

Women in Love

by D. H. Lawrence

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CHAPTER I. SISTERS

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen sat one morning in the window-bay of their father's house in Beldover, working and talking. Ursula was stitching a piece of brightly-coloured embroidery, and Gudrun was drawing upon a board which she held on her knee. They were mostly silent, talking as their thoughts strayed through their minds.

“Ursula,” said Gudrun, “don't you *really want* to get married?” Ursula laid her embroidery in her lap and looked up. Her face was calm and considerate.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “It depends how you mean.”

Gudrun was slightly taken aback. She watched her sister for some moments.

“Well,” she said, ironically, “it usually means one thing! But don’t you think anyhow, you’d be—” she darkened slightly—“in a better position than you are in now.”

A shadow came over Ursula’s face.

“I might,” she said. “But I’m not sure.”

Again Gudrun paused, slightly irritated. She wanted to be quite definite.

“You don’t think one needs the *experience* of having been married?” she asked.

“Do you think it need *be* an experience?” replied Ursula.

“Bound to be, in some way or other,” said Gudrun, coolly. “Possibly undesirable, but bound to be an experience of some sort.”

“Not really,” said Ursula. “More likely to be the end of experience.”

Gudrun sat very still, to attend to this.

“Of course,” she said, “there’s *that* to consider.” This brought the conversation to a close. Gudrun, almost angrily, took up her rubber and began to rub out part of her drawing. Ursula stitched absorbedly.

“You wouldn’t consider a good offer?” asked Gudrun.

“I think I’ve rejected several,” said Ursula.

“*Really!*” Gudrun flushed dark—“But anything really worth while? Have you *really?*”

“A thousand a year, and an awfully nice man. I liked him awfully,” said Ursula.

“*Really!* But weren’t you fearfully tempted?”

“In the abstract but not in the concrete,” said Ursula. “When it comes to the point, one isn’t even tempted—oh, if I were tempted, I’d marry like a shot. I’m only tempted *not* to.” The faces of both sisters suddenly lit up with amusement.

“Isn’t it an amazing thing,” cried Gudrun, “how strong the temptation is, not to!” They both laughed, looking at each other. In their hearts they were frightened.

There was a long pause, whilst Ursula stitched and Gudrun went on with her sketch. The sisters were women, Ursula twenty-six, and Gudrun twenty-five. But both had the remote, virgin look of modern girls, sisters of Artemis rather than of Hebe. Gudrun was very beautiful, passive, soft-skinned, soft-limbed. She wore a dress of dark-blue silky stuff, with ruches of blue and green linen lace in the neck and sleeves; and she had emerald-green stockings. Her look of confidence and diffidence contrasted with Ursula’s sensitive expectancy. The provincial people, intimidated by Gudrun’s perfect *sang-froid* and exclusive bareness of manner, said of her: “She is a smart woman.” She had just come back from London, where she had spent several years, working at an art-school, as a student, and living a studio life.

“I was hoping now for a man to come along,” Gudrun said, suddenly catching her underlip between her teeth, and making a strange grimace, half sly smiling, half anguish. Ursula was afraid.

“So you have come home, expecting him here?” she laughed.

“Oh my dear,” cried Gudrun, strident, “I wouldn’t go out of my way to look for him. But if there did happen to come along a highly attractive individual of sufficient means—well—” she tailed off ironically. Then she looked searchingly at Ursula, as if to probe her. “Don’t you find yourself getting bored?” she asked of her sister. “Don’t you find, that things fail to materialize? *Nothing materializes!* Everything withers in the bud.”

“What withers in the bud?” asked Ursula.

“Oh, everything—oneself—things in general.” There was a pause, whilst each sister vaguely considered her fate.

“It does frighten one,” said Ursula, and again there was a pause. “But do you hope to get anywhere by just marrying?”

“It seems to be the inevitable next step,” said Gudrun. Ursula pondered this, with a little bitterness. She was a class mistress herself, in Willey Green Grammar School, as she had been for some years.

“I know,” she said, “it seems like that when one thinks in the abstract. But really imagine it: imagine any man one knows, imagine him coming home to one every evening, and saying ‘Hello,’ and giving one a kiss—”

There was a blank pause.

“Yes,” said Gudrun, in a narrowed voice. “It’s just impossible. The man makes it impossible.”

“Of course there’s children—” said Ursula doubtfully.

Gudrun’s face hardened.

“Do you *really* want children, Ursula?” she asked coldly. A dazzled, baffled look came on Ursula’s face.

“One feels it is still beyond one,” she said.

“*Do* you feel like that?” asked Gudrun. “I get no feeling whatever from the thought of bearing children.”

Gudrun looked at Ursula with a masklike, expressionless face. Ursula knitted her brows.

“Perhaps it isn’t genuine,” she faltered. “Perhaps one doesn’t really want them, in one’s soul—only superficially.” A hardness came over Gudrun’s face. She did not want to be too definite.

“When one thinks of other people’s children—” said Ursula.

Again Gudrun looked at her sister, almost hostile.

“Exactly,” she said, to close the conversation.

The two sisters worked on in silence, Ursula having always that strange brightness of an essential flame that is caught, meshed, contravened. She lived a good deal by herself, to herself, working, passing on from day to day, and always thinking, trying to lay hold on life, to grasp it in her own understanding. Her active living was suspended, but underneath, in the darkness, something was coming to pass. If only she could break through the last integuments! She seemed to try and put her hands out, like an infant in the womb, and she could not, not yet. Still she had a strange prescience, an intimation of something yet to come.

She laid down her work and looked at her sister. She thought Gudrun so *charming*, so infinitely charming, in her softness and her fine, exquisite richness of texture and delicacy of line. There was a certain playfulness about her too, such a piquancy or ironic suggestion, such an untouched reserve. Ursula admired her with all her soul.

“Why did you come home, Prune?” she asked.

Gudrun knew she was being admired. She sat back from her drawing and looked at Ursula, from under her finely-curved lashes.

“Why did I come back, Ursula?” she repeated. “I have asked myself a thousand times.”

“And don’t you know?”

“Yes, I think I do. I think my coming back home was just *reculer pour mieux sauter*.”

And she looked with a long, slow look of knowledge at Ursula.

“I know!” cried Ursula, looking slightly dazzled and falsified, and as if she did *not* know. “But where can one jump to?”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” said Gudrun, somewhat superbly. “If one jumps over the edge, one is bound to land somewhere.”

“But isn’t it very risky?” asked Ursula.

A slow mocking smile dawned on Gudrun’s face.

“Ah!” she said laughing. “What is it all but words!” And so again she closed the conversation. But Ursula was still brooding.

“And how do you find home, now you have come back to it?” she asked.

Gudrun paused for some moments, coldly, before answering. Then, in a cold truthful voice, she said:

“I find myself completely out of it.”

“And father?”

Gudrun looked at Ursula, almost with resentment, as if brought to bay.

“I haven’t thought about him: I’ve refrained,” she said coldly.

“Yes,” wavered Ursula; and the conversation was really at an end. The sisters found themselves confronted by a void, a terrifying chasm, as if they had looked over the edge.

They worked on in silence for some time, Gudrun’s cheek was flushed with repressed emotion. She resented its having been called into being.

“Shall we go out and look at that wedding?” she asked at length, in a voice that was too casual.

“Yes!” cried Ursula, too eagerly, throwing aside her sewing and leaping up, as if to escape something, thus betraying the tension of the situation and causing a friction of dislike to go over Gudrun’s nerves.

As she went upstairs, Ursula was aware of the house, of her home round about her. And she loathed it, the sordid, too-familiar place! She was afraid at the depth of her feeling against the home, the milieu, the whole atmosphere and condition of this obsolete life. Her feeling frightened her.

The two girls were soon walking swiftly down the main road of Beldover, a wide street, part shops, part dwelling-houses, utterly formless and sordid, without poverty. Gudrun, new from her life in Chelsea and Sussex, shrank cruelly from this amorphous ugliness of a small colliery town in the Midlands. Yet forward she went, through the whole sordid gamut of pettiness, the long amorphous, gritty street. She was exposed to every stare, she passed on through a stretch of torment. It was strange that she should have chosen to come back and test the full effect of this shapeless, barren ugliness upon herself. Why had she wanted to submit herself to it, did she still want to submit herself to it, the insufferable torture of these ugly, meaningless people, this defaced countryside? She felt like a beetle toiling in the dust. She was filled with repulsion.

They turned off the main road, past a black patch of common-garden, where sooty cabbage stumps stood shameless. No one thought to be ashamed. No one was ashamed of it all.

“It is like a country in an underworld,” said Gudrun. “The colliers bring it above-ground with them, shovel it up. Ursula, it’s marvellous, it’s really marvellous—it’s really wonderful, another world. The people are all ghouls, and everything is ghostly. Everything is a ghoulish replica of the real world, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It’s like being mad, Ursula.”

The sisters were crossing a black path through a dark, soiled field. On the left was a large landscape, a valley with collieries, and opposite hills with cornfields and woods, all blackened with distance, as if seen through a veil of crape. White and black smoke rose up in steady columns, magic within the dark air. Near at hand came the long rows of dwellings, approaching curved up the hill-slope, in straight lines along the brow of the hill. They were of darkened red brick, brittle, with dark slate roofs. The path on which the sisters walked was black, trodden-in by the feet of the recurrent colliers, and bounded from the field by iron fences; the stile that led again into the road was rubbed shiny by the moleskins of the passing miners. Now the two girls were going between

some rows of dwellings, of the poorer sort. Women, their arms folded over their coarse aprons, standing gossiping at the end of their block, stared after the Brangwen sisters with that long, unwearying stare of aborigines; children called out names.

Gudrun went on her way half dazed. If this were human life, if these were human beings, living in a complete world, then what was her own world, outside? She was aware of her grass-green stockings, her large grass-green velour hat, her full soft coat, of a strong blue colour. And she felt as if she were treading in the air, quite unstable, her heart was contracted, as if at any minute she might be precipitated to the ground. She was afraid.

She clung to Ursula, who, through long usage was inured to this violation of a dark, uncreated, hostile world. But all the time her heart was crying, as if in the midst of some ordeal: "I want to go back, I want to go away, I want not to know it, not to know that this exists." Yet she must go forward.

Ursula could feel her suffering.

"You hate this, don't you?" she asked.

"It bewilders me," stammered Gudrun.

"You won't stay long," replied Ursula.

And Gudrun went along, grasping at release.

They drew away from the colliery region, over the curve of the hill, into the purer country of the other side, towards Willey Green. Still the faint glamour of blackness persisted over the fields and the wooded hills, and seemed darkly to gleam in the air. It was a spring day, chill, with snatches of sunshine. Yellow celandines showed out from the hedge-bottoms, and in the cottage gardens of Willey Green, currant-bushes were breaking into leaf, and little flowers were coming white on the grey alyssum that hung over the stone walls.

Turning, they passed down the high-road, that went between high banks towards the church. There, in the lowest bend of the road, low under the trees, stood a little group of expectant people, waiting to see the wedding. The daughter of the chief mine-owner of the district, Thomas Crich, was getting married to a naval officer.

"Let us go back," said Gudrun, swerving away. "There are all those people."

And she hung wavering in the road.

"Never mind them," said Ursula, "they're all right. They all know me, they don't matter."

"But must we go through them?" asked Gudrun.

"They're quite all right, really," said Ursula, going forward. And together the two sisters approached the group of uneasy, watchful common people. They were chiefly women, colliers' wives of the more shiftless sort. They had watchful, underworld faces.

The two sisters held themselves tense, and went straight towards the gate. The women made way for them, but barely sufficient, as if grudging to yield ground. The sisters passed in silence through the stone gateway and up the steps, on the red carpet, a policeman estimating their progress.

“What price the stockings!” said a voice at the back of Gudrun. A sudden fierce anger swept over the girl, violent and murderous. She would have liked them all annihilated, cleared away, so that the world was left clear for her. How she hated walking up the churchyard path, along the red carpet, continuing in motion, in their sight.

“I won’t go into the church,” she said suddenly, with such final decision that Ursula immediately halted, turned round, and branched off up a small side path which led to the little private gate of the Grammar School, whose grounds adjoined those of the church.

Just inside the gate of the school shrubbery, outside the churchyard, Ursula sat down for a moment on the low stone wall under the laurel bushes, to rest. Behind her, the large red building of the school rose up peacefully, the windows all open for the holiday. Over the shrubs, before her, were the pale roofs and tower of the old church. The sisters were hidden by the foliage.

Gudrun sat down in silence. Her mouth was shut close, her face averted. She was regretting bitterly that she had ever come back. Ursula looked at her, and thought how amazingly beautiful she was, flushed with discomfiture. But she caused a constraint over Ursula’s nature, a certain weariness. Ursula wished to be alone, freed from the tightness, the enclosure of Gudrun’s presence.

“Are we going to stay here?” asked Gudrun.

“I was only resting a minute,” said Ursula, getting up as if rebuked. “We will stand in the corner by the fives-court, we shall see everything from there.”

For the moment, the sunshine fell brightly into the churchyard, there was a vague scent of sap and of spring, perhaps of violets from off the graves. Some white daisies were out, bright as angels. In the air, the unfolding leaves of a copper-beech were blood-red.

Punctually at eleven o’clock, the carriages began to arrive. There was a stir in the crowd at the gate, a concentration as a carriage drove up, wedding guests were mounting up the steps and passing along the red carpet to the church. They were all gay and excited because the sun was shining.

Gudrun watched them closely, with objective curiosity. She saw each one as a complete figure, like a character in a book, or a subject in a picture, or a marionette in a theatre, a finished creation. She loved to recognise their various characteristics, to place them in their true light, give them their own surroundings, settle them for ever as they passed before her along the path to the church. She knew them, they were finished, sealed and stamped and finished with, for her. There was none that had anything

unknown, unresolved, until the Criches themselves began to appear. Then her interest was piqued. Here was something not quite so preconcluded.

There came the mother, Mrs Crich, with her eldest son Gerald. She was a queer unkempt figure, in spite of the attempts that had obviously been made to bring her into line for the day. Her face was pale, yellowish, with a clear, transparent skin, she leaned forward rather, her features were strongly marked, handsome, with a tense, unseeing, predatory look. Her colourless hair was untidy, wisps floating down on to her sac coat of dark blue silk, from under her blue silk hat. She looked like a woman with a monomania, furtive almost, but heavily proud.

Her son was of a fair, sun-tanned type, rather above middle height, well-made, and almost exaggeratedly well-dressed. But about him also was the strange, guarded look, the unconscious glisten, as if he did not belong to the same creation as the people about him. Gudrun lighted on him at once. There was something northern about him that magnetised her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing. Perhaps he was thirty years old, perhaps more. His gleaming beauty, maleness, like a young, good-humoured, smiling wolf, did not blind her to the significant, sinister stillness in his bearing, the lurking danger of his unsubdued temper. "His totem is the wolf," she repeated to herself. "His mother is an old, unbroken wolf." And then she experienced a keen paroxysm, a transport, as if she had made some incredible discovery, known to nobody else on earth. A strange transport took possession of her, all her veins were in a paroxysm of violent sensation. "Good God!" she exclaimed to herself, "what is this?" And then, a moment after, she was saying assuredly, "I shall know more of that man." She was tortured with desire to see him again, a nostalgia, a necessity to see him again, to make sure it was not all a mistake, that she was not deluding herself, that she really felt this strange and overwhelming sensation on his account, this knowledge of him in her essence, this powerful apprehension of him. "Am I *really* singled out for him in some way, is there really some pale gold, arctic light that envelopes only us two?" she asked herself. And she could not believe it, she remained in a muse, scarcely conscious of what was going on around.

The bridesmaids were here, and yet the bridegroom had not come. Ursula wondered if something was amiss, and if the wedding would yet all go wrong. She felt troubled, as if it rested upon her. The chief bridesmaids had arrived. Ursula watched them come up the steps. One of them she knew, a tall, slow, reluctant woman with a weight of fair hair and a pale, long face. This was Hermione Roddice, a friend of the Criches. Now she came along, with her head held up, balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feathers, natural and grey. She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blanched face lifted up, not to see the world. She was rich. She wore a dress of silky, frail velvet, of pale yellow colour, and she carried a lot of small rose-coloured cyclamens. Her shoes and stockings were of brownish grey, like the feathers on her hat, her hair was heavy, she drifted along with a peculiar fixity of

the hips, a strange unwilling motion. She was impressive, in her lovely pale-yellow and brownish-rose, yet macabre, something repulsive. People were silent when she passed, impressed, roused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced. Her long, pale face, that she carried lifted up, somewhat in the Rossetti fashion, seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within her, and she was never allowed to escape.

Ursula watched her with fascination. She knew her a little. She was the most remarkable woman in the Midlands. Her father was a Derbyshire Baronet of the old school, she was a woman of the new school, full of intellectuality, and heavy, nerve-worn with consciousness. She was passionately interested in reform, her soul was given up to the public cause. But she was a man's woman, it was the manly world that held her.

She had various intimacies of mind and soul with various men of capacity. Ursula knew, among these men, only Rupert Birkin, who was one of the school-inspectors of the county. But Gudrun had met others, in London. Moving with her artist friends in different kinds of society, Gudrun had already come to know a good many people of repute and standing. She had met Hermione twice, but they did not take to each other. It would be queer to meet again down here in the Midlands, where their social standing was so diverse, after they had known each other on terms of equality in the houses of sundry acquaintances in town. For Gudrun had been a social success, and had her friends among the slack aristocracy that keeps touch with the arts.

Hermione knew herself to be well-dressed; she knew herself to be the social equal, if not far the superior, of anyone she was likely to meet in Willey Green. She knew she was accepted in the world of culture and of intellect. She was a *Kulturträger*, a medium for the culture of ideas. With all that was highest, whether in society or in thought or in public action, or even in art, she was at one, she moved among the foremost, at home with them. No one could put her down, no one could make mock of her, because she stood among the first, and those that were against her were below her, either in rank, or in wealth, or in high association of thought and progress and understanding. So, she was invulnerable. All her life, she had sought to make herself invulnerable, unassailable, beyond reach of the world's judgment.

And yet her soul was tortured, exposed. Even walking up the path to the church, confident as she was that in every respect she stood beyond all vulgar judgment, knowing perfectly that her appearance was complete and perfect, according to the first standards, yet she suffered a torture, under her confidence and her pride, feeling herself exposed to wounds and to mockery and to despite. She always felt vulnerable, vulnerable, there was always a secret chink in her armour. She did not know herself what it was. It was a lack of robust self, she had no natural sufficiency, there was a terrible void, a lack, a deficiency of being within her.

And she wanted someone to close up this deficiency, to close it up for ever. She craved for Rupert Birkin. When he was there, she felt complete, she was sufficient, whole. For the rest of time she was established on the sand, built over a chasm, and, in spite of all her vanity and securities, any common maid-servant of positive, robust temper could fling her down this bottomless pit of insufficiency, by the slightest movement of jeering or contempt. And all the while the pensive, tortured woman piled up her own defences of æsthetic knowledge, and culture, and world-visions, and disinterestedness. Yet she could never stop up the terrible gap of insufficiency.

If only Birkin would form a close and abiding connection with her, she would be safe during this fretful voyage of life. He could make her sound and triumphant, triumphant over the very angels of heaven. If only he would do it! But she was tortured with fear, with misgiving. She made herself beautiful, she strove so hard to come to that degree of beauty and advantage, when he should be convinced. But always there was a deficiency.

He was perverse too. He fought her off, he always fought her off. The more she strove to bring him to her, the more he battled her back. And they had been lovers now, for years. Oh, it was so wearying, so aching; she was so tired. But still she believed in herself. She knew he was trying to leave her. She knew he was trying to break away from her finally, to be free. But still she believed in her strength to keep him, she believed in her own higher knowledge. His own knowledge was high, she was the central touchstone of truth. She only needed his conjunction with her.

