...

They...

Well they've found –

LOU: The man.

DANNY: Yeah, they've found the man.

LEAH: They've found the man?

DANNY: Yeah.

LEAH: They've found the man?

DANNY: Yes.

LEAH: Oh my god.

LOU: Exactly.

LEAH: Oh my god.

LOU: That's what we thought, we thought that, didn't we, Danny.

DANNY: Yeah, we did.

LEAH: Are you sure? I mean are you...

DANNY: Definitely. He's in custody now. They're questioning him.

LEAH: But how, I mean who, how, who, who is, who is, how?

LOU: Dunno.

LEAH: Who is he?

LOU: He's the man who kidnapped Adam.

LEAH: Right. No.

LOU: Yes.

LEAH: No.

DANNY: Yes.

LEAH: No, no, yeah, no, actually, because that man, the man who, he doesn't actually, I mean I'm not being fussy or anything, but the man who kidnapped Adam doesn't actually exist, does he. Well does he?

LOU: No. But they've got him.

DANNY: I heard his teeth are awful.

LEAH: You know, I mean he doesn't, he doesn't... Phil? Any... any thoughts? Any words, any comments, any...ideas, any, any, any...thing? At all?

I mean this is, this is, isn't it, this is, is it?

Shit. Oh shit.

DANNY: He answers the description. Fat postman, thinning hair, his teeth are terrible, apparently.

LEAH: But that's just

LOU: Yeah. That's what we thought.

LEAH: we just, didn't we, Phil, we just, we just, I mean you just...

DANNY: What are we gonna do?

LOU: We're screwed.

LEAH: We're not...

LOU: We're –

LEAH: No, no, sorry, no we're not, are we Phil, I mean we're, no we're alright.

DANNY: They're looking for Brian.

LEAH: Why?

DANNY: Because he can identify him.

LEAH: No he can't.

LOU: Because he saw him in the woods.

LEAH: He didn't

LOU: He did, he –

LEAH: No he didn't because that wasn't the man in the woods because there wasn't a man in the woods.

Where's Brian?

DANNY: Hiding. Dan and Mark have gone to find him.

LOU: He's shitting it.

LEAH: I mean what, they just picked this bloke up, they just saw him and said 'You look dodgy, you're a murderer because you've got a postman's uniform'?

DANNY: Well, there's the teeth as well.

LEAH: You can't go to prison for bad teeth.

LOU: What if he goes to prison?

LEAH: He won't go to prison.

LOU: You just said –

LEAH: He won't get done for it because he hasn't...

DANNY: This sort of stuff sticks, you know.

LEAH: Look, everyone, everyone calm, okay. Isn't that right, Phil. Phil, isn't that, I mean things are, everything is, well, better and isn't everyone more, you know, and cheerful and stuff, so lets, please, let's –

DANNY: How am I gonna get references?

LOU: We are completely –

LEAH: We are not –

DANNY: You need three references for dental college, how am I gonna get references?

RICHARD enters with CATHY.

RICHARD: We just came from the police station. It's full of reporters.

CATHY: It was great.

RICHARD: It was shit. Phil, have you heard?

LEAH: We heard.

CATHY: They wanted to interview me.

RICHARD: You've heard? You know?

CATHY: Didn't have time, but I'm gonna go back

RICHARD: So you know they've caught him?

CATHY: get on the telly

LEAH: How can they have caught someone who doesn't exist?

RICHARD: I don't know, Leah.

LEAH: Because that's impossible.

RICHARD: Why don't you tell them that? Why don't you pop down the station and say 'excuse me, but that fat postman with the bad teeth doesn't actually exist, so why don't you let him go?'

LEAH: Sarcasm, that's the lowest.

CATHY: they might even give me money for it, do you think I should ask for money?

LOU: He's gonna go to prison.

LEAH: Lou, they are not going to send him to prison because he answers a description they need more than that, they need fibres, they need samples, they need evidence.

RICHARD: DNA evidence.

LEAH: Exactly, they need DNA –

RICHARD: No, they've got DNA evidence.

Beat.

LEAH: What?

RICHARD: He answers the description, but they've got DNA evidence linking him to the crime.

LEAH: DN… What are you talking about?

RICHARD: We spoke to a reporter. They matched up the DNA evidence they found on the jumper to a police database and they came up with this man, this man who answers the description perfectly.

LEAH: That's impossible.

RICHARD: Well it's what happened.

LEAH: No, because, we made that description up and they got DNA from a random –

Beat. She turns to CATHY.

Cathy?

Pause. They all stare at CATHY.

CATHY: You told us to get DNA evidence. We got DNA evidence. We did what you said.

LEAH: Right.

Okay.

Hang on.

Where did you get the DNA evidence?

CATHY: From a man, like you said.

Beat.

A man down at the sorting office.

They stare at her.

LEAH: What?

CATHY: Well, we thought, you know, I mean you'd given a description so we thought, well, I thought, you know, show initiative, we'll look for a fat balding postman with bad teeth.

They stare at her.

There were quite a few.

DANNY: Oh my god.

CATHY: What?

LOU: Oh my god.

CATHY: We showed...initiative, we –

LEAH: And who asked you to do that?

CATHY: Richard, we showed initiative.

RICHARD: That is the most stupid –

DANNY: Oh, Jesus.

CATHY: Why?

LEAH: Why? Because there is now a man in prison who is linked to a non-existent crime, answering a description that Brian gave.

LOU: Oh, Jesus Christ.

CATHY: But isn't that...

LEAH: No, Cathy, it is not what we wanted.

RICHARD: What we wanted was to cover up what had happened, not to frame someone else.

LOU: We're screwed.

LEAH: Yes. We might actually be... This is a nightmare.

DANNY: We can't let them think it's him. I mean, I really can't be mixed up in something like that, it wouldn't be right.

LOU: What if he goes to prison?

RICHARD: What if we go to prison?

LEAH: Yes, I think now, we might just actually be a little bit, well, screwed.

JAN and MARK enter with BRIAN. BRIAN is crying.

BRIAN: I'm not going in.

RICHARD: You dick, Mark.

MARK: It was her idea!

LOU: Mark, you dick.

BRIAN: I'm not going to the police station.

JAN: He has to. They're looking for him.

BRIAN: I can't go in. It was bad enough talking to them before, saying what I said, but I can't do it again.

JAN: They're searching everywhere for him. They want him to identify the man.

BRIAN: I can't identify him, I can't go in there, don't make me go in there, I'm not going in there.

DANNY: This is terrible.

BRIAN: I can't face it. They look at me. They look at me like I'm lying and it makes me cry. I can't stand the way they look at me. And then, because I cry, they think I'm telling the truth, but I'm crying because I'm lying and I feel terrible inside.

LOU: We're going to have to tell them.

LEAH: Maybe we could do nothing?

DANNY: We can't do nothing, they want Brian.

BRIAN: I'm not going in.

LEAH: Phil?

No answer.

Phil?

Pause. PHIL walks over to BRIAN and lays a hand on his shoulder.

PHIL: This is a bad situation. We didn't want this situation. But we've got this situation. It wasn't supposed to be like this. But it is like this.

Beat.

You're going in.

BRIAN: No.

PHIL: Yes.

BRAIN: No, Phil –

PHIL: Yes, yes, shhhh, yes. Sorry. You have to go in. Or we'll take you up the grille.

Pause.

We'll throw you in.

RICHARD: Er, Phil.

DANNY: Is he serious?

LEAH: He's always serious.

PHIL: We'll take you up the grille now. Well get you by the arms. By the legs. And we'll swing you onto the grille. We'll throw rocks at you until you drop through. You'll drop through. You'll fall into the cold. Into the dark. You'll land on Adam's corpse and you'll rot together.

Beat.

We're in trouble now. We need your help. If you don't help us we'll kill you. Are you going to help us?

Pause.

BRIAN nods.

Okay. You go in there. Richard'll take you

RICHARD: Not me again.

PHIL: Richard'll take you. You take a look at that man and you say it's him. You say it's the man in the woods. That's what you do. Okay?

Slowly, BRIAN nods.

Everyone else stays calm. Keep your mouths shut. Tell no-one or we'll all go to prison. Just get on with things.

He starts to eat his pie. They stare at him.

* * *

A Field. PHIL and LEAH, PHIL picking his teeth.

Silence.

Suddenly LEAH jumps up, shocked.

LEAH: Woah! Woah, woah, woah…

No reaction from PHIL.

I just had déjà vu, but really strong, I just…

and you were…

I was…

I mean we were just here and, and…

I was sitting like that and…

Woah. I've been here before, Phil. Phil?

PHIL carries on picking his teeth.

LEAH watches, then explodes.

That's exactly what you did when I said Phil! I knew you were going to do that, I said Phil and you picked your teeth, Phil, you just carried on picking your teeth!

Oh my god. This might be the real thing. Maybe I have been here before. Maybe this has all happened before. Phil? Do you think this has happened before? I know what you're gonna do next. I can see, I know, I know, you're gonna...you're gonna...you're gonna...do nothing!

PHIL does nothing.

Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! You see? This is amazing, this is, the world has just changed, reality is not what we think, Phil maybe, this isn't real, maybe we're caught in some sort of...hang on, hang on, a bird is going to...a starling, a starling is going to land by that stone...now!

Nothing happens.

Now!

Still nothing happens.

Any minute...now!

Again, nothing happens.

LEAH sags. She sits back with PHIL.

Look at that sky.

Have you ever seen a sky like that? I've never seen a sky quite like that. Strange time we've been born in. No other time quite like this one.

Pause.

Do you think it's possible to change things? I know, I know, but I feel like this time... I dunno, this time... I feel like this is an important time. Do you think people always feel like that? D'you think we're doomed to behave like people before us did?

Phil?

No answer.

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Phil?

Pause.

PHIL!

Slowly PHIL turns to her.

If you change one thing you can change the world. Do you believe that?

PHIL: No.

LEAH: Right.

Well I do.

I do, Phil.

Beat.

Phil?

Three

A street. JAN and MARK.

JAN: Okay. Okay. Okay.

Beat.

Okay.

No.

MARK: Yes.

JAN: No, no

MARK: yes

JAN: no. No way, that's

MARK: I know

JAN: that's

MARK: I know, I know

JAN: And are you…is this…

I mean are you…there's no mistake or…

MARK: No.

JAN: Because this is

MARK: That's what I'm saying

JAN: this is really

MARK: Yeah, yes, yeah.

JAN: really, really

MARK: Exactly.

JAN: Are you sure?

MARK: Yes.

JAN: Where?

MARK: In the woods.

JAN: In the woods?

MARK: In the woods, Cathy found him in the woods

JAN: Cathy?

MARK: Yes.

JAN: Cathy found him...?

MARK: Yes, she

JAN: in the woods?

MARK: Yes.

Beat.

JAN: Cathy found him in the woods?

MARK: Yes.

JAN: Oh.

MARK: I know.

JAN: I don't…

MARK: I know, I know.

JAN: This is…

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: Does anyone know?

MARK: You and me. And Cathy. For the moment.

JAN: Right.

Right.

Pause.

Right.

* * *

A Field. PHIL sits with a bag.

Takes out a paper plate.

Places a waffle on it.

Takes out a pack of butter and a jar of jam.

Takes out a knife.

LEAH turns up. She is carrying a suitcase.

He stares at her.

LEAH: I'm going. I'm out of here, I'm gone, I'm, I'm, this is it. I'm running away, Phil.

PHIL says nothing.

Where'm I going? I dunno. Wherever the universe decides that I should be. It's a big world, Phil, a lot bigger than you, it's a lot bigger than you and me, a lot bigger than all this, these people, sitting here, a lot bigger, a lot lot bigger.

Pause. PHIL starts to butter his waffle.

Don't. No words. There's no point, so... What's the point? 'Why are you going, is it me, is it us, is it what we've done, is it what we're becoming, why Leah, why, is it me, is it the impossibility of ever saying exactly what you mean?' There's no point, Phil. So don't even try. I'm outta here. I'm gone. I am part of history, I'm on a jet-plane, I'm moving, I'm discovering, I'm, I'm, sayonara baby, sayonara Phil and hello discovery and, yeah don't try and stop me, because, because, exit stage left Leah, right now. Right now.

PHIL stops buttering the waffle.

Opens the jam.

Starts putting a thin layer of jam on the waffle.

Right now. Right now, Phil, right, bloody... I mean it! I really, really...

Pause. PHIL continues with his waffle.

You're not going to stop me, are you. You're not even thinking of stopping me. You're not even thinking of thinking of stopping me. The only thing in you brain at the moment is that waffle. Your brain is entirely waffle, single-mindedly waffle and maybe a bit of jam, I don't know how you do it. I admire you so much.

PHIL decides that the waffle needs more jam.

LEAH sags. She drops her suitcase and sits with PHIL.

Did you see Jan at Adam's memorial? Floods of tears. It was wonderful, everyone felt wonderful, I felt terrible of course, but everyone felt wonderful. It's incredible. The change. This place. You're a miracle worker. Everyone's happy. You know that? You notice that? Cathy was on the telly. Used that clip on every channel. She's like a celebrity, there are second years asking for her autograph. Suddenly Adam's everyone's best friend. Richard's named his dog Adam. Mark's mum says if her baby's a boy she's going to call him Adam. Funny thing is they're all actually behaving better as well. I saw Jan helping a first year find the gym. Mark's been doing charity work, for Christ's sake. Maybe being seen as heroes is making them behave like heroes

PHIL considers his waffle. Decides it needs more jam.

Yeah, everyone happy. Well it's not all roses, you know. Brian's on medication. Did you know that? Phil? Did you know that they've put Brian on medication?

No answer.

Yep, Brian's off his head, John Tate hasn't been seen in weeks, and the postman's facing the rest of his life in prison, but, you know, omelettes and eggs, as long as you've your waffle, who cares.

How do you feel?

PHIL turns to her.

Considers.

For a long time.

Opens his mouth to answer.

Stops.

Shrugs and goes back to his waffle.

LEAH stares at him.

LEAH: I admire you so much.

The waffle is ready. PHIL looks pleased.

JAN and MARK enter.

JAN: You better come with us.

MARK: You really better come with us.

LEAH: What is it?

Beat.

JAN: You really, really better come with us.

LEAH goes with JAN and MARK.

PHIL looks at his waffle, looks after JAN, MARK and LEAH, then back at the waffle. Irritated he puts it carefully away.

* * *

A Wood. CATHY, BRIAN, LEAH, MARK, LOU and JAN.

They stand around a boy who looks like a tramp. His clothes are torn and dirty and his hair is matted with dried blood from an old gash on his forehead that has not been cleaned up. He stands there, twitchily, staring at them as though they were Aliens and it looks as though he might run off at any moment.

Finally PHIL speaks.

PHIL: Hello Adam.

ADAM: Alright.

Pause.

CATHY: We found him up there, up the hill

BRIAN: I found him

CATHY: living in a hedge

BRIAN: a hedge, I found him, I found him, I found Adam living in a hedge, I found him

CATHY: It's like this hedge complex he's made, you have to crawl to get in

BRIAN: I crawled, I love crawling, I love crawling, Leah

CATHY: Like a warren in this hedge and he's dragged bits of cardboard and rags to make it better, more waterproof

BRIAN: I loved it, Leah, it was like a hideout.

CATHY: He's been living in there.

BRIAN: Living, she was shouting at me to get off the ground, but I love the ground, don't you like the ground?

CATHY: He was hiding away at the back.

BRIAN: D'you ever feel like the trees are watching you?

CATHY: Terrified.

ADAM: No I wasn't.

BRIAN: D'you ever want to rub your face against the earth?

JAN: No.

BRIAN: He wouldn't speak to us. I don't think he knew his name.

ADAM: Adam, my name's, I've got a name, it's...

BRIAN: Shall we do that? Shall we rub our faces against the earth? What do you think, shall we rub our faces against the earth?

CATHY: I think his head's hurt.

MARK: Who, Brian's or Adam's?

BRIAN: Don't they eat earth somewhere? Shall we eat the earth? I wonder what earth tastes like, what do you think it, do you think it tastes earthy, or, or...

He bends down to eat a handful of earth.

CATHY: I think he's been up there for weeks. Hiding.

I don't think he's very well.

BRIAN: (*Spitting the earth out.*) That's disgusting!

He suddenly starts giggling as he scrapes the earth from his mouth.

CATHY: I dunno how he's survived, what he's eaten.

BRIAN: (*Like it's hilarious.*) He's probably been eating earth!

He bursts into laughter.

CATHY: It took me half an hour to get him to come out.

BRIAN: D'you feel how wonderful this day is?

CATHY: I used violence.

BRIAN: She did.

CATHY: I threatened to gouge one of his eyes out.

BRIAN: She was gonna do it. She loves violence now. Can you feel the day licking our skin?

CATHY: He's a mess.

MARK: Which one?

BRIAN: Shall we hold hands? Come on, let's hold, let's hold, let's hold hands, come on, let's –

Suddenly CATHY slaps him.

For a second he looks as if he might cry, but instead he just giggles.

LEAH: Okay. Right. Okay.

Adam.

ADAM: Huh?

LEAH: Hello, Adam. How are you?

ADAM: ...

LEAH: Yeah. Great. Phil?

PHIL says nothing.

Because this is a bit...isn't it. I mean this is really, talk about a bolt from the, yeah, shit. No, not shit, I mean it's good

LOU: Good?

LEAH: it's, yeah, yes it's

JAN: How is it good?

LEAH: it's, it's good, Adam, that found, but I mean yes, it does make things a bit

LOU: Screwed?

LEAH: tricky, no, not...don't say

LOU: We are absolutely –

JAN: What are we gonna do?

LEAH: Don't panic.

MARK: What are we gonna do?

LEAH: I said don't panic.

MARK: We're not panicking.

LEAH: Good, because that's the one thing that's... So. Adam. How's...how's...how's things?

ADAM: I know my name.

LEAH: Yes you do.

ADAM: Adam, it's Adam, my name's Adam.

LEAH: Good. Well that's...

BRIAN starts giggling.

No, no, no Brian, that's, that's not gonna, so shut up. Please.

CATHY: What are we going to do?

LEAH: Phil?

What are we gonna...?

Phil?

Phil?

Say something Phil!

Pause. But PHIL says nothing.

LEAH: What happened.

ADAM doesn't answer.

LEAH goes to him.

What happened?

ADAM: I...

I was in a

dark...

Beat.

walking, crawling in this dark, when you're moving but with you hands and knees, crawl, crawling in this

dark

place and I don't remember

things

I fell, I falled into, I fell onto this...

wake, woke, wake up, I woke up with liquid on my head, leaves, dead and rotting, I remember leaves, but just dark maybe a light high, high, high, high, high...

above and, I drank the liquid it was blood, there was, it was mine, so I, it's not wrong because it was my

crawling for a long time, I thought, but that was hard to tell, tunnels, scared, I was, I felt like the dark was my fear, do you know what I mean? I was wrapped in it. Like a soft blanket.

And then I came out.

I saw this

light, this daylight light, I saw this light and went that way, towards, and I thought I died because that's what people

go to the light, you

and there was such a pain in my

I thought the light would make it go, but it didn't because the

light was...this.

Beat.

I was confused.

Beat.

Outside. I was sad, crushed.

Came outside.

I couldn't remember things.

I couldn't remember anything.

I was new.

A new

a new

a new me. And I felt

happy.

It hurt to laugh. But I laughed.

Beat.

Then night came and then I was

panicked, because, again dark, I panicked again

I ran

scratching there was lots of, scratching my skin

and I found my place where I live, and that's where I live now, I live there.

And I do know my name so you can shut, you can...

I live there. It's

mine, I

live

there.

Adam.

I'm not coming back.

Beat.

It's Adam.

LEAH: How've you been living?

ADAM: In the hedge.

LEAH: No, how?

What have you been eating?

ADAM: You can eat anything. I eat things.

Nothing dead, I don't

insects, grass, leaves, all good, but nothing, I caught a rabbit once and ate that, it's fur was soft, warm, but nothing, I found a dead bird and ate some of that but it made me sick so nothing, nothing dead, that's the rule, nothing

Beat.

What?

JAN: Jesus Christ.

MARK: He's lost it.

JAN: He's off his –

LEAH: Okay. Now things are strange. Things are really, really strange, Phil. I mean with the greatest of respect, Adam, you are supposed to be dead.

ADAM: Dead?

LEAH: And I mean, there's been a service, there's been appeals, there's been weeping... They're naming the science lab after him, for god's sake.

ADAM: I'm...dead?

BRIAN starts giggling.

CATHY: Shut up.

ADAM: Am I dead?

LEAH: I mean now we really have, I don't know how we're gonna get out of this one because now we really have

ADAM: I thought I was dead.

LOU: You're not dead.

CATHY: (*To BRIAN.*) If you don't shut up you'll be dead.

BRIAN: I love this! This is great! Mates!

JAN: What are we going to do?

MARK: Yeah, what are we going to do?

LEAH: We're gonna, right, we're gonna... What are we gonna do?

PHIL: Adam?

ADAM: Yes?

PHIL: Do you want to come back?

ADAM: What?

PHIL: With us.

ADAM: I

PHIL: Or do you want to stay? Are you happy? Here?

LEAH: Phil –

PHIL: Shut up. Do you want to stay?

Pause. ADAM thinks. Looks at PHIL.

PHIL smiles, kindly. Nods.

Brian? Take Adam back to his hedge. Then come back to us.

BRIAN: This is great!

BRIAN takes ADAM off. They all stare at PHIL.

LEAH: What's going on?

PHIL: (*To MARK and JAN.*) Go back home. Don't say anything to anybody about this. You too, Lou.

LEAH: Phil...?

JAN: Are we going to be in trouble.

PHIL: If you go now and you say nothing to no-one about this, you won't be in trouble.

She thinks. Nods to MARK. They go.

LOU stands there, unsure.

LOU: What about...

What about Cathy?

PHIL goes to her. Places a hand on her shoulder, smiles, warm, reassuring.

PHIL: Everything is going to be fine.

Beat. She goes off after JAN and MARK.

LEAH: Phil, what are you doing?

What? But he's...

Beat.

Phil, he's off his head. He's injured, he's been living off insects for weeks, he's insane Phil, he needs help.

PHIL: He's happy.

LEAH: He's not happy, he's mad.

PHIL: He doesn't want to come back.

LEAH: Because he's mad! We can't leave him here, I mean that's not, are you serious? Are you seriously –

Alright, yes, there'll be –

Phil, this is insane. I mean I've never, but this, because, alright, whatever, but this is actually insane. We can't just leave him up here.

PHIL: I'm in charge. Everyone is happier. What's more important; one person or everyone?

She stares at him.

LEAH: It's Adam, Phil, Adam! We used to go to his birthday parties, he used to have that cheap ice cream and we used to take the piss, remember?

PHIL: If he comes back our lives are ruined. He can't come back, Cathy.

LEAH: Oh, great, now you're talking to Cathy, like, I'm not, I'm not, because you don't like what I say and now it's Cathy, you sit there and you say nothing for years and suddenly now you chatting with Cathy.

PHIL: Cathy?

LEAH: Let's, come on, lets, it won't be that bad, it'll be, we can explain. we can talk. We can go through the whole thing and make them understand –

PHIL: (*To CATHY.*) Do you understand?

LEAH: Understand what?

CATHY: Yeah. I do.

LEAH: Oh great, now you're at it.

BRIAN comes back, giggling.

(*Pointing at BRIAN.*) I mean I might as well talk to him for all the sense I'm getting. Phil, we can't do this, I mean what if he comes down next week, next year, in ten years, even?

PHIL: Take Brian.

CATHY: Okay.

BRIAN: We going somewhere?

LEAH: No, no, wait, you can't, no, this is... Cathy?

PHIL: Make a game of it.

BRIAN: We gonna play a game?

PHIL: You and Cathy are going to play a game. With Adam

BRIAN: Brilliant!

CATHY: How?

LEAH: How what? What are you, will you please talk to me as if

PHIL: Brian?

BRIAN: Who?

PHIL: Come here.

BRIAN goes to PHIL.

PHIL: I'm gonna do an experiment with this plastic bag. I want you to stay still while I do this experiment.

BRIAN: I love experiments! Will there be fire?

PHIL: (*Emptying his carrier bag.*) No. No fire.

Stay still.

PHIL places the bag over BRIAN's head.

BRIAN: It's all gone dark.

He pulls the handles back around his neck and to opposite corners, making it airtight.

BRIAN is giggling inside, looking around and breathing the plastic in and out of his mouth.

Bit stuffy.

PHIL looks to CATHY. She nods.

This is great!

LEAH: Phi… Phil?

PHIL takes the bag off.

BRIAN: That was great!

PHIL: You just do what Cathy says.

BRIAN: I am brilliant at doing what people say.

LEAH: No! Stop, don't, don't, Phil, don't, what are you doing, what are you…

PHIL: He's dead. everyone thinks he's dead. What difference will it make?

She stares at him.

LEAH: But he's not dead. He's alive.

CATHY: Come on Brian.

BRIAN: This is brilliant.

LEAH: No, Cathy, don't, stop, Cathy…?

But she goes, taking BRIAN with her. LEAH turns to PHIL.

Phil?

Phil?

Please!

Please, Phil!

But PHIL just walks away.

* * *

A Field. PHIL and LEAH, sitting.

Complete silence.

PHIL takes out a pack of Starburst.

Opens .

Has one.

Chews. Thinks.

He offers one to LEAH.

She takes it.

She begins to quietly cry.

Crying, she puts the sweet in her mouth and begins to chew.

PHIL puts his arm around her.

Suddenly she stops chewing and spits the sweet out.

Gets up, stares at PHIL.

Storms off.

PHIL: Leah?

Leah?

Four

A Street. JAN and MARK.

JAN: Gone?

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: Gone?

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: What, she's gone?

MARK: Yes.

Beat.

JAN: When?

MARK: Last week.

JAN: Where?

MARK: Dunno. No-one knows.

JAN: No-one knows?

MARK: Well, not no-one, I mean someone must, but no-one I know knows.

JAN: I mean she must've gone somewhere.

MARK: Moved schools. That's what people are saying.

JAN: Moved schools?

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: Just like that?

MARK: Just like that.

JAN: Without saying anything?

MARK: Without saying a thing

Pause.

JAN: Oh.

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: Oh.

MARK: Yeah.

JAN: Oh.

MARK: I know.

JAN: Does Phil know?

* * *

A Field. RICHARD sits with PHIL.

PHIL is not eating. He stares into the distance.

Silence.

Suddenly RICHARD gets up.

RICHARD: Phil, Phil, watch this! Phil, watch me, watch me, Phil!

He walks on his hands.

See? See what I'm doing? Can you see, Phil?

He collapses. PHIL doesn't even look at him.

RICHARD gets up, brushes himself down, and sits with Phil.

Silence.

When are you going to come back?

PHIL shrugs.

Come on, Phil. Come back to us. What do you want to sit up here for? In this field? Don't you get bored? Don't you get bored sitting here, everyday, doing nothing?

No answer.

Everyone's asking after you. You know that? Everyone's saying 'where's Phil?' 'what's Phil up to?' 'when's Phil going to come down from that stupid field?' 'wasn't it good when Phil was running the show?' What do you think about that? What do you think about everyone asking after you?

No answer.

Aren't you interested? Aren't you interested in what's going on?

No answer.

John Tate's found god. Yeah, Yeah I know. He's joined the Jesus Army, he runs round the shopping centre singing and trying to give people leaflets. Danny's doing work experience at a dentist's. He hates it. Can't stand the cavities, he says when they open their mouths sometimes it feels like you're going to fall in.

Pause.

Brian's on stronger and stronger medication. They caught him staring at a wall and drooling last week. It's either drooling or giggling. Keeps talking about earth. I think they're going to section him. Cathy doesn't care. She's too busy running things. You wouldn't believe how thing's have got, Phil. She's insane. She cut a first year's finger off, that's what they say anyway.

Doesn't that bother you? Aren't you even bothered?

No answer.

Lou's her best friend, now. Dangerous game. I feel sorry for Lou. And Jan and Mark have taken up shoplifting, they're really good at it, get you anything you want.

Phil?

Phil!

He shakes PHIL by the shoulders. Slowly PHIL looks at him.

You can't stay here forever. When are you going to come down?

PHIL says nothing. RICHARD lets go.

PHIL goes back to staring at nothing.

Pause.

Nice up here.

As I was coming up here there was this big wind of fluff. You know, this big wind of fluff, like dandelions, but smaller, and tons of them, like fluffs of wool or cotton, it was really weird, I mean it just came out of nowhere, this big wind of fluff, and for a minute I thought I was in a cloud, Phil. Imagine that. Imagine being inside a cloud, but with space inside it as well, for a second, as I was coming up here I felt like I was an alien in a cloud. But really felt it. And in that second, Phil, I knew that there was life on other planets. I knew we weren't alone in the universe, I didn't just think it or feel it, I knew it, I know it, it was as if the universe was suddenly shifting and giving me a glimpse, this vision that could see everything, just for a fraction of a heartbeat of a second. But I couldn't see who they were or what they were doing or how they were living.

How do you think they're living, Phil?

How do you think they're living?

No answer.

There are more stars in the universe that grains of sand on Brighton beach.

Pause.

Come back, Phil.

Phil?

No answer. They sit in silence.

End.

NOTES ON DNA

Single and group activity suggestions for teachers and students studying Dennis Kelly's play for GCSE English in order to get inside the playtext and gain a thorough understanding of its story, characters, style, structure and themes.

THE STORY

Why do you think Dennis Kelly chose to write this story and have a group of teenage characters tell it?

The story begins immediately after a small group of people have carried out a violent and disturbing act. Explain how the storyteller reveals the details of the unseen act through his characters.

Each character responds to what has happened just before the story begins in a different way – explain how their various types of response illustrate what sort of character they are.

CHARACTERS

Each person in the group should choose a character from *DNA* so that all characters are covered.

Firstly, note down facts about your character according to all the hard evidence you can find in the play text. You should look carefully at what other characters say about your character, as well as the scenes in which your character features.

Secondly, use your imagination to fill in the areas you don't know about your character, with as much detail as you can think of, you should include everything from their family backgrounds to what their favourite music might be. You will find clues in the conversation that Richard and Phil have in the final scene.

Do any characters say the same line more than once? What recurring traits can you discover in the way they behave and react from moment to moment?

What effect do you think this makes the play have on the listener?

Read through scenes three, seven and eleven carefully. These are large group scenes.

Take each scene and work out the status of the characters in the scene from highest to lowest. Note if their status shifts during the

scene. Then compare the status of characters and how it changes across all three of these scenes.

STRUCTURE

Grasping an understanding of the sequence of events

The play is divided into fourteen short scenes.

Create a large chart on the wall giving each scene a number from one to fourteen, running left to right. For each scene, list all the characters which appear in each scene. Make a note of who is present at the beginning of the scene, and who arrives into the scene, and who leaves.

Decide what the most crucial action is in each scene, and also the most crucial line of dialogue.

Give each scene a name according to the most important event which happens in it.

You'll notice the play is also divided into four parts. Label the four parts on your chart. Think about why Dennis Kelly decided to segment his play into these four parts. Give each part a title and a summary about what happens in each part.

SETTING

Locations in which the play takes place

On your wall display, colour code each scene with three colours, according to whether it takes place in the street, the field or the wood.

Discuss why certain actions happen in certain places.

Also, discuss the order and frequency that we return to these places.

Now find photos which could be the three locations the play takes place in.

Gather them together and put them on the wall around the chart.

Discuss why Dennis Kelly has chosen these sorts of locations for his story to unfold in.

How do the locations contribute to the effectiveness of the story?

You will have realised that the whole play takes place in outdoor public places – how does this decision affect the telling of the story?

Now find photos of the locations and characters which we don't see during the play, but which are vital in the story.

What is the effect of us not encountering these people, or seeing these places?

STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Some of the characters say a lot and some say very little.

Some characters prefer to speak and some prefer to listen.

Read through the play with everyone taking on the part of one character.

Observe closely the occasions when that character speaks a lot, and when they mainly listen. Discuss how this contributes to our understanding of their character.

Dennis Kelly has made precise choices about the particular words and phrases his characters speak to explain their actions. Analyse the type of speech patterns, descriptive words and phrases your character uses throughout the play.

Write down the most significant lines you think your character has. You should include both questions and statements. Choose lines which reveal something about their instincts, fears, expectations and assumptions. Choose sentences which demonstrate a change

in thought. Find phrases which are particularly commanding or decisive, which influence the way the story proceeds.

Explain the different types of language which are used to describe, argue and persuade. Think about where these characters' language comes from: is it a result of their culture, the gang they hang out with, their environment, their family, their race, or their local speech habits?

Leah has some significant speeches in the play. Read through her speeches in isolation from scenes two, four, six, eight and twelve. What she has to say isn't always directly connected to the main strands of the plot. Think about how her descriptions of the other things she talks about creates a suitable universe for this story to exist in. What impact does her discovery and understanding of the world around her have on her reactions to the events of the story? How does this 'close-up' on her consciousness affect our reception of the decisions that her peers make?

THEMES

When you have read the play, and discussed its story and characters, you'll be able to explore the themes the play presents.

What is the overall effect of conveying these themes through a live drama?

What questions and thoughts do you think will buzz around the audience's heads as they leave the theatre?

NEVER LET ME GO

KAZUO ISHIGURO

A NOVEL

by the author of REMAINS OF THE DAY



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Never Let Me Go
Kazuo Ishiguro

From the acclaimed author of “The Remains of the Day” and “When We Were Orphans,” a moving new novel that subtly reimagines our world and time in a haunting story of friendship and love.

As a child, Kathy–now thirty-one years old–lived at Hailsham, a private school in the scenic English countryside where the children were sheltered from the outside world, brought up to believe that they were special and that their well-being was crucial not only for themselves but for the society they would eventually enter. Kathy had long ago put this idyllic past behind her, but when two of her Hailsham friends come back into her life, she stops resisting the pull of memory.

And so, as her friendship with Ruth is rekindled, and as the feelings that long ago fueled her adolescent crush on Tommy begin to deepen into love, Kathy recalls their years at Hailsham. She describes happy scenes of boys and girls growing up together, unperturbed–even comforted–by their isolation. But she describes other scenes as well: of discord and misunderstanding that hint at a dark secret behind Hailsham's nurturing facade. With the dawning clarity of hindsight, the three friends are compelled to face the truth about their childhood–and about their lives now.

A tale of deceptive simplicity, “Never Let Me Go” slowly reveals an extraordinary emotional depth and resonance–and takes its place among Kazuo Ishiguro's finest work.

Never Let Me Go

A novel by

Kazuo Ishiguro

To Lorna and Naomi

England, late 1990s

Part One

Chapter One

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as "agitated," even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I am boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying "calm." I've developed a kind of instinct around donors. I know when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen to everything they have to say, and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it.

Anyway, I'm not making any big claims for myself. I know carers, working now, who are just as good and don't get half the credit. If you're one of them, I can understand how you might get resentful–about my bedsit, my car, above all, the way I get to pick and choose who I look after. And I'm a Hailsham student–which is enough by itself sometimes to get people's backs up. Kathy H., they say, she gets to pick and choose, and she always chooses her own kind: people from Hailsham, or one of the other privileged estates. No wonder she has a great record. I've heard it said enough, so I'm sure

you've heard it plenty more, and maybe there's something in it. But I'm not the first to be allowed to pick and choose, and I doubt if I'll be the last. And anyway, I've done my share of looking after donors brought up in every kind of place. By the time I finish, remember, I'll have done twelve years of this, and it's only for the last six they've let me choose.

And why shouldn't they? Carers aren't machines. You try and do your best for every donor, but in the end, it wears you down. You don't have unlimited patience and energy. So when you get a chance to choose, of course, you choose your own kind. That's natural. There's no way I could have gone on for as long as I have if I'd stopped feeling for my donors every step of the way. And anyway, if I'd never started choosing, how would I ever have got close again to Ruth and Tommy after all those years?

But these days, of course, there are fewer and fewer donors left who I remember, and so in practice, I haven't been choosing that much. As I say, the work gets a lot harder when you don't have that deeper link with the donor, and though I'll miss being a carer, it feels just about right to be finishing at last come the end of the year.

Ruth, incidentally, was only the third or fourth donor I got to choose. She already had a carer assigned to her at the time, and I remember it taking a bit of nerve on my part. But in the end I managed it, and the instant I saw her again, at that recovery centre in Dover, all our differences–while they didn't exactly vanish–seemed not nearly as important as all the other things: like the fact that we'd grown up together at Hailsham, the fact that we knew and remembered things no one else did. It's ever since then, I suppose, I started seeking out for my donors people from the past, and whenever I could, people from Hailsham.

There have been times over the years when I've tried to leave Hailsham behind, when I've told myself I shouldn't look back so much. But then there came a point when I just stopped resisting. It had to do with this particular donor I had once, in my third year as a carer; it was his reaction when I mentioned I was from Hailsham. He'd just come through his third donation, it hadn't gone well, and he must have known he wasn't going to make it. He could hardly breathe, but he looked towards me and said: “Hailsham. I bet that was a beautiful place.” Then the next morning, when I was making conversation to keep his mind off it all, and I asked where he'd grown up, he mentioned some place in Dorset and his face beneath the blotches went into a completely new kind of grimace. And I realised then how desperately he didn't want reminded. Instead, he wanted to hear about Hailsham.

So over the next five or six days, I told him whatever he wanted to know, and

he'd lie there, all hooked up, a gentle smile breaking through. He'd ask me about the big things and the little things. About our guardians, about how we each had our own collection chests under our beds, the football, the rounders, the little path that took you all round the outside of the main house, round all its nooks and crannies, the duck pond, the food, the view from the Art Room over the fields on a foggy morning. Sometimes he'd make me say things over and over; things I'd told him only the day before, he'd ask about like I'd never told him. "Did you have a sports pavilion?" "Which guardian was your special favourite?" At first I thought this was just the drugs, but then I realised his mind was clear enough. What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his. That was when I first understood, really understood, just how lucky we'd been–Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us.

Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I'll think: "Maybe that's it! I've found it! This actually is Hailsham!" Then I see it's impossible and I go on driving, my thoughts drifting on elsewhere. In particular, there are those pavilions. I spot them all over the country, standing on the far side of playing fields, little white prefab buildings with a row of windows unnaturally high up, tucked almost under the eaves. I think they built a whole lot like that in the fifties and sixties, which is probably when ours was put up. If I drive past one I keep looking over to it for as long as possible, and one day I'll crash the car like that, but I keep doing it. Not long ago I was driving through an empty stretch of Worcestershire and saw one beside a cricket ground so like ours at Hailsham I actually turned the car and went back for a second look.

We loved our sports pavilion, maybe because it reminded us of those sweet little cottages people always had in picture books when we were young. I can remember us back in the Juniors, pleading with guardians to hold the next lesson in the pavilion instead of the usual room. Then by the time we were in Senior 2–when we were twelve, going on thirteen–the pavilion had become the place to hide out with your best friends when you wanted to get away from the rest of Hailsham.

The pavilion was big enough to take two separate groups without them

bothering each other–in the summer, a third group could hang about out on the veranda. But ideally you and your friends wanted the place just to yourselves, so there was often jockeying and arguing. The guardians were always telling us to be civilised about it, but in practice, you needed to have some strong personalities in your group to stand a chance of getting the pavilion during a break or free period. I wasn't exactly the wilting type myself, but I suppose it was really because of Ruth we got in there as often as we did.

Usually we just spread ourselves around the chairs and benches–there'd be five of us, six if Jenny B. came along–and had a good gossip. There was a kind of conversation that could only happen when you were hidden away in the pavilion; we might discuss something that was worrying us, or we might end up screaming with laughter, or in a furious row. Mostly, it was a way to unwind for a while with your closest friends.

On the particular afternoon I'm now thinking of, we were standing up on stools and benches, crowding around the high windows. That gave us a clear view of the North Playing Field where about a dozen boys from our year and Senior 3 had gathered to play football. There was bright sunshine, but it must have been raining earlier that day because I can remember how the sun was glinting on the muddy surface of the grass.

Someone said we shouldn't be so obvious about watching, but we hardly moved back at all. Then Ruth said: “He doesn't suspect a thing. Look at him. He really doesn't suspect a thing.”

When she said this, I looked at her and searched for signs of disapproval about what the boys were going to do to Tommy. But the next second Ruth gave a little laugh and said: “The idiot!”

And I realised that for Ruth and the others, whatever the boys chose to do was pretty remote from us; whether we approved or not didn't come into it. We were gathered around the windows at that moment not because we relished the prospect of seeing Tommy get humiliated yet again, but just because we'd heard about this latest plot and were vaguely curious to watch it unfold. In those days, I don't think what the boys did amongst themselves went much deeper than that. For Ruth, for the others, it was that detached, and the chances are that's how it was for me too.

Or maybe I'm remembering it wrong. Maybe even then, when I saw Tommy rushing about that field, undisguised delight on his face to be accepted back in the fold again, about to play the game at which he so excelled, maybe I did feel a little stab of pain. What I do remember is that I noticed Tommy was wearing the light blue polo shirt he'd got in the Sales the previous month–the

one he was so proud of. I remember thinking: “He's really stupid, playing football in that. It'll get ruined, then how's he going to feel?” Out loud, I said, to no one in particular: “Tommy's got his shirt on. His favourite polo shirt.”

I don't think anyone heard me, because they were all laughing at Laura–the big clown in our group–mimicking one after the other the expressions that appeared on Tommy's face as he ran, waved, called, tackled. The other boys were all moving around the field in that deliberately languorous way they have when they're warming up, but Tommy, in his excitement, seemed already to be going full pelt. I said, louder this time: “He's going to be so sick if he ruins that shirt.” This time Ruth heard me, but she must have thought I'd meant it as some kind of joke, because she laughed half-heartedly, then made some quip of her own.

Then the boys had stopped kicking the ball about, and were standing in a pack in the mud, their chests gently rising and falling as they waited for the team picking to start. The two captains who emerged were from Senior 3, though everyone knew Tommy was a better player than any of that year. They tossed for first pick, then the one who'd won stared at the group.

“Look at him,” someone behind me said. “He's completely convinced he's going to be first pick. Just look at him!”

There was something comical about Tommy at that moment, something that made you think, well, yes, if he's going to be that daft, he deserves what's coming. The other boys were all pretending to ignore the picking process, pretending they didn't care where they came in the order. Some were talking quietly to each other, some re-tying their laces, others just staring down at their feet as they trammelled the mud. But Tommy was looking eagerly at the Senior 3 boy, as though his name had already been called.

Laura kept up her performance all through the team-picking, doing all the different expressions that went across Tommy's face: the bright eager one at the start; the puzzled concern when four picks had gone by and he still hadn't been chosen; the hurt and panic as it began to dawn on him what was really going on. I didn't keep glancing round at Laura, though, because I was watching Tommy; I only knew what she was doing because the others kept laughing and egging her on. Then when Tommy was left standing alone, and the boys all began sniggering, I heard Ruth say:

“It's coming. Hold it. Seven seconds. Seven, six, five...”

She never got there. Tommy burst into thunderous bellowing, and the boys, now laughing openly, started to run off towards the South Playing Field.

Tommy took a few strides after them–it was hard to say whether his instinct was to give angry chase or if he was panicked at being left behind. In any case he soon stopped and stood there, glaring after them, his face scarlet. Then he began to scream and shout, a nonsensical jumble of swear words and insults.

We'd all seen plenty of Tommy's tantrums by then, so we came down off our stools and spread ourselves around the room. We tried to start up a conversation about something else, but there was Tommy going on and on in the background, and although at first we just rolled our eyes and tried to ignore it, in the end–probably a full ten minutes after we'd first moved away–we were back up at the windows again.

The other boys were now completely out of view, and Tommy was no longer trying to direct his comments in any particular direction. He was just raving, flinging his limbs about, at the sky, at the wind, at the nearest fence post. Laura said he was maybe "rehearsing his Shakespeare." Someone else pointed out how each time he screamed something he'd raise one foot off the ground, pointing it outwards, "like a dog doing a pee." Actually, I'd noticed the same foot movement myself, but what had struck me was that each time he stamped the foot back down again, flecks of mud flew up around his shins. I thought again about his precious shirt, but he was too far away for me to see if he'd got much mud on it.

"I suppose it is a bit cruel," Ruth said, "the way they always work him up like that. But it's his own fault. If he learnt to keep his cool, they'd leave him alone."

"They'd still keep on at him," Hannah said. "Graham K.'s temper's just as bad, but that only makes them all the more careful with him. The reason they go for Tommy's because he's a layabout."

Then everyone was talking at once, about how Tommy never even tried to be creative, about how he hadn't even put anything in for the Spring Exchange. I suppose the truth was, by that stage, each of us was secretly wishing a guardian would come from the house and take him away. And although we hadn't had any part in this latest plan to rile Tommy, we had taken out ringside seats, and we were starting to feel guilty. But there was no sign of a guardian, so we just kept swapping reasons why Tommy deserved everything he got. Then when Ruth looked at her watch and said even though we still had time, we should get back to the main house, nobody argued.

Tommy was still going strong as we came out of the pavilion. The house was over to our left, and since Tommy was standing in the field straight ahead of

us, there was no need to go anywhere near him. In any case, he was facing the other way and didn't seem to register us at all. All the same, as my friends set off along the edge of the field, I started to drift over towards him. I knew this would puzzle the others, but I kept going–even when I heard Ruth's urgent whisper to me to come back.

I suppose Tommy wasn't used to being disturbed during his rages, because his first response when I came up to him was to stare at me for a second, then carry on as before. It was like he was doing Shakespeare and I'd come up onto the stage in the middle of his performance. Even when I said: "Tommy, your nice shirt. You'll get it all messed up," there was no sign of him having heard me.

So I reached forward and put a hand on his arm. Afterwards, the others thought he'd meant to do it, but I was pretty sure it was unintentional. His arms were still flailing about, and he wasn't to know I was about to put out my hand. Anyway, as he threw up his arm, he knocked my hand aside and hit the side of my face. It didn't hurt at all, but I let out a gasp, and so did most of the girls behind me.

That's when at last Tommy seemed to become aware of me, of the others, of himself, of the fact that he was there in that field, behaving the way he had been, and stared at me a bit stupidly.

"Tommy," I said, quite sternly. "There's mud all over your shirt."

"So what?" he mumbled. But even as he said this, he looked down and noticed the brown specks, and only just stopped himself crying out in alarm. Then I saw the surprise register on his face that I should know about his feelings for the polo shirt.

"It's nothing to worry about," I said, before the silence got humiliating for him. "It'll come off. If you can't get it off yourself, just take it to Miss Jody."

He went on examining his shirt, then said grumpily: "It's nothing to do with you anyway."

He seemed to regret immediately this last remark and looked at me sheepishly, as though expecting me to say something comforting back to him. But I'd had enough of him by now, particularly with the girls watching–and for all I knew, any number of others from the windows of the main house. So I turned away with a shrug and rejoined my friends.

Ruth put an arm around my shoulders as we walked away. "At least you got

him to pipe down," she said. "Are you okay? Mad animal."

Chapter Two

This was all a long time ago so I might have some of it wrong; but my memory of it is that my approaching Tommy that afternoon was part of a phase I was going through around that time–something to do with compulsively setting myself challenges–and I'd more or less forgotten all about it when Tommy stopped me a few days later.

I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical almost every week–usually up in Room 18 at the very top of the house–with stern Nurse Trisha, or Crow Face, as we called her. That sunny morning a crowd of us was going up the central staircase to be examined by her, while another lot she'd just finished with was on its way down. So the stairwell was filled with echoing noise, and I was climbing the steps head down, just following the heels of the person in front, when a voice near me went: "Kath!"

Tommy, who was in the stream coming down, had stopped dead on the stairs with a big open smile that immediately irritated me. A few years earlier maybe, if we ran into someone we were pleased to see, we'd put on that sort of look. But we were thirteen by then, and this was a boy running into a girl in a really public situation. I felt like saying: "Tommy, why don't you grow up?" But I stopped myself, and said instead: "Tommy, you're holding everyone up. And so am I."

He glanced upwards and sure enough the flight above was already grinding to a halt. For a second he looked panicked, then he squeezed himself right into the wall next to me, so it was just about possible for people to push past. Then he said:

"Kath, I've been looking all over for you. I meant to say sorry. I mean, I'm really, really sorry. I honestly didn't mean to hit you the other day. I wouldn't dream of hitting a girl, and even if I did, I'd never want to hit you. I'm really, really sorry."

"It's okay. An accident, that's all." I gave him a nod and made to move away. But Tommy said brightly:

"The shirt's all right now. It all washed out."

"That's good."

"It didn't hurt, did it? When I hit you?"

“Sure. Fractured skull. Concussion, the lot. Even Crow Face might notice it. That's if I ever get up there.”

“But seriously, Kath. No hard feelings, right? I'm awfully sorry. I am, honestly.”

At last I gave him a smile and said with no irony: “Look, Tommy, it was an accident and it's now one hundred percent forgotten. I don't hold it against you one tiny bit.”

He still looked unsure, but now some older students were pushing behind him, telling him to move. He gave me a quick smile and patted my shoulder, like he might do to a younger boy, and pushed his way into the flow. Then, as I began to climb, I heard him shout from below: “See you, Kath!”

I'd found the whole thing mildly embarrassing, but it didn't lead to any teasing or gossip; and I must admit, if it hadn't been for that encounter on the stairs, I probably wouldn't have taken the interest I did in Tommy's problems over the next several weeks.

I saw a few of the incidents myself. But mostly I heard about them, and when I did, I quizzed people until I'd got a more or less full account. There were more temper tantrums, like the time Tommy was supposed to have heaved over two desks in Room 14, spilling all the contents on the floor, while the rest of the class, having escaped onto the landing, barricaded the door to stop him coming out. There was the time Mr. Christopher had had to pin back his arms to stop him attacking Reggie D. during football practice. Everyone could see, too, when the Senior 2 boys went on their fields run, Tommy was the only one without a running partner. He was a good runner, and would quickly open up ten, fifteen yards between him and the rest, maybe thinking this would disguise the fact that no one wanted to run with him. Then there were rumours almost every day of pranks that had been played on him. A lot of these were the usual stuff–weird things in his bed, a worm in his cereal–but some of it sounded pointlessly nasty: like the time someone cleaned a toilet with his toothbrush so it was waiting for him with shit all over the bristles. His size and strength–and I suppose that temper–meant no one tried actual physical bullying, but from what I remember, for a couple of months at least, these incidents kept coming. I thought sooner or later someone would start saying it had gone too far, but it just kept on, and no one said anything.

I tried to bring it up once myself, in the dorm after lights-out. In the Seniors, we were down to six per dorm, so it was just our little group, and we often

had our most intimate conversations lying in the dark before we fell asleep. You could talk about things there you wouldn't dream of talking about any other place, not even in the pavilion. So one night I brought up Tommy. I didn't say much; I just summed up what had been happening to him and said it wasn't really very fair. When I'd finished, there was a funny sort of silence hanging in the dark, and I realised everyone was waiting for Ruth's response–which was usually what happened whenever something a bit awkward came up. I kept waiting, then I heard a sigh from Ruth's side of the room, and she said:

"You've got a point, Kathy. It's not nice. But if he wants it to stop, he's got to change his own attitude. He didn't have a thing for the Spring Exchange. And has he got anything for next month? I bet he hasn't."

I should explain a bit here about the Exchanges we had at Hailsham. Four times a year–spring, summer, autumn, winter–we had a kind of big exhibition-cum-sale of all the things we'd been creating in the three months since the last Exchange. Paintings, drawings, pottery; all sorts of "sculptures" made from whatever was the craze of the day–bashed-up cans, maybe, or bottle tops stuck onto cardboard. For each thing you put in, you were paid in Exchange Tokens–the guardians decided how many your particular masterpiece merited–and then on the day of the Exchange you went along with your tokens and "bought" the stuff you liked. The rule was you could only buy work done by students in your own year, but that still gave us plenty to choose from, since most of us could get pretty prolific over a three-month period.

Looking back now, I can see why the Exchanges became so important to us. For a start, they were our only means, aside from the Sales–the Sales were something else, which I'll come to later–of building up a collection of personal possessions. If, say, you wanted to decorate the walls around your bed, or wanted something to carry around in your bag and place on your desk from room to room, then you could find it at the Exchange. I can see now, too, how the Exchanges had a more subtle effect on us all. If you think about it, being dependent on each other to produce the stuff that might become your private treasures–that's bound to do things to your relationships. The Tommy business was typical. A lot of the time, how you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at "creating."

Ruth and I often found ourselves remembering these things a few years ago, when I was caring for her down at the recovery centre in Dover.

"It's all part of what made Hailsham so special," she said once. "The way we

were encouraged to value each other's work."

"True," I said. "But sometimes, when I think about the Ex-changes now, a lot of it seems a bit odd. The poetry, for instance. I remember we were allowed to hand in poems, instead of a drawing or a painting. And the strange thing was, we all thought that was fine, we thought that made sense."

"Why shouldn't it? Poetry's important."

"But we're talking about nine-year-old stuff, funny little lines, all misspelt, in exercise books. We'd spend our precious tokens on an exercise book full of that stuff rather than on something really nice for around our beds. If we were so keen on a person's poetry, why didn't we just borrow it and copy it down ourselves any old afternoon? But you remember how it was. An Exchange would come along and we'd be standing there torn between Susie K.'s poems and those giraffes Jackie used to make."

"Jackie's giraffes," Ruth said with a laugh. "They were so beautiful. I used to have one."

