NEW PROJECTS:

SHORT STORIES; ARTICLES;

THE MAD APE REVISION.

'THE NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE'
Various excerpts / Partial M/S

'THE NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE'

BOOK I II III

P. 2 - 32 - Book I Ch. I

NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE

Maurice Rewdon.

Book I.....

Book II.....

Book III.....

BOOK I

CHAPTER 1.

On the train from the coast he talked loudly and the other passengers looked a bit intimidated under the direct fire of his questions. When he addressed them they blinked and shifted --- all except a quiet, well-bred young woman on the other side of the gangway who was evidently used to men shouting, and a woman from Johannesburg, her face dry and lined from the sun, who sat at his table and looked at him with admiration all the time because he seemed to her such a striking representative of the Old Country, which she had never visited before. ~~When he told her that he didn't think 'blacks' should necessarily live apart from 'whites' she looked stunned and turned away for a moment. But he went on asking his polite questions of her and the others, turning and twisting in his seat as if the buffet car was too small for his energies.~~

They entered the still, grey outskirts of London --- a deathly shadow that stole over the train without a sound; so it seemed to him underneath his energetic manner. But he didn't turn and look out of the window because he wanted to keep it at bay a little longer; the shadow would steal over him, too, as it had just done over the train, and it would darken him, too, before many hours. He didn't glance to left or right but went on talking like a robust Englishman --- well, he <u>was</u> robust and he <u>was</u> English! But it was deliberate, he was acting up all the time and there was a note of danger in his voice, which perhaps was what made people glance at him curiously, their eyes slightly narrowed.

He told the quiet young woman about his house in Basrah and the

irrigation scheme that was being planned by the government 'out there'. Now usually he would never think of using those words 'out there': it made a place seem impossibly far, and thus unreal, and he'd travelled too much to think like that. But it seemed more English to say 'out there' and he was being very ~~assiduously~~ definitely the Englishman.

Only five years before he'd felt ashamed of being so 'English'. Everybody had told him, either as a compliment or criticism, "You're so English!" And he'd always taken it as a criticism. ~~It meant stiff and aloof, like a man with ice down his back. If you were 'English' and, say, put your hand on another man's shoulder in a reassuring movement, the movement wouldn't come off: the other man would look at you with a half-frightened expression as if death had touched him. It was ridiculous, but that was what he'd felt. He'd never felt stiff and aloof inside; indeed, quite the opposite -- bubbling over, in fact, too hot to speak, not knowing where to put his hands and so forth. But~~ the sound of those words, "You're so English!" --- or it might be a glance a foreigner gave him, especially a swarthy foreigner with undisturbed black eyes --- always paralysed him and fixed his body in a stiffness foreign to it. Try as he might to ease his limbs, and look in front of him naturally, he couldn't, and got stiffer and stiffer. ~~seeing himself as the condescending Englishman used to being served, especially by foreigners.~~ He would try terribly hard sometimes, smiling and gesticulating and saying 'Yes' and 'No' prematurely, and kicking his feet about in a funny way, but it was no good, it only gave an impression of strangeness. Now a gentleman, an English gentleman, a real one, behaved quite differently. He always had ease. ~~He didn't condescend, and it was the genuine article.~~ But otherwise --- and Granville was an otherwise --- you had to fight your way to it slowly. It didn't matter

how easy and unstiff you were inside; you still had to fight through to a public manner.

He didn't think like that now. The word England meant other things --- summer afternoons and tea on the lawn, for instance (though he could hardly remember having actually had tea on a lawn), and streams, small woods; then, well - rather easy-going people, decent, lazy perhaps; nothing to frighten him any more. The word also meant London, which he thought of as in a perpetual glow of late afternoon, when the shops would have their lights on, and the buses looked like blazing liners putting out to sea. He'd been away two years now and he'd begun to realise that this sense he'd had of a stiffness being imposed on him from outside --- of being narrowed down all the time, thwarted of a real self -- must have been his own private fault, part of growing-up perhaps, not in the country itself. Indeed, something else had happened while he was away: far from losing the sense of being English he'd become proud of it -- not mentally proud but quietly and glowingly so, in his sense of belonging to England - that clement, far-off island - in the same way as his Arab friends belonged to Basrah. Before, he always used to say that there was something in England nowadays that turned your blood to water. But he'd forgotten that now.

Yet also he was afraid. He hadn't forgotten it completely. So he wouldn't look out of the train window until he was really obliged to. He wasn't going to invite the slate roofs, which always suggested, in fair weather and foul, that it had just been raining - a terrible, final rain, and the tiny, curtained windows, and the cement back-yards like prison walks, to drag him straight back again --- 'Come on, there --- you, the dusky fellow in the tropical jacket, your hair bleached from the nice

sea trip! You with a dishdasha in your trunk that you thought you might use as a dressing gown, we've got a few reminders for you now!'

So he went on talking at the top of his voice, his back straight and his eyes unflinching. He hoped to keep it up. After all, he had nothing to fear: he'd be off again in a couple of months. He'd be back on the same boat that had brought him. He hoped to keep it up, and disprove the idea that England watered your veins.

His house was on the edge of Shoreditch, not ~~very~~ far from Spitalfields market. He'd found it ~~one day~~ three years before, ~~it was~~ a quiet house with large Georgian windows, ~~quite unlike~~, surrounded by ~~streets of~~ small, drab houses built one on to the other. ~~By an extraordinary chance it had been for sale. The company helped him with a mortgage and within a month he and his wife were installed. It was assumed at the time that he'd be given a job with the head office in the City, for which the house would be ideal, being only a stone's throw away. But instead he got the Middle East job, and to his surprise the company let him keep the house.~~ It was more than big enough for them: three floors, ~~but~~ and when they had children the attic floor, which they hardly ~~ever~~ used now, could be turned into a nursery. His wife was expecting a child now; at least, he thought so.

He found a taxi and asked the driver to take him along by the Palace, then through Charing Cross along the Strand. It was a hot, cloudy evening and there were few people about. He liked the wall enclosing the Palace. He always used to walk here. It had the look of the old world, humbler than the shops on the other side, with their tall fronts from Victorian times. Paper fluttered along the gutter.

Trafalgar Square made him feel he'd never been away. It might have been yesterday evening when he caught that night-train down to Southampton - the taxi had taken him round the square while the Christmas tree from Norway was being put up; its coloured lights were being tested and kept flicking on and off like neat little flames in the darkness. Now there were no lights, only one red sign at the top of a building advertising a meat extract.

There were more people along the Strand, walking slowly because of the heat, glancing in at the dusty shops. Then came the City, wonderfully solemn and still, ~~quite~~ deserted now that the offices were closed. The taxi swept past the Stock Exchange, then through street after street, always silent, with the office fronts shuttered up. ~~Only the pubs were open, with glowing lights inside.~~ There was still damage from the war, huge gaps where there were only cellars, their walls tidily demolished so that they were like meaningless open boxes side by side, under the level of the road.

He had an impression of frightful grimness at first. The streets were so dumb and hollow-looking. It was all so dark! He'd been in the blinding sun such a long time now - if only they'd bought a house in the country! ~~They could easily have done so!~~ But he tried to remind himself that the darkness was only that of an overcast summer evening, which could happen in Basrah as well. One simply mustn't look at things too closely. One had to start living here, then it felt all right. He remembered finding these same tall streets delightful once, because they were always deserted in the evening. ~~And then they reminded him of Pepys and Dr. Johnson. Crowds hadn't trampled on the old London here, not entirely.~~ There was still St. Bartholomew's church hidden at the end of a narrow walk,

intimate and crouching, a ghostly, ancient grey. ~~And outside was the great square of Smithfields where at one time they'd burned heretics. He remembered a royal procession from Pepys's diary --- perhaps Charles II's home-coming procession, or was it his queen's when she arrived from Holland? --- how the horses' hoofs had made a deafening clatter on the cobbles, and the liveries and coats had made a blaze of colour in the narrow street, between houses that had almost touched at the floors above. It would have been possible to see the king within a few feet, from one of the windows. Life hadn't been separated then as it was now. Everything had been within touching distance. But now we were strangers to life. How massive these buildings were, hiding the light on either side! But sometimes, peeping between them, there was a bent Tudor house with tiny latticed windows, almost squashed but keeping an intimate, wry look.~~

He had an old-fashioned taxi, which was pleasant. They were difficult to come by these days. You could really lean back in their leather, jet-black seats, and the jolting reminded him of exciting taxi-rides before the war, in childhood. The horn ~~made a rumbling noise~~ sounded like an old man coughing. There was a special smell, too, ~~perhaps it was the leather~~. Yes, he'd known a London once --- so busy and enthralling, always sunny! 'But then,' he thought, 'what a ~~silly~~ damned daydream!'

The sky ~~was threatening and~~ low-cast ~~and~~ gave the streets an indoor look, as if there were a roof ~~over them~~ overhead. There was a strange dark stillness about everything. The twilight would come late and people would leave their curtains undrawn and their windows up because of the heat. Talk would be heard from behind the windows, drowsy and soft, then lights would go on one by one and fall across the pavement, a faint yellow.

Commercial Road looked forsaken with its blank shop windows, some with their shutters down, dusty and unpainted. It made him feel ~~quite~~ lonely. For a moment he couldn't think of a single friend he had ~~in the city. Here there were a few people about. But they seemed to him to be walking for no purpose of their own; they'd been flicked from out of the houses to act as a crowd for appearances' sake, on behalf of the city, at a miserable rate of pay. The taxi passed along, bare shop fronts of tradesmen's furniture.~~

He'd be called 'Pip' again. For the past two years he'd been Philip or Mr. Granville, ~~except to Pinkie, of course.~~ His ~~best friend~~ assistant in Basrah, Mohammed, ~~his assistant at the P.W.D. office,~~ never departed from a simple 'Granville'. Mohammed had dropped the Mr. part as a sign of friendship but wouldn't go further.

'With a snip and a clip,' he thought, 'they'll reduce me to Pip!'

The taxi turned into Chaworth Road, where he lived. It looked like a long, squat monument of stone, ~~desolate~~ sad and yet ~~some~~ cosy in a way. At the end stood his house, ~~larger than the rest and quite distinct~~, jostled about by its smaller ~~brothers~~ brothers, a little ridiculous with its lovely tall windows and the old uneven glass which had remained intact through all the bombing raids on the City. ~~Quite remarkable. Goodness knows how it had got there, or rather how the others had got there - they were an ordinary slum-breed.~~

Everything looked shrivelled and dusty in the heat. The taxi began slowing up and he saw with ~~some~~ surprise that there were two cars outside ~~the~~ his house, a low, cream-coloured sports car and an old-fashioned one with a muddy, dented frame. But what about two cars? Cars had

often stood there. And here he was trembling! The taxi drew to a halt and as he put his hand in his pocket to take out some money his eye caught the contrast between the back of his hand, brown and freckled, with bleached hairs, and [redacted] his tropical jacket, and in that moment he became aware of the distance that now existed between himself -- reaching for money with a trembling hand -- and the past he'd just left behind him at the railway station. In a few minutes, it seemed, all those hot, blinding days in Basrah had been wiped out, as if to say that a man could have only one destiny.

He glanced up at the house and saw that both his bedroom-window and that of the adjacent 'music-room' as they always called it were open at the bottom. There were guests, apparently. A wave of nervousness went through him like fingers stroking him inside. As he got out of the taxi he almost tripped over his bags. The front door was open, which made matters worse because, not having to ring the bell, he would appear at the top of the stairs suddenly and they would all stare at him with astonished eyes --- ! But why astonished eyes? How absurd! It was his house, after all! Where on earth had this fear of people come from, even when they were his own friends?

As the taxi drew away he looked up at the open windows a second time, hoping that someone would have heard him arrive and lean out of the window shouting, "There's Philip!" His train had got in at 7.29 and he'd sent a cable about it. But Pinkie hadn't come to the station. She didn't do things like that on the whole. He was always straining for an intimacy that ~~was~~ she barred him. She would say if he asked her, "But surely you can get from the station to here without me, can't you?"

He began dragging his heavy cases up the stairs. There was the

same stillness as in the street. The staircase was narrow and he banged his cases against the wall, scraping his calf. The stair-carpet was loose; perhaps someone had dashed down the stairs or fallen; ~~and~~ the rods had been torn out. Still there was no sound from above. He had a job getting the cases up, they were so big and heavy. The dove-grey distemper on the first landing, which he'd done himself two years before, had begun to flake, near a window where the damp came in. He'd have to have the drain-pipe outside looked at.

Just as he ~~turned on to the next flight of stairs~~ reached the landing he saw a young man standing by the telephone, his back towards him. Granville stopped, his heart beating fast. But why? it might be someone who'd slipped over from the office! Yet the encounter was different, he didn't know why. It was ~~like getting~~ the breath of a strange world in his face; chill and deathly. He noticed the back of the young man's neck, as if the strangeness lay there; the hair was soft and gently curled, not bristly at the base like most men's. Granville's mouth opened, dry with fear. Absurd! And the way the young man gripped his hand round the telephone had something special about it. He watched the plump, white knuckles as if they could speak; and they seemed to say, 'I'm here to stay and try and push me ~~off~~ out if you can!' Then the young man turned round to him with a pleasant smile and said, "Oh, hullo!" And the strange impression was gone at once.

He nodded quickly and went on up the stairs to the music-room. ~~without saying anything.~~ Things were more or less as he'd left them two years before. There was no one in the music-room itself but he could hear voices. They must be in the room beyond, where he and Pinkie slept; he'd often used that room as a study, if a glorified clerk in a so-called

'technical imports' firm could be said to have a study.

The first thing he noticed ~~when he got to the doorway~~ was that his desk had been ~~re~~moved from the window, ~~to the opposite wall, where it~~ and now served as a sideboard for ~~the~~ drinks. He had a swift impression of people holding glasses --- a dull light from the open window and a renewed sense of the stillness in the street outside --- quiet talk --- everyone leaning against something or with one leg crooked casually over the other. There were only seven or eight people.

No one had yet seen him. Then a stray voice said, "Here's Jesus Christ!" And almost at once another cried, "It's Pip!" He was aware of ~~another~~ clerk from the firm, a young man called Dick Pollocke with whom he'd been at the T.I.M. training school five or six years before. Pollocke still ~~sported~~ wore a fair, whispy beard; then ~~to his surprise he noticed~~ Granville saw that ~~Pollocke~~ He was standing there without a stitch of clothing above his waist. His chest was sunburned, a smooth, faint brown. His feet were bare, too. But nobody seemed to mind. The others were dressed casually, for the summer. They weren't even looking in Pollocke's direction.

Most of the faces were familiar ~~to him~~ more or less. Someone nodded to him from the other side of the room, a boyish ~~man~~ man with agreeable ~~eyes~~ eyes --- was his name Gerald? At first he couldn't see Pinkie. She was probably pouring drinks by the chimney-piece. In place of the bed he noticed there were just cushions on the floor, and people were sitting there. Everyone seemed tired, not ~~as~~ nervously alert as he was.

~~Pollocke was talking to a girl of about eighteen who nodded and smiled warmly at everything he said, while he leaned back, his chin lifted~~

~~so that his beard was almost horizontal. He was leaning on a stick which Granville suddenly remembered from the training school days. Pollocke had trouble with his leg now and then, due as far as he could remember to getting a sprain at school from cross-country running. At any rate, it wasn't permanent. The stick was the same as before, black and polished like ebony, of a heavy and menacing appearance like those military sticks that are supposed to contain rifles. In all other respects Pollocke was fit and agile, and for months the leg wouldn't worry him.~~

He caught sight of Pinkie with that little tremor of bewildered ecstasy which always came after an absence. She was standing on the other side of the room with a drink in her hand laughing at something, elegant and tall, her ear-rings shaking slightly, her eyes rather blind as they cast slowly round the room. Her head was raised as she laughed, and her mouth quivered as it always did when she was excited. She had less of a strained look than ~~when she'd left~~ Basrah. Perhaps it was his imagination but her face had an even more delicate look than usual, ~~and~~ her eyes were an even lighter blue. All he could do was stare at her, having dreamed about her so much in the last month.

She wore a print dress with short sleeves, her neck long and slim. The ear-rings were silver, ~~the shape of the Muslim crescent~~, he noticed. He hadn't seen them before. Perhaps she'd picked them up in the market near the South Gate in Basrah, where old men sat beating copper trays. She'd bought him a beautiful pair of turquoise cuff-links there once, but on his last day ~~there~~ sick with the heat and with being away from her, though she'd only gone a month, he'd stepped on them in the bedroom and the stones went into tiny blue fragments the colour of the sea. They

looked so beautiful on the floor! He'd no idea how they came to be there, under his feet, but perhaps Kath'm, his house-boy, had swept them off the dressing table with his duster, which he used much like a fly-whisk, beating at objects with a certain gracious fury.

He waved to her but she didn't see him. ~~She was always slow to~~ ~~come to consciousness like that. I wondered who had called his name.~~ ~~Perhaps it was the young man named Gerald, or was the name Harold?~~ Her blue eyes flickered gently, and she bent forward a little to talk to someone at her side. How peaceful and happy she looked! Then she turned slowly and sightlessly, as if by inward knowledge, lowering her head and gazing towards the door, still in her conversation, smiling and nodding with the charm she always showed to friends. Then their eyes met and a delighted, childish smile, no longer only charming, came to her face. His nervousness ebbed away. There was so little intimacy between them when all was said and done, but still they gave each other courage when they looked at each other like that.

"Pinkie!"

"Sweetheart!"

They pushed across the room and kissed each other in their awkward fashion, rather formal, holding each other for a moment. She looked so cool. Her shoulders had a wonderful smoothness and her hair shone like sand where the sun had bleached it in front.

"Hullo, you old bastard!" she murmured with her roguish expression and a chuckle. "How was the trip?"

"Oh, not so dusty!"

Nearly the whole of the Basrah office had turned out to see her off, including Mohammed. That seemed a great time ago now, though it was

just under four weeks. Her skin had kept its golden brown colour, from the bathing they'd done in the T.I.M. pool, in the spring. The Arab clerks called her 'the English flower'. She was a little paler than before perhaps, but that fitted her nature. It gave her the tragic look, which she carried more willingly than rude health.

She began leading him across the room to get a drink.

"These are only the left-overs," she murmured, glancing round in her blind way.

"What from?"

"Oh, I gave a party last night!"

He touched Pollocke's bare shoulder as he passed.

"Granville!" Pollocke cried, turning round at once with a smile, his chin still lifted, making his beard shine in the light from the window rather like tinsel. "How's tricks?"

"All right! You look well!"

Pollocke laughed in his breathless and silent way, down his nostrils. "You don't look so bad yourself. Arabian nights seem to suit you!"

~~Again the girl at his side laughed, giving him a warm glance.~~

n.p. They stood in silence, baffled by each other ~~for a moment~~, still smiling. He'd always had trouble talking to Pollocke, though ~~at training school~~ they'd been ~~reasonably good~~ friends. ~~Now Pollocke worked at head office, round the corner in Copthall Avenue.~~

"How long have you got over here?" Pollocke asked him.

"Two months."

"That's two months for two years, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's not too bad, I suppose. That's on top of what you get out there, is it?"

"I take a week-end or two out there. That's all!" And they laughed with sudden friendliness.

"What happened to your shirt?" Granville asked him.

"Oh ---" Pollocke glanced down at his chest. "It's upstairs drying. Some joker poured a double whisky on it."

[redacted]

His mouth was [redacted] plump under his beard, bulging a little from his teeth, not characteristic of his lean, pale, austere face at all. His youth was all in his eyes, [redacted] with their unusual friendliness and good will [redacted]. That was what had struck Granville first, when they met, in the entrance hall of the school at Reading, with hundreds of other candidates waiting to go in for an interview. Pollocke had joked with him, and they'd recognised a pleasant unconcern in each other. Most of the other candidates looked so tense. He and Pollocke hit on a certain courage in each other, and there was mutual respect at once.

"I haven't seen much of you since training school days," Granville said.

"No. But we can mend that, can't we?"

Pollocke's eyes were even lighter than Pinkie's. But they were steadier. Yet also they were strangely transparent, and abstract like shining steel. They had no real depth, or rather they seemed to have no base behind them. It was like looking into the sky: one was aware of

endless space.

Pinkie was pouring him a drink at the desk and he went across to her again. He kissed her on the cheek and looked at her closely. The kiss was a little against the laws between them, but he risked it. For a moment they were quite alone, their faces close together, and he seemed on the edge of intimacy with her. But in a moment her gaze faltered and she turned away quickly, pretending to be absorbed in getting his drink. It was much like flinching, though he preferred not to call it that. In Basrah she'd sometimes held her hand involuntarily up to her mouth when he talked, as if sick. He tended to talk on and on at times. Once on a favourite theme he was difficult to stop, and the words poured out. Now it was enough for her to be alone with him a few minutes to feel suffocated. Yet she said nothing about it. He only saw the look on her face as if she wanted to vomit.

On the surface they were such a perfect match. They looked so well together. Her aunt Beatrice had always said, "What a fine-looking couple they are!" Who could have guessed that Pinkie was mortally afraid of him?

He took his drink away, making no effort to keep her by him. At least the atmosphere was casual and he could sip his drink unnoticed. Pollocke was talking to a girl ~~again, moving heavily from one foot to another, his stick making a dull sound on the carpet.~~ And his beard was nearly horizontal as before. Granville wanted to laugh. 'It's all a joke!" he thought. There was Pinkie smiling again in the corner. She had such a quick power of recovery, considering how frail she could be sometimes. Why did he bring his thoughts bearing down on her all the time? For instance, at this moment, instead of standing there thinking,

why didn't he drink a glass of the reddish, sticky mixture she'd given him, with a kick of brandy in it, and then another, until he was ready to be casual as well? She loved that most of all, when he was a bit tight!

"You're such a sunny person, really," she'd said to him in Basrah just before she left. Two years there had altered him somewhat. Why did he give her such black looks sometimes? She wanted to know.

But more often than not they were cheerful and affectionate with each other. There was a kind of intimacy between them, in the light of common day, as if they were children. He called her 'calf-nose' and she called him 'little mouse'. They ragged each other. They hardly ever had an open quarrel. Only something deadly from the outside spread its shadow over them, and the shadow had grown in Basrah.

It was dull and sultry outside. Perhaps this helped to make the guests casual. The curtains were still. People leaned against the wall or sat on the floor, sipping their drinks. The punch took his nervousness away. He felt almost absorbed back into his old life. Only his flesh was absorbed back, though; not all of him.

He began talking to someone at his side, a plump man in a corduroy suit. He had a jolly face with bloodshot eyes which Granville thought he remembered. It turned out that he also worked at T.I.M., in the public relations office. Pollocke had brought him along.

"You've got one of those hot jobs east of the Suez, have you?" this man asked him with a smile.

"Yes, in Basrah."

"I thought so from the old duck suit!"

~~"Yes, the number of times I've sweated in this,"~~ Granville murmured, glancing down at his jacket, "Do you know the Middle East?"

"I pop out to Beirut or Cairo once ~~a year or so, that's all.~~ in a while. I prefer the ~~good old~~ patter of English rain. Especially with my tum." He looked at Granville meaningfully, his lips drawn tight. "Ulcers."

"Oh, that's nasty! Are you on a diet?"

~~"Yes, a bloodless one," he laughed, wheezing.~~ "Well, fish and h.p. pap, you know. The booze is what keeps me going." He held his glass up between plump fingers. "This chap's quite an enemy of mine. If I could rout 'im I'd be all right."

~~"Well," Granville said, "you'd still have your worries — that's what gives you ulcers, isn't it?"~~

~~"How damned right you are!" He looked into Granville's eyes with a grateful expression. "Mine's the sort of job you never leave. This is the first evening I can call my own for a month or more."~~

~~"Really?"~~

~~"Oh, Christ, yes — wining and dining, that's your publicity department. Still!" He smiled engagingly. "I wouldn't do it if I didn't get a kick out of it, would I? I say, you and me haven't met, have we? All your stuff goes through Beirut if I'm not mistaken?"~~

~~"Yes — Beirut is just the subsidiary office."~~

~~"Nevinson's the boss, isn't he?"~~

~~"Yes, in London."~~

~~"That's what I mean. Nice old bugger, Nevinson. Used to be a farmer. No money in that game."~~

Granville's attention kept wandering back to Pinkie. All of a sudden it struck him as preposterous that she should ~~have~~ give a party the night before his arrival. It hadn't been quite clear to him before. He almost strode across to her indignantly. But he held on to himself,

knowing how capable he was of causing a scene.

"You're rather a late arrival, aren't you?" the man asked.

"In what way?" Granville said, wondering if he'd lost the thread.

"Well, you're a day late for the party, I mean."

"Oh, yes! I couldn't get over in time."

"Have you known these good people for long?"

Granville paused. "Who?"

The other man nodded across to Pinkie. "The lady of the house, I mean?"

"Oh! This is my house. That's my wife!"

The man stared at him and then said, Is old Pinkie really your wife? You could be brother and sister! I thought you were much older!"

"Why?" Granville smiled in an uncertain way.

"Well, from the way ~~old Pinkie~~ she talks you'd think you were a sort / Ditto of funny old boy rather like a professor, if you see what I mean!" And again he burst out laughing. "And here you are like her kid-brother!"

"Awful, the impression our wives give of us, isn't it?" Granville said. So that was how she talked! / Ditto

"Isn't it the end? There's none of 'em knows what we're really / Ditto like! We're so good and interesting, aren't we, and it's all wasted on them?" He added, "Pinkie was out there with you, of course?"

"Oh, yes! She came ahead to get things fixed up here."

"You're married as well?" Granville asked him.

"Yes, with three huge kids. All male. They get bigger every / Ditto

day, [redacted] You haven't tried kids yet?"

"No. I hope to!"

"That's where my fat tum started."

"Three boys, did you say?"

"Well, I suppose you'd call them that, yes!" And he said, "Do you know, that was a marvellous party last night? Your wife certainly knows her stuff as far as entertaining [redacted] goes. She'd do well in my department."

Indignation tugged at him again. She'd done it deliberately! Why wasn't she alone now, even though she had given a party? They hadn't seen each other for a month! Of course, it was deliberate! Almost turning his back on the publicity-man he gulped down the rest of his drink and pushed his way out of the room, hoping --- indeed, expecting without much doubt --- that she would follow him with an anxious expression; she'd never not done so in the past, after all!

So he plunged out of the room, almost upsetting two of the guests. But he found himself alone in the music-room! And he began to feel a fool! Had anyone noticed him going? He hoped not - now! Pollocke had glanced up suddenly; he'd noticed that. The talk was going on as before. Had even Pinkie noticed? Or was she doing that deliberately as well? Were even their quarrelling-habits, ~~which were~~ the most intimate habits people could have, to be put aside?

He noticed spots of drink on the carpet, not yet dry. A wild evening from the look of it! The gramophone was still in the corner, apparently unbroken, the records piled on the turntable. An he remembered the whirring noise it made as each record fell into place.

'Well,' he thought to himself, 'now you've got neither a drink nor someone to talk to. You can hardly go back!'

Almost every hour on the boat and then for two whole days in Genoa he'd thought about ~~nothing but~~ her. That was the trouble; in his mind he'd arranged his home-coming so elaborately - the meal they were going to have alone in the kitchen upstairs, while the sky darkened outside; then they would go to bed and he would kiss her in earnest for the first time. But underneath he'd been afraid that nothing of the sort would happen. Well, he deserved it, perhaps. But he couldn't see clearly why.

A few months before she'd said quite out of the blue, "I'm a completely damned person!" He'd laughed and said all she needed was a child. But he knew there was a warning in what she'd said. It was the only piece of self-criticism he'd ever heard her utter. Otherwise she flew into a rage at any cirticism; it made her feel cornered and persecuted.

Her remark was caused by her having danced with some of the Arab clerks in the Cabala club by the river. One night she'd gone out alone with one of them --- not a clerk exactly but an assistant manager from one of the subsidiary stations in Kurdistan and therefore, technically at any rate, in Granville's employ. People started gossiping about Mr. Granville's 'shame'. The men of Basrah only showed their wives to trusted friends, and usually on a reciprocal basis even then. Otherwise the poor women were hidden away. The story went round the coffee houses not only of Basrah but of the whole region, and Kirkuk besides, that Granville was a ~~homosexual~~ queer and let his wife go free at night. Apparently, his performance with boys was stupendous, they said, five or six a night and still looking for more when dawn showed through! He pleaded with his wife, they said,

to find a good man who'd keep her busy till breakfast-time." "By Allah," they murmured in the coffee houses, sucking at their hubble-bubbles, "she has fat and beautiful thighs and the pull of a mare and let us go to the Cabala tonight!" They streamed to the Cabala in their cloaks and bernooses, craning round whenever an Englishwoman entered. This was what Mohammed told him. When Granville heard it he rushed back to the house in a fury and shouted at her, "Do you want me to lose my job?" Then ~~for the first time~~ he hit her across the face, and ~~he~~ went on hitting her with a dumb relish that astonished both of them. It was strange how they both seemed spectators of it, in the selfless intimacy of marriage. She even seemed to admire him for it. "It's better than leaving me completely alone," she said by chance one day afterwards. There were bruises all over her face and shoulders, and the clerks smiled. The coffee houses said he was a flagellist as well, like an attaché at the British Embassy thirty or forty years before who'd surprised his Arab boys at night by whipping them and calling out at the same time, "Take that, you little bugger, Cunningham!" Cunningham was ~~supposed to be~~ the name of the first boy he had ever whipped, at his public school; ~~as a prefect;~~ and his Arab boys called the flagellation bahgar-kahnin-kham; 'Sahib give me one bahgar-kahnin-kham hard tonight!' they would say.

He knew Pinkie would never forget that beating; it meant a change in their relation. The spell was gone. After this she went out very seldom and spent hours lying about the house, yearning ~~to be back in~~ for London. Mohammed described the assistant manager as a 'dog and son of a dog,' kelb ibn kelb, in a contemptuous, dusty voice. And Granville told her.

"Oh, well," she murmured, "he danced all right!"

She'd danced him off his feet and then got dead drunk. The assistant-manager was delirious with the sheer social triumph of it. Nothing had passed between them except slap and tickle; ~~apparently;~~ she always said she couldn't bear the touch of a stranger's hands on her body and he felt this was true.

After this, also, she began pleading with him for a child, as if she could see the dangers ahead and wanted a child to prevent them. He was horrified by the idea. This was odd because he loved children, but only other people's children, it seemed. She went on pleading as if to save the marriage, in a last effort. She almost pulled him inside her one night, when she had no ~~contraceptives~~ pessary. But he held back, frightened, his muscles quivering with the effort. Then he let himself go. Mentally he knew she was perfectly right, and mentally he wanted children. But his ~~climax~~ orgasm was grudging, and there was a certain sadness in her afterwards.

Well, apparently his grudging climax had taken. She hadn't had the curse ~~before bearing Petrocles~~ for a couple of months.

Just then the ~~young~~ man who'd been at the telephone came into the music-room. He had a small, rather fine face with a pallor so extreme that it seemed even to enter his eyes, though in fact they were dark. His hands were in his pockets. He had masses of black, shining hair and a remarkably tiny waist, quite out of proportion to his shoulders, as if he wore corsets. His expression was light and friendly. Everything in his face seemed reserved for the present moment, looking neither back nor forward. And yet, in this devotion to the present there was something opposite, too, a magical element ~~he~~ Granville couldn't describe. There was nothing empty about him. On the contrary, simply his presence fascinated Granville and he stood torn between horror and a blaze of friendship which the other man seemed to be calling forth in him.

They stood gazing at each other. Then they recollected themselves and smiled. The other man stepped aside as Granville walked to the door and said in a parodying tone, "After you, sir!"

Granville began walking up the stairs and the ~~young~~ other man called after him, "Where are you off to?"

He turned and watched his friendly smile for a moment. Surely his tone had been mocking? But the smile denied it. Why should a stranger want to mock him? Yet it wasn't mockery either, but a familiarity that knew its object.

"The kitchen," he replied. Then he walked on in confusion. "Just to get some coffee!" He heard the ~~young man~~ other one walk back with soft steps into the music-room.

He reached the top of the stairs and then, as he caught sight of the kitchen, stepped back in surprise. Every inch of the table was covered with dirty plates, piled up, and where there were no plates there was the refuse of vegetables and meat, ~~looking~~ like vomit. Thrown together on the plates were dirty knives and forks with food crusted all over them, and then cups half-filled with cold tea or coffee or punch. The tall dresser on the right that had always looked so old-fashioned and neat, reminding him of ~~a~~ Victorian kitchen, with ~~its~~ their shining blue-printed plates and scrubbed woodwork, had been cleared of everything clean, ~~and~~ its linoleum top was covered with dry porridge oats, sugar, ~~and~~ breadcrumbs. The drawers were half open, ~~and~~ sagging downwards with the sheer weight -- balls of string and oil-proof paper bags and cutlery and torn cookery books all mixed together. The sink was swimming with dark-brown greasy water and tealeaves, ~~and~~ the floor ~~was~~ shone with coffee stains and spilt food. It looked as if an army had passed through. There wasn't

a clean saucepan, let alone a cup or saucer! The sugar bowl was empty. He couldn't see the kettle anywhere. That put paid to a cup of tea! He noticed that the spout of the tea-pot had been smashed, leaving a jagged brown mouth. He stood in the middle of it quivering.

And there was a woman in charge here! She called herself a woman! He went on fuming. And if he said anything ~~to her~~ she replied, "Oh, Pip, for God's sake don't be so English!" 'English' apparently meant to-the-point! She needed freedom --- for herself, of course. Oh, of course! Freedom! Yet she'd never gone this far before, and the quiet knowledge that this was so was fixed in the back of his mind.

The attic room next door was nearly as bad. The mirror --- it had been a full-length mirror hanging by the window, for Pinkie when she was dressing up --- lay smashed on the carpet in numberless silver fragments. 'It is deliberate, it is deliberate!' his mind kept repeating while he trembled more and more.

The bed was unmade and there was glass all over the pillow. The chimney-piece was covered with playing cards, dirty cups, half-used candles, ash-trays piled ~~up~~ with cigarette ends. The wardrobe doors --- the pleated green curtain behind ~~its~~ their glass panels even now giving it an elegant and tranquil look --- were hanging open and some of Pinkie's clothes, her evening gowns and some fancy-dress material, had fallen to the bottom in a heap. His trembling grew into a cold shiver. He opened his mouth to yawn and his teeth chattered. He had a dull feeling that his life here was finished. But so quickly, without warning! What else had he got? An office in Basrah and Mohammed, who spoke nursery English....

She hadn't followed him up the stairs. She would have done that

in the past. She wouldn't refuse to do it now unless she'd made a new world for herself. But he refused this idea. "I'm completely damned!" she'd said. That was it! It was in her flickering gaze. And he was her victim. But even as he trembled and fumed against her he didn't really believe this. It was too neat a thought. Why didn't he do something about it? go downstairs, for instance? But he couldn't!

It was still lovely to go to the attic window and look out, as he'd often done two years before. Opposite there were roof-tops and the darkening summer sky. From here you could just see the cross ~~on the top~~ of St. Paul's, quite alone, as if it hung from the sky. How silent everything was. ~~Not a sound came from downstairs.~~ He remembered the milk-carts passing in the early morning, ~~two years before,~~ with the horses's hoofs making a loud clatter far below as it might have been a century ago when a carriage passed.

He picked some glass off the bed and sat down. There still wasn't a sound anywhere. He watched the ceiling for a moment. It slanted with the roof and the tiny window was cut into it. They'd spent winter-evenings up here sitting over the gas-fire, drinking coffee. He remembered the red-parchment shade over the light which always made the room glow warmly. There it was, in the same place, swinging in the light breeze from the window. A breeze had started, cool and brief, now that dusk was coming. How sad and barren the sky looked now!

He heard footsteps on the stairs. She was coming! At once the absurdity of these events struck him. Of course, things couldn't change so soon. Three or four weeks ago she'd been cooking for him as she'd always done before. Mind you, she'd never been frightfully tidy in the kitchen. But this wreckage must be an accident. He felt extraordinarily

happy/o

But it wasn't Pinkie. The steps came on to the landing, the boards creaked, then there was silence for a time. He was all suspense, craning round. And then he saw Pollocke's wife looking down at him.

"Hullo!" she cried.

He jumped up in an effort to hide his state, though he could hardly speak. He had to think for a moment before he recognised her. She had changed a little. While Pollocke had become more upright and solid-looking she had dwindled. But then she'd always been tiny. Everything in her face was cleanly marked and steady, especially her eyes, and there was a black fixity in her eyebrows, which were thick and almost met in the middle over her nose. And the line of her hair in front was low, giving her an unusually narrow forehead. She was pretty but in a sharp and detached way, as if the depth in her face couldn't get out. That depth was in her eyes. They were narrow, Arab eyes, very dusky, and it gave him a brief, painful, contradictory nostalgia to look into them as he'd been looking into eyes much the same for the past two years; they were so smoky and dense, smouldering! There was an odd mystical despair in them, too. She had tight dazzlingly yellow slacks on, with a red jumper that made her breasts look hard and sharp, like armour. She always went in for bright colours.

"How are you, Hanni? I didn't see you downstairs!"

"I was in the corner. I waved!" She always spoke a little

primly, from years of trying to talk the best English.

"I wondered if you were tired." "Come and sit down," he added. help

But she stood by the door awkwardly.

"Can't I get you a drink or something?" she asked, still gazing at him. He began to think his state was visible to her.

"Why? What's the matter?" he laughed.

"Nothing!" She shook her head and sat down quickly on a pouffe by the bed. "I'm dreaming! We didn't get a wink of sleep last night!"

"I heard it was a good party."

"Was it?"

You
One could see the Assyrian in her still. Her hair was a lighter colour than her eyebrows and she tried to eliminate its stiff crinkles by wearing it straight down to her shoulders, heavily-oiled, so that the fixity of her features was emphasised even more. And the desert was still there at the back of her eyes, undeniably, though her face was set to hide it. Her mouth always had a guarded and tense look. Eyebrows meeting in the middle was supposed to mean a quick temper but he remembered her as a mild, quiet person creature. Perhaps there was a quick flame inside her stillness. Pollock had called her 'the beast' at training school, when she came down for a visit once, before they were married. A quick movement seemed physically impossible for her, as if she was rooted down; yet she was slim and agile and had a girl's small hips and upright breasts. She feared being 'heavy' like the Arab women. He remembered that, too.

"Did you have a good trip?" she asked, gazing at him with her dusky, reflective eyes.

"Yes, it was marvellous on the boat. Lovely weather." Then he said in a sudden mood of impatience, "I wish we could get rid of all

these people!"

"It isn't a very good welcome home, is it?" And she smiled. "Shall I try and get rid of them for you?"

"Oh, no!"

He felt easier for her sympathy and leaned back, but he was still trembling. She ought to have been a nurse, he thought. He remembered how she used to send methodical little parcels to Pollocke at the training school, with instructions that he must share the cake with Pip. But he remembered her kindness as an intellectual event; it hadn't really left a mark on him. He couldn't think why this was so. He'd always had trouble remembering her Christian name as if her real self was absent to him. Perhaps it was because he and Pollocke hadn't become friends after all. Yet the conditions of friendship had seemed to be there.

"Let me get you a drink, really," she murmured, getting up again. "It'll make you feel better."

There was such a strange atmosphere between them, in the silence of this attic-floor, as if they were both refugees from the guests below.

"All right, then!" he said.

When she got to the door she turned round and murmured in her pursed and restricted way, "I said to Dick they ought to have been sent packing this afternoon. But Pinkie said you wouldn't mind!"

"Oh!" He laughed to suggest a comic audacity on Pinkie's part.

Many minutes went by after she left the room. So it seemed. It was growing dark now and fewer cars passed. His tropical suit shone white in the darkness and his hands looked almost black by comparison. He began to wonder if she was going to stay

downstairs after all. Once among them again she might forget him - she was flattered by people's attention. He lolled on the bed feeling neglected and sorry for himself. What a home-coming! He refused to lose sight of the form of the thing. He'd worked out the form of Pinkie's welcome so carefully. A hundred times he'd sat at the kitchen table with her in the dusk, sharing observations about what it felt like to be back in England again.

He heard Hanni's footsteps on the stairs and realised she hadn't been away more than two or three minutes --- time enough only to pour the drinks. In the distance, far away, perhaps in Commercial Road, a bus passed with a swishing noise like a sudden wind, then died as quickly.

She came up slowly and he could hear the tinkle of ice in a glass.

"Here we are," she said. With her free hand she switched on the light, and the room suddenly glowed, reminding him of the existence of the carpet, which was red and had originally been in his bedroom. It was faded now. He knew the old stains on it.

"God," he said, nodding towards the smashed mirror, "that's a hell of a mess, isn't it?"

"Yes, it fell off the wall."

"Fell off?"

"Well, it wasn't nailed on properly, I suppose!"

"It was never nailed. I screwed it on myself."

She put his drink down on a little table by the bed, her face averted.

"You look so healthy, Philip," she said, looking down at him with a smile. "This is really the tail-end of the party."

"Yes, Pinkie told me."

"It went on for about three days".

"Three days? I thought it was only last night!" He trembled more but took pains to hide it, clenching his teeth together. Yes, Pinkie was going to leave him!

"Well, you know -" She laughed in her shy and fixed way - "Pinkie took a time to work up to it! We came in and helped get the punch ready and all that."

"I wonder why she couldn't wait till I got back?"

"She said you had to stay in Genoa."

"Yes, so I did!" He said it as if it had suddenly occurred to him, so as to cover Pinkie.

~~"What do you think of Dick without his shirt?"~~

~~"I was absolutely astonished when I came in the room! I wondered what on earth was happening!"~~

~~"Somebody poured whisky all over him."~~

~~"Yes, he told me."~~

~~She smiled again. "I don't think he enjoyed the party very much!"~~

~~"Why not?"~~

"~~Well~~, I got rather drunk and came up here to sleep it off and some man crawled into bed after me, some awful, pot-bellied little man!" she told him. "I was too drunk to do anything about it and he fell asleep!"

He laughed nervously, his mouth dry. The story didn't fit her. She was telling it out of bravado for some reason. She was trying to be smart and off-hand and this was against her intimate nature.

"Dick came up about two in the morning and found him there, right on top of me, snoring away! He said, '~~I say,~~ Do you mind, this is my bed!'

But the horrid little man was fast asleep!" She spluttered with laughter.

"What happened, then?"

"Oh, poor ~~old~~ Dick walked the streets all night. He threatened to kill the man but he didn't touch him, of course!"

'Poor ~~old~~ Dick' didn't believe in violence. ~~He had once told Granville that if he'd been asked to fire a gun in the war he would have refused.~~

There was silence for a time and Hanni said, "Pinkie seems to have had a lovely time in Basrah."

"Yes, ~~I think~~ it suited her." ~~He added, 'Now's Dick's chance at Twickenham.'~~

~~"Oh, you know he'll be head of the section soon, do you?"~~

~~"Really? So he'll be getting a bigger screw?"~~

~~"Well, a bit. Of course we spend such a lot on forest. He's still down at Hampton Court, believe it or not."~~

~~Hampton Court had always been a source of trouble between her and Dick. It had started before they were married. Dick had found a flat there overlooking the river and, following a whim she never really understood, took it on a long contract. He thought the view from the window was the finest he'd ever seen. It was certainly nice in the evening when the shadows were long and sometimes swans flew above the water, straight-necked, making a powerful throbbing noise with their wings like a machine in the air. The flat itself was hideous. Every room was on a different level. Granville remembered one step up or one step down, and frightfully dark with cavernous ceilings that drew all the warmth. The kitchen was little bigger than a cupboard and the bath was a sit-up affair in the scullery. There wasn't enough pressure in the taps to put~~

To P. 34

'THE NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE'

Chaps: 2 – 6

+ P. 416

They talked on about nothing in particular, as if his arrival had been a year ago, and she got him another drink. It got dark and the lights were visible from the street below, rather silver, like moonlight. Then to his relief the guests began leaving downstairs. The cars outside started up, making an unholy roar in the narrow street. And Hanni rose, having unconsciously performed her role of nurse.

"I'll go and collect Dick," she murmured. And as she went to the door she added, "Come over and see us one day."

"We'd love to!"

After a time he heard the front door close. There, everything was all right after all!

CHAPTER 2.

But now they were alone together he couldn't bear to face her. That was the pattern between them. He sat on in the attic room in the darkness---Hanni switched off the light by accident when she went. He heard Pinkie clearing up downstairs. Why didn't she come up to say hullo? Surely it meant something? But why didn't he go downstairs to her? He could go downstairs now and chuck her under the chin and have another drink, make a joke of it. It was what he actually wanted to do, with all his heart. But he couldn't!

Later there would be a quarrel; a sudden rash word followed by tears. He would then pour everything out in a long speech, going into the whys and wherefores of her errors and sometimes, though more rarely, the whys and wherefores of his own, while he strode up and down the room gesticulating, a glare splitting his brow, his shoulders hunched up like someone trying to force his way into a tunnel. The theme would be moral: what their lives ought to be like together. Meanwhile her eyes would begin to flicker and she would stifle a yawn. She would begin to feel imprisoned in a torrent of words, suffocated, drowning. Once launched on a theme he was beyond

recall and she could only get relief by bursting into tears.

He heard her pulling his desk back into place, ~~downstairs,~~ straining at it and gasping, ~~muddy~~ This was part of a demonstration, no doubt. She was showing him how he'd ruined everything by making her guests feel he didn't want them in the house. 'Everything will be back in order soon', she was saying, 'especially your precious bloody desk where you do all your thinking!' Then, when ~~the order's re-established and~~ every damned boring piece of furniture is back in its place we'll sit and stare at each other as usual; what a bore!' But he was rather bucked that she was making the gesture at all; it showed he was in her mind. The desk bumped and rumbled below. Quite a relief! They were being beastly to each other on known lines.

The last month in Basrah had been ghastly. ~~There'd been little work at the office and in any case life there stopped at eleven in the morning in the hot months. The swimming pool had been closed suddenly because of an outbreak of polio among the English and Americans. Basrah was an ugly, stifling city full of dust and sand, little more than a settlement of shacks and jerry-built shops two storeys high with crumbling fronts. A main street, crowded and full of pot-holes, ran straight from the Southern Gate to the Northern, and in that street you had more or less the whole city. Beyond it lay the endless flat desert. The only good looking things were the old Turkish houses, ornate and wooden, with intricate little balconies, by the river. Little alleyways ran between these houses down to the river's muddy banks and when the heat got under way they stank like a sewer. It was all chatter and bustle in the centre of the town. Cars rose to peak sounding their horns in a constant massive orchestra, street boys with little trays of chewing gum or~~

~~chocolate shouting and running after you, mules stumbling between the ruts and holes in the pavement, blaring calls to prayer relayed by loudspeaker from the mosques, and screeching radios in the coffee houses. Old men would sit for hours in these coffee houses staring before them and smoking their hubble-bubbles, you could see the desert in their eyes.~~

The sweat used to collect at the base of his neck and make a nasty raw rash which he dabbed with a handkerchief, making it worse ~~and worse~~ until it bled. He couldn't sleep at night and spent much of his time in the Mesopotamia Hotel under the fans. ~~He got absurdly nervous in the last month about the possibility of a riot, though it wasn't the season for riots, which happened when the colleges were assembled. He went round the house checking on the doors and windows to see if they were fast, several times a night, and rather than risk somebody getting in at his window he barricaded it closed until dawn. He went into savage tempers at the office. The night wind from the desert had a strange touch for him. He kept hearing imaginary voices outside, and then he looked out of his bedroom window — his house was in the green district, where most of the consular houses were, spaced far apart — he thought he could see figures in dishdashas darting through the shadows of the palm trees. He knew, logically, that Mohammed, being a nationalist like most of the other clerks, would know how to protect him in a riot. Indeed, he already had protected him. He'd walked into the Mesopotamia Hotel the year before during a stiff student riot, while stones were being flung through the window, and coolly taken him out to his broken down Citroen in the main street under the eyes of the students. In any case, the crowds rarely attacked Europeans. Their target was the king and his ministers. Granville knew these fears were a kind of sickness, his only~~

relief was thinking about Pinkie; he spent hours alone at night, even avoiding Mohammed, to be alone with her image, in a state of half-collapse. It was a cool, voluptuous image and it kept him going. He saw her naked with full, round, heavy breasts, her nipples sharp and darkly red, swollen, while her eyes were closed, her mouth open, her hips seeming massive, moving .... ~~He wrote to her that he'd be spending a week in Genoa on his way back, but he hurried on after two days there and sent her a sudden telegram from Paris. The voluptuous image was made sanery, like his reality, by the healthy sea voyage from Beirut, but still it held his mind. And now, in London, it seemed to have nothing to do with her. There was nothing in common between her body and that of the image. It was an image of her body, yes, but she wasn't doing any of the things he'd had in mind for her.~~

She came upstairs and switched the light on, not realising he was there. At once he jumped up. Her hair was tumbled, presumably from her efforts with the desk, and she was wearing her tragic look.

"Good God!" he shouted, ~~suddenly getting the better of him,~~ "~~this~~ is an unholy bloody mess, isn't it?"

At once his chin was thrust forward, his shoulders were hunched, his eyes glared blackly towards her. He hadn't consciously meant the words at all! ~~They sounded distorted to him and he seemed to himself as he said them that their construction, grammatically, was strange.~~ But it was too late.

She screamed back, "What the hell are you talking about?"

~~"Well, I thought you'd be pleased."~~

"Well, Jesus Christ ---! Fancy coming back to this!"

This time she didn't cry. He was ~~bitterly~~ disappointed. Instead she walked across the room and flung the attic-window up, then, to

his amazement, brought in a kettle from off the roof! He wanted to laugh but his face was set with grim condemnation.

"You haven't seen the lid of this, by any chance, have you?" she asked, with equally ridiculous grimness, holding the lidless kettle in her hand.

"No, I haven't!"

She went next door to the kitchen and he heard her light the gas. Then she came back.

"I suppose you want a cup of tea?" she asked.

But he flung past her without a word: she'd given him something to refuse! Didn't she realise how awful it was coming back to this? he asked himself pathetically. But at the same time his mind was baffled. He couldn't quite tell what his feelings were. He was keeping something up deliberately; he really wanted to call her 'calf-nose' and have a cup of tea. He went downstairs to have his first real look at the house, now that it was quiet. Digital

His bags were still in the music-room where he'd dropped them ~~near the hearth~~ and he opened the first one, meaning to unpack. But he was too nervous. He walked into the bedroom and stood there, ~~for some time~~, letting the quiet sink into him. She'd made the room more or less presentable. There was still no bed, however. The tasselled bed-cover, coloured a sombre mauve, was lying on the floor. ~~It was strange to stand there without the guests and yet feel their presence still warm in the air. Their voices hadn't quite left the room. He believed he really had sent them away and they wouldn't come back even for Pinkie.~~

He looked at the grey fitted carpet, ~~covering every inch of the floor.~~ He was proud of that, having ~~laid~~ fitted it himself. ~~It was a thing to remember~~

~~of drawers.~~ His desk was painted a light sea-blue. He'd done that as well. ~~He went to one of the wardrobes let into the wall and found some of his old winter suits, heavy and dusty. He hadn't cared much about clothes two years before, to judge from the look of them. The trousers were out at the knee and the pockets sagged. There was a pair of simply massive walking shoes with crepe soles, out of question for Basrah.~~

The curtains were lovely, a delicate rose-coloured pattern of tall trees, with a still monkey sitting in the branches. This monkey had a flat, melancholy face wrinkled by the curtain's folds, and it stared out into the room, moving sometimes with the breeze. The curtains had come to Pinkie from a grandmother and had originally been at Aldercote, the Grysham home fifty years before. At the bottom they were in shreds and had yellowed. But the rose colour had become more and more delicate. New linings had been sewn on again and again.

A breeze came in from the window like a promise of excitement -- a cool, tender, secretive breath across his face. It made him shudder, he didn't know whether with excitement or fear. 'Why not let things go?' he thought. 'Why <u>insist</u> so much?' Let <u>him</u> go to parties, take a girl dancing! Why not? Let all the forms collapse!

It reminded him of another breeze, on the night of an eclipse three months before in Basrah. He'd stayed awake all night thinking things out in the way he'd always promised himself he would. In the morning after that long night of thought he saw everything clearly, gleaming and ice-cool. An ambition of his life had been fulfilled.

Pinkie knew nothing about that night. She seemed to see no change in him. He said nothing; telling her about it might take away some of his certainty; he wanted to let it lie dormant for a time. In

any case, though she was curious about his thoughts and followed his long arguments with an intrigued expression, from a distance, with a hint of love despite herself, in the end they made her yawn.

This had crushed their marriage, really. Ever since he could remember he'd had a problem beating at his brain for which everything must wait. 'If only I could reach a solution,' he always told himself, 'then my life would change, then I could behave normally!' It got so bad in Basrah that he gave up inviting people, even business-friends. Grudgingly he went to a film with her once a month. When he did go out to a party or dance it was on a kind of insurance-basis: it would keep her quiet for a time. In the end he got fed-up with her endless 'Pip, why don't we go out somewhere?" He told her to clear out and find a 'bloody dancing partner' somewhere, which she did!

One day, of course, he and Pinkie would be going out together all the time. Oh, yes, later they'd be out every night! He'd be carefree! Here he was hurting himself as well. He actually wanted to go out. He loved dancing with her and seeing her contented smile. She was so easily pleased. She only wanted him to be light-hearted a few hours every day and she knew it was a need in him, so, which he was holding back. The mark of a frown was getting deeper and deeper on his brow every day. Why? She couldn't understand it.

"You're such a sunny person, really!" she said. "Why do you have to be like this?"

It was the same over her little demonstrations of affection. She made to kiss him or stroke his hair and at once he ducked away. Another time, another time! But meanwhile he had to think things out. As for having children, well, of course, one day he'd be ready for them!

He'd be strong enough to take on fatherhood: but he didn't want to do it ~~propagate his seed~~ until he'd thought things out; he couldn't feel whole until he'd done so. On the other hand, he didn't tell her this in so many words. ~~He wasn't sufficiently aware of wanting to.~~ So she became more and more baffled. The lost look in her eyes grew. At last her sexual interest died as well. That was the flower he'd been clever enough to crush.

'Why do you hate people?' --- this was always on her lips, too. She'd always felt starved of life. She wanted lots of people round her, and he wasn't quite the person for that. At least he was in his nature but not in what he chose as his destiny. Her childhood had been lonely, she'd spent hours alone with a strict nurse. Her brothers and sisters, eight of them, had neglected her as the youngest; they had formed their clubs already. She told him once that being alone was a state of sin and shame for her. It meant you were disliked. And she thought that being alone meant the same in him - a state of shame! And he saw her looking at him with doubt sometimes, feeling shame on his account.

The silence of his room froze her and took her back to the long empty days of childhood. If they were alone together for long she felt imprisoned and suffocated, as she'd done as a child after too long in an overheated nursery or after too big a meal. The more she asked him to take her out in Basrah the more he resisted, in a fight to keep his privacy. The seige and the attack became their pattern. It was now a convention between them that she pulled in one direction and he in the other, whatever their real desires were. She insisted on going out even when she felt tired and ill, and he stayed at home when he was dying to see other people. Not did she really think he hated people: it had

~~simply~~ become part of the convention between them to say so. On his side he said she was afraid to be alone, and this was equally untrue. She loved tucking herself into bed at night with a book and a glass of hot chocolate. But since their marriage she'd rarely done it.

All this came to a climax in Basrah for the simple reason that men were ~~divided~~ cut off socially from women, except in advanced circles. There were times when he genuinely couldn't take her out --- to the house of a sheikh whose women were behind the veil ~~with whom he had business connections, for instance,~~ or to the cabaret where the whores were picked up. Nor could she go about the city alone, much less sit in one of the cafés, even the most modern ~~elegant~~ of them. Even carrying a shopping bag down the main street was 'shame' in the eyes of the sheikh-class. It had to be done by a servant, who followed you at a distance. Gradually she began to put the blame for this state of affairs on him, as if he'd invented Muslim society. And in an absurd way he did feel responsible for it. His career meant loneliness for her; this was becoming her theme. And it was difficult to deny it.

But really ~~not~~ even going out didn't satisfied her. It was something more difficult. At first, in Basrah, they'd gone out quite a lot, making a round of the cinemas where ~~one~~ you sat in an open boxes ~~rather~~ like a stables, protected against the yelling crowd; or they went to company dinners and even organised one of them. ~~There'd been numberless parties, some of them casual and others at the Embassy; there was a lot to choose from because everybody was lonely.~~ But still she felt swindled. The empty house still waited for them when they got back; and she dreamed of London, where she could leave the front door open all day, and all sorts of people drifted in. The house ~~in~~ Basrah waited for them after a party like a grim destiny claiming them back. Nobody in Basrah called without special

invitation. "What a stuffy lot of buggers they all are!" she cried.

Most of the parties were solemn affairs, too. The guests sat round the wall clicking their beads in silence, smiling at each other now and then, divided from their neighbours by a little table on which were placed a bowl of nuts, a glass of brandy and an ash-tray with water in it that sent up a stink of sodden tobacco. Mohammed's parties were like this, and Granville tried to persuade him not to give them. There would be semi-westernised Arab music from Cairo, and everybody would say, "Wallah, Allah!" with ecstasy when the famous Makboula started singing. Pinkie would yawn until tears came.

And when he did get to know people he ~~became~~ was friends with them in a man's way which she couldn't share. That was another of her complaints. Mohammed was a good example. An evening with him was agony for her; she would rather have one of his parties! "No more talk-and-beads for me!" ~~One~~ You had to be doing something, dancing or playing cards or talking to new people. She couldn't bear Mohammed's silences. To please her he took her to the Cabala, the high-class cabaret for Europeans, about once a month, but ~~always~~ there was still a sense of swindling. The evenings were too planned, Pinkie seemed to say, whereas if they ~~were~~ Racing ~~had~~ in a lively group of people there wouldn't ~~have been~~ be any need for plans. ~~things.~~ But he couldn't think with lots of people round him! He had to be alone for hours on end, and he wanted the free run of the house when alone, Sometimes she gave him two hours after lunch to be alone, and this made him feel swindled on his side because his thoughts refused to come according to a schedule. They had a persistent destructive effect on each other's freedom.

cap ~~In Egypt~~ there were a ~~number of~~ few English women married to Arab

architects or doctors or engineers, who also wanted a casual life, ~~free from the obsession with intrigue among the corrupt and powerful. And~~ there were Arab and Kurdish students who'd been to American or English colleges and had seen beyond the veil. One girl, the daughter of a police official, wore a tight jumper with the word WISCONSIN knitted across it, and never wore the abba; since ~~the~~ Kurdish women wore no veil there was already a precedent for the Arab women not to do so. This meant there were opportunities for Pinkie; and a circle did start up. But as always Granville held back. He could have given wonderful parties in the house. He knew it. The rooms were large, and there were terraces, even a lawn, though the grass was burned and patchy. And the girls in the circle were pretty. It was easy to talk to the men. They were a great relaxation from the sheikhs. Sometimes they all went off ~~together~~ for a picnic in the desert or ~~on longer trips~~ to Babylon ~~and~~ or the arch of Tesiphon, which the Wisconsin girl climbed, to everybody's horror; she stood on the peak of the immense broken arch gazing down at them. And there were fires on someone's specially irrigated lawn at night, and buffet suppers inside chic, gleaming rooms with fitted carpets and ~~polished wooden~~ Swedish furniture, ~~from Scandinavia~~, and abstract paintings on the walls. ~~But it was too much of a drug for him. He could live like that, he wanted to say, but the rest of his life would have to collapse.~~ Sometimes he yearned to let everything go, in a delicious, haphazard flow of life, talking to people all the time, wandering and lolling about, dancing and joking, ~~and suddenly~~ taking a drive across the desert to an encampment where the gypsies would dance all night, their women with golden plate-like ornaments on their breasts which they made ~~to~~ revolve inwards on each other in a ~~most seductive~~ sexy way. He could live like that till the end of

his days! But after a time he felt dispersed from his real self. With Mohammed it was different: talk followed themes slowly and coolly. But with other people he felt drawn too much into present reality. And he was searching all the time for an underneath-reality. They broke this underneath-reality in him, and the effect was both delightful and shocking.

Pinkie gave in. She saw that everything in him attractive might go to ruin. And Basrah made this clear to her for the first time. She'd always had the humble idea, before, that he might be leading her somewhere, with a bit of unhappiness at first, but not for long. Now it wasn't true. That took her strength away. She began to lean on him more and more. The more he tried to be alone the more she clung to him, and he felt he was expected to live her life as well as his own. She refused to be independent --- she could only conceive that as being in revolt against him. Decisions were left to him --- whom to invite, where to go, the letters they should write. He won absolute iron control of her without wanting to. She leaned on him for her whole life. He was her initiative, her morality, her judge. So she never left him really free for his work. There was always a part of him lurking in her, in another room, a responsibility that nagged and tugged at him: yet if he went next door, if he gave up his afternoon, he knew he wouldn't be able to give himself, all his passions and his uncurbed, flowing self; so he never could give his afternoons, or anything else, to her; she only wanted an element of him, which meant distortion of all his other self. He stayed hammering away at his work even when he didn't want to, and even when there wasn't any real work to do; he became more and more entrenched,

because the first condition of intimacy, the right of absolute self-abandon, couldn't be fulfilled; and correspondingly, she wilted and faded before his sight, day by day, in the enormous Basrah heat, because she was suffering exactly the same thing. She started calling him 'po-faced', a 'parson' --- and he felt a new pale alter ego growing, which he hated, too.

She stood in the doorway of the music-room and he started out of his thoughts. [redacted]

"Have you brought the lemons?" she asked, her eyes turned away, [redacted] Her hair was still down over her brow; [redacted] her eyes had lost [redacted] the curiosity and light he'd seen in them at the party not an hour before. Yet she was such an easy person to rally. He only had to say an encouraging word and she would smile! But he couldn't bring himself to do it. For God's sake, why couldn't he [redacted] do it?

"Yes," he replied waveringly, "I'll get them!"

A fortnight before, in her only letter, she'd asked him to bring over some Basrah lemons for halmuth tea [redacted] They were tiny, shrivelled, sun-blackened lemons that [redacted] put in [redacted] the tea-pot. He took them out of his case and handed them to her, three of them in tissue paper.

"Thank you," she said in a haughty tone, and he went on fiddling about with his suit case in an embarrassed way. He knew a storm was brewing. She was gazing at a point half-way between them on the floor, as always when she was angry, and her hair was down over her right eye, giving her a childish, pouting look. She went on addressing the point on the floor: "And now do you mind telling me what you meant by walking out of my party like that?"

[redacted]

He still had his head in his case, rummaging round, and dared not look up at her in case he got a swipe in the eye. It had happened before. He could feel her gaze fixed haughtily on his back and he wanted to giggle.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I said would you mind telling me why you tried to make a fool of me at my own party?" She added, "Make a fool of me in front of my guests!"

The words 'my guests' gave her a terrific grandeur and he turned round to look at her out of a simple objective curiosity. Her eyebrows were raised, her cheeks flushed, her chin pushed forward.

"I don't know ---" His voice sounded quite trivial. "I thought we were going to have dinner together ---"

"What on earth are you talking about?" she cried. "I only got your telegram yesterday!"

"That doesn't stop you ---" He was still crouched foolishly over his case.

"What do you mean, it doesn't stop me? Do you think I'm bloody-well going to cancel all my plans just because you take it into your head to come a few days earlier?"

"No, but ---"

"Do you think I've got nothing better to do than stand around here waiting for your next orders?"

"I didn't say that."

"Did you or did you not tell me you were staying a week in Genoa?"

Her eyes blazed at him and he was afraid she might get into one

of her frantic states when she gritted her teeth and screamed.

"Yes, Pinkie, I did ---" He added gingerly, "It's all right ---"

She stopped. "What's all right, you bloody fool?"

"Well, I was wrong."

"Oh, I see! So it was all for nothing, was it?"

"What?"

"Ruining my party!"

"Oh, come on, your party was last night!"

She was already placated. He could tell that from her eyes. The moment he'd said he was wrong all the defiance left her.

"Why do you always do that?" she said with sudden tears in her eyes. Her face was screwed up pitifully. "Why do you always have to ruin things?"

He shrugged. "I don't know." He gazed down at his case as if he was really trying to think about it. "Don't cry, Pinkie!"

"I wanted you to be at this party," she said. The tears began pouring down her face and he got up.

"Pinkie ..." He put his arms round her and they stood close to each other in an awkward way while she gasped and cried.

"How did I know you were coming back?" she whispered.

"I'm sorry, Pinkie."

He pulled her head gently on to his shoulder and looked across at the window. How forlorn they were! Her little gasps broke into the silence. She gave him affectionate little punches in the side while she wept, saying, "Oh, Pip", with the sheer helplessness of the situation. He could feel her cool bare shoulder against him, and her wet cheeks.

"It always seems to happen like this, doesn't it?" he said.

"I mean, when we've been away from each other?"

"Yes!" she said, and her tears increased.

"Don't cry any more!" He was completely sunk at the sound of her tears and swore not to find fault with her again. There was something so desparate and final about the way she cried, like a kind of final destruction of things; anything, including his own submission, was better than that.

This time he didn't make a long 'orang-utang' speech as she called it. He watched the fixed, identical roofs on the other side of the road, while a circle of lamplight like shining dust glowed from the street below.

"Let's go up and cook something, shall we?" he said.

"Yes. I've got some chicken!" And on the way up to the kitchen, still half in his arms, sniffing back her tears, she asked him, "How was the journey?"

They had a meal together, sitting at a slatted garden-table that had come from the summer-house at Aldercote. [redacted] he could see a solitary rooftop [redacted] close at hand shining faintly in the moonlight, through the small kitchen-window. They said little at first. He described the sea, how it had been quite still and blue for three days. They'd anchored at Syracuse for a couple of hours and he'd drunk thick red wine with a talkative Texan corn-merchant [redacted] who wore an enormous sort of cow-boy's hat and never really looked at him while he talked, only gazed all round him sleepily.

"Your hair got bleached," she said, and gave him a little kiss on the cheek.

She told him she'd been on the river at Hampton Court with the Pollockes. And she'd been so happy getting back to London: [redacted] could

live ~~as one wanted to here, she said,~~ with ~~nobody~~ other people watching. ~~It was marvellous, this freedom.~~

The party was now a forbidden subject between them. ~~[redacted]~~ That was another pattern, made largely by him. Certain matters fell into a silent abyss which grew steadily. So there would always be this source of mistrust between them. It would probably have been fun listening to her descriptions of the party. ~~But the subject was not there.~~ He tried to ask her about it, to break through the darkness, but he felt as if a hand had come over his mouth. And she, seeing his face, didn't dare broach it. / Italics

~~He wanted to ask what the kettle had been doing on the roof; that, again, was probably an amusing story. Three years before, he'd climbed out there during a party, for the devil of it, with her screaming to him to come in. He'd been drunk. But now the roof was a forbidden subject.~~

She looked ~~quite~~ washed-out from her tears. Her body was really sunken with grief. He noticed it for the first time. She leaned on her elbows listlessly, her head hanging. Why couldn't he accept her? wait and see what news she had for him, instead of always taking her by storm like this? 'Why did I send those people away?' he asked himself. Had he sent them away? ~~He was suddenly full of remorse.~~ He'd made a terrible fool of himself! 'Why did I stalk out of the room? Why did my heart beat at the sight of those cars?' He couldn't see what was right any more. He had a familiar sensation of lost and confused authority, that reminded him of the time before they went to Basrah. / n.p.

And ~~everything~~ the voyage had been so nice. The sky had been light and clear ~~all the time~~ and he had spent hours watching the white surf behind the boat. 'It's too late now,' he thought. 'I can't undo what I've done.'

They moved the bed back with much puffing and blowing. Then the bedroom was more or less as they'd left it two years before. She walked about mechanically, getting new sheets from the cupboard and fluffing the mattress up. He noticed for the first time that she'd only got one ear-ring on.

"Where's your other ear-ring?" he asked.

She stopped. "What?" She flinched for a moment, afraid that he'd said something cutting.

"You've lost an ear-ring."

"Oh, have I?" She put her hand vaguely up to her ear and gazed before her.

"Perhaps it fell off just now," he added.

"Yes." She gazed about the room, seeming to look for it, but vaguely, without moving from the bed. She was lost in thought. She could have been a thousand miles away. It quite frightened him and for a moment his trembling returned.

Then she went into the bathroom. There came the sound of trickling water as she got ready for bed. He noticed that the pillows still bore the imprint of heads. Objects in the room haunted him. He saw a piece of blue paper in the basket by the desk and found that it was one of his own letters from Basrah, ending, 'With all love to you, your own Pip.' How embarrassing it was to read that now. And he came across the words, 'you are my darling little calf-nose and I adore you.' Why did he whip himself up into these high dreaming states when they were away from each other? Then there was always a big let-down afterwards, from the spiritual peaks! If he wrote 'dear Pinkie' and signed himself 'Cheerio, Pip' they might come together naturally afterwards, without a word being spoken.

When she came back from the bathroom he asked her quietly, "What happened to the child?"

She was standing by the door and looked at him with the same stilled detachment as before, although on guard now. "What child, Pip?"

The trembling returned like a cold shiver all over his body. "Oh, for God's sake!" he cried. But he was careful not to raise his voice too much. "Didn't we start a child over there?"

"Oh!" She went and tucked a sheet in carefully, her eyes quite closed to him. "Something sort of fell out in the lavatory the other day. I don't know.... I've had the curse again, anyway."

There was a moment of relief for him, of a pained kind. He was free again to think out his life! Then it was gone. The child would have put them right rogether, perhaps! It would have committed them to each other once and for all. Now there would be no more chance! He tried to see if she was lying, by staring at her. 'Her flesh must have felt my unwillingness,' he thought. She walked about the room, her hair over her brow, detached, a little flushed. 'Our fleshes decided for us.'

She was gazing before her, unblinking, her face quite still. She was like a child: frightened or lying, he couldn't tell which!

"How?" he asked in a whisper.

"What do you mean --- how?"

"How could it just fall out?"

She shrugged. "Well, it did. I don't even know if we <u>did</u> start it."

"But you said so! The child was in you."

She was silent for a moment. "Oh, these things are never certain!"

He was looking for a trace of feeling on her face but there wasn't any.

"I don't know any more than you do," she said, and busied herself with the bed again, her face set as he'd never seen it before, even in Basrah when he'd told her to go and find a dancing partner.

"But don't you feel sorry?" he asked.

"Well, it's just a fact, isn't it?" She threw up her chin a little, blinking, as if casting off a thought very quickly.

After a pause he said, "You didn't get rid of it, did you?"

"Really, Pip!" She laughed and he trusted her at once. "What do you think I am?"

But again her face was set, as if she could be trusted only in that one statement.

"You've changed," he said softly. "If you hadn't changed you'd be sorry not to have the child. You wanted one out there. But you don't seem to have lost anything."

Again she threw up her chin ever so slightly, with a blinking, sensitive movement of the eyes.

"Well, as I said, it's just a fact."

"But I say you've changed."

She turned to him and to his surprise gazed at him reflectively for a time, her brow clear, as if thinking over what he'd just said in a perfectly objective way.

"Tell me how I've changed, then!"

He felt at a loss for a moment but took the plunge, and his voice quivered. "You seem harder!"

"How?" She showed no surprise, no regret. Her face was exactly

the same as before, quite clear.

"You don't seem to belong to me any more. It's the way you look at me!"

"I've had a holiday from you, that's all!"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I need time to get back to you." She said it as a suggestion which he could either accept or not. She herself didn't know!

"I always have to get used to you again, don't I?" she added.

"Do you? Why?"

She didn't answer. He half turned away and murmured, "I don't know, you seem so inhuman sometimes."

She went on with the bed. He wanted her to deny angrily what he'd [redacted] said. But she always accepted his verdicts mutely. Ironically, he was far from accepting them himself. She got a wretched picture of herself purely from remarks he threw out just to provoke her.

His body was slightly bowed as he stood by the door, in a posture of defeat. Then he moved, straightened his back and began unbuttoning his shirt. He didn't want to sleep, nor did he want to stay up. He didn't want to read and he didn't want to go on talking to her. He had an entombed, static feeling.

"The party went on for three days, did it?" he asked.

She glanced round at him and answered in a subdued voice, "More or less."

"You must have enjoyed that," he said in a deliberately light tone, trying to make amends for what he'd done earlier.

But she mistook him. "Oh, really?" Her voice was sarcastic.

"I wasn't being funny!"

"Why shouldn't I enjoy it?" Her mettle was up.

"I told you," he said quietly, "I wasn't being funny."

"Well, it sounded as if you were!"

"Pinkie," he said, as quiet as before, touching her on the arm. He drew her in a light movement towards him. To his surprise she didn't resist. "Have you been up to anything?"

She stared straight into his eyes, her mouth open, it seemed to him with terror, and whispered, "What do you mean?"

"Have you been having affairs or anything of that sort?"

"Affairs?" Her lips were dry and she didn't cease staring him in the eyes. "Of course, I haven't, darling!"

He said 'affairs' because he couldn't bear to pronounce the dreadful specific phrase 'an affair', though it was what he wanted to say and what he meant.

"Are you sure?" he asked, his throat so dry that he could hardly talk.

"Of course, I'm sure!"

The words were a great comfort to him. But since she kept staring at him, wide-eyed, he could tell nothing from her face. He nodded and let her go. And a moment later he felt foolish and embarrassed for having asked it.

She got into her pyjamas quickly and went to bed.

"God, I'm so tired," she murmured.

This was a sign for him not to touch her; it was understood between them. But he had no desires.

He took off his shirt and stood leaning against his desk naked to the waist. She closed her eyes, tucking the sheet up under her nose, her brow clear like a child's. Sleep came to her quickly and soon he'd be alone.

~~Poor Pinkie didn't want anything direct from him. So a habit of procrastination had grown up between them. That was it, he mused to himself. His love suffocated her like his speeches! She didn't want love that was serious and demanding. She wanted something lighter, with minimum responsibility. It was the responsibility that hurt and troubled her, he imposed it at every point. She shuddered at going so deep into life. Yet she had terrific character. But life must be embroidered. It was such an awful sight for him when a frown of thought came to her soft brow, splitting it unnaturally. And she lay there now, resting from him in perfect sleep, seeming to gaze at the distance with her eyes tight shut, as if it was something beautiful that made her still, in repose.~~

The breeze from the window chilled his back and he remembered that his pyjamas were still in his case. He went next door and pulled them out roughly. Then he, too, got into bed, careful not to touch her. The darkness was pleasant. It made him feel he was hiding, even from himself, in a wonderful suspension of reality. He stretched out his toes and yawned. The lamplight outside streamed in between the curtains on to the chimney-piece. It was good living in the City where everything was so quiet in the evening, with the silent offices all round. ~~It was still like countryside now.~~ He heard the screech of a barn-owl. All at once he felt drowsy and quite cheerful. He could see a chimney and a bit of roof opposite, between the curtains. Pinkie felt hot at his side and

swiftly her warmth drew him into sleep. He crooked his legs under hers and put his ~~right~~ arm round her waist in the way they'd been doing for five years. And it established a different reality for him, so that the party and everything he had said afterwards became absurd, and this familiar reality of warm thighs ~~close together~~ and the sound of breathing was the only one for him. He was happy to be back in his room.

He dreamt of Basrah that night; he was following Pinkie through the dusty, crowded main street, trying to push his way ~~past~~ between donkeys and mules, slapping at their haunches, edging ~~between~~ past the almost stationary cars in the middle of the road, while she went further and further away until ~~finally~~ in the end she was lost.

CHAPTER 3.

~~Next morning~~ he woke early and knew it was a lovely day ~~[illegible]~~ °/cap before he opened his eyes. There was ~~a [illegible]~~ a hush, like countryside in the heat, muffling the traffic ~~in the distance~~. He lay there for some time, breathing deeply, almost asleep. Then he opened his eyes and saw the sky between the curtains, clear and ~~[illegible]~~ blue, with whisps of white cloud. The chimneys looked sharp and red by contrast, like painted canvas held against the sky. There was such stillness in the air that everything looked fixed and vivid, even the furniture of the room, with a stream of sunlight pouring through the window on to the chimney-piece in one straight, brilliant shaft.

Pinkie was fast asleep, lying on her side, and he realised drowsily that his hand still lay on her hip from the night before, and his legs were still crooked in hers. He saw the monkey on the curtain, gazing sadly out. Their bodies lay in one united warmth, ~~joined~~ so ~~much together~~ close that he couldn't tell at first how his limbs differed from hers; he had to move slightly to make sure. The City made a busy, hushed throbbing in the distance now that the offices were open. He felt safe. All their divisions of the evening before were absurd. The quarrel between them in Basrah, the incident with the clerk from Kirkuk, were distant and absurd. Last night was unreal. Only this was real, the act of lying together, melted into one creature by the warmth.

He got up, careful not to disturb her, and without thinking went through the same motions as on morning after morning two years before,

leaning his arm first on the bed and then on the wall behind him so as to lever himself over her without waking her. And, just as she'd done nearly always before, she turned her face as if to look up at him, but with her eyes closed, then snuggled back into her pillow again and fell fast asleep. Only her short, auburn hair showed above the sheet.

He tiptoed out of the room and closed the door carefully, remembering that the latch never worked properly and one had to wait for a slight clicking noise before letting go of the handle. The brightness from the street ~~below~~ made him blink at first. It filled the music-room with a hot glow, making it strangely like a tropical garden, every colour -- the cool blue of the carpet, the silver chintz chair-covers, ~~of the armchairs~~, the delicate grey piano and the dazzling white bookshelves --- fixed and separate in the stillness. He did love this house! Every room had its soul!

~~The sun shone down the length of the street, on both pavements, and he caught sight of a small red milk-cart on the other side by the kerb. That, too, looked extraordinarily vivid and clean. It was operated by hand, he remembered, an electrical trolley that went the pace of a man. At one time, about three years before, there'd been a horse called Tim, and Pinkie had always taken down a bag of carrots and apples on Saturday mornings for him. But then Tim was transferred to another milkman because the man on this round went down with heart trouble and said he couldn't manage a horse any more; also he needed the extra bit of exercise. But it was sad without Tim. Other people would be overfeeding him now. He had a huge, round belly that looked as if it would burst the shafts. And Tim used to put his muzzle against Pinkie's stomach and give her a big,~~

~~affectionate shove.~~

The milkman hadn't changed and Granville watched him with a drowsy interest as he went up the steps to one of the front doors with a crate of bottles in his hand, his body leaning slightly to one side and his free arm held outwards so as to give himself balance, rather like a tightrope walker. That was exactly as he'd done it two years before. Indeed, his movements were so precisely the same and so familiar to Granville that he was hardly conscious of them now at all. Where were those two years between? It made him feel giddy. He had an uncanny conviction that he hadn't been away at all but had fallen into a long sleep. Basrah was a perfect blank for him.

The milkman had a sharp, lined worker's face, ~~with thin lips and humble, crushed eyes, hardly seen. He always gave a kindly good morning to passers-by, touching his cap, and then averted his eyes at once, back to the task of milk-bottles, as if he found looking outside his own world painful.~~ He passed unnoticed, rapt in his work, with a hidden devotion that made a tiny glistening point in his eyes. He put empty bottles back into the cart and took fresh ones out, never pausing, slightly bowed all the time, his lips set and his eyes with their rapt look, sunk, and almost hidden, tiny points. ~~There was the clank, morning-early, and familiar scrape of the man's boots on the pavement, the clink of bottles in his crate, the subdued click made by his trolley as he pulled on the brake, and his modest rat-tat on the door. So familiar. And all done with a kind of worship.~~ Granville watched him closely. How could the man do it day in and day out like a precise machine for ten or twenty or thirty years, and yet keep the gleam of love in his eyes? All at once Granville's interest was aroused. Of course, the man wasn't performing a function *d' Italo*

at all. Work wasn't just the movement of his hands for him any more than Granville's work in Basrah was just filling in invoices and dictating letters: his work in Basrah was the whir of the fan in the office, the blinding sunlight against the shutters of the window, the call-to-prayer blaring from a minaret across the road, and the sound of Mohammed sucking his teeth. And this milkman was in the open, the weather was part of his work; it was a ritual of nature almost, without explanation. The expression in his eyes was that of a man listening to a marvellous story all the time. That was it!

That was of gazing reminded Granville of his own father; he had the same gleam in his eyes ~~after working for thirty years on~~ when he worked at the docks near Tilbury.

And secondly it reminded him of Abu Kath'm~~~~, his house-boy's mother in Basrah, ~~and~~ who lived in a mud-hut at the bottom of the garden, by ~~the~~ a banana-tree.

But why did he think of them together now - his father, this milkman, Abu Kath'm? They were so different. ~~Her stride was long and slow, with her head lifted in perfect steadiness. Such a walk would be laughed at in almost any city so round and flowing and self assured. Whereas the milkman's walk one couldn't say a stride was hurried, it was gloomish in companion, as if a whip was raised over him. His father's too. And while Abu Kath'm's gaze was fixed on the distance in a fiery way, his was sunken and concealed.~~ Yet the glitter at the centre of their eyes was the same. And their movements, while from totally different worlds, had the same awe of things. That was what his father had in his eyes - a look of belief and awe. But there was something else behind it, too. It was a look of confidence. It suggested that things

things could be depended on. It wasn't a personal or active confidence: it wasn't a chosen state at all but a complete faith in the constancy of the world, which went along on one continuous theme and hummed with one activity. Their eyes didn't pry into the outside world, glancing from object to object. They looked at things hazily. They had the same patient and humble air, too, as ~~before a theme to which they must~~ listening to a tale.

That was the light in Abu Kath'm's eyes as she gazed into the distance, her head lifted proudly: ~~the theme was in her and all around her; she didn't see a world of herpicardon accordonbad concerto.~~ Her gaze invested everything with a safe and calm theme. And the milkman had essentially the same gaze. ~~That was the marvellous story he seemed to be listening to.~~ A gleam of belief, like a flame, had been kept intact in them.

This was how Granville's night of thought had begun in Basrah, through his seeing the gleam in Abu Kath'm for the first time; he had seen her in the afternoon, during the eclipse, standing in the garden. Her black cloak had been drawn nearly over her face so that only the slits of her eyes were visible, keen and shining, the genna-mark on her brow lurid in the strange light. She had warned him against Allah, pointing up at the hazy sun. Allah was in the sun, she said, and was very angry at this moment --- that was why he was hiding himself! And this had begun thoughts in Granville for which he'd been waiting ten or twenty years. He realised how often he'd asked himself, without finding the actual words, 'What does it feel like to believe in God?' And before him, in her, there seemed to be an answer if only he could penetrate to it. And so he'd begun to try, all night.

He turned away from the window, yawning, and realised with a hidden twinge of pain that he'd just been 'thinking' --- standing quite

still, his jaw thrust forward, his eyes popping out of his head, floating! -- his fists clenched, thinking, thinking!

He stopped on his way to the door. It was the first shame, of that squeezing and burning kind, a bleak, dispirited remorse for the whole nature of his being, that he'd had for two years.

He went upstairs to the kitchen, ~~which was~~ tidy now apart from a bucket crammed with refuse near the door. The slatted ~~garden~~ table, with the sunlight falling across it, gave the room the look of a garden summer-house. Along the dresser, on three shelves, were Victorian plates of various sizes, painted in a bluish-grey pastoral scene. ~~He and Pinkie had picked them up at Abbott's Road six years before, after a visit to his parents; they made a whole set, including a soup tureen, a sauce bowl and a magnificent platter for the Sunday roast, and it had all cost less than a pound. The young people of Abbott's Road, getting better money now, wanted bright, modern designs, and were throwing the old things out. Pinkie had furnished half this house from the second-hand shops in Abbott's Road.~~ What with the chintz covers and curtains from Pinkie's family, a quiet sedateness from the past hung over the rooms. It was so unlike the lives they actually led.

The kitchen floor creaked under his foot, ~~which was the way that the house always creaked~~ That was how they'd creaked two years before, and he waited for the familiar wooden bump that always followed. Bump! There it was! ~~On winter mornings he'd taken breakfast here alone, before it was light, at the time he was working at Copthall Avenue, round the corner. He always liked to give himself an hour of quiet before work.~~ He remembered the rustle of the morning paper as he used to open it at the table, in the

silence of the house, and the sound of his tea-cup as he put it back in the saucer, while the traffic throbbed softly in the distance, getting steadily louder. Here he didn't have to think. Everything was provided for you. Life throbbed outside. He would fall back into his old habits --- an evening concert, theatres, coffee with friends in the attic room next door, while his real self lay in abeyance all the time. But there would be no office this time, for two months. That was bad, perhaps ...

There was nothing in the larder, only a scrap of soiled grease-proof paper, so he went automatically to the door and took down a canvas shopping bag from a hook. It looked the same, like a small sack, with dusty earth at the bottom from potatoes. His steps across the room, the blind way his hand had risen towards the hook on the door --- the last two years might just as well not have existed!

There was a shop on the corner called Amy's where he could get everything. It was narrow, wedged between houses, the only shop in the street, dark and mysterious, with a rich display of packets and tins. There was a combined smell of soap and cheese, he remembered. A fresh ham always stood on the counter, and sometimes there was a tray of home-made bread-pudding, thick with sultanas and currants. Amy herself was plump, with healthy dark eyes and flushed cheeks, rather Irish-looking, and she always gave him extra weight, with a little wink. A light was usually necessary in the shop because it was so narrow, so that it glowed cosily, with bright packets piled up to the ceiling.

~~the child in a little pram behind the counter between the~~ ~~wrapped bread and corn flakes. There was never any hurry about her.~~

A special calm and silence hung over the shop. She went about her work with a delicate kind of concentration, slow. And she made the street outside seem in the country.

Now he had to steel himself to meet her again. It was such an effort: with surprise he found he wanted to hide himself away; he recoiled from leaving the house. That was another sensation he hadn't had these two years, since leaving. His initiative had taken a blow.

As he went downstairs he again had an unpleasant sense of unworthiness that was also familiar from two years before. ~~What was this ideal pattern of life he fell short of?~~ He was full of confused thoughts, like dry voices in his brain. And this state also he remembered from two years before, going down these same stairs, dark and soft to the feet, with the same canvas bag in his hand. His body had lost [redacted] its assurance since last evening. Was that his imagination? His legs felt out of step with the rest of him! 'Oh, please stop my brain!' he felt like crying.

He needed butter, sugar, bacon and eggs, brown bread. He must concentrate. He made a list in his mind, going down the stairs, as he'd always done before. And he felt automatically in his pocket for the money. And milk. Had he seen a packet of tea upstairs? He'd better get one, in case. A little sweat formed itself on his upper lip as he went down the last steps. He felt a twinge of peculiar revulsion and giddiness, like a desire to jump out of his own body, because he couldn't accept himself. The thought again went across his brain, for no apparent reason, that the guests had indeed left Because of him last night. 'Why did I stalk out of the room?' he asked himself. 'Why did my heart beat at the

sight of the cars outside?' Everything on the voyage had been so light and clear, like the surf behind the boat! But at this moment life was flat and plain and deadly, his own behaviour grotesque. And the question he'd asked Pinkie last night! What exaggeration --- what outlandish thinking! A hot blush of shame went through him, making his heart beat fast. How could he have done it?

But what was the truth about Pinkie? His mind wavered, putting its timid little question. What about his instincts, were they nothing? But again the plain and obvious world asserted itself. Of course, I'd felt nothing was wrong! It was only madness and dreams. There they were again, those little ghosts in his brain fighting each other! They'd been so quiet these two years!

He walked through the dark hall downstairs and stood at the top of the steps gazing into the street and breathing in the morning air. That was better. Ah, the air did you good!

Sunlight still drenched the street, blinding him at first. It was quite like Basrah, ~~in the early morning. The only shadow was under the porches of the houses opposite, where the milkman was.~~ Granville hurried past the milk-trolley, hoping to escape the man's notice. A revulsion from all public contact filled him. And the milkman didn't look up.

Then, influenced by being out of doors, his body underwent a sudden quickening process. ~~He felt quite different.~~ It wasn't simply that there was more noise and light. It was a total bodily influence, like ~~suddenly~~ waking up, with no trace of drowsiness. His mood of revulsion was gone. The house, behind him, seemed like a shrine of thought, dark. It was like waking up, yet also it was like surrendering his real self,

like dying. How could he be so malleable to life? Apparently, the night of the eclipse had achieved less for him than he'd thought! Perhaps one day he would be able to walk out of the house with the same self that had been thinking inside it. But that would mean a long journey yet!

His trousers flashed white in the sunlight as he crossed the road, and he was conscious of their brightness against the grey of the street. Surely they were too conspicuous? Someone passed on the other side, walking quickly, a man in drab clothes. Absurdly, he resolved to take off these flashing trousers when he got back.

The street looked like a village in the sunlight, with the clear blue sky beyond the roofs. It reminded him of Abbott's Road where he was born, on ~~days in his childhood before an outing to the sea,~~ one of those outing-days, when he would wake early with excitement; a long charabanc would be waiting outside the Co-op hall and he would wear plimsoll shoes for the sand; those mornings had smelled different - it was the smell of the smooth, shiny surface of the charabanc, and the bag of sandwiches, and the rubber of his plimsolls, and milting tar from the hot roadway. But almost at once a melancholy shadow followed this memory. He'd often had this same sequence of feelings - first the sense of a happy village, then the ~~little~~ eclipse of hope that came inexplicably.

~~Most of the houses looked brighter than they'd done two years before. There were white walls and newly-painted window frames. Surprising what a bit of paint did to the brickwork. The grim, industrial look had gone. He decided to walk down to Commercial Road, just to see it again. The trams were gone now, and the tracks had been taken up, which gave the road a wider appearance than before. There was a clatter of passing lorries and cars on their way to the City. It all looked as dusty as ever, squat shops and coloured hoardings. A tiny, thin-faced man was~~

It occurred to him that he hadn't touched Pinkie yet. This meant he hadn't touched her for a month. Wasn't that strange? Well, they were completely out of tune with each other, really. Their sex was fumbled, on the whole, glorified self-abuse. His desire was too direct for her: she wanted subtle and intricate approaches; even cruelty would have thrilled her more. She closed her eyes and got excited only when his touch seemed anonymous to her; when she could forget him as he really was. And he, wrecking his chances, obtruded himself, gazing at her and talking. The dim and shadowy excited her; but he was frightened!

But once---at Stratford on Avon---he could remember with fascination. They'd gone up to see 'The Tempest' and stayed the night at a small, cosy inn near the river. The spirit of the room was favourable to them, perhaps, with its bright curtains and tiny mullioned windows; it might have been the previous occupants---a lingering scent of good lust. Anyway, it was the first time they really abandoned themselves to each other; her breasts glistened with his kisses in the darkness, her nipples protruded,

→

hard and dark, and she pushed her body up towards him, opening her legs until they were bent under her, making her stomach seem massive. No endearments that time! No sighs! Just plain business - a clap of thunder - a flood! it happened suddenly, the moment they were in bed.

But when he mentioned the occasion to her afterwards, as something quite special, she said she didn't remember it; though they repeated it afterwards now and then, in the same accidental way. 'Stratford' became his word for the sex --- ~~which~~ meaning trust, silence --- they ought to enjoy. Ital

CHAPTER 4.

Dick and Hanni came over ~~again~~ the next evening --- which ~~surprised and~~ excited him. So he hadn't frightened people away! He was in his shirt-sleeves when they called --- he dashed downstairs to let them in, having seen them from the bedroom window, but there was no need as the front door was always open these days, on the latch. At once the house felt warm and thrilling to him, full of deep colours, as it had done two years before. He waved them into the hall and they smiled back at him.

"Hullo, Pip! We thought we'd come and help you finish the punch!"

"Yes, come on!" As if it was his punch --- he was overjoyed!

"And to hear all about it," Dick added quietly.

Pinkie was standing on the first landing.

"Trust you to come and finish the dregs," she called down with a familiar chuckle.

"Well, how's mum?" Dick called up to her, stumbling a little on the stairs at the bottom. He clearly liked Pinkie an enormous lot: a bit in awe of her, too --- he was smiling so pleasantly and youthfully!

"Have you recovered yet?" Hanni asked her.

"Hardly!"

"Never again!" Dick murmured.

They sounded familiar and easy, their tone already formed, without his help. But yet it seemed to include him. Or rather, there was no sign that it didn't. But yet --- ! How funny this sadness was --- that

came suddenly, drawing him back! Was that Basrah? Him, Pinkie?

They ate a scratch meal in the kitchen, sitting with bare arms. It was still sultry-hot, and the window was open at the bottom, showing the roofs of houses and a few commercial temples near the river like strange grey turrets and steeples in an extraordinary island-city with flat, green fields beyond, the sky immense and high even in the dying light. The lightness and greyness of everything was strange to him now, ~~making~~ with a curious heady effect. ~~Yet he felt more joined to his Basrah self now — the journey between had died away, and he really looked at Hanni and Dick for the first time. Now they'd be friends! He was certain of it!~~

Again Hanni's wide, densely black and smoky Arab eyes, her dark skin faintly pock-marked with traces of the desert-boil, her smooth black hair drawn back so tight from her brow, her thick eyebrows that nearly met over her nose, brought him back to the Basrah-world; and the dark glow of her skin made it seem that they were in their dining room in the consular district again, as the sun was going down, leaning over the table, and the printed blue plates, the bright dresser behind her, were eastern colours, after the stupendous day-heat, in the evening when silence was appreciated like the coolness, and thoughts came slowly, with an extraordinary methodical patience. Dick was pale next to her, ~~or seemed to be~~ --- a little austere, but warm, twinkling, with a certain kind of inaccessible cleanliness: it was in his fingers, their nails clean and well-kept, the pads under ~~his nails~~ them delicate and pale, also square-looking, as if they touched things softly but firmly. But his beard! Why didn't he cut the damned thing off? It looked as if ~~one~~ you could blow it away! One ~~wanted to~~ puff and it was gone! ~~A beard meant charlatan in our world, self-conscious and pettily assertive. But not in Dick.~~ He made it seem a whimsical little touch --

put there just because it wasn't like him at all, a ~~little~~ bit cussed, not quite healthy, either/o A strange bird/o

They went downstairs afterwards and sat on the bedroom floor with the bowl of punch in the middle --- Dick wanted to hear all about Basrah, and Granville was bubbling over to talk about it.

It was dark now but the curtains were still undrawn and the lamp on the chest-of-drawers, reddish and mellow, was reflected in the window, ~~making~~ filling the room ~~seem endless and full of~~ with mysterious colours. They were all sweating slightly --- if was good, good to be here! This was the homecoming! /Ditals How on earth could he expect a conventional homecoming from Pinkie, ~~involving just the two of them~~, cooing together in bed - and then what? No, thank God, they weren't a little couple and never would be! ~~One~~ You needed friends; /Ditals that was the real homecoming, something total, not just sex and the tiresome /Ditals petty marriage-unit of two --- thank God they didn't have that! Thank God they weren't a little couple in a little box! Pinkie preserved him from that: ~~look what he could have married!~~ At least, with her, ~~one was~~ you were in the /e.c. real world, not suffocated in a deathly marriage-box! She was in trousers this Ditals evening, her feet bare, half-lying on the floor against cushions, exactly as she was in Basrah when they went to see someone ~~in the student-group, where they could relax~~ emancipated. Her blouse was open low, showing part of her breasts. Yet ---! Were her breasts smaller? More inaccessible to him? Not belonging to him any more? Not wifely any more? And so a sad after- /Ditals thought came to chase the first away. But it was quickly swallowed up in reminiscences about Basrah.

"Well, did you enjoy it, Pip?" Dick asked him seriously. Ditals

"Not enjoyed exactly but ---"

"Interesting?"

"Yes!"

Pinkie chuckled. "It never stopped being that! Even the boredom was interesting, wasn't it, mouse?" Ditals

"Yes!"

"It wasn't a drizzly English boredom," Pinkie went on, "it was gaudy, real gaudy ---" Dick twinkled at her. "It got right inside you like a disease!"

"A worm," Granville cried, "disgusting but it had something dramatic about it, something was always going on in you!" Ditals

"Well," Dick said quietly, "it sounds just the place - for a worm like me!"

"You'd hate it," Hanni told him.

"I feel it changed me," Granville said --- yes, this was what he wanted to tell them! "It isn't a question of hating it or not --- all I know is it changed my life!" Ditals

"How?" Dick asked.

"Well, it made life more mysterious! As Pinkie says, even the boredom! Nothing's plain and ordinary! Do you think so, Pinkie?"

"Absolutely!"

"It wasn't because Basrah was new to us," Granville said, "because this sense of mystery didn't grow less as we went on living there but more -- do you see what I mean?" Ditals "

Dick nodded quickly, as if to say that so far it was obvious and didn't need emphasis.

"It was behind everything you did --- every little thought! It never left you! Do you see what I'm saying --- it wasn't really a sense of mystery like you might get here if you went inside a church, just for a Ditals

moment, it was *there* all the time, like the air! It was the *basic* thing about everything! The thing you always got *down* to! Don't you think that's extraordinary?" /Ditals "

"If it's true, old sport, yes!" And Dick showed with his eyes that he believed him earnestly - and yet didn't at all.

"And I felt more mysterious to *myself*. I felt I was less known and measured up than I'd been here. I began to think of myself --- I don't mean in a deliberate way, I mean I was aware of myself as *part* of the glow all round me, do you see what I mean? A *created* part! And Pinkie was more mysterious to me than before!" They smiled at her, and Hanni winked, but he went on breathlessly. "Her *body* was stranger to me ---" /Ditals " " "

"*Ah*!"

He smiled but wouldn't be pushed off his subject. "More distant! She was more in her own eternity! You could feel this mystery along the river most --- in the evening --- in the lights, and the way the oars went into the water without you seeing them! I mean, we knew the lights were just electric bulbs slung on wires, completely botched up and messy, and the river stank, and there was a completely horrible chorus of car hooters from the main street all the time, but it was all part of a *glow*, do you see what I mean?" /Ditals

"I had too much of it, Pip," Hanni murmured in her stiff but confidential way, with an endearing purse of her lips, "but I know what you mean..." She looked at the floor. "I think I do."

"But it's in people's *faces* as well, Hanni! Don't you think so? They've got a kind of eternity in their eyes. Something that's not in their control --- they aren't actually looking at things, they're more *gazing*! That's partly what I mean --- life's not in ~~one's~~ your control there, it's already /Ditals "

made for you, I mean in a grand way, not made by men but something no man can control. There's this stirring grandeur in everything --- you can feel it in the dust and filth, and the scars and pockmarks, and the khamsin ---!"

"The wind," Hanni explained to Dick in an unwilling way, as if the word struck disgust in her, "the hot wind, it makes you feel rotten."

"I'll tell you something, Dick, I began to feel my own powers ~~there really~~ for the first time in my life!"

Dick gazed at him for a moment quite seriously. "What do you mean?"

"I started listening to the created part of myself --- do you see what I mean? I didn't mind myself as much as I did in England --- I didn't mind losing my temper if that was on the cards --- I mean, the real part of me took over! I don't know ---!" He glanced a little desperately at Pinkie. "It's difficult to describe!"

"You mean you didn't have to tame yourself all the time as we do here," Pinkie said, with that neatness she had sometimes.

"That's it! I don't mean I was wild, I was probably much more peaceful than here, but I was just myself, I wasn't in control of myself in the old way --- I just let go, I let myself be taken in by that extraordinary glowing authority outside, and inside me, too!"

"There are dangers there for Englishmen," Hanni said softly. "I know that from my father!"

"Yes, I know what you mean, but I don't mean in behaviour to let yourself go all loose, to let the valves go --- anyway, I haven't got valves that always threaten to blow up, I think that's a middle-class thing, I think ---!"

"All right," said Dick quietly, hearing the danger-signal of an 'orang-utang' speech, "back to the subject, Phillimore-Jackson, and don't

rattle your decorations."