And this, this conjunction with her, which was his highest fulfilment also, with the perverseness of a wilful child he wanted to deny. With the wilfulness of an obstinate child, he wanted to break the holy connection that was between them.

He would be at this wedding; he was to be groom's man. He would be in the church, waiting. He would know when she came. She shuddered with nervous apprehension and desire as she went through the church-door. He would be there, surely he would see how beautiful her dress was, surely he would see how she had made herself beautiful for him. He would understand, he would be able to see how she was made for him, the first, how she was, for him, the highest. Surely at last he would be able to accept his highest fate, he would not deny her.

In a little convulsion of too-tired yearning, she entered the church and looked slowly along her cheeks for him, her slender body convulsed with agitation. As best man, he would be standing beside the altar. She looked slowly, deferring in her certainty.

And then, he was not there. A terrible storm came over her, as if she were drowning. She was possessed by a devastating hopelessness. And she approached mechanically to the altar. Never had she known such a pang of utter and final hopelessness. It was beyond death, so utterly null, desert.

The bridegroom and the groom's man had not yet come. There was a growing consternation outside. Ursula felt almost responsible. She could not bear it that the bride should arrive, and no groom. The wedding must not be a fiasco, it must not.

But here was the bride's carriage, adorned with ribbons and cockades. Gaily the grey horses curvetted to their destination at the church-gate, a laughter in the whole movement. Here was the quick of all laughter and pleasure. The door of the carriage was thrown open, to let out the very blossom of the day. The people on the roadway murmured faintly with the discontented murmuring of a crowd.

The father stepped out first into the air of the morning, like a shadow. He was a tall, thin, careworn man, with a thin black beard that was touched with grey. He waited at the door of the carriage patiently, self-obliterated.

In the opening of the doorway was a shower of fine foliage and flowers, a whiteness of satin and lace, and a sound of a gay voice saying:

“How do I get out?”

A ripple of satisfaction ran through the expectant people. They pressed near to receive her, looking with zest at the stooping blond head with its flower buds, and at the delicate, white, tentative foot that was reaching down to the step of the carriage. There was a sudden foaming rush, and the bride like a sudden surf-rush, floating all white beside her father in the morning shadow of trees, her veil flowing with laughter.

“That's done it!” she said.

She put her hand on the arm of her care-worn, sallow father, and frothing her light draperies, proceeded over the eternal red carpet. Her father, mute and yellowish, his black beard making him look more careworn, mounted the steps stiffly, as if his spirit were absent; but the laughing mist of the bride went along with him undiminished.

And no bridegroom had arrived! It was intolerable for her. Ursula, her heart strained with anxiety, was watching the hill beyond; the white, descending road, that should give sight of him. There was a carriage. It was running. It had just come into sight. Yes, it was he. Ursula turned towards the bride and the people, and, from her place of vantage, gave an inarticulate cry. She wanted to warn them that he was coming. But her cry was inarticulate and inaudible, and she flushed deeply, between her desire and her wincing confusion.

The carriage rattled down the hill, and drew near. There was a shout from the people. The bride, who had just reached the top of the steps, turned round gaily to see what was the commotion. She saw a confusion among the people, a cab pulling up, and her lover dropping out of the carriage, and dodging among the horses and into the crowd.

“Tibs! Tibs!” she cried in her sudden, mocking excitement, standing high on the path in the sunlight and waving her bouquet. He, dodging with his hat in his hand, had not heard.

“Tibs!” she cried again, looking down to him.

He glanced up, unaware, and saw the bride and her father standing on the path above him. A queer, startled look went over his face. He hesitated for a moment. Then he gathered himself together for a leap, to overtake her.

“Ah-h-h!” came her strange, intaken cry, as, on the reflex, she started, turned and fled, scudding with an unthinkable swift beating of her white feet and fraying of her white garments, towards the church. Like a hound the young man was after her, leaping the steps and swinging past her father, his supple haunches working like those of a hound that bears down on the quarry.

“Ay, after her!” cried the vulgar women below, carried suddenly into the sport.

She, her flowers shaken from her like froth, was steadying herself to turn the angle of the church. She glanced behind, and with a wild cry of laughter and challenge, veered, poised, and was gone beyond the grey stone buttress. In another instant the bridegroom, bent forward as he ran, had caught the angle of the silent stone with his hand, and had swung himself out of sight, his supple, strong loins vanishing in pursuit.

Instantly cries and exclamations of excitement burst from the crowd at the gate. And then Ursula noticed again the dark, rather stooping figure of Mr Crich, waiting suspended on the path, watching with expressionless face the flight to the church. It was over, and he turned round to look behind him, at the figure of Rupert Birkin, who at once came forward and joined him.

“We’ll bring up the rear,” said Birkin, a faint smile on his face.

“Ay!” replied the father laconically. And the two men turned together up the path.

Birkin was as thin as Mr Crich, pale and ill-looking. His figure was narrow but nicely made. He went with a slight trail of one foot, which came only from self-consciousness. Although he was dressed correctly for his part, yet there was an innate incongruity which caused a slight ridiculousness in his appearance. His nature was clever and separate, he did not fit at all in the conventional occasion. Yet he subordinated himself to the common idea, travestied himself.

He affected to be quite ordinary, perfectly and marvellously commonplace. And he did it so well, taking the tone of his surroundings, adjusting himself quickly to his interlocutor and his circumstance, that he achieved a verisimilitude of ordinary commonplaceness that usually propitiated his onlookers for the moment, disarmed them from attacking his singleness.

Now he spoke quite easily and pleasantly to Mr Crich, as they walked along the path; he played with situations like a man on a tight-rope: but always on a tight-rope, pretending nothing but ease.

“I’m sorry we are so late,” he was saying. “We couldn’t find a button-hook, so it took us a long time to button our boots. But you were to the moment.”

“We are usually to time,” said Mr Crich.

“And I’m always late,” said Birkin. “But today I was *really* punctual, only accidentally not so. I’m sorry.”

The two men were gone, there was nothing more to see, for the time. Ursula was left thinking about Birkin. He piqued her, attracted her, and annoyed her.

She wanted to know him more. She had spoken with him once or twice, but only in his official capacity as inspector. She thought he seemed to acknowledge some kinship between her and him, a natural, tacit understanding, a using of the same language. But there had been no time for the understanding to develop. And something kept her from him, as well as attracted her to him. There was a certain hostility, a hidden ultimate reserve in him, cold and inaccessible.

Yet she wanted to know him.

“What do you think of Rupert Birkin?” she asked, a little reluctantly, of Gudrun. She did not want to discuss him.

“What do I think of Rupert Birkin?” repeated Gudrun. “I think he’s attractive—decidedly attractive. What I can’t stand about him is his way with other people—his way of treating any little fool as if she were his greatest consideration. One feels so awfully sold, oneself.”

“Why does he do it?” said Ursula.

“Because he has no real critical faculty—of people, at all events,” said Gudrun. “I tell you, he treats any little fool as he treats me or you—and it’s such an insult.”

“Oh, it is,” said Ursula. “One must discriminate.”

“One *must* discriminate,” repeated Gudrun. “But he’s a wonderful chap, in other respects—a marvellous personality. But you can’t trust him.”

“Yes,” said Ursula vaguely. She was always forced to assent to Gudrun’s pronouncements, even when she was not in accord altogether.

The sisters sat silent, waiting for the wedding party to come out. Gudrun was impatient of talk. She wanted to think about Gerald Crich. She wanted to see if the strong feeling she had got from him was real. She wanted to have herself ready.

Inside the church, the wedding was going on. Hermione Roddice was thinking only of Birkin. He stood near her. She seemed to gravitate physically towards him. She wanted to stand touching him. She could hardly be sure he was near her, if she did not touch him. Yet she stood subjected through the wedding service.

She had suffered so bitterly when he did not come, that still she was dazed. Still she was gnawed as by a neuralgia, tormented by his potential absence from her. She had awaited him in a faint delirium of nervous torture. As she stood bearing herself pensively, the rapt look on her face, that seemed spiritual, like the angels, but which came from torture, gave her a certain poignancy that tore his heart with pity. He saw her bowed head, her rapt face, the face of an almost demoniacal ecstatic. Feeling him looking, she lifted her face and sought his eyes, her own beautiful grey eyes flaring him

a great signal. But he avoided her look, she sank her head in torment and shame, the gnawing at her heart going on. And he too was tortured with shame, and ultimate dislike, and with acute pity for her, because he did not want to meet her eyes, he did not want to receive her flare of recognition.

The bride and bridegroom were married, the party went into the vestry. Hermione crowded involuntarily up against Birkin, to touch him. And he endured it.

Outside, Gudrun and Ursula listened for their father's playing on the organ. He would enjoy playing a wedding march. Now the married pair were coming! The bells were ringing, making the air shake. Ursula wondered if the trees and the flowers could feel the vibration, and what they thought of it, this strange motion in the air. The bride was quite demure on the arm of the bridegroom, who stared up into the sky before him, shutting and opening his eyes unconsciously, as if he were neither here nor there. He looked rather comical, blinking and trying to be in the scene, when emotionally he was violated by his exposure to a crowd. He looked a typical naval officer, manly, and up to his duty.

Birkin came with Hermione. She had a rapt, triumphant look, like the fallen angels restored, yet still subtly demoniacal, now she held Birkin by the arm. And he was expressionless, neutralised, possessed by her as if it were his fate, without question.

Gerald Crich came, fair, good-looking, healthy, with a great reserve of energy. He was erect and complete, there was a strange stealth glistening through his amiable, almost happy appearance. Gudrun rose sharply and went away. She could not bear it. She wanted to be alone, to know this strange, sharp inoculation that had changed the whole temper of her blood.

CHAPTER II. SHORTLANDS

The Brangwens went home to Beldover, the wedding-party gathered at Shortlands, the Criches' home. It was a long, low old house, a sort of manor farm, that spread along the top of a slope just beyond the narrow little lake of Willey Water. Shortlands looked across a sloping meadow that might be a park, because of the large, solitary trees that stood here and there, across the water of the narrow lake, at the wooded hill that successfully hid the colliery valley beyond, but did not quite hide the rising smoke. Nevertheless, the scene was rural and picturesque, very peaceful, and the house had a charm of its own.

It was crowded now with the family and the wedding guests. The father, who was not well, withdrew to rest. Gerald was host. He stood in the homely entrance hall, friendly and easy, attending to the men. He seemed to take pleasure in his social functions, he smiled, and was abundant in hospitality.

The women wandered about in a little confusion, chased hither and thither by the three married daughters of the house. All the while there could be heard the characteristic, imperious voice of one Crich woman or another calling "Helen, come here a minute," "Marjory, I want you—here." "Oh, I say, Mrs Witham—" There was a great rustling of skirts, swift glimpses of smartly-dressed women, a child danced through the hall and back again, a maidservant came and went hurriedly.

Meanwhile the men stood in calm little groups, chatting, smoking, pretending to pay no heed to the rustling animation of the women's world. But they could not really talk, because of the glassy ravel of women's excited, cold laughter and running voices. They waited, uneasy, suspended, rather bored. But Gerald remained as if genial and happy, unaware that he was waiting or unoccupied, knowing himself the very pivot of the occasion.

Suddenly Mrs Crich came noiselessly into the room, peering about with her strong, clear face. She was still wearing her hat, and her sac coat of blue silk.

"What is it, mother?" said Gerald.

"Nothing, nothing!" she answered vaguely. And she went straight towards Birkin, who was talking to a Crich brother-in-law.

"How do you do, Mr Birkin," she said, in her low voice, that seemed to take no count of her guests. She held out her hand to him.

"Oh Mrs Crich," replied Birkin, in his readily-changing voice, "I couldn't come to you before."

"I don't know half the people here," she said, in her low voice. Her son-in-law moved uneasily away.

"And you don't like strangers?" laughed Birkin. "I myself can never see why one should take account of people, just because they happen to be in the room with one: why *should* I know they are there?"

"Why indeed, why indeed!" said Mrs Crich, in her low, tense voice. "Except that they *are* there. I don't know people whom I find in the house. The children introduce them to me—'Mother, this is Mr So-and-so.' I am no further. What has Mr So-and-so to do with his own name?—and what have I to do with either him or his name?"

She looked up at Birkin. She startled him. He was flattered too that she came to talk to him, for she took hardly any notice of anybody. He looked down at her tense clear face, with its heavy features, but he was afraid to look into her heavy-seeing blue eyes. He noticed instead how her hair looped in slack, slovenly strands over her rather beautiful ears, which were not quite clean. Neither was her neck perfectly clean. Even in that he seemed to belong to her, rather than to the rest of the company; though, he thought to himself, he was always well washed, at any rate at the neck and ears.

He smiled faintly, thinking these things. Yet he was tense, feeling that he and the elderly, estranged woman were conferring together like traitors, like enemies within the

camp of the other people. He resembled a deer, that throws one ear back upon the trail behind, and one ear forward, to know what is ahead.

“People don’t really matter,” he said, rather unwilling to continue.

The mother looked up at him with sudden, dark interrogation, as if doubting his sincerity.

“How do you mean, *matter*?” she asked sharply.

“Not many people are anything at all,” he answered, forced to go deeper than he wanted to. “They jingle and giggle. It would be much better if they were just wiped out. Essentially, they don’t exist, they aren’t there.”

She watched him steadily while he spoke.

“But we didn’t imagine them,” she said sharply.

“There’s nothing to imagine, that’s why they don’t exist.”

“Well,” she said, “I would hardly go as far as that. There they are, whether they exist or no. It doesn’t rest with me to decide on their existence. I only know that I can’t be expected to take count of them all. You can’t expect me to know them, just because they happen to be there. As far as *I* go they might as well not be there.”

“Exactly,” he replied.

“Mightn’t they?” she asked again.

“Just as well,” he repeated. And there was a little pause.

“Except that they *are* there, and that’s a nuisance,” she said. “There are my sons-in-law,” she went on, in a sort of monologue. “Now Laura’s got married, there’s another. And I really don’t know John from James yet. They come up to me and call me mother. I know what they will say—‘how are you, mother?’ I ought to say, ‘I am not your mother, in any sense.’ But what is the use? There they are. I have had children of my own. I suppose I know them from another woman’s children.”

“One would suppose so,” he said.

She looked at him, somewhat surprised, forgetting perhaps that she was talking to him. And she lost her thread.

She looked round the room, vaguely. Birkin could not guess what she was looking for, nor what she was thinking. Evidently she noticed her sons.

“Are my children all there?” she asked him abruptly.

He laughed, startled, afraid perhaps.

“I scarcely know them, except Gerald,” he replied.

“Gerald!” she exclaimed. “He’s the most wanting of them all. You’d never think it, to look at him now, would you?”

“No,” said Birkin.

The mother looked across at her eldest son, stared at him heavily for some time.

“Ay,” she said, in an incomprehensible monosyllable, that sounded profoundly cynical. Birkin felt afraid, as if he dared not realise. And Mrs Crich moved away, forgetting him. But she returned on her traces.

“I should like him to have a friend,” she said. “He has never had a friend.”

Birkin looked down into her eyes, which were blue, and watching heavily. He could not understand them. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” he said to himself, almost flippantly.

Then he remembered, with a slight shock, that that was Cain’s cry. And Gerald was Cain, if anybody. Not that he was Cain, either, although he had slain his brother. There was such a thing as pure accident, and the consequences did not attach to one, even though one had killed one’s brother in such wise. Gerald as a boy had accidentally killed his brother. What then? Why seek to draw a brand and a curse across the life that had caused the accident? A man can live by accident, and die by accident. Or can he not? Is every man’s life subject to pure accident, is it only the race, the genus, the species, that has a universal reference? Or is this not true, is there no such thing as pure accident? Has *everything* that happens a universal significance? Has it? Birkin, pondering as he stood there, had forgotten Mrs Crich, as she had forgotten him.

He did not believe that there was any such thing as accident. It all hung together, in the deepest sense.

Just as he had decided this, one of the Crich daughters came up, saying:

“Won’t you come and take your hat off, mother dear? We shall be sitting down to eat in a minute, and it’s a formal occasion, darling, isn’t it?” She drew her arm through her mother’s, and they went away. Birkin immediately went to talk to the nearest man.

The gong sounded for the luncheon. The men looked up, but no move was made to the dining-room. The women of the house seemed not to feel that the sound had meaning for them. Five minutes passed by. The elderly manservant, Crowther, appeared in the doorway exasperatedly. He looked with appeal at Gerald. The latter took up a large, curved conch shell, that lay on a shelf, and without reference to anybody, blew a shattering blast. It was a strange rousing noise, that made the heart beat. The summons was almost magical. Everybody came running, as if at a signal. And then the crowd in one impulse moved to the dining-room.

Gerald waited a moment, for his sister to play hostess. He knew his mother would pay no attention to her duties. But his sister merely crowded to her seat. Therefore the young man, slightly too dictatorial, directed the guests to their places.

There was a moment’s lull, as everybody looked at the *hors d’oeuvres* that were being handed round. And out of this lull, a girl of thirteen or fourteen, with her long hair down her back, said in a calm, self-possessed voice:

“Gerald, you forget father, when you make that unearthly noise.”

“Do I?” he answered. And then, to the company, “Father is lying down, he is not quite well.”

“How is he, really?” called one of the married daughters, peeping round the immense wedding cake that towered up in the middle of the table shedding its artificial flowers.

“He has no pain, but he feels tired,” replied Winifred, the girl with the hair down her back.

The wine was filled, and everybody was talking boisterously. At the far end of the table sat the mother, with her loosely-looped hair. She had Birkin for a neighbour. Sometimes she glanced fiercely down the rows of faces, bending forwards and staring unceremoniously. And she would say in a low voice to Birkin:

“Who is that young man?”

“I don’t know,” Birkin answered discreetly.

“Have I seen him before?” she asked.

“I don’t think so. *I haven’t*,” he replied. And she was satisfied. Her eyes closed wearily, a peace came over her face, she looked like a queen in repose. Then she started, a little social smile came on her face, for a moment she looked the pleasant hostess. For a moment she bent graciously, as if everyone were welcome and delightful. And then immediately the shadow came back, a sullen, eagle look was on her face, she glanced from under her brows like a sinister creature at bay, hating them all.

“Mother,” called Diana, a handsome girl a little older than Winifred, “I may have wine, mayn’t I?”

“Yes, you may have wine,” replied the mother automatically, for she was perfectly indifferent to the question.

And Diana beckoned to the footman to fill her glass.

“Gerald shouldn’t forbid me,” she said calmly, to the company at large.

“All right, Di,” said her brother amiably. And she glanced challenge at him as she drank from her glass.

There was a strange freedom, that almost amounted to anarchy, in the house. It was rather a resistance to authority, than liberty. Gerald had some command, by mere force of personality, not because of any granted position. There was a quality in his voice, amiable but dominant, that cowed the others, who were all younger than he.

Hermione was having a discussion with the bridegroom about nationality.

“No,” she said, “I think that the appeal to patriotism is a mistake. It is like one house of business rivalling another house of business.”

“Well you can hardly say that, can you?” exclaimed Gerald, who had a real *passion* for discussion. “You couldn’t call a race a business concern, could you?—and nationality roughly corresponds to race, I think. I think it is *meant* to.”

There was a moment’s pause. Gerald and Hermione were always strangely but politely and evenly inimical.

“Do you think race corresponds with nationality?” she asked musingly, with expressionless indecision.

Birkin knew she was waiting for him to participate. And dutifully he spoke up.

“I think Gerald is right—race is the essential element in nationality, in Europe at least,” he said.

Again Hermione paused, as if to allow this statement to cool. Then she said with strange assumption of authority:

“Yes, but even so, is the patriotic appeal an appeal to the racial instinct? Is it not rather an appeal to the proprietary instinct, the *commercial* instinct? And isn’t this what we mean by nationality?”

“Probably,” said Birkin, who felt that such a discussion was out of place and out of time.

But Gerald was now on the scent of argument.

