

The Wave

An Egyptian Aftermath

By Algernon Blackwood

PART I

CHAPTER I

Since childhood days he had been haunted by a Wave.

It appeared with the very dawn of thought, and was his earliest recollection of any vividness. It was also his first experience of nightmare a wave of an odd, dun colour, almost tawny, that rose behind him, advanced, curled over in the act of toppling, and then stood still. It threatened, but it did not fall. It paused, hovering in a position contrary to nature it waited.

Something prevented; it was not meant to fall; the right moment had not yet arrived.

If only it would fall! It swept across the skyline in a huge, long curve far overhead, hanging dreadfully suspended. Beneath his feet he felt the roots of it withdrawing; he shuffled furiously and made violent efforts; but the suction undermined him where he stood. The ground yielded and dropped away. He only sank in deeper. His entire weight became that of a feather against the gigantic tension of the mass that any moment, it seemed, must lift him in its rising curve, bend, break, and twist him, then fling him crashing forward to his smothering fate.

Yet the moment never came. The Wave hung balanced between him and the sky, poised in mid-air. It did not fall. And the torture of that infinite pause contained the essence of the nightmare.

The Wave invariably came up behind him, stealthily, from what seemed interminable distance. He never met it. It overtook him from the rear. The horizon hid it till it rose.

There were stages in its history, moreover, and in the effect it produced upon his early mind. Usually he woke up the moment he realised it was there. For it invariably announced its presence. He heard no sound, but knew that it was coming—there was a feeling in the atmosphere not unlike the heavy brooding that precedes a thunderstorm, only so different from anything he had yet known in life that his heart sank into his boots. He looked up. There, above his head was the huge, curved monster, hanging in mid-air. The mood had justified itself. He called it the ‘wavy feeling.’ He was never wrong about it.

The second stage was reached when, instead of trying to escape shorewards, where there were tufts of coarse grass upon a sandy bank, he turned and faced the thing. He looked straight into the main under-body of the poised billow. He saw the opaque mass out of which this line rose up and curved. He stared against the dull, dun-coloured parent body whence it came—the sea. Terrified yet fascinated, he examined it in detail, as a man about to be executed might examine the grain of the wooden block close against his eyes. A little higher, some dozen feet above the level of his head, it became transparent sunlight shot through the glassy curve. He saw what appeared to be streaks and bubbles and transverse lines of foam that yet did not shine quite as water shines. It moved suddenly; it curled a little towards the crest; it was about to topple over, to break—yet did not break.

About this time he noticed another thing there was a curious faint sweetness in the air beneath the bend of it, a delicate and indescribable odour that was almost perfume. It was sweet; it

choked him. He called it, in his boyish way, a whiff. The whiff and the 'wavy feeling' impressed themselves so vividly upon his mind that if ever he met them in his ordinary life—out of dream, that is—he was sure that he would know them. In another sense he felt he knew them already. They were familiar.

But another stage went further than all the others put together. It amounted to a discovery. He was perhaps ten years old at this time, for he was still addressed as 'Tommy,' and it was not till the age of fifteen that his solid type of character made 'Tom' seem more appropriate. He had just told the dream to his mother for the hundredth time, and she, after listening with sympathy, had made her ever-green suggestion—'If you dream of water, Tommy, it means you're thirsty in your sleep,'—when he turned and stared straight into her eyes with such intentness that she gave an involuntary start.

'But, mother, it *isn't* water!'

'Well, darling, if it isn't water, what is it, then?' She asked the question quietly enough, but she felt, apparently, something of the queer dismay that her boy felt too. It seemed the mother-sense was touched. The instinct to protect her offspring stirred uneasily in her heart. She repeated the question, interested in the old, familiar dream for the first time since she heard it several years before: 'If it isn't water, Tommy, what is it? What can it be?' His eyes, his voice, his manner—something she could not properly name—had startled her.

But Tommy noticed her slight perturbation, and knowing that a boy of his age did not frighten his mother without reason, or even with it, turned his eyes aside and answered:

'I couldn't tell. There wasn't time. You see, I woke up then.'

How curious, Tommy,' she rejoined. 'A wave is a wave, isn't it?'

And he answered thoughtfully 'Yes, mother; but there are lots of things besides water, aren't there?'

She assented with a nod, and a searching look at him which he purposely avoided. The subject dropped; no more was said; yet somehow from that moment his mother knew that this idea of a wave, whether it was nightmare or only dream, had to do with her boy's life in a way that touched the protective thing in her, almost to the point of positive defence. She could not explain it; she did not like it; instinct warned her—that was all she knew. And Tommy said no more. The truth was, indeed, that he did not know himself of what the Wave was composed. He could not have told his mother even had he considered it permissible. He would have loved to speculate and talk about it with her, but, having divined her nervousness, he knew he must not feed it. No boy should do such a thing.

Moreover, the interest he felt in the Wave was of such a deep, enormous character—the adjectives were his own—that he could not talk about it lightly. Unless to some one who showed genuine interest, he could not even mention it. To his brothers and sister, both older and younger than himself, he never spoke of it at all. It had to do with something so fundamental in him that it was sacred. The realisation of it, moreover, came and went, and often remained buried for weeks together; months passed without a hint of it; the nightmare disappeared. Then, suddenly, the feeling would surge over him, perhaps just as he was getting into bed, or saying his prayers, or thinking of quite other things. In the middle of a discussion with his brother about their air-guns and the water-rat they hadn't hit—up would steal the 'wavy' feeling with its dim, familiar menace. It stole in across his brother's excited words about the size and speed of the rat; interest in sport entirely vanished; he stared at Tim, not hearing a word he said; he dived into bed; he had to be alone with the great mood of wonder and terror that was rising. The approach was

unmistakable; he cuddled beneath the sheets, fighting-angry if Tim tried to win him back to the original interest. The dream was coming; and, sure enough, a little later in his sleep, it came.

For even at this stage of his development he recognised instinctively this special quality about it—that it could not, was not meant to be avoided. It was inevitable and right. It hurt, yet he must face it. It was as necessary to his well-being as having a tooth out. Nor did he ever seek to dodge it. His character was not the kind that flinched. The one thing he did ask was—to understand. Some day, he felt, this full understanding would come.

There arrived then a new and startling development in this curious obsession, the very night, Tommy claims, that there had been the fuss about the gun and water-rat, on the day before the conversation with his mother. His brother had plagued him to come out from beneath the sheets and go on with the discussion, and Tommy, furious at being disturbed in the ‘wavy’ mood he both loved and dreaded, had felt himself roused uncommonly. He silenced Tim easily enough with a smashing blow from a pillow, then, with a more determined effort than usual, buried himself to face the advent of the Wave. He fell asleep in the attempt, but the attempt bore fruit. He felt the great thing coming up behind him; he turned; he saw it with greater distinctness than ever before; almost he discovered of what it was composed.

That it was *not* water established itself finally in his mind; but more—he got very close to deciding its exact composition. He stared hard into the threatening mass of it; there was a certain transparency about the substance, yet this transparency was not clear enough for water there were particles, and these particles went drifting by the thousand, by the million, through the mass of it. They rose and fell, they swept along, they were very minute indeed, they whirled. They glistened, shimmered, flashed. He made a guess; he was just on the point of guessing right, in fact, when he saw another thing that for the moment obliterated all his faculties. There was both cold and heat in the sensation, fear and delight. It transfixed him. He saw eyes.

Steady, behind the millions of minute particles that whirled and drifted, he distinctly saw a pair of eyes of light-blue colour, and hardly had he registered this new discovery, when another pair, but of quite different kind, became visible beyond the first pair—dark, with a fringe of long, thick lashes. They were—he decided afterwards—what is called Eastern eyes, and they smiled into his own through half-closed lids. He thinks he made out a face that was dimly sketched behind them, but the whirling particles glistened and shimmered in such a confusing way that he could not swear to this. Of one thing only, or rather of two, did he feel quite positive: that the dark eyes were those of a woman, and that they were kind and beautiful and true: but that the pale-blue eyes were false, unkind, and treacherous, and that the face to which they belonged, although he could not see it, was a man’s. Dimly his boyish heart was aware of happiness and suffering. The heat and cold he felt, the joy and terror, were half explained. He stared. The whirling particles drifted past and hid them. He woke.

That day, however, the ‘wavy’ feeling hovered over him more or less continuously. The impression of the night held sway over all he did and thought. There was a kind of guidance in it somewhere. He obeyed this guidance as by an instinct he could not, dared not disregard, and towards dusk it led him into the quiet room overlooking the small Gardens at the back of the house, his father’s study. The room was empty; he approached the big mahogany cupboard; he opened one of the deep drawers where he knew his father kept gold and private things, and birthday or Christmas presents. But there was no dishonourable intention in him anywhere; indeed, he hardly knew exactly why he did this thing. The drawer, though moving easily, was heavy; he pulled hard; it slid out with a rush; and at that moment a stern voice sounded in the room behind him: ‘What are you doing at my Eastern drawer?’

Tommy, one hand still on the knob, turned as if he had been struck. He gazed at his father, but without a trace of guilt upon his face.

‘I wanted to see, Daddy.’

‘I’ll show you,’ said the stern-faced man, yet with kindness and humour in the tone. ‘It’s full of wonderful things. I’ve nothing secret from you; but another time you’d better ask first

‘I wanted to see,’ faltered the boy. ‘I don’t know why I did it. I just had a feeling. It’s the first time—*really*.’

The man watched him searchingly a moment, but without appearing to do so. A look of interest and understanding, wholly missed by the culprit, stole into his fine grey eyes. He smiled, then drew Tommy towards him, and gave him a kiss on the top of his curly head. He also smacked him playfully. ‘Curiosity,’ he said with pretended disapproval, ‘is divine, and at your age it is right that you should feel curiosity about everything in the world. But another time just ask me—and I’ll show you all I possess.’ He lifted his son in his arms, so that for the first time the boy could overlook the contents of the opened drawer. ‘So you just had a feeling, eh—?’ he continued, when Tommy wriggled in his arms, uttered a curious exclamation, and half collapsed. He seemed upon the verge of tears. An ordinary father must have held him guilty there and then. The boy cried out excitedly:

‘The whiff! Oh, Daddy, it’s my whiff!’

The tears, no longer to be denied, came freely then; after them came confession too, and confused though it was, the man made something approaching sense out of the jumbled utterance. It was not mere patient kindness on his part, for an older person would have seen that genuine interest lay behind the half-playful, half-serious cross-examination. He watched the boy’s eager, excited face out of the corner of his eyes; he put discerning questions to him, he assisted his faltering replies, and he obtained in the end the entire story of the dream—the eyes, the wavy feeling, and the whiff. How much coherent meaning he discovered in it all is hard to say, or whether the story he managed to disentangle held together. There was this strange deep feeling in the boy, this strong emotion, this odd conviction amounting to an obsession; and so far as could be discovered, it was not traceable to any definite cause that Tommy could name—a fright, a shock, a vivid impression of one kind or another upon a sensitive young imagination. It lay so deeply in his being that its roots were utterly concealed; but it was real.

Dr. Kelder established the existence in his second boy of an unalterable premonition, and, being a famous nerve specialist, and a disciple of Freud into the bargain, he believed that a premonition has a cause, however primitive, however carefully concealed that cause may be. He put the boy to bed himself and tucked him up, told Tim that if he teased his brother too much he would smack him with his best Burmese slipper which had tiny nails in it, and then whispered into Tommy’s ear as he cuddled down, happy and comforted, among the blankets: ‘Don’t make a special effort to dream, my boy; but if you do dream, try to remember it next morning, and tell me exactly what you see and feel.’ He used the Freudian method.