"Well," Granville went on, the wind out of his sails for a moment -- ('well' was a telltale word with him), "I --- er ---"

"The glowing authority outside," Pinkie reminded him, chuckling.

"Yes!" ~~Back again!~~ "For the first time in my life I felt natural! By surrendering! By letting the life outside me and inside me, /Ital. the mysterious part, take over! I could really lift my head up! Like the Arabs in the desert. Well, I'd never done that before! I've never relished just walking and things like that before, ~~not like~~ but I did in Basrah! You know, I really began to find out for the first time what real natural walking was! Before that, I just seemed to stumble along! We seem all /Ital. out of joint in our civilisation! I learned how to walk without hurrying " along, without bending over all the time to get there, you see, that's the " difference --- here we're brought up to think that walking is just a means " of getting to somewhere, it's part of a plan and the plan says you sleep now " and after a few hours of sleep you go there or you stay here, it's all like a schedule here, it all seems laid down by men, well, look outside the " window and you can see the result of that, in streets and buses running to an intricate timetable, and newspapers telling you the news from all over the world, everything running on little plans made by men, to serve men, it's all " man-made, but there you get the other world, and there is another world, " God's world! And I never really knew it existed before! Oh, I thought " it existed, I imagined it and I dreamed about it! But in Basrah it was " there, as I said just now, it was in the air, it was the world that lay in " front of you, it was in your food, it was ~~in~~ the way you slept and the way the palm trees moved outside the window, it was ~~in~~ the way the ~~drums~~ dumbuks sounded across the river and the way men walked. I didn't feel I had to demean "

myself before life all the time as I do here, I didn't have to humble my own strength all the time, and work on one cylinder instead of eight, and I bet Pinkie felt the same!"

"Did you?" Hanni asked her with a side-glance, smoking so that the smoke curled up her face like a tiny white snake, ~~for a moment.~~ Ital.

"Not quite like that, no," Pinkie answered with a smile, touching one of her forefingers with her tongue, in a soft, slow motion, as she did when she was thinking something over to herself very privately. Ital.

"You know," Granville went on, looking at Dick, "it made me feel I was looking into the past. I mean, the past as it was for this country as well! I had the sensation that people there were more like what people here used to be than we are!" Ital. "

"Before industries, you mean?" Dick asked.

"Partly, yes, but industries were only what happened as a result of --- well, of something getting lost. I mean, those people don't just believe in God, they don't believe in God at all, I mean God isn't in their minds at all, they just live in a world which was created by something completely beyond them, and which controls them, and which has this extra-ordinary glow! You see, that's what I mean by this glow --- they perceive God --- God is this glow that one can smell and see and hear and sleep in! Do you see what I mean? They don't have to believe in God, with their little minds, they perceive him, or rather they perceive the manifestations of him, in a tree, the wind, a sound, that sort of thing! They actually perceive eternity! And I'm saying we used to be able to! But now we can't! ~~now:~~ We can't perceive eternity, or the glow, or God, or whatever you like to call it, as a simple matter-of-fact, ~~or not,~~ as people used to in our world and still can over there! We have to be lofty about it --- we have

to think ---- dream --- believe --- make an effort --- we have to try and get beyond the matter-of-fact, or we think we do! We've lost the power to perceive God, or the things of God, directly! We can't believe in God in the real sense. In the Christian world there can't be a religious person! There's no such thing! We've all lost the faculty! That's what I feel I found out in Basrah! We can only try!"

/Ditals

/Ditals

"

"But how can you speak for everybody else?" Hanni asked.

That question always baffled him --- it baffled him that people could ask it, as if clear feelings didn't have their natural authority, if they were really clear!

Ditals

"Oh, I think we can talk for all of life --- I mean, if we're interested in that kind of truth. There's no other way of finding it out -- I mean, you couldn't produce tables and charts and figures in which such things are decided, could you?" And Hanni nodded quickly, as if her question had already taken them into a longer speech than she'd intended.

"

"And there," he went on, turning again to Dick, "you get the main difference between Basrah and London, or between Basrah and any western city. We've made our mark on everything! Do you see what I mean? And industries are only one of the marks! We've put things under a kind of plan, under hundreds and thousands of plans that you can see outside, in any city! We've made the earth for us. You'd think there was nothing but us on the earth, walking through this huge city! You'd think that eternity had been put aside in some way --- I mean that glow you get in your daily life in Basrah. I mean, you still see accidental things there --- a dead dog or cat by the road, half-eaten by carrion birds ...!"

"

"

"

"

"Ucch!" said Pinkie, smiling at Dick.

"But still, it makes you realise, even with the stink in your

nostrils, what a kind of basic providence life has there! But in our world we've made everything our business --- the garbage gets cleared away, there's a kind of mathematical concept over everything, governing every little hour! Do you see what I mean? I mean, not that you should leave your garbage out, or your dead dogs, but this in our world is the sign that we've got everything under control --- as if there wasn't anything beyond us, only men in life, who seem to have created themselves! And that makes an ~~extraordinary~~ empty feeling in the city --- just men who come from nowhere and go back to nowhere, without a word of explanation, nothing splendid in life, nothing marvellous and extraordinary beyond men that you can see in the sky, and which brought them into being, and which moves them in the evening sometimes when they are sitting round telling a story, or when they're making love, or when they go out on the balcony at night just before they go to sleep and feel the breeze and hear something in the distance --- you get all that out there still, what we've removed from our lives --- just as if removing the garbage contradicted God, which I don't see why it should!"

/Ditals

/Ditals

"

"Well, it must have been a terrific experience, that's all I can say, Pip," Dick murmured in a respectful way.

"But do you see what I mean?"

"Oh, yes, exactly!"

"You see, I listened to life more in Basrah." He was aware, underneath, of Hanni getting a bit restive --- she moved one foot up and down nervously, and filled her glass again, her lips pursed as when she was under constraint of some kind. "I was aware of what lay beyond men, the great spaces, and how these spaces never spoke or showed themselves but nonetheless brought life into being and draw men back again in the end.

Ditals

Do you see what I'm saying? Not that I discovered something for the first time which is completely obvious to all of us and which was certainly obvious to me as well long before I thought of Basrah, but that I perceived these spaces for the first time. I felt them! And I never had before! Or not in that continual, daily way! For the first time I experienced a world in which men didn't appear to be the authors!" Dick leaned forward, about to say something but Granville jumped in before him with an idea that ~~seemed~~ suddenly ~~so~~ chased the old one away. "In Basrah I saw a world so marvellous in organisation that it made me shudder, so much more marvellous in organisation that anything I'd seen men do, so much more marvellous than all the cities, and all the promises! I knew about that marvellous organisation before, as we all do, I had glimpses of it ~~even~~ in the country where I was evacuated during the war, but in Basrah, for the first time, I lived in it, with my own body and desires --- they were part of it as well, my hands, and, well ---" He glanced uncertainly at Pinkie --- "My sex, everything!"

"I hope you can endorse that, Mrs. Granville," Dick said with a little laugh.

"Well, I think I know what my husband means!" Pinkie said, chuckling and wetting her finger again.

"Lots of little things changed in my life --- I gave up using the alarm in the morning, I knew by the light what time I ought to get up, just as our house-boy did, and I never bustled round my work any more, not as I used to --- I did things more when and as I felt like doing them, and you'd be amazed I never got anything in too late for Nevinson's deadliness! I started sleeping in the afternoon ---!"

"Yes, that's something all civilised people should do!" Pinkie said.

"I never knew before," Granville went on, "that things could have such a fabulous appearance! Little tiny things like sipping a glass of lemon tea or walking home as the sun was going down or sitting under the fan at the Mesopatamia hotel or eating chicken livers at the bar with Mohammed ---" /Ditals

"Who's he?" Dick asked, glancing at Pinkie.

"Pip's assistant."

"We used to sit in the bar together while the Kurds from the mountains were kicking up a shindy in the lounge playing cards ---"

"They were real savages," Pinkie said, "or rather they looked it -- they were rather sweet, really! They wore big baggy trousers and kept daggers in their belts, and they wear little white turbans! Wasn't your dad an authority on them, Hanni?"

"That's right." But Hanni wasn't saying any more.

"One day Hanni's going to show me round over there," Dick said, "especially Kurdistan, near the Russian border."

Hanni laughed. "You won't get me near there! I wouldn't dream /Ditals of going back!"

"Well," Granville said, "I can see what Hanni means, it isn't exciting there, you couldn't be happy in our sense, like you could here, /Ditals I mean I think life in England's much more interesting --- I feel excited here --/" for instance, by you two ---" He smiled at Hanni and Dick, who made appreciative little nods, half-burlesque in Dick's case. "There's nothing like the clearness and light you get in England! ~~--- nothing dark at all!~~ There isn't the lightness in the people over there --- I don't know, everything seems separate from one here, after Basrah, one feels like a kind /Ditals of enchanted spectator here, if you see what I mean, it isn't the same world

at all, English people smile so much compared with people in Basrah, their voices seem so full of independence and optimism, and the feeling you get here is that you can make things all right with a bit of will, if you try! You see, I think that's Europe, that's our civilisation, it's completely different from there! In Basrah the voices seem to be coming out of the past, they ~~feel~~ sound deep and ~~dark and~~ dusty, they're controlled from somewhere very deep down, somewhere rather dark and forbidden and concealed, they're held back in the throat compared with our voices, they're not quite conscious as ours are. And the eyes are dark and tired, not lit by a quick curiosity as they are in our world!"

Then he told them about his sense of a shadow passing over him the previous evening, on the train from the coast, as they came into London. "It wasn't because I felt London was ugly," he went on, "Basrah's much uglier, but I started feeling eclipsed as a person, as a creature, at least I think that's why I felt a kind of shadow! I wasn't quite myself any more as I was in Basrah, I don't mean myself as a personality, I mean myself in my flesh, just in my nerves. Yet ~~it was~~ I'm free here --- there was freedom! ~~I was~~ I'm freed from myself, in a heady sort of way! ~~Here men's thoughts have touched everything, that's what you feel. So you don't go into anything straight, as yourself, naturally. There's some interpretation waiting for you all the time. Men have made things look safe in our world. Our movements aren't watched here as they seem to be in Basrah. We can talk our minds --- we can say whatever comes into our heads! Whereas there you're worrying all the time if you're offending someone by mentioning Israel, or someone else by mentioning the Arabs! Everything comes down to spite and division and hatred there, or seems to! But here it's so light, in Europe.~~ Yet at the same time we've lost another kind of freedom! In

Basrah we had our own lives, as far as the nerves went, we felt strange to ourselves, we felt created from beyond men! But here we're catered for all the time --- by the milkman and the shops and the newspapers and the buses and the idea of growing older and all the little responsibilities that are supposed to go with every age of life, like a clever little plan laid down for us by other men before we are born. We don't make our own lives! Yet we could! In all this planning we could! Here we could! But it takes time. All we do now is ~~to~~ choose our lives from what the outside world offers us, we don't really make it! And my question is whether we can achieve our own lives here, whether ~~one~~ we can go through the day with the same sort of unhesitating physical authority you feel in Basrah, do you see what I mean? It might take ~~one~~ years to achieve. Do you think it's possible?" He paused, gazing at Dick. "Well?"

"Well," Dick said in a quiet voice, looking at him squarely, "if I understand you right, that's about the biggest problem of the lot for me, just that!"

"But is it possible?"

"After years, perhaps," Dick went on, "when you're unsteady on your feet and your hair's falling out and your wife has a young lover of forty!"

"But you have to change yourself, isn't that it? You have to think things out! Then, perhaps!" By now the women were more or less out of the conversation.

"You have to surrender," Granville added, "learn to surrender to the rhythm outside, to the silence! And I began to do it in Basrah. I began to let my feelings decide when I was tired at night and we were talking to Mohammed by the river --- I didn't look at my watch --- I let my body

tell me, 'It's time to go to bed.' And it was always roughly the same time when I went. Sometimes the body told me nothing and we went on talking all night --- nearly till dawn as the air got colder and the sounds on the river stopped and the call-to-prayer came across the city at about four, over the loudspeakers. I surrendered there! But here we're taught not to surrender! We're taught to look at everything and work everything out! Our bodies get tired like clocks! We work like clocks! And yet you can do the same work, you can do more, without looking at the clock at all! Like Mohammed! He works to the clock in the sense that he comes in at the same time every morning --- but a deeper time is still alive in him. When I got out there I started mapping out every day according to the appointments book --- so many people to see, so many letters to write --- but for Mohammed the day just unfolded --- like the dawn unfolding --- it opened naturally in front of him and took him with it! Yet he did the work. And he did it without that awful fatigue of the nerves you get here. And I learned it, too. Because it was in the air, all round me. I surrendered! I surrendered to deeper time and deeper space! And that means being stronger, being much more of a man, much more supple and lively! But I hadn't got the strength in me --- it was only because it was in the air outside. I didn't take it to Basrah. I learned it in Basrah because it was in the air there. And I want to learn it in myself --- by myself --- to take it wherever I go --- it means surrendering, I know that --- some sort of surrender, but I don't know how to go about it, I don't know the path I should take! I know it'll take a long time! And I've seen that surrender --- I've recognised it here, too --- I know it exists here ---! I've seen it in the eyes of the milkman ---" The others glanced at each other --- they didn't know the reference, and he was aware of this but

hurried on just the same, not caring to explain --- "and in my father, too-- in the world where I was born --- there was the same surrender --- in my parents --- but I've lost it --- I've been taught to lose it and I've got to learn it again!"

At the end, when Granville seemed to have exhausted his subject, but not his desire to talk, Dick turned to Hanni and asked her, "Well, is he right about Basrah?"

"He's right except that it's all disgusting and horrifying, yes. Islam's heartless and cruel and dirty and petty and vindictive, and you can't get away from it whatever else you talk about!" She said the words with a crisp finality --- her hatred of that world was final. Then she added in a soft voice, "But I suppose it's all right for an englishman, if he doesn't stay too long --- after all, he puts a lot of himself into it --- a lot that doesn't really exist there at all --- there's no dignity there, to start with, you start like a dog and you go out like a dog, that's what my father always used to say. He's a good example --- he talked like Pip at first, but he stayed there too long, he hated everyone including my mother by the end. Not that mummy was a Muslim but I suppose she must have picked up some of the stink --- yes, Pip, I can imagine the dead cats and dogs by the road, that's what sticks in my mind from all you've said!"

"Well ---!" Pip shrugged amiably and smiled at her.

"Pip wasn't saying he liked dead dogs," Pinkie murmured, blinking protectively in his direction.

"No, not at all," Granville said, "I'm talking more like a person starved of something, you see! I might agree with you in the end --- I'm sure I would --- we belong to the same civilisation --- but I'm still starved of that sense of providence you get in that other world, for all its

stink --- that sense of life being untouched in its created part --- the silence you get though it's the noisiest place in the world!"

"Well," Dick said, looking sideways at Pinkie. "Pip's among us again. But I'm for bed ---!"

"So am I!" Hanni said, stretching.

Granville let them go without adding anything --- they almost scrambled out of the room, Dick chuckling and giving a last twinkling look as if to say, 'Catch us if you can, cock!' Of course, Pinkie had offered them the bed upstairs in the attic room and they accepted -- he was thrilled that the house would hum with someone else's presence. ~~It was what Pinkie had always dreamed about in Basrah, as her London life, and she was right!~~ They would all get up in the morning and have breakfast together, working by division of labour, Hanni on the toast, Pinkie on the ~~food~~ eggs, he on the tea ~~and~~ or coffee, ~~and~~ Dick on ~~the~~ his morning paper; ~~silence~~ by agreement established two years before Dick kept out of the way in the kitchen; his work wasn't worth the mess it made.

~~But he was also disappointed that they didn't sit there longer in the way he'd become used to in Basrah. Or rather, not longer, it wasn't a matter of time, but with a different sort of rhythm, a slower one. He remembered the clink of the beads during a pause in the talk, while people gazed before them, clink, clink in the dry air, waiting for the talk to exhaust itself naturally -- and silence to show the way. But no, he was back in the world where force was used all the time, where the will suddenly interposed and found things to do, even when there weren't things to do, in a kind of shame of surrendering to real outer time. Nothing was left to the silence here, the big rhythms outside had no chance, there was only the personal will grinding unharmoniously and breaking the evening up, breaking~~

~~it inwardly, even without outward signs, breaking it from inside so that even though people might sit there in exactly the same way as they did in Basrah yet there was something broken underneath, some nervous disturbance like a little voice saying, 'Well, to bed now, to work now, back to immediate life now, back to our will, to a cup of coffee, tea, a drink, a stroll.' And even though there might have been more tea drinking in Basrah, more strolling and perhaps more real work, yet the real inner silence was not shattered as it was here.~~

~~But it was a good evening.~~ It was good to be back! His ~~feeling of~~ foreboding and horror from the night before, had gone --- obviously a left-over from the dark Basrah-world, that. After all, people didn't stab their sisters to death here, with small cuts, if they turned prostitute, they didn't hang political prisoners by their neck in the main square and leave them on display for three hours, ~~afterwards,~~ the children didn't catch little birds ~~here~~ and use them as kites by tying their feet to a ~~long~~ piece of string, ~~and then~~ letting them flutter up and down helplessly! No, it was a different world and he'd better realise it quickly! Thank God a little sanity had returned to him, so soon, after only a day back! Those cars outside, for instance --- he'd really stopped breathing when he saw them from the taxi, his heart had suddenly beat so fast that he thought his head was going to burst! Extraordinary!

No, there was peace here. Order. That took time to learn again. He had to try and keep out those hot, stampeding thoughts that came to him from the Basrah-world --- things could be talked about here; bring them into the light! No shadows, no carrion-scandal, no hidden, foul spot!

He felt warmed and healthy and full of life all the way through, and he bounded upstairs to get Pinkie and himself a cup of cocoa while the

others got ready for bed in the attic room. Hurrah! Pinkie was putting on new pillow-cases. Thank God life wasn't the nightmare we ~~one~~ tried to ambush it into sometimes! No, it was more mysterious --- the mystery wasn't only dark, there was light as well. Yes! He boiled the milk and mixed the cocoa --- the kitchen was so neat and colourful, the light glowed so nicely over everything, the boards under his feet bumped so intimately as they had always done --- he was back, back! He could dance round the room! Back out of the shadows! Hanni was right! Back to people who talked their lives over --- who loved their freedom and other people's! To people who loved the light! And he bore two steaming cups of cocoa down to the bedroom.

"That looks good, little mouse!"

"Rather!" he said, putting them down on the mantelpiece.

"I'll elect you king of the cocoa!" she said, banging out the pillows.

"I wouldn't like it every night," he replied, taking his first sip. "Would you?"

"No, it's too sickly! But as a change it's orl right, eh?" She sat down playfully and pushed out her legs, taking her mug from the mantelpiece.

"Yes," she added, gazing before her, "Basrah's all right as a dream but what about being there?"

"Yes, I've been thinking that too!"

"How can one ever go back?"

"Well, that's the problem!"

And they sat staring before them, leaving the question to look after itself.

CHAPTER 5.

The house was quiet for the next few days, ~~and his fear that no guests would come seemed justified after all. The bell downstairs never rang, no one called on the telephone. He even began to miss the cars he'd seen outside on the first evening. He wanted to ask Pinkie if she could re-instate them in some way; but there was still a silence between them as well, not that it was forced or unnatural - they simply had nothing to say.~~ She did the housework and went shopping, while he sorted out his things and put the attic-room in order, removing the broken glass and fixing in brackets for a new mirror. Once or twice the phone rang, but no voice replied when he picked up the receiver; he suspected that Pinkie ~~was~~ went ~~going~~ outside to make her calls, ~~at~~ to a phone-box round the corner; but he rejected the thought because of the quietness with which she did everything, cooking nice meals as she'd done in Basrah, and otherwise trying on ~~her~~ clothes or mending something. It surprised him that she had no complaints, but he put it down to her being happy at living in London again. ~~He took up his old habits, going round to the library in the morning to browse through travel books, and searching the music brochures for a good concert.~~

He went to the office to try to renew his contract. But the head of the contracts-department wasn't there, and in any case the contract itself had been mislaid, so he left it. The management was quite casual about ~~such~~ these things. He could easily sign up again once he was back in Basrah.

They saw more of the Pollockes than before. Gradually his old friendship with Dick, from the training-school days, started again. They went down to Hampton Court and Pollocke ushered them straight through the dark flat to his famous view, as he'd done on their first visit. The river looked peaceful. It was wide and flat, running quite swiftly, and the fields on the other side were a vivid green in the last light. Pollocke was watching him with a little gleam in his eyes, and murmured, "It's worth coming for, isn't it?" And Granville, remembered Hanni's complaints about it, nodded in an awkward way.

The flat was just as he remembered it. There was little furniture and no books that he could see. It was grim and cold. But the river shone outside and filled the sitting room with light. Pinkie and Hanni seemed to get on well. They disregarded the view and sat talking over a gas-fire in the tiny kitchen, at the back of the flat. Hanni confided in her quietly, sitting stiffly in her chair, talking through her teeth as she always did. She had a gift of intimacy, and one could see Pinkie was lulled and drawn in.

Pollocke began calling at the house after work, sometimes just for a cup of tea, before a theatre, and Hanni stayed one week-end alone, helping with the meals. She and Pinkie talked about Dick quite a lot when he wasn't there. They would close the kitchen door, and Granville would hear their voices, low-pitched. He enjoyed the thought of this feminine intimacy. It gave the house a safe and warm feeling. Pollocke played darts with Glenning, the publicity-man, at a pub in the Commercial Road, and sometimes they all went there, sitting in the public bar, where there were long wooden benches, and bare wooden tables. It was an unimpassioned sort of life and he could find no trace of his first fears.

~~that first evening.~~ Yet they were there - in his tissues, asleep for the moment. ~~And~~ he never felt really at ease with Pollocke. ~~It was a strange relation. The talk had to be constructed all the time. This was Pollocke's manner; it set the tone. Granville felt himself under an obligation when he was with Dick to present himself, through talk, in a tidy and clean frame.~~ He rarely said whatever came into his head; when he did he had a sense of regret afterwards as if he'd exposed himself. ~~naked. It had been the same at training school. Pollocke would walk palely at his side, gazing down with his twinkling eyes, affectionate and whimsical, and the spontaneous talk was always about to begin: but it never happened. They never got beyond themselves for a moment. Yet at the same time this effort was a pleasure; beyond it lay a mystery, one day the curtain would be drawn aside! There was the pleasure of waiting, tremulous and full of respect for each other.~~

One Saturday they took a boat ~~out~~ from Hampton Court, just the two of them, and rowed towards Marlow, in still, sun-lit, misty weather. Pleasure-steamers passed them and Dick waved, ~~his hand in a jolly way,~~ making a burlesque of it. He rowed steadily, in shirtsleeves, shifting the boat along at quite a pace. And he seemed to watch everything as if it were a ~~passing~~ scene only, passing him like the fields and pleasure-steamers, while he was motionless, judging it all as a good or bad performance. ~~he was the amused spectator.~~ That was how he listened to Granville's talk as well, considering it in a judicious way, from afar. And there was something pleasurable in this, ~~too,~~ because it made ~~one~~ you feel master of the world, in control with ~~one's~~ your mind. Life was the subject of a continual mental essay, so to speak; nothing disastrous - even real - could happen. It gave ~~one~~ Granville a heady sense of freedom. At the same time

it wasn't natural.

Granville looked at Dick from the other end of the boat, at his cool, ~~very~~ light eyes as he squinted against the sun, scanning the banks slowly, ~~and~~ his mouth with less clarity than his eyes, bulging slightly, an odd soft decisiveness about it: but He couldn't get a sign from Dick's face of what a sort of person he was. His beard, thin and fair, stirring a little at the edges with the breeze, was like a disguise he'd put on just that morning. It hid the lines round his mouth so that he seemed to be faintly smiling all the time, though he probably wasn't. At the same time his face was youthful and without calculation or deceit. There was something innocent in his eyes; they were never sharp, much less fierce, but looked at everything with a lingering, uninquisitive good will. ~~They were what had first struck Granville at the training school. He had looked into Pollocke's light-blue eyes, so amused and boyish, and simply discovered friendship there, though the friendship had petered out.~~

They spent all day on the river. Some of the chumminess from the training-school days came back, and they moored up at a pub to get some beer. They played croquet on the lawn until it was dark. This meant rowing back without lights, and there was no moon. It was exciting, going close to the bank all the time, with silence all round. Sometimes they would steer into the reeds by mistake and Pollocke would laugh, still master of the world. And they made calm little remarks to each other all the time, enjoying the possibility of danger. The oars made a soft, hollow splash, and the water trickled off them as they feathered back. It took three or four hours, and they arrived exhausted. All the shops were closed and no one was in Pollocke's flat, so they took a train to Waterloo and went home to Chaworth Road. Hanni was there with Pinkie, just finishing

a meal, so there was a little party, with Pollocke describing the row back in burlesque terms. Two beds were fixed up. This evening put the christening touch to their friendship, and the four of them were now secure together, more or less.

If Granville spoke earnestly about anything Dick Pollocke would seem unmoved and gaze before him as if saying, "I enjoy your performance, but I don't necessarily agree with what you say!' The result was that Granville took to performing a little in his company, preparing his sentences before he spoke them and turning a nice phrase whenever he would. And the usual outlet was humour. They both enjoyed a laugh; it provided a relief from the effort.

Age was an obsession with Dick. He felt the approach of thirty like a death-sentence. He did press-up exercises in the morning; and when they were on the river together he insisted on rowing all the time. His hips were slim like a boy's. Granville was also aware of his youth disappearing. But in Dick it was an acute panic.

"I can tell you, old sport," he would say softly, "I lie in bed sometimes and sweat, just at the passing of old daddy time. I know it's just a crisis. When I get over the border, on to the other side of thirty, it'll be all right, I suppose!"

He would suddenly go into a dance in the middle of the room, flinging his legs out frantically, as if trying to jump back into his youth. Or he would leap out of a chair after being still for some time and start pottering about with something, biting his lip, horrified at the passing of time.

He would notice the marks of age, or youth, in Granville, too.

"I swear you look five years younger today," he would murmur,

looking at him with admiration. "I don't know how you do it, captain. And two days ago you looked as if the hounds of hell were after you!"

And another time he said, "I can feel myself slowing up. It's a message being flashed to me. You know, the old limbs sink down in that chair --- woof ---" He made a soft, blowing noise, spreading his hands out. "And I'm not getting the same kick out of things! I need less sleep, too. Sometimes I get out of bed in the morning feeling like a wiry old man."

He always described in a clear and succinct way whatever he felt. He made himself sound like another person, who while of absorbing interest was also remote from him. He gave a map of himself all the time, ranging over it freely, half-amused, ~~just as one might be amused by somebody on the street.~~ And he was always still and calm when he talked about himself. He seemed to be listening for signs of new movement in himself, hushed and absorbed. The phenomenon of Dick was as interesting for Granville as it was for Dick himself, it was a third object between them.

Hanni 'bored' him, he said one evening, adding, "As any woman you're going to live with should!" He talked about how he'd met her first, at the Capthall Avenue office, when she was doing a temporary interpreter's job there. "She looked ghastly, such a bloody school-marm, her eyebrows meeting in the middle like some black cigar across her face! Thank Christ my secretary doesn't look like that, I thought! Then I went back for more the day after, like a fool! And, well ---" He paused to smile. It was curiously theatrical - "she offered me the cigar and I liked it!"

"Were you in love with her?" Granville asked him.

Pollocke was silent, as always when he was asked a clear question, waiting to give it his open and free consideration, then he answered firmly,

"Yes, I was."

"Had you been in love with anybody else?"

And again there was a pause, followed by a firm, "No!"

~~Another time Dick said his life was in two parts, one his work and the other 'after-work'. He could quite happily devote himself to the after-work only, provided he got enough sun. His work meant nothing to him, really. He was at heart a "beach-boy", he said.~~

~~"That's why I'm conscientious," he said. "It's like doing a crossword puzzle. I like everything in place." He paused, quite still, his hands resting easily on his lap and his legs folded. "I suppose that's why I shall get on. I know I shall. The directors think I'm wizard. I'm pretty certain I'll be one of them in a few years time. I'm not handicapped by strong feelings on any of the issues. I keep an even keel."~~

~~It didn't sound cynical. His eyes were amused, gazing across the music-room at Granville, blue and still. He was talking about a performance, quite simply.~~

When they were rowing together that Saturday afternoon ~~he~~ Dick suddenly looked up at the sky with a twinkle and said, "Charlie God's putting up quite a decent show today, isn't he?"

And Dick always described points of strong feeling with more deliberate calm and style than ~~otherwise~~ usual. On the way back to Waterloo, after their long, blind row in the dark, he murmured to him, "Well, I don't know about you, Sergeant-Major, but I was an ant-heap of nerves in that boat. I thought we were going to strike a mine any minute. The old knees were knocking together like castanets!"

He ~~stood to one side of his own life~~ was a kind of musing, wistful, puzzled, heroic companion. ~~It~~ He was never really at ease with Dick, they

never really got down to anything, but afterwards he felt the loss of his company.

Quite suddenly, in the grounds of Hampton Court one afternoon, after they and the Pollcokes had eaten together, he turned to Pinkie →

and said, "Suppose I go back to Basrah alone? Shall I?"

Hanni and Dick were a little behind them. He had no idea how these words came into his head. But they caused her no surprise.

"Yes," she said, gazing loosely into the distance. They were standing at the edge of the lake, with the massive, red palace behind them. Then she asked, "But what would you do for a woman?"

"I could go to the brothel," he said at once, hoping to catch Dick's ear; but Dick was kissing Hanni's neck.

He glanced at her. She didn't appear ~~offended.~~ hurt. She only smiled in a crooked and slightly defensive way. The whole afternoon, still and dark, with thunder in the distance, was strange. They stood together, looking before them at the shining water, and spoke as if they had no control over their words at all. Dick and Hanni were near by, arm in arm, whispering something to each other; they tended to play lovers rather a lot for a married couple.

"I wouldn't mind being out of that atmosphere for a bit," Pinkie went on. "All those ~~bloody~~ bitchy pot-bellied sheikhs ---" She gave a glance towards Hanni, as if wanting to catch her attention in the same way as he'd tried for Dick's. And Hanni did look across at her, blinking. "Like a pack of old women! They were the ones who did all the talking!"

"Oh, the clerks did it as well," he murmured, getting more irritated. Dick also was looking at them now, and it seemed that all four of them were fixed together in the still afternoon, their wills paralysed and involved together, enacting a situation out of their control.

"But the sheihks went in for all the male-honour talk, didn't they?" she cried. "Calling you 'my brother' and all that?"

"Well," he said quietly, uncertain of himself, "you can't laugh

away all honour."

"But why male honour? What about my honour as well?" He eyes were flashing.

He flared up as well. "But there's some difference between a man and a woman!"

"Why?" Dick asked in a crisp way. Granville turned round as if he'd heard a shot fired, so strange was the new voice, like the cracking of a twig before a storm. "I don't think there's any difference!"

"What?" Granville asked, his throat dry. "No difference between a man and a woman?" / Ditals

~~"No." Dick spoke deliberately, his lips pursed.~~ "Their bodies n.p. are different, that's all."

"But our bodies aren't separate from us!" Granville cried, Ditals roused. "They're only an expression, just a part!" ~~It's a whole difference!"~~ The others were silent. "Why don't men have babies, then, and do the cooking, and everything a woman does?"

"Because they're physically different," said Dick, spacing out his words slowly and carefully, gazing down at the water.

"Men do cook," Hanni said, "quite often!"

"So when we go to bed with our women," he burst out, "we go to bed with our sisters or friends?"

~~He had no idea what he meant himself and~~ the others laughed. Caps. Pinkie looked happy again. He stood there blinking and confused, trying to make sense of his own words, and the others laughed even more.

"A body isn't just something you can touch," he went on, trying to pick up the thread. "It isn't all of a person ---" But the argument was gone.

"Anyway," Pinkie murmured, "all this is only because I felt like having a dance one night. I suppose you'd have liked me to go and have some illicit sex with a diplomat one afternoon while you were at work, like half the other English and American wives! Your male honour would have been intact then!"

~~She only broke the subject again because they were in company. And it stirred the old fire in him.~~

"Oh, for God's sake," he shouted, "just because you want a dance it doesn't mean you have to have one, does it?" His voice drifted across the gardens. "This male honour started just because men didn't do what they wanted to all the time!"

/ Ditals

/ Ditals

"That's because they could do what they wanted to all the time! And a woman can't!" She waved her hand blindly, with her strange half-smile, that was both defiant and hurt. "If I go and sit in a cafe alone I've got men staring me up and down, even here --- and as for Basrah ---!"

"Oh," he said, "a woman adjusts herself to that all right if she means business."

"If she's ugly, you mean!"

And there the argument ended. He forced the anger out of himself. And to judge by the set look on Pinkie's face, making her look older, she was doing the same.

~~Then, later, she squeezed his arm and said with a chuckle, "I'll give you 'male honour'. You're just like old Waffle-Waffle."~~

~~"Waffle-Waffle" was her grandfather, who'd married "Aunt Beatrice". "Aunt" was a courtesy title because Beatrice was much younger than Waffle-Waffle. She was a flashing, red-haired woman with a sharp, ribald wit, and "Waffle-Waffle" was a naval man. He thought she had grand style and~~

~~alone. Once, when his battalion was dug in for some static battle, in the Ardennes, he left the trench in daylight and cleared an enemy post with one grenade. He then sat down with a pipe and started reading Dryden's translations from Horace. He told someone afterwards that when his own men found him he was reading the line, 'Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today', and was thinking that he'd never had such a day and probably never would.~~

~~Not a word more was said between Pinkie and Granville on the subject of 'affairs'.~~ He found out from Hanni that the name of the pale young man he'd seen using the telephone ~~on~~ the first evening was Grove. ~~But~~ Otherwise no one ~~else~~ mentioned the name. Nor did Grove appear again. ~~Pinkie never went out at unusual times. The matter was left unexplored, as always between them. But circumstances were piling up: there was the incident with the clerk from Kirkuk, there was the beating he'd given her afterwards, there was the party she'd just given in his absence, there was the role of Grove, there was the baby. All these were now barred from conversation; slowly they were forming an encampment. But sometimes these things appeared simply bare incidents to him, without a theme behind them at all; and again he wondered at the extravagance of his own thinking.~~

n.p

He wanted to ask Dick what had been 'going on' in his absence, but he didn't want to ~~appear~~ seem petty or jealous ~~before him, if only because Dick seemed to regard him as a carefree person.~~ either. He did try it in an oblique way. He asked him how he thought Pinkie was these days; did she seem 'the same Pinkie' ~~he'd known at training school?~~ as ever — ? Very objective. And Dick seemed to understand what was in his mind, because he just looked straight ahead, his lips pursed slightly and his eyes unblinking, and said,

"Yes", then closed his lips as if he never wanted to open them again. A chill apprehension ran through Granville, because this made it clearer than before that there was something to hide.

During his talks to Hanni he tried to find out more, but that was even less hopeful, because her gaze was more watchful than Dick's, and seemed to pick up his moods more subtly; so whenever Pinkie came into the conversation he made it seem that he had no doubts about her, and that on the contrary there was the greatest confidence between them; he even wanted to give the impression that he was carefree and tolerant about 'affairs' --- that would be his position, from the public point of view, if he found out that there had been any! Also he was afraid that Pinkie was innocent, in which case his suspicions would sew a bad seed in other people's minds unnecessarily.

He thought of the other three as evasive and mute, but he was the one least capable of breaking into speech.

He learned through Glenning, the publicity-man, that Dick was 'a one for the girls', and instantly felt a twinge of admiration combined with disapproval; or perhaps the disapproval was only moral envy -- he couldn't tell. Glenning told him in the pub one evening when they were alone that Dick had borrowed his flat the previous week 'to do a secretary'; he talked about it in a genial, amused way as if Dick was famous for that kind of thing. When Dick came into the pub later Glenning looked up at him and said, "That girl of yours --- do you realise she left some of her feathers and an egg behind in my bed?" Dick's mouth fell open for a moment and he looked frightened, but then he laughed and sat down easily at Glenning's side, murmuring that he'd always thought the girl 'a bit of a hen'.

Hanni and Pinkie were together in the kitchen one day at one of their tête-à-têtes, with the door closed, when he happened to pass on his way to the attic-room and suddenly heard the name 'Grove', followed by a lowering of voices; their voices made a quiet rasping on the air, no more than a whisper. The idea formed in his head quite conclusively as he stood on the landing between the two rooms, with his heart beating fast and his mouth open, that she was in love with Grove. He went on to the attic-room and tried to work on the new mirror, but his hands trembled so much that he decided to lie down. Their voices were now normal again, a spasmodic humming on the other side of the wall. He heard Hanni laugh. It was such a comfortable and easy laugh, so without any conspiratorial note, that he thought he must be wrong; he tried to reconstruct the sentence in which 'Grove' had occurred, but he couldn't remember the other sounds; perhaps the word had been 'mauve'? Also it was possible that they had been talking kitchen-affairs, and had said 'stove'. But Kitchen-affairs weren't to the taste of either of them, as he knew/o Later Hanni opened the door and went downstairs to look for some cigarettes, and he realised from the sounds that they were cooking something together, perhaps one of Pinkie's French dishes, so that the word might ~~indeed~~ easily have been 'stove'. He got up again and went on with the mirror, revived more or less, but he couldn't get the thought out of his ~~mind~~ head.

/e.c.

Not for five or six days ~~after his arrival~~ did he touch Binkie. His raw desire, that had glared at him in Basrah like the sun itself, sickly and dangerous, had withered into a kind of local, urban itch. But the idea persisted. It had become a medical idea, probably a wrong one --- that the glands were full and needed their release whether he felt real

desire or not. So he watched Pinkie with interest, hoping to decoy her. She was unaware of it, but after nearly a week, seeming to feel a mild curiosity about him, as to where he had put his glandular fluids if not in her, she kissed him in a significant way and they began scrambling about as they always did when their desires were low. But the flame revived in him, and slowly the enormous, pitiless image that had hardly left him for a moment in Basrah returned, and even united with her briefly, until he had a shocked, sparse orgasm that failed to involve most of his body, touching only nerve-ends, not the centres; he was still wide-awake after it, and they lay together numbed, sad, continents away from each other. Pinkie's orgasm was a private event, distant from him. It wracked her middle for a moment, a small shudder that touched her stomach and died, like an awful vision that made her close her eyes and screw up her mouth painfully for a moment, and lose herself in an infinite sea of self. The act only confirmed them in their separateness from each other; it left them with more desires than before.

~~but nothing local.~~

~~It was remarkable to him now that Pinkie had ever felt desire for him. It had always happened when he'd been away for some time. She gave the impression of trembling slightly, he remembered, and of being sensitive to the timbre of his voice. But this desire was always spoiled in the fulfilment. Usually it died the moment he touched her. But this time there hadn't even been the desire.~~

CHAPTER 6

Later in the week, after a quiet phone-call, Pinkie announced that she was going back to her old job ~~at her brother's firm.~~

He was staggered. The firm had moved to the other side of London; it would mean travelling to Wembley every day, an hour or more.

"We don't need the money," he said.

"Oh, I just want a change. Everybody else is working, after all."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, all our friends!"

The following Monday she got up at seven and he made tea for her as once she'd made it for him, two years before. She looked neat and contented, with a spotted silk scarf tucked into her blouse. She wore her best high-heeled shoes, and a tight grey skirt that made her look tall and slim. She sucked her forefinger now and then, just touching it with the tip of her tongue, gazing down, as she did when she was making a silent calculation of some kind. She was ~~quite~~ remote from him. She might have been a young girl off to her first job, with a dance to go to in the evening.

"I thought you liked being free," he said.

"I do." She gazed down, her face closed to him, and wouldn't say any more.

~~Ever since then he'd been trembling more or less; he could settle~~

~~to nothing. His clear thoughts were gone. He watched her now across the breakfast table as he'd been watching her for several days past.~~ He tried n.p. to look into her eyes but she turned them away quickly. And when their eyes did meet her's were blind. She left for the office as if they were strangers, looking both more of a girl and older, too. Her face was set like ~~that of~~ a hard-willed young girl; yet even so the softness showed through, in the texture of her skin.

~~The beating he'd given her had changed her, he told himself. Had she said anything to Hanni about it? Had she and Hanni made this feminine plan together, that she should go to work and leave him isolated? He felt surrounded by heartlessness; he'd noticed a hard look in Hanni's face as well, when he was talking about 'male honour' in the gardens of Hampton Court. But in a moment the idea of a 'feminine plan' seemed absurd. Only her softness towards him had gone.~~ He sat at the same position in n.p. front of the breakfast table all morning, numbed and half-trembling. But it was a state that went on underneath, like a natural function of his body. And it wasn't unpleas~~rable~~ant. It was a state of excitement and suspense; what did the future hold?

After this he was alone in the house most days. ~~It was agreeable at first, as he got used to the idea of her working and it seemed only another aspect of a plain and obvious world.~~ She left at the same hour every morning, and came back looking rather pale and tired in the evening wanting her dinner, which he ~~now prepared for her.~~ helped her cook. It continued to be exciting. There were things to talk about: she had stories about the office, ~~and how Nigel was these days. He was coming over to dinner soon, she said. It made a tremendous difference to her, being close to Nigel~~

~~every day. So Granville thought.~~ Her confidence came back and she talked more readily. There was a healthy little flush in her cheeks and they were affectionate and natural with each other as they hadn't been for a year or more. He began to think that her working was a good bargain. It took her out of herself and he got his privacy. She didn't lean on him as she'd done in Basrah.

But they slept together less. She was tired and refused ~~him.~~ sex. ~~Desire~~ Randiness wracked and gnawed at him, and sometimes he yearned for her the whole day much as he'd done in Basrah during the last month, ~~there.~~ When she came back in the evening his approach ~~would be~~ was too overwhelming and direct ~~for her,~~ because he was pent-up. He felt ~~an~~ the 'orang-utang' in his sex ~~as he'd done on many occasions before.~~ too. She shrunk from him. The heat of his hands, his breath, the closeness of his eyes, ~~seemed to~~ panicked her. Usually he knew how to avoid this, and approached her in a quiet, deliberately unconcerned, light way, not kissing her too earnestly or touching her too heavily at first. He would fondle her ~~body~~ softly, like someone in a dream, while her eyes closed: this aroused her most, when the touches were abstract, coming from anywhere, in a dimness, his fingers not his but detached like things in a dream. First this dimness and silence had to be entered, softly and circumspectly, then her passion grew. He had to cancel himself out at first, withholding his breath and his real passions. That was the routine he'd learned with her.

But now he'd been kept in leash too long. He'd spent hours thinking about her breasts and hips, imagining voluptuous movements. She was tired and locked away from him, thin-lipped and perplexed.

But then she suddenly turned to him one evening after they'd gone to bed and put her hand between his legs. It was quite like 'Stratford'.

And he was once more quiet; of course, the desire would build up in him again, he knew that. He feared it - yet it was all the more exciting, because he couldn't satisfy it easily.

Hanni happened to get an afternoon off and dropped in ~~one day.~~ She cooked a meal with him and they went for a walk afterwards. ~~They'd never really spoken to each other freely before, not in the way the new friendship between the four of them demanded. But~~ this time she talked as he'd seen her talk to Pinkie, ~~in a~~ confiding ~~way.~~ her mouth tense and half-closed, yet all the more intimate because of ~~that. Whenever she spoke, a certain~~ sadness pervaded all her talk. It was always there, like keening. She was always mourning something --- someone's disloyalty, the pain of being misunderstood. She spoke in a monotone, her eyes fixed under her straight, black eyebrows, ~~that seemed to fix her eyes~~ in a frightened expression. ~~She was frightened! Of England, mostly. And of Dick's world too. She didn't know how much of herself to give. She was afraid that if she gave too much people would think her a poor, imitating, colonial sort of person; or a 'family woman', which Pollocke wouldn't allow her to be.~~

Her feet were tiny, Granville noticed as they walked along; she was like a little girl, with an old burden of sadness that made her stiff, unjustly.

Her mother was Assyrian, ~~and~~ her father English. He'd been a political officer ~~before marriage and had been sent by the Foreign Office~~ in to Kurdistan, ~~on a special mission after the 1914 war,~~ when the Kurds were resisting the idea of sharing Iraq with the Arabs. ~~He was a straight-backed young man at that time and was known to have a way with the Kurdish tribes. He could trust himself to their hospitality in lonely mountain villages.~~

~~at a time when a number of the political officers were getting bullets in their backs.~~ He met Hanni's mother in Kirkuk and after their marriage they settled ~~near by in a village.~~ down to an unhappy marriage, first in Mosul, then in Virginia Waters. Hanni reminded him of Bertha, their maid in Bastah. They had the same watchful air, /h.b. as if immediate personal dignity was the most important thing for them. Only when she talked softly and intimately was she ~~really~~ herself. At other times, especially when there were people about, she seemed to ~~be~~ concentrate on the form of the conversation and not on what was said.

He told her a little about Bertha, how she despised Kath'm/ the Arab Roseboy and hated it if he served at table, ~~which he did whenever Granville was eating alone.~~ And to his surprise Hanni didn't shut herself up, as she usually did when the Middle East was mentioned.

"Oh, yes," she ~~replied~~ said with a curiously tired look, touched with irritability, "I know her type all right!"

"She keeps a bible in the sitting room."

She nodded. "We kept a bible, too!"

It had been in the family for generations, she said, and always lay on a lace mat in the corner of the/ Mosul sitting room, ~~but without a silvered plated crucifix.~~ She hated ~~the village where she was born.~~ Mosul. She described the tiny front room with its stuffed owl in a glass case and its imitation-English furniture. Over the mantelpiece there'd been gilt-framed pictures of the King ~~and Queen~~ George and Mary and the Prince of Wales. It was/a ~~deliberate~~ rehash /e.c. of Victorian England.' He was struck by the phrase and threw her a quick glance, realising she was more articulate than he'd thought.

"That wasn't daddy's style at all," she added. "It was all mummy. He started a trading company and then started drinking. Mummy was horrified. You know, she had a kind of village-mentality. She thought he got us a bad

~~reputation~~ name. Which he did. He used to debunk everybody when he was drunk -- he used to call them ~~dirty~~ shysters to their faces --- in the middle of dinner --- and my mother used to go absolutely cold as steel! I can see her face now!"

~~His~~ her sympathy was with her mother. ~~One~~ You could feel that. /cap She shared that sense of indignity --- the steel-cold disapproval. It was in her own life, too, perhaps inherited --- disapproval coupled with a sense of personal position. Her father had outraged this, though she loved him. He was dead now --- he died of drink. And her mother still looked after the trading company, in Beirut now.

"Mummy came to England to give birth to me, so that I'd be English," Hanni said. "And she sent me to an English school near Kirkuk which was staffed by caricature-Englishmen. ~~They behaved like a cod-comic's idea of an English gent!"~~

. . . All the time she talked he was afraid that her ~~intimacy~~ friendliness would suddenly ~~break any moment,~~ cease, so he ~~said nothing, only~~ nodded warmly and made little exclamations. In this sort of life ~~one~~ you had to cling to any little bit of intimacy.

~~But he still couldn't fathom her, he couldn't get near her. No doubt she felt the same about him. Which of them was the more natural, he asked himself, if either of them were?~~

~~As soon as she was with other people again her stiffness, that was more an ancient dignity turned to a modern social use, came back, and everything he said to her was again like a message flashed across the sea. Her face hardly moved and she made only staccato little statements; perhaps only with Dick was she really seen.~~

~~Dick as good as said this one day.~~

~~"I could write volumes about that girl," he said. "She's like a South Sea island --- with the storms thrown in, of course!"~~

~~Hanni, she added, wasn't a talker. She was only known through her silences. "My book," he said with a charming simplicity which at the same time was deliberately not quite sincere, "would be a book of silence!"~~

Once or twice she stayed at Chaworth Road for the night, alone, when she didn't expect Dick back at ~~Hampton Court~~ their own flat. Apparently, this was a form of retaliation. She never said what Dick got up to on those evenings away. But it was easy to imagine. Sex was one of his big themes - it went with youth. All Hanni said was that it was part of his 'policy of independence' to stay out all night. She talked about him rather as she talked about her own father, coolly, without ~~apparent~~ attachment except a motherly kind. Her words left a sting behind them. She said she'd learned the gift of stinging gossip early in life. And Granville found himself burning with resentment against Dick when ever she talked about him. ~~until he pulled himself up. She always spoke in the same flat, unenchanted voice.~~

~~Sometimes she and Dick looked like perfect strangers together, and sometimes they were like young lovers.~~ She said Dick never allowed a h.b. loving mood to go on for long. It soon made him feel caught. He was horrified at the idea that she might require all his attentions; he was a little like Pinkie in this. And he always had a device ready for keeping her at a distance, like arranging a formal little dinner-party, just for the two of them, at the Caprice or the Berkeley Grill. He would phone her from the office and make the formal invitation, sounding jolly and facetious, and she would get herself up to impress him, as if they were new lovers. In a way she enjoyed this. The dressing-up was nice; she felt 'woken up'. And he did want her to look pretty, which was good. ~~unlike the boring men who took their wives for granted.~~ But, still, it was always a jolt: suddenly she had to behave as if she didn't know him. She would smile at

him across the table, shining in her new dress with the bare shoulders, and Dick would ~~behave~~ act as if he'd never seen her before, looking between her breasts with an exciting mixture of distance and familiarity. There was the sensuous thrill of being familiar with a stranger! He often hurt her and infuriated her, but in the end she always admired him.

Or he would ask her to go down to his parents at Harrow for a few days, just to make the formal break. And he laid it down as a principle that they must each have at least two evenings a month to themselves, to go out where they liked and with whom they liked, and no questions asked. For mutual happiness she agreed. But she rarely took up her free evenings. Once or twice, out of loneliness, she tried to interfere with his but he retaliated at once, with an ~~extraordinary~~ amazing unrelenting thoroughness: he would spend three or four evenings ~~out in a row without saying anything~~ away — punishment evenings. A principle once agreed on must never be broken. This was absolute with him.

She wanted to furnish ~~the Hampton Court~~ their flat properly but he wouldn't let her. They all began talking about this one evening and Dick murmured, glancing over at him with a smile, "The furniture'd start staring at me!" He said he wanted a place that offered no 'definitions' of his character. So the flat was as bare as possible. A properly furnished place would make too full a statement about him, he thought.

When she talked about him Hanni always made it seem that she played a meek role, giving in to him for the sake of peace. But behind her level voice there was quite a hard will. Yet this was only ~~an~~ this impression. Nothing could be verified from her quiet manner.

She had a good rapport with Dick's mother, whom Dick nicknamed 'Lady Godiva' --- his father was 'King Arthur' --- and often went down to see them. ~~From what she said they felt a shadow of disappointment over~~

~~their son. He hadn't gone the way they'd mapped out for him.~~ Dick was amused and offhand about them. But at the same time there was a touch of bitterness in his voice, as if they'd played all sorts of ineffectual tricks on him. His face took on a guarded look when they were mentioned. He said, ~~he called his mother Lady Godiva because the idea of her riding naked on a horse always thrilled him in an Oedipoidal way; while~~ 'King Arthur' was a good ~~name~~ title for a man who'd 'never attempted anything heroic in his life'.

~~Hanni seemed to share the disappointment with his mother.~~ [Dick told him one day that ~~she~~ Hanni always came back from Harrow with a knowing look in her eye, as if she could now see right through him down to his toes.

"This makes her look like the old girl," he added, "which gives me quite a kick! I can then literally fuck my own mother!" And he spluttered with laughter.

Granville only heard Dick's parents spoken of by their nicknames. Hanni used these names as well. Sometimes Dick would call his father 'King' or 'the King', and his mother 'milady'.

"Milady got on the blower to me this morning," he would say, "and do you know she said she'd just seen me from the top of a bus in High Holborn and I needed a haircut!"

He would smile but with a little twitch on his lips, as if his coolness towards his parents wasn't complete. Mostly he talked about them as distant characters doing some kind of bad performance. Granville hadn't met them and saw them only as caricatures, through ~~him~~ Dick. They were two mountebanks some of whose fake goods Dick had been tricked into buying; he knew their game and smiled, but bitterly because they'd caught him. That was the impression. Nothing they did or said lacked this fraudulent

quality. But when Granville asked him one day why he hated them so much he replied, "I don't!"

Lady Godiva, Hanni said, was a small, thin woman with a sharp nose and quick, intelligent eyes, not yet old and still attractive. She was an Australian and had met King Arthur in Brisbane when she was seventeen. Their families had been in the same business --- hotels. She still owned a number of them in Sidney and Brisbane, and King Arthur now managed them together with his English interests, in the same company. He was the son of a modest hotel-manager who had sent him to Australia to learn the ropes of the trade from the bottom, which he'd done, starting as a bell-boy. He was a tall, erect, kindly man and had one absorbing hobby, building model ships. One of his great private disappointments was leading Dick as a child to one of his most brilliant pieces of work, a vast, gleaming liner with cabins and lounges that had taken him ~~ever~~ three years to build, and hearing him say, "I hate ships, and that goes for all models of them, too."

~~Dick had a horror of the sea and couldn't swim a stroke. Much of his childhood had been spent on boats plying the seas between Southampton and Sidney Harbour. The journey never took less than six weeks and all that time he was cooped up with his parents, an only child, in a first-class cabin. This was usually followed by weeks in a hotel suite not unlike the cabin. They expected him to join the family business as a matter of course and perhaps manage the two Brisbane hotels on the spot. But he coolly took a job in T.I.M. without telling them.~~

Lady Godiva was ~~completely~~ baffled by Dick but wouldn't admit it to herself, Hanni said. She tried to play his game of cool talk but only sounded biting and disdainful. Really she'd taught him the coolness, believing it was true drawing-room style; and a public-school had done the

rest.

Slowly Granville was getting to know Dick behind the style. He even began to feel that this style was an urgent makeshift to stem hot tides of feeling inside. But, like Hanni, Dick rarely showed his hand. On the surface he did, giving a clear map of himself in conversation, but it was only a contour map and gave no real sense of the country.

One evening he did show his hand for a moment. They were sitting in the music-room talking about jealousy, just the two of them. ~~He~~ Dick was at his favourite game, examining a painful and intimate feeling with dauntless and methodical honesty. As always he sat quite still gazing before him, smacking his lips slightly while he thought the matter over, half-smiling, one leg crooked over the other, apparently perfect master of himself, and seeming to take ~~an enormous~~ great relish in the existence of his own limbs, in everything he did and said. That was ~~perhaps~~ the most compelling and attractive thing about Dick's company, ~~that he seemed to take an~~ his immediate physical relish in himself. ~~In her position at the time whether he was standing or sitting down, in all his movements, in the way he put the tips of his fingers together and tapped them against each other ever so slightly, and in the continual, slow smacking of his lips.~~ This self-sufficiency made Granville feel quite overshadowed sometimes. Dick always seemed to be leaning back ~~with~~ before an audience, while he himself was always leaning forward, trying to achieve an audience. I think

But this time Dick leaned forward and in the most confidential voice said, "You know who broke that mirror upstairs, don't you?"

"No?"

"I did!"

"You didn't!" ~~Granville said with astonishment.~~

"Yes," Dick went on coolly, "I did it when I found a chap in bed

with Hanni --- naked as well! ~~Oh, yes, that was what Hanni had told him the first evening he remembered.~~ Or rather, I did it the second time I found him in bed. The first time I just stood by the door and made a quivering little speech --- which the little man took ~~absolutely~~ no notice of at all! I said, 'This bed has been offered to myself and my wife for the night' (which it had, by Pinkie --- you see how principled I am even in my rages?), and I gave him ten minutes to fuck off! Otherwise, I said, I'd have to pull him out!" / Ital

It was a funny picture, Dick standing at the door talking like that, and Granville smiled. This seemed an encouragement to Dick and his face fell into more of a repose; a glint of humour came back into his eyes as well, as if by permission from Granville. ~~He'd never behaved so defencelessly before, even years ago at the training school.~~

"Did you pull him out?" Granville asked him. / Ital

"No. ~~The fellow was still there when I got back. So~~ I smashed the mirror instead."

He said he strode across the room and ~~to his own horror~~ tore the mirror off the wall and threw it at the window, where it caught the lower ledge and smashed to pieces.

"As a matter of fact," he added, "while I was tearing it off the nail an image of you came into my mind and I thought, 'Poor old ~~Granville~~ Pip, I'm smashing his furniture up!'"

~~"Oh," Granville said with a smile. "That's all right!"~~

~~"I'll pay for it one day."~~

~~"No, no, that's damages of war!" They exchanged a friendly, intimate glance that was unusual between them.~~

~~He~~ He hadn't, luckily, thrown the thing at the occupants of the bed.

Hanni ~~was~~ sat ~~sitting~~ up terrified and blinking, her breasts showing over her petticoat, he said. As for the man, he just stared at Dick with his mouth open, not grasping what was going on at all. Then Dick had flung out of the house and walked the streets for half-an-hour, his legs trembling so violently that he could hardly stand up.

~~"Were they up to anything?" Granville asked.~~

~~"I don't know," Dick said with a shrug and a smile. "But he was very fat."~~

~~"What does she say?"~~

~~"She says she was drunk and doesn't remember anything."~~

"Does the idea haunt you, rather?" Granville asked. He was happy to find that they weren't such different creatures after all.

But Dick asked, "What idea?"

"Her sleeping with somebody else?" ~~if she did?"~~

Dick was surprised. "No! Why should it?" And he went on talking in a reminiscent tone about how he'd wandered the streets that night. ~~"By God, Pip, that was an awful feeling -- the idea of him up there --"~~ He gazed at the floor, ~~before him,~~ his eyes gleaming as if he was telling an adventure story. There was almost a smile. ~~"Do you know the experience?"~~ "I think I must have walked twelve blocks that night, more or less counting the railings as I ~~they~~ passed, and all the time that little room was in my mind! ~~I kept saying to myself, 'I'll give them ten minutes more', then I was going to pull the fellow out. I probably wouldn't have, though.~~

Is This Enough?

~~"Was he there when you got back?"~~

~~"No. He'd gone."~~

~~"What did Hanni say?"~~

~~But again Dick had little interest. "What did she say?" He paused for a time, passing his hand vaguely over his mouth, still gazing at the floor. "Oh, I think she was already asleep."~~

It was the jealousy itself that seemed to interest him. He had an intrigued and baffled expression on his face ~~when he talked about his own trembling, as if it had come from outside, like something actually shaking his legs, a complete surprise and also in some way a gift: it showed that untouched experiences lay in him. He marvelled at it.~~ He seemed to be marvelling at the fact that he had such rich feelings ~~at all. They really surprised him - as if they proved his authenticity~~. And Hanni's role was secondary. ~~Yet surely he must love her, to feel the jealousy at all? Granville looked at his friend in perplexity.~~

In a moment ~~Dick~~ he returned to his old manner: he decided he wanted to have a look at the ~~girls~~ waitresses at the café in the Commercial Road ~~where they had wicker baskets on the walls - he said he liked the waitresses~~ — they were good there. And he leapt out of ~~the~~ his chair ~~as if it had just bitten him in the pants.~~ He left behind in Granville a sense that underneath his lonely style there was something grand and warm that would be revealed steadily ~~to him~~ in the next few weeks. Perhaps he would be another real friend like Mohammed. He was excited at the idea. Like all men he'd always looked for a friend but had a handfull of acquaintances instead. He terribly needed the talk of a man. It gave him confidence and steadied him. Even now he felt he could face his jealousy towards Pinkie better. ~~Who were women, after all? Damn them!~~

Dick and Hanni stayed at the house quite frequently, and were sometimes there for the week-end. Hanni said it was 'heaven' after their own ~~Hampton Court~~ flat. ~~However,~~ But there were ~~some~~ irritations between the two

couples. The chief cause, sometimes the scapegoat for the other three, because he was so helpless, was Dick. ~~When he slept the night in one of the single beds~~ he left his bed unmade in the morning, ~~and~~ he rarely washed up after a meal; he would cook himself eggs and bacon, and leave his dirty things floating in water. ~~His help in the kitchen was perfunctory, and he did strictly what he was asked to do, no more, even if it meant watching a kettle boil over while he sat at the table, or letting the joint burn. The answer afterwards was always, "Well, old sport, I'm awfully sorry and all that, but you didn't say anything, did you?" One Saturday he went shopping as a special gesture, engineered by Hanni, and returned to the house with almost nothing: he had read 'leg of lamb' in Pinkie's list as 'quarter of ham' for some reason, so that there was no joint for the weekend, and he said he couldn't find the vegetable shop.~~ Also he swung on a chair ~~in the kitchen~~ one evening until it broke. Granville found Dick's blindness to detail a romantic quality, and his own irritation at it petty and watchful.

Sometimes Pinkie and Dick seemed to be in league together, sitting over crossword-puzzles or a game of chess for hours. And sometimes Hanni and Pinkie seemed to be conspiring against 'the spear-side', as Dick called himself and Granville. Most of the irritations were unspoken, quickly forgotten in a smile or a friendly cup of coffee in the kitchen. Pinkie and Granville, as a couple, had a standing criticism of the other two— as a couple: that they 'crept off' to bed too soon, and didn't 'club in' to make an intimate little dinner-party together; their company was always on the point of being withdrawn; ~~it seemed;~~ they were 'nervous'.

There were odd comings and goings all the time. Hanni would call at the house and Pinkie would leave with her soon afterwards; then Dick

would call, after they'd gone, and seem surprised not to find them there, and leave immediately as if he knew where to find them. Or Pinkie would call from the office towards the end of the afternoon and ask if Hanni had come over, then omit to leave a message for her in case she did come over, saying it was 'all right', they were sure to 'meet up' somewhere. Or the three of them might return to the house together late in the evening, saying they'd all met 'by chance' in town. He had the impression of a club they knew, or a house similar to this one, only with a more flowing clientele. It excited and horrified him ~~at the same time.~~

~~the lights lowered, and Pinkie had her tragic expression again, her eyes closed and her lips drawn together in a pout that suggested both tenderness and hunts; it was strange combined with her pointed ears and the red forked tail that drifted out behind her; it gave her a peculiar dark haughtiness. She and Clockwork hardly held each other at all, only leaned together as if exhausted, their cheeks touching while their feet shuffled slowly along; this wasn't the right dance for most of the guests and the hall was more or less empty. He told Elizabeth how much he'd enjoyed Meedham and she said with a shake of her head, kicking him slightly in the ankle, "Oh, come again!" The slowness of the dance was a hindrance for her; she went at her steps with a country energy and kept glancing round the floor with a vivacious twist of her head, and she watched Pinkie, smiling at her as if the tragic expression was deliberately to amuse people.~~

They crawled into bed ~~just before dawn~~ as the birds were beginning to sing and the first milk-van passed. Having fixed her ears so well, Pinkie couldn't get them off, and he had to do it with a pair of tweezers, pulling the wires carefully away. Her forked tail was broken and her tights had split during the Scotch reel: she looked ecstatic, pale, quiet; to oblige her, though she hadn't made any direct request, he hardly spoke; and he left the paint on; his eyes were still long and slanting, ~~and~~ his lips full and red; she put her hand through his hair and gazed at him; and he was careful not to hug her too close in case he spoiled the spell; and they went to bed in the same quiet mood, exhausted; in the morning his red kiss-marks were smudged, vague red stains all over his chest and arms like the trace of blood, and the sheets were stained with them; thus ended his one night as a faun.

'THE NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE'

BOOK II - Chap. 8 p. 134-168

BOOK 11.

CHAPTER 8.

People started calling at the house again. Glenning, the publicity-man, was almost a daily visitor. Some of the other faces he'd seen that first evening reappeared; there was a girl Dick Pollocke had been talking to; her name was Lucy, and she always came with a girlfriend nicknamed Ginger. The two of them sat in the music-room together, long-haired and quiet, sometimes with a book, sometimes just sitting.

For some time there were repeated phone-calls in the day which came to nothing when he answered them. He would pick up the receiver and say hullo, then there would be silence, followed by a click at the other end. It got on his nerves and the idea became fixed in his mind that it was Grove trying to get through to Pinkie, though why Grove didn't know she worked at Wembley he couldn't explain. One day he shouted into the silent phone, trembling, "Stop it, you bloody fool, stop it!" He remembered afterwards how his voice had echoed up the well of the stairs in the empty house, like someone else's voice, rasping and strange; it sounded like someone bound and gagged.

~~He heard nothing more of the offer of the Beirut office, which Glenning had told him as more of less a certainty. Clearly it wouldn't happen before he went back again. In a way that was a relief.~~ But One day he would be in the office again with Mohammed at his desk, ~~on the other side of the room,~~ with the fans whirring and sunlight streaming between the shutters; it was quite a happy image, and it seemed to him that he could actually hear the silence of that office, with its special tone, as if the sunlight was pressing on the roofs outside, ~~like~~ a huge brass weight that came down harder and harder as the day went on; and behind the silence there was ~~always~~ the cacophony of car-hooters from the main street, ~~in the distance.~~ He ought to be getting his ticket back and wondered whether to shorten his leave by a week and take a boat ~~all the way~~ instead of flying: the voyage would calm him again. He noticed that he already assumed Pinkie wouldn't be coming. (But he told himself that she would follow him after a month or so.)

Pinkie came and went from the office. Several weeks passed without a single new event. But though he thought of going to a travel-bureau and getting his ticket it didn't seem quite serious. He couldn't imagine going back. Usually if something was certain to happen he could feel it in some way, ~~and~~ imagine the circumstances.

Sometimes ~~several of them~~ they went ~~together~~ to a new cafe in the Commercial Road where there were wicker-baskets on the walls for flowers, and a fisher's net draped across the ceiling. ~~in a chic manner.~~ Pinkie was subdued as he'd never seen her before, but still with the intact look that aroused his curiosity. She gave way to all his suggestions. They went shopping together, and otherwise she seemed quite content to stay in. He put it down to their getting ~~a good many~~ more visitors. The door

downstairs was open most of the day, as she liked it. ~~He took walks by Wapping docks and the Tower, and went to concerts quite frequently. Or he would stroll down to the Shoreditch library and get out a few travel books.~~ The house was tidy again and the mild weather held. He began to wonder how he would ever leave this light, clean life, with ~~the~~ its pleasurable undertone of menace, ~~in so short a time.~~

There was a lot of coffee-drinking in the kitchen, and he enjoyed ~~it in a mild way, especially~~ the long hours talking to Hanni, ~~sometimes,~~ when she felt in a confidential mood. But it was a vacuum. Underneath, it was all frightful. Yet his face mustn't acknowledge this. Nor must his talk. He was the same as the others, keeping his real self in reserve: it was the polite thing to do.

He asked Pinkie one evening, "I feel frightened sometimes --- is everything all right?"

Her coming and going seemed was so mechanical. She made a customary stiff blink of her eyes, with a loose gaze for a moment; and she said, "What do you mean, Pip?", in the same surprised and slightly breathless tone as when he'd asked his question about 'affairs' that first evening.

He gave it up. ~~One~~ You had to be sure of ~~one's~~ your facts.

To p 148

Hanni got furious at one of Dick's escapades. ~~She had come to stay the night with Pinkie, rather than go back to Hampton Court, and she'd rung up Dick at the office to say so. "Oh, I'm sorry about that, darling," Dick said over the phone, "go to bed early and get a night's rest. Your eyes are beginning to show the strain."~~ The three of them, he, Pinkie and Hanni ~~and Granville,~~ were sitting in the kitchen drinking wine ~~after dinner~~ when she suddenly laid down her glass and said, "I'm going

to ~~Hampton Court, and~~ I ~~think I'm going to~~ find something interesting when I get ~~down~~ there!" ~~They laughed and told her not to be a fool, but she got her handbag at once and left the house.~~ And next evening she ~~called in and~~ told them what she'd found. She ~~walked into the flat, she said, and~~ found ~~it~~ in darkness but knew he was there because she could smell the Turkish cigarettes he smoked when he was seducing a woman. She pushed ~~open~~ the door of the front room and switched on the light, and there was Dick with a stunning and 'Juno-esque' girl, sitting on a sofa ~~in front of the 'view'~~ with the window open at the bottom. He ~~had~~ just ~~undone her blouse and~~ had slipped her petticoat-straps off ~~her shoulders~~ so that her breasts were showing. ~~He was just about to bend down and kiss one of her nipples when she put the light on, she said.~~ The girl quite calmly pulled her straps up again and closed her blouse, and said, hardly turning round, "What unexpected guest have we got?" Dick looked terrified and said, "It's my wife! Won't you meet?" He got up and was just about to make the introductions --- Hanni said she was glad to find his fly-buttons were done up, at any rate --- when she walked towards them in a fury and shouted at the girl, "Get out of my flat at once!" The girl got up with a haughty expression --- she really was magnificent, and Hanni felt a little twinge of admiration for her --- and said in a casual way, "Yes, of course! I expect you want a little word with your husband, don't you?" After she'd gone Hanni began more or less chasing him round the flat. She filled a huge flower-bowl with water and calmly tipped the lot over his head. And while he was trying to wipe himself off she started slapping him round the face at a furious rate. As he said afterwards, she was really hitting the girl --- and he accepted the blows on this basis, which made them seem lighter!

He looked blue next day, and had a slight cut on his upper lip. By five o'clock in the morning they'd talked themselves out and then had the 'most enormous screw' ever. Hanni said it was wonderful dealing with a man after he'd been caught in flagrante delecti~~o~~ --- you could kick him, pour water over him and 'really go to town' as you never could otherwise; then you could really 'milk' him. For several days afterwards she was mute and narrow-eyed, and would answer none of Dick's questions. He gave her flowers and took her to the theatre, but she couldn't forget how magnificent the girl had been.

Granville ~~thought he~~ felt a glow of admiration for Dick. He told himself that Dick was asserting the only freedom left in life: The spell of the flesh! That was the only thing left! So he went to the office and found Dick just coming out of a board meeting. "What a wonderful fellow you are!" he said with the frivolous, sparkling glance which was now taken for granted between them, (and which he really thought idiotic). And then, while Dick was smiling back at him, with the same ~~little~~ idiot sparkle, he realised that he didn't know why he'd come to the office, that he hadn't wanted to come, that he didn't belong here, that he didn't know what had happened to his life, that he was whirling round giddily in other people's lives, ~~which they had made!~~ without one of his own! So he promptly made up a reason for coming --- he wanted to look up the contracts department ~~(oh, you! --- another little twinkle --- after more money, eh??)~~ and dashed out of the building. Why didn't he find a woman? Through loyalty to Pinkie! And she was probably with Grove, at this minute! But he refused this thought at once. Yet she probably was! But suppose she wasn't? He faltered again. And so his resolution failed him, which it didn't do in Dick. He didn't have Dick's pluck to enter the mystery

and risk everything with his own hands and his own life. He was always hanging back in thought!

One evening Dick gave him one of his little speeches about sex. "You know, I'm quite a methodical person, but by God there's no method as far as sex is concerned, is there? You can't book it in advance, can you? I'd say I really wanted sex about, well, once a week; ~~not more~~ it isn't a lot ~~I mean the real McCoy, not titillation and all that caper! Not often~~ for a thriving male, is it? But I bet Don Juan didn't do much better, for all his escapades!" He added, "One of our clients from South America had some sort of aphrodisiac powder, from a root or something, which he said made you red-hot. We had him ~~down to Hampton Court~~ to stay, then I came back one night and found he'd been putting the stuff in Hanni's tea!"

Granville laughed. "What happened?"

"Well, of course, I told him to leave the house and never darken my towels again!"

As time went on Pinkie became more and more matter-of-fact. It seemed to be the result of working at the office. She was tired when she came back, and anything too personal, any intimate discussion of their life, seemed absurd to her, perhaps because it was outside the working schedule. He tried to summon up courage to ask about Grove, but didn't for fear of getting an honest answer.

He made her breakfast every morning, and often cooked ~~usually prepared~~ dinner when she came back at night. She was kept out by business ~~on~~ each Friday until midnight or so. She said Friday was the night when the different departments ~~at Nigel's firm~~ got together, first in a committee-meeting and then over dinner. But he phoned her once during this committee-

meeting, in the early part of the evening, and there was no reply; she said afterwards that this was because the secretaries had gone home, adding that as a matter of fact she'd seen the light flickering on the operator's switchboard as she passed. But he didn't believe it. One week-end she went off to ~~Nigel's~~ her brother's house in Wiltshire and came back looking pale ~~and more tired~~ than before. He dared not ask her why this was so because it might indicate that he suspected her of not actually going, but spending two days in bed with Grove.

It occurred to him when she talked that she'd been listening to someone else's voice and, being impressionable, had absorbed this voice as her own. He tried to divine what sort of person this was. He thought it was a morally small person --- there was an unusual note of envy and bitterness in her sometimes. It wasn't the voice she'd had all these years. ~~And secondly it seemed to him that she was absorbing middle-class arguments about life. This was perhaps where her matter-of-fact tone came from.~~ He wasn't alone with her any longer; there was this third person all the time. She was now in the habit of getting up suddenly during a conversation and changing the subject, whereas before she had always stuck at a thing and not let her mind interfere. She now seemed to have learned a social manner of avoiding dangerous and even continuous themes. One evening she said in a crisp way that didn't belong to her, "After all, there's more in life than thinking out one's personal problems, you know!" She was beginning to use ~~the vocabulary he'd first recognised in Sussex.~~ a middle-class terminology. It was peculiar to hear her say how 'sensitive' somebody was, and she stunned him by saying just before they went to bed one evening that she found his 'philosophy' interesting. His mouth fell open and he put out his hand slightly as if to catch hold of her in her

disguise, but in a second she was the real Pinkie again.

He found he could get on quite well if he read the newspaper every morning, saw two or three people during the day and made sure that there was at least one event from the day before that he could talk to them about. This made ~~the obligatory~~ accepted outward conversation possible. Real talk was out of the question. Dick was the only one who did it, with his girls. He'd found a way of doing it ~~inside the system of work and city-life all round them --- and 'hats off to him', thought Granville.~~ They couldn't make their own lives any more, ~~they could only make new actions.~~ The job at the office, their newspapers, the hurried sounds in the streets, drew them all further and further into ~~the~~ a system, and the only satisfactory thing to do was to ~~lean on the system and~~ forego all thought and self-responsibility. ~~There were laws, and one wasn't likely to break them.~~ You could leave everything to the bustling outside world and never communicate ~~one's~~ your real self to other people; there was a comfort in this; the cycle of happiness and pain, the natural rise and fall of life, didn't seem to apply any more. There was a numbed but safe consistency. No one was sufficiently alone to be in control of his life any more, nor close enough to any one else to lose control either

He always thought he was about to get inside Dick and Hanni, to a true intimacy, but it never happened. He could ~~see Pinkie: he could~~ feel ~~her~~ Pinkie's existence. But they were closed to him as perhaps no other people had been in his life. Their silence always felt like a withholding of something that could or should be said and was actually in their minds. He had a constant sense of suppression in their company, and of mental surveillance, with remarks released by policy, after strict censorship. They were ~~sometimes~~ nicknamed 'the poltergeists' ~~perhaps~~ for

this reason.

When he had a quiet talk with Hanni the deadlock was broken for a time. She got several afternoons off and came to the house. They walked in Kensington Gardens and sometimes ~~bathed~~ swam in the Lido. He was quite glad to be with her, as if to convince her that he had no unusual feelings towards Pinkie and that his life was going along smoothly. He wanted her to have no fixed conclusions about him. So each time they walked together it was like a bid for freedom - from a preconceived judgement on her part. It always seemed that a subject was being avoided: was it Pinkie? But their tone was intimate. They laughed and talked quite gaily, yet he was nervous all the time. He had the impression that his life was wearing down slowly. Why couldn't he speak to her clearly about what he feared? Because he didn't want to show himself in weakness. And why didn't he want to show himself in weakness? Because whether he liked it or not suffering was weakness in ~~the~~ this society — or rather the society they'd made between the four of them. When Hanni went down with 'flu Dick stayed in the ~~Hampton Court~~ flat with her as little as possible, and only made a feeble effort at nursing ~~her~~. He would look at her and say quite candidly, "I can't understand how I ever made love to you. You look like a railway porter!"

~~It was always pleasant at the Lido. There were some lovely days.~~

He yearned for something new to happen, an escapade like Dick's, and also he had an optimistic sense that his life would change soon. The hot sunlight that drenched everything gave him this confidence. He talked to Hanni about Basrah at some length, but whenever ~~it seemed possible that~~ he ~~would~~ launched into one of his 'orang-utang' speeches ~~— when he leaned forward slightly and began flaring in front of him —~~ she would repeat, "Mm, mm,"

~~In a~~ frantic~~way~~ally, nodding all the time, ~~as if to tell him that she knew everything he was going to say and so he needn't say it. She had a horror of him boring her, it seemed, and anything that was the slightest departure from practical statements of fact carried this threat. But there was a pleasure in this for him: it was nice to choose little statements carefully, rather in Dick's candid style, like, "I think Glenning comes round to us for what he misses in his own home, don't you?"~~ And then she would tell him a little anecdote about Glenning --- how he once left his wife in a waiting-room at Norwich station and only remembered her when he stepped off the train at Liverpool Street. Glenning's wife was so stupid that all she wanted was to have babies, she said. ~~She and Glenning were always 'on the job', it seemed --- for instance, they would dress each other in impeccable outdoor clothes and then during a deliberately formal conversation undress each other again little by little, until they were on the bed together. His wife would ask him questions about the office like a secretary. --- "How are woolrens doing these days?" she would ask. --- "Oh, not too bad!" he would say as he slipped off her skirt, "A two-percent rise this week!"~~

~~Hanni~~ She would go from one anecdote to another in her chanting voice, chuckling now and then. "Dick was at it last night," she would say, "and every time he pushed I did a loud fart! He said it was like conducting a Sousa march!"

But he had the impression that talking like this hurt her ~~as well.~~ She hadn't a natural, flowing ribaldry. She flickered her eyelids in a pained way. Pinkie could talk like that naturally.

~~She~~ Hanni would complain about Dick in a monotonous voice, tight-lipped and brooding; underneath, she seemed concerned about him, in an irritated,

maternal way. Sometimes it seemed that she was talking about Pinkie as well, while mentioning only Dick's name; ~~she would turn to him as if he knew what she meant already, through Pinkie.~~ They began to share a grievance. Dick and Pinkie ~~had what they called the 'blind' quality of pursuing their own pleasures whatever happened, and stepping across other people as if they weren't there;~~ were to other people; they didn't notice small details; ~~they'd both been spoiled in childhood in one way, and yet not spoiled in another - deprived of something.~~ They didn't know what it felt like to be 'someone else'. But this left ~~him and Hanni~~ them with an uncomfortable feeling that they themselves were only more ethical because they were inactive, and that the other two had more pluck. It rendered them spectators of the other two, which wasn't flattering to the pride. /e.c.

Behind Hanni's panicky mm, mms there was always the implication that one day --- not now, because this wasn't the time or occasion --- she would reveal all the thoughts and facts and values on which she based her silent appraisal of things and her pre-knowledge of what ~~he~~ ever Pip was ~~going~~ about to say: but as with Dick the time never came; it was never the occasion! Yet he always believed she had the power to tell him. And he concluded that what he was about to say had no interest for her, and curbed himself. So, despite the growing intimacy between them, he felt the same edge of stiffness as always before; there was always the tremulous frontier where they doubted each other and had to rehearse their statements, and force their faces into a smile. Much was due to her fear of him; Pinkie said she didn't like the way he 'glared' at her sometimes. [illegible] italics

Hanni gave the impression of a dark and rather deadly calm, something held very deep inside her, timidly from the world but also obstinate. Yet she always answered him anxiously, whatever he asked her.

She was always trying to oblige; but there was still this locked reserve in her. More and more he was silent with her unless he had something grimly factual to say.

But he preferred it to being alone --- his nerves played such tricks on him. One afternoon, in the silent house, an unaccountable terror caught hold of him. It was about ~~a quarter to~~ four in the afternoon and he'd just finished eating. He got up to carry the dirty plates to the sink --- there was the swish of a passing bus in the distance, and an aeroplane throbbed overhead. He ran water into the bowl and slipped the plates in. But he didn't wash up, only turned away absently, his hand still on the water-tap.

Then ~~this~~ an unbearable nervous tremor started in him. He held his breath, listening for the sound of the downstairs door. But nothing came. His stomach ~~actually seemed to~~ quaked and quivered, sending ~~all~~ shafts of horror ~~all~~ through him, and a foreboding darkness approached him, like the slow, hot breeze he had felt that same afternoon in the street below, flowing past him with a solemn, ominous movement. The silence had become grim and hollow, like the silence round a dead person. He moved a foot, and the boards creaked under the linoleum as if only a dead wind had stirred them, nothing human.

He'd begun to think about Pinkie: he realised this --- it wasn't a thought so much as the shadow of herself that had passed over him! She must have done or said something against him at that moment --- twenty miles away, perhaps close by, it didn't matter! He believed in these ghostly connections between people. He saw her hand sliding gently down the face of ---. But the picture faded. Yet perhaps he had the impression -- or had he <u>planted</u> the impression? --- of a young man's face, pale and

smiling while Pinkie's hand made its cruelly suggestive, delicious, stroking motion?

Yes, she was always out these days! A hot dread spread over him. He ran downstairs to the bedroom and flung open the wardrobe door. Her best coat was gone! Her best coat! Her best summer coat! But what did that mean? Nothing! Her shoes, then --- her shoes ---! He tore out all the heaped shoes in a frenzy --- her best shoes, where were they? Or her handbag --- her black handbag, for the evenings --- that would prove something! He kicked the door closed again, crushing the frail shoes and the piles of old stockings and silk scarves together, and rushed next door. There! But no, the handbag wasn't in its usual place, on the bookshelf, close to the piano, close to his precious gramophone ---! Yes, she had wanted to look elegant this afternoon!

He stood in the middle of the room panting and staring down at the carpet. He felt a giddy trembling so violent that his legs hardly seemed able to support him any more.

The door opened suddenly and Hanni was standing in the doorway, calm and still. He turned round with a start, gaping at her.

"Whatever's the matter, Pip?" she asked.

"Oh --- hullo!"

He smiled. His heart was still beating fast. She looked round the room slowly. Hanni was black — as ever, as she always said with her restrained smile, 'chocolate!

"Is anything wrong?"

She came further into the room and at that moment he raised his hand, unawares, to touch his nose. She saw it trembling ever so slightly. The light from the street shone up into her eyes as she turned towards the window, making them seem darker than they were, a deep, mottled colour, nearly

an absolute black. Not a sound came from the street.

"No," he murmured. "Why?" Then he added at once, to make talk, "Have you just come?"

"Yes."

He stood with his legs astride, not knowing what to do with his hands until she spoke again.

"What about some coffee?" she said.

"Yes --- fine!"

She turned to go upstairs and gave him a quick, searching look. His trembling ceased and the colour came back to his face. As he followed her up the stairs awkwardly he felt much like an awkward child, hanging his head.

She glanced out of the kitchen window, at the roofs near the river.

"It's a wonderful day," she said. "Have you been out?"

"Just down the road, that's all." To p 156

She turned to look at him, slowly, still seeming to wonder. "Shall we go to the Lido, Pip?"

"Yes!"

They left right away, not troubling about the coffee.

That afternoon, as they were swimming at the Lido, a sudden change came over him: ~~he was aware of the sunlight over the lake in front of them as a blinding yellow flash across the sky spread out to infinity, and including in one moment all his life;~~ it was a revelation of stupefying hope, in which he felt his whole future contained in goodness, and resolved. All the bad things of his present life would go. But even now, at this

moment, he ~~was~~ felt free.

For the first time since his return he had an excited sense of the city round him, ~~and~~ a sense that it didn't matter what his life was or what happened at home, because of all the other activities that were open to him every day. ~~as one member lost in a mass of others; without a name as far as suffering went.~~ He kicked out his leg involuntarily, dripping with water, in a happy spasm of freedom, already celebrating the future, and he looked at Hanni with a relieved smile. He would do something! He didn't know what yet, but he would ~~do something to~~ change his life. Let him spend all the money he had, for instance --- he could take the other three to a club! ~~Already a fortnight had passed. How slowly the city reasserted its hold on him! Of course,~~ he was a Londoner after all --- why hadn't he realised that before? ~~The spirit had gone away from him!~~ He could go out into these streets as he'd always done in the past, and lose himself, as if life was eternal and he was walking up and down the span of eternal time, looking in at the lighted shop windows! He made no specific proposal of action to himself; something would turn up; the club-idea was only momentary, a suggestion. ~~But~~ he was quite certain that, now he was in a fit mood, his life would change. He dragged Hanni into the water again, whooping and laughing, and they splashed together under the diving board. She blinked at him, delighted and wondering. ~~He'd shaken Basrah off!~~ He'd found himself! And after two or three swims up and down the enclosure they went in again, puffing hard, and threw themselves down on the grass, where the trees were. "The water seems to do you good!" Hanni panted. He got a sudden dazzling impression of her, as someone he did know after all. The long grass was extraordinarily vivid against the slight darkness of her skin. It all looked so strange under

the trees, in the middle of a city, with people's white skin against the grass, in the shade of tall trees, with the bright light draining through the leaves in speckles, and here and there a negro, stark black, with glowing white eyes and teeth. And there were sunshades, red and yellow, with prams and also blankets spread out. And Hanni an oriental brown.

"Are you ever ashamed of being lonely?" he asked her suddenly, gazing at her in a ~~very~~ direct way, ~~but too fresh from the water to care.~~ As she dried herself, panting, she looked up, first with the slightest blink, as if reservation would take hold of her again and chill everything, ~~and~~ but said, "Yes, sometimes!" It gave him such ~~a sense of~~ relief to ask an honest question, not simply a prepared question in an honest style! In that moment everything seemed humbug that people talked, a nervous humbug imposed by the city. She didn't move for a little time. For a moment he thought she was going to take her little reply back by saying something clever or facetious; but, as if she knew what he expected of her --- she had such a gift for that ---, she went on drying herself quietly, with some little grief in her eyes as she looked down at the grass, lowering her head to rub the towel against her neck. He felt lazy and lay down, looking up at the trees. And she seemed suddenly relieved to be out of his scrutiny. She'd said to Pinkie ~~at the training-school~~ years before h.p. that he was the sort of person who tried to 'pin you on to a board' for his collection of 'butterflies'. Pollocke had said that was absurd. But he wondered now if ~~in a silent manner~~ she'd passed beyond that mistrust. The sun was still shining on the water in a great yellowness, flung lavishly over the trees and bushes on the other side of the lake, and he became happy again at the thought of the dusty, hot streets that

began at the edge of the park, and the cafés that would be filling with people about this time, the first taxis of the evening-rush that would turn the corner at Queen's Gate, the musty smell of beer as the pubs opened, and the dark interiors that seemed to wait for the evening to come and for dusk to fall. He thought of these things in quick succession, in an ecstatic mood anointed by this yellowness, a magnificent, dazzling splash that extended to the outermost spaces of reality in a vast sunset. How strange that he hadn't felt properly <u>in</u> the city until now! All those painful little thoughts at the house would be gone. He would be able to stand his full height. That was what they meant when they said 'old Pip' --- a gay and reckless sort of person, not this little thinking insect!

"Why did you ask that?" Hanni said.

"I don't know!"

The words were out of his mouth before he knew it. He was about to go on, to say that he deduced the sort of life <u>she</u> led from the one <u>he</u> led. He wanted to break the silence that had hung over his life since his return --- talk about all the intimate fears that had been playing at his mind, and the misery he'd sunk into, and the fact that he saw nothing before him in the future; and how he'd felt the weight of an accusation on him after his return, that he'd sent away all Pinkie's friends from the house, and that he felt he represented a shadow over her life, and how thankful he'd been that a group of friends had re-formed, even though it was without Grove! And 'Grove' ---! But he couldn't do it. He let the moment pass. And she blinked, recording everything so minutely with her face as she always did, as if she'd felt the breath of his revelations pass over her and then die away

~~again~~ before they could turn to speech. So they were back again in deadlock! Yet she seemed satisfied with his "I don't know!" and his laugh afterwards, that sounded hollow to himself. And they were too tired and hungry from the bathing to want to talk any more. The moment had passed.

People were beginning to pack ~~up~~ their things and leave. The stillness, that had muffled everybody's voice and turned what they said into a whisper, was broken now. The traffic from Knightsbridge sounded like a wind in the distance, level and unchanging, representing the city's preparation for evening. The other side of the lake looked like a coast-line ~~very~~ far away. Perhaps he endowed her with more strength than she had, and also perhaps she feared his expectations of her! Perhaps they were all doing that to each other! But still he couldn't bring himself to speak. She picked up the cloth bag she'd brought with her and they walked across the park towards the road. He was aware of her as a kind of little sentinel at his side, always armed, smooth, brown and slim, her eyebrows meeting in the middle like a frontier across her face, a black, negative line. The tufted grass stretched away before them, and the trees clustered together, beginning to contain the first shadows of the evening. He looked back as they plodded across the sand of Rotten Row, at the sky, for a last glimpse; dusk was just stirring, like a ~~vast~~ shroud of dust touched with red getting closer and closer to the earth. It fell so lightly, little by little, that it might be a breath of air, given substance, almost making a stir that could be heard. Their shoes made a quiet swishing noise in the grass, much like the countryside, except for the level roar of traffic that drew nearer.

When they got back he bought a dozen bottles of wine and rang up

Dick to tell him to come over for a little party. Dick was quite pleased -- "I see Pip's getting back into his old form," he murmured, but added that he couldn't manage it, as he was having dinner with 'an important contact on the distaff side'. In a lower voice he asked, "Is Hanni there?" and when Granville said yes he added, "Tell her I'm giving a talk on free trade at the local Y.M.C.A." Y.M.C.A. meant 'You're My Choice All right' --- so Hanni told him afterwards. It was Dick's private language and indicated that he would be taking a girl out - probably the one she'd caught him with at ~~Hampton Court,~~ the flat, she said - but wouldn't be unfaithful to her. She didn't seem annoyed, and they drank a tumbler of wine together.

There was quite a jolly evening after Pinkie came home. They made ~~a~~ n.p. punch, combining the wine with brandy and lemon juice, and Glenning called in ~~after theatre time~~ with a few others. Lucy and Ginger came. It grew into a party. There were the usual records, including one that had always stirred him called 'The Creole Shake'. And Dick came in after all ~~at~~ about midnight with a sorry expression: the girl had got a slap-up dinner out of him, he said, and then ~~went~~ gone straight home afterwards, almost without looking at him. ~~again.~~ Hanni was delighted, and Dick danced with her again and again, not even pausing when there was no music, his body tight against hers and his head lowered on to her shoulders, so that he seemed to be whispering messages ~~in~~ to her ~~ear.~~

Thus, ~~Granville~~ Pip gave his first party since his return, on his own initiative. This made a great difference to Pinkie --- that he'd done it himself, unexpectedly. She gave him a kiss on the neck similar to the first she'd ever given him. He'd found his feet again! ~~Of course he'd been a jolly person two years before!~~ That was what they meant by 'Pip'! It was like coming back home to himself after a long absence. And the

other three looked wonderful that evening, so clear and cheerful: how ungrateful he'd been to neglect them! The nightmares were finished. What did it matter, all this absurd calculation as to who was being loyal to whom? He had a glorious sensation of being alone and free and also happy, an extraordinary combination; he even felt close to Dick's dandyism! That would need practice. For the first time since his return Basrah seemed not to have been his own experience at all. And it had all happened through a yellow flash across the sky in Kensington Gardens! ~~that Welsh would have called "mystical"!~~

During the party he got ~~tipsy~~ tight and sat talking ~~with~~ dizzily to Hanni. ~~Dick~~ Dick had gone into the bedroom where some of the others were, sitting in candlelight, ~~with the gas-fire on.~~ There was a great din and bustle, and the air was thick with smoke, though all the windows were open. Pinkie was at the phone and he had a stirring of his old fears, but they were gone when she ~~returned to the room~~ came back looking as gay as before. The street was ~~quite still~~ quiet outside, and their noise echoed across it. ~~He wondered if there'd be a complaint from the neighbours, but there wasn't.~~ Hanni was confidential, as always at a party, and ~~she~~ asked him again what his question had meant that afternoon. ~~"Why did you suddenly ask me that?" she said.~~ They sat on the divan while people pushed past their legs, trying to dance. It wasn't a ~~true~~ real confidence between them. He perceived this through his clouded brain. It was Dick's style --- this cool probing, not hers. But he joined in the game. And, as before, he tried to lay himself bare.

"I was deducing something from myself," he said.

"What --- that you're ashamed?"

"No, no!" Again the words were out of his mouth like a reflex.

action. "I mean being lonely!"

She puffed at her cigarette slowly, her eyes narrowed. "In what way?"

"I suppose as we all are!"

Again his spirit had failed him, or rather the spirit simply wasn't there, while she moved hardly a muscle, gazing straight before her. What had he meant that afternoon? He hadn't an idea! He hadn't a thought in his head! How could he begin to talk about all those complicated little puzzles of intimacy? Where would he begin? He hadn't Dick's gift! She nodded after his last remark, her eyes almost closed against the smoke of her cigarette in their characteristic way.

"Yes, we're all rather lonely, I suppose," she said, finishing off a conversation that had contained nothing.

He would have replied to this but a clear thought refused to come ~~into his head.~~ With drinks inside him he was only fit to dance or play the fool! He was suddenly in a whirl of self-consciousness. He tried again with Hanni: why shouldn't he mention Grove now? Why not ask her what Pinkie did on Friday evenings? Why not talk about how he yearned to make love to Pinkie ~~sometimes~~ and she yawned in his face? That was the honest style he should learn. The words were there! But he couldn't. His mouth was fixed. The drinks only helped to paralyse him. He whirled round in his thoughts, and couldn't escape them. Thank God his leave was ending soon, at any rate! Suddenly he had a sharp sense of regret, that he had indeed laid himself bare to Hanni, in the short sentence he'd uttered, and that she had him caught now, and that he hadn't done justice to himself in those few words, and so had made things doubly worse! Oh, why had he talked? A flush began to rise up his neck. He was caught,

caught! It felt as if his limbs and insides were transfixed and held still, without a flow of blood through them. The longer the silence lasted between them the more he accused himself!

Happily for his feelings Hanni went on talking, but about Dick. At once the horrid whirl of his thoughts ceased. Dick, she said, was frightened of going mad. Granville felt he understood this very well at the moment! She said she was often worried about him. Dick would sit still for hours in the most uncanny way, without doing anything, or he would get up and prowl round the room with his head buried in his collar. He'd told her once that if he had the chance of jumping out of his own body into somebody else's he'd take it with pleasure, and risk being ugly or lame for the rest of his life. ~~He hated the passing of time, she said.~~ The moment never came when he felt really himself and enjoyed it; well, there were moments, perhaps a day, a wonderful summer's day, but it didn't last; and the passing of time meant a perpetual loss of opportunities for him. She seemed to understand him very well, talking softly, as if it was herself. ~~The emptiness all round us appalled him, she said. Sometimes he couldn't see how human beings had managed to fill the earth up with objects enough to make it look tempting. Of course he was frightened of getting old; that followed.~~ That was why he had affairs and was always thinking about women. He had a 'thing' about breasts; ~~he told her they made him feel he was 'floating on the face of eternity'.~~ It was much more ~~that 'sort of thing',~~ 'a good feel-sound', she said, than ~~the actual kissing and the~~ an actual woman that interested him. He ~~always~~ said he enjoyed sleeping with her ~~much~~ better than with anybody else; and ~~that~~ it was 'getting better and better with time'. But there was always this other quest, which had to do with ~~his~~ vanity. Yet vanity wasn't the right

P. C. / Vital

word; he wasn't vain. But he had to be reassured, and she couldn't do it on her own; no one woman could do it. ~~She had asked him the previous day why, if he felt empty, he didn't give up the Hampton Court place, which couldn't be emptier. Why didn't they move into London, where neither of them had ever lived? And he said he couldn't bear the idea of being 'classified' as he would be if he lived in London: if he lived in the City he'd be 'well, nondescript'; Chelsea was 'arty-bohemia'; Kensington was 'faded-genteel'; Notting Hill Gate was 'plain squalid'; Westminster ~~ that was the one district he wouldn't mind living in, "and the one place," Hanni added, "where the rents are fabulous, of course!"~~

The party ended at dawn, and there were the four of them left, sitting over breakfast in the kitchen as a grey, cloudy sky began to rise outside, ~~like~~ a new presence stealing through the window and changing ~~all~~ the furniture with soft touches. Dick jumped up and gave a ridiculous account of how Pinkie ate. ~~She had an acute dislike of being watched over her food, and Dick watched her deliberately, until she laid down her knife and fork slowly and murmured: "Look here, Pollocke, attend to your own bloody rations or I'll ~~ that that supercilious grin off your face!" At once he jumped up and gave a kind of speech.~~ "Every morsel is weighed up and rolled about the mouth," he cried, "every taste-bud is on the qui vive as with quick, exploring movements of the mandibles she opens up new layers of taste for the enslaved salival juices! Then, with a last salute, the dignitaries of the mouth lining the route in panoply of office, she flings it down to the cellars of the stomach where restive bohemians lie in wait over candlelight, reeking with yesterday's garlic!" His beard wagged up and down in the most comical way, and he didn't pause

for a moment, as if he'd rehearsed it. He once told Pip Granville that at school he'd been famous for this sort of thing. He had a peculiar burlesque vigour and extravagance in which his coolness disappeared.

To 158

Life was easier in the next few days. Pip went to the cafe more often, ~~and didn't feel obliged to leave when he'd drained his cup, but~~ hung around and reading or talking to people. ~~Or he walked in Kensington Gardens.~~ He'd gone back to his old life, so he told himself. But he couldn't remember ~~recollect~~ what his old life had been! He'd been more or less in harmony with Pinkie then --- that was one thing he remembered. But still there'd been something feverish underneath --- always.

~~He was rarely in his room now.~~ His day now had quite a routine. n.p. He read the paper over breakfast, after Pinkie had gone, and then went down to the bedroom to make the bed and write letters or read; then he went out for a coffee. He happened to look at himself in the mirror more closely than usual one morning and noticed that the skin round his eyes was ~~very~~ pale, and ~~that~~ his cheeks had lost their colour. He no longer had that weathered look.

In the music-room the piano he happened to pick up a medical encyclopedia of Pinkie's that was lying on the coffee-table. This was the book that ~~the~~ a young man ~~with the ginger beard~~ years ago — at ~~the time of~~ her first ~~studio~~ party (it was an old story). He had seduced her with ~~ginger beard~~ It had opened it at the venereal section with its diagrams and lurid illustrations of the sexual parts, and He had discussed it all with her so unambiguously that the act itself, when it came, seemed only ~~the~~ a demonstration of the first dead hypothesis. And the pages fell open naturally at these sections now. The first thing Granville saw was a description under the word SYPHILIS. Ther tertiary stage was

particularly frightful. It had the effect of blindness or madness, and could be inherited; the child of someone in the tertiary stage might be born blind. It sounded just like the state he and the other three had fallen into. The effect of blindness, and it could be inherited/0 And it was infectious in all its stages, incubatory, primary, secondary and tertiary! The last was incurable! It sounded quite like old Dick! Incurable! They were blind, and nearly mad: mute and blind! Mad and mute and blind!

