

Sons and Lovers

by D.H. Lawrence

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY MARRIED LIFE OF THE MORELS

“The Bottoms” succeeded to “Hell Row”. Hell Row was a block of thatched, bulging cottages that stood by the brookside on Greenhill Lane. There lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits two fields away. The brook ran under the alder trees, scarcely soiled by these small mines, whose coal was drawn to the surface by donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle round a gin. And all over the countryside were these same pits, some of which had been worked in the time of Charles II., the few colliers and the donkeys burrowing down like ants into the earth, making queer mounds and little black places among the corn-fields and the meadows. And the cottages of these coal-miners, in blocks and pairs here and there, together with odd farms and homes of the stockingers, straying over the parish, formed the village of Bestwood.

Then, some sixty years ago, a sudden change took place, gin-pits were elbowed aside by the large mines of the financiers. The coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was discovered. Carston, Waite and Co. appeared. Amid tremendous excitement, Lord Palmerston formally opened the company’s first mine at Spinney Park, on the edge of Sherwood Forest.

About this time the notorious Hell Row, which through growing old had acquired an evil reputation, was burned down, and much dirt was cleansed away.

Carston, Waite and Co. found they had struck on a good thing, so, down the valleys of the brooks from Selby and Nuttall, new mines were sunk, until soon there were six pits working. From Nuttall, high up on the sandstone among the woods, the railway ran, past the ruined priory of the Carthusians and past Robin Hood’s Well, down to Spinney Park, then on to Minton, a large mine among corn-fields; from Minton across the farmlands of the valleyside to Bunker’s Hill, branching off there, and running north to Beggarlee and Selby, that looks over at Crich and the hills of Derbyshire; six mines like black studs on the countryside, linked by a loop of fine chain, the railway.

To accommodate the regiments of miners, Carston, Waite and Co. built the Squares, great quadrangles of dwellings on the hillside of Bestwood, and then, in the brook valley, on the site of Hell Row, they erected the Bottoms.

The Bottoms consisted of six blocks of miners' dwellings, two rows of three, like the dots on a blank-six domino, and twelve houses in a block. This double row of dwellings sat at the foot of the rather sharp slope from Bestwood, and looked out, from the attic windows at least, on the slow climb of the valley towards Selby.

The houses themselves were substantial and very decent. One could walk all round, seeing little front gardens with auriculas and saxifrage in the shadow of the bottom block, sweet-williams and pinks in the sunny top block; seeing neat front windows, little porches, little privet hedges, and dormer windows for the attics. But that was outside; that was the view on to the uninhabited parlours of all the colliers' wives. The dwelling-room, the kitchen, was at the back of the house, facing inward between the blocks, looking at a scrubby back garden, and then at the ash-pits. And between the rows, between the long lines of ash-pits, went the alley, where the children played and the women gossiped and the men smoked. So, the actual conditions of living in the Bottoms, that was so well built and that looked so nice, were quite unsavoury because people must live in the kitchen, and the kitchens opened on to that nasty alley of ash-pits.

Mrs. Morel was not anxious to move into the Bottoms, which was already twelve years old and on the downward path, when she descended to it from Bestwood. But it was the best she could do. Moreover, she had an end house in one of the top blocks, and thus had only one neighbour; on the other side an extra strip of garden. And, having an end house, she enjoyed a kind of aristocracy among the other women of the "between" houses, because her rent was five shillings and sixpence instead of five shillings a week. But this superiority in station was not much consolation to Mrs. Morel.

She was thirty-one years old, and had been married eight years. A rather small woman, of delicate mould but resolute bearing, she shrank a little from the first contact with the Bottoms women. She came down in the July, and in the September expected her third baby.

Her husband was a miner. They had only been in their new home three weeks when the wakes, or fair, began. Morel, she knew, was sure to make a holiday of it. He went off early on the Monday morning, the day of the fair. The two children were highly excited. William, a boy of seven, fled off immediately after breakfast, to prowling round the wakes ground, leaving Annie, who was only five, to whine all morning to go also. Mrs. Morel did her work. She scarcely knew her neighbours yet, and knew no one with whom to trust the little girl. So she promised to take her to the wakes after dinner.

William appeared at half-past twelve. He was a very active lad, fair-haired, freckled, with a touch of the Dane or Norwegian about him.

"Can I have my dinner, mother?" he cried, rushing in with his cap on. "Cause it begins at half-past one, the man says so."

"You can have your dinner as soon as it's done," replied the mother.

“Isn’t it done?” he cried, his blue eyes staring at her in indignation. “Then I’m goin’ be-out it.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort. It will be done in five minutes. It is only half-past twelve.”

“They’ll be beginnin’,” the boy half cried, half shouted.

“You won’t die if they do,” said the mother. “Besides, it’s only half-past twelve, so you’ve a full hour.”

The lad began hastily to lay the table, and directly the three sat down. They were eating batter-pudding and jam, when the boy jumped off his chair and stood perfectly stiff. Some distance away could be heard the first small braying of a merry-go-round, and the tooting of a horn. His face quivered as he looked at his mother.

“I told you!” he said, running to the dresser for his cap.

“Take your pudding in your hand—and it’s only five past one, so you were wrong—you haven’t got your twopence,” cried the mother in a breath.

The boy came back, bitterly disappointed, for his twopence, then went off without a word.

“I want to go, I want to go,” said Annie, beginning to cry.

“Well, and you shall go, whining, wizzening little stick!” said the mother. And later in the afternoon she trudged up the hill under the tall hedge with her child. The hay was gathered from the fields, and cattle were turned on to the eddish. It was warm, peaceful.

Mrs. Morel did not like the wakes. There were two sets of horses, one going by steam, one pulled round by a pony; three organs were grinding, and there came odd cracks of pistol-shots, fearful screeching of the cocoanut man’s rattle, shouts of the Aunt Sally man, screeches from the peep-show lady. The mother perceived her son gazing enraptured outside the Lion Wallace booth, at the pictures of this famous lion that had killed a negro and maimed for life two white men. She left him alone, and went to get Annie a spin of toffee. Presently the lad stood in front of her, wildly excited.

“You never said you was coming—isn’t the’ a lot of things?—that lion’s killed three men—I’ve spent my tuppence—an’ look here.”

He pulled from his pocket two egg-cups, with pink moss-roses on them.

“I got these from that stall where y’ave ter get them marbles in them holes. An’ I got these two in two goes-’aepenny a go-they’ve got moss-roses on, look here. I wanted these.”

She knew he wanted them for her.

“H’m!” she said, pleased. “They *are* pretty!”

“Shall you carry ’em, ’cause I’m frightened o’ breakin’ ’em?”

He was tipful of excitement now she had come, led her about the ground, showed her everything. Then, at the peep-show, she explained the pictures, in a sort of story, to

which he listened as if spellbound. He would not leave her. All the time he stuck close to her, bristling with a small boy's pride of her. For no other woman looked such a lady as she did, in her little black bonnet and her cloak. She smiled when she saw women she knew. When she was tired she said to her son:

"Well, are you coming now, or later?"

"Are you goin' a'ready?" he cried, his face full of reproach.

"Already? It is past four, *I* know."

"What are you goin' a'ready for?" he lamented.

"You needn't come if you don't want," she said.

And she went slowly away with her little girl, whilst her son stood watching her, cut to the heart to let her go, and yet unable to leave the wakes. As she crossed the open ground in front of the Moon and Stars she heard men shouting, and smelled the beer, and hurried a little, thinking her husband was probably in the bar.

At about half-past six her son came home, tired now, rather pale, and somewhat wretched. He was miserable, though he did not know it, because he had let her go alone. Since she had gone, he had not enjoyed his wakes.

"Has my dad been?" he asked.

"No," said the mother.

"He's helping to wait at the Moon and Stars. I seed him through that black tin stuff wi' holes in, on the window, wi' his sleeves rolled up."

"Ha!" exclaimed the mother shortly. "He's got no money. An' he'll be satisfied if he gets his 'lowance, whether they give him more or not."

When the light was fading, and Mrs. Morel could see no more to sew, she rose and went to the door. Everywhere was the sound of excitement, the restlessness of the holiday, that at last infected her. She went out into the side garden. Women were coming home from the wakes, the children hugging a white lamb with green legs, or a wooden horse. Occasionally a man lurched past, almost as full as he could carry. Sometimes a good husband came along with his family, peacefully. But usually the women and children were alone. The stay-at-home mothers stood gossiping at the corners of the alley, as the twilight sank, folding their arms under their white aprons.

Mrs. Morel was alone, but she was used to it. Her son and her little girl slept upstairs; so, it seemed, her home was there behind her, fixed and stable. But she felt wretched with the coming child. The world seemed a dreary place, where nothing else would happen for her—at least until William grew up. But for herself, nothing but this dreary endurance—till the children grew up. And the children! She could not afford to have this third. She did not want it. The father was serving beer in a public house, swilling himself drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him. This coming child was too much for her. If it were not for William and Annie, she was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness.

She went into the front garden, feeling too heavy to take herself out, yet unable to stay indoors. The heat suffocated her. And looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive.

The front garden was a small square with a privet hedge. There she stood, trying to soothe herself with the scent of flowers and the fading, beautiful evening. Opposite her small gate was the stile that led uphill, under the tall hedge between the burning glow of the cut pastures. The sky overhead throbbed and pulsed with light. The glow sank quickly off the field; the earth and the hedges smoked dusk. As it grew dark, a ruddy glare came out on the hilltop, and out of the glare the diminished commotion of the fair.

Sometimes, down the trough of darkness formed by the path under the hedges, men came lurching home. One young man lapsed into a run down the steep bit that ended the hill, and went with a crash into the stile. Mrs. Morel shuddered. He picked himself up, swearing viciously, rather pathetically, as if he thought the stile had wanted to hurt him.

She went indoors, wondering if things were never going to alter. She was beginning by now to realise that they would not. She seemed so far away from her girlhood, she wondered if it were the same person walking heavily up the back garden at the Bottoms as had run so lightly up the breakwater at Sheerness ten years before.

“What have *I* to do with it?” she said to herself. “What have I to do with all this? Even the child I am going to have! It doesn’t seem as if *I* were taken into account.”

Sometimes life takes hold of one, carries the body along, accomplishes one’s history, and yet is not real, but leaves oneself as it were slurred over.

“I wait,” Mrs. Morel said to herself—“I wait, and what I wait for can never come.”

Then she straightened the kitchen, lit the lamp, mended the fire, looked out the washing for the next day, and put it to soak. After which she sat down to her sewing. Through the long hours her needle flashed regularly through the stuff. Occasionally she sighed, moving to relieve herself. And all the time she was thinking how to make the most of what she had, for the children’s sakes.

At half-past eleven her husband came. His cheeks were very red and very shiny above his black moustache. His head nodded slightly. He was pleased with himself.

“Oh! Oh! waitin’ for me, lass? I’ve bin ’elpin’ Anthony, an’ what’s think he’s gen me? Nowt b’r a lousy hae’f-crown, an’ that’s ivry penny—”

“He thinks you’ve made the rest up in beer,” she said shortly.

“An’ I ’aven’t—that I ’aven’t. You b’lieve me, I’ve ’ad very little this day, I have an’ all.” His voice went tender. “Here, an’ I browt thee a bit o’ brandysnap, an’ a cocoanut for th’ children.” He laid the gingerbread and the cocoanut, a hairy object, on the table. “Nay, tha niver said thankyer for nowt i’ thy life, did ter?”

As a compromise, she picked up the cocoanut and shook it, to see if it had any milk.

“It’s a good un, you may back yer life o’ that. I got it fra’ Bill Hodgkisson. ‘Bill,’ I says, ‘tha non wants them three nuts, does ter? Arena ter for gi’ ein’ me one for my bit of a lad an’ wench?’ ‘I ham, Walter, my lad,’ ’e says; ‘ta’e which on ’em ter’s a mind.’ An’ so I took one, an’ thanked ’im. I didn’t like ter shake it afore ’is eyes, but ’e says, ‘Tha’d better ma’e sure it’s a good un, Walt.’ An’ so, yer see, I knowed it was. He’s a nice chap, is Bill Hodgkisson, e’s a nice chap!”

“A man will part with anything so long as he’s drunk, and you’re drunk along with him,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Eh, tha mucky little ’ussy, who’s drunk, I sh’d like ter know?” said Morel. He was extraordinarily pleased with himself, because of his day’s helping to wait in the Moon and Stars. He chattered on.

Mrs. Morel, very tired, and sick of his babble, went to bed as quickly as possible, while he raked the fire.

Mrs. Morel came of a good old burgher family, famous independents who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson, and who remained stout Congregationalists. Her grandfather had gone bankrupt in the lace-market at a time when so many lace-manufacturers were ruined in Nottingham. Her father, George Coppard, was an engineer—a large, handsome, haughty man, proud of his fair skin and blue eyes, but more proud still of his integrity. Gertrude resembled her mother in her small build. But her temper, proud and unyielding, she had from the Coppards.

George Coppard was bitterly galled by his own poverty. He became foreman of the engineers in the dockyard at Sheerness. Mrs. Morel—Gertrude—was the second daughter. She favoured her mother, loved her mother best of all; but she had the Coppards’ clear, defiant blue eyes and their broad brow. She remembered to have hated her father’s overbearing manner towards her gentle, humorous, kindly-souled mother. She remembered running over the breakwater at Sheerness and finding the boat. She remembered to have been petted and flattered by all the men when she had gone to the dockyard, for she was a delicate, rather proud child. She remembered the funny old mistress, whose assistant she had become, whom she had loved to help in the private school. And she still had the Bible that John Field had given her. She used to walk home from chapel with John Field when she was nineteen. He was the son of a well-to-do tradesman, had been to college in London, and was to devote himself to business.

She could always recall in detail a September Sunday afternoon, when they had sat under the vine at the back of her father’s house. The sun came through the chinks of the vine-leaves and made beautiful patterns, like a lace scarf, falling on her and on him. Some of the leaves were clean yellow, like yellow flat flowers.

“Now sit still,” he had cried. “Now your hair, I don’t know what it *is* like! It’s as bright as copper and gold, as red as burnt copper, and it has gold threads where the sun shines on it. Fancy their saying it’s brown. Your mother calls it mouse-colour.”

She had met his brilliant eyes, but her clear face scarcely showed the elation which rose within her.

“But you say you don’t like business,” she pursued.

“I don’t. I hate it!” he cried hotly.

“And you would like to go into the ministry,” she half implored.

“I should. I should love it, if I thought I could make a first-rate preacher.”

“Then why don’t you—why *don’t* you?” Her voice rang with defiance. “If *I* were a man, nothing would stop me.”

She held her head erect. He was rather timid before her.

“But my father’s so stiff-necked. He means to put me into the business, and I know he’ll do it.”

“But if you’re a *man*?” she had cried.

“Being a man isn’t everything,” he replied, frowning with puzzled helplessness.

Now, as she moved about her work at the Bottoms, with some experience of what being a man meant, she knew that it was *not* everything.

At twenty, owing to her health, she had left Sheerness. Her father had retired home to Nottingham. John Field’s father had been ruined; the son had gone as a teacher in Norwood. She did not hear of him until, two years later, she made determined inquiry. He had married his landlady, a woman of forty, a widow with property.

And still Mrs. Morel preserved John Field’s Bible. She did not now believe him to be—— Well, she understood pretty well what he might or might not have been. So she preserved his Bible, and kept his memory intact in her heart, for her own sake. To her dying day, for thirty-five years, she did not speak of him.

When she was twenty-three years old, she met, at a Christmas party, a young man from the Erewash Valley. Morel was then twenty-seven years old. He was well set-up, erect, and very smart. He had wavy black hair that shone again, and a vigorous black beard that had never been shaved. His cheeks were ruddy, and his red, moist mouth was noticeable because he laughed so often and so heartily. He had that rare thing, a rich, ringing laugh. Gertrude Coppard had watched him, fascinated. He was so full of colour and animation, his voice ran so easily into comic grotesque, he was so ready and so pleasant with everybody. Her own father had a rich fund of humour, but it was satiric. This man’s was different: soft, non-intellectual, warm, a kind of gambolling.

She herself was opposite. She had a curious, receptive mind which found much pleasure and amusement in listening to other folk. She was clever in leading folk to talk. She loved ideas, and was considered very intellectual. What she liked most of all was an argument on religion or philosophy or politics with some educated man. This she did not often enjoy. So she always had people tell her about themselves, finding her pleasure so.

In her person she was rather small and delicate, with a large brow, and dropping bunches of brown silk curls. Her blue eyes were very straight, honest, and searching. She had the beautiful hands of the Coppards. Her dress was always subdued. She wore dark blue silk, with a peculiar silver chain of silver scallops. This, and a heavy brooch of twisted gold, was her only ornament. She was still perfectly intact, deeply religious, and full of beautiful candour.

Walter Morel seemed melted away before her. She was to the miner that thing of mystery and fascination, a lady. When she spoke to him, it was with a southern pronunciation and a purity of English which thrilled him to hear. She watched him. He danced well, as if it were natural and joyous in him to dance. His grandfather was a French refugee who had married an English barmaid—if it had been a marriage. Gertrude Coppard watched the young miner as he danced, a certain subtle exultation like glamour in his movement, and his face the flower of his body, ruddy, with tumbled black hair, and laughing alike whatever partner he bowed above. She thought him rather wonderful, never having met anyone like him. Her father was to her the type of all men. And George Coppard, proud in his bearing, handsome, and rather bitter; who preferred theology in reading, and who drew near in sympathy only to one man, the Apostle Paul; who was harsh in government, and in familiarity ironic; who ignored all sensuous pleasure—he was very different from the miner. Gertrude herself was rather contemptuous of dancing; she had not the slightest inclination towards that accomplishment, and had never learned even a Roger de Coverley. She was puritan, like her father, high-minded, and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her.

He came and bowed above her. A warmth radiated through her as if she had drunk wine.

“Now do come and have this one wi' me,” he said caressively. “It's easy, you know. I'm pining to see you dance.”

She had told him before she could not dance. She glanced at his humility and smiled. Her smile was very beautiful. It moved the man so that he forgot everything.

“No, I won't dance,” she said softly. Her words came clean and ringing.

Not knowing what he was doing—he often did the right thing by instinct—he sat beside her, inclining reverentially.

“But you mustn't miss your dance,” she reproved.

“Nay, I don't want to dance that—it's not one as I care about.”

“Yet you invited me to it.”

He laughed very heartily at this.

“I never thought o' that. Tha'rt not long in taking the curl out of me.”

It was her turn to laugh quickly.

“You don’t look as if you’d come much uncurled,” she said.

“I’m like a pig’s tail, I curl because I canna help it,” he laughed, rather boisterously.

“And you are a miner!” she exclaimed in surprise.

“Yes. I went down when I was ten.”

She looked at him in wondering dismay.

“When you were ten! And wasn’t it very hard?” she asked.

“You soon get used to it. You live like th’ mice, an’ you pop out at night to see what’s going on.”

“It makes me feel blind,” she frowned.

“Like a mouidiwarp!” he laughed. “Yi, an’ there’s some chaps as does go round like mouidiwarps.” He thrust his face forward in the blind, snout-like way of a mole, seeming to sniff and peer for direction. “They dun though!” he protested naïvely. “Tha niver seed such a way they get in. But tha mun let me ta’e thee down some time, an’ tha can see for thysen.”

She looked at him, startled. This was a new tract of life suddenly opened before her. She realised the life of the miners, hundreds of them toiling below earth and coming up at evening. He seemed to her noble. He risked his life daily, and with gaiety. She looked at him, with a touch of appeal in her pure humility.

“Shouldn’t ter like it?” he asked tenderly. “Appen not, it ’ud dirty thee.”

She had never been “thee’d” and “thou’d” before.

The next Christmas they were married, and for three months she was perfectly happy: for six months she was very happy.

He had signed the pledge, and wore the blue ribbon of a tee-totaller: he was nothing if not showy. They lived, she thought, in his own house. It was small, but convenient enough, and quite nicely furnished, with solid, worthy stuff that suited her honest soul. The women, her neighbours, were rather foreign to her, and Morel’s mother and sisters were apt to sneer at her ladylike ways. But she could perfectly well live by herself, so long as she had her husband close.

Sometimes, when she herself wearied of love-talk, she tried to open her heart seriously to him. She saw him listen deferentially, but without understanding. This killed her efforts at a finer intimacy, and she had flashes of fear. Sometimes he was restless of an evening: it was not enough for him just to be near her, she realised. She was glad when he set himself to little jobs.

He was a remarkably handy man—could make or mend anything. So she would say:

“I do like that coal-rake of your mother’s—it is small and natty.”

“Does ter, my wench? Well, I made that, so I can make thee one!”

“What! why, it’s a steel one!”

“An’ what if it is! Tha s’lt ha’e one very similar, if not exactly same.”

She did not mind the mess, nor the hammering and noise. He was busy and happy.

But in the seventh month, when she was brushing his Sunday coat, she felt papers in the breast pocket, and, seized with a sudden curiosity, took them out to read. He very rarely wore the frock-coat he was married in: and it had not occurred to her before to feel curious concerning the papers. They were the bills of the household furniture, still unpaid.

“Look here,” she said at night, after he was washed and had had his dinner. “I found these in the pocket of your wedding-coat. Haven’t you settled the bills yet?”

“No. I haven’t had a chance.”

“But you told me all was paid. I had better go into Nottingham on Saturday and settle them. I don’t like sitting on another man’s chairs and eating from an unpaid table.”

He did not answer.

“I can have your bank-book, can’t I?”

“Tha can ha’e it, for what good it’ll be to thee.”

“I thought—” she began. He had told her he had a good bit of money left over. But she realised it was no use asking questions. She sat rigid with bitterness and indignation.

The next day she went down to see his mother.

“Didn’t you buy the furniture for Walter?” she asked.

“Yes, I did,” tartly retorted the elder woman.

“And how much did he give you to pay for it?”

The elder woman was stung with fine indignation.

“Eighty pound, if you’re so keen on knowin’,” she replied.

“Eighty pounds! But there are forty-two pounds still owing!”

“I can’t help that.”

“But where has it all gone?”

“You’ll find all the papers, I think, if you look—beside ten pound as he owed me, an’ six pound as the wedding cost down here.”

“Six pounds!” echoed Gertrude Morel. It seemed to her monstrous that, after her own father had paid so heavily for her wedding, six pounds more should have been squandered in eating and drinking at Walter’s parents’ house, at his expense.

“And how much has he sunk in his houses?” she asked.

“His houses—which houses?”

Gertrude Morel went white to the lips. He had told her the house he lived in, and the next one, was his own.

“I thought the house we live in—” she began.

“They’re my houses, those two,” said the mother-in-law. “And not clear either. It’s as much as I can do to keep the mortgage interest paid.”

Gertrude sat white and silent. She was her father now.

“Then we ought to be paying you rent,” she said coldly.

“Walter is paying me rent,” replied the mother.

“And what rent?” asked Gertrude.

“Six and six a week,” retorted the mother.

It was more than the house was worth. Gertrude held her head erect, looked straight before her.

“It is lucky to be you,” said the elder woman, biting, “to have a husband as takes all the worry of the money, and leaves you a free hand.”

The young wife was silent.

She said very little to her husband, but her manner had changed towards him. Something in her proud, honourable soul had crystallised out hard as rock.

When October came in, she thought only of Christmas. Two years ago, at Christmas, she had met him. Last Christmas she had married him. This Christmas she would bear him a child.

“You don’t dance yourself, do you, missis?” asked her nearest neighbour, in October, when there was great talk of opening a dancing-class over the Brick and Tile Inn at Bestwood.

“No—I never had the least inclination to,” Mrs. Morel replied.

“Fancy! An’ how funny as you should ha’ married your Mester. You know he’s quite a famous one for dancing.”

“I didn’t know he was famous,” laughed Mrs. Morel.

“Yea, he is though! Why, he ran that dancing-class in the Miners’ Arms club-room for over five year.”

“Did he?”

“Yes, he did.” The other woman was defiant. “An’ it was thronged every Tuesday, and Thursday, an’ Sat’day—an’ there *was* carryin’-s-on, accordin’ to all accounts.”

This kind of thing was gall and bitterness to Mrs. Morel, and she had a fair share of it. The women did not spare her, at first; for she was superior, though she could not help it.

He began to be rather late in coming home.

“They’re working very late now, aren’t they?” she said to her washer-woman.

“No later than they allers do, I don’t think. But they stop to have their pint at Ellen’s, an’ they get talkin’, an’ there you are! Dinner stone cold—an’ it serves ’em right.”

“But Mr. Morel does not take any drink.”

The woman dropped the clothes, looked at Mrs. Morel, then went on with her work, saying nothing.

Gertrude Morel was very ill when the boy was born. Morel was good to her, as good as gold. But she felt very lonely, miles away from her own people. She felt lonely with him now, and his presence only made it more intense.

The boy was small and frail at first, but he came on quickly. He was a beautiful child, with dark gold ringlets, and dark-blue eyes which changed gradually to a clear grey. His mother loved him passionately. He came just when her own bitterness of disillusion was hardest to bear; when her faith in life was shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely. She made much of the child, and the father was jealous.

At last Mrs. Morel despised her husband. She turned to the child; she turned from the father. He had begun to neglect her; the novelty of his own home was gone. He had no grit, she said bitterly to herself. What he felt just at the minute, that was all to him. He could not abide by anything. There was nothing at the back of all his show.

There began a battle between the husband and wife—a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfill his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it—it drove him out of his mind.

While the baby was still tiny, the father's temper had become so irritable that it was not to be trusted. The child had only to give a little trouble when the man began to bully. A little more, and the hard hands of the collier hit the baby. Then Mrs. Morel loathed her husband, loathed him for days; and he went out and drank; and she cared very little what he did. Only, on his return, she scathed him with her satire.

The estrangement between them caused him, knowingly or unknowingly, grossly to offend her where he would not have done.

William was only one year old, and his mother was proud of him, he was so pretty. She was not well off now, but her sisters kept the boy in clothes. Then, with his little white hat curled with an ostrich feather, and his white coat, he was a joy to her, the twining wisps of hair clustering round his head. Mrs. Morel lay listening, one Sunday morning, to the chatter of the father and child downstairs. Then she dozed off. When she came downstairs, a great fire glowed in the grate, the room was hot, the breakfast was roughly laid, and seated in his armchair, against the chimney-piece, sat Morel, rather timid; and standing between his legs, the child—cropped like a sheep, with such an odd round poll—looking wondering at her; and on a newspaper spread out upon the hearthrug, a myriad of crescent-shaped curls, like the petals of a marigold scattered in the reddening firelight.

Mrs. Morel stood still. It was her first baby. She went very white, and was unable to speak.

“What dost think o’ ’im?” Morel laughed uneasily.

She gripped her two fists, lifted them, and came forward. Morel shrank back.

“I could kill you, I could!” she said. She choked with rage, her two fists uplifted.

“Yer non want ter make a wench on ’im,” Morel said, in a frightened tone, bending his head to shield his eyes from hers. His attempt at laughter had vanished.

The mother looked down at the jagged, close-clipped head of her child. She put her hands on his hair, and stroked and fondled his head.

“Oh—my boy!” she faltered. Her lip trembled, her face broke, and, snatching up the child, she buried her face in his shoulder and cried painfully. She was one of those women who cannot cry; whom it hurts as it hurts a man. It was like ripping something out of her, her sobbing.

Morel sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands gripped together till the knuckles were white. He gazed in the fire, feeling almost stunned, as if he could not breathe.

Presently she came to an end, soothed the child and cleared away the breakfast-table. She left the newspaper, littered with curls, spread upon the hearthrug. At last her husband gathered it up and put it at the back of the fire. She went about her work with closed mouth and very quiet. Morel was subdued. He crept about wretchedly, and his meals were a misery that day. She spoke to him civilly, and never alluded to what he had done. But he felt something final had happened.

Afterwards she said she had been silly, that the boy’s hair would have had to be cut, sooner or later. In the end, she even brought herself to say to her husband it was just as well he had played barber when he did. But she knew, and Morel knew, that that act had caused something momentous to take place in her soul. She remembered the scene all her life, as one in which she had suffered the most intensely.

This act of masculine clumsiness was the spear through the side of her love for Morel. Before, while she had striven against him bitterly, she had fretted after him, as if he had gone astray from her. Now she ceased to fret for his love: he was an outsider to her. This made life much more bearable.

Nevertheless, she still continued to strive with him. She still had her high moral sense, inherited from generations of Puritans. It was now a religious instinct, and she was almost a fanatic with him, because she loved him, or had loved him. If he sinned, she tortured him. If he drank, and lied, was often a poltroon, sometimes a knave, she wielded the lash unmercifully.

The pity was, she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much that he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She injured and hurt and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth. She also had the children.

He drank rather heavily, though not more than many miners, and always beer, so that whilst his health was affected, it was never injured. The week-end was his chief carouse. He sat in the Miners’ Arms until turning-out time every Friday, every Saturday, and

every Sunday evening. On Monday and Tuesday he had to get up and reluctantly leave towards ten o'clock. Sometimes he stayed at home on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, or was only out for an hour. He practically never had to miss work owing to his drinking.

But although he was very steady at work, his wages fell off. He was blab-mouthed, a tongue-wagger. Authority was hateful to him, therefore he could only abuse the pit-managers. He would say, in the Palmerston:

“Th’ gaffer come down to our stall this morning, an’ ’e says, ‘You know, Walter, this ’ere’ll not do. What about these props?’ An’ I says to him, ‘Why, what art talkin’ about? What d’st mean about th’ props?’ ‘It’ll never do, this ’ere,’ ’e says. ‘You’ll be havin’ th’ roof in, one o’ these days.’ An’ I says, ‘Tha’d better stan’ on a bit o’ clunch, then, an’ hold it up wi’ thy ’ead.’ So ’e wor that mad, ’e cossed an’ ’e swore, an’ t’other chaps they did laugh.” Morel was a good mimic. He imitated the manager’s fat, squeaky voice, with its attempt at good English.

“I shan’t have it, Walter. Who knows more about it, me or you?’ So I says, ‘I’ve niver fun out how much tha’ knows, Alfred. It’ll ’appen carry thee ter bed an’ back.’”

So Morel would go on to the amusement of his boon companions. And some of this would be true. The pit-manager was not an educated man. He had been a boy along with Morel, so that, while the two disliked each other, they more or less took each other for granted. But Alfred Charlesworth did not forgive the butty these public-house sayings. Consequently, although Morel was a good miner, sometimes earning as much as five pounds a week when he married, he came gradually to have worse and worse stalls, where the coal was thin, and hard to get, and unprofitable.

Also, in summer, the pits are slack. Often, on bright sunny mornings, the men are seen trooping home again at ten, eleven, or twelve o'clock. No empty trucks stand at the pit-mouth. The women on the hillside look across as they shake the hearthrug against the fence, and count the wagons the engine is taking along the line up the valley. And the children, as they come from school at dinner-time, looking down the fields and seeing the wheels on the headstocks standing, say:

“Minton’s knocked off. My dad’ll be at home.”

And there is a sort of shadow over all, women and children and men, because money will be short at the end of the week.

Morel was supposed to give his wife thirty shillings a week, to provide everything—rent, food, clothes, clubs, insurance, doctors. Occasionally, if he were flush, he gave her thirty-five. But these occasions by no means balanced those when he gave her twenty-five. In winter, with a decent stall, the miner might earn fifty or fifty-five shillings a week. Then he was happy. On Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday, he spent royally, getting rid of his sovereign or thereabouts. And out of so much, he scarcely spared the children an extra penny or bought them a pound of apples. It all went in drink. In the

bad times, matters were more worrying, but he was not so often drunk, so that Mrs. Morel used to say:

“I’m not sure I wouldn’t rather be short, for when he’s flush, there isn’t a minute of peace.”

If he earned forty shillings he kept ten; from thirty-five he kept five; from thirty-two he kept four; from twenty-eight he kept three; from twenty-four he kept two; from twenty he kept one-and-six; from eighteen he kept a shilling; from sixteen he kept sixpence. He never saved a penny, and he gave his wife no opportunity of saving; instead, she had occasionally to pay his debts; not public-house debts, for those never were passed on to the women, but debts when he had bought a canary, or a fancy walking-stick.

At the wakes time Morel was working badly, and Mrs. Morel was trying to save against her confinement. So it galled her bitterly to think he should be out taking his pleasure and spending money, whilst she remained at home, harassed. There were two days holiday. On the Tuesday morning Morel rose early. He was in good spirits. Quite early, before six o’clock, she heard him whistling away to himself downstairs. He had a pleasant way of whistling, lively and musical. He nearly always whistled hymns. He had been a choir-boy with a beautiful voice, and had taken solos in Southwell cathedral. His morning whistling alone betrayed it.

His wife lay listening to him tinkering away in the garden, his whistling ringing out as he sawed and hammered away. It always gave her a sense of warmth and peace to hear him thus as she lay in bed, the children not yet awake, in the bright early morning, happy in his man’s fashion.

