

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

It was towards the end of March, and spring was flowing down almost visibly from the heights behind the town. April stood on tiptoe in the woods, finger on lip, ready to dance out between the sunshine and the rain.

Above four thousand feet the snows of winter still clung thickly, but the lower slopes were clear, men and women already working busily among the dull brown vineyards. The early mist cleared off by ten o'clock, letting through floods of sunshine that drenched the world, sparkled above the streets crowded with foreigners from many lands, and lay basking with an appearance of July upon the still, blue lake. The clear brilliance of the light had a quality of crystal. Sea-gulls fluttered along the shores, tame as ducks and eager to be fed. They lent to this inland lake an atmosphere of the sea, and Kelverdon found himself thinking of some southern port, Marseilles, Trieste, Toulon.

In the morning he watched the graceful fishing-boats set forth, and at night, when only the glitter of the lamps painted the gleaming water for a little distance, he saw the swans, their heads tucked back impossibly into the centre of their backs, scarcely moving on the unruffled surface as they slept into the night. The first sounds he heard soon after dawn through his wide-opened windows were the whanging strokes of their powerful wings flying low across the misty water; they flew in twos and threes, coming from their nests now building in the marshes beyond Villeneuve. This, and the screaming of the gulls, usually woke him. The summits of Savoy, on the southern shore, wore pink and gold upon their heavy snows; the sharp air nipped; far in the west a few stars peeped before they faded and in the distance he heard the faint, drum-like mutter of a paddle-steamer, reminding him that he was in a tourist centre after all, and that this was busy, little, organised Switzerland.

But sometimes it was the beating strokes of the invisible paddle-steamer that woke him, for it seemed somehow a continuation of dreams he could never properly remember. That he had been dreaming busily every night of late he knew as surely as that he instantly forgot these dreams. That muffled, drumlike thud, coming nearer and nearer towards him out of the quiet distance, had some connection—undecipherable as yet—with the curious, dry, rattling sound belonging to the Wave. The two were so dissimilar, however, that he was unable to discover any theory that could harmonise them. Nor, for that matter did he seek it. He merely registered a mental note, as it were, in passing. The beating and the rattling were associated.

He chose a small and quiet hotel, as his liking was, and made himself comfortable, for he might have six weeks to wait for Sir William's telegram, or even longer, if, as seemed likely, the summons came by post. And Montreux was a pleasant place in early spring, before the heat and glare of summer scorched the people out of it towards the heights. He took long walks towards the snow-line beyond Les Avants and Les Pléiades, where presently the carpets of narcissus would smother the fields with white as though winter had returned to fling, instead of crystal flakes, a hundred showers of white feathers upon the ground. He discovered paths that led into the whispering woods of pine and chestnut. The young larches wore feathery green upon their crests, primroses shone on slopes where the grass was still pale and dead, snowdrops peeped out beside the wooden fences, and here and there, shining out of the brown decay of last year's leaves and thick ground-ivy, he found hepaticas. He had never felt the spring so marvellous before; it rose in a wave of colour out of the sweet brown earth.

Though outwardly nothing of moment seemed to fill his days, inwardly he was aware of big events—maturing. There was this sense of approach, of preparation, of gathering. How insipid external events were after all, compared to the mass, the importance of interior changes! A change of heart, an altered point of view, a decision taken—these were the big events of life.

Yet it was a pleasant thing to be a senior partner. Here by the quiet lake, stroking himself complacently, he felt that life was very active, very significant, as he wondered what the choice would be. He rather hoped for Egypt, on the whole. He could look up Tony and the birds. They could go after duck and snipe together along the Nile. He would, moreover, be quite an important man out there. Pride and vanity rose in him, but unobserved. For the Wave was in this too.

One afternoon, late, he returned from a long scramble among icy rocks about the Dent de Jaman, changed his clothes, and sat with a cigarette beside the open window, watching the throng of people underneath. In a steady stream they moved along the front of the lake, their voices rising through the air, their feet producing a dull murmur as of water. The lake was still as glass; gulls asleep on it in patches, and here and there a swan, looking like a bundle of dry white paper, floated idly. Off-shore lay several fishing-boats, becalmed; and far beyond them, a rowing-skiff broke the surface into two lines of widening ripples. They seemed floating in midair against the evening glow. The Savoy Alps formed a deep blue rampart, and the serrated battlements of the Dent du Midi, full in the blaze of sunset, blocked the Rhone Valley far away with its formidable barricade.

He watched the glow of approaching sunset with keen enjoyment; he sat back, listening to the people's voices, the gentle lap of the little waves; and the pleasant lassitude that follows upon hard physical exertion combined with the even pleasanter stimulus of the tea to produce a state of absolute contentment with the world.

Through the murmur of feet and voices, then, and from far across the water, stole out another sound that introduced into his peaceful mood an element of vague disquiet. He moved nearer to the window and looked out. The steamer, however, was invisible; the sea of shining haze towards Geneva hid it still; he could not see its outline. But he heard the echoless mutter of the paddle—wheels, and he knew that it was coming nearer. Yet at first it did not disturb him so much as that, for a moment, he heard no other sound: the voices, the tread of feet, the screaming of the gulls all died away, leaving this single, distant beating audible alone—as though the entire scenery combined to utter it. And, though no ordinary echo answered it, there seemed—or did he fancy it?—a faint, interior response within himself. The blood in his veins went pulsing in rhythmic unison with this remote hammering upon the water.

He leaned forward in his chair, watching the people, listening intently, almost as though he expected something to happen, when immediately below him chance left a temporary gap in the stream of pedestrians, and in this gap—for a second merely—a figure stood sharply defined, cut off from the throng, set by itself, alone. His eyes fixed instantly upon its appearance, movements, attitude. Before he could think or reason he heard himself exclaim aloud:

‘Why—it’s——’

He stopped. The rest of the sentence remained unspoken. The words rushed down again. He swallowed, and with a gulp he ended—as though the other pedestrians all were men—

‘—a woman!’

The next thing he knew was that the cigarette was burning his fingers—had been burning them for several seconds. The figure melted back into the crowd. The throng closed round her. His eyes searched uselessly; no space, no gap was visible; the stream of people was continuous once

more. Almost, it seemed, he had not really seen her—had merely thought her—up against the background of his mind.

For ten minutes, longer perhaps, he sat by that open window with eyes fastened on the moving crowd. His heart was beating oddly; his breath came rapidly. 'She'll pass by presently again,' he thought; 'she'll come back!' He looked alternately to the right and to the left, until, finally, the sinking sun blazed too directly in his eyes for him to see at all. The glare blurred everybody into a smudged line of golden colour, and the faces became a series of artificial suns that mocked him.

He did, then, an unusual thing—out of rhythm with his normal self,—he acted on impulse. Kicking his slippers off he quickly put on a pair of boots, took his hat and stick, and went downstairs. There was no reflection in him; he did not pause and ask himself a single question; he ran to join the throng of people, moved up and down with them, in and out, passing and re-passing the same groups over and over again, but seeing no sign of the particular figure he sought so eagerly. She was dressed in black, he knew, with a black fur boa round her neck; she was slim and rather tall; more than that he could not say. But the poise and attitude, the way the head sat on the shoulders, the tilt upwards of the chin—he was as positive of recognising these as if he had seen her close instead of a hundred yards away.

The sun was down behind the Jura Mountains before he gave up the search. Sunset slipped insensibly into dusk. The throng thinned out quickly at the first sign of chill. A dozen times he experienced the thrill—his heart suddenly arrested—of seeing her, but on each occasion it proved to be some one else. Every second woman seemed to be dressed in black that afternoon, a loose black boa round the neck. His eyes ached with the strain, the change of focus, the question that burned behind and in them, the joy—the strange rich pain.

But half, at least, of these dull people, he remembered, were birds of passage only; to-morrow or the next day they would take the train. He said to himself a dozen times, 'Once more to the end and back again!' For she, too, might be a bird of passage, leaving to-morrow or the next day, leaving that very night, perhaps. The thought afflicted, goaded him. And on getting back to the hotel he searched the *Liste des Etrangers* as eagerly as he had searched the crowded front—and as uselessly, since he did not even know what name he hoped to find.

But later that evening a change came over him. He surprised some sense of humour: catching it in the act, he also surprised himself a little—smiling at himself. The laughter, however, was significant. For it was just that restless interval after dinner when he knew not what to do with the hours until bedtime: whether to sit in his room and think and read, or to visit the principal hotels in the hope of chance discovery. He was even considering this wild-goose chase to himself, when suddenly he realised that his course of procedure was entirely the wrong one.

This thing was going to happen anyhow, it was inevitable; but—it would happen in its own time and way, and nothing he might do could hurry it. To hunt in this violent manner was to delay its coming. To behave as usual was the proper way. It was then he smiled.

He crossed the hall instead, and put his head in at the door of the little Lounge. Some Polish people, with whom he had a bowing acquaintance, were in there smoking. He had seen them enter, and the Lounge was so small that he could hardly sit in their presence without some effort at conversation. And, feeling in no mood for this, he put his head past the edge of the glass door, glanced round carelessly as though looking for some one—then drew sharply back. For his heart stopped dead an instant, then beat furiously, like a piston suddenly released. On the sofa, talking calmly to the Polish people, was—the figure. He recognised her instantly.

Her back was turned; he did not see her face. There was a vast excitement in him that seemed beyond control. He seemed unable to make up his mind. He walked round and round the little hall examining intently the notices upon the walls. The excitement grew into tumult, as though the meeting involved something of immense importance to his inmost self—his soul. It was difficult to account for. Then a voice behind him said, 'There is a concert to-night. Radwan is playing Chopin. There are tickets in the Bureau still—if Monsieur cares to go.' He thanked the speaker without turning to show his face: while another voice said passionately within him, 'I was wrong; she is slim, but she is not so tall as I thought.' And a minute later, without remembering how he got there, he was in his room upstairs, the door shut safely after him, standing before the mirror and staring into his own eyes. Apparently the instinct to see what he looked like operated automatically. For he now remembered—realised—another thing. Facing the door of the Lounge was a mirror, and their eyes had met. He had gazed for an instant straight into the kind and beautiful Eyes he had first seen twenty years ago—in the Wave.

His behaviour then became more normal. He did the little, obvious things that any man would do. He took a clothes-brush and brushed his coat; he pulled his waistcoat down, straightened his black tie, and smoothed his hair, poked his hanging watch-chain back into its pocket. Then, drawing a deep breath and compressing his lips, he opened the door and went downstairs. He even remembered to turn off the electric light according to hotel instructions. 'It's perfectly all right,' he thought, as he reached the top of the stairs. 'Why shouldn't I? There's nothing unusual about it.' He did not take the lift, he preferred action. Reaching the *salon* floor, he heard voices in the hall below. She was already leaving therefore, the brief visit over. He quickened his pace. There was not the slightest notion in him what he meant to say. It merely struck him that—idiotically—he had stayed longer in his bedroom than he realised; too long; he might have missed his chance. The thought urged him forward more rapidly again.

In the hall—he seemed to be there without any interval of time—he saw her going out; the swinging doors were closing just behind her. The Polish friends, having said good-bye, were already rising past him in the lift. A minute later he was in the street. He realised that, because he felt the cool night air upon his cheeks. He was beside her—looking down into her face.

'May I see you back—home—to your hotel?' he heard himself saying. And then the queer voice—it must have been his own—added abruptly, as though it was all he really had to say: 'You haven't forgotten me really. I'm Tommy—Tom Kolverdon.'

Her reply, her gesture, what she did and showed of herself in a word, was as queer as in a dream, yet so natural that it simply could not have been otherwise: 'Tom Kolverdon! So it is! Fancy—you being here!' Then: 'Thank you very much. And suppose we walk; it's only a few minutes—and quite dry.'

How trivial and commonplace, yet how wonderful!

He remembers that she said something to a coachman who immediately drove off that she moved beside him on this Montreux pavement, that they went up-hill a little, and that, very soon, a brilliant door of glass blazed in front of them, that she had said, 'How strange that we should meet again like this. Do come and see me—any day—just telephone. I'm staying some weeks probably,'—and he found himself standing in the middle of the road, then walking wildly at a rapid pace downhill, he knew not whither, that he was hot and breathless, that stars were shining, and swans, like bundles of white newspaper, were asleep on the lake, and—that he had found her.