We were having this conversation on a fine summer evening, sitting out on the little balcony of her recovery room. It was a few months after her first donation, and now she was over the worst of it, I'd always time my evening visits so that we'd be able to spend a half hour or so out there, watching the sun go down over the rooftops. You could see lots of aerials and satellite dishes, and sometimes, right over in the distance, a glistening line that was the sea. I'd bring mineral water and biscuits, and we'd sit there talking about anything that came into our heads. The centre Ruth was in that time, it's one of my favourites, and I wouldn't mind at all if that's where I ended up. The recovery rooms are small, but they're well-designed and comfortable. Everything–the walls, the floor–has been done in gleaming white tiles, which the centre keeps so clean when you first go in it's almost like entering a hall of mirrors. Of course, you don't exactly see yourself reflected back loads of times, but you almost think you do. When you lift an arm, or when someone sits up in bed, you can feel this pale, shadowy movement all around you in the tiles. Anyway, Ruth's room at that centre, it also had these big glass sliding panels, so she could easily see the outside from her bed. Even with her head on the pillow she'd see a big lot of sky, and if it was warm enough, she could get all the fresh air she wanted by stepping out onto the balcony. I loved visiting her there, loved those meandering talks we had, through the summer to the early autumn, sitting on that balcony together, talking about Hailsham, the Cottages, whatever else drifted into our thoughts.

"What I'm saying," I went on, "is that when we were that age, when we were

eleven, say, we really weren't interested in each other's poems at all. But remember, someone like Christy? Christy had this great reputation for poetry, and we all looked up to her for it. Even you, Ruth, you didn't dare boss Christy around. All because we thought she was great at poetry. But we didn't know a thing about poetry. We didn't care about it. It's strange."

But Ruth didn't get my point–or maybe she was deliberately avoiding it. Maybe she was determined to remember us all as more sophisticated than we were. Or maybe she could sense where my talk was leading, and didn't want us to go that way. Anyway, she let out a long sigh and said:

"We all thought Christy's poems were so good. But I wonder how they'd look to us now. I wish we had some here, I'd love to see what we'd think." Then she laughed and said: "I have still got some poems by Peter B. But that was much later, when we were in Senior 4. I must have fancied him. I can't think why else I'd have bought his poems. They're just hysterically daft. Takes himself so seriously. But Christy, she was good, I remember she was. It's funny, she went right off poems when she started her painting. And she was nowhere near as good at that."

But let me get back to Tommy. What Ruth said that time in our dorm after lights-out, about how Tommy had brought all his problems on himself, probably summed up what most people at Hailsham thought at that time. But it was when she said what she did that it occurred to me, as I lay there, that this whole notion of his deliberately not trying was one that had been doing the rounds from as far back as the Juniors. And it came home to me, with a kind of chill, that Tommy had been going through what he'd been going through not just for weeks or months, but for years.

Tommy and I talked about all this not so long ago, and his own account of how his troubles began confirmed what I was thinking that night. According to him, it had all started one afternoon in one of Miss Geraldine's art classes. Until that day, Tommy told me, he'd always quite enjoyed painting. But then that day in Miss Geraldine's class, Tommy had done this particular watercolour–of an elephant standing in some tall grass–and that was what started it all off. He'd done it, he claimed, as a kind of joke. I quizzed him a lot on this point and I suspect the truth was that it was like a lot of things at that age: you don't have any clear reason, you just do it. You do it because you think it might get a laugh, or because you want to see if it'll cause a stir. And when you're asked to explain it afterwards, it doesn't seem to make any sense. We've all done things like that. Tommy didn't quite put it this way, but I'm sure that's how it happened.

Anyway, he did his elephant, which was exactly the sort of picture a kid three

years younger might have done. It took him no more than twenty minutes and it got a laugh, sure enough, though not quite the sort he'd expected. Even so, it might not have led to anything–and this is a big irony, I suppose–if Miss Geraldine hadn't been taking the class that day.

Miss Geraldine was everyone's favourite guardian when we were that age. She was gentle, soft-spoken, and always comforted you when you needed it, even when you'd done something bad, or been told off by another guardian. If she ever had to tell you off herself, then for days afterwards she'd give you lots of extra attention, like she owed you something. It was unlucky for Tommy that it was Miss Geraldine taking art that day and not, say, Mr. Robert or Miss Emily herself–the head guardian–who often took art. Had it been either of those two, Tommy would have got a bit of a telling off, he could have done his smirk, and the worst the others would have thought was that it was a feeble joke. He might even have had some students think him a right clown. But Miss Geraldine being Miss Geraldine, it didn't go that way. Instead, she did her best to look at the picture with kindness and understanding. And probably guessing Tommy was in danger of getting stick from the others, she went too far the other way, actually finding things to praise, pointing them out to the class. That was how the resentment started.

"After we left the room," Tommy remembered, "that's when I first heard them talking. And they didn't care I could hear."

My guess is that from some time before he did that elephant, Tommy had had the feeling he wasn't keeping up–that his painting in particular was like that of students much younger than him–and he'd been covering up the best he could by doing deliberately childish pictures. But after the elephant painting, the whole thing had been brought into the open, and now everyone was watching to see what he did next. It seems he did make an effort for a while, but he'd no sooner have started on something, there'd be sneers and giggles all around him. In fact, the harder he tried, the more laughable his efforts turned out. So before long Tommy had gone back to his original defence, producing work that seemed deliberately childish, work that said he couldn't care less. From there, the thing had got deeper and deeper.

For a while he'd only had to suffer during art lessons–though that was often enough, because we did a lot of art in the Juniors. But then it grew bigger. He got left out of games, boys refused to sit next to him at dinner, or pretended not to hear if he said anything in his dorm after lights-out. At first it wasn't so relentless. Months could go by without incident, he'd think the whole thing was behind him, then something he did–or one of his enemies, like Arthur H.–would get it all going again.

I'm not sure when the big temper tantrums started. My own memory of it is that Tommy was always known for his temper, even in the Infants, but he claimed to me they only began after the teasing got bad. Anyway, it was those temper tantrums that really got people going, escalating everything, and around the time I'm talking about–the summer of our Senior 2, when we were thirteen–that was when the persecution reached its peak.

Then it all stopped, not overnight, but rapidly enough. I was, as I say, watching the situation closely around then, so I saw the signs before most of the others. It started with a period–it might have been a month, maybe longer–when the pranks went on pretty steadily, but Tommy failed to lose his temper. Sometimes I could see he was close to it, but he somehow controlled himself; other times, he'd quietly shrug, or react like he hadn't noticed a thing. At first these responses caused disappointment; maybe people were resentful, even, like he'd let them down. Then gradually, people got bored and the pranks became more half-hearted, until one day it struck me there hadn't been any for over a week.

This wouldn't necessarily have been so significant by itself, but I'd spotted other changes. Little things, like Alexander J. and Peter N. walking across the courtyard with him towards the fields, the three of them chatting quite naturally; a subtle but clear difference in people's voices when his name got mentioned. Then once, towards the end of an afternoon break, a group of us were sitting on the grass quite close to the South Playing Field where the boys, as usual, were playing their football. I was joining in our conversation, but keeping an eye on Tommy, who I noticed was right at the heart of the game. At one point he got tripped, and picking himself up, placed the ball on the ground to take the free kick himself. As the boys spread out in anticipation, I saw Arthur H.–one of his biggest tormentors–a few yards behind Tommy's back, begin mimicking him, doing a daft version of the way Tommy was standing over the ball, hands on hips. I watched carefully, but none of the others took up Arthur's cue. They must all have seen, because all eyes were looking towards Tommy, waiting for his kick, and Arthur was right behind him–but no one was interested. Tommy floated the ball across the grass, the game went on, and Arthur H. didn't try anything else.

I was pleased about all these developments, but also mystified. There'd been no real change in Tommy's work–his reputation for “creativity” was as low as ever. I could see that an end to the tantrums was a big help, but what seemed to be the key factor was harder to put your finger on. There was something about Tommy himself–the way he carried himself, the way he looked people in the face and talked in his open, good-natured way–that was different from before, and which had in turn changed the attitudes of those around him. But what had brought all this on wasn't clear.

I was mystified, and decided to probe him a bit the next time we could talk in private. The chance came along before long, when I was lining up for lunch and spotted him a few places ahead in the queue.

I suppose this might sound odd, but at Hailsham, the lunch queue was one of the better places to have a private talk. It was something to do with the acoustics in the Great Hall; all the hubbub and the high ceilings meant that so long as you lowered your voices, stood quite close, and made sure your neighbours were deep in their own chat, you had a fair chance of not being overheard. In any case, we weren't exactly spoilt for choice. "Quiet" places were often the worst, because there was always someone likely to be passing within earshot. And as soon as you looked like you were trying to sneak off for a secret talk, the whole place seemed to sense it within minutes, and you'd have no chance.

So when I saw Tommy a few places ahead of me, I waved him over–the rule being that though you couldn't jump the queue going forwards it was fine to go back. He came over with a delighted smile, and we stood together for a moment without saying much–not out of awkwardness, but because we were waiting for any interest aroused by Tommy's moving back to fade. Then I said to him:

"You seem much happier these days, Tommy. Things seem to be going much better for you."

"You notice everything, don't you, Kath?" He said this completely without sarcasm. "Yeah, everything's all right. I'm getting on all right."

"So what's happened? Did you find God or something?"

"God?" Tommy was lost for a second. Then he laughed and said: "Oh, I see. You're talking about me not... getting so angry."

"Not just that, Tommy. You've turned things around for yourself. I've been watching. So that's why I was asking."

Tommy shrugged. "I've grown up a bit, I suppose. And maybe everyone else has too. Can't keep on with the same stuff all the time. Gets boring."

I said nothing, but just kept looking right at him, until he gave another little laugh and said: "Kath, you're so nosy. Okay, I suppose there is something. Something that happened. If you want, I'll tell you."

“Well, go on then.”

“I'll tell you, Kath, but you mustn't spread it, all right? A couple of months back, I had this talk with Miss Lucy. And I felt much better afterwards. It's hard to explain. But she said something, and it all felt much better.”

“So what did she say?”

“Well... The thing is, it might sound strange. It did to me at first. What she said was that if I didn't want to be creative, if I really didn't feel like it, that was perfectly all right. Nothing wrong with it, she said.”

“That's what she told you?”

Tommy nodded, but I was already turning away.

“That's just rubbish, Tommy. If you're going to play stupid games, I can't be bothered.”

I was genuinely angry, because I thought he was lying to me, just when I deserved to be taken into his confidence. Spotting a girl I knew a few places back, I went over to her, leaving Tommy standing. I could see he was bewildered and crestfallen, but after the months I'd spent worrying about him, I felt betrayed, and didn't care how he felt. I chatted with my friend–I think it was Matilda–as cheerfully as possible, and hardly looked his way for the rest of the time we were in the queue.

But as I was carrying my plate to the tables, Tommy came up behind me and said quickly:

“Kath, I wasn't trying to pull your leg, if that's what you think. It's what happened. I'll tell you about it if you give me half a chance.”

“Don't talk rubbish, Tommy.”

“Kath, I'll tell you about it. I'll be down at the pond after lunch. If you come down there, I'll tell you.”

I gave him a reproachful look and walked off without responding, but already, I suppose, I'd begun to entertain the possibility that he wasn't, after all, making it up about Miss Lucy. And by the time I sat down with my friends, I was trying to figure out how I could sneak off afterwards down to the pond without getting everyone curious.

Chapter Three

The pond lay to the south of the house. To get there you went out the back entrance, and down the narrow twisting path, pushing past the overgrown bracken that, in the early autumn, would still be blocking your way. Or if there were no guardians around, you could take a short cut through the rhubarb patch. Anyway, once you came out to the pond, you'd find a tranquil atmosphere waiting, with ducks and bulrushes and pond-weed. It wasn't, though, a good place for a discreet conversation–not nearly as good as the lunch queue. For a start you could be clearly seen from the house. And the way the sound travelled across the water was hard to predict; if people wanted to eavesdrop, it was the easiest thing to walk down the outer path and crouch in the bushes on the other side of the pond. But since it had been me that had cut him off in the lunch queue, I supposed I had to make the best of it. It was well into October by then, but the sun was out that day and I decided I could just about make out I'd gone strolling aimlessly down there and happened to come across Tommy.

Maybe because I was keen to keep up this impression–though I'd no idea if anyone was actually watching–I didn't try and sit down when I eventually found him seated on a large flat rock not far from the water's edge. It must have been a Friday or a weekend, because I remember we had on our own clothes. I don't remember exactly what Tommy was wearing–probably one of the raggy football shirts he wore even when the weather was chilly–but I definitely had on the maroon track suit top that zipped up the front, which I'd got at a Sale in Senior 1. I walked round him and stood with my back to the water, facing the house, so that I'd see if people started gathering at the windows. Then for a few minutes we talked about nothing in particular, just like the lunch-queue business hadn't happened. I'm not sure if it was for Tommy's benefit, or for any onlookers', but I'd kept my posture looking very provisional, and at one point made a move to carry on with my stroll. I saw a kind of panic cross Tommy's face then, and I immediately felt sorry to have teased him, even though I hadn't meant to. So I said, like I'd just remembered:

"By the way, what was that you were saying earlier on? About Miss Lucy telling you something?"

"Oh..." Tommy gazed past me to the pond, pretending too this was a topic he'd forgotten all about. "Miss Lucy. Oh that."

Miss Lucy was the most sporting of the guardians at Hailsham, though you might not have guessed it from her appearance. She had a squat, almost

bulldoggy figure, and her odd black hair, when it grew, grew upwards so it never covered her ears or chunky neck. But she was really strong and fit, and even when we were older, most of us–even the boys–couldn't keep up with her on a fields run. She was superb at hockey, and could even hold her own with the Senior boys on the football pitch. I remember watching once when James B. tried to trip her as she went past him with the ball, and he was the one sent flying instead. When we'd been in the Juniors, she'd never been someone like Miss Geraldine who you turned to when you were upset. In fact, she didn't tend to speak much to us when we were younger. It was only in the Seniors, really, we'd started to appreciate her brisk style.

"You were saying something," I said to Tommy. "Something about Miss Lucy telling you it was all right not to be creative."

"She did say something like that. She said I shouldn't worry. Not mind what other people were saying. A couple of months ago now. Maybe longer."

Over at the house, a few Juniors had stopped at one of the upstairs windows and were watching us. But I now crouched down in front of Tommy, no longer pretending anything.

"Tommy, that's a funny thing for her to say. Are you sure you got it right?"

"Of course I got it right." His voice lowered suddenly. "She didn't just say it once. We were in her room and she gave me a whole talk about it."

When she'd first asked him to come to her study after Art Appreciation, Tommy explained, he'd expected yet another lecture about how he should try harder–the sort of thing he'd had already from various guardians, including Miss Emily herself. But as they were walking from the house towards the Orangery–where the guardians had their living quarters–Tommy began to get an inkling this was something different. Then, once he was seated in Miss Lucy's easy chair–she'd remained standing by the window–she asked him to tell her the whole story, as he saw it, of what had been happening to him. So Tommy had begun going through it all. But before he was even half way she'd suddenly broken in and started to talk herself. She'd known a lot of students, she'd said, who'd for a long time found it very difficult to be creative: painting, drawing, poetry, none of it going right for years. Then one day they'd turned a corner and blossomed. It was quite possible Tommy was one of these.

Tommy had heard all of this before, but there was something about Miss Lucy's manner that made him keep listening hard.

“I could tell,” he told me, “she was leading up to something. Something different.”

Sure enough, she was soon saying things Tommy found difficult to follow. But she kept repeating it until eventually he began to understand. If Tommy had genuinely tried, she was saying, but he just couldn't be very creative, then that was quite all right, he wasn't to worry about it. It was wrong for anyone, whether they were students or guardians, to punish him for it, or put pressure on him in any way. It simply wasn't his fault. And when Tommy had protested it was all very well Miss Lucy saying this, but everyone did think it was his fault, she'd given a sigh and looked out of her window. Then she'd said:

“It may not help you much. But just you remember this. There's at least one person here at Hailsham who believes otherwise. At least one person who believes you're a very good student, as good as any she's ever come across, never mind how creative you are.”

“She wasn't having you on, was she?” I asked Tommy. “It wasn't some clever way of telling you off?”

“It definitely wasn't anything like that. Anyway...” For the first time he seemed worried about being overheard and glanced over his shoulder towards the house. The Juniors at the window had lost interest and gone; some girls from our year were walking towards the pavilion, but they were still a good way off. Tommy turned back to me and said almost in a whisper:

“Anyway, when she said all this, she was shaking.”

“What do you mean, shaking?”

“Shaking. With rage. I could see her. She was furious. But furious deep inside.”

“Who at?”

“I wasn't sure. Not at me anyway, that was the most important thing!” He gave a laugh, then became serious again. “I don't know who she was angry with. But she was angry all right.”

I stood up again because my calves were aching. “It's pretty weird, Tommy.”

“Funny thing is, this talk with her, it did help. Helped a lot. When you were saying earlier on, about how things seemed better for me now. Well, it's

because of that. Because afterwards, thinking about what she'd said, I realised she was right, that it wasn't my fault. Okay, I hadn't handled it well. But deep down, it wasn't my fault. That's what made the difference. And whenever I felt rocky about it, I'd catch sight of her walking about, or I'd be in one of her lessons, and she wouldn't say anything about our talk, but I'd look at her, and she'd sometimes see me and give me a little nod. And that's all I needed. You were asking earlier if something had happened. Well, that's what happened. But Kath, listen, don't breathe a word to anyone about this, right?"

I nodded, but asked: "Did she make you promise that?"

"No, no, she didn't make me promise anything. But you're not to breathe a word. You've got to really promise."

"All right." The girls heading for the pavilion had spotted me and were waving and calling. I waved back and said to Tommy: "I'd better go. We can talk more about it soon."

But Tommy ignored this. "There's something else," he went on. "Something else she said I can't quite figure out. I was going to ask you about it. She said we weren't being taught enough, something like that."

"Taught enough? You mean she thinks we should be studying even harder than we are?"

"No, I don't think she meant that. What she was talking about was, you know, about us. What's going to happen to us one day. Donations and all that."

"But we have been taught about all that," I said. "I wonder what she meant. Does she think there are things we haven't been told yet?"

Tommy thought for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't think she meant it like that. She just thinks we aren't taught about it enough. Because she said she'd a good mind to talk to us about it herself."

"About what exactly?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe I got it all wrong, Kath, I don't know. Maybe she was meaning something else completely, something else to do with me not being creative. I don't really understand it."

Tommy was looking at me as though he expected me to come up with an

answer. I went on thinking for a few seconds, then said:

“Tommy, think back carefully. You said she got angry...”

“Well, that's what it looked like. She was quiet, but she was shaking.”

“All right, whatever. Let's say she got angry. Was it when she got angry she started to say this other stuff? About how we weren't taught enough about donations and the rest of it?”

“I suppose so...”

“Now, Tommy, think. Why did she bring it up? She's talking about you and you not creating. Then suddenly she starts up about this other stuff. What's the link? Why did she bring up donations? What's that got to do with you being creative?”

“I don't know. There must have been some reason, I suppose. Maybe one thing reminded her of the other. Kath, you're getting really worked up about this yourself now.”

I laughed, because he was right: I'd been frowning, completely lost in my thoughts. The fact was, my mind was going in various directions at once. And Tommy's account of his talk with Miss Lucy had reminded me of something, perhaps a whole series of things, little incidents from the past to do with Miss Lucy that had puzzled me at the time.

“It's just that...” I stopped and sighed. “I can't quite put it right, not even to myself. But all this, what you're saying, it sort of fits with a lot of other things that are puzzling. I keep thinking about all these things. Like why Madame comes and takes away our best pictures. What's that for exactly?”

“It's for the Gallery.”

“But what is her gallery? She keeps coming here and taking away our best work. She must have stacks of it by now. I asked Miss Geraldine once how long Madame's been coming here, and she said for as long as Hailsham's been here. What is this gallery? Why should she have a gallery of things done by us?”

“Maybe she sells them. Outside, out there, they sell everything.”

I shook my head. “That can't be it. It's got something to do with what Miss Lucy said to you. About us, about how one day we'll start giving donations. I

don't know why, but I've had this feeling for some time now, that it's all linked in, though I can't figure out how. I'll have to go now, Tommy. Let's not tell anyone yet, about what we've been saying."

"No. And don't tell anyone about Miss Lucy."

"But will you tell me if she says anything else to you like that?"

Tommy nodded, then glanced around him again. "Like you say, you'd better go, Kath. Someone's going to hear us soon."

The gallery Tommy and I were discussing was something we'd all of us grown up with. Everyone talked about it as though it existed, though in truth none of us knew for sure that it did. I'm sure I was pretty typical in not being able to remember how or when I'd first heard about it. Certainly, it hadn't been from the guardians: they never mentioned the Gallery, and there was an unspoken rule that we should never even raise the subject in their presence.

I'd suppose now it was something passed down through the different generations of Hailsham students. I remember a time when I could only have been five or six, sitting at a low table beside Amanda C., our hands clammy with modelling clay. I can't remember if there were other children with us, or which guardian was in charge. All I remember is Amanda C.–who was a year older than me–looking at what I was making and exclaiming: "That's really, really good, Kathy! That's so good! I bet that'll get in the Gallery!"

I must by then have already known about the Gallery, because I remember the excitement and pride when she said that–and then the next moment, thinking to myself: "That's ridiculous. None of us are good enough for the Gallery yet."

As we got older, we went on talking about the Gallery. If you wanted to praise someone's work, you'd say: "That's good enough for the Gallery." And after we discovered irony, whenever we came across any laughably bad work, we'd go: "Oh yes! Straight to the Gallery with that one!"

But did we really believe in the Gallery? Today, I'm not sure. As I've said, we never mentioned it to the guardians and looking back, it seems to me this was a rule we imposed on ourselves, as much as anything the guardians had decided. There's an instance I can remember from when we were about eleven. We were in Room 7 on a sunny winter's morning. We'd just finished Mr. Roger's class, and a few of us had stayed on to chat with him. We were sitting up on our desks, and I can't remember exactly what we were talking about, but Mr. Roger, as usual, was making us laugh and laugh. Then Carole H.

had said, through her giggles: “You might even get it picked for the Gallery!” She immediately put her hand over her mouth with an “oops!” and the atmosphere remained light-hearted; but we all knew, Mr. Roger included, that she'd made a mistake. Not a disaster, exactly: it would have been much the same had one of us let slip a rude word, or used a guardian's nickname to his or her face. Mr. Roger smiled indulgently, as though to say: “Let it pass, we'll pretend you never said that,” and we carried on as before.

If for us the Gallery remained in a hazy realm, what was solid enough fact was Madame's turning up usually twice–sometimes three or four times–each year to select from our best work. We called her “Madame” because she was French or Belgian–there was a dispute as to which–and that was what the guardians always called her. She was a tall, narrow woman with short hair, probably quite young still, though at the time we wouldn't have thought of her as such. She always wore a sharp grey suit, and unlike the gardeners, unlike the drivers who brought in our supplies–unlike virtually anyone else who came in from outside–she wouldn't talk to us and kept us at a distance with her chilly look. For years we thought of her as “snooty,” but then one night, around when we were eight, Ruth came up with another theory.

“She's scared of us,” she declared.

We were lying in the dark in our dorm. In the Juniors, we were fifteen to a dorm, so didn't tend to have the sort of long intimate conversations we did once we got to the Senior dorms. But most of what became our “group” had beds close together by then, and we were already getting the habit of talking into the night.

“What do you mean, scared of us?” someone asked. “How can she be scared of us? What could we do to her?”

“I don't know,” Ruth said. “I don't know, but I'm sure she is. I used to think she was just snooty, but it's something else, I'm sure of it now. Madame's scared of us.”

We argued about this on and off for the next few days. Most of us didn't agree with Ruth, but then that just made her all the more determined to prove she was right. So in the end we settled on a plan to put her theory to the test the next time Madame came to Hailsham.

Although Madame's visits were never announced, it was always pretty obvious when she was due. The lead-up to her arrival began weeks before, with the guardians sifting through all our work–our paintings, sketches, pottery, all our essays and poems. This usually went on for at least a

fortnight, by the end of which four or five items from each Junior and Senior year would have ended up in the billiards room. The billiards room would get closed during this period, but if you stood on the low wall of the terrace outside, you'd be able to see through the windows the haul of stuff getting larger and larger. Once the guardians started laying it out neatly, on tables and easels, like a miniature version of one of our Exchanges, then you knew Madame would be coming within a day or two.

That autumn I'm now talking about, we needed to know not just the day, but the precise moment Madame turned up, since she often stayed no longer than an hour or two. So as soon as we saw the stuff getting displayed in the billiards room, we decided to take turns keeping look-out.

This was a task made much easier by the way the grounds were laid out. Hailsham stood in a smooth hollow with fields rising on all sides. That meant that from almost any of the classroom windows in the main house–and even from the pavilion–you had a good view of the long narrow road that came down across the fields and arrived at the main gate. The gate itself was still a fair distance off, and any vehicle would then have to take the gravelled drive, going past shrubs and flowerbeds, before at last reaching the courtyard in front of the main house. Days could sometimes go by without us seeing a vehicle coming down that narrow road, and the ones that did were usually vans or lorries bringing supplies, gardeners or workmen. A car was a rarity, and the sight of one in the distance was sometimes enough to cause bedlam during a class.

The afternoon Madame's car was spotted coming across the fields, it was windy and sunny, with a few storm clouds starting to gather. We were in Room 9–on the first floor at the front of the house–and when the whisper went around, poor Mr. Frank, who was trying to teach us spelling, couldn't understand why we'd suddenly got so restless.

The plan we'd come up with to test Ruth's theory was very simple: we–the six of us in on it–would lie in wait for Madame somewhere, then "swarm out" all around her, all at once. We'd all remain perfectly civilised and just go on our way, but if we timed it right, and she was taken off-guard, we'd see–Ruth insisted–that she really was afraid of us.

Our main worry was that we just wouldn't get an opportunity during the short time she was at Hailsham. But as Mr. Frank's class drew to an end, we could see Madame, directly below in the courtyard, parking her car. We had a hurried conference out on the landing, then followed the rest of the class down the stairs and loitered just inside the main doorway. We could see out into the bright courtyard, where Madame was still sitting behind the wheel,

rummaging in her briefcase. Eventually she emerged from the car and came towards us, dressed in her usual grey suit, her briefcase held tightly to herself in both arms. At a signal from Ruth we all sauntered out, moving straight for her, but like we were all in a dream. Only when she came to a stiff halt did we each murmur: “Excuse me, Miss,” and separate.

I'll never forget the strange change that came over us the next instant. Until that point, this whole thing about Madame had been, if not a joke exactly, very much a private thing we'd wanted to settle among ourselves. We hadn't thought much about how Madame herself, or anyone else, would come into it. What I mean is, until then, it had been a pretty light-hearted matter, with a bit of a dare element to it. And it wasn't even as though Madame did anything other than what we predicted she'd do: she just froze and waited for us to pass by. She didn't shriek, or even let out a gasp. But we were all so keenly tuned in to picking up her response, and that's probably why it had such an effect on us. As she came to a halt, I glanced quickly at her face–as did the others, I'm sure. And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be suppressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her. And though we just kept on walking, we all felt it; it was like we'd walked from the sun right into chilly shade. Ruth had been right: Madame was afraid of us. But she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. We hadn't been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders.

By the time we'd crossed the courtyard and reached the grass, we were a very different group from the one that had stood about excitedly waiting for Madame to get out of her car. Hannah looked ready to burst into tears. Even Ruth looked really shaken. Then one of us–I think it was Laura–said:

“If she doesn't like us, why does she want our work? Why doesn't she just leave us alone? Who asks her to come here anyway?”

No one answered, and we carried on over to the pavilion, not saying anything more about what had happened.

Thinking back now, I can see we were just at that age when we knew a few things about ourselves–about who we were, how we were different from our guardians, from the people outside–but hadn't yet understood what any of it meant. I'm sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours that day; similar if not in the actual details, then inside, in the feelings. Because it doesn't really matter how well your guardians try to prepare you: all the talks, videos, discussions, warnings, none of that can really bring it home. Not when you're eight years old, and you're all together in a place like Hailsham; when you've got guardians like the ones we had; when the

gardeners and the delivery men joke and laugh with you and call you "sweetheart."

All the same, some of it must go in somewhere. It must go in, because by the time a moment like that comes along, there's a part of you that's been waiting. Maybe from as early as when you're five or six, there's been a whisper going at the back of your head, saying: "One day, maybe not so long from now, you'll get to know how it feels." So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realise that you really are different to them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you–of how you were brought into this world and why–and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange.

Chapter Four

I won't be a carer any more come the end of the year, and though I've got a lot out of it, I have to admit I'll welcome the chance to rest–to stop and think and remember. I'm sure it's at least partly to do with that, to do with preparing for the change of pace, that I've been getting this urge to order all these old memories. What I really wanted, I suppose, was to get straight all the things that happened between me and Tommy and Ruth after we grew up and left Hailsham. But I realise now just how much of what occurred later came out of our time at Hailsham, and that's why I want first to go over these earlier memories quite carefully. Take all this curiosity about Madame, for instance. At one level, it was just us kids larking about. But at another, as you'll see, it was the start of a process that kept growing and growing over the years until it came to dominate our lives.

After that day, mention of Madame became, while not taboo exactly, pretty rare among us. And this was something that soon spread beyond our little group to just about all the students in our year. We were, I'd say, as curious as ever about her, but we all sensed that to probe any further–about what she did with our work, whether there really was a gallery–would get us into territory we weren't ready for yet.

The topic of the Gallery, though, still cropped up every once in a while, so that when a few years later Tommy started telling me beside the pond about his odd talk with Miss Lucy, I found something tugging away at my memory. It was only afterwards, when I'd left him sitting on his rock and was hurrying towards the fields to catch up with my friends, that it came back to me.

It was something Miss Lucy had once said to us during a class. I'd remembered it because it had puzzled me at the time, and also because it was one of the few occasions when the Gallery had been mentioned so deliberately in front of a guardian.

We'd been in the middle of what we later came to call the "tokens controversy." Tommy and I discussed the tokens controversy a few years ago, and we couldn't at first agree when it had happened. I said we'd been ten at the time; he thought it was later, but in the end came round to agreeing with me. I'm pretty sure I got it right: we were in Junior 4–a while after that incident with Madame, but still three years before our talk by the pond.

The tokens controversy was, I suppose, all part of our getting more acquisitive

as we grew older. For years–I think I've said already–we'd thought that having work chosen for the billiards room, never mind taken away by Madame, was a huge triumph. But by the time we were ten, we'd grown more ambivalent about it. The Exchanges, with their system of tokens as currency, had given us a keen eye for pricing up anything we produced. We'd become preoccupied with T-shirts, with decorating around our beds, with personalising our desks. And of course, we had our "collections" to think of.

I don't know if you had "collections" where you were. When you come across old students from Hailsham, you always find them, sooner or later, getting nostalgic about their collections. At the time, of course, we took it all for granted. You each had a wooden chest with your name on it, which you kept under your bed and filled with your possessions–the stuff you acquired from the Sales or the Exchanges. I can remember one or two students not bothering much with their collections, but most of us took enormous care, bringing things out to display, putting other things away carefully.

The point is, by the time we were ten, this whole notion that it was a great honour to have something taken by Madame collided with a feeling that we were losing our most marketable stuff. This all came to a head in the tokens controversy.

It began with a number of students, mainly boys, muttering that we should get tokens to compensate when Madame took something away. A lot of students agreed with this, but others were outraged by the idea. Arguments went on between us for some time, and then one day Roy J.–who was a year above us, and had had a number of things taken by Madame–decided to go and see Miss Emily about it.

Miss Emily, our head guardian, was older than the others. She wasn't especially tall, but something about the way she carried herself, always very straight with her head right up, made you think she was. She wore her silvery hair tied back, but strands were always coming loose and floating around her. They would have driven me mad, but Miss Emily always ignored them, like they were beneath her contempt. By the evening, she was a pretty strange sight, with bits of loose hair everywhere which she wouldn't bother to push away off her face when she talked to you in her quiet, deliberate voice. We were all pretty scared of her and didn't think of her in the way we did the other guardians. But we considered her to be fair and respected her decisions; and even in the Juniors, we probably recognised that it was her presence, intimidating though it was, that made us all feel so safe at Hailsham.

It took some nerve to go and see her without being summoned; to go with the

sort of demands Roy was making seemed suicidal. But Roy didn't get the terrible telling-off we were expecting, and in the days that followed, there were reports of guardians talking–even arguing–about the tokens question. In the end, it was announced that we would get tokens, but not many because it was a "most distinguished honour" to have work selected by Madame. This didn't really go down well with either camp, and the arguments rumbled on.

It was against this background that Polly T. asked Miss Lucy her question that morning. We were in the library, sitting around the big oak table. I remember there was a log burning in the fireplace, and that we were doing a play-reading. At some point, a line in the play had led to Laura making some wisecrack about the tokens business, and we'd all laughed, Miss Lucy included. Then Miss Lucy had said that since everyone at Hailsham was talking about little else, we should forget the play-reading and spend the rest of the lesson exchanging our views about the tokens. And that's what we were doing when Polly asked, completely out of the blue: "Miss, why does Madame take our things anyway?"

We all went silent. Miss Lucy didn't often get cross, but when she did, you certainly knew about it, and we thought for a second Polly was for it. But then we saw Miss Lucy wasn't angry, just deep in thought. I remember feeling furious at Polly for so stupidly breaking the unwritten rule, but at the same time, being terribly excited about what answer Miss Lucy might give. And clearly I wasn't the only one with these mixed emotions: virtually everybody shot daggers at Polly, before turning eagerly to Miss Lucy–which was, I suppose, pretty unfair on poor Polly. After what seemed a very long while, Miss Lucy said:

"All I can tell you today is that it's for a good reason. A very important reason. But if I tried to explain it to you now, I don't think you'd understand. One day, I hope, it'll be explained to you."

We didn't press her. The atmosphere around the table had become one of deep embarrassment, and curious as we were to hear more, we wanted most for the talk to get away from this dodgy territory. The next moment, then, we were all relieved to be arguing again–a bit artificially perhaps–about the tokens. But Miss Lucy's words had puzzled me and I kept thinking about them on and off for the next few days. That's why that afternoon by the pond, when Tommy was telling me about his talk with Miss Lucy, about how she'd said to him we weren't being "taught enough" about some things, the memory of that time in the library–along with maybe one or two other little episodes like that–started tugging at my mind.

While we're on the subject of the tokens, I want just to say a bit about our Sales, which I've mentioned a few times already. The Sales were important to us because that was how we got hold of things from outside. Tommy's polo shirt, for instance, came from a Sale. That's where we got our clothes, our toys, the special things that hadn't been made by another student.

Once every month, a big white van would come down that long road and you'd feel the excitement all through the house and grounds. By the time it pulled up in the courtyard there'd be a crowd waiting–mainly Juniors, because once you were past twelve or thirteen it wasn't the thing to be getting so obviously excited. But the truth was we all were.

Looking back now, it's funny to think we got so worked up, because usually the Sales were a big disappointment. There'd be nothing remotely special and we'd spend our tokens just renewing stuff that was wearing out or broken with more of the same. But the point was, I suppose, we'd all of us in the past found something at a Sale, something that had become special: a jacket, a watch, a pair of craft scissors never used but kept proudly next to a bed. We'd all found something like that at one time, and so however much we tried to pretend otherwise, we couldn't ever shake off the old feelings of hope and excitement.

Actually there was some point in hanging about the van as it was being unloaded. What you did–if you were one of these Juniors–was to follow back and forth from the storeroom the two men in overalls carrying the big cardboard boxes, asking them what was inside. "A lot of goodies, sweetheart," was the usual reply. Then if you kept asking: "But is it a bumper crop?" they'd sooner or later smile and say: "Oh, I'd say so, sweetheart. A real bumper crop," bringing a thrilled cheer.

The boxes were often open at the top, so you'd catch glimpses of all kinds of things, and sometimes, though they weren't really supposed to, the men would let you move a few items about for a better look. And that was why, by the time of the actual Sale a week or so later, all sorts of rumours would be going around, maybe about a particular track suit or a music cassette, and if there was trouble, it was almost always because a few students had set their hearts on the same item.

The Sales were a complete contrast to the hushed atmosphere of the Exchanges. They were held in the Dining Hall, and were crowded and noisy. In fact the pushing and shouting was all part of the fun, and they stayed for the most part pretty good-humoured. Except, as I say, every now and then,

things would get out of hand, with students grabbing and tugging, sometimes fighting. Then the monitors would threaten to close the whole thing down, and we'd all of us have to face a talking to from Miss Emily at assembly the next morning.

Our day at Hailsham always began with an assembly, which was usually pretty brief–a few announcements, maybe a poem read out by a student. Miss Emily didn't often say much; she'd just sit very straight on the stage, nodding at whatever was being said, occasionally turning a frosty eye towards any whispering in the crowd. But on a morning after a rowdy Sale, everything was different. She'd order us to sit down on the floor–we usually stood at assemblies–and there'd be no announcements or performances, just Miss Emily talking to us for twenty, thirty minutes, sometimes even longer. She'd rarely raise her voice, but there was something steely about her on these occasions and none of us, not even the Senior 5s, dared make a sound.

There was a real sense of feeling bad that we had, in some collective way, let down Miss Emily, but try as we might, we couldn't really follow these lectures. It was partly her language. "Unworthy of privilege" and "misuse of opportunity": these were two regular phrases Ruth and I came up with when we were reminiscing in her room at the centre in Dover. Her general drift was clear enough: we were all very special, being Hailsham students, and so it was all the more disappointing when we behaved badly. Beyond that though, things became a fog. Sometimes she'd be going on very intensely then come to a sudden stop with something like: "What is it? What is it? What can it be that thwarts us?" Then she'd stand there, eyes closed, a frown on her face like she was trying to puzzle out the answer. And although we felt bewildered and awkward, we'd sit there willing her on to make whatever discovery was needed in her head. She might then resume with a gentle sigh–a signal that we were going to be forgiven–or just as easily explode out of her silence with: "But I will not be coerced! Oh no! And neither will Hailsham!"

When we were remembering these long speeches, Ruth remarked how odd it was they should have been so unfathomable, since Miss Emily, in a classroom, could be as clear as anything. When I mentioned how I'd sometimes seen the head wandering around Hailsham in a dream, talking to herself, Ruth took offence, saying:

"She was never like that! How could Hailsham have been the way it was if the person in charge had been potty? Miss Emily had an intellect you could slice logs with."

I didn't argue. Certainly, Miss Emily could be uncannily sharp. If, say, you were somewhere you shouldn't be in the main house or the grounds, and you

heard a guardian coming, you could often hide somewhere. Hailsham was full of hiding places, indoors and out: cupboards, nooks, bushes, hedges. But if you saw Miss Emily coming, your heart sank because she'd always know you were there hiding. It was like she had some extra sense. You could go into a cupboard, close the door tight and not move a muscle, you just knew Miss Emily's footsteps would stop outside and her voice would say: "All right. Out you come."

That was what had happened to Sylvie C. once on the second-floor landing, and on that occasion Miss Emily had gone into one of her rages. She never shouted like, say, Miss Lucy did when she got mad at you, but if anything Miss Emily getting angry was scarier. Her eyes narrowed and she'd whisper furiously to herself, like she was discussing with an invisible colleague what punishment was awful enough for you. The way she did it meant half of you was dying to hear and the other half completely not wanting to. But usually with Miss Emily nothing too awful would come out of it. She hardly ever put you in detention, made you do chores or withdrew privileges. All the same, you felt dreadful, just knowing you'd fallen in her estimation, and you wanted to do something straight away to redeem yourself.

But the thing was, there was no predicting with Miss Emily. Sylvie may have got a full portion that time, but when Laura got caught running through the rhubarb patch, Miss Emily just snapped: "Shouldn't be here, girl. Off you go," and walked on.

And then there was the time I thought I was in hot water with her. The little footpath that went all round the back of the main house was a real favourite of mine. It followed all the nooks, all the extensions; you had to squeeze past shrubs, you went under two ivy-covered arches and through a rusted gate. And all the time you could peer in through the windows, one after the other. I suppose part of the reason I liked the path so much was because I was never sure if it was out of bounds. Certainly, when classes were going on, you weren't supposed to walk past. But at the weekends or in the evenings–that was never clear. Most students avoided it anyway, and maybe the feeling of getting away from everyone else was another part of the appeal.

In any case, I was doing this little walk one sunny evening. I think I was in Senior 3. As usual I was glancing into the empty rooms as I went past, and then suddenly I was looking into a classroom with Miss Emily in it. She was alone, pacing slowly, talking under her breath, pointing and directing remarks to an invisible audience in the room. I assumed she was rehearsing a lesson or maybe one of her assembly talks, and I was about to hurry past before she spotted me, but just then she turned and looked straight at me. I froze, thinking I was for it, but then noticed she was carrying on as before,

except now she was mouthing her address at me. Then, natural as you like, she turned away to fix her gaze on some other imaginary student in another part of the room. I crept away along the path, and for the next day or so kept dreading what Miss Emily would say when she saw me. But she never mentioned it at all.

But that's not really what I want to talk about just now. What I want to do now is get a few things down about Ruth, about how we met and became friends, about our early days together. Because more and more these days, I'll be driving past fields on a long afternoon, or maybe drinking my coffee in front of a huge window in a motorway service station, and I'll catch myself thinking about her again.

She wasn't someone I was friends with from the start. I can remember, at five or six, doing things with Hannah and with Laura, but not with Ruth. I only have the one vague memory of Ruth from that early part of our lives.

I'm playing in a sandpit. There are a number of others in the sand with me, it's too crowded and we're getting irritated with each other. We're in the open, under a warm sun, so it's probably the sandpit in the Infants' play area, just possibly it's the sand at the end of the long jump in the North Playing Field. Anyway it's hot and I'm feeling thirsty and I'm not pleased there are so many of us in the sandpit. Then Ruth is standing there, not in the sand with the rest of us, but a few feet away. She's very angry with two of the girls somewhere behind me, about something that must have happened before, and she's standing there glaring at them. My guess is that I knew Ruth only very slightly at that point. But she must already have made some impression on me, because I remember carrying on busily with whatever I was doing in the sand, absolutely dreading the idea of her turning her gaze on me. I didn't say a word, but I was desperate for her to realise I wasn't with the girls behind me, and had had no part in whatever it was that had made her cross.

And that's all I remember of Ruth from that early time. We were the same year so we must have run into each other enough, but aside from the sandpit incident, I don't remember having anything to do with her until the Juniors a couple of years later, when we were seven, going on eight.

The South Playing Field was the one used most by the Juniors and it was there, in the corner by the poplars, that Ruth came up to me one lunchtime, looked me up and down, then asked:

“Do you want to ride my horse?”

I was in the midst of playing with two or three others at that point, but it was clear Ruth was addressing only me. This absolutely delighted me, but I made a show of weighing her up before giving a reply.

“Well, what's your horse's name?”

Ruth came a step closer. “My best horse,” she said, “is Thunder. I can't let you ride on him. He's much too dangerous. But you can ride Bramble, as long as you don't use your crop on him. Or if you like, you could have any of the others.” She reeled off several more names I don't now remember. Then she asked: “Have you got any horses of your own?”

I looked at her and thought carefully before replying: “No. I don't have any horses.”

“Not even one?”

“No.”

“All right. You can ride Bramble, and if you like him, you can have him to keep. But you're not to use your crop on him. And you've got to come now.”

My friends had, in any case, turned away and were carrying on with what they'd been doing. So I gave a shrug and went off with Ruth.

The field was filled with playing children, some a lot bigger than us, but Ruth led the way through them very purposefully, always a pace or two in front. When we were almost at the wire mesh boundary with the garden, she turned and said:

“Okay, we'll ride them here. You take Bramble.”

I accepted the invisible rein she was holding out, and then we were off, riding up and down the fence, sometimes cantering, sometimes at a gallop. I'd been correct in my decision to tell Ruth I didn't have any horses of my own, because after a while with Bramble, she let me try her various other horses one by one, shouting all sorts of instructions about how to handle each animal's foibles.

“I told you! You've got to really lean back on Daffodil! Much more than that! She doesn't like it unless you're right back!”

I must have done well enough, because eventually she let me have a go on Thunder, her favourite. I don't know how long we spent with her horses that day: it felt a substantial time, and I think we both lost ourselves completely in our game. But then suddenly, for no reason I could see, Ruth brought it all to an end, claiming I was deliberately tiring out her horses, and that I'd have to put each of them back in its stable. She pointed to a section of the fence, and I began leading the horses to it, while Ruth seemed to get crosser and crosser with me, saying I was doing everything wrong. Then she asked:

"Do you like Miss Geraldine?"

It might have been the first time I'd actually thought about whether I liked a guardian. In the end I said: "Of course I like her."

"But do you really like her? Like she's special? Like she's your favourite?"

"Yes, I do. She's my favourite."

Ruth went on looking at me for a long time. Then finally she said: "All right. In that case, I'll let you be one of her secret guards."

We started to walk back towards the main house then and I waited for her to explain what she meant, but she didn't. I found out though over the next several days.

Chapter Five

I'm not sure for how long the “secret guard” business carried on. When Ruth and I discussed it while I was caring for her down in Dover, she claimed it had been just a matter of two or three weeks–but that was almost certainly wrong. She was probably embarrassed about it and so the whole thing had shrunk in her memory. My guess is that it went on for about nine months, a year even, around when we were seven, going on eight.

I was never sure if Ruth had actually invented the secret guard herself, but there was no doubt she was the leader. There were between six and ten of us, the figure changing whenever Ruth allowed in a new member or expelled someone. We believed Miss Geraldine was the best guardian in Hailsham, and we worked on presents to give her–a large sheet with pressed flowers glued over it comes to mind. But our main reason for existing, of course, was to protect her.

By the time I joined the guard, Ruth and the others had already known for ages about the plot to kidnap Miss Geraldine. We were never quite sure who was behind it. We sometimes suspected certain of the Senior boys, sometimes boys in our own year. There was a guardian we didn't like much–a Miss Eileen–who we thought for a while might be the brains behind it. We didn't know when the abduction would take place, but one thing we felt convinced about was that the woods would come into it.

The woods were at the top of the hill that rose behind Hailsham House. All we could see really was a dark fringe of trees, but I certainly wasn't the only one of my age to feel their presence day and night. When it got bad, it was like they cast a shadow over the whole of Hailsham; all you had to do was turn your head or move towards a window and there they'd be, looming in the distance. Safest was the front of the main house, because you couldn't see them from any of the windows. Even so, you never really got away from them.

There were all kinds of horrible stories about the woods. Once, not so long before we all got to Hailsham, a boy had had a big row with his friends and run off beyond the Hailsham boundaries. His body had been found two days later, up in those woods, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off. Another rumour had it that a girl's ghost wandered through those trees. She'd been a Hailsham student until one day she'd climbed over a fence just to see what it was like outside. This was a long time before us, when the guardians were much stricter, cruel even, and when she tried to get back in, she wasn't allowed. She kept hanging around outside the fences, pleading to

be let back in, but no one let her. Eventually, she'd gone off somewhere out there, something had happened and she'd died. But her ghost was always wandering about the woods, gazing over Hailsham, pining to be let back in.

The guardians always insisted these stories were nonsense. But then the older students would tell us that was exactly what the guardians had told them when they were younger, and that we'd be told the ghastly truth soon enough, just as they were.

The woods played on our imaginations the most after dark, in our dorms as we were trying to fall asleep. You almost thought then you could hear the wind rustling the branches, and talking about it seemed to only make things worse. I remember one night, when we were furious with Marge K.–she'd done something really embarrassing to us during the day–we chose to punish her by hauling her out of bed, holding her face against the window pane and ordering her to look up at the woods. At first she kept her eyes screwed shut, but we twisted her arms and forced open her eyelids until she saw the distant outline against the moonlit sky, and that was enough to ensure for her a sobbing night of terror.

I'm not saying we necessarily went around the whole time at that age worrying about the woods. I for one could go weeks hardly thinking about them, and there were even days when a defiant surge of courage would make me think: “How could we believe rubbish like that?” But then all it took would be one little thing–someone retelling one of those stories, a scary passage in a book, even just a chance remark reminding you of the woods–and that would mean another period of being under that shadow. It was hardly surprising then that we assumed the woods would be central in the plot to abduct Miss Geraldine.

When it came down to it, though, I don't recall our taking many practical steps towards defending Miss Geraldine; our activities always revolved around gathering more and more evidence concerning the plot itself. For some reason, we were satisfied this would keep any immediate danger at bay.

Most of our “evidence” came from witnessing the conspirators at work. One morning, for instance, we watched from a second-floor classroom Miss Eileen and Mr. Roger talking to Miss Geraldine down in the courtyard. After a while Miss Geraldine said goodbye and went off towards the Orangery, but we kept on watching, and saw Miss Eileen and Mr. Roger put their heads closer together to confer furtively, their gazes fixed on Miss Geraldine's receding figure.

“Mr. Roger,” Ruth sighed on that occasion, shaking her head. “Who'd have

guessed he was in it too?"

In this way we built up a list of people we knew to be in on the plot–guardians and students whom we declared our sworn enemies. And yet, all the time, I think we must have had an idea of how precarious the foundations of our fantasy were, because we always avoided any confrontation. We could decide, after intense discussions, that a particular student was a plotter, but then we'd always find a reason not to challenge him just yet–to wait until "we had in all the evidence." Similarly, we always agreed Miss Geraldine herself shouldn't hear a word of what we'd found out, since she'd get alarmed to no good purpose.

It would be too easy to claim it was just Ruth who kept the secret guard going long after we'd naturally outgrown it. Sure enough, the guard was important to her. She'd known about the plot for much longer than the rest of us, and this gave her enormous authority; by hinting that the real evidence came from a time before people like me had joined–that there were things she'd yet to reveal even to us–she could justify almost any decision she made on behalf of the group. If she decided someone should be expelled, for example, and she sensed opposition, she'd just allude darkly to stuff she knew "from before." There's no question Ruth was keen to keep the whole thing going. But the truth was, those of us who'd grown close to her, we each played our part in preserving the fantasy and making it last for as long as possible. What happened after that row over the chess illustrates pretty well the point I'm making.

I'd assumed Ruth was something of a chess expert and that she'd be able to teach me the game. This wasn't so crazy: we'd pass older students bent over chess sets, in window seats or on the grassy slopes, and Ruth would often pause to study a game. And as we walked off again, she'd tell me about some move she'd spotted that neither player had seen. "Amazingly dim," she'd murmur, shaking her head. This had all helped get me fascinated, and I was soon longing to become engrossed myself in those ornate pieces. So when I'd found a chess set at a Sale and decided to buy it–despite it costing an awful lot of tokens–I was counting on Ruth's help.

For the next several days, though, she sighed whenever I brought the subject up, or pretended she had something else really urgent to do. When I finally cornered her one rainy afternoon, and we set out the board in the billiards room, she proceeded to show me a game that was a vague variant on draughts. The distinguishing feature of chess, according to her, was that each piece moved in an L-shape–I suppose she'd got this from watching the

knight–rather than in the leap-frogging way of draughts. I didn't believe this, and I was really disappointed, but I made sure to say nothing and went along with her for a while. We spent several minutes knocking each other's pieces off the board, always sliding the attacking piece in an "L." This continued until the time I tried to take her and she claimed it wouldn't count because I'd slid my piece up to hers in too straight a line.

At this, I stood up, packed up the set and walked off. I never said out loud that she didn't know how to play–disappointed as I was, I knew not to go that far–but my storming off was, I suppose, statement enough for her.

It was maybe a day later, I came into Room 20 at the top of the house, where Mr. George had his poetry class. I don't remember if it was before or after the class, or how full the room was. I remember having books in my hands, and that as I moved towards where Ruth and the others were talking, there was a strong patch of sun across the desk-lids they were sitting on.

I could see from the way they had their heads together they were discussing secret guard stuff, and although, as I say, the row with Ruth had been only the day before, for some reason I went up to them without a second thought. It was only when I was virtually right up to them–maybe there was a look exchanged between them–that it suddenly hit me what was about to happen. It was like the split second before you step into a puddle, you realise it's there, but there's nothing you can do about it. I felt the hurt even before they went silent and stared at me, even before Ruth said: "Oh, Kathy, how are you? If you don't mind, we've got something to discuss just now. We'll be finished in just a minute. Sorry."

She'd hardly finished her sentence before I'd turned and was on my way out, angry more at myself for having walked into it than at Ruth and the others. I was upset, no doubt about it, though I don't know if I actually cried. And for the next few days, whenever I saw the secret guard conferring in a corner or as they walked across a field, I'd feel a flush rising to my cheeks.

Then about two days after this snub in Room 20, I was coming down the stairs of the main house when I found Moira B. just behind me. We started talking–about nothing special–and wandered out of the house together. It must have been the lunch break because as we stepped into the courtyard there were about twenty students loitering around chatting in little groups. My eyes went immediately to the far side of the courtyard, where Ruth and three of the secret guard were standing together, their backs to us, gazing intently towards the South Playing Field. I was trying to see what it was they were so interested in, when I became aware of Moira beside me also watching them. And then it occurred to me that only a month before she too had been

a member of the secret guard, and had been expelled. For the next few seconds I felt something like acute embarrassment that the two of us should now be standing side by side, linked by our recent humiliations, actually staring our rejection in the face, as it were. Maybe Moira was experiencing something similar; anyway, she was the one who broke the silence, saying:

"It's so stupid, this whole secret guard thing. How can they still believe in something like that? It's like they're still in the Infants."

Even today, I'm puzzled by the sheer force of the emotion that overtook me when I heard Moira say this. I turned to her, completely furious:

"What do you know about it? You just don't know anything, because you've been out of it for ages now! If you knew everything we'd found out, you wouldn't dare say anything so daft!"

"Don't talk rubbish." Moira was never one to back down easily. "It's just another of Ruth's made-up things, that's all."