At nine o’clock, while the children with bare legs and feet were sitting playing on the sofa, and the mother was washing up, he came in from his carpentry, his sleeves rolled up, his waistcoat hanging open. He was still a good-looking man, with black, wavy hair, and a large black moustache. His face was perhaps too much inflamed, and there was about him a look almost of peevishness. But now he was jolly. He went straight to the sink where his wife was washing up.

“What, are thee there!” he said boisterously. “Sluthe off an’ let me wesh mysen.”

“You may wait till I’ve finished,” said his wife.

“Oh, mun I? An’ what if I shonna?”

This good-humoured threat amused Mrs. Morel.

“Then you can go and wash yourself in the soft-water tub.”

“Ha! I can’ an’ a’, tha mucky little ’ussy.”

With which he stood watching her a moment, then went away to wait for her.

When he chose he could still make himself again a real gallant. Usually he preferred to go out with a scarf round his neck. Now, however, he made a toilet. There seemed so much gusto in the way he puffed and swilled as he washed himself, so much alacrity

with which he hurried to the mirror in the kitchen, and, bending because it was too low for him, scrupulously parted his wet black hair, that it irritated Mrs. Morel. He put on a turn-down collar, a black bow, and wore his Sunday tail-coat. As such, he looked spruce, and what his clothes would not do, his instinct for making the most of his good looks would.

At half-past nine Jerry Purdy came to call for his pal. Jerry was Morel's bosom friend, and Mrs. Morel disliked him. He was a tall, thin man, with a rather foxy face, the kind of face that seems to lack eyelashes. He walked with a stiff, brittle dignity, as if his head were on a wooden spring. His nature was cold and shrewd. Generous where he intended to be generous, he seemed to be very fond of Morel, and more or less to take charge of him.

Mrs. Morel hated him. She had known his wife, who had died of consumption, and who had, at the end, conceived such a violent dislike of her husband, that if he came into her room it caused her hæmorrhage. None of which Jerry had seemed to mind. And now his eldest daughter, a girl of fifteen, kept a poor house for him, and looked after the two younger children.

"A mean, wizen-hearted stick!" Mrs. Morel said of him.

"I've never known Jerry mean in *my* life," protested Morel. "A opener-handed and more freer chap you couldn't find anywhere, accordin' to my knowledge."

"Open-handed to you," retorted Mrs. Morel. "But his fist is shut tight enough to his children, poor things."

"Poor things! And what for are they poor things, I should like to know."

But Mrs. Morel would not be appeased on Jerry's score.

The subject of argument was seen, craning his thin neck over the scullery curtain. He caught Mrs. Morel's eye.

"Mornin', missis! Mester in?"

"Yes—he is."

Jerry entered unasked, and stood by the kitchen doorway. He was not invited to sit down, but stood there, coolly asserting the rights of men and husbands.

"A nice day," he said to Mrs. Morel.

"Yes.

"Grand out this morning—grand for a walk."

"Do you mean *you're* going for a walk?" she asked.

"Yes. We mean walkin' to Nottingham," he replied.

"H'm!"

The two men greeted each other, both glad: Jerry, however, full of assurance, Morel rather subdued, afraid to seem too jubilant in presence of his wife. But he laced his boots quickly, with spirit. They were going for a ten-mile walk across the fields to

Nottingham. Climbing the hillside from the Bottoms, they mounted gaily into the morning. At the Moon and Stars they had their first drink, then on to the Old Spot. Then a long five miles of drought to carry them into Bulwell to a glorious pint of bitter. But they stayed in a field with some haymakers whose gallon bottle was full, so that, when they came in sight of the city, Morel was sleepy. The town spread upwards before them, smoking vaguely in the midday glare, fringing the crest away to the south with spires and factory bulks and chimneys. In the last field Morel lay down under an oak tree and slept soundly for over an hour. When he rose to go forward he felt queer.

The two had dinner in the Meadows, with Jerry's sister, then repaired to the Punch Bowl, where they mixed in the excitement of pigeon-racing. Morel never in his life played cards, considering them as having some occult, malevolent power—"the devil's pictures," he called them! But he was a master of skittles and of dominoes. He took a challenge from a Newark man, on skittles. All the men in the old, long bar took sides, betting either one way or the other. Morel took off his coat. Jerry held the hat containing the money. The men at the tables watched. Some stood with their mugs in their hands. Morel felt his big wooden ball carefully, then launched it. He played havoc among the nine-pins, and won half a crown, which restored him to solvency.

By seven o'clock the two were in good condition. They caught the 7.30 train home.

In the afternoon the Bottoms was intolerable. Every inhabitant remaining was out of doors. The women, in twos and threes, bareheaded and in white aprons, gossiped in the alley between the blocks. Men, having a rest between drinks, sat on their heels and talked. The place smelled stale; the slate roofs glistened in the arid heat.

Mrs. Morel took the little girl down to the brook in the meadows, which were not more than two hundred yards away. The water ran quickly over stones and broken pots. Mother and child leaned on the rail of the old sheep-bridge, watching. Up at the dipping-hole, at the other end of the meadow, Mrs. Morel could see the naked forms of boys flashing round the deep yellow water, or an occasional bright figure dart glittering over the blackish stagnant meadow. She knew William was at the dipping-hole, and it was the dread of her life lest he should get drowned. Annie played under the tall old hedge, picking up alder cones, that she called currants. The child required much attention, and the flies were teasing.

The children were put to bed at seven o'clock. Then she worked awhile.

When Walter Morel and Jerry arrived at Bestwood they felt a load off their minds; a railway journey no longer impended, so they could put the finishing touches to a glorious day. They entered the Nelson with the satisfaction of returned travellers.

The next day was a work-day, and the thought of it put a damper on the men's spirits. Most of them, moreover, had spent their money. Some were already rolling dismally home, to sleep in preparation for the morrow. Mrs. Morel, listening to their mournful singing, went indoors. Nine o'clock passed, and ten, and still "the pair" had not returned. On a doorstep somewhere a man was singing loudly, in a drawl: "Lead, kindly

Light.” Mrs. Morel was always indignant with the drunken men that they must sing that hymn when they got maudlin.

“As if ‘Genevieve’ weren’t good enough,” she said.

The kitchen was full of the scent of boiled herbs and hops. On the hob a large black saucepan steamed slowly. Mrs. Morel took a panchion, a great bowl of thick red earth, streamed a heap of white sugar into the bottom, and then, straining herself to the weight, was pouring in the liquor.

Just then Morel came in. He had been very jolly in the Nelson, but coming home had grown irritable. He had not quite got over the feeling of irritability and pain, after having slept on the ground when he was so hot; and a bad conscience afflicted him as he neared the house. He did not know he was angry. But when the garden gate resisted his attempts to open it, he kicked it and broke the latch. He entered just as Mrs. Morel was pouring the infusion of herbs out of the saucepan. Swaying slightly, he lurched against the table. The boiling liquor pitched. Mrs. Morel started back.

“Good gracious,” she cried, “coming home in his drunkenness!”

“Comin’ home in his what?” he snarled, his hat over his eye.

Suddenly her blood rose in a jet.

“Say you’re *not* drunk!” she flashed.

She had put down her saucepan, and was stirring the sugar into the beer. He dropped his two hands heavily on the table, and thrust his face forwards at her.

“Say you’re not drunk,” he repeated. “Why, nobody but a nasty little bitch like you ’ud ’ave such a thought.”

He thrust his face forward at her.

“There’s money to bezzle with, if there’s money for nothing else.”

“I’ve not spent a two-shillin’ bit this day,” he said.

“You don’t get as drunk as a lord on nothing,” she replied. “And,” she cried, flashing into sudden fury, “if you’ve been sponging on your beloved Jerry, why, let him look after his children, for they need it.”

“It’s a lie, it’s a lie. Shut your face, woman.”

They were now at battle-pitch. Each forgot everything save the hatred of the other and the battle between them. She was fiery and furious as he. They went on till he called her a liar.

“No,” she cried, starting up, scarce able to breathe. “Don’t call me that—you, the most despicable liar that ever walked in shoe-leather.” She forced the last words out of suffocated lungs.

“You’re a liar!” he yelled, banging the table with his fist. “You’re a liar, you’re a liar.”

She stiffened herself, with clenched fists.

“The house is filthy with you,” she cried.

“Then get out on it—it’s mine. Get out on it!” he shouted. “It’s me as brings th’ money whoam, not thee. It’s my house, not thine. Then ger out on’t—ger out on’t!”

“And I would,” she cried, suddenly shaken into tears of impotence. “Ah, wouldn’t I, wouldn’t I have gone long ago, but for those children. Ay, haven’t I repented not going years ago, when I’d only the one”—suddenly drying into rage. “Do you think it’s for *you* I stop—do you think I’d stop one minute for *you*?”

“Go, then,” he shouted, beside himself. “Go!”

“No!” She faced round. “No,” she cried loudly, “you shan’t have it *all* your own way; you shan’t do *all* you like. I’ve got those children to see to. My word,” she laughed, “I should look well to leave them to you.”

“Go,” he cried thickly, lifting his fist. He was afraid of her. “Go!”

“I should be only too glad. I should laugh, laugh, my lord, if I could get away from you,” she replied.

He came up to her, his red face, with its bloodshot eyes, thrust forward, and gripped her arms. She cried in fear of him, struggled to be free. Coming slightly to himself, panting, he pushed her roughly to the outer door, and thrust her forth, slotting the bolt behind her with a bang. Then he went back into the kitchen, dropped into his armchair, his head, bursting full of blood, sinking between his knees. Thus he dipped gradually into a stupor, from exhaustion and intoxication.

The moon was high and magnificent in the August night. Mrs. Morel, seared with passion, shivered to find herself out there in a great white light, that fell cold on her, and gave a shock to her inflamed soul. She stood for a few moments helplessly staring at the glistening great rhubarb leaves near the door. Then she got the air into her breast. She walked down the garden path, trembling in every limb, while the child boiled within her. For a while she could not control her consciousness; mechanically she went over the last scene, then over it again, certain phrases, certain moments coming each time like a brand red-hot down on her soul; and each time she enacted again the past hour, each time the brand came down at the same points, till the mark was burnt in, and the pain burnt out, and at last she came to herself. She must have been half an hour in this delirious condition. Then the presence of the night came again to her. She glanced round in fear. She had wandered to the side garden, where she was walking up and down the path beside the currant bushes under the long wall. The garden was a narrow strip, bounded from the road, that cut transversely between the blocks, by a thick thorn hedge.

She hurried out of the side garden to the front, where she could stand as if in an immense gulf of white light, the moon streaming high in face of her, the moonlight standing up from the hills in front, and filling the valley where the Bottoms crouched, almost blindingly. There, panting and half weeping in reaction from the stress, she murmured to herself over and over again: “The nuisance! the nuisance!”

She became aware of something about her. With an effort she roused herself to see what it was that penetrated her consciousness. The tall white lilies were reeling in the moonlight, and the air was charged with their perfume, as with a presence. Mrs. Morel gasped slightly in fear. She touched the big, pallid flowers on their petals, then shivered. They seemed to be stretching in the moonlight. She put her hand into one white bin: the gold scarcely showed on her fingers by moonlight. She bent down to look at the binful of yellow pollen; but it only appeared dusky. Then she drank a deep draught of the scent. It almost made her dizzy.

Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon.

When she came to herself she was tired for sleep. Languidly she looked about her; the clumps of white phlox seemed like bushes spread with linen; a moth ricocheted over them, and right across the garden. Following it with her eye roused her. A few whiffs of the raw, strong scent of phlox invigorated her. She passed along the path, hesitating at the white rose-bush. It smelled sweet and simple. She touched the white ruffles of the roses. Their fresh scent and cool, soft leaves reminded her of the morning-time and sunshine. She was very fond of them. But she was tired, and wanted to sleep. In the mysterious out-of-doors she felt forlorn.

There was no noise anywhere. Evidently the children had not been wakened, or had gone to sleep again. A train, three miles away, roared across the valley. The night was very large, and very strange, stretching its hoary distances infinitely. And out of the silver-grey fog of darkness came sounds vague and hoarse: a corncrake not far off, sound of a train like a sigh, and distant shouts of men.

Her quietened heart beginning to beat quickly again, she hurried down the side garden to the back of the house. Softly she lifted the latch; the door was still bolted, and hard against her. She rapped gently, waited, then rapped again. She must not rouse the children, nor the neighbours. He must be asleep, and he would not wake easily. Her heart began to burn to be indoors. She clung to the door-handle. Now it was cold; she would take a chill, and in her present condition!

Putting her apron over her head and her arms, she hurried again to the side garden, to the window of the kitchen. Leaning on the sill, she could just see, under the blind, her husband's arms spread out on the table, and his black head on the board. He was sleeping with his face lying on the table. Something in his attitude made her feel tired of things. The lamp was burning smokily; she could tell by the copper colour of the light. She tapped at the window more and more noisily. Almost it seemed as if the glass would break. Still he did not wake up.

After vain efforts, she began to shiver, partly from contact with the stone, and from exhaustion. Fearful always for the unborn child, she wondered what she could do for warmth. She went down to the coal-house, where there was an old hearthrug she had carried out for the rag-man the day before. This she wrapped over her shoulders. It was warm, if grimy. Then she walked up and down the garden path, peeping every now and then under the blind, knocking, and telling herself that in the end the very strain of his position must wake him.

At last, after about an hour, she rapped long and low at the window. Gradually the sound penetrated to him. When, in despair, she had ceased to tap, she saw him stir, then lift his face blindly. The labouring of his heart hurt him into consciousness. She rapped imperatively at the window. He started awake. Instantly she saw his fists set and his eyes glare. He had not a grain of physical fear. If it had been twenty burglars, he would have gone blindly for them. He glared round, bewildered, but prepared to fight.

“Open the door, Walter,” she said coldly.

His hands relaxed. It dawned on him what he had done. His head dropped, sullen and dogged. She saw him hurry to the door, heard the bolt chock. He tried the latch. It opened—and there stood the silver-grey night, fearful to him, after the tawny light of the lamp. He hurried back.

When Mrs. Morel entered, she saw him almost running through the door to the stairs. He had ripped his collar off his neck in his haste to be gone ere she came in, and there it lay with bursten button-holes. It made her angry.

She warmed and soothed herself. In her weariness forgetting everything, she moved about at the little tasks that remained to be done, set his breakfast, rinsed his pit-bottle, put his pit-clothes on the hearth to warm, set his pit-boots beside them, put him out a clean scarf and snap-bag and two apples, raked the fire, and went to bed. He was already dead asleep. His narrow black eyebrows were drawn up in a sort of peevish misery into his forehead while his cheeks’ down-strokes, and his sulky mouth, seemed to be saying: “I don’t care who you are nor what you are, I *shall* have my own way.”

Mrs. Morel knew him too well to look at him. As she unfastened her brooch at the mirror, she smiled faintly to see her face all smeared with the yellow dust of lilies. She brushed it off, and at last lay down. For some time her mind continued snapping and jetting sparks, but she was asleep before her husband awoke from the first sleep of his drunkenness.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF PAUL, AND ANOTHER BATTLE

After such a scene as the last, Walter Morel was for some days abashed and ashamed, but he soon regained his old bullying indifference. Yet there was a slight shrinking, a

diminishing in his assurance. Physically even, he shrank, and his fine full presence waned. He never grew in the least stout, so that, as he sank from his erect, assertive bearing, his physique seemed to contract along with his pride and moral strength.

But now he realised how hard it was for his wife to drag about at her work, and, his sympathy quickened by penitence, hastened forward with his help. He came straight home from the pit, and stayed in at evening till Friday, and then he could not remain at home. But he was back again by ten o'clock, almost quite sober.

He always made his own breakfast. Being a man who rose early and had plenty of time he did not, as some miners do, drag his wife out of bed at six o'clock. At five, sometimes earlier, he woke, got straight out of bed, and went downstairs. When she could not sleep, his wife lay waiting for this time, as for a period of peace. The only real rest seemed to be when he was out of the house.

He went downstairs in his shirt and then struggled into his pit-trousers, which were left on the hearth to warm all night. There was always a fire, because Mrs. Morel raked. And the first sound in the house was the bang, bang of the poker against the raker, as Morel smashed the remainder of the coal to make the kettle, which was filled and left on the hob, finally boil. His cup and knife and fork, all he wanted except just the food, was laid ready on the table on a newspaper. Then he got his breakfast, made the tea, packed the bottom of the doors with rugs to shut out the draught, piled a big fire, and sat down to an hour of joy. He toasted his bacon on a fork and caught the drops of fat on his bread; then he put the rasher on his thick slice of bread, and cut off chunks with a clasp-knife, poured his tea into his saucer, and was happy. With his family about, meals were never so pleasant. He loathed a fork: it is a modern introduction which has still scarcely reached common people. What Morel preferred was a clasp-knife. Then, in solitude, he ate and drank, often sitting, in cold weather, on a little stool with his back to the warm chimney-piece, his food on the fender, his cup on the hearth. And then he read the last night's newspaper—what of it he could—spelling it over laboriously. He preferred to keep the blinds down and the candle lit even when it was daylight; it was the habit of the mine.

At a quarter to six he rose, cut two thick slices of bread and butter, and put them in the white calico snap-bag. He filled his tin bottle with tea. Cold tea without milk or sugar was the drink he preferred for the pit. Then he pulled off his shirt, and put on his pit-singlet, a vest of thick flannel cut low round the neck, and with short sleeves like a chemise.

Then he went upstairs to his wife with a cup of tea because she was ill, and because it occurred to him.

"I've brought thee a cup o' tea, lass," he said.

"Well, you needn't, for you know I don't like it," she replied.

"Drink it up; it'll pop thee off to sleep again."

She accepted the tea. It pleased him to see her take it and sip it.

“I’ll back my life there’s no sugar in,” she said.

“Yi—there’s one big un,” he replied, injured.

“It’s a wonder,” she said, sipping again.

She had a winsome face when her hair was loose. He loved her to grumble at him in this manner. He looked at her again, and went, without any sort of leave-taking. He never took more than two slices of bread and butter to eat in the pit, so an apple or an orange was a treat to him. He always liked it when she put one out for him. He tied a scarf round his neck, put on his great, heavy boots, his coat, with the big pocket, that carried his snap-bag and his bottle of tea, and went forth into the fresh morning air, closing, without locking, the door behind him. He loved the early morning, and the walk across the fields. So he appeared at the pit-top, often with a stalk from the hedge between his teeth, which he chewed all day to keep his mouth moist, down the mine, feeling quite as happy as when he was in the field.

Later, when the time for the baby grew nearer, he would bustle round in his slovenly fashion, poking out the ashes, rubbing the fireplace, sweeping the house before he went to work. Then, feeling very self-righteous, he went upstairs.

“Now I’m cleaned up for thee: tha’s no ’casions ter stir a peg all day, but sit and read thy books.”

Which made her laugh, in spite of her indignation.

“And the dinner cooks itself?” she answered.

“Eh, I know nowt about th’ dinner.”

“You’d know if there weren’t any.”

“Ay, ’appen so,” he answered, departing.

When she got downstairs, she would find the house tidy, but dirty. She could not rest until she had thoroughly cleaned; so she went down to the ash-pit with her dustpan. Mrs. Kirk, spying her, would contrive to have to go to her own coal-place at that minute. Then, across the wooden fence, she would call:

“So you keep wagging on, then?”

“Ay,” answered Mrs. Morel deprecatingly. “There’s nothing else for it.”

“Have you seen Hose?” called a very small woman from across the road. It was Mrs. Anthony, a black-haired, strange little body, who always wore a brown velvet dress, tight fitting.

“I haven’t,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Eh, I wish he’d come. I’ve got a copperful of clothes, an’ I’m sure I heered his bell.”

“Hark! He’s at the end.”

The two women looked down the alley. At the end of the Bottoms a man stood in a sort of old-fashioned trap, bending over bundles of cream-coloured stuff; while a cluster

of women held up their arms to him, some with bundles. Mrs. Anthony herself had a heap of creamy, undyed stockings hanging over her arm.

“I’ve done ten dozen this week,” she said proudly to Mrs. Morel.

“T-t-t!” went the other. “I don’t know how you can find time.”

“Eh!” said Mrs. Anthony. “You can find time if you make time.”

“I don’t know how you do it,” said Mrs. Morel. “And how much shall you get for those many?”

“Tuppence-ha’penny a dozen,” replied the other.

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel. “I’d starve before I’d sit down and seam twenty-four stockings for twopence ha’penny.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Mrs. Anthony. “You can rip along with ’em.”

Hose was coming along, ringing his bell. Women were waiting at the yard-ends with their seamed stockings hanging over their arms. The man, a common fellow, made jokes with them, tried to swindle them, and bullied them. Mrs. Morel went up her yard disdainfully.

It was an understood thing that if one woman wanted her neighbour, she should put the poker in the fire and bang at the back of the fireplace, which, as the fires were back to back, would make a great noise in the adjoining house. One morning Mrs. Kirk, mixing a pudding, nearly started out of her skin as she heard the thud, thud, in her grate. With her hands all floury, she rushed to the fence.

“Did you knock, Mrs. Morel?”

“If you wouldn’t mind, Mrs. Kirk.”

Mrs. Kirk climbed on to her copper, got over the wall on to Mrs. Morel’s copper, and ran in to her neighbour.

“Eh, dear, how are you feeling?” she cried in concern.

“You might fetch Mrs. Bower,” said Mrs. Morel.

Mrs. Kirk went into the yard, lifted up her strong, shrill voice, and called:

“Ag-gie—Ag-gie!”

The sound was heard from one end of the Bottoms to the other. At last Aggie came running up, and was sent for Mrs. Bower, whilst Mrs. Kirk left her pudding and stayed with her neighbour.

Mrs. Morel went to bed. Mrs. Kirk had Annie and William for dinner. Mrs. Bower, fat and waddling, bossed the house.

“Hash some cold meat up for the master’s dinner, and make him an apple-charlotte pudding,” said Mrs. Morel.

“He may go without pudding *this* day,” said Mrs. Bower.

Morel was not as a rule one of the first to appear at the bottom of the pit, ready to come up. Some men were there before four o'clock, when the whistle blew loose-all; but Morel, whose stall, a poor one, was at this time about a mile and a half away from the bottom, worked usually till the first mate stopped, then he finished also. This day, however, the miner was sick of the work. At two o'clock he looked at his watch, by the light of the green candle—he was in a safe working—and again at half-past two. He was hewing at a piece of rock that was in the way for the next day's work. As he sat on his heels, or kneeled, giving hard blows with his pick, "Uszza—uszza!" he went.

"Shall ter finish, Sorry?" cried Barker, his fellow butty.

"Finish? Niver while the world stands!" growled Morel.

And he went on striking. He was tired.

"It's a heart-breaking job," said Barker.

But Morel was too exasperated, at the end of his tether, to answer. Still he struck and hacked with all his might.

"Tha might as well leave it, Walter," said Barker. "It'll do to-morrow, without thee hackin' thy guts out."

"I'll lay no b—— finger on this to-morrow, Isr'el!" cried Morel.

"Oh, well, if tha wanna, somebody else'll ha'e to," said Israel.

Then Morel continued to strike.

"Hey-up there—*loose-a'!*" cried the men, leaving the next stall.

Morel continued to strike.

"Tha'll happen catch me up," said Barker, departing.

When he had gone, Morel, left alone, felt savage. He had not finished his job. He had overworked himself into a frenzy. Rising, wet with sweat, he threw his tool down, pulled on his coat, blew out his candle, took his lamp, and went. Down the main road the lights of the other men went swinging. There was a hollow sound of many voices. It was a long, heavy tramp underground.

He sat at the bottom of the pit, where the great drops of water fell splash. Many colliers were waiting their turns to go up, talking noisily. Morel gave his answers short and disagreeable.

"It's rainin', Sorry," said old Giles, who had had the news from the top.

Morel found one comfort. He had his old umbrella, which he loved, in the lamp cabin. At last he took his stand on the chair, and was at the top in a moment. Then he handed in his lamp and got his umbrella, which he had bought at an auction for one-and-six. He stood on the edge of the pit-bank for a moment, looking out over the fields; grey rain was falling. The trucks stood full of wet, bright coal. Water ran down the sides of the waggons, over the white "C.W. and Co." Colliers, walking indifferent to the rain, were

streaming down the line and up the field, a grey, dismal host. Morel put up his umbrella, and took pleasure from the peppering of the drops thereon.

All along the road to Bestwood the miners tramped, wet and grey and dirty, but their red mouths talking with animation. Morel also walked with a gang, but he said nothing. He frowned peevishly as he went. Many men passed into the Prince of Wales or into Ellen's. Morel, feeling sufficiently disagreeable to resist temptation, trudged along under the dripping trees that overhung the park wall, and down the mud of Greenhill Lane.

Mrs. Morel lay in bed, listening to the rain, and the feet of the colliers from Minton, their voices, and the bang, bang of the gates as they went through the stile up the field.

"There's some herb beer behind the pantry door," she said. "Th' master'll want a drink, if he doesn't stop."

But he was late, so she concluded he had called for a drink, since it was raining. What did he care about the child or her?

She was very ill when her children were born.

"What is it?" she asked, feeling sick to death.

"A boy."

And she took consolation in that. The thought of being the mother of men was warming to her heart. She looked at the child. It had blue eyes, and a lot of fair hair, and was bonny. Her love came up hot, in spite of everything. She had it in bed with her.

Morel, thinking nothing, dragged his way up the garden path, wearily and angrily. He closed his umbrella, and stood it in the sink; then he slathered his heavy boots into the kitchen. Mrs. Bower appeared in the inner doorway.

"Well," she said, "she's about as bad as she can be. It's a boy childt."

The miner grunted, put his empty snap-bag and his tin bottle on the dresser, went back into the scullery and hung up his coat, then came and dropped into his chair.

"Han yer got a drink?" he asked.

The woman went into the pantry. There was heard the pop of a cork. She set the mug, with a little, disgusted rap, on the table before Morel. He drank, gasped, wiped his big moustache on the end of his scarf, drank, gasped, and lay back in his chair. The woman would not speak to him again. She set his dinner before him, and went upstairs.

"Was that the master?" asked Mrs. Morel.

"I've gave him his dinner," replied Mrs. Bower.

After he had sat with his arms on the table—he resented the fact that Mrs. Bower put no cloth on for him, and gave him a little plate, instead of a full-sized dinner-plate—he began to eat. The fact that his wife was ill, that he had another boy, was nothing to him at that moment. He was too tired; he wanted his dinner; he wanted to sit with his arms

lying on the board; he did not like having Mrs. Bower about. The fire was too small to please him.

After he had finished his meal, he sat for twenty minutes; then he stoked up a big fire. Then, in his stockinged feet, he went reluctantly upstairs. It was a struggle to face his wife at this moment, and he was tired. His face was black, and smeared with sweat. His singlet had dried again, soaking the dirt in. He had a dirty woollen scarf round his throat. So he stood at the foot of the bed.

“Well, how are ter, then?” he asked.

“I s’ll be all right,” she answered.

“H’m!”

He stood at a loss what to say next. He was tired, and this bother was rather a nuisance to him, and he didn’t quite know where he was.

“A lad, tha says,” he stammered.

She turned down the sheet and showed the child.

“Bless him!” he murmured. Which made her laugh, because he blessed by rote—pretending paternal emotion, which he did not feel just then.

“Go now,” she said.

“I will, my lass,” he answered, turning away.

Dismissed, he wanted to kiss her, but he dared not. She half wanted him to kiss her, but could not bring herself to give any sign. She only breathed freely when he was gone out of the room again, leaving behind him a faint smell of pit-dirt.

Mrs. Morel had a visit every day from the Congregational clergyman. Mr. Heaton was young, and very poor. His wife had died at the birth of his first baby, so he remained alone in the manse. He was a Bachelor of Arts of Cambridge, very shy, and no preacher. Mrs. Morel was fond of him, and he depended on her. For hours he talked to her, when she was well. He became the god-parent of the child.

Occasionally the minister stayed to tea with Mrs. Morel. Then she laid the cloth early, got out her best cups, with a little green rim, and hoped Morel would not come too soon; indeed, if he stayed for a pint, she would not mind this day. She had always two dinners to cook, because she believed children should have their chief meal at midday, whereas Morel needed his at five o’clock. So Mr. Heaton would hold the baby, whilst Mrs. Morel beat up a batter-pudding or peeled the potatoes, and he, watching her all the time, would discuss his next sermon. His ideas were quaint and fantastic. She brought him judiciously to earth. It was a discussion of the wedding at Cana.

“When He changed the water into wine at Cana,” he said, “that is a symbol that the ordinary life, even the blood, of the married husband and wife, which had before been uninspired, like water, became filled with the Spirit, and was as wine, because, when love enters, the whole spiritual constitution of a man changes, is filled with the Holy Ghost, and almost his form is altered.”

Mrs. Morel thought to herself:

“Yes, poor fellow, his young wife is dead; that is why he makes his love into the Holy Ghost.”

They were halfway down their first cup of tea when they heard the sluther of pit-boots.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Mrs. Morel, in spite of herself.

The minister looked rather scared. Morel entered. He was feeling rather savage. He nodded a “How d’yer do” to the clergyman, who rose to shake hands with him.

“Nay,” said Morel, showing his hand, “look thee at it! Tha niver wants ter shake hands wi’ a hand like that, does ter? There’s too much pick-haft and shovel-dirt on it.”

The minister flushed with confusion, and sat down again. Mrs. Morel rose, carried out the steaming saucepan. Morel took off his coat, dragged his armchair to table, and sat down heavily.

“Are you tired?” asked the clergyman.

“Tired? I ham that,” replied Morel. “*You* don’t know what it is to be tired, as *I’m* tired.”

“No,” replied the clergyman.

“Why, look yer ’ere,” said the miner, showing the shoulders of his singlet. “It’s a bit dry now, but it’s wet as a clout with sweat even yet. Feel it.”

“Goodness!” cried Mrs. Morel. “Mr. Heaton doesn’t want to feel your nasty singlet.”

The clergyman put out his hand gingerly.

“No, perhaps he doesn’t,” said Morel; “but it’s all come out of *me*, whether or not. An’ iv’ry day alike my singlet’s wringin’ wet. ’Aven’t you got a drink, Missis, for a man when he comes home barkled up from the pit?”

“You know you drank all the beer,” said Mrs. Morel, pouring out his tea.

“An’ was there no more to be got?” Turning to the clergyman—“A man gets that caked up wi’ th’ dust, you know,—that clogged up down a coal-mine, he *needs* a drink when he comes home.”

“I am sure he does,” said the clergyman.

“But it’s ten to one if there’s owt for him.”

“There’s water—and there’s tea,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Water! It’s not water as’ll clear his throat.”

He poured out a saucerful of tea, blew it, and sucked it up through his great black moustache, sighing afterwards. Then he poured out another saucerful, and stood his cup on the table.

“My cloth!” said Mrs. Morel, putting it on a plate.

“A man as comes home as I do ’s too tired to care about cloths,” said Morel.

“Pity!” exclaimed his wife, sarcastically.

The room was full of the smell of meat and vegetables and pit-clothes.

He leaned over to the minister, his great moustache thrust forward, his mouth very red in his black face.

“Mr. Heaton,” he said, “a man as has been down the black hole all day, dingin’ away at a coal-face, yi, a sight harder than that wall—”

“Needn’t make a moan of it,” put in Mrs. Morel.

She hated her husband because, whenever he had an audience, he whined and played for sympathy. William, sitting nursing the baby, hated him, with a boy’s hatred for false sentiment, and for the stupid treatment of his mother. Annie had never liked him; she merely avoided him.

When the minister had gone, Mrs. Morel looked at her cloth.

“A fine mess!” she said.

“Dos’t think I’m goin’ to sit wi’ my arms danglin’, cos tha’s got a parson for tea wi’ thee?” he bawled.

They were both angry, but she said nothing. The baby began to cry, and Mrs. Morel, picking up a saucepan from the hearth, accidentally knocked Annie on the head, whereupon the girl began to whine, and Morel to shout at her. In the midst of this pandemonium, William looked up at the big glazed text over the mantelpiece and read distinctly:

“God Bless Our Home!”

Whereupon Mrs. Morel, trying to soothe the baby, jumped up, rushed at him, boxed his ears, saying:

“What are *you* putting in for?”

And then she sat down and laughed, till tears ran over her cheeks, while William kicked the stool he had been sitting on, and Morel growled:

“I canna see what there is so much to laugh at.”

One evening, directly after the parson’s visit, feeling unable to bear herself after another display from her husband, she took Annie and the baby and went out. Morel had kicked William, and the mother would never forgive him.