He had walked and talked with Lettice. He bumped into more than one irate pedestrian before he realised it; they knew it better than he did, apparently. 'It was Lettice Aylmer, Lettice . . .' he

kept saying to himself. 'I've found her. She shook hands with me. That was her voice, her touch, her perfume. She's here—here in little Montreux—for several weeks. After all these years! Can it be true—really true at last? She said I might telephone—might go and see her. She's glad to see me—again.'

How often he paced the entire length of the deserted front beside the lake he did not count: it must have been many times, for the hotel door, which closed at midnight, was locked and the night-porter let him in. He went to bed—if there was rose in the eastern sky and upon the summits of the Dent du Midi, he did not notice it. He dropped into a half-sleep in which thought continued but not wearingly. The excitement of his nerves relaxed, soothed and mothered by something far greater than his senses, stronger than his rushing blood. This greater Rhythm took charge of him most comfortably. He fell back into the mighty arms of something that was rising irresistibly—something inevitable and half-familiar. It had long been gathering; there was no need to ask a thousand questions, no need to fight it anywhere. From the moment when he glanced idly into the Lounge he had been aware of it. It had driven him downstairs without reflection, as it had driven him also uphill till the blazing door was reached. He smelt it, heard it, saw it, touched it. It was the Wave.

Time certainly proved its unreality that night; the hours seemed both endless and absurdly brief. His mind flew round and round in a circle, lingering over every detail of the short interview with a tumultuous pleasure that hid pain very thinly. He felt afraid, felt himself on the brink of plunging headlong into a gigantic whirlpool. Yet he wanted to plunge. . . . He would. . . . He had to. . . . It was irresistible.

He reviewed the scene, holding each detail forcibly still, until the last delight had been sucked out of it. At first he remembered next to nothing—a blur, a haze, the houses flying past him, no feeling of pavement under his feet, but only her voice saying nothing in particular, her touch, as he sometimes drew involuntarily against her arm, her eyes shining up at him. For her eyes remained the chief impression perhaps—so kind, so true, so very sweet and frank—soft Irish eyes with something mysterious and semi-eastern in them. The conversation seemed to have entirely escaped recovery.

Then, one by one, he remembered things that she had said. Sentences offered themselves of their own accord. He flung himself upon them, trying to keep tight hold of their first meaning—before he filled them with significance of his own. It was a desperate business altogether; emotion distorted her simple words so quickly. 'I was thinking of you only to-day. I had the feeling you were here. Curious, wasn't it?' He distinctly remembered her saying this. And then another sentence: 'I should have known you anywhere; though, of course, you've changed a lot. But I knew your eyes. Eyes don't change much, do they?' The meanings he read into these simple phrases filled an hour at least; he lost entirely their simple first significance. But this last remark brought up another in its train. As the tram went past them she had raised her voice a little and looked up into his face—it was just then they had cannonaded. People who like one another always cannonade, he reflected. And her remark—'Ah, it comes back to me. You're so very like your sister Mary. I've seen her several times since the days in Cavendish Square. There's a strong family likeness.'

He disliked the last part of the sentence. Mary, besides, had mentioned nothing; her rare letters made no reference to it. The schooldays' friendship had evaporated perhaps. This sent his thoughts back upon the early trail of those distant months when Lettice was at a Finishing School in France and he had kept that tragic Calendar. . . .

Another sentence interrupted them: 'I had, oddly enough, been thinking of you this very afternoon. I knew you the moment you put your head in at the door, but, for the life of me, I couldn't get the name. All I got was "Tommy"!' And only his sense of humour prevented the obvious rejoinder, 'I wish you would always call me that.' It struck him sharply. Such talk could have no part in a meeting of this kind; the idea of flirtation was impossible, not even thought of. Yet twice she had said, 'I was thinking of you only to-day!'

But other things came back as well. It was strange how much they had really said to each other in those few brief minutes. Next day he retraced the way and discovered that, even walking quickly, it took him a good half hour; yet they had walked slowly, even leisurely. But, try as he would, he was unable to force deeper meanings into these other remarks that he recalled. She was evidently pleased to see him, that at least was certain, for she had asked him to come and see her, and she meant it. He remembered his reply, 'I'll come to-morrow—may I?' and then abruptly realised for the first time that the plunge was taken. He felt himself committed, sink or swim. The Wave already had lifted him off his feet.

And it was on this his whirling thoughts came down to rest at last, and sleep crept over him—just as dawn was breaking. He felt himself in the 'sea' with Lettice, there was nothing he could do, no course to choose, no decision to be made. Though married, she was somehow free—he felt it in her attitude. That sense of fatalism known in boyhood took charge of him. The Wave was rising towards the moment when it must invariably break and fall, and every impulse in him rising in it without a shade of denial or resistance. It would hurt—the fall and break would cause atrocious pain. But it was somewhere necessary to him. No atom of him held back or hesitated. For there was joy beyond it somehow—an intense and lasting joy, like the joy that belongs to growth and development after accepted suffering.

Vaguely—not put into definite words—it was this he felt, when at length sleep took him. Yet just before he slept he remembered two other little details, and smiled to himself as they rose before his sleepy mind, yet not understanding exactly why he smiled: for he did not yet know her name—and there was, of course, a husband.

CHAPTER IX

This resumption of a childhood's acquaintance that, by one at least, had been imaginatively coaxed into a relationship of ideal character, at once took on a standing of its own. It started as from a new beginning.

Tom Kelderdon did not forget the childhood part, but he neglected it at first. It was as if he met now for the first time—a woman who charmed him beyond anything known before; he longed for her; that he had longed for her subconsciously these twenty years slipped somehow or other out of memory. With it slipped also those strange corroborative details that imagination had clung to so tenaciously during the interval. The Whiff the Sound, the other pair of Eyes, the shuffling feet, the joy that cloaked the singular prophecy of pain—all these, if not entirely forgotten, ceased to intrude themselves. Even when looking into her clear, dark eyes, he no longer quite realised them as the 'eastern eyes' of his dim, dim dream; they belonged to a woman, and a married woman, whom he desired with body, heart and soul. Calm introspection was impossible, he could only feel, and feel intensely. He could not fuse this girl and woman into one continuous picture: each was a fragment of some much older, larger picture. But this larger canvas he could never visualise successfully. It was coloured, radiant, gorgeous; it blazed as with

gold, a gold of sun and stars. But the strain of effort caused rupture instantly. The vaster memory escaped him. He was conscious of reserve.

The comedy of telephoning to a name he did not know was obviated next morning by the arrival of a note: 'Dear Tom Kolverdon,' it began, and was signed 'Yours, Lettice Jaretska.' It invited him to come up for *déjeuner* in her hotel. He went. The luncheon led naturally to a walk together afterwards, and then to other luncheons and other walks, to evening rows upon the lake, and to excursions into the surrounding country. . . . They had tea together in the lower mountain inns, picked flowers, photographed one another, laughed, talked and sat side by side at concerts or in the little Montreux cinema theatre. It was all as easy and natural as any innocent companionship well could be—because it was so deep. The foundations were of such solid strength that nothing on the surface trembled. . . . Madame de Jaretska was well known in the hotel—she came annually, it seemed, about this time and made a lengthy stay,—but no breath of anything untoward could ever be connected with her. He, too, was accepted by one and all, no glances came their way. He was her friend: that was apparently enough. And though he desired her, body, heart and soul, he was quick to realise that the first named in the trio had no rôle to play. Something in her, something of attitude and atmosphere, rendered it inconceivable. The reserve he was conscious of lay very deep in him; it lay in her too. There was a fence, a barrier he must not, could not pass—both recognised it. Being a man, romance for him drew some tendril doubtless from the creative physical, but the shade of passing disappointment, if it existed, was renounced as instantly as recognised. Yet he was not aware at first of any incompleteness in her. He felt only a bigger thing. There seemed something in this simple woman that bore him to the stars. For simple she undoubtedly was, not in the way of shallowness, but because her nature seemed at harmony with itself: uncomplex, natural, frank and open, and with an unconventional carelessness that did no evil for the reason that she thought and meant none. She could do things that must have made an ordinary worldly woman the centre of incessant talk and scandal. There was, indeed, an extraordinary innocence about her that perturbed the judgment, somewhat baffling it. Whereas with many women it might have roused the suspicion of being a pose, an affectation, with her, Tom felt, it was a genuine innocence, beyond words delightful and refreshing. And it arose, he soon discovered, from the fact that, being good and true herself, she thought everybody else was also good and true. This he realised before two days' intercourse had made it seem as if they had been together always and were made for one another. Something bigger and higher than he had ever felt before stirred in him for this woman, whom he thought of now invariably as Madame de Jaretska, rather than as Lettice of his younger dream. If she woke something nobler in him that had slept, he did not label it as such: nor, if a portion of his younger dream was fulfilling itself before his eyes, in a finer set of terms, did he think it out and set it down in definite words. There *was* this intense and intimate familiarity between them both, but somehow he did not call it by these names. He just thought her wonderful—and longed for her. The reserve began to trouble him. . . .

'It's sweet,' she said, 'when real people come together—find each other.'

'Again,' he added. 'You left that out. For *I've* never forgotten—all these years.'

She laughed. 'Well, I'll tell you the truth,' she confessed frankly. 'I hadn't forgotten either; I often thought of you and wondered—'

'What I was like now?'

'What you were doing, where you were,' she said. 'I always knew what you were like. But I often wondered how far on you had got.'

'You had no news of me?'

‘None. But I always believed you’d do something big in the world.’

Something in her voice or manner made it wholly natural for him to tell her of his boyhood love. He mentioned the Wave and wavy feeling, the nightmare too, but when he tried to go beyond that, something checked him; he felt a sudden shyness. It ‘sounds so silly,’ was his thought. ‘But I always know a real person,’ he said aloud, ‘anybody who’s going to be real in my life; they always arrive on a wave, as it were. My wavy feeling announces them.’ And the interest with which she responded prevented his regretting having made his confession.

‘It’s an instinct, I think,’ she agreed, ‘and instincts are meant to be listened to. I’ve had something similar, though with me it’s not a wave.’ Her voice grew slower, she made a pause; when he looked up—her eyes were gazing across the lake as though in a moment of sudden absent-mindedness. . . . ‘And what’s yours?’ he asked, wondering why his heart was beating as though something painful was to be disclosed.

‘I see a stream,’ she went on slowly, still gazing away from him across the expanse of shining water, ‘a flowing stream—with faces on it. They float down with the current. And when I see one I know it’s somebody real—real to me. The unreal faces are always on the bank. I pass them by.’

‘You’ve seen mine?’ he asked, unable to hide the eagerness. ‘My face?’

‘Often, yes,’ she told him simply. ‘I dream it usually, I think: but it’s quite vivid.’

‘And is that all? You just see the faces floating down with the current?’

‘There’s one other thing,’ she answered, ‘if you’ll promise not to laugh.’

‘Oh, I won’t laugh,’ he assured her. ‘I’m awfully interested. It’s no funnier than my Wave, anyhow.’

‘They’re faces I have to save,’ she said. ‘Somehow I’m meant to rescue them.’ In what way she did not know. ‘Just keep them above water, I suppose!’ And the smile in her face gave place to a graver look. The stream of faces was real to her in the way his Wave was real. There was meaning in it. ‘Only three weeks ago,’ she added, ‘I saw *you* like that.’ He asked where it was, and she told him Warsaw. They compared notes; they had been in the town together, it turned out. Their outer paths had been converging for some time, then.

‘Why—did you leave?’ he asked suddenly. He wanted to ask why she was there at all, but something stopped him.

‘I usually come here,’ she said quietly, ‘about this time. It’s restful. There’s peace in these quiet hills above the town, and the lake is soothing. I get strength and courage here.’