"Then how come I've personally heard them talking about it? Talking about how they're going to take Miss Geraldine to the woods in the milk van? How come I heard them planning it myself, nothing to do with Ruth or anyone else?"

Moira looked at me, unsure now. "You heard it yourself? How? Where?"

"I heard them talking, clear as anything, heard every word, they didn't know I was there. Down by the pond, they didn't know I could hear. So that just shows how much you know!"

I pushed past her and as I made my way across the crowded courtyard, I glanced back to the figures of Ruth and the others, still gazing out towards the South Playing Field, unaware of what had just happened between me and Moira. And I noticed I didn't feel angry at all with them any more; just hugely irritated with Moira.

Even now, if I'm driving on a long grey road and my thoughts have nowhere special to go, I might find myself turning all of this over. Why was I so hostile to Moira B. that day when she was, really, a natural ally? What it was, I suppose, is that Moira was suggesting she and I cross some line together, and I wasn't prepared for that yet. I think I sensed how beyond that line, there was something harder and darker and I didn't want that. Not for me, not for any of us.

But at other times, I think that's wrong–that it was just to do with me and Ruth, and the sort of loyalty she inspired in me in those days. And maybe that's why, even though I really wanted to on several occasions, I never brought it up–about what had happened that day with Moira–the whole time I was caring for Ruth down at the centre in Dover.

All of this about Miss Geraldine reminds me of something that happened about three years later, long after the secret guard idea had faded away.

We were in Room 5 on the ground floor at the back of the house, waiting for a class to start. Room 5 was the smallest room, and especially on a winter morning like that one, when the big radiators came on and steamed up the windows, it would get really stuffy. Maybe I'm exaggerating it, but my memory is that for a whole class to fit into that room, students literally had to pile on top of each other.

That morning Ruth had got a chair behind a desk, and I was sitting up on its lid, with two or three others of our group perched or leaning in nearby. In fact, I think it was when I was squeezing up to let someone else in beside me that I first noticed the pencil case.

I can see the thing now like it's here in front of me. It was shiny, like a polished shoe; a deep tan colour with circled red dots drifting all over it. The zip across the top edge had a furry pom-pom to pull it. I'd almost sat on the pencil case when I'd shifted and Ruth quickly moved it out of my way. But I'd seen it, as she'd intended me to, and I said:

"Oh! Where did you get that? Was it in the Sale?"

It was noisy in the room, but the girls nearby had heard, so there were soon four or five of us staring admiringly at the pencil case. Ruth said nothing for a few seconds while she checked carefully the faces around her. Finally she said very deliberately:

"Let's just agree. Let's agree I got it in the Sale." Then she gave us all a knowing smile.

This might sound a pretty innocuous sort of response, but actually it was like she'd suddenly got up and hit me, and for the next few moments I felt hot and chilly at the same time. I knew exactly what she'd meant by her answer and smile: she was claiming the pencil case was a gift from Miss Geraldine.

There could be no mistake about this because it had been building up for

weeks. There was a certain smile, a certain voice Ruth would use–sometimes accompanied by a finger to the lips or a hand raised stage-whisper style–whenever she wanted to hint about some little mark of favour Miss Geraldine had shown her: Miss Geraldine had allowed Ruth to play a music tape in the billiards room before four o'clock on a weekday; Miss Geraldine had ordered silence on a fields walk, but when Ruth had drawn up beside her, she'd started to talk to her, then let the rest of the group talk. It was always stuff like that, and never explicitly claimed, just implied by her smile and "let's say no more" expression.

Of course, officially, guardians weren't supposed to show favouritism, but there were little displays of affection all the time within certain parameters; and most of what Ruth suggested fell easily within them. Still, I hated it when Ruth hinted in this way. I was never sure, of course, if she was telling the truth, but since she wasn't actually "telling" it, only hinting, it was never possible to challenge her. So each time it happened, I'd have to let it go, biting my lip and hoping the moment would pass quickly.

Sometimes I'd see from the way a conversation was moving that one of these moments was coming, and I'd brace myself. Even then, it would always hit me with some force, so that for several minutes I wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything going on around me. But on that winter morning in Room 5, it had come at me straight out of the blue. Even after I'd seen the pencil case, the idea of a guardian giving a present like that was so beyond the bounds, I hadn't seen it coming at all. So once Ruth had said what she'd said, I wasn't able, in my usual way, to let the emotional flurry just pass. I just stared at her, making no attempt to disguise my anger. Ruth, perhaps seeing danger, said to me quickly in a stage whisper: "Not a word!" and smiled again. But I couldn't return the smile and went on glaring at her. Then luckily the guardian arrived and the class started.

I was never the sort of kid who brooded over things for hours on end. I've got that way a bit these days, but that's the work I do and the long hours of quiet when I'm driving across these empty fields. I wasn't like, say, Laura, who for all her clowning around could worry for days, weeks even, about some little thing someone said to her. But after that morning in Room 5, I did go around in a bit of a trance. I'd drift off in the middle of conversations; whole lessons went by with me not knowing what was going on. I was determined Ruth shouldn't get away with it this time, but for a long while I wasn't doing anything constructive about it; just playing fantastic scenes in my head where I'd expose her and force her to admit she'd made it up. I even had one hazy fantasy where Miss Geraldine herself heard about it and gave Ruth a complete dressing-down in front of everyone.

After days of this I started to think more solidly. If the pencil case hadn't come from Miss Geraldine, where had it come from? She might have got it from another student, but that was unlikely. If it had belonged to anyone else first, even someone years above us, a gorgeous item like that wouldn't have gone unnoticed. Ruth would never risk a story like hers knowing the pencil case had already knocked around Hailsham. Almost certainly she'd found it at a Sale. Here, too, Ruth ran the risk of others having seen it before she'd bought it. But if–as sometimes happened, though it wasn't really allowed–she'd heard about the pencil case coming in and reserved it with one of the monitors before the Sale opened, she could then be reasonably confident hardly anyone had seen it.

Unfortunately for Ruth, though, there were registers kept of everything bought at the Sales, along with a record of who'd done the buying. While these registers weren't easily obtainable–the monitors took them back to Miss Emily's office after each Sale–they weren't top secret either. If I hung around a monitor at the next Sale, it wouldn't be difficult to browse through the pages.

So I had the outlines of a plan, and I think I went on refining it for several days before it occurred to me it wasn't actually necessary to carry out all the steps. Provided I was right about the pencil case coming from a Sale, all I had to do was bluff.

That was how Ruth and I came to have our conversation under the eaves. There was fog and drizzle that day. The two of us were walking from the dorm huts perhaps towards the pavilion, I'm not sure. Anyway, as we were crossing the courtyard, the rain suddenly got heavier and since we were in no hurry, we tucked ourselves in under the eaves of the main house, a little to one side of the front entrance.

We sheltered there for a while, and every so often a student would come running out of the fog and in through the doors of the house, but the rain didn't ease. And the longer we continued to stand there, the more tense I grew because I could see this was the opportunity I'd been waiting for. Ruth too, I'm sure, sensed something was coming up. In the end, I decided to come straight out with it.

“At the Sale last Tuesday,” I said. “I was just looking through the book. You know, the register thing.”

“Why were you looking at the register?” Ruth asked quickly. “Why were you doing something like that?”

“Oh, no reason. Christopher C. was one of the monitors, so I was just talking

to him. He's the best Senior boy, definitely. And I was just turning over the pages of the register, just for something to do."

Ruth's mind, I could tell, had raced on, and she now knew exactly what this was about. But she said calmly: "Boring sort of thing to look at."

"No, it was quite interesting really. You can see all the things people have bought."

I'd said this staring out at the rain. Then I glanced at Ruth and got a real shock. I don't know what I'd expected; for all my fantasies of the past month, I'd never really considered what it would be like in a real situation like the one unfolding at that moment. Now I saw how upset Ruth was; how for once she was at a complete loss for words, and had turned away on the verge of tears. And suddenly my behaviour seemed to me utterly baffling. All this effort, all this planning, just to upset my dearest friend. So what if she'd fibbed a little about her pencil case? Didn't we all dream from time to time about one guardian or other bending the rules and doing something special for us? A spontaneous hug, a secret letter, a gift? All Ruth had done was to take one of these harmless daydreams a step further; she hadn't even mentioned Miss Geraldine by name.

I now felt awful, and I was confused. But as we stood there together staring at the fog and rain, I could think of no way now to repair the damage I'd done. I think I said something pathetic like: "It's all right, I didn't see anything much," which hung stupidly in the air. Then after a few further seconds of silence, Ruth walked off into the rain.

Chapter Six

I think I'd have felt better about what had happened if Ruth had held it against me in some obvious way. But this was one instance when she seemed just to cave in. It was like she was too ashamed of the matter–too crushed by it–even to be angry or to want to get me back. The first few times I saw her after the conversation under the eaves, I was ready for at least a bit of huffiness, but no, she was completely civil, if a little flat. It occurred to me she was scared I'd expose her–the pencil case, sure enough, vanished from view–and I wanted to tell her she'd nothing to fear from me. The trouble was, because none of this had actually been talked about in the open, I couldn't find a way of bringing it all up with her.

I did my best, meanwhile, to take any opportunity to imply to Ruth she had a special place in Miss Geraldine's heart. There was the time, for example, when a bunch of us were desperate to go out and practise rounders during break, because we'd been challenged by a group from the year above. Our problem was that it was raining, and it looked unlikely we'd be allowed outside. I noticed though that Miss Geraldine was one of the guardians on duty, and so I said:

"If Ruth goes and asks Miss Geraldine, then we'd stand a chance."

As far as I remember, this suggestion wasn't taken up; maybe hardly anyone heard it, because a lot of us were talking all at once. But the point is, I said it standing right behind Ruth, and I could see she was pleased.

Then another time a few of us were leaving a classroom with Miss Geraldine, and I happened to find myself about to go out the door right after Miss Geraldine herself. What I did was to slow right down so that Ruth, coming behind me, could instead pass through the door beside Miss Geraldine. I did this without any fuss, as though this were the natural and proper thing and what Miss Geraldine would like–just the way I'd have done if, say, I'd accidentally got myself between two best friends. On that occasion, as far as I remember, Ruth looked puzzled and surprised for a split second, then gave me a quick nod and went past.

Little things like these might well have pleased Ruth, but they were still far removed from what had actually happened between us under the eaves that foggy day, and the sense that I'd never be able to sort things just continued to grow. There's a particular memory I have of sitting by myself one evening on one of the benches outside the pavilion, trying over and over to think of some way out, while a heavy mix of remorse and frustration brought me

virtually to tears. If things had stayed that way, I'm not sure what would have happened. Maybe it would all have got forgotten eventually; or maybe Ruth and I would have drifted apart. As it was, right out of the blue, a chance came along for me to put things right.

We were in the middle of one of Mr. Roger's art lessons, except for some reason he'd gone out half way. So we were all just drifting about among the easels, chatting and looking at each other's work. Then at one point a girl called Midge A. came over to where we were and said to Ruth, in a perfectly friendly way:

“Where's your pencil case? It's so luscious.”

Ruth tensed and glanced quickly about to see who was present. It was our usual gang with perhaps a couple of outsiders loitering nearby. I hadn't mentioned to a soul anything about the Sales Register business, but I suppose Ruth wasn't to know that. Her voice was softer than usual when she replied to Midge:

“I haven't got it here. I keep it in my collection chest.”

“It's so luscious. Where did you get it?”

Midge was quizzing her completely innocently, that was now obvious. But almost all of us who'd been in Room 5 the time Ruth had first brought out the pencil case were here now, looking on, and I saw Ruth hesitate. It was only later, when I replayed it all, that I appreciated how perfectly shaped a chance it was for me. At the time I didn't really think. I just came in before Midge or anyone else had the chance to notice Ruth was in a curious quandary.

“We can't say where it came from.”

Ruth, Midge, the rest of them, they all looked at me, maybe a little surprised. But I kept my cool and went on, addressing only Midge.

“There are some very good reasons why we can't tell you where it came from.”

Midge shrugged. “So it's a mystery.”

“A big mystery,” I said, then gave her a smile to show her I wasn't trying to be nasty to her.

The others were nodding to back me up, though Ruth herself had on a vague

expression, like she'd suddenly become preoccupied with something else entirely. Midge shrugged again, and as far as I remember that was the end of it. Either she walked off, or else she started talking about something different.

Now, for much the same reasons I'd not been able to talk openly to Ruth about what I'd done to her over the Sales Register business, she of course wasn't able to thank me for the way I'd intervened with Midge. But it was obvious from her manner towards me, not just over the next few days, but over the weeks that followed, how pleased she was with me. And having recently been in much the same position, it was easy to recognise the signs of her looking around for some opportunity to do something nice, something really special for me. It was a good feeling, and I remember even thinking once or twice how it would be better if she didn't get a chance for ages, just so the good feeling between us could go on and on. As it was, an opportunity did come along for her, about a month after the Midge episode, the time I lost my favourite tape.

I still have a copy of that tape and until recently I'd listen to it occasionally driving out in the open country on a drizzly day. But now the tape machine in my car's got so dodgy, I don't dare play it in that. And there never seems enough time to play it when I'm back in my bedsit. Even so, it's one of my most precious possessions. Maybe come the end of the year, when I'm no longer a carer, I'll be able to listen to it more often.

The album's called Songs After Dark and it's by Judy Bridgewater. What I've got today isn't the actual cassette, the one I had back then at Hailsham, the one I lost. It's the one Tommy and I found in Norfolk years afterwards–but that's another story I'll come to later. What I want to talk about is the first tape, the one that disappeared.

I should explain before I go any further this whole thing we had in those days about Norfolk. We kept it going for years and years–it became a sort of in-joke, I suppose–and it all started from one particular lesson we had when we were pretty young.

It was Miss Emily herself who taught us about the different counties of England. She'd pin up a big map over the blackboard, and next to it, set up

an easel. And if she was talking about, say, Oxfordshire, she'd place on the easel a large calendar with photos of the county. She had quite a collection of these picture calendars, and we got through most of the counties this way. She'd tap a spot on the map with her pointer, turn to the easel and reveal another picture. There'd be little villages with streams going through them, white monuments on hillsides, old churches beside fields; if she was telling us about a coastal place, there'd be beaches crowded with people, cliffs with seagulls. I suppose she wanted us to have a grasp of what was out there surrounding us, and it's amazing, even now, after all these miles I've covered as a carer, the extent to which my idea of the various counties is still set by these pictures Miss Emily put up on her easel. I'd be driving through Derbyshire, say, and catch myself looking for a particular village green with a mock-Tudor pub and a war memorial–and realise it's the image Miss Emily showed us the first time I ever heard of Derbyshire.

Anyway, the point is, there was a gap in Miss Emily's calendar collection: none of them had a single picture of Norfolk. We had these same lectures repeated a number of times, and I'd always wonder if this time she'd found a picture of Norfolk, but it was always the same. She'd wave her pointer over the map and say, as a sort of afterthought: "And over here, we've got Norfolk. Very nice there."

Then, that particular time, I remember how she paused and drifted off into thought, maybe because she hadn't planned what should happen next instead of a picture. Eventually she came out of her dream and tapped the map again.

"You see, because it's stuck out here on the east, on this hump jutting into the sea, it's not on the way to anywhere. People going north and south"–she moved the pointer up and down–"they bypass it altogether. For that reason, it's a peaceful corner of England, rather nice. But it's also something of a lost corner."

A lost corner. That's what she called it, and that was what started it. Because at Hailsham, we had our own "Lost Corner" up on the third floor, where the lost property was kept; if you lost or found anything, that's where you went. Someone–I can't remember who it was–claimed after the lesson that what Miss Emily had said was that Norfolk was England's "lost corner," where all the lost property found in the country ended up. Somehow this idea caught on and soon had become accepted fact virtually throughout our entire year.

Not long ago, when Tommy and I were reminiscing about all of this, he thought we'd never really believed in the notion, that it was a joke right from the start. But I'm pretty certain he was wrong there. Sure enough, by the

time we were twelve or thirteen, the Norfolk thing had become a big joke. But my memory of it–and Ruth remembered it the same way–is that at the beginning, we believed in Norfolk in the most literal way; that just as lorries came to Hailsham with our food and stuff for our Sales, there was some similar operation going on, except on a grander scale, with vehicles moving all over England, delivering anything left behind in fields and trains to this place called Norfolk. The fact that we'd never seen a picture of the place only added to its mystique.

This might all sound daft, but you have to remember that to us, at that stage in our lives, any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land; we had only the haziest notions of the world outside and about what was and wasn't possible there. Besides, we never bothered to examine our Norfolk theory in any detail. What was important to us, as Ruth said one evening when we were sitting in that tiled room in Dover, looking out at the sunset, was that "when we lost something precious, and we'd looked and looked and still couldn't find it, then we didn't have to be completely heartbroken. We still had that last bit of comfort, thinking one day, when we were grown up, and we were free to travel around the country, we could always go and find it again in Norfolk."

I'm sure Ruth was right about that. Norfolk came to be a real source of comfort for us, probably much more than we admitted at the time, and that was why we were still talking about it–albeit as a sort of joke–when we were much older. And that's why, years and years later, that day Tommy and I found another copy of that lost tape of mine in a town on the Norfolk coast, we didn't just think it pretty funny; we both felt deep down some tug, some old wish to believe again in something that was once close to our hearts.

But I wanted to talk about my tape, Songs After Dark by Judy Bridgewater. I suppose it was originally an LP–the recording date's 1956–but what I had was the cassette, and the cover picture was what must have been a scaled-down version of the record sleeve. Judy Bridgewater is wearing a purple satin dress, one of those off-the-shoulder ones popular in those days, and you can see her from just above the waist because she's sitting on a bar-stool. I think it's supposed to be South America, because there are palms behind her and swarthy waiters in white tuxedos. You're looking at Judy from exactly where the barman would be when he's serving her drinks. She's looking back in a friendly, not too sexy way, like she might be flirting just a tiny bit, but you're someone she knows from way back. Now the other thing about this cover is that Judy's got her elbows up on the bar and there's a cigarette burning in her hand. And it was because of this cigarette that I got so secretive about the tape, right from the moment I found it at the Sale.

I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham the guardians were really strict about smoking. I'm sure they'd have preferred it if we never found out smoking even existed; but since this wasn't possible, they made sure to give us some sort of lecture each time any reference to cigarettes came along. Even if we were being shown a picture of a famous writer or world leader, and they happened to have a cigarette in their hand, then the whole lesson would grind to a halt. There was even a rumour that some classic books–like the Sherlock Holmes ones–weren't in our library because the main characters smoked too much, and when you came across a page torn out of an illustrated book or magazine, this was because there'd been a picture on it of someone smoking. And then there were the actual lessons where they showed us horrible pictures of what smoking did to the insides of your body. That's why it was such a shock that time Marge K. asked Miss Lucy her question.

We were sitting on the grass after a rounders match and Miss Lucy had been giving us a typical talk on smoking when Marge suddenly asked if Miss Lucy had herself ever had a cigarette. Miss Lucy went quiet for a few seconds. Then she said:

"I'd like to be able to say no. But to be honest, I did smoke for a little while. For about two years, when I was younger."

You can imagine what a shock this was. Before Miss Lucy's reply, we'd all been glaring at Marge, really furious she'd asked such a rude question–to us, she might as well have asked if Miss Lucy had ever attacked anyone with an axe. And for days afterwards I remember how we made Marge's life an utter misery; in fact, that incident I mentioned before, the night we held Marge's face to the dorm window to make her look at the woods, that was all part of what came afterwards. But at the time, the moment Miss Lucy said what she did, we were too confused to think any more about Marge. I think we all just stared at Miss Lucy in horror, waiting for what she'd say next.

When she did speak, Miss Lucy seemed to be weighing up each word carefully. "It's not good that I smoked. It wasn't good for me so I stopped it. But what you must understand is that for you, all of you, it's much, much worse to smoke than it ever was for me."

Then she paused and went quiet. Someone said later she'd gone off into a daydream, but I was pretty sure, as was Ruth, that she was thinking hard about what to say next. Finally she said:

"You've been told about it. You're students. You're... special. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that's much more

important for each of you than it is for me."

She stopped again and looked at us in a strange way. Afterwards, when we discussed it, some of us were sure she was dying for someone to ask: "Why? Why is it so much worse for us?" But no one did. I've often thought about that day, and I'm sure now, in the light of what happened later, that we only needed to ask and Miss Lucy would have told us all kinds of things. All it would have taken was just one more question about smoking.

So why had we stayed silent that day? I suppose it was because even at that age–we were nine or ten–we knew just enough to make us wary of that whole territory. It's hard now to remember just how much we knew by then. We certainly knew–though not in any deep sense–that we were different from our guardians, and also from the normal people outside; we perhaps even knew that a long way down the line there were donations waiting for us. But we didn't really know what that meant. If we were keen to avoid certain topics, it was probably more because it embarrassed us. We hated the way our guardians, usually so on top of everything, became so awkward whenever we came near this territory. It unnerved us to see them change like that. I think that's why we never asked that one further question, and why we punished Marge K. so cruelly for bringing it all up that day after the rounders match.

Anyway, that's why I was so secretive about my tape. I even turned the cover inside out so you'd only see Judy and her cigarette if you opened up the plastic case. But the reason the tape meant so much to me had nothing to do with the cigarette, or even with the way Judy Bridgewater sang–she's one of those singers from her time, cocktail-bar stuff, not the sort of thing any of us at Hailsham liked. What made the tape so special for me was this one particular song: track number three, "Never Let Me Go."

It's slow and late night and American, and there's a bit that keeps coming round when Judy sings: "Never let me go... Oh baby, baby... Never let me go..." I was eleven then, and hadn't listened to much music, but this one song, it really got to me. I always tried to keep the tape wound to just that spot so I could play the song whenever a chance came by.

I didn't have so many opportunities, mind you, this being a few years before Walkmans started appearing at the Sales. There was a big machine in the billiards room, but I hardly ever played the tape in there because it was always full of people. The Art Room also had a player, but that was usually

just as noisy. The only place I could listen properly was in our dorm.

By then we'd gone into the small six-bed dorms over in the separate huts, and in ours we had a portable cassette player up on the shelf above the radiator. So that's where I used to go, in the day when no one else was likely to be about, to play my song over and over.

What was so special about this song? Well, the thing was, I didn't used to listen properly to the words; I just waited for that bit that went: "Baby, baby, never let me go..." And what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. Then there's a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: "Baby, never let me go..." partly because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen, that the baby will get ill or be taken away from her. Even at the time, I realised this couldn't be right, that this interpretation didn't fit with the rest of the lyrics. But that wasn't an issue with me. The song was about what I said, and I used to listen to it again and again, on my own, whenever I got the chance.

There was one strange incident around this time I should tell you about here. It really unsettled me, and although I wasn't to find out its real meaning until years later, I think I sensed, even then, some deeper significance to it.

It was a sunny afternoon and I'd gone to our dorm to get something. I remember how bright it was because the curtains in our room hadn't been pulled back properly, and you could see the sun coming in in big shafts and see all the dust in the air. I hadn't meant to play the tape, but since I was there all by myself, an impulse made me get the cassette out of my collection box and put it into the player.

Maybe the volume had been turned right up by whoever had been using it last, I don't know. But it was much louder than I usually had it and that was probably why I didn't hear her before I did. Or maybe I'd just got complacent by then. Anyway, what I was doing was swaying about slowly in time to the song, holding an imaginary baby to my breast. In fact, to make it all the more embarrassing, it was one of those times I'd grabbed a pillow to stand in for the baby, and I was doing this slow dance, my eyes closed, singing along softly each time those lines came around again:

"Oh baby, baby, never let me go..."

The song was almost over when something made me realise I wasn't alone, and I opened my eyes to find myself staring at Madame framed in the

doorway.

I froze in shock. Then within a second or two, I began to feel a new kind of alarm, because I could see there was something strange about the situation. The door was almost half open–it was a sort of rule we couldn't close dorm doors completely except for when we were sleeping–but Madame hadn't nearly come up to the threshold. She was out in the corridor, standing very still, her head angled to one side to give her a view of what I was doing inside. And the odd thing was she was crying. It might even have been one of her sobs that had come through the song to jerk me out of my dream.

When I think about this now, it seems to me, even if she wasn't a guardian, she was the adult, and she should have said or done something, even if it was just to tell me off. Then I'd have known how to behave. But she just went on standing out there, sobbing and sobbing, staring at me through the doorway with that same look in her eyes she always had when she looked at us, like she was seeing something that gave her the creeps. Except this time there was something else, something extra in that look I couldn't fathom.

I didn't know what to do or say, or what to expect next. Perhaps she would come into the room, shout at me, hit me even, I didn't have a clue. As it was, she turned and the next moment I could hear her footsteps leaving the hut. I realised the tape had gone on to the next track, and I turned it off and sat down on the nearest bed. And as I did so, I saw through the window in front of me her figure hurrying off towards the main house. She didn't glance back, but I could tell from the way her back was hunched up she was still sobbing.

When I got back to my friends a few minutes later, I didn't tell them anything about what had happened. Someone noticed I wasn't right and said something, but I just shrugged and kept quiet. I wasn't ashamed exactly: but it was a bit like that earlier time, when we'd all waylaid Madame in the courtyard as she got out of her car. What I wished more than anything was that the thing hadn't happened at all, and I thought that by not mentioning it I'd be doing myself and everyone else a favour.

I did, though, talk to Tommy about it a couple of years later. This was in those days following our conversation by the pond when he'd first confided in me about Miss Lucy; the days during which–as I see it–we started off our whole thing of wondering and asking questions about ourselves that we kept going between us through the years. When I told Tommy about what had happened with Madame in the dorm, he came up with a fairly simple explanation. By then, of course, we all knew something I hadn't known back then, which was that none of us could have babies. It's just possible I'd somehow picked up the idea when I was younger without fully registering it,

and that's why I heard what I did when I listened to that song. But there was no way I'd known properly back then. As I say, by the time Tommy and I were discussing it, we'd all been told clearly enough. None of us, incidentally, was particularly bothered about it; in fact, I remember some people being pleased we could have sex without worrying about all of that–though proper sex was still some way off for most of us at that stage. Anyway, when I told Tommy about what had happened, he said:

"Madame's probably not a bad person, even though she's creepy. So when she saw you dancing like that, holding your baby, she thought it was really tragic, how you couldn't have babies. That's why she started crying."

"But Tommy," I pointed out, "how could she have known the song had anything to do with people having babies? How could she have known the pillow I was holding was supposed to be a baby? That was only in my head."

Tommy thought about this, then said only half jokingly: "Maybe Madame can read minds. She's strange. Maybe she can see right inside you. It wouldn't surprise me."

This gave us both a little chill, and though we giggled, we didn't say any more about it.

The tape disappeared a couple of months after the incident with Madame. I never linked the two events at the time and I've no reason to link them now. I was in the dorm one night, just before lights-out, and was rummaging through my collection chest to pass the time until the others came back from the bathroom. It's odd but when it first dawned on me the tape wasn't there any more, my main thought was that I mustn't give away how panicked I was. I can remember actually making a point of humming absent-mindedly while I went on searching. I've thought about it a lot and I still don't know how to explain it: these were my closest friends in that room with me and yet I didn't want them to know how upset I was about my tape going missing.

I suppose it had something to do with it being a secret, just how much it had meant to me. Maybe all of us at Hailsham had little secrets like that–little private nooks created out of thin air where we could go off alone with our fears and longings. But the very fact that we had such needs would have felt wrong to us at the time–like somehow we were letting the side down.

Anyway, once I was quite sure the tape was gone, I asked each of the others in the dorm, very casually, if they'd seen it. I wasn't yet completely distraught because there was just the chance I'd left it in the billiards room; otherwise

my hope was that someone had borrowed it and would give it back in the morning.

Well, the tape didn't turn up the next day and I've still no idea what happened to it. The truth is, I suppose, there was far more thieving going on at Hailsham than we–or the guardians–ever wanted to admit. But the reason I'm going into all this now is to explain about Ruth and how she reacted. What you have to remember is that I lost my tape less than a month after that time Midge had quizzed Ruth in the Art Room about her pencil case and I'd come to the rescue. Ever since, as I told you, Ruth had been looking out for something nice to do for me in return, and the tape disappearing gave her a real opportunity. You could even say it wasn't until after my tape vanished that things got back to normal with us–maybe for the first time since that rainy morning I'd mentioned the Sales Register to her under the eaves of the main house.

The night I first noticed the tape had gone, I'd made sure to ask everyone about it, and that of course had included Ruth. Looking back, I can see how she must have realised, then and there, exactly what losing the tape meant to me, and at the same time, how important it was for me there was no fuss. So she'd replied that night with a distracted shrug and gone on with what she was doing. But the next morning, when I was coming back from the bathroom, I could hear her–in a casual voice like it wasn't anything much–asking Hannah if she was sure she hadn't seen my tape.

Then maybe a fortnight later, when I'd long reconciled myself to having truly lost my tape, she came and found me during the lunch break. It was one of the first really good days of spring that year, and I'd been sitting on the grass talking with a couple of the older girls. When Ruth came up and asked if I wanted to go for a little stroll, it was obvious she had something particular on her mind. So I left the older girls and followed her to the edge of the North Playing Field, then up the north hill, until we were standing there by the wooden fence looking down on the sweep of green dotted with clusters of students. There was a strong breeze at the top of the hill, and I remember being surprised by it because I hadn't noticed it down on the grass. We stood there looking over the grounds for a while, then she held out a little bag to me. When I took it, I could tell there was a cassette tape inside and my heart leapt. But Ruth said immediately:

“Kathy, it's not your one. The one you lost. I tried to find it for you, but it's really gone.”

“Yeah,” I said. “Gone to Norfolk.”

We both laughed. Then I took the tape out of the bag with a disappointed air, and I'm not sure the disappointment wasn't still there on my face while I examined it.

I was holding something called Twenty Classic Dance Tunes. When I played it later, I discovered it was orchestra stuff for ballroom dancing. Of course, the moment she was giving it to me, I didn't know what sort of music it was, but I did know it wasn't anything like Judy Bridgewater. Then again, almost immediately, I saw how Ruth wasn't to know that–how to Ruth, who didn't know the first thing about music, this tape might easily make up for the one I'd lost. And suddenly I felt the disappointment ebbing away and being replaced by a real happiness. We didn't do things like hug each other much at Hailsham. But I squeezed one of her hands in both mine when I thanked her. She said: "I found it at the last Sale. I just thought it's the sort of thing you'd like." And I said that, yes, it was exactly the sort of thing.

I still have it now. I don't play it much because the music has nothing to do with anything. It's an object, like a brooch or a ring, and especially now Ruth has gone, it's become one of my most precious possessions.

Chapter Seven

I want to move on now to our last years at Hailsham. I'm talking about the period from when we were thirteen to when we left at sixteen. In my memory my life at Hailsham falls into two distinct chunks: this last era, and everything that came before. The earlier years–the ones I've just been telling you about–they tend to blur into each other as a kind of golden time, and when I think about them at all, even the not-so-great things, I can't help feeling a sort of glow. But those last years feel different. They weren't unhappy exactly–I've got plenty of memories I treasure from them–but they were more serious, and in some ways darker. Maybe I've exaggerated it in my mind, but I've got an impression of things changing rapidly around then, like day moving into night.

That talk with Tommy beside the pond: I think of it now as a kind of marker between the two eras. Not that anything significant started to happen immediately afterwards; but for me at least, that conversation was a turning point. I definitely started to look at everything differently. Where before I'd have backed away from awkward stuff, I began instead, more and more, to ask questions, if not out loud, at least within myself.

In particular, that conversation got me looking at Miss Lucy in a new light. I watched her carefully whenever I could, not just from curiosity, but because I now saw her as the most likely source of important clues. And that's how it was, over the next year or two, I came to notice various odd little things she said or did that my friends missed altogether.

There was the time, for example, maybe a few weeks after the talk by the pond, when Miss Lucy was taking us for English. We'd been looking at some poetry, but had somehow drifted onto talking about soldiers in World War Two being kept in prison camps. One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified, and then someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching a fence. This might have been intended as a serious point, but the rest of us thought it pretty funny. We were all laughing and talking at once, and then Laura–typical of her–got up on her seat and did a hysterical impersonation of someone reaching out and getting electrocuted. For a moment things got riotous, with everyone shouting and mimicking touching electric fences.

I went on watching Miss Lucy through all this and I could see, just for a second, a ghostly expression come over her face as she watched the class in front of her. Then–I kept watching carefully–she pulled herself together,

smiled and said: “It's just as well the fences at Hailsham aren't electrified. You get terrible accidents sometimes.”

She said this quite softly, and because people were still shouting, she was more or less drowned out. But I heard her clearly enough. “You get terrible accidents sometimes.” What accidents? Where? But no one picked her up on it, and we went back to discussing our poem.

There were other little incidents like that, and before long I came to see Miss Lucy as being not quite like the other guardians. It's even possible I began to realise, right back then, the nature of her worries and frustrations. But that's probably going too far; chances are, at the time, I noticed all these things without knowing what on earth to make of them. And if these incidents now seem full of significance and all of a piece, it's probably because I'm looking at them in the light of what came later–particularly what happened that day at the pavilion while we were sheltering from the downpour.

We were fifteen by then, already into our last year at Hailsham. We'd been in the pavilion getting ready for a game of rounders. The boys were going through a phase of “enjoying” rounders in order to flirt with us, so there were over thirty of us that afternoon. The downpour had started while we were changing, and we found ourselves gathering on the veranda–which was sheltered by the pavilion roof–while we waited for it to stop. But the rain kept going, and when the last of us had emerged, the veranda was pretty crowded, with everyone milling around restlessly. I remember Laura was demonstrating to me an especially disgusting way of blowing your nose for when you really wanted to put off a boy.

Miss Lucy was the only guardian present. She was leaning over the rail at the front, peering into the rain like she was trying to see right across the playing field. I was watching her as carefully as ever in those days, and even as I was laughing at Laura, I was stealing glances at Miss Lucy's back. I remember wondering if there wasn't something a bit odd about her posture, the way her head was bent down just a little too far so she looked like a crouching animal waiting to pounce. And the way she was leaning forward over the rail meant drops from the overhanging gutter were only just missing her–but she seemed to show no sign of caring. I remember actually convincing myself there was nothing unusual in all this–that she was simply anxious for the rain to stop–and turning my attention back to what Laura was saying. Then a few minutes later, when I'd forgotten all about Miss Lucy and was laughing my head off at something, I suddenly realised things had gone quiet around us, and that Miss Lucy was speaking.

She was standing at the same spot as before, but she'd turned to face us now, so her back was against the rail, and the rainy sky behind her.

“No, no, I'm sorry, I'm going to have to interrupt you,” she was saying, and I could see she was talking to two boys sitting on the benches immediately in front of her. Her voice wasn't exactly strange, but she was speaking very loudly, in the sort of voice she'd use to announce something to the lot of us, and that was why we'd all gone quiet. “No, Peter, I'm going to have to stop you. I can't listen to you any more and keep silent.”

Then she raised her gaze to include the rest of us and took a deep breath. “All right, you can hear this, it's for all of you. It's time someone spelt it out.”

We waited while she kept staring at us. Later, some people said they'd thought she was going to give us a big telling-off; others that she was about to announce a new rule on how we played rounders. But I knew before she said another word it would be something more.

“Boys, you must forgive me for listening. But you were right behind me, so I couldn't help it. Peter, why don't you tell the others what you were saying to Gordon just now?”

Peter J. looked bewildered and I could see him getting ready his injured innocence face. But then Miss Lucy said again, this time much more gently:

“Peter, go on. Please tell the others what you were just saying.”

Peter shrugged. “We were just talking about what it would feel like if we became actors. What sort of life it would be.”

“Yes,” Miss Lucy said, “and you were saying to Gordon you'd have to go to America to stand the best chance.”

Peter J. shrugged again and muttered quietly: “Yes, Miss Lucy.”

But Miss Lucy was now moving her gaze over the lot of us. “I know you don't mean any harm. But there's just too much talk like this. I hear it all the time, it's been allowed to go on, and it's not right.” I could see more drops coming off the gutter and landing on her shoulder, but she didn't seem to notice. “If no one else will talk to you,” she continued, “then I will. The problem, as I see it, is that you've been told and not told. You've been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I'm not. If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know

and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. So you're not to talk that way any more. You'll be leaving Hailsham before long, and it's not so far off, the day you'll be preparing for your first donations. You need to remember that. If you're to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you."

Then she went silent, but my impression was that she was continuing to say things inside her head, because for some time her gaze kept roving over us, going from face to face just as if she were still speaking to us. We were all pretty relieved when she turned to look out over the playing field again.

"It's not so bad now," she said, even though the rain was as steady as ever. "Let's just go out there. Then maybe the sun will come out too."

I think that was all she said. When I was discussing it with Ruth a few years ago at the centre in Dover, she claimed Miss Lucy had told us a lot more; that she'd explained how before donations we'd all spend some time first as carers, about the usual sequence of the donations, the recovery centres and so on–but I'm pretty sure she didn't. Okay, she probably intended to when she began talking. But my guess is once she'd set off, once she'd seen the puzzled, uncomfortable faces in front of her, she realised the impossibility of completing what she'd started.

It's hard to say clearly what sort of impact Miss Lucy's outburst at the pavilion made. Word got round fast enough, but the talk mostly focused on Miss Lucy herself rather than on what she'd been trying to tell us. Some students thought she'd lost her marbles for a moment; others that she'd been asked to say what she had by Miss Emily and the other guardians; there were even some who'd actually been there and who thought Miss Lucy had been telling us off for being too rowdy on the veranda. But as I say there was surprisingly little discussion about what she'd said. If it did come up, people tended to say: "Well so what? We already knew all that."

But that had been Miss Lucy's point exactly. We'd been "told and not told," as she'd put it. A few years ago, when Tommy and I were going over it all again, and I reminded him of Miss Lucy's "told and not told" idea, he came up with a theory.

Tommy thought it possible the guardians had, throughout all our years at Hailsham, timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just too young to understand properly the latest piece of information. But of course we'd take it in at some level, so that before long all this stuff was there in our heads without us ever having examined it properly.

It's a bit too much like a conspiracy theory for me–I don't think our guardians were that crafty–but there's probably something in it. Certainly, it feels like I always knew about donations in some vague way, even as early as six or seven. And it's curious, when we were older and the guardians were giving us those talks, nothing came as a complete surprise. It was like we'd heard everything somewhere before.

One thing that occurs to me now is that when the guardians first started giving us proper lectures about sex, they tended to run them together with talk about the donations. At that age–again, I'm talking of around thirteen–we were all pretty worried and excited about sex, and naturally would have pushed the other stuff into the background. In other words, it's possible the guardians managed to smuggle into our heads a lot of the basic facts about our futures.

Now to be fair, it was probably natural to run these two subjects together. If, say, they were telling us how we'd have to be very careful to avoid diseases when we had sex, it would have been odd not to mention how much more important this was for us than for normal people outside. And that, of course, would bring us onto the donations.

Then there was the whole business about our not being able to have babies. Miss Emily used to give a lot of the sex lectures herself, and I remember once, she brought in a life-size skeleton from the biology class to demonstrate how it was done. We watched in complete astonishment as she put the skeleton through various contortions, thrusting her pointer around without the slightest self-consciousness. She was going through all the nuts and bolts of how you did it, what went in where, the different variations, like this was still Geography. Then suddenly, with the skeleton in an obscene heap on the desktop, she turned away and began telling us how we had to be careful who we had sex with. Not just because of the diseases, but because, she said, "sex affects emotions in ways you'd never expect." We had to be extremely careful about having sex in the outside world, especially with people who weren't students, because out there sex meant all sorts of things. Out there people were even fighting and killing each other over who had sex with whom. And the reason it meant so much–so much more than, say, dancing or table-tennis–was because the people out there were different from us

students: they could have babies from sex. That was why it was so important to them, this question of who did it with whom. And even though, as we knew, it was completely impossible for any of us to have babies, out there, we had to behave like them. We had to respect the rules and treat sex as something pretty special.

Miss Emily's lecture that day was typical of what I'm talking about. We'd be focusing on sex, and then the other stuff would creep in. I suppose that was all part of how we came to be "told and not told."

I think in the end we must have absorbed quite a lot of information, because I remember, around that age, a marked change in the way we approached the whole territory surrounding the donations. Until then, as I've said, we'd done everything to avoid the subject; we'd backed off at the first sign we were entering that ground, and there'd been severe punishment for any idiot–like Marge that time–who got careless. But from when we were thirteen, like I say, things started to change. We still didn't discuss the donations and all that went with them; we still found the whole area awkward enough. But it became something we made jokes about, in much the way we joked about sex. Looking back now, I'd say the rule about not discussing the donations openly was still there, as strong as ever. But now it was okay, almost required, every now and then, to make some jokey allusion to these things that lay in front of us.

A good example is what happened the time Tommy got the gash on his elbow. It must have been just before my talk with him by the pond; a time, I suppose, when Tommy was still coming out of that phase of being teased and taunted.

It wasn't such a bad gash, and though he was sent to Crow Face to have it seen to, he was back almost straight away with a square of dressing plastered to his elbow. No one thought much about it until a couple of days later, when Tommy took off the dressing to reveal something at just that stage between sealing and still being an open wound. You could see bits of skin starting to bond, and soft red bits peeping up from underneath. We were in the middle of lunch, so everyone crowded round to go "urgh!" Then Christopher H., from the year above, said with a dead straight face: "Pity it's on that bit of the elbow. Just about anywhere else, it wouldn't matter."

Tommy looked worried–Christopher being someone he looked up to in those days–and asked what he meant. Christopher went on eating, then said nonchalantly:

“Don't you know? If it's right on the elbow like that, it can unzip. All you have to do is bend your arm quickly. Not just that actual bit, the whole elbow, it can all unzip like a bag opening up. Thought you'd know that.”

I could hear Tommy complaining that Crow Face hadn't warned him of anything of that sort, but Christopher shrugged and said: “She thought you knew, of course. Everyone knows.”

A number of people nearby murmured agreement. “You've got to keep your arm dead straight,” someone else said. “Bending it at all's really dangerous.”

The next day I could see Tommy going about with his arm held out very rigidly and looking worried. Everybody was laughing at him, and I was cross about that, but I had to admit, there was a funny side to it. Then towards the end of the afternoon as we were leaving the Art Room, he came up to me in the corridor and said: “Kath, can I just have a quick word?”

This was maybe a couple of weeks after the time I'd gone up to him in the playing field to remind him about his polo shirt, so it had got about we were special friends of some sort. All the same, his coming up like that asking for a private talk was pretty embarrassing and threw me off balance. Maybe that partly explains why I wasn't more helpful than I was.

“I'm not too worried or anything,” he began, once he'd got me aside. “But I wanted to play safe, that's all. We should never take chances with our health. I need someone to help, Kath.” He was, he explained, concerned about what he'd do in his sleep. He might easily bend his elbow in the night. “I have these dreams all the time where I'm fighting loads of Roman soldiers.”

When I quizzed him a bit, it became obvious all kinds of people–people who hadn't been there that lunch-time–had been coming up to him to repeat Christopher H.'s warning. In fact, it seemed a few had carried the joke further: Tommy had been told of a student who'd gone to sleep with a cut on the elbow just like his and woken up to find his whole upper arm and hand skeletally exposed, the skin flopping about next to him “like one of those long gloves in My Fair Lady.”

What Tommy was asking me now was to help tie a splint on the arm to keep it rigid through the night.

“I don't trust any of the others,” he said, holding up a thick ruler he wanted to use. “They might deliberately do it so it comes undone in the night.”

He was looking at me in complete innocence and I didn't know what to say. A part of me wanted badly to tell him what was going on, and I suppose I knew that to do anything else would be to betray the trust we'd built up since the moment I'd reminded him about his polo shirt. And for me to strap up his arm in a splint would have meant my becoming one of the main perpetrators of the joke. I still feel ashamed I didn't tell him then. But you've got to remember I was still young, and that I only had a few seconds to decide. And when someone's asking you to do something in such a pleading way, everything goes against saying no.

I suppose the main thing was that I didn't want to upset him. Because I could see, for all his anxiety about his elbow, Tommy was touched by all the concern he believed had been shown him. Of course, I knew he'd find out the truth sooner or later, but at that moment I just couldn't tell him. The best I could do was to ask:

"Did Crow Face tell you you had to do this?"

"No. But imagine how angry she'd be if my elbow slipped out."

I still feel bad about it, but I promised to strap his arm for him–in Room 14 half an hour before the night bell–and watched him go off grateful and reassured.

As it happened, I didn't have to go through with it because Tommy found out first. It was around eight in the evening, I was coming down the main staircase, and heard a burst of laughter rising up the stairwell from the ground floor. My heart sank because I knew immediately it was to do with Tommy. I paused on the first-floor landing and looked over the rail just as Tommy came out of the billiards room with thunderous footsteps. I remember thinking: "At least he's not shouting." And he didn't, the whole time he went to the cloakroom, got his things and left the main house. And all that time, laughter kept coming from the open doorway of the billiards room, and voices yelling things like: "If you lose your temper, your elbow will definitely pop out!"

I thought about following him out into the evening and catching up with him before he got to his dorm hut, but then I remembered how I'd promised to put his arm in a splint for the night, and didn't move. I just kept saying to myself: "At least he didn't have a tantrum. At least he kept hold of that temper."

But I've gone off a bit. The reason I was talking about all this was because the idea of things "unzipping" carried over from Tommy's elbow to become a

running joke among us about the donations. The idea was that when the time came, you'd be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you'd hand it over. It wasn't something we found so funny in itself; it was more a way of putting each other off our food. You unzipped your liver, say, and dumped it on someone's plate, that sort of thing. I remember once Gary B., who had this unbelievable appetite, coming back with a third helping of pudding, and virtually the whole table "unzipping" bits of themselves and piling it all over Gary's bowl, while he went on determinedly stuffing himself.

Tommy never liked it much when the unzipping stuff came up again, but by then the days of his being teased were past and no one connected the joke with him any more. It was just done to get a laugh, to put someone off their dinner–and, I suppose, as some way of acknowledging what was in front of us. And this was my original point. By that time in our lives, we no longer shrank from the subject of donations as we'd have done a year or two earlier; but neither did we think about it very seriously, or discuss it. All that business about "unzipping," that was typical of the way the whole subject impinged on us when we were thirteen.

So I'd say Miss Lucy had it about right when she said, a couple of years later, that we'd been "told and not told." And what's more, now I think about it, I'd say what Miss Lucy said to us that afternoon led to a real shift in our attitudes. It was after that day, jokes about donations faded away, and we started to think properly about things. If anything, the donations went back to being a subject to be avoided, but not in the way it had been when we were younger. This time round it wasn't awkward or embarrassing any more; just sombre and serious.

"It's funny," Tommy said to me when we were remembering it all again a few years ago. "None of us stopped to think about how she felt, Miss Lucy herself. We never worried if she'd got into trouble, saying what she did to us. We were so selfish back then."

"But you can't blame us," I said. "We'd been taught to think about each other, but never about the guardians. The idea the guardians had differences between them, that never occurred to us."

"But we were old enough," Tommy said. "By that age, it should have occurred to us. But it didn't. We didn't think about poor Miss Lucy at all. Not even after that time, you know, when you saw her."

I knew straight away what he meant. He was talking about the morning early in our last summer at Hailsham, when I'd stumbled across her up in Room

22. Thinking about it now, I'd say Tommy had a point. After that moment it should have been clear, even to us, how troubled Miss Lucy had become. But as he said, we never considered anything from her viewpoint, and it never occurred to us to say or do anything to support her.

Chapter Eight

Many of us had turned sixteen by then. It was a morning of brilliant sunshine and we'd all just come down to the courtyard after a lesson in the main house, when I remembered something I'd left in the classroom. So I went back up to the third floor and that's how the thing with Miss Lucy happened.

In those days I had this secret game. When I found myself alone, I'd stop and look for a view–out of a window, say, or through a doorway into a room–any view so long as there were no people in it. I did this so that I could, for a few seconds at least, create the illusion the place wasn't crawling with students, but that instead Hailsham was this quiet, tranquil house where I lived with just five or six others. To make this work, you had to get yourself into a sort of dream, and shut off all the stray noises and voices. Usually you had to be pretty patient too: if, say, you were focusing from a window on one particular bit of the playing field, you could wait ages for those couple of seconds when there wasn't anyone at all in your frame. Anyway, that was what I was doing that morning after I'd fetched whatever it was I'd left in the classroom and come back out onto the third-floor landing.

I was keeping very still near a window looking down onto a section of the courtyard where I'd been standing only moments before. My friends had gone, and the courtyard was steadily emptying, so I was waiting for my trick to work, when I heard behind me what sounded like gas or steam escaping in sharp bursts.

It was a hissing noise that would go on for about ten seconds, pause, then come again. I wasn't alarmed exactly, but since I seemed to be the only person around, I thought I'd better go and investigate.

I went across the landing towards the sound, along the corridor past the room I'd just been in, and down to Room 22, second from the end. The door was partly open, and just as I came up to it, the hissing started up again with a new intensity. I don't know what I expected to discover as I cautiously pushed the door, but I was properly surprised to find Miss Lucy.

Room 22 was hardly used for classes because it was so small and, even on a day like that one, hardly any light got in. The guardians sometimes went in there to mark our work or get on with reading. That morning the room was darker than ever because the blinds had been pulled almost all the way down. There were two tables pushed together for a group to sit around, but Miss Lucy was there alone near the back. I could see several loose sheets of

dark, shiny paper scattered over the table in front of her. She herself was leaning over in concentration, forehead very low, arms up on the surface, scrawling furious lines over a page with a pencil. Underneath the heavy black lines I could see neat blue handwriting. As I watched, she went on scrubbing the pencil point over the paper, almost in the way we did shading in Art, except her movements were much more angry, as if she didn't mind gouging right through the sheet. Then I realised, in the same instant, that this was the source of the odd noise, and that what I'd taken for dark shiny paper on the table had also, not long before, been pages of neat handwriting.

She was so lost in what she was doing, it took a while for her to realise I was there. When she looked up with a start, I could see her face was flushed, but there were no traces of tears. She stared at me, then put down her pencil.

"Hello, young lady," she said, then took a deep breath. "What can I do for you?"

I think I turned away so I didn't have to look at her or at the papers over the desk. I can't remember if I said very much–if I explained about the noise and how I'd worried about it being gas. In any case, there was no proper conversation: she didn't want me there and neither did I. I think I made some apology and went out, half expecting her to call me back. But she didn't, and what I remember now is that I went down the staircase burning with shame and resentment. At that moment I wished more than anything that I hadn't seen what I'd just seen, though if you'd asked me to define just what I was so upset about, I wouldn't have been able to explain. Shame, as I say, had a lot to do with it, and also fury, though not exactly at Miss Lucy herself. I was very confused, and that's probably why I didn't say anything about it to my friends until much later.

After that morning I became convinced something else–perhaps something awful–lay around the corner to do with Miss Lucy, and I kept my eyes and ears open for it. But the days passed and I heard nothing. What I didn't know at the time was that something pretty significant had happened only a few days after I'd seen her in Room 22–something between Miss Lucy and Tommy that had left him upset and disorientated. There would have been a time not so much earlier when Tommy and I would have immediately reported to each other any news of this sort; but just around that summer, various things were going on which meant we weren't talking so freely.

That's why I didn't hear about it for so long. Afterwards I could have kicked myself for not guessing, for not seeking Tommy out and getting it out of him. But as I've said, there was a lot going on around then, between Tommy and Ruth, a whole host of other stuff, and I'd put all the changes I'd noticed in

him down to that.

It's probably going too far to say Tommy's whole act fell apart that summer, but there were times when I got seriously worried he was turning back into the awkward and changeable figure from several years before. Once, for instance, a few of us were going back from the pavilion towards the dorm huts and found ourselves walking behind Tommy and a couple of other boys. They were just a few paces ahead, and all of them–Tommy included–looked to be in good form, laughing and shoving each other. In fact, I'd say Laura, who was walking beside me, took her cue from the way the boys were larking about. The thing was, Tommy must have been sitting on the ground earlier, because there was a sizeable chunk of mud stuck on his rugby shirt near the small of his back. He was obviously unaware of it, and I don't think his friends had seen it either or they'd surely have made something of it. Anyway, Laura being Laura shouted out something like: "Tommy! You got poo-poo on your back! What have you been doing?"

She'd done this in a completely friendly way, and if some of the rest of us made a few noises too, it wasn't anything more than the sort of thing students did the whole time. So it was a complete shock when Tommy came to a dead halt, wheeled round and stared at Laura with a face like thunder. We all stopped too–the boys looking as bewildered as we were–and for a few seconds I thought Tommy was going to blow for the first time in years. But then he abruptly stalked off, leaving us all swapping looks and shrugging.

Nearly as bad was the time I showed him Patricia C.'s calendar. Patricia was two years below us but everyone was in awe of her drawing skills, and her stuff was always sought after at the Art Exchanges. I'd been particularly pleased with the calendar, which I'd managed to get at the last Exchange, because word had been going round about it from weeks before. It wasn't anything like, say, Miss Emily's flappy colour calendars of the English counties. Patricia's calendar was tiny and dumpy, and for each month there was a stunning little pencil sketch of a scene from Hailsham life. I wish I still had it now, especially since in some of the pictures–like the ones for June and for September–you can make out the faces of particular students and guardians. It's one of the things I lost when I left the Cottages, when my mind was elsewhere and I wasn't being so careful what I took with me–but I'll come to all that in its place. My point now is that Patricia's calendar was a real catch, I was proud of it, and that's why I wanted to show it to Tommy.

I'd spotted him standing in the late afternoon sunshine beside the big sycamore near the South Playing Field, and since my calendar was there in my bag–I'd been showing it off during our music lesson–I'd gone over to him.