She went over the sheep-bridge and across a corner of the meadow to the cricket-ground. The meadows seemed one space of ripe, evening light, whispering with the distant mill-race. She sat on a seat under the alders in the cricket-ground, and fronted the evening. Before her, level and solid, spread the big green cricket-field, like the bed of a sea of light. Children played in the bluish shadow of the pavilion. Many rooks, high up, came cawing home across the softly-woven sky. They stooped in a long curve down into the golden glow, concentrating, cawing, wheeling, like black flakes on a slow vortex, over a tree clump that made a dark boss among the pasture.

A few gentlemen were practising, and Mrs. Morel could hear the chock of the ball, and the voices of men suddenly roused; could see the white forms of men shifting silently over the green, upon which already the under shadows were smouldering. Away at the grange, one side of the haystacks was lit up, the other sides blue-grey. A waggon of sheaves rocked small across the melting yellow light.

The sun was going down. Every open evening, the hills of Derbyshire were blazed over with red sunset. Mrs. Morel watched the sun sink from the glistening sky, leaving a soft flower-blue overhead, while the western space went red, as if all the fire had swum down there, leaving the bell cast flawless blue. The mountain-ash berries across the field stood fierily out from the dark leaves, for a moment. A few shocks of corn in a corner of the fallow stood up as if alive; she imagined them bowing; perhaps her son would be a Joseph. In the east, a mirrored sunset floated pink opposite the west's scarlet. The big haystacks on the hillside, that butted into the glare, went cold.

With Mrs. Morel it was one of those still moments when the small frets vanish, and the beauty of things stands out, and she had the peace and the strength to see herself. Now and again, a swallow cut close to her. Now and again, Annie came up with a handful of alder-currants. The baby was restless on his mother's knee, clambering with his hands at the light.

Mrs. Morel looked down at him. She had dreaded this baby like a catastrophe, because of her feeling for her husband. And now she felt strangely towards the infant. Her heart was heavy because of the child, almost as if it were unhealthy, or malformed. Yet it seemed quite well. But she noticed the peculiar knitting of the baby's brows, and the peculiar heaviness of its eyes, as if it were trying to understand something that was pain. She felt, when she looked at her child's dark, brooding pupils, as if a burden were on her heart.

"He looks as if he was thinking about something—quite sorrowful," said Mrs. Kirk.

Suddenly, looking at him, the heavy feeling at the mother's heart melted into passionate grief. She bowed over him, and a few tears shook swiftly out of her very heart. The baby lifted his fingers.

"My lamb!" she cried softly.

And at that moment she felt, in some far inner place of her soul, that she and her husband were guilty.

The baby was looking up at her. It had blue eyes like her own, but its look was heavy, steady, as if it had realised something that had stunned some point of its soul.

In her arms lay the delicate baby. Its deep blue eyes, always looking up at her unblinking, seemed to draw her innermost thoughts out of her. She no longer loved her husband; she had not wanted this child to come, and there it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart. She felt as if the navel string that had connected its frail little body with hers had not been broken. A wave of hot love went over her to the infant. She held it close to her face and breast. With all her force, with all her soul she would make up to

it for having brought it into the world unloved. She would love it all the more now it was here; carry it in her love. Its clear, knowing eyes gave her pain and fear. Did it know all about her? When it lay under her heart, had it been listening then? Was there a reproach in the look? She felt the marrow melt in her bones, with fear and pain.

Once more she was aware of the sun lying red on the rim of the hill opposite. She suddenly held up the child in her hands.

“Look!” she said. “Look, my pretty!”

She thrust the infant forward to the crimson, throbbing sun, almost with relief. She saw him lift his little fist. Then she put him to her bosom again, ashamed almost of her impulse to give him back again whence he came.

“If he lives,” she thought to herself, “what will become of him—what will he be?”

Her heart was anxious.

“I will call him Paul,” she said suddenly; she knew not why.

After a while she went home. A fine shadow was flung over the deep green meadow, darkening all.

As she expected, she found the house empty. But Morel was home by ten o’clock, and that day, at least, ended peacefully.

Walter Morel was, at this time, exceedingly irritable. His work seemed to exhaust him. When he came home he did not speak civilly to anybody. If the fire were rather low he bullied about that; he grumbled about his dinner; if the children made a chatter he shouted at them in a way that made their mother’s blood boil, and made them hate him.

On the Friday, he was not home by eleven o’clock. The baby was unwell, and was restless, crying if he were put down. Mrs. Morel, tired to death, and still weak, was scarcely under control.

“I wish the nuisance would come,” she said wearily to herself.

The child at last sank down to sleep in her arms. She was too tired to carry him to the cradle.

“But I’ll say nothing, whatever time he comes,” she said. “It only works me up; I won’t say anything. But I know if he does anything it’ll make my blood boil,” she added to herself.

She sighed, hearing him coming, as if it were something she could not bear. He, taking his revenge, was nearly drunk. She kept her head bent over the child as he entered, not wishing to see him. But it went through her like a flash of hot fire when, in passing, he lurched against the dresser, setting the tins rattling, and clutched at the white pot knobs for support. He hung up his hat and coat, then returned, stood glowering from a distance at her, as she sat bowed over the child.

“Is there nothing to eat in the house?” he asked, insolently, as if to a servant. In certain stages of his intoxication he affected the clipped, mincing speech of the towns. Mrs. Morel hated him most in this condition.

“You know what there is in the house,” she said, so coldly, it sounded impersonal.

He stood and glared at her without moving a muscle.

“I asked a civil question, and I expect a civil answer,” he said affectedly.

“And you got it,” she said, still ignoring him.

He glowered again. Then he came unsteadily forward. He leaned on the table with one hand, and with the other jerked at the table drawer to get a knife to cut bread. The drawer stuck because he pulled sideways. In a temper he dragged it, so that it flew out bodily, and spoons, forks, knives, a hundred metallic things, splashed with a clatter and a clang upon the brick floor. The baby gave a little convulsed start.

“What are you doing, clumsy, drunken fool?” the mother cried.

“Then tha should get the flamin’ thing thysen. Tha should get up, like other women have to, an’ wait on a man.”

“Wait on you—wait on you?” she cried. “Yes, I see myself.”

“Yis, an’ I’ll learn thee tha’s got to. Wait on *me*, yes tha sh’lt wait on me—”

“Never, milord. I’d wait on a dog at the door first.”

“What—what?”

He was trying to fit in the drawer. At her last speech he turned round. His face was crimson, his eyes bloodshot. He stared at her one silent second in threat.

“P-h!” she went quickly, in contempt.

He jerked at the drawer in his excitement. It fell, cut sharply on his shin, and on the reflex he flung it at her.

One of the corners caught her brow as the shallow drawer crashed into the fireplace. She swayed, almost fell stunned from her chair. To her very soul she was sick; she clasped the child tightly to her bosom. A few moments elapsed; then, with an effort, she brought herself to. The baby was crying plaintively. Her left brow was bleeding rather profusely. As she glanced down at the child, her brain reeling, some drops of blood soaked into its white shawl; but the baby was at least not hurt. She balanced her head to keep equilibrium, so that the blood ran into her eye.

Walter Morel remained as he had stood, leaning on the table with one hand, looking blank. When he was sufficiently sure of his balance, he went across to her, swayed, caught hold of the back of her rocking-chair, almost tipping her out; then leaning forward over her, and swaying as he spoke, he said, in a tone of wondering concern:

“Did it catch thee?”

He swayed again, as if he would pitch on to the child. With the catastrophe he had lost all balance.

“Go away,” she said, struggling to keep her presence of mind.

He hiccupped. “Let’s—let’s look at it,” he said, hiccupping again.

“Go away!” she cried.

“Lemme—lemme look at it, lass.”

She smelled him of drink, felt the unequal pull of his swaying grasp on the back of her rocking-chair.

“Go away,” she said, and weakly she pushed him off.

He stood, uncertain in balance, gazing upon her. Summoning all her strength she rose, the baby on one arm. By a cruel effort of will, moving as if in sleep, she went across to the scullery, where she bathed her eye for a minute in cold water; but she was too dizzy. Afraid lest she should swoon, she returned to her rocking-chair, trembling in every fibre. By instinct, she kept the baby clasped.

Morel, bothered, had succeeded in pushing the drawer back into its cavity, and was on his knees, groping, with numb paws, for the scattered spoons.

Her brow was still bleeding. Presently Morel got up and came craning his neck towards her.

“What has it done to thee, lass?” he asked, in a very wretched, humble tone.

“You can see what it’s done,” she answered.

He stood, bending forward, supported on his hands, which grasped his legs just above the knee. He peered to look at the wound. She drew away from the thrust of his face with its great moustache, averting her own face as much as possible. As he looked at her, who was cold and impassive as stone, with mouth shut tight, he sickened with feebleness and hopelessness of spirit. He was turning drearily away, when he saw a drop of blood fall from the averted wound into the baby’s fragile, glistening hair. Fascinated, he watched the heavy dark drop hang in the glistening cloud, and pull down the gossamer. Another drop fell. It would soak through to the baby’s scalp. He watched, fascinated, feeling it soak in; then, finally, his manhood broke.

“What of this child?” was all his wife said to him. But her low, intense tones brought his head lower. She softened: “Get me some wadding out of the middle drawer,” she said.

He stumbled away very obediently, presently returning with a pad, which she singed before the fire, then put on her forehead, as she sat with the baby on her lap.

“Now that clean pit-scarf.”

Again he rummaged and fumbled in the drawer, returning presently with a red, narrow scarf. She took it, and with trembling fingers proceeded to bind it round her head.

“Let me tie it for thee,” he said humbly.

“I can do it myself,” she replied. When it was done she went upstairs, telling him to rake the fire and lock the door.

In the morning Mrs. Morel said:

“I knocked against the latch of the coal-place, when I was getting a raker in the dark, because the candle blew out.” Her two small children looked up at her with wide, dismayed eyes. They said nothing, but their parted lips seemed to express the unconscious tragedy they felt.

Walter Morel lay in bed next day until nearly dinner-time. He did not think of the previous evening’s work. He scarcely thought of anything, but he would not think of that. He lay and suffered like a sulking dog. He had hurt himself most; and he was the more damaged because he would never say a word to her, or express his sorrow. He tried to wriggle out of it. “It was her own fault,” he said to himself. Nothing, however, could prevent his inner consciousness inflicting on him the punishment which ate into his spirit like rust, and which he could only alleviate by drinking.

He felt as if he had not the initiative to get up, or to say a word, or to move, but could only lie like a log. Moreover, he had himself violent pains in the head. It was Saturday. Towards noon he rose, cut himself food in the pantry, ate it with his head dropped, then pulled on his boots, and went out, to return at three o’clock slightly tipsy and relieved; then once more straight to bed. He rose again at six in the evening, had tea and went straight out.

Sunday was the same: bed till noon, the Palmerston Arms till 2.30, dinner, and bed; scarcely a word spoken. When Mrs. Morel went upstairs, towards four o’clock, to put on her Sunday dress, he was fast asleep. She would have felt sorry for him, if he had once said, “Wife, I’m sorry.” But no; he insisted to himself it was her fault. And so he broke himself. So she merely left him alone. There was this deadlock of passion between them, and she was stronger.

The family began tea. Sunday was the only day when all sat down to meals together.

“Isn’t my father going to get up?” asked William.

“Let him lie,” the mother replied.

There was a feeling of misery over all the house. The children breathed the air that was poisoned, and they felt dreary. They were rather disconsolate, did not know what to do, what to play at.

Immediately Morel woke he got straight out of bed. That was characteristic of him all his life. He was all for activity. The prostrated inactivity of two mornings was stifling him.

It was near six o’clock when he got down. This time he entered without hesitation, his wincing sensitiveness having hardened again. He did not care any longer what the family thought or felt.

The tea-things were on the table. William was reading aloud from "The Child's Own", Annie listening and asking eternally "why?" Both children hushed into silence as they heard the approaching thud of their father's stockinged feet, and shrank as he entered. Yet he was usually indulgent to them.

Morel made the meal alone, brutally. He ate and drank more noisily than he had need. No one spoke to him. The family life withdrew, shrank away, and became hushed as he entered. But he cared no longer about his alienation.

Immediately he had finished tea he rose with alacrity to go out. It was this alacrity, this haste to be gone, which so sickened Mrs. Morel. As she heard him sousing heartily in cold water, heard the eager scratch of the steel comb on the side of the bowl, as he wetted his hair, she closed her eyes in disgust. As he bent over, lacing his boots, there was a certain vulgar gusto in his movement that divided him from the reserved, watchful rest of the family. He always ran away from the battle with himself. Even in his own heart's privacy, he excused himself, saying, "If she hadn't said so-and-so, it would never have happened. She asked for what she's got." The children waited in restraint during his preparations. When he had gone, they sighed with relief.

He closed the door behind him, and was glad. It was a rainy evening. The Palmerston would be the cosier. He hastened forward in anticipation. All the slate roofs of the Bottoms shone black with wet. The roads, always dark with coal-dust, were full of blackish mud. He hastened along. The Palmerston windows were steamed over. The passage was paddled with wet feet. But the air was warm, if foul, and full of the sound of voices and the smell of beer and smoke.

"What shollt ha'e, Walter?" cried a voice, as soon as Morel appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Jim, my lad, wheriver has thee sprung frae?"

The men made a seat for him, and took him in warmly. He was glad. In a minute or two they had thawed all responsibility out of him, all shame, all trouble, and he was clear as a bell for a jolly night.

On the Wednesday following, Morel was penniless. He dreaded his wife. Having hurt her, he hated her. He did not know what to do with himself that evening, having not even twopence with which to go to the Palmerston, and being already rather deeply in debt. So, while his wife was down the garden with the child, he hunted in the top drawer of the dresser where she kept her purse, found it, and looked inside. It contained a half-crown, two halfpennies, and a sixpence. So he took the sixpence, put the purse carefully back, and went out.

The next day, when she wanted to pay the greengrocer, she looked in the purse for her sixpence, and her heart sank to her shoes. Then she sat down and thought: "Was there a sixpence? I hadn't spent it, had I? And I hadn't left it anywhere else?"

She was much put about. She hunted round everywhere for it. And, as she sought, the conviction came into her heart that her husband had taken it. What she had in her purse was all the money she possessed. But that he should sneak it from her thus was

unbearable. He had done so twice before. The first time she had not accused him, and at the week-end he had put the shilling again into her purse. So that was how she had known he had taken it. The second time he had not paid back.

This time she felt it was too much. When he had had his dinner—he came home early that day—she said to him coldly:

“Did you take sixpence out of my purse last night?”

“Me!” he said, looking up in an offended way. “No, I didna! I niver clapped eyes on your purse.”

But she could detect the lie.

“Why, you know you did,” she said quietly.

“I tell you I didna,” he shouted. “Yer at me again, are yer? I’ve had about enough on’t.”

“So you filch sixpence out of my purse while I’m taking the clothes in.”

“I’ll may yer pay for this,” he said, pushing back his chair in desperation. He bustled and got washed, then went determinedly upstairs. Presently he came down dressed, and with a big bundle in a blue-checked, enormous handkerchief.

“And now,” he said, “you’ll see me again when you do.”

“It’ll be before I want to,” she replied; and at that he marched out of the house with his bundle. She sat trembling slightly, but her heart brimming with contempt. What would she do if he went to some other pit, obtained work, and got in with another woman? But she knew him too well—he couldn’t. She was dead sure of him. Nevertheless her heart was gnawed inside her.

“Where’s my dad?” said William, coming in from school.

“He says he’s run away,” replied the mother.

“Where to?”

“Eh, I don’t know. He’s taken a bundle in the blue handkerchief, and says he’s not coming back.”

“What shall we do?” cried the boy.

“Eh, never trouble, he won’t go far.”

“But if he doesn’t come back,” wailed Annie.

And she and William retired to the sofa and wept. Mrs. Morel sat and laughed.

“You pair of gabeys!” she exclaimed. “You’ll see him before the night’s out.”

But the children were not to be consoled. Twilight came on. Mrs. Morel grew anxious from very weariness. One part of her said it would be a relief to see the last of him; another part fretted because of keeping the children; and inside her, as yet, she could not quite let him go. At the bottom, she knew very well he could *not* go.

When she went down to the coal-place at the end of the garden, however, she felt something behind the door. So she looked. And there in the dark lay the big blue bundle. She sat on a piece of coal and laughed. Every time she saw it, so fat and yet so ignominious, slunk into its corner in the dark, with its ends flopping like dejected ears from the knots, she laughed again. She was relieved.

Mrs. Morel sat waiting. He had not any money, she knew, so if he stopped he was running up a bill. She was very tired of him—tired to death. He had not even the courage to carry his bundle beyond the yard-end.

As she meditated, at about nine o'clock, he opened the door and came in, slinking, and yet sulky. She said not a word. He took off his coat, and slunk to his armchair, where he began to take off his boots.

“You’d better fetch your bundle before you take your boots off,” she said quietly.

“You may thank your stars I’ve come back to-night,” he said, looking up from under his dropped head, sulkily, trying to be impressive.

“Why, where should you have gone? You daren’t even get your parcel through the yard-end,” she said.

He looked such a fool she was not even angry with him. He continued to take his boots off and prepare for bed.

“I don’t know what’s in your blue handkerchief,” she said. “But if you leave it the children shall fetch it in the morning.”

Whereupon he got up and went out of the house, returning presently and crossing the kitchen with averted face, hurrying upstairs. As Mrs. Morel saw him slink quickly through the inner doorway, holding his bundle, she laughed to herself: but her heart was bitter, because she had loved him.

CHAPTER III

THE CASTING OFF OF MOREL—THE TAKING ON OF WILLIAM

During the next week Morel’s temper was almost unbearable. Like all miners, he was a great lover of medicines, which, strangely enough, he would often pay for himself.

“You mun get me a drop o’ laxy vitral,” he said. “It’s a winder as we canna ha’e a sup i’ th’ ’ouse.”

So Mrs. Morel bought him elixir of vitriol, his favourite first medicine. And he made himself a jug of wormwood tea. He had hanging in the attic great bunches of dried herbs: wormwood, rue, horehound, elder-flowers, parsley-purt, marshmallow, hyssop, dandelion, and centuary. Usually there was a jug of one or other decoction standing on the hob, from which he drank largely.

“Grand!” he said, smacking his lips after wormwood. “Grand!” And he exhorted the children to try.

“It’s better than any of your tea or your cocoa stews,” he vowed. But they were not to be tempted.

This time, however, neither pills nor vitriol nor all his herbs would shift the “nasty peens in his head”. He was sickening for an attack of an inflammation of the brain. He had never been well since his sleeping on the ground when he went with Jerry to Nottingham. Since then he had drunk and stormed. Now he fell seriously ill, and Mrs. Morel had him to nurse. He was one of the worst patients imaginable. But, in spite of all, and putting aside the fact that he was breadwinner, she never quite wanted him to die. Still there was one part of her wanted him for herself.

The neighbours were very good to her: occasionally some had the children in to meals, occasionally some would do the downstairs work for her, one would mind the baby for a day. But it was a great drag, nevertheless. It was not every day the neighbours helped. Then she had nursing of baby and husband, cleaning and cooking, everything to do. She was quite worn out, but she did what was wanted of her.

And the money was just sufficient. She had seventeen shillings a week from clubs, and every Friday Barker and the other butty put by a portion of the stall’s profits for Morel’s wife. And the neighbours made broths, and gave eggs, and such invalids’ trifles. If they had not helped her so generously in those times, Mrs. Morel would never have pulled through, without incurring debts that would have dragged her down.

The weeks passed. Morel, almost against hope, grew better. He had a fine constitution, so that, once on the mend, he went straight forward to recovery. Soon he was pottering about downstairs. During his illness his wife had spoiled him a little. Now he wanted her to continue. He often put his band to his head, pulled down the corners of his mouth, and shammed pains he did not feel. But there was no deceiving her. At first she merely smiled to herself. Then she scolded him sharply.

“Goodness, man, don’t be so lachrymose.”

That wounded him slightly, but still he continued to feign sickness.

“I wouldn’t be such a mardy baby,” said the wife shortly.

Then he was indignant, and cursed under his breath, like a boy. He was forced to resume a normal tone, and to cease to whine.

Nevertheless, there was a state of peace in the house for some time. Mrs. Morel was more tolerant of him, and he, depending on her almost like a child, was rather happy. Neither knew that she was more tolerant because she loved him less. Up till this time, in spite of all, he had been her husband and her man. She had felt that, more or less, what he did to himself he did to her. Her living depended on him. There were many, many stages in the ebbing of her love for him, but it was always ebbing.

Now, with the birth of this third baby, her self no longer set towards him, helplessly, but was like a tide that scarcely rose, standing off from him. After this she scarcely desired him. And, standing more aloof from him, not feeling him so much part of herself, but merely part of her circumstances, she did not mind so much what he did, could leave him alone.

There was the halt, the wistfulness about the ensuing year, which is like autumn in a man's life. His wife was casting him off, half regretfully, but relentlessly; casting him off and turning now for love and life to the children. Henceforward he was more or less a husk. And he himself acquiesced, as so many men do, yielding their place to their children.

During his recuperation, when it was really over between them, both made an effort to come back somewhat to the old relationship of the first months of their marriage. He sat at home and, when the children were in bed, and she was sewing—she did all her sewing by hand, made all shirts and children's clothing—he would read to her from the newspaper, slowly pronouncing and delivering the words like a man pitching quoits. Often she hurried him on, giving him a phrase in anticipation. And then he took her words humbly.

The silences between them were peculiar. There would be the swift, slight “cluck” of her needle, the sharp “pop” of his lips as he let out the smoke, the warmth, the sizzle on the bars as he spat in the fire. Then her thoughts turned to William. Already he was getting a big boy. Already he was top of the class, and the master said he was the smartest lad in the school. She saw him a man, young, full of vigour, making the world glow again for her.

And Morel sitting there, quite alone, and having nothing to think about, would be feeling vaguely uncomfortable. His soul would reach out in its blind way to her and find her gone. He felt a sort of emptiness, almost like a vacuum in his soul. He was unsettled and restless. Soon he could not live in that atmosphere, and he affected his wife. Both felt an oppression on their breathing when they were left together for some time. Then he went to bed and she settled down to enjoy herself alone, working, thinking, living.

Meanwhile another infant was coming, fruit of this little peace and tenderness between the separating parents. Paul was seventeen months old when the new baby was born. He was then a plump, pale child, quiet, with heavy blue eyes, and still the peculiar slight knitting of the brows. The last child was also a boy, fair and bonny. Mrs. Morel was sorry when she knew she was with child, both for economic reasons and because she did not love her husband; but not for the sake of the infant.

They called the baby Arthur. He was very pretty, with a mop of gold curls, and he loved his father from the first. Mrs. Morel was glad this child loved the father. Hearing the miner's footsteps, the baby would put up his arms and crow. And if Morel were in a good temper, he called back immediately, in his hearty, mellow voice:

“What then, my beauty? I sh’ll come to thee in a minute.”

And as soon as he had taken off his pit-coat, Mrs. Morel would put an apron round the child, and give him to his father.

“What a sight the lad looks!” she would exclaim sometimes, taking back the baby, that was smutted on the face from his father’s kisses and play. Then Morel laughed joyfully.

“He’s a little collier, bless his bit o’ mutton!” he exclaimed.

And these were the happy moments of her life now, when the children included the father in her heart.

Meanwhile William grew bigger and stronger and more active, while Paul, always rather delicate and quiet, got slimmer, and trotted after his mother like her shadow. He was usually active and interested, but sometimes he would have fits of depression. Then the mother would find the boy of three or four crying on the sofa.

“What’s the matter?” she asked, and got no answer.

“What’s the matter?” she insisted, getting cross.

“I don’t know,” sobbed the child.

So she tried to reason him out of it, or to amuse him, but without effect. It made her feel beside herself. Then the father, always impatient, would jump from his chair and shout:

“If he doesn’t stop, I’ll smack him till he does.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” said the mother coldly. And then she carried the child into the yard, plumped him into his little chair, and said: “Now cry there, Misery!”

And then a butterfly on the rhubarb-leaves perhaps caught his eye, or at last he cried himself to sleep. These fits were not often, but they caused a shadow in Mrs. Morel’s heart, and her treatment of Paul was different from that of the other children.

Suddenly one morning as she was looking down the alley of the Bottoms for the barm-man, she heard a voice calling her. It was the thin little Mrs. Anthony in brown velvet.

“Here, Mrs. Morel, I want to tell you about your Willie.”

“Oh, do you?” replied Mrs. Morel. “Why, what’s the matter?”

“A lad as gets ’old of another an’ rips his clothes off’n ’is back,” Mrs. Anthony said, “wants showing something.”

“Your Alfred’s as old as my William,” said Mrs. Morel.

“’Appen ’e is, but that doesn’t give him a right to get hold of the boy’s collar, an’ fair rip it clean off his back.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel, “I don’t thrash my children, and even if I did, I should want to hear their side of the tale.”

“They’d happen be a bit better if they did get a good hiding,” retorted Mrs. Anthony. “When it comes ter rippin’ a lad’s clean collar off’n ’is back a-purpose—”

“I’m sure he didn’t do it on purpose,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Make me a liar!” shouted Mrs. Anthony.

Mrs. Morel moved away and closed her gate. Her hand trembled as she held her mug of barm.

“But I s’ll let your mester know,” Mrs. Anthony cried after her.

At dinner-time, when William had finished his meal and wanted to be off again—he was then eleven years old—his mother said to him:

“What did you tear Alfred Anthony’s collar for?”

“When did I tear his collar?”

“I don’t know when, but his mother says you did.”

“Why—it was yesterday—an’ it was torn a’ready.”

“But you tore it more.”

“Well, I’d got a cobbler as ’ad licked seventeen—an’ Alfy Ant’ny ’e says:

‘Adam	an’	Eve	an’	pinch-me,		
Went	down	to	a	river	to	bade.
Adam	an’	Eve	got	drowned,		
Who do yer think got saved?						

An’ so I says: ‘Oh, Pinch-*you*,’ an’ so I pinched ’im, an’ ’e was mad, an’ so he snatched my cobbler an’ run off with it. An’ so I run after ’im, an’ when I was gettin’ hold of him, ’e dodged, an’ it ripped ’is collar. But I got my cobbler—”

He pulled from his pocket a black old horse-chestnut hanging on a string. This old cobbler had “cobbled”—hit and smashed—seventeen other cobblers on similar strings. So the boy was proud of his veteran.

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel, “you know you’ve got no right to rip his collar.”

“Well, our mother!” he answered. “I never meant tr’a done it—an’ it was on’y an old indirrubber collar as was torn a’ready.”

“Next time,” said his mother, “*you* be more careful. I shouldn’t like it if you came home with *your* collar torn off.”

“I don’t care, our mother; I never did it a-purpose.”

The boy was rather miserable at being reprimanded.

“No—well, you be more careful.”

William fled away, glad to be exonerated. And Mrs. Morel, who hated any bother with the neighbours, thought she would explain to Mrs. Anthony, and the business would be over.

But that evening Morel came in from the pit looking very sour. He stood in the kitchen and glared round, but did not speak for some minutes. Then:

“Wheer’s that Willy?” he asked.

“What do you want *him* for?” asked Mrs. Morel, who had guessed.

“I’ll let ’im know when I get him,” said Morel, banging his pit-bottle on to the dresser.

“I suppose Mrs. Anthony’s got hold of you and been yarning to you about Alfy’s collar,” said Mrs. Morel, rather sneering.

“Niver mind who’s got hold of me,” said Morel. “When I get hold of ’*im* I’ll make his bones rattle.”

“It’s a poor tale,” said Mrs. Morel, “that you’re so ready to side with any snipey vixen who likes to come telling tales against your own children.”

“I’ll learn ’im!” said Morel. “It none matters to me whose lad ’e is; ’e’s none goin’ rippin’ an’ tearin’ about just as he’s a mind.”

“Ripping and tearing about!” repeated Mrs. Morel. “He was running after that Alfy, who’d taken his cobbler, and he accidentally got hold of his collar, because the other dodged—as an Anthony would.”

“I know!” shouted Morel threateningly.

“You would, before you’re told,” replied his wife bitingly.

“Niver you mind,” stormed Morel. “I know my business.”

“That’s more than doubtful,” said Mrs. Morel, “supposing some loud-mouthed creature had been getting you to thrash your own children.”

“I know,” repeated Morel.

And he said no more, but sat and nursed his bad temper. Suddenly William ran in, saying:

“Can I have my tea, mother?”

“Tha can ha’e more than that!” shouted Morel.

“Hold your noise, man,” said Mrs. Morel; “and don’t look so ridiculous.”

“He’ll look ridiculous before I’ve done wi’ him!” shouted Morel, rising from his chair and glaring at his son.

William, who was a tall lad for his years, but very sensitive, had gone pale, and was looking in a sort of horror at his father.

“Go out!” Mrs. Morel commanded her son.

William had not the wit to move. Suddenly Morel clenched his fist, and crouched.

“I’ll *gi’e* him ‘go out’!” he shouted like an insane thing.

“What!” cried Mrs. Morel, panting with rage. “You shall not touch him for *her* telling, you shall not!”

“Shonna I?” shouted Morel. “Shonna I?”

And, glaring at the boy, he ran forward. Mrs. Morel sprang in between them, with her fist lifted.

“Don’t you *dare!*” she cried.

“What!” he shouted, baffled for the moment. “What!”

She spun round to her son.

“*Go* out of the house!” she commanded him in fury.

The boy, as if hypnotised by her, turned suddenly and was gone. Morel rushed to the door, but was too late. He returned, pale under his pit-dirt with fury. But now his wife was fully roused.

“Only dare!” she said in a loud, ringing voice. “Only dare, milord, to lay a finger on that child! You’ll regret it for ever.”

He was afraid of her. In a towering rage, he sat down.

When the children were old enough to be left, Mrs. Morel joined the Women’s Guild. It was a little club of women attached to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which met on Monday night in the long room over the grocery shop of the Bestwood “Co-op”. The women were supposed to discuss the benefits to be derived from co-operation, and other social questions. Sometimes Mrs. Morel read a paper. It seemed queer to the children to see their mother, who was always busy about the house, sitting writing in her rapid fashion, thinking, referring to books, and writing again. They felt for her on such occasions the deepest respect.

But they loved the Guild. It was the only thing to which they did not grudge their mother—and that partly because she enjoyed it, partly because of the treats they derived from it. The Guild was called by some hostile husbands, who found their wives getting too independent, the “clat-fart” shop—that is, the gossip-shop. It is true, from off the basis of the Guild, the women could look at their homes, at the conditions of their own lives, and find fault. So the colliers found their women had a new standard of their own, rather disconcerting. And also, Mrs. Morel always had a lot of news on Monday nights, so that the children liked William to be in when their mother came home, because she told him things.

Then, when the lad was thirteen, she got him a job in the “Co-op.” office. He was a very clever boy, frank, with rather rough features and real viking blue eyes.

“What dost want ter ma’e a stool-harsed Jack on ’im for?” said Morel. “All he’ll do is to wear his britches behind out an’ earn nowt. What’s ’e startin’ wi’?”

“It doesn’t matter what he’s starting with,” said Mrs. Morel.

“It wouldna! Put ’im i’ th’ pit we me, an’ ’ell earn a easy ten shillin’ a wik from th’ start. But six shillin’ wearin’ his truck-end out on a stool’s better than ten shillin’ i’ th’ pit wi’ me, I know.”

“He is *not* going in the pit,” said Mrs. Morel, “and there’s an end of it.”

“It wor good enough for me, but it’s non good enough for ’im.”

“If your mother put you in the pit at twelve, it’s no reason why I should do the same with my lad.”

“Twelve! It wor a sight afore that!”

“Whenever it was,” said Mrs. Morel.

She was very proud of her son. He went to the night school, and learned shorthand, so that by the time he was sixteen he was the best shorthand clerk and book-keeper on the place, except one. Then he taught in the night schools. But he was so fiery that only his good-nature and his size protected him.

All the things that men do—the decent things—William did. He could run like the wind. When he was twelve he won a first prize in a race; an inkstand of glass, shaped like an anvil. It stood proudly on the dresser, and gave Mrs. Morel a keen pleasure. The boy only ran for her. He flew home with his anvil, breathless, with a “Look, mother!” That was the first real tribute to herself. She took it like a queen.

“How pretty!” she exclaimed.

Then he began to get ambitious. He gave all his money to his mother. When he earned fourteen shillings a week, she gave him back two for himself, and, as he never drank, he felt himself rich. He went about with the bourgeois of Bestwood. The townlet contained nothing higher than the clergyman. Then came the bank manager, then the doctors, then the tradespeople, and after that the hosts of colliers. Willam began to consort with the sons of the chemist, the schoolmaster, and the tradesmen. He played billiards in the Mechanics’ Hall. Also he danced—this in spite of his mother. All the life that Bestwood offered he enjoyed, from the sixpenny-hops down Church Street, to sports and billiards.

Paul was treated to dazzling descriptions of all kinds of flower-like ladies, most of whom lived like cut blooms in William’s heart for a brief fortnight.