“A race may have its commercial aspect,” he said. “In fact it must. It is like a family. You *must* make provision. And to make provision you have got to strive against other families, other nations. I don’t see why you shouldn’t.”

Again Hermione made a pause, domineering and cold, before she replied: “Yes, I think it is always wrong to provoke a spirit of rivalry. It makes bad blood. And bad blood accumulates.”

“But you can’t do away with the spirit of emulation altogether?” said Gerald. “It is one of the necessary incentives to production and improvement.”

“Yes,” came Hermione’s sauntering response. “I think you can do away with it.”

“I must say,” said Birkin, “I detest the spirit of emulation.” Hermione was biting a piece of bread, pulling it from between her teeth with her fingers, in a slow, slightly derisive movement. She turned to Birkin.

“You do hate it, yes,” she said, intimate and gratified.

“Detest it,” he repeated.

“Yes,” she murmured, assured and satisfied.

“But,” Gerald insisted, “you don’t allow one man to take away his neighbour’s living, so why should you allow one nation to take away the living from another nation?”

There was a long slow murmur from Hermione before she broke into speech, saying with a laconic indifference:

“It is not always a question of possessions, is it? It is not all a question of goods?”

Gerald was nettled by this implication of vulgar materialism.

“Yes, more or less,” he retorted. “If I go and take a man’s hat from off his head, that hat becomes a symbol of that man’s liberty. When he fights me for his hat, he is fighting me for his liberty.”

Hermione was nonplussed.

“Yes,” she said, irritated. “But that way of arguing by imaginary instances is not supposed to be genuine, is it? A man does *not* come and take my hat from off my head, does he?”

“Only because the law prevents him,” said Gerald.

“Not only,” said Birkin. “Ninety-nine men out of a hundred don’t want my hat.”

“That’s a matter of opinion,” said Gerald.

“Or the hat,” laughed the bridegroom.

“And if he does want my hat, such as it is,” said Birkin, “why, surely it is open to me to decide, which is a greater loss to me, my hat, or my liberty as a free and indifferent man. If I am compelled to offer fight, I lose the latter. It is a question which is worth more to me, my pleasant liberty of conduct, or my hat.”

“Yes,” said Hermione, watching Birkin strangely. “Yes.”

“But would you let somebody come and snatch your hat off your head?” the bride asked of Hermione.

The face of the tall straight woman turned slowly and as if drugged to this new speaker.

“No,” she replied, in a low inhuman tone, that seemed to contain a chuckle. “No, I shouldn’t let anybody take my hat off my head.”

“How would you prevent it?” asked Gerald.

“I don’t know,” replied Hermione slowly. “Probably I should kill him.”

There was a strange chuckle in her tone, a dangerous and convincing humour in her bearing.

“Of course,” said Gerald, “I can see Rupert’s point. It is a question to him whether his hat or his peace of mind is more important.”

“Peace of body,” said Birkin.

“Well, as you like there,” replied Gerald. “But how are you going to decide this for a nation?”

“Heaven preserve me,” laughed Birkin.

“Yes, but suppose you have to?” Gerald persisted.

“Then it is the same. If the national crown-piece is an old hat, then the thieving gent may have it.”

“But *can* the national or racial hat be an old hat?” insisted Gerald.

“Pretty well bound to be, I believe,” said Birkin.

“I’m not so sure,” said Gerald.

“I don’t agree, Rupert,” said Hermione.

“All right,” said Birkin.

“I’m all for the old national hat,” laughed Gerald.

“And a fool you look in it,” cried Diana, his pert sister who was just in her teens.

“Oh, we’re quite out of our depths with these old hats,” cried Laura Crich. “Dry up now, Gerald. We’re going to drink toasts. Let us drink toasts. Toasts—glasses, glasses—now then, toasts! Speech! Speech!”

Birkin, thinking about race or national death, watched his glass being filled with champagne. The bubbles broke at the rim, the man withdrew, and feeling a sudden thirst at the sight of the fresh wine, Birkin drank up his glass. A queer little tension in the room roused him. He felt a sharp constraint.

“Did I do it by accident, or on purpose?” he asked himself. And he decided that, according to the vulgar phrase, he had done it “accidentally on purpose.” He looked round at the hired footman. And the hired footman came, with a silent step of cold servant-like disapprobation. Birkin decided that he detested toasts, and footmen, and assemblies, and mankind altogether, in most of its aspects. Then he rose to make a speech. But he was somehow disgusted.

At length it was over, the meal. Several men strolled out into the garden. There was a lawn, and flower-beds, and at the boundary an iron fence shutting off the little field or park. The view was pleasant; a highroad curving round the edge of a low lake, under the trees. In the spring air, the water gleamed and the opposite woods were purplish with new life. Charming Jersey cattle came to the fence, breathing hoarsely from their velvet muzzles at the human beings, expecting perhaps a crust.

Birkin leaned on the fence. A cow was breathing wet hotness on his hand.

“Pretty cattle, very pretty,” said Marshall, one of the brothers-in-law. “They give the best milk you can have.”

“Yes,” said Birkin.

“Eh, my little beauty, eh, my beauty!” said Marshall, in a queer high falsetto voice, that caused the other man to have convulsions of laughter in his stomach.

“Who won the race, Lupton?” he called to the bridegroom, to hide the fact that he was laughing.

The bridegroom took his cigar from his mouth.

“The race?” he exclaimed. Then a rather thin smile came over his face. He did not want to say anything about the flight to the church door. “We got there together. At least she touched first, but I had my hand on her shoulder.”

“What’s this?” asked Gerald.

Birkin told him about the race of the bride and the bridegroom.

“H’m!” said Gerald, in disapproval. “What made you late then?”

“Lupton would talk about the immortality of the soul,” said Birkin, “and then he hadn’t got a button-hook.”

“Oh God!” cried Marshall. “The immortality of the soul on your wedding day! Hadn’t you got anything better to occupy your mind?”

“What’s wrong with it?” asked the bridegroom, a clean-shaven naval man, flushing sensitively.

“Sounds as if you were going to be executed instead of married. *The immortality of the soul!*” repeated the brother-in-law, with most killing emphasis.

But he fell quite flat.

“And what did you decide?” asked Gerald, at once pricking up his ears at the thought of a metaphysical discussion.

“You don’t want a soul today, my boy,” said Marshall. “It’d be in your road.”

“Christ! Marshall, go and talk to somebody else,” cried Gerald, with sudden impatience.

“By God, I’m willing,” said Marshall, in a temper. “Too much bloody soul and talk altogether—”

He withdrew in a dudgeon, Gerald staring after him with angry eyes, that grew gradually calm and amiable as the stoutly-built form of the other man passed into the distance.

“There’s one thing, Lupton,” said Gerald, turning suddenly to the bridegroom. “Laura won’t have brought such a fool into the family as Lottie did.”

“Comfort yourself with that,” laughed Birkin.

“I take no notice of them,” laughed the bridegroom.

“What about this race then—who began it?” Gerald asked.

“We were late. Laura was at the top of the churchyard steps when our cab came up. She saw Lupton bolting towards her. And she fled. But why do you look so cross? Does it hurt your sense of the family dignity?”

“It does, rather,” said Gerald. “If you’re doing a thing, do it properly, and if you’re not going to do it properly, leave it alone.”

“Very nice aphorism,” said Birkin.

“Don’t you agree?” asked Gerald.

“Quite,” said Birkin. “Only it bores me rather, when you become aphoristic.”

“Damn you, Rupert, you want all the aphorisms your own way,” said Gerald.

“No. I want them out of the way, and you’re always shoving them in it.”

Gerald smiled grimly at this humorism. Then he made a little gesture of dismissal, with his eyebrows.

“You don’t believe in having any standard of behaviour at all, do you?” he challenged Birkin, censoriously.

“Standard—no. I hate standards. But they’re necessary for the common ruck. Anybody who is anything can just be himself and do as he likes.”

“But what do you mean by being himself?” said Gerald. “Is that an aphorism or a cliché?”

“I mean just doing what you want to do. I think it was perfect good form in Laura to bolt from Lupton to the church door. It was almost a masterpiece in good form. It’s the hardest thing in the world to act spontaneously on one’s impulses—and it’s the only really gentlemanly thing to do—provided you’re fit to do it.”

“You don’t expect me to take you seriously, do you?” asked Gerald.

“Yes, Gerald, you’re one of the very few people I do expect that of.”

“Then I’m afraid I can’t come up to your expectations here, at any rate. You think people should just do as they like.”

“I think they always do. But I should like them to like the purely individual thing in themselves, which makes them act in singleness. And they only like to do the collective thing.”

“And I,” said Gerald grimly, “shouldn’t like to be in a world of people who acted individually and spontaneously, as you call it. We should have everybody cutting everybody else’s throat in five minutes.”

“That means *you* would like to be cutting everybody’s throat,” said Birkin.

“How does that follow?” asked Gerald crossly.

“No man,” said Birkin, “cuts another man’s throat unless he wants to cut it, and unless the other man wants it cutting. This is a complete truth. It takes two people to make a murder: a murderer and a murderee. And a murderee is a man who is murderable. And a man who is murderable is a man who in a profound if hidden lust desires to be murdered.”

“Sometimes you talk pure nonsense,” said Gerald to Birkin. “As a matter of fact, none of us wants our throat cut, and most other people would like to cut it for us—some time or other—”

“It’s a nasty view of things, Gerald,” said Birkin, “and no wonder you are afraid of yourself and your own unhappiness.”

“How am I afraid of myself?” said Gerald; “and I don’t think I am unhappy.”

“You seem to have a lurking desire to have your gizzard slit, and imagine every man has his knife up his sleeve for you,” Birkin said.

“How do you make that out?” said Gerald.

“From you,” said Birkin.

There was a pause of strange enmity between the two men, that was very near to love. It was always the same between them; always their talk brought them into a deadly nearness of contact, a strange, perilous intimacy which was either hate or love, or both.

They parted with apparent unconcern, as if their going apart were a trivial occurrence. And they really kept it to the level of trivial occurrence. Yet the heart of each burned from the other. They burned with each other, inwardly. This they would never admit. They intended to keep their relationship a casual free-and-easy friendship, they were not going to be so unmanly and unnatural as to allow any heart-burning between them. They had not the faintest belief in deep relationship between men and men, and their disbelief prevented any development of their powerful but suppressed friendliness.

CHAPTER III. CLASS-ROOM

A school-day was drawing to a close. In the class-room the last lesson was in progress, peaceful and still. It was elementary botany. The desks were littered with catkins, hazel and willow, which the children had been sketching. But the sky had come overdark, as the end of the afternoon approached: there was scarcely light to draw any more. Ursula stood in front of the class, leading the children by questions to understand the structure and the meaning of the catkins.

A heavy, copper-coloured beam of light came in at the west window, gilding the outlines of the children's heads with red gold, and falling on the wall opposite in a rich, ruddy illumination. Ursula, however, was scarcely conscious of it. She was busy, the end of the day was here, the work went on as a peaceful tide that is at flood, hushed to retire.

This day had gone by like so many more, in an activity that was like a trance. At the end there was a little haste, to finish what was in hand. She was pressing the children with questions, so that they should know all they were to know, by the time the gong went. She stood in shadow in front of the class, with catkins in her hand, and she leaned towards the children, absorbed in the passion of instruction.

She heard, but did not notice the click of the door. Suddenly she started. She saw, in the shaft of ruddy, copper-coloured light near her, the face of a man. It was gleaming like fire, watching her, waiting for her to be aware. It startled her terribly. She thought she was going to faint. All her suppressed, subconscious fear sprang into being, with anguish.

"Did I startle you?" said Birkin, shaking hands with her. "I thought you had heard me come in."

"No," she faltered, scarcely able to speak. He laughed, saying he was sorry. She wondered why it amused him.

"It is so dark," he said. "Shall we have the light?"

And moving aside, he switched on the strong electric lights. The class-room was distinct and hard, a strange place after the soft dim magic that filled it before he came.

Birkin turned curiously to look at Ursula. Her eyes were round and wondering, bewildered, her mouth quivered slightly. She looked like one who is suddenly wakened. There was a living, tender beauty, like a tender light of dawn shining from her face. He looked at her with a new pleasure, feeling gay in his heart, irresponsible.

“You are doing catkins?” he asked, picking up a piece of hazel from a scholar’s desk in front of him. “Are they as far out as this? I hadn’t noticed them this year.”

He looked absorbedly at the tassel of hazel in his hand.

“The red ones too!” he said, looking at the flickers of crimson that came from the female bud.

Then he went in among the desks, to see the scholars’ books. Ursula watched his intent progress. There was a stillness in his motion that hushed the activities of her heart. She seemed to be standing aside in arrested silence, watching him move in another, concentrated world. His presence was so quiet, almost like a vacancy in the corporate air.

Suddenly he lifted his face to her, and her heart quickened at the flicker of his voice.

“Give them some crayons, won’t you?” he said, “so that they can make the gynaecious flowers red, and the androgynous yellow. I’d chalk them in plain, chalk in nothing else, merely the red and the yellow. Outline scarcely matters in this case. There is just the one fact to emphasise.”

“I haven’t any crayons,” said Ursula.

“There will be some somewhere—red and yellow, that’s all you want.”

Ursula sent out a boy on a quest.

“It will make the books untidy,” she said to Birkin, flushing deeply.

“Not very,” he said. “You must mark in these things obviously. It’s the fact you want to emphasise, not the subjective impression to record. What’s the fact?—red little spiky stigmas of the female flower, dangling yellow male catkin, yellow pollen flying from one to the other. Make a pictorial record of the fact, as a child does when drawing a face—two eyes, one nose, mouth with teeth—so—” And he drew a figure on the blackboard.

At that moment another vision was seen through the glass panels of the door. It was Hermione Roddice. Birkin went and opened to her.

“I saw your car,” she said to him. “Do you mind my coming to find you? I wanted to see you when you were on duty.”

She looked at him for a long time, intimate and playful, then she gave a short little laugh. And then only she turned to Ursula, who, with all the class, had been watching the little scene between the lovers.

“How do you do, Miss Brangwen,” sang Hermione, in her low, odd, singing fashion, that sounded almost as if she were poking fun. “Do you mind my coming in?”

Her grey, almost sardonic eyes rested all the while on Ursula, as if summing her up. “Oh no,” said Ursula.

“Are you *sure*?” repeated Hermione, with complete *sang-froid*, and an odd, half-bullying effrontery.

“Oh no, I like it awfully,” laughed Ursula, a little bit excited and bewildered, because Hermione seemed to be compelling her, coming very close to her, as if intimate with her; and yet, how could she be intimate?

This was the answer Hermione wanted. She turned satisfied to Birkin.

“What are you doing?” she sang, in her casual, inquisitive fashion.

“Catkins,” he replied.

“Really!” she said. “And what do you learn about them?” She spoke all the while in a mocking, half-teasing fashion, as if making game of the whole business. She picked up a twig of the catkin, piqued by Birkin’s attention to it.

She was a strange figure in the class-room, wearing a large, old cloak of greenish cloth, on which was a raised pattern of dull gold. The high collar, and the inside of the cloak, was lined with dark fur. Beneath she had a dress of fine lavender-coloured cloth, trimmed with fur, and her hat was close-fitting, made of fur and of the dull, green-and-gold figured stuff. She was tall and strange, she looked as if she had come out of some new, bizarre picture.

“Do you know the little red ovary flowers, that produce the nuts? Have you ever noticed them?” he asked her. And he came close and pointed them out to her, on the sprig she held.

“No,” she replied. “What are they?”

“Those are the little seed-producing flowers, and the long catkins, they only produce pollen, to fertilise them.”

“Do they, do they!” repeated Hermione, looking closely.

“From those little red bits, the nuts come; if they receive pollen from the long danglers.”

“Little red flames, little red flames,” murmured Hermione to herself. And she remained for some moments looking only at the small buds out of which the red flickers of the stigma issued.

“Aren’t they beautiful? I think they’re so beautiful,” she said, moving close to Birkin, and pointing to the red filaments with her long, white finger.

“Had you never noticed them before?” he asked.

“No, never before,” she replied.

“And now you will always see them,” he said.

“Now I shall always see them,” she repeated. “Thank you so much for showing me. I think they’re so beautiful—little red flames—”

Her absorption was strange, almost rhapsodic. Both Birkin and Ursula were suspended. The little red pistillate flowers had some strange, almost mystic-passionate attraction for her.

The lesson was finished, the books were put away, at last the class was dismissed. And still Hermione sat at the table, with her chin in her hand, her elbow on the table, her long white face pushed up, not attending to anything. Birkin had gone to the window, and was looking from the brilliantly-lighted room on to the grey, colourless outside, where rain was noiselessly falling. Ursula put away her things in the cupboard.

At length Hermione rose and came near to her.

“Your sister has come home?” she said.

“Yes,” said Ursula.

“And does she like being back in Beldover?”

“No,” said Ursula.

“No, I wonder she can bear it. It takes all my strength, to bear the ugliness of this district, when I stay here. Won’t you come and see me? Won’t you come with your sister to stay at Breadalby for a few days?—do—”

“Thank you very much,” said Ursula.

“Then I will write to you,” said Hermione. “You think your sister will come? I should be so glad. I think she is wonderful. I think some of her work is really wonderful. I have two water-wagtails, carved in wood, and painted—perhaps you have seen it?”

“No,” said Ursula.

“I think it is perfectly wonderful—like a flash of instinct.”

“Her little carvings *are* strange,” said Ursula.

“Perfectly beautiful—full of primitive passion—”

“Isn’t it queer that she always likes little things?—she must always work small things, that one can put between one’s hands, birds and tiny animals. She likes to look through the wrong end of the opera glasses, and see the world that way—why is it, do you think?”

Hermione looked down at Ursula with that long, detached scrutinising gaze that excited the younger woman.

“Yes,” said Hermione at length. “It is curious. The little things seem to be more subtle to her—”

“But they aren’t, are they? A mouse isn’t any more subtle than a lion, is it?”

Again Hermione looked down at Ursula with that long scrutiny, as if she were following some train of thought of her own, and barely attending to the other’s speech.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

“Rupert, Rupert,” she sang mildly, calling him to her. He approached in silence.

“Are little things more subtle than big things?” she asked, with the odd grunt of laughter in her voice, as if she were making game of him in the question.

“Dunno,” he said.

“I hate subtleties,” said Ursula.

Hermione looked at her slowly.

“Do you?” she said.

“I always think they are a sign of weakness,” said Ursula, up in arms, as if her prestige were threatened.

Hermione took no notice. Suddenly her face puckered, her brow was knit with thought, she seemed twisted in troublesome effort for utterance.

“Do you really think, Rupert,” she asked, as if Ursula were not present, “do you really think it is worth while? Do you really think the children are better for being roused to consciousness?”

A dark flash went over his face, a silent fury. He was hollow-cheeked and pale, almost unearthly. And the woman, with her serious, conscience-harrowing question tortured him on the quick.

“They are not roused to consciousness,” he said. “Consciousness comes to them, willy-nilly.”

“But do you think they are better for having it quickened, stimulated? Isn’t it better that they should remain unconscious of the hazel, isn’t it better that they should see as a whole, without all this pulling to pieces, all this knowledge?”

“Would you rather, for yourself, know or not know, that the little red flowers are there, putting out for the pollen?” he asked harshly. His voice was brutal, scornful, cruel.

Hermione remained with her face lifted up, abstracted. He hung silent in irritation.

“I don’t know,” she replied, balancing mildly. “I don’t know.”

“But knowing is everything to you, it is all your life,” he broke out. She slowly looked at him.

“Is it?” she said.

“To know, that is your all, that is your life—you have only this, this knowledge,” he cried. “There is only one tree, there is only one fruit, in your mouth.”

Again she was some time silent.

“Is there?” she said at last, with the same untouched calm. And then in a tone of whimsical inquisitiveness: “What fruit, Rupert?”

“The eternal apple,” he replied in exasperation, hating his own metaphors.