He glanced at her with astonishment a moment. Behind the simple language another meaning flashed. There was a look in the eyes, a hint in the voice that betrayed her. . . . He waited, but she said no more. Not that she wished to conceal, but that she did not wish to speak of something. Warsaw meant pain for her, she came here to rest, to recuperate after a time of stress and struggle, he felt. And looking at the face he recognised for the first time that behind its quiet strength there lay deep pain and sadness, yet accepted pain and sadness conquered, a suffering she had turned to sweetness. Without a particle of proof, he yet felt sure of this. And an immense respect woke in him. He saw her saving, rescuing others, regardless of herself: he felt the floating faces real; the stream was life—her life. . . . And, side by side with the deep respect, the bigger, higher impulse stirred in him again. Name it he could not: it just came: it stole into him like some rare and exquisite new fragrance, and it came from her. . . . He saw her far above him, stooping down from a higher level to reach him with her little hand. . . . He knew a yearning to climb up to her—a sudden and searching yearning in his soul. ‘She’s come back to fetch me,’ ran across his mind before he realised it; and suddenly his heart became so light that he thought he

had never felt such happiness before. Then, before he realised it, he heard himself saying aloud—from his heart:

‘You do me an awful lot of good—really you do. I feel better and happier when I’m with you. I feel—’ He broke off, aware that he was talking rather foolishly. Yet the boyish utterance was honest she did not think it foolish apparently. For she replied at once, and without a sign of lightness:

‘Do I? Then I mustn’t leave you, Tom!’

‘Never!’ he exclaimed impetuously.

‘Until I’ve saved you.’ And this time she did not laugh.

She was still looking away from him across the water, and the tone was quiet and unaccented. But the words rang like a clarion in his mind. He turned; she turned too: their eyes met in a brief but penetrating gaze. And for an instant he caught an expression that frightened him, though he could not understand its meaning. Her beauty struck him like a sheet of fire—all over. He saw gold about her like the soft fire of the southern stars. With any other woman, at any other time, he would—but the thought utterly denied itself before it was half completed even. It sank back as though ashamed. There was something in her that made it ugly, out of rhythm, undesirable, and undesired. She would not respond—she would not understand.

In its place another blazed up with that strange, big yearning at the back of it, and though he gazed at her as a man gazes at a woman he needs and asks for, her quiet eyes did not lower or turn aside. The cheaper feeling ‘I’m not worthy of you,’ took in his case a stronger form: ‘I’ll be better, bigger, for you.’ And then, so gently it might have been a mother’s action, she put her hand on his with firm pressure, and left it lying there a moment before she withdrew it again. Her long white glove, still fastened about the wrist, was flung back so that it left the palm and fingers bare, and the touch of the soft skin upon his own was marvellous; yet he did not attempt to seize it, he made no movement in return. He kept control of himself in a way he did not understand. He just sat and looked into her face. There was an entire absence of response from her—in one sense. Something poured from her eyes into his very soul, but something beautiful, uplifting. This new yearning emotion rose through him like a wave, bearing him upwards. . . . At the same time he was vaguely aware of a lack as well . . . of something incomplete and unawakened. . . .

‘Thank you—for saying that,’ he was murmuring; ‘I shall never forget it’; and though the suppressed passion changed the tone and made it tremble even, he held himself as rigid as a statue. It was she who moved. She leaned nearer to him. Like a flower the wind bends on its graceful stalk, her face floated very softly against his own. She kissed him. It was all very swift and sudden. But, though exquisite, it was not a woman’s kiss. . . . The same instant she was sitting straight again, gazing across the blue lake below her.

‘You’re still a boy,’ she said, with a little innocent laugh, ‘still a wonderful, big boy.’

‘Your boy,’ he returned. ‘I always have been.’

There was deep, deep joy in his heart, it lifted him above the world—with her. Yet with the joy there was this faint touch of disappointment too.

‘But, I say—isn’t it awfully strange?’ he went on, words failing him absurdly. ‘It’s very wonderful, this friendship. It’s so natural.’ Then he began to flush and stammer.

In an even tone of voice she answered: ‘It’s wonderful, Tom, but it’s not strange.’ And again he was vaguely aware that something which might have made her words yet more convincing was not there.

‘But I’ve got that curious feeling—I could swear it’s all happened before.’ He moved closer as he spoke; her dress was actually against his coat, but he could not touch her. Something made it

impossible, wrong, a false, even a petty thing. It would have taken away the kiss. 'Have *you*?' he asked abruptly, with an intensity that seemed to startle her, 'have *you* got that feeling of familiarity too?'

And for a moment in the middle of their talk they both, for some reason, grew very thoughtful.

'It had to be—perhaps,' she answered simply a little later. 'We are both real, so I suppose—yes, it *has* to be.'

There was the definite feeling that both spoke of a bigger thing that neither quite understood. Their eyes searched, but their hearts searched too. There was a gap in her that somehow must be filled, Tom felt. . . . They stared long at one another. He was close upon the missing thing—when suddenly she withdrew her eyes. And with that, as though a wave had swept them together and passed on, the conversation abruptly changed its key. They fell to talking of other things. The man in him was again aware of disappointment.

The change was quite natural, nothing forced or awkward about it. The significance had gone its way, but the results remained. They were in the 'sea' together. It 'had to be.' As from the beginning of the world they belonged to one another, each for the other—real. There was nothing about it of a text-book 'love affair,' absolutely nothing. Deeper far than a passionate relationship, guiltless of any fruit of mere propinquity, the foundations of the sudden intimacy were as ancient as immovable. The inevitable touch lay in it. And Tom knew this partly confirmed, at any rate, by the emotion in him when she said 'my boy,' for the term woke no annoyance, conveyed no lightness. Yet there was a flavour of disappointment in it somewhere—something of necessary value that he missed in her. . . . To a man in love it must have sounded superior, contemptuous: whereas to him it sounded merely true. He was her boy. This mother-touch was in her. To care, to cherish, somehow even to rescue, she had come to find him out—again. She had come *back*. . . . It was thus, at first, he felt it. From somewhere above, beyond the place where he now stood in life, she had 'come back, come down, to fetch him.' She was further on than he was. He longed to stand beside her. Until he did so . . . this gap in her must prevent absolute union. On both sides it was not entirely natural as yet. . . . Thought grew confused in him.

And, though he could not understand, he accepted it as inevitable. The joy, moreover, was so urgent and uprising, that it smothered a delicate whisper that yet came with it—that the process involved also—pain. Though aware, from time to time, of this vague uneasiness, he easily brushed it aside. It was the merest gossamer-thread of warning that with each recurrent appearance became more tenuous, until finally it ceased to make its presence felt at all. .

In the entire affair of this sudden intercourse he felt the Wave, yet the Wave, though steadily rising, ceased to make its presence too consciously known; the Whiff, the Sound, the Eyes seemed equally forgotten: that is, he did not realise them. He was living now, and introspection was a waste of time, living too intensely to reflect or analyse. He felt swept onwards upon a tide that was greater than he could manage, for instead of swimming consciously, he was borne and carried with it. There was certainly no attempt to stem. Life was rising. It rushed him forwards too deliciously to think. . . .

He began asking himself the old eternal question 'Do I love? Am I in love—at last, then?' . . . Some time passed, however, before he realised that he loved, and it was in a sudden, curious way that this realisation came. Two little words conveyed the truth—some days later, as they were at tea on the verandah of her hotel, watching the sunset behind the blue line of the Jura Mountains. He had been talking about himself, his engineering prospects—rather proudly—his partnership and the letter he expected daily from Sir William. 'I hope it will be Assouan,' he said, 'I've never been in Egypt. I'm awfully keen to see it.' She said she hoped so too. She knew Egypt

well: it enchanted, even enthralled her: 'familiar as though I'd lived there all my life. A change comes over me, I become a different person—and a much older one; not physically,' she explained with a curious shy gaze at him, 'but in the sense that I feel a longer pedigree behind me.' She gave the little laugh that so often accompanied her significant remarks. 'I always think of the Nile as the "stream" where I see the floating faces.'

They went on chatting for some minutes about it. Tom asked if she had met his cousin out there; yes, she remembered vaguely a Mr. Winslowe coming to tea on her *dahabieh* once, but it was only when he described Tony more closely that she recalled him positively. 'He interested me,' she said then: 'he talked wildly, but rather picturesquely, about what he called the "spiral movement of life," or something.' 'He goes after birds,' Tom mentioned. 'Of course,' she replied, 'I remember distinctly now. It was something about the flight of birds that introduced the spiral part of it. He had a good deal in him, that man,' she added, 'but he hid it behind a lot of nonsense—almost purposely, I felt.'

'That's Tony all over,' Tom assented, 'but he's a rare good sort and I'm awfully fond of him. He's "real" in our sense too, I think.'

She said then very slowly, as though her thoughts were far away in Egypt at the moment: 'Yes, I think he is. I've seen *his* face too.'

'Floating down, you mean—or on the bank?'

'Floating,' she answered. 'I'm sure I have.'

Tom laughed happily. 'Then you've got him to rescue too,' he said. 'But, remember, if we're both drowning, I come first.'

She looked into his face and smiled her answer, touching his fingers with her hand. And again it was not a woman's touch.

'He was in Warsaw, too, a few weeks ago,' Tom went on, 'so we were all three there together. Rather odd, you know. He was ski-ing with me in the Carpathians'; and he described their meeting at Zakopané after the long interval since boyhood. 'He told me about you in Egypt, too, now I come to think of it. He mentioned the *dahabieh*, but called you a Russian—yes, I remember now,—and a Russian Princess into the bargain. Evidently you made less impression on Tony than—'

It was then he stopped as though he had been struck. The idle conversation changed. He heard her interrupting words from a curious distance. They fell like particles of ice upon his heart.

'Polish, of course, not Russian,' she mentioned casually, 'but the rest is right, though I never use the tide. My husband, in his own country, is a Prince, you see.'

Something reeled in him, then instantly righted itself. For a moment he felt as though the freedom of their intercourse had received a shock that blighted it. The words, 'my husband,' struck chill and ominous into his heart. The recovery, however,—almost simultaneous—showed him that both the freedom and the intercourse were right and unashamed. She gave him nothing that belonged to any other: she was loyal and true to that other as she was loyal and true to himself. Their relationship was high above mere passionate intrigue; it could exist—in the way she knew it, felt it—side by side with that other one, before that other one's very eyes, if need be. . . . He saw it true: he saw it innocent as daylight. . . . For what he felt was somehow this: the woman in her was not his, but more than that—it was not any one's. It still lay dormant. . . .

If there was a momentary confusion in his own mind, there was none, he felt positive, in hers. The two words that struck him such a blow, she uttered as lightly, innocently, as the rest of the talk between them. Indeed, had that other—even in thought Tom preferred the paraphrase—been present, she would have introduced them to each other then and there. He heard her saying the

little phrases even 'My husband,' and, 'This is Tom Kolverdon whom I've loved since childhood.'

Nothing brought more home to him the high innocence, the purity and sweetness of this woman than the reflections that flung after one another in his mind as he realised that his hope of her being a widow was not justified, and at the same moment that he desired exclusive possession of her—that he was definitely in love.

That she was unaware of any discovery, even if she divined the storm in him at all, was clear from the way she went on speaking. For, while all this flashed through his mind, she added quietly: 'He is in Warsaw now. He—lives there. I go to him for part of every year.' To which Tom heard his voice reply something as natural and commonplace as 'Yes—I see.'

Of the hundred pregnant questions that presented themselves, he did not ask a single one: not that he lacked the courage so much as that he felt the right was—not yet—his. Moreover, behind her quiet words he divined a tragedy. The suffering that had become sweetness in her face was half explained, but the full revelation of it belonged to 'that other' and to herself alone. It had been their secret, he remembered, for at least fifteen years.

CHAPTER X

Yet, knowing himself in love, he was able to set his house in order. Confusion disappeared. With the method and thoroughness of his character he looked things in the face and put them where they belonged. Even to wake up to an untidy room was an affliction. He might arrive in a hotel at midnight, but he could not sleep until his trunks were empty and everything in its place. In such outer details the intensity of his nature showed itself: it was the intensity, indeed, that compelled the orderliness.

And the morning after this conversation, he woke up to an ordered mind—thoughts and emotions in their proper places where he could see and lay his hand upon them. The strength and weakness of his temperament betrayed themselves plainly here, for the security that pedantic order brought precluded the perspective of a larger vision. This careful labelling enclosed him within somewhat rigid fences.