He remembered something about Dick: it was the nature of his anger; one couldn't call it real anger. It didn't come out properly, ~~as Walsh's hadn't.~~ When he got furious with Hanni ~~and~~ or Pinkie ~~a few weeks before, just after his promotion to the South American office,~~ he only went white round his lips, and his voice had cracked. It wasn't an anger that suffused all his body and made him flush, in a healthy flow. The anger didn't do him good. He had no voice to be angry with --- he physically couldn't raise his voice, it seemed/0 He was rational even in his flesh. ~~The anger was physically prevented, as if the necessary vocal chords were missing.~~ He could become steely, his eyes glassy and his lips pale, or else indignant in a plaintive manner that was nearer his gentle nature. ~~But~~ the anger was always checked in a pre-conscious manner; the check was already there, in his flesh; it was a conflict and distortion already accepted by the flesh, and written into his body; so that it had become a white-hot flame, destructive, with a dangerous licking edge, that flashed through him and then abated, usually, in silence; this was what 'anger' was in him. The middle part of the body constricted and pulled itself in; it didn't expand with a greater flow of ease than before. ~~As in Walsh,~~ there was nothing righteous or handsome about the anger. It

really did border on hysteria --- if it had come out it would have been hysteria. Vital

And Pip was beginning to feel the same thing in himself, as a shadow, perhaps through the remorse he felt after anger. There would be a spurt of sourness inside him, really like a gland spraying a kind of acid round his guts --- he remembered it at the Lido, in the moment when Hanni had seemed about to disregard his question. This sourness seemed to him yellow. He'd never known it before. Was this the first organic sign of what Dick had learned as a child, in his glands and tissues? T. P 162

He looked back at some of his own 'outbursts' with mild astonishment. Would the same consciousness as Dick's grow in him until by the end of his life it was 'tertiary' as well? until it had formed in his tissues, without surface manifestations (for the first bright-red, open chancres of syphilis disappeared early)? 19—

In this respect he and Pinkie were distinct, at present, from Hanni and Dick. When he or Pinkie blew a valve they really let themselves go --- Pinkie screamed at the top of her voice; their blood flowed better afterwards. Hanni was the same as Dick, though perhaps only on the surface; only a very slight, dangerous flush mounted her cheeks, and her eyes showed a glinting, relentless light. He had the feeling that if Dick tried to behave like Pinkie and really let himself go, some frightful meanness and spitefulness would be the result, and this he/Dick couldn't afford to let happen. The same might be true of Hanni, though she was too hidden a creature for one to be sure. But Pinkie, at any time in her anger, could be stopped. She didn't have that gleam of relentlessness or blind refusal of life. In Dick anger meant the

severance of connection with other people, but in her it meant a warmer connection; she was showing her connection. / Ital

And a smile brought her round at once. Nursing a grievance, scheming to avenge it, were unknown to her. Hanni's angers, on the other hand, lurked as wounded afterthoughts. Pinkie said that Hanni had a genius for creating 'undercurrents': people would ~~sometimes~~ quarrel in her company for no reason.

So they all inherited blindness and madness, one way or another. Would it go on, the legions of disease spreading all over the world through education, until everyone was tertiary? Blind and mad --- the whole world! They were planning huge schools in England; it would happen in Africa, Russia, in Asia and China! The senses would go mad!

Yet he didn't feel this would happen. The middle-class road was at the end. The spirochete of education wouldn't take. The body would be too stout and resistant.

At the end of these half-feverish reflections he began to feel a ridiculous hope, like standing before an immense golden plain on a hot day, with hardly a movement in the air, in a silence that came out of the earth, like the future being laid before him in one visible reality: a plain that stretched placid and flat as far as he could see! It had something to do with his own life, with the hope he'd begun to entertain in the last few days, and with the yellow flash across the sky at the Lido.

When Pinkie asked him, "Aren't you getting your ticket back?", it was quite a shock.

"Yes, I must see to that!"

~~He'd begun to think that reality had changed. But~~ how could she / h.p./cap bear him to go alone? He refused to tot up how many days ~~he had~~ were left.

He bought four tickets for a performance of 'Hamlet' he'd read about, with a new actor named de Cloud, which the papers said was a pseudonym and should be pronounced 'de Clue'. They were for the following week, and he had the illusion that it would help conceal the reality that he had five days left and had made no plans.

Suppose he had children? What living sense could he pass on to them? His father had given <u>him</u> a living sense --- but what had <u>he</u> got? Education had withered it away! He felt panic-stricken, wanting to strike out the years.

The garden in Abbott's Road, at home, had <u>breathed</u> for his father. Like a great beast with its paws tucked up, purring! But not for the son! Let him try to <u>make</u> that garden breathe --- let the son try! No! It was only a garden among others for him. <u>One</u> garden --- on that precious little map of life his school had given him! The trees were group trees, the leaves and bushes group leaves and bushes! Types, universals --- not the breathing presence itself! Not the only garden in the world!

So he couldn't pass it on. He could only pass on admonitions about life, and advice. Children remember your being, the way you looked into the garden at dawn, sipping your hot cup of tea ... Not your advice.

He thought this with an absolutely sucken spirit, his head down, quite motionless, his breath almost gone.

Pinkie's brother Nigel came over for dinner one evening and they set up a table in the music-room with candles. Nigel looked worried and kept moving his knee rhythmically under the table. He seemed to feel out of place. Dick wandered in with Hanni and they all sat having a drink.

The four of them made gay conversation for Nigel's benefit, exaggerating the closeness between themselves, but this only seemed to make Nigel feel excluded. He looked robust, with massive shoulders and a bald, weather-beaten brow, with wisps of blond hair, his face still soft and young, his eyes ~~with the usual~~ blazing with selfless curiosity. But this house wasn't his ~~circles~~ cup of tea. He gazed at Dick, blinking. He tapped his foot, his eyes strained, and left early. Pinkie said he was tired these days and had such a lot of work on his hands. He'd found his wife couldn't have children and this was a great blow to him, or so Pinkie thought --- she'd heard it from one of her sisters. She and Nigel didn't ~~rag~~ each other as they usually did ~~when they were together; they only did it in the country, when they felt~~ ~~readily at home. But~~ there was an intimate glow of respect in their eyes. ~~when she looked at him over dinner.~~ It made the music-room look too small. /cap

Pip ~~Granville~~ was troubled afterwards, wondering what was wrong with the house to make the man feel ill-at-ease. ~~He couldn't see things clearly any more, and so he couldn't tell what Nigel's private worry had been or what effect the house had had.~~ Nigel sent a polite little letter two days later from Wiltshire thanking them for an 'unusual' evening.

The music-room looked fabulous: its colours stood out vividly against each other, like a tropical garden lit up. ~~Did Nigel mean that?~~ Pip ~~Granville~~ would spend ~~two or three~~ hours there every day ~~in this room in the evening~~ when there was no one in the house, simply absorbing its brightness and variety: it was beginning to fill up with voices, now ~~they had~~ that people came every ~~night after night;~~ evening; sometimes he enjoyed it better sitting there and remembering them in silence than actually being with them. The house wasn't weird for him as it had been the first evening, in this section Mr Bunsel

He Granville began to perceive something about Hanni --- that she liked to be thought busy and in demand. She liked to appear suddenly in evening dress saying she'd just been to a first night, or that she was about to go to 'the most wonderful party'. Sometimes she seemed to enjoy making Pinkie feel left out, which wasn't difficult. "Really?" Pinkie would reply, her mouth drawn down in a sorry way, "I'd have given anything to go to a party tonight!" ~~Yet she may have been to one the night before.~~ The parties she wasn't invited to were always the best ones for Pinkie, and Hanni was aware of this weakness.

But there were also times when Pinkie was invited out and Hanni wasn't, and then Pinkie took her revenge, ~~sometimes~~ by asking her round for a drink 'beforehand' --- by saying 'beforehand' she aroused Hanni's curiosity. It was a grim feminine game. But slowly they were forming an alliance --- "If you can't beat 'em, befriend 'em ---" Pinkie told him one day --- "is a sound feminine principle!" They would scheme to get each other invited out, and keep a strict balance-sheet to see that not too much credit was given on one side.

If Pip met someone unusual he found he hurried home to tell Pinkie, with the same triumph that Hanni showed when she was called to the telephone by a stranger. Pinkie would question him closely, gazing down with a slight compression of her brow as if trying to choose in her mind whether to accept or reject what he said. She was like an examiner in the social mysteries --- she could recognise something false at once. Her fundamental question was, "How did you meet them?" Everything hinged on that. And it always turned out that he'd met them through some perfectly ordinary circumstance --- at the office when he was with Dick, or sitting

in the cafe with Glenning or Ginger; it was always through someone they both knew well --- confined to the little group of people she knew he knew. It made him feel like a child, offering her things of small magnitude. She listened to him squeamishly, and when she'd broken his story down to its ordinary elements she showed both relief and disappointment - relief that no fabulous event had taken place without her, and disappointment that she couldn't find a key to the fabulous through him. And the most superb new contact always turned out to be a man in the end not very different from other men. She had a primordial snobbery, not towards a lower social class but towards all lonely people. Sometimes when she came in and found him sitting in the bedroom alone, huddled up in an armchair - it might be without a book, gazing in front of him - she made a little gasp and hurried away.

Hanni was different. When he was alone she would come in and talk to him, curling up on the floor, smoking slowly, with movements that were at once rigid and graceful. Her dream of the fabulous social event had more simple vanity than Pinkie's. She and Pinkie eagerly discussed new contacts with each other, shutting themselves up in the kitchen. He was present at some of these investigations. They were harsh and clinical, laying the absent other person bare, until a humourous caricature emerged. It was like clever journalism. There was no hint of the other person's living presence, only his actions and phrases and the farcical situations he got himself into. All men were a little funny. Pinkie was always describing them as 'pompous'.

He began to be careful not to show himself too much, in case the others took him for granted. He left the house sometimes when he knew that she and Hanni were coming in together, so that he could return an

hour later and give the impression that he'd been away all day.

He waited for parties and evenings-out for the deadlock of life to be broken; the affection between the four of them welled up in a crowd of people. This was really how their friendship was kept going: it went from one public event to the next. There was always the exciting dressing-up beforehand, when Hanni would arrive from the office with a little attaché-case full of her things and take a bath and then start dressing in one of the rooms downstairs, (with the gas-fire on.) The house would feel warm, and a scent of bath-salts would float into the rooms. Sometimes he would have a drink with her while she pored over her toenails, clipping them and painting them, always talking in her quiet voice, that had such powerful intimacy and steadiness in it, through tight lips, as if her face were a rock. Pinkie would also come down, and they would sit on the floor by the gas-fire, safe in the knowledge that they would be going out as a group, already gay. ~~and so needn't feel nervous of the crowd later.~~ "We always go to good parties," Pinkie said once, "because even when they're bad we make them good!" ~~They were 'good' people to envy.~~

At a party Dick would 'go off', keeping to the side-rooms if there were any, until he'd found a girl. Pinkie would get extravagant and dance recklessly, Hanni would drink quietly at the beginning and dance with style, then go wild at the end of the evening, though never with absolute abandon. Each party was a marvellous landscape with new races of people, and they would catch each other's eyes across this expanse and wave or wink with an intimacy they could never really get ~~alone.~~ In a crowd they were always a family, but free and exciting, gloriously unknown to each other. Dick would slip over to him and confide something, usually about

one of the girls: "I say, you see that one with the bald head and the twitch, don't you? I've been trying to shake her off all evening! I thought of giving her your address!" Then he might make his loud, dusty-sounding laugh, like Huh!

But the following day it was always the same as before, with thoughts withheld and the conversation stylised and disjointed. It wasn't that they held things back really --- the more intimate the talk, the better: but there had to be a special tone. You couldn't show fear or misgiving. The other person might get ashamed of you. People who came to the house found them hard and offhand --- (those who weren't hard and offhand themselves).

Hanni told him why Pinkie had got ~~so~~ peeved with Dick ~~a few weeks before, about him always "keeping things under his hat".~~ once.

"She wanted Dick to do something for Grove at the office," she said quietly. "And he refused."

The name was like a blow, smack in the middle of his face! She spoke steadily --- she even said 'Grove' without blinking an eyelid. And he tried to stop the hot trembling that seized every part of his body like a sudden wind. At the same time he knew she was helping him, in a strange way. She was putting out a hand to him but ---!

~~Pinkie had~~ She wanted Dick to recommend Grove's firm, ~~in some way,~~ she went on, and ~~Dick had~~ he refused --- of course! (a smile, here) --- out of principle! But actually Because Dick didn't believe the firm was a good one.

What was Grove's firm? He daren't ask her! He sat there smiling and he even found himself asking, "Now which one was Grove?"

His heart was beating at an enormous rate, and he tried to prevent his eyes staring out of his head in a telltale way. The trembling had

concentrated itself in his middle, and for some minutes he didn't hear a word she said.

Ah, Grove worked in an advertising firm --- he had heard that! Here he jumped in --- and changed the talk at once with something idiotic about how public-relations was getting a racket these days. He didn't know what he was saying. But she refused to be budged. She went on to say, with the same quiet voice, like a nurse, that Grove worked mostly in the evenings, getting round the clubs, and that his only free evening was Friday.

Friday! He almost fell off his chair and went deathly pale, his lips dry and puffy. Friday evenings! He remembered Pinkie's face when she'd told him about the light on the operator's switchboard, she'd blinked quickly. Had she blinked? It was all so ghostly, this putting together of memories! And again he made a quick remark to cover up, though in a terrible unsteady voice.

He spent the rest of the day trembling, his insides surging up and down, his face flushed, and when Pinkie came in he wouldn't talk to her. But she was used to this by now and put it down to his thinking out some 'problem'. Gradually over the next few days he got back to normal, with the new information absorbed into the rest of him, to replenish the hidden nerve-war.

He also thought he remembered Hanni saying --- but it only came to his consciousness now --- that Pinkie's uncle, Lord Maimbury, was giving Grove some help --- offering to draw him in as a subsidiary to his own firm, perhaps? Or was that dreaming? Of course! But yet the words were clear before him --- out of the shadow of his unheard conversation

with Hanni.

A letter came from Mohammed. 'My darling Mr. Granville,' it said, 'a woman was murder in the souk yesterday, she has been in my house, my dear, how are you, Mr Tomlinson from Port of Beirut made inspect your office, I give him good tip for the Races outside 7-2, we sweat, my darling, I am your brother, give my humble satisfactions to Mrs Granville, I love you too much, Yours faithfully, Mohammed Hadawi." He smiled, but it was remote; he didn't trouble to show it to Pinkie. A woman was quite often murdered in the area of the souk, because that was where the brothels were, along a tiny alleyway guarded by the police. He'd seen Mohammed's signature many times before but it struck him with no familiarity now. The words stuck in his mind --- 'Mr. Tomlinson made inspect your office'.

'THE NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE'

?? Ch. 22

CHAPTER 22.

The weeks passed. There were newcomers in the group as a result of the Tail-and-Hoof ball. He was out nearly every evening and couldn't understand how he had managed to spend so much time in the house before; the phone rang continually for one or other of them; Dick and Hanni now took him for granted as a fellow party-goer; usually he slept until noon and waited for the day to develop, which it did of its own accord, largely through the telephone.

He went for long walks with Hell, one of the newcomers; they strolled by the river, hardly talking; a subject of conversation would seem to present itself but then fade away before it was clear; they were impenetrable to each other. The hair-girl also came to the house, sometimes with Hanni, sometimes alone, preoccupied and rarely talkative; but she would suddenly wake up and begin joking and making her deafening laugh; she would come and sit in the music-room while he was there, hardly glancing at him; making dates with her was out of the question; there was no need, since she came nearly every day; they would put on a record and dance, then he would make coffee, nothing else.

Alice the (muscular girl (alias the) snake-girl) also came, and Joyce the pale girl was sometimes there. He began to share Dick's fascination for the pale girl; she would sit in the kitchen for an hour or more looking at a magazine, still and soft, smoking and gazing in front of her; there was a quiet detachment between her and Pinkie; they had something in common, in

their presences, and they averted their eyes from each other as if afraid of mingling their identities. Hell wore her hair in the same way as at the ball, straight down, and usually she had a black dress on and clutched a small black hand-bag; she always looked cold, and her teeth seemed to chatter invisibly when she talked, while her shoulders were hunched slightly; Pinkie said that Grove called her 'the last trump'.

Life was not so casual that he felt his identity had gone, but pleasurably. There was no cause for nerves or apprehension since he wasn't called on to do anything; no conversation was expected of him and no powers were attributed to him. In this circle no one was greatly interested in anyone else. It made no difference that he had no money in his pocket; someone always called and an activity would start for which his company was required; he had to make no effort for this; he could sit in silence; his face was known and expected, as the other faces were expected by him. The social classes mixed, or rather the shadows left on social life by the past mixed --- the snake-girl's Cockney accent and Hell's breathless, crème-de-la-crème speech. But everyone had their being in suspense; the snake-girl was wary of Hell, and was delicately and flinchingly aware of her, so that their real presences didn't in fact mix at all. At first he thought that only he held his real self back but he saw that everyone did it; Dick was perhaps the most open of them, he gave the truest demonstration of himself in his behaviour; but here there was an heroic element, a cleverly and painfully devised performance; as a result he amused and enchanted people most, because he'd gone into the matter more deliberately than anybody else, and had come to the conclusion that if you were going to turn a false face to the world it might as well be an entertaining one. Dick's suffering, according to Hanni,

started the moment he was alone in ~~proportionately more impressed when he got back to~~ his room; he would sit ~~and tremble, Hamid said,~~ castigating himself; one evening he came back to her ~~at Hampton Court~~ and said he was sure ~~Granville~~ Pip looked on him as a 'sex-maniac' with nothing in his head at all; at such times of self-depreciation ~~she~~ he was afraid of going mad ~~everything would be unbridged for him, he would be floating, severed from everything, falling through empty space; she said she sometimes even appeared not to recognise her properly; there would be no consolation anywhere for him, even in her, she would recognise none of his pleasures, he couldn't lose himself in anything, that was the most frightful thing, he always jerked awake; it was this that sent him to girls, by the time he'd overcome this fearful floating detachment, sufficiently to excite their interest in him~~ ~~as he told Hamid that~~ luckily the 'little worm, vanity' had so far never let him down ~~he was already [illegible] him after another woman;~~ He told Hamid: it sent ~~him out into life, and strong enough to go back to Hamid and make love to her;~~ this, she said, was mainly why she didn't try to interfere with him; it was his way of getting strength, from which she benefited. /cap

Just as other people drifted into his house, without saying a word, so he drifted into ~~the local cafe or the pub where he might expect to find a group of them, and he would sit down in the same way,~~ Hamid's, nodding hullo and then giving himself up to the silence. Whether or not the others regarded this common behaviour as strange he couldn't find out, just as they couldn't find out if he regarded it as strange; it was simply the accepted style. Hell sometimes rang up in the middle of the night and asked for a bed; she lived with 'a family of school-teachers', as she called them --- even the little children were school-teachers, she said, and she dared not return when she'd taken 'more than a fair drop'; so she would creep into the house and be found on the divan in the music-room next morning, /digitals

her black lace underwear in a pile on the floor and her hair hanging down from the pillow like black crêpe. ~~He or Pinkie would leave the key under the mat for her.~~ But Granville still clung to his privacy; sometimes ~~after sunshine~~ he refused to let her in. Also he would lock the door downstairs during the day sometimes, and not answer the door-bell or telephone.

It seemed to him, even with all these callers, and the activities in the evening, that he had nothing to do; ~~he couldn't wear his energies out;~~ he wrote letters of application for jobs and then didn't post them; he was on the point of ringing T.I.M. a dozen times; ~~he got in travel books from the library and began to work out routes across the desert based on other people's journeys;~~ he wrote a long letter to Mohammed telling him what he'd done and promptly tore it up; then he wrote a frantic one, saying, 'Please, help me!', and posted it. He set himself tasks in the morning and arranged his desk neatly; he went through a carbon copy of his report for T.I.M. with the idea of amplifying it --- to hand the new sections in ~~to them~~ later, perhaps, as the basis of his next job with them. There was still no answer from Nevinson. Did they regard him as an ex-employee or not? Dick told him not to apply for his super-annuation as he would get more later, for some complicated reason; he obeyed without question and drew his last money out of the bank. He couldn't say he was unhappy, though.

Hell borrowed the school-teachers' car one evening - she simply took it out of the garage --- and ran it against the railings by the Tower of London. There was always some interesting little event like this. Deryk Aldercote had a special nod for her at parties. ~~they all went to~~ The past seemed quite dead; He was an accepted face, nowhere was barred to him; he talked to Aldercote casually, and the idea of there having been a to-do between

Dick and ~~Grysham~~ Aldaverta over himself, ~~as mentally he recalled there had been,~~ was outlandish and absurd; ~~and he longed to a moral conflict — a social conflict — was it a conflict of ideas — which he couldn't grasp now?~~ he could see words meant nothing for these people; you used them for their simple decorative effects, as you used attitudes.

Hell gave promise of real friendship; ~~it would be~~ a delicate, quiet relation in which they would sit much as he and Mohammed had sat by the ~~river~~ water in the evening, with long pauses, saying whatever came into their heads; she ~~used~~ smoked reflectively, saying didn't he think this person had something 'valiant' about him or that person was 'a York rather than a Lancaster', always in a style that just evaded ~~sound~~ real sense? He realised after a time that she ~~was~~ lived hardly aware of him. She ~~only went on in her~~ inside a reflective dream, drawing others in sometimes, if the conditions were quiet enough. Yet she was polite and answered questions; sometimes she showed ~~the most extraordinary~~ great courtesy and charm when accepting things like a cup of tea; but then she would be absent and fidgetty again; at a party, after a few drinks, she would ~~pass by him~~ walk by without the slightest recognition, ~~her eyes blind and~~ a smile drifting on her lips. Dick said ~~that~~ she ~~and her whole group of 'long mobile words'~~ gave him the heeby-jeebies, and he cursed the day ~~Granville~~ Pip had gone to that Tail-and-Hoof ball. ~~Sometimes, he said, Hell would fling her long, ready arms round him and scream, "Dick! Heaven! I see you in an egg!" and sometimes she would walk right past him jittering and muttering to herself; once he caught hold of her as she was going past and said in a sharp voice, right into her face, giving her whole body a little rattle, "Tell me my name!" and she had to gaze at him for some time, straining her eyes, before she could say in a faltering voice, "Is it — is it Dick Pollocke, by any chance?"~~

It occurred to ~~Granville~~ Pip that Hell set the tone for all the other

girls who came to the house --- to judge from their behaviour. They seemed to think that this was how you lived at Chaworth Road; the pale girl and the snake-girl talked quietly like Hell, yawned like her, lolled, smiled in the same limp way. Even the hair-girl showed no vivacity when Hell was there, not unless there was a party or Larry Vice was mentioned --- at the word 'Vice' her ~~tiny pale figure would make a jump~~ eyes would move in their deep sockets, and she would scream, "Oh, Vice! That boy's wound himself round me like poison ivy!" Once she said in a quiet voice, "I'll tell you something, kid, Larry and dad got on fine, and what more do you want than that, eh?" He nodded like an idiot and put another record on.

Hanni and Pinkie continued to take it for granted that he was having an affair with her. Pinkie told Hanni one day that she was 'somewhat embarrassed' to find Joy Celeste always in the house. Joy Celeste encouraged this whenever they were found together by yelling with laughter and shrieking, "Nearly caught us at it again, blabber-mouth!" or "I've just been up in heaven, help me down, sister of mercy!" Hell would sit for hours in the music-room, in the same chair always, smoking endlessly, never reading, her straight hair falling down to her shoulders and her thin, pale hands flickering to her face now and then. The young man nicknamed Cerberus to whom she was supposed to be engaged sometimes came as well, small and flushed, and as quiet as she was; he had the habit of smiling quickly on and off whenever anything was said to him, and then not answering. He recognised no one at all and everybody wondered how Hell had been able to establish herself in his memory; he called everyone 'job', or rather every male, for he had no name for women; he would say to Granville, "I say, job, have you got another drink there?", and when

Granville replied, "Yes, what will you have, wine or beer?", he would flash on his smile and say absolutely nothing, only wait. Or he would ask, "Can Hell and I stay the night, job?", then promptly leave the house. One day Dick took ~~Granville~~ Pip aside in the bedroom while Hell and Cerberus were sitting next door, and murmured to him, "Well, how do you like the middle classes now, bo'sun? Quite sane, aren't we, compared to them?" Hell told them all that Cerberus was in the habit of 'walking off' with things, and that a few days previously he'd left someone's house with a persian carpet over his shoulder; he had left it in the Tube --- "I think I left it in the Tube," he said afterwards. These stories sounded exaggerated, but they always turned out to be true; ~~for instance,~~ at any rate, Hell was called to a police-station in Islington to answer questions about ~~the~~ a persian carpet.

Glenning brought over a young man with ruby lips and a pleasant, drowsy smile called 'Mac' Saunders who ~~edited~~ worked on the daily gossip-column that ~~Granville~~ Pip had read so often in the last three months. ~~He and~~ They ~~Granville~~ began going for long walks together, sometimes with Hell as well, again hardly ever exchanging a word. The more he came to know 'Mac', or rather the more silences he shared with him, the more surprised he was that what Glenning called 'the racket' hadn't touched him; ~~and that~~ he gave an impression of untouched goodness, ~~and calm~~ in fact; 'Mac' had his own drowsy reflections, he ~~was the most~~ seemed amiable and cooperative, ~~person to be with~~, above all he fell in with every suggestion, he seemed to have no sense of status --- Granville was more and more taken aback. The thing that had broken Glenning in the same work, namely, that it was hollow, with no 'inside' to it, was the main advantage for 'Mac'. ~~It meant he could earn good money without touching the peculiar calm that lay in him, he could go on with his thoughts and pleasures really as if there was no work~~

~~In life at all, he had learned the deft touch, after a long apprenticeship, he said.~~ Sometimes he came into the kitchen when ~~Granville~~ Pip was there and worked on ~~the~~ 'conversations' he intended to have at parties that evening. ~~It was easy enough to get people to agree with them after you'd written them, he said, because most of them were like babes in arms when it came to a bit of publicity.~~ Now and then ~~he~~ 'Mac' showed ~~Granville~~ him these little notes, and Granville would see them in print next day: he could thus see how the 'glittering world' with which he had once excited his ~~own~~ imagination had come about in the mind of a young man not unlike himself, only with fewer illusions about how the world ran. He was also n.p. surprised to realise that 'Mac' Saunders looked on him as a source of information, because so many people came to the house; a conversation with Hell might, for instance, be useful one day if a member of her family flung a big party or got married or assaulted someone. ~~Granville~~ Pip also knew the Kaaba dancing company, the Marquis and some of the permanent guests at the Gare St. Lazare --- the 'darker side of life' which was also ~~could be~~ good material for 'Mac'; ~~for instance,~~ the gossip column once described a house where 'aristocracy met dancing-girls', which could have been Chaworth Road, 'Mac' liked the 'mice' there, too, namely, Joy Celeste, the snake-girl, Joyce and a number of others. But he seemed to have no sexual affiliations himself; he followed other people's affairs with a rapt, benevolent curiosity.

Parties came about at the house without Pinkie even knowing about them; she was now used to returning home and finding one in progress; and with astonishing ease she ceased to look on him as a recluse; he was now much like anyone else; but at the same time she showed traces of disappointment, as if a god of hers, however hateful, had fallen.

He had spent every penny of his money and stayed in the house nearly all the time, attaching himself to a group whenever one offered itself. Meanwhile she was getting plump and had taken to a wider skirt. He began to be sick in the mornings, and Glenning explained that this was ~~only~~ the 'couvade', an ancient primitive ritual by which the men went through ~~all~~ the labour-pains ~~for~~ of the woman sympathetically, while the women, he added with a look at Pinkie, went about their 'ordinary business'. The plumpness didn't stop her dancing; everyone agreed that exercise was good for child-birth. There were complaints from the neighbours about some of the parties; ~~the~~ his windows were usually kept open because of the heat and smoke. One morning they found that a passer-by had pissed into their empty milk-bottles ~~in the night~~ and then into the letter-box; the letters had soaked it up and were yellow and limp; one of them was from Elizabeth giving the date of ~~the~~ a river-party, and Pinkie had to phone to ask what she'd written; Granville said with a laugh that she ought to tell Liz that her letter had arrived soaked in piss, but a demure and haughty look came over Pinkie's face and she said, "I wouldn't dream of it!". The hall downstairs began to be cluttered up with articles left by guests --- raincoats, suitcases and even a small pram. No one knew where the pram came from. He decided to forget about past and future --- even the little reminders that there still were. People could say what they liked about him; he wouldn't stop to think; he ~~a~~ had achieved his objective, to be free in his own country/10 /n.p.

A heavily-built man not unlike Glenning started coming to the house; he seemed to connect ~~Granville~~ Pip with Pinkie in the matter of social rank; one day he asked ~~Granville~~ him in a soft voice, "Didn't I meet your father down at Freddy's place? I think his name was Granville!" But ~~Granville~~ Pip

only laughed; and the other man, ~~who was~~ called Algy, talked about something else at once. He slurred his sentences, unlike Glenning; and there was a vagueness in his eyes that Glenning didn't have --- the same blind quality as in Hell. It was said that Algy had once lifted a smaller man clean off his feet in a pub when he was drunk and said to him, "Don't I know your cousin David?" And the smaller man had said in an icy voice, "Let me down at once, you smell of garlic!", to which Algy had said, "All right, there's no need to be offensive about it!" There were endless little stories like this, mostly told by Hell, who made an odd, fluttering, ~~and~~ breathless laugh afterwards. Another story was that 'Mac' Saunders had bought a set of whips to flagellate his girl-friends with, but ~~the sight of them had terrified him and~~ instead he used them to pull the blinds down ~~with~~ at night.

~~Guerrille~~ Pip never felt watched in their company; that, he told himself, was a wonderful relief for his nerves; ~~there was none of the third ghost he remembered from Dali;~~ they weren't thinking about you silently behind their eyes, and judging your conduct; ~~they didn't judge you at all, you were simply a fact for them; they were outspoken and rash,~~ he could really let himself go if he wanted to; on the other hand he never did; he was more constrained than ever before in his life.

~~These people, he told himself, threw their voices out and weren't afraid of anyone; they didn't have closed or haunted faces; they might be peculiar, like Hell or Cerberus, but that didn't matter; it occurred to him that an aristocracy lived to the hilt for its country, it defined permissible behaviour once and for all, and the middle classes, following behind them, threw their caps in the air only as high as they had done. Thus, he said to himself, he was passing through a worth while experience,~~

~~he couldn't say who was aristocratic in the people who came to the house. Hell was said to be; but, more than this, what aristocratic was at a time when aristocracy didn't even exist, when it hadn't existed for a hundred years or more he didn't know. He meant the shadow of aristocracy, then; these people were in the shadow, and he was learning from it; that was a task, surely, he'd set himself at Meedham? But he couldn't remember what had passed through his head at Meedham. It seemed so long~~ ago, ~~and in a period when he had shone with health~~

He again thought ~~began to think~~ of the days before their Meedham visit as ~~more~~ clearer and ~~brighter than now. of thought and clarity.~~ His friendship with Dick and Hanni belonged to that period. Yes, there'd been a friendship. An extraordinary innocence seemed to surround it now. But the period was over. The friendship was past. They came to the house less and less, because of the 'weeds'.

Many of the people who came ~~to the house~~ now didn't even know his name; one of them, hearing Cerberus call him 'job', seriously thought his name was that, and even introduced him to someone as, "This is Job --- I'm sorry, I don't know your second name."

Another thing he liked about Hell and Algy and the others was that their manners were automatic; they were silent whenever the mood took them; they didn't hold a moral plan of conduct before them, and they didn't try to work out easy routes for themselves in life; they burned themselves at the flame; they didn't search other people's remarks for meaning, or judge people's feelings by the look on their faces; partly this was due to the fact that they rarely listened to other people, or paid the slightest attention to them at all. Sternness didn't frighten them; they didn't smile to put other people at their ease; they didn't feel threatened by outbursts of feeling in other people. ~~they didn't~~

~~stand in moral scrutiny of other people, other people were still in mystery for them. But there, in this last assertion, he doubted; what mystery did he feel himself to have in their presence? He was just a name, and often not even that; he was respected, but without him doing anything to win it; he was respected because he was one of them! Something was missed out - his personality; it was where he was seperate from everyone else. So he was more middle class then he thought! He asking for personality! For a moment he was aware of the night of the eclipse again; the spark in every man that Christ had shown - the place where he was secret to himself. But then it was gone!~~

Not that Hell and Algy were ~~so~~ certain of themselves; Hell was called 'the nerve-bag' or 'rattle-box'. Algy was morbidly convinced that people were 'getting at him' behind his back. ~~Yet, confronted by people, they had an automatic manner; there was already something in their voice and delivery which they hadn't built for themselves. That was another important thing for him. But this also meant that they didn't develop; since so much was already planted in them by upbringing there was no moral development~~ / But their lives didn't seem to move ~~to or from~~ towards anything / like other people's; ~~anything;~~ / they simply were; ~~but all round them there was movement. What was happening to him? That was his question all the time, even though he had nothing to answer it with. There was this moral concern in him, as there was in Dick. But for the others, for Hell, Algy, Gerberus and the others, life was in depth; it was still;~~ and that was restful to him; ~~but~~ at the same time there was movement in him, ~~and~~ he couldn't deny it; he couldn't deny its thumping demands ~~under the stillness. He couldn't talk to them as himself, so he made jokes, danced, sat in silence, drank and asked questions.~~ He tried to make his world devoid of future, ~~so~~

like theirs; but it wasn't natural to him, because the future stretched before him in the form of a quest, really a moral one. Suddenly, as if to deny these of his, thoughts, Algy threw up his job in London and flew to New Zealand where he started work as a wine-waiter in one of the big hotels; Glenning predicted that within a year Algy would be unrecognisable --- 'weather-beaten and brisk', impossible to tell apart from a working man, and without a trace of Hell or Cerberus on his person.

At one of his parties Joy Celeste held an impromptu strip-tease competition in an upstairs room; all the rooms had people in them, and the piano was being played downstairs, but more and more of the guests were drifting upstairs; he walked up as well and could hardly get in the door; there was a hush inside and the first thing he saw was a flattering yellow light reflected in the mirror; the lights were out and it appeared that by the mantelpiece, in the light of two candles, the hair-girl and a young man were making bets of some kind; losing a bet meant you had to take off an article of clothing; she was already in her blouse and knickers, minus skirt and stockings; the young man was without shirt or under vest; her hair flowed down over her shoulders, and it appeared that she had claimed untying her hair as a valid forfeit; Larry Vice was one of the guests, and his hoo, hoo could be heard in the hush; the only talk was between her and the young man; they were murmuring, "No, I claim one here," and "Start with your pants, then", "I claim a double on that and advance you one on the last forfeit, how's that?" The deep hush gripped them all. There was intense concentration. "No, sirree!" she suddenly shouted, yelling with laughter. All the men were gazing at her intently,

as if she were operating a subtle mechanism; ~~some kind of play was~~ ~~admiring her ingenuity~~, he didn't know half the faces; her blouse came off, and she stood there in ~~brassiere~~ bra and knickers, saying, "Hey, now, look, I'm chilly, customer," while the young man persisted, "That's not a full forfeit." Then it came to an end without further undressing; she was suddenly ashamed, glancing round at all the rapt faces in the flickering candle-light, and with a shake of her head and a defiant pout she pulled on her skirt and blouse again.

~~Gradually~~ He had got into the habit when talking alone to Dick of referring to the hair-girl as 'Makboula', her supposed real name, and by accident he did it one evening when they were all together in the music-room; she turned on him at once, her head lowered, and hissed, "Drop that name, streaky pants!"; there was the utmost blind venom in her eyes and he stepped back, astonished; but suddenly she was talking in an unconcerned way to someone else. They hardly spoke to each other again after that, but she continued to come to the house, and he made her coffee as before; she didn't seem to notice any difference. He reflected on ~~the expression~~ 'streaky pants', wondering what it meant; his trousers weren't streaked; Dick said he thought it was a cross between 'streak of piss' and 'randy pants', a 'grammatical cross or compound, old sport.'

Suddenly as he lay in bed one night there was a terrific onslaught on his mind from the silence outside, in accusations that came like hammers one after the other. ~~He was stunned and began to sweat, his mouth open. He didn't believe in God, he only believed in Christ as an historical figure! He didn't believe in the miracles! He didn't believe Christ was the son of God! He didn't believe Christ rose on the third day! He didn't believe in the ascent to heaven! He didn't believe~~ →

~~in heaven!~~ His heart beat fast and the blood plunged through him like a torrent in the darkness. He didn't believe in anything! ~~he would be received after death!~~ He believed in oblivion! There was no help. There was no foothold and nothing came from any activity. While he sweated and stared before him he had a sense of ~~there was silence~~ total pause. ~~in time.~~ The night of the eclipse was dead! He was an imposter. He struggled to recollect his reasoning that night. He almost pushed himself out of bed in the darkness, straining; where were the thoughts? where should he begin again? where was the first foothold so that he could climb again? But all he could think of --- they came ringing like a false bell into his mind, idiotically --- were bare propositions, ~~'the spark in every man', 'filling in an application', 'giving up ambitions',~~ but the state behind them was gone; they were words. He lay back again bathed in sweat, exhausted. "What has happened to me?" he asked ~~again.~~

~~There was~~ a small, pretty young woman in Hell's group ~~who~~ became his 'lover'. There was a sudden, gnawing desire between them, pulling their bodies together, like a hard will nobody else could stop. It was ~~like~~ a flame, white-hot, not really passionate but ~~white~~ white and hard with determination --- they met in a club, in a large group, and danced together at once. They mingled their breath together as they moved round the floor, gazed at each other closely, without a word, their faces almost touching. They kissed suddenly, under the eyes of her 'husband' --- the man living with her at the moment. It was beyond both of them, this hard, obstinate ~~hate~~ yearning. He quickly took her phone-number and they met three days later, in the afternoon, at ~~the Hampton Court~~ Dick's (Hanni connived). flat. It was a cold, dismal day. The moment the door closed behind them they fell on each other. ~~he began touching her and taking off her clothes.~~ She had the curse but, half-

naked, she pulled him ~~into the nearest room,~~ on to one of the divans, and he came on her stomach. That was before they'd spoken a word together. They met there again the following week, and stripped naked in front of the gas-fire. But the nakedness satisfied him less. The room was freezing cold on one side, and baking hot - from the gasfire - on the other. ~~while one side of them was baked from the fire.~~ She had ~~clung to him again and again for~~ one convulsive orgasm after another, and he wondered if ~~this~~ she was what people meant by 'nymphomaniac'. When they were finished they had nothing to say to each other. There was always the first ~~fascination,~~ while she ~~was~~ was dressed, but then, in the candour of nakedness, everything fled away. They found, talking to each other, that they didn't even like each other ~~much~~. On the bed she marvelled at him - ~~her eyes closed, saying,~~ "Oh, this is the best, the best!" but he felt ~~quite separate,~~ just an object for her. ~~as wide awake as he would be walking alone the street.~~ But He felt friendly towards her. "I like you', he kept saying. /e.c.

Really, it was the same as ~~he'd been~~ with Hell and Algy. He was a kind of abstract force for her --- his individuality was missing. And she didn't seem to be marvelling at <u>him</u> --- only at his movements, his erection. He was a 'man' for her. Just 'man'. In her circle you expected 'the man' to be rash and wild, rather blind and violent, not aware of women as more than 'little things', as 'gals' whom you were expected to crush in some way. Dick hated them because he understood them perhaps.

She had spurts of anger --- irritation that ~~erupted~~ erupted suddenly, ~~and tried to claw him,~~ perhaps because he gave her neither the bad treatment she was used to nor the first hard ~~love~~ love any more.

Pinkie had no suspicions. She continued to flinch when she saw the hair-girl or when the Kaaba dancing company was mentioned.

He found that she suspected all his innocent journeys across London, ~~when he was going to meet Glenning or Mac Saunders,~~ but was at peace when he left ~~the house~~ to meet Hester, (as, ~~with a touch of irony,~~ his 'lover' was called). Hester was a divorced woman with three children; n.p.
that was the only real subject of conversation between them, her children, and she would show him photographs of them; she had the same delicate, breathless manner of speech as Hell but there was a concentrated gleam in her eye that Hell lacked; she was clearer and more determined, with an obstinate will which couldn't be swerved; she said she dared not introduce him to the children because they might think badly of her; they would tell her parents, and her brother was a Jesuit priest; she had taken terrible risks to 'go' with him; her family watched her 'like hawks', they'd done so since she divorced, and once her father, ~~who was~~ an army-man, had pushed her down the stairs ~~just outside her flat~~ and threatened to 'make mince-meat' of her because she was 'going' with somebody. ~~a man at the time.~~

It was a macabre, finished world she described: the young men in it had n.p.
a desperate violence --- she ~~had~~ left her husband because he would twist her arm 'frightfully' if she came back late! And as she was always coming d.t.al
back late, ~~it seemed, always risking something! There was the same~~ it made life quite painful.
~~blindness as in Hell,~~ everyone she described was rather wild and frightening, a /cap
kind of massive caricature ~~she endowed them with stature, but it was~~
~~not and knew, quite well~~ she said her father had got wind of him, /cap.
~~Pip,~~ ~~Granville,~~ and had promised to search him out and give him 'a sound kick
in the ~~stomach'; he asked her, trying to joke as always and to throw off~~ teeth'.
~~the burden, "Isn't that unsportsmanlike, the stomach? Shouldn't it be~~
~~the arse?"~~ ~~But underneath he was~~ It made him feel sick and giddy. ~~These dreadful threats~~
~~Dick, also, had got wind of his "activities" in the empty flat, as which~~ n.p.

~~Hanni now seemed to have vacated --~~ Dick told him that Hester was known everywhere as 'the man-hole'. /u.p.

~~Yet,~~ though only his ~~unmarked~~ dead flesh was involved, in orgasm after orgasm, ~~separable from him and abstract, he felt revived;~~ it was what he seemed to need; it was in his flesh that he needed to revive and feel his first independence from Pinkie. /cap /dital And now he felt easier at Chaworth Road; he could delay his sexual ~~approaches~~ advances to Pinkie as long as he liked, having exhausted himself elsewhere; his approaches were more subtle and patient; ~~there was now no chance of his suddenly giving way to an outburst;~~ there was nothing pent-up in him; ~~his flesh was now equal to hers and~~ he now shared, so to speak, her burden of guilt when they lay down side by side at night. ~~usually without saying a word to each other.~~ He began to feel light, ~~and~~ his appetite improved. Dick told him he looked 'drained of impurities', and that was precisely how he felt; his flesh, separate from him, was healed; his blood was clean; he felt cool and ordered.

He asked Dick what had happened to Hanni; why was she never at the flat? The reply was, "No particular reason. Why?" ~~Nor had she appeared at Chaworth Road for some time. Pinkie hadn't seen her. Dick said she was working hard, he believed, though he hadn't seen too much of her himself either.~~ Then he took ~~Granville's~~ Pip's arm in a nervous way and said, looking round, "We all have our ups and downs, don't we?" His lips were pale and ~~Granville~~ Pip thought he saw the faintest trembling in his fingers.

He began going to the New Studio ~~theatre, and~~ club, then became a member; it was another place to ~~go and~~ take people to if you wanted to demonstrate a socially varied life. ~~Food could be had there and the tickets were on a subscription basis.~~ He got the money to join from Pinkie; he told her about the club and she nodded rather like someone

considering a pay-claim, and left the money on his desk before she went out in the morning.

'THE NIGHTS OF THE ECLIPSE'

Partial M/S Ch: 23 p436-42

CHAPTER 23.

The river-party Elizabeth had written about (on piss-soaked notepaper) was a great success. There were some faces from the Tail-and-Hoof ball. She introduced them to a bouncy young man who talked very fast and tapped his foot restlessly, and sang snatches of old hit-tunes. "Do you know this one?" he would say like a machine-gun; and launch into the deathly idiotic words of a 'hit'. To Pip's surprise Pinkie lapped all this up. Normally she chuckled to herself at this kind of thing, or said something genially cutting.

The river was touched with red from the sun. At the Isle of Dogs they turned round, the boat kicking up a wash with its paddles, and the bouncy young man kept up his endless chit-chat, taking his audience for granted. Pinkie and Elizabeth seemed rapt, glued to him; they never missed a syllable or breath. He couldn't make it out. The powerful Elizabeth was suddenly so docile and girlish. She ducked her head diffidently and kept saying to Pinkie, "Isn't he extraordinary?", after a completely flat remark he might have made, such as, "I tend to go for the quick tunes, I don't know about you." His other remarks were a string of references to odd things like aircraft, houses in the country, card games, turf for lawns---all in a jumble which Liz and Pinkie seemed to see a perfect logic in. Then there was the story of how he had hitchhiked fifty miles across Norway because his car had broken down; also he had stayed at a hotel where the food was good, and another one where the food was bad; sometimes it had rained, sometimes it hadn't. And at everything Liz and Pinkie showed enthralled

wonder. Pip tried to listen harder---to get a narrative thread he might have missed---and he tried to join in, laughing and showing surprise by lifting his eyebrows. ~~Hegarty~~ George---that was his name--- said he'd been on the 'grand tour' the previous year: he pronounced it the French way and Pip thought this was a joke and roared with laughter, but he tripped up badly there because it was serious. And George had once played baccarat with a lorry-driver in a bistro at dawn---an apparently serious remark which got howls of laughter from the women. Then, from George, "I was absolutely whacked the next night, I really was---God, I think I slept about twelve hours---!" To which Pinkie said in a demure way---it was so ~~unusual for~~ unlike her that Pip's mouth fell open---"Come, come, I can't imagine you getting tired!" Why not? She hadn't met the chap before.

They all went on to the Melbourne afterwards. And there was more champagne. Pinkie and George danced together---she showed him how to whirl round on the same spot without getting giddy; you kept your eyes on the other person's eyes! And she gave him such an oh-you-charming-devil look that Pip nearly fell off his seat. It was a role he simply couldn't connect her with in any way, it was just too astonishing for words. He couldn't imagine how a person you had lived with for four or five years could show a totally new side, unwarned and unrehearsed in the smallest hint beforehand. George wasn't a 'faun' after all. He didn't even have what she called 'umph'. Grove had 'umph', but not George. George was pleasant, inconsequential, cheerful--- not the sort of person who interested her ——————→

~~that way~~ at all!

As if by previous/divine arrangement Deryk ~~Greysham~~/Alderoate was also at the club, in another party on the other side of the room. ~~He seemed a bit touched tonight, too!~~ He was giggling, fluttering his hands at Pinkie and calling out, "Hullo, there!" --- he even acknowledged ~~Granville~~/Pip with a radiant smile; ~~and~~ he danced ~~as well,~~ with a ~~pretty,~~ dark~~-looking~~ robust girl who looked about her glumly and ~~didn't~~ seem/ed to understand ~~her~~ behaviour as little as Pip did Pinkie's. ~~He what he was up to with his little prancing steps. Well, Greysham~~ was ~~certainly~~/clearly dazzled by the river-party, that/much was clear/. ~~And Granville~~/Pip sat comfortably at ~~the~~/a long table, surrounded/u for all he knew by the best titles ~~in~~/of the land. ~~and there was Greysham on the other side with some tatty old group who probably couldn't run to an honourable, let alone a duchess.~~

~~Granville~~/He had had a few drinks and was in/quite an abandoned state of mind himself. He thought he would like to be said hullo to again by ~~Greysham~~/Alderoate and ~~deliberately~~ fluttered his hand to him ~~across the room;~~/again; and the effect was immediate --- ~~Greysham~~/Alderoate fluttered back as if to say, 'Why can't we always ~~be~~/have fun together like this?' He felt like making Deryk flutter all evening, just for the devil of it. ~~Someone said that Laura Lady Maine might be coming to the river-party table later in the evening -- she 'came alive' only after midnight. There! They were clearly going to get jam on it tonight! He felt like ringing up the prime minister and asking him to step over!~~

~~Pinkie's whirling and Greysham's capering went on.~~ ~~Granville~~/He danced, too, ~~first with Elizabeth and then~~ with one of the women in the party, whose face was extraordinarily composed, with a dazzling loveliness, her skin so soft that it appeared beyond touch, making him feel hushed,

suddenly, wondering if the noisy dream of his present life would come to an end and peace --- reality --- return. ~~He could hardly take his eyes off her. Yet she wasn't pretty. There was only this composure.~~ He sat gazing across the table at her, hardly blinking his eyes, not shifting his gaze even when he drank from his glass. ~~He went from chair to chair drinking up the unfinished glasses, since the bottles were empty. And he even asked a glowering, handsome, thick set man if he might finish his glass for him as he didn't appear to want it, and the man said to him after a long pause, "Yes, you may. I appreciate that you're honest about it. It's better than just doing it, like some other bastards." He said he was Runnock's brother, and began telling Granville how he hated most of the other people at the table. And he repeated, "I like you because you're honest - when you want to take the boose out of my mouth you say so, so here it is, and I bet you've got the bloody neck to drink it, too." Granville said he had, but only if they went half-way", which Runnock's brother did, scowling at one of the other guests and saying, "They're all robbers."~~

At the end of the evening ~~Laura Lady Manle didn't come after and see them~~ were made arrangements with George; ~~to meet him again~~, he must come and have dinner at Chaworth Road, Pinkie said. Once or twice ~~Granville addressed something to her in the foyer outside~~, while they were all getting their coats on, (Pip addressed something to Rex) but she appeared not to hear him. Her eyes passed him by, set on the task of studying — and wanting to seem ~~to which he was absent, but more than that, to which he was nothing but a dead object, fresh, just dead enough, without a spark of life in him; he'd had a similar sensation with Neil, but this was much worse - this cancelled out his whole past, self, body; he was nothing, just a thing in clothes; he existed only from the outside~~

K study — George.

~~a cardboard reality; that was how he felt himself~~ while she and Liz and George ~~still~~ pranced about among the coats and hats ~~just a prop for~~ = he felt like one? the hangers — just a prop for the clothes he was standing up in. ~~his clothes.~~ /cap

When they got back home, as they were going up the stairs in the darkness, he asked her, "Who was that young man, the one called George?" "Good God," she replied, "don't you know?" She half-turned in the darkness, nearly stopping: "That was Viscount Warsdale!" And the anger, pent up all these weeks, suddenly flooded ~~over~~ through him --- he knew he wouldn't be able to hold it! Already he'd begun to tremble --- her last look at him, in the foyer, burned in his memory so/o ~~And now he'd been given the reason~~ a viscount! A viscount! Viscount! How tawdry and cheap! /cap How bestial! He was silent for a time as they continued up the stairs to the music-room, but there, before the light had been switched on, he burst out, shrieking at the top of his voice, beyond himself as he thought it was impossible for him to be now, "You ~~dirty, filthy lot of~~ crawling toads! Stew in you own rotten juice instead of dragging other people into it --- you filthy lot --- you filthy lot --- you filthy lot --!" He had never yelled at her so much; his voice echoed across the street in a shriek, ~~and~~ the tears poured down ~~on~~ his face; "You heartless lot, you heartless lot!" It was like a frightening chant, almost a song! It appeared to be a complete shock to her; he was aware of her trembling in the darkness, and there was a gasp as if she'd begun to sob/o "What are you talking about?" she asked breathlessly. But his strange, shrieked chant went on, though he had no sense of choosing his words; and it came out in bursts, like panted breath, halting and half-croaking like a frightful cough, "God, if I'd known --- kowtowing to people like that --- you ~~filthy~~, bloody toads --- ~~ladies~~ where's your bloody ~~fff~~ pride,

both of you --- going down on your arses --- to some tuppeny-halfpenny kid with the manners of the gutter --- just because --- of some --- cheap bloody title --- what a foul --- couple --- of bastards --- you must be --- aristocracy --- you people ---!" The tears continued to pour down his face and into his mouth. He was sure, underneath, that she would accept what he said, not show anger or offence, because of the sheer helpless nature of his outburst; he thought she would want to nurse him in some way and calm him down. [redacted] But suddenly she leaned forward in the darkness and with a swift, coolly aimed movement swung her hand-bag, which had a sharp metal edges, into his face, drawing blood; he put his hand up and lowered his head and was at once calm; "It's all right," he said quietly, "I'm sorry."

She stood there quivering, her teeth chattering. And they continued to stand in the half-darkness, their legs astride. She seemed to recover and started to move away, and this had the effect of reviving his anger at once: he imitated her talking to George, bending his body in a mock-wheedling fashion, "Oh, come, come, I can't imagine you getting tired!" And he added in a clear voice, as if making a matter-of-fact announcement of some kind, "You [redacted] arse-crawling bitch!" He slammed out of the room clutching at his mouth and as he walked up the stairs he heard her cough in a pathetic way as if all the sorrows of life had [redacted] heaped themselves on her and she couldn't go on any more; he stopped, to return, but his pride made him go on up to the kitchen where he made himself two eggs and a rasher of bacon, with a pot of tea; she was asleep by the time he returned downstairs. He decided not to drink wine or beer for a few days to let his blood cool; his mouth swelled up and Pinkie made a joke about it next evening to Hell, saying how jealous he'd been

because she danced with Viscount Warsdale; Hell wanted to know at once how 'Georgey' was, she hadn't seen him for years; her interest quickened in the most unusual way. In three or four days he felt he could joke about it, too; "What's that you keep in your hand-bag," he asked Pinkie, "a knuckle-duster or something?"

Grove appeared at the house again, but this time only for a few minutes, on his way to a party. Again ~~Granville~~ Pip was acutely aware of his benevolence; standing at his side he felt that Pinkie was com;etely vindicated and right --- to choose Grove. Yet he knew that when alone again he would fall back to the twisted logic by which she was his rightful wife. But there was something extraordinarily bright and safe in Grove's presence which remained with him.

He noticed a change in Pinkie: she was more cautious in the way she talked about other people these days. If he appeared to criticise someone, say Hell or Cerberus, she withheld herself with a demureness he'd never ~~seen~~ found in her before; she turned his criticism back on him, as if the spirit of criticism ~~in him~~ was something dark for her now, belonging to the past --- to the time before he became a gay dog. ~~He felt from her silence that his criticism was an unnecessary departure from the light and reasonable attitudes that now governed the house.~~

His outburst ~~after the cocktail party~~ was quickly forgotten; he'd had too much to drink and that was that; it was true, he told himself, he'd drunk an enormous amount without realising it. Again Pinkie told him, as she'd done in Basrah, that he was 'such a sunny person' and that it was always a pity to see him ~~'burying his head in theories'~~ 'hiding his light away!'

An element in her character had waned recently; she was a less extravagant person. On the surface her extravagance was much greater

than before --- he noticed that she wore tight trousers in the evening and sexy blouses like one of the 'mice', and she no longer seemed nervous of other people's opinion, she seldom had a shy and lonely expression now; but this was only a social extravagance; underneath she seemed more reserved, he could feel her deciding not to say something out of social policy. But this new outward extravagance seemed to satisfy her; her old arrogant way of speech was gone but she was happier. While he thought of this as Grove's influence on her he couldn't account for it in Grove's personality; why should her extravagance have gone?

There was a second much stiffer note from the U.K. Compound in Basrah asking again for the sum of £11.14.2, but this time it gave him a little twinge of enjoyment --- to think that he'd laid down all claims to ~~people's~~ their good opinion. He began to wake up in the morning with the feeling that he had put his body in pawn the night before, to the public; it had been on show ~~revealed~~ naked and he didn't know just how much ~~of it had been seen, and what~~ shame he had brought on himself. sometimes he woke up in the middle of the night with his heart beating fast, a sense of ~~shame and~~ regret paralysing him like physical shock; this was shame, he found, at what he thought he might have said to someone in the evening; he had a vague memory of many conversations; particularly those he had had after a few glasses of ~~something~~ liquor were lost to him in their detail, and it was here, in what he couldn't remember, that the chief source of shame and ~~uncleanness~~ self-accusing conjecture lay; or else he would remember something he actually had said, and it would dart into his mind like a frightful flame, making him sweat. It might only be a small remark ~~he'd made~~ but if it had slipped out without preparation, and particularly if there had been a silence afterwards,

a lull in the talk, he felt the encroachment of shame; next morning, or in the middle of the night, the words would appear before him like a lighted sign. ~~It might be a remark that he'd enjoyed one of the plays at Protest Hall, after which, particularly if there had been a lull in the talk, he would feel silently judged as the sort of person who approved of all the plays at Protest Hall, or else the whole of that play;~~ he would conclude from the silence that the person he'd been talking to thought him a fool, and there was no way of retrieving himself from this verdict; it was the verdict as well that he saw held above him like a red neon-sign in the dead of the night. Thus, he found he was more interested in other people's good opinion than he'd thought. / cap

One night this took a graphic form in a dream which haunted him for days. It was after a gay ~~night~~ evening. There was a silver, gleaming, grotesque object in the sky making a trail of smoke, quite far away, but in a few moments it was close overhead, vast and silver, with four engines that made singularly little noise; it floated nearer and nearer --- he was standing in the centre of a large town --- until it suddenly dived down and crashed in flames; ~~still silently, enveloping some of the shops of the road he was standing in;~~ he jumped into a dark grocery shop for shelter, pulling two others with him --- were these Pinkie and Grove? --- and there they crouched waiting for all the debris to finish falling; then they went out ~~on~~ to the road again but all they saw was a black gap in the shops and no real debris, nor flames; and the area was already cordoned off; there was no great alarm, and one of the people he was with made a joke about it; he assumed that only the pilot was killed but afterwards he learned that a hundred or so people had died; yet the street was hardly disturbed. The sight of the huge floating plane worried him all day. It appeared to him

to be a picture of total calamity which people didn't record in their faces; life went on without alarm. There was even a certain anger against the other people for having been killed.

Hester, the lover, told him that she'd met Clockwork, whose real name was Barnes, and that Clockwork knew through Hanni 'all there was to know' about him. She then recited his own life to him with artful glances. He had thrown up his job in Basrah because his wife refused to go there with him; there was 'a skeleton in his cupboard' --- he came from a working class family; he lived on his wife; he was of rather an 'hysterical' nature; he was 'drowsily good-hearted,' which was why he would probably come to nothing in his work; his life was 'ignominious'; he was in love with a girl in the Kaaba dancing company.

They were sitting by the river gazing across at Hampton Court when she recited this to him; and when she asked if it was all true he said simply, "Yes". "Including the dancing girl?" she asked. He nodded again, pouting. She only smiled. A grudging, careless attitude had grown over her.

He waited to be stunned by what she had said, but felt only a mild irritation; he even felt no resentment against Hanni. He thought of approaching Dick in the confidential manner they sometimes adopted: "I say, tell old Hanni to watch her tongue, will you? I mean, I don't mind, but ---!" And Dick would be light and clear: "Of course, I will, old chap!" But he said nothing.

Pinkie said that Hanni was appearing at 'nearly every fashionable party in London' these days; she didn't say with whom, and he didn't offer

her the information Hester ~~No 2~~ had given him, namely that Hanni and 'Clockwork' were so much in love that they were 'like children' together. But then she probably knew it and was keeping it from him on the grounds that he might disapprove.

The following evening, as if she'd heard them talking, Hanni appeared at the door downstairs in a new coat, looking remarkably radiant and calm, with an unusual stillness ~~in~~ about her; it wasn't the quietness of withdrawal but deeper; ~~she walked easily and~~ her face was cool and smooth; ~~and~~ she appeared ~~bigger and~~ more erect, ~~and even seemed to look down at him for a moment.~~ He found he had a nostalgia for her and Dick as friends and asked her where Dick was; oh, he wouldn't be coming round that evening! She told him he looked tired and must sleep more; Pinkie treated her with deference like a special guest, and he heard her closing the door downstairs against possible visitors.

When Hanni had gone Pinkie told him that Dick had 'broken down' on the subject of Joe Clockwork; Hanni had stayed away from ~~Hampton Court~~ the flat for three or four nights running, and he'd got 'absolutely desparate' ~~there'd been nowhere for him to phone; he didn't know where Joe Clockwork lived; all he knew was that they worked in the same office, but she had blocked all personal calls, and he couldn't get through.~~ She ~~H~~had never really forgiven him for the pale girl, that time when he'd come in 'reeking of ~~beer~~ Arab,' ~~and~~ above all for making an 'Exhibition' that night in front of Pinkie and ~~Granville.~~ Pip. /e.c. She was especially sensitive about her dignity as far as he, Pip, was concerned, Pinkie said.

Joe Clockwork ~~had been an~~ was an 'exciting proposition'; here was a boy, virtually, with a genuinely queer streak who needed a nurse, and she had obliged, overlooking the fact that she might fall in love with him, which

she did do, or at least she was infatuated; she told Pinkie there was something ~~extraordinarily~~ 'sad and ancient' in Clockwork which she hadn't suspected at all, and that she ~~had~~ spent hours simply gazing into his face and lying on a bed with him, doing nothing; she said the silence would 'seem to be going along', there wouldn't be the sense of ~~a nervous pause, if~~ not doing, anything, as there was with Dick; it was a 'great rest' for her. ~~She was amazed at the dignity that lay in Clockwork unseen. Then Dick had broken down, he'd stayed outside the foreign office waiting for her, and had more or less pulled her off with him.~~ Pinkie said Hanni was as tickled as a kitten that she'd 'brought Dick low' at last.

~~He and Pinkie agreed that Hanni certainly had got~~ Dick had managed to get her back to the flat, where he told her that she must promise never to sleep with another man again; he hid his face in her lap and said ~~in a broken voice~~ that he couldn't reason about it, he knew ~~he hadn't got a leg to stand on, he knew~~ it didn't fit in with the rest of his life or with what he believed ~~or what he said every day,~~ but if she touched another man he would divorce her at once; and before looking up he asked her, "Will you take that as final?" There was silence and Dick repeated the question, still not looking up, and at last Hanni said, "Yes." ~~Granville~~ Pip imagined her looking calm and proud like a goddess when she said this; and with this unearthly calm round her she had come over to see them; she and Dick were now settled together at the flat, ~~back at Hampton Court,~~ and all further meetings with Clockwork were to be ones of friendship.

~~Granville~~ He found more and more that the idea of Pinkie sleeping with Grove gave him a sharp sexual excitement; the pain was an element in the alchemy, its base metal; and he found that this surpassed his old

desire for her. It overwhelmed his relation with ~~the other Heather~~ this 'lover.' The anger threatened to rise in him now and then, he often wanted to hit ~~Pinkie~~ her but it was never more than a passing twitch in his fingers, and he always checked himself in the interests of this new grim passion. He hid the photographs he had found of her and would glance at them secretly, whenever he wished to arouse his passion; he was astonished at what desire there was in him; ~~this~~ it seemed inexhaustible; and it was less and less possible to satisfy it; Pinkie ~~began to wonder at this, too, and~~ told Hanni that he was 'Herculean'. For her as well the new quiet, oblique sex was satisfactory; ~~and~~ she told him suddenly one evening when they were on their way out to the cafe that she could happily go on with this life for ever; when she came in late these days she always took a bath, and again he thought he smelt sperm on the towel she used; that, too, was a matter of quick, painful excitement; it was a marvellous liberation from the suffocating part of sex; it was ~~now~~ free, and no loyalties, much less moral speeches, were required. Pinkie had to suppress her anger, too; n.p. she started up whenever Joy Celeste was mentioned; he watched her doing the same as himself; her eyes flared up, then her face grew set and deliberate. They even began confiding in each other about their love-making. This was momentous, and happened quite by accident. ~~He suddenly said in a genial voice, "Oh, come, why do you try and hide these things? I don't hate you know!" and~~ she began telling him about the approaches /cap the 'young man with the ear-ring' had made to her, when she had called on him. He remembered how relieved he had been that she had returned to the house ~~before ten o'clock,~~ early that evening, and how ~~that~~ she had joked with Dick about it; but now he regretted that she hadn't more to tell. As Pinkie said, "You want your bread buttered on both sides!"

Grove wasn't mentioned directly; he had the impression that this was sacred for her, and above all other pleasures; he appreciated her character in this. Their talk was an exciting preliminary to love. It freed them from the shadows of ~~the~~ their intimate past, from the aching void of belonging exclusively to each other when they shared ~~nothing and weren't real kin;~~ so little; it ~~accepted the emptiness between them; they~~ established ~~each other again~~ them as separate people with interesting lives of their own; it filled the lack of a rock of trust; ~~underneath~~ the swirling waters ~~were received~~ thrust through, they plunged into them. They ~~slept with each other~~ made love much more. No hot feelings were involved. They kept their distance ~~from each other~~ as part of the pleasure. ~~It was not unlike Ellending's 'vestrist' activities with his wife.~~ They were like two strangers, ~~but these strangers~~ who took surprising liberties with each other. ~~That was the attraction. They were familiar and thrillingly new;~~ she began to need him sexually, ~~and to find him interesting.~~ even as a relief to straight sex with Grove. / cap

Apart from that he would spend whole afternoons listening to the Creole Shake over and over again, with a glass in his hand. ~~He went to a concert and heard the German Requiem; in the first movement during 'For all flesh is grass', he had the sensation of floating away quite beyond himself, almost into death, to the borders of nullity, rising and falling with the music as if he was being lifted up bodily and then lowered again, each time with less and less body so that the sky came nearer and nearer, and he was almost received into it, bathed in melodies and sunk down and limp; he was crushed, and stumbled back home afterwards; there now seemed two parts of himself -- the music wasn't absorbed into his life, it only made him float outwards; it didn't enter his flesh, changing him, as it always had before; it couldn't get through to his numbed and paralysed~~

~~expedience or reputation, not to consult other men before the truth. That is, to live with God in mind.~~

~~He wrote it all out later in the form of a letter to Nevinson, of all people; he wondered if he was going cuckoo but went on with it. It lay on his desk for some time and he even put it in an envelope; then he threw it away. He was surprised how much he thought about Nevinson these days, though he hadn't met him. He was aware of Nevinson watching over his life and calling to him like a father. And apparently he thought this letter would vindicate his conduct in some way.~~

There was a reply from Mohammed, quite cheerful, asking when he was coming back and assuming that his leave had been prolonged once again; as for ~~Granville's~~ Pip's 'Help me!' letter it seemed to have passed unnoticed, for which he wasn't sorry. ~~He puzzled how this could have been, and concluded that Mohammed had taken it as 'so help me God!' something like his own tired 'Allah, wa'allah!'~~ There was clearly no news at the Basrah office about his having offered his resignation. That was odd.

Joyce the pale girl gave a party at her basement-flat to which everyone they knew was invited, except for the 'weeds'; the whole Kaaba dancing company was there. Dick had evidently told Joyce about her fascinating pallor; she was dressed in next to nothing --- bare arms, bare shoulders, ~~and~~ her skirt ~~was~~ so tight she could hardly walk. It was like old times: Dick and Hanni were there, dancing separately; Pinkie came, though she went off early; there was the old excited sense, between the four of them, of laying themselves bare to each other as they didn't otherwise, in a quick chat, a shared glance across the room while other people whirled round them. ~~and without saying a word, only winking as they passed dancing, or stopping at the bar to chat for a moment.~~ Larry Vice got drunk and wedged himself in between the wall and a divan bed, and fell

asleep. P'p and the pale girl discovered a sympathy for each other, due partly to their common friendship with Dick, and ~~they~~ danced ~~together~~ several times in succession; Dick was applying himself to a girl in the Kaaba company but came over to him when he was alone for a moment and said in a low voice, smiling, "Listen, old sport, I can see the danger-signal! Do you know what I mean?" Granville shook his head and they looked into each other's eyes with the perfect openness they only had at parties; Dick went on to say ~~that P'p~~ Re ought to 'make up his mind' whether he wanted 'Joy or Joyce or who'; he didn't mind what the verdict was as long as he knew; it was only in the interests of their not getting their 'wires crossed'; he only wanted to know; and there was a look of real objective curiosity in his eyes; but P'p couldn't tell him anything, only ~~shrugged~~ his shoulders and smiled back.

As if Dick had planted a suggestion in his mind he found himself with the pale girl again, talking to her confidentially, mostly about Dick: together they watched him on the other side of the room with his dainty, smiling Moroccan girl, and laughed when he made a characteristic little gesture like taking the girl's glass to re-fill it and giving her a twinkling smile at the same time; and they watched him when he danced, his cheek pressed hard against her's. ~~An intimacy was growing up between them through Dick. Otherwise they had nothing to talk about, especially as Joyce barely spoke.~~ Dick had certainly changed her ~~in the last few weeks.~~ H.P. She was now tremulously aware of herself, and kept glancing down ~~in a slow way~~ at her ~~bare arms and her~~ bosom; and her pallor seemed even more of a veil now, soft and yet impenetrable; ~~than before,~~ also Dick had given her a style of intimate speech; she asked Granville all sorts of ~~quiet~~ questions; ~~her composure was extraordinary;~~ would he ever go back

to the Middle East? what were the women like out there? did he think she was too tall for a woman? She gazed before her all the time, still and reflective; this was the girl who not long ago had sat over love-magazines in the music-room for two or three hours of an evening, saying not a word. He wondered at Dick's patience.

Pinkie came ~~to the party~~ in a flowing, black gown; ~~rather like the one Elizabeth had lent her at Meedham~~; this was to hide her stomach mostly; she had a few drinks and danced twice with Dick, then left again, saying she felt tired.

Larry Vice woke up for a moment, surprised to find himself in such a tight position, and said, blinking up at ~~the other guests~~ everybody, "How do you people manage to sleep standing up?", and then went off again.

~~Granville~~ Pip heard the hair-girl on the other side of the room, in the half-darkness, cry, "Oh, no, you don't, not with my dad around!", ~~and "Anybody seen Larry? Vicey, Vicey!"~~ then she made her clapping laugh.

He noticed Alice the snake-girl sitting in a corner, quiet as always, like a dark, round-cheeked boy with her thick legs pushed ~~out~~ in front of her; ~~just as he'd seen her first at the Marquis, with Dick~~, she smiled a charming good-evening to him ~~while he was talking to Joyce~~, and later he went over and sat at her side on the floor, enjoying the casual intimacy that joined him to ~~everyone~~ virtual strangers. She glanced ~~down~~ sideways at him and said, "Your wife's having a good time, I see." He nodded, looking round involuntarily for Pinkie, but she'd gone; then he remembered that for Alice the snake-girl Hanni was his wife. At that moment Hanni was dancing quite near them, laughing and kicking up her legs, with one of the men from the Kaaba company.

He was about to explain that she wasn't his wife at all when

Alice said, "You wouldn't think he was in trouble to look at him, would you?"

"Who?" Granville asked.

She nodded towards Dick, who was dancing on the other side of the room.

"What trouble do you mean?" he asked.

"Wife-trouble!"

There was a pause and Granville asked, "Does he have wife-trouble?"

"Well, you ought to know," she murmured, turning to him with a smile, reminding him of Kit for a moment with her tom-boyish manner, "you're his best friend, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said; and he repeated his question, saying he hadn't heard of any 'wife-trouble'; to which she replied, "Oh, well, perhaps I'd better keep my trap shut!"

But later she told him; ~~after he'd said that he felt he ought to know as a friend~~: Dick's wife was sleeping with the Kaaba company's publicity man; Granville said quickly, "Grove?", a distant form of the old panic starting in him, a shadow; "Yes," she said.

"Who is?" he asked, not choosing his words properly.

"What do you mean?" she said, again looking sideways at him.

"Who's sleeping with Grove?"

"Dick's wife!"

"Hanni?"

"Yes."

"Good Lord!" He had the impulse to run home and tell Pinkie; it was nearly amusing. But he continued to give her his attention, quite still, where he was sitting.

"Yes," she went on, "you wouldn't think it from the way he comes to the Marquis and talks to Grove as easy as anything, would you?"

Again, "Who?"

"Dick!"

She then told him that Dick had thrown up his job 'in Basrah' to see her 'through the baby'. Granville's excitement turned into the familiar sexual one, pained and fascinated, as he recognised that for 'Dick's wife' he had to read Pinkie! He was surprised how little this girl knew Dick; and he had assumed some intimacy between them; ~~from the beginning,~~ he asked her, what had Dick told her about his life? Nothing, really: they just 'sat together'. Dick had tried to kiss her once but she had turned Sidney the snake on to him, and he had thought it was poisonous and jumped on a table with a green expression and said to her, "Now look here, sweet, cobras can be dangerous --- we've got laws in this country", drawing his trousers up like a skirt. After that they became friends, and she agreed to 'sit with him' if he wanted to. She'd got 'all the dope' about him from the head of the dancing troupe who lived in the same house as Grove and heard him and Dick's wife 'roaring and slapping' each other upstairs in one of the bedrooms.

Alice began laughing: "It's a scream the way he talks about them two! He says, Boy, sometimes I want to go upstairs and join in, it sounds so good! He says you hear smacks and kisses and yells and then the bed gives a clang like the gong in a boxing match! When things start moving upstairs round about half-past six in the evening he says to his wife, 'Well, here we go, luscious, seconds out of the ring!' and then it starts! Sometimes there's a knockout in the first round, he says, and sometimes they go on for three hours and one of them ~~or more and~~ wins on points. Friday

nights are the nights, he says! Sometimes you hear 'em shout, "You're driving me mad!" or 'It's terrific!" which makes this dancer and his wife just double up!"

At the end of this Alice gazed before her, stretching her legs out and yawning, and added, "To cap it all the baby she's going to have is Grove's!"

This stunned him so much that at first he only smiled and nodded, refusing to absorb the words; he got her to repeat it, and she said the same words again. She added, "I don't like that sort of behaviour. Somebody ought to tell him. Look at him dancing over there!"

And at that moment Dick gazed across the room at Hanni while he was dancing and gave her a pleasant little smile, his cheek still close to the Moroccan girl's. ~~Granville glanced at Alice sideways; she was so like a young boy, without a trace of wickedness.~~ His teeth began to chatter, and he took another drink swiftly; he was in a delirious state not unlike joy. The pale girl passed at that moment and smiled down at him.

Alice also said that Grove called ~~was always 'on' to Dick's wife about living in~~ the house in Chaworth Road ~~he said it was~~ the 'filthiest sink' in London, and ~~that he~~ feared it was slowly corrupting ~~her; she needed all the sympathy other people could manage because she was suffering a 'real crucifixion'.~~ 'Hanni' (meaning Pinkie).

~~So that was why she'd talked about the crucifixion once, in the kitchen. And this made him, Granville, her high priest; he was the mob that stoned and spat at her.~~

He could hardly control the chattering of his teeth and ~~Alice~~ she asked him if he was cold. She went on to say, about 'Dick', that you wouldn't think he was a 'violent' sort of person to look at him, but

according to Grove he was: he kept his wife indoors forcibly and ~~He~~ quite often beat her up; worst of all, he was unable to excite her passions/o Alice said she had only realised how true this probably was when she'd seen him dancing on that table pulling his trousers up in such an unmanly way, because of a harmless snake/o

How 'Dick' managed to get his girls was difficult to imagine, she said, because his touch --- according to Grove --- was 'the kiss of death' to his own wife/o Grove had said of 'Dick' that he was a 'nice enough person' but Pinkie ('Hanni') needed somebody with more love in their hearts, who went out to people more, and could give her the 'full life' she was yearning for. And Grove had offered 'Hanni' (Pinkie) a 'money-back guarantee', as he had called it, that within a year or two she would be completely free of her 'mania' that she wasn't 'wanted'; he would 'open society' for her.

He ~~Granville~~ pulled the snake-girl to her feet and made her dance with him, which she did awkwardly, saying to him when he swung her round fast, "Hey, do you want a snake-bite, too?" He was surprised how calm he in ~~his~~ fact felt; his heart had only a moment ago had beat fast ~~before~~ but now he was cool; a great coldness began to come over him, making him shiver. People were dancing drowsily now. At the end of the tune he let her go absently, hardly aware of dropping her hand. He stood in the middle of the room for a time, absent to everything.

He strolled into the basement-area of the house, alone, as dawn came up ~~--- it was like a shadow being lifted from behind the roofs~~ Outside it was quite still, ~~everything~~ the light coming like dust, ~~that had settled~~ as if for ever, /cap ~~in this first light,~~ ~~to his surprise~~ he found Dick leaning against the /cap railings, ~~rails~~ looking up at the sky, ~~also~~ alone; Dick turned slowly as if expecting him and murmured, "Hullo, there, old sport." So that there would never be night again.

Pip
~~Granville~~ asked him at once, "Did you know Pinkie's baby wasn't mine?"

There was a pause and Dick replied quietly, "Yes, of course I did."

"Why didn't you tell me then?"

~~"Ev'liez les complications, Pip, especially in matters conjugal."~~ ~~And he added in a more confidential voice,~~ "You know you're a boob. You ought to have got out long ago, as I tried to tell you," he said. /n.p

Pip
~~Granville~~ nodded.

Dick went on, "Never mind! You know now."

~~Dick stayed with Joyce and~~ he walked home alone. The dawn was /cap/n.p. grey with heavy clouds and the first buses were starting; now and then a sleepy person walked by, his steps enclosed in the ~~great~~ hush that still lay over the streets. He took a bath, ~~when he got back,~~ so numbed in his senses that it was like slipping someone else's flesh into the water; he hardly had the strength to lift himself out, ~~and~~ yet he couldn't think of sleeping. /cap He wanted to ~~go up and~~ make himself a cup of tea but the desire died suddenly; he didn't want to see Pinkie.

In the evening Dick told him again, 'Make up your mind — is it Joyce or Makbouba?' He said ~~"I stayed the whole night, and she gave me two eggs and a lovely rasher of bacon in the morning." He repeated that Granville ought to make up his mind;~~ he could see Pip's ~~his~~ faxcination for Joyce 'growing fast' and ~~He~~ added, "You can't have your cake and eat it, you know!" To which Granville said with a limp smile, "Your cake, you mean." n.p. "Yes, but you can have it if you like," Dick said, and ~~again~~ his eyes were perfectly clear, ~~so light and~~ utterly devoid of possessiveness. ~~He then went on talking;~~ there was nothing better than sleeping with a 'new' /cap woman, Dick went on; ~~that~~ breakfast with Joyce that morning had ~~been really classical; it~~ made him think of Homer and ~~the~~ 'rosy-fingered dawns'. He said that the first

four pleasures in his life were, in the following order: sleeping with a woman for the first time; ~~although one could come a cropper there very badly sometimes);~~ sleeping with his wife; ~~Hannah, meaning by her someone of long standing;~~ walking alone in a big city at dawn; and, last, ~~and fourth,~~ friendship. ~~He then threw in the idea that if you were 'really keen' on a married woman you shouldn't consider the husband to the point of withering the roots of love.~~

Pip ~~Granville~~ was disappointed that friendship should come so low; ~~in the last;~~ but he felt close to Dick as he had never done before, perhaps because everything else was finished for him. He was happy with Dick. He felt he was fit for Dick only when he was free, like this.

He tried to go on with the same life but could no longer break his face into a smile; ~~he went with people like a ghost and~~ he gave up phoning ~~the other~~ Hester; they met a last time at ~~Hampton Court~~ Dick's flat --- and after he involuntarily drew back from her, not ~~knowing~~ realising what he was doing, ~~at all,~~ with other thoughts in his head, ~~thinking of the party at Joyce's,~~ she snapped at him, "Oh, go to hell!" He was so abstracted that at first he thought she meant the person Hell.

The money ran out altogether and he had an hour's pale, disjointed conversation with Pinkie about it; she didn't seem to be blaming him ~~for it~~ in any way; he avoided her eyes these days, and she, following suit as she usually did, avoided his ~~in the same way.~~ As for the child, silence had been so customary between them in the old days that it was easy to revive. But their new form of sex persisted: it even flourished on the increased reserve between them. For the first time their love was safely beyond affection and words of endearment. It gave him a burning desire even stronger than before; he was now taking not only a stranger but an

M.P.

enemy.

They decided to ask Maimbury for a loan; he was to do the asking, by phone; there was Maimbury's cool voice at the other end asking "Who? Who did you say it was?" He asked for twenty-five pounds and Maimbury agreed without hesitation, as cool as before. He went to collect it the same afternoon and was ushered into the office by one of the clerks; for some seconds Maimbury didn't look up but continued writing something on the side of a typewritten sheet in a slow hand, in the silence of the room; then he looked up, his eyes calm and soft, and murmured, quietly, "Well, hullo, Philip." And he stood up to shake hands; the twenty-five pounds were brought in and counted ~~and when it was done Maimbury's manner became more confidential; "How's Hester?" he asked; "She's very well" "Good"~~ On the way back he passed T.I.M. and saw a messenger hasten inside; the entrance was bleak and inanimately hostile to him, ~~hollow and dark~~, and he crossed over the road to avoid being recognised by the commissionarie. He was still wearing his tropical jacket; it had turned a bit yellow, perhaps from constant smoky atmospheres, and the weather was decidedly chilly for it. These days he ate little and sat staring before him. Sometimes he told himself that a mistake had been made --- how could people know for sure who the father was? But he'd finished with that sort of reasoning.

He slept with Joyce, more or less because he had been asked not to in such an inviting way. Sharing the ~~same~~ fascinating pale secret with Dick was a pleasure, although, still, his own flesh was separate from him, and her softness was lost on him really. Once he and Dick met on her doorstep and burst out laughing; they didn't ring the bell but went off to a pub and then stayed together all evening to make sure that the other

didn't go back to her. It made their sense of intimacy even stronger. Joyce told them both --- separately --- that she'd never heard two men talk so admiringly of each other; she gave the impression that they were two aspects of the same being for her, and a perfect complement to each other. There wasn't a trace of disloyalty in her eyes when the three of them were together; he and Dick agreed that this was flattering to them; it meant they were 'sound' people.

One afternoon he made the decision to get out; it was the effect of meeting a friend of Hell's called Tim, whom Cerberus brought round to the house. He had a round face with rather staring eyes and his lips were strangely full and crimson; he was impeccably dressed, with a rolled umbrella, and spoke carefully, his vowels as rounded as his lips. ~~And~~ he began asking ~~Granville~~ Pip questions, one after the other: ~~he'd heard from Hell of his arrival some weeks ago; his name was Granville, wasn't it?~~ cap

He believed he worked in the Middle East? That must be very interesting? l.c.
Didn't one's nerves get edgy out there --- so he had heard? How long l.c.
would he be in England? Would the situation in the Middle East blow up l.c.
again, did he think? He must know a great deal about the 'Arab l.c.
psychology'?

His tone gave ~~Granville~~ Pip too much importance; since they ~~had~~ had never met ~~before~~ it sounded insinuating, with an edge of contempt. He spoke with a slow gravity. His lips, bright and moist, were set in a kind of pontifical deliberation, which also seemed on the edge of mockery; and yet when he smiled his eyes were honest and clear. His cheeks were plump; and his round lips suggested to ~~Granville~~ Pip a riotous appetite which his manner covered up; also he spoke unctiously and softly. ~~Granville~~ Pip

felt more and more distressed and was ~~also~~ convinced that in the strangest way he was causing the young man to behave like this, and that at any other time he would have looked quite different to him, and spoken quite differently/o He answered as casually as possible, careful not to give a sign that he condoned the tone of importance; he tried to throw the questions back --- did the young man live in this district? did he often come here? But they rebounded in his face, and he found himself answering the same questions himself; also he noticed that his own voice had a hollow, official sound. Tim suggested a walk, his eyebrows raised a little as if to ask for the privilege of his company --- could he spare the time? And he agreed like a hypnotised animal; they strolled through the City and the questions went on/o He felt pale and too hot, and ungainly in his stride. He tried to talk about Kurdistan and the Alpine-like flowers in the mountains there, but his words faltered and he couldn't get the hollow sound out of his voice. Some sort of strange pressure was being exercised by the young man, he felt; and he noticed Tim's rolled black umbrella again as if he hadn't seen it properly before. It was tap-tapping on the pavement; and also he had a black suit, buttoned fully at the front. What did he do for a living? He tried to find out, deviously, but couldn't form the slightest impression. Every question rebounded on him. The more he talked, the ~~more he made a fool of himself.~~ less he found out. He went on talking out of nervousness. ~~No real ideas came to his head.~~ "Turkistan's just like Scotland!" he ~~cried.~~ said. ~~His voice sounded so thin and high.~~ The air was heavy with emptiness. The emptiness ~~had~~ crept into him, covering the whole of the City as well like ~~a vast~~ an invisible blanket ~~suddenly coming down over~~ enshrouding the banks and offices and narrow streets. Tim was silent now. He ~~had~~ had pillaged Granville's soul --- and the verdict

was silence! [Granville] Pip wanted to get away. As he turned to announce that he must be off he was assailed by a dreadful sense of waste; he remembered it acutely from two years before; it was a sense of having time on his hands and no obligation or place in the world, and of being acknowledged for nothing by other people. His clothes felt drab, his body seemed to have shrunk into something like dust, on the verge of becoming pure air; he was nothing for the other man; he knew it!

"Well ---" he began; he wanted to turn tail and run off. ~~The New Studio Theatre club came up in the conversation; Tim had seen one of the plays; Granville said --- but apparently without his own voice, and without there being an idea in his head, much less a picture of what he was talking about --- that he hadn't liked that one. There was a silence. Tim then said that as 'the son of peasants ---' he paused again --- 'and not of decayed nobility' --- and here he gave Granville a long meaning look --- he liked the plays at the Studio theatre, but he understood how 'the language and some of the ideas' would be too strong for some people. Granville made a faltering reply, and Tim considered that he'd withered him.~~

At last Granville managed to get away; he almost ran back to the house, his eyes lowered from passers-by; when he got [back] Home he went straight to the bathroom and took a hot bath; [then] he changed into clean underwear and a clean shirt; the last piece of identity [had] seemed to have been wrested from him. He had no self! Therefore what did it matter where he transported it?

He resolved to get his job back, if that was possible. He phoned Dick at once and his answer was, "Good, Pip. I think that's wise. Would you like me to go along to the old cove now?" "Yes." And a meeting with Nevinson was arranged.

in fact

He found out from Hanni that Dick had saved the situation for him weeks ago. He had gone to Nevinson and told him not to take the letter of resignation too seriously --- Granville was having 'family-trouble' ~~she said he wasn't to let Dick see he knew this,~~ it was a secret, she said (but she'd let Pinkie into the secret).

~~Granville could find out nothing about the Basrah office, Dick said he wasn't sure he'd get the old job back; in fact, he thought it unlikely.~~

Nevinson was just as he imagined him: tall and rugged, with bushy eyebrows. His hair was ~~slightly~~ tussled like a boy's; ~~yellowish;~~ at first he was confidential, very much man-to-man.

"Well, I've been hearing all about you"; he smiled boyishly and went on, "As you probably know, I'm new to this outfit --- and not liking the desk-work at all!"

~~Here he smiled, and~~ Granville murmured something sympathetic.

Nevinson shifted a paper on his desk. "Well, as far as I can see you've been doing a first-class job of work out there --- first class!"

"Thank you."

~~A pause.~~

~~"It's just what we want, you see, somebody who gets out and mixes with people."~~

~~He meant by this mixing with Arab people. He said that if anything 'blew up' in the Middle East they wanted to see it didn't blow up 'under T.I.M.' as well, and that meant keeping people's sympathy, which couldn't be done by treating them like 'skivvies'; Granville had got out among people and hadn't 'parked' himself in the 'foyer of the British Embassy' waiting for the next dinner invitation like some people;~~

~~It was just what they wanted; he was very pleased, awfully pleased.~~

Another pause. The office was very quiet; its windows gave out on to a narrow courtyard, with other lighted offices on the opposite side. A persian carpet covered ~~nearly~~ the ~~whole~~ floor, and a tall lamp with tassles exactly like the one Granville had had in his own office stood behind Nevinson's chair, giving the room the same cosy and glowing look. Nevinson blinked. It was coming now. He pulled out a file.

"Now about this report of yours, we've had quite a lot of discussion about it ---" He scratched his head --- "Well, we found it a bit ~~high-flown~~ scrappy if you see what I mean! Mind you --- " He looked up, his eyebrows raised. "I think it's awfully good myself. But what we want out of these yearly reports is facts. I mean, we can't go blazing off into politics and religion, can we --- not on the office-level?" And he showed ~~Granville~~ Pip a page of his report; "Look at this", and he pointed to the words, ~~"The middle-class is the instrument of Christ."~~ 'The desert is a shadow, a divine presence!' "We can't have that, can we?"

"No, quite!" said Granville.

"I expect you know we've decided on a policy of expansion," Nevinson went on.

"No," ~~Granville~~ he replied.

"Well, what we thought we might do is to put the Basrah office in the care of Beirut for the time being, so we sent our Beirut chap over there --- he's new, awfully nice, a chap called Blair!"

"Oh!" He felt giddy for a moment but managed to smile ~~politely~~.

"It isn't very sensible geographically, of course, but it'll have to do until we get the Middle East working as one unit."

"This means he's sitting at my desk, does it?" ~~he asked bluntly.~~

Nevinson looked down and murmured, "Well, old chap, you did let the job go, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course, I realise I'm lucky enough to get a job at all. I just wanted to find out. This means somebody else is working over me, doesn't it? In the same office?"

"For the time being, yes. Your pay'll be the same, you needn't worry about that."

Granville flushed with indignation. "But I can't see why I'm being offered the job at all!"

"It's perfectly clear, old chap," Nevinson said, "we need you out there. But not as badly as all that."

Granville wondered at himself: ~~for getting indignant~~, he'd got his job back, what more did he want?

"This Blair-chap", Nevinson went on, "has been on the Middle East circuit for years with another company and we were ~~frightfully~~ lucky to get him. He's just what we need to pull the whole outfit together."

"After all," Nevinson added after a pause, "we can't risk you going off the rails again, can we?"

It was that or nothing; so he nodded. There was one change: no travel-allowance and no 'swindle-sheet'; in effect, his pay had been reduced. And he would have to ask permission to leave Basrah at any time; the old jaunts to Kirkuk and Mosul, to the 'Alp-like hills' of Kurdistan were finished.

Nevinson saw him to the door with a friendly, "Good bye, old chap." Then he added quietly, "You know, I'm very sorry about this. If you'd come to me a couple of months ago and asked for the Beirut office we'd have given it to you like a shot. But then this happened!" And his

last words were, "I don't suppose you've had a very pleasant time but if you pull your weight things'll be all right."

He went straight from the office to a travel-bureau and booked a passage from Naples to Beirut; ~~he wouldn't stop at Genoa this time; he needed to be alone, and~~ he needed a sea voyage to bring his health round.

How would he face Mohammed now as 'Mr. Blair's assistant'? ~~The atmosphere would be gone. He'd be tied to a desk with fixed hours. Mohammed would see that he was a subordinate now; his stature would be gone. The evenings by the river wouldn't be free any more. What a fool he'd been! And he could have had the Beirut office! So much for Dick's advice!~~ In his mind he began to blame Dick for the whole course of events, telling himself that if ~~he'd been~~ Dick had given him the slightest idea that he could get the Beirut office for the asking he would never have hung on in London like that, only Dick had discouraged his initiative; but this was little comfort, and he didn't believe it. I felt

~~The question that came to his mind again and again was, What had happened to the night of the eclipse? Where was its effect? Why hadn't he felt the triumph? Why wasn't he aware of it moving in him and changing him?~~

~~He thought that perhaps it might be all right in Basrah, even now, if he could manage to keep a certain stillness. He should try to keep before him an image of himself as small and therefore as undeserving; if he did this a spark might return to him, from outside; he must go about his work without worrying what other people thought of him; for instance, he must even try to enjoy losing stature in Mohammed's eyes; if he did so he wouldn't lose stature, perhaps; nothing could hurt silence if he kept to it; only pride was the easiest thing to hurt; he must let himself fall~~

He said nothing about the interview to Pinkie. It seemed she'd forgotten he was to have it. A few days later when his boat ticket arrived she murmured vaguely, "I suppose I'll be joining you in a few months, won't I?" He nodded glumly and they said no more. Grove came over again. He was once more struck by his friendly confidence, and felt revived; the events of the last few weeks, including the question of the child, seemed unimportant. A party gathered in the music-room that evening. Grove talked most of the time, making everyone laugh. While he talked, rattling away without the slightest embarrassment, Pip asked himself, why should he leave? why not be a subordinate here, if he was to be one anyway? But his thoughts went round in a sickening way, gone almost the moment they entered his head.

He found that Grove conducted a kind of human publicity service: he brought people together and talked admiringly about nearly everyone. But he never stayed long. He brought someone to the house and then left, as if he had many more missions to fulfil. Therefore he brought warmth and left a chill, in an enigmatic combination which had to do with his strange deeper self, that was always hidden, all the more for his quick repartee and cleverly transparent boasting. Grove knew---seemed to---that he was hurting Granville's life; but he did it like someone passing on a burden which he had carried [redacted] too long; though he gave no sign of the burden in his eyes, or anywhere. He was hurt, somewhere: and he was frailly passing on the hurt, without malice, and with no real hope of getting rid of it for good.

Grove made easy capital out of winning a beautiful young wife from a sunny young husband: yet it wasn't any more than the petty capital he made all day, out of the smallest event, half joking, building up his little reputation all over again, like a laughing mole. Something made him try to build a stout little nest for himself wherever he was, as if

from his natal nest
he had been dislodged every early in life and was always trying to get back, woffing himself round with intimacy, in talk and jokes and disarming boasts and promises. He did it a thousand times a day, this nest-building. Perhaps he had no other way of surviving. It wasn't a good way to survive, building a thousand nests a day, with everybody under the sun, in a dozen houses, at a dozen café-tables: you only needed one. So Pip didn't resent capital being made out of him---there was also something nice about this fairy-tale conquest that Grove hinted at to other people. For some hidden reason he needed that story: it seemed to bring him an important mystical gain. And As Pip was learning to do without reputation he could willingly let his go cheap. Was this was what weighed Grove down, bringing a strained look into his eyes, suddenly thoughtful and tortured with regret; a burning need for reputation? Pip didn't need reputation for the kind of nest he wanted to build.

He went down to Abbott's Road to say good bye. They knew nothing about his having resigned, and he left it vague; his mother divined that something bad had happened but said nothing. She only asked quietly, "Is Pinkie going back with you?" From his panic-stricken glance she knew everything. His father was gracious as always, a little formal, gazing with narrow eyes into the garden. The table was laid with cheese and lettuce and celery, and the tea-pot stood under a cosy in the scullery as it always had in his childhood.

~~and he kept wandering off. He kissed his mother good-bye and shook hands strongly with his father, he more or less stumbled out of the house, with his mother's eyes on him.~~

His boat was to leave Naples a day later than he'd been told, so he stayed a day more in London; in the morning, when nobody else was there, the phone rang and he heard Grove's voice at the other end saying, "Pinkie? Pinkie?", ~~so~~ full of ~~joy and~~ expectation and relief. He put the phone back as quietly as he could, without answering it. He even felt the flicker of a smile on his face, as if it wasn't his own face. And the trembling never left him for a moment, it was like a permanent bodily condition.

Grove came over that evening, alone, ~~having made the arrangement to do so before he'd delayed his trip.~~ thinking that he had already left. He Grove played the piano and sang while Pinkie swept out the music-room; meanwhile ~~Granville~~ Pip sat upstairs trying to read the paper. ~~nothing bore a relation to him — the house, Pinkie's broom hitting against the wainscoting, Grove singing, the boat ticket in his pocket.~~ The piano ~~downstairs~~ stopped suddenly and he heard Grove's laughter ~~that always had the~~ with its power to raise your hopes for a moment ~~without really touching your heart.~~ Then there was Pinkie's voice, imploring him, "Oh, don't darling, not now ---! Only a little while!" Only a little while more and he'll be gone! A pale anger rose in him and he strode out on to the staircase. But he stopped. She ~~spoke~~ spoke it so imploringly! He didn't even know she could sound like that. So tender and pleading! And he had thought of her as hard! Why hadn't she pleaded with him like that? He didn't know it was in her voice to do so!

He listened again, on the landing. There was Grove: "Come on, ~~Grisly~~ Pink, let's go out!" ~~Grisly was one of her nicknames from school —~~

And she replied, patiently, as if to a child, "Yes, darling, yes!" He realised for the first time---in a clear, even blinding way---that she was in love. No power could change that. She couldn't change it, certainly. She had tried perhaps. Even, she had wanted to change it. But she couldn't. Because she was in love, in love, in love! The words kept ringing in his brain. In love! It was like bells. In love! Then why hadn't he recognised it? Oh, why? For it made her innocent! She was in love! The words rang out like joyful bells! In love! In love!

He walked further down the stairs and had the sense of losing his body so that his steps hardly made an impression on him. He felt bodiless---the stairs were nothing to him, his pain was nothing, nor his trembling! These didn't matter, didn't matter! There was a shudder of relief through his body that drained all the poisons away. She was innocent, innocent. It was like touching Christ, as if Christ was standing there on the stairs, in him for a moment, bodilessly. He had a sense of sunlight, though he was trembling like a leaf. The trembling wasn't his. She was pure! pure! The tears poured down his face but with triumph---it was like his own triumph! He had surrendered! surrendered! She wasn't bad after all, nor hard, but in love, in love! And that was everything.

He parted from her casually next day; she lay on the bed, remote from him; he asked her not to come downstairs to see him off; it would make too much of a good bye.

"Well, cheerio," he said at the door of the bedroom, and waved his hand.

"Cheerio, darling!" She waved, too, in exactly the same way as he'd done, with a little flutter of fingers; just before he turned away she blew him a kiss as she'd done on the train to Meedham, with a bright look for a moment.

~~Dick had said jokingly the evening before that he was allowed if he was going to give him a second hand off. So they'd just shaken hands wearily.~~ Hanni had promised to come over to say good bye but didn't appear. The day was dull and ~~heavy and threatening; it was also~~ sultry, quite unusual for the autumn; ~~and~~ the sweat poured out of him; on the boat across to France he caught sight of himself in a mirror and was astonished to see how haggard he looked; ~~was; with yellowish bags under his eyes;~~ his hair was lank and greasy; he shuddered when he thought of the house in Basrah, silent and closed. And he saw Pinkie in his mind, a stranger to him, ~~and~~ far away, going about her own concerns. "Only a little while!", ~~he said~~

'THE NIGHT OF THE ECLIPSE'

Incomplete m/s Ch. 17 to end

CHAPTER 17.

Then the crisis petered out. Russia proposed a peace-conference, with the first condition that Britain withdraw her troops. This was a clever move as it isolated Britain morally, by making the negotiations depend on her alone. Britain announced that troops would be withdrawn only at the request of sheikh; but he requested it a few hours later.

There was suddenly another riot in Rubath in which a policeman had his feet cut off and was dragged through the streets by a howling mob. There was a banner, in English, which read, 'Humanity, happiness, habeas corpus'. Glenning said that the mob thought habeas corpus meant 'have a corpse' and picked on a policeman.

There was to be an international conference --- certainly; then, the day after,, there was to be one --- perhaps. Anyway, the crisis was over. There was no word about Creed. A paper published a cartoon showing the sheikh in conference with army officers, but without Creed, and underneath there was the caption, 'Altogether dis-Creed-ited'. There was a melancholy stillness in the country. Glenning's 'little political anatomies', as Dick called them, had become a regular feature of kitchen-life since the crisis started. He said that America and Russia had got the world into two armed camps, in which Europe was the temporary 'no-man's-land'. And we were living in the middle of this no-man's-land, or at least on its westerly edge, which was why we had the feeling of not being quite real at times, not quite men, but 'no-men'.

England hadn't really existed since 1938. After that she was a barracks, and still was. Like France, she was embalmed by both east and west into her old, dead self --- the 'colonial power', to serve identical interests. When the no-man's-land came alive again this would disappear overnight. The break with America would come. Dick didn't agree with this. He said that English interests were completely tied-up with American: there was such an intimate 'love-death' relationship that you wouldn't ever get a split. Glenning answered that this had nothing to do with it --- there would be a break in American policies, the post-war theory of American civilisation inheriting the earth by shere moral righteousness would go out with a fizz, or a fart: and we would cease to be 'no-men'. Dick listened to him attentively, with a little smile of appreciation; it was so clearly a voice he could understand, quiet and balanced, never trying to rush him.

Everybody seemed to return to life now the crisis was over. He realised as if jolted back after a long sleep that he was due to make a report --- he would have to go to the office --- that a few days before he'd met a strange, small woman called Joy Celeste --- that his leave was being extended --- that Grove existed! It was thrilling, horrifying, dazzling in one.