He was absorbed in a football match involving some younger boys over in the next field and at this stage his mood seemed just fine, tranquil even. He smiled when I came up to him and we chatted for a minute about nothing in particular. Then I said: "Tommy, look what I managed to get." I didn't try to keep the triumph out of my voice, and I may even have gone "dah-dah!" as I brought it out and handed it to him. When he took the calendar, there was still a smile on his features, but as he flicked through I could see something closing off inside him.

"That Patricia," I began to say, but I could hear my own voice changing. "She's so clever..."

But Tommy was already handing it back to me. Then without another word he marched past me off towards the main house.

This last incident should have given me a clue. If I'd thought about it with half a brain, I should have guessed Tommy's recent moods had something to do with Miss Lucy and his old problems about "being creative." But with everything else going on just at that time, I didn't, as I say, think in these terms at all. I suppose I must have assumed those old problems had been left behind with our early teen years, and that only the big issues that now loomed so large could possibly preoccupy any of us.

So what had been going on? Well, for a start, Ruth and Tommy had had a serious bust-up. They'd been a couple for about six months by then; at least, that's how long they'd been "public" about it–walking around with arms around each other, that kind of thing. They were respected as a couple because they weren't show-offs. Some others, Sylvia B. and Roger D., for example, could get stomach-churning, and you had to give them a chorus of vomiting noises just to keep them in order. But Ruth and Tommy never did anything gross in front of people, and if sometimes they cuddled or whatever, it felt like they were genuinely doing it for each other, not for an audience.

Looking back now, I can see we were pretty confused about this whole area around sex. That's hardly surprising, I suppose, given we were barely sixteen. But what added to the confusion–I can see it more clearly now–was the fact that the guardians were themselves confused. On the one hand we had, say, Miss Emily's talks, when she'd tell us how important it was not to be ashamed of our bodies, to "respect our physical needs," how sex was "a very beautiful gift" as long as both people really wanted it. But when it came down to it, the guardians made it more or less impossible for any of us actually to do much without breaking rules. We couldn't visit the boys' dorms after nine o'clock, they couldn't visit ours. The classrooms were all officially "out of bounds" in the evenings, as were the areas behind the sheds and the

pavilion. And you didn't want to do it in the fields even when it was warm enough, because you'd almost certainly discover afterwards you'd had an audience watching from the house passing around binoculars. In other words, for all the talk of sex being beautiful, we had the distinct impression we'd be in trouble if the guardians caught us at it.

I say this, but the only real case I personally knew of like that was when Jenny C. and Rob D. got interrupted in Room 14. They were doing it after lunch, right there over one of the desks, and Mr. Jack had come in to get something. According to Jenny, Mr. Jack had turned red and gone right out again, but they'd been put off and had stopped. They'd more or less dressed themselves when Mr. Jack came back, just as though for the first time, and pretended to be surprised and shocked.

"It's very clear to me what you've been doing and it's not appropriate," he'd said, and told them both to go and see Miss Emily. But once they'd got to Miss Emily's office, she'd told them she was on her way to an important meeting and didn't have time to talk to them.

"But you know you shouldn't have been doing whatever you were doing, and I don't expect you'll do it again," she'd said, before rushing out with her folders.

Gay sex, incidentally, was something we were even more confused about. For some reason, we called it "umbrella sex"; if you fancied someone your own sex, you were "an umbrella." I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we definitely weren't at all kind towards any signs of gay stuff. The boys especially could do the cruellest things. According to Ruth this was because quite a few of them had done things with each other when they'd been younger, before they'd realised what they were doing. So now they were ridiculously tense about it. I don't know if she was right, but for sure, accusing someone of "getting all umbrella" could easily end in a fight.

When we discussed all these things–as we did endlessly back then–we couldn't decide whether or not the guardians wanted us to have sex or not. Some people thought they did, but that we kept trying to do it at all the wrong times. Hannah had the theory that it was their duty to make us have sex because otherwise we wouldn't be good donors later on. According to her, things like your kidneys and pancreas didn't work properly unless you kept having sex. Someone else said what we had to remember was that the guardians were "normals." That's why they were so odd about it; for them, sex was for when you wanted babies, and even though they knew, intellectually, that we couldn't have babies, they still felt uneasy about us doing it because deep down they couldn't quite believe we wouldn't end up with babies.

Annette B. had another theory: that the guardians were uncomfortable about us having sex with each other because they'd then want to have sex with us. Mr. Chris in particular, she said, looked at us girls in that way. Laura said that what Annette really meant was she wanted to have sex with Mr. Chris. We all cracked up at this because the idea of having sex with Mr. Chris seemed absurd, as well as completely sick-making.

The theory I think came closest was the one put forward by Ruth. "They're telling us about sex for after we leave Hailsham," she said. "They want us to do it properly, with someone we like and without getting diseases. But they really mean it for after we leave. They don't want us doing it here, because it's too much hassle for them."

My guess, anyway, is that there wasn't nearly as much sex going on as people made out. A lot of snogging and touching up, maybe; and couples hinting they were having proper sex. But looking back, I wonder how much of it there really was. If everyone who claimed to be doing it really had been, then that's all you'd have seen when you walked about Hailsham–couples going at it left, right and centre.

What I remember is that there was this discreet agreement among us all not to quiz each other too much about our claims. If, say, Hannah rolled her eyes when you were discussing another girl and murmured: "Virgin"–meaning "Of course we're not, but she is, so what can you expect?"–then it definitely wasn't on to ask her: "Who did you do it with? When? Where?" No, you just nodded knowingly. It was like there was some parallel universe we all vanished off to where we had all this sex.

I must have seen at the time how all these claims being made around me didn't add up. All the same, as that summer approached, I began to feel more and more the odd one out. In a way, sex had got like "being creative" had been a few years earlier. It felt like if you hadn't done it yet, you ought to, and quickly. And in my case, the whole thing was made more complicated by the fact that two of the girls I was closest to definitely had done it. Laura with Rob D., even though they'd never been a proper couple. And Ruth with Tommy.

For all that, I'd been holding it off for ages, repeating to myself Miss Emily's advice–"If you can't find someone with whom you truly wish to share this experience, then don't!" But around the spring of the year I'm talking about now, I started to think I wouldn't mind having sex with a boy. Not just to see what it was like, but also because it occurred to me I needed to get familiar with sex, and it would be just as well to practise first with a boy I didn't care about too much. Then later on, if I was with someone special, I'd have more

chance of doing everything right. What I mean is, if Miss Emily was correct and sex was this really big deal between people, then I didn't want to be doing it for the first time when it was really important how well it went.

So I had my eye on Harry C. I chose him for a number of reasons. First, I knew he'd definitely done it before, with Sharon D. Next, I didn't fancy him that much, but I certainly didn't find him sick-making. Also, he was quiet and decent, so unlikely to go round gossiping afterwards if it was a complete disaster. And he'd hinted a few times he'd like to have sex with me. Okay, a lot of the boys were making flirty noises in those days, but it was clear by then what was a real proposition and what was the usual boys' stuff.

So I'd chosen Harry, and I only delayed those couple of months because I wanted to make sure I'd be all right physically. Miss Emily had told us it could be painful and a big failure if you didn't get wet enough and this was my one real worry. It wasn't being ripped apart down there, which we often joked about, and was the secret fear of quite a few girls. I kept thinking, as long as I got wet quick enough, there'd be no problem, and I did it a lot on my own just to make sure.

I realise this may sound like I was getting obsessive, but I remember I also spent a lot of time re-reading passages from books where people had sex, going over the lines again and again, trying to tease out clues. The trouble was, the books we had at Hailsham weren't at all helpful. We had a lot of nineteenth-century stuff by Thomas Hardy and people like that, which was more or less useless. Some modern books, by people like Edna O'Brien and Margaret Drabble, had some sex in them, but it wasn't ever very clear what was happening because the authors always assumed you'd already had a lot of sex before and there was no need to go into details. So I was having a frustrating time with the books, and the videos weren't much better. We'd got a video player in the billiards room a couple of years earlier, and by that spring had built up quite a good collection of movies. A lot of them had sex in them, but most scenes would end just as the sex was starting up, or else you'd only see their faces and their backs. And when there was a useful scene, it was difficult to see it more than fleetingly because there were usually twenty others in the room watching with you. We'd evolved this system where we called for particular favourite scenes to be played again–like, for instance, the moment the American jumps over the barbed wire on his bike in The Great Escape. There'd be a chant of: “Rewind! Rewind!” until someone got the remote and we'd see the portion again, sometimes three, four times. But I could hardly, by myself, start shouting for rewinds just to see sex scenes again.

So I kept delaying week by week, while I went on preparing, until the summer

came and I decided I was as ready as I'd ever be. By then, I was even feeling reasonably confident about it, and began dropping hints to Harry. Everything was going fine and according to plan, when Ruth and Tommy split up and it all got confused.

Chapter Nine

What happened was that a few days after they split, I was in the Art Room with some other girls, working on a still life. I remember it being stifling that day, even though we had the fan rattling behind us. We were using charcoal, and because someone had commandeered all the easels, we were having to work with our boards propped up on our laps. I was sitting beside Cynthia E., and we'd just been chatting and complaining about the heat. Then somehow we'd got onto the subject of boys, and she'd said, not looking up from her work:

"And Tommy. I knew it wouldn't last with Ruth. Well, I suppose you're the natural successor."

She'd said it in a throwaway manner. But Cynthia was a perceptive person, and the fact that she wasn't part of our group just gave her remark more weight. What I mean is, I couldn't help thinking she represented what anyone with any distance on the subject would think. After all, I'd been Tommy's friend for years until all this couples stuff had come up. It was perfectly possible that to someone on the outside, I'd look like Ruth's "natural successor." I just let it go, though, and Cynthia, who wasn't trying to make any big point, said nothing else about it.

Then maybe a day or two later, I was coming out of the pavilion with Hannah when she suddenly nudged me and nodded towards a group of boys over on the North Playing Field.

"Look," she said quietly. "Tommy. Sitting by himself."

I shrugged, as though to say: "So what?" And that's all there was to it. But afterwards I found myself thinking a lot about it. Maybe all Hannah had meant to do was point out how Tommy, since splitting with Ruth, looked a bit of a spare part. But I couldn't quite buy this; I knew Hannah too well. The way she'd nudged me and lowered her voice had made it all too obvious she too was expressing some assumption, probably doing the rounds, about me being the "natural successor."

All this did, as I say, put me in a bit of a confusion, because until then I'd been all set on my Harry plan. In fact, looking back now, I'm sure I would have had sex with Harry if it hadn't been for this "natural successor" business. I'd had it all sorted, and my preparations had gone well. And I still think Harry was a good choice for that stage in my life. I think he would have been considerate and gentle, and have understood what I was wanting from

him.

I saw Harry fleetingly a couple of years ago at the recovery centre in Wiltshire. He was being brought in after a donation. I wasn't in the best of moods because my own donor had just completed the night before. No one was blaming me for that–it had been a particularly untidy operation–but I wasn't feeling great all the same. I'd been up most of the night, sorting all the arrangements, and I was in the front reception getting ready to leave when I saw Harry coming in. He was in a wheelchair–because he was so weak, I found out later, not because he couldn't actually walk–and I'm not sure he recognised me when I went up and said hello. I suppose there's no reason I should have any special place in his memory. We'd never had much to do with each other apart from that one time. To him, if he remembered me at all, I'd just be this daft girl who came up to him once, asked if he wanted sex, then backed off. He must have been pretty mature for his age, because he didn't get annoyed or go round telling people I was a tease, or any of that. So when I saw him being brought in that day, I felt grateful to him and wished I was his carer. I looked about, but whoever was his carer wasn't even around. The orderlies were impatient to get him to his room, so I didn't talk with him long. I just said hello, that I hoped he'd feel better soon, and he smiled tiredly. When I mentioned Hailsham he did a thumbs-up, but I could tell he didn't recognise me. Maybe later, when he wasn't so tired, or when the medication wasn't so strong, he'd have tried to place me and remembered.

Anyway, I was talking about back then: about how after Ruth and Tommy split, all my plans got confused. Looking at it now, I feel a bit sorry for Harry. After all the hints I'd been dropping the previous week, there I was, suddenly whispering stuff to put him off. I suppose I must have assumed he was raring to go, that I had my work cut out just to hold him off. Because whenever I saw him, I'd always get something in quick, then rush off before he could say anything back. It was only much later, when I thought about it, it occurred to me he might not have had sex on his mind at all. For all I know, he might have been happy to forget the whole thing, except that every time he saw me, along a corridor or in the grounds, I'd come up and whisper some excuse why I didn't want sex with him just then. It must have looked pretty daft from his side, and if he hadn't been such a decent type, I'd have been a laughing stock in no time. Well, anyway, this era of putting Harry off lasted maybe a couple of weeks, and then came Ruth's request.

That summer, right up until the warm weather faded, we developed this odd way of listening to music together in the fields. Walkmans had started appearing at Hailsham since the previous year's Sales and by that summer there were at least six of them in circulation. The craze was for several people to sit on the grass around a single Walkman, passing the headset around. Okay, it sounds a stupid way to listen to music, but it created a really good feeling. You listened for maybe twenty seconds, took off the headset, passed it on. After a while, provided you kept the same tape going over and over, it was surprising how close it was to having heard all of it by yourself. As I say, the craze really took off that summer, and during the lunch breaks you'd see all these clusters of students lying about the grass around the Walkmans. The guardians weren't too keen, saying we'd spread ear infections, but they let us carry on. I can't remember that last summer without thinking about those afternoons around the Walkmans. Someone would wander up and ask: "What's the sound?" and if they liked the answer, they'd sit down on the grass and wait their turn. There was almost always a good atmosphere around these sessions and I don't remember anyone being refused a share of the headset.

Anyway, that's what I was up to with a few other girls when Ruth came up to ask if we could have a talk. I could tell it was something important, so I left my other friends and the two of us walked off, all the way to our dorm hut. When we got to our room, I sat down on Ruth's bed, close to the window–the sun had warmed the blanket–and she sat on mine over by the back wall. There was a bluebottle buzzing around, and for a minute we had a laugh playing "bluebottle tennis," throwing our hands about to make the demented creature go from one to the other of us. Then it found its way out of the window, and Ruth said:

"I want me and Tommy to get back together again. Kathy, will you help?" Then she asked: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I was just a bit surprised, after what's happened. Of course I'll help."

"I haven't told anybody else about wanting to get back with Tommy. Not even Hannah. You're the only one I trust."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Just talk to him. You've always had this way with him. He'll listen to you. And he'll know you're not bullshitting about me."

For a moment we sat there swinging our feet under our beds.

“It's really good you're telling me this,” I said eventually. “I probably am the best person. Talking to Tommy and all that.”

“What I want is for us to make a fresh start. We're about evens now, we've both done daft things just to hurt each other, but it's enough now. Martha bloody H., I ask you! Maybe he did it just to give me a good laugh. Well you can tell him he succeeded, and the scores are all even again. It's time we grew up and started afresh. I know you can reason with him, Kathy. You'll deal with it the best way possible. Then if he's still not prepared to be sensible, I'll know there's no point carrying on with him.”

I shrugged. “As you say, Tommy and I, we've always been able to talk.”

“Yeah, and he really respects you. I know because he's often talked about it. How you've got guts and how you always do what you say you're going to do. He told me once if he was in a corner, he'd rather have you backing him than any of the boys.” She did a quick laugh. “Now you've got to admit, that's a real compliment. So you see, it's got to be you to our rescue. Tommy and I were made for each other and he'll listen to you. You'll do it for us, won't you, Kathy?”

I didn't say anything for a moment. Then I asked: “Ruth, are you serious about Tommy? I mean, if I do persuade him, and you get back together, you won't hurt him again?”

Ruth gave an impatient sigh. “Of course I'm serious. We're adults now. Soon we'll be leaving Hailsham. It's not a game any more.”

“Okay. I'll talk to him. Like you say, we'll be leaving here soon. We can't afford to waste time.”

After that, I remember us sitting on those beds, talking for some time. Ruth wanted to go over everything again and again: how stupid he was being, why they were really suited to each other, how differently they'd do things next time round, how they'd keep much more private, how they'd have sex in better places at better times. We talked about it all and she wanted my advice on everything. Then at one point, I was looking out of the window towards the hills in the distance, when I was startled to feel Ruth, suddenly beside me, squeeze my shoulders.

“Kathy, I knew we could depend on you,” she said. “Tommy's right. You're

just the person to have when you're in a corner."

What with one thing and another, I didn't get a chance to talk to Tommy for the next few days. Then one lunch-time I spotted him on the edge of the South Playing Field practising with his football. He'd been having a kickabout earlier with two other boys, but now he was alone, juggling the ball about in the air. I went over and sat down on the grass behind him, putting my back against a fence post. This couldn't have been long after that time I'd shown him Patricia C.'s calendar and he'd marched off, because I remember we weren't sure how we stood with each other. He went on with his ball-juggling, scowling with concentration–knee, foot, head, foot–while I sat there picking away at clovers and gazing at the woods in the distance that we'd once been so frightened of. In the end I decided to break the deadlock and said:

"Tommy, let's talk now. There's something I want to talk to you about."

As soon as I said this, he let the ball roll away and came to sit down beside me. It was typical of Tommy that once he knew I was willing to talk, there was suddenly no trace left of any sulkiness; just a kind of grateful eagerness that reminded me of the way we were back in the Juniors when a guardian who'd been telling us off went back to being normal. He was panting a bit, and though I knew this was from the football, it added to his overall impression of eagerness. In other words, before we'd said anything, he'd already got my back up. Then when I said to him: "Tommy, I can tell. You haven't been too happy lately," he said: "What do you mean? I'm perfectly happy. I really am." And he did a big beam, followed by this hearty laugh. That was what did it. Years later, when I saw a shadow of it every now and then, I'd just smile. But back then, it really used to get to me. If Tommy happened to say to you: "I'm really upset about it," he'd have to put on a long, downcast face, then and there, to back up his words. I don't mean he did this ironically. He actually thought he'd be more convincing. So now, to prove he was happy, here he was, trying to sparkle with bonhomie. As I say, there would come a time when I'd think this was sweet; but that summer all I could see was that it advertised what a child he still was, and how easily you could take advantage of him. I didn't know much then about the world that awaited us beyond Hailsham, but I'd guessed we'd need all our wits about us, and when Tommy did anything like this, I felt something close to panic. Until that afternoon I'd always let it go–it always seemed too difficult to explain–but this time I burst out, saying:

"Tommy, you look so stupid, laughing like that! If you want to pretend you're

happy, you don't do it that way! Just take it from me, you don't do it that way! You definitely don't! Look, you've got to grow up. And you've got to get yourself back on track. Everything's been falling apart for you just lately, and we both know why."

Tommy was looking puzzled. When he was sure I'd finished, he said: "You're right. Things have been falling apart for me. But I don't see what you mean, Kath. What do you mean, we both know? I don't see how you could know. I haven't told anyone."

"Obviously I don't have all the details. But we all know about you splitting with Ruth."

Tommy still looked puzzled. Finally he did another little laugh, but this time it was a real one. "I see what you mean," he mumbled, then paused a moment to think something over. "To be honest, Kath," he said eventually, "that's not really what's bothering me. It's really something else altogether. I just keep thinking about it all the time. About Miss Lucy."

And that was how I came to hear about it, about what had happened between Tommy and Miss Lucy at the start of that summer. Later, when I'd had time to think it over, I worked out it must have happened no more than a few days after the morning I'd seen Miss Lucy up in Room 22 scrawling over her paperwork. And like I said, I felt like kicking myself I hadn't found out from him earlier.

It had been in the afternoon near the "dead hour"–when the lessons were finished but there was still some time to go until supper. Tommy had seen Miss Lucy coming out of the main house, her arms loaded with flipcharts and box files, and because it looked like she'd drop something any moment, he'd run over and offered to help.

"Well, she gave me a few things to carry and said we were headed back to her study with it all. Even between the two of us there was too much and I dropped a couple of things on the way. Then when we were coming up to the Orangery, she suddenly stopped, and I thought she'd dropped something else. But she was looking at me, like this, straight in the face, all serious. Then she says we've got to have a talk, a good talk. I say fine, and so we go into the Orangery, into her study, put all the stuff down. And she tells me to sit down, and I end up exactly where I was the last time, you know, that time years ago. And I can tell she's remembering that time as well, because she starts talking about it like it was only the day before. No explanations, nothing, she just starts off saying something like: 'Tommy, I made a mistake, when I said what I did to you. And I should have put you right about it long

before now.' Then she's saying I should forget everything she told me before. That she'd done me a big disservice telling me not to worry about being creative. That the other guardians had been right all along, and there was no excuse for my art being so rubbish..."

"Hold on, Tommy. Did she actually say your art was 'rubbish?' "

"If it wasn't 'rubbish' it was something like it. Negligible. That might have been it. Or incompetent. She might as well have said rubbish. She said she was sorry she'd told me what she had the last time because if she hadn't, I might have sorted it all by now."

"What were you saying through all this?"

"I didn't know what to say. In the end, she actually asked. She said: 'Tommy, what are you thinking?' So I said I wasn't sure but that she shouldn't worry either way because I was all right now. And she said, no, I wasn't all right. My art was rubbish, and that was partly her fault for telling me what she had. And I said to her, but what does it matter? I'm all right now, no one laughs at me about that any more. But she keeps shaking her head saying: 'It does matter. I shouldn't have said what I did.' So it occurs to me she's talking about later, you know, about after we leave here. So I say: 'But I'll be all right, Miss. I'm really fit, I know how to look after myself. When it's time for donations, I'll be able to do it really well.' When I said this, she starts shaking her head, shaking it really hard so I'm worried she'll get dizzy. Then she says: 'Listen, Tommy, your art, it is important. And not just because it's evidence. But for your own sake. You'll get a lot from it, just for yourself.' "

"Hold on. What did she mean, 'evidence'?"

"I don't know. But she definitely said that. She said our art was important, and 'not just because it's evidence.' God knows what she meant. I did actually ask her, when she said that. I said I didn't understand what she was telling me, and was it something to do with Madame and her gallery? And she did a big sigh and said: 'Madame's gallery, yes, that's important. Much more important than I once thought. I see that now.' Then she said: 'Look, there are all kinds of things you don't understand, Tommy, and I can't tell you about them. Things about Hailsham, about your place in the wider world, all kinds of things. But perhaps one day, you'll try and find out. They won't make it easy for you, but if you want to, really want to, you might find out.' She started shaking her head again after that, though not as bad as before, and she says: 'But why should you be any different? The students who leave here, they never find out much. Why should you be any different?' I didn't know what she was talking about, so I just said again: 'I'll be all right,

Miss.' She was quiet for a time, then she suddenly stood up and kind of bent over me and hugged me. Not in a sexy way. More like they used to do when we were little. I just kept as still as possible. Then she stood back and said again she was sorry for what she'd told me before. And that it wasn't too late, I should start straight away, making up the lost time. I don't think I said anything, and she looked at me and I thought she'd hug me again. But instead she said: 'Just do it for my sake, Tommy.' I told her I'd do my best, because by then I just wanted out of there. I was probably bright scarlet, what with her hugging me and everything. I mean, it's not the same, is it, now we've got bigger."

Until this point I'd been so engrossed in Tommy's story, I'd forgotten my reason for having this talk with him. But this reference to our getting "bigger" reminded me of my original mission.

"Look, Tommy," I said, "we'll have to talk this over carefully soon. It's really interesting and I can see how it must have made you miserable. But either way, you're going to have to pull yourself together a bit more. We're going to be leaving here this summer. You've got to get yourself sorted again, and there's one thing you can straighten out right now. Ruth told me she's prepared to call it quits and have you get back with her again. I think that's a good chance for you. Don't mess it up."

He was quiet for a few seconds, then said: "I don't know, Kath. There are all these other things to think about."

"Tommy, just listen. You're really lucky. Of all the people here, you've got Ruth fancying you. After we leave, if you're with her, you won't have to worry. She's the best, you'll be fine so long as you're with her. She's saying she wants a fresh start. So don't blow it."

I waited but Tommy gave no response, and again I felt something like panic coming over me. I leaned forward and said: "Look, you fool, you're not going to get many more chances. Don't you realise, we won't be here together like this much longer?"

To my surprise Tommy's response, when it came, was calm and considered–the side of Tommy that was to emerge more and more in the years ahead.

"I do realise that, Kath. That's exactly why I can't rush back into it with Ruth. We've got to think about the next move really carefully." Then he sighed and looked right at me. "Like you say, Kath. We're going to be leaving here soon. It's not like a game any more. We've got to think carefully."

I was suddenly lost for what to say and just sat there tugging away at the clovers. I could feel his eyes on me, but I didn't look up. We might have gone on that way for a while longer, except we were interrupted. I think the boys he'd been playing football with earlier came back, or maybe it was some students strolling by who came and sat down with us. Anyway, our little heart-to-heart was at an end and I came away feeling I hadn't done what I'd set out to do–that I'd somehow let Ruth down.

I never got to assess what kind of impact my talk with Tommy had had, because it was the very next day the news broke. It was midway through the morning and we'd been in yet another Culture Briefing. These were classes where we had to role play various people we'd find out there–waiters in cafés, policemen and so on. The sessions always got us excited and worried all at the same time, so we were pretty keyed up anyway. Then at the end of the lesson, as we were filing out, Charlotte F. came rushing into the room and the news about Miss Lucy leaving Hailsham spread through us in an instant. Mr. Chris, who'd been taking the class and who must have known all along, shuffled off guiltily before we could ask him anything. At first we weren't sure if Charlotte was just reporting a rumour, but the more she told us, the clearer it became this was for real. Earlier in the morning, one of the other Senior classes had gone into Room 12 expecting Music Appreciation with Miss Lucy. But Miss Emily had been there instead and she'd told them Miss Lucy couldn't come just at that moment, so she would take the class. For the next twenty minutes or so everything had gone quite normally. Then suddenly–right in mid-sentence, apparently–Miss Emily had broken off from talking about Beethoven and announced that Miss Lucy had left Hailsham and wouldn't be returning. That class had finished several minutes early–Miss Emily had rushed off with a preoccupied frown–and the word had started to go round as soon as the students had come out.

I immediately set off to look for Tommy, because I desperately wanted him to hear it first from me. But when I stepped into the courtyard, I saw I was too late. There was Tommy, over on the far side, on the edge of a circle of boys, nodding to what was being said. The other boys were animated, maybe excited even, but Tommy's eyes looked empty. That very evening, Tommy and Ruth got back together again, and I remember Ruth finding me a few days later to thank me for "sorting it all out so well." I told her I probably hadn't helped much, but she was having none of that. I was most definitely in her good books. And that was more or less the way things stayed throughout our last days at Hailsham.

Part Two

Chapter Ten

Sometimes I'll be driving on a long weaving road across marshland, or maybe past rows of furrowed fields, the sky big and grey and never changing mile after mile, and I find I'm thinking about my essay, the one I was supposed to be writing back then, when we were at the Cottages. The guardians had talked to us about our essays on and off throughout that last summer, trying to help each of us choose a topic that would absorb us properly for anything up to two years. But somehow–maybe we could see something in the guardians' manner–no one really believed the essays were that important, and among ourselves we hardly discussed the matter. I remember when I went in to tell Miss Emily my chosen topic was Victorian novels, I hadn't really thought about it much and I could see she knew it. But she just gave me one of her searching stares and said nothing more.

Once we got to the Cottages, though, the essays took on a new importance. In our first days there, and for some of us a lot longer, it was like we were each clinging to our essay, this last task from Hailsham, like it was a farewell gift from the guardians. Over time, they would fade from our minds, but for a while those essays helped keep us afloat in our new surroundings.

When I think about my essay today, what I do is go over it in some detail: I may think of a completely new approach I could have taken, or about different writers and books I could have focused on. I might be having coffee in a service station, staring at the motorway through the big windows, and my essay will pop into my head for no reason. Then I quite enjoy sitting there, going through it all again. Just lately, I've even toyed with the idea of going back and working on it, once I'm not a carer any more and I've got the time. But in the end, I suppose I'm not really serious about it. It's just a bit of nostalgia to pass the time. I think about the essay the same way I might a rounders match at Hailsham I did particularly well in, or else an argument from long ago where I can now think of all the clever things I should have said. It's at that sort of level–daydream stuff. But as I say, that's not how it was when we first got to the Cottages.

Eight of us who left Hailsham that summer ended up at the Cottages. Others went to the White Mansion in the Welsh hills, or to Poplar Farm in Dorset.

We didn't know then that all these places had only the most tenuous links with Hailsham. We arrived at the Cottages expecting a version of Hailsham for older students, and I suppose that was the way we continued to see them for some time. We certainly didn't think much about our lives beyond the Cottages, or about who ran them, or how they fitted into the larger world. None of us thought like that in those days.

The Cottages were the remains of a farm that had gone out of business years before. There was an old farmhouse, and around it, barns, outhouses, stables all converted for us to live in. There were other buildings, usually the outlying ones, that were virtually falling down, which we couldn't use for much, but for which we felt in some vague way responsible–mainly on account of Keffers. He was this grumpy old guy who turned up two or three times a week in his muddy van to look the place over. He didn't like to talk to us much, and the way he went round sighing and shaking his head disgustedly implied we weren't doing nearly enough to keep the place up. But it was never clear what more he wanted us to do. He'd shown us a list of chores when we'd first arrived, and the students who were already there–"the veterans," as Hannah called them–had long since worked out a rota which we kept to conscientiously. There really wasn't much else we could do other than report leaking gutters and mop up after floods.

The old farmhouse–the heart of the Cottages–had a number of fireplaces where we could burn the split logs stacked in the outer barns. Otherwise we had to make do with big boxy heaters. The problem with these was they worked on gas canisters, and unless it was really cold, Keffers wouldn't bring many in. We kept asking him to leave a big supply with us, but he'd shake his head gloomily, like we were bound to use them up frivolously or else cause an explosion. So I remember a lot of the time, outside the summer months, being chilly. You went around with two, even three jumpers on, and your jeans felt cold and stiff. We sometimes kept our Wellingtons on the whole day, leaving trails of mud and damp through the rooms. Keffers, observing this, would again shake his head, but when we asked him what else we were supposed to do, the floors being in the state they were, he'd make no reply.

I'm making it sound pretty bad, but none of us minded the discomforts one bit–it was all part of the excitement of being at the Cottages. If we were honest, though, particularly near the beginning, most of us would have admitted missing the guardians. A few of us, for a time, even tried to think of Keffers as a sort of guardian, but he was having none of it. You went up to greet him when he arrived in his van and he'd stare at you like you were mad. But this was one thing we'd been told over and over: that after Hailsham there'd be no more guardians, so we'd have to look after each other.

And by and large, I'd say Hailsham prepared us well on that score.

Most of the students I was close to at Hailsham ended up at the Cottages that summer. Cynthia E.–the girl who'd said about me being Ruth's "natural successor" that time in the Art Room–I wouldn't have minded her, but she went to Dorset with the rest of her crowd. And Harry, the boy I'd nearly had sex with, I heard he went to Wales. But all our gang had stayed together. And if we ever missed the others, we could tell ourselves there was nothing stopping us going to visit them. For all our map lessons with Miss Emily, we had no real idea at that point about distances and how easy or hard it was to visit a particular place. We'd talk about getting lifts from the veterans when they were going on their trips, or else how in time we'd learn to drive ourselves and then we'd be able to see them whenever we pleased.

Of course, in practice, especially during the first months, we rarely stepped beyond the confines of the Cottages. We didn't even walk about the surrounding countryside or wander into the nearby village. I don't think we were afraid exactly. We all knew no one would stop us if we wandered off, provided we were back by the day and the time we entered into Keffers's ledgerbook. That summer we arrived, we were constantly seeing veterans packing their bags and rucksacks and going off for two or three days at a time with what seemed to us scary nonchalance. We'd watched them with astonishment, wondering if by the following summer we'd be doing the same. Of course, we were, but in those early days, it didn't seem possible. You have to remember that until that point we'd never been beyond the grounds of Hailsham, and we were just bewildered. If you'd told me then that within a year, I'd not only develop a habit of taking long solitary walks, but that I'd start learning to drive a car, I'd have thought you were mad.

Even Ruth looked daunted that sunny day the minibus dropped us in front of the farmhouse, circled round the little pond and disappeared up the slope. We could see hills in the distance that reminded us of the ones in the distance at Hailsham, but they seemed to us oddly crooked, like when you draw a picture of a friend and it's almost right but not quite, and the face on the sheet gives you the creeps. But at least it was the summer, not the way the Cottages would get a few months on, with all the puddles frozen over and the rough ground frosted bone hard. The place looked beautiful and cosy, with overgrown grass everywhere–a novelty to us. We stood together in a huddle, the eight of us, and watched Keffers go in and out of the farmhouse, expecting him to address us at any moment. But he didn't, and all we could catch was the odd irritated mutter about the students who already lived there. Once, as he went to get something from his van, he gave us a moody

glance, then returned to the farmhouse and closed the door behind him.

Before too long, though, the veterans, who'd been having a bit of fun watching us being pathetic–we were to do much the same the following summer–came out and took us in hand. In fact, looking back, I see they really went out of their way helping us settle in. Even so, those first weeks were strange and we were glad we had each other. We'd always move about together and seemed to spend large parts of the day awkwardly standing outside the farmhouse, not knowing what else to do.

It's funny now recalling the way it was at the beginning, because when I think of those two years at the Cottages, that scared, bewildered start doesn't seem to go with any of the rest of it. If someone mentions the Cottages today, I think of easy-going days drifting in and out of each other's rooms, the languid way the afternoon would fold into evening then into night. I think of my pile of old paperbacks, their pages gone wobbly, like they'd once belonged to the sea. I think about how I read them, lying on my front in the grass on warm afternoons, my hair–which I was growing long then–always falling across my vision. I think about the mornings waking up in my room at the top of the Black Barn to the voices of students outside in the field, arguing about poetry or philosophy; or the long winters, the breakfasts in steamed-up kitchens, meandering discussions around the table about Kafka or Picasso. It was always stuff like that at breakfast; never who you'd had sex with the night before, or why Larry and Helen weren't talking to each other any more.

But then again, when I think about it, there's a sense in which that picture of us on that first day, huddled together in front of the farmhouse, isn't so incongruous after all. Because maybe, in a way, we didn't leave it behind nearly as much as we might once have thought. Because somewhere underneath, a part of us stayed like that: fearful of the world around us, and–no matter how much we despised ourselves for it–unable quite to let each other go.

The veterans, who of course knew nothing about the history of Tommy and Ruth's relationship, treated them as a long-established couple, and this seemed to please Ruth no end. For the first weeks after we arrived, she made a big deal of it, always putting her arm around Tommy, sometimes snogging him in the corner of a room while other people were still about. Well, this kind of thing might have been fine at Hailsham, but looked immature at the Cottages. The veteran couples never did anything showy in public, going about in a sensible sort of way, like a mother and father might do in a normal family.

There was, incidentally, something I noticed about these veteran couples at the Cottages–something Ruth, for all her close study of them, failed to spot–and this was how so many of their mannerisms were copied from the television. It first came to me watching this couple, Susie and Greg–probably the oldest students at the Cottages and generally thought to be "in charge" of the place. There was this particular thing Susie did whenever Greg set off on one of his speeches about Proust or whoever: she'd smile at the rest of us, roll her eyes, and mouth very emphatically, but only just audibly: "Gawd help us." Television at Hailsham had been pretty restricted, and at the Cottages too–though there was nothing to stop us watching all day–no one was very keen on it. But there was an old set in the farmhouse and another in the Black Barn, and I'd watch every now and then. That's how I realised that this "Gawd help us" stuff came from an American series, one of those with an audience laughing along at everything anyone said or did. There was a character–a large woman who lived next door to the main characters–who did exactly what Susie did, so when her husband went off on a big spiel, the audience would be waiting for her to roll her eyes and say "Gawd help us" so they could burst out with this huge laugh. Once I'd spotted this, I began to notice all kinds of other things the veteran couples had taken from TV programmes: the way they gestured to each other, sat together on sofas, even the way they argued and stormed out of rooms.

Anyway, my point is, it wasn't long before Ruth realised the way she'd been carrying on with Tommy was all wrong for the Cottages, and she set about changing how they did things in front of people. And there was in particular this one gesture Ruth picked up from the veterans. Back at Hailsham, if a couple were parting, even for a few minutes, it had been an excuse for big embraces and snogging. At the Cottages, though, when a couple were saying goodbye to each other, there'd be hardly any words, never mind embraces or kisses. Instead, you slapped your partner's arm near the elbow, lightly with the back of your knuckles, the way you might do to attract someone's attention. Usually the girl did it to the boy, just as they were moving apart. This custom had faded out by the winter, but when we arrived, it was what was going on and Ruth was soon doing it to Tommy. Mind you, at first, Tommy didn't have a clue what was going on, and would turn abruptly to Ruth and go: "What?," so that she'd have to glare furiously at him, like they were in a play and he'd forgotten his lines. I suppose she eventually had a word with him, because after a week or so they were managing to do it right, more or less exactly like the veteran couples.

I'd not actually seen the slap on the elbow on the television, but I was pretty sure that's where the idea had come from, and just as sure Ruth hadn't realised it. That was why, that afternoon I was reading Daniel Deronda on the

grass and Ruth was being irritating, I decided it was time someone pointed it out to her.

It was nearly autumn and starting to get chilly. The veterans were spending more time indoors and generally going back to whatever routines they'd had before the summer. But those of us who'd arrived from Hailsham kept sitting outside on the uncut grass–wanting to keep going for as long as possible the only routine we'd got used to. Even so, by that particular afternoon, there were maybe only three or four apart from me reading in the field, and since I'd gone out of my way to find a quiet corner to myself, I'm pretty sure what happened between me and Ruth wasn't overheard.

I was lying on a piece of old tarpaulin reading, as I say, Daniel Deronda, when Ruth came wandering over and sat down beside me. She studied the cover of my book and nodded to herself. Then after about a minute, just as I knew she would, she began to outline to me the plot of Daniel Deronda. Until that point, I'd been in a perfectly okay mood, and had been pleased to see Ruth, but now I was irritated. She'd done this to me a couple of times before, and I'd seen her doing it to others. For one thing, there was the manner she put on: a kind of nonchalant but sincere one as though she expected people to be really grateful for her assistance. Okay, even at the time, I was vaguely aware what was behind it. In those early months, we'd somehow developed this idea that how well you were settling in at the Cottages–how well you were coping–was somehow reflected by how many books you'd read. It sounds odd, but there you are, it was just something that developed between us, the ones who'd arrived from Hailsham. The whole notion was kept deliberately hazy–in fact, it was pretty reminiscent of the way we'd dealt with sex at Hailsham. You could go around implying you'd read all kinds of things, nodding knowingly when someone mentioned, say, War and Peace, and the understanding was that no one would scrutinise your claim too rationally. You have to remember, since we'd been in each other's company constantly since arriving at the Cottages, it wasn't possible for any of us to have read War and Peace without the rest noticing. But just like with the sex at Hailsham, there was an unspoken agreement to allow for a mysterious dimension where we went off and did all this reading.

It was, as I say, a little game we all indulged in to some extent. Even so, it was Ruth who took it further than anyone else. She was the one always pretending to have finished anything anyone happened to be reading; and she was the only one with this notion that the way to demonstrate your superior reading was to go around telling people the plots of novels they were in the middle of. That's why, when she started on Daniel Deronda, even

though I'd not been enjoying it much, I closed the book, sat up and said to her, completely out of the blue:

"Ruth, I've been meaning to ask you. Why do you always hit Tommy on the arm like that when you're saying goodbye? You know what I mean."

Of course she claimed not to, so I patiently explained what I was talking about. Ruth heard me out then shrugged.

"I didn't realise I was doing it. I must have just picked it up."

A few months before I might have let it go at that–or probably wouldn't have brought it up in the first place. But that afternoon I just pressed on, explaining to her how it was something from a television series. "It's not something worth copying," I told her. "It's not what people really do out there, in normal life, if that's what you were thinking."

Ruth, I could see, was now angry but unsure how to fight back. She looked away and did another shrug. "So what?" she said. "It's no big deal. A lot of us do it."

"What you mean is Chrissie and Rodney do it."

As soon as I said this I realised I'd made a mistake; that until I'd mentioned these two, I'd had Ruth in a corner, but now she was out. It was like when you make a move in chess and just as you take your finger off the piece, you see the mistake you've made, and there's this panic because you don't know yet the scale of disaster you've left yourself open to. Sure enough, I saw a gleam come into Ruth's eyes and when she spoke again it was in an entirely new voice.

"So that's it, that's what's upsetting poor little Kathy. Ruth isn't paying enough attention to her. Ruth's got big new friends and baby sister isn't getting played with so often..."

"Stop all that. Anyway that's not how it works in real families. You don't know anything about it."

"Oh Kathy, the great expert on real families. So sorry. But that's what this is, isn't it? You've still got this idea. Us Hailsham lot, we have to stay together, a tight little bunch, must never make any new friends."

"I've never said that. I'm just talking about Chrissie and Rodney. It looks daft, the way you copy everything they do."

“But I'm right, aren't I?” Ruth went on. “You're upset because I've managed to move on, make new friends. Some of the veterans hardly remember your name, and who can blame them? You never talk to anyone unless they're Hailsham. But you can't expect me to hold your hand the whole time. We've been here nearly two months now.”

I didn't take the bait, but said instead: “Never mind me, never mind Hailsham. But you keep leaving Tommy in the lurch. I've watched you, you've done it a few times just this week. You leave him stranded, looking like a spare part. That's not fair. You and Tommy are supposed to be a couple. That means you look out for him.”

“Quite right, Kathy, we're a couple, like you say. And if you must intrude, I'll tell you. We've talked about this, and we've agreed. If he sometimes doesn't feel like doing things with Chrissie and Rodney, that's his choice. I'm not going to make him do anything he's not yet ready for. But we've agreed, he shouldn't hold me back. Nice of you to be concerned though.” Then she added, in a quite different voice: “Come to think of it, I suppose you haven't been that slow making friends with at least some of the veterans.”

She watched me carefully, then did a laugh, as though to say: “We're still friends, aren't we?” But I didn't find anything to laugh about in this last remark of hers. I just picked up my book and walked off without another word.

Chapter Eleven

I should explain why I got so bothered by Ruth saying what she did. Those early months at the Cottages had been a strange time in our friendship. We were quarrelling over all kinds of little things, but at the same time we were confiding in each other more than ever. In particular, we used to have these talks, the two of us, usually up in my room at the top of the Black Barn just before going to bed. You could say they were a sort of hangover from those talks in our dorm after lights out. Anyway, the thing was, however much we might have fallen out during the day, come bed-time, Ruth and I would still find ourselves sitting side by side on my mattress, sipping our hot drinks, exchanging our deepest feelings about our new life like nothing had ever come between us. And what made these heart-to-hearts possible–you might even say what made the whole friendship possible during that time–was this understanding we had that anything we told each other during these moments would be treated with careful respect: that we'd honour confidences, and that no matter how much we rowed, we wouldn't use against each other anything we'd talked about during those sessions. Okay, this had never been spelt out exactly, but it was definitely, as I say, an understanding, and until the afternoon of the Daniel Deronda business, neither of us had come anywhere near breaching it. That was why, when Ruth said what she did about my not being slow making friends with certain veterans, I wasn't just cross. To me, it was a betrayal. Because there wasn't any doubt what she'd meant by it; she was referring to something I'd confided in her one night about me and sex.

As you'd expect, sex was different at the Cottages from how it had been at Hailsham. It was a lot more straightforward–more "grown up." You didn't go around gossiping and giggling about who'd been doing it with whom. If you knew two students had had sex, you didn't immediately start speculating about whether they'd become a proper couple. And if a new couple did emerge one day, you didn't go around talking about it like it was a big event. You just accepted it quietly, and from then on, when you referred to one, you also referred to the other, as in "Chrissie and Rodney" or "Ruth and Tommy." When someone wanted sex with you, that too was much more straightforward. A boy would come up and ask if you wanted to spend the night in his room "for a change," something like that, it was no big deal. Sometimes it was because he was interested in becoming a couple with you; other times it was just for a one-nighter.

The atmosphere, like I say, was much more grown up. But when I look back,

the sex at the Cottages seems a bit functional. Maybe it was precisely because all the gossip and secrecy had gone. Or maybe it was because of the cold.

When I remember sex at the Cottages, I think about doing it in freezing rooms in the pitch dark, usually under a ton of blankets. And the blankets often weren't even blankets, but a really odd assortment–old curtains, even bits of carpet. Sometimes it got so cold you just had to pile anything you could over you, and if you were having sex at the bottom of it, it felt like a mountain of bedding was pounding at you, so that half the time you weren't sure if you were doing it with the boy or all that stuff.

Anyway, the point is, I'd had a few one-nighters shortly after getting to the Cottages. I hadn't planned it that way. My plan had been to take my time, maybe become part of a couple with someone I chose carefully. I'd never been in a couple before, and especially after watching Ruth and Tommy for a while, I was quite curious to give it a try for myself. As I say, that had been my plan, and when the one-nighters kept happening, it unsettled me a bit. That was why I'd decided to confide in Ruth that night.

It was in many ways a typical evening session for us. We'd brought up our mugs of tea, and we were sitting in my room, side by side on the mattress, our heads slightly stooped because of the rafters. We talked about the different boys at the Cottages, and whether any of them might be right for me. And Ruth had been at her best: encouraging, funny, tactful, wise. That's why I decided to tell her about the one-nighters. I told her how they'd happened without my really wanting them to; and how, even though we couldn't have babies from doing it, the sex had done funny things to my feelings, just as Miss Emily had warned. Then I said to her:

“Ruth, I wanted to ask you. Do you ever get so you just really have to do it? With anybody almost?”

Ruth shrugged, then said: “I'm in a couple. So if I want to do it, I just do it with Tommy.”

“I suppose so. Maybe it's just me anyway. There might be something not quite right with me, down there. Because sometimes I just really, really need to do it.”

“That's strange, Kathy.” She fixed me with a concerned look, which made me feel all the more worried.

“So you don't ever get like that.”

She shrugged again. “Not so as I'd do it with just anybody. What you're saying does sound a bit weird, Kathy. But maybe it'll calm down after a while.”

“Sometimes it won't be there for ages. Then it suddenly comes on. It was like that, the first time it happened. He started snogging me and I just wanted him to get off. Then suddenly it just came on, out of nowhere. I just really had to do it.”

Ruth shook her head. “It does sound a bit weird. But it'll probably go away. It's probably just to do with the different food we're eating here.”

She hadn't been a huge help, but she'd been sympathetic and I'd felt a little better about it all afterwards. That's why it was such a jolt to have Ruth suddenly bring it up the way she did in the middle of the argument we were having that afternoon in the field. Okay, there was probably no one to overhear us, but even so, there was something not at all right about what she'd done. In those first months at the Cottages, our friendship had stayed intact because, on my side at least, I'd had this notion there were two quite separate Ruths. There was one Ruth who was always trying to impress the veterans, who wouldn't hesitate to ignore me, Tommy, any of the others, if she thought we'd cramp her style. This was the Ruth I wasn't pleased with, the one I could see every day putting on airs and pretending–the Ruth who did the slap-on-the-elbow gesture. But the Ruth who sat beside me in my little attic room at the day's close, legs outstretched over the edge of my mattress, her steaming mug held in both her hands, that was the Ruth from Hailsham, and whatever had been happening during the day, I could just pick up with her where we'd left off the last time we'd sat together like that. And until that afternoon in the field, there'd been a definite understanding these two Ruths wouldn't merge; that the one I confided in before bed was one I could absolutely trust. That's why when she said that, about my “not being slow making friends with at least some of the veterans,” I got so upset. That's why I just picked up my book and walked off.

But when I think about it now, I can see things more from Ruth's viewpoint. I can see, for instance, how she might have felt I had been the one to first violate an understanding, and that her little dig had just been a retaliation. This never occurred to me at the time, but I see now it's a possibility, and an explanation for what happened. After all, immediately before she made that remark, I'd been talking about the arm-slapping business. Now it's a bit hard to explain this, but some sort of understanding had definitely developed between the two of us about the way Ruth behaved in front of the veterans. Okay, she often bluffed and implied all sorts of things I knew weren't true. Sometimes, as I said, she did things to impress the veterans at our expense.

But it seems to me Ruth believed, at some level, she was doing all this on behalf of us all. And my role, as her closest friend, was to give her silent support, as if I was in the front row of the audience when she was performing on stage. She was struggling to become someone else, and maybe felt the pressure more than the rest of us because, as I say, she'd somehow taken on the responsibility for all of us. In that case, then, the way I'd talked about her slap on the elbow thing could be seen as a betrayal, and she might well then have felt justified retaliating as she had. As I say, this explanation only occurred to me recently. At the time I didn't look at the larger picture or at my own part in it. I suppose, in general, I never appreciated in those days the sheer effort Ruth was making to move on, to grow up and leave Hailsham behind. Thinking about this now, I'm reminded of something she told me once, when I was caring for her in the recovery centre at Dover. We'd been sitting in her room, watching the sunset, as we so often did, enjoying the mineral water and biscuits I'd brought, and I'd been telling her how I still had most of my old Hailsham collection box safely stowed inside my pine chest in my bedsit. Then–I wasn't trying to lead onto anything, or make any kind of point–I just happened to say to her:

"You never had a collection after Hailsham, did you?"

Ruth, who was sitting up in bed, was quiet for a long time, the sunset falling over the tiled wall behind her. Then she said:

"Remember the guardians, before we left, how they kept reminding us we could take our collections with us. So I'd taken everything out of my box and put it into this holdall bag. My plan was I'd find a really good wooden box for it all once I got to the Cottages. But when we got there, I could see none of the veterans had collections. It was only us, it wasn't normal. We must all have realised it, I wasn't the only one, but we didn't really talk about it, did we? So I didn't go looking for a new box. My things all stayed in the holdall bag for months, then in the end I threw them away."

I stared at her. "You put your collection out with the rubbish?"

Ruth shook her head, and for the next few moments seemed to be going through in her mind all the different items in her collection. Finally she said:

"I put them all in a bin bag, but I couldn't stand the idea of putting them out with the rubbish. So I asked old Keffers, once when he was about to drive off, if he'd take the bin bag to a shop. I knew about charity shops, I'd found it all out. Keffers rummaged in the bag a bit, he didn't know what any of it was–why should he?–and he did this laugh and said no shop he knew would want stuff like that. And I said, but it's good stuff, really good stuff. And he

could see I was getting a bit emotional, and he changed his tune then. He said something like: 'All right, missy, I'll take it along to the Oxfam people.' Then he made a real effort and said: 'Now I've had a closer look, you're right, it is pretty good stuff!' He wasn't very convincing though. I suppose he just took it away and put it in some bin somewhere. But at least I didn't have to know that." Then she smiled and said: "You were different. I remember. You were never embarrassed about your collection and you kept it. I wish now I'd done that too."

What I'm saying is that we were all of us struggling to adjust to our new life, and I suppose we all did things back then we later regretted. I was really upset by Ruth's remark at the time, but it's pointless now trying to judge her or anyone else for the way they behaved during those early days at the Cottages.

As the autumn came on, and I got more familiar with our surroundings, I began noticing things I'd missed earlier. There was, for instance, the odd attitude to students who'd recently left. The veterans were never slow coming out with funny anecdotes about characters they'd met on trips to the White Mansion or to Poplar Farm; but they hardly ever mentioned students who, right up until just before we'd arrived, must have been their intimate friends.

Another thing I noticed–and I could see it tied in–was the big hush that would descend around certain veterans when they went off on "courses"–which even we knew had to do with becoming carers. They could be gone for four or five days, but were hardly mentioned in that time; and when they came back, no one really asked them anything. I suppose they might have talked to their closest friends in private. But there was definitely an understanding that you didn't mention these trips out in the open. I can remember one morning watching, through the misted-up windows of our kitchen, two veterans leaving for a course, and wondering if by the next spring or summer, they'd have gone altogether, and we'd be taking care not to mention them.

But it's perhaps stretching it to claim students who'd left were an actual taboo. If they had to be mentioned, they got mentioned. Most commonly, you'd hear them referred to indirectly, in connection with an object or a

chore. For example, if repairs were needed to a downpipe, there'd be a lot of discussion about "the way Mike used to do it." And there was a tree stump outside the Black Barn everyone called "Dave's stump" because for over three years, until a few weeks before our arrival, he'd sat on it to read and write, sometimes even when it was raining or cold. Then, maybe most memorably, there was Steve. None of us ever discovered anything much about the sort of person Steve had been–except that he'd liked porn magazines.

Every now and again, you'd come across a porn mag at the Cottages, thrown behind a sofa or amidst a pile of old news-papers. They were what you'd call "soft" porn, though we didn't know about such distinctions then. We'd never come across anything like that before and didn't know what to think. The veterans usually laughed when one showed up and flicked through it quickly in a blasé way before throwing it aside, so we did the same. When Ruth and I were remembering all this a few years ago, she claimed there were dozens of these magazines circulating around the Cottages. "No one admitted to liking them," she said. "But you remember how it was. If one turned up in a room, everyone pretended to find it dead boring. Then you came back half an hour later and it would always be gone."

Anyway, my point is that whenever one of these magazines turned up, people would claim it was a left-over from "Steve's collection." Steve, in other words, was responsible for every porn mag that ever showed up. As I say, we never found out much else about Steve. We did, though, see the funny side of it even then, so that when someone pointed and said: "Oh look, one of Steve's magazines," they did it with a bit of irony.