Then, going down to his study again, he looked at the open drawer and sniffed the faint perfume of things—chiefly from Egypt—that lay inside it. But there was nothing of special interest in the drawer; indeed, it was one he had not touched for years. He went over one by one a few of the articles, collected from various points of travel long ago. There were bead necklaces from Memphis, some trash from a mummy of doubtful authenticity, including several amulets and a crumbling fragment of old papyrus, and, among all this, a tiny packet of incense mixed from a recipe said to have been found in a Theban tomb. All these, jumbled together in pieces of tissue-paper, had lain undisturbed since the day he wrapped them up some dozen years before—

indeed he heard the dry rattle of the falling sand as he undid the tissue-paper. But a strong perfume rose from the parcel to his nostrils. 'That's what Tommy means by his whiff,' he said to himself. 'That's Tommy's whiff beyond all question. I wonder how he got it first?'

He remembered, then, that he had made a note of the story connected with the incense, and after some rummaging he found the envelope and read the account jotted down at the time. He had meant to hand it over to a literary friend—the tale was so poignantly human—then had forgotten all about it. The papyrus, dating over 3000 B.C., had many gaps. The Egyptologist had admittedly filled in considerable blanks in the afflicting story

'A victorious Theban General, Prince of the blood, brought back a Syrian youth from one of his foreign conquests and presented him to his young wife who, first mothering him for his beauty, then made him her personal slave, and ended by caring deeply for him. The slave, in return, loved her with passionate adoration he was unable to conceal. As a Lady of the Court, her quasi-adoption of the youth caused comment. Her husband ordered his dismissal. But she still made his welfare her especial object, finding frequent reasons for their meeting. One day, however, her husband caught them together, though their meeting was in innocence. He half strangled the youth, till the blood poured down upon his own hands, then had him flogged and sent away to On, the City of the Sun.

'The Syrian found his way back again, vengeance in his fiery blood. The clandestine yet innocent meetings were renewed. Rank was forgotten. They met among the sand-dunes in the desert behind the city where a pleasure tent among a grove of palms provided shelter, and the slave losing his head, urged the Princess to fly with him. Yet the wife, true to her profligate and brutal husband, refused his plea, saying she could only give a mother's love, a mother's care. This he rejected bitterly, accusing her of trifling with him. He grew bolder and more insistent. To divert her husband's violent suspicions she became purposely cruel, even ordering him punishments. But the slave misinterpreted. Finally, warning him that if caught he would be killed, she devised a plan to convince him of her sincerity. Hiding him behind the curtains of her tent, she pleaded with her husband for the youth's recall, swearing that she meant no wrong. But the soldier, in his fury, abused and struck her, and the slave, unable to contain himself, rushed out of his hiding-place and stabbed him, though not mortally. He was condemned to death by torture. She was to be chief witness against him.

'Meanwhile, having extracted a promise from her husband that the torture should not be carried to the point of death, she conveyed word to the victim that he should endure bravely, knowing that he would not die. She now realised that she loved. She promised to fly with him.

'The sentence was duly carried out, the slave only half believing in her truth. It was a public holiday in Thebes. She was compelled to see the punishment inflicted before the crowd. There were a thousand drums. A sand-storm hid the sun.

'Seated beside her husband on a terrace above the Nile, she watched the torture—then knew she had been tricked. But the Syrian did not know; he believed her false. As he expired, casting his last glance of anguish and reproach at her, she rose, leaped the parapet, flung herself into the river, and was drowned. The husband had their bodies thrown into the sea, unburied. The same wave took them both. Later, however, they were recovered by influential friends; they were embalmed, and secretly laid to rest in his ancestral Tomb in the Valley of the Kings among the Theban Hills. In due course the husband, unwittingly, was buried with them.

'Nearly five thousand years later all three mummies were discovered lying side by side, their story inscribed upon a papyrus inside the great sarcophagus.'

Dr. Kelderdon glanced through the story he had forgotten, then tore it into little pieces and threw them into the fireplace. For a moment longer, however, he stood beside the open drawer reflectingly. Had he ever told *the* tale to Tommy? No; it was hardly likely; indeed it was impossible. The boy was not born even when first he heard it. To his wife, then? Less likely still. He could not remember, anyhow. The faint suggestion in his mind—a story communicated pre-natally—was not worth following up. He dismissed the matter from his thoughts. He closed the drawer and turned away. The little packet of incense, however, taken from the Tomb, he did not destroy. ‘I’ll give it to Tommy,’ he decided. ‘Its whiff may possibly stimulate him into explanation!’

CHAPTER II

As a result of having told everything to his father, Tommy’s nightmare, however, largely ceased to trouble him. He had found the relief of expression, which is confession, and had laid upon the older mind the burden of his terror. Once a month, once a week, or even daily if he wanted to, he could repeat the expression as the need for it accumulated, and the load which decency forbade being laid upon his mother, the stern-faced man could carry easily for him.

The comfortable sensation that forgiveness is the completion of confession invaded his awakening mind, and had he been older this thin end of a religious wedge might have persuaded him to join what his mother called that ‘vast conspiracy.’ But even at this early stage there was something stalwart and self-reliant in his cast of character that resisted the cunning sophistry; vicarious relief woke resentment in him; he meant to face his troubles alone. So far as he knew, he had not sinned, yet the Wave, the Whiff, the Eyes were symptoms of some fate that threatened him, a premonition of something coming that he must meet with his own strength, something that he could only deal with effectively alone, since it was deserved and just. One day the Wave would fall; his father could not help him then. This instinct in him remained unassailable. He even began to look forward to the time when it should come—to have done with it and get it over, conquering or conquered.

The premonition, that is, while remaining an obsession as before, transferred itself from his inner to his outer life. The nightmare, therefore, ceased. The menacing interest, however, held unchanged. Though the name had not hitherto occurred to him, he became a fatalist. ‘It’s got to come; I’ve got to meet it. I will.’

‘Well, Tommy,’ his father would ask from time to time, ‘been dreaming anything lately?’

‘Nothing, Daddy. It’s all stopped.’

‘Wave, eyes, and whiff all forgotten, eh?’

Tommy shook his head. ‘They’re still there,’ he answered slowly, ‘but——’ He seemed unable to complete the sentence. His father helped him at a venture.

‘But they can’t catch you—is that it?’

The boy looked up with a dogged expression in his big grey eyes. ‘I’m ready for them,’ he replied. And his father laughed and said, ‘Of course. That’s half the battle.’

He gave him a present then—one of the packets of tissue-paper—and Tommy took it in triumph to his room. He opened it in private, but the contents seemed to him without especial interest. Only the Whiff was, somehow, sweet and precious; and he kept the packet in a drawer apart where the fossils and catapult and air-gun ammunition could not interfere with it, hiding the key so that Tim and the servants could not find it. And on rare occasions, when the rest of the

household was asleep, he performed a little ritual of his own that, for a boy of his years, was distinctly singular.

When the room was dark, lit in winter by the dying fire, or in summer by the stars, he would creep out of bed, make quite sure that Tim was asleep, stand on a chair to reach the key from the top of the big cupboard, and carefully unlock the drawer. He had oiled the wood with butter, so that it was silent. The tissue-paper gleamed dimly pink; the Whiff came out to meet him. He lifted the packet, soft and crackling, and set it on the window-sill; he did not open it; its contents had no interest for him, it was the perfume he was after. And the moment the perfume reached his nostrils there came a trembling over him that he could not understand. He both loved and dreaded it. This manly, wholesome-minded, plucky little boy, the basis of whose steady character was common sense, became the prey of a strange, unreasonable fantasy. A faintness stole upon him; he lost the sense of kneeling on a solid chair something immense and irresistible came piling up behind him; there was nothing firm he could push against to save himself; he began shuffling with his bare feet, struggling to escape from something that was coming, something that would probably overwhelm him yet must positively be faced and battled with. The Wave was rising. It was the wavy feeling.

He did not turn to look, because he knew quite well there was nothing in the room but beds, a fender, furniture, vague shadows and his brother Tim. That kind of childish fear had no place in what he felt. But the Wave was piled and curving over none the less; it hung between him and the shadowed ceiling, above the roof of the house; it came from beyond the world, far overhead against the crowding stars. It would not break, for the time had not yet come. But it was there. It waited. He knelt beneath its mighty shadow of advance; it was still arrested, poised above his eager life, competent to engulf him when the time arrived. The sweep of its curved mass was mountainous. He knelt inside this curve, small, helpless, but not too afraid to fight. The perfume stole about him. The Whiff was in his nostrils. There was a strange, rich pain—oddly remote, yet oddly poignant. . . .

And it was with this perfume that the ritual chiefly had to do. He loved the extraordinary sensations that came with it, and tried to probe their meaning in his boyish way. Meaning there was, but it escaped him. The sweetness clouded something in his brain, and made his muscles weak; it robbed him of that resistance which is fighting strength. It was this battle that he loved, this sense of shoving against something that might so easily crush and finish him. There *was* a way to beat it, a way to win—could he but discover it. As yet he could not. Victory, he felt, lay more in yielding and going-with than in violent resistance.

And, meanwhile in an ecstasy of this half yielding, half resisting, he lent himself fully to the overmastering tide. He was conscious of attraction and repulsion, something that enticed, yet thrust him backwards. Some final test of manhood, character, value, lay in the way he faced it. The strange, rich pain stole marvellously into his blood and nerves. His heart beat faster. There was this exquisite seduction that contained delicious danger. It rose upon him out of some inner depth he could not possibly get at. He trembled with mingled terror and delight. And it invariably ended with a kind of inexpressible yearning that choked him, crumpled him inwardly, as he described it, brought the moisture, hot and smarting, into his burning eyes, and—each time to his bitter shame—left his cheeks wet with scalding tears.

He cried silently; there was no heaving, gulping, audible sobbing, just a relieving gush of heartfelt tears that took away the strange, rich pain and brought the singular ritual to a finish. He replaced the tissue-paper, blotted with his tears; locked the drawer carefully; hid the key on the top of the cupboard again, and tumbled back into bed.

Downstairs, meanwhile, a conversation was in progress concerning the welfare of the growing hero.

'I'm glad that dream has left him anyhow. It used to frighten me rather. I did *not* like it,' observed his mother.

'He doesn't speak to you about it any more?' the father asked.

For months, she told him, Tommy had not mentioned it. They went on to discuss his future together. The other children presented fewer problems, but Tommy, apparently, felt no particular call to any profession.

'It will come with a jump,' the doctor inclined to think. 'He's been on the level for some time now. Suddenly he'll grow up and declare his mighty mind.'

Father liked humour in the gravest talk; indeed the weightier the subject, the more he valued a humorous light upon it. The best judgment, he held, was shaped by humour, sense of proportion lost without it. His wife, however, thought 'it a pity.' Grave things she liked grave.

'There's something very deep in Tommy,' she observed, as though he were developing a hidden malady.

'Hum,' agreed her husband. 'His subconscious content is unusual, both in kind and quantity.' His eyes twinkled. 'It's possible he may turn out an artist, or a preacher. If the former, I'll bet his output will be original; and, as for the latter'—he paused a second—'he's too logical and too fearless to be orthodox. Already he thinks things out for himself.'

'I should like to see him in the Church, though,' said Mother. 'He would do a lot of good. But he *is* uncompromising, rather.'

'His honesty certainly is against him,' sighed his father. 'What do you think he asked me the other day?'

'I'm sure I don't know, John.' The answer completed itself with the unspoken 'He never asks *me* anything now.'

'He came straight up to me and said, "Father, is it good to feel pain? To let it come, I mean, or try to dodge it?"'

'Had he hurt himself?' the woman asked quickly. It seemed she winced.

'Not physically. He had been feeling something inside. He wanted to know how "a man" should meet the case.'

'And what did you tell him, dear?'

'That pain was usually a sign of growth, to be understood, accepted, faced. That most pain was cured in that way—'

'He didn't tell you what had hurt him?' she interrupted.

'Oh, I didn't ask him. He'd have shut up like a clam. Tommy likes to deal with things alone in his own way. He just wanted to know if his way was—well, *my* way.'

There fell a pause between them; then Mother, without looking up, enquired: 'Have you noticed Lettice lately? She's here a good deal now.'