“Yes,” she said. There was a look of exhaustion about her. For some moments there was silence. Then, pulling herself together with a convulsed movement, Hermione resumed, in a sing-song, casual voice:

“But leaving me apart, Rupert; do you think the children are better, richer, happier, for all this knowledge; do you really think they are? Or is it better to leave them untouched, spontaneous. Hadn’t they better be animals, simple animals, crude, violent, *anything*, rather than this self-consciousness, this incapacity to be spontaneous.”

They thought she had finished. But with a queer rumbling in her throat she resumed, “Hadn’t they better be anything than grow up crippled, crippled in their souls, crippled in their feelings—so thrown back—so turned back on themselves—incapable—” Hermione clenched her fist like one in a trance—“of any spontaneous action, always deliberate, always burdened with choice, never carried away.”

Again they thought she had finished. But just as he was going to reply, she resumed her queer rhapsody—“never carried away, out of themselves, always conscious, always self-conscious, always aware of themselves. Isn’t *anything* better than this? Better be animals, mere animals with no mind at all, than this, this *nothingness*—”

“But do you think it is knowledge that makes us unliving and self-conscious?” he asked irritably.

She opened her eyes and looked at him slowly.

“Yes,” she said. She paused, watching him all the while, her eyes vague. Then she wiped her fingers across her brow, with a vague weariness. It irritated him bitterly. “It is the mind,” she said, “and that is death.” She raised her eyes slowly to him: “Isn’t the mind—” she said, with the convulsed movement of her body, “isn’t it our death? Doesn’t it destroy all our spontaneity, all our instincts? Are not the young people growing up today, really dead before they have a chance to live?”

“Not because they have too much mind, but too little,” he said brutally.

“Are you *sure*?” she cried. “It seems to me the reverse. They are over-conscious, burdened to death with consciousness.”

“Imprisoned within a limited, false set of concepts,” he cried.

But she took no notice of this, only went on with her own rhapsodic interrogation.

“When we have knowledge, don’t we lose everything but knowledge?” she asked pathetically. “If I know about the flower, don’t I lose the flower and have only the knowledge? Aren’t we exchanging the substance for the shadow, aren’t we forfeiting life for this dead quality of knowledge? And what does it mean to me, after all? What does all this knowing mean to me? It means nothing.”

“You are merely making words,” he said; “knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want to *be* an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them. It is all purely secondary—and more decadent than the most hide-bound intellectualism. What is it but the worst and last form of intellectualism, this love of yours for passion and the animal instincts? Passion and the instincts—you want them hard enough, but through your

head, in your consciousness. It all takes place in your head, under that skull of yours. Only you won't be conscious of what *actually* is: you want the lie that will match the rest of your furniture."

Hermione set hard and poisonous against this attack. Ursula stood covered with wonder and shame. It frightened her, to see how they hated each other.

"It's all that Lady of Shalott business," he said, in his strong abstract voice. He seemed to be charging her before the unseeing air. "You've got that mirror, your own fixed will, your immortal understanding, your own tight conscious world, and there is nothing beyond it. There, in the mirror, you must have everything. But now you have come to all your conclusions, you want to go back and be like a savage, without knowledge. You want a life of pure sensation and 'passion.'"

He quoted the last word satirically against her. She sat convulsed with fury and violation, speechless, like a stricken pythoness of the Greek oracle.

"But your passion is a lie," he went on violently. "It isn't passion at all, it is your *will*. It's your bullying will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power. You want to have things in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to *know*."

He looked at her in mingled hate and contempt, also in pain because she suffered, and in shame because he knew he tortured her. He had an impulse to kneel and plead for forgiveness. But a bitterer red anger burned up to fury in him. He became unconscious of her, he was only a passionate voice speaking.

"Spontaneous!" he cried. "You and spontaneity! You, the most deliberate thing that ever walked or crawled! You'd be verily deliberately spontaneous—that's you. Because you want to have everything in your own volition, your deliberate voluntary consciousness. You want it all in that loathsome little skull of yours, that ought to be cracked like a nut. For you'll be the same till it is cracked, like an insect in its skin. If one cracked your skull perhaps one might get a spontaneous, passionate woman out of you, with real sensuality. As it is, what you want is pornography—looking at yourself in mirrors, watching your naked animal actions in mirrors, so that you can have it all in your consciousness, make it all mental."

There was a sense of violation in the air, as if too much was said, the unforgivable. Yet Ursula was concerned now only with solving her own problems, in the light of his words. She was pale and abstracted.

"But do you really *want* sensuality?" she asked, puzzled.

Birkin looked at her, and became intent in his explanation.

"Yes," he said, "that and nothing else, at this point. It is a fulfilment—the great dark knowledge you can't have in your head—the dark involuntary being. It is death to one's self—but it is the coming into being of another."

“But how? How can you have knowledge not in your head?” she asked, quite unable to interpret his phrases.

“In the blood,” he answered; “when the mind and the known world is drowned in darkness everything must go—there must be the deluge. Then you find yourself a palpable body of darkness, a demon—”

“But why should I be a demon—?” she asked.

“*Woman wailing for her demon lover*’—” he quoted—“why, I don’t know.”

Hermione roused herself as from a death—annihilation.

“He is such a *dreadful* satanist, isn’t he?” she drawled to Ursula, in a queer resonant voice, that ended on a shrill little laugh of pure ridicule. The two women were jeering at him, jeering him into nothingness. The laugh of the shrill, triumphant female sounded from Hermione, jeering him as if he were a neuter.

“No,” he said. “You are the real devil who won’t let life exist.”

She looked at him with a long, slow look, malevolent, supercilious.

“You know all about it, don’t you?” she said, with slow, cold, cunning mockery.

“Enough,” he replied, his face fixing fine and clear like steel. A horrible despair, and at the same time a sense of release, liberation, came over Hermione. She turned with a pleasant intimacy to Ursula.

“You are sure you will come to Breadalby?” she said, urging.

“Yes, I should like to very much,” replied Ursula.

Hermione looked down at her, gratified, reflecting, and strangely absent, as if possessed, as if not quite there.

“I’m so glad,” she said, pulling herself together. “Some time in about a fortnight. Yes? I will write to you here, at the school, shall I? Yes. And you’ll be sure to come? Yes. I shall be so glad. Good-bye! Good-bye!”

Hermione held out her hand and looked into the eyes of the other woman. She knew Ursula as an immediate rival, and the knowledge strangely exhilarated her. Also she was taking leave. It always gave her a sense of strength, advantage, to be departing and leaving the other behind. Moreover she was taking the man with her, if only in hate.

Birkin stood aside, fixed and unreal. But now, when it was his turn to bid good-bye, he began to speak again.

“There’s the whole difference in the world,” he said, “between the actual sensual being, and the vicious mental-deliberate profligacy our lot goes in for. In our night-time, there’s always the electricity switched on, we watch ourselves, we get it all in the head, really. You’ve got to lapse out before you can know what sensual reality is, lapse into unknowingness, and give up your volition. You’ve got to do it. You’ve got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being.

“But we have got such a conceit of ourselves—that’s where it is. We are so conceited, and so unproud. We’ve got no pride, we’re all conceit, so conceited in our own papier-maché realised selves. We’d rather die than give up our little self-righteous self-opinionated self-will.”

There was silence in the room. Both women were hostile and resentful. He sounded as if he were addressing a meeting. Hermione merely paid no attention, stood with her shoulders tight in a shrug of dislike.

Ursula was watching him as if furtively, not really aware of what she was seeing. There was a great physical attractiveness in him—a curious hidden richness, that came through his thinness and his pallor like another voice, conveying another knowledge of him. It was in the curves of his brows and his chin, rich, fine, exquisite curves, the powerful beauty of life itself. She could not say what it was. But there was a sense of richness and of liberty.

“But we are sensual enough, without making ourselves so, aren’t we?” she asked, turning to him with a certain golden laughter flickering under her greenish eyes, like a challenge. And immediately the queer, careless, terribly attractive smile came over his eyes and brows, though his mouth did not relax.

“No,” he said, “we aren’t. We’re too full of ourselves.”

“Surely it isn’t a matter of conceit,” she cried.

“That and nothing else.”

She was frankly puzzled.

“Don’t you think that people are most conceited of all about their sensual powers?” she asked.

“That’s why they aren’t sensual—only sensuous—which is another matter. They’re *always* aware of themselves—and they’re so conceited, that rather than release themselves, and live in another world, from another centre, they’d—”

“You want your tea, don’t you,” said Hermione, turning to Ursula with a gracious kindness. “You’ve worked all day—”

Birkin stopped short. A spasm of anger and chagrin went over Ursula. His face set. And he bade good-bye, as if he had ceased to notice her.

They were gone. Ursula stood looking at the door for some moments. Then she put out the lights. And having done so, she sat down again in her chair, absorbed and lost. And then she began to cry, bitterly, bitterly weeping: but whether for misery or joy, she never knew.

CHAPTER IV. DIVER

The week passed away. On the Saturday it rained, a soft drizzling rain that held off at times. In one of the intervals Gudrun and Ursula set out for a walk, going towards Willey Water. The atmosphere was grey and translucent, the birds sang sharply on the young twigs, the earth would be quickening and hastening in growth. The two girls walked swiftly, gladly, because of the soft, subtle rush of morning that filled the wet haze. By the road the black-thorn was in blossom, white and wet, its tiny amber grains burning faintly in the white smoke of blossom. Purple twigs were darkly luminous in the grey air, high hedges glowed like living shadows, hovering nearer, coming into creation. The morning was full of a new creation.

When the sisters came to Willey Water, the lake lay all grey and visionary, stretching into the moist, translucent vista of trees and meadow. Fine electric activity in sound came from the dumbles below the road, the birds piping one against the other, and water mysteriously plashing, issuing from the lake.

The two girls drifted swiftly along. In front of them, at the corner of the lake, near the road, was a mossy boat-house under a walnut tree, and a little landing-stage where a boat was moored, wavering like a shadow on the still grey water, below the green, decayed poles. All was shadowy with coming summer.

Suddenly, from the boat-house, a white figure ran out, frightening in its swift sharp transit, across the old landing-stage. It launched in a white arc through the air, there was a bursting of the water, and among the smooth ripples a swimmer was making out to space, in a centre of faintly heaving motion. The whole otherworld, wet and remote, he had to himself. He could move into the pure translucency of the grey, uncreated water.

Gudrun stood by the stone wall, watching.

“How I envy him,” she said, in low, desirous tones.

“Ugh!” shivered Ursula. “So cold!”

“Yes, but how good, how really fine, to swim out there!” The sisters stood watching the swimmer move further into the grey, moist, full space of the water, pulsing with his own small, invading motion, and arched over with mist and dim woods.

“Don’t you wish it were you?” asked Gudrun, looking at Ursula.

“I do,” said Ursula. “But I’m not sure—it’s so wet.”

“No,” said Gudrun, reluctantly. She stood watching the motion on the bosom of the water, as if fascinated. He, having swum a certain distance, turned round and was swimming on his back, looking along the water at the two girls by the wall. In the faint wash of motion, they could see his ruddy face, and could feel him watching them.

“It is Gerald Crich,” said Ursula.

“I know,” replied Gudrun.

And she stood motionless gazing over the water at the face which washed up and down on the flood, as he swam steadily. From his separate element he saw them and he exulted to himself because of his own advantage, his possession of a world to himself.

He was immune and perfect. He loved his own vigorous, thrusting motion, and the violent impulse of the very cold water against his limbs, buoying him up. He could see the girls watching him a way off, outside, and that pleased him. He lifted his arm from the water, in a sign to them.

“He is waving,” said Ursula.

“Yes,” replied Gudrun. They watched him. He waved again, with a strange movement of recognition across the difference.

“Like a Nibelung,” laughed Ursula. Gudrun said nothing, only stood still looking over the water.

Gerald suddenly turned, and was swimming away swiftly, with a side stroke. He was alone now, alone and immune in the middle of the waters, which he had all to himself. He exulted in his isolation in the new element, unquestioned and unconditioned. He was happy, thrusting with his legs and all his body, without bond or connection anywhere, just himself in the watery world.

Gudrun envied him almost painfully. Even this momentary possession of pure isolation and fluidity seemed to her so terribly desirable that she felt herself as if damned, out there on the high-road.

“God, what it is to be a man!” she cried.

“What?” exclaimed Ursula in surprise.

“The freedom, the liberty, the mobility!” cried Gudrun, strangely flushed and brilliant. “You’re a man, you want to do a thing, you do it. You haven’t the *thousand* obstacles a woman has in front of her.”

Ursula wondered what was in Gudrun’s mind, to occasion this outburst. She could not understand.

“What do you want to do?” she asked.

“Nothing,” cried Gudrun, in swift refutation. “But supposing I did. Supposing I want to swim up that water. It is impossible, it is one of the impossibilities of life, for me to take my clothes off now and jump in. But isn’t it *ridiculous*, doesn’t it simply prevent our living!”

She was so hot, so flushed, so furious, that Ursula was puzzled.

The two sisters went on, up the road. They were passing between the trees just below Shortlands. They looked up at the long, low house, dim and glamorous in the wet morning, its cedar trees slanting before the windows. Gudrun seemed to be studying it closely.

“Don’t you think it’s attractive, Ursula?” asked Gudrun.

“Very,” said Ursula. “Very peaceful and charming.”

“It has form, too—it has a period.”

“What period?”

“Oh, eighteenth century, for certain; Dorothy Wordsworth and Jane Austen, don’t you think?”

Ursula laughed.

“Don’t you think so?” repeated Gudrun.

“Perhaps. But I don’t think the Criches fit the period. I know Gerald is putting in a private electric plant, for lighting the house, and is making all kinds of latest improvements.”

Gudrun shrugged her shoulders swiftly.

“Of course,” she said, “that’s quite inevitable.”

“Quite,” laughed Ursula. “He is several generations of youngness at one go. They hate him for it. He takes them all by the scruff of the neck, and fairly flings them along. He’ll have to die soon, when he’s made every possible improvement, and there will be nothing more to improve. He’s got *go*, anyhow.”

“Certainly, he’s got *go*,” said Gudrun. “In fact I’ve never seen a man that showed signs of so much. The unfortunate thing is, where does his *go* go to, what becomes of it?”

“Oh I know,” said Ursula. “It goes in applying the latest appliances!”

“Exactly,” said Gudrun.

“You know he shot his brother?” said Ursula.

“Shot his brother?” cried Gudrun, frowning as if in disapprobation.

“Didn’t you know? Oh yes!—I thought you knew. He and his brother were playing together with a gun. He told his brother to look down the gun, and it was loaded, and blew the top of his head off. Isn’t it a horrible story?”

“How fearful!” cried Gudrun. “But it is long ago?”

“Oh yes, they were quite boys,” said Ursula. “I think it is one of the most horrible stories I know.”

“And he of course did not know that the gun was loaded?”

“Yes. You see it was an old thing that had been lying in the stable for years. Nobody dreamed it would ever go off, and of course, no one imagined it was loaded. But isn’t it dreadful, that it should happen?”

“Frightful!” cried Gudrun. “And isn’t it horrible too to think of such a thing happening to one, when one was a child, and having to carry the responsibility of it all through one’s life. Imagine it, two boys playing together—then this comes upon them, for no reason whatever—out of the air. Ursula, it’s very frightening! Oh, it’s one of the things I can’t bear. Murder, that is thinkable, because there’s a will behind it. But a thing like that to *happen* to one—”

“Perhaps there *was* an unconscious will behind it,” said Ursula. “This playing at killing has some primitive *desire* for killing in it, don’t you think?”

“Desire!” said Gudrun, coldly, stiffening a little. “I can’t see that they were even playing at killing. I suppose one boy said to the other, ‘You look down the barrel while I pull the trigger, and see what happens.’ It seems to me the purest form of accident.”

“No,” said Ursula. “I couldn’t pull the trigger of the emptiest gun in the world, not if some-one were looking down the barrel. One instinctively doesn’t do it—one can’t.”

Gudrun was silent for some moments, in sharp disagreement.

“Of course,” she said coldly. “If one is a woman, and grown up, one’s instinct prevents one. But I cannot see how that applies to a couple of boys playing together.”

Her voice was cold and angry.

“Yes,” persisted Ursula. At that moment they heard a woman’s voice a few yards off say loudly:

“Oh damn the thing!” They went forward and saw Laura Crich and Hermione Roddice in the field on the other side of the hedge, and Laura Crich struggling with the gate, to get out. Ursula at once hurried up and helped to lift the gate.

“Thanks so much,” said Laura, looking up flushed and amazon-like, yet rather confused. “It isn’t right on the hinges.”

“No,” said Ursula. “And they’re so heavy.”

“Surprising!” cried Laura.

“How do you do,” sang Hermione, from out of the field, the moment she could make her voice heard. “It’s nice now. Are you going for a walk? Yes. Isn’t the young green beautiful? So beautiful—quite burning. Good morning—good morning—you’ll come and see me?—thank you so much—next week—yes—good-bye, g-o-o-d b-y-e.”

Gudrun and Ursula stood and watched her slowly waving her head up and down, and waving her hand slowly in dismissal, smiling a strange affected smile, making a tall queer, frightening figure, with her heavy fair hair slipping to her eyes. Then they moved off, as if they had been dismissed like inferiors. The four women parted.

As soon as they had gone far enough, Ursula said, her cheeks burning,

“I do think she’s impudent.”

“Who, Hermione Roddice?” asked Gudrun. “Why?”

“The way she treats one—impudence!”

“Why, Ursula, what did you notice that was so impudent?” asked Gudrun rather coldly.

“Her whole manner. Oh, it’s impossible, the way she tries to bully one. Pure bullying. She’s an impudent woman. ‘You’ll come and see me,’ as if we should be falling over ourselves for the privilege.”

“I can’t understand, Ursula, what you are so much put out about,” said Gudrun, in some exasperation. “One knows those women are impudent—these free women who have emancipated themselves from the aristocracy.”

“But it is so *unnecessary*—so vulgar,” cried Ursula.

“No, I don’t see it. And if I did—*pour moi, elle n’existe pas*. I don’t grant her the power to be impudent to me.”

“Do you think she likes you?” asked Ursula.

“Well, no, I shouldn’t think she did.”

“Then why does she ask you to go to Breadalby and stay with her?”

Gudrun lifted her shoulders in a low shrug.

“After all, she’s got the sense to know we’re not just the ordinary run,” said Gudrun. “Whatever she is, she’s not a fool. And I’d rather have somebody I detested, than the ordinary woman who keeps to her own set. Hermione Roddice does risk herself in some respects.”

Ursula pondered this for a time.

“I doubt it,” she replied. “Really she risks nothing. I suppose we ought to admire her for knowing she *can* invite us—school teachers—and risk nothing.”

“Precisely!” said Gudrun. “Think of the myriads of women that daren’t do it. She makes the most of her privileges—that’s something. I suppose, really, we should do the same, in her place.”

“No,” said Ursula. “No. It would bore me. I couldn’t spend my time playing her games. It’s *infra dig*.”

The two sisters were like a pair of scissors, snipping off everything that came athwart them; or like a knife and a whetstone, the one sharpened against the other.

“Of course,” cried Ursula suddenly, “she ought to thank her stars if we will go and see her. You are perfectly beautiful, a thousand times more beautiful than ever she is or was, and to my thinking, a thousand times more beautifully dressed, for she never looks fresh and natural, like a flower, always old, thought-out; and we *are* more intelligent than most people.”

“Undoubtedly!” said Gudrun.

“And it ought to be admitted, simply,” said Ursula.

“Certainly it ought,” said Gudrun. “But you’ll find that the really chic thing is to be so absolutely ordinary, so perfectly commonplace and like the person in the street, that you really are a masterpiece of humanity, not the person in the street actually, but the artistic creation of her—”

“How awful!” cried Ursula.

“Yes, Ursula, it *is* awful, in most respects. You daren’t be anything that isn’t amazingly *à terre*, so much *à terre* that it is the artistic creation of ordinariness.”