Hanni was still sleeping at the house, and one evening Dick came in shortly before midnight 'prowling for sex', in Pinkie's words. He always had the same look, she said, of a boy who wanted to 'go' and couldn't hold it. He seemed to see nothing and didn't even nod hullo to Granville. Hanni was sitting in the music-room paring her toe-nails quietly when he came in, and, aware of his state, she decided to prolong

it. She hardly looked up at him to say hullo and after he'd walked round the room several times she asked Pinkie in a quiet voice, "What about some coffee?" And Pinkie, catching the intention with a smile, said at once, "Yes, I'd love some!"

They trooped up to the kitchen, Dick following in a disconsolate silence: he had a grim, held-in look on his face, and gazed at the floor a good deal, the edges of his mouth quivering ever so slightly so that the light hairs of his beard moved. His beard had been under attack recently. Linger-Longer didn't like it especially; she said it had struck as manly at first in a horrifying, 'bristly-brush' sort of way, but now it revolted her. Dick said that while she was 'ambivalent' about it he should leave it on: the effect of him clean-shaven might be worse, and in any case Hanni had never seen him clean-shaven! Pinkie said the beard made him look bogus.

"Cock!" Dick cried. "It goes perfectly with a strict black suit and a dark tie! Because it's blond and untidy! It makes people think twice about me --- they're always looking across the table to see if I'm really bogus or not --- I can feel them! And that means they're giving me their full attention, which in business is an awful lot! Whereas your clean-shaven man lays his cards on the table much too soon. A little twitch of the mouth and he's finished! Also," he added, "the beard indicates <u>possibly</u> a wild past but the black suit raps this idea soundly over the knuckles --- thus, an interesting conflict is set up in the spectator!"

His beard was more of a goatee than what he called a 'bush', he said. He couldn't stand men with bad-smelling bushes round their shops! Nobody could say his was a dark, nasty thing; it was blond and flimsy,

golden in the summer; in a word, 'Tudor'.

At last, over the coffee, Hanni was got to bed. As the bed downstairs was small they decided to sleep in one of the ramshackle attic-rooms, immediately above Pinkie and Granville.

In the middle of the night he was woken suddenly. The floor-boards creaked and bumped overhead, and the bed moved. He thought drowsily, 'They're making love', and tried to sleep again. Pinkie was always joking about how Dick was a stickler for 'new positions'; and now he seemed to be running, walking, hanging on to things, heaving at the bed, coughing, kicking at something, chuckling, jumping up and down, all in the most grotesque way. Granville glanced at the luminous alarm-clock --- three in the morning. Had they been at it all this time?

Then there was the sound of a powerful, regular beating like a drum, shaking the whole house, and he heard, when there was sudden quiet, two strange cries, first Hanni's, like a long, agonised laugh, and a few seconds later Dick's, like a man coughing in thick smoke, followed by a prolonged maon. He tried to stop his ears in the pillow against the intimacy of their sounds, but he couldn't. Pinkie still slept soundly. What would she have said? She would have joked about it, perhaps. But there was now silence, absolute, flat, and he was left alone with those intimate sounds, like a challenge to his whole self.

He told himself, with a dawning and pained awareness, that he'd heard the sound of real sex and that this wasn't what he and Pinkie had! Alone --- left with these sounds --- he couldn't joke, as he might have with Pinkie, rather tenderly, chuckling. If only she'd woken! But he was alone --- it was a strange feeling --- he was alone with someone else's intimacy which he could never talk or joke away but would have to resolve

in his own life. It was like a terrible task suddenly dropped in front of him, bonk, in the middle of the night.

He couldn't sleep all night. There was perfect silence upstairs: the natural after-sleep of sex, with all the tissues satisfied. He lay turning and sweating. Only when dawn came did he doze off into a thin, troubled sleep. Then he woke at eight o'clock, before Pinkie, worn out. He'd had nightmares and felt sick.

When the other three left the house for work he got up, having simulated sleep while Pinkie was dressing. He felt an itching perspiration all over his face and everything looked grim and bilious to him: he didn't even enjoy his precious breakfast alone in the kitchen. He was in a sompletely sunken state. But there was a pain over and above this: he was aware of being in a confused and hidden way ashamed of not having slept. How strange! It seemed that he was ashamed of having suffered during the night; there was a double sensation all the time, of the suffering itself and then the shame of it! His life had fallen into chaos for the space of a night --- that seemed to be the trouble; he hadn't slept at the publicly appointed time! His thoughts in the night had had a wildness that couldn't be contained in the clear waking hours; they couldn't be received into his life. The sensation was like wanting to vomit but being unable to; he couldn't pass the experience through him, and he couldn't get rid of it; he couldn't joke about it, as the daylight hours seemed to require, and he couldn't put it in the necessary impersonal language either, to make it a serious topic!

He remembered Basrah at night, the stars outside fantastically bright and twinkling, so that often he had leaned up on his elbows to make sure that they were stars and not silver lights someone was holding

up! It was a strange country where everyone was asleep and there were no bitter, dusty thoughts; where the earth was absorbed for once into the silence all round it, so that one could touch everything at the heart, without men's voices, in real state! He remembered lying in his room through those long, cool, silent nights when the palm-leaves moved outside, making their faint tinkle, and of being aware that the silence was teaching him something; it was the sensation of getting beyond the ordinary veil of life, to thoughts that had a prodigal violence!

But now the night flung him out; he felt joined to nothing, as if he'd been brought into life but then been abandoned naked, finding everything meaningless. Meanwhile his mind clicked and revolved in a dull, grey void, trying to find its way to a connection which would bring the rhythm and flow of life back, while his body lay inert and incongruous underneath this activity, without function, the blood sluggish and the limbs heavy. The night had broken an essential fibre in him; he was worn and pale all the way through, with the sensation that he was discarded for ever and would continue like this, among the dead, with only his mind limping on trying to perceive life through its bloodless little channels, trying to do service for the body! His feelings in the night were all crushed and herded into a frightened corner; there was no allowance for them in the life round him; there was simply nothing to be said about them, and other people's faces, even Pinkie's, seemed not to have in their tiny tines and crevices the possibility of <u>hearing</u> about such things. It was as if in the life all round him, in the streets, in the conversations they all had in the kitchen, in the buses that stopped and started regularly every day in the distance, in the newspapers, in the way people walked, in the flat shop-windows, in the way he himself had learned to

talk now, there was a kind of agreement to close the night-reality out. The lonely, dark, grim hours were only to be seen as a little abstract line in people's faces, the sign of stress! When Pinkie came home in the evening he would no doubt talk to her about the report, which he was at the moment unfit to touch, or ask her about the office; or she would tell him the latest about Dick from Hanni. But his feelings of the night - no! They wouldn't be absorbed into his flesh, into wisdom, they wouldn't even pass into his face as an extra sadness as they would have in Mohammed's; they would die out, and he would hope to forget them, so that the shame that had followed them would die, too! And then his face would carry the shame no longer; he would be fit for the world, and then later other dark and accidental feelings would rise in him, and the same would begin again! His feelings would die into the corpse of experience, one experience rejecting the last one.

How could he establish the meaning of these accidental vapours that rose under his nostrils in the dead of night, when there was no solitude, when he couldn't separate himself from Pinkie, when his body seemed not to be his own, when this fenced world outside was on the move all the time, when the streets pounded and hammered with recognition of the fenced life but not of the other which had no form of speech, when only the fenced life was present to him all the time, when it was in his own bed, when it lay in every wall of the house he wasin, when it was written in the papers he read? How could he establish the meaning <u>alone</u>? He would have to get away! He would have to suffer loneliness, perhaps in Basrah, until his true voice began to speak to him, in candour, and he could pick his way gradually through his life unravelling it from the other voices that had been dinning in his ears! When Pinkie came back

that evening he would be ready for her, hiding his concern and his nakedness of the night.

All through the day he heard the cries Dick and Hanni had made. He was stunned in his body. What quietness his own marriage had! Such a solemn act, requiring religious attentions! And Dick and Hanni abandoned themselves to pleasure. Pleasure! That was the stark comparison. What hold could he have on her, then? There was a treaty between them, but no mutual interests: that didn't make a good alliance! The cries of Dick and Hanni were like voices telling him about his life. Alone, how could he have found out what he and Pinkie were missing? Gradually a cloud had been growing round them, of their own touches and gestures, so that nothing definite could be told any more, even about the outside world!

But one the other hand only he was hoodwinked; Pinkie had taken the way out. Their love was limp and frail. What was the matter with him, not to have recognised this? Their bodies didn't exist! Once Dick had asked Pinkie, "What sort of women does Pip like?" And she'd replied with some surprise at the question, "None! He isn't like that at all!" His thoughts were clear now --- she didn't connect his body with pleasure! And he'd taken this quite for granted all these years.

He often tried to talk about 'Stratford'. He tried to break through their friendship, that marred everything and took away the mystery! Once he talked to her for nearly two hours, pacing round the room in his 'orang-utang' fashion; she only nodded at everything, agreeing listlessly and looking vague! They shouldn't go at it with their personalities, he'd said. There should be no 'you' or 'I'. They ought to follow their appetites selfishly, he said, as if they were alone, and then they'd

find something waiting for them, an extraordinary natural pleasure, as at Stratford! And she looked sick. She had the suffocating look as always when he talked too much; she put her hand up to her mouth and made as if to vomit, her eyes closed in a martyred way. He said they had to learn how to become like a 'limb' in each other's side, unconscious; and a 'sturdy confidence' would grow up between them, they would be able to tell each other 'everything', their hidden and outlandish desires, so that they were left with their bodies as things almost beyond them, lying in their own mystery! Then they would be more separate from each other, and closer.

Immediately after this talk she went on a slimming diet, and began to look pale and boyish, with a kind of martyred purity in her face.

There was a letter from the United Kingdom Compound in Basrah, about a bill.

"Dear Mr. Granville," it said, 'I have been informed by Technical Industries Management Ltd., that you are at present in the U.K. for a period of two months vacation. May I point out that there is an outstanding bill with us in your name for the sum of £11.14.2. and that in the circumstances a cheque by return post would be appreciated. Tesidents of the Compound settle accounts weekly and your bill having been outstanding over two months the Residents committee has decided Compound privileges can no longer be extended to you.' It was signed, &Yours faithfully, M. Scriven', which in his disabled state he read as 'Yours fearfully, M. Craven.'

Letters like that had an extraordinary power to arrive on the day of lowest ebb. "You little piece of iron in the English soul', he

thought. 'What makes you so proud to be inhuman?'

His teeth began to chatter with the accumulated distress; the kitchen was cold and had a bare look in the dull light; the weather was overcast and chilly again.

He'd been along to the office to draw his monthly cheque and found that his situation wasn't nearly as good as he'd thought; his cheques had been sent off to Basrah in the normal way, but his bank there had sent them back to his London account, thinking that these were his instructions. Thus, he'd been drawing from the bottom of the kitty without realising it! He was staggered when he saw how much he'd spent in the last month; for safety he deposited the price of an air ticket to Basrah with the cashier; to go on he'd have to borrow from Pinkie. However much he earned he never seemed to have any in his pocket. Pinkie was the same; they suddenly lavished it on a party or dinner out.

Pinkie returned that evening with Hanni and Dick, in a cheerful party; his sleepless night was forgotten at once. Pinkie put a question unexpectedly after dinner; would Christ be crucified if he came on earth again?

"Do you mean if he came in period costume or modern dress?" Dick asked.

"Oh, in modern dress!"

Dick said with a smile that he'd probably 'fill Albert Hall', representing as he would 'Charlie God'. Granville said he'd certainly be crucified again, though he might not be put on a cross or stoned. Hanni was against this; she agreed with Dick and added that people were different nowadays; when Granville asked what she meant by 'different' she said 'less bigotted'. Pinkie was non-committal, gazing at them all

in turn. It was a strange question coming from her, and he looked at her sideways, searching for a clue in her face, but there was none. That evening she had a light, vanishing quality in her face, as if she'd been through something purifying. In the discussion Dick talked about Christ as 'Charlie God, Junior'.

Granville said something vague, rather under his breath --- that we were all serving 'a silent meaning' in all our haphazard thoughts and actions every day. He said it almost to himself, gazing at the table. Dick looked at him strangely and seemed just about to say something facetious when he stopped, catching the seriousness in Granville's face, and asked quietly, "How do you mean?"

"Well ---!"

Before he could reply Dick leaned across the table so that his face was very close, his eyes screwed up, with their little twinkle of curiosity, and asked almost in a whisper, "Do you really believe all that caper about God, Pip? I never thought I'd know somebody intimately who did! Do you think old Charles God is up there when the show's over, sitting on the judgement seat, and all that caper?"

"No," Granville said, "I didn't mean exactly that."

"What silent meaning are you talking about, then?" He seemed genuinely to want to know --- to be <u>told</u> something.

"Well, a kind of order behind things!"

"But when do we find out what the order is?" Dick asked.

"We don't!"

"How do you know it's there, then?"

"All I mean is we can't ever know with our <u>minds</u>. You're asking for an order we can <u>talk</u> about. But this is something our minds can't

deal with. So we shall never know!"

"Well, how do you know, then? If you'll forgive the embarrassing question?"

"I know with what there is in me that's different from my mind."

"It's a feeling?"

"Yes."

This was an anti-climas for Dick; he had genuinely wanted to find out something!

"But you don't believe in judgement day?" Dick asked him.

After a pause he said unwillingly, "No!"

It buried the argument finally for Dick. And the brief discussion stung Granville to an awareness of his own insecure position: why not say he did believe in judgement day? Because he didn't! He resolved to go through his reflections on the night of the eclipse bit by bit soon, for he felt he had answered that question adequately then; but at the moment he could reflect on nothing!

Dick waited for him to go on talking but he didn't; he sat locked in silence, staring fixedly at the table. He thought he might try to unravel the matter, for himself and Dick; but when he looked up to begin Dick was fondling Hanni's hair with an intimate smile and saying, "Well, what about it?", meaning they should go home.

He went to the office and arranged for his files to be brought up. Nevinson didn't ask to see him. The secretary he was given was tall and non-committal, with bright yellow hair and a long face; she shook hands with him quickly, with a charm that came and went in a shy, intimidated way, her smile fading quickly and as quickly returning. Everything

about her was meticulous, and she walked with straight, symmetrical but easy steps, her high heels making a perfectly regular sound on the floor.

The office he'd been given was tiny, overlooking a bombed site; it had a gas-fire and panelled walls, and the dome of St. Paul's was close by, huge and grey, like a pencil drawing. He stayed there all day getting the files in order; but his work wasn't to start for a week or so, when the secretary would be free. She took down some notes for him in a business-like way, her lips tight together with concentration, pausing when he paused so that what he said seemed to have more importance than it really did. The room was dim with a tasselled light, and the desk was low, across one corner, with a rather gorgeous persian carpet. She told him that usually one of the directors used this room as his 'funk-hole'; she smiled at him pleasantly when she said this, with a sudden unexpected penetrating glance, slipping from her perfection for a moment. Later he met Glenning downstairs and learned that she was the best secretary in the place and was reserved for directors or visitors; she sometimes had to show them the sights of London, 'As a sort of top-class whore', he added. She was called among the directors 'the secret weapon' and was used to soften up 'hard clients.' Nevinson would say, "It's no good --- we'll have to use the secret weapon!"

He yearned to get down to work at once. The room had an inviting, safe, enclosed look; it lay at the end of a quiet corridor where few people passed, on the directors' floor. He would like to come there every day. He wanted to sink himself in it, lead Dick's sort of life, not go abroad any more on that endless quest. Like Dick he would arrive in the morning at the same time every day; the little office would be a haven for him, away from the raw, aching reality of home; he'd go back in

the evening quiet and renewed, seeing the house as a strange, vivid country where something fresh would be offered him, a kind of theatre that started the moment he opened the door, bright and glittering, with gaudy, soft colours, and the raw desires would return, dismaying and yet exciting him, making his heart beat, perilous nearly to the point of self-extinction, in an unexpected, grim, trembling rapture. Why didn't he accept the facts of his marriage to Pinkie, in sanity? Even now — as he stood beside the low, elegant desk with its polished top, he could face the existence of Grove better; comfortably, even! He could see them kissing; they slept together: what was wrong in that? The cosy little office saw nothing unusual about it! There were just facts, and other facts to counter them. Why didn't he consult his own pleasures as Dick did? Why not live like Mohammed, taking women as they came his way; and when nothing came his way, going to the brothel? Why was he afraid of going back to Basrah alone? The brothels were pleasant there. One could drink in them and pass an evening! He'd done it: sat in one of the small rooms with wooden floors while the girls passed to and fro along a gallery outside; in the courtyard below chickens had clucked and run all day, and men had come in noisily through the entrance-gate calling for madame. Why was he hemming his life in? Why couldn't he bring his body into the open? Dick had shown him the way, for London! There was now a chance to imitate Dick's dandyism; he thought of him as a dandy, serious and philosophical; a dandy of the night, in the glittering mystery; going out alone, shorn of everything familiar, without a wife, home, only a self that put on a new black mask for the journey! Granville could imagine him so well with a velvet mask held up on a little stick, only his mouth showing, moist, full, innocent, taking relish in itself, nearly smiling,

for the mystical journey of sex.

He remembered the solicitor Ismail Beg in Basrah, a tall, wild Kurd who always wore the most beautiful American duck-suits and a panama hat, and poured arak down his throat in the evening until he was swaying about and calling everyone except Granville, for whom he had a special, protective intimacy, a 'buffalo' or 'dog-son-of-a-dog'. Usually he and Granville went to a cabaret together where heavy Kurds and Arabs sat at tables glowering at a half-naked girl on the stage, while she revolved her hips, making her head go to and fro sideways without moving her neck. Ismail would tower above them in his superb western suit, while they laughed at him sheepishly, their robes pulled up to show their socks and suspenders. He was a clown for them but also awesome, a rich man afraid of no one. They withered and looked away under his blazing glance. He owned a number of brothels and sometimes took Granville on a 'tour of inspection' in the evening, to drink brandy or arak in one of the best tooms with the madame, while trade went on in the adjoining compartments. Madame would be called out every few minutes to settle a bill or stop a quarrel. A girl would rush in calling for the douche and permanganate of potash because a 'buffalo' had broken his french letter, while the 'buffalo' swore by Allah downstairs in the courtyard, at the top of his voice, that the rubber they used was like paper, and he hoped the '<u>bint al gawad</u>', the pimp's daughter, would make a better mother than she'd make a fuck! Huge sheikhs tumbled along the wooden gallery in the evening, their chauffeurs waiting outside in Cadillacs and Oldsmobiles. They would come in roaring from the cabarets, or quiet like children, their fat hands shining with jewels, their cloaks magnificent; they would stake whole villages over poker in the side-rooms, or buy one of the girls for a week

if they took a fancy to her. The madames were always calm and humorous; capable women past their youth. And they held Ismail Beg in esteem. They would settle him comfortably in an armchair however drunk he was, and clap their hands for a bottle of brandy, putting little bowls of nuts in front of him, and hot fried chicken-livers. He would pull the girls close to him when they came in and put his hand up their skirts to give them a pinch and make them scream; he would jump up and do a grotesque dance with his eyes closed, towering above everybody, snapping his fingers and moving his head sideways like the girls in the cabarets. He pissed over the bonnets of the cars outside while the chauffeurs --- 'dogs-sons-of-dogs' --- stared at him heavily from inside, afraid to say anything. And sometimes he made a strange yell that filled the narrow alleyways of the brothel quarter, rising and falling, like a cry that might be heard in the mountains, among the tribesmen. He boasted; he said he could pick up a handkerchief from the ground with his teeth while at full gallop on horseback, and he'd won many bets doing this in Kurdistan! He was a warrior, a prince --- hence, the name Beg --- greatly respected, feared, hated by the 'dogs-sons-of-dogs'! And an influence on the government, a friend of the king; adored by his wife; unhappy! He had one weakness, he said, and smiled, leaving Granville to think what it was. If he intended sleeping with one of the women he would go out alone and not call on Granville. He kept his wife under more or less lock and key, afraid of a 'dog-son-of-a-dog' getting into the house and making love to her. Sometimes he leaned out of his bedroom window at night and fired shots into the garden, thinking there were men below. Unlike the other women in Basrah his wife didn't wear the veil; she came from Beirut, the daughter of a merchant who spoke French, and she smarted all the time

against being cooped up in a house from morning till night. She would pour Ismail's arak into the potted plants in the sitting room when he wasn't looking, but the moment she'd done this he would turn round to her slowly with a smile full of graciousness and say, "You whore, fill my glass again!" however drunk he was. He told Granville that the only men who had seen her, apart from him, were his brother and the public prosecutor. She was obsessed by the idea that other women were pursuing him all the time; and he encouraged the idea. She even wrote Pinkie a note in French accusing her of trying to charm him; she said she had always considered Englishwomen, until now, 'above others in matters of honour'. Granville showed the note to Ismail and he laughed, slapping his hip; and then he added, giving him a roguish glance, "Is she trying to charm me?"

There was one madame who was plump, with a pale sallowness that shone in an intriguing way, like a light in her, hardly disclosed, making her eyes extraordinarily dark; she stood straighter and taller than the other girls, in an immovable way; they looked small and awkward next to her, clucking round her like hens, while she remained immovable, smiling, in her strange pallor. She was in the prime of life and, Ismail said, she was 'as good as ever', though the flush of youth had gone. Would Granville like to try her? Or would he prefer one of the girls? Which would he like? The girls were all 'bits of velvet', he said, but madame was 'a queen'. And he laughed, his eyes twinkling, as he gazed at Granville waiting for a reply. Granville said nothing, smiling also, watching the madame. And Ismail tried to tantalise him further: "Go on, isn't she magnificent? Look at her!" Granville began to ache with tantalised desire, but his will gripped him, and he poured himself another

brandy, shaking his head with a smile, for all the world as if he was tired and only wanted a little talk. And there it had ended.

He'd had occasion since his return to London to think of that incident again and again, wondering if he wouldn't be in a stronger position now if he'd performed that mystical act of self-release! He would have come back to her at night with the flush of strangeness in him. She wouldn't have liked it, perhaps, but her blood would have risen to him! As it was, that night, he'd come back to her resentful eyed; she'd already gone to bed, and gazed at him from the pillow with a frown, while he undressed. She attributed to him what he hadn't performed, and for a few days this burned in her and incensed her, and excited her. Why hadn't he done it? The desire still ached in him. It would have released her from the sin she saw herself accused of in his eyes which neither of them could name; he would have had <u>his</u> burden of sin as well! The moment had been perfect in the brothel; desire had coincided with opportunity; but if Pinkie took the lead his desire would be stunned by fear of what <u>she</u> might be doing; he realised that. He had forfeited the right to lead their unhappiness!

But he was resolved now to imitate Dick. He even had a mystical sense of Dick as the guide appointed to him. Their afternoon at the Marquis hadn't been mentioned again. The crisis had made a rift between them. He couldn't bring himself to call on the hair-girl alone, though he had her address; he was afraid of her ridiculing him; and of being ridiculous to the rest of the group, Dick included, supposing there <u>was</u> a group! Her face came to his mind again and again, indistinct, with dark hollow eyes and high cheek-bones, deathly sallow in complexion; she was gazing before her, downwards, not at him at all, the bones on her

shoulders showing, talking to herself all the time. He didn't know if she came to mind naturally or whether his will was doing it! Why did he want to call on her? Was hers the face he'd been expecting all these weeks? But that was ridiculous! She didn't even appeal to him! Only his will persisted, telling him that there was a mystical connection in his meeting with her. He tried to say something to Dick: when would they be going out again? But he always funked it. Dick was going about his life quietly, saying little. He'd taken Linger-Longer to the theatre and 'drawn a blank', Pinkie said.

Hanni had now returned to Hampton Court. She said she found it in a hell of a mess, and Dick said it had all been done the evening before, when he'd given dinner to Linger-Longer 'in a last effort'.

He tried to work on his report again. He wrote that the revolt in Rubath had been 'the birth of a middle-class', equivalent to what happened in England in 1832. He thought a definition of 'middle class' was necessary, so he wrote that this meant the class whose historical role was to destroy religion. When he read this over he thought it had too metaphysical a tone for a commercial report but he left it.

The sheikh of Rubath was now producing a White Paper on 'national reconstruction', together with the army-officers who had rebelled against him. Glenning said that Creed was behind this, too --- he got on quite well with the army officers! And the joke among the politicians now was that the riots had at least produced a 'social Creed'.

There was an unpleasant incident between him and Dick one morning, during the week-end. He was getting into a pair of trousers in the bedroom when Dick came in, looking for Hanni who'd apparently said she might be calling at the house. They nodded to each other, and Dick noticed

the long, blueish scars on his leg from the war.

"What are they?" he asked.

"Oh, haven't you seen them before?" Granville said casually. "I was wounded."

There was a pause and he sensed a stiffening on Dick's part. He looked up.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing. But, you know," Dick went on in a slightly trembling voice, "I've got no sympathy for that at all. Did you expect me to have?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, I'm rather surprised at myself! But you went out to murder people and that's what you got."

He pulled on his trousers quickly. "Yes, that's what I got." His anger was up at once, but this was the first time Dick had made a frontal attack on him, and the anger was diminished by surprise. "I didn't ask for sympathy!"

Dick was glaring at him in an unnatural way, and he felt quite frightened for a moment.

"What's bitten you?" he asked, calm again.

"Nothing. <u>You</u> attack people often enough, don't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I mean why be surprised when <u>I</u> do?" Dick said.

"I'm not! You've got the right!"

"That's what I was exerting, old sport — the <u>right</u>!" Dick's ease of manner had returned; his eyes were genial again. And he left the room with, "Well, I'd better look for the old woman."

Granville told Pinkie about this later and she said that Dick was

probably brooding over what he'd said after the Hamlet they'd seen. "After all, you're not one to pull your punches, are you, sweetheart?" she said with a quick, critical glance at him. Dick was frightfully sensitive, she added, and although he liked to give the impression of being balanced he 'brooded on hurts' for a long time without saying a word, and was full of 'the most awful doubts about himself.' Granville 'built people up too high' and then thought that only a 'God-almighty blow' would knock them down, whereas a 'tap' would do the job! He had a passing impression that this wasn't her true style of speech; the second such impression he'd had recently.

He expected to be stung by what Dick had said but instead he felt light and grateful; perhaps it was because Dick had shown his hand, and he could now see him in his heart, as a fellow-sufferer. He went out and bought a bottle of good wine, then phoned him to say it was waiting for him whenever he liked to call, as a reward for 'taking attacks so well'; to be drunk on the premises or not, as he wished! Dick's voice at the other end was quiet and gracious: "What a nice thought, Pip! Yes, please, teacher, I'll be there, Monday, and we'll go fifty-fifty!" On Monday evening he came full of smiles, and they drank the bottle together, sitting in the music-room.

Dick told him that, in view of the conversations they'd had during the crisis, he now put him down as 'a romantic supporter of <u>ancien regimes</u> everywhere.' It was a familiar theme, he said, of 'justifying poverty and distress --- other people's of course --- on picturesque grounds!' Granville wasn't unlike those 'Arabophils' Hanni sometimes came across at the foreign office --- who when they went out to the Middle East found 'dignity' in the Arabs and then hobnobbed with the dirtiest rogues among

them. Dick spoke pleasantly, gazing at him with light eyes, smiling, simply putting the propositions before him for rejection or agreement.

"Whenever there's something to say about henna-marks on Abu Kath'm's brow," he went on, "or the call-to-prayer that blares down the dirty streets, or the stink of the river at night in the summer months and all that caper, you say it! But as far as Arab schemes to change Arab life go, even elementary ones such as irrigation of the desert, or plans to introduce wide roads and hospitals, you've got nothing to say at all!"

Granville shrugged. "Well, all I can say is that I don't belong to the romantic school!"

"All right, tell me why not. You agree, first, that only talking about the stinks and the henna-marks would be romantic, don't you?"

"Yes," Granville agreed doubtfully.

"Well, then, tell me what else you think about over there! Tell me one realistic element that comes into your thinking about Arab life."

"I can't." Again he shrugged. But then he added, "In my friendship there, perhaps."

"No, I won't let you get away with it, old sport! Your friendships won't clear up the trachoma in the villages and decrease the child mortality-rate."

"Oh, I agree there."

"So you are a romantic, Pip!"

"No!"

"But why not?" Dick persisted, seeming pleased at Granville's lack of resistance but also curious.

"I don't know! I can't tell you!"

Dick laughed and took another sip of his wine. "You talk just

like me. And I thought I'd get a real explanation out of you."

"It's something I haven't made up my mind about."

"Well, that's how I like you, old sport, so stay where you are!

But this was exactly what Granville didn't intend to do.

What was it to be then, --- the 'flame' in people, which he recognised in Abu Kath'm, or decent lives? He had to say decent lives! How could he wish anything else on people? And why should the two be incompatible? But he felt they were; the plans and schemes would be at the expense of the 'flame'; and here he was back at the beginning! If the price to be paid for good lives was death in the end --- a kind of civic collapse --- what was the good of it? He couldn't resolve the matter! He realised how far he looked on the middle class as a total historical mistake; he wrote them off; he could see no need for this historical mistake, much less good! The middle-class was just a negative development in his eyes: the factories had come, people had been herded into them, smoke had filled the air, life was violated and made ugly! But how could an historical mistake have lasted two centuries? How was it possible for history suddenly to be twisted out of its path and remain distorted ever since? How could he put himself in opposition to history? Surely that was romantic? to simply turn his back? What were his ideas? What did distinguish him from a romantic? He couldn't tell himself! He didn't know what this experience was that men had needed. There lay his next real task of thought.

Hanni dropped in later and an argument developed between her and Dick. First she looked at the empty wine-bottle and, recognising a real chateau-label, murmured, "What a mean bastard you are, Dick! I thought you said we'd got to cut down on spending?" She lifted the bottle up

to the light while Dick watched her. "And you couldn't even leave me half a glass."

Dick nodded quietly. "That's right."

"He didn't know you were coming over," Granville said with a smile.

"Yes, he did. I phoned him at the office this afternoon. Not that you were very warm about it," she added, turning to Dick again.

And again he nodded, with the same expression as before.

"Well," she murmured, sitting down, but without looking in the slightest bit annoyed, "I say you're a mean bastard."

"And I say you're an interfering bitch," said Dick crisply, but also without annoyance. He then finished off his glass with a show of relish and added, "That bottle cost the best part of a couple of quid, too."

"That's what I mean!"

Then Dick turned to Granville and said, "Well, thanks again for the thought, bo'sun. I don't think anybody's invited me to a choicer drop of claret this two years."

There was silence and Hanni admitted defeat with a sudden smile. "Have I broken in on a stag-party, then?" she asked.

Granville was just about to tell her no, not at all, when Dick murmured firmly, "Yes."

"Oh, well, in that case," she said, stretching her legs and taking off the coloured scarf round her head, "I'll stay!"

Coffee was made, and she introduced another attack on Dick by saying that he was 'too bloody rational by half'; she agreed with Pip on the subject! She talked softly, choosing her sentences with the utmost care, gazing sideways at Dick without blinking, an edge of sceptical humour in her voice. She said that was why he loved 'communists and

scientists best of all the bipeds', at which Dick smiled in a distant way and winked at Granville. She added that the conversations fo these people always made an 'idiot smile' come over his face; he loved them because he believed in everything rational, "except your prick of course, and even that comes in for some quiet rational analysis at times, doesn't it?"

Here Dick laughed outright and asked, "What are you referring to there, old peach?"

But she didn't answer for the moment, only went on gazing at him levelly, with the flicker of a smile on her lips. Then she said, "I mean, you like to know when and where it's going to happen, don't you, so you can get yourself in shape?"

"Well, naturally, matron, I like to see my way ahead!"

Granville joined in the half-joking combat, and said he quite agreed, Dick was rational 'down to his fibres and bones'. Scientists and communists, he said, put forward clear propositions, which led to action of some kind; and this was why Dick liked them! Every rationalist was a practical man at heart, or tried to be. Hanni carried on and said that when Dick was with a scientist he spoke in a special way, trying to make everything he said sound like 'statistics'; and then she imitated him, showing how his beard lifted up, giving him a goatish look. The more intimate a subject was, she went on, the more impersonally he liked to talk about it. That was another of his 'school-boy affectations'. She turned to Granville and told him with a smile, "Do you know, we had a geneticist down at Hampton Court last week, and Dick kept asking him things like, "When the female organ makes a secretion on being excited, what exactly is going on, can you tell me?" He thinks he's so bloody

clever!"

Dick was enjoying himself, leaning back in his chair, his eyes on the ceiling, seeming to contemplate himself with her, as if they were flirting, using his image as a convenient subject. In her level gaze there was relish of his person, reluctant and concerned.

It was an unusual vein of talk for her, and Granville felt illuminated as to her nature, as if they'd been strangers before. The still, dignified presence with which she protected herself, always like a dark shadow, sometimes enchanting and sometimes hunched and ancient, sometimes unsubstantial like the evening light and sometimes dry and imprisoned, wasn't there for the moment. When he looked across at her he could see the desert blazing in her eyes, but closed round with darkness, so that it was like a glimpse of the boundary where light and darkness met and were one, at the primative beginning of matter.

He resolved to talk to her more often so that a real friendship would grow; the possibility was obviously there An uncomfortable wariness still prevailed between them; and this made it difficult in his relation with Dick, because there was always her shadow near by, an ambiguous no-man's-land. How marvellous it would be if all four of them could share confidences together and live in self-yielding warmth and safety, facing their own desires, so that a powerful vividness came about, from the variety of their separate feelings towards the lonely, subtle world outside, always giving them something to tell! And other people would be drawn to them; the rooms of this house were vivid even now; they <u>could</u> share everything; there need never be any problems of money; there needn't be dislikes or quarrels, because everything would be plain and stated; their natures would be simply <u>facts</u>; it would be as silly to quarrel with

these facts as it would be to quarrel with trees; they would watch the outside world together; there would be this marvellous fellowship of the flesh, in which all their raw desires would be shared and known, so that in looking at themselves it would be like looking in a strange pool, secret and mysterious, and apart from them, no longer their own possessions nursed in silence! If only they could break the silence between them!

There was real silence between them for a moment, and he found himself looking for something to say; shouldn't he express interest in what Hanni had just said about Dick's 'statistics-talk'? should he ask Dick, with a smile, why he went in for this style of talk? But as he sought round in his mind for the right interjection he began to realise that this was exactly the thing that went <u>against</u> them living openly together! What was it but a <u>doubt</u> of Hanni and Dick that he should all the time be asking himself what sentence would put them at ease, what would elicit an amusing confession or anecdote, what would call out their friendship? Surely this meant that he was in a state of tension? Why couldnIt he lean back in his own silence, letting them interpret it as they wished, so that his nature was conveyed to them in perfect truth? Let him create his own silence, and then perhaps they could reply with theirs; let them fall into a truthful silence responsive to his! For how could a question conceived out of <u>tension</u> put them at ease? Surely that was the mistake and stress of all middle-class conversation?

But the pressure of their conversation and its form would weigh on him, he would feel obliged to acknowledge it as a presence beyond all three of them which began to touch their thoughts so that the most spontaneous utterances were brought within its compass in the end, and were moulded to its formal requirements! Only Dick, as he'd often

observed before, had the gift of breaking through this into intimate self-revelation, probing and enquiring, and unfolding himself; he was used to this world, it seemed, and had learned the way to handle it early, so that the word 'candour' had come to mean this for him --- a deliberate break-through of conversational forms! It had to be done, in the name of sanity; perhaps that was how Dick remained sane, always challenging the dark powers to come to the light; the mind was there to break these powers by analysis! But the others weren't like that. Hanni's mind wasn't trained enough to make the analysis; Granville had too little experience of the conversational form; Pinkie, happiest of all, had a form in herself, natural and organic, which didn't take account of other people, she refused the analytic effort, or rather it was unnecessary to her, however much it might have excited her, as it appeared to sometimes; she gave vent to herself unguardedly, sensing in a blind way that the dark powers were an element of change and instruction in life, and had to be absorbed in the flesh, not reduced to indignity and flung out by the mind; she hid much, but never to the point of wounding herself; she followed her desires, while Granville refused to, finding himself in a permanent neutral territory as a result. Hanni was similar to him in this respect: she had neither Dick's searching mental hold nor Pinkie's flow of manner; the struggle was already giving her stature, beyond the shyness she'd always had in England; there was a mute, striking dignity growing in her; her face was beginning to wear a tragic look, determined and immutable, with a proud, long-suffering wisdom in it, like a god found in the desert, made of stone. It was partly this untouchable element that put Granville in awe of her, at a still distance.

Again he concluded that Dick had the purest middle class alchemy

in his blood, of all of them, like a new metabolism, as natural to him as breathing, and as automatic.

He heard Hanni ask Dick whether he was a communist or not, and if not why he didn't join the communist party.

And Dick considered this in silence, still gazing up, and stroking his beard.

"I'm not, no."

"Why not?" she asked him in a level, clear way.

"Because I don't like the idea of shedding blood. That's against all the rules for me!"

Here Granville was interested and spoke at once, with a bite in his voice: "But you don't mind cutting out embryos as you call them, and shedding blood like that?"

"Now, then, sea-scout," Dick murmured, smiling at him archly, "hold hard."

He was just about to answer this, opening his mouth to speak, when he saw Hanni's face become rigid, and it seemed that her self-revelatory moment had flown away; had he frightened it away? She said nothing, and looked as she'd done on innumerable occasions in the music-room --- mute and distant. Meanwhile, inwardly, he forced his interest in the theme to abate, like gripping a pounding heart relentlessly for a moment until there was no sign of life; and miraculously, when he had achieved this and was sufficiently collected for formal conversation again, the ease seemed to return to her as well, and she spoke once more. What terrible ghostly worlds had come into being!

"I wonder if he <u>is</u> all that rational," she said to Granville, then leaned over and stroked Dick's hair for a moment. "You're just a

soft sentimental lump underneath, aren't you, darling?"

"That's right, mother," Dick said in a mock-childish voice. Then he, too, leaned forward and began taking part in the conversation seriously for the first time, as if in answer to the biting remark Granville had made. He said that his 'paradox' lay in the fact that he admired rational people for their lack of squeamishness.

"And I mean by rational," he added, "the opposite of people like you, old sport." As an ideal, he said one couldn't beat communism; it planned life according to principles that had been thought out and supported by study and research, instead of the 'haphazard ways' of capitalism. On the other hand, being a paradoxical person, he was quite relieved that communism hadn't come about yet, because it would bring 'a frightful lot of earnestness and do-goodism' into life for which he was unsuited by temperament. But as an ideal, logically, he saw no holes in it. For instance, children ought to be brought up, not haphazardly as they were now, but according to an intelligent plan, which would enquire into what each child was best suited for, what training he would respond to best and what society required of him at all times.

Granville cut in with a remark that this might be unfortunate for the child --- he'd be 'in prison' before he started, in the 'prison of other people's ideas about him'! But Dick said that if the matter was properly studied the training would go according to the child's aptitudes and therefore wouldn't constitute a prison. Granville replied to this, how was it possible to know so much about a child's aptitudes, enough to make safe predictions about his desires and happiness, especially as the child could say nothing about himself? And Dick said again that it could be done if research was exhaustive enough.

There the talk ended, with a little irritation on both sides; the soothing effects of the wine were turned to spleen, and he wished that Hanni hadn't come in. Nowadays when he and Dick confronted each other they exaggerated their points of view out of irritated defiance; this gave them a wild idea of each other, and that in turn made the defiance stronger.

When Pinkie came in he told her about the conversation, while they were getting ready for bed, and she said that 'old Hanni' had probably got her ideas --- the 'rationalist' talk --- from Glenning, who liked to amuse himself by stripping Dick's character down.

"She's got a sound head on her, has old Hanni," she said, "but no mind!"

The bottle of wine for Dick had drained him; he asked Pinkie if he could borrow something from her but she replied, "I was going to ask you the same thing, old cock!" She hadn't a sou; in fact, she was overdrawn. He asked how she managed to spend so much, in view of the fact that he always footed the domestic bills, and this started an argument. He tried to broach the question of whether she and her uncle Lord Maimbury had loaned Grove anything, but he couldn't, though it supplied the indignation with which he argued.

He was always trying to pluck up courage to go and see the hair-girl; he thought perhaps he would offer Dick, the muscular-looking girl and the hair-girl dinner somewhere, a table for four, don't you know; but for that you needed coin, a base element, no doubt, but one which had a magical influence on restaurateurs, waiters and so forth. He hesitated to ask for an advance at the office. He wanted to take a bus to the Strand and look for Joy Celeste's home, but he thought of 'dad' being

there: he feared being ridiculous in the eyes of this mysterious, stooping old fellow with the tiny head.

CHAPTER 18.

He'd got into the habit of reading the morning paper over breakfast more or less column by column. It was an hypnotic activity he'd never known before; he left his books unread, and never went to the library. The newspaper was lying there when he got up, on the door-mat with some ridiculous head-line, and he ran down to get it automatically; at the breakfast table he opened it with his left hand, keeping the right for his cup of tea, which he could now pick up and replace in the saucer, after long practice, without glancing at it. He always turned to the middle pages first, where the gossip-column was. It gave him the sense of an inner circle of glittering activity from which he was cut off and which was going on all the time, spreading a glow over his small life. This circle involved more or less the same people day by day, but it wasn't 'society' in the fashionable sense; it was questionable whether that even existed. It was a kind of special gossip-column society, and even though it might be imaginary, it seemed acceptable in the breakfast-hour, in a half-dream, a little sickly and squalid, but compulsive. And also it was a relief from the dry, tyrannical hold of the other pages, where robberies, dirty civic crimes, yacht-races and political maneouvres were talked about, and the eye was drawn against its will by a few quick phases that seemed to touch the heart and then pulled quickly away again. He had the impression that the gossip-column was actually an intimate report of people's doings. It was like reading a letter someone had

written him. His mind put up a little resistance to this, but acceptance became easier with time; it went with the cosy light in the kitchen and the steaming cups of tea. And why so much effort, after all? The gossip was like meeting new people.

This gossip-world was glittering and extravagant as his wasn't; he didn't know <u>where</u> it was going on. He had no evidence that it was going on at all; but still it was a relief! It was more hopeful than reading a book because it talked not about an imaginary world or a past world but one that was going on here and now, it might be only a few hundred yards from him. Certain names always figured in the column --- Warsdale, Maine, Wynters; a star-name was Laura Lady Maine; she was a 'lavish party-goer', Glenning said one evening. These were the titled people; but having a title was only one of the certificates of entry; it wasn't essential. Nor was power. Nor was it even enough to be rich and important. There had to be something wild, a bit of extravagance, but extravagance on a sound footing. A kind of respectable wildness. The parties and balls, since they were all described in the same column, seemed to involve a group as distinct from the rest of the country as the old noble classes had been. And he felt a thrill at nearly being at the edge of the group himself, for weren't some of the names connected with Pinkie's family? Arthur Wynters, for instance, was Maimbury's son! A <u>cousin</u> of Pinkie's! The column would say, 'Viscount Maine will be back from his annual trip to New York at the end of the week. Something tells me he may shortly take a week-end at Warsdale, accompanied by his daughter. But Laura Lady Maine danced three times in a row last night with the rather dashing Hon. Wynters, who had flown in only an hour before from the Bermudas. One of the party told me afterwards, "Arthur always keeps

his appointments."'

He noticed that Pinkie turned to the column ravenously when she came home in the evening, and sometimes she and Hanni talked about the parties described as though they'd been there themselves. This surprised him because he expected her to feel boredom at a world she already knew; but apparently, she didn't know it; and she relied on the newspaper like everyone else! If anything, Hanni was less interested. Pinkie spoke without relish of her childhood at Aldercote, and made it seem that the people she'd known there, by virtue of her having known them, were dull and not in the style of these glittering personalities in the gossip-column. The inference of the column was that a kind of 'high society', mingled with 'trade' and 'art' still went on in palatial houses under brilliant chandeliers, with flunkies and attendants. The picture was silly, but it formed in his mind without him doing anything about it, in a breakfast-hour state of crassness which came each day with a dull, thudding cosiness.

Pinkie said that the 'real' aristocracy was living in rented rooms and draughty barns these days; but this didn't rob the '1911 aristocracy', as Glenning called it, of their glitter for her. Once they had met Arthur Wynters by chance in Shaftesbury Avenue and Granville noticed that she seemed to glitter and sparkle herself, in talking to him, by a strange sympathetic process. He was a pale young man with delicate, fluttering eyes, and there was a quiet assurance about him --- in the slow, undefensive way he moved and gazed before him --- which was unusual in post-war people.

Her family was also connected with the Maines, but illicitly. A General Maine had had an affair with one of her grandmothers during the

1914 war, and had been responsible for a deep hole in the divan downstairs in the music-room, which had come from a house in Carlton Terrace where the grandmother had lived for the war-years, it being so conveniently near the war office. Granville had gazed at it in wonder after she'd told him, trying to imagine the grand and fabulous actions of that world before his birth, and the magnificent bedroom with rose-coloured silk overlays, and the immense lace curtains hiding the windows, in an unsubstantial Carlton Terrace where the houses gleamed and towered like rocks of immutable sugar, and where the hum of the traffic --- or the clip-clop of hoofs --- was softened by tall trees!

Pinkie told him that in fact Maine and Nancy, as the grandmother was called had always made love in a box-room full of cobwebs, in the servants' quarters; her grandfather, she said, being a 'rather vague old boy!, always thought the pounding 'above stairs' was a Zeppelin raid! One night the bombardment was so loud that he decided to go up on the roof and 'have a look', and he came across Main in one of the upstairs rooms, in his Blues, though he was supposed to be fighting on the western front; "What's it like up there, Maine, old boy?" grandfather asked, and Maine replied at once, "Much too hot for you, sir! Better stay downstairs!"; and they both went down to the cellar for a drink. Maine said he'd 'dropped in to have a look at the raid on the roof', as the war office roof was 'crowded', and her grandfather weemed quite satisfied. The raids had gone on long after the Armistice, which her grandfather had thought was 'just like the Germans'.

When Pinkiettold these stories the men in them were nearly always vague and bewildered, so that one wondered how public life had ever been carried on at one time. But this vagueness helped to cast a legendary

warmth over them as well. Nearly every article of furniture they'd got from Aldercote had a story attached to it. The divan with the hole helped to give the music-room its glow, making it seem watched over by the past, and also as if it were continuing the past now in its glowing colours; the room had an extra dignity and presence. It made him think of heavy curtains, and love-letters written in a large, generous, untidy hand; so different from the careful, educated little scrawl he had taught himself. But it was more than a thought; it was almost a memory, seeming to lie in the room. Much was due to the curtains in the bedroom, too, with their sad monkey. And in the book-shelf there was a collection of Maine's letters and memoirs, written in a halting and oddly meek way, with much more tender feeling and doubt, Granville thought, than the letters he himself ever wrote or received! Something had gone out of us; we couldn't weep any more like those men; yet we thought of them as blustering and hard --- military men who rode rough-shod over their women and servants, and had sent battalions to their slaughter! Yet they had this peculiar meek dignity. He came across a note one day, slipped into the Memoirs, yellow and faded, one corner inexplicably burned, from Maine to Nancy Grysham, from General Headquarters in France, dated November 18th, 1915: 'My own darling Nanky,' it said, 'dined at the chateau last night, quietly toasted your health at the very moment, would believe it, when my host referred to Nancy, the town, in French! Rushing this off to catch the bag. Big push starting soon, your own Ted. P.S. Please tell Mamma to send chocolate biscuits!!!' Maine always announced a push some time before it happened, to give German spies, Pinkie said, 'a sportsman-like hint'. Sometimes he even gave the exact day and hour. "At dawn the day after tomorrow,' he would write, 'the big show starts'.

The past gazed on him from that letter as it gazed on the music-room. He felt he had to join up with this past, by his development; he didn't know quite how. But he couldn't forfeit what these men had had. If he'd been a Grysham it would have been easy; the gruff tone of the Grysham males would be in his voice now, and their glaring, impersonal gaze would be somewhere in his eyes; he might be like Nigel, who was more on the classical or what Pinkie called the 'gilt' side of the family. He wouldn't have been just one single person sitting in a kitchen, trying to make out where his personality lay and what the world was made of! The past would have been in his flesh: people would have said, 'That's just how his grandfather looked!' Life wouldn't be just here and now! Nor would his own life stick out like a sore thumb; he'd be one of the shadows of the house, that came and went, among the other shadows of the past that had come and gone in their time. The glow would be that of the past and future as one presence, absorbing everything!

Sometimes he felt he was in a mystical association with these men, through Pinkie. There was a scrap of a letter he'd seen from one of her uncles, Clive, who'd been killed as a boy at Ypres in a dawn-attack: 'Dear Mums, my boots are cracking again, and could you send some notepaper, also, dearest darling, I lost the precious lanyard.' Like a tiny city! With such a yielding innocence! No brittle mind-work going on! Only this golden, unquestioning belief! They'd all had such delicate voices compared with ours, so rich and full of heart, so rambling and soft. Everything had been spoken without caution or fear, then. There'd been such openness. But we were hemmed in all the time; our feelings bubbled over and simmered and made endless distortions.

People had been the be-all and end-all of life then --- thrilling,

curious, like stars, the outer spaces, speed, death! Rooms had been full of their touch and sound, the exciting rustle of clothes. And whenever he was with one of Pinkie's relatives he felt a tremendous inner relief, at the sensation of counting again in the scale of life for himself alone, in his flesh, in the way he moved and talked. The room, the sky outside, the touch of his clothes, the sight of other people, the sound of voices were different. There was no frandness in life beyond the grandness of people; they contained the glow of life! So their voices had a richer sound, and when they moved or smiled it always had a fabulous quality, yet quite natural, much more natural than ourselves! Their eyes lit up at other people, overcome by fabulous qualities, by endless achievements and infinite spaces!

He was astonished, in his naive modern self, that no schooling had gone into making these former people fabulous; there had been no ideas to support them. They had actually grown up with this glow of flesh. They had governed their households, and their country, with it. Nancy had written her letters to the General in one rush, with no full stops or commas, like the common people.

The gossip-column helped him believe what he knew was untrue, that their world was still intact. Of course, after breakfast there was a slow, lurking disgust. It was numbed state, like being condemned only to watch life. There he sat in the kitchen, and his whole self, even his flesh as he leaned on the edge of the table, cupping his hand under his chin, was put out of use. For the effect of reading about a falsely glittering world was to take away the real glitter of the kitchen for him. For two years he hadn't had quite this feeling, which he now accepted every morning as what it was to be alive! In those two years he'd

hardly read a newspaper. He felt, now, like something small in a fetid and unseen hole, watching an unreal tower that was the world. His independence was tainted. And the paper always made it seem that the world was going along on perfectly organised and sound lines like a story being unfolded day by day which however had no real plot, no meaning and no interest.

Under its influence the intimate side of his life seemed to disappear and he was no more involved in himself than a stranger would be. Indeed, he saw himself as a stranger --- bushy eyebrows --- tiny white creases round his eyes from the Basrah sun ---! Marked, found out! A clerk, a little clerk ---! It made him giddy and sick. All the hours with Mohammed by the river were an illusion, all the endless blue depths of the sky were an illusion, and the desert, and every spell he'd fallen under --- nothing counted by this dreary, day-by-day tale of a world where for a thing to really happen and be really serious it had to stink of money or importance or crime or a rotten glitter or whatever would draw a crowd; but nothing that would draw one single creature, with a message to him alone, addressed to his stature alone.

He had a panic-stricken sense, which he remembered from two years before, of being stranded for ever in England, a dumb registered functionary in a world where the spell had gone out and nothing was allowed to glow --- the horror of never being able to leave the country again, of being directed in his movements for the rest of his life according to his type and function, for after all weren't there millions of people like himself, who was <u>he</u> to have the desert and know Mohammed and stare into the blinding spaces, who was <u>he</u>, who was <u>he</u>? The endless English cry that had smashed and wrecked everything until it had finally

smashed and wrecked the country itself --- who was he, who was he, who is this fellow, who are you exactly? I am I --- I --- I and I stretch to the ends of the earth as endless as the spaces and no man shall take it from me, no man shall touch me with your who-is-he cancer!

But he didn't feel the power, or the right, to stop taking the paper. Pinkie said the style appealed to her, it didn't 'put on airs', it was 'racy and bitchy', and it 'gave the fashions'. Sometimes he flung it on the floor, and watched it lying there inertly, with its endless task of deifying public life like a musical box that sang the same thing over and over again, 'Look at the crowd, Look at the crowd!' A crowd, however, did excite fellow-interest, and sooner or later he bent down, his eye caught by one of the headlines, and began reading before he was really conscious of it. Always when he put it down again and leaned back it was like descending from a high, floating voyage where only the shadows of faces had been seen; and this withered the room for him; he was no longer quite there; the plates on the dresser didn't remind him so vividly of the old London and the sound of carriages rumbling past; the shaft of sunlight on the table was less lively; it was only a dusty, yellow patch; he wasn't present to his own life; the world was starkly physical, and he watched it in dumb relation, with the newspaper as his only passport to its inner reality; but then, once attained, this inner reality was only dust and shadows.

Glenning told them one evening that he'd started as a journalist. He said it was the same work as publicity --- it was 'caption-writing'. When he thought of all the people he'd worked with he felt sick at the thought of their influence on people's minds, except that by now he knew they had none, really. He said he'd fallen into 'the racket' with the

brightest of intentions and had meant to get out of it --- to start his real life --- as a matter of fact, to study music --- as soon as he'd made a bit of money. "Then," he said, "my guts slackened, after about twenty years"; and no he got a melancholy pleasure from 'sitting in the ruins of self'. He never went to a concert; he had no records; he felt music would hurt him. He'd studied nearly up to the Mus Bach but had run off to Greece, after a girl or something; he couldn't remember; anyway, he'd never gone back to college. He'd been brought up in the country and was the son of a country-parson. He had meant to become a priest at one time. "Or am I making that up?" he asked with a smile. "I can't be certain."

After he'd heard this Granville bubbled over to convey how much he, too, derived from music. He tried to talk --- perhaps he could really talk to Glenning, from his heart, instead of listening to his sad little witticisms with a yes and a no all the time! --- but all he found in himself was the bare words, all useless without a warm moral drive behind them. He wished he could talk with an easy flow about himself as Glenning did! But all his processes of speech were gummed up. He couldn't sit back and reflect about his own life. Also he realised that he wanted more to persuade Glenning that he had intelligent ideas than to convey the ideas themselves. As if doubt was cast on him every moment of the day?

Only with Pinkie did he talk endlessly, walking round the room flinging his arms out --- he laid himself bare to the one person it suffocated most.

The following Saturday the weather changed and it was warm again,

with hardly a breeze; he was aware of it the moment he woke up because of a fluffy, indefinable smell of leaves, mixed with that of the hot tarmac below; the light streamed in from between the curtains.

Pinkie was still asleep, turned away from him, and he began to feel sleepy again, too. There was a delightful silence; the traffic in the distance only made a light, comfortable swishing noise, as if they were near the sea and a holiday was beginning. He turned on his side again, towards her, closing his eyes, and just at this moment she stirred as well. She was hardly awake. His cheek touched hers slightly and he was sleepily aware of her face being turned square in his direction, as if to ask him a question. With a sleepy tenderness he drew close to her and for a moment their lips touched. Then he almost fell asleep, his mouth open.

But the drowsy mood of tenderness returned, and he put his face close to hers again. She hadn't moved and still seemed to be questioning him silently, her breathing steady and deep. Then she made a startled movement, and everything changed: he felt her eyes open, so that her lashes brushed quickly against his brow. She seemed to stare into the dimness of the room, trying to recollect herself, stiff and bewildered. Their lips were still almost touching, and he dared not move, wondering what was about to happen. Suddenly she pushed away from him. It was as if she'd just discovered who it was, so close to her! Only in sleep had she fallen close to him and now she drew back in a panic-stricken way. She held herself stiffly at the edge of the bed, gradually waking up, her breathing quicker. There was silence. He waited, hardly daring to breathe. Perhaps she'd had a nightmare. He made the slightest involuntary movement towards her and the moment she noticed it her body

quickened again, with the same panic-stricken movement as before, and this time she leaped out of bed. His heart began beating fast while he was wondering what she would do. She'd drawn back as if his sleeping presence was nauseous to her, that of a stranger! And she seemed to assume he was still asleep; he was aware of her as watching him for a moment, with this impersonal horror, as if he were inert! He made pretend he was still asleep, breathing deeply, and then he heard her start dressing, always with the same quick, panic-stricken movement, hurrying to pull on her things.

He heard her high-heeled shoes knock together. What was she doing? He was stiff with horror, and he tried to stop his limbs trembling in case she realised he'd been awake all the time. She slipped her shoes on. How strange! She didn't usually dress for breakfast, but put on an old dressing-gown. She went towards the door. She couldn't be going out, not at this hour! Without breadkfast? It had never happened before! She wanted to do some early shopping, perhaps; she would go upstairs and get the bag! She closed the bedroom-door very carefully, pausing outside so that he could hear her breathing for a moment, as if between pursed lips; she held the door for a moment so that it wouldn't click, as he himself did so often; it was quite unusual for her to do such a thing; hitherto she'd never seemed aware of the door clicking! The moment it was closed he leaned up, his whole body trembling and his heart making a great regular pounding motion in his chest; and he listened with all his strength, keeping his mouth open, so as not to hear even his own breathing. She went to the lavatory and he heard the chain being pulled. The rush of water made it impossible for him to hear where she went from there. Was it upstairs? He could

hear nothing. Some time passed. Then he heard the door downstairs close. She'd gone out! Out! He almost collapsed back onto the bed. He heard the sharp sound of her high-heeled shoes on the pavement below, going, he thought, towards the Commercial Road.

She was going out shopping! But she'd never done it before breakfast, ever; she wasn't interested in shopping! And this didn't account for her horror; but then his eyes hadn't been open and he couldn't be sure of this horror!

She didn't come back all morning. He waited in bed for another hour, quite still, but there wasn't a sound in the house. He sat over breakfast for a long time, until nearly noon, trembling all the time. But then he felt indifferent all of a sudden, as if his nerves had worn themselves out, and began sweeping the music-room, and tidying his records. He made lunch and went for a walk. She still hadn't returned when he got back, and his trembling, which was like being cold all the way through, started again. He made himself some tea and when his lips touched the cup he heard the door open downstairs; it was followed by the sound of her heels on the stairs, slower than before. She'd done some shopping. She was wearing her beret, which gave her a girlish look; her lips were small and moist, her eyes light and transparent, without a definite look in them. Nothing was said about her having gone. She talked naturally. He was astonished at her composure! She said what a good boy he was to have cleaned up the music-room, and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Also she'd bought in some cakes, and he made another pot of tea; there was warm sunshine outside, and all the windows were open; it was like being in the country, having tea on the lawn; tea-time passed so naturally, and his nerves were calm! The evening drew on and no one phoned. She began

to look preoccupied, though only with the shadow of a thought; she sat by the hearth looking across at the window vaguely, her blue eyes lost and flickering.

At about ten Dick phoned him up and asked him in a quiet voice if he could join them --- he was with the hair-girl and 'Joyce', whom for the moment Granville confused with the muscular-looking girl --- for a drink at the Marquis, downstairs, where one could also eat if one wanted to. There was a pause and Dick almost whispered, "Is Pinkie there?" Granville replied, "Yes," to which Dick said, "Well, what about it, then?" There was intimate conspiracy in his voice which at once made Granville feel sorry for Pinkie, who was only sitting in the next room, within earshop; but he told Dick "Yes!" and put the phone down without waiting for a reply. He walked next door casually and said he was going out for a drink with Dick and would probably be back by midnight; she surprised him by looking up in a glum way, with her lonely pout, and asking him what he expected <u>her</u> to do in the meantime! He was just about to lose his temper and shout, 'What the hell was <u>I</u> doing when <u>you</u> were out?', but he was too tired and limp in nerve, and simply shrugged. At the same time he was frightened that she'd retaliate by going out again, and he said quickly, "Surely you can spend a bit of time alone, can't you? I don't often see Dick alone!" She seemed satisfied and he was about to go when she said with her lips pursed, staring at the floor, "What's he got against me, then? Doesn't he like my company or something?" He replied, "I don't think he knew you were here!" She pushed out her legs and leaned further back in her chair: "All right, then, you old sod, go and have your stag-party! Tell him from me he's an unfriendly bastard!" She was now in goodhhumour and he said as he went, "I'll tell him!"

It wasn't yet dark, but downcast and still very warm; there was an exciting closeness in the air; but he felt immune to it, still trembling a little in the aftermath of the day. People were just coming home and the buses were full. A bus drew to a stop and some tired-looking people got out. Then it moved off again, and a woman walked away with steps so regular, on high-heeled shoes, that they might have been fixed by instruments; her head was bowed slightly as she walked, and she glanced about quickly, her eyes never staying on an object for more than a moment, as if newly intimidated each time. And other people had a similarly humbled manner; they fixed their eyes on the pavement, or hurried along; but above all they seemed to be trying to strip their faces of expression, as if to offer blank conduct-sheets to the world and avoid all verdicts; he did it himself; the habit had died a little in the last two years; but he remembered walking along this very street and trying to compose his face naturally as if for a photograph.

Dick and the others were sitting downstairs in the Marquis; the place was quite crowded. There was only a piano playing now, under a spotlight, and a few people were dancing, respectable-looking couples, while the others sat at the tables. Joyce, the girl with the extraordinary pallor, had just finished at the bar and had come down to eat before going home; the hair-girl sat with her chin cupped in her hands saying little. She hardly greeted him. He asked himself whether she had really been the 'image' in his mind all this time, infatuating him, but he couldn't tell. He could only think about Pinkie; it was a touch of irony that Dick should have chosen just this day to invite him. Pinkie's eyes as she'd come into the kitchen, with her beret on, remained in his mind. Dick was subdued as well. Little was said between any of them; they gazed at

the other guests in a desultory fashion. Granville could pay for nothing, which was another miscalculation on the part of providence; he only had a few shillings in his pocket. But yet, for all his trembling and his concern to get back to Pinkie --- God only knew what for!

The evening was exciting; it was exciting to suffer in this way; the inner trembling was like an exciting undertone. And it gave him an attitude of unconcern towards the hair-girl which she seemed to prefer to his former one of flushed participation. He leaned back in his chair coolly, and she leaned towards him, sharing the silence. They drank arak again, and she said she had to be home about midnight to see 'dad'. He was suddenly facetious and asked with a laugh how 'dad' was; she turned to him slowly with her grave, sallow, bony face, her black hair pulled tight round her brow so that her eyes were wide and narrow, and said in a harsh way, "All right, big-prick, that's enough about dad!" He felt stung, but as she at once began talking about something else to the pale girl, and as Dick looked quite unconcerned, running his hand through his beard and gazing across at the pianist, he was soon at his ease again. The hair-girl even turned to him again as she was leaving and said she thought all people who travelled were 'interesting', and that they must 'get together' again some time and be real friends. Again the image of Pinkie sprang to his mind and he hardly smiled at her in reply, which again stood him in good stead with her if the quick interested glance she flashed at him was anything to go by; he simply held out his hand, neither formally nor shyly, and nodded good bye! The pale girl stayed on a little longer, then she went as well. She hardly spoke at all, only sat there in an easy way, limply, her stomach bulging softly under her jumper while she gazed before her; her hand dangled down from the

chair-arm, and nothing that happened appeared to have an impact on her; her eyes didn't change, but neither were they fixed; they stayed in a soft, reflective unconcern, which seemed to have infected Dick as well; he had the impression that nothing could penetrate her pallor, which seemed actually inside her skin, its substance, not a colour only; it was like a wonderful veil that had been put over her and yet was absorbed into her, no longer substantial. Dick told him afterwards that she was driving him mad but that he was 'inching' her steadily towards the bed. Granville told him about his impression of her pallor, and he said it was exactly right --- there was something immovable but marvellously soft all round her, and he added that the idea of seeing her naked made him shudder all over; he wondered if he'd be able to bear it, having got nervous about the idea so often; he'd never felt like that about a woman before! She was soft to the touch as well, he said; he'd never felt anyone with such a soft body. Hanni was like a 'skiffle-board' next to her. He also told Granville, for the second time, that the hair-girl's real name was Makboula, and that she didn't allow anyone to use it; he doubted if 'dad' existed; she was a rum girl and no one knew what went on at her flat, if she had a flat; he'd never been round to the address to check up. They parted at Waterloo, where Granville went to see him off, meaning to walk home, right across the City, which would take him about an hour; it was just after one o'clock in the morning, and there the strange, quiet evening ended.

Pinkie was out again, and his previous state threatened to return, only worse, with the fear now that she would stay out all night. But she came back a few minutes after he'd taken off his shoes. He heard her go straight to the bathroom, but she didn't run the water. He had the idea

that she was wiping herself with the towel, between the legs; a clear image of it came into his mind, and to confirm it he went there after she'd gone upstairs to the kitchen; one of the towels looked recently used, and he ran it over with his hands, in surreptitious haste. And he found a small spot near the edge, moist and fresh. He lifted it to his nose and thought he recognised the smell of sperm. He was surprised to find that there was a thrill in this for him, besides the pain which was becoming so familiar to him how that it was like a permanent state of the bowels. He thought he would confirm his impression by examining her underwear after she'd slipped into bed; he would quickly touch them in the darkness to find if they, too, were wet. But the time came and there was no sign of her underwear. When she took off her skirt she was naked underneath. He asked her, trying not to speak with a trembling voice, didn't she, for Lord's sake --- he aimed at facetiousness --- wear knickers these days? And her reply, quite non-commital, was that she'd aleays found them 'an impediment'. She then yawned and asked how Dick was these days; and he said, "Fine!" When they'd switched the light out she told him that she'd decided to go to a cinema that evening. "That late?" he asked, with a touch of roguishness in his voice that was new and puzzling to him; and she replied, laying her head on the pillow and pulling up the sheet, "I went to the cafe afterwards. Hanni and Clockwork were there!" Then they fell asleep, simultaneously, it seemed.

BOOK IV

CHAPTER 19.

The fine weather continued and walking became his only pleasure. He would get back dead-tired in the evening and sit with the others drinking wine sleepily, his nerves exhausted. He found his thoughts were clearer when he walked and that dark notions didn't master him so easily as in a room. Sometimes he set out early in the morning, before Pinkie was up. He would walk along Leadenhall street and the Cornhill past the Bank of England, then down Cheapside to the back of St. Paul's, and from there he would cut up to Smithfields to have a look at St. Bartholomew's church, hidden and silent at the end of its own walk. Then he would turn south again to Fleet Street and the Strand, go through the Horse Guards' Parade to St. James's Park, where he would sit and watch the ducks for a time, and make the last stage of his journey to Kehsington gardens; he always ended there, and the walk was the same every morning. Everything gleamed and flashed in the sun on the way; it was always best during the morning hours; the air was cleaner and the shops and streets had a remarkably country-look; there was a golden bustle everywhere, and the sky looked especially high and blue and spacious above the roofs. Sometimes he took sandwiches, and sat on the grass near the Lido, where he'd gone with Hanni; she got little time off now and came to the house less; Pinkie said she thought Hanni's relation with 'Joe Clockwork' had clicked, and she was spending her evenings with him; so far Dick wasn't

'rattled'.

One morning he was walking near the Serpentine when he saw Pinkie's cousin, Deryk Grysham, strolling along; he'd just walked over the stone bridge and was standing still while some children ran past him. It was a lovely day; the water flashed through the trees, and the sky was a perfect blue, with only a slight warm breeze that stirred the grass now and then. One could hear the splash of an oar from the lake and the dull swishing sound of the traffic behind the trees. Grysham came out of the shadows, one hand idly in his jacket pocket, gazing before him, quite lost, while the children played and shouted near by. He looked drawn into himself as Granville had never seen him before; they'd met a hand-full of times, especially just after he and Pinkie were married; but since then they'd hardly seen each other. The family didn't hang together on the whole; Pinkie's brother Nigel, for instance, hardly knew Deryk.

Grysham had a long, pale face and gave the impression of being both massive and fragile; he was quite tall, and broad in the shoulders. There was a certain heaviness in his body, but it was veiled by a frailty of nature. Not that his face had any great delicacy. His nose was long and his jaw heavy, giving his face a formless, ever so slightly coarse appearance when in repose. His eyes had a pale look, tired and not fully open. All his body seemed to be in sleep, removed from the rough air; the delicacy was clearly in him, but he had no really delicate features. He was strolling along with a slow, pale motion, and seemed to emerge bodilessly from the shadows; Granville had to look twice before he was sure he was there. He had a grace ful way of moving and gave the impression of harmony. It wasn't Dick's deliberate cool harmony, but a real

quiet cohesion of the body, by virtue of its withdrawal from the world; Granville had never seen him in repose before, not quite like this. He only remembered him in drawing-rooms, smiling and shaking hands, gazing at everyone with eyes that seemed incapable of sharpness. And now Grysham had an effect on the trees round him: he made them seem part of a magnificent park still closed to the public. Granville thought of the gardens of Versailles. Partly it was Crysham's corduroy jacket, which at first sight looked velvet.

They walked towards each other quickly.

"What a wonderful surprise! I'd no idea you were back, Philip!"

They shook hands, smiling at each other, and Granville replied, "Yes, about two months ago!"

Grysham was so effusive that he felt ashamed of the weakness of his own feelings: he only felt a mild affection; also excitement, perhaps, at being with one of the Gryshams again --- they all had such a glow and style! Though Deryk and his mother Beatrice were looked on as outposts of the family --- too tidy and conscious of rank! That was because Beatrice was 'trade' --- she was more Grysham than the Gryshams, the family said. She was a flashing, wild, haughty woman --- but also careful underneath her style --- a snob from top to toe.

In Grysham's gaze now there was mingled admiration, curiosity and a subtle glittering look of being complimented by Granville's presence.

"Isn't it lovely?" Granville said, nodding towards where the sunlight flickered on the water, through the leaves.

"Isn't it? I couldn't bear my room any more! You look awfully well," Grysham added, giving him a side-glance. "How's Hester?"

"She's fine!"

The name 'Pinkie' was unknown to Deryk; he and his mother always said Hester. Granville tried to think of something more to say but couldn't, and they continued along the path; he added that Hester had got nice and sunburned in the Middle East, but stopped there. He felt quite tongue-tied but yet easy as well: there was something so foreign to him in Grysham, he himself had been away so long and in such a different world, that he felt a fascinated curiosity towards the other man, as if he himself was cancelled out and calmly listening to Deryk's being, that took shape at his side, helped by his silence; two years ago he would have forced the conversation along, believing that this was expected of him; he'd always been nervous with Deryk's mother Beatrice; he'd always felt too fired and stimulated socially, because of her gushing charm, for any drowsy, inquisitive calm to be possible. It was like being drawn into a strange, vivid country now, where he only had to watch and listen; he was no longer involved; what Beatrice or Deryk thought of him didn't matter so much; they had less power to hurt; their exclusion of him, if that had ever been in their minds, seemed not to concern him, but to be about an idea of him from which he in himself was immune; he hadn't heard the word 'background' for two years or more! He was thus less in awe of Deryk. A glow had come into his own life which he held intact; he'd tasted friendship; he deliberately remembered Mohammed as they walked along, as a protective device. He clung to the memory of Basrah! He felt nervous apprehension threaten to mount in him for a moment, like a devil inside him which his confidence had tempted to come out; he'd always felt feathers in the belly before seeing beatrice, because of her terrific social requirements of wit and constant talk, which he'd always found, once he'd steeled himself to them, that he

enjoyed fulfilling; but now he steeled himself the opposite way, to calm; with nothing to say he said nothing! And Deryk seemed to sense something new in him; his tone was more confidential than Granville could remember it, with less deliberate charm and courtesy; they were on an equal footing.

Granville was aware that this calm he had, which he knew wouldn't last long, might be his first glimpse of maturity, as he would have to find it in the world he'd graduated to; it had something to do with the defeat of pride in himself; he would have to learn how not to care what people thought of him; then he would be able to rest, and watch and listen; he would allow his own self to reside elsewhere, intact; and that would take much construction --- perhaps years more.

The carriage of Deryk's head was like a sea-horse's, uplifted, his eyes half-closed in a sleepy, pale surveillance, his nose long and also pale, seeming to overhang his lips. He could remember the first moment Deryk had opened the door of the top-floor flat to him, a few weeks after he and Pinkie were married; he remembered the sense of being incorporated into some grand and blazing activity, which never quite came about however; it was in Deryk's delighted smile as he stretched out his hand --- to his 'favourite' cousin's husband --- with, "How very nice to meet you! Do come in!"

"What's the work like out there?" Deryk asked him.

"Oh ~~I~~ --- it's fascinating!"

He made the words up, and smiled. And now a return-question was required of him: "How's the school?" Deryk worked in a school where his mother had a money-interest.

"Oh! I'm always thinking of giving it up --- travelling! But ---!

Granville glanced at Deryk quickly --- suppose he had failed to

understand Deryk? --- suppose they had equal desires, only on two sides of an immense gulf planted by history?

"Do you want to travel?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, I'd love to!"

"Why don't you come out to the Middle East?"

"I've always dreamed about it --- but, you know, Beatrice really couldn't get on without me --- at the school for one thing!"

"Why don't you try it? You could sent the money home!"

"I know!" Then a charming smile, which seemed to make it all make-believe --- everything he'd been saying.

"You could easily find some work out there!" Granville want on, persisting deliberately.

And Deryk's smile faded a little. The little formula of charm had been disturbed. "Yes!"

"Why don't you do it?" He persisted further, forcing himself to it with a hard directness while --- absurd!--- beginning to quiver ever so slightly inside, with apprehension --- from breaking the little formula that the other man insisted on with all his soft, casual being like a pale weight in the sunlight.

"Perhaps I will one day," Deryk replied. That was a little patronising. And the smile had almost quite faded. There was even the slightest edge of --- nastiness? But no --- perhaps a delicate sour distaste.

Slowly the old clouds, which he'd all but forgotten, gathered in Granville again. He began to remember the past. Partly it was Deryk's accent, which was like a deliberate attempt not to speak the language of ordinary men, with 'rarely' for 'really' and a painful

'ee-ow' for 'oh', an accent that seemed to say, 'I was paid for!" Granville fought against it, reminding himself of Basrah and trying to keep the idea of Deryk as someone foreign to him, and also mysterious. Partly he succeeded as they walked along together under the trees with the children's voices behind them. But the memories became more and more detailed --- of a slight rudeness here, of a sudden harsh sneering sentence from Beatrice, the 'lady', a look of horror on her face when he mentioned his mother casually in a conversation --- the horror really had made her face seem to fall into her chin! Absurd, dead, historical, but here they were coming up like steam from Deryk's presence at his side! Was he slowly recapturing that old sense of being favoured by Deryk --- was that the web he and Beatrice weaved on their visitors, was that the costly invisible article they were still trying to sell in a world which had flung them off as far as authority was concerned fifty years ago!

Behind them was the inner citadel of power, and they held the keys --- that was the idea you were supposed to get. But you were never let in. So the dream was always to hover before you.

Deryk had his pale hands behind his back, idly clasped together. They came out into an opening where a hill rose steeply, smooth and green, and the warmth of the sun had collected there, in the hollow, full of hot, dusty scents. He seemed like other men --- lost in thought, kicking slightly at the gravel with his foot, but as if he were off-duty in some way: his fragility wasn't that of the drawing toom for the moment, but more childish --- he might be a child kicking at the gravel, rather bored! His eyes had a childish, dreamy quality, too, without anything self-protective in their look. His jacket was a deep wine-colour, and his grey trousers had lost their crease; he was untidy but yet he had an

air of clean, fastidious detachment. His shoulders were bowed wearily. Granville had an impression of a child alone in his own park, pouting a little, sad and frightfully lonely, wondering what had gone wrong, because this was a public park and all the world roared close by. Suddenly their eyes met and Deryk's gaze changed at once, the dimness left his eyes like something falling into the sea, a shadow, replaced with a look of gentle solicitude --- yes, was Granville about to ask a question?

Granville's heart was moved at once. He had the sensation that there was a special recognition in Deryk's eyes at that moment, perhaps because they were in --- well, the same family! He suddenly blamed himself for the dark thoughts he'd just had, and for the absence in his life of this light courtesy! When Deryk shook hands with someone his expression was extraordinaryily gentle and delighted, and humbly solicitous. His whole body seemed made for courtesy, and one could't imagine that he had a dark thought, much less a censorious one. His eyes filled with light as if the social command had become the natural one for him. He disclaimed self when he talked to people, too --- it was all "How wonderful!" and "No, really?" and "How very nice for you!" And when he did bring in his own life he made it seem like a game, something you didn't bother about. He smoothed the path all the time, nodding and smiling, calling the other person on. But --- it didn't go all the way through! You were left with the feeling that he and Beatrice would tear you to peices as soon as your back was turned.

He remembered their house so well --- the hushed anteroom of the citadel of power! --- the thick carpets, the white, curving bannisters, the dim and heavily curtained drawing room that seemed to promise everything,

the dead-white walls because that was the only colour you could furnish to, the great porcelain bowl from Aldercote that shone from one of the tables, the deep armchairs where you sank down, the striped chintz everywhere, then beatrice rising from an armchair as you came in with a nighty rustle and sweep, always in a long, flowing gown that shone and glittered in the dim light. Yet she was robust as well, with thick arms and a determined chin. Her eyes sparkled at you, gleeful and challenging, black, with a tiny light of irony in them. Her dress was always cut low, and the lights were arranged to take twenty years off her age, which they did, giving her skin a marvellous, soft, healthy glow, with nothing pinched or thwarted. She had the habit of giving you an admiring not every now and then, even if she wasn't talking to you, together with a wide smile that had something roguish in it, making her teeth shine. She had blonde, unruly hair and together with her sharp nose it gave her an eagle-look, especially as she had the habit of darting her head from side to side as she switched her gaze. Her lips were full and open, yet gripped firmly in sunsual will, with something flirtatious and conniving in them.

Beatrice loved rank ravenously, almost with an innocent passion. Knowling that somebody was a lord or higher (lower she didn't go) made them seem extraordinarily beautiful to her, and she really did look at them with sexually admiring eyes, even if they were a lady or a duchess. When she was with Pinkie's uncle, Maimbury, she laughed and threw back her head, and all her wit came out --- she would flash him glances, and dim lights seemed unnecessary then, because her skin vibrated naturally with youth. By the same token she hated the absence of rank in people. She couldn't respect them. But, more than that, she couldn't forgive

them. She simply was unable to. There was no dream there for her.

She had a wonderful way of talking about the family. Did Pinkie know that one of her cousins was marrying the marquis of Averdale next year? Such a clever, charming girl! And had Philip been introduced to the Wynters girl? That must be arranged! They'd adore each other --- she knew that! And she would look across at Deryk and say, "Don't you think so, darling?" and he would answer, "Yes, mummy!" It never was arranged. But the promise was intoxicating. Beyond Beatrice you always saw a country mansion with tall lighted windows peeping through the cedar trees. Then it would be, "Your grandfather adored you when you were small," to Pinkie, smiling brilliantly. "Clive took your grandmother down to Aldercote that summer, do you remember, for the last time, she died the same year Pamela was born --- I always remember Pamela in her baptism clothes, she made such a lovely baby!" Or, "That was before your father sold everything up, when we always went down to Beeches for July and August, do you remember, darling?" And so the web was spun, closer and closer with every visit.

"Hester must be looking well after all that sun!" Deryk said.

"Oh, yes!"

"Isn't it rather too hot sometimes?"

"Well," Granville replied, "youccan always go for a dip in the swimming pool --- you don't dream of working after eleven in the morning!"

"Oh! Is that a company pool or ---?"

"Well, it's a kind of club run for the oil people mostly, and we've got membership cards." He was just about to add that they'd lost their membership cards when he cut himself short, knowing too well the hot feeling of regret that might result if he let his words rush on

without preparation, whatever the words were!

"Isn't it difficult for an English woman --- moving about freely, that sort of thing?" Deryk asked him.

"Well, it isn't easy but you get more and more women without the veil. They're quite used to seeing English women. They think they're all mad anyway."

"Oh!" Deryk chuckled in a breathless way. "And you work with Arabs, do you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"It must be a wonderful life, Philip," Deryk said quietly.

They came to a stone bridge with fat pillars where there were people leaning on the parapet gazing down into the water, silent. The stream was very still below, touched at the edge by willow branches. The sunlight cast the design of the pillars on to it, and these shadows trembled with the breeze sometimes; or a fish passed swiftly across.

"Are they trout?" Deryk said, peering down.

"They look like it!"

Two or three fish darted under the bridge, their bodies silvery blue. Further on they could see boats out on the Serpentine, moving slowly, without a sound from any of them; nearer the bank there were toy yachts, their sails a dazzling white as they went up and down on the tiny waves; far on the other side they could see people diving into the water at the Lido, white bodies streaking down and making a splash, with the trees where he and Hanni had sat making a dark cave-like hollow behind.

They came to a man launching a toy ship from the bank, with a crowd watching him. The little vessel had three funnels and was worked by radio. Some of the people watching were dressed for the office, in

dark winter suits. The man started the engine by pulling at a piece of cord, then he pushed the boat carefully away, giving it a final little shove with the tips of his fingers; he was a small man with a wrinkled, pale face and freckled hands, utterly absorbed in his task, the stub-end of a cigarette forgotten in the corner of his mouth, brown and dry. As the dignified little ship went smoothly out, keeping a straight course and sending out a surf on either side, he bent down to the radio, which had an aerial and three or four dials. And then he controlled the boat's direction, so that it moved out heavily, as if massive, still going a straight course; but then it veered heavily round, gleaming in the water. The port-holes and cabin windows flashed as it turned, and all the time the man kept his head bowed, only lifting his gaze slightly to look out for other boats, his hand on the dials. The only noise from the lake was the muffled bumping of an oar now and then on a rowlock, far out, and the flapping of the tiny yacht-sails.

Again Granville glanced at Deryk and was surprised to see that he was rapt and fascinated like every one else in the crowd; again he was like a child.

"He must be a happy man, don't you think?" Deryk said with a smile. There was the same wistfulness Granville had noticed before; he was bereft of a tangible self and looked extraordinarily lonely.

"Do you enjoy living in London?" Granville asked him as they walked away.

"Well, it's awfully <u>wearing</u> sometimes but the holidays are good --- I do get long holidays, that's one advantage of teaching!" And then, having said this little bit about himself, he turned to Granville with a final air, as if drawing a curtain, and made his little smile that seemed

to say, "But my life's just a game, what about yours?"

Granville felt suddenly elated --- he would really talk to Deryk, he'd get him to tell him about his life and fears, he'd dig further and further down, why shouldn't they be friends, why shouldn't he explore things in this way, why not cut through all this dreariness and formula and set talk that governed everything, that gripped England like a deadly paralysis and which you could see in people's faces! What was there in the air, against that exploration?

They'd come round the park full circle to where they'd met and the children still played. It seemed to finish the conversation, too. They walked on to Alexandra Gate, strolling. They saw two chestnut horses on Rotten Row, under the trees, with women riders in elegant top hots, turning and rearing slightly, their flanks close together, the sunlight going over them in dazzling yellow spots as they kicked up the sand, seeming not to move by their own wills but to be in an airy, floating motion like the brilliant shadows all round them.

Well! He and Deryk turned to each other to say good bye. So nice to have met! What about Hester, when was she going to call Beatrice? Then they must both come over! Yes, and Deryk must bring Beatrice over for dinner one evening, Hester would love --- and so forth. He hardly knew what he was saying or what he was hearing. He only had an impression of Deryk's face as gentle and solicitous again, smoothing the path, always smoothing the path!

They put out their hands and gave each other a final smile.

"Be sure to give Beatrice our love!" Granville cried, in a last sudden access of affection. "Hester's been meaning to phone for a long time!"

"Do come round and see us! Mummy's going to be so excited when I tell her!"

They walked away in opposite directions --- he chose the opposite direction though he was heading the same way as Deryk --- and then turned to wave at each other simultaneously. Granville caught a glimpse of his long pale face again, and his pale fingers as they waved delicately, flickering above Deryk's head for a moment. Then he was gone.

Pinkie's uncle, Maimbury, had a sparkling and golden quality that put people at ease right away. It was this perhaps that Deryk was striving for. Why didn't he attain it? He didn't --- quite. There was something grudging in him --- he and Beatrice beckoned you inside but that was also a good way of making you feel shut out as well, especially as there was no inside! All they did, really, was create a little fable, and then despise you secretly if you fell for it.

But Maimbury was whole: a still, slim, quietly gracious man with the same unaffected assurance touched with pallor as his son Wynters; only there was more bite to his gaze --- he'd made himself one of the richest men in the country and pulled off a good many brisk deals. He was '1911 aristocracy' --- but his mother was a Grysham; a bit too expensive for true blue blood, as the family said, but good to dine off! He kept his tall London house, that shone like a great white tooth in the sunlight, partly as a monument for them and partly as a restaurant --- they came in their muddy shoes and dirtied his carpet, Pinkie said, and belched loudly after means, to the horror of the butler who was also '1911' and was fool enough to think that aristocracy and delicate manners could ever go together!

Well, to some extent they did go together in Maimbury. He'd grown up in both worlds --- a bankers' world on the one hand and the old lingering world of the country estate (supported by the banks) on the other. He was the effective head of Pinkie's side of the family. Everyone came to him for advice and, of course, money. They brought their bastard children for him to support, and used his name when they were in a tight spot. Family conferences took place between him and Beatrice, who knew better than anybody where the family needed bolstering up and patching. They were always trying to keep the family together. But the family didn't want to be kept together: not unless they could see the money in it! As for a sense of aristocracy, they had absolutely none --- they didn't know what people meant!

Pinkie had a childish, romantic admiration for Maimbury: it was like her love for Nigel, only Maimbury --- 'Nicky' --- was a debonair figure who 'arranged' everything; he belonged to the world of affairs, and Nigel to nature.

The first real family event after Granville had married Pinkie was lunch with him. And it was an extraordinary event because it showed Granville a world he'd never known before even in his wildest imaginations, an invisible world which Pinkie had renounced in herself. He was always conscious afterwards that she'd renounced the England in herself, the unconscious and dreaming part of her blood, for which she could see no use in the world.

The moment Maimbury had walked across the carpet in the hush of the hotel-lounge Granville felt at ease, with a strange, immediate, involuntary change of feeling as if the man had brought a new golden light in with him, coming suddenly through the revolving glass door, dreading

softly, waving his hand in a casual movement towards Pinkie. He wore his raincoat open and carried an old trilby hat; Granville remembered the way he swung this hat, with an oddly childish and graceful abandon, so that it was like a school-cap for a moment. His eyes caught Granville's attention next: they were wide-set and still, remarkably placid, as if their physical shape had been determined slowly by quiet, good thoughts. And their original shape seemed to include a smile, which asserted safety and calm at once. It was a light, wondering quality, and dominated them all the time they were at lunch. It put Pinkie in a specially gentle and courteous mood, bringing out that invisible element that brooded and slept in her --- the ecstatic, thrilling, wild, half-choked way of talking that made her lips moist and full, and put lost, distant, shining vagueness in her eyes as if she was looking back across centuries and everything grand that had ever happened in the country was happening in her again and as if a natural authority and dominance lay in her body which only had to be called out, like the rustle of a silk dress and candlelight and the flash of eyes in the dimness! She and Maimbury made the crowded Oxford Street outside distant, rotten, dead and foul, an idiot dream sprayed on the earth like a stink and left to lie for a few decades, not more, before it was smashed to pieces by better hands than had put it there.

Maimbury had taken Pinkie by the hand warmly and spoken in a low, easy voice that at once seemed to establish endless time --- "Hester, how are you?", with a quick glance at her to verify she was well. Then he turned to Granville, his eyes measuring him for a moment in a mild, rather passive way, without scrutiny, absorbing him with an unwatchful calm, and said to him shortly, man to man, "How do you do?" Through the

whole lunch Granville kept glancing at Pinkie because of her metamorphosis into a tall, graceful, attentive creature, gazing before her in a dazzled way --- into her real self. She had a dark suit on with a red silk scarf loose round her neck which made her face glow and her skin pale and smooth, in a dramatic contrast. She could have been one of the great women of the past --- a Holland or Devonshire! It was extraordinary what effect his presence had.

Maimbury's hair was slightly grey at the edges and this made the casual vigour of his body all the more striking. He had a firm, lean face, weathered and lined; everything led to his eyes. As they went into lunch he snapped his fingers and called out "Boy!" sharply to one of the pages, then told him to 'take the gentleman's coat'. For a moment Granville had been surprised, and had stood still in the carpeted lobby --- 'The man means me!' he thought. It seemed to him then that Maimbury had subtly established equality between them by saying that --- by making a double announcement, to the page and himself. And the page raced towards him, even before he took Maimbury's coat.

Inside the dining room they were handed over to the head waiter, who said quietly, "This way, milord," and led the way briskly between the tables, whispering to another waiter in a brittle, narrow-eyed way, "Tell Joe quick --- Maimbury!"

Seats were drawn back from their tables in the corner, they all sat down, and Maimbury took the leather-covered menu in his hand. He glanced down at it and stroked his mouth thoughtfully, leaning on his elbow. "Now what shall we have?" he murmured. Granville said nothing. He was used to being confused by wine-names and dish-names at that time, so he decided to leave the talking to Pinkie. She always knew what she

wanted and said so, while he would order the same dish as someone else at the table, saying to the waiter after a pause, "I'll have the same!" Then he just hoped the food would be all right. Once he'd ordered escallop in this way --- it was one of the few dishes he knew --- and he got a heap of fish in a sea-shell instead of what he'd expected --- veal! He'd looked down at the fish in a bemused way, trying to reconcile it with his idea of veal fried in breadcrumbs, and wondering whether the waiter had misheard him.or if his leg was being pulled. Then he'd caught sight of the card and saw under FISH the word scallop and assumed this must be it. Apparently, you could use the word for both veal and fish.

Another time, when he was at the T.I.M. training school, he'd been invited to lunch by one of the specialists in Arab affairs. The man had small, gleaming, kindly eyes but he only spoke when he had something intelligent to say, a mannerism which always frightened Granville. Suddenly, between courses, he looked at Granville in a calm, rather patriarchal way and asked, "Will you share some plovers' eggs with me?" He decided to nod and smile, as if the thought had occurred to him, too. But he had no idea what the words meant! He thought it might be a wine --- something like 'Plaver Seggs'! It seemed all right -- 'Plaver Seggs '45'. And then the little mottled eggs came, six of them, and he ate three of them with a panic-stricken show of relish.

After a pause Pinkie said to Maimbury, "Well, I don't know a thing about wines for a start, Nicky. So you'd better do the ordering." There, it was perfectly simple! You just had to say it! And Maimbury replied, "Would you like me to order the whole thing?" Granville answered, "Yes, that'd be lovely!" So homely, this idea of the

host ordering for everybody! Maimbury gave him an appreciative little glance.

Granville had noticed for the first time in a restaurant of this kind that he felt no apprehension, nor a sense that he must hand on every word said to him in case he was guilty of a breach of manners. He sat easily in his chair, his elbows on the rests, and actually thought about what he was saying --- this was perhaps the most amazing thing for him, to actually think in a public place with the same unhurried reflection as he did in private! The table seemed to belong to them, their own, and though the hall clattered and hummed with conversation, the other tables seemed far away, and the streets outside were so remote as to be unimaginable.

He'd forgotten now what they talked about. But an extraordinary graciousness had flowed from Maimbury; it was something rooted and fixed in him, a blessed mark, that could never have been imitated or learned. Granville was astonished how, within a few moments of being in his presence, he felt not only at his ease but washed clean of guile and baseness; it actually seemed, by contrast, that at other times he'd learned to dislike himself! For he settled so comfortably --- not proudly or vainly --- into his own frame under Maimbury's gaze, and he observed that Pinkie was doing the same; Her sentences were like trenchant little edicts, uttered blindly, as if from the past, with the vagueness of the past round them, caught in a glow, dramatic, making the present moment seem only a contribution to the slow, legendary movement of time far beyond them. And her red scarf marked this more strongly. It was something in Maimbury's smile, and in the soft gaze of his eyes that carried no advance-image of the world but waited in good will for the world to

declare itself. Granville only said what he wanted to say, and his silence didn't feel hedged-in and intimidated. It was such a relief --- actually being with somebody in a public place and yet keeping intact, without fear! In an epoch when being in public meant losing intactness, in the roar of a city! Had the world always been like that? Was it only us, in our world, who underwent a strange psychological shock when we went into the company of other people, and uttered things we hardly knew or recognised, and then, afterwards, felt a sense of betrayal, that we'd departed from ourselves, unawares, and lost the road, as if we'd been bewitched, and odd public statements had been put into our mouths from the air? Was the usual air infectious nowadays? And was Maimbury free of that?

Granville had the momentary enchanting experience when he was with Maimbury of discovering goodness in himself --- not extra and above what he was in himself---- it was simply a recognition of the ordinary goodness every man had, as if hitherto he'd been given a false story, that there was no goodness in the ordinary state, no natural goodness inherited by everyone!

There were even all sorts of ways of talking and moving which had never appeared to him before; as if hitherto he'd been in the grip of fear, and had been paralysed by the gaze of other men, not consciously any more but in a manner almost physical, certainly automatic, like goose-flesh in sudden cold; sometimes it seemed that he could deduce the presence of other men near him, without seeing them, by this automatic response of the flesh! Indeed, it appeared to him that the whole of his life, apart from the interlude in Sussex, had been in a state of fear! Long ago, he'd forgotten what natural behaviour was like, and now he more

or less accepted a state of self-suspension as the price to be paid for being in public! And now, through Maimbury, he became aware that this might be true of most other people, too: it might be the state of our world. With Maimbury he said whatever thoughts came into his head, as if they were from a mysterious source --- mysterious even to him --- and not open to the limiting judgements of men; it was a strange freedom he had never known before, and he was less willing to say afterwards that he lived in a free epoch; for the flesh was in chains, it was chained to this throbbing public life that went round in a circle and caught us up like a St. Catherine's wheel, stretching and torturing us, twisting our faces and shooting out our hands in peculiar, unwilled gestures! The self was more or less in abeyance with Maimbury: he was simply a man, Pinkie was simply a woman; there was simply the world, no 'inner' or 'outer', no 'private' or 'public', but people sitting together to eat! Not was this a primitive sense, of having got behind civilisation to a supposedly untouched and intimate state; it was the reverse --- far in advance of anything primitive; it was actually a sense of civilised people --- not clever ones, or terrifically energetic ones, or demoniacally astute ones, but civilised ones in a golden way, in whom reason wasn't a faculty of the brain but a sweet power of curiosity and light! That was in Maimbury's face. There were no marks of fear!

Pinkie had once showed him a photograph of Maimbury as a child, standing in a tall hot-house with the rest of his family, dressed in knickerbockers: he had long, fair curls and the wonderful softness was already in his eyes. And it made Granville feel how seldom a child keeps his dream in our epoch, but is pinched and limited early, especially a boy, in recognition of the pitiless, dry symmetry of the public world

that has to be observed, requiring stricter gestures than natural ones ever could be, and only certain brain-calculations in place of thoughts, and hard pellets of 'fact' in place of the flowing truth and experience of life! Maimbury had kept his softness. Nothing had been damaged in him; so it was like a glimpse into more golden eqochs, seeing him. he'd been allowed his own dignity from the beginning. Perhaps only girls could grow like that in our world; with their graciousness intact in them, and the light of dreaming still allowed in their eyes. Granville remembered all too well in his own childhood how he had always tried to stop the graciousness in his face as much as possible, and to discourage the dream, in deference to a public world that never made a clear statement of its requirements, only seemed to turn a cold shoulder when he departed from this descipline into natural behaviour.

This was so wonderful in Maimbury's face --- that it had never been turned from its natural and sweet civilised development. Instead of civilisation being progress or industries or ethical presumption, or anything grandly intellectual and public, it was, in Maimbury, an intimate light that could only ba passed from person to person; it was something to do with the heart, inimitable --- in every man it would be a <u>different</u> flame --- how extraordinary to think that once life had consisted of all these flames, intact, touching and burning and reflecting each other! How exciting it must have been before our epochs came into being! The flame was in Maimbury's movements, in the way he talked and smiled; there was nothing constructed about him; he simply had this shining presence, which couldn't leave him because it was in the shape of his face and the sound of his voice! Granville thought of it as 'extraordinary'; but suppose it was what men had inherited in the past as the ordinary course of things,

without thinking about it?

The marvel of Maimbury's presence --- for which Granville had no parallel or previous warning in his life --- was that it showed no trace at all of the 'higher world'. That was the revelation of Maimbury's lunch invitation for Granville! And he realised that Deryk did, emphatically, belong to the 'higher world': like Beatrice, he had not a gentle heart, but gentle manners.

And this light in Maimbury was something that could never have been invented or cultivated by one man alone; it could only have been inherited, and grown out of birth, through slow years of growing, in safety! Were we going to lose all that? Were we going to become simply separate citizens, each with his personality, but with nothing marvellous inherited? What Maimbury carried in his body and in his fine, restful eyes was a theme that had grown like a slow flower by the ingenuity of generations, and was a doctrine that couldn't be passed on articulately: it was a light known only by presence, and impossible even to give a name to because no single thing composed it, only the total life of one person! That was aristocracy: it wasn't class - namely, power, but a genius which no country, once given it, could ever forget, and beyond which, in simplicity and sweetness, it could never go. Aristocracy was only an image, caught for a moment; it wasn't truly a historical reality. The image was only passed on in glimpses. No primciples safeguarded or hindered it. A man was it by his presence alone, it couldn't be purchased or learned or damaged: it could only be inherited.

Were we to have only bare records of it, only memoirs and country palaces open to the public? Were we to do away with the first image of our own souls? Could we inherit as well? Had the 'higher world'

reached the end of its historical task? Now a man had to create his own life! Would he do it in that most perfect of all images? It was all laid before us in the tales of kings, in the country houses that had never stirred from their first tranquillity: what an extraordinary inheritance awaited us if we could break our silence of the heart! But if we kept to the middle-class road, ashamed to be ourselves, because self was dark and secret, if we kept on joining movements and trying to make more movement, if we looked for the right society all the time, and the right principles, and the right safeguards for our children, if we let our selves of here and now die, broken by the noise outside that prompted us to join and spoke to us out of radios and stared at us in the morning from the newspaper and gazed at us from films, always drawing us to believe in a bigger and finer world outside which was only composed of people like ourselves, if we never turned to our own silence, never let that silence take its own time, never learned to take action from its sound root; if we never braved the accusation that we were useless or lazy or selfish, or out of the group, or hollow, or dead by virtue of our solitude: then we should inherit death, and our children would look into our public faces and read nothing! A great religious duty for the first time awaited not simply a few people but untold numbers.

CHAPTER 20.

That evening he told Pinkie about the meeting with Deryk and she chuckled. She said she wondered what Deryk was doing in Kensington Gardens --- he had a date with Peter Pan, perhaps! She would phone Beatrice one day from the office and they'd get a lunch out of the old girl!

Dick dashed into the house and took him aside, his beard wagging excitedly --- "Jesus, I could kick myself --- I've just let the most dazzling girl slip through my fingers! She sat next to me on the bus and we got off at the same stop! She started looking in the chemist's window and I know she wanted me to speak to her! But I funked it! You know, that sort of thing spoils the whole evening for me. What a fool I am!"

"Why don't you go back and look for her?"

"No, the spontaneity's gone now!"

He slouched about the house and later on, upstairs in the kitchen when Pinkie had left the room for a moment, he whispered in Granville's ear, "I keep going over it in my mind! I've had dozens of imaginary conversations with her. I'll never let that happen again!"