But her husband only smiled, making no direct reply. 'Tommy will have a hard time of it when he falls in love,' he remarked presently. 'He'll know the real thing and won't stand any nonsense just as I did.' Whereupon his wife informed him that if he was not careful he would simply ruin the boy—and the brief conversation died away of its own accord. As she was leaving the room a little later, unsatisfied but unaggressive, he asked her 'Have you left the picture books, my dear?' and she pointed to an ominous heap upon the table in the window, with the remark that Jane had 'unearthed every book that Tommy had set eyes upon since he was three. You'll find everything

that's ever interested him,' she added as she went out, every picture, that is—and I suppose it is the pictures that you want.

For an hour and a half the great specialist turned pages without ceasing—well-thumbed pages; torn, crumpled, blotted, painted pages. It was easy to discover the boy's favourite pictures; and all were commonplace enough, the sort that any normal, adventure-loving boy would find delightful. But nothing of special significance resulted from the search; nothing that might account for the recurrent nightmare, nothing in the way of eyes or wave. He had already questioned Jane as to what stories she told him, and which among them he liked best. 'Hunting or travel or collecting,' Jane had answered, and it was about 'collecting that he asks most questions. What kind of collecting, sir? Oh, treasure or rare beetles mostly, and sometimes—just bones.'

'Bones! What kind of bones?'

'The villin's, sir,' explained the frightened Jane. 'He always likes the villin to get lost, and for the jackals to pick his bones in the desert—'

'Any particular desert?'

'No, sir; just desert.'

'Ah—just desert! Any old desert, eh?'

'I think so, sir—as long as it *is* desert.'

Dr. Kelderdon put the woman at her ease with the humorous smile that made all the household love—and respect—him; then asked another question, as if casually: Had she ever told him a story in which a wave or a pair of eyes were in any way conspicuous?

'No, never, sir,' replied the honest Jane, after careful reflection. 'Nor I wouldn't,' she added, 'because my father he was drowned in a tidal wave; and as for eyes, I know that's wrong for children, and I wouldn't tell Master Tommy such a thing for all the world—'

'Because?' enquired the doctor kindly, seeing her hesitation.

'I'd be frightening myself, sir, and he'd make such fun of me,' she finally confessed.

No, it was clear that the nurse was not responsible for the vivid impression in Tommy's mind which bore fruit in so strange a complex of emotions. Nor were other lines of enquiry more successful. There was a cause, of course, but it would remain unascertainable unless some clue offered itself by chance. Both the doctor and the father in him were pledged to a persistent search that was prolonged over several months, but without result. The most perplexing element in the problem seemed to him the whiff. The association of terror with a wave needed little explanation; the introduction of the eyes, however, was puzzling, unless some story of a drowning man was possibly the clue; but the addition of a definite odour, an Eastern odour, moreover, with which the boy could hardly have become yet acquainted,—this combination of the three accounted for the peculiar interest in the doctor's mind.

Of one thing alone did he feel reasonably certain: the impression had been printed upon the deepest part of Tommy's being, the very deepest; it arose from those unplumbed profundities—though a scientist, he considered them unfathomable—of character and temperament whence emerge the most primitive of instincts,—the generative and creative instinct, choice of a mate, natural likes and dislikes,—the bed-rock of the nature. A girl was in it somewhere, somehow. . . .

Midnight had sounded from the stable clock in the mews when he stole up into the boys' room and cautiously approached the yellow iron bed where Tommy lay. The reflection of a street electric light just edged his face. He was sound asleep—with tear-stains marked clearly on the cheek not pressed into the pillow. Dr. Kelderdon paused a moment, looked round the room, shading the candle with one hand. He saw no photograph, no pictures anywhere. Then he sniffed.

There was a faint and delicate perfume in the air. He recognised it. He stood there, thinking deeply.

‘Lettice Aylmer,’ he said to himself presently as he went softly out again to seek his own bed; ‘I’ll try Lettice. It’s just possible. . . . Next time I see her I’ll have a little talk.’ For he suddenly remembered that Lettice Aylmer, his daughter’s friend and playmate, had very large and beautiful dark eyes.

CHAPTER III

Lettice Aylmer, daughter of the Irish Member of Parliament, did not provide the little talk that he anticipated, however, because she went back to her Finishing School abroad. Dr. Kolverdon was sorry when he heard it. So was Tommy. She was to be away a year at least. ‘I must remember to have a word with her when she comes back,’ thought the father, and made a note of it in his diary twelve months ahead. ‘Three hundred and sixty-five days,’ thought Tommy, and made a private calendar of his own.

It seemed an endless, zodiacal kind of period; he counted the days, a sheet of foolscap paper for each month, and at the bottom of each sheet two columns showing the balance of days gone and days to come. Tuesday, when he had first seen her, was underlined, and each Tuesday had a number attached to it, giving the total number of weeks since that wonderful occasion. But Saturdays were printed. On Saturday Lettice had spoken to him; she had smiled, and the words were, ‘Don’t forget me, Tommy!’ And Tommy, looking straight into her great dark eyes, that seemed to him more tender even than his mother’s, had stammered a reply that he meant with literal honesty: ‘I won’t—never . . .’; and she was gone . . . to France . . . across the sea.

She took his soul away with her, leaving him behind to pore over his father’s big atlas and learn French sentences by heart. It seemed the only way. Life had begun, and he must be prepared. Also, his career was chosen. For Lettice had said another thing—one other thing. When Mary, his sister, introduced him, ‘This is Tommy,’ Lettice looked down and asked: ‘Are you going to be an engineer?’ adding proudly, ‘My brother is.’ Before he could answer she was scampering away with Mary, the dark hair flying in a cloud, the bright bow upon it twinkling like a star in heaven—and Tommy, hating his ridiculous boyish name with an intense hatred, stood there trembling, but aware that the die was cast—he was going to be an engineer.

Trembling, yes; for he felt dazed and helpless, caught in a mist of fire and gold, the furniture whirling round him, and something singing wildly in his heart. Two things, each containing in them the essence of genuine shock, had fallen upon him: shock, because there was impetus in them as of a blow. They had been coming; they had reached him. There was no doubt or question possible. He staggered from the impact. Joy and terror touched him; at one and the same moment he felt the enticement and the shrinking of his dream. . . . He longed to seize her and prevent her ever going away, yet also he wanted to push her from him as though she somehow caused him pain.

For, on the two occasions when speech had taken place between himself and Lettice, the dream had transferred itself boldly into his objective life—yet not entirely. Two characteristics only had been thus transferred. When his sister first came into the hall with ‘This is Tommy,’ the wavy feeling had already preceded her by a definite interval that was perhaps a second by the watch. He was aware of it behind him, curved and risen—not curving, rising—from the open fireplace, but also from the woods behind the house, from the whole of the country right back to the coast, from across the world, it seemed, towering overhead against the wintry sky. And when Lettice

smiled and asked that question of childish admiration about being an engineer, he was already shuffling furiously with his feet upon the Indian rug. She was gone again, luckily, he hoped, before the ridiculous pantomime was noticeable.

He saw her once or twice. He was invariably speechless when she came into his presence, and his silence and awkwardness made him appear at great disadvantage. He seemed intentionally rude. Nervous self-consciousness caused him to bridle over nothing. Even to answer her was a torture. He dreaded a snub appallingly, and bridled in anticipation. Furious with himself for his inability to use each precious opportunity, he pretended he didn't care. The consequence was that when she once spoke to him sweetly, he was too overpowered to respond as he might have done. That she had not even noticed his anguished attitude never occurred to him.

'We're always friends, aren't we, Tommy?'

'Rather,' he blurted, before he could regain his composure for a longer sentence.

'And always will be, won't we?'

'Rather,' he repeated, cursing himself later for thinking of nothing better to say. Then, just as she flew off in that dancing way of hers, he found his tongue. Out of the jumbled mass of phrases in his head three words got loose and offered themselves: 'We'll always be!' he flung at her retreating figure of intolerable beauty. And she turned her head over her shoulder, waved her hand without stopping her career, and shouted 'Rather!'

That was the Tuesday in his calendar. But on Saturday, the printed Saturday following it, the second characteristic of his dream announced itself: he recognised the Eyes. Why he had not recognised them on the Tuesday lay beyond explanation; he only knew it was so. And afterwards, when he tried to think it over, it struck him that she had scampered out of the hall with peculiar speed and hurry; had made her escape without the extra word or two the occasion naturally demanded—almost as though she, too, felt something that uneasily surprised her.

Tommy wondered about it till his head spun round. She, too, had received an impact that was shock. He was as thorough about it as an instinctive scientist. He also registered this further fact—that the dream-details had not entirely reproduced themselves in the affair. There was no trace of the Whiff or of the other pair of Eyes. Some day the three would come together; but then. . . .

The main thing, however, undoubtedly was this: Lettice felt something too: she was aware of feelings similar to his own. He was too honest to assume that she felt exactly what he felt; he only knew that her eyes betrayed familiar intimacy when she said 'Don't forget me, Tommy,' and that when she rushed out of the hall with that unnecessary abruptness it was because—well, he could only transfer to her some degree of the 'wavy' feeling in himself.

And he fell in love with abandonment and a delicious, infinite yearning. From that moment he thought of himself as Tom instead of Tommy.

It was an entire, sweeping love that left no atom or corner of his being untouched. Lettice was real; she hid below the horizon of distant France, yet could not, did not, hide from him. She also waited.

He knew the difference between real and unreal people. The latter wavered about his life and were uncertain; sometimes he liked them, sometimes he did not; but the former—remained fixed quantities: he could not alter towards them. Even at this stage he knew when a person came into his life to stay, or merely to pass out again. Lettice, though seen but twice, belonged to this first category. His feeling for her had the Wave in it; it gathered weight and mass, it was irresistible. From the dim, invisible foundations of his life it came, out of the foundations of the world, out of

that inexhaustible sea-foundation that lay below everything. It was real; it was not to be avoided. He knew. He persuaded himself that she knew too.

And it was then, realising for the first time the searching pain of being separated from something that seemed part of his being by natural right, he spoke to his father and asked if pain should be avoided. This conversation has been already sufficiently recorded; but he asked other things as well. From being so long on the level he had made a sudden jump that his father had foretold; he grew up; his mind began to think; he had peered into certain books; he analysed. Out of the nonsense of his speculative reflections the doctor pounced on certain points that puzzled him completely. Probing for the repressed elements in the boy's psychic life that caused the triple complex of Wave and Eyes and Whiff, he only saw the cause receding further and further from his grasp until it finally lost itself in ultimate obscurity. The disciple of Freud was baffled hopelessly. . . .

Tom, meanwhile, bathed in a sea of new sensations. Distance held meaning for him, separation was a kind of keen starvation. He made discoveries—watched the moon rise, heard the wind, and knew the stars shone over the meadows below the house, things that before had been merely commonplace. He pictured these details as they might occur in France, and once when he saw a Swallow Tail butterfly, knowing that the few English specimens were said to have crossed the Channel, he had a touch of ecstasy, as though the proud insect brought him a message from the fields below the Finishing School. Also he read French books and found the language difficult but exquisite. All sweet and lovely things came from France, and at school he attempted violent friendships with three French boys and the Foreign Language masters, friendships that were not appreciated because they were not understood. But he made progress with the language, and it stood him in good stead in his examinations. He was aiming now at an Engineering College. He passed in—eventually—brilliantly enough.

Before that satisfactory moment, however, he knew difficult times. His inner life was in a splendid tumult. From the books he purloined he read a good many facts concerning waves and wave-formation. He learned, among other things, that all sensory impressions reached the nerves by impact of force in various wave-lengths; heat, light and sound broke upon the skin and eyes and ears in vibrations of ether or air that advanced in steady series of wavy formations which, though not quite similar to his dream-wave, were akin to it. Sensation, which is life, was thus linked on to his deepest, earliest memory.

A wave, however, instantly rejoined the parent stock and formed again. And perhaps it was the repetition of the wave—its forming again and breaking again—that impressed him most. For he imagined his impulses, emotions, tendencies all taking this wave-form, sweeping his moods up to a certain point, then dropping back into his centre—the Sea, he called it—which held steady below all temporary fluctuations—only to form once more and happen all over again.