Occasionally some flame would come in pursuit of her errant swain. Mrs. Morel would find a strange girl at the door, and immediately she sniffed the air.

“Is Mr. Morel in?” the damsel would ask appealingly.

“My husband is at home,” Mrs. Morel replied.

“I—I mean *young* Mr. Morel,” repeated the maiden painfully.

“Which one? There are several.”

Whereupon much blushing and stammering from the fair one.

“I—I met Mr. Morel—at Ripley,” she explained.

“Oh—at a dance!”

“Yes.”

“I don’t approve of the girls my son meets at dances. And he is *not* at home.”

Then he came home angry with his mother for having turned the girl away so rudely. He was a careless, yet eager-looking fellow, who walked with long strides, sometimes frowning, often with his cap pushed jollily to the back of his head. Now he came in frowning. He threw his cap on to the sofa, and took his strong jaw in his hand, and glared down at his mother. She was small, with her hair taken straight back from her forehead. She had a quiet air of authority, and yet of rare warmth. Knowing her son was angry, she trembled inwardly.

“Did a lady call for me yesterday, mother?” he asked.

“I don’t know about a lady. There was a girl came.”

“And why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I forgot, simply.”

He fumed a little.

“A good-looking girl—seemed a lady?”

“I didn’t look at her.”

“Big brown eyes?”

“I did *not* look. And tell your girls, my son, that when they’re running after you, they’re not to come and ask your mother for you. Tell them that—brazen baggages you meet at dancing-classes.”

“I’m sure she was a nice girl.”

“And I’m sure she wasn’t.”

There ended the altercation. Over the dancing there was a great strife between the mother and the son. The grievance reached its height when William said he was going to Hucknall Torkard—considered a low town—to a fancy-dress ball. He was to be a Highlander. There was a dress he could hire, which one of his friends had had, and which fitted him perfectly. The Highland suit came home. Mrs. Morel received it coldly and would not unpack it.

“My suit come?” cried William.

“There’s a parcel in the front room.”

He rushed in and cut the string.

“How do you fancy your son in this!” he said, enraptured, showing her the suit.

“You know I don’t want to fancy you in it.”

On the evening of the dance, when he had come home to dress, Mrs. Morel put on her coat and bonnet.

“Aren’t you going to stop and see me, mother?” he asked.

“No; I don’t want to see you,” she replied.

She was rather pale, and her face was closed and hard. She was afraid of her son’s going the same way as his father. He hesitated a moment, and his heart stood still with

anxiety. Then he caught sight of the Highland bonnet with its ribbons. He picked it up gleefully, forgetting her. She went out.

When he was nineteen he suddenly left the Co-op. office and got a situation in Nottingham. In his new place he had thirty shillings a week instead of eighteen. This was indeed a rise. His mother and his father were brimmed up with pride. Everybody praised William. It seemed he was going to get on rapidly. Mrs. Morel hoped, with his aid, to help her younger sons. Annie was now studying to be a teacher. Paul, also very clever, was getting on well, having lessons in French and German from his godfather, the clergyman who was still a friend to Mrs. Morel. Arthur, a spoilt and very good-looking boy, was at the Board-school, but there was talk of his trying to get a scholarship for the High School in Nottingham.

William remained a year at his new post in Nottingham. He was studying hard, and growing serious. Something seemed to be fretting him. Still he went out to the dances and the river parties. He did not drink. The children were all rabid teetotallers. He came home very late at night, and sat yet longer studying. His mother implored him to take more care, to do one thing or another.

“Dance, if you want to dance, my son; but don’t think you can work in the office, and then amuse yourself, and *then* study on top of all. You can’t; the human frame won’t stand it. Do one thing or the other—amuse yourself or learn Latin; but don’t try to do both.”

Then he got a place in London, at a hundred and twenty a year. This seemed a fabulous sum. His mother doubted almost whether to rejoice or to grieve.

“They want me in Lime Street on Monday week, mother,” he cried, his eyes blazing as he read the letter. Mrs. Morel felt everything go silent inside her. He read the letter: “‘And will you reply by Thursday whether you accept. Yours faithfully—’ They want me, mother, at a hundred and twenty a year, and don’t even ask to see me. Didn’t I tell you I could do it! Think of me in London! And I can give you twenty pounds a year, mater. We s’ll all be rolling in money.”

“We shall, my son,” she answered sadly.

It never occurred to him that she might be more hurt at his going away than glad of his success. Indeed, as the days drew near for his departure, her heart began to close and grow dreary with despair. She loved him so much! More than that, she hoped in him so much. Almost she lived by him. She liked to do things for him: she liked to put a cup for his tea and to iron his collars, of which he was so proud. It was a joy to her to have him proud of his collars. There was no laundry. So she used to rub away at them with her little convex iron, to polish them, till they shone from the sheer pressure of her arm. Now she would not do it for him. Now he was going away. She felt almost as if he were going as well out of her heart. He did not seem to leave her inhabited with himself. That was the grief and the pain to her. He took nearly all himself away.

A few days before his departure—he was just twenty—he burned his love-letters. They had hung on a file at the top of the kitchen cupboard. From some of them he had read extracts to his mother. Some of them she had taken the trouble to read herself. But most were too trivial.

Now, on the Saturday morning he said:

“Come on, ’Postle, let’s go through my letters, and you can have the birds and flowers.”

Mrs. Morel had done her Saturday’s work on the Friday, because he was having a last day’s holiday. She was making him a rice cake, which he loved, to take with him. He was scarcely conscious that she was so miserable.

He took the first letter off the file. It was mauve-tinted, and had purple and green thistles. William sniffed the page.

“Nice scent! Smell.”

And he thrust the sheet under Paul’s nose.

“Um!” said Paul, breathing in. “What d’you call it? Smell, mother.”

His mother ducked her small, fine nose down to the paper.

“I don’t want to smell their rubbish,” she said, sniffing.

“This girl’s father,” said William, “is as rich as Cræsus. He owns property without end. She calls me Lafayette, because I know French. ‘You will see, I’ve forgiven you’—I like *her* forgiving me. ‘I told mother about you this morning, and she will have much pleasure if you come to tea on Sunday, but she will have to get father’s consent also. I sincerely hope he will agree. I will let you know how it transpires. If, however, you—”

“Let you know how it’ what?” interrupted Mrs. Morel.

“Transpires’—oh yes!”

“Transpires!” repeated Mrs. Morel mockingly. “I thought she was so well educated!”

William felt slightly uncomfortable, and abandoned this maiden, giving Paul the corner with the thistles. He continued to read extracts from his letters, some of which amused his mother, some of which saddened her and made her anxious for him.

“My lad,” she said, “they’re very wise. They know they’ve only got to flatter your vanity, and you press up to them like a dog that has its head scratched.”

“Well, they can’t go on scratching for ever,” he replied. “And when they’ve done, I trot away.”

“But one day you’ll find a string round your neck that you can’t pull off,” she answered.

“Not me! I’m equal to any of ’em, mater, they needn’t flatter themselves.”

“You flatter *yourself*,” she said quietly.

Soon there was a heap of twisted black pages, all that remained of the file of scented letters, except that Paul had thirty or forty pretty tickets from the corners of the notepaper—swallows and forget-me-nots and ivy sprays. And William went to London, to start a new life.

CHAPTER IV THE YOUNG LIFE OF PAUL

Paul would be built like his mother, slightly and rather small. His fair hair went reddish, and then dark brown; his eyes were grey. He was a pale, quiet child, with eyes that seemed to listen, and with a full, dropping underlip.

As a rule he seemed old for his years. He was so conscious of what other people felt, particularly his mother. When she fretted he understood, and could have no peace. His soul seemed always attentive to her.

As he grew older he became stronger. William was too far removed from him to accept him as a companion. So the smaller boy belonged at first almost entirely to Annie. She was a tomboy and a “flybie-skybie”, as her mother called her. But she was intensely fond of her second brother. So Paul was towed round at the heels of Annie, sharing her game. She raced wildly at lerky with the other young wild-cats of the Bottoms. And always Paul flew beside her, living her share of the game, having as yet no part of his own. He was quiet and not noticeable. But his sister adored him. He always seemed to care for things if she wanted him to.

She had a big doll of which she was fearfully proud, though not so fond. So she laid the doll on the sofa, and covered it with an antimacassar, to sleep. Then she forgot it. Meantime Paul must practise jumping off the sofa arm. So he jumped crash into the face of the hidden doll. Annie rushed up, uttered a loud wail, and sat down to weep a dirge. Paul remained quite still.

“You couldn’t tell it was there, mother; you couldn’t tell it was there,” he repeated over and over. So long as Annie wept for the doll he sat helpless with misery. Her grief wore itself out. She forgave her brother—he was so much upset. But a day or two afterwards she was shocked.

“Let’s make a sacrifice of Arabella,” he said. “Let’s burn her.”

She was horrified, yet rather fascinated. She wanted to see what the boy would do. He made an altar of bricks, pulled some of the shavings out of Arabella’s body, put the waxen fragments into the hollow face, poured on a little paraffin, and set the whole thing alight. He watched with wicked satisfaction the drops of wax melt off the broken forehead of Arabella, and drop like sweat into the flame. So long as the stupid big doll burned he rejoiced in silence. At the end he poked among the embers with a stick, fished out the arms and legs, all blackened, and smashed them under stones.

“That’s the sacrifice of Missis Arabella,” he said. “An’ I’m glad there’s nothing left of her.”

Which disturbed Annie inwardly, although she could say nothing. He seemed to hate the doll so intensely, because he had broken it.

All the children, but particularly Paul, were peculiarly *against* their father, along with their mother. Morel continued to bully and to drink. He had periods, months at a time, when he made the whole life of the family a misery. Paul never forgot coming home from the Band of Hope one Monday evening and finding his mother with her eye swollen and discoloured, his father standing on the hearthrug, feet astride, his head down, and William, just home from work, glaring at his father. There was a silence as the young children entered, but none of the elders looked round.

William was white to the lips, and his fists were clenched. He waited until the children were silent, watching with children’s rage and hate; then he said:

“You coward, you daren’t do it when I was in.”

But Morel’s blood was up. He swung round on his son. William was bigger, but Morel was hard-muscled, and mad with fury.

“Dossn’t I?” he shouted. “Dossn’t I? Ha’e much more o’ thy chelp, my young jockey, an’ I’ll rattle my fist about thee. Ay, an’ I sholl that, dost see?”

Morel crouched at the knees and showed his fist in an ugly, almost beast-like fashion. William was white with rage.

“Will yer?” he said, quiet and intense. “It ’ud be the last time, though.”

Morel danced a little nearer, crouching, drawing back his fist to strike. William put his fists ready. A light came into his blue eyes, almost like a laugh. He watched his father. Another word, and the men would have begun to fight. Paul hoped they would. The three children sat pale on the sofa.

“Stop it, both of you,” cried Mrs. Morel in a hard voice. “We’ve had enough for *one* night. And *you*,” she said, turning on to her husband, “look at your children!”

Morel glanced at the sofa.

“Look at the children, you nasty little bitch!” he sneered. “Why, what have *I* done to the children, I should like to know? But they’re like yourself; you’ve put ’em up to your own tricks and nasty ways—you’ve learned ’em in it, you ’ave.”

She refused to answer him. No one spoke. After a while he threw his boots under the table and went to bed.

“Why didn’t you let me have a go at him?” said William, when his father was upstairs. “I could easily have beaten him.”

“A nice thing—your own father,” she replied.

“*Father!*” repeated William. “Call *him my* father!”

“Well, he is—and so—”

“But why don’t you let me settle him? I could do, easily.”

“The idea!” she cried. “It hasn’t come to *that* yet.”

“No,” he said, “it’s come to worse. Look at yourself. *Why* didn’t you let me give it him?”

“Because I couldn’t bear it, so never think of it,” she cried quickly.

And the children went to bed, miserably.

When William was growing up, the family moved from the Bottoms to a house on the brow of the hill, commanding a view of the valley, which spread out like a convex cockle-shell, or a clamp-shell, before it. In front of the house was a huge old ash-tree. The west wind, sweeping from Derbyshire, caught the houses with full force, and the tree shrieked again. Morel liked it.

“It’s music,” he said. “It sends me to sleep.”

But Paul and Arthur and Annie hated it. To Paul it became almost a demoniacal noise. The winter of their first year in the new house their father was very bad. The children played in the street, on the brim of the wide, dark valley, until eight o’clock. Then they went to bed. Their mother sat sewing below. Having such a great space in front of the house gave the children a feeling of night, of vastness, and of terror. This terror came in from the shrieking of the tree and the anguish of the home discord. Often Paul would wake up, after he had been asleep a long time, aware of thuds downstairs. Instantly he was wide awake. Then he heard the booming shouts of his father, come home nearly drunk, then the sharp replies of his mother, then the bang, bang of his father’s fist on the table, and the nasty snarling shout as the man’s voice got higher. And then the whole was drowned in a piercing medley of shrieks and cries from the great, wind-swept ash-tree. The children lay silent in suspense, waiting for a lull in the wind to hear what their father was doing. He might hit their mother again. There was a feeling of horror, a kind of bristling in the darkness, and a sense of blood. They lay with their hearts in the grip of an intense anguish. The wind came through the tree fiercer and fiercer. All the chords of the great harp hummed, whistled, and shrieked. And then came the horror of the sudden silence, silence everywhere, outside and downstairs. What was it? Was it a silence of blood? What had he done?

The children lay and breathed the darkness. And then, at last, they heard their father throw down his boots and tramp upstairs in his stockinged feet. Still they listened. Then at last, if the wind allowed, they heard the water of the tap drumming into the kettle, which their mother was filling for morning, and they could go to sleep in peace.

So they were happy in the morning—happy, very happy playing, dancing at night round the lonely lamp-post in the midst of the darkness. But they had one tight place of anxiety in their hearts, one darkness in their eyes, which showed all their lives.

Paul hated his father. As a boy he had a fervent private religion.

“Make him stop drinking,” he prayed every night. “Lord, let my father die,” he prayed very often. “Let him not be killed at pit,” he prayed when, after tea, the father did not come home from work.

That was another time when the family suffered intensely. The children came from school and had their teas. On the hob the big black saucepan was simmering, the stew-jar was in the oven, ready for Morel’s dinner. He was expected at five o’clock. But for months he would stop and drink every night on his way from work.

In the winter nights, when it was cold, and grew dark early, Mrs. Morel would put a brass candlestick on the table, light a tallow candle to save the gas. The children finished their bread-and-butter, or dripping, and were ready to go out to play. But if Morel had not come they faltered. The sense of his sitting in all his pit-dirt, drinking, after a long day’s work, not coming home and eating and washing, but sitting, getting drunk, on an empty stomach, made Mrs. Morel unable to bear herself. From her the feeling was transmitted to the other children. She never suffered alone any more: the children suffered with her.

Paul went out to play with the rest. Down in the great trough of twilight, tiny clusters of lights burned where the pits were. A few last colliers straggled up the dim field path. The lamplighter came along. No more colliers came. Darkness shut down over the valley; work was done. It was night.

Then Paul ran anxiously into the kitchen. The one candle still burned on the table, the big fire glowed red. Mrs. Morel sat alone. On the hob the saucepan steamed; the dinner-plate lay waiting on the table. All the room was full of the sense of waiting, waiting for the man who was sitting in his pit-dirt, dinnerless, some mile away from home, across the darkness, drinking himself drunk. Paul stood in the doorway.

“Has my dad come?” he asked.

“You can see he hasn’t,” said Mrs. Morel, cross with the futility of the question.

Then the boy dawdled about near his mother. They shared the same anxiety. Presently Mrs. Morel went out and strained the potatoes.

“They’re ruined and black,” she said; “but what do I care?”

Not many words were spoken. Paul almost hated his mother for suffering because his father did not come home from work.

“What do you bother yourself for?” he said. “If he wants to stop and get drunk, why don’t you let him?”

“Let him!” flashed Mrs. Morel. “You may well say ‘let him’.”

She knew that the man who stops on the way home from work is on a quick way to ruining himself and his home. The children were yet young, and depended on the breadwinner. William gave her the sense of relief, providing her at last with someone to turn to if Morel failed. But the tense atmosphere of the room on these waiting evenings was the same.

The minutes ticked away. At six o'clock still the cloth lay on the table, still the dinner stood waiting, still the same sense of anxiety and expectation in the room. The boy could not stand it any longer. He could not go out and play. So he ran in to Mrs. Inger, next door but one, for her to talk to him. She had no children. Her husband was good to her but was in a shop, and came home late. So, when she saw the lad at the door, she called:

“Come in, Paul.”

The two sat talking for some time, when suddenly the boy rose, saying:

“Well, I’ll be going and seeing if my mother wants an errand doing.”

He pretended to be perfectly cheerful, and did not tell his friend what ailed him. Then he ran indoors.

Morel at these times came in churlish and hateful.

“This is a nice time to come home,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Wha’s it matter to yo’ what time I come whoam?” he shouted.

And everybody in the house was still, because he was dangerous. He ate his food in the most brutal manner possible, and, when he had done, pushed all the pots in a heap away from him, to lay his arms on the table. Then he went to sleep.

Paul hated his father so. The collier’s small, mean head, with its black hair slightly soiled with grey, lay on the bare arms, and the face, dirty and inflamed, with a fleshy nose and thin, paltry brows, was turned sideways, asleep with beer and weariness and nasty temper. If anyone entered suddenly, or a noise were made, the man looked up and shouted:

“I’ll lay my fist about thy y’ead, I’m tellin’ thee, if tha doesna stop that clatter! Dost hear?”

And the two last words, shouted in a bullying fashion, usually at Annie, made the family writhe with hate of the man.

He was shut out from all family affairs. No one told him anything. The children, alone with their mother, told her all about the day’s happenings, everything. Nothing had really taken place in them until it was told to their mother. But as soon as the father came in, everything stopped. He was like the scotch in the smooth, happy machinery of the home. And he was always aware of this fall of silence on his entry, the shutting off of life, the unwelcome. But now it was gone too far to alter.

He would dearly have liked the children to talk to him, but they could not. Sometimes Mrs. Morel would say:

“You ought to tell your father.”

Paul won a prize in a competition in a child’s paper. Everybody was highly jubilant.

“Now you’d better tell your father when he comes in,” said Mrs. Morel. “You know how he carries on and says he’s never told anything.”

“All right,” said Paul. But he would almost rather have forfeited the prize than have to tell his father.

“I’ve won a prize in a competition, dad,” he said. Morel turned round to him.

“Have you, my boy? What sort of a competition?”

“Oh, nothing—about famous women.”

“And how much is the prize, then, as you’ve got?”

“It’s a book.”

“Oh, indeed!”

“About birds.”

“Hm—hm!”

And that was all. Conversation was impossible between the father and any other member of the family. He was an outsider. He had denied the God in him.

The only times when he entered again into the life of his own people was when he worked, and was happy at work. Sometimes, in the evening, he cobbled the boots or mended the kettle or his pit-bottle. Then he always wanted several attendants, and the children enjoyed it. They united with him in the work, in the actual doing of something, when he was his real self again.

He was a good workman, dexterous, and one who, when he was in a good humour, always sang. He had whole periods, months, almost years, of friction and nasty temper. Then sometimes he was jolly again. It was nice to see him run with a piece of red-hot iron into the scullery, crying:

“Out of my road—out of my road!”

Then he hammered the soft, red-glowing stuff on his iron goose, and made the shape he wanted. Or he sat absorbed for a moment, soldering. Then the children watched with joy as the metal sank suddenly molten, and was shoved about against the nose of the soldering-iron, while the room was full of a scent of burnt resin and hot tin, and Morel was silent and intent for a minute. He always sang when he mended boots because of the jolly sound of hammering. And he was rather happy when he sat putting great patches on his moleskin pit trousers, which he would often do, considering them too dirty, and the stuff too hard, for his wife to mend.

But the best time for the young children was when he made fuses. Morel fetched a sheaf of long sound wheat-straws from the attic. These he cleaned with his hand, till each one gleamed like a stalk of gold, after which he cut the straws into lengths of about six inches, leaving, if he could, a notch at the bottom of each piece. He always had a beautifully sharp knife that could cut a straw clean without hurting it. Then he set in the middle of the table a heap of gunpowder, a little pile of black grains upon the white-scrubbed board. He made and trimmed the straws while Paul and Annie rifled and plugged them. Paul loved to see the black grains trickle down a crack in his palm into the mouth of the straw, peppering jollily downwards till the straw was full. Then he

bunged up the mouth with a bit of soap—which he got on his thumb-nail from a pat in a saucer—and the straw was finished.

“Look, dad!” he said.

“That’s right, my beauty,” replied Morel, who was peculiarly lavish of endearments to his second son. Paul popped the fuse into the powder-tin, ready for the morning, when Morel would take it to the pit, and use it to fire a shot that would blast the coal down.

Meantime Arthur, still fond of his father, would lean on the arm of Morel’s chair and say:

“Tell us about down pit, daddy.”

This Morel loved to do.

“Well, there’s one little ’oss—we call ’im Taffy,” he would begin. “An’ he’s a fawce un!”

Morel had a warm way of telling a story. He made one feel Taffy’s cunning.

“He’s a brown un,” he would answer, “an’ not very high. Well, he comes i’ th’ stall wi’ a rattle, an’ then yo’ ’ear ’im sneeze.

“‘Ello, Taff,’ you say, ‘what art sneezin’ for? Bin ta’ ein’ some snuff?’

“An’ ’e sneezes again. Then he slives up an’ shoves ’is ’ead on yer, that cadin’.

“‘What’s want, Taff?’ yo’ say.”

“And what does he?” Arthur always asked.

“He wants a bit o’ bacca, my ducky.”

This story of Taffy would go on interminably, and everybody loved it.

Or sometimes it was a new tale.

“An’ what dost think, my darlin’? When I went to put my coat on at snap-time, what should go runnin’ up my arm but a mouse.

“‘Hey up, theer!’ I shouts.

“‘An’ I wor just in time ter get ’im by th’ tail.’”

“‘And did you kill it?’”

“‘I did, for they’re a nuisance. The place is fair snied wi’ ’em.’”

“‘An’ what do they live on?’”

“‘The corn as the ’osses drops—an’ they’ll get in your pocket an’ eat your snap, if you’ll let ’em—no matter where yo’ hing your coat—the slivin’, nibblin’ little nuisances, for they are.’”

These happy evenings could not take place unless Morel had some job to do. And then he always went to bed very early, often before the children. There was nothing remaining for him to stay up for, when he had finished tinkering, and had skimmed the headlines of the newspaper.

And the children felt secure when their father was in bed. They lay and talked softly awhile. Then they started as the lights went suddenly sprawling over the ceiling from the lamps that swung in the hands of the colliers tramping by outside, going to take the nine o'clock shift. They listened to the voices of the men, imagined them dipping down into the dark valley. Sometimes they went to the window and watched the three or four lamps growing tinier and tinier, swaying down the fields in the darkness. Then it was a joy to rush back to bed and cuddle closely in the warmth.

Paul was rather a delicate boy, subject to bronchitis. The others were all quite strong; so this was another reason for his mother's difference in feeling for him. One day he came home at dinner-time feeling ill. But it was not a family to make any fuss.

"What's the matter with *you*?" his mother asked sharply.

"Nothing," he replied.

But he ate no dinner.

"If you eat no dinner, you're not going to school," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"That's why."

So after dinner he lay down on the sofa, on the warm chintz cushions the children loved. Then he fell into a kind of doze. That afternoon Mrs. Morel was ironing. She listened to the small, restless noise the boy made in his throat as she worked. Again rose in her heart the old, almost weary feeling towards him. She had never expected him to live. And yet he had a great vitality in his young body. Perhaps it would have been a little relief to her if he had died. She always felt a mixture of anguish in her love for him.

He, in his semi-conscious sleep, was vaguely aware of the clatter of the iron on the iron-stand, of the faint thud, thud on the ironing-board. Once roused, he opened his eyes to see his mother standing on the hearthrug with the hot iron near her cheek, listening, as it were, to the heat. Her still face, with the mouth closed tight from suffering and disillusion and self-denial, and her nose the smallest bit on one side, and her blue eyes so young, quick, and warm, made his heart contract with love. When she was quiet, so, she looked brave and rich with life, but as if she had been done out of her rights. It hurt the boy keenly, this feeling about her that she had never had her life's fulfilment: and his own incapability to make up to her hurt him with a sense of impotence, yet made him patiently dogged inside. It was his childish aim.

She spat on the iron, and a little ball of spit bounded, raced off the dark, glossy surface. Then, kneeling, she rubbed the iron on the sack lining of the hearthrug vigorously. She was warm in the ruddy firelight. Paul loved the way she crouched and put her head on one side. Her movements were light and quick. It was always a pleasure to watch her. Nothing she ever did, no movement she ever made, could have been found

fault with by her children. The room was warm and full of the scent of hot linen. Later on the clergyman came and talked softly with her.

Paul was laid up with an attack of bronchitis. He did not mind much. What happened happened, and it was no good kicking against the pricks. He loved the evenings, after eight o'clock, when the light was put out, and he could watch the fire-flames spring over the darkness of the walls and ceiling; could watch huge shadows waving and tossing, till the room seemed full of men who battled silently.

On retiring to bed, the father would come into the sickroom. He was always very gentle if anyone were ill. But he disturbed the atmosphere for the boy.

"Are ter asleep, my darlin'?" Morel asked softly.

"No; is my mother comin'?"

"She's just finishin' foldin' the clothes. Do you want anything?" Morel rarely "thee'd" his son.

"I don't want nothing. But how long will she be?"

"Not long, my duckie."

The father waited undecidedly on the hearthrug for a moment or two. He felt his son did not want him. Then he went to the top of the stairs and said to his wife:

"This childt's axin' for thee; how long art goin' to be?"

"Until I've finished, good gracious! Tell him to go to sleep."

"She says you're to go to sleep," the father repeated gently to Paul.

"Well, I want *her* to come," insisted the boy.

"He says he can't go off till you come," Morel called downstairs.

"Eh, dear! I shan't be long. And do stop shouting downstairs. There's the other children—"

Then Morel came again and crouched before the bedroom fire. He loved a fire dearly.

"She says she won't be long," he said.

He loitered about indefinitely. The boy began to get feverish with irritation. His father's presence seemed to aggravate all his sick impatience. At last Morel, after having stood looking at his son awhile, said softly:

"Good-night, my darling."

"Good-night," Paul replied, turning round in relief to be alone.

Paul loved to sleep with his mother. Sleep is still most perfect, in spite of hygienists, when it is shared with a beloved. The warmth, the security and peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of the other, knits the sleep, so that it takes the body and soul completely in its healing. Paul lay against her and slept, and got better; whilst she, always a bad sleeper, fell later on into a profound sleep that seemed to give her faith.

In convalescence he would sit up in bed, see the fluffy horses feeding at the troughs in the field, scattering their hay on the trodden yellow snow; watch the miners troop home—small, black figures trailing slowly in gangs across the white field. Then the night came up in dark blue vapour from the snow.

In convalescence everything was wonderful. The snowflakes, suddenly arriving on the window-pane, clung there a moment like swallows, then were gone, and a drop of water was crawling down the glass. The snowflakes whirled round the corner of the house, like pigeons dashing by. Away across the valley the little black train crawled doubtfully over the great whiteness.

While they were so poor, the children were delighted if they could do anything to help economically. Annie and Paul and Arthur went out early in the morning, in summer, looking for mushrooms, hunting through the wet grass, from which the larks were rising, for the white-skinned, wonderful naked bodies crouched secretly in the green. And if they got half a pound they felt exceedingly happy: there was the joy of finding something, the joy of accepting something straight from the hand of Nature, and the joy of contributing to the family exchequer.

But the most important harvest, after gleaning for frumenty, was the blackberries. Mrs. Morel must buy fruit for puddings on the Saturdays; also she liked blackberries. So Paul and Arthur scoured the coppices and woods and old quarries, so long as a blackberry was to be found, every week-end going on their search. In that region of mining villages blackberries became a comparative rarity. But Paul hunted far and wide. He loved being out in the country, among the bushes. But he also could not bear to go home to his mother empty. That, he felt, would disappoint her, and he would have died rather.

“Good gracious!” she would exclaim as the lads came in, late, and tired to death, and hungry, “wherever have you been?”

“Well,” replied Paul, “there wasn’t any, so we went over Misk Hills. And look here, our mother!”

She peeped into the basket.

“Now, those are fine ones!” she exclaimed.

“And there’s over two pounds—isn’t there over two pounds?”

She tried the basket.

“Yes,” she answered doubtfully.

Then Paul fished out a little spray. He always brought her one spray, the best he could find.

“Pretty!” she said, in a curious tone, of a woman accepting a love-token.

The boy walked all day, went miles and miles, rather than own himself beaten and come home to her empty-handed. She never realised this, whilst he was young. She was a woman who waited for her children to grow up. And William occupied her chiefly.

But when William went to Nottingham, and was not so much at home, the mother made a companion of Paul. The latter was unconsciously jealous of his brother, and William was jealous of him. At the same time, they were good friends.

Mrs. Morel's intimacy with her second son was more subtle and fine, perhaps not so passionate as with her eldest. It was the rule that Paul should fetch the money on Friday afternoons. The colliers of the five pits were paid on Fridays, but not individually. All the earnings of each stall were put down to the chief butty, as contractor, and he divided the wages again, either in the public-house or in his own home. So that the children could fetch the money, school closed early on Friday afternoons. Each of the Morel children—William, then Annie, then Paul—had fetched the money on Friday afternoons, until they went themselves to work. Paul used to set off at half-past three, with a little calico bag in his pocket. Down all the paths, women, girls, children, and men were seen trooping to the offices.

These offices were quite handsome: a new, red-brick building, almost like a mansion, standing in its own grounds at the end of Greenhill Lane. The waiting-room was the hall, a long, bare room paved with blue brick, and having a seat all round, against the wall. Here sat the colliers in their pit-dirt. They had come up early. The women and children usually loitered about on the red gravel paths. Paul always examined the grass border, and the big grass bank, because in it grew tiny pansies and tiny forget-me-nots. There was a sound of many voices. The women had on their Sunday hats. The girls chattered loudly. Little dogs ran here and there. The green shrubs were silent all around.

Then from inside came the cry "Spinney Park—Spinney Park." All the folk for Spinney Park trooped inside. When it was time for Bretty to be paid, Paul went in among the crowd. The pay-room was quite small. A counter went across, dividing it into half. Behind the counter stood two men—Mr. Braithwaite and his clerk, Mr. Winterbottom. Mr. Braithwaite was large, somewhat of the stern patriarch in appearance, having a rather thin white beard. He was usually muffled in an enormous silk neckerchief, and right up to the hot summer a huge fire burned in the open grate. No window was open. Sometimes in winter the air scorched the throats of the people, coming in from the freshness. Mr. Winterbottom was rather small and fat, and very bald. He made remarks that were not witty, whilst his chief launched forth patriarchal admonitions against the colliers.

The room was crowded with miners in their pit-dirt, men who had been home and changed, and women, and one or two children, and usually a dog. Paul was quite small, so it was often his fate to be jammed behind the legs of the men, near the fire which scorched him. He knew the order of the names—they went according to stall number.

"Holliday," came the ringing voice of Mr. Braithwaite. Then Mrs. Holliday stepped silently forward, was paid, drew aside.

"Bower—John Bower."

A boy stepped to the counter. Mr. Braithwaite, large and irascible, glowered at him over his spectacles.

“John Bower!” he repeated.

“It’s me,” said the boy.

“Why, you used to ’ave a different nose than that,” said glossy Mr. Winterbottom, peering over the counter. The people tittered, thinking of John Bower senior.

“How is it your father’s not come!” said Mr. Braithwaite, in a large and magisterial voice.

“He’s badly,” piped the boy.

“You should tell him to keep off the drink,” pronounced the great cashier.

“An’ niver mind if he puts his foot through yer,” said a mocking voice from behind.

All the men laughed. The large and important cashier looked down at his next sheet.

“Fred Pilkington!” he called, quite indifferent.

Mr. Braithwaite was an important shareholder in the firm.

Paul knew his turn was next but one, and his heart began to beat. He was pushed against the chimney-piece. His calves were burning. But he did not hope to get through the wall of men.

“Walter Morel!” came the ringing voice.

“Here!” piped Paul, small and inadequate.

“Morel—Walter Morel!” the cashier repeated, his finger and thumb on the invoice, ready to pass on.

Paul was suffering convulsions of self-consciousness, and could not or would not shout. The backs of the men obliterated him. Then Mr. Winterbottom came to the rescue.

“He’s here. Where is he? Morel’s lad?”

The fat, red, bald little man peered round with keen eyes. He pointed at the fireplace. The colliers looked round, moved aside, and disclosed the boy.

“Here he is!” said Mr. Winterbottom.

Paul went to the counter.