To insist upon this precise ticketing had its perilous corollary; the entire view—perspective, proportion, vision—was lost sight of.

‘I’m in love: she’s beautiful, body, mind and soul. She’s high above me, but I’ll climb up to where she is.’ This was his morning thought, and the thought that accompanied him all day long and every day until the moment came to separate again. . . . She’s a married woman, but her husband has no claim on her.’ Somehow he was positive of that; the husband had forfeited all claim to her; details he did not know; but she was free; she did no wrong.

In imagination he furnished plausible details from sensational experiences life had shown him. These may have been right or wrong; possibly the husband had ill-treated, then deserted her; they were separated possibly, though—she had told him this—there were no children to complicate the situation. He made his guesses. . . . There was a duty, however, that she would not, did not neglect: in fulfilment of its claim she went to Warsaw every year. What it was, of course, he did not know; but this thought and the emotions caused by it, he put away into their proper places; he asked no questions of her; the matter did not concern him really. The shock experienced the day before was the shock of realising that—he loved. Those two significant words had suddenly shown it to him. The order of his life was changed. ‘She is essential to me; I am essential to her.’ But ‘She’s all the world to me,’ involved equally ‘I’m all the world to her.’ The sense of his own importance was enormously increased. The Wave surged upwards with a sudden leap. .

There was one thing lacking in this love, perhaps, though he hardly noticed it—the element of surprise. Ever since childhood he had suspected this would happen. The love was predestined, and in so far seemed a deliberate affair, pedestrian, almost calm. This sense of the inevitable robbed it of that amazing unearthly glamour which steals upon those who love for the first time, taking them deliciously by surprise. He saw her beautiful, and probably she was, but her beauty was familiar to him. He had come up with the childhood dream, and in coming up with it he recognised it. It seemed thus somewhat. . . . But her mind and soul were beautiful too, only these were more beautiful than he had dreamed. In that lay surprise and wonder too. There was genuine magic here, discovery and exhilarating novelty. He had not caught up with *that*. The love as a whole, however, was expected, natural. It was inevitable. The familiarity alone remained strange, a flavour of the uncanny about it almost—yet certainly real.

And these things also he tried to face and label, though with less success. To bring order into them was beyond his powers. She had outstripped him somehow in her soul, but had come back to fetch him—also to get something for herself she lacked. The rest was oddly familiar: it had happened before. It was about to happen now again, but on a higher level; only before it could

happen completely he must overtake her. The spiral idea lay in it somewhere. But the Wave contained and drove it. . . . His mind was not supple; analogy, that spiritual solvent, did not help him. Yet the fact remained that he somehow visualised the thing in picture form; a rising wave bore them charging up the spiral curve to a point whence they both looked down upon a passage they had made before. She was always a little in front of him, beyond him. But when the Wave finally broke they would rush together—become one . . . there would be pain, but joy would follow.

And during all their subsequent happy days of companionship this one thing alone marred his supreme contentment—this sense of elusiveness, that while he held her she yet slipped between his fingers and escaped. He loved; but whereas to most men love brings a feeling of finality and rest, as of a search divinely ended, to Tom came the feeling that his search was merely resumed, or, indeed, had only Just begun. He had not come into full possession of this woman: he had only found her. . . . She was deep; her deceptive simplicity hid surprises from him much—and it was the greater part—he could not understand. Only when he came up with that would possession be complete. Not that she said or did a single thing that suggested this; she was not elusive of set purpose; she was entirely guiltless of any desire to hold back a fraction of herself, and to conceal was as foreign to her nature as to play with him but that some part of her hung high above his reach, and that he, knowing this, admitted a subtle pain behind the joy. ‘I can’t get at her—quite,’ he put it to himself. ‘Some part of her is not mine yet—doesn’t belong to me.

He thought chiefly, that is, of his own possible disabilities rather than of hers.

‘I often wonder why we’ve come together like this,’ he said once, as they lay in the shade of a larch wood above Corvaux and looked towards the snowy summits of Savoy. ‘What brought us together, I mean? There’s something mysterious about it to me

‘God,’ she said quietly. ‘You needed me. You’ve been lonely. But you’ll never be lonely again.’

Her introduction of the Deity into a conversation did not displease. Fate, or any similar word, could have taken its place; she merely conveyed her sense that their coming together was right and inevitable. Moreover, now that she said it, he recognised the fact of loneliness—that he always had been lonely, but that it was no longer possible. He felt like a boy and spoke like a boy. She had come to look after, care for him. She asked nothing for herself. The thought gave him a sharp and sudden pang.

‘But my love means a lot to you, doesn’t it?’ he asked tenderly. ‘I mean, you need me too?’

‘Everything, Tom,’ she told him softly. He was conscious of the mother in her, as though the mother overshadowed the woman. But while he loved it, the tinge of resentment still remained.

‘You couldn’t do without me, could you?’ He took the hand she placed upon his knee and looked up into her quiet eyes. ‘You’d be lonely too if—I went?’

For a moment she gazed down at him and did not answer; he was aware of both the pain and sweetness in her face; an interval of thoughtfulness again descended on them both: then a great tenderness came welling up into her eyes as she answered slowly: ‘You couldn’t go, Tom. You couldn’t leave me ever.

Her hand was on his shoulder, almost about his neck as she said it, and he came in closer, and before he knew what he was doing his face was buried in her lap. Her hand stroked his hair. Twenty-five years dropped from him—he was a child again, a little boy, and she, in some divine, half-impersonal sense he could not understand, was mothering him. No foolish feeling of shame came with it; the mood was too sudden for analysis, it passed away swiftly too; but he knew, for a brief second, all the sensations of a restless and dissatisfied boy who needed above all else—

comfort: the comfort that only an inexhaustible mother-love could give. . . . And this love poured from her in a flood. Till now he had never known it, nor known the need of it. And because it had been curiously lacking he suddenly wondered how he had done without it. A strange sense of tears rose in his heart. He felt pain and tragedy somewhere. For there was another thing he wanted from her too. . . . Through the sparkle of his joy peeped out that familiar, strange, rich pain, but so swiftly he hardly recognised it. It withdrew again. It vanished.

'But *you* couldn't leave me either, could you?' he asked, sitting erect again. He made a movement as though to draw her head down upon his shoulder in the protective way of a man who loves, but—he could not do it. It was curious. She did nothing to prevent, only somehow the position would be a false one. She did not need him in that way. He was not *yet* big enough to protect. It was she who protected him. And when she answered the same second, the familiar sentence flashed across his mind again: 'She has come back to fetch me.'

'I shall never, never leave you, Tom. We're together for always. I know it absolutely.' The girl of seventeen, the unawakened woman who was desired, the mother who thought not of herself,—all three spoke in those quiet words; but with them, too, he was aware of this elusive other thing he could not name. Perhaps her eyes conveyed it, perhaps the pain and sweetness in the little face so close above his own. She was bending over him. He looked up. And over his heart rushed again that intolerable yearning—the yearning to stand where she stood, far, far beyond him, yet with it the certainty that pain must attend the effort. Until that pain, that effort were accomplished, she could not entirely belong to him. He had to win her yet. Yet also he had to teach *her* something. . . . Meanwhile, in the act of protecting, mothering him she must use pain, as to a learning child. Their love would gain completeness only thus:

Yet in words he could not approach it; he knew not how to.

'It's a strange relationship,' he stammered, concealing, as he thought, the deep emotions that perplexed him. 'The world would misunderstand it utterly.' She smiled, nodding her head. 'I wish—' he added, 'I mean it comes to me sometimes—that you don't need me quite as I need you. You're my whole life, you know—now.'

'You're growing imaginative, Tom,' she teased him smilingly. Then, catching the earnest expression in his face, she added: 'My life has been very full, you see, and I've always had to stand alone. There's been so much for me to do that I've had no time to feel loneliness perhaps.'

'Rescuing the other floating faces!'

A slight tinge of a new emotion slipped through his mind, something he had never felt before, yet so faint he could not even recapture it, much less wonder whether it were jealousy or envy. It rose from the depths; it vanished into him again. . . . Besides, he saw that she was smiling; the teasing mood that so often baffled him was upon her; he heard her give that passing laugh that almost 'kept guessing,' as the Americans say, whether she was in play or earnest.

'It's worth doing, anyhow—rescuing the floating faces,' she said: 'worth living for.' And she half closed her eyes so that he saw her as a girl again. He saw her as she had been even before he knew her, as he used to see her in his dream. It was the dream-eyes that peered at him through long, thick lashes. They looked down at him. He felt caught away to some remote, strange place and time. He was aware of gold, of colour, of a hotter blood, a fiercer sunlight. .

And the sense of familiarity became suddenly very real; he knew what she was going to say, how he would answer, why they had come together. It all flashed near, yet still just beyond his reach. He almost understood. They had been side by side like this before, not in this actual place, but somewhere—somewhere that he knew intimately. Her eyes had looked down into his own precisely so, long, long ago, yet at the same time strangely near. There was a perfume, a little

ghostly perfume—it was the Whiff. It was gone instantly, but he had tasted it. . . . A veil drew up. . . . He saw, he knew, he remembered—*almost*. . . . Another second and he would capture the meaning of it all. Another moment and it would reveal itself—then, suddenly, the whole sensation vanished. He had missed it by the minutest fraction in the world, yet missed it utterly. It left him confused and baffled.

The veil was down again, and he was talking with Madame Jaretzka, the Lettice Aylmer of his boyhood days. Such moments of the *déjà-vu* leave bewilderment behind them, like the effect of sudden change of focus in the eye; and with the bewilderment a sense of insecurity as well.

‘Yes,’ he said half dreamily, ‘and you’ve rescued a lot already, haven’t you?’ as though he still followed in speech the direction of the vanished emotion.

‘You know that, Tom?’ she enquired, raising her eyelids, thus finally restoring the normal.

He stammered rather: ‘I have the feeling—that you’re always doing good to some one somewhere. There’s something —he searched for a word—‘impersonal about you—almost.’ And he knew the word was nearly right, though found by chance. It included ‘un-physical,’ the word he did not like to use. He did not want an angel’s love; the spiritual, to him, rose from the physical, and was not apart from it. He was not in heaven yet, and had no wish to be. He was on earth; and everything of value—love, above all—must spring from earth, or else remain incomplete, insecure, ineffective even.

And again a tiny dart of pain shot through him. Yet he was glad he said it, for it was true. He liked to face what hurt him. To face it was to get it over. . . .

But she was laughing again gently to herself, though certainly not at him. ‘What were you thinking about so long?’ she asked. ‘You’ve been silent for several minutes and your thoughts were far away.’ And as he did not reply immediately, she went on: ‘If you go to Assouan you mustn’t fall into reveries like that or you’ll leave holes in the dam, or whatever your engineering work is—*Tom!*’

She spoke the name with a sudden emphasis that startled him. It was a call.

‘Yes,’ he said, looking up at her. He was emerging from a dream.

‘Come back to me. I don’t like your going away in that strange way—forgetting me.

‘Ah, I like that. Say it again,’ he returned, a deeper note in his voice.

‘You *were* away—weren’t you?’

‘Perhaps,’ he said slowly. ‘I can’t say quite. I was thinking of you, wherever I was.’ He went on, holding her eyes with a steady gaze: ‘A curious feeling came over me like—like heat and light. You seemed so familiar to me all of a sudden that I felt I had known you ages and ages. I was trying to make out where—it was—She dropped her eyelids again and peered at him, but no longer smiling. There was a sterner expression in her face. The lips curved a moment in a new strange way. The air seemed to waver an instant between them. She peered down at him as through a mist. . . .

‘There—like that!’ he exclaimed passionately. ‘Only I wish you wouldn’t. There’s something I don’t like about it. It hurts’—and the same minute felt ashamed, as though he had said a foolish thing. It had come out in spite of himself.

‘Then I won’t, Tom—if you’ll promise not to go away again. I was thinking of Egypt for a second—I don’t know why.’

But he did not laugh with her; his face kept the graver expression still.

‘It changes you—rather oddly,’ he said quietly, ‘that lowering of the eyelids. I can’t say why exactly, but it makes you look—Eastern.’ Again he had said a foolish thing. A kind of spell seemed over him.