With his moral and spiritual life it was similar a wind came, wind of desire, wind of yearning, wind of hope, and he felt his strength accumulating, rising, bending with power upon the object that he had in view. To take that object exactly at the top of the wave was to achieve success; to miss that moment was to act with a receding and diminishing power, to dissipate himself in foam and spray before he could retire for a second rise. He saw existence as a wave. Life itself was a wave that rose, swept, curved, and finally—must break.

He merely visualised these feelings into pictures he did not think them out, nor get them into words. The wave became symbolic to him of all life's energies. It was the way in which all sensation expressed itself. Lettice was the high-water mark on shore he longed to reach and

sweep back into his own tumultuous being. In that great underneath, the Sea, they belonged eternally together.

One thing, however, troubled him exceedingly: he read that a wave was a segment of a circle, the perfect form, yet that it never completed itself. The ground on which it broke prevented the achievement of the circle. That, he felt, was a pity, and might be serious; there was always that sinister retirement for another effort that yet never did, and never could, result in complete achievement. He watched the waves a good deal on the shore, when occasion offered in the holidays—they came from France!—and made a discovery on his own account that was not mentioned in any of the books. And it was this: that the top of the wave, owing to its curve, was reflected in the under part. Its end, that is, was foretold in its beginning.

There was a want of scientific accuracy here, a confusion of time and space, perhaps, yet he noticed the idea and registered the thrill. At the moment when the wave was poised to fall its crest shone reflected in the base from which it rose.

But the more he watched the waves on the shore, the more puzzled he became. They seemed merely a movement of the sea itself. They endlessly repeated themselves. They had no true, separate existence until they—broke. Nor could he determine whether the crest or the base was the beginning, for the two ran along together, and what was above one minute was below the minute after. Which part started first he never could decide. The head kept chasing the tail in an effort to join up. Only when a wave broke and fell was it really—a wave. It had to ‘happen’ to earn its name.

There were ripples too. These indicated the direction of the parent wave upon whose side they happened, but not its purpose. Moods were ripples: they varied the surface of life but did not influence its general direction.

His own life followed a similar behaviour; he was full of ripples that were for ever trying to complete themselves by happening in acts. But the main Wave was the thing—end and beginning sweeping along together, both at the same time somehow. That is, he knew the end and could foretell it. It rose from the great ‘beneath’ which was the sea in him. It must topple over in the end and complete itself. He knew it would; he knew it would hurt; he knew also that he would not shirk it when it came. For it was a repetition somehow.

‘I jolly well mean to enjoy the smash,’ he felt. ‘I know one pair of Eyes already; there’s only the Whiff and the other Eyes to come. The moment I find them, I’ll go bang into it.’ He experienced a delicious shiver at the prospect.

One thing, however, remained uncertain: the stuff the Wave was made of. Once he discovered that, he would discover also—*where* the smash would come.

CHAPTER IV

‘Can a chap feel things coming?’ he asked his father. He was perhaps fifteen or sixteen then. ‘I mean, when you feel them coming, does that mean they *must* come?’

His father listened warily. There had been many similar questions lately.

‘You can feel ordinary things coming,’ he replied; ‘things due to association of ideas.’

Tom looked up. ‘Association?’ he queried uncertainly.

‘If you feel hungry,’ explained the doctor, ‘you know that dinner’s coming; you associate the hunger with the idea of eating. You recognise them because you’ve felt them both together before.’

‘They *ought* to come, then?’

‘Dinner does come—ordinarily speaking. You’ve learned to expect it from the hunger. You could, of course, prevent it coming,’ he added dryly, ‘only that would be bad for you. You need it.’

Tom reflected a moment with a puckered face. His father waited for him to ask more, hoping he would. The boy felt the sympathy and invitation.

‘*Before*,’ he repeated, picking out the word with sudden emphasis, his mind evidently breaking against a problem. ‘But if I felt hungry for something I *hadn’t* had before—?’

‘In that case you wouldn’t call it hunger. You wouldn’t know what to call it. You’d feel a longing of some kind and would wonder what it meant.’

Tom’s next words surprised him considerably. They came promptly, but with slow and thoughtful emphasis.

‘So that if I know what I want, and call it dinner, or pain, or—love, or something,’ he exclaimed, ‘it means that I’ve had it *before*? And that’s why I know it.’ The last five words were not a question but a statement of fact apparently.

The doctor pretended not to notice the variants of dinner. At least he did not draw attention to them.

‘Not necessarily,’ he answered. ‘The things you feel you want may be the things that everybody wants—things common to the race. Such wants are naturally in your blood; you feel them because your parents, your grandparents, and all humanity in turn behind your own particular family have always wanted them.’

‘They come out of the sea, you mean?’

‘That’s very well expressed, Tom. They come out of the sea of human nature, which is everywhere the same, yes.’

The compliment seemed to annoy the boy.

‘Of course,’ he said bluntly. ‘But—if it hurts?’ The words were sharply emphasised.

‘Association of ideas again. Toothache suggests the pincers. You want to get rid of the pain, but the pain has to get worse before it can get better. You know that, so you face it gladly—to get it over.’

‘You face it, yes,’ said Tom. ‘It makes you better in the end.’

It suddenly dawned upon him that his learned father knew nothing, nothing at least that could help him. He knew only what other people knew. He turned then, and asked the ridiculous question that lay at the back of his mind all the time. It cost him an effort, for his father would certainly deem it foolish.

‘Can a thing happen before it really happens?’

Dr. Kelderon may or may not have thought the question foolish; his face was hidden a moment as he bent down to put the Indian rug straight with his hand. There was no impatience in the movement, nor was there mockery in his expression, when he resumed his normal position. He had gained an appreciable interval of time—some fifteen seconds. ‘Tom, you’ve got good ideas in that head of yours,’ he said calmly; ‘but what is it that you mean exactly?’

Tom was quite ready to amplify. He knew what he meant:

‘If I *know* something is going to happen, doesn’t that mean that it has already happened—and that I remember it?’

‘You’re a psychologist as well as engineer, Tom,’ was the approving reply. ‘It’s like this, you see an emotion, with desire in it, can predict the fulfilment of that desire. In great hunger you imagine you’re eating all sorts of good things.’

‘But that’s looking forward’; the boy pounced on the mistake. ‘It’s not remembering.’

‘That *is* the difficulty,’ explained his father; ‘to decide whether you’re anticipating only—or actually remembering.’

‘I see,’ Tom said politely.

All this analysis concealed merely: it did not reveal. The thing itself dived deeper out of sight with every phrase. *He* knew quite well the difference between anticipating and remembering. With the latter there was the sensation of having been through it. Each time he remembered seeing Lettice the sensation was the same, but when he looked forward to seeing her *again* the sensation varied with his mood.

For instance, Tom—between ourselves this—we’re going to send Mary to that Finishing School in France where Lettice is.’ The doctor, it seemed, spoke carelessly while he gathered his papers together with a view to going out. He did not look at the boy; he said it walking about the room. ‘Mary will look forward to it and think about it so much that when she gets there it will seem a little familiar to her, as if—almost as if she remembered it.’

‘Thank you, father; I see, yes,’ murmured Tom. But in his mind a voice said so distinctly ‘Rot!’ that he was half afraid the word was audible.

‘You see the difficulty, eh? And the difference?’

‘Rather,’ exclaimed the boy with decision.

And thereupon, without the slightest warning, he looked out of the window and asked certain other questions. Evidently they cost him effort; his will forced them out. Since his back was turned he did not see his father’s understanding smile, but neither did the latter see the lad’s crimson cheeks, though possibly he divined them.

‘Father—is Miss Aylmer older than me?’

‘Ask Mary, Tom. She’ll know. Or, stay—I’ll ask her for you—if you like.’

‘Oh, that’s all right. I just wanted to know,’ with an assumed indifference that barely concealed the tremor in the voice.

‘I suppose,’ came a moment later, ‘a Member of Parliament is a grander thing than a doctor, is it?’

‘That depends,’ replied his father, ‘upon the man himself. Some M.P.’s vote as they’re told, and never open their mouths in the House. Some doctors, again—’

But the boy interrupted him. He quite understood the point.

‘It’s fine to be an engineer, though, isn’t it?’ he asked. ‘It’s a real profession?’

‘The world couldn’t get along without them, or the Government either. It’s a most important profession indeed.’

Tom, playing idly with the swinging tassel of the window-blind, asked one more question. His voice and manner were admirably under control, but there *was* a gulp, and his father heard and noted it.

‘Shall I have—shall I be rich enough—to marry—some day?’

Dr. Kelverdon crossed the room and put his hand on his son’s shoulder, but did not try to make him show his face. ‘Yes,’ he said quietly, ‘you will, my boy—when the time comes.’ He paused a moment, then added: ‘But money will not make you a distinguished man, whereas if you become a famous engineer, you’ll have money of your own and—any nice girl would be proud to have you.’

‘I see,’ said Tom, tying the strings of the tassel into knots, then untying them again with a visible excess of energy—and the conversation came somewhat abruptly to an end. He was aware of the invitation to talk further about Lettice Aylmer, but he resisted and declined it. What was the use. He knew his own mind already about *that*.

Yet, strictly speaking, Tom was not imaginative. It was as if an instinct taught him. More and more, the Wave, with its accompanying details of Eyes and Whiff seemed to him the ghost of some dim memory that brought a forgotten warning in its train—something missed, something to be repeated, something to be faced and learned and—mastered. .

His father, meanwhile, went forth upon his rounds that day, much preoccupied about the character of his eldest boy. He felt a particular interest in the peculiar obsession that he knew overshadowed the young, growing life. It puzzled him; he found no clue to it; in his thought he was aware of a faint uneasiness, although he did not give it a definite name—something akin to what the mother felt. Admitting he was baffled, he fell back, however, upon such generalities as prenatal influence, ancestral, racial, and so eventually dismissed it from his active mind.

Tom, meanwhile, for his part, also went along his steep, predestined path. The nightmare had entirely deserted him, he now rarely dreamed; and his outer life shaped bravely, as with a boy of will, honesty, and healthy ambition might be expected. Neither Wavy feeling, Eyes, nor Whiff obtruded themselves: they left him alone and waited: he never forgot them, but he did not seek them out. Things once firmly realised remained in his consciousness; he knew that his life was rising like a wave, that all his energies worked in the form of waves, his moods and wishes, his passions, emotions, yearnings—all expressed themselves by means of this unalterable formula, yet all contributed finally to the one big important Wave whose climax would be reached only when it fell. He distinguished between Wave and Ripples. He, therefore, did not trouble himself with imaginary details; he did not search; he waited. This steady strength was his. His firm, square jaw and the fear less eyes of grey beneath the shock of straight dark hair told plainly enough the kind of stuff behind them. No one at school took unnecessary liberties with Tom Kolverdon.

But, having discovered one pair of Eyes, he did not let them go. In his earnest, dull, inflexible way he loved their owner with a belief in her truth and loyalty that admitted of no slightest question. Had his mother divined the strength and value of his passion, she would surely have asked herself with painful misgiving: 'Is she—can she be—worthy of my boy?' But his mother guessed it as little as any one else; even the doctor had forgotten those early signs of its existence; and Tom was not the kind to make unnecessary confidences, nor to need sympathy in any matter he was sure about.

There was down now upon his upper lip, for he was close upon seventeen and the Entrance Examination was rising to the crest of its particular minor wave, yet during the two years' interval nothing—no single fact—had occurred to justify his faith or to confirm its amazing certainty within his heart. Mary, his sister, had not gone after all to the Finishing School in France; other girl friends came to spend the holidays with her; the Irish member of Parliament had either died or sunk into another kind of oblivion; the paths of the Kolverdons and the Aylmer family had gone apart; and the name of Lettice no longer thrilled the air across the tea-table, nor chance reports of her doings filled the London house with sudden light.