Hanni joined them and they all went downstairs to the music-room. Pinkie put on a Bach record from years ago, scratched and faint, the suite in D major; they sat listening to it in silence; the atmosphere was sad; they all lolled in their chairs; it seemed to him that Pinkie was on the point of tears!

Some talk began afterwards about Bach in which Hanni said in a quiet voice, "I think he's so wonderfully mathematical!" This angered Granville. He asked her, trying to stop all sorts of indignant feelings rushing out, if she really meant that?

And here Dick spoke up; he said there was a 'case' for the idea; Bach did have a 'mathematical kind of symmetry'!

To shich Granville murmured, flushing, "Symmetry, my arse!"

Hanni's mettle was up: "What has he got, then," she asked. "Feeling, I suppose?"

Her face was fixed with fear and defiance at the same time, so that her lips trembled slightly, pale and pursed.

Dick stroked his beard and said he found 'old Johann Sebastian really stunning stuff!"

Hanni persisted with her question to Granville, asking him what there was in Bach if not symmetry, and he said with a rather foolish expression, "God!" And he added quickly, "Christ as well —— Bach understood everything about Christ!"

He leaned forward and was just about to go on talking when Hanni got up and strode out of the room. She left the house and Dick followed to look after her. And she didn't appear again for three days. Granville was left bubbling over to himself. But the next day Pinkie said that Hanni had been most annoyed about Dick —— he would go on talking about the girl he'd nearly spoken to outside the chemist's and saying he wanted to kick himself, and asking Hanni if she thought he'd missed anything really 'hot'. The Bach had just come on top of that!

There was an incident rather like this one a few days later —— it left Granville in the same state. It involved Pinkie and Dick this

time. Pinkie was studying 'The Racing Times', which she sometimes bought if she wanted to lay a bet; and she had ingenious ideas, which she never applied, for getting the winners by multiple betting, which meant laying out a lot of money; in Basrah they'd followed one of these multiple systems on paper, with the race-results from England, but were always baffled by the long losing-runs. She was lying on the divan reading the dog-race results, and making notes with a blue pencil. Dick was talking about the office, and asking him casually, with his light, deliberately objective voice, why he preferred working in Basrah, since the work there was the same as in London, the office-furniture was the same, only it was stifling hot. This came near to one of Granville's 'themes', and he leaned forward to speak about it; he said that the first thing was the presence of Mohammed facing him at the opposite wall; you didn't get that in London — and here Dick nodded and smiled agreeably; and there was the heat; there was the sunlight that blazed through the blinds in little strips; one could hear the call-to-prayer; as he spoke he was leading up to something, the presence in Basrah of the religious world, in all things big and small. But suddenly, as he was speaking, Pinkie looked up and said quietly to Dick, "I've just discovered the world's finest system." Her voice was so quiet that it was impossible to doubt the truth of what she said; Dick's eyes were alight at once and he asked her to 'spill the beans', and when she said in the same quiet voice, full of her discovery, "You want to know about a really watertight system, do you?" Dick cried, "Yes, please, teacher!" and jumped up from his chair; he went across to her without another glance at Granville and together they began going through the notes she'd made in her little book, with the latest results before them. Granville sat on, stunned, his unspoken

words whirling round in his head; but on behalf of his own dignity he didn't get up and leave. He heard Pinkie's voice, still soft with assurance: "Say you've got a dog running at 6-4 on and another one at 4-6 against, and you're betting even money both ways, well, what you do --- of course, that's if you've got more or less outsider-odds on at least three, otherwise you don't touch the race -- what you do is this ---" while Dick gazed over her shoulder, rapt, no longer judicious, and involved as Granville had never seen him in any discussion they'd ever had! To his surprise, half-way through Pinkie's explanation Dick looked up and murmured, "Sorry I interrupted you, old sport, but I won't get an offer like this again." Pinkie chuckled and they went on.

"You know, Pip, I think I'm better trained for this world than you are," Dick said to him one evening in the pub. And Granville nodded his agreement.

Dick paused, looking down at his finger-tips.

"I'll tell you something, Pip," he went on. "There's one thing I've never been able to shake off, and that's ---" He glanced at Granville with a smile, blinking quickly --- "A sense that I belong to the best people."

"Oh!"

"Now that comes from Lady Godiva. She's always told me, so has the old man, 'Remember, you've had the best this country can offer, you've been to the best schools, you've got advantages everybody else is after -- and they're going to envy you!' Now, it's odd, but I can't shake that off. I can't agree that I have got advantages, but I feel I have, I just can't help it ---!" He looked into Granville's eyes calmly, with the

slight smile he always had when he was trying to think something out. "I feel people look up to me, but more than that --- they want something out of me! They're trying to get some sort of advantage out of me! It isn't a matter of attitude at all --- it's just a state I'm always in --- I feel that when people approach me they recognise something!"

"Perhaps they do!"

"But I feel it towards you as well."

Dick turned his pale eyes towards him, and Granville felt chilled for a moment. But he was used to Dick's occasional frightening candour, and smiled. "How do you mean?"

"Well, I feel you and Pinkie like having me round the house --- for my company --- also to help the tone."

"Tone?"

"I tell you, it isn't an attitude, it's just what I feel instinctively. Say you stop and talk to me on the stairs, I feel you're after something! I can't help it! You want me to make you feel less lonely, or you're after some information about the office, or you'd like a drink, it's always something that I can give you! And I can give it to you or hold it back, as I like."

Granville smiled at him. "It's honest of you."

"Well, you know me, old man, poor but honest!" Dick said with a little laugh, falling into his facetious manner.

There was a pause.

"Is that how Lady Godiva feels?" Granville asked him.

"Yes! But she feels it about working people. They're all caricatures for her. Of course, I've passed beyond that. I'm not a bloody fool!"

"Suppose your parents met mine, do you mean they wouldn't talk to them as if they were real people?"

"Well," Dick gazed before him, considering it. "I don't know your parents, except what Hanni's told me --- she liked them a hell of a lot, but, yes, well, they'd see them as sort of working class characters, like on the stage, not people they could relax with or really talk to! They'd see them as rather pathetic --- not responsible for their own actions --- not quite in life! They'd humour them all the time! Oh, they'd be kindly and enquiring, but as they would be to --- well, invalids. They wouldn't think your parents' feelings worth talking about like their own!"

"What would my parents have to do to qualify as serious, then?"

"Well, they'd have to have money for a start, live somewhere else, change their accents. They'd have to be 'educated' --- but not what you mean by educated. They don't mean being able to read and think and that sort of thing, because all their reading and thinking is fake anyway, and they get it all from the newspapers like everybody else --- they mean by 'educated' living like them!"

"Being middle-class!"

"If you like. You see, they could never imagine that your parents had as much refinement or sensibility as they do. This is where I've advanced beyond them --- I can imagine it! They'd never be able to imagine themselves living in a working street and going off to work early in the morning, and that sort of thing. It's just a closed world to them! They couldn't credit someone who says 'iggins instead of Higgins with their capacities of feeling!"

"What they feel towards working people you feel to everybody, then!"

Granville said with a smile.

"Yes, but they <u>also</u> feel it to everybody. <u>Nobody's</u> up to their mark!" Then he added seriously. "I respect you more than most people. I'm rather scared of what you think. But at the moment of being with you, in a position of contact, I feel superior!"

"But why?"

"Because --- well, you're just <u>you</u>, if you see what I mean! There's just <u>you</u> sitting in front of me every time, and that little voice inside me says you ought to be more! <u>I</u> don't believe you ought to be more --- but the little voice says you should come to people with more style, if you see what I mean, not just <u>yourself</u>, you should coat it all round a bit like Glenning, or keep a more organised appointments book, or something like that --- it's difficult to put it into words! But <u>I</u> like <u>you</u> --- I don't agree with the little voice, but there it is! And when all's said and done, we're similar to each other in one respect -- we're --- lone birds!"

"But that little voice doesn't say the <u>same</u> about everybody, does it?" Granville asked him.

"Oh, no!"

"What does it say about Pinkie?"

"It says she's got an obsession about being left out of the party. So she needs my company! Which gives me a little itch to withdraw it."

"Oh!"

"I'll tell you something else, Abdul," Dick said as he got up to get more drinks. "You're the only man I'd allow to call me Dick. Otherwise it's Richard. Did you know that?"

"It's very flattering!" He realised for the first time that, indeed, the only people who called him Dick apart from himself were Hanni and Pinkie.

And when that conversation was over, as they drank coffee upstairs in the kitchen, as the last light was going down, Dick said to him, "Well, old sport, have you made up your mind about Makboula?"

"Makboula?"

"The hair-girl ---!"

"Yes, I know, but what ---?"

"Well," Dick replied, "do you <u>like</u> her?"

"Oh, yes!"

"<u>Well</u>, then, you'd better get in while the going's good! You'll catch her on the hop. I believe she's just finished something with an Australian crooner or an Azrec weight-lifter --- I forget which!"

Granville laughed and said, in that case he certainly <u>would</u> do something! He noticed Dick was easier with him that before. It was a barely perceptible change in his manner.

He tried to remember the hair-girl's face, but couldn't. His recent life had become abstract and floating, a kind of dazed flow; he could remember Deryk Grysham vividly, and also how Pinkie had left the house before breadfast that Saturday morning a week, two weeks ago; these incidents were like pictures in his mind, singularly detached from him; he couldn't focus his attention properly.

Pinkie rang up Beatrice and they went over to lunch. There was the same gushing politeness as ever. Pinkie looked tall, dazzling and rather patrician, a little as she had done for their first lunch with

Maimbury. This time she wore a pair of delightful turquoise ear-rings, which apparently she had bought at the same time as the cuff-links he'd smashed. She was quiet, however, over lunch, and answered Beatrice's continual questions perfunctorily. She was detached from them all, and for a moment it seemed to him that he was nearer the family than she was. Basrah she hardly mentioned. It was like dead history now. Between her and Deryk there was a family-playfulness; but it was automatic and didn't touch her inner mood. The flat had a sombre, damp light, without its former fabulous suggestions for him. Beatrice looked only a trace older, her eyes strained, while Deryk seemed to brood under an immense, overbearing fatigue that pushed him further and further down in his chair. Their inner moods, too, were hidden. What were they feeling underneath? Why did one require to know <u>what</u> they were feeling underneath?

Pinkie said afterwards that his job had 'Imperial style' for Beatrice and that he was now 'fully rehabilitated', meaning that he'd got over his 'background' all right.

She got a day off and they walked together near the river, then went for a bathe in the Lido. A letter came from her friend Elizabeth Bewley-Patton inviting them both to her house at Meedham, near York, in a week's time: Pinkie was to phone and arrange it. He'd never been there but she said the countryside was lovely and that the sea was near by; the house was an old vicarage and had a marvellous panelled bathroom with huge Victorian taps, she said, all smelling of Bewley Patton's 'musk-perfume and pine-salts'; she'd met him several times and said he was rather like Nigel, only an even more 'classical' sort of person; he didn't ride to hounds and he 'liked the girls'.

Pinkie was sun-burned again, from the Lido. They went through

a few days like their very first together, in Reading; they walked arm-in-arm, and she almost kissed him in the old style, with her tongue. They ragged and played the fool as they'd once done before Basrah. She called him 'Pip-squeak' for the first time in a year. He wondered at this, and his numbed state of mind accepted good as well as bad.

Glenning came in one evening and let it fall that he'd just lost 'a good man' at the office; this turned out to be Grove, of all people! Apparently, they'd done some work together, and Grove came to the office in a free-lance capacity. Pinkie wasn't there when Glenning talked about it; he didn't glance at Granville once but seemed to talk to himself, mumbling and looking down; then he took Granville out for a drink and bought a bottle of wine; Granville wondered if he was trying to do him a service of some kind!

Glenning told him he'd met Grove at the house, before Granville came back, and found out that he was a first-class photographer and 'contact-man'; "He's done bloody good work for me, I'll say that," he murmured; but now Grove had decided to set up on his own, a sort of publicity firm under the name 'Grove Publicity Management Ltd.' He didn't know where his money came from, because he hadn't had a bean before. He knew he'd got a loan from somewhere. There'd been a rumour that someone quite influential had extended a helping hand; could the name be Maimbury?

Granville's cheeks flushed and he said quickly, "Yes, that's an uncle of Pinkie's."

And Glenning simply notted in a lazy fashion, still gazing down; he had such a protective manner! And after he'd said this he leaned forward and poured him another glass of wine; "Let's get drunk tonight,

shall we, old boy?" he said, and Granville nodded.

They left the house, which was empty, it being Friday evening, and went to the Marquis, which Granville was proud to show him. Glenning bought a bottle of whisky there, and they drank it slowly; neither of them were members but Granville saw Joyce, the pale girl, and managed to get himself joined to the club by paying a pound. He was shy and detached with her and was terrified she'd come downstairs and join them when she'd finished at the bar; but there was no sign of her. Glenning said that funnily enough he knew this place through Grove, who did the publicity for the 'Kaaba dancing company' who rehearsed here! Grove was achieving quite a ubiquity! During the whisky he remembered that Pinkie's bank balance had been surprisingly low when he'd asked her for a loan; this explained it; she and Maimbury had gone in together! He began to feel a smarting indignation against them; but he remembered the last few sun-lit days with Pinkie and refused to believe it. Finally, when he went home, he was sure that Glenning would only have told him what he did if there had been no connection between Grove and Pinkie.

He began going to the office for the work on his files, and on the second day he asked Dick to spend the night at the house so that they could travel in together one morning; it would be like the old Reading days, when they'd got up early to go for a week-end's camping or a day's hike across Berkshire. They breakfasted alone in the kitchen, before Pinkie was up; it was darkening in the mornings now and they had the light on; Dick made the tea while he managed the bacon and eggs. They joked and chafed each other. The house was wonderfully silent, and they spoke in undertones, sipping their tea. There was the old fascin-

ation he got from Dick's company, of seeing everything fresh and vivid, as if life was being laid in front of him for the first time; there was none of the ache of being with a woman; there was a wonderful relish in everything; all the little sights and sounds of the kitchen could be noticed; the light glowed more mysteriously; they ate their fill and then threw everything into the sink. The whine of the first buses in the distance was thrilling to him; he advanced one of his favourite ideas to Dick, that men and women should have their separate worlds, ad the two 'rhythms' were so different; and Dick said, while he nosed over the morning paper, that this would be all right as long as he had access to the other world; and he added that he'd managed to establish a comfortable rhythm with women at times, 'differences notwithstanding'. They chuckled and went off to work.

They took a bus down; the lights were still on, looking sickly in the growing sunlight. "Well, bo'sun," Dick said, giving him a nudge, "now you know what I go through while you're basking in the desert sun!"

The tiny office was exactly as he'd left it the day before, with the files ready, piled on the floor; and the Secret Weapon was waiting for him with a notebook in her hand. A few of the people downstairs recognised him and greeted him cheerfully; they all had the same mild, respectful and enquiring air; what a difference it was from the black stared of Basrah! One of them asked him what life was like 'out there' and he stood between their desks trying to answer while they gazed at him with a certain light in their eyes; they seemed to be seeing the dazzling desert as he described it, gazing into the distance. When the door of his office was closed and the first file was lying on his desk he began to feel a peculiar relief; the chair was soft, on a swivel and made with

leather. He sat deeper in it and gazed out of the window; he could just see the edge of St. Paul's, dusty like a piece of fabric in the sunlight. His thoughts began to collect themselves into the office-plan he hadn't known for more than two months.

He worked there for three days and realised that the work would take him another week. Pinkie had talked to Elizabeth Bewley-Patton and had arranged for them both to spend about five days there. But now that was altered because of his extra work; she would go up in a few days alone, and after a week, when he'd finished at the office, he'd join her. She said she was so relieved to be getting out of London; and it wasn't going to be a 'dressy' sort of visit; there'd only be 'old Liz'; her husband was in Malta or somewhere for the Admiralty; when she'd phoned Elizabeth up, she told him, the housekeeper had thought she was Laura Lady Maine! But the house wasn't 'grand', she added; there wouldn't even be the housekeeper there during their stay; it was going to be cosy and restful.

In the evening he always left the office before Dick, who would be delayed at his desk or have to take a client out to dinner. This was the price one had to pay, Dick said, for early promotion. Dick had lost some of his ease of manner in recent weeks; his face took on a carful look when he reached the pillared entrance of T.I.M., where the commissionaire stood, and he appeared to steel himself.

Granville's life was regular again; he slept the moment his head touched the pillow; wild thoughts were kept at bay; the idea of Pinkie having a lover was now manifestly absurd to him; it was 'dramatic'; his mind was clear and practical! Other people's faces at the office had a fixed quietude; and he could see why; his own had become the same! His

secretary always closed the door with hushed, careful fingers; her face was wholly set on the work, as if its themes went into the pores of her skin and stretched down her long legs and into the thin heels and toes of her shoes; all her movements were under strict and minute survellance, from her tactfully painted lips to her stockings; she really did have the intricacy and exactitude of a weapon. It seemed that she'd been given a list of points on which a woman is judged by a man, and conformed to them methodically, in her dress and manners, without herself being involved in any way.

He began to feel shame towards his life at Chaworth Road. What a chaos and wreck it was ! How could he bear to look into his secretary's eyes and say good morning to the people downstairs as he passed their desks, when he had <u>this</u> behind him? He had the throbbing conviction that his life was remiss, far underground; he wished to keep to the order of the office from nowoon! It outlawed everything that belonged to him <u>alone</u> --- in the dead of night --- to do with him and Pinkie; it established a fixed exterior; and there was pleasure in this; you could become as symmetrical as the office itself, taking tea at eleven, going down to lunch with the morning paper under your arm, sitting in the same chair by the window, with a glass of lager which the waitress put before you in the same way every day, and picking up the telephone, talking in a formalised manner, smiling the same smile at the secretary every time the dictation was over!

Chaworth Road was sometimes a shock in the evening; he couldn't make the adjustment at once; and, especially when a small party collected, one had to look free; a drink halped! He remembered Mohammed's face from a great distance; it was a face wreathed with all sorts of little

corruptions and kindnesses, with all the brothels he'd been to, with all the araks he'd drunk in the evening, with the girls off the street, and the boys he took to his sqalid room, gazing at them with his soft, black, incurious eyes! Mohammed sat in a specially cushioned chair; and he would sigh sometimes, murmuring, "Allah, wa-Allah!", and take a cigarette, or sent out for tea; sometimes he would lift his eyes and begin talking to him quietly about the latest bit of scandal; um Hussein, the wife of the chemist Abdullah, had been seen in the green district the other night, in a closed car, number-plate diplomatic; his smoky black eyes would gaze into the distance; the chauffeur of the Minister of Economics had screamed an insult at his master in his own house, calling him 'a father of pricks' and saying that 'his arse streamed with come', which was the worst insult for a man, since it implied the 'passive role'; and that the Minister would surely 'put him away'! Granville began to think he'd never see the face again? and that it hadn't definitely happened.

Under his influence Pinkie also fell back into a routine life; the rituals of Basrah were established again; she got up half-an-hour earlier and made the tea; and she shopped on her was home, and began to have something ready for him in the evening. She even did extra cooking, and made delicious meat-loaves and desserts; the bathroom was clean, and there were fresh sheets on the bed.

She hardly went out in the evening. He looked at her in wonder; the affectionateness of the last few days continued. She was flushed healthily, and wore a pretty house-coat. From the moment he put on office clothes again a certain established submission had come over her; as Dick said to him one day, "There's nothing like a nine-to-five routine for bringing a woman to heel"; every woman, he said, was a suburban.

The house sparkled, and they got wonderful food.

The buses were always full when he came home, and very quiet, with the tiredness of everyone. Most people had newspapers, and opened them with a crackle; the air was full of mechanical, clicking movements. Newspapers were opened, folded once, folded again, then held before the eyes; it went on mechanically; the desire to read didn't seem essential to it. As the conductor moved down the gangway there would be clipped voices, "Aldgate, please," "Threepenny one, please", "Six and a half, please" while the bus hummed and trembled in its depths. Everything went click-click and there were few easy movements of the eyes, lips or hands; only underneath was there a hidden, broken, pathetic warmth and calm, joining everyone. After a few days the rhythm got into him, too; there was a place for the newspaper in the right hand; it was folded in a certain way; the face was set in a matter-of-fact expression; walking was business-like and unpretentious; your movements suggested that life was ordinary, known and previously examined, so that surprise, curiosity or the close inspection of anything were out of place. He remembered the hair-girl's dance, and caught his breath to realise that it had actually happened; and he couldn't believe that he'd sat downstairs in the Marquis with Dick and the muscular-looking girl, and kept his composure; life appeared to him as a pattern of flat, simple, ordinary facts; these facts were that he had a house, lived there with his wife, had a job, was free in the evenings, and so forth! Outside that commonsense-structure things were dreamy and unreal. 'Everything has been taken care of," the city seemed to say, 'and you needn't stir yourself.'

He was astonished at the serious way people now treated him --- the commissionaire outside the T.I.M. entrance when he arrived in the

morning, and bus-conductors, shop-keepers, waitresses; he wore a dark suit and a semi-starched collar, and the office-work made it possible for him to do everything at the acknowledged times; he was never anywhere out of hours; and there was an understood public tribute for that. What he really felt, or what he was, had become vague.

But he was brought up with a jolt; it happened on a Friday. Pinkie phoned him at the office to say she'd be going out with Hanni, and would he mind getting his own dinner tonight? Dick might be coming round to share his grub. However, Dick didn't join him on his way out of the office; some last-minute work had come in. Nobody was in the house when he got back, though these days the downstairs door was left open for people like Gerals or Glenning to wander in if they felt like it. He cooked some food and ate the dessert she'd left him; it became dark and he decided he'd like to go for a walk; he went as far as Piccadilly, where it was dusty and hot, and took a bus back, getting home after eleven. She was still not home, so he decided to go out again for a shorter stroll, down to the Commercial Road and back; he was walking quite near the house when he happened to turn round and watch a bus that was just slowing down; there weren't many people on board, and the yellow lights inside had a blazing effect on the darkness; it made him blink. He glanced at the upper deck and to his astonishment saw Pinkie with someone at her side; he looked closer and noticed that a hand was resting on her shoulder; it was Grove's; then Grove leaned towards her, whispering something, and and kissed her on the cheek; she gazed before her in a sad way, like a child being taken home after a treat, droopy and tired. Granville's heart was beating so fast that he could hardly take breath. He didn't

know which way to turn in case they should get off the bus now; but they didn't, and as the bus drew away from him he had a better view from behind --- the pale hand resting heavily on her shoulder, Grove's thick, black hair down to his collar, and the same neck he'd noticed the first evening, with fluffier hair at the base; he turned down a side-street to avoid home; Grove might take her to the gate and he might surprise them; he wanted to wait; he stumbled along, not seeing anything round him; his composure was gone; the palms of his hands were sweating and blood rushed into his head and pounded about.

He wanted to give them time to say good night. The absurdest doubt started in him as to whether he'd actually seen them; now he knew how he distorted things to his own advantage! He rushed towards Chaworth Road suddenly, wanting further proof that they were together, or rather that they were lovers; suppose she said to him calmly, "Well, what's in a kiss? Don't friends kiss each other sometimes?" But now it was too late. He'd given them time to get away! There was a pleasure in the hunt; the shadow of a grim sexual pleasure; it would excite him to see them together, see them kiss! He leaped along the pavement, his dark office-coat flying. When he got to the house there was no one outside; a light went on in the music-room upstairs; the sight was stupendously forlorn to him!

He started in on the subject as soon as he was standing in front of her; she was sitting on the bed taking off her stockings, and she had begun to undo her blouse so that her breasts were visible, preparing to go to bed.

"What the bloody hell have you been up to?" he shouted.

She made a jump and looked up at him, pale at once, her mouth

open, like a child; he fought against his compassion.

"What do you mean?" she asked breathlessly, terrified.

He could tell that her heart was beating fast now as well; he noticed for the first time that she had a touch of grey at the side of her hair.

"You're having an affair!" he shouted.

And she said to this, her voice trembling, "What on earth are you talking about?"

"I told you to be honest --- the first night ---!" he shouted at her.

His anger mounted and she started crying. He kept repeating, "Have you got a lover?" And to his surprise she suddenly looked up with the most simple expression and said in a quiet voice "Yes."

But either because she saw the crushed and stunned look on his face, and the total collapsing movement he made with his body, or because it was true, she added at once, "No, I haven't." The room looked in ruins. The carpet, bed and chairs had a disconnected look; he was dazed and sometimes it seemed his eyes had gone wrong, because her image kept flickering. He realised he hadn't mentioned what he'd seen; and he couldn't bring himself to mention it! She might then tell him everything; and he couldn't bear that! He kept drilling into her, exhausting her, until it was past two in the morning, storming about her lack of constancy, asking if she wanted a divorce, repeating his question again and again --- did she have a lover? She wept nearly all the time; he said she'd better get over her tears and start facing the question; to his question did she want a divorce, put for the fourth or fifth time, she made the same simple reply she'd made before, with the same expression, "Yes." When

they were in bed she broke down again and fell into his arms; she said through her tears that she wanted them to be 'lovers' again, like at first; it was a strange thing to say; he didn't know what it meant; what could he do to make them 'lovers' again? He thought about this even while she clung to him and he held her round the shoulders. He was comforted. The word came to his mind again and again, 'lovers': what did she mean? They switched the light out and she began to sleep; he lay puzzling; she wanted to go back to those first summer days in Reading; it was impossible; he was finished; and there he slept.

His life here was a masquerade; it struck him next morning; he was sick and beaten; he couldn't bear to look her in the face; he had nothing to say; and she seemed to have no sorrow; they spent two hours over breakfast, it being Saturday, and then made coffee; she was mute, with tight-closed lips. He wanted to attack her again and go through the same questionaire as the night before; but what was the use? Questions presupposed a hope; and there wasn't hope! He'd tried to find out the truth before, but not too hard; now he <u>knew</u>! He was alone, and he had to make a life for himself; it was a flat, pale, implacable conviction. There were no other thoughts in his head. Everything was quiet and still in him. But it didn't afford him any relief; it was only a weak state, like the pause after an operation. He tried not to believe what he'd seen with his eyes. A little idiot-voice in his head said that the kiss had been an illusion. He steeled himself to ask Hanni, had she really been with Pinkie the previous evening? He hung about the kitchen when Pinkie went shopping, hoping Hanni would come; but she didn't come all day.

Hanni appeared from Hampton Court Sunday afternoon, without Dick. But he couldn't do it. Then he suddenly forced himself, when Pinkie was in the bath, and he and she were sitting in the kitchen. Had she been with Pinkie Friday evening? "Yes," she replied without a flicker. They were with 'Joe Clockwork', she added. She had a sane, cool expression, which made his pain worse, because he could see how far he was from others. He was no wiser: why shouldn't there have been four of them on Friday evening --- Grove and 'Clockwork'? He'd meant to work on the report over the week-end but could only sit gazing in front of him.

He wouldn't go back to Basrah; no, he had no projects now; it even felt peaceful; he sat staring in front of him in a state of raw nerves, with hardly the will to make himself a cup of tea, much less open a book or go for a walk. He couldn't sleep, also. It was like actually living inside a dream. Nothing was quite tangible. Reality was at second removed behind his raw nerves. He would suddenly wake up after dozing and say to himself, "Of course, it isn't true!" And the truth would dawn on him slowly again like a pale light.

He worked at the office as best he could; downstairs in the canteen he only pecked at his food; he was anxious to get to the bar, and went back upstairs in the afternoon unsteady; the secretary found him much more jolly and relaxed, and behaved less mechanically. Dick hardly spoke to him, going about his work. Hanni came in after work in the evenings and manicured her toe-nails by the fire. He tried to disburden himself; but before Dick he was ashamed; Dick avoided people in trouble, and 'invalids'; before Hanni he was afraid she might use the information against him one day.

With a trembling hand he phoned up the Marquis to find out if the

hair-girl was there. To his surprise she was, and with a trembling voice he asked her if she'd like to go to the zoo with him --- he said the zoo on the spur of the moment; he was even more surprised when she took him at his word and said she'd love to; he'd expected her to ring off in a huff; but she asked politely how he was! He'd done it! Suddenly --- after all these weeks!

He made it for the following afternoon; and the next day he simply walked out of the office at the end of the morning and didn't go back, but caught a bus to Regent's Park. He hadn't said a word to the secretary. It was another lovely, warm day, and his black clothes were stifling. The hair-girl was amused by them and also impressed; she made him put his arm in hers, and walked proudly along. It gave him a sense of sacrilege against her --- that he wasn't fully aware of her; he only saw things through his pallor, dimly and weakly. He was only concerned with not showing his nervousness; his eyes twitched and he had to squint them against the sunlight. His bones ached from lack of sleep. He asked himself what they were doing together? She said "Gee, look at that!" to everything, and he smiled; she said he seemed much happier and easier than on the first day she'd seen him. He gave her a little squeeze on the arm when she said this; apparently, such gestures were enough; what a ridiculous world!

She walked with her head slightly down as before, preoccupied, making small jerky steps; this time she was wearing a bright print dress, which made her look like a little girl, dark-skinned, with deep, peering eyes. Her hair was tied in a ribbon behind, nearly, falling in one strand. He asked her how the dancing was going on and she said that 'the darkies' were annoying her as they always had done; and that her father had always

warned her against them; once more she said that if things were different, as they'd been when she was a child, those 'darkies' would be calling her miss and making their salaams to her. She kept her voice down; she was even demure.

As they reached one of the chimpanzee-cages one of the animals bent down, doubled up for a moment, then swung to a lower bar; there he sat for a moment, and then, gazing placidly at the spectators outside, he began to masturbate. He did it with quick little movements. A woman near by with a sharp nose and sad lines round her mouth said quickly to her two children, "All right, that's enough," and pulled them away; there was personal indignation in her voice. The hair-girl laughed and bellowed, "Now just look at that! You dirty old man!" He laughed as well and suddenly the chimpanzee subsided and looked at them both with an open mouth, peering at them, his hands at his side; he'd heard that monkeys think you're angry when you laugh or smile. Granville had difficulty in making his voice come out properly; it cracked and droned.

While they were walking towards the elephants she suddenly asked him, "Don't you ever go out with your wife?" She gave him a dark, upward glance. He said he did sometimes, and asked why she wanted to know. She'd met Pinkie, she told him, at that party she gave. They never seemed to be together, she said.

"Why should we be together?" he asked her.

"What?" she said, turning and looking him full in the eyes, so quickly that her hair swung round from one shoulder to the other. "What's the good of marriage, then?"

He said, "Well, one's still got to have a life of one's own."

"Why get married, then?"

He shrugged, completely done-up. "We go out together sometimes," he murmured.

"But she's beautiful! I thought she was the sweetest kid at the party!" she cried. "I can't understand it! Aren't you scared she'll run after somebody else?"

And again he shrugged. There were the delighted cries of children near by. They came to the gravel path where two elephants plodded clowly up and down, bearing awed-looking children on a great saddle which swayed slightly, close to the trees. The elephant's eyes had a smoky and merciful look in the midst of black, wrinkled, leathery skin, old and tiny.

They went to the lion house, where the air was thick and stifling. Sometimes a roar boomed out across the hall. Sunlight poured in through the tall windows and the arched doorways; there was a lioness padding up and down close to the bars, dark, with blazing eyes; her vast paws thumped softly on the floor and her coat rubbed against the bars as she searched the distance. The onlookers, tiny and shifting, were absent to her; she looked far over their heads. Her paws levered her smoothly and quickly along, and her body was tense with watching. It was near feeding-time, somebody said. Then she stood quite still, her head high. She was entirely concentrated on her object. An attendant had appeared, far at the other end of the hall, and his pail made a clanking sound. All the animals were up at once, and the prowling walk went on in all the cages. The attendant jumped down into a pit running in front of the cages and began walking along it, whistling. A lion gazed down at him as he passed, golden and red-maned, his mouth open so that his long white teeth showed slightly, his head lowered, watching the tiny figure pass underneath,

with friendly, intrigued eyes. The man reached the lioness and said something to her; the crowd moved closer. The man was small and thin, whippet-faced, with sharp eyes. She gazed straight down into his eyes, peering at him in his tininess, her head a little to one side, trying to understand his speech. All the time he spoke she watched him and sometimes she glanced at his pail, looking for the connection between his speech and that. He put his hand in the pail and she started forward softly, with a quickened interest as if he'd said something startling. He held a massive piece of meat before him, lurid red flesh hanging in a strand, yellow-streaked. Then with a quick accurate movement he threw it into the cage and she leaped on to it before it reached the ground, tearing at it with a deep sustained growl that was also like a croon of sympathy for the caught prey.

He hardly remembered leaving the hair-girl that afternoon; she was intrigued by his silence and kept shooting him quick glances. Now and then he put a question to her mechanically. It was one of those endless summer days when the air had a fevered and disquieting numbness; he took a bus down to Marble Arch alone and then walked across to the City through St. James's Park. There were lovers everywhere, and he watched the ducks cleaning themselves at the edge of the water, flicking their tails. The streets were rather deserted, as on a holiday. He kept on thinking of the lioness, and heard her strange croon of sympathy as she tore at the flesh. He felt drained and withered; there was half a bottle of wine in the kitchen which someone had left, and he drank it in record time; Pinkie had gone to bed.

To make it worse, as the days went on, he began to feel a terrible

desire for Pinkie. But he couldn't bring himself to touch her or even speak to her. He remained sunk in a chair in the music-room in the evenings. The previous week, when he and Dick had travelled to the office together, seemed positively ages ago. Only the immediate purposes of his body counted, nothing else; his desire for her was local and gripped in his genitals; not spread in his body but gnawing at him, disconnected from the question of her character, that being past hope for him. He watched her surreptitiously. His mind began to work in that thin way which he'd always been taught at school was true thinking; only the little brain-box ticked over! It worked alone, ticking abjectly about life, making its own painstaking, grim calculations, without moral drive behind it; there was no will in him. The brain had the run of his whole being; but it had no direction except to serve local needs. It was a pleasure to have this moral drive gone; the loss of will left a trembling placidness. He didn't care. He looked at his report on the desk, nearly laid out, and wondered that he'd ever had the sustaining power to get that far. Life was now piecemeal, simply events. He waited listlessly for the next event to turn up. Were some people always like that, he asked himself, the people who were deadly factual and crisp and reasonable?

He thought he might try to construct his life on these shambles; let him apply his mind coolly; let him decoy Pinkie artfully, to satidfy his sex; with no moral drive his brain could work coolly towards its ends; these ends were, in a word, his own comfort. Thank God that was still with him!

But he dared not touch her; he had to overcome the sense of humiliation; and yet the humiliation was part of the pleasure; it was the

desire; the more he felt it, the more his desire was stimulated; he remembered when she'd been brazen with him, recently; the memory was exciting!

He worked at his pride, trying to break it down; let him talk to her, as a beginning; the silence had to be broken down; then their life would grow together again on the new thin basis. This was difficult because she gritted her teeth against his feelings; this was clear; she went out of the house without saying a word; she no longer cooked the meals; the wonderful desserts and meat loaves were finished. Deliberately one morning she said to him, before they both went off to work, "Oh, I shall be out for a day or so." He couldn't answer her, only stared. A scheme occurred to him of locking the downstairs door and stopping her getting out; he hadn't thought her capable of staying out the whole night; he realised how much hope there had still been in him, in the deep regions! He looked panic-stricken and she seemed to take pity on him. She said she only meant she was going out for the evening. He suggested breathlessly that they go and see a film together; she agreed in a perfunctory way; she was watching him, her eyes flickering curiously. He face showed the slightest sign of unstiffening.

He spent that day wandering about Soho; office-work was out of the question, and at about half-past four he rang the Secret Weapon and told her that he'd been up to Birmingham and was delayed; would she lay out such-and-such a file for him, as he was coming in an hour earlier next morning? He ate in a noisy Italian place with marble-topped tables; the narrow, bustling streets of Soho were a comfort to him with their touch of foreign life. When he got back he found to his surprise that both Dick and Pinkie were there; he had a sharp sense of foreboding as

he walked up the stairs, and his stomach did a turn; there was the smell of Pinkie's scent outside the bathroom. Dick nodded to him when he walked in, without saying anything; Pinkie was next door in the bedroom putting the last touches to her hair; he almost dared not mention the cinema; it seemed out of the question that she would actually come.

He asked her if she was going out, and she turned to face him slowly, her eyes lost and liquidly blue, as they sometimes were when she went out alone. She said she was; just round the corner; she'd forgotten about the cinema --- some other time; she was going round to 'pick up an ear-ring' she'd lost; didn't he remember? Those ones in the shape of the Muslin crescent? He'd pointed out the loss to her himself that first night; he ought to know, she said.

He didn't want to say too much because of Dick being within earshot, but he managed, "Can't you cancel it? I was keen on seeing a film!"

She coolly unscrewed a lipstick and began touching her lips. No, it was impossible, she said; she'd fixed it up at the office; 'this fellow' had hung on to the ear-ring just to get her round to his flat; as the ear-ring was precious to her she'd have to 'face the music'; Dick chuckled next door. He went on asking her to make it another evening but she wouldn't budge. She went to the bed and pulled on some knickers under her skirt so that the elastic made a little smack on her skin. "Can't he bring it round here?" he asked abjectly. She laughed: "Good God, I wouldn't want him round here!" She walked past him coolly, her high heels making a soft scraping sound on the carpet, and he caught her scent again, something like roses, clean and disquieting. "Oh, Christ," he went on, following her into the music-room, "I came back specially. Why didn't you let me know?" She was adamant. He'd never dragged after

her like this before! Dick sat there on the arm of a chair, swinging one leg.

He felt hot and ungainly. Also he had a protective feeling towards Grove of all people; where was he tonight? He was aware of another hope that had still been sound in him, that while she might betray him she was incapable of betraying Grove as well --- namely, doing 'it' for its own sake! His brain in its new abject capacity even suggested a compromise, that she should be allowed Grove if she confined her betrayals to him! She picked up a small velvet bag from the mantelpiece and walked out of the room with a little wink at Dick. He went to the lavatory, not wanting to face Dick alone, and waiting there until he heard him go upstairs to the kitchen; then he left the house again.

There wasn't a sound in the street. A bird came and perched on the railing, a blackbird, and made a sad, distinct little song, his tiny head uplifted and his yellow points of eyes shining; then Granville disturbed him and he flew off. It was the first blackbird he'd seen here. He walked until he was exhausted and then returned; to his surprise she was already back; it was only ten. He was elated as he walked up the stairs, hearing her talk to Dick, but he checked his walk so that they wouldn't notice. He heard her tell Dick that after the second dance and the second stiff drink the 'bounder' tried to 'get fresh', but she'd snatched the ear-ring and made off. His relief was extraordinary; he wanted to get in touch with Grove at once and celebrate the soundness of her character! He almost liked Grove! Perhaps it was fate's subtle way of resigning him to Grove's existence? Eventually, perhaps, one could accept everything? With enough food and drink, and enough money in your pocket for an evening out, perhaps you could let life do whatever

it liked with you?

The next evening she was out again and when she came back he heard her take a bath. He went into the bathroom afterwards, while she was dressing in the bedroom, and saw that she'd been using her vaginal douche; that was strangely careless; why should she use it unless she'd slept with someone? But hercouldn't recollect if she used it <u>whenever</u> she took a bath; the impression stuck, however. He prevented his eyes showing any expression. There was pleasure involved in his examining the douche; it was a painful sexual delight, taking his breath away. His desire was being stimulated all the time; first there was the shock of discovery, then the desire began gnawing at him. He must let the brain go on ticking with its closed life, far behind the eyes; the eyes only twitched and fluttered, no longer the windows of the soul --- or perhaps they were more windows now than ever before, if he could only see himself; he dared not look in the mirror; when he shaved in the morning he used a small magnifying mirror that Dick had left behind once, thus avoiding his own eyes.

On the week-end she went about the house cleaning, and played the piano for the first time since his return to England; it brought the tears to his eyes; it was some Scarlatti, which she always played well, with calm, deft fingers; he stood on the stairs listening, his desire soothed a little; the playing was so lovely; it drifted through the house; he didn't go down into the music-room because it embarrassed her if she knew he was near by while she played. There was a stormy sky that evening, with great heat. Sweat poured down his neck as it used to in Basrah; he could feel his rash again on his neck, awakened; how would he be able to face those suffocating, fly-blown days again alone? It made

him shudder. He remembered the tinkling of the palm-tree by his balcony in the middle of the night, and the last month when pinkie hadn't been there, and his feverish fear that it was somebody climbing up. How would he be able to bear it again, alone?

Next morning his mind failed him with its humble little plans; he'd planned to approach her subtly, with hard calculation, decoying her sex so that it would be all the more exciting, seeming to come from a stranger, behind the veil of their silence together. But he ruined everything; a moment after they woke up, before his eyes were open and his mind was aware of what his desires intended, he put out his arm towards her in a caressing movement, with the old sincereity, and began kissing her neck, his will flooded out by yearning. She did exactly what she'd done before; she was alert at once and he could feel her blinking, the tiny lashes fluttering against his cheek; and again she stiffened with panic. But suddenly, this time, his abjectness was gone; he kicked at the bedclothes with one terrific push of his leg and, quite awake, jumped off the bed with an odd kind of roar, giddy, and then pulled up the whole bed with his two hands, surprised at his strength, then lifted it until there was danger of her being squashed against the wall; she screamed exaggeratedly, as if knives were being used, and with a sudden reversion to light-heartedness, so that he could have laughed, seeing her crumpled up on the edge of the bed like the heroine in a melodrama, he let the bed fall again. It came down with an almighty thump and clang and shook the whole house. He nearly burst out laughing. Now he didn't know where to put himself; he wanted to undo his action, and put his mind back into its underground clicking life again. But he couldn't! With a final show of disgust he pulled all the bedclothes off and flung them across to the other side of

the room; then he stalked upstairs.

If only he'd kept himself in check! He'd ruined everything! It would take him another two days to build up the grim, satisfying muteness; and then, slowly, he would remove her veil. He made some tea and began to feel still and soothed. The house was in silence. A few minutes later she came up in her dressing gown, pale and with the trace of tears on her cheek. He noticed at once when she looked at him that her eyes were devoid of any feeling towards him, even hatred. They'd never been like this before. She sat down and pulled a cup and saucer towards her, still gazing at him, her hair dishevelled, and said quietly, "You bloody little clerk. Who do you think you are, exactly?" And she continued to gaze at him dully, all the consideration gone out of her eyes. He sat under her gaze, frightened. 'Those were Grove's eyes', he thought.

'I'm not in her any more,' he thought. 'My spell's gone.'

He realised dumbly what respect she must have had for him before; by its absence now.

He got up and her hard eyes followed him; then she blinked and looked down at the table again. He went and lay on the bed downstairs, hollowed-out. He could see himself from outside, as white flesh, discarded; his flesh lay on the bed, only his mind kept life going; otherwise he had no self. After all, she was so near him, and had been for five, six years, thinking everything with him; now a whole element of himself was taken away; it was like being drained of blood; he lay panting! An uncanny feeling: his body was occupied by nothing. The sky looked deathly and bleak outside, its grey light touched every object in the room. Impossible that enchanting things could exist. She came and swept up her office-things from the room and dressed in the bathroom, and then he

heard her leave the house. She was right, he thought; how frightfully he behaved! He deserved to be hollowed out; he must learn to look at it like that every day; he had to protect her, against herself as well; he had to soothe the tears she shed because of him; he must see that the affair with Grove went well; in that way she'd keep her beauty; why couldn't he do that? Why not be her guardian, and go into her tears, be inside her all the time, beyond sex? That would be a real intimacy, beyond people! He mustn't diminish her in any way.

Tears filled his eyes; it began to patter with rain outside; he heard what she'd said again --- he was a bloody little clerk. He realised suddenly how precious his thinking was to him., His 'problems'! Not a little clerk - no -! The tears fell down the side of his face in a mechanical way, independently of him; he simply felt them streaming down. And it wasn't crying on his own behalf; he had the calm sensation behind his tears that he was crying for what men did; it was a lament for what life was, as if self had drained out of him and he was only the instrument of this unearthly lament that brought the tears pouring down his face while his eyes stared quite calmly in front of him.

But what was he, in himself? Let him look at the matter clearly. All he had was this faith in himself. What was he, more than a clerk? He remembered the shock a few nights before when Dick had got up to look at the 'Racing Times' with Pinkie. Suppose a water-tight betting system was more interesting than what he had to say? Suppose his 'problems' were nothing? Suppose the moment he leaned forward to speak he scared people off? He was bled dry; he couldn't lift his head; he'd reached the ultimate static depth of unbelief.

Slowly he revived; the spirit stirred and began to awaken in him;

it was like a hand stretching out and beginning to stir with life. He told himself that this was a point at which every man had to be blind, and not know what he was, and be prepared to go on in blindness; something in life, at an essential point, had to be accepted blindly; civilisation rested on that; there had to be a blind point of faith; there had to be a spark in every man which he held up to eternity against coubt and ridicule! For a moment he fell back: how silly it must look to an outsider, a little clerk storming an putting forward his ideas! Who was there in the world to say that his thoughts had meaning? Only himself! He couldn't think of one other person. In the Sussex days he'd always had a faith that people saw the light in him at once. But that was gone. He had to go on in blindness.

The night before she went up to Meedham his desire was fulfilled. It might have been an act of policy on her part; she took pity on him, obeying a deeper wisdom, perhaps. She got into bed naked, switching the light out first, leaving her pyjamas under the pillow; at one moment she'd been standing in her skirt and blouse, with her shoes off, while he lay in bed, and the next she'd switched the light out and was slipping her clothes off quickly; and he felt her cool flesh against his. She'd just come in from an evening-out; her story was that she'd been to the cafe and taken a taxi back. But there was a tremulous excitement about her, quivering in her body, and he found she was already wet between her legs; his sudden excitement --- a servant that answered her at once --- was almost unbearable, touched as it was with horror; there was an image, that both tortured and drugged him, of another contact.

It was a numbed, absent act with the echo of something intimate

underneath, like a silent massage; the moment it was over, as after a successful operation, there was great calm, a sense of cleanliness and light, and a certain air of convalescence. It wasn't quite the subtle act he'd been steeling himself for, in which he'd get behind the veil to where he could feel Grove's spirit in her and accept it; but it left him satisfied. He felt quiet and soothed, and next day he saw her off at the station.

She looked fresh and young in a print dress, and they blew each other a kiss as the train drew out, its windows flashing in the hazy sunlight, making her eyes twinkle; there was a sudden affection between them; he wanted to run after the train; they both seemed to recollect something! He strolled back to the house with his hands in his pockets. Miraculously the burden lifted from him.

That evening he went to a concert at the Albert Hall and had a sense of returning to himself, and of life at Chaworth Road as being foreign to him. He read in bed afterwards, sipping cocoa; he hadn't lived quietly like this for ages, it seemed; the calm flowed through him; his thoughts were clear; the life he led was alien to him. He was astonished at the balm that flowed through him simply from being alone.

In the morning he made tea on the gas-ring in the bedroom and sat in bed drinking it, the curtains still closed. The room, again to his surprise, looked settled and cosy, its objects rooted there. For weeks past he must have been in a fever, by comparison with this. It occurred to him that he wasn't worried about her at the moment; that was the main relief, perhaps; she would have a good, clean life with Elizabeth and the children; the nightmare would lift for a few days; she would cook and

gossip; she always bloomed in the country and looked a different person. Elizabeth was sane and responsible, accustomed to running a large household.

So he rested, infinitely, sleeping longer than usual and browsing through his travel books for hours in the evening. Hanni and Dick appeared to feel this when they came over; there was the old simplicity between them; Hanni cooked them meals, humming.

It reminded him of the previous spring in Basrah. Everything had been sparkling and lucid then. There'd been no dangers. The house had been quiet and spacious, with clear sunlight streaming through the corridors, and the lawns of the consular district had been a dazzling green; He and Pinkie had gone for picnics, even as far as Babylon once, in somebody's private plane; and they'd had tea in the garden, under the banana trees, almost every day.

During those lovely spring weeks he'd undergone a change which he thought would affect his whole life. The eclipse had happened then. It had seemed such a small thing: he'd spent the night awake in his room, thinking. And in the morning he felt he'd never seen things so clearly, or answered so many questions. It seemed the lucidity of the weather had actually come inside him, and he was part of it.

But after that, contrary to his hope, life had become darker. The month without Pinkie had been darkness itself. And since then he'd fallen further and further down.

Yet that sleepless night remained a landmark for him, behind a growing mist but always safe.

at Naples

true

describing as

Only a little while! A fortnight? ~~Eternity~~ ~~like he the state~~ like the light.

Only when he travelled the road

at Naples & Beirut did he realise

~~the the Arab was the what between~~

~~begin was the world & the~~ life

with the book on the ~~not me~~ were me & the

condition he had — alone, with

the ~~condition he had~~ — alone, with neither

a park

a pen he could return to ~~for~~ or the seeds

of a future. Muslims ~~Arab~~ were just as pious

true because they said the words we

did had already been written down in the

visible book. ~~So that the~~ Only the

present, human, was free, in the you were

entering into the work, while with death you

regained your freedom, the work was no

longer your story?

Memories of Baghdad gardens

CHAPTER 21.

The night the eclipse started I was before it was dee, when he

It had started by accident, just before the eclipse, when he and Pinkie wandered out on to the porch and found Abu Kath'm there. The year was 1950.

Abu Kath'm had a round, very flat face with still, black eyes set wide apart, her mouth a thick, straight, yellowish-crimson line. There were henna marks on her brow and chin, to ward off the evil eye, and a hem of her black abba was usually drawn up over her nose, so that her eyes shone blackly in the slit. She stood hardly higher than his elbow and walked in a round, fussy way, but always in perfect silence, her back straight and her head up, going forward softly on her toes, hardly disturbing the sand, her long skirt making a brief circular motion backwards and forwards. There was something too fussy about her --- it annoyed him a bit. She would make ceremonious little bows when she brought the washing over, and once she tried to kiss his feet. But it didn't impair her dignity. She had a dignity that was like a presence behind her, implied by her gestures and ingratiating little nods and smiles but not actually in them.

He often watched her from an upstairs window overlooking the garden. She would be squatting at the entrance of her mud hut mending clothes or picking bugs out of the hair of one of her grandchildren. Sometimes she would look up quickly as if she'd heard something and gaze before her, narrowing her eyes a little so that they shone; and no matter where she looked there always seemed to be the vast desert in front of her. A

special silence always seemed to hang round her hut, however much she shouted at the children or fussed about. Her husband came only rarely, on an old bicycle which he leaned against one of the banana trees. He had the same silence and the same distance in his eyes. It didn't matter how many awkward or quick gestures they made, the stillness was always there. And they weren't aware of each other's proximity. They went close together and sometimes spoke loudly into each other's faces. But there was always the same distant stare in their eyes, surpassing people.

The newspapers had been talking for days about the coming eclipse. And the time of total obscuration was predicted to the minute. It was to be a few minutes after three, in the afternoon.

Outside, a slight wind stirred the sand, like before a dust-storm. Baghdad ~~The city~~ lay in a great hush. Only this slight breeze touched the sand on the pathway outside and sent it whirling up in thin yellow clouds among the palm-leaves. Usually they could hear children playing near by, or cars in the distance. But today there wasn't a sound.

The sun still shone, but more and more dimly, as if a high mist obscured it. There was something vaguely disturbing in the air. Perhaps it was only the silence.

The palm-leaves were still like iron, and the colours of the garden were becoming more lurid as all brightness left the sky. He hadn't wanted to come outside. They'd just finished lunch, and he'd got up and walked to the window. Everything had seemed to be <u>waiting</u>. The sandy undulations of the waste area outside had looked hard like flint, each mound getting more and more fixed, a polished yellow crust. Then Pinkie had said she'd got a headache and added, "Let's go outside!" It seemed strangely wrong to go outside, but he nodded. And they walked out on to

the porch overlooking the garden, where everything now lay deep in a threatening silence. The rugged, knarled barks of the banana trees, the ragged grass and the yellow mud-hut with the endless shimmering desert beyond, grew more and more contrasted, in a fixed and flat way, as if, though more distinct from each other than before, these objects were all part of the same hard substance and had drawn together in a new, unwholesome intimacy. There was no wind now, not even a breeze. An absolute stillness held everything. Not a leaf or bough moved. The rooms of the house were very dark now. Inside and outside seemed to be drawing into one, and the plants and the trees had the dead immobility of furniture. And the air felt like that in a room.

Their shoes made a sharp rustling noise on the tiles, and this was covered up at once by the silence. Pinkie was frowning, her eyes screwed up in a tired way. He strolled towards the parapet and looked up at the sky. The sun was crescent-shaped now, almost finished. Why were there no sounds from the city? Pinkie moved to his side and he heard her breathing quite distinctly. The banana trees were black with shadow, their massive trunks like monuments of iron. The crescent, hardly more than a brilliantly curved line, was growing smaller and smaller.

He became aware of a dark movement below in the garden and looked down quickly. He'd forgotten Abu Kath'm was standing there, so much part of the garden had she become. Her black abba was drawn up close to her eyes and he heard her say the greeting <u>Allah bil khair</u> to him under the cloth. He nodded to her. She moved nearer them with her soft, circular motion. Her bare feet made the slightest thudding on the earth. Then she stood still under the parapet, gazing up at them, and he noticed that her eyes were troubled, blacker than usual, more fiery and pointed.

She made a long movement of her arm under her cloak and nodded with an urgent expression towards the house; she wanted them to go back inside! Like the colours of the garden the colours of her face had become more vivid under the strange sky. The henna marks on her brow were a more glaring reddish-brown, and the skin round her eyes was luminously yellow. Neither he nor Pinkie moved, only watched her. She nodded towards the house again, her eyes screwed up earnestly. She was standing perfectly still. Everything in the garden seemed immovable, the folds of her cloak like folds of iron. Her sallow, slightly sweating skin could have been wax. The sun was almost gone.

Then she said something, speaking very quickly under the cloth in a gutteral, hoarse whisper. It hardly touched the silence, and he wasn't aware of her actually ceasing to speak, only of the silence having asserted itself again. The sound was secretive and rasping, from an inhuman depth. It had a certain dryness, like twigs breaking. The voice seemed not her own. Her eyes, screwed up with an urgent concentration, seemed the only human thing in her, as if they were trying to send a message of help across the silence, to corroborate the voice that had come from under her cloth.

He didn't catch any of the words. He raised his eyebrows, to indicate he hadn't understood, but she took this for surprise at what she'd said, and nodded quickly again. Then she repeated the remark, and this time he managed to catch a few of the words. She was saying something about the sun being Allah. Then, "Allah is angry with men," he heard. And this was followed by a sentence something like, "He is hiding his eyes from men" or "He is covering his sight from men in shame for them!" She repeated the quick, stabbing word for 'shame', that was like a whip of

punishment itself --- aib, two syllables rushed breathlessly together.

When she said "Allah" she made the slightest backward movement of her head towards the sky. It was hardly enough to be noticed, only a faint swaying motion, with a look of gleaming confidence in her eyes. But there was such an unhesitating intimacy in it that he glanced up at the sun at once, almost expecting to see evidence of what she said. She stood absolutely still, fixed in the garden like the trees. Her eyes were unblinking, staring at him with pin-points of shrewd light. The sun was quite gone now. Over everything there was this uncanny dusk! He heard her repeat the words, "Allah is angry", and she drew the abba closer around her shoulders.

He glanced sideways at Pinkie and saw that she too was looking up at the sky. For a moment it was quite believable that Allah was there, showing his anger!

"How long does it last?" Pinkie asked in a murmur.

He shrugged. No birds were singing. He noticed it for the first time. She strolled to the parapet and leaned forward on it, staring into the bushes under the banana trees. And he yawned.

"I think it's only a few seconds," he replied.

"When was the last eclipse?"

"I don!t know --- years ago".

He didn't want to speak at all. It felt out of place. His voice sounded jagged and unharmonious.

"She doesn't like us being out here," Pinkie said softly, watching Abu Kath'm again.

"No."

But by now the sun was beginning to come back and the weather

revive. The fear seemed to have left Abu Kath'm's face. She had a softer look, and the folds of her skirt were no longer like iron. The skin round her eyes had lost its lurid, shining quality.

And one could see the weather had changed just by looking at her. As the sky cleared, so did her face. But he and Pinkie had to look up at the sun and <u>see</u> it appearing, to be certain. That was how they <u>knew</u>. But Abu Kath'm knew it without the use of her eyes. She was a part of everything else in the garden. Nor did she 'feel' the change in the sun. She was part of it. She was part of the weather. It was still active inside her. And just as everything else in the garden began to change its colour, so did she. She was fixed in nature like the trees, whereas he and Pinkie were looking on all the time, their minds active, far from the world round them. The world was 'external' to them. It was 'round' them.

Something of the silence lifted, too. He heard a bird singing alone. There was the faintest breath of wind through the trees. And the light was growing all the time. The desert, stretching far beyond the garden, was bright again, like a huge shimmering sea of yellow. He heard the hushed throbbing of the city again. Why did it come only now? Perhaps the slight wind brought it.

The colours of the garden were drawing out of their sombre, fixed darkness and taking on separate life again. A child shouted in the distance. Pinkie strolled back indoors, yawning.

Abu Kath'm walked away also, back to her hut. The weight and foreboding had lifted from her. She walked in her usual fussy way, her skirt swinging with its curiously soothing and circular motion. Her body turned a little with each step like an element of the air itself.

He turned back to the house and for the rest of the day his mind kept wandering to her. Really, she'd shown him the afternoon. Without her he would just have seen an 'eclipse' --- with his eyes! And he realised for the first time how little part of the world he was.

Abu Kath'm talked about the sky with an air of perfect authority, and made him and Pinkie look like children by comparison with herself --- strange, thoughtful, brooding children!

For them the eclipse was an 'event' taking place in a vast, empty zone: the moon moves between the earth and the sun, causing a partial obscuration of the light. There was nothing in this to involve their 'feelings'. It had nothing to do with them. The world was everything 'round' them, as if they were foreigners to it. And this wasn't a philosophy or doctrine on their part. It was a discipline so deep that it had become their way of perceiving things. And only with somebody like Abu Kath'm in front of them did they become at all conscious of this peculiar discipline.

Look at the way he'd thought about things on the porch, quite naturally and without question. Abu Kath'm was 'below' him, under the parapet. There were banana trees 'behind' her. Pinkie was at his 'side'. 'Above' them all was the 'sky' (a weather zone, so to speak), and the 'eclipse' was 'taking place' there, a predicted event. He was 'standing' on the porch. It was all like a physicist's survey. But it was the way he perceived things quite naturally. He <u>thought</u> while he perceived; and the two were no longer separable in him. He was apart from the things round him. They were in a kind of mathematical relation to him, 'above', 'below', 'at the side', 'behind'. The world was like a fixed chart. It was as if a thinker's consciousness had been imprinted on

his own so deeply that there was now no other way of seeing things.

But Abu Kath'm was inside the processes all round her. This didn't mean she lacked a mind. She had a quick, shrewd intelligence which showed in her eyes. But she didn't have a system of thought imprinted on her.

If the eclipse had affected him he would have said it was 'nervousness' due to 'the weather'. It would have been turned into a scientific type of concept, in which the body was a victim of influences from the 'outside'. Compared with Abu Kath'm, he thought about life all the time instead of actually perceiving and living it.

The comparison induced strange sensations in him; for a moment he could see himself as the Arabs did: a strangely static, pale, withdrawn creature. He seemed not really subject to the processes of life and death, but a spectator of them. The fact was, however, that these processes did still govern us. Therefore, he must have a distorted consciousness!

That evening, after the eclipse, there was a deeper silence in the house than usual. Kath'm the house-boy made a fire in the sitting room, for it was still cold in the evenings. There were no sounds from outside, only a dog barking in the distance now and then. Pinkie was reading the local newspaper for English residents. They'd planned to eat at the Cabala with one of the branch managers, but Pinkie had said she was tired and he'd called it off.

He sat gazing into the fire, thinking about the afternoon. It was a matter that concerned him very closely, he knew that. Abu Kath'm believed in God! As we believed in trees, say, or our own breathing;

these things simply were for us. And Allah simply was for her. The mind didn't enter into it. His vocabulary, 'believing in' God or 'feeling' God, put the matter wrong from the start. And he had to think through these words.

Pinkie went up to bed early and he stayed watching the last embers of the fire. Only a tall standing lamp was on, casting a dim red glow over everything. The room was long and high with folding doors in one wall which led to the dining room, and were opened only when there were guests. Curtains were drawn across them now to hide the rather ugly glass panelling, and they gave the room a shrouded, secret look, like a temple, especially now there was only the red lamp. He half-dozed. All evening he'd sat without a book. Then he became aware of a growing contentment in himself. He stretched out his legs, making a rustling sound on the rush mat, and settled further into his armchair. The fire was still hot and the room glowed with a wonderful subdued brilliance, the small black designs of the curtain standing out vividly, like designs on the wall of a mosque. He heard singing in the distance, with the thump of a drum. It was a servant in one of the consular gardens, perhaps. The dumbuk made smart little raps, exciting and subtle. The song seemed not to be developing in time, but static, like an endless wail. His mind was asleep for a moment, in second place, contented. The glowing room was like an indoor night, its objects fixed like stars, with that breathing stillness of trees.

It was like having life in depth instead of movement; he was only aware of the present moment; but the present moment was endless, in depth, there being no sound of movement to recognise time by. This had a strange relevance to his other thoughts. Only his mind could have told him that

time was getting on, that bed was waiting, that Pinkie was already asleep. But for the moment there was only the present, like eternity captured. Surely the mind always brought the shadow of death over an experience, by announcing the horizon beyond present time? taking us out of the depth of eternity? Did Abu Kath'm really live inside present time? But we'd got broken off! We moved at a tangent all the time!

He felt drawn right into life, sucked down by the flow of the room and the distant, whining song. There was no death for the moment. The mind pointed out no frontiers.

The song ended, and his mind was roused again. He looked at his watch and was surprised to see it was past midnight. Pinkie was probably asleep by now. He decided to sleep in his own room, which he did whenever he worked late.

Before turning off the light he looked back at the hearth again, where there were the last dusty embers. The room was very still; long and brilliant. Did Abu Kath'm live <u>all the time</u> with the fullness of that moment he'd just had? Was that what <u>real</u> life was like? Was that why she had endless patience? Once he'd told her to guard the house all day while he was away, and she'd taken him literally, and had sat squatting on the doorstep for eight hours, until he returned, without the slightest impatience, her abba drawn close over her head.

He closed the door and felt his way along the corridor to the stairs; on the first landing there was a double window where he sometimes stopped to watch Abu Kath'm on the lawn below. The sky was bright and he could just make out her yellow hut, a dimly shining hump with shadowy trees behind it. And beyond, stretching into vagueness, lay the desert, a whitish mass that seemed to move, because it was hardly distinguishable

from the sky. He stared at it for a few moments, and it disappeared. Then he looked down at the garden again, a black oblong, and once more it became visible, like a moving shroud in the night. There wasn't a sound. No dogs were barking. On this side of the house he couldn't hear the singing. Yet he had no sense of solitude. He had the impression of actually breathing the night, the source of his breath being the same stillness that lay outside. He turned round to look at Pinkie's door on the next landing and saw that her light was out. His shoes scraped on the stone stairs, and he went up on tiptoe. He didn't want to disturb the silence. It had the same commanding integrity as during the eclipse.

He opened the door of his room carefully and could make out his sparse objects there --- the narrow bed by the right-hand wall, the desk under the window and the rush matting in the centre of the floor. It was simple, rather like a monk's cell. He didn't want to switch the light on but walked through the darkness on to the balcony that let from his room. A faint breeze came through when he walked out, touching his face. He could see the waste area below with its little mounds and craters, and the path between the palm trees that served for a road, its sandy floor shining dimly between the stiff leaves. A dog barked in the distance, then it was still again. The palm tree at the edge of the balcony tinkled for a moment, and the breeze made the sound of a distant wave, rising and falling back again. Everything was composed of shadow, furry and soft; even his hands were unsubstantial like dust, hanging at his sides.

He pulled the door closed again and went over to his bed, where he lay down, propping the pillow up behind him and pulling a blanket over

his feet. How paltry Abu Kath'm made his past thoughts about 'believing in God', in the Sussex days and after! God was for her --- it didn't matter whether you called it God or the sun, or what. For the first time in his life he'd glimpsed the other state of being, for which he'd been searching since childhood! That was why he'd thought about her all afternoon. He'd arrived at a turning-point in his life, as far as thinking went --- he was sure of that!

He tried to remember his earliest thoughts about religion. He'd been sent to St. Mary's in Abbott's Road every Sunday. What had happened? What had his thoughts been there? He racked his brains, trying to remember. At St. Mary's there were dark mahonany pews and fat yellow pillars on either side of the chancel; it was quite a handsome church, really. The idea had been to keep him out of mischief more than anything. But what had happened in his mind when he'd heard the words Christ and God? Had he ever believed in God as Abu Kath'm did? What had happened to his religion? And all he could remember now was a vague perplexity.

At first, 'God' had been simple, just a gentle presence at the edge of the roof-tops. The image had been dreamy, in the style of childhood. But then those confirmation classes had started, and here, he remembered, the problems had begun, when he was about thirteen. His perplexity had begun over Christ, whom he'd never really thought about before. Christ, too, had been a simple figure, like a marvellous elder brother. In his mother's prayers Christ had never been mentioned, only God and people. Now he heard about Christ in detail for the first time. He was raised up by the story, and he was as quickly flung down, into perflexity. And since the day of his confirmation, when a bishop had

come to the church and he'd taken his first --- and last --- taste of the wafer, he hadn't given the matter a deliberate thought. Nobody else had bothered. And the perplexity had remained. But it had remained hidden. Only now had he become aware of it.

The confirmation classes had been held on Sunday afternoons when the church was empty. A group of children say in the front pew while a young clergyman from another parish talked to them from the chancel steps. At first Granville could hardly take his eyes off the clergyman's face; he thought he'd never seen such clear, good eyes in a person! They never seemed to show censure. And he noticed that the young man always spoke with a smile when he mentioned Christ. He smiled a little even when he was talking about Christ's death and how they didn't have to break his legs to quicken the end because he gave up the ghost early, while the two thieves still struggled on in the death-throes. He also told them how a soldier had thrust his spear into Christ's side, probably to make sure he was dea, and how there was a legend that a drop of the blood and water from the wound had fallen on to his face and he'd been cured at once of an eye-disease. Even when he spoke about the blood and water gushing out he smiled in a tender way. He had flushed, healthy cheeks and soft black hair, and talked in an easy way, his eyes resting on the children in equality, which struck Granville even then as wonderful in a grown-up, that he should be able to talk with equality to children.

By smiling when he told them about the last moments on the cross and how Christ had called into the darkness, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?', he made it all feel safe and even good: which was very strange.

The church itself had begun to feel a happier place! Before, it had been hopeless and sombre, a place where priests sniffed and haw-hawed through their vague sermons, and coffins were laid in the chancel, and grim, nervous couples were married, while the trams scraped and rumbled past outside. It was astonishing how the young clergyman could change it so! The sun seemed to shine in at the tall windows more, and the stained glass began to glow mysteriously. It began to look quite a lovely church, with its great clean beams and arches.

As the confirmation classes went on he began to associate the gentle look in the young man's eyes with what he was talking about, namely 'Christ'. And he listened more closely. He was determined to be <u>like</u> him if possible, to have those same good eyes. He wanted to be like that when he grew up, without suspicion or reserve. So many people in the streets outside had small eyes which twitched from side to side in a fixed, disbelieving watchfulness. He began to hate the streets at this time. They were hard, dusty, bleak corridors leading nowhere, grimy and yellow and grey. The trams creaked and clanged, and over everything lay a silence that had nothing gentle in it at all, no rhythm, but was simply a suspension, like a dead face. Even at thirteen he was jumpy and nervous, expecting accidents all the time. There seemed less and less to cling to in his life. The streets offered nothing. Life consisted of quick, unrelated events which didn't comprise a whole experience. It was a hard, disjointed dream.

Only in the countryside had he ever heard the real silence, that had a rhythm in it, like someone breathing. That was a comfort. But otherwise the gentleness in people's faces was his only comfort. When he saw someone 'nice', as Eve, Aunt May's daughter was 'nice', with her

sad, compassionate look, he had a terrific sense of awe. And the young clergyman was 'nice'. But this time there was more than a person. He felt 'Christ' behind it.

The young man talked about Christ intimately, as if he was close by, and Granville began to have a sense of Christ as actually being there on the chancel steps. The communion rail, the tasselled alter-cloth of crimson and silver, the gleaming altar of gold, seemed to be his home. It was a strange feeling, like discovering who these things belonged to, for the first time. The church began to feel like a house which the owner had just left, so that his golden presence was still in the air, in the ticking clock and the armchair.

He learned that confirmation would give them the right to eat of Christ's body and drink of his blood, symbolically, at the communion rail, for 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh of my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' The meaning of this was only vague for him --- idiotic, really --- eating flesh and drinking blood --- but his mind made a quiet acceptance and he thought of the communion as a silent meeting with Christ that was too far beyond the clutches of ordinary life to be examined thoroughly. Still, it wasn't simple --- not life the figure of Christ.

We must always remember, the young man said, that Christ willed his suffering and foretold everything that would happen to him. He had to show people what it meant to forgive and love. People don't believe words. They must have something to look at. And when they saw Christ dying above them on the cross they knew as they would never have known otherwise that he meant every word he'd said. Here was a man who had used <u>himself</u> as a living demonstration for other people --- used his own

body! 'Can you imagine that?' the young man asked. 'Do you wonder that his example has never left out minds since?' 'Though ye believe not me, believe the works,' Christ had said. 'And the breat that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'

Without his crucifixion Christ would simply have been a preacher -- 'like me', the clergyman said with a smile.

But during the last few classes Granville began to feel puzzlement. For Christ wasn't 'nice' in the way he'd thought at first! It began to seem strange to him that his own mother and father should have sent him to church. There was a great anger in Christ, often against mothers and fathers. 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword,' he said. 'For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.'

Now how was it that his mother and father had sent him there, if Christ wanted to put him at variance with them? And how could the young clergyman tell him to <u>honour</u> and <u>obey</u> his mother and father? There was no mistake about it at all! --- 'If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' Yet the clergyman always said that Christ was 'good'. And his mother and father had sent him to church so that he too would be 'good'. Could you be good without following Christ? How could you follow Christ if you loved your mother and father? Look at the man who'd asked Christ if he might bury his own father before following him! --- 'Let the dead bury the dead,' Christ had said. 'He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.'

Did other people hear the same words? Or did they gloss over them in some way? Or perhaps they didn't know about them!

In one of these classes he asked a question about it. But the young clergyman was vague and seemed not really to understand him. He said something about Christ's calling being beyond even his 'nearest and dearest'. 'But how can it be good to hate my mother and father?' Granville thought. And if everybody were to do it to follow Christ, surely the world couldn't go on, because there'd be no families?

But the other children didn't seem worried. And the clergyman went on talking, with the same smile. And gradually he put aside his doubt. The church was still there with its gleaming altar and tall stained windows. It was all so much bigger than he was. It had been alive such a long time. No doubt there were reasons he didn't understand. It seemed impossible that so many grown-up people, including the vicar, could be wrong. Perhaps he didn't understand the archaic language of the Bible? And if the bread and wine of the communion were 'symbolical' for Christ's flesh and blood, why shouldn't Christ's words be 'symbolical' in some way? Perhaps Christ hadn't meant <u>real</u> mothers and fathers, and <u>real</u> brothers and sisters!

Only in the marriage at Cana was there a glimpse of a possible meaning. When Christ's mother reminded him that there was no wine, implying that he alone had the miraculous power to bring it, Christ said angrily, 'What have I to do with thee?' and 'Mine hour is not yet come.' And Granville felt a dim understanding of Christ in this mood. It was what he'd often felt with his own mother, when she tried to interfere with him sometimes. But then how could Christ possibly feel the same as <u>he</u> did? Probably the words didn't mean what he thought they did!

He took Christ to mean, 'What's it got to do with you?' But that seemed much too familiar! So he accepted the puzzlement, and then put it out of his mind.

And people didn't seem to care. His mother and father didn't seem to know much about what Christ said. And he had the idea that one didn't go to church after one ceased to be a child. Only old fogies went. So the question never meant much to him.

The bishop confirmed his class, and the wafer melted in his mouth with a remarkable swiftness, and he wondered where it had been manufactured, He sought a special holy taste in the wine, which he was told had been blessed, but the sip he took --- the cup was pulled away from him almost at once --- was too small for him to find out. There was a crowded church and anthems sung by choirs from all over London, he had feathers in his tummy, but all to a purpose he didn't understand.

He was sure, now, that there was something right in that first puzzlement. And he wanted to get to the bottom of it. It wasn't difficult now to imagine that the vicar had been wrong, and the young clergyman, too!

He remembered the Bible that lay on show downstairs under the silver-plated crucifix, belonging to Bertha, and he toptoed down to get it. The house was so silent that he could hear the rustling of his clothes as he walked. The Bible was one of those family editions with the words of Christ printed in red, and genteel paintings of the disciples. It hadn't been moved for nearly two years, and there was a faded place on the lace cover underneath. 'Well,' he thought, 'I never imagined I'd ever use this!' It was a little symbol of Bertha's stuffiness, and he'd

wanted to get rid of it, but Pinkie had stopped him. And now he picked it up with the same gingerly awe he'd seen in Kath'm's eyes whenever he'd passed it.

That night, pulling his desk-lamp closer, he read more or less haphazardly in it. He was amazed at how simple and true-sounding the story of Christ was. Why had he never been taught it, just as a story? He felt he'd stumbled on his own language again after years of silence, and was suddenly talking!

He even began to see Christ as a person. This was the first time he'd really read the gospels. Even now, as he read, absorbed and still, it seemed silly that he should be doing so. He wondered that he could be <u>really</u> interested in it! He realised that he'd always taken the language of the Bible as meaningless. It all had a kind of vague symbolical application --- a sort of poetry, not meaning much! And here he was reading the words actually as if other men had written it! And he found a story that offered no difficulties at all.

How was it that he'd been disinherited from this story, in this great epoch of education? when, once upon a time, for generation after generation, simple and illiterate people all over the world had found no difficulty in it? What a lot of effort his 'education' was costing him in life!

He began to think of Christ as intimately close to him, and not wrapped up in divinity. Only for a short time in the confirmation classes, moved by the young man's smile, had he felt that intimacy before. Since then, his education had taught him that he had no right to feel intimacy--- of <u>all</u> things --- with great historical figures!

He was amazed at how clearly he could see Christ --- like someone

standing in front of him, very youthful, with an extraordinary calm and sweetness. He could see him sitting in the temple writing in the sand absent-mindedly, with perfect repose, before the crowd brought the fallen woman to him, playfully, to see if he was fool enough to bless a whore. And he could see him standing up and saying angrily that if anybody in the crowd thought he was clean of sin himself he had the right to judge this woman, but not otherwise! He could see him again, always with this marvellous repose, lying on the couch before taking dinner with the Pharisee, and showing a certain care to the woman who bathed his feet in oil, another whore, while the Pharisee sarcastically asked him if he minded being anointed by a 'sinner'? He could see Christ at the well talking to the Samaritan woman in his leisurely, reflective way, arguing quietly with her. That was ridiculous to most Jews --- to talk to a <u>woman</u> about God and to a low Samaritan at that! But Christ was always doing that kind of thing. When somebody touched Christ once in the crowd, and he turned, Granville had the impression that he knew <u>how</u> he turned, the exact gesture. Christ stood so clear and fresh among people.

Christ was always talking to people in their lonely state, he noticed --- not in their <u>importance</u>. He called to men alone in themselves. 'Beware of men,' he said, 'for they will deliver you up to the councils.' 'When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.' No priest was needed. No family was needed. Only a man alone in himself. This was what made Christ's teaching last from one generation to the next, that it depended not on other people but on one man alone withdrawing into himself.

But the Jews had said no less since Moses --- that God was only to be found 'in secret'. That had been their strength, too, this gleaming

secrecy which nothing could touch. It was the silent dignity that had held the Jews together. And Christ inherited this dignity. The difference was that he said that every human creature was chosen by God. Not just the Jews! The Jewish gift must be given to all men! And this was the blasphemy in Jewish eyes --- to call even the wicked blessed, even the low! To call all of them children of God was offensive!

And all at once Granville saw the connection with his first perplexity as a child! Christ said it didn't matter that you were somebody's son or brother, or a man as opposed to a woman, or a Jew instead of a heathen, --- the state of your life was what counted! And if you loved those names instead of God, if you rested on your position in life, you were rotten! Christ put his life against the whole suffocating weight of status quo! Against this throbbing public life!

God was so high in Christ's time that no one dared even pronounce his name. Foreigners and uncircumcised people were excluded from His mercy. Women were unclean, excluded from the Passover. God the State - the high priest governed for Him.

Therefore Christ's teaching was treason as well. He talked equally to women and whores, to foreigners and heathen. Everybody had an equal power of penetrating to God --- equal even to the priest's! It was a devastating argument and in the end took the Jewish God to almost every race on earth.

In everyone, Christ said, however dirty or wicked or despised, there was that mysterious element of light and silence where he belonged to something that was beyond other men beyond even himself; and which couldn't be destroyed by other men! No special credentials had to be shown. You could even be a slave! Everyone, the most foolish and

ignorant person, had this absolute self-responsibility. No wonder the Jews were aghast --- or rather laughed and mocked!

Every man had the power to choose between the light and the darkness. He always knew the difference, in himself! He was alone with his own conscience! The verdict of the priest made no difference. And the law made no difference, if your conscience was active! Only a man alone in himself was the judge of where the light of truth lay. 'He that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.'

Hitherto in Granville's life the name 'Christ' had meant, more or less, 'love'. Very well, everybody agreed with love! And Christ had been talked about so many times, after all! Even the crucifixion seemed painless now, especially as 'Christ' was too lofty to engage your sympathies! He'd often wondered, like those who had stood about the cross and mocked him, 'Why couldn't he save himself, if he was really the son of God?' How could you feel Christ's pain as your own, if Christ was divine and therefore started off with an advantage over everyone else?

And that was the chief difference now. He saw Christ as a real person. Like himself! Before, he'd never been able to see exactly what had gripped one generation after another, for nearly two thousand years, in the story of Christ! In the Sussex days he'd understood for the first time that the Christian civilisation had spread across the whole of Italy, and then the whole of Europe and parts of Asia, planting a cross in hundreds and thousands of villages, but he hadn't been able to see how it had happened that so many people had been influenced! He'd only seen it as an historical movement.

But now he saw Christ through himself. Therefore the crucifixion was real to him. And, also for the first time, since he could see Christ through his own experience, he could see how extraordinary he was! Of course, if you started by saying that Christ was extraordinary and divine, there was no room for amazement. Only if you saw him as yourself could you be amazed.

Christ seemed to tell the story of a man's pain wherever that man was, whatever language he spoke, whatever epoch he lived in. He didn't waste a gesture! It was all so beautifully conceived, his own life, spread out like a story which he knew from the beginning. Opinion didn't touch him. He went about his death with an absolutely calm deliberateness, foreseeing every stage because he brought it about himself. And the story was discovered again in every generation as something fresh because it was revived in each man's experience, like a flower that while new had the same head as millions before it.

The word 'God' was easier for Granville. It meant the spell --- what had gone out of our lives! At dawn in the Sussex days, when he'd been on sentry-go, the whole earth had seemed to stir, and then the word 'God' had seemed suitable.

The truth wasn't supported by the number of men who held it. That was Christ! One man alone could hold the only truth in the world!

Granville felt a terrific self-vindication! He did have a place, then, in life, he did have meaning, he did know something without ploughing through exams and books and fighting to the top of the T.I:M. worm-world!

It was a doctrine of terrific courage, it raised the single man to a height unknown before! And this man could be anyone! His strength in the truth would come from beyond him, where there were no numbers or

power, but silence! He only had to give up trying to satisfy that little will in himself, or the will of other men. Then the stronger will would come through.

This is what Christ did --- he actually did it with his own life! Even when he said he was the son of God he didn't mean himself with his own little will --- which the Jews thought. When they accused him of blasphemy at his trial he asked them, wasn't it written in their own scriptures that 'Ye are gods', that all men were gods? And he was a man! He was any man! All men were the children of God! Therefore his own prayer began, 'Our father.'

Nobody really saw what he meant, apart from the women round him, perhaps. The disciples didn't see. You could tell that by the questions they asked him. They thought he was going to offer them something, in life: or they believed him like children listening to a fairy-tale. When he told them that people on top found it more difficult than others to be close to God, they couldn't believe their ears! The priests as well? 'And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth them again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.'

For the disciples he was just a messiah. That meant the man who'd bring glory to Israel again, the kingdom of God on earth, that sort of thing --- a fairy tale. When he told them one day that he would soon be dead, and seemed not to care, Peter refused to take him seriously! How could a man who had come to save Israel, get rid of the foreign troops

and so on, want to die of all things, before he'd taken one step towards it? How could you save the world by promptly disappearing from it? No wonder the ones on top laughed!

It was the same at the last supper. They didn't understand it was the last at all. He told them, 'A little while, and ye shall not see me.' But they didn't understand: 'They said therefore, What is this he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto him, Do ye enquire among yourselves of what I said, A little while? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament.'

The darkness of the cross wasn't what they'd expected. Two of them had asked Christ once whether, on his day of 'glory', they could sit one on either side of his throne! And death was such a baffling answer to that.

Christ's magic was that he didn't ask for any satisfactions to his personal will, not even leadership or dignity. He remained absolutely still even when they were calling up to him to save himself, on the cross.

The silence is deeper than the noise of men's ambitions and society and virtue and laws. A man has to wait for it, alone and still.

He remembered reading about the ancient world in the Sussex days, and finding no theme there that had any importance for him. But now things began to fall together. He was surprised how much dead knowledge there was in his mind. The moment it fell into the new connection it was alive.

The Jews had seen great empires collapse all round them, they saw that though they were always passed by as an unimportant little people on

the way from Egypt to Persia, they were the only ones to survive. They survived invasion, massacre, annexation.

Their God had a perfect, irresistible and consistent justice which men couldn't buy or change. He wasn't a bull or the sun or a man in the sky. He was silent, inside every man --- every Jew. And so He survived everything that went on outside.

In none of the other great civilisations --- Egypt, Greece or Rome --- was there this intimate link between what a man did in the silence of his thoughts, and the grace bestowed on him from beyond. That 'beyond' was harmonious, it was one thing, it was an order --- not various little gods quarrelling in the sky and hurling thunderbolts. The 'beyond' meant peace. It was on your side. That was the relief Christ took all over the world, all over the broken Roman empire --- from the Jews!

And of course we now took it for granted. Every one of us! The world has a meaning for us. Nothing is quite haphazard or accidental in our world! It is based on laws. And that sense of laws underneath life that never changed was the first lesson of the Jewish religion.

'How strange,' Granville thought, 'that I should have taken all these years to arrive at a simple definition of 'Christian civilisation'!' Yet it was so simple on the face of it! And slowly he was beginning to link together his own life, too. What else had his sense of a silent order in life been, in the Sussex days, when he'd begun to take walks alone, but what the Jews had given? And his sense of there being a spark in himself, without help from other men? Had he inherited this experience from Christ, unawares, as Christ had inherited it, only more vividly, from the Jews? He was beginning to discover the historical connection he'd been after since childhood!

In everybody, Christ said, there was a secret place beyond all men. That was the peace he offered people. Every man had a place where his own infinite integrity lay.

Moses had promised the Jews 'great and goodly cities'. It was the one respect in which God did reward men's interests. And Christ removed this last reward. His disciples expected him to come mounted on a charger at the head of an army, to remove the Romans. And, deliberately, he came in mounted on an ass. He did overcome the Romans. But not in the method of ambition. His story gradually travelled through the broken-hearted empire, like hope. The empire's roads and ship-routes, running across Europe and Asia, a vast act of ambition, became the roads and ship-routes his story travelled by. Slowly the meaning of what he'd said dawned on people, as it dawned on the disciples, who wrote the story down.

Christ died on a Roman instrument of torture, kept for criminals. He was laughed at while he was dying, his death wasn't important enough to be recorded officially. But he overcame an empire. By giving up ambition he overcame the most ambitious project that the earth had been.

'So things can come about from the silent will of one man,' he thought, 'slowly through the years, working in the darkness unknown to the mind!' How the Pharisees must have laughed! He overcome Rome? And the world? A 'prophet' like all the others, with the same paraphernalia of disciples and miracles to catch the popular eye and parables and ominous quotations from the scriptures! Calling himself 'the son of God'?

'Well, they'd laugh the same today,' he thought. 'They want to see a plan for the future of mankind.'

But ordinary people went on living as they always had done, in

silence, passively, knowing that things did change in the darkness, like the stirring of new roots.

He heard the tinkling of the palm-tree by his balcony. It was about the middle of the night now. The breeze made a hushed sound outside, touching the window, and he glanced up. Beyond the light of the desk-lamp he could see the window like a square black picture. Though he could see nothing outside he had the same feeling as before, perhaps because of the silence --- that everything was unsubstantial like dust, a vast shadow, both the room and the night outside. The room looked rixed and yet vague, its individual things drawn into one unity by the silence.

What did Christ die into? he thought. What lay on the otherside of death? What was that silent order one became aware of in life? There was a gap behind Christ! 'What do I mean by God?' The experience was missing. But the word 'God' must have sprung from a human experience. 'Can I break through the obstruction of my own mind and get near to that experience?' he asked himself. 'And so come to within a shade of believing in God myself?' Hitherto, he'd always regarded 'believing in God' with distant awe. How could anybody believe in God? It was impossible!

Yet all those centuries of men lay behind, refuting him. What did 'God' mean? Hitherto he'd glided over the word. Well, he'd once glided over the word 'Christ'. Now let him see if he could do justice to 'God', too.

He thought for a long time in the silence. Then it occurred to him; 'Consult your own feelings. Don't try to conceive all the time,

with your mind. Go into your real life. What experience have you had of something utterly beyond you, for instance?' Wouldn't there be a clue in that?

The words 'divine presence' came into his mind. But it was only a phrase. And it had a lofty sound. He was sure the Jews hadn't meant by God what you could only get from an ecstatic experience. It must be an experience which came and went quietly, and unawares, even day by day. He had a conviction that he'd overlooked this experience all his life, because it didn't fit in with the allowed concepts of our epoch.

All of a sudden it seemed easy. Look at the way the room had appeared to him only a few moments ago, as being unsubstantial like dust! The silence had seemed to turn everything into one unity! He'd stood on the balcony and felt that everything was dust outside, joined together like one shadow, including even himself. And at the window on the landing, overlooking the garden, on his way upstairs, he'd felt he was actually breathing the stillness outside, and that the night was part of him! He'd felt no solitude!

There was a presence all round him, that actually seemed to breathe! The wind had touched his face when he'd gone out on to the balcony, like a breath from that presence, so intimate! And the presence was invisible, but always there. One could come and go, and forget it, but it would always be there. It would be there after he died, and it was there before he came. It included him. He had come out of it. And the presence was inside him as well. He was most aware of it when he felt peaceful. It was a presence he could violate, too. For instance, he hadn't wanted to switch the light on, from a sense that it would

violate the silence. So there was harmony in the stillness. And it was possible to ruin this. If he'd talked or moved about noisily he would have ruined it for himself. The stillness would have become separate from him. His thoughts would no longer have followed each other at their own pace, in their own order. For his thoughts seemed actually to <u>come</u> out of the stillness. They were quite different from those thoughts which he had <u>deliberately</u> --- at the office, for instance. So there was a guide in the stillness, too, which you could follow or disregard, at will!

He thought back over it again, quietly. Surely there --- only primitive, a mere beginning --- was the form of 'God'? His sense of a presence all round him, breathing, surely that was his recognition of something alive and yet inside him, apart from him and yet the whole of life? Surely that was a fumbling towards a definition of God, that the Jews had been the first to make? One God for the whole universe --- surely that was the feeling of things being a unity, with a presence behind it? The presence was invisible! It wasn't <u>this</u> tree or <u>this</u> touch of wind. These were only manifestations. So God was both invisible and intimate.

And it was a presence that lay before and after one's life, and continued while one was unaware of it. God was 'eternal'.

The presence included one's own life, too. One seemed to come out of it, and in death to be going back into it. This was the feeling of having been created. God was the 'creator'.

And yet the presence was inside one as well --- it didn't simply <u>include</u> one. It was whole inside one. So God was to be found 'in secret'.

And if one followed the stillness one was aware of a harmony, in one's thoughts. That was where the Jews had made a moral connection. You could follow God at your own free will. You could consult Him, in secret. You could follow His guidance or not. What was this but Granville's feeling that the presence was in and all round him, with a pace and order of its own? What was it but the idea of 'eternal justice'? Only a man whose conscience was free could talk to God, or have harmony!

God didn't take rewards, Moses had said. God wasn't a man, or in the image of a man, nor was He any <u>thing</u> in our sense. He was 'spirit'. 'Of course,' thought Granville, 'how absurd it would be for me to ask the presence all round me to <u>do</u> something for me!' For the presence wasn't something he could see before him, or feel. It was <u>underneath</u> everything, the sense of there being something alive which wasn't limited to the things you could see and feel, like the balcony or the palm-tree, though it was in them also. It was pure spirit!

But those words 'pure spirit' had come to mean something lofty, like 'pure idea'. And he'd got to think through these words, and through the snares of the mind. He couldn't deny that when he stood in the silence he was aware of a force beyond him and yet in him! And men had given it a name. Surely 'God' was that name?

For the first time he saw a meaning in phrases that had always been empty for him --- 'God is spirit', 'the Creator', 'the God of peace', 'the God of Gods', 'the just God'. They could all be translated into his experience. Only those words had been stripped bare of flesh, and he had to keep this experience of a 'presence' in mind, to make them real.

But it was impossible for him to keep this experience in mind without a word of some sort --- without using that word 'presence'.

But how could he talk to other people about 'the presence' and expect them to understand? Was that how the word God had come into being —— to cover all such experiences and make them one shared concept for everybody? Only we had lost the experience: only the empty word remained to us!

And again, that word 'presence', in covering only his own experience, didn't get beyond him, so that really it couldn't convey the magnitude of what he'd just come in contact with: he had to show that it was more than just a passing experience, that it was in a way beyond all experience. He had to convey the idea that while he'd been aware of a whole being —— the 'presence' —— yet it could never be experienced as a whole. Only a part or moment of it could be experienced —— the darkness on the balcony, a glance from the window —— and yet this part always suggested the whole. And the word 'presence' alone failed to convey this.

He remembered, from Exodus, that before the flight from Egypt Moses had told his people the name of God for the first time. It was no longer 'Lord', meaning simply master, but Jehovah. And Jehovah meant 'I am that I am'.

"I am that I am' gave the idea of an unanswerable will, a complete being, all that there was. It didn't bring in the spectator as 'presence' did.

'But even then', he thought, 'a word isn't enough in itself'. The fact was that he'd still be alone with his experience however many words he used! But 'Jehovah' had been used by men living together, with the same hopes. And they passed it on to their children. In this way it was separate from each one of them in himself. Yet it was still

intimate. So it had exactly that combined awe and intimacy which the thing itself, the 'Presence', needed. And it did this only by being absorbed into the lives of men. Only by being shared among men could it be lifted beyond one man alone. That was the power of a word, as Moses saw. A word, like an idea, had to have a communal sanction before it could seem to have the detachment of the thing it described.

'So,' thought Granville, 'if my word 'presence' was used by people now, and it entered into their lives, and was passed on to children, it would take on power; it would carry a hint in its very sound of the kind of thing I experienced when the word came to my mind.'

And so it was with 'God'. It had to be known and felt from childhood. And if it wasn't, then knowledge of 'God' was accidental. One stumbled on it here and there through life, as he'd just done. To know 'God' you had to see him in the eyes of people round you, and hear him referred to day after day and connected with the smallest actions, drawn into the flesh of life, not an idea, so that He always seemed to be at the edge of things and to be watching you. There was no difficulty in the knowledge itself, as Granville's experience of the 'presence' showed. But our community had no allowance for it. God had slipped out of life.

The word was certainly empty for <u>him</u>. It was the same as the pagan 'god', a man in the sky who cast a net round Venus and Mars while they made love; ridiculous or aesthetic, always untrue. The word 'God' couldn't convey that dumb and alive 'presence' he'd been aware of.

And this 'presence' was all he had. It came and went, a mere lonely experience. It didn't affect anything. It lacked the warmth of

something pointed out to him in childhood.

The eclipse had been an event in empty space for him, like the click of a machine. He couldn't help it. He would always see it like that. His feelings were separate from the event. There were his feelings, then the weather, then the eclipse, all separate, never in the unity he was sometimes aware of in life underneath --- to be touched so easily, it always seemed! Abu Kath'm had seen God. But for his world that was 'mystical', meaning strange and hidden, not belonging to the light of day or shared by other people.

Now even the word 'presence' was becoming empty for him. It was an idea floating in his mind, because he'd got used to the word now. It was private. It had no echoes beyond him. Yes, you had to see it in other men's eyes. Alone you weren't enough.

The room looked ordinary again, and the silence outside seemed familiar now, an accompaniment to his thoughts, no longer suggesting a 'presence'. He began to feel tired. But he was determined to get to the end of his thoughts. He heard Pinkie cough from next door in her sleep. It occurred to him that there'd be a heavy day at the office --- some files were coming in from Kirkuk. But a question persisted in his mind: how had a person like himself come about, perceiving the sky without anything divine in it, without 'God'? Because it wasn't the truth -- that sky he saw! It wasn't the real sky, that was mysterious and seemed to breathe!

He saw the sky as a kind of mathematical concept --- yes, but what did that mean? It meant he saw it as something useful to men: that is, men could measure it and predict its movements!

The eclipse was a kind of geometrical action for him: an Object called the moon moved between an Object called the sun and another Object on which he was standing. A dimming of light resulted, lasting so many seconds. He saw it like a surveyor from another universe. Yet he hadn't the slightest knowledge of surveying or physics! It was simply in his nature!

Ask any ordinary man and he'd give you the same geometrical story of what was 'happening' in the eclipse. It wasn't that this kind of thinking was new or unusual, but that in us it was more than thinking --- it was actually the way we smelt and touched and saw things!

It was unreligious thinking. But why? Well, it laid down the nature of the sky as something that could be measured and predicted: there was nothing in the sky that couldn't be tackled by men's minds; it was only oxygen, light, matter, only objects in space.

Everything beyond men's minds escaped him! Yet the world was full of it: men's minds were only a slight little tracing on this huge eternity. Yet he'd been brought up to say it was the whole thing! As a child he'd always imagined there was a policeman in the sky who controlled everything: not a god but a man, in a blue uniform, with a truncheon. And at the same time this created a terrible puzzlement because the policeman wasn't all that reliable. He had allowed a war to happen, for instance, which nobody could see the reason for afterwards.

What else was that but perceiving the world as if it had been made only for men's ambitions? All of a sudden he saw a connecting link --- his kind of mind came from a terrific act of pride, from wanting to turn the whole of reality into something you could manoeuvre and use, just as if you were the author of it all!

It reminded him of that railway bridge, in Sussex, when he'd gazed down at the gleaming tracks below and realised that all the facts he'd learned at school were dead facts, because they illuminated a thing only in so far as it could be used for some purpose; it was useful to know about expanding metals if you were laying those tracks. But it wasn't the whole truth! You had to strike the world dead first, in your mind, to see its function, like something mathematical, apart from yourself. And instead of just keeping that as one of our methods of thinking --- though a strange and disquieting one --- we had let it cloud over our whole consciousness until there were people like --- himself! --- people who saw the world naturally like that! He saw it with all the heart and breath and enormous mystical movement knocked out of it! Yes, all that invisible movement, all that 'presence' round him, had to be called 'mystical' --- a little cranky!

And to realise this he'd had to allow his whole self and will to be engulfed by something huge and apparently selfless outside him, first in Sussex, when he'd really seen the country for the first time, and now in Basrah. 'Islam' meant 'surrender': he'd surrendered to something both times, he'd been sucked in by the outer presence --- he remembered that walk along the road to Chichester when he could hardly tell the difference between his body and what lay all round him in the massive heat. And wasn't that what Moses had told the tribes in the desert --- to submit? Wasn't that the first law of all real religion --- submit and surrender not to other men but to the 'presence': listen to it, at night ---?

And this meant forgetting your ambitions. 'You' were forgotten --- only this huge will outside remained, flooding through you!

Christ had to say it again --- he came fifteen hundred years

after Moses. Again there were ambitions in the air --- the God of the Jews was waiting to conquer all the world for Israel. And Christ began the conquering in his own way, through a total submission of self that nobody else understood. He seemed to waver in the garden, the night before he was taken: no one understood what he was about to do, he was absolutely alone --- on the face of it, he would just die and not be heard of again; 'O, my Father', he said, 'if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' As the big will outside willed!

While people had ambitions in their minds they were cut off from the truth --- that was what Moses and Christ seemed to say! The little personal will stopped the big outer will from flowing through them. So both Moses and Christ had to lift God up above men again --- away from their ambitions --- from their itch for rewards!

'Is our role now,' Granville thought, 'the same, to life the sky up beyond men again?'

That was the meaning of Christ's death: people were shown that at least one man could give up all his ambitions and go willingly into death.

That was why the story held, because it was a standing testimonial from generation to generation of the power of the human creature.

Christ left no rules for us. Only this silence after his death! But was that also a sign --- that we had to look further and further into the silence until we found our feet? Was this what history had been doing? 'Is this my interest in history?' Granville asked himself. 'To find the traces of that theme?'

The moment the God of Moses was mixed up in ambitions --- the

moment temples were put up to Him and a high priest elected, the moment a society started round it — there was danger. The moment Christ was caught up in a church, in ambition and office and competition, there was danger. Their truth was smashed. Little personal wills got in the way. We had churches. But not a religious soul in the Christian world! Nobody could be religious! Nobody had it in him! He hadn't got it in his nerves, in his mind, in his heart, in his nose or bowels or belly! All you could do was make a little gesture — strive — try to fight your way through! But the churches were just muck. They were little reminders of what men used to be. Like the ruins of temples! But more than that they were only little clubs. The Christian couldn't believe in God. Christ and God had been smashed to pieces. We could only grub in the ruins and pick up little morsels of the marvellous coloured stone and try to piece the world together again so that real dawns would rise on our children's children's children ... 'If a man tells you he believes in God,' thought Granville, 'he's a liar or a fool or a swine!' The Christian was crippled and broken and babbling like an idiot, and God had almost totally disowned him, the link was only there by the thinnest umbilical cord. Could one of the idiots suddenly stop grubbing in the dust and garbage and lift his eyes up to the sky — eyes that shone with self — that saw nothing but self even in the sky — and say 'I believe in God?'

Perhaps only the middle ages had been really in the image of Christ. Then, ambitions had been really dead for a time. The old idiot-show of the ancient Roman world, with its endless armies and its putrid works of art and its sewers and straight roads, was finished for

a time. And so they were 'middle' ages for us --- after the Roman empire, which we understood, and before the renaissance in Italy, which we also understood: between two spectacular worlds, the Roman and our own!

Were they called 'middle' because they were all uncertainty from out point of view? Was it that we couldn't read our own ambitions in them? Nothing had <u>happened</u> in that time from our point of view! Just as, for our world now, Abu Kath'm hadn't seen the <u>real</u> eclipse!

We looked in the middle ages for our own plans and charters and personalities and continual fretting struggles between little personal wills from epoch to epoch, and didn't find them. No trade, as in our world, or very little of it! No great landowners with their armies of slaves, no ambitious ruling class! But one great ambitious project there <u>had</u> been, that held everything else together: the second coming of Christ.