“It’s very dull to create oneself into nothing better,” laughed Ursula.

“Very dull!” retorted Gudrun. “Really Ursula, it is dull, that’s just the word. One longs to be high-flown, and make speeches like Corneille, after it.”

Gudrun was becoming flushed and excited over her own cleverness.

“Strut,” said Ursula. “One wants to strut, to be a swan among geese.”

“Exactly,” cried Gudrun, “a swan among geese.”

“They are all so busy playing the ugly duckling,” cried Ursula, with mocking laughter. “And I don’t feel a bit like a humble and pathetic ugly duckling. I do feel like a swan among geese—I can’t help it. They make one feel so. And I don’t care what *they* think of me. *Je m’en fiche.*”

Gudrun looked up at Ursula with a queer, uncertain envy and dislike.

“Of course, the only thing to do is to despise them all—just all,” she said.

The sisters went home again, to read and talk and work, and wait for Monday, for school. Ursula often wondered what else she waited for, besides the beginning and end of the school week, and the beginning and end of the holidays. This was a whole life! Sometimes she had periods of tight horror, when it seemed to her that her life would pass away, and be gone, without having been more than this. But she never really accepted it. Her spirit was active, her life like a shoot that is growing steadily, but which has not yet come above ground.

CHAPTER V. IN THE TRAIN

One day at this time Birkin was called to London. He was not very fixed in his abode. He had rooms in Nottingham, because his work lay chiefly in that town. But often he was in London, or in Oxford. He moved about a great deal, his life seemed uncertain, without any definite rhythm, any organic meaning.

On the platform of the railway station he saw Gerald Crich, reading a newspaper, and evidently waiting for the train. Birkin stood some distance off, among the people. It was against his instinct to approach anybody.

From time to time, in a manner characteristic of him, Gerald lifted his head and looked round. Even though he was reading the newspaper closely, he must keep a watchful eye on his external surroundings. There seemed to be a dual consciousness running in him. He was thinking vigorously of something he read in the newspaper, and at the same time his eye ran over the surfaces of the life round him, and he missed nothing. Birkin, who was watching him, was irritated by his duality. He noticed too, that Gerald seemed always to be at bay against everybody, in spite of his queer, genial, social manner when roused.

Now Birkin started violently at seeing this genial look flash on to Gerald’s face, at seeing Gerald approaching with hand outstretched.

“Hallo, Rupert, where are you going?”

“London. So are you, I suppose.”

“Yes—”

Gerald’s eyes went over Birkin’s face in curiosity.

“We’ll travel together if you like,” he said.

“Don’t you usually go first?” asked Birkin.

“I can’t stand the crowd,” replied Gerald. “But third’ll be all right. There’s a restaurant car, we can have some tea.”

The two men looked at the station clock, having nothing further to say.

“What were you reading in the paper?” Birkin asked.

Gerald looked at him quickly.

“Isn’t it funny, what they *do* put in the newspapers,” he said. “Here are two leaders—” he held out his *Daily Telegraph*, “full of the ordinary newspaper cant—” he scanned the columns down—“and then there’s this little—I dunno what you’d call it, essay, almost—appearing with the leaders, and saying there must arise a man who will give new values to things, give us new truths, a new attitude to life, or else we shall be a crumbling nothingness in a few years, a country in ruin—”

“I suppose that’s a bit of newspaper cant, as well,” said Birkin.

“It sounds as if the man meant it, and quite genuinely,” said Gerald.

“Give it to me,” said Birkin, holding out his hand for the paper.

The train came, and they went on board, sitting on either side a little table, by the window, in the restaurant car. Birkin glanced over his paper, then looked up at Gerald, who was waiting for him.

“I believe the man means it,” he said, “as far as he means anything.”

“And do you think it’s true? Do you think we really want a new gospel?” asked Gerald.

Birkin shrugged his shoulders.

“I think the people who say they want a new religion are the last to accept anything new. They want novelty right enough. But to stare straight at this life that we’ve brought upon ourselves, and reject it, absolutely smash up the old idols of ourselves, that we sh’ll never do. You’ve got very badly to want to get rid of the old, before anything new will appear—even in the self.”

Gerald watched him closely.

“You think we ought to break up this life, just start and let fly?” he asked.

“This life. Yes I do. We’ve got to bust it completely, or shrivel inside it, as in a tight skin. For it won’t expand any more.”

There was a queer little smile in Gerald’s eyes, a look of amusement, calm and curious.

“And how do you propose to begin? I suppose you mean, reform the whole order of society?” he asked.

Birkin had a slight, tense frown between the brows. He too was impatient of the conversation.

“I don’t propose at all,” he replied. “When we really want to go for something better, we shall smash the old. Until then, any sort of proposal, or making proposals, is no more than a tiresome game for self-important people.”

The little smile began to die out of Gerald’s eyes, and he said, looking with a cool stare at Birkin:

“So you really think things are very bad?”

“Completely bad.”

The smile appeared again.

“In what way?”

“Every way,” said Birkin. “We are such dreary liars. Our one idea is to lie to ourselves. We have an ideal of a perfect world, clean and straight and sufficient. So we cover the earth with foulness; life is a blotch of labour, like insects scurrying in filth, so that your collier can have a pianoforte in his parlour, and you can have a butler and a motor-car in your up-to-date house, and as a nation we can sport the Ritz, or the Empire, Gaby Deslys and the Sunday newspapers. It is very dreary.”

Gerald took a little time to re-adjust himself after this tirade.

“Would you have us live without houses—return to nature?” he asked.

“I would have nothing at all. People only do what they want to do—and what they are capable of doing. If they were capable of anything else, there would be something else.”

Again Gerald pondered. He was not going to take offence at Birkin.

“Don’t you think the collier’s *pianoforte*, as you call it, is a symbol for something very real, a real desire for something higher, in the collier’s life?”

“Higher!” cried Birkin. “Yes. Amazing heights of upright grandeur. It makes him so much higher in his neighbouring collier’s eyes. He sees himself reflected in the neighbouring opinion, like in a Brocken mist, several feet taller on the strength of the pianoforte, and he is satisfied. He lives for the sake of that Brocken spectre, the reflection of himself in the human opinion. You do the same. If you are of high importance to humanity you are of high importance to yourself. That is why you work so hard at the mines. If you can produce coal to cook five thousand dinners a day, you are five thousand times more important than if you cooked only your own dinner.”

“I suppose I am,” laughed Gerald.

“Can’t you see,” said Birkin, “that to help my neighbour to eat is no more than eating myself. ‘I eat, thou eatest, he eats, we eat, you eat, they eat’—and what then? Why should every man decline the whole verb. First person singular is enough for me.”

“You’ve got to start with material things,” said Gerald. Which statement Birkin ignored.

“And we’ve got to live for *something*, we’re not just cattle that can graze and have done with it,” said Gerald.

“Tell me,” said Birkin. “What do you live for?”

Gerald’s face went baffled.

“What do I live for?” he repeated. “I suppose I live to work, to produce something, in so far as I am a purposive being. Apart from that, I live because I am living.”

“And what’s your work? Getting so many more thousands of tons of coal out of the earth every day. And when we’ve got all the coal we want, and all the plush furniture, and pianofortes, and the rabbits are all stewed and eaten, and we’re all warm and our bellies are filled and we’re listening to the young lady performing on the pianoforte—what then? What then, when you’ve made a real fair start with your material things?”

Gerald sat laughing at the words and the mocking humour of the other man. But he was cogitating too.

“We haven’t got there yet,” he replied. “A good many people are still waiting for the rabbit and the fire to cook it.”

“So while you get the coal I must chase the rabbit?” said Birkin, mocking at Gerald.

“Something like that,” said Gerald.

Birkin watched him narrowly. He saw the perfect good-humoured callousness, even strange, glistening malice, in Gerald, glistening through the plausible ethics of productivity.

“Gerald,” he said, “I rather hate you.”

“I know you do,” said Gerald. “Why do you?”

Birkin mused inscrutably for some minutes.

“I should like to know if you are conscious of hating me,” he said at last. “Do you ever consciously detest me—hate me with mystic hate? There are odd moments when I hate you starrily.”

Gerald was rather taken aback, even a little disconcerted. He did not quite know what to say.

“I may, of course, hate you sometimes,” he said. “But I’m not aware of it—never acutely aware of it, that is.”

“So much the worse,” said Birkin.

Gerald watched him with curious eyes. He could not quite make him out.

“So much the worse, is it?” he repeated.

There was a silence between the two men for some time, as the train ran on. In Birkin’s face was a little irritable tension, a sharp knitting of the brows, keen and difficult. Gerald watched him warily, carefully, rather calculatingly, for he could not decide what he was after.

Suddenly Birkin’s eyes looked straight and overpowering into those of the other man.

“What do you think is the aim and object of your life, Gerald?” he asked.

Again Gerald was taken aback. He could not think what his friend was getting at. Was he poking fun, or not?

“At this moment, I couldn’t say off-hand,” he replied, with faintly ironic humour.

“Do you think love is the be-all and the end-all of life?” Birkin asked, with direct, attentive seriousness.

“Of my own life?” said Gerald.

“Yes.”

There was a really puzzled pause.

“I can’t say,” said Gerald. “It hasn’t been, so far.”

“What has your life been, so far?”

“Oh—finding out things for myself—and getting experiences—and making things *go*.”

Birkin knitted his brows like sharply moulded steel.

“I find,” he said, “that one needs some one *really* pure single activity—I should call love a single pure activity. But I *don’t* really love anybody—not now.”

“Have you ever really loved anybody?” asked Gerald.

“Yes and no,” replied Birkin.

“Not finally?” said Gerald.

“Finally—finally—no,” said Birkin.

“Nor I,” said Gerald.

“And do you want to?” said Birkin.

Gerald looked with a long, twinkling, almost sardonic look into the eyes of the other man.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“I do—I want to love,” said Birkin.

“You do?”

“Yes. I want the finality of love.”

“The finality of love,” repeated Gerald. And he waited for a moment.

“Just one woman?” he added. The evening light, flooding yellow along the fields, lit up Birkin’s face with a tense, abstract steadfastness. Gerald still could not make it out.

“Yes, one woman,” said Birkin.

But to Gerald it sounded as if he were insistent rather than confident.

“I don’t believe a woman, and nothing but a woman, will ever make my life,” said Gerald.

“Not the centre and core of it—the love between you and a woman?” asked Birkin.

Gerald’s eyes narrowed with a queer dangerous smile as he watched the other man.

“I never quite feel it that way,” he said.

“You don’t? Then wherein does life centre, for you?”

“I don’t know—that’s what I want somebody to tell me. As far as I can make out, it doesn’t centre at all. It is artificially held *together* by the social mechanism.”

Birkin pondered as if he would crack something.

“I know,” he said, “it just doesn’t centre. The old ideals are dead as nails—nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman—sort of ultimate marriage—and there isn’t anything else.”

“And you mean if there isn’t the woman, there’s nothing?” said Gerald.

“Pretty well that—seeing there’s no God.”

“Then we’re hard put to it,” said Gerald. And he turned to look out of the window at the flying, golden landscape.

Birkin could not help seeing how beautiful and soldierly his face was, with a certain courage to be indifferent.

“You think its heavy odds against us?” said Birkin.

“If we’ve got to make our life up out of a woman, one woman, woman only, yes, I do,” said Gerald. “I don’t believe I shall ever make up *my* life, at that rate.”

Birkin watched him almost angrily.

“You are a born unbeliever,” he said.

“I only feel what I feel,” said Gerald. And he looked again at Birkin almost sardonically, with his blue, manly, sharp-lighted eyes. Birkin’s eyes were at the moment full of anger. But swiftly they became troubled, doubtful, then full of a warm, rich affectionateness and laughter.

“It troubles me very much, Gerald,” he said, wrinkling his brows.

“I can see it does,” said Gerald, uncovering his mouth in a manly, quick, soldierly laugh.

Gerald was held unconsciously by the other man. He wanted to be near him, he wanted to be within his sphere of influence. There was something very congenial to him in Birkin. But yet, beyond this, he did not take much notice. He felt that he, himself,

Gerald, had harder and more durable truths than any the other man knew. He felt himself older, more knowing. It was the quick-changing warmth and venality and brilliant warm utterance he loved in his friend. It was the rich play of words and quick interchange of feelings he enjoyed. The real content of the words he never really considered: he himself knew better.

Birkin knew this. He knew that Gerald wanted to be *fond* of him without taking him seriously. And this made him go hard and cold. As the train ran on, he sat looking at the land, and Gerald fell away, became as nothing to him.

Birkin looked at the land, at the evening, and was thinking: “Well, if mankind is destroyed, if our race is destroyed like Sodom, and there is this beautiful evening with the luminous land and trees, I am satisfied. That which informs it all is there, and can never be lost. After all, what is mankind but just one expression of the incomprehensible. And if mankind passes away, it will only mean that this particular expression is completed and done. That which is expressed, and that which is to be expressed, cannot be diminished. There it is, in the shining evening. Let mankind pass away—time it did. The creative utterances will not cease, they will only be there. Humanity doesn’t embody the utterance of the incomprehensible any more. Humanity is a dead letter. There will be a new embodiment, in a new way. Let humanity disappear as quick as possible.”

Gerald interrupted him by asking,

“Where are you staying in London?”

Birkin looked up.

“With a man in Soho. I pay part of the rent of a flat, and stop there when I like.”

“Good idea—have a place more or less your own,” said Gerald.

“Yes. But I don’t care for it much. I’m tired of the people I am bound to find there.”

“What kind of people?”

“Art—music—London Bohemia—the most pettifogging calculating Bohemia that ever reckoned its pennies. But there are a few decent people, decent in some respects. They are really very thorough rejecters of the world—perhaps they live only in the gesture of rejection and negation—but negatively something, at any rate.”

“What are they?—painters, musicians?”

“Painters, musicians, writers—hangers-on, models, advanced young people, anybody who is openly at outs with the conventions, and belongs to nowhere particularly. They are often young fellows down from the University, and girls who are living their own lives, as they say.”

“All loose?” said Gerald.

Birkin could see his curiosity roused.

“In one way. Most bound, in another. For all their shockingness, all on one note.”

He looked at Gerald, and saw how his blue eyes were lit up with a little flame of curious desire. He saw too how good-looking he was. Gerald was attractive, his blood seemed fluid and electric. His blue eyes burned with a keen, yet cold light, there was a certain beauty, a beautiful passivity in all his body, his moulding.

“We might see something of each other—I am in London for two or three days,” said Gerald.

“Yes,” said Birkin, “I don’t want to go to the theatre, or the music hall—you’d better come round to the flat, and see what you can make of Halliday and his crowd.”

“Thanks—I should like to,” laughed Gerald. “What are you doing tonight?”

“I promised to meet Halliday at the Pompadour. It’s a bad place, but there is nowhere else.”

“Where is it?” asked Gerald.

“Piccadilly Circus.”

“Oh yes—well, shall I come round there?”

“By all means, it might amuse you.”

The evening was falling. They had passed Bedford. Birkin watched the country, and was filled with a sort of hopelessness. He always felt this, on approaching London.

His dislike of mankind, of the mass of mankind, amounted almost to an illness.

“Where the quiet coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles—”

he was murmuring to himself, like a man condemned to death. Gerald, who was very subtly alert, wary in all his senses, leaned forward and asked smilingly:

“What were you saying?” Birkin glanced at him, laughed, and repeated:

“Where the quiet coloured end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles,
Over pastures where the something something sheep
Half asleep—”

Gerald also looked now at the country. And Birkin, who, for some reason was now tired and dispirited, said to him:

“I always feel doomed when the train is running into London. I feel such a despair, so hopeless, as if it were the end of the world.”

“Really!” said Gerald. “And does the end of the world frighten you?”

Birkin lifted his shoulders in a slow shrug.

“I don’t know,” he said. “It does while it hangs imminent and doesn’t fall. But people give me a bad feeling—very bad.”

There was a roused glad smile in Gerald’s eyes.

“Do they?” he said. And he watched the other man critically.

In a few minutes the train was running through the disgrace of outspread London. Everybody in the carriage was on the alert, waiting to escape. At last they were under the huge arch of the station, in the tremendous shadow of the town. Birkin shut himself together—he was in now.

The two men went together in a taxi-cab.

“Don’t you feel like one of the damned?” asked Birkin, as they sat in a little, swiftly-running enclosure, and watched the hideous great street.

“No,” laughed Gerald.

“It is real death,” said Birkin.

CHAPTER VI. CRÈME DE MENTHE

They met again in the café several hours later. Gerald went through the push doors into the large, lofty room where the faces and heads of the drinkers showed dimly through the haze of smoke, reflected more dimly, and repeated ad infinitum in the great mirrors on the walls, so that one seemed to enter a vague, dim world of shadowy drinkers humming within an atmosphere of blue tobacco smoke. There was, however, the red plush of the seats to give substance within the bubble of pleasure.

Gerald moved in his slow, observant, glistening-attentive motion down between the tables and the people whose shadowy faces looked up as he passed. He seemed to be entering in some strange element, passing into an illuminated new region, among a host of licentious souls. He was pleased, and entertained. He looked over all the dim, evanescent, strangely illuminated faces that bent across the tables. Then he saw Birkin rise and signal to him.

At Birkin’s table was a girl with dark, soft, fluffy hair cut short in the artist fashion, hanging level and full almost like the Egyptian princess’s. She was small and delicately made, with warm colouring and large, dark hostile eyes. There was a delicacy, almost a beauty in all her form, and at the same time a certain attractive grossness of spirit, that made a little spark leap instantly alight in Gerald’s eyes.

Birkin, who looked muted, unreal, his presence left out, introduced her as Miss Darrington. She gave her hand with a sudden, unwilling movement, looking all the while at Gerald with a dark, exposed stare. A glow came over him as he sat down.

The waiter appeared. Gerald glanced at the glasses of the other two. Birkin was drinking something green, Miss Darrington had a small liqueur glass that was empty save for a tiny drop.

“Won’t you have some more—?”

“Brandy,” she said, sipping her last drop and putting down the glass. The waiter disappeared.

“No,” she said to Birkin. “He doesn’t know I’m back. He’ll be terrified when he sees me here.”

She spoke her r’s like w’s, lisping with a slightly babyish pronunciation which was at once affected and true to her character. Her voice was dull and toneless.

“Where is he then?” asked Birkin.

“He’s doing a private show at Lady Snellgrove’s,” said the girl. “Warens is there too.”

There was a pause.

“Well, then,” said Birkin, in a dispassionate protective manner, “what do you intend to do?”

The girl paused sullenly. She hated the question.

“I don’t intend to do anything,” she replied. “I shall look for some sittings tomorrow.”

“Who shall you go to?” asked Birkin.

“I shall go to Bentley’s first. But I believe he’s angwy with me for running away.”

“That is from the Madonna?”

“Yes. And then if he doesn’t want me, I know I can get work with Carmarthen.”

“Carmarthen?”

“Lord Carmarthen—he does photographs.”

“Chiffon and shoulders—”

“Yes. But he’s awfully decent.” There was a pause.

“And what are you going to do about Julius?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she said. “I shall just ignore him.”

“You’ve done with him altogether?” But she turned aside her face sullenly, and did not answer the question.

Another young man came hurrying up to the table.

“Hallo Birkin! Hallo *Pussum*, when did you come back?” he said eagerly.

“Today.”

“Does Halliday know?”

“I don’t know. I don’t care either.”

“Ha-ha! The wind still sits in that quarter, does it? Do you mind if I come over to this table?”

“I’m talking to Wupert, do you mind?” she replied, coolly and yet appealingly, like a child.

“Open confession—good for the soul, eh?” said the young man. “Well, so long.”

And giving a sharp look at Birkin and at Gerald, the young man moved off, with a swing of his coat skirts.