Yet for Tom she existed more potently than ever. His yearning never lessened; he was sure she remembered him as he remembered her; he persuaded himself that she thought about him; she doubtless knew that he was going to be an engineer. He had cut a thread from the carpet in the hall—from the exact spot her flying foot had touched that Tuesday when she scampered off from him—and kept it in the drawer beside the Eastern packet that enshrined the Whiff. Occasionally he took it out and touched it, fingered it, even caressed it; the thread and the perfume belonged together; the ritual of the childish years altered a little—worship raised it to a higher level.

He saw her with her hair done up now, long skirts, and a softer expression in the tender, faithful eyes; the tomboy in her had disappeared; she gazed at him with admiration. The face was oddly real, it came very close to his own; once or twice, indeed, their cheeks almost touched: 'almost,' because he withdrew instantly, uneasily aware that he had gone too far—not that the intimacy was unwelcome, but that it was somehow premature. And the instant he drew back, a kind of lightning distance came between them; he saw her eyes across an immense and curious interval, though whether of time or space he could not tell. There was strange heat and radiance in it—as of some blazing atmosphere that was not England.

The eyes, moreover, held a new expression when this happened—pity. And with this pity came also pain: *the* strange, rich pain broke over all the other happier feelings in him and swamped them utterly. . . .

But at that point instinct failed him; he could not understand why she should pity him, why pain should come to him through her, nor why it was necessary for him to feel and face it. He only felt sure of one thing—that it was essential to the formation of the Wave which was his life. The Wave must 'happen,' or he would miss an important object of his being—and she would somehow miss it too. The Wave would one day fall, but when it fell she would be with him, by his side, under the mighty curve, involved in the crash and tumult—with himself.

CHAPTER V

Then, without any warning, he received a second shock—it fell upon him from the blue and came direct from Lettice.

The occasion was a tennis party in the garden by the sea where the family had come to spend the summer holidays. Tom was already at College, doing brilliantly, and rapidly growing up. The August afternoon was very hot; no wind ruffled the quiet blue-green water; there were no waves; the leaves of the privet hedge upon the side of the cliffs were motionless. A couple of Chalk-Blues danced round and round each other as though a wire connected them, and Tom, walking in to tea with his partner after a victorious game, found himself watching the butterflies and making a remark about them—a chance observation merely to fill an empty pause. He felt as little interest in the insects as he did in his partner, an uncommonly pretty, sunburned girl, whose bare arms and hatless light hair became her admirably. She, however, approved of the remark and by no means despised the opportunity to linger a moment by the side of her companion. They stood together, perhaps a dozen seconds, watching the capricious scraps of colour rise, float over the privet hedge on balanced wings, dip abruptly down and vanish on the farther side below the cliff. The girl said something—an intentional something that was meant to be heard and answered: but no answer was forthcoming. She repeated the remark with emphasis; then, as still no answer came, she laughed brightly to make his silence appear natural.

But Tom had no word to say. He had not noticed the manoeuvre of the girl, nor the manoeuvre of the two Chalk-Blues; neither had he heard the words, although conscious that she spoke. For in that brief instant when the insects floated over the hedge, his eyes had wandered beyond them to the sea, and on the sea, far off against the cloudless horizon, he had seen—the Wave.

Thinking it over afterwards, however, he realised that it was not actually a wave he saw, for the surface of the blue-green sea was smooth as the tennis lawn itself: it was the sudden appearance of the 'wavy feeling' that made him *think* he saw the old, familiar outline of his early dream. He had objectified his emotion. His father perhaps would have called it association of ideas.

Abruptly, out of nothing obvious, the feeling rose and mastered him: and, after its quiescence—its absence—for so long an interval, this revival without hint or warning of any kind was disconcerting. The feeling was vivid and unmistakable. The joy and terror swept him as of old. He braced himself. Almost—he began shuffling with his feet. . .

‘Tea’s waiting for you’; his mother’s voice floated to his ears across the lawn, as he turned with an effort from the sea and made towards the group about the tables. The Wave, he knew, was coming up behind him, growing, rising, curving high against the evening sky. Beside him walked the sunburned girl, wondering doubtless at his silence, but happy enough, it seemed, in her own interpretation of its cause. Scarcely aware of her presence, however, Tom was searching almost fiercely in his thoughts, searching for the clue. He knew there was a clue, he felt sure of it; the ‘wavy feeling’ had not come with this overwhelming suddenness without a reason. Something had brought it back. But what? Was there any recent factor in his life that might explain it? He stole a swift glance at the girl beside him had she, perhaps, to do with it? They had played tennis together for the first time that afternoon: he had never seen her before, was not even quite sure of her name; to him, so far, she was only ‘a very pretty girl who played a ripping game.’ Had this girl to do with it?

Feeling his questioning look, she glanced up at him and smiled. ‘You’re very absent- minded,’ she observed with mischief in her manner. ‘You took so many of my balls, it’s tired you out!’ She had beautiful blue eyes, and her voice, he noticed for the first time, was very pleasant. Her figure was slim, her ankles neat, she had nice, even teeth. But, even as he registered the charming details, he knew quite well that he registered them, one and all, as belonging merely to a member of the sex, and not to this girl in particular. For all he cared, she might follow the two Chalk-Blues and disappear below the edge of the cliff into the sea. This ‘pretty girl’ left him as untroubled as she found him. The wavy feeling was not brought by her.

He drank his tea, keeping his back to the sea, and as the talk was lively, his silence was not noticed. The Wave, meanwhile, he knew, had come up closer. It towered above him. Its presence would shortly be explained. Then, suddenly, in the middle of a discussion as to partners for the games to follow, a further detail presented itself—also apparently out of nothing. He smelt the Whiff. He knew then that the Wave was poised immediately above his head, and that he stood underneath its threatening great curve. The clue, therefore, was at hand.

And at this moment his father came into view, moving across the lawn towards them from the French window. No one guessed how Tom welcomed the slight diversion, for the movement was already in his legs and in another moment must have set his feet upon that dreadful shuffling. As from a distance, he heard the formal talk and introductions, his father’s statement that he had won his round of golf with ‘the Dean,’ praise of the weather, and something or other about the strange stillness of the sea—but then, with a sudden, hollow crash against his very ear, the appalling words: ‘. . . broke his mashie into splinters, yes. And, by the by, the Dean knows the Aylmers. They were staying here earlier in the summer, he told me. Lettice, the girl,—Mary’s friend, you remember—is going to be married this week. . .’

Tom clutched the back of the wicker-chair in front of him. The sun went out. An icy air passed up his spine. The blood drained from his face. The tennis courts, and the group of white figures moving towards them, swung up into the sky. He gripped the chair till the rods of wicker pressed through the flesh into the bone. For a moment he felt that the sensation of actual sickness was more than he could master; his legs bent like paper beneath his weight.

‘*You* remember Lettice, Tom, don’t you?’ his father was saying somewhere in mid-air above him.

‘Yes, rather.’ Apparently he said these words; the air at any rate went through his teeth and lips, and the same minute, with a superhuman effort that only just escaped a stagger, he moved away towards the tennis courts. His feet carried him, that is, across the lawn, where some figures dressed in white were calling his name loudly; his legs went automatically. ‘Hold steady!’ he remembers saying somewhere deep inside him. ‘Don’t make an ass of yourself’; whereupon another voice—or was it still his own?—joined in quickly, ‘She’s gone from me, Lettice has gone. She’s dead.’ And the words, for the first time in his life, had meaning: for the first time in his life, rather, he realised what their meaning was. The Wave had fallen. Moreover—this also for the first time in the history of the Wave—there was something audible. He heard a Sound.

Shivering in the hot summer sunshine, as though icy water drenched him, he knew the same instant that he was wrong about the falling: the Wave, indeed, had curled lower over him than ever before, had even toppled—but it had not broken. As a whole, it had not broken. It was a smaller wave, upon the parent side, that had formed and fallen. The sound he heard was the soft crash of his lesser wave that grew out of the greater mass of the original monster, broke upon the rising volume of it, and returned into the greater body. It was a ripple only. The shock and terror he felt were a foretaste of what the final smothering crash would be. Yet the Sound he had heard was not the sound of water. There was a sharp, odd rattling in it that he had never consciously heard before. And it was—dry.

He reached the group of figures on the tennis-courts: he played: a violent energy had replaced the sudden physical weakness. His skill, it seemed astonished everybody; he drove and smashed and volleyed with a recklessness that was always accurate but when, at the end of the amazing game, he heard voices praising him, as from a distance, he knew only that there was a taste of gall and ashes in his mouth, and that he had but one desire—to get to his room alone and open the drawer. Even to himself he would not admit that he wished for the relief of tears. He put it, rather, that he must see and feel the one real thing that still connected him with Lettice—the thread of carpet she had trodden on. That—and the ‘whiff’—alone could comfort him.

The comedy, that is, of all big events lay in it; no one must see, no one must know: no one must guess the existence of this sweet, rich pain that ravaged the heart in *him* until from very numbness it ceased aching. He double-locked the bedroom door. He had waited till darkness folded away the staring day, till the long dinner was over, and the drawn-out evening afterwards. None, fortunately, had noticed the change in his demeanour his silence, his absentmindedness when spoken to, his want of appetite. ‘She is going to be married . . . this week,’ were the only words he heard; they kept ringing in his brain. To his immense relief the family had not referred to it again.

And at last he had said good-night and was in his room—alone. The drawer was open. The morsel of green thread lay in his hand. The faint eastern Perfume floated on the air. ‘I am *not* a sentimental ass,’ he said to himself aloud, but in a low, steady tone. ‘She touched it, therefore it has part of her life about it still.’ Three years and a half ago! He examined the diary too; lived over in thought every detail of their so-slight acquaintance together; they were few enough; he remembered every one.. Prolonging the backward effort, he reviewed the history of the Wave. His mind stretched back to his earliest recollections of the nightmare. He faced the situation, tried to force its inner meaning from it, but without success.

He did not linger uselessly upon any detail, nor did he return upon his traces as a sentimental youth might do, prolonging the vanished sweetness of recollection in order to taste the pain more vividly. He merely ‘read up,’ so to speak, the history of the Wave to get a bird’s-eye view of it. And in the end he obtained a certain satisfaction from the process—a certain strength. That is to

say, he did not understand, but he accepted. 'Lettice has gone from me—but she hasn't gone for good.' The deep reflection of hours condensed itself into this.

Whatever might happen 'temporarily,' the girl was loyal and true: and she was—his. It never once occurred to him to blame or chide her. All that she did sincerely, she had a right to do. They were in the 'underneath' together for ever and ever. They were in the sea.

The pain, nevertheless, was acute and agonising; *the* temporary separation of 'France' was nothing compared to this temporary separation of her marrying. There were alternate intervals of numbness and of acute sensation; for each time thought and feeling collapsed from the long strain of their own tension, the relief that followed proved false and vain. Up sprang the aching pain again, the hungry longing, the dull, sweet yearning and the whole sensation started afresh as at the first, yet with a vividness that increased with each new realisation of it. 'Wish I could cry it out,' he thought. 'I wouldn't be a bit ashamed to cry.' But he had no tears to spill. . . .

Midnight passed towards the small hours of the morning, and the small hours slipped on towards the dawn before he put away the parcel of tissue-paper, closed the drawer and locked it. And when at length he dropped exhausted into bed, the eastern sky was already tinged with the crimson of another summer's day. He dreaded it, and closed his eyes. It had tennis parties and engagements in its wearisome, long hours of heat and utter emptiness..

Just before actual sleep took him, however, he was aware of one other singular reflection. It rose of its own accord out of that moment's calm when thought and feeling sank away and deliberate effort ceased: the fact namely that, with the arrival of the Sound, all his five senses had been now affected. His entire being, through the only channels of perception it possessed, had responded to the existence of the Wave and all it might portend. Here was no case of a single sense being tricked by some illusion: all five supported each other, taste being, of course, a modification of smell.

And the strange reflection brought to his aching mind and weary body a measure of relief. The Wave was real: being real, it was also well worth facing when it—fell.