Well, you could see the germ of trouble there, already. People would wait so long and no longer. Gradually the old ambitious itch had started again. The first sign was a revival of trade. Gradually the towns became important again. Certain people had grown tired of waiting! The 'burghers' --- the men of the towns --- were the seed of the new world that came into being. They <u>planned</u> life, they always had done: they planned the education, the law, the drainage. Their trade brought movement. They looked ahead. They brought refinement. That peculiar under-stillness of the middle ages, that patient waiting mood, came to an end.

There were long connecting roads again, new ship routes. Venice was typical of the new world, an independent republic based on trade, not faith! It sent its ships to infidel ports without a bad conscience.

Then ancient learning was revived. No sign like the cross had governed the ancient world! There'd been heroism --- fabulous stories, not the bitter stories of the saints, always waiting for second life! Men had seemed to stand their full height in the pagan world --- tragic figures! Men had even populated the sky, as gods! Happiness had been a reasonable design, even if the gods farted at you sometimes!

So this remaissance was a revival of life as a grand, enjoyable adventure! There were great voyages of discovery. The nobles were again cultivated people living in the towns --- not just soldiers as they'd been in the middle ages. Fortunes were made, courts sprang up everywhere, there were tyrants, strange whirling careers that went out like a star.

But it wasn't just a repetition of the ancient world. In a way this new world came from Christ. That was the contradiction! The will and stature he'd given men by saying they were the children of God, and therefore free, was precisely the energy behind the renaissance. It looked like a repetition because of its spectacular movement, but there was now a different morality from which people acted, there was a new dignity, there was the sense of one order governing everything. The old chaos of the ancient Roman world wasn't there --- no haphazard myths and cults and weird 'mysteries'. Theories of an ordered universe started, a universe governed by laws, and all of life was now searched for its consistent principles and themes, even the human body.

And the same thing went on in the church. But the end of the middle ages the church was as much a vehicle for personal ambition as the ancient Roman governments had been. The first real challenge to this was the reformation in Germany. Again this was from Christ. Again,

like the remaissance, it aimed to lift men up.

It denied that the pope had any mysterious access to God. Confession ought to be abolished, it said. This meant that the church wouldn't be able to absolve a man of his sins --- even for money, as it had been doing. Only the man himself could do it, in his own conscience. This took away the church's hold on people --- the hold of fear and interest. It took away the intimate hold, the consoling guidance in little things.

Both the remaissance and the reformation, without meaning to, achieved a kind of secular society in which Christ and God were separated from life. These words fell away from the lips of the poor, gradually. Men had been lifted up so high --- the renaissance made him shine with intelligence and seem to conquer all of reality, the reformation made him a priest to himself --- that nothing else beyond them could be seen!

So the two movements had the same effect. A society came into being that went round like clockwork, serving nothing but itself, not referring to anything beyond it. The sky became like an empty ceiling over it --- just space --- oblivion.

But people's behaviour wasn't the same as in ancient times. There was nothing like the greed and chaos of the old empire, in its last years. Christ seemed to have entered life, but anonymously, in people's behaviour. There was a new kind of social order. There were fewer and fewer slaves, fewer serfs. Women were no longer servants. That breath of freedom from Christ had come into life. There was the idea of the dutiful citizen, more and more, especially in the north, where the reformation had happened. Every man was more and more responsible for himself. But Christ was less and less recognised as the author. Society

was 'Christian', but the name Christ began to fall away.

Men chose their own lives. 'Democracy' --- demos-kratia, the power of men, above everything else.

'And so I see the eclipse as described by men,' he said to himself, 'in a universe spanned by men's measurements and calculations. I see it only inside men's capacities. And everything beyond a man's mind escapes me! I have no words for it. Only when I look into Abu Kath'm's eyes do I see it; and realise how little open to the real world I am!'

'If I withdraw from something and watch it,' he asked himself, 'what is the activity uppermost in me? Surely the brain? And so, naturally, if I'm in withdrawal from things --- from people ---even from myself --- my uppermost activity is in the brain: I see things from the brain, the sky like an empty proposition!

'This is perhaps what I noticed first in Abu Kath'm, that she isn't in withdrawal.'

He remembered how once he'd said to her jokingly one morning, "You're getting fat!", and she'd looked down at herself, at her flowing robes, with such a funny expression, so mixed and puzzled: she really never had thought about herself before, in that way, it seemed; she hadn't thought about her body. The division of 'mind' from 'body' didn't exist for her. That was his distinction! That was the Christian world!

Really his remark tore her out of God's world, where she was never quite distinct from everything round her, and it suddenly pitched her into a men's world, where she was a 'person', where she stood alone, surveying her own body from above.

She never could attain to a 'personality' in our sense. She

never could survey the world and herself as if she had really arranged it all, planning it as she went along! She had submitted, she was submitted, in all her being, she could be nothing else. She was blind. She had no plans for the day, for the next hour --- the will of Allah created her rhythm.

She felt it was unlucky if someone asked after the health of her children. She made a quick little prayer to ward off the evil eye. All the common people of Basrah did that. All the ancient Mediterranean peoples, the Greeks included, had done it, too. One mustn't pry too closely into life. There was a spell that mustn't be broken. Too much attention shouldn't be drawn to men. Indeed, the mind altogether was unlucky.

The dawn began to come through, an ever so faint blueness at the corner of the sky, making the rush carpet and the door to the balcony softly clear. And almost to the moment there was the sound of birds. Their singing seemed to be inside the air, waking with it, in no particular place. How restful the twittering was, with all the time of the universe at its disposal! The birds actually seemed to wake with the sky. And men were non-existent. How lovely freedom was!

Horror of the mind was in him, too --- from Abbott's Road. That was why Abu Kath'm had stirred so much thought in him. It was really a horror of men --- a horror of them dominating everything, shutting out the light.

His thoughts came drowsily, hardly connected any more: dim but with a peaceful clarity underneath, hardly words any more, disjointed and brief.

In Abbott's Road, too, life had been blind, like Abu Kath'm. 'They' --- the absent power --- had controlled everything. 'They' came and collected the rent. 'They' made wars. 'They' made you work. Movement always came from outside. Outside was the will of men --- invisible men who arranged the schedule: not the will of Allah.

Even then the intimate little favric of life was hardly touched -- the winding of the clock, pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, the walk in the park on Sunday afternoons. It was woven together again at once.

Of course, there wasn't Abu Kath'm's stateliness in Abbott's Road. Nobody walked like her. That had gone out. Life had a troublesome edge. There were shill things: at the end of life was oblivion, like the grey sky on a bad morning, eternally. Nobody explained it. Suddenly there might be a cream-coloured ambulance in the street. Or blinds might be pulled down. There was a sense of disaster. Death was unexplained. Just a frightful oddity.

And there was no slow awakening to the world like the birds. A hard routine had been fixed on every day. One couldn't way where it came from, and one didn't do it for oneself. It was just there, a jerking motion you had to join because there was nothing else. Life wasn't natural there. The face grew fixed, too, with set lips and unmoving eyes. The words became clipped. One's walk was jerky, too.

But even then, despite the plan that was fixed by somebody else, the little fabric was kept. People held stiffly away from each other. Their lives were arranged by men they didn't see. But still the fabric was untouched.

And Christ and God had gone into this fabric, it seemed. The church was just a building in Abbott's Road, but there was a decency

between people, and a quiet belief. The Christian dignity was there. But the word 'Christ' itself was only a swear-word.

He remembered one Monday afternoon in his early childhood, when he was sitting on his mother's knee, after she'd hung the clothes out on the line. He remembered gazing down at the narrow gardens where sheets were billowing in the sunshine, and having the impression that this was a glimpse of the very centre of life, which was a place of peace. It was difficult to explain. But it seemed to come from his mother, to be passed on to him like speech. It was the sense of there being one marvellous theme that ran through all life and included the sunshine, the silence, the wind making the sheets billow, and the two of them sitting there and gazing far beyond each other, while joined together.

Beyond the roof-tops in Abbott's Road there was oblivion. No questions were asked. There was only a plan of work made by men. That had to be fulfilled. There was no other meaning.

So you couldn't lift up your head to the sky, or to Christ or God. You no longer had the right. There was only the plan of work. But even then a glow was kept.

The plans always came from above. Of course --- those movements of history he'd just been thinking about, the revival of commerce, the renaissance, the reformation, the industrial revolution, they were all from above! That was why there were only books to go by --- nothing was passed from mouth to mouth about them.

Sometimes people had worked in fields, sometimes in cities, sometimes for one man, sometimes for several, sometimes for the state --- or in the name of God, or in the name of humanity! But it was only a wind that passed. Life remained substantially the same, with the same

peace.

Otherwise who would have done the work? You can't work running round all the time.

His father loved the dawn. Every morning he went round the tiny garden, just after the light came. Even the houses of Abbott's Road looked natural at dawn, like hills.

And at King George's dock his father could keep his dream. They couldn't take away the vast river gleaming in the early light, and the sound of fog-horns!

Unless a man had a light in his eyes --- of something beyond all men --- he was horrible!

'How horrible to grow up among burghers!' he thought. What suffering that must be for the children! He remembered something lovely from before the War: it was when he'd seen the old Queen pass in her carriage and a woman next to him had said to her child, lifting him up, over the heads of the crows, "There she is, duck! Look, there's the Queen!" And the boy had gazed before him, his mouth open, absolutely rapt; gazing it seemed into everything fabulous that there was in the world! It was lovely how a dream could be passed on like that!

He felt satisfied now. His life had joined together. That was why he'd set out on these thoughts, perhaps --- to join his life together. He could face men better now, he thought. He had his own world.

A clock struck in the distance, for he couldn't make out the number of strokes. He felt sleepy for the first time, and began to nod. Would a godly earth come back again? he wondered drowsily. As he thought this he opened his eyes again and looked across at the window, and saw a long curling leaf of the palm-tree silhouetted against the sky like a finger, pointing upwards.

BOOK V

CHAPTER 22.

He went up to Meedham at the end of the week, and Elizabeth met him at the station. He'd left the house neat and quiet --- he and Hanni got down to some cleaning, as a surprise for Pinkie, and everything sparkled. It was really a lovely house, if only they could keep it clean!

This was his first journey since he'd got back, and he sat gazing out of the window all the time, contented and drowsy, watching the steam sweep down in front of the window and hide the countryside for a moment. He'd given himself a treat with a first-class ticket, and he could stretch out his legs. The floor was carpeted. Delicious! There were the familiar snug stations with their glass roofs, and bookstalls with lights glowing inside them amid piles of magazines and newspapers, and gloomy halls marked 'Buffet' with steaming windows. And beyond the platform, trees. Why hadn't he come into the country before? It was such a relief to see the long grass and streams, the wooden stiles!

It was a misty, hot day, with the sun trying to get through, and the fields looked sullen. But it brightened the further north they went. And by the time they arrived, in the evening, the sun cast a red glow over the fields.

Elizabeth was like a rush of wind, as always. He'd begun to feel nervous, preparing for her volley of talk. She was sitting in the car --- a broken-down Ford with a canvas top --- and shouted out,

"Philip --- come on, you old dear!" She looked tremendously well.

They kissed.

"How are you?"

"I'm fine --- jump in, dinner'll be up in a few minutes!"

And almost before he'd thrown his bag in the back she'd engaged the gear and they were off. She had a wonderful cascading generosity. It was in her body. There wasn't a spare or flinching movement. She had full, strong, black eyes and dark hair that kept tumbling about as she talked, and a way of leaning forward all the time as if searching for something. She was full of questions and laughter, and rushed in all the time. But it was never social talk. It was like a great waterfall --- one was drenched with spray and it made the silence afterwards more glorious. She'd become plumper in the last two years but her face was still clear like a school-girl's.

"It's ages since I saw you!"

"Yes!"

He felt quite jaded and slow next to her, but increasingly excited: "How are the children?" he asked.

"They're marvellous! Jane's sweet. She gets soft on every little boy she meets --- isn't it a scream?"

He began, "I've never seen them, you know! Only ---"

But the words were swept out of his mouth.

"No?" she cried. "I could have sworn they knew you!"

"Oh, no!"

She turned and looked at him with her full, dark eyes: "But you've been up here before, haven't you?"

"No!"

"What? Oh, you poor darling --- I was sure ---!" She stopped, biting her lip and frowning while the car sped on, making perilous bumps near the grass verge. "Didn't you come up with Pinkie just before you went abroad?"

"No, just Pinkie."

"Really? Oh, well, we'll have to make up for it this time!" And she pressed forward over the steering wheel and increased speed, making the car lurch and rattle suddenly, then career off like a horse under the whip.

"She's been telling me all about you!" she cried, just like a rider shouting something in mid-gallop. "You have got a swell job!"

And she flashed him a bright glance of admiration, which he hadn't seen in her eyes before. She'd always given him a blinking, hesitant glance under her eyebrows before, as if she didn't know what to expect from him. But now, apparently, he'd proved himself!

The country looked very still in the evening light. They passed by a farmhouse lying behind elm trees, and great barns with red, mossy roofs, and paddocks with fences. Sometimes the red sky flashed in a window.

"Red sky at night ..." he murmured.

"Yes! It looks marvellous for the beach tomorrow!"

"Oh, I forgot, you're near the sea!"

"Yes, isn't it good? We went down this morning with the kids!"

"It's lovely country," he said, gazing out of the window.

"It's my ideal. It's got space, and lots of shade, and trees, and that sort of thing!"

They began an ascent between hedgerows, and the car seemed to

hesitate.

"Come on, you old crock!" she shouted.

But it went its own pace while she kept pushing herself forward in her seat to help it along.

"She doesn't like the hill!" she added. "Sometimes she does and sometimes she doesn't" It was a question whether they would get to the top at all. It went slower and slower. The chassis rattled and trembled, but then the car just cleared the rim of the hill before it gave out. "Done it!" The engine had stalled, but after a few tries with the starter, breaking through the country silence, she got it going again. "The mixture's too rich! I give her too much peddle or revving or something, so Gordy says! There, now come on and finish your stretch, you lazy old bounder! Isn't she marvellous? We wouldn't part with her for worlds! Gordy always runs about in the shiny thing, but I hate it! Yes, isn't the country lovely round here?"

And she looked out, blinking, with the most lovely air of discovery. There were hills stretching on either side as far as they could see; she suddenly pointed out to the right, where there was a cluster of thick trees in the distance, a dark green mass touched with red from the glowing sky.

"We live over there!" she cried.

He could make out the tower of a church with a tiny wooden steeple built on to it, and the faded red brick of some houses.

"I say," she added with a laugh, "I hope you're not going to be bored! I'm afraid my conversation's not up to much! What a pity old Gordy's not here, he's the brainy type, don't you think so?, It's going to be a bit of a hen party, Philip!"

He said something about finding her intelligent company and they both laughed. Then he asked, "How is Gordon?"

They'd met once or twice, in a distant kind of way, through Pinkie.

"Oh, working too hard as usual!" She shook her head with a vivacious movement, so that her hair swept across her shoulders. "I can't relax when he's here! Is Pinkie like that?"

"Probably."

"You men are so frightfully domineering! She looks sweet."

"Who?"

"Pinkie. I think you're doing her good."

He thought, 'It's Grove you're congratulating, old girl, did you but know it!'

The country swept past again. They were now in a perilous descent. Strange, he'd felt impudent asking after Gordon, using his Christian name!

He remembered Gordon Bewley-Patton as a tall man with the same bounding health as Elizabeth but a quieter voice, and a great civility and shyness of manner. Sometimes he winced if Elizabeth bounded about too much, Pinkie said, and called her 'Mrs. Bellows-Patton.'

He'd met Gordon at his club, while the women were off somewhere shopping. He had turned the same gingerly glance on Granville, combined with warm attention, as Elizabeth usually did. But when Granville showed, with a deliberate effort, that he was at ease, Gordon settled down as well. There had been a little crisis over the drink. Granville had wanted beer and asked for 'bitter, please'. Gordon didn't understand this. He'd apparently thought it was some mumbo-jumbo because he screwed up his eyes

and leaned forward, his hand to his ear, with the same gengerly expression as before, and said, "Bi---? Bi---? Bi---? What was that?" "Bitter." "Bi---? Bi---? I'm sorry I can't understand you!" Granville had laughed, "Bitter, bitter!" And at last the bar-man had rescued them with, "He means bitter beer, sir. Light beer!" And understanding dawned on Gordon's face. "Oh, beer!" he had cried, and then given Granville a bright, tender smile as if to say, 'So glad we don't talk different languages, after all!'

"I don't think she really enjoys it out there," he said as the car turned into a narrow lane.

"Oh, why ever not?" She flung him a quick, absorbed glance.

"Well, I don't know, the life's too small for her --- it's no good for a woman ---"

"But she said she adored it! I thought it was just the thing as long as you didn't stay out there too long and get used to the sun-downer and come back with a bad liver and all that!"

"Of course, it's exciting for her ---"

"Darling old Hester's such a bohemian, isn't she?" she asked with a laugh. She made it sound so harmless --- even good! "Isn't that the trouble?" she went on. "She's a bohemian!"

"Yes, I suppose so. But that's the point, she can't fling her legs out in Basrah as she can here. People don't understand it. Well, you know yourself: it's enough for a woman to show her face out there."

"Oh, quite!" Then she added more quietly, "You've got to be firm with Hester. You mustn't let her wander off."

"Why not?" he asked. And the question surprised him, as it did her.

"What a question! Don't you really care?"

"I meant why do you think she shouldn't wander off?"

"Well, for your benefit! I don't know ——!" She gave him an uncanny glance, unable to find her words.

"But if she wandered off," he said, "it would mean she wanted to wander off, and it's no use forcing somebody's life off its path, is it? You can't do it in any case. You'd feel that all you'd got in return was a fraud. You can alter somebody's will, but the will's got to be there."

"Does she want to wander, then?" she asked quietly, again biting her lip.

He shrugged. "It was your phrase."

"Everybody'd like to wander some time, I suppose. But first of all you've got to get a family going, don't you agree?"

"Oh, yes!"

There was a pause, and he gazed out of the window again. He had a sense of giving himself away, just as he would with Dick or Hanni, but it was gone in a moment. She was so different! The subject had already passed out of her. Nothing was harboured in her mind. The trees and grass outside looked clear and fresh. 'How paltry life usually is,' he told himself, 'because of thoughts lurking in peoples minds like rats!'

Then they arrived. He was astonished that they'd actually driven about ten miles. It had gone like a few seconds.

"Well, here we are!" she said. Then she called out, "Hester! Children!"

It was a lovely house, set back from the road, its porch shaded

by a dark plane-tree. The red brick walls glowed in the last of the sun. There were tall windows, their sills within a foot or two of the ground, so that one could have stepped into the rooms from the gravel drive. The house spread out wide, two storeys, with pillars at the entrance, and the roof was uneven, grown over with moss, like those of the farms he'd seen on the way.

Pinkie came out with the children, looking fresh and much happier than when she'd left. She gave him a smacking kiss and laughed.

The children were Toby, David and Jane. They looked him over casually after being introduced, and ran inside again. Jane had a slow, dark gaze, and one could see something of Elizabeth's impulsive warmth, in her, held back.

"Aren't they beasts, my children?" she cried.

"Perfectly horrible," Pinkie said, gazing up at the sky with loose eyes, blinking against the light. "It's all this modern upbringing, what?"

The house was apart from the village, which straggled down the road, hidden behind thick trees and bushes. On the garden-side of the house there stretched a long valley with endless fields and a range of low hills in the furthest distance, misty and blueish. It was like seeing everything from the air. This was the valley they'd seen from the car, when she'd pointed. But still it was a surprise, a sudden access of light as one came round the side of the house.

Elizabeth made rather a fuss of him, getting him tea and glancing at Pinkie brightly now and then. Pinkie played up to it, allowing him his importance. It seemed to give her a thrill, as well. She made the tea, and they drank out of tall nursery mugs that had once belonged to

Elizabeth's grandmother. Pinkie behaved as if she'd always given him tea in this style; for the time being, she seemed to believe it really was so.

"How do you like old Liz's jalopy?" she asked him.

"It goes fine, doesn't it?" They laughed.

"You'll be driving us all to the beach in it tomorrow."

"Oh, good!"

Elizabeth showed him Gordon's study with his collection of books that covered everywall. This was in case he got bored with the 'womenfolk', she said. The room led off the dark hall, long and quiet, with panelled walls visible here and there behind the books, and deep leather armchairs round the hearth. It was rather like a clubroom, with shields on the mantel-piece and a rack for pipes. There was an immense desk under the window at the end of the room, which overlooked the valley. He told Pinkie what a wash-out it made him feel, being a clerk, when he saw all this.

She murmured uncomfortably, not really coming to his aid, "Oh, I don't know!", and turned away. Then, perhaps under the influence of the mellow, still house, she added, "You don't have such a bad life. I wouldn't like to be in the shoes of <u>some</u> of the wives I know, anyway! Living in a sort of backyard with squalid little husbands coming in at six sharp every evening and giving them sour little pecks on the cheek!"

"Hear, hear!" Elizabeth shouted playfully from the hall,

Playfully Pinkie added, "Anyway, you've got <u>style</u>, and that's what counts!" And after another pause: "And you're not a clerk now, you're a branch manager!"

"That sounds worse!" he replied with a laugh.

That evening, when they were having a drink before dinner, sitting in the big drawing room where there were three tall windows, talk started about the value of confessing your sins. Elizabeth was a catholic and cried, "It's such a jolly good service! It's like going to the lavatory!" Then she clipped her hand over her mouth with a laugh. "Is that blasphemous, do you think? What I mean is you have such a purged feeling afterwards!"

"Why, do you have many sins?" asked Pinkie with a smile.

"Oh, lots! Not grave ones --- but lots of tiny little ones!"

"I have lots, too," said Pinkie quite seriously. "And grave ones."

"Oh, you poor dear!" She turned to Granville, giving him a lively, flashing glance. "Is she awfully wicked, Philip?"

"I suppose she is, rather."

"But what sort of wicked?" she asked, looking at Pinkie again. "I mean, do you have mean thoughts and that sort of thing? Surely not?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that sort of wicked."

"Well, how, then?"

"She means getting drunk and wanting men and that sort of thing," he said. "She thinks God's only interested in that sort of thing --- presumably because she is!"

Pinkie chuckled, gazing down at her glass, seeming to feel complimented.

"Oh, when I go to confession I think of when I snubbed somebody or was rude to Gordy, and things like that!"

"Really, Liz!" Pinkie laughed, rolling her drink round. "You

are a virtuous bitch!"

"Not a bit of it, they're real sins, those things!"

"Small hat, old girl, small hat! You wait until you commit a really wopping sin, then you'll know what guilt is!"

"Do you feel guilt, then?" Elizabeth asked her, intrigued, giving her one of her awed, blinking glances.

"Yes." She pouted, staring at the floor. "Quite a lot!"

She looked so solitary compared with Elizabeth, and sat low in the settee, pale, her eyes hesitant while she thought the matter over.

"Isn't it funny," Elizabeth said in a bright way, "how serious people take themselves! They think their little sins are so important. But nothing's too sinful to tell! That's the whole point of confession --- it makes you see how common and ordinary your sins are!"

"I suppose it does!" Pinkie said with a smile, a little tipsy now, still swirling her drink round and peering at it against the light, her eyes slightly narrowed.

There was silence for a time. He could just hear the trees outside, stirring with the breeze.

"Why," Granville asked Pinkie, "what's so grave about your sins?" He'd just remembered his outing to the zoo with the hair-girl and felt absurdly jubilant about it: he, too, had a sin --- a potential one anyway! And this went to excuse Pinkie's.

She seemed to catch the roguishness in his tone and said, "Oh, nothing uncolourful, anyway --- that's the real sin, don't you think so, being dreary?"

"Yes!" They flashed a smile at each other, unsteady because of the drink, like strangers excited with themselves.

"What about your sins?" she asked while Elizabeth studied them in a baffled way: it was like a tournament of words, tense and disjointed, and she was looking on like a child, her mouth slightly open.

"Mine," he said, "my sins," leaning back and gazing up at the ceiling, his glass in his hand with the ice clinking against the sides, "oh, they're like shadows, they come and go ..."

"How?" Pinkie asked, her chin quivering a little this time --- in case he got serious.

"Well, I never know what's going to turn out a sin --- something said --- something thought --- rarely anything done!" He stopped.

"No, I was talking about ordinary sins."

"Sleeping with people, you mean!"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, as Elizabeth said, they're not so big as they seem!" And he could have kicked himself for saying it, because a look not of relief exactly but half-excited deliberateness flashed into her eyes, making them glint for a moment, while the relief was in her mouth, in a certain sweet repose that settled there for a few seconds. And yet, why not ...? Why not give away your life with an easy gesture as with any other?

"I haven't time to be unfaithful," Elizabeth said.

"Good God, Liz, what an old philistine you are, you're like the person who's got no time for reading!" Pinkie cried.

"Well, I haven't!" They laughed.

"When I'm forty and the children are grown up," Elizabeth added in a demure way, blinking, her cheeks flushed from the gin, "I may --- cast my net around!"

"Oh, well, if you say a few Hail Maries afterwards, I suppose that'll be all right for old mother church!"

The sitting room had chintz-covered armchairs and a grand piano, all glowing and soft in an old style. He watched Pinkie stretch out her legs comfortably. Then, while his thoughts wandered, they got on to the subject of class. Elizabeth said that at the admiralty you could always tell the 'new' people who weren't out of the top drawer or anywhere near it. They always gave themselves away!

"And there are four standard give-aways that Gordy and I have noticed. They mark a person right off!"

Pinkie looked gleeful. "What are they?"

"Well, first, pouring milk in a cup before the tea," she replied.

"I always do," Pinkie said. "Nurse says it makes a stronger brew!"

"So it does, but that's not the point! It's allowed if you do it in revolt, darling, like you, but one could tell you a mile off --- gentry slumming it!"

"I see --- well, go on."

"The second one's 'pardon' --- instead of 'I'm sorry' or 'What did you say?'"

"Pardon's ghastly, I agree. But one can't really way 'What?' can one? It sounds a leetle straightforward, doesn't it?"

"But that's what manners are, darling! I think it sounds so robust!"

"And what's the third?" he asked her.

"Serviette for napkin," she said without looking at him. "That's a real give-away!"

"I always say that," he murmured. "By accident."

She didn't turn her eyes towards him but went on. "And the fourth is 'I'M awfully glad to have met you' or 'Nice to have seen you' --- you must never say that!"

"Really?" Pinkie said. "What are you to say, then --- supposing you feel it?"

"You mustn't feel it, I suppose!"

"But you really believe they're give-aways?" he asked her.

"Yes, dear, they work, they really do!"

"But what do they give away?"

"Well, a person's position ---"

"But what exactly?"

She paused, thinking again, in deference to him. It made an unnatural line come on her forehead. "Well, it proves a person's middle class."

"Oh!" He laughed. "You only go down as far as that!"

Pinkie laughed also, and Elizabeth followed them with an innocent expression.

"Anything under the middle class," murmured Pinkie, "is sea-monsters for Liz. One doesn't even mention it!"

"Well, they do give themselves airs sometimes," Elizabeth persisted with a doubtful expression

"Don't you sometimes?" he asked.

She fluttered, not answering.

"Liz is an hon., old cock, so she had the right!" Pinkie said.

"Well, if she's an hon. she ought to try and behave like one, that's all I can say --- !" Granville started indignantly, flushing, not looking

at Elizabeth.

"Oh, in what way?" Elizabeth asked him with a quick look, half abashed and half-admiring.

"Well, if you're an honourable it isn't very honourable sticking your nose into other people's lives as if you'd been set up as their judge by God Almighty — just muck from the past — and a dead past, too— that past wasn't even alive so why try and salvage a lot of dirty much from it?"

Elizabeth looked at Pinkie in confusion, and then they smiled at each other.

"I should think," Pinkie said in a quiet voice, rolling the ice round in her glass again, "that Liz didn't understand a word of that."

"All I said was people give themselves away sometimes without meaning to!" Elizabeth cried.

"Exactly!" Pinkie said with a laughing glance at Granville, who smiled back at her suddenly, his flush dying.

"Is he always like that?" Elizabeth asked her.

"Yes."

"That's the trouble if you marry a brainy type!"

"Isn't Gordon brainy?"

"Yes, and he's exactly the same!" And she gave Granville a warm, concerned, motherly look, seeming to see him from above for a moment.

They went up to bed early. So far Pinkie had been sleeping in one of the small spare rooms, but now they were given the bedroom of honour, where Elizabeth and Gordon usually slept. It was a wide, low-ceilinged room with an immense bed, and one of the windows looked straight across the valley.

"Well, what sort of time have you had?" he asked her when they were undressing.

"Eating mostly!" She sat down on the bed and added, "You know, one isn't really alive in London, is one?"

"My first feeling, getting here," he said in a confiding way, looking her straight in the eyes, "was not being fully alive compared with Liz!"

"Really?" She chuckled. "She'd be flattered to hear it!"

The window overlooking the valley was open and a breeze made the curtain billow into the room; it was curiously exciting in the dim light.

"She thinks you're just the man for me," she added.

He glanced at her as she said this --- she was peeling off her stockings, and there was an unusual look of quiet satisfaction on her face.

"What do you think?" he asked her.

But she didn't reply. Instead, she went on, "We talked about men quite a lot this time. I think old Liz really would like a change!"

"Wouldn't we all?" he said with a smile, unbuttoning his shirt --- the remark seemed not his own, but to come from the house; and his smile, it was almost put there, from outside.

"She's such a healthy bitch, old Liz!" Pinkie said. "It's rather like talking bloodstock!"

He pulled the curtain aside to look out. There was a bright sky and he could just make out the trees below. 'Grove' was on the tip of his tongue. Why not broach it here? But it didn't seem to matter here. It was paltry. That was annoying, as nothing would have been easier for him than to mention it then, with the same smile, as he leaned out of the window, hushed like the night.

"I think it'll be nice tomorrow," he said, his head still outside.

There came a bellow from another window along the wall, "Oh, do you really? Jolly good!" Pinkie jumped up and came to the window as well, and they all stood talking again --- in a strange, hushed way, half in the night, the valley laying black and immense underneath them. They arranged when to leave in the morning --- they were to take the car to the sea. Their voices sounded mysterious and muffled. Pinkie cried out to Elizabeth, "I hope you didn't near any intimacies!", and pulled in her head while Elizabeth's bellow of "No!" went down the garden.

When the light was out she said she'd described him to Elizabeth as 'a good stayer' in bed. He chuckled --- again with that sense of it being given to him, not his own chuckle. She talked with the light voice of a sound, healthy wife, with a touch of mockery that could excite a man. Just before he slept he remembered Grove on the bus and his hand made a tiny twitch as if the nerves in it wanted to strike out at something. But he slept at once, and next morning found his arm round her waist as usual.

In the morning the sun blazed into the room and there wasn't the stir of a breeze outside. Elizabeth was already up, getting the children ready. And they all set out, minus Elizabeth, who decided at the last minute that she had to go shopping.

The jalopy clanged and shook but worked all right. The children sat in the back, leaning over so that their heads touched his and Pinkie's. He could smell their hair, rather like cherries. He glanced sideways at Pinkie, to see what she would be like as a mother; she had a vague but curiously competent look as she listened to their chatter. The eldest, boy

Toby, was solemn and plump. He liked to go into detail and asked one question after another while his younger brother, with lovely fair eyes, sat listening intently, his mouth open; and Jane looked out of the window, occasionally addressing a quiet, feminine question to Pinkie, which the boys pounced on if they could.

"Do you like driving the car?" Toby asked him.

"Yes, now and then."

"Why now and then?"

"Well, I like to look out of the window sometimes and you can't do it if you're driving."

"Daddy can."

"Can he?"

"Yes, He turns round and talks to us while he's driving."

"That's rather dangerous, isn't it?" Pinkie said.

He took no notice. "He rides a motor bike, too. He's given it up now."

"Why?"

"He says it isn't suitable when you have a family."

Pinkie turned round to him. "Why isn't it?"

"Well," Toby said, giving her a stern look, "you can hardly take the family on a motor bike, can you?"

"No, I suppose you can't."

There was a pause and Jane asked quietly, "Hester, do you always wear your hair short like that?"

"Yes, why?"

"Mummy always has hers long. You ought to see it when she undresses and it unravels. I'd rather like to have plaits but they

don't let you at school."

"Oh, do be quiet," Toby said without looking at her. "You're always on about hair."

She leaned across and pinched him on the knee, which was bare: "Ouch!" He pulled her hair and she screamed.

"Hey, children!" Pinkie cried. "You'll fall out if you aren't careful!"

There was quiet again.

"That's impossible," David said after consideration. "You can't fall out if you're sitting in the back because your seats are in the way and there's only one door."

"How observant of you!"

"Jane hit her head on the top once when daddy bounced," Toby said "and she blubbered all the way back."

"Oh, blubber yourself," she replied; but she was ashamed and didn't say any more.

They guided him to a beautiful spot among tall, white rocks where there wasn't a soul; it was a tiny inlet with pools of clear water, some of them quite deep, with a pebbly bottom; they got the car almost to the edge of the sea and began taking off their clothes; Pinkie took charge of the children at once, putting their clothes in three piles on one of the smooth rocks shining in the sun; and as soon as they were ready, dressed in uniform black bathing suits, the three of them dashed off into one of the deeper pools and began splashing about. Beyond the rocks, about fifty yards out, because it was low tide, there was the sea, green and still, flickering in the sun; there wasn't a sound apart from the cries of the children, not even a bird, and nothing was visible on the sea as

far as the horizon. Pinkie pulled a white swimming cap over her head and waded with him into one of the pools; Jane was swimming apart from the boys, waiting for her to come in, brooding a little; Pinkie lowered herself into the water as she always did, with a gingerly action, flicking water over her shoulders, wincing and screwing up her face; but the water was luke-warm. He walked on towards the sea and Toby suddenly rushed after him, putting his wet hand in his.

"David and Jane aren't allowed to go in the sea without daddy," Toby said.

"Well," Granville replied, "let's leave them with Hester, shall we?"

"Yes."

The sea was much colder and they both plunged in at the same time, coming close to each other with a gasp. Toby called out breathlessly, "Jolly good, isn't it?" and they both put their heads under. Only the rocks and the open sea could be seen, but nothing of the coastline, so that it felt wonderfully deserted, like an island. He splashed Toby and ducked away; they chased each other, whooping and laughing; the boy had freckles on his nose which showed up more when he was wet, and his teeth had a gap in them; his head would shoot up in the water right by Granville's face; they lay full length, floating, only their heads and toes showing; they stretched and twisted in the clear water. David, on land, had begun to resent Toby's absence.

"Toby, come back! Daddy doesn't allow it!"

"Oh, you fibber," Toby shouted back without moving a muscle from his floating position, "you know jolly well he does! He doesn't allow you, you mean!"

They swam in again, panting, and Toby plunged into one of the shallow pools in an indifferent way, showing off to his brother; David came and splashed him and at once great fountains of spray went up, hiding them both. Jane dog-paddled away from them, close to Pinkie, who also had a quiet dog-paddle. "Aren't they awful?" he heard Jane say in a confidential tone.

Afterwards Pinkie saw to the childrens' hair, combing each of them in turn; he watched her from the car; they took her help quite for granted, remaining perfectly quiet while she was doing it; she had the competent look in her face that he'd noticed before. In the car, when they all got in, Jane wanted to stay close to her, so she was allowed in front; the smell of hair was greater now and also there was a cherry-like smell, fresh and clean, from their skins; they all began singing, 'Hickery-dickery dock, the mouse ran up the clock!' as the car bounced towards the road.

"That was a good swin, wasn't it?" Toby asked intimately, breathing down the back of his neck.

"Rather!"

There was a pause and Jane murmured, "Toby always <u>has</u> been a boaster."

But to their surprise Toby said nothing; perhaps his knee still hurt. But after a time he asked his sister, "How's your precious hair? I suppose you're going to tell us how you'd like to have plaits?"

"No, I'm not!" Jane paused, gazing out of the window steadily. "My remark wasn't addressed to you in any case."

"Oh, listen to that!" he cried. "Where did you get that from?"

"What?"

"That way of talking?" Toby turned to Pinkie: "She got that sentence from daddy. He often says, 'My remark wasn't addressed to you.' But he's funny when he says it!"

"And she," David said quietly, "just sounds pompous."

"Oh, shut up, you!" Jane cried, turning on the smaller brother. "There's no need for you to butt in! You're the most pompous little thing I've ever seen if it comes to that!"

David was silent, and a hush fell over the three of them; he seemed about to cry.

Jane turned her neck slowly to look at him and said in a gingerly way, "You aren't going to blubber, are you?"

"Oh, be quiet, you!" David said as the tears gushed out of his eyes and he continued gazing before him.

"Oh, dear!" Toby said in a glum, adult way, his lips pouting, turning to look out of the window, away from his younger brother.

"David!" Pinkie cried. "Come on, old boy, don't cry! She didn't mean it." And she leaned back and put a handkerchief to his eyes.

Through David's tears --- though he remained quite still --- came the words, "She meant every word of it. She always does!"

"Well, what about it?" Toby asked in a solid way, still looking out of the window. "She doesn't affect me. She can say what she likes. Girls are soppy, don't you know that?"

"But I'm younger," David said, reasoning, his eyes clear of tears.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Quite a lot!"

"I never cried at your age."

"That's a lie!" Jane said.

David turned to her, his eyes almost dry: "Why, can you remember him crying?"

"Of course, I can! All children cry!"

"All right," Toby said in a neat voice. "Chapter and verse, please."

There was a pause. "What on earth are you talking about?" Jane asked, actually looking across at him for a moment with her eyes screwed up.

But Toby didn't turn round, only remained solidly gazing out of the window with his hands on his chubby knees.

"It's from daddy again," David said quietly.

"Oh, dear, you are a copy-cat!" Jane cried, still looking across at Toby.

"I can use expressions like everybody else," Toby said in his usual unassailable tone. "Daddy speaks English, doesn't he? You can say I'm a copy-cat because I speak English if you like. That's the sort of thing you would say!"

"But nobody knows what it means!"

"What what means?"

"That about 'chapters'!"

"Of course they do!" David cried, his eyes light, leaping up and down in his seat. "You are a dunce! It means 'example'! Give me an example, it means!"

"There you are," Toby said. "That's what I mean about it not mattering if you're young. David knows far more than you already!"

And Jane was quenched for a time, biting her lip.

Pinkie turned to her. "Don't you cry as well."

"Oh, no," Jane replied, smiling at her brightly, "there's no

danger of that. They're so silly, both of them!"

"I had exactly the same when I was your age," Pinkie said to her, her eyes flickering a little.

"Did you?" Jane asked with interest.

"Yes. Only I had eight brothers and sisters."

"Eight?"

"Yes!"

"Golly!"

The two boys were silent, absorbed in a game of gripping each other by the hand and trying to push the other back; at the moment there was stalemate.

"Eight brothers and sisters!" Jane repeated, marvelling. "I'd like some sisters. Did you like it?"

"What, having sisters?"

"Yes."

"I hated it."

"You hated your sisters?" Jane cried with a touch of admiration in her voice.

"Well, I didn't hate them so much, I hated being younger, being left out of things." She made it sound like yesterday; the hurt was still in her voice.

"Did they leave you alone all the time, then?"

"Yes. So when your brothers are beastly, remember it could be worse!" And Pinkie smiled at her.

Toby won suddenly. David's arm was wrenched back and he called out, "Pax!"

"And that was my left arm," Toby said with satisfaction. "So I'm

quite a bit stronger."

"Wait till I'm your age," David said in a clear, factual way.

By that time they'd arrived. Elizabeth was back, and the children were swept off to lunch in the kitchen. Elizabeth looked full of life: "I phoned Gordy in Malta, can you imagine that? He sounded sweet!" They had beer with their lunch and decided on a sleep afterwards.

That evening he went for a walk alone, taking the road that went past the house. It dipped down between trees, shaded, with the valley on one side and a tall, grassy embankment on the other. The sunset didn't glow like the previous evening. It cast a thin yellow light over everything, making the shadows long and clear. It was still warm. He leaned on a fence, gazing across the valley.

Birds wheeled down on the field before him, most of them invisible, making a long soaring whistle as the swooped. But they didn't disturb the silence. It was strange, this silence: if he really concentrated he could hear noises inside it of which he'd been unaware before --- a dog barking in the distance, the sound of leaves moving slightly behind him, the whistling of other birds in the trees.

He could see cattle grazing in the distance, and there were long black shadows across the field, like an immense plain. He could smell newly-cut grass. There was a tiny flurry of wings, then a chirrup, and the long soaring whistle again. Things were so still round him that he might always have been standing there. Time was only a movement that took place in his head: it didn't exist round him. This stillness, like a breath that came from another world, didn't develop: it just was, in the endless blue of the sky, quite still. One couldn't say it was infinity,

and endless, progression, either. It hadn't beginning or end. There was just this absolute stillness of space, without time.

He sank into this outer time for a moment, lost, his own time gone.

A bird sang piercingly in the embankment behind him, actually in the bushes clinging to the side, where it was dark and enclosed. The song was poured out with marvellous leisure, every pause seemed fixed from somewhere else, from the outer spaces, not haphazard or a matter of choice. And it was like a comment from that outer time, on the things all round. The comment seemed to point out this and that, with such reflective beauty, so leisurely and calm, without apparent theme, sometimes like a cry, or like a word of pity, or a sudden, soaring, joyful cry, pausing to let the song fall into the silence, with a rhythm that was also beyond time, so bold and unceasing and triumphant that he almost cried out.

He remembered certain scenes from the past --- they swept into his mind suddenly, the names and places forgotten: tea in a garden with tall grass near by, hyacinths like a blue cloud in a wood, a voice across the fields, clear sunlight at dawn. And with them came a sense of miserable regret, like darkness falling over him, as if he'd lost something of terrific importance somewhere along the path of life and couldn't say where. There ---! It was on the tip of his tongue. He'd nearly got it: the key! But it didn't come.

The next day was social; Elizabeth took them to a castle a few miles away, a rugged, glowing pile at the top of a hill, with a long drive leading up to it. She knew the owner. There were tennis courts behind, and a few people were playing.

Only one turret of the old castle remained, the rest having been

turned into a low-lying house with mullioned windows about two centuries before; nearly all the fields round them, stratching as far as you could see, with an elm here and there, belonged to the house; it was mostly grazing land; what little was farmed didn't pay for itself, Elizabeth told them.

"They're as poor as church mice," she added. "There's just Tommy and his old mum now --- she's completely batty! He's an angel!"

It was windy and uncomfortable by the courts, because it was so high up, at the edge of a kind of cliff, unprotected from the wind that came straight in from the sea. A number of people were sitting on the grass by the courts, most of them women, and as soon as Elizabeth appeared there were loud cried --- "Darling!" "What a sweet dress!", "Did you get those cuttings I sent you?", "Elizabeth!" , "Liz, old girl!", "How's Gordy?", "Who's winning against who?" "Never play it myself!" "Liar, Charles!", "Wasn't that a gorgeous evening?" She was lost among them.

"I say, look out ---!" A ball flew over the net and bounced among them. "Sorry!" came a cry from the court; a young man in tweeds dashed across and retrieved it. There were roars of laughter among the women who'd been nearly hit.

"How's that?" someone cried.

"Out for a duck!"

"Boundary!"

One of the women had a new-born child in her arms and Elizabeth began cooing over it, completely absorbed and gay, chucking it under the chin, "Oh, what a booful, loverly, cheeky-weeky darling! You saucy-waucy, booky-wooky, booful little sweetheart, bbooful precious!" The young man in tweeds sat by the court on a shooting stick, crying out when there was a

good ball; but the wind kept carrying it off and there were shouts of "Damn!" and "Just my bloody luck!" from the players. The ball went swiftly to and fro, just over the net, making a steady plock on the rackets; beyond the court there was blue sky, and, below, hills patched with dark woods, lighted up by the sun for a moment and then dull again as a cloud raced across. Pinkie got caught in talk by one of the women and he could hear her saying 'yes' in her bored way so that it sounded like 'yerse'; he guessed that the woman was talking about housework or something, and moved closer to make sure; it was babies, whether one should have two or three; Pinkie looked as if she wanted to vomit. Suddenly an older woman who was only half in the conversation barked across at her, "Have you got stables?" and Pinkie replied in a perfectly steady voice, "No --- were you looking for one?"

There was tea in the library and they went in after most of the others, because they'd arrived late and the players had to be fed first. Elizabeth was helping in the kitchen and didn't join them: there were also the score cards to mark up and new balls to be unpacked. She dashed here and there, waving to them or saying, "So sorry, darlings!"

A long table had been laid out for about thirty people, but the only other person there when they sat down was a plump young man with pale, loose features, who sat bent over his plate running his fingers through the crumbs thoughtfully; the only clean place was at his side and Pinkie went there while Granville sat opposite.

There was a huge book-case behind him, nearly the length of the room, with criss-cross wire in front of it, but as far as he could see there were no books; there were piles of magazines everywhere, and he noticed gun cartridges, pipes and pipe-racks, billiard-cues leaning against

the wall and, surprisingly, a tall, black case for a double bass. People passed by in the cluttered entrance-hall outside, which was panelled with the most beautiful stripped oak, hundreds of years old. They talked heartily and banged their sticks on the wooden floor, laughing.

Then the man at Pinkie's side suddenly spoke; or rather he looked up and made a sound like, "Ah!" His eyes gave the ambiguous impression of being both piercing and vague, as if the keenness in them had never been called out properly; he was bald, which made him look older than his age.

He turned to Pinkie, after his "Ah!", and asked her in a soft voice, "Are you interested in jazz?"

She ducked her head forward in a characteristic shy way, fixing her eyes on the table before her with a slight frown, and said, "Quite, yes!"

"Do you know the ... ah ... Thames Wharf Stomp?"

"No," She shook her head. "I con't say I do."

"Ah!" He gazed at her with a drowsy light in his eyes. "It's awfully good." He added, "Do you play anything?"

"I play the piano."

"Oh, jolly good! Join our band. Where are you?"

"I'm staying with Elizabeth Bewley-Patton."

"Excellent!"

"But I live in London." She still had her head ducked attentively.

"Oh, that's a pity," he said. "I learned the sax. I've got a library of nearly four hundred records from Dixieland up!"

"Really?"

"Yes. All in this room."

"Oh, is this your house, then?" she asked, looking up for the first time.

"Yes!" He laughed in a wheezing fashion and as abruptly stopped. "You'll notice the lack of books."

"I didn't, as a matter of fact. Nice place you've got," she said looking round.

He said nothing to this, only gazed at his plate.

"Do you get away much?" she asked; but again he took no notice.

"I give myself three hours practice a day", he said, "come fair weather or foul. I go to town for records and sheet-music, I mean town here, you'll understand, not London!" He turned to her and gave her a charming smile, and suddenly said, "Have some more tea!"

"No, thanks!"

He then gazed across at Granville in a blind way for some time, silent, and called out at the top of his voice, "Have some more tea over there!", though they weren't more than two yards apart; and before Granville could answer he shouted, "What?"

"Yes, I'd love some!"

But he simply turned back to Pinkie: "I'm getting a band up. Five-piece. Rattling good! I'd like some better drums, that's all."

"You need a good strong beat, what?" she asked in her swashbuckling manner.

"Yes!" He wheezed a little without moving. "Sounds rather rude, doesn't it?" He asked suddenly, "Are you married?"

"Yes, That's my husband across the table!"

Again he gave him a long, blind look and said quietly, "Where's your husband?"

"You're looking straight at him."

He smiled brilliantly again, the whole of his face waking up, his eyes piercing and stern, light blue: "Oh, I say, I'm awfully sorry, I thought you were old Sanderson's cousin! I couldn't make out why you were here! He's in Mexico!" He laughed again, his shoulders shaking softly. "Or is it Nigeria?"

"Well, they're both rather hot," Pinkie said.

"That's right!" He laughed even more. "I say, you do come out with some rude things!"

"Don't you like tennis?" she asked, apparently to divert him.

"Never play it. Damned silly game. Hurts your arm. Pointless, don't you think so?" He addressed himself to Granville again. "I say, are you in the City?"

"In a way, I ---"

"Wish to God I was, sometimes! My pals do. It's the thing, really, don't you think so? But old mum'd go crackers, she would really!"

Elizabeth came in like the wind and shouted, "Tommy, you old bounder! On to jazz again, what?"

"Let's say I've been and gone," he answered quietly, giving her a little smile.

She began to play up to him, going behind his chair and tweeking his ears. "Tommy's a darling, an absolute darling, and when he gets on to that sax he's irresistible!"

Her look was demure and girlish --- she seemed completely changed by the young man. She looked complimented when he said anything to her. And Pinkie began to be the same, infected. She flashed him interested glances, rather like an actress.

They all got up to return to the courts and he heard Elizabeth invite him to dinner that evening --- a last-minute thing --- "I'm suddenly going to have a party!" she cried. And she went round some of the other guests, inviting them, until she had a party of about seven or eight.

When they were getting into the car to leave the young man came out to them and suddenly thrust his hand into Granville's as if they'd never met and said, "I'm Tommy Bligh! How do you do?" The women laughed and then they drove off.

"Isn't he a scream!" Elizabeth said. She turned to Granville. "Did you like the house, old thing?"

"Yes, lovely!" He gave it a last look as they turned out of the drive; it looked vast at the top of the hill, a bright orange mass, like something done angrily a long time ago.

The fuss and excitement had left Elizabeth. The wind dropped and the evening now looked quiet and clear.

"Quick! Spuds to peel!" Elizabeth cried as they stopped on the gravel path, and ran to the house.

A black silk dress was found for Pinkie, with bare shoulders. When she put on silver ear-rings with it she looked delicate and glittering. The men weren't dressing, Elizabeth said. He took a bath, feeling a twinge of excitement that reminded him of London. The bathroom was wonderful with panelled walls and huge taps bigger than his foot, and a creaking floor. He could hear Elizabeth going to and fro between the kitchen and the dining room, calling out to the children to get a hurry on. They were just going to bed, splashing about in the bathroom downstairs and arguing at the top of their voices; Toby had lost his tooth-

brush and Jane said she didn't want his germs, so he couldn't use hers; he said to this that germs didn't stay on things if they were in the light, and if oxygen could get to it; but she scorned the argument and asked why in that case 'fumigation' was necessary; he hadn't heard of that.

Granville took his time, letting the water become luke-warm; when the children's voices had gone and he heard their bedroom-doors close he got out; there was a wicker-chair on which one could sit when drying oneself, and a huge towel.

When he returned to the bedroom Pinkie had taken off her magnificent dress again and was in her petticoat powdering her shoulders, leaning towards the dressing-table mirror.

"Oh, by the way," she said, glancing round to see that he'd shut the door, "I'm going to have a baby."

"What?"

"I'm going to have a baby."

He stared at her from behind, staying where he was by the door, the towel over his arm. "When?"

"Oh, I'm about six weeks gone."

The familiar trembling came over his body like a shadow, then was gone, and he asked, "Whose child is it?"

She smiled. "What on earth are you talking about? Yours of course!"

"My God!" He was astonished, laughing almost, and moved further into the room. "When did you find out?"

"I didn't have the curse, so I went to see the doctor."

"Where?"

"In London."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted to make sure," she murmured.

He sat down on the bed and said with a laugh, "I was going to ask if it's a boy or a girl!"

"A bit premature, that," she said quietly; she didn't smile in answer to him.

A breeze touched the curtains and she began doing her eyebrows carefully, biting her lip.

"How extraordinary!" he went on. "But I don't remember ---!"

"What?"

"When could it have happened?"

She shrugged. "I suppose it can happen any time."

"It's never happened before!"

She was silent and then said, "Don't you remember, one morning, I said it didn't matter about putting anything in because I was getting the curse, and you can't conceive with the curse?"

He tried to remember bu couldn't. She went on, "In any case, these things aren't fool-proof." There was another silence and she added, "Why, don't you want a baby?"

"Yes, of course I do!"

She pulled on her dress and he sat gazing across at the window at a loss for anything to say; she was gazing down to see if her slip was showing; he glanced at her stomach.

"When do you start getting big?" he asked.

"Oh, in about two months' time, I suppose."

"What did the doctor say?"

"Take plenty of exercise. He's one of those. He's putting me on to a gynaecologist."

He searched her eyes for a feeling he could define, but she went on dressing in a nonchalant way, her face delicate, her gaze turned away ffom him.

"Would you zip me up?" she asked, turning her back to him.

He pulled the zip up and clipped it at the neck.

"Does Elizabeth know?" he asked.

"Yes, but it's old hat for her, she has about one a year!" She glanced at herself in the mirror. "I suppose I'll start getting matronly like her."

"Yes, lots of good food!"

"Don't worry about that, sweetheart!" She smiled slightly. "They say you get a passion for things, don't they? Like the duchess of Malfi and the plums, or was it apricots?"

"Ah, well," he said, bantering, "I suppose we'll have to grit our teeth and see it through!"

"That's right!" She was brief again and returned to the dressing-table.

Perhaps they'd have a life like Elizabeth, he thought; children brought light, after all! He was excited.

"Where will you have it?" he asked

"What country, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Here, I suppose." She paused. "Don't you think so?"

"Yes! What about Basrah, then?"

"I don't think it'd be a good idea, do you, with all that heat?"

"No, I didn't mean that! I meant, when would you come?"

"When I've had it, I suppose."

He nodded in silence and said, "But that's in nine months."

As quickly she changed the argument: "Well, I could come out now and then come back for the birth."

Later, just before they went downstairs, she said, "Of course, the heat'll be ghastly with a child inside."

He took no notice of this, feeling happy and reckless at the same time. He could see her as she would have been down at Aldercote a hundred years ago, in the vast rooms, walking down the gallery with its tall, framed pictures, her flickering, lost gaze not out of place. And Grove didn't matter! Indeed, he added to her stature! He was her servente, as the Italians used to call it; and Granville remembered from his reading of the Devonshire memoirs how the fifth duke of Devonshire had lived with his wife and mistress together, and how his wife had adored his mistress like a sister! A little voice told him that he didn't live in a palace, and that he was far from being a duke; also the duke hadn't lived with his wife's lover! But he told himself it was only the sense of glitter and space he was after.

The evening went well. Pinkie put down a neat gin at once and said in a loud voice, surveying the room full of people, that she felt 'a world better for it', and strode across to get another. In this sort of mood she infected Granville; he, too, talked loudly; Tommy Bligh was there in a green waistcoat, looking sprucer than a few hours before.

There was a man with a lined, sunburned face who'd worked in Ismailia for five years and was just off to the Aden Protectorate; he told Granville he knew Basrah like the back of his hand; he said after

a pause, "Hideous, isn't it?", and they both laughed. They agreed that there was a 'great godly hideousness' in the Arab countries which was fascinating; this was after the second drink; their eyes sparkled, and the women were beginning to laugh loudly, especially Elizabeth, who also had bare shoulders, her dress black and simple, rather tight, making her look neat and determined, with flashing, black eyes.

At dinner she gave him the place of honour, where Gordon usually sat. The talk went along at a smacking pace, hardly pausing but never pushed deliberately; the table had been pulled out to its full length and took up nearly the whole room; there was a last yellow glow from the sun coming in at the window almost horizontal, shining on to Elizabeth's face at the other end of the table, lighting on her lips now and then; the wall-panelling was mellow and red-tainted in the light; the women were all young, and the drink had brought flushes to their cheeks. The man next to him turned to him with deference and asked how Gordon was these days; he'd assumed that they moved in the same world --- travel and politics; Granville swallowed his astonishment and said he'd only met Gordon once or twice perfunctorily; he spoke in a careless way as he hadn't done since his arrival from Basrah.

He heard Elizabeth say something about 'while manners maketh man, it only maketh an ordinary man, whereas a gentleman maketh manners!" The man from Ismailia who was at her side, very flushed now, pouted and said something objecting to this, and his wife, sitting opposite him, said that the attitude was 'typical' of him. Elizabeth screamed with laughter for some reason, while the man glared across at his wife and said hotly, "What a damned, pilfering lot of bloody nonsense you do talk sometimes!" There was further laughter, from the other women, but the man's wife

didn't look in the slightest rebuffed; she only pursued her argument as if it was quite natural for a man to show indignation; she even showed a peculiar deference to it, and yet also she stood up to him, only without defiance; a glow even seemed to come into her as she stood her ground, but it included her husband as well. The argument got on to shooting, and the husband cried out, laying down his knife and fork, "But the blighter never brings down a feather!" and he turned to Elizabeth, still pouting, with grease from the meat on his lips, and said, "You seen 'im at it?" The answer was, "No, darling!" The wife said quite calmly, "He got a wonderful bag last season." Her husband made a terrific pah like a wind across the table, and set about his food again, murmuring to himself about how the chap needed 'a sound kick in the arse' and he'd give it to him himself if duty, 'that bloody ghoul always showing its face', hadn't called him out to the Aden Protectorate. The men roared at this. He was looked on as a great performer. He had pet hobby-horses, it seemed, and liked to damn everything up to the prime minister and down again. Tommy took up the subject of the sax again, sitting low in his chair with his paunch sticking out under his waistcoat; he showed no recognition of Pinkie though she sat next to him, and she took this with a chuckle, raising her glass to him. Granville roared with the rest, feeling he'd only really arrived in England this moment: the rest, in London, was dead, grey, neutral matter!

He gazed at the faces round the table --- they were so dramatic and full, flushed in the last yellow light! And they seemed to have the whole English past in them --- not just project their own feelings and natures. There was the dramatic mark of the past, dug into their flesh. Their authority was dead now but it still showed in their faces

and eyes --- they'd grown to full stature as people, nothing had hemmed them in, nothing in their lives had advised caution and safety. That could be seen in their gestures and heard in their voices echoing across the gravel enclosure outside, where the plane-trees made a deep evening shade and the heavy, lurking scent of cut grass and manure came drifting alone. And the light in their eyes came from the country: there were the brisk winds and high sky in them; there was the same light blueness of the English weather. And, again, those eyes weren't responsible for the look in themselves --- they were far beyond lone self. Something had come from the outside, from the past, and was blind and intractable.

It was like seeing the sky inside their gaze, immovable, for which their eyes were only the frame. Their faces were creased and ruffled with conflictsthat had broken and evolved in the past: and their blondness of complexion had the same, high, brisk quality of the weather. There had to be faces like these, he thought; we couldn't go on frittering away the past; faces had to show definite places, and therefore the past, they had to be more than the signposts of one limited being which lived for a space of a lifetime in its own feelings and then died!

There was the glow of England in the mellow wood-panels of the dining-room, in the evening light that came peacefully from the window behind them, in the hushed stirring of the plane-trees and elms outside that overshadowed the house; there was a lightness, a certain emerald quality, of the island set in a sea; and it was in the language, the way they smacked their vowels out and didn't slur them or cover them up; the words had a clapping purity which also belonged to the fields; it was in the firm, just cast of mouth and the chin. 'How ghastly not to have a

country!' he thought. There was always this for him to fall back to; he'd never realised it before; there was always this close, intimate, glowing community every one of whose little gestures and signs and messages he understood; without it he'd be hardly more than a mind, he'd only have his own little feelings, all to himself, on a tiny self-island with his mind making the necessary contact with other people, always trying to divine what they thought, without sure signs which let the heart rest! His country was known to him not in his mind but in the pores of his skin, mysterious and intoxicating, the realisation of God, a grand, secret presence in glances and faces, in a certain light like that in the open sea, glittering and spacious!

The evening renewed power in him; it wasn't power in his mind, or anything to do with importance; it was simply the power to throw out his voice and behave like himself, and yet not feel that he was making a performance, as a personality to be admired; the country held him and gave him his real form, to which he submitted; there wasn't any ambitious self in it; it was like the full use of his limbs for the first time; he felt he hadn't had a real conversation --- been really there with other people --- for three years or more; since his last visit to the countryside!

Afterwards, when everybody had clattered out of the house and driven off, leaving Elizabeth and Pinkie sipping a last drink in the sitting room, he strolled outside on the gravel-path where it was quite dark now, and stood looking at the house; he heard a barn-owl screech in the trees further down the road, and some cattle coughed near by; the curtains of the sitting room had been left undrawn and he could see their heads moving as they talked; Pinkie's ear-rings twinkled in the light, and

she smiled while Elizabeth was saying something. He would have a child soon! It struck him like the night-air, fresh and cool. Perhaps he could belong to his country now --- even like Gordon and Elizabeth; he could begin to share its mysteries and secrets for the first time, not just watch them; he was still foreign to them; so much thinking had to be done before England would be whole in him; this community had been wounded so many times; his flesh, being of the public body, showed the wounds; he had to bring himself to full stature slowly, like a flower coaxed from the dark past; perhaps England was being renewed in thousands of other bodies too, at this moment, by slow evolution, until the life came back; and it might be happening in other countries, too, so that the mystery would be renewed in men, of having the weather and light in their faces that they'd been born to.

He could only grow to his full power at home; he hadn't it in him, in the short span of life, to make a language by which he could be understood everywhere, wandering alone with his feelings; if he tried to do that he'd be a cardboard-man with internationally understood gestures of good will! The heart had to belong to one place; there must be a home if it was to be understood without explanations; that was the balm needed by the nerves; and also needed was a place which because it always remained the same, showing all its different faces, at dawn and at night, like his father's garden in Abbott's Road, began to show the face of all reality; otherwise, if we were't sure of our position with other people, we were tied to the present moment, always calculating our chances; in Basrah he remained hidden and closed, behind English gestures no one really understood, and of which he was sometimes painfully conscious, so that they froze on him sometimes; it couldn't go on much longer; three or

four years would be the limit; in that time he would have to prepare the England in himself, by isolation, seeing where it lay by contrast with that blazing, desert-world round him, so that on his return to England he could be strange and anonymous to himself as he was in Basrah, not feel his identity lost again as it was now, and his powers of loneliness dispersed; it would mean growing into the secret England, that was in this night-air, and not falling again into the public England that clamoured all round him; he would have to be whole enough to walk through Abbott's Road without a trace of the shudders which had once gone through him, remembering only the glow of his early childhood there, not the aftermath; he couldn't do it yet --- he thought. He must see the ghost of England, where it lay untouched, at the inner flesh where the wounds hadn't penetrated, so that he could know it in himself and create it in turn, for his children; after all the public schemes that had ravished this lovely ghost, the breath would come back again; as it was beginning in him, so it would be fulfilled in his children.

At that moment Elizabeth put a record on and he heard the strains of Leporello's 'Voglio far' il gentiluomo' from Don Giovanni; it was pathetic and mocking --- Don Juan's valet wanted to be a gentleman! And he suddenly felt mocked in himself. What other form did the countryside have but what those man he'd just had dinner with had made, generation by generation? How could he live like Gordon and Elizabeth? Would those same people be his friends if he came to live in the country? His friends? He belonged to another world!

Leporello's tearful and self-mocking song went on --- "Voglio far' --- il --- gent --- il --- uomo!", drifting through the night under the plane-trees. He'd seen people like Elizabeth created attention, in the

Tube, in buses; the accent was now decorative; it meant nothing in power; it brought back memories; it was the scent of fields in the evening; there was old England in it; that was what made people turn round, with an odd self-eclipsing deference; Elizabeth had the style and flashing ebullience of old England; and the modern citizens turned round to glimpse it again, like foreigners. How could he get over his foreignness? England couldn't forget her gentlemen; their manners were sweet like the meadows; it was in the literature, in the quiet country houses and the rolling fields; it meant something fair, enchanting, rugged. They'd intoxicated England; it was something in the flesh; Elizabeth had it. It occurred to him how close to his aunt May she was; there was the same lavishness; they hadn't the same manner at all; but underneath there was the same legend.

Suppose he lived among these men, going to their houses across the fields, perhaps riding with them, having them at table? He wouldn't have to duck to a smaller stature all the time as he felt he had to at present, to make himself acceptable as a citizen, or a clerk; he would be able to swear, behave like a man; all the namby-pamby reserves that made him want to go abroad --- to the desert --- wouldn't hold him any more; he wouldn't have to search for stern faces and glaring eyes among the Arabs; he'd find them here; among these men, too, the mind was lost in reflection, too deep to analyse itself, as it was in Mohammed; then he'd be able to grasp the heart of the country; the sting would be taken out of death; he wouldn't be a little unit of feelings and attitudes falling into oblivion when he died; he'd die into the soil.

But here he paused again. Their world wasn't intact. Their farms were divided up. They'd lost their grip. The countryside was

dead, really. How would he ride with these men? He wouldn't have the time, even if he had the horse! And they didn't even want that world; they weren't sure enough of themselves; he'd seen it in their eyes at dinner; there was the sureness in their flesh, cut deep into their eyes, but when they talked they had no sureness! They were looking to other people now. People like himself!

Yet still the countryside was there, unpopulated now, with an untouched air; how terrible to miss that gift! The fields had been smoothed and touched by centuries of hands; the paths and hedgerows gave off a scent of independence; that was it; it all lay there with an extraordinary independence! That was the thing in their faces at dinner! It was in their stride, in the cast of their faces! It was in Pinkie --- what put her in a swashbuckling mood --- it lay in the room where she now sat with Elizabeth --- it was the smell of new-cut grass, the shade of the plane-trees, the last yellow light on the panelled walls --- it was the touch of wildness --- independence! It was what made their gaze so open and distant and made them seem the vaguest of people!

It was in Pinkie's flesh, in her love of extravagance --- but were all these people the last witnesses? Would it go? Were they the last? It made him feel his smallness: how could he achieve the same powers without generations behind him, without the marks of it in his flesh? How could he do it alone? Could he only come to fullness in their form? Was that the only form? Was it waiting for him, unavoidable and overpowering? And intoxicating! And inviting! England had flowered in their flesh! How could he avoid the feeling of plagiarising them? He didn't know! But still there was the yearning. To bring out the wildness locked in his flesh! And the peace! But surely he had it,

as well as they? Surely it had been there, too, in his past! He had a past, too! Was it so different? Hadn't his extravagance been thwarted and tamed as Pinkie's had, too? Suppose his face was marked? How did he know it wasn't? How did he know it wasn't growing in him as it had grown in these men --- but always in a new form, so that he was the new form, already? How could he expect it to be known to the mind in any way --- this flesh that grew and flowered in the darkness and silence and beyond, where our minds could see nothing?

How wonderful to exist in England as he did in Basrah, swinging in a hammock by the river, his beads clicking in his hand while a dum-buk played in the distance! How marvellous if the same mystery could come back here--- to the fenced paddocks, the elm-trees standing alone in their fields, the glittering sky over the house at night, the smell of cider and beer, the sounds at harvest-time, the orchards that were furry and warm, the paths between hedges!

Leporello stopped singing and at once he was aware of the silence as a blanket on his thoughts; the devil intervened and he saw the lighted porch of the house as it might be in a neat, clean suburb, with trimmed bushes near by, under lamp-light, frightfully fixed, with the intimacy gone, no strange sounds at all, the owl gone, the cough of the cattle near by gone, no slight wind brushing through the trees --- everything giving only a sign of people and what they were doing --- a lighted window upstairs being the bedroom, the time being bed-time, the sound of a radio down the street, the mee-ow of a solitary cat that belonged to a hearth, the shining of slate roofs in the lamplight, the flat silence all round, a world stilled by men, possessing only men! No, he couldn't bear it! He wanted to leave for Basrah at once! The public schemes had gone

too far; the island was fixed to them; they peered into every mood and sigh; he couldn't bear it! No!

But as he went indoors again the other dream returned like a balm, brought on by the mellow glow of the panelling in the hall, and the sound of Elizabeth's voice at the end of the corridor.

Before they went to bed a health was drunk to the coming child; Elizabeth kissed him on the cheek and said, "Good for you, dad!" What was it going to be, she asked, boy or girl? He said girl, since boys were rather tricky to bring up; he'd already 'arranged' it to be a girl.

"Let's hope you don't get a big bum like me!" Elizabeth cried to Pinkie.

"You've got an exquisite bum," Pinkie murmured, putting the rest of her drink back with a gulp; then she smacked her lips, a wild look in her eyes for a moment, and added, "Give the little pairns plenty to drink, that's what I always say!"

CHAPTER 23.

The next morning he woke up early, even before the children. The sunlight was blazing into the room, already hot, and there was a furry stillness in the air. He went to the window and looked down at the orchard immediately below. The leaves were dusty and pale, with a wilted look in the blinding light. And the earth between the trees was dense-black. Not a leaf stirred, and the chorus of birds, in the gable above his head and also down in the trees, hidden in the black shadows, was absorbed into the stillness as he'd noticed two evenings before, like sounds that came out of the earth. Beyond the garden there was a vast haze across the valley, stretching as far as he could see and hiding the low hills in the distance, hot and motionless. Massive breaths of heat drifted through the window, reminding him of Basrah. Pinkie was still asleep, only her hair visible above the sheets, and he decided to have a look at the village before breakfast.

He left the house quietly, tiptoeing down the stairs. The hall below was dark and cool, with the curtains still drawn. There wasn't a sound. He carefully opened the front door and stepped out on to the gravel path. A hot breath came into his face, scented and heavy --- so like Basrah! And everything had the same fixed look, the leaves of the trees like iron. His step made a sharp sound on the gravel as he turned to look at the house, its windows gleaming in the light, its red brick like a marvellous coral reef in the sea, against the utter blue sky.

The real village lay off the road, through a path in the woods almost opposite the house, and this he found easily.

Everything was hushed there, with a tall arch of twigs overhead letting the sun through in tiny dazzling spots. The trees were young, planted regularly. The floor was damp, with autumn leaves from the previous year sunk into a muddy, soft carpet. And in the middle of the woods a dry turf began, of a dazzlingly fresh green, and he could hear his feet thump on it as he walked; it seemed to echo far underneath. There was a clearing at the end, where the hill dipped suddenly, and here he saw the ruins of a stone house, just the base of the walls with weeds grown all over them, and a broken doorway, the timber eaten through.

Then he came out over a clear valley, and immediately before him lay a squat Norman church, quite alone in its little green plot. The tombstones gleaming white in the sun, some of them at an angle and others sunk into the earth, only their heads visible, mossy and worn. A hot breath of wind went over the grass, stirring the wispy heads. He went to the wooden porch and to his surprise found the church open. And he walked into the cool, musty air, letting the door thump closed behind him. It was quite dark because of the stained-glass windows. And the golden altar gleamed in the trace of sunlight, before bright grey stone. The stone looked like thin canvas, ancient, as if delicate to the touch. The silence was quite unlike that of the fields. There were massive pillars with the brickwork showing through in places. Some of the pews were three or four hundred years old, and had the same frail, dusty-grey look as the stone, with initials carved on them, and signs of the cross.

He heard a bird whistle quite close to the porch, a brief, reminiscent sound piercing the silence for a moment. Then all noise was

gone again. At his feet there were tombstones laid flat --- Lady Jane Courtley, daut^r. of Harry Meedham Esquire, then a date, 1594. The head and hands of the copper figure, representing Lady Courtley, were broken off --- Cromwell's work, probably.

He looked up at one of the stained windows. The sky was just visible. The village felt a great distance away --- so did the house, and Pinkie, asleep. There was a vast silence ruffled by the wind, and the sky had a look of terrific openness as over the sea, and seemed to be intimate with the earth, knowing this church, not seeing the flow of centuries at all.

It made him feel suddenly taken beyond his own life, removed three or four centuries back, to 1594 perhaps, and, gazing at the sky through one of the windows, he felt he was actually removed into someone else's body, too, from that time, and caught a glimpse, like being vouchsafed another life for a moment, of the world then --- so that he saw the horizon outside the window as the horizon of his whole life, while the hush of the fields outside contained the dead with whom he was connected in his flesh, and to whom he would go again, with the golden, still country beyond the horizon strange to him, forbidden and limitless as only the sight of the stars was to us, in our shrunken world! Ah, at that time everything at the base of life must have been good, with a certain sweetness and local strength! At least, life had started out right then. Fibre and resolution hadn't had to be learned slowly, on top of ruins, as now. And again he arrived at the question, but distantly, as if it concerned someone else, as to whether he would be able to do this for his own life --- bring the early ruins to order. He stood in the church for nearly half-an-hour, gazing down the chancel between the pews,

listening to the silence with its strange, beckoning depth. Then he left quickly, returning to the hot air outside with relief.

He went on to the village. Half the street was in shadow --- closed shop-fronts and windows with the curtains still drawn. Only at the inn, with a cobbled yard and stables, was there life stirring. He heard the clang of a pail, and someone coughed. But the street was deserted, with the sun streaming down its length, blacking out one side.

At the bottom of the hill the road became barer and widened. The trees had been felled and there was an estate of bleak newly-built houses with tthe mud of construction still round them. Why did they always pull the trees down? But the English always did! He'd noticed it as a child. They even seemed to resent them. Were trees too soft, with their leisurely bowing and spreading of arms in the wind, like a comment on men?

Beyond, where the trees started again, tall and close together, he saw the chimneys of what looked like a big house.

He found a hole in the fence and went through. Was it the manor house? At any rate, nobody lived there. The garden was overgrown with tall bushes, with the trace here and there of an old rose tree, pushing its blooms through in a last gesture.

And behind lay the house itself, like a palace, but shuttered, with weeds up to its doors and climbing all over the steps from the garden, filling the stone urns that had been used once for flowers. There was a fountain in the garden, almost hidden by moss and weeds, quite dry. Here again roses of every colour peeped through, single bright heads.

Most of the windows were smashed. He looked through a crack in the shutters and saw a magnificent hall inside with a painted ceiling,

its gilt and blue stars still bright. It was bare of furniture. And just as he looked in a bird flew across, its wings fluttering in a strip of sunlight for a moment.

He tried to imagine the time when the lawns had been smooth and the urns full of daffodils and tulips. The meadow would lie beyong as it did now, rising and falling gently, with a few ancient oaks in the middle, bent and knarled. People would be strolling up the steps. The windows would be hining in the sun, with immense curtains behind them. In the hall there would be deep armchairs, a long refectory table, oak chests.

There was a squat building to one side, apart, that might be the chapel. It was older than the rest, with that sweet, native look of mediaeval things. It nestled more comfortably among the weeds than the rest of the house.

A fat raven flew up from one of the chimneys, startled as he pushed through the bushes.

On the train back from Meedham he kept talking loudly --- his voice seemed to have got used to it. But gradually he became aware of the other people in the compartment and began talking in an undertone. Pinkie, too, underwent the same change in her face. She gazed down at the floor, sometimes biting her lip. The chimneys and slate roofs of outer London passed. The dream was over. It was a dusty, warm evening.

Elizabeth had said she wanted to 'bring them out'; their lives weren't grand enough. There was going to be a 'terribly swish ball' in London, and she'd get tickets for all of them. Gordon would come as well. It would be in about two weeks' time. Granville knew this was

after he was due to go back to Basrah, but he said nothing. And Pinkie didn't seem to notice.

They got back after dark and found Dick in the kitchen. He was worried about Granville's report. The office had rung up several times, and also Nevinson had buttonholed him in the corridor about it.

"A lot might depend on it," he said.

"Yes, I'll get it finished." But he didn't sound interested, and Dick gave him a glance.

Pinkie left the house for a few minutes --- he thought to phone Grove from a call-box, since no shops were open, and he took the opportunity to say at once to Dick, "Did you know Pinkie was going to have a child?"

To his surprise Dick only looked up mildly --- he'd started reading the paper --- and asked, "What was that?", his eyes vague. Then he appeared to understand and said, "No, I didn't!" And after another pause he added in a quieter voice, "Well, I hope you're proud, dad."

Granville found himself saying in a hot way, "I am --- rather --- but afraid, perhaps!"

His voice trailed off, and almost at once Dick returned to his paper, his lips tight together and his eyes showing nothing. Granville felt a rush of affection for him which he couldn't explain. He had a sense of reliance in Dick which he hadn't known before. Dick's light blue eyes were resting casually on the paper before him, and he made his little sniff of concentration. There was a long silence. Then Dick looked up again and spoke: "Oh, I thought I'd give you a treat as you were off soon. I booked up for the theatre."

"Did you?" He smiled. "That's good of you!"

It was 'tit-for-tat', Dick said, for the bottle of wine they'd shared. There was a theatre-club called the New Studio which he'd heard of through Joyce and had joined; apparently, the Kaaba dancing company, with the hair-girl in her special dance, were giving alternate performances there. But Granville's treat was to be a play. About a sailor, he'd heard, and it was supposed to be good.

Dick glanced at the kitchen-door and, leaning across the table towards him, said quietly, "I heard about your day at the zoo."

Pinkie was on her way up the stairs and Dick managed to add in a whisper, "The going's rather good, wouldn't you say, jockey?" And when Pinkie appeared he turned round to her with a twinkling smile, pale and remote, and said in a normal voice, "Well, landlady, I hear you've got a bun in the oven?"

To which she said, hardly looking at him, "'S right, old cheese!" and went to the sink to peel some potatoes. She then exchanged a glance with Dick and they chuckled. The silence returned abruptly, cutting off their chuckles in a strange way; and their faced were at once serious again.

Granville asked her how she felt and she said "Fine!". She hadn't had any morning-sickness, she told Dick, who had already gone back to his paper. But he looked up in the same mild way as before and murmured, "It's evening sickness gets us down, don't you think so?"

There was no reply to this.

He asked himself again where the triumph of the night of the eclipse lay --- why it was still eluding him --- whether it was a false hope. He hadn't expected this total silence even though the first

conscious triumph had died. Where was it in his life now? How was it bearing fruit?

He began to tell himself that, indeed, if he came to think of it, his life was changing under the influence of that night, though the effects were difficult to perceive at first. Suppose their Meedham visit had been one of these effects? Pinkie's cheeks had been flushed with health there! Elizabeth, he told himself, had come as a saviour. And the news of the baby! It began to occur to him, in a slow light like that of dawn, that this was the first real answer --- in the flesh -- to his night of thought --- the first confirmation --- a touch from heaven --- the night of the eclipse transformed to flesh, in the shape of a new breathing life! There was his triumph!

At the same time, however, his body, and indeed his whole self, was sluggish, as if it couldn't meet this triumph. The triumph, apparently, hadn't reached his flesh. And he didn't know shy. Nor was there a new life between him and Pinkie on account of the child. In fact, it had made no difference. Her comings and goings were as mechanical as before. She kept her job. The child was hidden away under the multiple noises and activities of London. It was no longer their property, as it had been in Meedham, for a moment.

And the problem of his return to Basrah hadn't changed: would he be going? Would they go together? Would she really come afterwards as she promised? Nor did the child bring them into closer confidence. They curled up together at night with no greater intimacy than before, nor less. She looked at him --- and he looked at her --- with no more promise. If anything, her look was barer than before; sometimes bleak, when she glanced at him. But the thought of the child always waylaid

dark presentiments.

It felt strange seeing Dick and Hanni again. Also the house felt strange. He perceived everything in a kaleidoscopic fashion, broken in pieces; and this, also, was the opposite of his expectation. Was it the child? Was the seed in Pinkie breaking his own into another form, just as her body was changing, to accommodate the new being? But the night of the eclipse had led him to expect a better order in his life, like the opening of grand new themes from now on! And there was no such thing. Everything was broken. It was like having broken eyes. He felt that if he could get back even to his life before the Meedham visit, it would be something! Before, there had been the undertone of threat and forbidden excitement, and these were a sign of life at least! If he felt them again, he would have a sense of his own heart; its sadness, or the menace it recorded, would make a theme, and he would be able, at least, to feel it there, if only by its fright and trouble! But now there seemed to be a collapse of the inner sanctum; there were sights and sounds, he talked as usual, the same excitements happened externally, but it was separate from him, the inner link was gone, like a picture broken into many pieces, though bright and alluring; it made enchantment for the eye, but no messages were passed to the inner halls.

His work at the office had finished just before the Meedham visit. He'd shaken hands with the secretary, and he'd given him exactly the same smile as on the first day. So there wasn't the office-routine to hold his life together.

There was no moral basis to his life. He did what he felt instinctively to be right, or else what other people expected of him: but there was no clear decision in between --- no necessary truthful course he knew he always had to follow, whatever other people expected of him and whatever his instincts said.

So, really, he had no self. He was like all the others! Just products! Their lives geared and moved by the city outside!

All the moral words were dead for him: good, bad, evil, wicked, sinful, virtuous. Meaningless! Imagine telling Pinkie she was 'wicked'. She'd laugh! Hanni, too! They'd feel complimented --- the 'wild' touch, you know! But was he different? There was only one moral criterion for them all --- 'What impression did I make on other people?' That brought a shadow over the mind --- that made you stop --- that was the only guide you had, what other people thought!

So they were guiding each other --- the blind leading the blind!

But he wouldn't be blind, and he wouldn't be led by the blind! Hadn't Dick told him one day that this was how Lady Godiva and King Arthur lived --- doing only what people expected of them? And he was going to join this disgraceful middle class sort of living? He had to protect himself --- keep himself intact --- think things out all the time --- stay apart!

Of course --- what was the night of the eclipse but his childhood breaking through? insisting on thinking the matter out? determined to find a path alone? wild for independence? That had been Abbott's Road! There you had a morality! In Abbott's Road you didn't follow what other people expected of you, there you had your likes and dislikes and these weren't the same as any other man's and you were allowed this difference!

But not in this 'higher' world. Here your independence suffered staggering blows! You weren't meant to stand alone! The man who did so was mocked and stung and isolated! You 'joined in'. That was the soft, idiot little invitation --- join in with the murder if that's what 'they' expect! And he wouldn't --- he wouldn't if it cost him every friend he had on the earth --- not if it cost him his life!

This seemed to bring him to life again. For a few days he left revived --- determined --- he would be different!

He decided to get on with his report, finish it, take it in, get his ticket to Basrah, and so --- end things tidily! He could do it now! He smiled at Pinkie and got his papers together, and sat himself at his desk at eight o'clock sharp in the morning, just before she went off to work. And he started.

He revised the first part of his report, which now only wanted a conclusion. The revision took two or three days. But there he stuck. The weather seemed to grow gloomier. "Seemed', because the state of the sky hadn't occurred to him in the last few days.. His thoughts left him. He couldn't get on. He began lying on the bed, trying to rest. And he even put his papers away, wanting them out of sight. He didn't have a word more to say. And yet he didn't want to send the report in with a perfunctory end. He had to be clear about it. And it was only a matter of a few sentences!

He hammered away with his mind, got out his papers again, used all the reference books he'd thought he was finished with long ago, made himself tired and nervous, and all to no end. Not a thought! He'd carefully set out the organisation of T.I.M. in Basrah, showing its links

with Beirut and Cairo: that was the main part of the report. But now came his suggestions for the future. There must be changes! And this was where he got stuck.

'What are you doing,' he asked himself, 'trying to force things with your mind? Why not rest, wait a bit, idle, let new thoughts form?' And he forced himself to disobey his torn, scolding nerves. And slowly, during a concert, a clear question began to form in his mind: 'What's your objection to finishing the report? Why do you hate the idea?' For all of a sudden he saw that he hated the idea of making any suggestions for the future.

He wanted to contract out of the whole bloody lot! He didn't want more progress, more machines, more education --- he didn't believe in it --- he hated it --- he wanted to withdraw --- and that was the only suggestion he could make.

But he was in the thick of it all, by his life, by his work: there was a contradiction he hadn't worked out!

And he realised that he still didn't understand how or why the 'middle class' as he always called them had come into being; nor what good they'd done, if any. He described them to himself as the instrument that had killed religion in people. They'd killed it in him! But why had they done it? How had it been allowed to happen? How had the movement got such a hold? How could he write them off historically, or in any other way? For he was one of them. He couldn't write off his own life, his work --- it couldn't be done!

And he set himself that task, quietly. He lay awake, his nerves at rest now, wondering how the answer would come. Could that be his last word about the 'middle class', about the new world he'd come into ---

that it was simply history gone wrong? and one just hoped it would come better again?

Next day there happened to be an argument between Dick and Pinkie in the music-room --- about the Prince Albert bridge, leading from Battersea park to Chelsea. There were plans to pull it down. But complaints had come in to the local council, hundreds of letters; the bridge was a fine example, people said, of Victorian design, one of the best, and there was no need to go on tearing down all Victorian London just because the fashions had changed. And Pinkie said she liked the bridge. She thought the upper struts were like wonderful strings of beads, especially at night when they were lit-up, whereas Dick said they looked more like a row of ~~wonderful~~ Edwardian watch-chains. And then they began talking about Victorian houses. Pinkie said she got a cosy satisfaction from being in a real furnished Victorian house --- with all the trappings, it had to be the real job --- hideous towering doors and polished door-knobs, thick curtains and persian carpets, masses of cushions everywhere and knick-knacks and gaudy light-shades with tassles, and ~~little~~ inlaid tables --- everything 'purring like a ~~wonderful~~ luxurious cat' so that you really couldn't believe there was a real world outside ~~it~~ nothing considered too small or trifling to be worked on carefully ~~for~~ every tiny coffee cup a special work in itself, every table cloth and nail-file and embroidery-basket, as if the whole idea had been so flatter people, if they had money --- flatter every little taste and whim and desire.

Dick said he preferred ~~the~~ light and air. ~~He was on the side of modern architecture.~~

"Oh, I agree it's suffocating," Pinkie said. "But then, perhaps every age finds the last one suffocating!"

And afterwards, when he was alone, thinking of it again, he asked himself, 'What did the Victorians feel suffocated by, to make ~~all that~~ so much ~~clamour and~~ detailed extravagance?' Had they felt a similar suffocation with the world they'd been children in, which had made them undertake these proud excursions? He paused. Suppose the world before industries hadn't been so peaceful as he'd thought? Suppose there'd been decay and suffocation there, too, among certain people? --- never, of course, among most people, whose lives never changed from generation to generation, but among the few whose thoughts led to change in the outside world? Suppose the nobility had collapsed at that time --- turned only to pleasure --- lost interest in running the country, left even their own estates to clever agents and stewards? ~~And~~ Suppose certain men had come to want the same pleasure --- the same colour and light --- as it seemed --- in their own lives --- the extravagance? Hadn't they achieved it, then, these certain men, in the heavy embroidered cloths and their towers and buttresses and endless knick-knacks, in Victorian times? hadn't that been the climax of the first industries? Suppose that those hideous Victorian shops and miniature palaces had renewed people's pride? Did the Victorians, in fact, give a terrific boost to life, ~~which was~~ suffocating and horrible as it was to us? Without them, would country towns have become silent, deserted jewels of Georgian architecture?

Suppose that, in a way, industries had been a struggle for the light?

Suppose that only the gorgeous Duke's carriage had seemed to have colour and light, as it had sped past, in that world before industries? ~~And~~ Suppose darkness had fallen on certain other men whose minds were nevertheless active, and who had dreams, ambitions, even visions? Wasn't this how

industries had started? Hadn't they come out of lonely men, as the revival of trade in the middle ages had come from the lonely towns, from those men who weren't in any blind connection with other people, not knights or serfs, but men who thought things over to themselves, in the silence of their minds? Wasn't the first machine that started industries, the spinning jenny conceived by a weaver, always alone in his work, separate from the other villagers, a lonely traveller who went from place to place selling his cloth, contemplative and pale compared with the labourers?

Wasn't that the character of industries --- of our whole world --- that they had sprung from men's minds, calculating and dreaming and arguing things over?

And what did that mean --- for his other thoughts --- for the night of the eclipse --- where did that connect?

Christ had been alone: was <u>this</u> the answer? <u>He</u> had severed himself from the blind connections --- from the inherited connections!

One by one the blind ties had gone in England --- the divine power of Rome, the divine power of the king, the divine power of the dukes. Was it the lonely concept of freedom that had been trying to shine all the time? Was <u>this</u> what Christ had given in his person? Perhaps this freedom was part of being withdrawn and alone; it was the hunger that went with being alone --- impatience of family, of priest, of pope, of king, nobility, of every blinding power over the mind! <u>Certain</u> men had done it, always a small group, and the others, the majority, had watched, inheriting a little more freedom, if to lack blind ties <u>was</u> freedom! Was this what Christ had done --- made freedom the only path to God? Was that in all his movements, --- freedom? in everything he said, a wonderful

lightness? Was that, also, what those certain men had been trying to realise in their factories? Was it that they'd wanted a lighter world, where people wouldn't just inherit the life-long task for their hands, where their thoughts wouldn't only be those that had grown before they were born? Was it to make a world where people could unbend from blind work and leave it to the machines? Was this behind their greed and cruelty, without them knowing it, turning them into a movement that within fifty years of coming to birth had control of parliament and had turned the country from a rural community into a throbbing factory crossed with roads and canals and railway-lines? Was it to make a world free from the dark, pagan shadows as well; a universe without fear or guilt, so that when we looked up at the sky we should feel ourselves separate from it and clear in our freedom, not haunted by its frowns and storms? Was that why he'd seen the eclipse as he'd done, mathematically? Had he simply been projecting the freedom that was in him, so that he could see the sun change and go dark without the slightest qualm or fear, unlike Abu Kath'm who did show fear? Was this freedom an unparallelled freedom so that for the first time millions of people could face the changes and terrors of the universe with stillness? Was that from Christ? Was that the stillness he'd had in his own person? Had religion penetrated so much into us that it was now in the pores of our skin and we didn't know any more what it was like to be pagan and the victim of every omen and fright in the universe? How much we took for granted! Was this freedom presupposed in the tiniest things, such as our visits to the doctor, whom we left without the dark feeling that we ourselves through some fearful stain were responsible for our sickness and horribly involved, but stood apart even from our bodies with a cool stillness and detachment --- which

made us seem thinkers and scholars compared with the pagans? Everything had become phenomenon for us! It was in our consciences, which kept a moral principle as something separate from us, and stopped out plunge into dark self-interest; it was in our sense of the universe as separate; it was in our sense of our bodies; nothing stuck to us; wasn't that the fulfilment of an unparallelled freedom?

And what was this freedom but the spark Christ said could be found in every person in his lonely state, apart from his place in the world, no matter what his blind ties were, even a slave, a woman, an unbeliever? And what had happened since his death but one struggle after another against the blind ties that hid this divinity in which a man was perfectly free, perfectly alone and perfectly beyond the touch of other men?

Was this the kind of justification he'd been looking for all this time in the middle class? How else would he know his own freedom, how else would he be thinking as he was at this moment, unless what he called the middle class had done its work, in the nineteenth century, of removing the last blind tie?

Yes, industries had disinherited everybody! People no longer had a squire to lean on, to take their glow from, or their punishment. That had all gone out a century or more ago. The farmer with his homely face had gone. The village had gone. Everything blind had gone, everything you could inherit naturally, in the place where you were born! What was that but turning people, through the unthinkable pain of upheaval, into their own masters?

Was that where Christ had been leading us all this time, to where we could contemplate him in perfect freedom, free even from the dark

weight of religious advice and supervision, from the priests and councils? Was that what Granville himself had been trying to arrive at when he asked himself what life he would have in England, and whether it would mean joining the old class of authority? Was he seeking a way of perpetuating the aristocracy he saw in these men, their splendid independence, without their power? Was that what was going to happen in England? Would people take the form they had found and admired in these men, their easy gestures and authority, and perpetuate them in themselves without the servants, wealth and influence? Was that what made this class of authority bearable to him, that it was pure now, namely, devoid of power? so that these men could only assert themselves by what they were in themselves, as Christ, the everlasting model, had done? Was it this that rendered the concept of the gentleman real --- its being shorn of authority? Was that why aristocracy had existed, to cultivate the touch of divinity, in leisure and without any hemming-in by other men or by work, in perfect independence, spreading itself to the utmost in vast rooms and lovely parks? Was the aristocracy the heart of every country, however dead it might be now? was it the soul of a country? did the soundness of a country come from its aristocracy's soundness? Had the middle class made it possible for every man to inherit it, now that the form had been arrived at and settled, only without the vast rooms and lovely parks now, without the blind authority over other men? Was the middle class itself only an instrument for freedom, moving by blind function all the time, not a visionary body at all? Was its role to establish the utmost possible satisfactions of power and ambition for every man --- in speed, comfort, leisure, and marvellous flights through hundreds of different experiences all over the earth --- so that

in the end there would be no wonder left in power at all, only the contemplation of all the wonder that lay beyond men; so that the last immensely ambitious explorations of space, in cunning rockets travelling at unthinkable speeds, would end in a marvelling contemplation of the huge, still, blue empyrean?

Was this why the middle class had destroyed even the blind tie of religion, so that it would be a conscious one?

Had the great reiterated principle of the middle class been that men were the uppermost reality, and men must be served; had this been their function, to repeat it until the stature of every person was assured and admitted, and the touch of divinity could then be seen? Were we on the threshold of that new epoch, in which the stature of a man would be totally beyond his place and position? Had the middle class only been serving Christ all the time in trying to move towards the light, like a machine that could only go on until it had disrupted and consumed all humanity? Were they the little technicians of Christ, blind to the force they were creating? Was that why he found no real morality in Dick but was stirred and thrilled by his daring and intimately exploring thoughts, that tried to uncover the light all the time? Was that why he found Dick's ideas 'mental', separate from the life he led, because there was no total, driving moral vision? Had the middle class now performed the great menial task required by Christ? Had they strained further and further towards the light, away from the dark and marshy habits of endowing people with divine powers, and from superstition, so that at last the human being stood free to contemplate himself apart from his own fears and his own hopes and interests, as Christ had done throughout his mission? Was a detachment similar to that of Christ

growing on all humanity? After the shocks delivered by the middle class to the peace in which most people had been locked before, as Abu Kath'm was still locked, as he'd been locked in Abbott's Road as a child --- after the point of self-destruction had been reached in millions of people --- would the most of self-recall come as it had come in him, through recollection of the previous life of peace and blindness, and through the sense of having lost a guiding hand? Was it only a fulfilment of Christ's advice to give up the family, to give up all ties, for the one tie in which a person was no longer the victim of interest or even blind layalty, but chose the light for himself? Were people giving up the dark, blind, suffocating part of family so as to give their children the light of freedom; wasn't that how the children of the great houses had been brought up, unpossessed by their parents? Wasn't that what Jean Philby had talked to him about, when she'd said that a mother had no 'rights' over her child? was it the light in which all ambitions were dead, and we were free to contemplate other people, even the children of our own flesh, in their freedom? Did every man have to become one of the disciples --- even those working in the fields, even the Samaritans, the heathens, the fallen women, the Romans!

Yet it was say, this freedom. He was sunk down. There was so much responsibility. So little consolation. A terrible legacy! But it was there. You couldn't turn away.

And each time, perhaps, there was a new tie. We, in our world, had the tie of other men --- we couldn't get through to the beyond --- to our single selves --- we couldn't hear the silence --- that was our struggle! We had to contract out, in some way --- in our hearts ---!

He was numb with his thoughts, yet peaceful.

Next morning he sat down at his desk without a moment's thought and wrote the end of the report in a few minutes, making hardly a pause. He wrote that it was simply a question of the middle class getting power. As its power increased the Arab countries would come to resemble the Christian countries more and more. It had to be gone through. All you could do was to help the process on. Proposals flashed into his mind with terrible swiftness. Where T.I.M. had the power it should subsidise development-programmes, offer loans and so forth. T.I.M. should purchase a certain amount of land for disposal among its employees; a new industrial city outside Basrah might be the result. There should be a new housing scheme for employees. A health-insurance policy should be started, there ought to be arrangements with the university of Baghdad for the officialisation of T.I.M. educational certificates in the Compound school. How the words clattered out!

He wrote it in a reckless and cynical frame of mind: suicidal, almost. 'Let them get on with it!' he thought. 'And meanwhile the rest of us will lie low, keeping what little flame we can alive, until it's all finished --- keeping the flame for our children's children!'

He suddenly added at the end: 'These developments are part of a great religious programme. They are the extension of Christ to the Muslim world. The middle class is the blind instrument by means of which Christ is carried to all men.'

Next day he took the report to be typed out by the Secret Weapon. To hell with them!

On his way out of the office he met Hanni who to his astonishment said, "Well, how do you like the girls at the Marquis?"

"What girls?" His mouth fell open.

She laughed. "Your face is a picture!" She added, "You know, Joyce and the girl who does the hair-dance! Dick's been telling me all about it!"

So the top-secret regulations were off!

"He always tells me about his escapades after the novelty's worn off," she added. "And I enjoy seeing if the girls live up to his descriptions!"

"Do these?" he asked.

"Well, all except the Moroccan girls. I've got an ancient dislike of them, as you know, so I'm not a good judge!"

They came to a tea-shop near St. Paul's and chatted about Dick, smiling. Yes, she said, life with Dick never lacked for variety!

She repeated what she'd said about Moroccan girls, and he simply nodded. "But I hear you've fallen for one of them!" she said in a plunge.

He decided to agree. "Yes!"

Though he felt remote he was aware that he was making a better impression on her than usual; she was beginning to think him a gay dog, perhaps. And he was silent with her --- he sat slouched easily at the table, gazing through the window at the passers-by --- and this seemed to draw her attention, too.

He paid the bill and kissed her on the cheek when they said good bye. There was an anxious look on her face for a moment which puzzled him, just before she disappeared. She wasn't going to meet Dick, she told him. He wondered if there was trouble. She hadn't appeared at the house for some evenings, since their return from Meedham in fact.

It wasn't long before Pinkie had been briefed about the Marquis.

She was stunned and showed him a mute, disapproving face. This amazed him more than Hanni's revelation! He even noticed that she began to watch all his movements with grim, lip-biting concentration.

A pity she'd never grown her hair long, she said, otherwise she could do a nice hair-dance for him! He suddenly became a zone of interest for her, she began to give him a familiar drooping look he'd got used to in Basrah when she gelt left out of something. His ticket to Basrah, which was coming up again, was forgotten. 'Basrah' now seemed to mean 'flesh-pot' for her: not boredom any more!

Also Hanni told him that Pinkie's interest in 'outside life', by which he supposed she meant Grove, had gone down tremendously in the last few days. Pinkie had asked her numberless questions: had he kissed the hair-girl? Had they slept together 'yet'? How had they met?

Pinkie was not only morbidly intrigued, Hanni said, but she wanted spectacular answers to her questions, as if she needed to prove him a 'bastard like Dick', thought it hurt her. She no longer looked tired in the evenings. There was even an excited flush in her cheeks sometimes. When he went for a walk alone one evening she looked sulky. He began to blame himself for the two innocent occasions on which he'd seen the hair-girl; it seemed an act of cruelty to the coming child! Grove was cancelled out by the new factor.

He suddenly had a sense of hot foreboding about the child. He wanted to disburden himself to Dick but decided against it --- he remembered --- just in time, it seemed to him --- that Hanni had told him once that Dick looked on suffering as weakness; Dick feared a 'sympathetic detonation' in himself if he listened to other people's troubles. He had a sense of 'contamination'; he made himself scarce.

Granville had noticed this at training school: there was no brotherhood in Dick. If you asked him for help --- it might only be moving a desk across the room --- he did it perfunctorily and left the room in a kind of dream, as if helping someone put his own self out of action. Dick seemed to say, 'We're all alone, and if we meet and have a good time together, we do so by conscious social agreement, which would be broken if we did anything to displease each other. Our liking each other means that we have interests which coincide. Dick would cancel and appointment at the last minute --- say, at the cafe in the Commercial road --- and add, "But you go ahead, old sport", as if only the event --- sitting in the cafe --- interested Granville. Partly it was his poor estimation of his <u>own</u> company, so that he gave the impression both of an agreeable modesty and an unpleasant coldness.

Granville had stopped trying to make appointments with him. His pride would be hurt by Dick's, "Oh," followed by a pause, "can't quite manage that, old sport! Another day." Or he might say. "I've got to cover the annual flower-show at Hindhead for the Sperm News and Chancre Gazette," meaning he was meeting a girl.