These magazines, incidentally, used to drive old Keffers mad. There was a rumour that he was religious and dead against not just porn, but sex in general. Sometimes he'd work himself into a complete state–you could see his face under his grey whiskers blotchy with fury–and he'd go thudding around the place, barging into people's rooms without knocking, determined to round up every one of "Steve's magazines." We did our best to find him amusing on these occasions, but there was something truly scary about him in these moods. For one thing, the grumbling he usually kept up suddenly stopped and this silence alone gave him an alarming aura.

I remember one particular time when Keffers had collected up six or seven of "Steve's mags" and stormed out with them to his van. Laura and I were watching him from up in my room, and I'd been laughing at something Laura had just said. Then I saw Keffers opening his van door, and maybe because he needed both hands to move some stuff about, he put the mags down on top of some bricks stacked outside the boiler hut–some veterans had tried to build a barbecue there a few months earlier. Keffers's figure, bent forwards,

his head and shoulders hidden in the van, went on rummaging about for ages, and something told me that, for all his fury of a moment ago, he'd now forgotten about the magazines. Sure enough, a few minutes later, I saw him straighten, climb in behind the wheel, slam the door and drive off.

When I pointed out to Laura that Keffers had left the magazines behind, she said: "Well, they won't stay put for long. He'll just have to collect them all up again, next time he decides on a purge."

But when I found myself strolling past the boiler hut about half an hour later, I saw the magazines hadn't been touched. I thought for a moment about taking them up to my room, but then I could see if they were ever found there, I'd get no end of teasing; and how there was no way people would understand my reasons for doing such a thing. That was why I picked up the magazines and went inside the boiler hut with them.

The boiler hut was really just another barn, built onto the end of the farmhouse, filled with old mowers and pitch-forks–stuff Keffers reckoned wouldn't catch alight too easily if one day the boiler decided to blow up. Keffers also kept a workbench in there, and so I put the magazines down on it, pushed aside some old rags and heaved myself up to sit on the tabletop. The light wasn't too good, but there was a grimy window somewhere behind me, and when I opened the first magazine I found I could see well enough.

There were lots of pictures of girls holding their legs open or sticking their bottoms out. I'll admit, there have been times when I've looked at pictures like that and felt excited, though I've never fancied doing it with a girl. But that's not what I was after that afternoon. I moved through the pages quickly, not wanting to be distracted by any buzz of sex coming off those pages. In fact, I hardly saw the contorted bodies, because I was focusing on the faces. Even in the little adverts for videos or whatever tucked away to the side, I checked each model's face before moving on.

It wasn't until I was nearing the end of the pile that I became certain there was somebody standing outside the barn, just beside the doorway. I'd left the door open because that's how it was normally, and because I wanted the light; and twice already I'd found myself glancing up, thinking I'd heard some small noise. But there'd been no one there, and I'd just gone on with what I was doing. Now I was certain, though, and lowering my magazine I made a heavy sighing sound that would be clearly audible.

I waited for giggling, or maybe for two or three students to come bursting into the barn, eager to make the best of having caught me with a pile of porn mags. But nothing happened. So I called out, in what I tried to make a weary

tone:

“Delighted you could join me. Why be so shy?”

There was a little chuckle, then Tommy appeared at the threshold. “Hi, Kath,” he said sheepishly.

“Come on in, Tommy. Join in the fun.”

He came towards me cautiously, then stopped a few steps away. Then he looked over to the boiler, and said: “I didn't know you liked that sort of stuff.”

“Girls are allowed too, aren't we?”

I kept going through the pages, and for the next few seconds he stayed silent. Then I heard him say:

“I wasn't trying to spy on you. But I saw you from my room. I saw you come out here and pick up that pile Keffers left.”

“You're very welcome to them when I've finished.”

He laughed awkwardly. “It's just sex stuff. I expect I've seen them all already.” He did another laugh, but then when I glanced up, I saw he was watching me with a serious expression. Then he asked:

“Are you looking for something, Kath?”

“What do you mean? I'm just looking at dirty pictures.”

“Just for kicks?”

“I suppose you could say that.” I put down one mag and started on the next one.

Then I heard Tommy's steps coming nearer until he was right up to me. When I looked up again, his hands were hovering fretfully in the air, like I was doing a complicated manual task and he was itching to help.

“Kath, you don't... Well, if it's for kicks, you don't do it like that. You've got to look at the pictures much more carefully. It doesn't really work if you go that fast.”

“How do you know what works for girls? Or maybe you've looked these over

with Ruth. Sorry, not thinking."

"Kath, what are you looking for?"

I ignored him. I was nearly at the end of the pile and I was now keen to finish. Then he said:

"I saw you doing this once before."

This time I did stop and look at him. "What's going on here, Tommy? Has Keffers recruited you for his porn patrol?"

"I wasn't trying to spy on you. But I did see you, that time last week, after we'd all been up in Charley's room. There was one of these mags there, and you thought we'd all left and gone. But I came back to get my jumper, and Claire's doors were open so I could see straight through to Charley's room. That's how I saw you in there, going through the magazine."

"Well, so what? We all have to get our kicks some way."

"You weren't doing it for kicks. I could tell, just like I can now. It's your face, Kath. That time in Charley's room, you had a strange face. Like you were sad, maybe. And a bit scared."

I jumped off the workbench, gathered up the mags and dumped them in his arms. "Here. Give these to Ruth. See if they do anything for her."

I walked past him and out of the barn. I knew he'd be disappointed I hadn't told him anything, but at that point I hadn't thought things through properly myself and wasn't ready to tell anyone. But I hadn't minded him coming into the boiler hut after me. I hadn't minded at all. I'd felt comforted, protected almost. I did tell him eventually, but that wasn't until a few months later, when we went on our Norfolk trip.

Chapter Twelve

I want to talk about the Norfolk trip, and all the things that happened that day, but I'll first have to go back a bit, to give you the background and explain why it was we went.

Our first winter was just about over by then and we were all feeling much more settled. For all our little hiccups, Ruth and I had kept up our habit of rounding off the day in my room, talking over our hot drinks, and it was during one of those sessions, when we were larking around about something, that she suddenly said:

"I suppose you've heard what Chrissie and Rodney have been saying."

When I said I hadn't, she did a laugh and continued: "They're probably just having me on. Their idea of a joke. Forget I mentioned it."

But I could see she wanted me to drag it out of her, so I kept pressing until in the end she said in a lowered voice:

"You remember last week, when Chrissie and Rodney were away? They'd been up to this town called Cromer, up on the north Norfolk coast."

"What were they doing there?"

"Oh, I think they've got a friend there, someone who used to live here. That's not the point. The point is, they claim they saw this... person. Working there in this open-plan office. And, well, you know. They reckon this person's a possible. For me."

Though most of us had first come across the idea of "possibles" back at Hailsham, we'd sensed we weren't supposed to discuss it, and so we hadn't–though for sure, it had both intrigued and disturbed us. And even at the Cottages, it wasn't a topic you could bring up casually. There was definitely more awkwardness around any talk of possibles than there was around, say, sex. At the same time, you could tell people were fascinated–obsessed, in some cases–and so it kept coming up, usually in solemn arguments, a world away from our ones about, say, James Joyce.

The basic idea behind the possibles theory was simple, and didn't provoke much dispute. It went something like this. Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant, at least in

theory, you'd be able to find the person you were modelled from. That's why, when you were out there yourself–in the towns, shopping centres, transport cafés–you kept an eye out for "possibles"–the people who might have been the models for you and your friends.

Beyond these basics, though, there wasn't much consensus. For a start, no one could agree what we were looking for when we looked for possibles. Some students thought you should be looking for a person twenty to thirty years older than yourself–the sort of age a normal parent would be. But others claimed this was sentimental. Why would there be a "natural" generation between us and our models? They could have used babies, old people, what difference would it have made? Others argued back that they'd use for models people at the peak of their health, and that's why they were likely to be "normal parent" age. But around here, we'd all sense we were near territory we didn't want to enter, and the arguments would fizzle out.

Then there were those questions about why we wanted to track down our models at all. One big idea behind finding your model was that when you did, you'd glimpse your future. Now I don't mean anyone really thought that if your model turned out to be, say, a guy working at a railway station, that's what you'd end up doing too. We all realised it wasn't that simple. Nevertheless, we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you'd get some insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you'd see something of what your life held in store.

There were some who thought it stupid to be concerned about possibles at all. Our models were an irrelevance, a technical necessity for bringing us into the world, nothing more than that. It was up to each of us to make of our lives what we could. This was the camp Ruth always claimed to side with, and I probably did too. All the same, whenever we heard reports of a possible–whoever it was for–we couldn't help getting curious.

The way I remember it, sightings of possibles tended to come in batches. Weeks could go by with no one mentioning the subject, then one reported sighting would trigger off a whole spate of others. Most of them were obviously not worth pursuing: someone seen in a car going by, stuff like that. But every now and then, a sighting seemed to have substance to it–like the one Ruth told me about that night.

According to Ruth, Chrissie and Rodney had been busy exploring this seaside town they'd gone to and had split up for a while. When they'd met up again, Rodney was all excited and had told Chrissie how he'd been wandering

the side-streets off the High Street, and had gone past an office with a large glass front. Inside had been a lot of people, some of them at their desks, some walking about and chatting. And that's where he'd spotted Ruth's possible.

"Chrissie came and told me as soon as they got back. She made Rodney describe everything, and he did his best, but it was impossible to tell anything. Now they keep talking about driving me up there, but I don't know. I don't know if I ought to do anything about it."

I can't remember exactly what I said to her that night, but I was at that point pretty sceptical. In fact, to be honest, my guess was that Chrissie and Rodney had made the whole thing up. I don't really want to suggest Chrissie and Rodney were bad people–that would be unfair. In many ways, I actually liked them. But the fact was, the way they regarded us newcomers, and Ruth in particular, was far from straightforward.

Chrissie was a tall girl who was quite beautiful when she stood up to her full height, but she didn't seem to realise this and spent her time crouching to be the same as the rest of us. That's why she often looked more like the Wicked Witch than a movie star–an impression reinforced by her irritating way of jabbing you with a finger the second before she said something to you. She always wore long skirts rather than jeans, and little glasses pressed too far into her face. She'd been one of the veterans who'd really welcomed us when we'd first arrived in the summer, and I'd at first been really taken by her and looked to her for guidance. But as the weeks had passed, I'd begun to have reservations. There was something odd about the way she was always mentioning the fact that we'd come from Hailsham, like that could explain almost anything to do with us. And she was always asking us questions about Hailsham–about little details, much like my donors do now–and although she tried to make out these were very casual, I could see there was a whole other dimension to her interest. Another thing that got to me was the way she always seemed to want to separate us: taking one of us aside when a few of us were doing something together, or else inviting two of us to join in something while leaving another two stranded–that sort of thing.

You'd hardly ever see Chrissie without her boyfriend, Rodney. He went around with his hair tied back in a ponytail, like a rock musician from the seventies, and talked a lot about things like reincarnation. I actually got to quite like him, but he was pretty much under Chrissie's influence. In any discussion, you knew he'd back up Chrissie's angle, and if Chrissie ever said anything mildly amusing, he'd be chortling and shaking his head like he couldn't believe how funny it was.

Okay, I'm maybe being a bit hard on these two. When I was remembering

them with Tommy not so long ago, he thought they were pretty decent people. But I'm telling you all this now to explain why I was so sceptical about their reported sighting of Ruth's possible. As I say, my first instinct was not to believe it, and to suppose Chrissie was up to something.

The other thing that made me doubtful about all this had to do with the actual description given by Chrissie and Rodney: their picture of a woman working in a nice glass-fronted office. To me, at the time, this seemed just too close a match to what we then knew to be Ruth's "dream future."

I suppose it was mainly us newcomers who talked about "dream futures" that winter, though a number of veterans did too. Some older ones–especially those who'd started their training–would sigh quietly and leave the room when this sort of talk began, but for a long time we didn't even notice this happening. I'm not sure what was going on in our heads during those discussions. We probably knew they couldn't be serious, but then again, I'm sure we didn't regard them as fantasy either. Maybe once Hailsham was behind us, it was possible, just for that half year or so, before all the talk of becoming carers, before the driving lessons, all those other things, it was possible to forget for whole stretches of time who we really were; to forget what the guardians had told us; to forget Miss Lucy's outburst that rainy afternoon at the pavilion, as well as all those theories we'd developed amongst ourselves over the years. It couldn't last, of course, but like I say, just for those few months, we somehow managed to live in this cosy state of suspension in which we could ponder our lives without the usual boundaries. Looking back now, it feels like we spent ages in that steamed-up kitchen after breakfast, or huddled around half-dead fires in the small hours, lost in conversation about our plans for the future.

Mind you, none of us pushed it too far. I don't remember anyone saying they were going to be a movie star or anything like that. The talk was more likely to be about becoming a postman or working on a farm. Quite a few students wanted to be drivers of one sort or other, and often, when the conversation went this way, some veterans would begin comparing particular scenic routes they'd travelled, favourite roadside cafés, difficult roundabouts, that sort of thing. Today, of course, I'd be able to talk the lot of them under the table on those topics. Back then, though, I used to just listen, not saying a thing, drinking in their talk. Sometimes, if it was late, I'd close my eyes and nestle against the arm of a sofa–or of a boy, if it was during one of those brief phases I was officially "with" someone–and drift in and out of sleep, letting images of the roads move through my head.

Anyway, to get back to my point, when this sort of talk was going on, it was often Ruth who took it further than anybody–especially when there were

veterans around. She'd been talking about offices right from the start of the winter, but when it really took on life, when it became her “dream future,” was after that morning she and I walked into the village.

It was during a bitterly cold spell, and our boxy gas heaters had been giving us trouble. We'd spend ages trying to get them to light, clicking away with no result, and we'd had to give up on more and more–and along with them, the rooms they were supposed to heat. Keffers refused to deal with it, claiming it was our responsibility, but in the end, when things were getting really cold, he'd handed us an envelope with money and a note of some igniter fuel we had to buy. So Ruth and I had volunteered to walk to the village to get it, and that's why we were going down the lane that frosty morning. We'd reached a spot where the hedges were high on both sides, and the ground was covered in frozen cowpats, when Ruth suddenly stopped a few steps behind me.

It took me a moment to realise, so that by the time I turned back to her she was breathing over her fingers and looking down, engrossed by something beside her feet. I thought maybe it was some poor creature dead in the frost, but when I came up, I saw it was a colour magazine–not one of “Steve's magazines,” but one of those bright cheerful things that come free with newspapers. It had fallen open at this glossy double page advert, and though the paper had gone soggy and there was mud at one corner, you could see it well enough. It showed this beautifully modern open-plan office with three or four people who worked in it having some kind of joke with each other. The place looked sparkling and so did the people. Ruth was staring at this picture and, when she noticed me beside her, said: “Now that would be a proper place to work.”

Then she got self-conscious–maybe even cross that I'd caught her like that–and set off again much faster than before.

But a few evenings later, when several of us were sitting around a fire in the farmhouse, Ruth began telling us about the sort of office she'd ideally work in, and I immediately recognised it. She went into all the details–the plants, the gleaming equipment, the chairs with their swivels and castors–and it was so vivid everyone let her talk uninterrupted for ages. I was watching her closely, but it never seemed to occur to her I might make the connection–maybe she'd even forgotten herself where the image had come from. She even talked at one point about how the people in her office would all be “dynamic, go-ahead types,” and I remembered clearly those same words written in big letters across the top of the advert: “Are you the dynamic, go-ahead type?”–something like that. Of course, I didn't say anything. In fact, listening to her, I even started wondering if maybe it was all feasible: if one day we might all of us move into a place like that and carry on our lives

together.

Chrissie and Rodney were there that night, of course, hanging onto every word. And then for days afterwards, Chrissie kept trying to get Ruth to talk some more about it. I'd pass them sitting together in the corner of a room and Chrissie would be asking: “Are you sure you wouldn't put each other off, working all together in a place like that?” just to get Ruth going on it again.

The point about Chrissie–and this applied to a lot of the veterans–was that for all her slightly patronising manner towards us when we'd first arrived, she was awestruck about our being from Hailsham. It took me a long time to realise this. Take the business about Ruth's office: Chrissie would never herself have talked about working in any office, never mind one like that. But because Ruth was from Hailsham, somehow the whole notion came within the realms of the possible. That's how Chrissie saw it, and I suppose Ruth did say a few things every now and then to encourage the idea that, sure enough, in some mysterious way, a separate set of rules applied to us Hailsham students. I never heard Ruth actually lie to veterans; it was more to do with not denying certain things, implying others. There were occasions when I could have brought the whole thing down over her head. But if Ruth was sometimes embarrassed, catching my eye in the middle of some story or other, she seemed confident I wouldn't give her away. And of course, I didn't.

So that was the background to Chrissie and Rodney's claim to have seen Ruth's “possible,” and you can maybe see now why I was wary about it. I wasn't keen on Ruth going with them to Norfolk, though I couldn't really say why. And once it became clear she was completely set on going, I told her I'd come too. At first, she didn't seem too delighted, and there was even a hint that she wouldn't let Tommy come with her either. In the end, though, we all went, the five of us: Chrissie, Rodney, Ruth, Tommy and me.

Chapter Thirteen

Rodney, who had a driver's licence, had made an arrangement to borrow a car for the day from the farm-workers at Metchley a couple of miles down the road. He'd regularly got cars this way in the past, but this particular time, the arrangement broke down the day before we were due to set off. Though things got sorted out fairly easily–Rodney walked over to the farm and got a promise on another car–the interesting thing was the way Ruth responded during those few hours when it looked like the trip might have to be called off.

Until then, she'd been making out the whole thing was a bit of a joke, that if anything she was going along with it to please Chrissie. And she'd talked a lot about how we weren't exploring our freedom nearly enough since leaving Hailsham; how anyway she'd always wanted to go to Norfolk to "find all our lost things." In other words, she'd gone out of her way to let us know she wasn't very serious about the prospect of finding her "possible."

That day before we went, I remember Ruth and I had been out for a stroll, and we came into the farmhouse kitchen where Fiona and a few veterans were making a huge stew. And it was Fiona herself, not looking up from what she was doing, who told us how the farm boy had come in earlier with the message. Ruth was standing just in front of me, so I couldn't see her face, but her whole posture froze up. Then without a word, she turned and pushed past me out of the cottage. I got a glimpse of her face then, and that's when I realised how upset she was. Fiona started to say something like: "Oh, I didn't know..." But I said quickly: "That's not what Ruth's upset about. It's about something else, something that happened earlier on." It wasn't very good, but it was the best I could do on the spur of the moment.

In the end, as I said, the vehicle crisis got resolved, and early the next morning, in the pitch dark, the five of us got inside a bashed but perfectly decent Rover car. The way we sat was with Chrissie up front next to Rodney, and the three of us in the back. That was what had felt natural, and we'd got in like that without thinking about it. But after only a few minutes, once Rodney had brought us out of the dark winding lanes onto the proper roads, Ruth, who was in the middle, leaned forward, put her hands on the front seats, and began talking to the two veterans. She did this in a way that meant Tommy and I, on either side of her, couldn't hear anything they were saying, and because she was between us, couldn't talk to or even see each other. Sometimes, on the rare occasions she did lean back, I tried to get something going between the three of us, but Ruth wouldn't pick up on it, and before long, she'd be crouched forwards again, her face stuck between

the two front seats.

After about an hour, with day starting to break, we stopped to stretch our legs and let Rodney go for a pee. We'd pulled over beside a big empty field, so we jumped over the ditch and spent a few minutes rubbing our hands together and watching our breaths rise. At one point, I noticed Ruth had drifted away from the rest of us and was gazing across the field at the sunrise. So I went over to her and made the suggestion that, since she only wanted to talk to the veterans, she swap seats with me. That way she could go on talking at least with Chrissie, and Tommy and I could have some sort of conversation to while away the journey. I'd hardly finished before Ruth said in a whisper:

"Why do you have to be difficult? Now of all times! I don't get it. Why do you want to make trouble?" Then she yanked me round so both our backs were to the others and they wouldn't see if we started to argue. It was the way she did this, rather than her words, that suddenly made me see things her way; I could see that Ruth was making a big effort to present not just herself, but all of us, in the right way to Chrissie and Rodney; and here I was, threatening to undermine her and start an embarrassing scene. I saw all this, and so I touched her on the shoulder and went off back to the others. And when we returned to the car, I made sure the three of us sat exactly as before. But now, as we drove on, Ruth stayed more or less silent, sitting right back in her seat, and even when Chrissie or Rodney shouted things to us from the front, responded only in sulky monosyllables.

Things cheered up considerably, though, once we arrived in our seaside town. We got there around lunch-time and left the Rover in a car park beside a mini-golf course full of fluttering flags. It had turned into a crisp, sunny day, and my memory of it is that for the first hour we all felt so exhilarated to be out and about we didn't give much thought to what had brought us there. At one point Rodney actually let out a few whoops, waving his arms around as he led the way up a road climbing steadily past rows of houses and the occasional shop, and you could sense just from the huge sky, that you were walking towards the sea.

Actually, when we did reach the sea, we found we were standing on a road carved into a cliff edge. It seemed at first there was a sheer drop down to the sands, but once you leant over the rail, you could see zigzagging footpaths leading you down the cliff-face to the seafront.

We were starving by now and went into a little café perched on the cliff just where one of the footpaths began. When we went in, the only people inside were the two chubby women in aprons who worked there. They were smoking

cigarettes at one of the tables, but they quickly got up and disappeared into the kitchen, so then we had the place to ourselves.

We took the table right at the back–which meant the one stuck out closest to the cliff edge–and when we sat down it felt like we were virtually suspended over the sea. I didn't have anything to compare it with at the time, but I realise now the café was tiny, with just three or four little tables. They'd left a window open–probably to stop the place filling up with frying smells–so that every now and then a gust would pass through the room making all the signs advertising their good deals flutter about. There was one cardboard notice pinned over the counter that had been done in coloured felt-tips, and at the top of it was the word "look" with a staring eye drawn inside each "o." I see the same thing so often these days I don't even register it, but back then I hadn't seen it before. So I was looking at it admiringly, then caught Ruth's eye, and realised she too was looking at it amazed, and we both burst out laughing. That was a cosy little moment, when it felt like we'd left behind the bad feeling that had grown between us in the car. As it turned out, though, it was just about the last moment like that between me and Ruth for the rest of that outing.

We hadn't mentioned the "possible" at all since arriving in the town, and I'd assumed when we sat down we'd finally discuss the matter properly. But once we'd started on our sandwiches, Rodney began talking about their old friend, Martin, who'd left the Cottages the year before and was now living somewhere in the town. Chrissie eagerly took up the subject and soon both veterans were coming out with anecdotes about all the hilarious things Martin had got up to. We couldn't follow much of it, but Chrissie and Rodney were really enjoying themselves. They kept exchanging glances and laughing, and although they pretended it was for our benefit, it was clear they were remembering for each other. Thinking about it now, it occurs to me the near-taboo at the Cottages surrounding people who'd left might well have stopped them talking about their friend even to each other, and it was only once we'd come away they'd felt able to indulge themselves in this way.

Whenever they laughed, I laughed too just to be polite. Tommy seemed to be understanding things even less than me and was letting out hesitant little half-laughs that lagged some way behind. Ruth, though, was laughing and laughing, and kept nodding to everything being said about Martin just like she too was remembering them. Then once, when Chrissie made a really obscure reference–she'd said something like: "Oh, yes, the time he put out his jeans!"–Ruth gave a big laugh and signalled in our direction, as though to say to Chrissie: "Go on, explain it to them so they can enjoy it too." I let this

all go, but when Chrissie and Rodney started discussing whether we should go round to Martin's flat, I finally said, maybe a bit coldly:

“What exactly is he doing here? Why's he got a flat?”

There was a silence, then I heard Ruth let out an exasperated sigh. Chrissie leaned over the table towards me and said quietly, like she was explaining to a child: “He's being a carer. What else do you think he'd be doing here? He's a proper carer now.”

There was a bit of shifting, and I said: “That's what I mean. We can't just go and visit him.”

Chrissie sighed. “Okay. We're not supposed to visit carers. Absolutely strictly speaking. Certainly not encouraged.”

Rodney chuckled and added: “Definitely not encouraged. Naughty naughty to go and visit him.”

“Very naughty,” Chrissie said and made a tutting noise.

Then Ruth joined in, saying: “Kathy hates to be naughty. So we'd better not go and visit him.”

Tommy was looking at Ruth, clearly puzzled about whose side she'd taken, and I wasn't sure either. It occurred to me she didn't want the expedition side-tracked and was reluctantly siding with me, so I smiled at her, but she didn't return my look. Then Tommy asked suddenly:

“Whereabouts was it you saw Ruth's possible, Rodney?”

“Oh...” Rodney didn't seem nearly so interested in the possible now we were in the town, and I could see anxiety cross Ruth's face. Finally Rodney said: “It was a turning off the High Street, somewhere up the other end. Of course, it might be her day off.” Then when no one said anything, he added: “They do have days off, you know. They're not always at their work.”

For a moment, as he said this, the fear passed through me that we'd misjudged things badly; that for all we knew, veterans often used talk of possibles just as a pretext to go on trips, and didn't really expect to take it any further. Ruth might well have been thinking along the same lines, because she was now looking definitely worried, but in the end she did a little laugh, like Rodney had made a joke.

Then Chrissie said in a new voice: “You know, Ruth, we might be coming here in a few years' time to visit you. Working in a nice office. I don't see how anyone could stop us visiting you then.”

“That's right,” Ruth said quickly. “You can all come and see me.”

“I suppose,” Rodney said, “there aren't any rules about visiting people if they're working in an office.” He laughed suddenly. “We don't know. It hasn't really happened with us before.”

“It'll be all right,” Ruth said. “They let you do it. You can all come and visit me. Except Tommy, that is.”

Tommy looked shocked. “Why can't I come?”

“Because you'll already be with me, stupid,” Ruth said. “I'm keeping you.”

We all laughed, Tommy again a little behind the rest of us.

“I heard about this girl up in Wales,” Chrissie said. “She was Hailsham, maybe a few years before you lot. Apparently she's working in this clothes shop right now. A really smart one.”

There were murmurs of approval and for a while we all looked dreamily out at the clouds.

“That's Hailsham for you,” Rodney said eventually, and shook his head as though in amazement.

“And then there was that other person”–Chrissie had turned to Ruth–“that boy you were telling us about the other day. The one a couple of years above you who's a park keeper now.”

Ruth was nodding thoughtfully. It occurred to me that I should shoot Tommy a warning glance, but by the time I'd turned to him, he'd already started to speak.

“Who was that?” he asked in a bewildered voice.

“You know who it is, Tommy,” I said quickly. It was too risky to kick him, or even to make my voice wink-wink: Chrissie would have picked it up in a flash. So I said it dead straight, with a bit of weariness, like we were all fed up with Tommy forgetting all the time. But this just meant Tommy still didn't twig.

“Someone we knew?”

“Tommy, let's not go through this again,” I said. “You'll have to have your brains tested.”

At last the penny seemed to drop, and Tommy shut up.

Chrissie said: “I know how lucky I am, getting to be at the Cottages. But you Hailsham lot, you're really lucky. You know...” She lowered her voice and leaned forward again. “There's something I've been wanting to talk to you lot about. It's just that back there, at the Cottages, it's impossible. Everyone always listening in.”

She looked around the table, then fixed her gaze on Ruth. Rodney suddenly tensed and he too leaned forward. And something told me we were coming to what was, for Chrissie and Rodney, the central purpose of this whole expedition.

“When Rodney and I, we were up in Wales,” she said. “The same time we heard about this girl in the clothes shop. We heard something else, something about Hailsham students. What they were saying was that some Hailsham students in the past, in special circumstances, had managed to get a deferral. That this was something you could do if you were a Hailsham student. You could ask for your donations to be put back by three, even four years. It wasn't easy, but just sometimes they'd let you do it. So long as you could convince them. So long as you qualified.”

Chrissie paused and looked at each of us, maybe for dramatic effect, maybe to check us for signs of recognition. Tommy and I probably had puzzled looks, but Ruth had on one of her faces where you couldn't tell what was going on.

“What they said,” Chrissie continued, “was that if you were a boy and a girl, and you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and if you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you. They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations.”

There was now a strange atmosphere around the table, a kind of tingle going round.

“When we were in Wales,” Chrissie went on, “the students at the White Mansion. They'd heard of this Hailsham couple, the guy had only a few weeks left before he became a carer. And they went to see someone and got

everything put back three years. They were allowed to go on living there together, up at the White Mansion, three years straight, didn't have to go on with their training or anything. Three years just to themselves, because they could prove they were properly in love."

It was at this point I noticed Ruth nodding with a lot of authority. Chrissie and Rodney noticed too and for a few seconds they watched her like they were hypnotised. And I had a kind of vision of Chrissie and Rodney, back at the Cottages, in the months leading up to this moment, probing and prodding this subject between them. I could see them bringing it up, at first very tentatively, shrugging, putting it to one side, bringing it up again, never able quite to leave it alone. I could see them toying with the idea of talking to us about it, see them refining how they'd do it, what exactly they'd say. I looked again at Chrissie and Rodney in front of me, gazing at Ruth, and tried to read their faces. Chrissie looked both afraid and hopeful. Rodney looked on edge, like he didn't trust himself not to blurt out something he wasn't supposed to.

This wasn't the first time I'd come across the rumour about deferrals. Over the past several weeks, I'd caught more and more snatches of it at the Cottages. It was always veterans talking among themselves, and when any of us showed up, they'd look awkward and go quiet. But I'd heard enough to get the gist of it; and I knew it had specifically to do with us Hailsham students. Even so, it was only that day, in that seafront café, that it really came home to me how important this whole notion had become for some veterans.

"I suppose," Chrissie went on, her voice wobbling slightly, "you lot would know about it. The rules, all that sort of thing."

She and Rodney looked at each of us in turn, then their gazes settled back on Ruth.

Ruth sighed and said: "Well, they told us a few things, obviously. But"–she gave a shrug–"it's not something we know much about. We never talked about it really. Anyway, we should get going soon."

"Who is it you go to?" Rodney suddenly asked. "Who did they say you had to go to if you wanted, you know, to apply?"

Ruth shrugged again. "Well, I told you. It wasn't something we talked about much." Almost instinctively she looked to me and Tommy for support, which was probably a mistake, because Tommy said:

"To be honest, I don't know what you're all talking about. What rules are these?"

Ruth stared daggers at him, and I said quickly: “You know, Tommy. All that talk that used to go round at Hailsham.”

Tommy shook his head. “I don't remember it,” he said flatly. And this time I could see–and Ruth could too–that he wasn't being slow. “I don't remember anything like that at Hailsham.”

Ruth turned away from him. “What you've got to realise,” she said to Chrissie, “is that even though Tommy was at Hailsham, he isn't like a real Hailsham student. He was left out of everything and people were always laughing at him. So there's no point in asking him about anything like this. Now, I want to go and find this person Rodney saw.”

A look had appeared in Tommy's eyes that made me catch my breath. It was one I hadn't seen for a long time and that belonged to the Tommy who'd had to be barricaded inside a classroom while he kicked over desks. Then the look faded, he turned to the sky outside and let out a heavy breath.

The veterans hadn't noticed anything because Ruth, at the same moment, had risen to her feet and was fiddling with her coat. Then there was a bit of confusion as the rest of us all moved back our chairs from the little table all at once. I'd been put in charge of the spending money, so I went up to pay. The others filed out behind me, and while I was waiting for the change, I watched them through one of the big misty windows, shuffling about in the sunshine, not talking, looking down at the sea.

Chapter Fourteen

When I got outside, it was obvious the excitement from when we'd first arrived had evaporated completely. We walked in silence, Rodney leading the way, through little backstreets hardly penetrated by the sun, the pavements so narrow we often had to shuffle along in single file. It was a relief to come out onto the High Street where the noise made our rotten mood less obvious. As we crossed at a pelican to the sunnier side, I could see Rodney and Chrissie conferring about something and I wondered how much of the bad atmosphere had to do with their believing we were holding back on some big Hailsham secret, and how much was just to do with Ruth's having a go at Tommy.

Then once we'd crossed the High Street, Chrissie announced she and Rodney wanted to go shopping for birthday cards. Ruth was stunned by this, but Chrissie just went on:

"We like buying them in big batches. It's always cheaper in the long run. And you've always got one handy when it's someone's birthday." She pointed to the entrance of a Woolworth's shop. "You can get pretty good cards in there really cheap."

Rodney was nodding, and I thought there was something a little bit mocking around the edges of his smile. "Of course," he said, "you end up with a lot of cards the same, but you can put your own illustrations on them. You know, personalise them."

Both veterans were now standing in the middle of the pavement, letting people with pushchairs move round them, waiting for us to put up a challenge. I could tell Ruth was furious, but without Rodney's co-operation there wasn't much that could be done anyway.

So we went into the Woolworth's, and immediately I felt much more cheerful. Even now, I like places like that: a large store with lots of aisles displaying bright plastic toys, greeting cards, loads of cosmetics, maybe even a photo booth. Today, if I'm in a town and find myself with some time to kill, I'll stroll into somewhere just like that, where you can hang around and enjoy yourself, not buying a thing, and the assistants don't mind at all.

Anyway, we went in and before long we'd wandered apart to look at different aisles. Rodney had stayed near the entrance beside a big rack of cards, and further inside, I spotted Tommy under a big pop-group poster, rummaging through the music cassettes. After about ten minutes, when I was somewhere

near the back of the store, I thought I heard Ruth's voice and wandered towards it. I'd already turned into the aisle–one with fluffy animals and big boxed jigsaws–before I realised Ruth and Chrissie were standing together at the end of it, having some sort of tête-à-tête. I wasn't sure what to do: I didn't want to interrupt, but it was time we were leaving and I didn't want to turn and walk off again. So I just stopped where I was, pretended to examine a jigsaw and waited for them to notice me.

That was when I realised they were back on the subject of this rumour. Chrissie was saying, in a lowered voice, something like:

"But all that time you were there, I'm amazed you didn't think more about how you'd do it. About who you'd go to, all of that."

"You don't understand," Ruth was saying. "If you were from Hailsham, then you'd see. It's never been such a big deal for us. I suppose we've always known if we ever wanted to look into it, all we'd have to do is get word back to Hailsham..."

Ruth saw me and broke off. When I lowered the jigsaw and turned to them, they were both looking at me angrily. At the same time, it was like I'd caught them doing something they shouldn't, and they moved apart self-consciously.

"It's time we were off," I said, pretending to have heard nothing.

But Ruth wasn't fooled. As they came past, she gave me a really dirty look.

So by the time we set off again, following Rodney in search of the office where he'd seen Ruth's possible the month before, the atmosphere between us was worse than ever. Things weren't helped either by Rodney repeatedly taking us down the wrong streets. At least four times, he led us confidently down a turning off the High Street, only for the shops and offices to run out, and we'd have to turn and come back. Before long, Rodney was looking defensive and on the verge of giving up. But then we found it.

Again, we'd turned and were heading back towards the High Street, when Rodney had stopped suddenly. Then he'd indicated silently an office on the other side of the street.

There it was, sure enough. It wasn't exactly like the magazine advert we'd found on the ground that day, but then it wasn't so far off either. There was a big glass front at street-level, so anyone going by could see right into it: a large open-plan room with maybe a dozen desks arranged in irregular L-patterns. There were the potted palms, the shiny machines and swooping

desk lamps. People were moving about between desks, or leaning on a partition, chatting and sharing jokes, while others had pulled their swivel chairs close to each other and were enjoying a coffee and sandwich.

“Look,” Tommy said. “It's their lunch break, but they don't go out. Don't blame them either.”

We kept on staring, and it looked like a smart, cosy, self-contained world. I glanced at Ruth and noticed her eyes moving anxiously around the faces behind the glass.

“Okay, Rod,” Chrissie said. “So which one's the possible?”

She said this almost sarcastically, like she was sure the whole thing would turn out to be a big mistake on his part. But Rodney said quietly, with a tremor of excitement:

“There. Over in that corner. In the blue outfit. Her, talking now to the big red woman.”

It wasn't obvious, but the longer we kept looking, the more it seemed he had something. The woman was around fifty, and had kept her figure pretty well. Her hair was darker than Ruth's–though it could have been dyed–and she had it tied back in a simple pony-tail the way Ruth usually did. She was laughing at something her friend in the red outfit was saying, and her face, especially when she was finishing her laugh with a shake of her head, had more than a hint of Ruth about it.

We all kept on watching her, not saying a word. Then we became aware that in another part of the office, a couple of the other women had noticed us. One raised a hand and gave us an uncertain wave. This broke the spell and we took to our heels in giggly panic.

We stopped again further down the street, talking excitedly all at once. Except for Ruth, that is, who remained silent in the middle of it. It was hard to read her face at that moment: she certainly wasn't disappointed, but then she wasn't elated either. She had on a half-smile, the sort a mother might have in an ordinary family, weighing things up while the children jumped and screamed around her asking her to say, yes, they could do whatever. So there we were, all coming out with our views, and I was glad I could say honestly, along with the others, that the woman we'd seen was by no means out of the question. The truth was, we were all relieved: without quite realising it, we'd

been bracing ourselves for a let-down. But now we could go back to the Cottages, Ruth could take encouragement from what she'd seen, and the rest of us could back her up. And the office life the woman appeared to be leading was about as close as you could hope to the one Ruth had often described for herself. Regardless of what had been going on between us that day, deep down, none of us wanted Ruth to return home despondent, and at that moment we thought we were safe. And so we would have been, I'm pretty sure, had we put an end to the matter at that point.

But then Ruth said: "Let's sit over there, over on that wall. Just for a few minutes. Once they've forgotten about us, we can go and have another look."

We agreed to this, but as we walked towards the low wall around the small car park Ruth had indicated, Chrissie said, perhaps a little too eagerly:

"But even if we don't get to see her again, we're all agreed she's a possible. And it's a lovely office. It really is."

"Let's just wait a few minutes," Ruth said. "Then we'll go back."

I didn't sit on the wall myself because it was damp and crumbling, and because I thought someone might appear any minute and shout at us for sitting there. But Ruth did sit on it, knees on either side like she was astride a horse. And today I have these vivid images of the ten, fifteen minutes we waited there. No one's talking about the possible any more. We're pretending instead that we're just killing a bit of time, maybe at a scenic spot during a carefree day-trip. Rodney's doing a little dance to demonstrate what a good feeling there is. He gets up on the wall, balances along it then deliberately falls off. Tommy's making jokes about some passers-by, and though they're not very funny, we're all laughing. Just Ruth, in the middle, astride the wall, remains silent. She keeps the smile on her face, but hardly moves. There's a breeze messing up her hair, and the bright winter sun's making her crinkle up her eyes, so you're not sure if she's smiling at our antics, or just grimacing in the light. These are the pictures I've kept of those moments we waited by that car park. I suppose we were waiting for Ruth to decide when it was time to go back for a second look. Well, she never got to make that decision because of what happened next.

Tommy, who had been mucking about on the wall with Rodney, suddenly jumped down and went still. Then he said: "That's her. That's the same one."

We all stopped what we were doing and watched the figure coming from the direction of the office. She was now wearing a cream-coloured overcoat, and struggling to fasten her briefcase as she walked. The buckle was giving her

trouble, so she kept slowing down and starting again. We went on watching her in a kind of trance as she went past on the other side. Then as she was turning into the High Street, Ruth leapt up and said: “Let's see where she goes.”

We came out of our trance and were off after her. In fact, Chrissie had to remind us to slow down or someone would think we were a gang of muggers going after the woman. We followed along the High Street at a reasonable distance, giggling, dodging past people, separating and coming together again. It must have been around two o'clock by then, and the pavement was busy with shoppers. At times we nearly lost sight of her, but we kept up, loitering in front of window displays when she went into a shop, squeezing past pushchairs and old people when she came out again.

Then the woman turned off the High Street into the little lanes near the seafront. Chrissie was worried she'd notice us away from the crowds, but Ruth just kept going, and we followed behind her.

Eventually we came into a narrow side-street that had the occasional shop, but was mainly just ordinary houses. We had to walk again in single file, and once when a van came the other way, we had to press ourselves into the houses to let it pass. Before long there was only the woman and us in the entire street, and if she'd glanced back, there was no way she wouldn't have noticed us. But she just kept walking, a dozen or so steps ahead, then went in through a door–into “The Portway Studios.”

I've been back to the Portway Studios a number of times since then. It changed owners a few years ago and now sells all kinds of arty things: pots, plates, clay animals. Back then, it was two big white rooms just with paintings–beautifully displayed with plenty of spaces between them. The wooden sign hanging over the door is still the same one though. Anyway, we decided to go in after Rodney pointed out how suspicious we looked in that quiet little street. Inside the shop, we could at least pretend we were looking at the pictures.

We came in to find the woman we'd been following talking to a much older woman with silver hair, who seemed to be in charge of the place. They were sitting on either side of a small desk near the door, and apart from them, the gallery was empty. Neither woman paid much attention as we filed past, spread out and tried to look fascinated by the pictures.

Actually, preoccupied though I was with Ruth's possible, I did begin to enjoy the paintings and the sheer peacefulness of the place. It felt like we'd come a hundred miles from the High Street. The walls and ceilings were peppermint,

and here and there, you'd see a bit of fishing net, or a rotted piece from a boat stuck up high near the cornicing. The paintings too–mostly oils in deep blues and greens–had sea themes. Maybe it was the tiredness suddenly catching up with us–after all, we'd been travelling since before dawn–but I wasn't the only one who went off into a bit of a dream in there. We'd all wandered into different corners, and were staring at one picture after another, only occasionally making the odd hushed remark like: "Come and look at this!" All the time, we could hear Ruth's possible and the silver-haired lady talking on and on. They weren't especially loud, but in that place, their voices seemed to fill the entire space. They were discussing some man they both knew, how he didn't have a clue with his children. And as we kept listening to them, stealing the odd glance in their direction, bit by bit, something started to change. It did for me, and I could tell it was happening for the others. If we'd left it at seeing the woman through the glass of her office, even if we'd followed her through the town then lost her, we could still have gone back to the Cottages excited and triumphant. But now, in that gallery, the woman was too close, much closer than we'd ever really wanted. And the more we heard her and looked at her, the less she seemed like Ruth. It was a feeling that grew among us almost tangibly, and I could tell that Ruth, absorbed in a picture on the other side of the room, was feeling it as much as anyone. That was probably why we went on shuffling around that gallery for so long; we were delaying the moment when we'd have to confer.

Then suddenly the woman had left, and we all kept standing about, avoiding each other's eyes. But none of us had thought to follow the woman, and as the seconds kept ticking on, it became like we were agreeing, without speaking, about how we now saw the situation.

Eventually the silver-haired lady came out from behind her desk and said to Tommy, who was the nearest to her: "That's a particularly lovely work. That one's a favourite of mine."

Tommy turned to her and let out a laugh. Then as I was hurrying over to help him out, the lady asked: "Are you art students?"

"Not exactly," I said before Tommy could respond. "We're just, well, keen."

The silver-haired lady beamed, then started to tell us how the artist whose work we were looking at was related to her, and all about the artist's career thus far. This had the effect, at least, of breaking the trance-like state we'd been in, and we gathered round her to listen, the way we might have done at Hailsham when a guardian started to speak. This really got the silver-haired lady going, and we kept nodding and exclaiming while she talked about where the paintings had been done, the times of day the artist liked to work,

how some had been done without sketches. Then there came a kind of natural end to her lecture, and we all gave a sigh, thanked her and went out.

The street outside being so narrow, we couldn't talk properly for a while longer, and I think we were all grateful for that. As we walked away from the gallery in single file, I could see Rodney, up at the front, theatrically stretching out his arms, like he was exhilarated the way he'd been when we'd first arrived in the town. But it wasn't convincing, and once we came out onto a wider street, we all shuffled to a halt.

We were once again near a cliff edge. And like before, if you peered over the rail, you could see the paths zigzagging down to the seafront, except this time you could see the promenade at the bottom with rows of boarded-up stalls.

We spent a few moments just looking out, letting the wind hit us. Rodney was still trying to be cheerful, like he'd decided not to let any of this business spoil a good outing. He was pointing out to Chrissie something in the sea, way off on the horizon. But Chrissie turned away from him and said:

"Well, I think we're agreed, aren't we? That isn't Ruth." She gave a small laugh and laid a hand on Ruth's shoulder. "I'm sorry. We're all sorry. But we can't blame Rodney really. It wasn't that wild a try. You've got to admit, when we saw her through those windows, it did look..." She trailed off, then touched Ruth on the shoulder again.

Ruth said nothing, but gave a little shrug, almost as if to shrug off the touch. She was squinting into the distance, at the sky rather than the water. I could tell she was upset, but someone who didn't know her well might well have supposed she was being thoughtful.

"Sorry, Ruth," Rodney said, and he too gave Ruth a pat on the shoulder. But he had a smile on his face like he didn't expect for one moment to be blamed for anything. It was the way someone apologised when they'd tried to do you a favour, but it hadn't worked out.

Watching Chrissie and Rodney at that moment, I remember thinking, yes, they were okay. They were kind in their way and were trying to cheer Ruth up. At the same time, though, I remember feeling–even though they were the ones doing the talking, and Tommy and I were silent–a sort of resentment towards them on Ruth's behalf. Because however sympathetic they were, I could see that deep down they were relieved. They were relieved things had turned out the way they had; that they were in a position to comfort Ruth, instead of being left behind in the wake of a dizzying boost to her hopes. They were relieved they wouldn't have to face, more starkly than ever, the notion

which fascinated and nagged and scared them: this notion of theirs that there were all kinds of possibilities open to us Hailsham students that weren't open to them. I remember thinking then how different they actually were, Chrissie and Rodney, from the three of us.

Then Tommy said: "I don't see what difference it makes. It was just a bit of fun we were having."

"A bit of fun for you maybe, Tommy," Ruth said coldly, still gazing straight ahead of her. "You wouldn't think so if it was your possible we'd been looking for."

"I think I would," Tommy said. "I don't see how it matters. Even if you found your possible, the actual model they got you from. Even then, I don't see what difference it makes to anything."

"Thank you for your profound contribution, Tommy," said Ruth.

"But I think Tommy's right," I said. "It's daft to assume you'll have the same sort of life as your model. I agree with Tommy. It's just a bit of fun. We shouldn't get so serious about it."

I too reached out and touched Ruth on the shoulder. I wanted her to feel the contrast to when Chrissie and Rodney had touched her, and I deliberately chose exactly the same spot. I expected some response, some signal that she accepted understanding from me and Tommy in a way she didn't from the veterans. But she gave me nothing, not even the shrug she'd given Chrissie.

Somewhere behind me I could hear Rodney pacing about, making noises to suggest he was getting chilly in the strong wind. "How about going to visit Martin now?" he said. "His flat's just over there, behind those houses."

Ruth suddenly sighed and turned to us. "To be honest," she said, "I knew all along it was stupid."

"Yeah," said Tommy, eagerly. "Just a bit of fun."

Ruth gave him an irritated look. "Tommy, please shut up with all this 'bit of fun' stuff. No one's listening." Then turning to Chrissie and Rodney she went on: "I didn't want to say when you first told me about this. But look, it was never on. They don't ever, ever, use people like that woman. Think about it. Why would she want to? We all know it, so why don't we all face it. We're not modelled from that sort..."

“Ruth,” I cut in firmly. “Ruth, don't.”

But she just carried on: “We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We all know it, so why don't we say it? A woman like that? Come on. Yeah, right, Tommy. A bit of fun. Let's have a bit of fun pretending. That other woman in there, her friend, the old one in the gallery. Art students, that's what she thought we were. Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were? What do you think she'd have said if we'd asked her? 'Excuse me, but do you think your friend was ever a clone model?' She'd have thrown us out. We know it, so we might as well just say it. If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from.”

“Ruth”–Rodney's voice was steady and had a warning in it–“let's forget about it and go and see Martin. He's off this afternoon. You'll like him, he's a real laugh.”

Chrissie put an arm around Ruth. “Come on, Ruth. Let's do what Rodney says.”

Ruth got to her feet and Rodney started to walk.

“Well, you lot can go,” I said quietly. “I'm not going.”

Ruth turned and looked at me carefully. “Well, what do you know? Who's the upset one now?”

“I'm not upset. But sometimes you speak garbage, Ruth.”

“Oh, look who's upset now. Poor Kathy. She never likes straight talking.”

“It's nothing to do with that. I don't want to visit a carer. We're not supposed to and I don't even know this guy.”

Ruth shrugged and exchanged glances with Chrissie. “Well,” she said, “there's no reason we've got to go round together the whole time. If little Miss here doesn't want to join us, she doesn't have to. Let her go off by herself.” Then she leaned over to Chrissie and said in a stage whisper: “That's always the best way when Kathy's in a mood. Leave her alone and she'll walk it off.”

“Be back at the car by four o'clock,” Rodney said to me. “Otherwise you'll have to hitch-hike.” Then he did a laugh. “Come on, Kathy, don't get in a

sulk. Come with us."

"No. You go on. I don't feel like it."

Rodney shrugged and started to move off again. Ruth and Chrissie followed, but Tommy didn't move. Only when Ruth stared at him did he say:

"I'll stay with Kath. If we're splitting, then I'll stay with Kath."

Ruth glared at him in fury, then turned and strode off. Chrissie and Rodney looked at Tommy awkwardly, then they too began walking again.

Chapter Fifteen

Tommy and I leaned on the rail and stared at the view until the others had gone out of sight.

"It's just talk," he said eventually. Then after a pause: "It's just what people say when they're feeling sorry for themselves. It's just talk. The guardians never told us anything like that."

I started to walk–the opposite way to the others–and let Tommy fall in step beside me.

"It's not worth getting upset about," Tommy went on. "Ruth's always doing things like that now. It's just her letting off steam. Anyway, like we were telling her, even if it's true, even a little bit true, I don't see how it makes any difference. Our models, what they were like, that's nothing to do with us, Kath. It's just not worth getting upset about."

"Okay," I said, and deliberately bumped my shoulder into his. "Okay, okay."

I had the impression we were walking towards the town centre, though I couldn't be sure. I was trying to think of a way to change the subject, when Tommy said first:

"You know when we were in that Woolworth's place earlier? When you were down at the back with the others? I was trying to find something. Something for you."

"A present?" I looked at him in surprise. "I'm not sure Ruth would approve of that. Not unless you got her a bigger one."

"A sort of present. But I couldn't find it. I wasn't going to tell you, but now, well, I've got another chance to find it. Except you might have to help me. I'm not very good at shopping."

"Tommy, what are you talking about? You want to get me a present, but you want me to help you choose it..."

"No, I know what it is. It's just that..." He laughed and shrugged. "Oh, I might as well tell you. In that shop we were in, they had this shelf with loads of records and tapes. So I was looking for the one you lost that time. Do you remember, Kath? Except I couldn't remember what it was any more."

“My tape? I didn't realise you ever knew about it, Tommy.”

“Oh yeah. Ruth was getting people to look for it and saying you were really upset about losing it. So I tried to find it. I never told you at the time, but I did try really hard. I thought there'd be places I could look where you couldn't. In boys' dorms, stuff like that. I remember looking for ages, but I couldn't find it.”

I glanced at him and felt my rotten mood evaporating. “I never knew that, Tommy. That was really sweet of you.”

“Well, it didn't help much. But I really wanted to find it for you. And when it looked in the end like it wasn't going to turn up, I just said to myself, one day I'll go to Norfolk and I'll find it there for her.”

“The lost corner of England,” I said, and looked around me. “And here we are!”

Tommy too looked around him, and we came to a halt. We were in another side-street, not as narrow as the one with the gallery. For a moment we both kept glancing around theatrically, then giggled.

“So it wasn't such a daft idea,” Tommy said. “That Woolworth's shop earlier, it had all these tapes, so I thought they were bound to have yours. But I don't think they did.”

“You don't think they did? Oh, Tommy, you mean you didn't even look properly!”

“I did, Kath. It's just that, well, it's really annoying but I couldn't remember what it was called. All that time at Hailsham, I was opening boys' collection chests and everything, and now I can't remember. It was Julie Bridges or something...”

“Judy Bridgewater. Songs After Dark.”

Tommy shook his head solemnly. “They definitely didn't have that.”

I laughed and punched his arm. He looked puzzled so I said: “Tommy, they wouldn't have something like that in Woolworth's. They have the latest hits. Judy Bridgewater, she's someone from ages ago. It just happened to turn up, at one of our Sales. It's not going to be in Woolworth's now, you idiot!”

“Well, like I said, I don't know about things like that. But they had so many tapes...”

“They had some, Tommy. Oh, never mind. It was a sweet idea. I'm really touched. It was a great idea. This is Norfolk, after all.”

We started walking again and Tommy said hesitantly: “Well, that's why I had to tell you. I wanted to surprise you, but it's useless. I don't know where to look, even if I do know the name of the record. Now I've told you, you can help me. We can look for it together.”

“Tommy, what are you talking about?” I was trying to sound reproachful, but I couldn't help laughing.

“Well, we've got over an hour. This is a real chance.”

“Tommy, you idiot. You really believe it, don't you? All this lost-corner stuff.”

“I don't necessarily believe it. But we might as well look now we're here. I mean, you'd like to find it again, wouldn't you? What have we got to lose?”

“All right. You're a complete idiot, but all right.”

He opened his arms out helplessly. “Well, Kath, where do we go? Like I say, I'm no good at shopping.”

“We have to look in second-hand places,” I said, after a moment's thought. “Places full of old clothes, old books. They'll sometimes have a box full of records and tapes.”

“Okay. But where are these shops?”