CHAPTER VI

Between twenty and thirty a man rises through years reckless of power and spendthrift of easy promises. The wave of life is rising, and every force tends upwards in a steady rush. At thirty comes a pause upon the level, but with thirty-five there are signs of the droop downhill. Age is first realised when, instead of looking forward only, he surprises thought in the act of looking—behind.

Of the physical, at any rate, this is true; for the mental and emotional wave is still ripening towards its higher curve, while the spiritual crest hangs hiding in the sky far overhead, beckoning beyond towards unvisited reaches.

Tom Kelderdon climbed through these crowded years with the usual scars and bruises, but steadily, and without the shame of any considerable disaster. His father's influence having procured him an opening in an engineering firm of the first importance, his own talent and application maintained the original momentum bravely. He justified his choice of a profession. Also, staring eagerly into life's marvellous shop-window, he entered, hand in pocket, and made the customary purchases of the enchantress behind the counter. If worthless, well,—everybody bought them; the things had been consummately advertised; he paid his money, found out their value, threw them away or kept them accordingly. A certain good taste made his choice not too

foolish: and there was this wholesome soundness in him, that he rarely repeated a purchase that had furnished him cheap goods. Slowly he began to find himself.

From learning what it meant to be well thrashed by a boy he loathed, and to apply a similar treatment himself—he passed on to the pleasure of being told he had nice eyes, that his voice was pleasant, his presence interesting. He fell in love—and out again. But he went straight. Moreover, beyond a given point in any affair of the heart he seemed unable to advance: some secret, inner tension held him back. While believing he loved various adorable girls the years offered him, he found it impossible to open his lips and tell them so. And the mysterious instinct invariably justified itself: they faded; one and all, soon after separation. There was no wave in them; they were ripples only. . . .

And, meanwhile, as the years rushed up towards the crest of thirty, he did well in his profession, worked for the firm in many lands, obtained the confidence of his principals, and proved his steady judgment if not his brilliance. He became, too, a good, if generous, judge of other men, seeing all sorts, both good and bad, and in every kind of situation that proves character. His nature found excuses too easily, perhaps, for the unworthy ones. It is not a bad plan, wiser companions hinted, to realise that a man has dark behaviour in him, while yet believing that he need not necessarily prove it. The other view has something childlike in it; Tom Kelderdon kept, possibly, this simpler attitude alive in him, trusting overmuch, because suspicion was abhorrent to his soul. The man of ideals had never become the man of the world. Some high, gentle instinct had preserved him from the infliction that so often results in this regrettable conversion. Slow to dislike, he saw the best in everybody. ‘Not a bad fellow,’ he would say of some one quite obviously detestable. ‘I admit his face and voice and manner are against him; but that’s not his fault exactly. He didn’t make himself you know.’

The idea of a tide in the affairs of men is obvious, familiar enough. Nations rise and fall, equally with the fortunes of a family. History repeats itself so does the tree, the rose: and if a man live long enough he recovers the state of early childhood. There is repetition everywhere. But while some think evolution moves in a straight line forward, others speculate fancifully that it has a spiral twist upwards. At any given moment, that is, the soul looks down upon a passage made before—but from a point a little higher. Without living through events already experienced, it literally lives them over; it sees them mapped out below, and with the bird’s-eye view it understands them.

And in regard to his memory of Lettice Aylmer—the fact that he was still waiting for her and she for him—this was somewhat the fanciful conception that lodged itself, subconsciously perhaps, in the mind of Tom Kelderdon, grown now to man’s estate. He was dimly aware of a curious familiarity with his present situation, a sense of repetition-yet with a difference. Something he had experienced before was coming to him again. It was waiting for him. Its wave was rising. When it happened before it had not happened properly somehow—had left a sense of defeat, of dissatisfaction behind. He had taken it, perhaps, at the period of receding momentum, and so had failed towards it. This time he meant to face it. His own phrase, as has been seen, was simple ‘I’ll let it all come.’ It was something his character needed. Deep down within him hid this attitude, and with the passage of the years it remained—though remained an attitude merely.

But the attitude, being subconscious in him, developed into a definite point of view that came, more and more, to influence the way he felt towards life in general. Life was too active to allow of much introspection, yet whenever pauses came—pauses in thought and feeling, still backwaters in which he lay without positive direction—there, banked up, *unchanging* in the

background, stood the enduring thing: his love for Lettice Aylmer. And this background was 'the sea' of his boyhood days, the 'underneath' in which they remained unalterably together. There, too, hid the four signs that haunted his impressionable youth: the Wave, the other Eyes, the Whiff, the Sound. In due course, and at their appointed time, they would combine and 'happen' in his outward life. The Wave would—fall.

Meanwhile his sense of humour had long ago persuaded him that, so far as any claim upon the girl existed, or that she reciprocated his own deep passion, his love-dream was of questionable security. The man in him that built bridges and cut tunnels laughed at it; the man that devised these first in imagination, however, believed in it, and waited. Behind thought and reason, suspected of none with whom he daily came in contact, and surprised only by himself when he floated in these silent, tideless backwaters—it persisted with an amazing conviction that seemed deathless, in these calm deeps of his being, securely anchored, hid what he called the 'spiral' attitude. The thing that was coming, a tragedy whereof that childish nightmare was both a memory and a premonition, clung and haunted still with its sense of dim familiarity. Something he had known before would eventually repeat itself. But—with a difference that he would see it from above—from a higher curve of the ascending spiral.

There lay the enticing wonder of the situation. With his present English temperament, stolid rather, he would meet it differently, treat it otherwise, learn and understand. He would see it from another—higher—point of view. He would know great pain, yet some part of him would look on, compare, accept the pain—and smile. The words that offered themselves were that he had 'suffered blindly,' but suffered with fierce and bitter resentment, savagely, even with murder in his heart; suffered, moreover, somehow or other at the hands of Lettice Aylmer.

Lettice, of course,—he clung to it absurdly still—was true and loyal to him, though married to another. Her name was changed. But Lettice Aylmer was not changed. And this mad assurance, though he kept it deliberately from his conscious thoughts, persisted with the rest of the curious business, for nothing, apparently, could destroy it in him. It was part of the situation, as he called it, part of the 'sea,' out of which would rise eventually—the Wave.

Outwardly, meanwhile, much had happened to him, each experience contributing its modifying touch to the character as he realised it, instead of merely knowing that it came to others. His sister married Tim, following his father's trade, became a doctor with a provincial practice, buried in the country.

His father died suddenly while he was away in Canada, busy with a prairie railway across the wheat fields of Assiniboia. He met the usual disillusion in a series, savoured and mastered them more or less in turn.

He was in England when his mother died; and, while his other experiences were ripples only, her going had the wave in it. The enormous mother-tie came also out of the 'sea'; its dislocation was a shock of fundamental kind, and he felt it in the foundations of his life. It was one of the things he could not quite realise. He still felt her always close and near. He had just been made a junior partner in the firm; the love and pride in her eyes, before they faded from the world of partnerships, were unmistakable: 'Of course,' she murmured, her thin hand clinging to his own, 'they had to do it . . . if only your father knew . . . ' and she was gone. The wave of her life sank back into the sea whence it arose. And her going somehow strengthened him, added to his own foundations, as though her wave had merged in his.

With her departure, he felt vaguely the desire to settle down, to marry. Unconsciously he caught himself thinking of women in a new light, appraising them as possible wives. It was a dangerous attitude rather; for a man then seeks to persuade himself that such and such a woman

may do, instead of awaiting the inevitable draw of love which alone can justify a life-long union. In Tom's case, however, as with the smaller fires of his younger days, he never came to a decision, much less to a positive confession. His immense idealism concerning women preserved him from being caught by mere outward beauty. While aware that Lettice was an impossible dream of boyhood, he yet clung to an ideal she somehow foreshadowed and typified. He never relinquished this standard of his dream; a mysterious woman waited for him somewhere, a woman with all the fairy qualities he had built about her personality; a woman he could not possibly mistake when at last he met her. Only he did not meet her. He waited.

And so it was, as time passed onwards, that he found himself standing upon the little level platform of his life at a stage nearer to thirty-five than thirty, conscious that a pause surrounded him. There was a lull. The rush of the years slowed down. He looked about him. He looked—back.

CHAPTER VII

The particular moment when this happened, suitable, too, in a chance, odd way, was upon a mountain ridge in winter, a level platform of icy snow to which he had climbed with some hotel acquaintances on a ski-ing expedition. It was on the Polish side of the Hohe Tatra.

Why, at this special moment, pausing for breath and admiring the immense wintry scene about him, he should have realised that he reached a similar position in his life, is hard to say. There is always a particular moment when big changes claim attention. They have been coming slowly; but at a given moment they announce themselves. Tom associated that icy ridge above Zakopané with a pause in the rushing of the years: 'I'm getting on towards middle age; the first swift climb—impetuous youth—lies now behind me.' The physical parallel doubtless suggested it; he had felt his legs and wind a trifle less willing, perhaps; there was still a steep, laborious slope of snow beyond; he discovered that he was no longer twenty-five.

He drew breath and watched the rest of the party as they slowly came nearer in the track he had made through the deep snow below. Each man made this track in his turn, it was hard work, his share was done. 'Nagorsky will tackle the next bit,' he thought with relief, watching a young Pole of twenty-three in the ascending line, and glancing at the summit beyond where the run home was to begin. And then the wonder of the white silent scene invaded him, the exhilarating thrill of the vast wintry heights swept over him, he forgot the toil, he regained his wind and felt his muscles taut and vigorous once more. It was pleasant, standing upon this level ridge, to inspect the long ascent below, and to know the heavy yet enjoyable exertion was nearly over.

But he had felt—older. That ridge remained in his memory as the occasion of its first realisation; a door opened behind him; he looked back. He envied the other's twenty-three years. It is curious that, about thirty, a man feels he is getting old, whereas at forty he feels himself young again. At thirty he judges by the standard of eighteen, at the later age by that of sixty. But this particular occasion remained vivid for another reason—it was accompanied by a strange sensation he had almost forgotten; and so long an interval had elapsed since its last manifestation that for a moment a kind of confusion dropped upon him, as from the cloudless sky. Something was gathering behind him, something was about to fall. He recognised the familiar feeling that he knew of old, the subterranean thrill, the rich, sweet pain, the power, the reality. It was the wavy feeling.

Balanced on his ski, the sealskin strips gripping the icy ridge securely, he turned instinctively to seek the reason, if any were visible, of the abrupt revival. His mind, helped by the stimulating

air and sunshine, worked swiftly. The odd confusion clouded his faculties still, as in a dream state, but he pierced it in several directions simultaneously.

Was it that, envying another's youth, he had re-entered imaginatively his own youthful feelings? He looked down at the rest of the party climbing towards him. And doing so, he picked out the slim figure of Nagorsky's sister, a girl whose winter costume became her marvellously, and whom the happy intimacy of the hotel life had made so desirable that an expedition without her seemed a lost, blank day. Unless she was of the party there was no sunshine. He watched her now, looking adorable in her big gauntlet gloves, her short skirt, her tasselled cap of black and gold, a fairy figure on the big snowfield, filling the world with sunshine—and knew abruptly that she meant to him just exactly—nothing. The intensity of the wavy feeling reduced her to an unreality.

It was not she who brought the great emotion.

The confusion in him deepened. Another scale of measurement appeared. The crowded intervening years now seemed but a pause, a brief delay; he had run down a side track and returned. *He* had not grown older. Seen by the grand scale to which the Wave and 'sea' belonged, he had scarcely moved from the old starting-point, where, far away in some un-assailable recess of life, still waiting for him, stood—Lettice Aylmer.

Turning his eyes, then, from the approaching climbers, he glanced at the steep slope above him, and saw—as once before on the English coast—something that took his breath away and made his muscles weak. He stared up at it. It looked down at him.

Five hundred feet above, outlined against the sky of crystal clearness, ran a colossal wave of solid snow. At the highest point it was, of course, a cornice, but towards the east, whence came the prevailing weather, the wind had so manipulated the mass that it formed a curling billow, twenty or thirty feet in depth, leaping over in the very act of breaking, yet arrested just before it fell. It hung waiting in mid-air, perfectly moulded, a wave—but a wave of snow.