And he himself had fallen into a similar mental habit recently: he fought shy of doing anything which he couldn't construe to himself as useful in some way, and this meant, generally, useful to himself. It was difficult for him, for instance, to pick up the phone and pass the time of day with someone. There had to be an appointment in mind. Otherwise he felt 'soft'. Sometimes he would invent an occasion in order to pass the time of day --- he might ring up Glenning for some office-information which he didn't need. Giving Dick a bottle of wine had been difficult for him. He'd had to force himself to do it. All round him

he felt a moral vacuum. The reason for being nice to people and doing things for them wasn't clear. There seemed no reason beyond self-interest, and so it became a habit to present to himself the element of self-interest to absolve himself of 'softness'. This 'softness' was a sense that other people would set him at naught and assume he was idle and without important commitments. To be natural wasn't enough. He feared being rebuffed --- having the phone put down on him, for instance, if he laid himself bare to people. He feared people saying they were 'busy'. The word was coming to have a sting for him. Dick, Hanni and Pinkie were all 'busy'. So he made an effort to be 'busy' as well.

Dick seemed to like a methodical relation. Once, years before, they'd spent a week-end together at an inn near Reading, and had agreed to go half-way with the expenses, and at precisely ten o'clock on Saturday evening, as they sat over the lounge-fire, Dick turned to him and said quietly, "Well, Petty Officer, I think it's about time for you to take over 'mine host'. I think that's as fair a division as an untrained mathematical mind could devise --- we got here about a quarter to ten last night, I'm standing you ---" with a twinkling smile --- "that extra quarter of an hour, and we're leaving about that time tomorrow night, aren't we? So the bills are yours from now on!" Dick had no dark reserves about money. He always made it light and clear, on an objective basis which left no unpleasantness.

4 He spent one evening with Dick at Hampton Court, as during the first weeks of his leave. But the river was cold and bleak, not as he remembered it from the summer at all. Only the trees were lovely, on the other side of the river, golden and yellow, close to the mellow red

palace. They sat looking at the view with a bottle of cheap wine between them.

Dick said he always revealed his deceptions to Hanni --- not that he'd 'got anywhere' with the pale girl --- so as to change Hanni. Granville asked what this meant. Dick said that Hanni couldn't call them deceptions once he'd spilled the beans, thus she couldn't deep up her 'familiar pattern' of assuming he 'belonged' to her. Granville still couldn't see what he meant.

"Well," Dick said, "if she feels I'm deceiving her it must mean she feels she's in a familiar relation with me --- she's the guardian of my conscience in some way! Now by spilling the beans I wreck this. She's got to reconsider her relation to me as if she was just one of the other girls, do you see what I mean? She doesn't expect me to be dishonest --- she knows I won't lie, not for long, anyway --- and that breaks her chief moral hold over me."

This was what he meant by 'changing' her. He 'flushed the relation through, he said, and turned her into someone new for him. The 'familiar' part of the relation was broken. They could then make love as new people. It thrilled her as much as it did him, though it might 'rattle the old nerves about a bit'.

Granville went home admiring this. Dick also said that his affairs were a 'conscious self-therapy', each woman doing her work for him, until her role was exhausted, and then she was exchanged for another, having got her part of the bargain as well --- the therapy was mutual after all. Granville blamed himself for a lack of lightness on this subject. He always looked to women for permanent requirements, as possible lifelong companions --- permanent therapy, so to speak! The

name 'Grove' spelled the end of his life with Pinkie for him. Indeed, the end of life.

Dick also told him more about Lady Godiva and King Arthur --- how they'd discovered Hanni was living with him, before they were married. Lady Godiva had found a pair of knickers on the back of his armchair. King Arthur called him down to Harrow for a 'conference' at once; those were the days when he was still getting an allowance. Anyway, the old boy cut him off. Lady Godiva said the pants were filthy --- that was the main bone of contention: where was the girl's pride? Dick said he hadn't located it yet.

"Where does the girl dress and undress?" Lady Godiva had asked during the 'conference'.

"Well, where we kip down!"

"Good Lord! In front of you? I never undressed in front of your father for ten years after we were married!"

"Why," Dick asked her with a laugh, "what did you have to hide?"

Nowadays, he said, they accused him of taking up with people who were 'neither fish, flesh nor fowl', a favourite expression of Lady Godiva's, meaning people like Hanni and Granville --- nobody knew where they 'came' from. But Pinkie was 'quality'. From the day Dick told them that she was 'a real Grysham down to her uncut toe-nails' they always asked questions about her. Did she 'keep up' with the Aldercote part of the family? Was she ever invited to the house? Would she 'come into anything'? Did she know the present Lord Aldercote --- 'something in fertilisers', they believed? Everything she did was recited to them, and they approved of it all, even the story of how she got dead-drunk in Reading and lay out with the tin-cans in a backyard all night. So

'eighteenth century'! Well, the Gryshams had always been famous for that sort of thing, hadn't they? A real 'buccaneering family'!

As a child, Dick said, he'd always had 'conferences' with the old boy. His finances were discussed and an 'accounts book' brought out, with debit and credit columns. On each page there was a separate item --- 'Tuck Shop Allowance', 'Clothes Allowance', 'Income from Gardening', 'Breakages and Fines' --- he was fined for breaking crockery, raiding the larder, swearing and whistling and 'passing wind' at table, and for staying in the lavatory for more than seven minutes at a 'sitting'.

"There was a first-class row last week," Dick went on. "I totted up the old boy's assets on a piece of paper, to see what I'd get when he passed beyond. I wrote 'King Arthur's Assets' at the top, then made two columns, one for his assets and another for his likely debts and taxes. And he found it! I went down there for lunch and left it on the coffee table. He nearly had a fit!"

"It must have been quite a shock," Granville said.

"Well, that's the way he thinks, in debit and credit columns! He's done that all his life. For every hundred quid he's spent on me he's thought of getting back a hundred quidsworth of filial duty plus a five-percent divident. I don't think that man's done a single clean act off the balance-sheet in his life!"

Granville asked him if he hated him and to his surprise Dick said, "No, he's an amusing old stick! And he takes after me so much! Really, he quite liked me totting up his assets, it's just the sort of thing he'd do himself!"

Lady Godiva had never liked cutting Dick off like that. She tried to persuade King Arthur to put him back 'on half-pay', but he

wouldn't hear of it. She said the advantage of having Dick on an allowance was that it got him down to Harrow once a month to pick it up, whereas now he hardly came at all. Half the allowance would get him there 'bi-monthly', at least. But King Arthur said no, not since Dick had become a 'bedouin', meaning he lived with Hanni.

And Lady Godiva said to Dick one day with a smile, "You know, you're so easy to deal with --- if only your father knew --- because you're completely selfish, like me!"

CHAPTER 24.

As a gesture to Pinkie, so that she shouldn't feel the sting of Granville's having a lover, even an imaginary one, Dick arranged an evening for them all at the New Studio club shere she could meet some of the people she'd been hearing about. Hanni had been laying it on thick, and Pinkie had an impression of the Kaaba dancing group as a bunch of whores, drug-addicts and Moroccan playboys --- something really enchanting and 'dreamy'. They would make her feel 'ordinary' and 'English' with their dusky skins and deep, black, wild eyes that went right through you.

They were all to see the Kaaba performance at the club, then have drinks in the bar afterwards. Granville felt very embarrassed at the idea of facing the hair-girl and Pinkie together. He asked Dick why the hell he'd done this and he replied 'to leaven life up a bit, baker!'

To his surprise he later heard that Glenning was going to be there as well; and when he next saw Glenning he heard another surprise --- that the whole evening had been organised by Grove! Take <u>that</u>! Grove was the Kaaba company's publicity man!

Granville had the impression that Dick had acted as a cover for Grove, or for Pinkie (the problem had been how to get Pinkie there when Granville, as the hair-girl's friend, might also turn up --- so let Dick invite her openly, as a <u>gesture</u>, and so forth(; or that Hanni had persuaded him to do so, after a cue from Pinkie; or that they had all

concerted the plan. But as to why they should want to escaped him. A trace of the old trembling began in him, but it was the slightest fluttering which ceased almost at once; he was hardened, he felt; it increased his apprehensions about the evening, and therefore his excitement. When the evening came he drank half a bottle of wine beforehand, flushed down with brandy.

The man known as 'Joe Clockwork' was there. Granville was introduced to him but forgot his real name at once in favour of the nickname which they used almost every day at the house. He had a flat, sallow face with staring eyes that settled slowly on things, and large ears, with bigger shoulders than one would have expected from the rest of his body, which was slight and even frail; he moved with a strange heaviness as well, though he wasn't heavy of limb; he lingered at everything, dwelling on it slowly with his eyes, and turning round after a long delay when someone spoke to him. Pinkie described him as 'Hanni's show-piece'; he was designed to 'off-set' the pale girl. The pale girl was there, with Dick (breathing all over her', in Pinkie's words, his hand resting on the wall behind her with his glass almost pushed into her neck; but she seemed placid and even thrilled.

Pinkie was in a defiant frame of mind, and ordered herself a double brandy the moment she got there; she put it back with her eyes closed, because she hated all drink, and ordered another. Grove was nowhere to be seen.

There had been quite an unusual bustle in the house that evening; Hanni had come over with a dress to iron, her hair done up in a chignon; Dick got off from work early; the bathroom was hot and misty, with scent in the air; it was exciting, with all the lights glowing in the house and

the four of them rushing to and fro looking for collar-studs, hair-grips, links, nail-polish, and taking a sip of wine or brandy from the bottles in the kitchen.

The performance was a great success, and every seat in the tiny theatre was taken; the New Studio was off Cambridge Circus, over some shops, and the long window of its bar overlooked the street; it was a comfortable, plushy place which according to Dick had been used for 'naughty shows' in the nineties. Not that the performance was good; but the audience thrilled to the dark skins the moment the curtain went up.

Joy Celeste tried to make the opposite effect to darkness by painting her skin a light yellow and holding in her lips to avoid the 'nigger-look'. Her hair-dance was the triumph of the evening and there was long clapping for an encore, which she refused to give. The chorus bumped into each other and danced mechanically, their eyes all over the place; but the audience loved it; Dick nudged Granville all the way through, winking at him in the darkness; Pinkie, on the other side, was enthralled and sat there with her chin sticking out as if the ungainly people on the stage were vindicating a certain wild attitude to life for her; she asked Dick in the interval if they and their dances were 'straight out of the village', and Dick spluttered with laughter --- he said he was astonished at her naivety, they were all more likely 'out of Pimlico by Billingsgate'! During the hair-dance she leaned over to Dick in the darkness, with Granville between them, and said in a loud voice, her eyes fluttering and an abashed but defiant pout on her lips. "Is this the girl Pip's lost his heart to?" Dick said softly "I think that about squares the matter off, yes," to which she had nothing to say. She only leaned back reflectively. The hair-girl appeared to impress

her in a dark way. But at the end of the dance, during the wild clapping, she qualified this by saying loudly to Dick, "She'd be quite attractive if she ate a square meal, wouldn't she?"

The scene on the stage was garish, hung with straw and papier-mache fruit, showing a golden beach with palm-trees and mud huts. It was like a pantomime scene from Robinson Crusoe. There was shouting and frenzied drum-beating, and the audience clapped and roared at everything. The posters had advertised the 'real Arab dance and Dervishes'. Nearly every one of the dances was fast and loud. If a dance began slowly it had to go up to a deafening crescendo. It was a tiny stage, making it difficult for all the chorus to appear at once. Dick said he heard, "Get off my f--- toes!" resound across the stage. Sweat was pouring down the drummer's face and dripping on to his hands, while the pianist sat cool and clerkly in a striped blue suit, glancing up at the stage every few moments. When the curtain went down after one dance he heard someone sitting behind them say, "They're so extra-ordinarily vital, aren't they?

The curtain stuck and pieces of palm-tree drifted down as the dancers pushed and sweated past each other and tripped up like elephants, while the music got louder and louder and seemed to lose all rhythm. Only the hair-girl was remarkable. There was a real ferocity in her dance, and again he found himself catching his breath for fear her head would go flying off. And the leader of the troupe pranced round her in an ineffectual way as he'd done in the rehearsal, only with a sheepish expression now, as if the revolving of the black head underneath him was a surprise --- a social surprise. Someone's dress ripped with a loud tearing noise --- in the chorus. The hairy arm of one of the stagehands

was visible for a moment, trying to mend it. Only the hair-girl could have compared with the plump, lazy dancers of Basrah. The audience applauded madly, stamping the floor. There was a political element in this: the Rubath crisis had not long been over --- they were applauding Arab life in general.

The hair-girl came out to the bar afterwards where everyone was assembled. She was in a hard mood and talked at the top of her voice, looking small and shrivelled, with very pale cheeks, her high cheek-bones sticking out more than he'd noticed before; and she had a short girlish frock on which made her look fourteen or so. There was quite a crush in the bar. The club had a number of important sponsors, Dick told him, and some of the drinks were on the house. A man with shining bags under his eyes and thin, yellow hair, his neck flushed bright scarlet, got up on a chair and said that the management would like to offer a free drink to everyone 'in the selfish and calculated hope' that they would all become members of the club.

To his astonishment, Granville saw Deryk Grysham neat the bar, and they all greeted each other. Deryk was most polite, bobbing up and down as he took Pinkie's hand, and singing out, "Hullo!", his shoulders hunched a little. And, "How nice to see you again, Philip!" he cried. Granville asked after Beatrice and in return for this Deryk asked him when his leave would be over --- but there was so much noise near the bar that he didn't answer, not that he knew the answer anyway. People were pressing forward for their free drinks, in a gentle way, easing and leaning themselves against each other, smiling and making jokes. There was scent, the smell of hair-oil, smoke, brandy on the air. Most of them were good-looking, with clear faces, the dress was casual and yet

vivid and deliberate, the girls in tight trousers and the young men with ascots, fancy shirts, Italian-style suits. There was a strange, unfleshly atmosphere: there was sex --- in people's glances --- in the vibrant pallor of some of the girl's faces --- but it was detached, odourless, like a memory, a thought, enticing, brilliant --- but almost vanishing.

It was a long, pleasant room with settees the length of one wall and a few armchairs, with tall potted plants, behind one of which Dick had taken his pale girl --- she'd got the evening off from the Marquis specially for him. There was the sound of traffic outside, and a constant twinkling and glowing of lights from the street. At a distance 'Joe Clockwork' looked erect and striking; he had a strange presence; Pinkie said she'd heard he was a 'chronic snob', and he used Hanni by showing her off at parties as 'exotic'. There was a lingering softness in Clockwork's manner of addressing people, and in the slow way his eyes fell on to objects, but his neck and shoulders seemed too thick for this delicate manner to be natural. His eyes were deep in his head, dark and unblinking, and without their deliberate softness of expression they would have been relentless. Suddenly Clockwork lifted his head and made a brief, high-pitched laugh like a scream, then his face was serious again; he was talking to Hanni, and she was smiling calmly, having just said something. When they were all introduced Clockwork took Pinkie's hand very briefly, with no grip at all, touching only her first two fingers, and smiled in a bland way, seeming not to look at her at all; so soft was his gaze; but then, quickly so as to be hardly noticed, he gave her a quick, flashing glance of scrutiny; and once more the bland, leisurely smile was on his face. He turned his attentions to Hanni again, and put his arm round her shoulder; "darling, angel, " he murmured, but

with a curious heavy remoteness from her, and a gaucheness of limbs that was miraculously hidden by his softness. This softness set up a strange dramatic contradiction: sometimes in profile his face looked rapt and shadowy, unnaturally still like an image in the desert.

Pinkie said that the high-pitched laugh, which Clockwork repeated several times, making everyone look round, was his 'social speciality'; he did it to mark himself out from other people, but he never did it more than a set number of times on any occasion; for a brief appearance at a cocktail party he rarely did it more than once, with perhaps a parting one at the door; for a long party there would be five or six, louder as people drank more; at a dinner-party he kept it for the dessert; it was meant to show everybody that something very special was going on in his corner.

Dick went on talking to the pale girl behind the potted plant, leaning towards her, seeming to elect her the only person in the room; his eyes were clear and twinkling; he treated every one else casually, as if the evening had only one purpose for him.

A few people began to do some silly dancing in the middle of the room, to no music, while onlookers beat out a rhythm with their feet; three or four couples started it, and Clockwork and Hanni joined them, leaning against each other while keeping their hands at their sides; they moved slightly, their eyes closed, and Clockwork kissed her lightly on the brow once or twice; this performance seemed a strain to her, she was steeling herself to it and keeping her eyes closed, her lips pursed in a tell-tale way, showing how the display hurt her. But Clockwork was untroubled, and when he opened his eyes, gazing at the people round him, it was with a drowsy expression, as if he'd really been asleep. Pinkie,

gazing across at him, said she thought he was 'adorable' and she appreciated Hanni's taste.

Suddenly the hair-girl was standing in front of them, clasping a black hand-bag!

"Is this your wife?" she asked him.

Granville nodded and smiled. Luckily he was thick with drink! The hair-girl put out her hand to Pinkie with, "Well, I believe I've been to one of your parties!"

She gazed up at Pinkie in an intrigued manner, her hardness gone; and she glanced at Granville as if to assess his relation to her.

Pinkie was like a little girl for a moment: "Oh, we were <u>all</u> a bit confused that night, weren't we?"

"Well, that was certainly a nice party!" And she continued to gaze. Then she turned to a man standing near them and said in an unpleasant way, "Why don't you tell me how I danced?"

He was a man with very pale eyes, flickering and sensitive, and a creased face. "You danced ghastly!" he said in a husky voice and abruptly turned away.

"Shit-pot!" she replied and then gave a clapping laugh before walking off without another glance at any of them.

Pinkie looked a bit frozen; her lips were drawn tight together and she had the 'patrician' air.

"<u>Most</u> personable!" she said quietly, following the hair-girl across the room with her eyes.

Granville laughed and said she deserved another drink for that, and ordered more double brandy. That put Pinkie in a good mood again, and later Hanni came up to her and said that 'the Moroccan girl with the

green door-knobs on her shoulders' had said in a loud voice to somebody near her that 'Granville had a lovely wife.'

Glenning stayed with Pinkie most of the time. drinking quietly; he said he wasn't fit for a party, having dispepsia; when Pinkie asked him if 'old Clockwork' was 'out of the top drawer' he said, "Not at all, you lovely person! He's the son of a retired preparatory school teacher in Shepherd's Bush." But he added afterwards, "Well, he ought to be, anyway!"

When they got home Granville rushed to the lavatory and vomited; he came out again with his eyes watering, and Pinkie made a cup of tea; he told her he'd mixed his drinks. Hanni was also there. A crisis had come about just as they were leaving the theatre. An argument had started at the bar between Dick and Deryk Grysham of all people; Granville wasn't even aware that they knew each other. But Pinkie said that Dick had been interested in a girl at Deryk's school --- that was while Granville was in Basrah --- she used to keep a pair of stiletto-heeled shoes in her satchel --- and that was how Dick and Deryk had met. Anyway, Dick took Deryk aside, to the window where the lights flashed and blinked, and they stood there talking quietly together; the pale girl had disappeared by that time. Granville had never seen Dick abandon a girl for a man before --- it must be something serious!

Pinkie, Hanni and Granville had gone off in a taxi, leaving Dick and Grysham still at it. Dick said he'd walk back.

In the taxi Pinkie asked Hanni what Dick had been so mysterious about. Hanni looked tired as he'd never seen her before, and she answered Pinkie in a crisp way, "I haven't the faintest idea." She gazed out of

the taxi-window, smoking, a reflective, narrow gaze in her eyes; there was an atmosphere of irritation that might burst.

"Doesn't your husband tell you anything about himself, ever?" Pinkie asked her defiantly, looking the other way, her eyes haughty.

Hanni flickered a little and then said quietly, her eyes narrowed still further, "Oh, he does." She was frightened of Pinkie in this mood, and Granville thought he saw one of her fingers tremble ever so slightly as she moved her cigarette up to her mouth, concentrating everything on her poise, still looking out of the window.

"And what was the trouble with your boyfriend?"

"What boyfriend?" Hanni shivered slightly.

"Tom." Apparently, this was Clockwork. "Why did he go off like that?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"I thought he was coming back with us?"

"He had to go to another party."

"I think he's a bastard!"

"Why?" Hanni asked, erect and dark.

"Did he really make that remark?"

"What remark?"

"That he didn't feel comfortable in our house until he knew I was a Grysham?"

"I don't know!" Up went Hanni's hand again with her cigarette, trembling.

"He told you, anyway, you ought to!"

"Well," Hanni replied quietly, "you've said yourself he's a snob, so what's the argument?"

Hanni's strength returned as the taxi approached Chaworth Road. "I think you're annoyed, Pinkie," she said in a level voice, stubbing out her cigarette in a little tray on the door, "because you didn't have your boyfriend there tonight!"

Effective! Pinkie looked quite defenseless for a moment and said, lifting her chin up, "Oh, really?"

Hanni got out of the taxi in a remarkably cool way, and smiled at him; and she murmured to Pinkie, as they went up the stairs, "Now, then, it's all over now, there's no need to get rattled." Pinkie was calmed by this like a child, then Granville promptly went and vomited.

Dick came back after an hour and said he'd been having 'a little business-chat' with Grysham; as Grysham wasn't in business this was unlikely. It was about two in the morning with a clear, star-lit sky, when they went to bed. He stretched, feeling a pleasant drowsiness from the drinks and his subsequent disposal of them; Dick and Hanni were sleeping upstairs again, but this time there was silence.

The following day Pinkie found out from Hanni, by inviting her to a slap-up tea in Soho, what had passed between Grysham and Dick: surprises were accumulating --- Granville found their subject was himself!

Dick had heard a remark Grysham made a few days before to Glenning, that he'd always thought that Pinkie's marriage 'would go wrong' for the simple reason that she'd 'married beneath her'; Granville couldn't provide her with the life her upbringing had led her to expect --- which, despite the 'chip on her shoulder', she <u>deserved</u>; also, a social equal would have got rid of her chip. This incensed Dick so much that he couldn't work all day after he'd heard it: and when Granville heard <u>this</u>

he quivered with gratitude; what a wonderful friend to have! Dick had also managed, through Glenning, to get Grysham invited to the New Studio, for the sole purpose of having it out with him!

Grysham's remark made little impression on Granville, to his own surprise; he only coolly took stock of the fact that Deryk was perhaps a shyster.

Apparently, Dick and Grysham had paced up and down the Charing Cross Road for half-an-hour or more, Grysham denying that he'd ever said such a thing, saying he had the greatest liking for 'philip' --- this, Dick told Hanni, was of all strange contradictions probably true. But Deryk hadn't come clean, though he'd shown the 'white flag' immediately.

Pinkie recounted all this in an abstract way as if it concerned neither of them; other Gryshams hadn't the power to hurt her --- they were only amusing figures of caricature.

Pinkie asked him question after question about the hair-girl: was she literate? where did she come from? what was her real name? She assumed total intimacy between them; her eyes fluttered and she looked downcast and excited. He could feel her steeling herself to ask him whether they'd slept together but she couldn't do it; he thought this was a good opportunity to broach the subject of Grove, but neither could he do that!

Hanni inexplicably asked them if she could stay on a few nights longer as she was feeling unwell, and travelling down to Hampton Court horrified her; she brought her things over as before; it was quite cosy and Granville celebrated their reunion with more wine.

One morning after Hanni had left for work there was blue water

all over the lavatory floor; like pale ink; the lino was buckled where it had sunk in, and a pool had formed outside the door; Pinkie knew nothing about it; the hallway had an unpleasant, acrid smell.

It turned out that Hanni was bringing a child off and had taken pills that affected the bladder in an alarming way; there was also a blue stain on the carpet of the room upstairs; she 'just exploded', she told Pinkie, and had lost control of her bladder; she rushed down to the lavatory but it often happened just as she got to the door.

Granville was disgruntled; why couldn't she clear the mess up at least, if she must bring her children off? It opened an old subject of discord between him and Dick. "She said she would clear it up," Pinkie replied quietly. He insisted: why couldn't Hanni have the child and stop defying fate? "Search me," was Pinkie's reply, in an equally quiet voice; "she only thought this was a baby!"

He quoted the annual figures for abortions in France and England, and left the room; poor Hanni, feeling ill as well, had to avoid his sharp gaze. She didn't clear the mess up after all; it soaked in further and further, and stained the ceiling of one of the unused rooms downstairs, which he and Pinkie intended one day to turn into studies, or perhaps a nursery; a puzzling obstinacy had come over Hanni and she never left her room in the evening, even for the ritual of making coffee or cocoa before bed which she'd always enjoyed; Dick would come in at bed-time and go straight up, or he would phone and say he was going down to Hampton Court. One night he came in very late and there was a big rumpus in the middle of the night; Pinkie started up in the darkness and shook him awake. "What the hell's going on?" she whispered. It was the sound of a chair being dragged across the floor; something fell heavily, shaking the whole

house; then the door upstairs opened violently and was slammed closed again; there was the sound of scuffling and a faint cry.

"They're fighting," she said. "They had a fight when you were away, too."

"Shall I go up?"

"No, wait a bit!"

It was quiet again, then they heard light footsteps on the stairs; the bathroom door was opened, and water began flowing in the bath. Pinkie lay back again: "It seems to be over." After a time there was the muffled clang of someone getting into the bath, and then splashing.

"Who's taking a bath at this time of night?" he asked.

"It must be Hanni. She might have been taken short again."

He was irritated and growled, "The pills haven't sent her crazy as well, have they?"

A long time passed and they dozed off again; but the noise started once more, exactly the same; they were awake at once. "I'm getting up," Pinkie said; just as she got out of bed, shivering, the door upstairs opened and somebody rushed down the stairs again, this time to the lavatory. Pinkie went out into the hallway and he heard her shout, "What are you two up to, for God's sake? We want some sleep!" There was no reply as far as he could hear; he also got up, yawning, and put one of Pinkie's dressing gowns on. "There's someone in the lavatory," she whispered when he got into the music room; the light blinded them and they squinted at each other, shivering. She shouted upstairs again: "Are you deaf up there?" Whoever it was in the lavatory hadn't switched on the light; "Who's in there?" Pinkie asked, going closer to the door.

Then they heard Hanni's quiet voice, even now trying to sound

balanced: "It's me."

"What's been going on?" Pinkie asked her through the door.

"It's that bastard Dick ---!"

"What did he do?"

"Half a minute!"

The plug was pulled and she came out, also in a dressing gown, her hair ruffled, a haggard, menacing look on her face; she was sweating and her skin was sallow, with deep lines round her eyes. She went and sat down in the music room; "That bastard," she murmured, hugging her shoulders together, "I could kill him sometimes! Pinkie asked her again what he'd been up to.

"Oh, I was saying I ought to have a baby this time and what a fool I'd been, and he was bloody rude ---"

"How?"

"He said I could have all the babies I wanted if I paid for their upkeep!" She paused, and the tiniest flicker of amusement passed over her face, softening it for a moment. "It was his tone more than anything."

"Why don't you just have a baby and let him get on with it?"

Hanni was recovering a little and leaned back, a finer expression in her eyes; the lines round them were miraculously gone and a look of tragic rectitude that he'd often seen there before replaced it; she always gathered her strength again after an attack like this. She murmured that he was 'so bloody scared of settling down'; and she was fed up with living cooped up in a crazy flat miles from London --- sometimes she thought he was really off his head!

There was the sound of someone moving about upstairs quietly putting things in their place; Dick was always tidy after a scrap; he

detested things being broken, and always tried to persuade Hanni not to use objects in her quarrels.

Pinkie asked suddenly if he was 'having a woman' lately, and Hanni answered almost before her last word was out, "Yes, that's what the trouble was really about." Dick had come back about two in the morning stinking of 'Arab', she said; Granville's interest quickened --- which 'Arab'? Hanni said she could always smell 'Arab' and so she had made him go downstairs and have a bath; again the flicker of amusement passed across her face and then was gone. Pinkie smiled when she mentioned the bath and murmured, "That's fair enough." Hanni said she hated 'that bloody Kaaba company performing like a lot of monkeys' and felt that whoever it was had slept with Dick was 'laughing up her sleeve' at her. She refused to go back upstairs and Granville went quietly and made a cup of tea, leaving them to talk; not a sound came from Dick's room.

It was still dark outside and the street lay in silence. On an impulse he knocked softly on Dick's door and went in; Dick had lit the gas-fire and was sitting huddled over it in his pyjamas, his hair tussled, with a pale, grim expression; "Hullo, bo'sun," he said in a whisper, "come and sit down." He had tidied up rather thoroughly; there was no evidence of a scrap except his own hair; only the bed was in a bit of a mess.

Granville bantered with him; what was this about him smelling of 'Arab'? Dick only said, "Cock!" quietly and went on gazing at the fire. He called Hanni a bitch under his breath and added, "Sometimes when I see her phiz on the other side of the room I think to myself, you ugly old cow, how did I ever get strung up with you?"

"I hear she gave you a bath," Granville said with a silent laugh.

There was another pause and a smile came into Dick's face: "Yes,

cold water, too."

They sat for a time in silence; the whole city lay in stillness. Dick began talking, gazing at the fire all the time; he said that 'next time' he'd stay the night; in fact, he'd stay the night tomorrow night; also 'she' gave him eggs and a thick rasher of bacon for breakfast, which was more than 'this bitch' did. Granville was dying to ask who 'she' was but didn't want to deflect him; and after a few moments Dick looked up and said, "Arab, my arse! That girl smells of violets, if violets smell!"

There was another pause and finally Dick said he'd 'made it' with the pale girl, and she'd been 'like uncovering a marvellous garden'; he'd spent the first two hours 'just contemplating' her body; there was nothing on earth like it; he hated white skins normally and always went for 'the dusky ones' but, by God, she'd got them all beat by a furlong or more in 'nature's Derby'; her body was an 'expanse', that was all he could say, and he could happily 'wander all over her' for a day, a week, a year, with eggs and bacon in the morning! He then looked up and said, "It's good to see you, Pip." And he added, "I say, I'm sorry about tonight --- you must be whacked!"

Granville said it was all right, it made a change, and he'd put the kettle on for some tea; would he like some? To which Dick replied that he thought it would 'pull him round' nicely.

Later, as dawn was just beginning to appear over the roofs, Dick told him, "After all, she's got a lover."

He asked, "Who?" --- to make sure.

"Hanni," Dick said, misunderstanding his question; then he said that on second thoughts he didn't think so. There was a frown on his face and he was thinking hard, staring into the white bars of the gas-fire.

Hanni suddenly appeared at the door, still and collected, the trace of sweat on her nose, and said in a flat voice without looking at Dick, "I'd like to go to bed." Dick didn't look up and Granville, with a murmured, "Good night", left the room; "Good night, Pip," he heard her say behind him. Pinkie was already asleep.

Dick was as good as his word and didn't appear next evening; not had he come in by dawn; Hanni was mute and drawn-in when she left for work. Her blue-water attacks stopped.

Then Dick appeared the following day in the evening, with a huge bunch of flowers, and after an hour or so in the room upstairs they went off together, Hanni in the same evening gown she'd worn at the New Studio; Pinkie said they'd gone to a night-club. That was the end of <u>that</u>!

He and Pinkie were together a lot that week; this was due partly to his new status in her eyes, and partly to the fact that he'd done the report and she knew he must now leave. She took him to a jazz-club she'd heard about in Islington; it was full of youths from the working districts all round; and quite a private affair. Everybody weemed to know each other; and he noticed that people weren't afraid of smiling gently --- of being soft. He noticed that very strongly --- it was a quiet little blow. Their clothes were bright and graceful, the girls in tights and long jumpers, their hair done up in ribbons at the back, the boys in velvet jackets, heavily-striped shirts, cravats, some with their hair very long, draping over the back of their collars, others with it short, hardly more than a bristle. He and Pinkie sat close together, dancing sometimes; to his surprise she put her hand in his. One of the youths came up and asked them with a smile if they'd like to join --- the club was after new.

members. Granville felt inexplicably tired; he said he'd like to join very much and got up to sign the book; five shillings for each of them had to be paid. Membership would help to make him feel that his life was full and varied, that it didn't rise and fall by Pinkie alone --- he would come to this club alone. The room felt so safe. There were no hard mental battles here; Pinkie was quiet, close to him even with her body, in a gay print dress. If only he could get away from those other people --- they were so frightening with their eyes that noticed everything! Why couldn't they dream more, be soft?

But who were these 'other people'? People like himself! The youth at the door, when they signed the book and got their cards, murmured to them in a confidential way, smiling at him, "Two new 'uns? That's the style!" It was quite a small room, perhaps a billiard room once, with tall Victorian windows overlooking a grimy brick wall; but seen from this room, in this company, that grimy wall wasn't depressing; it had an intimate look, there was a certain distorted sweetness in its grime.

They strolled back home about ten o'clock, while it was still light, and he had an insight for the first time, feeling her hip move close to his, into what a life of quiet trust would be like. How much longer would he bear it? He even raised his eyes to the sky as they walked along; the foolish idea entered his head that this life of quiet trust had actually started this evening; it was in her --- she was fresh and clear-looking! But the moment they got back inside the house she was separate again, lost to him; he had hoped they would go to bed at once and complete this new trust with their bodies, but she didn't seem to know what he meant; she made the cocoa, rang up Hanni in Hampton Court

to see how she was, then went to bed, and fell asleep at once.

But there was a difference of behaviour in her, he thought; she hardly went out alone now. Where was Grove? Had the child made a difference? She was content with him; her flesh was slowly changing with the child, drawing her to him no matter what her will said; her breasts were bigger, also her hips; the softness was being forced on her from the outside! Was this, too, a reward for the night of the eclipse? 'You see', he told himself, 'if you live towards peace, only try to, an answer comes eventually."

Hanni looked pale and thinner; also she hardly spoke. Then Pinkie was with her a whole morning, one Saturday, with the kitchen-door closed tight, and it turned out that the blue medicine hadn't worked and that she'd have to have a proper abortion. One had to go to a psychologist and get him to give you a certificate saying you were mentally unfit to bear children, then a doctor would do it for you O.K. It was as easy as winking and 'everyone' did it these days; Dick had a doctor-friend he'd been at school with, who would manage everything. But it cost quite a bit of money; all her savings would go on it, in fact. One had to rest for a day afterwards, that was all, one lost quite a bit of blood; a girl at the office said it made it difficult having a child afterwards if you wanted one --- sometimes impossible, but Dick's doctor friend pooh-poohed the idea.

Hanni had a washed-out, stale look; her breasts had sunk, while all the time Pinkie was growing softer and healthier. Hanni implored Pinkie not to tell Granville about it because of his 'moralising', but she did; he said you only had to look at them both and compare them to

see where abortions led people!

"Wouldn't you like to have a baby?" Pinkie asked her. Hanni's answer came in a barely controlled voice, "Yes, but it's the last thing I should want at the moment!"

Dick had christened the child 'Tomb', apparently; he said with a twinkling smile to Pinkie without seeming to realise the macabre element, "Yes, if only we'd been able to affort young Tomb who knows where the little fellow wouldn't have been today?"

But then, after another day, it was found that the blue medicine had indeed worked; so the ugly business wasn't necessary.

He told Dick he'd finished the report, and it was ready to hand in.

"I thought I'd take it to Nevinson myself," he added.

"Yes, why don't you?" Dick replied in a non-committal way.

"Do you think I could ask him about the Beirut office outright?" Granville went on. It occurred to him that she could have the child in Beirut quite comfortably; there were good hospitals there, and it was cooler.

Dick didn't understand this at first. "What do you mean, old sport?" he asked, gazing at him with his light blue eyes, blinking.

"Well, just tell him outright that I'd like the Beirut office and that I think I'm up to the work!"

There was a pause and Dick looked down at the floor, biting his lip: "I wouldn't if I were you." He looked up again. "You've got to let these things ride a bit. It's no good trying to push them. In any case," he added, "I don't think Nevinson's the man to be pushed. And he might think, who is this chap trying to teach me my job?"

It was clear he was thinking carefully about every word he said;

it gave his eyes little pin-points of light; Granville felt he might have something up his sleeve. 'What does he know?' he asked himself. He felt dead of heart all of a sudden. Clearly, he wasn't going to get the Beirut office! In fact, they might be cooking up something unpleasant for him --- his removal to an even smaller post, now he'd built up Basrah! A better-cut fellow would take his place; he dropped the subject at once, simply nodding his dea.

That evening Pinkie told him she couldn't bear the idea of going back to Basrah.

"Why not?"

"Well ---" She was sitting on the divan, her shoes off and her skirt crumpled under her. "I think it's going to be awful with a child inside me out there ---!"

"But it'll be winter most of the time. It won't be any warmer than here."

"I know, but it's such a ghastly place!"

"But you said you liked it."

"Yes, I did, but I'll be even more a prisoner than I was before, with a child inside me, won't I?"

There was no question of her coming; behind her gaze there was something quite still and final. It was now three or four days to the end of his leave.

Then an idea occurred to him and he felt as gay as a child. He could have danced round the room. He would resign his place in Basrah! He realised he never had intended to go back; he felt idle and pale --- frivolous; he'd grown to like London; there was even a melancholy pleasure to be had in this city --- from the pain it inflicted. 'I like London!"

he thought foolishly.

Was it possible? No, of course not! Of course he'd be going back to Basrah!

But the idea stuck. He was astonished. Could he renounce his whole life --- all his training --- like that? He could! He found himself perfectly willing!

Where would the money come from? He didn't know. That was the beauty of it! He'd throw up his ambitions! There was some back-pay due, and they'd have to pay off his super-annuation, since he wasn't breaking his contract --- it had simply expired; and that would keep him going for a time! It was all very well, this thinking about Christ and surrender and all that sort of thing, but while he kept himself well-padded with a job it couldn't mean very much! Now he was going to live by it! He was going to submit himself to all the accidents of life! In a word, he'd give up being middle-class; wasn't that it? He'd close his mind to all schemes from now on. Life would just flow through him.

And so he deliberately didn't think about it any more. It seemed to him only a half-decision but still he refused to let himself think it out. He let it ride, in Dick's phrase; he did so for a further two days but it didn't make any difference. He only knew dumbly that he wouldn't be leaving London; he couldn't conceive travelling to Basrah; he, as a choosing and deciding agent, didn't exist.

He put his neatly-typed report in an envelope and enclosed a brief letter to Nevinson saying that he would like to offer his resignation. He didn't ask for another job at the head office; the thing mustn't be cluttered up with words; he explained that his wife was having a child and he felt he ought to stay with her. That was all. Nevinson would

think him soft in the head but he derived a satisfaction from that! He'd renounced all ambition. It was so easy now he'd done it! He felt so light and clean! He phoned his mother and talked gaily with her for nearly half an hour; the house looked wonderful; he didn't say a word to the others, and a stillness came over him which was strangely like complacency! Sometimes he stopped short in amazement at what he'd done, but he always put it out of his mind.

One day he returned home from his walk early, because Pinkie was getting the afternoon off, and to his surprise, when he walked into the music-room, he saw Dick swinging in a chair by the bedroom-door. Delightful! He took a jump across the room and, pointing a finger at him in a burlesque way, said, "Why aren't you at work, answer me!" But, to his further surprise, Dick didn't smile but looked abashed as if he'd really been accused of something, and then murmured, "All right, there, bo'sun", in a quiet voice, and returned to the book on his lap. There was a stir of nervousness in Granville, and he went on into the bedroom. The door wasn't quite closed. And there was Pinkie combing her hair in front of the mirror, sitting in a straight-backed chair, completely naked.

She made a marvellous picture. Her skin was a gentle pale-olive colour, quite unblemished, with a dazzling bounty and richness which she seemed to be aware of, reflecting on her image in a soft, drowsy, pagan mood of good will. He was amazed at how lovely nakedness could be! It presented a complete picture. She didn't turn round to look at him, but continued gazing drowsily into the mirror. Awe was roused in him, and a certain timidity, confronted by this marvellous ease and natural power. Nothing wrong was suggested. The picture was so complete! He almost

tiptoed across the room to the chest of drawers, and fiddled about there appearing to look for something. And he glanced at her again, from behind. She had such an extraordinary air of seeming queen of herself, the sovereign of a lovely, mellow island! He didn't connect her state with Dick outside. There was clearly so little fear or deceit in her, at that moment. He went next door again and sat reading like Dick, and later the three of them had coffee together upstairs.

Only a few days later did he begin asking himself why Dick had been there. And the door had been slightly open. And what a strange position for a chair, immediately outside a door. Had Dick been peeping at her? But with her knowledge? With the door half open between them? Talking perhaps about other things, while she sat naked, nonchalant --- and he devoured her with his eyes? both of them thrilled by this sheer nonchalant disregard for her nakedness, talking perhpas about the Kaaba dancing company, or the office, while the real, tempting, raw, voluptuous subject lay between them? andabsolute defiance of precedent that was more thrilling than love itself? Granville was thrilled, too! It was only one of many strange recent events he couldn't understand and daren't mention. Perhaps Dick had asked to watch her --- only watch! --- come on, old girl, be a sport! --- since he couldn't <u>have</u> her --- let him only watch the rich bosom that had lurked so often behind a blouse, so often daunted him! Suppose it was that? What was the truth? He didn't know! How would he <u>ever</u> decipher these friends?

The thought continued to thrill him. That nakedness --- such an expansive gesture! Yet behind it wasn't love. He felt that if there <u>had</u> been love --- if love had joined him and Dick and Pinkie and Hanni together, even to nakedness --- the thrill would have been complete; it

would have been less throbbing, less painful --- less ecstatically painful, but it would have contained them in one fierce glow, and gone beyond their tiny selves! But this didn't. Pinkie and Dick had been in possession of themselves, separate, and that was why it hadn't been love; only an aching concern, that depended on silences, glances, subterfuge all the time! This was what he couldn't bear! The nakedness was bearable, it was marvellous; any grand act of defiance must be appreciated! But not this locked-in self that peeped out all the time --- a city-version of the pagan! If it had been love the picture would have been the same --- nakedness in front of the mirror, Dick swinging on his chair, the door a little ajar; but there would have been wide-open eyes as well, the same thrill of sex but there would have been worship as well. And what there had been, in fact, was hate! He couldn't unfix that idea. There'd been something steely. It wasn't the sex-part that had stirred him strangely --- seeing Dick look abashed; the real thrill seemed beyond right and wrong --- he had stepped back in wonder seeing Pinkie, and she'd remained a naked image in his mind, quite separate from his interests, even from his desires --- she lay in herself, marvellously remote, a law to herself! It was the hate-element that made him feel destroyed. Her enjoyment, and Dick's, seemed to come from destroying an excluding him, as an image; there was something narrow-eyed in the enjoyment, a quiet squeezing of his throttle. Or was he dreaming? They couldn't face him properly. If they had faced him there would have been a kind of pagan thrill and love between them all. That was the element missing for him: love! He'd looked for it so long. And Pinkie thought he was looking for the convention! She was so wrapped in herself, she couldn't see him! There was no need for these plots, the silences and glances! Dick had no need to look ashamed!

They were missing the real thrill, that of love! But, he knew, Dick couldn't pay the price for that: he had to hold himself apart; that was Dick's discipline --- he was a recluse, he was locked inside his own desires, these raw, ecstatic yearnings! And Pinkie couldn't have risen to it, either; she, too, had to turn away, into herself! Only Hanni could have done it: her shyness was something circumstantial --- it could be broken down; again, she and Granville were on one side, Pinkie and Dick on the other. Pinkie and Dick needed this other, lesser, more painfully thrilling sex. It was their paganism. But it was too rarified and subtle, not to say deliberate, to be really pagan; there couldn't be a lasting glow --- nothing of the awful splendour that Pinkie's body had suggested --- finally, there couldn't be a real thrill, because no one really gave himself; the conventions had to be kept, finally, because of the thrill of breaking them!

And underneath there was hate; the self was hated, in its nakedness, and was only offered to the other person obliquely, with shaded eyes, in silence, the brain always conscious, never succumbing even to the thrill itself, except in the terrible last stage of orgasm, that was like an agony, if it ever came.

Yet there wasn't any evidence of hate in Pinkie or Dick! Hanni showed far more! She looked dark sometimes, with something negative brooding in her. But she had more of a flow of love, for all that, than the other two. She was only less sweet because of this flow, which found no rest. A few months before, just after his return from Basrah, he and Pinkie had sat in the bathroom at Hampton Court while Hanni lay in the water, naked. He'd forgotten it! That sort of thing was the form of love! Yes, he'd forgotten it!

Some days later Pinkie was trying on a new dress in the music-room and said to Dick, "Well, how do you like it?" At which Dick approached her with a deliberate expression, very close, and said, gazing down at her breasts, "Yes, I like them very much — very much indeed." And she murmured, with slightly narrowed eyes and a faint smile, "Now, then, Pollocke..." Hanni was there, too, and chuckled. Only Granville was a spectator, silent. And the question suddenly entered his head, 'Suppose I'm the one who's preventing a real paganism? Suppose my love is locked up no less than theirs?' And he felt powerless, tired, and forced himself to chuckle, too.

To his surprise, when he and Dick were talking together later with a bottle of wine between them, sitting on the bed, he found that, far from being a pagan, Dick favoured the conventions in the simplest way. Granville asked him suddenly, "What would you do if you found Hanni sleeping with another man?" And Dick answered at once, "Walk straight out and never come back again."

CHAPTER 25

As quickly as the panic was off about Hanni's child it was on again: the blue medicine hadn't worked, and she was already in the 'operating room' --- down at Hampton Court --- when he heard about it from Pinkie. The operation was a success and Dick had to attend her all night with hot water and swabs, after the doctor had left; again Granville was supposed not to know, and Pinkie bound him to secrecy. Dick rang her up to say that Hanni was doing well. 'Tomb' was really done for this time.

Then Hanni was on her feet again. She took a week off from the office and began coming to the house nearly every day; she sat with him in the kitchen and sometimes they went for walks together by the river, near London Bridge; she said she didn't want to see anyone else, only him and Pinkie; she'd had a bad 'stomach-upset', she told him, perhsps from the wine; but at the same time she appeared to realise that he knew and was quite relieved that this was so.

The newspapers had promised correctly: the weather was now dark and windy, with an unpleasant bite in the air, and clouds lay in a thick blinding mass over the roof-tops. One their walks he took Hanni's arm protectively: the life was knocked out of her; she looked limp and frozen; the comparison with Pinkie was extraordinary --- between a withered flower and a rich, swelling fruit. But very slowly Hanni was taking strength again; there was a staleness round her, something cut short

and stunned; she hadn't the confidence of her body and walked awkwardly; she looked round her with a hesitating, blinking glance, trying to marshal her old steadiness. But bit by bit the dignity returned to her face; Pinkie said she'd burst into tears one evening and couldn't tell her why. Dick called for her every day and took her down to Hampton Court; he was quiet and serious, and brought her little presents. She told Granville during one of their walks that Clockwork, who was also called 'Virginia Creepers' because of the soft way he 'loped along' and because he always told women he was a virgin, was in love with her, but he was 'homosexual at heart'; she said homosexuality was fashionable these days among young men; it provided a cover under which to get women without 'the direct male approach', it was a good excuse if 'you couldn't make love properly'. She said Clockwork was a boy really, a quite simple person underneath, and a masturbater; she was the 'nursemaid' who would bring him to manhood; there were 'worse jobs' she added in a sad way. She spoke with a tired, melancholy flatness. She was fed up with everything, she said, especially sex; she wanted a long holiday somewhere sunny; she even wouldn't mind going back to Kurdistan for a bit; she could go to see her mother in Beirut but hadn't the money; she'd come a long way in life, it seemed, for a lot of 'dirt and corruption'.

And one day in the kitchen, talking in a way that sounded like an apology to him, she said she was frightened of 'vehement men', and Clockwork was the opposite of vehement, which was perhaps why she liked him. Granville asked why she was frightened and she replied she felt they were always 'giving way to something'. There was a pause and she smoked at her cigarette with pursed lips, her eyes narrowed against the smoke in her characteristic way that had become for him a sign of long,

quiet talks; he felt he'd watched those eyes, flickering gently against the smoke, while she took pause for her next sentence, that was always strangely muffled and reminiscent, for hours and days in the last three months. "I don't understand that," he murmured after a time, feeling out her position. She said that surely if everybody 'let themselves go' there'd be chaos? He asked why letting oneself go meant chaos. She thought it didn't mean chaos necessarily, but a 'lot of nastiness' came up from 'underneath'; she looked at him with raised eyebrows for a moment, seeming to ask for confirmation. He said she must believe people <u>were</u> nasty underneath; did she think that? She wouldn't say yes or no; she put the question back to him; what did <u>he</u> think? And he said, "No"; She was silent, thinking it over.

"How do you feel?" he asked her.

"Rather awful!"

He remembered just in time that he wasn't supposed to know the cause; so he tried to go on talking. What would she rather have in a man, vehemence or cruelty? But she was silent again; he asked, would she rather have feelings 'come out' or 'stay brooding inside'? She replied that she thought 'brooding inside' was better, and he was just about to make an exclamation of surprise when she silently burst into tears, sitting quite still, without putting her hand up to her face, making not a sound. He got up and said, "Come on, let's go for a walk." She followed him helplessly while he got her coat and put it round her shoulders, and she dried her eyes before they got down to the street; after an hour or so, during which they were mostly silent, she was all right again and even timidly and shyly gay.

There was no reply from Nevinson so far, and Dick gave no sign

that he knew anything about it. The letter must have arrived, as he'd registered it. He thought it was strange but it fitted in with the dreamy and broken quality of the rest of his life now. Pinkie looked at him searchingly one evening when she came in and asked, "What about your ticket back?" He ought to have been gone three or four days before!

"Oh, yes," he said, turning away from her, "I must see about that!" he added, to waylay her suspicions, "I might hang on here for a week. They wouldn't mind. I've got a lot of things to hammer out with Nevinson before I go."

This seemed to satisfy her; she was the easiest person in the world to lie to!

"Won't you miss me?" he asked in a sudden gay mood.

"Of course I'll miss you," she said defensively, "but if you've got to go back you've got to, haven't you?"

He laughed. "Well, that's true enough!"

He took long walks again, full of a sense of being unseen and secret, because no one knew what he was up to. Everything looked new to him --- Westminster Abbey looked more fascinating than ever before; its vast shadow loomed in the darkness --- some of his walks were in the dead of night, after the buses had stopped --- and its walls seemed to topple down soundlessly towards you if you stood under them. It was like touching the past --- all the shops and roads near by, and the lamplights, disappeared, and there was only the giant mediaeval church standing alone in its lawn, and all the noise of London was nothing to it. The square in front was usually deserted when he walked through it, with lights shining between the trees like those of an elegant garden during a fete;

he could see Big Ben, its clock shining like a harvest moon; but he was mostly aware of the silence of the Abbey.

'I'll really live in England,' he thought, 'I'll look at it all, I'll study it, I won't just let all this history stand behind me, I'll run my fingers through it like through gold!' It suddenly seemed a terrible waste not to be feasting his eyes on it every day --- people had been laying up treasures here for nearly a thousand years! No more hours at home, talking and drinking and dreaming!

He went back to the Abbey in daylight and joined a party of tourists. He resolved to visit every castle and old house near London. But the Abbey disappointed him. The inside seemed to have no past at all! It had all been done away with. It was more like a sculptor's backyard. The air was full of activities of state --- the coronations and great funerals. But this lacked life. No sweetness was left. Only outside, where the walls touched the lawn as they had from the beginning, was there the infinite past. It was the same with the little chapel of St. Margaret's at its side, like a younger sister, lying immediately under the Abbey's towering presence --- only outside, with its low and humble form and its ancient, shining-grey walls, did it still have sweetness. But inside, where there were bright prosperous pews, there was an air of the 1914 war, of dread and regret and howling mistakes. It reminded him of the hymn, 'Abide with me', and it brought ridiculous tears to his eyes just thinking of the way people sang it, in hushed voices, with a strange helplessness, as if beasts were climbing all over them and beginning to crush them as their voices died further and further into the silence. And there were two flags from the time of Napoleon --- when he'd threatened to invade England: they were in tatters now, almost

quite grey, like a soft parchment touched by the faintest colours, which would be blown away by a breath. In one of the church-booklets he read that a man called Farrar, a Victorian, had torn down the old wood and put the hideous mahonany pews in --- there had once been a nice Wren gallery.

One evening he walked into the bathroom and saw her standing in front of the mirror naked down to her waist, powdering her breasts.

"What on earth are you doing?" he asked in surprise.

He was about to laugh but she said between her teeth without looking round, "Get out!" Her nipples were hard and unusually dark, protruding from the massive whiteness of her breasts, but perhaps that was an illusion due to the shadows of the bathroom; was she painting them with lipstick, of all things? He left the room meekly; she'd never spoken to him in such a rasping way. She was out of the house until about eleven that evening, but such was his state of quiet, now he could nurse the secret of his resignation, that he was numb to hurts.

One evening whem Dick and Hanni were there Pinkie told him that the pullover he wore more or less all the time these days 'stank to high heaven'. This was the result of 'living and eating in it'. He laughed and asked Dick if this was true, and there was a pause. Dick considered it and then nodded slowly, without a smile; and Hanni did the same, laughing quickly.

"For God's sake take it off and get another one!" Pinkie said.

There followed some talk about smells. Pinkie ranged on Dick and said she'd noticed his breath stank when he was nervous; she had

smelled it standing on one side of the kitchen while he was on the other. Dick bit his lip and murmured, looking down, "All right, old girl. That's enough!" and he added, still looking down, trying to smile, "Halitosis runs in the Pollocke family, didn't you know?"

"At least Pip never stinks in himself, Pinkie went on in a light way. "But he will stew in the same clothes for weeks till they're like a sort of rank skin!"

About this time a new tablet came out in the pharmacies, coloured red, which stained the mouth and was said to remove breath-odours. There was suddenly a plethora of these tablets in the house, and the four of them would suck them continuously; it stained the tongue and lips a delicate pink, 'the spring-time colour for spring-time people', the advertisements said; there were boxes of them, round and decorated with rose-buds, all over the house, on the tables and mantelpieces. They all tended to lean over each other more now, as if confident that they no longer bore noxious odours. The strange thing was, Granville noticed, that the more upset his life became, and the more lonely his situation, the more conscious he was of smells, and of the possible smells on his own person. And he wondered if the same applied to the others. All of them had their mouths stained delicately now, which gave them a peculiar puckish and sensual look. He noticed when Hanni was ill that she sat taking her own scent; drawing her own breath into her nose, pushing out her lover lip ever so slightly. Dick did it when he was in a thoughtful and inward mood, his index finger touching his upper lip; it happened when he seemed to be regretting something, to be nursing a lingering, backward-glancing sorrow in him. And Granville noticed that he himself did it when he was pent-up in his feelings and

hadn't touched Pinkie for some time; contact with her would be like a release of all his organs, back to their flowing state, and this morbid self-awareness --- that seemed an endemic part of their life --- would depart from him.

He had noticed this self-smelling most strongly at T.I.M. when he went to the office; people would sit at their desks making a little twitch of their lips, or a movement of their finger under their noses; one of the clerks he sometimes had to deal with in the exports-department would actually stop in the middle of a sentence, and a tiny, melancholy and yet fascinated gleam --- hardly noticeable --- would come into his eye as he took his own scent, as if discovering a new intimacy with himself that was hidden to the outside world --- his unique and solitary possession. Granville remembered that he had first become aware of this stink-consciousness as a 'higher world' phenomenon, depending on a certain degree of education. People like Abu Kath'm didn't have it --- nor did his father --- no one at Abbott's Road.

Dick's farewell treat to him had been put off because of Hanni's illness, but it now came round, on a Tuesday. They got themselves dolled up and set off like a couple of dandies, and sat in the front row of the circle. They ate at a French place called 'Le Gourmand', which everyone called Gorman's. They didn't talk much. Dick had a frail, remote look, his eyes delicate. Granville remarked on what good hands he had, so pale against the darkness of his suit, and Dick told him he'd had them manicured that day at the barber's; it was one of the nicest sensations 'available', and the girl always leaned forward obligingly to let him peep down her blouse. He'd tried to date her up but she said

the management 'frowned on it'.

The most puzzling thing about the evening was that Dick showed not the slightest awareness of his leave having expired over a week before! He was quietly genial all the time and didn't once mention the office.

After dinner Dick puffed at a cigar, which looked enormous against his delicate face; but after a time he stubbed it out and said it felt like 'smoking a business-man'.

The play at the New Studio jarred on their nerves; everything was said in a sneering vein --- bloody-this and sodding-that all the way through, but falsely, without real life. It was a social 'document'. The working people were slovenly, foul-mouthed, envious, they talked in a biting and leering way which he himself had only heard after leaving Abbott's Road! It was a 'higher world' picture of the working masses, and even without a plot, or point, or power, it went down well. An American critic had written that this was 'a heart-felt denunciation of the British caste-system.' An air of the dead Thirties lingered round it --- dead social battles. It was safe indignation, addressed to a prosperous society, about conditions everybody agreed on because they were history.

Dick said nothing afterwards, only, "Sorry it wasn't better!" and they left each other casually, again without reference to his leaving England.

Later in the week when they saw each other Dick said he'd been surprised that Granville hadn't liked the play; he would have thought it was 'just up his street', since it had portrayed 'a chunk' of his childhood! Granville opened his mouth to remonstrate, but he hadn't

the energy. Only a few weeks ago, about the time of his arrival from Basrah, he would have been up in arms immediately. But now he just smiled and nodded. Dick seemed much more contented in his company these days, and confided in him better.

A little party developed at Chaworth Road one Saturday afternoon which included the hair-girl; Dick and Hanni suddenly appeared with her soon after lunch and said that there were a few other people coming later; it made a curious fascinating atmosphere, this sudden afternoon party in the gloomy weather which every now and then let a quick, golden blaze of sunshine through, before the racing clouds closed again. Pinkie wasn't there and Granville was nervous all the time that she'd come in and assume he'd arranged it all with the hair-girl; and this increased the excitement for him.

The hair-girl was morose and pale at first, her shoulders hunched-up, and she hardly glanced at him; but she looked at everything else, at all the furniture in the room, from under her eyebrows, and fingered through the dance-records which had been accumulating lately; she was wearing bright-red, tight slacks with a black, shawl-like top; suddenly she said to him, still without looking at him, only frowning at the coffee-table, "Your wife's uncle's a lord?"; to which Hanni replied on his behalf, "Yes, -- fun, isn't it?" with an ironical smile. Miraculously she and the hair-girl had become 'friends', so Dick said, and Hanni had discovered that there was good to be found even in Arabs, though she qualified this by saying the hair-girl had been brought up in London after all.

Hanni had been to Joy Celeste's flat and found it all neat and 'urban'; no 'night-club tattiness' at all; lace curtains and a nice

persian carpet in the sitting-room, and a real drinks-sideboard; her wardrobe was quite large and didn't stink, in fact the place was cleaner than their own at Hampton Court!

A dance-record was put on and Granville brought two bottles of wine out of the kitchen-cupboard which belonged to Pinkie; he was out of money again and looked forward to the superannuation he'd be getting; he worked it out --- two years of overseas-service at five pounds a month, it made quite a tidy sum, enough to live on for a few more weeks, until a further decision presented itself; Pinkie could look after the bills for a bit; he resolved to ask her what the state of her finances was now; perhaps Grove had paid her back; he found he assumed quite naturally that she'd given all her savings to 'Grove Publicity Management Ltd.' He took the two bottles out of the cupboard with a childish sense of theft and realised how afraid of her he was.

The muscular-looking girl came along later with a friend of the hair-girl's, a young man called Larry Vice. Vice wasn't his real name, it turned out. He was called Vice, Hanni said, because he was vice-president of the Marquis, an honorary title; his real name was kept as dark as the hair-girl's. She was all eyes the moment he came in; she forgot everything else and kept asking him questions, "You all right, sweetheart?" "Like this place?", "Don't want to go, vicey-babe?","Have a nice ride over?" , "Been across to the club?", "What about your voice, Larry-gorgeous?", "Like this wine?", "Want to play the piano, honey?", "Oh, vice-sugar, you won't be cold in just that pullover?" She didn't move from her position on the divan and Vice never once replied to her questions, but stayed leaning against the piano, nodding and smiling, and sipping his wine. He was tall and wild-looking with a hanging jaw and clipped,

flaxen hair, and had his mouth perpetually open in a kind of silent laugh; he never did laugh outright, only made a strange 'Hoo!' noise when anything amused him, which almost everything did. He was someone from show-business, a crooner and tap-dancer, Hanni said. All through the afternoon there was a sustained patter; "Remember I'm a gent!" shouted Vice once to something Dick had said; to which the hair-girl shouted across, "If you're a gent my twat's a mangle, Vice!"; to which he shouted back, with his odd 'Hoo!' ejaculation, "Mangle-vice? You mean a mangle-wurzel or edelweiss, don't you, hoo, hoo?"

The muscular-looking girl said as little as she had done when Granville first met her; she only turned to him once and said in her gentle Cockney voice, "That girl of yours is a peach."

He didn't understand this, since she was looking straight at Hanni!

"Who?" he asked.

"She looks a peach," she repeated, still looking at Hanni. And after a pause she added "what a good couple they made.' He glanced at Dick who was sitting two feet away from them, but his face was telling no stories; Hanni also must have heard it, and she also was saying nothing. Later when more wine was brought in from a shop round the corner, and the 'Creole Shake' was blaring through the house, the muscular-looking girl went across to Hanni and said, "I think your husband's sweet! What's it like out there in Basrah?" To which Hanni replied without turning a hair, "Oh, it gets a bit hot in the heat, but apart from that it suits us down to the ground!"

A game started, while Hanni was upstairs getting sandwiches, in which Dick lay on the floor pressing his middle up so that he was balanced

on his heels at one end and the back of his neck at the other; the idea was to see how many times he could do it; he wasn't allowed to rest his arms on the floor. Then Joy Celeste came forward, jumping up from the divan, and said, "Half a mo! See if you can carry a passenger, Dick!"; whereupon she lowered herself over him so that her body was exactly resting on his while endless Hoo, hoos were being bellowed across the room. "This is awfully nice," Dick said quietly, his eyes alight, gazing straight into hers, "just relax and we'll be all set for the joy-ride!" "No, you don't, randy pants!" she cried, keeping her head up and laughing with a deafening bellow which seemed impossible of her tiny, thin figure. "All right, then", Dick said, "here we go!" He lifted his middle slowly, straining, and up she came as well, while the room was silent; then he subsided so that his behind hit the floor sharply, and she was knocked sharply against him; it was well-devised, and he repeated it, up slowly, straining, then down with a wallop. "Hey!" she cried. "This is good!" And she added with another bellowing laugh, "What d'yer keep in your prick --- a stick, Dick?" With his eyes closed Dick murmured, "That's my field-marshal's baton, sweetheart, there's one in every corporal's knapsack!"; and he went on raising and lowering himself.

Hanni came back in the middle of it, bearing the sandwiches, and said with a slightly abashed look, "What are you two up to?" And there the game ended; the hair-girl was sweating, and went and had a whispered, confidential talk with Hanni while everyone else attacked the sandwich plate. Vice played the piano, and Dick danced with the muscular-looking girl, putting his cheek close to hers while she gazed ahead of her with a perfectly vacant expression. When it became dark they didn't switch the lights on and the room was in a dim twilight from the street-lamp outside.

Pinkie came in about midnight and looked thoughtful at first; but she never put a damper on a party and once a drink was in her hand she had joined in, dancing with Dick. When it was all over Hanni asked Granville wasn't it amusing that 'Alice the girl-with-the-snake-called-Sidney' --- the muscular-looking girl --- had thought she was Mrs. Granville? She hadn't contradicted her because she'd seen a 'closed look' on Dick's face and thought he was up to one of his 'little games'; so she'd kept mum. Dick murmured to this, "Well, you never know, her little mistake might come in useful one day." Pinkie was intrigued: "Who did she think was your wife, then?" she asked Dick. He paused, gazing across at her in a level way, and said, "You --- and, oh, yes, please, teacher!"; and he continued to gaze at her while Hanni murmured "Now then, Dick."

Afterwards in the bedroom Pinkie said that Dick was showing her 'attentions' of late and she didn't know how seriously to take him; she couldn't believe it, in fact! Granville laughed and said that anything like that was believable coming from Dick. They slept happily; he was glad she'd found a party in progress --- she thought he was responsible for it, and Hanni had let her think so. He tried to see if her nipples were in fact painted with lip-stick while she was undressing but as always she turned away from him with a quick demure movement, slipping her night-dress over her head as she slipped her petticoat off. The image of her standing in the bathroom painting herself returned to him in a quick, voluptuous flash, and he burned with fascinated curiosity as to the love she might have given someone else that evening; if he imagined her submitting to love it brought a quick, stabbing pain of desire in him. He could visualise himself pleading with her to continue her infidelity so that he might have this stabbing desire like a white flame licking his

body and consuming him.

He felt so easy in his new life that the following week he went over to see the hair-girl in her flat; he hadn't the slightest embarrassment in doing so and asked her on the telephone with a deliberate devil-take-you laugh if she'd mind inviting him to lunch; she said she'd like to it he came over at once. He'd slept badly and felt horrible; only his mind was quiet and composed; it was working so much apart from his body these days.

Her flat was hidden behind the Strand and he searched for it with chill feelings; or rather the chill was in his guts and organs, separate from him, not in his frame of mind. As he reached the door he suddenly remembered, for no reason, Maimbury's genial, reflective way of gazing at things; 'Will I ever have that?' he asked himself. He put his finger on the door-bell; the flat was in a tiny side-street close to a vetable-market, and the staircase was dingy and uncarpeted; but the door itself was that of a luxury-apartment. Maimbury's gaze probably came with the years, he thought; fullness of heart was said to come after a lot of privation, when you needed it. But now, as he waited, wondering if she'd gone away, just to mock and ridicule him, he felt thin of heart, exposed and frightfully young.

But she was there --- a tiny, wan figure in a dark doorway --- and after looking at him briefly she shouted "Hi!" and at once turned her back and rushed into one of the rooms, leaving him to shuffle in and close the door himself.

"Something's cookin'!" she cried from the kitchen, and he went in after her.

Everything there gleamed, the pots and unstained saucepans and new plates. He told her what a nice place she seemed to have but as he said it in an uncertain voice, coughing at the same time, she only glanced at him and said nothing, assuming he hadn't spoken at all; there was no paint on her lips; he was aware that she'd made no effort for him at all, and again he asked himself whether he was infatuated with her or not; but the answer wasn't there; he'd thought of her image once or twice at Chaworth Road, changing her a little, making her eyes both sharper and more lavish in expression, and her hair blacker, while depriving her of her jerky walk; but at the same time she remained the same, and her fascination, if he felt it, lay partly in her walk. There was no scent in the air. She clearly wasn't conscious of him as an admirer; what <u>was</u> their relation, then? Why was he here? What had happened during their visit to the zoo? Had they warmed to each other? He couldn't remember! What did she expect from him? As they had no conversation, what else had they? Why had Dick congratulated him on taking her to the zoo? Surely that indicated something? He tried to keep Pinkie out of his mind; the stabbing pain of desire for her closed his mind to everything and everyone else; he forced himself to show an interest in the hair-girl and even took her hand while she was trying to get a hot frying-pan off the fire, burning her slightly on the elbow and nearly getting a cup-full of steaming fat down his trousers; "Hey, look out!" she screamed, and, "Well, fuck <u>that</u> for a lark!"

He remembered 'dad' for the first time and wondered if that deafening 'fuck' had travelled to his paternal ears. He laughed sheepishly and told her that water was good for a burn,'contrary to usual belief', to which she said, "Yak-er-ti-yak-yak-yak-!" and put her tongue out at him

while she grabbed a little pat of butter and rubbed it on her elbow.

She told him she'd only got up half-an-hour before as she'd had a late night at the club; he glanced in at the bedroom and saw that the bed was still unmade; the light outside depressed him; the low, dazzling clouds were still there, close to the roof-tops. There were lace curtains across the wide windows of the sitting room, as Hanni had said, and even a carpet on the wall behind the divan. He asked whether her father was in and she said, moving swiftly from the kitchen to the room where they were going to eat, "Are you crazy?" He said, "Why had he moved?" And the reply was, "Do you know what ycu're talking about?"

Then she became charming; he felt sick and giddy; she asked him in a small voice if he'd help her carry the food in, there wasn't much but if he didn't mind a 'scrap lunch' there was enough. He gazed at her; she was preoccupied and ruffled, the hair all round her face, uncombed; and there was an anxious look in her eyes; they were screwed-up painfully. She murmured, "I only see dad when he's asleep." She hurried out of the room again, her hair lifting gently off her back.

There were a few potatoes, some scraps of tinned ham and cheese; also she had to hurry up to be at rehearsal. She ate fast and made her deafening, clapping laugh once or twice when she remembered the party and how she'd lain on top of Dick; "How <u>is</u> old randy-pants?" she asked him. He said, "Working hard," and nothing more; he found he was in an irritable frame of mind. She made no effort to serve him and he forked his way through the tiny meal gloomily.

She said that Hanni had arranged the Saturday afternoon party quite deliberately as a kind of 'rebuff' to Pinkie; his ears pricked up at once --- "What do you know about Pinkie?" he asked in a protective way.

But she was unaware of anything sharp in his voice. She said, "That party was to show your wife where she got off!" Hanni was determined, she added, to try and do something for Granville in his present 'ignominious' life; he was astonished at how quickly and fluently she spoke, like an educated woman; the words 'rebuff' and 'ignominious' surprised him! Then she fell into a quiet vein of talk; she'd become friends with Hanni, she said, and now she knew better what his 'position' was. He could hear Hanni's voice in hers; she was certain of her information as if she'd lived through it herself, and she smoked her cigarette a little like Hanni, narrowing her eyes. He wanted to ask what she knew about his 'position' but she went on talking, this time about Hanni: Hanni had told Dick she wasn't going to stand the sort of treatment from him that Pinkie 'handed out' to Granville; she had more pride, and he'd better start revising his ways soon!

She suddenly jumped up from the table and dashed next door, where he heard her telephoning someone. She said in the phone, "You know, the guy who licks the spots off little ladies' twats!" and made her clapping laugh; the subject was a 'big man' in the night-club world who had to be treated nicely; he might get her out of the Kaaba company into a show all her own where she could have 'a little dignity', and therefore would the person she was talking to mind if 'we called it off for tonight8?

Then she returned to the table preoccupied and closed to him, an anxious frown on her face; her shoulders were hunched timidly as when she'd called with the others on Saturday afternoon, making her look like a little girl. There was a hissing sound in the kitchen and he started, thinking it was 'dad', but it was the kettle boiling for coffee and she clattered out again. The moment coffee was over she jumped up again and grasped

hold of her hair, looking round for grips to tie it up with, and said without looking at him that she was about an hour late and had to dash; a petty mood swept over him and he shouted, "Damn! Why the hell couldn't you let me know that before you invited me over?" He was quite surprised at himself; usually he would just have watched her getting ready in a passive state of mind! He expected her to turn round to him in surprise, insulted, but she did nothing of the kind; she ran next door, five or six hair-grips between her teeth, and began humming; and from next door she called out to him, "Come in here, sweetheart, and watch me dress!" He thought this was a change of tune and went into the other room. She was combing out her long hair, standing near a dressing table, bending down to see herself; he sat down on the bed while she told him that this 'big man' was taking her out to tea followed by drinks and that she had to look a lady, which was easier in the cool weather than the hot because her arm-pits seemed to have 'automatic douches' inside them the way they sweated! And 'they' didn't like to see you sweat, unless it was between your legs, and then, boy, they weren't so keen on you being a lady! She spoke as if she hated the 'big man' but at the same time flinched from him and would do anything for him.

The idea entered his head that he ought to try and seduce her if his visit was to be useful and not a shameful and empty episode in which he filled the hang-dog role; he must kiss her! His mind was working so much apart from him --- a thin little voice making its steady exclamations in his head. The flat felt lonely and desolate to him; while she combed her hair the melancholy, dazzling light poured in through the window behind her, and every object in the room looked cold and bare. He didn't feel the slightest inclination to touch her but his mind persisted, and

when she moved across the room to take a dress out of the wardrobe and began slipping off her dressing gown he pulled her gently towards him with a laugh, to lighten the misery of it, and kissed her on the cheek; she leaned towards him stiffly, not as surprised or anxious as he expected her to be; then she tried to push away from him by levering her arms against his shoulders --- "Hey, I'll be late, sweetheart! Now come on!" But suddenly she laughed and kissed him full on the lips; he had a totally different impression of her for an instant, as someone soft; the skin of her mouth actually changed for a moment, yielding and warm where it had been scaly before, pursed and withdrawn from him. "Why, you dirty old man!" she cried. But once again it was, "Hey, look at that time, you'll lose me my job!" She said it in a jarring tone, her lips hard again, trying to push herself away from him. She managed to break free and ran into the bathroom, where she remained for a few minutes washing her face; he glanced in and saw her wiping her armpits with a towel and spraying something; he called out to her, "What are you spraying?" and she shouted without the slightest hesitation, her voice echoing in the tiled bathroom, "Sweat-neutraliser, honey!" When she returned she wanted to make the bed and told him, "Get up, gee-gee!", which he did; but as she pulled the top sheet off he again made a sally towards her and this time pulled her over with an awkward movement and they both came down in a sprawl on the bed. "Hey, be careful!" She paused: "Dad'll be in!" "What?" he said, lifting his head. 'Dad' again' "Yeah," she cried, "he comes in round about now!" But he was less diffident of 'dad' now and remained lying on top of her; there was a sharp clang of the bed-springs under them and she tried to struggle free; he laughed again, this time genuinely; she tried to tickle him but he pinned her hands down; he was beginning to

enjoy it. To his surprise she had a rough pullover on under her dressing gown, and its flimsy little strands were worrying his nostrils and mouth, but he dared not move in case she wriggled free; she was quick and muscular. She appealed to him more quietly, "Now, then, sweetheart, fair's fair." Her hair fell like a great black shadow over the sheet and she looked into his eyes meditatively for the first time as if trying to find out who he was from a great distance; he had the sensation that it was the first time she'd looked at him; she had her head a little to one side, like an animal puzzled. She moved sideways and he took this as a movement of desire, though he still felt nothing himself; the only pleasure he was aware of was from her hair, its endless black shadow and its deep smell; apart from that he was dead of heart, and lay there a dead weight on her, and only stayed there for fear of being ridiculous if he got up.

Suddenly, getting angry, a dark shadow seeming to flit across her face and twist its expression for a moment, she made another heave, and he plunged his face towards her, trying to kiss her again, but with such speed that their noses collided with a painful thud; they sat up with a springing movement, nursing their faces. "Jesus!" she crooned; behind his hand he asked if hers was bleeding and she shook her head and then took the chance of getting off the bed.

She was again dressing, fixed the grips in her hair with an extraordinary speed like a machine; she flung her dressing-gown into the wardrobe, pulled off her sweater, stepped into some high-heeled shoes and put a flowery, loose-sleeved dress on which made her look frail and thin, with her head and hands and legs peeping out of it; she asked him if it was 'aristocratic' enough and he said it looked 'on the big side', but she didn't wait to listen to him and ran next door to get her bag. He

remembered that her chest had felt extraordinarily hard underneath him, and that her hips had been sharp, as if they had thin armour round them. She had painted her lips, a bright, savage mark across her face, and otherwise her face was drawn, flat and sallow, made more so by the red.

He happened to glance at the mantelpiece for the first time and noticed a quaint cylindrical bottle with an object dimly shining inside, floating in liquid, like a piece of skin; he went closer and to his astonishment saw that it was the embryo of a tiny child, no bigger than a man's fist, the umbilical chort floating away, waving lightly in the water as the hair-girl thumped through the flat, disturbing it. The embryo was a few months old from the womb, its tiny legs bent, and its hand held up to its mouth, with the tiniest suggestion of a thumb. When she came in he asked, pointing at it, "What's that?"

All her haste disappeared at once and she approached the mantelpiece softly; yes, she said, it was hers; didn't he think it was <u>like</u> her? It was a 'little boy'; she knew he would have been a darling! It was Larry Vice's! Couldn't he see Larry's face there; he only had to look closely, put his face right up to the glass and he'd see?

He did so and, indeed, there was the shadow of Vice's hanging jaw, and the shadow of his silent laugh, combined with the darkness of the hair-girl's eyes. He raised himself up again, not knowing what to say. She had to 'get rid' of him, she said, she hadn't been able to afford a child and she had rehearsals all day; she'd cried all night afterwards; every morning she came in and said hullo to him, and she never went to bed at night without imagining he was at his prayers, bent up in that way.

They left the flat and he said good-bye to her at a bus-stop in the Strand; as she got on the bus she gave him a little glance as if to

confirm what she'd told him and to underline the sadness; she made a hardly perceptible nod, with a serious look in her eyes, as the bus sped away. At night he thought of the embryo again and imagined the knife cutting the chord; Pinkie was at his side, already asleep; he put his arm round her; her cheeks were flushed with health and her stomach was just beginning to swell; she'd only been sick once or twice; he had a placid sensation of thanksgiving, that the child was coming further and further to the light, while her breasts swelled, waiting for the birth, without fear of a knife; nothing else was important.

Next day Hanni congratulated him with a chuckle on 'penetrating' to Joy's flat, which only Vice had done; Joy had phoned her and said that Granville certainly 'knew a trick or two'; also the hair-girl had put clean sheets on the bed that morning, and there'd be 'extra laundry' this week! The inference was clear: they'd slept together, and Granville said nothing to contradict it.

Dick had also been told, and he invited Granville for a drink that evening; he said he was 'relieved', with a little twinkle in his eye, and a lot of fun was in store for them both! Granville asked Hanni afterwards what Dick meant by saying he was relieved, and she said they were both glad he was 'standing up for himself at last'; ridiculously, a tremor of pity for Pinkie went through him when she said this, though he nodded with a laugh; he was getting into the habit of making an ineffectual little laugh nowadays, and he wondered how long it would be before his mouth looked like Vice's. There wasn't real amusement in the laugh but on the other hand it wasn't hollow; it stated a general rippling attitude to life of detached frivolity; particular amusement wasn't necessary, it seemed to

say.

Pinkie also got hint of the news; it came to her that the hair-girl had 'fallen head over heels' for him and that he was'next in line after Vice'. When they were alone in the music-room she asked him, a frown flickering painfully on her brow while she gazed at a point halfway between them on the floor, her lips tight together, "How is your girlfriend, by the way?" He was confused and had the impulse to laugh under her gaze; it was like being tickled, and reminded him of the occasion on the night of his arrival when she'd asked for the dried lemons and had stood frowning down at him from the door while he'd fiddled about in his suitcase. He asked her who she meant by 'girlfriend'. "Oh, well," was the reply, "if you don't know who your various girlfriends are, I'm sure I don't!"

She stalked up to the kitchen; he felt an odd nausea. Wondering if his own jealous rages had made her feel the same, he resolved not to indulge them again even if the energy came back to him. It was a grim nausea at the pit of his stomach, like being caught in family. He wanted to do something immensely free; was that what she'd felt when she'd suddenly dashed out of the house that morning straight from his bed?

He went upstairs and began imitating everything she'd said to him in a burlesque way while she cooked the evening meal; "By the way, how is your girlfriend?" he said, facing her playfully; and then he went through the words as if they were a part in a play, advising her how to stand, where to place herself; he thawed her out quickly, and she laughed.

She said that Elizabeth had rung up about the annual ball she wanted them to go to --- 'the most fabulous and fashionable thing' that happened in the year! She'd already got the tickets and it was to be a 'Tail-and-

Hoof' ball; that was what it was called. You had to come wearing a tail of some kind --- it might be a donkey or a lion, an elephant, a horse --- and hoofs. Granville asked if the hoofs were obligatory, supposing you went as a lion or elephant, for instance; and she said she thought so, yes. She added that she wanted him to go as a faun, with a little fluffy tail and pointed ears; hoofs would be necessary for that in any case, though she hadn't worked out the details yet.

What would she go as? She hadn't made up her mind but it would be something that hid 'a huge belly'. "It isn't huge at all!" he said. "You can hardly see it!" She felt enormous, she replied, but didn't mind it if a nice-looking child came into the world; he asked with a laugh if she thought it was going to look like him. She blinked and said quietly, "Well, one always hopes so, doesn't one?"

There was a problem of where they were to get their tails for the ball, and Pinkie decided against trying to make them herself; she would go to a theatrical costumers. She then announced casually that she broke two eggs into a bowl that Grove was coming round for a drink the following evening and he, trying to answer with the same casual air, said, "Oh, good!", so loudly that he seemed to be crying out with pain; they had the light on, because of the gloomy weather, and it glittered for a moment in her eyes as she turned to glance at him quickly; but she seemed not to notice anything unusual in his tone. There followed a burst of relief for him that Grove wasn't after all intimate with her, since if that had been the case she clearly wouldn't invite him round! At the same time, together with this relief, there was a little spasm of disappointment, touched with the pain of yearning and desire that she was still his own in the flesh and hadn't been transported into mystery by another man's touch; it made

her look dull for a moment, standing by the stove; her body had lost its glow for him; its secret light inside, of the forbidden sexual touch, had gone; he was aware even of resentment --- how could she stand in the bathroom putting lipstick on her nipples for no purpose, or make it seem she was doing so; how could she snatch the mystery away like this? And he was to have a child in the ordinary circumstances of family-life; how disgusting! It would go on, year after year, the two (or three) of them stuck together in a tiny house, revolving round each other; and she'd had this remarkable offer from fate ~~+++~~ from 'Grove' --- which she'd turned down, of a journey into the jungles of voluptuous and forbidden touch! And what were Dick's 'attentions' to her? Were they only polite and frivolous? Was he going to be robbed of them as well?

There was no wine in the house and he asked if she'd been to the bank recently; she said, no, she hadn't a sou! So he was without wine, without a job, without a woman! Just a faithful wife! It was the flattest evening he could remember since his arrival; the trembling he'd done in the last two or three months appeared to him ecstatic and desirable now.

But the following afternoon he had his wish, and the familiar trembling seized him as the hour of Grove's arrival drew nearer. He sat quivering in the kitchen. Hanni and Dick were to come as well. Grove arrived before them, smiling at the door. There was something so boyish and friendly about Grove, the moment he presented himself downstairs, that Granville's trembling went at once and he found to his surprise that the other man was in a most peculiar way a solace to him; he felt no resprictions on his own behaviour; nor was there any need to explain himself. It was like having his own brother in the house; he at once thought of what they

were going to do together, not immediately that evening, but in general, in the future, as their friendship developed. Grove gave off the promise of future activities --- they were all round him, like a fresh scent. A party might develop, he might go off somewhere, he might get tickets for the theatre(someone he knew --- just come back from a big tour) --- you didn't know what might not happen, but one thing was clear, that you'd be included; his presence gave you the assurance that you wouldn't be left out! He was available; even his fixed appointments, when he talked about them, seemed to have something soft and pliable about them. They wouldn't mean him dashing off in the middle of something, like Dick, unharmoniously. He was available for people --- that was his passion. All this Granville was aware of in the first few seconds of seeing him again, and the life that had lain dormant in him for the last few seeks flooded back solely under Grove's influence. And 'Grove' was the name he'd been afraid of!

At the street-door Grove had said to him, "Hullo, there! We met on the stairs once, remember? You look miserable!"

Granville stared at him for a moment, unable to collect himself: "Did I?" he asked in a helpless way; and at once Grove was in the house, as if he'd been there a twelve-month.

Hanni and Dick followed a few minutes later, and they all greeted each other like familiar companions, and settled at once into chatter in the music-room. He remembered Grove as deathly pale but couldn't imagine how he'd got the impression; he was quite brown in the face, with slightly flushed cheeks, and his eyes had a keen, healthy light! He still had masses of shining, black hair, and Granville's first impression of the back of his neck, with soft, curly hair like a baby's, was true; and his nose

was not unlike Pinkie's, small and fine, but sharper. He pulled off his jacket at once; Hanni smiled and asked him why he always liked to show off his 'wasp-waist', to which Grove only laughed in a good-natured way; it was quite chilly in the room, and the electric fire was on; Hanni ragged him gently, speaking between tight lips, and asked was it true that he wore a corset? He said quickly, "Only on my transvestist nights!", and turned at once to Pinkie, giving her a little smile. There was a certain pallor in his black eyes; Granville noticed it again; it was in the nature of his gaze, which was always beyond people even when he looked at them in an intimate fashion, as just now with Pinkie. It wasn't that his eyes passed quickly over objects or were superficial in their attention, on the contrary, he was in the habit of gazing long at things, but he seemed to be looking at a vague point behind and beyond people, even while he looked at them fixedly; nor was it that he was reflecting about them; he hadn't reflective eyes, and his attention rarely strayed from people; he seemed to be looking at something universal behind people, where there was no colour. Also his eyes were sad. He kept up a volley of jolly talk, leaning against the mantelpiece; his fingernails were bitten and nervous, Granville noticed.

"When are you off again?" Grove asked him, gazing at him with his universal charm.

Pinkie answered for him: "It should have been about a fortnight ago."

But Grove didn't look at her, only gave him another polite glance and said, "Oh," non-committally.

Pinkie's interjection quite took Granville aback; he really had assumed that she, like Dick, had overlooked the expiry of his leave; he'd

thought life had become a dream for them as well!

Whenever Grove joked with her she smiled in a tired and slightly exasperated way, as with a boisterous child; this, too, was to Granville's satisfaction; it showed that they didn't share a real intimacy. Later they all went along to the Jazz-club he and Pinkie had joined, in Islington, and there Granville saw that, on the contrary, she was helpless in Grove's presence; the familiar contained trembling started in him, which gave the evening a tone of forbidden excitement as strong as in the pre-Meedham days. When Grove asked her for a dance she seemed to have no power of refusing; she got up in a tired way, even unwillingly, and leaned against him while she danced; Granville now had a different explanation for her not smiling at Grove's jokes! But still he couldn't believe that their relation approached the intimacy he'd shared with her himself. Whenever Grove made a movement towards the tiny dance-floor she got up in obedience; the others were remote for her; he watched Hanni ask her a question and get no reply.

There was a hopeless, flickering look in Pinkie's eyes; she was floating in misery, it seemed --- but this was a tragic mask, she was dramatising it herself; there was happiness and thrill underneath. Grove, on the other hand, paid equal attention to Hanni, not that the relation between them was particularly good. She looked at him in a level way and spoke to him disbelievingly; 'I know your game', she seemed to say. This hurt Grove's pride and he tried to joke all the more with her; but his antics fell flat with her. Granville and Dick laughed --- though Dick in a reserved way.

Once when Pinkie and Grove were dancing an unusually slow number he saw Grove lean over and kiss her neck softly, whereupon an old giddiness

took hold of him, like the blood suddenly rushing up to his head, and he had to grip himself tight in his chair to become normal again. Pinkie had her eyes closed in the tragic expression and her mouth was trembling; she seemed to see herself under the gaze of numberless people who were following her tragic development with sympathy. He found he felt an irritated anger against her but not against Grove at all; about Grove there was something so disarming and boyish that you couldn't take offence. His kiss seemed universal like his charm; dancing with him was like dancing with anyone, that was the impression --- there were no narrow interests contained in him; the dancing was a gesture beyond people, at the same time as it contained and enveloped Pinkie; Grove's lips weren't personal, they didn't make a predatory assault. There was no interested, personal thrust behind his actions. When they sat down again Grove kept his arm round her, with a glint of universal satisfaction at the back of his eyes. Meanwhile Granville whistled to himself and made deliberate conversation with Dick and Hanni, trying to make the arm on Pinkie's shoulder seem an ordinary thing; there was only a telltale, livid flush on his face, and his lips were puffy and quivering. His eyes bulged out of his head. There was no drink, only lemonade and Coca-Cola. He and Dick decided to slip out to a pub in the interval.

"What the hell are you up to?" Dick suddenly said to him in an alarmed way as soon as they were outside.

Granville knew what he meant at once --- he'd found out about his resignation!

But then Dick was surprisingly cool. There was even a twinkle in his eye, perhaps of admiration. "Do you know what you're doing, you boob? I hope you do!"

"I don't know what I'm doing, no!" Granville told him with an obstinate pout. "I haven't any idea!" And then when they were standing at the bar, after their beer was in front of them, he said, "Buy me a whisky."

When it arrived he tipped it into his beer with a reckless motion, while Dick watched him.

"What are you going to live on?"

"Oh, there'll be enough for a couple of weeks or so!" Granville said.

"Then what?"

"I'll see!"

"Well, I admire your guts!" Dick said with a little breathless chuckle, giving him the same look of intimacy combined with curious interest as at training school years before; yet now, Granville thought, they knew hardly more about each other than in those days.

He didn't deny that his resignation had taken 'guts'; he needed all the good opinion he could scavenge. What did Pinkie feel about it? Dick wanted to know.

"I haven't told her."

This impressed Dick; he laughed and said he'd like to see her face when he broke the news!

The drink put Granville in quite a devil-may-care mood for a few moments and when they were back in the hall he danced gaily with Hanni.

Grove began telling stories about his powers over women; that very day, he said, he'd been sitting on a park bench and the 'most fabulous' woman he'd ever seen had passed him and thrown a note at his feet asking him to come up to her hotel-room.

Dick intervened quickly, a sharp look on his face, and said,

"What number?"

"What do you mean?" Grove asked with a smile.

"The number of the room, tell me quick!"

"Four hundred and ninety seven!"

They all laughed, including Grove.

"A large hotel!" said Hanni.

Pinkie smiled in a lazy fashion and without looking at Grove extended her hand and murmured, "Where's the slip of paper?"

"In my other coat!"

She took him gently under the chin and pulled his face round towards hers; "You bloody liar," she said slowly, with the same smile, and then let his face go.

Another story was that he'd once had a job as an insurance agent and a woman he'd called on had found him so attractive that she almost fainted and had to sit down, all without saying a word.

"What did you do?" Dick asked.

"I talked to her reasonably."

"Yes," Pinkie said with a chuckle. "I can imagine you doing that!"

Grove replied that as a matter of fact he did have more to say to her than that; after all, he wasn't all that much an 'Englishman'!

The impression was that these stories, invented or not, weren't about him in any particular way; so they weren't real boasting; nor did they mean vanity; it was again a kind of universal gesture, with a vein of sadness, and perhaps ancient tiredness, underneath.

On the way back Grove walked ahead of Granville with his arm round Pinkie, kissing her hair now and then. Granville wanted to rush up and tear them apart; he blinked and felt giddy, unable to walk properly.

Anger subsided; then it rose again, and went down again. All the while, as they walked along, Hanni held him in conversation, talking quietly; it was impossible to tell from her expression how much she saw of his feelings at the moment --- how much he hid them, as well. Was he like any other person walking along the street? How far was his own face composed? When the anger rose in him he was on the point of striding forward and tearing Pinkie away, but then it died as quickly and he concentrated all his attention on making steady remarks to Dick and Hanni; asked to repeat these remarks afterwards he couldn't have done it.

When the others had gone and he was alone with Pinkie he said to her in a hissing way, "Are you sure that's my baby, you filthy bitch?" She asked him what he meant by 'filthy bitch'; this was in a controlled voice; the tragic misery --- which had been soft --- had left her face, and a set look, touched with hardness, replaced it. He asked her, couldn't she 'behave' even when he was sitting in front of her, walking behind her --- did she have to turn the knife in the wound? Why didn't she made a clean sweep, not keep him dangling in the middle of this ambiguous situation, one man's wife and another man's mistress? He prevented himself raging at her; he held himself back, remembering the nausea she'd made him feel when she'd asked him about the hair-girl; he refused to be responsible for creating nausea in her; he wouldn't limit her freedom!

But at the same time that was exactly what he wanted to do. Free, she was an insult to him; imprisoned --- dull! He said to her, "Surely i can't be just an empty thing for you? I must have a heart like other people, don't you think so? How can you bear to do that sort of thing?" He meant accepting Grove's embraces while in front of him. But she asked with a pale face, her mouth open, "What sort of thing?" And now he found

he couldn't bring himself to mention it; though he knew that she knew he'd witnessed it, he had to treat it as a closed subject which might not have taken place; he allowed it to fall into the dream-zone of so much else that had happened in the last two or three months.

He hardly slept that night, aching for someone to talk to. Dick had a talk with him next day, trying to persuade him to go back to the firm, but Granville shrugged everything off. How did he like Grove? Dick asked him. He said, "I did! I liked him!" Dick said that 'old Grove' was an amusing fellow but he certainly carried a 'big load of corn' around on his shoulders.

That evening after Dick had gone, Granville found some nude photographs of Pinkie in one of his own drawers; he imagined they must have been taken by Grove. One showed her with her breasts thrust out in a gently challenging and yet submissive way; one of her nipples was pointed straight into the camera, dark and round, and he wondered if that was why she had painted them; another showed her from behind, low down, with her peeping round with a downward glance, her flank round and white, one of her breasts just visible. As he looked from one to the other his legs were trembling so violently that he almost toppled over. But still his mind was clear, working in its thin and satisfied way, apart from him, and though he was troubled he was also intrigued --- and thrilled, but he took this for granted now --- and perhaps, slightly, with a fierce edge, amused; this thin self went on so much in separation from him that he had to concentrate hard sometimes before he knew what he felt.

When she came in he told her he'd offered his resignation and would be staying on in London in view of the baby. She didn't take it very seriously, contrary to Dick's expectation. The first thing she said was,

"Well, I hope to Christ we'll have money enough to live on." Oh, he replied, he'd find something soon. She even seemed happy that he was staying; "That means we can have lots of fun this winter," she said.

"Don't you care about the Basrah office?" Dick asked him when they were together again. To delay an answer Granville asked what he meant. "Well, do you mind leaving it like that," Dick went on, "without winding it up properly? It must be in chaos! There's been nobody there for a couple or three months!" He added that it wasn't what he'd expect of Granville; he'd always known him thorough and hard-working. Didn't it offend just his sense of tidiness to leave the job in this way, apart from throwing away all his years of training, and his references? Granville answered that he was worried, yes, but only about Mohammed; that was all. Dick asked him who that was, unless he meant the Prophet himself? Granville said, "My assistant out there."

"Why don't you fly out there and wind things up?" Dick asked him suddenly.

It was a strange question and Granville gave him a look. After a pause he said, "Why, is that what they want at the office?"

Dick turned away from him: "God knows. I haven't spoken to anyone."

But he left Granville with the impression that he had.

He told Dick that Nevinson hadn't replied to his letter of resignation yet, to which Dick said that this was 'quite in order' as no contract had been broken, he'd only failed to sign a new one. Granville murmured that he thought Nevinson would have taken more interest in his work than that, "but then," he added, "I imagine much that isn't true."

Elizabeth sent the tickets for the Tail-and-Hoof ball, and he hired a tail and a pair of cloven hoofs for thirty shillings; Pinkie decided

to go as a 'devil-ess' and wore forked tail and a horn with pointed ears; cloven hoofs were too much, she said, and she went in high heels. All legs would be uncovered, she'd heard; she wore a pair of tights, with a blouse tucked into them, and her tail swished about behind her, attached by a belt she usually used when she had the curse.

Most attention she concentrated on Granville, when the night came. She said she wanted him as her own 'faun' tonight; and Hanni remarked that if only he kept his mouth shut more and just looked round him in a mysterious fashion he'd make a 'first-class faun' and all the girls would 'want to rape' him. Pinkie nodded as if this was more than a light remark; she busied herself smoothing his hair down at the sides so as to make it like a faun's head; she made him wear a pair of her tights, darker than hers and all over these she painted faun-like hair; his arms and neck had to be bare; he must wear a shirt she got out of a trunk which was a roughly faun colour, and she cut the collar off, then the sleeves; she painted red lips all over him, on his arms, his chest and his stockinged legs; and finally the cloven hoofs went on.

"I wish you were like that every day," she said to him. And she then started on his face; by the use of mascara she gave him long, faunlike eyes, and his lips a touch of red; the eyes interested Hanni most and she helped by making them even longer, curling his eyelashes with an instrument she always carried in her cosmetics-bag. To their surprise she was coming to the ball as well, but later; Clockwork was taking her; he never missed anything fashionable, she said. She hadn't started dressing yet; she hated fancy dress, she said, and had to work herself up to it by drinking a little beforehand; Clockwork would be coming round to Chaworth Road with a bottle of whisky and she would see what the mood brought her by way of

ideas. Pinkie looked delicate, her eyes small and glittering, as usual when she dressed up; she took no pains to hide her slightly swollen stomach; she was now proud of it, she said. She stalked around on her high heels, skirtless, her tail protuding from her at the back; her pointed ears kept coming off and Hanni clipped them on for her after much trial and error with paper-clips and ear-rings; at last it was done with cotton slipped through the holes in Pinkie's ears. Her eyes flickered with nervousness and whenever she looked at him she chuckled or leaned forward and kissed him; she said it would be her one night with a faun and she meant to enjoy it.

The evening was wild and boisterous, and they let themselves go with vengeance. He danced with a young woman called Helen who had dark, greasy hair down to her shoulders and a deathly pale face; her nickname, apparently, was Hell. Everyone called her that. She kept her eyes closed all the time she danced and whirled round blindly, holding on to him with only one hand. Her head was lowered so that her hair fell in two long strands round her cheeks, sometimes hiding the whole of her face, and she made a moaning noise under her breath, smiling in the strangest way; whenever the dance came to an end she woke up slowly and would smile her thanks at him and drift off at once, then would appear in front of him again, her eyes already closed, the moment the music started again; once she dragged him off to the bar and shouted to a group of people who showed no sign of hearing her, only looking at her in a mild way, "It's Hester Grysham's faun!"; she swung round as she said this, smiling in her strange way, and, having a glass of something in her hand swished most of it in his face and over his bare neck. He decided not to notice this and, to

save himself embarrassment, tried to behave in as blind a way as she, drifting off back to the dancing room, dabbing a handkerchief over his face. Occasionally someone bellowed at her while she danced, "Hell!" and she waved her hand blindly; and once a young man with immense shoulders and a red, moist mouth strode on to the dance floor and thrust his hand into hers with, "Hell! It's Giles! You look wonderful! Where's Cerberus?" and without getting a reply strode off again, a fixed expression on his face; he was dressed for dinner and had no tail or hoofs.

Hell had drunk half a bottle of gin before coming; Pinkie, who'd known her off and on for a long time, said she'd 'passed out' downstairs but was always quick to recover; once she'd passed out with a full bottle of brandy in her hand and when a young man tried to get it out of her grip she woke up and swiped him across the face with it, then passed out again. She had a boy-friend known as Cerberus because he was always 'at the gates of Hell'; he had 'three heads' because he seemed to be looking in all directions at once; he had the habit of going to the wrong house for a party and staying there all night. He had a mother universally called 'moms' who sent him a packet of fifty pound-notes every month or so which he was in the habit of 'handing out to people' when he got them; 'moms' appeared in London rarely but when she did she had a 'three-day drunk'; once she'd vomited her false teeth down the lavatory and pulled the chain --- that was in Belgravia on a Sunday morning, and by the time she'd got in touch with the sewage people the teeth were just passing under Hyde Park Corner; the sewage-people got them back unharmed, and the joke that circulated afterwards was that 'moms' had been 'putting her nose in other people's business again'.

Hell had come as a nanny-goat with a little fluffy tail which was

only partly there now, and a flimsy white beard was stuck under her chin so that sometimes when she had her eyes closed she looked like an Armenian priest. The dancing room was a kind of banquetting hall at the top of an imposing flight of stairs, where people sat and drank; the long windows opened and went out on to a balcony where the lights of Charing Cross and Pall Mall could be seen; the band was mounted high up on a platform at the other hand, in tiers nearly to the ceiling, and there were tables and chairs and dim, glowing lights all round the dance-floor; many of the lights had been pulled over or their wires torn, and there were broken glasses and forgotten hand-bags on the tables.