“Seventeen pounds eleven and fivepence. Why don’t you shout up when you’re called?” said Mr. Braithwaite. He banged on to the invoice a five-pound bag of silver, then in a delicate and pretty movement, picked up a little ten-pound column of gold, and plumped it beside the silver. The gold slid in a bright stream over the paper. The cashier finished counting off the money; the boy dragged the whole down the counter to Mr. Winterbottom, to whom the stoppages for rent and tools must be paid. Here he suffered again.

“Sixteen an’ six,” said Mr. Winterbottom.

The lad was too much upset to count. He pushed forward some loose silver and half a sovereign.

“How much do you think you’ve given me?” asked Mr. Winterbottom.

The boy looked at him, but said nothing. He had not the faintest notion.

“Haven’t you got a tongue in your head?”

Paul bit his lip, and pushed forward some more silver.

“Don’t they teach you to count at the Board-school?” he asked.

“Nowt but algibbra an’ French,” said a collier.

“An’ cheek an’ impidence,” said another.

Paul was keeping someone waiting. With trembling fingers he got his money into the bag and slid out. He suffered the tortures of the damned on these occasions.

His relief, when he got outside, and was walking along the Mansfield Road, was infinite. On the park wall the mosses were green. There were some gold and some white fowls pecking under the apple trees of an orchard. The colliers were walking home in a stream. The boy went near the wall, self-consciously. He knew many of the men, but could not recognise them in their dirt. And this was a new torture to him.

When he got down to the New Inn, at Bretty, his father was not yet come. Mrs. Wharmby, the landlady, knew him. His grandmother, Morel’s mother, had been Mrs. Wharmby’s friend.

“Your father’s not come yet,” said the landlady, in the peculiar half-scornful, half-patronising voice of a woman who talks chiefly to grown men. “Sit you down.”

Paul sat down on the edge of the bench in the bar. Some colliers were “reckoning”—sharing out their money—in a corner; others came in. They all glanced at the boy without speaking. At last Morel came; brisk, and with something of an air, even in his blackness.

“Hello!” he said rather tenderly to his son. “Have you bested me? Shall you have a drink of something?”

Paul and all the children were bred up fierce anti-alcoholists, and he would have suffered more in drinking a lemonade before all the men than in having a tooth drawn.

The landlady looked at him *de haut en bas*, rather pitying, and at the same time, resenting his clear, fierce morality. Paul went home, glowering. He entered the house silently. Friday was baking day, and there was usually a hot bun. His mother put it before him.

Suddenly he turned on her in a fury, his eyes flashing:

“I’m *not* going to the office any more,” he said.

“Why, what’s the matter?” his mother asked in surprise. His sudden rages rather amused her.

“I’m *not* going any more,” he declared.

“Oh, very well, tell your father so.”

He chewed his bun as if he hated it.

“I’m not—I’m not going to fetch the money.”

“Then one of Carlin’s children can go; they’d be glad enough of the sixpence,” said Mrs. Morel.

This sixpence was Paul’s only income. It mostly went in buying birthday presents; but it *was* an income, and he treasured it. But—

“They can have it, then!” he said. “I don’t want it.”

“Oh, very well,” said his mother. “But you needn’t bully *me* about it.”

“They’re hateful, and common, and hateful, they are, and I’m not going any more. Mr. Braithwaite drops his ‘h’s’, an’ Mr. Winterbottom says ‘You was’.”

“And is that why you won’t go any more?” smiled Mrs. Morel.

The boy was silent for some time. His face was pale, his eyes dark and furious. His mother moved about at her work, taking no notice of him.

“They always stan’ in front of me, so’s I can’t get out,” he said.

“Well, my lad, you’ve only to *ask* them,” she replied.

“An’ then Alfred Winterbottom says, ‘What do they teach you at the Board-school?’”

“They never taught *him* much,” said Mrs. Morel, “that is a fact—neither manners nor wit—and his cunning he was born with.”

So, in her own way, she soothed him. His ridiculous hypersensitiveness made her heart ache. And sometimes the fury in his eyes roused her, made her sleeping soul lift up its head a moment, surprised.

“What was the cheque?” she asked.

“Seventeen pounds eleven and fivepence, and sixteen and six stoppages,” replied the boy. “It’s a good week; and only five shillings stoppages for my father.”

So she was able to calculate how much her husband had earned, and could call him to account if he gave her short money. Morel always kept to himself the secret of the week’s amount.

Friday was the baking night and market night. It was the rule that Paul should stay at home and bake. He loved to stop in and draw or read; he was very fond of drawing. Annie always “gallivanted” on Friday nights; Arthur was enjoying himself as usual. So the boy remained alone.

Mrs. Morel loved her marketing. In the tiny market-place on the top of the hill, where four roads, from Nottingham and Derby, Ilkeston and Mansfield, meet, many stalls were erected. Brakes ran in from surrounding villages. The market-place was full of women, the streets packed with men. It was amazing to see so many men everywhere in the streets. Mrs. Morel usually quarrelled with her lace woman, sympathised with her fruit man—who was a gabey, but his wife was a bad un—laughed with the fish man—who

was a scamp but so droll—put the linoleum man in his place, was cold with the odd-wares man, and only went to the crockery man when she was driven—or drawn by the cornflowers on a little dish; then she was coldly polite.

“I wondered how much that little dish was,” she said.

“Sevenpence to you.”

“Thank you.”

She put the dish down and walked away; but she could not leave the market-place without it. Again she went by where the pots lay coldly on the floor, and she glanced at the dish furtively, pretending not to.

She was a little woman, in a bonnet and a black costume. Her bonnet was in its third year; it was a great grievance to Annie.

“Mother!” the girl implored, “don’t wear that nubbly little bonnet.”

“Then what else shall I wear,” replied the mother tartly. “And I’m sure it’s right enough.”

It had started with a tip; then had had flowers; now was reduced to black lace and a bit of jet.

“It looks rather come down,” said Paul. “Couldn’t you give it a pick-me-up?”

“I’ll jowl your head for impudence,” said Mrs. Morel, and she tied the strings of the black bonnet valiantly under her chin.

She glanced at the dish again. Both she and her enemy, the pot man, had an uncomfortable feeling, as if there were something between them. Suddenly he shouted:

“Do you want it for fivepence?”

She started. Her heart hardened; but then she stooped and took up her dish.

“I’ll have it,” she said.

“Yer’ll do me the favour, like?” he said. “Yer’d better spit in it, like yer do when y’ave something give yer.”

Mrs. Morel paid him the fivepence in a cold manner.

“I don’t see you give it me,” she said. “You wouldn’t let me have it for fivepence if you didn’t want to.”

“In this flamin’, scrattlin’ place you may count yerself lucky if you can give your things away,” he growled.

“Yes; there are bad times, and good,” said Mrs. Morel.

But she had forgiven the pot man. They were friends. She dare now finger his pots. So she was happy.

Paul was waiting for her. He loved her home-coming. She was always her best so—triumphant, tired, laden with parcels, feeling rich in spirit. He heard her quick, light step in the entry and looked up from his drawing.

“Oh!” she sighed, smiling at him from the doorway.

“My word, you *are* loaded!” he exclaimed, putting down his brush.

“I am!” she gasped. “That brazen Annie said she’d meet me. *Such* a weight!”

She dropped her string bag and her packages on the table.

“Is the bread done?” she asked, going to the oven.

“The last one is soaking,” he replied. “You needn’t look, I’ve not forgotten it.”

“Oh, that pot man!” she said, closing the oven door. “You know what a wretch I’ve said he was? Well, I don’t think he’s quite so bad.”

“Don’t you?”

The boy was attentive to her. She took off her little black bonnet.

“No. I think he can’t make any money—well, it’s everybody’s cry alike nowadays—and it makes him disagreeable.”

“It would *me*,” said Paul.

“Well, one can’t wonder at it. And he let me have—how much do you think he let me have *this* for?”

She took the dish out of its rag of newspaper, and stood looking on it with joy.

“Show me!” said Paul.

The two stood together gloating over the dish.

“I *love* cornflowers on things,” said Paul.

“Yes, and I thought of the teapot you bought me—”

“One and three,” said Paul.

“Fivepence!”

“It’s not enough, mother.”

“No. Do you know, I fairly sneaked off with it. But I’d been extravagant, I couldn’t afford any more. And he needn’t have let me have it if he hadn’t wanted to.”

“No, he needn’t, need he,” said Paul, and the two comforted each other from the fear of having robbed the pot man.

“We c’n have stewed fruit in it,” said Paul.

“Or custard, or a jelly,” said his mother.

“Or radishes and lettuce,” said he.

“Don’t forget that bread,” she said, her voice bright with glee.

Paul looked in the oven; tapped the loaf on the base.

“It’s done,” he said, giving it to her.

She tapped it also.

“Yes,” she replied, going to unpack her bag. “Oh, and I’m a wicked, extravagant woman. I know I s’ll come to want.”

He hopped to her side eagerly, to see her latest extravagance. She unfolded another lump of newspaper and disclosed some roots of pansies and of crimson daisies.

“Four penn’orth!” she moaned.

“How *cheap!*” he cried.

“Yes, but I couldn’t afford it *this* week of all weeks.”

“But lovely!” he cried.

“Aren’t they!” she exclaimed, giving way to pure joy. “Paul, look at this yellow one, isn’t it—and a face just like an old man!”

“Just!” cried Paul, stooping to sniff. “And smells that nice! But he’s a bit splashed.”

He ran in the scullery, came back with the flannel, and carefully washed the pansy.

“*Now* look at him now he’s wet!” he said.

“Yes!” she exclaimed, brimful of satisfaction.

The children of Scargill Street felt quite select. At the end where the Morels lived there were not many young things. So the few were more united. Boys and girls played together, the girls joining in the fights and the rough games, the boys taking part in the dancing games and rings and make-belief of the girls.

Annie and Paul and Arthur loved the winter evenings, when it was not wet. They stayed indoors till the colliers were all gone home, till it was thick dark, and the street would be deserted. Then they tied their scarves round their necks, for they scorned overcoats, as all the colliers’ children did, and went out. The entry was very dark, and at the end the whole great night opened out, in a hollow, with a little tangle of lights below where Minton pit lay, and another far away opposite for Selby. The farthest tiny lights seemed to stretch out the darkness for ever. The children looked anxiously down the road at the one lamp-post, which stood at the end of the field path. If the little, luminous space were deserted, the two boys felt genuine desolation. They stood with their hands in their pockets under the lamp, turning their backs on the night, quite miserable, watching the dark houses. Suddenly a pinafore under a short coat was seen, and a long-legged girl came flying up.

“Where’s Billy Pillins an’ your Annie an’ Eddie Dakin?”

“I don’t know.”

But it did not matter so much—there were three now. They set up a game round the lamp-post, till the others rushed up, yelling. Then the play went fast and furious.

There was only this one lamp-post. Behind was the great scoop of darkness, as if all the night were there. In front, another wide, dark way opened over the hill brow. Occasionally somebody came out of this way and went into the field down the path. In a dozen yards the night had swallowed them. The children played on.

They were brought exceedingly close together owing to their isolation. If a quarrel took place, the whole play was spoilt. Arthur was very touchy, and Billy Pillins—really

Philips—was worse. Then Paul had to side with Arthur, and on Paul's side went Alice, while Billy Pillins always had Emmie Limb and Eddie Dakin to back him up. Then the six would fight, hate with a fury of hatred, and flee home in terror. Paul never forgot, after one of these fierce internecine fights, seeing a big red moon lift itself up, slowly, between the waste road over the hilltop, steadily, like a great bird. And he thought of the Bible, that the moon should be turned to blood. And the next day he made haste to be friends with Billy Pillins. And then the wild, intense games went on again under the lamp-post, surrounded by so much darkness. Mrs. Morel, going into her parlour, would hear the children singing away:

“My shoes are made of Spanish leather,
My socks are made of silk;
I wear a ring on every finger,
I wash myself in milk.”

They sounded so perfectly absorbed in the game as their voices came out of the night, that they had the feel of wild creatures singing. It stirred the mother; and she understood when they came in at eight o'clock, ruddy, with brilliant eyes, and quick, passionate speech.

They all loved the Scargill Street house for its openness, for the great scallop of the world it had in view. On summer evenings the women would stand against the field fence, gossiping, facing the west, watching the sunsets flare quickly out, till the Derbyshire hills ridged across the crimson far away, like the black crest of a newt.

In this summer season the pits never turned full time, particularly the soft coal. Mrs. Dakin, who lived next door to Mrs. Morel, going to the field fence to shake her hearthrug, would spy men coming slowly up the hill. She saw at once they were colliers. Then she waited, a tall, thin, shrew-faced woman, standing on the hill brow, almost like a menace to the poor colliers who were toiling up. It was only eleven o'clock. From the far-off wooded hills the haze that hangs like fine black crape at the back of a summer morning had not yet dissipated. The first man came to the stile. “Chock-chock!” went the gate under his thrust.

“What, han' yer knocked off?” cried Mrs. Dakin.

“We han, missis.”

“It's a pity as they letn yer goo,” she said sarcastically.

“It is that,” replied the man.

“Nay, you know you're flig to come up again,” she said.

And the man went on. Mrs. Dakin, going up her yard, spied Mrs. Morel taking the ashes to the ash-pit.

“I reckon Minton's knocked off, missis,” she cried.

“Isn't it sickenin'!” exclaimed Mrs. Morel in wrath.

“Ha! But I’n just seed Jont Hutchby.”

“They might as well have saved their shoe-leather,” said Mrs. Morel. And both women went indoors disgusted.

The colliers, their faces scarcely blackened, were trooping home again. Morel hated to go back. He loved the sunny morning. But he had gone to pit to work, and to be sent home again spoilt his temper.

“Good gracious, at this time!” exclaimed his wife, as he entered.

“Can I help it, woman?” he shouted.

“And I’ve not done half enough dinner.”

“Then I’ll eat my bit o’ snap as I took with me,” he bawled pathetically. He felt ignominious and sore.

And the children, coming home from school, would wonder to see their father eating with his dinner the two thick slices of rather dry and dirty bread-and-butter that had been to pit and back.

“What’s my dad eating his snap for now?” asked Arthur.

“I should ha’e it hollid at me if I didna,” snorted Morel.

“What a story!” exclaimed his wife.

“An’ is it goin’ to be wasted?” said Morel. “I’m not such a extravagant mortal as you lot, with your waste. If I drop a bit of bread at pit, in all the dust an’ dirt, I pick it up an’ eat it.”

“The mice would eat it,” said Paul. “It wouldn’t be wasted.”

“Good bread-an’-butter’s not for mice, either,” said Morel. “Dirty or not dirty, I’d eat it rather than it should be wasted.”

“You might leave it for the mice and pay for it out of your next pint,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Oh, might I?” he exclaimed.

They were very poor that autumn. William had just gone away to London, and his mother missed his money. He sent ten shillings once or twice, but he had many things to pay for at first. His letters came regularly once a week. He wrote a good deal to his mother, telling her all his life, how he made friends, and was exchanging lessons with a Frenchman, how he enjoyed London. His mother felt again he was remaining to her just as when he was at home. She wrote to him every week her direct, rather witty letters. All day long, as she cleaned the house, she thought of him. He was in London: he would do well. Almost, he was like her knight who wore *her* favour in the battle.

He was coming at Christmas for five days. There had never been such preparations. Paul and Arthur scoured the land for holly and evergreens. Annie made the pretty paper hoops in the old-fashioned way. And there was unheard-of extravagance in the larder. Mrs. Morel made a big and magnificent cake. Then, feeling queenly, she showed Paul how to blanch almonds. He skinned the long nuts reverently, counting them all, to see

not one was lost. It was said that eggs whisked better in a cold place. So the boy stood in the scullery, where the temperature was nearly at freezing-point, and whisked and whisked, and flew in excitement to his mother as the white of egg grew stiffer and more snowy.

“Just look, mother! Isn’t it lovely?”

And he balanced a bit on his nose, then blew it in the air.

“Now, don’t waste it,” said the mother.

Everybody was mad with excitement. William was coming on Christmas Eve. Mrs. Morel surveyed her pantry. There was a big plum cake, and a rice cake, jam tarts, lemon tarts, and mince-pies—two enormous dishes. She was finishing cooking—Spanish tarts and cheese-cakes. Everywhere was decorated. The kissing-bunch of berried holly hung with bright and glittering things, spun slowly over Mrs. Morel’s head as she trimmed her little tarts in the kitchen. A great fire roared. There was a scent of cooked pastry. He was due at seven o’clock, but he would be late. The three children had gone to meet him. She was alone. But at a quarter to seven Morel came in again. Neither wife nor husband spoke. He sat in his armchair, quite awkward with excitement, and she quietly went on with her baking. Only by the careful way in which she did things could it be told how much moved she was. The clock ticked on.

“What time dost say he’s coming?” Morel asked for the fifth time.

“The train gets in at half-past six,” she replied emphatically.

“Then he’ll be here at ten past seven.”

“Eh, bless you, it’ll be hours late on the Midland,” she said indifferently. But she hoped, by expecting him late, to bring him early. Morel went down the entry to look for him. Then he came back.

“Goodness, man!” she said. “You’re like an ill-sitting hen.”

“Hadna you better be gettin’ him summat t’ eat ready?” asked the father.

“There’s plenty of time,” she answered.

“There’s not so much as *I* can see on,” he answered, turning crossly in his chair. She began to clear her table. The kettle was singing. They waited and waited.

Meantime the three children were on the platform at Sethley Bridge, on the Midland main line, two miles from home. They waited one hour. A train came—he was not there. Down the line the red and green lights shone. It was very dark and very cold.

“Ask him if the London train’s come,” said Paul to Annie, when they saw a man in a tip cap.

“I’m not,” said Annie. “You be quiet—he might send us off.”

But Paul was dying for the man to know they were expecting someone by the London train: it sounded so grand. Yet he was much too much scared of broaching any man, let alone one in a peaked cap, to dare to ask. The three children could scarcely go into the

waiting-room for fear of being sent away, and for fear something should happen whilst they were off the platform. Still they waited in the dark and cold.

“It’s an hour an’ a half late,” said Arthur pathetically.

“Well,” said Annie, “it’s Christmas Eve.”

They all grew silent. He wasn’t coming. They looked down the darkness of the railway. There was London! It seemed the utter-most of distance. They thought anything might happen if one came from London. They were all too troubled to talk. Cold, and unhappy, and silent, they huddled together on the platform.

At last, after more than two hours, they saw the lights of an engine peering round, away down the darkness. A porter ran out. The children drew back with beating hearts. A great train, bound for Manchester, drew up. Two doors opened, and from one of them, William. They flew to him. He handed parcels to them cheerily, and immediately began to explain that this great train had stopped for *his* sake at such a small station as Sethley Bridge: it was not booked to stop.

Meanwhile the parents were getting anxious. The table was set, the chop was cooked, everything was ready. Mrs. Morel put on her black apron. She was wearing her best dress. Then she sat, pretending to read. The minutes were a torture to her.

“H’m!” said Morel. “It’s an hour an’ a ha’ef.”

“And those children waiting!” she said.

“Th’ train canna ha’ come in yet,” he said.

“I tell you, on Christmas Eve they’re *hours* wrong.”

They were both a bit cross with each other, so gnawed with anxiety. The ash-tree moaned outside in a cold, raw wind. And all that space of night from London home! Mrs. Morel suffered. The slight click of the works inside the clock irritated her. It was getting so late; it was getting unbearable.

At last there was a sound of voices, and a footstep in the entry.

“Ha’s here!” cried Morel, jumping up.

Then he stood back. The mother ran a few steps towards the door and waited. There was a rush and a patter of feet, the door burst open. William was there. He dropped his Gladstone bag and took his mother in his arms.

“Mater!” he said.

“My boy!” she cried.

And for two seconds, no longer, she clasped him and kissed him. Then she withdrew and said, trying to be quite normal:

“But how late you are!”

“Aren’t I!” he cried, turning to his father. “Well, dad!”

The two men shook hands.

“Well, my lad!”

Morel’s eyes were wet.

“We thought tha’d niver be commin’,” he said.

“Oh, I’d come!” exclaimed William.

Then the son turned round to his mother.

“But you look well,” she said proudly, laughing.

“Well!” he exclaimed. “I should think so—coming home!”

He was a fine fellow, big, straight, and fearless-looking. He looked round at the evergreens and the kissing-bunch, and the little tarts that lay in their tins on the hearth.

“By jove! mother, it’s not different!” he said, as if in relief.

Everybody was still for a second. Then he suddenly sprang forward, picked a tart from the hearth, and pushed it whole into his mouth.

“Well, did iver you see such a parish oven!” the father exclaimed.

He had brought them endless presents. Every penny he had he had spent on them. There was a sense of luxury overflowing in the house. For his mother there was an umbrella with gold on the pale handle. She kept it to her dying day, and would have lost anything rather than that. Everybody had something gorgeous, and besides, there were pounds of unknown sweets: Turkish delight, crystallised pineapple, and such-like things which, the children thought, only the splendour of London could provide. And Paul boasted of these sweets among his friends.

“Real pineapple, cut off in slices, and then turned into crystal—fair grand!”

Everybody was mad with happiness in the family. Home was home, and they loved it with a passion of love, whatever the suffering had been. There were parties, there were rejoicings. People came in to see William, to see what difference London had made to him. And they all found him “such a gentleman, and *such* a fine fellow, my word!”

When he went away again the children retired to various places to weep alone. Morel went to bed in misery, and Mrs. Morel felt as if she were numbed by some drug, as if her feelings were paralysed. She loved him passionately.

He was in the office of a lawyer connected with a large shipping firm, and at the midsummer his chief offered him a trip in the Mediterranean on one of the boats, for quite a small cost. Mrs. Morel wrote: “Go, go, my boy. You may never have a chance again, and I should love to think of you cruising there in the Mediterranean almost better than to have you at home.” But William came home for his fortnight’s holiday. Not even the Mediterranean, which pulled at all his young man’s desire to travel, and at his poor man’s wonder at the glamorous south, could take him away when he might come home. That compensated his mother for much.

CHAPTER V

PAUL LAUNCHES INTO LIFE

Morel was rather a heedless man, careless of danger. So he had endless accidents. Now, when Mrs. Morel heard the rattle of an empty coal-cart cease at her entry-end, she ran into the parlour to look, expecting almost to see her husband seated in the waggon, his face grey under his dirt, his body limp and sick with some hurt or other. If it were he, she would run out to help.

About a year after William went to London, and just after Paul had left school, before he got work, Mrs. Morel was upstairs and her son was painting in the kitchen—he was very clever with his brush—when there came a knock at the door. Crossly he put down his brush to go. At the same moment his mother opened a window upstairs and looked down.

A pit-lad in his dirt stood on the threshold.

“Is this Walter Morel’s?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel. “What is it?”

But she had guessed already.

“Your mester’s got hurt,” he said.

“Eh, dear me!” she exclaimed. “It’s a wonder if he hadn’t, lad. And what’s he done this time?”

“I don’t know for sure, but it’s ’is leg somewhere. They ta’ein’ ’im ter th’ ’ospital.”

“Good gracious me!” she exclaimed. “Eh, dear, what a one he is! There’s not five minutes of peace, I’ll be hanged if there is! His thumb’s nearly better, and now—Did you see him?”

“I seed him at th’ bottom. An’ I seed ’em bring ’im up in a tub, an’ ’e wor in a dead faint. But he shouted like anythink when Doctor Fraser examined him i’ th’ lamp cabin—an’ cossed an’ swore, an’ said as ’e wor goin’ to be ta’en whoam—’e worn’t goin’ ter th’ ’ospital.”

The boy faltered to an end.

“He *would* want to come home, so that I can have all the bother. Thank you, my lad. Eh, dear, if I’m not sick—sick and surfeited, I am!”

She came downstairs. Paul had mechanically resumed his painting.

“And it must be pretty bad if they’ve taken him to the hospital,” she went on. “But what a *careless* creature he is! *Other* men don’t have all these accidents. Yes, he *would* want to put all the burden on me. Eh, dear, just as we *were* getting easy a bit at last. Put those things away, there’s no time to be painting now. What time is there a train? I know I s’ll have to go trailing to Keston. I s’ll have to leave that bedroom.”

“I can finish it,” said Paul.

“You needn’t. I shall catch the seven o’clock back, I should think. Oh, my blessed heart, the fuss and commotion he’ll make! And those granite setts at Tinder Hill—he might well call them kidney pebbles—they’ll jolt him almost to bits. I wonder why they can’t mend them, the state they’re in, an’ all the men as go across in that ambulance. You’d think they’d have a hospital here. The men bought the ground, and, my sirs, there’d be accidents enough to keep it going. But no, they must trail them ten miles in a slow ambulance to Nottingham. It’s a crying shame! Oh, and the fuss he’ll make! I know he will! I wonder who’s with him. Barker, I s’d think. Poor beggar, he’ll wish himself anywhere rather. But he’ll look after him, I know. Now there’s no telling how long he’ll be stuck in that hospital—and *won’t* he hate it! But if it’s only his leg it’s not so bad.”

All the time she was getting ready. Hurriedly taking off her bodice, she crouched at the boiler while the water ran slowly into her lading-can.

“I wish this boiler was at the bottom of the sea!” she exclaimed, wriggling the handle impatiently. She had very handsome, strong arms, rather surprising on a smallish woman.

Paul cleared away, put on the kettle, and set the table.

“There isn’t a train till four-twenty,” he said. “You’ve time enough.”

“Oh no, I haven’t!” she cried, blinking at him over the towel as she wiped her face.

“Yes, you have. You must drink a cup of tea at any rate. Should I come with you to Keston?”

“Come with me? What for, I should like to know? Now, what have I to take him? Eh, dear! His clean shirt—and it’s a blessing it *is* clean. But it had better be aired. And stockings—he won’t want them—and a towel, I suppose; and handkerchiefs. Now what else?”

“A comb, a knife and fork and spoon,” said Paul. His father had been in the hospital before.

“Goodness knows what sort of state his feet were in,” continued Mrs. Morel, as she combed her long brown hair, that was fine as silk, and was touched now with grey. “He’s very particular to wash himself to the waist, but below he thinks doesn’t matter. But there, I suppose they see plenty like it.”

Paul had laid the table. He cut his mother one or two pieces of very thin bread and butter.

“Here you are,” he said, putting her cup of tea in her place.

“I can’t be bothered!” she exclaimed crossly.

“Well, you’ve got to, so there, now it’s put out ready,” he insisted.

So she sat down and sipped her tea, and ate a little, in silence. She was thinking.

In a few minutes she was gone, to walk the two and a half miles to Keston Station. All the things she was taking him she had in her bulging string bag. Paul watched her go up the road between the hedges—a little, quick-stepping figure, and his heart ached for her, that she was thrust forward again into pain and trouble. And she, tripping so quickly in her anxiety, felt at the back of her her son's heart waiting on her, felt him bearing what part of the burden he could, even supporting her. And when she was at the hospital, she thought: "It *will* upset that lad when I tell him how bad it is. I'd better be careful." And when she was trudging home again, she felt he was coming to share her burden.

"Is it bad?" asked Paul, as soon as she entered the house.

"It's bad enough," she replied.

"What?"

She sighed and sat down, undoing her bonnet-strings. Her son watched her face as it was lifted, and her small, work-hardened hands fingering at the bow under her chin.

"Well," she answered, "it's not really dangerous, but the nurse says it's a dreadful smash. You see, a great piece of rock fell on his leg—here—and it's a compound fracture. There are pieces of bone sticking through—"

"Ugh—how horrid!" exclaimed the children.

"And," she continued, "of course he says he's going to die—it wouldn't be him if he didn't. 'I'm done for, my lass!' he said, looking at me. 'Don't be so silly,' I said to him. 'You're not going to die of a broken leg, however badly it's smashed.' 'I s'll niver come out of 'ere but in a wooden box,' he groaned. 'Well,' I said, 'if you want them to carry you into the garden in a wooden box, when you're better, I've no doubt they will.' 'If we think it's good for him,' said the Sister. She's an awfully nice Sister, but rather strict."

Mrs. Morel took off her bonnet. The children waited in silence.

"Of course, he *is* bad," she continued, "and he will be. It's a great shock, and he's lost a lot of blood; and, of course, it *is* a very dangerous smash. It's not at all sure that it will mend so easily. And then there's the fever and the mortification—if it took bad ways he'd quickly be gone. But there, he's a clean-blooded man, with wonderful healing flesh, and so I see no reason why it *should* take bad ways. Of course there's a wound—"

She was pale now with emotion and anxiety. The three children realised that it was very bad for their father, and the house was silent, anxious.

"But he always gets better," said Paul after a while.

"That's what I tell him," said the mother.

Everybody moved about in silence.

"And he really looked nearly done for," she said. "But the Sister says that is the pain."

Annie took away her mother's coat and bonnet.

"And he looked at me when I came away! I said: 'I s'll have to go now, Walter, because of the train—and the children.' And he looked at me. It seems hard."

Paul took up his brush again and went on painting. Arthur went outside for some coal. Annie sat looking dismal. And Mrs. Morel, in her little rocking-chair that her husband had made for her when the first baby was coming, remained motionless, brooding. She was grieved, and bitterly sorry for the man who was hurt so much. But still, in her heart of hearts, where the love should have burned, there was a blank. Now, when all her woman's pity was roused to its full extent, when she would have slaved herself to death to nurse him and to save him, when she would have taken the pain herself, if she could, somewhere far away inside her, she felt indifferent to him and to his suffering. It hurt her most of all, this failure to love him, even when he roused her strong emotions. She brooded awhile.

"And there," she said suddenly, "when I'd got halfway to Keston, I found I'd come out in my working boots—and *look* at them." They were an old pair of Paul's, brown and rubbed through at the toes. "I didn't know what to do with myself, for shame," she added.

In the morning, when Annie and Arthur were at school, Mrs. Morel talked again to her son, who was helping her with her housework.

"I found Barker at the hospital. He did look bad, poor little fellow! 'Well,' I said to him, 'what sort of a journey did you have with him?' 'Dunna ax me, missis!' he said. 'Ay,' I said, 'I know what he'd be.' 'But it *wor* bad for him, Mrs. Morel, it *wor* that!' he said. 'I know,' I said. 'At ivry jolt I thought my 'eart would ha' flown clean out o' my mouth,' he said. 'An' the scream 'e gives sometimes! Missis, not for a fortune would I go through wi' it again.' 'I can quite understand it,' I said. 'It's a nasty job, though,' he said, 'an' one as'll be a long while afore it's right again.' 'I'm afraid it will,' I said. I like Mr. Barker—I *do* like him. There's something so manly about him."

Paul resumed his task silently.

"And of course," Mrs. Morel continued, "for a man like your father, the hospital *is* hard. He *can't* understand rules and regulations. And he won't let anybody else touch him, not if he can help it. When he smashed the muscles of his thigh, and it had to be dressed four times a day, *would* he let anybody but me or his mother do it? He wouldn't. So, of course, he'll suffer in there with the nurses. And I didn't like leaving him. I'm sure, when I kissed him an' came away, it seemed a shame."

So she talked to her son, almost as if she were thinking aloud to him, and he took it in as best he could, by sharing her trouble to lighten it. And in the end she shared almost everything with him without knowing.

Morel had a very bad time. For a week he was in a critical condition. Then he began to mend. And then, knowing he was going to get better, the whole family sighed with relief, and proceeded to live happily.

They were not badly off whilst Morel was in the hospital. There were fourteen shillings a week from the pit, ten shillings from the sick club, and five shillings from the Disability Fund; and then every week the butties had something for Mrs. Morel—five or seven shillings—so that she was quite well to do. And whilst Morel was progressing favourably in the hospital, the family was extraordinarily happy and peaceful. On Saturdays and Wednesdays Mrs. Morel went to Nottingham to see her husband. Then she always brought back some little thing: a small tube of paints for Paul, or some thick paper; a couple of postcards for Annie, that the whole family rejoiced over for days before the girl was allowed to send them away; or a fret-saw for Arthur, or a bit of pretty wood. She described her adventures into the big shops with joy. Soon the folk in the picture-shop knew her, and knew about Paul. The girl in the book-shop took a keen interest in her. Mrs. Morel was full of information when she got home from Nottingham. The three sat round till bed-time, listening, putting in, arguing. Then Paul often raked the fire.

“I’m the man in the house now,” he used to say to his mother with joy. They learned how perfectly peaceful the home could be. And they almost regretted—though none of them would have owned to such callousness—that their father was soon coming back.

Paul was now fourteen, and was looking for work. He was a rather small and rather finely-made boy, with dark brown hair and light blue eyes. His face had already lost its youthful chubbiness, and was becoming somewhat like William’s—rough-featured, almost rugged—and it was extraordinarily mobile. Usually he looked as if he saw things, was full of life, and warm; then his smile, like his mother’s, came suddenly and was very lovable; and then, when there was any clog in his soul’s quick running, his face went stupid and ugly. He was the sort of boy that becomes a clown and a lout as soon as he is not understood, or feels himself held cheap; and, again, is adorable at the first touch of warmth.