It swung along the ridge for half a mile and more: it seemed to fill the sky; it rose out of the sea of eternal snow below it, poised between the earth and heavens. In the hollow beneath its curve lay purple shadows the eye could not pierce. And the similarity to the earlier episode struck him vividly; in each case Nature assisted with a visible wave as by way of counterpart; each time, too, there was a girl—as though some significance of sex hid in the 'wavy feeling.' He was profoundly puzzled.

The same second, in this wintry world where movement, sound, and perfume have no place, there stole to his nostrils across the desolate ranges another detail. It was more intimate in its appeal even than the wavy feeling, yet was part of it. He recognised the Whiff. And the joint attack, both by its suddenness and by its intensity, overwhelmed him. Only the Sound was lacking, but that, too, he felt, was on the way. Already a sharp instinctive movement was running down his legs. He began to shuffle on his ski. .

A chorus of voices, as from far away, broke round him, disturbing the intense stillness; and he knew that the others had reached the ridge. With a violent effort he mastered the ridiculous movement of his disobedient legs, but what really saved him from embarrassing notice was the breathless state of his companions, and the fact that his action looked after all quite natural—he seemed merely rubbing his ski along the snow to clean their under-surface.

Exclamations in French, English, Polish rose on all sides, as the view into the deep opposing valley caught the eye, and a shower of questions all delivered at once, drew attention from himself. What scenery, what a sky, what masses of untrodden snow! Should they lunch on the ridge or continue to the summit? What were the names of all these peaks, and was the Danube

visible? How lucky there was no wind, and how they pitied the people who stayed behind in the hotels! Sweaters and woollen waistcoats emerged from half a dozen knapsacks, cooking apparatus was produced, one chose a spot to make a fire, while another broke the dead branches from a stunted pine, and in five minutes had made a blaze behind a little wall of piled-up snow. The Polish girl came up and asked Tom for his Zeiss glasses, examined the soaring slope beyond, then obediently put on the extra sweater he held out for her. He hardly saw her face, and certainly did not notice the expression in her eyes. All took off their ski and plunged them upright in the nearest drift. The sun blazed everywhere, the snow crystals sparkled. They settled down for lunch, a small dark clot of busy life upon the vast expanse of desolate snow . . . and anything unusual about Tom Kolverdon, muffled to the throat against the freezing cold, his eyes, moreover, concealed by green snow-spectacles, was certainly not noticed.

Another party, besides, was discovered climbing upwards along their own laborious track: in the absorbing business of satisfying big appetites, tending the fire, and speculating who these other skiers might be, Tom's silence caused no comment. His self-control, for the rest, was soon recovered. But his interest in the expedition had oddly waned; he was still searching furiously in his thoughts for an explanation of the unexpected 'attack,' waiting for the Sound, but chiefly wondering why his boyhood's nightmare had never revealed that the Wave was of snow instead of water—and, at the same time, oddly convinced that he had moved but *one* stage nearer to its final elucidation. That it was solid he had already discovered, but that it was actually of snow left a curious doubt in him.

Of all this he was thinking as he devoured his eggs and sandwiches, something still trembling in him, nerves keenly sensitive, but not *quite* persuaded that this wave of snow was the sufficient cause of what he had just experienced—when at length the other climbers, moving swiftly, came close enough to be inspected. The customary remarks and criticisms passed from mouth to mouth, with warnings to lower voices since sound carried too easily in the rarefied air. One of the party was soon recognised as the hotel doctor, and the other, first set down as a Norwegian owing to his light hair, shining hatless in the sunlight, proved on closer approach to be an Englishman—both men evidently experienced and accomplished 'runners.'

In any other place the two parties would hardly have spoken, settling down into opposing camps of hostile silence; but in the lonely winter mountains human relationship becomes more natural; the time of day was quickly passed, and details of the route exchanged; the doctor and his friend mingled easily with the first arrivals; all agreed spontaneously to take the run home together; and finally, when names were produced with laughing introductions, the Englishman—by one of those coincidences people pretend to think strange, but that actually ought to occur more often than they do—turned out to be known to Tom, and after considerable explanations was proved to be more than that—a cousin.

Welcoming the diversion, making the most of it in fact, Kolverdon presented Anthony Winslowe to his Polish companions with a certain zeal to which the new arrival responded with equal pleasure. The light-haired blue-eyed Englishman, young and skilful on his ski, formed a distinct addition to the party. He was tall, with a slight stoop about the shoulders that suggested study; he was gay and very easy-going too. It was 'Tom' and 'Tony' before lunch was over; they recalled their private school, a fight, an eternal friendship vowed after it, and the twenty intervening years melted as though they had not been.

'Of course,' Tom said, proud of his new-found cousin, 'and I've read your bird books, what's more. By Jove, you're quite an authority on natural history, aren't you?'

The other modestly denied any notoriety, but the girls, especially Nagorsky's sister, piqued by Tom's want of notice, pressed for details in their pretty broken English. It became a merry and familiar party, as the way is with easy foreigners, particularly when they meet in such wild and unconventional surroundings. Winslowe had lantern slides in his trunk: that night he promised to show them: they chattered and paid compliments and laughed, Tony explaining that he was on his way to Egypt to study the bird-life along the Nile. Natural history was his passion; he talked delightfully; he made the bird and animal life seem real and interesting there was imagination, humour, lightness in him. There was a fascination, too, not due to looks alone. It was in his atmosphere, what is currently, perhaps, called magnetism.

'No animals *here* for you,' said a girl, pointing to the world of white death about them.

'There's something better,' he said quickly in quite decent Polish. 'We're all in the animal kingdom, you know.' And he glanced with a bow of admiration at the speaker, whom *the* others instantly began to tease. It was Irena, Nagorsky's sister; she flushed and laughed. 'We thought,' she said, 'you were Norwegian, because of your light hair, and the way you moved on your ski.'

'A great compliment,' he rejoined, 'but I saw *you* long ago on the ridge, and I knew at once that you were—Polish.'

The girl returned his bow. 'The largest compliment,' she answered gaily, 'I had ever in my life.'

Tom had only arrived two days before, bringing a letter of introduction to the doctor, and that night he changed his hotel, joining his new friends and his cousin at the Grand. An obvious flirtation, possibly something more, sprung up spontaneously between him and the Polish girl, but Keverdon welcomed it and felt no jealousy. 'Not trespassing, old chap, am I?' Tony asked jokingly, having divined on the mountains that the girl was piqued. 'On the contrary,' was the honest assurance given frankly, 'I'm relieved. A delightful girl, though, isn't she? And fascinatingly pretty!'

For the existence of Nagorsky's sister had become suddenly to him of no importance whatsoever. It was strange enough, but the vivid recurrence of long-forgotten symbols that afternoon upon the heights had restored to him something he had curiously forgotten, something he had shamefully neglected, almost, it seemed, had been in danger of losing altogether. It came back upon him now. He clung desperately to it as to a real, a vital, a necessary thing. It was a genuine relief that the relationship between him and the girl might be ended thus. In any case, he reflected, it would have 'ended thus' a little later—like all the others. No trace or sign of envy stayed in him. Irena and Tony, anyhow, seemed admirably suited to one another; he noticed on the long run home how naturally they came together. And even his own indifference would not bring her back to him. He felt quite pleased and satisfied. He had a long talk with Tony before going to bed. He felt drawn to him. There was a spontaneous innate sympathy between them.

They had many other talks together, and Tom liked his interesting, brilliant cousin. A week passed dances, ski-ing trips, skating, and the usual programme of wintry enjoyments filled the time too quickly; companionship became intimacy; all sat at the same table: Tony became a general favourite. He had just that combination of reserve and abandon which—provided something genuine lies behind—attracts the majority of people who, being dull, have neither. Most are reserved, through emptiness, or else abandoned—also through emptiness. Tony Winslowe, full of experience and ideas, vivid experience and original ideas, combined the two in rarest equipoise. It was spontaneous, and not calculated in him. There was a stimulating quality in his personality. Like those tiny, exciting Japanese tales that lead to the edge of a precipice, then end with unexpected abruptness that is their purpose, he led all who liked him to the brink

of a delightful revelation—then paused, stopped, vanished. And all did like him. He was light and gay, for all the depth in him. Something of the child peeped out. He won Tom Kelder's confidence without an effort. He also won the affectionate confidence of the Polish girl.

'You're not married, Tony, are you?' Tom asked him.

'Married!' Tony answered with a flush—he flushed so easily when teased—'I love my wild life and animals far too much.' He stammered slightly. Then he looked up quickly into his cousin's eyes with frankness. Tom, without knowing why, almost felt ashamed of having asked it. 'I—I never can go beyond a certain point,' he said, 'with girls. Something always holds me back. Odd— isn't it?' He hesitated. Then this flashed from him: 'Bees never sip the last, the sweetest drop of honey from the rose, you know. The sunset always leaves one golden cloud adrift—eh?' So there was poetry in him too!

And Tom, simpler, as well as more rigidly moulded, felt a curious touch of passionate sympathy as he heard it. His heart went out to the other suddenly with a burst of confidence. Some barrier melted in him and disappeared. For the first time in his life he knew the inclination, even the desire, to speak of things hidden deep within his heart. His cousin would understand.

And Tony's sudden, wistful silence invited the confession. They had already been talking of their forgotten youthful days together. The ground was well prepared. They had even talked of his sister, Mary, and her marriage. Tony remembered her distinctly. He spoke of it, leaning forward and putting a hand on his cousin's knee. Tom noticed vaguely the size of the palm, the wrist, the fingers—they seemed disproportionate. They were ugly hands. But it was subconscious notice. His mind was on another thing.

'I say,' Tom began with a sudden plunge, 'you know a lot about birds and natural history—biology too, I suppose. Have you ever heard of the spiral movement?'

'Spinal, did you say?' queried the other, turning the stem of his glass and looking up.

'No—*spiral*,' Tom repeated, laughing dryly in spite of himself. 'I mean the idea—that evolution, whether individually in men and animals, or with nations—historically, that is—is not in a straight line ahead, but moves upwards—in a spiral?'

'It's in the air,' replied Tony vaguely, yet somehow as if he knew a great deal more about it. 'The movement of the race, you mean?'

'And of the individual too. We're here, I mean, for the purpose of development—whatever one's particular belief may be—and that this development, instead of going forwards in a straight line, has a kind of—spiral movement—upwards?'

Tony looked wonderfully wise. 'I've heard of it,' he said. 'The spiral movement, as you say, is full of suggestion. It's common among plants. But I don't think science—biology, at any rate—takes much account of it.'

Tom interrupted eagerly, and with a certain grave enthusiasm that evidently intrigued his companion. 'I mean—a movement that is always upwards, always getting higher, and always looking down upon what has gone before. That, if it's true, a soul can look back—look down upon what it has been through before, but from a higher point—do you see?'

Tony emptied his glass and then lit a cigarette. 'I see right enough,' he said at length, quick and facile to appropriate any and every idea he came across, yet obviously astonished by his companion's sudden seriousness. 'Only the other day I read that humanity, for instance, is just now above the superstitious period—of the Middle Ages, say—going over it again—but that the recrudescence everywhere of psychic interests—fortune-telling, palmistry, magic, and the rest—has become quasi-scientific. It's going through the same period, but seeks to explain and understand. It's above it—one stage or so. Is that what you mean, perhaps?'

Tom drew in his horns, though for the life of him he could not say why. Tony appropriated his own idea too easily somehow—had almost read his thoughts. Vaguely he resented it. Tony had stolen from him—offended against some schoolboy *meum* and *tuum* standard.

‘That’s it—the idea, at any rate,’ he said, wondering why confidence had frozen in him. Interesting, rather, isn’t it?’

And then abruptly he found that he was staring at his cousin’s hands, spread on the table palm downwards. He had been staring at them for some time, but unconsciously. Now he saw them. And there was something about them that he did not like. Absurd as it seemed, his change of mood had to do with those big, ungainly hands, tanned a deep brown-black by the sun. A faint shiver ran through him. He looked away.