The bar was working at a ferocious speed, with all the drinks prepared in rows; a number of rollers had been installed, operated by the bar-waiters, on which all the drinks stood; when you took a glass the waiter gave the roller a slight turn and the gap you had made will filled; likewise, when empty glasses were to be returned they were put on a roller that worked the other way, and the bar-man rolled them towards him to wash them up. But after an hour or so this system had turned in on itself, so to speak; filled glasses were being taken haphazardly from anywhere on the roller, so that the waiter had to lean, swearing quietly under his breath, and put his newly-filled glasses in the haphazard gaps; and then, having taken a drop or two himself, he would move the roller a bit too smartly towards the customer and push a few of the end ones over the side of the bar; also a customer discovered that all the rollers worked both ways and that there were interesting results if he gave one of them a push or two towards the bar-man. This grew into a sport and a police-officer had to be called up from the street; he took his helmet off and was at once surrounded by people who said he must have a tail and hoofs,

and pinned hair and fur on to him from behind. He suggested 'paralysing the action of the rollers in some way', to which the head barman said he'd like to bloodywell paralyse the guests, one by one. The man who'd hit on the idea of revolving the rollers the wrong way said that the head barman had 'definitely lost control of the steering wheel and should have his licence endorsed, the bastard.' He was a big, flushed, burly man with immense dewlaps, and a deep county accent. It was surprising that the policeman didn't touch him --- but somebody in the crowd said that the police didn't like arresting 'big' men, this man being something 'big' in politics.

Suddenly a small, slim young man pushed through the crowd and, clutching the policeman by one of his chest-buttons, shouted, "Arrest me, you attractive bitch, I'm queer!" And the policeman said, "Do you mind jest taking your hands off my button?" "Listen to that --- he made a proposal!" the young man shouted back. "No, I won't meet you in the park, not with your big horny hands!"

There was a smiling throng round the bar, and glasses were being smashed on the floor. The policeman was lost sight of, and a game of tail-pulling started; nearly everyone's tail was off in a jiffy!

"I've got an elephant!" came a cry.

"Bag's a pony!"

"Dear, dear, I've got the sweetest little deer, dear, dear!"

In the body of the hall there were still many intact tails --- buffalo-tails, donkey-tails, cow-tails and golden horse-tails; the hoofs were of every colour and design --- some were wooden clogs, others high-heeled shoes adapted, others short rubber boots with hair painted on them; one man had a great hairy hump on his back and a camel-cloth; a woman had

come dressed as a giraffe with two little hairy horns between her ears and a blouse coloured orange with dark spots. Most of the women had taken advantage of the required animal-element and were without skirts; some had dyed or hair-covered knickers on, with stockings, and others wore tights of every colour like Pinkie's. Hanni suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs in perhaps the most fantastic costume of the evening: she was a zebra, striped all over, even down her stockings, all done in such a thorough way that her black eyebrows meeting together over her nose looked like another stripe; she had two vast ears and a long, thick tail which she could operate and turn one way or the other without touching it directly. She came in supported by Clockwork who was also a faun, but without the red kisses that had been painted all over Granville. A crowd collected round them at once, cheering and lifting their glasses to Hanni; she smiled and laughed as if she'd had her full share of Clockwork's whisky, her head lifted, while Clockwork softly and expertly pilotted her through the drunks; a high-heeled shoe suddenly appeared and then a bottle of champagne; Hanni was being invited to drink out of the shoe, but she shook her head with a grimace; the champagne was poured into the shoe unsteadily and then it spurted out of the toe in a fizzy spray, through a hole. Suddenly a young man with a vast, bushy lion's mane round his neck pushed himself towards Hanni and said at the top of his voice, "I'd go anywhere for meat like yours, being a lion!" and then as she disappeared, "See you back in Africa, you lovely piece!" Clockwork took all this with a slight, easy smile, his eyes seeking out the people he knew; then Granville saw him usher her up to one of the tables where there was a quiet group; people stood up and shook hands with her, none of them in fancy dress.

There were cries from all over the hall during every dance: someone would laugh at the top of his voice, or a couple would plunge into a table and upset everything. You certainly couldn't describe these people as the tame citizens of democracy! They stood, legs astride, staring on to the floor with flushed faces, or they raced the women round without the slightest etiquette; one of the women roared as loud as the men and kept shouting for no obvious reason, "At-a-boy, at-a-boy!" The giraffe-lady lowered her head during one dance, after another couple had deliberately 'barged' her, and drove her little hairy horns into a man's tummy, making him shriek with a laugh, "Letitia, no, Letitia, bitch!" From this developed a 'bull-fight' in which one man mounted another man's back and tried to tear another man off his! But this interfered with the dancing and the M.C. put a stop to it, saying at the top of his voice over the microphone, "I'm sorry, there, sirs, I'm sorry, there, sirs, you, sirs, yes, please, sirs, I'm very sorry, I'm sorry!", which was completely incomprehensible to those at the bar and on the balcony, who couldn't see the 'bull-fight'; one of those at the bar, hearing the voice, suddenly rushed into the hall with a half-pint tankard of whisky and soda in his hand shouting the same words, "I'm sorry, sirs, yes, sirs, you, please, sirs, yes, sirs, I'm very sorry!", weaving his way among the couples at a lightning speed, without spilling a drop of his drink, and then ran back into the bar again; he ended facing one of the rollers, and cried, "Terminus! All change!"

It was all like an extraordinary pre-arranged performance, one event fitting with the queerest logic into the next. Laura Lady Maine, the guest of the evening, appeared for a few moments, looking frail and dazzled and bemused by the publicity being poured on her: people got up

from their tables to bow and curtsy and he saw one man quietly put his tail in his pocket as she passed; then she was gone and the roars were as loud as before.

Suddenly there was a shining black riding boot on one of the tables and Granville watched a flushed, thick-set man with twinkling, bloodshot blue eyes shout at one of the waiters, "Waiter, come 'ere! Lady Maine left 'er shoe be'ind!", and he promptly dripped the boot on to the man's tray, where there happened not to be any glasses.

Elizabeth had been there all evening but in one of the side-rooms, and Granville, having pulled his fair weight at the bar and drunk two or three more glasses than he'd paid for by posting himself close to one of the rollers, whirled her round the floor at a breathless speed, which surprised both of them. She looked superb, her hair done up in a kind of mantilla, with long ear-rings; she wore a long black gown and had made no effort at fancy dress apart from a flimsy horse-hair tail, also black, that hung from a lace bow at the back. Then groups formed for a 'Scottish air' and each had to improvise a reel, with the others dancing round him; he could see Pinkie in another group bobbing up and down, her mouth wide-open in a crooked grin, while Hell pulled at her dress from behind, laughing breathlessly. The band looked down from their tiers in a gingerly way, not showing the slightest amusement or sense of participation, and seeming to go higher and higher as the evening went on. Pinkie told him in the interval that all the 'fainting' set, which apparently included Clockwork, were in one of the side-rooms sitting over cards and champagne; he asked her to point the room out to him, and she took him there through one of the corridors leading from the hall; it was a tall room with heavy curtains and a dim, glittering chandelier in the middle, and there was a complete

hush there; sitting at the tables were mostly young people, pale nearly all of them, and delicate-looking; by one of the windows he could see Hanni and Clockwork, quite silent, waiting for a player to make his move; hardly any of them wore tails or hoofs; Pinkie said they regarded fancy dress as an 'un-cool' thing to do; they wore dinner jackets and their expressions were tired and casual, sometimes sad, as if from repletion of the senses; Pinkie told him that this was all 'the thing' now --- 'pallor'; apparently, you couldn't even sun-bathe when you found yourself --- as you found yourself every year --- in the south of France; you had to look 'fainting'! Hell was more or less in this set but she danced too much; if she could just sit and 'sort of wilt' at a card-table for four or five hours in the evening she would qualify, but as it was she 'made too free'. Hanni's brilliant zebra costume stood out in the room like a precious carpet; Pinkie said that this was quite all right because Hanni, being 'exotic', could do nothing 'un-cool'.

Downstairs supper was being served in a room of the same style only with long tables shining white and silver, with bowls of roses in the middle; Elizabeth and Bewley-Patton were already there, and he and Pinkie joined them. Elizabeth gave him a customary blink of the eyes as if unsure of what he was going to do, but since he sat down like every one else it passed. She began talking at the top of her voice about how some 'absolute boob' upstairs had asked her if her black dress was meant to represent an 'elephant's skin'; to which Bewley-Patton said quietly that the 'gentleman' may have been referring to the fact that when she danced she did so 'not unlike an elephant'. Elizabeth laughed and said to Pinkie that 'our Gordy has had too much wine', and that he'd been saying to her what a 'gorgeous piece' she, Pinkie, was! It was true, Gordy

kept glancing sideways at Pinkie in an admiring way, but this was lost on her as she was concentrating on her food. People at the next table called out to Elizabeth and waved; one of the women also waved to Pinkie, and Granville recognised one of the guests from Elizabeth's dinner-party at Meedham, the wife of the Aden man who'd argued about shooting. Bewley-Patton sat quietly sipping white wine; he said he'd got it specially, and there was a crate under the table, which was why he had to spend so much time there; it was lovely Moselle wine with the 'mountain-streams' in it, only it had got a bit hot. He was remarkably like Nigel, only a little older and mellower. Elizabeth asked Granville when he'd be off again, and he said, "I shan't be, at all!", with a smile. What did he mean? she asked, blinking again. Pinkie told her he'd resigned, and Bewley-Patton turned to him confidentially and said, "Did it get you down?" as if one could change jobs endlessly. This appealed to Granville and he replied, "It did, rather ---", in a between-us-men tone. Pinkie chuckled and said to Elizabeth, "I like that 'rather', don't you?"

"Well, I hope you're doing right," Elizabeth said in a grave way.

Granville felt a spasm of irritation; "What's it got to do with you in any case?"

"Nothing, darling, nothing!" she cried in her light-hearted way, laughing. "It must be the school-marm in me, I suppose!" And she turned away with an air of disdain mixed curiously with fluttering respect.

Bewley-Patton sat there and gave him a smile as if to say, 'They can be annoying, can't they?' The music started again upstairs, a loud thumping on the floor, and people began to drift away. He danced with Elizabeth again while Pinkie danced with Clockwork, who had left the card-table to look, he told Pinkie, at 'the flesh'. It was a slow dance with

the lights lowered, and Pinkie had her tragic expression again, her eyes closed and her lips drawn together in a pout that suggested both tenderness and hurts; it was strange combined with her pointed ears and the red forked tail that drifted out behind her; it gave her a peculiar dark haughtiness. She and Clockwork hardly held each other at all, only leaned together as if exhausted, their cheeks touching while their feet shuffled slowly along; this wasn't the right dance for most of the guests and the hall was more or less empty. He told Elizabeth how much he'd enjoyed Meedham and she said with a shake of her head, kicking him slightly in the ankle, "Oh, come again!" The slowness of the dance was a hindrance for her; she went at her steps with a country-energy and kept glancing round the floor with a vivacious twist of her head; and she watched Pinkie, smiling at her as if the tragic expression was deliberately to amuse people.

They crawled into bed just before dawn as the birds were beginning to sing and the first milk-van passed. Having fixed her ears so well, Pinkie couldn't get them off, and he had to do it with a pair of tweezers, pulling the wires carefully away. Her forked tail was broken and her tights had split during the Scotch reel: she looked exstatic, pale, quiet; to oblige her, though she hadn't made any direct request, he hardly spoke; and he left the paint on; his eyes were still long and slanting, and his lips full and red; she put her hand through his hair and gazed at him; and he was careful not to hug her too close in case he spoiled the spell; and they went to bed in the same quiet mood, exhausted; in the morning his red kiss-marks were smudged, vague red stains all over his chest and arms like the trace of blood, and the sheets were stained with them; thus ended his one night as a faun.

Elizabeth rang up Pinkie that day and told her there was to be a sequel, a gorgeous boat-party on the Thames with champagne and guitar-playing, and they were to come as her guests --- nothing to pay this time; it would be on one of those pleasure-steamers, which would cruise down to the Isle of Dogs and back again.

He felt this new life they were leading confirmed the rightness of his resignation; he was moving in all kinds of circles --- nothing in English life was closed to him now! After all, he must learn about his own country, mustn't he?

Hanni came to the house later in the week and told him that her zebra costume had won Clockwork weveral 'good invitations'; he 'collected' cocktail parties. Also she said that a friend of Clockwork's had danced with Pinkie and exclaimed afterwards, because she danced with such abandon, "My God, that woman <u>throws</u> herself at you!", with an expression of offended disgust; she added that one could always tell a 'small' person by what he thought about Pinkie; this chap was 'an unwholesome little social climber'; she said that Pinkie had looked magnificent dancing, and that she doubted if she'd even been aware of the 'silly little trout', who had a nasty habit of knocking his ring against the wood of his chair to show that he <u>had</u> one. She spoke in her customary low, keening way, and he felt a protective indignation against the young man on Pinkie's behalf, though he hadn't set eyes on him. They agreed with each other that Pinkie gave herself to people without discrimination and allowed her 'wonderful dignity' to be brought within the compass of their pettiness.

She also told him that 'dad' was an invention of Joy Celeste's to keep people away from her flat and also for use against those 'like you', Hanni added with a smile, who were bold enough to penetrate there and make themselves 'troublesome'.

CHAPTER 26.

The weeks passed. There were newcomers in the group as a result of the Tail-and-Hoof ball. He was out nearly every evening and couldn't understand how he'd managed to spend so much time in the house before; the phone rang continually for one or other of them; Dick and Hanni now took him for granted as a fellow party-goer; usually he slept until noon and waited for the day to develop, which it did of its own accord, largely through the telephone.

He went for long walks with Hell, who was one of the newcomers; they strolled by the river, hardly talking; a subject of conversation would seem to present itself but then fade away before it was clear; they were impenetrable to each other. The hair-girl also came to the house, sometimes with Hanni, sometimes alone, preoccupied and rarely talkative; but she would suddenly wake up and begin joking and making her deafening laugh; she would come and sit in the music-room while he was there, hardly glancing at him, and making dates with her was out of the question; there was no need, since she came nearly every day; they would put on a record and dance, then he would make coffee, nothing else.

Alice the snake-girl also came, and Joyce the pale girl was sometimes there. He began to share Dick's fascination for the pale girl; she would sit in the kitchen for an hour or more looking at a magazine, quite still and soft, or smoking and gazing in front of her; there was a quiet detachment between her and Pinkie; they had something in common, in

their presences, and they averted their eyes from each other as if afraid of mingling their identities. Hell wore her hair in the same way as at the ball, straight down, and usually she had a black dress on and clutched a small black hand-bag; she always looked cold, and her teeth seemed to chatter invisibly when she talked, while her shoulders were hunched slightly; Pinkie said that Grove called her 'the last trump'.

Life was not so casual for him that he felt his identity had gone, but pleasurably. There was never any cause for nerves or apprehension since he wasn't called on to do anything; no conversation was expected of him and no powers were attributed to him. In this circle no one was greatly interested in anyone else. It made no difference that he had no money in his pocket; someone always called and an activity would start for which his company was required; he had to make no effort for this; he could sit in silence; his face was known and expected, as the other faces were expected by him. The social classes mixed, or rather the shadows left on life by the past mixed --- the snake-girl's Cockney accent and Hell's breathless, crème-de-la-crème speech. But everyone had their being in suspense; the snake-girl was wary of Hell, and the latter was delicately and flinchingly aware of her, so that their real presences were held back. At first Granville thought that only he held his real self back but he saw that everyone did it; Dick was perhaps the most open of them, he gave the truest demonstration of himself in his behaviour; but here there was an heroic element, of a special cleverly and painfully devised performance; as a result he amused and enchanted people most, because he'd gone into the matter more deliberately than anybody else, and had come to the conclusion that if you were going to turn a false face to the world it might as well be an entertaining one. His suffering, as Granville learned was

proportionately more unpleasant when he got back to his room; he would sit and tremble, Hanni said, castigating himself; one evening he came back to her at Hampton Court and said he was sure Granville looked on him as a 'sex-maniac' with nothing in his head at all; at such times, also, he was afraid of going mad; everything would be unhinged for him; he would be floating, severed from everything, falling in empty space; she said he sometimes even appeared not to recognise her properly; there would be no consolation anywhere for him, even in her; he would recognise none of his pleasures; he couldn't lose himself in anything; that was the most frightful thing; he always jerked awake; it was this that sent him to girls; by the time he'd overcome this fearful floating detachment, sufficiently to excite their interest in him --- he told Hanni that luckily the 'little worm, vanity' had so far never let him down --- he was already back in life, and strong enough to go back to Hanni and make love to her; this, she said, was mainly why she didn't try to interfere with him; it was his way of getting strength, from which she benefited.

Just as other people drifted into his house, without saying a word, so he drifted into the local cafe or the pub where he might expect to find a group of them; and he would sit down in the same way, nodding hullo and then giving himself up to the silence. Whether or not the others regarded this common behaviour as strange he couldn't find out, as they couldn't find out if he regarded it as strange; it was simply the accepted style. Hell sometimes rang up in the middle of the night and asked for a bed; she lived with 'a family of school-teachers', as she called them --- even the little children were school-teachers, she said, and she dared not return when she'd taken 'more than a fair drop'; so she would creep into the house and be found on the divan in the music-room next morning,

her black lace underwear in a pile on the floor and her hair hanging down from the pillow like black crepe. He or Pinkie would leave the key under the mat for her. But Granville still clung to his privacy; after a time he refused to let her in. Also he would lock the door downstairs during the day sometimes, and not answer the door-bell or telephone.

It seemed to him, even with all these callers, and the activities in the evening, that he had nothing to do; he couldn't wear his energies out; he wrote letters of application for jobs and then didn't post them; he was on the point of ringing T.I.M. a dozen times; he got in travel-books from the labrary and began to work out itineries across the desert based on other people's journeys; he wrote a long letter to Mohammed telling him what he'd done and promptly tore it up; then he wrote a frantic one, saying, 'Please, help me!', and posted it. He set himself tasks in the morning and arranged his desk neatly; he went throughta carbon copy of his report for T.I.M. with the idea of amplifying it --- to hand the new sections in to them later, perhaps, as the basis of his next job with them. There was still no answer from Nevinson. Did they regard him as an ex-employee or not? Dick told him not to apply for his super-annuation as he would get more later, for some complicated reason; he obeyed without question and drew his last money out of the bank. He couldn't say he was unhappy, though.

Hell borrowed the school-teachers' car one evening - she simply took it out of the garage --- and ran it against the railings by the Tower of London, There was always some interesting little event. Deryk Grysham had a special nod for her at a party they all went to. The past seemed quite dead; He was an accepted face, nowhere was barred to him; he talked to Grysham casually, and the idea of there having been a to-do between

Dick and Grysham over himself, as mentally he recalled there had been, was outlandish and absurd, and belonged to a moral conflict--- a social conflict --- was it a conflict of ideas? --- which he couldn't grasp now!

Hell gave promise of real friendship; it would be a delicate, quiet relation in which they would sit much as he and Mohammed had sat by the river in the evening, with long pauses, saying whatever came into their heads; she would smoke reflectively, saying didn't he think this person had something 'valiant' about him or that person was 'a York rather than a Lancaster', always in a style that just evaded sound sense? He realised after a time that she was hardly aware of him. She only went on in her reflective dream, drawing others in sometimes, if the conditions were quiet enough. Yet she was polite and answered questions; sometimes she showed the most extraordinary courtesy and charm when accepting things, like a cup of tea; but then she would be absent and fidgetty again; at a party, after a few drinks, she would pass by him without the slightest recognition, her eyes blind and a smile drifting on her lips. Dick said that she and her whole group of 'limp noble weeds' gave him the heeby-jeebies, and he cursed the day Granville had gone to that Tail-and-Hoof ball! Sometimes, he said, Hell would fling her 'long, reedy arms' round him and scream, "Dick! Haven't seen you in an age!", and sometimes she would walk right past him 'jittering and muttering to herself'; once he caught hold of her as she was going past and said in a sharp voice, right into her face, giving her whole body a little 'rattle', "Tell me my name!", and she had to gaze at him for some time, straining her eyes, before she could say in a faltering voice, "Is it --- is it Dick Pollocke, by any chance?"

It occurred to Granville that Hell set the tone for all the other

girls who came to the house --- to judge from their behaviour. They seemed to think that this was how you lived at Chaworth Road; the pale girl and the snake-girl talked quietly like Hell, yawned like her, lolled, smiled in the same limp way. Even the hair-girl showed no vivacity when Hell was there, not unless there was a party or Larry Vice was mentioned --- at the word 'Vice' her tiny pale figure would make a jump and her eyes would move in their deep sockets, waking up, and she would scream, "Oh, Vice! That boy's wound himself round me like poison ivy!" Once she said in a quiet voice to Granville, "I'll tell you something, kid, Larry and my dad got on fine, and what more do you want than that, eh?" He nodded like an idiot and put another record on.

Hanni and Pinkie took it for granted that he was having an affair with her. Pinkie told Hanni one day that she was 'somewhat embarrassed' to find Joy Celeste "always in the house." Joy Celeste encouraged this by yelling with laughter whenever Hanni came into the room when they were alone and shrieking, "Nearly caught us at it again, blabber-mouth!" or "I've just been up in heaven, help me down, sister of mercy!" Hell would sit for hours in the music-room, in the same chair always, smoking quietly, never reading, her straight hair falling down to her shoulders and her thin, pale hands flickering to her face now and then. The young man nicknamed Cerberus to whom she was supposed to be engaged sometimes came as well, small and flushed, and as quiet as she was; he had the habit of smiling quickly on and off whenever anything was said to him, and then not answering. He recognised no one at all and everybody wondered how Hell had been able to establish herself in his memory; he called everyone 'job', or rather every male, for he had no name for women; he would say to Granville, "I say, job, have you got another drink there?", and when

Granville replied, "Yes, what will you have, wine or beer?" he would flash on his smile and say absolutely nothing, only wait. Or he would ask, "Can Hell and I stay the night, job?", then promptly leave the house. One day Dick took Granville aside in the bedroom while Hell and Cerberus were sitting next door, and murmured to him, "Well, how do you like the middle classes now, bo'sun? Quite sane, aren't we?" Hell told them all that Cerberus was in the habit of 'walking off' with things, and that a few days previously he'd left someone's house with a persian carpet over his shoulders; he'd left it in the Tube --- "I <u>think</u> I left it in the Tube," he said afterwards. These stories sounded exaggerated, but they always turned out to be true; for instance, Hell was called to a police-station in Islington to answer questions about the persian carpet.

Glenning brought over a young man with ruby lips and a pleasant, drowsy smile called 'Mac' Saunders who edited the daily gossip-column that Granville had read so often in the last three months. He and Granville began going for long walks together, sometimes with Hell as well, again hardly ever exchanging a word. The more he came to know 'Mac', or rather the more silences he shared with him, the more surprised he was that what Glenning called 'the racket' hadn't touched him, and that he gave an impression of untouched goodness and calm; 'Mac' had his own drowsy reflections, he was the most amiable and cooperative person to be with, he fell in with every suggestion, he seemed to have no sense of status --- Granville was more and more taken aback. The thing that had broken Glenning in the same work, namely, that it was hollow, with no 'inside' to it, was the main advantage for 'Mac'. It meant he could earn good money without touching the peculiar calm that lay in him; he could go on with his thoughts and pleasures really as if there was no work

in life at all; he had learned the deft touch, after a long apprenticeship, he said. Sometimes he came into the kitchen when Granville was there and worked on the conversations he intended to have at parties that evening; it was easy enough to get people to agree with them after you'd written them, he said, because most of them were like 'babes in arms' when it came to a bit of publicity. Now and then he showed Granville these little notes, and Granville would see them in print next day: he could thus see how the 'glittering world' with which he had once excited his own imagination had come about in the mind of a young man not unlike himself, only with fewer illusions about how the world ran! He was also surprised to realise that 'Mac' Saunders looked on him as a source of information, because so many people came to the house; a conversation with Hell might, for instance, be useful one day if a member of her family flung a big party or got married or assaulted someone. Granville also knew the Kaaba dancing company, the Marquis and some of the permanent guests at the Gare St. Lazare --- the 'darker side of life', which also could be naterial for 'Mac'; for instance, the gossip column once described a house where 'aristocracy met dancing-girls', which could have been Chaworth Road, 'Mac' liked the 'mice' there, too, namely, Joy Celeste, the snake-girl, Joyce and a number of others. But he seemed to have no sexual affiliations himself; he followed other people's affairs with a rapt, benevolent curiosity.

Parties came about at the house without Pinkie even knowing about them; she was now used to returning home and finding one in progress; and with astonishing ease she ceased to look on him as a recluse; he was now much like anyone else; but at the same time she showed traces of disappointment, as if a god of hers, however hateful, had fallen!

He had spent every penny of his money and stayed in the house nearly all the time, attaching himself to a group whenever one offered itself. Meanwhile she was getting plump and had taken to a wider skirt. He began to be sick in the mornings, and Glenning explained that this was only the 'couvade', an ancient primitive ritual by which the men went through all the labour-pains for the woman, while the women, he added with a look at Pinkie, went about their 'ordinary business'. The plumpness didn't stop her dancing; everyone agreed that exercise was good for child-birth. There were complaints from the neighbours about some of the parties; the windows were usually kept open because of the heat and smoke. One morning they found that a passer-by had pissed into their empty milk-bottles in the night and then into the letter-box; the letters had soaked it up and were yellow and limp; one of them was from Elizabeth giving the date of the river-party, and Pinkie had to phone to ask what she'd written; Granville said with a laugh that she ought to tell Liz that her letter had arrived soaked in piss, but a demure and haughty look came over Pinkie's face and she said, "I wouldn't dream of it!" The hall downstairs began to be cluttered up with articles left by guests --- raincoats, suitcases and even a small pram. No one knew where the pram came from. He decided to forget about past and future --- even the little reminders that there still were. People could say what they liked about him; he wouldn't stop to think; he'd achieved his objective, to be free in his own country!

A heavily-built man not unlike Glenning started coming to the house; he seemed to connect Granville with Pinkie in the matter of rank; one day he asked Granville in a soft voice, "Didn't I meet your father down at Freddy's place? I think his name was Granville!" But Granville

only laughed; and the other man, who was called Algy, talked about something else at once. He slurred his sentences, unlike Glenning; and there was a vagueness in his eyes that Glenning didn't have --- the same blind quality as in Hell. It was said that Algy had once lifted a smaller man clean off his feet in a pub when he was drunk and said to him, "Don't I know your cousin David?" And the smaller man had said in an icy voice, "Let me down at once, you smell of garlic!" to which Algy had said, "All right, there's no need to be offensive about it!" There were endless little stories like this, mostly told by Hell, who made an odd, fluttering and breathless laugh afterwards. Another story was that 'Mac' Saunders had bought a set of whips to flagellate his girl-friends with, but the sight of them had terrified him and instead he used them to pull the blinds down with at night.

Granville never felt watched in their company; that, he told himself, was a wonderful relief for his nerves; there was none of the 'third ghost' he remembered in Walsh; they weren't thinking about you silently behind their eyes, and judging your conduct; they didn't judge you at all, you were simply a fact for them; they were outspoken and rash; he could really let himself go if he wanted to; on the other hand he never did; he was more constrained than ever before in his life.

These people, he told himself, threw their voices out and weren't afraid of anyone; they didn't have closed or haunted faces; they might be peculiar, like Hell or Cerberus, but that didn't matter; it occurred to him that an aristocracy lived to the hilt for its country; it defined permissible behaviour once and for all; and the middle-classes, following behind them, threw their caps in the air only as high as <u>they</u> had done. Thus, he said to himself, he was passing through a worth-while experience;

he couldn't say who was 'aristocratic' in the people who came to the house --- Hell was said to be; but, more than this, what 'aristocratic' was at a time when aristocracy didn't even exist, when it hadn't existed for a hundred years or more he didn't know! He meant the shadow of aristocracy, then; these people were in the shadow; and he was learning from it; that was a task, surely, he'd set himself at Meedham? But he couldn't remember what had passed through his head at Meedham. It seemed so long ago, and in a period when he had shone with health.

He began to think of the days before their Meedham visit as ones of thought and clarity. His friendship with Dick and Hanni belonged to that period. Yes, there'd been a friendship! An extraordinary innocence seemed to surround it now! But the period was over. The friendship was past. They came to the house less and less, because of the 'weeds'.

Many of the people who came to the house now didn't know his name; one of them, hearing Cerberus call him 'Job', seriously thought his name was that, and even introduced him to someone as, "This is Job --- I'm sorry, I don't know your second name."

Another thing he liked about Hell and Algy and the others was that their manners were automatic; they were silent whenever the mood took them; they didn't hold a moral plan of conduct before them, and they didn't try to work out easy routes for themselves in life; they burned themselves at the flame; they didn't search other people's remarks for meaning, or judge people's feelings by the look on their faces; partly this was due to the fact that they rarely listened to other people. Sternness didn't frighten them; they didn't smile to put other people at their ease; they didn't feel threatened by outbursts of feeling in other people; they didn't

stand in moral scrutiny of other people; other people were still in mystery for them. But here, in this last assertion, he doubted; what mystery did he feel himself to have in their presence? He was just a name, and often not even that; he was respected, but without him doing anything to win it; he was respected because he was one of them! Something was missed out --- his personality; it was where he was separate from everyone else. So he was more middle class then he thought! He asking for personality! For a moment he was aware of the night of the eclipse again; the spark in every man that Christ had shown --- the place where he was secret to himself... But then it was gone!

Not that Hell and Algy were at all certain of themselves; Hell was called 'the nerve-bag' or 'rattle-box'. Algy was morbidly convinced that people were 'getting at him' behind his back. Yet, confronted by people, they had an automatic manner; there was already something in their voice and delivery which they hadn't built for themselves. That was another important thing for him. But this also meant that they didn't develop; since so much was already planted in them by upbringing there was no moral development; their lives didn't seem to move to or from anything; they simply were; but all round them there was movement! What was happening to him? That was his question all the time, even though he had nothing to answer it with. There was this moral concern in him, as there was in Dick. But for the others, for Hell, Algy, Cerberus and the others, life was in depth; it was still; and that was restful to him; but at the same time there was movement in him, and he couldn't deny it; he couldn't deny its thumping demands under the stillness. He couldn't talk to them as himself so he made jokes, danced, sat in silence, drank and asked questions. He tried to make his world devoid of future, in

depth like theirs; but it wasn't natural to him, because the future stretched before him in the form of a quest. Suddenly, as if to deny these very thoughts, Algy threw up his job in London and flew to New Zealand where he started work as a wine-waiter in one of the big hotels; Glenning predicted that within a year Algy would be unrecognisable --- 'weather-beaten and brisk', impossible to tell apart from a working man, and without a trace ofHell or Cerberus on his person!

At one of his parties Joy Celeste held an impromptu strip-tease competition in an upstairs room; all the rooms had people in them, and the piano was being played downstairs, but more and more of the guests were drifting upstairs; he walked up as well and could hardly get in the door; there was a hush in the room, and the first thing he saw was a flattering yellow light reflected in the river; the lights were out and it appeared that by the mantelpiece, in the light of two candles, the hair-girl and a young man were making bets of some kind; losing a bet meant you had to take off an article of clothing; she was already in her blouse and knickers, minus skirt and stockings; the young man was without shirt or vest; her hair flowed down over her shoulders, and it appeared that she had claimed untying her hair as a valid forfeit; Larry Vice was one of the guests, and his <u>hoo, hoo</u> could be heard in the hush; the only talk was between her and the young man; they were saying in quiet voices, "No, I claim one here," and "Start with your pants, then", "Not on your life!", All right, I claim a couple on that and advance you one on the last forfeit, how's that?" The deep hush surrounded them. There was an atmosphere of intense concentration. "No, sirree!" she suddenly shouted, yelling with laughter. All the men were gazing at her intently,

as if she were operating a subtle mechanism of some kind and they were admiring her ingenuity; he didn't know half the faces; her blouse came off, and she stood there in brassiere and knickers, saying, "Hey, now, look, I'm chilly, customer," while the young man persisted, "That's not a full forfeit." Then it came to an end without further undressing; she was suddenly ashamed, glancing round at all the rapt faces in the flickering candle-light, and with a shake of her head and a defiant pout she pulled on her skirt and blouse again.

Granville had got into the habit when talking alone to Dick of referring to the hair-girl as 'Makboula', her supposed real name, and by accident he did it one evening when they were all together in the music-room; she turned on him at once, her head lowered, and hissed, "Drop that name, streaky pants!"; there was the utmost blind venom in her eyes and he stepped back, astonished; but suddenly she was talking in an unconcerned way to someone else. They hardly spoke to each other again after that, but she continued to come to the house, and he made her coffee as before; she didn't seem to notice any difference. He reflected on the expression 'streaky pants', wondering what it meant; his trousers weren't streaked; Dick said he thought it was a cross between 'streak of piss' and 'randy pants', a 'grammatical cross or compound, old sport.'

Suddenly as he lay in bed one night there was a terrific onslaught on his mind from the silence outside, in accusations that came like hammers one after the other. He was stunned and began to sweat, his mouth open. He didn't believe in God; he only believed in Christ as an historical figure! He didn't believe in the miracles! He didn't believe Christ was the son of God! He didn't believe Christ rose on the third day! He didn't believe in the ascent to heaven! He didn't believe

in heaven! His heart beat fast and the blood plunged through him like a torrent in the darkness. He didn't believe he would be received after death! He believed in oblivion! There was no help. There was no foothold and nothing came from any activity. While he sweated and stared before him there was also a total pause in him. The night of the eclipse was dead. He was an imposter. He struggled to recollect his reasoning that night. He almost pushed himself out of bed in the darkness, straining; where were the thoughts? where should he begin again? where was the first foothold so that he could climb again? But all he could think of --- they came ringing like a false bell into his mind, idiotically --- were bare propositions, 'the spark in every man', 'riding in on an ass', 'giving up ambitions', but the state behind them was gone; they were words. He lay back again bathed in sweat, exhausted. "What had happened to me?" he asked again.

There was a small, pretty young woman in Hell's group who became his 'lover'. There was a sudden, gnawing desire between them, pulling their bodies together, like a hard will nobody else could stop. It was like a flame, white-hot, not really passionate but with a white and hard determination --- they met in a club, in a large group, and danced together at once. They mingled their breath together as they moved round the floor, gazedgat each other closely, without a word, their faced almost touching. They kissed suddenly, under the eyes of her 'husband' --- the man living with her at the moment. It was beyond both of them, this hard, obstinate lust. He quickly took her phone-number and they met three days later, in the afternoon, at the Hampton Court flat. It was a cold, dismal day. The moment the door closed behind them he began kissing her and taking off her clothes. She had the curse but, half-

naked, she pulled him into the nearest room, to one of the divans, and he came on her stomach. That was before they'd spoken a word together. They met there again the following week, and stripped naked in front of the gas-fire. But the nakedness satisfied him less. The room was freezing cold, while one side of them was baked from the fire. She clung to him again and again, for one orgasm after another, and he wondered if this was what people meant by 'nymphomaniac'. When they were finished they had nothing to say to each other. There was the first fascination, while she was dressed, but then, in the candour of nakedness, everything fled away. They found, talking to each other, that they didn't even like each other much. On the bed she marvelled at him, her eyes closed, saying, "Oh, this is the best, the best!" but he felt quite separate, just an object to her, as wide-awake as he would be walking alone the street. He felt friendly towards her. "I like you', he kept saying.

Really, it was the same as he'd felt with Hell and Algy. He was a kind of abstract force for her --- his individuality was missing. And she didn't seem to be marvelling at <u>him</u> --- only at his movements, his erection. He was a 'man' for her. Just 'man'. In her circle you expected 'the men' to be rash and wild, rather blind, violent, not aware of women as more than 'little things', as 'gals' you were expected to crush in some way. Dick hated them because he understood them!

She had spurts of anger --- irritation that leapt out suddenly and tried to claw him, perhaps because he gave her neither the bad treatment she was used to nor the first hard lust.

Pinkie had no suspicions. She continued to flinch when she saw the hair-girl or when the Kaaba dancing company was mentioned.

Granville found that she suspected his innocent journeys across London, when he was goking to meet Glenning or 'Mac' Saunders, but was at peace when he left the house to meet Hester, as, with a touch of irony, his 'lover' was called. Hester was a divorced woman with three children; that was the only real subject of conversation between them, her children, and she would show him photographs of them; she had the same delicate, breathless manner of speech as Hell but there was a concentrated gleam in her eye that Hell lacked; she was clearer and more determined, with an obstinate will which couldn't be swerved; she said she dared not introduce him to the children because they might think badly of her; they would tell her parents, and her brother was a Jesuit priest; she had taken terrible risks to 'go' with him; her family watched her 'like hawks', they'd done so since she divorced, and once her father, who was an army-man, had pushed her down the stairs just outside her flat and threatened to 'make mince-meat' of her because she was 'going' with a man at the time. It was a macabre, finished world she described: the young men in it had a desperate violence --- she had left her husband because he would twist her arm 'frightfully' if she came back late! And she was <u>always</u> coming back late, it seemed, always risking something! There was the same blindness as in Hell; everyone she described was wild and frightening, a kind of massive caricature; she endowed them with stature, but it was set and known, universal; she said her father had got wind of him, Granville, and had promised to search him out and give him 'a sound kick in the stomach'; he asked her, trying to joke as always and to throw off the burden, "Isn't that unsportsmanlike, the stomach? Shouldn't it be the arse?" But underneath he was sick and giddy. These dreadful threats! Dick, also, had got wind of his 'activities' in the empty flat --- which

Hanni now seemed to have vacated --- and told him that Hester was known everywhere as 'the man-hole'.

Yet, though only his unanimated flesh was involved, in orgasm after orgasm separate from him and abstract, he felt revived; it was what he seemed to need; it was in his flesh that he needed to revive and feel his first independence from Pinkie. And now he felt easier at Chaworth Road; he could delay his sexual approaches to Pinkie as long as he liked, having exhausted himself elsewhere; his approaches were more subtle and patient; there was now no chance of his suddenly giving way to an outburst; there was nothing pent-up in him; his flesh was now equal to hers and he shared, so to speak, her burden of guilt when they lay down side by side at night, usually without saying a word to each other. He began to feel light, and his appetite improved. Dick told him he looked 'drained of impurities', and that was precisely how he felt; his flesh, separate from him, was healed; his blood was clean; he felt cool and ordered.

He asked Dick what had happened to Hanni; why was she never at the flat? The reply was, "No particular reason. Why?" Nor had she appeared at Chaworth Road for some time; Pinkie hadn't seen her. Dick said she was working hard, he believed, though he hadn't seen too much of her himself, either. Then he took Granville's arm in a nervous way and said, looking round, "We all have our ups and downs, don't we?" His lips were pale and Granville thought he saw the faintest trembling in his fingers.

He began going to the New Studio theatre, and then became a member; it was another place to sit and take people to if you wanted to demonstrate a socially varied life; food could be had there and the tickets were on a subscription basis. He got the money to join from Pinkie; he told her about the club and she nodded rather like someone

considering a pay-claim, and left the money on his desk before she went out in the morning. Dick said that the plays performed were written by a kind of committee employed by the club, and that their idea was to deal with one social problem after another, to make a 'clean sweep' of modern life. The place had already been nicknamed 'Protest Hall' for this reason, and people 'lapped it up'. There were to be no stars and the plays were never to draw attention to themselves by being 'over-dramatic' or in any way idiosyncratic; they were as far as possible simple and clear statements of a current problem with as much drama as it would need to sustain the interest of the audience. Granville was beginning to feel a peculiar unspoken indignation in his life, and he wondered if these 'protests' would contain it for him in some way. His life was taking more and more roots in London, he noticed; and ultimately he hoped that it would take on a stillness such as he'd known in the Sussex days, and false hopes would disappear; he wouldn't think of Basrah again!

Dick had a copy of the Studio club policy sent to him, and he read in it that the idea of the theatre was 'the pulpit of modern life' was to be applied; the West End commercial managers had kept modern life out of the theatre, it added. He began going to the Studio club once or twice a week, with or without Dick; there was a secret pleasure in sitting in the darkness with the evening paper in his hand; the stage glowed and he fell into a dream; sometimes what happened on the stage was more real to him than Chaworth Road; he would dream about it, and wake up in the morning expecting the situation of the play to unfold before him instead of his and Pinkie's world. There was one play of protest after another: a negro winning his way through race-prejudices in a northern mining town, a working man victimised by his foreman, a private soldier pitching himself

against 'brass-hats' at Corps headquarters; a young african nationalist against a British colonial magistrate; a poor family in Wales threatened with an eviction-order; an Irishman, drinking wildly and cussing 'the dirty bloody Limeys', trying to sing for a living; a kind of suffragette play in which a man's healthy desires caused his wife's suicide. The trouble was that when you added all these protests together they made you hate nearly everybody; which left no one to address the protest to! Those people who weren't bosses might be foremen, those who weren't foremen might be brass-hats, those who were none of these might be British, those who weren't British could easily be a man --- for the suffragette play it was enough to be a man! So each new play knocked the last one down. Last week you might have been morally indignant on behalf of the working man but this week you would be just as indignant against him for being a white man. At first Granville came out of the theatre burning with indignation every time, but he was now inured to it.

He noticed that he didn't sit through the plays in a spirit of criticism as he had done during the first one about the sailor in Liverpool; he wondered if a change had come about in his life that had removed a certain essential fibre. Most of the plays he simply sat through, hardly hearing them; he took pleasure in the glow of the lights on the stage, in a piece of scenery that suggested woods or the African bush; he would doze off in his seat and wake up with a start when the set protest-speech began, which it usually did towards the end of the second act; after that he could pop off again. As in the first play there was a lot of swearing. There were deliberately shocking references --- to homosexuality, to Laura Lady Maine, to the government. When the play was dull and stupid he was unwilling to admit to himself that this was so,

because he then felt classed among the renegade people whom the play was attacking. The protest-speeches covered up for the lack of drama and truth. In one of the plays a character said of another, "He's always got his eye on the Maine chance!" and there were waves of laughter; this laughter had the tone of the forbidden, as if mentioning the word 'Maine' on the stage was brave in itself, laying bare the social conventions. There were regular targets --- the royal family, the Church, the 'pukka sahib' from India; whatever no longer had power in modern life. There were trembling protests against a ruling class that no longer existed, against an empire that had been disbanded.

Dick was offended by the 'squealing' in the plays; he said that a man who suffered shouldn't put the blame on other people. But Granville only smiled. There wasn't a trace of the 'orang-utang' in him. He seemed to have little objection to anything.

CHAPTER 27.

The river-party was a great success. It was a superb autumn evening, warm even, with the sunlight yellow and pure-looking on the river; some of the roofs on either side looked as though they were made of gold for a moment, and the city made one massive roar that was like a new, exciting silence. There were many of the same faces as at the Tail-and-Hoof ball. They all sat about on deck or down in the long cabins while white-coated waiters brought round the drinks; the host, a small, flushed man with blond hair called Lord Runnock, tasted one of the drinks from a waiter's tray, holding the waiter by the sleeve as he did so, and then suddenly muttered with biting anger, turning round to his wife, "I thought so, I bloodywell thought so! He's done it again!" His wife tried to calm him, smiling at the guests and even at the waiter with, "What happened, darling?" "He's opened the champagne!" came the answer. "I told you not to!" he said to the man. "I said leave the champagne till I tell you; but no ---! Oh Christ!" He shouted, "Where's your brains, for Christ's sake?" And the meek reply came, "I don't know, sir!"

Elizabeth introduced them both to a bouncy young man with dark eyes whose name he didn't catch; he talked very fast, mostly to Pinkie, and tapped his foot restlessly on the deck while he glanced about, singing snatches of old hit-tunes. "Do you know this one?" he would say like a machine-gun; and he would launch into a tune, "Da-da-da-diddle-ly-da-da-dum-dum!" To Granville's surprise Pinkie looked enthralled all the time,

and seemed actually to be straining herself to recognise the tune, though hhis was impossible because it was too quick. She had none of her usual forbearance and dignity; and though the singing wasn't singing, and jarred on the nerves, there was a smile of appreciation on her face. They went down to the lower deck and sat on benches, crammed together, while someone phayed the guitar. Nearly all the guests were personal friends of Runnock's -- and suddenly from across the gangway, Runnock threw him a hard, resentful glance as if to say, 'And who the devil are you?' Granville turned away, deciding not to notice it, and said something to Elizabeth and the hit-tune young man who sat opposite him; luckily she smiled back at him in a vivacious way and when he glanced at Runnock again there was no malevolence in his gaze at all, but even friendliness, a soft and gracious look. All this went on invisibly, a little drama unseen by anyone else. The look in Runnock's eye was too direct, too intimate, both when it was hard and when it was gracious, for it to be meant for anyone else. Elizabeth, being a friend of Lady Maine's, and known by everyone, was a good friend to have there.

There was no wildness as at the ball. The river was lovely outside, flat and touched with red from the sun. At the Isle of Dogs they turned round, the boat kicking up a wash with its paddles, and the party, now that oil-lamps had been lit, became more boisterous. The bouncy young man kept up a constant chatter, taking his audience for granted. Pinkie and Elizabeth seemed rapt, glued to him, never missing a syllable or breath. He'd never seen Liz quite like it before. She was so docile and girlish. She ducked her head in a diffident way, like her daughter Jane for a moment, and kept saying, "Oh, you bounder, George!", then to Pinkie, "Isn't he extraordinary?" Granville listened

for something extraordinary but there was only a string of references to odd things like streets, aircraft, houses in the country, card-games, turf for lawns --- all in jumble he couldn't follow at all. And the whole time there was this vivacious wonderment from the women! Then there were hit-tunes again --- "Do you remember this one? Ta-ta-ti-ti-dum-dum-ti-ti-ti!" Then there was the story of how he'd hitch-hiked fifty miles across Norway because his car had broken down --- he'd stayed at a hotel where the food was good --- and one where the food was bad --- sometimes it had rained --- and sometimes it hadn't. And at everything there was the same enthralled wonderment. Granville tried to puzzle it out. He tried to listen harder --- to get the narrative thread he might have missed --- and he tried to join in, laughing and showing surprise by lifting his eyebrows. George ----if that was his name --- said he'd been on the 'grand tour' the previous year: he pronounced it the French way and Granville thought this was a joke and roared with laughter, but he tripped up badly here because the girls were nodding in a serious way. George had played baccarat with a lorry-driver in a bistro at dawn --- howls of laughter! how did they know when to laugh together? "George! Old thing!", it went on. And from George, "I was absolutely whacked the next night, I really was --- God, I think I slept about twelve hours ---!" To which Pinkie said in a demure way --- it was so unusual for her that Granville nearly nudged her to ask if she meant it --- "Come, come, I can't imagine you getting very tired!" Why not? She hadn't even met the chap before!

When the boat got back to the pier nearly everyone went on to the Melbourne, a quite fashionable club, by an arrangement that formed quickly as people were getting into their cars --- "Coming to the Melbourne?",

"We're off to the Melbourne, what about you?" He and Pinkie went in George's car; Elizabeth was travelling with Runnock. George spoke to Granville for the first time --- how did he think 'the old engine' sounded? Granville didn't know and didn't care, but he said, "All right, I suppose." "You <u>suppose</u> --- !" George cried with a rushed little laugh, "I only had it decarbonised today!" "Good Lord," Granville murmured, looking out of the window. He sat trying to think up something mechanical to say, and chose carburettors. At once George turned to him as if he'd said something stunning, and went into a long speech about the 'double-carb' --- "The double-carb's the job, it really is --- fit it in a day --- I said, look how does that adapt to the rest and he said, fine, so I said get to work --- you just have to give it a tickle and <u>whoof</u>! the girl's off --- stands to reason, doesn't it, but there you are --- rattling away I was, the old bus --- but very sound, though, don't you think so? Do you?" He fixed Granville with youthful, darkly sharp, friendly eyes. "Yes, I do," Granville said, trying to give him the same glance back.

At the Melbourne there was a long table under dim lights where most of the river-party guests sat. And once more there was champagne. Pinkie and George danced together --- she showed him how to whirl round on the same spot without getting giddy: you keep your eyes on the <u>other person's eyes</u>! And she swept him round with an oh-you-charming-devil look on her face, apparently more abandoned than ever she'd been with Grove, and in a role Granville couldn't connect with her --- it was just too extraordinary for words; he sat and stared at them with puzzled fascination, wondering if she'd gone cuckoo! George wasn't a 'faun'! He wasn't what she called an 'oomph-man' --- Grove had <u>oomph</u>, she always said! George was pleasant, inconsequential, cheerful --- not the sort of person who interested her

that way at all!

As if by previous arrangement Deryk Grysham was also at the club, in another party onethe other side of the room. He seemed a bit touched tonight, too! He was giggling, fluttering his hands at Pinkie and calling out, "Hullo, there!" --- he even acknowledged Granville with a radiant smile, and he danced as well, with a pretty, dark-looking robust girl who looked about her glumly and didn't seem to understand what he was up to with his little prancing steps. Well, Grysham was certainly dazzled by the river-party, that was clear! And Granville sat comfortably at the long table, syrrounded for all he knew by the best titles in the land; and there was Grysham on the other side with some tatty old group who probably couldn't run to an Honourable, let along a duchess!

Granville had had a few drinks and was in an abandoned state of mind himself. He thought he would like to be said hullo to again by Grysham and deliberately fluttered his hand to him across the room; and the effect was immediate --- Grysham fluttered back as if to say, 'Why can't we always be together like this?' He felt like making Deryk flutter all evening, just for the devil of it! Someone said that Laura Lady Maine might be coming to the river-party table later in the evening --- she 'came alive' only after midnight. There! They were clearly going to get jam on it tonight! He felt like ringing up the prime minister and asking him to step over!

Pinkie's whirling and Crysham's capering went on. Granville danced, too, first with Elizabeth and then with one of the women in the party, whose face was extraordinarily composed, with a dazzling loveliness, her skin so soft that it appeared beyond touch, making him feel hushed,

suddenly, wondering if the noisy dream would come to an end and peace --- reality --- return. He could hardly take his eyes off her. Yet she wasn't pretty. There was only this composure. He sat gazing across the table at her, hardly blinking his eyes, not shifting his gaze even when he drank from his glass. He went from chair to chair drinking up the unfinished glasses, since the bottles were empty. And he even asked a glowering, handsome, thick-set man if he might finish his glass for him as he didn't appear to want it, and the man said to him after a long pause, "Yes, you may. I appreciate that you're honest about it --- it's better than just doing it, like some other bastards." He said he was Runnock's brother, and began telling Granville how he hated most of the other people at the table. And he repeated, "I like you because you're honest --- when you want to take the boose out of my mouth you say so, so here it is, and I bet you've got the bloody neck to drink it, too." Granville said he had, but only if they 'went half-way', which Runnock's brother did, scowling at one of the other guests and saying, "They're all rotters!"

At the end of the evening --- Laura Lady Maine didn't come after all --- there were arrangements with George to meet him again; he must come and have dinner at Chaworth Road, Pinkie said. Once or twice Granville addressed something to her in the foyer outside, while they were all getting their coats on, but she appeared not to hear him. Her eyes passed him by, set on a task to which he was absent, but more than that, to which he was nothing but a dead object, flesh, just dead weight, without a spark of life in him; he'd had a similar sensation with Hell, but this was much worse --- this cancelled out his whole past, self, body; he was nothing, just a thing in clothes; he existed only from the outside ---

a cardboard reality; that was how he felt himself while she and Liz and George still pranced about among the coats and hats --- just a prop for his clothes.

When they got back home, as they were going up the stairs in the darkness, he asked her, "Who was that young man, the one called George?" "Good God," she replied, "don't you know?" She half-turned in the darkness, nearly stopping: "That was Viscount Warsdale!" And the anger, pent up all these weeks, suddenly flooded over him --- he knew he wouldn't be able to hold it. Already he'd begun to tremble --- her last look at him, in the foyer, burned in his memory so! And now he'd been given the reason --- a viscount! A viscount! Viscount! How tawdry and cheap! How bestial! He was silent for a time as they continued up the stairs to the music-room, but there, before the light had been switched on, he burst out, shrieking at the top of his voice, beyond himself as he'd thought it was impossible for him to be now, "You dirty, filthy lot of crawling toads! Stew in you own rotten juice instead of dragging other people into it --- you filthy lot --- you filthy lot --- you filthy lot --!" He had never yelled at her so much; his voice echoed across the street in a shriek, and the tears poured down on his face; "You heartless lot, you heartless lot!" It was like a frightening chant, almost a song! It appeared to be a complete shock to her; he was aware of her trembling in the darkness, and there was a gasp as if she'd begun to sob! "What are you talking about?" she asked breathlessly. But his strange, shrieked chant went on, though he had no sense of choosing his words; and it came out in bursts, like panted breath, halting and half-croaking like a frightful cough, "God, if I'd known --- kowtowing to people like that --- you filthy, bloody toads --- <u>ladies</u> --- where's your bloody --- pride,

both of you --- going down on your arses --- to some tuppeny-halfpenny kid --- the manners of the gutter --- just because --- of some --- cheap bloody title --- what a foul --- couple --- of bastards --- you are --- aristocracy --- you people ---!" The tears continued to pour down his face and into his mouth. He was sure, underneath, that she would accept what he said, not show anger or offence, because of the sheer helpless noture of his outburst; he thought she would want to nurse him in some way and calm him down. "What a filthy exhibition ---!" But suddenly she leaned forward in the darkness and with a swift, coolly aimed movement swung her hand-bag, which had a sharp metal edges, into his face, drawing blood; he put his hand up and lowered his head and was at once calm; "It's all right," he said quietly, "I'm sorry."

She stood there quivering, her teeth chattering. And they continued to stand in the half-darkness, their legs astride. She seemed to recover and started to move away, and this had the effect of reviving his anger at once: he imitated her talking to George, bending his body in a mock-wheedling fashion, "Oh, come, come, I can't imagine you getting tired!" And he added in a clear voice, as if making a matter-of-fact announcement of some kind, "You stupid, arse-crawling bitch!" He slammed out of the room clutching at his mouth and as he walked up the stairs he heard her cough in a pathetic way as if all the sorrows of life had suddenly heaped themselves on her and she couldn't go on any more; he stopped, to return, but his pride made him go on up to the kitchen where he made himself two eggs and a rasher of bacon, with a pot of tea; she was asleep by the time he returned downstairs. He decided not to drink wine or beer for a few days to let his blood cool; his mouth swelldd up and Pinkie made a joke about it next evening to Hell, saying how jealous he'd been

because she danced with Viscount Warsdale; Hell wanted to know at once how 'Georgey' was, she hadn't seen him for years; her interest quickened in the most unusual way. In three or four days he felt he could joke about it, too; "What's that you keep in your hand-bag," he asked Pinkie, "a knuckle-duster or something?"

Grove appeared at the house again, but this time only for a few minutes, on his way to a party. Again Granville was acutely aware of his benevolence; standing at his side he felt that Pinkie was com;etely vindicated and right --- to choose Grove. Yet he knew that when alone again he would fall back to the twisted logic by which she was his rightful wife. But there was something extraordinarily bright and safe in Grove's presence which remained with him.

He noticed a change in Pinkie: she was more cautious in the way she talked about other people these days. If he appeared to criticise someone, say Hell or Cerberus, whe withheld herself with a demureness he'd never seen in her before; she turned his criticism back on him, as if the spirit of criticism in him was something dark, belonging to the past --- before he became a gay dog. He felt from her silence that his criticism was an unnecessary departure from the light and reasonable attitudes that now governed the house.

His outburst after the river-party was quickly forgotten; he'd had too much to drink and that was that; it was true, he told himself, he'd drunk an enormous amount without realising it! Again Pinkie told him, as she'd done in Basrah, that he was 'such a sunny person' and that it was always a pity to see him 'burying his head in theories'.

An element in her character had waned recently; she was a less extravagant person. On the surface her extravagance was much greater

than before --- he noticed that she wore tight trousers in the evening and sexy blouses like one of the 'mice', and she no longer seemed nervous of other people's opinion, she seldom had a shy and lonely expression now; but this was only a social extravagance; underneath she seemed more reserved, he could feel her deciding not to say something out of social policy. But this new outward extravagance seemed to satisfy her; her old arrogant way of speech was gone but she was happier. While he thought of this as Grove's influence on her he couldn't account for it in Grove's personality; why should her extravagance have gone?

There was a second much stiffer note from the U.K. Compound in Basrah asking again for the sum of £11.14.2, but this time it gave him a little twinge of enjoyment --- to think that he'd laid down all claims to people's good opinion. He began to wake up in the morning with the feeling that he'd put his body in pawn the night before, to the public; it had been revealed naked and he didn't know how much of it had been seen, and what shame he'd brought on himself; sometimes he woke up in the middle of the night with his heart beating fast, a sense of shame and regret paralysing him like physical shock; this was shame, he found, at what he thought he might have <u>said</u> to someone in the evening; he had a vague memory of many conversations; particularly those he'd had after a few glasses of something were lost to him in their detail, and it was here, in what he couldn't remember, that the chief source of shame and useless conjecture lay; or else he would remember something he actually had said, and it would dart into his mind like a frightful flame, making him sweat! It might only be a small remark he'd made but if it had slipped out without preparation, and particularly if there had been a silence afterwards,

a lull in the talk, he felt the encroachment of shame; next morning, or in the middle of the night, the words would appear before him like a lighted sign; it might be a remark that he'd enjoyed one of the plays at 'Protest Hall', after which, particularly if there had been a lull in the talk, he would feel silently judged as the sort of person who approved of all the plays at 'Protest Hall', or else the whole of that one; he would conclude that the person he'd been talking to thought him a fool, and there was no way of retrieving himself from this verdict; it was the verdict that he saw held above him like a red neon-sign in the dead of the night. Thus, he found he was more interested in other people's good opinion than he'd thought!

One night this took a graphic form in a dream which haunted him for days. It was after a gay night. There was a silver, gleaming, grotesque object in the sky making a trail of smoke, quite far away, but in a few moments it was close overhead, vast and silver, with four engines that made singularly little noise; it floated nearer and nearer --- he was standing in the centre of a large town --- until it suddenly dived down and crashed in flames, still silently, enveloping some of the shops of the road he was standing in; he jumped into a dark grocery shop for shelter, pulling two others with him --- were these Pinkie and Grove? --- and there they crouched waiting for all the debris to fall; then they went out on to the road again but all they saw was a black gap in the shops and no real debris, nor flames; and the area was already cordoned off; there was no great alarm, and one of the people he was with made a joke about it; he assumed that only the pilot was killed but afterwards he learned that a hundred or so people had died; yet the street was hardly disturbed. The sight of the huge floating plane worried him all day. It appeared to him

to be a picture of total calamity which people didn't record in their faces; life went on without alarm. There was even a certain anger against the other people for being killed.

Hester, the lover, told him that she'd met Clockwork, whose real name was Barnes, and that Clockwork knew through Hanni 'all there was to know' about him! She then recited his own life to him with artful glances. He'd thrown up his job in Basrah because his wife had refused to go out there with him, she said; there was 'a skeleton in his cupboard' --- he came from a working family; he lived on his wife; he was of rather an 'hysterical' nature; he was good-hearted and would never make any sort of 'official', which was why he would probably come to nothing in his work; his life was 'ignominious'; he was in love with a girl in the Kaaba dancing company.

They were sitting by the river gazing across at the castle when she recited this to him; and when she asked if it was all true he said simply, "Yes" "Including the dancing girl?" she asked. He nodded again, pouting, "Yes!" She only smiled. A grudging, careless attitude had grown over her.

He waited to be stunned by what she'd said, but felt only a mild irritation; he even felt no resentment against Hanni. He thought of approaching Dick in the confidential manner they had sometimes adopted at training school: "I say, tell old Hanni to watch her tongue, will you? I mean, I don't mind, but ---!" And Dick would be light and clear: "Of course, I will, old chap!" But he said nothing.

Pinkie said that Hanni was appearing at 'nearly every fashionable party in London' these days; she didn't say with whom, and he didn't offer

her the information Hester No. 2 had given him, namely that Hanni and 'Clockwork' were so much in love that they were 'like children' together. But then she probably knew it and was keeping it from him on the grounds that he might disapprove.

The following evening, as if she'd heard them talking, Hanni appeared at the door downstairs in a new coat, looking remarkably radiant and calm, with an unusual stillness in her; it wasn't the quietness of withdrawal but deeper; she walked easily and her face was cool and smooth; and she appeared bigger and more erect, and even seemed to look down at him for a moment. He found he had a nostalgia for her and Dick as friends and asked her where Dick was; oh, he wouldn't be coming round that evening! She told him he looked tired and must sleep more; Pinkie treated her with deference like a special guest, and he heard her closing the door downstairs against possible visitors.

When Hanni had gone Pinkie told him that Dick had 'broken down' on the subject of Joe Clockwork; Hanni had stayed away from Hampton Court for three or four nights running, and he'd got 'absolutely desparate'; there'd been nowhere for him to phone; he didn't know where Joe Clockwork lived; all he knew was that they worked in the same office, but she had blocked all personal calls and he couldn't get through. She'd never really forgiven him for the pale girl, when he'd come in 'reeking of her', and above all for making an 'Exhibition' in front of Pinkie and Granville. She was especially sensitive about her dignity as far as he, Pip, was concerned, Pinkie said.

Joe Clockwork had been an 'exciting proposition'; here was a boy, virtually, with a genuinely queer streak who needed a nurse, and she had obliged, overlooking the fact that she might fall in love with him, which

she did do, or at least she'd become infatuated; she told Pinkie there was something extraordinarily 'sad and ancient' in Clockwork which she hadn't suspected at all, and that she had spent hours simply gazing into his face and lying on a bed with him, doing nothing; she said the silence would 'seem to be going along', there wouldn't be the sense of a nervous pause, of not doing anything, as there was with Dick; it was a 'great rest' for her; she was amazed at the 'dignity' that lay in Clockwork unseen! Then Dick had broken down; he'd stayed outside the foreign office waiting for her, and had more or less pulled her off with him; Pinkie said Hanni was as tickled as a kitten that she'd 'brought him low' at last.

He and Pinkie agreed that Hanni certainly had 'grit'. Dick had managed to get her down to Hampton Court, where he told her that she must never sleep with another man again; he hid his face in her lap and said in a broken voice that he couldn't reason about it, he knew he hadn't got a leg to stand on, he knew it didn't fit in with the rest of his life or with what he believed or what he said every day, but if she touched another man he'd go away and divorce her at once; and before looking up he asked her, "Will you take that as final?" There was silence and Dick repeated the question, still not looking up, and at last Hanni said, "Yes." Granville imagined her looking calm and proud like a goddess when she said this; and with this unearthly calm round her she had come over to see them; she and Dick were now back at Hampton Court, and all further meetings with Clockwork were to be ones of friendship.

Granville found more and more that the idea of Pinkie sleeping with Grove gave him a sharp sexual excitement; the pain was an element in the alchemy, its base metal; and he found that this surpassed his old

desire for her. It overwhelmed his relation with the other Hester. The anger threatened to rise now and then, he often wanted to hit Pinkie but it was never more than a passing twitch in his fingers, and he always checked himself in the interests of this new grim passion. He hid the photographs he'd found of her and would glance at them secretly, whenever he wished to arouse his passion; he was astonished at what desire there was in him, too; it seemed inexhaustible; it was less and less possible to satisfy it; Pinkie began to wonder at this, too, and told Hanni that he was 'Herculean'. For her as well the new quiet, oblique sex was satisfactory; and she told him suddenly one evening when they were on their way out to the cafe that she could happily go on with this life for ever; when she came in late these days she always took a bath, and again he thought he smelt sperm on the towel she used; that, too, was a matter of quick, painful excitement; it was a marvellous liberation from the suffocating part of sex; it was now free, and no loyalties, much less moral speeches, were required! Pinkie had to suppress her anger, too; she started up whenever Joy Celeste was mentioned; he watched her doing the same as himself; her eyes flared up, then her face grew set and deliberate. They even began confiding in each other about their love-making. This was momentous, and happened quite by accident. He suddenly said in a genial voice, "Oh, come, why do you try and hide these things? I won't bite, you know!" And she began telling him about the approaches the 'young man with the ear-ring' had made to her, when she'd called on him. He remembered how relieved h'd been that she returned to the house before ten o'clock, and that she had joked with Dick about it; but now he regretted that she hadn't more to tell. As Pinkie said, "You want your bread buttered on both sides!"

Grove wasn't mentioned directly; he had the impression that this was sacred for her, and above all other pleasures; he appreciated her character in this. Their talk was an exciting preliminary to love. It freed them from the shadows of the past, from the aching void of belonging exclusively to each other when they shared nothing and weren't real kin; it accepted the emptiness between them; they established each other again as separate people with interesting lives of their own; it filled the lack of a rock of trust underneath --- the swirling waters were received, they plunged into them! They slept with each other more. No hot feelings were involved. They kept their distance from each other as part of the pleasure; it was not unlike Glenning's 'vestist' activities with his wife. They were like two strangers, but these strangers took surprising liberties with each other; that was the attraction. They were familiar and thrillingly new; she began to need him sexually, and to find him 'interesting'.

Apart from that he would spend whole afternoons listening to the Creole Shake over and over again, with a glass in his hand. He went to a concert and heard the German Requiem; in the first movement during 'For all flesh is grass', he had the sensation of floating away quite beyond himself, almost into death, to the borders of nullity, rising and falling with the music as if he was being lifted up bodily and then lowered again, each time with less and less body so that the sky came nearer and nearer, and he was almost received into it, bathed in melodies and sunk down and limp; he was crushed, and stumbled back home afterwards; there now weemed two parts of himself --- the music wasn't absorbed into his life; it only made him float outwards; it didn't enter his flesh, changing him, as it always had before; it couldn't get through to his numbed and paralysed

flesh, so stayed in the floating regions, lulling him and calling him from the bad life. To verify this he went and heard Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' quartet, and waited for the movement of deadly pause in it, where the outer silence is captured for some moments, and its rhythm actually enters life, joined to the music in thorough perfection; and again when it came he was aware of something passing him by, an awful procession, like that of a king, that lulled him and called to him and tried to reduce his flesh, but couldn't take him wholly; again he hadn't absorbed it into the flesh of his life, turning it to blood.

Aunt Beatrice called and had them over to lunch; Pinkie had predicted this --- Deryk would tell Beatrice about the river-party and their social stock would soar up. They had a meal under a portrait of one of the eighteenth century Gryshams. Beatrice was all charm and flashed them glances; her wit was working overtime, but suddenly, after the coffee, as if he and Pinkie hadn't come up to her new expectations, her charm broke --- he was in the middle of saying something about the sheikh of Rubath when she suddenly turned a withering eye on him and got up with, "Well, I can't stay here all day!", and swept out of the room, leaving Deryk to clear up after her, so to speak. Deryk did his best, and said, "Mummy's so tired these days, poor thing!" Pinkie's theory afterwards was that the old girl had realised their invitation to the river-party was a 'fluke': she had a 'nose' for these things.

Again Granville was aware of betraying himself to an implacable verdict whenever he said anything more than good-evening or "What will you have to drink?' He tried as hard as he could not to say what came straight into his head, and never to say anything that brought a cloud

over people's faces --- any thoughtful remark might do this, it seemed --- but it was impossible; suddenly a hot thought would break from his mind and he would feel exposed to the contempt of others, imaginary as he knew it was. He feared their conclusions, like iron bars in front of his real self. He told himself that they were only 'iron bars' if he attributed importance to them; he tried to think of himself as a small and insignificant creature who had no right to people's good opinion; for only a high image of himself could be taken prisoner by other people and put into bars; a low image left him free! But when the next occasion arose his pride would come back like an unbreakable spring. He was surprised how much pride there was in his life. He had no work, no job, but he dressed himself up sometimes in his office-togs and sat at his desk, making quite useless notes on a travel-book or something; he realised when he did this that it was because he was ashamed of himself; but more than this, he was ashamed because he saw himself as someone else would see him --- lying on the bed for hours, listening to the 'Creole Shake' for hours waiting impatiently for the next phone-call; he wasn't ashamed in himself, left to himself, but he was when he imagined somebody else's eyes on his life; it was social shame that came from his not being properly alone; he was no longer ever alone, really. He remembered feeling just before Meedham that his loneliness was now full --- his self was full --- because he had Christ; but this thought was quite incomprehensible to him now; the lonely hours were bleak; he warmed them with music or wine! He asked himself again and again, 'What has happened to the night of the eclipse?' But he never got beyond the question.

He would suddenly have a fit of social shame that he was getting up too late and would set the alarm for an earlier hour, just after dawn;

Pinkie thought he was mad, but he said he liked the dawns! He would get up briskly, dress and shave, not linger in his dressing gown. But there was nothing to do; there wasn't even anything to think about, for he found that thoughts came easier to him when he was sprawled on the bed in old clothes, than when he was dressed and shaved for the office and sitting at his desk.

He went into a cafeteria near St. Paul's for a morning coffee, to revive his memories of when he'd worked at the head office two years before, and as he was collecting his coffee from the counter he suddenly took it into his head --- partly because he was glum --- to smile at the girl serving him, as a gracious act to throw off the darkness of his life, to try to bring a brief, tiny light to another human creature unknown to him, without ambitions for himself. And the effect was instant. At first she was absorbed in the mechanical business of handing out steaming cups of coffee, but then she smiled back at him in a delighted way, her tired, worn face awakened in a moment, and he heard her say to the other serving girl as he walked to his table, "You can always tell a gentleman, can't you?" He nearly dropped his cup with confusion and hurried to a chair behind one of the pillars, hiding from her in case he did something to besmirch her image of him, and to show his <u>real</u> life! After he'd sat down he took out a pencil and began writing a definition of 'the gentleman', with surprising clarity considering his state: 'First, to be true to your feelings. Second, to be enquiring of others, to show no power, to be gracious, to harbour no grievances, not to be competitive, not to pay undue attention to appearances. Third, to call out the good seed in other people, to forgive and protect, not to judge in silence. Fourth, to speak fearlessly, to be rash and wild for the truth, not to study

expedience or reputation, not to consult other men before the truth. That is, to live with God in mind.'

He wrote it all out later in the form of a letter to Nevinson, of all people; he wondered if he was going cuckoo but went on with it. It lay on his desk for some time and he even put it in an envelope; then he threw it away. He was surprised how much he thought about Nevinson these days, though he hadn't met him. He was aware of Nevinson watching over his life and calling to him like a father. And apparently he thought this letter would vindicate his conduct in some way.

There was a reply from Mohammed, quite cheerful, asking when he was coming back and assuming that his leave had been prolonged once again; as for Granville's 'Help me!' letter it seemed to have passed unnoticed, for which he wasn't sorry. He puzzled how this could have been, and concluded that Mohammed had taken it as 'So help me God!' something like his own tired 'Allah, wa-allah!' There was no news at the Basrah office about his having offered his resignation. That was odd.

Joyce the pale girl gave a party at her basement-flat to which everyone they knew was invited, except for the 'weeds'; the whole Kaaba dancing company was there. Dick had evidently told Joyce about her fascinating pallor; she was dressed in next to nothing --- bare arms, bare shoulders, and her skirt was so tight she could hardly walk. It was like old times: Dick and Hanni were there, dancing separately; Pinkie came, though she went off early; there was the old excited sense, between the four of them, of laying themselves bare to each other as they didn't otherwise, and without saying a word, only winking as they passed during a dance, or stopping at the bar to chat for a moment. Larry Vice got drunk and wedged himself in between the wall and a divan bed, and fell

asleep. Granville and the pale girl discovered a sympathy for each other, due partly to their common friendship with Dick, and they danced together several times in succession; Dick was applying himself to a girl in the Kaaba company but came over to him when he was alone for a moment and said in a low voice, smiling, "Listen, old sport, I can see the danger-signal! Do you know what I mean?" Granville shook his head and they looked into each other's eyes with the perfect openness they only had at parties; Dick went on to say that Pip ought to 'make up his mind' whether he wanted 'Joy or Joyce or who'; he didn't mind what the verdict was as long as he knew; it was only in the interests of their not getting their 'wires crossed'; he only wanted to know; and there was a look of real objective curiosity in his eyes; but Granville couldn't tell him anything, only shrugged his shoulders and smiled back.

As if Dick had planted a suggestion in his mind he found himself with the pale girl again, talking to her confidentially, mostly about Dick: together they watched him on the other side of the room with his dainty, smiling Moroccan girl, and laughed when he made a characteristic little gesture like taking the girl's glass to re-fill it and giving her a twinkling smile at the same time; and they watched him when he danced, his cheek pressed hard against her's. An intimacy was growing up between them through Dick! Otherwise they had nothing to talk about, especially as Joyce rarely spoke. Dick had certainly changed her in the last few weeks. She was now tremulously aware of herself, and kept glancing down in a slow way at her bare arms and her bosom, and her pallor seemed even more of a veil, soft and yet impenetrable, than before; also Dick had given her a style of intimate speech; she asked Granville all sorts of quiet questions; her composure was extraordinary; would he ever go back

to the Middle East? what were the women like out there? did he think she was too tall for a woman? She gazed before her all the time, still and reflective; this was the girl who'd sat over love-magazines in the music-room for two or three hours of an evening, saying not a word! He wondered at Dick's patience.

Pinkie came to the party in a flowing, black gown rather like the one Elizabeth had lent her at Meedham; this was to hide her stomach mostly; she had a few drinks and danced twice with Dick, then left again, saying she felt tired.

Larry Vice woke up for a moment, surprised to find himself in such a tight position, and said, blinking up at the other guests, "How do you people manage to sleep standing up?", and then went off again. Granville heard the hair-girl on the other side of the room, in the half-darkness, cry, "Oh, no, you don't, not with my dad around!" and "Anybody seen Larry? Vicey, Vicey!", then she made her clapping laugh.

He noticed Alice the snake-girl sitting in a corner, quiet as always, like a dark, round-cheeked boy with her thick legs pushed out in front of her, just as he'd seen her first at the Marquis, with Dick; she smiled a charming good-evening to him while he was talking to Joyce, and later he went over and sat at her side on the floor, enjoying the casual intimacy that joined him to everyone. She glanced down at him and said, "Your wife's having a good time, I see." He nodded, looking round involuntarily for Pinkie, but she'd gone; then he remembered that for Alice the snake-girl Hanni was his wife! At that moment Hanni was dancing quite near them, laughing and kicking up her legs, with one of the men from the Kaaba company.

He was about to explain that she wasn't his wife at all when

Alice said, "You wouldn't think he was in trouble to look at him, would you?"

"Who?" Granville asked.

She nodded towards Dick, who was dancing on the other wide of the room.

"What trouble do you mean?" he asked.

"Wife-trouble!"

There was a pause and Granville asked, "Does he have wife-trouble?"

"Well, you ought to know," she murmured, turning to him with a smile, reminding him of Kit for a moment with her tom-boyish manner, "you're his best friend, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said; and he repeated his question, saying he hadn't heard of any 'wife-trouble'; to which she replied, "Oh, well, perhaps I'd better keep my trap shut!"

But later she told him, after he'd said that he felt he ought to know as a friend: Dick's wife was sleeping with the Kaaba company's publicity man; Granville said quickly, "Grove?", a distant form of the old panic starting in him, a shadow; "Yes," she said.

"Who is?" he asked, not choosing his words properly.

"What do you mean?" she said, again looking down at him.

"Who's sleeping with Grove?"

"Dick's wife!"

"Hanni?"

"Yes."

"Good Lord!" He had the impulse to run home and tell Pinkie; it was nearly amusing! But he continued to give her his attention, quite still, where he was sitting.

"Yes," she went on, "you wouldn't think it from the way he comes to the Marquis and talks to Grove as easy as anything, would you?"

Again, "Who?"

"Dick!"

She then told him that Dick had thrown up his job 'in Basrah' to see her 'through the baby'. Granville's excitement turned into the familiar sexual one, pained and fascinated, as he recognised that for 'Dick's wife' he had to read Pinkie! He was surprised how little this girl knew Dick; and he had assumed some intimacy between them from the beginning; he asked her, what had Dick told her about his life? Nothing, really: they just 'sat together'. Dick had tried to kiss her once but she'd turned Sidney the snake on to him, and he'd thought it was poisonous and jumped on a table with a green expression and said to her, "Now look here, sweet, cobras can be dangerous --- we've got laws in this country", drawing his trousers up like a skirt. After that they became friends, and she agreed to 'sit with him' if he wanted to. She'd got 'all the dope' about him from the head of the dancing troupe who lived in the same house as Grove and heard him and Dick's wife 'roaring and slapping' each other upstairs in one of the bedrooms.

Alice began laughing: "It's a scream the way he talks about them two! He says, Boy, sometimes I want to go upstairs and join in, it sounds so good! He says you hear smacks and kisses and yells and then the bed gives a clang like the gong in a boxing match! When things start moving upstairs round about half-past six in the evening he says to his wife, 'Well, here we go, luscious, seconds out of the ring!' and then it starts! Sometimes there's a knockout in the first round, he says, and sometimes they go on for three hours or more and win on points. Friday

nights are the nights, he says! Sometimes you hear 'em shout, "You're driving me mad!" or 'It's terrific!" which makes this dancer and his wife just double up!"

At the end of this Alice gazed before her, stretching her legs out and yawning, and added, "To cap it all the baby she's going to have is Grove's!"

This stunned him so much that at first he only smiled and nodded, refusing to absorb the words; he got her to repeat it, and she said the same words again. She added, "I don't like that sort of behaviour. Somebody ought to tell him. Look at him dancing over there!"

And at that moment Dick gazed across the room at Hanni while he was dancing and gave her a pleasant little smile, his cheek wtill close to the Moroccan girl's. Granville glanced at Alice sideways; she was so like a young boy, without a trace of wickedness! His teeth began to chatter, and he took another drink swiftly; he was in a delirious state not unlike joy. The pale girl passed and smiled down at him.

Alice also said that Grove was always 'on' to Dick's wife about living in Chaworth Road; he said it was the 'filthiest sink' in London, and that he feared it was slowly corrupting her; she needed all the sympathy other people could manage because she was suffering a 'real crucifixion'.

So that was why she'd talked about the crucifixion once, in the kitchen! And this made him, Granville, her high priest ---he was the mob that stoned and spat at her!

He could hardly control the chattering of his teeth and Alice asked him if he was cold. She went on to say, about 'Dick', that you wouldn't think he was a 'violent' sort of person to look at him, but

according to Grove he was: he kept his wife indoors forcibly and he quite often beat her up; worst of all, he was unable to excite her passions! Alice said she had only realised how true this probably was when she'd seen him dancing on that table pulling his trousers up in such an unmanly way, because of a harmless snake!

How 'Dick' managed to get his girls was difficult to imagine, she said, because his touch --- according to Grove --- was 'the kiss of death' to his own wife! Grove had said of 'Dick' that he was a 'nice enough person' but Pinkie needed somebody with more love in their hearts, who went <u>out</u> to people more, and could give her the 'full life' she was yearning for. And Grove had offered Pinkie a 'money-back guarantee', as he had called it, that within a year or two she would be completely free of her 'mania' that she wasn't 'wanted'; he would 'open society' for her.

Granville pulled the snake-girl to her feet and made her dance with him, which she did awkwardly, saying to him when he swung her round fast, "Hey, do <u>you</u> want a snake-bite, too?" He was surprised how calm his fact felt; his heart had beat fast before but now he was cool; a great coldness began to come over him, making him shiver. People were dancing drowsily now. At the end of the tune he let her go absently, hardly aware of dropping her hand. He stood in the middle of the room for a time, absent to everything.

He strolled into the basement-area of the house, alone, as dawn came up --- it was like a shadow being lifted from behind the roofs. Outside it was quite still, everything like dust that had settled for ever, in this first light; to his surprise he found Dick leaning against the wall, looking up at the sky, also alone; Dick turned slowly as if expecting him and murmured, "Hullo, there, old sport."

Granville asked him at once, "Did you know Pinkie's baby wasn't mine?"

There was a pause and Dick replied quietly, "Yes, of course I did."

"Why didn't you tell me then?"

"Evitez les complications, Pip, especially in matters conjugal". And he added in a more confidential boice, "You know you're a boob. You ought to have got out long ago, as I tried to tell you."

Granville nodded.

Dick went on, "Never mind! You know now."

Dick stayed with Joyce and he walked home alone. The dawn was grey with heavy clouds and the first buses were starting; now and then a sleepy person walked by, his steps enclosed in the great hush that lay on the streets. He took a bath when he got back, so numbed in his senses that it was like kipping someone else's flesh into the water; he hardly had the strength to lift himself out, and yet he couldn't think of sleeping. He wanted to go up and make himself a cup of tea but the desire died suddenly; he didn't want to see Pinkie.

In the evening Dick told him, "I stayed the whole night, and she gave me two eggs and a lovely rasher of bacon in the morning." He repeated that Granville ought to make up his mind; he could see his faxcination for Joyce 'growing fast'. He added, "You can't have your cake and eat it, you know!" To which Granville said with a limp smile, "Your cake, you mean." "Yes, but you can have it if you like," Dick said, and again his eyes were perfectly clear, so light and devoid of possessiveness! He then went on talking: there was nothing better than sleeping with a 'new' woman; that breakfast with Joyce had been really 'classical'; it made him think of Homer and the 'rosy-fingered dawns'. He said that the first

four pleasures in his life were, in the following order: sleeping with a woman for the first time Ialthough one could 'come a cropper there very badly sometimes); sleeping with Hanni, meaning by her 'someone of long standing'; walking alone in a big city at dawn; and, last and fourth, friendship. He then threw in the idea that if you were 'really keen' on a married woman you shouldn't consider the husband 'to the point of withering the roots of love'.

Granville was disappointed that friendship should come so low in the list; but he felt close to Dick as he'd never done before, perhaps because everything else was finished for him. He was happy with Dick. He felt he was fit for Dick only when he was free, like this.

He tried to go on with the same life but could no longer break his face into a smile; he went with people like a ghost and he gave up phoning the other Hester; they met a last time at Hampton Court --- and after he involuntarily drew back from her, not knowing what he was doing at all, thinking of the party at Joyce's, she snapped at him, "Oh, go to hell!"

The money ran out altogether and he had an hour's pale, disjointed conversation with Pinkie about it; she didn't seem to be blaming him for it in any way; he avoided her eyes these days, and she, following suit as she usually did, avoided his in the same way. As for the child, silence had been so customary between them in the old days that it was easy to revive. But their new form of sex persisted: it even flourished on the increased reserve between them. For the first time their love was safely beyond affection and words of endearment. It gave him a burning desire even stronger than before; he was now taking not only a stranger but an

enemy.

They decided to ask Maimbury for a loan; he was to do the asking, by phone; there was Maimbury's cool voice at the other end asking "Who? Who did you say it was?" He asked for twenty-five pounds and Maimbury agreed without hesitation, as cool as before. He went to collect it the same afternoon and was ushered into the office by one of the clerks; for some seconds Maimbury didn't look up but continued writing something on the side of a typewritten sheet in a slow hand, in the silence of the room; then he looked up, his eyes calm and soft, and murmured quietly, "Well, hullo, Philip." And he stood up to shake hands; the twenty-five pounds were brought in and counted, and when it was done Maimbury's manner became more confidential; "How's Hester?" he asked; "She's very well!" "Good!" On the way back he passed T.I.M. and saw a messenger hasten inside; the entrance was bleak and inanimately hostile to him, hollow and dark, and he crossed over the road to avoid being recognised by the commissionarie. He was still wearing his tropical jacket; it had turned a bit yellow, perhaps from constant smoky atmospheres, and the weather was decidedly chilly for it. These days he ate little and sat staring before him. Sometimes he told himself that a mistake had been made --- how could people know for sure who the father was? But he'd finished with that sort of reasoning.

He slept with Joyce, more or less because he'd been asked not to in such an inviting way. Sharing the same fascinating pale secret as Dick was a pleasure, although, still, his own flesh was separate from him, and her softness was lost on him really. Once he and Dick met on her doorstep and burst out laughing; they didn't ring the bell but went off to a pub and then stayed together all evening to make sure that the other

didn't go back. It made their sense of intimacy even stronger. Joyce told them both --- separately --- that she'd never heard two men talk so admiringly of each other; she gave the impression that they were two aspects of the same being for her, and a perfect complement to each other. There wasn't a trace of disloyalty in her eyes when the three of them were together; he and Dick agreed that this was flattering to them; they were 'sound'.

One afternoon he made the decision to get out; it was the effect of meeting a friend of Hell's called Tim, whom Cerberus brought round to the house. He had a round face with rather staring eyes and his lips were strangely full and crimson; he was impeccably dressed, with a rolled umbrella, and spoke carefully, his vowels as rounded as his lips. And he began asking Granville questions, one after the other: he'd heard from Hell of his arrival some weeks ago; his name was Granville, wasn't it? He believed he worked in the Middle East? That must be very interesting? Didn't one's nerves get edgy out there --- so he had heard? How long would he be in England? Would the situation in the Middle East blow up again, did he think? He must know a great deal about the 'Arab psychology'!

His tone gave Granville too much importance; since they'd never met before it sounded insinuating, with an edge of contempt. He spoke with a slow gravity. His lips, bright and moist, were set in a kind of pontifical deliberation, which also seemed on the edge of mockery; and yet when he smiled his eyes were honest and clear. His cheeks were plump; and his round lips suggested to Granville a riotous appetite which his manner covered up; also he spoke unctiously and softly. Granville

felt more and more distressed and was also convinced that in the strangest way he was causing the young man to behave like this, and that at any other time he would have looked quite different to him, and spoken quite differently! He answered as casually as possible, careful not to give a sign that he condoned the tone of importance; he tried to throw the questions back --- did the young man live in this district? did he often come here? But they rebounded in his face, and he found himself answering the same questions himself; also he noticed that his own voice had a hollow, official sound. Tim suggested a walk, his eyebrows raised a little as if to ask for the privilege of his company --- could he spare the time? And he agreed like a hypnotised animal; they strolled through the City and the questions went on! He felt pale and too hot, and ungainly in his stride. He tried to talk about Kurdistan and the Alpine-like flowers in the mountains there, but his words faltered and he couldn't get the hollow sound out of his voice. Some sort of strange pressure was being exercised by the young man, he felt; and he noticed Tim's rolled black umbrella again as if he hadn't seen it properly before. It was tap-tapping on the pavement; and also he had a black suit, buttoned fully at the front. What did he do for a living? He tried to find out, deviously, but couldn't form the slightest impression. Every question rebounded on him. The more he talked, the more he made a fool of himself. He went on talking out of nervousness. No real ideas came to his head. "Turkistan's just like Scotland!" he cried. His voice sounded so thin and high! The air was heavy with emptiness. The emptiness had crept into him, covering the whole of the City as well like a vast invisible blanket suddenly coming down over the banks and offices and narrow streets. Tim was silent now. He'd pillaged Granville's soul --- and the verdict

was silence! Granville wanted to get away. As he turned to announce that he must be off he was assailed by a dreadful sense of waste; he remembered it acutely from two years before; it was a sense of having time on his hands and no obligation or place in the world, and of being acknowledged for nothing by other people. His clothes felt drab, his body seemed to have shrunk into something like dust, on the verge of becoming pure air; he was nothing for the other man; he knew it!

"Well ---" he began; he wanted to turn tail and run off. The New Studio theatre club came up in the conversation; Tim had seen one of the plays; Granville said --- but apparently without his own voice, and without there being an idea in his head, much less a picture of what he was talking about --- that he hadn't liked <u>that</u> one. There was a silence. Tim then said that as 'the son of peasants --- he paused again --- 'and not of decayed nobility' --- and here he gave Granville a long meaning look --- he <u>liked</u> the plays at the Studio theatre; but he understood how 'the language and some of the ideas' would be 'too strong for <u>some</u> people'. Granville made a faltering reply, and Tim considered that he'd withered him.

At last Granville managed to get away; he almost ran back to the house, his eyes lowered from passers-by; when he got back he went straight to the bathroom and took a hot bath; then he changed into clean underwear and a clean shirt; the last piece of identity had been wrested from him! He had no self! Therefore what did it matter where he <u>transported</u> it?

He resolved to get his job back, if that was possible. He phoned Dick at once and his answer was, "Good, Pip. I think that's wise. Would you like me to go along to the old cove now?" "Yes." And a meeting with Nevinson was arranged.

He found out from Hanni that Dick had saved the situation for him weeks ago! He'd gone to Nevinson and told him not to take the letter of resignation too seriously --- Granville was having 'family-trouble'; she said he wasn't to let Dick see he knew this; it was a secret; but she'd let Pinkie into the secret.

Granville could find out nothing about the Basrah office; Dick said he wasn't sure he'd get the old job back; in fact, he thought it unlikely.

Nevinson was just as he imagined him: tall and rugged, with bushy eyebrows. His hair was slightly tussled like a boy's, yellowish; at first he was confidential, very much man-to-man.

"Well, I've been hearing all about you"; he smiled boyishly and went on, "As you probably know, I'm new to this outfit --- and not liking the desk-work at all!"

Here he smiled, and Granville murmured something sympathetic.

Nevinson shifted a paper on his desk. "Well, as far as I can see you've been doing a first-class job of work out there --- first class!"

"Thank you."

A pause.

"It's just what we want, you see, somebody who gets out and mixes with people."

He meant by this mixing with Arab people. He said that if anything 'blew up' in the Middle East they wanted to see it didn't blow up 'under T.I.M.' as well, and that meant keeping people's sympathy, which couldn't be done by treating them like 'skivvies'; Granville had got out among people and hadn't 'parked' himself in the 'foyer of the British Embassy' waiting for the next dinner invitation like some people;

it was just what they wanted; he was very pleased; awfully pleased.

Another pause. The office was very quiet; its windows gave out on to a narrow courtyard, with other lighted offices on the opposite side. A persian carpet covered nearly the whole floor, and a tall lamp with tassles exactly like the one Granville had had in his own office stood behind Nevinson's chair, giving the room the same cosy and glowing look. Nevinson blinked. It was coming now. He pulled out a file.

"Now about this report of yours, we've had quite a lot of discussion about it ---" He scratched his head --- "Well, we found it a bit high-flown if you see what I mean! Mind you --- " He looked up, his eyebrows raised. "I think it's awfully good myself. But what we want out of these yearly reports is facts. I mean, we can't go blazing off into politics and religion, can we --- not on the office-level?" And he showed Granville a page of his report; "Look at this", and he pointed to the words, 'The middle-class is the instrument of Christ.' "We can't have that, can we?"

"No, quite!" said Granville

"I expect you know we've decided on a policy of expansion," Nevinson went on.

"No," Granville replied.

"Well, what we thought we might do is to put the Basrah office in the care of Beirut for the time being, so we sent our Beirut chap over there --- he's new, awfully nice, a chap called Blair!"

"Oh!" He felt giddy for a moment but managed to smile politely.

"It isn't very sensible geographically, of course, but it'll have to do until we get the Middle East working as one unit."

"This means he's sitting at my desk, does it?" he asked bluntly.

Nevinson looked down and murmured, "Well, old chap, you did let the job go, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course, I realise I'm lucky enough to get a job at all. I just wanted to find out. This means somebody else is working over me, doesn't it? In the same office?"

"For the time being, yes. Your pay'll be the same, you needn't worry about that."

Granville flushed with indignation. "But I can't see why I'm being offered the job at all!"

"It's perfectly clear, old chap," Nevinson said, "we need you out there!"

Granville wondered at himself for getting indignant; he'd got his job back, what more did he want?

"This Blair-chap", Nevinson went on, "has been on the Middle East circuit for years with another company and we were frightfully lucky to get him. He's just what we need to pull the whole outfit together."

"After all," Nevinson added after a pause, "we can't risk you going off the rails again, can we?"

It was that or nothing; so he nodded. There was one change: no travel-allowance and no 'swindle-sheet'; in effect, his pay had been reduced! And he would have to ask permission to leave Basrah at any time; the old jaunts to Kirkuk and Mosul, to the 'Alp-like hills' of Kurdistan were finished!

Nevinson saw him to the door with a friendly, "Good bye, old chap." Then he added quietly, "You know, I'm very sorry about this. If you'd come to me a couple of months ago and asked for the Beirut office we'd have given it to you like a shot. But then this happened!" And his

last words were, "I don't suppose you've had a very pleasant time but if you pull your weight things'll be all right."

He went straight from the office to a travel-bureau and booked a passage from Naples to Beirut; he wouldn't stop at Genoa this time; he needed to be alone; and he needed a sea voyage to bring his health round.

How would he face Mohammed now, as 'Mr. Blair's assistant'? The atmosphere would be gone. He'd be tied to a desk with fixed hours. Mohammed would see that he was a subordinate now; his stature would be gone! The evenings by the river wouldn't be free any more. What a fool he'd been! And he could have had the Beirut office! So much for Dick's advice! In his mind he began to blame Dick for the whole course of events, telling himself that if he'd been given the slightest idea that he could get the Beirut office for the asking he would never havehung on in London like that, only Dick had discouraged his initiative; but this was little comfort, and he didn't believe it.

The question that came to his mind again and again was, what had happened to the night of the eclipse? Where was its effect? Why hadn't he felt the triumph? Why wasn't he aware of it moving in him and changing him?

He thought that perhaps it might be all right in Basrah, even now, if he could manage to keep a certain stillness. He should try to keep before him an image of himself as small and therefore as undeserving; if he did this a spark might return to him, from outside; he must go about his work without worrying what other people thought of him; for instance, he must even try to enjoy losing stature in Mohammed's eyes; if he did so he wouldn't lose stature, perhaps; nothing could hurt silence if he kept to it; only pride was the easiest thing to hurt; he must let himself fall

back into silence.

He said nothing about the interview to Pinkie. It seemed she'd forgotten he was to have it. That evening he went to a cinema in Islington and was too tired even to follow the plot; there was a news-reel in which some poor creature of a hare was chased by whippets; it leapt through the air frantically, and always the hounds followed, decoying it this way and that, until at last its strength gave out and it tumbled under them, a limp ball of fur. Behind him a woman murmured, "Poor thing! What a damned shame!" in exactly the same voice as his mother would have done, and tears smarted in his eyes.

A few days later when his boat-ticket arrived Pinkie murmured vaguely, "I suppose I'll be joining you in a few months, won't I?" He nodded glumly and they said no more. Grove came over again. Granville was once more struck by the friendly confidence in him, and felt revived; the events of the last few weeks, including the question of the child, seemed unimportant. He couldn't imagine Grove in a dark or irritable mood. He told Granville, standing by the hearth and gazing out of the window in his curious abstract and yet local way, that he 'loved <u>everybody</u>'; he really <u>meant</u> that; he didn't turn away from anyone; he said that a person aroused his good will whoever he was, unless he was clearly a 'swine'. He was trying to give Granville to understand that he'd intended no malice against him.

A party gathered again in the music-room that evening. Grove talked most of the time, making everyone laugh. While he talked, rattling away without the slightest embarrassment, Granville asked himself, why should he leave? Again the absurdity of insisting on clear forms occurred to him: why not be a subordinate here? But his thoughts

went round in a sickening way, gone almost the moment they entered his head. He found that Grove conducted a kind of human publicity service: he brought people together and talked admiringly about nearly everyone; he sat in the centre of the room and already the house was filled with his spirit.

He went down to Abbott's Road to say good bye. They knew nothing about his having resigned, and he left it vague; a word was enough for them; he said he'd had a few things to 'clear up' with the head office, so he was late in going back. He was surprised when he stepped off the bus to see how fresh and clean everything in the district looked. The shop-fronts were newly-painted and the houses of Abbott's Road looked like tiny farmhouses, not dingy at all but with a warm, bustling life going on inside each of them. The windows were bright with coloured curtains, and the hedges in front were trimmed.

He sat with them in the back-room, with the window overlooking the gardens open at the bottom. His mother divined that something unpleasant had happened but said nothing. She only asked quietly, "Is Pinkie going back with you?" From his panic-stricken glance she knew everything. His father was gracious as always, a little formal, gazing with narrow eyes into the garden. He trembled and could eat nothing. The table was laid with cheese and lettuce and celery, and the tea-pot stood under a cosy in the scullery as it always had in his childhood. He drank one cup after another. He always returned to this world of Abbott's Road alone, it seemed; but it couldn't help him; his mother and father had nothing to say --- they could only watch his distress and hope for the best. The trains passed in the distance, stopping and starting again with a low grinding noise. He tried to talk but his mind was ineffective

and he kept wandering off. He kissed his mother bood bye and shook hands strongly with his father; he more or less stumbled out of the house, with his mother's eyes on him.

His boat was to leave Naples a day later than he'd been told, so he stayed a day more in London; in the morning, when nobody else was there, the phone rang and he heard Grove's voice at the other end saying, "Pinkie? Pinkie?" So full of joy and expectation and relief! He put the phone back as quietly as he could, without answering it. He even felt the flicker of a smile on his face, as if it wasn't his own face. And the trembling never left him for a moment, it was like a permanent bodily condition.

Grove came over that evening, alone, having made the arrangement to do so before he'd delayed his trip. Grove played the piano and sang while Pinkie swept out the music-room; meanwhile Granville sat upstairs trying to read the paper; nothing bore a relation to him --- the house, Pinkie's broom hitting against the wainscoting, Grove singing, the boat-ticket in his pocket. The piano downstairs stopped suddenly and he heard Grove's laughter that always had the power to raise your hopes without really touching your heart. Then there was Pinkie's voice, imploring him, "Oh, don't darling, not now ---! Only a little while!" Only a little while more and he'll be gone! A pale anger rose in him and he strode out on to the staircase. But he stopped. She'd spoken so imploringly! He didn't know she could sound like that. So tender and pleading! And he'd thought of her as hard! Why hadn't she pleaded with <u>him</u> like that? He didn't know it was in her voice to do so!

He listened again, on the landing. There was Grove: "Come on, Grisly, let's go out!" Grisly was one of her nicknames from school ---

which he'd never used. 'Grisyly Grysham'. Pinkie replied, patiently, as if to a child, "Yes, darling, yes!" And he realised for the first time --- not painfully but in a clear and blinding and staggering way --- that she was in love! She couldn't change that. She'd tried, perhaps. Even, she'd wanted to! But she couldn't! Because she was in love, in love, in love! The words kept ringing in his brain. In love! It was like bells! In love! Then why hadn't he recognised it? Oh, why? For it made her innocent!

He walked further down the stairs and had the sense of losing his body so that his steps hardly made an impression on him. This was the night of the eclipse! It was in his life now! It had come down from his thoughts into his life! And he felt bodiless --- the stairs were nothing to him, his pain was nothing, nor his trembling! They didn't matter, didn't matter! He could have walked down to the music-room at that moment in the most easy and smiling joy and put his hands on them both and sat talking to them and heard them telling each other 'darling' and 'sweetheart' without the slightest sense of being connected to them any more! There was a shudder of relief through his body that seemed to drain all the poisons away. Yet he was still in pain! But it wasn't really his any more. There was something beyond life in him, for the first time. It was like touching Christ, it was as if Christ was standing there on the stairs, in him for a moment, bodilessly. He had a sense of sunlight, though he was trembling like a leaf. Pinkie was pure! She was pure! The tears poured down his face but with triumph --- it was like his own triumph! He'd surrendered! He'd surrendered her up to her own life!

He parted from her casually next day; she lay on the bed, remote from him; he asked her not to come downstairs to see him off; it would make too much of a good bye.

"Well, cheerio," he said at the door of the bedroom, and waved his hand.

"Cheerio, darling!" She waved, too, in exactly the same way as he'd done, with a little flutter of fingers; just before he turned away she blew him a kiss as she'd done on the train to Meedham, with a bright look for a moment.

Dick had said jokingly the evening before that he was blowed if he was going to give him a second send-off! So they'd just shaken hands briefly. Hanni had promised to come over to say good bye but didn't appear. The day was dull and he travelled to the station in a dazed state, seeing nothing; it was also sultry, quite unusual for late autumn, and the sweat poured out of him; on the boat across to France he caught sight of himself in a mirror and was astonished to see how haggard he was, with yellowish bags under his eyes; his hair was lank and greasy; he shuddered when he thought of the house in Basrah, silent and closed. And he saw Pinkie in his mind, a stranger to him, far, far away, going about her own concerns. "Only a little while!", he heard her say again.