He suffered very much from the first contact with anything. When he was seven, the starting school had been a nightmare and a torture to him. But afterwards he liked it. And now that he felt he had to go out into life, he went through agonies of shrinking self-consciousness. He was quite a clever painter for a boy of his years, and he knew some French and German and mathematics that Mr. Heaton had taught him. But nothing he had was of any commercial value. He was not strong enough for heavy manual work, his mother said. He did not care for making things with his hands, preferred racing about, or making excursions into the country, or reading, or painting.

“What do you want to be?” his mother asked.

“Anything.”

“That is no answer,” said Mrs. Morel.

But it was quite truthfully the only answer he could give. His ambition, as far as this world’s gear went, was quietly to earn his thirty or thirty-five shillings a week somewhere near home, and then, when his father died, have a cottage with his mother,

paint and go out as he liked, and live happy ever after. That was his programme as far as doing things went. But he was proud within himself, measuring people against himself, and placing them, inexorably. And he thought that *perhaps* he might also make a painter, the real thing. But that he left alone.

“Then,” said his mother, “you must look in the paper for the advertisements.”

He looked at her. It seemed to him a bitter humiliation and an anguish to go through. But he said nothing. When he got up in the morning, his whole being was knotted up over this one thought:

“I’ve got to go and look for advertisements for a job.”

It stood in front of the morning, that thought, killing all joy and even life, for him. His heart felt like a tight knot.

And then, at ten o’clock, he set off. He was supposed to be a queer, quiet child. Going up the sunny street of the little town, he felt as if all the folk he met said to themselves: “He’s going to the Co-op. reading-room to look in the papers for a place. He can’t get a job. I suppose he’s living on his mother.” Then he crept up the stone stairs behind the drapery shop at the Co-op., and peeped in the reading-room. Usually one or two men were there, either old, useless fellows, or colliers “on the club”. So he entered, full of shrinking and suffering when they looked up, seated himself at the table, and pretended to scan the news. He knew they would think: “What does a lad of thirteen want in a reading-room with a newspaper?” and he suffered.

Then he looked wistfully out of the window. Already he was a prisoner of industrialism. Large sunflowers stared over the old red wall of the garden opposite, looking in their jolly way down on the women who were hurrying with something for dinner. The valley was full of corn, brightening in the sun. Two collieries, among the fields, waved their small white plumes of steam. Far off on the hills were the woods of Annesley, dark and fascinating. Already his heart went down. He was being taken into bondage. His freedom in the beloved home valley was going now.

The brewers’ waggons came rolling up from Keston with enormous barrels, four a side, like beans in a burst bean-pod. The waggoner, throned aloft, rolling massively in his seat, was not so much below Paul’s eye. The man’s hair, on his small, bullet head, was bleached almost white by the sun, and on his thick red arms, rocking idly on his sack apron, the white hairs glistened. His red face shone and was almost asleep with sunshine. The horses, handsome and brown, went on by themselves, looking by far the masters of the show.

Paul wished he were stupid. “I wish,” he thought to himself, “I was fat like him, and like a dog in the sun. I wish I was a pig and a brewer’s waggoner.”

Then, the room being at last empty, he would hastily copy an advertisement on a scrap of paper, then another, and slip out in immense relief. His mother would scan over his copies.

“Yes,” she said, “you may try.”

William had written out a letter of application, couched in admirable business language, which Paul copied, with variations. The boy’s handwriting was execrable, so that William, who did all things well, got into a fever of impatience.

The elder brother was becoming quite swanky. In London he found that he could associate with men far above his Bestwood friends in station. Some of the clerks in the office had studied for the law, and were more or less going through a kind of apprenticeship. William always made friends among men wherever he went, he was so jolly. Therefore he was soon visiting and staying in houses of men who, in Bestwood, would have looked down on the unapproachable bank manager, and would merely have called indifferently on the Rector. So he began to fancy himself as a great gun. He was, indeed, rather surprised at the ease with which he became a gentleman.

His mother was glad, he seemed so pleased. And his lodging in Walthamstow was so dreary. But now there seemed to come a kind of fever into the young man’s letters. He was unsettled by all the change, he did not stand firm on his own feet, but seemed to spin rather giddily on the quick current of the new life. His mother was anxious for him. She could feel him losing himself. He had danced and gone to the theatre, boated on the river, been out with friends; and she knew he sat up afterwards in his cold bedroom grinding away at Latin, because he intended to get on in his office, and in the law as much as he could. He never sent his mother any money now. It was all taken, the little he had, for his own life. And she did not want any, except sometimes, when she was in a tight corner, and when ten shillings would have saved her much worry. She still dreamed of William, and of what he would do, with herself behind him. Never for a minute would she admit to herself how heavy and anxious her heart was because of him.

Also he talked a good deal now of a girl he had met at a dance, a handsome brunette, quite young, and a lady, after whom the men were running thick and fast.

“I wonder if you would run, my boy,” his mother wrote to him, “unless you saw all the other men chasing her too. You feel safe enough and vain enough in a crowd. But take care, and see how you feel when you find yourself alone, and in triumph.” William resented these things, and continued the chase. He had taken the girl on the river. “If you saw her, mother, you would know how I feel. Tall and elegant, with the clearest of clear, transparent olive complexions, hair as black as jet, and such grey eyes—bright, mocking, like lights on water at night. It is all very well to be a bit satirical till you see her. And she dresses as well as any woman in London. I tell you, your son doesn’t half put his head up when she goes walking down Piccadilly with him.”

Mrs. Morel wondered, in her heart, if her son did not go walking down Piccadilly with an elegant figure and fine clothes, rather than with a woman who was near to him. But she congratulated him in her doubtful fashion. And, as she stood over the washing-tub, the mother brooded over her son. She saw him saddled with an elegant and

expensive wife, earning little money, dragging along and getting dragged in some small, ugly house in a suburb. "But there," she told herself, "I am very likely a silly—meeting trouble halfway." Nevertheless, the load of anxiety scarcely ever left her heart, lest William should do the wrong thing by himself.

Presently, Paul was bidden call upon Thomas Jordan, Manufacturer of Surgical Appliances, at 21, Spaniel Row, Nottingham. Mrs. Morel was all joy.

"There, you see!" she cried, her eyes shining. "You've only written four letters, and the third is answered. You're lucky, my boy, as I always said you were."

Paul looked at the picture of a wooden leg, adorned with elastic stockings and other appliances, that figured on Mr. Jordan's notepaper, and he felt alarmed. He had not known that elastic stockings existed. And he seemed to feel the business world, with its regulated system of values, and its impersonality, and he dreaded it. It seemed monstrous also that a business could be run on wooden legs.

Mother and son set off together one Tuesday morning. It was August and blazing hot. Paul walked with something screwed up tight inside him. He would have suffered much physical pain rather than this unreasonable suffering at being exposed to strangers, to be accepted or rejected. Yet he chattered away with his mother. He would never have confessed to her how he suffered over these things, and she only partly guessed. She was gay, like a sweetheart. She stood in front of the ticket-office at Bestwood, and Paul watched her take from her purse the money for the tickets. As he saw her hands in their old black kid gloves getting the silver out of the worn purse, his heart contracted with pain of love of her.

She was quite excited, and quite gay. He suffered because she *would* talk aloud in presence of the other travellers.

"Now look at that silly cow!" she said, "careering round as if it thought it was a circus."

"It's most likely a bottfly," he said very low.

"A what?" she asked brightly and unashamed.

They thought awhile. He was sensible all the time of having her opposite him. Suddenly their eyes met, and she smiled to him—a rare, intimate smile, beautiful with brightness and love. Then each looked out of the window.

The sixteen slow miles of railway journey passed. The mother and son walked down Station Street, feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together. In Carrington Street they stopped to hang over the parapet and look at the barges on the canal below.

"It's just like Venice," he said, seeing the sunshine on the water that lay between high factory walls.

"Perhaps," she answered, smiling.

They enjoyed the shops immensely.

“Now you see that blouse,” she would say, “wouldn’t that just suit our Annie? And for one-and-eleven-three. Isn’t that cheap?”

“And made of needlework as well,” he said.

“Yes.”

They had plenty of time, so they did not hurry. The town was strange and delightful to them. But the boy was tied up inside in a knot of apprehension. He dreaded the interview with Thomas Jordan.

It was nearly eleven o’clock by St. Peter’s Church. They turned up a narrow street that led to the Castle. It was gloomy and old-fashioned, having low dark shops and dark green house doors with brass knockers, and yellow-ochred doorsteps projecting on to the pavement; then another old shop whose small window looked like a cunning, half-shut eye. Mother and son went cautiously, looking everywhere for “Thomas Jordan and Son”. It was like hunting in some wild place. They were on tiptoe of excitement.

Suddenly they spied a big, dark archway, in which were names of various firms, Thomas Jordan among them.

“Here it is!” said Mrs. Morel. “But now *where* is it?”

They looked round. On one side was a queer, dark, cardboard factory, on the other a Commercial Hotel.

“It’s up the entry,” said Paul.

And they ventured under the archway, as into the jaws of the dragon. They emerged into a wide yard, like a well, with buildings all round. It was littered with straw and boxes, and cardboard. The sunshine actually caught one crate whose straw was streaming on to the yard like gold. But elsewhere the place was like a pit. There were several doors, and two flights of steps. Straight in front, on a dirty glass door at the top of a staircase, loomed the ominous words “Thomas Jordan and Son—Surgical Appliances.” Mrs. Morel went first, her son followed her. Charles I. mounted his scaffold with a lighter heart than had Paul Morel as he followed his mother up the dirty steps to the dirty door.

She pushed open the door, and stood in pleased surprise. In front of her was a big warehouse, with creamy paper parcels everywhere, and clerks, with their shirt-sleeves rolled back, were going about in an at-home sort of way. The light was subdued, the glossy cream parcels seemed luminous, the counters were of dark brown wood. All was quiet and very homely. Mrs. Morel took two steps forward, then waited. Paul stood behind her. She had on her Sunday bonnet and a black veil; he wore a boy’s broad white collar and a Norfolk suit.

One of the clerks looked up. He was thin and tall, with a small face. His way of looking was alert. Then he glanced round to the other end of the room, where was a glass office. And then he came forward. He did not say anything, but leaned in a gentle, inquiring fashion towards Mrs. Morel.

“Can I see Mr. Jordan?” she asked.

“I’ll fetch him,” answered the young man.

He went down to the glass office. A red-faced, white-whiskered old man looked up. He reminded Paul of a pomeranian dog. Then the same little man came up the room. He had short legs, was rather stout, and wore an alpaca jacket. So, with one ear up, as it were, he came stoutly and inquiringly down the room.

“Good-morning!” he said, hesitating before Mrs. Morel, in doubt as to whether she were a customer or not.

“Good-morning. I came with my son, Paul Morel. You asked him to call this morning.”

“Come this way,” said Mr. Jordan, in a rather snappy little manner intended to be businesslike.

They followed the manufacturer into a grubby little room, upholstered in black American leather, glossy with the rubbing of many customers. On the table was a pile of trusses, yellow wash-leather hoops tangled together. They looked new and living. Paul sniffed the odour of new wash-leather. He wondered what the things were. By this time he was so much stunned that he only noticed the outside things.

“Sit down!” said Mr. Jordan, irritably pointing Mrs. Morel to a horse-hair chair. She sat on the edge in an uncertain fashion. Then the little old man fidgeted and found a paper.

“Did you write this letter?” he snapped, thrusting what Paul recognised as his own notepaper in front of him.

“Yes,” he answered.

At that moment he was occupied in two ways: first, in feeling guilty for telling a lie, since William had composed the letter; second, in wondering why his letter seemed so strange and different, in the fat, red hand of the man, from what it had been when it lay on the kitchen table. It was like part of himself, gone astray. He resented the way the man held it.

“Where did you learn to write?” said the old man crossly.

Paul merely looked at him shamedly, and did not answer.

“He *is* a bad writer,” put in Mrs. Morel apologetically. Then she pushed up her veil. Paul hated her for not being prouder with this common little man, and he loved her face clear of the veil.

“And you say you know French?” inquired the little man, still sharply.

“Yes,” said Paul.

“What school did you go to?”

“The Board-school.”

“And did you learn it there?”

“No—I—” The boy went crimson and got no farther.

“His godfather gave him lessons,” said Mrs. Morel, half pleading and rather distant.

Mr. Jordan hesitated. Then, in his irritable manner—he always seemed to keep his hands ready for action—he pulled another sheet of paper from his pocket, unfolded it. The paper made a crackling noise. He handed it to Paul.

“Read that,” he said.

It was a note in French, in thin, flimsy foreign handwriting that the boy could not decipher. He stared blankly at the paper.

“‘Monsieur,’” he began; then he looked in great confusion at Mr. Jordan. “It’s the—it’s the—”

He wanted to say “handwriting”, but his wits would no longer work even sufficiently to supply him with the word. Feeling an utter fool, and hating Mr. Jordan, he turned desperately to the paper again.

“‘Sir,—Please send me’—er—er—I can’t tell the—er—‘two pairs—*gris fil bas*—grey thread stockings’—er—er—‘*sans*—without’—er—I can’t tell the words—er—‘*doigts*—fingers’—er—I can’t tell the—”

He wanted to say “handwriting”, but the word still refused to come. Seeing him stuck, Mr. Jordan snatched the paper from him.

“Please send by return two pairs grey thread stockings without *toes*.”

“Well,” flashed Paul, “‘*doigts*’ means ‘fingers’—as well—as a rule—”

The little man looked at him. He did not know whether “*doigts*” meant “fingers”; he knew that for all *his* purposes it meant “toes”.

“Fingers to stockings!” he snapped.

“Well, it *does* mean fingers,” the boy persisted.

He hated the little man, who made such a clod of him. Mr. Jordan looked at the pale, stupid, defiant boy, then at the mother, who sat quiet and with that peculiar shut-off look of the poor who have to depend on the favour of others.

“And when could he come?” he asked.

“Well,” said Mrs. Morel, “as soon as you wish. He has finished school now.”

“He would live in Bestwood?”

“Yes; but he could be in—at the station—at quarter to eight.”

“H’m!”

It ended by Paul’s being engaged as junior spiral clerk at eight shillings a week. The boy did not open his mouth to say another word, after having insisted that “*doigts*” meant “fingers”. He followed his mother down the stairs. She looked at him with her bright blue eyes full of love and joy.

“I think you’ll like it,” she said.

“*Doigts*’ does mean ‘fingers’, mother, and it was the writing. I couldn’t read the writing.”

“Never mind, my boy. I’m sure he’ll be all right, and you won’t see much of him. Wasn’t that first young fellow nice? I’m sure you’ll like them.”

“But wasn’t Mr. Jordan common, mother? Does he own it all?”

“I suppose he was a workman who has got on,” she said. “You mustn’t mind people so much. They’re not being disagreeable to *you*—it’s their way. You always think people are meaning things for you. But they don’t.”

It was very sunny. Over the big desolate space of the market-place the blue sky shimmered, and the granite cobbles of the paving glistened. Shops down the Long Row were deep in obscurity, and the shadow was full of colour. Just where the horse trams trundled across the market was a row of fruit stalls, with fruit blazing in the sun—apples and piles of reddish oranges, small green-gage plums and bananas. There was a warm scent of fruit as mother and son passed. Gradually his feeling of ignominy and of rage sank.

“Where should we go for dinner?” asked the mother.

It was felt to be a reckless extravagance. Paul had only been in an eating-house once or twice in his life, and then only to have a cup of tea and a bun. Most of the people of Bestwood considered that tea and bread-and-butter, and perhaps potted beef, was all they could afford to eat in Nottingham. Real cooked dinner was considered great extravagance. Paul felt rather guilty.

They found a place that looked quite cheap. But when Mrs. Morel scanned the bill of fare, her heart was heavy, things were so dear. So she ordered kidney-pies and potatoes as the cheapest available dish.

“We oughtn’t to have come here, mother,” said Paul.

“Never mind,” she said. “We won’t come again.”

She insisted on his having a small currant tart, because he liked sweets.

“I don’t want it, mother,” he pleaded.

“Yes,” she insisted; “you’ll have it.”

And she looked round for the waitress. But the waitress was busy, and Mrs. Morel did not like to bother her then. So the mother and son waited for the girl’s pleasure, whilst she flirted among the men.

“Brazen hussy!” said Mrs. Morel to Paul. “Look now, she’s taking that man *his* pudding, and he came long after us.”

“It doesn’t matter, mother,” said Paul.

Mrs. Morel was angry. But she was too poor, and her orders were too meagre, so that she had not the courage to insist on her rights just then. They waited and waited.

“Should we go, mother?” he said.

Then Mrs. Morel stood up. The girl was passing near.

“Will you bring one currant tart?” said Mrs. Morel clearly.

The girl looked round insolently.

“Directly,” she said.

“We have waited quite long enough,” said Mrs. Morel.

In a moment the girl came back with the tart. Mrs. Morel asked coldly for the bill. Paul wanted to sink through the floor. He marvelled at his mother’s hardness. He knew that only years of battling had taught her to insist even so little on her rights. She shrank as much as he.

“It’s the last time I go *there* for anything!” she declared, when they were outside the place, thankful to be clear.

“We’ll go,” she said, “and look at Keep’s and Boot’s, and one or two places, shall we?”

They had discussions over the pictures, and Mrs. Morel wanted to buy him a little sable brush that he hankered after. But this indulgence he refused. He stood in front of milliners’ shops and drapers’ shops almost bored, but content for her to be interested. They wandered on.

“Now, just look at those black grapes!” she said. “They make your mouth water. I’ve wanted some of those for years, but I s’ll have to wait a bit before I get them.”

Then she rejoiced in the florists, standing in the doorway sniffing.

“Oh! oh! Isn’t it simply lovely!”

Paul saw, in the darkness of the shop, an elegant young lady in black peering over the counter curiously.

“They’re looking at you,” he said, trying to draw his mother away.

“But what is it?” she exclaimed, refusing to be moved.

“Stocks!” he answered, sniffing hastily. “Look, there’s a tubful.”

“So there is—red and white. But really, I never knew stocks to smell like it!” And, to his great relief, she moved out of the doorway, but only to stand in front of the window.

“Paul!” she cried to him, who was trying to get out of sight of the elegant young lady in black—the shop-girl. “Paul! Just look here!”

He came reluctantly back.

“Now, just look at that fuchsia!” she exclaimed, pointing.

“H’m!” He made a curious, interested sound. “You’d think every second as the flowers was going to fall off, they hang so big an’ heavy.”

“And such an abundance!” she cried.

“And the way they drop downwards with their threads and knots!”

“Yes!” she exclaimed. “Lovely!”

“I wonder who’ll buy it!” he said.

“I wonder!” she answered. “Not us.”

“It would die in our parlour.”

“Yes, beastly cold, sunless hole; it kills every bit of a plant you put in, and the kitchen chokes them to death.”

They bought a few things, and set off towards the station. Looking up the canal, through the dark pass of the buildings, they saw the Castle on its bluff of brown, green-bushed rock, in a positive miracle of delicate sunshine.

“Won’t it be nice for me to come out at dinner-times?” said Paul. “I can go all round here and see everything. I s’ll love it.”

“You will,” assented his mother.

He had spent a perfect afternoon with his mother. They arrived home in the mellow evening, happy, and glowing, and tired.

In the morning he filled in the form for his season-ticket and took it to the station. When he got back, his mother was just beginning to wash the floor. He sat crouched up on the sofa.

“He says it’ll be here on Saturday,” he said.

“And how much will it be?”

“About one pound eleven,” he said.

She went on washing her floor in silence.

“Is it a lot?” he asked.

“It’s no more than I thought,” she answered.

“An’ I s’ll earn eight shillings a week,” he said.

She did not answer, but went on with her work. At last she said:

“That William promised me, when he went to London, as he’d give me a pound a month. He has given me ten shillings—twice; and now I know he hasn’t a farthing if I asked him. Not that I want it. Only just now you’d think he might be able to help with this ticket, which I’d never expected.”

“He earns a lot,” said Paul.

“He earns a hundred and thirty pounds. But they’re all alike. They’re large in promises, but it’s precious little fulfilment you get.”

“He spends over fifty shillings a week on himself,” said Paul.

“And I keep this house on less than thirty,” she replied; “and am supposed to find money for extras. But they don’t care about helping you, once they’ve gone. He’d rather spend it on that dressed-up creature.”

“She should have her own money if she’s so grand,” said Paul.

“She should, but she hasn’t. I asked him. And I know he doesn’t buy her a gold bangle for nothing. I wonder whoever bought *me* a gold bangle.”

William was succeeding with his “Gipsy”, as he called her. He asked the girl—her name was Louisa Lily Denys Western—for a photograph to send to his mother. The photo came—a handsome brunette, taken in profile, smirking slightly—and, it might be, quite naked, for on the photograph not a scrap of clothing was to be seen, only a naked bust.

“Yes,” wrote Mrs. Morel to her son, “the photograph of Louie is very striking, and I can see she must be attractive. But do you think, my boy, it was very good taste of a girl to give her young man that photo to send to his mother—the first? Certainly the shoulders are beautiful, as you say. But I hardly expected to see so much of them at the first view.”

Morel found the photograph standing on the chiffonier in the parlour. He came out with it between his thick thumb and finger.

“Who dost reckon this is?” he asked of his wife.

“It’s the girl our William is going with,” replied Mrs. Morel.

“H’m! ’Er’s a bright spark, from th’ look on ’er, an’ one as wanna do him owermuch good neither. Who is she?”

“Her name is Louisa Lily Denys Western.”

“An’ come again to-morrer!” exclaimed the miner. “An’ is ’er an actress?”

“She is not. She’s supposed to be a lady.”

“I’ll bet!” he exclaimed, still staring at the photo. “A lady, is she? An’ how much does she reckon ter keep up this sort o’ game on?”

“On nothing. She lives with an old aunt, whom she hates, and takes what bit of money’s given her.”

“H’m!” said Morel, laying down the photograph. “Then he’s a fool to ha’ ta’en up wi’ such a one as that.”

“Dear Mater,” William replied. “I’m sorry you didn’t like the photograph. It never occurred to me when I sent it, that you mightn’t think it decent. However, I told Gyp that it didn’t quite suit your prim and proper notions, so she’s going to send you another, that I hope will please you better. She’s always being photographed; in fact, the photographers *ask* her if they may take her for nothing.”

Presently the new photograph came, with a little silly note from the girl. This time the young lady was seen in a black satin evening bodice, cut square, with little puff sleeves, and black lace hanging down her beautiful arms.

“I wonder if she ever wears anything except evening clothes,” said Mrs. Morel sarcastically. “I’m sure I *ought* to be impressed.”

“You are disagreeable, mother,” said Paul. “I think the first one with bare shoulders is lovely.”

“Do you?” answered his mother. “Well, I don’t.”

On the Monday morning the boy got up at six to start work. He had the season-ticket, which had cost such bitterness, in his waistcoat pocket. He loved it with its bars of yellow across. His mother packed his dinner in a small, shut-up basket, and he set off at a quarter to seven to catch the 7.15 train. Mrs. Morel came to the entry-end to see him off.

It was a perfect morning. From the ash-tree the slender green fruits that the children call “pigeons” were twinkling gaily down on a little breeze, into the front gardens of the houses. The valley was full of a lustrous dark haze, through which the ripe corn shimmered, and in which the steam from Minton pit melted swiftly. Puffs of wind came. Paul looked over the high woods of Aldersley, where the country gleamed, and home had never pulled at him so powerfully.

“Good-morning, mother,” he said, smiling, but feeling very unhappy.

“Good-morning,” she replied cheerfully and tenderly.

She stood in her white apron on the open road, watching him as he crossed the field. He had a small, compact body that looked full of life. She felt, as she saw him trudging over the field, that where he determined to go he would get. She thought of William. He would have leaped the fence instead of going round the stile. He was away in London, doing well. Paul would be working in Nottingham. Now she had two sons in the world. She could think of two places, great centres of industry, and feel that she had put a man into each of them, that these men would work out what *she* wanted; they were derived from her, they were of her, and their works also would be hers. All the morning long she thought of Paul.

At eight o’clock he climbed the dismal stairs of Jordan’s Surgical Appliance Factory, and stood helplessly against the first great parcel-rack, waiting for somebody to pick him up. The place was still not awake. Over the counters were great dust sheets. Two men only had arrived, and were heard talking in a corner, as they took off their coats and rolled up their shirt-sleeves. It was ten past eight. Evidently there was no rush of punctuality. Paul listened to the voices of the two clerks. Then he heard someone cough, and saw in the office at the end of the room an old, decaying clerk, in a round smoking-cap of black velvet embroidered with red and green, opening letters. He waited and waited. One of the junior clerks went to the old man, greeted him cheerily and loudly. Evidently the old “chief” was deaf. Then the young fellow came striding importantly down to his counter. He spied Paul.

“Hello!” he said. “You the new lad?”

“Yes,” said Paul.

“H’m! What’s your name?”

“Paul Morel.”

“Paul Morel? All right, you come on round here.”

Paul followed him round the rectangle of counters. The room was second storey. It had a great hole in the middle of the floor, fenced as with a wall of counters, and down this wide shaft the lifts went, and the light for the bottom storey. Also there was a corresponding big, oblong hole in the ceiling, and one could see above, over the fence of the top floor, some machinery; and right away overhead was the glass roof, and all light for the three storeys came downwards, getting dimmer, so that it was always night on the ground floor and rather gloomy on the second floor. The factory was the top floor, the warehouse the second, the storehouse the ground floor. It was an insanitary, ancient place.

Paul was led round to a very dark corner.

“This is the ‘Spiral’ corner,” said the clerk. “You’re Spiral, with Pappleworth. He’s your boss, but he’s not come yet. He doesn’t get here till half-past eight. So you can fetch the letters, if you like, from Mr. Melling down there.”

The young man pointed to the old clerk in the office.

“All right,” said Paul.

“Here’s a peg to hang your cap on. Here are your entry ledgers. Mr. Pappleworth won’t be long.”

And the thin young man stalked away with long, busy strides over the hollow wooden floor.

After a minute or two Paul went down and stood in the door of the glass office. The old clerk in the smoking-cap looked down over the rim of his spectacles.

“Good-morning,” he said, kindly and impressively. “You want the letters for the Spiral department, Thomas?”

Paul resented being called “Thomas”. But he took the letters and returned to his dark place, where the counter made an angle, where the great parcel-rack came to an end, and where there were three doors in the corner. He sat on a high stool and read the letters—those whose handwriting was not too difficult. They ran as follows:

“Will you please send me at once a pair of lady’s silk spiral thigh-hose, without feet, such as I had from you last year; length, thigh to knee, etc.” Or, “Major Chamberlain wishes to repeat his previous order for a silk non-elastic suspensory bandage.”

Many of these letters, some of them in French or Norwegian, were a great puzzle to the boy. He sat on his stool nervously awaiting the arrival of his “boss”. He suffered tortures of shyness when, at half-past eight, the factory girls for upstairs trooped past him.

Mr. Pappleworth arrived, chewing a chlorodyne gum, at about twenty to nine, when all the other men were at work. He was a thin, sallow man with a red nose, quick, staccato, and smartly but stiffly dressed. He was about thirty-six years old. There was

something rather “doggy”, rather smart, rather ’cute and shrewd, and something warm, and something slightly contemptible about him.

“You my new lad?” he said.

Paul stood up and said he was.

“Fetched the letters?”

Mr. Pappleworth gave a chew to his gum.

“Yes.”

“Copied ’em?”

“No.”

“Well, come on then, let’s look slippy. Changed your coat?”

“No.”

“You want to bring an old coat and leave it here.” He pronounced the last words with the chlorodyne gum between his side teeth. He vanished into the darkness behind the great parcel-rack, reappeared coatless, turning up a smart striped shirt-cuff over a thin and hairy arm. Then he slipped into his coat. Paul noticed how thin he was, and that his trousers were in folds behind. He seized a stool, dragged it beside the boy’s, and sat down.

“Sit down,” he said.

Paul took a seat.

Mr. Pappleworth was very close to him. The man seized the letters, snatched a long entry-book out of a rack in front of him, flung it open, seized a pen, and said:

“Now look here. You want to copy these letters in here.” He sniffed twice, gave a quick chew at his gum, stared fixedly at a letter, then went very still and absorbed, and wrote the entry rapidly, in a beautiful flourishing hand. He glanced quickly at Paul.

“See that?”

“Yes.”

“Think you can do it all right?”

“Yes.”

“All right then, let’s see you.”

He sprang off his stool. Paul took a pen. Mr. Pappleworth disappeared. Paul rather liked copying the letters, but he wrote slowly, laboriously, and exceedingly badly. He was doing the fourth letter, and feeling quite busy and happy, when Mr. Pappleworth reappeared.

“Now then, how’r’ yer getting on? Done ’em?”

He leaned over the boy’s shoulder, chewing, and smelling of chlorodyne.

“Strike my bob, lad, but you’re a beautiful writer!” he exclaimed satirically. “Ne’er mind, how many h’yer done? Only three! I’d ’a eaten ’em. Get on, my lad, an’ put numbers on ’em. Here, look! Get on!”

Paul ground away at the letters, whilst Mr. Pappleworth fussed over various jobs. Suddenly the boy started as a shrill whistle sounded near his ear. Mr. Pappleworth came, took a plug out of a pipe, and said, in an amazingly cross and bossy voice:

“Yes?”

Paul heard a faint voice, like a woman’s, out of the mouth of the tube. He gazed in wonder, never having seen a speaking-tube before.

“Well,” said Mr. Pappleworth disagreeably into the tube, “you’d better get some of your back work done, then.”

Again the woman’s tiny voice was heard, sounding pretty and cross.

“I’ve not time to stand here while you talk,” said Mr. Pappleworth, and he pushed the plug into the tube.

“Come, my lad,” he said imploringly to Paul, “there’s Polly crying out for them orders. Can’t you buck up a bit? Here, come out!”

He took the book, to Paul’s immense chagrin, and began the copying himself. He worked quickly and well. This done, he seized some strips of long yellow paper, about three inches wide, and made out the day’s orders for the work-girls.

“You’d better watch me,” he said to Paul, working all the while rapidly. Paul watched the weird little drawings of legs, and thighs, and ankles, with the strokes across and the numbers, and the few brief directions which his chief made upon the yellow paper. Then Mr. Pappleworth finished and jumped up.

“Come on with me,” he said, and the yellow papers flying in his hands, he dashed through a door and down some stairs, into the basement where the gas was burning. They crossed the cold, damp storeroom, then a long, dreary room with a long table on trestles, into a smaller, cosy apartment, not very high, which had been built on to the main building. In this room a small woman with a red serge blouse, and her black hair done on top of her head, was waiting like a proud little bantam.

“Here y’are!” said Pappleworth.

“I think it is ‘here you are!’” exclaimed Polly. “The girls have been here nearly half an hour waiting. Just think of the time wasted!”

“*You* think of getting your work done and not talking so much,” said Mr. Pappleworth. “You could ha’ been finishing off.”

“You know quite well we finished everything off on Saturday!” cried Polly, flying at him, her dark eyes flashing.

“Tu-tu-tu-terterter!” he mocked. “Here’s your new lad. Don’t ruin him as you did the last.”

“As we did the last!” repeated Polly. “Yes, *we* do a lot of ruining, we do. My word, a lad would *take* some ruining after he’d been with you.”

“It’s time for work now, not for talk,” said Mr. Pappleworth severely and coldly.

“It was time for work some time back,” said Polly, marching away with her head in the air. She was an erect little body of forty.

In that room were two round spiral machines on the bench under the window. Through the inner doorway was another longer room, with six more machines. A little group of girls, nicely dressed in white aprons, stood talking together.

“Have you nothing else to do but talk?” said Mr. Pappleworth.

“Only wait for you,” said one handsome girl, laughing.

“Well, get on, get on,” he said. “Come on, my lad. You’ll know your road down here again.”

And Paul ran upstairs after his chief. He was given some checking and invoicing to do. He stood at the desk, labouring in his execrable handwriting. Presently Mr. Jordan came strutting down from the glass office and stood behind him, to the boy’s great discomfort. Suddenly a red and fat finger was thrust on the form he was filling in.

“*Mr. J. A. Bates, Esquire!*” exclaimed the cross voice just behind his ear.

Paul looked at “Mr. J. A. Bates, Esquire” in his own vile writing, and wondered what was the matter now.

“Didn’t they teach you any better than *that* while they were at it? If you put ‘Mr.’ you don’t put ‘Esquire’—a man can’t be both at once.”

The boy regretted his too-much generosity in disposing of honours, hesitated, and with trembling fingers, scratched out the “Mr.” Then all at once Mr. Jordan snatched away the invoice.

“Make another! Are you going to send *that* to a gentleman?” And he tore up the blue form irritably.