All this time Gerald had been completely ignored. And yet he felt that the girl was physically aware of his proximity. He waited, listened, and tried to piece together the conversation.

“Are you staying at the flat?” the girl asked, of Birkin.

“For three days,” replied Birkin. “And you?”

“I don’t know yet. I can always go to Bertha’s.” There was a silence.

Suddenly the girl turned to Gerald, and said, in a rather formal, polite voice, with the distant manner of a woman who accepts her position as a social inferior, yet assumes intimate *camaraderie* with the male she addresses:

“Do you know London well?”

“I can hardly say,” he laughed. “I’ve been up a good many times, but I was never in this place before.”

“You’re not an artist, then?” she said, in a tone that placed him an outsider.

“No,” he replied.

“He’s a soldier, and an explorer, and a Napoleon of industry,” said Birkin, giving Gerald his credentials for Bohemia.

“Are you a soldier?” asked the girl, with a cold yet lively curiosity.

“No, I resigned my commission,” said Gerald, “some years ago.”

“He was in the last war,” said Birkin.

“Were you really?” said the girl.

“And then he explored the Amazon,” said Birkin, “and now he is ruling over coal-mines.”

The girl looked at Gerald with steady, calm curiosity. He laughed, hearing himself described. He felt proud too, full of male strength. His blue, keen eyes were lit up with laughter, his ruddy face, with its sharp fair hair, was full of satisfaction, and glowing with life. He piqued her.

“How long are you staying?” she asked him.

“A day or two,” he replied. “But there is no particular hurry.”

Still she stared into his face with that slow, full gaze which was so curious and so exciting to him. He was acutely and delightfully conscious of himself, of his own attractiveness. He felt full of strength, able to give off a sort of electric power. And he was aware of her dark, hot-looking eyes upon him. She had beautiful eyes, dark, fully-opened, hot, naked in their looking at him. And on them there seemed to float a film of disintegration, a sort of misery and sullenness, like oil on water. She wore no hat in the heated café, her loose, simple jumper was strung on a string round her neck. But it was made of rich peach-coloured *crêpe-de-chine*, that hung heavily and softly from her

young throat and her slender wrists. Her appearance was simple and complete, really beautiful, because of her regularity and form, her soft dark hair falling full and level on either side of her head, her straight, small, softened features, Egyptian in the slight fulness of their curves, her slender neck and the simple, rich-coloured smock hanging on her slender shoulders. She was very still, almost null, in her manner, apart and watchful.

She appealed to Gerald strongly. He felt an awful, enjoyable power over her, an instinctive cherishing very near to cruelty. For she was a victim. He felt that she was in his power, and he was generous. The electricity was turgid and voluptuously rich, in his limbs. He would be able to destroy her utterly in the strength of his discharge. But she was waiting in her separation, given.

They talked banalities for some time. Suddenly Birkin said:

“There’s Julius!” and he half rose to his feet, motioning to the newcomer. The girl, with a curious, almost evil motion, looked round over her shoulder without moving her body. Gerald watched her dark, soft hair swing over her ears. He felt her watching intensely the man who was approaching, so he looked too. He saw a pale, full-built young man with rather long, solid fair hair hanging from under his black hat, moving cumbrously down the room, his face lit up with a smile at once naive and warm, and vapid. He approached towards Birkin, with a haste of welcome.

It was not till he was quite close that he perceived the girl. He recoiled, went pale, and said, in a high squealing voice:

“Pussum, what are *you* doing here?”

The café looked up like animals when they hear a cry. Halliday hung motionless, an almost imbecile smile flickering palely on his face. The girl only stared at him with a black look in which flared an unfathomable hell of knowledge, and a certain impotence. She was limited by him.

“Why have you come back?” repeated Halliday, in the same high, hysterical voice. “I told you not to come back.”

The girl did not answer, only stared in the same viscous, heavy fashion, straight at him, as he stood recoiled, as if for safety, against the next table.

“You know you wanted her to come back—come and sit down,” said Birkin to him.

“No I didn’t want her to come back, and I told her not to come back. What have you come for, Pussum?”

“For nothing from *you*,” she said in a heavy voice of resentment.

“Then why have you come back at *all*?” cried Halliday, his voice rising to a kind of squeal.

“She comes as she likes,” said Birkin. “Are you going to sit down, or are you not?”

“No, I won’t sit down with Pussum,” cried Halliday.

“I won’t hurt you, you needn’t be afraid,” she said to him, very curtly, and yet with a sort of protectiveness towards him, in her voice.

Halliday came and sat at the table, putting his hand on his heart, and crying:

“Oh, it’s given me such a turn! Pussum, I wish you wouldn’t do these things. Why did you come back?”

“Not for anything from you,” she repeated.

“You’ve said that before,” he cried in a high voice.

She turned completely away from him, to Gerald Crich, whose eyes were shining with a subtle amusement.

“Were you ever vewy much afwaid of the savages?” she asked in her calm, dull childish voice.

“No—never very much afraid. On the whole they’re harmless—they’re not born yet, you can’t feel really afraid of them. You know you can manage them.”

“Do you weally? Aren’t they very fierce?”

“Not very. There aren’t many fierce things, as a matter of fact. There aren’t many things, neither people nor animals, that have it in them to be really dangerous.”

“Except in herds,” interrupted Birkin.

“Aren’t there really?” she said. “Oh, I thought savages were all so dangerous, they’d have your life before you could look round.”

“Did you?” he laughed. “They are over-rated, savages. They’re too much like other people, not exciting, after the first acquaintance.”

“Oh, it’s not so very wonderfully brave then, to be an explorer?”

“No. It’s more a question of hardships than of terrors.”

“Oh! And weren’t you ever afraid?”

“In my life? I don’t know. Yes, I’m afraid of some things—of being shut up, locked up anywhere—or being fastened. I’m afraid of being bound hand and foot.”

She looked at him steadily with her dark eyes, that rested on him and roused him so deeply, that it left his upper self quite calm. It was rather delicious, to feel her drawing his self-revelations from him, as from the very innermost dark marrow of his body. She wanted to know. And her dark eyes seemed to be looking through into his naked organism. He felt, she was compelled to him, she was fated to come into contact with him, must have the seeing him and knowing him. And this roused a curious exultance. Also he felt, she must relinquish herself into his hands, and be subject to him. She was so profane, slave-like, watching him, absorbed by him. It was not that she was interested in what he said; she was absorbed by his self-revelation, by *him*, she wanted the secret of him, the experience of his male being.

Gerald’s face was lit up with an uncanny smile, full of light and rousedness, yet unconscious. He sat with his arms on the table, his sunbrowned, rather sinister hands,

that were animal and yet very shapely and attractive, pushed forward towards her. And they fascinated her. And she knew, she watched her own fascination.

Other men had come to the table, to talk with Birkin and Halliday. Gerald said in a low voice, apart, to Pussum:

“Where have you come back from?”

“From the country,” replied Pussum, in a very low, yet fully resonant voice. Her face closed hard. Continually she glanced at Halliday, and then a black flare came over her eyes. The heavy, fair young man ignored her completely; he was really afraid of her. For some moments she would be unaware of Gerald. He had not conquered her yet.

“And what has Halliday to do with it?” he asked, his voice still muted.

She would not answer for some seconds. Then she said, unwillingly:

“He made me go and live with him, and now he wants to throw me over. And yet he won’t let me go to anybody else. He wants me to live hidden in the country. And then he says I persecute him, that he can’t get rid of me.”

“Doesn’t know his own mind,” said Gerald.

“He hasn’t any mind, so he can’t know it,” she said. “He waits for what somebody tells him to do. He never does anything he wants to do himself—because he doesn’t know what he wants. He’s a perfect baby.”

Gerald looked at Halliday for some moments, watching the soft, rather degenerate face of the young man. Its very softness was an attraction; it was a soft, warm, corrupt nature, into which one might plunge with gratification.

“But he has no hold over you, has he?” Gerald asked.

“You see he *made* me go and live with him, when I didn’t want to,” she replied. “He came and cried to me, tears, you never saw so many, saying *he couldn’t* bear it unless I went back to him. And he wouldn’t go away, he would have stayed for ever. He made me go back. Then every time he behaves in this fashion. And now I’m going to have a baby, he wants to give me a hundred pounds and send me into the country, so that he would never see me nor hear of me again. But I’m not going to do it, after—”

A queer look came over Gerald’s face.

“Are you going to have a child?” he asked incredulous. It seemed, to look at her, impossible, she was so young and so far in spirit from any childbearing.

She looked full into his face, and her dark, inchoate eyes had now a furtive look, and a look of a knowledge of evil, dark and indomitable. A flame ran secretly to his heart.

“Yes,” she said. “Isn’t it beastly?”

“Don’t you want it?” he asked.

“I don’t,” she replied emphatically.

“But—” he said, “how long have you known?”

“Ten weeks,” she said.

All the time she kept her dark, inchoate eyes full upon him. He remained silent, thinking. Then, switching off and becoming cold, he asked, in a voice full of considerate kindness:

“Is there anything we can eat here? Is there anything you would like?”

“Yes,” she said, “I should adore some oysters.”

“All right,” he said. “We’ll have oysters.” And he beckoned to the waiter.

Halliday took no notice, until the little plate was set before her. Then suddenly he cried:

“Pussum, you can’t eat oysters when you’re drinking brandy.”

“What has it go to do with you?” she asked.

“Nothing, nothing,” he cried. “But you can’t eat oysters when you’re drinking brandy.”

“I’m not drinking brandy,” she replied, and she sprinkled the last drops of her liqueur over his face. He gave an odd squeal. She sat looking at him, as if indifferent.

“Pussum, why do you do that?” he cried in panic. He gave Gerald the impression that he was terrified of her, and that he loved his terror. He seemed to relish his own horror and hatred of her, turn it over and extract every flavour from it, in real panic. Gerald thought him a strange fool, and yet piquant.

“But Pussum,” said another man, in a very small, quick Eton voice, “you promised not to hurt him.”

“I haven’t hurt him,” she answered.

“What will you drink?” the young man asked. He was dark, and smooth-skinned, and full of a stealthy vigour.

“I don’t like porter, Maxim,” she replied.

“You must ask for champagne,” came the whispering, gentlemanly voice of the other. Gerald suddenly realised that this was a hint to him.

“Shall we have champagne?” he asked, laughing.

“Yes please, dwy,” she lisped childishly.

Gerald watched her eating the oysters. She was delicate and finicking in her eating, her fingers were fine and seemed very sensitive in the tips, so she put her food apart with fine, small motions, she ate carefully, delicately. It pleased him very much to see her, and it irritated Birkin. They were all drinking champagne. Maxim, the prim young Russian with the smooth, warm-coloured face and black, oiled hair was the only one who seemed to be perfectly calm and sober. Birkin was white and abstract, unnatural, Gerald was smiling with a constant bright, amused, cold light in his eyes, leaning a little protectively towards the Pussum, who was very handsome, and soft, unfolded like some red lotus in dreadful flowering nakedness, vainglorious now, flushed with wine and with the excitement of men. Halliday looked foolish. One glass of wine was enough to

make him drunk and giggling. Yet there was always a pleasant, warm naïveté about him, that made him attractive.

“I’m not afraid of anything except black-beetles,” said the Pussum, looking up suddenly and staring with her black eyes, on which there seemed an unseeing film of flame, fully upon Gerald. He laughed dangerously, from the blood. Her childish speech caressed his nerves, and her burning, filmed eyes, turned now full upon him, oblivious of all her antecedents, gave him a sort of licence.

“I’m not,” she protested. “I’m not afraid of other things. But black-beetles—ugh!” she shuddered convulsively, as if the very thought were too much to bear.

“Do you mean,” said Gerald, with the punctiliousness of a man who has been drinking, “that you are afraid of the sight of a black-beetle, or you are afraid of a black-beetle biting you, or doing you some harm?”

“Do they bite?” cried the girl.

“How perfectly loathsome!” exclaimed Halliday.

“I don’t know,” replied Gerald, looking round the table. “Do black-beetles bite? But that isn’t the point. Are you afraid of their biting, or is it a metaphysical antipathy?”

The girl was looking full upon him all the time with inchoate eyes.

“Oh, I think they’re beastly, they’re horrid,” she cried. “If I see one, it gives me the creeps all over. If one were to crawl on me, I’m *sure* I should die—I’m sure I should.”

“I hope not,” whispered the young Russian.

“I’m sure I should, Maxim,” she asseverated.

“Then one won’t crawl on you,” said Gerald, smiling and knowing. In some strange way he understood her.

“It’s metaphysical, as Gerald says,” Birkin stated.

There was a little pause of uneasiness.

“And are you afraid of nothing else, Pussum?” asked the young Russian, in his quick, hushed, elegant manner.

“Not weally,” she said. “I am afraid of some things, but not weally the same. I’m not afraid of *blood*.”

“Not afraid of blood!” exclaimed a young man with a thick, pale, jeering face, who had just come to the table and was drinking whisky.

The Pussum turned on him a sulky look of dislike, low and ugly.

“Aren’t you really afraid of blod?” the other persisted, a sneer all over his face.

“No, I’m not,” she retorted.

“Why, have you ever seen blood, except in a dentist’s spittoon?” jeered the young man.

“I wasn’t speaking to you,” she replied rather superbly.

“You can answer me, can’t you?” he said.

For reply, she suddenly jabbed a knife across his thick, pale hand. He started up with a vulgar curse.

“Show’s what you are,” said the Pussum in contempt.

“Curse you,” said the young man, standing by the table and looking down at her with acrid malevolence.

“Stop that,” said Gerald, in quick, instinctive command.

The young man stood looking down at her with sardonic contempt, a cowed, self-conscious look on his thick, pale face. The blood began to flow from his hand.

“Oh, how horrible, take it away!” squealed Halliday, turning green and averting his face.

“D’you feel ill?” asked the sardonic young man, in some concern. “Do you feel ill, Julius? Garn, it’s nothing, man, don’t give her the pleasure of letting her think she’s performed a feat—don’t give her the satisfaction, man—it’s just what she wants.”

“Oh!” squealed Halliday.

“He’s going to cat, Maxim,” said the Pussum warningly. The suave young Russian rose and took Halliday by the arm, leading him away. Birkin, white and diminished, looked on as if he were displeased. The wounded, sardonic young man moved away, ignoring his bleeding hand in the most conspicuous fashion.

“He’s an awful coward, really,” said the Pussum to Gerald. “He’s got such an influence over Julius.”

“Who is he?” asked Gerald.

“He’s a Jew, really. I can’t bear him.”

“Well, he’s quite unimportant. But what’s wrong with Halliday?”

“Julius’s the most awful coward you’ve ever seen,” she cried. “He always faints if I lift a knife—he’s tewwified of me.”

“H’m!” said Gerald.

“They’re all afraid of me,” she said. “Only the Jew thinks he’s going to show his courage. But he’s the biggest coward of them all, really, because he’s afraid what people will think about him—and Julius doesn’t care about that.”

“They’ve a lot of valour between them,” said Gerald good-humouredly.

The Pussum looked at him with a slow, slow smile. She was very handsome, flushed, and confident in dreadful knowledge. Two little points of light glinted on Gerald’s eyes.

“Why do they call you Pussum, because you’re like a cat?” he asked her.

“I expect so,” she said.

The smile grew more intense on his face.

“You are, rather; or a young, female panther.”

“Oh God, Gerald!” said Birkin, in some disgust.

They both looked uneasily at Birkin.

“You’re silent tonight, Wupert,” she said to him, with a slight insolence, being safe with the other man.

Halliday was coming back, looking forlorn and sick.

“Pussum,” he said, “I wish you wouldn’t do these things—Oh!” He sank in his chair with a groan.

“You’d better go home,” she said to him.

“I *will* go home,” he said. “But won’t you all come along. Won’t you come round to the flat?” he said to Gerald. “I should be so glad if you would. Do—that’ll be splendid. I say?” He looked round for a waiter. “Get me a taxi.” Then he groaned again. “Oh I do feel—perfectly ghastly! Pussum, you see what you do to me.”

“Then why are you such an idiot?” she said with sullen calm.

“But I’m not an idiot! Oh, how awful! Do come, everybody, it will be so splendid. Pussum, you are coming. What? Oh but you *must* come, yes, you must. What? Oh, my dear girl, don’t make a fuss now, I feel perfectly—Oh, it’s so ghastly—Ho!—er! Oh!”

“You know you can’t drink,” she said to him, coldly.

“I tell you it isn’t drink—it’s your disgusting behaviour, Pussum, it’s nothing else. Oh, how awful! Libidnikov, do let us go.”

“He’s only drunk one glass—only one glass,” came the rapid, hushed voice of the young Russian.

They all moved off to the door. The girl kept near to Gerald, and seemed to be at one in her motion with him. He was aware of this, and filled with demon-satisfaction that his motion held good for two. He held her in the hollow of his will, and she was soft, secret, invisible in her stirring there.

They crowded five of them into the taxi-cab. Halliday lurched in first, and dropped into his seat against the other window. Then the Pussum took her place, and Gerald sat next to her. They heard the young Russian giving orders to the driver, then they were all seated in the dark, crowded close together, Halliday groaning and leaning out of the window. They felt the swift, muffled motion of the car.

The Pussum sat near to Gerald, and she seemed to become soft, subtly to infuse herself into his bones, as if she were passing into him in a black, electric flow. Her being suffused into his veins like a magnetic darkness, and concentrated at the base of his spine like a fearful source of power. Meanwhile her voice sounded out reedy and nonchalant, as she talked indifferently with Birkin and with Maxim. Between her and Gerald was this silence and this black, electric comprehension in the darkness. Then she found his hand, and grasped it in her own firm, small clasp. It was so utterly dark, and yet such a naked statement, that rapid vibrations ran through his blood and over his brain, he was no longer responsible. Still her voice rang on like a bell, tinged with a

tone of mockery. And as she swung her head, her fine mane of hair just swept his face, and all his nerves were on fire, as with a subtle friction of electricity. But the great centre of his force held steady, a magnificent pride to him, at the base of his spine.

They arrived at a large block of buildings, went up in a lift, and presently a door was being opened for them by a Hindu. Gerald looked in surprise, wondering if he were a gentleman, one of the Hindus down from Oxford, perhaps. But no, he was the man-servant.

“Make tea, Hasan,” said Halliday.

“There is a room for me?” said Birkin.

To both of which questions the man grinned, and murmured.

He made Gerald uncertain, because, being tall and slender and reticent, he looked like a gentleman.

“Who is your servant?” he asked of Halliday. “He looks a swell.”

“Oh yes—that’s because he’s dressed in another man’s clothes. He’s anything but a swell, really. We found him in the road, starving. So I took him here, and another man gave him clothes. He’s anything but what he seems to be—his only advantage is that he can’t speak English and can’t understand it, so he’s perfectly safe.”

“He’s very dirty,” said the young Russian swiftly and silently.

Directly, the man appeared in the doorway.

“What is it?” said Halliday.

The Hindu grinned, and murmured shyly:

“Want to speak to master.”

Gerald watched curiously. The fellow in the doorway was goodlooking and clean-limbed, his bearing was calm, he looked elegant, aristocratic. Yet he was half a savage, grinning foolishly. Halliday went out into the corridor to speak with him.

“What?” they heard his voice. “What? What do you say? Tell me again. What? Want money? Want *more* money? But what do you want money for?” There was the confused sound of the Hindu’s talking, then Halliday appeared in the room, smiling also foolishly, and saying:

“He says he wants money to buy underclothing. Can anybody lend me a shilling? Oh thanks, a shilling will do to buy all the underclothes he wants.” He took the money from Gerald and went out into the passage again, where they heard him saying, “You can’t want more money, you had three and six yesterday. You mustn’t ask for any more. Bring the tea in quickly.”