‘Extraordinary,’ Tony went chattering on. ‘It explains these new wild dances perhaps. Anything more spiral and twisty than these modern gyrations I never saw!’ He turned it off in his light amusing way, yet as though quite familiar with the deeper aspects of the question—if he cared. ‘And what the body does,’ he added, ‘the mind has already done a little time before!’

He laughed, but whether he was in earnest, or merely playing with the idea, was uncertain. What had stopped Tom was, perhaps, that they were not in the same key together; Tom had used a word he rarely cared to use—soul—it had cost him a certain effort—but his cousin had not responded. That, and the hands, explained his change of mood. For the first time it occurred to his honest, simple mind that Tony was of other stuff perhaps, than he had thought. That remark about the bees and sunset jarred a little. The lightness suggested insincerity almost.

He shook the notion off for it was disagreeable, ungenerous as well. This was holiday-time, and serious discussion was out of place. The airy lightness in his cousin was just suited to the conditions of a winter-sport hotel; it was what made him so attractive to all and sundry, so easy to get on with. Yet Tom would have liked to confide in him, to have told him more, asked further questions and heard the answers; stranger still, he would have liked to lead from the spiral to the wave, to his own wavy feeling, and, further even—almost to speak of Lettice and his boyhood nightmare. He had never met a man in regard to whom he felt so forthcoming in this way. Tony surely had seriousness and depth in him; this irresponsibility was on the surface only. . . . There was a queer confusion in his mind—several incongruous things trying to combine. . . .

‘I knew a princess once—the widow of a Russian,’ Tony was saying. He had been talking on, gaily, lightly, for some time, but Tom, busy with these reflections, had not listened properly. He now looked up sharply, something suddenly alert in him. ‘They’re all princes in Russia,’ Tony laughed; ‘it means less than Count in France or *von* in Germany.’ He stopped and drained his glass. ‘But you know,’ he went on, his thoughts half elsewhere, it seemed, ‘it’s bad for a country when titles are too common, it lowers the aristocratic ideal. In the Caucasus—Batoum, for instance—every Georgian is a noble, your hotel porter a prince.’ He broke off abruptly as though reminded of something. ‘Of course!’ he exclaimed, ‘I was going to tell you about the Russian woman I knew who had something of that idea of yours.’ He stopped as his eye caught his cousin’s empty glass. ‘Let’s have another,’ he said, beckoning to the waitress, ‘it’s very light stuff; this beer. These long ski-trips give one an endless thirst, don’t they?’

Tom didn’t know whether he said yes or no. ‘What idea?’ he asked quickly. ‘What do you mean exactly?’ A curious feeling of familiarity stirred in him. This conversation had happened before.

‘Eh?’ Tony glanced up as though he had again forgotten what he was going to say. ‘Oh yes,’ he went on, ‘the Russian woman, the Princess I met in Egypt. She talked a bit like that once . . . I remember now.’

'Like what?' Tom felt a sudden, breathless curiosity in him: he was afraid the other would change his mind, or pass to something else, or forget what he was going to say. It would prove another Japanese tale—disappear before it satisfied.

But Tony went on at last, noticing, perhaps, his cousin's interest.

'I was up at Edfu after birds,' he said, 'and she had a *dahabieh* on the river. Some friends took me there to tea, or something. It was nothing particular. Only it occurred to me just now when you talked of spirals and things.'

'*You* talked about the spiral?' Tom asked. 'Talked with *her* about it, I mean?' He was slow, almost stupid compared to the other, who seemed to flash lightly and quickly over a dozen ideas at once. But there was this real, natural sympathy between them both again. It seemed he knew exactly what his cousin was going to say.

Tony, blowing the foam off his beer glass, proceeded to quench his wholesome thirst. 'Not exactly,' he said at length, 'but we talked, I remember, along that line. I was explaining about the flight of birds—that all wild animal life moves in a spontaneous sort of natural rhythm—with an unconscious grace, I mean, we've lost because we think too much. Birds in particular rise and fall with a swoop, the simplest, freest movement in the world—like a wave—'

'Yes?' interrupted Tom, leaning over the table a little and nearly upsetting his untouched glass. 'I like that idea. It's true.'

'And—oh, that all the forces known to science move in a similar way—by wave-form, don't you see? Something like that it was.' He took another draught of the nectar his day's exertions had certainly earned.

'*She* said that?' asked Tom, watching his cousin's face buried in the enormous mug. Tony set it down with a sigh of intense satisfaction. '*I* said it,' he exclaimed with a frank egoism. 'You're too tired after all your falls this afternoon to listen properly. *I* was the teacher on that occasion, she the adoring listener! But if you want to know what *she* said too, I'll tell you.'

Tom waited; he raised his glass, pretending to drink; if he showed too much interest, the other might swerve off again to something else. He knew what was coming, yet could not have actually foretold it. He recognised it only the instant afterwards.

'She talked about water,' Tony went on, as though he had difficulty in recalling what she really had said, 'and I think she had water on the brain,' he added lightly. 'The Nile had bewitched her probably; it affects most of 'em out there—the women, that is. She said life moved in a stream—that she moved down a stream, or something, and that only things going down the stream with her were real. Anything on the banks—stationary, that is—was not real. Oh, she said a lot. I've really forgotten now—it was a year or two ago—but I remember her mentioning shells and the spiral twist of shells. In fact,' he added, as if there was no more to tell, 'I suppose that's what made me think of her just now—your mentioning the spiral movement.'

The door of the room, half *café* and half bar, where the peasants sat at wooden tables about them, opened, and the pretty head of Irena Nagorsky appeared. A burst of music came in with her. 'We dance,' she said, a note of reproach as well as invitation in her voice—then vanished. Tony, leaving his beer unfinished, laughed at his cousin and went after her. 'My last night,' he said cheerily. 'Must be gay and jolly. I'm off to Trieste tomorrow for Alexandria. See you later, Tom—unless you're coming to dance too.'

But, though they saw each other many a time again that evening, there was no further conversation. Next day the party broke up, Tom returning to the Water Works his firm was constructing outside Warsaw, and Tony taking the train for Budapesth *en route* for Trieste and Egypt. He urged Tom to follow him as soon as his work was finished, gave the Turf Club, Cairo,

as his permanent address where letters would always reach him sooner or later, waved his hat to the assembled group upon the platform, and was gone. The last detail of him visible was the hand that held the waving hat. It looked bigger, darker, thought Tom, than ever. It was almost disfiguring. It stirred a hint of dislike in him. He turned his eyes away.

But Tom Kolverdon remembered that last night in the hotel for another reason too. In the small hours of the morning he woke up, hearing a sound close beside him in the room. He listened a moment, then turned on the light above the bed. The sound, of an unusual and peculiar character, continued faintly. But it was not actually in the room as he first supposed. It was outside.

More than ten years had passed since he had heard that sound. He had expected it that day on the mountains when the wavy feeling and the Whiff had come to him. Sooner or later he felt positive he would hear it. He heard it now. It had merely been delayed, postponed. Something gathering slowly and steadily behind his life was drawing nearer—had come already very close. He heard the dry, rattling Sound that was associated with the Wave and with the Whiff. In it, too, was a vague familiarity.

And then he realised that the wind was rising. A frozen pine—branch, stiff with little icicles, was rattling and scraping faintly outside the wooden framework of the double windows. It was the icy branch that made the dry, rattling sound. He listened intently; the sound was repeated at certain intervals, then ceased as the wind died down. And he turned over and fell asleep again, aware that what he had heard was an imitation only, but an imitation strangely accurate—of a reality. Similarly, the wave of snow was but an imitation of a reality to come. This reality lay waiting still beyond him. One day—one day soon—he would know it face to face. The Wave, he felt, was rising behind his life, and his life was rising with it towards a climax. On the little level platform where the years had landed him for a temporary pause, he began to shuffle with his feet in dream. And something deeper than his mind—looked back. . . .

The instinct, or by whatever name he called that positive, interior affirmation, proved curiously right. Life rose with the sweep and power of a wave, bearing him with it towards various climaxes. His powers, such as they were, seemed all in the ascendant. He passed from that level platform as with an upward rush, all his enterprises, all his energies, all that he wanted and tried to do, surging forward towards the crest of successful accomplishment.

And a dozen times at least he caught himself asking mentally for his cousin Tony; wishing he had confided in him more, revealed more of this curious business to him, exchanged sympathies with him about it all. A kind of yearning rose in him for his vanished friend. Almost he had missed an opportunity. Tony would have understood and helped to clear things up; to no other man of his acquaintance could he have felt similarly. But Tony was now out of reach in Egypt, chasing his birds among the temples of the haunted Nile, already, doubtless, the centre of a circle of new friends and acquaintances who found him as attractive and fascinating as the little Zako-pané group had found him. Tony must keep.

Tom Kolverdon meanwhile, his brief holiday over, returned to his work at Warsaw, and brought it to a successful conclusion with a rapidity no one had foreseen, and he himself had least of all expected. The power of the rising wave was in all he did. He could not fail. Out of the success grew other contracts highly profitable to his firm. Some energy that overcame all obstacles, some clarity of judgment that selected unerringly the best ways and means, some skill and wisdom in him that made all his powers work in unison till they became irresistible, declared themselves, yet naturally and without adventitious aid. He seemed to have found himself anew. He felt pleased and satisfied with himself: always self-confident, as a man of ability ought to be, he now felt proud; and, though conceit had never been his failing, this new-born assurance

moved distinctly towards pride. In a moment of impulsive pleasure he wrote to Tony, at the Turf Club, Cairo, and told him of his success. . . . The senior partner, his father's old friend, wrote and asked his advice upon certain new proposals the firm had in view; it was a question of big docks to be constructed at Salonica, and something to do with a barrage on the Nile as well—there were several juicy contracts to choose between, it seemed,—and Sir William proposed a meeting in Switzerland, on his way out to the Near East; he would break the journey before crossing the Simplon for Milan and Trieste. The final telegram said Montreux, and Kolverdon hurried to Vienna and caught the night express to Lausanne by way of Bale.

And at Montreux further evidence that the wave of life was rising then declared itself, when Sir William, having discussed the various propositions with him, listening with attention, even with deference, to Kolverdon's opinion, told him quietly that his brother's retirement left a vacancy in the firm which—he and his co-directors hoped confidently—Kolverdon might fill with benefit to all concerned. A senior partnership was offered to him before he was thirty-five! Sir William left the same night for his steamer, and Tom was to wait at Montreux, perhaps a month, perhaps six weeks, until a personal inspection of the several sites enabled the final decision to be made; he was then to follow and take charge of the work itself.

Tom was immensely pleased. He wrote to his married sister in her Surrey vicarage, told her the news with a modesty he did not really feel, and sent her a handsome cheque by way of atonement for his bursting pride.

For simple natures, devoid of a saving introspection and self-criticism, upon becoming unexpectedly successful easily develop an honest yet none the less corroding pride. Tom felt himself rather a desirable person suddenly; by no means negligible at any rate; pleased and satisfied with himself, if not yet overwhelmingly so. His native confidence took this exaggerated turn and twist. His star was in the ascendant, a man to be counted with. . . .

The hidden weakness rose—as all else in him was rising—with the Wave. But he did not call it pride, because he did not recognise it. It was akin, perhaps, to that fatuous complacency of the bigoted religionist who, thinking he has discovered absolute truth, looks down from his narrow cell upon the rest of the world with a contemptuous pity that in itself is but the ignorance of crass self-delusion. Tom felt very sure of himself. For a rising wave drags up with it the mud and rubbish that have hitherto lain hidden out of sight in the ground below. Only with the fall do these undesirable elements return to their proper place again—where they belong and are of value. Sense of proportion is recovered only with perspective, and Tom Kolverdon, rising too rapidly, began to see himself in disproportionate relation to the rest of life. In his solid, perhaps stolid, way he considered himself a Personality—indispensable to no small portion of the world about him.