When I think of that moment now, standing with Tommy in the little side-street about to begin our search, I feel a warmth welling up through me. Everything suddenly felt perfect: an hour set aside, stretching ahead of us, and there wasn't a better way to spend it. I had to really hold myself back from giggling stupidly, or jumping up and down on the pavement like a little kid. Not long ago, when I was caring for Tommy, and I brought up our Norfolk trip, he told me he'd felt exactly the same. That moment when we decided to go searching for my lost tape, it was like suddenly every cloud had blown away, and we had nothing but fun and laughter before us.

At the start, we kept going into the wrong sort of places: second-hand bookshops, or shops full of old vacuum cleaners, but no music at all. After a while Tommy decided I didn't know any better than he did and announced he would lead the way. As it happened, by sheer luck really, he discovered

straight away a street with four shops of just the kind we were after, standing virtually in a row. Their front windows were full of dresses, handbags, children's annuals, and when you went inside, a sweet stale smell. There were piles of creased paperbacks, dusty boxes full of postcards or trinkets. One shop specialised in hippie stuff, while another had war medals and photos of soldiers in the desert. But they all had somewhere a big cardboard box or two with LPs and cassette tapes. We rummaged around those shops, and in all honesty, after the first few minutes, I think Judy Bridgewater had more or less slipped from our minds. We were just enjoying looking through all those things together; drifting apart then finding ourselves side by side again, maybe competing for the same box of bric-a-brac in a dusty corner lit up by a shaft of sun.

Then of course I found it. I'd been flicking through a row of cassette cases, my mind on other things, when suddenly there it was, under my fingers, looking just the way it had all those years ago: Judy, her cigarette, the coquettish look for the barman, the blurred palms in the background.

I didn't exclaim, the way I'd been doing when I'd come across other items that had mildly excited me. I stood there quite still, looking at the plastic case, unsure whether or not I was delighted. For a second, it even felt like a mistake. The tape had been the perfect excuse for all this fun, and now it had turned up, we'd have to stop. Maybe that was why, to my own surprise, I kept silent at first; why I thought about pretending never to have seen it. And now it was there in front of me, there was something vaguely embarrassing about the tape, like it was something I should have grown out of. I actually went as far as flicking the cassette on and letting its neighbour fall on it. But there was the spine, looking up at me, and in the end I called Tommy over.

“Is that it?” He seemed genuinely sceptical, perhaps because I wasn't making more fuss. I pulled it out and held it in both hands. Then suddenly I felt a huge pleasure–and something else, something more complicated that threatened to make me burst into tears. But I got a hold of the emotion, and just gave Tommy's arm a tug.

“Yes, this is it,” I said, and for the first time smiled excitedly. “Can you believe it? We've really found it!”

“Do you think it could be the same one? I mean, the actual one. The one you lost?”

As I turned it in my fingers, I found I could remember all the design details on the back, the titles of the tracks, everything.

“For all I know, it might be,” I said. “But I have to tell you, Tommy, there might be thousands of these knocking about.”

Then it was my turn to notice Tommy wasn't as triumphant as he might be.

“Tommy, you don't seem very pleased for me,” I said, though in an obviously jokey voice.

“I am pleased for you, Kath. It's just that, well, I wish I'd found it.” Then he did a small laugh and went on: “Back then, when you lost it, I used to think about it, in my head, what it would be like, if I found it and brought it to you. What you'd say, your face, all of that.”

His voice was softer than usual and he kept his eyes on the plastic case in my hand. And I suddenly became very conscious of the fact that we were the only people in the shop, except for the old guy behind the counter at the front engrossed in his paperwork. We were right at the back of the shop, on a raised platform where it was darker and more secluded, like the old guy didn't want to think about the stuff in our area and had mentally curtained it off. For several seconds, Tommy stayed in a sort of trance, for all I know playing over in his mind one of these old fantasies of giving me back my lost tape. Then suddenly he snatched the case out of my hand.

“Well at least I can buy it for you,” he said with a grin, and before I could stop him, he'd started down the floor towards the front.

I went on browsing around the back of the shop while the old guy searched around for the tape to go with the case. I was still feeling a pang of regret that we'd found it so quickly, and it was only later, when we were back at the Cottages and I was alone in my room, that I really appreciated having the tape–and that song–back again. Even then, it was mainly a nostalgia thing, and today, if I happen to get the tape out and look at it, it brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does our Hailsham days.

As we came out of the shop, I was keen to regain the carefree, almost silly mood we'd been in before. But when I made a few little jokes, Tommy was lost in his thoughts and didn't respond.

We began going up a steeply climbing path, and we could see–maybe a hundred yards further up–a kind of viewing area right on the cliff edge with benches facing out to sea. It would have made a nice spot in the summer for

an ordinary family to sit and eat a picnic. Now, despite the chilly wind, we found ourselves walking up towards it, but when there was still some way left to go, Tommy slowed to a dawdle and said to me:

"Chrissie and Rodney, they're really obsessed with this idea. You know, the one about people having their donations deferred if they're really in love. They're convinced we know all about it, but no one said anything like that at Hailsham. At least, I never heard anything like that, did you, Kath? No, it's just something going around recently among the veterans. And people like Ruth, they've been stoking it up."

I looked at him carefully, but it was hard to tell if he'd just spoken with mischievous affection or else a kind of disgust. I could see anyway there was something else on his mind, nothing to do with Ruth, so I didn't say anything and waited. Eventually he came to a complete halt and started to poke around with his foot a squashed paper cup on the ground.

"Actually, Kath," he said, "I've been thinking about it for a while. I'm sure we're right, there was no talk like that when we were at Hailsham. But there were a lot of things that didn't make sense back then. And I've been thinking, if it's true, this rumour, then it could explain quite a lot. Stuff we used to puzzle over."

"What do you mean? What sort of stuff?"

"The Gallery, for instance." Tommy had lowered his voice and I stepped in closer, just as though we were still at Hailsham, talking in the dinner queue or beside the pond. "We never got to the bottom of it, what the Gallery was for. Why Madame took away all the best work. But now I think I know. Kath, you remember that time everyone was arguing about tokens? Whether they should get them or not to make up for stuff they'd had taken away by Madame? And Roy J. went in to see Miss Emily about it? Well, there was something Miss Emily said then, something she let drop, and that's what's been making me think."

Two women were passing by with dogs on leads, and although it was completely stupid, we both stopped talking until they'd gone further up the slope and out of earshot. Then I said:

"What thing, Tommy? What thing Miss Emily let drop?"

"When Roy J. asked her why Madame took our stuff away. Do you remember what she's supposed to have said?"

“I remember her saying it was a privilege, and we should be proud...”

“But that wasn't all.” Tommy's voice was now down to a whisper. “What she told Roy, what she let slip, which she probably didn't mean to let slip, do you remember, Kath? She told Roy that things like pictures, poetry, all that kind of stuff, she said they revealed what you were like inside. She said they revealed your soul.”

When he said this, I suddenly remembered a drawing Laura had done once of her intestines and laughed. But something was coming back to me.

“That's right,” I said. “I remember. So what are you getting at?”

“What I think,” said Tommy slowly, “is this. Suppose it's true, what the veterans are saying. Suppose some special arrangement has been made for Hailsham students. Suppose two people say they're truly in love, and they want extra time to be together. Then you see, Kath, there has to be a way to judge if they're really telling the truth. That they aren't just saying they're in love, just to defer their donations. You see how difficult it could be to decide? Or a couple might really believe they're in love, but it's just a sex thing. Or just a crush. You see what I mean, Kath? It'll be really hard to judge, and it's probably impossible to get it right every time. But the point is, whoever decides, Madame or whoever it is, they need something to go on.”

I nodded slowly. “So that's why they took away our art...”

“It could be. Madame's got a gallery somewhere filled with stuff by students from when they were tiny. Suppose two people come up and say they're in love. She can find the art they've done over years and years. She can see if they go. If they match. Don't forget, Kath, what she's got reveals our souls. She could decide for herself what's a good match and what's just a stupid crush.”

I started to walk slowly again, hardly looking in front of me. Tommy fell in step, waiting for my response.

“I'm not sure,” I said in the end. “What you're saying could certainly explain Miss Emily, what she said to Roy. And I suppose it explains too why the guardians always thought it was so important for us, to be able to paint and all of that.”

“Exactly. And that's why...” Tommy sighed and went on with some effort. “That's why Miss Lucy had to admit she'd been wrong, telling me it didn't really matter. She'd said that because she was sorry for me at the time. But

she knew deep down it did matter. The thing about being from Hailsham was that you had this special chance. And if you didn't get stuff into Madame's gallery, then you were as good as throwing that chance away."

It was after he said this that it suddenly dawned on me, with a real chill, where this was leading. I stopped and turned to him, but before I could speak, Tommy let out a laugh.

"If I've got this right, then, well, it looks like I might have blown my chance."

"Tommy, did you ever get anything into the Gallery? When you were much younger maybe?"

He was already shaking his head. "You know how useless I was. And then there was that stuff with Miss Lucy. I know she meant well. She was sorry for me and she wanted to help me. I'm sure she did. But if my theory's right, well..."

"It's only a theory, Tommy," I said. "You know what your theories are like."

I'd wanted to lighten things a bit, but I couldn't get the tone right, and it must have been obvious I was still thinking hard about what he'd just said. "Maybe they've got all sorts of ways to judge," I said after a moment. "Maybe the art's just one out of all kinds of different ways."

Tommy shook his head again. "Like what? Madame never got to know us. She wouldn't remember us individually. Besides, it's probably not just Madame that decides. There's probably people higher up than her, people who never set foot in Hailsham. I've thought about this a lot, Kath. It all fits. That's why the Gallery was so important, and why the guardians wanted us to work so hard on our art and our poetry. Kath, what are you thinking?"

Sure enough, I'd drifted off a bit. Actually, I was thinking about that afternoon I'd been alone in our dorm, playing the tape we'd just found; how I'd been swaying around, clutching a pillow to my breast, and how Madame had been watching me from the doorway, tears in her eyes. Even this episode, for which I'd never yet found a convincing explanation, seemed to fit Tommy's theory. In my head, I'd been imagining I was holding a baby, but of course, there'd have been no way for Madame to know that. She'd have supposed I was holding a lover in my arms. If Tommy's theory was right, if Madame was connected to us for the sole purpose of deferring our donations when, later on, we fell in love, then it made sense–for all her usual coldness towards us–she'd be really moved stumbling on a scene like that. All this flashed through my mind, and I was on the point of blurting it all out to Tommy. But

I held back because I wanted now to play down his theory.

“I was just thinking over what you said, that's all,” I said. “We should start going back now. It might take us a while to find the car park.”

We began to retrace our steps down the slope, but we knew we still had time and didn't hurry.

“Tommy,” I asked, after we'd been walking for a while. “Have you said any of this to Ruth?”

He shook his head and went on walking. Eventually he said: “The thing is, Ruth believes it all, everything the veterans are saying. Okay, she likes to pretend she knows much more than she does. But she does believe it. And sooner or later, she's going to want to take it further.”

“You mean, she'll want to...”

“Yeah. She'll want to apply. But she hasn't thought it through yet. Not the way we just did.”

“You've never told her your theory about the Gallery?”

He shook his head again, but said nothing.

“If you tell her your theory,” I said, “and she buys it... Well, she's going to be furious.”

Tommy seemed thoughtful, but still didn't say anything. It wasn't until we were back down in the narrow side-streets that he spoke again, and then his voice was suddenly sheepish.

“Actually, Kath,” he said, “I have been doing some stuff. Just in case. I haven't told anyone, not even Ruth. It's just a start.”

That was when I first heard about his imaginary animals. When he started to describe what he'd been doing–I didn't actually see anything until a few weeks later–I found it hard to show much enthusiasm. In fact, I have to admit, I was reminded of the original elephant-in-the-grass picture that had started off all Tommy's problems at Hailsham. The inspiration, he explained, had come from an old children's book with the back cover missing which he'd found behind one of the sofas at the Cottages. He'd then persuaded Keffers to give him one of the little black notebooks he scribbled his figures in, and since then, Tommy had finished at least a dozen of his fantastic creatures.

“The thing is, I'm doing them really small. Tiny. I'd never thought of that at Hailsham. I think maybe that's where I went wrong. If you make them tiny, and you have to because the pages are only about this big, then everything changes. It's like they come to life by themselves. Then you have to draw in all these different details for them. You have to think about how they'd protect themselves, how they'd reach things. Honest, Kath, it's nothing like anything I ever did at Hailsham.”

He started describing his favourites, but I couldn't really concentrate; the more excited he got telling me about his animals, the more uneasy I was growing. “Tommy,” I wanted to say to him, “you're going to make yourself a laughing stock all over again. Imaginary animals? What's up with you?” But I didn't. I just looked at him cautiously and kept saying: “That sounds really good, Tommy.”

Then he said at one point: “Like I said, Kath, Ruth doesn't know about the animals.” And when he said this, he seemed to remember everything else, and why we'd been talking about his animals in the first place, and the energy faded from his face. Then we were walking in silence again, and as we came out onto the High Street, I said:

“Well, even if there's something to your theory, Tommy, there's a lot more we'll have to find out. For one thing, how's a couple supposed to apply? What are they supposed to do? There aren't exactly forms lying about.”

“I've been wondering about all of that too.” His voice was quiet and solemn again. “As far as I can see, there's only one obvious way forward. And that's to find Madame.”

I gave this a think, then said: “That might not be so easy. We don't really know a thing about her. We don't even know her name. And you remember how she was? She didn't like us even coming near her. Even if we did ever track her down, I don't see her helping much.”

Tommy sighed. “I know,” he said. “Well, I suppose we've got time. None of us are in any particular hurry.”

By the time we got back to the car park, the afternoon had clouded over and was growing pretty chilly. There was no sign of the others yet, so Tommy and I leaned against our car and looked towards the mini-golf course. No one was playing and the flags were fluttering away in the wind. I didn't want to talk

any more about Madame, the Gallery or any of the rest of it, so I got the Judy Bridgewater tape out from its little bag and gave it a good look-over.

“Thanks for buying this for me,” I said.

Tommy smiled. “If I'd got to that tape box and you were on the LPs, I'd have found it first. It was bad luck for poor old Tommy.”

“It doesn't make any difference. We only found it because you said to look for it. I'd forgotten about all this lost-corner stuff. After Ruth going on like that, I was in such a mood. Judy Bridgewater. My old friend. It's like she's never been away. I wonder who stole it back then?”

For a moment, we turned towards the street, looking for the others.

“You know,” Tommy said, “when Ruth said what she did earl-ier on, and I saw how upset you looked...”

“Leave it, Tommy. I'm all right about it now. And I'm not going to bring it up with her when she comes back.”

“No, that's not what I was getting at.” He took his weight off the car, turned and pressed a foot against the front tyre as though to test it. “What I meant was, I realised then, when Ruth came out with all that, I realised why you keep looking through those porn mags. Okay, I haven't realised. It's just a theory. Another of my theories. But when Ruth said what she did earlier on, it kind of clicked.”

I knew he was looking at me, but I kept my eyes straight ahead and made no response.

“But I still don't really get it, Kath,” he said eventually. “Even if what Ruth says is right, and I don't think it is, why are you looking through old porn mags for your possibles? Why would your model have to be one of those girls?”

I shrugged, still not looking at him. “I don't claim it makes sense. It's just something I do.” There were tears filling my eyes now and I tried to hide them from Tommy. But my voice wobbled as I said: “If it annoys you so much, I won't do it any more.”

I don't know if Tommy saw the tears. In any case, I'd got them under control by the time he came close to me and gave my shoulders a squeeze. This was something he'd done before from time to time, it wasn't anything special or

new. But somehow I did feel better and gave a little laugh. He let go of me then, but we stayed almost touching, side by side again, our backs to the car.

"Okay, there's no sense in it," I said. "But we all do it, don't we? We all wonder about our model. After all, that's why we came out here today. We all do it."

"Kath, you know, don't you, I haven't told anyone. About that time in the boiler hut. Not Ruth, not anyone. But I just don't get it. I don't get what it's about."

"All right, Tommy. I'll tell you. It may not make any more sense after you've heard it, but you can hear it anyway. It's just that sometimes, every now and again, I get these really strong feelings when I want to have sex. Sometimes it just comes over me and for an hour or two it's scary. For all I know, I could end up doing it with old Keffers, it's that bad. That's why... that's the only reason I did it with Hughie. And with Oliver. It didn't mean anything deep down. I don't even like them much. I don't know what it is, and afterwards, when it's passed over, it's just scary. That's why I started thinking, well, it has to come from somewhere. It must be to do with the way I am." I stopped, but when Tommy didn't say anything, I went on: "So I thought if I find her picture, in one of those magazines, it'll at least explain it. I wouldn't want to go and find her or anything. It would just, you know, kind of explain why I am the way I am."

"I get it too sometimes," said Tommy. "When I really feel like doing it. I reckon everyone does, if they're honest. I don't think there's anything different about you, Kath. In fact, I get like that quite a lot..." He broke off and laughed, but I didn't laugh with him.

"What I'm talking about's different," I said. "I've watched other people. They get in the mood for it, but that doesn't make them do things. They never do things like I've done, going with people like that Hughie..."

I might have started crying again, because I felt Tommy's arm going back around my shoulders. Upset as I was, I remained conscious of where we were, and I made a kind of check in my mind that if Ruth and the others came up the street, even if they saw us at that moment, there'd be no room for misunderstanding. We were still side by side, leaning against the car, and they'd see I was upset about something and Tommy was just comforting me. Then I heard him say:

"I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing. Once you find someone, Kath, someone you really want to be with, then it could be really good. Remember

what the guardians used to tell us? If it's with the right person, it makes you feel really good."

I made a movement with my shoulder to get Tommy's arm off me, then took a deep breath. "Let's forget it. Anyway, I've got much better at controlling these moods when they come on. So let's just forget it."

"All the same, Kath, it's stupid looking through those magazines."

"It's stupid, okay. Tommy, let's leave it. I'm all right now."

I don't remember what else we talked about until the others showed up. We didn't discuss any more of those serious things, and if the others sensed something still in the air, they didn't remark on it. They were in good spirits, and Ruth in particular seemed determined to make up for the bad scene earlier on. She came up and touched my cheek, making some joke or other, and once we got in the car, she made sure the jovial mood kept going. She and Chrissie had found everything about Martin comical and were relishing the chance to laugh openly about him now they'd left his flat. Rodney looked disapproving, and I realised Ruth and Chrissie were making a song and dance of it mainly to tease him. It all seemed good-natured enough. But what I noticed was that whereas before Ruth would have taken the opportunity to keep me and Tommy in the dark about all the jokes and references, throughout the journey back, she kept turning to me and explaining carefully everything they were talking about. In fact it got a bit tiring after a while because it was like everything being said in the car was for our–or at least my–special benefit. But I was pleased Ruth was making such a fuss. I understood–as did Tommy–that she'd recognised she'd behaved badly before, and this was her way of admitting it. We were sitting with her in the middle, just as we'd done on the journey out, but now she spent all her time talking to me, turning occasionally to her other side to give Tommy a little squeeze or the odd kiss. It was a good atmosphere, and no one brought up Ruth's possible or anything like that. And I didn't mention the Judy Bridgewater tape Tommy had bought me. I knew Ruth would find out about it sooner or later, but I didn't want her to find out just yet. On that journey home, with the darkness setting in over those long empty roads, it felt like the three of us were close again and I didn't want anything to come along and break that mood.

Chapter Sixteen

The odd thing about our Norfolk trip was that once we got back, we hardly talked about it. So much so that for a while all kinds of rumours went around about what we'd been up to. Even then, we kept pretty quiet, until eventually people lost interest.

I'm still not sure why this happened. Perhaps we felt it was up to Ruth, that it was her call how much got told, and we were waiting to take our cue from her. And Ruth, for one reason or another–maybe she was embarrassed how things had turned out with her possible, maybe she was enjoying the mystery–had remained completely closed on the subject. Even among ourselves, we avoided talking about the trip.

This air of secrecy made it easier for me to keep from telling Ruth about Tommy buying me the Judy Bridgewater tape. I didn't go as far as actually hiding the thing. It was always there in my collection, in one of my little piles next to the skirting board. But I always made sure not to leave it out or on top of a pile. There were times when I wanted badly to tell her, when I wanted us to reminisce about Hailsham with the tape playing in the background. But the further away we got from the Norfolk trip, and I still hadn't told her, the more it came to feel like a guilty secret. Of course, she did spot the tape in the end, much later, and it was probably a much worse time for her to find it, but that's the way your luck sometimes goes.

As spring came on, there seemed to be more and more veterans leaving to start their training, and though they left without fuss in the usual way, the increased numbers made them impossible to ignore. I'm not sure what our feelings were, witnessing these departures. I suppose to some extent we envied the people leaving. It did feel like they were headed for a bigger, more exciting world. But of course, without a doubt, their going made us increasingly uneasy.

Then, I think it was around April, Alice F. became the first of our Hailsham bunch to leave, and not long after that Gordon C. did too. They'd both asked to start their training, and went off with cheerful smiles, but after that, for our lot anyway, the atmosphere at the Cottages changed forever.

Many veterans, too, seemed affected by the flurry of departures, and maybe as a direct result, there was a fresh spate of rumours of the sort Chrissie and Rodney had spoken about in Norfolk. Talk went around of students,

somewhere else in the country, getting deferrals because they'd shown they were in love–and now, just sometimes, the talk was of students with no connections to Hailsham. Here again, the five of us who'd been to Norfolk backed away from these topics: even Chrissie and Rodney, who'd once been at the centre of just this sort of talk, now looked awkwardly away when these rumours got going.

The "Norfolk effect" even got to me and Tommy. I'd been assuming, once we were back, we'd be taking little opportunities, whenever we were alone, to exchange more thoughts on his theory about the Gallery. But for some reason–and it wasn't any more him than me–this never really happened. The one exception, I suppose, was that time in the goosehouse, the morning when he showed me his imaginary animals.

The barn we called the Goosehouse was on the outer fringes of the Cottages, and because the roof leaked badly and the door was permanently off its hinges, it wasn't used for anything much other than as a place for couples to sneak off to in the warmer months. By then I'd taken to going for long solitary walks, and I think I was setting out on one of these, and had just gone past the goosehouse, when I heard Tommy calling me. I turned to see him in his bare feet, perched awkwardly on a bit of dry ground surrounded by huge puddles, one hand on the side of the barn to keep his balance.

"What happened to your Wellies, Tommy?" I asked. Aside from his bare feet, he was dressed in his usual thick jumper and jeans.

"I was, you know, drawing..." He laughed, and held up a little black notebook similar to the ones Keffers always went around with. It was by then over two months since the Norfolk trip, but I realised as soon as I saw the notebook what this was about. But I waited for him to say:

"If you like, Kath, I'll show you."

He led the way into the goosehouse, hopping over the jaggy ground. I'd expected it to be dark inside, but the sunlight was pouring through the skylights. Pushed against one wall were various bits of furniture heaved out over the past year or so–broken tables, old fridges, that kind of thing. Tommy appeared to have dragged into the middle of the floor a two-seater settee with stuffing poking out of its black plastic, and I guessed he'd been sitting in it doing his drawing when I'd gone past. Just nearby, his Wellingtons were lying fallen on their sides, his football socks peeking out of the tops.

Tommy jumped back onto the settee, nursing his big toe. “Sorry my feet poo a bit. I took everything off without realising. I think I've cut myself now. Kath, do you want to see these? Ruth looked at them last week, so I've been meaning to show you ever since. No one's seen them apart from Ruth. Have a look, Kath.”

That was when I first saw his animals. When he'd told me about them in Norfolk, I'd seen in my mind scaled-down versions of the sort of pictures we'd done when we were small. So I was taken aback at how densely detailed each one was. In fact, it took a moment to see they were animals at all. The first impression was like one you'd get if you took the back off a radio set: tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels were all drawn with obsessive precision, and only when you held the page away could you see it was some kind of armadillo, say, or a bird.

“It's my second book,” Tommy said. “There's no way anyone's seeing the first one! It took me a while to get going.”

He was lying back on the settee now, tugging a sock over his foot and trying to sound casual, but I knew he was anxious for my reaction. Even so, for some time, I didn't come up with wholehearted praise. Maybe it was partly my worry that any artwork was liable to get him into trouble all over again. But also, what I was looking at was so different from anything the guardians had taught us to do at Hailsham, I didn't know how to judge it. I did say something like:

“God, Tommy, these must take so much concentration. I'm surprised you can see well enough in here to do all this tiny stuff.” And then, as I flicked through the pages, perhaps because I was still struggling to find the right thing to say, I came out with: “I wonder what Madame would say if she saw these.”

I'd said it in a jokey tone, and Tommy responded with a little snigger, but then there was something hanging in the air that hadn't been there before. I went on turning the pages of the notebook–it was about a quarter full–not looking up at him, wishing I'd never brought up Madame. Finally I heard him say:

“I suppose I'll have to get a lot better before she gets to see any of it.”

I wasn't sure if this was a cue for me to say how good the drawings were, but by this time, I was becoming genuinely drawn to these fantastical creatures in front of me. For all their busy, metallic features, there was something sweet, even vulnerable about each of them. I remembered him telling me, in Norfolk,

that he worried, even as he created them, how they'd protect themselves or be able to reach and fetch things, and looking at them now, I could feel the same sort of concerns. Even so, for some reason I couldn't fathom, something continued to stop me coming out with praise. Then Tommy said:

"Anyway, it's not only because of all that I'm doing the animals. I just like doing them. I was wondering, Kath, if I should go on keeping it secret. I was thinking, maybe there's no harm in people knowing I do these. Hannah still does her watercolours, a lot of the veterans do stuff. I don't mean I'm going to go round showing everyone exactly. But I was thinking, well, there's no reason why I should keep it all secret any more."

At last I was able to look up at him and say with some conviction: "Tommy, there's no reason, no reason at all. These are good. Really, really good. In fact, if that's why you're hiding in here now, it's really daft."

He didn't say anything in response, but a kind of smirk appeared over his face, like he was enjoying a joke with himself, and I knew how happy I'd made him. I don't think we spoke much more to each other after that. I think before long he got his Wellingtons on, and we both left the goosehouse. As I say, that was about the only time Tommy and I touched directly on his theory that spring.

Then the summer came, and the one year point from when we'd first arrived. A batch of new students turned up in a minibus, much as we'd done, but none of them were from Hailsham. This was in some ways a relief: I think we'd all been getting anxious about how a fresh lot of Hailsham students might complicate things. But for me at least, this non-appearance of Hailsham students just added to a feeling that Hailsham was now far away in the past, and that the ties binding our old crowd were fraying. It wasn't just that people like Hannah were always talking about following Alice's example and starting their training; others, like Laura, had found boyfriends who weren't Hailsham and you could almost forget they'd ever had much to do with us.

And then there was the way Ruth kept pretending to forget things about Hailsham. Okay, these were mostly trivial things, but I got more and more irritated with her. There was the time, for instance, we were sitting around the kitchen table after a long breakfast, Ruth, me and a few veterans. One of the veterans had been talking about how eating cheese late at night always disturbed your sleep, and I'd turned to Ruth to say something like: "You remember how Miss Geraldine always used to tell us that?" It was just a

casual aside, and all it needed was for Ruth to smile or nod. But she made a point of staring back at me blankly, like she didn't have the faintest what I was talking about. Only when I said to the veterans, by way of explanation: "One of our guardians," did Ruth give a frowning nod, as though she'd just that moment remembered.

I let her get away with it that time. But there was another occasion when I didn't, that evening we were sitting out in the ruined bus shelter. I got angry then because it was one thing to play this game in front of veterans; quite another when it was just the two of us, in the middle of a serious talk. I'd referred, just in passing, to the fact that at Hailsham, the short-cut down to the pond through the rhubarb patch was out of bounds. When she put on her puzzled look, I abandoned whatever point I'd been trying to make and said: "Ruth, there's no way you've forgotten. So don't give me that."

Perhaps if I hadn't pulled her up so sharply–perhaps if I'd just made a joke of it and carried on–she'd have seen how absurd it was and laughed. But because I'd snapped at her, Ruth glared back and said:

"What does it matter anyway? What's the rhubarb patch got to do with any of this? Just get on with what you were saying."

It was getting late, the summer evening was fading, and the old bus shelter felt musty and damp after a recent thunderstorm. So I didn't have the head to go into why it mattered so much. And though I did just drop it and carry on with the discussion we'd been having, the atmosphere had gone chilly, and could hardly have helped us get through the difficult matter in hand.

But to explain what we were talking about that evening, I'll have to go back a little bit. In fact, I'll have to go back several weeks, to the earlier part of the summer. I'd been having a relationship with one of the veterans, a boy called Lenny, which, to be honest, had been mainly about the sex. But then he'd suddenly opted to start his training and left. This unsettled me a little, and Ruth had been great about it, watching over me without seeming to make a fuss, always ready to cheer me up if I seemed gloomy. She also kept doing little favours for me, like making me sandwiches, or taking on parts of my cleaning rota.

Then about a fortnight after Lenny had gone, the two of us were sitting in my attic room some time after midnight chatting over mugs of tea, and Ruth got me really laughing about Lenny. He hadn't been such a bad guy, but once I'd started telling Ruth some of the more intimate things about him, it did seem like everything to do with him was hilarious, and we just kept laughing and laughing. Then at one point Ruth was running a finger up and down the

cassettes stacked in little piles along my skirting board. She was doing this in an absent-minded sort of way while she kept laughing, but afterwards, I went through a spell of suspecting it hadn't been by chance at all; that she'd noticed it there maybe days before, perhaps even examined it to make sure, then had waited for the best time to "find" it. Years later, I gently hinted this to Ruth, and she didn't seem to know what I was talking about, so maybe I was wrong. Anyway, there we were, laughing and laughing each time I came out with another detail about poor Lenny, and then suddenly it was like a plug had been pulled out. There was Ruth, lying on her side across my rug, peering at the spines of the cassettes in the low light, and then the Judy Bridgewater tape was in her hands. After what seemed an eternity, she said:

"So how long have you had this again?"

I told her, as neutrally as I could, about how Tommy and I had come across it that day while she'd been gone with the others. She went on examining it, then said:

"So Tommy found it for you."

"No. I found it. I saw it first."

"Neither of you told me." She shrugged. "At least, if you did, I never heard."

"The Norfolk thing was true," I said. "You know, about it being the lost corner of England."

It did flash through my mind Ruth would pretend not to remember this reference, but she nodded thoughtfully.

"I should have remembered at the time," she said. "I might have found my red scarf then."

We both laughed and the uneasiness seemed to pass. But there was something about the way Ruth put the tape back without discussing it any further that made me think it wasn't finished with yet.

I don't know if the way the conversation went after that was something controlled by Ruth in the light of her discovery, or if we were headed that way anyway, and that it was only afterwards Ruth realised she could do with it what she did. We went back to discussing Lenny, in particular a lot of stuff about how he had sex, and we were laughing away again. At that point, I think I was just relieved she'd finally found the tape and not made a huge scene about it, and so maybe I wasn't being as careful as I might have been.

Because before long, we'd drifted from laughing about Lenny to laughing about Tommy. At first it had all felt good-natured enough, like we were just being affectionate towards him. But then we were laughing about his animals.

As I say, I've never been sure whether or not Ruth deliberately moved things round to this. To be fair, I can't even say for certain she was the one who first mentioned the animals. And once we started, I was laughing just as much as she was–about how one of them looked like it was wearing underpants, how another had to have been inspired by a squashed hedgehog. I suppose I should have said in there somewhere that the animals were good, that he'd done really well to have got where he had with them. But I didn't. That was partly because of the tape; and maybe, if I have to be honest, because I was pleased by the notion that Ruth wasn't taking the animals seriously, and everything that implied. I think when we eventually broke up for the night, we felt as close as we'd ever done. She touched my cheek on her way out, saying: "It's really good the way you always keep your spirits up, Kathy."

So I wasn't prepared at all for what happened at the churchyard several days later. Ruth had discovered that summer a lovely old church about half a mile from the Cottages, which had behind it rambling grounds with very old gravestones leaning in the grass. Everything was overgrown, but it was really peaceful and Ruth had taken to doing a lot of her reading there, near the back railings, on a bench under a big willow. I hadn't at first been too keen on this development, remembering how the previous summer we'd all sat around together in the grass right outside the Cottages. All the same, if I was headed that way on one of my walks, and I knew Ruth was likely to be there, I'd find myself going through the low wooden gate and along the overgrown path past the gravestones. On that afternoon, it was warm and still, and I'd come down the path in a dreamy mood, reading off names on the stones, when I saw not only Ruth, but Tommy, on the bench under the willow.

Ruth was actually sitting on the bench, while Tommy was standing with one foot up on its rusty armrest, doing a kind of stretching exercise as they talked. It didn't look like they were having any big conversation and I didn't hesitate to go up to them. Maybe I should have picked up something in the way they greeted me, but I'm sure there wasn't anything obvious. I had some gossip I was dying to tell them–something about one of the newcomers–and so for a while it was just me blabbing on while they nodded and asked the odd question. It was some time before it occurred to me something wasn't right, and even then, when I paused and asked: "Did I interrupt something here?" it was in a jokey sort of way.

But then Ruth said: "Tommy's been telling me about his big theory. He says

he's already told you. Ages ago. But now, very kindly, he's allowing me to share in it too."

Tommy gave a sigh and was about to say something, but Ruth said in a mock whisper: "Tommy's big Gallery theory!"

Then they were both looking at me, like I was now in charge of everything and it was up to me what happened next.

"It's not a bad theory," I said. "It might be right, I don't know. What do you think, Ruth?"

"I had to really dig it out of Sweet Boy here. Not very keen at all on letting me in on it, were you, sweety gums? It was only when I kept pressing him to tell me what was behind all this art."

"I'm not doing it just for that," Tommy said sulkily. His foot was still up on the armrest and he kept on with his stretching. "All I said was, if it was right, about the Gallery, then I could always try and put in the animals..."

"Tommy, sweety, don't make a fool of yourself in front of our friend. Do it to me, that's all right. But not in front of our dear Kathy."

"I don't see why it's such a joke," Tommy said. "It's as good a theory as anyone else's."

"It's not the theory people will find funny, sweety gums. They might well buy the theory, right enough. But the idea that you'll swing it by showing Madame your little animals..." Ruth smiled and shook her head.

Tommy said nothing and continued with his stretching. I wanted to come to his defence and was trying to think of just the right thing that would make him feel better without making Ruth even more angry. But that was when Ruth said what she did. It felt bad enough at the time, but I had no idea in the churchyard that day how far-reaching the repercussions would be. What she said was:

"It's not just me, sweety. Kathy here finds your animals a complete hoot."

My first instinct was to deny it, then just to laugh. But there was a real authority about the way Ruth had spoken, and the three of us knew each other well enough to know there had to be something behind her words. So in the end I stayed silent, while my mind searched back frantically, and with a cold horror, settled on that night up in my room with our mugs of tea. Then

Ruth said:

“As long as people think you're doing those little creatures as a kind of joke, fine. But don't give out you're serious about it. Please.”

Tommy had stopped his stretching and was looking questioningly at me. Suddenly he was really child-like again, with no front whatsoever, and I could see too something dark and troubling gathering behind his eyes.

“Look, Tommy, you've got to understand,” Ruth went on. “If Kathy and I have a good laugh about you, it doesn't really matter. Because that's just us. But please, let's not bring everyone else in on it.”

I've thought about those moments over and over. I should have found something to say. I could have just denied it, though Tommy probably wouldn't have believed me. And to try to explain the thing truthfully would have been too complicated. But I could have done something. I could have challenged Ruth, told her she was twisting things, that even if I might have laughed, it wasn't in the way she was implying. I could even have gone up to Tommy and hugged him, right there in front of Ruth. That's something that came to me years later, and probably wasn't a real option at the time, given the person I was, and the way the three of us were with each other. But that might have done it, where words would only have got us in deeper.

But I didn't say or do anything. It was partly, I suppose, that I was so floored by the fact that Ruth would come out with such a trick. I remember a huge tiredness coming over me, a kind of lethargy in the face of the tangled mess before me. It was like being given a maths problem when your brain's exhausted, and you know there's some far-off solution, but you can't work up the energy even to give it a go. Something in me just gave up. A voice went: “All right, let him think the absolute worst. Let him think it, let him think it.” And I suppose I looked at him with resignation, with a face that said: “Yes, it's true, what else did you expect?” And I can recall now, as fresh as anything, Tommy's own face, the anger receding for the moment, being replaced by an expression almost of wonder, like I was a rare butterfly he'd come across on a fence-post.

It wasn't that I thought I'd burst into tears or lose my temper or anything like that. But I decided just to turn and go. Even later that day, I realised this was a bad mistake. All I can say is that at the time what I feared more than anything was that one or the other of them would stalk off first, and I'd be left with the remaining one. I don't know why, but it didn't seem an option for more than one of us to storm off, and I wanted to make sure that one was me. So I turned and marched back the way I'd come, past the gravestones towards

the low wooden gate, and for several minutes, I felt as though I'd triumphed; that now they'd been left in each other's company, they were suffering a fate they thoroughly deserved.

Chapter Seventeen

As I've said, it wasn't until a long time afterwards–long after I'd left the Cottages–that I realised just how significant our little encounter in the churchyard had been. I was upset at the time, yes. But I didn't believe it to be anything so different from other tiffs we'd had. It never occurred to me that our lives, until then so closely interwoven, could unravel and separate over a thing like that.

But the fact was, I suppose, there were powerful tides tugging us apart by then, and it only needed something like that to finish the task. If we'd understood that back then–who knows?–maybe we'd have kept a tighter hold of one another.

For one thing, more and more students were going off to be carers, and among our old Hailsham crowd, there was a growing feeling this was the natural course to follow. We still had our essays to finish, but it was well known we didn't really have to finish them if we chose to start our training. In our early days at the Cottages, the idea of not finishing our essays would have been unthinkable. But the more distant Hailsham grew, the less important the essays seemed. I had this idea at the time–and I was probably right–that if our sense of the essays being important was allowed to seep away, then so too would whatever bound us together as Hailsham students. That's why I tried for a while to keep going our enthusiasm for all the reading and note-taking. But with no reason to suppose we'd ever see our guardians again, and with so many students moving on, it soon began to feel like a lost cause.

Anyway, in the days after that talk in the churchyard, I did what I could to put it behind us. I behaved towards both Tommy and Ruth as though nothing special had occurred, and they did much the same. But there was always something there now, and it wasn't just between me and them. Though they still made a show of being a couple–they still did the punching-on-the-arm thing when they parted–I knew them well enough to see they'd grown quite distant from each other.

Of course I felt bad about it all, especially about Tommy's animals. But it wasn't as simple any more as going to him and saying sorry and explaining how things really were. A few years earlier, even six months earlier, it might have worked out that way. Tommy and I would have talked it over and sorted it out. But somehow, by that second summer, things were different. Maybe it was because of this relationship with Lenny, I don't know. Anyway, talking to Tommy wasn't so easy any more. On the surface, at least, it was much like

before, but we never mentioned the animals or what had happened in the churchyard.

So that was what had been happening just before I had that conversation with Ruth in the old bus shelter, when I got so annoyed with her for pretending to forget about the rhubarb patch at Hailsham. Like I said, I'd probably not have got nearly so cross if it hadn't come up in the middle of such a serious conversation. Okay, we'd got through a lot of the meat of it by then, but even so, even if we were just easing off and chatting by that point, that was still all part of our trying to sort things with each other, and there was no room for any pretend stuff like that.

What had happened was this. Although something had come between me and Tommy, it hadn't quite got like that with Ruth–or at least that's what I'd thought–and I'd decided it was time I talked with her about what had happened in the churchyard. We'd just had one of those summer days of rain and thunderstorms, and we'd been cooped up indoors despite the humidity. So when it appeared to clear for the evening, with a nice pink sunset, I suggested to Ruth we get a bit of air. There was a steep footpath I'd discovered leading up along the edge of the valley and just where it came out onto the road was an old bus shelter. The buses had stopped coming ages ago, the bus stop sign had been taken away, and on the wall at the back of the shelter, there was left only the frame of what must have once been a glassed-in notice displaying all the bus times. But the shelter itself–which was like a lovingly constructed wooden hut with one side open to the fields going down the valleyside–was still standing, and even had its bench intact. So that's where Ruth and I were sitting to get our breath back, looking at the cobwebs up on the rafters and the summer evening outside. Then I said something like:

"You know, Ruth, we should try and sort it out, what happened the other day."

I'd made my voice conciliatory, and Ruth responded. She said immediately how daft it was, the three of us having rows over the most stupid things. She brought up other times we'd rowed and we laughed a bit about them. But I didn't really want Ruth just to bury the thing like that, so I said, still in the least challenging voice I could:

"Ruth, you know, I think sometimes, when you're in a couple, you don't see things as clearly as maybe someone can from the outside. Just sometimes."

She nodded. "That's probably right."

"I don't want to interfere. But sometimes, just lately, I think Tommy's been

quite upset. You know. About certain things you've said or done."

I was worried Ruth would get angry, but she nodded and sighed. "I think you're right," she said in the end. "I've been thinking about it a lot too."

"Then maybe I shouldn't have brought it up. I should have known you'd see what was happening. It's not my business really."

"But it is, Kathy. You're really one of us, and so it's always your business. You're right, it hasn't been good. I know what you mean. That stuff the other day, about his animals. That wasn't good. I told him I was sorry about that."

"I'm glad you talked it over. I didn't know if you had."

Ruth had been picking at some moulding flakes of wood on the bench beside her, and for a moment she seemed completely absorbed in this task. Then she said:

"Look, Kathy, it's good we're talking now about Tommy. I've been wanting to tell you something, but I've never quite known how to say it, or when, really. Kathy, promise you won't be too cross with me."

I looked at her and said: "As long as it's not about those T-shirts again."

"No, seriously. Promise you won't get too cross. Because I've got to tell you this. I wouldn't forgive myself if I kept quiet much longer."

"Okay, what is it?"

"Kathy, I've been thinking this for some time. You're no fool, and you can see that maybe me and Tommy, we might not be a couple forever. That's no tragedy. We were right for each other once. Whether we always will be, that's anyone's guess. And now there's all this talk, about couples getting deferrals if they can prove, you know, that they're really right. Okay, look, what I wanted to say, Kathy, is this. It'd be completely natural if you'd thought about, you know, what would happen if me and Tommy decided we shouldn't be together any more. We're not about to split, don't get me wrong. But I'd think it was completely normal if you at least wondered about it. Well, Kathy, what you have to realise is that Tommy doesn't see you like that. He really, really likes you, he thinks you're really great. But I know he doesn't see you like, you know, a proper girlfriend. Besides..." Ruth paused, then sighed. "Besides, you know how Tommy is. He can be fussy."

I stared at her. "What do you mean?"

“You must know what I mean. Tommy doesn't like girls who've been with... well, you know, with this person and that. It's just a thing he has. I'm sorry, Kathy, but it wouldn't be right not to have told you.”

I thought about it, then said: “It's always good to know these things.”

I felt Ruth touch my arm. “I knew you'd take it the right way. What you've got to understand, though, is that he thinks the world of you. He really does.”

I wanted to change the subject, but for the moment my mind was a blank. I suppose Ruth must have picked up on this, because she stretched out her arms and did a kind of yawn, saying:

“If I ever learn to drive a car, I'd take us all on a trip to some wild place. Dartmoor, say. The three of us, maybe Laura and Hannah too. I'd love to see all the bogs and stuff.”

We spent the next several minutes talking about what we'd do on a trip like that if we ever went on one. I asked where we'd stay, and Ruth said we could borrow a big tent. I pointed out the wind could get really fierce in places like that and our tent could easily blow away in the night. None of this was that serious. But it was around here I remembered the time back at Hailsham, when we'd still been Juniors and we were having a picnic by the pond with Miss Geraldine. James B. had been sent to the main house to fetch the cake we'd all baked earlier, but as he was carrying it back, a strong gust of wind had taken off the whole top layer of sponge, tossing it into the rhubarb leaves. Ruth said she could only vaguely remember the incident, and I'd said, trying to clinch it for her memory:

“The thing was, he got into trouble because that proved he'd been coming down through the rhubarb patch.”

And that was when Ruth looked at me and said: “Why? What was wrong with that?”

It was just the way she said it, suddenly so false even an onlooker, if there'd been one, would have seen through it. I sighed with irritation and said:

“Ruth, don't give me that. There's no way you've forgotten. You know that route was out of bounds.”

Maybe it was a bit sharp, the way I said it. Anyway, Ruth didn't back down. She continued pretending to remember nothing, and I got all the more

irritated. And that was when she said:

“What does it matter anyway? What's the rhubarb patch got to do with anything? Just get on with what you were saying.”

After that I think we went back to talking in a more or less friendly way, and then before long we were making our way down the footpath in the half-light back to the Cottages. But the atmosphere never quite righted itself, and when we said our goodnights in front of the Black Barn, we parted without our usual little touches on the arms and shoulders.

It wasn't long after that I made my decision, and once I'd made it, I never wavered. I just got up one morning and told Keffers I wanted to start my training to become a carer. It was surprisingly easy. He was walking across the yard, his Wellingtons covered in mud, grumbling to himself and holding a piece of piping. I went up and told him, and he just looked at me like I'd bothered him about more firewood. Then he mumbled something about coming to see him later that afternoon to go through the forms. It was that easy.

It took a little while after that, of course, but the whole thing had been set in motion, and I was suddenly looking at everything–the Cottages, everybody there–in a different light. I was now one of the ones leaving, and soon enough, everyone knew it. Maybe Ruth thought we'd be spending hours talking about my future; maybe she thought she'd have a big influence on whether or not I changed my mind. But I kept a certain distance from her, just as I did from Tommy. We didn't really talk properly again at the Cottages, and before I knew it, I was saying my goodbyes.

Part Three

Chapter Eighteen

For the most part being a carer's suited me fine. You could even say it's brought the best out of me. But some people just aren't cut out for it, and for them the whole thing becomes a real struggle. They might start off positively enough, but then comes all that time spent so close to the pain and the worry. And sooner or later a donor doesn't make it, even though, say, it's only the second donation and no one anticipated complications. When a donor completes like that, out of the blue, it doesn't make much difference what the nurses say to you afterwards, and neither does that letter saying how they're sure you did all you could and to keep up the good work. For a while at least, you're demoralised. Some of us learn pretty quick how to deal with it. But others–like Laura, say–they never do.

Then there's the solitude. You grow up surrounded by crowds of people, that's all you've ever known, and suddenly you're a carer. You spend hour after hour, on your own, driving across the country, centre to centre, hospital to hospital, sleeping in overnights, no one to talk to about your worries, no one to have a laugh with. Just now and again you run into a student you know–a carer or donor you recognise from the old days–but there's never much time. You're always in a rush, or else you're too exhausted to have a proper conversation. Soon enough, the long hours, the travelling, the broken sleep have all crept into your being and become part of you, so everyone can see it, in your posture, your gaze, the way you move and talk.

I don't claim I've been immune to all of this, but I've learnt to live with it. Some carers, though, their whole attitude lets them down. A lot of them, you can tell, are just going through the motions, waiting for the day they're told they can stop and become donors. It really gets me, too, the way so many of them "shrink" the moment they step inside a hospital. They don't know what to say to the whitecoats, they can't make themselves speak up on behalf of their donor. No wonder they end up feeling frustrated and blaming themselves when things go wrong. I try not to make a nuisance of myself, but I've figured out how to get my voice heard when I have to. And when things go badly, of course I'm upset, but at least I can feel I've done all I could and keep things in perspective.

Even the solitude, I've actually grown to quite like. That's not to say I'm not looking forward to a bit more companionship come the end of the year when I'm finished with all of this. But I do like the feeling of getting into my little car, knowing for the next couple of hours I'll have only the roads, the big grey sky and my daydreams for company. And if I'm in a town somewhere with several minutes to kill, I'll enjoy myself wandering about looking in the shop windows. Here in my bedsit, I've got these four desk-lamps, each a different colour, but all the same design–they have these ribbed necks you can bend whichever way you want. So I might go looking for a shop with another lamp like that in its window–not to buy, but just to compare with my ones at home.

Sometimes I get so immersed in my own company, if I unexpectedly run into someone I know, it's a bit of a shock and takes me a while to adjust. That's the way it was the morning I was walking across the windswept car park of the service station and spotted Laura, sitting behind the wheel of one of the parked cars, looking vacantly towards the motorway. I was still some way away, and just for a second, even though we hadn't met since the Cottages seven years before, I was tempted to ignore her and keep walking. An odd reaction, I know, considering she'd been one of my closest friends. As I say, it may have been partly because I didn't like being bumped out of my daydreams. But also, I suppose, when I saw Laura slumped in her car like that, I saw immediately she'd become one of these carers I've just been describing, and a part of me just didn't want to find out much more about it.

But of course I did go to her. There was a chilly wind blowing against me as I walked over to her hatchback, parked away from the other vehicles. Laura was wearing a shapeless blue anorak, and her hair–a lot shorter than before–was sticking to her forehead. When I tapped on her window, she didn't start, or even look surprised to see me after all that time. It was almost like she'd been sitting there waiting, if not for me precisely, then for someone more or less like me from the old days. And now I'd shown up, her first thought seemed to be: “At last!” Because I could see her shoulders move in a kind of sigh, then without further ado, she reached over to open the door for me.

We talked for about twenty minutes: I didn't leave until the last possible moment. A lot of it was about her, how exhausted she'd been, how difficult one of her donors was, how much she loathed this nurse or that doctor. I waited to see a flash of the old Laura, with the mischievous grin and inevitable wisecrack, but none of that came. She talked faster than she used to, and although she seemed pleased to see me, I sometimes got the impression it wouldn't have mattered much if it wasn't me, but someone else, so long as she got to talk.

Maybe we both felt there was something dangerous about bringing up the old days, because for ages we avoided any mention of them. In the end, though, we found ourselves talking about Ruth, who Laura had run into at a clinic a few years earlier, when Ruth was still a carer. I began quizzing her about how Ruth had been, but she was so unforthcoming, in the end I said to her:

"Look, you must have talked about something."

Laura let out a long sigh. "You know how it gets," she said. "We were both in a hurry." Then she added: "Anyway, we hadn't parted the best of friends, back at the Cottages. So maybe we weren't so delighted to see one another."

"I didn't realise you'd fallen out with her too," I said.

She shrugged. "It wasn't any big deal. You remember the way she was back then. If anything, after you left, she got worse. You know, always telling everyone what to do. So I was keeping out of her way, that was all. We never had a big fight or anything. So you haven't seen her since then?"

"No. Funny, but I've never even glimpsed her."

"Yeah, it's funny. You'd think we'd all run into each other much more. I've seen Hannah a few times. And Michael H. too." Then she said: "I heard this rumour, that Ruth had a really bad first donation. Just a rumour, but I heard it more than once."

"I heard that too," I said.

"Poor Ruth."

We were quiet for a moment. Then Laura asked: "Is it right, Kathy? That they let you choose your donors now?"

She'd not asked in the accusing way people do sometimes, so I nodded and said: "Not every time. But I did well with a few donors, so yeah, I get to have a say every now and then."

"If you can choose," Laura said, "why don't you become Ruth's carer?"

I shrugged. "I've thought about it. But I'm not sure it's such a great idea."

Laura looked puzzled. "But you and Ruth, you were so close."

"Yeah, I suppose so. But like with you, Laura. She and I weren't such great

friends by the end."

"Oh, but that was back then. She's had a bad time. And I've heard she's had trouble with her carers too. They've had to change them around a lot for her."

"Not surprising really," I said. "Can you imagine? Being Ruth's carer?"

Laura laughed, and for a second a look came into her eyes that made me think she was finally going to come out with a crack. But then the light died, and she just went on sitting there looking tired.

We talked a little more about Laura's problems–in particular about a certain nursing sister who seemed to have it in for her. Then it was time for me to go, and I reached for the door and was telling her we'd have to talk more the next time we met. But we were both of us by then acutely aware of something we'd not yet mentioned, and I think we both sensed there'd be something wrong about us parting like that. In fact, I'm pretty sure now, at that moment, our minds were running along exactly the same lines. Then she said:

"It's weird. Thinking it's all gone now."

I turned in my seat to face her again. "Yeah, it's really strange," I said. "I can't really believe it's not there any more."

"It's so weird," Laura said. "I suppose it shouldn't make any difference to me now. But somehow it does."

"I know what you mean."

It was that exchange, when we finally mentioned the closing of Hailsham, that suddenly brought us close again, and we hugged, quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories. Then I had to hurry off to my own car.

I'd first started hearing rumours about Hailsham closing a year or so before that meeting with Laura in the car park. I'd be talking to a donor or a carer and they'd bring it up in passing, like they expected me to know all about it. "You were at Hailsham, weren't you? So is it really true?" That sort of thing. Then one day I was coming out of a clinic in Suffolk and ran into Roger C., who'd been in the year below, and he told me with complete certainty it was about to happen. Hailsham was going to close any day and there were plans to sell the house and grounds to a hotel chain. I remember my first response when he told me this. I said: "But what'll happen to all the students?" Roger

obviously thought I'd meant the ones still there, the little ones dependent on their guardians, and he put on a troubled face and began speculating how they'd have to be transferred to other houses around the country, even though some of these would be a far cry from Hailsham. But of course, that wasn't what I'd meant. I'd meant us, all the students who'd grown up with me and were now spread across the country, carers and donors, all separated now but still somehow linked by the place we'd come from.

That same night, trying to get to sleep in an overnight, I kept thinking about something that had happened to me a few days earlier. I'd been in a seaside town in North Wales. It had been raining hard all morning, but after lunch, it had stopped and the sun had come out a bit. I was walking back to where I'd left my car, along one of those long straight seafront roads. There was hardly anyone else about, so I could see an unbroken line of wet paving stones stretching on in front of me. Then after a while a van pulled up, maybe thirty yards ahead of me, and a man got out dressed as a clown. He opened the back of the van and took out a bunch of helium balloons, about a dozen of them, and for a moment, he was holding the balloons in one hand, while he bent down and rummaged about in his vehicle with the other. As I came closer, I could see the balloons had faces and shaped ears, and they looked like a little tribe, bobbing in the air above their owner, waiting for him.