Gerald looked round the room. It was an ordinary London sitting-room in a flat, evidently taken furnished, rather common and ugly. But there were several negro statues, wood-carvings from West Africa, strange and disturbing, the carved negroes looked almost like the foetus of a human being. One was a woman sitting naked in a

strange posture, and looking tortured, her abdomen stuck out. The young Russian explained that she was sitting in child-birth, clutching the ends of the band that hung from her neck, one in each hand, so that she could bear down, and help labour. The strange, transfixed, rudimentary face of the woman again reminded Gerald of a foetus, it was also rather wonderful, conveying the suggestion of the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness.

“Aren’t they rather obscene?” he asked, disapproving.

“I don’t know,” murmured the other rapidly. “I have never defined the obscene. I think they are very good.”

Gerald turned away. There were one or two new pictures in the room, in the Futurist manner; there was a large piano. And these, with some ordinary London lodging-house furniture of the better sort, completed the whole.

The Pussum had taken off her hat and coat, and was seated on the sofa. She was evidently quite at home in the house, but uncertain, suspended. She did not quite know her position. Her alliance for the time being was with Gerald, and she did not know how far this was admitted by any of the men. She was considering how she should carry off the situation. She was determined to have her experience. Now, at this eleventh hour, she was not to be balked. Her face was flushed as with battle, her eye was brooding but inevitable.

The man came in with tea and a bottle of Kümmel. He set the tray on a little table before the couch.

“Pussum,” said Halliday, “pour out the tea.”

She did not move.

“Won’t you do it?” Halliday repeated, in a state of nervous apprehension.

“I’ve not come back here as it was before,” she said. “I only came because the others wanted me to, not for your sake.”

“My dear Pussum, you know you are your own mistress. I don’t want you to do anything but use the flat for your own convenience—you know it, I’ve told you so many times.”

She did not reply, but silently, reservedly reached for the tea-pot. They all sat round and drank tea. Gerald could feel the electric connection between him and her so strongly, as she sat there quiet and withheld, that another set of conditions altogether had come to pass. Her silence and her immutability perplexed him. *How* was he going to come to her? And yet he felt it quite inevitable. He trusted completely to the current that held them. His perplexity was only superficial, new conditions reigned, the old were surpassed; here one did as one was possessed to do, no matter what it was.

Birkin rose. It was nearly one o’clock.

“I’m going to bed,” he said. “Gerald, I’ll ring you up in the morning at your place or you ring me up here.”

“Right,” said Gerald, and Birkin went out.

When he was well gone, Halliday said in a stimulated voice, to Gerald:

“I say, won’t you stay here—oh do!”

“You can’t put everybody up,” said Gerald.

“Oh but I can, perfectly—there are three more beds besides mine—do stay, won’t you. Everything is quite ready—there is always somebody here—I always put people up—I love having the house crowded.”

“But there are only two rooms,” said the Pussum, in a cold, hostile voice, “now Rupert’s here.”

“I know there are only two rooms,” said Halliday, in his odd, high way of speaking. “But what does that matter?”

He was smiling rather foolishly, and he spoke eagerly, with an insinuating determination.

“Julius and I will share one room,” said the Russian in his discreet, precise voice. Halliday and he were friends since Eton.

“It’s very simple,” said Gerald, rising and pressing back his arms, stretching himself. Then he went again to look at one of the pictures. Every one of his limbs was turgid with electric force, and his back was tense like a tiger’s, with slumbering fire. He was very proud.

The Pussum rose. She gave a black look at Halliday, black and deadly, which brought the rather foolishly pleased smile to that young man’s face. Then she went out of the room, with a cold good-night to them all generally.

There was a brief interval, they heard a door close, then Maxim said, in his refined voice:

“That’s all right.”

He looked significantly at Gerald, and said again, with a silent nod:

“That’s all right—you’re all right.”

Gerald looked at the smooth, ruddy, comely face, and at the strange, significant eyes, and it seemed as if the voice of the young Russian, so small and perfect, sounded in the blood rather than in the air.

“I’m all right then,” said Gerald.

“Yes! Yes! You’re all right,” said the Russian.

Halliday continued to smile, and to say nothing.

Suddenly the Pussum appeared again in the door, her small, childish face looking sullen and vindictive.

“I know you want to catch me out,” came her cold, rather resonant voice. “But I don’t care, I don’t care how much you catch me out.”

She turned and was gone again. She had been wearing a loose dressing-gown of purple silk, tied round her waist. She looked so small and childish and vulnerable, almost pitiful. And yet the black looks of her eyes made Gerald feel drowned in some potent darkness that almost frightened him.

The men lit another cigarette and talked casually.

CHAPTER VII. FETISH

In the morning Gerald woke late. He had slept heavily. Pussum was still asleep, sleeping childishly and pathetically. There was something small and curled up and defenceless about her, that roused an unsatisfied flame of passion in the young man's blood, a devouring avid pity. He looked at her again. But it would be too cruel to wake her. He subdued himself, and went away.

Hearing voices coming from the sitting-room, Halliday talking to Libidnikov, he went to the door and glanced in. He had on a silk wrap of a beautiful bluish colour, with an amethyst hem.

To his surprise he saw the two young men by the fire, stark naked. Halliday looked up, rather pleased.

"Good-morning," he said. "Oh—did you want towels?" And stark naked he went out into the hall, striding a strange, white figure between the unliving furniture. He came back with the towels, and took his former position, crouching seated before the fire on the fender.

"Don't you love to feel the fire on your skin?" he said.

"It *is* rather pleasant," said Gerald.

"How perfectly splendid it must be to be in a climate where one could do without clothing altogether," said Halliday.

"Yes," said Gerald, "if there weren't so many things that sting and bite."

"That's a disadvantage," murmured Maxim.

Gerald looked at him, and with a slight revulsion saw the human animal, golden skinned and bare, somehow humiliating. Halliday was different. He had a rather heavy, slack, broken beauty, white and firm. He was like a Christ in a Pietà. The animal was not there at all, only the heavy, broken beauty. And Gerald realised how Halliday's eyes were beautiful too, so blue and warm and confused, broken also in their expression. The fireglow fell on his heavy, rather bowed shoulders, he sat slackly crouched on the fender, his face was uplifted, weak, perhaps slightly disintegrate, and yet with a moving beauty of its own.

“Of course,” said Maxim, “you’ve been in hot countries where the people go about naked.”

“Oh really!” exclaimed Halliday. “Where?”

“South America—Amazon,” said Gerald.

“Oh but how perfectly splendid! It’s one of the things I want most to do—to live from day to day without *ever* putting on any sort of clothing whatever. If I could do that, I should feel I had lived.”

“But why?” said Gerald. “I can’t see that it makes so much difference.”

“Oh, I think it would be perfectly splendid. I’m sure life would be entirely another thing—entirely different, and perfectly wonderful.”

“But why?” asked Gerald. “Why should it?”

“Oh—one would *feel* things instead of merely looking at them. I should feel the air move against me, and feel the things I touched, instead of having only to look at them. I’m sure life is all wrong because it has become much too visual—we can neither hear nor feel nor understand, we can only see. I’m sure that is entirely wrong.”

“Yes, that is true, that is true,” said the Russian.

Gerald glanced at him, and saw him, his suave, golden coloured body with the black hair growing fine and freely, like tendrils, and his limbs like smooth plant-stems. He was so healthy and well-made, why did he make one ashamed, why did one feel repelled? Why should Gerald even dislike it, why did it seem to him to detract from his own dignity. Was that all a human being amounted to? So uninspired! thought Gerald.

Birkin suddenly appeared in the doorway, in white pyjamas and wet hair, and a towel over his arm. He was aloof and white, and somehow evanescent.

“There’s the bath-room now, if you want it,” he said generally, and was going away again, when Gerald called:

“I say, Rupert!”

“What?” The single white figure appeared again, a presence in the room.

“What do you think of that figure there? I want to know,” Gerald asked.

Birkin, white and strangely ghostly, went over to the carved figure of the negro woman in labour. Her nude, protuberant body crouched in a strange, clutching posture, her hands gripping the ends of the band, above her breast.

“It is art,” said Birkin.

“Very beautiful, it’s very beautiful,” said the Russian.

They all drew near to look. Gerald looked at the group of men, the Russian golden and like a water-plant, Halliday tall and heavily, brokenly beautiful, Birkin very white and indefinite, not to be assigned, as he looked closely at the carved woman. Strangely elated, Gerald also lifted his eyes to the face of the wooden figure. And his heart contracted.

He saw vividly with his spirit the grey, forward-stretching face of the negro woman, African and tense, abstracted in utter physical stress. It was a terrible face, void, peaked, abstracted almost into meaninglessness by the weight of sensation beneath. He saw the Pussum in it. As in a dream, he knew her.

“Why is it art?” Gerald asked, shocked, resentful.

“It conveys a complete truth,” said Birkin. “It contains the whole truth of that state, whatever you feel about it.”

“But you can’t call it *high* art,” said Gerald.

“High! There are centuries and hundreds of centuries of development in a straight line, behind that carving; it is an awful pitch of culture, of a definite sort.”

“What culture?” Gerald asked, in opposition. He hated the sheer African thing.

“Pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate *physical* consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual. It is so sensual as to be final, supreme.”

But Gerald resented it. He wanted to keep certain illusions, certain ideas like clothing.

“You like the wrong things, Rupert,” he said, “things against yourself.”

“Oh, I know, this isn’t everything,” Birkin replied, moving away.

When Gerald went back to his room from the bath, he also carried his clothes. He was so conventional at home, that when he was really away, and on the loose, as now, he enjoyed nothing so much as full outrageousness. So he strode with his blue silk wrap over his arm and felt defiant.

The Pussum lay in her bed, motionless, her round, dark eyes like black, unhappy pools. He could only see the black, bottomless pools of her eyes. Perhaps she suffered. The sensation of her inchoate suffering roused the old sharp flame in him, a mordant pity, a passion almost of cruelty.

“You are awake now,” he said to her.

“What time is it?” came her muted voice.

She seemed to flow back, almost like liquid, from his approach, to sink helplessly away from him. Her inchoate look of a violated slave, whose fulfilment lies in her further and further violation, made his nerves quiver with acutely desirable sensation. After all, his was the only will, she was the passive substance of his will. He tingled with the subtle, biting sensation. And then he knew, he must go away from her, there must be pure separation between them.

It was a quiet and ordinary breakfast, the four men all looking very clean and bathed. Gerald and the Russian were both correct and *comme il faut* in appearance and manner, Birkin was gaunt and sick, and looked a failure in his attempt to be a properly dressed man, like Gerald and Maxim. Halliday wore tweeds and a green flannel shirt, and a rag

of a tie, which was just right for him. The Hindu brought in a great deal of soft toast, and looked exactly the same as he had looked the night before, statically the same.

At the end of the breakfast the Pussum appeared, in a purple silk wrap with a shimmering sash. She had recovered herself somewhat, but was mute and lifeless still. It was a torment to her when anybody spoke to her. Her face was like a small, fine mask, sinister too, masked with unwilling suffering. It was almost midday. Gerald rose and went away to his business, glad to get out. But he had not finished. He was coming back again at evening, they were all dining together, and he had booked seats for the party, excepting Birkin, at a music-hall.

At night they came back to the flat very late again, again flushed with drink. Again the man-servant—who invariably disappeared between the hours of ten and twelve at night—came in silently and inscrutably with tea, bending in a slow, strange, leopard-like fashion to put the tray softly on the table. His face was immutable, aristocratic-looking, tinged slightly with grey under the skin; he was young and good-looking. But Birkin felt a slight sickness, looking at him, and feeling the slight greyness as an ash or a corruption, in the aristocratic inscrutability of expression a nauseating, bestial stupidity.

Again they talked cordially and rousedly together. But already a certain friability was coming over the party, Birkin was mad with irritation, Halliday was turning in an insane hatred against Gerald, the Pussum was becoming hard and cold, like a flint knife, and Halliday was laying himself out to her. And her intention, ultimately, was to capture Halliday, to have complete power over him.

In the morning they all stalked and lounged about again. But Gerald could feel a strange hostility to himself, in the air. It roused his obstinacy, and he stood up against it. He hung on for two more days. The result was a nasty and insane scene with Halliday on the fourth evening. Halliday turned with absurd animosity upon Gerald, in the café. There was a row. Gerald was on the point of knocking-in Halliday's face; when he was filled with sudden disgust and indifference, and he went away, leaving Halliday in a foolish state of gloating triumph, the Pussum hard and established, and Maxim standing clear. Birkin was absent, he had gone out of town again.

Gerald was piqued because he had left without giving the Pussum money. It was true, she did not care whether he gave her money or not, and he knew it. But she would have been glad of ten pounds, and he would have been *very* glad to give them to her. Now he felt in a false position. He went away chewing his lips to get at the ends of his short clipped moustache. He knew the Pussum was merely glad to be rid of him. She had got her Halliday whom she wanted. She wanted him completely in her power. Then she would marry him. She wanted to marry him. She had set her will on marrying Halliday. She never wanted to hear of Gerald again; unless, perhaps, she were in difficulty; because after all, Gerald was what she called a man, and these others, Halliday, Libidnikov, Birkin, the whole Bohemian set, they were only half men. But it was half

men she could deal with. She felt sure of herself with them. The real men, like Gerald, put her in her place too much.

Still, she respected Gerald, she really respected him. She had managed to get his address, so that she could appeal to him in time of distress. She knew he wanted to give her money. She would perhaps write to him on that inevitable rainy day.

CHAPTER VIII. BREADALBY

Breadalby was a Georgian house with Corinthian pillars, standing among the softer, greener hills of Derbyshire, not far from Cromford. In front, it looked over a lawn, over a few trees, down to a string of fish-ponds in the hollow of the silent park. At the back were trees, among which were to be found the stables, and the big kitchen garden, behind which was a wood.

It was a very quiet place, some miles from the high-road, back from the Derwent Valley, outside the show scenery. Silent and forsaken, the golden stucco showed between the trees, the house-front looked down the park, unchanged and unchanging.

Of late, however, Hermione had lived a good deal at the house. She had turned away from London, away from Oxford, towards the silence of the country. Her father was mostly absent, abroad, she was either alone in the house, with her visitors, of whom there were always several, or she had with her her brother, a bachelor, and a Liberal member of Parliament. He always came down when the House was not sitting, seemed always to be present in Breadalby, although he was most conscientious in his attendance to duty.

The summer was just coming in when Ursula and Gudrun went to stay the second time with Hermione. Coming along in the car, after they had entered the park, they looked across the dip, where the fish-ponds lay in silence, at the pillared front of the house, sunny and small like an English drawing of the old school, on the brow of the green hill, against the trees. There were small figures on the green lawn, women in lavender and yellow moving to the shade of the enormous, beautifully balanced cedar tree.

“Isn’t it complete!” said Gudrun. “It is as final as an old aquatint.” She spoke with some resentment in her voice, as if she were captivated unwillingly, as if she must admire against her will.

“Do you love it?” asked Ursula.

“I don’t *love* it, but in its way, I think it is quite complete.”

The motor-car ran down the hill and up again in one breath, and they were curving to the side door. A parlour-maid appeared, and then Hermione, coming forward with her

pale face lifted, and her hands outstretched, advancing straight to the newcomers, her voice singing:

“Here you are—I’m so glad to see you—” she kissed Gudrun—“so glad to see you—” she kissed Ursula and remained with her arm round her. “Are you very tired?”

“Not at all tired,” said Ursula.

“Are you tired, Gudrun?”

“Not at all, thanks,” said Gudrun.

“No—” drawled Hermione. And she stood and looked at them. The two girls were embarrassed because she would not move into the house, but must have her little scene of welcome there on the path. The servants waited.

“Come in,” said Hermione at last, having fully taken in the pair of them. Gudrun was the more beautiful and attractive, she had decided again, Ursula was more physical, more womanly. She admired Gudrun’s dress more. It was of green poplin, with a loose coat above it, of broad, dark-green and dark-brown stripes. The hat was of a pale, greenish straw, the colour of new hay, and it had a plaited ribbon of black and orange, the stockings were dark green, the shoes black. It was a good get-up, at once fashionable and individual. Ursula, in dark blue, was more ordinary, though she also looked well.

Hermione herself wore a dress of prune-coloured silk, with coral beads and coral coloured stockings. But her dress was both shabby and soiled, even rather dirty.

“You would like to see your rooms now, wouldn’t you! Yes. We will go up now, shall we?”

Ursula was glad when she could be left alone in her room. Hermione lingered so long, made such a stress on one, she stood so near to one, pressing herself near upon one, in a way that was most embarrassing and oppressive. She seemed to hinder one’s workings.

Lunch was served on the lawn, under the great tree, whose thick, blackish boughs came down close to the grass. There were present a young Italian woman, slight and fashionable, a young, athletic-looking Miss Bradley, a learned, dry Baronet of fifty, who was always making witticisms and laughing at them heartily in a harsh, horse-laugh, there was Rupert Birkin, and then a woman secretary, a Fräulein März, young and slim and pretty.

The food was very good, that was one thing. Gudrun, critical of everything, gave it her full approval. Ursula loved the situation, the white table by the cedar tree, the scent of new sunshine, the little vision of the leafy park, with far-off deer feeding peacefully. There seemed a magic circle drawn about the place, shutting out the present, enclosing the delightful, precious past, trees and deer and silence, like a dream.

But in spirit she was unhappy. The talk went on like a rattle of small artillery, always slightly sententious, with a sententiousness that was only emphasised by the continual crackling of a witticism, the continual spatter of verbal jest, designed to give a tone of

flippancy to a stream of conversation that was all critical and general, a canal of conversation rather than a stream.

The attitude was mental and very wearying. Only the elderly sociologist, whose mental fibre was so tough as to be insentient, seemed to be thoroughly happy. Birkin was down in the mouth. Hermione appeared, with amazing persistence, to wish to ridicule him and make him look ignominious in the eyes of everybody. And it was surprising how she seemed to succeed, how helpless he seemed against her. He looked completely insignificant. Ursula and Gudrun, both very unused, were mostly silent, listening to the slow, rhapsodic sing-song of Hermione, or the verbal sallies of Sir Joshua, or the prattle of Fräulein, or the responses of the other two women.

Luncheon was over, coffee was brought out on the grass, the party left the table and sat about in lounge chairs, in the shade or in the sunshine as they wished. Fräulein departed into the house, Hermione took up her embroidery, the little Contessa took a book, Miss Bradley was weaving a basket out of fine grass, and there they all were on the lawn in the early summer afternoon, working leisurely and spattering with half-intellectual, deliberate talk.

Suddenly there was the sound of the brakes and the shutting off of a motor-car.

“There’s Salsie!” sang Hermione, in her slow, amusing sing-song. And laying down her work, she rose slowly, and slowly passed over the lawn, round the bushes, out of sight.

“Who is it?” asked Gudrun.

“Mr Roddice—Miss Roddice’s brother—at least, I suppose it’s he,” said Sir Joshua.

“Salsie, yes, it is her brother,” said the little Contessa, lifting her head for a moment from her book, and speaking as if to give information, in her slightly deepened, guttural English.

They all waited. And then round the bushes came the tall form of Alexander Roddice, striding romantically like a Meredith hero who remembers Disraeli. He was cordial with everybody, he was at once a host, with an easy, offhand hospitality that he had learned for Hermione’s friends. He had just come down from London, from the House. At once the atmosphere of the House of Commons made itself felt over the lawn: the Home Secretary had said such and such a thing, and he, Roddice, on the other hand, thought such and such a thing, and had said so-and-so to the PM.

Now Hermione came round the bushes with Gerald Crich. He had come along with Alexander. Gerald was presented to everybody, was kept by Hermione for a few moments in full view, then he was led away, still by Hermione. He was evidently her guest of the moment.

There had been a split in the Cabinet; the minister for Education had resigned owing to adverse criticism. This started a conversation on education.

“Of course,” said Hermione, lifting her face like a rhapsodist, “there *can* be no reason, no *excuse* for education, except the joy and beauty of knowledge in itself.” She seemed to rumble and ruminate with subterranean thoughts for a minute, then she proceeded: “Vocational education *isn’t* education, it is the close of education.”