Paul, his ears red with shame, began again. Still Mr. Jordan watched.

“I don’t know what they *do* teach in schools. You’ll have to write better than that. Lads learn nothing nowadays, but how to recite poetry and play the fiddle. Have you seen his writing?” he asked of Mr. Pappleworth.

“Yes; prime, isn’t it?” replied Mr. Pappleworth indifferently.

Mr. Jordan gave a little grunt, not unamiably. Paul divined that his master’s bark was worse than his bite. Indeed, the little manufacturer, although he spoke bad English, was quite gentleman enough to leave his men alone and to take no notice of trifles. But he knew he did not look like the boss and owner of the show, so he had to play his role of proprietor at first, to put things on a right footing.

“Let’s see, *what’s* your name?” asked Mr. Pappleworth of the boy.

“Paul Morel.”

It is curious that children suffer so much at having to pronounce their own names.

“Paul Morel, is it? All right, you Paul-Morel through them things there, and then—”

Mr. Pappleworth subsided on to a stool, and began writing. A girl came up from out of a door just behind, put some newly-pressed elastic web appliances on the counter, and returned. Mr. Pappleworth picked up the whitey-blue knee-band, examined it, and its yellow order-paper quickly, and put it on one side. Next was a flesh-pink “leg”. He went through the few things, wrote out a couple of orders, and called to Paul to accompany him. This time they went through the door whence the girl had emerged. There Paul found himself at the top of a little wooden flight of steps, and below him saw a room with windows round two sides, and at the farther end half a dozen girls sitting bending over the benches in the light from the window, sewing. They were singing together “Two Little Girls in Blue”. Hearing the door opened, they all turned round, to see Mr. Pappleworth and Paul looking down on them from the far end of the room. They stopped singing.

“Can’t you make a bit less row?” said Mr. Pappleworth. “Folk’ll think we keep cats.”

A hunchback woman on a high stool turned her long, rather heavy face towards Mr. Pappleworth, and said, in a contralto voice:

“They’re all tom-cats then.”

In vain Mr. Pappleworth tried to be impressive for Paul’s benefit. He descended the steps into the finishing-off room, and went to the hunchback Fanny. She had such a short body on her high stool that her head, with its great bands of bright brown hair, seemed over large, as did her pale, heavy face. She wore a dress of green-black cashmere, and her wrists, coming out of the narrow cuffs, were thin and flat, as she put down her work nervously. He showed her something that was wrong with a knee-cap.

“Well,” she said, “you needn’t come blaming it on to me. It’s not my fault.” Her colour mounted to her cheek.

“I never said it *was* your fault. Will you do as I tell you?” replied Mr. Pappleworth shortly.

“You don’t say it’s my fault, but you’d like to make out as it was,” the hunchback woman cried, almost in tears. Then she snatched the knee-cap from her “boss”, saying: “Yes, I’ll do it for you, but you needn’t be snappy.”

“Here’s your new lad,” said Mr. Pappleworth.

Fanny turned, smiling very gently on Paul.

“Oh!” she said.

“Yes; don’t make a softy of him between you.”

“It’s not us as ’ud make a softy of him,” she said indignantly.

“Come on then, Paul,” said Mr. Pappleworth.

“*Au revoy*, Paul,” said one of the girls.

There was a titter of laughter. Paul went out, blushing deeply, not having spoken a word.

The day was very long. All morning the work-people were coming to speak to Mr. Pappleworth. Paul was writing or learning to make up parcels, ready for the midday post. At one o'clock, or, rather, at a quarter to one, Mr. Pappleworth disappeared to catch his train: he lived in the suburbs. At one o'clock, Paul, feeling very lost, took his dinner-basket down into the stockroom in the basement, that had the long table on trestles, and ate his meal hurriedly, alone in that cellar of gloom and desolation. Then he went out of doors. The brightness and the freedom of the streets made him feel adventurous and happy. But at two o'clock he was back in the corner of the big room. Soon the work-girls went trooping past, making remarks. It was the commoner girls who worked upstairs at the heavy tasks of truss-making and the finishing of artificial limbs. He waited for Mr. Pappleworth, not knowing what to do, sitting scribbling on the yellow order-paper. Mr. Pappleworth came at twenty minutes to three. Then he sat and gossiped with Paul, treating the boy entirely as an equal, even in age.

In the afternoon there was never very much to do, unless it were near the week-end, and the accounts had to be made up. At five o'clock all the men went down into the dungeon with the table on trestles, and there they had tea, eating bread-and-butter on the bare, dirty boards, talking with the same kind of ugly haste and slovenliness with which they ate their meal. And yet upstairs the atmosphere among them was always jolly and clear. The cellar and the trestles affected them.

After tea, when all the gases were lighted, *work* went more briskly. There was the big evening post to get off. The hose came up warm and newly pressed from the workrooms. Paul had made out the invoices. Now he had the packing up and addressing to do, then he had to weigh his stock of parcels on the scales. Everywhere voices were calling weights, there was the chink of metal, the rapid snapping of string, the hurrying to old Mr. Melling for stamps. And at last the postman came with his sack, laughing and jolly. Then everything slacked off, and Paul took his dinner-basket and ran to the station to catch the eight-twenty train. The day in the factory was just twelve hours long.

His mother sat waiting for him rather anxiously. He had to walk from Keston, so was not home until about twenty past nine. And he left the house before seven in the morning. Mrs. Morel was rather anxious about his health. But she herself had had to put up with so much that she expected her children to take the same odds. They must go through with what came. And Paul stayed at Jordan's, although all the time he was there his health suffered from the darkness and lack of air and the long hours.

He came in pale and tired. His mother looked at him. She saw he was rather pleased, and her anxiety all went.

"Well, and how was it?" she asked.

"Ever so funny, mother," he replied. "You don't have to work a bit hard, and they're nice with you."

“And did you get on all right?”

“Yes: they only say my writing’s bad. But Mr. Pappleworth—he’s my man—said to Mr. Jordan I should be all right. I’m Spiral, mother; you must come and see. It’s ever so nice.”

Soon he liked Jordan’s. Mr. Pappleworth, who had a certain “saloon bar” flavour about him, was always natural, and treated him as if he had been a comrade. Sometimes the “Spiral boss” was irritable, and chewed more lozenges than ever. Even then, however, he was not offensive, but one of those people who hurt themselves by their own irritability more than they hurt other people.

“Haven’t you done that *yet?*” he would cry. “Go on, be a month of Sundays.”

Again, and Paul could understand him least then, he was jocular and in high spirits.

“I’m going to bring my little Yorkshire terrier bitch to-morrow,” he said jubilantly to Paul.

“What’s a Yorkshire terrier?”

“*Don’t* know what a Yorkshire terrier is? *Don’t know a Yorkshire—*” Mr. Pappleworth was aghast.

“Is it a little silky one—colours of iron and rusty silver?”

“*That’s* it, my lad. She’s a gem. She’s had five pounds’ worth of pups already, and she’s worth over seven pounds herself; and she doesn’t weigh twenty ounces.”

The next day the bitch came. She was a shivering, miserable morsel. Paul did not care for her; she seemed so like a wet rag that would never dry. Then a man called for her, and began to make coarse jokes. But Mr. Pappleworth nodded his head in the direction of the boy, and the talk went on *sotto voce*.

Mr. Jordan only made one more excursion to watch Paul, and then the only fault he found was seeing the boy lay his pen on the counter.

“Put your pen in your ear, if you’re going to be a clerk. Pen in your ear!” And one day he said to the lad: “Why don’t you hold your shoulders straighter? Come down here,” when he took him into the glass office and fitted him with special braces for keeping the shoulders square.

But Paul liked the girls best. The men seemed common and rather dull. He liked them all, but they were uninteresting. Polly, the little brisk overseer downstairs, finding Paul eating in the cellar, asked him if she could cook him anything on her little stove. Next day his mother gave him a dish that could be heated up. He took it into the pleasant, clean room to Polly. And very soon it grew to be an established custom that he should have dinner with her. When he came in at eight in the morning he took his basket to her, and when he came down at one o’clock she had his dinner ready.

He was not very tall, and pale, with thick chestnut hair, irregular features, and a wide, full mouth. She was like a small bird. He often called her a “robinet”. Though naturally rather quiet, he would sit and chatter with her for hours telling her about his home. The

girls all liked to hear him talk. They often gathered in a little circle while he sat on a bench, and held forth to them, laughing. Some of them regarded him as a curious little creature, so serious, yet so bright and jolly, and always so delicate in his way with them. They all liked him, and he adored them. Polly he felt he belonged to. Then Connie, with her mane of red hair, her face of apple-blossom, her murmuring voice, such a lady in her shabby black frock, appealed to his romantic side.

“When you sit winding,” he said, “it looks as if you were spinning at a spinning-wheel—it looks ever so nice. You remind me of Elaine in the ‘Idylls of the King’. I’d draw you if I could.”

And she glanced at him blushing shyly. And later on he had a sketch he prized very much: Connie sitting on the stool before the wheel, her flowing mane of red hair on her rusty black frock, her red mouth shut and serious, running the scarlet thread off the hank on to the reel.

With Louie, handsome and brazen, who always seemed to thrust her hip at him, he usually joked.

Emma was rather plain, rather old, and condescending. But to condescend to him made her happy, and he did not mind.

“How do you put needles in?” he asked.

“Go away and don’t bother.”

“But I ought to know how to put needles in.”

She ground at her machine all the while steadily.

“There are many things you ought to know,” she replied.

“Tell me, then, how to stick needles in the machine.”

“Oh, the boy, what a nuisance he is! Why, *this* is how you do it.”

He watched her attentively. Suddenly a whistle piped. Then Polly appeared, and said in a clear voice:

“Mr. Pappleworth wants to know how much longer you’re going to be down here playing with the girls, Paul.”

Paul flew upstairs, calling “Good-bye!” and Emma drew herself up.

“It wasn’t *me* who wanted him to play with the machine,” she said.

As a rule, when all the girls came back at two o’clock, he ran upstairs to Fanny, the hunchback, in the finishing-off room. Mr. Pappleworth did not appear till twenty to three, and he often found his boy sitting beside Fanny, talking, or drawing, or singing with the girls.

Often, after a minute’s hesitation, Fanny would begin to sing. She had a fine contralto voice. Everybody joined in the chorus, and it went well. Paul was not at all embarrassed, after a while, sitting in the room with the half a dozen work-girls.

At the end of the song Fanny would say:

“I know you’ve been laughing at me.”

“Don’t be so soft, Fanny!” cried one of the girls.

Once there was mention of Connie’s red hair.

“Fanny’s is better, to my fancy,” said Emma.

“You needn’t try to make a fool of me,” said Fanny, flushing deeply.

“No, but she has, Paul; she’s got beautiful hair.”

“It’s a treat of a colour,” said he. “That coldish colour like earth, and yet shiny. It’s like bog-water.”

“Goodness me!” exclaimed one girl, laughing.

“How I do but get criticised,” said Fanny.

“But you should see it down, Paul,” cried Emma earnestly. “It’s simply beautiful. Put it down for him, Fanny, if he wants something to paint.”

Fanny would not, and yet she wanted to.

“Then I’ll take it down myself,” said the lad.

“Well, you can if you like,” said Fanny.

And he carefully took the pins out of the knot, and the rush of hair, of uniform dark brown, slid over the humped back.

“What a lovely lot!” he exclaimed.

The girls watched. There was silence. The youth shook the hair loose from the coil.

“It’s splendid!” he said, smelling its perfume. “I’ll bet it’s worth pounds.”

“I’ll leave it you when I die, Paul,” said Fanny, half joking.

“You look just like anybody else, sitting drying their hair,” said one of the girls to the long-legged hunchback.

Poor Fanny was morbidly sensitive, always imagining insults. Polly was curt and businesslike. The two departments were for ever at war, and Paul was always finding Fanny in tears. Then he was made the recipient of all her woes, and he had to plead her case with Polly.

So the time went along happily enough. The factory had a homely feel. No one was rushed or driven. Paul always enjoyed it when the work got faster, towards post-time, and all the men united in labour. He liked to watch his fellow-clerks at work. The man was the work and the work was the man, one thing, for the time being. It was different with the girls. The real woman never seemed to be there at the task, but as if left out, waiting.

From the train going home at night he used to watch the lights of the town, sprinkled thick on the hills, fusing together in a blaze in the valleys. He felt rich in life and happy. Drawing farther off, there was a patch of lights at Bulwell like myriad petals shaken to

the ground from the shed stars; and beyond was the red glare of the furnaces, playing like hot breath on the clouds.

He had to walk two and more miles from Keston home, up two long hills, down two short hills. He was often tired, and he counted the lamps climbing the hill above him, how many more to pass. And from the hilltop, on pitch-dark nights, he looked round on the villages five or six miles away, that shone like swarms of glittering living things, almost a heaven against his feet. Marlpool and Heanor scattered the far-off darkness with brilliance. And occasionally the black valley space between was traced, violated by a great train rushing south to London or north to Scotland. The trains roared by like projectiles level on the darkness, fuming and burning, making the valley clang with their passage. They were gone, and the lights of the towns and villages glittered in silence.

And then he came to the corner at home, which faced the other side of the night. The ash-tree seemed a friend now. His mother rose with gladness as he entered. He put his eight shillings proudly on the table.

“It’ll help, mother?” he asked wistfully.

“There’s precious little left,” she answered, “after your ticket and dinners and such are taken off.”

Then he told her the budget of the day. His life-story, like an Arabian Nights, was told night after night to his mother. It was almost as if it were her own life.

CHAPTER VI DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Arthur Morel was growing up. He was a quick, careless, impulsive boy, a good deal like his father. He hated study, made a great moan if he had to work, and escaped as soon as possible to his sport again.

In appearance he remained the flower of the family, being well made, graceful, and full of life. His dark brown hair and fresh colouring, and his exquisite dark blue eyes shaded with long lashes, together with his generous manner and fiery temper, made him a favourite. But as he grew older his temper became uncertain. He flew into rages over nothing, seemed unbearably raw and irritable.

His mother, whom he loved, wearied of him sometimes. He thought only of himself. When he wanted amusement, all that stood in his way he hated, even if it were she. When he was in trouble he moaned to her ceaselessly.

“Goodness, boy!” she said, when he groaned about a master who, he said, hated him, “if you don’t like it, alter it, and if you can’t alter it, put up with it.”

And his father, whom he had loved and who had worshipped him, he came to detest. As he grew older Morel fell into a slow ruin. His body, which had been beautiful in

movement and in being, shrank, did not seem to ripen with the years, but to get mean and rather despicable. There came over him a look of meanness and of paltriness. And when the mean-looking elderly man bullied or ordered the boy about, Arthur was furious. Moreover, Morel's manners got worse and worse, his habits somewhat disgusting. When the children were growing up and in the crucial stage of adolescence, the father was like some ugly irritant to their souls. His manners in the house were the same as he used among the colliers down pit.

"Dirty nuisance!" Arthur would cry, jumping up and going straight out of the house when his father disgusted him. And Morel persisted the more because his children hated it. He seemed to take a kind of satisfaction in disgusting them, and driving them nearly mad, while they were so irritably sensitive at the age of fourteen or fifteen. So that Arthur, who was growing up when his father was degenerate and elderly, hated him worst of all.

Then, sometimes, the father would seem to feel the contemptuous hatred of his children.

"There's not a man tries harder for his family!" he would shout. "He does his best for them, and then gets treated like a dog. But I'm not going to stand it, I tell you!"

But for the threat and the fact that he did not try so hard as he imagined, they would have felt sorry. As it was, the battle now went on nearly all between father and children, he persisting in his dirty and disgusting ways, just to assert his independence. They loathed him.

Arthur was so inflamed and irritable at last, that when he won a scholarship for the Grammar School in Nottingham, his mother decided to let him live in town, with one of her sisters, and only come home at week-ends.

Annie was still a junior teacher in the Board-school, earning about four shillings a week. But soon she would have fifteen shillings, since she had passed her examination, and there would be financial peace in the house.

Mrs. Morel clung now to Paul. He was quiet and not brilliant. But still he stuck to his painting, and still he stuck to his mother. Everything he did was for her. She waited for his coming home in the evening, and then she unburdened herself of all she had pondered, or of all that had occurred to her during the day. He sat and listened with his earnestness. The two shared lives.

William was engaged now to his brunette, and had bought her an engagement ring that cost eight guineas. The children gasped at such a fabulous price.

"Eight guineas!" said Morel. "More fool him! If he'd gen me some on't, it 'ud ha' looked better on 'im."

"Given *you* some of it!" cried Mrs. Morel. "Why give *you* some of it!"

She remembered *he* had bought no engagement ring at all, and she preferred William, who was not mean, if he were foolish. But now the young man talked only of the dances

to which he went with his betrothed, and the different resplendent clothes she wore; or he told his mother with glee how they went to the theatre like great swells.

He wanted to bring the girl home. Mrs. Morel said she should come at the Christmas. This time William arrived with a lady, but with no presents. Mrs. Morel had prepared supper. Hearing footsteps, she rose and went to the door. William entered.

“Hello, mother!” He kissed her hastily, then stood aside to present a tall, handsome girl, who was wearing a costume of fine black-and-white check, and furs.

“Here’s Gyp!”

Miss Western held out her hand and showed her teeth in a small smile.

“Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Morel!” she exclaimed.

“I am afraid you will be hungry,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Oh no, we had dinner in the train. Have you got my gloves, Chubby?”

William Morel, big and raw-boned, looked at her quickly.

“How should I?” he said.

“Then I’ve lost them. Don’t be cross with me.”

A frown went over his face, but he said nothing. She glanced round the kitchen. It was small and curious to her, with its glittering kissing-bunch, its evergreens behind the pictures, its wooden chairs and little deal table. At that moment Morel came in.

“Hello, dad!”

“Hello, my son! Tha’s let on me!”

The two shook hands, and William presented the lady. She gave the same smile that showed her teeth.

“How do you do, Mr. Morel?”

Morel bowed obsequiously.

“I’m very well, and I hope so are you. You must make yourself very welcome.”

“Oh, thank you,” she replied, rather amused.

“You will like to go upstairs,” said Mrs. Morel.

“If you don’t mind; but not if it is any trouble to you.”

“It is no trouble. Annie will take you. Walter, carry up this box.”

“And don’t be an hour dressing yourself up,” said William to his betrothed.

Annie took a brass candlestick, and, too shy almost to speak, preceded the young lady to the front bedroom, which Mr. and Mrs. Morel had vacated for her. It, too, was small and cold by candlelight. The colliers’ wives only lit fires in bedrooms in case of extreme illness.

“Shall I unstrap the box?” asked Annie.

“Oh, thank you very much!”

Annie played the part of maid, then went downstairs for hot water.

“I think she’s rather tired, mother,” said William. “It’s a beastly journey, and we had such a rush.”

“Is there anything I can give her?” asked Mrs. Morel.

“Oh no, she’ll be all right.”

But there was a chill in the atmosphere. After half an hour Miss Western came down, having put on a purplish-coloured dress, very fine for the collier’s kitchen.

“I told you you’d no need to change,” said William to her.

“Oh, Chubby!” Then she turned with that sweetish smile to Mrs. Morel. “Don’t you think he’s always grumbling, Mrs. Morel?”

“Is he?” said Mrs. Morel. “That’s not very nice of him.”

“It isn’t, really!”

“You are cold,” said the mother. “Won’t you come near the fire?”

Morel jumped out of his armchair.

“Come and sit you here!” he cried. “Come and sit you here!”

“No, dad, keep your own chair. Sit on the sofa, Gyp,” said William.

“No, no!” cried Morel. “This cheer’s warmest. Come and sit here, Miss Wesson.”

“Thank you *so* much,” said the girl, seating herself in the collier’s armchair, the place of honour. She shivered, feeling the warmth of the kitchen penetrate her.

“Fetch me a hanky, Chubby dear!” she said, putting up her mouth to him, and using the same intimate tone as if they were alone; which made the rest of the family feel as if they ought not to be present. The young lady evidently did not realise them as people: they were creatures to her for the present. William winced.

In such a household, in Streatham, Miss Western would have been a lady condescending to her inferiors. These people were to her, certainly clownish—in short, the working classes. How was she to adjust herself?

“I’ll go,” said Annie.

Miss Western took no notice, as if a servant had spoken. But when the girl came downstairs again with the handkerchief, she said: “Oh, thank you!” in a gracious way.

She sat and talked about the dinner on the train, which had been so poor; about London, about dances. She was really very nervous, and chattered from fear. Morel sat all the time smoking his thick twist tobacco, watching her, and listening to her glib London speech, as he puffed. Mrs. Morel, dressed up in her best black silk blouse, answered quietly and rather briefly. The three children sat round in silence and admiration. Miss Western was the princess. Everything of the best was got out for her: the best cups, the best spoons, the best table cloth, the best coffee-jug. The children thought she must find it quite grand. She felt strange, not able to realise the people, not knowing how to treat them. William joked, and was slightly uncomfortable.

At about ten o'clock he said to her:

"Aren't you tired, Gyp?"

"Rather, Chubby," she answered, at once in the intimate tones and putting her head slightly on one side.

"I'll light her the candle, mother," he said.

"Very well," replied the mother.

Miss Western stood up, held out her hand to Mrs. Morel.

"Good-night, Mrs. Morel," she said.

Paul sat at the boiler, letting the water run from the tap into a stone beer-bottle. Annie swathed the bottle in an old flannel pit-singlet, and kissed her mother good-night. She was to share the room with the lady, because the house was full.

"You wait a minute," said Mrs. Morel to Annie. And Annie sat nursing the hot-water bottle. Miss Western shook hands all round, to everybody's discomfort, and took her departure, preceded by William. In five minutes he was downstairs again. His heart was rather sore; he did not know why. He talked very little till everybody had gone to bed, but himself and his mother. Then he stood with his legs apart, in his old attitude on the hearthrug, and said hesitatingly:

"Well, mother?"

"Well, my son?"

She sat in the rocking-chair, feeling somehow hurt and humiliated, for his sake.

"Do you like her?"

"Yes," came the slow answer.

"She's shy yet, mother. She's not used to it. It's different from her aunt's house, you know."

"Of course it is, my boy; and she must find it difficult."

"She does." Then he frowned swiftly. "If only she wouldn't put on her *blessed* airs!"

"It's only her first awkwardness, my boy. She'll be all right."

"That's it, mother," he replied gratefully. But his brow was gloomy. "You know, she's not like you, mother. She's not serious, and she can't think."

"She's young, my boy."

"Yes; and she's had no sort of show. Her mother died when she was a child. Since then she's lived with her aunt, whom she can't bear. And her father was a rake. She's had no love."

"No! Well, you must make up to her."

"And so—you have to forgive her a lot of things."

"*What* do you have to forgive her, my boy?"

“I dunno. When she seems shallow, you have to remember she’s never had anybody to bring her deeper side out. And she’s *fearfully* fond of me.”

“Anybody can see that.”

“But you know, mother—she’s—she’s different from us. Those sort of people, like those she lives amongst, they don’t seem to have the same principles.”

“You mustn’t judge too hastily,” said Mrs. Morel.

But he seemed uneasy within himself.

In the morning, however, he was up singing and larking round the house.

“Hello!” he called, sitting on the stairs. “Are you getting up?”

“Yes,” her voice called faintly.

“Merry Christmas!” he shouted to her.

Her laugh, pretty and tinkling, was heard in the bedroom. She did not come down in half an hour.

“Was she *really* getting up when she said she was?” he asked of Annie.

“Yes, she was,” replied Annie.

He waited a while, then went to the stairs again.

“Happy New Year,” he called.

“Thank you, Chubby dear!” came the laughing voice, far away.

“Buck up!” he implored.

It was nearly an hour, and still he was waiting for her. Morel, who always rose before six, looked at the clock.

“Well, it’s a winder!” he exclaimed.

The family had breakfasted, all but William. He went to the foot of the stairs.

“Shall I have to send you an Easter egg up there?” he called, rather crossly. She only laughed. The family expected, after that time of preparation, something like magic. At last she came, looking very nice in a blouse and skirt.

“Have you *really* been all this time getting ready?” he asked.

“Chubby dear! That question is not permitted, is it, Mrs. Morel?”

She played the grand lady at first. When she went with William to chapel, he in his frock-coat and silk hat, she in her furs and London-made costume, Paul and Arthur and Annie expected everybody to bow to the ground in admiration. And Morel, standing in his Sunday suit at the end of the road, watching the gallant pair go, felt he was the father of princes and princesses.

And yet she was not so grand. For a year now she had been a sort of secretary or clerk in a London office. But while she was with the Morels she queened it. She sat and let Annie or Paul wait on her as if they were her servants. She treated Mrs. Morel with a

certain glibness and Morel with patronage. But after a day or so she began to change her tune.

William always wanted Paul or Annie to go along with them on their walks. It was so much more interesting. And Paul really *did* admire “Gipsy” wholeheartedly; in fact, his mother scarcely forgave the boy for the adulation with which he treated the girl.

On the second day, when Lily said: “Oh, Annie, do you know where I left my muff?” William replied:

“You know it is in your bedroom. Why do you ask Annie?”

And Lily went upstairs with a cross, shut mouth. But it angered the young man that she made a servant of his sister.

On the third evening William and Lily were sitting together in the parlour by the fire in the dark. At a quarter to eleven Mrs. Morel was heard raking the fire. William came out to the kitchen, followed by his beloved.

“Is it as late as that, mother?” he said. She had been sitting alone.

“It is not *late*, my boy, but it is as late as I usually sit up.”

“Won’t you go to bed, then?” he asked.

“And leave you two? No, my boy, I don’t believe in it.”

“Can’t you trust us, mother?”

“Whether I can or not, I won’t do it. You can stay till eleven if you like, and I can read.”

“Go to bed, Gyp,” he said to his girl. “We won’t keep mater waiting.”

“Annie has left the candle burning, Lily,” said Mrs. Morel; “I think you will see.”

“Yes, thank you. Good-night, Mrs. Morel.”

William kissed his sweetheart at the foot of the stairs, and she went. He returned to the kitchen.

“Can’t you trust us, mother?” he repeated, rather offended.

“My boy, I tell you I don’t *believe* in leaving two young things like you alone downstairs when everyone else is in bed.”

And he was forced to take this answer. He kissed his mother good-night.

At Easter he came over alone. And then he discussed his sweetheart endlessly with his mother.

“You know, mother, when I’m away from her I don’t care for her a bit. I shouldn’t care if I never saw her again. But, then, when I’m with her in the evenings I am awfully fond of her.”

“It’s a queer sort of love to marry on,” said Mrs. Morel, “if she holds you no more than that!”

“It *is* funny!” he exclaimed. It worried and perplexed him. “But yet—there’s so much between us now I couldn’t give her up.”

“You know best,” said Mrs. Morel. “But if it is as you say, I wouldn’t call it *love*—at any rate, it doesn’t look much like it.”

“Oh, I don’t know, mother. She’s an orphan, and—”

They never came to any sort of conclusion. He seemed puzzled and rather fretted. She was rather reserved. All his strength and money went in keeping this girl. He could scarcely afford to take his mother to Nottingham when he came over.

Paul’s wages had been raised at Christmas to ten shillings, to his great joy. He was quite happy at Jordan’s, but his health suffered from the long hours and the confinement. His mother, to whom he became more and more significant, thought how to help.

His half-day holiday was on Monday afternoon. On a Monday morning in May, as the two sat alone at breakfast, she said:

“I think it will be a fine day.”

He looked up in surprise. This meant something.

“You know Mr. Leivers has gone to live on a new farm. Well, he asked me last week if I wouldn’t go and see Mrs. Leivers, and I promised to bring you on Monday if it’s fine. Shall we go?”

“I say, little woman, how lovely!” he cried. “And we’ll go this afternoon?”

Paul hurried off to the station jubilant. Down Derby Road was a cherry-tree that glistened. The old brick wall by the Statutes ground burned scarlet, spring was a very flame of green. And the steep swoop of highroad lay, in its cool morning dust, splendid with patterns of sunshine and shadow, perfectly still. The trees sloped their great green shoulders proudly; and inside the warehouse all the morning, the boy had a vision of spring outside.

When he came home at dinner-time his mother was rather excited.

“Are we going?” he asked.

“When I’m ready,” she replied.

Presently he got up.

“Go and get dressed while I wash up,” he said.

She did so. He washed the pots, straightened, and then took her boots. They were quite clean. Mrs. Morel was one of those naturally exquisite people who can walk in mud without dirtying their shoes. But Paul had to clean them for her. They were kid boots at eight shillings a pair. He, however, thought them the most dainty boots in the world, and he cleaned them with as much reverence as if they had been flowers.

Suddenly she appeared in the inner doorway rather shyly. She had got a new cotton blouse on. Paul jumped up and went forward.

“Oh, my stars!” he exclaimed. “What a bobby-dazzler!”

She sniffed in a little haughty way, and put her head up.

“It’s not a bobby-dazzler at all!” she replied. “It’s very quiet.”

She walked forward, whilst he hovered round her.

“Well,” she asked, quite shy, but pretending to be high and mighty, “do you like it?”

“Awfully! You *are* a fine little woman to go jaunting out with!”

He went and surveyed her from the back.

“Well,” he said, “if I was walking down the street behind you, I should say: ‘Doesn’t *that* little person fancy herself!’”

“Well, she doesn’t,” replied Mrs. Morel. “She’s not sure it suits her.”

“Oh no! she wants to be in dirty black, looking as if she was wrapped in burnt paper. It *does* suit you, and *I* say you look nice.”

She sniffed in her little way, pleased, but pretending to know better.

“Well,” she said, “it’s cost me just three shillings. You couldn’t have got it ready-made for that price, could you?”

“I should think you couldn’t,” he replied.

“And, you know, it’s good stuff.”

“Awfully pretty,” he said.

The blouse was white, with a little sprig of heliotrope and black.

“Too young for me, though, I’m afraid,” she said.

“Too young for you!” he exclaimed in disgust. “Why don’t you buy some false white hair and stick it on your head.”

“I s’ll soon have no need,” she replied. “I’m going white fast enough.”

“Well, you’ve no business to,” he said. “What do I want with a white-haired mother?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to put up with one, my lad,” she said rather strangely.

They set off in great style, she carrying the umbrella William had given her, because of the sun. Paul was considerably taller than she, though he was not big. He fancied himself.

On the fallow land the young wheat shone silkily. Minton pit waved its plumes of white steam, coughed, and rattled hoarsely.

“Now look at that!” said Mrs. Morel. Mother and son stood on the road to watch. Along the ridge of the great pit-hill crawled a little group in silhouette against the sky, a horse, a small truck, and a man. They climbed the incline against the heavens. At the end the man tipped the wagon. There was an undue rattle as the waste fell down the sheer slope of the enormous bank.

“You sit a minute, mother,” he said, and she took a seat on a bank, whilst he sketched rapidly. She was silent whilst he worked, looking round at the afternoon, the red cottages shining among their greenness.

“The world is a wonderful place,” she said, “and wonderfully beautiful.”

“And so’s the pit,” he said. “Look how it heaps together, like something alive almost—a big creature that you don’t know.”

“Yes,” she said. “Perhaps!”

“And all the trucks standing waiting, like a string of beasts to be fed,” he said.

“And very thankful I am they *are* standing,” she said, “for that means they’ll turn middling time this week.”

“But I like the feel of *men* on things, while they’re alive. There’s a feel of men about trucks, because they’ve been handled with men’s hands, all of them.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel.

They went along under the trees of the highroad. He was constantly informing her, but she was interested. They passed the end of Nethermere, that was tossing its sunshine like petals lightly in its lap. Then they turned on a private road, and in some trepidation approached a big farm. A dog barked furiously. A woman came out to see.

“Is this the way to Willey Farm?” Mrs. Morel asked.

Paul hung behind in terror of being sent back. But the woman was amiable, and directed them. The mother and son went through the wheat and oats, over a little bridge into a wild meadow. Peewits, with their white breasts glistening, wheeled and screamed about them. The lake was still and blue. High overhead a heron floated. Opposite, the wood heaped on the hill, green and still.

“It’s a wild road, mother,” said Paul. “Just like Canada.”

“Isn’t it beautiful!” said Mrs. Morel, looking round.

“See that heron—see—see her legs?”

He directed his mother, what she must see and what not. And she was quite content.

“But now,” she said, “which way? He told me through the wood.”

The wood, fenced and dark, lay on their left.

“I can feel a bit of a path this road,” said Paul. “You’ve got town feet, somehow or other, you have.”

They found a little gate, and soon were in a broad green alley of the wood, with a new thicket of fir and pine on one hand, an old oak glade dipping down on the other. And among the oaks the bluebells stood in pools of azure, under the new green hazels, upon a pale fawn floor of oak-leaves. He found flowers for her.

“Here’s a bit of new-mown hay,” he said; then, again, he brought her forget-me-nots. And, again, his heart hurt with love, seeing her hand, used with work, holding the little bunch of flowers he gave her. She was perfectly happy.