'Irish eyes!' he heard her saying. 'They sometimes look like that, I'm told. But you promise, don't you?'

'Of course I promise,' he answered bluntly enough, because he meant it. 'I can never go away from you because'—he turned and looked very hard at her a moment—'because there's something in you I need in my very soul,' he went on earnestly, 'yet that always escapes me. I can't get hold of—all of you.'

And though she refused his very earnest mood, she answered with obvious sincerity at once. 'That's as it should be, Tom. A man tires of a woman the moment he gets to the end of her.' She gave her little laugh and touched his hand. 'Perhaps that's what I'm meant to teach you. When you know all of me—'

'I shall never know all of you,' said Tom.

'You never will,' she replied with meaning, 'for I don't even know it all myself.' And as she said it, he thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in all the world before, for the breeze caught her long gauzy veil of blue and tossed it across her face so that the eyes seemed gazing at him from a distance, but a distance that had height in it. He felt her above him, beyond him, on this height, a height he must climb before he could know complete possession.

'By Jove!' he thought, 'isn't it rising just!' For the Wave was under them tremendously.

April meanwhile had slipped into May, and their daily companionship had become the most natural thing in the world, when the telegram arrived that threatened to interrupt the delightful intercourse. But it was not the telegram Tom expected. Neither Greece nor Egypt claimed his talents yet, for the contracts both at Assouan and Salonica were postponed until the autumn, and the routine of a senior partner's life in London was to be his immediate fate. He brought her the news at once: they discussed it together in all its details and as intimately as though it affected their joint lives similarly. His first thought was to run and talk it over with her; hers, how the change might influence their intercourse, their present and their future. Their relationship was now established in this solid, natural way. He told her everything as a son might tell his mother: she asked questions, counselled, made suggestions as a woman whose loving care considered his welfare and his happiness before all else.

However, it brought no threatened interruption after all—involved, indeed, less of separation than if he had been called away as they expected: for though he must go to London that same week, she would shortly follow him. 'And if you go to Egypt in the autumn, Tom'—she smiled at the way they influenced the future nearer to the heart's desire—'I may go with you. I could make my arrangements accordingly—take my holiday out there earlier instead of here as usual in the spring.'

The days passed quickly. Her first duty was to return to Warsaw; she would then follow him to London and help him with his flat. No man could choose furniture and carpets and curtains properly. They discussed the details with the enthusiasm of children: she would come up several times a week from her bungalow in Kent and make sure that his wall-papers did not clash with the general scheme. Brown was his colour, he told her, and always had been. It was the dominant shade of her eyes as well. He made her promise to stand-in the rooms with her eyes opened very wide so that there could be no mistake, and they laughed over the picture happily.

She came to the train, and although he declared vehemently that he disliked 'being seen off' he was secretly delighted. 'One says such silly things merely because one feels one must say something. And those silly things remain in the memory out of all proportion to their value.' But she insisted. 'Good-byes are always serious to me, Tom. One never knows. I want to see you to

the very last minute.' She had this way of making him feel little things significant with Fate. But another little thing also was in store for him. As the train moved slowly out he noticed some letters in her hand; and one of them was addressed to Warsaw. The name leaped up and stung him—Jaretzka. A spasm of pain shot through him. She was leaving in the morning, he knew. . . .

'Write to me from Warsaw,' he said. 'Take care! We're moving!'

'I'll write every day, my dearest Tom, my boy. You won't forget me. I shall see you in a fortnight.'

He let go the little hand he held till the last possible minute. The bells drowned her final words. She stood there waving her hand with the unposted letters in them, till the station pillars intervened and hid her from him.

And this time no 'silly last things' had been said that could 'stay in the memory out of all proportion to their value.' It was something he had noticed on the envelope that stayed—not the husband's name, but a word in the address, a peculiar Polish word he happened to know:—'Tworki'—the name of the principal *maison de sauté* that stood just outside the city of Warsaw.

Half an hour, perhaps an hour, he sat smoking in his narrow sleeping compartment, thinking with a kind of intense confusion out of which no order came. . . . At Pontarlier he had to get out for the Customs formalities. It was midnight. The stars were bright. The keen spring air from the wooded Jura Mountains had a curious effect, for he returned to his carriage feeling sleepy, the throng of pictures drowned into calmness by one master-thought that reduced their confusion into order. He looked back over the past weeks and realised their intensity. He had lived. There was a change in him, the change of growth, development. He loved. There was now a woman who was his entire world, essential to him. He was essential to her too. And the importance of this ousted all lesser things, even the senior partnership. This was the master-thought—that he now lived for her. He was 'real' even as she was 'real,' each to the other *real*. The Wave had lifted him to a level never reached before. And it was rising still. . . .

He fell asleep on this, to dream of a mighty stream that swept them together irresistibly towards some climax that he never could quite see. She floated near to save him. She floated down. Her little hands were stretched. It was a gorgeous and stupendous dream—a dream of rising life itself—rising till it would curve and break and fall, and the inevitable thing would happen that would bring her finally into his hungry arms, complete, mother and woman, a spiritual love securely founded on the sweet and wholesome earth. . . .

CHAPTER XI

During the brief separation of a fortnight Tom was too busy in London to allow himself much reflection. Absence, once the first keen sense of loss is over, is apt to bring reactions. The self makes an automatic effort to regain the normal life it led before the new emotion dislocated the long-accustomed routine. It tries to run back again along the line of least resistance that habit has made smooth and easy. If the reaction continues to assert its claim, the new emotion is proved thereby a delusion. The test lies there.

In Tom's case, however, the reaction was a feeble reminder merely that he had once lived—without her. It took the form of regret for all the best years of his life he had endured—how, he could not think—without this tender, loving woman at his side. That is, he recognised that his love was real and had changed his outlook fundamentally. He could never do without her from this moment onwards. She equally needed him. He would never leave her. . . . Further than that, for the present, he did not allow himself to think. Having divined something of her tragedy, he

accepted the definite limitations. Speculations concerning another he looked on as beside the point. As far as possible he denied himself the indulgence in them. But another thing he felt as well—the right to claim her, whether he exercised that right or not.

Concerning his relationship with her, however, he did not deny speculation, though somehow this time the perspective was too vast for him to manage quite. There was a strange distance in it: he lost himself in remoteness. In either direction it ran into mists that were interminable, as though veils and curtains lifted endlessly, melting into shadowy reaches beyond that baffled all enquiry. The horizons of his life had grown so huge. This woman had introduced him to a scale of living that he could only gaze at with wondering amazement and delight, too large as yet to conform to the order that his nature sought. He could not properly find himself.

‘It feels almost as if I’ve loved her before like this—yet somehow not enough. That’s what I’ve got to learn,’ was the kind of thought that came to him, at odd moments only. The situation seemed so curiously familiar, yet only half familiar. They were certainly made for one another, and the tie between them had this deep touch of the inevitable about it that refused to go. That notion of the soul’s advance in a spiral cropped up in his mind again. He saw her both coming nearer and retreating—as a moving figure against high light leaves the spectator uncertain whether it is advancing or retiring. He would have liked to talk to Tony all about it, for Tony would be sympathetic. He wanted a confidant and turned instinctively to his cousin. . . . *She* already understood more than he did, though perhaps not consciously, and therein lay the secret of her odd elusiveness. Yet, in another sense, his possession was incomplete because a part of her still lay unawakened. ‘I must love her more and more and more,’ he told himself. But, at the same time, he took it for granted that he was indispensable to her, as she was to him.

These flashes of perception, deeper than anything had experienced in life hitherto, came occasionally while he waited in London for her return; and though puzzled—his straightforward nature disliked all mystery—he noted them with uncommon interest. Nothing, however, could prevent the rise upwards of the Wave that bore the situation on its breast. The affair swept him onwards; it was not to be checked or hindered. He resigned direction to its elemental tide.

The faint uneasiness, also, recurred from time to time, especially now that he was alone again. He attributed it to the unsatisfied desire in his heart, the knowledge that as yet he had no exclusive possession, and did not really own her; the sense of insecurity unsettled him, the feeling that she was open to capture by any one—‘who understands and appreciates her better than I do,’ was the way he phrased it sometimes. He was troubled and uneasy because so much of her lay unresponsive to his touch—not needing him. While he was climbing up to reach her, another, with a stronger claim, might step in—step back—and seize her.

It made him smile a little even while he thought of it, for her truth and constancy were beyond all question. And then, suddenly, he traced the uneasiness to its source. There *was* ‘another’ who had first claim upon her—who had it once, at any rate. Though at present some cloud obscured and negated that claim, the cloud might lift, the situation change, the claim become paramount again, as once it surely had been paramount. And, disquieting though the possibility was, Tom was pleased with himself—he was so naïve and simple towards life—for having discerned it clearly. He recognised the risk and thus felt half prepared in advance. . . . In another way it satisfied him too. With this dream-like suggestion that it all had happened before, he had always felt that a further detail was lacking to complete the scene he half remembered. Something, as yet, was wanting. And this item needed to make the strange repetition of the scene fulfil itself seemed, precisely, the presence of another.’

Their intercourse, meanwhile, proved beyond words delightful during the following weeks, when, after her return from Warsaw, she kept her word and helped him in the prosaic business of furnishing his flat and settling down, as in a hundred other details of his daily life as well. All that they did and said together confirmed their dear relationship and established it beyond reproach. There was no question of anything false, illicit, requiring concealment: nothing to hide and no one to evade. In their own minds their innocence was so sure, indeed, that it was not once alluded to between them. It was impossible to look at her and doubt: nor could the most cynical suspect Tom Kelderdon of an undesirable intrigue with the wife of another man. His acquaintance, moreover, were not of the kind that harboured the usual 'worldly' thoughts; he went little into society, whereas the comparatively few Londoners she knew were almost entirely—he discovered it by degrees—people whose welfare in one way or another she had earnestly at heart. It was a marvel to him, indeed, how she never wearied of helping ungrateful folk, for the wish to be of service seemed ingrained in her. Her first thought on making new acquaintances was always what she could do for them, not with money necessarily, but by 'seeing' them in their proper *milieu* and planning to bring about the conditions they needed in order to realise themselves fully. Failure, discontent, unhappiness were due to wrong conditions more than to radical fault in the people themselves; once they 'found themselves,' the rest would follow. It amounted to a genius in her.

It seemed the artist instinct that sought this unselfish end rather than any religious tendency. She felt it ugly to see people at issue with their surroundings. Her religion was humanity, and had no dogmas. Even Tony Winslowe, now in England again, came in for his share of this sweet fashioning energy in her; much to his own bewilderment and to Tom's amusement. .

The summer passed towards early autumn and London emptied, but it made no difference to them. Tom had urgent work to do and was absorbed in it, never forgetting for a moment that he was now a Partner in the Firm. He spent frequent week-ends at Madame Jaretska's Kentish bungalow, where she had for companion at the moment an Irish cousin who, as Tom easily guessed, was also a dependant. This cousin had been invited with her child, Molly, for the summer holidays, and these summer holidays had run on into three months at least.

A tall, thin, angular woman, of uncertain manners and capricious temperament, Mrs. Haughstone had perhaps lived so long upon another's bounty that she had come to take her good fortune for granted, and permitted herself freely two cardinal indulgences—grumbling and jealousy. Having married unwisely, in order to better herself rather than because she loved, her shiftless husband had disgraced himself with an adventuress governess, leaving her with three children and something below £150 a year. Madame Jaretska had stepped in to bring them together again: she provided schooling abroad, holidays, doctors, clothes, and all she could devise by way of helping them 'find themselves' again, and so turning their broken lives to good account. With the husband, sly, lazy, devoid of both pride and honesty, she could do little, and she was quite aware that he and his wife put their heads together to increase the flow of 'necessaries' she generously supplied.