Then the clown straightened, closed up his van and started walking, in the same direction I was walking, several paces ahead of me, a small suitcase in one hand, the balloons in the other. The seafront continued long and straight, and I was walking behind him for what seemed like ages. Sometimes I felt awkward about it, and I even thought the clown might turn and say something. But since that was the way I had to go, there wasn't much else I could do. So we just kept walking, the clown and me, on and on along the deserted pavement still wet from the morning, and all the time the balloons were bumping and grinning down at me. Every so often, I could see the man's fist, where all the balloon strings converged, and I could see he had them securely twisted together and in a tight grip. Even so, I kept worrying that one of the strings would come unravelled and a single balloon would sail off up into that cloudy sky.

Lying awake that night after what Roger had told me, I kept seeing those balloons again. I thought about Hailsham closing, and how it was like someone coming along with a pair of shears and snipping the balloon strings just where they entwined above the man's fist. Once that happened, there'd be no real sense in which those balloons belonged with each other any more. When he was telling me the news about Hailsham, Roger had made a remark, saying he supposed it wouldn't make so much difference to the likes of us any more. And in certain ways, he might have been right. But it was

unnerving, to think things weren't still going on back there, just as always; that people like Miss Geraldine, say, weren't leading groups of Juniors around the North Playing Field.

In the months after that talk with Roger, I kept thinking about it a lot, about Hailsham closing and all the implications. And it started to dawn on me, I suppose, that a lot of things I'd always assumed I'd plenty of time to get round to doing, I might now have to act on pretty soon or else let them go forever. It's not that I started to panic, exactly. But it definitely felt like Hailsham's going away had shifted everything around us. That's why what Laura said to me that day, about my becoming Ruth's carer, had such an impact on me, even though I'd stone-walled her at the time. It was almost like a part of me had already made that decision, and Laura's words had simply pulled away a veil that had been covering it over.

I first turned up at Ruth's recovery centre in Dover–the modern one with the white tiled walls–just a few weeks after that talk with Laura. It had been around two months since Ruth's first donation–which, as Laura had said, hadn't gone at all well. When I came into her room, she was sitting on the edge of her bed in her night-dress and gave me a big smile. She got up to give me a hug, but almost immediately sat down again. She told me I was looking better than ever, and that my hair suited me really well. I said nice things about her too, and for the next half hour or so, I think we were genuinely delighted to be with each other. We talked about all kinds of things–Hailsham, the Cottages, what we'd been doing since then–and it felt like we could talk and talk forever. In other words, it was a really encouraging start–better than I'd dared expect.

Even so, that first time, we didn't say anything about the way we'd parted. Maybe if we'd tackled it at the start, things would have played out differently, who knows? As it was, we just skipped over it, and once we'd been talking for a while, it was as if we'd agreed to pretend none of that had ever happened.

That may have been fine as far as that first meeting was concerned. But once I officially became her carer, and I began to see her regularly, the sense of something not being right grew stronger and stronger. I developed a routine of coming in three or four times a week in the late afternoon, with mineral water and a packet of her favourite biscuits, and it should have been wonderful, but at the beginning it was anything but that. We'd start talking about something, something completely innocent, and for no obvious reason

we'd come to a halt. Or if we did manage to keep up a conversation, the longer we went on, the more stilted and guarded it became.

Then one afternoon, I was coming down her corridor to see her and heard someone in the shower room opposite her door. I guessed it was Ruth in there, so I let myself into her room, and was standing waiting for her, looking at the view from her window over all the rooftops. About five minutes passed, then she came in wrapped in a towel. Now to be fair, she wasn't expecting me for another hour, and I suppose we all feel a bit vulnerable after a shower with just a towel on. Even so, the look of alarm that went across her face took me aback. I have to explain this a bit. Of course, I was expecting her to be a little surprised. But the thing was, after she'd taken it in and seen it was me, there was a clear second, maybe more, when she went on looking at me if not with fear, then with a real wariness. It was like she'd been waiting and waiting for me to do something to her, and she thought the time had now come.

The look was gone the next instant and we just carried on as usual, but that incident gave us both a jolt. It made me realise Ruth didn't trust me, and for all I know, maybe she herself hadn't fully realised it until that moment. In any case, after that day, the atmosphere got even worse. It was like we'd let something out into the open, and far from clearing the air, it had made us more aware than ever of everything that had come between us. It got to the stage where before I went in to see her, I'd sit in my car for several minutes working myself up for the ordeal. After one particular session, when we did all the checks on her in stony silence, then afterwards just sat there in more silence, I was about ready to report to them that it hadn't worked out, that I should stop being Ruth's carer. But then everything changed again, and that was because of the boat.

God knows how these things work. Sometimes it's a particular joke, sometimes a rumour. It travels from centre to centre, right the way across the country in a matter of days, and suddenly every donor's talking about it. Well, this time it was to do with this boat. I'd first heard about it from a couple of my donors up in North Wales. Then a few days later, Ruth too started telling me about it. I was just relieved we'd found something to talk about, and encouraged her to go on.

"This boy on the next floor," she said. "His carer's actually been to see it. He says it's not far from the road, so anyone can get to it without much bother. This boat, it's just sitting there, stranded in the marshes."

“How did it get there?” I asked.

“How do I know? Maybe they wanted to dump it, whoever owned it. Or maybe sometime, when everything was flooded, it just drifted in and got itself beached. Who knows? It's supposed to be this old fishing boat. With a little cabin for a couple of fishermen to squeeze into when it's stormy.”

The next few times I came to see her, she always managed to bring up the boat again. Then one afternoon, when she began telling me how one of the other donors at the centre had been taken by her carer to see it, I said to her:

“Look, it's not particularly near, you know. It would take an hour, maybe an hour and a half to drive.”

“I wasn't suggesting anything. I know you've got other donors to worry about.”

“But you'd like to see it. You'd like to see this boat, wouldn't you, Ruth?”

“I suppose so. I suppose I would. You spend day after day in this place. Yeah, it'd be good to see something like that.”

“And do you suppose”–I said this gently, without a hint of sarcasm–“if we're driving all that way, we should think about calling in on Tommy? Seeing his centre's just down the road from where this boat's meant to be?”

Ruth's face didn't show anything at first. “I suppose we could think about it,” she said. Then she laughed and added: “Honest, Kathy, that wasn't the only reason I've been going on about the boat. I do want to see it, for its own sake. All this time in and out of hospital. Then cooped up here. Things like that matter more than they once did. But all right, I did know. I knew Tommy was at the Kingsfield centre.”

“Are you sure you want to see him?”

“Yes,” she said, no hesitation, looking straight at me. “Yes, I do.” Then she said quietly: “I haven't seen that boy for a long time. Not since the Cottages.”

Then, at last, we talked about Tommy. We didn't go into things in a big way and I didn't learn much I didn't know already. But I think we both felt better we'd finally brought him up. Ruth told me how, by the time she left the Cottages the autumn after me, she and Tommy had more or less drifted apart.

“Since we were going different places to do our training anyway,” she said, “it

didn't seem worth it, to split up properly. So we just stayed together until I left."

And at that stage, we didn't say much more about it than that.

As for the trip out to see the boat, I neither agreed nor disagreed to it, that first time we discussed it. But over the next couple of weeks, Ruth kept bringing it up, and our plans somehow grew firmer, until in the end, I sent a message to Tommy's carer through a contact, saying that unless we heard from Tommy telling us not to, we'd show up at the Kingsfield on a particular afternoon the following week.

Chapter Nineteen

I'd hardly ever been to the Kingsfield in those days, so Ruth and I had to consult the map a number of times on the way and we still arrived several minutes late. It's not very well-appointed as recovery centres go, and if it wasn't for the associations it now has for me, it's not somewhere I'd look forward to visiting. It's out of the way and awkward to get to, and yet when you're there, there's no real sense of peace and quiet. You can always hear traffic on the big roads beyond the fencing, and there's a general feeling they never properly finished converting the place. A lot of the donors' rooms you can't get to with a wheelchair, or else they're too stuffy or too draughty. There aren't nearly enough bathrooms and the ones there are are hard to keep clean, get freezing in winter and are generally too far from the donors' rooms. The Kingsfield, in other words, falls way short of a place like Ruth's centre in Dover, with its gleaming tiles and double-glazed windows that seal at the twist of a handle.

Later on, after the Kingsfield became the familiar and precious place it did, I was in one of the admin buildings and came across a framed black-and-white photo of the place the way it was before it was converted, when it was still a holiday camp for ordinary families. The picture was probably taken in the late fifties or early sixties, and shows a big rectangular swimming pool with all these happy people–children, parents–splashing about having a great time. It's concrete all around the pool, but people have set up deck chairs and sun loungers, and they've got large parasols to keep them in the shade. When I first saw this, it took me a while to realise I was looking at what the donors now call "the Square"–the place where you drive in when you first arrive at the centre. Of course, the pool's filled in now, but the outline's still there, and they've left standing at one end–an example of this unfinished atmosphere–the metal frame for the high diving board. It was only when I saw the photo it occurred to me what the frame was and why it was there, and today, each time I see it, I can't help picturing a swimmer taking a dive off the top only to crash into the cement.

I might not have easily recognised the Square in the photo, except for the white bunker-like two-storey buildings in the background, on all three visible sides of the pool area. That must have been where the families had their holiday apartments, and though I'd guess the interiors have changed a lot, the outsides look much the same. In some ways, I suppose, the Square today isn't so different to what the pool was back then. It's the social hub of the place, where donors come out of their rooms for a bit of air and a chat. There are a few wooden picnic benches around the Square, but–especially when the sun's too hot, or it's raining–the donors prefer to gather under the

overhanging flat roof of the recreation hall at the far end behind the old diving board frame.

That afternoon Ruth and I went to the Kingsfield, it was overcast and a bit chilly, and as we drove into the Square it was deserted except for a group of six or seven shadowy figures underneath that roof. As I brought the car to a stop somewhere over the old pool–which of course I didn't know about then–one figure detached itself from the group and came towards us, and I saw it was Tommy. He had on a faded green track suit top and looked about a stone heavier than when I'd last seen him.

Beside me Ruth, for a second, seemed to panic. “What do we do?” she went. “Do we get out? No, no, let's not get out. Don't move, don't move.”

I don't know what I'd been intending to do, but when Ruth said this, for some reason, without really thinking about it, I just stepped out of the car. Ruth stayed where she was, and that was why, when Tommy came up to us, his gaze fell on me and why it was me he hugged first. I could smell a faint odour of something medical on him which I couldn't identify. Then, though we hadn't yet said anything to each other, we both sensed Ruth watching us from the car and pulled away.

There was a lot of sky reflected in the windscreen, so I couldn't make her out very well. But I got the impression Ruth had on a serious, almost frozen look, like Tommy and I were people in a play she was watching. There was something odd about the look and it made me uneasy. Then Tommy was walking past me to the car. He opened a rear door, got into the back seat, and then it was my turn to watch them, inside the car, exchanging words, then polite little kisses on the cheeks.

Across the Square, the donors under the roof were also watching, and though I felt nothing hostile about them, I suddenly wanted to get out of there quickly. But I made myself take my time getting back into the car, so that Tommy and Ruth could have a little longer to themselves.

We began by driving through narrow, twisting lanes. Then we came out into open, featureless countryside and travelled on along a near-empty road. What I remember about that part of our trip to the boat was that for the first time in ages the sun started to shine weakly through the greyness; and whenever I glanced at Ruth beside me, she had on a quiet little smile. As for what we talked about, well, my memory is that we behaved much as if we'd been seeing each other regularly, and there was no need to talk about anything

other than what we had immediately in front of us. I asked Tommy if he'd been to see the boat already, and he said no, he hadn't, but a lot of the other donors at the centre had. He'd had a few opportunities, but hadn't taken them.

"I wasn't not wanting to go," he said, leaning forward from the back. "I couldn't be bothered really. I was going to go once, with a couple of others and their carers, but then I got a bit of bleeding and couldn't go any more. That was ages ago now. I don't get any trouble like that any more."

Then a little further on, as we continued across the empty countryside, Ruth turned right round in her seat until she was facing Tommy, and just kept looking at him. She still had on her little smile, but said nothing, and I could see in my mirror Tommy looking distinctly uncomfortable. He kept looking out of the window beside him, then back at her, then back out of the window again. After a while, without taking her gaze off him, Ruth started on a rambling anecdote about someone or other, a donor at her centre, someone we'd never heard of, and all the time she kept looking at Tommy, the gentle smile never leaving her face. Perhaps because I was getting bored by her anecdote, perhaps because I wanted to help Tommy out, I interrupted after a minute or so, saying:

"Yeah, okay, we don't need to hear every last thing about her."

I said this without any malice, and really hadn't intended anything by it. But even before Ruth paused, almost as I was still speaking, Tommy made a sudden laughing noise, a kind of explosion, a noise I'd never heard him make before. And he said:

"That's exactly what I was about to say. I lost track of it a while ago."

My eyes were on the road, so I wasn't sure if he'd addressed me or Ruth. In any case, Ruth stopped talking and slowly turned back in her seat until she was facing the front again. She didn't seem particularly upset, but the smile had gone, and her eyes looked far away, fixed somewhere on the sky ahead of us. But I have to be honest: at that instant I wasn't really thinking about Ruth. My heart had done a little leap, because in a single stroke, with that little laugh of agreement, it felt as though Tommy and I had come close together again after all the years.

I found the turning we needed around twenty minutes after we'd set off from the Kingsfield. We went down a narrow curving road shrouded by hedges, and parked beside a clump of sycamores. I led the way to where the woods began, but then, faced with three distinct paths through the trees, had to

stop to consult the sheet of directions I'd brought with me. While I stood there trying to decipher the person's handwriting, I was suddenly conscious of Ruth and Tommy standing behind me, not talking, waiting almost like children to be told which way to go.

We entered the woods, and though it was pretty easy walking, I noticed Ruth's breath coming less and less easily. Tommy, by contrast, didn't seem to be experiencing any difficulty, though there was a hint of a limp in his gait. Then we came to a barbed wire fence, which was tilted and rusted, the wire itself yanked all over the place. When Ruth saw it, she came to an abrupt halt.

"Oh no," she said, anxiously. Then she turned to me: "You didn't say anything about this. You didn't say we had to get past barbed wire!"

"It's not going to be difficult," I said. "We can go under it. We just have to hold it for each other."

But Ruth looked really upset and didn't move. And it was then, as she stood there, her shoulders rising and falling with her breathing, that Tommy seemed to become aware for the first time just how frail she was. Maybe he'd noticed before, and hadn't wanted to take it in. But now he stared at her for a good few seconds. Then I think what happened next–though of course I can't know for certain–was that the both of us, Tommy and I, we remembered what had happened in the car, when we'd more or less ganged up on her. And almost as an instinct, we both went to her. I took an arm, Tommy supported her elbow on the other side, and we began gently guiding her towards the fence.

I let go of Ruth only to pass through the fence myself. Then I held up the wire as high as I could, and Tommy and I both helped her through. It wasn't so difficult for her in the end: it was more a confidence thing, and with us there for support, she seemed to lose her fear of the fence. On the other side, she actually made a go of helping me hold up the wire for Tommy. He came through without any bother, and Ruth said to him:

"It's only bending down like that. I'm sometimes not so clever at it."

Tommy was looking sheepish, and I wondered if he was embarrassed by what had just happened, or if he was remembering again our ganging up on Ruth in the car. He nodded towards the trees in front of us and said:

"I suppose it's through that way. Is that right, Kath?"

I glanced at my sheet and began to lead the way again. Further into the trees, it grew quite dark and the ground became more and more marshy.

“Hope we don't get lost,” I heard Ruth say to Tommy with a laugh, but I could see a clearing not far away. And now with time to reflect, I realised why I was so bothered by what had happened in the car. It wasn't simply that we'd ganged up on Ruth: it was the way she'd just taken it. In the old days, it was inconceivable she'd have let something like that happen without striking back. As this point sunk in, I paused on the path, waited for Ruth and Tommy to catch up, and put my arm around Ruth's shoulders.

This didn't seem so soppy; it just looked like carer stuff, because by now there was something uncertain about her walk, and I wondered if I'd badly underestimated how weak she still was. Her breathing was getting quite laboured, and as we walked together, she'd now and then lurch into me. But then we were through the trees and into the clearing, and we could see the boat.

Actually, we hadn't really stepped into a clearing: it was more that the thin woods we'd come through had ended, and now in front of us there was open marshland as far as we could see. The pale sky looked vast and you could see it reflected every so often in the patches of water breaking up the land. Not so long ago, the woods must have extended further, because you could see here and there ghostly dead trunks poking out of the soil, most of them broken off only a few feet up. And beyond the dead trunks, maybe sixty yards away, was the boat, sitting beached in the marshes under the weak sun.

“Oh, it's just like my friend said it was,” Ruth said. “It's really beautiful.”

We were surrounded by silence and when we started to move towards the boat, you could hear the squelch under our shoes. Before long I noticed my feet sinking beneath the tufts of grass, and called out: “Okay, this is as far as we can go.”

The other two, who were behind me, raised no objection, and when I glanced over my shoulder, I saw Tommy was again holding Ruth by the arm. It was clear, though, this was just to steady her. I took long strides to the nearest dead tree trunk, where the soil was firmer, and held onto it for balance. Following my example, Tommy and Ruth made their way to another tree trunk, hollow and more emaciated than mine, a short way behind to my left. They perched on either side of it and seemed to settle. Then we gazed at the beached boat. I could now see how its paint was cracking, and how the timber frames of the little cabin were crumbling away. It had once been painted a sky blue, but now looked almost white under the sky.

“I wonder how it got here,” I said. I'd raised my voice to let it get to the others and had expected an echo. But the sound was surprisingly close, like I was in a carpeted room.

Then I heard Tommy say behind me: “Maybe this is what Hailsham looks like now. Do you think?”

“Why would it look like this?” Ruth sounded genuinely puzzled. “It wouldn't turn into marshland just because it's closed.”

“I suppose not. Wasn't thinking. But I always see Hailsham being like this now. No logic to it. In fact, this is pretty close to the picture in my head. Except there's no boat, of course. It wouldn't be so bad, if it's like this now.”

“That's funny,” Ruth said, “because I was having this dream the other morning. I was dreaming I was up in Room 14. I knew the whole place had been shut down, but there I was, in Room 14, and I was looking out of the window and everything outside was flooded. Just like a giant lake. And I could see rubbish floating by under my window, empty drinks cartons, everything. But there wasn't any sense of panic or anything like that. It was nice and tranquil, just like it is here. I knew I wasn't in any danger, that it was only like that because it had closed down.”

“You know,” Tommy said, “Meg B. was at our centre for a while. She's left now, gone up north somewhere for her third donation. I never heard how she got on. Have either of you heard?”

I shook my head, and when I didn't hear Ruth say anything, turned to look at her. At first I thought she was still staring at the boat, but then I saw her gaze was on the vapour trail of a plane in the far distance, climbing slowly into the sky. Then she said:

“I'll tell you something I heard. I heard about Chrissie. I heard she completed during her second donation.”

“I heard that as well,” said Tommy. “It must be right. I heard exactly the same. A shame. Only her second as well. Glad that didn't happen to me.”

“I think it happens much more than they ever tell us,” Ruth said. “My carer over there. She probably knows that's right. But she won't say.”

“There's no big conspiracy about it,” I said, turning back to the boat. “Sometimes it happens. It was really sad about Chrissie. But that's not

common. They're really careful these days."

"I bet it happens much more than they tell us," Ruth said again. "That's one reason why they keep moving us around between donations."

"I ran into Rodney once," I said. "It wasn't so long after Chrissie completed. I saw him in this clinic, up in North Wales. He was doing okay."

"I bet he was cut up about Chrissie though," said Ruth. Then to Tommy: "They don't tell you the half of it, you see?"

"Actually," I said, "he wasn't too bad about it. He was sad, obviously. But he was okay. They hadn't seen each other for a couple of years anyway. He said he thought Chrissie wouldn't have minded too much. And I suppose he should know."

"Why would he know?" Ruth said. "How could he possibly know what Chrissie would have felt? What she would have wanted? It wasn't him on that table, trying to cling onto life. How would he know?"

This flash of anger was more like the old Ruth, and made me turn to her again. Maybe it was just the glare in her eyes, but she seemed to be looking back at me with a hard, stern expression.

"It can't be good," Tommy said. "Completing at the second donation. Can't be good."

"I can't believe Rodney was okay about it," Ruth said. "You only spoke to him for a few minutes. How can you tell anything from that?"

"Yeah," said Tommy, "but if like Kath says, they'd already split up..."

"That wouldn't make any difference," Ruth cut in. "In some ways that might have made it worse."

"I've seen a lot of people in Rodney's position," I said. "They do come to terms with it."

"How would you know?" said Ruth. "How could you possibly know? You're still a carer."

"I get to see a lot as a carer. An awful lot."

"She wouldn't know, would she, Tommy? Not what it's really like."

For a moment we were both looking at Tommy, but he just went on gazing at the boat. Then he said:

“There was this guy, at my centre. Always worried he wouldn't make it past his second. Used to say he could feel it in his bones. But it all turned out fine. He's just come through his third now, and he's completely all right.” He put up a hand to shield his eyes. “I wasn't much good as a carer. Never learnt to drive even. I think that's why the notice for my first came so early. I know it's not supposed to work that way, but I reckon that's what it was. Didn't mind really. I'm a pretty good donor, but I was a lousy carer.”

No one spoke for a while. Then Ruth said, her voice quieter now:

“I think I was a pretty decent carer. But five years felt about enough for me. I was like you, Tommy. I was pretty much ready when I became a donor. It felt right. After all, it's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?”

I wasn't sure if she expected me to respond to this. She hadn't said it in any obviously leading way, and it's perfectly possible this was a statement she'd come out with just out of habit–it was the sort of thing you hear donors say to each other all the time. When I turned to them again, Tommy still had his hand up to shade his eyes.

“Pity we can't go closer to the boat,” he said. “One day when it's drier, maybe we could come back.”

“I'm glad to have seen it,” Ruth said, softly. “It's really nice. But I think I want to go back now. This wind's quite chilly.”

“At least we've seen it now,” Tommy said.

We chatted much more freely on our walk back to the car than on the way out. Ruth and Tommy were comparing notes on their centres–the food, the towels, that kind of thing–and I was always part of the conversation because they kept asking me about other centres, if this or that was normal. Ruth's walk was much steadier now and when we came to the fence, and I held up the wire, she hardly hesitated.

We got in the car, again with Tommy in the back, and for a while there was a perfectly okay feeling between us. Maybe, looking back, there was an atmosphere of something being held back, but it's possible I'm only thinking

that now because of what happened next.

The way it began, it was a bit like a repeat of earlier. We'd got back onto the long near-empty road, and Ruth made some remark about a poster we were passing. I don't even remember the poster now, it was just one of those huge advertising images on the roadside. She made the remark almost to herself, obviously not meaning much by it. She said something like: "Oh my God, look at that one. You'd think they'd at least try to come up with something new."

But Tommy said from the back: "Actually I quite like that one. It's been in the newspapers as well. I think it's got something."

Maybe I was wanting that feeling again, of me and Tommy being brought close together. Because although the walk to the boat had been fine in itself, I was starting to feel that apart from our first embrace, and that moment in the car earlier on, Tommy and I hadn't really had much to do with each other. Anyway, I found myself saying:

"Actually, I like it too. It takes a lot more effort than you'd think, making up these posters."

"That's right," Tommy said. "Someone told me it takes weeks and weeks putting something like that together. Months even. People sometimes work all night on them, over and over, until they're just right."

"It's too easy," I said, "to criticise when you're just driving by."

"Easiest thing in the world," Tommy said.

Ruth said nothing, and kept looking at the empty road in front of us. Then I said:

"Since we're on the subject of posters. There was one I noticed on the way out. It should be coming up again pretty soon. It'll be on our side this time. It should come up any time now."

"What's it of?" Tommy asked.

"You'll see. It'll be coming up soon."

I glanced at Ruth beside me. There was no anger in her eyes, just a kind of wariness. There was even a sort of hope, I thought, that when the poster appeared, it would be perfectly innocuous–something that reminded us of

Hailsham, something like that. I could see all of this in her face, the way it didn't quite settle on any one expression, but hovered tentatively. All the time, her gaze remained fixed in front of her.

I slowed down the car and pulled over, bumping up onto the rough grass verge.

"Why are we stopping, Kath?" Tommy asked.

"Because you can see it best from here. Any nearer, we have to look up at it too much."

I could hear Tommy shifting behind us, trying to get a better view. Ruth didn't move, and I wasn't even sure she was looking at the poster at all.

"Okay, it's not exactly the same," I said after a moment. "But it reminded me. Open-plan office, smart smiling people."

Ruth stayed silent, but Tommy said from the back: "I get it. You mean, like that place we went to that time."

"Not only that," I said. "It's a lot like that ad. The one we found on the ground. You remember, Ruth?"

"I'm not sure I do," she said quietly.

"Oh, come on. You remember. We found it in a magazine in some lane. Near a puddle. You were really taken by it. Don't pretend you don't remember."

"I think I do." Ruth's voice was now almost a whisper. A lorry went past, making our car wobble and, for a few seconds, obscuring our view of the hoarding. Ruth bowed her head, as though she hoped the lorry had removed the image forever, and when we could see it clearly again, she didn't raise her gaze.

"It's funny," I said, "remembering it all now. Remember how you used to go on about it? How you'd one day work in an office like that one?"

"Oh yeah, that was why we went that day," Tommy said, like he'd only that second remembered. "When we went to Norfolk. We went to find your possible. Working in an office."

"Don't you sometimes think," I said to Ruth, "you should have looked into it more? All right, you'd have been the first. The first one any of us would have

heard of getting to do something like that. But you might have done it. Don't you wonder sometimes, what might have happened if you'd tried?"

"How could I have tried?" Ruth's voice was hardly audible. "It's just something I once dreamt about. That's all."

"But if you'd at least looked into it. How do you know? They might have let you."

"Yeah, Ruth," Tommy said. "Maybe you should at least have tried. After going on about it so much. I think Kath's got a point."

"I didn't go on about it, Tommy. At least, I don't remember going on about it."

"But Tommy's right. You should at least have tried. Then you could see a poster like that one, and remember that's what you wanted once, and that you at least looked into it..."

"How could I have looked into it?" For the first time, Ruth's voice had hardened, but then she let out a sigh and looked down again. Then Tommy said:

"You kept talking like you might qualify for special treatment. And for all you know, you might have done. You should have asked at least."

"Okay," Ruth said. "You say I should have looked into it. How? Where would I have gone? There wasn't a way to look into it."

"Tommy's right though," I said. "If you believed yourself special, you should at least have asked. You should have gone to Madame and asked."

As soon as I said this–as soon as I mentioned Madame–I realised I'd made a mistake. Ruth looked up at me and I saw something like triumph flash across her face. You see it in films sometimes, when one person's pointing a gun at another person, and the one with the gun's making the other one do all kinds of things. Then suddenly there's a mistake, a tussle, and the gun's with the second person. And the second person looks at the first person with a gleam, a kind of can't-believe-my-luck expression that promises all kinds of vengeance. Well, that was how suddenly Ruth was looking at me, and though I'd said nothing about deferrals, I'd mentioned Madame, and I knew we'd stumbled into some new territory altogether.

Ruth saw my panic and shifted round in her seat to face me. So I was preparing myself for her attack; busy telling myself that no matter what she

came at me with, things were different now, she wouldn't get her way like she'd done in the past. I was telling myself all of this, and that's why I wasn't at all ready for what she did come out with.

"Kathy," she said, "I don't really expect you to forgive me ever. I can't even see why you should. But I'm going to ask you to all the same."

I was so thrown by this, all I could find to say was a rather limp: "Forgive you for what?"

"Forgive me for what? Well, for starters, there's the way I always lied to you about your urges. When you used to tell me, back then, how sometimes it got so you wanted to do it with virtually anyone."

Tommy shifted again behind us, but Ruth was leaning forward now, looking straight at me, like for the moment Tommy wasn't with us in the car at all.

"I knew how it worried you," she said. "I should have told you. I should have said how it was the same for me too, just the way you described it. You realise all of this now, I know. But you didn't back then, and I should have said. I should have told you how even though I was with Tommy, I couldn't resist doing it with other people sometimes. At least three others when we were at the Cottages."

She said this still without looking Tommy's way. But it wasn't so much like she was ignoring him, than that she was trying so intensely to get through to me everything else had been blurred out.

"I almost did tell you a few times," she went on. "But I didn't. Even then, at the time, I realised you'd look back one day and realise and blame me for it. But I still didn't say anything to you. There's no reason you should ever forgive me for that, but I want to ask now because..." She stopped suddenly.

"Because what?" I asked.

She laughed and said: "Because nothing. I'd like you to forgive me, but I don't expect you to. Anyway, that's not the half of it, not even a small bit of it, actually. The main thing is, I kept you and Tommy apart." Her voice had dropped again, almost to a whisper. "That was the worst thing I did."

She turned a little, taking Tommy in her gaze for the first time. Then almost immediately, she was looking just at me again, but now it was like she was talking to the both of us.

“That was the worst thing I did,” she said again. “I'm not even asking you to forgive me about that. God, I've said all this in my head so many times, I can't believe I'm really doing it. It should have been you two. I'm not pretending I didn't always see that. Of course I did, as far back as I can remember. But I kept you apart. I'm not asking you to forgive me for that. That's not what I'm after just now. What I want is for you to put it right. Put right what I messed up for you.”

“How d'you mean, Ruth?” Tommy asked. “How d'you mean, put it right?” His voice was gentle, full of child-like curiosity, and I think that was what started me sobbing.

“Kathy, listen,” Ruth said. “You and Tommy, you've got to try and get a deferral. If it's you two, there's got to be a chance. A real chance.”

She'd reached out a hand and put it on my shoulder, but I shook her off roughly and glared at her through the tears.

“It's too late for that. Way too late.”

“It's not too late. Kathy, listen, it's not too late. Okay, so Tommy's done two donations. Who says that has to make any difference?”

“It's too late for all that now.” I'd started to sob again. “It's stupid even thinking about it. As stupid as wanting to work in that office up there. We're all way beyond that now.”

Ruth was shaking her head. “It's not too late. Tommy, you tell her.”

I was leaning on the steering wheel, so couldn't see Tommy at all. He made a kind of puzzled humming sound, but didn't say anything.

“Look,” Ruth said, “both of you, listen. I wanted us all to do this trip, because I wanted to say what I just said. But I also wanted it because I wanted to give you something.” She'd been rummaging in the pockets of her anorak, and now she held out a crumpled piece of paper. “Tommy, you'd better take this. Look after it. Then when Kathy changes her mind, you'll have it.”

Tommy reached forward between the seats and took the paper. “Thanks, Ruth,” he said, like she'd given him a chocolate bar. Then after a few seconds, he said: “What is it? I don't get it.”

“It's Madame's address. It's like you were saying to me just now. You've at least got to try.”

“How d'you find it?” Tommy asked.

“It wasn't easy. It took me a long time, and I ran a few risks. But I got it in the end, and I got it for you two. Now it's up to you to find her and try.”

I'd stopped sobbing by now and started the engine. “That's enough of all this,” I said. “We've got to get Tommy back. Then we need to be getting back ourselves.”

“But you will think about it, both of you, won't you?”

“I just want to get back now,” I said.

“Tommy, you'll keep that address safe? In case Kathy comes round.”

“I'll keep it,” Tommy said. Then, much more solemnly than the last time: “Thanks, Ruth.”

“We've seen the boat,” I said, “but now we've got to get back. It might be over two hours back to Dover.”

I put the car on the road again, and my memory of it is that we didn't talk much more on the way back to the Kingsfield. There was still a small group of donors huddled under the roof as we came into the Square. I turned the car before letting Tommy out. Neither of us hugged or kissed him, but as he walked away towards his fellow donors, he paused and gave us a big smile and wave.

It might seem odd, but on the journey back to Ruth's centre, we didn't really discuss any of what had just happened. It was partly because Ruth was exhausted–that last conversation on the roadside seemed to have drained her. But also, I think we both sensed we'd done enough serious talking for one day, and that if we tried any more of it, things would start going wrong. I'm not sure how Ruth was feeling on that drive home, but as for me, once all the strong emotions had settled, once the night began to set in and all the lights came on along the roadside, I was feeling okay. It was like something that had been hanging over me for a long time had gone, and even if things were still far from sorted, it felt like there was now at least a door open to somewhere better. I'm not saying I was elated or anything like that. Everything between the three of us seemed really delicate and I felt tense, but it wasn't altogether

a bad tension.

We didn't even discuss Tommy beyond saying how he looked okay, and wondering how much weight he'd put on. Then we spent large stretches of the journey watching the road together in silence.

It wasn't until a few days later I came to see what a difference that trip had made. All the guardedness, all the suspicions between me and Ruth evaporated, and we seemed to remember everything we'd once meant to each other. And that was the start of it, that era, with the summer coming on, and Ruth's health at least on an even keel, when I'd come in the evenings with biscuits and mineral water, and we'd sit side by side at her window, watching the sun go down over the roofs, talking about Hailsham, the Cottages, anything that drifted into our minds. When I think about Ruth now, of course, I feel sad she's gone; but I also feel really grateful for that period we had at the end.

There was, even so, one topic we never discussed properly, and that was about what she'd said to us on the roadside that day. Just every now and then, Ruth would allude to it. She'd come out with something like:

"Have you thought any more about becoming Tommy's carer? You know you could arrange it, if you wanted to."

Soon, it was this idea–of my becoming Tommy's carer–that came to stand in for all the rest of it. I'd tell her I was thinking about it, that anyway it wasn't so simple, even for me, to arrange such a thing. Then we'd usually let the topic drop. But I could tell it was never far from Ruth's mind, and that's why, that very last time I saw her, even though she wasn't able to speak, I knew what it was she wanted to say to me.

That was three days after her second donation, when they finally let me in to see her in the small hours of the morning. She was in a room by herself, and it looked like they'd done everything they could for her. It had become obvious to me by then, from the way the doctors, the co-ordinator, the nurses were behaving, that they didn't think she was going to make it. Now I took one glance at her in that hospital bed under the dull light and recognised the look on her face, which I'd seen on donors often enough before. It was like she was willing her eyes to see right inside herself, so she could patrol and marshal all the better the separate areas of pain in her body–the way, maybe, an anxious carer might rush between three or four ailing donors in different parts of the country. She was, strictly speaking, still conscious, but she wasn't accessible to me as I stood there beside her metal bed. All the same, I pulled up a chair and sat with her hand in both of mine, squeezing whenever

another flood of pain made her twist away from me.

I stayed beside her like that for as long as they let me, three hours, maybe longer. And as I say, for almost all of that time, she was far away inside herself. But just once, as she was twisting herself in a way that seemed scarily unnatural, and I was on the verge of calling the nurses for more painkillers, just for a few seconds, no more, she looked straight at me and she knew exactly who I was. It was one of those little islands of lucidity donors sometimes get to in the midst of their ghastly battles, and she looked at me, just for that moment, and although she didn't speak, I knew what her look meant. So I said to her: “It's okay, I'm going to do it, Ruth. I'm going to become Tommy's carer as soon as I can.” I said it under my breath, because I didn't think she'd hear the words anyway, even if I shouted them. But my hope was that with our gazes locked as they were for those few seconds, she'd read my expression exactly as I'd read hers. Then the moment was over, and she was away again. Of course, I'll never know for sure, but I think she did understand. And even if she didn't, what occurs to me now is that she probably knew all along, even before I did, that I'd become Tommy's carer, and that we'd “give it a try,” just as she'd told us to in the car that day.

Chapter Twenty

I became Tommy's carer almost a year to the day after that trip to see the boat. It wasn't long after Tommy's third donation, and though he was recovering well, he was still needing a lot of time to rest, and as it turned out, that wasn't a bad way at all for us to start this new phase together. Before long, I was getting used to the Kingsfield, growing to like it even.

Most donors at the Kingsfield get their own room after third donation, and Tommy was given one of the largest singles in the centre. Some people assumed afterwards I'd fixed it for him, but that wasn't the case; it was just luck, and anyway, it wasn't that great a room. I think it had been a bathroom back in the holiday camp days, because the only window had frosted glass and was really high up near the ceiling. You could only look out by standing on a chair and holding open the pane, and then you only got a view down onto the dense shrubbery. The room was L-shaped, which meant they could get in, as well as the usual bed, chair and wardrobe, a little school desk with a lift-up lid–an item that proved a real bonus, as I'll explain.

I don't want to give the wrong idea about that period at the Kingsfield. A lot of it was really relaxed, almost idyllic. My usual time to arrive was after lunch, and I'd come up to find Tommy stretched out on the narrow bed–always fully clothed because he didn't want to "be like a patient." I'd sit in the chair and read to him from various paperbacks I'd bring in, stuff like The Odyssey or One Thousand and One Nights. Otherwise we'd just talk, sometimes about the old days, sometimes about other things. He'd often doze off in the late afternoon, when I'd catch up on my reports over at his school desk. It was amazing really, the way the years seemed to melt away, and we were so easy with each other.

Obviously, though, not everything was like before. For a start, Tommy and I finally started having sex. I don't know how much Tommy had thought about us having sex before we started. He was still recovering, after all, and maybe it wasn't the first thing on his mind. I wasn't wanting to force it on him, but on the other hand it had occurred to me if we left it too long, just when we were starting out together again, it would just get harder and harder to make it a natural part of us. And my other thought, I suppose, was that if our plans went along the lines Ruth had wanted, and we did find ourselves going for a deferral, it might prove a real drawback if we'd never had sex. I don't mean I thought this was necessarily something they'd ask us about. But my worry was that it would show somehow, in a kind of lack of intimacy.

So I decided to start it off one afternoon up in that room, in a way he could

take or leave. He'd been lying on the bed as usual, staring at the ceiling while I read to him. When I finished, I went over, sat on the edge of the bed, and slid a hand under his T-shirt. Pretty soon I was down around his stuff, and though it took a while for him to get hard, I could tell straight away he was happy about it. That first time, we still had stitches to worry about, and anyway, after all the years of knowing each other and not having sex, it was like we needed some intermediary stage before we could get into it in a full-blown way. So after a while I just did it for him with my hands, and he just lay there not making any attempt to feel me up in return, not even making any noises, but just looking peaceful.

But even that first time, there was something there, a feeling, right there alongside our sense that this was a beginning, a gateway we were passing through. I didn't want to acknowledge it for a long time, and even when I did, I tried to persuade myself it was something that would go away along with his various aches and pains. What I mean is, right from that first time, there was something in Tommy's manner that was tinged with sadness, that seemed to say: "Yes, we're doing this now and I'm glad we're doing it now. But what a pity we left it so late."

And in the days that followed, when we had proper sex and we were really happy about it, even then, this same nagging feeling would always be there. I did everything to keep it away. I had us going at it all stops out, so that everything would become a delirious blur, and there'd be no room for anything else. If he was on top, I'd put my knees right up for him; whatever other position we used, I'd say anything, do anything I thought would make it better, more passionate, but it still never quite went away.

Maybe it was to do with that room, the way the sun came in through the frosted glass so that even in early summer, it felt like autumn light. Or maybe it was because the stray sounds that would occasionally reach us as we lay there were of donors milling about, going about their business around the grounds, and not of students sitting in a grassy field, arguing about novels and poetry. Or maybe it had to do with how sometimes, even after we'd done it really well and were lying in each other's arms, bits of what we'd just done still drifting through our heads, Tommy would say something like: "I used to be able to do it twice in a row easy. But I can't any more." Then that feeling would come right to the fore and I'd have to put my hand over his mouth, whenever he said things like that, just so we could go on lying there in peace. I'm sure Tommy felt it too, because we'd always hold each other very tight after times like that, as though that way we'd manage to keep the feeling away.

For the first few weeks after I arrived, we hardly brought up Madame or that conversation with Ruth in the car that day. But the very fact of my having become his carer served as a reminder that we weren't there to mark time. And so too, of course, did Tommy's animal drawings.

I'd often wondered about Tommy's animals over the years, and even that day we'd gone to see the boat, I'd been tempted to ask him about them. Was he still drawing them? Had he kept the ones from the Cottages? But the whole history around them had made it difficult for me to ask.

Then one afternoon, maybe about a month after I'd started, I came up to his room and found him at his school desk, carefully going over a drawing, his face nearly touching the paper. He'd called for me to come in when I'd knocked, but now he didn't raise his head or stop what he was doing, and just a glance told me he was working on one of his imaginary creatures. I stopped in the doorway, uncertain whether I should come in, but eventually he looked up and closed his notebook–which I noticed looked identical to the black books he'd got from Keffers all those years ago. I came in then and we began talking about something else entirely, and after a while he put away his notebook without us mentioning it. But after that, I'd often come in and see it left on the desk or tossed beside his pillow.

Then one day we were up in his room with several minutes to kill before we set off for some checks, and I noticed something odd coming into his manner: something coy and deliberate which made me think he was after some sex. But then he said:

"Kath, I just want you to tell me. Tell me honestly."

Then the black notebook came out of his desk, and he showed me three separate sketches of a kind of frog–except with a long tail as though a part of it had stayed a tadpole. At least, that's what it looked like when you held it away from you. Close up, each sketch was a mass of minute detail, much like the creatures I'd seen years before.

"These two I did thinking they were made of metal," he said. "See, everything's got shiny surfaces. But this one here, I thought I'd try making him rubbery. You see? Almost blobby. I want to do a proper version now, a really good one,

but I can't decide. Kath, be honest, what do you think?"

I can't remember what I answered. What I do remember is the strong mix of emotions that engulfed me at that moment. I realised immediately this was Tommy's way of putting behind us everything that had happened around his drawings back at the Cottages, and I felt relief, gratitude, sheer delight. But I was aware too why the animals had emerged again, and of all the possible layers behind Tommy's apparently casual query. At the least, I could see, he was showing me he hadn't forgotten, even though we'd hardly discussed anything openly; he was telling me he wasn't complacent, and that he was busy getting on with his part of the preparations.

But that wasn't all I felt looking at those peculiar frogs that day. Because it was there again, only faint and in the background at first, but growing all the while, so that afterwards it was what I kept thinking about. I couldn't help it, as I looked at those pages, the thought went through my mind, even as I tried to grab it and put it away. It came to me that Tommy's drawings weren't as fresh now. Okay, in many ways these frogs were a lot like what I'd seen back at the Cottages. But something was definitely gone, and they looked laboured, almost like they'd been copied. So that feeling came again, even though I tried to keep it out: that we were doing all of this too late; that there'd once been a time for it, but we'd let that go by, and there was something ridiculous, reprehensible even, about the way we were now thinking and planning.

Now I'm going over this again, it occurs to me that might have been another reason we were so slow to talk openly to each other about our plans. It was certainly the case that none of the other donors at the Kingsfield were ever heard talking about deferrals or anything like that, and we were probably vaguely embarrassed, almost like we shared a shameful secret. We might even have been scared of what might happen if word got out to the others.

But as I say, I don't want to paint too gloomy a view of that time at the Kingsfield. For a lot of it, especially after that day he asked me about his animals, there seemed to be no more shadows left from the past, and we really settled into each other's com-pany. And though he never asked me again for advice about his pictures, he was happy to work on them in front of me, and we'd often spend our afternoons like that: me on the bed, maybe reading aloud; Tommy at the desk, drawing.

Perhaps we'd have been happy if things had stayed that way for a lot longer; if we could have whiled away more afternoons chatting, having sex, reading aloud and drawing. But with the summer drawing to an end, with Tommy getting stronger, and the possibility of notice for his fourth donation growing

ever more distinct, we knew we couldn't keep putting things off indefinitely.

It had been an unusually busy period for me, and I'd not been to the Kingsfield for almost a week. I arrived in the morning that day, and I remember it was bucketing down. Tommy's room was almost dark, and you could hear a gutter splashing away near his window. He'd been down to the main hall for breakfast with his fellow donors, but had come back up again and was now sitting on his bed, looking vacant, not doing anything. I came in exhausted–I'd not had a proper night's sleep for ages–and just collapsed onto his narrow bed, pushing him against the wall. I lay like that for a few moments, and might easily have fallen asleep if Tommy hadn't kept prodding my knees with a toe. Then finally I sat up beside him and said:

"I saw Madame yesterday, Tommy. I never spoke to her or anything. But I saw her."

He looked at me, but stayed quiet.

"I saw her come up the street and go into her house. Ruth got it right. The right address, right door, everything."

Then I described to him how the previous day, since I was down on the south coast anyway, I'd gone to Littlehampton in the late afternoon, and just as I'd done the last two times, walked down that long street near the seafront, past rows of terraced houses with names like "Wavecrest" and "Sea View," until I'd come to the public bench beside the phone box. And I'd sat down and waited–again, the way I'd done before–with my eyes fixed on the house over the street.

"It was just like detective stuff. The previous times, I'd sat there for over half an hour each go, and nothing, absolutely nothing. But something told me I'd be lucky this time."

I'd been so tired, I'd nearly nodded off right there on the bench. But then I'd looked up and she was there, coming down the street towards me.

"It was really spooky," I said, "because she looked exactly the same. Maybe

her face was slightly older. But otherwise, there was no real difference. Same clothes even. That smart grey suit."

"It couldn't literally have been the same suit."

"I don't know. It looked like it was."

"So you didn't try and speak to her?"

"Of course not, stupid. Just one step at a time. She was never exactly nice to us, remember."

I told him how she'd walked right past me on the opposite side, never glancing over to me; how for a second I thought she would also go past the door I'd been watching–that Ruth had got the wrong address. But Madame had turned sharply at the gate, covered the tiny front path in two or three steps and vanished inside.

After I'd finished, Tommy stayed quiet for some time. Then he said:

"You sure you won't get into trouble? Always driving out to places you're not supposed to be?"

"Why do you think I'm so tired? I've been working all kinds of hours to get everything in. But at least we've found her now."

The rain kept splashing outside. Tommy turned onto his side and put his head on my shoulder.

"Ruth did well for us," he said, softly. "She got it right."

"Yeah, she did well. But now it's up to us."

"So what's the plan, Kath? Have we got one?"

"We just go there. We just go there and ask her. Next week, when I take you for the lab tests. I'll get you signed out for the whole day. Then we can go to Littlehampton on the way back."

Tommy gave a sigh and put his head deeper into my shoulder. Someone watching might have thought he was being unenthusiastic, but I knew what he was feeling. We'd been thinking about the deferrals, the theory about the Gallery, all of it, for so long–and now, suddenly, here we were. It was definitely a bit scary.

“If we get this,” he said, eventually. “Just suppose we do. Suppose she lets us have three years, say, just to ourselves. What do we do exactly? See what I mean, Kath? Where do we go? We can't stay here, this is a centre.”

“I don't know, Tommy. Maybe she'll tell us to go back to the Cottages. But it'd be better somewhere else. The White Mansion, maybe. Or perhaps they've got some other place. Somewhere separate for people like us. We'll just have to see what she says.”

We lay quietly on the bed for a few more minutes, listening to the rain. At some stage, I began prodding him with a foot, the way he'd been doing to me earlier. Eventually he retaliated and pushed my feet off the bed altogether.

“If we're really going,” he said, “we'll have to decide about the animals. You know, choose the best ones to take along. Maybe six or seven. We'll have to do it quite carefully.”

“Okay,” I said. Then I stood up and stretched out my arms. “Maybe we'll take more. Fifteen, twenty even. Yeah, we'll go and see her. What can she do to us? We'll go and talk to her.”

Chapter Twenty-One

From days before we went, I'd had in my mind this picture of me and Tommy standing in front of that door, working up the nerve to press the bell, then having to wait there with hearts thumping. The way it turned out, though, we got lucky and were spared that particular ordeal.

We deserved a bit of luck by then, because the day hadn't been going at all well. The car had played up on the journey out and we were an hour late for Tommy's tests. Then a mix-up at the clinic had meant Tommy having to re-do three of the tests. This had left him feeling pretty woozy, so when we finally set off for Littlehampton towards the end of the afternoon, he began to feel carsick and we had to keep stopping to let him walk it off.

We finally arrived just before six o'clock. We parked the car behind the bingo hall, took out from the boot the sports bag containing Tommy's notebooks, then set off towards the town centre. It had been a fine day and though the shops were all closing, a lot of people were hanging about outside the pubs, talking and drinking. Tommy began to feel better the more we walked, until eventually he remembered how he'd had to miss lunch because of the tests, and declared he'd have to eat before facing what was in front of us. So we were searching for some place to buy a takeaway sandwich, when he suddenly grabbed my arm, so hard I thought he was having some sort of attack. But then he said quietly into my ear:

"That's her, Kath. Look. Going past the hairdressers."

And sure enough there she was, moving along the opposite pavement, dressed in her neat grey suit, just like the ones she'd always worn.

We set off after Madame at a reasonable distance, first through the pedestrian precinct, then along the near-deserted High Street. I think we were both reminded of that day we'd followed Ruth's possible through another town. But this time things proved far simpler, because pretty soon she'd led us onto that long seafront street.

Because the road was completely straight, and because the setting sun was falling on it all the way down to the end, we found we could let Madame get quite a way ahead–till she wasn't much more than a dot–and there'd still be no danger of losing her. In fact, we never even stopped hearing the echo of her heels, and the rhythmic thudding of Tommy's bag against his leg seemed to be a kind of answer.

We went on like that for a long time, past the rows of identical houses. Then the houses on the opposite pavement ran out, areas of flat lawn appeared in their place, and you could see, beyond the lawns, the tops of the beach huts lining the seafront. The water itself wasn't visible, but you could tell it was there, just from the big sky and the seagull noises.

But the houses on our side continued without a change, and after a while I said to Tommy:

"It's not long now. See that bench over there? That's the one I sit on. The house is just over from it."

Until I said this, Tommy had been pretty calm. But now something seemed to get into him, and he began to walk much faster, like he wanted to catch up with her. But now there was no one between Madame and us, and as Tommy kept closing the gap, I had to grab his arm to slow him down. I was all the time afraid she'd turn and look at us, but she didn't, and then she was going in through her little gateway. She paused at her door to find her keys in her handbag, and then there we were, standing by her gate, watching her. She still didn't turn, and I had an idea that she'd been aware of us all along and was deliberately ignoring us. I thought too that Tommy was about to shout something to her, and that it would be the wrong thing. That was why I called from the gate, so quickly and without hesitation.

It was only a polite "Excuse me!" but she spun round like I'd thrown something at her. And as her gaze fell on us, a chill passed through me, much like the one I'd felt years ago that time we'd waylaid her outside the main house. Her eyes were as cold, and her face maybe even more severe than I remembered. I don't know if she recognised us at that point; but without doubt, she saw and decided in a second what we were, because you could see her stiffen–as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl towards her.

Then something changed in her expression. It didn't become warmer exactly. But that revulsion got put away somewhere, and she studied us carefully, squinting in the setting sun.

"Madame," I said, leaning over the gate. "We don't want to shock you or anything. But we were at Hailsham. I'm Kathy H., maybe you remember. And this is Tommy D. We haven't come to give you any trouble."

She came a few steps back towards us. "From Hailsham," she said, and a small smile actually went across her face. "Well, this is a surprise. If you aren't here to give me trouble, then why are you here?"

Suddenly Tommy said: “We have to talk with you. I've brought some things”–he raised his bag–“some things you might want for your gallery. We've got to talk with you.”

Madame went on standing there, hardly moving in the low sun, her head tilted as though listening for some sound from the seafront. Then she smiled again, though the smile didn't seem to be for us, but just herself.

“Very well then. Come inside. Then we'll see what it is you wish to talk about.”

As we went in, I noticed the front door had coloured glass panels, and once Tommy closed it behind us, everything got pretty dark. We were in a hallway so narrow you felt you'd be able to touch the walls on either side just by stretching out your elbows. Madame had stopped in front of us, and was standing still, her back to us, again like she was listening. Peering past her, I saw that the hallway, narrow as it was, divided further: to the left was a staircase going upstairs; to the right, an even narrower passage leading deeper into the house.

Following Madame's example, I listened too, but there was only silence in the house. Then, maybe from somewhere upstairs, there was a faint thump. That small noise seemed to signify something to her, because she now turned to us and pointing into the darkness of the passage, said:

“Go in there and wait for me. I'll be down shortly.”

She began to climb the stairs, then seeing our hesitation, leaned over the banister and pointed again into the dark.

“In there,” she said, then vanished upstairs.

Tommy and I wandered forward and found ourselves in what must have been the front room of the house. It was like a servant of some sort had got the place ready for the night-time, then left: the curtains were closed and there were dim table lamps switched on. I could smell the old furniture, which was probably Victorian. The fireplace had been sealed off with a board, and where the fire would have been, there was a picture, woven like a tapestry, of a

strange owl-like bird staring out at you. Tommy touched my arm and pointed to a framed picture hanging in a corner over a little round table.

“It's Hailsham,” he whispered.

We went up to it, but then I wasn't so sure. I could see it was a pretty nice watercolour, but the table lamp beneath it had a crooked shade covered with cobweb traces, and instead of lighting up the picture, it just put a shine over the murky glass, so you could hardly make it out at all.

“It's the bit round the back of the duck pond,” Tommy said.

“What do you mean?” I whispered back. “There's no pond. It's just a bit of countryside.”

“No, the pond's behind you.” Tommy seemed surprisingly irritated. “You must be able to remember. If you're round the back with the pond behind you, and you're looking over towards the North Playing Field...”