But at the end of the riding was a fence to climb. Paul was over in a second.

“Come,” he said, “let me help you.”

“No, go away. I will do it in my own way.”

He stood below with his hands up ready to help her. She climbed cautiously.

“What a way to climb!” he exclaimed scornfully, when she was safely to earth again.

“Hateful stiles!” she cried.

“Duffer of a little woman,” he replied, “who can’t get over ’em.”

In front, along the edge of the wood, was a cluster of low red farm buildings. The two hastened forward. Flush with the wood was the apple orchard, where blossom was falling on the grindstone. The pond was deep under a hedge and overhanging oak trees. Some cows stood in the shade. The farm and buildings, three sides of a quadrangle, embraced the sunshine towards the wood. It was very still.

Mother and son went into the small railed garden, where was a scent of red gillivers. By the open door were some floury loaves, put out to cool. A hen was just coming to peck them. Then, in the doorway suddenly appeared a girl in a dirty apron. She was about fourteen years old, had a rosy dark face, a bunch of short black curls, very fine and free, and dark eyes; shy, questioning, a little resentful of the strangers, she disappeared. In a minute another figure appeared, a small, frail woman, rosy, with great dark brown eyes.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, smiling with a little glow, “you’ve come, then. I *am* glad to see you.” Her voice was intimate and rather sad.

The two women shook hands.

“Now are you sure we’re not a bother to you?” said Mrs. Morel. “I know what a farming life is.”

“Oh no! We’re only too thankful to see a new face, it’s so lost up here.”

“I suppose so,” said Mrs. Morel.

They were taken through into the parlour—a long, low room, with a great bunch of guelder-roses in the fireplace. There the women talked, whilst Paul went out to survey the land. He was in the garden smelling the gillivers and looking at the plants, when the girl came out quickly to the heap of coal which stood by the fence.

“I suppose these are cabbage-roses?” he said to her, pointing to the bushes along the fence.

She looked at him with startled, big brown eyes.

“I suppose they are cabbage-roses when they come out?” he said.

“I don’t know,” she faltered. “They’re white with pink middles.”

“Then they’re maiden-blush.”

Miriam flushed. She had a beautiful warm colouring.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“You don’t have *much* in your garden,” he said.

“This is our first year here,” she answered, in a distant, rather superior way, drawing back and going indoors. He did not notice, but went his round of exploration. Presently his mother came out, and they went through the buildings. Paul was hugely delighted.

“And I suppose you have the fowls and calves and pigs to look after?” said Mrs. Morel to Mrs. Leivers.

“No,” replied the little woman. “I can’t find time to look after cattle, and I’m not used to it. It’s as much as I can do to keep going in the house.”

“Well, I suppose it is,” said Mrs. Morel.

Presently the girl came out.

“Tea is ready, mother,” she said in a musical, quiet voice.

“Oh, thank you, Miriam, then we’ll come,” replied her mother, almost ingratiatingly. “Would you *care* to have tea now, Mrs. Morel?”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Morel. “Whenever it’s ready.”

Paul and his mother and Mrs. Leivers had tea together. Then they went out into the wood that was flooded with bluebells, while fummy forget-me-nots were in the paths. The mother and son were in ecstasy together.

When they got back to the house, Mr. Leivers and Edgar, the eldest son, were in the kitchen. Edgar was about eighteen. Then Geoffrey and Maurice, big lads of twelve and thirteen, were in from school. Mr. Leivers was a good-looking man in the prime of life, with a golden-brown moustache, and blue eyes screwed up against the weather.

The boys were condescending, but Paul scarcely observed it. They went round for eggs, scrambling into all sorts of places. As they were feeding the fowls Miriam came out. The boys took no notice of her. One hen, with her yellow chickens, was in a coop. Maurice took his hand full of corn and let the hen peck from it.

“Durst you do it?” he asked of Paul.

“Let’s see,” said Paul.

He had a small hand, warm, and rather capable-looking. Miriam watched. He held the corn to the hen. The bird eyed it with her hard, bright eye, and suddenly made a peck into his hand. He started, and laughed. “Rap, rap, rap!” went the bird’s beak in his palm. He laughed again, and the other boys joined.

“She knocks you, and nips you, but she never hurts,” said Paul, when the last corn had gone. “Now, Miriam,” said Maurice, “you come an ’ave a go.”

“No,” she cried, shrinking back.

“Ha! baby. The mardy-kid!” said her brothers.

“It doesn’t hurt a bit,” said Paul. “It only just nips rather nicely.”

“No,” she still cried, shaking her black curls and shrinking.

“She dursn’t,” said Geoffrey. “She niver durst do anything except recite poitry.”

“Dursn’t jump off a gate, dursn’t tweedle, dursn’t go on a slide, dursn’t stop a girl hittin’ her. She can do nowt but go about thinkin’ herself somebody. ‘The Lady of the Lake.’ Yah!” cried Maurice.

Miriam was crimson with shame and misery.

“I dare do more than you,” she cried. “You’re never anything but cowards and bullies.”

“Oh, cowards and bullies!” they repeated mincingly, mocking her speech.

“Not such a clown shall anger me,
A boor is answered silently”

he quoted against her, shouting with laughter.

She went indoors. Paul went with the boys into the orchard, where they had rigged up a parallel bar. They did feats of strength. He was more agile than strong, but it served. He fingered a piece of apple-blossom that hung low on a swinging bough.

“I wouldn’t get the apple-blossom,” said Edgar, the eldest brother. “There’ll be no apples next year.”

“I wasn’t going to get it,” replied Paul, going away.

The boys felt hostile to him; they were more interested in their own pursuits. He wandered back to the house to look for his mother. As he went round the back, he saw Miriam kneeling in front of the hen-coop, some maize in her hand, biting her lip, and crouching in an intense attitude. The hen was eyeing her wickedly. Very gingerly she put forward her hand. The hen bobbed for her. She drew back quickly with a cry, half of fear, half of chagrin.

“It won’t hurt you,” said Paul.

She flushed crimson and started up.

“I only wanted to try,” she said in a low voice.

“See, it doesn’t hurt,” he said, and, putting only two corns in his palm, he let the hen peck, peck, peck at his bare hand. “It only makes you laugh,” he said.

She put her hand forward and dragged it away, tried again, and started back with a cry. He frowned.

“Why, I’d let her take corn from my face,” said Paul, “only she bumps a bit. She’s ever so neat. If she wasn’t, look how much ground she’d peck up every day.”

He waited grimly, and watched. At last Miriam let the bird peck from her hand. She gave a little cry—fear, and pain because of fear—rather pathetic. But she had done it, and she did it again.

“There, you see,” said the boy. “It doesn’t hurt, does it?”

She looked at him with dilated dark eyes.

“No,” she laughed, trembling.

Then she rose and went indoors. She seemed to be in some way resentful of the boy.

“He thinks I’m only a common girl,” she thought, and she wanted to prove she was a grand person like the “Lady of the Lake”.

Paul found his mother ready to go home. She smiled on her son. He took the great bunch of flowers. Mr. and Mrs. Leivers walked down the fields with them. The hills were golden with evening; deep in the woods showed the darkening purple of bluebells. It was everywhere perfectly stiff, save for the rustling of leaves and birds.

“But it is a beautiful place,” said Mrs. Morel.

“Yes,” answered Mr. Leivers; “it’s a nice little place, if only it weren’t for the rabbits. The pasture’s bitten down to nothing. I dunno if ever I s’ll get the rent off it.”

He clapped his hands, and the field broke into motion near the woods, brown rabbits hopping everywhere.

“Would you believe it!” exclaimed Mrs. Morel.

She and Paul went on alone together.

“Wasn’t it lovely, mother?” he said quietly.

A thin moon was coming out. His heart was full of happiness till it hurt. His mother had to chatter, because she, too, wanted to cry with happiness.

“Now *wouldn’t* I help that man!” she said. “*Wouldn’t* I see to the fowls and the young stock! And *I’d* learn to milk, and *I’d* talk with him, and *I’d* plan with him. My word, if I were his wife, the farm would be run, I know! But there, she hasn’t the strength—she simply hasn’t the strength. She ought never to have been burdened like it, you know. I’m sorry for her, and I’m sorry for him too. My word, if *I’d* had him, I shouldn’t have thought him a bad husband! Not that she does either; and she’s very lovable.”

William came home again with his sweetheart at the Whitsuntide. He had one week of his holidays then. It was beautiful weather. As a rule, William and Lily and Paul went out in the morning together for a walk. William did not talk to his beloved much, except to tell her things from his boyhood. Paul talked endlessly to both of them. They lay down, all three, in a meadow by Minton Church. On one side, by the Castle Farm, was a beautiful quivering screen of poplars. Hawthorn was dropping from the hedges; penny daisies and ragged robin were in the field, like laughter. William, a big fellow of twenty-three, thinner now and even a bit gaunt, lay back in the sunshine and dreamed, while she fingered with his hair. Paul went gathering the big daisies. She had taken off her hat; her hair was black as a horse’s mane. Paul came back and threaded daisies in her jet-black hair—big spangles of white and yellow, and just a pink touch of ragged robin.

“Now you look like a young witch-woman,” the boy said to her. “Doesn’t she, William?”

Lily laughed. William opened his eyes and looked at her. In his gaze was a certain baffled look of misery and fierce appreciation.

“Has he made a sight of me?” she asked, laughing down on her lover.

“That he has!” said William, smiling.

He looked at her. Her beauty seemed to hurt him. He glanced at her flower-decked head and frowned.

“You look nice enough, if that’s what you want to know,” he said.

And she walked without her hat. In a little while William recovered, and was rather tender to her. Coming to a bridge, he carved her initials and his in a heart.

She watched his strong, nervous hand, with its glistening hairs and freckles, as he carved, and she seemed fascinated by it.

All the time there was a feeling of sadness and warmth, and a certain tenderness in the house, whilst William and Lily were at home. But often he got irritable. She had brought, for an eight-days’ stay, five dresses and six blouses.

“Oh, would you mind,” she said to Annie, “washing me these two blouses, and these things?”

And Annie stood washing when William and Lily went out the next morning. Mrs. Morel was furious. And sometimes the young man, catching a glimpse of his sweetheart’s attitude towards his sister, hated her.

On Sunday morning she looked very beautiful in a dress of foulard, silky and sweeping, and blue as a jay-bird’s feather, and in a large cream hat covered with many roses, mostly crimson. Nobody could admire her enough. But in the evening, when she was going out, she asked again:

“Chubby, have you got my gloves?”

“Which?” asked William.

“My new black *suède*.”

“No.”

There was a hunt. She had lost them.

“Look here, mother,” said William, “that’s the fourth pair she’s lost since Christmas—at five shillings a pair!”

“You only gave me *two* of them,” she remonstrated.

And in the evening, after supper, he stood on the hearthrug whilst she sat on the sofa, and he seemed to hate her. In the afternoon he had left her whilst he went to see some old friend. She had sat looking at a book. After supper William wanted to write a letter.

“Here is your book, Lily,” said Mrs. Morel. “Would you care to go on with it for a few minutes?”

“No, thank you,” said the girl. “I will sit still.”

“But it is so dull.”

William scribbled irritably at a great rate. As he sealed the envelope he said:

“Read a book! Why, she’s never read a book in her life.”

“Oh, go along!” said Mrs. Morel, cross with the exaggeration,

“It’s true, mother—she hasn’t,” he cried, jumping up and taking his old position on the hearthrug. “She’s never read a book in her life.”

“Er’s like me,” chimed in Morel. “Er canna see what there is i’ books, ter sit borin’ your nose in ’em for, nor more can I.”

“But you shouldn’t say these things,” said Mrs. Morel to her son.

“But it’s true, mother—she *can’t* read. What did you give her?”

“Well, I gave her a little thing of Annie Swan’s. Nobody wants to read dry stuff on Sunday afternoon.”

“Well, I’ll bet she didn’t read ten lines of it.”

“You are mistaken,” said his mother.

All the time Lily sat miserably on the sofa. He turned to her swiftly.

“*Did* you read any?” he asked.

“Yes, I did,” she replied.

“How much?”

“I don’t know how many pages.”

“Tell me *one thing* you read.”

She could not.

She never got beyond the second page. He read a great deal, and had a quick, active intelligence. She could understand nothing but love-making and chatter. He was accustomed to having all his thoughts sifted through his mother’s mind; so, when he wanted companionship, and was asked in reply to be the billing and twittering lover, he hated his betrothed.

“You know, mother,” he said, when he was alone with her at night, “she’s no idea of money, she’s so wessel-brained. When she’s paid, she’ll suddenly buy such rot as *marrons glacés*, and then *I* have to buy her season-ticket, and her extras, even her underclothing. And she wants to get married, and I think myself we might as well get married next year. But at this rate—”

“A fine mess of a marriage it would be,” replied his mother. “I should consider it again, my boy.”

“Oh, well, I’ve gone too far to break off now,” he said, “and so I shall get married as soon as I can.”

“Very well, my boy. If you will, you will, and there’s no stopping you; but I tell you, I can’t sleep when I think about it.”

“Oh, she’ll be all right, mother. We shall manage.”

“And she lets you buy her underclothing?” asked the mother.

“Well,” he began apologetically, “she didn’t ask me; but one morning—and it *was* cold—I found her on the station shivering, not able to keep still; so I asked her if she was well wrapped up. She said: ‘I think so.’ So I said: ‘Have you got warm underthings on?’ And she said: ‘No, they were cotton.’ I asked her why on earth she hadn’t got something thicker on in weather like that, and she said because she *had* nothing. And there she is—a bronchial subject! I *had* to take her and get some warm things. Well, mother, I shouldn’t mind the money if we had any. And, you know, she *ought* to keep enough to pay for her season-ticket; but no, she comes to me about that, and I have to find the money.”

“It’s a poor lookout,” said Mrs. Morel bitterly.

He was pale, and his rugged face, that used to be so perfectly careless and laughing, was stamped with conflict and despair.

“But I can’t give her up now; it’s gone too far,” he said. “And, besides, for *some* things I couldn’t do without her.”

“My boy, remember you’re taking your life in your hands,” said Mrs. Morel. “*Nothing* is as bad as a marriage that’s a hopeless failure. Mine was bad enough, God knows, and ought to teach you something; but it might have been worse by a long chalk.”

He leaned with his back against the side of the chimney-piece, his hands in his pockets. He was a big, raw-boned man, who looked as if he would go to the world’s end if he wanted to. But she saw the despair on his face.

“I couldn’t give her up now,” he said.

“Well,” she said, “remember there are worse wrongs than breaking off an engagement.”

“I can’t give her up *now*,” he said.

The clock ticked on; mother and son remained in silence, a conflict between them; but he would say no more. At last she said:

“Well, go to bed, my son. You’ll feel better in the morning, and perhaps you’ll know better.”

He kissed her, and went. She raked the fire. Her heart was heavy now as it had never been. Before, with her husband, things had seemed to be breaking down in her, but they

did not destroy her power to live. Now her soul felt lamed in itself. It was her hope that was struck.

And so often William manifested the same hatred towards his betrothed. On the last evening at home he was railing against her.

“Well,” he said, “if you don’t believe me, what she’s like, would you believe she has been confirmed three times?”

“Nonsense!” laughed Mrs. Morel.

“Nonsense or not, she *has!* That’s what confirmation means for her—a bit of a theatrical show where she can cut a figure.”

“I haven’t, Mrs. Morel!” cried the girl—“I haven’t! it is not true!”

“What!” he cried, flashing round on her. “Once in Bromley, once in Beckenham, and once somewhere else.”

“Nowhere else!” she said, in tears—“nowhere else!”

“It *was!* And if it wasn’t why were you confirmed *twice?*”

“Once I was only fourteen, Mrs. Morel,” she pleaded, tears in her eyes.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morel; “I can quite understand it, child. Take no notice of him. You ought to be ashamed, William, saying such things.”

“But it’s true. She’s religious—she had blue velvet Prayer-Books—and she’s not as much religion, or anything else, in her than that table-leg. Gets confirmed three times for show, to show herself off, and that’s how she is in *everything—everything!*”

The girl sat on the sofa, crying. She was not strong.

“As for *love!*” he cried, “you might as well ask a fly to love you! It’ll love settling on you—”

“Now, say no more,” commanded Mrs. Morel. “If you want to say these things, you must find another place than this. I am ashamed of you, William! Why don’t you be more manly. To do nothing but find fault with a girl, and then pretend you’re engaged to her!”

Mrs. Morel subsided in wrath and indignation.

William was silent, and later he repented, kissed and comforted the girl. Yet it was true, what he had said. He hated her.

When they were going away, Mrs. Morel accompanied them as far as Nottingham. It was a long way to Keston station.

“You know, mother,” he said to her, “Gyp’s shallow. Nothing goes deep with her.”

“William, I *wish* you wouldn’t say these things,” said Mrs. Morel, very uncomfortable for the girl who walked beside her.

“But it doesn’t, mother. She’s very much in love with me now, but if I died she’d have forgotten me in three months.”

Mrs. Morel was afraid. Her heart beat furiously, hearing the quiet bitterness of her son's last speech.

"How do you know?" she replied. "You *don't* know, and therefore you've no right to say such a thing."

"He's always saying these things!" cried the girl.

"In three months after I was buried you'd have somebody else, and I should be forgotten," he said. "And that's your love!"

Mrs. Morel saw them into the train in Nottingham, then she returned home.

"There's one comfort," she said to Paul—"he'll never have any money to marry on, that I *am* sure of. And so she'll save him that way."

So she took cheer. Matters were not yet very desperate. She firmly believed William would never marry his Gipsy. She waited, and she kept Paul near to her.

All summer long William's letters had a feverish tone; he seemed unnatural and intense. Sometimes he was exaggeratedly jolly, usually he was flat and bitter in his letter.

"Ay," his mother said, "I'm afraid he's ruining himself against that creature, who isn't worthy of his love—no, no more than a rag doll."

He wanted to come home. The midsummer holiday was gone; it was a long while to Christmas. He wrote in wild excitement, saying he could come for Saturday and Sunday at Goose Fair, the first week in October.

"You are not well, my boy," said his mother, when she saw him. She was almost in tears at having him to herself again.

"No, I've not been well," he said. "I've seemed to have a dragging cold all the last month, but it's going, I think."

It was sunny October weather. He seemed wild with joy, like a schoolboy escaped; then again he was silent and reserved. He was more gaunt than ever, and there was a haggard look in his eyes.

"You are doing too much," said his mother to him.

He was doing extra work, trying to make some money to marry on, he said. He only talked to his mother once on the Saturday night; then he was sad and tender about his beloved.

"And yet, you know, mother, for all that, if I died she'd be broken-hearted for two months, and then she'd start to forget me. You'd see, she'd never come home here to look at my grave, not even once."

"Why, William," said his mother, "you're not going to die, so why talk about it?"

"But whether or not—" he replied.

"And she can't help it. She is like that, and if you choose her—well, you can't grumble," said his mother.

On the Sunday morning, as he was putting his collar on:

“Look,” he said to his mother, holding up his chin, “what a rash my collar’s made under my chin!”

Just at the junction of chin and throat was a big red inflammation.

“It ought not to do that,” said his mother. “Here, put a bit of this soothing ointment on. You should wear different collars.”

He went away on Sunday midnight, seeming better and more solid for his two days at home.

On Tuesday morning came a telegram from London that he was ill. Mrs. Morel got off her knees from washing the floor, read the telegram, called a neighbour, went to her landlady and borrowed a sovereign, put on her things, and set off. She hurried to Keston, caught an express for London in Nottingham. She had to wait in Nottingham nearly an hour. A small figure in her black bonnet, she was anxiously asking the porters if they knew how to get to Elmers End. The journey was three hours. She sat in her corner in a kind of stupor, never moving. At King’s Cross still no one could tell her how to get to Elmers End. Carrying her string bag, that contained her nightdress, a comb and brush, she went from person to person. At last they sent her underground to Cannon Street.

It was six o’clock when she arrived at William’s lodging. The blinds were not down.

“How is he?” she asked.

“No better,” said the landlady.

She followed the woman upstairs. William lay on the bed, with bloodshot eyes, his face rather discoloured. The clothes were tossed about, there was no fire in the room, a glass of milk stood on the stand at his bedside. No one had been with him.

“Why, my son!” said the mother bravely.

He did not answer. He looked at her, but did not see her. Then he began to say, in a dull voice, as if repeating a letter from dictation: “Owing to a leakage in the hold of this vessel, the sugar had set, and become converted into rock. It needed hacking—”

He was quite unconscious. It had been his business to examine some such cargo of sugar in the Port of London.

“How long has he been like this?” the mother asked the landlady.

“He got home at six o’clock on Monday morning, and he seemed to sleep all day; then in the night we heard him talking, and this morning he asked for you. So I wired, and we fetched the doctor.”

“Will you have a fire made?”

Mrs. Morel tried to soothe her son, to keep him still.

The doctor came. It was pneumonia, and, he said, a peculiar erysipelas, which had started under the chin where the collar chafed, and was spreading over the face. He hoped it would not get to the brain.

Mrs. Morel settled down to nurse. She prayed for William, prayed that he would recognise her. But the young man's face grew more discoloured. In the night she struggled with him. He raved, and raved, and would not come to consciousness. At two o'clock, in a dreadful paroxysm, he died.

Mrs. Morel sat perfectly still for an hour in the lodging bedroom; then she roused the household.

At six o'clock, with the aid of the charwoman, she laid him out; then she went round the dreary London village to the registrar and the doctor.

At nine o'clock to the cottage on Scargill Street came another wire:

"William died last night. Let father come, bring money."

Annie, Paul, and Arthur were at home; Mr. Morel was gone to work. The three children said not a word. Annie began to whimper with fear; Paul set off for his father.

It was a beautiful day. At Brinsley pit the white steam melted slowly in the sunshine of a soft blue sky; the wheels of the headstocks twinkled high up; the screen, shuffling its coal into the trucks, made a busy noise.

"I want my father; he's got to go to London," said the boy to the first man he met on the bank.

"Tha wants Walter Morel? Go in theer an' tell Joe Ward."

Paul went into the little top office.

"I want my father; he's got to go to London."

"Thy feyther? Is he down? What's his name?"

"Mr. Morel."

"What, Walter? Is owt amiss?"

"He's got to go to London."

The man went to the telephone and rang up the bottom office.

"Walter Morel's wanted, number 42, Hard. Summat's amiss; there's his lad here."

Then he turned round to Paul.

"He'll be up in a few minutes," he said.

Paul wandered out to the pit-top. He watched the chair come up, with its wagon of coal. The great iron cage sank back on its rest, a full carfle was hauled off, an empty tram run on to the chair, a bell ting'ed somewhere, the chair heaved, then dropped like a stone.

Paul did not realise William was dead; it was impossible, with such a bustle going on. The puller-off swung the small truck on to the turn-table, another man ran with it along the bank down the curving lines.

"And William is dead, and my mother's in London, and what will she be doing?" the boy asked himself, as if it were a conundrum.

He watched chair after chair come up, and still no father. At last, standing beside a wagon, a man's form! the chair sank on its rests, Morel stepped off. He was slightly lame from an accident.

"Is it thee, Paul? Is 'e worse?"

"You've got to go to London."

The two walked off the pit-bank, where men were watching curiously. As they came out and went along the railway, with the sunny autumn field on one side and a wall of trucks on the other, Morel said in a frightened voice:

"E's niver gone, child?"

"Yes."

"When wor't?"

"Last night. We had a telegram from my mother."

Morel walked on a few strides, then leaned up against a truck-side, his hand over his eyes. He was not crying. Paul stood looking round, waiting. On the weighing machine a truck trundled slowly. Paul saw everything, except his father leaning against the truck as if he were tired.

Morel had only once before been to London. He set off, scared and peaked, to help his wife. That was on Tuesday. The children were left alone in the house. Paul went to work, Arthur went to school, and Annie had in a friend to be with her.

On Saturday night, as Paul was turning the corner, coming home from Keston, he saw his mother and father, who had come to Sethley Bridge Station. They were walking in silence in the dark, tired, straggling apart. The boy waited.

"Mother!" he said, in the darkness.

Mrs. Morel's small figure seemed not to observe. He spoke again.

"Paul!" she said, uninterestedly.

She let him kiss her, but she seemed unaware of him.

In the house she was the same—small, white, and mute. She noticed nothing, she said nothing, only:

"The coffin will be here to-night, Walter. You'd better see about some help." Then, turning to the children: "We're bringing him home."

Then she relapsed into the same mute looking into space, her hands folded on her lap. Paul, looking at her, felt he could not breathe. The house was dead silent.

"I went to work, mother," he said plaintively.

"Did you?" she answered, dully.

After half an hour Morel, troubled and bewildered, came in again.

"Wheer s'll we ha'e him when he *does* come?" he asked his wife.

"In the front-room."

“Then I’d better shift th’ table?”

“Yes.”

“An’ ha’e him across th’ chairs?”

“You know there—Yes, I suppose so.”

Morel and Paul went, with a candle, into the parlour. There was no gas there. The father unscrewed the top of the big mahogany oval table, and cleared the middle of the room; then he arranged six chairs opposite each other, so that the coffin could stand on their beds.

“You niver seed such a length as he is!” said the miner, and watching anxiously as he worked.

Paul went to the bay window and looked out. The ash-tree stood monstrous and black in front of the wide darkness. It was a faintly luminous night. Paul went back to his mother.

At ten o’clock Morel called:

“He’s here!”

Everyone started. There was a noise of unbarring and unlocking the front door, which opened straight from the night into the room.

“Bring another candle,” called Morel.

Annie and Arthur went. Paul followed with his mother. He stood with his arm round her waist in the inner doorway. Down the middle of the cleared room waited six chairs, face to face. In the window, against the lace curtains, Arthur held up one candle, and by the open door, against the night, Annie stood leaning forward, her brass candlestick glittering.

There was the noise of wheels. Outside in the darkness of the street below Paul could see horses and a black vehicle, one lamp, and a few pale faces; then some men, miners, all in their shirt-sleeves, seemed to struggle in the obscurity. Presently two men appeared, bowed beneath a great weight. It was Morel and his neighbour.

“Steady!” called Morel, out of breath.

He and his fellow mounted the steep garden step, heaved into the candlelight with their gleaming coffin-end. Limbs of other men were seen struggling behind. Morel and Burns, in front, staggered; the great dark weight swayed.

“Steady, steady!” cried Morel, as if in pain.

All the six bearers were up in the small garden, holding the great coffin aloft. There were three more steps to the door. The yellow lamp of the carriage shone alone down the black road.

“Now then!” said Morel.

The coffin swayed, the men began to mount the three steps with their load. Annie’s candle flickered, and she whimpered as the first men appeared, and the limbs and bowed

heads of six men struggled to climb into the room, bearing the coffin that rode like sorrow on their living flesh.

“Oh, my son—my son!” Mrs. Morel sang softly, and each time the coffin swung to the unequal climbing of the men: “Oh, my son—my son—my son!”

“Mother!” Paul whimpered, his hand round her waist.

She did not hear.

“Oh, my son—my son!” she repeated.

Paul saw drops of sweat fall from his father’s brow. Six men were in the room—six coatless men, with yielding, struggling limbs, filling the room and knocking against the furniture. The coffin veered, and was gently lowered on to the chairs. The sweat fell from Morel’s face on its boards.

“My word, he’s a weight!” said a man, and the five miners sighed, bowed, and, trembling with the struggle, descended the steps again, closing the door behind them.

The family was alone in the parlour with the great polished box. William, when laid out, was six feet four inches long. Like a monument lay the bright brown, ponderous coffin. Paul thought it would never be got out of the room again. His mother was stroking the polished wood.

They buried him on the Monday in the little cemetery on the hillside that looks over the fields at the big church and the houses. It was sunny, and the white chrysanthemums frilled themselves in the warmth.

Mrs. Morel could not be persuaded, after this, to talk and take her old bright interest in life. She remained shut off. All the way home in the train she had said to herself: “If only it could have been me!”

When Paul came home at night he found his mother sitting, her day’s work done, with hands folded in her lap upon her coarse apron. She always used to have changed her dress and put on a black apron, before. Now Annie set his supper, and his mother sat looking blankly in front of her, her mouth shut tight. Then he beat his brains for news to tell her.

“Mother, Miss Jordan was down to-day, and she said my sketch of a colliery at work was beautiful.”

But Mrs. Morel took no notice. Night after night he forced himself to tell her things, although she did not listen. It drove him almost insane to have her thus. At last:

“What’s a-matter, mother?” he asked.

She did not hear.

“What’s a-matter?” he persisted. “Mother, what’s a-matter?”

“You know what’s the matter,” she said irritably, turning away.

The lad—he was sixteen years old—went to bed drearily. He was cut off and wretched through October, November and December. His mother tried, but she could not rouse herself. She could only brood on her dead son; he had been let to die so cruelly.

At last, on December 23, with his five shillings Christmas-box in his pocket, Paul wandered blindly home. His mother looked at him, and her heart stood still.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I’m badly, mother!” he replied. “Mr. Jordan gave me five shillings for a Christmas-box!”

He handed it to her with trembling hands. She put it on the table.

“You aren’t glad!” he reproached her; but he trembled violently.

“Where hurts you?” she said, unbuttoning his overcoat.

It was the old question.

“I feel badly, mother.”

She undressed him and put him to bed. He had pneumonia dangerously, the doctor said.

“Might he never have had it if I’d kept him at home, not let him go to Nottingham?” was one of the first things she asked.

“He might not have been so bad,” said the doctor.

Mrs. Morel stood condemned on her own ground.

“I should have watched the living, not the dead,” she told herself.

Paul was very ill. His mother lay in bed at nights with him; they could not afford a nurse. He grew worse, and the crisis approached. One night he tossed into consciousness in the ghastly, sickly feeling of dissolution, when all the cells in the body seem in intense irritability to be breaking down, and consciousness makes a last flare of struggle, like madness.

“I s’ll die, mother!” he cried, heaving for breath on the pillow.

She lifted him up, crying in a small voice:

“Oh, my son—my son!”

That brought him to. He realised her. His whole will rose up and arrested him. He put his head on her breast, and took ease of her for love.

“For some things,” said his aunt, “it was a good thing Paul was ill that Christmas. I believe it saved his mother.”

Paul was in bed for seven weeks. He got up white and fragile. His father had bought him a pot of scarlet and gold tulips. They used to flame in the window in the March sunshine as he sat on the sofa chattering to his mother. The two knitted together in perfect intimacy. Mrs. Morel’s life now rooted itself in Paul.

William had been a prophet. Mrs. Morel had a little present and a letter from Lily at Christmas. Mrs. Morel's sister had a letter at the New Year.

"I was at a ball last night. Some delightful people were there, and I enjoyed myself thoroughly," said the letter. "I had every dance—did not sit out one."

Mrs. Morel never heard any more of her.

Morel and his wife were gentle with each other for some time after the death of their son. He would go into a kind of daze, staring wide-eyed and blank across the room. Then he got up suddenly and hurried out to the Three Spots, returning in his normal state. But never in his life would he go for a walk up Shepstone, past the office where his son had worked, and he always avoided the cemetery.

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII LAD-AND-GIRL LOVE

Paul had been many times up to Willey Farm during the autumn. He was friends with the two youngest boys. Edgar, the eldest, would not condescend at first. And Miriam also refused to be approached. She was afraid of being set at nought, as by her own brothers. The girl was romantic in her soul. Everywhere was a Walter Scott heroine being loved by men with helmets or with plumes in their caps. She herself was something of a princess turned into a swine-girl in her own imagination. And she was afraid lest this boy, who, nevertheless, looked something like a Walter Scott hero, who could paint and speak French, and knew what algebra meant, and who went by train to Nottingham every day, might consider her simply as the swine-girl, unable to perceive the princess beneath; so she held aloof.

Her great companion was her mother. They were both brown-eyed, and inclined to be mystical, such women as treasure religion inside them, breathe it in their nostrils, and see the whole of life in a mist thereof. So to Miriam, Christ and God made one great figure, which she loved tremblingly and passionately when a tremendous sunset burned out the western sky, and Ediths, and Lucys, and Rowenas, Brian de Bois Guilberts, Rob Roys, and Guy Mannerings, rustled the sunny leaves in the morning, or sat in her bedroom aloft, alone, when it snowed. That was life to her. For the rest, she drudged in the house, which work she would not have minded had not her clean red floor been mucked up immediately by the trampling farm-boots of her brothers. She madly wanted her little brother of four to let her swathe him and stifle him in her love; she went to church reverently, with bowed head, and quivered in anguish from the vulgarity of the other choir-girls and from the common-sounding voice of the curate; she fought with her brothers, whom she considered brutal louts; and she held not her father in too high

esteem because he did not carry any mystical ideals cherished in his heart, but only wanted to have as easy a time as he could, and his meals when he was ready for them.

She hated her position as swine-girl. She wanted to be c