It was a sordid, commonplace story, sordidly treated by the soured and vindictive wife, whose eventual aims upon her saviour's purse were too obvious to be mistaken. Even Tom perceived the fact without delay. He also perceived, behind the flattering tongue, an acid and suspicious jealousy that regarded new friends with ill-disguised alarm. Mrs. Haughstone thought of herself and her children before all else. She mistook the impersonal attitude of her benefactress for credulous weakness. A new friend was hostile to her shameless ambitions and disliked accordingly. . . . Tom scented an enemy the first time he met her. To him she expressed her

disapproval of Tony, and *vice versa*, while to her hostess she professed she liked them both—' but' the 'but' implying that men were selfish and ambitious creatures who thought only of their own advantage.

His country visits, therefore, were not made happier by the presence in the cottage of this woman and her child, but the manner in which the benefactress met the situation justified the respect he had felt first months before. It increased his love and admiration. Madame Jaretzka behaved unusually. That she grasped the position there could be no doubt, but her manner of dealing with it was unique. For when Mrs. Haughstone grumbled, Madame Jaretzka gave her more, and when Mrs. Haughstone yielded to jealousy, Madame Jaretzka smiled and said no word. She won her victories with further generosity.

'Another face that has to be rescued?' Tom permitted himself to say once, after an unfortunate scene in which his hostess had been subtly accused of favouritism to another child in the house. He could hardly suppress the annoyance and impatience that he felt.

'Oh, I never thought about it in that way,' she answered with her little laugh, quite unruffled by what had happened. 'The best way is to help them to—see themselves. Then they try to cure themselves.' She laughed again, as though she had said a childish thing instead of something distinctly wise. 'I can't *cure* them,' she added. 'I can only help.'

Tom looked at her. 'Help others to see themselves—as they are,' he repeated slowly. 'So that's how you do it, is it?' He reflected a moment. 'That's being impersonal. You rouse no opposition that way. It's good.'

'Is it?' she replied, as though guiltless of any conscious plan. 'It seems the natural thing to do.'

Then, as he was evidently preparing for discussion in his honest and laborious way, she stopped him with a look, smiling, sighing, and holding up her little finger warningly. He understood. Analysis and argument she avoided always; they obscured the essential thing; here was the intuitive method of grasping the solution the instant the problem was stated. Detailed examination exhausted her merely. And Tom obeyed that look, that threatening finger. In little things he invariably yielded, while in big things he remained firm, even obstinate, though without realising it.

Her head inclined gracefully, acknowledging her victory. 'That's one reason I love you, Tom,' she told him as reward; 'you're a boy on the surface and a man inside.'

Tom saw beauty flash about her as she said it; emotion rose through him in a sudden tumult; he would have seized her, kissed her, crumpled her little self against his heart and held her there, but for the tantalising truth that the thing he wanted would have escaped him in the very act. The loveliness he yearned for, craved, was not open to physical attack; it was a loveliness of the spirit, a bird, a star, a wild flower on some high pinnacle near the snow: to obtain it he must climb to where it soared above the earth—rise up to her.

He laughed and took her little finger in both hands. He felt awkward, big and clumsy, a giant trying to catch an elusive butterfly. 'You turn us all round *that!*' he declared. 'You turn her,' nodding towards the door, 'and me,' kissing the tip quickly, 'and Tony too. Only she and Tony don't know you twiddle them—and I do.'

She let him kiss her hand, but when he drew nearer, trying to set his lips upon the arm her summer dress left bare, she put up her face instead and kissed him lightly on the cheek. Her free hand made a caressing gesture across his neck and shoulder, as she stood on tiptoe to reach him. The mother in her, not the woman, caressed him dearly. It was wonderful; but the surge of mingled emotions clouded something in his brain, and a string of words came tumbling out in a fire of joy and pain.

'You're a queen and a conqueror,' he said, longing to seize her, yet holding himself back strongly. 'Somewhere I'm your helpless slave, but somewhere I'm your master.' The protective sense came up in him. 'It's too delicious! I'm in a dream Lettice,' he whispered, 'it's my Wave! The Wave is behind it! It's behind us both!'

For an instant she half closed her eyelids in the way she knew both pleased and frightened him. Invariably this gave her the advantage. He felt her above him when she looked like this, he kneeling with hands outstretched, yearning to be raised to where she stood. 'You're a baby, a poet, and a man rolled into a dear big boy,' she said quickly, moving towards the door away from him. 'And now I must go and get my garden hat, for it's time to meet Tony and Moyra at the train, and as you have so much surplus energy to-day we'll walk through the woods instead of going in the motor.' She waved her hand and vanished behind the door. He heard the patter of her feet as she ran upstairs.

He went to the open window, lit his pipe, leaned out with his head among the climbing roses, and thought of many things. Great joy was in him, but behind it, far down where he could not reach it quite, hid a gnawing pain that was obscure uneasiness. Pictures came floating across his mind, rising and falling, sometimes rushing hurriedly; he saw things and faces mixed, his own and hers chief among them. Her little finger pointed to a star. He sighed, he wondered, he half prayed. Would he ever understand, rise to her level, possess her for his very own? She seemed so far beyond him. It was only part of her he touched.

The faces fluttered and looked into his own, one among them an imagined face—the husband's. It was a face with light blue eyes, moreover. He saw Tony's too, frank, laughing, irresponsible, and the face of the Irish girl who was Tony's latest passion. Tony could settle down to no one for long. Tom remembered suddenly his remark at Zakopané months ago, that the bee never sipped the last drop of honey from the flower. . . . His thoughts tumbled and flew in many directions, yet all at once. Life seemed very full and marvellous; it had never seemed so intense before; it bore him onwards, upwards, forwards, with a rush beyond all possible control and guidance. He acknowledged a rather delicious sense of helplessness. The Wave was everywhere behind and under him. It was sweeping him along.

Then thought returned to Tony and the Irish girl who were coming down for the Sunday, and he smiled to himself as he recalled his cousin's ardent admiration at a theatre party a few nights ago in town. Tony had something that naturally attracted women, dominating them too easily. Was he heartless a little in the business? Would he never, like Tom, settle down with one? His thought passed to the latest capture: there were signs, indeed, that here Tony was caught at last.

For Tom, Tony, and Madame Jaretzka formed an understanding trio, and there were few expeditions, town or country, of which the lively bird-enthusiast did not form an active member. Tony took it all very lightly, unaware of any serious intention behind the pleasant invitations. Tom was amused by it. He looked forward to his cousin's visit now. He was feeling the need of a confidant, and Tony might so admirably fill the rôle. It was curious, a little: Tom often felt that he wanted to confide in Tony, yet somehow or other the confidences were never actually made. There was something in Tony that invited that free, purging confidence which is a need of every human being. It was so easy to tell things, difficult things, to this careless, sympathetic being; yet Tom never passed the frontier into definite revelation. At the last moment he invariably held back.

Thought passed to his hostess, already manœuvring to help Tony 'find himself.' It amused Tom, even while he gave his willing assistance; for Tony was of evasive, slippery material, like a fluid that, pressed in one given direction, resists and runs away into several others. 'He scatters

himself too much,' she remarked, 'and it's a pity; there's waste.' Tom laughed, thinking of his episodic love affairs. 'I didn't mean that,' she added, smiling with him; 'I meant generally. He's full of talent and knowledge. His power over women is natural, but it comes of mere brilliance. If all that were concentrated instead, he would do something real; he might be extraordinarily effective in life. Yes, Tom, I mean it.' But Tom, though he smiled, agreed with her, feeling rather flattered that she liked his cousin.

'But he breaks too many hearts,' he said lightly, thinking of his last conquest, and then added, hardly knowing why he said it, 'By the by, did you ever notice his hands?'

The way she quickly looked up at him proved that she divined his meaning. But the glance had a flash of something that escaped him.

'You're very observant, Tommy,' she said evasively. It seemed impossible for her to say a disparaging thing of anybody. She invariably picked out and emphasised the best. 'You don't admire them?'

'Do *you*, Lettice?'

She paused for an imperceptible second, then smiled. 'I rather like big rough hands in a man—perhaps,' she said without any particular interest, 'though—in a way—they frighten me sometimes. Tony's are ugly, but there's power in them.' And she placed her own small gloved hand upon his arm. 'He's rather irresponsible, I know,' she added gently, 'but he'll grow out of that in time. He's beginning to improve already.'

You see, he's got no mother,' Tom observed.

'No wife either—yet,' she added with a laugh.

'Or work,' put in Tom, with a touch of self-praise, and thinking of his own position in the world. Her interest in Tony had the effect of making himself seem worthier, more important. This fine woman, who judged people from so high a standpoint, had picked out—himself! He had an absurd yet delightful feeling as though Tony was their child, and the perfectly natural way she took him under her mothering wing stirred an admiring pity in him.

Then as they walked together through the fragrant pine-woods to the station, an incident at a recent theatre party rose before his memory. Tony and his Amanda had been with them. The incident in question had left a singular impression on his mind, though why it emerged now, as they wandered through the quiet wood, he could not tell. It had occurred a week or two ago. He now saw it again—in a tenth of the time it takes to tell.

The scene was laid in ancient Egypt, and while the play was commonplace, the elaborate production—scenery, dresses, atmosphere—was good. But Tom, unable to feel interest in the trivial and badly acted story, had felt interest in another thing he could not name. There was a subtle charm, a delicate glamour about it as of immensely old romance, but some lost romance of very far away. Yet, whether this charm was due to the stage effects or to themselves, sitting there in the stalls together, escaped him. For in some singular way the party, his hostess certainly, seemed to interpenetrate the play itself. She, above all, and Tony vaguely, seemed inseparable from what he gazed at, heard, and felt.

Continually he caught himself thinking how delightful it was to know himself next to Madame Jaretzka, so close that he shared her atmosphere, her perfume, touched her even; that their minds were engaged intimately together watching the same scene; and also, that on her other side, sat Tony, affectionate, whimsical, fascinating Tony, whom they were trying to help 'find himself'; and that he, again, was next to a girl he liked. The harmonious feeling of the four was pleasurable to Tom. He felt himself, moreover, an important and indispensable item in its

composition. It was vague; he did not attempt to analyse it as self—flattery, as vanity, as pride—he was aware, merely, that he felt very pleased with himself and so with everybody else. It was gratifying to sit at the head of the group everybody could see how beautiful *she* was; the dream of exclusive ownership stole over him more definitely than ever before. ‘She’s chosen *me!* She needs me—a woman like that!’

The audience, the lights, the colour, the music influenced him. It seemed he caught something from the crude human passion that was being ranted on the stage and transferred it unconsciously into his relations with the party he belonged to, but, above all, into his relationship with her—and with another. But he refused to let his mind dwell upon that other. He found himself thinking instead of the divine tenderness that was in her, yet at the same time of her elusiveness and the curious pain it caused him. Whence came, he wondered, the sweet and cruel flavour? It seemed like a memory of something suffered long ago, the sweetness in it true and exquisite, the cruelty an error on his own part somehow. The old hint of uneasiness, the strange, rich pain he had known in boyhood, stole faintly over him; its first and immediate effect heightening the sense of dim, old-world romance already present. .

And he had turned cautiously to look at her. She was leaning forward a little as though the play absorbed her, and the attitude startled him. It caused him almost a definite shock. The face had pain in it.

She was not aware that he stared; her attention was fastened upon the stage; but the eyes were fixed, the little mouth was fixed as well, the lips compressed; and all her features wore this expression of curious pain. There was sternness in them, something almost hard. He watched her for some minutes, surprised and fascinated. It came over him that he almost knew what that was in her mind. Another moment and he would discover it—when, past her profile, he caught his cousin’s eyes peering across at him. Tony had felt the direction of his glance and had looked round: and Tony—mischievously—winked!

The spell was broken. In that instant, however, through the heated air of the crowded stalls already weighted with sickly artificial perfumes, there reached him faintly, as from very far away, another and a subtler perfume, something of elusive fragrance in it. It was very poignant, instinct as with forgotten associations. It was the Whiff. It came, it went; but it was unmistakable. And he connected it, as by some instantaneous certitude, with the play—with Egypt.

‘What do you think of it, Lettice?’ he had whispered, nodding towards the stage.

She turned with a start. She came back. The expression of pain flashed instantly away. She had evidently not been thinking of the performance. ‘It’s not much, Tom, is it? But I like the scenery. It makes me feel strange somewhere—the change that comes over me in Egypt. We’ll be there together—some day.’ She leaned over with her lips against his ear.