We went silent again because we could hear voices somewhere in the house. It sounded like a man's voice, maybe coming from upstairs. Then we heard what was definitely Madame's voice coming down the stairs, saying: “Yes, you're quite right. Quite right.”

We waited for Madame to come in, but her footsteps went past the door and to the back of the house. It flashed through my mind she was going to prepare tea and scones and bring it all in on a trolley, but then I decided that was rubbish, that she'd just as likely forgotten about us, and now she'd suddenly remember, come in and tell us to leave. Then a gruff male voice called something from upstairs, so muffled it might have been two floors up. Madame's footsteps came back into the hallway, then she called up: “I've told you what to do. Just do as I explained.”

Tommy and I waited several more minutes. Then the wall at the back of the room began to move. I saw almost immediately it wasn't really a wall, but a pair of sliding doors which you could use to section off the front half of what was otherwise one long room. Madame had rolled back the doors just part of the way, and she was now standing there staring at us. I tried to see past her, but it was just darkness. I thought maybe she was waiting for us to explain why we were there, but in the end, she said:

“You told me you were Kathy H. and Tommy D. Am I correct? And you were at Hailsham how long ago?”

I told her, but there was no way of telling if she remembered us or not. She just went on standing there at the threshold, as though hesitating to come in. But now Tommy spoke again:

“We don't want to keep you long. But there's something we have to talk to you about.”

“So you say. Well then. You'd better make yourselves comfortable.”

She reached out and put her hands on the backs of two matching armchairs just in front of her. There was something odd about her manner, like she hadn't really invited us to sit down. I felt that if we did as she was suggesting and sat on those chairs, she'd just go on standing behind us, not even taking her hands away from the backs. But when we made a move towards her, she too came forwards, and–perhaps I imagined it–tucked her shoulders in tightly as she passed between us. When we turned to sit down, she was over by the windows, in front of the heavy velvet curtains, holding us in a glare, like we were in a class and she was a teacher. At least, that's the way it looked to me at that moment. Tommy, afterwards, said he thought she was about to burst into song, and that those curtains behind her would open, and instead of the street and the flat grassy expanse leading to the seafront, there'd be this big stage set, like the ones we'd had at Hailsham, with even a chorus line to back her up. It was funny, when he said that afterwards, and I could see her again then, hands clasped, elbows out, sure enough like she was getting ready to sing. But I doubt if Tommy was really thinking anything like that at the time. I remember noticing how tense he'd got, and worrying he'd blurt out something completely daft. That was why, when she asked us, not unkindly, what it was we wanted, I stepped in quickly.

It probably came out pretty muddled at first, but after a while, as I became more confident she'd hear me out, I calmed down and got a lot clearer. I'd been turning over in my mind for weeks and weeks just what I'd say to her. I'd gone over it during those long car journeys, and while sitting at quiet tables in service-station cafés. It had seemed so difficult then, and I'd eventually resorted to a plan: I'd memorised word for word a few key lines, then drawn a mental map of how I'd go from one point to the next. But now she was there in front of me, most of what I'd prepared seemed either unnecessary or completely wrong. The strange thing was–and Tommy agreed when we discussed it afterwards–although at Hailsham she'd been like this hostile stranger from the outside, now that we were facing her again, even though she hadn't said or done anything to suggest any warmth towards us, Madame now appeared to me like an intimate, someone much closer to us than anyone new we'd met over the recent years. That's why suddenly all the things I'd been preparing in my head just went, and I spoke to her honestly

and simply, almost as I might have done years ago to a guardian. I told her what we'd heard, the rumours about Hailsham students and deferrals; how we realised the rumours might not be accurate, and that we weren't banking on anything.

"And even if it is true," I said, "we know you must get tired of it, all these couples coming to you, claiming to be in love. Tommy and me, we never would have come and bothered you if we weren't really sure."

"Sure?" It was the first time she'd spoken for ages and we both jolted back a bit in surprise. "You say you're sure? Sure that you're in love? How can you know it? You think love is so simple? So you are in love. Deeply in love. Is that what you're saying to me?"

Her voice sounded almost sarcastic, but then I saw, with a kind of shock, little tears in her eyes as she looked from one to the other of us.

"You believe this? That you're deeply in love? And therefore you've come to me for this... this deferral? Why? Why did you come to me?"

If she'd asked this in a certain way, like the whole idea was completely crazy, then I'm sure I'd have felt pretty devastated. But she hadn't quite said it like that. She'd asked it almost like it was a test question she knew the answer to; as if, even, she'd taken other couples through an identical routine many times before. That was what kept me hopeful. But Tommy must have got anxious, because he suddenly burst in:

"We came to see you because of your gallery. We think we know what your gallery's for."

"My gallery?" She leaned back on the window ledge, causing the curtains to sway behind her, and took a slow breath. "My gallery. You must mean my collection. All those paintings, poems, all those things of yours I gathered over the years. It was hard work for me, but I believed in it, we all did in those days. So you think you know what it was for, why we did it. Well, that would be most interesting to hear. Because I have to say, it's a question I ask myself all the time." She suddenly switched her gaze from Tommy to me. "Do I go too far?" she asked.

I didn't know what to say, so just replied: "No, no."

"I go too far," she said. "I'm sorry. I often go too far on this subject. Forget what I just said. Young man, you were going to tell me about my gallery. Please, let me hear."

“It's so you could tell,” Tommy said. “So you'd have something to go on. Otherwise how would you know when students came to you and said they were in love?”

Madame's gaze had drifted over to me again, but I had the feeling she was staring at something on my arm. I actually looked down to see if there was birdshit or something on my sleeve. Then I heard her say:

“And this is why you think I gathered all those things of yours. My gallery, as all of you always called it. I laughed when I first heard that's what you were calling it. But in time, I too came to think of it as that. My gallery. Now why, young man, explain it to me. Why would my gallery help in telling which of you were really in love?”

“Because it would help show you what we were like,” Tommy said. “Because...”

“Because of course”–Madame cut in suddenly–“your art will reveal your inner selves! That's it, isn't it? Because your art will display your souls!” Then suddenly she turned to me again and said: “I go too far?”

She'd said this before, and I again had the impression she was staring at a spot on my sleeve. But by this point a faint suspicion I'd had ever since the first time she'd asked “I go too far?” had started to grow. I looked at Madame carefully, but she seemed to sense my scrutiny and she turned back to Tommy.

“All right,” she said. “Let us continue. What was it you were telling me?”

“The trouble is,” Tommy said, “I was a bit mixed up in those days.”

“You were saying something about your art. How art bares the soul of the artist.”

“Well, what I'm trying to say,” Tommy persisted, “is that I was so mixed up in those days, I didn't really do any art. I didn't do anything. I know now I should have done, but I was mixed up. So you haven't got anything of mine in your gallery. I know that's my fault, and I know it's probably way too late, but I've brought some things with me now.” He raised his bag, then began to unzip it. “Some of it was done recently, but some of it's from quite a long time ago. You should have Kath's stuff already. She got plenty into the Gallery. Didn't you, Kath?”

For a moment they were both looking at me. Then Madame said, barely audibly:

“Poor creatures. What did we do to you? With all our schemes and plans?” She let that hang, and I thought I could see tears in her eyes again. Then she turned to me and asked: “Do we continue with this talk? You wish to go on?”

It was when she said this that the vague idea I'd had before became something more substantial. “Do I go too far?” And now: “Do we continue?” I realised, with a little chill, that these questions had never been for me, or for Tommy, but for someone else–someone listening behind us in the darkened half of the room.

I turned round quite slowly and looked into the darkness. I couldn't see anything, but I heard a sound, a mechanical one, surprisingly far away–the house seemed to go much further back into the dark than I'd guessed. Then I could make out a shape moving towards us, and a woman's voice said: “Yes, Marie-Claude. Let us carry on.”

I was still looking into the darkness when I heard Madame let out a kind of snort, and she came striding past us and on into the dark. Then there were more mechanical sounds, and Madame emerged pushing a figure in a wheelchair. She passed between us again, and for a moment longer, because Madame's back was blocking the view, I couldn't see the person in the wheelchair. But then Madame steered it around to face us and said:

“You speak to them. It's you they've come to speak to.”

“I suppose it is.”

The figure in the wheelchair was frail and contorted, and it was the voice more than anything that helped me recognise her.

“Miss Emily,” Tommy said, quite softly.

“You speak to them,” Madame said, as though washing her hands of everything. But she remained standing behind the wheelchair, her eyes blazing towards us.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Marie-Claude is correct,” Miss Emily said. “I'm the one to whom you should be speaking. Marie-Claude worked hard for our project. And the way it all ended has left her feeling somewhat disillusioned. As for myself, whatever the disappointments, I don't feel so badly about it. I think what we achieved merits some respect. Look at the two of you. You've turned out well. I'm sure you have much you could tell me to make me proud. What did you say your names were? No, no, wait. I think I shall remember. You're the boy with the bad temper. A bad temper, but a big heart. Tommy. Am I right? And you, of course, are Kathy H. You've done well as a carer. We've heard a lot about you. I remember, you see. I dare say I can remember you all.”

“What good does it do you or them?” Madame asked, then strode away from the wheelchair, past the two of us and into the darkness, for all I know to occupy the space Miss Emily had been in before.

“Miss Emily,” I said, “it's very nice to see you again.”

“How kind of you to say so. I recognised you, but you may well not have recognised me. In fact, Kathy H., once not so long ago, I passed you sitting on that bench out there, and you certainly didn't recognise me then. You glanced at George, the big Nigerian man pushing me. Oh yes, you had quite a good look at him, and he at you. I didn't say a word, and you didn't know it was me. But tonight, in context, as it were, we know each other. You both look rather shocked at the sight of me. I've not been well recently, but I'm hoping this contraption isn't a permanent fixture. Unfortunately, my dears, I won't be able to entertain you for as long as I'd like just now, because in a short while some men are coming to take away my bedside cabinet. It's a quite wonderful object. George has put protective padding around it, but I've insisted I'll accompany it myself all the same. You never know with these men. They handle it roughly, hurl it around their vehicle, then their employer claims it was like that from the start. It happened to us before, so this time, I've insisted on going along with it. It's a beautiful object, I had it with me at Hailsham, so I'm determined to get a fair price. So when they come, I'm afraid that's when I shall have to leave you. But I can see, my dears, you've come on a mission close to your hearts. I must say, it does cheer me to see you. And it cheers Marie-Claude too, even though you'd never know it to look at her. Isn't that so, darling? Oh, she pretends it's not so, but it is. She's touched that you've come to find us. Oh, she's in a sulk, ignore her, students, ignore her. Now, I'll try and answer your questions the best I can. I've heard this rumour countless times. When we still had Hailsham, we'd get two or three couples each year, trying to get in to talk to us. One even wrote to us. I suppose it's

not so hard to find a large estate like that if you mean to break the rules. So you see, it's been there, this rumour, from long before your time."

She stopped, so I said: "What we want to know now, Miss Emily, is if the rumour's true or not."

She went on gazing at us for a moment, then took a deep breath. "Within Hailsham itself, whenever this talk started up, I made sure to stamp it out good and proper. But as for what students said after they'd left us, what could I do? In the end, I came to believe–and Marie-Claude believes this too, don't you, darling?–I came to believe that this rumour, it's not just a single rumour. What I mean is, I think it's one that gets created from scratch over and over. You go to the source, stamp it out, you'll not stop it starting again elsewhere. I came to this conclusion and ceased to worry about it. Marie-Claude never did worry about it. Her view was: 'If they're so foolish, let them believe it.' Oh yes, don't show me that sour face of yours. That's been your view of it from the beginning. After many years of it, I came not exactly to the same viewpoint. But I began to think, well, perhaps I shouldn't worry. It's not my doing, after all. And for the few couples who get disappointed, the rest will never put it to the test anyway. It's something for them to dream about, a little fantasy. What harm is there? But for the two of you, I can see this doesn't apply. You are serious. You've thought carefully. You've hoped carefully. For students like you, I do feel regret. It gives me no pleasure at all to disappoint you. But there it is."

I didn't want to look at Tommy. I felt surprisingly calm, and even though Miss Emily's words should have crushed us, there was an aspect to them that implied something further, something being held back, that suggested we hadn't yet got to the bottom of things. There was even the possibility she wasn't telling the truth. So I asked:

"Is it the case, then, that deferrals don't exist? There's nothing you can do?"

She shook her head slowly from side to side. "There's no truth in the rumour. I'm sorry. I truly am."

Suddenly Tommy asked: "Was it true once though? Before Hailsham closed?"

Miss Emily went on shaking her head. "It was never true. Even before the Morningdale scandal, even back when Hailsham was considered a shining beacon, an example of how we might move to a more humane and better way of doing things, even then, it wasn't true. It's best to be clear about this. A wishful rumour. That's all it ever was. Oh dear, is that the men come for the cabinet?"

The doorbell had gone, and footsteps came down the stairs to answer it. There were men's voices out in the narrow hall, and Madame came out of the darkness behind us, crossed the room and went out. Miss Emily leaned forward in the wheelchair, listening intently. Then she said:

“It's not them. It's that awful man from the decorating com-pany again. Marie-Claude will see to it. So, my dears, we have a few minutes more. Was there something else you wished to talk to me about? This is all strictly against regulations, of course, and Marie-Claude should never have asked you in. And naturally, I should have turned you out the second I knew you were here. But Marie-Claude doesn't care much for their regulations these days, and I must say, neither do I. So if you wish to stay a little longer, you're very welcome.”

“If the rumour was never true,” Tommy said, “then why did you take all our art stuff away? Didn't the Gallery exist either?”

“The Gallery? Well, that rumour did have some truth to it. There was a gallery. And after a fashion, there still is. These days it's here, in this house. I had to prune it down, which I regret. But there wasn't room for all of it in here. But why did we take your work away? That's what you're asking, isn't it?”

“Not just that,” I said quietly. “Why did we do all of that work in the first place? Why train us, encourage us, make us produce all of that? If we're just going to give donations anyway, then die, why all those lessons? Why all those books and discussions?”

“Why Hailsham at all?” Madame had said this from the hallway. She came past us again and back into the darkened section of the room. “It's a good question for you to ask.”

Miss Emily's gaze followed her, and for a moment, remained fixed behind us. I felt like turning to see what looks were being exchanged, but it was almost like we were back at Hailsham, and we had to keep facing the front with complete attention. Then Miss Emily said:

“Yes, why Hailsham at all? Marie-Claude likes to ask that a lot these days. But not so long ago, before the Morningdale scandal, she wouldn't have dreamt of asking a question like that. It wouldn't have entered her head. You know that's right, don't look at me like that! There was only one person in those days who would ask a question like that, and that was me. Long before Morningdale, right from the very beginning, I asked that. And that made it

easy for the rest of them, Marie-Claude, all the rest of them, they could all carry on without a care. All you students too. I did all the worrying and questioning for the lot of you. And as long as I was steadfast, then no doubts ever crossed your minds, any of you. But you asked your questions, dear boy. Let's answer the simplest one, and perhaps it will answer all the rest. Why did we take your artwork? Why did we do that? You said an interesting thing earlier, Tommy. When you were discussing this with Marie-Claude. You said it was because your art would reveal what you were like. What you were like inside. That's what you said, wasn't it? Well, you weren't far wrong about that. We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all."

She paused, and Tommy and I exchanged glances for the first time in ages. Then I asked:

"Why did you have to prove a thing like that, Miss Emily? Did someone think we didn't have souls?"

A thin smile appeared on her face. "It's touching, Kathy, to see you so taken aback. It demonstrates, in a way, that we did our job well. As you say, why would anyone doubt you had a soul? But I have to tell you, my dear, it wasn't something commonly held when we first set out all those years ago. And though we've come a long way since then, it's still not a notion universally held, even today. You Hailsham students, even after you've been out in the world like this, you still don't know the half of it. All around the country, at this very moment, there are students being reared in deplorable conditions, conditions you Hailsham students could hardly imagine. And now we're no more, things will only get worse."

She paused again, and for a moment she seemed to be inspecting us carefully through narrowed eyes. Finally she went on:

"Whatever else, we at least saw to it that all of you in our care, you grew up in wonderful surroundings. And we saw to it too, after you left us, you were kept away from the worst of those horrors. We were able to do that much for you at least. But this dream of yours, this dream of being able to defer. Such a thing would always have been beyond us to grant, even at the height of our influence. I'm sorry, I can see what I'm saying won't be welcome to you. But you mustn't be dejected. I hope you can appreciate how much we were able to secure for you. Look at you both now! You've had good lives, you're educated and cultured. I'm sorry we couldn't secure more for you than we did, but you must realise how much worse things once were. When Marie-Claude and I started out, there were no places like Hailsham in existence. We were the first, along with Glenmorgan House. Then a few years later came the Saunders

Trust. Together, we became a small but very vocal movement, and we challenged the entire way the donations programme was being run. Most importantly, we demonstrated to the world that if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being. Before that, all clones–or students, as we preferred to call you–existed only to supply medical science. In the early days, after the war, that's largely all you were to most people. Shadowy objects in test tubes. Wouldn't you agree, Marie-Claude? She's being very quiet. Usually you can't get her to shut up on this subject. Your presence, my dears, appears to have tied her tongue. Very well. So to answer your question, Tommy. That was why we collected your art. We selected the best of it and put on special exhibitions. In the late seventies, at the height of our influence, we were organising large events all around the country. There'd be cabinet ministers, bishops, all sorts of famous people coming to attend. There were speeches, large funds pledged. 'There, look!' we could say. 'Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?' Oh yes, there was a lot of support for our movement back then, the tide was with us."

For the next few minutes, Miss Emily went on reminiscing about different events from those days, mentioning a lot of people whose names meant nothing to us. In fact, for a moment, it was almost like we were listening to her again at one of her morning assemblies as she drifted off on tangents none of us could follow. She seemed to enjoy herself, though, and a gentle smile settled around her eyes. Then suddenly she came out of it and said in a new tone:

"But we never quite lost touch with reality, did we, Marie-Claude? Not like our colleagues at the Saunders Trust. Even during the best of times, we always knew what a difficult battle we were engaged in. And sure enough, the Morningdale business came along, then one or two other things, and before we knew it all our hard work had come undone."

"But what I don't understand," I said, "is why people would want students treated so badly in the first place."

"From your perspective today, Kathy, your bemusement is perfectly reasonable. But you must try and see it historically. After the war, in the early fifties, when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions. Suddenly there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions. This was what the world noticed the most, wanted the most. And for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they

grew in a kind of vacuum. Yes, there were arguments. But by the time people became concerned about... about students, by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it was too late. There was no way to reverse the process. How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? There was no going back. However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease. So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn't matter. And that was how things stood until our little movement came along. But do you see what we were up against? We were virtually attempting to square the circle. Here was the world, requiring students to donate. While that remained the case, there would always be a barrier against seeing you as properly human. Well, we fought that battle for many years, and what we won for you, at least, were many improvements, though of course, you were only a select few. But then came the Morningdale scandal, then other things, and before we knew it, the climate had quite changed. No one wanted to be seen supporting us any more, and our little movement, Hailsham, Glenmorgan, the Saunders Trust, we were all of us swept away."

"What was this Morningdale scandal you keep mentioning, Miss Emily?" I asked. "You'll have to tell us, because we don't know about it."

"Well, I suppose there's no reason why you should. It was never such a large matter in the wider world. It concerned a scientist called James Morningdale, quite talented in his way. He carried on his work in a remote part of Scotland, where I suppose he thought he'd attract less attention. What he wanted was to offer people the possibility of having children with enhanced characteristics. Superior intelligence, superior athleticism, that sort of thing. Of course, there'd been others with similar ambitions, but this Morningdale fellow, he'd taken his research much further than anyone before him, far beyond legal boundaries. Well, he was discovered, they put an end to his work and that seemed to be that. Except, of course, it wasn't, not for us. As I say, it never became an enormous matter. But it did create a certain atmosphere, you see. It reminded people, reminded them of a fear they'd always had. It's one thing to create students, such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of created children who'd take their place in society? Children demonstrably superior to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people. They recoiled from that."

“But Miss Emily,” I said, “what did any of that have to do with us? Why did Hailsham have to close because of something like that?”

“We didn't see an obvious connection either, Kathy. Not at first. And I often think now, we were culpable not to do so. Had we been more alert, less absorbed with ourselves, if we'd worked very hard at that stage when the news about Morningdale first broke, we might have been able to avert it. Oh, Marie-Claude disagrees. She thinks it would have happened no matter what we did, and she might have a point. After all, it wasn't just Morningdale. There were other things at that time. That awful television series, for instance. All these things contributed, contributed to the turning of the tide. But I suppose when it comes down to it, the central flaw was this. Our little movement, we were always too fragile, always too dependent on the whims of our supporters. So long as the climate was in our favour, so long as a corporation or a politician could see a benefit in supporting us, then we were able to keep afloat. But it had always been a struggle, and after Morningdale, after the climate changed, we had no chance. The world didn't want to be reminded how the donation programme really worked. They didn't want to think about you students, or about the conditions you were brought up in. In other words, my dears, they wanted you back in the shadows. Back in the shadows where you'd been before the likes of Marie-Claude and myself ever came along. And all those influential people who'd once been so keen to help us, well of course, they all vanished. We lost our sponsors, one after the other, in a matter of just over a year. We kept going for as long as we could, we went on for two years more than Glenmorgan. But in the end, as you know, we were obliged to close, and today there's hardly a trace left of the work we did. You won't find anything like Hailsham anywhere in the country now. All you'll find, as ever, are those vast government 'homes,' and even if they're somewhat better than they once were, let me tell you, my dears, you'd not sleep for days if you saw what still goes on in some of those places. And as for Marie-Claude and me, here we are, we've retreated to this house, and upstairs we have a mountain of your work. That's what we have to remind us of what we did. And a mountain of debt too, though that's not nearly so welcome. And the memories, I suppose, of all of you. And the knowledge that we've given you better lives than you would have had otherwise.”

“Don't try and ask them to thank you,” Madame's voice said from behind us. “Why should they be grateful? They came here looking for something much more. What we gave them, all the years, all the fighting we did on their behalf, what do they know of that? They think it's God-given. Until they came here, they knew nothing of it. All they feel now is disappointment, because we haven't given them everything possible.”

Nobody spoke for a while. Then there was a noise outside and the doorbell

rang again. Madame came out of the darkness and went out into the hall.

“This time it must be the men,” Miss Emily said. “I shall have to get ready. But you can stay a little longer. The men have to bring the thing down two flights of stairs. Marie-Claude will see they don't damage it.”

Tommy and I couldn't quite believe that was the end of it. We neither of us stood up, and anyway, there was no sign of anyone helping Miss Emily out of her wheelchair. I wondered for a moment if she was going to try and get up by herself, but she remained still, leaning forward as before, listening intently. Then Tommy said:

“So there's definitely nothing. No deferral, nothing like that.”

“Tommy,” I murmured, and glared at him. But Miss Emily said gently:

“No, Tommy. There's nothing like that. Your life must now run the course that's been set for it.”

“So, what you're saying, Miss,” Tommy said, “is that everything we did, all the lessons, everything. It was all about what you just told us? There was nothing more to it than that?”

“I can see,” Miss Emily said, “that it might look as though you were simply pawns in a game. It can certainly be looked at like that. But think of it. You were lucky pawns. There was a certain climate and now it's gone. You have to accept that sometimes that's how things happen in this world. People's opinions, their feelings, they go one way, then the other. It just so happens you grew up at a certain point in this process.”

“It might be just some trend that came and went,” I said. “But for us, it's our life.”

“Yes, that's true. But think of it. You were better off than many who came before you. And who knows what those who come after you will have to face. I'm sorry, students, but I must leave you now. George! George!”

There had been a lot of noise out in the hallway, and perhaps this had stopped George from hearing, because there was no response. Tommy asked suddenly:

“Is that why Miss Lucy left?”

For a while I thought Miss Emily, whose attention was on what was going on

in the hallway, hadn't heard him. She leaned back in her wheelchair and began moving it gradually towards the door. There were so many little coffee tables and chairs there didn't seem a way through. I was about to get up and clear a path, when she stopped suddenly.

"Lucy Wainright," she said. "Ah yes. We had a little trouble with her." She paused, then adjusted her wheelchair back to face Tommy. "Yes, we had a little trouble with her. A disagreement. But to answer your question, Tommy. The disagreement with Lucy Wainright wasn't to do with what I've just been telling you. Not directly, anyway. No, that was more, shall we say, an internal matter."

I thought she was going to leave it at that, so I asked: "Miss Emily, if it's all right, we'd like to know about it, about what happened with Miss Lucy."

Miss Emily raised her eyebrows. "Lucy Wainright? She was important to you? Forgive me, dear students, I'm forgetting again. Lucy wasn't with us for long, so for us she's just a peripheral figure in our memory of Hailsham. And not an altogether happy one. But I appreciate, if you were there during just those years..." She laughed to herself and seemed to be remembering something. In the hall, Madame was telling the men off really loudly, but Miss Emily now seemed to have lost interest. She was going through her memories with a look of concentration. Finally she said: "She was a nice enough girl, Lucy Wainright. But after she'd been with us for a while, she began to have these ideas. She thought you students had to be made more aware. More aware of what lay ahead of you, who you were, what you were for. She believed you should be given as full a picture as possible. That to do anything less would be somehow to cheat you. We considered her view and concluded she was mistaken."

"Why?" Tommy asked. "Why did you think that?"

"Why? She meant well, I'm sure of that. I can see you were fond of her. She had the makings of an excellent guardian. But what she was wanting to do, it was too theoretical. We had run Hailsham for many years, we had a sense of what could work, what was best for the students in the long run, beyond Hailsham. Lucy Wainright was idealistic, nothing wrong with that. But she had no grasp of practicalities. You see, we were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you. Hailsham would not have been Hailsham if we hadn't. Very well, sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we fooled you. I suppose you could even call it that. But we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. Lucy was well-meaning enough. But if she'd had her way, your

happiness at Hailsham would have been shattered. Look at you both now! I'm so proud to see you both. You built your lives on what we gave you. You wouldn't be who you are today if we'd not protected you. You wouldn't have become absorbed in your lessons, you wouldn't have lost yourselves in your art and your writing. Why should you have done, knowing what lay in store for each of you? You would have told us it was all pointless, and how could we have argued with you? So she had to go."

We could hear Madame now shouting at the men. She hadn't lost her temper exactly, but her voice was frighteningly stern, and the men's voices, which until this point had been arguing with her, fell silent.

"Perhaps it's just as well I've remained in here with you," Miss Emily said. "Marie-Claude does this sort of thing so much more efficiently."

I don't know what made me say it. Maybe it was because I knew the visit would have to finish pretty soon; maybe I was getting curious to know how exactly Miss Emily and Madame felt about each other. Anyway, I said to her, lowering my voice and nodding towards the doorway:

"Madame never liked us. She's always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things."

I waited to see if Miss Emily would get angry, no longer caring much if she did. Sure enough, she turned to me sharply, as if I'd thrown a ball of paper at her, and her eyes flashed in a way that reminded me of her Hailsham days. But her voice was even and soft when she replied:

"Marie-Claude has given everything for you. She has worked and worked and worked. Make no mistake about it, my child, Marie-Claude is on your side and will always be on your side. Is she afraid of you? We're all afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham. There were times I'd look down at you all from my study window and I'd feel such revulsion..." She stopped, then something in her eyes flashed again. "But I was determined not to let such feelings stop me doing what was right. I fought those feelings and I won. Now, if you'd be so good as to help me out of here, George should be waiting with my crutches."

With us at each elbow, she walked carefully into the hall, where a large man in a nursing uniform started with alarm and quickly produced a pair of crutches.

The front door was open to the street and I was surprised to see there was still daylight left. Madame's voice was coming from outside, talking more calmly

now to the men. It felt like time for Tommy and me to slip away, but the George man was helping Miss Emily with her coat, while she stood steadily between her crutches; there was no way we could get past, so we just waited. I suppose, too, we were waiting to say goodbye to Miss Emily; maybe, after everything else, we wanted to thank her, I'm not sure. But she was now preoccupied with her cabinet. She began to make some urgent point to the men outside, then left with George, not looking back at us.

Tommy and I stayed in the hall for a while longer, not sure what to do. When we did eventually wander outside, I noticed the lamps had come on all the way down the long street, even though the sky wasn't yet dark. A white van was starting up its engine. Right behind was a big old Volvo with Miss Emily in the passenger seat. Madame was crouching by the window, nodding to something Miss Emily was saying, while George closed up the boot and moved round to the driver's door. Then the white van moved off, and Miss Emily's car followed.

Madame watched the departing vehicles for a long time. Then she turned as though to go back into the house, and seeing us there on the pavement, stopped abruptly, almost shrinking back.

“We're going now,” I said. “Thank you for talking to us. Please say goodbye to Miss Emily for us.”

I could see her studying me in the fading light. Then she said:

“Kathy H. I remember you. Yes, I remember.” She fell silent, but went on looking at me.

“I think I know what you're thinking about,” I said, in the end. “I think I can guess.”

“Very well.” Her voice was dreamy and her gaze had slightly lost focus. “Very well. You are a mind-reader. Tell me.”

“There was a time you saw me once, one afternoon, in the dormitories. There was no one else around, and I was playing this tape, this music. I was sort of dancing with my eyes closed and you saw me.”

“That's very good. A mind-reader. You should be on the stage. I only recognised you just now. But yes, I remember that occasion. I still think about it from time to time.”

“That's funny. So do I.”

“I see.”

We could have ended the conversation there. We could have said goodbye and left. But she stepped closer to us, looking into my face all the time.

“You were much younger then,” she said. “But yes, it's you.”

“You don't have to answer this if you don't want to,” I said. “But it's always puzzled me. May I ask you?”

“You read my mind. But I cannot read yours.”

“Well, you were... upset that day. You were watching me, and when I realised, and I opened my eyes, you were watching me and I think you were crying. In fact, I know you were. You were watching me and crying. Why was that?”

Madame's expression didn't change and she kept staring into my face. “I was weeping,” she said eventually, very quietly, as though afraid the neighbours were listening, “because when I came in, I heard your music. I thought some foolish student had left the music on. But when I came into your dormitory, I saw you, by yourself, a little girl, dancing. As you say, eyes closed, far away, a look of yearning. You were dancing so very sympathetically. And the music, the song. There was something in the words. It was full of sadness.”

“The song,” I said, “it was called 'Never Let Me Go.' ” Then I sang a couple of lines quietly under my breath for her. “Never let me go. Oh, baby, baby. Never let me go...”

She nodded as though in agreement. “Yes, it was that song. I've heard it once or twice since then. On the radio, on the television. And it's taken me back to that little girl, dancing by herself.”

“You say you're not a mind-reader,” I said. “But maybe you were that day. Maybe that's why you started to cry when you saw me. Because whatever the song was really about, in my head, when I was dancing, I had my own version. You see, I imagined it was about this woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies. But then she'd had one, and she was so pleased, and she was holding it ever so tightly to her breast, really afraid something might separate them, and she's going baby, baby, never let me go. That's not what the song's about at all, but that's what I had in my head that time. Maybe you read my mind, and that's why you found it so sad. I didn't think it was so sad at the time, but now, when I think back, it does feel a bit sad.”

I'd spoken to Madame, but I could sense Tommy shifting next to me, and was aware of the texture of his clothes, of everything about him. Then Madame said:

"That's most interesting. But I was no more a mind-reader then than today. I was weeping for an altogether different reason. When I watched you dancing that day, I saw something else. I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. That is what I saw. It wasn't really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I've never forgotten."

Then she came forward until she was only a step or two from us. "Your stories this evening, they touched me too." She looked now to Tommy, then back at me. "Poor creatures. I wish I could help you. But now you're by yourselves."

She reached out her hand, all the while staring into my face, and placed it on my cheek. I could feel a trembling go all through her body, but she kept her hand where it was, and I could see again tears appearing in her eyes.

"You poor creatures," she repeated, almost in a whisper. Then she turned and went back into her house.

We hardly discussed our meeting with Miss Emily and Madame on the journey back. Or if we did, we talked only about the less important things, like how much we thought they'd aged, or the stuff in their house.

I kept us on the most obscure back roads I knew, where only our headlights disturbed the darkness. We'd occasionally encounter other headlights, and then I'd get the feeling they belonged to other carers, driving home alone, or maybe like me, with a donor beside them. I realised, of course, that other people used these roads; but that night, it seemed to me these dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super cafés were for everyone else. I don't know if Tommy was thinking something similar. Maybe he was, because at one point,

he remarked:

“Kath, you really know some weird roads.”

He did a little laugh as he said this, but then he seemed to fall deep into thought. Then as we were going down a particularly dark lane in the back of nowhere, he said suddenly:

“I think Miss Lucy was right. Not Miss Emily.”

I can't remember if I said anything to that. If I did, it certainly wasn't anything very profound. But that was the moment I first noticed it, something in his voice, or maybe his manner, that set off distant alarm bells. I remember taking my eyes off the twisting road to glance at him, but he was just sitting there quietly, gazing straight ahead into the night.

A few minutes later, he said suddenly: “Kath, can we stop? I'm sorry, I need to get out a minute.”

Thinking he was feeling sick again, I pulled up almost immediately, hard against a hedge. The spot was completely unlit, and even with the car lights on, I was nervous another vehicle might come round the curve and run into us. That's why, when Tommy got out and disappeared into the blackness, I didn't go with him. Also, there'd been something purposeful about the way he'd got out that suggested even if he was feeling ill, he'd prefer to cope with it on his own. Anyway, that's why I was still in the car, wondering whether to move it a little further up the hill, when I heard the first scream.

At first I didn't even think it was him, but some maniac who'd been lurking in the bushes. I was already out of the car when the second and third screams came, and by then I knew it was Tommy, though that hardly lessened my urgency. In fact, for a moment, I was probably close to panic, not having a clue where he was. I couldn't really see anything, and when I tried to go towards the screams, I was stopped by an impenetrable thicket. Then I found an opening, and stepping through a ditch, came up to a fence. I managed to climb over it and I landed in soft mud.

I could now see my surroundings much better. I was in a field that sloped down steeply not far in front of me, and I could see the lights of some village way below in the valley. The wind here was really powerful, and a gust pulled at me so hard, I had to reach for the fence post. The moon wasn't quite full, but it was bright enough, and I could make out in the mid-distance, near where the field began to fall away, Tommy's figure, raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out.

I tried to run to him, but the mud sucked my feet down. The mud was impeding him too, because one time, when he kicked out, he slipped and fell out of view into the blackness. But his jumbled swear-words continued uninterrupted, and I was able to reach him just as he was getting to his feet again. I caught a glimpse of his face in the moonlight, caked in mud and distorted with fury, then I reached for his flailing arms and held on tight. He tried to shake me off, but I kept holding on, until he stopped shouting and I felt the fight go out of him. Then I realised he too had his arms around me. And so we stood together like that, at the top of that field, for what seemed like ages, not saying anything, just holding each other, while the wind kept blowing and blowing at us, tugging our clothes, and for a moment, it seemed like we were holding onto each other because that was the only way to stop us being swept away into the night.

When at last we pulled apart, he muttered: “I'm really sorry, Kath.” Then he gave a shaky laugh and added: “Good job there weren't cows in the field. They'd have got a fright.”

I could see he was doing his best to reassure me it was all okay now, but his chest was still heaving and his legs shaking. We walked together back towards the car, trying not to slip.

“You stink of cow poo,” I said, finally.

“Oh God, Kath. How do I explain this? We'll have to sneak in round the back.”

“You'll still have to sign in.”

“Oh God,” he said, and laughed again.

I found some rags in the car and we got the worst of the muck off. But I'd taken out of the boot, just while I was searching for the rags, the sports bag containing his animal pictures, and when we set off again, I noticed Tommy brought it inside with him.

We travelled some way, not saying much, the bag on his lap. I was waiting for him to say something about the pictures; it even occurred to me he was working up to another rage, when he'd throw all the pictures out of the window. But he held the bag protectively with both hands and kept staring at the dark road unfolding before us. After a long period of silence, he said:

“I'm sorry about just now, Kath. I really am. I'm a real idiot.” Then he added:

“What are you thinking, Kath?”

“I was thinking,” I said, “about back then, at Hailsham, when you used to go bonkers like that, and we couldn't understand it. We couldn't understand how you could ever get like that. And I was just having this idea, just a thought really. I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always knew.”

Tommy thought about this, then shook his head. “Don't think so, Kath. No, it was always just me. Me being an idiot. That's all it ever was.” Then after a moment, he did a small laugh and said: “But that's a funny idea. Maybe I did know, somewhere deep down. Something the rest of you didn't.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Nothing seemed to change much in the week or so after that trip. I didn't expect it to stay that way though, and sure enough, by the start of October, I started noticing little differences. For one thing, though Tommy carried on with his animal pictures, he became cagey about doing them in my presence. We weren't quite back to how it was when I'd first become his carer and all the Cottages stuff was still hanging over us. But it was like he'd thought about it and come to a decision: that he'd continue with the animals as the mood took him, but if I came in, he'd stop and put them away. I wasn't that hurt by this. In fact, in many ways, it was a relief: those animals staring us in the face when we were together would have only made things more awkward.

But there were other changes I found less easy. I don't mean we weren't still having some good times up in his room. We were even having sex every now and then. But what I couldn't help noticing was how, more and more, Tommy tended to identify himself with the other donors at the centre. If, for instance, the two of us were reminiscing about old Hailsham people, he'd sooner or later move the conversation round to one of his current donor friends who'd maybe said or done something similar to what we were recalling. There was one time in particular, when I drove into the Kingsfield after a long journey and stepped out of the car. The Square was looking a bit like that time I'd come to the centre with Ruth the day we'd gone to see the boat. It was an overcast autumn afternoon, and there was no one about except for a group of donors clustered under the overhanging roof of the recreation building. I saw Tommy was with them–he was standing with a shoulder against a post–and was listening to a donor who was sitting crouched on the entrance steps. I came towards them a little way, then stopped and waited, there in the open, under the grey sky. But Tommy, though he'd seen me, went on listening to his friend, and eventually he and all the others burst out laughing. Even then, he carried on listening and smiling. He claimed afterwards he'd signalled to me to come over, but if he had, it hadn't been at all obvious. All I registered was him smiling vaguely in my direction, then going back to what his friend was saying. Okay, he was in the middle of something, and after a minute or so, he did come away, and the two of us went up to his room. But it was quite different to the way things would have happened before. And it wasn't just that he'd kept me waiting out in the Square. I wouldn't have minded that so much. It was more that I sensed for the first time that day something close to resentment on his part at having to come away with me, and once we were up in his room, the atmosphere between us wasn't so great.

To be fair, a lot of it might have been down to me as much as him. Because as I'd stood there watching them all talking and laughing, I'd felt an unexpected

little tug; because there was something about the way these donors had arranged themselves in a rough semi-circle, something about their poses, almost studiedly relaxed, whether standing or sitting, as though to announce to the world how much each one of them was savouring the company, that reminded me of the way our little gang used to sit around our pavilion together. That comparison, as I say, tugged something inside me, and so maybe, once we were up in his room, it was as much me feeling resentful as the other way round.

I'd feel a similar little prickle of resentment each time he told me I didn't understand something or other because I wasn't yet a donor. But apart from one particular time, which I'll come to in a moment, a little prickle was all it was. Usually he'd say these things to me half-jokingly, almost affectionately. And even when there was something more to it, like the time he told me to stop taking his dirty washing to the laundry because he could do it himself, it hardly amounted to a row. That time, I'd asked him:

"What difference does it make, which one of us takes the towels down? I'm going out that way anyway."

To which he'd shaken his head and said: "Look, Kath, I'll sort out my own things. If you were a donor, you'd see."

Okay, it did niggle, but it was something I could forget easily enough. But as I say, there was this one time he brought it up, about my not being a donor, that really riled me.

It happened about a week after the notice came for his fourth donation. We'd been expecting it and had already talked it through a lot. In fact, we'd had some of our most intimate conversations since the Littlehampton trip discussing the fourth donation. I've known donors to react in all sorts of ways to their fourth donation. Some want to talk about it all the time, endlessly and pointlessly. Others will only joke about it, while others refuse to discuss it at all. And then there's this odd tendency among donors to treat a fourth donation as something worthy of congratulations. A donor "on a fourth," even one who's been pretty unpopular up till then, is treated with special respect. Even the doctors and nurses play up to this: a donor on a fourth will go in for a check and be greeted by whitecoats smiling and shaking their hand. Well, Tommy and I, we talked about all of this, sometimes jokingly, other times seriously and carefully. We discussed all the different ways people tried to handle it, and which ways made the best sense. Once, lying side by side on the bed with the dark coming on, he said:

"You know why it is, Kath, why everyone worries so much about the fourth?

It's because they're not sure they'll really complete. If you knew for certain you'd complete, it would be easier. But they never tell us for sure."

I'd been wondering for a while if this would come up, and I'd been thinking about how I'd respond. But when it did, I couldn't find much to say. So I just said: "It's just a lot of rubbish, Tommy. Just talk, wild talk. It's not even worth thinking about."

But Tommy would have known I had nothing to back up my words. He'd have known, too, he was raising questions to which even the doctors had no certain answers. You'll have heard the same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you've technically completed, you're still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centres, no carers, no friends; how there's nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It's horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don't want to think about it. Not the whitecoats, not the carers–and usually not the donors. But now and again, a donor will bring it up, as Tommy did that evening, and I wish now we'd talked about it. As it was, after I dismissed it as rubbish, we both shrank back from the whole territory. At least, though, I knew it was on Tommy's mind after that, and I was glad he'd at least confided in me that far. What I'm saying is that all in all I was under the impression we were dealing with the fourth donation pretty well together, and that's why I was so knocked off balance by what he came out with that day we walked around the field.

The Kingsfield doesn't have much in the way of grounds. The Square's the obvious congregating point and the few bits behind the buildings look more like wasteland. The largest chunk, which the donors call "the field," is a rectangle of overgrown weeds and thistles held in by wire-mesh fences. There's always been talk of turning it into a proper lawn for the donors, but they haven't done it yet, even now. It might not be so peaceful even if they did get round to it, because of the big road nearby. All the same, when donors get restless and need to walk it off, that's where they tend to go, scraping through all the nettles and brambles. The particular morning I'm talking about, it was really foggy, and I knew the field would be soaking, but Tommy had been insistent we go there for a walk. Not surprisingly, we were the only

ones there–which probably suited Tommy fine. After crashing about the thickets for a few minutes, he stopped next to the fence and stared at the blank fog on the other side. Then he said:

"Kath, I don't want you to take this the wrong way. But I've been thinking it over a lot. Kath, I think I ought to get a different carer."

In the few seconds after he said this, I realised I wasn't surprised by it at all; that in some funny way I'd been waiting for it. But I was angry all the same and didn't say anything.

"It's not just because the fourth donation's coming up," he went on. "It's not just about that. It's because of stuff like what happened last week. When I had all that kidney trouble. There's going to be much more stuff like that coming."

"That's why I came and found you," I said. "That's exactly why I came to help you. For what's starting now. And it's what Ruth wanted too."

"Ruth wanted that other thing for us," Tommy said. "She wouldn't necessarily have wanted you to be my carer through this last bit."

"Tommy," I said, and I suppose by now I was furious, but I kept my voice quiet and under control, "I'm the one to help you. That's why I came and found you again."

"Ruth wanted the other thing for us," Tommy repeated. "All this is something else. Kath, I don't want to be that way in front of you."

He was looking down at the ground, a palm pressed against the wire-mesh fence, and for a moment he looked like he was listening intently to the sound of the traffic somewhere beyond the fog. And that was when he said it, shaking his head slightly:

"Ruth would have understood. She was a donor, so she would have understood. I'm not saying she'd necessarily have wanted the same thing for herself. If she'd been able to, maybe she'd have wanted you as her carer right to the end. But she'd have understood, about me wanting to do it differently. Kath, sometimes you just don't see it. You don't see it because you're not a donor."

It was when he came out with this that I turned and walked off. As I said, I'd been almost prepared for the bit about not wanting me any more as his carer. But what had really stung, coming after all those other little things, like

when he'd kept me standing in the Square, was what he'd said then, the way he'd divided me off yet again, not just from all the other donors, but from him and Ruth.

This never turned into a huge fight though. When I stalked off, there wasn't much else I could do other than go back up to his room, and then he came up himself several minutes later. I'd cooled down by then and so had he, and we were able to have a better conversation about it. It was a bit stiff, but we made peace, and even got into some of the practicalities of changing carers. Then, as we were sitting in the dull light, side by side on the edge of his bed, he said to me:

"I don't want us to fight again, Kath. But I've been wanting to ask you this a lot. I mean, don't you get tired of being a carer? All the rest of us, we became donors ages ago. You've been doing it for years. Don't you sometimes wish, Kath, they'd hurry up and send you your notice?"

I shrugged. "I don't mind. Anyway, it's important there are good carers. And I'm a good carer."

"But is it really that important? Okay, it's really nice to have a good carer. But in the end, is it really so important? The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they'll complete."

"Of course it's important. A good carer makes a big difference to what a donor's life's actually like."

"But all this rushing about you do. All this getting exhausted and being by yourself. I've been watching you. It's wearing you out. You must do, Kath, you must sometimes wish they'd tell you you can stop. I don't know why you don't have a word with them, ask them why it's been so long." Then when I kept quiet, he said: "I'm just saying, that's all. Let's not fight again."

I put my head on his shoulder and said: "Yeah, well. Maybe it won't be for much longer anyway. But for now, I have to keep going. Even if you don't want me around, there are others who do."

"I suppose you're right, Kath. You are a really good carer. You'd be the perfect one for me too if you weren't you." He did a laugh and put his arm round me, though we kept sitting side by side. Then he said: "I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it's just too much. The current's too strong. They've got to let go, drift apart. That's how I think it is with us. It's a shame, Kath, because we've

loved each other all our lives. But in the end, we can't stay together forever."

When he said this, I remembered the way I'd held onto him that night in the wind-swept field on the way back from Little-hampton. I don't know if he was thinking about that too, or if he was still thinking about his rivers and strong currents. In any case, we went on sitting like that on the side of the bed for a long time, lost in our thoughts. Then in the end I said to him:

"I'm sorry I blew up at you earlier. I'll talk to them. I'll try and see to it you get someone really good."

"It's a shame, Kath," he said again. And I don't think we talked any more about it that morning.

I remember the few weeks that came after that–the last few weeks before the new carer took over–as being surprisingly tranquil. Maybe Tommy and I were making a special effort to be nice to each other, but the time seemed to slip by in an almost carefree way. You might think there would have been an air of unreality about us being like that, but it didn't seem strange at the time. I was quite busy with a couple of my other donors in North Wales and that kept me from the Kingsfield more than I'd have wanted, but I still managed to come in three or four times a week. The weather grew colder, but stayed dry and often sunny, and we whiled away the hours in his room, sometimes having sex, more often just talking, or with Tommy listening to me read. Once or twice, Tommy even brought out his notebook and doodled away for new animal ideas while I read from the bed.

Then I came in one day and it was the last time. I arrived just after one o'clock on a crisp December afternoon. I went up to his room, half expecting some change–I don't know what. Maybe I thought he'd have put up decorations in his room or something. But of course, everything was as normal, and all in all, that was a relief. Tommy didn't look any different either, but when we started talking, it was hard to pretend this was just another visit. Then again, we'd talked over so much in the previous weeks, it wasn't as though we had anything in particular we had to get through. And I think we were reluctant to start any new conversation we'd regret not being able to finish properly. That's why there was a kind of emptiness to our talk that day.

Just once, though, after I'd been wandering aimlessly around his room for a while, I did ask him:

“Tommy, are you glad Ruth completed before finding out everything we did in the end?”

He was lying on the bed, and went on staring at the ceiling for a while before saying: “Funny, because I was thinking about the same thing the other day. What you've got to remember about Ruth, when it came to things like that, she was always different to us. You and me, right from the start, even when we were little, we were always trying to find things out. Remember, Kath, all those secret talks we used to have? But Ruth wasn't like that. She always wanted to believe in things. That was Ruth. So yeah, in a way, I think it's best the way it happened.” Then he added: “Of course, what we found out, Miss Emily, all of that, it doesn't change anything about Ruth. She wanted the best for us at the end. She really wanted the best for us.”

I didn't want to get into a big discussion about Ruth at that stage, so I just agreed with him. But now I've had more time to think about it, I'm not so sure how I feel. A part of me keeps wishing we'd somehow been able to share everything we discovered with Ruth. Okay, maybe it would have made her feel bad; made her see whatever damage she'd once done to us couldn't be repaired as easily as she'd hoped. And maybe, if I'm honest, that's a small part of my wishing she knew it all before she completed. But in the end, I think it's about something else, something much more than my feeling vengeful and mean-spirited. Because as Tommy said, she wanted the best for us at the end, and though she said that day in the car I'd never forgive her, she was wrong about that. I've got no anger left for her now. When I say I wish she'd found out the whole score, it's more because I feel sad at the idea of her finishing up different from me and Tommy. The way it is, it's like there's a line with us on one side and Ruth on the other, and when all's said and done, I feel sad about that, and I think she would too if she could see it.

Tommy and I, we didn't do any big farewell number that day. When it was time, he came down the stairs with me, which he didn't usually do, and we walked across the Square together to the car. Because of the time of year, the sun was already setting behind the buildings. There were a few shadowy figures, as usual, under the overhanging roof, but the Square itself was empty. Tommy was silent all the way to the car. Then he did a little laugh and said:

“You know, Kath, when I used to play football back at Hailsham. I had this secret thing I did. When I scored a goal, I'd turn round like this”–he raised both arms up in triumph–“and I'd run back to my mates. I never went mad or anything, just ran back with my arms up, like this.” He paused for a moment, his arms still in the air. Then he lowered them and smiled. “In my head, Kath, when I was running back, I always imagined I was splashing through

water. Nothing deep, just up to the ankles at the most. That's what I used to imagine, every time. Splash, splash, splash." He put his arms up again. "It felt really good. You've just scored, you turn, and then, splash, splash, splash." He looked at me and did another little laugh. "All this time, I never told a single soul."

I laughed too and said: "You crazy kid, Tommy."

After that, we kissed–just a small kiss–then I got into the car. Tommy kept standing there while I turned the thing round. Then as I pulled away, he smiled and waved. I watched him in my rear-view, and he was standing there almost till the last moment. Right at the end, I saw him raise his hand again vaguely and turn away towards the overhanging roof. Then the Square had gone from the mirror.

I was talking to one of my donors a few days ago who was complaining about how memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don't go along with that. The memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading. I lost Ruth, then I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them.

I suppose I lost Hailsham too. You still hear stories about some ex-Hailsham student trying to find it, or rather the place where it used to be. And the odd rumour will go round sometimes about what Hailsham's become these days–a hotel, a school, a ruin. Myself, for all the driving I do, I've never tried to find it. I'm not really interested in seeing it, whatever way it is now.

Mind you, though I say I never go looking for Hailsham, what I find is that sometimes, when I'm driving around, I suddenly think I've spotted some bit of it. I see a sports pavilion in the distance and I'm sure it's ours. Or a row of poplars on the horizon next to a big woolly oak, and I'm convinced for a second I'm coming up to the South Playing Field from the other side. Once, on a grey morning, on a long stretch of road in Gloucestershire, I passed a broken-down car in a lay-by, and I was sure the girl standing in front of it, gazing emptily out towards the on-coming vehicles, was Susanna C., who'd been a couple of years above us and one of the Sales monitors. These moments hit me when I'm least expecting it, when I'm driving with something else entirely in my mind. So maybe at some level, I am on the lookout for

Hailsham.

But as I say, I don't go searching for it, and anyway, by the end of the year, I won't be driving around like this any more. So the chances are I won't ever come across it now, and on reflection, I'm glad that's the way it'll be. It's like with my memories of Tommy and of Ruth. Once I'm able to have a quieter life, in whichever centre they send me to, I'll have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that'll be something no one can take away.

The only indulgent thing I did, just once, was a couple of weeks after I heard Tommy had completed, when I drove up to Norfolk, even though I had no real need to. I wasn't after anything in particular and I didn't go up as far as the coast. Maybe I just felt like looking at all those flat fields of nothing and the huge grey skies. At one stage I found myself on a road I'd never been on, and for about half an hour I didn't know where I was and didn't care. I went past field after flat, featureless field, with virtually no change except when occasionally a flock of birds, hearing my engine, flew up out of the furrows. Then at last I spotted a few trees in the distance, not far from the roadside, so I drove up to them, stopped and got out.

I found I was standing before acres of ploughed earth. There was a fence keeping me from stepping into the field, with two lines of barbed wire, and I could see how this fence and the cluster of three or four trees above me were the only things breaking the wind for miles. All along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. It was like the debris you get on a sea-shore: the wind must have carried some of it for miles and miles before finally coming up against these trees and these two lines of wire. Up in the branches of the trees, too, I could see, flapping about, torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags. That was the only time, as I stood there, looking at that strange rubbish, feeling the wind coming across those empty fields, that I started to imagine just a little fantasy thing, because this was Norfolk after all, and it was only a couple of weeks since I'd lost him. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave, maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that–I didn't let it–and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be.

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The Shout

Simon Armitage

We went out
into the school yard together, me and the boy
whose name and face

I don't remember. We were testing the range
of the human voice:
he had to shout for all he was worth

I had to raise an arm
from across the divide to signal back
that the sound had carried.

He called from over the park - I lifted an arm.
Out of bounds,
he yelled from the end of the road,

from the foot of the hill,
from beyond the look-out post of Fretwell's Farm -
I lifted an arm.

He left town, went on to be twenty years dead
with a gunshot hole
in the roof of his mouth, in Western Australia.

Boy with the name and face I don't remember,
you can stop shouting now, I can still hear you.