Gerald, on the brink of discussion, sniffed the air with delight and prepared for action.

“Not necessarily,” he said. “But isn’t education really like gymnastics, isn’t the end of education the production of a well-trained, vigorous, energetic mind?”

“Just as athletics produce a healthy body, ready for anything,” cried Miss Bradley, in hearty accord.

Gudrun looked at her in silent loathing.

“Well—” rumbled Hermione, “I don’t know. To me the pleasure of knowing is so great, so *wonderful*—nothing has meant so much to me in all life, as certain knowledge—no, I am sure—nothing.”

“What knowledge, for example, Hermione?” asked Alexander.

Hermione lifted her face and rumbled—

“M—m—m—I don’t know . . . But one thing was the stars, when I really understood something about the stars. One feels so *uplifted*, so *unbounded* . . .”

Birkin looked at her in a white fury.

“What do you want to feel unbounded for?” he said sarcastically. “You don’t want to *be* unbounded.”

Hermione recoiled in offence.

“Yes, but one does have that limitless feeling,” said Gerald. “It’s like getting on top of the mountain and seeing the Pacific.”

“Silent upon a peak in Dariayn,” murmured the Italian, lifting her face for a moment from her book.

“Not necessarily in Dariayn,” said Gerald, while Ursula began to laugh.

Hermione waited for the dust to settle, and then she said, untouched:

“Yes, it is the greatest thing in life—to *know*. It is really to be happy, to be *free*.”

“Knowledge is, of course, liberty,” said Mattheson.

“In compressed tabloids,” said Birkin, looking at the dry, stiff little body of the Baronet. Immediately Gudrun saw the famous sociologist as a flat bottle, containing tabloids of compressed liberty. That pleased her. Sir Joshua was labelled and placed forever in her mind.

“What does that mean, Rupert?” sang Hermione, in a calm snub.

“You can only have knowledge, strictly,” he replied, “of things concluded, in the past. It’s like bottling the liberty of last summer in the bottled gooseberries.”

“*Can* one have knowledge only of the past?” asked the Baronet, pointedly. “Could we call our knowledge of the laws of gravitation for instance, knowledge of the past?”

“Yes,” said Birkin.

“There is a most beautiful thing in my book,” suddenly piped the little Italian woman. “It says the man came to the door and threw his eyes down the street.”

There was a general laugh in the company. Miss Bradley went and looked over the shoulder of the Contessa.

“See!” said the Contessa.

“Bazarov came to the door and threw his eyes hurriedly down the street,” she read.

Again there was a loud laugh, the most startling of which was the Baronet’s, which rattled out like a clatter of falling stones.

“What is the book?” asked Alexander, promptly.

“Fathers and Sons, by Turgenev,” said the little foreigner, pronouncing every syllable distinctly. She looked at the cover, to verify herself.

“An old American edition,” said Birkin.

“Ha!—of course—translated from the French,” said Alexander, with a fine declamatory voice. “*Bazarov ouvra la porte et jeta les yeux dans la rue.*”

He looked brightly round the company.

“I wonder what the ‘hurriedly’ was,” said Ursula.

They all began to guess.

And then, to the amazement of everybody, the maid came hurrying with a large tea-tray. The afternoon had passed so swiftly.

After tea, they were all gathered for a walk.

“Would you like to come for a walk?” said Hermione to each of them, one by one. And they all said yes, feeling somehow like prisoners marshalled for exercise. Birkin only refused.

“Will you come for a walk, Rupert?”

“No, Hermione.”

“But are you *sure*?”

“Quite sure.” There was a second’s hesitation.

“And why not?” sang Hermione’s question. It made her blood run sharp, to be thwarted in even so trifling a matter. She intended them all to walk with her in the park.

“Because I don’t like trooping off in a gang,” he said.

Her voice rumbled in her throat for a moment. Then she said, with a curious stray calm:

“Then we’ll leave a little boy behind, if he’s sulky.”

And she looked really gay, while she insulted him. But it merely made him stiff.

She trailed off to the rest of the company, only turning to wave her handkerchief to him, and to chuckle with laughter, singing out:

“Good-bye, good-bye, little boy.”

“Good-bye, impudent hag,” he said to himself.

They all went through the park. Hermione wanted to show them the wild daffodils on a little slope. “This way, this way,” sang her leisurely voice at intervals. And they had all to come this way. The daffodils were pretty, but who could see them? Ursula was stiff all over with resentment by this time, resentment of the whole atmosphere. Gudrun, mocking and objective, watched and registered everything.

They looked at the shy deer, and Hermione talked to the stag, as if he too were a boy she wanted to wheedle and fondle. He was male, so she must exert some kind of power over him. They trailed home by the fish-ponds, and Hermione told them about the quarrel of two male swans, who had striven for the love of the one lady. She chuckled and laughed as she told how the ousted lover had sat with his head buried under his wing, on the gravel.

When they arrived back at the house, Hermione stood on the lawn and sang out, in a strange, small, high voice that carried very far:

“Rupert! Rupert!” The first syllable was high and slow, the second dropped down. “Roo-o-opert.”

But there was no answer. A maid appeared.

“Where is Mr Birkin, Alice?” asked the mild straying voice of Hermione. But under the straying voice, what a persistent, almost insane *will!*

“I think he’s in his room, madam.”

“Is he?”

Hermione went slowly up the stairs, along the corridor, singing out in her high, small call:

“Ru-oo-pert! Ru-oo pert!”

She came to his door, and tapped, still crying: “Roo-pert.”

“Yes,” sounded his voice at last.

“What are you doing?”

The question was mild and curious.

There was no answer. Then he opened the door.

“We’ve come back,” said Hermione. “The daffodils are *so* beautiful.”

“Yes,” he said, “I’ve seen them.”

She looked at him with her long, slow, impassive look, along her cheeks.

“Have you?” she echoed. And she remained looking at him. She was stimulated above all things by this conflict with him, when he was like a sulky boy, helpless, and she had him safe at Breadalby. But underneath she knew the split was coming, and her hatred of him was subconscious and intense.

“What were you doing?” she reiterated, in her mild, indifferent tone. He did not answer, and she made her way, almost unconsciously into his room. He had taken a Chinese drawing of geese from the boudoir, and was copying it, with much skill and vividness.

“You are copying the drawing,” she said, standing near the table, and looking down at his work. “Yes. How beautifully you do it! You like it very much, don’t you?”

“It’s a marvellous drawing,” he said.

“Is it? I’m so glad you like it, because I’ve always been fond of it. The Chinese Ambassador gave it me.”

“I know,” he said.

“But why do you copy it?” she asked, casual and sing-song. “Why not do something original?”

“I want to know it,” he replied. “One gets more of China, copying this picture, than reading all the books.”

“And what do you get?”

She was at once roused, she laid as it were violent hands on him, to extract his secrets from him. She *must* know. It was a dreadful tyranny, an obsession in her, to know all he knew. For some time he was silent, hating to answer her. Then, compelled, he began:

“I know what centres they live from—what they perceive and feel—the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud—the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose’s blood, entering their own blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery.”

Hermione looked at him along her narrow, pallid cheeks. Her eyes were strange and drugged, heavy under their heavy, drooping lids. Her thin bosom shrugged convulsively. He stared back at her, devilish and unchanging. With another strange, sick convulsion, she turned away, as if she were sick, could feel dissolution setting-in in her body. For with her mind she was unable to attend to his words, he caught her, as it were, beneath all her defences, and destroyed her with some insidious occult potency.

“Yes,” she said, as if she did not know what she were saying. “Yes,” and she swallowed, and tried to regain her mind. But she could not, she was witless, decentralised. Use all her will as she might, she could not recover. She suffered the ghastliness of dissolution, broken and gone in a horrible corruption. And he stood and looked at her unmoved. She strayed out, pallid and preyed-upon like a ghost, like one attacked by the tomb-influences which dog us. And she was gone like a corpse, that has no presence, no connection. He remained hard and vindictive.

Hermione came down to dinner strange and sepulchral, her eyes heavy and full of sepulchral darkness, strength. She had put on a dress of stiff old greenish brocade, that fitted tight and made her look tall and rather terrible, ghastly. In the gay light of the drawing-room she was uncanny and oppressive. But seated in the half-light of the dining-room, sitting stiffly before the shaded candles on the table, she seemed a power, a presence. She listened and attended with a drugged attention.

The party was gay and extravagant in appearance, everybody had put on evening dress except Birkin and Joshua Mattheson. The little Italian Contessa wore a dress of tissue, of orange and gold and black velvet in soft wide stripes, Gudrun was emerald green with strange net-work, Ursula was in yellow with dull silver veiling, Miss Bradley was of grey, crimson and jet, Fräulein März wore pale blue. It gave Hermione a sudden convulsive sensation of pleasure, to see these rich colours under the candle-light. She was aware of the talk going on, ceaselessly, Joshua's voice dominating; of the ceaseless pitter-patter of women's light laughter and responses; of the brilliant colours and the white table and the shadow above and below; and she seemed in a swoon of gratification, convulsed with pleasure and yet sick, like a *revenant*. She took very little part in the conversation, yet she heard it all, it was all hers.

They all went together into the drawing-room, as if they were one family, easily, without any attention to ceremony. Fräulein handed the coffee, everybody smoked cigarettes, or else long warden pipes of white clay, of which a sheaf was provided.

"Will you smoke?—cigarettes or pipe?" asked Fräulein prettily. There was a circle of people, Sir Joshua with his eighteenth-century appearance, Gerald the amused, handsome young Englishman, Alexander tall and the handsome politician, democratic and lucid, Hermione strange like a long Cassandra, and the women lurid with colour, all dutifully smoking their long white pipes, and sitting in a half-moon in the comfortable, soft-lighted drawing-room, round the logs that flickered on the marble hearth.

The talk was very often political or sociological, and interesting, curiously anarchistic. There was an accumulation of powerful force in the room, powerful and destructive. Everything seemed to be thrown into the melting pot, and it seemed to Ursula they were all witches, helping the pot to bubble. There was an elation and a satisfaction in it all, but it was cruelly exhausting for the newcomers, this ruthless mental pressure, this powerful, consuming, destructive mentality that emanated from Joshua and Hermione and Birkin and dominated the rest.

But a sickness, a fearful nausea gathered possession of Hermione. There was a lull in the talk, as it was arrested by her unconscious but all-powerful will.

"Salsie, won't you play something?" said Hermione, breaking off completely. "Won't somebody dance? Gudrun, you will dance, won't you? I wish you would. *Anche tu, Palestra, ballerai?—sì, per piacere.* You too, Ursula."

Hermione rose and slowly pulled the gold-embroidered band that hung by the mantel, clinging to it for a moment, then releasing it suddenly. Like a priestess she looked, unconscious, sunk in a heavy half-trance.

A servant came, and soon reappeared with armfuls of silk robes and shawls and scarves, mostly oriental, things that Hermione, with her love for beautiful extravagant dress, had collected gradually.

“The three women will dance together,” she said.

“What shall it be?” asked Alexander, rising briskly.

“*Vergini Delle Rocchette*,” said the Contessa at once.

“They are so languid,” said Ursula.

“The three witches from Macbeth,” suggested Fräulein usefully. It was finally decided to do Naomi and Ruth and Orpah. Ursula was Naomi, Gudrun was Ruth, the Contessa was Orpah. The idea was to make a little ballet, in the style of the Russian Ballet of Pavlova and Nijinsky.

The Contessa was ready first, Alexander went to the piano, a space was cleared. Orpah, in beautiful oriental clothes, began slowly to dance the death of her husband. Then Ruth came, and they wept together, and lamented, then Naomi came to comfort them. It was all done in dumb show, the women danced their emotion in gesture and motion. The little drama went on for a quarter of an hour.

Ursula was beautiful as Naomi. All her men were dead, it remained to her only to stand alone in indomitable assertion, demanding nothing. Ruth, woman-loving, loved her. Orpah, a vivid, sensational, subtle widow, would go back to the former life, a repetition. The interplay between the women was real and rather frightening. It was strange to see how Gudrun clung with heavy, desperate passion to Ursula, yet smiled with subtle malevolence against her, how Ursula accepted silently, unable to provide any more either for herself or for the other, but dangerous and indomitable, refuting her grief.

Hermione loved to watch. She could see the Contessa’s rapid, stoat-like sensationalism, Gudrun’s ultimate but treacherous cleaving to the woman in her sister, Ursula’s dangerous helplessness, as if she were helplessly weighted, and unreleased.

“That was very beautiful,” everybody cried with one accord. But Hermione writhed in her soul, knowing what she could not know. She cried out for more dancing, and it was her will that set the Contessa and Birkin moving mockingly in Malbrouk.

Gerald was excited by the desperate cleaving of Gudrun to Naomi. The essence of that female, subterranean recklessness and mockery penetrated his blood. He could not forget Gudrun’s lifted, offered, cleaving, reckless, yet withal mocking weight. And Birkin, watching like a hermit crab from its hole, had seen the brilliant frustration and helplessness of Ursula. She was rich, full of dangerous power. She was like a strange

unconscious bud of powerful womanhood. He was unconsciously drawn to her. She was his future.

Alexander played some Hungarian music, and they all danced, seized by the spirit. Gerald was marvellously exhilarated at finding himself in motion, moving towards Gudrun, dancing with feet that could not yet escape from the waltz and the two-step, but feeling his force stir along his limbs and his body, out of captivity. He did not know yet how to dance their convulsive, rag-time sort of dancing, but he knew how to begin. Birkin, when he could get free from the weight of the people present, whom he disliked, danced rapidly and with a real gaiety. And how Hermione hated him for this irresponsible gaiety.

“Now I see,” cried the Contessa excitedly, watching his purely gay motion, which he had all to himself. “Mr Birkin, he is a changer.”

Hermione looked at her slowly, and shuddered, knowing that only a foreigner could have seen and have said this.

“*Cosa vuol dire, Palestra?*” she asked, sing-song.

“Look,” said the Contessa, in Italian. “He is not a man, he is a chameleon, a creature of change.”

“He is not a man, he is treacherous, not one of us,” said itself over in Hermione’s consciousness. And her soul writhed in the black subjugation to him, because of his power to escape, to exist, other than she did, because he was not consistent, not a man, less than a man. She hated him in a despair that shattered her and broke her down, so that she suffered sheer dissolution like a corpse, and was unconscious of everything save the horrible sickness of dissolution that was taking place within her, body and soul.

The house being full, Gerald was given the smaller room, really the dressing-room, communicating with Birkin’s bedroom. When they all took their candles and mounted the stairs, where the lamps were burning subduedly, Hermione captured Ursula and brought her into her own bedroom, to talk to her. A sort of constraint came over Ursula in the big, strange bedroom. Hermione seemed to be bearing down on her, awful and inchoate, making some appeal. They were looking at some Indian silk shirts, gorgeous and sensual in themselves, their shape, their almost corrupt gorgeousness. And Hermione came near, and her bosom writhed, and Ursula was for a moment blank with panic. And for a moment Hermione’s haggard eyes saw the fear on the face of the other, there was again a sort of crash, a crashing down. And Ursula picked up a shirt of rich red and blue silk, made for a young princess of fourteen, and was crying mechanically:

“Isn’t it wonderful—who would dare to put those two strong colours together—”

Then Hermione’s maid entered silently and Ursula, overcome with dread, escaped, carried away by powerful impulse.

Birkin went straight to bed. He was feeling happy, and sleepy. Since he had danced he was happy. But Gerald would talk to him. Gerald, in evening dress, sat on Birkin's bed when the other lay down, and must talk.

"Who are those two Brangwens?" Gerald asked.

"They live in Beldover."

"In Beldover! Who are they then?"

"Teachers in the Grammar School."

There was a pause.

"They are!" exclaimed Gerald at length. "I thought I had seen them before."

"It disappoints you?" said Birkin.

"Disappoints me! No—but how is it Hermione has them here?"

"She knew Gudrun in London—that's the younger one, the one with the darker hair—she's an artist—does sculpture and modelling."

"She's not a teacher in the Grammar School, then—only the other?"

"Both—Gudrun art mistress, Ursula a class mistress."

"And what's the father?"

"Handicraft instructor in the schools."

"Really!"

"Class-barriers are breaking down!"

Gerald was always uneasy under the slightly jeering tone of the other.

"That their father is handicraft instructor in a school! What does it matter to me?"

Birkin laughed. Gerald looked at his face, as it lay there laughing and bitter and indifferent on the pillow, and he could not go away.

"I don't suppose you will see very much more of Gudrun, at least. She is a restless bird, she'll be gone in a week or two," said Birkin.

"Where will she go?"

"London, Paris, Rome—heaven knows. I always expect her to sheer off to Damascus or San Francisco; she's a bird of paradise. God knows what she's got to do with Beldover. It goes by contraries, like dreams."

Gerald pondered for a few moments.

"How do you know her so well?" he asked.

"I knew her in London," he replied, "in the Algernon Strange set. She'll know about Pussum and Libidnikov and the rest—even if she doesn't know them personally. She was never quite that set—more conventional, in a way. I've known her for two years, I suppose."

"And she makes money, apart from her teaching?" asked Gerald.

“Some—irregularly. She can sell her models. She has a certain *réclame*.”

“How much for?”

“A guinea, ten guineas.”

“And are they good? What are they?”

“I think sometimes they are marvellously good. That is hers, those two wagtails in Hermione’s boudoir—you’ve seen them—they are carved in wood and painted.”

“I thought it was savage carving again.”

“No, hers. That’s what they are—animals and birds, sometimes odd small people in everyday dress, really rather wonderful when they come off. They have a sort of funniness that is quite unconscious and subtle.”

“She might be a well-known artist one day?” mused Gerald.

“She might. But I think she won’t. She drops her art if anything else catches her. Her contrariness prevents her taking it seriously—she must never be too serious, she feels she might give herself away. And she won’t give herself away—she’s always on the defensive. That’s what I can’t stand about her type. By the way, how did things go off with Pussum after I left you? I haven’t heard anything.”

“Oh, rather disgusting. Halliday turned objectionable, and I only just saved myself from jumping in his stomach, in a real old-fashioned row.”

Birkin was silent.

“Of course,” he said, “Julius is somewhat insane. On the one hand he’s had religious mania, and on the other, he is fascinated by obscenity. Either he is a pure servant, washing the feet of Christ, or else he is making obscene drawings of Jesus—action and reaction—and between the two, nothing. He is really insane. He wants a pure lily, another girl, with a baby face, on the one hand, and on the other, he *must* have the Pussum, just to defile himself with her.”

“That’s what I can’t make out,” said Gerald. “Does he love her, the Pussum, or doesn’t he?”

“He neither does nor doesn’t. She is the harlot, the actual harlot of adultery to him. And he’s got a craving to throw himself into the filth of her. Then he gets up and calls on the name of the lily of purity, the baby-faced girl, and so enjoys himself all round. It’s the old story—action and reaction, and nothing between.”

“I don’t know,” said Gerald, after a pause, “that he does insult the Pussum so very much. She strikes me as being rather foul.”

“But I thought you liked her,” exclaimed Birkin. “I always felt fond of her. I never had anything to do with her, personally, that’s true.”

“I liked her all right, for a couple of days,” said Gerald. “But a week of her would have turned me over. There’s a certain smell about the skin of those women, that in the end is sickening beyond words—even if you like it at first.”

“I know,” said Birkin. Then he added, rather fretfully, “But go to bed, Gerald. God knows what time it is.”

Gerald looked at his watch, and at length rose off the bed, and went to his room. But he returned in a few minutes, in his shirt.

“One thing,” he said, seating himself on the bed again. “We finished up rather stormily, and I never had time to give her anything.”

“Money?” said Birkin. “She’ll get what she wants from Halliday or from one of her acquaintances.”

“But then,” said Gerald, “I’d rather give her her dues and settle the account.”

“She doesn’t care.”

“No, perhaps not. But