And there was significance in the commonplace words, he thought—a significance her whisper did not realise, and certainly did not intend.

‘All three of us,’ he rejoined before he knew what he meant exactly.

And she nodded hurriedly. Either she agreed, or else she had not heard him. He did not insist, he did not repeat, he sat there wondering why on earth he said the thing. A touch of pain pricked him like an insect’s sting, but a pain he could not account for. His blood, at the same time, leaped as she bent her face so near to his own. He felt his heart swell as he looked into her eyes. Her beauty astonished him; in this twilight of the theatre it glowed and burned like a veiled star. He fancied—it was the trick of the half-light, of course—she had grown darker and that a dusky flush lay on her cheeks.

‘What were you thinking about?’ he whispered lower again, changing the sentence slightly. And, as he asked it, he saw Tony still watching him, two seats away. It annoyed him; he drew his head back a little so that her face concealed him.

‘I don’t know,’ she whispered back; ‘nothing in particular.’ She put her gloved hand stealthily towards him and touched his knee. The gesture, he felt, was intended to supplement the words. For the first time in his life he did not quite believe her. The thought was odious, but not to be denied. It merely flashed across him, however. He forgot it instantly.

‘Seems oddly familiar somehow,’ he said, ‘doesn’t it?’

Again she nodded, smiling, as she gazed for a moment first into one eye, then into the other, then turned away to watch the stage. And abruptly, as she did so, the entire feeling vanished, the mood evaporated, her expression was normal once more, and he fixed his attention on the stupid play.

He turned his interest into other channels; he would take his party on to supper. He did so. Yet an impression remained—the impression that the Wave had come nearer, higher, that it was rising and gaining impetus, accumulating mass, momentum, power. The gay supper could not dissipate that, nor could the happy ten minutes in a taxi, when he drove her to her door, decrease or weaken it. She was very tired. They spoke little, he remembered she gave him a gentle touch as the cab drew up, and the few things she said had entirely to do with his comfort in his flat. He felt in that touch and in those tender questions the mother only. The woman, it suddenly occurred to him, had gone elsewhere. He had never had it, never even claimed it. A deep sense of loneliness touched him for a moment. His heart beat rapidly. He dreamed. . . .

Why the scene came back to him now as they walked slowly through the summery pine-wood he knew not. He caught himself thinking vividly of Egypt suddenly, of being in Egypt with her—and with another. But on that other he refused to let thought linger. Of set purpose he chose Tony in that other’s place. He saw it in a picture: he and she together helping Tony, she and Tony equally helping him. It passed before him merely, a glowing coloured picture set in high light against the heavy background of these English fir-woods and the Kentish sky. Whether it came towards him or retreated, he could not say. It was very brief, instantaneous almost. The memory of the play, with its numerous attendant correlations, rose up, then vanished.

‘Give me your arm, Tom, you mighty giant: these pine-needles are so slippery.’ He felt her hand creep in and rest upon his muscles, and a glow of boyish pride came with it. In her summer dress of white, her big garden hat and flowing violet veil, she looked adorable. He liked the long white gauntlet gloves. The shadows of the trees became her well: against the thick dark trunks she seemed slim and dainty as a flower that the breeze bent over towards him. ‘You’re so horribly big and strong,’ she said, and her eyes, full of expression, glanced up at him. He watched her little feet in the neat white shoes peep out in turn as they walked along; her fingers pressed his arm. He tried to take her parasol, but she prevented him, saying it was her only weapon of defence against a giant, ‘and there *is* a giant in this forest, though only a baby one perhaps!’ He felt the mother in her pour over him in a flood of tenderness that blessed and soothed and comforted. It was as if a divine and healing power streamed from her into him.

‘And what *were* you thinking about, Tom?’ she enquired teasingly. ‘You haven’t said a word for a whole five minutes!’

‘I was thinking of Egypt,’ he answered with truth.

She looked up quickly.

'I'm to go out in December,' he went on. 'I told you. It was decided at our last Board Meeting.'

She said she remembered. 'But it's funny,' she added, 'because I was thinking of Egypt too just then—thinking of the Nile, my river with the floating faces.'

The week-end visit was typical of many others; Mrs. Haughstone, seeing safety in numbers possibly, was pleasant on the surface, Molly deflecting most of her poisoned darts towards herself; while Tom and Tony shared the society of their unconventional hostess with boyish enjoyment. Tom modified the air of ownership he indulged when alone with her, and no one need have noticed that there was anything more between them than a hearty, understanding friendship. Tony, for instance, may have guessed the true situation, or, again, he may not; for he said no word, nor showed he smallest hint by word, by gesture, or by silence—most significant betrayal of all—that he was aware of any special tie. Though a keen observer, he gave no sign. 'She's an interesting woman, Tom,' he remarked lightly yet with enthusiasm once, 'and a rare good hostess—a woman in a thousand, I declare. We make a famous trio. As you've got that Assouan job we'll have some fun next winter in Egypt, eh?'

And Tom, pleased and secretly flattered by the admiration, tried to make his confidences. Unless Tony had liked her this would have been impossible. But they formed such a natural, happy trio together, giving the lie to the hoary proverb, that Tom felt it was permissible to speak of her to his sympathetic cousin. Already they had laughingly discussed the half-forgotten acquaintanceship begun in the *dahabieh* on the Nile, Tony making a neat apology by declaring to her, 'Beautiful women blind me so, Madame Jaretzka, that I invariably forget all lesser details. And that's why I told Tom you were a Russian.'

On this particular occasion, too, it was made easier because Tony had asked his cousin's opinion about the Irish girl, invited for his special benefit. 'I was never so disappointed in my life,' he said in his convincing yet airy way. 'She looked so wonderful the other night. It was the evening dress, I suppose. You should always see a girl first in the daytime; the daylight self is the real self.' And Tom, amused by the irresponsible attitude towards the sex, replied that the right woman looked herself in any dress because it was as much a part of her as her own skin. 'Yes,' said Tony, 'it's the thing inside the skin that counts, of course; you're right; the rest is only a passing glamour. But friendship with a woman is the best of all, for friendship grows insensibly into the best kind of love. It's a delightful feeling,' he added sympathetically, 'that kind of friendship. Independent of what they wear!'

He enjoyed his pun and laughed. 'I say, Tom,' he went on suddenly with a certain inconsequence, 'have you ever met the Prince—Madame Jaretzka's husband—by the way? I wonder what he's like.' He looked up carelessly and raised his eyebrows.

'No,' replied Tom in a quiet tone, 'but I—exp—hope to some day.'

'I think he ran away and left her, or something,' continued the other. 'He's dead, anyhow, to all intents and purposes. But I've been wondering lately. I'll be bound there was ill-treatment. She looks so sad sometimes. The other night at the theatre I was watching her—'

'That Egyptian play?' broke in Tom.

'Yes; it was bad enough to make any one look sad, wasn't it? But it was curious all the same—'

'I didn't mean the badness.'

'Nor did I. It was odd. There was atmosphere in spite of everything.'

'I thought you were too occupied to notice the performance,' Tom hinted.

Tony laughed good-naturedly. 'I was a bit taken up, I admit,' he said. 'But there was something curious all the same. I kept seeing you and our hostess on the stage——'

'In Egypt!'

'In a way, yes.' He hesitated.

'Odd,' said his cousin briefly.

'Very. It seemed—there was some one else who ought to have been there as well as you two. Only he never came on.'

Tom made no comment. Was this thought-transference, he wondered?

The natural sympathy between them furnished the requisite conditions certainly.

'He never came on,' continued Tony, 'and I had the queer feeling that he was being kept off on purpose, that he was busy with something else, but that the moment he came on the play would get good and interesting—real. Something would happen. And it was then I noticed Madame Jaretska——'

'And me, too, I suppose,' Tom put in, half amused, half serious. There was an excited yet uneasy feeling in him.

'Chiefly her, I think. And she looked so sad,—it struck me suddenly. D'you know, Tom,' he went on more earnestly, 'it was really quite curious. I got the feeling that we three were watching that play together from above it somewhere, looking down on it—sort of from a height above——'

'Above,' exclaimed his cousin. There was surprise in him—surprise at himself. That faint uneasiness increased. He realised that to confide in Tony was impossible. But why?

'H'm,' Tony went on in a reflective way as if half to himself. 'I may have seen it before and forgotten it.' Then he looked up at his cousin. 'And what's more—that we three, as we watched it, knew the same thing together—knew that we were waiting for another chap to come on, and that when he came the silly piece would turn suddenly interesting, dramatic in a true sense, only tragedy instead of comedy. Did *you*, Tom?' he asked abruptly, screwing up his eyes and looking quite serious a moment.

Tom had no answer ready, but his cousin left no time for answering.

'And the fact is,' he continued, lowering his voice, 'I had the feeling the other chap we were waiting for was *him*.'

Tom was too interested to smile at the grammar. 'You mean—her husband?' he said quietly. He did not like the turn the talk had taken; it pleased him to talk of her, but he disliked to bring the absent husband in. There was trouble in him as he listened.

'Possibly it was,' he added a trifle stiffly. Then, ashamed of his feeling towards his imaginative cousin, he changed his manner quickly. He went up and stood behind him by the open window. 'Tony, old boy, we're together somehow in this thing,' he began impulsively; 'I'm sure of it.' Then the words stuck. 'if ever I want your help——'

'Rather, Tom,' said the other with enthusiasm, yet puzzled, turning with an earnest expression in his frank blue eyes. In another moment, like two boys swearing eternal friendship, they would have shaken hands. Tom again felt the impulse to make the confidences that desire for sympathy prompted, and again realised that it was difficult, yet that he would accomplish it. Indeed, he was on the point of doing so, relieving his mind of the childhood story, the accumulated details of Wave and Whiff and Sound and Eyes, the singular Montreux meeting, the strange medley of joy and uneasiness as well, all in fact without reserve—when a voice from the lawn came floating into the room and broke the spell. It lifted him sharply to another plane. He felt glad suddenly that he had not spoken—afterwards, he felt very glad. It was not right in regard to her, he realised.

'You're never ready, you boys,' their hostess was saying, 'and Miss Monnigan declares that men always wait to be fetched. The lunch-baskets are all in, and the motor's waiting.'

'We didn't want to be in the way,' cried Tony gaily, ever ready with an answer first. 'We're both so big and clumsy. But we'll make the fire in the woods and do the work that requires mere strength without skill all right.' He leaped out of the window to join them, while Tom went by the door to fetch his cap and overcoat. Turning an instant he saw the three figures on the lawn standing in the sunlight, Madame Jaretzka with a loose, rough motor-coat over her white dress, a rose at her throat and the long blue veil he loved wound round her hair and face. He saw her eyes look up at Tony and heard her chiding him. 'You've been talking mischief in there together,' she was saying laughingly, giving him a searching glance in play, though the tone had meaning in it. 'We were talking of you,' swore Tony, 'and you,' he added, turning by way of polite afterthought to the girl. And one of his big hands he laid for a moment upon Madame Jaretzka's arm.

Tom turned sharply and hurried on into the hall. The first thought in his mind was how tender and gentle Madame Jaretzka looked standing in the sunshine, her eyes turned up at Tony. His second thought was vaguer: he felt glad that Tony admired and liked her so. The third was vaguer still: Tony didn't really care for the girl a bit and was only amusing himself with her, but Madame Jaretzka would protect her and see that no harm came of it. She could protect the whole world. That was her genius.

In a moment these three thoughts flashed through him, but while the last two vanished as quickly as they came, the first lingered like sunlight in him. It remained and grew and filled his heart, and all that day it kept close by him—her love, her comfort, her mothering compassion.

And Tom felt glad for some reason that his confidences to Tony after all had been interrupted and prevented. They remained thus interrupted and prevented until the end, even when the 'other' came upon the scene, and above all while that 'other' stayed. It all seemed curiously inevitable.

CHAPTER XII

The last few weeks of September they were much alone together, for Mrs. Haughstone had gone back to her husband's tiny house at Kew, Molly to the Dresden school, and Tony somewhere into space—northern Russia, he said, to watch the birds beginning to leave.

Meanwhile, with deepening of friendship, and experiences whose ordinariness was raised into significance because this woman shared them with him, Tom saw the summer fade in England and usher in the longer evenings. Light and heat waned from the sighing year; winds, charged with the memory of roses, took the paling skies; the swallows whispered together of the southern tour. New stars swam into their autumnal places, and the Milky Way came majestically to its own. He watched the curve of it on moonless nights, pouring its grand river across the heavens. And in the heart of its soft brilliance he saw Cygnus, cruciform and shining, immersed in the white foam of the arching wave.

He noticed these things now, as once long ago in early boyhood, because a time of separation was at hand. His yearning now was akin to his yearning then—it left a chasm in his soul that beauty alone could help to fill. At fifteen he was thirty-five, as now at thirty-five he was fifteen again.

Lettice was not, indeed, at a Finishing School across the Channel, but she was shortly going to Warsaw to spend October with her husband, and in November she was to sail for Egypt from Trieste. Tom was to follow in December, so a separation of three months was close at hand. 'But

a necessary separation,' she said one evening as they motored home beneath the stars, 'is always bearable and strengthening; we shall both be occupied with things that must—I mean, things we ought to do. It's the needless separations that are hard to bear.' He replied that it would be wonderful meeting again and pretending they were strangers. He tried to share her mood, her point of view with honesty. 'Yes,' she answered, 'only that wouldn't be quite true, because you and I can never be separated—really. The curve of the earth may hide us from each other's sight like that'—and she pointed to the sinking moon—'but we feel the pull just the same.'

They leaned back among the cushions, sharing the mysterious beauty of the night-sky in their hearts. They lowered their voices as though the hush upon the world demanded it. The little things they said seemed suddenly to possess a significance they could not account for quite and yet admitted.

He told her that the Milky Way was at its best these coming months, and that Cygnus would be always visible on clear nights. 'We'll look at that and remember,' he said half playfully. 'The astronomers say the Milky Way is the very ground-plan of the Universe. So we all come out of it. And you're Cygnus.' She called him sentimental, and he admitted that perhaps he was. 'I don't like this separation,' he said bluntly. In his mind he was thinking that the Milky Way had his wave in it, and that its wondrous arch, like his life and hers, rose out of the 'sea' below the world. In that sea no separation was possible.

'But it's not that that makes you suddenly poetic, Tom. It's something else.'

'Is it?' he answered. A whisper of pain went past him across the night. He felt something coming; he was convinced she felt it too. But he could not name it.

'The Milky Way is a stream as well as a wave. You say it rises in the autumn?' She leaned nearer to him a little.

'But it's seen at its best a little later—in the winter, I believe.'

'We shall be in Egypt then,' she mentioned. He could have sworn she would say those very words.

'Egypt,' he repeated slowly. 'Yes—in Egypt.'

And a little shiver came over him, so slight, so quickly gone again, that he hoped it was imperceptible. Yet she had noticed it.

'Why, Tom, don't you like the idea?'

'I wonder—' he began, then changed the sentence—'I wonder what it will be like. I have a curious desire to see it—I know that.'

He heard her laugh under her breath a little. What came over them both in that moment he couldn't say. There was a sense of tumult in him somewhere, a hint of pain, of menace too. Her laughter, slight as it was, jarred upon him. She was not feeling quite what he felt—this flashed, then vanished.

'You don't sound enthusiastic,' she said calmly.

'I am, though. Only—I had a feeling—'

He broke off. The truth was he couldn't describe that feeling even to himself.

'Tom, dear, my dear one—' she began, then stopped. She also stopped an impulsive movement towards him. She drew back her sentence and her arms. And Tom, aware of a rising passion in him he might be unable to control, turned his face away a moment. Something clutched at his heart as with cruel pincers.

A chill followed close upon the shiver. He felt a moment of keen shame, yet knew not exactly why he felt it.

'I am a sentimental ass!' he exclaimed abruptly with a natural laugh. His voice was tender. He turned again to her. 'I believe I've never properly grown up.' And before he could restrain himself he drew her towards him, seized her hand and kissed it like a boy. It was that kiss, combined with her blocked sentence and uncompleted gesture, rather than any more passionate expression of their love for one another, that he remembered throughout the empty months to follow.

But there was another reason, too, why he remembered it. For she wore a silk dress, and the arm against his ear produced a momentary rustling that brought back the noise in the Zakopané bedroom when the frozen branch had scraped the outside wall. And with the Sound, absent now so long, the old strange uneasiness revived acutely. For that caressing gesture, that kiss, that phrase of love that blocked its own final utterance brought back the strange rich pain.

In the act of giving them, even while he felt her touch and held her within his arms—she evaded him and went far away into another place where he could not follow her. And he knew for the first time a singular emotion that seemed like a faint, distant jealousy that stirred in him, yet a spiritual jealousy . . . as of some one he had never even seen.

They lingered a moment in the garden to enjoy the quiet stars and see the moon go down below the pine-wood. The tense mood of half an hour ago in the motor-car had evaporated of its own accord apparently.

A conversation that followed emphasised this elusive emotion in him, because it somehow increased the remoteness of the part of her he could not claim. She mentioned that she was taking Mrs. Haughstone with her to Egypt in November; it again exasperated him; such unselfishness he could not understand. The invitation came, moreover, upon what Tom felt was a climax of shameless behaviour. For Madame Jaretska had helped the family with money that, to save their pride, was to be considered lent. The husband had written gushing letters of thanks and promises that—Tom had seen these letters—could hardly have deceived a schoolgirl. Yet a recent legacy, which rendered a part repayment possible, had been purposely concealed, with the result that yet more money had been 'lent' to tide them over non-existent or invented difficulties.

And now, on the top of this, Madame Jaretska not only refused to divulge that the legacy was known to her, but even proposed an expensive two months' holiday to the woman who was tricking her.

Tom objected strongly for two reasons; he thought it foolish kindness, and he did not want her.

'You're too good to the woman, far too good,' he said. But his annoyance was only increased by the firmness of the attitude that met him. 'No, Tom; you're wrong. They'll find out in time that I know, and see themselves as they are.'

'You forgive everything to everybody,' he observed critically. 'It's too much.'

She turned round upon him. Her attitude was a rebuke, and feeling rebuked he did not like it. For though she did not quote 'until seventy times seven,' she lived it.

'When she sees herself sly and treacherous like that, she'll understand,' came the answer, 'she'll get her own forgiveness.'

'Her own forgiveness!'

'The only real kind. If I forgive, it doesn't alter her. But if she understands and feels shame and makes up her mind not to repeat—that's forgiving herself. She really changes then.'

Tom gasped inwardly. This was a level of behaviour where he found the air somewhat rarified. He saw the truth of it, but had no answer ready.

'Remorse and regret,' she went on, 'only make one ineffective in the present. It's looking backwards, instead of looking forwards.'

He felt something very big in her as she said it, holding his eyes firmly with her own. To have the love of such a woman was, indeed, a joy and wonder. It was a keen happiness to feel that he, Tom Keverdon, had obtained it. His admiration for himself, and his deep, admiring love for her rose side by side. He did not recognise the flattery of self in this attitude. The simplicity in her baffled him.

'I could forgive *you* anything, Lettice!' he cried.

'Could you?' she said gently. 'If so, you really love me.'

It was not the doubt in her voice that overwhelmed him then; she never indulged in hints. It was a doubt in himself, not that he loved her, but that his love was not yet big enough, unselfish enough, sufficiently large and deep to be worthy of this exquisite soul beside him. Perhaps it was realising he could not yet possess her spirit that made him seize the precious little body that contained it. Nothing could stop him. He took her in his arms and held her till she became breathless. The passionate moment expressed real spiritual yearning. And she knew it. She did not struggle, yet neither did she respond. They stood upon different levels somehow.

'There'll be nothing left to love,' she gasped, 'if you do that often!' She released herself quietly, tidying her hair and putting her hat straight while she smiled at him. Her dark veil had caught in his tie-pin. She disentangled it, her hands touching his mouth as she did so. He kissed them gently, bending his head down with an air of repentance.

'My God, Lettice—you're precious to me!' he stammered.

But even as he said it, even while he still felt her soft cheeks against his lips, her frail unresisting figure within his arms, there came this pang of sudden pain that was so acute it frightened him. There was something impersonal in her attitude that alarmed him. What was it? He was helpless to understand it. The excitement in his blood obscured inner perception. . . . Such tempestuous moments were rare enough between them, and when they came he felt that she endured them rather than responded. He was aware of a touch of shame in himself. But this pain—? Even while he held her it seemed again that she escaped him because of the heights she lived on, yet partly, too, because of the innocence which had not yet eaten of the tree of knowledge. . . . Was that, then, the lack in her? Had she yet to learn that the spiritual dare not be divorced wholly from the physical and that the divine blending of the two in purity of heart alone brings safety?

She slipped from his encircling arms and—rose. He struggled after her. But that air he could not breathe. She was too far above him. She had to stoop to meet the passionate man in him that sought to seize and hold her. She had—the earlier phrase returned—come back to fetch him. He did not really love yet as he ought to love. He loved himself—in her; selfishly somehow, somewhere. But this thought he did not capture wholly. It cast a shadow merely and was gone.

Somewhere, too, there was jealous resentment in him. He could not feel himself indispensable to a woman who occupied a pinnacle.

His cocksureness wavered a little before the sharp attack. Pang after pang stung him shrewdly, stung his pride, his confidence, his vanity, shaking the platform on which he stood till each separate plank trembled and the sense of security grew less.

But the confusion in his heart and mind bewildered him. It was all so strange and incomprehensible; he could not understand it. He knew she was true and loyal, her purity beyond reproach, her elusiveness not calculated or intended, yet that somewhere, somehow she could do without him, and that if he left her she—almost—would have neither remorse nor regret. She would just accept it and—forgive. . . .

And he thought suddenly with an intense bitterness that amazed him—of the husband. The thought of that ‘other’ who had yet to come afflicted him desperately. When he met those light-blue eyes of the Wave he would surely know them . . . ! He felt again the desire to seek counsel and advice from another, some one of his own sex, a sympathetic and understanding soul like Tony.

The turmoil in him was beyond elucidation: thoughts and emotions of nameless kind combined to produce a fluid state of insecurity he could not explain. As usual, however, there emerged finally the solid fact which seemed now the keynote of his character; at least, he invariably fell back upon it for support against these occasional storms: ‘She has singled me out; she can’t really do without me; we’re necessary to each other; I’m safe.’ The rest he dismissed as half realised only and therefore not quite real. His position with her was unique, of course, something the world could not possibly understand, and, while resenting what he called the ‘impersonal’ attitude in her, he yet knew that it was precisely this impersonal attitude that justified their love. Their love, in fine, was proved spiritual thereby. They were in the ‘sea’ together. Invariably in the end he blamed himself.

The rising Wave, it seemed, was bringing up from day to day new, unexpected qualities from the depths within him, just as it brings up mud and gravel from the ground-bed of the shore. He felt it driving him forward with increasing speed and power. With an irresistible momentum that left him helpless, it was hurrying him along towards the moment when it would lower its crest again towards the earth—and break.

He knew now where the smothering crash would come, where he would finally meet the singular details of his boyhood’s premonition face to face,—the Sound, the Whiff, the other pair of Eyes. They awaited him—in Egypt. In Egypt, at last, he would find the entire series, recognise each item. He would also discover the nature of the wave that was neither of water nor of snow. .

Yet, strange to say, when he actually met the pair of light-blue eyes, he did not recognise them. He encountered the face to which they belonged, but was not warned. While fulfilling its prophecy, the premonition failed, of course, to operate.

For premonitions are a delicate matter, losing their power in the act of justifying themselves. To prevent their fulfilment were to stultify their existence. Between a spiritual warning and its material consummation there is but a friable and gossamer alliance. Had he recognised, he might possibly have prevented; whereas the deeper part of him unconsciously invited and said, Come.

And so, not recognising the arrival of the other pair of eyes, Tom, when he met them, knew himself attracted instead of repelled. Far from being warned, he knew himself drawn towards their owner by natural sympathy, as towards some one whose deep intrusion into his inner life was necessary to its fuller realisation—the tumultuous breaking of the rapidly accumulating Wave.